

Netherlands Documentation Project Time-Coded Notes

Interview with Jacob van Proosdij (born April 15, 1921 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands), May 2, 2004

RG-50.570*0001

Spelling of names marked * has not been verified

TCR 1

1.01: J. is second of five children. Two brothers, two sisters. Boys were the oldest. Father was a lawyer in Amsterdam and grandfather and great grandfather were from Amsterdam and were preachers. Mother was from Amerongen.

1.02: went to school one year earlier, was always the youngest in the class. To Dutch reformed schools. Was a law student. Skipped a year there too. At 21 he was a lawyer already. Just before the University faced having to close down.

1.03: Professor was Victor Rutgers.

1.04: got along well with father, but both felt it was better to work for another law firm, Van Krimpen in the Vondelstraat in Amsterdam. Dad had firm on Nassaukade, where family also lived. Older brother became a doctor. Other brother also doctor.

1.05: oldest of two sisters studied English after war. But quickly married the future head of the BVD (Dutch Security Agency). Younger sister was not allowed to marry until she had finished university, studied law. But never practiced, married organ player.

1.06: younger brother went into hiding in Zaanstreek. Older sister was in espionage so had to disappear from time to time. Younger sister and J. laid low from time to time but lived at home during war. We all did something we knew well in the war, but we tried to know as little of each other's work as possible.

1.07: J. never noticed anti-Semitism before the war or even during the war. Only with NSB people. J. knew that Jews were "a little bit different". A lady worked for father who worked for organization to help German immigrants. J. helped her out sometimes.

1.08: If you walked on the Amstellaan on a Friday night, people might ask you from time to time to open a letter for them.
Only in '42 did I really get into touch with the "difficulties". Before that I never knew of any anti-Semitism.

1.09: I did not know Jews as such, they were just people. J. went to the Dutch reformed Free University (VU). Talks about learning VU dogmatic philosophy. Talks about the Keizersgracht Church.

1.10: Father was loose, bended the rules a little bit. Grandfather did that too.

1.11: J. wanted to study law, like his brothers always wanted to be doctors. J. hid Mr. Levy's* stock during the war, that is the only instance of being aware of another lawyer being Jewish.

1.12: talks about how they kept the stock in good shape after the certificates got wet.

1.13: remembers the February strike [of 1941]. In the early days of the war they were concerned about his father's employee who was a son of Prime Minister Gerbrandy. The man hid, but then J.'s father was taken instead and the son turned himself in.

1.14: Those were things he was involved in. Remembers the February strike, that is why J. does not believe the Dutch are anti-Semitic.

1.15: his boss Van Krimpen was attorney for the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. He represented the Dresdner Bank too and that was how he got in touch with Palash*, who head the Portuguese Synagogue. But Van Krimpen could do little. Kotting*, one of his partners did most of the work.

1.16: talks about what motivated him to help Jews: "Why not?" Once a person is involved they stay in it. "You're there to help people, just like a doctor. It is your profession." J. was young and just took on many cases, mostly divorce, to learn the trade. Never did criminal cases.

1.18: Father did a lot of Jewish cases, but defended people in the underground. Was greatly interested in Jewish history. He was a non-conformist. The Dutch reformed always were a clique and Father distanced himself. Just like PM Gerbrandy.

1.20: Jewish cases were often lineage cases, about a Jewish person's ancestry. It was not about it being more interesting than divorce cases, it just came my way. Elaborates on lineage cases. About Jews having to report and file forms. People had to prove it if they were not Jewish.

1.21: Kalmeijer was appointed to decide in cases where there was doubt. He was an army corporal. He was a cultivated person. Seyss-Inquart never intervened in Kalmeijer's decisions.

1.22: Talks about Kotting arguing that Sephardim were different from Ashkenazim. Talks about Sperrliste system. There would be a different Sperrliste for the Sephardim. There was a "Barneveld"-list (named after the town). Kalmeijer also kept Sperrliste for lineage-cases.

1.23: Talks about Kalmeijer subordinate Mr. De Waard, a Dutch lawyer. Talks about Miesen*, a German doing genealogical research. Kalmeijer had a German secretary, and three other female employees. J. took those ladies out to dinner, paid the secretary a separate wage. J. doesn't like the word bribe, but that was what it was.

1.25: talks about people who wanted to be rid of their yellow star. Kotting was married to a Jewish woman.

1.26: after the war only, J. learned about the sacrifices Kotting and his wife made to hide that she was Jewish.

1.27: talks about lawyers bringing cases where there was doubt about lineage to Kalmeijer's attention, because he decided those.

1.29: Talks about SS pressure on Kalmeijer to get rid of lists. Agreed to help Kalmeijer with lists. On condition that he could quit if it caused him problems with his conscience. But it did not.

1.31: talks about the list and how there were many people on there who were dead already. Discusses his interest in the archived application, because of possible uses in the future. They predated a lot, because there was ban on new applications.

1.33: talks about forgetting a lot after the war and thinking about his work back then only years later.

1.34: talks about the caseloads and the cases he moved. Talks about cleaning up Portuguese list, if people had few Sephardim ancestors.

1.36: J. felt he deserved to travel first class. Wage was 100 guilders at Van Krimpen's firm. It was not much, he says.

1.37: Talks about a pediatric physician who after the war was difficult around Kotting. J. speculates that the man was uncomfortable to have been saved by Kotting without having ever paid him in any way.

1.38: only in retrospect J. realizes that his cases decided over life and death.

1.39: Talks about case of Brechtstein*, a Lithuanian Jew. Talks about anthropological investigation into Brechtstein, measuring his skull to prove he was not Jewish. Case involved a lot of file tampering and pre-dating.

1.43: talks about personal relationship to Brechtstein, a father figure.

1.44: talks about the arrest of an associate named Pollack* (Polak?). They did not go into hiding and Pollack never ratted. When he was released it was a surprise and people suspected him of becoming an agent provocateur. J. had left Van Krimpen, Gerbrandy the son eavesdropped at their meeting to have some back-up. Pollack wanted help in contacting underground, J. played dumb.

1.46: later, Arie de Foe* (de Fou?) came by J. De Foe was the ombudsman for the underground and decided over liquidations (also within underground). De Foe asked about the meeting with Pollack.

1.47: Pollack was shot around the corner from J.'s office on the De Lairesestraat. After the war J. was questioned about the case but nothing came of it.

1.49: talks about a man, Ten Cate*, who researched Jews in the 19th century and went after their offspring. Just before 9/19/1994 ("Jolly Tuesday"), he was on to Koting, but with the optimism about the allied advances in the South he was coward enough to flee.

1.50: Went into hiding one or two nights when there were rumors about danger. "You just lived on. It was sometimes scary."

1.51: talks about Elsa Pereira* who was among a group of Jews who were rounded up even though they thought they were safe and brought to Westerbork for examination.

1.52: they helped certifying her as non-Jewish. They forged the entire file including documents like verdicts. Talks about the way they kept her from being deported.

1.54: talks about coincidence how miraculous it was. He heard Elsa's side of the story years later. She was almost in the train before she got called back.

1.56: talks about reuniting her with her fiancé. She married that night. They talked about it when she came to South Africa twenty years later.

1.57: talks about cases that nearly failed. One of the early cases was that of "Brammetje Polak"* a rich man "who ate salmon during the war".

1.59: talks about how he compared Kalmeijer to Herodes, you kill children too.

TCR 2

2.02: talks about seeing Kalmeijer who rejected a case, just after J. returned from Westerbork "a dreadful visit". J. started to weep, Kalmeijer was affected because they had a good relationship. Later he gave J. the decision.

2.04: J. still holds something against Kalmeijer: he let his mood affect his decisions. If his mood was bad he would sign what equated to a person's death sentence. After the war Kalmeijer was imprisoned with many of the other Germans. Koting revealed that his wife was actually Jewish to him. Kalmeijer countered that sure, they pulled that off, but J. had never deceived him. Which of course J. had done that over and over again.

2.06: talks about repressing what happened in the war. Doing things for "rechtsherstel" (lit. "rights restoration") to do something about what they had to do the Jews [apparently referring to his legal work].

2.07: talks about no anti-Semitism in Netherlands, but reading about persecution in Germany, reading about it in the papers, seeing the new immigrants.

