

**UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT
– SARA SONJA GIFFEN**

[Testimony: 1hr 55.” Artefacts: 9’ 30”]

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SARA SONJA GIFFEN CLEAN CUT 00

10:00:00:00

Sara

My name is Sara Sonja Giffen, and I was born in Haarlem, 27th January 1943. I was a hidden child in Amsterdam during the war.

[Fade to black and black up]

10:00:13:04

Interviewer

Ok. It's a very big decision for you to talk to me today isn't it?

10:00:17:01

Sara

Yes it is.

10:00:18:10

Interviewer

Have you spoken to anyone about your story before?

10:00:22:05

Sara

No. Never. I have never spoken about it. No.

10:00:28:09

Interviewer

Who knows the most about your story?

10:00:31:04

Sara

Probably my older sister in Holland, yeah. And erm, I've spoken to Chava. To Chava Rosenzweig. That was probably the first time that I really spoke about it. And now and again I would ask my mother, you know to-, sometimes because I was so young, I wasn't always certain it was something she told me, or something that I'd really seen. And that very worst story, my very worst memory. No my mother was very shocked and because she didn't think I would remember so much and she wasn't there when it had happened, but she knew that it had happened.

10:01:13:16

Interviewer

What about your husband and your children?

10:01:16:16

Sara

My husband, no. I mean he knows that I've had bad dreams and er specifically after I had my first child I went through a very bad time where I was dreaming I was hiding her, and I was always found, you know the Germans would, the dogs would find us or she would cry and the Germans would, and then I'd wake up crying. And so my husband knew that I'd had a bad -, I only used to say I had a bad dream. And that

was all. And very specifically I never wanted to talk to the children about it, because at home where I lived they always spoke about it every day and all day. Because we didn't move away from the place where it had all happened ,you know. We grew up back in Haarlem. So, you know, there was streets where my aunties had lived, and a street where my grandparents had lived, and there was a street where my grandparents live and my mother would take us there you know, my sister and me and she'd stand outside crying. And then the woman would come out screaming at us; "go away you miserable" - whatever and "I call the police." And so I, and you know we got it for breakfast lunch and supper, all day and every day. My poor mummy, she so suffered. And so I didn't want to do that at all so I went the other way, the exact opposite way, I never spoke about it at all.

10:02:37:23

Interviewer

Have your children ever asked you questions?

10:02:40:08

Sara

Erm, they now find -, they, they did but not so specifically. You know, my daughter the one that I told you about, my daughter Yudit who teaches in a big school in America, in Hillel - which is supposedly the biggest Jewish school there - she teaches Jewish history, she actually runs the department, and she teaches Holocaust. And she has asked, she asked me things and she's been quite peeved that I never told her you see. So when I explained to her that you know; "It was for your sake I want you to be happy and carefree and not suffer with this second-generation syndrome" and believe you me they don't none of them. And so she did understand but I think they would probably be happy -, I think they might find it hard to speak to me about it too. Because they know it's hard for me to speak about it.

10:03:38:12

Interviewer

So with that in mind, why have you decided to speak today?

10:03:43:11

Sara

For a variety of reasons. First of all because I think, I do think that it is important for people to know because we've had so much, we hear so much now about people that you know, Holocaust, Holocaust was, not didn't happen, you know all these Holocaust deniers and also because for my children, let them know, let them know but also, you know that, you know some of these stories from people that what I've seen and why should they all be forgotten and nothing has ever been written about it you know. It is such a terrible, such a terrible thing you know, people just being wiped off the face of the world, and people don't even know anything about it. And, people do want, I've realised now that people really do want to know about it. I think at first people did not want to know about it, they really didn't. Because my mother-in-law who shall rest in the garden of Eden she was once telling me what a terrible time she'd had in the war. She had to queue up for oster milk. She lived in London and then in Manchester and it was so hard, and things were rationed, she couldn't buy bananas, she couldn't buy oranges, so I said to her; "shall I tell you what we went through in the war?" And she said, "No, no, no, no, no. A hard time was had by

all, and the least we say about it the better” and you know what that’s how it was. People didn’t really want to hear. People really didn’t want to hear. So you didn’t talk about it. And then I grew up in a non-Jewish world and, and people definitely didn’t want to know about it because a lot of people had guilty conscious [*sic*]. I mean after all Holland lost 90% of the Jewish population. 10% survived.

10:05:35:16

Interviewer

So in your times of darkness where have you got solace then, because that must have been a very lonely place to be when you are trying to come to terms with what you witnessed when you were very young?

10:05:48:04

Sara

I would take myself off, off. I was always very into; into nature I use to pick flowers bring all kinds of weeds home to my mother. And she’d throw them in the bin. [*Laughs*] Daisies, dandelions, but I was always for some reason I was a very religious child I seemed to have been born, you know, religious. And I used to find, I used to find solace with that you know. There is that very famous, that non-Jewish people also use it you know the psalm, you know 23 the lord is my Shepard I used to say that to myself, and of course now I say it in Hebrew, right, but I’ve always found that very, very comforting. I used to find, I did find solace and comfort in religion, yes, for sure.

10:06:36:05

Interviewer

But your religion must be have been questioned with everything that you saw?

10:06:40:03

Sara

Well I was brought up, I went to Roman Catholic schools, I’ve got some school photos with me with the nuns on it and they thought I was for sure going to be a nun I was such a holy child and I knew the Bible and I was very interested in the Bible you know and, then of course I went off wasn’t I, I was starting to question and I’m Jewish you know and they put quite a lot of pressure on me that way, yeah. But it seems to have, you know it is, one is born with, inborn with - you know we truly believe that we have a Jewish soul you know an [*Jewish phrase?*] and I think I probably had quite a big one because it seems -, And of I was the one that had a Jewish name. Perhaps thanks to Hitler but I did have a Jewish name. If my mother would have called me after her mother she said didn’t know because I asked her once, would have given me that name anyhow, so she said she didn’t know. So -, but I still had a Jewish name.

10:07:43:20

Interviewer

How do you -, how did you feel this morning when you woke up knowing that we had this meeting today?

10:07:51:09

Sara

I was busy. I was busy. I was very busy. I had a dentist appointment also this morning which I have done and then I had a few clients, and I was, I was awake very, very early, I was awake at five o'clock. So I took my Tehilim, my book of psalms out because it was too early to say my morning prayers, and I said that for quite a while, I say for this person, I say for that person, for all my children, for my new baby, and, erm and for people that are not well and you know so that took me quite a while and then I said my morning prayers but I was on my own my husband is away. So yes I just kept busy. Just kept busy.

10:08:28:21

Interviewer

And how do you feel, now that you're -

10:08:29:20

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

and I put music on, I do that too.

10:08:31:18

Interviewer

Good. And how do you feel now that you're sitting here? Do you feel ok?

10:08:34:24

Sara

Yes I feel alright.

10:08:36:06

Interviewer

Because it's a big decision, isn't it?

10:08:37:04

Sara

Once, I think once I have made the decision to talk I do find it stressful but I'm not nervous or anything. It's, difficult, it's hard to explain but I wouldn't say I'm relaxed but yes.

10:08:50:14

Interviewer

No but hopefully you'll feel unburdened -

10:08:53:05

Sara

I trust you.

10:08:54:09

Interviewer

Good. You do need to trust me -

10

Sara

I trust you.

10:08:56:04

Interviewer

- and I think you can. I know you can trust me. So let's start from the beginning and tell us a little bit about where you were born and a bit about your family?

10:09:06:02

Sara

I was born in Haarlem. And that is, you know, Haarlem is a small town, it was small - it's not so small now - you know about 20 miles west of Amsterdam. And it was a small historic town with a small Jewish community.

10:09:21:18

The community was mixed some people were religious, some people were not so religious. That's how it was in the Netherlands very much.

10:09:29:09

And, um, I've got an older sister, my older sister, she's four and half years older than me.

10:09:39:07

And my father he was an engine-, he was an engineer. And he, we were quite comfortable financially before the war. He worked very hard,

10:09:50:07

my mother was very beautiful, and everything was quite, you know everything seemed very nice. And then of course Hitler came.

10:10:00:10

And I was born in January 1943, and something had happened in Haarlem. there was an act by the resistance, and the Lord Mayor of Haarlem was a Nazi. He was what was in Holland called NSB: The Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging. And he, because of him really, so many Jews got killed. I've got my birth certificate in my papers, and you see there's a J on it, I am a Jew. And in the register of birth always in the Netherlands, people were registered also by their religion. So all they had to do was go into the register of birth and could see exactly who was Jewish. My grandfather - my mother's father - had been, asked to be on the Judenrat and he had refused. So because he had refused he was straight away send to the camps already in 1941. First into, into a work camps, and we don't quite know exactly where they all went and because we had confusing reports from where he died and where he'd been. And my grandmother went because she was asked, she was told if she wants to go she can go and look after him, she can set up house, she can set up a little home, she should take two of this and two of that and her money and valuables with her and she can go and look after her husband, which she did. So in 1942 and she took her youngest daughter with her, my mother's youngest sister went with her. Now we know that they they probably, I think my aunty might have died in Auschwitz, but my grandmother went straight away to Sobibór which was one of the worst camps.

10:11:49:21

And so when my mother gave birth there was a decree that all the Jews had to leave Haarlem overnight, because they wanted to be *judenfrei* - they didn't want any Jews in that town. So everybody who they knew was thrown out of the houses, but my mother had just given birth, so they gave us I think three days, no six days I think the 3rd of February she was thrown out of the house.

10:12:12:12

To Amsterdam. In, on this very infamous plain: Waterlooplein, in one of the houses and that became, that whole area became the ghetto. People from all over Holland, Jewish people from all over Holland were pushed in there, I think we were just pushed in one room in a house,

10:12:32:03

and then I went, my mother went into hiding with me - in Rembrandt's house.

10:12:37:05

Interviewer

Before that though, Sonia, were you not given to a neighbour for a while?

10:12:40:07

Sara [*talking over Interviewer*]

I was given to yeah, yeah.

10:12:42:02

Interviewer

So tell me about that?

10:12:43:12

Sara

I don't know very much about it. I just know that I was given, my mother could not take it, but I don't think I was there for very long, I think once they knew where they lived I think my father went and fetched me.

10:12:54:11

Interviewer

So the story is that, once your mother gave birth she was given a period of grace before she had to move to the ghetto -

10:12:59:20

Sara

Six days yes.

10:13:00:21

Interviewer

-six days with a newborn baby. And then when she went to the ghetto you were looked after by a neighbour - is that right?

10:13:16:03

Sara

Yes. Yes.

10:13:07:18

Interviewer

Is that what your mother has told you?

10:13:08:24

Sara

That's what my mother has told me.

10:13:10:16

Interviewer

And then what happened? Your father came to collect you?

10:13:12:05

Sara

And then he came, yes. He came to fetch me because my mother wanted me. She was breast feeding me as well. But then there was you know, a message came, because my father was in the Dutch resistance. So you know there were people that had still at that time there was some of the Dutch police were helpful, you know, they would send messages when they knew, you know they still were using some of the Dutch police, the Germans you know slowly and surely unless they were proper collaborators. And then they - which they had plenty of. But, and then I'm not quite sure how old I was when I went back to my mother

10:13:51:01

but I know there was a short period of time when I was in hiding in Rembrandt's house. Where there were other Jewish people. And the place was raided. They were not supposed to go -, you know you had like the National Trust in Holland, it was called [*Dutch word*]. And the Germans were not supposed to go in these places but as if they cared you know. So there was a raid. But I had been crying, and the people had been complaining that I was keeping them awake so, my mother had gone in the loft space, you know there was like a loft above the loft and so they were all taken away. And a German soldier, yeah my mother said he was very young and he came up the ladder and he found me and my mother there, and I was crying, she was trying to keep me quiet I was crying you know, there must have been a lot of carryings on and he actually took me out of my mother's arms and he put his hand very tight over my mouth, and then he shouted, "Alles klar hier oben" and that means, - "everything is clear up here" and he banged and he stamped with his boots and he went downstairs and he left me there with my mother. I used to dream about him. You know my mother told me that story when I was a little girl and I used to dream about him. I used to see him somewhere dead. You know I used to imagine all sorts of horrible things and, yeah, poor boy. Poor boy.

