

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin-Beck, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. This evening, we have with us Sophia Cohen Chatov of Amsterdam, Holland. And Sophia is going to tell us about her story during World War II.

Sophia, would you tell us about your childhood, before the Nazis came on the picture?

I was four years old when the war broke out in 1940. So I can't remember very much from before 1940. However, when during the war time, when the order came for Jews to wear a Jewish star, that was one of the first little rules that were introduced in Holland to separate the Jews from the non-Jews, because we were very-- well, the Jews were a part of Holland, and of the community, integrated. And the Germans were very careful in separating us. And in a very, very slow way.

And one of the rules was having the Jews wear a Jewish star, with J-O-O-D on it, which means Jew. And but the Jews below six years didn't need to wear a Jewish star. So I was very upset that I couldn't wear one on my heart. And so my mother, to just console me, that I could also wear a Jewish star, put one in my hair, under my ribbon.

And when I was six, when I had my sixth birthday, that was in 1942, my first present was when I woke up, was my coat on the foot end of my bed, with my Jewish star sewed on, on the left side. And I remember very vividly-- it was a brown coat, and there was a gold star on it.

It's interesting how children want so much to conform, even if it's a negative thing. But of course you didn't realize it was a--

It wasn't viewed by us as negative. My mother was-- we were proud of it.

You were proud of being identified as Jews? So you were just a little girl, and you remember that as your first instance of the Nazis separating you. What happened? Was it safe in 1942 for you to remain in Amsterdam?

Well, I remember between '40 and '42, there were all kinds of incidents that happened. And of course, since I was a child, I don't remember a whole string of days connected with each other. But I remember strings. I remembered from across the street-- see, I lived in the southern part of Amsterdam, that was not a ghetto.

And there were Jews and non-Jews living together.

Was it near the canals?

No, no, no, it's in the southern part-- in a newer part of Amsterdam.

I understand.

And across from us, I remembered very vividly, of somebody jumping out of a window. And that was a Jewish man who couldn't stand the tension, and committing suicide. That, I remembered.

I remembered a-- since we were living at the outskirts of Holland in Amsterdam at that point, at that time, now it's all built up, I remembered also an airplane was shot down, with one pilot in it, an English airplane. And just was shot down outside our house, or outside our flat building. And it crash landed and burst into flames.

I remember bombardments, and that we all went down in the cellar of the building, wait for it to get over, this threat to get over. I remember, also, at times that we all had to go in communal cellars, when there were just in general sirens going off, and we all had to flee into--

Those were your shelters?

The shelters, yes.

Were you frightened by the Nazis?

Yes, yes, yeah. As a child, of course, at four, I wasn't bedwetting anymore, and both my brother and I, who is four and a half years older than I, returned to bedwetting again. Because of the fear of all-- yes, I remember the airplanes coming over constantly at night. And of course, the fear of my parents transferred to us.

Nobody was allowed to leave the house at 8:00 at night. The whispering, the--

Do you remember being hungry?

Oh, yes, but that was not in Amsterdam. That was when I went in hiding. Yes, oh, yes.

So in 1942, you were in school. You were in first grade, I presume.

Yes. Right.

Were you separated because you were Jewish? Or were you in a regular school?

I was-- no, we were in a Jewish class. In fact, I was in nursery school, I was already in a Jewish classroom, with all Jewish children. We were already with a Jewish teacher. That was already--

Was that an edict?

That was an edict, yes.

So you were separated already. But of course, being so young, you didn't realize it was different.

Right.

When did your life change radically?

When I went into hiding, really. And that was not told to me as such. I just was told by my parents, or by my mother, that I was going for a nice visit to a friend of hers, or friends of theirs, somewhere out in the country.

This was 1942?

And that was in 1942. That was after we had been already rounded up by the Germans at one point. You see, they would round up the Jews at night, because they were sure to be at home. So at night, there were always pogroms-- that was also one of the fears. You hear the big trucks coming by and stopping somewhere.

And then, these hobnailed shoes would come boulder up the stairs and ring the bell, and would round up Jews.

Jews, to take them away to the camps?

