

I wanted to know how on earth did I come to this de Jongh family. So I asked my foster sister, the eldest one who died six weeks ago. Do you know something about it? She said, no. You have to ask my father. And my father, he passed away. So I don't know. So I said to her, can you recall a name, Schwenke. Do you know something about it?

Yes, she said. He was also in the resistance movement. My father was the head of this district. And Mr. Schwenke was the brains behind it. He was the one who figured out, because he had in and out on the governmental level. And they were together.

So I asked him, where did they live? Where did he live at that time? She said, well in Oosterbeek where we used to live. So I came home and I wrote a letter to the municipality of Oosterbeek, that I did a research for the Medal of the Righteous among the Nations of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. And after three months, I got my own letter back. On the back it was stamped from municipality to municipality, that they moved from one place to the other place, et cetera, et cetera. Usually you have to pay for that. But this was free of charge, because they were nominated for this medal.

And the last stamp, it says there is a Tina Schwenke, Christina Schwenke. She is still alive. That's the daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Schwenke and she lives in Driebergen. And I received this letter on a Friday. And I opened this letter on a Saturday. So I came to my wife and I said, Annette, listen. I have to go to Holland, because maybe she's in her 90s. Maybe she is-- I cannot speak. She is the last one who can tell me something about my parents.

And it was just before Passover, a week before Passover. Then we have a problem. Because there are a lot of people are coming to Israel, going out is OK. But coming back it's a problem. So she said, why don't you call. So I called a friend. And I said, Leo, I'm looking for a telephone number for so-and-so.

So he said, hold on. I got a telephone-- [AUDIO OUT] I thought it's an elderly lady. And so, I got her on the phone. And she said Tina Schwenke. OK, so good morning. Miss Schwenke. My name is Tswi Herschel, and I'm calling you from Israel.

And then she said, are you the son of Nico and Ammy? I said, yes. And then it was we were disconnected. So I said after a few seconds, are you there? Are you there Mrs. Schwenke? And it was a tiny little voice, said, it is if I found a lost son back. I said, well, can you tell me something?

My mother and I, we went to Amsterdam to the ghetto. I took you from your mother in my arms, because I was 17 years old. And a 17-year-old can have a baby. And I brought you to our home. And after a week, or 10 days, or two weeks, we brought you to the family de Jongh. That's the story.

And you do keep in regular contact with de Jongh's and Tina Schwenke?

Oh, yes. With my foster brothers and sisters, the ones who are still alive, we have telephone contact. And whenever we are in Holland, we visit them with. Tina Schwenke, it's a different relationship. She had never been married. And she sees me as her son, more or less.

So she calls us much more often than my foster brothers and sisters. But that's also because this relationship we built up was in a later time. And the moment that's what she told me that when I mentioned my name, she was always looking for me. She wanted to know what happened to this little baby, what I took. So her relationship is in a different perspective as it is from the family de Jongh.

And do you know if this was common for the Schwenkes? Did they do this for other children, perform some resistance activity, aside from the father? No, they did it, I think, because of the simple fact they very much appreciated the friendship of my parents with the Schwenke family. And it was very dangerous what they did, very, very dangerous.

I wanted to backtrack just a little because you said that your first religion that you learned was Calvinist. But the other day when I said to you we were talking about Judaism, and you said, I'm so Jewish. So I wanted to know what that was like for you, how you came to appreciate Judaism after being raised in a non-Jewish religion, and how hard that was for

you.

First of all, when I was taken to my new family in 1945, I prayed in my bed to God that he is going to forgive me, because I was praying in a different language, and that I couldn't go to church. And I still can remember all the prayers. If you want me, I can do it in Dutch for you now. It's no problem.

Even that my foster sister, when we are invited to be there with lunch, she asked me to do the prayers. And I don't mind, to the contrary. They saved my life, and it doesn't matter anymore, whether it's Calvinistic, or it is Jewish, or whatsoever. But I know I feel inside me that I am so Jewish, I'm so connected to my heritage, connected to my people. And that was the main reason that we went to live in Israel.

And I wanted to also talk about that. Because the prophecy which is you can actually see the original in the exhibition, in our exhibition on hidden children. It's the last object that we display. And Tswi felt that it was very important, because remembrance was an extremely important part of the hidden child's experience. Because for many of them they had no memories of their parents. And this prophecy says a number of things.

And I wanted you to mention some of the things it says, and how it's related to your life today. And what has come of the prophecy in comparison.

Here's what I would like to thank you, here for the opportunity gave to me to display this, the story of my life. It's an honor to my father and my mother. And I was very touched when I saw the first time this afternoon, and my friend came to see me here, and to be here with this interview. I showed it to him, and again, I cannot describe my inner feeling, my emotions about it. Well, a part of it came out.

First of all, my love. And first of all, I'm very sporty. I did a lot of sports in my life. I never smoked, by the way. And one of my sports is sailing. And we are very lucky to have our own sailing yacht, my wife and I, Annette and I, we sailed in 1986 from Amsterdam all the way around via Gibraltar to Tel Aviv in three months. And there are two things.

First of all, you can see in this description of my life, it says that I'm going by boat to Israel, to Palestine. That's true. That I am going to emigrate. That's true. The only thing is I got two daughters, and not a son.

But you have a grandson.

That's right.

OK. Finally before we open it up to questions, you said I could ask anything you wanted. You gave me carte blanche. So I'm going to ask you how you've dealt with learning about your past, the post-war relationship with your grandmother and your aunt. How have you dealt with that psychologically? What have you done or what have you learned to help you? And what is it like for you today?

In the beginning, it was very hard to find a way, to find-- as a teenager, you have all kinds of difficulties. And my difficulties were much more severe than anyone else. When I was 18, I don't want to describe the youth I had. It's not necessary. But when I was 18, I felt so horrible. I got up in the morning. And I was shaving myself. And I saw my own face. And I said, who are you? What do you want? And what are you going to do?

So the first question was very easy. I know I'm Tswi Herschel, and that's it. What I want I knew also. But what I'm going to do with it, I didn't know. But I find a way. And one of them was actually to disconnect my educators from my life. And that is a gradual thing. On the other hand, I tried to analyze my situation as such. And I came to remarkable ideas and results, and that actually steered my life in a certain direction.

I never had any help, no therapist, no psychiatrist or whatsoever. I did everything alone. And when I look back then, I think I did the right thing. I married the right wife. I got the right children. And I got a right grandchild.

Well, I'd like to open it up to any questions you might have for Tswi. Anybody? Don't be shy. Yes?

When you were living with your biological family, you described your childhood as it wasn't-- it wasn't very wonderful. But before you were taken, it was you had a wonderful life with the family that adopted you. It is surprising to me that when you were old enough, that you stayed a Jew, that you didn't say, well I'm not a Jew I'm a Calvinist. And that's who I am, and that's who loves me. It surprises me that you stayed Jewish, because there's no love. There was no love in your childhood associated with being Jewish.

I was expecting this question. And I think I'm very happy that you asked it. Somehow, in our genes, and that's not because I'm Jewish. I think with everyone, somehow it's there. And I give you an example. The time when we used to live in Amsterdam, one of the neighbors was a military rabbi from Holland. And we often, we talked about all kinds of things. One day, he said to me, I have to tell you a story.

To make a long story short, he said, I am giving a lectures about Jewish habits, Jewish laws, et cetera, et cetera, for the Jewish soldiers. But it's open for everyone, not only for the Jewish soldiers. So one day there came a soldier. And he said, well, that's interesting. I want to hear more. Is it OK that I join your lectures, he said, it's fine. After two or three lectures, he said I want to become a Jew.

So he said, OK. OK, you have to learn for it. So he gave him homework. And in no time, he did everything. After four months, he said now I want to become a Jew. And so the rabbi said to him, listen before you do that, we have one of the Ten Commandments is to honor your parents. You have to go to your parents and to tell them, and then to come back, and then I will proceed in this whole thing.

So he came to his father. And he said, well, I don't like it. Because we are Roman Catholics and I don't like it at all. But if you want to, go ahead. So he went to his mother. He said I want to become a Jew. And she had an emotional breakdown. And she said, you don't need to be a Jew anymore, because you are a Jew. Because I'm Jewish. I'm a child survivor. And I stayed with the family. So that's my answer. It's in your genes.

And sometimes it comes out, and sometimes not. And in my case, it came out.

[APPLAUSE]

This little girl here? When you went to church, was it hard when you prayed in the church, when you were Jewish.

I didn't know that I was Jewish. I was sitting in the front. I remembered that I'll say the minister doing the sermon et cetera, and there was someone with a long stick, and a velvet sack, and you have to put money in it. And I grabbed that sack. I put my hand in it and took it out, and there was-- and there was a button in it. So my mother said to me, don't do that again. And my father was very angry.

Tell them what your children say [INAUDIBLE].

Oh, yeah. My children say, well Daddy, he always goes everywhere with us. But when he sees a church, he has to go into the church.

Yes?

I think what you said, there's some confirmation. I don't know if people read in the Wall Street Journal in the last year, before I'm involved in medicine at UCLA. And with DNA research, in the Jewish religion, there are the high priests that were called [NON-ENGLISH] that go all the way back 3,000 years. They had to be pure, that did not have any deformity to become a priest or a leader. 1,800 of those were tested that were said that they had this thing told them by their parents, and 90% of them, I think it's on chromosome 22 had a marker. And it was on every one of them.

Well, I am not in this field. Can you tell me? I know a lot of stories. But I think it's true. In somehow, someway. I tell you another thing is I travel around the world, and I meet a lot of people. And somehow you can feel he or she is Jewish, yes or no. And 9 out of 10, and actually 10 out of 10, it's always being.

Yes?

What kind of qualities do you think you had as a child that enabled you to survive all of the changes, and the storms, and the turbulent passages that you went through? You must have had some special qualities? What kind of qualities do you think?

Let me repeat the question first. The question was, what qualities did Tswi have as a child that helped him weather the storm?

I don't know if you noticed. I'm a fighter. I never give up in my life. And that's my advice. And that's how I'm keeping. That's the way I am. And that's why I'm survived. I never give up. My children, they say, daddy, I know why. You never give up. Never give up when you are fighting for a good cause. The true thing, never ever give up.

Sir, yes?

Are you an observant Jew or a conservative, or reformed?

The question was, you an observant Jew, a reformed Jew?

Well, as in my-- when I was with my aunt and my grandmother, they were observant. Even my parents were observant, but not extreme. They were just ordinary Dutch observing Jews. I have the possibility, let's say more or less, to compare. And in principle, it doesn't matter anymore. What matters is actually what do you want to do in your life, and you know the difference between good and evil. And whether it's Christianity or it's any other religion, it doesn't matter.

I observe in a way my Jewish religion. I'm very religious in my heart. I don't need to go around with a yarmulke on my head, et cetera, et cetera. And I know I learned, I know a lot about Judaism, and I know a lot about Catholicism. And at home we are kosher. We are kosher at home. And on Friday night, I go to the synagogue. It's two minutes' walk from my place. And just to get into the atmosphere of that Friday night, because Friday night is a celebration, the whole family is there.

And at last, we have a bigger family. First, we were sitting with two, then we're sitting with four. Now we're sitting with five, and another two grandchildren. So we're sitting with eight. So for me, it's fantastic. So why should you-- so it's everything together, to sit at a table with your family, your children, and your grandchildren. It's so positive. And the ceremony about it, the kiddush, the blessing of the wine and breaking the bread, it's a part of this fabulous, fantastic religion.

Any other questions? Well before I let you have the last word, I wanted to ask you. Your daughter, you have one daughter who lives in Israel. But you have another daughter who lives in the Netherlands. How do you feel about the fact that she doesn't live in Israel or the United States? How do you feel about the fact she still lives in the Netherlands?

I think when I speak also on behalf of my wife, it's terrible. It's she knows. She said the other day to us, listen, I'm missing out of this family life. It's very hard for us. We went all of us to Israel. We immigrated to Israel she couldn't get a proper place to work, et cetera, et cetera. She had the opportunity to go back to Holland, and she stayed there. But I think, and I do hope, and I pray that she will come back. And I'm sure, and convinced that she will come back.

And is it because you are concerned about the antisemitism, or--

Well, it's in the first place I want to have my family around me. But the antisemitism in Holland, I don't know if you know, if you read the newspapers about it, it's the highest percentage at the very moment in Europe. And I blame the Europeans, not the Muslims. Will blame the European politicians for it. But that's another-- I can give you a lecture about that.

Well, I wanted to thank you very much, Tswi. I've been looking forward to this for many months. And I'm so glad you

came. And as is the tradition for First Person, you have the last word. So anything that you'd like to say?

Yes. I have something to tell you, actually. I'm a father myself. And to give away your children or your child must have been terrible for those people at that time, for my parents. On top of it, no one ever talked about it. And I wrote a testimony. And when I did that, I came to the following conclusion. And also, because I know a lot of people, also child survivors. They say, well, it's a pity that my parents didn't take me with them.

But I came to the following thing. I read it for you. I have great admiration and profound respect for my parents, and all the other parents who had to give their most precious possessions, their children, with indescribable pain to strangers in the hope that we, their own flesh and blood, should live. This life that they granted to us should be cherished and passed on. We have to open ourselves up and recount our grief to our offspring in order for them to build their lives in peace and tranquility.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.