United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Adriaan Hoogerhuis
September 22nd, 2004
RG-50.477.0157

PREFACE

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This transcript was created by Linda Tuttle as part of the National Court Reporters Foundation Oral Histories Program. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges this contribution.

Adriaan Hoogerhuis
September 22nd, 2004

Part One

SPEAKER 1: Today is September 22nd, 2004. And we are in Sebastopol, California interviewing Mr. Hoogerhuis, Adriaan. And this is for the San Francisco Bay Area Holocaust History Project. And the Videographer is Dr. Anne Grenn Saldinger. Interviewer is Hilde Gattmann. Mr. Hoogerhuis, what was your birth name?

SPEAKER 2: My first name is Adriaan, Adriaan Peter Hoogerhuis.

SPEAKER 1: Hoogerhuis. And when were you born?

SPEAKER 2: I was born on February the 24th, 1925 in a very small village in the south part of Holland. Name was Ouderkerk.

SPEAKER 1: And your father's name and mother's name?

SPEAKER 2: My mother's name was Cornelia Van Staldt (ph) and my father's name was Peter--Jon Peter Hoogerhuis.

SPEAKER 1: Uh-huh. And did you have brothers and sisters?

SPEAKER 2: I have still two sisters, yes. My older sister is Martha Cornelia and my younger sister is Petronella.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. And how did your family support themselves?

SPEAKER 2: Well, when I was born my family lived in a small village and my father was a farm hand. And at the time in the '20s that was--farmers had a lot of help in the summertime for the harvest but for the wintertime let most of the people go and there was no welfare and there was nothing so you depend on church charity. But my dad's family, socialists __ so you were at the bottom on the list for charity. So my parents had two children shortly behind each other. The difference between my sisters is only 13 months. And so she got one guilder and a loaf of bread. And my mother said we can live from that she said to the church elders. And the elders said you pray to God and He will help you. Well, you could pray to your teeth are bloody, but no help came.

So my dad went to Notterdam, worked a little bit in the harbor ships, loading and then he saw an ad in the paper in 1928 the Olympics came to Amsterdam and they needed policemen so __+ he was accepted so he couldn't --he went to Amsterdam for the course to become a policeman. And by the end of 1926, the whole family moved to Amsterdam. So my dad was always a policeman.

SPEAKER 1: What schools did you attend then, in Amsterdam?

SPEAKER 2: In Amsterdam, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Uh-huh. And regular public school was it?

SPEAKER 2: I attend always public schools, yeah. I went first two years to kindergarten, but actually every kid in Holland used to at that time, and then to elementary school. And after elementary school, one year with--called junior high. And then I went to a trade school and got trained as in sheet metal work in a factory.

SPEAKER 1: Okay, umhum.

SPEAKER 2: And I graduated from that in 1941. And then I right away started working. I was 16 years old. I started work full time in factory.

SPEAKER 1: Is that right, at 16?

SPEAKER 2: At 16. And it was common in that time. As a matter of fact, you could start work when you were 14 years old.

SPEAKER 1: Is that right. And your parents' education, do you know anything about that?

SPEAKER 2: My mother went to 7th grade and then she worked first as a maid for a baker in the village. And later my grandfather, small piece of land. Then she had to work in the field until she got married. And my dad had also 7th grade in the __ went to night school to learn for policeman.

SPEAKER 1: I see. Okay. What kind of a neighborhood did you live in?

SPEAKER 2: We lived in several neighborhoods in Amsterdam. You could say where the common people lived.

SPEAKER 1: Working class?

SPEAKER 2: All working class people, yeah, because policemen in that time, that was not really in high-paying job. The only thing was steady job, but not high paying.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum.

SPEAKER 2: Plus we had always the drawback. That's like I told you welfare was very bad at that time in Holland. And my dad had one brother and five sisters, and sisters all moved away from the small village, and most of them settled in Notterdam. So then my dad's parents decided to move to Notterdam. And they came there, but that was depression years, and the depression years older men who only knew farm work was no work to be had. So he applied for welfare and welfare said oh, you have seven kids, let's see what the seven kids can do. And they found out the five daughters were married, but all the husbands are all out of work. And only my dad had a steady job and his brother had a steady job. So then they decided--my dad made 28 guilders a week. And five guilders a week had to go to his parents. So my mother always said if you're unemployed, then we're better off than a steady job.

So I actually grow up in the depression years. I was always very poor. I learned at a young age, that it was almost a curse to be poor especially when you got old and something, but still always __.

SPEAKER 1: How did your family relate to each other? Was there--your family, with all of the aunts and uncles and cousins?

SPEAKER 2: Well, that's a little bit difficult. Then my parents 25 years of marriage, my dad threw a big party. It was a big party, and two weeks later he packed all of his stuff and he moved out and separated.

SPEAKER 1: Was it a bad feeling?

SPEAKER 2: In that time that was for the woman that left behind you could say it was very bad. It was terrible to get some alimony. And at the same time then we were completely dead from my family, my dad's family.

SPEAKER 1: Uh-huh.

SPEAKER 2: So that actually, the connection that was completely gone from that moment.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum. Did your family have a religious affiliation?

SPEAKER 2: My mother was growing up basic--a little bit basic __ religion, yes. From my dad's side, no. Like I said, we was always a socialist family.

SPEAKER 1: No religion?

SPEAKER 2: No religion.

SPEAKER 1: Was anybody--you were--your family involved in politics, local politics?

SPEAKER 2: Very strong. Very strong. We grew up debating it.

SPEAKER 1: Socialists, umhum.

SPEAKER 2: So, you know, very strong feeling about that.

SPEAKER 1: What kind of things were you involved with?

SPEAKER 2: Well, at that time the social democrats had youth groups, ten of us in the youth groups until the war started, you know, then were outlawed. You could go switch over to the sympathizers for the Germans, but that was-- I never did that. I didn't want to do that, not at all.

