

Hans Prins, Survivor

Today is June 4, 1987. This is Fern Niven of the National Council of Jewish Women. I am at the home of Mr. Hans Prins in Englewood, Florida. Mr. Prins is a survivor of the Holocaust and he has kindly consented to be interviewed and tape recorded by us.

Q: Mr. Prins, we appreciate your willingness to do this, and as I explained to your earlier, we want to know a bit more about you than just what happened during the war years. Would you start by telling us something about your family, how many brothers and sisters you have, where you were born, what your parents did for a living – that sort of thing – your education.

A: My father was a musician; he was a trumpet player. My mother was a ballerina. I guess you could say. I was born in Hilversum, Holland. Education – till the war broke out – I didn't have any education because I was only five going on six, I guess.

Q: Were you an only child?

A: I have one brother.

Q: Older or younger?

A: He is two years older than I am.

Q: What year were you born?

A: 1935.

Q: So, you really were very young. How much do you remember about the invasion of Holland?

A: I would say just about all of it. I don't know if you are familiar with the invasion itself, ah, that part got nothing to do with the Holocaust, but, ah, it happened that, ah, when the Germans invaded the Netherlands they gave an ultimatum that if the Dutch Army would not surrender they would flatten the city of Rotterdam, and it just so happened that we lived at the time in the city of Rotterdam when they flattened it, and, ah...

Q: They bombed it?

A: They bombed it. They just, they just destroyed it – the whole city was gone.

Q: How did your people protect yourselves?

- A: Ah, the part that I remember from that is I used to have nightmares about it. The, ah, streets were just glass. You couldn't see the streets, they were in glass, and I remember my father carrying me.
- Q: You mean from the broken windows?
- A: Yeah, yeah, broken windows and, and debris, and I remember my father carrying me over the glass and, ah, my mother and my brother following, and somehow we survived it, and we went, we moved to...
- Q: About what year was this?
- A: This was in 1940 – in fact, it was May. I think Rotterdam got bombed May 12th. I'm not sure of the exact date, but that was in May, 1940. And then we moved to Amsterdam. I went to grade school there till we had to go into hiding.
- Q: As you said, you were very young at this point, but in subsequent conversations with your parents and other people, were they subjected to anti-Semitism before this time?
- A: Ah, I couldn't answer that for myself because I would be too young to remember that, but...
- Q: No – but did they tell stories of having anti-Semitic experiences?
- A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.
- Q: Can you remember any of them?
- A: Are we talking before the war?
- Q: Yes. At any time...
- A: I, myself, don't remember any of ...
- Q: But them – did they tell you stories of anti-Semitism?
- A: Yeah, oh yes, they did. There were, there were stores that were bashed in with, ah, swastikas already – that's before the war broke out, and, ah, we knew that...
- Q: Was your father's employment in any way jeopardized because he was Jewish? You said he was a trumpet player. Did that affect his employability?
- A: Yes, it did. Ah, again are we before or after, or during the war?
- Q: At any time – before, during...

- A: Ah, yeah, in 1940 he couldn't work anymore – after the Germans occupied Holland.
- Q: But before that...
- A: No, before that he, he played. As a matter of fact, ah, Hilversum, where I was born is the, ah, it still is -- it's where all the radio stations are and I would say that 90% of the musicians at that time were all Jewish.
- Q: Were your parent's religious people?
- A: Ah, no. We were – what we are now, is Jewish by tradition more than by religion -- like you get together with Grandma every Friday night and have the chicken soup and that...
- Q: Were your grandparent's living at that time?
- A: Yes, they were.
- Q: And what happened to them? Did they, I mean, were they living in Rotterdam when you were there or were they living somewhere else?
- A: They were living in Amsterdam, and, ah, they were gone.
- Q: They had already died?
- A: No. They were picked up by the Germans and...
- Q: Oh, in 1940?
- A: No. '42. Till '42, you could, ah, well, you could walk the streets till they – they did not start rounding up in, in great deal. By '42, when everybody was required to get the Jewish star is when they really – the Germans – then they started really in earnest.
- Q: You said you started to go to school in Amsterdam.
- A: Right.
- Q: And was this a public school or a Jewish school?
- A: That was a public school.
- Q: What was it like for you to go to school? Were you subjected to anti-Semitism in school from your classmates?

