

1 INTERVIEW WITH: INA HOFFMAN
2 INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL WEINSTOCK
3 DATE: JANUARY 27, 1988
4 TRANSCRIBER: Irene Bernstein
5 QUESTIONS by Michael Weinstock: ANSWERS BY Ina Hoffman
6 Q. And what is your name?
7 A. Ina Hoffman.
8 Q. Okay, Ina, what was your life like as a child in
9 Amsterdam?
10 A. Before the Nazis came?
11 Q. Before the Nazis.
12 A. Well, I came from a very close-knit family, I was
13 the youngest of, there were two children in our family,
14 I was the youngest, my sister was four years old, and we
15 came from a very happy family, very loving family.
16 And all this was shattered, when, you know, during
17 the war when we were deported to concentration camp.
18 Q. How did your life change as a result of the Nazis?
19 A. In which respect?
20 Q. Your daily life, your home life.
21 A. You mean when we were deported?
22 Q. When the Nazis, when the Nazis came.
23 A. When the Nazis came, there was really very little
24 change in the beginning; and we had intended, when we
25 knew that it was coming close, that the Nazis would

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2 invade Holland, we were thinking of fleeing to England.
3 And my father changed his mind because he always said,
4 "Oh, it's not going to happen what's happened to the
5 German, the German Jews. I think Holland will be fine
6 and nothing is going to happen."

7 And so by the time we had decided to go and flee to
8 England, it was too late, we couldn't get out anymore.

9 Q. When did you first notice that, in fact, things
10 were changing, what happened then?

11 A. Well, then, not rapidly -- in the beginning, of
12 course, they had promised us that everything, nothing
13 would change and everything would be fine. But then
14 shortly after that things changed, you know, and the
15 Jews had to wear the Star of David, and they couldn't
16 shop in markets, stores -- and I went to a, well, a high
17 school, which was really a much higher, you know, level
18 of high school than here in the United States, it was an
19 academic high school.

20 And I was supposed to be a pharmacist.
21 And, well, soon afterwards we had to change schools and
22 were put into a Jewish district where they had all these
23 children from different academic high schools, taking
24 their education. In fact, I was in the same school as
25 Anne Frank.

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2 Q. Did you know Anne Frank?

3 A. No. She was a real scrawny kid (laughter).

4 Q. Do you remember any personal contact you had with
5 Nazis? During that time?

6 A. No, no. Several times we, my father and mother had
7 discussed going illegal to Switzerland. And the last time
8 we tried was in -- well, very shortly before we were
9 deported in 1943.

10 My father had already paid, you know, to have a man
11 take us over the border to Switzerland. And we were
12 supposed to go with a family that was living next door to
13 us. And they were waiting for us. We were living at
14 that time in a, AMSTER-DYKE and the AXEL was right, you
15 know, opposite from there.

16 And this man was pacing back and forth, waiting for
17 us to come out; and my father, at the last minute, said,
18 "I can't go through with it." And our neighbors went and
19 they made it.

20 Q. Do you know why your father decided not to . . .

21 A. He was scared, very scared, yes.

22 Q. What kind of work did your father do before?

23 A. He was a diamond dealer, yes.

24 And so then he decided he was going to -- the Germans
25 had said, you know, the Jews wanted to give them a certain

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2 amount of money, not in money, but in gold and diamonds,
3 these people would go to Switzerland.

4 So my father paid, I think it was a hundred and
5 twenty thousand guilders to the Germans in gold and
6 diamonds, and we got, you know, it was like compensation
7 where we didn't have to go then to the concentration camp.

8 And so one day they decided to put all the people who
9 had this, you know, who had given this amount of money
10 to the Germans, they decided to put us all into a ghetto,
11 all the Jews together.

12 And so we stayed, I don't know how many months --
13 maybe it was weeks; I really don't know -- I think we
14 stayed a half a year, something like that. And then one
15 day -- but my father, he didn't trust it. And he had
16 upstairs, there was an attic. And he, before going into
17 the attic, he had a big closet, put a big closet, like a,
18 what do they call it -- I don't know the name here -- but
19 anyway, a big closet, and he put it in front of the door,
20 and he stacked the little attic with food and clothing and
21 blankets and whatever.

22 And sure enough, one day, very, very early in the
23 morning, the Germans came from door to door, and they were
24 picking up everybody, and, you know, they were going to
25 deport them.

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2 So we escaped and we went into the attic. And while
3 we were sitting in that attic, they were searching all
4 over. We heard these, you know, big guys coming up, and
5 they were yelling and screaming. And we were sitting there,
6 the four of us in that attic, and then they left.

7 And then my mother, who didn't look Jewish at all,
8 in fact it was my grandmother was not Jewish -- she threw
9 off her Star of David, and she just walked out of the
10 neighborhood. And they had guards on all corners. But
11 she just strolled out and nobody bothered her.

12 And she got us a contact that we were going to go
13 underground. But then we had to get out of the neighbor-
14 hood. And, of course, they had guards all over the
15 neighborhood. My father looked very, not really Jewish,
16 he looked, you know, Italian, here they would say he was
17 Italian; he was dark, olive skin.

18 And he was very scared to get out, but my mother got
19 him out. And we all got out of the attic, and walked
20 casually out in the street, and we went to a family, and
21 that family had arranged for us to go underground in
22 Holland.

23 And my sister, my mother, and my father was supposed
24 to go to one party, and I was supposed to go into the
25 country and go by myself. So we got separated. And I was

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2 with this family. And all of a sudden they told me I
3 should go up, they had also an attic, that I should go
4 into the attic. So I had no idea why.

5 So as it turned out, which I didn't know, that early
6 in the morning, wherever my father, my mother, and my
7 sister were hidden, the Nazis came and picked them up.
8 It was a trap. They apparently had known that there was
9 money.

10 And the minute they came in they said, "You dirty
11 Jew, where's your money," you know, and they wanted to
12 have the money. And "Where's your other daughter?" So
13 they knew exactly, you know, there was a trap, you see.

14 So they deported my father, my mother, and my sister
15 to this meeting place in Amsterdam, where people were all
16 gathered; and then from there they went to Westerbork,
17 and from Westerbork to the concentration camp.

18 So the next day I was supposed to go at night, and
19 they picked me up, a woman picked me up, and she got me
20 on the streetcar. And then we walked over a bridge, near
21 a police department, and all of a sudden the gun was pushed
22 in front of my nose. The guy said he was a Dutch woman.
23 And the guy said, "Oh, you dirty Jew," you know. And I
24 said, "I'm not Jewish."

25 Well, anyway, he took me to the police department

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2 and then immediately said, "And where is your money?"
3 And my mother had sewn into my panties money, and I was
4 sitting on it. And I said, "I have no money, I have no
5 money." And he said, "You'd better give me your money,
6 because, you know, I have your parents and your sister."
7 I said, "Impossible, they have been deported long time
8 ago."

9 And while I was sitting there, some policemen
10 marched by and they, one of the guards said, "Oh, God,
11 he got another one." This guy was the head of the police
12 department who had turned Nazi.

13 And so then he took me, with a gun in my back, on a
14 streetcar, near the PODOL. And I was contemplating to
15 jump the streetcar. But then I decided I'd better not,
16 because he had shown me pictures of my family, you know.
17 And I thought, if he -- if I jump, you know, what is
18 going to happen to my parents and my sister.

19 (It sounds as though Ina Hoffman is crying)

20 Anyway, I got to the place in Amsterdam, and who is
21 greeting me, my parents and my sister. So it was all
22 a trap. So from there we stayed and then we went to
23 Westerbork. And we stayed in Westerbork, I don't know
24 how long. And from there on we were deported to Bergen-
25 Belsen.

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2 Q. When you say you don't know how long it was, was it
3 days or weeks or --

4 A. I -- probably a few days. They didn't keep us long.
5 And I still remember that it was on my sister's birthday,
6 so I remember it was October, it was around October the
7 7th that this happened.

8 Q. What did you do while you were waiting, before you
9 were deported?

10 A. Well, we were in this big building, and all these
11 people was, you know, desperate, and we were sitting there
12 waiting, you know, not knowing what was going to happen,
13 really. But when I saw, I was very happy that at least
14 we were together, you know, and that we were not killed,
15 you know, the family.

16 Q. And this was, like, it used to be a theater or
17 something?

18 A. Yes, yes, yes. So from there we went to Westerbork,
19 and then we stayed in Westerbork for I, you know, I don't
20 remember, how long, but I would say probably a few weeks.

21 Q. Well, while you were waiting, before you went to
22 Westerbork, how did you eat? Did they. . . .

23 A. Well, in Westerbork it wasn't too bad, you know. It
24 was not luxurious, I can assure you, but it was not that
25 bad. And then we were transported in cattle trains; and

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2 of course, sitting like sardines in a can; and -- which
3 was a terrible experience. And then we arrived in Bergen-
4 Belsen, and we were greeted by the Nazis with the dogs,
5 with the big dogs, and guns, you know, waiting for us to
6 come out of the train.

7 And whoever could walk -- and if you couldn't walk,
8 believe me, they let you have it, you know. And so then
9 we got into the camp. And that was the beginning of the
10 nightmare.

11 Q. Before you got to Bergen-Belsen, did you know about
12 its existence?

13 A. Not -- nothing, no, absolutely nothing. We knew
14 there were camps, but we had no idea, absolutely no idea.

15 Q. What were your first impressions when you got there?

16 A. Well, not too pleasant. As you can well imagine,
17 there were all these barracks, and then, of course,
18 towers, with the Nazis in there and always they were
19 parading around with guns, and yelling and screaming.

20 And we were still fortunate, we were very fortunate
21 because our family was left together, you know, which in
22 most instances didn't happen. But we stayed together,
23 and that was because of the hundred twenty thousand
24 guilders that my father had given to these miserable
25 bastards. Yeah.

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2 Q. Did you see your family every day?

3 A. Yes, yes, my mother and my sister and I were together,
4 and the men were in another barracks. And, you know, we
5 worked. And we were put to work in a -- we had to take
6 shoes apart, and of course, we had no idea where these
7 shoes came from, we -- I didn't, maybe my mother knew,
8 but of course nothing was being said. And they were
9 shoes from people who were gassed.

10 We had to take the leather off the soles. And I had
11 terrible infection, because, you know, you do cut yourself,
12 and dirt and filth and everything, and I had two terrible
13 infections, that, well, you just had to keep on going,
14 you know. So that was the work we did for quite awhile.

15 And I still remember while I was doing it in the
16 beginning, this guard, he was watching me and eyeing me,
17 and my mother must have been absolutely frantic, and I
18 had no idea, of course, I was fifteen, and, you know, I
19 didn't think anything, didn't even know, you know, what
20 he had maybe intended, you know, to do. But thanks God,
21 nothing happened.

22 Q. Did you make friends?

23 A. No. It's a very strange thing, that very shortly
24 after I was in the camp another transport came, and a
25 very close friend of mine, with whom I had gone to school,

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2 for years and years and years, came with her mother.

3 And, of course, we greeted each other, and while we were
4 in the camp we practically did not look at each other,
5 because everybody was looking for their own survival. And
6 just, you know -- the family looked after each other. But
7 there was no caring for anybody else.

8 And you saw people dying all over. I climbed over
9 dead bodies. You know, we had these bunk beds. And, well,
10 in the morning, Mr. So and So had died, his feet were
11 hanging out. Well, you just climbed over it, and we didn't
12 even look. And that was the way it was.

13 Q. Do you remember the first time you saw a dead body?

14 A. Well, I think in the beginning, you know, the first
15 time it probably bothered me, I don't remember. But after
16 awhile it didn't matter, because you saw bodies heaped up
17 all over the place. And so I didn't even look at it
18 anymore.

19 Q. Did you eat together as a family?

20 A. Yes, we did, if you can call it eating, yes. Water
21 with turnips, and a little piece of bread; and that was for
22 breakfast, lunch and dinner.

23 Q. Did you family . . .

24 A. We had terrible dysentery, and all kinds of illnesses,
25 hepatitis and -- I mean, I was constantly sick. And there

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2 was when they put you in the so-called hospital, where
3 they took a little bit better care of you, you know. But
4 otherwise, you know, everybody just fended for themselves,
5 and lived for themselves. A very selfish existence.

6 Q. Did your family have conversations around dinner or...

7 A. Well, you didn't have dinner, really. You sat on
8 your bunk bed and you just, you know, spooned it up, and
9 that's . . . And my mother was wonderful, because she
10 always shared, and the children came first; and I'm sure
11 she gave, you know, her ration a lot of times to us. Yes.

12 Q. Were you hopeful?

13 A. Hopeful? Yes, yes, we were very hopeful. We kept
14 on saying, you know, "We are going to make it." But my
15 father got weaker and weaker and weaker. And towards the
16 end, I mean, we knew the Germans were very close, and
17 that, you know, he just couldn't hold on anymore, he died
18 of malnutrition.

19 And then, there was this very, very terrible thing,
20 he had dysentary, like all of us had, you know, towards
21 the end it was very, very bad. And he just was dehydrated
22 and couldn't eat anymore, couldn't shave, I shaved him,
23 my mother shaved him, my sister shaved him. He tried, you
24 know, to hold on.

25 And one day, you know, when he knew the end was near,

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2 he called us all together, and it was a very strange thing,
3 because he said to me, "You're going to make it." But
4 he didn't say to my mother or my sister -- my mother was,
5 you know, in fairly good shape, much better than we were,
6 and if it wouldn't have been for the typhoid fever, she
7 would have definitely made it.

8 But, anyway, she, you know, she helped us unbelievably,
9 when, and tried to, you know, do the best that she could.
10 And towards the end, you know, my father really said,
11 "You're going to make it." And I said, "We're all going
12 to make it." "No, you're going to make it."

13 Q. When did he die?

14 A. I think maybe a week or two weeks before liberation.
15 And we knew they were close, you know, we knew that.
16 Things started to leak out. Because we had those
17 so-called Capos, that were Jews, mainly from Greece,
18 that were trained by the Germans to beat us. And, of
19 course, towards the end the Capos were very meek, and
20 they were very nice then; and they, you know, informed us
21 and said, "Well, they're losing, and, you know, they're
22 very close by, the Americans and the English and the
23 Russians."

24 So we knew it was very close. But he just couldn't
25 hold on.

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Q. What happened when you were liberated?

A. Well, we were not liberated in Belsen. We were liberated by the Russians. What really had happened, when they knew that the Allies were very close to the camp, they put us in a cattle train, and what they had intended was to blow up the train, to get rid of the evidence.

And that did not happen. The guy that was -- I forgot the name, the German, he was an architect, and was Hitler's right hand, really, and he . . .

Q. Speer?

A. What was it?

Q. Speer?

A. Right, Speer. And when he got the orders to, you know, to blow up the train, he refused to do it.

Q. How did you know about these orders to blow up the train?

A. Well, we found out afterwards, you know, I found it out way and way later, yeah. But by the way, while we were in the camp, you know, they had -- then after while they didn't have us work anymore, I mean we got weaker and weaker, and we just, you know, we couldn't do anymore.

And so then what could they do with us, right? And so then they had us stand in snow, you know, when it was

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2 very cold, and they were counting people. And then they
3 always managed to have somebody missing, you know, the
4 count was never right. So we stood for hours and hours
5 and hours with no clothes, no shoes, nothing, in that,
6 in the snow, in the wet.

7 And people were fainting, and they'd beat them up,
8 and, you know, they'd have to stand up again. And so
9 they really, I mean they were killing us, slow death, by
10 not giving us any food.

11 And we saw all this smoke coming from outside our
12 area and barbed wire area. We saw this chimney going
13 continuously. And we had absolutely no idea that they
14 were gassing people in other areas of the camp.

15 And so one day they said, "Now you're going to get a
16 shower." And they gave us each a bar of soap, and we were
17 delighted to get finally showered. And thanks God, they
18 didn't put the gas on, they did give us water. But, you
19 see, we didn't know anything. We had absolutely no idea.
20 And it was so strange, it was always going, you know,
21 what are they doing. We had no idea.

22 Q. Do you remember, was there any odor?

23 A. Oh, sure, sure, we smelled, you know, but maybe my
24 parents knew, but I had no idea, absolutely, there was
25 never ever a discussion about that, you know. So . . .

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2 Q. When you left Bergen-Belsen, where did they take
3 you?

4 A. So then we were just going, getting away from, you
5 know -- the Americans, the English, the Russian, and
6 finally they just left the train, no food, no water,
7 nothing, and they left us. And then the Russians came,
8 which was ghastly. And -- because they didn't take care
9 of us, never gave us any care, no medication, nothing.
10 And I'm sure if maybe we would have been liberated by the
11 Americans or the English, we would have gotten medication,
12 and maybe even my mother could have been saved.

13 Q. Do you know where . . .

14 A. Well, what happened, it must have been in April,
15 because the liberation was in May, right?

16 Q. Well, actually Belsen, I think, was liberated in
17 April.

18 A. In April. So that must have been in April, you know.
19 And if we would have stayed in Belsen, if we wouldn't --
20 if they wouldn't have dragged us out, we would have been
21 much better off.

22 Q. Well, did the train end up at a town?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. What town was that?

25 A. Near TUR-BIS.

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2 Q. And . . .

3 A. And my mother -- by that time my sister and I couldn't
4 walk anymore. We had both typhoid fever. And my mother
5 had acted very strange, you know, while we were in the
6 train, and we couldn't, we couldn't figure out what was
7 wrong with her. Little did we know that she had typhoid
8 fever. But she dragged herself to the village, and she
9 said, "I'm going to get food for both of you." And
10 we waited and waited, and mother didn't come.

11 And we had absolutely no idea what had happened. So
12 in the meantime they put my sister and I in isolation,
13 because I was forced to go. And my sister died right next
14 to me, and (Ina is very upset) -- and when the Germans
15 that were then, that had to pick up the dead bodies, they
16 came to pick my sister up, I was, whatever I could yell,
17 screaming, and they said, in German, of course, they said,
18 "Oh, she will be next." But I fooled them.

19 So then they came, the Germans, and they -- by that
20 time, I guess, my typhoid fever, I had, you know, broken
21 the fever and everything. And then they deloused me.
22 And they shaved my head . . .

23 Q. This is the Germans?

24 A. The Germans.

25 Q. The . . .

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2 A. Well, the Germans, you know, did the work for the
3 Russians.

4 Q. Okay. But this was in the Russian zone, or in the
5 Russian . . .

6 A. It was in Torbid, and it was in a little -- I have
7 no idea. I have no idea. I mean, it was in a little room.
8 I have no idea where I was, absolutely no idea.

9 Q. But you were . . .

10 A. Yes, because we were supposed to die, you see. And
11 my sister then, you know, died, right next to me. And I,
12 you know, when I realized she wasn't moving, and I, you
13 know, I touched her, and by that time she was already
14 cold.

15 So -- so then they came and they, they washed me, and
16 they shaved my head, the Germans, and then I was put into
17 a hospital part. But I couldn't walk, and I don't think
18 I got medication. But they must have fed me, they must
19 have done something.

20 And then -- what happened -- no, before that happened,
21 they put me somewhere else, not in isolation, in a, in a
22 room, where they had another woman, and she was pregnant,
23 and she delivered the baby also right next to me, and
24 died in childbirth, and of course the baby died too, and
25 I couldn't do anything, I couldn't get up, I couldn't --

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2 nobody helped the poor soul, nobody. And then they got
3 me out, out of the bed, they got me out, and they put me
4 in a hospital. And then they -- I guess they gave me
5 food and from that . . .

6 Q. Who?

7 A. The Russians.

8 Q. They were the Russians running the hospital?

9 A. Well, the Germans really did, but Russian guidance,
10 you know. But they really didn't do anything for us,
11 absolutely nothing.

12 So then one day -- by that time I, you know, they
13 taught me again how to walk a little bit, and then they
14 put us into a, we were going to go to Leipzig to -- what
15 was that; I don't know -- anyway, we was supposed to be
16 exchanged against Russians, you know, the Americans gave
17 the Russians back to the Russians, and we were supposed
18 to go to the Americans. That's how it happened, yeah.

19 And then we were put into, from that moment on I was
20 in Leipzig, I think, we were put into a Red Cross train,
21 the ones that, you know, the ones that could walk and
22 navigate, they went regular. But they put us in a, you
23 know, a hospital train, actually.

24 And then we were transported to Belgium, and I was
25 in a Catholic hospital in Belgium, somewhere in Belgium

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2 I don't even know where. And they took wonderful care of
3 me, absolutely fantastic.

4 And then we were, when I was ready to navigate and
5 walk again, then they took us to southern part of Holland,
6 where they were going to see whether they could place us
7 in, you know, homes, and see whether there was family.

8 Q. This was in the summer of 1945?

9 A. That must have been in the summer, yes, yes. I have
10 absolutely no recollection of dates.

11 Q. And how long . . .

12 A. Absolutely none. I mean, part of my life is a total
13 blank, absolutely a total blank.

14 And then I came in -- and this is a very interesting
15 thing -- because when the real mystery started, then I
16 arrived in Mustraid, which is in the southern part of
17 Holland, we were taken to the school building, and they
18 had all these volunteers sitting there, and trying to find
19 out where the people were going.

20 And they gave us clothes and everything. And at that
21 time I still didn't know what had happened to my mother.
22 And so we were in that school building, and there was some
23 women who also had been in the camp, you know, and I don't
24 know, they started to talk, and they were in Turbit, and
25 they had typhoid fever, and so on.

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2 And I said, you know, I don't know, but my mother is
3 somewhere, I don't know where she is. She left us and
4 we never saw her again, and, you know, never heard from
5 her.

6 And they said, "What is your name," and what is your
7 mother's name?" And the minute I mentioned my mother's
8 name, there was this dead silence, and these two women
9 looked at each other.

10 And I said, "What is the matter?" I smiled, you know,
11 if it was something. And then they said, "Oh, your
12 mother was very ill, your mother had typhoid fever, and
13 she died of typhoid fever." So that's how I found out
14 that my mother had died.

15 Q. Were these women there in -- I forget the name of
16 the town?

17 A. Mustraid.

18 Q. Mustraid, before, when the Russians, when you were
19 with the Russians?

20 A. Yes, they all, they all came with the -- but they
21 had typhoid fever also, but they made it, and they were
22 apparently together with my mother in the hospital in
23 Turbit, whatever there was. I don't know whether it was
24 a hospital over there. But what had happened, my mother
25 had come to -- the Russians, of course, had gone into the

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2 homes of the Germans, and they just made them very, just
3 made themselves very comfortable. And my mother had come
4 into this huge home, apparently, and she had said she
5 wanted food for her children.

6 And they said, yes, we will give you food, but you
7 have to cook for us. And she apparently cooked and then
8 collapsed over there, you know, she just collapsed, and
9 that was the end of that, you know. And she was then taken
10 to, I guess a hospital, I don't know, and never made it.

11 But then I was in Mustraid, this woman was sitting
12 there, and she was registering me, and she said to me --
13 she was from German descent and had gone, she, her husband,
14 and her two sons had gone to Holland in order to escape
15 the Nazis in Germany.

16 And then their family was deported, and she went
17 underground and, in Brussels, she went into a nunnery,
18 and the nuns hid her until after the war. So she donated
19 her time to, you know, help the people that came back
20 from the concentration camp.

21 And I guess I must have looked a little pathetic,
22 and she said to me, "Where are you going to go?" And I
23 said, "I don't know, I have nobody, you know, I don't
24 think there's any family left."

25 And she said, "How would you like to live with me?"

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2 And I said, "Oh, that would be wonderful." I never
3 knew, never had met the woman, you know.

4 So I went home with her, and she lived in a small
5 apartment, in Mustraid, and she said to me, "You can stay
6 with me. However, I must tell you that I have a brother
7 living in Chicago, and he is giving me an affidavit, and
8 any minute I can be called to emigrate to the United States."
9 She said, "I can't ask my brother to give you an affidavit
10 because he is not that well off, you know, he can't have
11 the responsibility. But do you have anybody in the
12 United States that would give you an affidavit?"

13 And I said, "No-- oh, yeah, I have an uncle in
14 San Francisco" -- and this was a very strange situation,
15 because when my mother had died, her mother died in
16 childbirth, so my mother was really adopted and was never
17 raised by her family. There were seven sisters and
18 brothers.

19 But my mother knew that one of her brothers had
20 gone to the United States when he was seventeen years old,
21 and she also knew that he was living in San Francisco,
22 had gotten married, and that he by profession was a baker.

23 So my mother had told me that story. Infact, she
24 had told us this story while she was in the concentration
25 camp. We knew nothing of her family, nothing about the

1
2 family.

3 And so this lady, and her name was Else Newberger,
4 she said, "Why don't we write to the Joint Committee and
5 maybe they can find this uncle in San Francisco?"

6 Well, anyway, "Do you know the name of the uncle?"
7 And I said, "well, my mother's maiden name was Pollak,
8 and I think his name was Hachtal." And she said, "Fine,
9 let's write to the Joint Committee."

10 Well, we did. Well, in the meantime, I stayed maybe
11 three months, I guess, with this lady, and I was mentally
12 and physically not too well, as you can well imagine.
13 And I think after three months she had it with me.

14 And so the excuse was, Well, she was going to the
15 United States, you know. In the meantime, when the
16 Red Cross had found out that there was a cousin of mine
17 living in Amsterdam, and they had contacted him, and he
18 thought at that time that I was the daughter of a cousin
19 of his who was about four years old.

20 And so they had said, Okay, they were going to take
21 this four-year-old child in, right. And then it turned
22 out that the four-year-old child was almost eighteen --
23 seventeen and a half. And then they thought, well, they
24 couldn't really back down, and they were going to take
25 me in.

1
2 So I went to Amsterdam and I lived with this cousin
3 whom I also didn't know, and his wife -- and he was
4 Jewish and his wife was not Jewish, and there were two
5 daughters.

6 And I wish they wouldn't have taken me in, because
7 I think a lot of problems could have been spared; because
8 the wife, she did, on the outside she said I was the
9 daughter, and -- but really I was not the daughter because
10 she felt I -- she had a mania with cleaning, and I was
11 just like a cleaning girl over there.

12 And A lot of things happened. And they didn't have
13 a proper bed for me to have a mattress. And apparently
14 what happened, I caught cold, and was not taken care of,
15 and I developed a very, very serious case of pleurisy.
16 It got so bad that -- well, I was blue, I couldn't breathe
17 anymore, and they got me into the hospital after many
18 months, you know, when she finally -- when I said I was
19 sick, and she said, Oh, no, she said, I wasn't sick, there
20 was really nothing wrong with me. She could see it if
21 somebody was sick.

22 And, but when I started to turn blue, she discovered
23 that really there was something wrong. So she took me
24 to the doctor, and the doctor immediately got me into the
25 hospital, I was in the hospital, I think, for three months.

1
2 And afterwards I was in the sanitorium for about a year.
3 So During that year, I -- then I had all kinds of problems.
4 I'm sure it was a lot of neurological problems.

5 But they treated me unbelievably well, and I got the
6 best of care. And the doctor had decided that I was not
7 going to be released until I was totally mentally and
8 physically well. And he decided that when the time came
9 that I felt that I could go on the outside, and I asked
10 for it, that I could go. And it happened after one year.
11 So I was there for one year.

12 While I was there, in the sanitorium, a letter came
13 from the Joint Committee, telling me that they had found
14 this man in San Francisco by the name of Harry Bollack,
15 not Pollak and not Hachtal, who apparently was my uncle.

16 So sure enough I get this letter back from this man
17 in San Francisco, and he knew nothing about me, and he
18 said that he had heard that I was supposed to be his niece
19 and would I give a little bit more information about my
20 mother.

21 Well, I knew that he knew that his mother died in
22 childbirth and she delivered my mother. So of course I
23 wrote back immediately and I told him about the story
24 that, you know, I had a sister, and so on and so on.

25 And then afterwards the letters came back, "oh, we

1
2 are so happy, we have found you." But then I still
3 didn't want to ask for an affidavit, because I felt really,
4 well, I didn't want to impose on them, you know.

5 (Tape turned over to the other side; don't know if
6 she continued to keep talking, because it seems like
7 something is missing.)

8 During the Holidays he was a cantor, and he was a
9 very talented man, he did a lot of things, very artistic
10 in every respect. And so he was very religious, my
11 mother was not, not at all.

12 And we were very, very close with family, so you
13 can well imagine, you know, how that left me, you know,
14 all of a sudden being without father, mother, and sister.

15 Q. And after the war did the Jewish community. . .

16 A. No, no, unfortunately not. The, you know, that,
17 that-- Amsterdam had a tremendous Jewish population, and
18 they were all deported and gone.

19 Q. And were you observant?

20 A. As a child, yes, as a result that my dad and I were
21 extremely close. And I was. But as a very strange thing
22 that my father always had said, "If you ever marry out of
23 your religion, I will never, you know, that's the end of
24 it, I will disown you." And that's it.

25 And towards the end, while we were in the concentration

1
2 camp, my dad called us and said, "I hope one thing, that
3 if you make it, that you will never marry a Jew."

4 Q. Never marry a Jew?

5 A. Never marry a Jew, because he didn't want his grand-
6 children to go through what we had gone through, really,
7 yes. And of course, when I came out of the camp, I was
8 totally against religion, totally. And in fact, one of
9 us in the sanitorium, the director of the sanitorium was
10 an ordained minister, that was very Protestant sanitorium
11 there; and she was working on me to convert, and I was
12 very, very close to converting.

13 And one day, she had given me the Bible, and one day
14 I said to myself, "Oh, God," I saw my father in front of
15 me and I said, "How can you." And so I told, I said, I
16 cannot go through with it. She really was working on me,
17 it was like brainwashing, you know.

18 But it took me a long time, really, I was very
19 turned off, because, you know, what we went through, you
20 lose all faith. And you say, why did it happen to us,
21 you know, what did we do to deserve that?

22 Q. Do you still feel that today?

23 A. No, it's a very strange thing, that for many, many
24 years I didn't want to go to Temple or anything. I still
25 don't go to Temple, only for the simple reason I feel

1
2 you have religion inside, you have it in your heart. And
3 if you are kind to people and live up to what religion is
4 really all about, by going, you know, to Temple, a lot
5 of people who go to church and go to Temple, and then
6 they, when they get out they really don't live up to
7 whatever they're supposed to do, right?

8 And so I, for a lot of -- the only time I really go
9 to Temple is for memorial service, because I feel my
10 mom wouldn't have cared but my dad would. And I do that
11 in his memory.

12 But I think as we get older and it's a tradition,
13 really, a Jewish tradition, that is, I really enjoy it,
14 I really do.

15 Q. Have you raised your family in . . .

16 A. Well, when the boys were born, and my husband went --
17 didn't go through the same thing as I did, but . . .

18 Q. Is he Jewish?

19 A. Yes, he's Jewish, but he's from Germany, and he had
20 to flee to England. And then after the war came here to
21 the United States. We both really were very turned off
22 to religion.

23 And so when the kids got to a certain age, we said,
24 well, now we have to really decide what to do, should we
25 send them to Sunday School. And then we both said, well,

1
2 we are Jewish, and there is, after all, you can't change
3 that. And I think we owe it to our children to know
4 something about their religion.

5 And so they did go to Sunday School. And, in fact,
6 the first boy that was going to be Bar Mitzvahed came
7 home with a slip of paper, and said, "Mom and dad, you
8 have to sign that, if, you know, I want to become Bar
9 Mitzvahed, I have to go for all the training."

10 And my husband and I looked at each other and we
11 said, "We will discuss this." And then we said, "Oh,
12 God, do we have to go through all this?" And why don't
13 we let him decide whether he wants to become Bar Mitzvahed.
14 And we gave him, and we said, "Lon, if you wanted to
15 become Bar Mitzvahed, we will go through with it." And
16 he did.

17 And so then with the second one we didn't even
18 decide, we said, "Okay, the first one was Bar Mitzvahed,
19 the second one is going to be Bar Mitzvahed."

20 But it is a very ironic thing, my younger son is
21 married, and he married this lovely girl who is not
22 Jewish and who chose on her own to become Jewish. And
23 she really has brought back the Jewish religion into the
24 Hoffman family. Because, you know, now we observe
25 Passover, and we have Chanukah, and, you know, Rosh

1
2 Hashana we have a dinner.

3 So it's very nice and I enjoy it, really.

4 Q. When did you first tell your children about your
5 experiences?

6 A. Well, I really never talked about it, as you can see,
7 it's very difficult for me to talk about it. And there
8 are a lot of things still that I even have a tough, you
9 know, that I haven't told you, because we would be here
10 for quite a long time. I'm just skimming through it.

11 And I, I just couldn't, because for a parent to start
12 talking about an experience like that and then breaking
13 down, I think is a very traumatic experience for a child.
14 I chose not -- and another thing, like I told you, I don't
15 live in the past, I live today, and enjoy today, and try
16 not to worry about tomorrow.

17 And so I really didn't talk about it until, well,
18 what happened, my children, about seven and half years ago,
19 they went to Johannesburg, they went to South Africa, and
20 they went to Europe. And without me knowing it, they had
21 decided that they wanted to go to Bergen-Belsen, which
22 they did, against the advice of relatives who are living
23 in Germany, and I think my husband knew about it, and they
24 still went.

25 However, there's nothing left anymore, it's just like

1
2 a museum, with a monument, I think. But they went back.
3 And when they came back, they had taken movies, and they
4 asked me whether I wanted to see the movie. And I did
5 see it. And it was very hard on me.

6 And so really never talked about it. And I think
7 that's why the boys wanted to go, they wanted to see,
8 you know, they wanted -- their grandfather is somewhere
9 you know, amongst all the other bodies and ashes. And
10 so I was very, very pleased, really, that they did. It's
11 a good thing they didn't tell me beforehand, because I
12 would have said no. But after I found out that they went,
13 I was very, very pleased.

14 So I still didn't really say anything until the
15 movie the Holocaust was shown, and my youngest son, Jeff,
16 came to work the next day, and one of his coworkers said,
17 "Can you imagine parents not telling their children about
18 what has happened during the war?" And Jeff said, "Yes,
19 I can very well imagine, because my mother went through
20 it and she doesn't talk about it."

21 And so slowly I have said things, you know, about
22 what has happened to me, but I really have not sat down
23 and discussed everything. And so that's why the boys
24 have said, "Mom, we really should know more," you know,
25 about what has happened to you," and that's why they

1
2 wanted me to come down here and go through this ordeal.

3 Q. So, wait, we skipped a step. What happened when you
4 first got to the United States, back in 1949?

5 A. Right when I came here to the United States, I had
6 promised my uncle and aunt that I would not be dependent
7 on them financially. And so I stayed with my uncle and
8 aunt for maybe three, four weeks, and then my aunt sug-
9 gested, I was very bashful to speak English, you know,
10 I've had French, German and English in high school, but
11 I could understand but I was very scared to open up my
12 mouth and speak English.

13 And so my aunt suggested that I become a domestic,
14 you know, live with a family, and do light housework,
15 you know. Which I did, and it was a terrible experience,
16 because we always had helped at home, and all of a sudden
17 I was a maid. And, you know, maybe you don't understand,
18 now it wouldn't bother me anymore, but coming from
19 Europe, you know, being a domestic is really not such a
20 nice thing.

21 And so I lived with this family for three months,
22 and they really, I think they exploited me, you know, they
23 expected an awful lot for very little pay. There were
24 two bratty kids that I had to take care of, and they took
25 advantage of me because I didn't speak English very well.

1
2 And after three months I decided it's time to move
3 on. In the meantime I had decided that I wanted to go to
4 City College here in San Francisco. So I got into City
5 College and then my next job was with a very lovely family,
6 I stayed with them for about nine months. And I lived
7 walking distance to City College. And I had very little
8 money, so I walked as much as I can to save the streetcar
9 fare.

10 And I think I got paid thirty five dollars a month
11 board and room; and from that I had to pay my medical
12 insurance and whatever came along. And -- but I managed,
13 I did very well. And they were really very nice to me,
14 and I made it clear at the time that I wanted to have
15 Sunday off and I wanted, you know, to have some evenings
16 off, and they really were lovely, just lovely. So I
17 stayed with them until I got married.

18 Q. You stayed in touch with your uncle?

19 A. My uncle and aunt both passed away, here in San
20 Francisco.

21 Q. Oh.

22 A. The cousin in Holland?

23 Q. No, I meant the uncle. . .

24 A. Here in San Francisco?

25 Q. Right.

1
2 A. Right. Oh, no, my uncle passed away many years ago,
3 and my aunt passed away about four years ago. I was very
4 close with my aunt up to a certain point. And then,
5 unfortunately, the last two years of her life, we didn't
6 talk to each other, it was a very unfortunately thing.
7 But . . .

8 Q. When you first arrived, did they want to know what
9 happened to your family?

10 A. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. But it was very ironic to
11 my uncle and aunt were very a little bit on the left side
12 and they were very pro-Russia. And then I came here, and
13 of course I didn't know that. And when I came to San
14 Francisco, my, and I told them that the Russians had
15 killed my sister and my mother, actually, you know, and
16 almost me, that didn't sit very well.

17 So -- but we had a good relationship, we really did.
18 And I think they had a lot of understanding, they sure
19 did, yes; more than I had in Holland, unfortunately.

20 Q. Did you remain in contact with . . .

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Your cousin?

23 A. Yes, yes. I write to him several times a year, and
24 now they're both very ill. And I always felt very close
25 to him, you know. She really was a very difficult woman,

1
2 very bright, but very difficult, who had a mania with
3 cleaning, and she thought -- she had a maid, and besides
4 that she wanted me as a maid.

5 So -- but everything turned out very well, and I think
6 in my optimistic mind really helped very, very much. I
7 have good genes, thanks God. And I know my parents would
8 want me to be happy and live a full life, which I'm doing.
9 I'm very happy to have a wonderful family.

10 Q. Looking back, do you think you had an optimistic
11 mind while it was all going on?

12 A. Always, yes, yes, yes. We all, out whole family was
13 very optimistic. My mother was, even in her misery, all
14 always very happy, and helped us unbelievable with every-
15 thing. When we were sick she was there, and she, you
16 know, it was unbelievable what she did.

17 My father was not as optimistic, but having a wife
18 that was like that, I'm sure, got him through, and he was
19 hanging on to the last minute, to the last minute. The
20 body just gave out. He wanted to, but the body just,
21 you know, he had shrunk down to practically nothing, I
22 mean, no food, no nothing, no medical care.

23 Q. Have you stayed in contact, or were you in contact
24 with Else Newberger?

25 A. Very, very strange. She, we were in contact. The

1
2 minute I wrote to her I'm coming to the United States,
3 it was -- so many things really have happened. It was a
4 very strange thing.

5 My father, being in the diamond industry, had put
6 away a lot of diamonds and gold and all that thing. And
7 the tract that we went into, this was a very strange thing,
8 the, the head of the department who was supposed to --
9 there was a, like a ring, you know, that, to kill people,
10 to go underground. And the head of the department was the
11 daughter-in-law of a very influential person in Amsterdam,
12 oh, he was actually the diamond industry, someone by the
13 name of Asher, they had big diamond factories.

14 And she was the one who was supposed to get us under-
15 ground. She was not Jewish, her husband was. Her husband
16 was the son of Asher. And after, when I was in Mustraid,
17 when I came out of the camp, this Mrs. Newberger took me
18 to a family, friends of hers, who knew this Mrs. Asher,
19 which I didn't know; and she said to me, I was going with
20 Mrs. Newberger to Amsterdam to see whether I could find
21 some of the jewels and things and stocks that my father
22 had given to Gentile people, you know, in safekeeping.

23 So she went with me to Amsterdam. And she said, "Oh,
24 she said, let me go with you to this woman that is the
25 head of the Red Cross in Amsterdam, she knows this family

1
2 that she knew in Mustraid."

3 and I walked into the, you know, into the Red Cross,
4 and there was this woman, very pretty woman, she was
5 sitting there in a uniform. And I looked at her. And I
6 said to myself, "I have met this woman somewhere." And
7 then I said, "I know you." And then all of the sudden
8 the flash came, and I said, "You were supposed to put us
9 underground somewhere."

10 And then she said, "Oh," and then she mentioned my
11 name, you know. So the people that had recommended her,
12 that had got us together, were still living in Amsterdam.
13 The man was Jewish and the wife was not Jewish. And I went
14 t these people and I said, "I met just this Mrs. Asher."
15 And she said, "You met Mrs. Asher?" She said, "You know,
16 she was no good. She was the one that delivered all these
17 people, you know, into the trap."

18 And she said, "Well, with whom are you?" And I
19 said, "Well, I'm with this Mrs. Newberger." And she said,
20 "You ought to get away from her, you must get away from
21 her, because something is wrong, you know." They seem to
22 think that Mrs. Newberger knew, you know. And also knew
23 that there was money, you know, that I was coming through,
24 and that there was money. And that they, they did not.

25 And, of course, at that time I was eighteen, so,

1
2 seventeen years old. And I said, "It's impossible, she's,
3 you know, she's very good." So I don't know whether --
4 there was something not kosher there, definitely. I could
5 never put my finger into it.

6 Oh, by the way, there was another thing. While I was
7 in this sanitorium, one day the head nurse came to me and
8 said, "We have somebody in the waiting room, it's going to
9 be very unpleasant, because two policemen are here, and
10 whole entourage was there, with the guy that had put, who
11 had caught me with the gun, the guy, the head of the police
12 department. They had caught him, and they had found out
13 that I was still around, and I had to identify him.

14 Well, I don't have to tell you how I acted. They had
15 to restrain me with, in my weakened state, I mean, I was
16 trying to go to his throat and kill the guy. And I, I
17 identified him. Because I remember that he couldn't say
18 the S. You know, my sister's name was Sonya, and I made
19 him say "Sonya". And he couldn't say the S, you know,
20 he used another letter for the S. And I said, and that
21 is the guy.

22 And then afterwards I had to go in to, they got a
23 you know, a month later or weeks later, I don't know, I
24 had to go to Amsterdam and I had to go to court, and he
25 got -- well, I think twenty years, that's all he got.

1
2 We were not the only family, there was so many
3 families that he had -- well, killed.

4 Q. Do you know how they connected you to him?

5 A. Yes. They found out, though I don't really remember --
6 this is, you see, there are parts that I absolutely don't
7 know -- but they found out, and how they found out I don't
8 know, that I, they must have gone through lists, and they
9 must have maybe found lists that he had with names, you
10 see. I, that's, I would presume, that's what happened,
11 that he had papers, you know, showing families that he
12 had caught, and that they must have then gone through
13 lists for people that came back out of the concentration
14 camps.

15 And they got me. I mean, they found out I was in a
16 sanitorium. And so I had to go to court and I had to
17 testify.

18 Q. Do you know why he did what he did? Was it . . .

19 A. Money, money, oh, yes, absolutely money.

20 Q. Do you sense there was anti-Semitism or was it more
21 a . . .

22 A. Very much anti-Semitism, oh, yes. He was an anti-
23 Semetic. And greed you know, he wanted money. And, oh,
24 definitely. And he got after the people that he knew that
25 had the money, you see.

