[1] **Ed Lessing**

My family has lived in Holland for about 250 years, starting with a Lithuanian immigrant who came to Holland, and changed his name from Lessert, in the late 1700's, to Lessing. And from there on we were all Lessings, and mostly lived in Amsterdam. My great-great-grandfather, and my great-grandfather and my grandfather all lived in Amsterdam, and the last generations were mostly tailors: my great-grandfather was a tailor (although he also, later on, rented formal clothing), and my grandfather was a tailor, but he worked himself up to foreman in a famous clothing factory in Amsterdam – the first one to introduce mass-production systems.

My father was the first one to actually sort-of jump out: he became a musician, and he left Amsterdam and started working around, and so forth. So that's sort-of the basic background of my family: Dutch-Jewish family through generations, with many side-branches, aunts and uncles and great-uncles, and nephews and nieces and so on and so forth – all Dutch.

It was a very large family. I didn't know all of them, but I met some of them. But we lived separately, mostly in other cities but Amsterdam; so once in a while I got to see some of the family members.

It's interesting. My grandfather Lessing lived in Amsterdam, as I said, and we'd go and travel there every once in a while, a couple of times a year. We'd go on the steam-train to Amsterdam, which would take hours and hours and hours. And Isaac . . . we said he was a "typical

[1] 10:12.59.23

[2]Lessing." A typical Lessing meant that you never stayed at home if you didn't have to; you always went out for some entertainment. So we'd go to my grandfather and he'd always have tickets to some show or to the circus, and we'd all go there and have a great old time. And we'd stay overnight. The thing I remember most about him was that when I was a little boy I would in the morning jump in his bed. And he has all these games he would make (it's sort-of funny: all the games that I did with my children later on) – make a mountain out of his knees and we would slide down, or it would collapse suddenly . . . It was wonderful. We'd play in bed with these games – the same games I played with my children later on. I'm pretty sure my son probably plays it with his children.

And then, he taught me some old-fashioned rhymes on your fingers, you know; or little rhymes that made no sense at all. And I remember some of those; they were wonderful (later on I thought they were wonderful; at the time I thought they were . . . you know).

That is the view of a child of my grandfather. In the real sense he was a real scoundrel. You ask me what did he teach me about life? Nothing very profound. He was a man, in general, I would say, who didn't look back, and he didn't look very far forward. He lived for now, like many of the Jews of those days did. He didn't have any money. Life was to be lived right now.

By the way, I shouldn't forget: like, my great-grandfather, he was an amateur theatrical buff. He would organize little theatrical events in the house. He told me about those; it was pretty wonderful. I shouldn't forget

[2] 10:15.25.15

[3]to tell you. They would form a little theatrical group that would rehearse on Sunday, because they worked six days a week (tailors, you know, worked six days a week from sun up to sun down), and on Sunday was the only day they could get a little group together; and they would rehearse amateur plays for various occasions.

I'll tell you about one, because I have a million family stories, and this is a funny one that I remember – my grandfather telling that he had written an "ABC" to honor a fellow-tailor, I think (or somebody who gave him work). What they did was they'd write an ABC: "A is the Affection by which we hold you" (I'm doing this in English, but it was in Dutch, of course); "B is the Bravery of you to giving us all this work," and so on. And every member of the group had a letter (there were twenty-six letters). As my grandfather told it, they had one guy who was kind of a messenger; he was a little "challenged," today they say (at home we would say he was backward). He got the letter Q: "Q is the quality of the work that you demand from us," or something like that.

Anyway, then came the day of the performance, and this man was seated . . . My grandfather had them all lined up on the little stage (it had a curtain). "A was the Affection . . .", and "B . . .," and everybody stepped forward, then they went off. And it came to Q, and this guy stepped forward. My grandfather was the prompter behind the curtains: "Q!"

Nothing.

"Q!"

[3] 10:17.43.05

[4]Finally, as my grandfather told me, this little guy turned around and he said: "There ain't no Q, Goddamit!" and he walked off the stage. So, this is the kind of little stories that have been in the family about the theatrical adventures ….

My grandfather helped us in the beginning in our hiding adventures. And, after I got married and we went to Israel and we came back to Holland in 1955-56, for a year in Holland, he had found a little apartment for us, which was very difficult. He was still around. He actually came to visit once here in the United States, when we still lived nearby in another village, so my children got to meet him.

[With the theatrical productions} I'm talking about the 1910's, 1920's maybe, maybe the early 1930's [before my time].

I think I tried to express [my grandfather's attitude towards life] in saying that he lived for now. He would go out and say, "Come along, and we're going to buy for lunch; we're going to buy pickles and smoked fish and go in . . ." It was a whole Jewish neighborhood where my grandfather lived. It was nice to go with my grandfather, and he'd buy stuff . . .

He and his brother, my great-uncle Morris, would frequently get together. Morris lived in Utrecht and had this clothing store (also sort-of a tailor: he started out as a tailor; had a clothing store). And Morris would come and visit, sometimes the same time as we were there. And I remember that Morris and my grandfather said, "Well," (like about ten o'clock in the morning Sunday morning) "we're

[4] 10:20.38.06

[5]going out for a walk." Then they'd get their canes and walk out the front door.

I remember once asking my grandfather's second wife: "Where do they do this walking?"

She said, "They don't do any walking. They get on the street-car; they go to Hotel Americain; they sit down and they have coffee."

This is accepted. Anyone knew that. They didn't go walking. This is sort-of life, you know. You went to the Hotel Americain; you sat down there outside in the summer; and you had coffee, and you schmused . . . Life was to be lived by now; there was no deep philosophies about it. So I'm trying to paint that picture of it: people who lived now; they lived by their wits.

I can tell you one [of Grandfather's rhymes]. *{Quotes one in Dutch]* The translation is:

Under the bridge at Unkie Brunkie's
There they sell oak wood.
But that wood won't burn:
Oh! What terrible.
Don't buy from Unkie Brunkie.

Makes no sense, of course.

There were others. I don't know if I remember them.

[Quotes another in Dutch] [Translates, using fingers of one hand:]

'To bed, to bed,' said Thumbalot.
'First we have to eat something,' said
[I forget the name of this guy].
'Where can we find it?' said Long John (longest finger).

[5] 10:23.29.28

[6]'In grandmother's cabinet,' said Ringaling (the ring finger).

'Then I will tell her,' said the little finger."

Little old Dutch rhymes.

I think I told you that I didn't get to see much of my father, because when other fathers came home he went out to work. There was one summer (I forget the year: I have it in my photo album – it must have been in the end 'thirties) that my father got a job in Sandfurt(?), which is a beach resort not very far from Amsterdam, and he played there in a fancy bar and restaurant. So my parents rented a ground-floor apartment, and I went to school there, actually: maybe for a couple of weeks or a month I went to public school in Sandfurt. And, strangely, I remember suddenly that I got involved there: when that school ended for the summer vacation, there were phys. ed. competitions. You had to do the far jump and the high jump and stuff like that, and running. And I competed in that, and I actually got a diploma, and we were very proud.

But for the rest of the summer, my two brothers were there (they were very little then). It must have been about the year 1938, come to think of it. We'd go to the beach every day, if the weather was nice (which it isn't very often in Holland). We'd go to the beach, and we'd sit there in our bathing suits, and my dad would come around one o'clock or so and he'd join us for fifteen minutes. But since he was all dressed up, he'd put down a newspaper to sit on, and he'd sit in his tuxedo, you know, and his very shiny black shoes. He'd sit with us on the beach. And I never thought it was strange, to have my father sit in a

[6] 10:26.44.03

[7]tuxedo on the beach with us. It was normal, because practically the only time I ever saw my father he was always in a tuxedo, always dressed up.

I remember also, that summer I got a little pair of roller skates. There was a forgotten, little roller-skate rink. Man! Did I roller-skate that summer! I got to be so good! Wonderful. So that was one summer with my father somewhere, and my two brothers. We all had bikes. I have some pictures in my photo album that show us coming back from a tremendously hot day, a heat-wave day, my little brothers and me and my mother.

It is difficult to [say] what was important to me about my mother, because it gets all distorted by the view that I have now of her, of course. When I was a young boy and a teenager, from what I look back now, she wasn't important at all to me. But she must have been, because she was the one who was home when I came home from school. But I don't remember her as a very benevolent, wonderful, warm woman – although she was, she was a . . . Her emotions were right out in the open.

I don't know if she was a very good mother. First of all, I wasn't supposed to be there, to begin with. You know, I was conceived before they were married, and I was always told that my parents always deceived me with their wedding-date: they always put it a year later*[sic]*, so that I would be legitimate. This went on until I was in my forties, for God's sake. In any case, my mother was rather strict, and loving, I guess. But then, pretty soon, she had more babies. She had a child: I got a little brother, and she had to take care of him. Then two more brothers

[7] 10:29.27.13

[8]came along, later on. So I became sort of . . . I was eight and ten years removed from my other brothers, so I was really kind of a loner. And I remember my mother more as a sort-of avenging angel as anything else.

So, it's funny, I don't have much to tell you about my mother, pre-War. [But during the War I came to respect in my mother] great strength, enormous strength; strength to go out and battle the world, this dark world - for her family, for her children, for her husband, for herself. It's unimaginable, at this time, what that situation was. I sometimes try to portray it in speeches, but it's almost impossible. We're talking about a time that I can only best describe as dark-gray clouds hanging low over the land, a dark world that when the sun went down, the lights went out and there were no street lights or anything: the world was pitch-black, and full of danger; and not just a simple danger but a danger of getting killed, getting murdered, you know.

So, in this atmosphere, in this darkness, this threatening, horrible time, she was a tower of strength. She went out, found hiding-places, actually arranged to be with her children for a weekend, or with her husband, to escape the little room in which they were hiding. And then, of course, she saved my life. She saved my life, and my brothers' and my father's lives, by just plain being herself, strong Jewish woman who wasn't going to just give in, you know.

When I look back on the pre-War time, I realize that she always had that strength, because before the war there are points that I know about where she showed also

[8] 10:32.25.27

[9]strength. I have to go back, for instance, to 1929, when we emigrated from Holland to the United States for three years, returning in 1932. We emigrated to the United States, my father and mother and their three-year-old little Eddie, and my father got tuberculosis; had to be taken into what they called a sanatorium to try to get better. So she farmed me out to someone and went to work in a travel agency as a secretary, and must have been very good. She was very good at taking charge, and always that strength was always there.

This [isn't] apropos; these stories come up but I can't help it. I was just telling Karla again, when we talk about travel agents and so on, because of our traveling on vacation and so on, I all of a sudden remember - when we were in Grenada just now, I remembered that my mother worked a travel agency of Mr. Allen, in Boston. Mutter (as I always called her) always told the story of the letter that came to her desk as a secretary from one of Mr. Allen's clients. The note said: "Dear Mr. Allen, I don't know anyone whom I hate enough to let him suffer one of your travels."

And my mother was petrified, and Mr. Allen said, "What is that letter?"

And my mother said, "Well, it's nothing."

And Mr. Allen said, "Let me read that."

So she had to hand it over to Mr. Allen. And Mr. Allen read it, and he said: "That's wonderful! Have that framed!" And he hung it up in his office.

To us this was America: only in America would something like that happen. Mr. Allen thought it was

[9] 10:34.53.27

[10]hilarious. "I don't know anyone whom I hate enough to let him suffer one of your tours." (Allen Tours was the name.)

Anyway, my mother worked there to try and provide, to keep things going. After we returned to Holland, she opened a little millinery store with a friend, in a house some place. They opened on Saturday afternoon; by Saturday night all the hats were gone. They had to work like crazy to make new hats out of scraps and stuff. By Monday they had new hats, and they couldn't keep up with the demand. My father went, at the same time, on another venture. I don't want to get into that story because it's long and it's extremely funny, but it totally failed . . . together with my grandfather Isaac, and my uncle Jacob. They went to open something else.

But my mother was highly successful at these things. Later on, they had to close the store because somebody bought that house. Later on, somebody sold them on the idea of selling motor oil to garages. It was a new kind of motor oil called graphite oil (nobody had ever heard of it then). Both my mother and my father decided things were bad in the music field and they would both go out. They had, both, a beautiful order book they got from the motor oil company; they'd have a sample can of oil with them in a case, and they'd go out and sell oil. My mother came home with orders for, I don't know, five hundred dollars worth of oil. My father came home with nothing, even though I remember him standing in the living room practicing his speech: "This oil is unusual; it has never been seen before." But as my father told, he would go in a garage, and the guy was always lying under a car, and he'd speak to

[10] 10:37.06.16

[11]the guy's legs the speech that he had learned; and he didn't sell anything. But my mother came home with orders.

Then after that, they got involved in selling the first Yellow Pages in Holland – ad space. They both got an order book, again. Pop went out in the morning; Mutter went out in the morning. Mutter came with an enormous . . . three thousand guilders worth of ads; Pop came home with nothing. She could do anything.

So, how do I remember my mother? From all these stories, and from the war-time. But as a mother, not too much. As a woman who was strong and you had to watch your step as a kid, otherwise it was a paw right in the kisser, as Jackie Gleason used to say! I remember her beating me up with a clothes hanger once - yeah - and I was fourteen years old then: because she thought I had lied, and I hadn't (it was very interesting). But anyway . . . She was very . . . So she cried after this – cried, and cried and cried.

So, it wasn't all roses, but she was . . . And I don't know how much you want me to tell you about my mother, but if you want to hear more there's one lovely story that I could wind up with about her. Later on (I'm talking now about 1960's, probably '70's), my father taught music at the Putney School in Putney, Vermont. He would go there every week by Greyhound Bus, and he'd stay overnight. But Mutter would go along at graduation day, because there was a famous speaker there – to hear the speaker. (Putney School is a fairly well-known school.) And, you know, it was a festive day, and they'd have lunch there.

[11] 10:39.34.27

[12]That time that Mutter went with Pop, Eleanor Roosevelt was the speaker at the graduation, and Pop would play with students in the orchestra, you know – "Pomp and Circumstances," things like that. And Pop was finished, and the orchestra was done; the graduation was over. They'd played "Pomp and Circumstances," I guess, a couple of times. And Pop packed up his cello and looked around for Mutter. He couldn't find her among all the milling parents with their students, with the caps and gowns. So he went to look for her, and he went to the administration building, which is an old Victorian house. He went there; he thought she might be there, resting or something. . . . [break]

This is about Eleanor Roosevelt and her graduation speech at the Putney School. So, my father went looking for her, and he went to the administration building of the Putney School. This was an old Victorian house, and as you came in there was, like, a little parlor, and there was what used to be the living room, I guess. As my father came in, carrying his cello, he heard my mother's voice; he heard her talking to someone; he didn't want to disturb. And he looked around into the parlor, and there was Mutti talking to Mrs. Roosevelt and telling to her, "Well, if you're so tired with all this travel, what you should do, you should drink more tea. That's very good for you. That helps me, so it should help you."

