


April 2010

## Sam Schryver oral history interview by Ellen Klein, April 23, 2010

Sam Schryver (Interviewee)

Ellen Wilson Klein (Interviewer)

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**Ellen Klein:** Okay. Today is April 23, the year is 2010, and I am here today with Samuel Schryver. My name is Ellen Klein. We are in Clearwater, Florida, in the United States of America. Our language today will be English, and our videographer Nafa Fa'alogo.

So, Sam, please tell us your name and spell it for us.

**Sam Schryver:** My name is Sam Schryver. S-c-h-r-y-v-e-r.

EK: And it was spelled differently when you were born, yes?

SS: When I was born, it was spelled S-c-h-r-i-j-v-e-r. That's the Dutch way of spelling it.

EK: And what year were you born?

SS: It's such a long time ago I forgot. Nineteen twenty-two.

EK: And what was the date?

SS: May 7.

EK: May 7. And what was your father's name?

SS: Jacob.

EK: Jacob. With a K?

SS: With a C.

EK: Okay. And your mother's name?

SS: Janse. That's spelled J-a-n-s-e.

EK: And when were they born?

SS: In Amsterdam.

EK: And what year?

SS: My father was born in 1892, and my mother was born in 1889.

EK: And you had a sister, yes?

SS: I had a sister, that's right.

EK: And what's her name?

SS: Her name is Rosa.

EK: And what was her birth date?

SS: Her birthday is January 27, 1919.

EK: Okay. And she's still living, yes?

SS: Still living, in Amsterdam, Holland.

EK: Okay. Good. So, tell me a little bit about when you were a child in Amsterdam.

SS: (clears throat) When I was a child in Amsterdam, it was the most amazing time of my life. Amsterdam, beautiful city; Holland, a wonderful country. The life there [of] the Jewish people was unbelievable—great. We had so many Jewish people in government, in the city council: my grandparents, my relatives. The atmosphere there, the Jewish atmosphere, was so beautiful, so amazing. For instance, on Friday afternoon, all the merchants were selling off their merchandise very fast: the Sabbath was coming. You could feel it hanging in the air. And then the Sabbath, you went to synagogue. [On] Saturdays in the afternoon, you congregated with your friends on the street. It was so wonderful, so beautiful.

Life in Holland was, for Jewish people—Jews had been living there for more than 800 years in Holland. We were so integrated, we were so Dutch. It's not like this here in the United States: one is Greek, another was Italian, and the other one is English and this one is Jewish, then the next one is Hungarian. No, no, no. We were so Dutch, just plain Dutch. And the Jewish part came, of course, on the Sabbath, where you had the Jewish—you were at home Friday night, you were together with the family in the Sabbath. My grandparents—you went to visit your grandparents on the Sabbath. It was just amazing. It was just amazing for Dutch people to live in Holland. It was just wonderful, wonderful. It was very great.

EK: Tell me about your family.

SS: My family was a good family. My father was a tobacco merchant. We were not rich, but well-to-do: well taken care of, good education, and loving parents. The family was wonderful; we had a good family. Yes.

EK: What was your father like?

SS: Hard working, a very hard working man; kind man, good man, charitable man. He was a great guy. It so happened in his business he had to work seven days a week. It had

to be seven days a week. This man worked so hard. Only one day in his life, one day in his life, Yom Kippur, he didn't work. Otherwise, work, work, work. Hard working man, great man. He was my best friend. Every day after work we went swimming together, and then after the swim, then we went home and we had dinner at home.

EK: You worked together. Tell me about that.

SS: I worked in my father's place. (clears throat) And, well, I tried to work twice as hard as he could so that he would have to do less, because that was the respect and the love that I had for my father. He was my best friend. We were together the whole day. He was tough. He was tough, he was strict. When I came to Canada with only eighty-five dollars in my pocket, and there I was, this guy in the street, I was out there and I was in between, and I said to myself, "How would my father have done it?" And he would have said, "Well, get off your fanny and make a life for yourself." I think that, with the backbone that my father had put into me, I succeeded in Canada. And it was him, with him in mind, that I succeeded.

EK: Yeah. That was his gift to you.

SS: Oh, yes, absolutely, because of his hard work. So, I ended up sixteen hours a day myself: workaholic. But I enjoyed it, I loved it. Work, work, work.

EK: What happened to him?

SS: My father—well, this actually will come into the story when Jews were being rounded up and all that stuff, because when Jews had to report themselves for work, he was taken away from work. But this story I prefer to tell later on, when it comes right in where how things went.

EK: Okay.

SS: Because, like I told you, life in Holland was so beautiful and was wonderful for Jews to live, till that very unfortunate day in May. May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Holland unannounced. The Dutch army, they couldn't fight that big German war machine back, and in five days it was all done. The country was occupied, and that was that.

EK: So, it was a surprise, you think, then, when the German army came in?

SS: Yeah, it was a surprise; it was [a] surprise attack. But now we're occupied, and they told us, "We are going to leave you alone. Go about your work, go about your daily tasks, go about your schools and everything, your work. We won't bother you; we are here only to occupy the territory so that the Allied forces will not be able to come on from the coast from the North Sea and enter Europe." And we believed them and we went with it, and life went on just like normal, nothing doing—not knowing that for nine months they are taking all kind of information about anybody and everybody living in Holland.

That's where it came in that everybody had to present themselves in an office, where everybody was getting an ID card. Everybody had to go there—and as a matter of fact, you were fingerprinted. You [had] never done anything wrong: fingerprinted. At that time, I was eighteen, nineteen years old: fingerprinted. Never done anything wrong: fingerprinted. I had to bring a passport picture that was put on there.

But the difference of the whole thing was that Jewish people, they'd get an ID card with a J on it. And this ID card had to be worn on the person at all times. If you were stopped on the street by the Gestapo—Nazis—you had to identify yourself, and if you couldn't produce that ID card you were taken away for good, for never, ever to come back. This was the law. You had to wear this ID card with you at all times.

EK: This was the Ausweis, yeah?

SS: That was the Ausweis. Then, it didn't take very long. All kinds of signs went up, signs on the street, at stores: "Jews forbidden." Jews were not allowed to go to all these places. They were barred from public places, places like the stores, theaters, movies, bars, hair salons, schools, sport halls, sport events, public transportation, et cetera, et cetera. Jews were not allowed to participate in all these things.

EK: What was the first restriction you remember?

SS: The first restriction was that—well, you were not allowed to go in the streetcar, because Jews are not allowed in the public places and all these things. So, it takes your ride away, and you couldn't go out with your friends, going dancing or this or that. No dance halls. But we tried to get around it another way, so we got a bunch of friends together, boys and girls, and we rented a little place. We had some soft drinks there and a DJ playing some music, and that's what we did. But the Dutch Nazis, they didn't like that very much, so one day they came with about, I would say, two dozen of them. They

were going to beat up those Jewish kids for still having their dancing and their pleasure. But they didn't know that we were there with about, I would say, eight or ten boys from my sporting club: boxing, weight lifting, wrestling.

EK: And the men that came, were they people that you knew? Were these your neighbors?

SS: You mean the one who came? No, they were the Dutch Nazis, the Dutch Nazis. Holland had an awful lot of collaborators. So, with that group of boys from the sporting club, we beat the daylight out of them and they were gone. They promised that they would come back. We infiltrated the Nazi organization from the resistance group, because right after we were occupied by the Nazis—by the Germans—I joined the resistance.

EK: Okay.

SS: So, from the resistance, we had the Nazi Party—the Dutch Nazi Party—infiltrated, so we knew when they were coming to the Jewish neighborhood to beat the people up. As a matter of fact, there were people from Amsterdam there. But this, I mean, not only Jews to defend themselves: non-Jews were there, too, because they were defending their own people. And that day, they came with about 150 of them, but we had about a thousand people in the big square, in Waterloo Square. We had people in the homes and on the places and warehouse and whatever it was. And when they came from side streets into the Waterloo Square, these streets were closed off by us and then they couldn't get out. So, we beat also the daylight out of them. One of them got killed, a fellow by the name of Cote. As a matter of fact, I remember I came home that night with his Nazi cap that he had. You know, at that time you were young, you wanted your souvenir. (laughs) It's funny.

But what I meant to tell you, also, is that for forty-eight years, I got my experience during the war locked inside myself. I couldn't speak about it. It was hard. It was kind of emotional to talk; it is not easy to talk about these things. But those who are attempting to deny my suffering, and the suffering of millions of others, they have forced me to speak out. And that's why I am doing what I am doing these days. I am going to schools, to universities, colleges, and organizations, and I talk about the Holocaust to combat the Holocaust deniers. That's actually the main idea of the whole thing.

Now, as I was telling you there, the Jewish people were not allowed to go to public places. Then, all of a sudden, around 1942—yes, 1942—Jewish young men between the age of seventeen and forty received an order to come and report themselves. The idea



was to take the young men out of the city of Amsterdam. Before this all happened, Jews from all over Holland were ordered to come to the city of Amsterdam. They had to move from wherever they were and get settled in Amsterdam.

EK: Now, had your father already been taken at that point?

SS: No, no, no.

EK: No, this is before that.