2.08: does not remember much of yellow stars worn in the street etc. Was distracted by his work. Remembers the strike. Talks about Amsterdam being given a fine for the strike.

2.09: does not remember the Amsterdam ghetto being locked off.

2.10: Does remember Jewish professors being dismissed. VU students deciding to not sign the loyalty oath to the new government.

2.11: speculation about what fuelled anti-German sentiment: the insults to the Jews? Talks about hearing that Jews would go to Mauthausen. That could be no good. He heard rumors that some were dead before arrival. Never official or full confirmation, but at the end he knew "90%" maybe "100%" sure. Because sending children and the ill to labor camps made no sense.

2.13: Talks about the way things were run in the Ministry of Interior.

2.14: Kalmeijer talked to J. about expected new measures. Kalmeijer spoke very freely about things.

2.15: Kalmeijer was more pro-German at the end of the war.

2.16: talks about the opportunity of getting inside the Jewish administration machine through his work with Kalmeijer.

2.18: talks about understanding between lawyers, even though he was a young lawyer and his partners were much older. Kotting possibly had fatherly sentiments about J.

2.19: talks about Gemmecker, Westerbork commander, and his mistress.

2.20: what J. holds against Gemmecker. A woman who wrote in a letter about Gemmecker's affair was immediately jailed. J. got on that case through Kalmeijer.

2.21: talks about Dr. Ottenstein* who did a lot of good work at the Antragsstelle at Westerbork, he was completely impartial. Advised J. on how to approach Gemmecker.

2.22: After request, Gemmecker made sure that the lady was immediately transported east.

Years later, a traveling investigative judge from Germany followed-up the case in South Africa with J. They did not do anything about it, because Gemmecker served time already.

2.23: calls Gemmecker “correct”, kept Westerbork decent.

2.24: talks about rules that Westerbork had: Aryans could not applaud performances by Jews.

2.25: talks about having seen the train just before it left once. A cattle cart: “you knew it could not have a good ending.” Once he asked more about it, when he spent the night in staff accommodation. He spent the night in Green Police barrack and drank with them to try and find out more. He did not.

2.26: talks about formality of interpersonal relationships.

2.27: talks about his working relationship with Kalmeijer, which was good, friendly.

2.28: Portuguese list was anywhere between 600 and 1000 people. J. took about 200 people off. But he assumes all of them were dead or deported already.

2.30: talks about different tactics used in lineage cases: claim bastard children. Some people wondered about that when they saw the files. Why did the Jews have so many bastard children? Talks about cooking books and using old ink and letters to forge “old” letters.

2.32 in: Talks about verifying the quality of forgeries with unwitting police specialist in old documents.

2.34: lot of churches were prepared to give out phony baptism certificates. “The Germans liked to see stamps.”

2.35: J. quips his relations with the underground are still a secret. Lost some school friends, his sister knew many people. His mother helped distribute fake IDs.

2.36: talks about school friend who was executed. He was captured in Haren, in Groningen province in 1942 but escaped. He was one of the founders of resistance paper Trouw. He was caught in February or March 1945.

2.38: talks about Sjoerd Gerbrandy, the PM’s son. He could not be in the resistance because the Germans monitored him too well as the exile-PM’s son. Family was friendly with his mother, who stayed in the Netherlands.

2.39: talks about setting up firm with Kotting after leaving Van Krimpen firm. Talks about not going out anymore to work after 9/21/1944 because everyone was rounded up all the time.

2.41: talks about the Jews who looked Jewish but were certified as non-Jewish. People became suspicious of the chair of the Zandvoort temple, because he was not Jewish all of a sudden but still listed as chair in the old phone book.

2.44: talks about practicalities of his work for Kalmeijer, including being allowed to travel with German records. J. would be taken in SS-cars to see Gemmecker, wonders what other travelers from train thought of him.

2.45: people knew about Westerbork, because it was known that that was where the Jews went. It was guarded by Dutch police.

2.46: it used to be open, flat land, nowadays there are woods around it. It is unrecognizable.

2.47: talks about Gemmecker's house just outside camp. Gemmecker had Jewish servants.

2.48: talks about the trip to Westerbork by train. Could talk to inmates from time to time.

2.49: did not interact with inmates too much, because wanted to keep up appearance of being loyal to Kalmeijer.

