

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** de Hes, Betsy

**Date of interview:** 7/19/1990

**Summary:** Betsy de Hes has a remarkable story of growing up in a small village in northern Holland. She was born in 1910 in Gorredyk, Holland. Her father, Moses, was a Rabbi, and her mother, a housewife, was named Alida van Berg. Betsy had three brothers with whom she was very close. Betsy pursued a career as a chemical and medical analyst near Frissilon, Holland. In 1942 her parents moved to Amsterdam, where the Jewish community was thriving and they could be near their oldest son. Betsy remained in Berhenabsoln (near Frissilon) to work in a research institute. She sensed little anti-Semitism in Holland but also expressed that non-Jews could not help Jews either. Life began to change: the de Hes family were no longer allowed to travel, couldn't shop when they wanted, and couldn't hire non-Jewish help. Betsy's gut feeling said she needed to get out because nothing good could come of Hitler's political views.

She originally wanted to escape to Switzerland where she knew of safe houses along the way. However, before departing she contacted her friends, Kees and Julie De Ruiter, who she knew from a folk dance group. They got her a ticket and false papers so she could live with an elderly woman near the Belgian border in Holland. Just one hour after she fled, the Gestapo came looking for her. Betsy later found out that the De Ruiters hid 30 other Jews - though only two survived - and Mr. De Ruiter died in a concentration camp for his involvement with Communism.

Betsy took the train with the ticket her friends bought her. She lived with this woman from 1942-1944 in what she describes as a 'legit bedroom'. This lifestyle was unpleasant and she remarks on some of the daily routines that were uncomfortable. She slept with a bag ready to go and a bat in case she needed to flee. It was dangerous for her to listen to the British news, and although she could hear bombings in the distance, the German papers never let on to being under attack.

While in hiding, no one knew where she was except the De Ruiters. When people came to stay with the elderly woman she always feared she would be found. Because there were many Jews hidden in Holland there was much fear. If there was too much garbage being produced neighbors could tell that something was out of the ordinary. When no one was home she would have to cook very quietly on a coal stove. She would try to take little walks around the house to get some fresh air and she would have to go to the dentist only after dark. This life was very trying on her mental and physical perspectives and her younger idealistic ideologies shifted to more of a realistic mindset.

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The night before liberation, German soldiers were having dinner at the house before setting dynamite under the bridge. She had to act as if nothing was happening for fear they would find out she was Jewish. In October of 1944 she was liberated and no longer remained in hiding. With the help of a Canadian soldier she was able to write a letter to her brother, who had made it to San Francisco. She waited six months before contacting the U.S. consulate in Antwerp to emigrate. Transportation to America was very hard to find and she was able to get a seat on a freighter with just fourteen other passengers to New York. She then took a train to Oakland and a ferry to San Francisco where she met her brother, his wife, and their two children. The remaining members of her family were held at Vestaburg, a concentration camp in Holland, and most of them were transported to Westerbork and then Auschwitz.

While in San Francisco, Betsy began her job hunt for a position in the research field and she became a researcher for the American Chemical Association until realizing she wanted to go back to school. She was very interested in the Weitzman Institute in Israel, although admits to never wanting to live there. Betsy never married.