SS: No, no, that's before that. So, the Jewish people of Amsterdam were all put in a ghetto in Amsterdam. And they put up signs and everything around that whole neighborhood that was in the center of town. So, Jewish young men between seventeen and forty had to report themselves, and they were taken then—first, we had to get—it was an exam. They were examined [to determine] if they were good enough to go to these work camps, you know. But everybody—even if they were sick or whatever, they wanted the young men out of the city. By the time they were going to make the big round-ups and take everybody out, there wouldn't be a young element to fight back the Nazis. So, all these young men had to go.

At that time I had—I was engaged, at that time. I was—forty-two [1942]—I was nineteen, twenty years old, and I was engaged to a very lovely young lady.

EK: What was her name?

SS: Her name was Henrietta “Jetty” de Leeuw. And Jetty said to me, “They want unmarried young men between seventeen and forty. Let's get married and you don't have to go, too.” I said, “Yes, I understand, but I know how they work, because they will always retaliate whatever you do.” Instead of that, what I did, I went to a Jewish hospital, and for working in the Jewish hospital I got a stamp from the Gestapo on that ID card that I was exempt from going to one of these work camps. And, as a matter of fact, it worked out for me so well that I had that stamp because, being in the resistance, if I was stopped on the street to be taken away, all I had to do was show that card with the stamp on it and they had to let me go.

EK: Okay.

SS: So, it worked out for me very well, two and a half years that I could be in the resistance without being taken away. As a matter of fact, a lot of boys married either their girlfriend or a neighbor girl. "Let's get married; after the war we will annul the marriage." And then, they retaliate, like I said. Now married and unmarried, so they had them all, they had them all. All the young men were gone out of the city, and then they [Nazis] started with people a little bit older than the forty years bracket.

And that's where I like to come back to my father. He was fifty years old and he had also to report himself. And he had from the doctor on a test that he was something, which wasn't true—something wrong with his stomach or some this or that. So, he didn't have to go to one of these work camps, which were located fifty miles outside of the city of Amsterdam. He was assigned to work in the outskirts of Amsterdam and could come home at night to sleep over, have dinner with the family, and then the next morning at six o'clock he had to report himself again. And that went on for months, several months, and everything went fine.

One morning, again I went to the hospital where I had that job in the meantime (inaudible) that card, the stamp that I had on it, and my father went to that work camp. And in the evening, then he didn't show up—six-thirty usually he used to come home—and I went on the street to find out what happened. They had taken all these men who were in that slave labor camp on the outskirts of Amsterdam. They took them in trains away from there, off to the death camps in Poland. Not knowing in the morning when I said goodbye to my daddy that I would never see my daddy again: that was the last time I saw my father.

EK: Do you remember what day that was?

SS: That was in October forty-two [1942]. I never saw him again.

EK: So, it was you and your sister and your mother then?

SS: All of a sudden, I became the man in the family at a young age. Proclamation came: Jews not allowed on the street after eight o'clock. The reason for this was they were going to round up the Jewish people now, the complete family. Eight o'clock in the evening, curfew. Not allowed on the street, you had to be home—every night. Every night they came into the streets. They had a list. Because of those ID cards, they knew where you were living. So, they had a list with names. You were sitting behind the curtain. I've never been able, in all these twenty years that I do public speaking, to find the right words—and I still haven't got the right words—how scared you were, the anxiety.

You were sitting behind the curtains. You saw your neighbors being taken out of the home, people you had been living with for years. Their children, kids I was playing ball with on the street, with their suitcases, backpacks and everything: taken away out of the street for never, ever to come back. And that went on every night, and it was so scary. You were so scared. And it went on until one o'clock in the morning, and finally at one-thirty you went to bed, but you knew that the next evening it would start all over again. Seven days a week, every day, and every day it happened.

One night, indeed, they came to our home. Those who came into our home, it was German military police. There was the Gestapo, and the Dutch collaborators. I looked at the Dutch collaborator and said, "John, what are you doing with these people?" It was a buddy from my sporting club. I said, "What are you doing with these guys?" He looked at me, he pulled a gun, and he said, "You've got two minutes to pack and get the hell out of here."

They took him, they took me, my mother, and my sister to that place where everybody was put together; that was in Amsterdam, in the Hollandsche Schouwburg. It used to be a theater, but they had taken the seats out and everything, and people were sitting on the floor there. And then, let's say a day or two later, they were put in those trains and boxcars, taken away to Westerbork concentration camp. Seeing that I was in the resistance, you learned certain things—how to do and how to act to get things done or that you can do things—and I managed to get my mother and my sister out of there.

EK: How did you do that?

SS: Well, it's an act. It's an act that you perform. I took my mother and my sister to the front where the guard was on the door, and I plainly said to him, "These people, let them go." And he let them go. He thought I was one of the principals there who was working, because we had the Jewish rat [Judenrat] there; that was Jewish people working on the inside to assist [the Nazis]. So he—I acted as if I was one these workers inside there, so when I went to him, I said, "These people were let go." So, they were let go, and they left.

EK: And did you go with them?

SS: No, I couldn't, because I had to go back in, of course.

EK: And where did they go?

SS: They went back home.

EK: Okay.

SS: And the next day, I escaped myself from the building.

EK: Okay. How did you get out?

SS: I went to the—in that same building, way up high. I went to a window on the roof and went to the next building. And, as a matter of fact, I came back there years ago—it's now eight years ago. It was still there. Then, there was a café and (inaudible) or something downstairs. And then, via the other building, I went just out on the street. But I had—

In the meantime, my mother [was] home again, but it was time for my mother to go into hiding because my mother wants to—once they have the husband, they come automatically for the wife. When they have the husband taken away, they interrogate the husband: where did you live, your name, and the whole thing, marriage. So, they go home and get the wife. So, I had to get my mother in hiding. I couldn't get a hiding place for my mother so easily, so I went to the director of the hospital where I was working, and I asked the director to give my mother a bed. Now, as you can—

EK: Stop for a minute and tell me what kind of work you were doing at the hospital.

SS: I was working in the hospital as a cleaner: cleaning rooms, taking care of the garbage from the whole hospital. I was just doing housework. The idea was to get that stamp so that I didn't have to go to a work camp.

EK: Right.

SS: The place where I was working in the hospital—it was, of course, a big hospital, et cetera. So, I asked the director, "Give my mother a bed." But you had to be sick to be admitted to a hospital. Finally, I persuaded him, and my mother got a bed on the third

floor. So, my mother in the meantime is safe, because they're not going to look for my mother. They did come to the house for my mother.

I had, in the meantime, the paper that I didn't have to go to the camp. My sister—I got my sister also a job in the hospital, in the linen room, where she was making sheets, repairing sheets, and this and that. She worked in the linen room, sewing, so she had also a stamp on her card. So, we were in the meantime safe, so now my mother had to be. I saw my mother in the hospital; they're not going to look in the hospital for my mother. So that was, in the meantime, good. And that went on every night, and every night they went in the street, it was so—oh, the anxiety, it was terrible, terrible. But it seems that they didn't go fast enough.

One day, and that was in May 1943, they had opened up all the bridges in Amsterdam. Let me explain to you what I mean with that. Amsterdam is a city with canals. When you have canals, you have bridges. They had made the center of town the ghetto for the Jewish people. As a matter of fact, we were living already there, but now they made it a ghetto itself. All the Jews from all of Holland had to come and live [there]. They had opened up the bridges, and they did it in the early morning hours in May 1943. You couldn't get out of the ghetto. So now, they went from door to door to door picking up all the Jews. They didn't go with the list no more; they went just searching here and there and everywhere for to get the Jewish people, to take them to the death camps in Poland.

I was working that day in the hospital. They came in the hospital to empty the hospital from all the Jewish people; it was a Jewish hospital. It was the Netherlands Israel Hospital on the Keizersstraat in Amsterdam. That day, I saw the most gruesome thing I've ever seen in my whole entire life, the most gruesome, gruesome thing. They came in with an army—with an army! Gestapo, German military police, Dutch collaborators: they came in with so many, many to empty the hospital. That day, they went into the rooms of the patients, turned over the beds, threw them on the floor, yanked out tubes, whatever was attached to their bodies, dragged them down the hall, down the stairs, threw them into trucks.

My mother was on the third floor. I couldn't get to the third floor. It was a panic, it was a panic: everybody yelling and screaming. Unbelievable. That day, they emptied the hospital in its entire. Patients, doctors, nurses, cleaners, office workers, everybody who was there was taken out of the hospital and taken to Westerbork concentration camp. Westerbork was the central camp; it was the transit camp, the last stop before the death camps in Poland. They took everybody out of the hospital, everybody.

I couldn't get to the third floor to my mother. There was a panic there. I had made a key. I was, like I told you, in the resistance, and always you have to be prepared. I had a key

made of a back door from the hospital, and I escaped from the hospital that day through the back door. I went to the place where I did my resistance work, and they had seven Jewish people in hiding there.

EK: Where was this? This was in the city?

SS: It was in the city of Amsterdam, on the street—the name was Amstel, number 107, on the fourth floor. It used to be a factory on top there; they used to manufacture things.

EK: And you were hiding a family there?

