United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Sieny Kattenberg Cohen
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Sieny Kattenberg Cohen, conducted by Adina Conn on October 12, 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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SIENY KATTENBERG COHEN
October 12, 1990

Q: Please tell me your full name.

A: Sieny Cohen.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Amsterdam in [not audible on this tape] March 1924.

Q: What can you tell me about your childhood?

A: Uh my childhood was very, very nice...warm, a wonderful family. I had a sister...I still have her, a sister...my parents who don't live anymore. I had a brother, nine and a half years younger than I was at the time. He also isn't there anymore. And we had a large family, and uh I have fond, fond memories of my youth, yah. Wonderful memories.

Q: What do you remember about your town and your family life while growing up?

A: Well, the town was Amsterdam. I remember the street in which we lived. At the time it used to be in my imagination later on it used to be a big avenue (laughter). Later on when we came back and saw the street it was as narrow as can be. I believe two cars can pass (laughter) and that's it, but at the time there were not so many cars. There were just bicycles and it was always crowded and busy. It was a really through-fare, through Amsterdam, and, uh, in a predom....a predominant Jewish neighborhood; uh, so on Shabbat it would be quiet. It was not an orthodox neighborhood. Everything, everybody was mixed really. Uh, on Saturday there wouldn't be much traffic but I remember the huge cars from Heinekken's beer and from Van Gend en Loes with the horses that went through. Uh, ice trucks that delivered ice on Monday with big ice picks. It was an old neighborhood with all types of people, working people, uh...poor people, people some a little better off. My parents were very well off. They had a store, shoes. They were...my father's name was a well-known name in Amsterdam...Kattenberg. There's a borough, not named after him (laughter)...maybe after the borough, that I don't know; but, uh, he...they were a well-known family, yah, I might say.

Q: What were your friends like?

A: Friends were a little bit...at the time when I grew up, I wasn't allowed, for instance, to play in the street. A lot of other children were allowed to play in the street, but somehow my parents thought it wasn't right to have their...you know...little girl...I had a sister one and a half year older. He says...she says she did play in the street, you know...play...what was play at the time? Uh, jumping rope, uh, marbles...nothing special but I remember maybe they regarded me too small. It wasn't allowed, and I wanted to become a nurse, so I rather played with dolls anyhow.

Q: What was the memory that you remember most from your childhood?

A: Well, I was sixteen when I practically saw my parents for the last time, my house for the last time. My childhood... loving care...just beautiful.

Q: And what was the Jewish feeling like in the town when you were growing up?

A: The Jewish feeling? Well, you grew up as a Jew and that was the only thing there was. There was uh...there was no choice. There was no...at least for me, in my family, there was no other thing. Just being Jewish and living according to the Jewish laws.

Q: While you were growing up was there any antisemitism in the town?

A: Not that I know of, but I can remember one childhood experience. I don't know how old I was...maybe I was eight or nine and, uh, maybe I had an argument with a child or the child with me and the child called out, "Lousy Jew!" You know. I didn't even know. I never had heard such a thing, so I said, "Lousy Christian!" I didn't even know (laughter) what it meant, you know. That was just child's, uh...that was the only experience I had.

Q: Could you please tell us the names of your parents, your brothers and sisters and any aunts and uncles, cousins, who lived nearby?

A: Oh, that's quite a lot. My father's name was Jonas Kattenberg. My mother was Berthe Kattenberg-Rueff. She came from Switzerland, as well as all her sisters who had married Dutch hus...uh, husbands. And my grandfather, Samuel Kattenberg, lived in our house on the first floor. We lived on the second and the third, and then there was his daughter across the street, Bella Kattenberg, her son...because she was divorced and she took her own name back; and there was another brother of my father's, Saul Kattenberg, with his wife and two children. Uh, then there were in the nei...in the....a little bit further out of the neighborhood we had, uh, also relatives...the sisters of my mother who married Dutch people, with their children, one of whom still is alive and another one married a cousin, but they are, uh, seventy-eight and the other one is in their eighties, and we get along still fantastically. It's like...like our...we are like sisters, really.

Q: What was a typical day like for you as a child?

A: Uh, I recall...I don't know why, but I, I recall, uh, when I went to kindergarten and I always see the same picture, you know: my mother taking me to kindergarten. That was down, uh, some steps. You were delivered to somebody, you know, and you played there until they picked you up; and then we came home and I got chocolate milk. That I will always remember, you know. I don't know for what reason, but chocolate milk...that was when we (laughter] got home. A little later I started studying the piano. My mother would call at the moment I rang the bell, "It is time to practice!" You know. After a while I hated it (laughter)

terribly and I gave it up. Later on, I got back. But, uh, as a child...yah...what do you experience as a child? Then later on I went to elementary school, from eleme...in the neighborhood... from elementary school I went to, uh, junior high which was a little bit further out. You had to take a bicycle. It was near the Vondelpark. No. That was near the Mauritskade, on the Mauritskade. And, uh, that was...oh, we had a good time there as kids and you felt a little bit freedom because you could ride from school to home, to your house and vice versa, and sure it was a little bit freedom because at home was home, and you had to played the game that was, uh, set by the parents, heh?

Q: In the years prior to the Dutch...to the German invasion of Holland in 1940, what was the Jewish feeling like in the town then?

A: I don't remember before. Of course, I remember...I was still very young...uh the time that Hitler came in power, into power. I remember friends of my parents who had experienced already, '33, '34, and fled Germany...coming to my parents and saying, uh, "Get out of here. Pick up everything. Come along with us. We are going to England." But my mother used to say, "Here, Holland, is such a wonderful country. There's such freedom. Nothing will ever happen here." So when 1940 came, I was in Switzerland. I...as I said, my mother came from there. She came from, uh, Saint Louis, the Alsace, and had family living...still brothers...in Basle [Basel, Switzerland] and I was going to visit one of them with another two cousins of mine, at the time a little bit older. That was in '39, and I was fifteen, and we went on the train and we stayed there with my aunt and uncle, had a wonderful time, until one night my parents called. That must have been September. At that time...September '39...at that time, uh, the military were mobilized here, mobilization, as they say; and my parents told us to get back the next day, soonest, uh, opportunity...get back to Holland. I don't know whether my aunt and uncle told them, "Come here," because that I don't know. I don't recall that. I don't remember that. But I went...we went back. The three of us went back. Well, then later on I survived. The other two didn't. But, uh, people didn't believe it would be so bad and it would...Holland was a stronghold, a democratic stronghold...nothing would happen here. That was the overall opinion of most people.

Q: What happened in 1940, after the Germans invaded Holland, to you and your family?

A: That was a total surprise. And, uh, I remember that at first we walked in the street. We looked at the planes. Nobody actually understood what was happening. The reality came soon enough; and, uh, then fear started slipping in then, and eating at everybody. Uh the fear of the unknown, the fear what would happen and stories that had been told by Germans that had left Germany, uh, but people still hoped for the best. They were Dutch Jews and they were...nothing would happen to the Dutch Jews and this only could happen in Germany but never here. That still persisted...that that overall feeling of here we will be OK. And, uh, I remember, uh, a bomb fell in Amsterdam because Rotterdam was bombed, and I think one stray bomb fell in Amsterdam and people were sitting in their cellars and their, uh...cellars...there were no cellars. Maybe, yes, some houses had cellars but they were hiding and trying to get away from windows and they didn't want to be seen; and there was fear. I

remember we all slept together on one floor...my father, my mother, my brother, my sister. Uh, we had a girl who did the home-work [the housework], a maid...sleeping-in maid...and we had somebody else who tended the store, and, uh, she also had a room in the house, so we all were down on the floor and, uh, it was...it was a very fearful something, because you felt the fear from your parents and, uh, yah...it was a very unpleasant, unsettling, fearful time. Of course, the Germans, the uniforms. Now I don't know exactly the date, but shortly after, things seemed to normalize and then the Germans had folders, big huge folders put on the walls in the Jewish neighborhoods that, uh, the Dutch Jews, they could sleep at ease. They could be at ease, because they were Dutch Jews and nothing would happen to them. They didn't have to fear the Germans. They would be regarded as the Dutch, and, uh, so they could all go and tend to their own business as usual. Well, a sigh of relief for everybody. I mean, as a child I wasn't so interested in politics; but the overall fear that had taken...yah, that crept under your skin, that did did...it never left you, and...but you became...adjusted. You adjusted to the circumstances and for a while life seemed to go on as usual. Then, after awhile, they played it so smart...so I don't know...I don't have the words for it...they played it in a way that everybody believed what was being told and was being printed and being said....

Q: Who played it?

