

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Tina Strobos
February 11, 1992
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Tina Strobos, conducted on February 11, 1992 in Larchmont, New York on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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TINA STROBOS

February 11, 1992

Beep.

Are you ready? We're going. Okay, let's start talking about what changes happened in everyday life when Hitler invaded.

Well, right away after we were invaded, we had a call from a well known uh Jewish Socialist/Communist friend of my grandparents to ask for shelter. This was the day after the army, Nazis, marched in, and uh, we said they could come, and they lived in the country in Lavin, and we had visitors sometimes, we were not close, but his cousin, for instance, had been in our house, so we had had contact with them on and off, and we told my grandmother that uh we were, our house was full at that po-moment because we rented a room, that uh, would she take them, and she said immediately, "Yes." So, one thing is if they come for him, being followed for instance, you got paranoid right away too. Um, well, then you tell them that you don't know, that you're just renting a room to these people, and uh, they're fleeing from the war, and she said, "But, he's a communist with a picture in the paper, you know, and I read the paper." "Well, can't you say that you can't read the paper anymore?" "No." She says, "And I've lined all my closets with the paper!" So well, my mother and I said, "Okay, we'll come over and rip out the paper and throw them out." So, but uh, in the kitchen cabinets it was glued on, so we started ripping them shred by shred, and we're sitting there in the kitchen with all these pots and pans on our knees, and ripping these little sheets, and I thought, "You know, this is crazy." The craziness started right the first day. When you say, "How did our lives change? It changed overnight. I remember waking up from the sound of airplanes, and the telephone rang at 5:30, 6:00 in the morning, and my aunt said, "Don't be upset, but the war has started." And that's how it changed, and we had this call right after that because they were, no, the war started last fa, five days--Rotterdam was bombed, and 5 days later we surrendered, and the refu--suicides began. We had many Jewish friends, and many suicided and uh, many started going hiding because they thought that was necessary. Then, Seisencort, who was a traitor of Germany, the head of the uh, Austrian Nazi, who had uh, was the head of the Nazi government from 38 became the head of our government so we had a civilian Gestapo government really, rather than, uh, Denmark had a military government, uh Belgium had a military government, France did, and the military, although they cooperated with Hitler, they weren't as antisemitic and as rabid. They didn't make passports, what, were as difficult to copy. Ours were the most difficult to copy. I don't know the ones in East Germany, in, in Eastern Europe, but it was easy if you

brought people to the Belgian border, like this man was talking about, uh, to get a Belgian passport was easy, was easy to falsify. Anyway, I, I used to start stealing passports right from the beginning.

Let's back up to how life changed, and tell me about things that changed in the street, for example.

Well, after that first panic wave, uh, things calmed down somewhat because the Germans in Seisencort were holding speeches about how they would wipe out your past, they weren't interested in politics, or changing our politics or arresting anyone, they would leave us alone as long as we didn't hinder their war effort. They were just interested in winning the war, and if we didn't sabotage their effort, they would leave us alone. Now we were too glad only to believe that. Sounded sensible that they would do that, but uh, we did not really uh at that moment take cognizance of the uh fact that *Mein Kampf* and Hitler, and many of his friends were obsessed with what they thought was the fifth column of the Jews inside. And that became more and more a priority, and of course, the Gestapo preferred arresting Jews and getting rid of them, and it was and undangerous job for them rather than going to the front. So they had a selfish interest in cleaning up the, the Jewish inside the country rather than the war effort. So their, their tension shifted. So, then gradually everybody had to have passports, every, they Jews had to have a J in it. And they segregated the Jews in the ghetto, former Jewish neighborhood, and, and the pogroms started, or raids, where they would just empty out all of the Jews. My mother was caught in one of those raids, and they let her out because she had no J on her passport, and many people asked to tape on the back of her bag or ,or on the back of her bike or in the bag of her bike, a Jewish baby, take out of the ghetto. And of course, they checked everything before she went out, she couldn't do that. But she came home broken. (Sighs). Well, my sorority that I was a member of was very active in the underground, and in placing Jews, and especially Jewish children. And I would pick them out of the ghetto because if they weren't raiding it, the ghetto was open, and you could ride in and out, you know, with a child. They were not checking. They could, but they didn't always. And so, uh, I took people out of there, brought them home, and then there were homes for them in the country, especially for children, it would be much better to place them in the farms, and uh, they would stay with us for a couple of days to a couple of weeks. And it is true we uh, finally found people staying with us one, because there weren't that many raids anymore after D-Day, that was June, forty....forty-four, June 6, 44. After that, there were no more trains to camps in Poland, and people had less raids. All the Gestapo's, the ----- against the green police, were all called up for active duty, and there were less raids, and then, we had more stable population in our house, 4 or 5 people, who stayed until the end of the war. And, uh, it's true, people that were not compatible with us, we'd try to find harder a place for them outside. Because it's hard to live with strangers in

your house, and uh, if they have a very different background, lifestyle, uh, well, for instance, I brought a young couple to uh, the hothouses in Asmir, where they lived fairly independently. They were brought food or they could cook some themselves. In other words, there's 2 of them in one hothouse, a big place and it was warm, unlike, most of our houses were unheated. So, uh, after a couple of fights with them, I found a place for them in a hothouse. They were better off, and we were better off.

Go back and talk a little more about how old you were at this time, and what your sorority did.

Yeah. When the war started, uh, those 5 days, uh, I was a medical student, and I was 19, almost 20. And uh, I was part also of an underground group. One of the leaders of the underground, Johann Brower, enlisted me. He was hiding in our house for a while, and he enlisted me, and I was part of a group of 10, mostly boys, students, and we read *Mein Kampf* and it was good, we, we knew what Hitler was about; we weren't as deluded as some. You know, we didn't know about the gas chambers, we didn't know about the Final Solution until after the war, but, I did not have much illusions when these people were called up, so-called for work in Germany, that they would come back. I did not, I thought maybe they worked them to death, but how come you never hear, you don't get a postcard, you don't get a message, nobody escapes.

We have to reload.

Beep.

Okay, let's uh, let's talk again about your sorority and how the education went underground and how many people were involved.

Yeah, uh, my medical school closed when we had to sign a loyalty oath, and uh, nobody wanted to sign a loyalty oath. The whole university closed, and except maybe, I remember out of my class of 200, there was one boy who was a Nazi, and, but there were no classes. But he, he signed the loyalty oath. Zeller was his name, I remember him. And he, we all thought he was an idiot to begin with, you know, one of these people who in grammar school have cooties, you know, the, somebody doesn't fit in anywhere, and those people became Nazis, about 3% of the population. And uh, it is true that they were very interested in power. They thought the Germans would win, and they would uh, harass us, you know, or betray us if they could. But most of the time, uh, I would say, you trusted people and you could trust people, because if you were in a streetcar, and a German soldier got in, in, they would say in Ger- in Dutch slang something derogatory, everybody

sort of wink or snicker, you know, like we're all, this is our enemy, and we were taught in the underground how to behave when you were arrested. And uh, always ask for an interpreter even though you speak German so that you can hear the question twice, and that you can correct the answer, and try to get in control of the interview by different ruses, you know, distractions and so forth, and I remember once, I was so afraid they had come to arrest me, and they, two guys took me by the wri-wrist, threw me against the wall, and I was trembling, and I didn't want to show them. Don't show them that you're scared, you know, then they'll become more sadistic. So, I was uh trembling, and to hide it, I was crossing my legs and uncrossing my legs, and I had shorts on, and this uh, Gestapo ----- said to me, "You're not impressing me with your legs." So then I stopped trembling automatically because I felt I had gained a little human control. He was, after all, just a person, a man, rather than, this devil. Anyway, and then, I...they sat me in a chair, and they were in the meantime rolling up the rugs, looking in all the closets, going in the attic, the basement, searching for contraband. And fortunately had, we had been warned, so there was no, nobody in our house hiding, no Jews, and we had no underground papers under the rugs, so I felt a little bit safer because of that. And then I asked if I could uh, speak to my grandmother. I said, you know, she's 80 years old, and she's expecting me for dinner. They always come around 6 in the morning or 6 at night. And he said, you can just say that you're not coming for dinner and nothing more. And they went with me to the telephone, you know, watching me. So I said, I'm not coming for dinner. And fortunately Tibs, uh, my best friend, Jewish girl, was hiding in her house because our house was empty. And she answered the phone, fortunately, because my grandma was a little deaf, and I knew I couldn't say too much, so Tibs said, "You weren't supposed to come here for dinner. Are you having visitors?" I said, "Yes," and I said, "Hang up," and she said, "I'll call your mother and warn her not to come home." And then he punched the button to hang up. And uh, that made me feel so good, the fact that she knew that they were there somehow that connection makes you feel very good, and that my mother wouldn't walk in the trap unwarned, and uh, she knew where my mother was. We were kind of on, on warning about that particular visit because they were looking for a particular man, who was indeed hiding in house -----, and we knew they were looking for him.

Let's go back to the sorority and the university, and tell me sort of in a broad way how the students all got involved and what general kinds of things they got involved in.

Well, for instance, I would get a call, "Could you pick up such and such a person at such and such an address, and keep that person until we have his uh, further, a further address for him. This was mostly in code we say, said all those things, so I would go there and pick, let's say, a little 3 year old, and then, um, they would call me and say, "Would you do an errand for us to um, Inghausen?"

or uh "Horne?" and I knew what that was, some contraband had to be transported. Like a radio sender for uh, contact with England. Of course, that was very highly punishable. And so, and they did have these little check, you know these little uh, how do you call, little wooden houses for soldiers on the roads everywhere, checkpoints, and they would uh, check you, and if you had food, they would uh, take it and keep it. Sometimes take your bike, they could do that. They would take your bike, and you had to walk home, wherever you were. And if you had a radio sender, well, that was, you would be shot. So I would bring things like that. We also hid weapons that were stolen from Virma. I'd get a call if we would keep stuff for a couple of days, usually a bit longer than a couple of days. And then uh, if you were one minute after 8 on the street, they would arrest you and you'd go to jail, and they'd always pick people from the jails to be shot if there was any, if any soldier was killed or any railroad blown up, whatever subversive activity, they would take 100 people and shoot them, innocent people, people in the camp or in the jail, innocent in the sense that they were one minute late after the curfew. So, but if you had to bring people to the country, it was very hard to get back before the curfew was over. So, I sometimes had to travel uh, at night. And then when it was 8 o'clock, uh you just slipped from doorway to doorway in the dark to find shelter yourself, to get back in time. Uh, fortunately, we had a network, and uh, sometimes it was far away in the country, uh, we would go two, and we would have two networks and addresses. And if I had to bring, let's say, a radio sender to another part of the country, uh, a boy would drive in front of me with no sender, and I would ride behind him, let's say 100 yards behind him with the contraband, and if, I were held up, he could escape, and I wouldn't know the address we were going to. And then I brought people to the Belgian border, and you had to get Belgian passports, but we got them there. But we would fix them there with a, they had to bring their passport pictures and put them on right then and there, and then they would go from there, from the village on the border. The Geeters had brought, and Lean Geeter was 7 months pregnant, and she, her husband, her brother, and her mother in law walked all the way to Spain--there was an underground railroad, and unlike what Harry was saying, a lot of people were caught, yes, but there was a reliable group that did this.