And, and then so she, my mother was petrified to move. So that my father went to see what had happened and the neighbours across the road had said they didn't see anybody with a baby. So he went in, and the, the caretaker who had run away told my father, I was up in the roof space, so he found my mother there.

10:15:32:00

So we went back in the house where we were sent to because it wasn't so easy to

go in hiding you know, it was very difficult and most of the time it cost a very lot of money as well.

10:15:42:21

So, and then we were, I think very shortly afterwards we were taken out of the house and put, they used to gather all the people on this square you know, hundreds of people on the square and then my mother was standing there with Betty and me - my older sister - and on the other side a few houses further up was a church. A very famous church that's called Mozes en Aäronkerk - Moses and Aaron church. And they were a religious order. They were not, not you know, they were in priests. They used to visit us after the war one of the fathers. And he went up to my mother and he said to my mother, "give me" just you know, and all the Germans were standing there with their guns and he said to my mother; "give me those children and I'll save them for you." And my mother did, and she said she didn't understand the Germans just let him do it. They followed him with the guns, but they just let him do it. So he took us into the church. And he put us into the confessional. But Betty said I was screaming, screaming, screaming she didn't know how to keep me quiet and then they took me into somewhere else - whatever - and my sister went to another place, she went in Oostzaan and went into hiding there. And I apparently went all over the place, I didn't, I don't think my mother saw me after that till after the war.

10:17:07:21

Natasha

Really? How long do you think you were separated from your mother at that point?

10:17:11:24

Sara

About two years at least.

10:17:14:11

Interviewer

And how old were you? Still a baby when that started -

10:17:17:13

Sara

I was a few months old.

10:17:18:16

Interviewer

A few months old. We'll pick up on that in a second. Let's just talk a bit more about that German soldier because he's featured so prominently in your life and actually he saved the life of your mother and you that day.

10:17:30:09

Sara

Yes, he did.

10:17:31:22

Interviewer

When you had dreams about him, why do you think he kept on coming back - because you can't have any memory of that really can you?

10:17:38:12

Sara

I haven't seen his face clearly ever, but I used to think, I use to think to myself that he got killed. He was my mother said he was very young, and if that's what he did, you know if they would have been found out, he wouldn't have survived. However young I was I realised that. They would have sent him to the Eastern, to, to, to Eastern Europe to the Russian front who knows. I always used to imagine that I saw him somewhere dead. And that was so horrendous. I used to find it so horrendous.

10:18:13:23

Interviewer

Because he saved your life.

10:18:15:19

Sara

Yes and my mother Betty wasn't with us it was just me and my mother. Betty was, I think she was, I don't know where she was.

10:18:24:08

Interviewer

So at this point when you were handed around, where was your mother?

10:18:24:11

Sara

Well she went to Westerbork. she went to the concentration camp, or there was what you call a *durchgangslager* - a transit camp. She went to Westerbork, but my father somehow got her out.

10:18:41:03

Interviewer

What did she tell you of the fact that she gave you to somebody else to be looked after? Do you know anything about who looked after you at that time of your life?

10:18:49:08

Sara

I think it was by, by people in the Roman Catholic -, people in the church, I do know that we got baptised straight away because my sister told me. Because I screamed even more then so. [Laughs] And that gave me quite a bit of grief later. But you could understand you know that is the teachings of the church. You know they save your soul before they save your life you know. And on the other side of the square there this, you know on the other side of the square there were big synagogues. There was on one side a Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, on the other side there were three Ashkenazi synagogues. The three Ashkenazi synagogues were totally destroyed. But the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue that was like 350 years old and they wanted to keep, the Germans wanted to keep that, they wanted to do with that what they did with the Altneuschul in Prague. You know the Altneuschul in

Prague? They wanted to make that into a museum of a vanished people. And they wanted to do that with -, So they did not destroy that. Now the rabbi, the *Chacham* of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, whenever he use to see any of the padres of the church he would take his hat off for them, because they had been so good in -, to the Jewish people in the war. My mother put their names in Yad Vashem. One of them used to come and visit us after the war. He was called Padre [?] he use to come and visit us. Yes.

10:20:22:03

Interviewer

Because you were so young - and I'm trying to work out what we're going to talk about now. How much of that is you've been told, and you know that to be a fact and where your memory starts? I guess it's probably around now that your memory starts. Is that right?

10:20:30:09

Sara

I don't know. My memory starts when I was, my memory starts when I was stuck into a little, little corner cupboard under the stairs, and they use to gag me and pushed me in there because on the other side of the church was Gestapo headquarters. Also on the opposite side. There was a whole complex of them, and they were coming and going all the time and that's also one of my early memories. You know, hearing them shout and seeing the black cars and trucks and shootings. There were lots of shootings, lots of guns and then being stuck underneath that cupboard, that was horrendous because they would come in. They would come in. They would because they were emptying out all the houses, and this was the house, she, that house there belonged to the church it's not there anymore it's all pulled down, the church is still there but not the house. Up to this day I cannot go on that square.

10:21:43:01

A few years ago, remember my youngest daughter before she was married, I was visiting my sister and my sister wanted to go and show my daughter where, you know, where we were in the war and so on and I got a panic attack on the, on the square. I got such a panic attack everything fell away; it looks totally different now but everything fell away. It looked just the same. I pushed my hand back in my sister's hands and I run. I ran to Rembrandt's house, don't ask me why, but I didn't even think I just run. I just run. And I have not been there since.

10:22:22:24

Interviewer

What did you remember from that square?

10:22:26:13

Sara

From that square, they would round, that's where they would round Jewish people up. They would always, there was -, and then people would look from behind the curtains and now and again they would shoot at the windows also. The Germans. And there were always things going on. There were public executions there and people were always being beaten. They were always beating, they were always

kicking and beating. That seemed to be part of their, of the way they behaved. I just don't know, why people had to behave like that. That's not normal behaviour not even in war, is it?

10:23:07:00

But I remember the cupboard because I have a similar little cupboard in my house under the stairs, and the electricity meter is there, and the gas meter is there. I never go in there; it must be so dusty. I never go in there. And we once, there was a gas leak and this, this, this man was lying there with his head in my cupboard, I just freaked out. Went upstairs and I wouldn't come down anymore. No it's -that made me quite claustrophobic, that is probably one of the things that I've really can put down to the war. This claustrophobia. Yes, I don't like closed doors and windows.

10:23:47:14

Interviewer

How often were you put underneath the cupboard would you say? Under the stairs?

10:23:50:05

Sara [*simultaneously*]

I don't know.

10:23:51:19

Interviewer

You don't know? But it's a frequent memory is it? You were put under there -

10:23:54:07

Sara [*simultaneously*]

I think it happened quite often.

10:23:56:12

Interviewer

And who would put the tape over your mouth to protect you?

10:23:59:07

Sara

She was called the lady, Tante Cor she was, I used to call her Tante that means aunty and she use to put tape over my mouth. She stuck something in my mouth and tided something around me, it wasn't so much tape as -, because I wasn't allowed to cry when people came in I had to be very quiet, and she didn't rely on me to be quiet and that was done. And it was dark, it was very dark.

10:24:27:17

Interviewer

Do you think you knew what danger you were in?

10:24:32:04

Sara

Probably. Probably.

10:24:35:23

Interviewer

How old would you have been at that point?

10:24:38:24

Sara

Well I don't know when it started, but by the time the war ended and the Gestapo was there even until after the war, because there was a shooting, I remember when the British tanks came in, you know, that there was, they were shooting from the buildings there and that was you know after the 5th May. So I was perhaps two and four months something like that. Yes.

10:25:05:00

Interviewer

But again, roughly how old do you think, at what age did it span that you were in hiding there?

10:25:11:21

Sara

Probably two years. I would imagine two years.

10:25:14:09

Interviewer

From the age two to four? Something like that?

10:25:16:13

Sara

No, no, no. From the age of four months till two.

10:25:19:21

Natasha

Ok. And you still have memories of that do you?

10:25:23:03

Sara

Very, very patchy. I also remember they had a dog, don't ask me why they had a dog, but they had a dog. And the dog ate the ration book and I remember her chasing the dog with a brush, to get the ration book back from the dog. You know it is these, it is these dramatic, um, and she was screaming and yelling, and I remember that very well I don't know when that happened but that I remembered. And perhaps most of my memories are from the later years of the war.

10:25:54:12

Apparently it's not unusual that, that people who had such traumatic, who saw such traumatic things have such an early memory. Because I was once, once in Hope Hospital after I'd had a miscarriage. They were washing me - I'd had an operation; they were washing me - and the two auxiliaries were German and they were speaking German over me. So I went hysterical I started yelling at them and I took the bowl of water, and I threw it at them and, they ran out. And then the gynecologist

Doctor Faulkner he said, "I want you to speak to a psychiatrist. You can't, there must be so much trauma." So they send me this Doctor Davenport in, and he brought me a tape and it was in Dutch. And the girl was younger than me and they put her under hypnosis, to remember. And she was screaming and swearing, and I was furious, so he said; "You know it will do you good, we can do that to you and then all your memories will come out and you will feel much better." and I said to him; "Do you want me to scream and carry on like that?" I said, "No thank you. Be gone with you." I didn't want to know, but she was younger than me. I've always thought to myself you know she was younger; she was half a year younger. So how she remembered?
[Pause]

10:27:15:21

I remember they once took me to the zoo. There's an artist in Amsterdam I remember that. I don't know when that was. They took me once to the zoo that was nearby. Wasn't far. I don't have any photos at all from when I was a little girl. Because nobody took photos obviously. She must have done but she didn't give them, she wouldn't give me back to my mother. And then eventually obviously she had to, you know, and then my moth-, she wanted to sell me, she wanted to give my mother, she wanted to buy me. She offered a hundred thousand guilders for me, to keep me. And my mother didn't of course obviously, how could she? And she might have been tempted because we had nothing after the war, everything had gone to stay alive, you know, and my father hadn't worked of course. And whenever I was a naughty girl which apparently was very often, she used to say to me, "Why didn't I sell you? Or I should have sold you!" And once I said, "I wish you would have done!" And you know the day before she died she reminded me that I had said that to her. Yes.

10:28:47:00

Interviewer

Can we talk about the square a little bit more? Because you have other memories about the square don't you?

10:28:53:13

Sara

They are all horrible. They are all so horrible. You want me to tell you about, yeah?

10:28:59:24

Interviewer

Can you?