A: The Germans. Uh, the Jews were not allowed anymore on the trams, not in public buildings. They were kept away from this. They had to stay home at certain hours. They...then they had...non-Jews were not allowed anymore to stay with Jewish people...Jewish people were not allowed to visit non-Jews...a separation became as a wake, suddenly, between the people who were your friends and people you had lived with all...all those years. And it went from one thing to another and finally people...I, I forget to tell that right after the invasion, a lot of people had tried to escape. For instance, in the first days after 1940, after the May occupation, I know, for instance, my parents also tried to escape. I go back now to a few days after May 10th, uh...because the, the images come up and they don't come in...you know...in order. Flies back and forth there. But, uh, my parents, too, ...they tried to escape with friends. They had to wait because the friends were coming and they...believe it or not they came with valises full of clothes. Because...you know...nobody understood what was going on. They thought they could take a taxi and they could drive to the Hook of Holland, to Ljmuiden, and take a boat and go to England. But then by the time my parents and they got a...I don't know, a cab or a car or whatever it was, it was some kind of a car. Uh, we all were piled in and we drove but soon the car couldn't go any...anywhere. Nobody could get through, and the few people that got away in Ljmuiden, they were just the lucky ones, if they made it to England, and the rest had to go back. So there was a try, there was.... People tried to escape then, but later on they adapted to the rules and, uh, they hoped for the best.

Q: Did you or any of your family members try to leave Europe?

A: At that moment...afterwards, no. No. Only at that moment, at that time when most people tried to escape, but afterwards there was no opportunity, there was no way out because, uh, very soon borders were closed and, uh, no...it was very dangerous and a parent didn't want to

endanger his children. Uh, parents had parents too, older people they didn't want to leave. It was...it is an involved thing to leave. To get up and leave is a terrible thing, because you have to be thinking only of you, your children and maybe if your parents can go, but you cannot take the whole family. It...it breaks you in in two pieces. It's terrible.

Q: What was the feeling like in the community after the Queen fled the country?

A: Despair. Hope that the Queen would survive and that the Queen could do something and that the Queen would take care of us all. But it meant...well, it meant..."My gosh, she left!" You know. That was unheard of...terrible! Not that she left, but understood because the Queen was a symbol of uh beauty, honesty. Uh, the Queen was looked upon as a wonderful, wonderful person, the whole family. I think most of the Jews were very royal-minded, at least in my, uh, surrounding, you know, so when she left it was quite a shock.

Q: After the Germans had invaded and the anti-Jewish laws were put into effect, what did the Nazis do to the townspeople?

A: It took awhile before they started, uh, getting at persons, you know. They had laws. You were not allowed to do this. You were not allowed to do that. You were not allowed to buy here, to go to a store, to have non-Jews, to be with non-Jews. Uh, I don't know at what time...I couldn't pinpoint the date when they said, uh, businesses had to be taken care of by...they called it "Verwaltung" [**Translation:** "administration"] at the time. That was somebody, they set in place of the owner, of the director of the business so the, the director or owner had to get out and they put somebody else in place, and a lot of people...I know my father did...he had a big...yah business, import/export shoes and wholesale and he also in stores...uh, I know my father got in touch with, uh, one of the manufacturers of shoes who had become a close friend through the years and talked with him, a man he could trust, and this man recommended his own bookkeeper. He gave my father his own bookkeeper. At the time they lived in Deurne, in North Brabant. It was quite a distance away, and he actually gave this man out of the goodness of his heart--with the consent of the man, of course, and his family because they had to move to Amsterdam--and he conducted the business from then on, and my father trusted this man implicitly.

Q: Was this man Christian?

A: Yes, he was Christian. Only Christians could do this. No Jews were allowed to uh conduct somebody else's Jewish business, you know.

Q: So he ran the business for your father?

A: He ran the business for my father.

Q: What was the reaction and the response of the townspeople of Amsterdam to everything that was happening?

A: Fear, because by now it was clear that the intentions were not so good. Uh, I remember '41, the razzia. That was the first one in June '41. Uh, when a cousin of mine--the one I had been with to Switzerland--was picked up from the street because at that time it seemed that a German had been shot and I think that was the reason, the reason for the razzia. They picked up a number of Jewish young men from the streets, and sent them to uh...yah...what was the name of the concentration camp?...uh, it comes to my mind later on.... I can, I can say it every day and every minute of the day and of the night, but just now it...

Q: Westerbork?

A: No. No. They went right through to...later on we got notice that there he was shot trying to escape. My husband has a certificate of somebody else in his family...that's what they did, you know. They they they took them. They they tortured them. They put them in horrible camps and they...then they sent a notification to the parents: uh, "Your son has been shot because he tried to escape."

Q: Was the concentration camp in the Netherlands?

A: No. No. No. In Poland....I will...later on I will fill in the name. I just cannot, uh, think of it now.

Q: What did the Nazis do to you and your family?

A: Uh...what did they do to...you skip a long while...then we come now to 1943. I, meanwhile, ...I told you I wanted to become a nurse and as I was too young to become a a...to to get the training for a nurse; as usual then, girls often got the training in children's care. I went to the Creche. The Creche was an existing, uh, institution in the Middenlaan [it was called the Plantage Middenlaan] in Amsterdam, and the Directrice was Henrietta Pimentel, and she had been there already since 1926 or '28, something like that...a long time. She was at that time already in her fifties...to me an old lady. But, uh, I was registered there and could start with this course, with other young girls my age. I was, I think, eighteen then. I had finished high school, and, uh, '43 I became an intern there. At home was very heavy, very...yah, it was terrible really, because they picked up people from everywhere...in the street. They had small razzias, big razzias; because we skipped that time. We went from '41 to '43, and, uh, people had to take, uh, to buy rucksacks, backnaps [**NB:** backpacks or knapsacks], and put a name in it and and name everything they had to take along. They got lists what they had to take along, because they were going to a camp to work and to, uh...they had to bring their own clothes, all things well-known by now; so my par...my father bought them and bought, uh, backnaps and he bought, uh, clothes and my mother sewed the tapes and we each had one; and it was already there all the time, as for all Jews, not only for us. And, uh, my mother was very scared. She was so scared. She wasn't fit to do anything. She couldn't anymore. She was just sitting there, and sitting, and I think she was...the fear had taken hold of her and she couldn't do anything but just sit and would fear the bell and would fear the call that her

children would be called, that her children would be taken away from her; and I...my father was a strong man and he said, "What God will..." He was not...he was orthodox but he was not what you can consider today orthodox orthodox. He was a religious man, and he kept us...he kept telling us, "Whatever happens to you, keep your mind strong. Your body can, uh, uh...withstand a lot...hunger, even a beating, but keep your mind strong because your mind will carry you through and try to believe that there is somebody, that there is a God who will get you through this, and when we get back, and we will all get back...." He was so strong in his con...yeah, later on he was...later on I talked to him. He was not...he knew, but at that time he was so convinced that we would all get through, you know. He was a strong man. A very, very nice man. Loved by everybody, and he even tried for us to escape. Yes, we tried. Maybe in '42 it was. Oh my gosh, how I jump back and forth. Do you mind?

Q: Not at all.

A: In '42, my sister, uh, she had a friend she got engaged to and married later on; and, thank God, they are still alive. Uh, he told her, "Let's get into hiding." So my parents didn't want to because to break up the family, the daughter to get away, you know..."Let's be together." But my sister insisted, "And you better, you better Mom, you go also, go in hiding. Try to find somebody. Get away. Sieny, you too." I wouldn't want to get away from my parents, and she, [Yetty (ph)] went with her...and my parents, after a while they thought it was very wise for her to go, and then they really helped her and assisted her and said, "Yes, do it," you know. "Let's try." So she went into hiding. Uh, she went to an address...the address was Rusland, "Russia," near the Königsberg Hall in a room next to a paper factory or something what was there; and, uh, there she stayed and her fiancé went every day, went over there. He had a place not too far away from her because at that time you couldn't stay together. That wasn't being done. That wasn't...it was unheard of, so later on they did...they stayed together later on. They had a heck of a horrible time, but later on...so [Yetty (ph)] left. My sister's name is [Yetty (ph)]. And I...in '42, the Directrice, Miss Pimentel, she wanted me me...she wanted three girls. Sieny Kattenberg, Betty [Hausmit (ph)]...no, Betty [Oudgekirk (ph)] it was at the time, and [Bonnie Philips (ph)]. There were three girls. Because in every class...you have some outstanding people. I wouldn't say because of of intellect, but because they are just their personality or they have something... and she picked us, and she made me head of a department because children started coming in. Meanwhile, people from the razzias were being brought to the Schouwburg and the Germans didn't want the noise of the children and they couldn't, uh...it was a horrible situation there. It was awful.

Q: The "Schouwburg" is?

A: The Schouwburg. You have heard of that?

Q: Could you tell us what the Schouwburg was?

A: The Schouwburg was the Hollandse Schouwburg, the Dutch theater. That was a theater where opera, operettas were performed; also theater, and, uh, it was a well-known theater at

the time in Amsterdam. It was right opposite the Creche, so I don't know how come the Germans decided to take this Schouwburg to bring the Jews to, to gather them and from that point on they went to Westerbork. I don't know what, whatever the reason was. The only reason being maybe it was still part of the Jewish neighborhood, not completely but still, so once the parents came in there with the children, the children were taken to the Creche, in the beginning by the parents. But the Germans put a stop to that. Very soon, parents were not allowed to leave the Schouwburg anymore. The children had to be taken there by people from the Creche who wore an armband and who were marked and who had special permission to do so and the three of us were designated to do so, and, uh, that is where the most horrible time of my life started. Also the most important time of my life, because my life is divided between before then and after then. Now, uh, you ask....

