

My Story

*Unedited transcript
of personal account
given May 10, 2006,
the sixty-sixth anniversary
of the German occupation
of the Netherlands
during World War II*

by Jewish Holocaust Survivor

Dini Oppenheimer

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Unedited account of the German Occupation
of the Netherlands in World War II.
Available in CD and book with pictures.

This account was recorded on CD, May 10, 2006, and was transcribed
for preservation purposes by Deborah R. Leininger, Freeport, IL.

*In remembrance of
the dead,
respect for
and recognition
of the Jewish people,
Judaism,
and the State of Israel*

PREFACE

*After forty-seven years of speaking in
a fifty-mile radius in Northwest Illinois,
my good friend, Mary Otte, suggested I make
a historical memorial of my story.*

*I would like to thank Deborah Leininger,
who recorded the CD and transcribed my story,
a personal journey through darkness
and despair during World War II's
five years of occupation of the Netherlands
towards the light of liberation and freedom.*

*Throughout the years I have received
hundreds of letters from people who have
heard me speak. However, I did not have
a permanent record of the events
that took place over sixty-six years ago.*

*I am very thrilled it happened
while I am still alive.*

*Peace and harmony can only endure
in this world if all people
respect and cherish each other's
differences – be it in religion, land of origin,
political persuasion, or race.*

*In fact there is only one race on this earth
and that is "The Human Race."*

Dini Oppenheimer

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CHAPTER 1

INVASION

My name is Dina Oppenheimer. I come originally from Europe, from the Netherlands, where I was born in the early twenties. I lived there, and went through school, and graduated in 1939. The school was called the Jewish HBS, which is five year education with all the mathematics, all the foreign languages, not Chinese, already, what I mean but Dutch, English, German, and French.

Like I said, I graduated in June of 1939, just before the September invasion of Germany into Poland. But for us that seemed another country. Although we were never involved in a war since the Middle Ages, we did not expect to be involved in another war after World War I, when we stayed neutral. While Belgium and France were involved, the Netherlands stayed neutral. But this time was a different game.

After the September 1939 invasion of Poland, the world saw that Hitler would not stop annexing and taking over other countries. And so it became 1940, and in that time we mobilized our small Dutch army. There were only twelve million inhabitants of the Netherlands, a small country like the state of Illinois. We hoped and we thought that we would never be involved.

So you can probably imagine now, after what has happened five years ago here in this country (9/11 attack on the World Trade Center) that we were shocked to learn on the morning of the tenth of May, exactly today – sixty-six years ago – the tenth of May, 1940, a Friday

morning that we were wakened by sounds that we had never heard before. Booms, like heavy booms of heavy weapons, bombs around the city.

Rumors came around, already, very early that the big airport of Schiphol near Amsterdam was bombed. That could not be by anybody else but the Germans. We tried to turn on the radio and tried to get information, but there was absolutely no sound on the Dutch radio. You can imagine we were in shock. We had no idea what had happened. The rumors came around that morning that the Queen, and her cabinet, and the rest of the government had fled. That was the truth. They had fled to England. So we in Holland had no government at all. That will show you that Holland, from all the occupied countries, got it the worst between 1940 – 1945.

In the four days that followed, the Dutch army that was mobilized in the fall of 1939, a very small army of a small country, tried to fight courageously the Germans, who had come in from the east. But it was unbelievable, impossible, and after four days they had to surrender.

On the night of May 14, 1940, I was standing on the side of the road of the street. I saw the German army coming in, an endless army, no end to it. We could not believe it that they were all different groups, all different parts of the army. We thought maybe they came in one street, turned around, and came again. But that is not true. They were all new soldiers, and that way they were in Russia later, and in Belgium, and in part of France.

They had an enormous army that was not allowed since the end of World War I. Germany could not have an established army because Germany started World War I, and they lost World I, as you know. It was not allowed, but Hitler did it anyway. Maybe, although we never know for sure, that the Allied Forces let him do it – thinking he would fight Communism, which was rampant in the Soviet Union in those years.

After five days, on the fifteenth of May, the hotel next to us – the Carlton Hotel, which was a hotel where so many Americans had stayed during their visits to Europe, was evacuated right away and taken over by what I call the Luftwaffe (the German Air Force). The head of it was Reichsmarshall Hermann Goering. Older people will know who I am talking about.

First there was not much of a change. Don't forget, Germany was trying to fight a World War against especially Britain and later on against America. Holland was in the way, but it was not really the idea to conquer Holland, as far as we knew. But we knew one thing. We, our family, being part of a minority, a religious minority, a Jewish minority, not a racial minority, but a religious minority – we knew that in Germany atrocities had happened on Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, in 1938. So we knew that things had happened in Germany against the Jews; that they blamed them (for the loss of) World War I.

They needed a scapegoat. What was the easiest? It was to take a scapegoat who had not much power not in Holland, not in Germany. There were only a few hundred thousand in Holland, the Jewish people.

We always had a very good life in Holland till the Nazis came in, or the Germans came in. I could go to any school I wanted. If I wanted to go to church, I could go. If I wanted to go to the synagogue, we could go. There was freedom of religion. It was always a haven for people who were persecuted, not only Jews during the Golden Ages from Spain and Portugal, also to a lot of people from France, who had to leave. They always found a place in Holland, where they were very tolerant. So for us to see that a German Nazi party was taking over our country, it was unbelievable hard to take.

After these five days a temporary government was installed by the German government. Nothing really started to change yet, only that we saw the Air Force troops in beautiful uniforms standing in front of the hotel. The guards, they left us alone.

They were fighting a war much greater than only little Holland, and so we thought, "Oh, this is maybe very temporary."

The Queen, who had fled to England, had established Radio Oranje, a Holland radio via BBC from England. We were not allowed later to listen to the BBC by the Germans, but we did it anyway.

We heard the Queen saying over the radio, already, in the beginning of the occupation, "Hold on, Dutch people, there will be an invasion from the Allied Forces. That will not be far away. In the meantime the

people who will get it worst are your Jewish brothers and sisters. Please help them as much as you can.”

I remember quite well that she said that.

The year 1940 went on with the temporary German government eventually being taken over by a real Nazi government. The head was Dr. Seyss-Inquart, an Austrian Nazi, who like Hitler, was not a German, but an Austrian. But they talked German anyway, the same language. Since he came in, he brought in the SS, the SA, and the Gestapo, all Nazi troops and Nazi police. It became suddenly a terror state.

We were not allowed, like I said, to listen to the BBC, but we tried it anyway. For awhile it went alright. I remember one day. We lived up on the second floor in the modern apartment. I saw a big convertible coming under us to the beautiful modern restaurant Astoria. It stopped, who came out of there in a blue, a light blue uniform with a mink stole and an ivory staff with gold stars on it? It was Reichsmarshall Hermann Goering!

As fat as he was, he needed to be helped out of the convertible by aides and went in for lunch while we were listening to the BBC – my father, my mother, my brother and I. We knew it was forbidden. We knew that they could not hear us, but the idea that under us was one of the greatest Nazis of the German government was a thrill! You have no idea what that meant!

I want only to say that staff that I was talking about, I saw that many years later when I paid a visit to West Point. There in one of the cases, there was that beautiful staff. It looked much smaller than I thought

that Goering had in his hands. The name was under there, "The Staff of Hermann Goering, Reichsmarshall of Nazi Germany."

There it lay, so silently, knowing that the owner had committed suicide. Many years later, of course, than I am talking about, but before I saw it, and it was what an idea when you saw that so many years later. That is one thing that I have to tell you.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGE

After that day the new Reichskommissionar of the Netherlands was Arthur Seyss-Inquart, as I said, an Austrian. Things started rapidly to change. Every day there came new proclamations on the public buildings. The first was that everybody, every Dutch person, had to come to registration places, that were set up by the Germans, mostly German soldiers behind the desks in the open.

Everybody had to come and had to declare whether they had two, three, or four Jewish grandparents.

They also said, “We will find out anyway. We have lists. We know what’s going on, and who is who. You will be better off, and we will much more lenient to you if you tell us yourself that you have Jewish grandparents. Otherwise we will be more harsher to you.”

Because no one had ever lied to us by a government, we believed it.

So with our pride, that we had in our heritage, my father, my mother, my brother, and I all said, “Four. Four Jewish grandparents.”

The thousands and thousands who did it with us signed our own verdict of death.

We all got an identification paper, every Dutch person. But when you had said that you had two, three, or four Jewish grandparents – they couldn’t see it on your nose, or your so-called curly hair, or your stereotype that doesn’t exist – so they had to know it from you.

The ones who had said two or three or four Jewish grandparents got a “J” in the middle of their identification paper. Everybody got an identification paper in Holland, but the Jews got a big “J” in the middle so they could never deny that they were Jewish. You had to carry it with you at all times.

More proclamations came, and we felt like prisoners in a prison, especially Jewish people. We were not allowed – I was out of school – but the other kids were not allowed to go to a public high school anymore. It had to be the Jewish high school. The kids were not allowed to really play with non-Jewish children.

My father (Benjamin Frank), who happened to be a physician, was not allowed to have non-Jewish patients. No Jew was allowed to have a bicycle. Everybody in Holland had a bicycle. The country is flat, and it was the cheapest way of transportation. We had to bring it to the German authorities. And my father, who in that time (being a doctor) – doctors visited their patients because there was no penicillin. If you had a fever, you stayed in bed. So the doctor went to see the patients.

He had an American Hudson. I see it in front of me, a beige, new, 1940 Hudson. He had to deliver it to the Germans. He had to go and walk to the patients. I went often with him, also, to very poor Jewish people.

That would be a surprise to many people, who think that Jewish people are all rich. Which is, of course, a figment of the imagination. There were poor, there were middle class, there were rich – just like anybody else.

I went with him to these tenements, where the people were very poor and very sick. We had to climb the steps. There were no elevators in those buildings. I went with him, and then we walked home again.

In the meantime there came more and more proclamations. We were not allowed to go out after eight o'clock at night. We had to stay in – in our own home – not an uncle or an aunt's home. We were not allowed to go to a grocery store more than once a week, at a certain time in the afternoon for an hour.