2.50: Prof. Meijers, the lawyer-professor, was in Westerbork, but was on the Barneveld list. For a long time that was a protected list. They were sent Bergen-Belsen, but most survived.

2.51: Talks about how Meijers worked on civil law revision in Westerbork. And reaction to that from censors. "If they need a Jew to help them out with that, the Dutch are not worth much." J. then offered Meijers to smuggle documents for him.

2.52: talks about practicing going through check point with secret document pass from Kalmeijer for when it he really needed to. To train his nerve and know how to play out having that pass.

2.53: talks about forging notes from Kalmeijer to Gemmecker to more positive messages about individual cases so Gemmecker might judge more leniently. Then J. would take Gemmecker's document back and return it to Kalmeijer with the original note from Kalmeijer.

2.54: talks about a case that nearly went wrong. It started with a round-up where a former secretary of Kalmeijer's was arrested. He went to Amsterdam to find her and bumped into a man on the station named Sinek, a Czech whom he encouraged to look to lose his yellow star. Sinek contacted J.

2.57: talks about the use of photo albums to prove that someone was not Jewish. Sinek's family was in Westerbork.

2.58: talks about Gemmecker's way of looking at faces to determine whether someone was Jewish.

2.59: Gemmecker allowed Sinek to go with his family.

TCR 3

3.00: talks about Sinek and his son going to America.

3.02: talks about Jewish tailors in Westerbork who made uniforms for German officers, Gemmecker and Aus der Funte*.

3.05: Aus der Funte led the effort to round up Jews in Amsterdam.

3.06: talks about the Breda Three, about ms. Slotke*, a low ranking officer who telexed the lists of people to be put on the train. She had a very bad reputation.

3.08: Kalmeijer liked to keep distance from Gemmecker, because he wanted stay clear of possible deployment. He liked the high life in The Hague.

3.09: talks about the administrative chaos in Westerbork on Mondays while transports were being prepared. J. was free travel to Westerbork any time, but does not remember why he always went on Tuesdays late.

3.10: talks about Kalmeijer being pressured to reduce number of people on list by SS. Kalmeijer had J. go to Westerbork to take half people of the list. Most awful thing I ever had to do, says J., but I did, because if you can save half or none at all, you have to save half. He took more than half, tried to cheat the system.

3.13: Ottenstein assisted in making those decisions. Inconclusive recollection of how they made those decisions.

3.15: talks about other cases and Kalmeijer being challenged about the consistency of his decisions by a female colleague of J.'s, ms. Von Tanningen-Dolsen*, threatening the safety of an Aryanized client of J.'s.

3.17: talks about Kalmeijer refusing to clarify his decisions. He just did it intuitive.

3.18: other reason why Kalmeijer wanted no contact with the SS was because they would try to influence his decisions.

3.19: Talks about Kaufman case. German Jew who was financial specialist and worked as doorman at Antragsstelle who had been there since beginning if the war.

3.20: talks about practice at financial institutions to not hire Jews.

3.22: Kaufman got out and would work for financial institution and moved to Zürich.

Only ms. Appelman was bought. Some of her secretary colleagues were wined and dined.

3.24: talks about eating in legal and illegal restaurants.
Talks about receiving money to fund their illegal operations.

3.25: talks about having people hide in his parents' house for short periods. Talks about the need to keep different illegal activities separated because people had to know as little as possible about each other.

3.26: talks about needing contacts with other groups without knowing anything about the other's activities. Principle of underground work is to work in small cells.

3.27: Kotting's wife wore a yellow star.

3.28: talks about regular house concerts. Geza Fried* violonist from Concertgebouworchestra who was fired because he was Jewish. They would organize hose concerts for him.

3.29: talks about having discussion near the end of the war about how to achieve "rechtsherstel" or restoration of rights.

3.30: Case of Alkan*, whose store was sold to Germans. Talks about his long quest to get the store back for Alkan and the new owner, a Dutch lady who was German through marriage, locked up.

3.34: Talks about professor Koops, a chemistry man. He headed rounding up of collaborators after the war. Koops did underground work with J.'s sister.

3.36: talks about keeping that woman in jail through legal trickery. By the time she got out she had been there for a long time. J. says it was not nice of him, but he says it was a kind of revenge on behalf of the people she had hurt.