SS: I went to the place there, and I told the people that eventually they will come to the place and look for Jewish people. I had a hiding place made behind the wall by a cupboard, because—I have to explain that, because for American people it's hard to understand. In the olden days, they had potbelly stoves, and from a potbelly stove you get a stovepipe going through the wall up to the chimney. But for this, you had to have space between the wall and the house and the bricks outside, so there was about eighteen, twenty inches there. By a cupboard, I had taken the side wall of the cupboard out, and I made it like a door, so you could get in and out the hiding place.

I told the—there was a family of four there: father, mother, boy of five, and a baby of about—close to one year old. We all went in there: pitch dark, of course. You can't burn a candle; that takes away oxygen, and there was no ventilation. I told the father to keep the five-year-old on his lap and to keep him quiet, and the mother I asked to put—to give me the baby to hold. She didn't want to, but I told her she had to, because if that baby would start crying or make noise or whatever, the baby would have given us away. They would shoot through the wall to kill us, and they would have found us automatically.

So, I had that baby on my lap. I told the mother she had to give it to me. The reason for this is you learn in the resistance that if you have to save the lives of eight people and one can give you away, you have to get away with the one who would give you away. So, that baby was on my lap, and I was having the baby's head in one hand and a pillow in the other. And the moment the baby would have given a sound, I would have smothered the baby right in the pillow. I had to do it to save the other seven people. But, in the meantime, what goes through your mind? To my mind goes, if we all get out alive, if we get alive safe, and if I had to smother that baby to keep it quiet, to kill that baby, and we come out of there, what are the parents going to tell me? They won't understand that their life got saved by giving up that one baby.

And I was shaking and trembling all over my body. I was—I was going crazy. I did hear them coming into the building, and they were throwing around chairs and all kinds of stuff, with their heavy boots on the wooden floor making sounds and everything, and I was shaking and trembling all over, worried that the baby would give a sound. After a while, they were leaving, and then we opened up the wall from the side wall of the cupboard and we could see again. I noticed that from the shaking and trembling, the way a mother cradles a baby to sleep, the baby had fallen asleep. I was so relieved that I didn't have to kill that baby. But what are you going to tell the parents?

Unfortunately, two months later in another hiding place, the family got found and taken to the death camps in Poland for never to come back. The other four people, myself included, we came, too.

EK: Who were the other people that were with you? There was the family of four and you, and then who were the other people?

SS: There was a brother and a sister. That family of four was the sister from that brother. The brother, the man, was actually the fiancé of a woman who was an Austrian non-Jewish woman, who had an Austrian passport with the swastika and everything on it, and when the Nazis, the Germans, came into the building to search, she showed her passport.

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking for Jews.”

“What do you think—I haven't got those dirty Jews. What do you want from me, that I am a dirty Jew?” You know, she was even playing it up, but they were still searching the whole place and everything. She was engaged to that Jewish boy. Jim (inaudible) was his name, and Jim Sousa had two sisters: one was single, and the other one was the one with the family of four. The other one was a friend of mine, Jimmy (inaudible) and myself, and that makes eight. So, these other four people, they got saved and came, too.

EK: Now, what happened to your mom and to your sister? Tell me a little bit about them.

SS: My mother was taken away from the hospital, never to come back. My sister—before the big roundup, when everybody was rounded up, a friend of my father came to our home, a woman. She came to our home—my mother was gone; she was in the hospital. She had a message from my father, because she had visited my father in

Westerbork. There was a time that non-Jewish [people] could come to visit some Jewish friends. They kept it at such low-key, as if nothing was going on. Non-Jewish friends of Jewish in the camp could come and visit, if they had a special pass for that or whatever.

She had a message from my father: "Save my children." So, she came to the home. In my home, I had—in the meantime, also, my girlfriend was gone already; she was taken away with the big raid, my fiancée. She took with—I had, in the meantime, another girl in the house. I wanted to prove that I could save my fiancée. I had a niece of an aunt of mine living with us in the house. As a matter of fact, I got her also a job in the hospital, and she had a stamp on her ID card.

EK: What was her name?

SS: Her name was Clara Vanerongen. But after the big raid these stamps were of no value no more, because all of a sudden, everybody had to go. So, that woman came to our house to save the children, but I told the woman that I could not go, but to take my sister and take this girl. I have to stay here; I'm in the resistance, because I have to keep working for whatever I have to do. So, she took my sister and that girl to The Hague, in a hiding place.

In the meantime, I had to stay in Amsterdam because a lot of Jewish people went into hiding, and people who are in hiding, they need food, food stamps. Now, you couldn't go to a store and just buy food; everything was rationed. To get—to buy food, you had to give them those coupons, rations, which once a month you had to go for to get from an office. I had to deliver these coupons. I got them illegally, or I went to these places where they were given out with false ID cards and everything.

EK: So, you had false papers that allowed you to travel in the city?

SS: No. I had that card that I was free to work, but that was in the meantime not valid no more. So, I was taking a risk. I was just going. I didn't even think of it. I knew I had a job to do. I had no cover no more for that. In the meantime, that stamp that I was having on my ID card was not valid no more. I went to these people, delivered them coupons, rations. Then, there were Jewish people who tried to get to a country that was not occupied by the Germans, like Spain, Portugal, or Switzerland. Now, Holland was completely closed off; you couldn't get out of the country. It was completely locked, closed. But if you had papers, passports or whatever, non-Jewish, then you could get out. So, there were Jewish people who tried to get out of the country.



For these people, I did the following: I did also forgery on these ID cards. I went to restaurants, doctors' offices, where gentile—non-Jewish people—went to visit, and then, of course, they hang up their coats. I search in the coats and I found these ID cards, and I stole these ID cards. Now, you might say that that's not nice, but if there's a war, in the war, anything goes. They could go the next day to the office [and say] "I lost my card," or "It burned," or this or whatever, and get another one. But I couldn't care less. I needed these cards. Then, I changed the picture on it; I changed the identity on it so the Jewish person got the identity of the gentile and then could travel to the countries that were not occupied, like Spain, Portugal, or Switzerland. I delivered these cards, and I went here, there, and everywhere to deliver them.

One night—I did it always after eight o'clock, when it was dark. One night, I went out for a delivery, and I had all these cards and papers with me, and coupons and rations. I got stopped on the street by an SS officer, who asked me for my ID. I was gone, I'm lost already, and if he's going frisk me and he finds the cards and everything and the false ID cards—so, it became a matter of him or me. Anyway, to make the story short, I'm still here. So, I had to do away with him.

Another time, it happened that I was also—went to that office to get coupons and rations, and the man behind the counter [said] "I have to get some more," and he went to the back to get some more; he didn't have enough. And I said to myself, "Get the hell out of here!" But I needed those coupons, so I stayed. Unfortunately, it didn't take long; it took about three minutes, and three Gestapo agents came in and arrested me. That was in that office where I got the coupons, in the Staalstraat in the corner of the (inaudible). They were housing the Gestapo in the Doelen Hotel, which was just around the corner. So, they were there in no time. They took me to the hotel to interrogate me.

EK: Do you remember what date this was?

SS: It was in the fall. It was in the fall of 1943. They took me to the place and interrogated me.

EK: What happened there?

SS: Well, they want to know about other resistance fighters, and for whom do you need all these coupons, and are these for Jewish people in hiding? Where are these people in hiding? And, of course, you don't tell. So, they told me that they're filling up the bathtub, and by the time the bathtub is filled, if I didn't tell them, they're going to drown me in the bathtub. Luckily for me, while they interrogated me, one of them—and it was the one in charge of the three—was called away, and I was left alone with these two, who

were just asking me questions, but not as intense as the one who was in charge. Anyway, they didn't drown me and they didn't get anything out of me, but when the one in charge came back, he said, "Well, if you don't talk, then I'll take you to our commander. He's got a way of getting it out of you."

They took me to a school building that was in the Jewish neighborhood; the school was, of course, not being used anymore. They had their headquarters there, the Gestapo, and it was in the Euterpestraat. When I came in there, they—that was the three Gestapos—told me to stand with my nose against the wall. The idea is, when you stand with your nose against the wall, you cannot look left and right.

I hear them go in through a door, and I figure that is to the commander, to tell him I'm there for interrogation. And then, I said to myself, "Well, I'll try to get out of here." The moment I lift my face off the wall, not knowing that from the three, one was still standing behind me, and he said, "I told you to put your face against the wall. That's what it is," and he took my head and he smashed me into the wall, broke my nose. I've got nothing underneath there; that's completely gone. I was bleeding. I fell down. I was not unconscious, but I played possum, as if I was unconscious. I was lying there, and he kicked me in the back to see whether I was unconscious, that I would yell and scream, but I didn't give a sound. And he went inside, too.

That gave me a chance to escape from the building. I always carried with me a red farmer's hanky, and that was the purpose if I didn't want to show any bleeding. You know, that's also things that you learn in the resistance. I got out of the building, and I had to cross a playground, a fenced-in playground from the school. It was the longest walk I ever did in my whole entire life. I had that red hanky in front of my face—I was bleeding—because on the entrance was an SS guard. And the man, of course, was armed. I didn't want to show the bleeding, so I had that hanky in front of me.

I couldn't run. If I would have run, he would have stopped me: then he knows there's something wrong. If I go too slow, the other ones are catching up with me. So, I had to walk very casual. That was the longest walk I ever did in my life, just to cross that playground. There was no end to it, no end. When I came to the guard there on the entrance, I had the hanky as if I was blowing my nose, and I said, "*Auf Wiedersehen*," that means goodbye. "*Auf Wiedersehen*." And he said, "*Auf Wiedersehen*," to me, and I kept walking. I walked around the fence and I got around the corner, and I started to run.

I got into the Beethovenstraat—Beethoven Street—and there was just a streetcar passing by. In the olden days, streetcars' doors were open; they had no automatic closing door. And I ran after that streetcar. Jews were not allowed on public transportation. You don't think, you're not thinking, you're running, you want to get out of the neighborhood as

fast as you can. I ran and I jumped on the back balcony of that streetcar, and on the back balcony there were four German military police standing there. They were so busy with each other, talking, that they didn't even notice me.

But the conductor, he saw me. I still had that hanky there, and he said, "What are you doing running?" I said, "Well, so-and-so-and-so," fast to the front. And he took me to the front, and he told the driver that I'd like to get off the streetcar, to go slower, that I would jump off again, which I did. I went back to the place where I did my resistance work, and I told the boys that I could do it no longer—I was caught, they took my picture, they knew what I looked like—and I had to go into hiding myself. That's when I went into hiding. I was in hiding for eighteen months.

EK: All right. And where did you hide?

SS: I was hiding in The Hague.

EK: In The Hague?

SS: The same place where my sister and that girl was. And I was there for eighteen months. And after eighteen months, on January 21 [1945] at nine o'clock in the evening, [the Nazis] rung the doorbell and banging on the door, and that's when we got caught. I was taken with the three girls to that very infamous Gestapo jail in Scheveningen.

EK: Who were the three girls? Your sister—

SS: My sister—

EK: And Clara—

SS: My sister and Clara, the two girls. The three of us: with me, that's three.

EK: The three of you together, okay.

SS: The three of us were taken to that—they used to call that infamous Gestapo jail Orange Hotel, because the Dutch people of the House of Orange and the good Dutch

people went in the House of Orange. So, they called it the Orange Hotel, which was the jail, of course. The jail is still there. I visited it after the war. The next day—no, first—no, no, no. That night when we got caught, they put us in jail, in the police jail, in a regular police jail in The Hague. And then, the next day, they transported us to—a Dutch policeman, because even the police were collaborators in Holland. Not all of them, but a lot of them. It's known that the police collaborated a lot. And they took us, walking—no transportation, walking, from The Hague to Scheveningen, to that Orange Hotel, to the jail there. I told these two girls, "We have to try to escape." We had to walk in front of them, ten, fifteen feet in front of them; ten feet, I would say.

I told each girl, "When we get to that intercession, you go right, you go left. I'll turn around and I'll smash those two guys, those two policemen, right over. Start running. They are but two, we are but three; one of us has a chance to escape." Anyway, that's what we did. I got to that corner, and there was a lamppost on the corner, and I swung around that corner to get speed and I run those two policemen over. It was January; there was snow on the street. I couldn't run very fast. I got to a corner. But, in the meantime, before I got to that corner, he was shooting at me. I was counting the bullets, but I wasn't sure whether he had six or seven shots. And when I came to the corner—went around the corner—it was a left corner, and I was standing there ready. The moment he comes around that corner, I'll smash him to pieces.

But that guy was smart. He went in a big circle around the corner, and was standing with his gun in front of me. He didn't come right away around the corner, because then I would have had him. I would have finished him off out there, because I knew the other policeman went after the other two girls. So, I—and he had me right there.

EK: What happened to Clara and to your sister?

SS: I'll tell you that later.

EK: Okay.

SS: This policeman is standing there with the gun. I said, "There's nothing in there no more. It's empty." He said, "Try me." I said, "I know. I counted the bullets. It's empty." But I didn't want to take a chance. I didn't want to take a chance, so I—if I would have known, of course. But anyway, I didn't take a chance. He was taking me back, with the gun. He could have had another one in there.

So, he took me back. And when we came there, where we split, my sister was lying on the street there. She was shot through the leg. And Clara was standing there, and he was holding her. These girls run both in the same direction. They didn't split up like I told them. So, he run after two girls; one he shot, and Clara he took like that, so now they had the three of us together. They put us into a cellar, downstairs somewhere, and I performed first aid on my sister. I put a tourniquet on her that she won't bleed to death, on her leg. And then other policemen came with—not now with guns, but with a carbine; that is shorter than a rifle. They're sharpshooting machines. So then they said, "Okay, now try to escape." I told the girls, "There's no chance now."

So, they walked us over to that infamous Gestapo jail in Scheveningen, the Orange Hotel. I was in the Orange Hotel. I didn't see the girls. I was in one cell with three other men, also Jews who got caught, and I was for fourteen days interrogated in Scheveningen, in jail. But, of course, I didn't let anything out.

And after fourteen days, they put us all in a boxcar. A boxcar is one of those cattle cars that they used to use for to transport the Jewish people to the concentration camps, to the death camps: no windows, no seats, no nothing. I was in there with about, I would say, eighty people. No water, no food, no bathroom facilities. There was a barrel in the corner. Three days and three nights. People had to let go. The smell, the stench. Old people moaning, groaning, heart attack; kids, babies, crying. I was then twenty-two years old. How do I get out of here? But you can't get out of there. You're in a boxcar, which is locked from the outside. It was no doing, and it took three days and three nights that we traveled. And we came to Westerbork concentration camp.

EK: Okay. So, Sam, we're coming to the end of this tape. We're going to stop here, and then we'll start again in just a moment.

SS: Okay.

EK: Okay.

***Part 1 ends; part 2 begins***

EK: I'm Ellen Klein with Sam Schryver, and this is tape two.

So, before we ended tape one, you were about to tell us about being taken to Westerbork. But, before you do that, would you back up and tell us a little bit about being in hiding,

because you were in hiding for eighteen months, and that's a long time. What was that like?

SS: Boring. Extremely boring. You have nothing, no place to go. Most of the time, I was in a room—it was a decent room, but in the attic. So, I had a puzzle there, a crossword puzzle, a deck of cards to play some kind of card game. It was so boring that I opened up a little window and I let a fly in, to have some company. For the fly not to fly away, I pulled the wings off, so it could only walk on the table where I was. And I fed it; I kept it alive.

It was a very boring time. You were hearing about the war, and you did hear about the invasion and that they landed in France and you followed it, but there was no information from the outside. The only information we got by the press was the press that was from the Germans, from the occupation, and everything was being controlled. So, you didn't know, but whatever we knew is that they were on their way to liberate Europe. As a matter of fact, when I got caught, they were already in Holland, but they were standing still there for about eight, nine months. It was with the Battle of the Bulge.

EK: Yes.

SS: They were standing still in Holland for a long time—and Holland is so small. You can cross and in an hour you're out of the country. But they couldn't get past Nijmegen and Arnhem; the battle was there. They were first. No, the hiding time—I knew I was safe there in the meantime, that's the only thing—and taken care of.

EK: Why was that a safe space?

SS: Because I was not outside. I couldn't be caught on the street, and I didn't go out. Once or twice in the evening dark, I walked around the block, and then I said to myself, "It's not worth the chance to get caught. If you want to have some fresh air, then open up that little window and take a breath of fresh air." So, I haven't been outside for practically eighteen months. It's a boring time. But, in the meantime, you're safe.

EK: And why do you think you got caught?

SS: I don't know. I don't know. Maybe I do know, but I cannot accuse anybody without having any proof.

EK: Right.

SS: I cannot accuse anybody. You want me to tell the story the way I told you before [in the pre-interview], then I will do that.

EK: Well, I was looking for what you felt like the change was and what was happening there where you were hiding.

SS: Do you want me to tell the story of what I think, how I got caught?

EK: I think so, if you're comfortable.

SS: I was in hiding there for eighteen months. Food was getting scarce. There were no extra rations, no coupons coming in. It was only the coupon ration from the people that were there living. I cannot accuse anybody, because I have no proof. We got caught, the three of us, on January 21, 1945, nine o'clock in the evening. They were knocking on the door, ringing the doorbell. They came in, the Gestapo. There were three Gestapo agents there, and they took us to the jail in The Hague, the regular police jail where we had to stay overnight. The next morning, we had to—on the control of the Dutch police, we had to walk to that very infamous jail in The Hague, in Scheveningen; they used to call it the Orange Hotel, because Orange is the color of Holland, and the good Dutch people—only the good ones would be in there.

When we were walking there, the two policemen behind us, the three of us, I told the two girls, "This is the chance, at least for one person to be able to get away, to escape. When we get to this intersection, you go right and you go left, and I will turn around and smack those two policemen over, knock them to the ground. And one of us will have a chance." Which I did. I came to the corner and I swung around the lamppost that was on the corner there, and at full speed into these two policemen, knocked them over. Then I started running. I did hear shooting behind me; the policeman was running after me, and he was shooting and shooting.

I came to a corner, a left corner, and when I came around the corner I was standing with my back against the wall, ready: the moment he comes around the corner, I would have him. But he was smart enough. He was smart, he came in a big circle around the corner, and he was standing with the gun in front of me. I told him, "It's empty; you emptied it out on me."

“Oh, yeah? Try it.”

I said, “I know it’s empty.”

He said, “Well, just try it.” I didn’t want to take a chance, and he pointed the gun at me and walked me back to the corner there where we were. My sister was lying there, bleeding from her leg. The policeman had run—the girls didn’t split up. They stayed together, they walked in one direction, so the policemen shot one of them—my sister—in the leg, and that other girl he caught.

So, then we were brought into a place there, some kind of a cellar. I gave my sister first aid, put a tourniquet on her leg, and then other policemen came with the heavy materiel, with carbines; that is some kind of rifle, precision rifles. And they told us, “Okay, now try to run away.” That’s when they took us walking to that jail in Scheveningen there, to that very infamous Gestapo jail. And I was there for fourteen days, and interrogated for fourteen days. After that, I was put in a boxcar, like I told you before.

When I came into the camp, Westerbork, I must have been brought in there with a note, because one or two of the Gestapo who had caught me was there. I was brought into the office of the camp commander; his name was [Albert K.] Gemmeker. That Gestapo agent was there, and I was interrogated. I was standing, and half a step behind me, on each side, was an SS. The camp commander, Gemmeker, he interrogated me. He had two lights, sharp lights, on my face—beams; that’s how they do that—and he was asking me questions: my name and where I lived, and about the resistance and other people in the resistance. But by the very first question that he asked me, I was shrugging my shoulders.

He asked me everything in German. Now, I do happen to speak fluently German, but I acted as if I didn’t understand German. So, they did get a German Jew in Westerbork, in the camp, to become the interpreter. So now, he asks me—the camp commander—the question. The question he asked me in German. Now I look at the interpreter, he has to—but, in the meantime, it gets me time to think. That was the whole idea. So, every question was, “What’s your name?” and “Where did you live?” “Are there other resistance fighters and people in hiding?” And, of course, I don’t answer any of these questions. And all the time he goes through the interpreter, and I was waiting for him to translate it.

And then the camp commander asked me a question in German, “*Wo sind deine Eltern?*” That means, “Where are your parents?” and I did not wait for the interpreter to translate



it. I got right back at the camp commander, and I said, “I’d like to ask you that question, where my elders are! They were here once. Where are my parents?” Oh, that did it, of course, and I was put in solitaire [solitary confinement] for three days, water and bread only. But I didn’t let anything out, of course. I didn’t give him any—no information.

EK: So, he was embarrassed?

SS: I don’t care whether he was embarrassed. Well, I couldn’t hold back at that time, when he asked me that. He felt, of course, that it made a fool out of him. It’s too bad. It’s too bad. And then, I was put in a work commando, where I had to do batteries. In Holland, if you want to buy new batteries, you had to bring in the old batteries. I mean, the regular flashlight batteries. So, all of Holland, a hundred thousand of these batteries were being delivered, being brought in, and they came to Westerbork.

What we had to do there, we had to take them completely apart. There was one machine that you had to put it in, and you had to give it a kick to open it, and cut the battery in two. Now, these batteries where you cut them open and they split, then you have on the outside here paper. And, oh, I knew it so well. I did thousands of them. And paper that went in the garbage can, and then the sink went in this can, and then there was a lead strip inside. You had to cut that off. The tip was copper, so the strip goes there, that’s lead, and there goes the copper. And then there was leftover brown (inaudible) but that was in gauze, in some kind of a gauze, and you had to get that off the gauze. You had to do that with your fingers, because they don’t give you tools, because a tool becomes a weapon. You had to do that with your fingers. And I’ve done that for all the time that I was there in the punishment barrack.

I had an ID card specially, with an S on it. S in Dutch means *straffe* [pain] and also in German, *gestraft*. And whenever an SS officer would ask me for my ID card and he sees the S on that, they had special treatment. In the barracks where I was peeling off the brown (inaudible) which was stuck on the battery, my hands, my fingers, my thumbs were bleeding. The flesh was gone on my thumb, because I can do something here with my finger that normal people cannot do. Look. (gestures) It’s got a whole dent in it. All that flesh on both thumbs are gone. Here, I push it in; look here. There’s nothing there.

EK: Because it’s so caustic, right?

SS: Yeah. Completely—the flesh was gone. And after I was in the punishment barracks, I got later on in the regular camp.

EK: Were Clara and your sister also there at Westerbork? Were they transported to the same place?

SS: Clara was there, but I didn't see them. I didn't see them at all till after the war. I haven't seen them at all. But the reason that I am going out to schools and to colleges, universities, and high schools to speak to young people is because young people have to know what happened for their own protection. So, I do that because I have a legacy to do that, a legacy, and I have six million reasons. The six million reasons are the six million Jews who died in the concentration camps. Six million Jews who died; among the six million Jews, a million and a half children—a million and a half!

And I ask myself so very often, from the million and a half children who died, maybe today there could have been a genius, like there've been so many geniuses among Jewish people. Einstein. Take, for instance, Dr. Jonas Salk. Maybe he isn't even known by a lot of people. Dr. Jonas Salk in the fifties [1950s], 1950s, came out with the polio vaccine. Today young people don't even know what polio is. There have been so many Jewish geniuses in literature, in music, and in every aspect. And I ask myself so very often, from the million and a half children who died, got killed, murdered, slaughtered, maybe today there could have been another genius who could have found a cure for today's sicknesses: the lung, heart, cancer, AIDS, all that.

No. No, they killed a million and a half kids. Not for what they had done, no, no, no: for what they were, Jewish. Six million Jews in total. Also got killed five million non-Jews, like homosexuals, Gypsies, like political prisoners, invalids—Hitler killed his own invalid non-Jewish people. He wanted a pure race, a pure race. He killed his own non-Jewish invalid people, because he wanted a pure race: blond hair and blue eyes, and that's something that I don't understand. Himself, he had dark hair and dark eyes. That's still unbelievable for me. And that's why I never understand that.

EK: Tell me—go back, though, and tell me more about being in Westerbork. Tell me about how you survived in Westerbork, and who you helped in Westerbork.

SS: Uh—

EK: And how you escaped.

SS: No, I didn't get to help in Westerbork. I helped myself.

EK: Okay. Tell me about that.

SS: Everybody was on his own. Because of my attitude, because it comes to a point I have a very bad attitude if it comes to survival—not in regular life, but in survival. Food—didn't get no gourmet. It wasn't very bad, because they kept Westerbork as a low-key. There were no numbers on the arms given in Westerbork, either, because Westerbork was still in Holland. They didn't want any suspicion that 3,000 kilometers away from Westerbork in Poland people got put in the gas chamber and killed and slaughtered. So, they kept it at a pretty low-key. The food was—you could just live on it; you didn't die from it, you didn't get no stomach problem from eating too much, but it was not too bad. But for me, it wasn't enough, because I was always hungry, hungry.

So, one day I took my little pan that I had there, and I went to the Gestapo kitchen. There was a cook there, and I went to one of those pots that were right on the stove, opened it up, and started scooping out [the food]. I think, either he kills me, or what the hell can happen to me? I'm hungry here, I didn't know what the hell it's going to be all together anyways. And he said to me in German, "What are you doing there? You know if they see you here that I could get—" I think, "Oh, I've got the right guy here!" He's afraid that's he's gonna get [killed] if they see me here.

I said, "I will be coming here every day. I'm hungry. You guys are eating. I gotta eat, too."

"Don't you come back!"

I said, "Here's what I'll do. This pan here, I will put every day right there under the barrack. If there's no food in there, I will come." And every day, I had food, every day—besides the other things that I stole. When I came out, I was pretty well built. I didn't have no hunger. Listen, for survival, you'll do anything, and when it comes, a guy'll go through everything. I'll go through the wall if I have to.

EK: And how did you escape from Westerbork? Because I know that you escaped.

SS: We could hear the sound of—well, first, I'd like to tell you something else. I'd like to tell you that in Westerbork—to Westerbork came 110,000 Jews. There were in Holland, before the war, 140,000 Jewish people. From the 140,000, 110,000 got caught and taken to Westerbork. From Westerbork they were sent to the death camps in Poland, of which, from the 110,000, less than 2 percent came back. About 2,000, 3,000 came

back, that's all, when the camps were liberated. From the 110,000 who were taken away into the death camps were also my parents. And—

Let me put it different. From the two sets of grandparents—my father was one of fourteen, and my mother was one of five children. That means from the two sets of grandparents there were nineteen children, married: thirty-eight uncles and aunts. I have never been able to count how many cousins I had. After the war, there was one uncle, one aunt left. Cousins, less than fingers on one of my hands. They killed all my relatives, my friends, my neighbors, my schoolmates, my—everybody I knew, everybody, including my parents. After the war, I was an orphan, without parents. You've gotta make a life for yourself. You gotta see that you get there.

You know, when I go to schools, very often I ask the kids, “What is the worst disease?”—you know, when I give lectures. “What is the worst disease that has killed more people than any of the diseases that has been combined in the world?” And they put up their hands, and they come with AIDS and cancer and heart trouble, and the plague. No, no, no, no, no. No, no. The worst disease that has killed more people than any, any of the diseases that are combined in the world is discrimination. Discrimination has killed more people than anything else in the whole world. Discrimination is deadly. Discrimination is the worst thing there is.

And I tell these kids in school, “Don't you ever, ever discriminate, not against race, religion, nationality, or color of skin. If it comes to color of skin, I'm colorblind. I don't know any color. I only know good or bad. The bad ones, I don't associate with. Don't you ever discriminate, because if you discriminate, you start the next Holocaust, because that's how it all started, with discrimination. Hate, bigotry, that's the worst thing there is in the world. Don't you ever, ever discriminate or hate. Scrap hate out completely.”

EK: So, what happened? Go back again for me, though, to Westerbork. How did you get out?

SS: We could hear the thundering of the artillery fire coming close and closer, and we knew that any day we could be liberated, any day. We had to work from sunup to sundown every day. And I said to my buddy, “You know, pretty soon, we're going to be free.” In the middle of the day, we had to stop working, about one o'clock.

EK: What day was this? Do you remember?

SS: That was on April 11.

EK: Okay.

SS: We had to stop—forty-five [1945]. April 11, forty-five [1945], 1945. Everybody in the barracks [was told] “Don’t come out. If you come out of the barracks, from the towers you’ll get shot.” I said to my buddy, “I don’t trust that. I don’t trust.” If the Allied forces are coming closer and closer, the guards are going to run away. What are they going to do with all the people in the barracks before they run away? They can come in with a machine gun and mow us all down. I said, “We’re going to escape tonight.”

“I don’t want to get shot from the towers,” my buddy said, “and I don’t want to be in the middle of that.” I said, “Well, if you don’t go, then I’ll go by myself. I’m not going to be a sitting duck.” When it got a little dark, I crawled on my stomach out of the barrack, tucked myself into a garbage dump, put a box over my head with a hole in it to be able to breathe. When it was completely dark in the camp, I escaped: went under the barbed wire, ’cause in Westerbork the barbed wire was not electric powered. I escaped.

I start walking in the dark through the woods for hours, in the direction of the noise of the artillery fire. Then I got between the two fighting armies. Bullets were flying all around. I got to a canal, and I want to swim across the canal, so I undressed and I got my clothes bundled above water and I swam across the canal. When I came out on the other side, I had a rifle butt on my head. Oh, my God, those Germans got me again! But I did hear a foreign language being spoken. I think, oh, that’s it! I’m free! No. They took me into custody.

EK: Who was it?

SS: It was a brigadier general.<sup>1</sup> The name, I found out later, of course. At that time, I didn’t know. It was a brigadier general. He claimed that—by an interpreter, because I didn’t speak no English at that time—he claimed that I was a collaborator with the Nazis. I said, “I’m an escapee from Westerbork concentration camp!” “That is—I don’t know.” I walked through the night four miles, five miles.

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Victor Allard (1913-1996), who was the commander of the Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade during World War II. He was Chief of the Defence Staff from 1966 to 1969.

“I don’t know a way from the camp you’re talking about—” that’s now going with the interpreter back and forth. “The camp you’re talking about are military barracks, German military barracks. We have seen from reconnaissance planes yesterday, who took the pictures. Only military.” I said, “Sure, because we were kept in the barracks! We were not allowed to go out.” [The interpreter said] “No, you’re lying. It’s not true. They’re military barracks, and we’re going to bombard it and flatten it with artillery fire.”

So, I said to the brigadier general, “If you do so, I told you right now that there is being kept about close to 1,000 Jewish people there. If you’re going to do that, then I’m going to hold you responsible after the war for killing 1,000 innocent people. I told you so.” He looked a little different at me. “Are you willing to go back with a six-man patrol?” I said, “Sure. Give me some firing power. I’m not going back into German territory without being armed.”

“No, we don’t arm civilians.”

I said, “Well, that’s too bad, then. I’m not going back, but I’m still holding you responsible.”

So, then he changed his mind. He gave me a handgun with several rounds of ammunition, and then we had to start walking. I was walking between two military men, who were half a step or a step behind me, and four in the back, and the interpreter. They had the order, I was told, that the moment I make a wrong move, to kill me. We run into a stiff German SS and collaborators from the German side, and we had to eliminate them. We started to fight these men, and they found out very fast on whose side I was. We eliminated these guys—we didn’t lose any of our own men—and we continued to walk.

It got just a little bit daylight when we got to the camp. The gate was open. The guards had run away already, and everybody was still in the barracks, because it was still—it just started to get twilight, or dawn, whatever you call it early in the morning. It had just started to get the bright light. There was one man with us with a field radio; he radioed back to his commander that it’s true, what I told, it’s a camp with the prisoners, and an hour and a half later the Canadian armed forces rolled into the camp. The brigadier general was there, too: a big man, giant, big man. He came over to me, and all he said in his very heavy voice, “Oh, you were right.” And that’s all he said, because he had to continue to liberate the rest of the country. That was the end of that story.

But twenty-two years later, when I immigrated to Canada—in the meantime, I worked in Canada first, and then in 1954 I immigrated to Canada. On Armistice Day 1967—I always go to Dominion Square in Montreal, Canada, where I live now, and I put to

commemorate the soldiers who died, the people who died in the Holocaust, soldiers of the First World War, the Second World War, and all these. There is the mayor of the town speaking, and a priest was speaking, a rabbi speaking, and a military man is speaking. And I look at that man, and I think, "I've seen you before." It was a big man with lots of medals, all full of medals. "I think I've seen—that is the brigadier general from twenty-two years ago!"

Right when he's finished, I go over to see him. He was finished, he comes down the podium there, and I start to walk over to him. Before I knew it, I was hanging in the air: two big military policemen who was guarding him, they got me. As a matter of fact, I met one in Montreal later on in life, one of these military policemen. And I yell at the brigadier general. In the meantime, he became the chief of staff, the highest in command of Canada. I said, "Don't you recognize me?"

"Who?"

"Holland, Westerbork."

And he looked at me. He said, "You're the boy who swam across the canal."

"You're right!"

He said, "Let him go, let him go!" Anyway, they marched through the city; I marched with them. And after, we became good friends. Every Armistice Day we were together. As a matter of fact, I have pictures that I can show you on that. I will show you that later on. We got together every Armistice Day, had lunch with the wife, and he became a good friend of mine. He passed away in 1993. But I never talked about this here. How did I get to talk about it after forty-eight years—

EK: Yeah, tell me about that.

SS: —because for forty-eight years, I didn't talk about anything. Only I start to talk to combat the Holocaust deniers. So, when I started to talk in schools and at the Holocaust Museum, Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, I had kids asking me questions. They said, "Sam, you were talking about when you were in Westerbork, but you didn't say how you were liberated, how you came out." And that's how that story came out with the brigadier general and that later on he became [a friend]. And there was a journalist in the audience there, and he came over to me after. He said, "Could I

interview you?" I said, "Well, what do you like to know?" He asked me about this story and everything, and before I knew it, it was in the *St. Pete Times*. It was on the front page with pictures and the whole thing, and then it came into the *Tampa Tribune*. I was asked to be on television and talk radio and all these things.

Before I knew it, it blew over to Montreal, Canada. When I came back in Canada in June, this guy came to me from the *Montreal Gazette*, and phoned me. "Can I come over to your house to interview [you]?" They came to the house, and before I knew it, it was on the front page with my story and a picture. I get a call from the Consul-General of the Netherlands, and he asked me to come and see him. Anyway, I came there, and he asked me about the story. I told him the story, and a while later—it was in 2000. In 2000, my wife got a call—it was kept secret—to bring me to the consulate. When I came there, there were about 130 people there. There were ambassadors there and consul-generals of all the various countries were there. I didn't know what it was going on.

And then, all of a sudden, I was called to come, by the Consul-General, out of the audience there, and before I knew it—he had reported it to the royalty in Holland, to the Queen of Holland. And then he told the story to the audience there, the whole thing about what happened, and for having saved the lives—later on, I was told the real amount, 870 Jewish people in the concentration camp. I was given this medal. I was knighted by the Queen of Holland. That was the story with the brigadier general there.

EK: Beautiful.

SS: I will show you a picture later on of the brigadier general.

EK: Good, good. So, what did you do after the war, before you immigrated? When you were there at the camp, the camp had been liberated. What happened after that?

SS: When the camp was liberated, they started right away to bring in Dutch Nazis and German SS. And now, I became the guard in Westerbork. We were not allowed to—anyway, we couldn't go back to our cities yet, because Holland wasn't completely liberated. The northern part and eastern part of Holland was liberated, but not the west, and it still took quite a while. So, everybody had to stay in the camp. But in the meantime, they brought in Dutch Nazis and German military, SS, and then I became the guard.

EK: What was that like, to switch roles like that?



SS: What was it like? It's very difficult even to express myself about it. You haven't got a feeling "Now I am in charge," no. You try to get back what has been done to you, and you can never, never, never get back what they did to you and what they have done to you bodily, mentally, in every respect. I was a guard there from 19—from the liberation that was on April 12, 1945, I was a guard there until June 22. So, that's a good two months. I tried to get back, but you can't get back what they did to you. And then it was taken over by the Dutch government later on, and all these people, they never—and all those Dutch collaborators—Holland had per capita, compared to other countries who were occupied by Germany, Holland had the most collaborators of all of the other occupied countries.

EK: Why do you think that is?

SS: Because they collaborated with them. People were promised they'd get this, they'd get that, they'd get bread, they'd get wine, they got here, they got there, their children got this or that. And some of them [the Dutch] are being sympathetic to them. There were so many collaborators in Holland; it's known for it. It's statistics; you can look it up. Holland had the most collaborators of all of the Nazis' occupied territories, most of them. (inaudible) But all these hundreds of thousands of people, you cannot all put them in jail. And the same thing in Germany, in the concentration camps and all the ones who killed all the people: they didn't get anything.

But I could never, never understand. I could never understand what a mentality—and I've seen pictures. I've seen so many, many things. These—I cannot find the right words for these people who did the killing. How could they go, on Christmas, home to the wife and the children, and bring them some toys for the kids or a doll for their own kids, and play with their own kids, while they were killing millions of children themselves, Jewish kids? I never understood that mentality, how they could just—and in the concentration camps, they'd get together with their own people, having their own parties and singing and dancing and all this. They were beasts. They were beasts.

I never could understand that. I still will never be able to understand. I will never be able to comprehend. I will never be able to find peace, just to think what happened, because I have so very often after I have been speaking, people come over to me, and they say, "Oh, you know, I can imagine—" I say, "No, you can't. You can't. It's unimaginable." As a matter of fact, when I get to talk about it, I find the words "It was very bad." You cannot find the word. I made a word myself, I made a word, because there is—if you say it was atrocious, it was (inaudible), no, no. It was unbeklumicable. There has to be a new word for what the Holocaust was, because there isn't a word in the whole dictionary. It was really unbeklumicable, unbeklumicable, and I know the word, what it means. It was the worst that it has ever been in the world. Unbeklumicable.

And that type of people, I still don't understand. I still don't understand. One crazy man, Hitler. There were millions who followed him. Those highly, highly, highly, highly, highly intelligent Germans, because these Germans—I'm now talking before the war. I'm only talking before the war. If you wanted your children, the countries around Germany, if you wanted your children to have a good education, you sent them to Germany. The schooling there, they were the best in anything and everything: science, physics, in literature, in arts, in tool-making, in furniture-making, you name it. In anything and everything, they were the best. And that these highly, highly intelligent people, that they have lent themselves to do what they have done, to follow a madman and kill eleven million people not for what they had done, but for what they were—I cannot find the word for it, but that's unbeklumbicable.

I will never be able to find peace with that, never. Never, ever. Never, never, never. Still, up to today, I cannot—I don't want to go very deep in my mind about what happened and what I have lost, because I'm afraid I will go bananas. I really don't want to take stock, go really deep, deep into it, and I have never done it. And I don't want to, because I know myself. I would go berserk. I would smash everything around me to pieces. I don't want to go deep into it, because it has really been unbeklumbicable.

EK: Okay. You did some very wonderful things after the war. Do you want to tell me about those?

SS: Well, after the war, when I came out of it after the war, I was alone. My parents didn't come back. I didn't know what to do. I haven't got any recollection of the first six months. I don't know how I had been living, I don't know from what I had been living. I know only one thing, that I had no direction where to go or what to do, because I was going to the Red Cross, who were getting the names of the people who were coming back from the concentration camps, looking at the lists. They find people in here and there, in Poland and Czechoslovakia; they found them here and there, some people. And I found one friend of mine, Harry Goldberg: a bosom buddy, lived in my own street, and we were friends for years. He was in Davos in Switzerland, because he came out of the camp with tuberculosis, and Davos is the best place in Switzerland. They sent him there for getting cured and better.

I was going there every day to the Red Cross for months to see relatives coming back, the names on it [the list]. After a month, then two months and three months, and then after six months, I had to give up. I didn't see the names of my parents or any other relatives. There was one aunt. And I had to give up. One day, at home—I was living in a room—I walked into the bathroom, and I see the guy in the mirror, and I didn't like what I saw. I didn't like the guy, the way he looked. And I told that guy that if you don't take care of

yourself, then you're gonna go under. So, either—what do you want? You want to live, or do you want to die, make an end of it and be gone, or do something?

And what I did was I started to get a job, and that was with, at that time, with Hachshara Aliyah Le'Azrat Ha'Yeled. I went to school in evening and study at night, and at three o'clock my head fell on the table but at seven o'clock, up again. I got my B.A. and I did very well, and I took care of myself. I worked for Hachshara Aliyah. Hachshara Aliyah was—Hachshara is for the preparing of the *aliyah* for Jewish people to Israel. Who wants to go to Israel after the war? People who were alone, or had nothing or nobody. But there were also children who were given, during the war, by Jewish people into hiding. “Take my child.” And, after the war, to get them back. But a lot of these people did not come back, and the child was with gentile people.

So, a lot of these gentile people, after the war, came forward and went to the Jewish community and said, “I have here a child, and the original name is so-and-so,” and gave them back to the community. But an awful lot did not give the children back, which I understand. They had the kids, let's say, for two years, three years. You get to love the child. Some had them from babies on; some had them when the kid was eight years [old]. I had a cousin; he was from his eighth to his eleventh year. And they get to love the kid. But hey, hey, hey, we lost so many! After the war, we were left over from 140,000 to 25,000 Jewish people in Holland. We like to get as many as possible back into the community to build it up again.

So, I went around for Hachshara Aliyah, in Holland, visiting villages and little towns, because most of these kids were in hiding with farmers or with little villages, to find these kids. Now, how do you find a Jewish child, you know? So, I went to playgrounds, and I went to school playgrounds. There is recess. During the recess, you see those kids play. And one kid said, “That's one kid there; you stand here, and you together—” That was the Jewish child, because we are leaders. We are leaders. They cannot take that away from us. We are leaders, and we are also order-givers. So, that has to be a Jewish child. When that kid came out of school, I went over to him. Now, in the olden days, you could start up with kids, but today, you tell your children not to talk to strangers. But not in the olden days. And when I went over to that boy when he came out of school and I said, “Hi, I want to talk to you,” he said to me, “I'm not talking to strangers.” That gave me the confirmation: you are a Jewish boy. Besides that, I knew it. I knew it, I felt it.

So, next time, a couple of weeks later, I followed him to his home and I went to the parents, and I told the parents what I thought. They said no, and they showed me a birth certificate. I said, “Very nice. I'm a forger, too, and I used to forge IDs and passports and all these things for Jewish people who tried to get out of Holland during the war, to Spain, Portugal, or Switzerland.” The dad said, “No, it's official,” and they didn't give in. And then, later on, I went again to the school and he came out of the school, and he

didn't want—I said, “No, I know you don't want to talk to me. I just saw you and say hello to you because I'm going to the Goldbergs'. See you in town. They invited me; we're going to have a nice meal. We're going to have the dish and potato latkes, and we're going to have knishes—” [The boy said] “Knishes?!” I said, “What do you know about knishes?” That's how we felt through. Then I went to the parents; they were so-and-so.

But I had found an awful lot of these kids, and we put them in a home with very good care, and with schooling and students. And we had *shliyakh* coming from Israel, teachers to teach them in the meantime their language. And when the day came there when the State of Israel was proclaimed, these kids—if we couldn't find parents, uncles, aunts, any relatives, then these kids were taken to bid their—okay, and some were too young even to—and taken to Israel. I have hundreds of kids living in Israel, my kids: hundreds of them. Whenever I go to Israel they give me a big welcome there. I have pictures in Montreal of these homes with these kids.

I think, and I had a good life aside from the Holocaust—I think that those three years Hachshara Aliyah Le'Azrat Ha'Yeled; that means “for the help to the children.” I think those three years were the most wonderful years of my life. And as a matter of fact, my wife remembers, because we were just girlfriend and boy going out together. I used to bring adults from Holland to Marseilles to the *Exodus* ships. One day I had a double big truck, with a big trailer behind it, full of arms and munitions—(coughs) excuse me—that I took to Marseilles. She came to say goodbye to me. These three years, from 1945 till 1948, till the State of Israel was proclaimed, were the most wonderful years of my life.

It was just—I had everything. I had black Jewish kids, I had blond ones from Norway, Sweden. I had Chinese Jewish kids, and the beauty of everything is they speak a different language, and with your hand and your feet you had a conversation with them. I don't know what it is, but you could always talk with them. With your hand and your feet, you got there. These three years were the most, most beautiful years of my life. They were beautiful, beautiful.

EK: So, we're coming to the end of the second tape, and if it's okay we'll stop here, and then why don't you tell us some more?

SS: Okay.

EK: Okay.

***Part 2 ends; part 3 begins***

EK: I'm Ellen Klein with Sam Schryver, and this is the beginning of tape three.

Sam, you were telling me about three of the best years, and about what was happening in those years after the war, about finding children and transporting people. Tell me more about that.

SS: Well, to find children after the war was, of course, very difficult. But I think I told you about that already. We put these children in homes, where we educated them, and then we kept them there. The war was going on—the State of Israel was not proclaimed yet. So, we were educating these kids to prepare them for the *aliyah*, for to go to Israel. There was also a group of children which were in hiding in Romania. The children in Romania, they went into the woods, were living there, had their leaders—the leaders were fifteen years old. Little kids, older kids, but mainly there were kids. After the war, these kids came out of the woods. Now, Romania [was] behind the Iron Curtain and everything.

So, finally, these kids—we got 500 of them to Holland, and they went in that big building that used to be a building for sick people, Jewish sick people, demented people, in Apeldoorn in Holland. They were there and they were educated, prepared, Hachshara Aliyah, for the *aliyah*. All the *shliyakh* was there and teaching them and everything. And when the State of Israel was proclaimed, these kids, all of them, went to Israel. And the most joyous day of it was when these kids came from Apeldoorn to Amsterdam, where they stayed for a while, and then they were marching—you know, a group. I was in front with my car with the first Israeli flag, because the State of Israel was proclaimed, right on top of that car, and they were walking through the city to the Central Station in Holland, from where they were going to Marseilles, from where the *Exodus* ships were going to Israel. That was such a joyous day, such a nice part of the whole thing. That was all done and the kids were gone.

Years later—it happened only—this happened in 1948, after the state was proclaimed. About eight years ago, my wife had to see a doctor, and I went with her. When we got to the doctor's office, the receptionist talking with her was a middle-aged woman, and talk and more talk. Anyway, she said, "Your name—" I said, "Well, that's Dutch." And she tells me that she was in Holland, and I ask her about it. She was one of the 500 children from Israel. She came, eventually, to Canada and had married that doctor. He was then a young man; they were both young people. That was—it's a small world, you know, how people meet. And we met them again there. I still see her on occasions now.

EK: That's beautiful.

SS: It's nice. It was nice.

EK: And children were the reason that you started working at the Holocaust Museum, right?

SS: Yes. What actually happened: I haven't got a day where I can commemorate my parents. There isn't a day, a set day, or gravesite that I can go to. I did put my parents' names in Miami at that monument in Miami, on those tableaus there—you know, the big monument there. But I haven't got a gravesite or a certain date [that] I know when they separately were killed in the death camps. So, I read in the newspaper, the *St. Pete Times*, that Bay Pines [VA Medical Center], where the former soldiers and everything here in St. Petersburg. They were have a commemorating service for the soldiers and people who died during World War II. And I said to myself, "That's a new one. That's a good opportunity to go and commemorate my parents and the soldiers who died, who gave their lives so that I will live and so many others."

I went down there. (clears throat) Sorry. When I came there, I felt like an outcast, because these old soldiers were sitting there, one with only a jacket, another one with a cape, but I was just dressed in a normal suit. There was a man there with a white collar; he was a nice guy, a big black man. He came over to me; he was a priest of some kind. I said to him, "I look like an outcast. I'm not a soldier. I'm here for the reason to commemorate my parents. I'm a Holocaust survivor myself, so I like to commemorate here all the people."

"Oh, you're a Holocaust survivor! Maybe you'd like to talk to the boys."

I said, "No, no, no, no. I'm sorry. No, no. I cannot talk. No, are you kidding? I cannot [be a] speaker. No, no, no, no." Anyway, he came back to me later again and again, and finally I think, "Oh, my God, give in already," and then I say okay when he asked me to go on the stage there, on the mic, to speak. I said to them that "I'm a Holocaust survivor, I was liberated by the Allied forces, and I'd like to thank you guys very much for what you have done, and if wasn't for you guys then I wouldn't be here," and I did it all fast to get off the mic, and that was it.

When the whole ceremony was finished and I was about to leave the building, I hear a man calling me. "Sir! Sir! Sir!" and I looked back and see a big guy standing there. I said, "Yes? What can I do for you?" He said, "I am the director of the Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial and Education Center," which is now the Florida Holocaust

Museum. It was Steve Goldman. He said, “I would like you to come there to speak.” I said, “I’m not a speaker.” He said, “Well, come and just see what’s doing there. We have a museum there.” So, I went down there one day to see what’s doing there.

When I got there, there was a docent just going around with children to show the Anne Frank exhibition. As they were going around, I see a picture of a friend of mine, Simon Pierbaum, a guy from Holland that I used to be friendly [with]. He was in my school, in elementary school. And then I see another picture of my father’s youngest sister sitting on the railroad station with a star, waiting with other people to be transported to Westerbork concentration camp. And when I saw these pictures, I wanted to get out of the museum. I went out. “That’s not for me. That’s not for me.”

I came outside, but there were children waiting to come in because it wasn’t organized. The Museum had just started and un-organized; they were coming one bus after the other waiting to go in. But in the meantime, to keep the kids going on the outside, they were showing them a movie about Anne Frank. So, I asked one of the kids when I was outside—I had to get out of there. I said to the kids, “Did you see the movie of Anne Frank already? Well, like Anne Frank, I myself am from Amsterdam, Holland. I was also with it.”

And before I knew, I was talking to these kids about my life and what I—and then they had to go in, but the other group waiting, I started to talk, and before I knew it, I was talking to these kids, and the next kids. The day went by with talking to all these kids. And the next morning when the Museum opened up, I was there from opening till closing talking to all these kids, because they were—it wasn’t organized yet, and they were coming at random, just one bus after the other. So, it was so busy there. And ever since, I’ve been talking, up till today.

EK: So, you had some things you wanted to say about why it’s important to talk about it?

SS: Yeah, it is very important, and let me tell you why it is so important: because young people have to know what happened for their own protection. And if they don’t know what happened in the past, then it is very simple that history will repeat itself. It has always been like that, and it’s been through the years like that. History will always repeat itself, and they have to know for their own protection what’s doing and what has been going on.

Survivors can be silent, like me. I’ve been silent, like I told you, for forty-eight years. They can be silent, or they can lecture, or they can publish their stories. But like—all of these, they contribute to memory. But memory is more than information and more than

words. I know that the Holocaust happened. I know, because even though years of study have convinced me that I will never arrive at the level of real understanding, I will never arrive at the level that I will understand how these highly intelligent Germans have lent themselves to do what they have done, to kill eleven million people. Still, I can't get over it. It is still getting me. People haven't done anything, anything bad to anybody. To kill eleven million people for no reason? I will never be able to find peace with that, for as long as I live.

How do you know, you may ask? I know, because I was there. I experienced it. That memory and the knowledge that goes with it will be gone forever when there are no survivors left, because let's face it: survivors won't be here forever. And I tell that to the children, too. I tell the children when I speak to them that this is a very unique opportunity that they have today, an opportunity that their children, their grandchildren, will never have the same opportunity they have, that they have today, to meet a Holocaust survivor.

I tell these kids, the students, that, "Later on in life, if you ever are going to meet anybody who's going to say that the Holocaust never happened, you can tell them, 'I met somebody who was there. I met somebody who experienced it.' You can tell these people who will deny the Holocaust that you met somebody who was there. That's why today, I want to transfer my memory to you." That's what I tell these kids.

And then I tell them, "One day, perhaps"—well, I used to say thirty years from now, and now I may be down already to ten years from now—"when there are no Holocaust survivors left, it will be your turn to speak for us. You will say that you were present when a survivor of the Holocaust, a witness, made you a witness for the other witnesses. And when one day you are no longer able to speak, then somebody else will speak for you. This way, in a thousand years from now, someone will stand and be a witness and a living thing of memory." And I tell these children, "I just transferred my memory to you," and that's how I leave them.

After I have been speaking to these kids, they'll come over to me, and they thank me. I have tens and tens of thousands of letters over the last twenty years that I have been doing this from the children, which are the most amazing letters that I have ever read. Just imagine what they write. "Now that I met a survivor, now I believe the Holocaust really happened." What did they believe before? In the letters, they write, "You made a different person out of me. I will have more respect for my parents now. I will not hate no more. I will never do this or that again. You changed my life." I get the most amazing letters from children: letters that I know they got the message, letters that I know that I reached them. And then I say to myself, "I wish in one shot I could speak to all the kids in the whole world." Maybe, yes, but it's not possible.



So, I take them by school, one by one at a time, and I will do it for as long as I live, for as long as I can, and I hope that at least I have made some impression on them, because let's face it, these kids have to know what happened for their own protection, and they have to learn what happened because, like I said it before, the Holocaust [is] unbeklunicable. It's unbeklunicable. There's no word to find for it. Unbeklunicable.

EK: How do those children and how do those of us who will watch this—how do we honor the transfer of memory that you've given us?

SS: Well, we have to keep going the story of the Holocaust. If you don't do it, then they will die out like the six million Jews and the five million non-Jews. The story of the Holocaust has to be kept talking and learned and thought, and if this isn't done, this will die out like the people who died out. This is a story that has to be retold and retold and retold, because this is the worst story and the worst thing that has ever been and happened in the world. So, let's face it. The Holocaust [is] unbeklunicable.

EK: Thank you.

SS: You're welcome.

*End of interview*