

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe
January 13, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe, conducted by Gary Covino on January 13, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Highland Park, Illinois and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe
January 13, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection.

This is an interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe, conducted by Gary Covino, on January 13th, 1999, in Highland Park, Illinois. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotaped interview conducted with Hetty DeLeeuwe. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, maybe we could just start by having you say your name and where we are, maybe what the date is, what the weather's like outside.

Answer: Well, today is the 13th of January, in 1999, and we are here sitting in my kitchen, in Highland Park, Illinois and the weather is awful. It's snowing, and snow is piled up very, very high, and it's wonderful to be inside and not have to suffer outside in the cold. And we are sitting here talking about what happened to my life after we were liberated, and I'm ready to ask -- answer questions, I think.

Q: Okay. Let me -- Let me ask you to go back. You did a video interview about your experiences during the war --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- with the museum in Washington. But let's go back a bit and you've talked about this somewhat in that interview. Let's take it back maybe to a couple months before the

end of the war. If you could just briefly describe what -- what your circumstances were, where you were, who you were with, and what was happening at that time.

A: Well, we were liberated in, I think the third of December, of 1944, by the Scottish army and they were followed by I guess British and the Americans. But I don't know much about that any more. The -- Couple of months before that, we suffered immensely under real war conditions. In September they started dropping the troops in Arnum, and since I lived in Fenlow at that time, which isn't so far, we saw, actually it -- all the troops coming over in big airplanes, and it was on a Sunday, it was brilliant, sunny day, and I'll never forget it, because it was just immense. It -- It was never ending, big airplanes and little airplanes, which we later on found out were gliders, and that's really when our liberation sort of started, from that moment on, we were practically constantly under fire. And we -- we couldn't go outside any more and we didn't have gas and electricity and things like that. And life became very, very difficult. I was still in hiding of course, and a few very dangerous things happened to my personally. We had no food so my stepmother and her daughter went out to get food in the field, like cauliflowers an-and potatoes and things like that, cause the farmers couldn't get it, because the man didn't go outside, they -- the Germans were very much aware of the man and they wanted them to go to help them in Germany, I guess. So, and then, it was a couple of -- maybe -- it was in October, maybe then already, that some Germans came to the house. I was there with my stepfather, who was in bed, because he was on strike. The Dutch government had told all the people who worked for the railroad that they had to go on strike, so he did. And there

was a son in the house, who was supposed to be working for the Germans. So, he was also somewhere hiding in the house, so I had to open the door. And the Germans said they wanted to look in the house, and they looked in the house, and they decided the house was good. And they told me they were going to come back in the evening to live in our house for awhile. So, for about two weeks, I think, they lived with us. And they sometimes asked for me, but I was every night very, very tired, so when they came in, my stepmother told them that well, I was so tired, I wasn't used to doing the housework and all that sort of stuff, so I always went to bed early. So they never saw me. Course, they were scared that if they found out I was Jewish, that the whole family would be killed. So, when the war came closer and closer, the Germans left, because they -- they stayed away from the real fighting apparently. And then in December, we were finally liberated, but that was sort of difficult too, because the -- the Germans had recreated all the people who lived in our little town, and they had to all go across the River Maus, into Germany, and then up north, into the northern part of Holland. And they wanted all the regular people out of town, and they wanted to go -- go [indecipherable] us for the Americans and the British who were coming. So, my stepparents decided that I, who had no papers at all, was too much of a danger to take along on that kind of a trip, and so we all went into hiding. The man stayed somewhere, I don't know where, but we, the women, stayed in a bombed-out house, and there we stayed for a couple of days. There was some food, there was water and that's where we were liberated. And it was, of course, still very, very dangerous, because the troops didn't cross the river, and it was constant bombarding and

grenade fire. So, we somehow crawled to our house, and then the British decided that they didn't want us there, so we were evacuated to another town, and there we stayed til I think the middle of April. In the meantime, Holland wasn't even liberated altogether, so while I was in the other town with my step-parents, and the son and the daughter, we were free. My step-parents kept on asking me, very unnoticed for me, really, my name and my -- my father's name. And then the next day they ask me my mother's name, and so they came -- in a couple of weeks they came to know who I really was, cause you never talked about it and you never wrote that down. And they apparently gave that to a Jewish organization who was trying to find all the children. And then they -- that organization decided that maybe it was a good thing for me to go to Israel, but -- then Palestine, but I didn't want to hear about that, cause I wanted to know if I still somehow, would find my parents back. I had no idea where they were. So, they -- they decided they were going to keep me in the house for -- I don't know how long, maybe they would have taken me forever. And then my father, who was hidden in Amsterdam first, but later on left for northern Holland, somehow got himself involved in underground work. He was an artist and he was good in doing precise pictures, so he put part of the province where he was in, an-and mapped it for the underground and that was sent to England, so that when the troops were coming, that they knew exactly where every house was, and where every little obstacle would be. And then somehow he was caught by the Germans. They came in the house to check something. He and the owner of the house were sent to prison because they were listening to the English radio when the Germans walked in. And thank

God my father didn't reveal that he was Jewish, and they never found out that he was Jewish, so he spent a couple of months in jail. And had they known he was Jewish, they would, of course, have killed him instantly. But he was liberated there. And as it was, the troops apparently traveled with lists of children who were liberated. So, when my father came out of prison, they somehow presented him with a list. And my maiden name is D'Ancona, D'A, and when -- in Holland, it's -- the A counts as the main letter, so my name was on top, and my father found out that I was okay. But then the problem was he was up north and I was down south and there was no transportation in Holland, especially in the part where I was, everything was damaged and bombed, and there were no roads, there was no public transportation, no trains, no buses, nothing. So, since my father had worked for the underground, he got some letters from important people, I would say, who gave him permission to travel. So he somehow talked himself into being allowed to cross the rivers, and you know, on a bicycle without tires. And he came one day to -- to the house where I was hidden, and I then lived in freedom. And well, he knocked on the door, and we didn't get many visitors there, and so when I heard a man speak, I knew right away it was my dad. And at that time I found out that my mother was caught by the Germans and that she had gone away, that she was in the holding camp, Westerbork, and after that was sent to wherever, and that we had no way of knowing if my mother had survived.

Q: Let me just go back for a second --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: The place where you were at in the country --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- who were these people you were with, if your parents were still in Amsterdam, were -- who were you with?

A: When I was in hiding?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, my par -- we were -- we were -- we all went in hide -- in hiding at same time. I was taken by an organization to the southern part of Holland, and to a family that I had never met in my life, didn't know the people, and --

Q: You say an organization, do you know the name of it, or who those people were?

