

This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Susie Schwarz. This is tape number three, side A.

I think I forgot something very important, namely that, obviously, I went back to Holland after I was here for a number of years, to which-- we went in 1967. At that time, the wife of the farmer where my father was, was still alive. And as we approached the house, she was sitting there and selling beans.

And she looked up and recognized me. And she was very happy to see me. And that was very emotional-- very. And she looked at me and she said, my, my-- in Dutch, of course, those were terrible times, but we'd do the same thing all over again. And I remember, I dissolved in tears.

And in '67, they still, on the farm where we were in hiding, the hiding place, was still intact, so I could show it to my husband.

But-- and then, we continued to go every few years to visit the farmers, the-- the surviving ones, the children. And we always were in touch with them, we-- birthdays.

As I said, we-- well, we write on birthdays, and during the holidays-- New Year and Christmas, I call them and chat with them. And the Hartamings that are the people where we were, the only one that is still in Holland is daughter, Lida, and her husband, Herman, who was my teacher. And three brothers and a sister had emigrated to Canada, and incidentally, we are in touch with them, too. They visited us here once, and we've been there a few times, and we talk to them and we write to them.

And this past summer, we visited them. And they are still very religious. And it is also moving because when we visit with the one son and we have a small repast, he will sit and say his prayers and always thank God that he still can see us.

Anyhow, to go back to Holland-- so we took our grandson and showed him.

And how old was he?

No, when he was 13. Yes--

Yeah, I meant his age.

13, and--

Same age as you were.

Right. And he was quite-- well, impressed is not the word. When I ask him what was the highlight of your whole trip-- because we did many wonderful things, we went boating, hiking, biking-- and he said, being in the village where you grew up and meeting the people and seeing where you stayed.

And fortunately, the farm on which my father had stayed, the room where my father had slept, was still there. So our grandson could see it. So that was really quite a nice experience. And I think he got a lot out of it.

So it was good. And incidentally, when he was in fourth grade, he asked me once, would I come to his school and speak to his class about what happened? And I did, and--

Now, was this in LA?

No, our son in LA is not married. It's the daughter who lives in Baltimore, it's Tanya's children. And I went to his school, and I spoke to his classmates. They were very interested.

And of course, he was very proud to have his Oma come in and tell them about what life was like once upon a time. So all of this makes for very wonderful things and wonderful living.

And our farmers, in 1994, were honored by Yad Vashem in the Netherlands. And that was very beautiful, too, because the Canadians all came for the occasion-- not all, but some of them came for the occasion. And later Lida and Herman's children were there, and it was a very beautiful ceremony, and a very beautiful gathering.

Now, were a whole group of people who had hidden Jews in the ceremony together? Or was it just yours?

There were two other--

So it was very small.

Yes, two other-- well, and the reason it was so small is it's late.

Yes.

And there, too, it is something that should have been done-- I should have done it much earlier than when I did, and I was not even aware of how this could be done. But I did it. And I'm so happy that we were able to do it.

You sent the documentation and so on?

Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, when I was in Israel, I went to Yad Vashem, and I contacted the proper people there to set it all in motion. And it took a couple of years. And I was very nervous that nothing should happen to any of them before.

And luckily, it didn't. And it was very, very beautiful.

I was thinking of your-- as you spoke of the friendship, how wonderful that was. But wondering if there are ways in which you can thank them, and of course, that was the most superb way of doing it.

Yeah, it was a superb way of doing it. Whatever you do, you can never thank them.

No, and we never know if we were in that position whether we would all do the right thing that they did.

Exactly, yes, exactly. And I often say this, there's no way I can thank them. I did this, and this is fine, because they will go down in history as having been amongst the righteous. And it will be wonderful for their children to be aware of-- who are aware of that, too. But as far as our role is concerned, there is nothing we can do to ever show them our gratification.

You cannot humanly do that. Because what they did was so extraordinary-- putting their lives and their house and their children on the line for three total strangers.

Yes, and it's even like the fact that they were fairly poor, relatively uneducated, and yet they behaved in the most--

Noble.

Wonderful-- yes, noble, princely, I was going to say, but noble.

Noble way, exactly.

According to higher standards of [BOTH TALKING]

Exactly, that's precisely correct. And was it religion, or whatever it was? It's just-- and even now, whenever we go and see them, especially the daughter, there is something very beautiful about their presence. And they still like to talk about the times-- but never in a sad way. Well, just reminiscing what happened, but always with the feeling, well, what happened-- what we did, it was right.

Yes. Has life been good to Lida, her daughter?