10:29:01:11

Sara

I will try. Yeah. Erm, I think it must have been very shortly before the end of the war, because it was light. But it was early. I know it was early because nobody was on the square and it was light. And so there was lots, lots of noise and screams and shouts and so everybody went to the window. And my, my I slept under the window in the front. You know I don't think I had; I think I slept on a kind of a sofa I think. And so we sat up and looked. And it was -, what we saw was all the empty houses across the square and so there were big -, cars outside and lots of, lots Germans. So people were being thrown out of the door. And there was one woman - one lady -

and I think my mother told me later she was pregnant because I said to my mummy how come she was fat? And my mother she said she was pregnant. And they were kicking her and then people must have escaped, they must have escaped onto the roof, and they were just throwing them down off the roof. You know, just saw them tumble. You know. Arms and legs and – [pause] And then when they fell on the floor they were just being kicked. And they were laughing, you know, they were just -, and shouting and I don't even know how many people. It must have been a few families. There were some people they didn't kick. I realised just only lately they must have kept them alive to find out, you know, who had been looking after them, who had been bringing them food and God only knows what happened to them. And then the truck came. Then a truck came and they just, they just picked up, you know, little toddler probably, I don't know. And they were pulling, just bashed, they must have been alive still, so they just bashed the head against the wall and flung them in the truck. And there were quite a few children and that's what he did. Bashed them against the wall and then flung them in the truck. And goodness knows what he did with the bodies afterwards. Probably discarded them like any old rubbish. So that's one of the reasons I wanted to tell this too. People like that should not just be forgotten and not be written off as any old rubbish. Of course you know, you know that the almighty takes care of everybody and they probably have a very special place in heaven. But to remember that, that's certainly not heaven.

[Cut for card change]

10:32:47:09

Natasha

So, remembering is very hard but you've had nobody to share it with, you haven't spoken. How have you coped with all of those ghastly memories for all of these years?

10:32:59:21

Sara

Sleepless nights. Very many sleepless nights. I'm a very bad sleeper. I walk around the house. I can bake you know. I bake my Shabbas challahs like four o'clock in the morning and things like that. Stand in the window and yeah. I never minded feeding the babies in the night, because I'm a very bad sleeper.

10:33:19:21

Interviewer

Do you still have nightmares?

10:33:21:06

Sara

Yes. Yes, something will trigger them off, I don't know. I um, do you know I've also had lots of friends that sort of Holocaust survivors who always would speak to me because they would be my clients and then they would tell me their stories and so then I knew for sure that night I would have nightmares. Yeah. But I would listen, whatever you know. I felt I had to listen they might not want to tell their children and they told me. So -

10:33:52:01

Interviewer

How often would you say that you think about that memory that you've just shared with me?

10:33:59:11

Sara

How often? It's hard to tell how often. I have periods probably where I don't, where I - , and then it could come like very much to the foreground. You know with all the trouble now that's going on and all this, this antisemitism, where you called names in the street and you know, then you think of all that and you think is it going to happen again, you know? There is always that fear. You know I never changed my passport. I've still got a Dutch passport because I would say to my husband when he said, "No I want my Dutch passport if anything happens in here I can take the kids and go to Holland." And if anything, so my kids could have dual nationality because of that so I always kept my Dutch passport. And when, when we, when I moved to my marital house, my marital house where I have lived for over 49 years. There was by the front door, there was a trap door, and it was quite a deep drop - about 8 ft. So under there I stored tins, and I made sure that in the back of the house, I made another little trap door, so I had an escape route under the house. So if anything happened I could take all my kids - my husband would have to look after himself - I could take all my kids. And that was there for a long, long time. And it took a long time for it because don't forget while I was still in Holland, I left Holland when I was 21. I didn't hear anything, anything else it was always Holocaust, Holocaust, Holocaust all the time. You know, I came home from school as a little girl and my mother would sit in the chair crying. And my sister and me we used to do a very lot; I was always you know keen on cooking. My sister use to do a very lot - we had help as well - but we always helped a lot at home. We didn't mind you know, that was just what we did you know. Mummy had been through so much, so we didn't even think of what we had been through because it was really all about what my mother had gone through. She had not put herself out of this, she was really a victim.

10:36:07:10

You know, while she was in Westerbork she'd seen her, her, her aunties and her cousins and everybody going on trains to the various camps. They didn't quite know what was going to happen to them, but the rumours were already coming in. And of course she never heard from her parents again. So you know, she was totally traumatized, she never ever recovered. Never. She was always very, very severe Holocaust - she had a very severe Holocaust survivor's syndrome.

10:36:37:22

So, it wasn't really till I came to England and I, I, I, I, you know I went to study in London, and I lived with a Jewish family. And - you might have come across her - Hannah Chaudy [?] She -, well she works in one of the centres, anyhow. That I realised you know there's Jewish people in the world where there was not everything is before the war, after the war, during the war. And, you know, that was our whole life revolved around that you see. So, it was such an eye opener that here are Jewish people that hadn't go through all that. That was quite -, it was strange. It was really strange.

10:37:19:19

Interviewer

But it gave you real determination not to let your life be defined in the way that your mother had been defined?

10:37:24:00

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Definitely not. I wasn't going to give my kids nightmares thank you very much. I just didn't, you know. And when they ask me questions I, I, I, I just sort of fobbed them off probably a bit, I didn't want to. I said, "Well you know I'll tell you another time." or whatever. I didn't want to talk about it.

10:37:41:20

Interviewer

So when you had a trap door in your house, and an escape and you kept all the tins, they must have thought what is the matter with my mother. What is she worried about? They must have worried about you?

10:37:50:07

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

I did, well they did know that I always had this obsession because my husband always has and he still now because he tells me I have a siege mentality. My larder unit is overflowing with -, I've always got tins of salmon and it's always -, my freezers always full I've always got lots of food in the house, you know there is -, I've never run out of anything because it's always there. Apparently that is one of the common syndromes when you are a Holocaust survivor but yes very much so. Yes they use to think mummy is a bit batty really you know. Oh well my mother is like that. They didn't really seem to think so much about it. Yes.

10:38:32:20

Interviewer

But it's interesting that you had various things on display in terms of the trap door and the excess of food?

10:38:36:24

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

It wasn't on display. It was underneath the carpet.

10:38:38:06

Natasha [*talking over each other*]

- no I know but they all saw that, but they knew it was there and they didn't ask you too much -

10:38:41:14

Sara

I don't think they knew it. Not for a long time. No, no, no.

10:38:43:13

Interviewer [*talking over each other*]

Ah I see. It was under the carpet.

10:38:45:19

Sara

- it was, I didn't show that no. My husband knew but I don't think the kids knew. No. I don't think so.

10:38:53:10

Interviewer

But it made you feel a bit better?

10:38:55:07

Sara

It made me feel very good yes. Yes.

10:38:57:24

Interviewer

That you could protect your family?

10:38:59:24

Sara

And I always had my passport near me, and it was always, it was never, never out of date or anything and little things -, I don't know, certain things just trigger off memories, it's hard to tell but sometimes even some, even some music I hear you know and sort of. Now especially with Christmastime. You know that brings back all sorts of memories you know what er -,

10:39:28:16

from after the war, you know, when I went to a Roman Catholic school. Because I was Mary in the nativity play quite a few times, because I was in a Roman Catholic school. And I could, and I sing very well. So they made me sing *Ave Maria* in church, yes and I *Panis Angelicus* all that yes I remember that, and I was probably quite young when that all happened but I remember all that and to me that's not such a good memory really you know. It makes me feel quite weird, you know, there is this Jewish girl singing *Ave Maria* in church, you know.

10:40:04:17

Interviewer

Yes although it means that you've done your homework in terms of your religious choice doesn't it? It's not like you've just opted to, um -

10:40:12:13

Sara

Oh no. I was very determined.

10:40:14:16

Natasha

- to be Jewish. You've been through all of the religions almost.

10:40:16:12

Sara

Well that, they I didn't have much choice in the matter. My mother was so devastated she just let it flow. You know because the church still tried to look after us. they tried to be good, you know. They, you know I went to this very good school and yes.

10:40:34:14

Interviewer

Well in many ways they saved your life.

10:40:36:12

Sara

They did save my live, and my sister's. Yes.

10:40:40:21

Interviewer

Can we talk about, because I think there's probably a little bit more information?

10:40:43:16

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

And my mother's actually, because if my mother would have arrived in, in, in Westerbork with two little children, she would have gone straight on to Auschwitz that's what they did. They didn't keep kids there you know. Especially a woman with a nursing baby. They would have gone, she would have gone straight through, so they saved all of us.

10:41:03:22

Interviewer

Can we talk a bit more about the story of, um, when your mother wanted you back from the lady who'd looked after you? Because you were beautifully dressed weren't you? And she took that very badly the lady who'd cared for you. Can you tell me that story again, but with more detail?

10:41:18:01

Sara

Well I had -, apparently she had brothers who were black-marketeers, and they always use to come in with stuff, for me and food also because food was terribly scarce the last year of the war in Holland. And I had a new dress. I had a very pretty blue dress with a frill on the bottom. And frills here, and I probably was quite a vain little girl, and I had ringlets long ringlets with a bow - I remember the bow - and I had new shoes. I had red patent shoes with little buttons, and they were new. And I loved them, and she used to sing a Dutch song, there's this Dutch song that went [*Sings the words of a Dutch song*] and so that stayed in my, that song and the shoes, and I wasn't - she took them off me. I wasn't allowed to have my shoes. I wasn't allowed to have my dresses. She sent me home in knickers and vest and socks. And then I realised, I just, I hadn't -, had forgotten about it actually, but I remembered that I didn't have ringlets when I came home. So I said to my sister not long ago what happened I had ringlets when I came home, I forgotten they were about, so I said to my sister no so long ago, "Betty, what happened? I had ringlets. Did I have..." she said, "No she'd cut all your hair off." So she'd cut all my hair off and she sent me

home in socks and nickers and it was not already no, so shortly after the war it was already chilly. Because my father came to fetch me on a bicycle, and he wrapped me in his jacket. Because it was cold, we had to go to Haarlem from Amsterdam. And yes. And there was no money and nothing to be had. So I remembered having clothes from my sister who was 5 years, nearly 5 years older than me. Now she's 5 years old, but when it is my birthday its only 4 years. Yes so.

10:43:19:02

Interviewer

Do you remember that? You remember your father coming to collect you?

10:43:20:19

Sara

Yes I remember. Yes I remember that very clearly because the police stopped us, "Why hasn't she got clothes on?" And my father told him what, what so he wanted to go back to get my clothes the policeman, but my father wouldn't have it. He said no. They probably sold them again because you know, you could get good money for it. It was nothing it was there to be had.

10:43:39:08

Interviewer

But your parents had the opportunity of getting quite a large amount of money if they had allowed that carer to keep you, but they just wanted you back.

10:43:48:00

Sara

They wanted me back.

10:43:49:05

Interviewer

And when you got back, how did it feel because you hadn't been raised by them for two years?

10:43:53:22

Sara

I didn't like that woman who did nothing but cry. My poor mother, I wanted nothing to do with her. We didn't really ever bond properly. Because my sister who had been with her for and then she came back for most of the time, and it was already she had a new baby also, one of my brothers had been born. And I, I just you know, I just didn't -, I remember that I just, I wouldn't speak. I wouldn't speak to anybody. And I just, I kept on thinking for quite a long time that I'd gone to the wrong family. I didn't, you know, I didn't feel anything for them. And then I started to, my mother used to say that I looked like her. Because I said to me, I'm sure I must have said to her once or twice, "Are you sure you are my mother?" And she said, "Well of course I am, you look like your grandmother. You look like my mother" Yes

10:44:51:08

and my mother used to always say, "We're the only ones left. We're the only ones left" And I really thought she meant that we were the only Jewish people left in the

whole, whole world. I didn't think there were any Jewish people left in the whole, whole world. She meant from the family, but as a little girl I thought, you know, that was it, there were no Jewish people left, everybody was killed. So it was very, very hard. It was very hard. And once the kids in school started finding out I was Jewish you know, they called me names and you know and whatever. Not that I couldn't stick up for myself. I could, but it was hard.

10:45:31:22

Interviewer

But you'd already been through a huge amount, to have to go back and experience more antisemitism would have been very difficult.

10:45:35:21

Sara [*talking over Interviewer*]

I don't know if it was or if it wasn't, my mother used to say when I sort of used to ask her I would tell her things she often use to say, "Ach, what do you know about it you were too young." So I used to think to myself, well perhaps I didn't know about it. Perhaps I imagining it you know. So perhaps it was a good thing. Perhaps I didn't let it get to me so much, I don't really know. But then once I told her the story what upsets me so much then she was very shocked because she was not there when that happened, but she had heard about it.

10:46:11:05

Interviewer

It sounds like your mother was so traumatized by everything that she'd been through that she didn't really have any, any emotion left to deal with all of your own traumas?

10:46:20:00

Sara

For Betty, for my older sister because she had been with her. Because she always used to say that to us, "Betty was with me, and she knows what I went through." But it was very much, it is apparently quite a common Holocaust survivor's syndrome you know, when people really can't empathize with other people's so because they've been through so much themselves and I, I, I, I really don't want to say negative things about my mother because she, you know she'd been through too much you know. And I just hope she's at peace now because you know what I honestly don't think she had a single happy moment. She had also a very lot of survivor's guilt, you know that, that -, And she came from such a close-knit loving family it must be absolutely horrendous you know to, to be just left like that. To be left like that. Yeah. And then you know she had always been quite spoilt, spoilt and pampered you know. She was very beautiful and there was no shortage of money and here we were with absolutely nothing. With absolutely nothing. I remember when they cut a boiled egg in quarters and we got a quarter egg and a slice of orange you know and it was, it was very, very hard because there was, there was no social services. There was no, you couldn't go and get you know, if you didn't work, you didn't have any income you starved. You know that's how it was. There were no scroungers in Holland in those days, I don't -, probably now there are but then there weren't. You know you worked. But then the whole country had to be built up again, so work became available. Very, very hard times.

10:48:05:09

Interviewer

What else to you remember? Once you'd returned to your family, what else do you remember about that time of your life?

10:48:14:00

Sara

Well, we had neighbours and they had lots of sons. And it was a very bohemian family. The father was a painter, portrait painter. And they had lots of pets. And at that time I wasn't speaking to anybody. And so I use to longingly look, you know, at the family next door. I remember that very much there were two sons, they were older than me and one the same age. One was called Kace, Arty and France [?] and so their cat had kittens, there were kittens in the garden, and I was looking at these kittens and so the second son Arty [?] he showed me one of the kittens and I said can I have the kitten, can I have? No I was looking. So he said to me, "Do you want it?" So I nodded my head, he said, "You have to say can I have that kitten." And I didn't say anything, so he said to me; "Can you not speak at all then?" And I said, "Of course I can you stupid." And that apparently was the first thing I'd said and anyhow he gave me the kitten. And I smuggled it into the house under my jumper and I took it in my room in the bedroom and I put it in my bed. And Betty went and told my mother. She was always telling tales. And so she told my mother. So -, and I created something awful and so my mother wisely let me keep the kitten. And I had the cat for seventeen years. Yeah. It followed me to school my cat and whenever I use to be upset I use to go and sit in the corner, I never cried in public, I always hid, and then the cat would come and sit with me and start licking me and - [Laughs] my cat, yes my cat.

10:49:53:00

Interviewer

Ah, a very special relationship that you had. You obviously really needed that kitten.

10:49:57:13

Sara

Yes, probably.

10:49:58:16

Interviewer

When you said you didn't speak, so when you came back to the family, do you remember the lady who looked after you? Do you remember what she was called?

10:50:05:21

Sara

Yes, I called her Tante, Tante Cor

10:50:06:19

Interviewer

That was Tante, your auntie. When you came back to your family did you not speak at all?

10:50:14:18

Sara

No. Well I don't know what -, if I, I must have said something, but I didn't hold conversations that's right. That's true.

10:50:21:14

Interviewer

What do you think changed after a while that you started to speak again, and started to have a relationship, because it sounds like your relationship with Betty was the first to one to improve. Is that right?

10:50:31:16

Sara

No it was very acrimonious. She was extremely jealous of me, because she'd been with my mother all throughout the war and then I came. And er, er, so no, she was always telling tales about me and she -, No, was very jealous.

10:50:48:01

Interviewer

And your father?

10:50:49:12

Sara

He, he was, he was also traumatised very traumatised, and he tried so hard to please my mother, you know, and there wasn't really all that much time left for us really. You know, she was so needy. She was, it was -, I suppose it was hard. We didn't know any better. We just got on with it. And we were not allowed to tell anybody we were Jewish you know, and when the bell went when anybody came to the door, my mother would never open the door. She'd be standing there, and she'd be holding her heart, and she'd say we had to open the door for her because she was hoping you know that people would return and of course nobody ever did. It was a long time before they knew for sure that nobody would come back.

10:51:5:15

Interviewer

Is it possible to say how many members of her family died?

10:51:51:12

Sara

My grandfather was one of 19. My grandmother had twins and triplets, was quite a well-known family and nobody survived. And there was lots of cousins - hundreds, hundreds. I've never really gone into it to count. But hundreds. A sister, my mother was the oldest and then she had a sister who had two little girlies. She went to Auschwitz, and the others were not married because they were younger. But she had aunts and uncles and also from, from my grandmother's side of the family that was a big family also. [Pause] Hundreds. That name doesn't exist in Holland anymore. Both names don't exist in Holland anymore from my grandfather and my grandmother. My grandfather, my mother was in the [Dutch name?] and that doesn't exist anymore that name. And my grandmother was called Elzman [?] and also

there's no Jewish Elsmans [?] anymore in Holland. No. And you know you're never ever away from the Holocaust. You know when I go to the, when I go to the cemetery in Haarlem where my mother is buried. That is an old cemetery, an old Jewish cemetery and the Germans had lifted it in the war. They had taken all the stones, the stones they would use, you know for the roads you know when they went on the tanks to Russia. They were these huge granite slabs, and the bodies they'd thrown in a pit in the back, in the back of the field, and they made anti-aircraft battery there because it's on the river and you're on the river - you know one of the sides of, arms of the river Rhine - and of course that's how the planes came over the British planes. And so there was this big anti-aircraft, still now when they do burials they find pieces of aircraft and whatever. Anyhow, so when you come into, into the cemetery - because after the war they gave the place back to the Jewish community, and one of the churches, one of the Christian churches, decide to restore it for the, for the, for the Jewish people. So they're insert whatever they could, but they had no DNA, you had none of this -, so you have no idea who's buried there and some of the stones that were left they were put up were put. So when you walk, and some of my relations were buried there too so when you walk up in the middle path or you stand in the middle with your pray book, and you say your psalms, I look right, I look left, and I just look. Because you have no -, there is no graves to really pray for. So that is what happens when I go to see the grave of my mother. so you're straight away step back into the Holocaust. And very ironically in the back of the base, of the cemetery, of the base there is a big grave, a big family grave, and that was untouched. Why was it untouched? Because they were buried right in the back of the cemetery because they were German Jews and they had escaped from Germany for a good reason you know they were on the list of -, and when Holland was invaded they all committed suicide. So they buried them in the back of the cemetery and ironically that was the only grave untouched. You, you're never ever going to be away from, from Holocaust memories. Yeah so, and when I go and see my mother and I stand there with my pray book, I can see my father too he is in another cemetery, and then I think one of the first things I say, "thank God mummy you have a grave." Because nobody else had a grave, you know.

10:56:04:21

Interviewer

And you don't think your mother found any peace before she died?

10:56:08:18

Sara

No. I spoke to her the day before she died - she wasn't expected to die. -I was going to see her you know on the Monday, I had a ticket and on the Sunday afternoon I spoke to her she was in hospital I phoned her, and she was telling me how angry she was with the Almighty. And she knew she was going to die, she said, "I'm going to see my father and mother soon." And why, and then she started you know, "Why did he do this to us? Why did he, you know, why did he have to take my parents in such a terrible way." No she didn't find any peace. And then in the middle of the night I had a - I was also on my own - I had a phone call from my sister that my mother had died. The hospital had called her, and she had died. So I'm sure she's very happy now. I hope so. I hope so you know, you do these things you give charity in their names, and you say the prayers and you know, and you hope. And then we have got grandchildren called after her and yeah. I've got one granddaughter called

after her and she is really feisty. *[Laughs]*

10:57:17:09

Interviewer

[Laughs] You picked the right one.

10:57:19:01

Sara

Yes. Yes. *[Laughs]*

10:57:21:02

Interviewer

Um, after the war you talked about sharing an egg between all of you and that times were very hard. Did you go, you went back to your house didn't you? To your home?

10:57:31:10

Sara

Not in the house where we lived in before the one no. No. That was taken over we couldn't go back there. We went into another house, and, and ironically the people that had lived in that house were thrown out of the house because he had been a Nazi, the people that lived there. So they were thrown out of the house, and you know we were put there. Yeah.

10:57:56:17

Interviewer

But you were able to recover some items from your family, is that right?

10:58:00:04

Sara

Very few.

10:58:01:12

Interviewer

Where, where had they been kept?

10:58:03:10

Sara

Well, my grandparents had given things to neighbours. My grandmother -, they had given things to neighbours. She'd given her silver. And, um, she didn't have much silver because in Holland they had a lot of brass you know they were the traditional Jewish items they were made from brass and so my mother - and also money -and so my mother after the war she went, Betty and me were with her, she went two months to get her stuff back, you know when she got herself organised to do these things. there were various places, but this was the specific place I went with her. She never got anything much back at all. Jewellery, nothing. So, "oh no" they said, "everything is gone because we got burgled and they stole everything. So my mother saw her mother's clock on the mantelpiece and she said; "Well they must have forgotten my mother's clock then." So she picked it off the mantelpiece under her arm and walked out. And their neighbours stopped us, other neighbours stopped us and said they buried things in the back garden. So my father went with some of his

Resistance, you know his mates from the Dutch Resistance and they went and they dug up the garden. And they found my grandmother's menorah. A brass menorah it was wrapped in, whatever I don't know what it was wrapped in, but I remember it was very dirty because Betty and me cleaned it up and polished it. I was never so good at, at, at, at heavy - you know, hoovering and stuff like that but I was always good at polishing. So and I remember, so I remember the Menorah and after my mother died I wanted that Menorah, I didn't want anything much. They were very good because there was a lot of stuff because they recovered finically after the war and I just, but I wanted that Menorah, but they all wanted the Menorah. But they were not going to use it for what it is supposed to be used for, it is supposed to be used now for Hanukkah, you know today is the last day of Hanukkah - the 8th day. And so I wanted that Menorah. But my brothers wanted the Menorah and they all wanted the Menorah so, Betty had one already. So she said, "You know what, you can draw lots." So we drew lots and guess what and I never ever win anything in my life. Nothing. And I got the Menorah so obviously the Almighty wanted me to have the Menorah. And ever since I've used it. Every Hanukkah you know we light that menorah with the candles and yes I'm tearful then because it is an old Menorah so it's probably not worth all that much but it is very precious and you know generations, my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents. Who knows, I've no idea how old it is but it is old. And every year I've polished it. I polished it last night after I lit my last eight candles, I cleaned it and I polished it. It's lovely and shiny and I brought it. Yeah. So, yes I have the menorah and I light it and then I think of my grandparents and my grandmother. And - yeah. And you know, there is special prayers you know the Kaddish, the Kaddeshian, the Kaddish prayers. So whenever I go to the synagogue and other people say the Kaddish, I always stand up and I listen carefully, and I always say in my mind grandparents, aunties, uncles, can't you hear, here I am I, here I am. And I've got children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, you know. Yeah, yeah. [Jewish word?] Yeah you know I had a grandson three weeks ago. Yeah.

11:01:37:10

Interviewer

Wow, congratulations. Um, You having a big family as you have is your chance -

11:01:42:19

Sara [*talking over Interviewer*]

It's a triumph. Triumph.

11:01:43:20

Interviewer

- to triumph.

11:01:45:11

Sara

Triumph you know.

