

My name is Marsha French. Today, is September 16, 1984. I am here to interview Margot Lawson, who was a rescuer of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. And she is here in Washington, DC to participate in the Faith in Humankind conference. What is your complete name?

Margot, M-A-R-G-O-T, Edith, E-D-I-T-H now Lawson.

And where and when were you born?

I was born April the 3rd, 1909, in Mannheim, Germany.

What were your parents' complete names?

Hans Scharf and Sofi, S-O-F-I, Scharf.

What were their occupations?

My father was a General Motors representative for Europe and also had big, big imports for, like, almonds and nuts, so for foodstuffs, for all the small stores and it was wagon, trains, and so forth.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Nobody.

Were you married at the start of the war?

At the start of the war? That was 1936. I was married, but I was divorced. I-- I don't quite know when the divorce was final.

You had no children at the time?

Yes, I had two children. Yeah, I was divorced.

What were their ages?

Three and six. The oldest one is Margit, G-I-T, Roz, R-O-Z, and the little one was Evelyn Roz.

Did your family belong to any particular church?

No, I belong-- or I did belong to the Catholic Church, but I must confess, I didn't go so much to church. I'm religious, but I don't believe you have to pray in church.

That was around the time of the war?

Yeah, it was around the time in 1933 already in Germany. I studied in various countries, and I was in Germany at that time, in Heidelberg.

Was your family involved in politics in any way?

No, no.

Were you involved in politics?

No, not at that time.

Where were you living when the war began?

In Holland.

Could you describe the area and the people for us?

Amsterdam. I was an inhabitant of 800,000 of which 100,000 were Jews. And after the war-- that's interesting-- 10,000 came back. All the rest was killed.

Did you or your family have any relationships with Jews prior to the war?

Yes.

Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Well, I have a lot of Jewish friends. Matter of fact, my best friend was killed in Auschwitz. I have an awful lot of Jewish friends. And I don't mind what religion anybody has as long as I like them.

Did your parents or your friends discuss among themselves what was happening to the Jews at the time?

Yes.

Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Well, we discussed it a long time. They were persecuting Jews, and in Germany they were entering the houses, taking little babies, throwing them out of the window, pianos out of the window. There was a pogrom. You know what that is? Not "a"-- several pogroms. It was a terrible thing.

My parents came later on from Berlin to Holland. But I was already there. It was-- I came to Berlin in 19-- Amsterdam in 1936, before even.

So you were speaking of your experiences when you were in Germany.

Yes.

Before you left for Amsterdam.

Before I left. Yes, it was terrible. Hitler gave amnesty to a lot of I almost say crooks and good people, and they came in big [FRENCH] and big-- you're French. You should know. And they yelled "heil Hitler" and all that stuff, and they smashed Jewish windows, Jewish stores. They put big swastikas on the doors, and they were just awful.

Did you personally see these things happen?

Yes, I did. Oh, yes.

Was there one specific incident that you saw that first made you very aware of what was happening?

That was in 1932 and '33, when we found out what was going on when Hindenburg had Hitler put in as-- Adolf Schicklgruber as his successor. Hindenburg was so old. Was Hindenburg, wasn't it? Yeah.

He was too old already. And he thought a young man, but there were these meetings in Munich, and all these little kids, and they were in our street. They had little brown suits on with knives in their belts.

And we had a maid, a cook. And when her husband made a remark, it wasn't even over the government-- about the government. It wasn't even about anything. Except they thought it was against Hitler. They go and betray.

That's what they were taught-- to immediately tell. When you didn't like your parents here, some of the people, they kill them, the parents. You have seen young men killing their father. They just went to the government and said, my father has done such and such, he's against Hitler. And they picked him up, and you have never heard another-- like in Argentina. You never heard another word about it. It was a terrible thing.

So was the maid's husband-- was he turned in?

Yeah, yeah. He said something. And in German, it was-- they had-- they lived in a room, and the room had only one toilet way back, and it was filthy. In German, you say instead of being dirty with what, they say "verschissen." It's a German word. You heard about it.

And one of the little boys heard that he said "fascistic." And he said a "verschissene bande." And he said a "faschistic bande." it's pretty similar when you yell and speak loud. And he was taken away and killed.

And that literally means? What he thought he said means?

What?

In English?

In English? Dirty, filthy people making the toilet so dirty. That was the real meaning, but they understood fascistic instead of the other word.

Were they Jewish?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. That had nothing to do with Jews. The Dutch too, they were all-- we are all inferior. It doesn't make any difference what religion you had, especially of course Jewish and Catholics. Because Hitler had to put it on somebody, whether it was Jews or anybody, and Catholics especially. Because I have a very, very good friend. He's an old father, and he worked with us because he--

I can say that he sacrificed his entire life for the lepra, sick people, leprosy, and went to Suriname, which is a Dutch colony or was a Dutch colony. And he was there, and every 10 years the fathers who helped there-- he was very young at the time-- got six months vacation. And they came in by boat back to the motherland.

