

Mrs. H. Voute tape#1 side A

- HV: Is there something special that you want to know from me or not?
- MK: Everything.
- HV: Oh, that's quite a lot.
- MK: Only everything. But just to go back to what we were saying. You know, some people, because of the Holocaust revisionists...the ones who say the Holocaust never happened—.
- HV: Yah, yah.
- MK: Some people feel a duty to speak because of those other people who were saying nothing happened.
- HV: Yah. So maybe that's a reason too. There's a reason why they start talking now you think. I don't know. For that problem for me never existed that there were people around me who said they don't believe it.
- MK: In the United States you see sometimes ads in the newspaper. These groups who try and say nothing happened.
- HV: They didn't live amidst it during the war so for them it always has been just a story, just a narrative. But for the boys who came over and fought here forgot.
- MK: So tell me your story. I don't know very much about you. Just what Mrs. Dunkelgrun told me.
- HV: I am the seventh child of an ordinary family not Jewish. I had five elder brothers and one sister. Yes, we saw the war coming, of course, and I then I thought that I was studying biology but I thought nobody has any use of a biologist so I entered a course for Red Cross help. It was in '38, I think.
- MK: This is here in Amsterdam?
- HV: No, this is in Utrecht. I was just in the center of the city. We lived near the dome, the very big tower. *[skipped some about the city]* And so that's where I lived. That's when the war broke out. I was very well aware of what was happening for I knew several Communist boys who went to the Spanish war '37, '38 I think. Yes. and then the war started here. So only five days—.
- MK: You were still living at home?
- HV: I was living at home and I was working at the Red Cross. But that was quickly done because there was only five days war and then after that I went back to my study. Although I thought this is the start of the real war. After those five days of those Germans we had to capitulate and it was *terrible*. All the boys who came back from their five days of war with legs shot off and when there came a boy and said we capitulated, they wanted to kill him. It was such a terrible message. So then two of my elder brothers started to have an underground paper.
- MK: They were reading it?
- HV: Nay! They were making it! They started it! And that's what they did for a year and a half but then there were already so many other papers, they stopped with it. But they were the first to do it.
- MK: They were putting it together right in your house, there?
- HV: My eldest brother was living in another house and there they did it. They all had black fingers all over and you always had to assemble the news to make people aware of what was happening. For the Germans they started being all very nice and peaceful with us. And in the mean time they stole everything out of shops and

- all these kinds of things. You didn't know what to do. And you were a boy who had a sender, a contact with England. What do you call that?
- MK: A telegraph.
- HV: Yes. I had a friend and together we had a study near the sea. We were living down there and we could see from the plankton what was in the water if the sea men should go out and fish. It was all nonsense and it was only because we had a Schtrumpt Ausweis[?]. So we could go to the beach and we were allowed to go to the beach but every month we had to renew our Ausweis. So you know what that is?
- MK: Is that a pass?
- HV: Yes, the Germans had to allow us. For nobody was allowed to go to the beach anymore.
- MK: So you told them that you needed to look at the plankton?
- HV: Yes, and it was such a—. The story was so believable that—. So we could exactly every month see if they had a very nice map and there they put where all the anti aircraft guns were on that piece of land where we were. So that I gave to a boy and he could tell them.
- MK: So, let me see if I understand. You and your friends, you would go down to the water. You'd tell the Germans that it's to look at the plankton to tell if the fishing was good or not, but while you are interacting with the Germans you get to see the map on the wall and you get to see the strategy.
- HV: Every month we would have to go to—.
- MK: Renew the pass?
- HV: Yes, and it's called the office where they are sitting—.
- MK: The headquarters?
- HV: We had to go to the Arts Commandant. And then we had to renew the Zunde Ausweis[?]. And the day I was arrested for quite another thing, I had one of these Zunde Ausweis in my pocket. So I thought now that I must eat that for if they find that it's too complicated. They won't believe my story. Of course they won't believe it.
- MK: Oh, for you to explain why you have that?
- HV: Yah. But then it was 1942 and then came the first *razzia* in Amsterdam where the Jewish people were rounded up and in the evening there were some Jewish children left behind. And that was the start of some students to help find hiding places for them. So from then on I only thought that this was some kind of play, you know. Very amateuristic. Spiellage play. And those Jewish children I thought that's real so then I stopped with that.
- MK: So [you] actually saw that this was real. This was actually happening. The parents were being taken away. The children were being abandoned. These families were being torn apart and then you became involved.
- HV: From that moment the Jewish families saw how serious it was, so then the parents came and asked me, "Will you please take the child and find a place for it?" When you came to get the child there was always someone else, families or neighbors and they asked also to take their child also. So from then on it was a full day's work finding places, finding money, finding ration cards, all these kinds of things.

- MK: So you were a young person. You were helping to find homes for these children. Get food cards for them and just provide for their needs. You couldn't take them in yourself but you were looking—.
- HV: If I had no place, I think I started in June '42 and already in the end of August we were a group of students. We had already one hundred-forty children.
- MK: That's a huge number to find homes for.
- HV: Oh, terrible! It was day's work. But if you start you simply had to go on.
- MK: So what would you do? See, I'm thinking that you had to, you couldn't just knock on doors and say, "Help this—."
- HV: Oh, I did! That work on the sea coast. It was in Neuertrecht[?]. It's a little village at the sea. And there I went inland and just when I saw a big farmer I thought, "Oh, he could easily have children there." I would just go in and ask. I think it's kind of a, you feel it: this man I can trust or this man I can't trust. And when they started asking money you never did it.
- MK: Maybe an intuition, a sense?
- HV: For example, I knew the blacksmith very well. He had a very big family and he said, "I can't take one but just try here or try there." And I knew he was reliable, so I could dare to do that. So it was a pretty small town but you knew quite a number of the people so it wasn't like being a big city where you weren't sure who you were dealing with. In Utrecht I did it together with students who all were in Utrecht and each of us tried to do it in another place.
- MK: Another block or another section?
- HV: Yah. If I had a child and they had no place then I could also bring it to my mother and she took it. She never asked what I did but she helped me everywhere.
- MK: Was that a temporary stopover for those children or did she adopt any of them?
- HV: No, she was just my outlet.
- MK: So, she would sort of hold them for a while there at your house until they had a place? Now, all this time you've...this story, there's no fear. It doesn't sound like there was any fear in this story.
- HV: There wasn't. You just did it with children. There was nothing to have fear about, we thought. It was so innocent and you can't let children be taken away.
- MK: Did anybody threaten you? Did you see a poster on the wall that said—?
- HV: Of course, everywhere. They were always threatening all around. They didn't reach us.
- MK: You just ignored it?
- HV: Yes.
- MK: And did your parents ever—?
- HV: My father didn't want to know anything and my mother never asked something but she helped me everywhere. After the war when I came back, my father told me, "If I should have known what you did, I should have locked you up in your room!" [laughs]
- MK: So he wasn't aware of the full extent of what was going on?
- HV: I think that he was afraid and didn't dare himself to take risks. And that was sad for him. For three of my brothers had been arrested. One of them had been in Germany from '40 to '41. That was the one of the two who had made the illegal paper and then he went to do spielnage and then he went to go to England with two other boys and they were arrested by the Germans when they were half way

on the sea. And so he went to Germany for the rest of the war. But we all came out alive so we were very lucky.

MK: So this went on for a while, this rescuing of the children?

HV: Yes, this went on and on, yes, and it became bigger and bigger what you were involved with. Faking papers, falsifying everything—.

MK: How many people were involved at the peak of it?

HV: We were quite a little group. I think we were about ten. Ten students. We knew each other, we trusted each other, absolutely. That was marvelous.

MK: And is that because you were all close friends before? Or did you come together because of this crisis?

HV: No. no. I started doing it with the same friend with which I was working on the beach. That took her with me. After I was arrested she stopped with it.

MK: So it sounds like the crisis brought you all together for a good reason, for a good cause? You trusted each other completely.

HV: They were *marvelous* people! You simply could trust them. They were, all of them had something special. You felt at home and you felt safe. In a way it was a great time. It was *terrible*, but just that was the reason why you reached heights that you would never reach otherwise in ordinary life.

MK: So you had an opportunity to do something very, very important.

HV: Yes, and that's marvelous.

MK: Tell me when did you get arrested? What was that?

HV: Yes. Life was very complicated and we had a marvelous place in the east of Holland and there was a very nice lady and she had a house and there could be ten Jewish children hidden there. As if they were on holiday, they could go out and they were swimming in the little river there and she gave them lessons at home and we thought we must have more like this house. We got an opportunity to have a house in the south of Holland and there we had to look for a couple who could be there and could look after the children and we had thought that we had found a very nice couple. I didn't know them. They came there very quickly and said, "Oh, give us the children." And after we had brought them several children we heard that they were Nazi. And they already had ones being in a group and they had traded them all. And the Jewish people they gave to the Germans. So it was a terrible shock to us when we heard it.

MK: Do you mean that they traded the children over to the Germans for payment?

HV: Yes. And also the grownups, Jewish, who were in that house. And so in other places we heard of that afterwards. What must you do in such a moment? They knew one address from us. They didn't know our real names so then we decided to liquidize them.

HV: How?

MK: Somebody knew somebody who had a little group who does that kind of things. But it was '43 and we didn't know anything. We were just students and it was such a stupid thing. And we were such terrible amateurs about it so that was very badly done. My friend and I came in the morning and we took the children for a walk, we said. And then the boys came with two other boys from the group who said they could shoot them. They only had one pistol and it really was done stupid. So the man was dead and the woman wasn't. And by chance there was another boy there who belonged to this couple. They didn't know that he should

- be there but he had to be shot also. And that also went wrong. He just had a little shot, nothing serious.
- MK: So then the woman went to the Germans?
- HV: Yes, then she could tell the Germans. Yes, they came there very quickly. She was rather severely wounded. But she could tell that there were two girls. That was my friend and I. We came by bicycle and so they went to the station and there they found our bicycles still there. So the German police followed our bicycles to Utrecht. And the next day I came to get my bicycle and there stood the NSB with my bicycle. And I didn't see them. I said, "Oh look, here's my bicycle!" and at the same time I was arrested. So that was the moment that I ate my Ausweis. For I thought if they find my Stount[?] Ausweis[?], that's too complicated.
- MK: Because they would wonder what you were doing—?
- HV: Of course, they would understand that there was no good business for them there.
- MK: So how long were you—? What happened after you were arrested?
- HV: I went to prison. They have very, very long interrogated for they wanted. Now when I was arrested I must very quickly warn the boys that they don't get their bicycles for then they will arrest them also. And my friend also for sure. They first put me in the police station in Utrecht and they went back to the Central Station to be at the other bicycles. And there was a Dutch policeman. It was on my birthday, my 25th birthday, and I said, "Please, I must phone at home for they are waiting for me. It must be a mistake. I have done nothing and I can't understand why this happened." He said, "Oh, no. It's absolutely forbidden. If they know it." I said, "They will never know it. You just go outside and you will see a very old fashioned telephone hanging on the wall." And in the end he did, so it was a good man. So I quickly called them at home. I said, "Don't ask me anything, just warn her and tell her." And then—.
- MK: Did that work?
- HV: It did work. The boys didn't go to get their bicycles but the girl got the message and didn't understand it. She thought that she had to go very quickly to a special address so first she got her bicycle and then she was arrested also. And afterwards I was *so* glad the whole time afterwards. If I had been alone I don't think I should have went through, but with her it was always fantastic.
- MK: Is this the same friend who you knew from looking at the plankton?
- HV: No. It was another friend.
- MK: So you were very young. You had just turned 25.
- HV: I was arrested at 25. Not so young.
- MK: Then were you imprisoned for a long time? Were you able to get out?
- HV: No. No. I went in prison and it was for six months and then went to a concentration camp in Holland and then to a concentration camp in Germany.
- MK: How many years total?
- HV: Two years. But you know, going into prison you think that's terrible but it's life also. It's quite another life you're entering in and it was very exciting. When I came into prison I heard people on top of me. [phone rings.. tape stopped] The cell on top of me. I heard him walking. The prison was a very big prison. It was a seminary. A Catholic seminary that they made a prison out of. So that was marvelous. I had a little cell and the window was all with bricks; only a very small place was open there. But I had a sink. I had a stream of water. Because

that's where the cells were, the boys who were in the seminary. And that was a central heating but it was June so I didn't need the central heating. But you could stand on the central heating and there was a tube for the central heating going there and when your mouth was at the point where the tube went through the ceiling, that was the place you could speak with who was above. At first I scraped the tube and I started talking and then he answered and that boy, it was a Dutch boy, he came from England, he was dropped here. Have you ever heard of EnglandSpiel? That was a double Spielnage. The Germans caught the boy with a sender. The boys who were in England made ready to be dropped here and give leading to the resistance movement.