11:01:46:12

Interviewer

Tell me know many children you had and how many grandchildren you have?

11:01:49:22

Sara

I have six children and I would have liked more [*Laughs*] And I have twenty-two grandchildren, and so far six great grandchildren. Yeah. And we hope for more don't we.

11:02:11:06

Interviewer

You certainly don't look old enough to have great grandchildren, I have to say that right now. [*Laughs*]

11:02:15:21

Sara

Thank you. Thank you.

11:02:16:15

Interviewer

It's amazing. And none of them know your story?

11:02:20:05

Sara

But you know what, and think you asked me before what kept me going? Faith. Religion, it really does. You know we have in our religion, you know, we have special prayers for people that die, And we have special prayers for people that have died, and all these little things that you can do to keep their memory going, you know. The giving of charity in their name and, and calling children after the people that have passed away. And the faith that you know, that please God we will see them again. You know and that whatever happens to us you know, it's still for the best - even though it is still very difficult to understand.

11:03:01:18

Interviewer

But your parents had lost their faith hadn't they after the war?

11:03:03:17

Sara

Yes, totally. Completely. Totally. Completely. And my brothers and sisters keep nothing. One of my sisters has got a small menorah that was also a small one - I don't know where that came from - and she lights Christmas candles in it.

11:03:19:21

Interviewer

You said at the beginning that you were born with your faith and that you were born with a Jewish soul?

11:03:27:17

Sara

But I probably was also very stubborn little girl you know. So if I was pushed one way I probably went the other way, you know.

11:03:34:04

Interviewer

Do you think that's what made you so observant?

11:03:36:17

Sara

I don't know. I don't know. I think it was also very much, I think I was probably always quite sensitive and I was told quite often that I looked like my grandmother. You know Haarlem was a small town and I was, a few times I was stopped in the street and asked, "Are you a [Herera?]" And I said, "No but my mother is." "Oh you look like your grandmother." You know things like that. So there was something for me to, to want to live up to. You know that's, that's -, I don't know I just always wanted to be Jewish. I just wanted to be Jewish. And I'm always like that if I do something I do it properly. You know, there is nothing in-between with me, you know. It's always this way or nothing at all. Yeah, I like to do things properly. So that's what I wanted to do it properly.

11:04:26:13

Interviewer

And your children?

11:04:27:20

Sara

Oh they're all religious. Yes, thank god. Yeah, they all got Jewish wives, Jewish husbands and all religious. Yes, and functioning human beings. Thank God.

11:04:41:15

Interviewer

And your family is obviously the most important thing in your life?

11:04:45:03

Sara

Oh yes. Oh yes. I go and look after them all when they have babies and spoil them all and yes.

11:04:51:09

Interviewer

I bet you're amazing. I bet you're absolutely amazing.

11:04:53:12

Sara

I wouldn't, no I wouldn't say that.

11:04:54:21

Interviewer

I bet you are absolutely amazing.

11:04:56:05

Sara

I wouldn't say that, I think I can be quite a tartar.

11:05:00:18

Interviewer

So after the war, after you'd spent a bit of time getting to know your family again. You were at school until you were about fifteen is that right?

11:05:11:04

Sara

Fifteen.

11:05:11:21

Interviewer

And then what happened?

11:05:13:07

Sara

I went to work. I went to work. I worked in -, there was a very big salon in Haarlem where my mother was a client and it was a hairdressing and beauty parlour but they would only take girls from good families, who had been well educated; and because by that time I spoke fluent German and English, and they used to get you know, they use to get important clients. So I started there and I was an apprentice. Slave labour. You know you didn't get a salary, you know, but I learnt my profession well, so and it has helped me a lot.

11:05:46:00

Interviewer

And you've been in beauty since then haven't you?

11:05:48:03

Sara

Yeah. And my husband has been very, very sick. He has been not able to work for a few years. He had massive heart surgery and it made the difference between you know, holding my head up or being dependant on other people. And I wasn't, I never asked anybody for anything just rolled my sleeves up and got on with it. So you know it was -, it all fell, it all into place and also I had a profession I could do at home. You know, I've got this little beauty salon in my house and so I didn't have to be out of the house when the children came home from school and I was there for the kids and I could still earn a living.

11:06:20:17

Interviewer

And what about your own health because you've had some problems because of your malnutrition when you were younger, haven't you?

11:06:26:01

Sara

I have some very big health problems. Yeah, yeah. I've just been diagnosed with something new, which I didn't particularly fancy but I didn't have any choice. I've got um, well first of all I've got [Lye?] lymphoma. Which is, you know, I've got cutaneous

T-cell lymphoma, which is really quite a rare disease. Sort of one in ten million. So I don't know why the Almighty had to pick on me, but you know I would have thought there is plenty of other people you could pick on but he picked me. So, and then I had a load of miscarriages and always troubles with, with that. I didn't realise but you know and I thought I would just do that behind the washing machine but it didn't go so easy. And I've got rheumatoid arthritis and osteo-arthritis and now they also diagnosed me with fibre-, what is it, fibromyalgia.

11:07:15:17

Interviewer

Well, that's very painful isn't it?

11:07:17:15

Sara

Yeah. That was what all the pain was about. Yeah.

11:07:21:03

Interviewer

Is any of that linked do you, do they think to when you were younger?

11:07:24:22

Sara

Apparently it is quite common for people that are survivors you know to, because that's trauma isn't it?

11:07:31:07

Interviewer

Of course.

11:07:31:18

Sara

It's caused by trauma.

11:07:32:08

Interviewer

Oh, I'm so sorry that you're dealing with that. That's very, very difficult, and a lot of pain.

11:07:36:01

Sara

Well you just get on with it. You just get on with it, try not to pay much notice and mind over matter.

11:07:46:05

Interviewer

Um, so by twenty-one you were living in London. Tell me about your life then?

11:07:51:05

Sara

Yeah, well then I went to live with family Chaudy [?] – Hannah and Philip Chaudy [?] And they had young children so -, and I was quite a capable young woman so. She was expecting her forth child and I sort of more or less took over because she had a bit of a bad time of it, and so I pulled my weight but they were extremely good to me and very kind to me. And even them I never told anything. She was so shocked when I told her that now, or I was, she said, “And you never ever told me anything?” She keeps on saying, “Come to London and I’ll council you.” But I don’t think I want to be counselled by somebody I know so well. Because I don’t know, I don’t know. I don’t always know if counselling is such a good idea you know. I think it sometimes makes people wallow in their misery instead of just get on with it my love pull your socks off, socks up and get on with it. Because I think that is better for people.

11:08:51:15

Interviewer

Well you found your own way of coping with what you went through haven’t you?

11:08:55:21

Sara

Yes.

11:08:58:02

Interviewer

When you look back at the hardest points in your life, do you wish you’d been able to share a little bit more? And you wish that you’d had more confidence to ask for help?

11:09:11:17

Sara

No not really. I don’t know if it would have changed anything. And perhaps I, I was too busy to do these things, you know, I was just too busy. You know, and also don’t forget when I was young and when I was having children, of course I would had all these dreadful nightmares but then the minute one of the kids would call me, “Mummy” You know, then that was it I was up and busy and it went up and out of my mind, you know. And you had to, you couldn’t be a big drama queen. So you know, it was, I was too busy to be too traumatised with it all. It was just, that’s probably where the dreams came from when I slept you know then it took over.

11:09:58:01

Interviewer

But now that you have got more time, you’ve got more time for yourself, you’ve got more time for your memories. You’ve got more time to reflect on your life and you’re at a different point in life where you’re starting to think about the next generation taking over, and the next generation learning from what you experienced, what do you think now?

11:10:21:19

Sara

I don’t know if you can compare things like that because every generation is so different. You know generations are just not, generations are not -, I think when you

go through extremes it either makes you very strong or it makes you a windy wimp you know. And I don't, honestly don't know if generations could deal with. I don't think my kids could deal with this. I really don't. Because whenever there is something in their lives it's always straight away on the phone to mummy you know so. Yeah, you know and this happens and that happens. And you, know, one of my daughters once phoned she was newly married, my oldest daughter and they'd had words. And, "You know what he said to me?" I said and what did you say? So she told me; "But he" I said; "I'm sure daddy never said that to you." And I said how do you know? She said, "Well I never heard him." I said; "Of course not, we didn't do it in front of you but I can assure you he did and so did I. So just get on with it." But she, she couldn't, you know she couldn't really you know I had to help her with it. But it is things don't have the same resilience that, that we had. But I must say that my sisters didn't cope with it. My older sister is very, very bitter.

11:11:42:02

Interviewer

And your younger brother?

11:11:43:10

Sara

And my youngest – Dave, Dave – well, he was too young to remember. He really doesn't but they suffer all terrible from second generation syndrome. Very much so. Because they saw, because that's all they heard and all they saw all day and every day.

11:11:59:24

Interviewer

So when you say they suffer from second generation syndrome?

11:12:02:22

Sara

They all see counsellors and psychiatrists and yeah, big time.

11:12:11:17

Natasha

Which has made you even more determined to deal with all this on your own?

11:12:15:02

Sara

Well, I never even knew so much what, what they were doing. Because I lived here and they lived there and we didn't really so much discuss it but yeah this one had this counselling and this one had that counselling and, yeah. Yeah. And my oldest sister Betty who was so -, she was really emotionally so tied to my mother. And it really more or less ruined her life because my mother did not let her live. When she went on holidays with her husband my mother went with as well. She could not enjoy herself without my mother. And sort of and now she wraps that in very much you know, "You're alright you left me with it, you left me to deal with it all." You know, that kind of. And it was true I did, I went. Well there was no way that I could have lived a life that I wanted to live there, because there was too much opposition at home about it. They did not want it my mother was much too scared. She used to say to me;

“You want to do that? You want to get killed? You want to get you and our family killed? You want to do that to me?” And you know so, I picked myself up and went.

11:13:30:21

Interviewer

It’s almost like you turned a chapter. You started again?

11:13:35:05

Sara

I did, but I kept always in contact with them you know, birthdays and I used to send presents, yeah. But my mother didn't -, you know when I had my first child, my very first child – Leah - she was born on a Jewish holiday she was born on the Jewish holiday of Selichos? you know. And so I phoned her straight afterwards and I said, “Mummy I’ve had a little girlie and I called her after your sister I called her Leah after Lina.” She said, “Oh, very nice, tell me when you’re well enough to look after me and I’ll come and see the baby.” I said, “Well I’ll be well enough in a couple of weeks so please come.” That’s was in June. She came in November.

11:14:17:11

Interviewer

Which is also perhaps why you’re an amazing grandmother. Because you’re right there straight away.

11:14:22:01

Sara

I’m there before they have babies!

11:14:23:15

Interviewer

Waiting. [*Laughs*]

11:14:25:06

Sara

Yeah.

11:14:26:05

Interviewer

Because you had the opposite experience.

11:14:28:13

Sara

Yes, but it was so hard on my own so I didn’t want my kids to go through that. So you know. Yeah.

[Card change]

11:14:36:23

Interviewer

There was a story about your sister Betty crossing the dyke and the fear that she went through.

