

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Sonja DuBois
November 10, 2008
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Sonja DuBois, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on November 10, 2008 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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SONJA DUBOIS

November 10, 2008

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Sonja DuBois**, conducted by **Ina Navazelskis**, on November 10th, 2008, in **Washington, D.C.**, at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum. First of all, thank you **Sonja** for agreeing to talk with us today.

Answer: My pleasure.

Q: And as we do with all of our interviews, we're going to begin at the beginning.

A: Right.

Q: We'd like to hear – we'd like to lay the groundwork, and that means where you were born, when you were born, your family, who was your family. So, short descriptions of your father and your mother, if you had any siblings, their names. And before we start with that, there's something I see that's very unusual, with mo – from most of the interviews that we've conducted, in that today you are **Sonja DuBois**, and on the day you were born you were **Clara van Tyne**(ph). That's quite a different name.

A: Isn't it?

Q: Yeah.

A: Right.

Q: So, ex –

A: And I've had a name in between.

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Q: So, it's all a – you know, here it is –

A: All right. Yes, I was –

Q: Explain it to us.

A: Yes, I was born October 1994 – '90 – 1940, of course, in **Rotterdam, The Netherlands**, or **Holland**, whichever way you want to put that, to a young Jewish couple named **Moshe** and **Sophie van Tyne(ph)**. They were – had been married in 1939, and I was born in 1940, and their lives ended in 1942, and I was their only child.

Q: Oh my.

A: And –

Q: Is **van Tyne(ph)** a – a Dutch Jewish name?

A: Yes, it's a –

Q: So you –

A: – it's a dut – Dutch Jewish name, but I never knew what my name was until quite a few – few years later. To get to the en – to the initial part of the story, which will – you will want to – will want to come back to, is in 1938, a cousin got out of **The Netherlands** on the last ship, **Hospel(ph)**. Her name – her – her new husband and her, and her baby girl, went to **Australia**, cause **United States** wasn't accepting any more refugees. And these people figured back into my life much later.

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Q: What are their names?

A: Oh boy. **Bev Schulster**(ph) is the daughter of Aunt **Alice**. Aunt **Alice van Hilder**(ph).

Q: **Van Hilder**(ph).

A: Yeah, **g-e-l**, yeah. She and her young husband; he used to travel abroad, and kind of saw the handwriting on the wall. And he and his wife and little baby girl, and his parents came over. Who turned back up in life way later.

Q: Okay, okay. So, when you were born in 1940, where were you born – were you still with – yeah, of course you were with your mother, but were your parents in their own home? Were they both –

A: You know, I th – I think I might have been born right after their initial home was bombed. They lived in the old city in **Rotterdam** and I understand that was bombed early on by the Nazi. So, they either lived there or another place in **Rotterdam**, and I know – I know that address. The initial address is, you know, no longer.

Q: Did you ever see photos of them?

A: I have one precious photo of them. And I didn't get that until I was 60 years old.

Q: Oh my.

A: Which is a long time ago, too, you know.

Q: No.

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A: But I'll tell you how it –

Q: It's a long time –

A: Yeah, it's a long time to wonder what your mother looked like, what she smelled like, you know, the intimacy that you – that surely kids –

Q: Yes.

A: – I presume.

Q: Yes.

A: You know, all this I presume they develop with their mother, because I was 21 months old when they were deported to **Westerbork**. And –

Q: By that time you were in hiding? That mo – by that time you had been taken away from them, or they had –

A: No, the day they got on the – on the train, on the transport to **Westerbork**, I was handed over, they handed me over to a friend of theirs. And, you know, I will never know if – if this was a – of course it was agonizing – if it was a decision that they had made prior to that, or if it was just because, as I heard it later, Daddy's friend said, you don't want to take this child with you. I sort of think of the earlier, you know, that they had agonized over it and decided that they didn't really know where they were going yet in '42, except, you know, you haven't worked in awhile, and they promised people jobs, too, so –

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Q: Well, what – what – do you know what he had been doing, what his job had been?

A: Yes, yes, as a matter of fact, after the war, I have a few precious papers, and one of these was his dismissal letter, which was typed in 1941, just a paragraph. And it said that they were very sorry, due to circumstances, they had to let him go, but would recommend him to anyone. So when I – and he – he worked in a – he chaired a linguist department like – it was an export company, so I guess he knew languages.

Q: Oh, so it was an export company that had a department of – of – of many multilingual people.

A: Probably, yeah, yeah.

Q: And he was the head of that department.

A: And so he, you know, he hadn't worked at – in awhile, and I tried to look up that company many years later when I si – finally started researching and found out they were a Jewish company too, and of course, had been bought for pennies on the dollar, or **guilder**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Long time before that. So he –

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Q: At 21 – at 21 months old, I would be very surprised to think that you'd have any memories of that time.

A: No, I'm –

Q: What are your earliest memories?

A: It's really strange. An earl – earliest memory that I have didn't flash in – see, my life's floating puzzle pieces, didn't flash in until maybe a dozen years ago, when my husband and I were in **Saint Thomas** and they have these little boats that go between hotels and port. And there was this – they look like little **Thomas** the train trains. And I said to **Ron**, I said, I've been on one of those before. And smells are always the strongest memory for me. And I smell that I've been on that boat before. Well, the person I was given to, after we went [**indecipherable**] and that was a temporary situation, when Mom came to pick me up, she tells me, she went one way, like my tram probably, and came back another way, which was across the **Mass** river, you know, not to be traced. And I remember sitting down on a little bench, smelling that smoke go over me, and oh, it's so strange that, you know, things like that still happen. And put –

Q: The little flashes.

A: Yeah, they just – they're just little flashes.

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Q: So, what happened to y – what happened to you before your earliest memories kick in, that you were told later, of your road? Your parents are there until they're deported to **Westerbork**. At the time of their deportation, they hand you to somebody.

A: Right, to Mr. **Dolf Henkes**, who became quite a well known artist in **Europe**. And that's an important connection, cause until like the 80s, I couldn't figure out why I was given to one person and not to another. He was a friend of Daddy's, and I did find out later that they were both artists. Daddy's an art – was an artist.

Q: Your father in – when you say daddy, you mean your birth father?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Okay.

A: There are Mother and Daddy, and Mom and Pop.

Q: Okay. That's how they're distinguished.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. And Mom and Pop are the people who raised you?

A: Right, right.

Q: Okay.

A: So, I was given to Mr. **Henkes**, he was a single man, always was, and had – took me home – well, first he took me to farm country, where a lot of kids were hidden,

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but he found – the conditions he'd found were atrocious. It was behind a chicken coup, there was a family there. And I think it was a mutual decision, they didn't want me, cause I cried a lot, you know, I would have given them away.

Q: You're a baby.

A: Yeah.

Q: You're a baby.

A: I'm probably missing my mommy. So he took me home, and then through the underground, nobody'll ever know where, who, what, because I've tried to find out. Just within the last two years I was rejected to have them named as Righteous Gentiles, cause we couldn't find – one of the reasons was we couldn't find enough witnesses.

Q: We can talk –

A: Okay.

Q: We can talk about that later.

A: Yeah, okay.

Q: Okay.

A: Fine. Enough witnesses. So he took me home, Mom and Pop are – Mom came to pick me up. And I think the reason my birthday was celebrated in August, nobody knew a thing about me, was that they got me in August, you know. I know when

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Mother and Daddy went to **Westerbork**, that was like the 27th or something, July. Figure they **futzed** around a little bit, finally found somebody. So in August, it was, you know, a new beginning for me. And they couldn't have children, so you know, I was an answer to their prayers as well.

Q: And where did – where were they – who are – what are their names, and where were they from?

A: They're – were **Elizabeth** and wille – **William van der Kaden**.

Q: **Van der Kagan**(ph)?

A: **Kaden**.

Q: **Kaden**.

A: Which is of the dike, in **Holland**.

Q: Okay, **van der Kaden**.

A: And they had always lived in **Scheidam**, which is a city right next to **Rotterdam**. And he – he was active, Pop was active in the underground, and Mom used to volunteer the Red Cross, so it's – you know. I'm sure they had –

Q: How old were they? Were they older than your own parents?

A: No, they were – Mom was born in the same year, 1913, just like Mother and Daddy were, and Pop was maybe about five years older.

Q: Okay.

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A: So – but I didn't look like anybody, you know, when – it's amazing how many people – it really did take a village to bring up this child, because they weren't the only – you know, they took the biggest risk, but there was the pediatrician they found to examine me, who guessed at my age. Yeah, August sounds good, you know. Two years old, fine. You know, it's two or three months. There was the food stamp office that gave me a s – a stamp so I could eat.

Q: Eat. So you'd have food rations.

A: Yeah, I had food rations. Let's see, what else? Oh, there were people that Mom knew – oh, one friend of theirs was a policeman, and from an old coat of his, I got this wonderful navy cape that she sewed. I must have look – you know, and it had a lining, I remember a plaid lining. So I must have, you know, worn. And the – the first picture I had was with a little knitted dress that was pulled – you know, it was warm. Nobody else had anything either. So, they pull that thing on and started over, and made this pretty dress for this little girl.

Q: And you – you had no brothers and sisters in that family, or did you?

A: None. No, I had – you know, I was first child of my natural family and they never had children either. So, as Mom used to call me when she aged, and could remember my name, she'd say, oh, here comes my only one. So, you know, we all – always meant a lot to each other.

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Q: Then let's go back to your – your – you've been – you end up with them, and your earliest memories then, with them. Do you ha – can you pull those –

A: Oh yes, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, I wrote a story about this, because it keeps flashing in front of my eyes. And that is the first time I saw a parade, or I thought I saw a parade. We u – we lived three different places during four years, by the way.

Q: You were with them for four years?

A: No, I was with them all my life, but –

Q: Okay.

A: – you know, communication was much slower than it was –

Q: That's right.

A: – so when people in one end of town started making – posing questions that they couldn't or wouldn't answer, we'd just move across town. Well, you know, that doesn't make any sense now, but it did then.

Q: Of course, of course.

A: So, the second place we lived was on the second floor, and in **Holland** you had these little spy windows at – at the front of the window, so you could see who was at the front door. Well, I was not – never ne – knew why, I was never allowed near the window anyhow. Strange rule, I thought, but –

Q: You weren't allowed, yeah.

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A: Not allowed near the window. Well, what do you do when you're told you're not – told you're not allowed?

Q: Go to the window.

A: Well, you go to the window.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, I don't know how old I was, but I know it was at dusk. It was a rainy – it was that nasty rain they have in **Holland**, just kind of slithers down and co –

Q: Cold and clammy.

A: Yeah. And there is a – a parade of men, and I could count, I could count to 10, I think. And there were five men across, and then a row back, and I don't know how many there were. And they were – there was a drum in front of them, one drummer. And these people had strange costumes, to a child's eye. They were all kind of brown and gray and black. But it wasn't a happy parade. Just kind of strange, but I thought it was a parade, because I had never seen a parade, probably. And some wore hats, and some that – I can remember the glistening of their hair, those that weren't – weren't wearing hats. They all had carried a roll of some sort, which later on I figured out were blankets. Where we lived, just around the block was a train station.

Q: Oh.

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A: And so, they were having their last walk in their city, because you know, when they went to the train station and the door closed –

Q: So these were not soldiers, these were just ordinary people?

A: These were – these were men that were found, they're being deported. And of course, you know, I was being protected from whatever nasty was going on. I didn't know it was nasty. I couldn't figure it out. Why would you have a parade on a rainy day, why didn't they cancel it? I knew that much. And there wasn't any happy music.

Q: And there was a drummer. That's so strange.

A: Yeah, it was just a – a single drummer. And then of course, it was much later when I figured out that their fate was probably sealed when –

Q: They were found.

A: – they sealed the doors of the train.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And – but, you know, Mom and Pop always, always worked hard at protecting me from – from my other life. I – my life kind of became a conspiracy of silence. There is good and there is bad in that, I'm afraid.

Q: Did you play with other kids during the war years?

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A: No, I belonged to – they tried to make life as normal as possible for me. I remember going to a pre-school or kindergarten, or something like that.

Q: Did they look very different than you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your parents – I mean, your – your adopted parents? They did?

A: Oh yeah. Pop was red haired, kind of bald already, and Mom was a dark blonde. So – but there were questions all the time, and – and in another group of people who – who could have – who became part of the – the extended family were the teachers and the parents that used to pick the kids up. Where'd this little girl come from? How come, you know, she doesn't look like any of us? I have a picture, you know, class picture, of me. I was short, I was sitting on the bench in the front row, and there's like a row behind me and a teacher on each side. It's one redhead, all towheads and me, you know, so you know, my hair is still black. And that had to be very telling, and it was years, years, years later that my girlfriend **Welly**(ph), who I still correspond with in **Holland**, told me, we were all sworn to silence. The reason was given that it would just hurt me. It would, you know, upset me to know that I didn't belong [**indecipherable**]. Well, of course, kids have that instinct where they know that, or I did, anyhow. By the time I was about five years old I figured out that –

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Q: Something's different.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: How'd you figure that out?

A: Well, it's hard to tell. There again, snippets.

Q: Well, let's have them, snippets.

A: The most obvious was that towards the end of the war, we used to – you know, people walk there all the time. I used to walk around the city and meet acquaintances and friends. And I'd be standing here holding [indecipherable], and the conversation was always the same. Well, who have you heard from, did anybody come back? When – when's anybody coming back? That – and the answer was always negative, no, we don't know. And I'm standing right there. So eventually I figure out, they're talking about Mother and Daddy. And –

Q: Did you always know –

A: – I felt – I felt – I felt – I think I felt cheated, cause nobody ever told me anything. I was spoken about – it's like, even when I was older, but I was never spoken to. I wasn't given the fact that I had an intelligence, that I had ears, you know, that I could hear. People don't adopt kids that way, not that I was ever adopted, but they don't handle situations like that. Course, during the war they didn't have much choice.

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Q: Yeah. Were you tol – do you remember ever being – did you – when you came to them, were they your mother and father? For all intents and purposes, you had no – no other mother and father, or did you always know that you had another one, another set of parents?

A: At that point where we're putting things together, I knew. I wasn't told until six years later.

Q: So you were only told when you were like 11 years old.

A: Almost 12, right.

Q: Almost 12. But at that point is when you started suspecting that you had a – there was something –

A: M-More.