Q: Was it legal for you to take the children?

A: Yes.

Q: From the Schouwburg to the Creche?

A: Yes, yes it was because as I just said I had a band, so we were...that meant we were...the three of us were the only ones, at the time, to take children, pick them up in the Schouwburg, bring them to the Creche and later on return them to the parents or not.

Q: Could you tell me about your work in the Creche?

A: Work in the Creche...that started in....

TAPE #2

PAUSE - TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Would you tell us about your life in 1941?

A: In 1941, uh...1940...the days dragged on. In 1941, uh, the restrictions became worse. I remember my grandfather passed away at home and he was buried by boat. They took him by boat because they were not allowed to take out cars or anything. It is very vague what I remember. Uh, as a as a girl I wasn't... certainly not allowed to go along to the cemetery. Uh, no women did anyhow, but then there were only few men who were allowed to go with the corpse and, uh, I remember the story that they went by boat because they were not allowed to take a car out. Uh, people were scared. I started working...I finished, uh, school and got into the Creche where I started taking...the, the Creche, where I started taking the course, and by the end of that, uh, the situation had changed so much that, uh, the Directrice, Miss Pimentel, thought it necessary to have three girls staying there...

Q: When you said by the end of that, by the end of what?

A: By the end, uh...that was '42...beginning '42. Uh, when the...when I had done the exam, taken the ex...exam and that meant I was now...I had a degree...you can't call it a degree, but children's care. So, uh, as I said, three girls were staying there permanently; but before that, I forget...there was a nasty incident, because my sister was in hiding and my father got in touch with somebody who told him he could take his daughters and bring them over the border and would take care that they would come in, uh, with the "Maquis" or under...underground organization and to get them away. That would cost three thousand guilders a child, and my father took care that the money was there, because he had money hidden because they had to give in all the money to Lipmann and Rosenthal,[1] to the bank. They had to...silver or whatever they had...radios, bicycles, whatever...they had to, uh, deliver at a certain point. That was all German property from now on, but he kept hidden money, some money, and he gave this to this man to take care of us. The man didn't dare to take me because I was raven black, my hair was; so I had to be...I had to go to a beauty parlor and have my hair done, and that was done in the evening. And it so happened he took me to an, an NSBer.[2] An NSBer was...was somebody who was on the wrong side of the...of

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[1] Lipmann, Rosenthal & Company was an organization used by the Germans for the express purpose of milking the Jews. According to Law No. 148/1941, which was passed in December 1941, Jewish financial assets--cash, checks, bank deposit, etc.--were to be transferred to, and managed by Lipmann-Rosenthal.

[2] A member of the Nationaal Socialistische Bewegung (NSB), a Dutch Nazi movement founded in 1931 by Anton Adriaan Mussert. Antisemitic and pro-German, the members of the NSB collaborated closely with the German occupation regime.

decency, he was a pro-German. Nothing was said. He must have paid him quite a lot of money but when I was sitting in front of the mirror I saw my hair getting from from black to red, from red to yellow-orange. It was...finally it was orange. It was terrible. I was in shock, but it had to be done because the man wouldn't take me otherwise, so, uh, we went the next day and we walked and as we walked on the Gelderskade ...from my house, I lived the Nieuwe Hoogstraat ...that is not far away from the Dam ...as we walked on the Gelderskade toward Centraal Station, a man came over and and he saw my sister and my...we were both was together and he said, "Don't go further. Don't go further, because they are trying to trick you; because over there is an "overvalle wagen" [a type of emergency police vehicle], a big German truck, and the man who your parents probably gave money to, he is in cahoots with them." So we ran like crazy and I don't remember anything of my sister, anything, anything at all, but I remember I came home. I rang the bell and I fell in my father's arms and he cried so terribly. You...you know, that broke my heart because to see your father cry...so there I was again the next day back to the beauty par...to another beauty parlor, had my hair done black, then back...went to the Creche and, uh, maybe I wasn't ready with the course yet. Maybe I hadn't taken my exam at the time. But by the end of '41 I stayed in the Creche because that is when the the Directrice asked us three, which I told already, to come there. Another incident while I was there, so I didn't sleep at home anymore...my little brother who was then at the time eight and a half...he came to the Creche and he walked through the barriers because there were bridges in Amsterdam. Amsterdam is a city with canals. As most people know is bridges, and the Germans had a habit of raising the bridges, certainly when there was a razzia, and closing them off at eight o'clock because nobody was allowed after eight to be in the streets, so this little guy, when he...when he could, he tried to...being a young little boy, he wanted to show that he would get through and all of us, we would be scared to death and I scolded him, you know. "Don't do it!" And, "Why did you do it?" And, "Don't you know what you are doing to Dad and Mom?" And, you know. And then afterwards, shortly afterwards, he was taken. I often...oh, I often told myself, you know, why had I scolded him? Why I...why did I do that? Why? You know...memories.

Q: When was he taken?

A: He was taken May 26th, 1943--with my parents. In '40...after '42, times were horrible. Times were very intensive, and as I said I was in the Creche and then the, uh, razzias started taking people from the streets, bringing in people from hiding. Everybody went to the Schouwburg as we said before, and that is when the ordeal started with the Creche and the Schouwburg where there were three transports during the week. Now I don't recall exactly what evening. There was one Friday night. There was probably one Monday night, Tuesday or Wednesday...I don't recall the evenings. That meant that the children who were given to the Creche to taken care...to be taken care of, to be loved by everyone, they went on transport, transport...those...during those nights, and that was terrible, the way it went. You see, the Creche was meant for children of parents who worked during the day. They used to come there at eight o'clock, seven-thirty, between seven-thirty and eight o'clock in the morning. The parents delivered them, mother usually, and then they got clean clothes and they got breakfast and we played with them. In the afternoon they got a meal. They rested. They were

there till five, five-thirty I believe. When the mother was through with work, she came and picked up the child. Now an influx of new children came there, that were taken away from their parents. The Creche was changed then. It used to have...imagine a building...you enter...there's a big hall. Where you enter is a big door. Next door, next to that big door is a smaller door with a smaller hallway. That is the place where the children were given to us in the morning by the parents when they went off to work. The big doors, they were usually not even opened. Every...the whole traffic went through there. Now let's get back to the big door. On the right hand side when you come in, there's a door. That's where the Directrice, Miss Pimentel lived. The following door on that hall to the right is a dining room for the personnel. On the left hand side, there was a small room where the babies used to be. Mothers had babies too, and the babies came there too during the day, so from any time after birth till they were about a year old, they were in that room, in the wicker baskets, in the little beds, and they were very well taken care of. Next to that baby room, on the left-hand side, was a huge kitchen. In my mind, huge then, you know. Uh, then when you go a little bit through the hall, there was a large room but that was where the diapers were washed, because we didn't only take care of the children. We also had to wash their clothes, at least their, the diapers and the the underwear, etc. It was a heck of a smell always (laughter), it was terrible. And we didn't look forward to have, to have "corvée," as it was called. There was a big staircase going upstairs, with a balcony. There was to the left, if I remember correctly, a room, a right room and the room to the street must have been up front, a huge big room. Uh, at the original time it was used for...we had baby little, little, yah, cots standing there, because the kids would sleep during the day. But now it was converted to a real dormitory. Cots, little beds, everything that could hold a child would stand there. The big huge room in the up front, was then used for the age from about the time they were born 'til four or five, and the bigger children would be in another room. I had, uh, charge of children from zero till four or five years old. I was in charge of them. The baby room was moved upstairs because the baby room now became an office where Mr. Süskind, who was working in the Schouwburg, who was in charge of all the registration of all people who came in there, so he had a room in the Schouwburg; and the Directrice converted [**NB:** conversed] with him--secretly always--in that baby room. Am I clear? Yah? Uh, by '42, not too many children came in but we knew we could count on many more because there were transports but not as regular yet as it would be by the end of '42, middle of '42, '43. Then really the whole Jewish population was taken away, and they needed every...every centimeter of space they had to put up the children and to put up the people there. So, they came. Uh, let me start a day during occupation, during razzias. They came by tram from the city.

Q: Who came by tram?