11:14:43:08

Sara

Betty went -, Betty, how old must she have been? She was born in 1938 or '37 was it? Wait a minute if she's -, yeah she was probably just 5. And she was in hiding in a little place called Oostzaan. It was then an island. And there was a dyke that went from, from, the the east of Amsterdam, just behind the station there was a dyke that went over the IJ, that was the river called IJ, and it went to this little place Oostzaan. It was a narrow dyke with big boulders on both sides and she was in hiding there. And there were more Jewish children there. And there was a man in the village who they knew was a sympathiser, a Nazi sympathiser, and he was missing. So all the people got very scared. And Betty thinks that he drowned the other children that were there, because if you find Jewish kids with you, and was a small village so everybody knew, and they told her to start walking down the dyke. And if she saw people come, because I think it was quite, I'm not quite sure how long it was, but probably about 3 miles - perhaps even a bit longer: 6 kilometres, 6 kilometres, that's about 3 miles; and she should go and lie between the boulders and hide. And that's exactly what happened. She first saw the guy come back on his bicycle, so she went and laid in in, in between the boulders and very shortly after that she saw cars coming, the black cars. So she lay there the whole night between the boulders. And they told her when you come on the other side of the dyke you see a church, you go in the church, you tell them who you are and you give them the name of the Moses en Aäronkerk and they will see that you'll, that you'll be safe. And that's what she did. Eventually when she saw the cars come and go back again so she laid until it was light and then she walked into the church there to, to, yeah. And then she went, she was with my mother for the rest of the war, my mother wouldn't let her out of her sight after that. So wherever my mother went in hiding she went into hiding. I think my mother must have been back from Westerbork by that time.

11:17:15:14

Interviewer

What did your mother tell you of her experience in Westerbork?

11:17:18:10

Sara

Oh, how terrible -, she had a terrible time, because she lived in fear all the time. She didn't know -, names were called off every morning off lists, who had to go on the trains. But she was also, she, apparently the commander of the camp liked her and sort of, he kept her, kept on inviting her to have whatever, have tea with him or something. And, um, eventually my father got her out. I don't know probably bribery. Because in those days - it was in 1943 that still was, you were still able to do that. I don't know, but she was there for a few months in Westerbork.

11:17:57:06

Interviewer

And did she tell you any details about it?

11:18:01:15

Sara

No, she told me that, that when she came her breasts were very full of milk. And they

asked, so they expressed her for a little while because they used the milk for the babies, some babies that were there. And then her milk just went.

11:18:16:24

Interviewer

And that was supposed to be your milk, wasn't it?

11:18:18:18

Sara

That was my milk, yes. I never thought of it that way. Thank God if it kept some other babies alive, for however much longer, who knows? So no, I don't mind sharing. So, no. It must have been so hard for her you know, that she gets a baby back who doesn't even want to talk to her you know. Yeah. Yeah [*pause*] so it was really not surprising that my sister resented me, you know. She had my mother to herself for all these years and then I came back and she had to share her clothes with me as well. Even her -, I had her wellingtons, little wellies and they put newspapers in because they were much too big on me, because you know you couldn't buy anything.

11:19:18:15

Interviewer

It was hard for your sister, but incredibly hard for you as well.

11:19:22:01

Sara

I don't think I realised it so much.

11:19:25:07

Interviewer

It sounds like you did, because you were very angry weren't you?

11:19:29:09

Sara

Was I?

11:19:30:07

Interviewer

It sounded like you were. You didn't want to talk to anybody.

11:19:33:19

Sara

Yeah, that probably was anger. I never thought of that, but probably was. But I think it was probably more also because I just didn't know them, you know I just didn't know them, what should I say? And I don't honestly think they tried very hard. Because, you know, what, what my mother had had another baby, and she had Betty who was so very emotionally tied to her because it was always Betty that used to get extra of this, extra of that because she had been through so much in the war. And I couldn't remember, I was too young you see, so that's how it was. So I didn't even -, you know that's how it was. That's how it was. You don't know any better, you don't know any better. Although

11:20:16:05

I used to be quite envious of the kids in school who had aunts and uncles and grandmothers and, you know, if there was something in school then they would whole families would come you know. And I just -, nobody came. Yeah. nobody came. There is lots more, whatever people don't have to know.

11:20:41:04

Interviewer

Like what?

11:20:42:08

Sara

No. No, but Rosie, that's strange isn't it, I can't even, I just didn't even know, I didn't even, or just a name that I remembered and I remembered that I should cry with that name, there was sorrow there. Yeah, Betty remembers that. Yeah.

11:21:07:19

Interviewer

So Sonja, with what you've just said are there memories that you don't want to share with me today?

11:21:14:05

Sara

Yes I'm sure. Yes, there are.

11:21:19:11

Interviewer

That you don't want to talk about now?

11:21:21:13

Sara

Not really, no.

11:21:23:07

Interviewer

Worse than the square that you've explained?

11:21:26:13

Sara

Different. Different. The ones on the square, they had a woman with a baby, and they just had her there and nobody was allowed to go near her. She was sitting there for a very long time. I don't know what happened. I don't know what happened. [Pause] Days. I imagine they found her in one of the houses too, and she shouldn't have been there anymore. [Pause] So many people were, you know someone people were always there, rounded up. [Pause] And also some of the Dutch police, they had yellow, they had yellow trucks. They helped the Germans. [Pause] Yeah. And some of the stories from after the war with the Dutch Resistance, my sister and

me we used to listen behind the door. They did what they did in France as well. If they knew there were people that had been traitors and they knew for certain and they seemed to have gone Scott-free, they had, they had unexplained accidents. Yeah. Yeah. I don't think anybody looked into it too carefully. Once we, you know, we didn't live so far from the, from the -, well, we used to walk to the sea side. I used to walk with brothers and sisters and kids from the neighbourhood you know, you had a lot more freedom then, it was about an hour and a half's walk to the beach but we used to cut across the dunes. And that whole coastline was all fortified, you know by the Germans, you know, bunkers and goodness knows what, and, and how on earth we survived, because we once found a grenade and took it home my father flipped we brought this grenade home and it was live. Yeah. And there were accidents with the kids, you know that happened, people that stood on things and, for a long time, for a very many years. But we once, we once went, it was with Betty also, and we were 3, we had sandwiches and we were sitting in the dunes and was sitting there and I started feeling not well. I started feeling and I said, "Betty I have to go from here, it's very spooky here, I want to go away, I don't want to stay here, I don't want, I want to go." And so Betty was, said, "Oh, don't be stupid." I said, "But I don't want to stay here, I want to go!" And so we went home, I didn't want, I wanted to go home. And she told my father and so he wanted to know exactly where it was, and then they, yeah, they found, they quite a lot of bodies there that had been executed by the Germans and had buried there, had been buried. There is a plaque there now. So, er I just -, it was, it was a horrible place.

11:25:40:09

Interviewer

And you could feel it?

11:25:42:01

Sara

I could feel it. It was a horrible place and my father took it serious. So he told his whatever, his mates because they used to meet quite regularly, you know the people from the Dutch Resistance, because don't forget it was the times of the Cold War, you know, so they didn't just let go of the organisation so easily after the war. And my father had been the first aid man in the war. He was the one that was doing the first aid he was, because they couldn't go to doctors, all the doctors were, were watched. And so my sister and me, they set up these organisations you know, *Eerste hulp in oorlogstijd* - It was first aid in war time, and it was quite extensive first aid courses, so we had to go, Betty and me, you know we had to, we were trained like that. And you know what, whatever I have learnt, has been so useful over the years, you know. But that, that was, that was so terrible that I just remember it so clearly. And you know in there, not far from there also in the dunes, they made that, they made a war cemetery where all the people that were killed by the Germans, you know from the Dutch resistance, they are buried there. Yeah. And they always have on the 4th of May, the day before Holland was liberated, they always have, you know like they have here you know the poppy days, and everybody goes to them. We used to go, we used to go with school. We used to go to there and there was a huge war cemetery by Arnhem - you know the film *The Bridge Too Far*. There's a huge cemetery there and so they used to take us there on a trip, you know, and all these Dutch girls used to jump around laughing and joking, and I walked around crying. I walked, and I used to read, you know. And there was English and Americans, and

you know 16, 17 years, 18 years, 19 years. You know, as far as the eye could see, war graves. So horrendous, you know, so horrendous. What for? What do people have to have wars for? Because, you know, apart from all the millions of Jews, and according to Simon Wiesenthal you know, 6 million Jews was an underestimate he reckons it was double that figure. But all these, how many? 20 million people that got killed? And what did he achieve?

11:28:10:05

Interviewer

There are a few more things that I just want to fill in, a little bit about your faith and about meeting your husband. Um, but before that, I'm concerned that there are memories that you don't want to share. And I'd just like you to reconsider that, if there is anything that you'd want to tell me?

11:28:32:12

Sara

There is, but some of it is so, so sketchy you know? You know.

11:28:36:00

Interviewer

Doesn't matter.

11:28:39:10

Sara

Well I told you one of them. About the lady with the, with the baby. I think she was tied up. *[Pause]* Is it a surprise that I don't want to walk on that square? And you know, there was the last winter in Holland, it was the hunger winter. Because, you know, the British army and the American army came to stop by the river Rhine. Right? You had the famous Battle of the Bulge, you know, when the weather was so terrible, there was such a terrible, terrible wind. And, you know, the radio, you know they used to, they called up Holland for all the people to strike. So there was a general strike in the Netherlands. So the Germans retaliated and they emptied Holland out of everything: all the coal, all the fruit, everything out. And they stopped, they stopped everything. They stopped even the electricity, so, to force people back to work. But there was nothing left anymore in Holland, so it was, it was, was, was terrible. And people had no fuel, there was no coal to be got. Now on the square, there were trees on either side of the square, in the, the, the book that I brought with on the pictures, on the pictures and so -, and curfew, there was every evening curfew and people weren't allowed out of the house. So people would creep into those empty houses, and take water out. That I was told. But what I saw, they would climb in the trees and cut off branches, you know, to use as fuel. And then the Germans came. And I don't know if they were Dutch or Jewish. I don't know who was the people in there, and they just kicked and beat them to death as well, just like that. You know put big lights on them, because they had lights and they would shine them over the trees. And then shoot. And kick and beat. People were cutting themselves a bit of wood to keep alive. You know to, you know to take that risk. *[Pause]* To do such a thing right near the Gestapo Headquarters, people must have been so desperate. *[Pause]* When my mother used to say that one of the reasons she didn't sell me because she needed me to look after my younger brother. So I always had to play with him and I had to give him well -, well, it doesn't matter, it

doesn't matter. No, no, no it's not necessary. I think things happened on that square on a daily basis.

11:32:09:19

I also remember there was a famous hotel in Amsterdam - The Carlton Hotel. And they had anti-aircraft batteries all over. There was one right near behind our, where we were in Amsterdam also. Because there was all these rivers they used to use the rivers. Got no radar, well if they had radar they -, anyhow, they used to use the rivers and there was always planes, you know, they were shooting at the planes. And apparently the German anti-aircraft gunners were much better than the English ones. And because I remember seeing planes being shot out of the sky, I remember that also very clearly. But there was one instance when everybody - the Dutch people were very, they were all very jubilant about it - because two planes had been shot and they steered the planes right on top of The Carlton Hotel and that was full of Germans. And, you know, big shots were there and the whole place went up in flames. So people were very jubilant about the Carlton Hotel. That the British landed their planes, the poor boys probably burnt to death too but they landed the planes on it. On the - you know what? I hate war, I so hate war. It's, it's such a terrible thing, you know. It's a terrible, terrible thing that people have to do that. What for? Where does it come from? People have to wage wars.

11:33:53:13

Interviewer

It feels like you have a sea of memories. And I find it so extraordinary that you've been able to hold them still.

11:34:08:10

Sara

I've got a memory like an elephant.

11:34:11:21

Interviewer

You have. But that you've been able to keep them all to yourself, and that you've protected your family from them, I find it amazing.

11:34:22:02

Sara

Why amazing?

11:34:23:12

Interviewer

Well because it shows such extraordinary strength, that you made a decision. You responded to how your mum brought you up and you decided to do it differently. But that you didn't even share with your husband any of these things.

11:34:39:00

Sara

Well my husband is -, if you knew my husband he is very soft and gentle.

11:34:42:08

Interviewer

But so are you.

11:34:44:14

Sara

I am a tough cookie you know.

11:34:45:14

Interviewer

Oh I'm sure.

11:34:46:05

Sara

I was the bogie man, I always was the disciplinarian. Whenever, whenever they used to know Mummy is going to say no they went and asked daddy. And then daddy used to say, "go and ask Mummy." And then Mummy say, "oh no you can't." Yes, I was always the bogie man so -, He was very soft and gentle, I wanted to protect, he couldn't have dealt with it. He never went with me when I had babies, he couldn't bear to see me in pain. He always found some excuse not to be with me you know. That's not, he's -, no it's not him.

11:35:18:02

Interviewer

And you wanted him to be here today?

11:35:19:16

Sara

But now he can just jolly well see the DVD. It's enough already. Now he can jolly well see it.

11:35:23:06

Interviewer

Yeah, so he couldn't be here today but you wanted him to be here, because you want him to hear now?

11:35:26:21

Sara [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Well I did ask him actually to -, could he, could he not postpone it. He said no he can't. So, so I don't really think he wanted to be here but, but I would have like him to be here but you can't, you can't demand him on things, you know, which cannot be given, you know.

11:35:43:16

Interviewer

But how do you think your family will respond now to the testimony that you've given?

11:35:48:05

Sara

Well, I've told him and they all want, they all want to see it. I think it's probably easier for them from a distance because they're not going to see me so upset, or if they do see it on the DVD then it's not, it's not the same. There is nothing they can do about it anyhow, and they know by now I've bounced back already you know, because they know me. I never even cried when I had miscarriages. And I had very big ones. I lost twins at 26 weeks, yeah, because I was not strong enough to carry them; so I must say they were so good to me, I've been really lucky with doctors and people complain about the National Health but they have been so incredibly kind to me you know, when they said to me, "Why do you do this?" And I explained to them, "you know, well I'm the only one having Jewish children and I -", and they said, "We'll help you." And they did. They were so good to me.

11:36:42:12

Interviewer

Yes, the NHS when you really need them are fantastic aren't they?

11:36:45:08

Sara

Yeah but just on a personal basis, you know, individuals.

11:36:48:23

Interviewer

Compassion.

11:36:50:12

Sara

Kind.

11:36:51:12

Interviewer

Um, Sonja, you talked earlier about one of the experiences you had in hospital when you suddenly had a panic attack. Um, is there anything else that happens in your life now that you find very hard? You've said you're very claustrophobic -

[Cut for direction]

how is your claustrophobia manifesting itself now?

11:39:24:18

Sara

Oh, when I'm on my own I don't even close the door in the bathroom, even though there is a window there. And, er, my curtains in the bedroom, my husband likes the curtains closed and I don't like them closed so there is always a little space open, there's always a bit open. And when I am on my own I leave lights on in the house. I am not scared in the dark, it's just -, and I will sit in a window. I like big windows around me and I don't like going in lifts. I find it hard now going up the stairs but, I still try to avoid -, I still try go up a few flights of stairs to avoid lifts, you know. I don't like lifts at all. I don't like people too close around me either you know. Yeah.

11:40:05:15

Interviewer

It's all completely understandable. When you look at the political scene at the moment and what's happening, does it worry you? Do you feel that we haven't learned lessons, or do you think it's got nothing to do with our experience in the past?

11:40:19:13

Sara

No I think, I don't think, I think mankind will never learn lessons. I really -, I've absolutely given up on this idea of world peace and all that. I really don't think it's possible. I really don't think so. I mean, we, we believed that *mashiach* - the messiah will come and I cannot see how anything can be sorted out, you know, without any divine intervention. I mean, where is, where is the end to all these conflicts that are going on around the world?

11:40:49:21

Interviewer

Do you feel that any lessons were learnt from the period of history that we've just been talking about?

11:40:55:00

Sara

I don't think so, but I don't know why because if anybody has any knowledge of history. Let's go just from the Jewish point of view. If anybody has any knowledge of history - general history - you can see so clearly that any country who kicks out Jews goes into a period of extreme unrest. We only have to look in England, you know 1290 Edward I – Longshanks - he expelled the Jews out of England. Ever since there was nothing but civil war you know and his son Edward II was murdered in Berkeley Castle, he was, he was, he was a terrible man. And civil war all the time. Richard III. Civil war. Then you have all the Wars of the Roses. Civil war. Then you have the Tudor kings coming in. Henry VIII was a terrible man. Killed how many: two wives and all his ministers they all got killed every single one: Worsley, Cromwell. People were petrified of him. And then his son died young and then you have Mary, bloody Mary who persecuted all the Protestants. Then you have Elizabeth, who persecuted all the Catholics. And then Charles I who got his head chopped off. And you didn't, and all the time Jews were not allowed to live in England. Under Charles II he let the Jews come in, you know it was under Cromwell there was already correspondence going on with *Menasseh ben Israel* in Amsterdam. He was trying you know, because Cromwell was a very religious man and he said you know it says in the bible that when Jews live all over the world, the Messiah will come again. And but it was only under Charles II that Jews came back in - because he had Jewish financiers who financed his coming back to England -and then Jews came back in to England. Then you had a lot of the country calm down. You know the Merry Monarch? There was peace in England, there was no more civil wars. And prosperity came back to England. And it was the same in Spain when they kicked out the Jews there was a lot of unrest. The Jews went into Holland and they had a golden century started. It doesn't do any countries any good when they kick out the Jews. It didn't do Germany any good either. You know, it was divided into two for so

very, very long.

11:43:13:24

Interviewer

How did you come to find your faith, because your faith is very, very strong?

11:43:18:07

Sara

Well I think, if you want to, I think people have to make this initial step. You know in faith. Then if you want to have faith I think the almighty comes along and helps you with it. I really think so. I really think that's what happens. Because when I was young girl there have been times when I've thought to myself; oh goodness gracious what on earth am I doing this for? It would be so much easier if I just fit in with the rest of them at home, you know. Because I was excluded from so much. And there was a lot of anger you know, they didn't want me to be. I gave my mother a guilty conscious. And, so there were periods but then you know, I'm sure I must have been depressed at times. And um sort of, you know, I use to think, say to, say to the almighty, you know, [*Hebrew or Yiddish quotation*] the holy one he should be blessed. You know this is too much for me I can't cope with this anymore, here come on I'm throwing it back to you catch it. So you sort it out, you get on with it for me. And I still do that and it works. It works.

[cut for card change]

11:44:23:24

Interviewer

Another story that we haven't picked up on, we've talked a lot about your mother but we haven't spoken very much about your father; but he had a very kind soul didn't he and he was a very generous man. He supported a lot of people apart from your family.

11:44:37:10

Sara

Yes he did. He would go when my mother, my mother's sister was in hiding, he would go every month and bring the money to have her in hiding. And he -, and every time he went he wanted to see them, said, "Can I see Lina? Can I see Lina?" and, "It's too dangerous not now, not now." And then one day when he went and, and he gave money, one day when he went people on the corner of the street stopped him, and they said, "We know why you were going there, don't go they are waiting for you. Gestapo's waiting for you." He said, "Why did you still come when you know they weren't there anymore?" he said, "I didn't know they weren't there, I brought money to, to pay for them." They had been taking the money for months, we never quite knew how long, for a long, long time, and they'd already betrayed, yeah betrayed them. Yeah, and he had actually, he'd actually had an address for my grandmother to go into hiding but she wouldn't go. She wouldn't go. And her sister went with, and the same with my grandfather, his son, my mother's brother went with to look after, after his father.

11:46:01:13

So, we don't even quite know exactly when, when people died because those Red

Cross dates they -, yeah. Yeah destination Auschwitz as if they went on a skiing holiday. You should see those papers my mother got you know '49, '51, and every time they came she'd go absolutely, absolutely demented. And crying and screaming and fainting and terrible. Just -, yeah, whole piles of them.

11:46:39:00

Interviewer

These were the letters from the Red Cross saying 'you had died.'

11:46:41:17

Sara [talking over interviewee]

From the Dutch Red Cross, yeah, declaration. The name of the person, arrived in this camp such and such a date. Arrived at that camp such and such a date. Final destination - skiing holiday right? - Auschwitz, presumed [cast?] and cremated. That's it. Nothing else. And it's just a pile of them. I photocopied some and brought them back with me. Yeah. In Eng-, In Dutch of course. My mother hated the Red Cross. she told me, I would never ever allowed to give them a penny. Yeah. They didn't do anything for the Jews at all. They sent food and parcels to the prisoner of war camps but not to the -, well perhaps, perhaps they wouldn't have allowed them to, but they never, never to the death camps.

11:47:42:23

Interviewer

I promised you that we're reaching the end, and we really are. Can I ask a little bit about how you met your husband?

11:47:51:02

Sara

Well I was studying in London and I came to a wedding in Manchester. And they had set me up but I didn't know. My husband did. And there was a wedding of rabbi [Schlesinger's?] son was getting married to a girl in Manchester and I was looking after his very elderly mother so I was -, got out of the taxi with her and I can see this man stands there staring at me and I said hmm, you know what you looking at me for and I gave him a glare and so I got her settled and comfortable and then I was called out. "I want to speak to you Sonja, come, come in the car." So and my husband is sitting there and I looked at him. And I said; oh not again you know another stupid boy. So they dropped us a bit further, they dropped us out of the car and said, "you go for a walk and get to know each other" yeah just like that. My husband knew all about it but I didn't. Anyhow it started raining and I was in my pretty dress, in my pretty wedding dress, in those days I was still pretty - and slim. And it started raining and I really was sort of waiting to go back, you know, I wasn't going to have any conversations with this man I didn't know anything about. Anyhow so he took his jacket off and gave me his jacket because it was raining. And I thought to myself: oh well he's quite sweet after all you know. And that's how it started. Yeah. My husband made up his mind more or less straight away that he yeah, he wanted me, yes, so we were engaged, got engaged a few weeks later. Yeah so,

11:49:26:01

Interviewer

And that's when life started again really for you?

11:49:29:24

Sara

Yeah then I had to start all over again in Manchester. Yeah, that I found hard. Yeah.

11:49:38:21

Interviewer

But you made the decision not to share too much about your past?

11:49:42:12

Sara

I didn't no. I didn't.

11:49:44:19

Interviewer

How many years have you been married?

11:49:47:11

Sara

This is our golden year. This is our 50th year. Our wedding anniversary is going to be in August. 50 years. Yeah, and my daughter, my eldest daughter, we had our first child 9 months after we were married and I had been a good girl before that so, yes, 9 months! So [*Laughs*]

11:50:01:11

Interviewer

Well done you.

11:50:03:17

Sara

Nine months.

11:50:06:22

Interviewer

So the golden year is the year that you decide to tell your family everything?

11:50:11:17

Sara

Yes. Yes. It hasn't been that golden so far. My mind you mustn't say that, we had a new grandchildren and two great grandchildren so it has been good. Yeah. It has been very good.

11:50:23:01

Interviewer

But maybe also sharing your story is unburdening yourself a little bit? You're giving, in a way, a gift to your family of knowledge?

11:50:32:24

Sara

Do you think it's a gift?

11:50:34:12

Interviewer

It's a very difficult gift, but yes I do think it's a gift. It's very hard. Do you not think so?

11:50:46:03

Sara

It is very hard. It was very hard and -, last night I slept funnily enough but the night before I didn't at all. I think I was so tired last night that I slept.

11:50:56:19

Interviewer

And you didn't sleep the night before because you were worried?

11:50:59:08

Sara

Yeah.

11:51:00:16

Interviewer

And how do you think you'll be tonight?

11:51:01:13

Sara [*talking over Interviewer*]

I mean and then I dozed off and I sort of started remembering things and I thought to myself I don't want to cry I don't want to cry you know and -, I have something against crying.