And he was just about to get ready, about six to eight weeks he had left to get ready to go back when the Germans fell into Holland. He couldn't go back. So we associated together. I was introduced to him or he to me, whatever the case was. And we worked together.

He came into concentration camps. As a matter of fact, I have a little book here which I'm going to give you, and you will read about him. He was here to visit us three, and he wrote us a beautiful letter. And I can show it to you if you're interested. Fabulous.

He never forgets his trip too. He's not too old. He can't even do anything anymore. This is some time ago.

This began-- his helping began in what year that was?

Well, the Germans were already in, and the war started in '41. And a little while later, somebody said there's an old father who can't go back. And so I was introduced. He came every Monday to us for dinner. And one Monday, he didn't show up. I found out he was in concentration camp. Now, he was not Jewish, of course.

Did you ever see any children being beaten?

Yes, yes. They pulled the people by the ear, whether it was children or fathers or mothers or whatever and people who were sick and in bed. They pulled them by the hair, and I saw it.

This was in what country?

Amsterdam.

Amsterdam. Did you see anyone wearing a yellow star?

Oh, yes. I got a yellow star with me.

Did you see any signs saying not to do business with Jews?

No. You see, when I was picked up one night, my father always gave me American dollars and thought I can buy everybody. I was picked up, and I couldn't buy the guy with dollars. And my father said, we had planted a man into the Gestapo, one of our Dutch detectives and said he had converted and blah, blah. And he said I could have bought the whole world but not this guy. He was so fanatically Nazi. You'll hear the whole story, and you can also read.

When did you decide that you were going to help?

Right away when somebody asks you for help, you don't even decide. You don't even think. Suppose I'm falling here. You run and pick me up, probably. And you don't think I'm deciding now to help her get up.

Who first approached you?

First the Dutch government. It came like this. When I came over, I went to the Hague, and I said, quasi, I had a letter from my friends who are friends of Franco. I can go any time to Spain I want. It's an open invitation. And it seems that there's a war, and the Germans will fall.

Ah, ridiculous. This country has been a long time without war, neutral. And now why? And I said, well, in case you need anybody, I speak and write six languages, not just to help myself but perfectly. If you need anybody--

And right after the war-- shortly after the war started in Holland, they came, we haven't got time to train anybody. Would you help us? And we would know you if something happens to me.

I said, that's-- to me? That's a very good offer. I'll take it. So I helped and did whatever I was supposed to do.

What was the purpose of that original pass?

What do you mean, original pass?

The pass that enabled you to go to Spain?

Well, they gave me a-- I speak very well German, better than any other language. German and French was my first language. And they gave me a German passport, which of course, was stolen by the break-in, but you can-- my picture was in, and everything was in. And when you need a stamp, you take a soft-boiled egg-- I shouldn't tell that-- and take off the skin, you know the hard skin?

And make a German-- take any kind of a stamp and pull it then on the passport. I had a outstanding five-year German passport.

What break-in are you speaking of when you say your passport was stolen?

They broke into the German headquarters. There were lots of blank passports and a blank everything, which they stole.

This was prior to your coming to Amsterdam?

No, no. That was in Amsterdam. That was already when the Germans came, yeah. So that they could have some people in. There were so many-- so few people who spoke so perfectly with dialect and everything that they could do that too.

For purposes of clarification, what years were you in Germany and when did you leave?

Well, I was born in Germany and went to school. But when I was 15, or a little earlier, I went to Geneva to school, which French was my first language I knew better than anything else. And I passed. I looked at all the things because I wanted to see what I had. Everything was honors. And I said, boy, must I have worked and studied.

And after that when I came home, my father said, what would you like to be? You got to learn something because money can be taken away from you but never what you have in your head. My father was very, very wealthy, and he wanted to spend the money. And I said, why? Why do I have to go? My friends learned tennis playing, tennis and they swim. Why have I got to go and learn? He said, go to England, learn English, and think about it.

It so happened-- I can tell all that. You have enough tape. It so happened one morning, I ran to-- I went to Pitmans College. I ran to the underground. And I bought I had already the penny. I bought the Beaverbrook paper, which was the daily express.

And in there, I read a little article which is very-- which helped me in my life. Balfour of Burleigh-- Burleigh-- that's an English peer-- had a son. He said, father, what's diplomacy? And the father said, my son-- took him on his knee and said, my son, there was a sheikh in Arabia who dreamed he lost all his teeth. So he had a dervish come to interpret the dream.