A: The...the Jewish people that were picked up in razzias. The bridges were going up. The Germans came in the district. They combed every house. They first with the big, uh, things... with the how do you call them? I forgot...where you...where you can call through [megaphones]. I forgot the name for that thing. Not in Dutch nor English I know. Uh, they screamed in the streets for people have to come down and old people, young people, men, women, children...everybody had to get down in the streets. There would be big trucks, huge

trucks to pick them up. They were beaten into the trucks...trucks. Uh, I saw that...I have seen personally that they threw older...an older neighbor of mine, all the way down from the staircase because he didn't want to come down, and, uh, that was only once. Then once I was in the Creche, I wasn't in the city anymore. I was there. Maybe lucky, I don't know, because the day my parents were taken away from their home with my brother and the whole family--May 26th, 1943--I was not home. I was in the Creche. I was there day and night. (Cough) So, uh, the children, the parents, they came in the tram, were pushed out of the trams. They were standing in front and then in the hall of the Schouwburg and they were registered by people there from the Joodse Raad. The Germans were there standing guard and they were just seeing to it that everything went correctly, that they were registered correctly by name, by number. So what they tried to do there, they tried not to register children. They tried if possible, if they could, they tried, uh, a family with four children...uh, mama, papa, child.

Q: This is the Jewish Council, or the Joodse Raad?

A: Yeah. They would try, if possible. And that was mainly the intent of Mr. Walter Süsskind, with some other people too, because nobody worked alone, nor in the Creche nor in the Schouwburg nor in the underground. It was all a combined effort. At...in the beginning, nobody knew what he was doing, just, uh, trying to save, uh, relative, an acquaintance, somebody. But very soon it became a joint effort to try to save as many as you could in the Schouwburg. So, as I said before, the people in the Schouwburg, they were crowded. Imagine...I don't know how big the theater was...maybe two hundred people at the time...that would have been a big theater I suppose at the time. Many hundreds were sent in there. No beds. No nothing. They were just sitting on very uncomfortable chairs. Uh, there must have been two, maybe three, maybe one...I don't know...toilets. How was that, uh, sixty, seventy years ago when they built the theater? Maybe there was one toilet, so you can imagine what went on there. And, uh, so the Germans decided, "All the children, out" And that's where the Creche came in. We...after awhile, we--the three girls--got orders from our Directrice who was always in touch with this Mr. Süsskind. She sent us to get the children from there and bring them to the Creche. Now we all had...the three of us were all in charge of a group, so we all had a number of girls working with us, and something I regret for the rest of my life is--and my husband knows because he became involved there, too--uh, I had a book with every name of every child, when it came in, who the parents were, when it was born, and when it left. On the last day of the Creche, we left--that's another story--and I couldn't take it with me because that was too dangerous.

Q: How did you avoid this entire time being deported yourself?

A: Uh, there was no question of avoiding. Since we were.... the Directrice was supposed to be there...

Q: Was she Jewish?

A: She was Jewish. She was necessary there. The three of us were necessary there. The other

girls that worked there were necessary there. However, I have here with me a picture of the Directrice with the, as was called, the "Onderdirectrice" [assistant director], the director. She was a non-Jewish woman. She had to leave the premises I believe already in the beginning of 1941 because she was non-Jewish. So we were all Jewish there, and the Germans would say, "We have...we need some" ...through the Joodse Raad, I suppose..."We need so many people there, and this person, this person, this person...they are necessary because you can't leave those children alone," so there was no doubt for me that I would stay on. So was the Directrice. So were the others. Now we discussed once in a while, what if something, ...heh? But we dismissed it from our minds. We were busy. We were young. We didn't think the worst. We...it it ...now I can honestly say that the big tragedy didn't even penetrate at the time because the people went out to the camps to work. Who could imagine what was intended for them. Who could imagine? Nobody. So, uh, we just hoped that everybody would come back.

Q: Now this entire time, what did you know of your family, your parents and...

A: My parents were....

Q: Your sister and brother?

A: My, my sister was in hiding. I didn't know anything about her. My parents were taken away on the 26th of May with my brother...

Q: In 194....3?

A: Three...and I saw them because I saw them in the tram as they...as they drove...they were not even in the Schouwburg. They went directly to the Poldeweg or where ever station... whatever station. They were going straight to Westerbork.

Q: How did you find out that they had been taken?

A: Because, uh, we found out the same day because other people were brought in and I don't know where the choice was made...this one goes through and that one doesn't go through and this one goes in the Schouwburg. My parents never made it to the Schouwburg. They went through, and uh...yeah that was known so fast because that is such an operation. All the bridges go up. Nobody comes through. Not a gentile, not a Jew, nothing, nobody. So that was known, I think, the same half hour that it started, and messages someway always slip through, come through, and in the Schouwburg they must have known, because they must have been told by the Germans that they could expect many children, many people, many everything. You asked me something I really, uh, never thought of, but we knew what we kew. We knew it. My luck, call it luck...was that I wasn't home. If I would have been home, I would have had the same fate as all the others. But, uh, the children came, kept on coming and by that time there were some organizations going without my knowledge. I mean the underground, the, the, uh, the VN that operated in Brabant and there was an organization in

Utrecht and there was an organization in Amsterdam, but unknown to us, because we occupied ourselves only with the children...get them ready, get them from the parents, keep them quiet, play with them, dress them, get them ready for transport, because three times at nig...during the week, the transport would leave at ten o'clock at night. That meant that we knew in the morning already that kids would have to be delivered to the Schouwburg. Now which kids? Most of them. Sometimes it was a lucky one, the one who was not registered. There were very few of them. Those children were hidden within the Creche and my husband can tell his story better than I do, but he stayed with the children that were hidden upstairs in the attic. That those were mostly bigger boys because how could you do it with very young ones, you know, so they must have been so in the age from eight or twelve, thirteen, fourteen...I don't know exactly anymore. They were taken out. They were either on a walk or, uh, over the hedge...over the edge from...over the...over the...yeah...over the gate in the back. I have never seen it. I haven't even ever known it, because everybody did their own bit secretly. Nobody told anybody. Nobody...you didn't tell your best friend, whatever, because it was just too dangerous. Not too dangerous...you didn't realize it was dangerous for you, but it was dangerous for the children. If you would say, "This kid is not registered," then it goes out, then that couldn't be told; and I don't even think anybody knew that that child wasn't registered. That was something absolutely between something absolutely between Mr. Süskind in the Schouwburg and the Directrice in the Creche. Uh, to take the children to transport was terrible. They were all little. As if they felt, you had to wake them up at nine o'clock to have them ready by ten, and, uh, to get them dressed as if...and as if they felt it. I don't remember anybody cried, ever. As...there was such a terrible atmosphere, such fear of not knowing what is going to happen. Nobody knew they were going to be killed. You, you, you knew...you didn't know whether they stayed with the parents, maybe in a work camp, maybe...there were work camps, even in Holland you didn't know about. Uh, there were work camps...they called "work camps" later, when you heard the word "concentration camps." We didn't know, and that is the tragedy of it all because the people didn't know. Maybe...maybe the Dutch population would have done more if they would have known, but they were scared. They were not helpful. They, uh...there were some...I would say maybe five percent...I don't know. According to my knowledge, what I saw in my neighborhood, in my...of the people that were saved through others, maybe...maybe a very, very small percentage of the people did something.

Q: Did you know what was going to happen to the children after they were transported?

A: No. That's what I just explained. How could you know? How? How could you know? They went to...with their parents to to work camps. Now a work camp, that was something not pleasant but you had to work there, maybe in a factory, maybe make I don't know what; but the children went with the parents. Now we were told, the three of us were told an org..., underground organizations were set up. An underground organization, people--individual people--they they would contact people...not that I knew it at the time but they would contact people in, say, Friesland, Limburg, in the country; and they would ask, ask people, "Would you have room for a little Jewish girl or a little Jewish boy?" This one would be able to have one if it would have blue eyes and blond hair. The other one needed a four-year-old with

dark hair and blond eyes...uh, uh, blond hair and dark eyes, so it would fit in the family. Those messages came through, through the underground. Even so, it sounds incredible. Finally through Süskind who was, of course, completely underground-minded with all he did with the Joodse Raad. He got the message back to the Directrice; so when we had children that fitted that image, that child would be kept away. That child...but you couldn't keep a child away from the parents without the parents giving consent to give it away, so the three of us, we were sent to the Schouwburg with the message to the parents as follows. In your own words: "Look, we don't know what is going to happen. We don't know where you are going to be, under what circumstances you will have to live with your children. Would you mind if we tried to find a family, a foster family, for your child, which will keep it until you come back?" You can imagine the questions would follow. The mother: "For how long?" "How long? Nobody can tell you." "Where?" "I...I don't know. Sorry, I don't know." "To whom are you going to give it?" "Yah, to somebody who will take care of your child." So you speak in, in, in kind of a veil...in kind of.... How would you call it? Uh, in, in a language that people don't understand, the people cannot trust it. They trust me probably, so few gave up their children. Too few, because of...you want to keep your child with you. If I would have the choice today, I would say, "I keep it. I keep my child with me;" because those we are talking about...children from from year old to five years old, six years old. So the few people that gave up their children...there were not so many I would say. Those children we kept in the Creche when the other children went on transport, but we came to the door...Family A has four children. The Family B has three children. Everybody was accounted...had to be accounted for, so now came the family who had given up a child to go in hiding. We didn't use the word underground with those people because that word didn't exist. Hiding didn't exist. No, they would be foster children to someone. So at night when we came to be counted for, what we did...we took instead of the children, of instead of that particular child that they had consented to go in hiding, we we had a little blanket, blanket with a little piece of rag in there or a doll or whatever looked like a, a child. If the child would be bigger, a little bit bigger, we would really have something big there, you know. It was scary. It was really scary. But you didn't think. It was just in the way of work. You did it uh and you hoped only that the parents wouldn't allow anybody to look at the child. You know? Oh, God forbid! I still, I still get the creeps when I think of it; that the German would say, "Let me see the child." Which never happened.

LONG PAUSE - TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: We're in 1943.

A: We're in 1943. Uh, there are several razzias. There are many razzias, small ones. People are being picked up. Uh, uh, I skipped the February razzia in 1942, but, uh, that was a different story...political, where the Dutch really went out; and they... there were strikes, railway, trams, etc., public transportation. But in '43, in, on the 26th of May, there was this tremendous big razzia where they took everybody out of the houses, closed off the city; and (coughs) at that time they picked up as many as as three thousand people at a time, and that was the reason I recall now that my parents did not enter the Schouwburg, that they had

because at that time they didn't separate anybody. They didn't bring anybody down there. They went straight to the...to Westerbork. Now in June 1943 there was another razzia; and, well, this time...I think it was the 20th of June, uh, another razzia took place where they took a tremendous big amount of people, whereby my husband's family who had moved...who had lived originally in Rotterdam...they were obliged to mo...to move to the ghetto as Jews, to Amsterdam, and now um in June the 20th, June the 20th, they were picked up in a razzia and taken by train straight to Westerbork and from there on. That was first my family...now Harry's family. Uh, at this time the Directrice, liked Harry, liked me; because Harry was...when he came to Amsterdam, got also a job, uh--but he will tell his story himself--and, uh, she decided we should get married before anything should happen. Uh...we got married on June the 28th, 1943, in the morning at twelve o'clock; whereby Harry came to the Creche and called out to me, "Sieny, uh, give over to somebody else. Take care that you are ready by twelve because we are getting married." And at that time we got married in a house which was supposed to be the Joodse Gemeente, the Jewish community, but it didn't exist anymore and it was just a formality, and, uh, there came a few people from City Hall in long...in a long coats and I had just gotten a clean uniform from somebody, a nurse's uniform because, uh, you know, after all getting married is not such a...you don't get married in a dirty uniform. So that took care of our marriage. The Directrice was witness. When we came back to the Creche, she had cookies and then some chocolates which she had kept for a special occasion, you know, and this was it. Shortly afterwards...it must have been July, Harry moved in the Creche then, too. We all had little rooms in the Creche, the three girls and uh, now uh, I don't know the date anymore but it must have been the beginning of July, there was another razzia. I couldn't tell you the date anymore exactly...by which the whole Creche was involved. They took all the children, all the personnel help including the Directrice and me, and, uh, we all went on transport; so we all went to what was called then the Poldeweg --which was I suppose a railroad plaats, placement, placement, where the trains turned around, etc. etc.--from where all the razzias, people that were taken in the razzias, went to Westerbork. We were lying there during the night and, uh, the hos...hospitals were empty. Then all the people's homes, whoever was a Jew was brought there. And, uh, suddenly they called out, "Mrs. Cohen from Das Kinderhaus!" So, we had with us Virrie Cohen. She was the daughter of Professor Cohen, the head of the Jewish Council, Joodse Raad; and she went, uh, to where she was called, but it wasn't her, she - they wanted. They wanted me. "Das freche Weib." Now they had...one of the Germans--Von Klingebiel--who was a guard at the Schouwburg, he called me "Das freche Weib" [meaning "the impudent or cheeky woman" in German] because I dared to stand up to the Germans at the time.

Q: That translates to...

A: That translates to a whole room where children are asleep, a dormitory, and suddenly twenty Germans come in with their boots stamping and screaming and shouting; and there am I, and I call out, "Get out of here! How dare you to come in here! How dare you to disturb children that are asleep! I don't want to see you. Get out!" And with that they left. Unbelievable as it sounds. Incredible, but it happened. And from that time on, to the Germans I was "Das freche Weib." They called me... they called me that. One day I was called to the...because

once in a while you gave up your...you gave up your bed because one of the other girls had family in the Schouwburg, and they wanted to see them for the last time. For the time being they didn't know, but for the last time, their family or their friends, so we exchanged the beds and she went, you know. So one day I was called and I was said, "You go on transport," and I said, "Why?" And I...and they said, "Because you have a nerve giving your bed to somebody else. You are supposed to come here and you gave it.... You go on transport." So I said, "So send me. Big deal. My parents are there. You took my parents. I go to my parents. Take me. I go." Whereupon he gave me back my bed and told me to get out. I don't want to use the word, but to get out fast, go back to the Creche. So that's my story about "Das freche Weib"; and when I was at the Poldeweg we didn't, between three thousand people, and they called off my name, then Virrie Cohen went because after all she was the daughter of Professor Cohen, and then they needed me. They put me in a in a truck with all Germans around me. I think I was stiff with fear. I, I think I couldn't move a finger. And they drove off, changed trucks, put me in another truck, and dropped me in front of the Creche in the middle of the night, not a single person in the street, anybody, nobody; and I came back to the Creche, and Mr. Süskind and all the others were standing, not outside the Schouwburg but in the Schouwburg within the glass, without...within the wall. When they saw me, they couldn't believe their eyes. And the Germans gave them order, "From now on she is in charge here in the Creche." But then I was nineteen, and the daughter of Professor Cohen came back the next day and she was something like twenty-five, twenty-six and she was a registered nurse; so it was the logical thing that she would be in charge and she became in charge. So we stayed in the Creche then 'til the end. I think it was the 29th of September...

Q: 1943?

A: 1943...when the Creche was emptied. If the date is not hundred percent correct...the 29th...was the end of September. And, uh, at that time, that morning, Harry came over and said, "Sieny, get dressed. Get out of here. We are leaving." And I said, "I cannot leave. How can I leave? We still have children here." Not many...there were not many, anymore. He said, "You have to, because I heard and I feel it is over." So we discussed it with a few other girls and they said, "You have to go." Also Virrie said, "Go." So we went, and as we went across the street past the Schouwburg, the Germans stopped us and Harry had a false identity card because we all had passports with a J on it, but he had gotten from the underground organization there in the same Schouwburg, he had gotten false identification cards for him and for me. And as we walked there and we were stopped and the German said, "Show me your papers." I dropped dead almost because I thought he gave the wrong papers, but he gave the right papers without the J, so he said go on. And we walked, and we walked all the way to the Amsterkade, which is in Amsterdam, the southern part of Amsterdam. We didn't talk. We didn't...we didn't dare to sigh. We didn't...we wanted to keep as silent as...and we walked over there and when we came near that corner, I will never forget...it is a round building on that corner...we stood there and we took off our stars which had been fastened...we had loosened already before...and we took out, off the stars and we went quickly upstairs to the woman who had an address for us to go into hiding. We came up there and shortly afterwards came a man, "Uncle Hannis." And this is really the story...the

end of my story from the Creche. I couldn't take a...I couldn't bring along the book with all the names, with all the children, because that would have endangered everybody uh to show them the children, those children have gone on transport and those children are in hiding, so I had to leave it there, not realizing that it wouldn't be there after we came back because we didn't know. After I came back there was no Creche anymore. So, uh, that was the end of the most important time in my life for ever and ever to be; and then comes the hiding story which is a story unbelievable, too...

Q: Before we go into that, Sieny, when you were at the Creche, about how many children were saved?

A: Well, I always...I always...

PAUSE - TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - TAPE CHANGE

TAPE #3

Q: About how many children were saved from the Creche?

A: Uh, you ask me a question which is very difficult to answer. I know I have seen in in in different articles the amount of thousand children. The number of thousand children, to me, seems almost not possible. I have always thought from the start when we talked about it while we were in hiding, that the number of children saved from the Creche, actually from the Creche, would have been around three hundred, because it was so difficult; but then I don't know what else played without my knowing. Uh, to me it always seemed a reasonable number, three hundred. I've talked about it with some other people too, who thought so.... But, yah...I, I don't dare to say thousand is impossible. A thousand maybe would be possible if you calculate the children that were picked up in the streets and were not taken to the Creche, but were were taken immediately to to Westerbork or wherever; but a thousand children...it seems an awful lot to me.

Q: You had mentioned something before about going...

TECHNICAL DISRUPTION

Q: You had mentioned before, before you went into hiding, that your husband had given false papers to a German on the street, but if you were wearing a yellow star, how is it you were able to pass?

A: Yah...no. Sorry. Of course he gave them the correct passport with the J, but I I was scared to death that he would pull out the, the uh...yah...how would you call it...the imitation passport without the J, which to me was as I am telling the story, that was the good one, you know, so my mind skipped and I made from the imitation the good one, while at that time the correct one was the one with the J on it. So I was scared that he had given the one without the J on it.

Q: But the Germans still let you pass?

