

"First Person"

Louis de Groot

July 17th, 2019. "First Person"

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July 17th, 2019. They were married just a few months shy --

>> World War II started in Germany's attack on Poland in September 1st, 1939, the war's full impact on your family, began in Germany's invasion of the Netherlands, in May of 1940. Before you talk about the war, and what happened to your family during the Holocaust, start, first, with just telling us about you and your family, what your life was like before the war.

>> We were a very happy family.

>> which, during the war.

So, .

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[STAND BY FOR LIVE CAPTIONS]

>> Extended family.

>> My extended family, about, 8 or 9  
uncles and aunts.

So --

>> So lots of cousins.

>> Lots of cousins, yes,.

>> After the Nazis came to power in  
Germany, and came to the  
Netherlands, tell us about your  
father, helping those fleeing from  
Nazi Germany, as they came --s.

BILL BENSON: We saw a picture  
earlier of Eva, tell us a little bit  
about who Eva was:

>> >> I found out about Eva, there  
she was, when she passed away.

BILL BENSON: When Germany, invaded  
Poland, September 39, world war II  
had begun.

At that time, did your parents, or  
others, that they knew -- do you  
think that they fought Germany, when  
they invade the Netherlands.

>> No never expected, the had been  
neutral in the world war, and so we

were expected they were going to be neutral in the second war, and through the second world war. As a matter of fact, I'm told, that on the streets, the night before, they attacked, Holland they said they would never attack a small country, on the bank.

BILL BENSON: And, of course, they did on May 10th, 1940. What do you remember about the German invasion, and what did it mean for your family, at that time?

>> Family, realizing, this was, trouble, so, we tried to -- to get out of the country.

They had to go through us so they just found a taxi and a taxi driver, willing to take us. Now, so we had to find a manual gas pump, and we did find one, as a matter of fact. And we lost so much time, by the time we tried to get to the west, the Army had already blocked all of the roads, so we had to turn back

home.

BILL BENSON: Go back home. Before that happened, when you shared with me two things, one was that when they actually marched, in you were awakened in the early morning by your dog.

>> Over head, yes, the dog was barking.

>> And then the other thing you shared with me, is that, police came and said, you should open your windows.

>> That's right, because there were -- they were about to detonate a bridge, in 19 -- 1944, the allies, that's the same place, that was blown up.

BILL BENSON: So when you opened the windows.

>> I opened -- opened the windows, and I started to hang out of the window, and then they blew up the bridge, go back into the house. Enormous catastrophe.

BILL BENSON: Once the -- when you came back after you tried to flee, you came back for -- now the Nazis are in control.

Tell us about the incident, when -- when the German soldiers, tried to buy some -- they wanted to buy some things from your father's store.

>> well, well, they would come in to our country. I assume we were about 20 miles from the border. -- maybe 15, 20 minutes, and I couldn't find in Germany, so they would -- they would come, part of the south, and he wouldn't. The shores, the. But they found things that they can't find at home.

BILL BENSON: You told me, that once, the -- once Holland was under German control, after May 1940, things were relatively normal, until November of that year. And that you went back to school during that time. What happened after November,

1940.

>> Well, the -- actually, the first Jews couldn't be civil servants, and in Holland, most of the universities were state universities.

So professors, were civil servants. Professors were not allowed to continue teaching.

University, saying you had sign out to the German government.

The very first, people, in Holland, in other words they had to help the children. So, opposite of what they had had.

>> As bad as it was during that time, under the German occupation, things turned far worse, for you and other Jews in September 1941.

What happened at that time?

>> September 41 --

>> Okay.

>> That was actually, the worst, thing that affected me, because, my. I was in -- at that time, so, we -- we had to wait, until, the

Jewish faculty, so there was not until November.

So, at the same time, we were not allowed, to be at the houses of Jewish people, and Jewish people weren't to be at the house of the Germans, now my parents said don't worry about this. You can come here, and spend time.

But I was afraid, you know, the children didn't like me.

So, it was impossible.

BILL BENSON: Tell us some -- tell us about your bar mitzvah, you were 13 at that time.

>> The week before, my bar mitzvah, the Germans, it was part of the orders, to but it would take two weeks to get the administration set up, so I could apply for permits. So, when I --.

BILL BENSON: Louis shared with me a list that he made of a sample of restrictions, issued by the Germans, to Jews in the Netherlands. And

this is extraordinary, after the program, Louis is going to go up, upstairs, where you can chat if you want to, maybe an opportunity to take a look at this unbelievable list.

Just June 4th, 1941, public playgrounds swimming pools, Jews cannot stay in hotels, and beach resorts, tourist attractions such as the zoo, the museum, camping grounds, and playgrounds, are off limits, movie houses and theaters, are off limits for Jews, this is just one, this long list of restrictions.

Louis, did you -- you said to me, that you and "Chelly", you knew this was eating your parents up.

Can you say anything more about that?

>> Louis: well, my parents were going into hiding, and so there were, thinking we would be cut off, from the rest of the world.



At the same time, you know, they didn't tell my sister and me what they were doing, although they said, you can't talk about this; so, it was a very tense situation. Within the family, itself.

BILL BENSON: And, as your parents, and, of course, in 1942, roundups and deportations of Jews were underway.

And, you -- and you said your parents began, making preparations. Their preparations were extraordinary. Share some of them with us.

>> Louis: well, the -- they bought -- some of the -- the ships, because, as I said, you know, it was -- you know, it could be safe my brother, brought -- they were, totally perfect kind of a pace. My parents think that was the way it was done, in Holland. Before, my parents. And they used to have to send -- so my mother knew. Made

their own, and they were short with one of the neighbors.

well, that made an arrangement with the other neighbor to go into hiding.

But, you know, the day came that we went into hiding, people changed their mind.

So, we -- went to a hiding place, and didn't get the food.

>> BILL BENSON: Stored a great deal of it and didn't get anything.

>> That's right.

>> What was invent that triggered your parents to go into hiding?

What was --

>> There was a policeman, who came and warned us not to sleep at home, that night. The police in -- that they really got to be -- you know, recognized. For having warned people.

They weren't sure, but they were -- going to be used by the Germans to locate the Jews

they wanted to deport. They told us don't sleep at home. My parents, they asked the -- employee, about ten years, an employee, so I could go home with him, and sleep at his house, and he says, yes,.

He was the one who felt to see the next day, whether deported or not, because after they had come to the house, there was a seal on the lock, if there was a seal on the lock, you knew they had been there.

He looked and found out they had been there so he told my parents, my parents -- because, it had fallen through.

>> where did they go from there?

when it fell through, where did your parents go?

>> well, -- we referred to an uncle who was in hiding, who had been, in jail, for raising money, for the resistance.

And a clever attorney was able to get him out.

But, while he was in jail, he met people, so -- my the first thing to do was to go see him, and indeed, sister, for about 30 minutes, so then he told us where to go in Amsterdam, to France, and he was able, to arrange, to follow him. Somebody came and take me, to -- took me.

So, then my parents went down.

BILL BENSON: Louis, over the next year you and your sister Rachel were hidden separately in several different places.

>> Yeah.

BILL BENSON: while your parents were hidden together. Then Rachel joined your parents, and you went into hiding with the with the family, tell us what that year was for you, before you ended up with the Onderweeg family.

>>> The first year was a painful year.

And first, the first hiding places,

I told you about, I was detained, luckily enough, I got help, and I went back to see my parents.

They found me a new hiding place.

BILL BENSON: Let me stop you for just a minute. Louis, tell us what happened with that policeman, when you were betrayed. Somebody betrayed you, the policeman came to the house.

>> Yes, and he said, take you under arrest tomorrow morning.

Travel with you to Amsterdam, they can take me to Amsterdam, I can find my parents, and then, you know, you will be safe.

The fact is that they could claim that they arrested me.

The Germans during that time they were looking for -- especially for I.D. cards. I was on the -- just as alone in the corner, hopefully, enough for the Germans, to get me into questioning.

So, they -- nice to have a place.

They arrested me.

Thanked for having done that and told them I would find my way, because. It was such a difficult time. That who -- was on your side, you didn't know. But I started walking to find my parents, I can't recall. Someone was following, but it turned out he was.

Unfortunately, I never have been able to find -- to find him.

To thank him. But, that was a very -- you know, --

BILL BENSON: So once you were in Amsterdam you found your parents.

>> Found my parents.

So the lady, she just liked to have a boy there, first of all, she said, I only wanted a couple, they found me another hiding place.

The -- interestingly enough, the same lady, traveled with me, to a new hiding place.

They weren't bother people, and they were right, they were not to be

found that day. So we were told, there would be no hiding place, she was, of course, glad that I was going.

And I stayed there for about, six months,

I always wanted the people, to help me,

And they were nice to me. I can't -- I can't

understand -- understand that.

But.... one thing about -- going into hiding as a child, no place like home.

So, anywhere you go, you have to trust to the way people think, the way people act; and that was very much, in that particular case, the situation.

But

BILL BENSON: why did you leave there? And where did you go?

>> well, the people, they -- they didn't think, the truth. In hiding, you're a nonperson, in a way.

But, they occasionally, gave me soap to wash, or change my linens, or cleaned. They -- they were just taking that nobody sees me, or do they really care for me? I ate meals, with them, that was true; and one time, I had a cousin, who needed a -- a hiding place, very urgently, so she came to see me, the girl, it was a girl.

And so this cousin... and they thought that that was -- at that time, I was so fed up with these people, that I lost my cool.

And I told them off.

And they didn't like it.

So I used to go to my parents, to get room and board, and because you couldn't buy anything, without a ration card.

A ration card. So my father asked how was it going, they said, well, we had an incident. So my parents thought I was with very nice people and I was making trouble, so my



father came to talk to me.

And I said, to him, you know, take me to my mother. And six months, even for one day.

So after he did take me.

And so, I told him, exactly what my situation was, my parents, first, thought that I was telling this, because, I didn't want to be removed from them. But after a few days my brother said -- your story is so consistent. He can't be lying.

So, I never went back to that place.

But then -- it was difficult to find places, and I moved, out a few times, and in the summer and fall, of 1946; and then my father had to connect with the people who were, specializing helping Jewish children, and I don't know if any of you familiar with this.

She wrote a book "the hiding place" available here in the -- in the book, the organization, took me, from Amsterdam, to the hiding place.

>> BILL BENSON: That was in January 1944, you went to the Onderweegs and you would remain with them until after the war, and that was a different set of circumstances for you. Tell us about your time with the Onderweegs.

>> They were, first of all, very much involved.

And -- and the first six months, they helped 32 Jewish people find a hiding place.

I was not supposed to stay with them, their responsibility was to find a hiding place, for me.

And so, we told -- this was an agricultural area. He was a town clerk, he would find me a place, as a foreigner, and his wife told him, you're so undernourished. He can't go to a farm, a farm, I think. Just have him fry potatoes, after she kept telling him and telling him he finally gave in. But the family had already committed, to take a Jewish

baby.

So, the baby came about two, three days after I had come there.

We stayed all through the war. I talked about the first six months. Because, his family, all of us had to go into hiding. We -- we went all together, to show up, in a different city.

In the meantime, the Jews had -- there were a couple of people working in the underground. So the responsibilities became much larger. So he worked 24 hours.

You know, so our -- our livelihood, was working for --

BILL BENSON: Now you helped out.

>> Louis: I did courier work, I took care of some mail.

We had a special mail drop in a dentist's office, so just -- if it looked suspicious, who people who go there, they come out again.

We did stamps, I -- to fix the lights, an electrician, we went to

the roof, and so --

BILL BENSON: You said to me, that at the -- the Onderweegs, really made you feel safe.

Could you say more about that?

>> Louis: They were just incredible people.

They -- they didn't -- they naturally were convinced they would make it through the end of the war, and they were looking at us, but they always were able, the day.

They gave me a lot of -- feelings of confidence. They were very, very, very believing.

The fact that they would --

BILL BENSON: You shared with me Mrs. Onderweeg, she treated you, not like you were a Jewish kid who just needed to be hidden; that you were a kid, who didn't have a mom at that time. And she was going to be your stand-in mother.

During that time.

>> Louis: Exactly, exactly the

truth. She -- that I was a child, taken away from a mother, and so therefore, she had to -- stand in for a mother.

She felt the same way with the baby. who was almost two years old, after the war, mother showed up. His father hadn't survived. And they had to turn over the child.

This was a very emotional moment.

Because, they had exactly accomplished what they wanted.

They saved a child for another. But also, bonded with the child; and so it was really, remarkable, as a child, took from its biological mother. For two, three, days and she left -- she never got in touch again with the family. Youngest daughter, who was born after the war, and all was heard about the baby, the baby -- so when he was about 48 years old, I believe, he found out, where he had been -- his mother had never told him, they had

been in hiding, and so he came to visit. And they always have been in touch since then.

BILL BENSON: Let me -- in early April, 1944, several months after you went to the Onderweeg family, your parents, and your sister were arrested. You were 14.

When did you learn what happened to your family? And tell us about that.

>> Louis: Well, Ms. Onderweeg, went to be with my parents. And February 1944.

He took two **WUNLT** he wanted to make sure nobody was asking him for money, the other part was he wanted to set up some way that I can go home with my parents, and most importantly, he wanted to know my parents, they would stay with these people, not -- prophetically, he told them, if it ever happens, don't worry. Now, he didn't tell them, who he was, or the town where he

came from.

He said, you know, I could find a hiding place for her, meanwhile your son -- your children can be together. So my parents -- saying I'll be back in about six weeks to get the children, and so when they came back, they were about five days late and they had been betrayed. In our absence.

So I...

BILL BENSON: The -- the officer, who arrested your father.

>> Yeah.

BILL BENSON: He knew your father didn't he?

>> He knew my father.

He knew the family.

He had...

>> When they were kids.

And parenthetically you also told me he was the same police officer, who arrested, Anne Frank.

>> Louis: Yes, yes, Anne frank, the only difference, in Anne frank, it

was a German, who went to Germany.  
He to help us.

BILL BENSON: You tell me, that you  
had learned that your -- you learned  
that your parents, and Rachel, your  
sister, had been sent out of the  
country, but that you didn't believe  
the worst.

>> No, I -- they actually didn't  
know. The camps, we saw people  
working hard, and maybe a few  
survivors but we didn't know what  
happened until they -- you know,  
there's -- here undestroyed that  
shows how the -- what they found,  
they couldn't believe it.

. That's when we saw hope -- there  
were some people, who survived. So  
who knows? Maybe there's  
some -- maybe, you don't remember  
who they are.

So somebody, you know, came forward,  
as the witnesses said, just see them  
go to the gas chambers, I know they  
were, 1947, two years after the war,



ended.

BILL BENSON: When you found out the truth: We saw that picture, earlier, of your mom, and -- in the box car, tell us about that photograph.

>>Louis de Groot: Well, there was a -- a photographer, a professional photographer, it -- professional photographer.

The children were detained there, and every Tuesday, there were a few thousand people, to Auschwitz, and so this photographer, was told by to make a movie.

And, I mean, so, he -- he wrote a -- a he was going to film, a -- a -- he deportation, loading us in box cars, so he did a -- he did some -- and it just happened, he felt the car, standing near the door, before we left, so after the war, the people, purchased this -- wanted to see, asked him to -- and said, I -- I suggest. If

you come to Holland, come to, and show you the -- permanently, you can be identified. And I just go, and there was no question.

So, I -- I just kept the --.

BILL BENSON: The war ended, in May, 1945, Louis. You remained with the Onderweegs, until August of 1946. What do you recall of liberation, and then, what your time was like with the Onderweegs for the next 15 months? .

>> Well, one reason, I say this that they made it to school. I had gone to school before I went in hiding. They said I should go back to school. So, they knew my parents had been arrested; they knew, just like I knew, that we didn't know what happened to them; so we're going to wait, and see.

So, that was one of the reasons, why I stayed. They were very, very exceptional people, so, I had no reason to leave.

BILL BENSON: Right. Right.

School, you went back to school, after the -- the war ended; you had missed two-and-a-half years of school. What was it like for you to start school again? .

>> Well, I wasn't ready for school. First of all, I had gone to school three months, before I went into hiding, and now, I went to school, in May and June, July, and then, you know, ad --

BILL BENSON: Making up those grades.

>>Louis de Groot: Yes.

And so the children in school, many, many Jewish children, were in hiding. They were so proud to be in the class, I would sit there like a king.

Sitting --

>> You said it was almost like a festival!

>> Yes, that's right.

They were so proud.

None of them had known about people who were in hiding, and kept in Auschwitz; so, they were really, wonderful, so I was -- second grade, because -- it was tough for me, I guess, so at the end of the second grade, of course, I couldn't keep up.

So, then I went to orphanage, in Amsterdam, for Jewish boys; sounds horrible. But the children the boys had the same background, losing our parents in the war, I found an extended family. It was a very good thing to go there. The -- you know, we -- suffered the same pains.

The -- the school, in Amsterdam, was founded especially for people who had been in hiding or in camps, so we had teachers who worked with us very hard; and then, many of them called up -- too far back, the principal sent me down to his office, and he said, "Look, I will get your children, they will work

very hard, in order to catch up."

He says, you realize, your parents had been alive, I would talk to them, as I'm talking to you, you have to make a decision.

That was an important part of my life. And he said to me that I had to look out for myself, and nobody else would do it; and I said, "I will learn. " And so, I worked very hard. And I did catch up, and I got to school.

BILL BENSON: Louis, when you went to the boy's orphanage, and left the home of the Onderweegs, what was that like for you, to leave the Onderweeg family?

>> It was very difficult, unfortunately; but, we had had a good talk and good understanding, as to why it was good for me, to go back to the environment. That's what I wanted to do.

And they -- they supported it a lot.

>> And you've been able to remain in

touch.

>> I remained in touch with them.

I visited them. They had visited me in the states. You know.

BILL BENSON: Louis, did any other members of your large, extended family, survive?

>> Louis: Yes, I had an aunt and uncle, although -- one aunt lost her daughter, in Auschwitz.

The -- the whole family was intact. The aunt and uncle, the other aunt and uncle, had a daughter, in Auschwitz. Yes.

BILL BENSON: Everybody else was lost.

>> Louis de Groot: Everybody else was lost.

BILL BENSON: Your father, was a -- an amateur film --

>> Yes.

BILL BENSON: Photographer, he used 8 millimeter film, you know, back in the early late 30s, early 40s, and.

>> Yes.

BILL BENSON: You have some of that film. Tell us how you got that film.

>>Louis de Groot: well, he had kept safe keeping through a photographer he used to buy his stuff.

Then, the city where we lived, so the films were in a safe, and the safe had been blown open, to see whether anything was inside, so pieces of film were found, the films were damaged, that the photographer recognized, but I visited the city, he handed -- he gave them to me.

They are kept in the museum now, and they're in the -- in the.... facilities, set up for -- for saving.

BILL BENSON: And it's film you of you and your family doing outings and picnics and things like that. Yeah.

>>Louis de Groot: Yes, and so...: And the city, where I grew up, the -- there is a -- a lot of

activity, now, being placed, I don't know if you're familiar with it, people can move, and it says -- in this house lives so and so, who were supported. What date.

Lots of schools, decided to use these, as a article to teach about the Holocaust.

They had, for about 800 children, because the city also decided, to -- to have a monument, that -- The -- November.

BILL BENSON: The event in November.

>> The event in November, where they will have a monument, for the Jewish people killed,.

So some developed posters. Some folks, made some films.

About -- what they thought the family wanted -- if and one wrote a poem, and will be left at the -- the -- at the.

BILL BENSON: The event in November.

>> At the November --

BILL BENSON: The commemoration.



>> Commemoration, yeah.

BILL BENSON: Before we came up on the stage, Louis told me he just had gotten this poem written by this 15-year-old girl about Louis and his family, and he read it, in Dutch, but he read it and it's really just beautiful.

In the little time that we have left, I want to just ask you a couple of other questions. Louis. You, very generously, shared with me, your own personal memoire that you let me read. And in that memoire, you wrote, with incredible devotion and love, about your wife, Barbara.

will you just say a little bit about Barbara to us?

>>Louis de Groot: Barbara, was an outstanding, thoughtful person.

I had not realized, that in 1958, I went to Holland for one year, and Barbara met the Jewish people, and one family, they all had lost, and

camp survivors and she.... came,  
you know, -- came to -- to  
understand, how it was for me, to  
have lost my family.

And she -- she realized, that I  
thought about her, I mean, the loss  
of my family, was very, very  
painful.

And my children, from high school,  
from elementary school.

No grandparents, to go, and no  
parents -- no, children, for the  
grandparents.

And so, it was the same as the  
aunts, the oldest person.

You know, so, I -- I would shed a  
tear, and Barbara would go -- I was  
thinking about what happened again.

And she wanted to see me, to help me  
get out of this, of course, I  
grieved for a long, long time.

BILL BENSON: We're going to close  
our program, in just a moment. I'm  
going to turn back to Louis, to  
close our program.

Are you going to -- thinking about reading the poem?

>>Louis de Groot: If I may.

BILL BENSON: You may absolutely! I want to thank all of you for being with us today. It's clear, that, as I said at the beginning, we have spent a long time, here with Louis, we didn't even begin, to talk about what happened, after the war.

Going and fighting for the independence of Israel, and -- and many other things that Louis did with his life. But thank you, for being here. We'll have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until August 8th. All of our programs are on the YouTube channel, in the museum so you can see them there; so we hope you can see other programs, either in person, or online, if you will.

It's our tradition, at "First Person", that our "First Person", has the last word.

And so, with that, I'm going to turn it over, to Louis to close our program, when Louis finishes, we're going to try and rush him as best as we can, up, outside the door.

And I think we might go the back way -- and he's going to sit up there, and be available to answer any questions you have; to just meet him, shake his hand, take a picture with him -- whatever you would like to do, we welcome that once Louis's done, Louis?

>> Okay. This is a poem. She said, we walk 5,000.... they had to flee. They had to go into hiding, because they were not allowed to live anymore. Only 13 years old. Only survivor, father, and mother, and sister.

You can see him on the movies -- a survivor who gave us his memories of family life.

we think about our Jewish because they belonged to us in this city.

we know what has happened.

[APPLAUSE]

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BILL BENSON: Thank you all, very much and as I said Louis will head out and we'll have him upstairs, thank you, all.