You mentioned in your other interview...

We have to change rolls.

We need to be more general...

Beep.

Why don't we start with the, why don't you describe the hiding place in your house and how that

got killed, and what it was like.

Well, we were hiding people, as I told you, from the very first day of the war really. Was the invasion, but uh, we didn't get a hiding place made until a carpenter, we hadn't really thought of that, although we had rehearsed that if there would be a raid on our house, and every house was raided, house block by block, house by house, they went to every house in the country, I'm sure, and especially in Amsterdam because there were so many Jews in Amsterdam. And, uh, so we had hiding, we had escape routes made, out of the window of the top floor, and then over the roofs in to uh, an attic of the school. Uh, I explained to you that our house, being a house, first of a mayor of Amsterdam, then it became a school, and with a house for the principal, and that house in 1915 belonging to the city of Amsterdam, was rented by my grandfather, and I was born there in 1920. And we lived in that, my mother, and later my grandmother, a maid, and I. And we rented rooms, one or two usually, and um, because my, my father had left, and he was not supporting us, and so um, when we started taking in people, we realized that they had to get away if the Gestapo came. So we had a first floor, in other words, electrical button could open the door, and so you could look through a wall window, through the door downstairs on the 1st floor downstairs on the 1st floor and see who's coming in. And we had a alarm that we rang for the 3rd floor, so the people on the 3rd floor could cripe, creep out the window, in the gutter, and get lost, and go to the attic on the back side of the house on the school, it was connected with us. There were two, a front part of the school, they had this wing, we had this wing, and then, in the back was the school behind the courtyard, and there were, uh, there was an attic that we had access too, so they could, you could go in hiding there. And that we had as an escape route, and we rehearsed that. To get out of the window and out in there quietly, very fast. So, when uh, uh time came that a man called and he said "I'm a carpenter from the underground," and he had tools with him, and he looked so honest and reliable, we trusted him. My mom said, "Do you know this man?" I said, "No, but let him make a hiding place." And he made such a good hiding place that when I go back to that house, It's very hard to find. It doesn't hold too many people though, 2 or 3 crammed sitting together, but we, we did have those safeties, unlike Anne Frank who didn't have, have a hiding place to go to in case for raid, and I think they were, well, either was not possible there or they were naive or fatalistic that once the Gestapo found them they would, that would be the end. I felt, felt that we maybe because it was part of an underground network, the, it's called the Lomlok Organization I found out later. The LO uh, trained us in how to do these things, not only to how to be interrogated, but what papers to get, what was safe, and uh, how you needed a hiding place in your house, or an escape route, to get out. You couldn't just go on the roof because they would uh, put barbed wire on each side on each side of the road, and machine guns, and they would have, even have somebody on, on the rooftops watching. It's impossible to believe the effort and time and manpower these Gestapo's

employed to, to catch Jews. And when my mother and I were arrested, and we said that this Hans Young they were looking for had indeed rented a house, a room in a house, but he was a businessman who had spent time in Amsterdam, and uh, yes, he had met his bookkeeper, we believe, there, uh, and his bookkeeper was arrested that's how we knew that his bookkeeper might be talking, so we had a story ready that Hans Young to us was not Jewish, he had good papers, he had blond hair, blue eyes, how could he be a Jew? Well, we'll show you pictures of eye grounds. And they showed us pictures of eye corners, I mean, like, 8 in a row, 16 pictures, and that's how you could recognize that somebody was a Jew, never mind the color of the hair. And my mother and I would say, "Really!?" You know, later, when we were alone, we said, "Can you believe such craziness?" They were crazy. Because, it couldn't be true, right? And besides, if it were, ----- planning to do that anyway, but of course, we had to uh, pretend, and they believed us. They always believed you if you went along with their delusions because they were possessed by this delusional belief descending from on high, Hitler, and the anti-Semites there that ruled the country, and they believed it, and they thought that we should believe it to, that it was natural for us to believe that, that Jews were really that evil, and that you had to wipe them out.

Can you tell me the story of incident on the street with the boy who ran when he was out after 6.