A: Yeah. When he saw that the passport had a J on it, for Jew, he let us go. He said, "What are you doing here?" And Harry said, "Oh, we are just...we belong...we...we're going back to the Creche. We were just going for a little stroll. We just walk around here and we go back." "OK," he said; but of course we never came back.

Q: So now it's late 1943 and you've gone into hiding.

A: Hiding just starts as we enter the house of one Mrs. de Swaan,[3] who was a a fantastic woman

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[3] Truus de Swaan was a woman in Amsterdam who collaborated with Boogard family to help find homes in the country for Jewish children.

who saved many many children; and, uh, as we came to her apartment, we had sent there some clothes in a valise and we heard immediately the valise was stolen because there was broken into our house, so we were without clothes. Uh, a few hours later came the man to pick me up, one of us up, to take to, uh, to somebody's house where we would...where I would be for the time being until Harry could join me, and then he would take us to our house where we would stay, so, uh, there was no time for clothes, for anything. I went with this man and he took me to a family. They had...they had nine children of their own and had just lost a child and wanted to take a Jewish child that just fit in the range of their children with the same color eyes and the same color hair at the age in between their children. That was a wonderful family.

Q: And where was this?

A: That was in (cough)...yah...the family name was [Ablossedam (ph)], and they lived in Lisse. No, Harry? I think so. I believe that. Yeah. [Wiewerdam (ph)] was their name. So I stayed there one day, and at night Harry came with the same man who had taken me there and now the man picked up Harry later because it was too dangerous to take up...to pick up two people at the same time. So he said, "I'm going to take you to your address where you will stay for the time being until the occupation is over." So he took us, and we--it was by bicycle, I believe--and we drove through part of the country--uh pasture, water, beautiful pasture, beautiful country, what you don't see...everything you don't see in Amsterdam--and we felt...oh, we could breathe. As if a brick fell from our heart and our shoulders. We were free. We stopped for a boat. Imagine a boat...half of the...half on the on the ground...a little bit over the water...a home boat. A houseboat, it is called...a houseboat. This man held goats. Oh, what a smell! It was...the smell was was horrendous, but we didn't mind it. It felt...we felt, we were free. As we entered that boat, the man said...the owner from the boat, said to "Uncle Hannis," the man who took us there, "What do you do? To bring me Jews again? I just had a raid. You...I cannot take them." Oh my gosh. There was...there was the brick again, you know. We felt terrible. "Uncle Hannis" said, "But you have to take them, even if it is only for tonight because I cannot take them back. It is too dangerous." We came in the boat. There's a boat...the cabin where where where he has his, uh, steering equipment and behind there a big room, big flowers, gladiolas on both sides, windows on the boat. As he explained to us the flowers were there to protect the people either from the side of the boat or the side of the land to look into the boat, because there were no curtains. So, uh, he said "Now, make yourself at home here. Here is a bed. I'll give you...I'll bring you some sheets and uh there is no danger here, but be careful. I have a little dog and if the dog barks, there's danger. Then quickly open this window on the water...on the water-side and jumped into the water, in the canal." So we were stiff with cold and fear again, and we put our clothes close behind us and we lie down on this bed. Who dares to undress, you know? And behold, the little dog started to bark, and we jump out of the water, out of the window, in the canal. Don't ask me, "Now, how or or what or how did you come back?" I don't know. I don't even remember. I remember that afterwards he went around with a...with a...with a flashlight and he said, "Tis nothing. Everything is OK. He must have smelled a rat or something. Come back." So I don't know how we got back, but, I don't know. Next morning...next morning:

"Uh, are you dry?" "Yes, we are dry." He said, "I'm getting water." Now, this is the story. It shouldn't be told because it is a horrible, terrible (laughter), dirty story; but listen...those people lived still in the country without gas, without electricity, without water, so what did they do? They had a big pot. They call it here in Holland a kroes [a pot used for drinking] pot, blue Delft pot or something. During the night this pot was used for all of us, to do you know what. In the morning we took this pot, held it over the boat, did like this in the canal, emptied it out, took his little rowboat, went with this pot across the canal. There was a pump on the other side of the canal, and he pumped water and that was our drinking water and our that we had to cook with and to do with, and we cooked with the water out of the canal. Well, it couldn't have been worse if you'd just come out of civilization, you know? Those people never washed themselves, uh...selves and they were used to this kind of life. But we were not, so not only did we have to look out of the windows that nobody was coming...it became a danger to stay there; so in the evening we had to take that little rowboat and row to a little isle in the canal where somebody had hidden some kind of a yacht, yacht...what you called then a yacht. A little speedboat or God knows what it was...a boat. So we sat...we went in that little canoe, ___ it wasn't, and we hurried with paddles, went to the island, and we heard plump, plump, plump, plump...and we thought, "My God...the Germans, you know...they are after us," because it was dark. We had to go there in dark. Nobody was allowed to see us. So when we came within the shelter of the of the... What is it? Loods where the boat was lying...some kind of a small warehouse or something...we settled...we had taken a blanket...we settled in the boat and then the rats came, all over, because what we had heard were rats. Well, there we stayed every night, and in the morning early we would be...we went back. At five o'clock in the morning we went back. It was now October, November...beginning of October I think. No...we were not so long there. We were not...we were about two, three weeks there. Uh one day somebody visited us from the underground--because people had applied with the underground through, through...I don't know but through people, because they needed tickets to get food, extra food from the underground--so a man came and said, "So," he said, "Nice to see you. You are staying here?" And Harry told them that I had gotten thinner in a few weeks, so many...shed so many kilos, and food wasn't there and it was so terribly scary and so dirty. "Couldn't you please get us another place to hide?" So he said, "I'll try...and do my best," he said--but he shouldn't have told, because it was really dangerous what he did--he said, "In my house," he said, "we have a number of Jews hiding; were under an older man, an old man;" and Harry said, "Who, who? What's his name?" He said, "Uncle Hank." Yah, "Uncle Hank." That was absurd. It was a name just taken from from anywhere. "Mr. Smith." So Harry went into his pocket and picked out a photo from his father and showed it to the man and said, "Would it be this man?" And he said, "Yes. That's him." And Harry said, "That's my father!" He said, "Let me see what I can do," and he left. The next evening he came back and he said, "I have it all arranged. The moment I stepped in the house, I said to my mother, 'I've been there and there and I met the children of "Oom Hank" and they are in need...they need another place as soon as possible. Can they come here?'" And the mother said, "If they are the children of 'Uncle Hank,' there's no question about it; they come here." So he and the brother came to pick us up during the night, one evening, and they had three bikes. One for Harry, and I went in the back of one of the men, and we drove through the polder. If you take the Haarlemmerweg, through the

Haarlemmermeer polder, and we drove and we drove and we drove. And finally we got to the little house, and came in there and there were...at the time there were seven people hiding, Jewish children and the families, and they were all sitting at a table with cups and saucers and we saw as we came in...heaven. Free. So they had already seven people. We were eight and nine. Then there came another woman with a baby just born who was...she had lain in the, in, in the grain to hide herself, so she was picked up and brought there too, and so we were with ten people, ten Jewish people there, a little baby and a son of theirs who was hiding from the Arbeitseinsatz. He didn't want to work in Germany. They had a room...imagine you come in the house. You have a door...you stand in the kitchen and you can see this place where I sit and that kitchen wasn't much bigger, about this and this behind me, and that's what they called the kitchen. There was a cupboard and there was an old sink, and that was the kitchen. Later on when we took out the bread, the bread had holes in it because the mice walked right through it, but it was delicious. Uh, we couldn't get up in the morning and wash ourselves because those were city manners. They didn't like that. That was unnecessary to get all the fat from your skin...that wasn't necessary. But they were beautiful, wonderful people. We have kept a relation with them. As a matter of fact we just came back from Canada, from the son. They visit us. Their life and our lives were from that time on just brother, sisters, father, mother. Fantastic.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: We stayed there for one and a half year, but...we couldn't stay there, as it was, because pretty soon we got raids from the Germans, from the Dutch pol...police; uh, so we had to do something. Harry...now the man of the house, the owner, he was a farm hand. They made a few guilders a day. They were very poor people. They had seven children. Their house was...the kitchen, a small living room, an upstairs, an attic, and that was all. So Harry said, "'Uncle Sam,' what could we do? Where could we go?" And "Uncle Sam" said, "I was in the cellar." There was no cellar, but there was a potato cellar that runs under the living room and that is to keep the potatoes from freezing in the winter. On top of there there were a few closets in which there were the beds. Bedsprei [cupboard bed], as they call it here. And he said, "I went in the potato cellar and on the right-hand side from the wall, I saw that there's maybe eighty...fifty centimeters wide, that cellar." He said, "In the wall is a crack. That might be the finger of God, that I have to make a door in that right hand wall; that if I have to hide somebody, they can go through that door in the wall underneath the living room." And that's what happened. Harry and and his sons, they started digging out all the dirt from under the house, the earth. They could only do that during the night because nobody was allowed to know that we were there, and they put straw in there. They brought straw in. So you...you go in the cellar. You crawl to the back. Then there is a door, not on the right, not in the floor, but on the right hand side in the wall, higher so you have to step over it, and then you come under the planks from floor. Now they couldn't dig more than seventy-five centimeters because there was the water. It was in the Haarlemmermeer polder; so when they hit the water, they put back a little bit more earth, dirt. "Uncle Sam" had straw, bundles of straw being put down, and that was our living quarter for one and a half year; and the only air, light we had--that was...that were those little things from the foundation. In each house you have

little opening on the bottom so the air can circulate under the floor, and that was where we stayed.

