

Erma Bindelglas Phoenix

I was born in Amsterdam, Holland on November 13, 1930. My maiden name was Stopper.

My parents came to Amsterdam from Poland 1917/18; my parents married in Germany. Mother went from Poland to Leipzig. They were distantly related and were married at 20 or 21 in Leipzig and then came back to Amsterdam.

I have 2 older sisters and a younger brother, five years younger, all born in Holland. My grandparents lived in Poland, I never met them. I went to public school in Holland and afternoon Hebrew School. Amsterdam was a strong Jewish community. I had friends both among Jews and non Jews, there was no anti Semitism.

I had a lot of family in Holland. I had a traditional upbringing, we were orthodox. Father owned a clothing store and we lived in a apartment above the store. Father did well. The store was closed Saturday and open Sunday.

When we heard rumors, since Holland was truly Western Europe, we thought nothing would come of it. In May 1940 when Germany invaded Holland, we still thought nothing terrible would happen to us. Five days later Holland capitulated. In 1941 relatives were smuggling themselves into Switzerland. They started to pick up young people in the streets of Amsterdam to be sent to labor camps. My sister who was a teenager was picked up. If you knew someone, you could be released which is what happened.

My father decided that with 4 young children, we could not go to the Alps and it was also very expensive as it took months to get to Switzerland. He thought not much would happen. By 1942 we lived in ghettos which we could not leave. The ghetto was in the neighborhood where our apartment and our business was so we remained in our apartment. We wore yellow star and had J on our ID cards. We had curfew at 8 p.m. We were not allowed to speak to non Jews. Non Jews lived in the ghetto too but they could be out after 8 p.m. There were no guards but Germans walked through the streets.

We went less and less to school. The police came at night and took people away so many were missing from school. The Jewish theater was made a deportation center. We still had food and other things. In 1941 non Jews could buy from Jewish stores. Later more and more were picked up. Father converted money to diamonds which he put in metal cigar boxes and buried them so that we would have something when the war was over. My mother gave a box of family candlesticks and other valuables to a non Jewish friend who saved it for us and returned it to us after the war.

In 1943 pick up trucks went through the ghetto with a loudspeaker telling Jews to stay in the house and not leave the house. Get your bags ready. My father said we will not open up. The store was boarded up so we hid quietly upstairs. They knocked on the door and finally left. We moved to another address in another ghetto and the same thing happened. This time they took us away in green trucks. They brought us straight to the train station in

Amsterdam, waiting in the train depot to take us to a transit camp. My brother and I ran away home , my sister followed , then my mother and sister. My father was picked up, that was the last we saw him.

Erma Bundelglas, Phoenix Page 2 We were trying to get in touch with the underground to find hiding places. Germans were afraid of scarlet fever as there were no antibiotics. They rubbed mustard with a spoon onto my throat to simulate scarlet fever. We went to the Health Department and a Dr. Peters, an anti-Nazi, non Jew, helped us and put a sign on our door Scarlet Fever. We were planning each child would get it in turn. The Germans finally got tired of seeing the sign and they took all of us except my sister. They sent an ambulance to take her to the Jewish Hospital in the ghetto.. My mother went to the authorities and told them we were all infected with scarlet fever. We escaped from the hospital as we heard they were going to empty out the hospital the next day. Friends took us to the underground. Although the friend was Jewish, she had an Uruguayan passport. My older sister was deported to Bergen Belsen. My brother and sister and I were taken and hidden out by the Uruguanuan lady. My sister survived 10 death camps, Auschwitz, Buchenwald. Towards the end of the war transports of women were marched from camp to camp. She was with five girls from Holland and they gave each other moral support. She was liberated by Bernadotte. He worked for the Red Cross and towards the end of the war he exchanged people from the camps for other things and brought them to Sweden. Many died there in Sweden. My sister had typhus In the transports things were so horrible, some drank their urine. My sister and my mother were in prison till the end of July 1945. They were sent from Bergen Belsen to Beberach where they were liberated in 1945

We had lost contact with my brother and sister. I was living with a widow and her two sons in Northern Holland on a farm , very primitive, no electricity, no running water. Then I went from one place to another. I worked on the farm, I leaned the house. Very primitive lifestyle, very tiny village. They took me to church. I was 12. They took me to Sunday School, Protestant. The Undergroud sent rations and then that stopped. They all knew my Jewish identity I didnt look like a Dutch farmgirl but noone spoke of it. We lived near a forest. The sons built a little hut. It was too late to go to the hut as to 2 collaborators were outside the farm. The sons pushed me into a cabinet. They came in and asked if there was a 12 year old girl there. All the neighbors were outside and would have killed them if they took me. They hated collaborators. They left and came back with 5 men but the only one in the house was the widow. I stayed for a few days until they found another place for me. I visited the widow last year and she said she had to stay alive so she could see me again. I was the daughter she never had. I remember they bleached my hair with proxide so I would look Dutch, it turned red. I looked ghastly.

A peddler was at the farm and he took me to live with him and his wife. I stayed there 4 months. We were liberated June 1945. The underground organization became an organization to find relatives of survivors. We gave them the names, it turned out my brother was with a family an hour away. They came with him on a bicycle . My brother stayed. First thing he said to me, You got fat. He had been in a p lace that was more sophisticated. The woman was a teacher, the man the head of the Post Office. They did not have children. He looked very Jewish He was with one family 2 years. We still keep in touch. My brother went to visit them They called him their stepson. They had the ceremony for the righteous in Israel for them. My sister was in 10 different camps and has her number. The Canadians liberated me. Most of the Dutch were very good but many were collaborators.

Erma Bundelglas, Phoenix, Page 3

The Red Cross contacted my cousins in Switzerland and they came and got us. They found my mother and sister in Bergen Belsen but it took a while till they got back to Holland. They took my mother and me and their parents to Amsterdame. My mother and sister came back to Amsterdame from Bergen Belsen. It was a matter of months. My sister was alive in Sweden. My sister knew about the Switzerland family. She sent them a telegram that she was alive. Five of six alive. We were reunited in 1945. We looked for the diamong boxes. Our house was demolished. We went to dig around the rubble and found one of the three boxes. The non Jewish family returned the boctx of candles, pictures, silver etc. We have the artifacts. We all moved in 1949 to Israel. My sister nad I moved first and my mother and the others moved in 1950. They all still live there. My mother died 6 years ago. I go back and forth. ,My cousins had gone earlier. With the help of the Jewish Agency for Palestine we came to Israel,. first to Marseilles and then to a ca mp where D.P. were in France and then to Israel.This was August 1949. It took a week on the boat to get to Haifa. We were 2 weeks near Marseilles. It was a difficut journey. We stayed on deck all week. My cousins came to greet us with grapes.

They took us to their home in Jerusalem. We worked with them and stayed with them. After we found an apartment my mother and two children arrived and we stayed in an apartment near Mt. Scopus. First I worked in my cousin's raincoat factory . Then I went into the Army. It was not easy in those days. It was a good atmosphere. We had relatives who lived there for many years. I went to night school in Israel and went back to school in Holland after the war. My brother went to high school in Israel and is now married and has tow children. He served in the Army.

In 1959 I came to the US. I went to a party in Haifa., bought a raffle and won a trip to Marseilles and then went to Holland.. My sister knew my husvand's family and he looked me up and we were married in Israel and then lived in New York for two years and moved to Phoenix. I have four children, two daughter live in Israel, a son lives in Phoenix and the youngest son is a student at U. of Calif. My husband is a practicing psychiatristWe have lived in Phoenix for 28 years.