

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Lore Baer
June 8, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Lore Baer, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 8, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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LORE BAER June 8, 1990

01:00:04

Q: Please tell us your name.

A: Lore Baer.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Amsterdam, Holland, August 26, 1938. And, uh, my parents had come to Amsterdam from Germany. Uh, my mother was born in Erfurt which is the eastern sector of Germany and my father was born in Frankfurt-am-Main. And, uh, in 1933, my, my parents came to Holland to avoid, uh, and evade Hitler. Uh, it was no no longer safe for Jewish people to be in, in Germany at that time and they thought that they would be safer in in Holland. Uh, a friend of my father's had started a butcher shop in Amsterdam, uh, on a street called the Van Baerlestraat which is a main street right across from the Concertgebouw. It's still...it, it's still a big street in in Amsterdam today and, uh, he opened up a butcher shop and although my father didn't have any background in, in, in that business at all, he felt that that was the only way he could really leave Germany and have an income so he, uh, went into a partnership with this friend of his and, uh, was in Amsterdam for several years before my mother joined him there. My mother and, uh, my grandfather, uh, came to Amsterdam and, uh, joined my father and I was born, as I said, in 1938, and at that time things seemed to be going fairly smoothly. We didn't have a tremendous amount of problems. I grew up pretty much like any young, uh, kid would in, you know, in Holland. I learned how to speak the language. Although my parents were German, they also learned to speak the language, which probably wasn't that difficult for them. They were still pretty young and, uh, I went to nursery school and my mother helped my father in the store because, uh, it was growing and so she and, uh, and he and ran the store and my grandfather took care of me, and he was pretty much the one who was in charge of, uh, my growing up and he and I went walking together and I have very fond memories of my, as I called him my opa¹ and, uh, he was my mother's father and the only grandparent that I ever knew. Uh, my other grandparents had died before I was born and, uh, he was just very dear to me and very special and, but he became ill. He was quite a bit older, uh, than my grandmother had been, although she died when my mother was sixteen and, uh, my grandfather was not too well and, but he lived with us in an apartment in, uh, in Amsterdam. Uh, I'm not exactly sure of the, the street although my mother has said that it's the street called Wauwermanstraat, uh, which does exist today as well. Uh, I don't recall a great deal about my very early childhood except that my grandfather was very, very dear to me and that I had a little playmate called Harold who, uh, was the son of, uh, my father's partner. Unfortunately he died when, before my childhood friend Harold, uh, was born, so he never knew his father and so we were quite a large extended family. Uh,

¹ Grandpa.

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this young boy Harold, his mother Erna, and my mother, my father, my grandfather and I and we, we were very close and, uh, again I don't remember a great deal of what was happening, uh,

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in Amsterdam at the time except I knew that the climate, what the climate was like and there was a tremendous amount of tension and I saw that my parents worked very hard and were very serious and I just remembered that and I remember my mother being very nervous a lot and crying a lot and I remember my, uh, my grandfather, a tremendous amount of concern about my grandfather and I only found out really much later that, uh, the reason there was this concern was because the Germans were beginning to round up old people in Holland and they were beginning to round them up to take them to concentration camps. And when I was about, I guess it was four or five, somewhere in that area, uh, my grandfather was in fact, uh, taken away by the Gestapo and I remember that very well. I remember, I remember him being in a wheel chair and I remember standing next to him and I remember there was a knock on the door and and my mother was screaming and I don't know what she was screaming except something like they're coming, they're coming. Uh, so, you know, for opa...they're coming for opa...and I think up to, up till that time my father did what ever he could, uh, to, uh, either bribe the Germans and with, with salami and meat and because the butcher shop was a very desirable thing but I guess it, it reached the point where that could no longer be done and so these two uniformed men...that's all I remember...they were very tall...they knocked on the door and my grandfather was in a wheel chair and there was really nothing to be done. They just took him away and and I never saw him again. And they took him to Bergen-Belsen and and that was the last I ever saw of him, and shortly after that, uh, things just started turning very bad. I think that that was when they were rounding Jews. It was in 19, uh, 43 or maybe before that already. Uh, they were starting to round up Jews and deporting them and my father had, uh, made friends with this very nice couple. They were called Elsa and Sam Izaaks, uh, and they lived somewhere in near Amsterdam I think in a place called Zandvoort which is Am..a suburb and, uh, she was Gentile and he was Jewish and she worked for the...they both worked for the underground. They both tried to help place, uh, families with, with, uh, Dutch Gentile families. They tried to help Jewish families and, uh, and so my father asked if there was any way that they could, uh, try to find a place for them and it was told to me that it was not safe for, uh, for us to be together, so, uh, we had to be separated and my mother and father had to leave me and find...and the underground had to find a place for me and they had to find a place for them as well.