- A: No, not at that time. And when the Germans invaded Holland they took that particular school over as one of their headquarters, and then we had no school to go to.
- Q: What's the first thing that you can remember about this besides being carried by your father through the streets in Rotterdam?
- A: Okay, the first thing that I can remember is that, ah, we were required to wear Jewish stars, and ah, my brother and I used to play a game to, ah, we used to go on the trolleys without the Jewish stars and we would, we would, ah, see who would get picked up first.
- Q: What would happen to you if you got picked up?
- A: Ah, we both got picked up once. What they would do is they would take – that's what they would, that's what they did with all the Jews they rounded up, they put them in a, what do you call that here?
- Q: Holding.
- A: No. It's a – it's the a...
- Q: Detention?
- A: No, no, no. It's a, the building, it's, it's like a cultural building – Staat's Harbor...
- Q: Gymnasium?
- A: No. Staat's Harbor is where they give all the plays. It's a cultural center –really what it is.
- Q: How long would they keep them there?
- A: Till they were shipped off. But we knew a way out on the side door, and, ah, we escaped twice –and then we were ...
- Q: Sounds like a dangerous game you were playing.
- A: It was. We quit then, we quit.
- Q: Only little kids would even think of doing such a thing.
- A: My brother, he got picked up more than I 'cause he really looked Jewish. He's got a big nose and he didn't get by. Anyway, then we started wearing a Jewish star and quit...

Q: Was there any concerted effort by the Germans to make all the Jewish people to move into a certain area, like a ghetto, or were you allowed to live wherever you had been living?

A: At that particular time there was a ghetto, but the ones that were not living in the ghetto, ah, we were still living at whatever it was we were living.

Q: What can you remember about the roundups?

A: The roundups, ah, I was in one around...well –they would round up in the ghetto –that's is where they started really, which is, it was the market, it was an open market where all –it was an all-Jewish neighborhood and the Germans would come in and they would open –see four bridges –they opened those four bridges and nobody can go anywhere. And, ah, what you try to do is to try to make it to the last bridge and get over. That is, this is where they started the roundup.

Q: This was back in '42?

A: This is back in '42. Ah, they just about cleaned it out. They go all the Jews out of there.

Q: Where did they take them?

A: They took them, ah, they would take – depending on how much room there was – they would take them to the cultural center, then they would take them to a little town in Holland called Westerborg. That was a holding camp and from the holding camp they would be transferred east in cattle cars, either to Poland or Germany.

Q: To extermination camps?

A: To extermination camps.

Q: Did they know that? Did the people in Holland know about these camps and what was becoming of people?

A: They knew it. They knew it. Ah, what they would do –they – you would get in the mail, like you get here, what would be – when they had the draft from Uncle Sam – you would get in the mail an order. It was called an Ochfru order, what is calling order. They would give you instructions – what you were allowed to take. Ah, you were allowed to take, ah, what do they call it a...

Q: Backpack?

- A: Yeah, backpack with soap and so many pairs of pants, then a, this and that. Ah, it's always, it's, it's always been amazed, amazing to me, ah, a lot of them just went and reported and...
- Q: Even though they knew what the end result was...
- A: I think a lot of them might have known. I don't see how they could not have known, ah, I remember talking to my uncles before they left and they would say nah, they are just going to go to work and they're going to come back and, ah, figure that, ah, at a certain point we better get into hiding because after that, after they cleaned out the ghetto, ah, we would get word on which particular street that, that would have what they call a, they called it a "rasia" –which is a, a...
- Q: A gathering, roundup?
- A: A roundup –right. And, ah, they would come –somebody would come and say they are now on such and such a street. So, finally, we, ah, the four of us went into hiding. We, ah, a – a good friend of ours, my father played with her husband – she took me out on a bicycle and got me out – out of Amsterdam and got me into Utrecht and, ah, at some point...
- Q: How old were you then?
- A: I must have been seven or eight.
- Q: In 1942, you would be seven.
- A: Yeah, seven. And...
- Q: Did – you went separately, you went with this lady...
- A: Right.
- Q: And your brother went with somebody else...
- A: Right.
- Q: And your parents...
- Q: And all this happened in 1942?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Within a few months?

A: Ah, well it happened one day. We just, we just did what, ah, the Franks did. We up and...

Q: Was there like an underground system you could contact people and or they would contact you? How did this work? Can you describe it in more detail?

A: Yes. Ah, this particular lady was not with the underground. She got in touch with the underground. Ah, they picked me up, she got me out on a bicycle, and picked – somebody picked me up in a, in a car who was with Utrecht. Ah, there – I don't know how this happened – ah, I was reunited with a, with a, a farmer, Mr. Pott. I'll never forget, never forget him. Ah, and we lived there with another, I could say at least –there were about ten or twelve of us.

