

This is an interview with Cornelia Knottnerus, a rescuer from Holland. We would like to know what motivated you during the war to help those people, especially Jews.

Mhm. Well, there were several reasons for it. I was raised in a very Christian family, where we grew up with the Old Testament stories and with the stories of Abraham and Jacob. And when the war started and we saw that all those horrible things were happening to the Jews, it was to us like they were touching God himself. And we had such a love for God's people that we could never be a part of this.

And also I think I grew up in a family where we were very helpful. We lived in a small town where we still had neighbor duty, where neighbor helped neighbor. And if somebody died in the neighborhood, people would help or they were sick. And I don't think we made a big deal out of it.

Mother used to say, we are in the world to help each other. And so it became an automatic thing, that if somebody was in need, we would help, and especially with the Jews, like I said before, we were raised with a deep love for God's people. And to us, it was like they were trying, God himself, to see you know what. And to us, it was shocking.

So when my brother lived in another part of the country, and when he had those people for us, my parents didn't hesitate and take them in and loved them and nurtured them and took care of them. And also, my one brother who was in the police force, he was in the Navy when the war started. And then when the war was over, he automatically was brought into the police force, and they were forced to pick up the Jewish people, sometimes old people who had to be carried out on stretchers and small children who really couldn't hurt a fly.

And so this whole police squad, this whole police force, there were about 10 men, they all said, no, it's our religious belief, and our conscience won't allow us to pick up those Jewish people. And they said, well, if you don't do it, you go to the concentration camp yourself. And so my brother spent two years in a concentration camp for refusing to arrest Jews.

And he was one of the lucky ones. He came out alive after two years. And after he came back, skinny and bald and everything, he survived. He went right back in the underground and helped again, like blowing up railroad tracks, and the forces would drop weapons to close to where we were, and he would pick them up. And so he got right away in the [? force. ?]

And the Jewish boy, he stayed with us, and we then had to go in our hiding ourselves. Because my dad worked for the railroad, and the quislings, there was a part, a small part of the Dutch people, they were on the German side, and they took over our house. And so this boy came along with us.

We were then with 10 people in a small chicken coop. And he stayed with us, and he was liberated with us too. And he was just a wonderful boy. He was only 16, but he had to be a man. He had to grow up real fast.

How this boy came to you?

Well, through my brother. See, my brother had contacted us. And he lived in another part of the country, And He would contact us, and he would bring-- he was just one family member. His father survived too, but we got the boy then.

That was a friend, a old friend or?

No, we didn't know the people. No, see, and for safety reasons, the less you knew the better off you were. Because, see, we had a family, and we had to rehearse that we would not say anything. We didn't know. The less you knew the better off you were.

So if people would-- if your house was ransacked or they would come and search your house, the less you knew the better off you were. You didn't the people, and you didn't know. Later on, of course, we met the father. And the father survived too, and the boy.

But the girl we had, her father and mother did not survive. They were taken to a camp.

Yes, and the girl, is she still alive?

The girl? She is. She still lives in Holland, and she is married to a man. And his family-- he was forced to see his children being gassed in the concentration camp. And she married this man. And we still consider them a part of our family, and she does us too.

And so then at one time we had a Dutch family who were helping Jews too but were betrayed. And this boy from the Dutch family, he stayed with us for a long, long time too. And his whole family was involved too, but they were betrayed. They had a Dutch Jewish family living under the floor of their house, and so they all had to escape real fast.

And very often you had people like that too, who were involved with Jews themselves but were betrayed or something like that. And we had to hide them too, so it was just a real involved thing.

So who was the main rescuer in your family? How old had you been?

Well, see, I was only 13 when the war started. And I was 18 when the war ended. And my father and mother were-- see, the whole family was involved. Of course, my father and mother were the main. If they wouldn't have done it, I'm sure we wouldn't have been a part of it too. We were too young.

But my father and mother instilled in us right away this love for other people. And so we grew up with that, and then of course once we were involved, we had to do our share too. Once our house was ransacked and they threatened us that if we didn't say you know who was in the house. And we had had at that time two people, and we had a false closet.