Mrs. Roosevelt would say, "Yeah, that might be a good idea."

[12] 10:45.02.22

[13]So this was her way. It didn't matter: you could be Eleanor Roosevelt; you could be the grocer: she talked the same way.

So, she could be difficult; could be insistent upon things that drove you crazy. But all in all, of course, in hindsight, she became the saint of the family, the angel who rescued all our lives. How do you ever repay anything like that? What do you say about a woman like that?

And, of course, for me . . . I was just a wee complication in Grenada, and I took along some CD's to listen to, with earphones, and my CD player, and I listened to the last songs that she heard, that I had sent to her. I don't know if I have told you this story about her death? Would that be appropriate to tell here?

My mother had gone into the hospital for an intestinal operation, which was successful, but she had a slight heart attack. This was in Springfield, Massachusetts. She got a slight heart attack there, and so she had to stay for a while. Her doctor, as always, was Dr. Greenspan, and one Friday evening we got a call from Dr. Greenspan that said, "Ed, would you please come up; take your mother out of the hospital."

I said, "What happened?"

He said, "Well, she threatened me."

I said, "What do you mean, she threatened you?"

"She said, 'I want to get out of this hospital, and if you don't let me go and take me out of here, I'm going to die and it'll be your fault,'" she had said to him.

"So," he said, "you'd better get your mom out of here."

[13] 10:47.12.28

[14]Just like everyone else, Greenspan was no match for my mother. So we drove to Springfield, my wife Karla and I, and we arrived on Saturday, and we visited her and said Sunday morning we would take her out. And Sunday morning we came, and my cousin Hans was there with me, and my father, and Karla and I, and we got my mother out of the hospital, and we drove home, a ten-minute ride. She was very happy, you know – walked into the home, and there was the dog, Flippy(?). (All their dogs were called Flippy. There's a whole story connected with the very first Flippy. The very first Flippy stopped Churchill in his tracks. But that's another story! Let's stick with my mother for a second.}

So she walked into the house, and Flippy was there, and the cat was there, Sam (not my own Sam – the previous Samantha), and she was very happy. I said, "Why don't you lie down on the couch [in the little parlor]. It's been a hectic morning; maybe try to sleep some."

"Yes," she said. "That's a good idea."

So she put her head down on the pillow, put a blanket, and the dog jumped on, and she was very happy. That lasted about a minute and a half, and then she jumped up and she said: "And now I'd some coffee with real cream!"

"Okay!"

That was all that lasted of that nap. And then she sat upright and she said, "Play the record you sent me."

Now, I had sent a record to her, an L.P., a series of songs by Schumann. It's called "*Dichterliebe*" – the love of a poet. These were songs . . . She was an amateur singer, and she sang some of those songs (not the whole

[14] 10:49.13.17

[15]cycle; the whole cycle is maybe about ten or twelve songs, *Lieder)*. And I had sent her this before she went into the hospital. She said, "Oh, I saw the album that you sent; play it now."

I said, "Mutter, the whole house is full of neighbors and friends . . ." – and my cousin was there with his wife, … people walking around. I said, "Later!"

"No," she said, "now. Put it on now."

Well, I didn't argue with Mutter, so I went, and I put it on the record-player, and we listened. I sat next to her, lying on that couch, and she would sing with a broken voice along with some of the Lieder, so dear to her and to me, a beautiful song-cycle. (I listened to them again in Grenada, and cried [I always cry when I listen]}. Anyway, she sang along with a half-broken voice – she remembered some of the words. And then my father, I think, had made some food, or one of the neighbors.

You know, it's interesting: I fed her like she had fed me; I had a little bowl and fed her. And she ate. And then, it was about time for me and Karla and me to go home, you know, to drive back to Hastings. And I said, "Mutter, we've got to go."

Oh, she was very busy talking with the neighbors about what bulbs she was going to plant, you know . . . I said, "Goodbye; we'll talk to you tomorrow on the phone."

So Karla and I drove home. And we got back here on Sunday evening, and I got a call from my daughter Noa(?), at five o'clock in the morning, that my mother had died in her bed. … that even that she arranged herself; she died next to her husband in bed. She had said to Greenspan, "If

[15] 10:51.44.27

[16]you don't get me out of this hospital it'll be your fault if I die here." And she went home and died.

So, I have that album here; but I also have it on the CD now, and I took it along with me. And whenever I play those songs . . .

Interesting sidelight: Some five years ago, a play came on off-Broadway. It was called "The Wicked Old Songs" – by an American playwright. And I read in the paper the review: they said it was very interesting; it was based on the song-cycle *"Dichterliebe."* I said to Karla, "That I've got to see." So we got tickets for it.

It's a lovely play. I have the manuscript here now. It was a lovely play, and it was the whole story . . . The Holocaust was in there also. I was very moved by it, because here were the songs my mother loved so much, all intertwined with the story of a young pianist who goes through Vienna to get special lessons from some famous Nazi-type, I think, teacher. It winds up with another man who . . . (it's like a substitute). I don't want to go into details too much, but, the substitute, he's there, and the young man says: "Well, I'm going to make a side-trip to Dachau, to the concentration camp." And he says to this Viennese man, who is teaching him piano or something - he says: "Dachau. I'm going to Dachau."

And he says, "Oh yes, place for dead Jews."

[blank portion of tape]

. . . with the cantor, played a piece for flute and . . . {My brother is not a flautist. Both my brothers were philosophy professors; Fred changed into a therapist. He's a natural-born musician; he can pick up the flute.)

[16] 10:55.12.24

[17]This play, "Wicked Old Songs" - "*Boese Alte Lieder*" – it's one of the songs out of the song-cycle, and the playwright named the play after that one. And it refers, of course, to the wicked old songs about the past and the Holocaust. Anyway, the young man finds out about(?) this man (he said, "Oh, Dachau – a place for old dead Jews") at the end of the play. He has a number on his arm. So, even though it didn't start to tell about the Holocaust, the Holocaust gets in that song.

Anyway, I wrote to the playwright a letter, telling him what I just told you about my mother and how she died, how these were the last music she heard. And I got a letter back from him which said:

> "Last night was the last night of performance, and I called the whole cast on stage, and I read them your letter, and they all cried."

Still, my mother's strength, I guess. So, anyway, all this to do with my mother's legacy, sort of.

I should tell you here, just as apropos, that music was extremely important in our family. My father was a musician, of course, and my mother was an amateur singer of German Lieder, French Lieder. She sang for the Jewish Brigade, soldiers, right after she came back from Algiers. I played the piano in a manner of fashion; I'm really on the lower scale of the musicians. My brother Art is practically a professional cellist; my brother Fred is a wonderful flute-player. His wife, Rose, is an accomplished pianist. My mother's brother, Abraham, who lived with us right us right after the ending of the war, who came from Indonesia with his family, was a wonderful singer of

[17] 10:58.56.07

[18]Lieder, just like his sister was. His wife was a cellist. My cousin Liesbet, who died recently, graduated from a conservatory of music. Her brother Brom, son of Abraham, cousin of mine who lives in Ann Arbor, is a professional pianist, graduated Conservatory in The Hague. All these in the family; all that music in the family. So there was always music in the family.

Okay, I think that's as much as I could tell you about my mother. And there's much more to tell.

It's funny, when there's a little bit of philosophy about this interview, is that I realize . . . I've done interviews myself, and I realize that it is totally impossible to understand the life of a family during an interview. You get a glimpse, you know, and it's probably a distorted glimpse, but at least that's what we try to do.

[As a teenager] a major hobby was reading. I was an enormous reader; I read and read and read and read. I went to the library in Delft where we lived, and I read endless volumes about science and nature. I read all the Jules Verne stories – who knows, rows of them – and my father always complained: "Ah! You're always reading." We went to the beach (I think I've told you), and there we were, sitting in our bathing suits, and Pop said later, "I looked at you and there you were; you'd found in the sand a little piece of yellow newspaper, torn off, and there you were, reading it." He said, "Go in and play with the sand and the sea . . . reading!"

So, I did a lot of reading. I've always had an immense interest in flying and airplanes. I still have. I was yesterday in a bookstore, and there was a book that

[18] 11:01.26.03

[19]opened up gatefolds of World War II airplanes, and I'm looking through that thing . . . still interested in flying and airplanes. To touch an airplane is still magic to me. I guild model gliders, big gliders, you know, and sail them. Wonderful. That was a hobby. I was like other kids: I had a stamp album at one time. Girls – I always had a deep interest in girls. Women, later on.

As a teenager, what else? I think that's about it.

[Living in Delft] was wonderful. We moved in 1939 from big city The Hague to small-town Delft - Delft, an ancient little city full of canals and bridges: some people called it the Venice of the North. But it changed me. God knows, I probably would have been a vagrant or something or would have been in jail if I had stayed in The Hague. We did things with my buddies, you know, that we weren't supposed to do. But once in Delft, everything changed. I somehow or other changed with the town. Loved it; it's a lovely town. I can recommend to anybody who wants to visit Holland – go walk around in Delft, the old town: it's beautiful.

I think it's also the first time we lived in a real house. We had only lived in apartments. This time we had a whole house, three floors. My parents had a store downstairs, a clothing store, and on the second floor we had the living space, and the kitchen, and on the third floor were the little bedrooms: my two brothers and I had a little bedroom. So, we all fell in love with Delft; everyone does. And we have funny stories about Delft, and wonderful stories about Delft. And, we lived in Delft *before* we went into hiding; we were in hiding for two and a

[19] 11:04.00.07

[20]half years; we came back to Delft – before we emigrated to the United States. So, it's some very happy memories there.

In 1937 there was the International Jamboree of Boy Scouts in Holland. [Sings a Dutch Jamboree Scout song – "In 1937, the Jamboree comes to Holland"] And I had a Jewish kid in my elementary class. I must have been eleven year old. And this kid in my class, Solly Hammer, Jewish kid, said, "Would you be interested to come to spend a day with my Cub Scouts? It's a lot of fun."

I said, "All right." And I went with him.

Unbeknownst to me, it was a Jewish Cub Scout group. In Holland, Scouting was divided by religion, very often. You had the Catholic Scouts, and the Protestant Scouts, and then there was this one Jewish group, T.O.P. I joined them, and I would go out Sunday afternoons (all the Boy Scouts in Holland met on Saturdays, but that was Shabbat, so the Jewish group met on Sundays). Boy Scouts in Holland are called Pathfinders, and my father, irreverent as always, when I'd come home, he'd say, "Oh, did you find the path yet?"

People always said, "Your parents always make fun of you kids." Karla said that; she wasn't very happy about that: "You're always the butt of the jokes with your parents." And yet, my mother would go into stitches about things.

I can't even translate some of the stuff that my parents laughed about.

Anyway, I went with the Cub Scout Group. And then I found out that I was Jewish, actually, for the first time,

[20] 11:06.56.24

[21]because they said at one point – my buddy said, "Well, we're having a Seder."

So I said: "What's a Seder?"

And he said, "A Pesach."

And I said: "What a Pesach? Explain to me."

We had the Seder in the evening, with the whole thing: the Cub Scouts in uniform, the Boy Scouts in uniform, with their leaders, all in the shorts and the hats, and then there was the Senior Scouts. These were men over fifty years old! – with the short pants, and the hats, and the sticks . . . – all Jews. The leaders, the Boy Scouts, everyone, our leaders, all were(?) . . . I have a photograph of that whole group.

So I went to my first Seder. All I remember is that it lasted very long, a helluva long time, and that when we rolled oranges over the floor they had stamped on them "Jaffa." And one week we went out camping somewhere in the provinces, in the countryside. You discover things in your life where when you look back something happened there that was a mark that you had never realized before.

I didn't have a bag – I forget what you call them; sailors have them: it's a long white bag with a string on top that you put all your stuff in. J----, I forget the name. But anyway, we called it … in Holland. A duffel-bag, that's it – I didn't have a duffel-bag. But somebody found, or my mother found someone whose kid had gone to camp, and he had a duffel-bag, a beautiful white duffel-bag. And I got that along with my clothes and everything marked for a week with the Scouts in the countryside. And we had a wonderful time. We were way in the countryside,

[21] 11:09.26.15

[22]and we built towers out of wooden poles and string, you know. The Scouts and the Senior Scouts and us were all together; it was just wonderful.

And at one point . . . See, I was a city kid. This will show you so well I was a city kid. . . I found this boulder, this beautiful shaped white, smooth rock. I fell in love with it. I put it in the bottom of my duffel-bag and my clothes on top when we had to leave. And I dragged it along, because I couldn't lift it. I was in love with this stone. And when I arrived at The Hague on the platform I dragged the duffel-bag and, of course, totally ruined the G------ thing. And I cried because it was such a wonderful week. And then I cried again because my mother said, "What the hell have you done with this G------ bag? Look, you've ruined the whole thing."

But I had that stone. I took it to my little bedroom, and that's where my stone was. And that stone, I realize now, if you look around in this house, there are many things that I have collected – all sorts of . . .I don't know, even some stones: there's a little duplicate of that stone lying here someplace. I realize, when I look back, that this was some sort of instinctive aesthetic desire, you know, which pointed the way for later life. I only realized it not so long ago.

So, I had a wonderful time with the Scouts. Then the Germans came; and the Scouts was one of the first things the Germans disbanded – all youth organizations, especially the Scouts: anything that smelled of organization was destroyed except the Hitler youth, the Dutch Hitler youth, and, of course, the Jewish youth … and then, of course,

[22] 11:11.51.00

[23]came the deportatations and I found only one man back, so far, of that Cub Scout group who has survived. He is in Holland, he is in the Hague. None of the other 30 or 40 boys that I can see has made it. They have all been killed, all been murdered, you know. I have that photograph of the leaders, the women also, I think one of them I've heard one of the leaders, ladies, survived.

The holocaust is [sighs, ponders], it's much more horrendous than when you tell it in an interview. It's the darkest, it's the most terrifying, the most horrendous, horrendous mass murder of all time, but you know that. Anyway, none of them came back. My cub scout group, they're all gone except this one man. Okay [sighs], but it gave me my first glimpse of being Jewish, so much about that.

Oh, yeah. Very much so. My great grandfather was already assimilated. He didn't go to … or anything. My grandfather never, never did anything. My grandfather ate one matzo every day. That's interesting, that was so lovely because we would go to Amsterdam and there was always this, the Dutch had this company that had round cardboard boxes and the matzos were, oh, I'd say, maybe 15 inches in diameter and they were wonderful and my grandfather would eat a matzo everyday. But we didn't do anything, the only thing that we did was my mother had sort of a little savings plan. She had a member of her family who was very, very poor and who went and sold milk and eggs from door-to-door and he had sort of a savings program and he'd come around once a week, I think, and she'd pay him 25 cents. And by the time that Passover would come around,

[23] 11:14.28.02

[24]she could afford to buy matzo and butter and eggs. Otherwise, there was not enough extra money to pay for this. And then this man would come and deliver these things, you know, and that was the only Jewish sign that we had. I don't think there was anything else that was Jew. And yet, it was funny most of my parents' friends were Jews. But we didn't go to synagogue, we didn't pray, we didn't go to Hebrew school.

Well, I have a very clear memory of that day, of course, because I woke up very early in the morning and there was shooting going on and I looked out of my little room, a little window under the roof and gee, the whole sky was filled with parachutes, white parachutes coming down in and around Delft. And these planes of war right over and I thought it was exciting. I climbed out of my window out of the roof. J – my father almost got a heart attack. He came and he said, "what are you doing?! Come out of there, you're going to get killed! There's shooting going on!" I didn't know what it was, it was fun. A lot of funs and airplanes? Ooh, lots of airplanes in the sky, different planes I'd never seen. And my father pulled me back in and said, "don't ever do that again, it's dangerous, there's shooting." Finally, we heard over the radio that Germany had invaded Holland.

Well, mostly it was confusion. Confusion in the house. We had three floors; one room was rented to a lady, to a schoolteacher and she was there and didn't know what to do, you know. There was a war going on. My parents decided they should build a shelter for bombs. So, under this stair that led from the ground floor to the second

[24] 11:17.02.00

[25]floor, sort of triangular space, and put a table in there and they took, we had a little store where they sold clothing, and they took all the clothing from the racks piled up on this table and we kids were told to get into there. We were sitting under this table sort of laughing our heads off, you know. It was so funny, you know, stuff like that. Confusion. Rumors, running out of food. My mother said, we need some groceries and the grocery store was at the next corner. Pop said, I'll go see if Harry is there. Harry is the grocery man. He opened the front door and there was a Dutch soldier across the street and leveled a shot at him. He was so nervous, I guess, this soldier, hit the bricks right next to my father. And my father, white as a sheet, came back in [laughs].

So, but it was all over in five days. The war was over and I still had a ball because a friend of mine came and I forget who that friend was, we went on our bikes two places. First the road from Delft to the Hague, the Dutch had put military airplanes there under trees. I don't know when this was done, if it was done in anticipation or after the war started, after the Germans invaded. Anyway, there were these outdated planes. My god, it was like heaven, I could climb up the open cockpits. I could climb in a cockpit and sit in an airplane and there were all these instruments in front of me and I managed to extract one instrument out of that dashboard and I took it home. It was a hell of a job to get that thing out, but I took it home. That was one thing. That was on the way from Delft to Waterdam on the other side of the highway. We went to look and there were maybe 20 of these younkers(?) planes

[25] 11:19.36.20

[26]that had dropped the parachuters that had been shot down by the Dutch because they were very slow lumbering planes. I watch them every time on the History channel. And then we climbed over these planes that were lying there like dead birds, you know. We climbed over the wings and the picture that I remember so well because I see it every day in front of me on the streets. On the engines, of these younkers airplanes that had dropped the parachuters in Holland, always was this BMW shield, the blue, black, and white little shield that I now see on the proudly displayed by their owners on their cars. Little do they know what memory is in place when I see a BMW.

So, and then the fun was over. The German troops started marching through the streets and then life went back to normal except for the first Jewish regulations started appearing in the paper very soon. The first thing to go was ritual slaughter forbidden. Of course, it didn't do anything for us because we weren't kosher … it starts so innocently, you know, it starts like a tiny little step. It's almost impossible to visualize how naïve we were about evil. Nobody could imagine the evil that was lurking there. It sounds kind of melodramatic, but there was absolute evil and we had never seen them before. And these first little steps, these little regulations ah, so what, you know. So you couldn't go into a park anymore. The sign said, *forbidden for Jews*, but, you know, for Polish-Jews, I guess they were used to that, anti-Semitism. The Dutch Jews, if they saw a sign like that, it was almost comical. It's ridiculous, you know, forbidden for Jews? What the hell does that mean, you know.

[26] 11:22.06.29

[27]Nobody ever, we didn't, anti-Semitism, we had never encountered anything like that. And above all, it was hard to imagine now, but we knew the war was only going to last six months. In six months, it would be over. The English would defeat the Germans in France and then the Germans would go back to the country and that would be it. That'd be it, so this was all kind of a joke, these bastards coming in. They weren't even bastards, these troops would march by singing. Sometimes they would be innocuous songs, like *Edel Weiss*. I remember them singing [sings *Edel Weiss*]. They'd march with their boots on Delft's cobblestones and we looked at them and thought, very strange guys, you know. Dutch soldiers never sang, these guys sang, but they were strangers and they were a little silly, singing in the streets, and they'd be gone soon. Who knew what it would end up in. You know, when we look back now [sighs], now it's all clear. But then, it was a silly little game, it was a silly little show, you know. So, those are my first impressions of the war, of the invasion of Germany.

Well, it was a beautiful morning, the 10th of May 1940. It must have been 5 o'clock in the morning just as the dawn was coming up or something close to it and the sky was blue I remember and the parachutes were all white and they were very peaceful drifting down except for the machine gun fire that was incessant coming from the Dutch soldiers in the streets and so on. But it was a gorgeous sight all these just slowly drifted very peacefully down. And then there were all these younkers planes roaring down, you know. It was kind of a wonderful panorama of blue with white filled

[27] 11:25.27.26

[28]half spheres, little black dots dangling coming down, kind of beautiful. It still looks beautiful, I saw it yesterday on the History channel, the invasion of Holland. Part of it planes flying over. It was sort of the big, I understand the first big news of Germany of paratroopers, Holland and Belgium. And I saw them just roll peaceful little parachutes coming down. For a 14-year-old who loved playing and who loved adventure, this was heaven. I can't tell you more about it.

Well, the first soldiers, I think came through in funny little cars, something like Jeeps. The German version of a Jeep, some people still have them here, I've seen them in California. Some people still drive these things and I say, do you know what the hell you're driving, those goddamned German things. But anyway, it's like a little ribbed open vehicle. But we didn't see much of that, they didn't come into the town of Delft, it was peaceful. But they did have little troops of soldiers like about 20 or 30 or so marching through singing these songs. On their way to probably their place where they were quartered or something like that. And they had different uniforms from the Dutch and they wore boots, the Dutch didn't wear boots like that. The Germans wore boots over their pants in the boots. The Dutch had muffies(?), you know, the things that they wind around. So they were different, but after awhile, single soldiers would be walking around sometimes and, as a matter of fact, an officer came into my father's store and wanted a suit. A civilian suit. And there happened to be a friend of my father's there and it all became kind of a joke. It's hard

[28] 11:28.13.14

[29]to translate there's a joke in there and it goes over two languages, none of them are English. But anyway, the German put on the jacket of the suit that my father had picked out of the rack, and he said very proudly, he said, "yah, …", meaning I have a body fit for off the rack clothes. … "mas" means mass textiles. Now, the Masse in Holland is a river. It's called the Muese in English, m-u-e-s-e, but in Dutch it's Mass, m-a-a-s. So my father's friend said, in Dutch, he said, "yah, you have a wonderful figure for the Maas [laughs]. And the German didn't understand English and he said, "yah, yah, yah, …", but they sold him the suit and he went away. And there's a story, it's told, I just heard it recently again. It seems at one point we got a German quartered in our house in our house in one of the top little bedrooms, I guess. And in the evening, this man put out these boots to be shined like the Europeans used to do in hotels and there was just typical, gives you a little glance of how naïve and innocent the whole thing was in the beginning. My father said you have to shine this guy's boots, he put them outside the door. My mother said, what, I'm not going to shine his boots!! My father said, you have to, you know, it was a big joke. Finally, my father shined the guy's boots. I don't remember this man being in our house, but it seems he was there for a short awhile, maybe a couple of days or so or a week. Anyway, he seemed to disappear.

So that gives you some glimpse of western European feelings in the beginning with Germans around. It was, ahh, kind of, we can deal with it, you know. They're a little strange, but they'll soon go and the war will be

[29] 11:31.04.29

[30]over. It wasn't serious business, the four to five days war had been serious, you know, but now it was over and pretty soon … sitting here, talking to you 60 years later, after we all that we know now and that happened, this seems strange, but it was an innocent time. It was a time that even the Dutch-Jews would say, ah, they wouldn't do here what they did in Germany, you know. They wouldn't do that. After all, … the new Governor, the Reich's commissar … the Dutch territories, … had spoken to the Dutch people that we are not here as enemies. We're here as comrades to build new Europe and we know that the Dutch, a Germanic race, are our friends and we certainly would never interfere in Holland's civic affairs. He said that, the Germans wouldn't do anything to us, you know, they respected our civil government. I hope that gives you something, it's hard to express, but that's how it began.

Well, in the beginning, it didn't change at all. I just kept on going to school and being a lousy student and during that time, I think I was held back again and all the shame I was putting, my father went around asking friends, what should I do with my son because he doesn't seem to do a goddamned thing in school. And one friend said, one of our former neighbors of the Hague, who later on joined the Dutch Nazi party, said, you know, it would be a wonderful profession for him to become an instrument maker. He worked for the National Geo, no no. He worked for the Dutch government in some fashion. He said, we have instrument makers who take care of instruments, scientific instruments, and it's a wonderful profession. So, my father said, you're going to be an instrument maker and

[30] 11:33.47.29

[31]sent me to Bosey's, to trade school. I'm probably the only Jewish kid who ever went to trade school in Delft, at least. But I didn't do good there, either, I played around.

Life began to change slowly, but bit by bit, I couldn't go anymore to my swimming pool where I liked to swim. I couldn't go to the swimming pool, it was forbidden for Jews. Then it was forbidden for Jewish kids to go to public schools, so I was out of school and I became a delivery boy. And then Jewish Jews couldn't have bicycles, couldn't go on the streetcars, couldn't go on the buses, couldn't go on the trains, couldn't have non-Jewish service, bit by bit; deliver up your radios, deliver up your bicycles. It narrowed in slowly so it became more concentrated on the family in a sense. Then we all had to wear Jewish stars and even that, in Holland, in Delft, especially, a little town, with half a dozen Jews. You'd walk around with that star on you and sometimes Christian people would come up, shook your hand and said, "you can be proud of being a Jew. Don't feel bad, you can be proud." People would say that. So it wasn't, I didn't feel ashamed walking around with a star. Nobody said, Jew, people looked at me like a Dutch, it was un-Dutch, that people shied away from something that was unpleasant. They didn't want to come near that. They knew that it was an injustice, but they couldn't do anything about it. But, as I said, there were some people that came up and congratulated you. So, life changed imperceptibly, more for the young people like me than for my parents, of course. My father had to sell that business.

[31] 11:36.09.14

[32]Yes, we did have to register as Jews somewhere. I think in 1941, an announcement appeared in the paper, that people of Jewish descent had to go to town hall, this did come from the Germans, go to town hall to the burgomaster of Delft or the Hague, announced that you had to go to town hall and to register as Jews. If you had Jewish ancestors and then you would be given a receipt, which cost $1.00 and the order of receipt would be sent to your home. Something very innocuous. Of course, by this time, I think by this time already, anybody who was Jewish was fired from Dutch civil service. The Dutch had to sign documents that said that were not Jewish and so on and very few refused. The President of the Dutch Supreme Court was a Jew … and he had to leave and the rest of the court didn't resign, they went right on. The Dutch story isn't a very nice story.

Anyway, again, the naiveté is astounding in hindsight. We went there and registered, not realizing it put a noose around our necks. But who would know? It was still all right, so you're registered at the town hall, your own town hall. A Dutch bureaucrat would sit there, "Hi, Mr. Lessing, how are you?" Maybe somebody you lived at the next street or somebody you had met in the grocery store. Oh, it's just a formality. And from that, every Dutchman was issued an identity card, which was so insidious, insidiously designed, that it was almost impossible to fake. It was on that fake identity card that my mother was arrested later on because it had a tiny little mistake, a tiny little glitch. It was like bank notes, almost impossible to duplicate.

[32] 11:42.55.07

[33]You asked me, did it, was it a turning point, well, you added something on. You said in hindsight, of course, in hindsight, it was the measure that put the noose around our necks, and we didn't know it. I've heard of some people, very few in Holland, who decided they weren't going to go. They didn't register, they stayed the whole war in Holland and nobody bothered them because they didn't register as Jews. The Dutch were highly organized. Everything was set down on paper, it was a very meticulous society and bureaucrats were proud that every, you could go back to 1700 as my cousin in Holland did and found the whole history of the family; their marriages and where they went and how they moved and how they got divorced or where they got children and it's all there, and it killed most of Holland's Jews. So, in hindsight, yes, at the time, ahh, it didn't mean anything.

For awhile until, I guess, 1940, maybe the beginning, end of 1941, and then all Jewish business had to be handed over either to a Nazi, sold for very little. People sold businesses that was worth millions for $5,000, they had to. But my father, yes, his little business, but they were very smart my parents it seems. I found out later on that we practically lived off of that the whole war. Before they closed down the little store, they sold all the clothes in it illegally. See, you couldn't, in those days you had to have textile coupons to buy any pair of pants, shoes, socks, whatever, and my parents sold at way marked up prices, 90 percent probably of everything. People were dying to get textiles without a coupon. So I think with

[33] 11:45.31.02

[34]that, they, part of the war, I surmise we financed part of our hiding time.

So no, the Germans didn't allow, the Germans plundered as they did in every country in Europe. They plundered the Jews first; the system was the same. You restrict, then you rob, you know, you take everything away, then you concentrate, then you send them away to be killed. So you have everything; the gold, the jewels, the investments, the bank accounts, the artworks, everything. Everything was taken until the Jews were destitute, ready to be concentrated. Not in Holland, but in Poland, for instance, into a ghetto and then from there transported to their death. So, my parents got rid of their little business and they rented a house with 17 rooms, a much bigger house strangely enough, in another section of town. It was a house that they could rent to students. Delft is a university town. So we had 17 rooms with students, that provided some income. And my parents would make one meal a day, a communal meal, that was a little dining room, but, you know the size of a good-sized kitchen. And everybody would get this potatoes with cauliflower, unfortunately once my father dropped a big bar of soap in it by mistake. All the students said, well, Mr. Lessing, it smells a little bit like soap. Nah, my mother said it was impossible. Later on, when they cleaned out the pot, they found this big bar of Sunlight soap down at the bottom. Anyway, just a little sideline. The students were a pain in the ass, but they were funny too, you know. I remember they put a little sign on the downstairs bathroom. I don't know if I can translate it [speaking in Dutch] … Gentlemen,

[34] 11:47.55.08

[35]what I may bid to you is don't piss on the seat, but in the middle [laughs], stuff like that. Students were very irreverent, but they were nice. They formed the initial corps of the Dutch resistance. It was the young people who resisted, not the oldies. So that was what happened.

Well, yes, you were supposed to turn over your bicycles and your radio. I think mostly we found an old radio, we didn't have any good bicycles anyway or something. That didn't hit us too hard. Even though we had this little story of my parents, my parents didn't have anything really. A bank account, what bank account? They had never been in a bank. The first time I was in a bank was in this country.

I did have a bike, yes. And I don't know what happened, I must have given it up, I guess. I don't remember that, though. I don't remember.

No, but I could find it back. I think it was 1941 when the decree came that Jewish children could no longer, I think it was August 1941 that the Reich's … for the occupied Dutch territory decreed that Jewish children can no longer attend public schools. They had to be educated in Jewish schools only, except Delft didn't have any Jewish schools. So, I think probably about August '41.

Yeah, that is actually the first time that light-heartedness disappeared. The light-heartedness about German occupation even though we, by then had already moved, I think to that other house with the students in it. So plenty of things had already changed. But my cousin, Hans, had come from the Hague nearby, to visit, and we had this fun idea, as 15-year-olds, I guess, to dress up

[35] 11:50.48.11

[36]similarly and pretend to make people think we were identical twins. He looked a little bit like me and we had the same coats because they came out of my father's store, the same brown coats. He had one and I had one. We had the same mufflers, I think, and we had the same kind of shoes and we looked so much the same. The only difference was that on my coat there was a big yellow star that said Jew and he, since his mother had been married to a non-Jew, didn't have to wear a star. So we decided we'd go to walk through Delft and look at people's faces to see if they see that we were identical twins [laughs].

So we walked out and we were walking and I don't know if people thought we were identical twins, but all of a sudden a German officer stopped us in a very high class uniform, pressed and he had a little ribbon around his sleeve that said he belonged to the SS division, paramount German. And he began shouting at my cousin, Hans, and said, why are you walking with a Jew, in German? [speaks German] And Hans tried to explain that we were cousins and he didn't let him finish, he started screaming at him. "If I see you once more with this Jew, you'll both go to a concentration camp!" And then suddenly he lashed out and hit me with his black gloves, German gloves, Germans love to wear gloves. Hit with his fist in the face, I fell on my knees on the cobblestone. I just stayed there until he walked away. And that, not until recently, very recently, I decided it ended my childhood. It was the end of my childhood [sighs].

Carla and I just went on a week's vacation, my wife, Carla and I just went on a week's vacation. And we were

[36] 11:53.17.26

[37]sitting in restaurants sometimes in the evening and around us were people and they were having a couple of margueritas or something, drinks. And they laughed and giggled and the women would sometimes hilariously, the whole table would explode, all friends, maybe four or six people, explode in laughter. And I said to Carla, we have never laughed like that. We never laughed like that, we don't laugh, not like that. I don't think I have laughed for nothing like that since the time the German hit me. It ended something, you know, it ended innocence, it ended naiveté, it ended, well, it ended my childhood. And, of course, as I always add on, in my speeches, Hans and I never pretended to be twins again ever. That game was over; the games were over, childhood was over, it became serious I had met up with something horrible. Horrible, something that even with all the decrees, I had never realized. I guess it was the first moment where my naiveté vanished and it never came back, believe you me. The rest of my life has been lived in the sign of danger ever present, ever suspicious and I hear it from every holocaust survivor. We can have fun, we can dance, we can even laugh, but we never give ourselves completely because we never trust completely. We know there's nobody completely.

I always demonstrate it by saying my son sleeps like this, with his arms widespread on his back like this. we don't sleep like that, Carla and I, we sleep like this. I don't know if it's meaningful, but I think it is, in a sense. We don't lie like that open. In this room, I'm ranging far and wide, but in this room where we are sitting now, which used to be my graphics studio until recently.

[37] 11:56.13.13

[38]In this room, my friend who lives down the street, the architect, designed this room or this addition and he said, hey, Ed, this is a flat roof. He said, you know what we're going to put in, put in skylights. Wonderful, we'll have all these lights. I said, "David, no skylights." He said, "what?" He said, "it's ideal, it's a flat roof and you do graphics work." I said, no skylights, he said, why not. I said, I need to have roof over my head. I can't have anything that's open, anything can come through there. Well, that's ridiculous, of course. It's ridiculous, but one of these little things that live on through the rest of your life. Your whole life has been lived in a sign of what happened, under the influence of what happened then. So, I forgot where I started out. Oh, the story with Hans, well, it ends there the skylights in this room.

I think that that decree came through in the spring of 1942 or the very end of '41. probably the end of '41 because in the spring of '42 the vice commissar of the occupied Dutch territories started threatening the Dutch Jews and saying, if you don't go, well, I don't know, it needs probably introduction. But I think probably during the end of '41 a decree came for the Dutch Jews that they would have to go something that the Germans called Work Relief in Germany. I'm trying to think of the date of the … conference where it was decided that the Jews of Europe should be murdered. So there is some relation there, of curse, between the … conference and the decree that the Dutch had to go to Work Relief in Germany. For this, you got a call by mail that told you to appear at the railroad station by a certain date. And get on a train, if you

[38] 11:59.14.15

[39]lived in provinces like we did, get on a train. In Amsterdam, you got on a streetcar. You could take a suitcase with personal belongings and the Jewish council gave us good advice saying that we should prepare a backpack, take warm clothes for our stay in the camps in Germany because it would be unpleasant if we didn't have those. And so, my parents got backpacks and my mother put all the warm clothes in it that she could get. I remember that, I think there's still somewhere in our family, little pieces of blanket that my mother had cut from a big blanket so that they would fit in the backpacks. Little cut up blankets and my father painted our names on the backpacks and we were ready to go. because the choice said, as it said in the decree later on, if you didn't go, you were sent to concentration camp … Hausen. Now the only experience that Holland's Jews had with concentration camps was Mount Hausen. Early after the German invasion there was a protest by the Dutch and a group of, and there were some skirmishes in the street, and a group of Dutch Jewish young men, younger men, were just trapped in the street and sent to Mount Hausen. And within three months, they were all dead. I don't know if you know anything about Mount Hausen, but I don't want to go into the details. They were just worked to death there and in no time at all.

It was an infamous place, one of the early concentration camps, didn't have gas chambers. So there was a choice, you either went or you were sent to your death. And, of course, Holland's Jews still being naïve, said, ah listen, so what. You have warm clothes, you go there … it was always said although the Germans advertised

[39] 12:02.00.19

[40]it as Work Relief in Germany, everybody knew you were going to Poland. Oh, you're going to Poland … and it was cold and you need warm clothes and war would still be over soon. And it was stretching. And so they went, Holland's Jews, out of 140,000 Dutch Jews, 110,000 went to their death. Grandmothers, they emptied out the insane into the mental hospitals, and threw them into trucks. People don't know what the hell, they didn't know. My mother said after she was taken prisoner there was a group of 800 children in … and one day they're all gone. They just took them, those f… killed them. So, you know, Work Relief in Germany. That's what they said and so people wound up in a Dutch holding camp in … concentration camp, which was paid for by Holland's dues, by the way. It was originally designed as a camp to hold the German refugee Jews who came over the border and were loose in Holland and now the Dutch government, the bureaucrats said that they couldn't have all these foreigners just running loose in the country. So they should be collected in a camp. So they found a nice place somewhere near where my cousin lives now in … , in the center of Holland, but the Dutch Queen of Holland, Wilhelmina, didn't want the German refugees that close by. So the Dutch government found another place somewhere Shakespeare would call the blasted heath somewhere and they built a camp there to hold the German Jews. And strangely enough, most of those who survived in that camp were German Jews because they ran the camp. The story isn't very pretty. There were a lot of Germans, lot of Dutch Jews who were sent to their death by German Jews who ran the camp. It wasn't a death camp, it was a transit camp and if

[40] 12:04.44.25

[41]you were on the list to go on the next train, every week a train would go on Tuesday with at least 1,000 Dutch Jews; little babies; little mothers and fathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, to Work Relief in Germany and nobody knew what that was. Nobody knew where those trains were going. They said, oh, we're going to Poland, but you know in that camp in … they did anything to stay off that train, to get off that list. And they cried and there were suicides the night before the train left because even though people didn't know where those trains were going, somehow they knew it was death, it was the end. It had come that far by 1942 and Holland's Jews began to realize and yet, the Jewish Council in Amsterdam kept on saying, take a backpack and warm clothes because you don't want to be uncomfortable. A couple of postcards had come back from … saying it's, we have to work hard here, but we're all right and the food is not bad. Made up by people there under duress.

They responded like most Dutch Jews did by saying, there's no way out. There was no way out. In the beginning of my speeches I used to say, the choice was death in Mount Hausen or you'd go into hiding and if you were found in hiding, you were sent … [break].

Well, that was what we thought were our choices. You went to Mount Hausen, which was inevitably death or you went into hiding. Some people went into hiding, but when you were found in hiding, the Germans said, we will send you to a concentration camp. Well, that meant death. Little did we know that there was no choice at all. As I said always, at the end of those railroad lines, death was

[41] 12:09.54.06

[42]waiting for all of us. So it didn't matter how you got there, but anyway my parents were all set. We were all set to go because we didn't see a way out. I guess my parents, I wasn't involved. I was just told what to do and my brothers were told what to do, you know. And what my parents said, okay. It was a strange situation. With everything, I still didn't see the seriousness of it, I think. I was a teenager, what the f… does he know, a 14-year-old, 16-year-old kid. I can't tell you. My grandson, Aram yesterday, 16-years-old, I'm going to write him a letter in October when he went into hiding. It's going to be a long letter to my 16-year-old and I looked at him and I thought, I was like him. I was like him. Anyway, I think that that answers your question, my parents were all set to go.

Well, not my mind really because I was, you know, whatever I was told to do I would do. But my grandfather, Isaac, came from Amsterdam and he lived right in a Jewish section of Amsterdam in the modern Jewish section. There were thousands, right around the corner from where Anne Frank lived. And my grandfather saw at night because the Jews didn't go anymore like they were supposed to go. They'd get the calls in the mail and in the beginning they went, but after a short while people began to realize, hey, there are rumors here. and my grandfather insisted there were rumors going around in Amsterdam, rumors mind you, only rumors, that the Germans are lying to us. Oh, God, really? That you're not at all going to work in Germany. Wow, how could they do that? Lie, I mean, why, you know? Government officials didn't just lie to you, no, my

[42] 12:12.16.23

[43]grandfather said there are rumors going around. I'm trying to make you see the naiveté that was still there. There are rumors going around and he said, don't go on those trains. You must not go on those trains to, you must try to go into hiding, I'll try and help you.

And, I don't know, I so often, as I always say, I just so often try and think what it must have been in my parents' mind when my grandfather Isaac said this, who had seen the trucks come at night. When the Jews didn't go voluntarily anymore and dragged people screaming out of their apartments. Old people, babies, men and women, full families thrown into trucks. The streets were cornered off on both sides and whatever was in there, a Jewish with a star registered by now, in the trucks and off to fill those trains because Eichman(?) wanted those trains filled. So my parents, you know [laughs], Jesus, here comes my grandfather saying, don't do this, you know. We had the backpacks already! Anyway, the upshot was they decided to follow my grandfather's advice, I guess.

It's mysterious, you know. You ask for a turning-point. There was the turning-point, when my parents decided f… of the occupied Dutch territories. (They wouldn't say it that way.) So, we were supposed to go into hiding. And then, I guess a short time after that we must have gotten a letter in the mail.

Now, we had a friend in the Jewish Council in Delft, Mr. Cohen, a German Jew who had come from Germany, and he knew all about what Germany was all about. And he said, "I'll warn you when they come to get you." And we got the warning on one morning, very early. He said, "There are

[43] 12:14.38.05

[44]Germans in town in trucks, and you'd better get the hell out."

We took off the stars of our jackets, and we walked out in little groups, not altogether – probably my father and me, maybe, up ahead, and maybe my mother with the two brothers after. And we walked to old friends in the suburb of Delft, and we stayed there. They knew we were coming. And that evening everybody disappeared. My parents went into hiding someplace; I don't know where they went. They didn't really have hiding-places; my mother just had to get started finding places, permanent places. And my little brothers were picked up by friends – that school teacher who had rented originally with us a room, and she came with her boyfriend, her husband, and they picked up the boys. And I stayed behind for a little while with these people.

In a sense it was my first hiding-place – for a couple of weeks . . . a very short time there. And that's what changed our mind, my grandfather.

[Leaving home like that is] not what you think. I'm still sixteen years old, still sort-of a never-do-good kid from Bosey's(?) Trade School, delivery boy, building little airplane models, walking out of our home because my parents said that's what we were going to do. And finding myself in a home with these older people with this gorgeous daughter I immediately fell in love with. It comes slowly, even then. It's easy to say, "By then I was in the Holocaust, and it was all terrible." I was a city kid, teenager, Jewish but not really Jewish. I had had a star on, but . . . And here I was in this strange situation. And then, also, hey, I didn't have to work; I didn't have

[44] 12:17.26.11

[45]to go to school. So, as I would say, it's a strange life started, you know.

My real first hiding address was: my mother had found some old, old friends of my father. When my father was young he had known these ladies. They were young women then; now they were too old of ladies. They took me for a while in Utrecht in an apartment. It was strange. I was there. Luckily, there was a grand piano, because these two ladies rented a room to a nurse, who was away all day long, and I played the piano, the same pieces that I play here still. So I had something to do: play the piano. And, interestingly enough, as a follow-up to that strange rock that I dragged home, I made a waterfall painting. Out of the little hiding window there was a medieval church tower there. I can see the painting in front of me; it was meticulously done; and I don't know where it went. I'm so sorry; I don't have it any more. It was a wonderful painting.

So, I did that, and I masturbated a lot. I was sixteen years old, and isolated; I'd never been kissed. So it was something that you did.

A strange thing happened there, in a sense - a ridiculous thing. They're ridiculous things. These stories are stories, I would say, about Western European Jews who are in hiding. There are sometimes humorous things. Not from Polish people in ghettos: there was nothing there to laugh. But at night, after dark, I a couple of times went out of that hiding place and walked to these two ladies' sisters', who lived twenty minutes' walking away. In the dark, among the German soldiers in

[45] 12:19.51.00

[46]the street, I would walk to these other sisters', who were a little younger. And that other sister had a daughter, who was in her twenties, probably (who went out with German soldiers, by the way). And I would go there and they were so lovely(?). Oh, I was so glad! They knew I was in hiding. They gave coffee and they made cake.

And, they also had somebody quartered in their house, a high official of the German railroad, because Utrecht is a center of railroad activities: there were a lot of Germans directing the railroad activities for the Wehrmacht and for the War, and everything. And they had this high officer in the house, who in the evening was always on duty some place. So he had this wonderful uniform hanging there, with the cap, with the little railroad symbols on it, and black uniform dress and big, shiny black boots. And I put them all on, and marched through the house in that f------ German uniform! And they laughed! They just thought it was so funny! And I thought it was funny. You know, I liked to clown around.

But it didn't last very long, that stay with the old ladies; they got too scared. I now think that they were lesbians; they were lovely people. But they got so scared, I had to leave. And then my mother found someone else.

I don't know any more, [how it was, splitting up from my family that first evening]. I don't think we cried; I don't think we even said goodbye. It was all improvised. My parents left for some friends; we didn't know what the hell was going to happen. My brothers were picked up to go some place; it was all improvised. We did not have, like some Jews had, prepared places: I don't think we had

[46] 12:25.13.26

[47]prepared places. My mother just sprang into action after that, and started to organize and find things, cook up schemes. But at that point that evening, I don't think I was aware. I'm aware now that I lost my family that night; I had no home any more; my brothers were gone; my parents were gone; my friends were gone; my rooms were gone. I had nothing. Not only that, but if you were caught somebody would get seven Dutch guilders for denouncing you to the police. So, there was a price on my head.

It's funny, I could sit here for hours and talk, and I could not tell you the shape of my mind at certain points. As the War went on, I know one point where my mind was in such a shape that I was like a zombie. I worked on farms. I remember working on a farm and I remember walking from the main house to the barns. And I know that if you had asked me half-way to the barn, "Where did you come from?" I wouldn't be able to answer you. And if you said, "Where are you going?" I wouldn't know. But I would automatically go on, and walk until I get there and I'd feed the animals, and water them, and come back. I'd do all these things like a zombie, like a mechanical thing. My mind couldn't cope with dealing with anything beyond this second. I had been by then something like, I say always, about 10,800 hours on the run, and the fear and the terror of . . . You know that death was waiting, all the time. One tiny, lousy little mistake; one word, one gesture would do it, would be the end. So at that time I could only deal with one second at a time.

But that was later, as I said, after ten thousand hours of hiding. This was in the beginning. I must have

[47] 12:28.22.07

[48]felt the loss of everyone, but I can't recall it now. All I knew was, you go on.

You hear it very often from people in the concentration camps, in the death camps: you go on. You survive from minute to minute. You don't think back; you don't think ahead, you just . . . And some people survived that way. So I started out that way, by just going on; didn't think much about the past, and didn't think much about the future. And the War would still be over anyway, soon; then we'd all go home. Except it didn't happen that way. So that's the best I can tell you.

My mother couldn't find a hiding-place for me. My mother found a place for my little brothers – as a matter of fact, they stayed with my grandfather in Amsterdam for a while, at the beginning. And my mother and father had found a place. I'd better not go into that story, how he found it, but together they found a place of an ex-Marine and cleaning woman, married couple, no children, and they took them in, and they stayed there for 2½ years, in a room. If you go upstairs in this house, in the little front room, and you look on the right hand side, near the window, there's a painting that my father made, out of the window from his hiding-place.

But she couldn't find a hiding-place for me. It was almost impossible to find a hiding-place for a teenage Jewish boy. A baby, people could sort-of adopt. Little children, like my brothers, of six and eight years old, somehow could be added into a Catholic family with a lot of kids – "cousins coming to visit," or whatever. But a sixteen-year-old Jewish boy . . . So my mother said,

[48] 12:30.49.01

[49]"We've got to bleach your hair, and then I'll try to find a farm. You'll go there and pretend that you're a Christian boy from the city, and that your house was bombed (I don't know, there was a story). And I had a false identity card by then. So she found a little farm, and I was taught to learn some Christian prayers, and never, never tell anybody who you really were.

It's the beginning of every hidden child's story: never tell who you really are. You deny everything about yourself. I became the kid who came from the city, who didn't have enough to eat and the house was bombed and my parents couldn't help me, and I would work for bed and board. And every minute of every day, and even every minute of every night I began this routine of being someone else. That basically what it was: you became someone else. And when you moved from one place to another you became another person, someone else again.

It may have been a bit easier for me because I always was a loner boy. But it has carried through to my whole life, this dual life, sort-of. There's a whole personality inside of me that is a hidden personality that is different from the outward personality. And I guess probably everybody has something like that, but for me it was second-nature. Lying became something that you would specialize in – not just lying but it has to be a good lie, a very precise lie. If a farmer said to you, "Well, what happened to your street with the bombing, that your house was destroyed in the city?" you added interesting details. "You know, the bricks were falling down, and there was a cat and he just escaped . . ." Amazing. You made this

[49] 12:33.39.21

[50]shell around you. That is what hidden children did, you know.

I can't recall the feelings [at the time], because, as I said, they were deadened very soon. You couldn't *have* too much feelings, because you would fall apart! It's like soldiers in the war. They go in there. They can't say to themselves, "Yeah, my wife is waiting for me back home. I don't know if I should fire my gun right now." Or, "Gee, I'm going to kill this guy there." You do it. You go on. It's not exactly the same, but it's something like that. You don't . . . It's people in extreme stress situations. You go on. And I soon learned to do that, I guess.

But I must have been terribly frightened. Sometimes I just stop for a minute and think, "I was sixteen years old, like A… is now. Out of my home, no parents; nobody to help me, nobody standing next to me. I'm working work that I don't know how to do. It's hard and I'm not used to it. It's full of pain and suffering and people that I dislike really but have to be friendly to. And God knows, will they find out?" And this went on day and day and day and day, and I got very depressed: I was going to give myself up.

My mother met me somewhere in the pasture sometimes, and I said, "You know, I've got to give myself up. I can't cope. They're going to get me anyway." I became depressed and decided I might as well end it. My mother talked me out of it. We had a little round thing somewhere in the house, I remember, before the War, that said: "This also will pass." It was a cute little thing. My mother said to

[50] 12:36.14.20

[51]me: "This also will pass. Say it to yourself. Say it! Say it! Keep on saying it: This also will pass."

"Okay. Okay."

And then they ran into …, which is a different chapter; I don't know if you want me to go into that . . .

[I guess the visits with my mother at this time] must have been the last fleeting contact of what was once a warm family home. A woman, somewhere behind a tree in a pasture; a quick hug; some tears probably. "Eddie, carry on!" Her oldest. She'd send me a picture from the Dutch concentration camp later on. It said, "For my big son." She didn't send it to my father; she didn't send it to my brother; she sent it to me: "For my big son."

I was her first-born. The first-born's a little special, I guess. She had three after that. It must have been terrible, these meetings, because it was short and I had to give her up again. [It was] the only thing in my life that reminded me of what was once, you know. She would come there and talk to me and tell me about something, about Pop maybe, about her husband. I don't know if she ever told me about my brothers. I don't know if they were alive, don't know if they were alive or dead. It was all gone, and I was in the middle of a farm landscape where I didn't belong, with strangers who didn't really like me, doing work that was too hard for me, that I couldn't do, yet I had to do in order to not get thrown out, because I had nowhere to go. I couldn't go home; I didn't have a home.

[51] 12:38.38.23

[52]So, those few visits must have been heart-wrenching. I'm making this up. What else could it have been? A boy lost somewhere in the wilderness without anyone.

[There's a] typical example of my mother's what you call Hutzpe(?), what I call strength. She decided that they had been in hiding in that room, that one room . . . You could get claustrophobic, because not only were you in a room, but you were totally dependent on the people who were hiding you. They ate three meals with them; and inevitably there was friction. You couldn't avoid it, even if you were saints. And my mother decided she would try to find a little place where they could go for just a weekend. And so she found this hamlet, called the Lachefuerse(?), and it played an enormous role in her and my life. But she found this hamlet, and she rented a room there for a weekend, and they must have bicycled there, maybe (I don't know). And they moved into this room; it was on the second floor. (I think the hotel is still there; I may have a postcard of it someplace. Anyway . . .) And, Pop, after unpacking, said that he'd take a stroll down the main street, which was a hundred yards long and then a couple of houses on both sides. And he walked out on the street and was immediately stopped by a policeman in black uniform, Nazi-looking, nasty, bastard-looking. And the man said, "I want you to come with me."

And Pop said, "Well, that's the end. It's the end of my *life* – it's not just the end [meaning] I'm going to get a ticket." The fright, the fear must have been horrendous. But anyway, the man took him across the street into a house, and set him down in the living-room; and he

[52] 12:41.35.00

[53]said: "I want to tell you something. I recognize you immediately as a Jew."

So Pop said: "Well, that's it."

He said, "I am the head of the police here, in this little place, and Germans come through here frequently. You cannot just be here, because you'll be caught. I'm the head of the resistance also, here, and I'm hiding about thirty Jewish men, women and children here in the area, and you're endangering everybody. So what you're going to have to do is, you and your wife will have to move out. I have another place where you can spend the weekend, which is safe. You can't stay here."

M… O… - Dutch police officer, the only good member of a family that was all Nazi, anti-Semitic, and dangerous. He was the only good one.

So he moved my parents into a different place, and, I guess, maybe, at that occasion my mother must have talked with him and said, "You know, I have son and he's hidden on a farm, and he wants to give himself up to the Germans, he's so desperate, so lonely and frightened." So, I don't know if *I* talked with O… - I always remember that I talked with him, but it could have been my mother. And he said he had a place for me but it was very dangerous. And, he said, also there were restrictions on me: I could not go out any more: once I go in, there were other people there but I could not go out. And I would not have any contact with my mother any more.

But I guess I decided that anything was better than being alone. So I went with him, and he took me to a parcel of woods outside his village, the Lachefuerse(?).

[53] 12:43.43.14

[54]And, there was a secret path into this very dense little wood. You had to know how to get into it. There was a little pine tree; it had no roots; you lifted it up (it had a sharp point to it), and you saw the beginning of the path; you went in and you put the pine tree behind you again, so that closed off the path, so you couldn't recognize it. It was a zigzagging path, which, by the way, had a signal in the ground that signaled the people in the hut that somebody was on the path (a little bell-signal, I guess) – and it led to a hut, and in the hut I was left with seven men, Christian men, some nice, some not so nice. I had the impression that they weren't very happy to have me there. Later on it came out that that was right. And my life began In this hut. This must have been the spring or summer of 1943.

The men in the hut knew I was Jewish. As I said, they didn't really like to have me. Later on, through writings of one of them, I found out that they had really spoken against it; that they didn't want a Jewish boy; they didn't want a Jew – because Jews were unreliable; when caught they would probably squeal; and so . . . They had high ideals – this was a group of intellectuals, a group of intellectual Christians who had decided, by principle, to resist the Germans. They were very nationalistic; they felt Holland had been overpowered by aliens who were anathema to the world, these Germans, and they decided they were going to resist. One of them, in addition, had been an office in the Dutch army, and was really required to go in a Dutch prisoner-of-war camp, so he was there also.

[54] 12:46.24.21

[55]It was a mixed bag. Some were nice, some were . . . ughh! They weren't the guys who blew up trains or anything (which the Dutch didn't have anyway). First of all, the hut served as sort-of a center, where people would bring illegally published newspapers; they would bring false identity cards, and stuff like that. Other people would come in, resistance workers. So they served as a center. They would go out sometimes at night and perform raids on police stations and town halls – break in and steal some necessary . . . – as I told you, these Dutch I.D. cards were almost impossible to duplicate. So they'd steal the original forms, the blank forms. Those were perfect, of course – you could put false name and a false picture. … So, they would raid those halls; they would steal the German rubber stamps, which were important, to make fake documents. They'd steal thousands of food cards, food ration cards, for people in hiding like my parents. They would steal weapons, uniforms – whatever they could lay hands on – and bring them back to the hut. The weapons and the uniforms were buried in a cache underground in the woods.

I, in the beginning, didn't have much of a task there, because I was the Jewish kid who was just in hiding. But, at a certain point, all of a sudden, too, they brought in two R.A.F. people from the Royal Air Force, who had baled out of a …. And I spoke English well. It's interesting point, because the reason I spoke English well is because I had lived in the United States for three years as a kid: when I was three to six, I was there. And I was assigned to interview these two men, sort-of as a friend, but to try

[55] 12:49.28.14

[56]to find out if they maybe were German infiltrators. It was a dangerous job, in a sense, because, had they been Germans, God knows what they could have done: they could have strangled me, or kept as . . . I don't know what, but . . . They might have hidden weapons on them (not that I know of, but . . .). But they came out . . . I had wonderful conversations. There was an Englishman and a Canadian, and the Englishman was a little easier to deal with: he was kind of friendly. He was funny, with a good sense of humor. The Canadian was kind-of brusque, not very open, young (they were young guys). I was seventeen. I thought they were much older; I recently found out that they were twenty – three years older. But I interviewed, for instance, Fred Sutherland, the Canadian, and tried to find some questions that would trip him up if he was a German. So I asked him where he was from. He came from Canada, he said. And I asked him where in Canada, and he said he came from a place called "Bear River." And, so far, I thought, well, anyone could learn that. I thought I'd ask a cute question and maybe find something. I said, "What did you do there for a hobby when you lived there at Bear River?"

He said, "We hunt bears."

I figured no German would have said that. They would have made up something like "collect postage stamps," or something. So I figured he was all right. I met him two years ago for the first time, and told him that story. He laughed so hard; he remembered me well.

So, that was important task that they gave me. And, right next to the woods there was a fence, and then there

[56] 12:51.57.08

[57]was a convent. The Mother Superior of the convent knew that we were there, and one other nun was in cahoots in the kitchen, and in the afternoon they would put containers with food for us there. It was my task to go to the fence, and there was a hole there, and get the containers. Later on, I'd wash them and bring them back. And there was water there. We had an electric line that went from there into the hut. So I did all that: chores, cleaning up. There's a picture of me, wooden shoes, in the woods there, right next to the hut, cleaning blankets – flopping them.

I asked [if I could participate in the raids]: it sounded very . . . I still had some spark of Boy Scoutism in me, I guess. Because it sounded interesting, going out at night. They would come back before dawn and tell about what they'd done, you know. It was all very exciting. They never took me along: I was too young to die, they said. I think maybe they were mostly afraid to take a Jewish kid because you couldn't rely on Jews anyway.

The appearance of the R.A.F. men in the hut was indescribable for me. I have tried to describe this, but it's hard to. Every night, like a thousand Lancaster bombers would roar over, way up high, on their way to Germany to bomb Germany. I would hear sometimes for half an hour, squadron after squadron of these big bombers slowly roar over. They were freedom up there. They're going to beat the shit out of the Germans, what they were doing to me. For that was retribution; it was wonderful. But we never knew who these were. And then, one day, two of these *angels* appeared, these two men. And they had come from freedom; they didn't know anything. They were there a

[57] 12:55.08.11

[58]week and they said, "Oh, we want to go back home, and we'll walk to France." They were crazy. They had no idea about the dangers, no idea about what the Germans really were. And so, they were told, you can't. The resistance will tell you when to go, and provide you with a very set route. And they did, later on. They had no idea. And that was the job. These men weren't beaten down; they weren't in a hut. They just said, "We want to go back! You know, we don't belong here; we belong over there; we go fly these machines."

Oh, it was beautiful to have them, to look at them every day. Even the Canadian was kind-of dark and unresponding, but they were free men, not like us. It was amazing. And when they had to leave, it was very sad that they left.

Through the Resistance Movement, I guess, a message came in. Somebody came to the hut and said, "We've intercepted a message. There's danger coming up here. The Germans have become suspicious." And it was decided to set out watchposts in the morning – especially morning, and at night, in case of a raid, because the Germans always raided at dawn, you know. So we were asked to draw lots, you know, what watch to . . . And I got a watch at 29th of December, 1943, from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m., a four-hour watch, with a body, another man, one of the resistance men. And I was given a weapon, a 9 mm. Mauser semi-automatic pistol, and I was shown how to . . . wonderful, heavy thing!
G--, have you ever felt a gun in your hand? It's a heavy thing. It's like lifting half a pound of stuff, you know – black steel, with a little slide that's the safety. You

[58] 12:57.51.15

[59]pull it, you start it up, you just keep on firing and aim . . . Okay. Marched out in the dark to stand behind the front row of the trees – for nothing! Nothing was going to happen. Just stand there for four hours, and then you can go back to sleep . . . Except that, about five of five o'clock in the morning we heard noises coming up the road, truck wheel crunching on the gravel, and then we saw the blue slits of light. Trucks in those days – all cars – the headlight was covered with a black circle, and then there was a little slot left open, with a blue lamp. You could see them, you saw them coming, a whole row of trucks coming around the bend. And then they stopped right in front of us. (Because, we thought, they might be passing by – you know . . .) They stopped right in front of us.

Then I heard German commands. You could see, barely, soldier beginning to come off the trucks. There was equipment, and machine guns. This wasn't just three soldiers or four soldiers coming off the trucks, you know – these were like, ten, twenty, with machine guns and equipment. And, it's the traumatic moment of my hiding time up to this. I'd suddenly realized: There here. They're going to kill me. They're going to come, they'll either torture me, kill me, send me to a concentration camp [and] kill me there. It was the end of my life, happening there, you know. And it said in my head to run!

They're going to kill you! Do you want to get killed?

I don't want to get killed! Run away, NOW! Run!

And I did run. Maybe my buddy said, "Let's go back to the hut." I don't know. I don't know any more what happened. All I know is that we ran back to the hut,

[59] 13:00.13.24

[60]because that's why we were there, to warn them. And we ran back and we warned them: pulled the blankets off them, and screamed and yelled "They're here, the S.S.! Wake up! Save yourselves! It's a raid!"

And, you know, these people were in mid-sleep in their bunk-beds. They started to, half-dazed, come out of their bunk-beds, try to find in the dark clothes. Some started crying, some swearing. But when we saw that they were all up, I guess we didn't see any sense in waiting any more, standing around – so we ran. And we ran to the side of the woods, and there I thought I saw the Germans coming around the edges, encircling the woods behind me. We jumped across the dirt road into another . . . I don't know how we got through, because it was the same kind of wood and you just couldn't get through, but we must have just forced our way through (I must have been scratched over, I don't know . . .). And we ran. We ran and we ran and we ran and ran, until we couldn't run any longer. We may have rested a little bit, then we walked on, and towards dawn we wound up in Hilversum. You may have heard of Hilversum last week, two weeks ago, when … …, Dutch candidate for party leader was shot in Hilversum coming out of the radio studio (Hilversum is the center of radio and TV).

Anyway, we were in Hilversum, and people were going to work, as if nothing had happened! We didn't know where to go, but I had an idea. My father (there are things that are hard to understand now; they seemed logical at the time) – my father took painting lessons once a week. He'd go on his bike to a place called …, a little village, and there he got painting lessons from a Dutch painter. He'd spend

[60] 13:02.56.04

[61]all day long there, painting still lifes. (If you want to see those still lifes, you can see them in the front room, and you can also see a painting by his teacher there hanging - two farmers playing cards, I think.)

So I knew Pop was there. So I said to my buddy, "Do you know what? Let's go to …. Maybe my dad is there." Then we didn't know. So there was a little steam-tram, and we arrived at the door of the studio – and there was my father, sitting, quietly painting a still-life. He said, "What are you doing here?"

I must have been pretty incoherent, and I was shaken to the core. So I told him that we had been raided, and we didn't know what to do, and here we were. He said, "Well, you know what, I'll tell your mother. I don't know – well, what do you think you're going to do?" Pop wasn't like my mother; Pop didn't have any much ideas. He was sort-of helpless, you know. So we said, "Well, at eight o'clock we have to be back in the woods, because we're supposed to meet with the others there. You know – regroup." So we stayed there with the painter, who was very nice – Mr. Schloeter(?). We stayed there all day, and I guess we took the steam-tram back and went to the woods to the hiding place, then the place where we would

[tape blanks]

So, I told my father that we were supposed to regroup and meet the others, at a certain point in the woods, if anybody survived, that night. So he said he would tell my mother. Pop didn't know what to do. So we took the steam-tram back and we went to those woods and then we stood behind trees. And this time we had taken our guns out,

[61] 13:16.26.00

[62]because we figured the Germans might come instead of our men (I thought that they were all caught, anyway) – the Germans would come and get us. And we stood with drawn guns, the safety off, behind tress, waiting for the Germans to come. I thought at that time that I wouldn't just go with them: I would shoot, I would try to kill some German, and then I would be shot down, no doubt. I didn't want to go to a concentration camp, or get tortured, or whatever; so I made up my mind to die, whatever would come. And we stood there, and then suddenly we heard sounds coming through the woods. It sounded like a rattling of sheet metal. It sounded like one of the bikes in those days. You've go to realize that in those days there were no more inflatable tires, so people put pieces of solid rubber from old car tires around, or wood. Your bike would rattle apart in a month, you know! So I heard that sound coming through the woods of a bike, and I thought, "This is it," you know – "they're coming." And then the bike came in, right in a little clearing. You could see a little light of a flashlight ahead of it. And we stood there, holding our breath, thinking "This is it." For the second time that day I thought, "This is it. I'm going to have to use my gun, and that'll be the end of my life.

But nothing happened. We waited a while, and then we approached the bike rider, who had gotten off the bike (the flashlight had gone off), and found that it was not a German; it was not one of our men. The person who got off the bike was my mother! She had heard about the raid, found out somehow or other our regrouping place, and had come to rescue us. She put her arms around me at that

[62] 13:18.33.02

[63]time; that I know. It seemed to last forever; it was half a minute, maybe, at most. I hadn't seen her since I'd gone to the hut, you know. She told us how dangerous things were. We were surrounded. There was a circle of hundreds of soldiers and S.S. around us. Of course, they were still looking for us. The first thing she told us was to bury the guns, because she said that if they found us with the guns, that's it, they may kill us right at the spot. Without the guns, maybe. There wasn't much hope: we were surrounded, and … … ….

Then my buddy, my partner, said that he knew a place where he might hide, but he needed a bike; and my mother gave him her bike, that old, rattly bike, and she gave him that flashlight. Now, I can't tell you about the flashlight; this was not a regular flashlight. During the war, there were no more batteries. Phillips, the electronic company, made a little hand-generator flashlight. It's called in Dutch a … I don't know why. It's called a "Pinch-cat." It had a little handle on top, and you squeezed it, and as long as you kept on squeezing, you had this faint little light. It was worth a fortune in those days, because Phillips didn't make them any more, and – no batteries, this was the only source of portable light. My mother had that; she gave it to my buddy; and he pedaled off in the darkness with my mother's flashlight.

And then my mother told us what to do: we should act as lovers, and maybe get this way by the guards. And we started walking towards the circle of guards; and there was a guard standing, a soldier with a shouldered rifle. And we put our heads together, and we put our arms around each

[63] 13:20.49.04

[64]other, we giggled, and we made kissing sounds. And we laughed (with ice-cold fear in our hearts), and, walking, waved to the guards. It was the biggest role I ever played in my life, I think. It was a role that had to save our lives, you know. So I acted like crazy, giggling and laughing and waving to the German. And he let us go. He couldn't see us as the dangerous armed Resistance fighters he was told to watch out for. So we walked and waved some more and giggled some more, and walked out of that circle of death.

I stayed one more night with my parents at their hiding-place, but it was right next to a highway. And trucks came by. Every truck that came by, I flew out against the ceiling, practically. I was very close to a nervous breakdown. Some people put me up in their home, in a beautiful room overlooking a garden, and there I stayed a couple of weeks, and stopped shaking.

And then it was time to go, but before that I opened a book in there that changed my feelings about a lot of things. They had a Bible in there, an Old Testament. I'd never read an Old Testament. I opened it, I put my finger in it at a page of Jeremiah and I read: "You shall try to hide, but there will be no hiding places. You shall try and sell yourself, but there will be no buyers." And it was like the proverbial light-bulb went off. I became a Jew there.

You'd think that by then I would know that I was Jew, right? And of course I did. But all of a sudden, son of a gun, this book, this is my history book. It's mine! This belongs to me! I never knew – I always thought it sort-of

[64] 13:23.11.28

[65]belonged to the Christians. They had Bibles; we didn't . . . not knowing about a synagogue and a Torah and all that stuff. And here was a book, and I began to read it from the beginning, and . . . It was gold! it was silver! It was everything! It was the story of my people!

All of a sudden, I became a member of a people. And it's never left me; I've always stayed a member of that people. And I got a Christian bible – you know, one of those Gideon-type Bibles, for free, from the Bible company; and I took it with me when I left there, that room I had to leave after a couple of weeks. I got myself a pair of wooden shoes, bleached my hair again, and moved out to a farm – even registered in that town with my false identity card; and started working as a farm hand. And read that Bible at night – read the Old Testament and the stories about the kings and the prophets and the . . . wow! Moses, and Egypt. Wonderful. All of a sudden I had a history.

My mother was caught May 1944. She was on her way to my brother Fred, who had been sick, I think, and on the way back she was inspected by Gestapo on the train, and he, a specialist, recognized a tiny little fault in her identity card, and arrested her, and put her in a separate compartment of the train, with a Dutch police officer to guard her. She was sent to Amsterdam and she was put in jail there with some Resistance people and other Jews who had been caught. From there she went to Westerborg, a Dutch transit camp, and she was there a while in the prison barracks. And she sent a little picture of herself to me. And then she disappeared; we didn't know. That was the last sign of life.

[65] 13:25.44.29

[66]Then I went and found my father and my brothers, because I didn't know . . . and I don't know how; I think it's probably through my grandfather some contact was established. I found my father and my two brothers in a little summer cottage. Here again was one of the things my mother had done; she had rented this cottage to go there with my father and my two little brothers who'd come there for a weekend, so she would be with her little children for a weekend – and she was caught just before it.

So my father went to the cottage, and the boys were brought there; and I heard about it and I went there; and I quit the farms. I brought some eggs with me, and some milk, and started living in that cottage. Winter came, the last winter of the War, '44-'45, bitter winter. We went begging for bread from farm to farm.

And funny things happened there, too. (I've got to tell this because . . . I'll tell it short.) We'd go to a farm and knock on the door, and usually a farmer's wife would come and say, "Yes?"

"Miss, we're starving. Could you give us some food?" She'd look at my father and she'd look at me. We weren't that starving. She looked at Fred. He was always purple, and he was always shaking. She'd say, "Oh, my God! Come in! Give that kid . . ." and she'd sit him down. We usually timed it so it would be in the middle of the midday meal. And they'd sit him down with the family and put a big plate full of mashed potatoes and what went for gravy, which was melted pork fat or lard. "Here! You eat this, boy. You need this. Oh, my God! Look at him, he's all

[66] 13:27.49.25

[67]purple and shaking." So, okay, he would eat that. And we'd get, maybe, a piece of bread for us.

And on to the next farm. The same g------ thing would happen. "Oh, my God! Look at that child! He's purple. Come in, sit him down!" By this time Fred couldn't eat a thing any more – he was up to this!

"Well, he's very sickly. He's not used to eating any more. Maybe you could give it to us in a little something, and we could take it home, and he could eat it in little bits and bits."

"Oh yes, of course."

These are stories.

We didn't have salt, so my father went and found out that cows need salt in the pastures, so farmers hang up a block of salt, called a salt-lick. We'd steal those, take them home. I'd break them up with a hammer into smaller pieces, dump them in a pot of water, cook them all day long until all the water was gone, and there was this sediment of sooty salt in the bottom. We'd scrape, and scrape, and scrape, and we had salt.

Pop found a store that was totally empty; there was nothing any more. There was nothing in Holland; the Germans had stolen every d--- piece of food there was. There was nothing. People were starving in the cities. In Amsterdam they were falling dead in the street. Pop found this little store, and they had bottles of cough syrup. So he waited and waited, and nobody came. So he knocked on the door; nobody came. He finally took one of the bottles of cough syrup and put it in his bag and pedaled off, back to our little cottage.

[67] 13:29.42.17

[68]That night, we ate frozen turnips with cough syrup. Ah . . .! I mean, no French dinner could have ever been . . . Later on, when we got some ground-up wheat, I made sort-of pancakes out of it, and we'd have it with cough syrup. And I said, "Oh, man! When the war is over we're going to eat that every day!" *[laughs]* It's amazing! It was astounding.

I've got to hurry on, but there's so much to tell. My brother Fred wrote a little article, "The Year that Things Fell from the Sky." The year that we stayed in that cottage, everything fell from the sky. The first thing *[interruption]* [Americans?] . . . accompanying the day-time bombers. They had plastic tanks on the fuel. When they were empty, they would drop them. The first time we said, "Oh, J---- ------, it's a bomb!" – you know. These things would bounce a little bit, and that was it. And then we'd realize, These are not bombs, they're something else.