Q: Mm-hm. Because of that conversation, always the same.

A: Yeah. You know, I was –

Q: Did you ask them, and they just deflected your answers?

A: No, I didn't – you know, I didn't begin to ask until after to – they told me, because instinctively I think I knew it would hurt their feelings, or I wouldn't be a good girl, and we were all trying to be very good, and you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And –

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Q: Did you have –

A: – it was kind of cowardly, I guess, you look at it now, but I was a little girl, you know?

Q: Oh, it's not cowardly at all, it's normal. And it's also – what a – what we've found in – is that there's a lot of people who had silences in their lives, in their early lives. And most of the reasons – and sometimes they don't know those reasons, you can only kind of assume, but those who i-impose the silences, let's say your – your – your –

A: Mom and Pop.

Q: – adopted parents –

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Didn't want to traumatize the child. They – they – they didn't know –

A: I think they didn't know how to begin.

Q: That's right. They didn't know what to – how would they handle this, and they didn't know what effect it could have on you. Or – I mean, I'm assuming too. I don't know.

A: And on them.

Q: Yeah.

A: Later on you find, you know –

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Q: Okay.

A: – you – well. Let's talk a little bit how I was kept alive.

Q: Yes, please.

A: These – these people – you know, everybody in **Holland** was hungry, too. It was the land of, you know, butter and milk and cows, and you know, the – the soldiers were getting it all, you know, they had to keep the troops alive.

Q: So how were you kept alive?

A: There one – one day – one meal a day, a hot meal, was the meal of the day. I used to go – in **Holland** we have a lot of aunts and uncles, just everybody's an aunt and uncle. They found an aunt and uncle for me who gave me hot meal a day. Nobody asked where they got the food, or you know, that type of thing. But I went to these folks, my little cape on. And it must have been just a couple of blocks, cause I went by myself. And –

Q: Why didn't you eat at home? Didn't they have the food?

A: Well, they were getting to the s – going to the soup kitchen and getting this, you know, two slices of bread and this thin soup.

Q: No, no, I'm – what I – where my curiosity comes from is that you had a ration card; somebody had colluded and given you a ration card.

A: Yeah, but that food was pretty yuk for a three year old.

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Q: Oh, I see, I see.

A: All right, yeah, yeah, it was –

Q: So –

A: – it wasn't nourishing. Couldn't get any milk. I have another story about how I got milk. But, you know, to get a regular, substantial meal, I was told I was a little waif already by the time I came to them. Which is likely because I wasn't getting enough to eat, you know, at Mother and – and Daddy's.

Q: And so you went to this aunt and uncle who were probably not their relations either, but just –

A: No, no, they weren't.

Q: Yeah.

A: And, you know, it was sort of shady, I'm sure, as to where they got their food. And – but I had a nice, hot meal, and it was so sweet. I would come home and I remember this distinctly, I don't know why it didn't – you know, some things just come to me, and – and Pop would have the – they have these little tins, like I think probably **Laura Ingalls** carried to her – to lunch for school.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And the soup would be in there, and he would ask me if I was still hungry. And I'm told that nine out of times – 10 times, I ate it, you know.

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Q: Well

A: [indecipherable] you – you know, I didn't know, but I didn't need it, you know, and he – he did.

Q: You – maybe you were hungry.

A: Right.

Q: Your – you're a child and they know that, and they know that, and they loved you.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's what it sounds like because they were – there could have been a situation – you were with a family which would not have fed you more than they needed to.

A: Right, right. Yeah, it was – it was fine. So, you know. And Pop used to cook sugar beets. And every – they c – they cut them in strips, and then they simmer them, and it makes some sort of syrup. And he would cut them, and he was always hungry. And he would give me a si – a little piece of – half of that, and he says, don't tell Momma. You know, but he wa – he was my buddy.

Q: Did you – did you ever feel, during the – during the war times, that you were in danger? Did you ever remember such a feeling?

A: Yes. Yeah, I do. I remember – you know, in **Holland** the bathrooms are not the way they – ours are. They call them **WCs** and they were water closets, they really

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are. And Mom and I, I – I do remember sitting there, not knowing why, being held on her lap, and hearing these high pitched sounds, and those were, of course, the bombs, or the bombers flying near, or whatever. But we used to sit in the –

Q: Oh.

A: – in the – in the toilet there. And another time there was a – a man raid, and somebody had warned us. Pop had already hidden out with a friend of his, and we were to go there as well. And it was a – must have been summer, because I remember the cobbles – I had bare feet, and so it was at night and the cobblestones were slick, but not ice cold – because Mom was carrying a – a pot of soup or something like that, and her – she said to the soldier that she had to go to

krankenhaus.

Q: To the hospital.

A: Right. And I guess in those days, whatever you had, you brought. And she told me to, you know, go ahead and run ahead. And it's the black boots that frightened me. I don't own a pair of black boots. There will never be any in my closet.

Because, you know, Nazis boots came up, probably to my eye level.

Q: Oh my.

A: And that is, you know, that's just one of those quirks that still exists in my life, and –

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Q: Did you – the dane – the first danger that you mentioned is the kind that would be indiscriminate. It – you know, a bomb falls, it doesn't –

A: Right.

Q: – care who it falls on. Was there danger about you?

A: I don't think there – I was eve – Mom and Pop were ever personally, or myself, attacked, to – where we ha – where we felt – where I felt I'm safe.

Q: So, the only thing was is that occasionally someone would say something, ask too many questions about where you came from, and you moved.

A: Right.

Q: But not to the p –

A: Oh, and what I remember, the man I was given to, Mr. **Henkes**, I – to a – the earlier address we lived in, came – and I think he tried to come and see me.

Q: It's okay, okay.

A: Okay, all right then.

Q: Yeah, the earlier man, mm-hm.

A: We lived, again, second story, and I remember that someone said that Mr.

Henkes tried to come see me. I guess to see if I was all right. And I remember, you know, Mom and Pop being very upset about that. And he got a picture of me, and I know the day it was passed to him. I don't know why I knew that. I was about four

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years old, and there's this picture of me holding a doll carriage. And one of the teachers handed something over the fence. I don't know why I knew it was my picture, and I didn't think of it again until much later, 1987, but we're not there yet.

Q: We'll get – we'll get there. We'll get there. But, do you think that he came to visit you close to the end of the war? Is that – if you were four years old, and it was 19 – you were born in 1940, so that would take it, you know, half a year a –

A: I know.

Q: – yeah, half a year away from, you know, liberation.

A: Liberation. No, it must have been earlier than that, because we didn't live near that railroad yet. The address I came to was the one where I remember – because across the street, on the ground level, was a – I guess he was an invalid, he was an old man who used to sit in the window and wave at me. I call him **Opa**, you know.

Q: Yeah. Oh, I just had a thought, what was it?

A: Jot it down.

Q: Went in one ear and out the other. Let me see if I can rece – recover it. But in the meantime, are there any other memories from the ti – yes, I remember now what it was. Your Pop, what was his job, what did he do?

A: Carpenter.

Q: He was a carpent –

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A: Carpenter cabinetmaker, right.

Q: Uh-huh. And –

A: And that was – cause he didn't have a job over the fren – over the – during the war, either, you know, nobody was working doing any construction. And he couldn't get one after the war in that trade, because all the wood was gone. You know, people chopped down little trees, they used their furniture to burn their f –

Q: To heat.

A: – you know, to get so – to heat, yeah, or you know, there – there were no jobs.

Q: Did they come from large families, your adoptive parents?

A: Pop was one of six, and Mom was one of three. No, I think Pop was one of seven, yeah.

Q: And did you meet the aunts and uncles?

A: Yeah. Yeah, I became part of the – the family. As a ma – ma – my favorite cousin was on – on Pop's side, a little boy.

Q: Did you ever feel like you were different, family-wise, that there was something different about you, the way you felt, you know, in the general life?

A: Not when I was with them, no. No, I would – I felt – as a matter of fact, probably I was the happiest when I was with them, because it was a lonely life being an only child and kind of not knowing how to act. Was – I –

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Q: What do you mean by that?

A: I never knew if I was being good or not. Not that I ever made any gross mistakes, I don't think, but it's all part of trying to please, I think. And Mom and Pop were never **dismonstrative**, so I didn't know by touch, or by hug or by **atta** girl, whether I was measuring up.

Q: But when you were in the larger family you felt –

A: Yeah, I'm just one of the kids, I'm fine, yeah.

Q: Did you feel that they loved you?

A: Mom and Pop?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, even if they weren't demonstrative, it wasn't because there – there was coldness in the home?

A: I don't know. That is really hard to say. I think I became their possession. I don't ever feel like – like I was nurtured a lot as a child, as a little human who was fulfilling – this is a terrible thing, this – it's gonna sound awful – that was fulfilling their dreams.

Q: It's a big burden.

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A: And I don't know if it was the – the age of – you know, the time, or whether it was a European philosophy, but kids definitely were to be seen and not heard. And I always tried to measure up to that. But I don't ever remember sitting on Mom's lap. I would have remembered, because my **Opa**, her dad, used to come over and I loved sitting on his lap, and we used to listen to the radio programs, and he was just my favorite person in the world, you know.

Q: What were their dreams that you were fulfilling?

A: Well see, I never really knew. I never knew when – I knew when I was doing wrong, but I guess I never got – I don't know, it was kind of cold, I think.

Q: So it was cold.

A: Yeah.

Q: It was cold.

A: An-And I don't mean to si – you know, negate –

Q: What they did.

A: – what they did. And it becomes more obvious later on in life when I did start asking questions, and I was rebuffed, you know, not to ask questions.

Q: Oh.

A: So.

Q: Okay. Hang on just a second.

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A: And I was – I was – you know, I was trying to be loyal to their – their wishes. You know, they had wanted a child so badly, they wanted a good child, and where would I have been without them? So I certainly had to be grateful. And it sure –

Q: Those are huge burdens though.

A: Huh?

Q: For a little – for a child, those are burdens –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to be goo – you know. Because the no –

A: We didn't analyze that until much later, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I don't – you know, when people say, was – did you have a happy childhood? I'll say, I don't think so. I had a comfortable childhood. I had food, I was dressed well. Pop and I used to walk by windows, you know, shopping. And I guess I was very clever, because I never asked for anything outright, I – I knew that wasn't the thing to do, but I'll si – he says – I used to say, that's all **[indecipherable]** this is what we'll buy someday, right? And, you know, likely it showed up, but I knew – I was polite enough to know that you didn't ask for things.

Q: Did they get along with one another?

A: Yeah.

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Q: So it wasn't that –

A: Cause I – cause, well, you know, and this comes in later on. They would – they made an agreement not to tell – ever tell me anything. And I think Pop would have broken that, hadn't it been for Mom. She was definitely the more dominant person.

Q: Were they religious?

A: Yeah [indecipherable]

Q: Protestant [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, Protestant.

Q: Did you go to church with them?

A: I went to chur – after the war, we started – you know, when you could worship freely again, I went to church with them.

Q: Oh, I didn't realize that Christians wouldn't have been able to worship during the war.

A: N-No, it's – I don't know. Maybe they didn't want to take me out in the street any more than normal. But I remember a minister friend of theirs, their minister, I guess, coming to the house and – and visiting. But I don't remember going to church until after the war.

Q: Do you remember how – when the war ended?

A: Oh yeah.

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Q: What was that like?

A: I remember some flashes, and then later on I was, you know, as I'm listening to the after dinner stories, I'm saying, oh that's what we're – that's what I saw. May fifth, it was in the evening, I think, when they finally heard that they'd been liberated. And I was taken from bed. I don't remember being asleep, but I know I was groggy, and they were dancing around the street with me, with all these – I saw all these flags, you know? That was another thing that was confiscated besides bikes and radios, you know, also, they had to – had to give up their flags. Well, you know, you might give up one flag, but they rolled the other one up and hid it in the attic. And there was lots of dancing and – and music, and I remember feeling really out of it, you know. But – but that was –

Q: It was a good mood.

A: – that was liberation, yeah –

Q: Yeah.

A: – that was – yeah. And I don't know why it was such a big moment until later on. I knew it was an odd time for me to be out, and we – you know, people being riotous in the street.

Q: Did your life change much after liberation?

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A: I had a visitor. The aunt – did I tell that one of the – Daddy's sisters – grandfa – his grandfather's level, his younger sister was married to a Christian who was very well-to-do?

Q: No, you didn't tell me about this.

A: Okay, well, **Tante Sinke**(ph) was married to this man who was a Christian, so she was safe. You know, they didn't make an issue out of her being a Jew. But they came – she came to visit, sometime. I don't know how they found me, but there was –

Q: I was just going to say, yeah, they came to this – so she was your –

A: Here we go again with the underground. You know, underground was underground.

Q: Yeah, exactly. They didn't –

A: Did a good job.

Q: That's right, yeah.

A: And I remember as if it were yesterday. I had – I was still taking naps in the afternoon some, and Mom's getting me up, and there's this lady in this long cart – coat with the fur collar, and the hat with the feather, that came to us and – and visited with us. And I'm look – and we look out the window and she's – it looks

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like this big, black car is down there. Well, it probably wasn't, but you know, in a child's eye.

Q: Sure.

A: And that's when my life became a conspiracy of silence. I think that – you know, her children are grown, the youngest one was maybe 17 - 18. And so, an agreement must have been made that Mom and Pop would keep me, cause they had a right to take me.

Q: That's right.

A: There were a lot – there were a lot of court issues about that in – in – in every country, I guess. But they probably came to an agreement that I would stay with them, and perhaps never – nothing would ever be said. Nothing.

Q: Did she – did she say that she's your aunt? Did she say – introduce herself? How was she introduced to you? Or was she?

A: **Tante.**

Q: **Tante.**

A: Another – another aunt and uncle. Look I told you, you have a lot of aunts and uncles that aren't. It's like the south has **mizz** and mister.

Q: That's right.

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A: We have aunts and uncles, you know, so they could be first cousins, you know, for all – for all I knew.

Q: Or they could be somebody who, they just liked –

A: Right, there's a neighbor down the street –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you go and stay with Aunt **Ann** when you come from school, you know.

Q: And yet, she stood out in your mind, because she was so well dressed, because she was from a – a wealthier milieu.