Yeah, my mother was a little careless, and we would tell her, you know, "you really have to come home in time," and one time they had uh, people with machine guns on the corner of our street, uh, and arrested a couple of people, and they waved to my mother to get off her bike and come in the side street. And uh, she waved back at them. I mean she, she was uh naive, and uh, no, no, over there, and they pointed a gun at her, and she went and so, well, people already arrested because it was 2 minutes after 8, and one boy bolted from this roll, and ran away over a bridge and back, and uh, he was shot, and a doctor who lived on the corner behind us, ran out of his house to tend to this boy. Well, my mother never did that again. But she was let go because she had a letter from a doctor that she had some phlebitis, and sometimes needed emergency help, which was true. She also had a heart condition. And so she had that letter with her. We did take precautions like that, so...

How organized was the sorority?

Excuse me?

How organized was the sorority?

I do not know. I was, of course, a new member, I was 19, and young student, and some of the members were uh, graduate students, medical students, you stay in school for 7 yrs, so some were older, and I have a feeling that one of my uh, older sorority members, uh organized this, but, we did not talk about those things, but when she called me, I could sort of tell that she was organizing this, and would I do this, or that. And then I would call her, in turn, and say, "I'm having a family of 5 people here. They're orthodox Jews, uh father mother and 3 children. Can you find shelter for them, they would like to stay together if at all possible." And then she would say, "Yeah, I'll do my best," and, uh, then they would be picked up by someone.

And what about the passports--we have to reload.

Beep.

Beep.

Why don't you start with that story

4-second sticks???

Family, and some of the things that happened, just give a little general story.

Well, my best friend in high school was Tetsa Fenamo, who uh, survived the war being hidden in our house, my grandmother's apt., and different places. Her sisters and her brother in law stayed with us the longest time, almost a year at the end of the war, but right before the end of the war, Tetsa Fenamo and her sister, Jan, her husband Leon Nortem, and Bram Pays, rented a, an apt in Janet's name. She had good fal-false papers and she rent an apt, and the four of them then, two boys, uh, were hidden, but the girls, not looking very Jewish, moved about freely. And they were of course very happy to have an independent life. And they were betrayed or they were arrested in a raid, and um, I got the girls and Bram Pays out by going to the jail and talking to the ----- . This was now, at the very end of the war, the spring of 1945, and they knew they had lost the war, the Germans, and they, the jails were overfilled, and Bram Pays was uh, invited by Neils Bohr to study in, in Denmark, and he had uh, I had a letter, and uh, just as he said, they did have some respect for scientists, maybe, and they let the girls go, they couldn't prove they were not Jewish because by now the Cadaster, where everybody was registered, so that you could check if somebody had a false passport, you could check if the counterpart was in the city hall. Cadaster. Well, that was burned by this Johann Brower and his friends, who had hired me, you know, for the underground,

and he blew that up with a bomb, and of course, he was arrested and killed. And uh, at least the advantage was they could not check anymore who had good papers and who had false papers by checking them with the city hall, registration.

(Sandy says something, can't hear)

So Bram Pays, how did I know him? He was a very close friend of uh, the Fenameroans, and I was 2 when we met there, and we actually were engaged to be married, or, let's say we were very close, and, uh, he hid in our house, but he hid also in my best friend's house, the Cohor's and in other people's houses, and uh, I still have contact with him, and he's writing his now his own bio-autobiography, and he sends me chapter by chapter to check for veracity and what I remember, and do I remember stories. So, should I tell you one of the stories about Bram Pays? He was very uh, up person, and uh, Leon Nordheim was shot in, I told you they were arrested, the 4 of them, I got the girls out, but basically you had good papers, and I got Bram Pays out because he had this paper by Neils Bohr where he was invited, and Leo Nordheim had on his pocket, in his pocket when he was arrested, a, a manuscript of a paper that he had written for the underground papers about what to do with the Jewish children after the war if their parents hadn't survived. And a copy of that paper he was carrying in his own handwriting on him, that had just happened. And so that was one reason why he was shot. The other was, I think, because he was so scared. Bram was not scared, and it made a difference, I think. Leon Nordheim also looked very Jewish, and that always got them. Well, let me tell you another story about Bram. For a long time, he was hiding in our house, and the doorbell rang very early, and a man called and he said Ziedepolizzi, that is the moral police, uh, police for uh, moral uh, well, the issue was he asked who lived in the back of the house, and my mother said, "My daughter has a room in the back." "Well, can I see that? Can I talk to her?" And what had happened was that I had washed myself, I had a basin in front of a window, and knowing that school wasn't open in the morning, I didn't think anybody would see me. Besides their windows were lower, so you couldn't look up. But, actually, a block and a half away, 2 streets further, was a seminary, a religious seminary, a Roman Catholic church, and they had trained, um, spyglasses on our house, and they had watched me undress in my room. Big deal. And so this man came, and we were very mad at this...uh, well, say, Prior of, the head of the Seminary that he hadn't called and called the police, I mean in those times you didn't call the police. You didn't know who was good and who was not good. Anyway, this man came upstairs, and my mother had rang the alarm bell, so Bram, she thought, would be in the hiding place in the attic. But Bram was very bold and curious, being a scientist, and he was, instead of going up in the attic, he was listening behind the door. He didn't realize there was a, uh, milklice window in that door. And you could see his Jewish profile through the window, and the man said, "Who is there? Who lives in that room?"

