

# Margalith Clarenberg Testimony Transcript

My name is Margalith Clarenberg. My mother came from Strasbourg and was brought up German and French. My father, I'm from the Rothschild family. My father was the great grandson of Maximillian Rothschild. He married my mother, in nineteen, I don't know, in the '20s. He had a factory in the town of Solingen in Germany but they went to live in the Netherlands because my father was born on the border between the Holland and Germany. My father went generally during the week to Solingen and came the weekend home. We had a lovely house close to the sea and brought up actually quite luxuriously. There was never money problem.

I had friends, but I would say my early youth was already under the stamp of Nazism. You heard everyday stories, people read the papers. People were scared to come to the war. I was in fourth or fifth grade in grade school, I had a test, I had a geography test and I put alarm clock for whatever six o'clock the next morning because I hadn't done any work. I woke up. My parents were both in my bedroom and I had a balcony I was at the front of the house and a window and my parents were looking out and my mother or father say these are German planes and they were afraid this was an invasion. And so I went up also and looked at the planes then I said to my mother the most important question, "Do I have to go to school?" And she said, "No" and I was so glad that there was war. I didn't have to go to school. I didn't have to do this test. And then after five days, the Dutch gave up.

The laws against Jews started very slowly in the Netherlands. I would say about a half a year later. The first things I really don't even remember. But I do remember for instance quite in the beginning you couldn't sit on benches in parks being Jewish. It was a law. Slowly they started with laws like Jews can only buy at between twelve and one – no it was later –between four and five. Jews have to be inside at 8 o'clock in the evening and then they said Jews have to wear a star. This feeling of degrading of is horrible. In Utrecht, I couldn't go to school anymore. And my mother started to teach me. I don't know where she got books but she got books. And we did all the things that you do in junior high. Then really it started that there was for instance an order that Jews couldn't use transportation. We had a car and the Germans had taken our car.

We got a notice that my mother had to go to Poland to a work camp. They called it work camps and there were big discussions in my family. Because they say I have to go to work, it's nothing against working. That's the law. Let's do it. I was teenager, and I said I'm not going. I again was under the age and I had to go with my mother. And the family said what do you mean you're not going are you scared of work. No. I don't want a fence around me. But what I really meant, and I didn't realize then, was I didn't want somebody who's telling me what to do. And it saved our life really. What happened then was a friend of the family, who a physician – he was a surgeon and he told me how to handle to have appendicitis. And I went to other surgeon

and he told me exactly what to say. And I got admitted at the hospital. They cut me open and saw that I was healthy, took the appendix out and then they put me on a bed high up. I was for three weeks in hospital. This surgeon, who did this was very angry and he said to my mother, “Do you know they can close my hospital for that, if they find this out”?

But meanwhile, it was past the date that she had to go to Poland. We got a second letter to go to Poland in April, March or April. When we got the second letter to go and I told my parents that again I didn't want to go. My parents said, “ok, try to find a place to hide if you can find something and we don't know how do it.” There was a problem also. And don't forget, financially, there was no income anymore for years already. And literally you have your money in a shoebox under the bed. And when the money is gone, what are you going to do. And it's scary. For me it was not, because you're young and you think it's ok. But for my parents, yes, there was responsibility involved. And I remember that my parents, my mother probably, my father was not that passive, but in handling things, my mother was the one who said why don't we find something for you in hiding, it's much easier and we go. And you'll at least have enough money. And they tried to talk me into it. I said ok if you find a place where we can hide. And I remember I walked because you couldn't bike anymore as a Jew didn't have a bike. There was no transportation that we could use. So I walked and people told me these people probably will help and these people. But these people and for several days I couldn't find anything.