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And I guess I really...I don't really remember how I felt, but I must have felt or what I think now, what I think about and how it must have felt to, you know, to leave your child must have been pretty unbearable for my parents and it was probably very difficult for me too, but again I don't remember that very, very well. Uh, again it was told to me that I had been placed by this couple with, uh, one other or maybe two other families in, uh, Gentile families

in Holland, but that I didn't like them and I didn't want to stay with them and I cried a lot and I was very unhappy so they, uh, they found this wonderful family for me who I lived with for two years and they were the Schouten family and they lived in, uh, Oosterlokker which is about forty miles outside of Amsterdam and they had a farm and it was Ma and Pa Schouten,² and they were I guess in their fifties. Uh, and they had five children. They had two daughters...uh, Triene [Catheriena] and Cornelia, and three sons and that was Jan [Johannes], uh, Kees [Cornelius] and Cor [Cornelis], and they were all in their twenties but the one that I was the most attached to was Cornelia. She was twenty-five at the time that I was five and placed with her and she was just very special. She sort of took me under her wing, uh, and when I cried for my mother and father, she just... she was just with me. She just comforted me and at night when I cried she would sleep with me and she would hold my hand and she would tell me stories and, uh, they were very religious Catholic people and, uh, they went to church regularly and of course before I left, my mother had told me that my name would not be the same. I would be living with other people, not with them, and I should never divulge my real name because it would not be safe and I should not divulge that I was Jewish and I should just remember that that they loved me very much and that hopefully they would see me again and, uh, they were, uh, and I, I just remember that this family was very special and warm and and good and I just really loved them and, uh, I liked being there and they had, uh, because they had such a large family they had a lot of children in the neighborhood for me to play with and from what Cornelia tells me now, while I don't remember it, I didn't cry very much after the first week and I didn't seem to miss my parents very much after that and I sort of just fit in and played with the children in the neighborhood and one of the things I thought about was how I fit in with them, because I had always pictured that I would...this is in going back and thinking what it might have been like then ...and I had always pictured that all Dutch people had blonde hair so I had fantasized that I had had my hair dyed blonde and I asked Cornelia on this trip whether I in fact had my hair dyed blonde and she said no, it wasn't necessary because her father, uh, had dark hair. In fact he was called, uh, the black Schouten because there were others with that name but they all had blonde hair and he was, uh, and he had dark hair so it's not as though I didn't fit in, uh, in terms of, you know, hair coloring. I did.

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And there were a number of things that I probably fantasized in terms of, uh, coming to terms myself with what happened at the time and how I might have been protected by these people. Uh, from I, I seem to have remembered clearly that by because I was Catholic now and living with this family that I had a rosary and that I, I prayed with this rosary every day and Cornelia doesn't remember that at all, so I would think that if she doesn't remember it, it probably never happened but this is probably how I sort of resolved my being Catholic and also, uh, I thought that I was brought up by the nuns in the Catholic school, and again I don't think that that...Cornelia doesn't seem to think that there were any nuns in the school that I went to. Uh, I was, uh, a very stubborn child and I...it was told to me that I was, when I went

² Martha Schouten-Stam and Theodorus Schouten.

to school, uh, I was really, uh, I was not very...uh, what's the word I'm looking for...empathic with people who weren't religious Catholics and that if I saw people that weren't, or kids that weren't that weren't, uh, saying their prayers or doing their homework I would point them out as not being good Catholics like I was. Uh, and when I came to the Shoutens, my name as I said could not be Lore Baer. It was Lora Kruk and, uh, I hated that name and because it meant that I wasn't anything. I wasn't Baer and I wasn't Schouten, so I really, uh, begged them to have me, name me Schouten so after a lot of cajoling, I guess, they agreed that I could call myself Lore Schouten.