A: Ah, well they called them Emfay, which is in Dutch, the same as LTD. And the -- the organization was started by a man, Mr. Debrown, which was not his real name, and he had helpers, young man and young women, who took the kids from the Germans. When -
- When you were picked up from your home in Amsterdam, small children were put in a -
- sort of what -- what used to be a school, and the parents were across the street in what used to be a theater. And then, before they went on transport to Westerbork, and those children, those young children were taken care of by Jewish people, most likely, I think, nurses, and people who took care of kids. And they went out for walks sometimes. And the organization had made it their business to steal some of those children. So, every day when some of those kids were walked outside to get a little fresh air, -- and I'm sure that it was prearranged with help inside, that certain children were going to be taken away. So

they had as many clothes on as possible. And then they walked at the end of the line, cause there were like maybe 10 or 15 kids, and then at the end, and then those young people came and just stole them away. And how they organized getting rid of their papers and -- I have no idea. I guess that's known in -- in Holland how it went, but those children were just rescued. And I was still at home. I was one of the very, very last in Amsterdam, who lived in their own house and that was because we are Sephardic. My father and my mother both are from Sephardic descent, and the Germans, with all their crazy rules and regulations had, at some point said that most of the Sephardine were going to be descendants from Aranos, which most likely was true, and we were not really Jews, we were Christians. So, my parents tried everything in the world to get us declared non-Jews, not because they didn't want to be Jews, but you know, it was important not to have to go to the other side of the world. I don't know what -- what my parents knew about what was waiting on the other side of the fence. I didn't know an awful lot, because as much as possible was kept away from me. But I knew, and everybody knew that, that it wasn't very good. So, we were in Holland; in Amsterdam still quote quote free, in October of 1940 -- in 1943 were -- and was practically no Jew left in Amsterdam walking the streets. There was no school any more, and there was no organized life for Jews any more. So, on the 16th of October, my father decided that since we weren't declared non-Jews, we had to go. So, my father found this organization and they said they would have a place for me. So, on mon -- and one morning they came -- and the lady came to pick me up and she took me along to the station and there she handed me to a

young man, and he took me on the train with another child that I never saw again, and we traveled a long distance. We had to change the pla -- the train in the station and we took another train. Then we finally came at the destined place and this young man said to me, "Well, you just wait here." And he took the young man with him and came back maybe three quarters of an hour later, half an hour later, without the young man, but that a -- that time that I had to wait at that station was like -- like a year. It was never ending, and here I was, I was in -- I mean, I was 13 years old. I was -- I was child, but I was -- I was aware of the dangers. I had no name, I didn't know where I lived, I -- I -- I -- I was nobody, and if they -- somebody had come up to me and said, "Where are you going, what are you doing, are you waiting for somebody?" I couldn't say anything. So, I was very, very scared. And then when he came back, he came on back with a -- with a bicycle, so I went with him on the bicycle and he dropped me off at this family. And there I stayed for the rest of the year and -- and another year. And I was very, very different from my own home. I came from a middle class family, nothing very fancy, but these people, the man was working for the railroad, he repaired railroad cars. And they were fine people, there's nothing to s -- be said about them, they were risking their life for me, they knew what they were doing. And they were terrific. But it was an altogether different life than what I was used to. They were going to church all the time, they read the Bible, they prayed every day and I wasn't used to that at all, cause my parents were atheist, and -- not that they wanted to deny they were Jewish, but there was absolutely no religion in my house, and so --

Q: And these people were not Jewish, that you're with, or they are?

A: No, no, no, they were Christians.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: They were Christians where I lived now. So, everything was different, and of course I -- I had just said goodbye to my parents, my father and my mother, and I knew very well that that wasn't all that sure that I would ever going to see them again. So, at -- it was very traumatic, and -- but I had to adjust, I had no choice.

Q: When you -- When you were in this house, with these people that you'd never met before and they're not from your background, and they're not from your religion or whatever, but they -- did you realize at the time how much of a risk they were taking to --

A: Oh, I knew that, yeah, hundred percent, yeah, I knew that if somebody was going to come, that th-the man would most likely be killed, and the son, who was 16 or so at that time, would have had a hard time, too, and maybe the whole family. You never knew what the Germans were going to do. But, no, they knew very well what they did, and after the war, I asked them why did you do this? And then my stepmother told me that somebody who was sent by one of the clergy in that town, came to their house and asked if they would take a child, a Jewish child. And she was willing to say yes right away, but she thought it was prudent to ask her husband if he was thinking the same way. So, she said, "Well, you have to wait til my husband comes home from work and I can tell you tonight." So, as it happened, their oldest daughter was going to leave home, and that is very important because in those days, you couldn't buy beds, you couldn't buy linens,

you couldn't buy blankets, you couldn't buy anything, even if you had the money, it wasn't available, and so they could only take me if they had a spare bed. So when the daughter left, I could take her place, so they told the man who came from the underground, they could only have a girl, because I could stay with their other daughter in the same room. So that's how come I found this place, or they found the place for me.

Q: And in this place, where these people who were, at first anyway, are strangers, and they're [indecipherable]

A: It was very strange.

Q: I was going to ask you, what was it like to be there? How did you act, how did you feel? Did you feel quickly like part of the family, did you kind of keep to yourself, how did they react? You know, what was that like? That's a strange situation to be in.

A: It's -- It's -- It's -- It's an awful situation to be in cause, number one, I was very nervous that I had left my parents, and that this -- this -- this whole town was -- was -- you know, it was so different from a big city, and everything in tha-that household was different than -- than in my house, and I -- I was -- I'm an only child, so I wasn't used to brothers and sisters, and once I was settled a little bit, you know, they started to tease me and I wasn't used to that at all. And I don't think I've cried a lot, because ed -- I knew -- I was old enough to realize that crying wasn't going to help. And I knew also that I had to behave myself and that I couldn't be this spoiled brat and that I had to adjust, because if I didn't do that, maybe the people wouldn't want to keep me, and where was I going to go then? I had nowhere to go. And that is the -- an -- an awful feeling. If -- If they had put

me out on the street, I wouldn't have had any place to go. I was far, far, far away from even non-Jewish friends that I knew, but I had no money, I had no papers, I had -- I had nothing. And I think that was the scariest part, that I had to really be as perfect as could be, because I couldn't risk any problems in that house, so when they teased me I had to take it and they didn't do that to be mean to me, but they were just used to it and I was not. I couldn't go to school. The daughter went to a parochial school, but that was a long walk and there was no transportation at that time any more either. So, they didn't want me to risk that big long walk to school. So I had to stay home and in the beginning I tried to do a little bit of my schoolwork, but my head wasn't there. So, my stepmother said, "Well, I didn't get you in here to be my maid, but maybe it would be a good idea to help me once in awhile." So I -- I helped my stepmother with making the beds, and in those days, everything was breaking, so we had to sew a lot and mend a lot and I'm pretty handy when it comes to that, so I helped and I liked that. And I loved to scrub, so I -- I learned a lot. I learned a lot of things that my mother never would have taught me, and that came in handy later, I think. So, I -- I had to do things during the day, cause I was bored stiff otherwise. And so my stepmother and I got along very well. When she went shopping, she sho -- most of the time took me along, cause she wouldn't let me home alone, and so we went shopping and -- but there wasn't much to shop, so we didn't do that too much. And so that was the -- my daily job, to help and do as much as I could to -- to not be a nuisance.

Q: What were the names of these people?