3.37: Talks about doing another legal thing that is "not very nice". He used the new law that was aimed at getting Jews their possession back, like houses that were sold while they were in camps.

3.38: talks about case of a rich lady who was indignant. J. chuckles at the memories of getting in her face about forcing her to give up her house. "I was mean in those day, because I was angry."

3.39: talks about Herodes incident with Kalmeijer. He did not deny the killing. Kalmeijer admitted knowing after the war. "You suspected it."

3.40: J. does not view films about holocaust, they remind him of people he used to know.

3.41: has only been to Westerbork in 2004. Did not go to Germany for years. In South Africa he would get German clients from time to time who marveled at his German. They would tell him they had been to Holland too once they heard he was Dutch – as soldiers. They would salute him at goodbye. Then he told the embassy to send him German clients. “Now I am alright with them [the Germans].”

3.42: still has some anger towards the Germans.
Restoration of rights was about houses, companies.

3.43: talks about facing off with more experienced lawyers in court, but who would know more off the restoration of right law.

3.44: for restoration of rights trials there was a separate court.

3.46: talks about having a niche in the law. Not being a broad specialist helped deciding to migrate. There was also the Berlin stand-off and his in-laws had connections in South Africa. There he had to study all over again to practice. No regrets.

3.47: J. had enough of war.

3.48: goodbye to Holland and especially Kottling was difficult. We were good friends with a deep trust. “We trusted each other as a couple. Which sounds strange.” Left with tears in my eyes.

3.50: talks about case of Amsterdam art dealer Morpurgel*.

3.51: talks about Morpurgel’s tactic to survive Theresienstadt: pose as barber, always needed, and paint miniatures for the camp commander.

3.54: talks about cases that would have been interesting to talk about on TV when he was in Netherlands few years before interview. He could not find a lot of files. Talks about having saved a child from Westerbork but he does not remember doing it. The basis for the escape was a made up story that she was a bastard child. The child is now called Marianne Willemsen*.

3.57: talks about how seeing someone you saved is also very difficult both for the saved and the savior.

3.58: talks about being mistaken for a high-ranking German and getting an acquaintance arrested for collaboration. Prof. Koops had to help out to free her.

3.59: talks about taking the train to Assen and being picked up by SS and what is fellow passengers from the train would think. Did they go over what they had said?

TCR 4

4.01: talks about not wanting to see Kalmeijer in prison, when Kalmeijer learned that even J. had lied to him. Calls Kalmeijer sympathetic toward the Jews, but not enough to try really hard to save them. Kalmeijer was recognized early on by Yad Vashem. He corresponded with them about the lawyers Nijgh* and Kotting, and Kalmeijer. J. said Megman* of Yad Vashem recognized Kalmeijer despite his objections. J. argued that Gemmecker and Aus der Fünfte should then also be recognized but never got a reply on that.

4.04: when recognized himself by Yad Vashem, he was asked by Israeli embassy not to mention Kalmeijer.

Talks about not wanting to put down Yad Vashem too much, because they do so much good work.

When someone says some negative about Jews J. replies: "I trust the Jews more than the non-Jews."

4.05: expresses dislike for apartheid in South Africa, happy that it is over, that there are still race problems.

4.06: mentions that visa waiver program for South Africans for the Netherlands was thrown out when apartheid was over!

4.08: talks about looking up the sons of Dr. Brechtstein after the war.

4.09: talks about study about Jews who were traumatized by getting certificates that they were not Jews.

4.10: talks about Kalmeijer trying to save Jews from sterilization and other measures, all using the German law.

4.11: talks about misleading Kalmeijer by swapping grandparents so that people would have grandparents who were not Jewish. Then Kalmeijer would exempt a person.

4.13: after the war people at the population registry were angry with J. and his associates for tampering with the records (referring to the grandparent swapping and other trickery). J. said: "and what is worse, they're even still alive!"

4.14: says original investigation into Kalmeijer by Dutch was very badly done. Cops who took up statements did terrible jobs.

4.17: says he would not know if he would do it again. You don't decide in advance, it just crosses your path.

4.18: Freedom in his work that he had in the war stopped after migration.

Tape ends but J. was still speaking!