There were no supermarkets. There were grocery stores at the corners. That was only for us that we could go only one hour. There were lots more proclamations, too many even to mention. Maybe later on I will remember some more.

As I had said, also after eight o'clock at night we were not allowed to get out of the house, and we were not allowed even to look out of the window. This was all in preparation of something that was ominous, but we had no idea what it all meant. Everything was kept silent and secret by the Germans. Whatever they could do, they did in the dark.

It became February 1941, a late afternoon on a Saturday afternoon. I think it was the twenty-third of February 1941. People were walking in the Jewish district, not a ghetto. People of all religions lived all over the country and all over town. But there was a certain quarter where there were Jewish shops, and there was a market. It was the Sabbath, the Saturday, and it was closed.

People were window shopping and were having a good time, as far as they all could do at that time. Suddenly squad cars of the Gestapo,

the German secret police, came through the streets and stopped. They stopped in the middle of the street, jumped out, and picked out boys and men, anyone they could see – only boys and men. They put them on those squad cars and drove them off to the headquarters of the Gestapo, which was a huge school at the south of Amsterdam that was evacuated right after the Nazi government took over. We had no idea what happened.

Only I was not at that quarter at that moment, but of course, you heard it later. And what you heard was that all the boys and men were taken. The ones that had a “J” on their identification papers were kept. The other ones were released. The ones that were kept were taken that night out of the headquarters on trucks to the station, the railroad station, to closed cattle cars that were standing there. They were laden on these cars till they were filled, totally filled. Then they were locked, and they were driven out of the country.

Two weeks later the families of these men and boys, those Jewish men and boys – got a notice from the German government, all the same, the same wording in German.

I will say it in English. “So and so had to be shot because they wanted to flee out of Mauthausen. We had no idea what Mauthausen meant. It was a German name.

After the war we found out that it was one of the first so-called concentration camps in Austria where quarries were, where they had these men and boys from all over Europe. Jewish men and boys had to go and were inmates, where they had to take the stones out of the

quarries and bring them up on the top of the stone steps. Then they're thrown down with the stones in the deep holes and were murdered. Nobody in their right mind would have tried to get out and flee out of a camp like that because there was nothing but barbed wire electricated and also soldiers on guard posts there. Nobody had fled. They were all shot.

When we got these cards, or the people who got these postcards, were stunned. And when the Amsterdam population found out, they started to strike, the only strike in Europe during that time – enormous, courageous of the Dutch people.

But that didn't last long. People were picked up from the street by the Nazis, and put against the wall and shot, and their bodies stayed on the street. So who dared to do that again? But they had shown to the Jewish people that they were real friends of them and dared to stand up against Hitler and his armies.

Now it became 1942. That was one of the worst. years of the occupation. We were still in our home downtown, but in May of that year we had to move out of there because we had no rights anymore, as you understood. A German couple, a young couple, wanted to rent this, and of course, we had to go. We had to find our own place somewhere in the south of Amsterdam where more Jewish people were put together. (We found an apartment) on the fourth floor, where we luckily were still together – the four of us.

It was an apartment that had no elevator, so patients who would come had to climb up the stairs, and they were not all in good shape.

They were not bad enough to stay in the bed. But anyway, they could not go in an elevator anymore. But we were happy that we were still together. That was after May of 1942.

During that summer besides having the identification paper with the “J”, we also had to wear the yellow star, the star of King David. The star that supported and defended King David in battle was for us a sign of death. We had to sew it on the left side of our jackets, our coats, our dresses, and men, of course, on their overcoats and on their suits.

And so they didn't even have to ask for our papers anymore. We had to wear them because it was a terrible sin if we would not do that. That would mean that we would disappear. That happened during the summer of 1942.

Then came almost the end of July of 1942. We were still together, but we found out that after eight o'clock in the evening, many people of Jewish ancestry were taken out of their homes. The German soldiers, the German police came, knocked the doors in if they didn't open them, pulled the people out, put them on the squad cars, brought them to the Gestapo headquarters. From there they were transported to the trucks to closed cattle cars, and driven out of the country, and left, and we never saw them again.

CHAPTER 3

PERIL

And it became, like I said, I don't know the date exactly, but it was the end of July of '42, a hot day, drizzly, like rainy.

A friend of my father's, who was a man about fifty-five, a Jewish man, said to me, "You see every day more people will be taken out every night. The only way to survive might be to find a hiding place."

He said to me, "I know of a place. Do you want to go along and see first if that is the right place for your family?"

So we walked. We had a star on our coats. We had our identification paper with the "J" with us. We walked downtown. It was a place that was absolutely the wrong place to go in hiding, a dangerous place. So we went back, disillusioned, disappointed.

We were walking back. We were maybe a mile from my home that two people, a man and a woman, probably a couple, were coming up to us – non-Jewish people, no star.

They said to us. "You know, it's dangerous for you to be on the street because the German police is on the street the Gestapo too. All the SS and all these names of the party are looking for people with a star. It doesn't matter now if you are a boy, or a man, or a girl, or an older woman."