Yes. But first to a gathering point. They had all kinds of gathering points. One was in Holland, which is now a national monument, which is in--

Amsterdam?

In Amsterdam, in Amsterdam, is the Holland theater, called. And that's now a monument. There, the Jews of Amsterdam would be gathered and separated. There, I was separated from my parents.

And we managed to get out-- my mother somehow had an ability of getting us out. She was a nurse, and she used the color of her nursing uniform, which was brown, and Germans had an enormous respect for anything that had uniforms on. And the brown color of her uniform happened to be the same color of a nurse in Germany-- German nurses.

So somehow, my mother was able-- managed to get us out.

Does that include your father, too?

Yes, all of us. And then afterwards, we went into hiding. But beforehand, my father, who wasn't allowed to work anymore--

What was his business, Sophia?

He had a men's clothing factory. And he shared that with a non-Jewish partner. But then, there was one of the regulations, one of the orders was that Jews were not allowed to own any more their own businesses. So my father transcribed it over to his non-Jewish partner.

So my father was home. And I think about two or three times, my father was picked up when my mother was out. And my brother would come-- would come down the stairs and say to my mother that my father was picked up by the Germans. And all those times, my mother would get into her nurse's uniform, and would go back to that gathering point.

And pull him out?

And get him out, yes, was able to get him out.

It was a small miracle then?

Well, and connections, too. My mother knew some people at that place who were in charge. You know, the Germans were very smart, putting not their own people in charge, but Jews.

Local people.

Local people in charge.

If your father wasn't working, was your mother working?

My mother-- no.

Was she still nursing?

No, she wasn't.

What she did for income? For bread? For--

Savings.

So as a little child, you must have been hungry, then.

Well, we all had rations. I mean, whole Holland was in poor condition. The real hunger, I knew after when I went into hiding. Somehow, well, what is hunger? You don't get the goodies anymore, no more cookies, or other things. Those things are going first.

Now, I still remember-- and my mother used to bake her own bread, and she used to have some-- no, I don't remember real hunger in those early years. Scarcity, yes, but not real hunger.

Would you tell us how you first went into hiding? Who orchestrated the hiding?

Well, we had a family friend, a German Jew, by the name of Manfred Levinson-- do you want to have a picture?

Yes, I think we have a picture right here. And this is Manfred.

Yeah, Manfred Levinson is his name. And he was a family friend. Because he married a former nursing student friend of my mother's, shortly after they were married, she died. But Manfred stayed a close friend of us.

He had left Germany to come to Amsterdam?

He had left Germany, yes, already, in the early '30s. Had seen what was happening there. And warned everybody.

And then, before or just at the time of the war-- when the war broke out, he went into illegal fighting. And he was a member of a very famous illegal movement in Amsterdam, and one street is mentioned after this particular movement, or the head of the movement, was called f and Manfred was one of the main members of that movement.

How would you translate that into English?

I can't translate--

It is the name of--

It's the name of this man, [DUTCH], and Manfred had assumed another name. And his name was in the war time, Gerard Clock.

Sounds very Dutch.

It's-- yeah. And since he was fluent in German, of course, and he had a very Irish, quote, appearance, he got away with a lot, and did an enormous a lot of courageous things in a German SS uniform.

Oh, this is a uniform that he stole--

Somehow he must have gotten it.

And was disguised.

Yeah. And he even managed to get people still out of Westerbork, which was another-- the second gathering point.

The concentration camp.

Concentration camp in Holland, from where people then were dispersed to the East Germany and East Europe.

Well, how did he come to you? And what did he do for you?

He was a close friend of ours. So of course, we were amongst people with for whom he had great concern. Outside us, he saved hundreds of other children's lives.

But he, after we had been in the Hollandsche Schouwburg that last time when we were all picked up, then my parents decided that we should go out in hiding, because it became very dangerous.

All of you, or just the children?

All of us. But since we were living in a neighborhood, mixed, and some of them were collaborators, and some were not, we couldn't be sure. If we would go, all of us, it would be too obvious.

So we-- my parents decided that I should go first. And then two weeks afterwards, my brother went into hiding. And then two weeks after that, both my parents went into hiding.