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Now, uh, the Schouten family, uh, Ma and Pa were also very stubborn, uh, Dutch people. They, they lived in a neighborhood that seemed to be very sympathetic to, to people who were, uh, discriminated against in any way, not necessarily Jews, and I was under the impression that the two other people who they harbored...there were two other people living with me, uh, underground on the farm...I was under the impression that they were Jewish but it turns out that neither of them were Jewish. They were, uh, young men who, who were to be conscripted into the German army and they did not want to, uh, join the army because they didn't want to have anything to do with the Germans, so they were also fleeing and they were also in hiding and, uh, they did not...and they were sympathetic to this as well as the other neighbors in the area were sympathetic to the same, uh, to Jews as well as to Protestants as well as to conscientious objectors or people who just didn't sympathize with the Germans, which there many of and it seems to me that my, my memories of this family and my life there were really, uh, very good memories. I don't remember a great deal of, uh, bombing of that area. I don't remember a great deal of, uh, hardship. In fact that particular area was very fortunate because it was a farm area and everybody, uh, in the area was either a dairy farmer or a vegetable farmer and the Schouten family had a dairy farm. In fact, Cornelia tells me that her father was supposed to deliver a certain quantity of, uh, milk to the German army and he was greatly opposed to doing this and he refused. He, in fact, he felt that if he was going to produce milk he wanted to give it to the Dutch people and he was called, uh, in to, uh, by the Germans to come to Amsterdam. Again, this was told just to me this week, which I didn't know about...uh, to explain his actions and it, it seems that, uh, in order for the Germans to, uh, to ma...to scare him, he was supposed to read when he came to Amsterdam a list of, uh, the names of all the people who had been killed by the Germans for doing the same thing, and he knew that if he was to do this and he claimed that he couldn't read any German so...I mean that he couldn't read ...and that, so he didn't have to do that but that's an indication of how stubborn this man was and how...but also how he risked his, you know, his life and his ideals not only for the Jewish people but just for humanity and, you know, just for doing the right thing. He felt so strongly that this was the wrong thing that, you know, his actions in every way indicated that you must do what is right and listening to what the Germans tell you to do is not the right thing

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and, uh, he, uh, he obviously...his children obviously felt very much this way too. Uh, because and his grandchildren, because last year when I went back to, to, uh, to the farm with some friends of mine, my friend asked one of the grandsons, uh, how...what he would have done in a similar situation and his grandson said, is there any choice? How could I act differently? And it, it's to me incredible that a young person today who is now twenty years old would say that when obviously there were many choices and there are many people who did other things and not what this family did. So my memories, uh, are that I that I led a fairly normal childhood there and and I, uh, helped on the farm. I didn't have any toys really because on the farm you, you know, you play outdoors and I played outdoors a lot. I went bicycling a lot and, uh, and it was my impression that when the Gestapo came around, uh, I hid with the two other undergrounders and there was a trap door in a closet that led to a hayloft. Now the way the, the house is constructed, the farmhouse is a house with the actual barn and hayloft attached to it. It's all one building, so that the trap door of the closet that you would, you know, it was the whole, basically the floor boards of the closet lifted up and led to a staircase which led under the ground and up to a little room in the hayloft and the little room was covered over with hay and there was a window in this room which, when you push away the hay, you could see out but of course you didn't push away the hay because you didn't want anybody to see you, so this was like a room within the hayloft that you got to, and this was the secret hiding place where we would remain, uh, when the Germans came. Cornelia tells me that they came, when they did come, very often instead of hiding in the hayloft she would, uh, bicycle with me to another neighborhood. We would just...she would say to me let's just go for a bicycle ride and she would bike down the road with me to another area, uh, so that I wouldn't be so scared because she, I gather, was felt that I would be very frightened by having to hide, so she thought it would be better if, if it was a more normal kind of a situation where we would just go bicycling together and she would try to distract me. And I don't recall that,

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but I do recall spending a lot of time with her and I remember a lot of the things that I really had forgotten came back to me last year when I went back to, to the farmhouse, which I didn't recognize at first because they had changed the front of it, but as I bicycled away from the house and I looked towards...looked over my shoulder, I saw the farm the way I had remembered it and the part that had not been changed and then the, you know, just the visuals came back to me and then I went back into the farm. Her brother lives in...Cornelia's brother still lives on the farm now and it's pretty much intact the way it was when I was there, except the room that I lived in is now, uh, a stall for animals and, uh, but other than that nothing much has changed, and I've taken some, some photographs. I took some photographs last year, uh, of that and the living room and the dining room and the kitchen are pretty much the way it was when I was there and it was interesting because when we sat down and had lunch together, the thing that I remember was the soup and the way they made little meatballs and the smell of the soup and the way it was served and the prayer that they said before the meal are all things that I remember. It wasn't, uh...it was all the good things that I remembered, and still remember, you know, just the warmth... churning butter with

Cornelia in the back and learning how to make cheese and learning how to bake, because a lot of that was done and Cornelia did a lot of that with me. Uh, that's what I remember. I remember just the warmth, uh, and that's, you know, to me the important part of things. Uh, I don't remember, uh, the Gestapo coming except for one time and I seem to recall, although Cornelia doesn't remember but her nephew Dick does have some memories of this, that there was also a manhole cover in the garden in the...or not the garden but the pasture in back of the house, uh, where we would also go down into it was like a sewer-like hole that would lead to, uh, into a a dark area. Now I may be confusing that with, uh, with the stairs and the closet that we walked into. I don't know, because she doesn't re... recall it. Uh, and my recollection was that we were staying down in that area for about a week, but she said it was more like an hour if at all, so I guess, you know, time plays funny tricks on you.

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Uh, the things that I remember too were the many people, uh, uh, that came to the house always. There was always a great deal of activity at the house. Uh, the many relatives, the aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and sisters and family and the busy work place... you know, the milking of the cows and, uh, and I remember making wreaths out of buttercups for my hair, that Cornelia taught me how to make too. And, uh, very often she would make me a little wreath that I would put around my hair and although I've tried to do the same with my own children, I've forgotten how to do it. And again when I went back to Holland last year and I went biking through the fields, through the, through the countryside, through the Dutch countryside, it was really the memory that I have of the stillness and the sort of the flatness and the beauty of those buttercups that I remember and sort of the cows grazing and just that sort of peaceful time and, uh, sometimes now that I think back I remember the green uniforms...the khaki colored uniforms of the Gestapo, but I think it must have been difficult for the Gestapo in that area because the neighbors were very, very close with each other and told each other when they were coming, when someone from the Gestapo was coming by.

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And as I said earlier, I was fortunate to be in that particular region because when there was a famine in Amsterdam, I think it was in '44, people came for vegetables and potatoes and milk because there was no food to be had in Amsterdam. The only place where you could get food was in the farm country. What I remember is--I don't remember a tremendous amount of hardships or famine, I don't remember doing without. I remember things were good. When I think back how, what it must have been for my parents, its very different. Living with another family, and they moved around a great deal before they found a family that took them in where they felt comfortable. They were with people for about, at least four or five different families, and many of the families took in a lot of borders and a lot of them took in Jews and got paid for it. It was very dangerous for a lot of people because they, for people like my parents, so when they felt uncomfortable in a house, when they felt there were people who might talk, and who might divulge that they were Jews, they had to move

on, and they were very fortunate also the last year and a half before the war ended to live with a family, as it turned out, only ten miles from where I was living but unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to them because it wasn't safe for them to know where I was because if they knew they would want to find me, and if I knew I would want to probably find them as well. So that was never spoken about and Cornelia tells me that her family did not know where my parents were, didn't know my real name, didn't know where I came from. But after the war the family that my parents were with knew where I was living. They had know that; somehow they had found out. But my family lived in very tight quarters. They lived with a couple who had one daughter and in a town not far from Oosterblokker called Berkhout. I went, I went back there last year and unfortunately the house is not standing the way it was. It's now a garage. It was a very small, humble home and these people shared whatever food they had; they were not farmers, with my mother and father. You know they did the same thing that the Schouten family did, but my mother and father did not, were not able to leave the house and go bicycle riding and play outdoors. They had to stay in hiding in their house all those years. And it wasn't safe because no one in that neighborhood could really know about them. I think maybe one other couple knew about them, but that was it.

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So when the war did end and my mother and father came for me, I really didn't want to go back with them. Probably it was a combination of being worried that they would leave me again, maybe it was that I had a new family name, I had friends, I was in school, I was comfortable, and it was very difficult for me. I think it was more difficult for me after the war than it was during the war. I just, I just felt very much alone when I left because I didn't have any friends and my mother and father really didn't know any people anymore in Amsterdam. They had no family. My grandfather, we never heard from again. And, so after, when my parents did come for me, I really didn't want to go with them at all. I claimed that I didn't recognize my father. I had remembered him as very, very tall, and he wasn't all that tall and it was a very difficult thing for my mother and father whose only hope and only wish was to be reunited with me. For me not to want to go with them must have been a really horrible thing. I mean, I think back to what would happen in my situation, how it would feel. I mean it must have been awful. But I was just a kid, I was seven years old and I was interested in playing and, you know, in my friends. So that's all I could think about.

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So we went, after the war, my father was able to get his store back, his butcher shop, which had been taken away by the Germans in 1943, when all Jews had to give up any of their property and any of their belongings and their apartments and whatever they had that belonged to them, they had to give up. But after the war he was able to reclaim his butcher shop, which he did, and he worked there for another two years, waiting to get a visa to come to America. And the only way we could get that really was through my father's brother who was living in America and he helped us with the formalities of getting to the United States. And I went back to school in Amsterdam and had a very difficult time in Amsterdam, in the

city and the school, and missed the farm a great deal. I remember I was very sad and I was very nervous at night. I remember not sleeping well at all because I was so scared that my parents would leave me again or that the Germans would come and I guess I just couldn't really understand the concept of the war and the end of the war, and that it was all over and now I would be with my parents again forever, and I really missed my playmates. I remember that very well and, uh, we lived in an apartment that...it's sort of vague to me, but it was an apartment that I think while our...while we couldn't get our our original apartment back we lived in this, uh, apartment that one of the Germans had lived in during the war who was quite wealthy, and I remember the apartment as being quite luxurious and the kind of a place where you couldn't touch anything and and so different from the farm where, you know, everything was so comfortable and I could just run around and here I felt I had to be this proper lady and everything had to be kept perfectly because the apartment didn't belong to us and the furnishings didn't belong to us and nothing really belonged to us and, uh, I just felt uncomfortable, and, uh, I don't remember anything about school. I remember that there was a young boy who I was friendly with who lived in this apartment...uh, it was a brownstone on the Amsteldijk in, in Amsterdam. And I remember befriending him and I remember being close with him and I remember again then having to come to America and being uprooted from from him as well, and I don't remember seeing my family, the farm family, at all after that.

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Uh, and I remember when I came to America living in the Bronx with another family because we didn't have any money and they took us in for about a year and I started to learn English and they were very good to us. They had three daughters and one of them took me under her wing and taught me English and, uh, we lived with them in their house for about a year and again, I felt, you know, this sort of constant uprooting and this not knowing where I was really going to be. Will I ever be permanently in any one place and always the fear, you know, of, of leaving but I really had...I was eighteen before I went back to Holland again to see the Schoutens and it was very difficult for me. Uh, I was very, very nervous because I didn't speak Dutch anymore. I never kept it up because my parents didn't speak Dutch at home. They spoke only German because their friends were were friends that they had from Germany that came over to America before the war and they had a circle of German friends and they wanted to forget the war. They wanted to forget the time and so for them, uh, I mean Dutch just wasn't a language that was spoken. My mother wanted me to become Americanized as quickly as possible. She wanted me to speak English. I didn't want to speak German because I hated the language. I hated the Germans. I hated everything that represented that time. So I didn't, uh, speak German and I didn't speak Dutch and when I went back to Holland when I was eighteen, uh, I wanted to I wanted to, uh, you know, thank these people for the wonderful thing they had done for me and how they had saved my life but I was kind of tongue-tied, you know. I just didn't have the words and I had heard that the Dutch people really hated, uh, if they hated the Germans and they hated people who spoke German and while I didn't speak German I understood German perfectly and when I spoke whatever Dutch I knew, I kept mixing my Dutch and German, and I was really afraid that I

was going to offend them that by speaking, you know, Dutch with a, with German mixed in and it really took me all these years to realize that they wouldn't care what I spoke. They really had no, you know, uh, I mean it didn't really matter. I think it took me up till last year to realize that...that I could have spoken to them in gibberish...it would have been all right, uh, you know, because whatever connection I felt, they must have felt too. So I feel very...I feel very sad that I hadn't kept up a connection with this family all these years. I really, uh, only started thinking about Holland and what I went through again when I was fifty last year, and that's when I felt that I had to go back and make a connection again, even though the parents that, uh, kept me were no longer alive, uh, and the only real connection that I felt that I had there was Cornelia and, uh, again the problem of the language, but luckily there were many people in Holland that spoke Dut...uh, English that were able to interpret for me so when I went back to see Cornelia last year, it was a very short visit

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because again I felt like it would be very uncomfortable not being able to speak the language, uh, but it, you know, gave me time from last year to this year to think about what these people had done and to what it means, uh, not only to me but I think to to my children, to my family, to my friends...uh, that they have risked their lives at a time when it was very dangerous to go against what was told to them to do which was that all the Jews were being rounded up and and they must, you know, follow the dictum of the government of Germany which had occupied Holland at that time, and I really feel that for people to do what they did without any, uh, I mean to them what they did was what they feel every human being should do. They really feel that it was nothing. They feel like what they did was only the right thing, that it's not something unusual for them and when I think about how, when I think back now what I would have done, I don't think I would have done the same thing. I think that if I had a family and if there was a threat that my family might be killed or if my family would, uh, be hurt or that I might be, I don't think I could have made that decision and now I will think differently because I lived through that, but I, I hope that people don't have to live through that to make the decision to help another human being, to save another human being, and, uh, so that's why I think it's so important, you know, people like this, uh, talk about their experiences so that other young people and our children and, uh, my friends' children and future generations will think about what it is to do the right thing and what it is to save human life and what it is to risk your own life, and that's I guess all I can say.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

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