"They take everybody," they said. "You better see that you go home."

That's what we tried to do, trying to put our hand on the star that they wouldn't see what we were. I remember trying to stay as calm as we could. Suddenly I saw on the other side of the street – my brother.

I was twenty-one years old at the time. He was nineteen. He was a tall man like my father, over six foot. He had been a medical student, but was not allowed to continue and had taken a job as a male nurse. He was only allowed in a Jewish old-age home. He was on his way to work.

After that couple left and had told me that it was so dangerous, and seeing my brother going the other way towards town, I wanted to run over to warn him to go home!

I had just stepped off the sidewalk. The man next to me stopped me. It's like a miracle. This man was almost totally deaf.

He said to me, "Let me look. You better stay here."

I said to him, "I don't see anything. I only see my brother."

He said, "Yes, but your brother is already arrested."

Because of his deafness his sight was better developed. He could see that the men behind him with tan raincoats were Gestapo men, like here, the CIA. They had revolvers in their pockets. Nobody else in Holland and in Europe during that time was allowed to carry weapons. Never, but only of course, the occupation, the German soldiers, the German army, and the German police. He knew he could see that. I, as a normal seeing person, who could hear normal too, never would have seen that.

So this man saved my life because if I had run over or had yelled, “Rudy, go home.” They would have caught me.

I happened to have, I remember that quite well on my dress, it was a very nice dress, I had not sewn a star yet. That was the worst sin that you could do against the Nazis because you wanted not to know that you were Jewish. That’s what they thought. I happened to have few dresses, and that dress was one that I till that time had not time to sew a star on. So if I had run over I would never, never been released. I would have been dead, all ready, for over sixty years.

My brother, who was a medical student, as I told you, was now a male nurse. He was on his way to that Jewish home. He had a special paper that was called a spare. He would be “spared” temporary because they needed him – doctors and nurses – to care for the sick people in these old age homes. So he walked.

They told him, these Nazis behind him, “You walk, straight, looking ahead! If you don’t, we shoot you!”

In the 1940’s you never heard of anything like that. Now-a-days students have heard many things – drive-by shootings, a lot of people carry weapons. Every day people getting killed in Rockford, that close by here. So you can imagine that for us, for him, for my brother to hear that they will shoot him, was reason enough to go ahead, walk ahead.

He heard shuffling behind him so he knew more people were taken. He walked and he walked. It was more than a half hour, maybe more than three-quarters of an hour till they came to the headquarters of the Gestapo in that school.

There they came into the playground. The first row was put against a wall, not knowing what was going to happen. Hundreds and hundreds came in that afternoon until it was filled up – all Jewish people with the star – small children, old people, women, men. All kinds.

Then the high officers, they were in uniform, came out. They said to them they had to walk in circles – one circle this way, one circle the other way for hours and hours, till it was dark – without food, without drink in that hot drizzly weather. When it became night they were put into the hallways. They couldn't rest, and they couldn't stretch their legs because soldiers with their rifles and bayonets were walking between them. So they had to pull up their legs till the next morning. They were chased out again, and had to walk in circles both ways again.

Till in the late afternoon the high officers came out with cookies and beer, not for the people but for themselves – to eat in front of those hungry, tired, worn out people.

Suddenly one of the highest of these officers called out, "Halt! Stop!"

Everybody stopped.

Then they called out, "Is here a Rudolf Frank?"

That was the name of my brother.

"Come forward!"

So my brother had to come in front of all these people. He had no idea what was going to happen.

aus der Fuenten – that was his name. The highest officer at that time, in that school, in the headquarters said to him, “You are a male nurse, aren’t you?”

My brother says, “Ya. Yes.”

“You have a special paper?”

“Ya. Yes.”

“Show it to us.”

So he did. He had to carry it with him. He showed it to this high officer.

Then he said in German like they barked – like the Germans were mostly barking at us – especially the Nazis, “Machts, das du rauskommst!” (See that you get out!)

My brother didn’t know if he should run or walk. But he went out, and he made it home. He was the only one who could tell this story. Therefore, I can tell you this story now.

All these other people had to stay till the night came. There came the trucks. There they were brought to the central station, out of the country – never to be heard of again.

The Germans had said they needed people for labor camps. They never mentioned concentration camps or death camps. We did not know that. We had never known about gas chambers or anything like that till after the war.

CHAPTER 4

TRAGEDY

Now it was the end of almost August of '42, eighteen of August '42. A Tuesday afternoon, time for my father to receive patients. There was a ring on the bell. I was there.

I opened the door from the top because they had asked, "Is Dr. Frank home?"

Of course he was home. This was time to get patients, Jewish patients. Who came up the steps?

Two men in tan raincoats, two Gestapo – very polite as the Germans can be – coming into our living room, sat down, and said, "I want to talk to Dr. Frank."

My father was already in his room.

He came in, and they said to him, "You have to give us information."

My father said, "What is it that you want to know?"

They said, "Not here. You have to come to the headquarters."

My father pleaded with them, "I can tell you here what you want to know."

"No! Our superiors told us to bring you there."

They told my mother and I was there – the three of us were there. My brother was working.

To my mother, "You pack a suitcase for him with a blanket and some night underwear or pajamas, in case he has to stay overnight."

Another lie that the Germans told, because they knew beforehand that he would not be home that night. We didn't know that. We made it ready for him.

I see my father leave, going down the steps, around the corner – never, never to be seen again – the eighteenth of August 1942.

CHAPTER 5

ESCAPE

Now it became September 7 – September 1942. September 6 I have to tell you about. There we were, my mother and I. My brother was working. It was a Sunday afternoon. It was late summer. It was a nice day, I remember.

We were saying, “How long can we go on? We don’t have a place to go in hiding. What will we do?”

We were hoping and hoping for that invasion that was promised us years before, already, since 1940. It had not come in ’42 yet.

That afternoon there was a knock on the door. Who stood there? A man I had never seen before. A young man, blond hair, blue eyes – real Germanic – but many Dutch people look that way. Many also with dark hair and dark eyes.

It was a young man who said, “I am a journalist. I am a friend of the father of a good friend of yours.”

I will say the name, Leonard DeVries. That was a friend of mine at the time. This man didn’t mention his name as far as I know.

He said, “You have to trust me.”

He told me, “If you trust me I know a place for you to go in hiding where it will be safe.”

What was I going to do? When you were staying home you knew that one night, after eight o’clock, the Nazis would come and take you.

You would be gone – disappear. I talked it over with my mother what I was going to do. My mother did not see the danger really yet.

But she after a long time talking to her. She said, “You go.”

The young man had left and said, “You come tonight. I live with my mother.”

He gave me the address.

“You stay overnight and tomorrow we will see what we will do. I will tell you tomorrow. You walk alone.”

I left that night before dark, and I went over to his house where his mother was, a nice lady.

She said, “Here’s your bedroom. My son will tell you tomorrow what you are going to do.”

It must have been an underground house. I don’t know. I had never heard of a Dutch underground movement, but there was. The next morning was Monday, September 7, a date that is printed in my brain forever, 1942.

In the morning this young man said to me, “From now on you are not Jewish anymore. Give me your paper with the “J” on, take all the stars off your clothes.”

I had a little suitcase with clothes with me.

And he said, “Here. Here is another paper. We could not get you a total new paper. That is impossible, but we have sometimes papers that will be about your age, also from a woman. We will put your thumbprint on there.”

There was not a picture on it.

He said, "We hope that it will help you to go in hiding."

So I took all my stars off, and he gave me that paper.

He said, (Monday afternoon, that day, seventh of September 1942.)

"You, at four o'clock you will leave from here. You will go by yourself because when I go with you. . ."

They knew that – that the Germans had said already a long time before. Anybody, any Gentile who will help Jewish people, will undergo the same fate as they – never mentioning the fate. We knew that we would disappear, but we had no idea where, to what. So I understood the man and didn't want to get him in danger. I agreed. It became four o'clock. He gave me his bicycle, and I went on my way.

It was a bicycle with a total different brake system. It was not a year old, but I knew for my life I had to get on that thing. I put my little suitcase in the back.

I was half of the way. It was half an hour, at least, to go to the station where he had said he would meet me. He would buy a ticket, and that we would go out of town on the train, something that was totally forbidden for Jewish people.

It was forbidden not to go without a star, without a paper with a "J". I was doing everything against the Nazi law. The only way that I, in desperation probably thought, the only way to try to survive.

In the middle of my trip my little suitcase fell off in the middle of the street and opened. There was the police in the middle. There were no red, yellow, and green lights in those years. It was a traffic cop in

the middle of the street. He stopped the traffic for me to get my clothes together and put it back in there.

I thought, "September, the vacations are over. What will this man think? That I am a Jewish girl trying to escape? Trying to get somewhere?"

You can not imagine how hard my heart must have beaten. But I got on my bike, and I got out of there.

I made it to the place where this man said to bring his bicycle. I left it there and walked over with my suitcase into the hall of the station.

There he was, this young man as he had promised. He gave me a ticket. He had also told me we act that we don't know each other.

"You know, when they catch you – and that's possible – there will be an inspection maybe on the train. Your paper has to hold up. If not, I have done everything I can do," he said.

"So you do what I do, but we do that we don't know each other."

So I followed him to the train. He went into one of the trains. It was around five o'clock, the rush hour. At that time you had rush hours. It was filled with people who lived in other towns, who came from their work.

I followed him. He sat on one side. I on the other side. It was so filled up that not even a mouse could get in, and certainly not a German police.

I was so lucky there was no inspection that afternoon on the train. But I was sitting between people that I, of course, thought knew exactly what I was doing. They know I am trying to get out of here.

But, of course, everyone was thinking about their work. They were coming home, going home and, of course, not thinking about that. But when you know you do something against the government, even if it was this evil German government

I told you what I had – no star anymore, false identification paper. I had been on a bicycle, going on a train, which was not allowed. It was a terrible feeling, but I had taken that chance. So I was there. We made the first leg.

Most people went off the train. We went off the train. I followed him to another train.

