

We're speaking with Mrs. Polak about her parents. Let's start with your father, could you tell me your father's full name and his date of birth and where he was born and anything you might know about his family?

My father's name was Abraham Soep, S-O-E-P, which is the Dutch word for soup, which was not a nice name to go off with as a child, as you can imagine, was teased a lot. He was born on April 17, 1892.

Do you know about his childhood?

I don't know too much about his childhood. I know that his mother was very young when she got married. Polak His father started a diamond factory which was built, I guess, with money of his father. Before that, as far as I know they were cigar makers. They were out of a poor Ashkenazi background. But the diamond factory was a success and they became well-to-do later. My grandmother I remember very well. She was a very wise person but very uneducated. She had an inner wisdom about her but she didn't know much about anything.

My grandfather died when I was four, so I don't remember him too well. I think he was quite a bit more intelligent. My father was the oldest. He was born 10 years after his parents were married. They couldn't have children. They adopted or took in a niece. A sister of my grandfather's had one child after another and didn't know how to take care of them, so they took one of those children as a child who I consider my aunt. And my father, who was born after 10 years of marriage, after the adoption, considered his sister. She was quite a bit older.

Then they had four other children who all died before age one for different reasons. One had diphtheria, another one was dropped by somebody else, and horrible stories that never really was talked about because in those days a lot of people lost a lot of children. And then my uncle was born was 10 years younger than my father. His name was Hans, Hans Soep, and he was a very sickly child and they thought they were going to lose him but they didn't.

Where my father was this tall, broad, heavy person, my uncle was the opposite. He was small and very small boned and a small build. And they got along well. My uncle looked up to my father a lot and he was always a little bit in his shadow. He went into business. After schooling he went into business with my father as a partner or junior partner.

My father had three years of high school, which at that time was already quite a bit. It was an official three-year course high school. And after he finished, he went into business with his father. His father died at age 64, and his mother died during the beginning of the war in 1942, I think. What else do you want to know about them?

I think we have most of the story.

The basic bit. Yeah, my father. My mother was a family of six children. She was born on December 8, 1895.

Would you state her name? Her name is Toni Frederica Kaufman was her maiden name. Everybody called her Toni. She came from a very liberal family. My father came from an orthodox family. But when she married my father, she became a dutiful kosher housewife and later on took an interest in Hebrew. She took Hebrew lessons as a conversation, lessons to learn the language.

Her parents were German but they had moved to Holland in the 1880s. And the six children were all born in Holland, the oldest one I think in '87, and it was a span of 20 years between the oldest and the youngest. And one of my aunts is still alive and lives in Israel, the youngest one who is going to be 85 in May. And we're all going to Israel, all the nieces and nephews that are still there, for a reunion.

She was a dutiful housewife. It was a very good marriage. But my father was a very dominant person. Not of many words but his whole being was a little authoritarian. But my mother was perfectly happy in her role and not until after he died, which was in 1953, and she lived till 1980, not a few years after he died did she become her own person and showed a lot more personality and initiative and everything than I had ever seen before. And we were on very good terms always. We were good friends.

How was she as a mother when you were growing up?

Well, when we were growing up she was like a mother should be, very nurturing. But we lived in a fairly big house and we had two maids, and one of them was more or less what they call a kinder fraulein. They all came from Germany. They took care of the children. And there was a cleaning woman and there was a seamstress, so there was a lot of other people to take care of us.

My father traveled a lot. He was in the diamond business. He went every other week to Belgium to sell and once a month to England, to London, to buy. And he was on a lot of committees, so my mother was often alone with us. But she was kind of a-- She doesn't stand out in my mind as a child. I used to say as a child I'm not being brought up I'm just growing up by myself. So I felt kind of independent, I guess, from young years on, not realizing that I probably wasn't but it seemed that way.

But she was very sweet. Everybody loved her. She was a real lady. She looked like a lady. And she was cultured. She came from a cultural background like my father. She was fond of music. She played piano quite nicely. She spoke beautifully in French.