And so they knew there was something wrong there. And so they threatened us that if we didn't tell, then we would be taken to a concentration camp. And as young as we were, I don't know what it was. We didn't say anything.

Did you understand it at that time?

And they got away. They turned the house--

Did your parents talk to you about it?

Oh, yes.

You knew?

Oh, yes. We knew very well what was involved.

What is going on?

And they said even if we were taken away that we should not say anything. We should-- if my father and mother would be taken to a concentration camp, to just be brave and let them be taken and not say anything. No, we were very well aware what was going on.

Where did you live, you say, in this place?

Ermelo. It's E-R-M-E-L-O. And it was it's a small town.

It's a small town?

In Holland, yeah.

And how did you-- how did you rescue these people, taking them to your house and again shifting them to another safer place?

Yeah. Sometimes we had to. Sometimes-- at one time, we had the one boy who was a Dutch boy who was involved with rescuing too. And there was another Dutch diver they used to call him. They used to dive. They were underground, so to speak.

And when our house was ransacked, we had to dress them up as a couple in love, as a boy and a girl. And then we had to move them on because it wasn't safe for them. And so my brother in the other part of the country had to do the same.

And so as long as nobody knew, they could stay with you for a long time. And then through the underground, with secret messages and codes, they taught you then that it wasn't safe, so then sometimes you had to move them on again you.

But how do you remember the Germans when they came in and how all this rescue operation started?

Well, I tell you what it was. The first year when the Germans occupied Holland, it wasn't as bad. It was bad, but first Holland was a rich country. We had lots of food and everything. And so they took everything away from us.

We had to turn in the copper and the valuable things. And they ate us. They took everything because Germany had prepared for war a long time already. So first they took everything that they could use.

Well, then it started in a small way. They picked up the men. They had to go working for the Germans. And it was just like a snowball. And once it started rolling, it couldn't stop. People were fighting back. So it started with a small way.

The news had to be brought so you would bring papers around secretly, the paper, what was going on in the world. And we had radios hidden all over, and we would listen to the radio. And then we would know that this person was going to be arrested. So we would help him, blowing up railroad tracks.

Then all those people who went underground, the divers and stuff, they all had to have coupons and money. So from somewhere we had to get money and coupons and false IDs to those people so that they could keep on living. And so and then in '43, '44, that's really '42 when they started really getting meaner. The meaner they got, the more intense the underground became.

Did you get some Aryan papers for these people?

Papers?

They lived on Aryan papers? Did you get papers for them?

Oh, yes. Yes, my father himself, because, see, he was working for the railroad, and they had to go on strike. So my father himself at one time when he had to go in a hospital had to have false IDs. Yeah, they had to have that. But we did not get them like the Jewish people.

Yes.

They wore the star and everything. And so of course, for them, if they looked very Jewish, it was just best to just keep them in hiding and stuff like that.

Do you remember the names of these?

Yes, the boy's name is Leo, Leo Vromen. And it's V of Victor again. And it's R-O-M-E-N. Leo Vromen.

And the girl?

And the girl is-- I don't know her maiden name, because at that time like I say, we didn't remember all. But she is married to Van Maarsen. And it's Netty is her first name. And Netty is spelled N-E-T-T-Y And it is Van-- that's V-A-N Maarsen, M-A-A-R-S-E-N. And she still lives in Holland.

You have contact with her?

Oh, yes.

With both of them?

Leo Vromen, once in a while he will let us know. I think he worked out of the country for a while too. And once in a while, we hear from him. But the girl, she lives in Holland, and yeah, we have contact with her all the time.

In fact, she knows about this too, and we let her know that I was going here.

Yes.

Yeah.

Yes.

And she is the one who married the man, and he is a very nice man who was for years married, and like I said before, was forced to see his children being gassed.

So as a child, you say you have been only 13 years old.

When the war started.

When the war started, when this rescue operation took place in place in 1943 you say?

I would think. Wouldn't you think that it was then that they became more intense with arresting Jewish people?

Yes.