Then it was, already, a little bit, not yet a little bit darker – a little bit. It was maybe six-thirty by that time. I went on the other train. There were not too many people in. I hoped and I hoped that we would get through that also.

The train went south. I had never been to the south of Holland. Holland has eleven provinces, but I had never been to the province of Brabant, where I was going. I didn't know. We went for another hour on the train. We didn't talk. We didn't look at each other.

CHAPTER 6

REFUGE

Finally the train stopped at a little station, and we went off. There were a few men. I didn't know them. They had two extra bicycles for us. We went on the bicycles, and we went on a country road.

It was so quiet and so green yet and the trees around. To leave that city of terror after more than two years of occupation, I thought I was in heaven. I could not believe that this was still occupied Holland. Such a change. But it was. It was still occupied Holland, and there were still German soldiers, and Gestapo, and all the horrors of these real criminals.

Anyway, we were bicycling for half an hour, and I saw in the distance an old, old country home – a dilapidated home, the more close I got.

I thought, “Where are we here?” There was nothing around but a few trees and pastures, some cows.

Then we came closer and closer. I could see there was a man and a woman, a gentleman and a lady in front of the house. They introduced themselves to me. They were Baron and Baroness van Boetzelaer, real nobility, country nobility, some people who you don't get in touch with as a commoner. They were very simple, plain people, religious people, Christian people who did it out of their religious conviction.

Also, really being for the royalty of the royal house, they had listened to the Queen, who had said, “You have to help your Jewish brothers and sisters.”

They were the most noble, most fine people I have ever met in my life. When I met them, they opened the door.

I was suddenly in another age. It was not the twentieth century. Everything was like in the nineteenth century. There was no electric light, there was no electricity, and no running water.

There was a stove in the kitchen that probably nobody here has ever seen, a black, black huge stove that you had to use either paper – whatever you had, wood or coal. That was going to be my work.

I chose that. They didn’t say I had to do anything, but the Baroness didn’t know how to cook. Her maid didn’t know how to cook, and I didn’t know how to cook.

But I said, “I will try.”

So I started at two o’clock in the afternoon. We wanted to eat at seven o’clock that night – five hours of steam and smoke in the kitchen. I wore overalls, and I got a meal together. Unbelievable. They liked it. So I was to cook for the rest of the time.

There I met my friend, Leo DeVries. As I said, he was there by himself. Unbelievable how he got there. That’s quite another story – and how he got me there by this man who suddenly had disappeared. The young man had gone back to Amsterdam. I don’t remember even seeing him leave. Everything was so new and old that I forgot.

There I was, and there we were – Leo and I, and the Baron and the Baroness, and the maid. She was a farm girl about sixteen years old. I still correspond with her. I telephoned her a few weeks ago, on the fifteenth of April was her birthday. We kept in touch all those years. I have a picture of her. I am the only survivor still from that time. All the others have died.

Anyway, I went there, and they treated me like their daughter. They had two sons, who were as old as I was, but they were students. They were agricultural students, and they were in the north of Holland in school in agricultural college. I was there with Leo, and then the Baron, the Baroness, and the girl.

We were careful not to go outside, not during the day, not during the night. Besides being in a hiding place, we had a little hiding place between the pantry and the kitchen that was – I don't know how many square feet. It was a small place where four people could sit in, and one and a half could sleep in. There were no bedrooms.

Normally I never had a pajama on or anything night clothes. We always had our clothes on day and night, that we could go in there in case of a raid by the Nazis because even there it was dangerous. We lived always in fear that they would find out.

CHAPTER 7

REUNITED

We went through the winter of 1942, and it became 1943.

The Baron, who liked me so much, said, "I treat you like my daughter. I always wanted a daughter."

He said, "I will go and pick up your mother and your brother."

So he did. He went, and my mother finally went along, left her beautiful antique furniture that she didn't want to leave, and went with him. They came on the night of the twenty-eighth of May, 1943. We were safe and well at that place, Eickenstein – Eickenstein, you can call it.

Ah, no. No, no, no, no, no. I have the wrong name – Zwanenburg. Their estate was Eickenstein, but that was in another part of the country. This was a rented part that they needed because the Baron was a clerk in the highest court of Holland in the vicinity. So they had rented this place. This was Zwanenburg. And you understand, it is Zwanenburg. There I stayed through the years 1943 – 1944.

Finally the invasion came on the sixth of June. My brother heard on his little crystal receiver. We were waiting for it day in, day out. Although we were at least safe for awhile, we were still all waiting for this time that the allied forces would land in Europe. That day finally came – D-Day – the sixth of June 1944.

On that day we did not know how many American soldiers had been killed. How many were killed by the Nazi and German troops on the

beaches of Normandy. Unbelievable – thousands and thousands of them. We will be grateful forever for that day. They were the real people who liberated us.

The Baron and Baroness liberated us, and they could not liberate their own son (Zeger). The youngest was, without them knowing, as a student had gone into the underground movement in the north of Holland – the part that was liberated much later than we – who were in the south.

He was in the underground movement. He tried to keep a bridge from being blown up by the Nazis and was caught and executed. So they lost one of their sons and we survived, which was a very hard thing to take. But we had already taken so much that we had to take this too.