And the dervish said, well, rejoice, all your sons will die before you. So to this dervish, he had decapitated. He decapitated this dervish. And he had another dervish come and said, what does it mean? I dreamed I lost all my teeth. So the other dervish said, go down on your knees and thank the Almighty Allah that he will let you live so long that you will even survive the lives of your son. This, my son, said Balfour of Burleigh, is diplomacy.

And when I came home from England, my father says, well, have you decided? I said, yes, I want to go in diplomatic and diplomacy. And that's how my life was actually formed about this. How you sometimes have little things that gets you to do something. And I went to all these schools and all the languages, the history of the countries and everything, and therefore I speak Italian, and you know that. OK.

So when your father said select something, and you selected diplomacy--

Well, I selected actually first languages, and then you learn. Like in Italy, I learned-- I studied all the religions besides the history of the country and everything. And then they opened a school from the League of Nations later on. And whoever wanted to come-- there were an awful lot of people. But for politics like in The Hague and the Palais-- the Peace, you see, they were only three, and only two passed. And I was one of the two.

Because there you had to have a minimum of four languages. I had at the time Five So That was that.

So you entered this school?

I entered the school.

What year?

That was 1920 something. After I've come from all the-- you see, I studied in Italy. I studied in Spain and studied-- and then later on, I went into that school from the League of Nations. It was in Mannheim, Germany, close to Heidelberg.

And one of the professors said, you come to the French class, and I don't know-- the last minute I went to the English class.

And he said, why didn't you come over to French? I said, I don't know. And you had to know everything about English history and literature and everything.

So you studied until what year?

'31 or '32.

And what prompted you at that time?

I got married. I met a guy. I wasn't really very much in love with, but you know how it goes sometimes.

And you remained in Germany?

No, it was in-- I went to Holland with him now in 1936, '5, '6, around this time.

When you first began to help people, Jews in Holland, were they friends? Were they strangers?

They were friends and strangers, anybody who came along and I could do something. And I tell you something, Miss French, there's so little you can do, so very, very little that it is almost-- I never speak about it, and you forget about it.

And you come to Holland, the last time we were, there my husband spoke to my godfather, have you read the book A Bridge Too Far? And the guy says, we don't read these things. We don't want to talk about it. See?

You were working with a group or were you working--

Both. I was working with a group in a [? band ?] of [? illegal ?] workers. Suddenly when I woke up, I remembered where I have all that stuff. That's still the paper. And I got a letter paper from them.

We printed a newspaper. We did all sorts of things. And here later on, they gave me that I'm a member. See? [DUTCH] that's Dutch, and means since 1949. I was earlier there, but they gave that out in 1949.

Could you tell us the name of the organization then?

Well, we didn't really name it because there was no reason to do anything of the sort, name it or have it officially known. We just were there. And when somebody came in and said, will you go tonight, blah, blah, and help, you were there. And that was it.

What year was this?

The Germans came in 1940 in May, and it was three months later that I was recruited and immediately went out to work. Also, I have a very penetrating voice. And when I was in jail, they have a heating system that goes down with little holes. Of course, that heating system-- not yet, Hafa.

That heating system, you can only talk through like this, and my voice carried. And also a friend of mine went down, and I went on her shoulders, and I spoke to the holes in the wall, which was a triple wall, not a double-- a triple wall. Holes here, holes there, and holes there.

And I spoke through to get contact with the men in prison. And I got everybody. [CHUCKLES] I was in a few months when Stalingrad fell, which is now Volgograd, see? So it must have been in 1942. That's right. When I was the first time in prison.

Was most of your work done in prison, contacting?

Nothing. No, I couldn't do a thing. I was just making propaganda as much as I could, and then was thrown in a separate cell because some man came in, and they wanted to hear the latest news. And I heard it. And somebody said, what about Stalingrad? And I said, they haven't got it, and they will never get it.

And they said that Margot knows everything, but I didn't know that upstairs a German was listening. And he came down, and he asked, what's your name? And I said Edith Scharf. [INAUDIBLE] And then he slammed the door. You always had to get up when the German came and salute, because you are all inferior. You are inferior, whatever race you are if you're not an Aryan German.

You know what Aryan means? These are the Eurasian Genghis Khan's people and the European who have nothing to do with Jews, Arabs, or anybody in the whole world. But they are pure until the great-great-great-grandfather.

You would go into the prisons under what guise?

Nothing guise. I was taken. I was picked up. I was taken as a prisoner.

When was this?

The first time, 1942.

What happened that you were arrested?

Well, we weren't supposed to be out after 8 o'clock. Well, I had a German passport. I could, the curfew. But I had other people which I shuffled around. And when I came in the house, somebody betrayed me. And that was the only time I was betrayed.

How long were you in prison for?

A few months.

How did you get out?

You wouldn't-- you see, it's not like here. There's no prison system. You go in. You don't know why. And you go out, you don't know why. All of a sudden, the door opens-- raus. You know the German word "raus." And out you are.

Or you go-- one door opened, and Mrs. Knoring, the poor thing, she had to go at 6 o'clock in the morning with a few Jewish people, and out in the camp, and she was gassed. She came back when the cell door was open, and embraced my knee and said, if I don't come back, see that my children will be good men, will you?

What can you do? You're in there yourself. It was the most horrible moment of my life. You know, you had tears in your eyes because how can you promise something? You yourself are a prisoner.

They had sent her for what unknown reason?

Well, it's in that book I have written, which you were happy to read. It's not a book. It's a little story I've written. I've never shown it to-- except my good friends and my husband later on. See, when I retired, I didn't know what to do, so I started writing stories. And you usually write about something you know, and that's the only thing I know. So.

Could you tell us?

About Ms.--

For the people who are listening, about her?

Oh, there were a lot of people. If you wait-- can you take it off second? I open my suitcase. In the cell where I was, when I came in, there was a one-man cell, just about nine-- eight by eight or something like that. There were six women. For sleeping, they had straw sacks. And I came in, and I thought, my God, they look pale. They looked so gray. And I said, you look awful.

And then when the food came, I couldn't eat it. It came in a little aluminum pot. Terrible. And after a few days, you're so hungry, you eat anything. And there was every week, day, a different-- so you knew what day it was. We found a rusty nail and made the days on the wall. Nobody knew, and all of a sudden they opened the door, and they yelled Knoringer and Allenford and another woman, and they took her away.

And she never knew why because she was not pro-German, against, because you wouldn't like it either if somebody comes into your house and tells you what to do. And the Dutch are pretty stubborn. They don't like that, see? A lot of people killed themselves who were not strong enough. I'm so strong I can't even be hypnotized.

There was quite a bit of resentment, from what you're telling.

In Holland, an awful lot of resentment.

Among Gentiles?

Gentiles especially. They helped the Jews immensely.

Because they didn't like what was going on.

No, of course not.

To them, to everyone.

Terrible things happened.

I tell you something. There was one girl, 19 years old in our cell. There was one bed because it was a one-man cell. She was on that bed. She had like a scene that was horrible.

So I decided I'll take the food, whatever there is, bread, which was nothing, which was like clay, and I called the doctor, the only one who spoke German well. Now, you push a button, and an arm comes out, and then they said, still in there. And they yelled. And I said, I want a doctor. And I screamed and hollered. I was mean, see?

And finally, a big fat German comes and behind him a little thin nothing with a briefcase under his arm. And he said, what's the matter here? And I said, this girl is terribly sick. Now, look at her.

And he looked. Didn't touch. He just stood there and said, medicine. So the guy opened his briefcase, a little schtunk, and brought in a salve, kind of a cream, and threw it on the bed and said, take that.

Well, when he was gone, I said, don't touch it. I want to see what it is. It was against flies. The next morning, the girl was dead. Then I yelled again, I want disinfection. He said, you don't need it. I said, this is not the doctor. Somebody else, it's the guard, the German.

I said, disinfection for our cell! And he said, no way. I yelled. And then I said, come here a little bit. I said, the girl had syphilis. And he yelled, disinfection for cell 19! Believe me, we got it quicker than you could say grandmother.

You were not in prison with any Jews?



Yes, there were Jews and half-Jews and Gentiles, everything. Oh, sure. And they pulled them in by the ear. Terrible thing. Oh! Oh, nobody has ever molested me, but there was a Jewish girl who was-- I don't want to use the word rape, because I don't know how it went. She thought she saved her life, because you couldn't save your life for all the tea in China. I mean, for a little bit of whoopee. [CHUCKLES]

What happened after you got out of prison? Did you get very active?

Oh, yes. Did I get active? The last two years-- I was young, you see. I couldn't go to bed and sleep. I was impossible. We were day and night on the post, but one night I had some very important papers. I had a table, a very antique table, small table. You could open it.

My father had made that, and I threw that in. But then when you went by, you did like that, the damn thing opened. So I turned it. I went out of bed. I had a headache powder because I was terribly sick.

And I turned the thing. And in the middle of the night, all of a sudden, three guys with a gun stand in front of me. That was another time, of course. And wake up, wake up. And I said, wait a minute. I have a headache. I've taken my sleeping powder.

Get up!

And I was not even allowed-- and it's cold in Holland-- to take a robe or anything. I was sitting there. I said, can my maid make you a cup of coffee or me? No. But they went into my refrigerator and ate all the sausage that was in there.

But anyway, they took all the furniture. They threw over the couch and slid it open, everything. Sliding glass door they took out, and looking for-- and then suddenly, they went-- one was always standing there, and the two others were-- he walks by that table and did like this and it didn't open.

The good Lord had made me to turn it around. But my heart went like this. I didn't move. I was cold, shivering. I didn't move. I was sitting like a poker face. And then they said, you go with us in the headquarters. I was submitted to a third degree.

What was in the desk?

Papers from people, all our papers. That's why they later said, give it to Margot, because when she's picked up we know she isn't going to talk.

These were papers of Jews?

Of Jews and Gentiles and people who wanted to do things. Because we had--

People who were being helped or people who were helping?

Being helped, suppose it was like this. Anne Frank, you heard about her. I know exactly where she lived. It was to them more important to get a little food on the clandestine way which we got in. Then it was much more important to get the news, when is the war going to end. So we had an illegal newspaper we printed.

And I brought the news along, but there was the addresses to get along, see. And it was-- it was icy and stony, and I was I was behind on a sled of a bicycler. Because they took all the cars and everything away.

And I said, be very careful If you see that there are some Germans standing there. You better stop and go somewhere else before. He didn't see a bunch standing there. And I slid off that sled with my stuff, and the next guy who came I said, give me your bike. And he immediately went down, gave me his bike.

The Dutch are very helpful. And I go on that bike, and I fall down around the corner-- it was ice-- and broke my leg.

And the stuff had to go there. And I had high boots on, couldn't get that leg off. The butcher took it off.

They took me in a butcher store. Terrible things happened. Then, of course, there was no electricity, no nothing. And a friend of mine who is a very famous surgeon, I had to go on a tricycle where clandestine [? calls ?] on. I went to the hospital. No elevator, no nothing.

And a very thin man who helped me up, I went upstairs, but down when he said, I can't set your leg. What do you want from me? I said, you can. You feel it. You have no X-rays, no electricity. You feel it.

He felt it, and he set my leg. It was towards the end of the war. But I hobbled around in it.

Did you form any close relationships with the people that you were--

Only with the man who we had put in the Gestapo, and this one just died last year when we were over there.

This man was--

Aldi Althof was his name. He was a Dutch police. Not in uniform, a detective or whatever they call these people, not uniformed, with a high standing. And we pushed him in there. And one day, I'll tell you this little story that's also in there.

He came, and came every night practically. And he was frightfully pale. I said, my God, you look like death warmed over. And he said, I don't like it. I said, what? Well, you called-- I called Gestapo headquarters. We had a very important thing to say, and we had, of course, codes for everything.

And there's a man saying, headquarters, and I said, could I speak to Mr. Althof, please? And he said, no, he's not in. Can I take a message? I said, yes, would you tell you the dinner is at 8:00. This is Margot speaking.

And that message he had on his desk, and [DUTCH] in Dutch, you say a rijks for that voice. [DUTCH] in Dutch that means I give you a rijksdaalder. That's 2 and 1/2 florins, 2 and 1/2 guilders. If I can meet that lady with that voice.

And he didn't like me to introduce. I say, why, what's wrong with the guy? He's the head of the Dutch Nazi movement. I said, fabulous! Tomorrow, you're going to invite everybody for lunch. Here's the money, and I'll meet the guy. And I met him. And you will see what happened.

They picked up at night. We were standing. He got my friend, of course. At night, we were standing at a window, and we were looking out, and the Germans were picking up young Dutchmen to work in the Eastern European factories.

And I said, isn't that awful? He said, so what? Few of them, more or less. And I said, listen, my good man. Germany is never winning the war, never. And one day, I will stand there, and you will be prisoner, and I will say, what does it matter, a few of them, more or less? He said, you got a lot to learn, my darling. Gave me a kiss on my forehead and went out.

You said this to the head of the Dutch Nazi party?

Yes, and do you know what happened? After the war, our people, like the FBI, came and said, can you go with us to Westerbork, which is a concentration camp? I said sure. Why? What's up? Well, I want you to meet somebody.

Well, this head of the Dutch, shiny buttons, beautiful shoes, nice manicured nails, he always looked like he came out of an egg, you know, so good. And at night, at 10 o'clock, we arrived in Westerbork. And these two detectives asked for him, and in comes a man without shoes, without stockings, without anything, dirty nails, filthy, unshaven, open jacket with no shiny buttons.

And he did [GASPS] when he saw me. And one of the detectives said, you know this lady? He said, yes. And he said,

how do you know her? So he said that they took me to the third degree, and that I said, I don't know, but if I knew, I wouldn't tell you. That was the dumbest thing I ever said.

And they said, you will. I said, no. We'll take you, and you will be killed. I said, so?

When was this?

That was 1944, about. I was every five minutes--

You were being interrogated under what circumstances?

About talking about some friends of mine, what they did. And I said, I don't know. But if I knew, I wouldn't tell you. Which was dumb to say. And then they got nice. And you know what it is when they got nice? Then you have to be careful.

If somebody is nice to you and is your enemy, you got to-- I thought of that French-- I don't know whether you have the schooling, La Fontaine, le Corbeau et Renard, The Fox and the Raven. The fox wanted the raven's cheese, and the raven didn't let it loose. And then he said, I heard you sing so beautiful, and he said, oh, yes, I do. And he starts singing, and the cheese fell down.

And I was thinking of that. And he suddenly he came and said, I don't have anything over for you-- kind. That was him. I hear you been here all night. The three constantly have interrogated you. You know, one for an hour and the other one for an hour.

You're talking now of the head of the--

Of the head of the--

--Dutch Nazi party.

But he said, I have no use for them, but I admire you. And I thought, oh my God. Now he is nice. Now I have to be careful. And he told that story to the people at that night, what happened, that I never, never spoke. And then he came, and he embraced my foot.

Now, if they said, we were Nazis, we were convinced, that's OK. But he said, you know I only followed orders. You know. And that was so-- and I'll never forget it, so help me God. I stood there. He was lying there, dirty, filthy. And I said, well, actually I'm thinking, what does it matter, a few of this kind, more or less?

I'll tell you what you do, I said, to the detective-- kill him. And I walked out the door. He was hanged the next day.

By your testimony?

Yeah, and by our people, by the Dutch people.

Had you witnessed any acts of barbarism by him?

No, not by him. But there was once in the biggest street there, they picked out the men at night. They came, [INAUDIBLE] and picked up the men, and took them out in the Apollolaan. That's a beautiful street like an avenue with flowers and stuff in the middle. And they put all the mens up, and the women and the kids had to look out of the window at 2 o'clock in the morning. They shot them.

And I came to my headquarter friend, and I said, what's the big idea? What's going on? He said, well, you see a German has been killed, and we teach them a lesson. I said, what happens if the German has been killed by somebody else but by Dutchman? He said, never. I said, will you do me a personal favor? Give me one of your German people, and I will

help investigate it, and we'll see.

Well, we investigated, and it was another German soldier who was jealous and killed his guy. And that came out, and he didn't even apologize.

And those people had been killed in retaliation?

They had already been killed, yeah.

Who hung this man at Westerbork?

The Dutch, the Dutch. They hung everybody. They killed everybody. There's an awful joke there, because somebody said, a Dutchman, I saw a German today, and I hacked his hands off. And he says, why didn't you take his hat off? He said, that was off already. [LAUGHS]

Were there any people that you personally knew, friends or family who tried to dissuade you from the work that you were doing?

No, nobody knew it. Oh my God. If anybody would have known it, I wouldn't be sitting here. Not everybody is so strong. Nobody knew it, not even my children. And not even after the war I told them. No.

Except a man I wanted to marry, very, very close friend. He knew it, and he was killed in concentration camp, '40. He never said it. What is she doing? And he said, I don't know. You know. And that went on and on, and he's lying on the floor, and he was beaten to death.

The people that-- your contacts, they did know of your involvement. This was a small group.

Yeah. Yeah. They knew, and they didn't know. They know only little bits of things.

Was there one particular person in this underground that you reported to?

No. We all did our job. There was not one particular person.

Did anyone assign you a task to do? No, I had such a good voice. I mean, good voice-- loud voice that I was sent to the radio, especially because I speak English. I learned it in England, by the way.

And Prince Bernhard, who was the head of the Princess Irene Brigade-- that's a Dutch Army in England, see? And he told us what to do through the radio. And I gave it on, but there was nobody special. At one time, I heard from three Gestapo people, tonight we have to be at 1 o'clock at the polder, which is north of Amsterdam. Because some of the people are going over to the Princess Irene Brigade.

And I said, I don't know nothing about it. I said, why don't you come over? By 1 o'clock, you've gone there. Yeah, we do. I got wine and stuff from our people, and I made them drunk. By the time my telephone clicked, it was just a very small click they didn't know it could have been something. They were so drunk, they didn't know what hit them.

And one said, Oh my God. It's 1:30. We should have been out in the polder at 1:00. See? I kept them away. And what am I going to say? I said, you just say that it was a bum steer. There was nobody there. Hmph.