A: Yeah, I think that's – that's what – and we used to visit them regularly. In

Holland kids don't go to school on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. And to me it seemed like every other week we were getting on the train – tram after I came home from school and go to **Tante Sinke**(ph) [**indecipherable**] and – and visit with them, and stay until we had dinner, stay will – until it got dark and come home, yeah. And I think the 17 year old was probably the only one still living there. And can you imagine a s-seven year old – six year, seven year old little girl following around a –

Q: Sounds like –

A: – a teenager, it was – you know, heroin.

Q: Yeah.

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A: Yeah. It was fun.

Q: But they never told you then. Your aunt and your – your aunt – your real aunt never said, you know, hey, there is a different life, there was a different identity.

A: Oh no, oh no. As a matter of fact, several years later, must have been about seven, cause they took a picture and I had a tooth missing, so that was kind of –

Q: Yeah [indecipherable]

A: – how I gauged things. We went to this young woman's engagement party at **Tante Sinke's**(ph) house. And somebody took me aside, or I was in the garden, and talked to me, and – and said what I already had developed in my mind, that these people you live with aren't your mother and father, you know. And somebody found out about that, and that person was permanently uninvited to the house. So you can imagine how upset they were, and I felt –

Q: Why the –

A: – the same way as the day that Mom and Pop told me who I was. It was this tremor went through – went through my body. Yes?

Q: It was another one of those where I had a question –

A: Fleeting moment?

Q: Fleeting moment. Your name, that's what it was. What was your name? You said –

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A: **Clara. Clara van Tyne(ph).**

Q: That's right. But when you were with Mom and Pop, what was your name?

A: **Sonja van der Kaden(ph).** I – they renamed me the minute I – I got there. Well, nobody knew what my name was until **Tante Sinke(ph)** showed up.

Q: That's what I was after, okay.

A: Right. She's the one who, you know

Q: So they – when they – when they got you, they didn't even know that you were **Clara van Tyne(ph).**

A: Oh no, no, they –

Q: They just named you **Sonja.**

A: Yeah, she liked **Sonja**, and that was – you know, that was fine.

Q: Okay.

A: Later on she told me what it meant, you know.

Q: What does it mean?

A: Supposedly it's – it's from – in **Sweden** they use it and it means sunshine, so – and I also found out what my Jewish name was.

Q: What was your Jewish name?

A: **Shifra.**

Q: **Shifra.**

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A: And whenever I write, you know, like I've been at the conference and I write to friends I've made there or friends I have, I sign off as **Shifra** and they know who I am. So that's – and – and the way I found that out was through **Tante Sinke**(ph), she left for a – I guess Mom and Pop got some papers which I eventually ended up with, and it has this wonderful acknowledgement, you know, I wouldn't – Daddy must have known things were going to get worse, because there's a letter dated January '42, I think, that said, pertaining to our telephone conversation this morning, your daughter's name is listed as **Shifra**. So I kept thinking, I was born in 1940, why didn't they name me til 1942? Well, they did, it was in the records, but I would have never known without that document.

Q: Do you think your aunt and her family ended up paying Mom and Pop any money for your upkeep later?

A: No, I don't think so. No, I don't – I don't think so at all. I always wonder where the piano came from. I –

Q: You got a piano as you were growing up?

A: Yeah, we had a piano, I guess I took lessons for probably about three years. The picture that they had made before we left to s – you know, to let everybody know I was well and healthy and – was sitting at that piano with **Jossy's** dress, and she's in **Israel**.

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Q: Is there anything else that you think between those a – those years, between liberation and – I want to get to the point where you have that conversation with them. In those first po-post-war years, when you're five and six years old and you're starting to go to school, anything else of your memories that stands out, that kind of works for –

A: Well, that was the other side of the family. We used to go visit three aunts, and they really were aunts.

Q: Whose? Yours? Or – or –

A: Yeah, mine, yeah.

Q: So your mother's –

A: It was my mother's side of the family. There were three maiden ladies. And when they went to talk about me, they'd say, send **het kind**, that's me. If I ever write a book, that's the title, **het kind**.

Q: **Het kind**.

A: That child.

Q: The child, yeah.

A: Send her to play with the maid, you know, or – or go do something, or – one of them, one of those aunts had a – some sort of a lab upstairs, and we would go up to the lab. And –

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Q: Well, how did you feel about knowing – now – knowing that you – your mother and your father did not come back. But, you had rela –

A: I had relatives.

Q: You had relatives.

A: But I would – never found out that they were until it was too late.

Q: Okay. But now it's too – you find out about it. I'm not talking about your feelings in 1940s when you're introduced to their lives, I'm talking later. When you realized this – these are my relatives, and that you live with one and not with another may be one thing, but that they never told you the beginnings. How do you – you have that – those very complicated feelings with Mom and Pop, how do you explain them to yourself? The three maiden aunts, the aunt who was married to the wealthy Christian?

A: Who eventually came to the **United States**, and I saw very regularly.

Q: Okay.

A: I feel s – I feel such a loss, that I didn't get to know them. And selfishly that I never got to talk to them about my fam – my parents.

Q: That's not selfish.

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A: Because there's only one person in the world that I've ever spoken to, that actually knew the person, Daddy. Now, these people are images for – well, images that I can't visualize until I'm 60 years old when I saw a picture.

Q: That's not selfish.

A: It's a floating puzzle piece. I'm – I'm just – you know. And you ha – I – I feel a real loss [indecipherable] you know. And we traveled back and forth to **Holland** probably a couple of times while I was a teenager, and they were st-still alive. I don't remember if we went to see them. But –

Q: Well, let's go on then. Let's go – u-unless you –

A: Yeah – no, go on.

Q: – there's a [indecipherable], let's go on to the time when they do talk to you.

Ho – do you remember the circumstances?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Tell me about it, okay?

A: It was a couple of days before we were going for a passport. I knew we were emigrating –

Q: Oh, you were emigrating?

A: Yeah, from **Schiedam** to **New York**.

Q: Oh, really? So they had to

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A: [indecipherable] the three of us, yeah.

Q: So they decided to – they decided to leave **Holland**?

A: Right.

Q: And wa – the reason for that was?

A: There are a couple of them.

Q: Okay.

A: But anyhow, to get back to –

Q: Right, okay.

A: – they – they told me in – probably in five minutes time, that M-Mother and Dad had been killed by the Germans in the war, but I was too young to know them, so they didn't want me to worry about it, or ever think about it, because I belonged to them. And on this piece of paper practice writing this word, cause this is your name. So, as an eleven –

Q: **Clara van Tyne**(ph)?

A: Yeah. So as an eleven year – and a half year old, I'm practicing writing this cause I'm gonna – this is gonna be an official document, and I'm – I'm signing. So I left the country as **Clara van Tyne**(ph).

Q: So they did know your real na – real name eventually?

A: Oh yeah, **Tante Sinke**(ph) brought all that, remember?

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Q: Oh, oh, okay, okay, okay.

A: Yeah, she brought –

Q: All the documentation.

A: – bunch of stuff. Yeah, some documentation, couple of pieces of jewelry – two pieces of jewelry. No, three. One had a sad ending. Anyhow, so we left a few days later. I was sick as a dog all the way over. And we went to **Hoboken**, and were met by our sponsor, who was a family member.

Q: Your family member? Oh my gosh.

A: Another one I never knew until 2000.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: He was the grandfather to that little baby, and the couple that left in 1938. Okay, they – they show back up.

