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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Van de Perre
Forename:	Selma
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	7 June 1922
Interviewee POB:	Amsterdam, Netherlands

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV256

NAME: Selma Van de Perre

DATE: 4th August 2020

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 4th of August 2020 and we are conducting an interview with Mrs Selma Van de Perre. And my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.

What is your name, please?

My name is Selma van de Perre.

And when were you born?

I was born in June, the 7th of June 1922 in Amsterdam, Holland, the Netherlands.

Selma thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview - socially distant interview - in your garden. And tell us a little bit about your family background please.

I am one of four children. I had two elder brothers. One thirteen years older than me, and the other one eleven years older than me. And then I arrived in June 1922 after a long time, the girl they wanted, luckily for me. And then in 1928 my sister Clara was born. So that's why we are- with four of us.

And tell us a little bit about where you were born, about your parents' environment. What sort of-?

I was born in Amsterdam, but when I was fourteen days old, we moved to Zandvoort – a seaside town - near Amsterdam. And we lived there for four years, so I can remember being pulled- well, unless I saw the photographs and stories, but I think I can remember being pulled in one of these *strand- strand-* beach carriages, by my younger brother, David, who was then in his teens.

And why did your parents move out of Amsterdam?

[0:02:00]

Because my father was still *an de bühne* - on the stage - he was an actor. And he- actor and singer. And he thought- he said to my mother, "It's much better for the children to be near the sea in the fresh air rather than dirty town." And then after four years we moved to Alkmaar again, where my parents were born and… my brothers were born, or brought up at least, as well. And it's a small town in the north of Holland - and famous for the cheese market. And I went to school there for a year and then we moved to Amsterdam 1928. And that's where my sister was born.

And were there grandparents in-

Yes, we moved to Alkmaar, I think, because my father's grandparents were- his grandfather had died but his grandmother was still living there. I remember a very, very old lady. I was a young girl - and we went there every week. And… She died in- I think, '25 or '26, something like that.

And had the family been there for a long time, in Alkmaar?

Yes. My- my father's family and my mother's family have been there for centuries. In fact, the families came to, as far as I can go back, to Holland in the 16th century.

From where?

We don't know for sure, but we think from the east, probably.

And what was the family- what was their business? What did they do in Alkmaar?

My- their family- the- my father's- grandfather's- grandparents- he was brought up by his grandparents. And his grandparents- his grandfather and the- the rest of the- of the family members before that, they- when they came to Holland, they were dealers in skins. That's where the name came from: Velleman. Vellum is skin. And by the time my father was born, his grandfather had a big factory which made paper and other things from- oh, what do you call- what do you call that stuff? From old clothes… Spultje [stuff/odds and ends].

[0:05:05]

Yeah?

And- and that was- that was going very well until his father- his grandfather died.

And what happened to his parents? You said he was brought up by his grand-

Yes, he was- well- his parents- his father and mother lived in Haarlem, where a lot of the Velleman family come from - as well as Alkmaar. And his father had married first a lady and she died in childbirth, the first child. And the first child was also a Barend. And the first child died after four days as well. And then my great-grandfather married again. And she was five years older than he was but he married her again, within four or five months of his other wife dying, and he- they had another child. And that was my father and they called him Barend again. And then after a year, his sister was born, Tante Greta. And what happened was - this is the family story - is that the baby was lying on the table where my grandmother was trying to put a nappy on. And my father was playing on the ground as an- fourteen month or year-old boy. And the bell went and she went to open the door, my grandmother, and she left the child on the table. When she came back the child was on the floor. And she thought that my father had pulled her down as a one-year-old. What Tante Greta tells me later on, that she probably rolled from the table. But my grandmother was not a very household person at all. Was never any good at cooking, or cleaning, or anything like that. And she also- because she

had her hands full with the second one- and within nine months she was pregnant again. And that happened in those days, eh? And- so my father was given to his grandparents- taken by his grandparents for the time being, and he never came back. He stayed- kept him, and he stayed with this grandparents. Which was very good for him in a way, not phys- not psychologically, but for financial reasons, because his grandfather was very well off. But his father- father therefore not so much, with the children coming every year. About ten, I think. And- so my father stayed with his grandparents. And they- he went to a very good school. ABS. And after school- they were very religious, very Jewish religious, very *frum*. And they sent him to become a rabbi to an, what do you call it in Hebrew?

A *yeshiva*.

[0:08:27]

Yeah. A *yeshiva*. And- but my father didn't want to do that. He didn't believe like that. He didn't- he asked too many questions. And they sent him off a few times. And his grandfather gave him a beating and sent him back again. Brought him back again. But when finally, the third time he was sent home, because he was asking too many questions about the history and about the religion and- which he didn't believe in- many things. And- so then in the end they decided he could go on stage. So that's what he went - on the stage. But while he was at the *yeshiva*, my father, that was in Amsterdam, and my mother and he had already met because his parents and- his grandparents and her parents used to play bridge together – *kaartspel* together. And my mother used to pour out the tea. And my father played cards with the other three. And so, they met like that. And although they both had another girlfriend, boyfriend, they fell in love. And when my father was in Amsterdam my mother asked her parents could she go to stay with a family in a shop, and learn to make hats. Well, the Spier family - the girls - never went to work, because they were quite well to do. Had a big, big shop. Two, in fact - one in Den Helder. So, she- she- she was allowed to go to Amsterdam, stay with these friends- with this family and- who were friends of her parents. And they met again of course, my father and my mother. And when he came off the *yeshiva*, he- they went out together - officially - and they got married in 1911.

But it must have been an unusual profession, to be an actor?

Well, he was a very good singer-

[0:10:50]

Yes?

And throughout his youth, throughout when he was a young boy, in family- with family of- or community… celebrations, he always seemed to have done the registration, the- the-

You mean he sang in the synagogue, or?

No, no, no, no. In- in- in- in the community centre or in family- family had- families had a lot of parties in their own house.

Oh, he did-

Musical, and things like that.

Oh, private entertainment.

And also, he did- yes, and as an entertainer. And he was so good that I've got an- there are letters from the newspapers where he is – "*Very well done by Barend- by Barend Velleman- by the young Barend Velleman*." You know.

So, was he quite well known?

He was quite well known then, yeah. He became well known then. Yeah.

Barend Velleman?

Yeah. Well, his actor- his actor's name was Ben Velmon. B E N, Ben. V E L M O N – *Frans*, they made *Frans*- a French name of- name of it. V E L M O N.

So, you said he didn't want to go to yeshiva. So how-

Oh, he did go to *yeshiva* but he didn't want to become –

A rabbi.

A rabbi.

So-

He didn't believe in what they told him.

So, when your parents married, what, how, was-

Yes. They married- Jewish, yes-

Yes, and then afterwards-

In the synagogue. And the boys, the two boys were brought up and- and Bar Mitzvah. But by the time I came along, they didn't believe anymore. At least my father didn't believe anymore. He was very much against it all. [laughs]

So, you grew up in a quite secular home?

[0:12:41]

Very secular, yeah. We did have some- I did have a feeling that I was Jewish. I knew that aunts and uncles and so, you know, but that was all.

So, Selma what are your earliest memories?

Well, this is very difficult because you're told so much, aren't you? And you might have seen photographs. As I said - this beach cart - is that really what I remember? Or have I seen the photographs, you see? We have no photos left- hardly any photos left anymore. We had-

because my father was on the stage, we had a huge… suitcase, iron- iron case, you know, full of photographs of all his does? and all the friends and all the colleagues.

Was it mainly in Holland or did he also travel?

No, he travelled because when the, the- when I was born, he was on a European tour.

So, are there some surviving recordings?

No.

Of his singing?

No. No. They- don't forget that wasn't in existence in- the- the records were just getting out. He did do a record once he- he- he told us. And my brothers went to look for it. But he didn't- he was poor, we were always very poor and up and down, and up and down, you know. Because you didn't have any help if you were poor and he just- we just- I just- I remember- I remember the- the good days very well as well as the poor days.

Did your mother work at all?

No. I think- well, I say 'No', I think, when we were very poor in Amsterdam for a while a few months I think she took some sewing in. But the girls in the Spier family never worked, no. They did the household and so- although they had maids as well. They had two maids for work. Yeah. I've got a photograph. My mother as a little girl with the two maids next to her. One of the very few photographs of her.

What about-you said you were poor. Describe a little bit your- where you lived in Amsterdam, and- what-

[0:14:55]

Well, when we lived in Alkmaar, we- when we went to live in Zandvoort we lived first in a- in a pension- in an hotel. And then we lived in a house. Very nice. Not far from the sea. And

then we went to Alkmaar. We lived in a very nice house at the end of Alkmaar, near the beach - near the meadow. And- but then we- and my grandparents or my great-grandparents, my father's grandparents, had a housekeeper. Tante Roos we called her. She was called Roos. And when my grand- my great-grandmother died, she came to look after me as a nanny, until she died as well. I describe that in my book, how- that I found her dead one morning in bed. And we moved then to the Laat, which is a main road in Alkmaar, above a café. So, I think we were very poor then. I'm thinking we were probably not able to pay the rent for the house or whatever. You didn't own houses in those days. And so, we were in *de* Laat until we went to Amsterdam. And there we were very poor. My father thought though that he could get- you see in those days people who were on acting or singing- who were actors, there was no society for it. And you- you just went to a café where the directors came to sign you up. And so, my father thought that when you went to Amsterdam it would be better to get a job. To get some - things done. But we lived- we lived in a flat in the east of Amsterdam - poor neighbourhood. Quite new. In this neighbourhood it was new built all. And we couldn't pay the rent, I think, because a colleague of my father, an artist also, took my mother and sister - little baby - and me in. And the brothers and my father they couldn't because they had children themselves, so my brother and my father went somewhere else. But my father of course had always the feeling that he wanted to keep his family together, having been excluded from his own family so long. And he- he said, "No, we have to live together". So, he found a flat and we moved there. Also, a poor neighbourhood flat. And a poor flat. Quite big, but poor. And-

[0:18:00]

Which part of Amsterdam? Where was that?

Amsterdam. All in Amsterdam. Yeah. And then he got a job again, or he got work again, because he organised- he was a great organiser. He organised a Lunapark in Diemen. And Diemen is the- is a little- well, now it belongs to Amsterdam, but it used to be a little village just outside Amsterdam. And my father opened a Lunapark there. And it was very- in '29.

Like a funfair, yes?

Yes, but much bigger.

OK.

It had a *manege* – a horse- horse riding and it had ice skating. And much better than a funfair.

Yes?

And bigger. And it existed already in- in America. That's where it begin- began. Luna Park. And my father thought it was a good idea to have one in Holland as well. And so, it was very successful the papers were full of it. I've got papers- cuttings and everything.

And what was it known as? Was there a name?

Luna Park.

Just the Luna Park?

Yeah. And-

And he organised – all the?

He organised it all, yeah. He organised the- the funfair people and so, yeah. Yeah – yeah. And the financial bit of course.

And how long did that go?

That was very good. But then you had- and we lived in a very nice house. And I had been in a sanatorium because when we lived in this poor house in Amsterdam still, I had got- I was very, very ill one night. I got pleuritis- pneumonia and pleuritis. And so I had to be sent to a sanatorium to recuperate. And while I was there, my father and mother moved to- and my sister moved to this- to Diemen - and the boys. And I was allowed to go home, because we were able to first of all have a good house with bathroom and everything, which was unusual in those days. And also, my father was able to hire a nurse for me, to look after me. So, we were quite well off then again.

[0:20:17]

So, Selma, you were in a sanatorium – where? Where was your sanatorium?

In Laren - Laren.

Laren.

In the Gooi. It's just outside Amsterdam as well.

Because of your-

Near Hilversum. Laren and Hilversum are next door to each other. Yeah, because of my pleuritis still.

How old were you?

Then I was nine, but I was seven when I got it.

So, you remember that clearly?

Yes. Yes, I remember it all, yeah. Yeah. And then I went to school there. Until- and funnily that school was a farmers' school because- there were three schools. One school was the state school where I went, and one school was a Catholic school from the Catholics- and one school was a Protestant school where all the Protestants went. And all Holland of course was very Christian - Protestant. And my sister went to the Catholic nursery school because it was the only nursery school [liked inaudible] there. And she went there. And one day- one day when she came home, she was crossing herself. She was only three years of age, you see, three or four. And so, my father went when she- when he asked her, she said she didn't- the sister had told her to do that. So, he went to talk to the sisters. And said, "Sorry but my- my son-daughter is not able to do that. I'd rather you don't tell her that she has to do it." And so, she wasn't any more. So, he was quite keen on that. Yeah. And my school was actually- I was there as the only towns girls really. With shoes. And there were- there was the Mayor's

son also wearing shoes. But all the rest- and I think the baker's son wore shoes. But all the rest were having clogs which- were all farmers' children, and they were all wearing clogs. And those clogs were standing outside the room- outside the classroom, you know, every day. And they went in, in their socks. Yes, I can remember that very well. And one day when my mother had taken my sister and me to- when we were well off, we were always shopping you see, and stocked up on clothes that- my father insisted on that. So, we were always very well dressed [half laughs] - whether we were poor or not. And my mother had bought us wellingtons which had just come out from America. My sister little red ones, and I little brown ones. When I went- I very proudly went to school in them because nobody had wellingtons, you see? And the boys called me a *drege*- maid, *bagger*- maid, [dredger-maid] which were the maids- in those days the ships going through the canals and the rivers had a horse at the outside with a man on it, or a woman on it, who pulled the- the boats.

Yes-

The *bagger*.

Through the canal.

[0:23:25]

And the cleaning boats, you know, the boats that were cleaning the water. And they called it a *bagger*-

A bakker?

So, they called me a *bagger*- maid. And I cried, and I cried, and I never wanted to wear my boots anymore. [laughs] So that's why I wanted to go to a girls' school when we moved to Amsterdam. I insisted on the girls'- there was only one. Well, one state- there were Catholics of course, schools, but this was the only state one. And so, I went there.

And what was that like?

It was very nice. Very nice, in fact, yeah. Yeah.

And where was that? In Amsterdam?

It was in Amsterdam too, yeah.

Which part of Amsterdam?

I had to- well, behind the Jewish quarter actually, *op de* hm- kade. Hm- kade. Not Wilhelminakade. Julianakade? No. I can't remember at the moment.

And did you live in a Jewish area or where-?

No, no, no. No, we lived in- well, it became a Jewish area when all the Germans- Jews came over. We lived in De Pijp first. That was just-because my father had an actor friend, a well-known, very well-known family in Holland, who'd said- who told him that there was a flat empty next-door to him. And so, we rented that. And it was very big, it was- before it was rented by a builder, who had changed it completely. We had a bathroom, which was unusual in those days. And lots of rooms. And- so we went there and lived there next to him. And – de la Mar. Fientje de la Mar, his daughter, became famous as well. You even have the Fientje de la Mar [DeLaMar] theatre in Holland now.

What was it called?

[0:25:30]

Fientje- DeLaMar Theatre.

Fientje de la Mar?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

And that's where you lived?

Well, no, we lived in- in Jan van der Heijdenstraat.

Yeah.

Painter called Jan van der Heyde. It was a whole painter's *buurt* [neighbourhood]. And then we went to the Jan Lievensstraat when- in the 40s. Because there- where we lived it was a very nice flat but it was very high, third and fourth floor. The- the builder had built it like that. And my father and mother thought it was getting too high a bit, so we moved to a modern flat in the Jan Lievensstraat. And that became, I wouldn't say a Jewish bu- neighbourhood, but many of the German and Austrian refugees came to live there. So more or less, yes. Amsterdam Zuid. It was not-not exclusively Jewish, but there were many Jews living there.

And do you remember-

Well-to-do ones.

And do you remember the- the refugees coming in?

Yes, I do.

[0:26:44]

Tell us a little bit about it, because that's- because you know in our- in the archive we have interviewed quite a few people who came to Holland as refugees, but not somebody who was there from the-

And who didn't like it?

The people who came? No, they- they- I think they did like it, most of them.

Well, I can remember, yes, I can remember the- well, I was a young girl still, you know, because in those days you were still young if you were in the teens. We were- my sister and I really were children in the family because all my nephews and nieces were as old as my

brothers. So, they were all ten years older than we were, so we were always seen as the children. And even when I was in my late teens I was still seen as a child. So, when the war broke out, I was still a child. And I can remember when the refugees came in that they opened a lot of firms and married into the Dutch, like this de Jong firm, I was working for, she was a German refugee. And her family came over as well. And I can remember the Dutch were not as well- not very pleased many of the Dutch people were not.

The non-Jews or the Jews?

The non-Jews. Yes - yes. Some of the Jews as well, I suppose. [Laughs] Because many of the Dutch Jews had lived in Holland a very long time, I mean, centuries. And they were [inaudible] with their thoughts and their opinions and so on. And makes a lot of difference. Yes. It was a bit of envy as well, probably.

And in your school do you remember did some refugee children-?

No, I can't remember a refugee girl coming in my class or my school, no. I can remember a few other Jewish girls there. One Jewish girl, Doortje. I was the only one who wasn't off on- you were still going to school on Saturdays, you see? Schools were open Saturday morning.

You went? You went?

[0:29:13]

But I went. My father insisted I went. Yeah. So, one day, it was a Jewish holiday, I think, and Doortje wasn't there and the others weren't there. Two more. We were with four, actually. And the teacher said, "Would somebody please bring homework to Doortje?" And I volunteered. I said, yes. So, I took her homework to the home. This was in Weesperstraat which was the centre of the Jewish neighbourhood.

Weesperstraat?

Weesperstraat - yeah. It was definitely the centre of the Jewish neighbourhood and still is - if there are any Jews left. And so the mother gave me a - bar of chocolate. Jewish chocolate.

And she said, "This- " to me, she said, "This is Jewish chocolate. You don't know but that's special chocolate." And so on. She- I had no idea [inaudible]. I'll never forget that. [laughs]

What chocolate was that? What was that?

It was - kosher chocolate, you know.

So, did you ever go to synagogue or anything or-?

[0:30:31]

I went once. But I didn't want to go again because the teacher in the Jewish- what do you call him? *En*- not a priest- en…

A rabbi?

Well, the rabbi or the *ga- gazen*?

Chazzan, yeah?

He made- there was one girl in the class to learn Hebrew- therefore we went. And it was one girl in the class who was not completely right in her head. And he made a tremendous amount of jokes of that. And I was very young then, I was only six, but I was very, very upset about that. And I didn't want- well, also, he took me on his lap and I didn't want that. So, I- next week I didn't want to go. But my brother Louis, the eldest one there- pulled me- pushed- starts pulling me towards the synagogue. And then my father saw that because I was screaming. And he said, "No, leave her. If she doesn't want to go, then she doesn't go." So, I've never been again. I went to the synagogue when my brother, my younger brother David- because both my brothers married very – very religious Jewish girls. When I asked them once why, because before the war they only had non-Jewish girlfriends. So, I said, "How is that, that you marry into such Jewish families?" They said, "Because of the war." It was interesting. Anyhow, David- what was I going to say?

[0:32:32]

We talked about school and synagogue, religion.

Oh yes, my- David and Sadie's wedding I was a bridesmaid. So, that was all in the synagogue, of course.

But in which- When was that?

1947.

After the war.

Yes, after the war, yes, yes. Yes, both my brothers- my- David was here with the Dutch Army, but he was an administrator in London for the - where I was put later on as a secretary - for the Dutch medical services. And because he had been in the medical services as a soldier. And Louis, my eldest brother, always had wanted to go to sea. And he'd gone to a school- college for it. Finished the college. But when he wanted to go to the marine- to the- to apply for a job they thought they said he said he was too small and too small chested and too-too small. David was the tall one, the younger brother, but Louis was the small one. He never got over that. And he said- Louis said it was because he was Jewish that they didn't want him. So, he went on the stage, like my father. And I've got loads of photographs of him, yes, and singing.

In Holland?

In Holland yeah. Singing, yes.

And what- what was his stage name?

Also, Louis Velleman. Velmon – Velmon. He took my father's name. And he did that for a long time, until one day he met a friend from college who was working for the Dutch Nederlands Stoomboot-Maatschappeij – steaming- steamboats. And he- who told him that he was- that he knew there was a job open at the Hollandse Stoomboot-Maatschappeij – the Holl- The Dutch steaming firm. And so, Louis went for an interview and was taken on. And

so that's when he started to sail as an officer with the marine- with the- what do you call it? Oh- what's it called in English?

[0:35:13]

And- not the Navy. No.

No, the Navy is-

That's military- not- for the civilian-

What is the other one called? You have the Navy and then you have all the ones who are owned privately or by the state?

Just-

Oh, there' s a word for it. [laughs] I've used it in my book.

OK. In the- in the ship-?

I've used it. No-

Erm…We'll come back to it.

A seafaring… seafaring-

Seafaring- seafaring trade or-

Yeah. But it has a name.

OK.

The shipping has a name. Never mind.

OK. We'll come back to it. Doesn't matter, doesn't matter.

Yeah. So that's what happened. And then he, with his ship he was lying one day in Hull – Hull, here, and he was asked to go to a dance, and he met Ann's sister there - first. And then he had a bit of a do with this sister and then he met Ann as well and he married Ann. And those are the two who went to Canada afterwards. Because he was not allowed to stay here; he had to be demobbed in Holland. While my younger brother, David, was allowed to stay here which was very funny, we all thought, but he was.

OK.

And he set up his own business.

[0:36:48]

In England?

In England, yeah.

Let's just go back-

But I had to go back when the- when I was working at the BBC-

Yeah?