And my mother said, "Well, here's my daughter's room. She opened the door to my room, and so he told the story what we, I, was accused of, and I said, "Oh, thank God, is that all?" which was stupid of me, you know, because, but I had a feeling that this was a decent citizen. He had, wore a bowler hat, boulder? bowler hat. The Gestapo wouldn't wear bowler hats, you know those English hats with a rim and it's round, round ball. So, Bram thought it was all funny. One time he came, and uh, we had, we would listen to the radio, that was also punishable by death penalty--if you had a radio and listened to the BBC. But, we were one of the few people who felt we could have them, we should have it and listen to it, and then, as many as 30, 35 people would come to listen to the radio. Well a gathering of more than 8 or 10 was also punishable by death. But, that was a lot of fun for us, to have all our friends come and visit, and for them of course, being hidden, and, kind of locked up in isolation, you know, this is one family, was a great thing for them, and they would all meet each other and chat and then, uh, the Dutch National Anthem would sound, you know, we'd all be quiet, the Queen was going to speak, the Dutch Queen was in hiding, in exile in London, and uh, and she would talk, and then the National Anthem would sound again, and my mother sat up and she said, "Quiet! The National Anthem! The Queen is going to speak!" Well, she had just finished when all of the sudden, tired from all this, she just fell asleep even though there were 30 people in the room, so we just started laughing uncontrollably. Here was this big event and she had slept through the whole thing. She was reprimanding us for being quiet...Another incident that was funny and sort of tells you how we lived was that uh, we were just sitting down to dinner with the people we were hiding, this was Leon and Janet and Hans Doin and Vishavasonte were the Jews, and there was my grandmother, our maid, my mother and myself, and we were sitting down and all we had was rotten potatoes, and my mother said, "Something smells awful." "It's the potatoes." "No, no," she said, "I know what they smell like, it smells like the cat did something. Let's go look." So we all sniffed around, and I said, "I know what it is," and there was a shelf behind my mother's head, and there was a loaf of bread behind it, and the bread by now was so terrible, it smelled like cat doo, cat doo, and that was what the smell...Anyway, so, that's how we lived. This bread was mud colored, and in the middle was something, it wasn't flour, I don't know what, what was it, we ate mostly sugar beads ground up, which was mostly cellulose, and my mother was hospitalized because it formed a knot in her intestine, and she had acute ----, and she had to be hospitalized, and nothing would pass anymore through that knot of cellulose. And I was so proud that I had a new recipe--you know, you grind up this, this sugar bead, and it looked just like rice, and then you put, we still had curry powder, and you put curry on it, and it looks like curried rice. Well, my poor mother was hospitalize for that.

Okay, we have to reload.

Beep.

What did you and your family and other rescuers risk? What were the risks?

Life and death. There were big placards hung up all through the city that helping Jews uh, was punishable by death. And, uh, this was no idle boast--my uncle, who did not have Jews found in his house, was in a camp, concentration camp for a year...

Let's stop...Go ahead and come down.

Take 6 is up.

Beep.

I'm just going to start again.

What were the things that you and other rescuers risked?

If you were caught, you were going to be punished by death. And whenever they arrested us, just for, you know, being accused, helping Jews, uh, they would say, "You're under arrest, you're going to jail." And my uncle who was accused of helping Jews was a year in a concentration camp. Now, this was not a gas chamber camp, this was a Dutch camp, but, people died like flies there from undernourishment, illness, and uh, he escaped sort of miraculously. They emptied out the camp, and he was left behind with a couple of other people hiding in the latrines. And he walked to the next village, it was in Fuft, and uh, he came home emaciated a year later. They helped him in Fuft, they called his family, they gave him money for the train, and it wasn't, this was not toward the very end of the war, and his wife, my aunt, was allowed to send him a package once a month, of maybe 3 lbs of food and uh, she would come to our house to make a package, it was so painful for her to do that, and uh, I have asked his three daughters to record what he did and what uh, what they actually found uh, what they found, they came to my grandmother's and they were uh, she was under arrest, she was then in her 80s and they said, um, she said, "Why have you arrested my son? You have absolutely no proof that he did anything wrong." "Yes he helped Jews. He uh, we found silver in his house with initials that were not his own." So my grandma took a drawer from her uh, chest, and she emptied it out all over the table, and there was all this silver, forks and knives, and she said, "Look at that. In our family, we buy at auctions. You see there are initials on there that are not ours, so, I think that's a lot of nonsense." The man was sort of quiet, and he had sent the

others away, and it was just one Gestapo with her, which was unusual, but they figured, you know, she was so old maybe, she wouldn't do anything bad. And then, uh, let's see, he was questioning her, "Had she helped Jews?" She denied it of course, and she grabbed his arm, and she looked in his face, and she said, "I saw you at my neighbor's house, the Mendelssohn's, and you took a rug at night, you were alone with another guy, and you're not allowed to do that. That's looting, and that's forbidden." And the man got very nervous, and he put all his papers together in his, in his briefcase, and he said he had to go now, and he never came back, and we, we said, "Grandma, you know, you, he could have shot you, and nobody would have, have known the difference, right." And they did that, as I just told you before. Well, she scared him away. She scared him, and when she was retelling the story, she got all angry again, you know, and he was afraid of her.

Over all those years of rescuing, about how many people went in and out of your house?