Q: In the main part of the house or in a secret place, or the attic?

A: We were in the main part of the...no, we were in the back part of the house, but it was the main house and there was –the man had a barn and if we knew – we saw Germans coming, you could see them coming. We had a place in the barn that was covered with hay and, ah, at one time we – they were coming – and we went up to the hiding place. We went under the hay and the Germans went up there and struck hay forks...

Q: Pitch forks?

A: Pitch forks, ah, which came – they came about this close from the people – and I remember there was a couple that had a little baby and they had to keep the baby quiet. Ah, we were afraid that baby was going to be smothered to death, but it didn't. Ah, they left – the Germans left – and after that we knew we had to, we had to leave that place, and the underground came and this is the last time I saw my parents...

(Pause, while Mr. Prins recovered his composure.)

Q: You were saying that was the last time you saw your parents.

A: Ah, right. I was taken, well, I was taken to about five or six places – safe houses – that the underground had arranged for us, and I was going to the province of Overijssel. My brother went to the opposite – no, we both went there – I'm sorry, we both went there, ah, and stayed at one address for about two months. Ah, then...

Q: Did you just live with the families, or were you hidden?

A: Right. Ah, over there we were hidden. We were in a, ah, underground, ah, cellar, it's, it's like a fallout shelter I would, you know, it's what you call it, and they let us out once in a while. And then what happened was – I had a big mouth, ah, I'll

never forget it, we'd walk on a bridge, and Holland, like any other country, had its collaborators, and there was a, ah, a Dutch – not a policemen, it's what we call the Landwacht, they, ah, collaborated with the Germans to find Jews. This guy started talking to me and I talked back. I didn't give him the whole story but it was enough for the underground to, ah, get us out of there.

Q: The people you were staying with would have been in danger then too, wouldn't they?

A: Right. Oh, they would be shot on sight for hiding Jews, that's, ah... So then – that was the last time I saw my brother. He went to Freesland, which is actually not too far from the German border. And also, he had about – I think he counted them up – sixteen safe houses till he got someplace where he could stay for awhile, and I had about five or six till I ended up with the people that I just saw now, forty years later. I was there for, I think about a year and a half, or something like that.

Q: What were the conditions during those days, like how much food did people have? How much could you – like we talked about this first place, the farm, where there were fifteen or twenty people hiding – how discreet were the neighbors? I mean, it takes a lot of food to be brought in to feed fifteen or twenty people. How did you know they could be trusted?

A: Okay, in cases where people were hiding Jews that –and the people did not have food enough –the underground provided extra coupons. They were living on, you know, they had coupons in those days, they...ration coupons.

Q: Ration coupons. Just like we had here, too.

A: Yeah, right. They had them right then during the second World War. And, they, they printed them, they printed false coupons. And, ah, we didn't always eat very good. We, ah, I was hiding in one house and every other day I would get two pieces of bread and then I was asked – did I want a little butter on the two pieces of bread? You know, we didn't get it, we didn't get enough to eat, you know, a lot of places. In a lot of places we did, ah, depending if the underground could get it, could get to you.

Q: Did you lose a lot of weight?

A: I don't know. I've always been skinny. You wouldn't say it now because I just came back from vacation. But, ah – yeah, I was very skinny actually.

Q: How about other things, like keeping clean? How about when you were in hiding, what did you do about toilet facilities? Just very basic things like that. How did you manage? Can you remember that?

A: Ah, when we were – well, there was only a couple months that we were in a, in a, in a shelter, in a fallout shelter, and, ah, they would check on us if we had to go, and they would check if the coast was clear, and we went. Ah, we would sneak a shower at night – well, not a shower, ah...

Q: A sponge...

A: A sponge bath is what...

Q: What did you do to pass the time? It must have been awfully boring to remain in a cellar as you were telling me.

A: It was. It was. We didn't do much of anything.

Q: Did you have light down there?

A: Yes, we did. There was an electric light. No, there was not an electric light – we had a bicycle light – that's what they used to do in Holland because a bicycle...

Q: To generate power?

A: To generate power – and we used to take turns if we wanted some light. And we'd, ah, we just pedaled. We had a little light, and they would give you something to color, ah...

Q: How old was your brother?

A: He's two years older so he was, ah, let's see, around nine.