Yeah, at first they started you had to wear the yellow.

The yellow star.

Then they were not allowed to travel from the place.

Yeah. They were not allowed. They were forced to wear the yellow star, and then they were-- so everybody was to recognize them. And then they weren't allowed to go into places. And it got from bad to worse. It was finally they were carried away, so to speak. And I've seen that myself because I've seen an old lady being carried out on a stretcher, was just too old to do anything.

And so we saw it. Holland had a lot of Jewish people. And so--

In this small place of Ermelo you say there were many Jewish people?

Not too much in Ermelo, no. There were a lot of them came-- Amsterdam had had many, many Jews. Amsterdam is known for a lot of Jews.

How many Jews you had--

But we had some. And I know we had and Professor Kohnstamm. He was a German professor, and he wore the star, and he went underground. Because when we were liberated in our town, he came. He had saved a bottle of champagne, and he came walking to the street, and one of the American soldiers put a piece of chocolate on his star and went that the war was over. It was all done, he came to the street, him and his family, they had survived. They were very well liked and very well known.

How did you take the part-- I mean, you as a small girl, how do you feel that? I mean, how much you did as a rescuer? I mean, how you accompanied your parents in this rescue operation?

Well, I think we were proud. We were proud that the Dutch people and especially my family, that they stood up for injustice. And that we had to be a part of that, we were proud of that too. When my brother went into a camp for his principals, that he was brave enough to stand up and say I do not believe in this, that we as children were just as proud. And we did our share.

You knew what you were doing.

Yes, we knew very well what we were doing. And like I say, 13 years old, you're a child, but yet you're not a child. And then when all those things were happening so fast all around us, and we grew up real fast. And by the time we were 14 or 15, we weren't really children anymore. We had to do our part.

When mother told us that this girl is coming and is Jewish and told us all about it, we were not to tell our friends that we had a Jewish girl, and we were not to speak out and everything. And so we were instructed. And so if we wouldn't have been a part of that--

The girl.

So we knew very well what was going on. And I think we were proud of our parents.

So can you remember? I mean, what did you do during this time when this girl and boy were staying in your house together? What did you do?

We were as a family, I think. And we learned, because we were Christians, and the Jewish girl especially who observed all her Jewish holidays and Jewish things, and we knew, like I say from the Old Testament stories, but for the rest, we knew. We learned from her, that she went in her room fasting for two or three days when she had to fast.

And she did this and was all away from her family all by herself that I think we gave her the love as a sister. She was taken in in our family, and she became a part of our family except that we could not share her. Just she had to stay within the family. And it was the same with the boy. Because he was with us the last year of the war, when we stayed in this chicken coop, and we didn't have nothing. And so he shared.

We went out to the farmers and picked up whatever we could get to eat. You know and we had an aunt and uncle staying with us. And another girl who had no parents, so we were all forced together. And we had no light, so we would put a bike upside down and had the light from the bike. And we would take turns reading.

And I mean, like this boy, he was just a child. And he would sit there with his watch, and whoever's turn it was, he would say it's time now to stop, and it's somebody else's turn to turn the wheel from the bike. And I think as us as children, he impressed us. Here he was isolated from everything, and he was a Jewish boy. And so all the fear in his heart, but still he was so grown-up.

And when my uncle and myself and him, we had to go way up north on our bikes to get food, and he went right along with us, which of course he was a child. But still he must have had that fear all the time.

Did he talk to you about it?

Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. And his father, later on my sister-- his father lived in another city, and my sister stayed with the father for a while. And his wife had gone somewhere else, so my sister was taking care of the father. And was he was very, very nervous.

Of who?

Of that Leo Vroman.

Of the boy?

Yeah.

Did you get any contact with the family? I mean, this boy had contact with his parents? What's happened to his parents?

No, Vroman. Let's see. Now, I can't remember the first name because, see, we knew so little.

Yes.

The less you knew, the safer it was. So my parents didn't say, well, the father-- because for safety reason, a lot of things were-- because if they ransacked your house and they found a lot of names, so you didn't keep no names.