The first eight years- well, first few years at the Dutch Ministry and then I went to the BBC. And when the- when the Dutch and the- when the West European sections finished in Bush House I had to go back because I wasn't allowed- I got a job in an Anglo-Dutch bank - very nice. Private secretary to the director, Dutch director, but I wasn't allowed to stay. And I had already started to study while I was at the BBC. And I was studying at the LSE. And I had done two years of the three or four years that I did and I didn't want to go back to Holland. I asked them to finance my studies, or help me with a grant, but they said no. And, so then the English- then I did my exam the first exam you had to do for the LSE in those days, because everybody had to do an economics exam. Not now anymore, but then they did. And so, they-

I did it very well and so they offered me a grant. And, so but I had to take that. To take that, I had to become British.

Aha.

And they- you know the Foreign Office sent me- for years while I was still at the BBC, for years they used- and every time I had a letter, I put it in the desk, in the drawer of the desk. And I had loads of these letters. And I just- I've always thought a very international. Yet when I had to give up my nationality, that was a big thing. Unbelievable. I'm- I'm still surprised about it because, I think, everyone should live everywhere. Anywhere they want. So, then my husband who was then my boyfriend – he was working for the Belgian section in the BBC - he said, "Oh, you better do it, and finish your study. And when you- I will do the same." So, we both took our national-

[0:39:20]

Became naturalised.

Became naturalised, yes.

So, you had to give up your citizenship?

Yeah.

In order to become-?

In those days. Now you don't; you can have both.

No.

But in those days, you had to-

OK, Selma, we have to just go to- back to before the war until we came back.

Yeah.

When the German refugees came, was there a sense of being worried? Were your worried or was the family worried about what was going on?

Well, in the beginning, not. No, we didn't believe it, because in the First World War the Netherlands had been neutral. And everybody said, they're neutral again and the- and tje government said so too, you know – it won't happen. So, everybody thought this. So, they weren't very worried in the beginning. Some people probably were, but I don't think we were. And- but it slowly- it started to come in, of course. And, we started to be worried later, yeah. In the end of the 19- of the 30s. Yeah.

And how did it manifest itself for you as a- as a- teenager?

[0:40:22]

Well, I was still at school and I was still having all my friends and- you know, it didn't manifest itself, let's be honest. It didn't. Don't forget, we look at all these things from now.

Yes.

The same with all the camps, and all the Resistance things and so the questions people ask. You mustn't forget that we were in a different situation. And we look now at those situations, but then - it was different.

So, you had a fairly normal life-

Very normal life.

In Amsterdam?

Until the war started, of course. Yeah.

What- did you have particular hobbies or anything you remember in particular?

Oh, I had quite a lot of girlfriends from school and we had a little group, a little club together and so- so that we- we went together. Yes. And we played games together and so- chess a lot. And things like that. Yes. And we went swimming a lot. There was a beautiful swimming pool nearby, in south Amsterdam. So, we went swimming a lot. Yes. My sister was three when she got her swimming certificate. Yeah.

And holidays?

No. That's what I keep saying. People now are so worried if they can't go on holiday. We didn't have any holidays, no. We never went abroad. We- nobody went abroad. I think my uncle and aunt went once to Brussels and that was a big talk in the family. No, we didn't go abroad and we didn't go on holiday. What you did go was you were sent to an aunt who lived in the country. My aunt in Alkmaar – Tante Jahn. I was sent there for big holidays. Or I was sent to Leiden where my mother had other family.

Yeah.

And that was our- our- I was talking to Cornelia yesterday, another Dutch friend of mine who lives here, and she was saying - she came from a quite well to do family – and, and she said they didn't go on holiday. They were sent to an aunt! They were four girls and they were all sent to a different aunt! And so were we! Or at least I.

So, you said things changed when the war started. So-

Well, yes. Well, first of all there was the mobilisation for Holland. The war started with Britain and Germany and that's when it started actually, yes. And that's when we started to think - if I may say it so. That was in September '39.

You were still in school?

[0:43:13]

I was still in school, don't forget, the time was taken up with school. The- the holiday before, my school had started- my class had started a trip to England. So, I had- in '39 I had a trip to England. In the spring.

To- came to London, or to where?

Yeah. To London, yeah. To- in Purley. I stayed with a family in Purley. Yeah. And another- another school girlfriend the two of us stayed together. Yeah. And several of us stayed with people in Purley or in London. Yeah. And what I can remember from that very clearly was that my family where I stayed - were all wearing gas masks! When we went to London to look at things, we were all wearing gas masks. They were all wearing gas masks. Not all the time, but often. And we were so- we laughed about that of course. Children- you know.

But obviously at that point, there was no idea about staying in England, or anything like that.

Well, there was one girl in my group from my school - Jewish girl in fact. And she said, "My father's given me a lot of money Selma, to- if anything happens, that I should stay here." So, I said, "You mustn't carry that around with you in London." You know, we went to, to – to St Paul's and to all the other things. I said, "Leave it with the family where you're staying." And she did. But she went back of course because the war hadn't broken out for Holland yet. And they didn't survive I expect.

[0:45:09]

And you said-

But I remember that, yes.

So, what, you were here for a week or-?

For a week, yes.

What were your impressions?

Oh, I thought-

Was it the first time abroad?

Yes, yes, yes - yes of course, yes. Yeah. And in England too - later on stayed. It's a funny thing, really. Yeah.

And what were your impressions then, apart from the gas masks?

Well, some of the food I didn't like, of course. I mean, that's normal, isn't it? And some of the things I did like. They had a lovely tennis court in the back of the garden. And they had a- they were a family of the WH Smiths. And- and their children had grown up already and so- and so that's why they had room to put us there.

And where was it? In?

In Purley.

In Purley. Sorry, you said, yeah.

Purley, yeah. And so, I thought they were very rich. They might not have been very rich, but I thought they were very rich, you know, yeah, having a tennis court too. And then I was so surprised, because when she let it out, they paid for it. The people who used it, paid for it, you know. So that surprised me very much, because I thought you could let friends or neighbours do it without paying, but no. They paid. So, I thought they were very good business people. That was- but my impression from England was well, very expensive. Because my father had given me some pocket money but for Dutch- Dutch ideas. And you know, it wasn't enough.

Couldn't buy anything?

No. And you didn't- well, I bought a few presents. Small presents. But no, what you had to pay for a lot was entrance. I mean, St. Paul's was sixpence here and sixpence for the, the- the Whispering Gallery and so, you know. Because I remember my father saying, "Where did

you spend it all on?" And I said, "Well you had to pay for everything." And that we weren't used to in Holland, actually.

And then you went back - and back to school?

We went back to school, yes. And then the war broke out between England and Germany.

So, this is September '39.

[0:47:30]

Yeah.

And then the mobilisation.

And the- and my brother was mobilised then, David. Because he was- because in Holland you had still the– What do you call it when sold- when boys become soldiers?

Compulsory-

Compulsory – yes. So once- once a year he had to go for a week to do the training. It's usually the eldest boy, but Louis wasn't- big enough to be- to be accepted.

And were you still living together, all of you, at that point?

Yes. Oh, yes – yes. Yes, we were.

So, he then went where, or what-?

No, no. We were all together.

But you said he was mobilised.

Oh, he was mobilised. He went to live with- David, he went to live in Zeeland, south of Holland in Middelburg with the family Jongeneel - family. And Louis was mobilised in the, in, in- on the boat. So- that was- we- we knew there was something happening, therefore. But we didn't take it too serious. Well, I didn't. I know that.

And did your father still manage to work in that time?

Yes, very much so. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, he'd- also by that time, he- don't forget his voice had gone, 'cause he drank a lot and his voice had gone. And he- he organised things more like the Lunapark. And- and he was the one- he was the person who- who brought the first- introduced the first *Poffertjes kraam* [stall/booth]. *Poffertjes* are little pancakes, this size, and Holland is famous for it. And he introduced it in Holland, from America as well. And he introduced a lot of things like that.

And did your mother work with him?

No, no my mother never worked - no. No, my mother was a very sweet woman, but she had no- as I say the- the women in the Spier household weren't really educated. They went to the state school, to primary school, but that was it. You know, they could make blouses and they could make things to- to wear and so, for themselves and for parents probably, I don't know. But they - no.

[0:50:00]

But for your parents, or for your father, was it important that you would be educated? Was that-?

Yes. Oh, yes. He very much insisted that. I wasn't allowed to wash up even. [Laughs] I never knew how to cook. My mother was a good cook. But I never knew what- how to cook. I wasn't allowed to do that, no. I had to study.

Right.

Yeah. [laughs]

So again, you went to school post-September '39?

Yeah. Till '41 – well, '42 really.

Yes, so tell us what happened when-?

No, '41 - till '41.

What happened then in- in spring 1940?

In spring 1940 I had my final exam. In Holland you have a very big examination for a fortnight. Because you have loads of subjects and you have to do all those subjects, not like in England that you can choose three subjects for your A-levels. You can't. You have to do all the subjects: three foreign languages, your own language, history, geography - lots of other things, you know. Science. Physics. And you had to do exams in that. And the war had broken out in May - 5th [sic] of May 1940. We had German parachutists coming down in Amsterdam and the German Army entering Holland. And they fought for four days. And my- and then Holland capitulated. And that was [inaudible]. That was very bad of course, very, very bad, yes. That's when we started feeling it, yes, and very nervous, because we didn't know where my brothers were. Because they might have been taken by the Germans. We didn't know that because several people were. My cousin's husband were- was. And he was an officer in the Dutch Army and he was taken prison, because he was just near the border, you know, when they came in. So, we didn't know what had happened to my bothers at all. When- when the war broke out and my brother, my eldest brother Louis came at five o'clock in the morning home from his ship and said, "War has broken out. War has broken out! Wake up! Wake up!" So, I said, "Boy, don't be silly. Let me sleep." And then I realised when everybody- when the noise was out that there was something happening. So, I got up. And we took my brother- my father, my cousin and my uncle, and my sister and my father and I took my brother Louis back to his ship in the IJ. It was an hour's walk, 'cause there was no trams going anymore. And so- and it never occurred to us to go on the ship with him.

[0:53:22]

Where was the ship going?

Well, obviously it was going away. In fact, it went to England, of course, yeah.

Where- was that in IJmunden cause that's the port isn't it?

Yes, but he was- they were lying in Het IJ, which is the- was the- the port of Amsterdam – in- inside the town. That was where the ships could lie as well. They went- after the war he told me that they went for four days to IJmuiden which is the ship on the north seaside- the harbour on the seaside. And that they were lying there till May the 15th.

And then?

And then many people- I've just read a book, about- from Eli Prins, a man from Alkmaar, who describes how he got to the- to a boat and got into England and to Bath. And reading that book, you know, I've been thinking all the time, why did we not go on the boat?

Yeah?

When I said this to my brother later on after the war, to Louis, he said, "Well, the captain was an anti-Semite; he wouldn't have taken you probably." But I mean, you know. People did.

Mn.

You had to have a lot of money, mind you, to pay for it, so maybe he wouldn't have taken us anyhow. But I often think of it, why we didn't even try.

To go?

To flee, yeah.

Yeah. And what was it, the boat? It was a commercial boat or what – that boat?

It's- it's commerce- it's commercial navy.

Yeah.

[0:55:10]

Is it called commercial navy? No, it's a different word. But that's what it is, yeah, the commercial navy. It was taken on by the Navy - by the Marine actually - during the war.

Right.

And he did a lot of sailing to all- he went to all the countries all over the world to fetch- fetch boot and to bring war things and so on.

Because there's that famous story of- you know, we have a few interviewees who came on that last boat. You know, there was a Kindertransport-

Yeah.

With this Truus Wijsmuller who took the children to IJmunden and then took a boat to England.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Oh, that date-

Yeah, and a lot of people fled. You know, a lot of people couldn't cause my cousin couldn't. He tried but he couldn't get on. But a lot of people got on, of course-

Managed to?

Managed to, yeah. To cycle to IJmuiden or to one of the other ports. And when I was in Sweden after the war, because we were taken to Sweden by the Swedish Red Cross, I met a lady there, *Mevrouw* [Mrs.] DeVries. And she had- her son was in the Navy, and he had chartered a boat, a small boat - fisher's boat, in 1942. The end of 1942, she told me, and took

her to Sweden in that little boat. So, people did things you see, and there have been what they call in Holland *Engelandvaarders* – "England travellers". *Vaarders* are travellers by sea.

Yeah, but it was- it's a long way. I mean the crossing is a- it's a big crossing.

Many people died of course or drowned and so- or were killed by the Germans.

Yeah.

But many of them had managed to do it and get- I've got a lot of books from *Engelandvaarders*. Yes. Or from people- people who've written now to me after my book-publication of the book. You know. Many people wrote.

So, you set your brother off and then went back to Amsterdam? You-?

We went back home. Yeah – yeah. Yeah – yeah.

And what happened then?

[0:57:24]

Well, then we had the days of the war finishing. Of the war had started, and we were- we were wondering, very nervous what happened to the boys. And you know, you- you saw your neighbours. And I was just a schoolgirl. My school went on even during the war. School went on normally- normally, in Holland. I met afterwards- I've been very great friends with another Dutch girl here who married *en*- a Scotsman. And she told me that she didn't have to do the exam at all. That was the next year's.

But you did?

But we had to - yeah. Yeah. They weren't organised yet, I think. That was it, you see?

And did it have an impact on- once the Germans came into Amsterdam, did that-?

Oh, you know- well, in the beginning they were very, very – friendly, almost. Good. You know. That's how they got it. That's what they have done the whole war through. And in the beginning, you are taken. You believe things. Which is terrible really, but they were very, very - clever. *Slim* - clever.

What about-

They didn't want to upset the Dutch at all, you see?

Yeah.

They said, they wanted to be friends. They hoped that- that Holland was becoming a part of Germany almost. Friendly part of Germany. That's what they said, as well.

And when did anything start anti-Jewish or anti-Jewish measures? How do you remember that?

[0:59:25]

Yes, I do remember that. The first thing that happened was when they took two- when they took two hundred boys from their bed, Jewish boys. And one boy was near us about there- we lived here and they lived about there. And so, we were very taken by that, you know. And they were taken because the- the resistance then already, there were people who had killed a German. And so, they took those two hundred boys. And they were sent to Mauthausen, we'd heard later on. And they were terribly- a few months after that, the families got a note saying that they were- that they had died. But we thought later on when, because rumours go very quickly, you know, that they were killed. And they were, some of them were put out naked in the snow. And some of them were just killed 'fleeing' they said, but of course, they didn't- they just killed them. But that made a terrible impression on me. Yeah. And then we had an ice parlour near us, a few minutes' walk. And the owner was a German refugee like many firms by that time were. And he had refused to sell ice cream to the German soldier. So, the German soldier went to his officer, back, came back with the officer, and the officer took the owner and put him against the wall and shot him. And these things of course made an impression.

Did you see that or you heard about it?

Heard about it. But I knew the owner of course. Ijssel and we bought our ice cream from him. So those things - yeah. And then there were people in the street who were Jewish and my father knew them very well. They were actors or in the- in the acting business at least. And they committed suicide. They put their heads in an oven. And I heard that. My father told- was told that while I was there. So those things were terrible, you know. And made really- made me think. Yeah.

But you started to also work- you- after school? After you-

Yes, I went- I wanted to work and earn a bit, and I had first of all- the first job I had was - turned out to be a cigarette factory. It was near our home. I'd answered an advert. And it turned out to be cigarettes that you had to put your- the- the part- the non-smoking part, you know. The mouth part in.

[1:02:42]

The filter, or-?

Filter, yeah. Put the filter in. After my first day, my father said, "So how was it? What…?" And when I told him that the– he was furious! I wasn't allowed to go back anymore. And he got me the job with the German fashion chap he'd heard about who lived in a beautiful big house on the canal and had a fashion firm. And I was taken on as a model. And- because I had quite a good figure. And, and secretary. So, I did both. I went with him. Because by that time, by that time Jews were not allowed to work in non-Jewish firms anymore. They had already taken all the off- the Bijenkorf the Harrods of Amsterdam because they were Jewish owners. And all the firms weren't allowed. And doctors and, and other people were not allowed to work anymore for non-Jews. So that had happened already. Slowly, but surely. And so, I worked for him, and he- he took me, he had a car still. And he took me in his car to the shops. And most lucky for him, most of the clothes shops of course were Jewish owned because it's well known that Jews own - fashions. And so, I modelled- modelled there for him and for the- for the shops. And then in his house I worked as a secretary.

So, models- so, the clothing they produced? They-

I modelled the clothing they produced, yes, yes - yes.

And what were they? Just…?

Oh, all types of dresses and blouses and - all types of things. Coats.

And what was it called? What was the company called?

Mittwoch – Mittwoch. Wednesday - *Mittwoch.*

Mittwoch.

That was his name. Mittwoch and Co.

And you made some money? You earned some - money?

[1:05:01]

Oh yes it was a normal job. Yes. Yes. But it was from nine till five-thirty. Officially. But he always- I had to walk all the way from the south of Amsterdam to the east, or the centre- the end of the canals, which was a long, long journey. You weren't allowed to use- Jews weren't allowed to use trams or bicycles or anything anymore. You had to give in your bicycle. That was another thing.

Yes.

You had to give in all your things. And-

You couldn't cycle?

No. And you, you couldn't have a radio anymore.

Yeah.

And all your possessions like that-

When- when did that start?

That started in, in- I think, the end of ’41 already. Yeah.

Yeah. So, you had to walk a long way to get there?

Yeah - yeah. And- and he- he wasn’t very, he was alright. But he wasn’t very kind. He always kept me for a very long time. He did his, his secretarial work till late in the evening. Seven o’clock or half past seven or so. He offered me an apple always, but- then one evening I thought I must leave; I can’t do it anymore. And- because he was very strict about the time coming, you know, that had to be. But he wasn’t strict about leaving. So, he had the *Jewish Chronicle* every week. We didn’t at home. He had. And I looked in the adverts and I saw an advert for a secretary with the firm DeJong which was ten minutes’ walk from home. And I applied and I got the interview and they took me on.

That was another Jewish firm?

Yeah. Yes, she was the one- she was the Jewish German refugee. But he was Dutch. And she had a- he had a girl, his first wife died and he had a girl Sarah of nine or ten years of age. They all went as well of course. Were killed.

[1:07:19]

And how long did you work for them, for DeJong?

Well, I worked form the beginning from when they took me on till- which was ’41 I think, end ‘41. Not quite sure. End ’41 beginning ‘42. No, I think it was end ’41. Till ’42, till I got- got my call-up. My card to go to the east to work in a conc- in a work camp. And that’s when I…The first time I got a call-up was on the 7th of June 1942. And my father said, “Ill. Be ill.”

And he gave me some chocolate to eat with lots of stuff in it that you have to go to the loo all the time. And he called the doctor and they said I had blood in my faeces - officially. So, I got a week free. But then I had to go back to again, and the doctor couldn't do it longer than a week. So, when I had to go again, I thought well, another way of being free is when you work for something, you know, you didn't need to go. So, a friend of ours, a friend of mine – of my cousin really - used to be a nurse. So, I borrowed her nurse's outfit, and I went to the south of Amsterdam where you had to apply, where they had set up an information bureau which was really outside. It was a big table sit outside. And behind it was a lady, Jewish lady sitting. And behind her stood an SS officer. And you had to apply there. So, I – [to cameraman] Sorry- am I alright? Can you hear me still?

[cameraman:] Yeah.

And-

Bea: [to adjust wires] Lift your leg a little bit. That's it. Perfect. Yeah.

So, I said, "I- I have had a call-up again", and she said, "Oh, no-". "But I'm a nurse." "Oh," she said, "You were ill. No, you can't- you can't become a- from an sick bed to an social exemption. Tomorrow morning nine o'clock at Central Station." So there- so, I- I went to DeJong, to my firm people. And I told- was telling them about that, that I couldn't come anymore. Well, I had to go to - a work camp. We all thought it was a work camp still, don't forget. And so, they were talking in their garden to the neighbour on the other side of the fence. And he was a German refugee. And he said to me, "Oh," when he heard my story, he said, "Oh, well why don't you come and work for me in my fur factory? Then you're free as well." So that's what I did. And so that's how I didn't go to work- to the work camp or to the east.

Because if you had a job. If you could show that you were working, they didn't-?

[1:10:59]

For something that was needed.

Right

So, either a nurse or a fur factory, because fur was needed for the Germans, for the soldiers to be warm when they went to Russia.

For the front.

For the front, exactly. So that's what I did. I learned to make mittens, and I learned to use the- the machine. Cause it's a different machine for fur as it is for normal machinery. And I learnt a lot. And my father had had a call-up in October to go to work, to a work camp. And the Jewish Council had said that because we only had our information now from Jewish Council because we didn't have radios anymore. So, that's why many people therefore bought the *Jewish Chronicle*. And - what was I going to say? Oh, yeah, my father had his call-up. And the *Jewish Chron*- the Jewish Commune - Council had said and the rumours as well, that if the man goes to work, wife and children will be free. So, my father went. And he went to the work camp in Drenthe. In the same evening they were sent on to Westerbork which was the *Durchgangslager for-*

Which was a transit camp.

And that same evening, I could hear all the heavy boots of the soldiers and the police - German and Dutch - fetching people out of their house, terrible. Terrible, all that noise. Screaming. And-

You were- where were you at the time?

We were asleep at- I was asleep at home with my sister at home in the bed. Double bed we had.

And your mother was there?

And my mother was there as well, of course, yes.

[1:13:19]

And your father already left?

My father was in the camp therefore, yes. Yes. And so, they did- I- I had *krulspeld* [curlers], I had curls- made curls in my hair. And I quickly took them out just in case they came- just in case they came for us. You see? Unbelievable!

You had the rolls, you mean, the plastic?

The rolls. That's right. Unbelievable, the things you think of at that moment.

And you thought if you- if you have to go-

I don't want those curlers in my hair. Yes – yeah. Exactly. Yeah. But they didn't come for us that evening, thank God. Otherwise, I wouldn't be sitting here. So, I said to my mother "They'll come for us tomorrow or the day after." "Well, what can we do?" And so, I said, "Well we have to go in hiding. *Onderduiken."* Because I knew a- a cousin friend of mine with whom I had been to dancing class. We went to dancing class still in those days if you think of it. But it was a very nice evening. And- and my cousin Lootje went there as well. Was very nice. And Clara, not my sister, but this Clara- the friend and daughter of. And I- she had said to me, "I can't come next week anymore because we're going away." Well away means *onderduiker*, you know, means going in hiding, so I knew what she meant. You didn't tell each other, but I knew what she meant. So, I said to my mother, "I think we have to go into hiding." So, I went to Els, which was this girl's sister-in-law who was still living there. The others had gone. The rest of the family had gone. They first of all moved- they were a family Cardoso and my Tante Sarah was a sister of them, so they were really family.

Cardoso?

Cardoso, yeah.

So, Sephardi.

[1:15:23]

Yeah. They had- they had had a beautiful business in Roermond in Limburg on the border of Belgium. And they had to leave, of course, as you weren't allowed to keep anything. And they came to Amsterdam and went into a lovely flat - with their sons. They had two or three sons. And- and one of the sons had married Els, a non-Jewish lady. She looked – a Jewish lady, but she looked not Jewish. Very blond, very tall, slim. And she had- they a little girl as well. And Els and the little girl survived. So, I went to see her. The rest wasn't there anymore, of course. And she gave me the name of a man, the address of a man to go to. Oh, sorry. And- and he- he turned out to be our insurance broker. You know, you all had an insurance for when you die and so forth. So, I knew him. So, he gave me an address for my mother and sister and said that somebody was coming tomorrow morning to fetch them to go into hiding. And that's what happened. They went into hiding in Eindhoven, which is south of Holland as well. And they were there for a year. But they were betrayed in July 1943 - June 1943. I don't remember now. And- and they were killed straight away in Sobibor. But I - had gone to a friend because while I was still at school. I also went to evening classes to learn to type and steno. And I had met a girl there and became very friendly with. And she said to me then, "If there is any need, you can come and stay with us." So, I got in touch with her again, and said, "You said that. Is that still true?" She said yes, and she asked her mother and - said yes. So, I went there.

[1:18:05]

A non-Jewish girl or a Jewish-?

Yes, of course, yes. And the family too. And so, I went there. And then- they had five children thought. And after a few days the mother said, "Oh, we've run out of food. And coal." So, I said, "Well, my father had taken a lot of coal and a lot of food in, it happens that- a lot actually." So, I said that we'd got it and that she could use it, you know. So, she went to fetch it - me as well, and the daughter. And then after a week she said, "Sorry, but I think it's too dangerous for you to be here." I said, but you have- "You'd better go." So, I said, "But you have all my food and coal." So- "Oh," she said, "that's all- that's all up. All finished." So, it was a lie of course but- so I had to go. And before eight o'clock in the evening, because it was already curfew then, by eight o'clock. So, there I was with my big suitcase in the street.

And your mother by then and your sister were in Eindhoven?

They were in Eindhoven, yes, they were.

So why did you not join them, or-?

[1:19:26]

Well, first of all, I didn't have the money enough for it. It lots of- cost a lot of money.

To go there?

And they only had- to stay there, monthly. And also, there was no room, really. She had three little children as well. There was no room really for me. No. In a way, it was good because I would have been taken too there. Anyhow, I went to my uncle who had married- the first time he married was my mother's sister. Tante Suse. But she died young, and Jacques had just remarried a non-Jewish lady. Tante Tini. And I went there. And I stayed there for a while. But it was- it was terrible really because they lived on the third floor and Uncle Jacques of course couldn't work anymore. Well, he made, he made private shirts - bespoke shirts. He didn't before, he was a- he was a colleague of my father. But his son taught him this, and he did it in the end because they had to make some money, you know? And sometimes the bell rang for the – what do you call it? Black- the Blackout. The men, man who looks out for things that the blackout is black. And they come and control and check it so every time he checked I had to run out of the window on to the roof so that I wasn't taken. And I was- I did that in all types of weather. Terrible. And Tante Tini became very nervous about that. And so, one day came when Jack, Uncle Jacques said to me, "I think you better try and find another place because Tante Tini is getting so nervous, she may by accident give something away." Which of course happened often, you know, even if they didn't need- wanted to do it. And so, I looked for some- I went back to this fellow who had given us the addresses, and he got me an address in east Amsterdam. And- no, west Amsterdam, he sent to west Amsterdam, sorry. It was very new built, with a young couple and they'd just had the twins and they lived on the third floor in a very tiny flat. They had two rooms. One was- they called the best room, and the other one was the one was the room which they used with the

two twins. So, I slept- I got the best room and a divan taken from- from the- from the- the attic. And they lived in the other room near the kitchen, with the two babies. Terrible, really. And my room they got this divan from- this sofa from the attic. But it- I turned out, I got all red spots on my body. So, I went to my friend Dientje, the one who used to be a nurse and I wondered what it was. And she said, "Oh, you have flea [picks]." So, the- the- the sofa was full of fleas. She gave me something to put on it but it didn't help of course because there were thousands of them. So anyhow, I couldn't do anything about it. And then one day- I always went out- I was- I was supposed to be- I was blond. I had- my hair- was blond then. And- I always tried to go out as much as possible to keep- keep- to give them room, you know. And the man, a big Dutch chap, blond Dutch chap used to say that I was his sister. And so that was that. But I often went out in the street and so. One day I was out and I met another friend of my cousin, and he said, "Oh, you can't go back there because the man who gave you the address has just been arrested by the SS and his family as well and he gave a whole list of names. And he- he'd passed the, he'd said to the SS that he- he- if he gave the list of all the people, he'd given the addresses to, would they leave his wife and children free. But of course, they didn't. They took the whole lot. And so, I couldn't go back to this flat any more. And this was Hartog and he said, "Well, you can come and stay with me." So, he got a bed from Els. The one I just talked about. And because she had plenty of beds with the whole family had gone into hiding. And I shared a room with him - for a while. He was a very good cook because he- he'd trained as a pastry chef. So, the most wonderful things he made, I can think about. And- but what I hadn't realised was- I was so very much a child, what I hadn't realised was that he was falling in love with me. And so, one night, one evening, I could feel him coming into my bed. So, I just did as I was asleep and pushed him away. Luckily that was alright. But a few nights later, he came again, and he started to push me a bit further, and so I woke up and I said, "You can't do that. I'm sorry, but I don't want you to do that to me." So, he was ashamed and he went back to his bed. And I the next morning, went back to Dientje, the one who used to be the- nurse. And who was in the- by that time I knew she was in resistance and that they- they found a lot of people places. And so, she found me- Wim [inaudible] actually found me-she called Wim, and he found me a room in a flat with two doctors in Leiden.

[1:26:35]

In Leiden?

Yeah.

So, just to say that- the man who was arrested by the SS. What was his name? The man who found you the first hiding place.

I can't remember that at the moment. Can't remember that-

And the couple who took you, they knew that you were Jewish? The couple with the twins.

I suppose so. I don't know. I should think so.

And do you know, did they take you to- to save you- to help?

Oh, yes. They were they very kind. Yes. Oh, no, they were very kind.

They wanted to-

They wanted to help, yes.

They knew the risk?

Well, I think and they also wanted the money.

So, who paid them?

I did.

You had to pay?

I got the- my father had- my father had left some money with the Jongeneels in Middelburg. Or actually, she came over and he then gave it to her. And I paid first some- first Eindhoven, my mother and sister. And then my own, yeah.

So, you had to pay?

[1:27:35]

I paid a lot- long time, yes. Until I couldn't anymore, and then in- that was when I was- But up till I was in Leiden I had paid it all yes, yes, yes. And also, wait a minute. Also, Louis was with the *koop- koopvaardij [merchant navy savings plan]* is the word in Dutch.

Koopver-

Koopen is to buy, and *vaaren* is to – to [inaudible] . And the man of the *koopvaardij* came to see me, because they deducted some of my brother's money in America or in *Engeland-* in England. Or wherever he was. To give to me. Or to my parents if they would have been there still. But- so that was of the *koopvaardij* something that was set up. So not only me, probably, all the other people as well who had boys doing that.

And what happened to the- you said you worked- the last factory you worked for- the, the- the fur factory-

Well, one day I- one day, well, the- the boss of the factory - I've forgotten their names – he… He gave me some cheese and some- to send to my father. And also, my father had sent from Westerbork a- a note - because they were allowed to send notes once a month or something - and he asked for chocolates, bonbons. He never ate any sweet at all, any chocolates at all, but he wanted the big boxes which he knew existed. And he- I was told later on by a family member who came back from- who was working for the Jewish Council and was allowed out home every week. And- and she told me that he gave it to the nurses to bribe them a bit I expect to- to stay longer in- because he was in the hospital. So, he stayed in the hospital from October till December. Till he was taken away- and finally.

And that-

But I had to send these boxes of chocolate. So, I went early in the morning to the post office with the big box and a piece of cheese and- or whatever he wanted. And sent that. And one morning I was on my way to the factory from the post office, and I came on the corner of the

street and I got such a funny feeling- [pause for helicopter noise above] [No- I thought it was mine-] Such a funny feeling that I just didn't go. And I went back to Uncle Jacques which I still was with Uncle Jacques. And that same day, all the fur factories in Amsterdam were taken by the Germans. So, I really escaped because of that funny feeling.

You had a- an instinct.

Instinct, yeah – yeah. And it's happened to me several times during the war.

OK, Selma. Now we've managed to get to Leiden and your time from there, with the resistance, but I think we need to have a- a break before we start really your story. Because-

Ok.

It's been

Am I going too long, or not?

You're perfect, but I think you just need a drink and we'll have a break. Is that OK, Simon?

[1:31:41]

You OK? The sound is OK? One second, one moment.

My sound as well?

Yeah?

OK. And the camera is - Simon?

OK. OK, Selma, so let's continue our interview.

Good.

And we just managed to get to Leiden. When you got to Leiden.

Oh, yes.

Let's take the story on from there.

Doctor Wim Storm, he was head of the gynaecological department of Leiden hospital. And he did an awful lot of good *verzet* [resistance] work. Many women have got babies because he helped them, and so on and for other… people who were in hiding. You know, women who were hiding. He was always there to help. But I went to stay with Mientje and Antje. Mien and Antje. And Antje was the assistant of Wim's so I mean the hospital. And Mien was in the laboratory. Laboratories. And I- when the Germans started looking for Wim Storm, when he got too hot, he had to go into hiding himself. He did travel a lot and still helped people a lot. But he had to take- to go away from his job. And Antje – she was only twenty-three - Antje Holthuis, took over his job as head of the gynaecological department which was a very interesting job. And- the doctor- the doctors had already quite an resistance movement there. Which when I came there, I didn't know. I knew one or two were in it but not the movement itself. Several of the doctors came to eat often with us. And because we lived in a big canal house, you know, one of those big houses - huge front room. And - they were just talking about what they'd done during the day and medical things. But after a while- then I went- there was a long, long corridor from the sitting room to the kitchen. And when I went to fetch some food or something for- they must have been talking about something which I shouldn't hear, you see. I realised that after a while - not in the beginning - but after a while. And after a while, they started talking when I was there as well, about things. They were telling how they brought people into hiding places and- for instance my cousin who just died yesterday, Sunday, they brought her as well and my uncles and aunts. But I didn't know that of course. They only talked about people, Jewish people.

[1:34:49]

And- after a while they were telling stories about resistance workers who had been imprisoned, or because- and at that time they just started- the Germans just started to call up non-Jewish boys and girls for work in Germany. And so, several of those- and also some of them who went to- wanted to go to university had to sign a loyalty paper - loyal to the

German idea. And they didn't do it several of them, and they went into hiding then. So, you had quite a lot of non-Jewish boys and girls - boys and men - who needed provision of cards and photographs and things like that. So, it was quite a lot of work. And the doctors kept on telling me, or us, how few resistance workers actually there were. Not enough to supply all these people. So, one evening when they said it again and they- I just listened to the story of Sushi [nickname of Joachim Simon?], one of the Westerweel Group, who had jumped out of the prison window - well, out of the hospital window where he was imprisoned - to his death because he rather did that than under torture giving names away. I thought this was fantastic. So, I said, "Can I help?" And they said they needed young people. I said, "Yes" - certainly, ladies, certainly women, my- girls. So, I said, "Well, what can I do?" you know. And that's how I started. In the beginning it was just filling in envelopes with illegal papers and so – illegal newspapers which there were. There was only one newspaper that could be printed. But we had many illegal papers. And so that's what I did in the beginning and- for a few weeks. And then I was asked to do real good jobs, which meant my first big job was when Ann, the fiancée of Wim Storm, Ann de Langer who had been in the resistance already since the war broke out almost. He knew a lot of people. And she gave me- I met her in the Central Station in Amsterdam, and she gave me a big- or she put a big suitcase in the luggage rack. And I had to take that to five different towns and give it to the person there who then would distribute it. So, I was having that suitcase. And it was quite late in the afternoon. And by eight o'clock you had to be in, so I couldn't manage to go all the way to the south of Holland, so I went out in Leiden. And there, was a terrible- I went on to the platform, to go home, and there was control. There were German officers and Dutch policemen standing there with the- at the exit. So, I didn't know what to do. Well, I just went to exit. I had to get out. And I went to the exit and with my big suitcase, and a German said, "What's this? – "*Was ist das*?" And I said, "Papers." And he said, "*Machen Sie offen*." So, I tried to open it. And- but I didn't know the suitcase till the locks were quite difficult to do for me, 'cause I didn't know how to do it exactly. So, it took quite a while. And then I at last opened it. And inside this suitcase was what I had not seen before either, five parcels in brown packing paper, with just one letter on the top of the town where I had to bring it. And I thought, well, that's my- that's my- I'll be gone, you know, now. But he said, the German said, "Right, off." So, I got to go through. Well, when I came out of that station, I was so nervous! I stood there trembling for a while before I could go on. Then I went home, and told the story. And the next morning I took the case back to the towns where they needed to go. So, this was my first job. [laughs]

And did you- before you got it, did you know much about the resistance - the Dutch resistance?

[1:39:48]

No, no - no. No, I didn't. I knew of course because Dientje - this one I got the nurse's [uniform] from - she asked me one day could- would I go to the Jewish hospital - by that time women were only allowed to go in the Jewish hospital, Jewish women - because my cousin's wife was having a baby there. And she asked me to go and talk to Ann, the mother. To Riki, sorry, Riki. To Riki. So, I went and talked to Riki, and then I was told that she had just had the baby and I was told this by Dientje, and that I should take it out, instead of taking it to the baby department - the babies were separate, you see, in those days- and give it to Dientje in another room. And that's what I did. So I knew that already there was something. And all three children survived the war, because the other two were in the school- the nursery opposite. And they were saved as well.

And the mother?

No. And my cousin, not either. But he was alive till 1945. We know because Dientje received a letter, a note from him, asking for sugar.

And she was the Dientje you knew her from school or from-?

No, no, she was the best friend of my cousin Zetty. They all came from Alkmaar. It was a whole group. So did Hertog, so did David, so did- they were a small Jewish group in Alkmaar already.

And when you arrived in Leiden, what- what-did people say who you were or-?

Oh, they knew. Antje and Mien knew yes, yes – yes.

But what did they say? Did you say, you were a cousin. How did you manage to stay there at that point? Did you have any-?

Well, because I knew the resistance was- had put me there. And Wim and Ann were very nice. They did a lot of resistance. They came a lot as well, to visit us you know when they were in the neighbourhood. But it was Ann who took the money to my mother and sister's place. And- and told me the news of it. And then there was one day, then they said when I started to go to work for the resistance, they asked me to do it myself. By that time, it was the money of the resistance, not mine anymore. I didn't have any left.

So to- to bring it or to-?

Yes.

Be a sort of-?

To bring it, yeah. To bring it and see my mother and sister at the same time.

And did you?

[1:42:42]

Yes, of course I did. Yes, every month, yes. But- then suddenly when I was- then the, the woman had taken in an old man, an old Jewish man who- And she already had three children. And the two children, the two girls already slept in her bed, and the little boy had his own room until this old man came. And then he also slept in the same bed of the mother. And- and the mother had *en* German boyfriend, from- German Army boyfriend, who came every night, every evening. And Ann said- when I said, "I don't like that at all, Ann. All those children in one bed, they're going to talk" in school, and so on- they were all under ten, you know. And - all three. And so, Ann said, "Oh, but she's very good. Nobody will think the woman has got somebody living there if she has got the German." And anyhow- and I said, "Can't you take them somewhere else?" And so, she said, "Well, it's very difficult at the moment because there's a lot of control in Eindhoven stations." And of course, that was true, you know. It was difficult. So, but I've always been sorry about that yes. I couldn't do very much myself at all except ask and talk. But of course, I was right. I said, "One of the children's going to talk."

And what happened?

Well, we don't know. After the war I went to see the woman 'cause she was in prison for six months, in Vught concentration camp, because of taking Jews in the house. Luckily, she wasn't there when I came there, because otherwise she would have recognised me. But she told me that her husband who was living with a pub owner, that he had done it. Well, after the war my brother Louis went to the police there, and- because that was happening in Holland. And the police went to interview the man. And he said, no he had nothing to do with it at all. So still- I still think that my story, that one of the children, you know. The little boy and the two girls sleeping in the mother's bed must have said something at school to- to a little friend or something.

[1:45:16]

So, before you got- when you were still in Amsterdam did you ever have to wear a yellow star?

Yes. We all did, yes, yes, yes. Yes. But I used to cover it up with my- [laughs] with my bag.

What did you do?

Well- with my bag, my handbag, I used to cover it up. Yeah. But you had to wear it, yes, because otherwise you'd be- they said, if you didn't wear it and they found out you were shot straight away. Story.

Because in one of our testimonies the lady said that you actually had to pay for it. You had to buy these stars.

Yeah, the family had to buy them. And they'd been talking-

Do you remember that?

Yes. Well, I didn't know that but that was my father had to buy them, yes. Yes - scandalous. A few years ago, that was in all the papers in Holland and they said that the- the government should pay the people back who were- who were alive still.

And when did you take- when did you then take that off that yellow- that star?

Oh, when I- when I went to hide with the- the friend's family. I had to.

Yeah. And did you manage to get any false identity, or-?

[1:46:30]

Yes. I got- in Leiden I got a false identity, yes. Not before. I first- the room I got on the top floor, was a room of a girl who had just gone to America with the- with the last boat. And all her things were still there and they gave me her name. I can't remember if her passport were there, but cards and other things were there still. So, they gave me- and she was called Wil Buter.

Wil Buter?

Yeah. And B U T E R – and probably Wilhelmina, Wil Buter. And, you know, they put my photo- they took her photograph off and put mine on. And that was the first time. But when I went into the resistance to work for them, they asked one day when the second distribution card came out, everybody had to go and fetch it, and fetch a new identity card. And they told me, or they asked me, would I be willing to have- to- to try out a new real identity card. We- by that time- you see because of all the boys and men already having to go into hiding, by that time we also had people in the government offices, in the community offices, assisting us. One or two. And so, they could get *en*- in the archive which you had to go to, to fetch a thing, was then a card which they took out of a little baby who has just died. And they put my name into it, and my photograph and everything. And- but it was a real one out of the archive - from the archive. It wasn't changed. It wasn't a baby's, it was a real one but they changed it into the baby's existence. And that was me. And so, on that card. On that identity card I had to go and get a voucher for my shoes to see if it worked, you see. And a voucher for this, and a voucher for that, so I did. And it all went *prima* – perfectly alright, so they were very pleased with that. And when I was later on arrested, and they- you know, every time they asked in the trains and so also, because I travelled through the whole of Holland by that time. And there were many times check-ups and so on but it was alright. And then I was arrested in

July 1943 - ’44. And when we- when I was taken to the Teupestraat the headquarters of the SS in Holland, I thought, well, now it’s finished, you know, because checking in a train or an office is different from checking at a headquarters. They must have machines here, and find out. So, he took- took my bags, and I was sitting there smiling cause on that side was a row of boys behind machines - typing machines. And there was a row of girls behind typing machines. And I smiled at them in that time as if there was nothing happening, but inside I thought oh, God, this is it. You see? And then the man came back, he took my- came back and gave me my bag back so it was alright. So, then I was taken to the prison in Amsterdam and put in a cell with five others. And while I was there, I had several interviews by a German and a Dutchman and so- and - which were not very nice. But they didn’t hurt me. Which I heard later on many of people have been hurt but I didn’t. I just smiled at them. And said I had nothing to do with the with them- with it. I was only a girlfriend. And so, the boys said as well I was only the girlfriend. And I kept that through the whole interrogation, you know.

[1:51:20]

What did they accuse you of?

Of resistance work.

Associated with? You said the boyfriend- you were the girlfriend of who? Of- of-?

Of the two boys I worked with. Of Bob and Jan. We had a little- little group within a bigger group. You know, you were all little groups really because it was too dangerous otherwise if you knew too many people.

And how did they come to arrest you? Or how did they-?

Well, they arrested Bob actually, the- our leader, in a train. They’d been looking for him for a while we heard later on. And they’d arrested him. And he came to his room where just unhappily I and Jan were. Because another friend, another resistance worker, Frans Gerritsen, had promised - he was a designer and he’d promised - to make me some bookshelves with secret places in the- secret room in them so that I can put, could put those cards and all the

things I had in the suitcase under my bed which they said was very dangerous. And I could put them in these places. And Jan had just brought me those book [shelves] in Bob's room because that was near the station. And he had just explained to me how it all worked, you know, where the- where the movement was and so. And then they came in. I could hear. I said, "Ah! There's the boss." And I looked down the stairs – I was on the first floor - I looked down the stairs and there was Bob in between *zwei grüne Polizei [police force]*. And he became completely white and he didn't know we were there, you see. Shocked. Yeah. Very unlucky. Just that one day.

So, tell us a little bit about- what was it those booklets? Were they empty?

No, they were cards.

Yes? Tell us-

[1:53:31]

They were booklets with cards in them and- and coupons for food. If you wanted for instance you had *[inaudible] koeken* – it was like, like, food that was ready where you could go and buy in the street for instance, or, or at the- the what's the big building called from the community? What do you call it, you go…? What's the word for it where we all have to go to sign up, or something?

A synagogue or – no.

No, no, no.

Town hall?

Town hall, thank you. Town hall. We had to go to the Town hall then and fetch our food - *stamppot* [stew] or so. And you had to give a coupon for that. So, these books were full of coupons –

OK.

For your shoes, for your other things - whatever.

So, to just distributed to people who were in hiding or?

No, no. To everybody! Everybody had to have one of these booklets.

But the ones you had, or the resistance.

Yeah. That's right, to- for the people in hiding, yeah. Or actually for the people they stayed with, 'cause they needed it.

Right.

It's like, you know, when you now have to deliver food to people - to old people or sick people or something.

Yeah. Like rations.

[1:55:04]

Yeah.

Yeah.

They were ration books, yes. All ration books. Yes – yes.

So, when he was arrested, they caught him on the train, and then-?

Took him to his room.

And then you happened to be there

And then I happened to be there. Yeah. So, we had arranged it had happened, because you talk about that of course, that we would say that I just was a girlfriend. And so, I stuck to that too. And they did too.

But your papers were good enough-

Yeah.

Because they were actually real papers. They were not fake.

No, they were real. And that's what we real- what I realised then that that was true. Yeah. Thank God, for the resistance. Yeah.

So, they just added your picture on to a real- on to the real document. And those other two boys - were they Jewish or not Jewish?

No, no-Jewish. No, Bob was half-Jewish. Yeah. No, but Jan, not. No, no.

And then did you stay together with them, or what happened when you were all arrested?

No, no, no. We were all three taken in separate cars to the prison. No, I never saw them again. Well, Jan died. He was sent to Neuengamme *concentratie* camp. And when Neuengamme was freed, they put the boys- they put the prisoners on the ship to take them to Sweden, but the ship was bombed by the Allies. They thought- they thought it was Germans. Yeah. Like my when I was going in- in the trucks to Sweden, well, to Denmark first, we were shot at by the Allies because again, they thought it was Germans fleeing. Yeah. Yeah.

[1:57:06]

So, during your time before you were arrested, what was your most dangerous mission or what did you feel was, or what-?

Oh, the dangerous mission was when- actually, was when I had to go to Paris to get some papers. And there was a man there. Well, I first I- I had to cross several borders of course into

Belgium and then into France and back again later on. And when I- I- I didn't know exactly what was going to happen. All I knew was the address, which I can't remember now. And- and that there was a German office with a chap in it who should give me an envelope and I gave him my envelope. And it went so smoothly; I thought there was going to be much more interrogation or something like that, you know, control. But there wasn't. I went- and the man himself- and later on – I didn't know that then, but later on I found out after the war that he was actually a German Jewish refugee. Because I worked together with the Westerweel *Groep* and the Westerweel Group- I don't know if you've ever heard of that. They were a group of German and Austrian boys and girls, who were Zionists. And to learn they went to Holland before the war in 1936, '7 '8 '9 to learn the agriculture, so that they could in Israel, or Palestine as it was then, start as a farmer.

Yeah.

And this group was still in Westerbork, which they built, which they built for them, actually, when the Germans came into Holland. So, they were caught there, really. But they were a wonderful group during the war. I worked with them.

What was it called? Westerbil?

Westerbork.

Westerbork. Not- it's not the- not Westerbork. Not the camp.

The camp. What did you say?

No, what was this group called?

[1:59:25]

Westerweel. Because-

Westerweel.

Because- because Wester- because Wil and Joop Westerweel- Wil and Joop Westerweel were two teachers at the Kees Boeke School. Kees Boeke School was a very, very advanced, modern school, and they were teachers there. And they brought- they took it on to them to have one or two of the German Jewish refugees in the house and that's how they started. And in the end, they became a big group of all the boys and all the ones they worked together with who weren't with them. They were wonderful. They opened up the- some of the borders, the going of the borders. You know, they had opened it up first and- so that you knew which farmer to go to. And then you know you were with a farmer. And then next morning early, say four o'clock or something, he would take you over the border of his, of the meadow. You know. And it happened all the time. Unhappily, Weel- Joop Westerweel himself was caught in 1944 when he came back into Holland after bringing a group of Jewish people to France and Palestine. And he was caught and he was shot in- in Vught.

And you knew about them? You worked with them?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes, no I knew them.

OK Westerwil. Westerwil boys?

Westerweel.

Westerweel, OK.

Yeah. The famous. There's a- there's a wood in Israel called after him.

And how many-?

Which has a tree of me, in it too.

How many members did they have or how big was that group?

Oh, no, not so terribly big- not so terribly big itself, originally. Well, we had meetings sometimes when we were with twelve which was four of us and about eight of them. I should think twenty or something like that. But don't forget there were other groups. Jewish groups,

who also, they worked together with. They knew a lot of the people. And I think or I was told that this man I met later on, Paula- Paula Kaufman told me that she was one of the Westerweel Group. When I was asked one day, when I was in Leiden, living in Leiden in the beginning, I was asked to go to Haarlem to a house of Frans and Hennie Hertzen, non-Jews. And they had a Jewish girl in house, in the house. German. Paula Kaufman. But she was very Jewish looking, very dark and very Jewish looking. So, she wasn't allowed to go out, or open the door. And Frans [Gerritsen] had sent his wife Hennie who had just had two children, twins, to her parents in Zeist. And so, Paula was there alone to open the door and they thought it was not good, so they asked me to go there so that if the bell rang I could open the door. And we had meetings there of the Westerweel Group as well. And that's where I met a lot of them, you see?

[2:03:19]

Yeah. So, Paula, after the war she- she went to Israel. She survived. She is- but she was in France, the north of France after the invasion, or just before the invasion over the borders, you know. And she worked in German offices. Her German was perfect, you see. She worked in German offices and the unbelievable story is she went to look for her mother first, before she went to work, through all the camps to look for her mother and she found her in one of the camps. Unbelievable! She told me that in- in Israel. So, she got married and she also told me that the man who was in that office was probably so- I can't remember his name- one of the group. And later on, when I was in Sweden, I met another one whom I was very friendly with - Kurt Reilinger. I remember his name very well because I met him again in Sweden. And he told me he was arrested just about that time in '44. But the Germans didn't shoot him directly. And couldn't interview him because of the invasion troubles. And they sent him to German concent- German prisons. And he was freed by the Russians. Or, or the English. I can't remember who. And I met him in Sweden and he told me about the story about how they worked in the north of France, which I didn't know up till then, you see. But I now- it opened my eyes to a few things which I thought, hey, I must have met one of them.

[2:05:10]

But how did you feel? Did you feel safe? You were blond and-

Yeah.

So, did you feel safe going around travelling around?

Yes, I did by then because I'd been through so many check-ups which I went through that, that I felt safe, yes. Well, you're never hundred precent safe of course. But yes, I felt safe-ish, yeah. Yeah.

You had the right papers. So, you went to Paris once you said?

I had the right papers and the right - attitude.

Which was?

Not- don't show fear. I kept on smiling to everyone, you know. I should smile more now in the photos. [Laughs] But I did then.

And when did you see your mother and sister last, or-?

Well, that time when I went to them in- in June '43.

And they were ok where they were?

Oh, yes, they were very well, yes, yes, yes- yes. I think, my mother did most of- most of the household - housekeeping. Cooking and everything else.

And when did you find out that they were betrayed, denounced?

Well, I was in Leiden, and Dientje - same Dientje - sent me a card saying, "Fem [mother's name was Femmetje] and Clara ill." So, I knew there was something happening. And Mien said, "I'm coming with you. You can't go on your own to"- because Dientje asked me to come over, because my mother asked for toothpaste and toothbrush and a- and a rucksack. Oh, yes. And Dientje didn't know where the rucksack was, so I had to go because that was with Greet, my best friend Greet. And my father had bought us all rucksacks, you know.

Cause they- we were going to a work camp and you were told you should take some things. You weren't allowed a suitcase but rucksacks were fine. Huge rucksacks, actually. Unbelievable.

[2:07:12]

Could you bring it to your mother?

Hm?

Could you bring that?

We sent it. Dientje sent them. We wouldn't bring-

To where?

Westerbork. I don't know if they ever got it because they probably went straight- they sent them straight to Sobibor so I doubt whether they ever got the things.

So, they were sent to first Westerbork and then Sobibor? But that-

My mother and sister.

Yes. But that probably you found out later.

Yeah.

And how did you feel when you found out they were in Westerbork?

Oh, I cried, and cried, and cried and cried. Yeah. I couldn't sleep for weeks. Well, days. No that still- still upsets me now. The funny thing is that I'm not so worried or upset about what I experienced. It's what my mother, sister and father experienced that upsets me regularly.

Yeah. And to think about- because you don't know exactly what they experienced.

No, you imagine it.

Imagine it - yeah.

That's the terrible thing of it. You know roughly because you- although I try not to look at television and so, you can't help it.

And how old was your sister when she went?

Fifteen. Yeah, I often think of when we were young or when the photographs you know, when she was young and so. I took a photograph of her in- on my birthday, June 1942. Sitting in front of the house.

And were you close to her?

Yes, very close. Yes. Although there was six years difference, but we were very close. We slept in the same bed. Double bed. Big double bed. Well, as close as you can be when you are six years older.

Yeah. And were there many other cases where there were people denounced and- I mean.

Where?

In Holland.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Betrayed, oh, yes. Yes, the Dutch- especially when they started paying seven guilders for every Jew they denounced.

Yeah. I guess Anne Frank is the most famous one or that people would know about.

Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

That they were denounced.

There were hundreds of stories like that. I- I once got a question on that, and they said what I think is that they probably didn't realise or knew, but we know now, what was going to happen to these people. They thought they were just being arrested. You know. I think this might have been one of the cases. Not-

People were willing to-

I think so. Not everybody, but- but money can do very- and don't forget a lot of them had hunger, were without jobs and so. Money does a lot of things. Very dangerous.

[2:10:42]

But you met so many, I mean, Dutch people, non-Jews who were actively helping.

Oh yes, many people helped. That's one of the reason that I went as well, because I felt that so many non-Jewish people were helping, you know, and did a- did a beautiful job. I felt I- I- it was my duty to do it as well. Oh, definitely, yes. Yes.

So, you felt a sense of duty to- to?

To help.

To help.

Yeah. Because it was needed.

Yeah. So how long was it before you were arrested? How long? Was it about a year, or?

No. You mean I was in the resistance?

Yeah.

No, I went into the resistance in 1942, didn't I? At the end of 1942.

Yeah.

So ’44, two years, yes. Almost two years.

It’s a long time.

Yes. Yes. Well, I travelled every day - almost every day. Once- I moved to- they asked me to move from Leiden to Utrecht when these cards came and these booklets with coupons came out and the new identity card came out. *De Tweede Distributiekaart* it was called. And- “TD” and our group called the TD Group.

That was the- the section?

Yeah. Now what was I going to say?

They asked you to move to Utrecht.

Yeah, and they asked me to move to Utrecht with the- when that happened, when I got the Margarete van der Kuit name. And they found me a room in Utrecht, yeah. In fact, last year somebody took me there again. [Laughs] Yeah.

Aha. And what- what’s the name you got? Margarete?

[2:12:35]

Yeah, Margarete is the full name. But I called- I always said, Marga.

Marga?

Marga Van der Kuit. All my colleagues.

Marga Van de-?

Van der Kuit.

Van der Gout?

Kuit.

Kuit.

Yeah. So, that's when I started travelling a lot. Yeah. I visited boys who- non-Jewish boys as well, who were with farmers, say, and who were trouble because they didn't want to work. And the farmer and his wife got fed up with them, you know. And I was told to- I was asked to go and talk to them. They probably needed a girl who said- and so- and I found some of them with poor living standards on the top of a hay -stack. You know, and that's where they slept.

And did you still have money or did at that point-?

No, I just had money for- for travelling, yes. And they paid my- my room.

Right.

Yeah. And you got the food because the *hospita* gave the food- meals and so on. Yeah. And you had two- I had two ration cards. One to give to the *hospita,* to the landlady, because she made the food as well. That was done in Holland in those days. And one to give to a farmer or whoever I was with and couldn't go home.

So, at that point the job was really to- to visit people or to look- to go to people-

Yeah.

- who had-

Yeah. I can't remember. You asked me about the money. I must have- they must have given me money but I can't remember that, actually. [laughs]

But you had enough for yourself. Did- or, were you hungry?

I'm sure it must have been some. Yeah.

Did you-

But I also-

You didn't suffer from hunger? Or I mean, did you-

Oh, no, no, no. No, no, no.

You had enough?

Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I also was sent to- that's another job I had- I was sent to people who- they were factory owners or architect owners or something like that, where- who gave us money. I travelled sometimes with thousands of pounds in my, you know-

[2:15:04]

Where would you hide it?

In my body - on my body. But it always was alright. I always gave it to Bob. This was money needed for people who were in hiding or anything else. And he must have given me some money to- to spend on tickets or something like that.

So again, that's dangerous, if they- if you were caught you would have been caught with it.

Yeah, of course. Yes, it's true.

But you- you didn't get caught.

No.

So, did they believe you, you think, when- when they did arrest you that you were the girlfriend?

Yes- oh, in the beginning- Oh, those two *grüne Polizei* they- they said so to- to the head of the Gestapo who stood on the top of the stairs who said, "*Was ist das*?" And they said, *"Oh, das Mädchen hat nichts damit zu machen*…" [Oh, the girl. Nothing to do with…] And- I can speak German to you. [laughs]

You can.

And- it's not too bad, I hope, after all these years. And- so he said- What's his name again? He was the head of Gestapo in Holland. Forgot the name at the moment. I mentioned it in the book. He said, "*Glaub' ich nicht*." [I do not think so.] *Ik dacht men*- I thought, my heart sank in my shoes, you know. First when those two *grüne Polizei*, said, *"Oh, das Mädchen hat nichts damit zu machen*…" I thought, oh, fine, he- they still believed me. But when he says, "*Glaub' ich nicht*." I thought oh, dear…

And then?

Yeah.

And then?

And then they took me to the- Amsterdam prison. And I was interrogated a few times there. In the beginning of course, I kept full that I was only the girl. And - girlfriend. Until one day he came, and he offered me a cigarette…the interrogator. And I saw that it was packet out of my suitcase because my father, when he did the shopping if he was home, he put always the dates on everything. And I did that too. On my- because I had so many cigarette coupons having two - two ration books, I had quite a lot of cigarettes always. Although I didn't smoke that much; I smoked but not that much. And so, I could see my handwriting on it. So, I knew they'd been in my suitcase. Luckily, it was weeks after I was taken. We were taken on the 20- on the 18th - 18th of July - of June.

[2:17:59]

'44?

'44. And I was sent to Amsterdam- I was sent to Vught on the 6th of August. So, this was beginning of August, I should think. So- so they must have believed me for quite a few times before it happened. Before it wasn't. So, I thought oh, my goodness, what now? And- so he said, "You'd better tell us the truth now, because we know you're not just a girlfriend." I said, "I am!" "What about all this then?" I said, "Well – I just hide- I'm just hiding it for them. I'm helping." So, I kept on saying that. In the end he said, again, "You better" another day, "You'd better tell us the truth, because Hitler doesn't kill women. You may get some prison, but Hitler-" But we knew of course that Hitler was killing women, but that's what he said. And- so in the end I got *Kriegsdauer* [imprisonment for duration of war].

What is it?

Kriegsdauer. – Duration of the- of the war.

Kriegsdauer?

Imprisoned – *Kriegsdauer*, yeah.

Who gave that to you, the-?

The- the Gestapo.

The Gestapo.

Yeah – yeah.
And that was in Holland still?

In Holland, yeah - yeah. In the prison, still. And then I was sent to-

So, was there a trial, or what-? No trial? They just-?

That was a type of trial, yeah. No, it wasn't really. Interrogations. No, I don't think they had time to have a trial for everybody.

No, but the Kriegsdauer was written somewhere or in a document.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah – yeah. Oh, yes. The NEOT has got all the documents. The War Institute in Holland.

And what were conditions in that- Amsterdam, in the prison?

[2:20:17]

Well. [half-laugh] As I said, we were- I was with five others and there was only one bed. And a farmer's wife was lying on the bed. They had imprisoned her because they were looking for her son. And- in those days it often happens that they took a mother or a father to get the son to come - in. And of course, the son didn't come. And they hadn't taken the farmer because he needed him to do his farm, you see. So, they took the mother. And the farmer brought her a meal every other day. She never gave anything to us. And there was another girl in my age, and we made- made friends. And we walked. It was a very small prison cell, about this size, no, a little bit bigger, about this size - and narrow. And we used to walk from one side to the other, you know, to keep fit and do exercises. And sang. We sang songs.

What did you sing? What- like what?

Hm?

What did you sing?

We sang Dutch songs. And songs from famous musicals or so, in those days already. But most of it was Dutch songs, you know, and-

Do you remember some?

And Louis Davids songs… No, no, no, no, no.

Sorry, you said, Louis Davidson?

No, no. Louis Davids was his name.

Aha?

He was a singer.

OK-

And he- we sang some of his songs. I can't remember them now. Something about *Draaiorgel* [barrel organ] – *Draaiorgel…* No, I can't remember now, no - no. And- but the others were getting furious because they thought it was so noisy. [laughs] S, the guard, the female guard we had, came to fetch us one morning, the girl and me. And we thought, what now. And she took us to her room, and there she gave us some German, some soldiers' clothes to mend. She said, "I better get you out of that cell because the others are so fed up [laughs] with your noise." And we thought- we said to each other quietly, "Be careful." Because she asked too many questions too, you see? So, we- we didn't say anything - much. Yeah, you were the whole day in that cell, and the whole night of course. We slept on the floor the rest of us, except the- the farmer's wife. And in the morning, you were woken and you had to clean the cell out, and to empty the- the bucket. And then we were taken out- there was an round courtyard, and there were for each cell had this, had their own- their own this- this size, this way, where you could walk. So, there was- there was a wall there and a wall there and you could walk here, so that size. And you weren't allowed to talk, which we did of course. And we also sang again. [Laughs]

[2:24:00]

And how long did you stay there in that- in that cell?

Not very long. I think six of 6th of August- [breaking off to point out:] Look. Look! Can you see it?

Yeah. Yeah. Lovely.

What's it called again? Hedgehog? No, not a hedgehog. It's a young one too. Now he's there, he's jumping in there. [laughs]

Yeah.

Now he's there.

A squirrel.

Squirrel that's the word yeah, a squirrel. He's not afraid at all.

No.

[laughs] It's a lovely little grey one.

Yes, I asked you how long you were-

[2:25:00]

Yes, the 6th of March we were taken to, we were suddenly asked to get out of the- well, I was at least, on my own, out of my cell. And people from the other cells came as well. And in a long, long queue, we went to the tram. And the tram took us to the station, and then we went to Vught, camp Vught - concentration camp Vught. And there we had to take off all our clothes and have a bath. And then we were given blue overalls to wear and a blue scarf with white spots on it. And - clogs. And then the first day, I was told to clean the nursery floor. I was given a *zwabber [mop]* and- and a- and a bucket and a- a, a brush. And to clean it. And it was- I was so- it was something so unusual, because when I came into that nursery there was another prisoner, a girl, about my age or younger even, and the- on the walls were two men painting nursery rhymes - in a concentration camp. You see they, they just wanted to go everything normal. But if you think that all those children - about 200 Jewish children- I think it was - were sent within a few weeks to Auschwitz.

How many people were there? How big of a camp was it, that Vught?

Oh, it was quite a big camp, compared nothing with- compared with the German camps, of course. But in Holland-

Because this was in Holland?

In Holland, yes. Yes. One side was for the men, the other side was for the women.

And children as well you said?

Yeah. And children. Yeah. And then- and then the next day I was told to line up, and we were taken by trucks to s'Hertogenbosch and I was put in an gas mask factory, to make gas masks on the - bench – what do you call the things? The-

Assembly line?

No. One of those things that roll on.

Assembly line, no? A motor belt?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, roller belt. And we were told to fit gas masks together from small pieces. Each- each person was given a small piece and had to put it. And I was there till the invasion. The invasion was on the 4th of June in France, but they were on the 6th of September they were near the Belgian border, near the Dutch border, the- the- the Anglos. And- and on the 6th of Dec- of September, they transported us to Ravensbrück. We all had to queue up to go in a big queue to the train, but I thought I'm not going. So, I hid under a *matras* but my legs were still outside when the *Aufseherin* [warden] came and pulled me back again. And then she pushed me into the last wagon. Cause they were all cattle wagons. And I was put in the last wagon

which was in a way my luck because there were only about eight people- eight women there. And they had worked in the kitchen, so they had a big tin of food with them. So, then we went to Ravensbrück for three days and two nights. And arrived there the evening of the 8th. And that was terrible, terrible. Screaming, and shouting, and dogs. And whips. Unbelievable. Yeah. We weren't used to that at all in- in the Dutch concentration camp.

[2:29:48]

So, it was quite different?

Yes! Later on, we said Vught was a sanatorium compared to it. [phone rings] That's mine.

Careful, careful, one second. [sound break]

Rolling.

Yes, so we were discussing Ravensbrück and it was quite a shock you said when you arrived.

Yes – yes.

What did you see first when you- when you came?

[2:30:01]

Oh, the- the SSes. And the dogs. And the dogs were having- having the same clothes as the soldiers. Same colour material and so.

They were dressed?

Yes. The they had the- the hat of the- you know, the- which they wear to show what they belong to, and so. And that had the dogs as well, yeah. Yeah. And the green-grey cloth. Yeah. Yeah. And then we were taken to the main camp. And marched to the main camp. And there we were put in *en* tent. I thought we were all put in a tent but afterwards when I started going to Ravensbrück and talk, and other people came as well to talk, I heard that we were only half

in the tent. The other half slept in the open on the hill, because were couldn't get all in the tent. So. But we were in the tent and we were very tired. Many of us hadn't slept well because they were in wagons- in cattle wagons with seventy or eighty people, which was terrible of course for them. That's where I was lucky that we only had a few of us.

And who were the other women in your-?

All the ones from- all the resistance workers who were with me in Vught and in s'Hertogenbosch. In Den Bosch. They- they were all non-Jewish, well, as much as I think. Perhaps one or two might have been like me. [half-laughs]

But at that time, they didn't know that. Or did-?

No of course not, no, no, no.

Your fellow inmates they also didn't know.

No.

You wouldn't say that to anyone.

No, nobody. No. No, that came out later in Sweden.

At that point they- nobody knew?

No.

And they called you-

Marga.

Marga.

[2:32:27]

Mn. Yeah. So, we- then the next day we had to- well, first of all one of us- one of them had taken the lead and was a bit older than me. And somebody suddenly shouted, "Oh, there is a beast there!" And so, she said – the one who took the lead said, "All come here near me then. Come and sleep near." So, we all slept on each other almost. And it was very funny because within a few weeks everybody was full of lice. It was a lice colony. And the next morning we had to queue up for the shower barrack… and we were told- you were always told to stay in fives. The the Germans were very good: five, five, five, five. And when the first five went in they came out and said, "We have to give ev…" They- they were undressed, completely undressed, and then go through the- so we quickly gave whatever we could and wanted to keep to the persons in the back so- so that we could take it again when we came out of the shower. But when I went in, I was completely- I had taken all the- had to give all the clothes, our lovely Dutch – what do you call it?

Dress?

Overall.

Overall.

Not an overall, it's really- it's- it's trousers and top in one.

Yeah, overall.

Yeah. And with this- with this Dutch head *das* - headscarf. There he is again, good heavens! [Bea Laughs]

This is the first time a squirrel appears in our interview.

Yeah? [Both laugh]

[2:34:39]

And- so- we went under a cold shower. There was no hot water left *denk ik* - I think - if there was at all. And then we went- all naked of course, and we were all naked there. And then we went to doctor's investigation. And- who never changed any gloves or anything like that, if he'd had gloves on, I can't remember if he had gloves on. But he didn't wash his hands at least. And then we were given, well, I was given a very thin dress, prison dress. Very thin blue-grey stripe prison dress, and that was all. And some wooden shoes. And no underwear, or anything. Some people had got *en* jacket in the beginning but they didn't have enough. When we arrived, you see, Ravensbrück was already sold out for- crowded. And in the beginning, it was completely different when- in the beginning '41 or '42 when they came, but not when we came anymore. And so, we were told to go into *en* barrack. I got my- my jumper back and my father's fountain pen, and- which was smuggled for me. Smuggled for me. And by- by Zetty's sister-in-law who worked for the- in Holland for the Jewish Council. And my father had given her his pen, his Water pen. Waterman pen. And when I went to England my mother had knitted me *en* cardigan, blue- navy blue cardigan with a zip in it that just came out. And it was very, very modern, very new, and I wanted one. And so I had that to go to England with. And I had that still when I was wearing it in Ravensbrück. It kept me warm all those years. All those months.

So, did you give it to the people behind you and the collected it?

Yeah, and then got it back. Yeah.

What else did you give them?

My fountain pen, my father's fountain pen.

And the jumper?

And the jumper, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, we didn't remem- we didn't realise that you didn't get any underwear or anything like that.

Funny I never thought about that. So, people were not given?

[2:37:22]

No, no, no. No. Anyhow, we were- we were told to go into *en* barrack, quarantine barrack. And in Holland we were given *en*- they called it a bed, but it was one of those *stapel* [bunk]bed - where we had to sleep. And we were in Holland you had a not a face flannel to wash yourself, but you have *en* where you could put your hand in. And we hanged that on our corner in Vught of our bed, with our toothbrush and our toothpaste in it. We did the same in Germany. When we- when we came back from work, or when we slept, when we woke up, it had disappeared. Stolen by all the rest of the women, and we learned later on that that was quite a normal thing to do.

And what was the work, Selma? What did you have to do?

Well- nothing. [laughs] Wil Westerweel and I shared a bed. And because when her husband was arrested, she was arrested as well. And she came into Ravensbrück with me. And we decided- well the- the Dutch women were asked to go to work and we were scared that it's going to be very very heavy work which we can't do. Cause we were told by some of the people that were there already that they had to go and do street- street making and things like that, you know, every heavy stones and so. Carrying. And so, Wil and I went to another barrack and hid ourselves under the top mattress and philosophised [laughs] about the world and things to do. Unbelievable, really. And so, we did that the whole day. I felt a bit uncomfortable- in case we were caught. We did it the next day again. And then I thought, no, it's too dangerous, which it was of course. We hadn't realised. We came from Holland and oh, we figured- well- but it was very dangerous. If we would have been caught, we would not be alive anymore - anyhow. So, I- I told- so one of the ladies, the girls said to me, "Where were you then?" I said we slept under a *matras*. "Oh," she said, "why didn't you come to Siemens?" I said, "Well…" Because when we arrived there, the first day, or the next morning actually, people- the women who had been working for Philips, because near Eindhoven, near Vught is Philips, Eindhoven. And people who- the whole long, large group who had been working for Philips were straight away taken to Siemens to work.

As slave labour?

Yeah.

Slave labourers?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

[2:40:58]

So, she said to me, this girl, I can't remember who it was anymore, she said to me, "Why don't you come and join us?" I said, "Well, I've never worked for Philips. I don't know how to use the- the machines." "Oh," she said, "it's very easy, simple, you just…" I said, "But they- they're going to ask my- my name, or number or so…" We were all given a number- a number and *en* red cross, red piece of material to show that you were political prisoner. And so I said, "I- I can't do that. I've never done it..." And "Oh," she said, "it's so easy to do." I said, "But they'll know when I go into the queue, through the gate." "No, no, no," she said, "It's just rows of ten and they count the rows. They don't count who's in it." And so, with my heart in my shoes I followed, and I went to- and she was quite right. The next morning at half past five I was queuing up with her and we just went through the gate. And I arrived in Siemens. But of course, I didn't know what to do. So, they put me on *en* high stool on the walls of that barrack - a long, long barrack. And the walls of that barrack had shelves. And behind the shelves were stools. *Kruk*s - stools. And a little machine was put on it, you know, everywhere, and you sat and did that. To- to solder they were soldering machines. You had to solder very fine- very, very fine - wire together. And I was so nervous I didn't know what to do, how to do and so every time I thought, oh, gosh I'm doing it wrong. And so, I did- but what I could do, when the telephone went, I jumped up and answered it. I went to the desk where it was and I answered the phone, and called the *chef*. I said, "It's telephone for you." And this happened quite a lot. Until, a certain moment came after some weeks, that I had headquarters in Berlin on the phone. And he got a notice saying that no prisoner was allowed to answer the phone anymore. So, that was that. I couldn't answer the phone anymore. So, I tried to do the machinery again, the soldering. But I was so nervous I- I just -fainted. And one of the next days- we were still in the big camp for sleeping- because later on there was a Siemens camp built, but we were still in the big camp. And one morning I couldn't - or one evening - I couldn't get up from the loo, because by that time my tummy was completely out of order and I just went all the time.

What was the food you were get-?

[2:44:20]

Oh, there was no food. The- there was coffee – they called it coffee - in the morning. And we had one thin slice of bread, very small. And then for the day, this was for the day. And then in the evening we were given they called 'soup', which was water with a few grass sprits in it. You know, and that was it. So, no wonder I was very quickly- so, I couldn't get up from the loo. There were still real loos there in that barrack. Because later on in- later on they only had the holes. And couldn't get up from the loo. And then an SS came, and started beating me with his belt, which had all these iron things on it, you know. And so I fell fla- I- I fainted again. And so, two girls had to take me up, and hold me up while he was counting. And- and the *Aufseherin* [warden] was counting. And then they took me to the hospital barrack. And I was there for- then I- they put me on a bed on the- below, beneath everything else. And on the other end were two German women, non-Jewish women, who later on I heard from them, they had been selling black market, and they were in prison because of it. And they threw- I was still unconscious. And the next morning they threw me out of the bed 'cause they were lying on the foot end and I was lying on the main end - head end. And they said, "*Die Holländer - die schmutzige Holländer- Holländerin hat sich nicht gewaschen.*" And- but because they threw me out, I well woke up, you see. And I crawled to the corridor which was quite nearby and out of the door and there was a wash- wash basin. And I undressed and I started washing myself. And an old Polish woman who was standing next to me, said, "Oh, you, you, you, Dutch people shouldn't wash so much. That's why you die quickly." So, I heard the *Aufseherin*, no, *niet Aufseherin*, the nurse actually, German nurse saying to the *Aufseherin*, "Oh, I thought that one would be dead, the Dutch one would be dead this morning." And so, she took me by my arm and took me- pulled me all the way to the bed again and put me in bed. And the German women didn't dare say a thing, of course. And- so I was there for three or four days, three days or- and then one of the girls of my Philips, of my- Den Bosch group, my- the gas mask factory came and said, "You must come out, Marga, because we are being sent to another camp." So, I said, "Oh, I'm much too weak still for that." Cause also I didn't want to go out because I thought if I change, they may look through my papers again. And I don't want to do that because I'm much better here then. So, I said, "I'm sorry, I can't come, no." So, I never saw them again till after the war, some of them. And they were sent to a camp, a factory, a brick factory to work.

Especially for the Siemens-?

[2:48:16]

And I was, well, I then went back to Siem- oh- no. One- another girl came, a Jewish girl actually - she had star on still. And there were some Jewish people in Ravensbrück as well. And she came and she [inaudible] Betty, and she came and she said, "*Herr* - they built a new barrack for Siemens, and Herr Seefeld" that's the *chef*, "says that you should come and be his secretary, his *Aufschreiberin* really*."* So, that's what I did; I went, I sat at one side of his table and he sat on the other side. I did the paperwork. [laughs] So, that was luck.

He was the Siemens manager?

He told me later on actually because you see, you were having six nights, six nights' work, and six day works. Daytime, you see? So, we used to sit there a whole night with each other really. So, he told me a few things.

He was civilian?

He was civilian. He was *heel* [very] young man- as a very young man he came to Siemens and he worked himself up.

And was he- did he-

He was very nice.

- help people? I mean-

Yes, he did. He did.

Was he nice to people?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Very much so. He- when I told him about Mrs Van der [inaudible] and their daughter Jackie how they had to do this heavy work in the main camp

and so, and were very, very poorly, he said, “Tell them to join the queue and come to our…” And also, when there was one other Dutch- we were only with two Dutch girls in that barrack- in that hall. And when - Toni, she was called - and when Toni kept on crying every day, every night, on, and on and on. And he said to me, “Do go to your compatriot and talk to her and ask her why she’s crying. So, I did and so talked. And in February Toni was freed. And I think that he had something to do with it, because he said to me after that, “if they free you, Van der Kuit, go to Siemens, go to headquarters in Berlin and tell them I said- I sent you, and they’ll give you a good job.” I thought, “You should know.” [laughs] Yeah - yeah. He did. So, I think he may have had something to do with it, you know. Not sure, but- I think so. After the war I tried to get hold of him- I tried to get information about him, but of course it was impossible, terribly bad, because they were- Ravensbrück was on the Russian side, you see, no was east of Berlin. And it was very difficult. And in the end when I got hold of it, I was told that the- the archives of Siemens were closed for years, and years and years. Until, one day I received an invitation, because every year I went to Ravensbrück first with Dutch students and later on with German students as well. And I got an invitation because one of the directors of Siemens had asked me to come over at a dinner. So [Insa] Eschebach, the Director of until- until last week, the Director of Ravensbrück, with whom I was quite friendly, arranged the dinner. Beautiful, brought in, beautiful dinner. And he was sit- he asked for me to sit next to him, and he asked me about things. And I told him, and I said, “Why is it not open, why can’t I find out?” He said, “Well, if you go to Munich, that’s where the headquarters are at the moment- so if you go to Munich, I will- and you ask for me, I will help you.” But I didn’t do it. I thought that’s not worth it to go all the way to Munich.

[2:52:35]

But you wanted to find him? You wanted to-

I wanted to find him. I wrote a few times of course.

What did you want to tell him?

Sorry?

What did you want to tell him? Why did- what did you want to-?

I wanted to find out what people did to him if- if anything at all, whether he was imprisoned or whatever happened after the war. Oh, I would have told him then, yes, of course if I would have met him, yes. [laughs] Very funny, that. Yeah. And very original, too. Never heard a story like that at all. Yeah. So then one day we were told to stand outside the barrack, and they told us that the old women, people over fifty, were, didn't have to work anymore, and were given better food and so on. And so, they were taken to the *Jugend* [youth] camp, Uckermark. What we heard later on was that they were gassed and killed.

The older ones?

Yeah, the older ones. We had several of their daughters with us, because mother and daughter were- and father probably and brother, were imprisoned at the same time, you see, arrested at the same time. So, we had several- and the daughters then, you hear rumours all the time.

Selma, I think somebody is ringing at the door.

Really?

One second.

[sound break]

Yeah, so we were talking about Ravensbrück, still. You obviously were there as a non-Jewish prisoner.

Yeah.

But you came across some Jewish prisoners.

Well, no, you weren't allowed to go to there at all. No, no, no.

There was a different section?

[2:54:29]

What happened was, we were getting cold. You know, September, October, still in the big- and it was very cold, and you weren't allowed to be in the barrack during the day either. And so, one of our people said to me, "Oh, there is a Jewish woman- woman in the Jewish barrack who works in the textile barrack." Because they did everything there, you know. And "If you save up your bread, she has two little children, three little children, and she wants bread for the children and she'll give you some warm clothes." So, I went to see her with- I saved up the week's bread, week's sliced bread. And she gave me a long man's under-trousers. What do you call them? Long johns.

Long johns, yeah.

Long johns. And that kept- they kept me warm the whole time I was in Ravensbrück. Fantastic. And later on, after the war, when I came to give my workshops and so, there was one girl, one lady, and she was the girl, the daughter of this woman. And when she told her story, and I told my story, we said, "Hey," I said, "You were…" "Yes," she said, "that was my mother."

And did they survive?

Yes, I saw her- not her mother, but her brothers I met as well, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. She is still alive now, Emmy – Emmy. Lives in Israel. Her father was Hungarian but he was not alive.

So, what other nationalities did you encounter in Ravensbrück?

Oh, every- everyone. I spoke a little bit of Polish and all the- you know. Slovaks were there, Czechs were there. I made a very good friend Czech. Walina Wodna. And in my barrack, there was- Toni and I were the only Dutch. There were loads of French as well, oh yes, there was one whole- whole table with French women.

And Hungarians you said?

And Hungarians, yeah.

They just- they were arriving at the same time?

Yeah. Very late, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But in the barrack where I was working at Siemens there were no Jews anymore.

They were already deported?

They were deported- deported, yeah.

For Auschwitz?

[2:57:19]

Yeah. Except that barrack where I got my long john.

So, by the time you were there, were most Jewish women already deported further?

Yeah, to- to Auschwitz yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There were a few left, but we had not contact. Especially not when we were up in- because when October, November came, probably, Siemens was fed up with the women who were very tired by the time they came to the factory having walked and being underfed and having walked all that way up the hill, to the factory. They built- they built eight barracks for people to sleep.

And was that near the factory?

Yes.

So, that was in fact out-

Yes, two minutes - two seconds.

Outside? Was that outside the camp?

Yeah. No – yes, of course, yes, it was on the hill. Yeah. Yeah.

And did you sleep there as well?

Yeah, yeah, we all- we all- everybody who worked in Siemens had to go there, yeah.

And was that an improvement?

Oh, tremendous improvement. Improvement was number one that you slept- I slept with Wil, in one bed. So, there were only two in a bed. Three tiers mind you. But there were no dogs and no big SS fellows screaming away. There were *Aufseherinnen* - you had your own *Aufseherin* all the time. That was different, too. We didn't have that in the big one. We just had the same old *Aufseherin*, you know, *Aufseherin*.

And she was an SS person? SS?

Well, I expect so, *Aufseherin*. Yeah. Ours was very good though.

What was her name?

That was- I can't remember, no.

But she was - good? She was-?

[2:59:22]

Yeah. Have you seen the notices in the German papers about the *Aufseherinnen* in Ravensbrück? I've not a note there somewhere. Johanna Langefeld was the *Haupt aufseherin*. I met her. She- she caught me. One night I was getting very bad. Mind you I- I almost died. And I was so poor, that Siem- that *Herr* Seefeld said to me, "Go and lie on the bed in my office." And the office was - I didn't even know it, I'd never been there - at the end of the hall. And so, I went there and I fell asleep of course straight away. And that one evening, I'd never seen her before, I'd never had a check-up before, that one evening- that

one night, actually, it was a night, that one night, the *Aufseherin* Johanna Langfeld came. And they started counting, the *Aufseherin* counted, and she hadn't noticed either. And one was missing. So, in the end they said, "Oh, yes, of course she must be there." And so, I was collected. And for one reason or another, I never heard about it anymore. So, I think well the *Aufseherin* was yelled at. The *Hoofd- Aufseherin* – the *Hauptaufseherin* gave her tremendous- and, but I think Seefeld must have told her that he told me to lie down. Now she could still have made- and I think, really that she couldn't make a big job of it because otherwise she and the other *Aufseherin* would be in trouble as well. And he. So, I never heard. I was very scared though that I would hear about it or be taken out or so. Be taken away from Siemens.

So, did you stay there till- till your time- until you were exchanged?

Sorry?

Did you stay at Siemens then until you were exchanged?

Yeah.

So, tell us what led then to this exchange and what happened?

[3:01:37]

Well, Himmler and Count Bernadotte had been for years, for years at least, trying to get all the women prisoners, Jewish as well, out. And Himmler didn't agree. He said no. And then so they said, well what about all the other countries, the non-Jewish ones? And he said, no. And it took, it took Bernadotte a long time. And I think Winston Churchill was in it as well, and- and the one from America. They had meetings. But when the Germans started losing, Himmler didn't have so much to say anymore, and finally he agreed for the Ravensbrück women to be freed. First of all, the Norwegians. So, the Norwegians went. We didn't believe it mind you, but we- the rumours go of course. You weren't told anything. And then the Danish went. And then the *Frans*, French went. And then we: Belgian and Dutch. And my Czech friend I learned only a few years ago, went at the end, on the 29th of April. Yeah.

And you knew that you were being exchanged? What were you told?

No, we didn't know a thing. It was terrible.

So, what did they say?

We were, we were, well, we had to stand outside the- the, the barrack again, see? And we thought we'd get the same treatment as the old people a few months beforehand. And we said, "Oh," I said, to Dit, my friend I said, "That we have to get like this after all what we have made and, and you know, what we'd gone through. Terrible. And just at the last minute." "Yeah," she said, "terrible, really." So, we didn't know what to do. You couldn't flee because there were Germans on the side of you, you know, with dogs. And then we passed Uckermark, luckily. We first- we thought we were going to take to the youth camp, you see, but we weren't. We passed it, and then we came to the big camp. So, we were very pleased in a way, but we still were scared because what's going to happen! We didn't know, you see? So, we were put in *en* barrack for a few nights. And we thought, and every day we thought we'd be taken out because they were killing women, we knew that. You could smell it, as well. And the crematorium was going all the time. And so was the pipe.

[3:04:37]

And you knew about-you, you knew about- that there was a crematorium at Ravensbrück?

Oh, yes, oh, yes, yes, yes. That was in the main camp. You couldn't miss that. And- and also you- you saw the- in the beginning- I saw the big- big vans with all the- the bodies, dead bodies on it, which they'd taken from the hospital and they just drove them- rode them to- you know, few women pulling and another pushing. And I can still see that in front of me. Yeah. All those- all those arms and legs hanging over the edge. Terrible. I remember that, terrible. Yeah. Yeah. No, we knew that. So, we thought- and then, every day we weren't sure what's going to happen. And then came the order to stand outside, again. And we did, and we were marched outside the gate. And we thought well maybe- now one thing was my- my Czech friend, when we were still in the camp in Siemens-no- Downstairs, we were already in the big camp. And we had been- received *en* Red Cross parcel with everything in it. And we knew that the- the Norwegians had had that too before they were saved. And so well maybe

there's something in it. And my Czech friend came and said, "You're going to be freed Selma – Marga." [laughs] I never did that before. And "You have got a Red Cross parcel." So, we said, "Well we hope so." I gave her a piece of bread, biscuits, and some sausage on it. I remember, 'cause she had been very good to me. Anyhow, we then stood outside. And then- that was morning and nothing came for a while. And then in the afternoon there was suddenly *en* little sportscar came. And he drove up and out jumped a Swede, a young man. He was Swedish and he told he was friend of Count Bernadotte and- who was going to come with white buses to bring us- take us to Sweden. Up till that moment we didn't believe it, you know. And we still didn't because the buses didn't come. They just didn't come. We stood there. We stood there the whole evening, we stood there the whole night, [Laughs] nothing came. No buses. We told him our stories and he said, when the dark started, he said, "You'd better go back to your beds and go to sleep in the camp." And we said, "Never!" And the poor man didn't believe our stories, really, he didn't believe how- how bad it was really, you see. Well, it is unbelievable. It is really unbelievable. Anyhow. Next morning- so we stayed there the whole night. We said to him we used to work during the night and some of them were working with big- big machines and so and were standing the whole night so it was nothing. For me it was a big more difficult because I was used to sit.

[3:08:05]

But- suddenly two trucks came, three trucks came and - military trucks. And we were told to jump in, and most of the young ones did so, me included. And the others had to go back to the camp. Because he said, the, the- the buses are coming. But it turned out later on that- that day, later on that day the buses came. But we were already on our way to Denmark. About an hour driving from the camp- well, we first of all, I- a friend, one of the prisoners and I fought- [Are you cold as well?] Fought for the seat next to the- to the driver, 'cause we wanted to see, you see? Cause the trucks had that material over it and it was closed of course. And so I fought because I wanted to sit next to the driver and so- so did she. So, we fought and then the driver took us apart and said, "We'll stop in an hour's time, so then you can change." So, I let her go- let her go and- and I went with my friend to the next truck. And we stopped for an hour, after an hour, in a *bos*, beautiful wood, beautiful. It's beautiful around Ravensbrück, you know? It's, it's unbelievable- beautiful. And we were given chocolate and sandwiches and drinks and so by the drivers who had it all ready for us. And with beautiful flowers and beginning of green as well, you know the pale green that comes out in the spring

and so. It was really beautiful and it was so wonderful to sit there in freedom. And then suddenly there were shots. And the drivers came up and said, "Leave everything and come quickly back in the truck, come quickly back in the trucks! Leave it all! Leave it all!" And so we went in the truck and I wanted to go and sit next to him. But the other one was fighting with me again, and so I let- I had to let her go, because my friend Dit pulled me in the truck before. This was the truck we were fighting, and she pulled me in the truck there, in the back. And lo and behold, the truck I should have sat in, was shot. And the woman and the driver were shot – by the- by the Allies, 'cause they thought it was- they were German. Yeah. And I was saved again. Anyhow, we went up to Denmark there, and they took all our clothes away because- Oh, and I fought for my father's Waterman pen, but she said, "No, no, no, because…" Well, we didn't speak each other's language. I didn't speak Danish, she didn't speak Dutch or German. So, we couldn't- I said, "No, no, no, no, no!" But it was already in the fire, and she was quite right of course because it was full of lice.

[3:11:39]

And did you all this time have your- this uniform, the stripy blue and white uniform?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No - I didn't actually. Because when it became so cold, when we were in the- in the camp still and it became so cold, Walli? my Czech friend said to me, "Go to the *Kleidungskammer* and I have a friend there, Czech friend there. Tell her- I will tell her and tell them that you come from me and she'll give you some clothes." And- because I was getting very cold in that thin dress. And we were still in the big camp so it must have been October or something. And I came there and she said, on a Sunday, because you couldn't take off on any other day, but we supposed not to work on a Sunday. And I said, "I'm Marga." "Yes," she said, "I know." And she came with a beautiful coat, as warm as this, warmer even. Lovely coat. And - a hat. And was very nice and warm, and the coat was black and quilted then already. Very narrow, but I was very slim so it fitted me perfectly well. I was often thinking whose coat it was, you know. I thought probably a poor Jewish girl who had- who had been killed and- but it kept me warm till the end of the – thing.

So, those clothes were all taken away once you arrived in Sweden?

[3:13:20]

In- in Denmark.

In Denmark, sorry.

Yeah, yeah. Oh, definitely, or in Sweden, yeah, yeah. Yeah, you're quite right, it was in Sweden actually, because that was where got-

Sweden?

That's where we got the new clothes. Yes, that was in Sweden. It was not in Denmark. No, in Denmark -

Were you put in a-?

We got food and we were all terribly sick of it. Yeah.

Where were you put? Was it a sort of residence? What sort of-?

In Sweden?

Yeah.

No *en- en* huge museum they'd emptied or they'd covered the big, they'd emptied it and covered the big animals with cloth. And they put mattresses on the floor and we were all put on that. And when we were there, the Dutch attaché came, sat behind a table and we had to queue up and give our names. And I gave Margarete van der Kuit. And when we were finished, they all went to sleep on the mattresses but I couldn't rest at all. So, I went to the doc- I went- first I went back to the attaché and luckily, he was still there. And I said, "Where are- where does the list go to? Does it go to Holland?" He said, "No, Holland is still occupied." Because that was the 23rd of April, you see, and Holland was only freed on the 5th of- 10th of May. And so, I said, "Where does it go to?" He said, "To England." I said, "But England is still at war." "Oh, yes," he said, "but this goes into the diplomatic post. Why?" I said, "Well…" And I didn't dare do it. It took me ages, you know. I said, "Well… well

actually my name is not Marga van der Kuit. It's Selma Velleman." So, he looked at me, didn't say a word, took his pen out, crossed it through, and put in my own name. And my brother in London was one of the first to see the list. And my name on it. So, luckily that I had changed it. But nobody else knew until we, after a few days, after we were given clothes, we were offered clothes hanging on- two dresses and a coat and I bought, I bought a bright red winter coat. And green - bright green dress. And blue dress. And salamander shoes. Colourful, you know, after all the greyness we'd had. So- we were then taken to *en* camp in Sweden near Göteborg, called Skatås. It was a camp still, but we were given everything, you know, saunas and food galore - beautiful food. And so. And when we were there, some girls made holes in the- in the wiring and went through to the- but I didn't. And then the- on the 5th of May, no, 5th of May was – yes, 10th of May we were, the war started for us, didn't we? Yeah, 5th of May. Fifth of May was the liberation from Holland, and the Ambassador and the Consul came with cakes and drinks and so and orange drinks and orange cakes - and the flag. And we all sang the Dutch [*Het*] *Wilhelmus*. And then the- and it was lovely there, that camp because we had- we had a bed of our own of course, then. And there were *stapel* beds. There were tier beds but only two. And there was beautiful wash- and beautiful food. Unbelievable. You could eat as much as you liked. But they were well warned not to make too heavy food because we had been so ill in- in Denmark. And then the Dutch Consul or the Ambassador came and asked Thea Boissevain and me would be come to- would we mind coming to Stockholm and help out with all the other people coming from all those concentration camps. And so, we said, "Yes, of course." Because we had been secretaries before we were arrested. And so, we said yes. So, we went to Stockholm and we were received by the Swedes and the Dutch- [inaudible] Dutch ones. Unbelievable. They spoiled us, really. Yeah.

[3:18:31]

And had you told anyone that you were- who you were at that point?

Well, yes. Before that- before that happened, one evening we had dinners in the big hall there in- in Skatås camp. And there was *en* stage. Because it had been a camp for soldiers, or, or, or a holiday camp, can't remember. Anyhow, that was there- there was a stage and *en* big hall. But we had to- we could keep- we could choose whether we had our dinner at six or at seven. And that evening I had chosen seven. And a man went on to the stage and called out, "Is there a Selma Velleman here?" And nobody answered. So, I got up and I said, "Yes, that's

me." He said, "I've got a telegram for you." So, I went to get the telegram, and it was from my brother David: "Very glad you are alive. What about Pa, Moer and Clara?" And- so the others were dead surprised, you see. They said, "What? Marga? What?" Never thought it!" They'd never thought- they told me. "Not an inkling," they said, "How you could keep it all those months!" I said, "I had to, to stay alive." "You could have told us," one or two said, but most of them understood, of course. Yeah. And were very nice. Very, very nice. One of my interviews, one interview - I can't remember who - asked me whether they changed their attitude towards me. Not at all. They said, 'Marga' for a long, long time, in Holland still and so- when we had our reunions, you know, in '75 - I went back.

[3:20:31]

You had the reunions with the- all- all the other-?

With the Dutch, yeah.

The Dutch?

With all the other pris- ex-prisoners. Yeah.

Ravensbrück, yeah.

Ravensbrück reunion, yeah. It's on the day of the freedom.

On the day of- when you were taken out or-?

Yeah. When we were taken out.

So, it's that-

When we were liberated

- specific group.

On the 23rd of April, yes. Lately, because so few people are left; I'm the only one now. No, no. Gisela is still- but she is dement- no… Now, I've forgotten-

Are you the last- the last one of that group still?

No, Gisela, Gisela is still alive, but she is not able to do anything anymore. Her daughter told me.

So, are there any more reunions, or that's all? It?

Yes, there is, yeah. Oh, yes, there are a lot of. And all the old ones of course of the committees have died.

So, is it the children coming or-?

And the children are doing it. Or, or, some now, the committee now is only one of the children, but the rest is- well, they are old as well now, don't forget. They must be in their sixties as well - thirties to sixties. But the committee consists of people, or students, who have been to our meetings. You know? Which is very, very nice. And this year for the first time they had the Ravensbrück reunion. There weren't of course was not allowed to have so many people. But she laid the flowers on the monument. And there was somebody who made a speech. Yeah. Yeah, it's nice because it is- Dessing, what's her first name? Agnes Dessing. Yeah. She has written about the *Engelandvaarders* also. And Andreas [inaudible] he is the secretary. No, he is the *penningmeester* - the financial chap. Yeah, it's very good and they're doing it very well actually.

[3:23:00]

But your brother sent you that telegram?

Yeah. I've got it still, yeah.

And he was here working for the Dutch-?

Dutch, yes, with the- he was still a soldier.

So, when you were in Sweden, what was your aim? What did you think you were going to do?

I didn't-

Any ideas?

No, I just wanted to enjoy life. I said, "We have to enjoy every day." And I still think so. 'Getting old now. And feeble. But I think that's the only thing to do yes, yes. Yes, yes. Well, and the- and take care that it doesn't happen again. That's why in the beginning when they asked me to come to schools to- to Germany I said no. But once they, the Dutch Ravensbrück Association when they said, "But the PABO students, which are the future teachers, the teacher colleges, are going now, and it's- it's all arranged and so and we would be very pleased if you could come and tell them about it." And I thought that was a good idea, because a workshop with them meant that they could tell it all to the children. And so, I thought that was a very good- And since then, which is the last twenty years, I have done that.

So, when did you start your educational work?

You mean that ed-?

Educational work, you know, going to Ravensbrück, talking to groups?

Yeah. In- well, twenty years ago, I think. Yeah.

So, Selma, tell us-

[3:24:50]

And then about- about six years ago to Germany. That's when Germans started asking me. First of all, it was- it was Siemens who asked me to give a talk to the young employees.

Really?

And they took me to the factory. Yeah. Yeah. To talk to them.

The factory where?

In Berlin. Outside Berlin then. It's a huge- it's like a town.

Is it still in the same place?

Yeah.

Where you worked?

Oh, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. Their factory.

There to Siemens.

Yeah – yeah.

It's not the- where you-

No, no, no, no, no, that doesn't exist. Not- that is the thing; not a thing exists anymore.

All gone.

All gone, yeah. I am taken up there all the time because I'm the one who worked there. And so, they put me down- I can show you photographs where I had not this on, but two years ago the- the Dutch girl, the Dutch leader, Gemma, had taken the- the cover of her bed and put it around me all white, and that's on the photo. [Laughs] Me talking, yes, where everything was, where the loo was and everything, so.

[3:26:01]

Sure. Selma so tell me, when did you find out about your family? The fate of everyone?

Well, I was in Holland already of course. My friend Greet and I went to see the list, because they published lists all the time. And on one of the lists was my mother and sister. But I only found out about my father- they couldn't tell me, the Red Cross couldn't, nobody could, until I was here already in England. So, six months at least.

And when did you get back to- to Holland?

Well, I did a job there, what they asked me to do in the embassy- at the embassy, in the consulate. And then Thea and I shared a room in a hotel, very nice. There was this lady Miss DeVries who helped me making my, one of the Swedish ladies had given me *en* whole ball- ball of blue cloth, very nice – check and so. And because we didn't have anything except what we were given in Sweden, you see? And I wanted to make *en* dressing gown of it. And this Mrs DeVries had taken her, had *en* sewing machine. So, she made it for me. It was lovely, with very big skirt and so on, very narrow here. I used it a lot here, for years. But it became very old.

So, how long- you worked in Sweden for a bit, you said?

And then I worked- well I worked for them, there, for the Consul and for the embassy. And-

You said you-

[3:27:52]

I went till, I went home. My brother had written- both my brothers had written letters by then, you know, full of what they'd done during the war et cetera, and I'd written to them. And then my younger brother David who worked in the- Louis had come back to Holland and- and already on the ship again, and- but David said he had to be- Queen Wilhelmina's birthday was on the 31st of August, and he had to be in Holland on the 30th of August. Could I come as well? So, I put- well my job- the first job I had with the Embassy was when they asked me to come over and help, was to write to- to ex-prisoners who were either in hospital or with a family, to see what they needed. Dutch ex-prisoners, of course. So, that's what I

did. And then, what they needed, they needed something, I made a list of it, and had permission and somebody went to buy it. But when that was quite soon over of course, I was asked to- when they started flying, because the first few months there was no plane at all. And then they started flying, and I was asked to put a name on a list, make a small list of people who should go, or wanted to go back to Holland. And that's what my job was, making that list. And seeing that people got on to that plane, et cetera, and book it, and so on. And that's what I did until August. I think that started probably end of June, something like that. In the beginning we couldn't go. And so, I put myself on the list for the 30th of August, and went back to Holland. And I can remember when we flew above Holland all the green of Holland and the cows. There were a few cows left. [Laughs] And when the pilot said, "We'll be landing in a few minutes." Ten minutes, or something, and we all said, "Hip, hip, hip hooray!" Yeah. And sang the *Wilhelmus*. Yeah.

Were you happy to go back or, I mean it-?

[3:30:30]

Well, at that moment I was, later on I wasn't, because it was terrible. I mean, you know, there was all the family fetching the people. And I was- of course nothing, for me. I had written to Greet, my best Dutch friend, Catholic friend, very, very, very strict Catholic. They were very, very good people. And when I moved into Jan van der Heidstraat back to Amsterdam again from Diemen, I went to play outside with a ball. Went to play outside, and this girl Greet lived opposite, and saw me through her window. And she came down with a ball and said, "Would you like to play with my ball?" This was 1945, and we were friends until she died a few years ago. And she was so good also during the war. In fact, she came to my room the day I was arrested. And if- if the Gestapo would have gone that day to my room I would have been killed, of course. She would never have been able to do anything about it. But no, they didn't come. She waited, and she waited, and she waited. In the end she went away - home. And then I sent a letter from prison, that I was in prison and so and that's when she knew.

So, you had a few people when you came back? There were some of your old-

She, she, she was at the station, not at that station because she'd been told it was- we were arriving at the south of Amsterdam station so she was at the wrong station. So, I was taken to

her home because we had arranged that of course. We had written, and I'd arranged all- written all the time of course since I was freed. And-

Any other family members? Did you have anyone else?

[3:32:37]

Well, all my mother's family in Leiden had survived, yes. But we weren't very close to them. I went to see them, but we weren't very close to them. Been closer last years with their children more than I was with the uncle or aunt. Also, because they- I married *en* non-Jewish husband. And they don't agree- didn't agree with that of course, because they were very, very strict. Sat- sat in the synagogue committee and – you know- everything else, and were very frum. My- that's my cousin who died yesterday – Sunday. But I became quite friendly with her and certainly with her son.

In Holland?

In Holland. Her son and daughter-in-law, very friendly, in fact.

They stayed in Holland?

Yes, yes – yes. Yes, they all stayed in Holland. My father's family I didn't know very much about, because my father didn't- didn't see his brothers or sisters very much.

What happened to them?

Only one brother, Uncle Harry, and he- he survived, and his son survived. I became very friendly with his son because he was a journalist and so was Hugo. And so we became very friendly and they came to England actually, to live in Richmond for a long time until they went back to Holland. But both of them died.

And what happened to your father's siblings, to all the-?

Well, they all married non-Jews. Catholics or Protestants.

And survived?

And therefore survived, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I had *en* letter from one or two of them and then they came- I had one here, Tante Roosje, but that was years afterwards, of course. The children wrote, since my book is out, have many of the children written.

That's nice.

Yeah.

That's really nice. So, when you were in Amsterdam did you think, you were going to stay there or when you-? What-?

No, because I felt very strange. I felt very lonely, even with my friends and parents being very kind. But I found I'm- I'm too much really, you know. I felt a bit over- well, over comfortable, no, it's not the word I'm looking for. Give me a good word.

Displaced?

[3:35:22]

Displaced? But- although everybody was very, very kind, I felt I was over- over-burdened actually - overburdening them - with having me. And then my friend Dit, from the camp, invited me to come to their house and she lived in Maarssen with her father and the family still have - a very big grape nursery, growing grapes. And I went to stay there, but again after a week, I felt- and they were very kind. But after a week I felt again, I'm really too much. You know. Because you see that's a family, and you're not.

Yeah.

So, meanwhile I'd heard from my cousin Zetty who had survived, and was living in Leiden in the flat where I used to stay. And she had opened a student house. Now she had a little girl born in 1942, Eveline, who was put with- on- in front of the door of *en* couple in Leiden, no it

was [inaudible] actually. And she was- she had- well, when my cousin Zetty went into hiding, the little- her husband didn't come back. He was taken straight away. The Jewish sergeants and soldiers were straight away sent to Auschwitz. So Evelintje was- the baby was put in front of the door of this couple, Kurz, and was there till the war was over. But mother and- and then she was given back to Zetty, but mother and Zetty- mother and child never got on again. Eveline still sees her *pleegmoeder*. Her-

Foster mother?

Foster mother, as her mother. And her brothers, foster brothers therefore, as her brothers. And never- hasn't got many good words for her mother at all. I've seen her several times in France. She lives in France.

[3:38:18]

But she did go back to her mother?

Her mother fought for her. In fact, my family in- was the very big- first big fight in Holland for a Jewish child to go back to their parents. My family in Leiden, the ones who were members of committees and so, fought for it. And so-

Was a court case?

Court case, yes.

How old was the child when she came back?

Well, she was born in '42 so in '45 she was three. When I saw her later on she was five I think, five or six.

And the court decided that she has to go back?

Yeah, because the Jews fought for it. The Jewish community.

Sad. There- there are many cases like this.

Yes, of course.

And not with a happy ending.

No, I know. I know. I know, I told Evelintje that. Yeah. Well, difficult for me as well to talk about it. But- yeah, and Zetty of course was very, her mother was very upset of course. First of all, in the beginning she had no money. She had to do- she had to do- she did a course in some- some course at the university. Can't remember what it was. And she became house- housing manager for the- for the Town Hall in- oh, what's the town called? I often went there. [Laughs] Well, in the town where she lived. And she became very well-known, because when I was with her always everybody stopped and talked to her, you know. And Eveline lived with her for a long time of course, but often went back to her *pleegouders*. Foster parents.

Yeah.

And still - still sees her brothers. Foster-brothers, that is.

[3:40:33]

And what about you, did you have- what did you live off when you came back to Amsterdam? Did you have any- how did you support yourself?

Well, I think I got some- somebody came to see me quite quickly, actually, a social worker or something like that from the council or from the societies. I can't remember who it was exactly. And she- she said, she, she would take care of- well, my- my worry was that the people I was with were not very wealthy, you know. And so, she said that they would pay for that. I can't remember- council, I think.

You didn't want to be a burden?

That's right, yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes - yeah. And so, I was in Leiden then with Zetty and her friend. They both had set up this student house – home. I stayed there for a while and then I got a letter from the Ministry of Defence saying, "Could you please…" No, not 'could you', it was an order. [laughs] "Come to The Hague to the Ministry of Defence at- on the 14th of November 1945 at 11 o'clock" I think, or something, "For your flight to London." It was the first I knew about it. [laughs] So I did go.

[3:42:15]

And why you? How did they? Because of your-?

Because my brother must have arranged that, I should think. We all think- that's what we all thought. And- but there was no transport yet or anything, you see. And no flight, but- so I was taken by car to the airport, and there was a sergeant in tiny little- and *en piloot*, pilot, in a tiny little plane. And we went to London! Flew to London. And here, just outside London, near Croydon was a military airfield. And we came down there and my brother was there to- and the- and an embassy person was there. And Angelique who was a Lieutenant in the Dutch Army. And- and she was supposed to look after me. And they took me at first to the doctor who investigated everything. And then my brother took me to my room, which he had had hire- which he had rented for me. Terribly expensive. And I went in the bathroom- he went back to his office, and I went to the bath, and I stayed in the bath for ages, so badly that my *hospita* phoned my brother. He had said, "Phone me if you have any worry." So, she phoned him, she said, "You know your sister is not- hasn't come out of the bathroom. I'm worried!" So, he told her not to worry. [Laughs] I mean, to lie in a bath was fantastic, really.

After so many years.

That's right. Yeah. Yeah. And so, then I had to start work the next Monday or something. Yeah. But Angelique and I went out a lot. We went- she lent me her daily uniform and she went into her Sunday uniform, her good one, and we went then both to the officers' clubs and so, dancing. Yeah.

These were only for Dutch officers, or-? Or Dutch? Only Dutch, Dutch officers or British officers.

No, no, British officers as well. Somewhere in Knightsbridge it was, I think, yes. Yeah.

Right.

Yeah.

So were you- how-

It was just for all the officers, you know.

So how- How were you feeling when you arrived in London? Were you happy to come here or-?

Yes, of course I was, yes, yes, yes. And happy to- I thought with my two brothers I would have a family again. Of course, that was my mistake, but-

Why - why?

[3:44:56]

Well, because it wasn't. David had this fiancée in Birmingham and he went every- and every evening he went out dinner- dining with his friend Jaap, who was the Head of the department. And I was- I was asked once to show me where it was and that was it. So, I was alone, every evening. On top of that, my brother was Head of the administration there. And he had a lot of Dutch girls, because Holland was- the south of Holland was liberated early. And so those girls had come over already and were working in the offices, they were of the Ministry of Defence. And they had fought, that they had, because my job was *en* very 'up' job, you know. First of all, I didn't have much to do. I sat with *en* lieutenant, and an officer and a major and me. And my job was- There was *en* big filing cabinet there, with files of all the soldiers who were training to be officers in England. Dutch- Dutch ones. And my job was to learn what the medical files of these boys were, because if the doctor asked for it, I was the one who should get it because nobody else had the key. Well, except the doctor and me. So, the girls were rather jealous, and thought one of them, Doortje, should have had the job.

Because she was the daughter of the military head of Breda offices. So, they were rather a bit angry. I became very friendly with them later on, you know, but first few months were not very easy. And so, I was alone. Very alone. My other brother was sailing, or when he was here in England he was in Hull, far away. I mean, I spent one Christmas there, or one New Year or something like that, with the family. But they were very- they were very kind. But they were Polish Jews who didn't even had become British because they were afraid that if they went out that they wouldn't be able to come back again, you know. And he was a tailor. Very good tailor actually. And they were a large family. But they were very religious, again. And I was not.

The in-laws? His- his married family? Who were they, that family?

No, they were- they were- yes, his in-laws.

[3:47:54]

His in laws.

Louis' in-laws, yes. And they were very frum. And I was not. Wasn't before the war and certainly not after. And so that was very difficult. Well, difficult for me at least a bit. They were very nice, and I was very pleased with it and so- one of the boys took me out to the cinema and things like that. And the father made me a lovely little white jacket and so. But again, you know, I felt, over-burdening. It wasn't- it wasn't as if you went back to your home family, you see?

No, you were alone.

Yes. And so, I had a difficult time actually, in beginning. And then somebody had told me about the International Friendship Club. So, one day- and also, by the time I became friend with my Dutch girlfriends, because I moved from that expensive room to Earls Court where the girls were all having rooms. So, we became very friendly. And so much so that with Hugo, after the war, I went to stay with some of them. What did I want to tell you? I've lost it again.

We were talking about, you know, being friends.

Oh the- Louis, yeah. Yeah. And so, I went back to London again, but stayed with several people again, but I felt very lonely. Oh, yes, no I was going to tell you the International-

Yeah.

Friendship Club. And so, I went one night. I thought well, let me pop in there and see what it is like. And so, the girl behind the desk said, "Oh, you're Dutch, are you? Well, there's another Dutch girl. She'll be here at seven o'clock. Do stay here and she'd be lovely- she'd love to meet you." So, I stayed till seven o'clock and sure enough this girl came, and she worked for the BBC. That's how it happened. And we became very friendly. And then one day she came and she said, "I got a job with the United Nations. And I'm going to give up my job with the BBC but I have to get somebody else to do the job." There were quite strict rules in those days- just after the war. And so, she said, "Why don't you take my job?" So, I did. I went for an interview, got much less paid than I did for the Dutch Ministry. But I liked it and it was very nice in Bush House because the whole of Bush House, or most of it at least, was with journalists, actors, film actors, all people - or refugees from eastern Europe and western Europe. The atmosphere was fantastic. Beautiful! Marvellous.

[3:51:10]

And you became Dutch broadcast-?

I was in the Dutch section, yeah. Yeah. And my husband- my future husband, worked for the Belgian section.

So, you met him there?

I met him there, yeah, yeah - yeah. Well, we all- the- the Flemish part of the Belgian section speak Dutch really, you know. So, the Flemish part used to have meals with us, really, we joined each other because then they could speak Dutch, you see? Well, their own people from the section all spoke French. And so, I knew my husband before we even started to go out.

But then one day, I was in the canteen and Hugo came and there- was empty chairs. And he said, "May I sit down?" I said, "Yes, certainly." And he said, "Are you free this afternoon?" I said, "Well, after two." Because you had three- I had three-

Shifts?

[3:52:12]

Different shifts, you see. We had a morning, an afternoon, and evening shift because of the transmissions. And so, he said, "I've got two tickets for a film. Would you like to come along?" This happened a lot. It was not an extremely- I mean, the journalists often asked the female secretaries to go with them and so. And so- because they got two tickets, they didn't want to spoil it, you know. So, I said, "Well, after two o'clock." "All right I'll see you here, then." So, I said, "Fine, at the entrance." So, then he sat down, had coffee. And then one of the English journalists came and said, "Oh, are you free this afternoon? I've got two tickets for a film." I said, "Well, Hugo just asked me. Why don't you join us?" You see? So, the three of us went to this film. He became a famous journalist, actually. I won't tell names. Then after the film fin- finished - it was called "*Marry Me"*. It was very funny, really - Hugo said, "Would you like to have a bite?" I said "Oh, that would be lovely, yes." And then he said, the English chap said, "Would you like to come and have a bite?" I said, "Well, Hugo just- why don't you join us?" "No." he said, "Another time." So, it was that. So, Hugo took me to- there weren't very many restaurants in those days, you see. And certainly not food. Hugo took me to a big Chinese one in- just off Piccadilly, and we had a lovely time. And so, he- his great, he was a great wine drinker so we had a glass of wine and a toast. He said, "Well, I'm very pleased you could come." You see? So, I said, "So am I, especially as it's my birthday." So, it was the 7th of June 194…6, I think it must have been. No, later. Yeah, later. 1949. But we knew each other of course anyhow from seeing each other and having coffees and teas and things like that. So, the funny thing is in Holland you have- really every woman, every person has a birthday and celebrates it. Family and friends come, and bring you flowers or chocolates or, you know, something like that. While in England you only do it for special ones, or for children and so. So, I felt very, very down. I had a few cards from Holland but that was all, you know. I really felt very down. So, when he asked me that was it, you see. So, I said, "Oh, it's my birthday" he said, "Oh, that- that needs champagne." So, we had another good bottle.

[3:55:31]

And then we told each other a bit of our stories. Why did you come here and so? How did you come here - and so. He was in the Belgian resistance. And was imprisoned twice. And the third time was warned, and then he fled over the Pyrenees to Spain and Portugal - that type of thing. And went flown to England and then as a journalist started working for the BBC. So, he took me home after our meal and so it was a very nice evening. And since then he didn't leave me alone. He fetched me from home, and took me home and so. And I quite soon moved to a hostel near Marble Arch. You know, now it's a big hotel, but then it was a hostel specially for girls who worked for the government. Only those. And so me working for the BBC, which is foreign office really, our part was at least. So, I got there. My friend Rini who died only last year in America, was already in there. She came from Germany with her father as a six-year-old. In '36 I think it was. And we became friends- great friends and she told me that there was a room- there was a bed empty near her which was near the window. It was lovely. "So, why don't you come and join us?" Because I had a lot of trouble with my brother and sister-in-law. Especially my sister-in-law. And I was crying away. And my brother had said, "You better go and find something." So, I phoned Rini and that's when she said this. So- I went into the hostel and we had a room. We said- we put our name down for a room together, but we never did, because we had a big, big room of- I think we were seven, something, six or seven. And we had a wonderful time. I learned my English there cause up till then I'd only spoken Dutch, you see? And-

[3:57:55]

So, when you came to England you didn't really speak English?

"Tea for two" [laughs] Well, I'd learned English for four years. At school we learn English French and German. But you don't speak it, you see.

No.

And so yes, that's right. That's where I learned to speak it, yeah.

And then you married?

And then we, well-

Not that-

Rini and I were still looking for a flat together. And we- Hugo and I were going out by then, yes. He really took me home and fetched me and then- and then went home again. He lived in Earls Court where I lived with my brother and sister-in-law the first time. That's when we both went to Earls Court. And- then when I'd moved to the hostel, he wrote *en* poem every evening, and then brought it back again and so that I would find it for- for breakfast in the morning. Then when he fetched me to go to the BBC: "How did you like it?" Some of it was in French, I couldn't understand it, really. [laughs] But it's a poem, every day. And so… Rini and I were looking for a flat. And then her friend Margaret was living in St Peter's Square, and had said to Rini that there was a flat empty on the ground floor. And so Rini said, "Let's go and see it." So, we went, and then she said - well it was very nice – and then she said, "Well actually it's too far." Because by that time, she had studied psychology, and she had a job with the hospi-, the Maudsley Hospital and- as a psychologist. And she was going to do her MA and she said, "It's much too far- awkward to- from St Peter's Square to go to where I have to go. It's better if I stay here." So, in the end she found a room in Belsize Park - and her family lived there too. So, Hugo said- he came to have a look then. He said, "Why don't we take it?" And I thought- so we did. We took it. And the family knew that I was living in the- in the thing, and he was living on the top, you see. And- but we weren't of course; we were living together. But he stayed a gentleman for a long, long, long time. And then- well, he was married you see, actually.

[4:01:22]

Ah.

So, we couldn't get married straight away. And his wife, very Catholic, Belgian Catholic, didn't want to marry- to divorce. Also, because he came from a very wealthy family and she didn't want to give back anything. And-

And where was she? In-?

In Belgium.

Belgium.

Yeah. In Brussel. And so, we had a- I had a difficult time at times, in spite of being happy. [Laughs] And I started to study as well, and so, was busy studying. Yeah. I did sociology and anthropology. And I was busy working at the same time, so I had a busy time – and, and a, and a household. Well, Hugo was very easy. He, he- he loved eating out and so, so it was OK. And then we had friends coming over here. In the flat there. And one of his friends was a solicitor, a well-known solicitor in Belgium. And he thought it was really ridiculous. So, he went to see her, and they came to an arrangement and so the divorce came through. Well, first of all I went off. I left him. He was in Belgium and I left him because I had enough. I had said that I didn't want to be a mistress. No *maitresse* being for me. I wanted to marry and have a child if possible. And - yeah, he tried and tried, he said, he tried and tried. I believed him. And, but up till this friend came, [sp? Covin] he said, "I'll talk to her." So, he went to talk to her and he arranged it and the, the - the divorce came through quite soon. So, we got married.

[loud siren sounding in background]

There is some noise coming.

[4:03:43]

Yes. So, you got married when?

The- the 15th of November 1955.

OK.

And Jocelyn was born in '57.

And was it important for you to have a child?

No, because- well yes, I wanted to very much, but they had told me actually that I couldn't have a child. Because- the doctor said because of the wartime experience, the food experience and everything else, and so, "You wouldn't have easily children" they said. So, I had- I put myself down. OK. Mind you I still- I still used contracept- but as he'd said so. But then we went to holidays together as well. And one of the holidays was the island Corsica. And we used to both love lying in the dunes, on the beaches and so, naked. So, you can imagine what happened. And- so, I always thought that Jocelyn probably was born because of that. Yeah. Because by that time, of course, I didn't use anything anymore.

You didn't think you could have a child?

[4:05:29]

No, no - not in the dunes. No. [laughing] Didn't even think it was going to happen. Yeah.

And where did you settle, in- in London?

In London.

Where- did you then stay in that flat or-?

We stayed in the flat, yes. Yes.

In Hammersmith?

Yes, and we bought- we- we rented the rest of the house, when it came free, yeah. But not the whole house, because the top of the house was let. And we couldn't get- we tried to buy the house actually after some years and when we both were working. And but it was in- in charge of a young girl who was still not twenty-one. The father had been in the RAF and with the money of his demob, he had bought that house. In those days 100 pounds or something like that, 300 pounds - now three million. He had bought it but he died after a few years, and his wife was living in Scotland. And we had to work with the- oh, dear, I've got the hiccups-

with the estate agents. And we tried several times to buy it, but it couldn't. And then we had quite a bit of trouble coming from upstairs. And every time I came home from school, 'cause I was teaching math. When I came in from school Hugo was in a terrible mood. And he was a very good- he was never moody or so, never- never nasty or anything, but he was very depressed, because he was work- sitting there typing doing his work and then one of those children came and tried to open the door et cetera, because it was one door for them as well, you see. And so, I thought- I was fed up. We had been looking for *en* cottage anyhow near- near Brighton. And then a friend of ours who lived just around the corner there- well we were friends with many of the people, she, she said to me, "There is a house empty around the corner here." Because she knew I'd been looking at some. And so, I- I was ill in bed with flu. It was November. And she had the key. And so, I said to Hugo, "You'd better go. It's very kind of the [inaudible] to- to let us have a- to tell us about it and so. Just go and have a look." So, Hugo went. And he comes home, and he says, "I put a deposit down." I was furious. I didn't want to live in Black Lion Lane. I had seen the most beautiful houses, but he- every time he had an excuse. You know, he didn't want to have a mortgage on his- on his back, he said. So, to do this to me, straight away, you know, I hadn't even seen it. [laughs] So, he said, "I made an appointment for you to see it in a few days if you're alright." So, we came to see it. It was quite dark; it was November. And the front room is very dark in- in the evenings and the afternoon and so on. So, I said, "It's very dark." And my friend, the architect, friend the architect who came with us, who lived in the square then - her husband was *en- en-* a journalist as well- and they said, "Oh, it's very dark, yes." I remember he said that. So, I thought if I don't say yes now, I'll never ever have a house. So, Hugo said, "Well, if we don't like it after five years, we can move." You know. So, I said, "Alright." So, that's how we got this house. And we're still there- I'm still there. [laughs]

[4:10:02]

After how many years?

Well, this was- when was this? 1962.

OK.

'63.

Fifty-seven years. Fifty-seven years.

Fifty-seven years, yes, yes, yes. Long time.

And you lived here-

Well, we moved in the next year actually because we had a lot of trouble with the owner who put the price up all the time. You could do that in those days. And- every time 500, 500, 500, 500. In the end, we had to borrow. And then I- I- I had said- somebody once had told me while we were living there and looking for cottages, somebody had told me if you leave some money with the Goldhawk, with *en* building society, not very much, even ten pounds, you can get a mortgage. So, I put straight away ten pounds in there and that was some years before this house. So, I said to Hugo, "Hey-" but we first went to the council, because it was cheaper. You got as much, but it was cheaper as a mortgage payment. And that turned out better, *dacht ik,* better arrangements. But the council said, "Oh, no, you are not working." I said, "I am working!" "Yes, but you're working half time." I was working half time by then because with a child when Jocelyn became a year, I wanted to have part time. So, he said, "We don't do that, and we don't do it for women anyhow." So, I said, "All right." So, we went to the Goldhawk with my ten pounds in there, and they gave us the mortgage. The moment we had signed, in comes the man from here, in comes the man from the council. "Are you Mrs Van de Perre?" I said, "Yes." "Are you Mrs Van de Perre who is teaching my at the- at the" I said, "Yes." "Oh, well my secretary is Pamela Brown, you've- you taught math." I said, "Oh, yes. Is she any good?" He said, "Yes, especially in math." [laughs] He said, "I've come to offer you a mortgage." I said, "I wish you'd come quarter of an hour earlier, [Laughs] or an hour earlier, because we've just signed- signed with the…" Yeah. So, we were very sorry about that, yes, yes, yes. Hugo kept saying, "Have we never- haven't we paid it off yet? Haven't we paid it off yet?" But we hadn't. I paid it off after his death.

[4:12:52]

And when you raised- you were working as a teacher and then eventually you became a foreign correspondent.

I was working as a teacher, maths teacher, and the last five years as a sociology teacher. I was working here in Hammersmith at the Sacred Heart Catholic School. But they knew. And… One day the Sister sked me to come in the office and she said, "I've got your folder here. I believe you have studied sociology." I said, "Yes." She said, "I would like to you set up a sociology department." And so, I did. So, the last five years- that was five years and then Hugo died. The last five years I taught sociology as well. Yeah. And then Hugo died. And I thought of going back to Holland, but the papers all phoned, and the television phoned, because by that time he was working for all these things and- as a foreign correspondent. And the Belgians phoned as well, the Belgian papers, could I do this and that and such and so. So, I stayed, and did the foreign correspondence.

Did you want to- you wanted to go back to- back to Holland?

I was thinking of doing that, yes, yes. Yes. Because- because my cousin from, well, they still lived in Earls Court. They still lived in Richmond actually, but he had said that for older people in Holland it was very much better. So, I was thinking of it. But I'm glad I didn't actually, because-

You stayed here and worked for the- for what? For Dutch papers?

Dutch papers. And television. *Televisie*, yeah. And-

And what did you report on? What did you report on?

On Britain. On the television. On the radio. On Britain itself. I went- I was invited to- you are invited everywhere, of course, if you are a foreign correspondent. Beautiful job. Lovely job. Very tiring because it's twenty-four hours a day, really. Because if you are invited you still work through the dinners and through the evenings and so. I was invited to Scotland a few times, and invited to Wales doing - rearing of sheep. [laughing] You learn a lot too! And…Yeah.

[4:15:29]

You enjoyed it?

And I was invited- I've been to- several times to Buckingham Palace, and the garden parties. And- yeah, what more? No, very interesting, yeah. I missed it a bit. I miss all the- and- oh, I- I wrote on art. The Belgian papers asked me to write on art. Yeah. So, I wrote on art- special- when there was a special exhibition in the galleries.

Because you also- you also paint yourself?

Well, I wasn't then.

Aha! So, when did you take that up? [both laughing]

But Hugo- Hugo - Hugo was a collector, and was- and wrote on art and knew everything on art. He was an art- he not an artist, well, not a painting artist at least. But when they asked me to, I said, "I've never done it!" You know they filmed straight away after he- when he died I couldn't- what he was also, Hugo did a lot of translations and so, and announcing on boats, ferries, and things like that. And- he used to call it 'prostitution' because it wasn't real art, you know. And, so I had to do that and- and of course my mind wasn't toward- as soon as he died- I knew, it had to go through because every week the same thing is happening, you see, every day. And I just couldn't. And the BBC in- information - all the heaps of information - about what is going on the television, going to come and so. And I used- I had to do that, and I mean, I lost my husband within a week, of a cancer they hadn't discovered. And- so, I was terribly upset I couldn't do anything. So, the man who did England from Holland, from the *televisie* came over and stayed in Jocelyn's room, in the back room. And I stayed in front of the typing and just dictated everything, and really helped me out. And that's when I started. And then, but the- and then I started going to the art exhibitions of course, I got the invite. And then I thought, one day I thought, well, I can do that, really. And then when I started working so much as a journalist, I needed some relaxation. So, I went to evening classes, one evening class to play golf, to learn to play golf. That's how- I did two years of that before I went to a course. And- at the same time, I- one day when I wanted to sign up for a golf course, for a golf lesson, I went through the booklet – you know the thing- booklet – and evening classes booklet. And I saw they had painting classes. So, I signed up for that as well as a relaxation. And that's how I started. I wrote on art. Well, I was used to look at with Hugo and I was used to his writing and so on. And I said to the man who phoned me from Belgium,

the first one, said- I said, “I’ve never done that.” He said, they said, “We know, Mrs Van de Perre but you try it, and send it on and I’ll tell you if we do it or not.” And they did! They published it all the time. So, it was OK.

[4:19:32]

Fantastic.

Yeah.

You said you also then started doing art work- art workshops in Ravensbrück for students? Much later? You did art workshops in Ravensbrück?

No.

That you worked with your art. Did you not say that?

For art?

Yeah. No, in Ravensbrück-

No.

You said you did some workshops, that’s nothing to do with it?

No.

Oh, sorry. I misunderstood.

No. Oh, you mean the art teacher who gave me the- the thing. No. No, she was one of the students who came to the workshop. I didn’t even know she was a teacher then.

Oh, but the workshop- I mean, do you do your own-?

Oh, the workshop I have done, except this year.

Yes, so what workshop is that?

The workshop is to tell about the war.

Right. So, it's your testimony?

And to tell the children what happened in Ravensbrück.

I want to ask you now, did you talk about your experiences at all with your husband? With your son?

Well, that's another funny thing. A few years ago- well, every time I went to Ravensbrück the Dutch as well as with the Germans, they asked me especially the Dutch group, "Why doesn't Jocelyn come along once?" And I said, "Well, he's probably not interested. He doesn't know, and he doesn't speak Dutch very much, so it's no good to him." And then one day there was the big exhibition opening from the- the commandant's- commandant's off- house. It was changed into an exhibition house. Exhibition gallery. And they asked me, Ravensbrück asked me, to give the opening talk. And so- then they said why- and then the Director himself of Ravensbrück said, "Why doesn't Jocelyn come along?" I said, "Well, you invite him?" And they did, and he did. He said he couldn't come the whole week, but he would come for the opening. So- so, there was this exhibition, therefore. And I said to him after he'd been, I said, "Have you been?" "Yes", he said. I said, "What do you think of it?" "Well, I knew a lot of it." I said, "You know a lot of it? How did you know a lot of it?" He said, "Well, you know, you're on the internet. And those things are on the internet as well." So, he knew a lot about it already he said. So, you know, then he- he came along once again. And he came to the book- and since- since I started having the book thing, he's been interested completely. Yeah, yeah, yeah. In fact, the people- the publishers from Holland send- when they send something to me, they send it to him as well.

[4:22:39]

But you were surprised?

Very surprised! Very surprised! I didn't say a word to him about things. Never.

You didn't speak about it?

Not- never at all. I didn't speak at all the first thirty years! To anyone or anything or myself. It was in 1975 with the opening of the Ravensbrück Memorial in Holland, the monument on the- in Amsterdam, when they asked me again to come, that I went. For the first time. And they said, "Why didn't you come before?" But I was building up a new life, really, here, you know. But since then, I went every year. Yeah. I met my friend Dit in the tram from the- from the Central Station to the Museumplein where the monument is, near the Van Gogh museum. And- and we were very pleased to see each other again. And she told me, so she said, "Well, I'm married." I said, "Oh, that's lovely." "Yes, I married *en* vicar. You'll be surprised?" I said, "Why should I be surprised?" Because I knew she was very religious, so why should I be surprised? So, we became very good friends after that. Very good friends. Because when I- when I was a journalist, I spent a lot of time going to Zandvoort to Holland. I had to go four times or five times a year to Holland. So, I stood- I stayed in a house of the head of the department who went to their house in Spain, and I stayed in the house there, and it was a lovely house. And Dit lived in the village- in the town quite near it, ten minutes' drive, so we became very great friends. Yeah.

So where-?

But when I arrived on Museumplein, or where the- the reunion was, I said to the one who took my pen to the camp, I said to Christa – Christa, I said, "Do you remember me, Christa?" She said, "*O ja, zeker Marga*." "I do remember you. I remember those white trousers, those white legs coming down." She was sleeping on the first floor you see and I was sleeping down- I was sleeping on the first floor and she was sleeping downstairs. "I remember those white trousers, those white legs." That was my long johns. [Laughs]

[4:25:38]

Long johns, yes – yes. But do you feel also, I want to say, what made you write the book? You know, at what point did you feel you wanted to write it down?

Well, my nephews had said to me several times, "*Je moet*- you must write it down Selma because you're the last one of the family, and it must be told." And so, I made a few notes but I never did anything about it. But it was when I went to this painting class, where I said, "I can't come next week because I'm going to Holland." And she said, the teacher said, "Oh, how nice, what a lovely holiday. Have a nice holiday." I said, "Well, it's really not a holiday. It's you know, it's that and that." "Oh!" she said, "What's it…?" "I really give speeches – talks." "Oh," she said, "What about?" So, I gave a few things, you see. And then she asked for more. She said, "I've never known this! Concentration camps in Holland? Resistance workers? I didn't know there were resistance workers in Holland." And it- you know, and then the others, several of the others asked questions and I told- said a few things. And they had never heard of Ravensbrück. Never mind- they had heard- by then they had heard of Auschwitz and- and-

But not of the smaller?

[4:27:13]

No. And they never thought that there were non-Jewish resistance workers. And certainly not Jewish resistance workers. They didn't know that. Why I think it is necessary to talk – well, I thought it was necessary to talk then, I thought I must write it, you see - was because so very little is known about Jewish resistance workers. Because if they- when they were caught, they were killed!

Yeah.

Nobody was alive after the war. Very few, like me. There are a few, but not many. And that's why it's not known. So, that's why I thought it needs to be written.

And are you glad you wrote it?

Oh, very. Especially when it was so successful in Holland.

And you got-

Unbelievable!

Tell us for the record how successful was it? And what's the title of the book?

In English it's *My-* in Holland it's "*Mijn naam is Selma"*. I can show you in a minute. In English it will be *My Name is Selma* and the cover will be exactly the same, the cover.

And it was on the best seller list?

It was for weeks on the best seller list. No, it was for weeks, top of the best seller list. And then it was for weeks on the best seller list. I don't know how it's now. You can find that out probably-

That's amazing!

On the internet. Yeah. Yeah, I mean they, everybody was amazed. The publisher was amazed. They'd never had it before like that. And in Holland everybody had seen me on TV. The interview.

And do you find it- you said the first thirty years you couldn't speak about it and how do you find it now?

Oh, yes, I've got used to it.

You're used to it?

I've done that so often now in Holland and in Germany. In those workshops, you tell about it all the time to the groups, different groups all the time.

So, you find it makes- does it make it easier the more-?

Oh, yes, very much easier, yes, yes, yes.

And what- I'm sure they ask you the students, so that's one of the questions I always find interesting: What impact do you think did your experiences have on your later life? How did it impact you?

It did, of course it did, yes, yes, yes. It does. I enjoy- I tell myself to enjoy every day and I try to do that. I'm very glad I'm alive still every day, and every morning I know that. And certainly, that's the influence it is as well. And I also- I- I don't attach so much thought about things that go wrong, breaking something or something, well, it's not a human life. When my husband broke something, dropped a nice antique cup or something like that and he was so sorry. And I said, "Darling, it's not a human life." And I think, that's a very big thing you take with you, you know.

[4:30:23]

Because you've seen, you've seen- you have seen what the value of human life is.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, definitely. I think it's it, really. Nothing goes better than human life.

And do you feel that talking about it or writing a book in this- in the current climate is important?

Yes, especially the current climate, because I often think about the current climate yes, which is very difficult of course to- to say things like that. Also, to say- when I say to groups I give the talk to, "Please don't quarrel and don't make *ruzie*, make trouble, because from the small things they become large. And that's how wars started really." It's a bit overdoing it, but it's truth in it. And especially now. And I'm terribly, terribly, terribly sorry about all the things that is still happening in North Africa and so and in the Far East.

Yeah. Yeah.

And that people haven't learned anything.

No.

Which you notice that all the time, even now with the- with the Covid. I mean, all those young people who don't stick to it. And we haven't either, now.

I think we're ok.

We're far enough away.

We're far enough and we're outside. But how- did this Covid situation bring back some of your memories, I mean, the hiding?

Yes. Yes, of course, yes. Yes.

Did it bring back?

Also, the first-

It's very different, but-

[4:32:12]

The first thing I said when people started saying, "Oh, well, I can't go to Spain and," you know, this and that and all the things. First thing I said, "Well, we never could either." And during the war you could- and when they said, "We had to sit in the house. It's terrible!" It is terrible for people of course, especially with children in a small flat. But even so! If you think of what the Jewish people who were under the ground for four years or three years. Or certainly even my cousin Zetty in a room. She wasn't allowed to move, because the- the mother-in-law was anti-Jews. I mean, what is it then to stay in your own flat or your own house with- with all what we have?

So, you managed it OK the lock- the lockdown?

Oh, yes, that's why I managed it OK! Perfectly alright. Days just fly past. Past. You can always read, anyhow.

Yeah. And Selma, coming from Holland, living here for so many years, how would you describe your identity today?

That's a very difficult one. It's a very good question, because my friend Kornelia, another Dutch lady and I have discussed this as well. And we- we were laughing about it, because when there is a Dutch-English. When there is a- when there is a Dutch-German football match or tennis match or whatever, then of course we are in favour of the Dutch. You can't help it. When it's a Dutch-English one, or an English-Dutch one, it's much more difficult! Especially for me. Not for her so much because she's lived in America for a long time. But for me, who's been living here so long, and who's British, I find it very difficult. And you can't help feeling for the Dutch. You can't help that. That's what I've learned.

So, do you still feel to be Dutch? Would you describe yourself as Dutch?

Many things, yes, yes, yes, yes. I think so. Yes, yes, yes.

And where's your home? Where do you feel home- at home?

Oh, here now, in England. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Are there things you miss from Holland?

Because there is no home in Holland.

Yes.

Yes, I miss several things in Holland. [laughing]

What do you miss?

I miss *chokolade hagelslag*. Which is- do you know what that is? It's- you, you – you put it on cakes.

Ah! The little-

[4:35:00]

Vermicelli. And we- we use that on bread, you see? I would have had that today if I would have been not in a hurry.

I- my children love that. [laughs]

Yeah - good! Well, there you are. I do too. In fact, the- the previous, the previous interviewer brought me a packet from Holland.

It's a chocolate- it's a chocolate spread with little - sprinkles.

Little vermicelli- sprinkles, yes, that's right. Yeah.

Yes. What else?

I miss that. And I miss the *komijnekaas*, which is seeded cheese. Special seed- cumin seed.

Cumin seeds?

Cumin seeds, I think. *Komijne*. I think.

Kümmel, Cumin?

Probably yeah. Probably, yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah. I miss that too. And he brought that as well. [laughs]

OK. What else?

Well then, I miss a little bit of the openness of the Dutch. Sometimes it's rude, but then they're open. They give themselves quicker. If you want to be friends, I mean. The English have a reservedness, and it takes a long, long time to get friendly - open friendly - as a woman, I mean. You know. You can be friends, but- or acquaintances. But the difference- like now with my Dutch friend, Kornelia, it's only last few years, because she was in America with her husband and he died here. But we have a lot of- and she is very religious. Protestant - Catholic. Sorry. [Laughs] So, we haven't got that in common. But even so, we have a lot of other things in common. We laugh about it every time that we- oh, well, it's fantastic really, how we both think of that. You know? And that we miss as well, I think.

How different do you think your life would have been if- if-?

In Holland?

Yeah, without-

Oh, completely different.

Without- without Hitler, let's say?

Without Hitler? Oh, I see! I don't know. Maybe I would have been a secretary. That's what I wanted to be: Secretary of the Bijenkorf, the Director of the Bijenkorf. [laughs] I didn't have much-

Ambition?

Hm?

Ambition?

[4:37:42]

Ambition, yeah. Yeah. That was my ambition. Because I came from an artist family, and we had a lot of moving, as you've noticed. And we had a lot of ups and downs, poverty and- and

I said to my- when people- I used to be very good at school organising plays, with the help of my father. And also, very good at *declameren* [reciting]. What's that in English?

Proclamation, or-

No. To- to speak a poem or- or an-

Yeah, or to recite.

Recite. To recite, yeah. And they said, "Oh, she's going the way her father was!" You know, on the stage. "You should go on the stage," they said to me when I was last few years at school, because I- I- I made plays, and I controlled and I- *regisseur*…

Recited?

No. If you use the others; if you tell the others what to do.

Oh, directed - directed?

Directed, ok, no, looking for another word, but never mind. The one who- who directs the plays, there is another word for, no? *Regisseur* in Dutch.

Yeah. In English it's director.

Ok, director then.

Regisseur in German also.

Yeah. OK, I directed the girls in school to- but I had- I had written the play. And the- the people said then, "Oh, you should go on the stage", you see? And I said to my mother, "Never. Never will I go. I want a job nine to five, nine to six." That was- that was my ambition. Not very high, but that was the reason, I think.

Yeah.

Don't know what happens in life, of course, but-

And Selma what about your- your Jewishness? You said after the war you were not- felt- not more, less Jewish than before. What about in London? Did you ever get in touch with anything Jewish? Or you-

No – no. No.

Is that something you're-

Well, with my sister-in-law I was a lot. I went with her to the synagogue as well because she was a singer. She was a musician and she was a pianist. Gave lessons in-

In Hull, or-?

[4:40:09]

No, here in- in Edgeware. Her name was Marguerite Tury. And I went with her to- to the synagogue. I mean, not for the religion, but for- she wanted to sing and she wanted to go and we went on special occasions or so.

But for you-?

Just to please her.

For you it's not- it's not important?

Not at all, no, no, no. No. No religion is. I mean I can appreciate it. I- I have friends with Catholic- very good Catholic friends, still them. I have Protestant friends, Jewish friends. Not many, but- no, I don't believe in nothing that- that way. I never have, actually. I studied anthropology, cultural anthropology, and you learn a lot from that because all those primitive tribes have their religions and they're all different. They all come down to the same thing really, but they're all different. There are so many religious- religions, that I think, no.

Yeah.

Sometimes I've thought- I wished I was religious, 'cause it seems to me so easy to go and pray.

Yeah.

And say, and say "Oh, well, I give a little prayer to St. Anthony and he'll bring it back." You know. Mind you I taught at a Catholic school.

Yeah.

Catholic high school. But they were very good, and they knew and I didn't want to go to the chapel. Only once or twice when it was necessary, you know, to give the girls- but otherwise the others did.

But did you ever convert? Did you ever-?

No. I don't believe!

You don't want to be-

[4:42:25]

No. Gosh, no. Good heavens, no. No. We never talked about it, actually. It wasn't- it wasn't *en*- it wasn't a question. I don't know how much Hugo stayed believing. I didn't think he believed either because when his sister-in-law- his family of course were very Catholic. His father was leader of the Catholic party in Belgium.

Oh-

And-

And where is he buried? Here in London? Where is he buried, Hugo?

Hugo? In- here in London. And I'll be buried with him, yes, yes, yes. But when we- when his sister for instance with whom he was very friendly, Marthe, and I'm friendly with her daughter who is also very religious. Who wanted to become a nun, but they didn't want her. She was too worldly. And- but when his sister asked us to come over to Belgium for a holiday, especially when there were so many cuts here, electricity cuts and everything. And Hugo said, "Oh, not for Christmas. I'm not going for Christmas." We went the day after Christmas. So- and all- but- And when I saw him, he never here went to church either. We only went if people got married or something like that.

And how did you raise your child- your son?

Jocelyn is the same, like me. He doesn't believe. I think he doesn't believe either. He went to St. Pauls, where they have morning assemblies and so. But I don't think it did anything to him. No, no, no. He saw too much at home. [laughs] We never discussed it, either. The only thing was that when he was- when he died, his sister and brother-in-law- his brother-in-law used to be a priest before he married Hugo's sister, so they were very Catholic. But not as much as to get married. So, they thought- you know, they- I thought actually, I have to live with- I became very friendly with them, actually. I always stayed with them and so on. We're very friends- good friends. And I thought I have to stay friends with them, you know. So, what do I do? And the vicar of St. Peter's here, the church of St. Peter's, who lived in the square and we were friendly with. Although we never went to church of course but Hugo loved the church because of this- of the structure. He was very good at these things- and, and history and so. And he came to see me straight away when he heard Hugo had died, the vicar. He's dead now himself. And said, "Can I do something for you?" I said, "Well, the thing is this. Hugo is Catholic, I am Jewish, and we both are not religious." [both laugh] He knew I was Jewish actually-

[4:45:56]

Yeah?

But- so he said, "Well, look, shall I do the- the service? The funeral? And I'll ask a Catholic priest," because I told him that I was worried about the in-laws, you see?

Yes.

So, he said, "I'll ask a Catholic priest to come as well and we can do it together." I said, "What a good idea. Not too much religion, please."

Because he's Anglican?

Yeah.

Right. So, you had an Anglican-

So, that's what happened. It was very good. It was very good. And the funeral, the- the grave, you know the Catholics do this and this, so the Catholic priest did that and that. And Jocelyn put a bit of earth on it. Yeah.

OK. Selma, we discussed- I'm worried that you haven't had a break and this was for many hours, really. Thank you so much.

It's all right.

Is there anything we haven't discussed you would like to add?

No, no. I probably - a few things I haven't told you, but I'll think of it later on.

It's impossible.

It is still possible. Yes.

What is the message you normally, if you speak to children or, what is the main message you want to give, or what is the main message here if somebody watches the interview, based on your experience? What is the main message you like to give to people?

[4:47:19]

Well, I think I've said it already. I think- what I tell children or youngsters, teenagers, or students is: please try and understand other people. Try and under- put yourself in their shoes. Don't quarrel about such very small things. I don't- and be tolerant. I don't think you can be tolerant all the time because there is intolerance. But please try and… trade on it, which, try to stand in their shoes. Even if you don't agree, you don't need to get quarrels. You don't need to make *ruzie, ruzie* is Dutch: quarrels. Because I- I as I said before, from small, small fights and small quarrels become big fights and wars. And the only thing we have to do is to prevent wars. And that means understanding other people. You don't agree, need to agree with that, but you can understand that.

But what about the- Selma, also taking some action? I mean, your story is an example of somebody- you took some action, you took some risks.

I think, yes, you should do the- Oh, well, I do. I don't believe- and that's another thing I say actually, I'd forgotten. I don't believe in words only. When you hear people at the moment for instance, so often words, so many words, instead of actions. If we would have acted- acted earlier with the- with the Covid, then with the lockdown, not so many people would have died. And that often happens. People talk and talk and talk. Some people talk a lot instead of acting. And I think you should act. And you should act how you feel, without trying to hurt other people. That's the main thing too. Whatever you do, try not to hurt other people. Not physically and not mentally.

And do you feel proud that you were part of the Dutch resistance?

Yeah. Now especially, yeah. Yeah.

[4:50:00]

So, I think absolutely right there are not so many Jewish-

No, that's correct.

Survivors. I've- I have- you know I've-

And not resistance, in fact.

Not resistance fighters, no.

Although, I've just heard about that story of the uprising in Sobibor. Did you know that?

Yeah. A little bit. I know it a little bit.

I didn't know that.

But you know there's also an argument not only about Jewish resistance but also-

And the two people are still alive. Or the one has just died, I think, but the other man is still alive.

You know there is an argument to be made that people- you know, there is the Righteous Gentile- that people are recognised who helped Jews. But what about Jews who helped Jews? You know?

Yeah, you don't get it. I don't get it because I'm Jewish.

This is an interesting point, isn't it?

I've said that from the beginning, because I got it for Greet, my friend Greet for- you know, the one who stayed in my room when I was arrested that day.

Yes?

My good friend Greet, and her parents who took me in.

They got the - a Righteous?

They got the- the Israeli-

The Yad Vashem-?

Yad Vashem, yeah.

The recognition? Yeah?

Because I asked for it, yes. And there is Wim, who got it. And there is Antje and Mien who got it.

Wim- just tell us the surnames, Wim-?

Wim Storm. The one who took me to Leiden.

Yeah?

Who did a lot for- other people asked it for him mind you, but-

Wim, and second name?

Antje Holthuis.

Antje Holthus?

Holthuis.

Holthuis, yes?

And Mien, the one- the other one, the laboratories specialist. The two in Leiden, therefore, they got it as well. Yeah.

Because you, you, you organised it?

[loud phone ring- sound break]

Wait, wait, wait I'll bring it. Yeah.

He's in Norfolk.

Yes, you were saying, so you can't get a recognition from Yad Vashem because you're Jewish.

Yeah.

Your resistance work-

Yeah, I haven't tried of course for myself. But they say nobody can.

But in Holland you got- you got some recognition in Holland?

Oh, yes, yes, yes.

What did you-?

[4:52:15]

I get- I got *en* medal. Yeah. The Resistance Medal. Yeah. And I got the resistance pension. Especially for the resistance workers. The, the, the accepted resistance workers, because there is a book which I have, which gives the names of all the resistance workers which are accepted as such, and who have received the, I think about 2,000 or so - the amount.

Yeah. Maybe it's- that's an interesting point, isn't it? That's something for-

It's a very interesting point, yes. Yes.

Maybe in the future there will be some. There will be some-

Are you going to work for it? [laughs]

Maybe, because I know quite, you know, through my work, certainly we have come across a few-

Before we die! You have to hurry up! [Laughs]

Cases that, that – Yeah. I think that's definitely something which-

But I'm very proud I have a tree in planted in Joop Westerweel *woud* - wood. That I think is very good, so, yeah.

Well, and you'll get certainly a lot of publicity now. And tell us, your book is being translated now, and coming out in how many languages?

Ten.

Wow.

Except eleven, because Hungary is now with it as well. When I said ten it wasn't Hungary, now it's eleven. Yeah.

Did you ever think that- that you would get that response?

No. In Holland too I said this every time, I was so surprised. So surprised! When the second edition came out, I was surprised, but when the sixth edition came out, I was even worse- more surprised.

And what do you think is it which captures - I haven't read the book, that's why I'm asking you – which captures the imagination or people are so interested in it?

Well, it is what people tell me. You know-

What do they say? What is it?

The big difference, some say… translation. The- the courage I had, and the- the way I have put it all, I've written it. With feelings and not too, too- not too stiff. And that you- you, you really - I have got so many letters, I'm thinking of- you, you really wrote it with feelings, and without overdoing that. Which other people often do, they say. Well, I can't- I can't remember now. I've had so many letters. But actually the- the publisher had a lot of letters too and then they sent them through to me.

[4:55:40]

Well, can you imagine how many letters you're going to get now once it's published in English?

Well, if it is as- if it goes as well in England, yes. I hope so.

You'll be very busy.

In America it will of course, yes. I hope some of them will come out before I die. Because don't forget I'm ninety-eight.

That's - unbelievable.

Yeah, I feel it now.

Yeah?

This last six months, year.

Well, but it's- anyway it's coming out- the English book here is coming out next month.

Yes, of course it's already next month! I used to say, "18th of September, that's a long time." You know?

OK, Selma well, thank you so much for doing this and for giving us so many hours outside, in your garden where it's getting now chillier and chillier.

Yes, it is, isn't it?

And darker and darker.

We have to go-

I think we have to-

We have to go in. You can sit inside if you have time.

So, again, thank you Selma, for sharing your story and-

I'll show you my book in a minute.

And we're looking forward- I'm looking forward to reading your book. [Refers to the mic] I'll do it don't worry. Don't worry. And thank you again.

I needed the coat.

One second.

[Selma laughs]

You still filming?

Yes, just one second.

Yes, and the thing-

[End of interview]
[4:57:28]