And before they went into hiding, on the stairs of some friends of theirs, they tore up their own identification cards with J on it. And got some others with different names.

Before we talk about your parents' identification paper, perhaps you want to tell us about your going into hiding. I see we have a picture of you as a little girl. This is when you went into hiding.

This was while I was in hiding, yeah.

And did you have false papers, too?

I must have had some, because everybody needed food. And you get-- the papers give you a right to get some rations, yes. So my name was also Van Doorn.

Oh, what was your first name?

The same, Sophia. Because it was not an obvious Jewish name.

And where did you go? Where did they hide you?

Well, I remember that I came home from school, and I went up the stairs and I realized that, for the first time, I was able to take the stairs with great ease.

You were getting bigger.

I was getting bigger. And I went with Ohm, as I called him, Uncle Manfred, to a first address. There was a couple with a son who was maybe a year or two older than I was, Peter, I remember his name. And they lived in Ooman Overijssel which is a-- in the center, east center of Holland.

Was it a village?

A village, yes.

Smaller than Amsterdam.

Very woody area. Lots of people-- writers lived there, and sculptors, and this man happened to be a sculptor. And since he was Jewish, and I was rather dark, and since I was six, and I wasn't used to yet say that my name was not Sophia Cohen, but Sophia Van Doorn, it was too dangerous for them to keep me.

How long did you stay with them?

I think about four weeks.

Was that good? Was it a good experience for you?

I just, yes, I felt very much at home. I just loved it there. And then, afterwards, when I moved to an-- then I came to this other person, Tante Audry, as I call her, auntie Audry, then I realized-- or I started to realize that I wasn't going home again and then I, of course, I felt deserted by my parents.

And how long was it before you saw your parents again?

Towards the end of the war.

So that was another three years, or two years?

Two years, two and a half years, yes.

So you went to this woman, who was a Christian woman.

Yes.

And where did you go? Where was the geography?

That was close by. She lived in the woods, too. Very, very special woman. She had 13 other Jewish children there.

Did she have her own children, as well?

No, no, she was an unmarried woman. But she was a very famous person in the Scouts, with the Scouts. Apparently, she was very familiar with Baden-Powell, and I really don't know what-- oh, yes, she was a translator. And she's still translating. So she was a writer and translating.

And then, her conscience called, and she was, I think, even in armed fighting before she started taking children up into her home.

You were living in a forest, you said?

Yes, in a forest.

Was that dangerous?

It was very close to another German center place, [? Homan, ?] which was a German encampment there.

And they had no idea that you were in hiding nearby?

They had no idea we were there. No, they, in fact, there were more people around there who were all working together with Tante Audry. Because some of those people we visited. But in case of danger, the oldest one was a 13-year-old, knew a hiding place in the forest. And she was then to lead us to it in case there was treason, or anything. Or if we had to get away quickly.

Did that ever happen?

We had-- yes, we had at times, we had to stay in the forest during a night or a day, until the danger had passed.

Was that an adventure for you? Or did you feel fear?

Well, Tante Audry made it into an adventure. We got all Indian names.

Oh, my.

I was Sharp-Eye, because apparently, or Falcon Eye, because I was able to discover little nests of birds, and so on. And discover things. And somebody else had the name of Rapid Foot, because he could run fast. And we were learned-- we were taught to suffer. Because she thought if the case we get into more suffering, she would be able-- she taught us to be able to endure.

Like what? How did that come about?

Well, go without water, go without food. Teach us--

That was part of an adventure, too, I presume.

Well, yes, and endure pain. Well, we had to, because sometimes somebody had to go to a dentist. A dentist did this also in secret. But he didn't have the medication to give an injection, or so, so teeth had to be pulled, or teeth had to be filled. Or a doctor had to do something to a snakebite, and there was no way of-- no anesthesia.

Did you feel comfortable with Tante Audry and the other children?

Well, it became a way of life, yes. I think Tante Audry taught me a great deal in life. Some of the bad experiences can be turned into a learning experience for the rest of your life.

Certainly.

And endurance is one. Learning to go without things, learning to share, learning-- well, at that time, I was able to walk on everything barefooted because we didn't have any--

In the wintertime, too?