Next thing, we'd wake up in the morning – everything was covered with little pieces of paper, silver on one side and black on the other. Billions, I mean acres, of this stuff. We couldn't figure out what the h--- it was. We always looked for something we could do with it, because we had nothing. We didn't know what to do with this; we didn't know what the h--- it was for.

One morning we woke up. All round our little cottage: parachutes, with containers. We opened up one container: guns. We opened another: radios. It was a drop for the resistance, gone wrong. Soon the Germans came. I had taken one parachute (I think I thought I could make shirts out of it, or something), disconnected it from one of the

[68] 13:32.04.18

[69]containers, put it under the house. The Germans came to collect it: "Hier sind(?) one parachute missing."

They came to our door. "Where's the parachute?"

We said, "Well, well . . ." We couldn't take any chances: we were in hiding . . . He didn't know we were Jews.

He said, "If that parachute isn't there within half an hour, you'll all go with us." Get all arrested. Pop said, "For God's sake, bring back the parachute."

The Germans took off with everything, all the beautiful stuff that the English and the Americans had given. But they had missed one container. There was a tree that had fallen over, and, behind it, one container we found – with food! Rice pudding! Cigarettes! Five bars of chocolate! Potatoes and gravy!

So, we divided it up with a neighbor, and every day my father and I would smoke half a cigarette together. And we saved one cigarette for Mutter, when she would come back from wherever she was; and we saved one bar of chocolate for her. And every night we said a little prayer. I had become religious, and I made up a little prayer for my mother. We said a little prayer over our frozen turnips.

Then the generals fell from the air. Plane came over and dropped millions of pamphlets. In German it says: "Surrender! These German generals have already surrendered. You don't have to worry about it. You can surrender too." We called them "The German Generals." Now, here was something we could do something with. We gathered up hundreds of them and put a string through them

[69] 13:34.07.08

[70]and hung them in the outhouse. It's great wiping you're a—with the German generals. That was one thing.

Then, one day, one of the last days of the war, beautiful spring sky, we heard, high up machine-gun fire in the sky. We couldn't even see the planes. We knew there was an air battle going on between planes. All of a sudden, a plane came hurtling down, straight down, straight towards us. As it came closer, we realized it was a Messerschmidt 109, the German fighter plane. I said, "Oh, my God! It's going to crash right on us!" At the last minute it swerved and dived into the ground about half a mile away from us. So we ran to see . . . And the only thing that was sticking out of Holland's wet ground was the tail with the little swastika on it, and the little tail-wheel, which was still spinning. And a farmer came with a wheelbarrow, and with a wrench he took the wheel off and he took that home. And I realized, There's a German in there, you know. Nobody had had a chance to jump out.

That's the kind of stuff that fell out of the sky.

We were worried about my mom, because we said a prayer for her every night. But I think we were pretty sure that, if she didn't die from hunger, because Germany was losing the war; we knew the cities were bombed; and she was somewhere: she wasn't in Holland, she was somewhere in Germany, I guess – if she didn't die from hunger, she would be back. That's why we saved the little cigarette and chocolate bar. We prayed for her coming back.

I want you to realize . . . There was no Holocaust yet. All those 110,000 Dutch Jews had gone to work relief in Poland. They were working there.

---

[70] 13:36.49.02

[71]Then the Canadians came, in the spring, with a three-day artillery bombardment, to wipe out the Germans around us. And we stayed in an underground shelter that we had dug. After three days, it stopped. Somewhere in the middle, about a day and a half after that, we heard voices outside. Pop said, "Go take a look, see what could it be? Americans, maybe?" So I stuck my hand out a little bit, not very far, and saw Germans running with a machine-gun on their shoulders. And I went in and said, "Pop, it's Germans running."

And he said, "Oh, my God, we're never going to be free."

But the firing stopped. These enormous shells were exploding all around us, and we crawled out, and it was silent and there was no-one there. But we heard noises coming out of the fields, and we ran to see, and there was this huge column of army material, with white stars on it, coming towards us, tanks and ambulances and kitchens, and guys in cute little cars, you know – open, flat. Behind me, little cars, cutest little cars. Who would have thought that the allies would come in cute little cars?

We waved; we shouted. "This is Canada," it said on their arms. That column of stuff was endless to the horizon. We hadn't pictured it that way. I don't know how I had pictured it. I think I had pictured it cars painted red, white and blue with stars on it. It was dull, green things, with a white star: what the hell did a white star mean?

And the guys, the Berets . . . We waved and we waved; we cried. The dust swirled around us. Tanks would go by

[71] 13:39.49.22

[72]and throw up dust all over us. And the guys would grin and wave back as they went by. And everything . . . the whole bridges went by. Kitchens, with guys cooking as they went . . . Oh, I mean, J----. It can't be described, the feeling. These weren't Germans – different soldiers. We were free. We couldn't understand it.

So we were liberated.

I think it must have been about two weeks later that my father heard that in a nearby town called Barnefeldt(?), which lives on in the annals of the German history of occupation of Holland, because there was a group of Dutch Jews that stayed there, intellectuals, supposed to be saved. Very strange. But in Barnefeldt my father heard that there was a Red Cross group, people with lists, where you could find everybody. Listen to me: "**where you could find everybody**." And he went there on his old, rattly bike. And he found a couple of old, Jewish men, and they said, "Can we help you?"

And he said, "Yes."

"What can we do for you?"

And he said, "Well, my wife was arrested, you know, by the Germans, and I would like to know where she is."

"Oh," they said, "Well, right now you're a little early. We haven't got anything right now. But there's a couple of our men there in Germany coming back with lists where everybody is. So, if you come back a week from now, we can tell you where your wife is."

And, as Pop says later on in one of the interviews with my brother Fred, "I came back there a week later, and the three men were there, but they didn't look the same.

[72] 13:41.49.25

[73]They were beaten down. They told stories about gas chambers, about places where people were murdered, where children were beaten to death or burned alive."

As I always say in my speeches, it was then that my father found out where those trains went with that work relief – where our fathers and mothers, my father's brother, my cousin Jackie, my father's sister-in-law – slaughtered, for no reason, no G------ reason! Anyway, the men said, "We are sorry, Mr. Lessing."

But Pop said, "Could you still look on the list?"

And they said, "Well, we give you very little chance, you know."

They looked on the list, and the man said, "But, she's here, your wife, Angeline Elizabeth Lessing."

Pop said, "She's alive! Where is she?"

And the man said, "Well, she's at a place called Philipville."

He said, "Philipville, where is that?" He didn't know any Philipville.

"Well," said the man, "it's in Algeria, it's in North Africa."

"Huh!" Pop said, "No, that's impossible. We never had anything to do with Africa. I'm not a businessman; we never had business in Africa. She couldn't be there."

The old man got very huffy. He said: "Mr. Lessing, the Red Cross never makes a mistake. Please go home and tell you children your wife is alive."

He said yes, and came home and he said, "Mutter is alive. But she's strange: she's in a place in Africa! She couldn't be there, could she?"

[73] 13:44.02.25

[74]I said, "I don't know. What's Mutter doing in Africa?"

[The date of our liberation] was almost the same day that we were overrun by Germany, either 5 of 10 May or something like that, 1945. We may have been liberated maybe the last days of April. But it was either the last days of April or the first week of May.

A couple of weeks later, we got on army trucks and we traveled to Delft, and there we went to the headquarters of the Dutch Resistance. The War was just over, you know. They said, "…?" And our greengrocer recognized him.

"Oh," he said, "Mr. Lessing, how are you doing?"

"Oh," said Pop, "I'm doing fine."

He says: "What are you doing here for?"

And Pop said: "Well, we ain't got a house."

"Well," he said, "we give you a house." (He was kind of a workman-type, you know!) He says: "Come on, boys! Give Lessing a house."

So they went to the house of an ex-Nazi in the street, and they said: "Here, here's a house."

Pop said: "Can I have " What else do you need?"

"Well," he said, "I was a music teacher."

"What else do you need?"

"Well," Pop says, "a piano would help."

"Oh," he said, "we've got lots of pianos. Boys, give the man a piano."

He got a piano.

"What else?"

"Well," he said, "we need forks and knives and stuff."

[74] 13:45.57.10

[75]"Oh, yeah. Oh, sure, we've got lots." We got forks and knives with strange initials on it (from Nazis, you know, Dutch Nazis). We got plates; and they even gave us some scraps of material to hang in front of the window as curtains. And so we installed ourselves in this house.

My two brothers went back to school. Fred has written a lovely little piece about going back into class. (If I get a chance I'll let you read it; it's beautiful.)

I went back to my trade-school, and instead of being called "Hey, you!" I was called "Mr. Lessing, what can we do for you?" I said, "I would like to finish this and get my diploma." The director was the same man from when I left.

"Certainly," he said. And I went back to school and immediately became No. 1 in every class. I was an old man among kids. And when the kids started throwing pieces of wood in woodworking class, I looked at them and I thought, "What's the matter with these kids? Don't they know that they're here to learn a profession for themselves?" I was an old man among kids. And I finished the diploma in no time, of course. And life was totally different.

Then, my cousin Hans came from The Hague and said, "You know, there's a group in The Hague; they're boys and girls, and they do dances and they sing. And, you know, like, from Palestine . . . And, the girls there . . ."

"Oh," I said, "I'll go to it." I was nineteen years old and still doing the same thing I used to do, a lot, and never been kissed by a girl.

Went there, and found all these young people that had been in hiding, like me, come up above ground. I

[75] 13:48.14.22

[76]immediately joined the Zionist Party, and people from the Jewish Brigade came, and they took us under their wing. They gave uniforms to the boys who wanted to go to Palestine – made them into Jewish Brigade soldiers. It was a wonderful thing; you can read about it.

Interestingly enough, the Jewish Brigade settled in Delft, right near where we lived, into a barracks there, where they guarded German prisoners-of-war. The German prisoners-of-war didn't know what the hell happened to them. They had been guarded by English soldiers before, and every time an English soldier smoked a cigarette he'd drop it, and a German would immediately pick up the [butt].

When the Jewish soldiers came, there wasn't a grain of tobacco left for them to pick up. They took them, all twenty or so of them, to the local little synagogue, and had them clean it with their fingers, all the … … , … and lamps and everything, until it was sparkling clean; and then we had, I think, a Rosh Hashanah service there. Mr. Cohen, the same one who had warned us, led the little congregation of left-over Jews like us. And I came back from a Zionist meeting in August, I think – '45. It was dusk when I came back from the meeting, with all those beautiful girls, the dancing and the singing. We danced the Hora I never knew about. And I came back, and there was an English army truck standing in front of the house, with a camouflage canvas over it. And I came by there and a voice came out from it – as I reached my home, almost, it came out from under the canvases: "Oh, sir, would you know where the Lessings live?"

It was my mother, come back.

[76] 13:50.38.10

[77]I said: "Mother, it's me, it's Ed. It's me."

And we had a cigarette and a little piece of chocolate ready for her. And she came out of the truck, all tanned in an army jumpsuit, and rolled into our house. And my brother Art got so excited, he rolled all from the second floor down on the stairs, into her arms. And she came in, and she had boxes and cases, with stuff. And she wanted to open it all. And Pop kept on saying, "Sit down! I just want to look at you. Sit down! I want to look at you."

And she said, "No! … I have pajamas for the kids here, and I have . . . here! Here's a box: it has twenty-five bars of chocolate in it. And here's a hundred cigarettes."

And our little cigarette and chocolate . . .

And she said, "Is this our home?" And we said yes. "Oh, it's beautiful! And a piano – my G--! And an armoire, even! And chairs and table, oh, and curtains . . .{the rags we'd put up).

As Pop later on said: "Well, that only lasted one day. The next morning she got up and said, 'Yeah, well, those curtains, that's junk; that's got to go. And the piano isn't right there; I want you to move the piano over there . . .'" She immediately started rearranging everything.

And my brother said to her: "Mom, we've got Jewish soldiers right near by you – the Jewish Brigade."

My mother said, "I never want to see a Jew in my life again."

[77] 13:52.34.20

[78]And, I don't know, a week later (I think it was Rosh Hashanah or something) she was singing Hebrew songs in the barracks for the soldiers.

And then the family came over from Indonesia, my uncle and his wife, and my cousins, and they all joined in. And, speak about *music* in that house . . . my father piano and cello; my mother singing; her brother Abraham, from Indonesia, singing duets together; his wife playing the cello; me playing the trumpet all the way to the top with my cousin, who also played trumpet; and then my other cousin, Liesbet, on piano. There was more music in that house.

And then we came to the States.

I don't [remember much about VE-Day]. You see, we were in the east of Holland, somewhat, and we were already liberated. So VE-Day didn't mean a thing to us. It came, maybe, five days after we were liberated. But we were liberated. We were already in the middle between the Canadians, doing business with them and God knows what – and all sorts of funny stories that I don't have time to tell you. But VE-Day didn't mean anything. I mean, it was the end of the war for the western part of Holland, ???plus us, but no, no meaning.

I don't know if you want to hear this, [about when we first arrived on U.S. soil].

[tape blanks]

. . . broke up on the cases, and then the inspector came and they hammered them closed again . . . Stupid, instead of handing the guy ten bucks, said: "No, it says no . . ." Next thing, two cases of stuff had disappeared,

[78] 13:56.20.12

[79]stolen right there and then. My trumpet was gone, a lot of music . . .

It wasn't one of these, "Oh, there's the Statue of Liberty: how wonderful!" It was: "Son of a bitch, they stole from us all our stuff, practically!"

It was the 23rd of October, 1942, that we walked out of our house [and into hiding].

I think [we emigrated to the United States after the war in] 1947. I don't know the exact date any more, but my guess is that it would be 1947 that Pop and I came here.

I met my wife in Holland at the Zionist Party. Remember they had all those pretty girls there.

I met my wife at the Zionist Party right after the war. But she was sixteen years old and I was nineteen. She was kind of a baby. I didn't pay much attention to her. There were other girls who were a little bit more – what shall I say? – developed.

We had been in hiding for years. Everybody was as horny as a goat. (You can cut that out later, if you want to.)

But about two weeks before I was to leave for the United States, I suddenly fell in love. She had developed in the year or two into a beautiful girl. Ah! Beautiful! And I fell in love with her. We went out to the beach together (I'll show you a picture – two skinny kids on the beach). And I decided I had to go to the States with my father, and if we kept on writing letters, then it would be something; and if we didn't write letters, then it was just, you know, over.

