

Oral History: Harry Van Hammond, June 14, 2000

Summary

Harry Van Hammond, born March 1, 1935 in Veghel, Netherlands, the eldest son of Peter and Anna Van Hammond, who hid Jews during the Holocaust, describes: his father, who worked as a farmer and a glass-cutter; a comfortable working class existence; his father taken as a POW at the outbreak of the war, used as a laborer in Poland and Germany, and then released early to return to Holland in order to farm, including providing food to the German occupiers; housing a Jew named Lawrence and his "lady friend" for 18 "hectic months" because Lawrence was a "reckless man" who eventually was executed in Amsterdam after trying to steal a German officer's revolver; not having anyone residing with them for about six months; overhearing some visitors, including a priest, and a commotion that resulted in the family hiding a Jewish couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Locher*; [responding to a question] having younger sisters and brothers, all of whom ended up in Australia; managing to hide the Lochers'* identities from local people, which placed great strain on the family; only one occasion when their identities were almost compromised accidentally by one of the children; [in response to a question] his early education; developing respect for the Jewish people, particularly their resilience in the face of the horrors of the Holocaust; Locher* being an educated man and a rabbi; having a radio and guns "as a last resort," which were kept in a seldom-used shelter; his father probably being motivated to help the Jews by his strict Catholic faith; the family immigrating to Australia in 1953; regretting not asking his father about the war before he died; [responding to a question] recalling three occasions on which German soldiers searched the house in a cursory way, primarily to find downed Allied airmen more than hidden Jews; never having SS or Gestapo come to the house; the Lochers* founding an orphanage for Holocaust survivors after the war, and later moving to Israel.

*As heard/transliterated