MK: They sent people from England to help with the resistance movement?

HV: Yes. And that was people who first escaped from Holland to England and that was very, very exciting ways already. And there they were made ready to be dropped here. But when they were dropped here it was a double play. The Germans knew exactly they came. Everybody who used the telegraph, in England they believed what came through it and they answered. They told them tomorrow, always with full moon, that they knew boys who were dropped here, so tomorrow at so and so they will be dropped there and there. And when they were dropped there, there was a committee of the German police. And then they were directly brought to that prison where I was also brought to so I could talk to him. I had a marvelous way of getting the messages out of the prison. I'll show you. I asked that same boy that I worked with to tell England what was happening here but other people also knew it already and had taken that message to England but they never reacted on it. So it was a double play. What it exactly was is not known but—.

MK: So this is called espionage, the spy and counterspy.

HV: For the first time I talked with him and he said, "Oh, you must help me for my neighbor." Also one who was dropped here and arrested. He wanted to escape together with somebody who was three cells farther. Heide[?] was the name of the prison. "They don't know what are the surroundings of the prison. So try to give me a map of how it is situated." So I asked them. There were prisoners who were allowed to go through the corridors and give us our meals and put away the tub where you did your—. [chuckles] So I first had to make a hole up there and the styles of the bed. They were iron styles and if you broke them like that, it was very harsh where it was broken. And with that I have very long made a real hole and I got a *marvelous* map with the silhouettes of the church and the little villages all around. So that came and the two boys escaped.

MK: Great!

HV: Yes, great but the Germans were terrible. The moment they escaped the Germans on the telegraph told England that the Germans let free two and they will try to come to England and they are spies. So when they at last a long, long way, through to France, Switzerland, again France, Spain and then to England, they were directly put into prison. They didn't believe them. They didn't believe their story.

MK: And what happened to them? Did they finally believe them?

HV: At the end of the war. But they went on and in the end of November there were again three who had escaped and then the Germans searched through all the cells

below. They had already thought that I had contact with them and then they found my hose. And my friend in the meantime also made contact with the boy who was on top of her. And then for punishment they send us to [Furcht?]. It was *so* exciting that you had not the idea of being in a prison. You were just too busy to think about it. And the boy that was above me, he was dropped to look after the anti-aircraft guns. I said, "Now look. I have a Straunt Ausweis[?]" only we were both in prison so we couldn't do anything. But he told me all the last songs that were sung in England and the last films they saw.

MK: It really boosted your morale?

HV: Oh, yes! And he loved singing and I also did that, so we always sang a lot.

MK: It sounds like you had a very strong spirit in prison.

HV: I was just living, yes.

MK: This was exciting to be able to continue to fight against the Germans while inside the prison and sabotage what they were trying to do. And then as punishment for that, they sent you to the concentration camp, and then you got out of the concentration camp when the war ended?

HV: Yes. From the concentration camp in Holland it was Furcht. From there, when the Allies came too close, we were all taken to Germany. So then I went to Ravensbrück and from there I was liberated by the Swedish Red Cross Vorkabentacles[?].

MK: The Red Cross returned to help you with their sisters.

HV: [Laughs] Yes, indeed.

MK: Now once you were liberated, what was that like?

HV: Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable. And when I came to Sweden the Dutch government had built marvelous little houses where we all should go to. But then it turned out that I had tuberculosis so I couldn't come with them. I again went with other nationalities in a school made as a hospital. So then I lost all my Dutch friends. They all went away. When I really had to think about something I thought myself back in the concentration camp. That was much more real for me than liberty. It took a long time before I could believe that life should go on.

MK: Somehow the concentration camp had become your whole world and it was hard to get used to the idea of normal life.

HV: In that time I had written several stories about what happened in the camp. I had a pencil and a book and I wrote down *very* small. I still thought every piece of paper in the camp was very precious. In the beginning you couldn't believe there could be an abundance of something.

MK: Plus also your health was not good. So did you have to be in this hospital or were you in a dwelling and someone was helping?

HV: I was in a school and there were all people with tuberculosis. There were so many coming out of the camps with tuberculosis. And there were still a lot of girls who died there who were too ill.

MK: So that must have been hard to be separated from all your friends?

HV: Yes. In the beginning it was hard but I thought I would start learning Swedish. I thought with tuberculosis it would take a long time. There were also people from outside who came to visit you who brought you cakes and all these kind of things and dresses. I got my first fountain pen and all these kind of things. They helped

- me with a dictionary so I started. There were papers. The first book I read it was [*Nils Halbersom?*]. Have you ever heard of it?
- MK: What would it be translated as?
- HV: *Wonderful Journey All Through the Country*. It's Selma Lagerlof. You ever heard of Selma Lagerlof? [describes book for a few minutes] In August the Dutch government made a special hospital for those Dutch people who were ill. So then we all came from the several places from Sweden. They all came to Stockholm.
- MK: So they came and you transferred back to Holland?
- HV: Yes. Only you were not allowed to go back to Holland when you were ill. You were in Sweden. It was there so good and Holland had a short food supply. So I had to stay there.
- MK: You learned Swedish and it sounds like you turned it into a positive experience.
- HV: Yes, why not?
- MK: Here's an opportunity so I'll learn Swedish. [talk about folk tales and Swedish, a gnome—.] So you recovered in Sweden but it was hard for you to get used to the idea that the war was over and you were out of the camp.
- HV: I was just in my bed knitting the whole day for all my little nephews and nieces which were born in the meantime.
- MK: So how did you make that adjustment then to come to accept and move into a new stage of your life?
- HV: I was still there. I was longing for living so it wasn't so difficult.
- MK: Gradually, gradually you just moved on to the next phase. Did you think of the war much? Did you think about the concentration camp much?
- HV: No. After I wrote down several stories and I still have them. I should have written down much more but then I started looking around and then I stopped being able to write about it.
- MK: You just wanted to be in the present and start to rebuild your life.
- HV: But then I came back to Holland and I thought that I would continue my study. I had not yet finished it. But I was not able to. I was not able to read the books and all these kind of things. The professor was very nice and said, "Oh, we'll help you. You are already so far." Then I met a boy who was in the Japanese concentration camps and he wanted to go back to the Dutch East Indies. I liked him so I thought that was very exciting going to the Dutch East Indies. That's all right. So we married and we went there and that was again very exciting. For that was the situation in the Dutch East Indies that the Indonesians wanted to be free, and we said, "Oh, no. You are not ready to be free," and they wanted to be, so then came the war there. A political war.
- MK: How old were you when you got married?
- HV: 28.
- MK: You went with this man to the Dutch East Indies. Now you skipped over something very quickly. Why couldn't you be in school? You said you couldn't read books anymore. What was that?
- HV: I think it didn't interest me so much. It was too abstract. It was too small. It wasn't small, of course, for biology is a *marvelous* study, but then—.
- MK: Maybe you were used to so much action and doing things in the world, that to just read books all day and think about these things was too—.

- HV: I couldn't enter into the magic of biology. At that moment nothing in me had something to do with it.
- MK: In English we would say you couldn't connect with it.
- HV: But in 1940 I did my first exam. With that I was allowed to give lessons in school.
- MK: In science?
- Yah. That's what afterwards, when after 26 years we were divorced—I had four children and they were all grown up—I started giving lessons in school. It was quite something new for me. In the beginning it was as if I had made some theater entering school.
- MK: Did you feel drawn to other causes once the war was over? During the war you were fighting for justice. The Germans were doing bad things. They were taking away people's freedom, taking away their lives, and you were on the side fighting against this. Sabotaging their plans. Then you came back to normal life. There was no war. Do you think in the Dutch East Indies that you were drawn to that because that was another case of justice?
- HV: Yes, and I agreed with the Indonesia people although a lot of Dutchmen didn't. They thought they're not ready for that and it's our country and we made it so big. So that was not so easy.
- MK: So you were on the side of the Indonesian people and you felt that it wasn't—.
- HV: Of course! I knew by myself what it was to be possessed by somebody else and that's what they had for ages. I didn't—no. I didn't do anything against it. I only talked with people about it. For I got very quickly four children there!
- MK: So you were busy being a mother.
- HV: My three eldest children were born being in the Dutch East Indies and my youngest girl was born in Indonesia. That was just the time between being in our possession and being free. Then I got back my tuberculosis so we came back to Holland and again I went to bed for one year.
- MK: So being a mother, did you find that rather mundane or another kind of, not excitement but—?
- HV: Oh no, I thought it was *marvelous*. It was my whole life. My husband also. Afterwards, when I think about it, my husband was much more wounded by his Japanese camps than I was with my German.

Tape 1, side B

- HV: I wouldn't need to talk about it but for him it was an obsession. You had never to say one single word about it. He absolutely did not want to hear about it and he didn't want to speak about it. And when the children grew up I thought it was very difficult and I wanted to speak about it. And that's why in the end it went wrong. He got another woman who was absolutely not interested. So she had no—. She needn't talk about it. I think he was right. It was right that we separated.
- MK: He had a need to have the subject never be brought up and it was cutting off a whole part of your life.

- HV: I simply had to talk about it and I had to talk about it with the children. They got history at school. It was such an important thing that had happened. In the end I think that he was absolutely right to choose another woman.
- MK: Because you couldn't see cutting all that out and he couldn't deal with it.
- HV: And I had so much I wanted to talk about and be busy with and he was just closing in more and more. I think now I should much better understand him and perhaps I should have handled it in another way but I was not wise enough then.
- MK: That's what living is for. I have a friend who is a retired minister and one of his favorite sayings is that you live life forward and you understand it backward.
- HV: Yes, and that's true.
- MK: I assume you went or raising your children, being a mother, and then later you became a school teacher.
- HV: Yes, when we divorced I didn't want to have money from him or nothing. So I thought that is why I have my studies and so that's when I started to give school lessons. And that was marvelous. I liked that very much. I made my own lessons and I could talk with these children about very interesting and important things.
- MK: What age were these children:?
- HV: They were 14-18. Middle class.
- MK: They were ready to handle difficult concepts?
- HV: Yes.
- MK: And how long did you do this?
- HV: I did it eight years. And then I started being rather tired and then there were a lot of people around me that said you can get money out of being imprisoned and having had something. Kind of a pension. I don't think it's the government. They call it here the Schtikten [?] from the Foundation 1940-1945. In the beginning I didn't think about it. I thought it was terrible. I won't have that but then I thought, Yes, I can't go on giving lessons. I'm getting too tired about it. It was very easy for me to get. I thought that this was a terrible thing that I would have to go through but before I knew it, it was all settled. And that's why I live here in such a beautiful house!
- MK: The service that you did for your country was great. I'm glad that they're returning the favor. [pause] So it seems like you have a personality that isn't afraid of taking risks.
- HV: Oh, I like it. I like starting something that is a little bit dangerous.
- MK: And putting yourself on the line. I guess what surprises me the most is that when I hear the stories of how fearsome the Germans were with—. For instance in Poland, there was one woman who, she was hiding Jewish people and she went out to the market to do her shopping and they had people hanging in the market. People were hung in the square of the market and they had a billboard that said, "These people hid Jews." This is their punishment. So this woman was shaking because she knew that she might be next. It seems like many people had so much terror.
- HV: I think in Poland they were much more severe, the Germans.
- MK: There was already a lot of anti-Semitism in Poland.
- HV: So if you were really dared to help Jewish people that was very brave. Much braver than we here in Holland.