Q: Can you remember how you felt then? Were you afraid? Were you apathetic...

A: No.

Q: What was your feeling?

A: I was not afraid the first – till we split up, then I was afraid – then I knew, which was in Utrecht. Up till then I, ah, I thought it was a big adventure. Like the lady getting me out of Amsterdam – I thought that was a big adventure, and by the time we split up, then I knew there was, you know, it wasn't a game.

Q: How much time was this from the first time you went into hiding till you split up completely?

A: Ah, I believe that it wouldn't have been no, no more than – I would say between two and three months.

- Q: I see, okay. And then this last place that you were at, you were there for two years – or three years?
- A: A year and a half, two years. What happened over there, there were only three people in that town that knew that I was Jewish. There were, there were two Jew –there was a Jewish girl and I were hiding there, not in the same place. Ah, the story was, and I was –they drilled that story into me. I almost started to believe it –that I came from Rotterdam, ah, when Rotterdam was bombed out, lost my parents, had no place to go, and these people took me in. This was, this was the story –and, the only, the only ones that knew were the people, of course, that were hiding me and the school principal because if the Germans, ah, were in that particular area trying to round up Jews, I couldn't go to school. And then they – she – to make it look good, the lady would write a sick letter, whatever you call it that I couldn't go to school.
- Q: Oh. But at that time, though, you were able to leave the hiding place and go to school and lead a fairly normal life?
- A: Yes. Yes. Yes.
- Q: Did you use your own name?
- A: Yes. I used my own name. Ah, that was, yeah, I think it was, that was for about a year and a half – that I didn't have to – we didn't have to move.
- Q: What else can you remember about the conditions in those days that I maybe haven't thought to ask you?
- A: Ah, the last year and a half?
- Q: Yes.
- A: I would say they were fairly as normal as you can make it. I knew what the score was. I knew to keep my mouth shut.
- Q: Was there enough food then?
- A: There was... Yes, ah, the underground would come by one every two weeks – a lady from the underground – and she would ask me if I needed anything, if I had enough to eat.
- Q: It sounds like a pretty well organized system.
- A: They had a very good – they had a very well – a very good underground in Holland.

Q: Did they know what had become of your parents?

A: Ah, they did not know. Nobody knew. When the war was over, I was still there. Ah – no, I did before the war was over – as a matter of fact, an underground lady came by and said, "I'm sorry, your parents are dead." Ah, that was shortly before the war ended. And then when the war ended, ah, somebody from the Red Cross came by and said the same thing, "I'm sorry, your parents were gassed."

Q: Were they gassed?

(Pause)

A:Ah, my mother was gassed in Auschwitz and my father was in Auschwitz, but what happened was – a mistake was made because I was playing outside the house – we're after the war now – and this guy come walking over to me, over to me, he says, "I'm your father." I said, "What!" Well, he had survived Auschwitz and he had some, ah, he had found me through the Red Cross – I would presume it was the Red Cross.

Q: And you were still staying with these people?

A: And I was still with these people.

Q: And this really was your father?

A: That was my father. What happened was, when we heard this, I was going to be adopted by these people. They could have no children of their own anyway, and it was all set. I was going to stay there. Ah, now let me think back – okay, so he came and he went to the people that were hiding – had been hiding me – and he told them, you know, "I'm back." Well, he, he had T.B., he, you know, was a very, very sick man – he also had found my brother, by the way – he arranged for us to go to an orphanage in Laren, that's where the orphanage was. Ah, he had no means of to, you know, to support us or anything. As a matter of fact, he then went to a hospital for a half year and then they sent him to Switzerland because he had T.B. and in those days, they – the only way to cure, that was the cure for T.B. And, ah, my brother and I were both in the orphanage for, I would say five, six years. And, and then we, ah, -- I have very good memories, by the way, of the orphanage, they – that was not an orphanage that you'd really think was an orphanage. They tried to do the best they could for us.

Q: Were there mostly Jewish children in this orphanage?

A: All. All, all Jewish children and I – we were the only ones, except my cousin came later, that had a parent left. Everybody else really was – they were – they had lost both of their parents.

Q: Was this run by a Jewish agency?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Do you remember the agency?

A: Phew... Ah, no, I don't.

Q: Okay, it's not urgent.

A: I really don't.

Q:Hebrew International Aid Society?

A: No, I don't remember the name of it. I know where their office was located, but I can't remember...

Q: Where was it located, in Amst...?