Q: So in some ways your adopted parents had closer ties to your blood relatives than you did?

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Q: And this was kept from you?

A: Oh yeah, they were – you know.

Q: [indecipherable] It's just – it's just, you know, kind of –

A: Kind of out of there, isn't it?

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Q: Yeah.

A: One of my **Holland** foster cousins, don't say adopted –

Q: Yeah.

A: – foster cousins, told me several years ago when we visited, he says, oh we all knew why they were leaving. It was to keep you from ever connecting with your, you know, other self.

Q: Why?

A: That I don't know. I'm thinking – the only realizati – a lot of people say, well, they didn't want to hurt you, da, da, da. But by the time that age comes around, you know –

Q: If you never know –

A: – you have a right to the truth.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I was always discouraged – more than discouraged, from asking about it.

Q: Yes, at some point it becomes no longer I want to protect you, towar – to something else. And I want to pick up on something else. You say, why not – not – never say adopted, say foster?

A: I wasn't adopted. I went out on what name?

Q: **Clara van Tyne**(ph)?

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A: Yeah. But I didn't know I was so – **Clara van Tyne(ph)**, I was **Sonja van der Kaden**. And it wasn't until – and I don't know how this happened either – when you come in at a certain age, you don't automatically become a citizen, you have to do your own. So, when I was 16, I became a naturalized citizen, and officially had a name change. The back of my naturalization papers say that this is a name change to **Sonja Elizabeth van der Kaden** from, legally I was still **Clara van Tyne(ph)**. I – at that point I should have been asked if that's what I wanted to do.

Q: Of all the names that you've had, which one are you closest to?

A: **Shifra**. You know, I – I – I think it's lovely, because in the Jewish tradition, had my grandmothers been deceased, I would have automatically been named after her. But **Shifra** in the Old Testament was one of the midwives that went against the rules when the – was it **Herod**, said kill all the little boys? And she was one of two in – midwives who s – who made up all sorts of stories and said no, he – you know, these such strong women, they deliver their own, and you know, there's no – there are no – no use for us. And so, you know, that's not a common name, although it is more common in Jewish.

Q: It's known. It's a known name.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

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A: But I sort of hope that Dad was a Bible scholar, and he –

Q: When da – was the first time that you said to yourself and felt free to say to yourself, I am a Jew?

A: After 2000.

Q: Oh, my God.

A: And I practiced the Christian religion and will, but I do both now. And I, you know, burn candles – not Friday nights, but I – but I burn **Hanukkah** candles and I go to **Yom HaShoah**. And that's sort of a liberating feeling that I can –

Q: But still –

A: And I'm not cheating on anybody.

Q: Oh. Do you feel like you owe something to Christianity?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Do you feel like you owe something to Judaism?

A: Yeah. Not owe, I just want to feel like I understand what my family believed in, and what they died for. Why they died. You know, I'm – I'm now want to be more enveloped in – in their tradition.

Q: Did you have an alienation from your foster parents after you came to the **United States**, or even before?

A: I've, I guess, been more emotionally distant than an only child ought to be.

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Q: What should an only child ought to be?

A: Well, you know, people who loved you and cared for you all your life, I owe them –

Q: It sounds as –

A: – real loyalty.

Q: Well, it sounds like that's one of the thing – the real strong threads that has run through, is that you owe them gratitude. And in the normal sense of, when a child is born, you don't ask to be born. So, even though you're given life, to your natural parents you would never say I – I owe you my life because you gave me life.

A: I know, but they took me of free will, endangering their lives.

Q: I know. I – I know. I know. We know the historical circumstances, yes.

A: And that's – and that – and that's where this is.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I never had a chance to love my Mother and Daddy. And I don't know that – I really don't know that no – that completely trusting feeling that I think kids have with their parents.

Q: Well, I'm not adopted, and I am an only child. And I have a very fraught relationship sometimes with my parents. I wouldn't say it's completely trusting. I

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love them dearly, I know they love me dearly. We've had our issues, you know?

But I've never had to – I've never had that feeling that I n – I need –

A: Owe them.

Q: – I – I owe them a deep gratitude. Of course I do. Of course I do because without them I would be nothing, but do you know what I mean? That sort of thing that I wouldn't be able to say the truth about what I needed to quite – to such an extent.

A: Well – enough, okay?

Q: Okay. Did you ever after – after you came to the **United States**, did you ever have any follow up conversations, or try to have follow up conversations with them about who am I, and who – who am I, where did I come from, what were the circumstances?

A: Right. We ha – I have – you know what, I would do that every few years for awhile, and I was always rebuffed. You're too young, you don't need to know that, you know. You belong to us, and – almost like, well, if you're asking questions like that, then we're not meeting your needs, and I certainly wanted them t-to think –

Q: That you were meeting –

A: – that they were meeting my needs, because they were doing, physically, all they could.

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Q: Did you end up living in **Hoben – Hoboken, New Jersey**, or did you move anywhere?

A: Oh no, no, no.

Q: What happened after that?

A: We lived in **Park Ridge, New Jersey**, because that's where my sponsor – our sponsor lived. Well, come to find out in – not until 2000, that he was a distant relative, sor – so my biological family, distant as they were, did still care for me, and did still, you know, help to establish me an-and keep me safe, and knew where I was – where I was at, for awhile any – anyhow.

Q: Did you – and you had that feeling from them, even if there was at a distance, there was this concern –

A: No. No, no, no, no.

Q: No.

A: I – that's my reaction later, knowing what they did, and they did it for this little girl that was the only survivor of that generation.

Q: Did more – did more of the family die than your parents?

A: Yeah, both sets of grandparents, Mother was one of four, their families. I had three little cousins that – you know, they did the normal thing. What happens when a thunderstorm, the kid comes running to you, you know, you –

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Q: You hold them.

A: – you hold them, and you, when there's danger, you all go through it together.

Mother and Daddy were very unusual in that unselfish act that they –

Q: To give you up.

A: [**indecipherable**] to give me up. It took me a lot of years to forgive them for not taking a chance on life. See, when I first beg – got to thinking about it, gosh, they were young people, they have just been married, and first child, why aren't they going to hiding? You know, they – why did they go –

Q: And you never knew the answer. Or did you?

A: No, I didn't get the answer, but the more I read, and I ki – I read Holocaust memoirs, you know, 10 to one to a novel, that I realize they wouldn't have had a chance. You know, there were so many people that were picked up, and you know, that was the end of them, and you know, you read, they didn't even – even bother using bullets on little kids. You know, to think that I was spared from that. That I'm the matriarch of a new family, you know. We have [**indecipherable**] and five grandchildren and it's amazing, you know, that – that that was made possible.

Q: Through that one gesture.

A: And the gesture of that whole unique unit that kept me safe.

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Q: The last sense I have, and we're going chronologically is that you're now in the **United States**, you're in **New Jersey**, in another town.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: What did your foster father do? What did –

A: Okay, he went back into cabinetmaking. He worked – it was really funny – Mom became lingual much faster than he did. I became lingual in three months, I'm told. But he worked with some Swedes, and guess what they talked **[indecipherable]** you know. And Mom just threw herself in there, she was good, you know. She start the sentence in English and end up in Dutch. And this is the first time in her life that she worked, you know. At that time Dutch women **[indecipherable]** were housewives. So, she ended up becoming a dietician. Yeah, she worked in school, and even with her half English they sent her to – to dietician school, and she was a great cook.