- MK: But still I heard they had posters on the poles and in all the newspapers publishing it and telling you what could happen to you.
- HV: Yes, but they were the Germans telling you and you never believe it and if you believed it, it was Germans who were telling you so.
- MK: What about when people you know would get picked up?
- HV: Oh, my brothers—I thought it was terrible but it simply happened.
- MK: It didn't daunt you?
- HV: No, and if I was arrested then you would know very well that you were a girl because the main thing they wanted from us was the names of the boys who were there. And if they got the boys they would have shot them but they didn't shoot us.
- MK: What about—. I'm pressing this because I'm interested in that you are not expressing that you had much fear about this. What about—weren't you concerned about torture or rape? All these terrible things. That was not something that would cross your mind?
- HV: Oh, yes. It did. One night there was a German who was walking along the corridor outside the cells.
- MK: A German guard?
- HV: Yes, a guard. And there were the English airplanes to Germany to bomb it. They always came with hosts of airplanes. And he was—. This man was scared to death. Perhaps his wife and children were living there, where they threw the bombs. And then he entered my cell and put on the light and there was no darkening so the man who was standing downstairs started shooting. He wanted to rape me and I shouted, "Hier ist kein Hurenkott!" I'm not a girl who you can come to in the night. And he went away because they were shooting outside so he put out the light and went away and next morning I was sitting there alone and all around me there were men. We were the only two women in there and my friend was sitting there somewhere else. And the next morning—.
- MK: Were these German men?
- HV: No, these were Dutch political prisoners and we were the only girls. And next morning they told the commandant of the prisoner what had happened that night and he came in and he said, "What happened here?" and I said, "Nothing." I didn't want to tell him and then we were put in a corridor where there were more people and we were not so alone.
- MK: It sounds as if there was some sense of order. Like some of the stories about the Germans make them sound like they were wild dogs. They would just go in and get drunk, and rape, and kill, and destroy but it sounds like where you were there was order.
- HV: But you know during interrogation you were always spanked in the face. At first they took off my spectacles and then they started. It was much better than when they were nice to you because it is much more difficult to shut your mouth when they are doing nice things and saying nice things. I prefer to be slapped in the face much more.
- MK: Sometimes they would give the nice treatment and be very nice so you would want to talk. Other times they would slap you and try to force you to talk.
- HV: For hours, for hours it went on and then they just went behind their typewriter and then they would type that they would arrest my parents. I said, "Now if you think

- they know more than I know, then you must do that." Then I thought, "Oh, no! Let them not do that." But they never did. It was just to make you afraid. To make you talk.
- MK: So what was going on in your mind?
- HV: Just every moment was the moment you lived at that moment. Not thinking too much. A lot of singing. I did a lot of singing. Together with my friend. My friend was four or five cells away from me. When I'm nervous I like to sing so the first day I started to sing and then she heard me sing and she started singing to me. And that was the way we communicated with each other
- MK: And what would you sing?
- HV: Everything you could think of. Folk songs—. When you went in summer camps they were always singing and the whole time during the war we had made songs that we sang together on the tunes that were there. Jacques Brel or German or English or Dutch songs. We made words in these songs and told the story of what happened every day. It was a kind of diary all through the camp time.
- MK: This was just somebody's idea to do this or was this just going on all over the place?
- HV: Oh, no. We did it. She was also a student and I also. Being a student you always made songs. There were always special events when you had to make songs together. Theater or things like that. And still now the women we were with know these songs and sing them. You ever heard of that camp, the Japanese camp in Sumatra where the women had songs, only with their voices not with words.
- MK: No, I haven't heard of that. I've heard of songs from the war where they took old melodies and put new words.
- HV: Yah. That's what we did.
[Both sing and talk about the song "Peat Bog Soldiers" which Mark had heard on a recording of Pete Seeger]
It's originally a German song. That was in one of the first German camps there was a man who made it. I think he was named Lumnow or something like that. The German words are: [sings verse of "The Peatbog Soldiers" in German] When I came in Ravensbrück they sang it in French. That Ravensbrück, that was fantastic. There were—. When we came there it was overfull. I think there was about forty to fifty thousand women. From all nationalities. When we came in there, there was a big street, a lagerstrasse, and in the evening you had just one hour that you could just walk there. And you heard *all* tongues around you: Russian, Norwegian, Polish, Danish, Hungarian, Romanian. At first you just heard voices, and then slowly you started hearing if it was a Hungarian or Romanian, and then you got in contact with several of these girls, and the Russians sang so beautiful.
- MK: So it was like a world city.
- HV: Yes, it was and I always wanted to go around the world and see other people and there I thought, "I needn't here. I have them all."
- MK: But there was the language barrier?
- HV: Oh, but I learned French in the camp. German I could speak so that was not difficult.
- MK: So you have Dutch, Swedish, French, German, English. Five languages! So I never heard anyone speak about the music in the camps.

- HV: It was marvelous and my friend sang a lot and she sang very well and I always very easy can make the second voice. She could sing high and I could always sing very low. So the moment she starts I quickly made the second voice and that's the way we sang.
- MK: Everybody in large groups would sing together? Would it be like the verse of a song and then everybody would sing on a chorus?
- HV: Oh no. It was always a big mass of people being unhappy. There were lots of them who didn't want to sing. They liked us to sing for them but they didn't *come* with us.
- MK: It seemed like you had more life in you. More good spirit.
- HV: Yes, but it was easy for us. We were students; we had no children or husbands. I thought that it was a pity for my parents. There were a lot of Communist women, and their husbands were shot. There were a lot of them that already had such sad things behind them. So we were just innocent girls. It was easy for us to live through it.
- MK: So you were then in the position where you could cheer up other people. You were not so—. Your life hadn't been shattered in that way so your spirits were better. You sang and other people would listen. It would help to boost the morale and keep you cheered up. Did anyone have anything to play, instruments?
- HV: Oh no. Nothing. It was like hell. When we came there, when we came to Ravensbrück, it was unbelievable. It really was like hell. They were all skeletons clinging to you because perhaps you had something to eat for them. It was really *unbelievable* when you came in. But we came there because the Allies were so near us so we thought two weeks and it was over. But that is not what happened. It was the beginning of September and only at the end of April it ended. So there were lots of them who died there.
- MK: So it was eight months?
- HV: Yes.
- MK: So I get this dual image that on one hand you are like a chirping bird and the other—.
- HV: We came in Ravensbrück and it was too full so we couldn't go in and there was a little wall outside with black earth, coal it seemed like. And there we had to stay two days and two nights and it was raining so everyone was black and dirty and had nothing to eat. And then there came a group of Greek girls who had entered the partizaner who fought in Albania together with the English army and they were arrested and they came a long way by train to Ravensbrück. But because they had fought together with the English and Americans they got a kind of Red Cross parcels with cigarettes and with all kinds of things. And they told stories and they talked a little bit French and we did. So we had lovely stories there and when we now afterward talk with other women who have been there they have such absolutely other stories than what we had. They only know about rain and dirtiness and we only know about exciting stories which we heard there. I still have one package of those cigarettes. I'll show you. [shows cigarettes to Mark] Oh, I have lots of things. For my last three weeks in Furcht, I had played Suppletage and that's why they put me in the bunker. The bunker is the prison of the concentration camp. There I sat together with the boys who were shot and

- they gave me their last farewell letters. I got them through, those letters, in the end.
- MK: These were boys who were on their way to being executed?
- HV: Yes, they were executed. I saw them standing there and I heard the fusilage. These are the scratches that we threw out of the train when we went from Furcht to Ravensbrück. [Shows Mark little bits of paper with messages for loved ones scrawled on them by the executed soldiers.]
- MK: This is a political message here.
- HV: Yes. Nice, isn't it? [pause] When I was in Ravensbrück I was very ill. I had an inflammation of the ear and my friend always managed to get a little scratch of paper to me. They're so marvelous if you could read them. I think that I once translated them in English. For I wanted to know from somebody why do they—. Why they are so emotional for me. If I read them now it always is that I am impressed by it. It's just we called each other Pooh and Piglet. That's because a prisoner in prison in Hiera[?]. I knew him. He was a student from Delft and I got a little letter from him to welcome Pooh and he said that he himself was Christopher Robin. And then quickly I named my friend Piglet and we've always been Pooh and Piglet, and you know, that's marvelous! For being Pooh and Piglet is something abstract. You can say "Pooh feels unhappy." You don't have to say, "I feel unhappy." That's what we played.
- MK: Seems like you had all kinds of ways of getting through. You had the singing, the little letters—.
- HV: It was this what I made to get the little farewell letters from the boys. [Shows Mark various objects and photographs.] This was my friend. There were Polish girls skilled at making toothbrushes. My number was 61 and a 31. That was my prison number.
- MK: This was a kind of gift?
- HV: She let the Polish woman make that and she gave her bread for it. You had to pay for a thing like that. So that was my Santa Klaus present she gave to me. It was really wonderful. We had a very, very special time. You can never compare it with usual life. It was on the level that you will never reach again.
- MK: Why was that on such a special level?
- HV: Because I never believed that I was living on the earth. You were on another planet. It was unbelievable that you stood for hours during the appel and then came a gull, a bird flying over. Unbelievable, where did he come from, and where did he go to? You couldn't compare it with nothing you'd ever seen before.
- MK: Do you mean comparing it with the freedom the bird had?
- HV: You had an impression that you were no longer on the earth.
- MK: I see. It was like when a gull would come it was something from the outside world.
- HV: After I was free, after the war was over, it was as if I came from another world, from another planet. It was impossible for me to believe that it was somewhere on this earth. And once I had to write to Ravensbrück, to the people who were there, for I knew in their archives there was something that I wanted to have. I can't write to Ravensbrück. That's impossible. That's not a place you can write to. I thought how should I start a letter there? In the end I started with my number. I couldn't write "Dear I don't know who." I got a very polite letter back. [chuckles]

- MK: You mean that you started the letter with your number?
- HV: Yes. You were not somebody. You were only a number there.
- MK: So you were a number and you were thrown together with all these other numbers.
- HV: And all the older women in December in Ravensbrück—there started to be a gas chamber also—and all the old ones who were not able to work any longer, they all went there. That was terrible! Then on Sunday night the other ones waited for us for a new song or something like that and we thought we can't do it and then we thought but we simply have to. Then you went simply on.
- MK: You mean that you have to sing. Keep thinking positive. Many people came out of the concentration camps as you said your husband was: very scarred, very wounded. Lost their faith in humanity. Have you heard of the famous scientist and writer, Primo Levi?
- HV: Oh, yes.
- MK: He was never the same after the camps. He felt such shame.
- HV: And in the end he committed suicide. Although he was able to tell people about it and still in the end he didn't succeed and took his life.
- MK: So I'm interested in trying to understand how this didn't turn you into a sad, bitter person who didn't want to see anybody or talk to anybody. Didn't trust anybody. This didn't affect you in that way.
- HV: I think that I had a marvelous youth. I had a strong mother and a very special father. And five brothers and a sister. We really had a marvelous house and I think that is important.
- MK: You had a very strong happy family. It was very positive. You got a good start in life.
- HV: And so with my friend. It was the same with her.
- MK: It sounds like a very happy childhood. You think that might have helped. That sustained you.
- HV: If you want to be a very great writer you must have a very unhappy youth, so I'll never be a great writer!
- MK: Maybe unhappy teenage years would be sufficient. It's interesting because that's what Mother Teresa said. People have asked her how she can spend her time picking these dying people up off of the street. "Doesn't this depress you? Make you sad everyday that you're doing this work?" She says "No." To her, this is her spiritual path. But she also says that she had a very happy childhood. She had a wonderful family. For her being a nun was something very happy. She doesn't think of it as something depressing or sad. That's something we haven't talked about. You haven't indicated any religious beliefs or any faith. What were you?
- HV: I was Protestant. [Ribelstront?] It's a very free thinking belief and my friend was nothing. Atheist. Absolutely nothing and in prison I got to have a Bible and I'm very well at home in the Bible. My mother always read from the Bible to us. The wonderful stories and then I made a little scrap of paper and I wrote something for her. There were several cells between us. When I sent a letter to her there were always three songs we sang. All Santa Klaus songs. "The boat of Santa Klaus is coming." That was the moment I gave it to my neighbor and then he had to give it to his neighbor and then he had to give it to my friend. And in the meantime that happens she sang, "My heart is awaiting it" and then she got it and then she sang, "Oh, just come what I got in my shoe this morning." So, when I gave a letter to

- her we knew exactly how long it took until she got it. On that letter I put some nice things out of the Bible and then she answered it with, "Of course, that's nice, but everybody can see and you needn't get that out of the Bible." But now I have no faith any longer. Not a sad thing but simply I think it's all Bacholov[?]. Are you really a Jew?
- MK: Do you mean practicing? No. My parents, no. My grandparents, yes.
- HV: It's marvelous to have a real faith. For example the Roman Catholic Church. They all pray to saints and light candles and such. How do you call that?
- MK: Ritual and dogmatic? Ceremony?
- HV: Superstition.
- MK: To you it's all superstition?
- HV: To me it's absolutely superstition. Marvelous if you believe in it, but I cannot believe in it any longer. Never mind though because if it's beautiful, it is beautiful.
- MK: You never were thinking of some higher power or something beyond yourself or some force of some sort?
- HV: Oh I could and sometimes I would pray very deeply because it helps me but I know it's pure superstition. But never mind.
- MK: It helps you, but part of your mind also thinks that this is a superstition.
- HV: Yet, in a way it helps.
- MK: Were there other factors we could think of besides coming from such a happy family and getting such a good start in life that might of helped you make it through in such a positive way?
- HV: I think that I always felt very content that I had done something. I was not arrested for nothing. For in the camp we were together with a lot of Jewish people. Although we had exactly the same life and the same food and the same threat, for them it was much more terrible. They had done nothing. They were simply destroyed because they were Jews. That's terrible!!
- MK: What did you know about Jews before the time that you started to save them?
- HV: I didn't know much. I know that my great grandmother was Jewish, so my mother told about her. I thought it must be really fantastic to be something like that but I didn't know anything about it. In the camp, I like the melody of their songs. It was very special. But after the war, long after the war when I started thinking about what had happened and what—. For all these things my mother kept it and I never looked in it.
- MK: You just kept it closed.
- HV: Yes. I just kept it closed and my husband didn't want to look at it. It would be nice if I could find the English translation of those stories she wrote to me when I was nearly dead but her letters were so fantastic. How she wrote to me: "It's my mother's birthday today and I've been singing her most beloved songs the whole day. Come with me to the woods and we'll kick through the leaves so it will be all gone and you must go first for all the spiders. With my long heels I'll get strick in the _." Always letters like that you know. So marvelous!
- MK: And when did you receive these letters?
- HV: When I was in the hospital in the camps.
- MK: In the hospital recuperating from the TB?

- HV: No. It was in the concentration camp. I was terribly ill there and then she managed to get little—. These little scraps were letters I got there.
- MK: They were somehow smuggled in?
- HV: Yes. There was a Dutch nurse and she managed to get them in. But to come back on the Jewish interest for me, I am now very much engaged with Jewish history for 3 weeks ago there was opened an exhibition in the Dutch department of [Loch Hamayah Ghetto Ot?] : The Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel. You ever heard of it?
- MK: Not that particular house.
- HV: They were all the people that were together in the ghettos. All those who survived came in one kibbutz together in Israel. I'll give you some information about it. For years we've worked on this exhibition to show them how the life of the Jews in Holland went.
- MK: Boy, what a project!
- HV: Marvelous to collect everything for them. Have you ever been in Israel?
- MK: No, I haven't.
- HV: Here is Haifa, Akko, and here is [Loch Hamayah Ghetto Ot?]. And I did that together with my friend and I met her during the war. She remembered me and I didn't remember her. In 8040 she called me and she said for years and years I'm looking after you and now I'm here and I got your address so I phone you. And I said, "I think you have a nice bright voice but I have not the slightest idea who you are." And then she came here and she came into this room and she said, "Oh, exactly the same eyes. Don't you remember that you were standing in the Umstalsischalder[?] and I gave you those two little, a very little boy and a girl. I said, "I've been standing so many times in the Umstalsischalder and they gave me so many children that I don't have absolutely the slightest idea." But then we were talking and talking and then slowly, slowly there came things up that I knew I had done several things together with her. Then she told me what she was doing. Making this exhibition of the Dutch Jews. And then I started doing it together with her and it was a marvelous work but very much to do.

(Mark talks about not tiring her out and wanting to visit again)

I have lots of friends in Israel now and one of them, she is a professor at the University of Haifa and she gave lectures on the Holocaust. She asked me (she had a very nice group of students) if I wanted to talk with them and there was also a Palestine boy in her class and then in the end he asked me if —.(tape #1 ends)

Hetty Voute **Tape #2 (side A)**

It was not because they were Jews. At that moment it was the Jews who needed the help. If they had been Palestinians? or I don't know what, if they had been treated like that, I think I would have helped them.

So it was that person-to-person kind of thing?

Yes.

So you just cared about the people being mistreated. It wasn't any special love of the Jewish people or special sympathy for the Jewish people. It was just because you cared about people. You saw that here were these people and terrible things were happening to them.

Inhuman way of being treated. You can't let that happen around you. That's impossible and the Jews were so much integrated in our society that you weren't even aware of who was a Jew and who wasn't.

Yes. And suddenly they were being singled out.

In our school and in university we did all together and all at once, people were no longer there and then you said yes, he was a Jew. It was a—.

It must have felt very strange.

Unbelievable. Very strange. And you felt yourself so guilty about it because you couldn't do anything against it.

There's someone who lives in the United States who said that her family helped to rescue Jewish people. She said that she was a girl in school, maybe in high school, and the Germans came and showed that movie comparing the Jewish people to rats. You've probably seen or heard of that movie.

No, but I know the story of *Maus*, [chuckles] but that was quite something else.

That was different. This was a propaganda film where they show pictures of Jewish people on the street.

Which country did she come from?

Here, in the Netherlands. Then they would show pictures of rats picking up a grain bag, a bag full of wheat, and then underneath are rats going into holes, and they would say the Jews are like rats, and this kind of thing.

I never saw a picture like that, but I never saw a picture from the Germans.

That was something that they showed in her school. But she said that what she remembers is that everybody laughed at it. The Dutch children, they laughed. She said that one of her friends came up to her and said, "That was the stupidest movie I've ever seen, but I can't help but feel a little bit different towards the Jewish people even though I don't want to, but it did something to me, just seeing that movie. Before I never thought of myself as different from them. They were just my playmates."

But he was a Jew who said that?

No, a non-Jew. He just was saying that the movie affected them. It was such a powerful propaganda film, that even though they didn't want to be affected, it swayed them somehow, so now they, — like us and them.

Yes, that was the meanest thing that happened, that the Germans set them apart. They made a difference between them —. And then they always stressed? that they felt safe here, they thought that it would never happen to Holland. All those German Jews who came here, they thought that it would never happen. And then it happened and we didn't do anything, we couldn't do anything against it. That is terrible—for what we did—this nothing. In the end, our group saved about 400 children, I think. But that's nothing in comparison by what is not saved.

You did what you could. You had this group and you were saving these children. You couldn't do everything, but you did as much—.

But you know, what we did was not saving children, it was work! It was hard work. We were not aware of saving children. It was what you had to do at that moment. From early in the morning till late, you were busy.

But you knew that you were finding homes for these children.

Yes, yes. You simply had to, and you couldn't stop with it.

But what about the people, sad to say, that weren't doing that? They were going about their life. They were, you know, baker baking bread, somebody else being a carpenter.

Yes, I was always begging for money. And that's what I've done now the last years also for this museum. It's my whole life. [chuckles] I'm doomed begging money so that's what I did then also. And then there were very nice students here in Amsterdam I went to. And then that girl: there was a boy and a girl that went together, and she said, "You must look more astral to this, you see, just try to go into the stars and look from there what is happening here."

I don't quite understand that expression.

Don't put yourself so near to what is happening now.

Oh, I see: distant.

Just try to get aside and from a distance. Don't be moved by it.
I see. Don't get so involved.

People told you that?

Terrible!

So what was with those people that they would think that? For you it was the most natural thing. Children need help. You're working all day trying to do something. I know that you can't answer for them, but—.

Now my sister, she had three young children and my brother-in-law, I loved him very much, he said I don't dare to. I said no, you're right. If you don't dare to, please don't. If you don't dare do it you will do it in a wrong way, so better don't do it. But I could always bring a child there for one day if I needed it sheltered

Well, as we talked about before, your high-risk personality, that helped that you had that nature. Some people, they would be timid about anything, it wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that they didn't want to help. But maybe just the nature of their personality would be a conservative, timid kind of personality type.

Yes, and those are not the right people to do it. You must be kind of a daredevil to do it, I think. Something like that.

So I guess that there were these other types, more conservative types, who were doing these little, quiet sabotage things.

Oh, sure.

Maybe designing, you know—.

Oh, yes. And that was very important also. We had a very nice Austrian Jewish girl who was hidden by us. She came from Berlin from the [? ?] school and she did marvelous work in falsifying the—.

Falsifying the documents?

Yes.

I guess there were a lot of opportunities, but still it is very, very sad when you think that only 11% of the Jews survived in the Netherlands. It's wonderful that there were people like yourself who were doing as much as you could, but one asks from the perspective of history, why wasn't there more done?

In a way, it was also the Jews themselves who believed in it that it would not happen. They knew all those Jews coming from Germany and staying here instead of flying and say to all the other ones, "Go away. It's wrong what's coming over us." And it often happens in a family when I got the two children they had, I told them I can look for an address for you also, a hiding place. And then they said, "Oh, we're young. It's just a work-camp. We can overcome."

So, I've gotten the impression that there was a lot of underestimating.

Oh, a lot of it! And that's also natural. They lived in a safe country, a neutral country. We hadn't had a war for ages—I don't know for how long. And nobody wants to believe the worst.

Nobody wants to believe the worst.

Yes, it's true.

In World War I, there was food shortage, wasn't there?

Yes.

But there wasn't actual—.

No, there was nothing. Food shortage, yes. We had tinned milk, or something like that. There was no real hunger.

Well, one thing that someone else said was that certain people had an attitude that if you're in trouble, it must be your fault because they'd been taught by their parents that if you grow up and you do the right things, then you'll be okay in life. There must be something that the Jews did, or else, you know, they wouldn't have this trouble.

That's a silly, silly way of thinking, I think. But that's what lots of people think and that's the curse for the Jews. They always say it's their own fault. They must have done something.

And naturally, that can be taken back to the original, Christ being killed and all of that hating the Jews for that. It could go all the way back. It's a way of justifying.

Yes. It's what Christianity has done. It's terrible all through the ages! Terrible!

I've always had a hard time understanding the words of Christ as compared with the actions of the church. It's hard to reconcile.

Yes.

So would you say that this was another reason why more wasn't done because some people felt like oh, it must be the fault of the person who was being oppressed somehow? Or what would you say?

Perhaps that's what those students meant when they said you have to see it from a distance. I don't know. I don't know. And at that time I had not the time to talk with them, to have a dispute. I thought you can burst. [laughs]

Another thing that some people have said is that if they ever really thought about, or if they had known in advance what they were getting into, they might not have started. Did you feel that way at all or were you just gung ho?

I mustn't? think about it that I should not [emphasized] have done it. I think for my whole life I would be unhappy. I'm glad we did in that way.

Did you—? At the time were you thinking—? It sounds as if, from what you've told me, it sounds like it wasn't a choice for you, you just knew: this is the thing to do and do it.

And that was with all of us. The whole group never had a second thought of if we should do it or not. It was simply we had to do more, if possible.

And you didn't think, well, what's this going to lead to, and weighing it out, and all? this—?

Oh, no, no. Never! Never!

Just gung ho?

Yes. Now that's why we did silly things we should never have done. We should have thought more, and more precise about the couple we took into that home. It was so stupid! So stupid! And the boy who initiated that, in the end he was arrested because he had a false identity card and he died in the camp. So you never can blame somebody. Nobody does it on purpose...the wrong thing.

Well, I don't want to tire you out, but it's wonderful talking with you, and you have so much to tell.

Oh, I can tell much more.

Does it bring up bad feelings?

No! Absolutely not!

It's ok?

I never had a nightmare. Sometimes I think I'm not a deep-feeler or something like that. I don't know why—.

Well, just enjoy it.

Yes, I do.

That's good. I can tell.

So if you want to come back, how long will you be here?

Oh, I'll be here until the middle of December.

Oh, now then, if you've time off and you really want to come back, just give me a call and we'll see.

Ok. See, what always happens with me, I'm not so good at thinking on my feet. You know that expression, "to think on your feet."

Yah, yah.

But I know later I'll go home. I'll think about all the things you said, and I'll say—.

But what will you do with all these things? You don't know yet?

Well, I'd like to write a book about different people's stories and the moral choices they made during the war and how it affected the rest of their life and how they look back at it. So that's what I've got in my mind. I think that a lot of people in my generation, they have a hard time taking a stand and there aren't too many examples of people who have taken a stand.

But I think, in a way, we were happy. We said we had to take a stand. I think so. My grandchildren they say, "Oh, we don't know if we would have done what you have done." No, but I had a chance to do something.

Yes, it was just the gestalt, what was happening for you. A special opportunity, which many people passed up and I'm very interested in that, too.

How old are you?

I'm 41. [pause] Well, I'm sure when I get home there'll be other questions and there'll be things—.

Just think about it and if you want to, you just give me a call.

Ok. It's a real delight.

[End of session, tape begins again in medias res]

Men making music. And I think the Jewish women, they also sang. [inaudible comments]
We started to have a —.

Were you one of the instigators?

Yes, I was. Together with Fusilla[?] who lives in Vollrecht[?]. Fusilla Vivadink[?]

The two of you would get people—?

We started in prison. That was the way we had first contact in prison. We were separated.
She was in another cell quite in another—.

And you'd sing to each other?

And then we sang to each other. And we sang whatever we wanted to tell them during the interrogations. And all those kind of things we could sing to each other. They couldn't stop doing that.

Did you ever...This is off the subject. I'm already off the subject but this is even more off!

Fine, fine! That's what I like.

Did you ever have some kind of a code so you could sing messages to each other and the Germans wouldn't understand?

No, I think I already told you how we got messages to—.

That was the pipes[?] up and down.

Yes, that was the boy[?] upside[?] But when we got messages to each other, we sang different songs so that the other one knew, now she has given it to her neighbor.

I didn't know that. So, a certain song would mean that—.

Yah. The first song was "so now there's coming something." And then she sang back, "I'm looking forward to it." And when she had it, she said, "Oh, now I'm glad I've got it." So then I knew, they hadn't read it in the meantime. It wasn't meant for other bodies, only for her.

Ok. The Germans hearing that, they would just think this is some popular song you're singing?

Yes. And we sang German as well as French as English as Dutch, so they couldn't say much about it.

Alright. That's funny. You know, I recently heard a story about a bakery truck in the Netherlands, where the doors in the back of the truck open up to deliver the bread. When the doors were closed, it said something like "fresh, tasty bread" or something. But when the doors were open, on each side of the

door, the way the words would break, it would say something like, "Down with Hitler."

Aaah! Oh, that's magnificent! [both laugh] That's very nice.

**So people found these ways to protest even though they were afraid to be overt.
They found these ways to do it anyway.**

Yah, yah.

I thought of another song. I wonder if this was another song that they sang. [Mark hums then Hetty joins in.] Was that something you sang?

We had our own words in that song. Yes, we had. [laughs] We were sleeping in three rows, three stores. [stories?] They were rickety beds and when you went in it, everything was always sweeping. And then we had this song: [Hetty sings in Dutch or German]

Sing me the whole song, if you can remember. I don't know the language, but I can have it translated later.

You're talking very nicely and the whole row is sweeping with you when you turn around.

I see. Ok.

Eight years ago, we sang all the songs again. Because there was some thing. And there we sang a song and then there came a boy, a child of parents who also were in the camp, and he has a studio and he said, "I want you to sing all these songs and I'll make a cassette of it." And he did.

And what was his name? Do you remember?

Frank Afulte[?] His mother, she was half-Jewish. She was Surinam-Jewish, West Indies-Jewish. And afterwards she married a man who also was in the camp, in Furcht. So they both were [low and unintelligible] and she was, uh—. Yes, their son, he made a cassette, and his father, Kuno[?] Fulte[?] also was in the camp and he's playing piano and he accompanied us.

So I should try and find that.

I have it. I can give it to you.

Oh, you do! I could copy it and return it to you.

Oh, I can copy. I copy them every time.

That would be wonderful!

[Hetty walks away and gets something—a book?]

Look, here you see Pooh and Piglet singing. That's what I made for her for Christmas, '44.

Oooh, so sweet!

That's the way we always were feeling together.

Now, you read Pooh and Piglet, you read Winnie the Pooh in school when you were growing up?

Yes, I read[?] at home: I loved it.

It's a great piece of children's literature. Oh, this is great. Thank you.

This is the book where all the songs are in. [pause]

[Hetty explains that the song she just sang was sung to the tune of "Lily Marlene." and it is on the tape she has given Mark.]

[pause while they are looking through the things]

Here, here are the songs we made in Furcht, these are the gas masks: we made gas masks in Demboss[?] That's the transport. We made lovely songs about the transport, the cattle.

You say gas masks, you mean the gas chambers?

No, in Demboss[?], that's a rather big town near Furcht, there was a big factory that was making the tires for the autos. That was it originally. Then the Germans came and they confiscated that factory, and they made a factory for gas masks. So we had to make gas masks. So we were from morning six till the afternoon six. We sat there on the running bands [does she mean conveyor belts?], so everybody did something.

I see. And you'd make up songs for that?

Oh, yes. We did. Then I was sitting on the last movement you had to do to make the nose on it, the nose band, and then they went into a very big oven to be uh,—.

Heated? Molded?

Yah, something like that. Then it came out and you couldn't change it any longer. Then I just put my nails in it so when they came out they were not right. [laughter] But

then in the end somebody told the Germans I did that so then I went to Dudeboker[?] for punishment. Those were the last three weeks I was in the camp and then we all went to Germany. [laughs]

So you were a problem child for the Germans?

Yes, yes. That's what I wanted to be. That's what I wanted to be.

You asked me how old I am. I think that gives me the right to ask you how old you are.

I'm 78.

A very young 78.

I'm from 1918, just the end of the First World War.

You're the same age as my friend Jack Lewis, that's that minister I mentioned who says you live life forwards, you understand it backwards. He tells me all kinds of good things. [pause] Another thing I wasn't clear about was with your brothers. They all survived the war?

They all survived the war. [She gets a photograph] This is a very nice photograph.

Oh, these are your brothers.

These are my five brothers. That's my sister, and I'm the youngest. He was living in the Dutch East Indies, so he was in a Japanese camp. My oldest and my youngest brother, when Holland capitulated, they started the illegal paper. And he also did a lot of espionage work. In midst of '41, there came other illegal papers, "Frei Nedland"[?] ("Free Netherlands") and other ones. So then they stopped with it and he also joined the espionage. And he went with two friends in a little boat to England, but they were shot in between, so he was the whole war in Germany. But they all survived!

MK: And your sister?

HV: She was married to a very nice man, but they had two little children and they didn't dare to do it. They thought it terrible themselves, but they simply didn't dare to do it. They said, "No, never mind,"[?] but they helped me everywhere. When I had material to hide, I could always bring it to her, but she didn't dare to do things herself.

Sometimes people with children, I've gotten the impression—.

I can understand it. We were free, we hadn't done anything terrible.

Did you get to know any of these children? Were you with them long enough to know them?

No.

It was more like you placed them quickly?

I placed them quickly, those who were already a little bit older—. But you know, I was arrested in '43, June, '43. I was liberated in April, '45. And then I came out with tuberculosis. So I only came home in April, '46. And then life was going on and I only had the idea of I must quickly finish my study and I want to live. In my thoughts at that time, thoughts of prison and concentration camp were much more real than what I had done before. I had forgotten about it, in a way.

About normal life.

Yah. But now I know lots of them. Slowly, slowly things come back and they start seeking, and I've very, very many of them. Also, when the first Hidden Children Congress in New York was, we got papers about that, but we didn't want to go there. It was not for us to go there. But one of the children, who was hidden as a child of 14, we still had contact with and she was living in New Mexico. So we sent her the papers. And then she said, "If you come there too, then you can come and stay with me for some weeks and I'll show you everything." And we thought, "yes, that's nice." But then, being in New York, there were lots of people coming to us and asking, "Do you know something about me? Did I belong to the group you have hidden?"

People trying to find each other.

Yes. And then slowly, slowly there became more people and more people.

I really wanted to hear more about the project you're involved in now—this project with Israel.

The museum in Israel?

Whatever it is. Yes, please tell me more about that.

Years, years ago, did I tell you a lady phoned me and said that, "Oh, at last I have found you"?

Yes. You couldn't remember who she was.

Absolutely I couldn't remember, but very slowly it came back. Then she told me how they, from, I think, 1953, those people who came out of the ghettos and the camps of Poland, when they came to Palestine they came together in a kibbutz. The kibbutz was called "Loch Hamayah Ghetto Ot[?]" (Ghettofighters' House). When

they still were in the ghetto they promised each other that those who will come out have to assemble everything that was ever made in the ghettos or in the camps: all the paintings, everything that was done there. There was a marvelous lady Miriam Novich[?] and she traveled around the world and everywhere where she knew somebody had gone to. She tried to get the paintings back. And all those pieces of art are in that Kibbutz Loch Hamayah Ghetto Ot[?] and there were several of the Jewish men out of the ghettos who went to Canada. That group who stayed together said we will send you money (they became rather rich) and from that money they built a beautiful museum, a very big museum. That's where all the pieces of art are in and where they made how the ghettos looked and how the fighting began. All the history and all the people who are living there told their stories and are in that museum assembled. They stimulated the group of my friend, they were the Palestinian Puvees[?]. Several German boys and girls who came here hoping to go to Palestine because they were caught here. They also came together in a kibbutz in Israel after the war. And they stimulated them: tell your stories—you can get a room in the museum and there you can come and work and assemble everything. And that's what she told me and she had in her mind the world must know what happened in Holland. For there in Israel, in that museum, it was only Poland it was only East Europe. They had not the slightest idea that in West Europe things happened also. First when I came there I told them about my history, they had no idea about it. That's what she said, the whole world must know that it was all over Europe. It was everywhere in the same way. And then when she told me, I thought, "Yes that's marvelous. I'll help her. That's what I want to do.

And that's what you've been doing now, assembling this portion of the museum?

Yah. I took lots of my own material that I brought there. Yes, but I am not a Jew and it's especially for Jews. But we simply had so much in common. We touched each other, so they also have something from the non-Jews there.

I think I heard something about that before you. Someone was putting together a big collection of photographs trying to recreate a shtetl and they had collected almost all the photographs of all the people who had been there.

And that was in Israel also?

That's it.

I think it will be also the Ghettofighters' House.

And you had your quilt here. Do you want to tell me more about the quilt? It looks wonderful.