Someone reported you? Why they ransacked the house?

Well, yeah. See, we had this false closet. And yeah, they reported us. And they took the fireplace away from the wall--

Some of the neighbors saw the children there?

I don't know who did that. Because, see, you didn't know, except my father worked for the railroad, and there was a German who always stood guard at the railroad, where my dad was working. And for some reason or another, he liked my father. And so my father said, well, when he comes to the door, I hope it is him. And so he came to the door, and he said, a Freund from Bahnhof.

And my father says, well, that's a nice friend who comes in the middle of the night. And so when they went around, he was the one who took out the stick of that false closet, and nobody else was looking. And I don't know if he knew that there was something wrong, and right away he pushed that stick back in, and that was the chute to that false closet.

And so then they left, and we had sort of a flat roof in the back of the house. And so they said-- well, they were talking amongst each other, and they said, well, we knew there was somebody here. And so then one of the soldiers, he said, well, maybe they could have jumped off the flat roof. And so we thought, well, if they believe that, we won't-- So we said, well, they must have jumped off the flat roof. And so we all had a guard by our bed. Yeah.

Your parents were religious, you say?

Religious?

Yes.

Yes, my parents, we were raised in a reformed church, and we went to a Christian school.

They were Protestants?

Protestant school, yes.

Did you go to the church?

Oh, yeah. And we every morning, we started with a Bible story, and we had pictures all over the classroom. Well, we claimed Abraham, Jacob, and just like you do. They were--

Did you take some of them, the children also? The boy and the girl with you?

They prayed with us, you mean?

No, to the church.

No, they did not go with us to the church. No, no. They did not go. For safety reasons, they couldn't go, no.

That they had the Aryan papers?

Well, they kept-- especially the girl, she was very and still now, she keeps all her holidays. And so I think that we as children were so impressed by her that they were so, so far away from home, and they were--

Did you get some connection-- I mean contact with the parents with both of them, the girl and the boy?

The girl's--

The parents knew where the children are?

Not at that time, no.

Not at that time?

No. And see, the parents of the girl, they were taken away already. They lived in a different city. And through my brother, we got this girl. And so the parents, and I think her sister, survived, survived too. But her parents, they died in a concentration camp.

You say through your parents you knew the girl, but how? I mean, you did not talk about, I mean, how they come, how they come to your house.

See, that was my brother. You see, OK, he had contact. He was in the underground.

He does that?

My brother.

How many children you were in the family?

We had six children in our family.

Six children?

Yeah. In our family. Two brothers and four girls. And so he would contact my dad, and he would say, now I have this Jewish girl here, and can you find a place for her? Or this Jewish boy?

And so sometimes we had to find another address. See, at one time we had, oh, I would say four or five people who were in hiding. Well, we had a big family ourselves, so sometimes we had to send them on to other people. And so then at one time, my brother said to my dad, here I have this Jewish girl, and she needs a place to stay.

And so we would take her then. If sometimes we lost a boy who had to go to another place for safety reasons, but we would right away take another one back again.

So you really saved-- I mean, like your whole family was rescuing.

In full, yeah.

Yes, like a network.

Right. Yeah.

They were operating.

Right.

And through the resistance and the resistance network--

Right, through the underground.

The family-- I mean the underground contacted the family, and then you did whatever it was proper for you to do.

Right, yeah. That's how. See, we were all-- we didn't do anything like that on our own. And I know maybe some people did. There was even talk that maybe somebody did it for money. They knew this rich Jewish person and said, well, I'll take him in, and so he'll pay me.

Now, in our case, that wasn't done. We did it through the safe channels, through the proper channels, through the underground channels that everybody was involved, and that if you contacted this person or he contacted you, that you knew what he was doing and where he was involved with. And that was all done as less papers or words as possible. So that for safety reason that everybody was protected who was within that organization.

And once in a while, a leak would come out or they would very often-- how do you call that now? Punish, interrogate people to the point like they would shine light in people's eyes for hours. They'd torture people. Some people broke down. Who is to judge?

The Germans were mean. And so once in a while, they picked up a person from the underground, took him along, and they became weak, and they would say a few names. And so then of course it was it was very dangerous.

You say that the children, how long they stayed with you?

With your family.

Well, I would say that each of them-- close to a year, I imagine. The boy did anyway, because he stayed with us for--

A year?

Yeah, I imagine that they did. Yeah, because the boy was rescued with us. And we were-- let's see. It was in the fall that we went through that, and he was with us then already for a long time. And we were liberated in the spring. And that last year, the last winter of the war was the worst year. People--

So they came very late.

Yes.



When he came to you.

The girl earlier in the war.

The girl earlier. How long the girl stayed there?

Well, I imagine that she was there too like eight, eight, from eight months to a year.

Until the liberation.

No, she was not with the liberation to us. From us she went somewhere else, and I don't remember where because that was--

What did you-- what did you--

For safety reason.

For safety.

Yeah. Yeah.

So you say that every time some different people came, but--

Dutch and Jews. And sometimes just people who were involved also with the Dutch-- with the Jewish rescuing but were then betrayed themselves. And we had one family, Bosman was their name, and they had this Dutch-- they had this Jewish family. And they had to go in hiding for the rest of the war, and they lived close to we were. They lived in a chicken coop too.

And so they were involved also with the-- and so very often that they had to go in hiding themselves because they were risking their lives too.

Yes. So your family rescued Jews and as well Dutch.

Oh, yes, Dutch people too.

Also.

Yeah.

So they were acting during the war time--

In the underground.

In the underground and in a rescue operation.

Right. And my brother, see--

Yes?

When he came out of the camp-- he came out of the camp, that was in, I think, '43, '44. And it was the last year of the war, and they was close to the liberation. So everything became more intense. And we were in hiding. And our house, the quislings took over our house.

And while the quislings were in there, our house was bombed. And the whole back of the house was totally destroyed.

Was-- yes? Was there anyone caught in this operation?

Not in my--

Someone from your family or someone from your--

Friends.

Rescuers?

Oh, yeah, friends. Yeah.

They were?

Yeah, they were. We had one family was in our town, and there was the father and two sons. And they were-- three sons. They were taken out of the house and just killed right there. Yeah.

So how would you summarize the whole thing? What was the main reason that you rescued, why you rescued these people whom you rescued?

Well, I have a paper here, and I have written this from a book. And I have written some of it down, and I'll see if I can find it here. Corrie Ten Boom, her family was-- she has written a book from-- The Hiding Place.

--where you had to rescue the other people.

Well, in the age group between 18 and 55 or 60--

What kind of people there?

A lot of the men, they were students, sometimes students, university students, sometimes Dutch people who were involved with the rescue of Jewish people and were then betrayed themselves. Men in the age that they would have to go to Germany if they were caught, in the age--

So how would you say it with just these few words? Who were these people? What kind of people whom you rescued, the non-Jewish?

Well, Dutch people who were in danger. I wouldn't know.

Persecuted by the Germans.

Yeah, persecuted by the Germans.

People persecuted by the Germans.

Yeah.

OK And these people were people whom you knew before the war or they were all strangers?

Strangers, mostly. Yeah.

Mostly strangers.

Some of them we knew, but mostly strangers.

Were there also persons who were close friends or acquaintances?

Yeah, one. We had a relative stayed with us, a relative.

OK. When you decided to rescue, was this a quick decision? Did you think about it for a long time or did that vary according to the occasion?

I would say, like I mentioned before, it started in a small way. It was done little by little. And so eventually you went into it deeper and deeper.

I don't think we thought about it. We didn't think it over. It was something-- what needed to be done at that time, we did.

So it was a quick decision?

Sometimes it was a quick decision, yeah.

And you say also varied according--

To the need at that time. Yeah.

You got deeper involved.

Yeah, you got deeper involved.

When you made the decision to rescue, how much risk did you feel you were taking?

Well, we knew we were taking big risks. We all knew that. Maybe--

Great deal of risk? Some risk?

Yeah, great risk. We knew that. Yeah.

When you made the decision to rescue, how concerned were you about the risk you were taking? Were you very concerned, somehow concerned, not very concerned?

We were concerned, but I think we knew that we were doing God's will. So I don't think that we were as fearful as we might have been if we didn't have that strength.

So what would you say, somehow concerned?

Yeah, somehow concerned.

And you say that when you rescued, were you asked for help by the person whom you rescued, or you did offer the help or someone who was approaching you and asked for your help?

Yeah, we did it mostly through the safety channels, through the underground.

Yeah.

Approached by the underground. Sometimes it was an impulse that somebody would say, now, I have this person, and I don't know what to do. If we knew this person who approached us, we would help too. We would not do it if we didn't know the person who approached us. Because that was too risky.

So everywhere in the underground, mostly males or females?

Oh, both. Male and female.

Yes. In what month and year did your rescue activity first begin?

Well, I would say that that really started right after the war in a small way. We were right away, I think, involve. when we were occupied by the Germans, we started right away in the underground with papers, listening to the radio. And then as the war went on, it became more involved all the time.

'42? '43?

Yes, all through the war years.

But when it began?

I would say it began right when we were occupied, in '41. '41.

And which month?

Well, I wouldn't know what month.

OK. Let's say the last month of '40.

Yeah, right in the beginning of the war.

And how long did it continue?

Right up till we were liberated. [LAUGHS]

End of the war.

That was April. We were in our town. We were liberated April the 17th in 1945. Our town was liberated.

Was there a time when someone put a pressure on you to stop your rescue activities?

Yes, people said that we were just stupid to do that.

Who was the person who put this pressure on you?

Well--

What was your relationship with these people?

Sometimes neighbors would say I don't know why you stick out your neck like that.

Males, females?

Yeah, both.

Neighbors?

Neighbors, yeah. Friends.

So what did you do when they pressured you?

Well, just the same. We said that we had to live with our conscience, and they had-- for not doing this, they would eventually have to live with their conscience. And it's just like we took a risk, they didn't take the risk. So in the end, I think us taking the risk could live with ourselves, even if it meant bad things.

So you just continued. I mean, you just ignored their--

Yes, yes.

Ignored their sayings and pressure.

Right. Yeah, we ignored it.

And continued to risk.

Right.

Ignore those sayings.

Did anyone praise your rescue activities during the war?

I didn't get the--

If anyone praised you for your rescue activities.

Oh, praised, you mean?

Praised.

Yes, praised. After the war, yeah, I think people--

During the war.

Yeah, during the war too. People did because they knew that they could count on--

Who were these people? What was your relationship to these people?

Well, relatives. Relatives would and people in our church, our fellow believers from church.

Men and women?

Yes. Yes.

Did you receive any compensation for your rescue activities?

No.

Were you or the person whom you rescued arrested sometimes?

Not that I know of. It could be maybe that some of the people we moved on to other places. But as far as I know, not the ones we helped.

You say that you have contact with the person after the war whom you rescued?

Yes.

You still have the contact?

Yes. Yes. She knows that I'm here now too. Yes. Yeah.

Was there any time when you gave aid to someone and you regretted it?

No.

No. You always did it with the right way to the right person. Did you discuss your rescue activities with any members of your family?

Yeah, we did it with each other, within our immediate family. Yeah.

And what was their feeling?

Well, we were pretty much all in one mind and one spirit, I would say. We all agreed what we were doing.

Did you discuss your rescue activities with any of your friends?

No, except our friends in the underground once we could know who could be trusted for sure. Otherwise, you didn't discuss anything with anybody.

During the war, how many of your neighbors knew about your rescue activities? Would you say that almost all of them knew or some of or none of them?

Some of them knew. Yeah, some of them knew.

Did they approve or disapprove your rescue activities?

I imagine that some of them approved and some of them disapproved. I think the ones who knew and knew our motives, they approved.

And after the war, did your neighbors find out about your rescue activities?

Yes.

They approved or disapproved?

They approved.

Approved. Were you involved in bringing Nazis to justice after the war?