Hundreds, close to a hundred. My mother and I made a list after the war. I lost the list with all the names of the people.

Tell me how...

Well, as I said, people would call us and ask us if they could stay with us, and then if uh, we had to get the house empty again, we would uh place them elsewhere. And so, a new bunch would come. And uh, at the end of the war, uh, one of the girls that uh, hid in our house for a long time, Visha Ensante, she's a survivor, uh, was caught, was in jail, and one of the Gestapo's uh, not the head, but right under him, protégé, uh, made her his lover, he set her up in an apt, he dyed her hair blonde, and he sent her out to make contact with the underground, her, her group, her boyfriend and his brother, whom I also knew quite well, made bombs and they were caught, and they were shot, and Visha was in this apt and she went to the underground, brought messages back, but fake, and of course, she could not keep that up too long. She was 17 and not well. She had a slipped disc probably, uh, now I know she did. I got her later in a hospital under a false name, but anyway, she escaped from this apt, and we hid her, and of course, it was doubly dangerous, they were looking for her. And, uh, so...

Were you afraid all the time?

Yes, we were terrified all the time, but, you know, you can suppress that fear if you know that it's important, what you're doing. I also distributed underground newspapers. I thought it was important enough to risk your life for. It was very important to have communication and know

what's going on in the world, rather than the censored press, which was worthless. So...

Do you think it was a combination of fear and excitement, adventure...?

Yeah, it was also an adventure, that's true. I wasn't, I would say, the most adventurous because that group of 10 that I was assigned to by Johann Brower, uh, he was born conspirator, he had fought in the Spanish Civil War, and, um, I was afraid of him, his recklessness, and I was afraid of the 10 guys I was connected with. They were the kind that made bombs and did dangerous thing, and I'm a pacifist, I was against violence. I didn't rescue German soldiers who fell in the canal, but I didn't kill anybody, I didn't want to kill anybody, and, uh, so I left that group, and none of those survived, those boys, not sur, did not survive. One of my best friends had a radio sender, he never survived. Many, there was many friends that I was in high school with, apart from the Jewish friends that I lost, uh, the underground, I lost many...and uh, Johann Brower was killed, um, I wasn't such a daredevil that I carried a gun or did, made bombs, I was um 100% into making passports, underground papers, and hiding people, mostly hiding people, and taking care, and I would visit them once a month. I would be the only contact for them with their family or with, well, their old world. It was very important. One young boy of 14 that I visited regularly was a very heartbreaking, quiet, depressed kid, and, uh, the people that he was with were also rather quiet and un, unemotional people, and they would complain to me that he had such smelly feet, which he did. As soon as you came in the apt, you smelled it, it was really terrible. And I couldn't understand that they didn't discuss that with each other. So, I said "You must talk about that," and we did, and I said, "You have to wash your feet all the time, and uh, bring a powder, and you have to powder your feet, and you have to walk on your socks, and you have to walk on your socks, and they have to be washed, and you don't...smell it, but it's really terrible for people to live with that." So, it seems like a crazy problem but smell is very important, and you can't live with a bad smell in your house. And so they almost hated him and I said, "I cannot send this young kid, he's your child, you have to tell him this." So, that problem got fortunately solved.

Uh, tell me a little more, we have to reload.

Correction, sync take 7 is up.

Beep.

Okay, so tell me about the Gestapo, and the times that they came to your house. How many, and in general what you knew about it or didn't know about it. How you felt about it.

Most of the time I would think we knew that they were coming. Like when Hans Dion's bookkeeper was arrested. We could suspect that he would talk, and he did, that he had met his boss in our house, and so we were prepared then that they were coming. At the same time, you couldn't hide yourself elsewhere, then you wouldn't be useful anymore, and there was a good chance that if we had a good story together, my mother and I, that we would, as before, talk our way out of it. We felt we were so smart, we had done it before. And, uh, so when I was arrested there and they threw me against the wall, and uh, they left, but they, they would come in, the way you knew that it was the Gestapo is they would ring the bell, and two men would come at once, obviously armed, you know, like you see in the movies, and even some with open arms, but they came in uh, civilian clothes, but 2 at once throwing open the door, well, that's most unusual, so you knew it was the Gestapo, they rang the bell to warn, and usually when we were by the in, from the Gestapo headquarters, these men wouldn't say "This is Gestapo headquarters," but he said, "You're going to have visitors," and then hang up, so I deduced from that he knew what he was talking about because a few days later they would come. And so, we heeded these warnings, and we would call everyone, get rid of everyone, get rid of all the illegal newspapers, the illegal passports that was on their way in transit to different places, and we would call every Jewish person, or every underground person, uh, "Don't come, we're going to have visitors." Well, Hanna Nordbauer, a Jewish girl, who made passports, always travelled with about 30 to 50 passports in her pocketbook, came anyway, and, we said, "Hanna, we called you." Well, right on her heels, they came. There was no way for her to get out. So I said to my mother, "I'll put her in the hiding place, and you keep them busy downstairs here. So, I went upstairs, we put her in the hiding place, and thank God they didn't stay too long, and they didn't search the whole house. They just sniffed around. They usually came with 6 people, and they sniffed around everywhere, fanned out, rolled up rugs, looked, but this time they didn't go to the attic. So after they left, I went to the attic to get Hanna out of there, and in front of the hiding place was a little bunch of freesias wrapped in a fresh paper, and if they had seen that, I bet they would have thought, "How come there's a bunch of flowers lying in the attic on the floor? There's something going on here." So my mother and I were very angry at Hanna and said, "If we call you not to come, you really must not come." So, this is how it went.