Like I say, we were the lucky ones. Of all the one hundred forty-thousand Jewish people in the Netherlands, one hundred ten thousand were murdered in the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, which was not a death camp, but where people were dying from typhus and other diseases, like Ann Frank, and her sister, and mother. There were so many other camps – thousands of camps were there.

It is almost unbelievable that the German people never knew about these camps, but they didn't care either what happened to the Jews. The Germans were not very – pro-Semitic. Wrong word, but that I will use this time. We were lucky.

I want the people to know that Hitler never would have come that far and became the highest power in the country if he had not had Dr. Joseph Goebles as his Minister of Propaganda.

He was an ugly-looking guy, as shrewd as there is, who told the German people, "If you tell a lie a thousand times, the people will eventually take it as the truth."

This doomed the Jewish people in Europe because of the lies that were told about the Jewish people. They are no better, no worse than anybody else. They are human. There is only one race, and that's the human race.

CHAPTER 8

DANGER

As far as I can remember, we had times there that it was dangerous too – especially in 1943 it was very dangerous. The Germans were looking for labor people, not especially alone for the Jews. They were looking around.

One time the Baron got really scared. He let us go out of the house, out of that little hiding place, that small place. We had to walk in the snow in the woods. I thought that was really – I don't want to use the word – but it was really stupid because you could see your steps in the snow. I thought I heard in the distance the Germans and their dogs.

I thought, "Now they find us."

When we were in the little place maybe they would have not come in the house, and would not have found us. But luckily they never followed that path. We were for about ten hours in the woods in the ice cold – my mother, my brother, the oldest son (Rutger), Leo, and I.

Rutger had come home because he didn't want to sign a loyalty declaration – that he wouldn't do anything against the Germans. It was required of them by all students. He, as a good Dutchman, didn't want to do it, so he had to go into hiding too. So we had an extra one. We were in the woods until night.

We also had a little cabin – half in the wall of a little hill. It was filled with straw where we would sleep, in case it was necessary to be out of the house. That saved us too.

One time, and that was one of the biggest dangers we had, we were in the house. Leo, who was a writer by profession, wrote boys books well known in Holland at that time. He was writing a book, and he was illustrating it.

The Baroness had given him permission to sit in the back in the woods. We had a wooded place away from the first pasture. He was in there with a table in there. He was doing his work till suddenly German soldiers came out of the bushes and caught him.

Luckily in one way they were only looking for Americans and Englishmen because every night and during the day – the big flying fortresses, American planes and the British, the Spit-fighters, and I don't know all the names anymore. They were coming over, and sometimes they were shot down. They were looking for people to catch – the so-called enemy, the Americans, and so on.

He was dressed in khaki. I remember it. We were in the house. He was brought to the house with the bayonet in the back by two soldiers. We were just warned on time. We were in the little hiding place, just before they came through the house. I remember them coming and hearing them coming in.

I thought, "Oh, my gosh. They will find us!"

This little thing had a little lid on and a little Oriental rug on top so to hide everything. We were never sure they would not look in every hole and wherever they could see anything.

We heard them on the steps, that barking of the German soldiers. We heard someone talking on the telephone. We had no idea what was

going on. We stayed in there about one and a half hours – the four of us, the oldest son of the Baron, my mother, my brother, and I.

In the meantime the Baron and the maid, who were alone in the house at that time. The youngest son at that time in '43 was in the house. They had called the mayor of the town, who did not know anything about us being there.

The Germans wanted to take him (Leo) there to find out if he was registered. Everybody had to be registered if you were not in your own home. Of course, we as people in hiding were never registered. So was Leo not registered. He was walking on the highway with these two soldiers towards the mayor's office.

The Baron called the mayor and said, "I want to tell you I have here a writer from Amsterdam. He is here for the summer. Would you please tell the soldiers when they come that he is registered?"

Being the mayor, and being the Baron, and knowing each other, that is what the mayor said. So they let Leo go.

Leo came home, and we still didn't know. We stayed in that little hole till they came and said it was safe because there was in front a German soldier, who had stood guard there all that time, for one and a half hours while we were in there.

He said, "I don't trust it. I will come back with the Gestapo."

He never did. That was our luck that he never did. But then we were even more careful than other times. We stayed around that little square hole as much as we could in the room next door. I helped still in

the kitchen, but we were mostly there. They never came back, which was unbelievable.

CHAPTER 9

LIBERATION

Then, of course, September 17 of 1944, after the invasion was for us a day we will never forget. It was a Sunday. It was beautiful weather. I was in the kitchen. We suddenly saw in the distance all little spots in the air.

We thought, “What is that?” All black spots in the air, nothing on the radio. Nothing.

We didn’t know. You know, there was a time that there were no television. I always have to tell that to the students. There was once a time when there was no televisions. We had only radios.

It didn’t take long. Toos, I will call her by her name. Toos, the girl, who was the cleaning lady there at sixteen or seventeen years old – she went to the road to see what was going on on the highway, the country road.

She came back and said, “All – they are all American soldiers. They are all there. They must have jumped out of the planes, but I don’t know English. I don’t know how to talk to them. You have to come.”

My mother, who knew English, my brother and I, we went out. We went to the road, thinking the war was over. This was only the seventeenth of September 1944.

We talked to the soldiers, we saw them in jeeps, we saw high officers. We saw all kinds. They had chocolate with them.

They had gasmasks with them. They didn't know if it would be a gas war like World War I. They had no idea. They had to keep the bridge three miles away from us – three kilometers away from us – that that would not be blown up by the Germans. And so in a little while all the Americans had left our neighborhood.

There we were in no-man's land. We couldn't see the Germans. We didn't know what we were. It was very strange. We went straight back to the house and hoped for the best.

Then the next afternoon there was a ring on the bell. There were high German officers. Now the times had changed. The Allies were in the neighborhood. They didn't know what to do. They wanted to take over the house as a kind of headquarters.

After the Baron talked with us, and all together we decided the best way was to get out of the house. We loaded some clothes and some things on a donkey, and on some bicycles. We went without knowing where we were going out of the house. We were afraid that when the Germans would take over this place, it would be like a fortress and may be bombed.

Luckily we survived this. We went out and we stayed the night, overnight, in a barn with more people. We made it through and when we came back, the house was liberated by the British, who made a radio post out of it.

For six weeks we had to stay, all of us, in the basement because there was fighting like a real war. Around us the British came in. They

were the first there. Then the Canadians came in, then the Americans. So they were all there.

We were in October sometime. There was not a set time. We were finally liberated. We thanked the ones who helped us – the Americans, the Baron, and the Baroness, who guided us through those difficult years and brought us into freedom.

I tell you, there is nothing better but your health, of course, and freedom! Nobody in this country and all over the world should never forget that without freedom there is no life.

CHAPTER 10

VISITATION

During my time at the Baron's I often slept in a room by myself. It was pitch dark because we didn't have electric light, as I told you. Candles were too dangerous, anyway, to let burn during the night. It was pitch dark. I was never a lover of darkness, but in those years that was the safest to be.

I was sleeping and I woke up in the middle of the night by a hand on my head. I know that for sure. I woke up and otherwise in normal circumstances and especially in times of danger, I would be very alarmed, but I was not. I was very calm, and it was very peaceful. I knew that this was something special.

Who the hand belonged to, I don't know. I listened for breathing, like a human being would breathe. I didn't hear a footstep. I saw nothing, but after that I was fully awake.

I heard something, somebody drinking out of the pitcher that was left for my washing for the next morning on the dresser about – a about a ways away. It was a long room. I heard like a sound of a river or a little stream and like somebody, something was drinking out of that pitcher.

The next morning I asked the Baron. I never said anything about that.

I said only, “Is it possible because this is an old house that a rat or a mouse could have come in and drank out of the pitcher, not falling in and drowning?”

He said, “That’s impossible. It’s too slippery. That is not possible.”

Then I combined the two things that happened so enormously quick after each other. After thinking for a long, long time, that this must have been a supernatural being that told me, “Use your brain – by having his hands on the top of my head – use your brain and talk because the water was going like a little river or stream.”

That’s how I finally decided that I probably had to tell this story as long as I live. That’s what I am doing since 1959.



O.M. Baron van Boetzelaer



Ursula Baroness van Boetzelaer



Zeger Baron van Boetzelaer

Zeger Baron van Boetzelaer, the Baron and Baroness's youngest son, joined the Netherlands underground, and was executed by the Nazis on December 20, 1944.

The van Boetzelaer family received *The Righteous Gentile Medal* from Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Israel.

The title *Righteous Among the Nation* is given to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.



Rutger W. Baron van Boetzelaer
Picture taken 2003



Toos Kerkhof nee van Vugt
Picture taken 1998



Leo DeVries, Author & Friend
Picture taken at the beginning
of World War II

The following are slides taken of Dina Frank by Leo DeVries in the Province of Gelderland around the beginning of World War II.





THE HIDING PLACE

This is the home, Zwanenburg, as it was when Dini Frank, her mother, Julia Frank, and brother, Rudolf Frank, hid during the German Occupation in the Netherlands.

The pictures were taken just before World War II.





Baroness and Baron van Boetzelaer with
Dini Frank's mother,
Julie (Vecht) Frank Gomperts.
Picture taken in 1946



Dini Frank with Baroness and Baron van Boetzelaer
Picture taken in 1946

IDENTIFICATION PAPER



This is the forged document used by Dini Frank during the German Occupation of the Netherlands in World War II.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



Dini Frank met her husband, Walter Oppenheimer, in the town of Zwolle five years after World War II. They immigrated to the United States, September 24, 1951. Six weeks later their first child, Edgar, was born. She became an American citizen in 1957.

They settled outside the city of Freeport in Northwest, Illinois, where Walter became a cattle dealer.

Dini has two children: Edgar (Lola) Oppenheimer and Emily (John) Hartman, and four grandchildren: Aaron Oppenheimer, Andrew, Alexandra, and Andrea Hartman.

For the past forty-seven years she has told her compelling story to schools, churches, synagogues, and organizations in Northwest Illinois.