My father took an interest later in music and became very musically inclined. I think he played the violin when he was a young boy so there must have been something there already. They traveled quite a bit without us, which we resented at the time we were children. When we used to complain, my mother used to say in a German expression which her mother used to say to her, you'll just travel with your own husband. That's about all I can say about my mother from the early years.

Yeah, and then about my sister, well she she's still alive. She was there with us.

Well, in that case, I have to talk to her directly.

Yes, she has lots of problems. I don't think they relate to the war. She's been a problem their whole life. She doesn't have a very happy, pleasant life. She lives in Los Angeles. She is a very strong, determined person but with lots of problems.

Can we go on and talk about these two friends?

Yes, let's talk about these two friends. One of them is Rudy Acohen, A-C-O-H-E-N and who was really my boyfriend. I met him when he was 13 and I was 12. We lived next to each other during the summer at summer resort our parents had rented homes.

What was the name of that resort?

Zandvort. Z-A-N-D-V-O-R-T. And it was very close to Amsterdam. My father commuted every day for business by car because the chauffeur came and picked him up and brought him down. That's what was done in those days. He also went to Montessori school but a different one than mine. And I remember hearing his name when in June '35 we went to visit our Montessori high school for the first time just for orientation and everybody's name was mentioned, I thought what a strange name this boy has.

And then we went a few weeks later to Zandvort, and who lived next door the boy was a strange name. And we were very crazy about each other even at that young, you know like children are. We played together. We played ball, we went to the dunes, we went swimming. And then he was in my class for several years and then he was transferred to another school. He wasn't a terribly good student and couldn't stay in our school.

But I stayed very friendly with him actually till he was arrested also in a raid, again a reprisal raid in July '42, just before the deportation started. Also a German soldier had been killed and they emptied that whole street of all the Jews, one very long, very nice residential street. Went in every home who were Jewish and arrested them.

Do you know what year Rudy was born?

Yes. His birthday was June 4th and he was born in 1922.

And did he have other interests, any musical interest?

We also play tennis and he played the violin. He had violin lessons. He liked popular music records and stuff like that.

Do you remember songs in particular?

Well, we listened a lot to French songs like [INAUDIBLE]. You probably don't even know that name. He was very popular then. And also Austrian songs like Marthe Keller I think was her name. No, that was not her name. We listened to American songs. Frank Sinatra was big. We played we played a lot of classical records. We had an old fashioned-- For his bar mitzvah he got a record player that you turn the handle to play, and we play a lot of classical music. What else? I don't /know. What did young people do? We went on bike trips and stuff like that.

And he was caught in one of those raids and that was the end of him. The day after he was arrested they were sent on to Auschwitz or wherever, I never heard, with his parents and his brother.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yes, they came to his home. And I even went in a day or two after because I worked with the Jewish council in that department of it was called Aid to Departing People. And I was able to send some stuff to Westerbork because most people stayed. But later on I heard that they were in and there. Packed some clothes for all of them. And of course he never came back. And I didn't know that at the time. During all those years I always thought he might be back. He was young and everything. Of course I realized that he probably didn't live three days afterwards.

What month was that again?

It was June 1942. And it was just after his birthday. It was on a Sunday. And I'm trying to look back. His birthday was on June 4, 1942, and whatever the Sunday was after that. I think it was June 9th was that date. He had just turned 20.

And he had a younger brother who was very, very bright and very, very musical. He was three or four years younger than he, and of course he went with his parents, everybody. And then after that I had some sort of a boyfriend who lived-- His name was Hans Rudelshein. And he was born in Kampen which was near Zwollen in Overijssel I don't know any specifics. But he was very interesting. He went into hiding. He came out a lot. His father was a tailor and he was a good tailor too. As a matter of fact, he remodeled some sports clothes of my father for my sister and me into skirts and little tops. And he was also very gifted pianist.

And he took some piano lessons from a blind Jewish Hungarian pianist who lived in Holland, was also caught in Holland. And we used to practice. When he couldn't play concerts anymore he would give a house concerts, that pianist, and he practiced at my parents' house. We had a grand piano. And he got to know this friend of mine and he gave him lessons.

Do you know what year this was?

I think probably also in 1922. May have been '21. He may be a year older. And he had to leave Kampen for Amsterdam like all the people from the provinces were sent to Holland. And then he looked very Jewish and then dyed his hair blonde and went into hiding and did all kinds of reckless things-- traveled and went everywhere. And of course they were betrayed.

Do you know when that was?

I don't know exactly when that was. We were still in our house, and we left there-- May '43, so it must have been maybe in February, March '43. And I don't know what happened to him. He was sent away and nothing.

And then this other picture here is of a young man named Gideon. In Dutch it's called Jideon. And we called him Ji [PERSONAL NAME]. He was from a very prominent Dutch Gentile family. They were originally Huguenots, therefore did the French name. We were very good friends. We were in the same grade. He was a very good friend of my boyfriend Rudy.

In the very beginning I hear of the Dutch National Socialist movement. In the early 30s a lot of people became members of this Nazi group, even Jews, because they thought it was a good system and very orderly and everything before we knew all this stuff was going to happen. But this family eventually of course totally abandoned this and they were very, very good, had many Jewish friends.

He went in the resistance was two of his brothers. He and his older brother were caught and killed. His parents were in the resistance and hid Jews. His father was sent away and died in I think it was Buchenwald or Dacha, one of the two. His mother was in Ravensbruck, survived, came back wreck and lived for quite a few years as a wreck and never really got over all this horrible--

What can you tell-- Either about Ji, Hans or both? And Rudy, what were they like? What was their personalities like?

Well, when you grow up together as children you don't delve that much in the personalities or whatever. He was just also not a great student but a very sweet guy and fun. We had a lot of fun together. We were young. We had parties. We organized our own parties. We decided were we going formal to this party or should we go another way. And we everybody brought their best records and we played and we danced. And we had very happy teenage years. It was mostly for fun.

Although I do remember, though, once we were in high school that we had very deep conversation subjects about the incarnation or vivisection experiments on animals, who was for or was against, like teenagers who go to a decent school and do. But it was mostly just friends together all the time. I spent really my all my years in high school with my friends rather than with my family. We did our homework, but that had to be done quick as we could and then we would get together and play records and talk and have fun.

And there were, of course, girls involved. He had a girlfriend too. So--

Hans, how did you get in you circle?

Hans really didn't move to Amsterdam until the war was already on. And his uncle was a physician in Amsterdam and they were the best friend of Rudy's parents. So I know him really through Rudy. And then he was deported. He went after me because he liked me from the beginning but then-- So somehow that's how all these people fit in. I mean, these are just three of them, I showed you a little tennis picture. There were several more that we were always together with. That was already after school. These were already after-school friends.

What was Rudy like?

Rudy was a very nice, down-to-Earth, very simple kind of a guy, I think. You don't know. I always sometimes wonder what would Rudy have been or become? He was, as I say, he didn't have a very good head for learning. But his father was a stockbroker, and I think he could have become that too. He was interested in business and everything. But there wasn't much time for development yet.

We were both 16 when the war broke out in Europe and 17 when Holland was invaded. We were kids. I mean even today 16- and 17-year-olds aren't, and they are much more sophisticated than we were. But even they're little kids. Well, they know more what goes on in the world with television and-- We didn't have television, of course. We didn't have a radio in the house till I was 14. If I wanted to hear some children's programs on the radio, I walked for 25 minutes to my grandmother's every Tuesday afternoon to hear children's programs.

We were not severely spoiled kids. It wasn't that much.

Is there anything else you'd like-- I know I've picked your brain. And she's the ringer here. So if there's nothing else you'd like to add--

There's probably a million things I can add. You have to stop somewhere.

Right. OK. Well, thank you very, very much.

You're very welcome.