Were you afraid of the Gestapo?

Was I afraid of them?! I was terrified of them. It was, my mother would tremble from head to toe when they would come, and I would uh, sort of hold her arm or say, "Don't show them you're scared. Don't show them you're scared." There's nothing here in the house. Don't worry. They can't pin anything down on us." You know, whenever they weren't paying attention, uh, I'd bolster

her spirits.

Were you behind most of the rescuing, and she not behind it?

She was 100% behind me, but I got most of the people in. Hans Young was one of her people, an older man. But, most of the people that came, came through my network, and my friends, and as I said, uh, Henry Polok, who called the first day after the invasion was uh relationship of my grandparents, and called her specifically.

Can you talk about how important rescuing was in general in Poland. How big an effort it was generally.

It must have been a big thing in Amsterdam and all over the country because I know the churches were doing this, and I know uh ordinary uh farmers who'd never seen a Jew were doing this, I brought people to them, and they didn't really care about, they cared about doing the right thing. I mean, I could say that most of these people were my friends, or friends of my friends, although we had people that we had never seen before, but, it was very important, and my whole family was involved in it, and all my friends were involved in it. Two of my cousins were also in jail for a long time for helping.

Were you afraid of traitors?

Very afraid.

Well, tell me about them.

Well, if you lived next to uh NS-----, is uh, Dutch Nazis. Uh, these people were paid and trained to, to watch out for Jews at the neighbor's houses, and um, so if you knew that you lived next door to them, or underneath them, uh, they would take a lot of extra courage to do that. My friends, Tetsa lived for a while in a house in Okmar where a neighbor said to her people, "We know you have a Jew here in the house," and they denied it, but they knew she had either been seen, and that these people were Nazi sympathizers, so then they placed her elsewhere--she came maybe back to us for a while or my grandmother's or an aunt of mine who hid people too in Hausen. Now in Hausen, for instance, a little fishing village on the Zauderzei, uh, they were raided. There was a village of about 8000 souls, and they were raided by 7000 Gestapo, house to house, so when I'm talking about what they put into it, as effort to find hidden Jews, it was enormous. I don't know any

other country they did that. And uh, I've heard people ask me, "How come 95% of the Danish Jews were saved and only 20% of the Dutch?" Well, that was the reason. The Danish Jews could, in one night, roll over to Sweden, and apparently there wasn't too much patrolling there, because 95% could get to Sweden. But we had Germany on one side, the North Sea on the other. People tried to escape, some of my friends tried to escape over the North Sea in a boat, but if your boat wasn't seaworthy...besides, they had a lot of patrols on the North Sea, the Germans, uh with big lamps, boats with big lamps, and if you weren't caught, these boats weren't seaworthy. Very interesting, our maid was from a family that had Rhine Boats that uh, trafficked up and down the Rhine was good for...Europe. And, they were requisitioned by Hitler, and he cut off front of them, and put tanks in them, and tried to see if they were seaworthy, and he could invade Germany that way. And many of those boats were requisitioned, but they were not seaworthy, so they, he couldn't, if he had been able to use them, uh, history might have been different, he might have invaded England, and the war would have been lost maybe, to Hitler, because the English didn't have many tanks at that time.

What about bounties?

Bounties? I heard that you could get 100 Gelders for betraying a Jew, and our maid, who uh, was deep in the black market, was uh, because of her family, transporting and this food to Germany, and stealing from it, and selling it, that that saved our lives because many people died from hunger. 1000 people a day in Amsterdam died the last ----- winter. Anyway, our maid was arrested. She had, she had threatened to betray us when my mother got mad at her for not doing anything in the house, and they started yelling at each other, she would say, "I, I'm going to tell them that you have Jews in the house!" And it was an empty threat because when she was arrested, she did not betray us. One of the times that they came to our house, was arresting our maid for her black marketeering...

We have to reload.

Continuing interview with Tina Strobos.

Beep.

Um, why did you do it, and why did the rescuers do it, uh, my mother said to me, "You know we can get killed, but you know, even if it's the last thing you do, you have to do that because uh, you can't live with that injustice and not do anything, and then live with yourself, and knowing you

didn't do...everything you could. I wouldn't want to live in a world where nobody cares a damn.

What kind of people were the rescuers that you knew of?

Well, I suppose we had a strong sense of justice, and um, a strong sense of that the Nazis shouldn't win, and that we should do everything to make them worth their efforts. And that the worst thing they did was really to the Jews. They were the most victimized, and that, uh they had very few choices, and so we should help them, and we did. And most of the people I know, did help. And most people I know were in the underground, and most of the underground people that I know were involved in this rescue work, I would say. I'm not saying that there was a total absence of antisemitism, but it was of a joking benign kind, usually. Nobody, uh, even if let's say they didn't have Jewish friends or uh, there was one club in, in the city that I know didn't take Jews at least before the war, but they didn't, wouldn't ever think of harming anyone, or doing any harm to someone. And uh, they were involved in, most of those people were upright citizens, and were involved in it, and a lot of money was needed for it too. You know, poor farmers, if you place people there, and you could promise them, you know food was very expensive, and you could really not live on sugar beads alone, so you had to have some money to feed these people. And I brought money around too for one of the little girls that, and for this boy I just mentioned, 14 year old boy, I brought money every month there, and food cards and stamps, so that they would have um, at least one loaf of bread you got a week, which deteriorated in quality. Well, let me tell you how we uh were connected with the black through our maid, mostly, and uh, one time my mother, and one of the hidiers, uh Leon Nordheim, said uh, Churchill's going to talk tonight. And, uh, when after he talked about blood, sweat and tears, and they're going to fight them on the beaches, they got so depressed because it meant the war was still going to be longer than we thought. You know, you lived in this constant hope that the war was miraculously going to be won soon. Um, well Leon and my mother plunked down 60 dollars for a bottle of gin, but I didn't know about that, and I would be studying with one of these bottles of gin, you know, those earthenware bottles, and I would fill it with hot water, and try to study in my room, which was fro-freezing cold, and put blankets over me, and this wa-hot water bottle, and put on gloves, and my little fur coat, and I'd try to study, and then I would come with the bottle, ---- cold, I would come in the living room where we had a 2 lb coffee can, you know, those Maxwell coffee cans, and cut a hole in the bottom, and we had tiny little bit of fuel in that, and on top of that was a kettle, either with hot water of a kettle with sugar beads to extract the sugar from it, and every house smelled of sugar beads, and if I now drive past a field of sugar beads, I still get nauseated because it smells like the war. Anyway, uh, I would come in, and fill my, my hot water bottle with hot water, and then take it back to my room to study. And so I saw this hot, bottle of balls, I'll show you one like it, and I emptied it out in the

sink, and as I was pouring it, I smelled gin. Ughhhh! And so I stopped midstream, and at that moment Leon came in, one of our hidiers, Jewish boy, and he in a glance knew what happened because he had bought the bottle, and he started laughing like a hyena, he had a funny laugh, and when he laughed, I started laughing too because I felt terrible, guilty of course, I knew what I'd done, and then everybody said, "What's the matter? What's going on here?" And everybody started laughing, laughing, because they finally bought this bottle after much deliberation, and I was pouring it down the sink, and then my mother came in, and she was furious with me. Stupid, didn't you see the glasses standing there? No, I thought it was my bottle. And uh, so everybody laughed hysterically to kind of help me because my mother was so mad at me, you know, and then she had to laugh too, finally.

What was your closest call in all those years?

I guess when I went to the apt where uh I knew was raided, and my friends were caught, my closest friends, and I wanted to find out who the ----- was, and what their status was, and whether the girls were discovered to be Jews or not, so that I could up a defense for them. (clears throat) And on top of that, they were dealing in diamonds, and they had a diamond of my aunt's in that apt and I was hoping to be able to find that. However, they had found the diamonds. It was good, I was immediately arrested, and they said, "You're a Jew too!" and uh, then they looked in my pocketbook, and stupidly I had in there a letter from Visha Ensant and thanking me for something, and she was in the hospital at that time. She had a slipped disc, and she was operated on, got her hospitalized, she had intolerable pain, and I got her hospitalized under false name in a catholic hospital. And they operated on her, and I had a letter in my pocketbook, and it said, "Visha" and Visha was notorious with the Gestapo. That was very close call because they started asking me, "Who is this Visha?" Fortunately I knew another Visha, and I made up a story, and, but I was sitting in that apt, they had me under arrest, and I'm sitting in that apt and I had my ears open, and I found out, one, that they didn't know the girls were not Jewish. And I found out that they noticed that Leon Nordheim and his wife were sleeping in one bedroom and that they thought she was not Jewish, I overheard all that. And so this is how I could get them out, or at least help them. And say to this -----, "I know that they're not Jewish. You know, and you're jeopardizing these people."

What do you mean you kept your ears open?

Hmmm?

What do you mean you kept your ears open?

I overheard their conversations, and they said, "You know, if a man's socks and a woman's underwear in one drawer, they're sleeping together, this Jew, and this non-Jew are sleeping together." And they all thought it was a terrible thing, but at least I knew what they thought they knew. So I wasn't going to jeopardize them, you know, and blow their cover. And that's how the girls got out. And of course, when they got out, they came to our house right away. And Bram came out of jail too. He said, "I was the only Jew walking broad daylight in the Ledsestraat, and I walked in the middle of the street," he said, and was so happy, and we said to him, "What if some little Gestapo was snooping around and he didn't know that the head of the Gestapo had let you out, and you were back in jail before that all got cleared up, and you were shot before that was all found out?" Yeah, he didn't think of that.

So, were all of you fearless?

No, you could be scared to death, and do what you have to do, like I said, you know, even if it's the last thing I do, I have to do that, I have to because else I can't respect myself.

Thank you

-----planes going overhead.

30 seconds room tone with aircraft.

End room tone.

Another 30 seconds room tone without aircraft.

End room tone. That was both of those pieces of room tone to go with a previous interview with Tina Strobos.

End of sound roll, short roll.