1
2 But there was a connection with him and this Mrs.
3 Ashwer. And the people, our contact, they were good.
4 They had no idea what she was doing. But after the war,
5 this man told me, when I went back to these people, that
6 you know, had gotten us the contact, they didn't even
7 trust this Mrs. Newberger. And they said, "Something is
8 wrong, very much wrong," but they didn't know either.

9 Well, anyway, I left Mrs. Newberger, and she did not,
10 you know, I mean, I didn't get the money back that I was
11 supposed to get back, anyway, because my father had given
12 a strongbox with diamonds and gold and whatnot, to this
13 family that lived Arnam. And the people were good, there
14 was definitely no, you know, they were honest. And their
15 house was bombarded, and they lost everything themselves.

16 And so the strongbox went with whatever they had.
17 And that was the end of that, you know. But I got some
18 things back, and some people were honest, and some people
19 were not honest, unfortunately.

20 Q. Did Mrs. -- did your father have to pay Mrs. Asher?

21 A. Yes, of course, of course. To go underground?

22 Q. Yes.

23 A. Oh, I do not remember. We didn't know at the time
24 that it was Mrs. Asher. We didn't know, you see. We found
25 that out -- I met her because she came to the -- that's how

1
2 I remembered her, because she came very briefly to the
3 people that were hiding me, you see, just overnight,
4 because the next day I was supposed to go underground,
5 you know, into the country somewhere, Holland.

6 And so she -- I met her, that's, only one time, and
7 that's how I recognized her, when I came back. That was
8 a lot of, you know, anti-Semitism. Although the Dutch
9 people overall were very good, but I think a lot of people
10 hated the Jews and they wanted the money, and they knew
11 that a lot of the Jewish people had lots of money, and
12 you know, so they took advantage of that.

13 Q. Do you remember when anti -- well, at the beginning
14 of the war, was there more anti-Semitism in Holland than
15 there had been before the Nazis had really come . . .

16 A. I don't think it changed. I think the people that
17 were anti-Semitic, a lot of them became Nazis, and they,
18 you know, they, when people were underground, they, well,
19 they tried to find them, and get, extort the money, and,
20 you know, see to it that the people were transported to
21 concentration camp.

22 Yes, but overall I think the Dutch people were very
23 kind and tried to help as much as they could, you know.
24 There's a bad apple in every, you know, everything. So
25 it's, really -- but Holland had a very good name of being

1
2 very helpful and doing a lot for the people. A lot of my
3 family went underground and unfortunately nobody came out.

4 Q. Nobody?

5 A. Nobody, no. I had one cousin living in, in Australia,
6 she is the four-year-old that was supposed to go to my
7 cousin at the time in Amsterdam, thought I was her. And
8 for many, many years I could not bring myself to get in
9 contact with her. She was adopted by her uncle and aunt
10 in Sydney.

11 And, because her parents were like second parents to
12 me. Her father was the oldest son of my father's oldest
13 sister. So they were a young couple. I was at the time,
14 you know, when they got married, I was about, maybe, seven,
15 eight years old, I don't really remember exactly. And I
16 was always with them.

17 And then when the oldest child was born, it was like
18 my little sister. And then when this little girl was born
19 that is living now in Australia, I diapered her, and you
20 know, she, we were very, very close. And so I just couldn't
21 bring myself, you know, to -- and I also didn't know what
22 she knew of her family, because she was adopted, and I
23 didn't want to really open up a hornet's nest.

24 But I finally did, about, let me see, I would say
25 eight years ago, through somebody who came to visit here

1
2 from Sydney, I asked this lady whether hse knew somebody
3 by my cousin's maiden name, and as it happened she did
4 know somebody, and we got in contact, and after writing a
5 letter to each other, and when she found out I knew a lot
6 about her parents, she immediately called me and a week
7 later she was on the plane, and she stayed with me for one
8 week. And I don't have to tell you it was a very emotional
9 week.

10 And we are like sisters, we are very, very close.
11 Unfortunately she is in Australia and I'm here. So this
12 is really the only relative that I have, you know, from
13 a large family. So I don't have to tell you that it's,
14 it was a nightmare.

15 Q. Has the whole experience affected your view toward
16 current issues in the world at all?

17 A. Well, you know, I try -- I, I know I should be more
18 like -- of course, current events, yes. But I try not to
19 think of misery, you see, I block it out. And the only
20 thing I worry about are my children. And of course, and
21 my grandchildren, I have one grandchild and one is coming.

22 And I just hope that my children and grandchildren,
23 and great-grandchildren, and whoever after that, will
24 never have to go through what we had to go through.

25 And I try not to think, really. I, you know, I try

1
2 to think of pleasant things, and live the life to the
3 fullest. And I'm, I think I'm successful at it, yes.

4 Q. Is there any particular experience that you haven't
5 managed to talk about that stands out in your mind?

6 A. No, I think this is, you know, life in the concentra-
7 tion camp day in and day out was very much the same.
8 People dying, people being sick, everybody fending for
9 themselves, a very selfish existence.

10 Q. Was there any time where you remember laughing?

11 A. Well, I'm sure that there were things that we did
12 laugh about. But there really wasn't that much that you
13 could laugh about. And you just hope that you were going
14 to hold on and hang on to the bitter end. That we all,
15 you know, could make it out together, which unfortunately
16 didn't happen.

17 Q. Did you know that things would be different, even if
18 you had made it out with your whole family, did you know
19 that . . .

20 A. Well, of course, my whole life would be entirely
21 different, because we would have stayed in Holland, I'm
22 sure, and my life would have been entirely different, yes.

23 But I'm a firm believer in living it now, at this
24 moment, and in the present, and not looking back and
25 really finding misery. I -- in fact this one friend that

1
2 I have in Holland, she is, you know, living very much in
3 the past and have to go to psychiatrists and has terrible
4 crying spells and everything. And thanks God, I don't
5 have that problem.

6 I'm able to, you know, enjoy. I'm thankful I made
7 it, and I wish my whole family would have made it. And
8 -- but I have lots of wonderful, wonderful memories.
9 That's worth quite a bit, yes.

10 Q. Thank you.

11 A. That's the end of the story. Got it over with.

12 THE END
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