Part of the wintertime, yes, because we didn't have shoes. And if we had shoes, they were too small.

So you really had to learn to manage. Do you remember missing your parents and your brother?

Well, after a while, it became a way of life, to be without parents or without family.

Because everybody was without parents, too.

Well, after a while, I didn't stay the whole time with this woman, with 13 other children. Unfortunately, there was treason in that illegal movement, and Manfred was picked up in a train, found out. And apparently, he happened to have that one time, lists with him of where we all were.

Oh, my.

So then, of course, we all had to disperse, we all had to go.

How long, up till then, had you been with Tante Audry?

I can only-- I can't really tell you a whole span. I know that--

One winter?

A half a year or so, half a year, maybe longer. I never asked Tante Audry. And it looked as-- yeah, maybe three quarter of a year. Then, after that, I went-- or was it before Tante Audry? I was also with a family-- I was at 12 other addresses. And it was all mixed up.

12 in the--

About 12, yeah.

So it gets a little confusing.

Yes, and I was with one couple who had, at that time, two children. And he was-- they both were teachers. And he lived on an estate of a baron. I was hidden there for some time, too.

These were also non-Jews?

Non-Jews, oh, yes.

All the hiding places were with non-Jews?

Non-Jews. And I remember-- that was must have been in the beginning of my hiding, because I became rather confidential with the two daughters of this baron-- I played with. They were my age. And these girls, I said in a very-- when we were playing, and I said very secretive, I said, I'm really not Sophia Van Doorn, my real name is Cohen. I am Jewish.

And when they came back home, they told it to their parents. This baron brought it back to the teacher. And then, I remember this Tante [DUTCH], this auntie told me, well, you're not Jewish. And your parents are dead.

So that's how they just cleaned up the whole-- just don't talk about them anymore. They don't exist anymore. They're dead. So that's it, that's part of your life you don't need to talk about.

Did you believe them?

Well, they said it's very dangerous for me, I shouldn't talk. It cost me my life, it can cost their lives. So they really imprinted on me that I should not--

And you were old enough to absorb that, presumably.

Yeah.

Did you go to school during this time?

No, I didn't. No, I lost about three years of school. Also during that time, I spent a couple of nights, or three, four nights with Quakers, who had a school there. And when the Germans came on that estate, I stayed with Quakers in Holland for some time.

And then, I went back to Tante Audry again, and then we started marching, barefooted, and I was a day's walk, but we went in little groups, two or three, to another place in Ede, it's called. And there was an-- I believe the head of that particular institute must have been in the illegal movement, too.

But the rest of the institute didn't know anything. Not the nurses, or the nurses aides, or the doctors-- maybe just the directors knew. And that was a home for retarded and physically very, very, very severely handicapped children.

And when we arrived there, in little groups, we all had to-- we were instructed that at times that the Germans would come, that we all had to assume some kind of a handicap, to be part of the whole--

Of the group.

Of the group.

Normal?

Yes. And of course, we were not supposed to know each other. When we arrived, we should do as if we never had met each other before, and we just reacquainted there.

Yes.

And from there-- there must have been--

Did the Nazis come to that--

Yes, they once came. We were then in the sandbox playing, and at the time that they came, well, we all either lie down, or whatever we had to do to just be part of the rest of the crowd of the people who were there.

To make believe you were with the other children.

Yes. And then, from then, we all dispersed to-- oh, no, not-- see, then we went also-- that was before, I'm sorry--

That's all right, it's so confusing, 12 places. People can't keep one or two moves.

Yeah, no I think before we went to Ede, we all went with Tante Audry to a home, a big home of a professor. And of course, the professor was not a collaborator with the Germans. And he lived also in-- he had his house in the forest, too. And there we were for some time, until that place became dangerous.

Was Tante Audry with you at that point?

Yes, the whole time--

So you had a feeling-- you had some continuity with you much of the time.

Yes, until after the place-- until after the institution where we were, that hospital or the rehabilitation center, that center, then it became too dangerous. And then, we all were placed in different homes. Maybe some two together, but I was placed then with a farmer in Friesland, which is in the northern part of Holland.

By yourself?

All-- yes, by myself.

And how was that?

Well, that was the most traumatic of all.

Why was that?

First of all, it was very isolating. I was the only child. And if you ever have been in the northern part of Holland, you know, farms are very far apart. It's a very stretched out, flat country, separated by waters and some trees. And lots of livestock.

And since I wasn't allowed to go to the village, I remember spending most of the time in the summer-- I used to be amongst the sheep. And in the winter, I used to be in the stable amongst the cows.

Were the people nice to you?

Yes, their own way, they were. they were rather primitive people in their thoughts.

They were very religious. And I guess their biggest hope was that my parents wouldn't return. And that they could convert me to their religion. For them, it was a certain thing to be sure to be closer to God.

This was their way of expressing--

This was their way of-- yes.

Were there other children nearby?

Not close enough for me to--

So you were really very much alone, then.

Yes, yeah, so I learned to cope with isolation there.

Oh, my, all these things for a little girl-- you're only eight or nine, then, I guess.

Yeah, and of course, the different cultures I came-- I was with a very cultural family. I was with this Tante Audry, who was a very stoic person, and had her own way of input. And then, the institute.

And oh, in between, I was also with a-- I guess before I went to this farm, I was with a doctor in veterinary medicine. I stayed with him for some time, and his family. I remember falling off his motorcycle at--

Oh, my.

He took me, at one point, on a ride. And he had not noticed that I had fallen off. So that is one of the fun things that I remember. [LAUGHS]

Now, not any time during this time did you connect with your parents or your brother?

No.

So that was certainly traumatizing. What happened to your brother, Sophia?

I don't know if it's traumatizing. I think as a child, it's part of your-- yeah, it becomes a life, a way of life. It's as you say, you're just here if you say you're Jewish, it can cost your life. So you learn not to say you're Jewish. And you'll be very circumspect, and you become very secretive.

And so you also observed the non-Jewish holidays, Christmas and Easter with all these people? And you had new activities.

Yes.

Just took it as it came?

Yeah, in fact, I became very involved in the religion at this farm. But they were very-- I guess, Calvinistic, like here. Very, very observant.

What happened to your brother at this time?

My brother was in hiding all the time in one room, hidden, or with one family. He didn't move. Was close to Arnhem, which was another center of German occupation. And he was hidden with two older brothers. And since they were all in one room, they took it upon themselves, these two older young fellows, to teach my brother.

And he went through these years, going through everything in elementary school, so that when he came out of hiding, he could just go over into high school. He had not lost anything.

So he didn't lose any time with education.

No. But he went through a day of teaching. Each one took upon him in math, and whatever. And so they kept themselves busy and occupied. Even some gym on a mattress, I think, to not disturb--

So he has different kinds of experiences and remembrances. And what happened to your parents, Sophia?

My parents knew of each other where they were located. And they were-- however they were not sitting-- they were not hidden together my father was in one room and he was also rather dark of complexion. And he was most of the time in a room. And during those years, he did an awful lot of woodwork, cutting, fine--

Whittling?

Whittling-- no, not really whittling. I don't know, planters, cutting out all kinds of beautiful figures in wood. I never-- I don't know what happened to all those beautiful--

Something that he had never done before?

Never done before.

Was your mother nearby?

Close enough to see him then some now and then.

Oh, they did see each other.

Yes, but they never saw-- my father didn't come out. My mother did-- my mother was-- first of all, she had a nurse's uniform. And she had taken upon herself-- and was taken in by a family, non-Jewish farming family, who had an elderly mother who was very sick

Oh, so she took care of--

And needed to be nursed. Yes. And of course, my mother put also peroxide on her-- and bleached her hair. And there's one funny anecdote, because my mother held, during hay season, she used to help bringing the hay in. With a big pick-up fork and putting it on the hay wagons.

And she at one point she had a red handkerchief on her hair. And one of the young men, who was slightly retarded, said to my mother, Marie, you look just like Ruth out of the Bible.

She remembered that to tell you. Oh, we should talk about, you mentioned your mother's name, Marie, which wasn't her name.

No.

And we have a picture of the identification papers of your parents. Perhaps we could see them on the screen, and you can explain to us what happened.

