

SCHOONBERGEN, Engele
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In this interview, Engele Schoonbergen remembers life and daily routine as a school child during the time of the German occupation of the Netherlands. He talks about the propaganda against Jews, their persecution and deportation from Amsterdam. In addition, he discusses the reasons and incidents around the February Strike of 1941.

[01:] 00:46 – [01:] 05:50

He states his name as Ed Schoonbergen, born Engele Schoonbergen, on September 8, 1930; says he has always lived in Amsterdam, in the Indische Buurt until age 7, and from then at his current address on the Bos en Lommerweg in the Bos en Lommer area of Amsterdam; says he grew up in a protected family in which his father worked and his mother was a housewife who was always there to care of the children; nonreligious family, one younger sister; says father was nonreligious because during Depression he had to work too hard to believe in anything; he recalls attending a primary school called the Querido School, a mixed school with Roman Catholics and Protestants, no prayer, no attention to faith; characterizes his youth as very happy and safe; recalls being too young to notice the hardships of the Depression; father was bookkeeper at the healthcare insurance fund AZA Ziekenfonds; expresses amazement about there being no discussions of politics; talks about his father who came from a family with four brothers; his mother had 14 siblings; says everything was centered on the family; no discussion of the newspaper; wonders whether his parents had a notion of Germany even existing; recalls family owning a little radio, but no telephone, and that the radio was only used on Sunday for boring religious music and at four there was sports; recalls favorite radio show of his father.

[01:] 05:51 – [01:] 12:49

He recalls that the war was there all of a sudden; recalls waking up in May 1940 from planes flying over very low, the noise; recalls total panic everywhere; says nobody knew what was going to happen next; recalls people talking on the street, everyone expressing their own different opinion; recalls his father telling him not to worry and to keep quiet, and assuring him that the Germans would not harm him; says his father told him Germans were there to occupy the “big buildings”; recalls not much changing, because children were safely taken care of in the family; no discussions of war in school; says nothing changed; recalls people thinking yes the Germans violated Dutch neutrality, but they were a civilized people so it must have had a reason; says as a ten-year-old not much changed, at least he could not see it, but as a grown man he studied the war a lot; says life continued in neighboring families in the same way, just the Queen had left the country; recalls Seyß-Inquart coming into the country and the speed at which the jokes were thought up: zes-en-een-kwart (six and a quarter); recalls his parents saying they had to start watching what they said: did not talk about politics; says only positive comments about Germans were allowed; elaborates on why he should not talk badly about the Germans.

[01:] 12:50 – [01:] 16:00

He recalls the “Februaristaking” (February Strike of 1941); elaborates by saying the strike had to do with the “problems with the Jews”; says he started to think more about the war around 1941; recalls that the first sign was that the Jews were not allowed to serve in the “Luchtbescherming” (the organization that warned people and directed them to bomb shelters); recalls that the promise was that the Jews would be left alone after that; recalls that the arrest of Jews triggered the February Strike, saying that the Germans never expected it; recalls posters stuck on walls by the resistance with calls for to strike and to resist; says the Germans put it down violently after initial bafflement at the sheer audacity of the strike; elaborates on the kind of posters that were stuck to walls, estimates the primitive production process based on their quality.

[01:] 16:01 – [01:] 22:59

He recalls that children would normally play on the street after school; does not recall Jewish children being in his primary school; says life simply continued as usual at school; describes reason for the February Strike: people did not accept antisemitic measures; describes antisemitic press; says communist workers initiated the February Strike; says strike was mostly spontaneous; says the main thing he noticed from strike was Germans in the streets; says Amsterdam mostly came out of war unscathed except for the area near the Fokker airplane plant in Amsterdam-Noord, which was missed in a bombing that hit a residential street instead; describes witnessing Jewish people being rounded up at their houses; remembers signs of “Judenviertel” and “Nur für Juden”; remembers cycling to family members who lived on the Hoogte Kadijk, which was near the Jewish Quarter; recalls round-ups mostly happened in the night; is uncertain whether non-Jews were allowed to enter the Jewish Quarter; recalls the Quarter being fenced off; recalls the yellow star of David; recalls two Jewish families living nearby his parents’ house on Bos en Lommerweg; remembers waiving at a Jewish lady who would often pass by his house; explains what yellow star of David was for; says no children in the neighborhood talked about it; his parents told him not to meddle with yellow star, because it was prescribed by the Germans.

[01:] 23:00 – [01:] 30:59

He says that as a kid you were on the street, at school or at home; recalls a big truck coming in and kids ran to watch; recalls Dutch police being there and ordering a gentleman to get down and then taking him away; recalls adults being there, some sympathizing with the gentleman, others angrily saying it was about time “they” were cleaned out, so they would finally do some work; recalls people telling each other that the Jews were sent east to live and work; says no one ever dared to publicly criticize the round-ups for fear of being heard by the Security Service of the SS, “Sicherheitsdienst,” (SD), or other organizations; says the saying for that was “Feind hört mit” (the enemy listens in), but people also gathered together if an ambulance came to collect a sick person; recalls the lady that his family used to waive hello to in the street being rounded up; recalls how nicely dressed up she was, as was her dog; says her husband was non-Jew, who was allowed to stay by police but who did not want to leave his wife and thus went along; says he later learned the husband insisted

on going with his wife; describes what a “mixed marriage” was; says the husband had once told someone he would never let his wife go alone should the day come; links people’s antisemitic comments at round-ups to persistent negative newspaper articles about Jews; says it was “verbal antisemitism”; says about the aforementioned woman: she did not walk, she strode proudly; interprets her dignity as contempt for what went on; talks about another family being taken away in a truck, where a woman was sick in bed and was taken into the truck while still in bed; recalls explanation that in Eastern Europe there would be doctors to care for her.

[01:] 31:00 – [01:] 37:19

He says the only thing that was said was “Eastern Europe”; talks about gathering point for Jews in Amsterdam: de Hollandse Schouwburg (lit., the Dutch Playhouse); says at night around eleven or midnight, trams would move Jews to the Central Station and on to trains to Westerbork and the death camps; says only Westerbork was known, other than that people just said “East”; recalls people received very positive postcards; says some people doubted the stories because they knew about pogroms; explains what pogroms are; talks about newsreels in cinemas that talked about what happened in other areas; says pogroms in Warsaw were shown on these newsreels or talked about; says people were not critical about antisemitism publicly; recalls riding on a tram to the stamp market, when a Gestapo man took someone’s newspaper and no one dared protest that behavior; says he does not recall the name of the woman who was rounded up while still in bed; says it was hard to get the bed down the stair; says that people in civilian clothes carried the woman and bed down the stairs; says later a truck from the company “Puls” came to clear out the home; says Jews had to hand over their keys; says he later learned people were told that they were allowed to bring only one suitcase; says he did not know those people personally.

[01:] 37:20 – [01:] 45:29

He recalls that near the end of the war his father would listen to “Radio Oranje” which broadcast from England; says he is uncertain about having to turn in radios; recalls changing the dial to a Dutch station after listening to an English station, just in case police, SD or Gestapo would enter his home; says he never witnessed that, but heard about it; says he is certain Jews had to turn in radios, but is unsure whether non-Jews had to do that; says Jews had to queue at Entrepodok near Hoogte Kadijk where they had to turn in their radios; says he could not believe the amount and types of radios he saw there; says his uncle lived at Hoogte Kadijk; says his uncle wanted to trade someone for his radio because his own radio had broken; says no one wanted to do that; says as a result he had never heard someone curse the Jews as badly as his uncle after no one wanted to trade him their radio; says his uncle was so angry because the only people who wanted to trade their radio wanted some extra money (one or two-and-a-half guilders); says from then on, his uncle was an intense antisemite; talks about his uncle’s job; says that after this a family member said about the round-ups that it was about time the Jews were “cleaned out”; expresses dismay because “the Jews were hard working people just like you *[to the interviewer]* and me”; describes the kind of businesses Jews ran; wonders whether it was jealousy that caused the hate; says most Dutch people worked for government or companies; says

what surprised him most was how much people were influenced by media; says people just relied upon what they heard on the radio; says resistance was not because of the Holocaust, but against German occupation.

[01:] 45:30 – [01:] 47:00

He talks about a non-Jewish family living next to a Jewish family; says the Jewish mother gave all her dresses to the mother of the non-Jewish family because they were the same size; says the Jewish mother was the only member of the 30-strong family to return after the war; says the Jewish mother rang the doorbell and the other woman opened the door; says the woman wore her dress and told her “I’ll be damned, are you still alive?!”; expresses dismay at the comment and at how that must have felt for the survivor; says he read about this anecdote.

[01:] 47:01 – [01:] 52:50

He goes back to the woman who was taken away in her bed; says “everyone” helped; says that includes family members; recalls being fixated on the bed because he did not understand why she had to be taken in the bed; assumes that it was the entire family; says he left after they were done loading the woman into the truck; says the people who loaded her onto the truck were in plain clothes, some local cops looked on, but no question of riots; says he looked at the bed from some 150 meters; recalls the woman who strode; says she strode, head up high, looked straight ahead, no distraction; says he did not know the woman in the bed; says onlookers said she was going to a place where Jewish doctors would take care of her; has no recollection of teachers ever saying anything about Jews being taken away; recalls going to secondary school in Keizersgracht, and that after the war nobody talked about what happened during the war; recalls people gave their house keys to someone who coordinated the deportations; says keys were labeled with the house addresses, later people would come by to clear out the houses *[interruption by cat who crashes into table]*.

[01:] 52:51 – [01:] 57:00

He describes that a verb was created for the company “Puls” which cleared out the houses of deported Jews: “pulsen” [lit., to puls]; says trucks usually came after a few days, but there were no burglaries; says the key was handed over to “a person” when the family was taken away; says this was a person whose job it was to supervise the deportations; stresses that it was someone who was involved in the deportation of the family; says this person was Dutch; says he has seen that everything was taken out of a home; says no one asked questions or made remarks as it happened; says in hindsight he wonders what those people who emptied those homes took for themselves; says after a while, other people moved into those homes; says first the houses would be fixed up and then a new family would rent the home; says the time between deportation and a new family moving in was anywhere between one week and a month.