SPEAKER 1: So your socialist youth group was outlawed before the Nazis came in or after?

SPEAKER 2: The moment the Nazis came in.

SPEAKER 1: The moment they came in?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: So you could no longer meet as a group?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, no, no, no, not at all.

SPEAKER 1: Did you try?

SPEAKER 2: As a matter of fact that--the leader--the top leader was jailed very soon.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum. Okay. Were you worried about repercussions?

SPEAKER 2: You always had to be because you could be picked up for any reason because I was --even at the start of work, you go to night school, so I had to take the streetcar and then in 1942 then Jewish people were not allowed to go in the streetcar. And I went to night school and there were a couple of German soldiers, and I had a very dark complexion at that time. And take the streetcar--they had these secret IDs. And they would check my identity card over and over to see if it was counterfeit because they thought I was Jewish.

SPEAKER 1: They thought you were Jewish. So they checked it and then finally...

SPEAKER 2: After a couple of hours, they let me go. And then you got, like I said, I started working when I was 16. And just before I turned 18, then the Germans came in the factory, and all of the men between 18 and 45 had to register that day at the labor office. And papers had to go to Germany to work in the factories over there. So I just missed out on that.

SPEAKER 1: Let's take a break just a moment. Okay. You were telling us about in the factory.

SPEAKER 2: Yes. I work in the factory because we all were doing some work, a little bit related for the Germans because nothing could be done without their permission. And just to work, you could do some repair work sometime we had--factory was alongside the canal. Sometimes an old barge came in and it was something broken on it, and for some potatoes, then we tried to repair it and we can't--because elevators in the time were not built. And private buildings, they're not allowed anymore, only that Germans occupied that the elevators were still running and had to be in tiptop shape. For the rest, not at all.

And gradually the whole situation get worse. You know what, I turned 18, and I got some counterfeit papers that I was __ what's it called, I was neither for the German war machine. But when you passed 18 you were ripe to be picked up to go to Germany. And so when I went to work, always had to look over your shoulders. If you saw German soldiers, you tried to hide in the stairway or someplace.

SPEAKER 1: So anyplace that you would pass German soldiers, there was a chance of you being picked up?

SPEAKER 2: Yes, you never knew because they could do what they wanted as long as they had--I had bicycle for a long time with wooden tires. But even they could steal that from you. They could give you work, a sheet of paper, but it wasn't worth the paper it was written on.

SPEAKER 1: And they could actually induct you into the German army?

SPEAKER 2: Tried to get you for that. You know the __ Amsterdam used to be a big clothing store on the corner. And they turned it to a propaganda office. There was a big poster on the outside and saw boys and girls happily playing in the mountains, on the lake, you know, and had a lot of fun dancing and singing and marching, you know. And so you could go to Germany for a free vacation.

But by the same token, tried to talk you into signing up for the German army, the girls in the __ they called it and the boys, yes, trained for Dutch SS. And one boy I worked with, he went in there, and he ended up in Russia and he died there.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum. So what were the counterfeit papers that you had?

SPEAKER 2: It was--I had a paper that was supposedly original German stamps on it that I was needed for the German war machinery to keep it going.

SPEAKER 1: So that you could keep working rather than go into the Army?

SPEAKER 2: Supposedly that I should be picked up. But like I said, it didn't always count.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum.

SPEAKER 2: And then in--but you had crazy Tuesday, that was September 1944, that was the time that the allis made such big progress into Belgium in a certain part of Holland. And they got to Battle of Aland--the Battle of Aland, so the allis decided that the best __+ let the Germans sit there and we go around. They go up north. And so that started what they called the hunger winter, the hunger winter. You know there was no electricity. There was no coal. There was no wood. There was no gas. There was nothing to be had. Food was almost nonexistent. You had to __ sometimes, part of potatoes and potatoes half rotten. And the bread that was made with potato flour, and because everything was the worse. The Germans took the pick first. Then what was left, that was for Dutch and a lot of time there was potatoes, sugar beads __ that when a lot of

people died from hunger. Money was worthless. So the only thing you could do was trade something, was a big black market, but you paid eight guilders for a slice of bread.

SPEAKER 1: When did you decide to do something about it in your life? When did you decide to escape?

SPEAKER 2: What can you do about it? We had a big strike when the Germans started taking the Jews away. It was a big strike and so then right away, the Germans took people on the street, and they shot machine gun, throw hand grenade in it, so that fizzled out pretty fast.

SPEAKER 1: So this was general population in Amsterdam, had a general strike when people were rounded up?

SPEAKER 2: Yes, see because we had --

SPEAKER 1: Were you part of that or did you witness that?

SPEAKER 2: I didn't go to work, no. But in Amsterdam, you had Jewish population. You had the rich area, you had the poor area, but it was definitely ghetto, and actually it was mostly quiet to live there and people mingled. And it was never that the Jews were separated that you could say--a part of the total population. There was really no distinction, really not. And that was the reason that the slogan was for the strike, keep your hands off our Jews.

SPEAKER 1: When was that strike?

SPEAKER 2: It was in February of 1941.

SPEAKER 1: And do you remember approximately how many people participated in that?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, it's quite a bit, quite a bit. And then you never knew because, like I said, the papers that was in control of the Germans, right, and they always printed what they wanted, and there was not much.

SPEAKER 1: And was there any question in your mind about whether you would participate, if that put you or your job in jeopardy?

SPEAKER 2: No, no, not really.

SPEAKER 1: So then you tried to escape yourself so you wouldn't have to bother with the Germans, I mean that the Germans couldn't look for you?