[79] 13:59.34.02

[80]So I left, and I came to the States, and I worked for a year, and I wrote letters. Man, I wrote letters, at least five letters a week, at least eight pages each, on that onionskin paper, you know. And oh, man, I wrote and wrote. And once in a while she'd write back, also. So after about six months of this, my mother sent me a notice in a Dutch-Jewish weekly paper that said that I was engaged! She had decided that it was long enough. As my mother had decided so many things in my life, she decided that I was engaged. So, it said in the paper that I was engaged to Karla H…. I thought it was pretty normal. When I tell that story, people always laugh; they can't imagine that. But my mother decided that I was engaged, so.

And Karla came over because she was under-age. She came on the German quarter, because her mother was born in Germany. We got married, pretty soon, in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, March, '48, I think. In 1940, we packed up and left for Israel. Palestine had become Israel in 1948. So we wound up in a kibbutz in Israel where Karla's brother lived. And there we worked for five years, and there our daughter was born. And after five years we left again, spent one year in Holland. I worked at the same place. And in 1956 we came here. It was my third time in this country. In 1929 I came with my father and mother; I came in 1947 with my father; in 1956 with a wife and a child. Found a job here, started working. Immediately decided that I wanted a new profession, something I had seen in Holland, industrial design – which didn't exist in my youth – and went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn to get a degree in that. Started working in industrial design and slid

[80] 14:02.47.19

[81]into graphic design. Did that for about forty years until last month. And now I'm retired.

Our second child is 44 years old, so he was born in the l960's, somewhere.

My son was born in l958, here in this country, nearby.

Originally, before we left for Israel, we had leaved in O , which is in this county, also. And somehow or other, when I came back here – two crazy circumstances – I wound up again here in Westchester. It was a mistake, really. I don't know if you want to hear all this; it's another story.

I've always felt, after we came here for the third time, at least, the sense of belonging in this country – to a certain extent. I have never had great feelings for George Washington as my firs president, if that's what you mean. I liked the American spirit. You know, I had worked in Holland as a junior designer, and the chief engineer there, if you met him in the street he wouldn't even acknowledge you passed him. My first job here, at General Electric, my boss came over, [and] he said: "Hi, Ed!"

I said, "Oh, Mr. Camwell . . ."

"Oh, don't call me that," he says, "I'm George."

"Call me George." How do you mean "Call me George"? It's my boss! What a country!

So I always felt that the people here . . . There were some things here that people would accept you right away for . . . My first graphics jobs, I went to New York and then met a man called Julian Bryan who had a film company.

He said: "What can you do?"

I said, "Well, I can do graphic design."

[81] 14:06.32.20

[82]He said, "Well, I need a new flyer for my film on Afghanistan. Here, do it."

I went home, did a wonderful job.

He said, "Oh, that's good. Do three more."

Where in the world would they do that? Not in Holland – not at that time, anyway.

So I felt at home. But my primary allegiance is to the Jewish people, and to the Jewish State.

Now that I'm retired, I spend some time writing newsletters for the Hidden Child Foundation. I do some speaking during certain times of the year: that takes up a lot of my time. I go swimming. I do watercolor painting (I take several courses in watercolor painting because it's a nice hobby to do for somebody who was in graphics. I do some gardening: I have a little pond.

I want to do a lot of writing. I would like to write down all the wonderful stories of my family. There are dozens and dozens – and I never get to it. I should do it, you know.

I don't know. Time goes away. This room where we are sitting used to be a graphics studio with all sorts of electronic equipment in it. It took six months for my wife and I to transform and to buy furniture. We spent weeks going out from store to store. We still need some stuff and we'll be done. I really would like to write the story of the Lessings. Unfortunately, my brother wanted to arrange a conference with a very famous man who would interview us, for the three brothers – and my brother Art refuses to participate. I just heard yesterday . . . I had written my brother Art a letter saying, "Please

[82] 14:09.01.27

[83]reconsider. You write so well. Why not say it among the three of us?" He won't do it, so I'm afraid that's out the window. But I would like to write.

You see, my brothers don't know many of the stories that I know. My brothers don't know any of the stories of the 1930's, of my parents – how they were, what they did, the funny things, the wonderful stories. So I'd like to write those down. For the rest, I'm getting old!

The train set is fun. I must say, I bit a little bit off more than I should have. It has multiple problems in it. It's a wonderful train set, and I want to really make it run. For my grandchildren, now. So, yes, I will spend some time doing that too. I will. That's another thing.

You were just waiting for me to say that, then, I guess.

I have four grandchildren. Grandchildren are very mysterious. They somehow or other absorb the love of grandparents. Or they set off the love of grandparents, and I don't know why. I do not know why. I wasn't that great a parent to my children; I was at night school then and I had a job in the day-time, and Karla really brought up the children. Weekends I did my homework for school, fixed my cars . . . Now, with the grandchildren, it's . . . But it's very limited time. The first years, when they're small, it's wonderful, wonderful. Now, Aaron, my oldest, is sixteen years old. He is now the same age that I was when I went into hiding; and that is incredible! I looked at him yesterday at the picnic party, and I thought, "My dear grandson, you are now as old as I was then. I

[83] 14:11.24.27

[84]hope that nothing like that will ever happen to you, that you'll have a happy life. No …, please."

But I will write him a letter, in October. I may start to write it on the 23rd of October, when we walked out of our home; when I lost our home, my family then. I want to write to him, about how I was then. That's a hobby, isn't it?

I'm most proud of the fact that I became a pretty good person. I have done mitzvahs. I love to get people things. We didn't talk about it, but, for some years, I helped and supported another Hidden Child, Eddie Strauss Abraham Katz from Belgium, a man who had no legs, and no family, and nobody. And I tried to take care of him, and I provided for him the things that he wanted most. And I'm very proud of that. And then he suddenly died, in 1997. But Eddie was my proudest time; it was time that I did good. And I'm proud that I became a decent person. I'm not very selfish. And I'm proud that we have a nice home; that Karla's still with me: that we're still married, and we were away for a week in a strange country, and we had a good time together. Listen, after 54 years or so, it's something maybe to be proud of, I don't know.

So, *ha ikar*, as they say in Israel – the main point is, from the snotty kid who didn't do any good, I think, through the Holocaust, into a decent person.

It's part of being a decent person [dedicating myself to educating people on the Holocaust]; it's part of having survived, and having people ask me, Could you tell the children? And I'll go any time, anywhere to kids. I was in Jersey City, sixty per cent black, thirty per cent

[84] 14:14.39.09

[85]Latino, ten per cent mixed Chinese – white, and they crowded around me after I told the story. That's what I wanted. I could tell them something about hate and what it did. And who knows? There might be one kid who might remember something. Because I always wonder what they take home, you know. And I get the letters, and in the letter one child will say, "I got family that was in the Holocaust. They got killed. Thank you for coming." A Jewish kid, or a black kid . . . I had one Japanese kid said: "We were discriminated against badly. I'm glad you came and told us about . . . I didn't know."

And I do good. I'm a good speaker, I think, and I can excite them. And my story happens to be not one of death, of piles of bodies. The worst of the Holocaust I cannot tell them: I wasn't there. I can tell them about how we survived all. So, that's why: it's a story that children can identify with, and I can tell it well.

The question is, "Are you touched by the children that you lecture to?" I look at them, and my heart goes out to them. I remember my Cub Scouts, who were maybe the same age then, or maybe eleven, twelve years old. And I speak to them and I think, "They're all gone, all the Jewish children." Thank God you're there.

And it's specially strong when I'm in a Jewish group; it drives me crazy. They sit around and they laugh and they giggle and they d… , they have the backpacks, and they don't look anything like our Jewish children – but they are them. They are like, "Come back."

[85] 14:17.22.16

[86]I can't tell this very well, but to you I can. I can't express it. It's not all the time, but these flashes; and I see them, and I think they were like them. That God . . .

And especially the Jewish children . . . I was in a yeshiva nearby; there were eight hundred children. I look at them. And I don't think anyone else looks at them that way. They are there; they are still there. And I pray to God that nothing will happen to them. *That's* what I sometimes think when I speak to the children. "Oh! They're there!"

[To future generations] I think I would say the same that I say in speeches to this present generation of children; and my speech always ends saying:

> "Don't be a hater. Be one of those righteous on the nations: help people. This is what happened to me, because of hate, because of lies. Remember, this is the danger: hate, prejudice. This is the danger. Watch out. Don't believe what they tell you: examine, find out."

All the things I say at the end of my speech. They hold through for every generation to come. God knows what is to come yet in hate and destruction and all that.

I have such a belief in the Jewish people. To me they are the salt of the earth. To me our people are amazing. I don't believe much in mysteries, but there's one mystery I cannot figure out: Why has this people survived?

And I think sometimes the mystery is that we're here for certain to show the world what a people really should be. This sounds so g------ nationalistic, but show me one

[86] 14:20.07.22

[87]people with the accomplishments of our people. I know, now, we got the bad apples among them. Moses knew it already. They're a hard-necked people. They're a pain in the ass, look what they've accomplished, and look what they do. And I don't see us going out and blowing up ourselves among other people, to kill. And we don't spread hate, and we don't do this. We're a marvelous people; we're a wonderful people; and we're ancient. We will survive:----------. And I'm a member of it! It' magical; it's wonderful.

I have hope for the Jewish people. As I just said, They will live on. They will go on and on. I have hope for Israel, this marvelous country that Jews built after two thousand years. I have great hopes that maybe someday the world will recognize what this people really can do, what they have done, and . . . I have great hopes. But it's for us ----------now - for us, for our people, for this amazing, amazing people. I can't even begin to tell you how I feel about being Jewish. That the Holocaust is.????

If the Holocaust had not been around, I probably was the same snot-nosed man, selfish, that I was then. I've grown into a decent human being, and I think it was through the suffering, through being able to feel suffering for others. That's why I volunteered to be an interviewer for the Spielberg-… Foundation. And I listened. I listened . . . and I couldn't. Couldn't even understand how they could go on living. They had lost their mother and their father and their sisters. One man had lost seven brothers and sisters and his father and mother. And he went on

[87] 14:22.59.25

[88]living; and he's sitting there telling me this . . . and I thought, "I have everybody. It's amazing." A Jew who survived and he's still here.

I could tell you stories about the interviews . . . It was a good thing to do – another good thing that I'm proud of. Yes, it was a good thing to do. I've done some good things. I've done some lousy things, and some good things.

Of course [I'm proud of my family]. I look at my wife, and she's a beautiful person. And I still see that seventeen-year-old: it's amazing! She never believes it. I look through the wrinkles and I see that girl, that beautiful girl, that Jewish girl. She's so smart, and she has all the wits ----------, you know. And my son and daughter are good people. They're a little strange sometimes, but they're good people: they don't have a harmful thing in them. And the grandchildren? Well, I'm a typical grandpa – I love them all. They're wonderful. I love 'em. I'd do anything for them. So yes, of course I'm proud.

Tikun olam? I've heard the phrase and I've never really examined it. I would think, from the top of my head, that we, as a people of Israel, are supposed to repair the world. I believe that we, as the Jewish people, have somehow or another . . . seems to be the chosen people. I'm not sure there's anybody up there – but somehow and another we have survived. All these --------- are gone: the Syrians and the Greeks and the Romans and the Assyrians and the Egyptians are all gone – all these great people with their great civilizations. And we, the

[88] 14:25.18.02

[89]Schlamil(?) people, all we have is a roll of paper. Do you realize that? You know, I just became bar mitzvah two months ago, and it all of a sudden occurred to me . . . All carrying this thing around; and they put it down and you read from it. And then they put a thing all round it – you know, the cloth and the silver; and they put it in the *haron hakodesh*. And it's a g------ roll of paper! That's all we have! What a people! We've lived for four thousand years, or three thousand or whatever, on a roll of paper! It's amazing! Is there any other people in the world like that? Maybe the Navajos? American Indians, the Zunis – I was there . . . *Tikun olam*? It comes out of that people who have only a roll of paper. They don't have saints . . . I could go on and on, you know . . .

If you ever thought about the greats in our religion . . . Moses, who stutters. God says, "Go to Pharaoh; tell him, Let my people go.: He says, "I'm sorry, I stutter." He's the great hero of our people; he stutters.

He says, "I'll give you Aaron; he doesn't stutter, so go with him."

Okay, we get King David, [who] sends somebody's husband to the front so he can get killed, so he can screw his wife. Another great hero of ours. They're all human beings; they're all humans, with failures, just like us. This is our religion. We don't have any people who are Sons of God, who died on the cross. We don't have any Buddhas who . . . – as beautiful as they are. We only have these flawed people – and a roll of paper. We done pretty good with that, man.

[89] 14:27.32.15

[90]I love much of the [American] people: their openness, their willingness, their naiveté – I love most of that. I *hate* the cheapness sometimes, and the garbage, and so; but, we've found friends in this country that you wouldn't find anywhere else, I think – wonderful, open. Yeah, that's what I love about this, the people of America.

[train sounds]

I built [the train set] for myself. I didn't build it for my grandson. People always thought I built it for my grandson, but I didn't, really. I built originally a little track for my son Dan. That was thirty-five years or so ago. But this time I'm really building it for myself.

I guess I built a wooden track for Aaron, my first grandson. And he said, "Opa, can we get another mocolotive?" – instead of "locomotive." And since then I always tease him with it. "Hey, Aaron, you've got a real mocolotive going around." He gets a little irritated by that. But I always call them mocolotives.

It's not finished, you know. There's going to be a lake there, with houses around. When my grandson Aaron built this whole village here, he stipulated that he wanted to have a house. So we built him a house up on the hill there. Then Peter, my second grandson, came, and he said that he also wanted a house on the hill. So this house is Peter's. Now, thank God …… because I wouldn't know. We don't have enough hills to build houses on.

I want to finish this. This whole area here has to be finished with woods, and maybe snow; then down here, the lake, is going to be like glass, with little boats on it; and then around the lake we need to have maybe a couple of

[90] 07:22.35.30

[91]little houses here, or a boat club, and then we'll have trees – like here, this has to be covered; this is all bare right now; it will be covered with moss and trees. And close this in with something. I have to be able to open it because, if something derails in there you have to be able to get to it.

You buy the trees. I have tons of stuff downstairs. You buy this, and that. But the trees are mine. You buy little trees, you buy pine trees; you buy grass that you sprinkle on with glue. Oh, it's just great.

I have lots of mechanical troubles here. Trains derail, cars fall off. Now, there's a little man in Blaufelt, New York, who has a store. And I go back there, and I say, "I have to go to Blaufelt. . .

[continues in this vein]

[91] 07:24.27.13