A: They are the Shumachers. No, they are not alive any more. My stepfather died years and years ago. My stepmother died a few years ago. And she had willed that -- she had asked her children that when she was going to be gone -- in Holland it's usually that they send out cards that somebody has passed away and an ad goes in the newspaper and she had asked the children if they would resent it that sh -- they also put my name in as a daughter. So they didn't mind, and so when she died, we flew over for her funeral. And I had to sit right in front in the church, and the pastor knew about it, he -- he mentioned what they had done for me, and that I was there, and that they really looked at me as their daughter, even though I wasn't their -- their real daughter. But, they were very, very kind to me, and up to now, we are still friends with the children, and the daughter who is the youngest, was my best friend, really, because we -- we were together all the time. I'm going to see her next week. And the daughter who left home and made room for me, is very, very ill and I'm going to meet her next week, too. She's in a nursing home and I'm going to say hello to her, too, of course.

Q: This is over there, or --

A: That's in The Netherlands, that's in Holland, yeah.

Q: What were their first names, this family?

A: He was Johann and she was Aleida and then they had three children, Cynthia, Bowker and Yozeem. And the parents are honored in the Holocaust museum and they are mentioned on the wall upstairs as Righteous Gentiles, and they are mentioned in Yad Vashem. I never get -- they got there, a big medal at one time, presented by Yad Vashem,

as being Righteous Gentiles, and having saved my life. So, after the war, when we were liberated, and my father had come to my house where I was hidden, he -- he took me along up north, where he had been living all that time, because we really didn't know what we were going to do. And there was a lot of food in the north, and where we were, there was not so much. So my father took me along and after maybe two or three weeks, we got a telephone call from Amsterdam, that somehow, miraculously, my mother had appeared. She had traveled for weeks, coming back from Austria, but she had arrived in Amsterdam and was looking for us. So, then my father and I went back to Amsterdam on a milk truck. And my mother was like unreal. She was skinny and she used to be pretty well rounded and she looked scary, and like a witch, sort of. And I was -- I was really scared of her. But, a-after a couple of days that -- I got used to it. Now, we didn't have a house at that time. She came to her brother's house, and so we were there, too, and --

Q: You say your mother arrived --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- suddenly --

A: Yeah.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe. This is tape number one, side B.

A: Scary and like a witch, sort of, and I was -- I was really scared of her, but after a couple of days that -- I got used to it. Now, we didn't have a house at that time, she came to her brother's house, and so we were there too, and --

Q: You say your mother arrived --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- suddenly --

A: Yeah.

Q: Up until that point, before she showed up, what did you and your father think had happened? Did you have any knowledge that she was still alive?

A: No.

Q: Did you think that she did not survive?

A: No, no, we didn't think she had survived.

Q: So you thought she was dead?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And then she appears?

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, that's an astounding experience. What -- What was that like?

A: Unreal, unreal. We -- We -- We didn't know where my mother had gone. We knew my mother was caught at the place where she was in hiding, and after jail and I don't know what else, she ended up in -- in Westerbork, in that camp before you go to -- to Germany or Poland. And since we had had this stamp in our papers, that we were most

likely not Jewish, and merranos and all that sort of stuff, which was like an exemption, my mother had had that in her papers and the Germans didn't first want to recognize that, but when she was in that camp, with the help of friends who lived there for quite awhile, they recognized that. So, my mother was sent to Theresienstadt, and that was sort of the show camp for the Germans. And that -- My father knew that she had been sent to Theresienstadt. But we also knew, after the war, that not everybody stayed in Theresienstadt, and so for the rest, we had no knowledge of what had happened to my mother. My -- My mother came back, though, she told us what had happened, and she did the rounds. She stayed in -- She was caught in July of '44, which most likely is why she was still alive, because it was sort of at the end of the war. She -- She went from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, and there she stayed for about two weeks. And she didn't talk much about that, but when she did talk about it, she said it was hell, and it was worse than hell. They sort of stayed together, 10 Dutch women, and what was the best thing in Auschwitz was that if there was a transport to go somewhere else, cause nothing could be worse than Auschwitz. So, one evening, all the people who knew about that there was a transport going, were lining up outside somewhere. And another story goes that everybody who is up front ends up going on transport, and the ones who are left over are going to be killed, that they knew. However, the Germans liked doing nasty things, so when all those women are fighting and -- and -- and -- and being excited about going away from Auschwitz, were standing in line, they let them turn around, so the ones who were standing in front were standing in the back and the ones who standing in back were

standing up front. That saved my mother's life, because my mother otherwise would have been in the back, instead of in the front. Then she was transported to Lanzing, which was -- I guess nobody knows about that concentration camp. It was part of Mauthausen, in Austria. And there she had to work in a factory where they made rayon for parachutes. Very poisonous. People who work in that kind of an industry have to get extra food, have to drink a lot of milk, can't do it more than so many months, I guess, in a year, and there are strict rules, but for Jewish women that wasn't important, so they didn't get fed, and they had to work very hard. They burned their skin and they were nauseous and sick sometimes, because all the poisonous gases and whatever. They -- My mother was fluent in German, and that sort of helped them, too, I think. My mother was -- I don't know ab - - if she was -- ca -- you can say she was a boss, but she was a teacher and so she knew how to be ahead of the group, and so she told the Germans off whenever she could. And they sabotaged a lot, too, cause if you put your finger on those instruments, then the whole thing messed up, and they ruined I don't know how much. And so they were good at that. And somehow my mother survived, even though she got very, very ill there. They operated on her without any anesthesia, any -- any medicine, nothing. And even though the German doctor who did it wanted to kill her, I'm sure, he saved her life, because if he hadn't done that, I'm sure she would have died. So, by the time she was liberated, she was very, very ill, but the Americans took enormous good care of them. They sent them to hospitals, they had them x-rayed. Everybody who had TB was sent to a sanitorium, and the -- the medical staff of, I guess the military, took care of the prisoners. They stumbled

on this group of women. Now, my mother was with those 10 -- of which one had passed away, but there were also lots of Hungarian women in that group, and I don't know where those americ -- the -- where those Americans really took them. My mother talked about flying to, I think southern Germany, and from there they were transported through Switzerland, to France, and there they stayed for awhile, and then they came to Holland. But you have a -- imagine that there was absolutely no normal transportation. Railroads were bombed, and so it was very hard to get a train together and th--there wa -- there was no infrastructure whatsoever, so there was no mail. My mother wrote every day and we never got those letters, until months and months later, after she had arrived. And then when we all three were back in Amsterdam, we didn't really know what to do. Our business was dismantled, all our belongings were taken away. And somehow my father started again. He -- He got some help, I think, from the Marshall fund. That -- That wasn't something that they gave you, ee -- it was like loans. And in the same house where we used to live, we came back. But we had no furniture, we had no beds, we had no clothes, and --

Q: Your house was still there? Other people hadn't --

A: Well, it was -- but --

Q: -- taken it, or --

A: -- n-no, other people had lived in our house, but the Germans had taken everything away. Practically everything was gone and s -- a few -- very, very few things were hidden with friends, and we got that back, but sometimes you didn't get that back either, cause

people were used to having it and they didn't want to give it back. But we basically were homeless and -- and penniless. And my father was in his 40's, in his late 40's, and he had to start all over again, which he did, but it was so difficult, because your support was gone. Everything that -- that used to be n-normal ju -- before the war, and during the vi -- first year, maybe, of the war, was gone. My grandparents were gone. All my uncles and aunts were gone, all my cousins were gone, all my friends were gone. My parents friends were gone. You -- You had nowhere to go. That what -- was very lonely existence. And now, after 50-plus years, you -- you wonder how we did it. We didn't talk about what we had lost, we didn't talk about how terrible it was. It was something that wasn't talked about and you just sort of try to make the best of everything. And my mother was sort of not normal when she first came back. She -- And she never was going to get to dress decent any more, who needed it, and who wanted to wear stockings, hose. or things like that, th-that wasn't necessary. But after maybe half a year, she was sort of the old mommy again, and --

Q: What do -- What do you think was going on? Do you think maybe she was depressed?

A: No, I don't know, my mother wasn't depressed. No, she -- she was stronger than that.

No, she had had typhus in -- in the camps, and I guess she was just so undernourished and so -- had been so sick that it took a long time to recover from that. And they had suffered so much, of course, and she never talked about much, cause I've a-asked my children about what did Omar ever tell you, and she never talked about camps with them. She never talked about the war, but we never talked about we missed this person, or how sad

the way our family came to their end. It -- It was just a subject that wasn't touched. And I guess that it took many, many, many, many years before anybody could talk about it, and realized that we all buried that inside us.

Q: Why -- Why do you think you all did that? Why did you not talk about it, why did you keep it inside? What do you think?

A: It was -- It wa -- wa -- It was too awesome, it was too -- too big a problem. I don't think anybody could understand it, how it could have happened, why it happened. It wit - - It was so unreal, it was something that nobody wanted to -- to understand, and I think that basically -- I'm not a psychologist, but I think that basically, everybody felt guilty that the -- the few that -- of us who did survive, did survive. And I still have that myself, too. I so many times ask myself, why did I survive and not my very best friend, or m-my very dear cousin? It -- It -- It's such a terrible thing that happened, that it's -- it's -- you -- you can't explain it. And so I think it was so painful, and it hurted so much, that we just figured, don't talk about it, and maybe it goes away. The truth ath -- is that with the years, I think the -- the pain never goes away and you keep on missing those people. I -- I -- I'm fixated with my grandmother, and I was a kid when she died, and I -- I have -- I've -- I talk to her in my mind, and I -- I can see her still in her house, in my mind. And I -- I -- I just have problems sometimes with why, why did all those people have to be killed? They were all honest, hard working, were not in anybody's way and they were just regular citizens like the rest, and it's -- it's some th -- very, very troublesome part of a life, and it -- I don't think it will ever go away. I mean, I live a very comfortable life now, and I have

-- thank God I have -- I have a family, but that pain will never go away, that always comes back somehow. And, if you live in a -- in a society like we are living here, you realize what you're missing, too, because people have like school gatherings, you know, they have reunions of their school. And -- And they have family affairs and you see 40 - 50 - 60 people coming, maybe even more, and I have nobody. I have a cousin in Toronto, and that's my closest relative. And all my uncles, all my aunts, my cousins, they're all gone. And maybe they were not my best friends, but that -- that part of your life is so empty. And you don't realize it every second of the day, but you know it's there. And if there are happy occasions in your family, you can't share it with relatives. Now, thank God, we have good friends here, but it's still different than your own family.

Q: Mm-hm. How do you feel about what -- it's sort of two questions in one, how do you feel about Germany and Germans? And how do you feel about -- I mean, you had one particular experience, how do you feel about the people from your own country, from -- people from The Netherlands, not the Jews, but the other people, and how they behaved?

A: Well, that's a tough one. I prefer not to go to s -- Germany. I -- I can't hold it against young people, or people my own age for that matter, so most of the Germans who did what they did, are not around any more. However, when I see or meet a German, I can think in the back of my mind, maybe your grandfather or your father did to my grandparents or my uncles and aunts, which is the unthinkable, but they did it. And I can't hold it against anybody, but I'm not very comfortable with Germans, I have to be really honest. I wouldn't drive in a -- in a Mercedes. I -- I would think of a staff car,

especially when it's black, I would think, "Oh, that's the SS." Or the [indecipherable] polici. A crazy thing, I cannot have a Krupp coffee maker or a Krupp any machine in my house. I have a Brown coffeemaker, also comes from Germany, but it doesn't have the same connotation as Krupp. Krupp is a bad word in my imagination, so I don't want to see it in my house, I can't stand that.

Q: Because of all the war industries?

A: Of all the war, and -- and -- and -- and what they did to us. About the Dutch, I don't think I feel as strongly a-about the Dutch, as about the Germans, but I know now that the Dutch, as a whole, could have done a lot more, including our queen. Queen Wilhemina never talked about anything, not on the -- on the English radio, about stand up against the Germans, try to help your Jewish neighbors. Never, ever that that came about, and they turned to her, then they thought, "Well, it's too dangerous to help the Jews." I mean, I was too young to realize all those things maybe then, but when you think about it, when you're a grown-up and an adult, you wonder why not more people had tried to help. On the other hand, I know that it was extremely dangerous, because Jewish doctors only could t-take care of Jewish patients and non -Jewish doctors couldn't take care of non-Jewish -- of Jewish patients. Everything was segregated and we had never had that in Holland. Holland was a very liberal country. As a matter of fact, my ancestors came to Holland after the Inquisition, and Holland welcomed them. It's -- It's -- It -- It's very hard to -- to really judge and to say, well they could have saved more, because everybody knew that if they did help Jews, they would be punished like Jews. On the other hand, if

lots of people would have stuck together, maybe they would have been able to accomplish more. In Belgium they did a lot more for the Jews than they did in Holland. And it's -- it -- it -- it sh -- true it wasn't publicized, I mean, so most of the Jews lived in the big cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, maybe The Hague, and in some s -- all over the country. And the -- the population in -- in the smaller towns, might not have known exactly what happened to the Jews, but the masses in -- in the big cities, did know. They saw it. I mean, part of Amsterdam was cordoned off and nobody could move, and they went house to house and house, and picked up the Jews. And i-it was -- it was a very difficult thing. I can't blame them hundred percent because I know how dangerous it was to help Jews. On the other hand, you would have liked to had a little more help from the masses. And they did it once when they had the strike, when the first Jewish young people were picked up, they had a strike in Amsterdam, all the municipal workers stopped working and it was a mass demonstration that day, and there was is a monument, [indecipherable] dock worker in Amsterdam, to remind us of that. And that was fantastic, but it was one day, and then they went back to work, and the Germans went back to pick up Jews. So, it's -- I can't say that I -- I -- I hated the Dutch people for it, but in hindsight, you could say they could have done a little more for us.

Q: But I take it, for instance, if you bought a Philip's VCR or something, that you don't ban Dutch products from the house, the way you might some German products?

A: No, no, no.

Q: You were, you know, a -- a younger woman during the war when all this happened.

A: Mm.

Q: What -- When did you first hear about and what was your reaction when say, Anne Frank's diary was published?

A: I don't think I read it for many, many years, and I ha -- I don't think I have read it all together. I -- I -- I've seen it and I've taken a few pages here and there.

Q: Did you know about it when it was first published, or later?

A: Yeah, I guess so, yeah, I guess so. And there's a lot of controversy about it now, unbelievable. I think it was a beautiful thing, because it gave the world insight of what happened to us, and how -- how people who absolutely had nothing wrong done, were convicted and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and persecuted. And it give the -- the world an insight of what -- what it was all about. But, still I don't think the -- the -- the pain that came afterwards comes out of that, because that's not what she experienced. She was one or two years older than I was, and I knew her, because she lived in a neighborhood where I used to live, and I had a friend there, so I -- I knew her so ve-ve-very -- very casual.

[indecipherable]

Q: Oh, so you actually knew her personally?

A: Yeah, well -- well very casual, I mean, if y -- if you would -- I -- I -- I know she lived there and we played outside once, or twice maybe, you know. You know, all those little kids there in the neighborhood. But, you know, she was a very nice kid, but very intelligent that she could write about it the way she did. I was not able to do that in those years, I wasn't that -- that verbal and I wasn't good at writing, or anything.

Q: Had you known at all, at the time or later, right after the war, what had happened with her family, how they had hid, and how most of them had not survived or whatever, or di -
- di -- they -- or they weren't familiar enough to you that you would even have known about it?

A: The Franks, you mean?

Q: Yeah.

A: No. No, no, I don't know. You know, you were all too much involved with your own problems, that I-I didn't know the family or anything like that. You know, you were so involved with -- and the very few people who were there, and who needed support, and who were your support, people that -- that you didn't know about, or were -- that -- that didn't come up in our lives, you know. Our lives were tough because we had -- we had to work so hard to get back to -- to where we were before. And I think about it, I have the greatest admiration for my father, who somehow managed to get a factory back to work, and make some money. And, I mean, we had a house again and later on, we had -- with everything we needed again. It's amazing how it -- it all came back. And what was very painful after the war was that some people left money and -- and belongings and there were big fights in families on who got what, and nobody had a will, cause you didn't think of things like that. So you inherited from the strangest people and from your closest relatives, you sometimes didn't inherit. And then the -- the government took enormous amounts of money as taxes of those inheritance. We had people who had valuables were -
- and who came back after the war, tried to get their valuables back from friends, or from

a-acquaintances, and people just didn't want to give it back, they said, "Oh no, that was mine." And they were so used to having those things that they didn't want to give it back. Th-The -- The strangest situations arose, that made it hard to get friendly with people that you used to be friendly with. What was it -- it was a strange, empty life, right after the war, and it took years to sort of come back to a normal life. For instance, I had gone to -- I've -- I've had -- finished elementary school, and I -- I was supposed to go to some sort of a high school, but I did that for one year, but that year was so strange, because people were not showing up the next day, teachers weren't showing up the next day. You know, there was always somebody who was taken away by the Germans, so the school was not a normal school year. And so when I went back after the war, I went for three years to high school, and then I just quit, because I just couldn't stand it, I was in the meantime this grown-up -- I had gone through so much that I wasn't this 15 year old kid when I came out of the war. I -- I -- I just didn't have the patience to sit in class and study. So, after three years I quit and I went to work. And I helped my father in his business.

Q: What was his business?

A: He produced corsets and we -- we manufactured like sportswear, things like that. And

I-I worked in the --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe. This is tape number two, side A.

A: -- patience to sit in class an-and study. So, after three years I quit and I went to work. And I helped my father in his business.

Q: What was his business?

A: He produced corsets and we -- we manufactured like sportswear, things like that. And I-I worked in the office and I worked in the factory, too. That was better for me, I think. School was just not challenging enough at that time, I -- I didn't have the -- the brains to - - to put myself to work, and my mother would have loved to see me go to college, but -- was big disappointment, but I couldn't help it. I was better off doing something with my hands and keeping my mind occupied that way. And so I worked for many, many years, and for -- later on my father sold the business, cause he was sick, and so then I had a regular job. And I lived in Holland til I was 31, and then I married and came to the United States.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: How I met my husband? My husband is originally also from Holland, and that family was very lucky, they made it just in time out of Holland before the war. I guess they were on the boat when the war broke out, or something that close. And so my husband, as a small child, was growing up in the United States. After the war, the family went back to Holland, because they used to have businesses there, and my father-in-law wanted to see

what he could salvage. So they stayed in Holland. But having grown up in the United States and then coming back to Holland in a small town, being my husband was very st -- rather observant, it was sort of an impossible task. So, he came back to the United States when he was 18, and then he ended up in the service, during Korea. He ended up serving in Morocco and when he was discharged, they asked him to stay on, and he worked in Weisbaden, Germany. And that way he came home once in awhile. So that's how we met, because they lived sort of around the corner. And then we married, and he lived in the United States, but we married in Holland and then I came with him here.

Q: Where did you come to? What -- What --

A: We started out in New York City, and we lived on Long Island and then he was transferred to Washington area, and we lived between Washington and Baltimore. And then we got transferred to Chicago, and that's where we are now.

Q: How did you feel about coming to the United States and leaving Holland? Were y -- Were you happy about it? Did you want to get out of there, or were -- were you sad --

A: No. No, no, no, no, no, no. I -- I felt bad that I left my parents and I never realized how hard it was for them that their only child was leaving. I really never thought of that. But I was happy, I was marrying a very nice guy, and I had never wanted to go to the United States, it never was any attraction to me. But I had no choice, it was either marrying my -- my lover and go with him to the United States, or not marry. And so I chose the United States and my husband. And I'm not sorry. I love it here. I don't think I would s -- go back to Europe. I love Europe, I love to travel there, love the culture and I

think you miss that in the United States. But -- The old buildings and all that sort of stuff.

But, I don't think I could settle in Holland any more.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It's -- It's painful. I ha -- My parents passed away in the meantime, too. So, I have my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and her family, and that's all very well, but it's -- it's empty for me there. And here I have good friends, and my kids.

Q: When you came over, you didn't have any children at that point?

A: No, no, no, I was just married.

Q: Yeah. How many children do you have? When did you have them?

A: I have two sons, I have two sons and one lives, thank God, in Chicago. The other one, for the time being, lives in Sao Paulo, Brazil. So, that's far. But we -- we have travel privileges at United Airlines, because my husband used to be pilot. So we travel easy and he can come home once in awhile. It's -- It's far, but it's not that far that it's unreachable.

Q: Mm-hm. What are your son's names? How old are they?

A: One, the youngest is David, he's 34. And Isaac, he's 35, the oldest. And sadly enough, they're both single, but that's something I can't do anything about any more.

Q: Any eligible --

A: They know I would love -- I would love them -- to seem -- see them married, but there comes a time that a mother has to keep her mouth shut.

Q: If any eligible women are listening, do you want to drop their phone numbers onto the tape at this point?

A: No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no, it's their business, you know, I can't mingle in any more.

Q: Did you, when you came to the United States, did -- did you work, did you stay at home?

A: No, I stayed home. I was 31 when I married, I was 32 when I had my first ca -- child and we decided that it was better for me to stay home and raise the kids. And in those years, it might have been nice if we had had a little extra, but over the years, being an airline pilot, we -- we had a decent income, and it wasn't necessary for me to -- to go to work, so I was a stay home mom. But I did always do something, volunteer work, so -- and I'm still involved in that.

Q: What about your children and you, and your experiences during the war? Did you -- When they were younger, did you talk about it much with them? How did you handle that? You know, you said your -- your family back in Holland, basically, you didn't talk about it.

A: No, my mother didn't talk about it. No, the kids know that I was hidden, and they know about th-the family that I was with, and they know some of them. And they have visited, too, there. When they were in Holland, I took them along there, and they visited. Not too many times, but we did go there. And --

Q: You went where?

A: To Holland to visit my step-parents.

Q: Oh.

A: They -- They knew about it, and somehow they, over the years have told me that I am o -- too overprotective, because -- and they -- they blame that on the sort of holding onto them, and it's a result of the war that I am the way I am. I don't know if that's true. They always say, well Jewish mothers are always overprotective. I don't think that is true, I think that all mothers are protective of their children if they're normal mothers. But, I'm always happy when I know they're coming, that they're home and worried that -- I think I wor -- I worry -- I -- I worry that th-they got an accident, or that something happens to them, and I'm always happy when they're home and then they're safe around. But they know my story and -- and they know how difficult it was. And they missed too, the par -- th-the -- the family. They -- They have no extended family, as such. So, they -- they -- they know what -- what the war did to them, too. It's -- They have three cousins in Holland, my sister-in-law has three daughters, but that's all they have. And they have this one uncle and this one aunt, and there is nothing else, you know, that comes after that. So they too, feel the -- the pain of not having a big family, like other people around here.

Q: Did they get to know their grandparents very well?

A: Well, they -- my -- my father and my father-in-law -- my father-in-law passed away before we were married, my father-in-law -- my father died right after we were married, so they never knew their grandfathers, but my mother came regularly and my mother-in-law, too, so they know their -- they knew my mother very well, they had a good relationship with her, and they have a very good relationship with my mother-in-law. My

son from Brazil calls her like every other week, and -- and they -- they value that very much, yeah.

Q: Your mother had a -- a horrible experience during the war.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did they talk much with her about that?

A: No, no, she didn't talk about that, no.

Q: Did they ever ask and she refuse, or what? It just didn't come up?

A: I n -- I don't think they ever asked and she never talked about it. She never talked about it. The only thing [indecipherable] that she was in Auschwitz in October, and when my father had passed away, she came regularly here in the winter, because those long nights and those lonely days, especially in October, she didn't want to be alone because apparently she always re-lived the horror of those days in Auschwitz, and -- and she liked to be here with us. She didn't talk about it, but I know that's why she wanted to be away. No, she never -- she never mentioned it, she -- she was very close, though, with all those women who were with her in the concentration camps, and all of them, exe -- except one, I think, have passed away. But they were all like sisters, like good support for each other. They -- They understood each other, and they -- without talking about it, they -- they knew what was going on in their minds, I think. They -- They needed each other very badly. And they were very, very close bunch, all those years. But no, my mother didn't say much about it and I guess the kids never thought of asking. Maybe they didn't dare, I don't know. Never came up.

Q: What about when things happen, which they do occasionally, things come up in the press, things come up in the media, things come up in the movies. There's a new documentary, a movie like "Schindler's List" is made, things like that happen.

A: I've seen that. I basically don't go to war movies, I don't go to -- I don't read books on the Holocaust. I hate real war movies, like shooting and things like that. My kids never had guns. I'm very much against war, because I lived through it and it's -- it's so scary, it's so horrendous. I've -- I've seen the last movie, "Life is Beautiful," which has mixed reactions from some people, and I know the Holocaust is not to make fun of, but I thought the movie was very sensitive about what happened, it -- I feel it's like -- like a little -- not a fairy tale, what's the right word? A fable, you know. How it starts early in that life of the man and the woman, that they -- they fall in love and they have a good life, good family life. They have a cute little kid, and already the anti-Semitism comes in with the mother, and then in the war -- of course, in the concentration camp it wasn't that way it is depicted in -- in this movie, but the love of the father to protect his child, is -- is -- is so beautiful. I think that the film is really very, very special. And I went there by mistake, because if I had known it was all about the Holocaust, I wouldn't have gone. But I -- I wasn't sorry I saw it. And I saw "Schindler's List." And the -- I never saw "Shoah." And I don't want to see movies on -- on -- on the Holocaust, on th-the -- the camps and things like that. I've been to the Holocaust Museum, few times. But I find that difficult. I find it very difficult. It's when you see all those mass of shoes, I think, "Oh maybe the -- my --

my -- my uncle's shoes are in there," or my whatever. All those pictures. It's something that will never leave us.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I know most of those people that I mourn all the time, wouldn't have been here any more, you know. By this time, most of them would have been gone. My p -- My grandparents for sure. But it -- it was -- you can't realize that -- that all those people were murdered, for what? Just because you're Jewish? And as I say, my parents were atheists. They didn't do anything about being Jewish, religiously, that is, for sure. And -- But Hitler didn't care. Hitler didn't care.

Q: How about you and your husband, are you religious at all? Are you like your parents, or --

A: Well, my husband came from an o-observant home, and I learned, in my hiding days, about religion. And so, after the war, I guess I made up my mind that I -- I wanted to marry Jewish, because I thought -- I don't know if it's true, but that was in my mind, that somebody who was Jewish, could understand better what went through in my head once in awhile. And so that was a hard thing, because most of the people in my age group, in Holland, were gone. Were very few eligible men. So, it took me awhile to -- to find the right one, or the right one to find me. And so, since his mother is observant, I decided that it was prudent to start out with a kosher home. And then we, somehow, when the kids grew up, we got more observant, and my husband is very observant, I am a little less observant. But we keep a kosher home, and we keep all the holidays. And the kids are not

that observant. We tried to teach them, and it's up to them now. They went to parochial school, here in Chicago. At least they had a good Jewish education, and they know what they don't want to know when they know what it's all about. And we -- we tried to be an example. But it's hard, it's hard to be very religious when I know some people all together forgot about religion after the war, others went just to religion to get strength in life. There are always so many questions that it's -- it's -- it's hard, it's hard to believe that everything just was for some reason. I can't de -- I can't deal with that. I th -- I can't believe that was God's plan. But who am I to know?

Q: Do you feel like you have found any answer, or it's just one big question?

A: No, no, I didn't find an answer. No, how can you find an answer to this? I mean, it's terrible when -- when -- when some person shoots one person for one reason or another, for hatred, for -- for jealousy, for whatever. And -- But -- But how can you murder so many people? I mean, it's not just the 6,000,000 Jews, there were 6,000,000 other people also killed, homosexuals and Gypsies, and whatever. People that were not hundred percent the way Hitler wanted them to look. When you were born with some defect, you were destined to go. That's not life, that's not right. No, I haven't found an answer to that. I never will find an answer.

Q: How often these days do you think you think about it, does anything pop into your head or you have thoughts about it? Is it often, hardly ever?

A: Oh, no, not hardly ever. There is always a day, you know, it's like, it's now January, so on the seventh of January, my very best friend had her birthday. She was just a f-few

months older than I am. And now of course, I write down seventh of dec -- of January, and I say, "Oh my God, it's Yute's birthday," and the mil --

Q: You talked about her in your video interview.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there are things that just happen, you know, that you think of somebody. No, it -- it -- it's not daily, but it's always there, in the back of your mind. But it's also because here people have so much family, especially in Chicago. When we lived in Baltimore, in -- in -- in Columbia, Maryland we lived, everybody was imported from somewhere. It was a new city and everybody was from somewhere. So nobody had the whole extended family around them. Here in Chicago, they all are from the south side or the west side and they -- they have hundreds of relatives around them, and I'm jealous of that. People don't realize how lucky they are that they have them, and I mean, they can fuss about a relative this or a relative that, then I tell them, "You have -- You have no idea how I -- how -- how -- how I would love to have a cousin that I could fight with, you know, because it's better than having nobody around." But, it's with everything else, if you don't know it, you don't miss it, and people don't realize it, when they have all this extended family, and so -- even if you bury somebody, even if you bury that's a pr -- that's a privilege compared to what we went through, cause nobody has a grave. Can't go anywhere.

Q: Do you think so -- think a lot of people take family for granted, do you think there are other things that people take for granted that you might not, because of what you experienced?

A: Oh yeah, I guess always having food on the table, cause at the end of the war, we didn't always have what we wanted. We went to bed and we said, "Mom, we are hungry." Oh, when I think about it, what we did to this poor woman, to tell her that we'd like to have another slice of bread and she couldn't give it to us, because if she gave us another slice of bread, we wouldn't have bread in the morning, and everything was rationed, and I, for instance, didn't always get a ration books. So, then I ate from their food, and the son told me so, not because he wanted to be mean, but he thought that was - - was cute, you know, to say, "You know, you ate my bread." Well, then I couldn't eat. So, no, I am very ra -- very much aware of, that I never go hungry and that everything is available and that I have a -- a good life. Oh yeah, I'm aware of that.

Q: I'm just old enough so that when -- when I was very young, I don't know when this stopped, but it was pretty early in my life, that occasionally, you know, we'd be eating and I didn't want to finish everything --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- that I'd been given to eat, and I can still remo -- remember my mother occasionally saying to me, "You know, you should finish that, there are children starving in Europe." And you know, it became like this cliché in a way, and I think when my brothers and I got a little older, we'd still occasionally hear that, and you know --

A: Now you make fun of it.

Q: -- we'd want to be -- well, we'd want to be smart, so we'd say to her, "Well, you know, so fine, so send it to them." You know, "I don't want it," or "How is me eating it going to help them?"

A: That's true, that's true.

Q: But I guess she was referring to people like yourself were in the circumstances you were in after the war, and during the war.

A: Yeah, after the war, it was still very tight. But, well you realize, you know, when you - - once when you've been hungry, it's a different story, of course. But there's so many unjust things in this world. I wish I could save the world, but it -- I try my best, just a little bit, you know.

Q: How so? What do you do?

A: I volunteer for Soviet Jews. Not the ones who are here, but the ones who are still there. So, try to pay a little bit back to the world. But it's -- it's tough.

Q: I think -- I've done several of these interviews, and one of the things that always comes up, one of the strongest things that people say, and that they refer to very often, is the same thing you've been bringing up here, is all those missing people, and sort of this kind of huge hole which is created at the center of your life.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: That can never completely be filled again.

A: No, it won't.

Q: Every-Everybody talks about that.

A: Yeah. Ca-Ca-Cause that is -- that is what bothers us the most, I think, you know?

Whatever you do, you know, you can make a million dollars, you can make 10,000,000 dollars, i-it -- that will never be able to come back in your life. You know, in my house I am surrounded with things from my parents and the clock is my mother's wedding gift from one of their friends. And you know, I -- I have peace with my mother having passed away at the age she did. I have less peace with my father having died as young as he did, because that must have been a result of the war. The sorrow and the anguish and everything else, he just didn't want to live any more. And -- And that's also indirect, you know, a result of the war. So, there are things in my house that remind me of my parents, that's fine, that doesn't seem to hurt. But there are also things in my house that remind of people who have been murdered. And that -- that -- that always hurts, that always hurts, and it reminds me of them not being around, you know. It's something that will never be -- be fixed.

Q: Tho -- Those type of things that you were just referring to, are there any of them right nearby here, that we can see from where we're sitting, or --

A: No, this was from my -- my aunt.

Q: That is -- Tell us what you're pointing to there.

A: This is a -- This is a -- a silver tray that was in my aunt's house, and --

Q: Which is filled with cookies right now.

A: -- is filled with cookies, yeah. And it never should have been in my house. You know, that's what it is, too, because she had a daughter. So, if she had passed on in the meantime, it would have been in my cousin's house and not in my house. And that's -- that's how it -- how all those things speak to you. So, you don't always think about the person directly, but then you see something in your house and you say, "Oh yeah, this was from this [indecipherable]. Or when I say -- when I say a date you write down, you just -- you think of somebody's birthday or whatever special day. It's -- It's a big hole that can never be fixed, can't mend it.

Q: There are some people, I would imagine, who would -- feeling that way, who would take those reminders out of their life, who would not have things, you know, like this silver tray, or like the clock around. Maybe they wouldn't get rid of them totally, but they, you know, you know --

A: Put them away.

Q: I mean often -- I mean, people have different responses to experiences, and sometimes when people go through very painful things, their way of coping with it is to take away the reminders, to kind of put a barrier around and make a space where those thoughts come up less. There's -- There's -- There are less physical things even around to prompt any thoughts like that.

A: Well, we did that in the beginning.

Q: You did?

A: After the war. I guess we -- we just sort of had blinders, and just tried to do our everyday chores and tried to make life bearable again. But I don't think it -- it -- it serves a purpose to -- to bend those thoughts out of your life, cause they -- there was -- they were all people, they were all bright minds and -- and -- and wonderful persons. And I think it's good to remember them, and to remind yourself that they were around one day. It would -- i -- i -- I think it -- it -- it's good to remind them, in your mind, of things --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe. This is tape number two, side B.

A: -- bend those thoughts out of your life, cause they -- there was -- they were all people, they were all bright minds and -- and -- and wonderful persons. And I think it's good to remember them, and to remind yourself that they were around one day. It would -- i -- i -- I think it -- it -- it's good to remind them, in your mind, of things that were also good in our lives, before the war. We think about the good old days. They were not everybody's happiest days, but they, you know, they were part of our life, so I think it's good to remind yourself that they were one day around and sadly enough, no more. I don't want to push it away.

Q: When you first came to the U.S. -- well, first of all, I don't know if we've ever actually said your husband's name.

A: Abraham DeLeeuwe. Al, we call him.

Q: When you came over here at first, was it hard to adjust to this country?

A: Oh, awful. I didn't know anybody. I spoke a little English, but not American English, and I was different. It -- It -- It's a altogether different life. So I guess I was lucky that we had children right away, and -- and that brings you in contact with your surroundings, and then somehow you make friends, and you get acquaintances, and when my kids were little, I met somebody in the synagogue, who said, "Oh, you can't stay home all day long," So she dragged me to -- to one of the meetings of -- one of organizations and that's how I started, you know, getting part of the community. But it's hard to, especially in New York, to get started if you don't know anybody. Here, it was different, here in the Midwest, people are warmer, and so they -- they come to you, and welcome you. It's different, altogether different approach here. But in New York it was hard.

Q: Did you live actually in the city?

A: I lived in Queens, yeah, in the beginning, and then later on we lived on Long Island. And that's still New York.

Q: Little different than Amsterdam, though, huh?

A: A lot different, yeah, a lot dif -- well, I didn't live -- after the war we didn't live in Amsterdam any more, we lived like in the suburbs. And that was better, that was better, cause you didn't want to walk those streets every day, where you had so many sad reminders. It was a good thing that we moved away . . . yeah.

Q: What were you thinking about just now?

A: How th -- How hard it is. It's -- It's -- It's difficult sometimes to talk about it, too, you know, and it's hard to express yourself.

Q: Doing fine.

A: Yeah, well, that's what they always tell me, but it doesn't always come easy, you know. I never say no if they ask me, because I feel that I owe it to whatever, to talk about it. I -- Normally, I don't talk about it, it -- you know, it's something that is inside me. And my husband was here during the war, so he -- he also lost a lot of relatives, but he didn't feel that -- the -- the anguish, you know, and the -- the Germans came to the house, and rang the bell, or they picked you up, or things like that, the -- the -- you know, always the nervousness that was around your life. So he didn't grow up, thank God, that way. But he suffered enough from the war, of course.

Q: When you think back on the time where that family had taken you in, and -- before liberation, or whatever, you did a video interview for the museum, now we've -- we've talked for awhile. Is there any little story, or anecdote, or memory you have from that time, that you haven't mentioned, that -- I mean, it could be anything, or just a little thing that sometimes you remember that happened, or a conversation or some little incident, or --

A: Not really. You know, it w -- it w -- it was -- it was very serious household. They're very orthodox Christians, I guess that's why they took me in, cause my stepmother told me, when I asked her why did you do this, she said, "Well, when they came to ask me, I figured God sent those people to me, and I have no choice." That was -- There was never

anything fun, you know, that happened. Wa -- Ev-Everything was serious, it was a serious time, we -- we -- nearly every night, even before the start of the liberation, we ended up in bomb shelters, because we were bombed. So, you know, it -- it wasn't a pleasant life there either. It -- My father was up north, and nothing happened there, you know, he had all good food, and he was with sweet people, and he walked outside all the time. And, of course, he wasn't in his own surroundings, but he -- he didn't live under that pressure, like we had every day, that they bombed the surroundings, and once he was in jail, he -- he wasn't so happy either, I'm sure. But [indecipherable] really nothing extraordinary that I can think of, I mean, when I was there, it was most difficult.

Q: You say nothing fun happened, it was very serious, was that because, you know, it was a serious and difficult time, or were these people also just very serious and --

A: No, I -- I don't think that that's the case, cause I remember not too long ago, couple of years ago, when we were visiting, that we were having dinner and we had a bottle of wine on the table, and my stepmother said, "Well, you see me, we can have a pleasant dinners, too." Everything was just tight in those days. I don't know how much money the man made, but they had to feed another mouth. I mean, there was -- they all had to sacrifice for me. And, you know, there was just always nerve wracking -- the circumstances were just that way, they w -- and they were serious people, but the war just made it that way, I think. And maybe me being there, too, you know. I -- I was a threat to their family life, there's no question about it. And they were s -- they were involved in underground work themselves, too. I never knew that then, during the war, I found that

out after the war, cause what you didn't know, you couldn't talk about. The least you know, the better it was. But, no, it was just a very serious time. You know, you couldn't go out, there was no radio, you couldn't -- th-there -- there was -- people don't understand it, how --how you grew up in those years, without having any fun, you know? And then, after the war, I was so serious and old, compared to 15 year old kids, because I had -- it -- it -- it takes it's toll -- it t-took it's toll, you know, being away from my parents and it's tension. And -- And the years before I was in hiding, you know, cause we -- we lived through all these -- these crazy times at home, but it was nerve wracking. I remember when my -- my youngest aunt was picked up with her husband, my mother just went to bed. She couldn't deal with it. And the life was awful, life was just awful. Yeah.

Q: But you've had a decent 50 years since.

A: Oh yeah. Oh -- Oh yeah, oh yeah. I -- I -- I'm not complaining, you know. Sometimes I think, "Well, what was the purpose that I -- I did survive?" You know, why me? That -- That comes up many times in your mind. But I have a good life, I'm -- I mean I -- I -- I won't say I'm -- I'm every day in tears, far from. No, I have a good life, and I enjoy my - my family and my husband, and even retirement isn't so bad. You know, we travel a lot, and we enjoy that, and we have -- we have fun with our kids. Nobody's life is perfect.

Q: No.

A: But -- And I think there are lots of people who have tragedies in their life, so I'm not the only one who had it difficult, you know? But this tragedy was so different from every

other, normal tragedy i-in life. Can get sick and die young, it's sad, but the whole thing is just unreal, but it happened, that's for sure. It's not something we -- we imagine.

Q: That's about it for my questions, is there anything that you want to say a little more about, or that didn't come up, that you want to talk about before we end the interview?

A: I've no idea, I don't know. I don't know. I don't think so.

Q: Well, listen, thanks for taking the time.

A: Thank you, thank you.

Q: And -- And talking with us, and it's very nice and warm and comfortable in here, and there's what, seven or eight feet of snow?

A: No, no, no.

Q: That's piled up outside there in the last --

A: Yeah -- th -- th --

Q: -- year? I mean, in the last week. I mean, I've never seen -- I lived here for years and I never saw snow like you have now.

A: No, but you -- no, no, but we haven't had it for -- the last one was about 11 - 12 years ago, maybe. I don't know exactly. '70, we came here '76, in '77 - '78, it was awful.

That's 20 years ago. I don't know what -- how long ago it is that we have that. For the last couple of years, I can't remember having shoveled snow, but this is awful.

Q: Now there are mountains of it out there.

A: Yeah. And then the hard part is to get out of driveways and to -- to see your way out of those -- those mountains. You don't know if somebody's coming, yes or no. It's tough.

Oh, I live for that, too. You learn, you learn. I -- When I first lived here, I couldn't drive in snow. In my life, I hadn't done that. But you have no choice here. If you don't want to drive in the snow, you -- you're stuck here, sometimes for months. So, we deal with it, drive careful.

Q: Okay, well thanks again.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hetty DeLeeuwe.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview

