

Flora Bader: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Flora van Brink Hony Bader (nee Melkman)
(1919 – 1997)

Birth Place: Amsterdam, Holland

Arrived in Wisconsin: Milwaukee, 1954

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors
of the Holocaust

Biography: Flora van Brink Hony Bader (nee Melkman) was born in Amsterdam, Holland, on June 20, 1919. She was the oldest daughter in a well-to-do Dutch family. When the Germans occupied Holland in May 1940, the Melkmans witnessed increasingly anti-Jewish legislation.

In January 1943, the family realized it was only a matter of time before they would become victims of the Nazis. The 24-year-old Flora and her husband of two years, Israel van Brink, went into hiding with Flora's sister. Both Israel and Flora's sister were betrayed by Dutch Nazis, arrested, and eventually killed. Flora took refuge in the home of a Dutch Underground member.

After the member was betrayed and deported, Flora moved through the homes of several Dutch Underground members until the Allied liberation in May 1945. After the war, Flora was the only survivor in her family. She joined her mother-in-law in Amsterdam and they took many survivors into their home. One of those was Josef Hony, who had survived Auschwitz. The two married in 1946. In 1954 they immigrated to the U.S. with their only child and settled in Milwaukee. Both Flora and Josef worked at Gimbels department store. After Josef's death in 1967, Flora married Aron Bader in 1968. He died in 1979. Flora died in September 1997.



Flora Bader



Audio Summary: Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

Tape 1, Side 1

- Family background and history of Jews in Holland
- Happy childhood, summers at the ocean
- Recollections of siblings and mother
- Family's religious life

Tape 1, Side 2

- Childhood and school years in Amsterdam
- Cultural activities and childhood friends
- Anti-Semitism increases during the 1930s
- Volunteer work during teen years

Tape 2, Side 1

- Refugees and Zionist activities in Holland
- Dutch reaction to German aggression
- Outbreak of war, 1939
- News of early concentration camps reaches Amsterdam

Tape 2, Side 2

- Marriage to Israel Van Brink, 1940
- Anti-Jewish measures, Jews must close businesses
- Terror raids (razzias) and the dockworkers' strike of 1941
- Husband avoids deportation, thoughts of escape

Tape 3, Side 1

- Jews herded into a single Amsterdam neighborhood
- Razzias and deportations, March 1943
- Abduction of family members
- Flora and her husband go into hiding

Tape 3, Side 2

- Hiding with underground leader Anthonie Vingerhoed
- Radio Orange provides news of death camps
- Poverty at war's end, D-Day, arrival of Americans
- Holocaust experience of second husband, Josef Hony

Tape 4, Side 1

- Role of Amsterdam's Jewish council early in the war
- News from labor camps
- Incident with German soldier who felt he was a victim
- Decision to go into hiding, fears and reservations

Tape 4, Side 2

- Hiding with Bergsma family
- Hiding with Vingerhoed, Dutch underground resistance
- D-Day 1944
- Leaving hiding place to see her mother

Tape 5, Side 1

- Husband and sister arrested
- Flora escapes arrest
- Finding refuge with Vingerhoed and life in hiding

Tape 5, Side 2

- Involvement with Dutch underground and resistance
- Wartime effects on health, eating tulip bulbs
- Hitler's suicide
- Freedom fighters Rob De Vries and Tom Van Druyten

Tape 6, Side 1

- Underground members caught by Germans, tortured and executed
- Flora carries coded messages to printer
- Joy of liberation eclipsed by deaths of family members
- Emaciated survivors in Amsterdam

Tape 6, Side 2

- Amsterdam after the war
- Flora takes over confiscated home of Dutch traitor
- Second husband Josef Hony
- Postwar business and emotional difficulties

Tape 7, Side 1

- Immigrating to Milwaukee in 1954, learning English
- Financing the trip, weathering storms at sea, New York experiences
- Moving into black neighborhood to counter racial hatred
- Working conditions at Gimbel's department store

Tape 7, Side 2

- Jewish Family and Children Service, New Home Club
- Second husband's death
- Visit to Holland with daughter
- Courted by Aron Bader

Tape 8, Side 1

- Flora's religious practices in Wisconsin
- Psychological scars from her Holocaust experiences
- Family and friends
- Relations with American-born Jews, anti-Semitism in the U.S.

Tape 8, Side 2

- Flora's intellectual and social life in Wisconsin
- Thoughts on dramatizations of the Holocaust, the need to speak out
- Family and travels
- Reflections on Jews in the U.S., American Nazi marches, prejudice

Tape 9, Side 1

- American culture and politics
- Thoughts on new refugees, anti-Semitism, and Israel
- Germany and present day Germans
- The pain of talking about her experience

About the Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky during two sessions at Flora's home in Milwaukee, on November 17 and 18, 1980. The sessions lasted two and one-half hours and six hours respectively.

Over the course of the conversations, Flora described her years in hiding several times, each time adding new details or clarifying others. The interview is somewhat complicated to follow because Flora circles back to the same topics multiple times, hours apart.

Transcript Details:

Interview Dates

- Nov 17, 1980; Nov 18, 1980

Interview Location

- Bader home, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky

Original Sound Recording Format

- 9 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews

- 2 interviews, total approximately 8.5 hours

Transcript Length

- 154 pages

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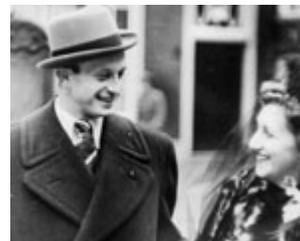
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Transcript

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Key

JL Jean Loeb Lettovsky, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist
FB Flora Bader, Holocaust survivor

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

JL: I'd like to ask you about your family background — your date and place of birth, and the names, dates of birth, and places of birth of your parents and grandparents.

FB: My grandparents I don't remember anymore. Throughout the time and everything that happened, I totally lost track of their dates. I haven't met them ever. I haven't known them, only the mother of my mother.¹ My father was Salomon Melkman, a Dutch. My mother was Duifje Melkman. That is like the name [sounds like: Taiby] in America. I heard it only once. My sister was Annie, Anneke Melkman. I had a little brother. His official name was Hartog Melkman. We called him Harry. I personally called him Pieter or Little Brother. We all were born in Amsterdam. Father was born September 28, 1884. My mother was born June 7, 1894. My sister Annie was born September 13, 1920. My brother was the latecomer; he was born September 22, 1925. We were all born in Amsterdam.

JL: You have no recollection of either side of grandparents?

FB: No. My mother's mother was very dear to me, but -- she died under normal circumstances in Amsterdam, when I was very, very young, at the ripe old age of seventy-two. At that time that was a ripe old age. She was sick, passed away, and that was a great tragedy. It was the only grandmother I knew and I loved her dearly. But circumstances, when I think back now, were so blessed that I never

¹Annie Veerman

regretted her death. When things started to happen in Amsterdam we all were very happy that Grandma wasn't there to see it.

JL: Do you have any recollections of the relationship with your parents? What type of people were your parents?

FB: My parents were the warmest people you can imagine. I was very blessed to be born into a family where family life was *it!* We had a beautiful youth, we were surrounded by sisters from my mother mainly, and brothers, cousins, nieces. Every weekend we came together, especially on the Saturday afternoon. It was a family day where all sisters and brothers would come and have coffee klatches in Europe. It was always that all the children would meet and it was fun.

JL: Were all these cousins and aunts and uncles in Amsterdam?

FB: They were all in the same neighborhood mostly. We were all situated around the Rembrandt's house in the Jodenbreestraat, which was then the main artery going from centrum of the city in town. The synagogue — the Portuguese synagogue, which is a very, very beautiful building — was one side of the Jodenbreestraat; the other side would lead you to the Waag, which was a museum, demonstrating now the terrible things that happened in the war. At that time it was for the seafarers. When I was a child there was a big display of everything that went on in the harbor of Amsterdam, the IJ². It was very interesting to live there. There was a very, very bright Jewish life. On Sunday morning there were markets and as children we would look at it and for the young there was a display of stalls and goods in the street in front of the stores that were there. And much to the dismay of the people that lived there and had stores; they felt it was an intruding, was intruding their business. They couldn't do much when all the stalls were on. But it was extremely beautiful as children. However, the deepest desire my mother had was to get away from it all, and be out of that part of the city that became so crowded. It was so overpopulated that in the thirties when a total new quarter was built in Amsterdam, Amsterdam Zuid — that was the south side — Mother and Father were the first to buy a new business

²The river on which Amsterdam is located

there in a newly built, condo-like structure. Then new. Our whole family moved when Father opened his second store in Amsterdam in the new Amsterdam Zuid, which is still new. Whenever I come back in Holland I'm amazed that this part of Amsterdam did not deteriorate. Beautiful houses as condos and stores.

JL: Your store -- What kind of store was it?

FB: A poultry store.

JL: You mentioned to me when we talked earlier that there were several stores.

FB: Several, yes. After this, my father and mother went out to the Blassiusstraat. That later became more Jewish-oriented because so many Jewish people, were forced to move out of that neighborhood in Amsterdam that slowly but surely started to deteriorate a little bit. And Father did all that. However, Father became very, very sick. He had a stroke at a very early age, and had a bachelor brother who jumped into the business to help my mother survive and kept the three businesses going, with Father at home. Constantly, during his whole sickness, Mother refused to have Father hospitalized or "put away in a home." This was not done in Holland. It was not necessary because the facilities were beautiful. We had a nurse coming, we had a psychiatrist come into the home three times a week talking to Daddy, also talking to Mother at the same time. Our whole household was supported by a marvelous Dutch Jewish maid, Sonja [sounds like: Boss] from Zutphen. She was the right hand for my mother. We girls were not supposed to do anything in the household. Our nails would break or all kind of disasters would occur when we would enter the kitchen. We could only see and smell how delicious the Friday dinner was and then we were allowed to put flowers in vases or bonbons on silver trays. But the kitchen was not meant for us. My mother was sure we would marry very wealthy people because this was the trend in Holland, that if you were educated well, and if you came from a good Dutch Jewish family, it was like the 1600s or 1700s in England when I see the movies now. There was no doubt that you would follow Mother's footsteps and marry into a nice Dutch Jewish family who would also give you that kind of life where you would go every summer to the oceanfront.

We had every summer a two-, three-month vacation there with everybody going with us and every winter we would be with parties and friends and togetherness. When I think of my youth, it was the most beautiful part I've had in my life, and I thank God I was born in that part of the world where education was so stimulated, even though it was not common for girls to have it.

JL: How long had your family been in Holland?

FB: My family was in Holland -- As far as I can think, they came to Holland during the last Spanish war, the Eighty Years' War between Spain and Holland where the persecution in Spain was so terrible that a lot of people fled up to the countries France, Belgium, Holland and Germany.³ My family settled there and we were [inaudible] and we would discuss the fact that the Jews were terribly bad off in Poland, in Russia, even in Germany, where anti-Semitism I was told was bred and was fed to the Germans with mother milk. That was what my mother told me: There is a latent and a dormant anti-Semitism and we Dutch Jews were very, very fortunate because our population was very beautiful. Jews were very assimilated. We were allowed to have any profession we wanted, our schools were wide open, our universities did not even at times ask what your religion was. Nobody bothered to know if you were Jewish or not Jewish, but you didn't hide it either. We were proud to be Jews but not to the extent that we had to say, "I'm so proud to be Jewish," because we lived with everybody in peace. Holland is a place where you could disagree in a very agreeable way. Everybody would admire you for your own convictions. We did not have the need to conform, we had the need to be an individual, and that was fed, as a child, that idea — be yourself, and you be more admired than just follow the crowd. And this was how I saw Holland. We were as free as you feel yourself to be here. We had freedom there, totally, and also the insight to help other people, but [there] were always committees for the German Jews that came to Holland, there were always committees for the East European [refugees] — *verein*.⁴ There were committees to help anybody, and everybody came to Holland. However, they

³The Eighty Years' War, 1568-1648, established the independence of the Netherlands from Spain.

⁴German for 'association', 'society', 'union', 'club'

could not, as they can in America, work. Our population was so, that we were overpopulated. The foreigners could receive aid and help in any form and size and possibility. For work they needed a permit and that was hard to receive, especially in the days of late 1930s when the depression reached Holland also. I was a child, a young teenager in school. It was hard for people not born in Holland.

JL: Later, I'd like to later on get back to your activities with the refugees. First, what special recollections do you have of your sister and brother?

FB: I have pain and warm beautiful feelings when I think back. I have had the privilege of having lived in a household where we loved each other. I slept in one room, in one bed, with my sister all my life and never doubted if that was "normal." Anneke was there, and I was there. When I married, she grieved as if I would be away to another continent. I lived in the same block where my parents lived, and the whole household grieved when I left the house as if I would move to America. It was terrible for anybody to leave the house.

JL: Was this just your family or was that typical?

FB: I think it was more so my family because my father was so sick. And I had a great admiration for my mother where the facilities in Holland were so good. Medical care is there for everybody to enjoy. But she took upon herself the great burden of keeping my father at home, and therefore we respected her very much. And I, as the oldest in the household, became very much aware of my mother's beautiful nature and her willingness to sacrifice everything for the good of the household. I realized that when I was young, and not now. I realized that when I was in my twenties, what a beautiful mother I had in every sense and in every way.

JL: Did you have any family or close friends in the United States prior to the outbreak of the war?

FB: No. I had nobody in the States. I read a great deal about the United States but I was a little bit frightened about the United States. Most of the stories we heard in Holland were the stories in the times of the twenties, thirties,, about crime in Chicago and about money-minded Americans. How everything here would be very, very materialistic. It frightened me a little at that time. I had no idea I

would ever live here. I studied America like I was forced to study in school everything, but I had nobody here.

JL: I'd like to go back a bit [...] Could you tell me a bit more about changes that took place in Amsterdam while you were living there?

FB: There were changes that are in some way identical to what happens now in Milwaukee downtown. The better stores are closing up. Chapman is leaving here, and people that want to save their businesses go away because of the public not reaching the downtown area anymore. So as my father clinged on to the main store that we had till we were deported, it was not very lucrative to him. Because the wealthy Jews that lived in that neighborhood — it was originally a very wealthy neighborhood, the Jodenbreestraat — later on it deteriorated because most wealthy people moved to different parts of Amsterdam. One part was named the Temptation, where very, very wealthy people moved in one family homes. Beautiful homes, with a view on the historic Botanicus — it was a beautiful yard. That was much better than living in a street, totally business-minded. And, as I said, my father pioneered. That beautiful part of Amsterdam was built, and it was open for the one who wanted to buy this or wanted to move there. My father was the first to go there. My mother always had it in her head that we should have the best of education, the best of neighborhood, the best of opportunities, and there we went.

JL: Did you move to any other cities before the war?

FB: No

JL: What kind of synagogue attendance did your family have?

FB: I have to tell you very honestly that I was a rebel. I did not want to go to religious school. I had a magazine that came at home, I saw the Friday night, I saw — I knew we were Jewish. It is very hard to understand now that we would be in temple when somebody was married, we would be in temple when there was a bar mitzvah in the family, and for the rest, I did not. I rebelled, I did not want to go with mother to temple, neither did mother ever force me. When I read the Jewish papers that I had to

read and when I had to enroll in religious classes, I gave my father and mother the hardest time you can think because nothing could be proven, nothing was — I thought it didn't — I was tremendously attracted by the fact that there should be one religion in the world and I felt, from reading papers, that most people were duped in their lives because they were forced into a religion as opium and if they could think straight and see what had happened in the world, that religion was the cause of many, many miserable things and many, many monstrosities towards each other. And I felt very happy with not going to religious school. Of course I had a chupah⁵ and of course my brother had bar mitzvah and everything that was in a Jewish home was there. However, I refused and I as the oldest made that my sister refused and my mother — I had a sick father and [my mother] couldn't cope. [She] discussed it with uncles in the family and everybody was shaking heads and were absolutely sure that the whole house would be doomed. But nothing happened to us. I just knew I was Jewish, but there was no religious life in my family.

JL: So what kind of observance did the parents have?

FB: It is [sounds like: Yompus] and because it was [Yompus] we had the [sounds like: eve of Yompus] and the tables were set, we had the dinners, and we had Yom Kippur, were we could not eat, and in the evening we had to break the fast. And it was beautiful. And at Passover, I would go to an aunt, who was extremely religious, and had a son who was a rabbi, she was my favorite aunt, and I would observe Passover, because I loved the atmosphere. But, I was reluctant to believe too strongly, I think I was very, very, modern thinking for the times.

JL: And already did you react like that as a youngster?

FB: As a youngster, yes, I reacted like that. I didn't hide it.

JL: And did you acquiesce a little bit to go to a religious school? Or just not at all?

FB: Not at all. I read, but I did not go. I started reading, but the more liberal I became in my thinking. And I must have driven my mother crazy, but I can not tell you that I believed very strongly.

⁵The canopy under which the bride and groom stand during a Jewish wedding ceremony.

JL: Do you remember what you read?

FB: I read *Mein Kampf*, I read everything that you were not supposed to read. I read books about Esperanto, the new language that started to flair up in Europe. I read a lot about becoming identical with other people, but of course, our Jewish religion doesn't teach us, and I was forced to, isn't it terrible, that I have read a great deal, and I cannot find the names of books now. I was liberal. I was sent to a school, that was the HBS [Hoge Burger School] I told you about. I was about the only person in the family that had a higher education than just grade school, because in these years it was very normal, especially for a girl, when she would be thirteen or fourteen, to quit school and start working in retailing or in household activities or whatever. Never was there anybody who would get it in her mind to continue their education. However my mother was told that I could observe very well and that I was a child that had possibilities, so she was sure I had to become a teacher, which is a very good profession in Europe. I had the qualification for it, so I went to school — much to the dismay of my father, who did not understand at all. He was very, very sick. In his family a girl that would go to school more than fourteen years was just a goof who would never marry and would fool up her life and that was just unbelievable. I remember the quarrels, the only quarrels that my parents had, was when my father would tell my mother how foolish she was to send me to higher education.

JL: Higher education was after what grade?

FB: Eighth grade.

JL: This was at what school?

FB: This was the HBS, the Hoge Burger School. This is identical to what I saw and had in college here, only we were not asked, "What would you like to study?," like Aron is asked, "What way would you go?" We were forced to devour whatever was told us to study.

JL: How many years did you do?

FB: I initially would have to take the five years. However, I lasted four years because I fell deeply in love and my father's wise words came true. I never became a teacher. I married instead and stayed home.

I got my degree because there was a way of getting my degree after three years. I took four years.

After five years you would get a degree in order to go to the school for teachers.

JL: This would be what kind of teacher?

FB: A high school teacher like Annie, or any teacher, any form or direction where you wanted to go.

JL: Before we go on, I think I'd better turn the tape over.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

JL: We just began to talk about religion again and you mentioned that nobody in your family kept kosher.

FB: No. Our family that consisted of seven sisters of my mother and two brothers, only one sister had a kosher home. The rest — it was all clean and lovely and neat — but there were no kosher homes. I had no contact with Orthodox Jewish people when I was a child. I don't know about my teens, not later in my life, but as a child. I respected everybody for his religion. I could not see the need for laws. Later in my life I changed my mind. There were made thousands and thousands of years ago when making electricity meant days of work. It was so simple now and I saw there was no need for it, doing all the things that had to be done and that was such a waste of time in my view. Of course, I was not mature, I was just rebellious. I saw no need for it. And my parents apparently by not having an Orthodox household, somehow did not stimulate that for me to develop. But I never held it against them. I never felt the desire — "Oh, I wish I was raised in an Orthodox family" — because I was very glad to come here and find the Reformed temple. And we joined Temple Emanu-El right away and there I found peace that I could never find in Holland. Because when I was a child there were no Reformed temples in Amsterdam.

JL: What did you belong to as a family?

FB: As a family, to the Portuguese Temple for a while. Then when we were married, there was a temple in the Rapenburgerstraat where we would go.

JL: What was it?

FB: I would not even remember the name of it.

JL: What was its religious orientation? Was it liberal, for example?

FB: It was Orthodox. Orthodox. I remember the women on one side, the men on one side, and everything that would go with it. I could not understand it very well because I lacked the background and I lacked the religion. And I always felt it wasn't my fault. It was through the fault of being born in a too assimilated country. This is the price you pay by having generations and generations of people who

are not Orthodox. You live maybe next to reality, or maybe this is reality. I do not know what's right. I couldn't tell you.

JL: Did you have anything to do with the liberal congregation that was formed by refugees? Did that attract you at all?

FB: No, no, because I associated a great deal with the refugees, but just there is in every form of society, the refugees were together a great deal. They did not blend in society as easily as we do here. Maybe this was created by the lack of opportunity to find jobs. Was a great deal of pain I detected in the people who came from Eastern Europe. A great deal of pain. I was very, very aware of that. I was very helpful and I was very grateful that we were saved that pain, and therefore I could do whatever I had to do for them. But when it came to socializing, they would hold back. I was in their houses, I felt at home, they loved me. I came there occasionally, but we would not socialize together. Strange how life is.

JL: Getting back to your secular education, what kinds of things did you study in school?

FB: Wait a moment. [pause] Geography, history. We studied a great deal about history because at that time I had a marvelous teacher who would remind us that if we do not learn from history, history repeats itself and we would eventually become victims. Whatever I had in my life I always had that man in front of me because his teaching kept with me all my life.

JL: Was that in the lower grades?

FB: No, in the higher grades. This was all in the HBS. Science, mathematics. The love for reading, a great desire to read, which is not so stimulated here in American schools. I had to fight my way through to get and to learn the love for reading, to open a new world. An all-around education was given to me but I had to work very hard for it. I had loads and loads of homework. In Holland we have our day off on Wednesday. It's a half day of school, and the Wednesday afternoon is just meant to do your homework.

JL: You're still talking about HBS?

FB: HBS. My mother would like to go out on those days with her daughters. We would every week pick a movie, go to a beautiful restaurant and have lunch with one of her favorite sisters. We would be all dressed up and just look around at a beautiful city and enjoy. But I had to do my homework. Would you believe it that I was the one who told my mother that she would have to go alone? She would feel so sorry for me if I would have to sit home. Whenever I was the victim of too much homework she would come home with a gift for me because it was so tragic that her Flory could not join that beautiful day with her sister downtown. This is the kind of mother I had.

So I, myself, wondered at times why I was forced into such a rigid education. I was sure never to use it anymore, especially when I became involved with boys later in my life, in my later teens. My mother said, "Darling, one time in your life you will be so grateful that you had it all. It will shape the rest of your life."

JL: Now do you feel it has?

FB: Yes, to a great extent. Because it is not that I know that in 1813 the Battle of Waterloo was there — and I was the only one in Temple Emanu-El in the Sisterhood who knew that, much to the delight of Rabbi [Francis Barry] Silberg, but it has helped me survive. It has taught me that there is not such a thing in life that is permanent. Some teachers gave me such a beautiful insight of life, on the other hand it has opened for me a lot of fear about societies where we are in. I think it is a benefit in just not being aware of everything around you.

JL: Fear of what kind? In what way?

FB: A little bit of knowledge is a frightening thing to have and I am always afraid if I read papers. I remember when I read the break-in of the Watergate in a very tiny part of the [*Milwaukee Journal*], long before we ever thought that that would be something impressive in our lives. I read that article. It was just a few pages, a [sounds like: great thing] it was, years and years ago now. I told my husband, "This is terrible." He said, "What? I think you're crazy. You're overreacting. Why should that be so

terrible?" I said, "This is a terrible thing to have happened." Now, those kind of things. I was so afraid that that would turn out to be a disaster, and that was a disaster. This kind of things that frighten me.

JL: Tell me something about the cultural activities at the HBS.

FB: We did not have what we have here, that extra-curriculum activities. It was just studying, sheer studying. The social activities was a club that I belonged to and we would express ourselves in theater. We would have a theater party every month. I was chosen. I could play very well in theater. I could create myself in a role. I did react, and I could recite poems about peace. I had a great attraction for peace, being born in a peace-loving country, as Holland is. This is how we would spend Saturday nights. The whole sorority would come together and we would alternate on the stage and we would study those very, very beautiful Dutch poems.

JL: Were they just women?

FB: Mostly women. I had went to school to a private kindergarten where there were only girls. This lasted till thirteen, fourteen years. Then I became so shy that I could not in high school communicate with boys so easily. I think it was a disaster. I thought it was the wrong thing for my parents to have done that because I was very shy to boys. My brother was just a little teensy thing in the house and for the rest I was very, very — I held back. I was afraid and I didn't like to be with boys so much. Also, at the HBS we were in a club with girls who would do those things. At a later stage, maybe the last two years, I started to swim and to have activities with boys. I overcame that fear.

JL: Boys that were at the school?

FB: That were in the school. We had clubs where we would swim together, do sports together, and do all those beautiful activities together. Swimming was a very, very much required sport in Amsterdam.

JL: You mentioned before that you were a member of the club [...] Was it anything specific or just the girls of the school together?

FB: The girls of the school and that club. Yes, I was for a little while in a group where I didn't like it. It was rowing. I considered it very snobbish. Your parents had to have a certain amount and a certain level of

income in order to belong to that group. It took me so long to get in a group, at that time I was a very thinking human being. When they finally "accepted" me in the group, Poseidon was the name, I declined to enter. I was very humiliated. I thought the amount of money that my parents had in the bank had nothing to do with me being accepted in certain group. So when my time came that I was accepted, I declined to be part of that group of people. It was the elite Jewish people in Amsterdam.

JL: Was the HBS only for Jews?

FB: No, no, no, no, by no means. The only Jewish school was the kindergarten that I belonged. That was only Jewish. But my parents were very, very modern-thinking. They felt society is Jews and not Jews, if you want to survive in Europe. So I had to deal with everybody and that was my survival.

JL: But you started talking about Jewish girls in the rowing club.

FB: See, I met a few Jewish girls in the HBS who belonged to that group of people and they instilled in me the beauty of belonging and going and I was fifteen, sixteen, and I asked my parents if I could belong and they said sure. And when I wanted to belong, and for a while I was allowed to be there and enjoyed it, till I found my membership was not coming in. Then I heard that they had inquired about my parents and that they had to have all the information. When I finally got my letter at home, where I waited for the longest time, I declined. I was so insulted that I never went to that group of people.

JL: In the HBS, what kinds of friends did you have besides those Jewish girls who took you into that club?

FB: I had all kind of friends. I had many not-Jewish boy friends. Not that you say "boyfriend" here, that means that you are determined to get married or engaged one day. In Holland it was not so. You could have boy friends like you have girl friends. I was not allowed to drive the bicycle in Amsterdam, that means that you cannot be without a car in America. My mother had such a fear that she instilled to me so I couldn't go. After four on Thursday afternoons when school went out, I would jump on the back seat of the bicycle of some of my male friends who would all drive me to a natatorium, which is gorgeous in Amsterdam because we are surrounded by water, and sports, especially swimming, is very encouraged in the schools. Not only it being very healthy, but it is a matter of to save your life

because many accidents happen in the streets of Amsterdam are water. So we would be there with a group of people that came from a variety of backgrounds. I never was a snob. I would not go with just anybody, but I did not judge people by the way they were dressed, and I enjoyed life to the fullest with Jewish girls that were "my background" — that our mother would approve of — and not-Jewish girls that I liked. Just because I liked them, they were my friends. It was mostly middle-class and upper-middle-class people because the lower class in Amsterdam did not send their children to a higher education. Everybody then had to work at fourteen.

JL: Before you got to higher education, did you also have this variety of friends?

FB: I could not have because my mother did not want her daughters to go to the school in the Jodenbreestraat which was connected with all the children there. It was the Oudeschans Sjol that was on the water. She sent her daughters to the private girls' school in the [sounds like: Roosstraat or Ruysstraat] This was only women. I regretted that afterwards, not in the beginning. But it was the school where the more privileged people could send their girls. So I encountered a certain class, mostly Jewish, girls there. I did very well in school. I loved my teachers, they were very beautiful people, but I remember we were not allowed to dance in streets when the *pirment*⁶ — in Holland is an *orkeel*⁷ in the street, a *pirment*. An organ, in the streets on wheels, making the most beautiful music. And then it would come in our Jodenbreestraat and I would be in the store saying hello, and asking my daddy for some pin money for the afternoon. Everybody would dance in the streets. Can you imagine anything more beautiful than that? People standing still and dancing in the streets together. However the girls of that particular school were not allowed to do that and I would take my sister or anybody standing there and dance in the streets. I didn't see any harm in that. If we were reported, it meant to make so many punishments, work, it meant evenings of writing because you danced in the streets of Amsterdam. And I would do that constantly, I loved it. I loved the *pirment*.

⁶Dutch for 'street organ'.

⁷Dutch for 'organ'.

JL: You told me before there was a good relationship between Jews and non-Jews.

FB: A beautiful relationship.

JL: But was there absolutely no anti-Semitism?

FB: Of course there was anti-Semitism. There must have] been. There is not a country in the world...where you have human beings you have human frailties. And among the Jews in Israel I encountered hatred for each other, not only love. We kid each other if we tell that to each other. We are next to reality. However, I personally have never encountered anti-Semitism, nor did my parents, and we employed a great deal of people in business. We also had with our Jewish girl always a cleaning woman or a girl from Germany who would do the hard work and those girls happened to be not Jewish. I have never ever heard any form or expression of anti-Semitism as long as I was a child.

JL: And in school?

FB: Never, never. They had high regard and high respect. We were not mentioned as a form or a class or a religion that was on the outside looking in. It was very insulting and strange for me when I came here that I heard "black" and "Jews." I thought, "What an insult!" This was not done. You never mentioned a person's religion. Here, you never ask what a person has in the bank. There it is the same thing. If anybody would approach you and ask, "What religion are you?" — that is so personal, people didn't discuss that with each other.

JL: You mentioned clubs at the school. Outside of the school, were there any other political or cultural clubs that you belonged to?

FB: It was not a group of people. I have a very dear girlfriend of mine. I met her in swimming lessons and then I married her cousin, so we became related. She is the best friend I ever had and still lives — very sick at the moment. I was visiting her last summer when I was in Holland. She was totally devoted to a group of people who had just come here. Being a very good secretary, a very clear mind, she started doing voluntary work for the East European *Verein*, and since we would meet at times on Friday afternoons when our mothers would prepare the house for the Friday evening, we would always

go and spent our Friday afternoons together, Elsie and me. Elsie would sweep me off my feet and would be so elated to tell me how many good things could be done if people only give time for it. I then started to be interested in a group of people that came to Holland, and did very well. They were given permits to work, and they had opened very successful [shops], mostly in ready-to-wear, on the *grachten*, on the waterways of Amsterdam. They have mostly garment business. Those people were amazing people. They would come with a small amount to Holland or would get a loan and they would prosper and make a terrific business out of nothing. Yet they had needs and they had cultural differences and they would like to talk to people. This is how we then did work. Elsie started it all, and Elsie did the typing. I was never good in typing, but I would interview and talk and speak with the people from Russia and Poland who came then, who were fortunate enough to come to Holland, thinking — like we think of America, they thought of Holland. People were caught in Holland, trapped in Holland because of it being for ages an island of peace. And they were tricked into coming there. My own husband, Josef, came from Germany to Holland. While he had a visa for, I think, Cuba or [inaudible], and the parents decided Holland. It was the end station in 1939 -- no, not 1939, in the 1930s. By the 1940s we were just as worn out by war and everything as the whole Europe was. We were absolutely sure — that is my parents, my family, my uncles, and aunts — that Holland would escape whatever would happen in Europe. Switzerland and Holland would not be part of it. Our queen, the House of Orange, was totally liberal in her thinking. She would visit the Jewish Invalid, which was a home for the aged, identical to what we have in Prospect [Avenue].⁸ It's supported by the family of Orange with money donations that are unbelievable. So this was the work that was necessary to be done in the thirties. For the rest, I was never a child that could... there was not more to be done. Don't forget, when I was young, in my teens, the pain of Europe started to reflect in Holland. So there was not such a gay time in Europe. There was depression. We read about America, where people slept under bridges, and we shivered. We were very secure in our freedom, in our prosperity, in our

⁸Amsterdam's Joodse Invalide and the Milwaukee Jewish Home.

capacity to make a good living, in being with the family and seeing the people from Europe come to Holland. There was no need for me, as a thinking teenager, to go out and dance and all the things that young people do here.

JL: At what age did you join with Elsje to work in that club?

FB: This was in sixteenth, seventeenth year. Elsje was a little bit older than I am. Elsje is three years older, so Elsje was already in her twenties then. And I started dating her nephew -- no, cousin.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

JL: One further question about the organization helping refugees. Do you recall the exact name of it?

FB: Yes, but I know it in Dutch: the *Oost Joodse Verbond*. That was the name in Dutch.

JL: Eastern European [Jewish] *Verbond*?⁹

FB: Eastern European [Jewish]. *Verbond* is *Verein*. That was the name of it. And the *Vluchtelingen Comité*.

JL: Refugee Committee.

FB: Refugee Committee. That was it. That was mostly volunteers and people who were very interested in the cause also with the umbrella over our heads that we were safe. This was at times mentioned to us. By doing that work we had sometimes the feeling that people rejected us. I can understand it now, having been a refugee in America myself, their feelings better. Because whatever we did or tried to do or understand we would go home to our safe houses and to our well-established community, and they were not so secure. We did everything under the umbrella of safety and security. It was easier to do it that way, and that is why I, coming to the States, felt I had lost my identity, everything. And I didn't know that before I got here. All of a sudden I went voluntarily in a situation where there was no need to escape Europe in my eyes in '54 to a very humble situation in a society where I was looked upon as a refugee. I had a hard time establishing myself, I all of a sudden was not a daughter of Salomon Melkman anymore. Nobody knew me in the street. I was offered clothing when I had better clothing in the closet that I took from Europe. Well-intended, but making me so depressed and sad because in the American eyes there was no difference. Anybody from Europe was a *shnorer*.¹⁰ Can you understand that?

JL: I think so.

FB: And that made me very, very sad. I started working to overcome that. I wanted to build up my own identity here and my husband was absolutely furious. I didn't have to work. He was European, the

⁹Dutch for 'association' or 'alliance'.

¹⁰Yiddish for 'beggar'.

women stayed in the house. But I was so homesick, I was so frustrated, that I had to work, for my own benefit. Whatever I made I spent putting the child in nursery school, and I wanted to find a way where my English would be more fluent. I wanted that mark of displaced person out of my system. I wanted to prove that even though I had never worked for money I could do as well in a working market as I did in school. In two years I was offered a position as a buyer in Gimbels. I had to prove that in order to feel at home.

JL: So you started out as a salesperson?

FB: I started out as a salesperson, the first job I tried to have in order to be away from the four walls and to meet people that I could identify with and to see how my English was holding up, my school English. And I was hired right away, it was the first job I applied. After one-and-a-half years of taking the summers off to be with Ann — I stopped working every day at four because I wanted to be at the house when Ann would be home — I was offered a buyer's position in Gimbels for the stationery. But my husband, who then was selling furniture and TV sets, could not cope with that. Being from Europe it is unknown to American men what it means. He refused for me to take a full-time job and I wanted peace and the family more than anything else, it was not so important. I declined. Later, when I became very sick, I thought, "How stupid!" But at the time I kept my job for about ten years. My English improved a little bit. Of course, as soon as I stopped working I started thinking in Dutch again.

JL: I'd like to talk more about your early years in Milwaukee a bit later on. First, let me ask you again to go back to Amsterdam. Besides this activity with the refugees from Eastern Europe, did you have any Zionist activities in which you participated?

FB: I personally had not. Later I came back to that when I married Josef Hony, who was a very, very outspoken Zionist and had attended meetings in Austria and Germany for the Zionist movement. I myself had no desire in that direction. I saw no need for it. I felt safe, I felt comfortable, and I didn't see why that was a necessity for us. I personally never worked for that cause, or did anything for it, no.

JL: Even after '33?

FB: No. Don't forget, till '33 I was a child. I was born in '19 and you don't think of those big things till you are capable of thinking about them. That is usually when you reach twenty. At that time I became involved with a man who worked in British India and my destiny was then to go to that other part of the world. So my whole interest was in a different direction, my personal interest. I had enough with my father and mother, who I had to support emotionally because of Daddy being constantly sick. My mother [was] trying to survive a very, very miserable situation. That she did beautifully. And that part with Elsje and the frightening things that reached us from Germany. So that was not a pleasant youth. There were no pleasant teens even though [sounds like: harm] was not involved. We saw the stream of people and the gloom over Europe. This was not fun. It was a frightening time to live in, but a beautiful time because we had that home life so perfect.

JL: Now, let me ask you, what language did you speak at home?

FB: We spoke Dutch mainly. If Mother wanted to talk with her sisters about something that we should not understand, it was German. But I would probably understand it. I personally studied French, English, and German.

JL: So then there was no Ladino at all, Judeo-Spanish?

FB: No, I studied that later. With Israel, my first husband. After he came home from British India, he was sure that Spanish would be the language that would eventually dominate our hemisphere, and we both — I still have the books here — started to study Spanish together in the first year of our marriage when we were not sure that we will be so engulfed. And to keep our sanity we started studying together. Of course it didn't last long. I know a few words of Spanish.

JL: To what group did your family and you feel that you owed allegiance in Holland? Meaning, could you distinguish between Jewish and Dutch?

FB: This is the thing here that you have to distinguish between two things. You can love your father and your mother identical. We never had to distinguish between Jewish and Dutch. This was one. You were a Dutch Jew. It was here that I heard, when I worked in Gimbels, I'd take off for the Jewish

holidays. I was told, "I thought you were Dutch." And I had to explain that you can be Dutch and Jewish like you can be an Englishman and be a Catholic. It is here where they distinguish between the two. In Europe I was a Dutch Jew. It was one.

JL: You started alluding earlier to the news you did have of the growing storm clouds in Germany. What kind of news did you have about German aggression, Austria, the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia? What kinds of things did you hear about that?

FB: Everything. I read the paper fervently, I was aware because of the people who came in great streams to Holland, reading, material things, and then listening to the stories. Thinking that maybe it's a little bit exaggerated. Later, when I took up all the readings, all the materials, I was strongly inclined to believe that this doom would not just pass us by. I had a feeling it would come to Holland. It was in my being, and my mother would say, "Stop reading those books. You read too much."

JL: So you would discuss your feelings with your family?

FB: Oh yes. I would tell my family that it would be wise if we could try to leave Europe, and my mother said, "Stop reading those books." I was without husband, without my fiancé. He was in British India, and as I told you, I wanted to get away and I wanted to marry him but I had promised and my mother promised me. But by the coming of the war she refused to fulfill her promise because I wasn't twenty-one, and her philosophy was, "If he loves you, he will come to Holland." We're thinking, reflecting, that Holland would never be involved, for which I do not blame her — now.

JL: You received the news with a great deal of . . .

FB: Apprehension, and belief.

JL: And others around you, how did they . . .

FB: Others around me were thinking what many people think here, "It cannot be possible, it is exaggerated, and we will never be involved; it's good that we are good to the refugees that are here but we will stay out. The House of Orange will protect us, and Holland was always safe during every

war. The last war we were not involved; 1914-1918 war left Holland neutral." That was the opinion of every Dutch person; we are neutral.

JL: What about Hitler's threats to the Jews? Didn't they hear about that?

FB: Of course. I believed, but that involved the German Jews. It did not involve the Dutch Jews. We are Dutch Jews — they cannot destroy us. And then the fact that we were decades, ages, centuries without anything in the form of persecution in Holland, it was a dream that was not possible for the Dutch Jews.

JL: You say that you reacted to the stories of the refugees that came to Holland, and properly so, but the people around you, when they heard the stories, what did they say?

FB: As I say, what many people say now here, "It couldn't be that bad or they would not have been here. They did survive, and we can only hope and pray it will not be here and we will be safe." It is the disbelief of a person that every disaster can come to the next but not to yourself personally. You want to believe that what you hope will come. You never accept the very bad things until it is happening to you.

JL: What do you remember of September 1, 1939 [when Germany invaded Poland]?

FB: Sitting on a square with my mother-in-law, the husband [sic] of the man I married, being engaged to her son, him being safe in British India and I was sitting on a sidewalk cafe having coffee with her on a Sunday morning, if I think very well, and all of a sudden the bomb fell that they invaded Poland. And I said, "See!" as if I had made a personal victory because all my doom and gloom was true, and her telling me, "Thank God my son is safe." And I angry that she said that because I wanted to be with him. Not for the safety, I wanted him to be with me. This was my personal recollection of it.

JL: How concerned were you now about the involvement of Holland, you yourself, and the people around you? Were you still thinking it wouldn't happen?

FB: Oh yes. I went home — my mother-in-law went to her house, and I hurried home to my father and mother and I said, "See what has happened, and see that we should — " And my mother said, "My

dear child, it's terrible, but thank God you are not married. You will not have to leave us, and that does not mean that we have problems. Europe has very bad problems, but we will be all right and safe."

This is what she wanted to believe. Have you seen women deny even when they know that their husband is dying, that he has cancer? You don't want to believe the unbelievable.

JL: What kinds of things did you hear about early concentration camps and labor camps?

FB: We did not believe it. We did hear the concentration camp stories of the people that came from Europe. We never knew about any camps that were *Vernichtungslagers*.¹¹ We heard about camps that they were making for people in order to have cheap labor.

JL: I'm referring to before the invasion of Holland.

FB: Oh, the pre-Holland invasion concentration camps. I believed everything of it, yeah. I personally believed everything of it. But, then, there were many people who refused to believe the stories, even if people who'd escaped with marks, maybe one in a million, but [the people who did not believe would say,] "How did he come up? See, if it was so bad, how did he then survive it?" It was great disbelief to believe the unbelievable. To think that human beings could inflict [such things] upon others was unbelievable for the Dutch mind. Especially for the Dutch mind when never, never anything like that was allowed. Where a bird was free, where — we professed a freedom like America did. We instilled in people to be good to each other. In school we had great respect for any religion. We had Indonesia as a colony. Therefore, many Indonesian people came to Holland to work, to visit, and mostly on vacation. And we were respectful and correct. And we could not believe that any people would violate those laws that were being conducted by our government, by our press, by the Royal House of Orange, where there was so much love and freedom and wisdom that it was, for our minds, impossible.

JL: But then comes the German occupation in May 1940.

¹¹German for 'extermination camp'.

FB: Yeah. Then comes the Thursday night that I would say to my mother, "We will have," for months I said, "God forbid, they had the Siegfried line, the Maginot line in French," and my mother said, "You are such a hard child to have. Why can't you be quiet like your sister or your brother? You make all kinds of horror stories. You read too much." And I said, "Mother, the one day when we least expect it, something will happen to us." She said, "It is only your fear because your fiancé is not with you." And I would listen to "J'attendrais," in French, the song, "I Wait for You," and my mother said, "Put yourself into constructive labor and stop longing for your fiancé. He will come back if he loves you." Then one Thursday the — do you know the movie, *Gone with the Wind*? — had its premiere in one of the most luxurious theaters in Amsterdam. Elsie [Koopman] and I received tickets for that. It was a Friday afternoon. We conversed by phone, but we leave work because this was a big thing, in Tuschinski.¹² And as I went to bed Thursday night, I had all my beautiful clothing out. Everybody that was somebody was at that premiere and in the evening we were offered a big dinner and gorgeous surroundings. It was the most elegant surroundings in Amsterdam. During the night I woke up and I thought somebody was fooling around with the garbage cans. We have the same cans with those metal covers. Because I heard as if somebody put the cover down, up and down. So I opened my eyes and I thought, "Who would be in the night in the backyard?" And it became more clear to me that it wasn't so, and I looked out the window and I saw planes with little black puffs of cotton coming out of them. And when five would be over, ah, but eight would come, and if eight would become, ten would come and it was so powerful that I became to start perspiring. And I thought, "What can it be? That can't only be Germans." So I went to my mother's bedroom. Remember, I had such a devotion for my sister that I had [let] my sister sleep, I didn't wake up my sister. I went to my mother's — this is my father and mother's bedroom, but Father I had already cleared out of my life because he was so sick. Whatever was done in the house was with Mother. So I went to Mother's bedroom, I said, "Mom, we are invaded." She said, "Did you dream?" I said, "No, these are German planes." So she said, "My

¹²An Amsterdam cinema.

child, I wish you would leave me alone. You are crazy." I said, "Let me put on the radio" — there was no television. She said, "Oh no, I don't wake up the household." I said, "Come to the window." I took her to the window, and she saw the same planes. We turned on the radio, and we heard that during the night we were invaded. I started shivering as if I became very ill. My mother looked at me and said, "My child, what is there to worry you? So we have an invasion." I said, "Mother, do you know what it means? Do you know that we will not have peace?" She said, "I have always paid whatever there was to pay. Businesswise I have kept all the things up. I have no debts, we are an honorable family. There is nobody who can do anything to us. And she said, "I wish you would stop being so hysterical." [inaudible] And then the next day we heard it all over that we couldn't go on the streets and that there were bombs falling and then the bombardment started. Then I started praying that that would stop because I felt an occupation I could take, but the bombing drove me crazy. The bombing was something that I had not thought of; I thought of an occupation. But I had not thought of our resisting the Germans. I never dreamt that the Dutch government would even try for five days to resist the coming in of Germany and we did that.

JL: What did you think would happen?

FB: I thought the Germans would come, and that would be it. The Germans would rule us or would force us Jews out, but what happened was from that Friday morning till Wednesday night we had a constant battle. Bombs were dropped, people were told not to go out in the streets, houses were bombed, we had to glue our windows with brown paper. And we refused to give up. Our army was ill-prepared to fight, had the disadvantage — if they had any chance — of having a fifth column, all the German maids and all the people that were taken in by Holland were all of a sudden the cooperative force with the German *Wehrmacht*.¹³ So we didn't have a chance and still they didn't give up till the Tuesday, during the day, Rotterdam, which is the greatest harbor in the western European sea, that whole city was flat, with thousands of people killed. And then there was no way that — we were told that

¹³German for 'army'.

Amsterdam would have the same fate. And I was praying that we would just stop fighting because we had no chance and a lot of people were killed and in the long run we would be occupied and I personally — this is something any human being — was more afraid for the bombing than I thought for anything else. My mother could stand the bombing very well. I went totally crazy. I took every human being that was in the house to the bathroom where we were supposed to be and would yell out loud, yell out of fear. So, as we had the news in the evening over the radio, I then know that for the first time in my life, the great mother who said nothing could happen to us, when she heard the news, collapsed and became unconscious. I saw her sink from the dining room table into shock and she had a marvelous [inaudible] because when we heard that we had capitulated and that the queen had gone to England and that we would be occupied, I felt a feeling of relief, insanely of course, and I looked at my mother who was seated across from me and I saw her disappear under the table. She fainted. And then I thought, "Oh, we are in bad shape if mother faints; something very bad is going to happen. How stupid that she faints now the bombardment will stop."

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

JL: How were you and your family affected by the increasing anti-Semitic measures?

FB: We were shocked. At first we were amazed by the fact that nothing changed. Of course, we were appalled when we saw the German troops come in the city. I could not understand that even a few Dutch people were watching it; I refused to look at them. And then we were pleasantly surprised that nothing happened. I was elated in a time because I personally had experienced that my husband came back from British India. And because of his coming back, my mother-in-law, who was separated from her husband, my father-in-law, were both trying to hide the anger towards me because I was the source of making their son come to an occupied country.

JL: You mean he came back? After the occupation?

FB: He came back after the occupation just to be with me. Can you imagine the agony, after I survived the war, and [their] children didn't? That is another topic. I was happy personally. I saw the proof of his love. Don't forget, I was stupid, too. I was twenty years old and there was the proof that a beautiful man with that marvelous job and all the safety he had would come back to marry his sweetheart. And my mother's saying, "If he loves you, he comes back" was also, for me, proven to be right — if he loves me, he comes back. That is what — the limit of my thinking at the time. I hadn't lived yet; I was a child. So we married, and yet -- you saw the picture -- it was all in black, because I was well aware that Europe was in mourning. It was no time to celebrate a wedding; yet, as I made my wedding plans, and at that time we had our religious laws already. Now I remember, I said, "Mother, this is only for our household. I will marry without a great ado." And she told me, and I thought, "My very, very dumb mother is not aware of how serious our condition is." However, when she said, "Flory, you are my oldest, and you will be the only child that I will see into marriage. I will not see my other children marry. Will you allow me to have a family dinner in my house with my sisters?" I didn't find it in my heart to say no because I knew this would be also a good-bye to the whole family, and I said yes. And "But how do you get meat and how do you get — ?" She said, "Leave that up to me." I think she must

have sold part of our home in order to have the dinner that we had that night of my wedding. [We] had a very simple *chupah*, and after that we had a beautiful reception in my parents' home and after that the family sat down to our last dinner together — my wedding. My mother made such a fuss, as if I would go to the other side of the continent, and my future home with my husband was in the Rijn Street 201, while we lived Rijn Street 179. It was the same block on the same side of the street but I was prepared as if I would go to British India. I left the house in the evening and my mother was in tears. My sister was ready to faint because I would leave the house for the first time in my life. But at that time we had already lost — where going in the street in the evening was forbidden.

JL: What was the date?

FB: The date I married, November 27, 1940. It would be forty years I would have been married now. So, after my initial — I remember that night the *afweergeschut*. I cannot say it in English -- the cannons on the floor that tried to grasp the panes in the air [anti-aircraft guns]. The whole night Amsterdam was on fire, and of course it was terrible for me and for — I was afraid that a bomb would fall in the street and etcetera. Then, as we were married, there was great panic in my mother's household because we were forced, we Jews were forced to close the businesses, which would paralyze the income. First we were told we had to give up our radios — there was no television. I refused absolutely everything. I said, "We have no radios," but my husband, who was a very courageous man to even board a ship in the dark to come to Europe in the time when the waters were not safe anymore, refused to listen to me. Everything that was told by the Germans, he did. He felt nothing was worth risking our life — no radio. But for me it did not represent the radio but it represented the not having information what was going on in the world. But he did everything — so did my parents — for fear. They had to close down the business. That meant no income. We slowly had lost that no gentile person was allowed to work for Jews, okay. Then it came, no Jews should have people working for it, even other Jews. Sonja, who was maybe fifteen, twenty years with my parents, had to go back to

Zutphen.¹⁴ Sonja was in a fit. Sonja was all alone and she loved our family. She was with us it seemed a lifetime. She refused to leave us. So here there was the only part where my mother and father did something that wasn't proper; we had Sonja in our home without anybody knowing it. She stayed on with us. My mother couldn't have done in the big household. And she supported the business by selling poultry from our — we lived in the Rijnstraat behind the store and next to the store, so our Jewish customers would come as visitors and leave with poultry. So part of the household was taken up by what was our store. Our store was empty.

JL: Who slaughtered the poultry?

FB: Ah, let's say my father had people working for him. They would slaughter it, and they would bring it in. And the brother of my father, who was with my mother, would help them.

JL: How did you -- were those people Jews?

FL: No, those people, they were not Jews. But they did it anyway. They respected the family. They knew that my mother was alone, and then when that became too dangerous, and my mother, and my father had lost great amounts of money, by having it for many, many months, and the household, to be kept up, my husband and I decided to eat with my mother. As I said, I lived in the same block. I gave my household money to my parents and I would eat there and tell them that I don't like to cook alone with my husband and that I'd much rather have the same company that I had. So my mother cooked and we ate every evening with my parents and then leave at a quarter to eight to go to my house, because after eight you were not allowed in the streets. It was a time of great fear, but we did not know what would happen. It was the inconvenience of it all that I thought was temporary. I thought, if this is the only thing that they bother us with, we can overcome. Till in '42 we all of a sudden heard that there were camps being made in Poland and Germany and that the intention was not to keep us in Holland. A lot of Jews did not believe it, and I also thought this is just malicious

¹⁴A manufacturing commune in the eastern part of Holland on the IJssel river.

undermining of our capacity to survive the war. I thought we could survive there, but the *razzias*¹⁵ started. My brother was taken from a library on the corner where we lived and taken to the Johannes Vermeerstraat, where the German *Kommandantur*¹⁶ was, on a Saturday afternoon.

JL: When was this?

FB: In the year 1942. Broertje ["little brother"] went to the corner, didn't come home. Days, days, days, weeks, and my mother turned gray. And we thought he would be deported. People were taken in front of the synagogue and sent to Mauthausen. Terrible things happened. And as Broertje didn't come home, I went on Saturday to my mother and I saw her sit gray. She was young and beautiful — she was only forty-six then — and I said, "Mother" — or forty-seven — "What's the matter? Why — he is still in Amsterdam?" And she would say, "They've taken away part of my heart. If you have children once, you will know what I feel." And believe me, I then thought, "This is only the beginning. We will suffer far more. I wish I could give my mother poison." I had such an odd feeling that day in my mother's home, in the living room, that if I had drugs, I would have drugged my mother. I would really — I felt so much compassion for her, knowing that far worse would come, feeling it, that I thought, I wish — for the first time in my life — how can you think, "I wish my mother dead. I wish my mother was dead because she will have far more to undergo before we find our peace." Of course, not a thought of this to her. And then my brother came back the next weekend. They just let him go free.

JL: What did he tell? What had happened to him?

FB: The SS came that afternoon. They just had a raid. They were so perfect in their having no system that at any time, any moment, they could make a raid and take young people that were carrying this [the yellow star]. And then some were being put on the train to the concentration camp and some were sent free. It was sheer luck. Later, when we all had alphabetically our *aufruf zum Kamp*.¹⁷ When I had

¹⁵Dutch for 'terror raids'.

¹⁶German for 'headquarters'.

¹⁷German for 'called up for camp', a postcard or letter ordering people to report to the German authorities.

to be I was married to Van Brink, I said, "Of course we don't go." My brother was eager to go. Because the boy across the street, his friend, must go. I said, Broertje, you are blond and we have so many friends out in the country who would take you. Hide, work, do." "Oh absolutely not. I do it there and the war will be over and I will come out." Yet, I think now often back at the time that he was in my living room, when we mentioned the things that other people had told us from Germany, he would turn white. Imagine, he was a sixteen-year-old boy, and he would say, "But Flory, do you think they would want me?" And I said, "No, of course they don't want young people." It was too hard for me to say what I thought they would want. And now, at times, they watch news. Of course the children see everything here on TV, on the news. As we were looking at reruns one night with David [her grandson], all of a sudden David turned to me with the same intonation that my brother had and he asked me, "Grandma, were many children killed in your war?" I said, "David, children are not killed in war." He said, "How do they survive? Weren't Jewish children killed?" And I failed to answer him. But can you feel what arouses in my heart, that we live in a world where people have to wonder if they will be killed? And then I think of my history teacher that says if you don't learn from history it will repeat itself. But what answer can you give to a bright seven-year-old?

JL: Let me go on to ask you specifically what you remember about the time that the Jewish quarter was sealed off in Amsterdam?

FB: At the time we were not living anymore there. It was a time we were in the south part [of Amsterdam] and our store had dried up there. It was closed, nobody wanted — my father was very sick, my mother could not keep it up so we — the Blassiusstraat was eliminated. We concentrated only on the Rijnstraat, and, as I said, it became too dangerous, it stopped. We tried to survive by putting the households together and also by my mother trying to work with a *sperr*,¹⁸ a thing in her identity papers that she worked for a firm that was exempt from being sent to Germany, which of course now we know it was foolish; then we believed it was sent by heaven. [telephone interrupts]

¹⁸German prefix meaning 'separated out' or 'special'.

JL: What specifically was your reaction to the closing of the Jewish quarter? Were you affected by that at all?

FB: We were affected by almost everything that went on in Amsterdam, and we were inclined to stay away from everything that was called dangerous. Now, sheer walking in the street proved to be dangerous because all of a sudden Holland wasn't Holland anymore. We recognized that the gentile neighbors became enemies. The latent anti-Semitism that did not exist when I was a child, or even when I was in my teens, all of a sudden, human beings, as they are, some belonged to the NSB [Dutch Nazi Party]¹⁹ and openly were our enemies. The NSB was a situation, political situation, that approved of the German occupation and they helped. So whatever would go on in the street they would point out that the neighbors are doing. So what we decided to do was to come out as little as possible, to go out as little as possible. We heard through papers and through whatever, it would not even be in the papers, what was happening in the Jewish *viertel*,²⁰ where we lived far removed from. There were boys lined up on one Saturday afternoon in front of the Portuguese synagogue where my mother was married -- I wish I had all the pictures for you to look how beautiful it was. On one Saturday afternoon they halted — the first *razzia* was there. They halted the boys, made them do exercises in the open, and as they were doing that they were kicked in the face and it was the first real open *razzia* — hit, did exercising and at the end of the afternoon some were released and some were sent to Mauthausen, I believe, was the concentration camp. And as it came to the south part where we lived in relative peace, Jews among gentiles in the streets. We were stunned, we were horrified. Never happened. And then when the laws came that the Jews couldn't participate in traveling, the Jews couldn't do business. All of a sudden after that there was a decision for the Dutch people. On a Monday morning we woke up and the city was a ghost. Nobody went to work. A strike. But a strike as eerie as you cannot imagine in your wildest dreams. No bus, no baker — everything was being delivered at home. No milk, no lights,

¹⁹Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (National Socialist Movement), the Dutch Nazi party.

²⁰German for 'quarter'.

no police, nothing. The dockworkers started it in Amsterdam. This was gentile people who were totally free to do whatever they want; they were so one with the Jewish population that they felt it could not happen. Now they have a statue -- you know about it? -- on a square in the memory of that one man. But of course, that lasted maybe three times or twice, twenty-four hours. They went to a part of the city that is identical to Fox Point here, took out at eight in the morning, six in the morning, all the male population of that square, placed them in front of the beautiful flower parks that we have in Holland, and killed them, in front of their wives and children. After that, the strike broke. Nobody dared to lift a finger for the Jewish population, except a very, very strong underground movement and very prominent Jewish people who went into that movement. And also, for the first time, the Jewish Council was formed. Still it was not — then there was no knowledge of the concentration camps. That came in '42, when we were told to make a sack ready to take the most necessary belongings and to leave. That was when in our block people would jump out of windows, mainly people that had very pleasantly lived there, that came from Germany and that had more knowledge than we had. A lot of people in our block committed suicide. A lot of people tried to save their children and had surgery, had doctors who were willing to operate on their children. I know of one man that was a widower with a beautiful young daughter, and he had the daughter in the hospital for an appendix surgery, and she died in surgery. My own husband, Iz [Israel Van Brink], had a doctor who was willing to perform surgery on a football knee in order for him to not meet the deadline, to be added in that square at eight o'clock in the morning that Monday. We figured out what we could do about that. Now, little did we know that that would be his doom, because when he came in a concentration camp with a cane, he was doomed to go into the gas. Can you see how crossed we lived and what an eerie world we lived? Because initially that surgery "saved" Iz. And when he came home after the surgery, in the Rijn Street, in my house, we had a bay window, and on a sunny afternoon out of the blue sky, a car from the SS came in our block and started getting the Jews out of the houses. They had the lists from temples that we belonged to and charitable causes that all the Jews supported and according to that

list they knew exactly where the Jews were. So they would run into these beautiful new buildings -- that I told you about, like condos now, *etages*, gorgeous -- you would see them with the German shepherds — that's why I still cannot look at a German shepherd dog — they would go up and get the families out. Now, in Holland it was very normal that the older people lived with the young. It's not like here. If a mother was widowed, they would live with the children. There were beautiful homes and room enough. It would be that a family was doomed to come out of their houses; the *razzia* was there. So the children were dressed warm, the people were dressed warm, but the old mother was not dressed quickly enough or could not grasp it all and did not come out quick. We would see scenes where the German shepherds were sent up stoops, the big stoops that went into those houses, and they would take out a woman in her sixties, seventies, that was not so quick to follow the children, and the woman would just hit her head, stoop stoop stoop stoop stoop [bumping down the stairs], and would be just one piece of meat. That made you so sick and so bewildered that when I watched it — and of course I couldn't, these were neighbors, my, my people I grew up with, friends — I would question the sanity of it, and I would know that it was nuts to work for people who wanted us to work. They wanted to destroy us. And that set my mood for escaping them. It also made me half crazy because I would go by that block across the street, and here was the store of my parents, so I would know they would go in and get my father and mother and my sister, who lived there. My brother had already gone at that time. So one Sunday afternoon that happened, and they skipped the store of my parents to come up to my house with my husband. And I had a Green Polizei in the house, with my husband just come back from surgery. So they told us to get dressed and go with them and get out.

JL: So the surgery didn't help

FB: And I said [speaks in German] And by sheer chance, they let me go. Okay, they went down. So what is there that is not *gulek* [luck]? It's sheer luck because other people that were far more dependent upon each other were taken out of their houses, or older, or stronger; it was sheer luck that you could escape. So here was where the knee was profitable. Now, some doctors did that kind of surgery for

nothing or a small amount. Some people that could pay paid fortunes; there were many, many stinkers, people who enriched themselves.

JL: Jewish doctors?

FB: Jewish doctors would never perform surgery on other Jews; that would make their lives impossible. These were gentile doctors who had to do that. Jewish doctors would not try to risk their lives to do those things. Then at all of a sudden [the German troops] would disappear out of the street just as they came in it. So my mother would automatically run up to see if we were there, and I knew she was there because we were not in the house. Now, then in me came that spark, we have to do something to escape. And my mother didn't want to because she had my sick father. And my husband had that surgery, and he did not believe in the courage of the gentile people to take such a risk to hide [Jews]. So his answer to the question was after each *razzia*, he begged me to commit suicide. It depressed him so that that very strong man — he was six foot tall, he had traveled in all the world, he was bright, alert, educated, you mention it and he was it — he saw no way out but to commit suicide. And I said, "I cannot do it. If my mother will not live next door, I would, but I cannot grant you that. I find our life is worth fighting for. And that we can always do — why commit suicide?" And this is, "Why we didn't?" And I said to him, "If you are willing to commit suicide, you must be willing to try to hide." And he found this the cowardly way out. And I convinced him it was the only way out. And at that time when we were discussing that, we also exchanged thoughts on escaping and being betrayed or not making it, and then we would join each other in death or in going to camp. And I made him vow that if I would be taken away from him, he would not volunteer, and neither would I. We each would try to survive. And this is the basis of how we made it.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

JL: There are just a couple more things I want to ask you about the German measures against the Dutch Jews. How did you all feel when you had to register as Jews?

FB: We did not register as Jews, no. I do not remember having registered as a Jew. They had those lists from temples. We paid dues as Jews to our temples. We were in charitable organizations. As I told you, the people, the refugees, had to be supported and they were supported by the Jews who could afford it, and for that reason we were all registered. There was not a Jewish family who tried not to give for the people that came from countries that were in need. So we did not have to register as Jews, we were registered by the temples, the organizations. Not having been religious did not mean that we did not support everything that was Jewish. Therefore, they had all our names.

JL: What of the time from the beginning of 1942 when the provincial Jews were herded into Amsterdam and had to live with the Jews in Amsterdam? Were you affected by that?

FB: No, I will tell you why not. We did not live in the *Juden Vierte*²¹ then. So we were never sent out of our homes. We were living in an assimilated neighborhood, in a new neighborhood.

JL: So there were no Jews from the provinces sent to south Amsterdam?

FB: To south Amsterdam, no. We were, in that respect, very well off. We never had to leave there. This was not considered Jewish *Viertel*. So we stayed in the houses where we were.

JL: How did you feel about wearing the yellow star?

FB: I felt it to be as if I had blonde hair and you have dark hair. I could not feel the fact that many people said, "I'm very proud to wear it." I was neither proud nor hurt by it. Of course, I felt it was not the right of any human being to force another human being to be marked, unless he wants to be marked in such way. But I felt not damaged by it. I wore it. I felt angry. But many people felt pride, many people. I felt just anger that any human being could force me to be identified in such a way, that it was a law. I

²¹German for Jewish Quarter. Prior to the German occupation, Amsterdam never had a formal ghetto in which Jews were forced to live. Such a ghetto was created during the war.

would tell and blow it from the roofs that I was Jewish all my life, but who has the right to tell me to wear a David Star if I do not choose to do that so by myself? But of course I was wearing one, and so was my husband, and so was the whole household.

JL: Were there any specific reactions by the Dutch to your wearing the star? How did people treat you?

FB: Some people, not-Jewish people, were trying to be funny and trying to say that they wanted to join the Jewish cause and were wearing stars. Very often it cost them their lives or their house was smashed, and they stopped. They treated it in the beginning as something funny. There was nothing funny about it, of course, and as they would right away take them out, and invade their houses, and treat them as Jews. So they stopped it. In the Rijnstraat, I know neighbors. I have only great compassion and love for my non-Jewish neighbors. Living in a non-Jewish neighborhood at the time, but enough Jews in my block to make it the business of the neighborhood. Everybody was nice and cordial and I had no feelings about this. Of course, the anger is with you constantly. But except anger and fear, I had no feelings — pain, a deep pain, for my parents, for the well-being of my sick father and my mother. That I had constant pain of what would happen with my loved ones. My sister Ann had to undergo surgery at that time. They found a big tumor and she had tuberculosis of the [sounds like: bafvel] without her knowing it. I was told by doctors. Her menstruation didn't come in time. In the early '40s she needed intensive surgery. This was overshadowed everything. I had, from the doctors who diagnosed it, a letter that showed that you could never have children, their diagnosis that you would not live long. I was absolutely sick, mentally, emotionally, that such a thing should happen to her. I asked the doctor a letter, at the same time my mind worked, that it would be very advantageous for her if she would ever be picked up, she could not work. But in the beginning I had still doubts and I thought it might save her from going to a concentration camp. And I had that letter constantly in a [sounds like: platil], in a vase on top of my mother's dining room. One day she found it and I said it was a joke and it was something that I had made out in order to "move" the Germans who would eventually pick her up.

JL: Did she believe you?

FB: No, she never believed me. We had hard times, we had painful times at that time. My mother and I knew. My mother never told my father, and Ann was a very, very sick person. And she was only twenty-one at that time, twenty-two. So then I had intensive testing to find if anything was wrong with me. But much to my dismay I was okay. So that's what was tragedy that overshadowed a great deal of the political part of our lives.

JL: Do you remember anything about the beginning of the deportations to the work camp January 1942? What about your brother? Was that what --

FB: His way was, "Mother and Father, I'm going." Because his friend across the street was not to be moved in any non-Jewish household because he was, what we call Jewish looking. There's nothing wrong with that. He was a beautiful, handsome boy. But the two boys decided that when it was the time to go, they would go. They did not volunteer but they did not fight it. Now my father had in the country many people that he did business with and my mother knew those people because my father was out. He didn't want to hear about it. I said, "Broertje,²² go. We have enough funds for you to take with you." He said, "I believe that I'm strong enough to work and I will. I go work." He had glasses. And he went. He got his [sounds lie: uproot], his call to go, his number, his paper, etc. He said, "If I don't go, they will come to Mommy and Daddy and they will make investigations at their house. Leave them in peace. I go."

JL: Was this as early as January '42?

FB: Yes. I cried. I was sick and miserable. And that was when my mother became so very, very down, as I told you, that I had the thoughts of killing my mother. I had crazy thoughts, crazy thoughts. But that was the fear in me, that it would get worse before, if ever, would get better. So Broertje went away.

²²Dutch term of affection for a younger brother.

This was as sad as can be in a household so closely connected. And then we had to come and we escaped with [inaudible] to Germany, the surgery. And then the *razzias* came in between.²³

JL: You were going to mention the specific *razzia* of June 20.

FB: Well this was when we all were already in hiding. In January of, I believe, '43, I believe. It was, after many, many *razzias*, and after many tight escapes. There were things that I witnessed in the streets. I had my friends over that night, it was coincidental, I did not plan it. Of course, we discussed, if things should happen, and we had our luggage packed, and everything ready, when they told me that they were willing to take us if we had courage. I said I [had] a deep desire, and they took me that night. But of course that is a story in itself. When I was then in hiding, this occurred where they made the final clear-out of Jews. The whole south, then was taken. There was not a home that was omitted. It was on my birthday, June 20, 1943, that the final *razzia*, with *razzias* before, took place, where absolutely all the stations were filled, where they would pack people in cars like herring, where it was unbelievable. Now, before these, in May, 1943. I have to tell you that in April, 1943, no. My parents were taken from their house, one night in March, by a *razzia*, my father, mother, and sister, I was already in hiding. Those Dutch friends of mine took me that evening. I went to their house, I didn't stay in their house, because they were afraid. They had a variety of stores in Amsterdam south. I was taken to the cleaning woman's house in a lesser neighborhood in Amsterdam. But, there I could not stay. From her, in the same building where she lived, I moved into the house of the Dutch detective, who saved my life. However, I had to sleep in her facilities, because he was afraid if I would move out of her entirely, that she would have a hold on him, knowing that he kept Jews. If she was part of the plot, her responsibility was also there. So I had to pay her, for her facilities, and I had to pay the household, of the detective. So I was "saved" with my husband. My mother and father were still there, in their house, and then one night, they were taken, with my sister.

JL: Had you told your family that you were going to hide?

²³Dutch for 'raid'.

FB: No, I asked the woman who took me to tell my parents the next day that I was safe but not where and that I prefer that to committing suicide. That was more sane to me. Now, when my parents were taken out of the house they were brought to the Jewish theater in Amsterdam, which was the scene of where the Jews would unite against their will, but from there they would be distributed to Westerbork, to Vught; these were not *Vernichtungslager*. These were quote "work" and Lagers²⁴ that would send them to a variety of Lagers that were impossible to be held in Europe because I think if they would have *Vernichtungslager* in the western part of Europe it would not have gone that far. Whole Europe would be gone in flames because my trust is so that the Dutch, the Belgian, the French, would not have allowed it. The *Vernichtung*²⁵ was only possible in the bosom of the German nation and the Polish nation, who were by nature criminal and anti-Semitic. It was so against everything that was humane that the western part of Europe would not have cooperated in that kind of monstrosity. So, when my parents came to that theater, many friends of mine were working there in being in the Jewish Council and my parents were very well-respected and well-known Dutch Jews. So, the first thing that happened was when they were sitting in the theater my mother's name was called and my sister's name was called, my father was brought to the department where the sick people were. Now, my mother went for my father. After their name was called my mother went up and my sister went up and as they went up they were told by a man, "Mrs. Melkman, I want you to enter this stage." She went on the stage and out came in the street. And my mother said to my sister, "Annie, you go. I refuse. I have to stay with my husband." And a man, who I spoke to later, said, "Go, go, go, your husband is doomed." And my mother saying, "You cannot judge that. My child has to have a chance. I will stay here." And my mother was healthy and well, and she refused to leave my father alone, and my sister went. My mother went back. My father was brought the same night with the whole transport to Westerbork and my mother was brought with another transport to Vught, and they never saw each

²⁴German for 'camp'.

²⁵German for 'annihilation' or 'extermination'.

other again. Can you know what a tremendous hurt that was when somebody wrote a letter to Amsterdam telling me -- by the strange name, I have letter here -- that my father believed that my mother had forsaken him. The woman who'd never left him alone for an hour and that I had letters from my mother in Vught that she had not seen my father and that she is the head of the kitchen if I want to send her curlers and that she's so glad that Annie's safe and then the letters reach me. My sister, who had escaped the theater, came straight to my mother-in-law, who was in hiding in Amsterdam, but my sister knew her address. And now tragedy comes. As I heard that my sister was in the hiding place of my mother-in-law, our detective had to see Jewish people through to Switzerland, as he wanted to make our place free because one Jew could never meet the other Jew in the underground. He asked me if we would want to stay a few days in our room there, that half room that they had with the neighbors, or if we would prefer to go to my mother-in-law's for a few days. My husband was so dumb and I was so eager to see my sister to tell me about my mother, I appealed to my husband to please go a few days to be with his mother and I would meet my sister. This was in April. But we decided in the evening we would take off our David Stars and we would walk to this house where his mother was. We did that. He rebelled. I said no rebellion, we do it. I took off my David Star and my other identification, he shaked, but we both walked. This was April 8, 1943. We went to this Swammerdamstraat that night. I saw my sister, who told me about my mother and father, how they had left. How through fright and everything, didn't have a penny. My mother had her material things in hiding. I knew where they were, so I asked for the things through other people to [sounds like: come out]. I discussed with my husband the fact that we had money enough or diamonds and gold enough to survive the war, but that I had to share with my sister that what was from my parents so she had a chance to survive this alone. She could not be with us. I asked the detective. It was impossible. So I made plans with my sister. Wednesday, I had all the jewelry up in that house in the Swammerdamstraat from my father-in-law because he was — Israel van Brink was very generous and said "Give her so that you don't have a headache about her safety." I said, "Ann,

are you sure that your identification papers are all right? You cannot just go to the [sounds like: hoie]" -- that is south of Amsterdam and very beautiful wooded area. I just visited last July. She said, "Flory, the man is a Jewish person. He only charges 600 *florin* for the identification papers and it is all right. Don't worry, I know what I'm doing." So I gave her 600 *florin* that Tuesday night; Wednesday morning at 1:00 she left. That night I asked Iz, please, that I would sleep with my sister because she would leave the next day and he was very hurt, his feelings were very hurt, but I ignored it. And I slept with Anneke and I told her where she could reach me in case of need, I wouldn't know where she was going and that she should not leave the next day but come home — and that became fatal — and study her new name by heart before she would expose herself with the new identification papers. Because that is very hard. Anneke did so. She went away that Wednesday, came home with the new identification papers, and I told Iz that she would leave in the evening, she would be picked up at eight o'clock. As we were seated, eight o'clock around, gathered in the living room, was a knock at the door, and three people stepped in. Men from a dream. Creatures that you see in horror movies. Dutch people with a mustache telling us, "You are all Jews. You are all arrested." None of us had a star. And I said, "No, we are not," and he said, "Show me your identification." Now I had the right identification because I was in the underground with Iz. My sister, who was very nervous, stood up and said to the man, "It's I that you are looking for. Take me. My family has nothing to do with it." Then she gave me away that I was Jewish, of course, but I never blamed her. And he said to Anne, "You come with me, but first sew your David Star on." My mother-in-law, whose address it was where we were, had in that building made a double closet. Imagine a closet with an extra closet and behind that a hiding place. Before anything could happen or anybody would think of, I saw her disappear and I knew why nobody would see her again. She ran right around the corner and went into the closet and let everybody talk. She was disappeared. Now, I stood up. I said to the man, "Why don't you give us a chance to escape?" I could not deny I was Jewish — "My sister is not Jewish and I am not" — she said it's [mine?]. So he said, "Are you so lazy that you don't want to work for the Third Reich?" I said, "You're

Dutch. Don't you know better? We have no chance of working." He said, "Who feeds you that nonsense?" I said, "My feelings, because I see too many things happen." -- He said "get dressed young woman!" I had a sort of, robe on, and as I was going to the room behind the living room, it was a bed room, he followed me. And there were two more [men in the house]. And he said "change." So I went in my slip and did my dress on and I was shaking, and as I was looking I was on the shelf, in leather, they had those old fashioned leather covers, for diamonds, do you remember the bundle of leather and the money, and a sack in it, of those old fashioned people? And I saw it, and I thought, "that could help us." And I said "If you let us go, I give you everything we have." But he didn't pay any attention that was laying there. Twas all there, all my mother and father had worked for, all their lives. Of course we had to bring that to [inaudible], no Jew was allowed to have anything. But I didn't point out what I meant. Then he asked, "Where is that old woman?" I knew there was a thing [secret closet]. My husband said, "I don't know what you're talking about. There was no old woman here" and he was walking around in the kitchen, and I to my husband — My husband was walking with this cane. Anne was hysteric. She couldn't even sew the thing [yellow star] on. She was crying and "I did this to you, I did this to you. Why didn't I listen to you? Why didn't I stay in the theater with Mama?" She was younger than I, too, and as I said, she had just had the surgery. My husband went in the kitchen and he told him — Blonk is his name, a Dutchman — "Listen," my husband said to him, "I can work, but I will be very handicapped if I had my wife there. Why don't you take me? It's more than you bargained for because you thought to find" — they were paid money for these Jews — "one. Let my wife free." And he said, "She won't have a chance to escape; where could she escape to?" And my husband said, "She would be able to find her way out of here." He gave the man all the money we had, all the gold, all the jewels we had, and he had also our identification papers — we had false, but I had nothing. All of a sudden when I was dressing to go out with my sister, I was called to the kitchen, and the others were busy with my sister — there was a cousin of my mother-in-law also in that house — and my husband said, "Flory, I just made a deal. I want you to leave." And as we had no questions

that we would leave each other and thinking that with my detective we could do a great deal because many people were taken from the Weteringschaus jail by the underground. He said, "I want you to leave. This is the deal: you go in the front." And he [Blonk] said, "How old are you?" I said, twenty-two. He said, "Much too young. Will you remember me? I'm Blonk, my name is Blonk. Go in front showing the others. I give you a sign, and you can disappear." I went to the front room, joined the others, looked for the last time at my sister, and he did so. I don't know how I had strength. I walked through the room, knocked to the closet, knocked at the wall, my mother-in-law opened. I went in the closet with my mother-in-law and I heard my husband, my sister, and my cousin — the cousin of my mother-in-law — go down the steps to jail. Because anybody who was found was punished. As if we Jews were not punished enough. But that was their law.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

JL: Today I want to back up just a bit and ask you, what memories you have of the actions on Black Thursday, August 1, 1942, and then Black Friday, August 2, 1942, very large raids.

FB: I cannot personally recall the dates. Since what I have told you previously might have been connected with the dates that were mentioned here. I have only recollection of the destruction that started in 1942 with *razzias*, and days of rest in between, and inhumanity of the pattern that did not have a pattern or any system. You felt safe in a certain way in a certain pattern. To have it destroyed the following day, to have a total new pattern. We would have *sperrs*,²⁶ exemptions in certain passports and we tried very hard to run for that exemption. We would give money, we would spend a great deal of time to have it and to find that the next evening everybody with a certain exemption was picked up just because they have it. So we decided, my husband and I, we would not run for all that. Of course those *razzias* were in Amsterdam. However, as I told you before, Josef [sic: actually, Israel] had surgery in that time. Ann detected that she had tuberculosis. I had great pains with my mother not knowing how to keep the household going. We had to turn in our gold, our radios, our jewelry. This was a hard time because we refused to do so and many things had to be hidden, and that occupied our time. Thought, who to trust and who not to trust, where to bring our valuables and not to pay with death because we saw people being arrested because they had to save it. My mother was eager to give it all to the Germans and have it over with. We said, "We might need it. We all might have to buy our lives for it." Mother was willing to just go, have it over with, work. You have to not forget that now we look at it with a hindsight and know that it was that. We Dutch Jews did absolutely not believe — even I, who had read *Mein Kampf* — that we would be killed. My greatest fear was that we would have to work and work very hard. That is as bad as I could think it would be. But when I saw the sick people go and old people, I was wondering, "Why do they want those people to work? They cannot work." And I was afraid they would be put in barracks and just be wasted and die eventually. But none

²⁶German prefix meaning 'separated out' or 'special'.

of us ever thought of *Vernichtungslager*. So you have to understand that for that reason, so many people resigned [themselves] to the worst. To have it over with was for many Jews better than to live in agony every night and being afraid that they [the Nazis] would come in the house and kick them out or hurt somebody, to have it over with was the feeling of the Jews in late 1942. Now, the days in August, I cannot recall. I was not in hiding then, and I think that were the days when there were *razzias* that I told you about previously, from which Joe was exempt because he had that operation on his knee. It was Israel, I'm sorry, Joe wasn't in my life, yet.

JL: Did you know anything about the statement that the churches made?

FB: Yes, yes. The statement of the churches as such were very strong in the beginning, very urgent in the beginning, and very much for helping Jewish people. But human nature as it was, they had to give up. After the strike that cost so many lives, there was a feeling of *laissez faire*. It was fighting against the impossible. They were absolutely overruled and it was unsafe to keep on trying too long to protect Jewish people. Out of the corner of the Pope, not much was done. Out of the corner of our allies, America, I was always amazed. I had hoped, "One night something will happen." I was sure. But then I thought, "It is a good sign. We all have to work. Why should they bother? They know, of course, but we will have to work." But I didn't want even to work for them. Even though I did make everything ready to go. We were just lucky not to be caught in 1942 because our decision to go came in spring 1943 when I saw so many things and was absolutely against jumping out of a window or committing suicide for the sake of my mother. I thought, "What's the sense of waiting to be picked up? We are not cattle. Let's hide." And then we did that with the help of our friends.

JL: By the time you hid, did you know already the worst?

FB: No! Oh no, no, no, no — nobody knew it. I heard the worst in 1944 after I escaped, from the previous night, that I was talking about yesterday [when her husband was captured]. I went back to the detective, Mr. [Anthonie Gerardus] Vingerhoed, who then told me explicitly how he had layers of weapons in his attic in between the *etages* and how he expected me to be in a closet with the radio,

which was illegal to have, and to listen to the messages being brought in by Radio Orange at ten o'clock every night. For that, he had made the same type of closet that I had escaped in when I told him. He had people come, he had his whole thing out and in a corner we had a closet where there was a double, again the same type, where I could push the panel in and it was invisible. Again this saved my life another time when he was invaded by the Green Polizei. That street was raided for Jews and they rushed into their homes. I quickly went into that closet and as I was there I saw the lanterns, the batteries with the flashlights and they were knocking against the exact wall that I was hiding [behind]. The radio didn't play. It was during a Sunday afternoon. [The policeman] asked, "Is this *Judenfrei?*"²⁷ and [Vingerhoed] said, "Well, check." And the officers came in and I heard say, "*Juden verstecken sich manchmal. Dauf ich in die Klosett [sic] kucken?*"²⁸. He had respect because the man was a detective, an officer, and I heard that. I felt so safe I wasn't even excited. I also had come to a point why I didn't care any more. In that exact closet. So then they left the house and I was taken out of the closet. Nothing had happened. I was not heroic. I was not afraid anymore because I was alone. I didn't care. I thought it was crazy for me to have fought so hard for my life. Because in '44, one night after I had to remember messages like, "Jan carries the bicycle. The bridge and the dog have met each other." Those kinds of messages meant something.

JL: They were codes?

FB: Were codes. Every night it was in between a report of how well we were doing in London. What was bombarded and what was not bombarded, how successful the war was.

JL: It was on the radio?

FB: Yes, on the radio. Now on that same radio, one night, I heard, "We want the world to know that the concentration camps where the European Jews are being referred to, also our Dutch Jews, are in essence death camps. Death is being -- roofs are being opened and gas is poured in and people are

²⁷German for 'Jew-free'.

²⁸German for "Jews sometimes hide. May I look into the closet?"

dying like cattle." And on it went. [confused sentence fragments] I was paralyzed. I thought [it must be] propaganda. The blood went down to my feet. I became so sick that I hardly could get out of the closet that evening. And I told the family where I was in hiding that I had heard that. Mr. Vingerhoed told us, "Lainie" — that was my name then²⁹ — "Don't believe that. That's propaganda." I said, "Do you think that it would be possible?" He said, "No, that cannot be possible. They cannot do that." But of course then it clings in your heart and you wonder, "Is it done? Maybe it's true." And that was only in '44 that first word came. Of course in '45, after the liberation, when we confronted people in the Portuguese hospital in Amsterdam who had survived, we knew enough. And the fact for me was, at that time when I heard those messages, maybe I don't see Israel back with me soon, and certainly not Ann with her sickness, and my father, who had written me in deep despair that life had no meaning without my mother. He was partially paralyzed, had no chance. But I was sure that my brother would return and my mother, who was in her forties and very beautiful and very strong-minded and healthy. So I wanted to live for them and be there when they would come to Amsterdam. But as I was talking to the first survivors in that hospital where I went to see them, they were all sick, they all had typhoid or they were undernourished, eighty, ninety pounds. I met a cousin of Israel who had survived. By surviving, I mean survived since 1942, one of the first to be taken in *razzias*. And when he told me the matters, he said, "Don't hope. It's hope against hope." I heard Treblinka and I tried to follow what pattern they had and what date they were taken. I know they had no chance, that they would go into the gas right away. That is what I had hoped, that they had not survived one day there. They were sent through all in different transports in May 1943. As I told you before, each to a different situation in Holland, totally separated. And when I had the message that Anneke and Israel had be released from jail. Imagine, they were in jail like criminals because they dared defy to Germany and try to go into hiding. I had a letter written on toilet paper, thrown out of the train and brought to an address because the Koopmans, being there on the platform where the trains left -- Nobody could be there. No human

²⁹Bader had false papers identifying her as Helene Veenstra.

being was allowed, only the Germans and the dogs and a few of the Dutch council. And the letter reached me, and all I could think of is, thank God it's spring. How marvelous! Maybe by *Yontef*³⁰ the war will be over and they will return. But a tremendous despair always was in me. I tried to once to go from my attic room that I had only half of and it was in the greatest disarray and dirt because this was the room that belonged to the cleaning woman. I told you that, and I had to pay her every week a great amount of money. I was seeing the bottom of what I had, because all the jewels were taken from me. I went because the isolation made me totally sick. The Vingerhoeds didn't want me into their house when they had company. Their best relatives or friends didn't know that they had Jews hiding, so I was days and days alone with the food on the floor in front of the room. But the food I could not eat, I wanted the human touch, and of course they couldn't give it to me because they were busy with their own lives and they did a great deal for the underground. And as I was leaving the house on Sunday night wanting to go to the theater, which was close to where I was in hiding, I had that feeling [to] "get it over with and know what is happening, why survive." All of a sudden when I was walking in the street I was hit on my — and it was Mr. Vingerhoed, and he said, "Come home." He said, "I told you why you couldn't leave." I had made a promise. I never left; it was the first time. I said, "Yes, I didn't want to leave. I just wanted to join." And he said, "Up," and up I went. He was talking to me and trying to tell me what sense it had. What a terrible disaster if my mother should return and ask him, "What did you do? Why did you let Flory go? What a waste of life to help the Germans destroy us." So then I started all over again and hoped.

JL: I want to go back a little bit more to ask you, what did you perceive as the reason that people just sat there with their bags packed? Why did people just sit there waiting to be picked up in the *razzias*? Why didn't they do something?

FB: I told you the reason, that the impossible was not believed. We did not comprehend that people could kill in that fashion [JL presses the question] For most of the Jewish people there was no way out.

³⁰Yiddish for 'holiday', referring here to Rosh Hashanah.

People did not advertise to hide people. You had to have non-Jewish connections. If your pattern of life was surrounded by temple-going and Jewish friends, there was no way out for you. Also, the fact that human nature, as it is, and food prices staggering, inflation was crazy. I didn't mention it before because it was a minor thing compared to what we had to endure. For most people, leaving meant to be able to have great capacity in cash. You could not take your luggage, you could not take your furniture. You had to have diamonds, you had to have furs, you had to have art, and that you could not carry with you. Preferable gold and diamonds were. And how many families — many did have it but when they had it they probably would have only Jewish friends and very few not-Jewish friends. I was in that respect fortunate that I went to a school where so many not-Jewish friends were mine and where I had an open look on life and was surrounded by not-Jewish friends who offered to help me. Because you would not even dare ask a thing like that. This was not giving you something, this was sharing with you your doomed destination. Who would ask anything from anybody, that big? There were Jewish people not capable of helping other Jewish people because they were afraid for their own children and their own lives. So never in my head did I ever think I'd ask a human being to hide me. I was uttering it to a friend that I would want to. On top of it I had to bring out that I was willing to pay for it. I had no cooperation from my husband; he was totally against it. He was the one who would sit and wait. But I felt we were in a fortunate position. My parents had a great deal of money. Not in cash, in diamonds. My husband's father left, and gave his son diamonds, and everything he owned. He was the one who left passively, the father waited to be picked up. He was, he felt, 50, 60, he was a very beautiful man, there was no way for him to go. It was hard for older people to leave. It was much easier for younger people. It needed courage, it needed also the willing people to help you. And I was fortunate enough, our family was fortunate enough to have that. I would tell you that at the end of the war all my sources were gone. I came out of the war without a penny, with nothing that I could call mine. I had lost the capacity to think where everything was. I knew my mother had given silver to neighbors. I knew things of myself that I had stored, and I didn't have the courage to ask people, "Do

you still have it?" Because, as I do not remember August 1942, I do remember Dolle Dinsdag³¹ in 1944, when so many people hoped that when the Allied troops landed in Arnhem and that is *A Bridge Too Far*, the movie that I saw, they were destroyed and our hunger really just started in the northern part of Holland, which was the hardest part of the war. This is after the June 6 when D-Day was.³² This was a time that you cannot even recall. A bread was identical to have a house. The house my parents' owned was totally destroyed. There was no house anymore. People took the wood. People broke it off and traded it for bread. You could not buy bread with money. You had to give things. And as a Jew you couldn't even go out and deal. You had no idea how unbearable life became in the northern part of Holland after this time, after the Dolle Dinsdag where we thought we would be liberated, where we knew Americans were fighting to go over the Rhine in Arnhem, and go up north to Holland, and were defeated. Where we knew that many, many Dutch people who were friendly to Germany tried to escape and were killed in the streets. Finally, I thought, we'd see the end, and then it wasn't the end. And the next morning we started all over again.

JL: Again, I want to go back to ask about your reactions to the things that happened before you went into hiding. What was your feeling about the sterilization of Jewish partners in mixed marriages?

FB: Oh, I thought it was the most awful thing that any human being could have done to other human beings. But you do not stand still to look at the wounds of other Jews if your own heart is bleeding so much. You almost became numb toward anything that is not happening to your family. I felt it was a terrible thing that it could happen in the country. But if you stand still by the fact that people can sue because your bumper is damaged here. Then to know the powerlessness of a human being like I was demolished, taken apart, my family was murdered in a fashion where they were not even together when they were murdered but separated before. And then not be able to even find anybody who is

³¹Dutch for Crazy Tuesday, September 5, 1944, when Nazi collaborators in Holland fled to be safe after the Allies retook Holland, resulting in the virtual collapse of organized fascism in the Netherlands.

³²From September 17 to 25, 1944, the British 1st Airborne Division attempted unsuccessfully to capture the bridges over the Rhine at Arnhem, the Netherlands. Only a quarter of the British troops escaped.

guilty for that. If I had to do it over -- I do not have the feeling of Anne Frank, that people are good. Of course she could have it, she was still young and had not lived to see the after-war situation, where people are not as good. People are only human. If they had a great deal in storage, they turned after the war anti-Semitic instead of defending the Jews that came back. When I came in my street, I saw the eyes of my friends with different view than when I left, of my friendly neighbors. Because some had a fur coat of my mother that I didn't know of, and saw me come back so that was the end of the fur coat.

JL: Did they give it back to you?

FB: No. Most of it I did not get back. But then how did I know what my mother was hiding? I was already in hiding. I had beautiful things — a silver spoon that my mother brought to one neighbor that I had given her, just a silver sugar spoon, it was of no significant value. I still have it. Well, I know she had a whole silver, because that disappeared and I did not know to what Gentile neighbor she gave that. So I saw the nature of human beings and maybe we are all alike. I don't know, it was very hard. Also, I had hoped to live to see *wraak*.³³ What is *wraak*? *Rächen*.³⁴ Revenge, revenge: this is *wraak*. Call it mean, call it vicious, but I had hoped to see revenge. Instead of it, I saw the Marshall Plan. Germany was built up before America was totally recuperated. My trips to Europe now, I never include Germany. I have never set foot there. I still cannot touch German soil and I never will. They do very well without me. But I never saw punishment in actual sense of how we visualize punishment. Where can I turn to? I have the proof that Josef [her second husband], who became violently ill in his early fifties, with cancer of the pancreas, after having worked in Auschwitz in three years since 1942. See, I was not connected with Josef in the war, but he was the one who followed his wife and child, who were picked up in streets of Amsterdam, to the [inaudible] in Amsterdam, and via the [inaudible] to Auschwitz, where he saw his wife and three-year-old son disappear in one of the destruction groups. He survived

³³Dutch for 'vengeance'.

³⁴German for 'to revenge'.

and had to labor alone in times. There was no crematoria built yet to burn the bodies. He had to open the grounds, he had the people that were buried there taken out. There were no caskets. People were just put in the dirt and he had to take them out with the hands. The people were not capable of eating for weeks, not physically. All the stories were told to me. How could I later prove that his cancer had any bearing to the years in Auschwitz? Try to prove things that are common sense to you and me.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

TAPE 4, SIDE 1

JL: Could you tell me a little bit about your knowledge of the activities of the Jewish Council? Did you have any contact with them?

FB: Yes, I did. I had contact when we were destined to arrive that Monday morning at a certain place in Amsterdam with our luggage to leave for the concentration camp Westerbork.

JL: When was that?

FB: That was one of the first. My name was van Brink, and it went alphabetically.

JL: The B?

FB: The B. As I told you before, we tried to find a way out. We were just the first one and in our heads was not materialized that we were ready to hide. My husband was very eager — not pleasantly eager — but he was sure that we would survive working. I said, "Why don't we try to linger on in Amsterdam in our comfortable homes longer and then try to work later?" And I encouraged him to have his surgery because he that sick knee. For it we needed Dr. [sounds like: Tetzner], who for an enormous amount was willing to take him into a hospital, and for an enormous amount gave him surgery, but we were frightened not to come to that place of destination. He was in the hospital so I went with doctor's papers to the *kommandatur*³⁵ and asked the *polizei*, the police that was standing there, if I was allowed to show the papers since we could not come, my husband had taken sick and we could not be at our destination. I was told that he had nothing to do with it, there was a German Council for it, this is where I was introduced to the German Council. I went to another building close to it in the Gerrit van der Veenstraat in Amsterdam and as I was entering the building most people were middle-aged and were of East European descent. I recognized people that I had talked to years ago when I was with Elsje, playfully trying to adjust people in new surroundings and there I met a man I will never forget. A Mr. Oberski. Mr. Oberski slightly remembered me as a young girl. Spoke with an accent. I was in tears because I was afraid that I would be told that I had to go alone. That chance we took

³⁵German for 'headquarters'.

exposing myself with my papers there. Since you're picked up at random, why wouldn't they pick up just me? I was shaking, telling this Mr. Oberski that my husband was in the hospital. I didn't tell him that we had set it up. And I asked him if he was willing to help me. I also told him that I had a father and mother, with a father deadly ill and my mother needed my comfort. Without me she would totally collapse. I knew that too. He allowed me an exempt. He told me I should be in touch with him. He lived in my neighborhood, in a beautiful Amsterdam South where gorgeous trees, where flowers, trees, stores, beauty, I was surrounded by beauty and a temple, a beautiful temple. He lived around the corner. He was a doctor in economy. Anytime I needed him I didn't have to go to that horror street where I saw all the Germans. He took a liking to me. He knew I had worked for that [refugee society]. I then struggled because I had to go to the hospital but also it was a few days exemption. So it would be that my ordeal would end there on that day. That's, say, ten days from now and we would go. Israel wasn't ready to go. I then walked to his home at 8:00 in the morning and tell him of my desperation. He would receive me at 8:00 with children in the house and his wife as if I was a welcomed friend. The man was very powerful and would give me another exemption. As I was walking in the street, and I remember taking a corner and seeing the trees, the beauty of Amsterdam, the early day. I thought how strange it is that one person should have that power to exempt another Jew from ill fate. And how blessed I was to find a man willing to help me. How blessed I was that I was articulate enough to express those things. Where other people wouldn't want the favors of other Jews, but I never felt that anything I would have to do in order to give comfort to my mother, and myself, and, consequently, therefore, were all too much to ask for survival. What I needed in my own mind were days to survive and those days would bring me closer to the end. This was my philosophy. So that is how I met the council. Through it, later I met the various ways of the council, how it worked. There were people in less prominent positions also belonging to the Jewish Council. Much to my dismay I cannot say only good, but it was so human I never condemned anybody because they all tried to save their own lives. I

did not condemn people. They even tried to save my mother and my sister from the theater This was done by friends who belonged to the council.

JL: The one who called your mother outside?

FB: Called my mother outside and my sister could escape. Little did we know that in two days she would be in jail for it. But there were good things done by the council. In the latest moment, one day the whole council was taken up and sent to deportation. And this was unbelievable, but it is as if --. Many people rejoiced in that. I didn't.

JL: Was that in June?

FB: No, much later. This was later than June. It was, I think, after D-Day when they closed Westerbork, the whole "crew" was taken out and sent to Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen. [pause in tape] During the court hearing of Blonk and the two other criminals and many war criminals, great imperfections were done and created by the council, expressed by our butchers, therefore, and traitors. Therefore I never believed it. I never wanted to believe it, because a great deal of my friends were connected with the Jewish Council and had survived and I loved them and I didn't want to judge them. I couldn't believe it.

I do not believe in a uniform guilt that you can bring upon people and say the whole council was rotten. I have lived and seen what Mr. Oberski did for me. I have always wondered if one day I would be in a position to be in the council — I didn't try very hard because I escaped hiding — if I would be strong enough to escape the temptation knowing that my life for a short while at least would be safe. How can I judge? I felt great compassion for everybody who had to choose between taking a part in the Jewish Council and going to Auschwitz or going to any camp. One had to be very strong to say, "I prefer the camp." Also the fact of belonging to the Jewish Council gave you a certain sense of superiority, prominence. You had to have common sense. You had to have a certain education. I felt I couldn't judge the whole council as such. It were human beings confronted with the situation where no human being should ever be confronted with. This is it. This is my feeling.

JL: Now the *Jewish Weekly*, the *Joodse Weekblad*. What role did that play?

FB: You could compare it with our *Jewish Chronicle* [in Milwaukee]. They were very outspoken, as far as they could be outspoken to a certain point. They informed us. Years as a child we only read articles [about] who was married, who got a baby, what was fashionable, where was a style show, what was social acceptable. This was the *Jewish Weekblad*. Later it started to give us information about what had to be done with our Jewish way of life, what was expected of our situation. And this was to be compared with the *Jewish Chronicle*. I know the printer, [sounds like: Johann Stall]. It was situated in the same street that I showed you that I was born in. I would like to bring out that the Jewish *viertel* or the Jewish neighborhood was in Amsterdam occupied by Jews by choice. Nobody told us to live there. We were born there and therefore it was our street. But we were free to leave and there were many non-Jewish people leaving there totally at ease and peace with the Jewish neighbors. That is what I wanted you to know. It was not a ghetto of any sort.

JL: What knowledge did you have of mixed marriages that were contracted to escape persecution, in some small measure, people who tried to save themselves by marrying non-Jews?

FB: I know of no marriage that was willingly performed to escape persecution. I knew many Dutch Jews that had intermarried long before the war started. One of them was the brother of my mother-in-law who lived in the same house where I experienced the night I expressed previously [when she escaped]. Most of the mixed marriages were relatively safe because of the fact that there were children involved. At least in the beginning they ordered horrible things, but like cattle, people would have it done unto their bodies. I was always amazed how I thought that I would fight or disappear, but the mixed marriages I know were of an age group, let's say, in the fifties. I then was a child in the twenties and had no desire to have children anymore. That particular person that I know of. So he had an operation performed and it meant nothing to him. I know very few mixed marriages. As I say, I know none that were performed for the reason of escaping.

JL: After the movements, the deportation to labor camps began, what kind of news did you get from the labor camps? Besides what came in the weekly newspaper.

FB: News came in from the labor camps by postcards that were talking about relatively unimportant things. Nobody could really figure out what happened because it always said the uniform things: "We are well," printed in big letters, and "Send packages. Love." Nothing more. In the beginning we even had postcards from people that were sent as far as Auschwitz. Occasionally a postcard would drop in. This created great hope among the Jews who were not caught yet, an eagerness to go rather than to hide. I thought it was done for that purpose, with no other purpose in mind.

JL: Now, was this hope that was created by the postcards, and what you told me before? In the quiet period before deportations, did life just go on functioning normally?

FB: You wouldn't believe it, what a capacity a human being has to just enjoy the now and try to forget whatever may come. Life went on as normal as possible in Holland. In between the *razzias*, there was the concern on how to survive, on how to get a *sperr*. The topic of conversation was that he or she was alone in the house because husbands and children were picked up and she found a place with another family to live, that she isn't alone. The need to not be alone by people was so great because after 8:00 we could not be out in the streets. We were confined. People tried to be together all the time. Yet you were forbidden to not be at your address. But they took the risk. Life went on as good as possible till there was another explosion. Also, I have to tell you that at times we were tipped off by the Jewish Council that there would be a *razzia*. I was, at least my family was. As I said, I had many people that I knew very well and they would come and tell us, "Be careful." But you couldn't be careful enough because wherever you would go was Jewish territory. You wouldn't want to burden your not-Jewish friends by coming to their house. How? Why? So there was no other place to turn to, to sit, hope, and pray it would not happen to you.

JL: The Dutch police -- what were your reactions to the Dutch police's handling of Jews?

FB: They had absolutely no power. As far as I know, the Dutch police was always very, very good. It made no difference if you have Jews or not-Jewish people to deal with. But there were no Dutch police inside whenever there was a *razzia*. They were totally powerless. It was also not the German soldiers who came in streets, what we had to deal with was strictly the *Grünepolizei*³⁶ and the SS. This was a different department. This was the group that worked with dogs. This was the group that already had other uniforms on. This was the elite who had volunteered to do that work and erase the Jews.

JL: Now, the Green Police consisted of Dutch people, also?

FB: No. The Green Police was helped by the Dutch, who never had the uniform from the Green Police. They had their own NSB³⁷ uniforms and would not expose themselves but at the last moment of a *razzia*. Now, it does not mean that therefore the Dutch police was absolutely flawless. In the police force, like in everybody, were people that were betrayers. They would sell out their colleagues for money, and they would sell out Jews for money. But I have to believe that the percentage was very low. I was saved by the Dutch police. Mr. Vingerhoed, who was a detective, belonged to the Warmoesstraat Police Station and was a powerful force in the underground. So I would trust my life and go to a Dutch policeman and tell him, "I'm a Jew. Please." But he could not help me. He was as powerless as any Dutch person that I would confront. They had absolutely no power. Also, difficult as it might seem to you, the German soldiers as such, were "innocent" in the whole handling of the Jews. I had a phone call from my husband who was for business in the city, Haarlem. I lived in Amsterdam. Now Haarlem is as I would go to Kenosha here. He was tipped off that Amsterdam station was unsafe. It would be in the evening that you could not even travel. But at that time some people did. He would go there for, from Kenosha instead, coming to Milwaukee, he would go to Green Bay. If I would please come to Green Bay to be with him. He had a *tante*,³⁸ an aunt there. I couldn't travel. I had my star. I

³⁶German for Green Police, the Nazi police force.

³⁷The Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, or National Socialist Movement, was a Dutch Nazi organization formed in 1931.

³⁸Dutch for 'aunt'.

said, "I cannot do that." "Please don't leave me alone." I took off my star. I said to my mother I had to do that. I went to the Dutch station, which was crowded with *Wehrmacht* people, soldiers. A piece of luggage, a small, well-dressed blonde. I felt totally safe. Even other Jews who would know me, but there were no Jews at that places. The soldier opened the door for me in the station. The soldier went into the *coupe*³⁹ part of the train that I had to travel in, and started to conversing with me.

JL: You must have been terrified.

FB: No. I played a role. How did he know that I was Jewish? I could converse with him. He conversed in German and I could speak German very well. I told him I would visit my aunt in Schveningen. He politely opened the door, helped me out with my luggage and I went my way and we said good-bye to each other. What would I do? What was there to do? Those people. He told me how much grief he had that he was sent to the front, that he would have liked staying with his wife in Germany. Now you can believe me that I could never, never even forgive till now, and this is a pain for me not to be able to ever forgive, but I cannot help it. Maybe people can forgive who write it in books. I cannot forgive. I had hoped to see the doom of Germany after the war. Maybe it sounds insane. So I did not do that because I like the German soldier. But at the time that I was talking to him I felt he, too, was a victim even though it was their choice to start the war.

JL: Now I'd like to talk a bit more about the hiding. Do you remember when it was that you finally decided to go into hiding?

FB: Oh, January 1943, in the wintertime.

JL: You started telling me before that you went and you left hints here and there that you were ready to go into hiding. What specifically did you do? To whom did you talk?

FB: No. We had to be home by eight. My luggage was ready, I told you. I had a very comfortable home in the Rijnstraat with my husband. My mother I said good night to after dinner, like I usually do, and went home with Israel. That evening, instead of us going out, my very good friends, Bergsma, in the

³⁹Dutch for 'compartment'.

Rijnstraat, had a library and a bookstore, a few, in the south side of Amsterdam. They were very, very well-to-do not-Jewish friends of mine, a little bit older than my husband and I were. They used to come up and just have tea with us and talk about current events and make us aware of what was going on outside of the Jewish realm of life. I enjoyed that. I cannot help that. Maybe it's hard to understand for you but it was very normal in a country where you were so highly assimilated. So Mrs. and Mr. Bergsma came that evening to have tea and cake and whatever there was available with us and had conversation mostly. As I was expressing the fear that one day I would wake up and see my mother's home empty, is like a disaster. Also the fear that it would be vice-versa and mother would run over and not see me any more. And our desire to find a room to eventually go into hiding. You were not enlightened. There was not a booklet would tell you how to go into hiding. It was something that you dream up alone and that you would not even dare to express to your closest friends.

JL: Was this after you and your husband had talked about suicide?

FB: Yes, after that. My husband did not want to go into hiding. He felt it was a cowardly way out, it was also very irresponsible to bring that very great burden upon other people, and he felt fear that we might not have enough money in order to have an undetermined time to live on our assets, which at the time might not even reach because it was divided among so many not-Jewish people. I said I would take that risk and live day by day. He said he wouldn't and I said, "Israel, only death is the answer because we had that surgery and how long can you work?" And I said, "If we have a year in hiding and we will then be caught, you will be stronger and be able to work." I believed that. So Mr. and Mrs. Bergsma looked at each other and they said to me— [tape breaks off]

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

TAPE 4, SIDE 2

FB: They [the Bergsmas] had a very nice home in a condition that my parents had in another store, not in the Rijnstraat, a little bit more towards the centrum of the city, where they could hide us for a short period of time. They also had two teenagers which knew about it. But the rest, her cleaning women, her personnel in the store, nobody ought to know. We were like two dead people, we didn't dare talk during the day. The facilities were not at all so that one had a reasonable chance of survival because we couldn't move.

JL: So who was in there, just you and your husband?

FB: Just Israel and I.

JL: And you took with you just those suitcases?

FB: Just what I could carry in my suitcase. Just a nightgown and nothing more. I asked her also to next day to tell my mother that I was okay. She didn't want my mother to know that I was with her but she went to my mother's home to tell her that we were not picked up by the Germans. That we were hiding and that we were all right.

JL: Not where you were?

FB: No. My mother cried as if I *was* picked up by the Germans but she saw there was no way out.

JL: So you just picked your things up and walked to that place?

FB: Walked out. Left my home with all my belongings. It meant *nothing* any more. Everything I possessed was in the room, [everything] we worked for, I left it like everybody else had to leave it for a concentration camp. I preferred my life to continue.

JL: So you just got up and walked to their store at night? Walked --

FB: Walked. Well, I think they drove a car. They had a car. And walked to their other store, because one store was on my block and the other store was closer to the centrum of the city. When we were in this home and lived with the people, like every human being and close friend, you do not know the imperfection. Mr. and Mrs. Bergsma had a problem in their marriage and they made us part of that.

They opened it for us, we saw it. And we were exposed to it. And I said to my husband and my husband said to me, "Uh unh. We cannot possibly do that upon them." And with all the kindness they had, in addition to it, I gave her all my pictures that I had. Before we left I had given her a great amount of money, a great amount of beautiful things that I had hoped to keep for later, now I asked her, "Would you know a way where you would not be taxed by us, or would you know anybody who would want to take us where we would not be such a total burden on you?"

JL: So, how long, then, were you with them?

FB: Maybe two, three weeks. In that time I did not get my period and I thought I was pregnant. I had to go out there. Now imagine how risky this is without that star, and walk to any doctor that was close by to find out if I was pregnant or not. It was the shock of the situation where I was in that allowed me not to menstruate anymore and since then I had not menstruated in the whole war period. But [Mrs. Bergsma] then told me that she had a cleaning woman that she knows would not betray us. But she also knew that her only motivation was material things. If we were willing to pay her, she would want to take us. And that was more in the city than where she lived. I thought anything better than being torn between Mr. and Mrs. Bergsma.

JL: So you were actually in the home? Were you in the store or in the home?

FB: In the home. Now this is — the store was connected with the home. Also, the upper was connected. The *Wohnung*,⁴⁰ the house where they lived was connected with the store. We were behind the store and also in their house. Because the steps, like Anne Frank, brought them to their living quarters, which were very, very nice. But I was afraid of the tension and my husband became very, very depressed and I became very tense when I did not menstruate any more. I heard my mother was down. I heard the situation where mother insisted on a meeting with me before anything would happen to her and I didn't see a chance for her, where I could meet her. That all made me very irritable, I wanted out, and we took the risk, we confronted her cleaning woman who took us to the

⁴⁰German for 'apartment'.

Valkenburgerstraat or⁴¹ Valkenierstraat, I do not even know the address — 23, the number, I know.

They gave us an attic room in a very poor neighborhood. And this attic room was divided in two parts.

If you've seen [the film] *It Happened One Night*, with the curtain in between the beds, that is how we had. Part of a room. Because in the other bed was another roomer sleeping.

JL: Who, another Jew?

FB: No, a gentile young man who was living out of town and worked in Amsterdam had rented rooms from her. He too was okay, and he knew that we were Jewish and he would get half of what we paid. We paid an enormous amount for that room. He had to keep silent. I was brought in that room and I shivered. We could not come down because she had maybe ten children, eight children.

JL: So nobody knew but she and ---

FB: Nobody knew — she and the man and her husband. Every Friday I gave her an enormous amount of money. It was disastrous. The bed was full of fleas, the house was filthy. It was absolutely unbelievable to sleep in our fear with another human being with a curtain in between. And I heard my husband moan, "Maybe concentration camp is better," and I said, "How can you say it? We have a corner and a window." Then I was Anne Frank, and I would say, "Look out of the window and look at the blue — " There was no way, he was totally depressed. One day, as I was just confined to that room, I heard noise, and I should not have gone out, and before I knew I faced a man with gray hair, very handsome, and I had a tremendous shock. Next to my attic room was the attic room of the neighbors on the top floor and that was the neighbor of the top floor who came into his attic room and therefore saw me on the attic.

JL: You mean there was a connection between the attics?

FB: Two doors came out on that attic and I was in front of the two doors. I was airing, I was trying to get some air from that room and I saw them accidentally. He right away felt it but didn't know it, did as if he didn't know that I was Jewish and I betrayed myself. He was not Jewish. He introduced himself,

⁴¹Dutch for or***.

and I said, "I'm Lainie Veenstra." He told me, "Oh, how nice. Are you . . . ?" I said, "Yes, we are just for a short time here." I didn't say anything and he said, "I bet you like a nice dinner." And I could not eat [the cleaning woman's] food. We were hungry and didn't have food. I said, "No, thank you very much." He said, "Pride doesn't count. Come on." I entered his home —

JL: You alone?

FB: With my husband. And I felt a sense of comfort. There were pretty things in the house, it was clean, and there were freesias — flowers, the Dutch flower — freesias in a vase. I never forget it. With the little beautiful doily under it and I felt part of being at home but I didn't want to say it. We ate like animals. It was served well, and we went up again. We thanked and I cried. I couldn't stop my tears.

JL: To the people?

FB: I cried. I cried. The man sensed. The next day [the man] came up and said — I saw his gun, I saw his belt, he was carrying that -- he said, "Listen, I feel that you're very unhappy here. I would like to help you both, but how can I?"

JL: Was that Vingerhoed?

FB: Yeah. "I would like you to come to my home, but I cannot take you away from the other family because it would create envy. Do you have enough financing to continue to pay the amount that you pay now for whole room, board, and everything?" We said yes. He said, "In my house you only have to pay and share what we eat and nothing more." I found heaven; this was heaven. I said, "Don't you have to discuss this with Mrs. Vingerhoed?" He said, "I have to tell you a sad story. My wife is dying. She has a brain tumor, and therefore she's very moody." I said, "Is she to be trusted?" He said, "Yes, totally. But there is nothing that can be done for her. My daughters live with me. You can come and be with us."

JL: And the whole family would know?

FB: Only the household would know. Nobody else. If there was anybody coming we had to go up to the attic again.

JL: So you were welcome?

FB: But during the day, if he would go to work in the morning I would get out of my bed. I had a place to go to. I would help her do the house. He did not request it; I did, volunteered. Did the cleaning and helped her with the cleaning. Did the laundry. I had never ironed. I had never ironed in my life, much to my dismay. I learned from her to iron and she had a very good help in me and her capacity to communicate was very limited. She did not grasp what was going on and little by little . . . He would cook in the morning. He made the most delicious goulash, and as I was there I saw more and more what he did. He would not come home evenings and I would read papers — because they had a paper — that people were killed. He would never say anything, he would not mention a word until that terrible night in April where he would tell me that we either had to be a week in the attic and eat the food of that terrible woman, that cleaning woman where we were, because he had to help other Jewish people go to Switzerland. And therefore he never wanted to expose one party to the other, it was too dangerous.

JL: So he had to bring other people into his home?

FB: He had to temporarily have other people in order for them to go to Switzerland. He explained to us. [Israel] then didn't like it. How could he like it? There was nothing likable about it. There is nothing likable in a situation where a man has to watch his — here, there was no work for him. He was so humiliated by being forced to stay indoors. The man who had a terrific job, the man who would go out and make a splendid life. We were doomed, we were destined to be in British India, and we were destined to retire between forty and fifty years as wealthy people. He had the job, the capacity and all of a sudden he came back to Holland and saw himself in a situation like that.

JL: Now tell me, just to set some dates straight, how long did you sleep in the cleaning woman's house, in the attic?

FB: Till D-Day.

JL: In the cleaning woman's house?

FB: Years, years. I went back to Vingerhoed after we were, after that April night that I related.

JL: Wait - you were in the cleaning woman's home first, years, and the Vingerhoed and then the cleaning woman and then back to Vingerhoed?

FB: No no no. I never left the bedroom. Remember, it was his condition that I would stay in the cleaning woman's bedroom and pay her what she had initially asked us to pay.

JL: So you continued sleeping up there but you were part of his household [during the day]?

FB: I was part of his household. And in addition, therefore had to pay the household money that was --

JL: And the cleaning woman, was she aware of your participating in their household?

FB: Oh yes, she welcomed it. Because her burden was totally erased. She had only the people in the attic, she had nothing to do with it.

JL: She did nothing for you except --

FB: Nothing. She give me that room in the attic and was given a fortune every week for that. Nothing she had to do. I stayed there until 1944, June 6, when much to my dismay, that day Mr. Vingerhoed did not come home to enjoy with me in what I had heard in the early morning hours at eight o'clock. I was in that closet a few times a day, whenever there was a Radio Orange. I was not interested what they [the newspapers] printed; I was in that closet. So at eight o'clock before I did start my duties in the house I was in the closet and then that morning I heard the great day had finally arrived, troops had set foot in Normandy and I — you have no idea what that meant to me. This was the coming home of my family. I thought, "Oh, he's [Vingerhoed] not home. I will share it with him when he comes home." I could not tell that to the woman [his wife]. It didn't dawn to her what happened there. She was a vegetable. She took medication and drugs. There were no operations available to her. And that afternoon he did not come home. He had tried to help a Jewish family go to a certain place and the Jews were betrayed. As they were betrayed, they turned around and told him, "Thank you," thinking that he was the one who had betrayed him. They caught him with the Jews and sent him to Neuengamme. Of course, we didn't know that day. He didn't come home, period. He was at one

Kommandantur. That same evening that she was told by her children, who were all working and very uninvolved. They were kind to me, but they thought the father was a fool to do all that work. But I always expected that certain work they did do, courier work, going on bicycles and doing the printing. She turned to me and she said, "I would like you to pack up your things and go." I said, "How can I go? I don't know where to go to." She said, "You Jews betrayed my husband." This was my home, this was my corner where I slept. Let me think, this was June 6. I think that I then went to a daughter for a little while who was married in the Blassiusstraat.

JL: Vingerhoed's daughter?

FB: Yeah. And there it was very hard for me. Then I went back and I recall for a little while in that room but with very great pain for fear that I would be detected by Mrs. Vingerhoed, because Mr. Vingerhoed was on that attic room alone where I heard also the *Dolle Dinsdag*,⁴² September, I have recollections. It was after D-Day and then my — she became totally insane, the woman, totally irrational and the daughters feared that something very frightening might happen to me. I had to leave. Then I met Tom Van Dryten, the [underground] organization helped me. Also Bob De Vries, the Jewish man.

JL: How did Blonk fit in, or didn't he come in yet?

FB: Blonk?

JL: Yes.

FB: Blonk fitted in when I was told — I came there in January. I was told in April to go, or stay at the attic for a week. The mood of my husband was terrible.

JL: This is April of what year?

FB: April 1943. I knew that my mother was taken and released from the theater. First my mother had requested — she knew that any day she would be picked up — a meeting with me at the house of her

⁴²Dutch for Crazy Tuesday, September 5, 1944, when Nazi collaborators in Holland fled toward Germany, where they believed they would be safe after the Allies retook Holland. The result was the virtual collapse of organized fascism in the Netherlands. (Hirschfeld, [Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration](#), p. 310)

sister, a very wealthy woman, whose business had [sounds like: voorwalter]. A *voorwalter* was a man who stepped in and said, "I'm the owner of that Jewish business." These were only the very wealthy people who had that. And that sister of hers lived in the Plantation. The Plantation, I told you, was a wealthy neighborhood, was close to where I was in hiding. And one day I walked from the Plantation without a star to my *tante's* home and met my mother and there I said good-bye to my mother. I knew I would not be able to help her.

JL: When was this?

FB: 1943, spring.

JL: After she had escaped from the theater?

FB: Before. Before. Mother did not escape. Mother stayed home. Mother stayed home and knew one night she would be picked up, but she wanted to see me once more. This was the first time after I was in hiding that I saw mother and the last time knowing this is the end. I will not see my mother anymore. I said good-bye to my mother and told her to have courage and that with God's will we might see each other again and walked away out of the house to my hiding spot. Where Blonk came in was when we were confronted with the choice to either stay at the attic or what I dreamed up: we go to the house of Israel's mother who was intermarried with a second husband and was hiding in her own house. Oh, it's unbelievable to comprehend it for a stranger. It's impossible what I tell you. So, I talked him into going to his mother who would bake crepe suzettes for him, who would make his delicious dinners, and have a vacation from the spot. Of course we were afraid of walking there. But life was a risk. Just breathing was risky. So we took off our David Stars. At dawn we walked together to that certain spot, what was maybe a fifteen-minutes walk, not longer. Trembling, but we arrived there. There I met my just escaped sister who told me about mother's destination and father's sickness and it was the next day -- I told you, that night I slept with Anneke, my sister -- and the following day she was followed by the Jewish man whom she trusted, and that evening Blonk came in the house of my mother-in-law who had that double closet.

JL: Before I turn the tape over, just tell me, now what date was this?

FB: April 19, 1943.

JL: So that means already in the beginning of 1943 you had gone to the attic and the Bergsma was done.

FB: I had nothing to do with Bergsma. Bergsma came in when I requested the gold and the jewels to divide with Ann. Remember?

JL: Wait a minute. Bergsma was at the beginning or later?

FB: In the beginning. They had the gold and many people had the gold and I wanted it there. So some of the girls requested for me to go. They had a certain code, what we all had, and the money came up. I didn't have all that money with me. It was in a variety of places and it all came neatly up and I all had it in the house of my mother-in-law. Excuse me. To divide it, I had my husband with me. Anneke was totally alone, unprepared to go into hiding, already resigned to the fact that she would go with Mother, and given that opportunity, spontaneously taking it without reservations. You don't think if you have a door opened when you are in prison. So here we were with all that gold, diamonds and jewelry, and cash. That was all given away, taken away. I wanted to share it with Anneke. Of course this was the whole reason for it to be there.

JL: I'd like to talk about Blonk now but I'm going to turn the tape over first.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

JL: I'd like to just set the situation into perspective. You told me earlier that Mr. Vingerhoed had to help some people get to Switzerland and had to keep them in his home for a while and you had to leave.

FB: Or stay in the attic.

JL: Or stay in the attic, and that's the point at which you went to your mother-in-law's.

FB: Correct.

JL: And that date was?

FB: That date was April 18, 1943.

JL: Good. Would you continue from when you went to your mother-in-law's?

FB: I went to my mother-in-law that night and saw my sister who had just escaped from the theater and she was telling me the horror that went on. She was told and given a chance with my mother to leave, which is an opportunity that people would have given and were willing to pay fortunes for. But this was the doing of having our friends in the Jewish Council. Now, Ann was very down. I was very down. However, we could manage to get the money there for Ann who had to pay for her identification papers, falsified by a Jewish man and therefore very, very safe, in her estimation. And in my judgment, okay. She had paid 600 florins. The money was there. Ann had to pick it up on that Wednesday. This was Tuesday night. We slept together, she gave me in detail the horror story of my mother who could not even enter the sickroom where my father was laying with many, many more sick people. However, she was determined to "take the same transport as my father." She was unaware that you could not take a transport or a train. You were put on a transport. Consequently, my father was turned with ambulances away and my mother was forced to take another transport to a total different part of Holland and a total different camp. Now, that morning Annie told me about her plans to go to the [?sounds like: hoie⁴³] in the evening. She would see the Jewish man and leave with

⁴³Here, Mrs. Bader refers to the same wooded area south of Amsterdam which she mentioned in Tape 3, Side 1, which is pronounced "hoy."

him, pay him the money. I said, "Ann, I'm not dividing the money yet. I would like you to come back here." And that became fatal to us. "I would like you to come here because I know from experience of hiding that you cannot learn the contents of your new identification paper in a minute. You have to sit down for an hour and study who was your fake father, who was your fake mother, where were you born. All of those things have to be done in peace. You are unsafe in a train where you do not know who you are. So come back. We divide whatever we have. I give you the means to live for a few years." That was not giving, this was our mother's money. I was not giving anything to her. It was my duty to protect her now. And she agreed to that and she said, "I will be picked up in the evening at eight, so I come home at four and I can study." As we were having dinner, and I rejoiced in the fact that my mother-in-law would make the exact dinner that her son would want, he did not eat, he was withdrawn, there was another cousin there in hiding. The familiarity of her own house made us all very relaxed. More relaxed than that we had been in ages. Seeing the face of my mother-in-law, whom I dearly loved, was a great, great escape for us. The anger of my husband that I had not slept with him the previous night had subsided because I told him, "Tonight I sleep with you again because Ann will leave at 8:00." We were always tense in a situation where you are in hiding and dealing with other people, in other people's homes. And variety of households were involved with my hiding. As we were relaxing with surrogate coffee or whatever coffee, and dessert, after dinner, in the living room, the door opened and three men stepped into the house. We were shocked. The houses in Holland were *étages*,⁴⁴ like condos here. We had the front door locked. My mother-in-law's brother, who was intermarried, lived on the second floor and we were amazed how that man came in. But apparently they had called and somebody had opened the door or somebody went to visit the upstairs neighbors and they had waited and went in. I had a feeling that my breath was taken away. They were creatures so horrible to look at. One had a face that you would see in a Hitchcock movie, and that was Blonk, but I did not know the man. I did not know if they were German or Dutch. As they were speaking, I

⁴⁴Dutch for 'apartment houses'.

heard they were Dutch and telling us — one was German — to get up, take our stars, and sew them on in order to leave and work for the Germans like every other Jew. I told him, "We are not Jewish. None of us is Jewish here." I could do that because I was light blonde, I had blue eyes and I was always sure. But he said, "I know, let me see your identification paper." We had all falsified papers that we had paid for.

FB: In the beginning of all the turmoil my mother[-in-law] was seated on the davenport. I saw her get up. She did not quarrel; she didn't say a word. She was prepared to do what she had always wanted to do if something would happen. Just around like you can see in my home, she would go in the kitchen, next to the kitchen was a big closet and in it was made, we had the same type closet where she would hide, as confusion started because my sister came forth and said, "Take me, I am the Jewish girl you are looking for." She felt she was betrayed at that time. There was no denying that we were Jewish. It was senseless. I started asking him, "Please let us go. Why do you have to take it? We are defenseless. We are of no value to the Germans because we cannot work." He said, "Why can't you work?" I said, "I have the feeling they don't let us work." He said, "You believe all that dirt that they talk about Germany." I said, "This is no dirt. Why do they take all the people if they let them work? Why do they take old?" He said, "I'm not going to study philosophy with you tonight. You get dressed. Go into your room and get dressed." I was in a robe with a zipper. I had to unzip, he went to my room, and as I was unzipping I saw the leather and the things. They were not visible; it was all in packaging. And I thought, "My goodness, this is all here." As Ann was crying and walking around and she was starting to sew the stars, I was called to the kitchen by my husband. He [Blonk] was following me. He started a conversation when Joe [actually, Israel] was having his cane. I said, "Please let my husband go." He said, "Does the leg bother you?" And my husband said, "No, the leg doesn't bother me. I just need it for now. I could work." See, we had that fantasy that we were sent to work in '43. Nobody knew that we would be killed. And after all, we were young people then. "I could work, but my wife is not strong.

She could not. She's very spoiled and she is not strong enough, she would be a handicap to me." And he said, "How old are you?" I said "Twenty-two." And he looked at me, he said, "What a pity." My husband said, "I have the capacity to make you a wealthy man if you let my wife go." I had no thought of it. He said, "I don't believe you." And he said, "I will give you everything I possess if you let my wife go." And he said, "She would have no place to escape. I have two other people. Where would she go?" And none of us told him because the mother was there. And my husband said, "Leave that up to her. Give her the permission." He said, "First she has to show herself in the front room where the other two were." I said, "No, no, no." And he said, "What was our promise?" And I also had in my mind, Vingerhoed would turn heaven for me. He will help because it happened all the time that people would escape from prison. They would liberate people with — I don't know how — with cars, with surprises. The funniest things happen. So I went into the room, the living quarters, saw my sister and the cousin of my mother-in-law and walked around when he, when Blonk did so, walked around, didn't even look at my husband, stepped in the closet. Didn't even look at my husband anymore. I saw him standing, watching me. My mother-in-law was in the first moment totally unaware that anybody would follow her. Said, "Hmm, hmm, hmm." And I knock, knock, but she opened and I came next to her. Of course we were not thinking straight and none of us was normal at those moments. The door was shut and I heard them say, "Es werde eine Juden hier. Es werde eine blonde Juden noch dar."⁴⁵ Ann knew about the closet. Next to the closet was the WC [lavatory]. Ann said, "I flushed her through the toilet." I heard that. I say, "They're going to look for me. They were running up and down and as they were not finding me they were very elated that they had a few more because they went out to catch one Jewish girl and they came home with three." So as they were walking down the steps the impact dawned that my husband was going, and Ann, and I had the eeriest feeling. "How could I have done that? Go in the closet?" I had forsaken him. Why didn't *he* go in the closet for that. Why didn't he say, "Save me?" I wasn't even aware of what I had done. The only thing that I

⁴⁵German for "There will be a Jewish woman here. There will still be a blonde, Jewish woman there."

could reason in my own feeling was the thought that I could move Mr. Vingerhoed to liberate. If anybody, I would. He did not have that contact with Israel that he had with me. I didn't know why I had that feeling. I had that feeling and that gave me a certain feeling, it's not final what is happening now. But my mother-in-law was torturous. Once they were out she was telling me she didn't want to come out of the closet. She had done her urine in the closet, everything. She let go of everything in her panic. She could not control anything and she was not an older woman. At that time she might have been in her late fifties. But she was absolutely without any sense at the moment, telling me, "My boy, my child is going away." But she too made no move to save that child. She was paralyzed. Her only thought was to come in that closet. How can we judge people? What do we know what we do when we are confronted with certain situations? Now, as she was refusing to get out, I didn't want to go out. We both stayed in the closet till we heard a knock on the closet a few hours later. "Come out, come out! Hurry, hurry, because they are going to *puls*⁴⁶ the house." Now *pulsing* the house is taking away all the furniture. Anybody who was taken out of a home, it was always followed with the same ceremony. A few hours later, everything of value was taken out already by the betrayers, and an hour later, then the furniture and the heavier things would follow. So we came out. We were both paralyzed, my mother in no condition to speak.

JL: Who was it who had gotten you out?

FB: Blonk! Blonk!

JL: He was the one who told to come out?

FB: Blonk. He said, "You have to leave right away." I said "Where to? Where? Where can — ?" I knew Mr. Vingerhoed had other people. "We have no place to go." My mother-in-law then added, "We have no money. We have no identification papers." And he said -- I said, "Do you know where we are?" I thought this was an angel coming, helping us. I said, "Do you know where we are?" He said, "Stop! I

⁴⁶A verb derived from the name of the Puls moving company, which confiscated for the Germans the possessions of Jews who had died, fled, or been rounded up.

do not want to know where you are. Don't tell me where you are. Just go." And I said, "I have no way of going. We cannot. I have nothing, not a penny. Not my identification papers." He returned the identification papers to us and he took one of the bags, dugged into it, and gave me some jewels back and said, "Save your life. I will be in touch with you, but save your life. Go where you came from before you came here and don't tell me." And he left. So my mother-in-law said, "I'm not leaving here. I stay in my house. It was always good to me. I'm not leaving here." I said, "We have to leave." She said, "I don't." So I went up to her brother and asked if she could stay there. He cried and told me that it was impossible since he was Jewish himself and it would be the first place where they would look for, knowing that two escaped.

JL: And her husband was gone, too, the second husband?

FB: Her husband was not in town at that moment. So as dawn approached — and it was dangerous to walk in the night but it is more dangerous during the day where everybody knows you in the neighborhood — I forced her violently to leave and she refused. Also a bay window -- I said, "Now listen. We cannot stay here. We will be doomed. They will come any moment." And she said, "We will be betrayed at the corner. There will be people waiting for us to bring us to the *Kommandatur*. They will not leave us alone. They know we have some jewels with us and some money. He gave me back some money. They will take us." "That risk," I said to her, "we have to take, because we are doomed here. They come here for the furniture." So she said, "Flory, you go first." This is a woman who I thought would give her life for her children. But I never held that against her. The panic and fear were so great that she stayed in the window looking for me to pass the corner. That is what I said to her, "I pass that corner and if I'm not picked up, you follow me. But you have to promise me: don't leave me out in the street waiting." She did not know where I would go. She had no idea where Vingerhoed was. She let me pass the corner, I passed that other corner, was a big intersection, and as she was seeing me in the street she followed me. As she followed me she became very sick, very sick, extremely sick.

But I had to push her. We came to the house of Vingerhoed crying. It is a miracle that nobody approached us.

JL: You walked all the way?

FB: Walked. I told Vingerhoed what had happened. I told him that the man had said he was Blonk. And he said, "You dream. That is not true. That cannot be true." I said, "Maybe I misunderstood him." "How does he look?" I told him how the man looked. This is the greatest war criminal. He would not leave anybody escape. I started crying because I was not believed. He did not believe me. He said, "Did you tell him?" How little did I dare to tell him that I almost had betrayed him? Then he said to my mother-in-law, "You're welcome to stay here, with Flory, with Lainie. However, I have certain rules. You can never call. You can never leave this house, never, never. You must obey by the orders. Only when there is a situation where I want you to leave you can go for a certain time at a spot that I know." And here I was, that same night, in bed with my mother-in-law who would talk about nothing else, how terrible that her son had to come back from a country where he was safe and now to be taken out. We were told without any trace of a doubt there was no way of getting him out of jail. No way could he risk the underground for a mission for two Jewish people, or three Jewish people. The ones that were taken out of jail were people that were prominent and essential for the survival of the Jewish underground, but not just Jews. [whispers:] I was destroyed. Then my mother-in-law tried to reach her husband and that became fatal because we told her we found out that her husband was in the street. She thought to be clever and go with detours. One day he came and said to her, "I have to tell you something." It was one week or two weeks later. My mother-in-law had a daughter, who also was in hiding who she could not reach — that made her [the mother-in-law] almost insane. The man she had remarried — she had a love-hate relationship with. She couldn't be without, and he was not allowed to visit her, and she was not allowed to get out. So he [Vingerhoed] said, "You're free to leave if you feel too restricted here. I cannot have you — I must have peace to work with; I cannot have the fear that you will go out and come back when I am not home. Lainie, you can choose." And my

mother-in-law said, "I go where my sisters are, and I will try to find my daughter. My husband will bring me there." And I never liked the husband. And [Vingerhoed] told me, "You choose." And I was afraid for the dislike that I had towards the husband and for her irrationality, and I chose to stay with the Vingerhoeds. So after two weeks of great pain my mother-in-law left me.

JL: Just two weeks?

FB: Just two weeks, maybe two-and-a-half weeks. And I stayed alone in the bed behind the curtain. I didn't have my husband to console me, I didn't have my mother-in-law, and everybody was gone.

JL: So this was where you stayed over a year then?

FB: There I stayed over a year.

JL: Let me ask you a bit about the circumstances in the hiding place. The food -- You continued getting the food from the Vingerhoeds?

FB: From the Vingerhoeds. I would eat with them at the table from their ration books. They were extremely generous. It also helped for him, I always felt, as a detective and being part of the underground, there were ways and facilities where they could generate more food on the table. It was extremely kind, it was extremely generous. It was as if I belonged. Sure, my pain was my own; there were days during Christmas and holidays there was company, and I had to stay in my room. There was no bathroom; there was a variety of vases that I used, and there were ways that I — no radio, no human contact, just that man, boy, that came in the evening and would leave the following day. A poor [person] to talk to — I would never have conversation, just "Goodnight, Lainie." "Goodnight." And that curtain would be there. It was beyond any imagination.

JL: What did you do during the day besides cleaning? Did you spend the whole day in household chores with her [Mrs. Vingerhoed]?

FB: We would usually work till eleven and we would follow the Dutch habit of having coffee together. I would try to make conversation with her, but that was not always successful. I would hear mostly the snide remarks about the Jews and that she could not understand how her husband would help any of

them. And the rest of the day was spent in — I have created the most beautiful tablecloth in that time, that my mother had given me once, if you see it, you wouldn't believe it. I made it, it's unbelievable, I have it packed for Florida. Did needlework, did what I had, I finished it. And then finally, I started my diary that I destroyed later. And also it helped that in the evening the girls would come home, the daughters, who worked, and Mr. Vingerhoed would come home, who was a man who would bring me into all the conversation. The girls were not stupid at all, were very intelligent, and it helped. And the days became weeks, and you wake up every morning, find that all of your dreams of sleeping away are not fulfilled because you're young and healthy. And also the radio, the motivation to listen to the radio, and what would happen now kept me going.

JL: That was a specific job that Vingerhoed gave you to do?

FB: Yes. After I came back he had that closet installed in the same fashion for me.

JL: Was that in the attic or in the house?

FB: No, that was in the house, because we had the radio, which was already reason to be executed, just having the radio. But he had the radio in that closet, it was in his bedroom, where I would go, three times a day. I avoided later going during the day, because he felt she [Mrs. Vingerhoed] was not stable enough to stand me being in the closet, and he was afraid that she would run out of the house while I was in the closet. I made him the promise that I would go at eight, when he was still at home, and at ten in the evening, when he could control the motions that his wife made. That was a very, very hard time.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

JL: So you were actually working for the underground?

FB: Well, I was no hero. I never did willingly work, and say, "Here I am. Take me for the underground." It was never discussed. My fear was so big of not remembering who I was that I had terrible dreams. Not only of that what has happened, but I was sure that one day somebody would run up into my attic room and ask me "How?" and "Who are you?" and "What are you doing here?" That became nightmares. I thought what a courage it took for the people to have all the weaponry in their house to volunteer for that. Not only Jews were picked up from the street, but Gentile young men that they needed to work in Germany were also picked up as if they were flowers. They took the right to pick up the Dutch youth, Jew or Gentile. So I was with myself in constant fight. What obligation do I have? Can I be here and be a guest and not help when I know that they endanger their life for me? Don't I have a moral duty to give myself to this work that is meant to hurt the Germans who are our murderers? So I said, "Is there something that I can do?" Mr. Vingerhoed then said, "We don't want you out of the house. You can only do that if it brings in your life a ray of hope and it helps us greatly." So I had the codes. Later I would bring the codes to a certain place in Amsterdam, to a printer. I would also go to a house — Eduard Verman, which was a very prominent Dutch writer, was the brain of the whole underground. But this is how I slowly became involved. Never did anybody tell me to accept things that happened. I only sensed it. Until I came in contact with Tom van Druyten.

JL: When did that happen?

FB: With Tom I came in contact after I was told to leave, reluctantly. First still staying in that attic room, and then knowing that I couldn't survive. It was after that invasion of Arnhem, where the troops were defeated, after Mr. Vingerhoed was in Neuengamme, and his chances of survival were very, very slim. I felt an outcast. The woman [Mrs. Vingerhoed] didn't want me in her house, how could I stay there? I was afraid, too. And the children thought it would be the best for me to leave, and I did. And then I

contacted the house of Tom Van Druyten and his wife, Sietske, who were from Fries⁴⁷ descent, Gentile people who lived originally in the northern part of Holland which is the part where there are many, many lakes and where many, many Dutch people were hiding Jewish people. Most of the Fries people were very, very much against the dictatorship and the tyranny of the Germans.

JL: You just walked to his house?

FB: Like everything. You risked and walked and then you had always a code to introduce yourself. I was told by one of the daughters that I would use a certain word when I would enter the home and that code made you familiar when you had to enter strange territory. Over the years your appearance changed, you became more down, you became sicker, your financial sources dried up, you became unsure. Only one thing was sure, the end was closer. So I walked to Tom's house. I said the word. I was welcomed in a mess, in a mess you have no idea. And I thought by two idiots. Sietske was light blonde, Tom was black[-haired]. But very, very good people. A potato was a big dinner. There was no food, yet Tom would bring food. Tom was always in an overall with a zipper. He was on the go and he would come.

FB: Two days later, I would read and hear that in the Amstel Hotel — where the Amstel, which is a river in the city, had the boats of the Germans with foods to deliver in the Amstel Hotel which was occupied by Germans. We would know that they would have killed the guards and that the boats were robbed for the Dutch population. The food would not be shipped to the Germans, but would be distributed among the Dutch, because food then became an issue. I heard that two days later. I heard that, and two days later Tom would tell me that he had done that. I did not believe him. I did never believe him. I thought he's just a naughty boy trying to impress me because I figured, after so many years with the Vingerhoeds, where I never heard a word of what he had done, if he had done it he would not have told me. Later, after his death, I knew he had done it all.

⁴⁷Dutch for 'Frisian', referring to Friesland in Northern Holland.

They were exercising, they were recruiting, the house was full of weapons, and he was gone always. He killed so many Germans it was unbelievable. I was also introduced there to a man who gave me my ration papers because I had papers that were not falsified. I had papers that were set in the district and the city hall of Amsterdam. This particular group had for the people who worked for them, not false papers with the false pictures: my parents lived, my name, my own finger[print] —

JL: Helene?

FB: Helene Veenstra was my name. I have the identification. I can show it to David [Mandel, project photographer] if he comes here next week. So there came a time where we had so much need of food that I had to stand in line to get my ration when I was at Tom's because we simply hungered. Now more people came there from the underground. There were nights, and he said, "Lainie we have to go. We cannot stay home."

JL: Because they knew they would be —

FB: They were afraid for that certain night. I would walk the streets and hide in a little corner where there was all stone — before you would enter the steps, I don't know how you would call that in English, it's typical Dutch in the old houses — and dream that that was not true. Then the next morning they would find me and take me home again. I thought it doesn't matter anymore. I became so that it really did not matter anymore if I would survive or not and therefore you risk far more things than when it does matter. Then, in the last month, we had one very unique thing happening. They would restrict one big square in Amsterdam and planes would come from Norway to drop food. Bread was thrown out of planes and butter packages in plastic. Each Hollander received half a loaf of bread and half a package of butter. And that would create such a party. I remember sitting around a table and eating that and feeling as if this was a gift of God. This was a gift of the Red Cross to the Dutch population of Amsterdam. Now a unique thing happened. Most of the people that I came in contact with had big swollen legs, [sounds like: euding], or the teeth fell out. Nails became weaker. Because people were hungry. I thought of my mother all the time. Nothing happened to me. I kept my normal shape. I did

not become sick. Nothing fell out but my hair. I had big bald parts and I was wearing a cloth. This was so badly that I was almost ashamed to look in the mirror. And one day I again stepped out to consult the doctor — it was toward the end of the war — just as I had done when my period stopped. I told him that I have no hair. "My hair is falling out and I had beautiful hair." And he said, "These are the risks that come with war. After the war you will get your hair back." I didn't mind even that I risked my life for my hair. I went back and as we were continuing hearing about what happened, about the Russians coming closer to Berlin — because Tom had a radio too, all those people had not given up their radios. One day Tom came up -- We had no coal. We had no food. We were black — we had no soap. What we ate were tulip bulbs that we popped at times when we had the heat on maybe an hour in the evening, just a few little coals. We would have the tulip bulbs there and we would eat them, we would divide them as if this was a gift of God. I would go to bed with a cookbook and study all the recipes. This was a marvel to look at [inaudible] and dream of them. I had no time to think of my people. I finally came to a level where I thought maybe I have it as bad as the concentration camps. And yet when I could enter a bed I still thought, "I have it much better, I'm sure, than they have it."

JL: But this went on for a year-and-a-half?

FB: No, no, this went not for a year-and-a-half because in May 1945 —

JL: Right, it was September, so just a half a year.

FB: In May 1945 we were liberated. It was the evening that we were around that little stove, Sietske and I. Sietske and her husband fought like cat and mouse. Tom came from a lovely family and had volunteered for that work. His father and mother wanted to have nothing to do with him, therefore, he was constantly without money. They had had a quarrel. I was withdrawn in myself, hungry, miserable, thinking if it was all worthwhile. Tom came up and said, "Lainie, the war is over." I said, "No, Tom." He said, "Believe me. The war is over. Hitler just killed himself." I said, "I don't believe it." And he said, "It's over. It's all over now." His beautiful face was glowing, he had black hair, he kissed Sietske and danced with her. I said, "Can we go out in the street?" He said, "No, no, no, not yet. Tomorrow we

have to disarm a bunch of crooks. After that it is officially declared that we are free. But stay in the house. It's very dangerous. There are very many things that are happening at the last minute. Please don't go out, we have survived that long." It was the last of my reserves, I had no place to go to. Just thinking that it would be over was such a delight that I didn't need food. I said, "Tom be careful, I see you tomorrow." He would leave early in the morning. As he left and Sietske and I and, we were all a few other women that had men in the underground, were waiting around. Tom didn't show up and then we had the news that Tom was disarming a whole truck of Germans who "volunteered" to give their guns to the underground who helped. The last one to come out of the truck directed his gun towards Tom and killed him on the spot, instantly. If I show you the pictures you wouldn't believe it. I have all the pictures. Tom was revenged. The man was shot in a hundred pieces by Tom's friends. As Tom was brought home, I have never felt a grief like that. I felt grief, a different kind of grief. It was so ironic, it was so ill-timed. I didn't think that any play that would have been written by any writer could ever reflect that what we felt. That on the day when the flags went out, when the flowers went in the streets, we got Tom home, dead. That idiot who stole food, that had killed German soldiers for a potato, and had risked everything to just get food on the table for us, was killed the day of our liberation. I couldn't see him. I was forced to look at him and I couldn't look at him. We walked — there was no way of transportation, there was no gas in Holland, there were no cars — we walked from Amsterdam to the place where his funeral was, when I had to confront his parents, who almost collapsed. But the funeral -- There was a stone dedicated in Amsterdam, right on the place that he was shot. Whenever I visit Holland, I bring flowers there. And this was the end of Tom. Sietske left for her parents in Friesland. I never saw her again.

JL: When you were in that house with Tom, you were helping out in whatever way you could?

FB: It was such a dirt that there was no way of helping out.

JL: No, I mean helping with the underground.

FB: Oh, yes. No, there was not much I could do. It was violent, not at all the organized underground of Mr. Vingerhoed. This was a violent young section of that underground who did recruiting, who did the spontaneous hard work of fighting. I couldn't possibly work for them. I didn't have the heart, the strength, the motivation, the bicycles, the anything. In this house I met Bob De Vries, who became a brilliant actor in Holland after the war. A Jewish boy who volunteered. Instead of going to Germany, he went into hiding and worked as a freedom fighter. He would go into Westerbork, take Dutch Jews out, pretending that he was not Jewish. He had a good identification paper. Like I, he was young, handsome, and did the most crazy things and survived. Bob would bring me my ration papers there and would start conversing with me. And with Bob I had a very, very nice feeling of being at home. He was a very, very nice man from Dutch Jewish old-fashioned family. After the war, when I just became involved with Josef, Bob had been at the house where I was residing, and had asked for me. I then paid a visit back and Bob asked me to marry him. But I had just told Josef that we would be married together. And I loved Bob just as much. He did so much. He became one of the most brilliant actors in Holland, to all of a sudden die of a heart attack. He received the most honorable award from the queen in Holland. The most honorable distinction a human being can achieve for his work in the underground.

JL: When did he die?

FB: He died in the '50s I believe, at a very young age. Now, prove that this has to do with anything of the war. Prove it. So this is it.

JL: I'm very intrigued with the code activity. You told me earlier that the code activity that you did was specifically related to what you got off the radio?

FB: Only what I got off the radio. They would exactly ask me. I would then tell him. Mr. Vingerhoed was closed as a book. He would not even write it down. He would keep it in his head.

JL: You didn't know what the things meant?

FB: Never. I was never told what it meant. If I would express some worry about certain movements by the German, or measurements, Mr. Vingerhoed would indicate, "That is not possible. Wait, then you will see it will not happen. It will be made impossible." That indication I had that he had any part in what would happen in Amsterdam. But he never would betray the organization or do anything next to having weapons and next to bringing the people to Switzerland. My desire to leave Holland and go to Switzerland I expressed, and he would think it too dangerous for me to do that. It were mostly Jewish families and as a family he would help them get the first train to find another train who eventually would go.

JL: As opposed to Tom, who was in sort of a guerrilla movement, Mr. Vingerhoed was in the official Dutch resistance movement?

FB: No. The writer, Eduard Veteman, was the head. But Mr. Vingerhoed was more composed, being a person in his fifties. He was shrewd, intelligent, less demonstrative about the things he did.

JL: But he was a member of the Dutch resistance?

FB: Oh yes, definitely, definitely. A good member.

JL: Of the official Dutch resistance?

FB: Yes, this is why he never, never — I don't know if this is the reason, but he never survived Neuengamme. He was killed there. He never came back. Tom was more the hero, the young impulsive person who would go out, do it, keep his mouth for two, three days, and then was so overwhelmed by what he had done, and he was so eager to please me and see me smile, that he would tell me the most unbelievable stories. And then weeks later I would believe it because it was true. At times he would say, "I go out and I will take a few tonight. I will kill a few tonight." I said, "Tom, aren't you afraid that it would cost you your life? Don't tell me." He said, "So what? So what? We live only once." He was a daring person, he was a figure bigger than life. He was so convinced the only way to come out of this war was by resisting them, by not sitting back and waiting there for it to take over, that he would do almost anything. If there would have been a whole family of Jewish people

outdoors the moment I was there, not for a moment would he think, "I have no room. I cannot do it."

He did the impossible.

JL: So you mean he took in people constantly?

FB: No, there were no Jewish people in Amsterdam then that tried to hide anymore. See? The Jewish people in Amsterdam at the hunger winter in 1944 were not there. Most of them were betrayed like my family. Most of them had already died unknowingly to me in concentration camps, or did not survive, or were in Friesland, where in the country was more food than there was in the city.

JL: I see. What kind of accommodations did you have there?

FB: Oh, very, very poor. I was in a bed in the living quarters and sometimes somebody else needed this blanket, or Sietske would sew and make alterations. I would have to sleep under all the junk that was on the bed and I had no facilities there. But how could I complain if he was willing to give his life and risk his life for me?

JL: And you said that you had to leave when he knew that something would be happening?

FB: Might happen. That happened a few nights. He would hate to do that for me. If I would be in such a situation, I could be sure that before the dawn he would be in that little stoop. It was like the stoop where steps go up, before dawn would come. I would be so cold and so hungry. He would come there in his zippered uniform-type overall and take me and put me under his coat, bring me home, make me ersatz coffee and feed me as if I was his baby. Then Sietske would come and rub me and do all the things to comfort me. [sobs]

JL: How old were they?

FB: Young, young, my age. A little bit older than I was, and I was only twenty-two. Young, beautiful people. Beautiful people. [sobs] Maybe he was twenty-seven and Sietske about twenty-five. I never saw Sietske [sounds like: baack]. He told me strange things about Sietske. They had an odd marriage and I never wanted to hear anything, but the problem is that if you are confined to people's home and live with them day and night, you know more than you want to know.

JL: Were there any times were he was not able to get all of you out? Were there any Nazi searches ever?

FB: Not there. I never had any confrontations with Nazis in his house. This was the most dangerous place to be in and I never had it where it was likely to happen.

JL: And at the Vingerhoed's?

FB: At the Vingerhoed's once. On a Sunday afternoon they raided street, house to house to look for Jews. They invaded the privacy of his home, came in the bedroom. When I was tipped off that they were in the street I entered the closet. I heard "Juden verstecken sich manchmal,"⁴⁸ saw the light of the flashlight, stayed in there quietly. I was not even alarmed.

JL: We're going to have to start the next [tape].

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2

⁴⁸German for 'Jews sometimes hide'.

TAPE 6, SIDE 1

JL: Two further questions about being in hiding. Where did you get the papers saying you were Helene Veenstra?

FB: From the organization, from Mr. Vingerhoed, who felt it was not safe to just have an identification without a "J" and then still when it would go through the testing, it was visible right away that it was a faulty identification. I had the one that was safe. Nobody could see that this was a false identification.

JL: As Helene?

FB: As Helene Veenstra.

JL: And before that what did you have?

FB: I cannot remember which one I had, but I had a not so safe one. I was another person. Now, I could pick out a name myself and they built around Helene Veenstra a father, a mother, and they were all in the papers in the city hall. It was all legitimate. If I would be arrested in the streets and had the courage to insist that my father was — I don't know the names anymore — so and so, they would find out. They would have to let me go.

JL: So Helena Veenstra was a real person?

FB: A real person.

JL: Do you know what had happened to her?

FB: No. It was my imagination Helena Veenstra. I thought it was a beautiful name. Veenstra was Fries, and Helene — Lainie — I thought was okay.

JL: You said there were papers in city hall. Did they put the papers in city hall?

FB: They placed them in. They worked there. It was the underground. It was city hall, in the dossiers, in the registers of the city of Amsterdam were people working for the underground. This is how widened, this whole organization was. But, of course, with it came the very terrifying things. Discussions like, "That and that one is picked off the streets. He did not confess. He was tortured." Then also that we

would hear of executions in the dunes of Santpoort, the very same city where we would go every year with my parents. Executions took place. Many people of the organization were killed forever.

JL: By the Germans?

FB: Silenced, by the Germans, and always the fear that they had given information, had leaked out for the other members. But everybody had a white capsule so their life would be terminated if they would be tortured.

JL: And you didn't carry that yourself?

FB: I did not carry that.

JL: [The other papers you had](#) - You talked about two sets of papers, the ones before and the ones for Helene Veenstra. And that's it?

FB: And that's it.

JL: And the ones before, where did you get those from?

FB: I had papers made with my husband. That was also from a certain underground organization that was sent to me out of nowhere. We paid a great amount of money for it. When I showed them to Mr. Vingerhoed, he [said], "Uh uh." He did so. But for the time being, since I did not go out in the streets, it was okay. However, after I lost Josef [Israel], and for my own well-being, and for the satisfaction of him [Vingerhoed] to know that I was part of this. He was smart enough to know that that gave me a certain satisfaction even though I was very afraid of the weapons. He wanted me to be safe and he gave me the papers. And then the question came, Why don't you make that so that I could go to Switzerland and away from here? He promised me then that as long as he would live he would look after me and I will not ever have to be afraid that anything would happen.

JL: One more thing. You mentioned to me that you visited some underground members. Could you describe that?

FB: I was never told these are underground members. I became at times in such a state of depression that I would be quiet. I could not eat. I had a deep feeling of total isolation, total isolation. I couldn't

express it. It would manifest in days of crying, and I would not come down. I would stay in my bed. My food would be placed in front of the room but they would find it, like dog. I had not eaten it. I could not consume food. And I was bit by fleas there because it was very, very dirty. And yet they did not want me to leave that room, or to give it up, because they were afraid that that cleaning woman would eventually talk if I would tell her that I could not stay there anymore. They wanted her to carry, share, part of the responsibility. In case something would happen, she would be guilty. Making her feel guilty kept her silent. So one day when I was absolutely on the edge of giving up, the daughter came and said, "Lainie, we go out tonight. We meet some people. You will love it." Little did I know that it would be the underground organization. They never took me out. Never anybody I knew, it was not family, and she said, "It's very interesting. It's a group of people that you would love meeting." I wasn't told. Toni took me out, through the Amstel, which is a beautiful river in Amsterdam. We walked, and just walking there and breathing fresh air in the evening was so pacifying to me. [pause in tape] I was asking my mother, walking by the Amstel so often in my life, "Mother how beautiful this is. The boats, the picturesque houses, the lanterns. It's impossible to believe. But how do I know that it's more beautiful than any other city." And my mother would say, "Travel and you'll see." I was thinking that night of my mother, because I had not traveled, I was not out of Holland at that time, and I could see that I lived in a beautiful city. It was only a short walk to the Keizersstraat. This is all an interwoven net of water in Holland. And as I was walking up the stoop, the stone steps towards the very, very old building, I was greeted by Katie Veterman, the wife of Eduard Veterman, whom I was to meet later that evening. Little did I know that those people were united in the same experience. It was just any party where there were some refreshments, very simple, but people were so pleasant to each other, kind. Yet I detected some significant Dutch patriotic marks that were not allowed in our houses: the Dutch flag, and Orange symbol [of the Dutch monarchy], very, very delicately hidden in a touch, in a picture, and I felt at home. Of course I felt at home. I was seated in a corner. More than participating in the conversation, I followed the conversations that other people had with each other. And I knew then that

it signified more than just simple visit. Many people disappeared for a little while and came back to see other people disappear for a while and returning to the room. Later in the evening Eduard Veterman joined us. But of course these were all different names because Veterman was a Jew also. He had a total different name. I do not remember the name. This was lovely. It gave a warm feeling in me. It was also frightening because I thought what a courage it takes. What if a soldier would walk in? As I was walking back, Toni said to me, "Flory, this is nothing. We all live by the grace of God, so why should it be dangerous? Why should they walk in a house like that?" And I was lifted. My spirits were lifted. I never saw them again. I was never taken to the house again. I was asked to do certain things for a printer on the [sounds like: Ruysdaelkade] in Amsterdam, which I did later in the war, once more.

JL: Were you taking messages to him?

FB: Taking messages because there was nobody available at the time, or it would be dangerous for certain people to go out there. They had to be extremely careful. I felt I couldn't refuse. At times I felt very afraid. But living was frightening. The sheer fact that you were alive was a threat to you, so I didn't think long. I had to do this. Even though I was no hero doing it. If I had not ended up in this household, I would have never been in the underground. I would have never volunteered. My whole being is not that of a hero. I did it because I felt if the Gentile people would risk their lives for me, how could I as a Jew not cooperate in their struggle to liberate Holland? It was a simple "must" for me to do so. That is why I did it.

JL: Before we leave Holland and talk about circumstances surrounding liberation, I'd like to put in here the question about Iz and Annie and the treatment they had in the camp, that you wanted to mention to me.

FB: As I said, this terrible frightening night that happened in April 19, 1943, was ended with the knowledge that Ann and Israel were placed in a prison that as long as I remember was a place where the hardest criminals would go on the Weteringshans in Amsterdam. I received word through the

Jewish Council where I had some relations and through somebody who'd be able to find me there, that Ann was placed in the woman's section and Israel was placed in the male section with hard-core criminals. I had a moving letter from Anneke which I still have telling me how deeply worried and guilt-ridden she was that she was the source of my husband being caught. She felt a tremendous guilt. She knew how we loved each other and my agony was, that I could not tell her that she was not guilty. I could not comfort Ann. She had absolutely no guilt. How could I tell her? I couldn't send her letters. The punishment came when I was aware that they were not within my reach anymore, that no letter of mine could comfort them. At the night of the May 18 to May 19, a big transportation left for Westerbork, and in it was my sister and my husband, separated from each other in the train. They both had sent me letters on toilet paper. Ann again telling me, "Oh, my dearest Flory, I know I'm sick and I know my destination, but what has to become of you?" She pitying me. And one letter from Israel telling me, "Please say good night to me every night of your life. I will do the same. This is the only way we can communicate and be strong so we can see each other again." And as those letters reached me, I was already aware, because friends of mine were in Westerbork, that they were placed in the barracks that were kept to punish people who tried to escape, behind bars, not being able to go out, not being able to receive decent food because nobody, no package, would reach them. That drove me to sheer despair. At the same time my mother sent me a letter from Feuft, the south side of Holland, that she ended up as head of the kitchen there, had never seen my father after he left the Dutch [sounds like: svalberik] in Amsterdam. My father had somebody else write a letter in which he explained and wondered why mother had left him after so many years devotion. He could not understand, his mind could not. So as I had that recollection on that sunny May day, that our whole family was absolutely shattered over all Holland and nobody had the comfort of being with anybody, my brother someplace in Germany, I saw the absolute folly of it all. And I thought there was no hope for any of us to ever see each other anymore, because it dawned to me how vicious the system worked, where people planning to stay together had absolutely no power over the destination of

another human being. And my only thought was, "Well, it's spring, maybe by *Yontef* in September we'll be together." Of course this was not true. But it was the hardest moment of my life knowing that we were all separated. The anger that any race had a power to do that to another person.

JL: At this moment, I'd like to move away from that. We have talked a bit about the arrival of the Allies, now I'd like to talk a bit about the circumstances surrounding your liberation, where you went, the fate of your home and your possessions, and the reaction of your neighbors.

FB: As the liberation came, we were confronted with the death of Tom, which paralyzed us. The joy of being liberated was totally diminished. I saw no use in having survived. If I had lost a part of my family, I could not have been paralyzed more. But then, after Tom was gone and Sietske wanted to go to her parents, I lingered on somehow a little bit longer in this house that was on a crossroads. Another street would be straight parallel, as if you would walk here from this street and see Morris [Boulevard], this house there. I was in this house. So one day, as I was awaking and looking for something to eat, I saw my mother-in-law walking towards my home. As my heart bounced up and we embraced each other, she very emotional because her son and daughter — what I did not know, her daughter was also betrayed and caught — she had no children left. She gave me the story of her husband who had actually found another human being that he liked better during her time of her hiding. She was totally alone and she found me. I don't know who was happier. We had found each other. She made me promise that I would be a child to her and I promised her. I was glad since I had lost everything. We both had nothing. All our means were gone. I had no idea that I could claim later all the things that belonged to my parents. The initial feeling was to go to her home, the home where everything had happened.

JL: Was it still in May [1945]?

FB: It was May, it was towards the end of May, maybe May 20. As I was preparing to do that and pack my few belongings and just leave that home, two beautiful men, two cousins of mine, approached the house in the same fashion. I do not know who told them I was there. I think relations from my mother-

in-law might have indicated. They both came to me and I was absolutely — surprised, is no word. I was — elated. One of them suggested that I would live with them because he was married to a not-Jewish wife and was safe. It didn't work out. The woman thought she had a very nice baby-sitter when I moved in to a very fashionable home.

JL: You tried it for a while?

FB: Also on the south side of Holland [Amsterdam]. I tried it for a while. She had just had a boy and I could not be confined to the house anymore. It was over for me. I could not baby-sit. I was not capable of giving anything from myself. I was so changed that I was incapable of sitting in this house in the evening. I wanted to walk on the streets. I wanted to meet people that I had not seen. I wanted - - Elsje came, all of a sudden in Amsterdam, and had survived with her husband and her mother. And I became, for the first time in my life, extremely envious of mothers. When I saw Elsje with her mother I was not aware that I had the capacity to be so envious. I felt a deep grief and need for my mother. But they were so kind and good to me. Whenever I was asked to baby-sit again I rebelled and I asked my cousin if I could move out because it was impossible for me to serve. I had no capacity to serve after the war. I had given so much of myself, and I had tried to survive in so many ways where I would serve the people that I was in hiding in order to please them, that I could not please anybody anymore. I wanted to just look for my husband and find somebody back. Then there came a time of running after tramps because I recognized my husband. I would walk in Amsterdam, see a tramp, and I knew I had seen Iz. I would run two blocks, three blocks. The tramp would disappear. I would ask where the station was, where a friend would go to. Great despair. I would go to the hospital where the people arrived from concentration camps and I would meet there a cousin of my husband who had survived for many years. As I told him and asked him about Israel, he told me straight, "Flory, don't make yourself any illusions. He will not survive. He had a weak knee. Even if he got rid of his cane, he would not have [survived]." He was tall, handsome, strong, but with a knee injury there was no way of surviving. Then they also found out that certain transportation, at a certain time, went to a

direction that was detectable. So they found that Anneke and Israel landed in Sobibor⁴⁹, and this was a no-no. I never wanted to know more about Sobibor. Every book I have in my hands about Sobibor, I don't want to read. I want to live with the illusion that they were killed instantly. I don't want to know, and this is very cowardly. I cannot know. [sobbing] They have no way. I can only read that they suffered more. This was also the case with my mother's fate. From Feuft, they sent the people straight to Sobibor, I heard. My mother had no way of surviving or working or serving. They came there and they went into the gas, hopefully. I don't even know. As much as I have heard about Auschwitz, and as much as I studied that concentration camp, because I later married a man having been there, I never wanted to know about Sobibor, and I want to believe that they were killed instantly. That was the only peace I could give myself. Can you understand that? [sobbing] So, as I saw those people there weighing eighty, ninety pounds — some still in uniforms of the camps because they had no clothing and there were no clothing available in Holland, which was extremely poor — my mother-in-law and I, who had already departed from the home of my cousin, because I could not baby-sit, everything was against, revolting. I had that terrible feeling of finding no peace. When I was with my mother-in-law, I wanted to be in the streets to see if somebody came back. If I was in the streets, I wanted to be with my mother-in-law out of fear that somebody would arrive there and I would not be there. It was a terrible fear. I wanted *rache*,⁵⁰ I wanted a revenge. Yet, if there was at a corner a person whose head was bald because she slept with German people, I didn't want to see it. I had also in me the feeling that I had the duty to report our arrest of April 19. I felt by then my people would not return. I'm the only one who can tell the world what was done to them. So I went to the police, and not to just one station, I went to the police headquarters in Amsterdam and tried to tell my story. They looked at me and they said, "We cannot just take your story. You need to come in with a person who is willing to testify and you have to allow us to typewrite that. You have to sign it and spend an afternoon." We did

⁴⁹ [Nazi extermination camp in the Lublin region of Poland where ca. 250,000 Jews were gassed in 1942-1943.](#)

⁵⁰German for 'revenge'.

not have the cassettes like that then. And I said, "Yes, I come." I think I took Elsie, I don't remember. I took a very dear friend of mine, spent the afternoon there, and told them of the fact of the night. Little did I know that later in my life I needed it. I told them that my husband, my daughter [sister] was arrested. I told them about the Jewish man who had betrayed them, but then out of the blue sky somebody told me that he was killed in the streets of Amsterdam. So that satisfaction I had.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1

TAPE 6, SIDE 2

FB: Marie, my mother-in-law, who always wanted to be called Marie by me, was a very young woman, a beautiful woman. She told me, "This is no good. We have to find ways that we can find roots. I'm going to make Friday night serving like we used to have them, and we are going to start from scratch." How do we start? I find no peace. I cannot sleep. She could sleep better than I could even though she had lost her children, but she was much older. She resigned to the fact that it was the way it was. She found her sisters back. Some of them came out of hiding, and that was a great satisfaction to her. I could find no — I became very ill. I did not sleep. I had nights of terrible dreams and days of being exhausted. I didn't know where to look, where to go. I found that my things were not returned to me. Partially. And then I was told that that was all I had given them. I was not welcomed by the people anymore because I thought it was not all. I knew it was not all.

JL: Had they taken your home where you and your parents lived?

FB: I went back of course to the Rijnstraat [sobs] and as I was approaching the house of my parents [crying] -- There was the poultry store, and as I looked at the peacock who was the trademark of my father's stores — was a triangle with a peacock with his tail down that was so gracious and beautiful in delft blue — I remember my parents discussing if they would allow that new store to have that same thing that was in the Jodenbreestraat, even though it was so tremendously expensive to have that installed in a wall. They did it. It was the trademark of my father's stores. And when I was watching that that was still in the wall, and the modern equipment, and anything, and everything, I became extremely sick. I tried to talk. I couldn't talk and I run away. It was no way of getting anything back. You were an outsider. I went to the Bureau of Huisvesting⁵¹ in Holland and asked for my home, 201 [Rijnstraat]. The furniture was gone. People had rented the house from the company that had those buildings. They looked at me as if I was crazy. "What do you want? I cannot help that you came back. So, find a home." It was devastating. It was just unbelievable.

⁵¹Dutch for 'lodging' or 'housing'.

Neighbors would say, "Oh Flory, I have that spoon." I would like to show you the spoon if it wasn't involved with so much emotion now. My mother had silver [sounds like: cruchettes],⁵² you know how we all had those things. I would go in the street and visit people and nobody would show up with it. I could not know which one had what. We were so trusting. And then, on the other hand, if I think of the hunger winter, where bread was identical with a whole cruchette of silver, could I really blame anybody? So I was heartbroken, sick, and decided not to ever enter the Rijnstraat any more. I didn't for years. It was in 1966 that I came back. 1966 was the first time that I could normally look at the shop of my parents. I was asked in and in it was a man who had worked by my father and had learned the trade from my father. I was received like a queen. I was offered a seat in the house that was the place of my mother, near the fireplace. I was offered coffee and couldn't drink the coffee. I saw the house, it was still beautiful. I saw the yard, it was perfect. I saw the room and my heart turned. That year I was hospitalized in Holland. I had to undergo certain surgery in Amsterdam. After my surgery a flower piece was sent into the room by the people that I had visited and in it was a card. It said, "To the most gracious daughter of a man we deeply loved. You will always be welcome in our home." Because he had worked for my father and had only known me as a very, very young child. And this was a flower piece. I was asked if it could leave my room because it was too big to be placed into my little private room that I had in that hospital in Holland. People were overwhelmed by the fact that one daughter of Salomon Melkman still was alive, because since 1945 till 1966 I could not enter the Rijnstraat. It was too much pain. I couldn't face it. Also the injustice of not having back, or given back, anything that belonged to us. There was no way. [sobs]

JL: Before you left Holland -- you had nobody in the U.S., before you left Holland?

FB: Nobody.

JL: Was there any contact with people who might have gotten out?

⁵²French for 'a small pitcher'.

FB: I will tell you what happened in Amsterdam where I met in this hospital Josef. As my mother-in-law decided that we should resume life, and when I became aware of our Jewish tradition where you turn to life, and then I realized for the first time in my life — even though I did not allow myself to enter the temple, I couldn't — that our Jewish philosophy of life it's not only our religion. I then turned to the philosophy of our religion that says: turn to life. You had it.

FB: We started inviting the people in the hospital to our home on Friday night, and my mother-in-law and I, even though the food was extremely expensive, gave up all the food during the week in order to make Shabbat in our home. We would ask the young people who were sole survivors and had no home but a dreary hospital place, to come to our house. And as we did that, we invited Auschwitz in our home. We had food and stories that were so terrifying, that were so horrid, that our wildest dreams and imagination could never have met that what we encountered. But, it was a great need in us to know more and more and more and more. We could not stop at one o'clock in the night. We went until four. We would take the last piece of cheese that was in the house and eat it and offer it. Then we would ask people to stay on the davenport or in the chairs, to just be with a mother that Marie was and with somebody who needed them as much as they needed me because I had stayed in Holland. I had hair and they had no hair. They had just short cut things. They had no clothes. And some of the clothes of my husband came back. So I decided with Marie to give my clothes to the people that came back, and I picked the people who spoke least. Now I with my big mouth always was attracted to the people who could not discuss it because I felt they had suffered most. And among them was Josef. He was as tall as my husband and I asked him if he would please accept a warm sweater and suits that we didn't [need]. He was very proud. He did not want that. Marie, in her motherly way, could talk him into accepting it. This is how we started an acquaintance. He would not be able to talk for years about it.

JL: How long did you know Josef before you got married?

FB: I did not know Josef at all. I knew that he had lost his wife and child in the gas chamber, that he had volunteered to follow her to Auschwitz, which in my estimation was "foolish," with my young mind and our determination to try to survive. However who am I to judge? The need for me to leave my mother-in-law's home came when she made up with her second husband who had left the girlfriend and came home. I couldn't live under those circumstances because I never I liked the man. There was nothing to go home to. Where did I go? As rebellious as I was, I found a policeman willing to give me a list of traitors, Dutch traitors that are very prominent. Among them was a person from the government, Paul Kiës, living in the Johannes Vermeerstraat 48. This was a home with a library, with maybe five, six bedrooms, three bathrooms, a basement, everything that you might want. But I didn't want much, I wanted a place to sleep. And when everything failed and I couldn't get anything back, the police told me that particular man, there is nothing that anybody can do when you enter this house. This house is confiscated, the man is in a concentration camp because he will be punished by the law, this home is his but open. And there were millions — thousands, not millions — I wish there were millions. But there were hundreds of people without any roof over their heads.

FB: So I said, "George, I need a few men to help me move into this house." He said, "Are you crazy, Flory?" I said, "No, I'm not crazy. But if I wait till somebody brings me home, I can sleep in the streets, and I've had years of sleeping in the streets. I don't want it anymore." So one night George came and with him came Josef and with him came Mr. [sounds like: Pfeffer], another one who had survived Auschwitz, and we all broke into this home. Now, this is against all Dutch law and normality what I tell you now —

JL: But wasn't it the law?

FB: — and I would not approve of it now, but were the terrible conditions that made me do it. As we were in the home, we saw the library, we saw the terrible writings against the Jews, so that made my determination to stay in that home even bigger. We contacted the [sounds like: knots fare 1840], that were the owners of that particular project, and offered to pay the rent. They did not want to have

anything to do with me and told me that they would never accept any payment from us because we did not rent their home. It was Mr. Kiës who was the renter. But Mr. Kiës was a war criminal.

JL: Was that in essence approval for you to take the home over?

FB: I took the home over, yes.

JL: Did you then interpret that as approval?

FB: As approval? No, I didn't need anybody's approval. I was capable of talking. It was Dutch, it was my language, and I felt a great injustice was done to us. There were no facilities that would harbor us. We had no rooms. We had no survivors. I was alone. Where would I go? I had no money.

JL: Wasn't there any organization?

FB: There was an organization with very little funds and I was very proud. I did not accept any clothing or money from any organization. I was the daughter of Salomon Melkman. We gave. We did not receive ever in life. We were not -- It's terrible if you are brought up that way. And I found, I used my own judgment, which, of course, might be incorrect by today's standards. It's still done in Holland, that people go into homes and I do not approve of that at all. At that time it was not done. It was highly unusual. And certainly the moment came -- The sisters of my mother-in-law who came back were allowed by me to come in that home and start taking up their trade. They were excellent seamstresses. Mrs. Katie Veterman came to us and had dresses made to be received in court by the sisters of my mother-in-law. The parachute silk or nylon was the material that she had her evening gowns from. There was no material. Can you imagine what a world it was? And also the men who were sick of being in the hospital volunteered. Who ever wanted to come in could get a room, there were so many bedrooms. So Josef said, "I would like to live here. So do the [sounds like: Tankes]." I said, "Take that room at the end of the hallway and come in." George didn't want a room because he found his mother back in [sounds like: Screening]. I took another room at the other end of the hall and the Tankes lived there. Now, the police came. We lived there, and this was not lawful. I said, "Can you give me a definition of law? What was lawful, that my parents are being killed? Get me my home back

in the Rijnstraat and I will in a minute empty this house." We always ended up with coffee and agreeing with each other. And everybody that came to the house was very well received but left with the knowledge that that was the place for us to stay. We stayed there for years and there was not a lawyer or a law who was capable of getting us out of there. We accumulated rent in an account that was not received. [sounds like: 1840] wanted to have nothing to do with us. We placed an article in the Dutch papers. That was my idea because I wanted the Dutch population to know what was happening, that I'm not a person who would take a home.

JL: An article explaining your presence?

FB: Yes. Josef took me on his bicycle, there was no cars, and I would jump on the bicycle and I would explain to journalists what had happened. That I was not a criminal, that I was eager to have the belongings of my parents' back and would be very willing to leave instantly if we had a place. Here were two women that had lost their children and their husbands, incapable of making a living and therefore a burden to society, now they had a place to work from, etc. We were allowed to stay in there. But, meanwhile, from all the bicycling and talking to each other, Josef opened up to me and asked me to marry him.

JL: Was he much older than you?

FB: He was eight years older than I was, but he was very, very marked by the death, mostly of his mother, whose Bible he found one night after he had given up to stand on the *Rampa*.⁵³ You must have heard the *Rampa*. He was at the *Rampa* every night. That particular night he was not, and there came a transport from Holland. His mother was in it. And the next day he found her Bible with the name Henriette de Leeuw, Henriette Rory de Leeuw. He picked up the Bible and knew that his mother had come in the gas and he was then capable of selecting or taking a person out. He was then helping in the *Kanada*.⁵⁴ You must have heard about that. After having been years there, he had a certain

⁵³The railway platform at Birkenau where new arrivals in the Auschwitz complex disembarked.

⁵⁴The warehouse in which belongings confiscated from prisoners were held.

seniority. How do you call that, in the concentration camp, seniority? So, this was his great cross that he had to bear after he had lost his wife and child. Know[ing] that he could have saved his mother. So at that moment in my life I decided to try to get married with Josef. At that time my mother-in-law and her husband disagreed at certain points, and she was very eager to have me back in her home. I told her I would only come back with Josef, and she was very, very delighted that I had finally given up the idea of her son coming back. She welcomed me with my future husband into her home. We lived together in another home that we acquired later which was gorgeous.

JL: All three of you?

FB: All three of us, till the moment I went to America.

JL: When did you get married to Josef?

FB: 1946. I had two marriages, one by a rabbi and one by the state. I had problems because Dutch law did not acknowledge the death of most of the people that died in concentration camps for various reasons, be it insurance, be it restitution. It was a horrible time. A most alarming situation after the war. No peace. When I expected my baby in '47, I became violently ill. I had eclampsia and I had dreams that this child was Israel's child. It was terrible. At that time, there was a possibility by claiming estates or allowing lawyers to claim for you. I didn't read papers. I didn't do anything that was normal. I only wanted to be left alone and the doctor ordered — I had a specialist for me to be two months by myself in my bedroom because I had eclampsia. I blew up like a balloon and I was in a great terror to lose my child. I personally never wanted children after what I had seen happen, but Josef was very eager to have a child and therefore I tried to have that baby. I wanted a sister. I wanted Anneke back. And I was devoted just to one cause, to get a healthy baby. I was two months by myself. I was three days in labor and when I had my child it was an Anneke again.

JL: When was she born?

FB: November 12, 1947.

JL: What business was your husband in, in Holland?

FB: Josef? Josef had a hard time getting adjusted in Holland. I was Dutch. As I said, in Holland, more than before, even after the war, with many foreign people coming back to Holland who originally were not even Dutch, but being allowed, you had to have permits for almost anything. His father was German; therefore, he became stateless. That meant a stateless passport, you did not belong to anything. He resented that enormously. Of course all my friends that came back were extremely successful right away in the choice of their original profession, be it professional people, having had businesses. My Israel had a business of his own in yard goods, so had his father. So right away I was given two permits, as the only survivor. So was my mother-in-law given a permit because she also had a business like that. By having so, we started to have -- since there was no room at our attic -- we moved from the house where we had that initial place. This was no place for us anymore. But there were no places to be had. It was a transaction where you would exchange one home for the other and then pay a great deal of money in order to get it. It was a beautiful house with a few floors available. We decided I should take one floor and she would take the other floor with Josef. As she swayed from husband and not husband in that awful marriage — for a while she had her husband, Bruno, with her upstairs — I married Josef, had my baby there. At the attic there was plenty of space to have a merchandise. Our customers came and it was a terrific business. We were already situated before anybody could make anything in Holland.

JL: Was this [inaudible] sewing?

FB: That were materials. This were woolens, silks, anything. Now I had never dealt, or done anything in my life. My mother-in-law was the businesswoman. What she did was letting me assist her in the bookkeeping and teaching me how to judge materials. I would talk to customers and enjoy it. The whole world opened for me. Being able also to install a home to my own liking was marvelous after the war. Seeing the building up. However --I will show you the pictures of my home in Holland. However — Josef did not like that at all because Holland didn't allow him to do the things he wanted to do. He

wanted to start an apron factory. That he was familiar with but he did not get any permit to do so. It was very hard for anybody who was not Dutch to make a living in Holland.

JL: Eventually did he get into something?

FB: Eventually he had heartaches. He would start something and through the mere fact that he was a survivor, he was not having good judgment in doing business. And when that became apparent to him we had a hard time communicating for a while. And this was also the reason that I thought when he uttered a word, when we married, before anything happened, he told me that he would never raise a child close to Russia. He had seen Russia. He was liberated in Stettin⁵⁵ and was afraid that this danger would eventually be the start of the third war. And, therefore, raising a child would be as far away from Russia as possible. Would I marry him and be willing to go to either Israel or the United States? I said, "For me to go to Israel is hardly possible. I'm so used to the facilities of life that are available to me. Let's go to the United States when the child is six." There was no need for me to go to the United States. I had all my friends back, the few that survived. I had my mother-in-law who lived then with her husband there and it was a "good way of life." The capacity to go to beautiful ballet, all the things that my mother taught me in art, in literature, even though my capacity to read wasn't totally healed. It was at my fingertips, it was a cultured country, Holland. Why should I leave? So when the baby was born no way would I leave. I had made that statement that I would follow him but forgotten about it.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2

⁵⁵A Pomeranian town currently in Poland and known as Stettin in German and Szczecin in Polish. It was the site of Soviet port facilities in 1945.

TAPE 7, SIDE 1

FB: The [sounds like: Maarten Jansz Kosterstraat] in Amsterdam. It was a lovely home. I would like to just show you pictures from it. My mother-in-law living upstairs. At that time, in disarray with her husband again, decided to take the two sisters in that originally were in that house of 40 years. After years and years and years the aunt alone didn't want to stay there. The young people had gone their way and found each other. Another couple that I know came there and found each other there. She decided that on her floor she would take her sisters in. It was okay with me. I had a kitchen installed in my floor, which wasn't there. My friend that I just discussed was a niece from my mother-in-law (the mothers were sisters) had also returned from Auschwitz. She met a friend of mine who had lost his wife and decided to set up housekeeping together, became very close friend of mine. He right away had a terrific job in Amsterdam as a buyer for the Héma, which is a considerable -- how do you say -- conglomerate. It was a unbelievable opportunity for the man. But they were sure also that, having survived Auschwitz, they didn't want to stay in Europe. We four, on Sunday afternoons would come together. She had her son at the same time that I had my daughter. We decided to go together to America. I had made that statement to Joe that I would leave with him, but year after year I tried to postpone it. But when Anneke was six, and we had already omitted the two first chances to go, you could only then have a third chance and then you had to start asking for your papers all over again. We were tested as if we would go to the moon as astronauts — our health, our mental capacity, our financial capacity, our sponsors, our child's capacity to — you have no idea.

JL: Why did you choose the United States as opposed to Israel?

FB: I wanted to be with my friend that I felt like a sister to, and they wanted to be with me because she had lost her sister and brother in a concentration camp just like I had. And Joe agreed to that because we loved each other. They [the friends] backed out at the last minute. He was given a promotion, at the Hema, and the insecurity of America — and they read up on America. And the impression that Amsterdam had of New York — America was judged by the city of New York. It was terrible. People

would kill each other in the street and step over the bodies. The fantasies that were in Europe were not very favorable for America right after the war. Unless you were in great desperation, one did not leave your country for America. And the great desperation wasn't there in '54 in Holland anymore. Can you understand that? There are not many Jewish Dutch people here, are there? Why should they have to leave? So Josef said, "Flory," — in '53 — "you have to decide." I said, "Go for a year and I come with Anneke," and he told me, "God had taken a child from me, I cannot leave you and Anneke alone. You have made a promise." I had to abide. I had made a promise. I went with him, filled out papers. [Her friend] backed out. I felt an icy fear in me and I knew what I had in Holland. I had lovable friends, I had my mother-in-law upstairs but I also had a very unhappy husband at times. I did not know if that was Auschwitz, I did not know if that was envy because the Dutch people were all making and doing very well and he felt restricted. The time came, March 5, 1954, that we left Holland with Anneke.

JL: How did you leave?

FB: By boat.

JL: From?

FB: From Amsterdam. I remember having had a black suit with pearls, and I was told — I have two pictures — I looked very elegant. [laughs] When the ship reached the canal, which is between Dover and Dunkirken, which is the roughest part of any sea you can fare, I was laying on deck with the pearls in my own misery, never dreaming that it would be I leaving Europe after having survived for nine years after the war and taking that kind of step — starting all over again. However, Josef had a friend here, Elfriede [Evelyn] Heineman, who left right after the war. She, too, was of German descent and had lost everything and did not want to stay in Europe because she could not live with facing that what she had to face and instilled in us the beauty that America had to offer, the opportunity of coming to Milwaukee where she lived and she would like us to live at the east side. She explained

Milwaukee to us. It would be identical in physical layout as Holland and I would get used to it. She was a great deal of help to us when we came here.

JL: I assume that you financed your trip yourself?

FB: Partially, maybe, yes. I always had the fear of not being able to return back to Holland. We always had the funds separated. It was a solemn oath that I had to have the door open -- if I would not be able to succeed here that we could start over again in Holland.

JL: Which ship did you travel on?

FB: The *Veendam* or *Rijndam*. I don't know if it was the *Veendam* or *Rijndam*. Was from the Dutch-American Line.

JL: Was it a cruise ship?

FB: Oh, yes. It was a smaller cruise ship than the *Rotterdam*. It was a cruise ship that was absolutely in bad shape because we had the bad storms of March. I remember having been ill the whole trip with Anneke and my husband.

JL: How long did the trip take?

FB: Seven days at that time. We arrived in New York. A Dutch friend of mine was there to pick us up from New York and asked us to stay two weeks as her guest in New York.

JL: What did you think of New York?

FB: This is a city, I thought of New York then, as a blessing to be out, again. I liked St. Moritz Hotel. I liked everything that reminded me of Europe. But New York as such was frightening to me, very frightening. It was funny because we have St. Nicholas, and it has a "Black Peter." A first opinion of my Anneke I heard when we were in the subway, and she looked at me and said, in front of a black person, "This is a country where there are a lot of Black Peters." Black Peter is the valet of St. Nicholas. She openly expressed that. We had not informed her and I thought it was so cute. Also we arrived on March 17, St. Patrick's Day. I never had heard of St. Patrick's Day. When I saw the green flowers, the beautiful carnations transformed into green, I thought, "This is an odd country. Who would deform a flower?"

The boo-boos I made — going into a flower shop trying to buy a whole bouquet of roses for a dollar-and-a-half. Because I saw the price tag, \$1.50. And in Holland the flowers are a gift you can buy. And I went in and asked that bouquet of roses. Okay, it was fifteen or twenty dollars. A bouquet of roses. And I thought it was \$1.50. I didn't know how to run out of the flower shop. All the crazy things you do when you are in a different country.

JL: What were your impressions upon seeing the Statue of Liberty?

FB: Moving. I was deeply moved by the fact that so many people had passed this before me. I was very moved by the whole thing.

JL: Now you stayed in New York for two weeks knowing that you were heading toward Wisconsin?

FB: Yes.

JL: How did you get to Wisconsin — by train, by plane?

FB: By train. We took the train in New York. We traveled through Philadelphia. We arrived at Union Station in Chicago where my friend Evy Heineman picked us up. We had lunch at that great restaurant there and I ordered the salmon salad. I thought I was in Europe. They looked at me and said, "What do you mean?" I was, for the first time in my life, introduced to tuna. And Evelyn helped us to come to Milwaukee, and in Milwaukee I was graciously received by a lady who stationed us in the hotel here where we spent one week.

JL: Do you remember the hotel?

FB: Yes, it was here. I don't know the name. It was a very, very small hotel close to the university, where we had a dinette and where I —

JL: A resident hotel?

FB: Yeah — where I helped and there I was stunned about my own feelings. I couldn't eat for a week. I was thrown into a world that I had imagined to be different. It was strange, it was alien, the way of the houses were different. My English, that I was thinking to have mastered completely, was not up to par at all. My husband's English that he had taken by private lessons in the evenings a few times a week

was totally inadequate, and we two were determined to make a good living here. Also the fact that Joe became violently sick the first week and had to be brought to Mt. Sinai Hospital gave me great fears and pains. It was all nerves and for a week I did not eat. Josef did the wash for me, Josef encouraged me and all of a sudden I felt, if I do not make up my mind to make a go out of it, I will hinder my husband. And I didn't want to not make a go out of it because my friends had told me, "You will come back within a year," and I didn't want to give anybody that satisfaction, that I would come back within a year. I didn't want charity. Neither did Joe. So he started at Goldmann's, the first job he could find.

JL: Furniture store?

FB: Goldmann's is a department store on the south side. What he earned at that time was eighty-five cents an hour as a stock boy, at [age] forty-four. In nine months he was offered a job as manager. However, he was not paid according to what he thought he would need. At that time I became, as I told you, determined to not stay in the house, and went to Gimbels to work. At that time, while working in Gimbels, and while being acquainted with my buyer, who was a marvelous person — Miss Hart. We took a great liking to each other. She had traveled in Europe and could understand me very well. There was an enormous friendship between us. She made me aware that the first branch store would be opened in Gimbels Southgate. I tipped off Josef. We were invited that Sunday, and that same day, he applied to be a manager in Gimbels and they hired him right away. So my working had some merit: we would not have known. Josef became a manager from the department.

JL: That was the furniture department?

FB: No. That was the drapery. And as he was managing the drapery and starting to make a good living, better living, he saw that joining furniture department and TV department was very lucrative, and he applied for that. However, they had only an opening as a salesman, but in those years it would mean a raise of \$3,000 a year. He then "demoted" himself and became a furniture salesman and television salesman with a \$3,000 more paycheck a year. And at that time he suggested that I would leave

Gimbels and that we would buy the home and we could make it, make a go of this life. We bought this home, because we rented very conveniently on Stowell Avenue.

JL: You were on Stowell Avenue after you had been at that hotel?

FB: Yes -- No, we were at four or five different addresses. I was first in a black neighborhood because I became convinced that all the hatred here was the fault of the white people. Why should we not live with the black people together? So I moved into a black neighborhood because I liked the landlady, who was a Russian Jewish woman that was very kind to me.

JL: Let me just ask you this, what was the name of the woman who installed you at the hotel?

FB: I could not remember.

JL: So, English -- How long did it take you finally to get to the point of speaking English so well?

FB: I don't think I speak it well. My choice of words is very limited, but by having a lot of American friends, by reading all the papers, by trying and trying very hard and not speaking Dutch, it became my second language. Or I tried to make it my first language.

JL: At this time, in the workplace, did you experience any anti-Semitism in the workplace?

FB: Never. In Gimbels, never. I had very lovely conditions to work in. I was very familiar with everybody. I had a very considerate buyer. The woman who was my supervisor still calls me, and I haven't been in Gimbels in ages. It was a marvelous time. I had a beautiful write-up in the paper when I came there — in the *Gimbel Light*. I was complimented on my capacity to sell, I was having raise after raise after raise. I was the only woman who did not need to take — to quit the job for summer vacations. I could take any vacation I wanted, three, four months, and not lose my priorities. I could do all that. I gave my child the number one position in my life. I told the buyer, "I cannot stay and will not stay after 4:00." At times, she will become -- if the department was very busy, she said, "Would you please stay?" I would say "No, I have Anneke coming home. I cannot." Later, I invited her to the wedding, and at my home, and she saw Anneke. She said, "It was worthwhile, the no that you gave me. At the time I wouldn't understand it. It is worthwhile." She gave me that compliment.

When my Josef died, I was determined to go back to Holland, but Ann didn't want to. This buyer, who had bought up the Schwartz Bookshop in Wisconsin Avenue, which is quite an institution here, offered me a position as her partner in that store. That is how she considered me.

JL: But you couldn't accept that?

FB: I didn't want to accept it. I wanted no commitment here anymore. I wanted to leave for Europe. In '67, after the riots of '68, when Joe had gone.

JL: When did he die?

FB: He became sick in '66 and he died in '67. At that time Ann was engaged -- not engaged, but dating. I could not go at the hospital at times because of the riots. The hospital was in Columbia Hospital. Police would bring me there because we were not allowed on the streets. After the death of Kennedy, and the killing of his brother, and [Martin] Luther King, this country frightened me to death and I wanted out. I was afraid. I had also promised Josef when he was dying. He asked me to please go back to Europe because he did not feel that I would prosper or could help myself here very well. Isn't that strange? Isn't that strange? He thought that being with my friends would be more comfort to me than being here. I promised him. However, Ann — how could I go to Europe without Ann? I made a trip, and Ann didn't like Europe because she was in love. This is how it was. When Ann started to apply for a job in Gimbels and was trained — because we had to have her help me going through college after Joe had passed away — she was told that the best saleswoman they had in stationery was a Dutch woman who could not fully handle the English language. But the willingness and her eagerness to make it sell, make her sell more merchandise than anybody else.

JL: That was you?

FB: That was I. She came to the hospital and showed me the material that she was given. After so many years away from Gimbels I was mentioned as one of the top salespeople. Josef was the top salesperson in all the Gimbels stores. This was not such a unique thing but it was an accomplishment, in my book.

JL: In the beginning, who were your friends?

FB: Here?

JL: Besides Evelyn.

FB: Dr. and Mrs. Drucker, of Dutch origin. He was working for a chemical firm here but they left. Hannie and Lex Drucker. Mr. and Mrs. Metzger, also of Dutch origin that I met. She lost her husband and now lives in California. I have still contact with her. I had a couple from Utrecht also.

JL: They were also Jewish?

FB: Yes, all Jewish people.

JL: You mentioned the buyer who was so nice to you. What other special acts of kindness can you remember when you first came?

FB: The tremendous eagerness of the American people to overlook your dialect and overlook your accent and just accept you for the way you are. The tremendous kindness bestowed upon Ann, trying to help us. Joe did not know if he was told to bring up a tie or a pencil. He would just go down to the basement in ninety-degree August weather to get up something and show his eagerness to please. That was enough. And as time progressed, and we would help each other in the evening with the errors he would make, because I could master it much better having had my school training, he made so much progress because he was an avid reader. He was a very intelligent man. And within nine months, we were on a level where the average American would be after all the schooling, training and everything that was required to "make a living." We could live without my job very easily. We could manage very well. I then decided that a trip to Holland for me was not a luxury, occasionally. It was a necessity for me. I had to see my country back at intervals. Josef agreed with that and my first trip to Holland was in '59. I took Anneke along. We went on the *Rotterdam*, the liner who made a maiden trip with the Queen Juliana's daughter, Beatrix, who is now queen in Holland, aboard. The separation of classes was totally removed on her trip, and we were allowed to walk the ships, everybody. It was just

one big ball and a tremendous experience for Ann. So little by little we totally assimilated in American society.

JL: Let me just again ask you about the beginning, the schooling you had for Anneke.

FB: Ann went for the first grade here in Hartford [Avenue School]. No, she was first in Maryland [Avenue] School when we lived on Prospect Avenue. She started out at Hartford when we moved to Stowell [Avenue] after intervals at the various times moving and trying. Whenever I was installed in a home, and had a very decent nice Dutch cleaned, we had a race and we had to move forward. So we decided to buy a home after having lived six-and-a-half years with very, very decent friends here that had a duplex here on 3015 North Stowell, next to Temple Emanu-El. I befriended then Rabbi [Dudley] Weinberg and this was a beautiful relationship. His secretary, being the mother of Ann's best friend, became my best friend and still is — Connie Schwartz. So we were quite happy here until Joe's and my determination that Ann should attend high school in a way that we would like her to have peace and not be bothered by the tremendous pressure that was on the children at the time at Riverside High. We decided to buy in Shorewood. For me this part of the city reminded me most of Europe. This was the house we bought in 1963.

JL: OK. Before I go on to the next question, I think I'll stop here.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2

TAPE 7, SIDE 2

JL: Now let me ask you, what kind of official help was there forthcoming from the community?

FB: We had tremendous offering of help at that time in the Third Street, from Jewish Family Services, who tried everything in their power to make us at ease here, very successfully. However, much to my happiness, Josef was determined to make it in a week. He would have taken any job to make it work without any help. And he did. We could swing it right away by ourselves. But forever I will be grateful to trying to help us with whatever was necessary in the form of advice, telling us that the Drucker family was here, and telling us that another Jewish family was here from Holland. And through those families I met other people. Through my working I met very, very lovely human beings that stayed with me forever. In '59, after my first trip, Joe had detected that I was still homesick and joined the New Home Club, which is a club of American German Jews coming here in the '30s, instead of me in the '50s. They were old-timers and had escaped the war. But at that time we were a "young group." I was about one of the youngest. And there I met very, very good friends that stayed with me throughout my life. I will say, when we were living here and when Josef became sick, after I had surgery in Holland in 1966 — I mentioned the flowers that were sent me to the hospital there. I returned here to find my husband in great pain. He had visited me in Holland during my operation. I was told to stay six weeks before I could travel. My friends who came to visit me to see how well I was doing after surgery, found me in excellent shape and Josef in despair, in pain. This is how our tragedy started. We were just finishing the house here, our yards and everything, when he discovered pancreatitis, a doctor discovered that. What we suffered is immense, unmentionable. With the surgery, to remove it in January, the knowledge for me to know that he was dying, I never told him, nor did I tell Ann. I had the burden by myself but I had a great deal of support of all the members of the New Home Club — Dr. Herman Weill. I don't know if you know him. As Israel went into war, Joe was only bemoaning his lot because he could not give the life he had to Israel, but he had to die defenseless here. My friend from Holland came here to be with me for a month. It had a tremendous impact on me, knowing that

my husband could not survive, that man that was so strong and had survived Auschwitz. We do not believe that people can die of natural causes. After having survived that you think you have life eternal. You think you're superhuman. It was very hard for me to face this. It was also, and this sounds strange, in a way comforting to know that he was in an American hospital bed and not in a bunker in Auschwitz where he would die. I tried to comfort myself in a variety of ways. Therefore, when our insurance ran out, I had the man in a private room. This was a very selfish motivation. This was one human being that I loved and could see die in dignity. The first time in my life I witnessed a death with dignity. But if I tell you how that man was haunted by concentration camp memories, this is unbelievable, unbelievable. He relived the whole Auschwitz thing with his daughter. He didn't want — I hate to bring it up. After his death, his death certificate said that he had died of cancer. I was expecting his dying and was doubtful that after it happened. Rabbi Weinberg just happened to be that day in the hospital and was with me. I didn't ask the doctor for anything. I had planned to ask the doctor for a death certificate indicating the agony that he suffered in addition to the cancer. I completely forgot. Afterwards, when it came up to have restitution, I was denied anything because my husband had died of "natural causes." Who am I to tell anybody that this was maybe [due to] his years of going without decent foods and everything that was showered upon us without us wanting to have this ordeal? There are no laws made to protect survivors. So Josef was in the grave. He wanted to be in American soil, and I trying to find consolation in that. The New Home Club members offered me help. I declined. I have always held on the fact that I wanted to help myself, and for the first time in my life I had to take a full-time job. I struggled. We didn't have an ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] at that time, to get Josef's job because I knew I would be capable of selling furniture. But they didn't take women at that time in that position and in that capacity to make money on that scale. So I was told that they would "risk" and give me a position as a manager in the china, gifts, household in the Gimbels store on Capital Drive. And at the same time I would receive twice a week training as a manager. This was a tremendous hardship on me — to be on my feet, to run to the stockroom, and to

hide the fact that I was trained. Nobody in the department was supposed to know because there were people there working for twenty, thirty years, and I was stepping in as a woman in her forties. They figured they could get fifteen, sixteen years work out of me. My pay was a little bit above the average, hardly enough to live on. And I refused for Ann to go away from college. She had to stay in college, I had promised Josef. So this was a very hard life of every day from 12:00 to 9:00 and then coming home to an empty home. It was like a nightmare. I was away from home without a husband. That is how I felt. I was away from Holland without a husband, and a daughter to support. My friends, well-meaning, were telling me to leave this home and sell it. I felt wherever I would go I would have to take a young growing-up woman. We could not go anyplace. I had to keep this. This was not a luxury. So, I worked for nine months in Gimbels receiving the training. I received an honorable mention in my class and I was told that I could pick out any Gimbels store to manage.

However, at that time Ann was dating a man who's background was not identical with hers. I was very much afraid for the future of my daughter. I begged of her to reconsider. She felt lonely. Her father, whom she adored, was gone, and she needed a substitute father in the form of that man. I threatened. For the first time in my life I had arguments with Ann. It never happened before. I then decided to leave for Holland with her. I forced her to take a trip to my friends, to Holland. And for that I had to give notice in Gimbels. They didn't want me to leave and they told me I could get a leave of absence and get my job back, because they had invested the training in me, Gimbels Capital Court. I said that's okay. I left for Holland with Ann, with Dutch friends that I met here that went with me. Girls I met here that went with me to the [sounds like: Anne Freises Sjol], the private school that I mentioned where I was as a girl. I met a couple here in [sounds like: Sipkin] Elkhart Lake that had gone to school with me in Amsterdam and that still are my friends in Florida. As I was preparing my friend for my coming to Holland, and as I was boarding the plane with those particular Dutch friends who also went to Holland in '68, my Ann was showing me her engagement ring in the plane.

[inaudible] had lined up all available Dutch Jewish boys in the city of Amsterdam waiting for that

lovely girl to arrive. That lovely girl didn't want to date any of the lovely boys waiting for her, and the well-meaning mother was so frustrated that I had a hard time not hitting her in the house of my friends.

JL: You mean she hadn't told you she was engaged before?

FB: No, no. The night before she boarded the plane she became engaged to Fred [Ingiald]. I was the very crazy mother who wanted to put a wake in between the two of them. So what could I do? Ann's fiancé had had a car accident, was on crutches, could not walk, had just left medical school, and was not sure if ever he would walk again. Yet he had courage to tie Ann down to him. My conversations with Ann were making me -- bringing me to the edge of insanity. I would tell her that her capacity to earn as a teacher — what she wanted to become — was limited, and the amount of money that Fred had to spend in order to stay healthy was far above the income that she would make, and that, therefore, there were no conditions in life to ever be happy together. It didn't matter. She wanted that unhappy life that I [sounds like: mirrored for] her. And money meant absolutely nothing. Had I not married her daddy and been very happy with him and had conquered everything? And what do you say? Well, I couldn't say anything. I was in Holland. I stayed there for my six, seven weeks, decided to come back with my child because my child refused to stay in Holland. My friends offered me their home, their brains, their thinking power, the capacity to do anything I wanted in Holland. I had very, very well-to-do friends that were willing to do anything, everything, for me. And my daughter said, "You do it alone, Mother. I return to America." So I returned with my daughter to America. However, I had dated Mr. Bader once, and when I was in Holland, all of a sudden I had roses. And he came to Holland to meet my family, this was no family of mine. These were friends and related to my first husband. He met them and when I arrived back in the United States, not only did I find Fred, Ann's future husband, at the airport, but also Aron Bader. When I came home, I was told that I should not go back to Gimbels but instead become Mrs. Aron Bader. And I did not know Mr. Bader. I said, "I don't have my papers.

My husband died just a little more than a year ago. Let's get to know each other better." In November of that year I married Aron, and Ann married Fred when he could walk in 1970.

JL: And you married Mr. Bader in 1968?

FB: November 28, 1968.

JL: Ann's husband's first name was Fred, and the last name is?

FB: Ingiald

JL: And she's divorced?

FB: Yes.

JL: And what is the name of her future husband?

FB: Myron Fields.

JL: The date and place of birth of your daughter?

FB: Amsterdam. She was born November 12, 1947.

JL: And now she is here in Milwaukee?

FB: In Milwaukee, where she wanted to be, and at times regretting her lot that she, as we all find out through being hurt, did not listen to Mother and that marrying not in your religion and out of your culture is a double hazard to overcome in life. It's not an impossibility if two people are determined enough and willing enough and educated enough to overlook certain things. But if they are both highly emotional, and have both mothers in the background, it's a breeding ground of discontent after the initial glowing love affair is gone. But only experience knows that. Children don't know that.

JL: And there is one grandchild?

FB: There is a beautiful, marvelous David Josef Ingiald, who is raised Jewish in our temple. Ann joined the temple when David was about four or five years old. Fred agreed to the children. [They] had a *hupah*.⁵⁶ Rabbi [Manfred] Swarsensky married them in 1970.

JL: What job does Ann do?

⁵⁶Hebrew for 'wedding canopy'.

FB: Ann taught for a while, but her stomach aches and her colitis and her background and the fact that she was manipulating a black, unruly class with children that absolutely have no regard for teachers made that she hated teaching. She also hated teaching here in Shorewood High. She could not cope, and decided to quit teaching. When she decided to quit teaching, she also wanted very badly to [inaudible]. At that time we had a Jewish restaurant in Bayshore area that was [sounds like: Maxie's]. She wasn't sure if she could handle the public and wanted to find out and applied for a job as a hostess. That was very successful the first month and then she became bored because there was no way to expand. When she then wanted to better herself, she applied for a job in an ad placed by a doctor who wanted to train a new form in a medical field, an "assistant" to the doctor who would help him with the paperwork and also would be willing to be introduced into giving shots and being present at certain check-ups, etc. Ann applied and is trained, has lessons for high blood pressure, gives shots now and works four days a week. This is a job that she hopes to leave when she marries again. I hope everything will work out the way she wants it to be.

JL: There were just a couple of things... Mr. Hony was born in Germany?

FB: In Essen.

JL: And Mr. Bader?

FB: Was born in Warsaw, Poland.

JL: And he died?

FB: He passed away last year, March 11, 1979. I had a note, a call from Rabbi [Israel] Feldman because at that time we were not living together.

JL: What was Mr. Bader's occupation?

FB: Mr. Bader had [pause in tape] a salvage company. He was the head of a salvage company in Wauwatosa.

JL: When were you naturalized?

FB: This might become very strange to you. I could not very easily let go of my Dutch nationality. I do not understand why. I cannot explain it. I was always very proud of it. It meant the same thing for me as your American citizenship means to you. When my husband decided after five years, very proudly to become an American citizen, at that time I was in Europe. When I came back I was married to an American. I then promised him I would become American citizen as soon as I can. I tried, without knowing it, I postponed it all the time. However, with the coming in of Jack Kennedy, I saw a new era coming in America. I loved democracy. I liked everything that he represented. And I became American citizen ten years after I was here. That was in 1964. At the same time that Ann told me, "I will not teach in American school and American children without being an American citizen."

JL: She would become a citizen with you?

FB: That had merit. She always was on my passport and I felt, having gone through what we had to go through, that we had to be a unit. My family could not be one part Dutch and one part American and whatever would have to happen now would happen to all of us. So I became an American citizen at the same time that Ann, much to the happiness of my husband.

JL: How did you feel finally when you did take that step?

FB: I had mixed feelings. I was very happy to be American and I felt as if I had betrayed Holland. I cannot explain to you what I felt. Holland had saved my life and I had betrayed this country by denying it to be part of me. I'm one of the few Dutch citizens that comes back to Holland and can speak fluently Dutch after twenty-six years. And I'm proud of that. I did not lose my language. I never want to lose my identification with Holland. You can love two countries as well as you can love your father and mother, and be loyal to both of the countries. Why not?

JL: With that, what language did you speak at home?

FB: At home here?

JL: Yes. You said to me before that you wanted to learn English well so you spoke English at home.

FB: Here in this house? Ann could not understand that I couldn't express myself fluently and adequately and that I was still making so many errors. That made her to decide to major in English. She would be the one who would conduct my language. However, it made me so angry that with whatever word I would express I had a teenager telling me how to speak, that I became violently angry with her and told her that she should start trying to speak Dutch in the manner that I speak English and then she could judge me. So in my house was spoken a variety. When her father was alive we would speak Dutch and German with my German friends. When Aron came in my life, we would speak English and at times in order to not Ann overhear my conversation, resort to French because he was in Paris so long. At the same token, we had Fred at our table and we had to speak English constantly. If we wanted to go to the kitchen and serve dinner on Friday night and the husbands were boring — we had Vietnam constantly with us in those years, and we did not see eye to eye on every subject — we would resort to Dutch in the kitchen and say how terrible men were and how little they understood about war. We resorted to any language at the moment that I wanted with the person.

JL: So does Ann still speak Dutch fluently?

FB: Oh, fluently, yes. But I feel over the years she's not capable of reading it anymore.

JL: Now how much does Ann know about your experiences?

FB: Everything. I have never tried to hide it. She's part of our lives. I feel as if my child is deprived of so many beautiful things that I grew up with, and therefore I feel a deep compassion for all the children of survivors. Without their knowledge or fault, they have become victims of our situation. I wanted to give her all the love I had, but with the love came the deep pain that I carry in me all my life, no matter how I try to hide it. And I think, if you have a young woman growing up in your home, you cannot hide the pain that comes with the Jewish holidays and her asking, "Why don't I have family?" And being in temple looking at all the faces of the men and thinking, "This is how my brother would look. He would be a man of fifty now. How marvelous if I would have a sister next to me." Can't you understand? I couldn't even enter temple after Joe died because I thought all the Jewish men looked like my

husband. The entering of the temple after the war was very hard for me since I didn't go to temple in Holland anymore. I had a very frustrated feeling that it was all wasted on me. Then, when Ann had to grow into a religion — we did not want Ann without religion — we joined Temple Emanu-El and we introduced Ann to school and temple life and for that we had to set an example. So as I walked in temple in 1955 and saw the beauty of the service in Temple Emanu-El, conducted by Rabbi Weinberg at that time, I thought I fainted. It was an emotional experience for me, as if I had come home in America for the first time. And then I felt the contradiction of my rebellious youth, my not wanting to be religious, my refusal to practice piano, my not wanting to participate in ballet lessons. All of a sudden I thought what an ugly child I must have been to not want to give my mother that satisfaction to participate.

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 2

TAPE 8, SIDE 1

JL: Do you still go to synagogue?

FB: Oh, yes, Oh, yes. Now more than when I was young. I find it very comforting to know that the services are still the same as when I was young. In this life with constant change, where I saw three husbands die, where I saw Ann's divorce from a man that I originally objected to but became very dear to me after she was married to him. It was a loving person, he was a very good son to me. I felt as if I was involved in the book *Future Shock*, as if I was a victim of that shock. I couldn't cope. I had to find ways where I saw things unchanged. I went to Europe a few times to be with my friends and saw the same faces, but things had changed there too. So I find it comforting to go to temple and see the flowers that remind me of Holland, the beautiful service on Friday night, and the knowledge that David's all part of that, and that my coming here may not have been in vain. Because David is the one that brings over the chain of continuity in our lives, hopefully.

JL: What traditions did you observe in the home — holidays, for example?

FB: Holidays. However, at times it's hard to convince Ann that I would like her to do it in the way that I would like to do it since I am very contradictory, you know, as I told you I was as a child. So I'm very lenient. I don't want to burden Ann's life. That is burdened enough by raising a child alone. I leave her free as much as I can and I go to temple whenever it suits me.

JL: Do you have a kosher home?

FB: Absolutely not. I never had it in my life.

JL: What kind of religious school education did Ann have?

FB: The whole religious school education that is necessary.

JL: Through confirmation?

FB: Through confirmation, she did not go because she did not want the gifts. She had passed all the classes in Temple Emanu-El, but the day of her confirmation she rebelled. All of a sudden she was my daughter and said, "I'm not going there. I don't want you to make a party. I don't want the friends

to give me all the gifts. I think it's a *shnorerei*.⁵⁷ I stay home." And that was it. What could I do? I knew she had the education and that meant [sound like: it] to me.

JL: What problems do you think she had faced school because of your unusual experience and that of your husband?

FB: Ann was a very good student. I think school-wise she hadn't any problem because, much to my regret, I was very much on top of her all the time. I wanted to see that she did the amount of reading that I had done. I was very glad that she took a great interest in all the books that I had read. I fed her with Pearl Buck, I fed her with Emile Zola. I fed her with whatever was possible to read, and she loved reading.

JL: But do you think that generally in school she suffered because of her background?

FB: No, never suffered in school because of her background, never. She had a devoted father who would do her homework even if he came home after ten o'clock. He was a devoted European father.

JL: I mean psychologically.

FB: Psychologically she has a great deal of scars. She's physically ill at times, and I think it is psychosomatic induced because she has a hard time facing movies that relate to the Holocaust. At times she tells me she wished she was not an only child because she has such a great responsibility she feels towards me that it overwhelms her. I hear at times telling me that she expresses the feeling not to have been born in such a generation of anxiety, that she had family. I see it in her whole being. I also see it in the disaster in her marriage. She wanted, and did not want to confront Europe. She couldn't. She cannot live with it very well. She tries, but I know that she has difficulty. I know it. But what can we do?

JL: As far as family relationships -- Compared to other American families, do you think your family is closer?

⁵⁷Yiddish for 'begging'.

FB: No. I have seen very, very many close relationships in American families. I think our family is close but we have all the problems that other people have when they go through divorces. Maybe we have more problems because with every pain comes the multiple pain of our previous experiences. With every grief the pain of the war becomes magnified in our minds and multiples over the years.

FB: Life becomes much harder as you grow older alone. It's a very hard life. I have more pain now than I had when I was young after the war because there was hope for a different life. Now I know that I had that life and it was painful because I have lost my husbands that I tried to start a new life with. Ann is not fulfilled. You cannot be happy after the divorce. Also, I have seen the deep pain men can inflict upon other men. The inhumanity of the people towards each other, and that has nothing to do with being Jewish or not Jewish. That is the indifference in people towards other people. They are not guilty because they haven't done anything. But our incapacity to stop violence, no matter to what race or creed, is terrible. Our unwillingness to be involved is terrible, frightening. Do you agree? And that saddens me.

JL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than others?

FB: Oh, yes. Definitely, frightfully.

JL: Why?

FB: Because I live in constant fear that anything should happen to my loved ones. This is the one thing that I feel I haven't experienced yet, and never want to experience. I have a very great fear that anything should happen to my children.

JL: When Ann was younger, what were your greatest concerns for her?

FB: Her safety, her well-being, her being in a whole family with Mommy, Daddy, and the works, a feeling of belonging.

JL: What activities and forms of behavior would you forbid Ann to engage in, as a youngster?

FB: The same overprotection that my mother placed upon us when we were children I inflicted upon Ann. I was afraid if she would ride a bicycle. I was afraid for almost anything that was absolutely normal.

But she had a very sane father who saw in me the overprotected child that I was in Holland and told Ann that she should ignore me in that respect and I'm forever grateful for that. Ann is far more capable than I ever was. She had to help me with the household. Because he resented the fact that I was told that I couldn't dirty my hands or break my nails and not to be in the kitchen, she had to be in the kitchen. I never did the dishes alone. He taught her how to be helpful. When my friends came at parties, they had all hired help. We were very proud that our teenager was standing in the kitchen to serve my friends. They thought it was absolutely slavery, but I rewarded Ann by serving her friends at her parties and giving nice parties for sixteenth birthday, eighteenth birthday, and I would slave for Ann. So I thought we raised her very, very adequately with the right values.

JL: Do you feel that Ann's sense of family responsibility is greater than that of other children?

FB: No, not necessarily. I think Ann is a very good mother. A very nervous person. She had her child because Fred wanted a child. At times I feel she's not capable of handling it alone. It is a hard burden. I think anybody in this society could not handle a child very well. It's very hard for a woman to raise a child even if she had not been a survivor of the Holocaust. But for a person who is burdened with a nervous mother, this is a double hard experience.

JL: Did you ever object to any of her friends?

FB: At times, but her choice in the later years of her life was very, very good. I happen to be friends with all the mothers of Ann's friends. They are my best girlfriends. At times we laugh about it, because Ann's high school friends moved away and have disappeared from her life. She had to make a whole new circle of friends by being single, and my friends, the mothers, all stayed with me. At times I had to object. One time in her life we both strongly objected and we had placed a halt on her seeing one particular girl. That was the only time.

JL: Why was that?

FB: The girl had very poor judgment in making decisions. We did not agree with the way the child handled herself, her manners, her outlook on life, her values.

JL: As a teenager?

FB: As a teenager. And we hoped Ann would see it, but Ann became devoted to that child, who had very, very poor surroundings to begin with. And I had to talk to Ann that it would be very wise to not become involved with this particular girl. We talked to Ann, we expressed it a few times, and she let go of the girl. We never had problems with Ann.

JL: Besides the mothers of Ann's friends, who are your close friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, presently?

FB: My Dutch friends in Holland are friends that I have since my teens that knew my father and mother, that knew my first husband, that ate chicken soup in my parents' home. Of course these are the friends I'm most comfortable with at this time in my life but I see very seldom. I was invited this summer in one of my friend's homes and I was delighted. They all became very, very successful and are very, very dear to me. At that moment I have a few ladies from the New Home Club that I meet regularly in a group that we play mah-jongg with. I, however, find it very hard being alone. I'm not the only woman who will tell you that. You lose track of your old friends because this group that is the New Home Club is a card-playing group. Their preference is to come together and play — either poker, and the ladies play mah-jongg. They need a partner for poker playing and that must be a man. Therefore, after Josef died, Aron was invited, and after Aron, the invitations stopped coming in, which is a natural thing. I'm not the only single woman that will tell you that. You can read records about that. It's hard. It became harder. [pause in tape]

JL: Would you say that most of your friends are survivors here?

FB: In the sense that they all came in the '30s, they are surviving Hitler. But in the sense that I consider having survived the war, no. There's nobody who can share my experiences with me concerning the war. Thank God, they came all out before that happened. So in this country, there are only my Dutch friends in Bay Harbor Island now that I met here in [sounds like: Sipkins], that can share that experience with me. The girls that I was in the [sounds like: Anne Freises Sjol] , in the private school

in Amsterdam, in the Jewish *viertel*, they lived a little bit farther and their mother had decided that they should go to that same private school — we are still friends. And this is my motivation to go to Florida.

JL: What about the Eastern European Jews that you might have met through Mr. Bader?

FB: Mr. Bader was a very private man. He never wanted me to be friendly with anybody. He wanted me to not be involved with any living person, just on the outside. We attended the meetings for the Zionistic course for building up Israel. At the moment anybody would invite us to their homes, he declined. He told me I could never accept an invitation and he told me that I should never extend an invitation. So I was totally isolated in my third marriage.

JL: So then you didn't have that contact with these European Jews?

FB: No. I have it a little bit now because I volunteer in the Jewish Center.

JL: Since you do have that contact there, I'd like to ask you about the traditional animosity that there's been between eastern and western European Jews.

FB: Oh, I'm deeply aware of that, sure. That animosity is there.

JL: Do you still feel it now?

FB: Don't you? I feel it very deeply. I'm appalled by it. The fact is there.

JL: Has it been directed against you as a western European?

FB: I don't feel it. People are kind to me, but yet I feel never close to anybody. I tell my own philosophy of my life. It is that I'm loved by everybody and the responsibility of nobody. Also, I'm in a minority. I kid myself with it — that I am never having an affair or party where there is anybody who sees eye to eye with me. When I'm together with the friends of the New Home Club, I feel at certain moments left out. Their background is so alien with mine and so different that at times I do not even want to say a word. They feel superior to the eastern European Jew. Maybe they feel I'm betraying them. There's nothing wrong with that. I think it's only human because I encountered the same thing being in Israel. I also know that the Polish Jew feels that the German Jew is different than they are and I hear the words

being used when they are in private. So I draw my own conclusions. It's a terrible thing in this world that even our Jewish people are, in that way, not united, or more tolerable of each other, and bigger. I've come to the conclusion that after the war very few people live by the rules of life: that it's so vulnerable and so precious that we should give and take, live and let live. They are harsh in their judgments. They value material things instead of human beings. But this is my feeling. Maybe I'm wrong. I hope I'm wrong. This is what I feel, and therefore I feel that I'm deeply isolated here and this has nothing to do with being here. I only don't feel it in Europe because there I have the friends that knew my father and mother. I could meet a doctor in Amsterdam at a party and be introduced as Mrs. Hony, and he would tell me, a very old man, "My dear it means nothing. Somebody tells me, 'Mrs. Hony from America.' Take off your glasses and tell me your maiden name." So I took off my glasses. I was very well dressed and I felt, "Oh, I made no impression on that man." I took off my glasses and I saw the tear in his eye and he said, "You are the oldest daughter of Salomon and Taiby. Let me look in your face." And the man started to cry and he knew my father and mother. Well, it's crazy to expect that to happen here. It cannot. I wish for things that are not real. So this is why I feel my roots are still in the old country.

JL: Have you joined any *landmannschaft*⁵⁸ of Dutch Jews?

FB: There is nothing that I could join. There are no Dutch Jews here. And to be frank, once I am with my German friends, I feel very close to them. They're good to me. They are good people. They have helped me survive Josef's death.

JL: Besides them, what contact do you have with American-born Jews?

FB: Much to my dismay, besides now — after Ann has joined a single group of people in the temple where she met delightful women instead of men — the initial feeling was, of course, that people go there to meet male company — I have encountered very dear friends of Ann that became my friends. Outside the block here where I like every neighbor and visit none, I have no American friends. I do

⁵⁸German for 'an association of immigrants from the same town or region'.

work in the Jewish Center and every person there is a friend of mine. But I will never enter their homes besides having been a board member of ORT.⁵⁹ I'm too outspoken.

JL: Have you ever had any occasion to try to explain to these people what you went through?

FB: No, I never tried. "Who wants to hear that nonsense?," and "boring," and, "Oh, we know it," and "Greenhorn." That can turn me totally off. I've heard those words.

JL: What do you think are the feelings of these American-born Jews towards the Holocaust?

FB: I think they really sympathize, but I feel also the exact same feeling that I had when I would receive the people from Russia and Germany: the delicious feeling of being secure, well taken care of, having your family, having your friends. And being good, do a *mitzvah* to other people, and then turn your back to that person. This is happening all over again in my life, and now I'm not the giver, I'm the recipient. And that hurts as the Dickens. Could you understand me? Do I make myself clear? This is part of my problem.

JL: With non-Jews, what do you think is their feeling towards the Holocaust?

FB: I told you, of great disbelief. But they are more compassionate in trying to understand than most Jewish people were. If I tell you that this whole thing I could not have told to any human being, that part of my life that is very important to good friends to know — what happened to Tom, what happened in April, the irony from everything that mothers were sent there, and others. I haven't even tried to discuss that with any of my friends. Nobody knows how I survived. And to be frank, nobody ever asked how I survived. Nobody was interested enough to raise one question: how did you ever survive it? Not wanted. So why should I tell? Why should I burden our —

JL: Have you had generally any unpleasant experiences with non-Jews?

FB: Here?

JL: Yes.

⁵⁹Organization for Rehabilitation through Training.

FB: Here. No, no. One experience where we moved into a house and we're telling our landlord that we were Jewish in order to avoid later moments of unpleasurable things. After we lived there for a little while, we had behind our name tag, and I still have that name tag, a swastika, a *Hakenkreuz*⁶⁰ signed, I removed it from the — not signed, it was pictured. I removed it from the mailbox, showed it to my husband and saved it, and that was the only time. I never heard anything. Once during working in Gimbels, a woman told me, "Do you see that lawyer? He is my lawyer. Even though he is a Jew, he is a very good lawyer." [laughs] And I told her, "Isn't that terrible? Do you know that you speak to a Jewish person?" "But Flory, you are so different." I said, "That is not a compliment. I am a human being and a Jew on top of it. This kills me." But it was the only one.

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 1

⁶⁰German for 'swastika'.

TAPE 8, SIDE 2

JL: What political and social clubs do you belong to?

FB: I don't belong to any political group. My social group is the New Home Club. I'm a member of the ORT. I tried to work for the Jewish Family Service. I enjoy being with my friends at time where we have lunches together and I also enjoy playing mah-jongg once in the two weeks. I enjoy theater. I like to go to movies when they're worthwhile. I spend time with my children. That is all there is to do at the moment. I especially love being with people I love. This is my favorite pastime. I enjoy people. However, the passion I had for reading became an impossibility. After all what it was happening to me, my capacity to read is hindered. I cannot read anymore very well. That is a pity.

JL: What hobbies or special interests do you have besides all these things that you mentioned? Is there anything really all-consuming?

FB: All-consuming is traveling. Reading about other countries. I like needlework. I love being with my grandson. What else is there to enjoy? Reading the terrible news in newspapers. I read every night, consume it. And I'm always angered by the fact that we do not show enough of European and worldwide news. This is a fact of life.

JL: What newspapers and magazines do you receive?

FB: *Milwaukee Journal*, *Psychology Today*, the *Sentinel* in the morning, at times *Newsweek*, and the *Jewish Chronicle*. That's it. Dutch magazines at times when my friends send them.

JL: You just said to me that you don't read anymore. I assume you meant by that heavier things?

FB: I mean books. The heavier things that I used to enjoy reading. I do, at times, if there are books out about psychiatry. Psychiatry is very, very close to my heart. I followed lessons at the high school. The Shorewood High School gave evening classes and I took courses in psychology because I love being with people and I wanted so much to understand Josef and why he would have this problem. But I know now, after I become older and read more about it and people are more aware about our pain, I

think many people now understand that survivors have a specific feeling of fear at times of not being able to be in a closed room. When I read it I all of a sudden see myself.

JL: In what languages do you read?

FB: Mostly English. I can read in Dutch very well. I read many books in Dutch. When I'm in a plane, I am capable of reading part German. And at times French when I am with French friends.

JL: Have you read any specific books or articles on the Holocaust?

FB: I have devoured them all. I could do it easier when Joe was alive because we would review them together and discuss matters. It became very hard to me after Joe passed away. Seeing those movies alone made me miss him more. It became almost intolerable for a while right away after his death to see what he had suffered, and then to have died when for him here life was fulfilling again. He had built up a life in a land that he wanted. He had succeeded in giving me a home and giving Ann a good school, making himself a good job, and then God took him away.

JL: What was you and Mr. Hony's reaction to the things you read on the Holocaust?

FB: How true most things were and how impossible it is for any artist, writer, human being, to fully understand the total impact of the disaster. I think no human being can fully comprehend what was done to us. It's impossible. When I talk to you now, it seems, even for me, impossible to have survived this. And this is not an accomplishment to have survived this. It is sheer luck, only luck. Not great knowledge or courage. It were other people that had the courage to pull me through, don't you agree?

JL: I understand that you saw the program *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Vanessa Redgrave in *Playing for Time*. Did you also see the longer *Holocaust* docudrama?

FB: Oh yes. At that time I happened to visit my Dutch friends in Chicago, in Illinois. We decided to see the movie together. They had gone through the Holocaust and through concentration camps just as I did. And having known my whole family, my first husband, it was as if I was sheltered by their knowledge of how it was. The impact wasn't so hard on me as it would have been had I watched it alone. And knowing that it was even worse than what you saw is so painful.

JL: What was your reaction generally to the docudrama and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was specifically about the Dutch experience, and *Playing for Time*?

FB: I think it's very, very good that people are exposed to part of the pain we went through. I think it is disastrous that we had to wait forty years for the public to accept the willingness to see those pictures. I felt it as an offense that people turned away from our pain. It was an added pain that people didn't dare or care to listen to the survivors. It was what I see here, where many people die alone because people can't face cancer or terminal diseases. They turn away from pain. They turn away from anything that is hurting. This is a hurt to live with that kind of pain. And just as people turn away from cancer, they turn away from hearing about the war. Therefore, since it is not in our books in school, how will the world know after we are dead what happened if we are not willing to tell? If we are so selfish that it hurts us — sure it hurts, but then life hurts.

JL: In the immediate reaction, have people been more interested in your experience because —

FB: No, no, no. I never tried to bring it over to people at that stage of my life.

JL: No, I mean after these programs were aired on TV, and now that they've been aired again last night, have people become more interested?

FB: No, no, no, no. I wouldn't want to burden people with my experience. After all you are not going to sit and tell people, "Wait, I have to tell you something."

JL: No, I mean since these things have been more in the American public's consciousness since they were on TV, have people reacted to you as someone who was affected by those things?

FB: No, nobody did. And the movie of Anne Frank, I see it over and over again. I have seen it with Shelley Winters and whenever I see it, it seems that I am deeper moved by it than anybody else who have not lived through it. It's not new for me and still it moves me all the time.

JL: I'd like to ask you a bit about Wisconsin. Where have you traveled in Wisconsin?

FB: I have traveled to the Devil's Lake, to La Crosse, to the northern part of Green Bay. Door Country was the favorite vacation spot of Josef and I and Ann. I couldn't see it many, many years, and her husband

took me up there again. I love Fish Creek, Ephraim, Washington Island. I think it is beautiful. It reminds me a great deal of part of Holland. I especially like our lakefront here in Milwaukee, I think it's very, very pretty. I've been in Madison. We wanted to do more, but after Joe's death everything halted for me.

JL: In what way does it remind you of Holland?

FB: The beautiful green landscaping, the lake. Holland was bordered by the North Sea, which has a beautiful beachfront. You cannot compare that. Now there is a park here north of Port Washington that looks like it. At this moment I do not know the name, but it reminded me very much of Holland. But, lately, when I travel through Wisconsin I'm stunned to see in what shape the houses are, how neglected they are, and how they look almost as frightening as our whole economy looks. And this is through the country, with traveling in Europe where everything is very bright and painted well. This is very sad. This was not so when I came here. Now it looks sad. The farms -- When I went to Fort Atkinson one day, it struck me how poorly painted everything is that you meet on the road to Fort Atkinson.

JL: On the brighter side, what parts of Wisconsin have you liked most?

FB: The northern part, the fishing in Door County, Ephraim. Are you familiar with those surroundings?

JL: A bit.

FB: Beautiful beaches and the boats, this part I like very, very much. The Norwegian type of villages.

JL: How satisfied are you with the cultural climate of Milwaukee?

FB: I would like it to be more cultural. I would have liked it if we had an occasional ballet or more choice in theatergoing. I've seen beautiful things here, *Swan Lake* and beautiful ballets, but it's poor in comparison to other cities. Not much theater is exposed to the public. Maybe there isn't a need for it. Don't forget I come from a country where everything was government-subsidized and here art is totally on its own. So, therefore, we were exposed to greater things because the government took care of that. That it came to the people.

JL: How much happier do you think you would have been living in an area of greater Jewish population compared to Milwaukee?

FB: I never gave it a thought. I don't think the surroundings of the religious atmosphere would have added or taken away to my inner happiness. It wouldn't have made any difference if I lived in a more Jewish surroundings. I was very happy being in Israel, but I don't think I could live there forever in an only Jewish surrounding. I like the color of different nationalities and religion.

JL: How do you feel about living in Wisconsin, with its high percentage of ethnic Germans?

FB: At times this is very hard, too, for me. At times I resent it, [but] I chose this. I try to hide my resentment because I was never invited to Wisconsin, to come here. So it is my choice and I have to live with that. Is that honest and clear?

JL: Given the choice, if you had an opportunity to leave Wisconsin, where would you go?

FB: I would go to a much milder climate, where the winters were not so hard. Increasingly hard as one grows older. It becomes very hard to survive here. In this climate one has to be young and healthy and not older and afraid of winters. This is a very, very, violent climate. Always was to me.

JL: What effort have you made to acquaint yourself with Wisconsin history?

FB: I have to confess that I failed. I haven't made much effort to acquaint myself with the history of Wisconsin. I tried to keep up with the history of our country as such, but not particularly with Wisconsin because I have in me always the feeling that this is not my end station.

JL: How do you feel you've contributed to the Wisconsin, specifically Milwaukee, community?

FB: I have tried in my own way. Maybe I have not contributed. I've tried to be a good citizen. I have tried to raise a decent family. I've tried to make my husband — I was married to Josef for twenty years — happy. I try to do some volunteer work now. More I couldn't do. By just surviving I had given my all, by just trying to stay sane in circumstances where I had to face life without a husband, with the multiplication of doctor bills that were unbelievable, coming from a world where that was taken care of by the state. I did not know how to survive and give my child a chance in life. After we had tried to

work our way into this society, I had failed because my husband became sick. This is the irony of this world. I had to do it on my own after I was forty-six and had started over and over again. I could not let my daughter down. I could not think of giving to anything in my life but my child, [to] see her grown up and have a good education.

JL: Where did Ann go to school, by the way?

FB: Ann went to Hartford [Avenue] School.

JL: Then to what college?

FB: To college? Here, to UW-M in Wisconsin. We had promised her two years in California after she would prove herself to be a rewarding student in our university. However, our daddy became very sick when she was in the first grade at the university, so our dreams could not be fulfilled.

JL: Do you feel any sort of obligation to Wisconsin for having begun, for your life in America?

FB: I will always be grateful to the Jewish Society for having given us a chance to start a new life after the Holocaust, after we wanted to come here. I have always tried to repay it in some way. I am grateful for kindnesses bestowed upon my family. For the rest, I feel at times a great emptiness in a world where people that survived that kind of thing are not accepted, as such, where we still have to struggle to survive. Of course we have the same laws as any citizen in this country, and I don't blame the country or America or Wisconsin for it. Now, I blame Europe. They should have provided for people in my situation better with laws that would allow me to not worry about the future. [pause in tape] I would like to add that as much as I rejoice in the fact that many people coming from Germany are sufficiently taken care of in their old age, those laws should also apply to people who unwillingly became victimized by the German government, be it under Hitler, and were of another nationality. One necessarily did not have to be German to have suffered, and my government did not, until 1975, take any interest in providing for people like I am. Neither did the German government. As I told you before, the fact that it was not mentioned in Josef's death certificate, that he also was hallucinating about the concentration camp, makes me not get restitution from Germany. I think that is grossly

unfair. How can I prove? Does that need proof, that a human being who had survived three-and-a-half years of Auschwitz had suffered? I cannot prove that. He's dead and I should have him at peace. I'm not at peace with myself. I do not know how to go by finding peace of mind. Now the Dutch government tries to find people. According to your income you are given some form of restitution. However, people that are having homes or having some form of property and have been very industrious and very brave are being punished by being told that they get their restitution in a form conducive to what they have. Even this week I found a note in my mail that I will not get restitution or that it was deducted because I have my home. I think this is grossly unfair.

JL: So you feel then restitution is definitely is something that should be done?

FB: Definitely, because we grow older. As you told me, you had very few people who were married when the war started. I was an unfortunate one that was married. I had already established a form of life with a man who could provide for me very well. I should now have this kind of life. It was not my fault that I had to go through what I had to go through. Don't you agree?

JL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi Party planned to march in Milwaukee?

FB: Oh, of utter dismay, of profound sickness. I find the laws in this country are absolutely — this is the price we pay for freedom, I know. And I come from a country where freedom is valued more than anything else, but we should have a restricted freedom if it allows the preaching of hatred. Our laws have to be changed. We should not allow any possibility that that would have a place in American society, that ugliness. I am afraid for the economic conditions that worsen. We do not have to tell each other that it is happening. And as we set the breeding ground, unwillingly, for it to happen, there will be always people thinking that we Jews unduly have it better, or we are there and taking the good positions in life. They do not know that it is with great pains and suffering that we bring up our children to be better educated than the average human being. I have denied myself and Josef has denied himself a great deal in life in order for our child to survive here as an educated person. I feel whatever we have in life is earned by pain, suffering, and regarding life and education as the most

precious possession we have. Little do other people know that it took sacrifices of Jewish people to bring their children to that great level — if it is a great level — but it is the only level that I feel life is worthwhile. Now again, we are viewed upon as the "wealthy part" of this world. I see, much to my dismay, after Ann intermarried, that I was looked upon — even though I was the newcomer in this world, in Wisconsin — I was the wealthy woman because I was Jewish. I was educated. I was the one that came here twenty-five years ago and I was dirt. This is frightening to me. I feel everybody has the same chance that we have in life. We make our chances work better, and then we have the values of our parents, and that is beautiful. I think that makes us survive.

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 2

TAPE 9, SIDE 1

JL: How satisfactory do you find the American system of government to be?

FB: I find it satisfactory in that we have a kind of a scale that balances out the Democratic Party with the Republican Party in a match. That is, in my feeling, being a Democrat, [laughs] very rewarding to know that nothing lasts forever. If we have the party that is not our choice, we can be sure that within a limit of time the party of our choice will reappear. If damage is done in between, we have to take and pray that it is not too intensive. That is why I find it very satisfactory.

JL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society in fields such as politics, the arts, etc.?

FB: I find it very encouraging that we appear in all facets of society. I find it's rewarding that we are represented in the arts in a great amount. I find it's rewarding that we are in government. I am not one of the Jews that is afraid because Dr. Kissinger had such a great saying in our politic. It's healthy and why shouldn't we have a word in the country where we live? I live here and I hear very often, "After what we went through, we Jews should keep our mouth shut. Kissinger shouldn't be in the public eye." I think this is the wrong kind of politic. Why shouldn't we? Why not? We cannot live with that kind of fear because then our life would be limited. We have to be that what we are. This is the way I look upon it. I lived in a country where Jews were in the limelight and allowed to be having any position they wanted to that they could acquire. And why not? We are not second kind of citizen. We can criticize and we can try to correct things. We shouldn't live in fear. Not that kind of fear. Then Hitler would have dominated us and we would have lost the war, if we start living that way. Don't you agree? That's what I feel.

JL: What do you see as the most important issues facing America today?

FB: The most important issue — of course, next to inflation — is the incapacity to deal with peace in the world. Our arms race frightens me. Our last four years, even though I feel like a Democrat, were very frightening in my view by not being able to deal with Russia adequately. I am very afraid that we do

not have the kind of leadership that is very shrewd as we used to have in the old country, where statesmen were statesmen, where you were allowed to have a certain privacy in affairs of state. You cannot have a plan and be open about it. If we would give away the menu for Thanksgiving, half of that fun is gone, or the triumph is gone. This is not good policy to have the people know ahead of time what your plans are for the hostages to be freed. Some has to be secret in order for it to be successful. I think there we fail.

JL: How do you feel about the refugees coming in recently to the United states?

FB: The Cuban, the Haitians? I'm very contradictory when I tell you this, and I hate myself for saying so. I feel everybody should have a chance to start a new life. However, the way they were admitted in this country was opening doors to people that had criminal records. They did not even try to find out what kind of history was behind the people. I see no country in this world that allows in this economy itself, to have such luxuries when we hardly can deal with the problems that are within our own population. We do not adequately deal with single families now, or with the people in need. How then can we allow ourselves to such extent to have people in whose background we do not know, whose intentions we do not know? As I recall from my experience, they could have taken in a fifth column like we did in Holland by allowing the German maids to betray our households. This is my greatest fear, next of course to the unpleasant feeling that crime and violence are utmost.

JL: To what extent do you believe there is anti-Semitism in the United States?

FB: I do not think anti-Semitism is only in the United States. I don't have that feeling. I have the feeling that where there are people there is love and there is hatred. Usually one dislikes that what is alien to people. I have met many people in the United States that lived in a facility where they never saw a Jew and were anti-Semitic because we are an alien figure in their minds. Knowledgeable people, people that are coming in contact with Jews are usually not haters. The same anti-Semitism that is here is in every country of the world. We allow people to open up more here.

JL: Can you apply what you're saying now also to the latest manifestations of anti-Semitism in Europe?

FB: Yes, yes, of course there are Jew-haters. We will not live the day — [though] I hope it will be, I pray for that — that there is not any form of hatred in this world. There will always be hatred as long as there [is] love there will be hatred. But people hate out of envy. People hate out of fearing the unknown. People hate that what is not familiar to them.

JL: With that hatred, how secure do you feel as a Jew in America?

FB: Not only as a Jew in America — I don't think anybody that is thinking feels very secure in this world, being a Jew or not a Jew. This is a world that goes through tremendous turmoil. I'm afraid that we are already in the start, in the fore-evening — I cannot explain it in English very well, but I've discussed it in Holland. My motivation in coming here and Josef[']s deep motivation was to be away from Russia. However, we always thought that a third world war would explode in the East, the Mideast. I'm afraid that all the pains we have are due to the fact that this world is in a turmoil and therefore any thinking human being, Jew or not-Jew, is frightened. How can you not be frightened when you hear the news?

JL: But do you foresee a situation arising again in which you personally might be threatened?

FB: Oh, yes, the possibility is there. I always hope that I personally or my children will not be affected by it, but I don't see how for the children. I hope that I will not live anymore, but I'm afraid that something will happen again. The possibility is there. Where there are human beings there is hatred and the capacity of people to hate is as unlimited as the capacity to love, if you allow them the freedom to consecrate together. And also I'm afraid here more because there is not that encouragement to be an individualist. People are more following the leader and I'm afraid that people are, therefore, more inclined if times become harder to, "follow the leader" and believe that what they are doing for the good of this world is hating. Sure, we are vulnerable.

JL: What are your feelings about Germany and present-day Germans?

FB: I have to confess that my brain tells me that the world was already right when they prepared us not to hate. However, I agree with that feeling that people that cannot hate haven't seen the destruction that I saw. I cannot care for Germany. I cannot enter Germany. I cannot not love anything that comes from

Germany. I hate programs that show beautiful German cities. I do not like seeing it. This is my personal feeling that I know is negative and not good. I tell you my feelings. I cannot help it.

I have seen too much destruction in the heart of Germany. Nobody can tell me that they did not know or did not participate. Those concentration camps were in the heart of Germany or Poland. Everybody knew. It was visible, the transportations went through the German population and were noticeable by every German who wanted to see. How now can I believe the people that say, "Wir haben es nicht gewußt"⁶¹? And how then can I forget?

JL: In Holland, though, there must still be some of those betrayers. How do you feel when you go there? Do you have any of those same feelings?

FB: Very few betrayers are living. Many of the Dutch population pointed to the betrayers and they were punished by law. They had to repay what they had to repay. Of course people escape. There's no room. I do not believe the German people that were at fault in the war could escape to Holland. It's impossible.

JL: So you don't have any of those feelings towards Holland that you have towards Germany?

FB: Not in Holland, no. How can I? I'm personally saved by Dutch not-Jewish people who gave their live in order to save mine.

JL: Now just some miscellaneous questions. You mentioned that you visited Israel. What were your reactions to Israel?

FB: I found it overwhelmingly beautiful.

JL: How many times have you been there?

FB: Once, in '74. I visited Sfat [Safed]. A day later we had that very terrible tragedy where the children were killed in the same area. I could not live there because I'm too old for it now. I'm afraid always for Israel. I have a great pain when I hear how economy is and I felt a great compassion for the people

⁶¹German for 'We did not know about it'.

there. Also I have great fear in me since I'm aware now that many young people want to leave Israel. That is very frightening to me to know that, the knowledge. I enjoyed being there very, very much. Also the love that I received from Israel, knowing that I was Dutch. They have a great compassion for Holland because in the Yom Kippur War and in all wars we had the ambulances in the street of Holland. Not only did the Jewish people go to give blood. The milkman in the street, the baker in the street, they all lined up to give blood for Israel. Every Dutch family signed up to have Israeli children in the house if they would be sent. It was unbelievable what my friend told me who went out to try to collect money for Israel. The not-Jewish neighbors were insulted that they were not approached to give money for Israel. They came to the houses of my Jewish friends to pledge for Israel. That was unbelievable. So when I bought fruit in Israel, in the streets, and I told them I was Dutch, after they ask what my accent was, I was asked please not to pay, that it was on the house. In many instances I was treated that way.

JL: We've talked for a long time. Do you think it's easier for you to talk about your experiences now with some distance than it would have been closer to the time that they happened?

FB: No, it's not easier. It's just the same. There were times that I could hardly discuss it and there were times that I wanted to discuss it. It had such a negative impact on me that I always became sick afterwards. I was never capable of talking about it because my life was not even. I had other terrible tragedy after twenty years of marriage to lose my husband here, who was instrumental in bringing me here. I think I could have discussed it with him but whenever I had a problem and wanted to discuss my experiences in any way or form, I became tremendously sick afterwards.

JL: After he died?

FB: Yes. Because I thought I could not discuss this adequately and nobody would know how much it hurt to discuss that. Therefore, I gave up discussing it at all.

JL: So now, ten, twelve years after your husband died, how do you feel?

FB: I'm very glad that this form of expressing is made possible by your institution because I was constantly living with the fact that I wanted it on paper and became so tremendously nervous when I started to write. I didn't want this experience to die with me. I know it would have died with me and I wanted somehow my beloved ones to live on. I also had an experience in being a member of the New Home Club where we discuss the possibility of making a memorial for the people that were killed and had no survivors. My family had one survivor, but there were families that were totally erased. The reluctance I met in that group of people who were so willing to donate for Israel or for other causes, was appalling to me. I worked ten years on the board and still have many friends there, and since I had lived in a country that taught me to pleasantly disagree [pause in tape].

JL: You were telling me that you never took offense personally.

FB: Personally, of the fact that nobody thought it necessary. Of course, most of the people did not have any personal loss in the tragedy that took place, and they didn't see the need. My personal feeling is, with our generation, the children will never see a need to put on a monument. Since this is a place that was visited and where European Jews lived out a great part of their lives, why not should we leave a memorial to our loved ones since we could not leave that in Europe? Many, many prominent people in this group of people saw it my way, and discussed the matter that if it would help one person in this group and give it any form of meaning it would be worthwhile doing so. However, there were people fanatically opposing the fact, while it was only a money matter, that there should be a memorial. Now I read that our government is trying to make a memorial for our fallen people. But why should it be our government? Why could [it] not be we, the survivors? And for the people who did not have to suffer as a survivor but could escape the war, it should be an extra *mitzvah* or [sounds like: korwit] to make that monument for the sheer fact that they did not have to go personally through the war to survive. It was always a great big question mark. I hope one day to be able, when I will leave here, to leave my own mark in the old age home and remember my parents this way. Because there is no

stone on this earth that mentions their name and it is my duty to remember them. I feel this as a great loss, why our Jewish community to not have done that till now after so many years.

JL: This project is funded in part by monies from the federal government. How do you feel about that fact?

FB: I can only applaud it. If I tell you now that I felt a great need for that monument that never was built, can you feel how grateful I personally feel that there are people in our government that care that much that they see that the need for expressing ourselves as a survivor is so urgent that society will eventually benefit from our experiences? I hope that one day David will listen with his children to my tape and if somewhere the name of my sister is mentioned, or my brother, I felt that maybe it was not all in vain. And they didn't die just as cattle, but in dignity, even though circumstances were very undignified and full of terror. But they have a right to be mentioned just as everybody has a right to have a stone on their graves. Why do they have to be perpetually dead? Why did they disappear from this earth without leaving a trace and then are not even recognized by our own Jewish people because it cost money? That I do not understand. Therefore I think I'm eternally grateful that this society made it possible to speak up. I might not have made friends by speaking my mind, but then they, too, have to learn to disagree agreeably.

JL: I have come to the end of my prepared questions for you. All I want to say to you is thank you very much, very very much. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

FB: I would like to make one additional comment. I pray Hitler was a cancerous part of our history. The fact that he could live and do what he did is terrible. It did not create the pain that made life sometimes not worth living. The pain that is most hard to take is the indifference that people have for other people. The indifference as far as looking the other way when pain is involved. Why not try to get yourself involved in the pain of other people, even if it hurts? That is not Hitler that made it possible, that what happened to us. It is the people that allowed it to happen and didn't raise or lift a finger. That is what hurt. I also would like to add that I mentioned that I have no Dutch friends here. I have a tremendous Dutch friend here that belonged to the New Home Club. His story is identical to that of

Josef. His mother is Dutch, in her nineties, and his father was German. He also was in hiding when he was young in Holland. However, in his fifties, he's stricken down by multiple sclerosis. I share a great deal of my experiences with him and he is a great comfort to me because I talk a great deal about this whole project with him. I would like to mention his name, he is Rudy Heinman, and he's very helpful to me in trying to cope with everything that happened in Europe. I hope it will never happen again.

JL: Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 1

END OF TRANSCRIPT