11:51:12:10

Interviewer

It's ok to cry. You've done brilliantly. And how do you think you'll be tonight now that you have -, I'm sure you, there's a lot that you haven't spoken about but now that you have un-burdened yourself a little bit?

11:51:25:24

Sara

Yeah. I I. did have a lot of trouble in school I-, they once locked me in the chapel because I had been very annoyed and I had said you know it was before Easter. And I had said that; "It was absolute rubbish, that the Jews hadn't killed Jesus and it was rubbish and it was not right and it was not a Jewish punishment, Jews didn't didn't crucify people it was the Romans" And so they got very annoyed with me, and they had this medieval chapel where the school I was and they had on the walls the 12 stations of the cross. All these horrendous pictures you know of poor Jesus with blood down his face and they told me I had to go, go around each station of the cross on my knees and ask for forgiveness because we had killed him. Yeah. Yeah. I don't know how old I was 12 perhaps, something like that and I was petrified I was so scared. And I was cold. Freezing cold.

11:52:40:16

Interviewer

But two nights ago when you said you didn't sleep, and you were worried about crying and worried about what I might ask you or what you might say, was there anything particular that, apart from that you were anxious about? Or was there any stories that you thought that you might talk about that we haven't talked about?

11:53:00:19

Sara

Probably. Probably. Anyhow it's enough already.

11:53:08:19

Interviewer

It is enough. I, I think that you've been absolutely amazing and I thank you very, very much because it was a very big decision to talk because it wasn't just a decision to talk to me, but it was a decision to share with your family and I'm very grateful.

11:53:23:21

Sara

But do you really think that people are interested in, in, in reading those things?

11:53:28:13

Interviewer

Yes I do, and if they're not they need to be. And that's the point of this project. Because people need to know to make sure it doesn't happen again; and if we don't hear from people like you who experienced it first hand, who can we ever learn from? So you've done a service today and I'm grateful to you so thank you.

11:53:51:14

Sara

But I do want to come over as well that even though there was so much evil, there was also so much goodness, you know.

11:53:57:20

Interviewer

You have done that.

11:53:58:13

Sara

So very, very much goodness people. Because don't forget, if you, if you, if you had Jewish people in your house and the Germans found them, the same happened to you what happened to the Jews. They would also beat you and you would also go to the concentration camps. So all these people that, that, that children, it wasn't difficult to place children but adults was very difficult but they still risked their life doing so.

11:54:26:19

Natasha

And the German soldier right at the beginning of your story.

11:54:30:04

Sara

He did save -, he did risk his life. Well, I'm sure that he got his reward if he's not in this world anymore.

11:54:43:06

Interviewer

I feel like I've pushed you, and I'm sorry if I have

[cut for direction]

but I just wanted to say one more thing if there was anything that you wanted to say? If you have a message for your great, great, great, great, great, great grandchildren that will never have the chance to meet you but will feel like they can through this recording?

11:55:03:20

Sara

Well, you know they had, they had very, you know it was a pity that my, my children never knew you know more of my family you know that, that all got killed and a message to everybody is really that people should be, should be truly and sincerely religious. You know it is not about all the outward things, it's about all the inward things. And if people, the world really should truly keep, I mean after all the 10 Commandments were given to mankind. You know, I am the lord your god, you know. And honour your father and your mother. You should have no other gods beside me and keep my Shabath, keep it holy. Whatever day of the week people want to keep holy it doesn't matter but, and thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not covert your neighbours wife and his possessions and don't tell lies and if people would really- , those messages were for mankind not just for Jews. And if people would truly keep that sincerely how can we have wars? You know. How come? And I do really, you know, it doesn't matter what religion. If it is a good religion where people are taught to respect human life and respect other people's property that, that's important. I think a lot to do with all the immorality and all the terrible troubles in the world have got a lot to do that people are don't, you know don't keep to, to the basic principles. If they don't want to believe in God, for goodness sake just keep the ten Commandments. You know that's the basics of civilisation isn't it? You know and we have to have a court of judgement in the country, you know you don't take the law into your own hands.

All these, these, these you know there is a very famous, I think it was Rudyard Kipling - I'm not sure exactly - who said it but he said, how strange of god to choose the Jews. And then Heine replied, 'stranger still are those who choose the god of Jews, yet scorn the Jews.'

Have you never heard that? You have haven't you? It was Rudyard Kipling wasn't it? And Heine I think yeah. Yeah It's true though isn't it? It's true. They are after all the people of the bible. Yeah the people of the book.

- END OF INTERVIEW -

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: Sara's birth certificate & 'Bewijs Van Aanmelding' on the reverse.

16:25:19

Sara

That was certificate of birth and also Bewijs Van Aanmelding [...] I had to register myself as this because I was Jewish [...] it was [...] only applied to people that were Jewish or partly Jewish you know. One the Jewish grandparents or two Jewish grandparents [...] And apparently that had always got to be on my person wherever I went.

ARTEFACT 2: a watercolour of a girl in a blue dress holding flowers

16:27:57

Sara o/o/v

That is a picture that I drew with [...] Chava Rosenzweig [...] what I probably looked like when I was with [...] the Dutch people that looked after me during the war. In hiding. So I had a blue new dress with frills and a bow, and a red ribbon in my hair in my ringlets, and red patent shoes with little buttons. And I couldn't take the clothes home with me when my father came and picked me up. I had to leave them behind.

Sara o/o/v

And she cut off all my hair [...] My sister told me that I was nearly shown my hair was so short it was all hacked she said. It was hacked off. And that's how I arrived home.

Sara iv

[...] I was very upset about my shoes,

Sara o/o/v

I loved my red patent shoes. Yes, because I was always, you know little girls like to dance around on their new shoes and I liked my shoes and I had no shoes at all when I came home, there were no shoes. No.

ARTEFACT 3: a family clock

16:40:35

Sara o/o/v

The clock is one of the few items that we've got left from my grandparent's house. And when my mother went to ask back for the stuff that had been given in safe keeping,

Sarah iv

she was told everything was stolen, so my mother saw the clock, and said; "Well they must have forgotten my mother's

Sarah o/o/v

clock." And she took it under her arm and walked out.

ARTEFACT 4: Sara's family's menorah

16:41:00

Sara

And the menorah, apparently neighbours told my mother on her way past, she was crying, um, that, um, there were things buried in the garden, that some of my grandparents things were buried in the garden. So my father went at night with some of his cronies from the Dutch Resistance and dug up the garden and this is all they found. That was all that was left. Yeah. Yeah. A menorah that is very old, and has probably been used for generations by my family. You know every year on the day

the Festival of Lights - Hanukkah it was lit. And then after my mother died I got the menorah and I continued the, I continued the tradition and light it every year.

Caption: HANUKKAH, THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

16:46:49

Sara

Well the Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights. Which had it's, which had its origin in the time of the Maccabean. You know, when the Jews defeated the Syrian armies. You know, a small, small army that defeated the larger Assyrian army. And they wanted to re-dedicate a temple. To re-dedicate the temple, they wanted to light the menorah, which was just the six and one in the middle. They found only one small jug of oil, which had a seal of the High Priest, to proclaim that it was pure and had been not been used for any idle worship, and that it could be used to light the menorah in the temple. But it was only one small jar. It would take, take 8 days to get a replacement, it would take 4 days to go and get and 4 days to come back. To the place where the pure olives grew, that had to be um, pressed from fresh olive oil. They put it in the Menorah, and to their surprise, the oil lasted for 8 days. So an extra arm was added to the Menorah, and that's why, we light one candle. We start with day one on one candle. We start with day 2 on the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, the eighth, today is the eighth day. Last night I lit my eight candles with a Berakhah, with a benediction, with a blessing.

Now we'll do it without a blessing. This one is the Shamash, because we cannot have any benefit from these candles. You know, they're, they're purely to commemorate the miracle. So we have an extra one which we light the candles with and this one will stay on. If this one would go out, we would have to, really not sit and read by the light of the Menorah, we can't do that. So now I'm going to light this one and I'm going to light, and that is really to commemorate, not just a miracle that happened then, but all the miracles that have happened in the future.

You know, because let's face it, all the ancient people are not there anymore. The Babylonians, the Syrians, the Romans, the Egyptians, but we the Jews still are. And Paul Johnson, he wrote, he's a non-Jewish gentleman, he wrote a book, *History of the Jews*. And he writes in the book that for him, that is the proof, that there is a God in the world, because it's such a miracle that Jews are still there with their religion and their customs, and so many people have tried to annihilate us.

It is a very special menorah because I am carrying on the tradition. It's a gain, it's triumph. You know? The German's wanted to have it, they took all the copper and all the brass, and they used it for bullets and, and cannonballs. Everybody had to give, the Jews of course, all their metal and, and this was kept. This was not used. So it wasn't used to kill and shoot people.

It was in my mother's house. And then my mother passed away. I got it. I wanted it very badly, but everyone wanted it, but I was the one that was going to use it. So my sister suggested, because she had one already. She suggested that we would draw lots - and I won it. I didn't want anything else I just wanted the Menorah. But I won it and obviously the Almighty wanted me to use it and my husband has used it. He's got a silver one by the way, but he uses this one every single year. Cause this is more precious than the silver one.

Caption

CELEBRATING HANNUKAH

16:53:38

Sara

it's a lovely festival. It's joyful. It hasn't got any, you know, you rejoice, you know, the children get gifts and um, and a little bit of money, and there is food associated with it, you know. To commemorate the, the, the festival, the miracle of oil, we bake something that's called latkes it is potato cakes, and you fry it in oil. It's greasy, you know, one minute on your lips, ten inches on your hips. And also doughnuts, you know doughnuts with the jam inside. And again, it's fried in oil, and it is oily things that we have. We also have milky foods because -, I don't know if anybody knows the Bible but the story about Yehudis and Holofernes, you know that she -, you know that was in the time of the Syrians, and she went, em, she went with a tray of cheese and a bottle of wine, to do the -, to do the um -, it was the general of the Syrians army because he demanded the *droit de seigneur*. Anybody that got married had to spend the first night in his tent. So she was a widow, so she offered herself, so she went with a tray of cheese and a bottle of wine, and that was also on the festival of Hanukkah; and she, she made him drunk and then he fell asleep, and she chopped off his head. So yeah.

ARTEFACT 5: scan of a photograph of her grandfather

No commentary

ARTEFACT 6: scan of a photograph of her grandmother

No commentary

ARTEFACT 7: scan of a photograph of her father, Gijsbertus van Schaik

No commentary

ARTEFACT 8: scan of a photograph of her mother, Ereira

No commentary

ARTEFACT 9: scan of a photograph of a street in Amsterdam

No commentary

ARTEFACT 10: scan of a photograph of Sara and classmates at a convent school

No commentary

ARTEFACT 11: scan of a photograph of Sara playing

No commentary

ARTEFACT 12: scan of a photograph of Sara hidden as a Catholic child standing on the right of her two brothers

No commentary

ARTEFACT 13: scan of a photograph of Sara's husband

No commentary

ARTEFACT 14: scan of a photograph of Sara in pearls

No commentary

ARTEFACT 15: scan of a photograph of Sara and husband during their wedding ceremony

No commentary

ARTEFACT 16: scan of a photograph of Sara and her husband on their wedding day

No commentary

ARTEFACT 17: scan of a photograph of Sara with her siblings

No commentary

ARTEFACT 18: scan of a colour photograph of Sara's six children

No commentary

ARTEFACT 19: scan of a photograph of Sara and a daughter on her wedding day

No commentary

ARTEFACT 20: scan of a photograph of Sara at another daughter's wedding

No commentary

ARTEFACT 21: scan of a photograph of Sara with one of her daughters

No commentary

ARTEFACT 22: scan of a photograph of four males

No commentary