A: In Amsterdam.

Q: In Amsterdam?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: When the end of the war came, you remember the specific day, you know, like with people celebrating? How did they act...?

A: The two nights before, all we heard was, ah, cannons and shooting, and, and, ah, we stayed in a – they had a, they had a shelter for – a bomb shelter. And we stayed there a lot of times because of the bombings and that went on, I think, two – three nights – mostly nights. Then, one morning, the town was freed and I will never...

Q: How did you know it was freed? I mean, the Americans came in, or...

A: Canadians. The Canadians came in and they set up their field kitchen. In fact, I showed my wife where I had set it up – and we knew, ah, of course, that we knew we were free. And then, the other Jewish kid that was there, the girl, ah, I will never forget it – they put us on a tank because we were the only two to survive...the only two Jews in the whole town, and they paraded us around in the town – it was really – it was something! It was really fantastic. And then there were a lot of celebrations, of course, that went on for...

Q: You were about ten years old at this point.

- A: Yeah, ten or eleven. And the celebrations went on for three, four (years – yeah, right) days. And, ah, as far as I knew it, this was where I was going to stay then, till – these things happen.
- Q: It must have been hard to leave these people who had been so good to you.
- A: It was. It was. And I tell you, I – this is something I forgot – I stayed in touch with them, even in the orphanage, because I met her two weeks ago, I guess it was – after forty years – and she had a stack of letters that I had written, that I had forgotten about.
- Q: And she saved them.
- A: And she had saved them, she had saved them – yes.
- Q: How old is this lady now?
- A: Seventy-five, and he died of cancer six years before, which, of course, I didn't know.
- Q: You said that after your father found you, you were in this orphanage for about six years. And then what did you do?
- A: We went to Israel. This is...
- Q: We? Is this your father...? He went with you?
- A: No. There was a group in the orphanage, ah, this is when Zionism was really alive, and there was a group in the orphanage that, ah – see, the orphanage had, had a, four different buildings, a couple of small ones, then you had the head building, and the building where we were at – and we were, ah, how would you call it, the stepmother and the stepfather, whatever you call it...
- Q: Houseparents?
- A: Yeah, right, yeah. And, ah, they were really Zionist people, and they started feeling us out – who would want to go – would we have any desire to go to Israel? And most of us said yes. So there was a group of – maybe twenty-five of us, decided that we, we wanted to go. And they sent a representative from a kibbutz in Israel to, ah, try to get us in that particular kibbutz – and we ended up in that kibbutz.
- Q: What do you remember about the trip to Israel?

- A: It was fantastic. There were headlines made. We left from the Grand Central Station in Amsterdam, which was jammed with Jewish dignitaries, the press – it was, it was...I'll never forget it.
- Q: How many children went? Just children?
- A: Yeah, all.
- Q: How many children were involved in this?
- A: There were about twenty-five of us – and such a thing had never happened.
- Q: This is now in 1945, right after the war?
- A: No, we are in about 1950-51.
- Q: Then you were in the orphanage for six years?
- A: Yeah. And, ah, such a thing never happened – that a whole group like that decided to go.
- Q: Did they give you any preparation for it. Did they teach you Hebrew or...
- A: Yes, they did.
- Q: Did they do anything else that would have helped you prepare for it?
- A: We had been, ah, learning Hebrew all along – that went with the thing, they observed religion there, so we had been learning Hebrew.
- Q: You really got a religious education while you were in the orphanage.
- A: Yeah. Yeah, I would say so, and, ah, some of us were – in fact, I did the same thing, ah – went to – what do you call it – these schools, ah – like I went to a school for agriculture.
- Q: Trade school.
- A: Yeah. This was for agriculture, which I found out I hated when I got to Israel.
- Q: Well, this wasn't Israel...
- A: No, no...
- Q: This was getting you ready for the kibbutz...

