

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Aronstein, Elizabeth

Date of interview: 11/16/1989

Summary: Elizabeth was born on 25 October 1938 in Valreda, Holland. Her father was a Jew and her mother was not. On 29 November 1939, her family left for Indonesia because her father had a job there as a clothing dye chemist. At that time, Indonesia was part of Holland. After arriving in Indonesia, Elizabeth's sister was born in 1942 and her dad joined the Red Cross as a volunteer. After her father left, the rest of the family was picked up by the Japanese and sent to an internment camp.

Elizabeth does not remember much of her experience because of her age, but her mother has told her many stories. In the camps she was very sick. The nurses used to tell her mother she would die that day but she never did. Elizabeth had monkey pox, dysentery, malaria, and pneumonia and was never given medications. She remembers that after liberation doctors told her that she should have died. They were given no clothing, but unlike in Germany the weather was always hot. The only food was a handful of rice each day. Her mother told her that her sister would crawl along the wall eating the wall.

The camps Elizabeth, her mother, and her sister lived in were women and children only camps. When a boy turned ten, he would be transported to a men's camp. Everyone over the age of ten had to do jobs. Elizabeth's mother cleaned latrines, wooden floors, straw mats and made soup and rice. She would try to steal extra food for Elizabeth and her sister. Communication between guards and prisoners was only through sign language and pointing due to the language barrier. There was also a problem with sexual abuse because young women's husbands were working back in Indonesia. As camps ran out of food, prisoners were transported to other camps by walking or trucks. The only contact with the outside world was a bulletin board, which had the names of the men who died fighting. Elizabeth's mom would check the board daily and never saw her husband's name.

When the Scottish troops liberated the camps, the Red Cross helped find their families. It was the Red Cross who informed the family that their father died on a Yameze transport. When the family was trying to get home, the Red Cross wanted to send them to England because their mother was a British citizen. They asked to go back to Holland because Elizabeth's grandparents lived there if they were still alive. They ended going back to Holland on a ship with many soldiers going home. The trip home was a big party. The soldiers enjoyed the women and playing with the children.

Upon arriving back in Holland, Elizabeth and her family learned about what happened in Germany. The Red Cross was only able to find two relatives of her father's family, a niece and a nephew. Elizabeth's life had to begin. She attended school, but was behind, not knowing what a chair or table was. After her first year in school, she caught up with her schoolmates. In 1964, Elizabeth

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came to the United States because of work. She currently works as a tour guide of San Francisco and resides in the Bay Area.

Her mother and sister still live in Holland.

Elizabeth has never practiced any religion, but will attend church if invited by friends and has never entered a synagogue. She has never married.