

Rachamim, Chaya
RG-50.120*0344
Two Videotapes
In Hebrew

Tape 1

- Abstract:** Chaya Rachamim was born in Holland in 1925 to a secular Jewish family. Her parents were advanced in their political views (vegetarians, peace-lovers). She was offered a special education in a “Caseboker”[?] school that centered around equality, democracy and anti-militarism. She met Jewish refugees: children from Germany. This meeting prompted her to wonder “If the Jews had a country of their own, would they still be persecuted?” She was thus introduced to the ideals of Zionism. When the war broke out, Chaya was sent to Westerbork, a transition camp. She was released, and managed to escape further detention by moving to Frishland to work on a dairy farm under an assumed name. She stayed at the farm for the duration of the war. Chaya was able to contact the Dutch underground (Chaya’s older sister, Miriam, was very active in the organization). She was reunited with her family after the war. After the war, Chaya wished to immigrate to Palestine. In preparation, she learned every aspect of dairy farming. Later in life, Chaya worked for recognition for the farmer who hid her during the war. She wanted Yad Vashem to grant them the title of “Righteous Gentile.”
- 1:00:00 Chaya (née Wasserman) was born in Holland on September 24, 1925, in the village of Loosdrecht [Loshtrect?]. She was the fourth child of five. Her parents were both born in Amsterdam. Her father learned to polish diamonds but his dream was to become a farmer and grow flowers and fruit. The family had a large field around the house, but her father could not support the family solely by farming. The beloved field became his weekend hobby. Workers worked on it during the week when her father was not home. Chaya’s father had businesses in Amsterdam and in Antwerp.
- 1:05:15 Chaya recalls her early education.
- 1:05:28 Chaya’s family was vegetarian. In the period between the two World Wars, Her parents advanced politically (socialist; anti-war). Her mother was a member of an organization of women against war. She always wore a pin with a broken rifle on her dress. Her mother decided to send Chaya and her younger brother Mauriezio[?] to a “Caseboker”[?] school, where education strove for equality, anti-militarism and democracy. Her three older siblings: Miriam, Elie and Judah, had already finished school.
- 1:07:58 Judaism did not have a role in their lives. For Passover, they would go to the grandparent’s house in Amsterdam, where the entire family gathered and an impressive repast was served. Someone was reading something in a language they could not understand. They did not know the significance of Passover.

- 1:08:52 Chaya recognized that Friday nights were special, with good food and white tablecloths, but didn't know anything about Shabbat.
- 1:10:00 There was another Jewish family in the village. Chaya's family was friendly with this family, but not because of their Judaism.
- 1:12:04 Chaya and her brother rode their bicycles to school, which was an hour away.
- 1:13:19 Until age nine, Chaya went to school in Hilversum.
- 1:14:21 Chaya recalled adapting to the new school and reflects on the principal, camps and excursions. She remembered students and teachers meeting at end of school day. All were allowed to bring up a subject. One story: [in 1938] a student said that on his way to school, he saw a group of children playing in the forest. He got off his bike and asked them why they were not in school. They responded that they were Jewish refugees from Germany. This incident made the students realize that something was happening beyond Holland's borders. In the case of Chaya and her brother, they were forced to realize that they, too, were Jews.
- 1:19:30 Chaya talked about this with her older sister Miriam (born in 1916); her other siblings were Elie, born in 1918, Judah, born in 1920, and Mau [?], born in 1928. The refugee children Chaya had met were accepted into Chaya's school as a separate group. Miriam, who was a teacher, was asked to teach them. Over time, Miriam requested permission to bring two refugees – twin sisters – to live at home. Chaya remembers thinking then: "If the Jews had a country of their own, they wouldn't be persecuted." Slowly, they began to learn that this idea was called Zionism. They learned about, and joined, Zionist youth groups and began learning Hebrew.
- 1:23:34 Chaya reflected more about the special school, which went from kindergarten to high school. The principal was Jop Estovel[?].
- 1:30:41 Chaya said that no anti-semitism was felt in the village.
- 1:31:22 The two refugee sisters living in Chaya's house, along with their mother and brother, took the last boat to America.
- 2:00:00 Chaya's father's brother in Amsterdam was more committed to his Judaism. Chaya recalled her aunts and uncles.
- 2:05:34 Dutch was spoken at Chaya's house.
- 2:07:16 Chaya felt that being a Jew meant also becoming religious. There were many discussions of this at home. She managed to make contact with rabbis, other than the one she knew from Hilversum, who helped her in her quest.