Q: How long did you live at home?

A: Until I got married.

Q: Okay, and so that was when?

A: At 22, I guess.

Q: Did you go to university?

A: I went to business college in **New York**.

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Q: Okay.

A: When I graduated high school I used to commute into **Manhattan**, and from there I met **Ron** at the si – at the place where I worked. He worked as an outside person, engineer, and I worked inside, and we used to talk on the phone, and that's how we got together, and got married in '62.

Q: Wow. Wow.

A: Yeah, 46 years ago. My baby just turned 40, can you imagine?

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, **Elise**(ph) turned 40 this year.

Q: And how did your life change after that?

A: Well, my own – my – my **Clara**, my **Shifra** life really was moved to the back burner. I had family [**indecipherable**] I had things to do. Thought about it, but had no time to do anything. I did one time follow up some through – through the mail. But just like before when I used to ask Mom and Pop and got no answer, that would set me way back to try to do that again. So it –

Q: Did you share this?

A: – took awhile.

Q: Did you share these kinds of pains with anybody else, that you wanted to know more and –

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A: **Ron. Ron** knew.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. That's – you know, he's – he's my friend as well as my husband, he's –

Q: That's wonderful.

A: – been very – yeah, he's been very understanding. But no, there wasn't – I've never been to a professional or anything like that, just – I've never been to a professional or anything.

Q: When did – when – it sounds like at some point there was a breakthrough, where you found out more information, where you found out more. So let's bring that story to that point. Can you tell us about that?

A: Well, first we need to talk about 1987.

Q: Okay, let's talk about –

A: That's when I received a front page of a newspaper from **Holland**, from my girlfriend **Willy**(ph) who I'd been corresponding with all these years. It was a big picture of me with that doll carriage. And it had been all over the newspapers in **Holland**. Mr. **Henkes** had – had [indecipherable] saying, what happened to **Clara**? He knew that I went to the **States**, but didn't know anything else. Was I happy, was – did I have a family? He was well into his 80s then, and his doctor suggested that,

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you know, bec – if he's mental about it, would he get an answer? And sure enough, I understand that he, in the follow up article that they have, it says the phone rang off the wall for days. And –

Q: You mean there were lots of **Claras**?

A: No, lots of people who knew about me. Yeah, because **van der Kaden's** name was in there.

Q: Okay.

A: And so **Willy(ph)** sent it to me, but other people sent these articles to Mom and Pop, they didn't know my address, to pass on. Which, of course, didn't happen. But my girlfriend **Willy(ph)** did. And at that time she said, you know, I've known your situation from since you were a little girl, but we were sworn to se – all of us – whoever that means – were sworn to secrecy, so we never said anything, but we think – I think this is important enough for you to – for me to break that vow.

Q: And her – and she broke the vo – in – in sending you that article, and in giving you his name, that's the vow she was breaking?

A: Right. And so it was within a year that I went to **Holland**. It happened to be our 25th we-wedding anniversary, so I didn't need an excuse. But Pop knew. He said, you know, you will never get to the bottom of this. And I don't know what that meant, but it was part of their thinking, you know, the less you know, the better.

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You start digging, you're never gonna be satisfied. Which I am not, but I'm more satisfied than I was, you know. I always used to call it my other self. That's not my other self, it's me. It's also me.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I went to see him, and **Willy**(ph) arranged that. And at that time his sister gave me a precious gift. It was a necklace, they were **Jerusalem** beads, like an every day kind of necklace, not the precious jewels that – not the garnets I have. And she said, your mother took this from around her neck when she got on the train. Well, I can't even wear it any more, I'm so scared it will break. I had a picture taken over there, just red and black painted beads. And, you know, it is – it's just a treasure.

Q: Of course.

A: Yeah.

Q: Of course.

A: Yeah.

Q: And what could he – what did he tell you? What gaps did he start filling in?

A: I didn't ask.

Q: What did you talk –

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A: I was under the cloud of do not ask. I was not there – and of course I could kick myself, he died about four years later. I never – we had – was a very superficial visit. He took me – my daughter **Elise**(ph) has a fit over this. He took me up to his studio at – lined up three paintings, and said choose one. I turned him down. I did, he's famous. Becau – I wasn't thinking. I didn't want to show up – they knew he was – Mom and Pop knew he was a painter.

Q: You didn't want to look –

A: I was still cover – I was still covering. I didn't want to look like I had visited him.

Q: I see. You didn't want them to know that you had seen him.

A: You know, I think of myself as pretty cowardly now when I – when I think back, and say –

Q: I wouldn't – I wouldn't call it cowardly. I – I'd call it like you had been put in chains, and you were – and you had been put in such invisible chains, and you were trying to break free from them, but being invisible, you never know when they're locked up again. I wouldn't blame yourself for that.

A: Well, there is a lot that, you know, as I said, Aunt **Alice** is the only person I ever met that knew Daddy. It turns out that **Dolf Henkes** and Daddy were close friends because they both painted.

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Q: But you didn't know that they were close friends at that time?

A: Oh no, I didn't find that out until I – 2002 I put it together. I'll get to that.

Q: Okay.

A: All right, so I went back to **Holland**, and with no painting, but **Willy**(ph) and I then had a more open communication, because I could ask her questions, she – she did quite a bit of research for me initially then. Like, I didn't know who else died, and that all, you know, [**indecipherable**] opened up.

Q: So she fu – so she did some of the research into the family?

A: Right.

Q: Did she re-contact those maiden aunts? Did she talk to –

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. And it's mainly because it was – Daddy's side was more visible, and –

Q: Did he cli – but no – the Aunt **S-Sinke**(ph), what was her name, that you used to visit?

A: Well, she came – they came to live in the **United States**.

Q: Oh, that's right, that's right, that's right.

A: Yeah.

Q: I'm sorry, I forgot about that part.

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A: But I never n – I could never tell her, or I never knew until after she died. So, yeah, all this is –

Q: So how do you take it forward? So you've got – you're in **Holland**, you meet him, but you don't –

A: You go home and you leave it on the back burner again, cause you're very busy and you have children to bring up, and this was an episode that you don't deal with, and I didn't deal with it until 2000. I had a –

Q: What happened then?

A: I had a telephone call – thank God for answering machines. We weren't home, second time we weren't home, third time was a charm. Telephone call said, my name is **Bev**, I think we may be cousins. One of those tremors went through me again. And when we connected, yes we are cousins. She is the younger daughter of the family that left in '38. And of course she came over the following weekend and we sat up and talked, and –

Q: And did they live in **New Jersey**?

A: They live in **Israel**.

Q: They live in **Israel**?

A: Right.

Q: So how did you con –

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A: So the next year we went to **Israel**, and it was so funny. I see **Jocelyn**, whose oh, that's the one who's been wearing my clothes. Because they used to – after the war, I got all these wonderful care packages, I was the best dressed kid in elementary school because they used to send **Jossy's**(ph) outgrown, hardly worn dresses to **Sonja**. And they used to hear, let's put this in the box for **Sonja**. Who's **Sonja**, you know. But Mom was keeping in touch with them, they were writing letters back and forth. So the package comes and I'm wearing these pretty clothes from my cousin.

