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Summary

Joseph "Joe" Koek Hague, Netherlands, b. 10/30/1930 father Phillip (tailor), mother Katrina (manicurist), Joe, middle child, had two sisters (Eva, Henny), Jewish family but according to Joe, "not Orthodox," Koek family dates back to 1730s-Netherlands "mostly Ashkenazi," extended family; attended public & Hebrew school, most friends non-Jewish, Joe experienced little antisemitism; active in cub scouts, which became a Zionist organization-postwar, Joe continues activity in scouting his entire life, meets founder of scouting, scouts singing to Baden-Powell, "We Will All Be Brothers" (to Beethoven's 9th finale); German bombing of Rotterdam, on 5th day, king capitulates Netherlands to Nazis; Jews forced to wear star (Joe, only child in class with a star), Joe's friends/teachers before war were still friends after war broke out & did not adapt antisemitism; father uses overcoat to hide his star so he can enter trolley; parents not allowed to go to store, Joe (blue-eyed blonde) enters stores undisturbed; scouting & Hebrew school stops; family receives letter/order to train "to go to work"; parents pay a couple to hide Joe (now age 12) & sisters (10 & 14), hidden in 3rd floor room above 1st floor Montessori school where siblings were not allowed to attend; each day before school starts, siblings allowed to enter 2nd floor (protectors' apt) for breakfast, during day, siblings self-educate a bit, e.g. sisters teach Joe knitting; window where siblings could look out; after 1st floor school ended day, siblings allowed back on 2nd floor for dinner; parents arrested (later learned parents were killed at Auschwitz); Joe separated from sisters as Resistance retrieves each sibling "one by one"; Resistance changes Joe's last name on each train as he is sent North; Joe arrives to small farm, placed in school, required church attendance, his rescuers Mr. and Mrs. Flonk treat Joe "wonderfully"; Joe breaks leg, spends 6 weeks in hospital-saves his life because Nazis went through Flonk's home & town, shoot his rescuers; Resistance places Joe with another farming family (Mr. and Mrs. Douna/Oosterzee dairy), Joe works making cheese in agonizing uncertainty where sisters & parents are; winter 1945, "extreme difficulty" as starving people come to farm seeking food; liberation celebrations (May 1945), The Dounas bring out their treasured 5 yr. old cheese; Christian Mr. and Mrs. Douna promise Joe that if his parents don't return, they will raise him as a Jew, "That's how good they were."; Resistance places Joe in orphanage, which forbid him from returning to Dounas to thank them, Joe is told "We have lost too many (Jewish) souls to (Christian) people who want to adopt."-Joe's lingering mixed emotions, from not being supported to address "the people who had saved our lives"-eventually talks with Douna's oldest son; sisters reunite with Joe at orphanage, who "had been picked up in Ireland, placed where children were sent to (concentration) camps" but en route to train, sisters rescued by Resistance; Joe's post-war journey in therapy, finding a way to talk about the trauma endured, sisters' continued inability to share their trauma (even with Joe); ongoing guilt of his formal education thwarted, however he became custom tailor; 1954, sister's chance encounter with an American visiting Amsterdam (clothing company exec), which leads to sister marrying exec's son & she brings Joe to America; Joe, first works at Oxford clothing company, then for Feld Clothing; marriage/divorce, second (happy) marriage to Sheila; discussion re: Joe joining Illinois Holocaust Museum Speaker's Bureau & sharing his story with students; admiration for his protectors who "took total strangers into their house at the risk of being killed"; discussion on Dutch defiance against Hitler; interview with wife Sheila who recounts Joe's story, sharing her

admiration for Joe & siblings who “grew up to be wonderful human beings”; out of Joe’s 60 relatives, only 12 survived; Joe shares family photographs & artifacts from the Holocaust.