- A: And, ah, to get practical experience at that, the farmer tried to get all the work out of you, you know he doesn't teach you anything. But anyway, they were trying to give us some kind of preparation, but what we ran into, we weren't really – we weren't ready for – because in – you know, Israel had just become a state and the conditions were, were very harsh.
- Q: What kibbutz did you go to?
- A: Glarome, which is – I don't know if you ever heard of Yad Mordechai? This was a big...
- Q: Yes.
- A: You were at Yad Mordechai?
- Q: Several times.
- A: Yeah. We were not too far from there. That's where the big, big battle was fought, at Yad Mordechai.
- Q: How long were you in the kibbutz?
- A: Well, I'm sorry to say, my brother and I were the first ones to leave because we didn't care much for it. We, ah, went in the – we stayed there two years, went in the army, and never came back.
- Q: And then what did you do?
- A: Ah, I worked in Haifa. I lived in Haifa, but I took a job – see there is – you could – you can be a member of a kibbutz or you could be working and I took a job driving a – plowing – driving a tractor at night, which nobody else wanted to do because it was dangerous. And what you do is you have a – hire somebody – because they pay you good – to sit in back of you to watch for Arabs. And I did that, ah – my father, in the meantime, had gone to America and wanted to know if we wanted to come to America.
- Q: So, he survived his tuberculosis?
- A: He survived everything, ah, remarried...
- Q: About this time you are about eighteen years old when you took the job on the truck?
- A: Yeah. That would be, that would be about right. Yeah, I was – must have been about eighteen because I went in the army when I was sixteen and stayed about two and a half years.

- Q: Well, you said you were sixteen when you left the orphanage and you were in the kibbutz for two years and then you were in the army for two years, that would have made you closer to twenty.
- A: That's right. That would be... Well, wait a minute now – I was bar mitzvahed in the orphanage and I would say...
- Q: Do you know what year that was?
- A: '48 right? '48-50? Okay, '51 we went to Israel, I remember that, in '51.
- Q: That was when you were sixteen.
- A: Right.
- Q: You were in the kibbutz, you said, for two years.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And then you went in the army.
- A: Right. That brought us up to ... Yeah
- Q: That's eighteen.
- A: Yeah. That's – that would be right.
- Q: That makes you about twenty, then.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Yeah, okay.
- A: Because I was about twenty-one or twenty two when I came to...
- Q: This country.
- A: To this country. My brother came – he went before I did – because I – I wasn't quite sure I wanted to go or not, and, ah...
- Q: You father was living where?
- A: Irvington, New Jersey.
- Q: And that's where you went when you came to America?

- A: That's where I went, to Irvington, yeah.
- Q: What did you do to earn a living after you got out of the army? The tractor?
- A: Yeah, up till I had enough money saved up.
- Q: You were able to keep the money, it didn't have to go to the kibbutz?
- A: No – see, because you can work, like I said – you can work – and be a member of the kibbutz and then there are people who work for the kibbutz, but they're not a member and they're getting a regular paycheck.
- Q: I see.
- A: I forgot the name of the kibbutz. It was close to Haifa.
- Q: So, what was it like compared to what you thought it would be like when you came to the United States? What was it like – did it live up to your expectations, or was it easier or harder to live here than you had expected?
- A: Easier. Easier. Israel for, ah, it was very hard and I think I was not idealistic enough to have stayed. Most of the people from the orphanage did stay. I would say maybe 60% stayed and 40% left for Australia, America.
- Q: You mentioned earlier you had gone back to Holland. Will you tell about that?
- A: My recent trip?
- Q: Yes. That was the only trip you made back?
- A: No. I went back ten years ago and, ah, I didn't do much of anything ten years ago – and I don't know what made me to see the lady. We had a sort of reunion. My cousin – we were over at my cousin's mother's house – and another guy from the orphanage and me were there with Carol and, and the other people's wives – and it so happened that my cousin, two months ago, had done the same thing. He had gone to see – he was hiding out in France. He had gone to see the people that hid him and the other guy – after all these years – he had to go – he went to see the people that hid him – and I brought it up, I said – what – why, why did we do this after forty years? And one guy says, "Guilt."
- Q: A psychologist said it?
- A: No, it wasn't. It was Mickey.
- A: Anyway, it, it was guilt.

Q: That made you go see them again? Or had it kept you from going all these years?

A: I think that made me go to see them again, and I think it made sense. Ah, guilt, because these people had saved, had saved your life and what, and what in the hell did I ever do for them? Nothing.

Q: Not only saved your life, but risked theirs.

A: They would have been shot on the spot. And, I – if it wouldn't have been for these people – I would not have been sitting here. Why it took forty years, I don't know. Maybe it is guilt.

Q: So, what was it like to go back and meet them? Were you nervous about it? Were they nervous about it? Was it like rejoining your family?