Well, one of them is Marie. My mother got-- my mother's name is Rebecca. And she got the name of Marie de Jager. And my father, whose name is Isaac, which is Isaac, got the name of Albert Van Doorn. And probably Dr. Van Noss, who was involved in the falsification, told you that it wasn't easy to get or to make those identification papers. But those were very often stolen, or by purpose lost by other citizens.

Oh, to be picked up to be used for resistance?

For resistance, right. And after the war, when I was a student, it was far after the war, in the '50s, I was a student, and we had a play. And the play director was Albert Van Doorn.

Oh, that's your father's name. Or father's pseudo name.

Yes. So I went up to him and I asked him if he had ever lost his papers during the war time. And he said, well, he used to have them pickpocketed by purpose. So I said, my father used to carry his name.

His name. That is a strange coincidence. So they lived under strange and covert circumstances, as you did.

Yes.

And during that time, just your parents knew of each other. But did they know where the children were?

Well, that's another story. The connection-- do we have--

Yes, we have time.

The connection was supposed to be kept up by a courier-- a courier?

Yes.

From the illegal movement. And in the beginning, my mother knew where I was. And of course, I was in one address, at one address. But as soon as Manfred was picked up, the connection--

What happened to Manfred?

Yeah, he probably tortured, and then sent to Bergen-Belsen. And my mother mentioned that somebody had seen him last in Auschwitz, and he was sent on the death march.

So he wasn't heard of, he didn't survive?

He didn't survive, no.

Oh, so that is sad. So let's go back to the courier. So the courier was supposed to keep the connections flowing.

But he wasn't supposed to know the-- I mean, we-- my mother was not supposed to know where we were located. Or I wasn't, of course, supposed to know where my parents were located.

And I guess, when I was six, I didn't even write. What the courier did, probably brought messages over that I was fine. I was doing all right, this-- but as soon as the treason was in the illegal movement, and Manfred was picked up, the connection was broken.

Well, then how did you get-- that's the question I've been waiting to ask-- how did you all get together at the end of the war? When? How did it come about?

Well, my brother who was older than I was, somehow they were able to-- that was a different movement. And my mother was burning of curiosity to find out where my brother was located. And my brother had started a newspaper, so-called newspaper. And he had made himself the name as Peanut Chinese, or something like that.

And my mother wrote once in a paper, please would the Peanut Chinese be able to write down where this person lives? Or in some kind of a puzzle way. And apparently, in a series of newspapers, my brother was able to code his address to her.

Oh, this was still while the war was on?

Yes, so she found out through him where he was. And so for her, she knew where he was, and all through the war. With me, of course, there was no connection. So while the war was still going on-- because towards the end, she couldn't stand the tension anymore. And she put on her nursing uniform again and went on a bicycle, on wooden tires, because they didn't have regular tires, of course.

And with the person where she was hidden, this non-Jewish man, they both went on the bicycle, and they went from address to address to trace me.

You mean, they did have certain addresses?

Well, they started from where they knew where I was.

I see, and followed-- had each one refer. And how long did that all take till they found you?

I believe about three weeks, three or four weeks.

It was very brave of her. She could have been picked up at that time, too. So did she come to the final destination to see you?

Yes, yes. At that point, I was-- and that is another-- I don't know how long I have time.

Please, that's all right.

That was in another place. That was next-- I was hidden with that Frisian family who had two elderly parents with them. And the father was very old. He was always in bed, I remember. Because at one point, I had to be hidden with him under the blankets, when the Germans came. So I was under his legs.

Oh, my.

With the little box of bonds, or food stamps. That and me was under the blanket under his legs when the Germans came.

And they didn't suspect anything?

Well, they walked in the room and walked out again. They saw a very sick old man lying in bed. And but at the time that he was dying, I was brought into a village-- it was a remarkable place. That was not too far from where the farm was, a few miles away, 5 miles, I think.

That whole village was illegal. The whole village was in the resistance. And they had-- I don't know how many, many, many people hidden, people who were in the resistance. And for whom the ground got too hot, and also Jews. And they had the most ingenious hiding places all over-- extra floors, in the chimneys, just--

And you were brought to that village?