Q: And you never knew what –

A: Right.

Q: And you never knew.

A: Never knew it until, you know, until **Bev** tells me all – all this stuff that's going on. And that her grandfather **van Helger**(ph) was our sponsor. And it's – is it confusing?

Q: Well, it's perplexing.

A: Okay, may –

Q: It's extraordinarily – no, no, no, not confusing as far as who was who –

A: Who fits where.

Q: But it is perplexing in its intensity.

A: It's a good job, and –

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Q: To keeping this from you, in the name of protecting you, and it certainly doesn't sound like that. I mean, I can only imagine – I don't – as I've mentioned before, our job is to kind of be neutral and let you [indecipherable] talk –

A: Right.

Q: – and – and so, but the feeling that I get is if it had been me, I would have been livid to the sky that somebody –

A: Good girls don't get mad. They don't slam doors, they don't say anything rude. They don't even go to their rooms to sulk.

Q: When did Mom and Pop die?

A: Mom died last August two years ago.

Q: So, very recently?

A: Yes. And Pop died about seven years before that. And I brought her to an – a nursing home close to where we lived so I could go see her.

Q: Be with her.

A: Yeah. But it's something we could never talk about, and she went to her grave thinking that I didn't care about my birth family, because by the time 2000 - 2002 came around, she wasn't all that cognizant, so I didn't have to answer for my actions.

Q: But it's all so – how could someone not know that that's important to you?

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A: I don't know. M-May – you know, early psychology didn't think that kids had – you know, when I've been to the – the hidden children conference, and we all say the same thing, we heard, oh, you were too young to know anything. So it didn't happen? They didn't believe in the subconscious at the time.

Q: Well, it sounds – even if you don't have memories of the time, you do have memories of feeling different. And of hearing these voi – these conversations, over-hearing them when you're walking down the street and they say to you, or you hear the grownups talking, did they come back, no they didn't come back. Or that you're different at school. I mean, that's conscious. That's where questions could start arising, and a child would want to know, why are these quest – why is this situation there?

A: Well, they were very – they were suppressed, yeah, very, very much.

Q: When you – when you got that call from **Bev**, and she said I think we're cousins, to me it sounds like these – you know, the past has broken through, finally.

A: Right. And it's amazing that she got my telephone number, cause she got it from Mom. Now, Mom didn't know who was calling, I don't imagine, because that's when the yarn started to unwind. We went to **Israel**, and I spoke to Aunt **Alice**, her mother, who is the only person I've spoken to who knew Daddy as a person.

Q: So what did she tell you about him?

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A: Well, she used to tell me what they used to do, they used to go on bike trips together. And I – again, put a little piece of the puzzle together, rightly or wrongly, they used to go to **Seders** together at Grandpa **Abe's**. You know, they had the common grandfather. And she said, we were so bored, we didn't understand a word they were saying. Was a large family, we kids used to sit on the end. Well, he was conducting it in Hebrew. He wore a hat over his yarmulke. That also is either Conservative – probably Conservative. So, makes you wonder how far did the apple fall from the tree? When Daddy picked **Shifra** as my name, did he just like it, or did he know the Bible, the Old Testament? Did he attend Torah readings? You know, was he part of a minyan? All those things that I don't think she would have known, but the – but all the other people that crossed my path could have asked me questions that I didn't know I had until I was too late.

Q: It sounds like also, and forgive me, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you had mentioned something about this before, is that you regained a part of who you are. You talked before about having different selves. Is that what happened in 2000? Is that some –

A: Oh definitely.

Q: – moral you have integrated?

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A: I allowed integration. There's not much of it. You know, every year or so I learn some – I come to the hidden children conference, I might find another distant cousin. I did the last – two years ago.

Q: You did?

A: When we were in **Detroit**, and **Elise(ph)**, our youngest daughter came – came with me, I asked her to attend as a second generation. And she went to a workshop and explained why she was there, and she said, you know, this is – I'm the daughter of – and she mentioned my name and the man in the corner there jumped out of a chair, ran up to her and said, oh, yeah, I have that name in my family, you know, a- and so, you know, he's another distant, distant cousin. But we see – we saw each other this weekend [**indecipherable**]

Q: I've come to the point in the interview where I ask, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think is important?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I'm very intent on seeing that my grandchildren have a much smoother – become knowledgeable about the Holocaust through me, about the family, not necessarily the horrors of the Holocaust, in a much more gradual and open way. And – and I've

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started that with my – our 16 year old granddaughter. **Emily** is doing a school project where she's using –

Q: Your story.

A: – my story as an example, and I've – **Elise**(ph) has been very active in getting me involved in the school system where she is. And the first time I spoke to class, where my eldest grandson is, those chills went through me again. And there I am speaking to children. The kid who shouldn't be there and his younger brother **Seth** is the one I really – it suddenly happened. I used to go and take care of him while his mom worked. I'd see him every now and again. And even by the time he was two years old, he was such a clinger. He just loved his mommy and he – she used to have to sneak out the door for me to take care of him. And I suddenly realized what – what a sacrifice that must have been. I didn't get it until I was a grandparent. What a sacrifice that must have been to turn your child and give – and give it life that way. Cause [**indecipherable**] to that extent, but –

Q: But yes.

A: – yeah, she tried to –

Q: She took it.

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A: Yeah, but she took it. I mean, that's amazing. And so now, you know, I speak to schools not just to tell my story, but to say that everybody can take a stand, and they need to take it for the good.

Q: Did you talk – did you share with your daughters, as you were going through the [indecipherable] steps?

A: I had Mom and Pop tell them. They knew nothing until they were about 10 and 13 years old, and I said to Mom, giving them another opportunity to open up, actually, and it was pretty much the same way, a very – a snippet – you know, well, we took care of your mommy, she's our daughter, during the war – her parents didn't come back from concentration camp. That was about it. So when **Elise**(ph) and I went to **Detroit** and we went to the – to the Holocaust museum at the end of the – the session, I went for a book. I said, I'm gonna – will you be all right if I got this for **Riley**(ph)? And she was – her oldest son – and she was rightly very concerned, and said, you mean you're gonna hand him a book and tell him about his heritage? I said, oh no, this is to help me mature him into it. An – and I've been to the gift shop at the museum and I'm continuing that with – as the children grow older, so they can take pride in their –

Q: Yes, of course. I'm – I'm speechless. Thank you. Thank you very much. I think you've had such a tough row to hoe, because the shadows that you have were so

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invisible. You know, when you talk through the Holocaust, you know that there's a concentration camp. You know that there's a horror. You know that there's – but all of these other things were invisible, to try and pull away those veils.

A: You know, in th – and the Jewish community does not recognize that hidden children have this emotional invisible burden, that most of us are carrying for one reason or the other. If you don't have a number on your arm, you're in a different classification. And I think that's probably going to change as the older folks, you know, pass away, it's the hidden children that are going to carry on, and perhaps our children will carry on the tradition of – of teaching.

Q: Well **Shifra**, thank you very, very much.

A: Well, you're welcome. You were easy to talk to, thank you.

Q: Thank you, but not a very easy topic.

A: No, no it isn't, and it doesn't get easier sometimes. Sometimes I don't lose it, like today.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Sonja Shifra DuBois** –

A: Thank you.

Q: – on November 10th, 2008. Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview