

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION**

**HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT**

Name of Interviewee	<b>PEPPI DEKKER</b>		
Name of Interviewer	Sue Danford	Date	1/31/85
Name of Abstractor	Michelle Heyer	Date	5/6/89

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY**

Peppi Dekker was born in Apeldoorn, Holland, a city of 100,000. She has a twin sister. Her parents owned a successful textile business and the family lived comfortably.

Peppi attended public school until the war began. Although there were many Jewish families in Apeldoorn, Peppi was one of very few Jews at the public school. One year after Germany invaded Holland, she was forced to attend the local Jewish school.

After the invasion, the family planned to send Peppi and her sister into hiding; however, this plan was abandoned when it became apparent that the woman who was to hide them was recklessly boasting about hiding Jews. Peppi's grandparents had also planned to hide, but her grandmother was too ill with stomach cancer.

The family escaped the first round-up of Jews, in May 1942, but Peppi's father fled the city that same month. The family was deported the following September.

Peppi, her sister, mother and grandfather were sent to Westerbork, a camp which served as a channel to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. There, they found Peppi's father, who had been in Eede and had walked three days to Westerbork.

Most people remained at Westerbork only a short time, but Peppi's father became a "law and order officer," and the family acquired special status, exempt from the weekly deportations.

Finally, in 1944, they were sent to Bergen-Belsen on a transport with Dutch orphans of parents caught in hiding. One of these children had meningitis, so the transport spent six weeks in quarantine before going to Bergen-Belsen.

During their two years at Bergen-Belsen, Peppi was often sick, as were her sister and mother. Peppi's mother was a very strong person, determined to survive and to maintain the family's dignity.

Peppi's mother obtained a cleaning job outside the camp. She used newspapers to clean windows, but she read them first and disseminated the news through the camp. She was eventually betrayed, and as a punishment she was continually beaten and raped for several days. This incident was too much for Peppi's father to bear - his spirit was broken.

In April, Bergen-Belsen was evacuated. The Nazis intended to send them to Auschwitz, but the railways were blocked by fighting. Instead, the train was sent toward Elba. After a few weeks, they were liberated by the Russian army.

The family was given a home which had been occupied by a German officer. The officer's maid and her husband were still living there, and the maid was pregnant. Peppi's family invited them to remain in the house.

They later moved to the American zone after several incidents with Russian soldiers. Then they returned to Holland. At first, the Dutch treated them badly. Eventually, however, the government gave them a reparation payment and some furniture which had belonged to collaborators.

The family re-established themselves well, but the Hungarian revolution frightened her father and he decided to send Peppi and her sister to the U.S.

They arrived in 1957, and stayed with her father's brother and his wife. Peppi's sister married, leaving Peppi lonely and homesick. However, she married, too, and moved with her husband to Chicago, New Jersey and then to Cleveland.

At the time of the interview, Peppi's parents were healthy and living in Holland, as was her sister, who divorced and returned to Holland. Peppi lives in Strongsville, Ohio and has two children - a daughter, Claire, and a son, Mike.

**Peppi Dekker**

**ABSTRACT**

**VIDEO 1 OF 2**

**PRESENT LIFE**

Lives in Strongsville, Ohio. 50 years old. Married, has two children - daughter, Claire, 23, is dental hygienist; son, Mike, 19, in college.

**BORN IN APELNDOORN, HOLLAND**

Beautiful suburb. Queen's summer residence there. In eastern Holland.

**MANY JEWS IN APELNDOORN**

Total population was 100,000.

**PEPPI HAS A TWIN SISTER**

**FAMILY OWNS A TEXTILE BUSINESS**

Mother, father and grandparents ran the business. Had four employees. Family was well-off.

**EDUCATION - PUBLIC AND JEWISH SCHOOLS**

Went to public school. Approximately 2% of children were Jewish. Continued there for one year after war started. Then had to walk three miles to Jewish school. School closed after half a year.

**GRANDPARENTS FORCED TO MOVE, GERMAN COMMANDER TAKES THEIR HOUSE**

Had plans to go into hiding, but grandmother too sick with stomach cancer.

**PEPPI AND SISTER TO GO INTO HIDING, BUT MOTHER SAYS IT IS TOO DANGEROUS**

She got anonymous call that woman to hide them was talking freely about harboring Jews.

**FIRST ROUND-UP OF JEWS, MAY 1942**

All taken to MAUTHAUSEN. A tailor two doors away hid with gentile relatives of his wife. They stole all his possessions and those of another Jewish business.

**PEPPI DISPLAYS A FAMILY PHOTO TAKEN ON SEPTEMBER 28, 1942.  
FAMILY IS DEPORTED TWO DAYS AFTER PHOTO TAKEN**

#### THE FAMILY'S MAID STEALS THEIR BELONGINGS

She had been like a member of the family.

#### RELIGIOUS LIFE

Family not religious, but belonged to synagogue. Peppi went to Hebrew school.

#### FAMILY SPEAKS DUTCH

#### PARENTS HAVE ACTIVE SOCIAL LIFE WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

#### FAMILY VACATIONS

Went to sea. Went to Poland once to see father's mother.

#### RELATIONS WITH GENTILES

Parents well respected. Had many gentile friends. Peppi also had many gentile friends.

#### FATHER FLEES IN MAY

Heard men would be deported.

#### PEPPI, MOTHER, GRANDFATHER AND SISTER ARE DEPORTED

Neighbor was stationmaster. Told them "strange things are going to happen tonight and tomorrow." That night police came, said the family had to report to police station. Mother called doctor who said Peppi and sister had bronchitis, couldn't go. Mother told police, who sent her home to get Peppi, sister and grandfather. All at police station sent to Catholic school. Slept there on the floor.

#### PUT ON TRAINS, SENT TO ARNHEM

Taken off trains, beaten. Pregnant women, old people kicked. Everyone forced to do calisthenics. After several hours, put back on trains.

#### SENT TO HOOGEVEEN, IN NORTHERN HOLLAND

It was a connection to Westerbork, the Dutch deportation center to Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen.

#### ARRIVAL AT WESTERBORK

Arrived at night. Walked one hour to camp. Arrived at registration center October 3. Put in co-ed barracks.

NEXT DAY THEY DISCOVER THAT FATHER IS AT WESTERBORK

He had been in Eede, walked three days to Westerbork. Those too weak were shot. Parents were now very pessimistic.

THERE ARE TRANSPORTS OUT OF WESTERBORK EVERY TUESDAY

FATHER BECOMES "LAW AND ORDER OFFICER," FAMILY GAINS SPECIAL STATUS

Father saw a group of men one day. His cousin was among them, so he joined. Cousin told him to claim he had military experience. Family got a blue stamp, exempting them from deportation.

PEPPI HAS CONSTANT EAR INFECTIONS, BUT THERE IS NO MEDICINE

THERE IS A SCHOOL IN WESTERBORK, BUT SHE DOES NOT REMEMBER IT

Only remembers a composer who led children in Hebrew songs.

PEPPI GETS PNEUMONIA

In hospital three months. Got lice, nurse cut off her waist-length hair.

PEPPI, SISTER AND MOTHER LIVE IN ONE BARRACKS. FATHER LIVES IN ANOTHER

PEPPI DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL THE NIGHT BEFORE ALL PATIENTS ARE DEPORTED

PEPPI'S AUNT AND UNCLE BUY SPECIAL STAMP, STAY AT WESTERBORK UNTIL 1944

Used house as collateral to borrow money, gave it to German soldiers. Was essentially a bribe.

THEY ARE DEPORTED TO BERGEN-BELSEN IN 1944

On same transport as Dutch orphanage children of parents caught hiding. One orphan has meningitis, so entire transport quarantined six weeks.

A PERSON STANDING NEAR PEPPI KILLED IN AN AIR RAID

AFTER SIX WEEKS THEY WALK TO BERGEN-BELSEN

Every one dirty, had dysentery. Bergen-Belsen was extermination camp, where people died of starvation and beatings.

LIVING CONDITIONS AT BERGEN-BELSEN

Slept in horse stable for a while. Later slept in bunk beds. Got turnip soup once a day.

MOTHER VERY STRONG. DETERMINED TO SURVIVE

Kept children immaculate. Worked to get extra food.

MOTHER DEVELOPS BOILS ALL OVER HER BODY

Doctor burst them with dirty needle, covered them with newspaper. Got infected.

FATHER CONTRACTS IMPETIGO. SOLDIER FORCES HIM TO FILL HUGE HOLE WITH DIRT.

PEPPI IS OFTEN SICK

THEY ARE AT BERGEN-BELSEN TWO YEARS

FATE OF GRANDPARENTS

Grandfather sent immediately to Auschwitz. In Westerbork, they received word that grandmother had died of cancer.

MOTHER WORKS OUTSIDE CAMP, GATHERS NEWS FOR FELLOW PRISONERS

She cleaned windows with newspapers. Read them before using them, spread news in camp.

MOTHER IS BETRAYED. BEATEN, RAPED AS PUNISHMENT

That finally broke father's will. Peppi and sister had to help him with everything, including going to bathroom.

THEY ARE EVACUATED BY TRAIN, APRIL 10

Peppi had strep throat. Train infested with typhus. Nearly everyone got sick.

NAZIS WANT TO SEND THEM TO AUSCHWITZ, BUT TOO MUCH FIGHTING. SO SENT THEM TOWARD ELBA

ON TRAIN MANY DAYS

Very cold. Allowed off to walk, get water.

THEY ARE LIBERATED BY RUSSIANS, APRIL 23

400,000 PASSED THROUGH WESTERBORK. 600 SURVIVED

PEOPLE IN BERGEN-BELSEN BECOME DEMORALIZED, STEAL FROM EACH OTHER

If Germans caught a thief, he was buried up to the neck and pelted with turnips until dead.