A: Well, we took a shot – we took a shot in the dark. We went there. I didn't know if these people were still alive, if they were living there, or what happened. And so, I told my wife, "If we can't find them, I'm going to go to the city hall." I went in. It's a very small town and there is no – I didn't see any phone so I went into the cheese farmer's store there and, ah, I asked him if I could look at a phone book. And their name was Kolbman, the people that hid me – there was only one—there were five Kolbmans, but there was one with an "M" – and that's the one I called. And she said, "This is Mrs. Kolbman." I says, "Is this Mrs. Reik Kolbman?" (that was her name – that is her name) And she says, "Yes". I says, "Do you remember in the war you hid a little Jewish boy by the name of Hans?" She says, "Yes." I says, "Well, I am here in Halendorf." And she was stunned – for a minute – for a second – she says, "You're where? I can't believe it!" And then she said she had moved but she's going to be right there to pick us up because they were living, when I was hiding out, in another part of the country. And, ah, it was a, a very emotional thing when she came down at the – it's hard to describe – you sort of went back into your past. Everybody says you can't go back to the past, but you can.

(Remark made by Mrs. Prins)

You said to me at that time, that day, that you felt like it was forty years ago again. That's how we felt, sitting with that lady.

A: Yeah. Another thing was that the lady had a brother, has a brother. He did not know all – he didn't know that I was Jewish either while I was hiding there – and they came over when we were at her house. Him and his wife came over and he said, "I saw you standing there and I told my wife, 'That's Hans.'" Now we're talking forty years later and I've got a beard, I wear glasses, I'm forty years older...He took a look and he said, "This is Hans." He was right!! He found out because he came over to the house, but it was a, it was, it's hard to describe.

- Q: Now was this the meeting that he had ten years ago?
- A: No, this was two weeks ago.
- Q: But you said they had a bunch of letters that you were given. Are these the letters while you were in the orphanage? So you had contact with these people until you went to Israel and then you lost contact with them.
- A: Right. Yeah. I even wrote a couple letters from Israel and that was the end of it. And I think that they stopped it because it was very hard for them, very hard for them, because they already – as far as they were concerned they had, they had a child.
- Q: Yeah, they were going to adopt you and then all of the sudden you were whisked away.
- A: Right.
- Q: It's almost a shame. You could have lived with them for five or six years instead of the orphanage.
- A: Ahh, I have nothing – I tell you, I have nothing but good – I've always told my wife that – nothing but good recollections of the orphanage.
- Q: Well, I can understand what they – once they knew that they couldn't adopt – go to your father and leave us out of it. Five more years would have been too...
- A: No. They cut, they cut it right there and I don't blame them. I found out, in fact I found that out three weeks ago, ah, from a guy that had also – he was in the orphanage. He went to Israel with us. He went back to Holland – a psychiatrist – and I remember that once a month, or once every three weeks, we get, we talk into a – Am I talking too much?
- Q: No. You're doing fine, I just don't want the tape to run out.
- A: Ah, and then we talked to this psychiatrist every three weeks. We call his office and he talks. And now I found out that he has done a study on a lot of the people in the orphanage that we, nobody knew about, to see the progress over the years – what has happened to, to these kids that went through this and, ah, did they come out normal, did they become... They, ah, the guy showed me the book – he knew the psychiatrist, as a matter of fact, and so he had found out that we had been under some kind of study – what, what had happened to us. And I didn't believe it, but he showed me the book and there's, there's a couple of pictures of me even in it that I never even, even know that they had been, that they had been taken. Ah, I presume – most of us came out, ah, pretty normal. We all have our, ah, I

had up till three, four years ago – I got medicine now – nightmares. But that's pretty normal. But as far as turning out, everybody turned out pretty good.

Q: Do you have a copy of the book?

A: No, ah, I don't think I'll be able to get... I asked Arthur if we could get one. I don't know. He's going to try.

Q: What language was the book written...

A: Dutch. It was published in Dutch.

Q: It sounds like it would have been a very worthwhile study.

A: Ah, it must have been. He, ah – when I heard about it three weeks ago I thought it was a sort of a, a invasion of your privacy of being studied and you don't even know it. But then, maybe – I don't know – it does some good. It might. It might do some good for these people that are in jail now for killing and it's being on a bad childhood.

Q: Well, they must have been interested then – because they must have lost contact with you – to find out what had become of you after all those years.

A: Well, not only me, ah, just about everybody. Not everybody from the orphanage, but most of the people went to Israel. Ah, they took a, they were still being studied.

Q: Followed.

A: Followed – studied, whatever.

Q: Will you keep in touch with this lady now?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely. In fact, we were going to go next year to Israel and were just saying this afternoon that, ah, maybe I – instead I go to Holland. I guess now, now it probably is, it might be a question of guilt now too because you want to do something but there isn't ah – for example, we told her that we would like to give her, give her some money so that she could put flowers on her husbands grave. And she said, no, he wouldn't, he wouldn't want that. I says, "Well, how about instead of for flowers, give it to charity, something." She said, no, he, he wouldn't want that. She said he would be very happy to know that you did finally – that you, after forty years, showed up.

Q: Knowing that you care is a big gift in itself.

A: Well, I keep apologizing that it took me forty hears and she was pretty good about it. It really – she, she said, "I always hoped that I would see you one more time." And, ah, finally, it happened.

Q: Do you have a family of your own here?

A: Ah, they're living in, ah, Mobile, Alabama. They're both working.

Q: I've asked you a lot of questions. Are there things that I haven't asked you that you'd like to include? I may not have asked you the right questions.

A: Well, out of, ah, -- we counted it up once – 94 – this is just statistics that I happen to know – 94, ah, our family was 94 people and, ah, four of us came back. In, ah, Holland – I just found that out not too long ago – ah, three out of four Jews never came back. So, I feel, you know, I always feel pretty lucky to be around.

Q: You are indeed.

A: Yeah. Because that's pretty big odds.

(Remark made by Mrs. Prins)

His father is still alive, I don't know if you made that clear...

Q: No. Where is he?

A: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, he went to, he went to America. He got, he got married again in Holland after he got back from Switzerland. Ah, got married and went to America.

Q: You said he lived in Irvington, New Jersey.

A: He lived in Irvington, New Jersey. He had, ah, he opened up, ah, music schools like – he had about four or five – till he retired and he lives now in North Miami Beach with his wife.

Q: And what trade did you follow when you came to this country?

A: What trade did...? Ah, most of my life here was in the restaurant business. I ran country clubs, I was maitre d'. The last ten years before we came to, ah, Florida, I tended bar in Manhattan and...

Q: You said earlier you're semi-retired. Are you still doing this part time?

A: Ah, what I'm doing part time is I do moving – move people.

Q: Oh, that's hard work.

A: Keeps you in shape, anyway.

Q: I'll bet. Do you have your own truck?

A: Yeah – well, I – for big moves I rent one and I, I've got a small one. And, ah, I don't know – I can't think of anything...

Q: Well, I certainly appreciate your sharing with us your memories and the information. I know it dredges up a lot of feelings that may be a little uncomfortable, but as I explained to you, this is for the purpose, hopefully, of keeping this fresh in people's minds so that it will never happen again.

A: Well, let's put it this way – I think that's the most I've talked about it since the war is over, I think.

Q: We have another question. Where is your brother?

A: He lives in Poughkeepsie, New York. He works for IBM. He went back to Israel for a couple of years and decided to come back to the States.

Q: Is he married?

A: He's married. He's got three kids. Ah, he was, he went to Israel to stay but I guess he decided there's a better, better life here.

Q: I have one last question. Would you say that your experiences of being in hiding shaped your life – that if you hadn't had the experience, hadn't lived through those four years, your life would have been different – in the long run?

A: It's hard to say. I think in the long run I would have – well, then it would be a question, ah – if I wouldn't have been in hiding, I wouldn't have been a Jew – that would have shaped my life quite different, yes.

Q: That's true.

A: Ah, after, even after it's, you know, you're a Jew, you're always, ah, you're looking for – you're not looking for it – you're going to find it. You're – there is anti-Semitism, and there always will be. So, you say, "Did it shape your life?" Of course it did. Ah, I was, I was running a country club in, for example, in ah, Illinois and I was offered a job to run a bigger country club – and that country club had, ah, ah, they don't – they don't allow Jews. I mean it's, it's – I'm just giving you an example – and I said, "You mean to tell me I'm good enough to run this thing and work for you, but Jews aren't allowed?" They said, "Well that's the policy." So, sure, anybody – anybody that's not a Jew – their life is shaped different than anybody that is a Jew.

- Q: The only place where you're a majority is in Israel.
- A: That's why there is an Israel. And I, I don't know when it's going to happen – sooner or later I will go back and live there, probably.
- Q: There's quite a bit of anti-Semitism still in Holland.
- A: Oh, it's unbelievable.
- Q: I'm going to be there this August.
- A: In Holland?
- Q: Yes. Well, I want to thank you very much for participating in this.
- A: You're very welcome.