I tell you something, speaking of Jews, I mean, there are good and bad in everybody. But one time, one of these Gestapo people whom I knew very well came and said, I have a terrible task. Even the Gestapo said that. I said, what?

A man came. A Jewish man came to the headquarters and said my brother from Rotterdam is coming today with his family to live with us. And if you make a razzia call tonight, pick him and leave me and my family alone. And they have to pick him up, the friend, the brother from Rotterdam. What are we going to do?

I said, simple. I said, pick up the guy who came to the Gestapo by mistake. He said that's what we're going to do. And they did. They let the other guy live.

Were you able to get Jews out of Holland?

Yes. Oh, yes. Through the woods. Did you ever hear that very religious Jews wear a wig, a Scheitel they call that? And where were, Holland, it's called Holland, which is houtland. Hout is a Dutch name for wood, because we have so much wood.

And we went through the woods to Belgium. [LAUGHS] And all of a sudden, I hear, ah! And I run back and said, what happened? To her wig was-- her Scheitel was hanging on the tree. I said, come on, come on.

But you see, I helped a lot of kids, and there was a young couple who wanted to get out. We had addresses and everything. And we let them out, and they went through Belgium through France to Switzerland. And I think maybe they ended up in Jerusalem. I don't know who it was. There are so many names that comes back to me. We had a lot of people hidden in our house too.

But I said, one day, I wish to God I knew whether these kids have arrived well in Switzerland. And about a week later, I had a birthday on April the 3rd. Somebody comes and said, I have a gift for you. I said, what? There was a little Swiss handkerchief with Swiss lace, and I opened it, and I had a bracelet and that was a charm in the form of a diamond, a golden charm.

On the one side, it said a date, when we had taken them over the border. And on the other side, it said "thanks" engraved. But everything was stolen, so I haven't got it anymore.

When you took the children out of Holland, did you take them as far as the border?

Sometimes I reunite them with women, with their parents who were hid. I went at night and picked up some people and went over the roofs. Now--

Can you tell me about a typical night where you did this?

Well, we went over the roof quite often, so it was actually not so typical. Because I always went over the roof. As a matter of fact, we were last year back in Holland, and the son of that friend of mine, he had read it. And he said, even though you disguised all the names, I recognize the people. And he was only a kid.

He said, but I remember that you came in our house over the roofs. And I said, yeah. I climbed with a little kid over my arm over the roof.

How many people did you take at each trip?

Oh, not too many at each trip. Because I could always say that's my baby, see?

Just one or two?

That's my child. Yeah, with my German passport if something happened. Because they came in practically every other night. And they said, Ausweis? That means papers. And I showed them my permanent passport. And I said goodbye.

The children had no papers?

No, but could have been my kid with no paper. Who knows?

Who did you turn the children over to? At what point did you release them?

Sometimes I had to go to a certain place which they told me the parents were, on the Prinsengracht, and so a lot of Dutch people have hidden the Germans. And some I have up-- there is a very famous chemist. He just passed away too, Dr. Jellinek. All his kids are professors. He and his wife were up in our things for years.

Up in your attic?

Yeah.

How did--

Your children knew of these people hiding in your attic?

No. No.

How did you manage this?

Well, you see, it was an apartment. It was an apartment house. And we had that room. They didn't know anything.

How many in your family?

They never went upstairs. We were two-- my two children and. I but they never went upstairs.

How many were the people you were hiding?

Oh, there was-- I tell you something, one of the girls whose name I've forgotten, there was Lowenthal and there was the two Jellineks. And one of the Jewish people, when it was all over with, I rang. There was no electric bell. We had a cow clock.

I rang about that cow bell. And I said-- I wanted to say-- and my foot was in the cast, and I said, come on down! Everything is over. And I lost my voice.

As a matter of fact, when I get excited, I lose my voice still. And I couldn't talk anymore. And so one of the girls came down and said, let somebody else be a Jew now. I have had it. You know?

So that--

There were three people then living?

Three and then somebody else. And then came somebody in in the middle of the night, and we hid that. That was going and coming. Would you like a peppermint?

How long did they stay?

For the voice. Jellineks stayed for years.

How many years would you say?

Two, three years. She's still alive. He's dead.

How did you manage to get them bedding and clothing?

I'll tell you. Mrs. Jellinek was a typical Jewish woman, the nose, the attitude. I'm so sorry I'm alive. You know, Apologetic. I'm so sorry. You know. And this Aldi Althof came one night and said, you're with two feet in a grave, and

your third foot is on a banana peel. Now, why don't you do something?

I said, what am I supposed to do? He said, don't let that Jellinek go out of the house. Because they'd pick her up any minute. I said, she's got good papers. My father called him Jonker and had a good, false papers. We forged all the papers.

And he said, do anything you want to do. And I got an idea. I called my friend, who was the biggest surgeon in Holland, to come over and operate her nose. And in my house, he operated the nose. And when I saw her after the war, I took my husband over, and he said, you know I'm so glad I cut my nose. My name I had to change again, but my nose? Oh, I'm so pleased about it.

Her Jewish-- I'm sorry-- attitude never left her. But with a straight nose and a little bit different, she was better. It wasn't my death sentence, so to speak. It's really true. And I swear to you.

Did these people remain in Holland after the war?

Yeah, he's a very famous man. He was a big chemist. He was even-- he had Frutal Works I don't know whether you know the Frutal Works in the United States. And that's a part of it. And he made essences, perfumes, and essences for bakeries.

I had a smell-- I learned it. I had to smell 200 smells a day. You had to-- you get trained for these things.

Do you call his full name?

Yeah, Dr. Paul Jellinek. And I know his address because he died just about a year and a half ago. And we had visited him. He's full of jokes. He was from Austria. And he was very funny. Because when I first came to Los Angeles, I had a car, and I had to stop because some people were quarreling in the middle of the street, so all cars stopped.

And I went a little bit to the right, and a lady got out. And the lady said, are you from England? I said no. I had an English accent. And I said, no, I'm from Holland. He said, oh, I have some relatives in Holland. They were rescued by a couple.

I said-- by a lady especially. And I said, who? Who? What's the name of the people? He said, Dr. Jellinek. I said, you know it was Scharf who rescued him? Yeah, that's the name. I said, that's me. So small the world is. Now you see how small everything.

How did you manage to-- without your children knowing, without your neighbors knowing--

Nobody knew anything. My children were taken into the Catholic convent, when I was taken to prison, by my father, see?

They remained there?

This book is completely authentic except that my parents died. I didn't know how to start. I'm not a writer. I said they were dead, but my father was alive and helped everybody. We forged all the papers. One man by the name of Strauss came, and he said, what am I going to do? They're going to pick us up, blah, blah, blah.

My father forged American consulate, American embassy papers and wrote that he was a Swiss subject. He has to be helped. All that stuff was authentic.

And this gentleman that you were helping, who was he?

Jellinek. That Strauss, I didn't know him so well. But he was all of a sudden Swiss. [CHUCKLES] And the Jellinek I knew very well.

What did you do with Strauss?

Strauss? They walked around with papers from the American embassy to help them because they are Dutch-- they are Swiss citizens.

And they pretended that they were Aryan?

Yeah. And so was-- and even if they hadn't, they couldn't start with Switzerland too. And that was really something. With Jellinek, we had all sorts of false papers. Their name was Jonker, J-O-N-K-E-R, born in, I think, Austria or somewhere. I don't know. They are from Austria.

My father made all these things with the foreign office in Holland. Everybody helped.

So your father was quite active?

Oh, was he ever. You know something? At the end of the war, the German had taken every little bit of food. We didn't have anything. He bought on the clandestine market for an awful lot of money a little bit of flour. We had of course nothing. We had a little stove in one room. And we bought candles and coal, and my mother made fire. And on top of that stove, we baked the bread.

And the people who came by always came in for dinner, lunch, or whatever it was for food and ate in our house every day that God gave. Because you haven't seen nothing yet. When people are hungry, A, it hurts. I know it. And B, they swell up. They called [DUTCH]. And they fell down, and they were swollen up.

And vultures came and took their boots and their jackets and stuff like that. They were dead in the streets. Oh, it was a time you wouldn't believe.

Were you living in the same house with your parents?

No, no. But my parents were evacuated first from university, city of Leiden and Oegstgeest. And then they went to Bussum, and they were evacuated there too. So you see, the Germans--

So they went from Germany to--

To Amsterdam first, and then they went to Oegstgeest. They had a little house. They rented it there.

Utrecht?

Ouest Geest O-U-E-S-T and then G-E-E-S-T. Oegstgeest.

And that is where--

That's next to Leiden. It's like you say it's next door is Virginia, see? That's where you live when you want to study or something. And the Germans took everybody out of there because they sent these missiles over to England from there. That was a terrible time.

But they were helping on their--

My father helped everybody. And my father was very wealthy. I told you that. I don't want to brag, but he was frightfully wealthy, and every little bit of money he had he gave away to buy on the clandestine market for the poor people who had nothing.

The bread, the food.



Yeah, also for the convent. He kept the whole convent going with coals and food.

Your children remained in the convent for the duration of the war?

For quite a while. For the duration that I was in prison. And then they came out, and they couldn't go anywhere else so we pushed them back in again and all sorts of things.

Did you do this to prevent them from being at risk?

Yeah, sure.