Q: "Uncle Sam" was also "Uncle Hank"?

A: No. "Uncle Sam" was Sam, the man of the house. "Uncle Hank" was Harry's father, who was also in hiding there, already taken there by the underground before we came. His name was Solly Cohen, but they called him "Uncle Hank" because just the word "Solly"...if it would slip. Nobody in that whole neighborhood was called "Solly." That was a Jewish name.

Q: So you met with your husband's father when you were there?

A: We had met before. He was...he was in the hospital in Amsterdam. As a matter of fact, uh when he went into hiding, that was the night they took all the patients out of the hospital. He was operated on. He had an operation and he walked off the operation table, walked out of the hospital some way, somehow, came outside, asked somebody to help him to get there and there and there, and there they helped him to get to the address where he wanted to go, people he could trust.

Q: After a year and a half of staying at this place, what happened then?

A: We couldn't walk because we had lain down all the time. We couldn't sit, because seventy-five centimeters is not high enough. Our food was brought through a door in the floor. They had an invalid daughter and whenever there was a raid she would sit on that door. However, the Germans found that door and went into that door but looked on the floor with their flashlights to find an opening to a hiding place....

TAPE #4

Q: What happened when the Germans came?

A: Uh, what happened to the...the Germans came. There were seven raids. There were incredible raids. There were raids that they closed off the whole area, the whole district. Why? Because, uh, there was another...there was a farmer, not far away--Boogard[4]--a very well-known name here, because of what he did during the war. He had sixty Jews and those sixty were hidden in the...in the fields and, uh, the Germans found out. They rolled up the whole thing. They took everybody, and our...the family where we were hiding, they had told the underground...they knew what was going on everywhere...to be safeguarded from raids they had told, "Look, we have no Jews anymore. They left. We don't know where they are, where they went. We have no Jews anymore." So pretty soon it was known all over the place that [Bryer (ph)] doesn't have Jews anymore. When they made this big raid and they beat the Jews--they beat one man so badly, telling him, "Where are Jews?! You have to tell us! You have to tell us!" His mind ran quickly and he said, "The [Bryers (ph)], they have Jews;" because he knew that they had gone there, they had left there. They would have told him there were no Jews, so he felt it safe, rather than mention another name, gave the name of people who did not have Jews anymore, you know. So they came over there with trucks and with raids and with guns and with everything and they they they searched the whole house and they screamed. We were lying there. We heard every word of it, and Harry's father at the time was in his sixties, lying there too; and a little boy seven year old lying against his shoulder, who later on told him, "'Uncle'...'Uncle Hank,' I heard your heart go rick-a-tick-a-tick-a-tick," you know. So, uh, the oldest son, the one we just visited in Canada now, they took...they hit him and they said, "There are Jews here in the house, and you tell us where they are!" And the mother stood up and she said, "We have no Jews in the house;" and the father said so; and the son said, "You can take me. You can kill me. We have no Jews in the house." "Come along!" he said, and they were doing as if they were going to kill him. They didn't kill him. They left. And we were all lying down. Unbelievable, where those people got the power.... Fantastic! Fantastic. So that was one of the raids. There were more. There were seven in total, the Dutch police included. They... they...they did their share, and, uh, but we made it. We made it. Now, I mean, to tell you the whole story, it would take hours to give you an account of what happened in that little house and who got sick and who didn't and how did they keep people from knowing that, uh, we were lying there; and we were not...we couldn't cough. We couldn't sneeze. We couldn't talk because if people would be in the house, they would hear us. There was only a plank, uh, keeping us away from everybody else, and, uh, but we came through and on the 4th of May, when the war was over, and they said, "You can come out now. It is all over. We heard it on the radio...," we came up. We couldn't come up, many of us; because the doctor had to come and take water out of our knees because we couldn't walk. We had, uh, to be down there for a year and a half. You will

[4] Boogard was a farming family who lived just south of Amsterdam and known for helping Jews, especially children, find homes during the war.

ask, "How did you go to the bathroom?" Well, they put down a coffee can or a cookies can or anything they put down and anybody would go and we would hold it up and they would pick it up but they would give it back again, and that's how we went to the bathroom, and that is how we were fed too. Bread...bread... bread. Downstairs. So, uh, we always tried to keep up the morale because then this one was down and that was down...there were children. The youngest was seven. He had to be kept busy. Uh one form of entertainment was counting fleas in the blanket in the morning. It...really, you laugh, but it really was..."How many have you? How many have you?" Because reading we didn't do. We couldn't. The...they were very, uh, Christian, most beautiful people; but the only thing that was being read in the house that was the Bible. And for the rest of us, absolutely nothing to keep you busy; so my husband, he knows the Bible by heart, the old as well as the new...and, uh, for the rest of us...ugh! I don't know how we passed the time. I don't know. I really don't know anymore. I couldn't tell. And uh the interesting story also is that the two people, husband and wife, in their fifties, they had different views--but both very religious. The man said, "I do it because in the Bible it says God gives the order to save people whether it be anybody." He said, "I would have saved the German who'd come...would he have come to my house for shelter, or a pilot, or a Jew...I give shelter." And "Tante Anne" ["Aunt Anne], her name--a marvelous woman--said, "I did it because I am sure I will go to heaven." That was their story.

Q: So you were never found? You were liberated then on the 4th of May?

A: When we were liberated we came upstairs. We went in the street; uh, finally you know, after the doctor came and we made it. We came out, and Harry's father, he couldn't take it anymore. He had run off the day before. Danger...danger... danger...but he couldn't. He just couldn't anymore; and we came up, all of us, with the family. And then we heard they were shooting, and the Germans are still coming and they were shooting left and right; and Harry and I said, "If it kills us, let them kill us, but we never go down again there. We have breathed air and we can't go down again there anymore." But it wasn't necessary. The Germans didn't come that far, and the next day, uh, we went to church. That was the biggest thing we could do for "Uncle Sam" and "Aunt Anne"--Annie is her name--and their children. We all went to church and that was their biggest, biggest, biggest thing; because now all the neighbors, everybody could see: "Look what the [Bryers (ph)] had. Look what they did. How fantastic! They had ten Jews. They hid ten Jews and they all came through!" Because what...whatever place you mentioned, mostly the Jews were taken. They were....you know, they were taken off until...and with them, they saved ten lives.

Q: What was your physical condition like, going to church?

A: Our...

Q: Wasn't it hard to move?

A: Our physical condition...it was...we walked over there. (laughter) It was tremendous. It

was...I don't know how many kilometers. It wasn't too far to go to church, but to us it was like we had walked from here to, to Paris, you know? We came back (imitating a panting sound)...haa...haa...haa. We were dead, but it was also such a satisfaction and because of the happiness. You were free...now you had to go and look for your parents, for your family, for a house, so somebody had, uh, a bicycle. He had gotten some money from a farmer to come and visit us once in a while. We went all through the years, and he came over right away with the bicycle. It was a bicycle without tires, you know. There were no tires anymore, so it was a hard bicycle, a big one...and he came over with that bicycle and he said, "Harry and Sieny, I've come to pick you up. You come with me to Amsterdam." So we sat and talked to Anne and "Uncle Sam" and everybody and said goodbye for the time being, and we went with him to Amsterdam, and there was shooting on the Dam and we were there at the dam when the shooting occurred, and we just could hid in a store--called at that time Peek & Kloppenberg [a Dutch department store] on the corner of Dam next to the palace. That was a horrible experience, too. You...everytime you think you are free and then boom...you are not free, you know? And then we saw the most horrible scenes. We saw...later on we saw people being shaved and that gave us the creeps. It gave us...oh it was so terrible to see that...what you can do to other people. Those people...that were women that had collaborated with the Germans ...

Q: People being shaved in Amsterdam?

A: Being shaved...their hair, being shaved in Amsterdam in the streets. It was like a like a...a Koninginnedag [the Queen's birthday]...on Queen's Day there is a...everybody is out in the street celebrating, flags, and this was part of the celebration... shaving their heads and and uh, uh...yah... terrible, you know.

Q: Who shaved whose heads?

A: The Dutch people shaved...the girls who had collaborated with the Germans, had gone with them, had gone out with them, had worn beautiful clothing during the war while the others had nothing; so they were...in every street you could see a scene where somebody were...was being shaved.

Q: But in other words it was one of these Dutch collaborators who was being shaved?