Did we bring Nazis to justice? Yes.

Yes?

Yeah. Oh, yes.

What way?

Oh, the one I told you earlier, the Jewish professor who was standing there, and there was one man who had been a

quisling all during the war. And he was standing along the road when we were liberated waving the Dutch flag. Well, he was just caught right now. I mean, they were dragged out. They were brought into a public place, and they were harassed.

The girls who went out with the Germans, they were shaven bald. And we remembered each and every one of them who had been on the wrong side in our town. And I tell you, they didn't come off very good at all. And they still remember it now, some of them.

Maybe you didn't understand my questions.

To justice.

The Nazis, the Nazis. Did you complain after the war? Did you bring them to justice?

Yes.

The Nazis.

The Nazis? The German Nazis? As much as we could. We came into-- yeah. Oh, yeah. I thought you meant the Dutch people who were on the Nazi side.

No, no.

The Nazis.

The Nazis.

Yeah, we did.

With what way?

Well, we--

You reported them somewhere?

Yes. If we knew, and we supported if they were brought to justice by somebody else. We supported their-- yeah.

How much influence does your religion have on the way you live your life at the present time? Does it have a great deal of influence, some influence, not very much influence, or no influence at all?

A great deal of influence.

A great deal. Yeah. Are you involved in helping activities in the community, such as volunteer work with charities, school, churches, or anything of that sort?

Church, yes. We are very involved with church work.

What are you doing there?

Well, I've held offices in our women's organization in the church, and we work for world relief and mission work and all that through the church, through the women's organization and the church.

Have you spoken about your war experiences in any public places?

Yes, I've done it in a school close to where I live, and in my church.

When was it?

Well, it was just since this spring. I went into a school. The town where we live now, we moved there about six years ago, and so they asked me through--

This spring? Spring '84?

Yeah, in '84 in a school.

And in a church?

In a church. Yeah, after I came back from California last year.

The church and school was in your city?

Yeah, in the city where I live.

So both. They both were this area?

Yeah.

Do you have any children?

Yes, I have three children, and we have three children of Arthur's, my husband's brother. Their parents died, and those three children are living with us. The oldest is in college, but the two other children are living with us.

How much do your children know about your rescue activities?

Well, we talk. We have talked a lot about that to them. Yes.

Quite a bit, yeah? Do you think they were influenced in any way by what they know about your rescue activities?

I hope so.

Were they influenced?

I hope so.

How?

Well, I think that we're trying to tell them that freedom is not to be taken for granted and that the Americans, we are so sure of everything and that this will never happen again, and we always have to be aware.

What they think about you, the children?

I think they're very proud of us. They're very proud of my parents and us that we did that. Yeah.

And you think your children strongly approve your-- or disapprove or somehow disapprove all these things?

Well, they approved.

Strongly or somehow?



Well, it's hard for a child to understand what went on. But I would think that if they could realize-- it's hard for them to place themselves in a world like that, but I would say they would approve strongly.

Yes. And your present neighbors know about your rescue activities?

Yes, some of them do. Yeah. And they love to hear about it, and they-- yeah, I think they're very much--

They approve?

Yes.

What would you tell today young people if a party with goals similar to those of Nazis came to power?

If the Nazis came to power?

If they would come, a party like the Nazis would come to power, what would you tell them?

Oh, I would just tell them, look. Look all that happened. Look into history and let never anything like that happen again. To be very, very aware and learn from what has been done.

Learn from the experience.

Yes.

The previous experiences.

Mhm.

Is there anything what came to your mind now what you would like to say, something more about your rescue activity?

Well, I think like I said earlier, I think if we would have all worked more together, if more people would have been brave and more people would have-- if we didn't have so many people who were on the wrong side, if all the people would have banded together, Jew and non-Jew alike, everyone, I think that we maybe would have been able to save more people. We had a lot of people who were not brave.

So if we would have more people like you there, yes?

Well, that would have been nice. I don't think that we set out to be heroes. We did it with God's strength. We couldn't have done it without his strength. And I think just to know that we were within his will, that we did his will that we can have a clear conscience and that we did it for that reason.

You said that not everyone has this conscience.

No, not everybody had this courage, I don't think. And I think we had the courage because God gave it to us. We couldn't have done it. Nobody can be a hero, I think. We didn't do it for that reason anyway, but nobody can do that without God's help. We are not very much without him.

We would like to begin by asking some questions about you and your family during that time when you were growing up. First of all, in which country were you born?

Holland.

In which city?

Ermelo.

How do you spell it?

E-R-M-E-L-O.

E-R-- E-R?

E-R-M-E-L-O.

E-L-O. Where did you live for the longest period of time when you were growing up?

Oh, about two weeks to--

No, where.

Vacation?

No, no. Where did you live? In which city?

In Ermelo.

In Ermelo.

Yeah.

The city where you have been.

Yes.

Now, I would like you to look into this booklet and to answer me what you think. Did you live in a large city?

Ours was called a village, I would say.

Small city. Village?

Village. Yeah.

OK. Again, how would you describe the neighborhood? I mean the neighbors when you were growing up? Were they very friendly and helpful, somehow friendly and helpful, not very friendly and helpful, and so on?

Very friendly and helpful.

What was the month and the year of your birth.

The 14th of April, 1927.

Now, we would like to make a list of the people who lived in your household during the time you were growing up. I don't need their names, just their relationship to you and their ages when you were 10 years old.

So that would have been in 1937.

1937.

Would you like to think back in 1937, who were the people who were living in your house?

My father and mother.

Father, mother.

And two brothers.

Two brothers.

And three sisters.

One brother and another brother.

And three sisters.

Three sisters. Sister, sister, sister. In which country your father was born?

In Holland.

In Holland?

Yes.

And mother?

Oh, everybody was born in Holland from my family.

All of them.

Yeah.

Now, what was the age of your father when you were 10 years old?

Yeah. My mother was 50. Because she was 40 when I was born. And my father was 47. He was a little younger than my mother.

And your brother?

My brother was about 12 years older than I was, the oldest one.

The oldest.

And let's see. My other brother was about--

So 12 years older than you?

Yeah.

He was 22, yes?

Yes, and the other one was 24. And my sister was-- one of them is 10 years older than I am. So she was 20 at the time. And my sister-- 15 and one, 12. When I was 10.

Yes. So that include everyone who was living in your household in 1937?

Yes.

All were born in Poland-- I mean in Holland, you say?

Yes.

Do you remember what kind of work they did when you were 10 years old? Every person who was older than 12 years old.

Oh--

Your father, what was your father?

My father worked for the railroad. My mother was a housewife.

Railroad worker?

Yeah, railroad worker.

And mother was a housewife?

Yes. Let's see. My brother.

One brother?

Yeah, 22. The brother of 22. Let's see. The other one was working. He was working--

The 22?

Yeah, the 22-- no, he was in the Navy. Yeah, he was in the Navy.

In the Navy?

In the Dutch Navy, yeah. And my other brother was working for an-- yeah, drawing technical-- I don't know how you would say that.

Technical drawing

Yeah, technical drawing. And my one sister. Let's see. How old were they now? My sister. They were--

One was 20.

She had a housekeeping job, 21-year-old. And the others went to school.

The 15, student. Yes. Who was the head in the family?

My father. The head of--

He was the main wage earner?

Yeah.

OK. Now please look on the page three. How would you describe the relationship between the members of your family when you were growing up? What would you say your family was--

I would say we were very close, very close.

Before-- again, page four. Before the war, was your family very well-off financially? Quite well-off and so on?

I would say we were neither rich nor poor.

Yes. That is--

That's right?

Very good. Yeah. That's fine.

Before the war, was your family thought of as being upper class, middle class?

I would say middle class.

Yes. Who was the person in your household who had the most influence on you when you were being brought up?

I would say my mother.

Your mother. Now we are talking about your mother. What kind of work did she do? You say that when you have been growing up, housewife, you said?

Yes. She was a housewife. Why she had an influence on me? I don't know.

Yes.