- 2:10:00 Chaya remembered Youth Aliyah houses.
- 2:11:00 Friendships with refugees began in earnest when Chaya and others began their activities in the youth houses. These friendships last to this day.
- 2:12:13 On May 10, 1940, war broke out. Chaya lived in the low lands, which were to be flooded in case of an enemy invasion. All who lived there were evacuated by train to the shores of the North Sea. The area, however, was not flooded. The German take-over lasted five days. Many of the evacuees tried to flee across the sea to England by hiring fishing boats. Most did not succeed. Chaya's family, as well as other evacuees, were told to return home.
- 2:20:04 Schools were closed. Chaya's sister Miriam recruited a group of children to teach at home. That year in school, when Chaya lived with one of the teachers – prohibitions against the Jews began. After that year (in September 1941), Jews were forbidden to go to school. Chaya was disappointed that no one inquired after her once she stopped attending school. She felt betrayed by the school, and no longer believed in one of its fundamental principles: the equality of education for all. She thought: "Rich and poor can continue to study but Jews cannot?" Upon stopping her schooling, Chaya returned home to help with the housework and in the fields. This was considered preparation for settling in Eretz Israel. In 1942, the strictures against Jews proliferated. One of the prohibitions was against Jewish actors, who could no longer perform. Chaya's mother opened her home to these actors, and to all local Jews who enjoyed the performances.
- 3:00:00 Chaya began a journal. Registration of the Jews began, as did the issuance of I.D. documents. Jews were beginning to be sent to work camps. Chaya's father received an exemption stamp with "Until further orders."
- 3:08:19 In 1942, Jews began to be sent away.
- 3:10:46 In March of 1943, the Gestapo paid Chaya's family a visit, searching for hidden refugees. Chaya, her younger brother and her parents were taken to prison. They were imprisoned for a week. The strongest impression of that week remaining with Chaya was her father crying.
- 3:17:03 Chaya was taken to Westerbork
- 3:18:29 Her older brother was living in Canada when the war broke out. (Chaya's peace-loving mother had sent him there to avoid conscription into the army). During the war, all foreigners in Canada were taught a skill. Chaya's brother was trained as a bomber-pilot.
- 3:20:43 Westerbork was a transition camp where people were interned before being sent to the east. Chaya reflects on her time in the camp.

- 3:25:35 Six months after being sent to Westerbork, they were liberated.
- 3:26:00 The special group that came from Erden[?], from a Youth Aliya house, had already received instruction on how to work the land. Chaya and her group joined them, and they all worked outdoors together.
- 3:32:29 Chaya and her family received food parcels from outside, and even letters that managed to avoid censorship.
- 4:00:00 Chaya recalls the daily routines at Westburg and the facilities at the camp.
- 4:04:12 She remembered a train coming into the camp to take people away.
- 4:12:00 Her family was released from Westerbork in exchange for diamonds and returned to Amsterdam. Chaya recalled how her family escaped Amsterdam.
- 4:20:00 The underground found hiding places for Chaya and her family.
- 4:21:50 Chaya arrived in the Hague, where, in exchange for room and board, she helped around the house. She was issued false I.D. papers.
- 4:26:32 She moved to north Holland (Frishland) to work on a cattle farm. She stayed there until the end of the war (about a year and a half).
- 4:28:47 A different language was spoken there: Dutch was learned in school as a foreign language. The family Chaya stayed with had four children. In addition, there were a couple of handy-men. Chaya was considered there as a house-maid.
- 5:00:00 Chaya registered in City Hall under a false name. She remembers her fears. By registering, she became a registered worker, with the right to food coupons.
- 5:05:53 No one had heard of informers in Frishland.
- 5:06:51 The only German who happened by was a hungry soldier who came to ask for milk.
- 5:07:32 Chaya's sister, Elie, came to get food for the members of the underground. Harry Asher was the leader of the organization.
- 5:08:40 Through letters and parcels Chaya maintained contact with her parents.
- 5:10:25 Chaya learned to milk the cows in preparation for life on the Kibbutz
- 5:13:51 Chaya learned the Bible because, in the mornings, the farmer would read from the Hebrew Bible and in the evenings, from the New Testament. She would also occasionally attend church.

- 5:17:00 Chaya fell in love with someone on the Frishland farm.
- 5:19:23 Chaya remembered visiting her parents.
- 5:32:36 Chaya reflected on her time spent on the farm and how the farmers made a potentially traumatic time, passable.
- 6:01:52 Towards the end of the war, no one knew the dimensions of what had happened in Europe. There were suspicions that people taken from Holland “to work,” could not really work (old people, babies), but no one envisioned the tragedy.
- 6:06:00 Chaya talks about the fates of her siblings.

Tape 2

- 6:13:47 Towards the end of the war, at the end of 1944, radio broadcasts brought news of the Allied advance. April 1945, impressions of the end of the war, which came on April 16, 1945
- 6:17:37 Information began to arrive about millions of Jewish victims
- 6:20:00 On May 5, 1945, all of Holland was freed from the Nazis
- 6:24:01 Chaya stayed put until June 7th because it was impossible to travel due to the destruction of the roads.
- 6:24:10 Chaya received news that her parents returned home, and that her brother who had lived in Canada and had become a pilot in the RAF, was also home.
- 6:26:00 Chaya’s father came to take her home. She was happy but also sad to leave the family that had adopted her, the animals and the way of life.
- 6:28:01 Chaya did not have any future plans
- 6:30:04 Menachem [?] and Miriam, Chaya’s siblings, returned from Bergen-Belsen. The entire family was reunited.
- 6:34:00 Chaya attempted to complete her education in a regular school, but did not succeed.
- 7:00:00 Chaya elaborated on how the war affected each of her family members.
- 7:05:50 The soldiers of the Jewish Brigade reorganized the Jewish communal Zionist life. Chaya was an enthusiastic participant as she wanted to immigrate to Palestine as soon as possible. (These activities were carried out mostly in Amsterdam).

- 7:08:44 In preparation for immigration to Eretz Israel, the candidates needed to specialize in one aspect of farming. Since Chaya had been hidden on a dairy farm, she had skills desperately needed on a kibbutz and she went back to Frishland to study dairy farming.
- 7:10:10 She was not accepted in the school for dairy farming because women were not allowed in. She decided to study cheese-making and other aspects related to the dairy industry, in a milking station. It was unusual for a woman to learn these skills, but she was accepted. The first requirement was to volunteer for year, which Chaya did. At the same time, she became the organizer and leader of other youngsters in the area, who were eager to immigrate to Palestine. Her first paying job lasted about six months, until her immigration to Eretz-Israel.
- 7:25:41 Chaya's first flight was in a small plane with her brother.
- 7:27:32 At the end of 1947, Chaya managed to go to Palestine, on a three-week visa supposedly to help her sister Miriam, who was pregnant with her second child.
- 7:28:58 The flight to hod[?], via Rome.
- 7:30:36 Chaya arrived in Haifa, and met with Miriam. She worked in the dairy section of Tnuva, the agricultural cooperative. She recalled her work in Tel Yosef.
- 8:01:13 Chaya had to adapt to living in Israel.
- 8:06:17 Chaya lived in Kibbutz Ein Harod.
- 8:09:28 Chaya joined a group that settled a new kibbutz, Dovrat but continued her work with Tel Yosef. She then decided to abandon the idea of living on the new kibbutz, and moved to the city of Afula.
- 8:13:05 Chaya was offered a position in the Tnuva dairy section on Kibbutz Degania, where she opened her lab. Here, she met her husband, who worked in the dairy department. They were married and remained in Degania, living in the barrack by the shores of Kinneret that her husband shared with his parents. When Chaya's mother immigrated to Israel, after her husband's death, they fashioned an entire room from the "lift" in which her possessions arrived. There was no electricity and no running water, but they were happy. Chaya's husband had emigrated with his parents from Iran when he was four years old. When the dairy farm closed in Degania, Chaya worked in the national water carrier's lab. After she retired and her children grew up, she began helping her older sister Miriam establish the Dutch Jewry archive on Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot (Ghetto Fighters). Chaya remembered visiting Holland again. She worked to have the farmer who sheltered her recognized by Yad Vashem as a "Righteous Gentile." During the Holocaust, Chaya learned that in the midst of chaos and destruction, there were

always a few people who were truly humane, and who came to the rescue of fellow-man regardless of race, religion, or national origin.