Yes. And the only way that they could get people immediately in hiding place was that outside the village was a big electrical power tower. And one person was waiting there, and a person in a room in that little village, in the village, was sitting with the light on, always.

It was a guard.

As a guard. And as soon as the light would go on and off, they knew there was a patrol coming. Because it's a very flat country. So from miles away, they could see a whole--

Platoon?

Or all these trucks would come down the road. So there was enough time to warn if the light would go on and off three times, everybody who had to go in hiding would be hidden.

And in that place, I was with a baker. And it was Sinterklass evening, it was December 5th, I remember. Because that was the night when we were all sitting together. There were more people. And at one time, the man was called to the front-- and there was my, apparently my mother, and this other friend with her.

And she said, if I was there. So he didn't want to give me away, because he wanted to be sure that that was my mother. So my mother-- as I saw it then, there was a woman standing in the doorway with this gentleman. And we all had to parade past her-- everybody, grown-up, small children.

And I passed by. And suddenly, I was yanked out of the group, and that's her. That's how she found me.

But I didn't want to ride away.

You didn't want to break that tie yet? Did you want to go to your mother?

Tie-- I don't know. No, I didn't want to agree that this stranger was my mother. I felt, no, she was dead. She had deserted me, and she wasn't there. This could not be my mother. Although, maybe deep down, I recognized her.

So that was part of the trauma of being in hiding for so long. The deception had really reached you. How did you meet your father? How did you reunite with your father?

Afterwards, after the war, I was picked up, I was brought back by-- we had, before the war, a non-Jewish help. And this lady came after the war, picked me up, and brought me to her home. And there, my parents came.

Do you remember that reunion?

No. Not too much.

There are other things that are more vivid. Sophia, when we had the Dutch consul, Van Nass here, Professor Van Nass, he talked about people coming to him, the Dutch Jews, to get forged papers. Now, were these people of means? People who were better established who didn't live in the ghetto? Were they ghetto Jews? How did that work?

I think that, first of all, to get papers, you had to have some-- you had to be able to purchase them. Unfortunately, yes. Money is very-- it's very true in these times, and it's in war time, money gives freedom in many ways. And also, I think that in the ghetto, people didn't have really connections with non-Jews. They were so on their own and were so isolated by the barbed wire and walls.

Oh, they were actually put behind barbed wire? So they didn't have access to other avenues. And so I suppose those were the Jews who were picked up and easily--

Very easily transported. Those were the first ones.

First ones.

First ones. So in your book, *The Annals of the Dutch Community*, those that survived were mostly those that didn't live in the ghetto, I presume.

No, that's not true. Because if people were picked up and sent to concentration camps, very often, those people worked. Were able to go through the camps with working. It depends-- it's the survival of the fittest, the survival of the strongest.

We were living in the south, and I know one neighbor was a collaborator. And we had to be very careful not to contradict. And my brother was in those days a bit naughty, and at one point, he would pull the bell, push the bell, and run away. And at one point, my mother was-- that was before '42-- this lady was standing there and told my mother that your son, you know, I've seen him. He pushed the bell, and he should be-- he's naughty.

And so my mother was very, very upset with my brother. Because it could have cost our lives. They could have just called the Germans and say here are these Jews. They're bothering us. Just pick them up.

And I presume that happened at times.

At times, it happened--

But first, Holland has a good reputation compared to other countries.

Well, Denmark was, of course, number one.

And then we heard the stories of Belgium, as well.

Yes, yeah. In Holland, yes, but there were also quite a lot of people who were very-- who were welcoming the Germans in Holland. There was quite a--

Of course, there were historical ties from way back. I think before we run out of time, Sophia, you mentioned your Tante Audry. And we have a picture of her. And perhaps you want to tell us about your activities on her behalf. Oh, here she is.

You want to tell us about her. She's still alive?

Oh, yes. She's in her 70s, and she's still-- she's sickly. I don't really what is ailing her, but she says, she doesn't leave her home very much anymore. But she's still very involved, is very aware of everything around her. And she is doing still translating work.

And I think I'm the only one who is really in close contact still with her. I'm trying to get her in the Yad Vashem, in the-

Oh, in the Avenue of the Righteous?