A: Yah. The girls...mostly girls. Uh, that is how you got the short hair style after the war, because before that grew in, that took a long time, and they made a whole new style out of it, and, uh, we couldn't see it. It hurt us so much because to...from verneder [the humiliation] to, to another human being...I, I cannot recall the word for verneder in English right now. That goes against your strength, against your...no matter what they did, you know? Give them a trial but not this...not not...so anyhow we went home, at least was...what was home once, because there were other people now. We couldn't enter the house. We were not allowed to go in. We couldn't get back the property. Now I talk about much later. We had to fight. We had to take a lawyer. We didn't get it back until much much later. Uh, friends took us in.

Clothes we didn't have. Somebody gave us three hundred guilders...the same man in Deurne, from shoe factory, gave us three hundred guilders to buy, uh, second, third, fourth-hand bed to sleep on. The time after the war was so terrible...hunger. We didn't have food. We had to stand in line to get food because somebody was nice enough to give us...because we were not registered. We were...we were...we were people--where did we come from? He gave us some money my father had given to him. We went to the bank later on with that money. The bank said, "Where did you get that money?" We went...we got an interrogation, and, uh, these, uh, biljets [bank notes], they are not valid anymore. So sorry. Oh...the time after the war...it was terrible. Was it not for our friends, we wouldn't have got through that time. We wouldn't have got through it.

Q: You have some pictures here? You want to?

A: Yah. I have....

Q: Do you want to show them?

A: To give you an example, a cousin came back from a concentration camp with her little boy. Her husband didn't come back. Her family didn't come back. She came to Amstelveen. The government gave her ten guilders for her and her little boy and said, "OK, you are free now. Go on your way. Goodbye." She come from concentration camp. She got ten guilders. She had to find her way to Amsterdam. She had to find, to beg in the neighborhood. Please, would anybody take her up? That was the reception there was because there was no understanding. Of course nobody knew how...what had happened maybe, but that was the welcome back...after the war. You had to fight your way from beginning to end, to get shelter, to get clothing, to get anything, everything. It was terrible...yah. And we stayed here because, Harry's father was here and he spoke Dutch and he didn't want to leave and he was broken. Otherwise, we would have said goodbye and we would have left.

Q: When did you find out what had happened to your family?

A: That we found out already while we were in hiding because Harry understood English, spoke English; and they had hidden a radio within a shelf of hay...in hayshelf, and that was dangerous to do, but, uh, they did it anyhow. But if they keep ten people, they, they, they would certainly keep a radio to keep posted, so Harry heard over the English radio what went on in the concentration camps in Germany. The whole world knew--at that time already, in '43. And they didn't do anything. If they just would have bombed the little train track from Westerbork or to Westerbork...I don't care...from Amsterdam to Westerbork or from Westerbork to the border...I don't care. They should have thrown a bomb there. Nothing happened, because I, I still feel it...I couldn't care. I say, I dare to say it, because the Jews were not important to the rest of the world. I'm bitter over that. I'm terribly bitter over it, because I believe it...so many, so many lives could have been saved. So many lives could have been...if somebody would have thrown a bomb. If somebody...you know...the English, the Americans...the Dutch. It's so easy to say, "Yes. Yes sir." Well, that's our story, really, in

short.

Q: Sieny, is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: We live with this every day. If you put two Jews together, here in Holland, who went through it, and they start with a birthday party, they end mourning, because this is with us every day. And our second generation, our children, they got their guilt too, and I'm not talking only about our children. I'm talking about the children from the people who went through it, because it is...there are no words to describe it, and our future is completely...future...we try to be happy. We try...we live and there are good things happening, thank God, but this is the overall most important thing that happened in our lives. We can't forget. We try to forget; we cannot. And that's the sad thing, because you live with it always. People have no idea what it means to live without family, without parents, without brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents. The generation right after us have nobody. They have the parents and further nobody. Nobody. If the parents die, over. No...it's horrible.

Q: What happened to your sister?

A: My sister has two chi...two sons. She got married after the war, with this same man I told you about. One lives in Israel--does his duty every three months--he goes in the army and has five little daughters. And another son they have, also married. Yah. Something to be very thankful for. Our children have no children.

Q: You had mentioned a trip to Germany.

A: Yah. I went to Germany on a business trip because I worked for French company, and I had to go to the, to the fair. And I made myself a commitment; and I told myself I will go under one circumstance [condition], and that is: "Sieny, if you tell every German you meet, what they did in the past, what country they were under Hitler, and what they will do it, what they will do with it in the future." And I did. I did. I took my chance and there is not one single German I spoke to for the business or I told them the whole story. I asked them, "Please sit down. I have to tell you something. And I want you to listen to me." And they did; so at least that's my only satisfaction for having had to go Germany. I wouldn't set a step over the border, ever, for vacation.

Q: What year was this that you had gone?

A: In '83. 1983.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: Let's hope there will be a world of peace. Let's hope this will never happen again. And that is the reason I told this story, because I realize there are so few left that I saw that this is a

necessity to do this for posterity. People should know.

Q: Thank you. Could you tell me about some of the pictures in there?

A: (Shows an album). Uh, this is the Creche, the building. This is the Directrice, she is a wonderful woman. And what I did not tell yet on the next page you see this child. He was a foundling and that gave her the idea to save the Jewish children, because if he was a foundling and nobody knew....

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: You have some photos you wanted to show us?

A: Yah. I have...I have them in here. (Showing photographs) [(1)] This building is the Creche as it used to be. It doesn't exist anymore as it is now. [(2)] This is Directrice Pimentel, and she is the (clearing throat)...she was the Directrice always there. [(3)] Here are some pictures of the Creche with the former onder, subdirectrice, and [(4)] that's me with a child, children, children with some names. I still have them because they were on the back of the picture, and [(5)] this is the Directrice again, Miss Pimentel, with a boy that was laid there, that was put as a foundling on the steps of the Creche, not exactly at the Creche but it was someplace else. It was found and it was taken there, and she took it in as a foundling, and...

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: (Showing photographs) So this is the Directrice. She used to be the Directrice since 1926 or '28, something like that; and, uh, here are some pictures of her and her sub, subdirectrice, the manager; and these are some pictures of the children. That's myself as a child. Here I still have some names of children that were deported, because they were on the, on the back of the picture...February 1942. These two. This is the Directrice with a child that was brought to the Creche that was a foundling, and that was really the first foundling there was and she (pointing to the photograph of the directrice and the child) was...she fell in love with the child. It was an adorable baby and she regarded it as her child and she was the one who took care of it. She...it was her child. She took care of it. Nobody else. Here he grew up. Here he was a little bit bigger, and, uh, he got a lot of toys. But there was a German also...one of the Germans who was taking away everybody else, brought toys to this child, but in the end he took him too and put him on transport. Can you understand that? And these are pictures taken in the Creche but these are not children from during the Holocaust but some of them might have come there anyhow. And this is the certificate which allows me to go to the...across the street to the Schouwburg, etc., etc., etc., because I needed that.

Q: Thank you.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: (Showing photographs) [(1)] This is the original building, the Creche, as it used to be. It doesn't exist anymore. [(2)] Uh, this here is the Directrice. She was the Directrice there from something like 1926 or 1928. She was in charge of the whole operation, because it used to be a home for children whose parents worked. [(3)] Uh, this is...these are a few pictures from the Directrice and her and her...the woman who was just under her who took care of everything, who was not allowed to work there anymore because she was not Jewish. She has to...she had to leave in 1941.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION (IN DUTCH)

A: (Showing photographs) [(3)] This is the director with her sub who wasn't allowed to work there anymore after 1941 because she was not Jewish. [(4)] Then here, very unclear, is a Jewish girl who came in her place, [Ver Boaz (ph)]. She was also gassed. She didn't come back. [(5)] That's me with one of...with this baby and there is another baby. You...you can see how small they were when they came there. [(6)] Here are six children with name because the name happened to be on the back of the picture. That is how I kept it. [(7)] These too. [(8)] And this is...these are pictures of a foundling...this...uh this baby was a foundling and taken to the Creche and uh actually this was the first foundling that was taken there; and the Directrice was very fond of the boy, and she called him Remy because there is a book called "Remy"...that is...that goes...this is over a little boy who was alone in the world and he also is alone in the world and she found him. And she took care of him. [(9)] Here he grows up. He is a little bit older here. [(10)] Here he plays. He got a little...he got a lot of toys from everybody. He was the little favorite and there was also a German uh who picked up the children, threw them in the trucks and didn't care for anybody and this child he brought...

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION (IN DUTCH)

...and this little boy, he brought even toys. And, uh, after his time was up, according to the Germans, he put him on transport too. I've heard he came back. I've heard he didn't come back. I don't know what happened to the little boy. [(11)] And here are pictures of how it used to be in the Creche. Uh, little boys, little girls, eating together, playing together. Here are some of the people that worked there. [(12)] And this is a certificate which says that I was allowed to work there during the war, which permitted me to go to the...back and forth from the Creche to the Schouwburg.

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(Closeups of photographs)