I think so. Herman became the principal of a school. And I think they have five children, and they, in turn, have children. And I think they have a very good family life. One son had a brain tumor, and that's very sad. He's terribly handicapped. And he lives with them, but they seem to be quite positive and upbeat.

And the Canadians are very happy and wonderful people. And I learned something interesting there, too, when we were there just now. That the son's wife, in other words, Lida's sister-in-law, came from a family-- the father was a minister. And she told us that one brother was killed because he worked in the underground. One sister did nothing but transport Jewish children to and from hiding places. The mother was engaged and imprisoned in underground work.

The father, the minister, was sent to a work camp, concentration camp, was sent, came home again. And it's so amazing when you hear how many people did what they did. It's awesome.

Yes.

Very awesome.

Even Lida, herself, you tell the story in your previous interview of her being threatened by German officers when they searched the farmhouse, and showed her courage then in risking being shot at.

Right, exactly. Because it was something she believed that-- and no matter how threatening they were, and intimidating they were, she was going to stand her ground. And I think they were really-- and when we visit, we talk about the courage. And it's awesome.

You know, another thing sticks in my mind is the mothers wrestling with the issue of having sworn on the Bible that she was hiding no Jews. But in fact, again, that an ordinary person, but what she did was correct, and she found her way of--

Justifying it. Yes, she justified it to herself. And my mother said to her, well, I wouldn't worry about it, because swearing--

To these people--

--falsely, that God will forgive you. And I think she sort of acknowledged that. But nonetheless, she had a very nice way to circumvent-- yes, to sort of get around it.

Yes, which was?

That well, they were Jewesses, after all. She was pretty wonderful. They were all very wonderful. And they still-- the ones that I still-- are wonderful, the ones that we see.

Now, how-- I know that you've spoken about how many farming people hid Jews, but what were the numbers, overall? I mean, was it really a tiny minority of lives that were saved of the Jewish--

In the-- as to the Dutch-- the area where I lived, Eastern Holland, in the fairly isolated area, I would call it, there were quite a number of people that did save-- that did take in Jews.

Some for mercenary reasons, because I had heard of cases where money gone-- you are gone now, too. And that happened. But I don't know how many instances there were. I did hear about it.

But all in all, after the war-- or not even after the war-- in recent years, I learned that the Dutch percentage-- the Dutch people were not as helpful or as cooperative with respect to saving Jews as some of the other countries did. But even some Eastern European countries had a higher rate, shall we call it, of having saved or managed to help Jews than the Dutch did.

And part of it may have been the government, because when the war broke out, the queen hotfooted it over to England, and the Princess Juliana and her children went to Canada. And I think Prince Bernhard served in the English army, or in the Dutch division, I think, of the English army. I don't know.

But articles have said, or books have said, that Queen Wilhelmina could have done more to help her Jewish compatriots than she did. And apparently, according to literature, she had sort of said, yes, it's too bad what's happening, but has not made a real tremendous effort to help.

And perhaps that set the tone-- I don't know. But the NSB in Holland, the Dutch Nazi party was quite active. And again, more people could have been helped than were helped, as compared to the French, who had a higher record of having saved people. Of course, the Danes were amazing, Belgium and so forth. Holland came out very low on the list.

And I can't-- I don't know why. I really don't know.

And then, you had your policeman friend who was, again-- he wasn't putting his life on the line or anything, but he seems to have had his values in order. And what-- I mean, do you have any thoughts about why he would take the position he took, when other neighbors--

Did not.

Yeah, exactly.

Well, it's interesting. He lived next door, and across the street from us were other people. They had a little girl who must have been my age. And shortly after the war broke out, perhaps a year after, all of a sudden, the child was no longer allowed to play with me. And then we learned that the father had joined the NSB.

Now, Mr. Fisher-- that policeman next door to us-- he was born in Germany, interestingly. He had told us, he said, watch out for the neighbor across the street, he joined the party. He was just a totally unprejudiced man, as was a neighbor two doors further down, who was also a low-level official in the local government, who was also very pro-Jewish and also very interested in us.

And incidentally, I think that he, too, knew-- yeah, he knew we were going into hiding. So he was very helpful and very well aware of it. So there, you have two people who were helpful. Didn't put their life on the line, but at the same time, did not hesitate to have commerce with us, which was very brave in later times when we were no longer supposed to be associating with non-Jewish people. And they did.

Their daughter, incidentally, still lives in Holland, and has remained a good friend of mine. So I don't know-- and I also don't know, in general, what the beliefs of the people in the village were. I knew there were quite a few NSB, but others were sort of invisible. And I don't know what their beliefs were or what their support was for one or the other.

I'd like to go back to your marriage, and it certainly seemed to me that everything about Max was right. And then, that sort of-- if you theorized about someone's background being suitable for a lasting happy life, even his experiences, you both survived the Holocaust, and I know that neither of you feel that you suffered as people did who survived the camps, and so on.

But I wonder if you've thought much about that suitability?

Well--

Compatibility?

Compatibility. It's interesting, because in a way, we came from opposite backgrounds and opposite everything. What we had in common is, we were raised in the same country, we spoke the same language, and we were both Jewish who had survived the Holocaust. And that's another topic that I wanted to address, albeit briefly.

Yes, survived the Holocaust we did, but I never considered myself a survivor as I do consider those people that were in the camps. And my husband feels very much the same way. I wish there were another word for it because in a way it's a misnomer.

Perhaps it should be called concentration camp survivor, versus a hidden person-- or there must be another word for it. Because I think what we went through was a snap, honestly, compared to what people suffered in all the different camps. And my husband feels very strongly about that, too, that people such as we, or some of the people that he has seen on tape because of his volunteer work that he does in the Oral History-- are not really that much related to the-- should not really be pegged as survivors.

They may have played a role, of sorts, but it's the people that survived the concentration camps should be in a category all to themselves. That's really, I think, an important thing to know, to be aware of. Because they are unique, I think.

What I think is very sad, though, is with all that has happened, with the awareness, with the education, with the Schindler's List, et cetera, et cetera, man's inhumanity to man continues. So what has history taught us? I don't know. This, I find very disturbing and very shocking.

I mean, if you think about Kosovo, it's frightening. So have we not learned anything? I guess not.

We have to keep telling the story and reminding ourselves and each other. And that's so analogous, because they're people just like us, enjoying the same way of life, and so on.

But telling the story over and over, of course, is good. And having the museum is more than good-- it's a wonderful educational thing. And I think the more museums are created the better it is. And I think people are very keen on learning about it.

So long term, I guess it will hopefully have some sort of positive effect on people. But at least over here, I really don't know. It's an eye opener for many people-- I see people going in and out of the museum. And if you look at their expressions, they're quite shocked and astonished, and it's very difficult for them.

And for the children, it's very good to learn about it. That's one of the reasons I felt, when my grandson wanted me to go to his school, why not? But I don't know how much of this education is being spread in other places and in other countries, given the fact that so many atrocities are still taking place.

And we know about them instantly.

Yes, that's right, as they happen. And that makes it all the more shocking. So I don't know what the world will look like 10, 20, 30 years from now. But I hope some of these killing fields will be gone.

When we mention the Holocaust Museum, do you think that that might be a phase of this great popularity? That it might be a passing fad? Or do you think that the institution and the message really are much bigger than that?

I would think it's not a phase-- I would hope it is not a phase. And I would think that the institution and the message are something that will endure. Because there will always be other generations with some curiosity about what was, just like there is still a curiosity about the Civil War, or any of these events that have happened in history. I think this will continue to be of the same interest as time goes on-- I would hope.

I think so, because as long as the textbooks and the educators show that this was an important part of history, the likes of these museums will continue to be of interest to the public. I guess. I hope.

I wonder to what extent your own experiences have had an impact on the position you've taken as an American citizen in dealing even with-- we were speaking of the war in Bosnia-- do you think that in all these cases-- I'm thinking of all the things that have happened historically since you came here-- do you want to comment on your perspective?

Too many things have happened since I came here. And the Kosovo, and the African wars, and so forth and so on-- remember when in Rwanda. When there were all these problems, I kept saying, well, history is repeating itself because the world is standing by and nothing-- and I felt so impotent. In some ways, I felt as if I should pack up and go and do something, knowing fully well, what can I do there?

And then I chide myself, or deride myself and say, well, if that's not the right attitude to take, either. If you feel that strongly you ought to go and do something, you are no better than people were at that time. So I get very enraged and very frustrated. Obviously, other than giving some financial help, I didn't do anything.

And when I look on the television screen I see what's going on in Kosovo, I feel the same way. Well, why isn't our government more active? And why?

And yes, you can write letters to your Congress people, and we do when we feel the need. But that's where our involvement then ends. And in some ways, it's not enough.

I get this feeling of indignation-- how dare people be this way, still, after all that has happened? And I sometimes think we, as a nation, ought to get more involved in it. But it doesn't always happen that way.

But it would have influenced your political position, and so on?

Yes, of course. As a matter of fact, that's why I said, the only voice I have is by expressing it in writing, by writing to my representative or my senator. Unfortunately, my representative is not of the right beliefs, but the senators in the state of Maryland are. And I just-- the only thing we can do is encourage them.