Gentiles, yes.

And you have to get several more witnesses to testify on her behalf?

That's what they requested, yes.

Well, are you in touch with any of the 13 with whom you were housed?

No.

Is she?

She said that she-- no, she wrote me just by accident that she knows of one person in Israel. I know, too, but I don't know the address. I'll see if I can get the address and the name of this-- that is the oldest girl, by the way.

Oh, the one that you talked about.

But when I wanted to take up contact with her in '74, when we were in Israel, my husband and my oldest son and I, at

that point, I was still four months pregnant with my youngest.

That's when you visited Tante Audry?

Yes, and I was in Israel, also. And I didn't dare take up contact with Lynn, that's the oldest of the 13 girls and boys, since she had just lost a son in the Yom Kippur wars.

So it was too emotional.

It was too painful.

Too painful. Did the rest of your family, aside from your parents and your brother, survive?

Of my father's side, and he was from a large family, he was one of six brothers and sisters, only one sister, her husband, and one child survived.

My mother's-- well, we all have splinters here and there, some cousins over-- but my mother's closest relatives fortunately were in Israel. My mother's sister was in Israel, had escaped from Germany in '33 with her family. And my mother's brother was, in fact, the first one to see us. He was in the Jewish Brigade of Montgomery's Eighth Army, yes, and he fought-- he enlisted in Israel, and then through Sicily, and then up north.

That must have been a wonderful reunion.

For him, yes.

Or for the family.

Yeah, I didn't remember him so much. But my mother, of course.

Of course, of course. Do you tell these stories to your children? I know your children are young.

They're asking more and more so, now. So far, I haven't--

Will you tell these stories to your children?

Well, Bob wants me to write it down sometime, or maybe take it on tape.

Or as you mentioned, trials strengthen people. And vicariously, in telling your children, they will certainly learn another dimension of your life and the life of the Jews.

What are your feelings toward the Germans, toward Nazis?

Oh, I for the longest time, that I'm able to talk about this is just a very short time. Beforehand, I was not able to talk about my experiences. It was something emotional. I couldn't explain why.

There's a block?

Yes, there was something about it, I couldn't. And I hated them so immensely. And still, I would not be able to go to Germany to-- maybe for transfer from one plane to another plane. But that is the longest I could be in Germany or Austria.

Because it would just be too traumatic for you.

Yes, as long as there is a generation alive still of whom I suspect that they might have been involved in anything of this

macabre period, I just don't want anything to do there. Contact with Germans, I was able to make, I think, in the late '60s, early '70s, I started to be able to relate to people of my age, of my own generation.

Yes, what made it easier for you to talk about your experiences after all these years?

I guess, maturity, growing up.

Having your own children, perhaps?

No, I guess distance.

Years away from it.

Yeah.

Do you and your brother ever share experiences? Ever talk about it?

No. And it's strangely enough, I have also friends-- we never-- and also in Holland, we never used to talk about experience. I had an aunt who was in a camp, in the medical experimental lager. And so we never, never talked about this. This was taboo. Nobody did that.

And we were very circumspect not to talk about it, very circumspect. We would meet new, or some other Jewish people, we would never ask about family, because you don't know where you would step.

You would be afraid to hurt them.

Yes.

Does this involve your mother in the same way? Does she talk about her experiences now, after all these years?

More so. I think in general, she's talking more about the past. So she's an elderly lady, so she's thinking more.

So it's easier for her.

I don't know-- I think also old age brings back more memories of--

It makes them a little more vivid, too. She's living more in the past, more in the past.

Yeah.

I think our time is almost up, and I wanted to ask you one more question. It's very good of you to give your time. What is the message that you would like to give to people who will be hearing your story and seeing you?

Well, I hope that nobody needs to be separated from their family, because you never know what experiences a child is going through away from their parents. And very traumatic experiences.

And the reason why I wanted to have this interview is just to avoid anything like this, and worse. And I'm sure you have that on tape, too, to re-occur with any group in humanity.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Sophia. I know it's been difficult, but your story is so valuable.

Thank you very much for coming tonight.

I did gladly.

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