PEPPI ATTACKED BY DOGS AT BERGEN-BELSEN

She was picking flowers for her mother.

## VIDEO 2 OF 2

WORK IN CAMP

Father pulled tree stumps out. Known as death commando because work was so hard.

FATHER KICKED IN GROIN BY SOLDIER

Get hernia. Operated on after war.

MANY NATIONALITIES AT BERGEN-BELSEN. GREEKS ARE FAVORITES OF GERMANS

HEAD OF CAMP CALLED ALBERAUER. HEAD OF WORK UNIT CALLED BEPPO

MORE ON LIVING, WORK CONDITIONS

PEPPI IS BEATEN BY A KAPO

That afternoon he returned to give her bread and cheese.

MORE ON EVACUATION FROM BERGEN-BELSEN

LIBERATION, APRIL 23

Train stopped. Russians on horses liberated them. Prisoners desperate for food. Many people ate raw chickens. Parents told to find a house, throw Germans out. Lived in home of German officer. Maid and husband lived there, too. Maid was pregnant, so they allowed her to stay. First meal was raw bacon - got very sick.

RUSSIANS COME LOOKING FOR VODKA, STEAL MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY CAKE AND HER WATCH

IMMEDIATELY AFTER WAR, PEPPI FEELS SHE COULD KILL ANY GERMAN SHE SEES

THEY GO TO THE AMERICAN ZONE, THEN ON TO HOLLAND

Dutch treated them badly.

THEY RETURN HOME ON JUNE 29

House was destroyed. Mother's sister had hidden, survived.  
Lived with her.

FATHER IS APPOINTED HEAD OF FOOD SUPPLIES BY RUSSIANS

He was originally from Poland, spoke some Russian. Drove around in horse and buggy, gathering food from German houses. Found much food from occupied countries - Holland, France, Belgium.

PEPPI HAS TROUBLE ADJUSTING TO NORMAL LIFE

Music made her cry. Whole family cried on Friday nights. Had trouble keeping up in school. Moved back into old home. Dutch government gave them furniture confiscated from collaborators.

PEPPI SHOWS A PICTURE OF FURNITURE. PARENTS, SISTER, BROTHER BORN AFTER WAR ARE IN IT. SHOWS OTHER FAMILY PHOTOS

THEY RECEIVE TEN GULDERS WAR REPARATION. FATHER USES IT TO RE-START BUSINESS.

THERE IS MUCH ANIMOSITY BETWEEN DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES IN CAMP

NONE OF PEPPI'S FRIENDS SURVIVE

She later made friends with a survivor from Amsterdam.

MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCE IS SEEING HER PARENTS BEATEN

SHE GRADUATES FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLLAND

Has always wished she had gone further in school, but early gap in education too difficult to overcome.

PEPPI NO LONGER HATES GERMANS

Had gentile German friend in N. Y.

FATHER SEND PEPPI AND SISTER TO U.S.

When Hungarian revolution broke out, father afraid of another war. Sent Peppi and sister to U.S., where his brother lived.



THEY ARRIVE JANUARY 8, 1957

SISTER GETS MARRIED

Peppi felt alone, wanted to return to Holland.

SHE MEETS HER HUSBAND

Worked for Holland-American line. Parents upset he was gentile.

AUNT AND UNCLE NOT VERY SUPPORTIVE

ONE OF PEPPI'S BOSSES WAS AT WESTERBORK

SISTER AND HUSBAND DIVORCE. SHE RETURNS TO HOLLAND

PEPPI'S HUSBAND TRANSFERRED TO CHICAGO, NEW JERSEY, THEN CLEVELAND IN 1957

Peppi found it hard to get a job because of her accent.

BOTH PARENTS ARE STILL ALIVE

Business was very successful after war. Father 82 years old, in good health. Mother is 72, healthy except for occasional bad depressions.

PEPPI DREAMS OF HOLOCAUST. DOESN'T WANT TO FORGET IT

SHE HAD NO ONE TO TALK WITH WHO HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES

Friends tell her to forget the Holocaust. Husband doesn't understand it.

HUSBAND WAS IN HOLLAND DURING WAR

He is Catholic. Father was forced to work for Germans, but they experienced no real hardship.

SHE HAS SHARED HER EXPERIENCES WITH HER CHILDREN

HOLOCAUST HAS MADE HER A STRONGER PERSON

WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT SUCH A CIVILIZED COUNTRY COULD DO SUCH BARBARIC THINGS

PEPPI DOES NOT PRACTICE JUDAISM TODAY, BUT PLANS TO RETURN TO TEMPLE EVENTUALLY

PEPPI FEELS SHE WAS LUCKY THAT HER STORY HAS A HAPPY ENDING

ONLY ABOUT TEN FAMILIES FROM WESTERBORK SURVIVED  
MOTHER WAS KEY IN GETTING THE FAMILY THROUGH THE HOLOCAUST