SPEAKER 2: No, they didn't do that. That was later they started to do that, in the beginning of the war. Played a very nice game when they came. And then said well, your government flew the coop, they all went to England, you know, but we will take care of you, so nothing will change, everything stays the same. The only thing that we keep an eye on it, but then started replacing everybody, the sympathizers. And then gradually it started, all kinds of little things. First thing we was not allowed to have radios anymore. And because that was registered, it was very easy to check on that.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum.

SPEAKER 2: And then you have to turn over all of the brass things, copper and brass because it was needed for the Germans. And so gradually took all of your freedom away, like I said, no radio, and the papers were curtailed, and hardly anybody had telephone. Cut off people that didn't--private people cutting the telephone service and so controlled everything. And couldn't--you couldn't trust strangers anymore because if you ratted somebody to the Germans

then you got an extra ration card, right, especially by the end--hardly any food left. It was very important.

SPEAKER 1: Yes. Okay. So you never knew who was a sympathizer or desperate enough to --

SPEAKER 2: Yes.

SPEAKER 1: -- to turn someone in? And the laws, which gradually took away more and more civil rights, that was applicable to everyone?

SPEAKER 2: Except for the sympathizers and then the hard core, not the bread and butter sympathizers because you had a lot of those, too, in order to keep their job. But the hard core, they had all kinds of privileges, yes.

SPEAKER 1: So did you continue to work in that factory?

SPEAKER 2: Yes, umhum, until crazy Tuesday __ because then the Germans started to step up the __ and my mother said you are not going out of the house anymore. And then I made a little hiding place under the floor of the house and then--so I didn't go outside, only nighttime we lived on the ground floor and we had a little backyard. And if it was dark and I could go out in the backyard to get in a breath of fresh air for the rest--the whole day stayed inside. And at nighttime when you heard a car, it could only be Germans. And if you heard something walk, the Germans were always in their boots in the back. And the metal, so when you heard the metal or heard the clicking on the street or you heard the car, right away I had to go in the ground.

SPEAKER 1: Tell us more about the hiding place that you created.

SPEAKER 2: Well, if you did--there's four beams in the floor and about this high, so in-between the couple of slats and the two boards from that, and I could just move and lay along with your arm steady, and could just go in there.

SPEAKER 1: You couldn't stand?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, no, no.

SPEAKER 1: Just lie down?

SPEAKER 2: Just lie down, sometimes for hours.

SPEAKER 1: Now, why did you feel the need to hide so much? You couldn't go out into --

SPEAKER 2: Because if the Germans __ came in the houses.

SPEAKER 1: And they would have arrested you?

SPEAKER 2: Just take you.

SPEAKER 1: Just take you away?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yeah, a couple of blocks they could completely corden off and take every man in there unless you were too old or too young. And no matter what kind of papers you had, it didn't count anymore because by that time they're desperate for people to work in Germany and under __ law.

SPEAKER 1: So especially a young strong man like yourself?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: You felt the risk was very great that you would have been taken?

SPEAKER 2: Very great.

SPEAKER 1: So you would lie down under the floorboards for most of the day?

SPEAKER 2: For most of the night.

SPEAKER 1: And then just get out at times you said to get a breath of fresh air?

SPEAKER 2: Well, if my mother thought it was safe. Sometimes you got a tip. Like I said, my dad was a policeman. And in 1943 he was assigned as a bodyguard for the chief prosecutor in Amsterdam that was a Nazi sympathizer and he __ and the underground told him that you keep the job because then he could an eye, but the guy __ where he's going.

SPEAKER 1: So what were your father's connections with the underground?

SPEAKER 2: Well, that was through friends. It was--we knew a couple of people in the communist party or strongly underground with all kinds of connections. My sister -- my older sister was in Korea (ph). She brought __ papers around and sometimes it had a stolen ration card for the people that are in hiding, so that was food.

SPEAKER 1: So she was like a runner --

SPEAKER 2: Yes.

SPEAKER 1: -- for the underground?

SPEAKER 2: Umhum.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum. Did you see her during that time? Would she come home?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yes, we lived in the same house, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: You were above ground, and then when necessary you went under. Was there room for more than just yourself down there?

SPEAKER 2: Only for myself because my dad was safe because he had a bodyguard job and so they didn't take any girls.

SPEAKER 1: And sister?

SPEAKER 2: My sister, no. Well, she was always at risk.

SPEAKER 1: She was at risk because of the underground work she was doing?

SPEAKER 2: Yes.

SPEAKER 1: But, per se, the girls and women were not at risk?

SPEAKER 2: No, no.

SPEAKER 1: So they were able to get food, whatever there was?

SPEAKER 2: Yes, basically for the women. The men no longer couldn't go out for -- to get food or do the work because they were too vulnerable, you know, could have picked up at any moment, and in general the Germans left females go.

SPEAKER 1: So your father was a guard for this important man. Did he then pass on information to the underground?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yes.

SPEAKER 1: On a regular basis?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, yeah. He could always tell -- my dad knew ahead of time if he was going to travel, then he could gave hints to whether they go to Rotterdam or __ conference.

SPEAKER 1: And there was often information that could be used?

SPEAKER 2: It could be used. We didn't know the value exactly of it, but underground like to know that.

SPEAKER 1: So I imagine that was quite risky?

SPEAKER 2: For him it was risky, yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum. Did they ever come into the house looking for you, the Germans?

SPEAKER 2: No, no, never, never, no.

SPEAKER 1: Thank God. How long a time period did you have to hide?

SPEAKER 2: That was actually from September '44 until we got liberated in May of 1945.

SPEAKER 1: So would you go outside at all?

SPEAKER 2: At nighttime.

SPEAKER 1: Is that right?

SPEAKER 2: In the backyard, because my mother wouldn't let me out of the front door.

SPEAKER 1: Were you able to sleep in this little place down there?

SPEAKER 2: Not so easy.

SPEAKER 1: Oh, I bet. What did you do in there? Was it totally dark?

SPEAKER 2: It was dark, yeah, because there was no light whatsoever, the little bit you have, and the light was __ a little light and used in __ structure underground.

SPEAKER 1: So when you were in there, you couldn't do anything?

SPEAKER 2: No, just lay there.

SPEAKER 1: Changed your clothes, couldn't go to the bathroom?

SPEAKER 2: No. And believe me it was cold in the wintertime.

SPEAKER 1: Oh, I bet. So did you have to sleep there at night always?

SPEAKER 2: Sometimes, I fell asleep, yeah, a little bit dosing, not really sleeping.

SPEAKER 1: But for let's say your nighttime sleep, could you go into --

SPEAKER 2: Not really, but my mother was a very light sleeper, and she heard everything that happened and we always -- you become light sleeper because there was too many things happening around.

SPEAKER 1: So whenever you heard something, anything --

SPEAKER 2: It just sort of just--yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Was anybody else that you know of in that house that had a hiding place?

SPEAKER 2: Well, actually only the people lived--the ground floor could do that because in the upper floor there's no room to hide, nothing whatsoever. And, you know, some people made a false --

SPEAKER 1: Closet?

SPEAKER 2: Piece of paneling in a closet, but the Germans thought the closet was too small, could put the bayonets through it or shots through it.

SPEAKER 1: Now what about your neighbors, did your neighbors know or you think anyone would have thought oh, what happened to --

SPEAKER 2: The neighbors knew, of course, that I was hiding in the house, yeah, and knew from two houses past, and that there was--he was Jewish, and he was hiding in the house, yes.

SPEAKER 1: But for the most part then people could trust each other if they knew their neighbors would not say anything?

SPEAKER 2: Not have any trouble in that respect, no, no. We knew from one he was--what's called bread and butter and __ national socialist __ that was Nazi sympathizer. And he was bread and butter one, but he never said anything. He worked for city hall. And in order to keep his job, you had to be a member of the party.

SPEAKER 1: What do you think helped you survive down there? I mean when I think of just laying there and not being able to sleep, what did you think of? What helped you? What attitude helped you survive?

SPEAKER 2: Well, I have a lot of patience. And that last part of the war when--my 20th birthday I got a little bit of a sore throat. It turned out that I had what they called diphtheria so then doctor came, but there were no drugs. You couldn't go to the hospitals because the hospitals were all taken for the wounded Germans so --

SPEAKER 1: What did they do for you in those days?

SPEAKER 2: Practically nothing. The doctors said keep him isolated. It's very difficult to get five people in a house with two bedrooms.

SPEAKER 1: Anybody else get it?

SPEAKER 2: What?

SPEAKER 1: Nobody else got it?

SPEAKER 2: Nobody else got it.

SPEAKER 1: You did very well.

SPEAKER 2: And I made it.

SPEAKER 1: Do you know more--I don't know how much you can tell us about the working of the underground from what you know that your father and your sister did?

SPEAKER 2: Well, what we knew is that always on the 1st it was always tied to __ city hall for new ration cards was one of the things, right? Also tried to find out what the Germans were

doing. A couple of times tried to assassinate some of the higher officers in the Army. But they always--I think that factor is always a little bit dubious because one time the __ uniforms, the underground wanted German uniforms showing-- the middle part of Holland, say, ambushed and took staff cars and started all regular soldiers to hire German officers as they killed them so as __ Germans took, in one village, took all the men away, and sent them to Germany. And I think out of 20 men, I think something like 10 or 15 came back.

SPEAKER 1: So sometimes their actions backfired?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, because also later when the allis made progress in Germany and France, when France and Belgium then blew up the railroad tracks, and then the Germans picked local people there and said you guard this piece of track, you guard this piece of track, you guard this piece of track, and if something happens, we'll shoot you and we'll shoot your family, as they did because they didn't care because they were what you call the head of folks and __+ to serve them.

SPEAKER 1: Were you ever nearly caught? I mean nobody--I mean you were that lucky? Nobody tried to catch you, tried to --

SPEAKER 2: No, no, no. I was very lucky in that respect.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, that's true. I guess I shouldn't even ask, but what was the penalty for people who were caught hiding?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, several people, my sister worked with were caught, worked in the underground and shot by the Germans, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Were there--did people ever gather in your home or were involved in the underground or it was --

SPEAKER 2: Like my sister, and my dad was the bodyguard.

SPEAKER 1: Right, but would there be meetings or anything or that wasn't --

SPEAKER 2: No, no. We knew several of them but--

SPEAKER 1: Would your father know when people were going to be rounded up or when they were going to be deportations?

SPEAKER 2: Sometimes heard it, yeah, because he was--like I said, the man he was guarding was the prosecutor and he had contact in which the Germans, and what you call it, the Dutch SS, the Dutch people signed up for the SS troop, service station in Amsterdam because they used for the roundups. Sometimes he heard us talking about it. He didn't know what part of Amsterdam but he heard so there's a precaution and gave a tip and I knew what to do.

SPEAKER 1: So you knew at those times to stay inside?

SPEAKER 2: Yes.

SPEAKER 1: And he passed that onto others?

SPEAKER 2: If he knew, a few people, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: How did you know how to trust anyone? Did you?

SPEAKER 2: Well, some people you could trust. There's never 100 percent sure.

SPEAKER 1: That's true.

SPEAKER 2: Never 100 percent sure. But some people you knew--assume you could trust, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Did you ever think about trying to get out of the city? Would that have helped?

SPEAKER 2: To where? Holland is so small. There's no place to go. Secondly, you're not allowed to go by train anymore, right, there was no cars. There was no buses, and bikes, couldn't go that far with it. And most of the farmers around Amsterdam you don't know them. You don't trust.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum, so, yeah, for instance, going back to your hometown you couldn't get there?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: So how did you find out about when the war was over? I mean --

SPEAKER 2: Well, like I said, the allis dropped leaflets, little loose papers sometimes. And they would pass from hand to hand. And we had a friend with a radio, and he told you what the BBC told. And I had a map of Europe, right, and then I read headline what the Germans said and __+ BBC said the war was. And then you heard all the way from the Germans said. And had a better defensible position, but they're meant they're moving back so many miles. You knew by then that the German propaganda you could not touch for a penny. Like I said, the Dutch newspaper was just propaganda, and you had a list of like what you could get your stamps and __+ because it last in the winter. Like I said, the Germans took what they wanted so there was really nothing you could own--meat we didn't have for years. Milk disappeared and there was no butter and no cheese. There was really nothing to eat. So that people start really getting hungry and people are dying all over. And also the whole __+ it is so sad to see.

We had a neighbor and he was a retired colonel from the Army and he was always very dignified man, you know, he wore long overcoat and bald head and he'd always have a growl just like an Englishman, and he was a very dignified man. And if I was in the __+ and he went to the center kitchen, you know, if you could cook yourself because there was nothing to cook on. You could--for your ration stamp, you could go to the center kitchen and you could cook soup and the soup would be made from maybe a couple of rotten potatoes and some cabbage leaves, but it was warm liquid. So then you had a little pan that you walked with, but of course, in the winter there was a lot of ice and snow and he slipped. And pan of soup dropped to his feet. And I never forget that he was down on his knees with the spoon to put soup back in the pan.

SPEAKER 1: So you were really able to stay in your parents' home until --

SPEAKER 2: I stayed in my parents' home, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: You were very lucky. And what did your family eat?

SPEAKER 2: Eat? Well, not much.

SPEAKER 1: Not much?

SPEAKER 2: Not much. I can tell you that when the war ended in 1945, I was 20 years old, and I weighed 95 pounds.

SPEAKER 1: And you're tall. How tall are you?

SPEAKER 2: I was 5'11" at the time.

SPEAKER 1: 5'11", 95 pounds.

SPEAKER 2: I was just skin and bones. And at the time people came around the house and begging for something to eat. And my mother always said you open the door and everybody walked in. There are reasons I still can't see any food spilled. If I see on the TV there's a smashed pie in the face, and even if it's fake, I still can't see it.

SPEAKER 1: I still can't see it either.

SPEAKER 2: In the depression years there was nothing, you know, because, like I said, the bare minimum that you had, and then the war years, the little bit you had, you lost because it sounds silly, but if you broke a cup, that was a disaster because you couldn't replace it. You couldn't buy anything.

It's hard to imagine, but the store front, if there was something laying in the store front it was fake and really nothing you could get, couldn't get toothpaste. You couldn't get a razor blade to shave or nothing, nothing. A new coat, we had clothing that was once a year, maybe you got a stamp for it. It was really nothing. For years the only thing I had was a pair of wooden shoes and I got those because the factory supplied it.

SPEAKER 1: So people must have become sick also.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: After you were freed because of when food became available --

SPEAKER 2: Yes, because the center kitchen--the Canadians took over the center kitchen and they saw all of those hungry people and said we have to feed them. So they give you soup very rich and people couldn't handle it. The stomach could not handle it anymore. And the Americans gave you those big tins with crackers, right, and crackers. And the warning was don't eat too much because if you eat those crackers and you drink water, it expand your stomach, and you can't handle that. A lot of people got sick.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, yes.

SPEAKER 2: And even for years you could see the effect because in 1946 I was drafted for the Dutch army and that was for three-and-a-half years. And I became a drill sergeant. And when the new recruits came in and the boys who were about ten years old when the war started, had a lot of stomach problems.

SPEAKER 1: Sure.

SPEAKER 2: So really had a lasting effect on a lot of people.

SPEAKER 1: Hard to get started again on food or interfered with development?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: So was that right after the war ended you were drafted?

SPEAKER 2: No, in May 1946 I was drafted. I was supposed to go to Indonesia at that time because that was a Dutch colony and then Sukarno came and tried to take over. And we were supposed to go over there and take Sukarno out and make it a colony again. So got drafted at the time and became three-and-a-half years, but because I became a drill sergeant, I never went over there. So I start to train every time a group of new recruits.

SPEAKER 1: So what happened? You mentioned you met--were you still in the Army when you met?

SPEAKER 2: No. No. No. No, I came out in 1950.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, okay.

SPEAKER 2: Between the end of December 1950.

SPEAKER 1: All right. And you met in --

SPEAKER 2: In 1950. May 30th, 1950.

SPEAKER 3: You still know the right date.

SPEAKER 1: So what did you do after you came out of the Army?

SPEAKER 2: I went back to work. I went back to work. But in that time my parents were separated, so I had to support my mother. A lot of us would go back to school, but couldn't support my mother and go back to school the first--was no money for that.

SPEAKER 1: And you started working?

SPEAKER 2: Yes, I started working, and I had an accident putting up elevators in little power plant. And I fell down and broke both of my heels. And I was laid up for almost a year.

SPEAKER 1: Was that while you were in the Army or after?

SPEAKER 2: After Army, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: So they paid you compensation I hope?

SPEAKER 2: Very little.

SPEAKER 1: Is that right?

SPEAKER 2: Because they figured I was still living with my mother and they said well you live with your mother. My mother doesn't have any money either. Well, that's too bad.

SPEAKER 1: That's tough. But you survived all of it, and that's good. And then you met your bride.

SPEAKER 2: Umhum.

SPEAKER 1: Your heels were fixed and you were ready to dance again.

SPEAKER 3: Not right away, not right away.

SPEAKER 2: No.

SPEAKER 3: Those heels hurt him for years, for years.

SPEAKER 1: Did you personally have effects from those years of being hungry?

SPEAKER 2: No. I don't think so. Well, maybe. It is your mind. You never lose it. It's so--I was overburdened. I always--in part I don't __+ I always told my kids we were never teenagers.

SPEAKER 1: I was thinking about that.

SPEAKER 2: See, in--before the war, the depression years, there was no money. And I think I got five cents pocket money before I went to work. And then I went to work and I got twelve

cents an hour. And I went to night school and my dad didn't want to support that, so my mother had a little bit of household money she had. And with the monies I brought in, I had to pay for the books and tuition so I got a raise of ten cents pocket money so...

And like I said, you saw that people that poor, especially when you are 65 years old, not like Social Security now, that there's almost nothing so that if it was a curse to be old and poor, and something that you never forget, never.

SPEAKER 1: Of course.

SPEAKER 2: No.

SPEAKER 1: And how bad emotional healing after the war? Did anybody help you to heal from your negative experience?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, no, that didn't exist. You get all of the help from--the whole population had problems. The thing that always surprised me that he that during the war years that everybody, me included, if you came someplace, and you had to repair an elevator, is there something to steal that can burn and that you can eat. Because I made a little stove actually, and if you got some branches, tree sticks, a little piece of wood, you could burn it and you can cook. That's the only thing we had. So the first thing is always some wood to steal or maybe a piece of coal, and if there's something to eat. And the war was over and everybody is on the hunt. It's unbelievable, unbelievable.

SPEAKER 3: Tell about the time, the lifting, about the black money, the money on the black market.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yeah, the Germans print money and could care get less. So they would print money and so money was practically worthless, right? And then in beginning of 1946, then we had the new minister for finance, Piet Lieftinck, was his name. And he had a __ policy to show what he did with new money printed and everybody got ten guilders which at the moment you got those ten guilders, all the old money was worthless, you had to turn it in and was it was registered how much you turned in.

And then every month you could go and you got a little bit of your money back and new money. But at the same time you could see you were, let's say, a postman and you turned in $500,000 guilders, it was black market money. So that's gone. So it was confiscated and called __ and confiscated and you never saw it back. For a postman, you could make that much money, right? Maybe you saved a little bit, that is supposedly what you have to have. And the rest is gone. Straightened the whole financial burden in Holland otherwise inflation was unbelievable so it prevented that.

SPEAKER 1: So if someone had black money or money on the black market, all of a sudden it was worth nothing?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah.

SPEAKER 3: They would give--if you didn't have--if you were not in the black business, you know, I could say, hey, you take that much money from me, and I give you some, but you know, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: So it took quite awhile for things to get back on track after the war?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yeah, because everything was ruined in the __ on top of all the craze, drop in

the water, what we had __ for the railroad, that take to Germany--or it was shot up by the allies, right, in the factories, all of the machinery or destroyed it. So it was really--the whole country was a disaster area and there was really nothing. They had to start building it up from the ground.

SPEAKER 3: And the Marshall plan at that time helped us. After the war, everybody was communist.

SPEAKER 1: How did your wartime experience affect you right after?

SPEAKER 2: Well, I think that the fact in such a way like all kids of age--all were cooped up for five years, there was nothing. In the libraries all the French and English and American books are gone. They are outlawed. The only films you could see were German propaganda films, right, we were completely shut off from the whole world, right. And then you were liberated and you heard all of the American music on the radio, and all of the songs, and we all wanted to get out of Holland.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah, umhum.

SPEAKER 2: Wanted to get out. I applied for the KLM the Royal Dutch Airlines. They wanted people to train as mechanic, airplane mechanic and send them out to states and fields in other countries where the KLM flew to. So I wanted to get out, out of Holland. They flew everything.

And first I was accepted because of a technical background, and four weeks later I got a letter that they were sorry but couldn't take me because the Dutch army needed me. They knew it before I knew it.

SPEAKER 1: So it was before you were drafted?

SPEAKER 2: They knew it already. And after you were too old--normally got drafted in Holland when you are 18 years old. And I was already 21, but __+ because of the background experience in the war you are not so easily trained, and you are not as easy to form anymore, you know, an 80-year-old doesn't have any experience.

SPEAKER 1: Umhum, umhum. But they went after your age group anyway?

SPEAKER 2: Yes. Well, a lot of my age were picked up by the German and worked in Germany for a couple of years. And they came home and within a year they had to go in the service and so it was not what you called a happy bunch there, and most went straight to Indonesia.

SPEAKER 1: Oh, my. That is something. How did your children feel about your story? Have you told it to them?

SPEAKER 2: Well, sometimes, you know, it's a little bit difficult always to talk because I had to work at the early age, you know, and do something for money. And if I see my kids, my grandkids, then I want to say something, but I don't say it.

SPEAKER 1: Your grandkids don't know?

SPEAKER 2: No, I don't always agree, but don't bring it up, right.

SPEAKER 1: Right.

SPEAKER 3: We grew up with no television, practically no radio.

SPEAKER 2: But my dad bought one of the first radios, and don't touch that radio. Don't touch that. It was sacred. It was his private thing, right? So poor, so nothing. Unbelievable to know that

I think we in comparison to most Americans don't say anything but we feel rich, right? And then our kids have better than we had, and that's fine. That's great. But I hope that they realize it and appreciate as much as we do. I think we appreciate much more that we have than they do.

SPEAKER 3: There cannot be anything else.

SPEAKER 2: It's not their fault.

SPEAKER 3: If you don't get everything you don't appreciate it. But Inga got one soft animal, you know, a soft thing, and she still has it.

SPEAKER 1: Appreciates it.

SPEAKER 3: Now they have heaps of it. You know, you cannot appreciate if you have heaps of it, yeah? You can only appreciate food when you have been hungry.

SPEAKER 1: Were people well outside your family willing to hear your story or wanted to hear your story, friends, people you met, after you came here?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Were people interested in hearing your story?

SPEAKER 2: Some people, yeah. You talked a little bit. Maybe just came here for a newspaper but never really go in depth in the whole thing. For the first time that didn't go into it.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah, and you know you have your friends our age, you know, they all have their stories. And if we talk about the war, we understand each other totally, you know.

The reason we got a couple of friends in Corvallis, we were--my older son put our picture and our story--a little bit of our life story in the paper. So this lady called me up. She was Dutch. And she said "Are you Dutch?" "Yeah. Yeah. We still speak Dutch. Yeah, of course we still speak Dutch." So they came from Holland. They went through the war. They know everything that we--so when talking about it, we understand total, you know. We sing the same songs, we have the same -- we know the same artists, you know. From that time it's wonderful to have that memory in common.

SPEAKER 1: So after your service in the Army, did you go back to the same factory to work?

SPEAKER 2: After that year started to work in the field putting up elevators, and then I got my accident there. And after the accident, then I work for the same company, I start work as a draftsman. And from that time on, always worked as a draftsman.

SPEAKER 1: Then how did you feel about leaving Holland, once you got married and had kids?

SPEAKER 2: It was for me not too easy, no. But I saw more of my responsibility. I had a family. I felt responsibility if I do something that affects everybody.

And we had an apartment and it was very important at that time in Holland. And I had a steady job, I could -- I wasn't for sure the rest of my life that if I wanted it, so that you give up everything. I still left my mother and two sisters, all right? And it was really big steps. I think it took about two years, yeah, before Inga was born, about two years.

SPEAKER 1: And then how was that transition for you? Did you have to look for a job here or...

SPEAKER 2: Well, I tell you we immigrated, and then you had a choice you can fly--at the time Dutch paid you to get rid of people.

SPEAKER 1: Oh, really.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yes. They paid part of your immigration cost. So you could fly to New York or go by boat. And in the states wherever you went you had cheap transportation. So we decided we take the boat because there was such an upheaval. You have to say farewell to the whole family and then all of those things, it is like you go away forever. So we decided to take the boat so that way, you could dress up a little bit. It didn't turn out that way but--and in the United States we decided to fly from New York to Los Angeles. And it was in January, the wintertime, full moon, but it was snow all over. And we were flying.

And in Holland, if you drive there, here's a town and by the time you get out of this one, you see all of the __+ for the next town. And we are flying there and you see one city, no lights, nothing but __ on the ground. How big is this country? And I tell you it scared the heck out of you really. And then we came in __+ and said oh, you find easy work here. And it didn't turn out too easy because I went to the oldest factory. I knew it was oldest factory, we tried to get a transfer, but we didn't do that. So we went over there and looked if they have work for me.

And the first thing he said, no, we don't have an opening, but let me show you what is going on there and found out I had a lot of experience that nobody else had. At that time worked in the factory. Worked in the field putting up elevator and repaired them, and worked later as a draftsman.

And I hardly spoke any English. It was horrible. But we had all of the books and I could explain the whole thing. By the end of the interview, the manager said I don't have an opening but I want to help you. He said I go and check with __ if we can do something about it. So came home and I told Salena (ph) I have to look out for something else. And so I look around in another town, maybe a job from one of the factories, they hire today and tomorrow we lay you off, you know. Didn't look too good. Came home and she said __ can come back for another talk, and said any time. So went over there. And I said well, we--I can hire you. He said when you can you start? I said tomorrow. And so well, let's start February the 1st. So started working then. It was two weeks arriving here I started work. I was very, very lucky.

SPEAKER 1: I should say.

SPEAKER 3: Without speaking any English. No driving a car ever. All came in a hurry.

SPEAKER 2: And I could tell you I never was homesick. I was never homesick.

SPEAKER 1: So it was very hard to come to this decision to leave, but you didn't feel homesick once you got here?

SPEAKER 2: It was very hard because in one way I knew a lot and one way it was lucky, and the other way it was difficult because I could read English pretty good. I had no trouble with that and so they gave me the paper, she said you have to draw an elevator for that. And those are the dimensions. And I could do that, right?

And the first couple of times somebody checked and then she said hey, wait a minute. You know it. You know it all. You are on your own. That is fine. But then that means you send the drawing out for an elevator for New York or Texas and you got a telephone call or got a letter. And then you have to fabricate an answer and you had to talk over a telephone, and that was horrible. We had to--luckily had the secretary, and she was a doll. She helped me so much.

SPEAKER 3: And we have the centimeters and the meters. Over here you have the inches and

your yards. I don't know how you did that so quick.

SPEAKER 1: Very good. Do you feel that--do you feel American or do you feel Dutch?

SPEAKER 2: I feel much more American than Dutch. If you go back to--she wants to go back for a couple of months to Holland, and after four weeks I had it. I want to get out.

SPEAKER 1: Too close?

SPEAKER 2: Just too confined. Everything is regulated. You know, you don't--I always feel there's pressure on me over there.

SPEAKER 1: So which of your attitudes and values and interests do you think stem from that difficult time that you went through?

SPEAKER 2: My attitude about a difficult time, you can overcome quite a bit if you really try. You really have to--in Holland we say you have to bite through it.

SPEAKER 1: You have to what?

SPEAKER 2: You have to bite through it.

SPEAKER 1: Bite through it.

SPEAKER 2: Put your teeth through it and bite through it. It was only way. Because when I started working and if you ask something, you could ask it once. Give you an answer. And you ask the same question a second time, you're stupid. And it was a lot of unemployment from the __ in 1941 when I started to work. And like I said, I started to work for twelve cents an hour. And after a year, I got a raise and I got two cents more. That was quite a lot and there was another guy same age. He started the same time as I started. He got one cent. And he went to the boss and he said he got two cents, I got one cent. And the boss says don't you like it? He says there is a whole row outside the gate that wants your job. That was the attitude. And that teach you a lesson and it was the same when I came to the states. The manager was a nice guy, Bill Hedges (ph) because in Holland there was still a little bit of class society. If I had for some reason come to the office of the plant director, just like a school teacher, standing in front of his desk and he's sitting there, you have to yes, sir, no, sir, yes, sir, no, sir, right? And that was it.

And I came here in the states and the plant manager introduced himself, and said "My name is Bill Hedges." (ph) And I told my name and he said "Sure." And he said "My name is Bill. Take a seat." you could just--he was the manager, and not completely equal, but you are more equal level than in Holland. In Holland he is the boss and you are there. And over here it's just much more level. And whole feeling makes such a difference to me.

SPEAKER 3: I don't think it is like that anymore so much.

SPEAKER 2: Not anymore but at the time that we left.

SPEAKER 1: Now, do you think another Holocaust could ever occur?

SPEAKER 2: Pardon?

SPEAKER 1: Do you think another Holocaust could ever occur?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, yeah, sure, I know that.

SPEAKER 1: You think so?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, sure I know, because I was there before the war already. I came from a socialist family, and we already had several books. We had one book about concentration camp, Oranienburg, that was close to Berlin.

SPEAKER 1: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: And like I said, we had always a socialist newspaper. And they told the stories of this happening in Germany. There was __+ completely unaware of it. A lot of German Jews fled to Holland. They had the stories to tell. And then we ___ on May 15th in 1940. And actually there was always a calamity because a lot of people killed themselves. And a lot of people tried everything to get away to England. Rich people went to the harbors and then tried to get in fishing boats to take them to England. And a lot __ got away--like I said, a lot killed themselves, like people, socialist papers that burned them or threw them away because we knew already what the Germans, what they do in their own country. And nobody had any illusions. That is what is different.

SPEAKER 3: She said could it happen again?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, sure.

SPEAKER 3: Could a Holocaust happen again?

SPEAKER 2: Sure.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: Because there's a lot of people if you tell them you are better than somebody else, let's go for it.

SPEAKER 1: What are some of the lessons that you learned from your experiences that you would want to pass on to the next generation?

SPEAKER 2: Well, one of the lessons, like I said, you have to cherish the freedom that we have because it is so easily taken away and you see it. Maybe I see it too black, but if I look at America we came here in 1963 and what it is now then sometimes it scares me. Maybe I see maybe too dark but we have like attorney general __+ talk that scared the heck out of me, really. Because I remember too well who it was that occupied Germany every time a little bit here and a little bit there, and a little bit there. And then you come to the conclusion you don't have any freedom.

SPEAKER 1: So a little bit in terms of the taking away of civil rights?

SPEAKER 2: Yes. I got the feeling, and maybe I am wrong, but are very few newspapers who really tell what it is because I always got the feeling there are certain groups steer in certain direction.

SPEAKER 3: Look at flying. Look at flying. First they look through your luggage. Then we go, and you have to take your shoes off. Now you have to take everything off. Gradually, things do change.

SPEAKER 1: Are there things that you saw happening in Holland at-- during the years, you know, when the Germans first took over that you recognized today?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, I got a feeling. Yeah, the __+ too many things that I had the feeling that can misuse. __+ to put a nice label on it, television. But too many things that can be misused and

probably are misused. Like you said in the libraries, they can check that you're reading, right? And check what you call it sneak and peek in your house when you look around and go through the whole thing and you see everything that you have and leave, and you never know they've been there, right?

And next step they'll start censoring your things so you can't do this and you can't do that. And a lot of people-- I am against any form of censorship, no matter what, I think not good for your kids and then you have to give your kids a little morals and say this you should do and this you shouldn't do. But those __ today you are in charge and you are in charge and you censor that and in a little while there is nothing left.

SPEAKER 3: It can be dangerous, yes.

SPEAKER 2: The whole thing. The more politics--I see we go to capitalist society. Everything is for profit, everything is for greed, even things that shouldn't be.

SPEAKER 1: And are there attitudes that you have that have been either formed or reinforced by your wartime experiences?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Like?

SPEAKER 2: Like I said, I hate that a newspaper or radio has to tell you and check what you are supposed--what they think you should hear and the rest are a bunch a lies.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. Is there anything that you would like to add to tell us about your experiences and where it's brought you today?

SPEAKER 2: Well, the one sad thing that we have as a nation we are so divided now. And that one of the things that is so sad to see that we should live--even we are very diversified, right? Called the melting pot, come from all over, right? And we should try it, live together as good as possible and accept each other and accept each other's values. They don't because you are this and you are no good and you are no good. We have to learn live to live with each other and give each other full value and don't say because I have this, this allegiance so I am that or I am this skin color and I am better, we should forget and have to learn to live each other. The whole world needs to live each other. We are too close together. It's too important.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah, we have to keep our eyes open and our ears open, and really communicate with each other, you know. I am aware very, very, yeah. People already really seem to forget what really freedom is. That is a very scary thing. We start already to recognize things, you know? They're telling you lies every day.

SPEAKER 1: So I think with that awareness and tolerance--so we want to thank you for sharing your experiences with us. On behalf of the Holocaust project, thank you for spending the time.

SPEAKER 2: Thank you for doing this. And I hope there is some value what I said. (Picture shown) The picture was taken in August 1946. I was supposed to go to Indonesia, and my mother wanted to have a good picture of me because she was crying all the time and I don't know if you ever come back, so I have to have it. She had to have a good picture of me.

SPEAKER 1: So that was when you were in the Dutch army?

SPEAKER 2: In the Dutch army, yes.

SPEAKER 1: And does that particular insignia represent anything?

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, it was called the __ regimen __ a little bit like an American agent regimen, a little bit more advanced training.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. Well, thank you.

End of Part One

Conclusion of Interview