Oh, it is wonderful. A lot of things are connected with the war, of course. That's a very beautiful one and that was made by the curator of the museum who has stimulated us very much in making our own exhibition and he died three weeks before the

opening. Avi Hermans[?] He was here two times. He stayed with me. And that's Anita, the girl living in New Mexico who stimulated us to come to America. And this is, these are the Star Children. Figa Ascher[?] wrote several books about them. Typical Dutch and she wrote one book and it's called *The Star Children* (*Starre Kinder*[?]). It's all about 1943. When I came into prison I got a very nice letter from somebody who called himself Capi[?] and he was captain in the Dutch army. To make me welcome in prison, that's very nice, and the way you can stick things on the walls just with bread. From bread you can make dominos. And just tear out the thread of your clothes and you can embroider whatever you want to. It was very nice writing letters to each other and it was always those who were allowed to go through the corridors in prison who brought those letters. That was marvelous. That's a friend of mine who escaped from the gas mask factory. You see her running over the roof.

Did she succeed?

She did succeed with two others. At that time I was already in the bunkers or perhaps I should have gone with her. And then they came outside the wall and there was a meadow and a little hill and they ran over the hill and there lay a German soldier with his sweetheart. He just took out his pistol and they were brought back to the camp. It was terrible, terrible.

Oh bad luck.

It's all full of remembrances. This is a girl of 15 and she worked in the creche. The creche was the place where the very small children—. People were assembled in Amsterdam and first of terrible places and they all went to the Dutch theater and in the war it became the Jewish theater because they were not allowed to go to other theaters. That was the place the Germans assembled all the Jews before they went to Westeborg. Opposite in the same street there was a children's creche. The babies and the very small children that came with their parents to the theater, they were sent to the creche. They were better looked after than in the theater. It was terrible. There was no food and from that creche several children have been smuggled out. I think more than a thousand. So that was one of the girls who worked there and I met her in Israel later on and then she made this. All the little girls named Sara afterwards were named Maria and all the little Ishes[?], they were named Klaus or something. I met her when we got the medal of Yad Vashem and planted the tree and she was also there.

What's 1891 and it's a piglet?

That's when the mother of Piglet was born. And near the mother is a earlinghme[?]
[chuckles] Did I show you the thing, the embroidery that I made in prison? It's very old.

Tape #2 (side B)

It is similar in there. When I was looking out the small window of my cell that's what I saw. It was the church. Here's a piece of my mattress I cut out. And all these threads I had a sweater.

That's beautiful. You did a good job.

See here, that's when I was arrested, the twelfth of the six, 1943. They didn't know when I'd get free. And that Capi, he was a captain, and he had uniform and I mended the button of his uniform and that's where I embroidered the line from. Here you see poor Piglet behind bars and against the church wall there was always this plant with leaves that get red. And that's a sentence from our national hymn.

Could you read that for me?

Stand fast, steht mein Heart (ugg. hope you got the translation! :)) [that was Michele's note]

So it seems that your friendship with your friend was so important?

Oh, so important! Without her, and I think she without me, I don't think we would have been able to do that. But now we had exactly the same way of thinking. There was always something silly or something humoristic in what happened. And if you can see it in that way it's not so bad. Once I was, they saw me writing down something and that was a letter for the boy who was living on top of my cell. So they were not allowed to get that but then they—I was brought out of my cell in a very strong way. Then it was very nice for them. They asked the woman who had to come up for to look after me. I had to undress everything. I was in the corridor standing with all pieces of clothing and in the moment I quickly put my pencil in my socks and the moment I took off my socks I got my pencil in my toes like that. So they haven't found it. And the paper I've eaten up but I couldn't so quickly so the rest they put it out of my mouth. For hours they tried to get something but they couldn't read it any longer. But then in the meantime it was outside of her cell that this all happened in the corridor. She sang all kinds of silly children's songs like "I have to go around in the world and seek all kinds of things." It was just fun.

I'm particularly interested in why the people who helped, helped. I know that it seems very obvious to you. It was obvious but only 11% of the Jews survived in the Netherlands. The percentage would have been much higher if more people had been taking action.

Sure, but don't forget with all these things it was just *one* year that they understood we simply have to do something otherwise none of us will survive. There were already in '41 [those who] knew it was better to hide, to go away, to try to cross the border or something like that. When we started it was '42. There were lots of them that were not yet ready to go into hiding. I know one couple who had 2 daughters, one of two years and the other of some months. The oldest girl I took

away and then I came to get the other one. Then there were already many families and neighbors that asked me, "Will you take my child also?" And then I asked those parents, "Why don't you go in hiding? I can seek a place for you. And they said, "Oh, we are young. We can go away to a working camp."

People didn't understand?

I think that a lot of those people didn't realize that it was reality that they wouldn't stay somebody alive.

And would you say that it was because you were not Jewish that that had to do with your being able to survive the camp? If you were Jewish you would have been treated differently and sent somewhere different.

The Jews were sent to extermination camps. They simply went straight into the gas chambers. It was just a very small group who were able to survive. Those Jewish people who came to Furcht, our concentration camp in Holland, there they worked for Phillips. Phillips had barracks there and they made crepe karte[?].

Something electronic?

I'll show you. I have one. And they made for radios. When the Jews had to go away from Furcht to Germany they went straight to Auschwitz. They were a group of 140-150 men and women. There they got out of the train. They put themselves in rows of 10 and they said here are the workers from Phillips. They had also a piece of paper with all their names on it and that saved their lives. They didn't enter Auschwitz to go to the gas chambers. They went to Telefucha[?] and several places in Germany. But otherwise the Jews had no chance. And we, we simply came into a work camp. Only in December there came the gas chambers and then the old ones were also gassed.

It sounds as if they were much less harsh in their treatment of non-Jewish people.

Yes, sure.

If you tried to run away and you were Jewish they might have, you know—.

Yah. And the same happened in the Dutch East Indies. The Japanese were all internated [sic] in camps. All the Dutch people, and those who were Jewish came into special barracks. And they were treated harsher then the—.

Really? This is we are talking about later? This is a totally different time.

This is the same time, '42-'43, although the Japanese had not the slightest idea of what Jews were. They just got that from the Germans. They said, "Oh, you have to uh—."

You had to treat these people badly?

Yah.

I wanted to know more about your interest in the cause of the Indonesians and the Dutch. It seems there is a connection there. You tend to be drawn towards cases where someone's rights are being violated. Would you say that's true?

I don't understand the question.

I'm making an observation that you've been drawn, attracted to causes that have to do with someone's rights or freedom being violated, someone being oppressed or mistreated. That's in you and after the war you became aware of the situation in Indonesia and you felt like you wanted to put your energy into that cause also. Is that correct?

I should have wanted to but I couldn't do anything there. I was just getting children. What I saw around me, I had a different look on it then most of the Dutch people living there. They should have loved to have the Dutch East Indies being still our property.

What in your upbringing made you this way? Did your mother teach you something or say something? Did your father say something? You saw your father responding in a certain way or your mother acting in a certain way? How did you learn to be this way?

I think that both of my parents were rather independent. They were never impressed by what other people said. They always went their own way and had their own thoughts. And that was the way we were brought up. I don't know if it's that but I think so.

Do you remember seeing, you know this as a teacher, children often look to adults as role models and then they kind of copy what they see as their personality is being formed. Do you remember your mother or father taking a stand?

Oh yes. They were also rather independent. My father always took his own stand. He was not impressed by other people. So that's why at school I was terrible. I was never impressed by the way they wanted us to be.

So you made up your own mind. I spoke to one person who said that when she was a child (she was an Austrian child) and W.W.I had happened and there was a big food shortage and she wasn't getting enough to eat and there was a program where families in the Netherlands had volunteered to take children from Austria.

Yes. We had them. We had them from Germany and from Austria, children after the war.

You? Your family?

Yes. For years afterwards there were girls who became our friends. I was still very small but my mother always told me there came a train with starved little girls and boys and they were in a big room and Mother could choose who she wanted to take home with her. It was a small black-haired girl that my mother asked, "Do you like playing with dolls?" "NO." "Do you like to embroider?" "NO." Then my mother said, "You are exactly like my children, come with me." [laughs] And she became a great friend and then afterward her family also came and we had other girls. Yes, we often had children out of those groups.

They stayed for months?

Yes, for months. We were seven so it was very easy that there came some more. That made no difference.

And what did your parents do? What was the profession of your father?

My father started doing coffee and tea in the Dutch East Indies and then he met my mother and they wanted to marry but my mother had asthma so the climate was very bad for her so she said, "No, I won't go there." So then he had to change his profession.

Was he growing it or importing it?

Just importing it. He was buying and selling. And he still had contacts his whole life there until the war broke out with those tea plantations. And he always got a very big crate with full of tea. So, we always had tea. The moment the war broke out there was only very small little bit of tea left there. Then he started, he was always going on his own. He was a solitaire. Whatever he did afterwards it never went right but my mother came out of a banker's family. A big financial family and they had money. Our grandfather always helped us. It was not nice for my father, I think, in a way.

So much money on your mother's side of the family.

Not being able to do it himself. He was a proud man.

**So, you were taking in these children when you were growing up in your family.
Your mother was choosing them.**

And that's the way it always went when somebody needed help. My mother and father always helped them.

Do you remember other examples?

In that time there was not real social help. It was very particular always. I was living in Utrecht and there were several families that had hardly any money and that's where every weekend my mother would send me and say, "You just bring this envelope with money in it and go there and there and there." It was terrible. All the poverty.

So, you saw what it was like to help people.

Yes. When it was Santa Claus we were making lots of parcels with food and all these kind of things and brought them around to all those people. It was natural. [pause] But my father, my mother understood in the war that I did something but I never told her and she always helped me. If I had no address for a child I could always bring it home. And then quickly look for an address and then take it away. My father didn't want to know about it. He was a little bit afraid I think. He didn't do it himself but when I came back after the war he said, "Oh, if I had known what you had done I would have put you in your chamber and locked it up!" And he died very shortly after.

Here's a big question. Many people have anger towards the people who imprisoned them. I understand that the Dutch people still don't like the Germans. Did you feel very angry at these people? Did you hate these Germans? Have you forgiven them? What went on with your feelings toward them?

I'm not quite sure about that you know. I always said, "Oh, I love German literature, poetry, I always read German books just as much as English books. It makes no difference. I can talk about it." I have no hatred I think. But when we came back from the Dutch East Indies to Holland for holiday, it was one in the five years, you could come over and have a [half a year of holiday?—spoken away from the mike]

What year is that?

That was in '51. And then we had a stop in Frankfurt and there was a German lady showing little autos and flying machines to little boys, to my youngest boy. And I went absolutely sick. I threw over seeing that woman. It was as it was somebody from the camps. I had not the slightest idea or intention of thinking these terrible thoughts but it was in me.

It just made you sick that this woman was talking about airplanes to little boys.

Talking to my boy!! All at once it was terrible. And that same kind of feeling I sometimes have when I'm driving my auto on the highway and there's a German auto behind me or going in front of me and riding in a bad way. There are always people liking to do that. I simply have to stop at the side of the road and wait a minute and then I can go on again. I don't know if its hatred or anger, but I don't have it really. It's something that you can't master, that feeling.

So it sounds like in your daily life you don't ordinarily feel any anger or hatred, but once in a while situation will trigger some feelings just out of the blue and then that will subside and you will be back to your usual self.

I know that I simply have to step aside and wait and then it's over. So there is something.

While you were in prison and while you were in the camps, it sounds as if you were—I don't want to be too flippant—it sounds as if you were having a good time.

In a way I had.

You were mischievous and you were trying to foul up the works. [Explains monkey wrench expression] You'd look at the humorous side of things and laugh at things. So it doesn't sound to me like you are walking around saying Oh, I hate them. I hate them. No, you had a different approach.

Oh, I think hated them. I didn't trust them. I knew that they were like that. I love challenges. That makes me feel fine especially against "you'll find that you won't be beaten by him. Whatever he does you'll always be the master of it." That was the way I was thinking about.

This is your way of preserving your identity?

Yes, I think so and I think my friend Gisela (this is Piglet) she exactly understood what I was. I had a little bit more than she. She always said that she was nice and blond. She was looking like a German. Her name was German. Her grandparents came from German origin. She was treated much nicer. From the beginning I was treated—they first said, "You have false papers. You are a Jew, you are Jewish." And the man who was interrogating me in a very harsh way he was named Gottshalk[?]. So I told him, "Herr Gottshalk, ich habe genau schon wie Jewish blut wie Sie." (Mr. Gottschalk, I have exactly as much Jewish blood as you have.) And instead of beating me he didn't say anything so I'm sure he was. He had Jewish blood. From that moment I got things to wash myself. Then I felt how it was to be treated like a Jew. You were humiliated so terribly that I thought I won't get myself being humiliated. And I had two boys with the name of Gottshalk and I had hidden them, so I thought, you're Jewish also.

You were never passive?

No.

There's a word in English, pro-active. It means you act before they can act so you become the master of the situation.

But that's my whole life. I always say too quickly things and then afterwards I think, "Oh, I shouldn't have said anything." It's always like that.

Yes, you have a personality that's confident.

I think that's also because I had five older brothers so I had to act quickly.

Were you the youngest?

Yes.

So you were the baby?

Yes. [pause] Did I ever tell you that when I started to work it was June or July '42. I first did it on my own then in August I joined the group. The students from Utrecht. There were so many all at once, I think in the end of August we had more than 100 children already hidden somewhere. And I had to look after the distribution cards. So I made a little notebook with all the papers of their names in it. And that's in the Jewish historical museum. And I have photos. Do you want to see it?

Yes.

It was their name and it was the number of the person....(looking through photos) It was a small otto[?] like that and on the backside I had the assembled tales of John Galsworthy, so I could put it on my bookshelf without anybody knowing where it was. And only long after the war did I get it back and now it's in the Jewish museum. These are all the pages.

These are all the information on the children?

No. Only their name, the number of their distribution card. I don't know exactly what I meant with all of this. It was about which part of the city the child was hidden. But nobody could understand. Only the names were in it. And what is written on it, directly after the war during when I was arrested, they brought this to the archbishop of the Catholic Church in Utrecht and they kept it from us all during the war. And directly after the war my friend with whom I worked, together with this piece of information, went to Amsterdam and that's where they started to find the children back and if the parents came out[?]. Orlachsprechnin[?] the war the Jewish in Germany that were left. That was an official bureau working for them.

This looks very efficient. You typed everything and it looks well organized.

Yes, but I can't remember very much about it. Only that every time I gave them their papers I put it down and it was 7 times. I started with it, I think in November, so it's exactly the time before I was arrested.

Now when you say every time you gave them—.

Every month I had to go around and get distribution papers for them and those I could get. When you took a child you always took his—, where you got the ration cards or distribution papers.

So, it's like an identification and the ration cards for food. When you say 7 times, did you have to renew this every month?

Every month you had a new big piece with all the numbers on it where you bought sugar and bread and flour, shoes, tires for the bicycle.... They were all rationed.

And were these falsely printed?

Afterwards, but in the start of it all nobody knew how to do things like that. So I took their official papers and I looked for people working in the distribution office and I brought it to them and they changed it. If they had the right number they could change it for a ration card. So I had several people all through the land where I could change 50 numbers and get 50 papers from them or sometimes 20 or sometimes more.

These were resistance people?

All of them were resistance.

So certain people knew how to do this?

But imagine that I had to get 200 of these distribution cards, so I had to go—.

That's a big job.

A terrible job! It was really from early in the morning to late in the evening that you were busy going around. When I was arrested, when I was locked in my cell, I thought, "Ahh, at last rest." I went to bed and I directly fell asleep and it wasn't yet time that I was allowed to sleep. So the guard would come in and say you are not allowed to sleep now.

So you were working very hard on this?

Oh, I have been really working very hard. Perhaps that is also why you had no time to think. You were just working. Sometimes you had to get 2 or 3 children in one day. But those parents were unbelievably brave to give away their children. You can't believe that they simply did it.

This you understood later, once you were a mother, what it would be like to give away your child. I've noticed being in the Netherlands, the Dutch people seem to be very caring, they help.

I think every mother is caring but especially Dutch, do you think that?

To give you an example, yesterday I was in the department store and I needed to find a building. One of the buildings in the University of Amsterdam so I thought I would ask. I asked a woman and she started to explain to me and she could tell that I was a little bit confused so she walked out of the store with me and she pointed when she could show me directly where to go. It was very, very nice but—.

Oh, I think that's also typical Dutch.

So it seems like in time of trouble, great crisis, it brought out that helpfulness to great extremes. Day and night you were working to save these children. Just that sense of it the thing to do. The human thing to do.

But now they often say so many people did nothing but that's also not true. When I was traveling with a real Jewish-looking boy or girl or whatever, nobody said something though they knew exactly what happened. That's also kind of a helping the resistance.

My impression is that the Germans were very clever in terms of how they presented the situation to the Dutch so the Dutch didn't really understand what was going on with the Jews.

Yes, they started very nicely. That's why my brother started that paper. He wanted to tell them don't get yourself trapped in the way they are behaving. They are stealing in the meantime. They are stealing everything. Already Jews were not allowed to work in several kinds of jobs.

Good for your brother, because I heard that at the beginning the Germans appointed a Jewish counsel as a liason and said all we ask is that the Jews will register and that many Jews were trying to be cooperative and not cause trouble. They thought if they would be cooperative they would be left alone. Wouldn't be bothered. So it wasn't until later that it became more and more clear what the agenda was. But it sounds as if your brother, he knew sooner so he started the newspaper to warn people.

My youngest brother at the time of the war he was a KLM official in Berlin and there he was when there was a Kristallnacht so he knew exactly what was happening in Germany.

Ahh, was he the one who started the paper?

Yes, together with my oldest brother. Yes, we were living aware of what was going around us.

So he was in Germany. He saw what was going on.

I already told you about starting the Red Cross help? So, also before the war I knew there would be a war.

Were there other sources of information besides your youngest brother that warned you in advance?

No, we all through the 30s we got people from the Balkan or Austria on their way to America and they stayed with us. I think that had something to do with the university. Professors with their wives and children. The families that were flying to America.

And they would tell you what was going on in Germany?

No. I don't think they told much. It was natural and they were worried about what was awaiting them and I was always playing with the children.

Why were they staying with you, these people?

I think because my parents said that you could always bring them here. Just hospitality, I think.

Your parents knew them somehow?

I think that was one of their friends. He was a professor in the university. Through them, I think, they've asked can you give hospitality to these people and they gladly did it, of course.

So your parents knew somebody at the university and he asked—.

He was engaged in bringing away and I think they were all Jewish but Jewish had no difference for us. It was just people.

So they were engaged in immigrating to the United States and your family just offered hospitality when they stopped often in Utrecht. So it sounds as if your family was a very nice family.

You know, I thought everybody was like that. When after the war they told me only a small part of the population has been working against the Germans I said it's nonsense. Everybody I knew did his own job. I didn't encounter many people who didn't do it or were against it so I thought everybody is doing it.

I have heard that there are Dutch people who don't want to talk about the war because they feel they should have acted differently than they did?

Oh, I think so. When I came back in '46 I knew a lot of people that were absolutely not interested in my stories so I never told about it. I thought if you don't want to hear it then I won't tell it.

Do you think that was because people just wanted to put the war behind them or why do you think that would be?

Now, after so many years I think that perhaps they felt a little bit uneasy in not having done anything. And I can understand it. I musn't think about not having done anything. That must have been terrible. And for us I think therefore being in prison, being in the camp, and in Furcht we were there together with the Jewish boys and girls. For us we had done something. We were there because we had done something. They just were there because they were Jewish. They didn't know how hard they should work hoping the Germans were content with the way they worked so they could stay some longer. And we only thought about how can we sabotage it.

For you it was like a battle scar. You were proud of being in prison because you had done something to stop them.

And my eldest brother had been in prison and my youngest brother had been in prison. And my youngest brother came out, so he told me the way you got in contact with your neighbors. So when I was put into prison—it was a Dutch prison in Demboss[?]
—and he directly said, "Oh, you will be separated. You will be all alone and it's terrible." I said, "Oh, that's not so terrible. My brothers were like that also." That was the way I took it. It simply was the way I took it. It was natural.

Your parents must have been worried about you and your brothers?

When the war broke out I had to stay at home for I had to enter into the Red Cross in the military service and my parents went—they had a house near the sea in Nuretweg[?] and that's where my parents went. And all those 5 days of war, we had 5 days of war, that was all, my mother was always saying, "Oh, my poor little daughter, my youngest daughter." And she was *terrible*. The other ones told me how terrible she was. My first illegal letter when I was imprisoned was, "Please mother, the only thing you can do for me is being strong" and that's what she did. She was marvelous. She just went on doing what she could do.

You told her that you didn't want her to worry or to be crying?

Yes, that was the worst thing that they could do.

They must have been very happy at the end of the war to find that all their children were ok.

Sometimes they felt ashamed against the friends who had lost a child or lost everything. We all came back. Yes, it's marvelous.

They must have had to wait so long, waited to get the news.

Oh, terrible. There also from Sweden to Holland there was absolutely no possiblilty.

(end of tape #2)

Tape #3 side A

- MK: They didn't know that you were in the hospital with tuberculosis?
- HV: Oh, no. They didn't, and I haven't told them either.
- MK: So they must have thought that something had happened to you when you didn't come back after the war.
- HV: No, but nobody could come back. They all stayed in Sweden. The first who came back to Holland, that was the end of August, and then they knew already. There came a nephew from me from the United States and he was in Stockholm in the Dutch embassy, and there was a list of Dutch women coming from Ravensbrück and he was just looking in it. He saw my name and he went to England afterwards, and from there he had contact with all of them. He told them that—. And he came to me in my hospital, in my school where all these other people were with tuberculosis. And we talked about home and what would have happened there, and who would be alive. I knew of my brothers in prison, so I said, "I don't know who will come back." And then when he came to have contact, all of his brothers were fusilladed and all of my brothers came back.
- MK: Oh, that's wonderful. What was the word you just used? Fusilladed?
- HV: He was shot. If you're sentenced to death and you're shot.
- MK: Oh, executed.
- HV: That's how life was.
- MK: Many people were lost. Many families had children who never came back. In your family, everyone came back, which was very, very happy, but also some guilt over the other families around you.
- HV: Yes. That's what you felt sometimes. Why are we so well off?
- MK: I've heard that there's a professor at the university here who's studying guilt people felt over having survived.
- HV: I'm not really feeling guilt over having survived. I'm only glad about it. [both chuckle]
- MK: I don't think guilt is a very good thing to have to live with.
- HV: No. Often I think every day is a present. It could have been otherwise.
- MK: Ok. Well, finally I'll ask you the biggest question of all. This is turning you into a minister, but do you have any views about how justice can be established in the world, or how the world can be improved, or anything?
- HV: I think only by being an example yourself. I think that's the only way to learn [teach] people something. [They stop for soup.]
- MK: I would love to know about this project with the horses.
- HV: With the Icelandic horses. Now two of my children are raising Icelandic horses. When you are raising horses you are getting more and more and more so that it [unintel. "went we"] a terrible problem, and one spring we got three male foals and that is marvelous, only you can't keep them together with the flock.
- MK: With the herd.
- HV: With the herd. Because then they want sex and you can't use those males for your own mares. And then we thought at that time it was so that the farmers which had very poor land and always had to have subsidial money—.
- MK: Subsidies.

- HV: Yah. They got better land and then the poorer land was given back to the government. And from that land they made again rural land, wild land.
- MK: Now ordinarily the horses are castrated?
- HV: The male horses are castrated when they are not yet one and a half, otherwise they mate. I told the agriculture department that they perhaps could use very young foals to graze the grass of these lands. If you don't give too much foals on a piece of land, they can be very handy of grazing. They agreed so we started to have first one piece of land. It was about one hundred hectares, and that's rather a nice piece of land. It was rather poor, so we agreed we should give them thirteen foals and then let them graze somewhere in the winter without giving fertilizer to the land, without doing anything—just get them back to natural wildlife.
- MK: These kind of horses, nothing needs to be done to them, they can be outside during the winter?
- HV: They can be outside. They only need fresh water and we have to give them two times a year anti-worms cure and have to cut the nails. I don't know how you say this in English. So we started with that and that went marvelous! It was a great success. And now we have four of these pieces of land in different places in Holland and we have about sixty young foals living there until they're four years and then we give them back to the owners and then we get new ones in spring when the new foals are born. I get letters, "Is it possible to take my either male or female foal for grazing on your land?"
- MK: What would happen to these horses if they can't graze on the land?
- HV: You have to castrate the males. Now it's possible you can leave them being male. Then perhaps after three years you see this is a good raising male you can use for breeding. You must be sure you have a pure breed Icelandic horse.
- MK: Pedigreed.
- HV: A pedigreed, yah. To be a male you can use for raising you have to pass an examination. If it has a good pedigree and if it has good health, you can leave it a male until three or four years and then pass the examination. Then if it's all right, you have a horse to breed with.
- MK: And if it's not all right?
- HV: You castrate it and then it's riding. They're marvelous riding horses! They're very special, Icelandic horses. They have five ways of going. They go step and gallop and trot but they can also amble and tilt. I think tilt is an Icelandic word. Tilt is when the horse is only standing on one leg and if the horse is tilting you hear tuh, tuh, tuh, tuh, tuh, tuh, tuh [Hetty approximates the noise]—every time one leg is on the —. And if you're riding horses and he's tilting it's like sitting on a canopy, you know? It's marvelous! It's very easy, it's very nice.
- MK: They teach them to do that?
- HV: They know it themselves.
- MK: They just are born with that capacity?
- HV: They're born with that. And in the beginning when the first Icelandic horses came here and we were riding them, we had not the slightest idea of what [idiot kind of goal?] they had. Then slowly somebody told us these are real Icelandic ways of going. Now there is an international group of people who are riding those Icelandic horses together there. Members, of course, in Iceland, and in Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Switzerland, all over Europe we have competitions.

- MK: So you mean when you first got the horses, nobody knew what they were capable of?
- HV: The first horses came to Holland after the war, seeing they're nice to use in the mines, as mine horses. But they were absolutely not usable for that purpose. But they were also bad horses. They were horses given away because they couldn't use them for anything. Then slowly we understood that they were very good riding horses, so that's when the critical raising started.
- MK: I see. And somebody figured out about the special—.
- HV: Yah. And the horses in Iceland, it is absolutely forbidden to take horses to Iceland. That's a law from [Alfred?] 1100. There was a terrible famine then. There was nothing to eat so they got in the law of the land that no living creature except human beings were admitted to go into the land. No horses, no dogs, nothing, nothing. So whenever an Icelander wants to join the competition somewhere in Europe, he takes his horse, but he's not allowed to take it back for no animal may enter Iceland.
- MK: Wow!
- HV: So those are the good horses which come into Europe.
- MK: That's interesting! So after the competition—.
- HV: They sell it. And now there's several Icelanders having a big raising-station in Germany so they can have their own horses here.
- MK: But the horses that graze, they have to get castrated anyway after a few years, when they're done grazing?
- HV: If they're not approved right for breeding, they are castrated, yes.
- MK: But the old way, before there was the grazing—.
- HV: They were castrated. They were always castrated.
- MK: Then how would they breed?
- HV: There were always some, and we had not many Icelandic horses, though in the beginning we had perhaps two or three approved.
- MK: So you used the same ones to breed the others?
- HV: Yes.
- MK: And the rest were castrated?
- HV: The rest were castrated. "Hangst," what is a "hangst"? Oh, stallion! Now we have bred [bred] two good stallions. That's marvelous and very easy. You can use your own stallion. Only afterwards, in the second generation, you can't use that stallion any longer because it's the same blood. You have to look for new blood in the stallions.
- MK: Yes. I wonder, if before the grazing land, if they were castrating all of the horses, then how would they spot the ones that would be used to breed?
- HV: If you have not too many horses, you only need two or three approved stallions. You can use them every year again.
- MK: And then when they get old, maybe you've noticed a couple of others that seem perfect and you save these.
- HV: We also had one land somewhere and that's our old horses' land. They can have their old days there. [chuckles]
- MK: Oh, really!?
- HV: Yah. They needn't be used any longer and they needn't do any exercise. They can just walk around and have lovely playing together. That's *marvelous* going over to

those lands, you know. That's really very nice. And in the beginning when I started this people said, "Oh, I won't give my foal there. They will be wild and you can never get them into hands!" But it's absolutely not true. Those horses are terrible only when they are raised by people and always people going around them. That's what they hate. But the moment that you leave them on their own, they come to you and are very friendly and you can handle them just whatever you want to. It's people that makes them terrible—like always the same everywhere.
[they laugh]

[Tape stops, then begins again and Hetty shows something to Mark.]

HV: Now when I was in Israel, when Piglet was here, they made for that window a very special glass. And it symbolizes the solidarity between the women who were in Furcht in the concentration camp. There was one terrible accident in the camp. Women were punished for having done something to the traitors. They were put together in a small cell in the bunker, in the solitary prison. They put seventy-four women in one cell and the next day ten of them were dead. Most of them were half-crazy by the end. That's what you see here. You see one laying on the ground and the other ones getting them up. It's a beautiful window and when it was put in and they had festivities around it, it was all music they made around it. And there they sang those songs which were sung in the camp in Sumatra, in the Dutch East Indies. And that choir which sang that also sang some of our songs we made. My daughter went there with my granddaughter and she said it was so *emotional* that for the first time she could understand how we as young girls were standing singing there. That was very nice. And that's ["her der frau singe here"] the women sang. That's in that book where all our songs are in. There was a man, he makes music himself, he writes music, and he also was in the camp and he also was in those cattle trains that brought us to Germany. Then in Berlin, the men's train was set apart from the women's and we were singing, of course. Then he said to his tired companions, "Here the women are singing." And that's what he writes in his forward. That's the story he writes in the forward.

MK: I thought of another question for you. Do you think friendships between women are more durable or long-lasting than friendships between men and women?

HV: I don't think that you can say that like that.

MK: I know it's hard to generalize.

HV: I know several men out of the camps and they have also comrades with whom they shared all the terrible things, and that's still a very good friendship. But I've now a lot to do with Furcht, with the concentration camp in Furcht and we have written several books about how life was there. We also made an encate[?]. You know what an encate is? When you want to ask many people the same questions, you put a question and you send it around and ask them to give an answer. The women all are sitting down and writing answers to all these questions, and the men just either take like that, nothing to say, or they say one word. They'll never go into it and give you a real answer.

MK: Why is that?

HV: They don't want to go back into it, into Furcht. I think that we do that more easy than men do. I think they don't think it's manly to say much about it. I don't know why it's that. For example, my husband who came out of the Japanese camps, he *never* spoke one word about it.

- MK: You know, it's interesting that women in the United States complain about the same thing. We're not even talking about the war, just—there are books written, popular books: why can't men open up? Why can't men talk about their feelings? So it seems to be a universal—.
- HV: Perhaps that's in their [art?], in the way that they are. In their nature.
- MK: It seems like certain ethnic groups are more expressive than others. Like when we talk about Italians, we think about more expressiveness than certain other groups.
- HV: I don't know. I have not the slightest idea if Italians—I think they're machos, they're more machos. They are more expressive, but in what ways. In letting see their inward feelings? I don't know. I don't know. I've not the slightest idea. I could imagine that an African is very sensitive. You ever heard about Ben Okri[?]? He's, I think, a Nigerian writer. So marvelous the way he can express feelings!
- MK: Oh, really? Maybe I'll read his books some time—in translation.
- HV: I don't know, but I think he writes in English or he translates it himself into English. [Some discussion of Latin American writers (Marquez and Allende) follows, then Mark thanks Hetty for her information.]
- MK: Another friend of mine once quoted me something. She said that the secret of life is to gracefully give to it what it asks of you.
- HV: Yes. I think that's all right.
- MK: So in each different time period we're asked different things. Also in the Bible you know that it says a time to be born, a time to die, a time for this, a time for that. So there's just different demands made on us at different times. It's a matter of responding to those demands, whatever they are.
- HV: You were raised up with the Bible?
- MK: A little bit. [chuckles] I was more religious than anybody in my family.
- HV: Oh, yes? How is your family formed? Do you have brothers and sisters?
- MK: I have an older sister. My father lost any faith in God because of the war.
- HV: I can understand.
- MK: He thought if there was a God, there would have never been the Holocaust.
- HV: Yes. But what did he think about a god? I think it's so terribly difficult to know what a god is. What do you want from a god? Is he responsible? What is he? It's inside you, I think.
- MK: Yes. And my mother was—. Well, my grandfather on my father's side was very religious, and so was my grandmother. They were Orthodox Jews. My grandmother and grandfather were always pressuring my father to be religious, so he, partially, rebelled against that, but also because of the war, he lost his faith. My mother's parents were more secular, but they were very good people, especially my grandfather on my mother's side. Everybody loved him and he had a candy store. I remember as a child visiting the candy store and there'd always be lots of people there, just hanging around there talking to my grandfather. They just liked to visit him and talk all day long.
- HV: They were all Jewish people?
- MK: No, some Jewish, some not. He was not religious, but he was just a very good-hearted man and people liked him. He was one of those, they call them the "New York Jewish intellectuals," but a working man. He had a very humble living, just this little candy store, but he'd be reading Dante...At night he'd go to discussion

groups and be involved in communist party or socialist—I don't know. He'd go to these political meetings. They call it "plain living, high thinking." His was life of the mind and people—.

HV: You should have loved joining him if you were old enough at the time.

MK: Yes. So I was brought up not in a religious way, but I was drawn toward religion. So I would go to the synagogue myself and became friends with the rabbi.

HV: Yes, and that all depends on being good rabbis, able to talk with them, not to dispute.

MK: Exactly. The first rabbi, when I was growing up in New York City, he was very nice. But then my family moved to Schenectady, New York, just north, and that rabbi was cold and very cerebral. He couldn't relate to people. He was a big scholar, too much in his mind, so I didn't like him. So I became disillusioned with Judaism.

HV: So that's difficult. It's not connected with one man, but you [can't get in the part?] It's very important that the one you're listening to is good.

MK: Same thing with teachers. Some people have a teacher, and because of the teacher, it changes their life. I know I've taught music and I felt it was a great privilege to be the first teacher a child would have in music.

HV: Yes. And it made you happy or you were disappointed?

MK: Oh, I loved it! Because I felt that I could start them off in a good way. I wasn't mean. I would introduce them to music in a way where they would love it for the rest of their life. Too many people, they say, "Oh, I don't play piano. I took lessons as a child, but they made me practice and it wasn't—." No, they remember it as being an unpleasant experience and I think music is a wonderful thing and children should *enjoy* it.

HV: Sure! Yah, yah. You just tell Piglet about it. She'd like it. [both laugh]

[Talk about Hetty, instead of Israel, sending Mark something (cassette tapes?) which isn't specified.]

MK: The only other thing is that I have something for you to sign saying that it's ok for me to use your words. I think I'm supposed to do this. Someone told me I should have it.

HV: Oh, I'll sign whatever you want. [laughs]

MK: It's very simple, so that I can use what you've said if I'm able to finish the book.

HV: I want to read that book, of course.

MK: Of course, of course. I'll send you a copy. [Discussion about a pen follows.] You know what else I'll tell you is, when I was fourteen years old, I was introduced to Pete Seeger—you've heard of Pete Seeger?

HV: Yes.

MK: He lives not too far from where I grew up. I continue to have contact with him, so I think he'll be interested in this. I'm gonna write him a letter when I get home. He might want to sing some of the songs.

HV: You know, they're just crazy little songs, only for us they mean a lot.

MK: Well, that's the way folk music is. I've been—. [tape stops]

End of tape #3 (there is nothing on side B)