

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: De Groot, Louis

Date of interview: 9/12 & 10/25/1989

Summary: Louis De Groot was born in Amsfort, Holland in 1929, and grew up in Arnhem. This was a city with a Jewish community of about 1600. Arnhem was a major city in the general area, located on the Rhine. Louis explains that the Dutch Jews were very comfortable in Holland prior to the war and did not anticipate a German invasion. The Jewish population considered themselves part of the Dutch community although there was some anti-Semitism and discrimination. His parents had a hardware and electrical appliance store and he mentions a sister who was two years older than him. He does not give the names of his family members.

On May 10, 1940 Germany invaded Holland and Louis recalls being awoken early by dogfights over the city. The local police warned the residents that the bridge crossing the river was to be blown up. Louis' father attempted to find a taxi with the intention of going to the western part of Holland and then fleeing to England. The family had not made any preparations because Holland had declared neutrality and invasion was not anticipated. The family was unable to escape because the Dutch broke the dikes in an attempt to keep the Germans out, but in effect, it kept the population from escaping. The family returned to Arnhem, which is located near the German border and the city was occupied by 10 AM.

In November 1940 the first Anti-Semitic activity took place and all civil servants with Jewish ancestry were required to register. That same year all Jewish civil servants were fired and Jewish university professors were dismissed. Subsequently, the Dutch students went on strike and the Germans closed the Universities forcing the students into the resistance. This was the beginning of the underground movement in Holland.

In February 1941 the Germans issued identification cards to Dutch citizens and required all those who were Jewish to register. Jews were no longer allowed in public places including swimming pools, theaters, playing in the street and participating in sports. In the summer of 1941 Jewish children were made to attend Jewish schools. Louis de Groot's family decided to go into hiding in 1941, when he was about 11 years old. The decision was made to hide in the home of a neighbor and to hoard food in the home of another neighbor.

In April 1942 the Jewish population were forced to wear yellow stars. In November 1942 Jews were being rounded up and arrested and the family fled to Hilversum, near Amsterdam. The family were hidden several times and Louis eventually went to live with a family who treated him very badly. In late 1943

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Louis who was malnourished, was placed with a young couple involved in the resistance movement. Paul Ungerway and his wife had a 4-year-old daughter and in addition to Louis they were hiding a Jewish baby. They attempted to bring Louis' sister to their home, but she was arrested with her parents and deported to Auschwitz, where they all died.

The Ungerway family continued to care for Louis until they had to flee after being reported. Louis was hidden with another family and Paul Ungerway and his wife visited him daily. Towards the end of the war, Paul was able to take Louis to meet Canadian troops and he was liberated and able to return with Paul to the home they had fled from. Paul had helped 32 people hide from the Nazis and they all survived. The mother of the Jewish baby claimed her child after the war and emotionally, this was hard for the Ungerways.

Louis remained with the Ungerways for another year and had a difficult time coping with the loss of his parents and sister. He decided to move to an orphanage with other Jewish children and felt comfortable there.

In 1948 Louis fought for Israel, but decided to return to Holland in 1949. In 1950 he emigrated to the United States, where he continued his education, married and had two sons.