My mother had an uncle and aunt who lived in The Hague also, in a boardinghouse. The owner of the boardinghouse was a Mrs. Gamble. Mrs. Gamble was married to Mr. Gamble who was English. And her husband was in a concentration camp. The Germans had picked up. She had also a son and the son was also in the camp for English people. And Mrs. Gamble helped us. Mrs. Gamble came and she said, “I will help you to hide.” And we went to a house and she said don't bring anything. They picked up probably, a suitcase. But all the time in the world I mean you leave everything behind but what you wear that's about it. I had a few things. I had a small suitcase, it got lost somewhere too. And so we came, but we couldn't come together at the same time. It was all organized. And we there and I remember she took a scissors and she cut off the Jewish star from my father. And my father said, “what are you doing?” And she said, “It's ok, for the time being, you can stay here.” She had not told us this before. But I can't keep you all three but I will find a place for Margalita or whatever. I don't remember how it go, but so that's the beginning of our hiding.

Edith found a home for me. But the people had a boardinghouse and they needed, you couldn't find help for house work. So they wanted somebody and I was meanwhile fifteen, sixteen probably, getting on sixteen, somewhere in that neighborhood. But I could do the housework, but they didn't think they wanted me to do the kitchen work, because the boardinghouse, I forgot how many boarders they had, but the people ate there too. So in that time, the Dutch eat potatoes a lot, like I told you. So I peeled and we got pails of potatoes. I could peel potatoes very fast. Fish, you could get fish still. But anyway, the people, I had some bad experiences there. I was there only for probably a half a year. I didn't want to complain. I

slept in the kitchen - there was a little room off the kitchen and I put a bunk bed there and that's where I slept. And really I started at six in the morning and I worked until quite late. The story is kind of a sad story. I told you about an uncle and aunt where we came to. They went also into hiding. We lost somewhere towards the end we didn't know, because we didn't live in the same town anymore. And the people in the house where I lived, didn't want me to meet people, the boarders in the house. So they had a daughter and the daughter brought the food up to the people on trays. One day the tray came back with a tea caddy. The Dutch have special tea caddies. And I had embroidered that for my aunt, and I recognized that tea caddy. Of course I recognized it. And accidentally because they didn't know I was there. I mean I didn't come out of my kitchen. And I knew that they had to be there. And I remember that they had a room in the attic. It was a big house, four levels, three or four levels, four levels but they were the third level. And I did hide to see if somebody would come out of the room, because the restroom was across the hall. And I don't remember if I did it once or more. And my uncle came out of there and it was my uncle. And we started crying and we went to the room and we kissed each other and cried and the lady of the house heard it and I don't know how she knew about it and came upstairs, and she hit my aunt and she said that they had done it. And I'll never forget this. My aunt, she was a real lady like elegant lady and I remember that this went through me, now when I talk about it I still get goosebumps because it was so degrading again.

So it's a sad story to finish this. I got the flu and I felt miserable and this lady who had helped us came every so often, once a month or so, I don't remember the time, to see us and see if everything was okay and brought my coupons, because the underground give coupons also to these people for my food and found me sick. I was miserable and had the flu and felt so sick and she said, "Can you sit on the bed with my bike?" "You know, everybody in Holland bike rides. And I said, "why?" And she said, "oh, I want to take you home for the time being till your better." So I went with her to her house. It was the first of April, 1944. The third of April the Germans came and picked up my uncle and aunt. So I never went back. And I told you I lost my clothes somewhere on the road so that was where I lost, so that was it. And then they found for me another place. So there is a special school along one of the rivers. The head of the school lived in the house right next to the school and he had a wife who was sickly, had three sons and adopted a little girl - a four-year-old girl. They needed some help in the household. And I went to these people, lovely people. Stayed there for, I don't remember, I would say a year, eight months to a year. I had some problems there. The big building was empty the school building. And the German airforce - Luftwaffe, went into this building. And I saw them, of course all the time, it was the same ground. Okay, I speak German, of course, and I talked to them kind of doing normal because officially I was not Jewish and if I would have run away from them it would not have been normal. One day the man where I was in hiding came to me and he had a leather bag and he said, "Do you know the bag?" And my heart stopped beating, because this was my father's attaché case. I told him "yes, it's my father's." And then he said to me okay there is a man here and he says that he knows where your parents are and he wants to bring you because your mother's birthday is next week.

It's a surprise, she doesn't know it, we would like to bring you. Your father told us this. Now officially, my parents didn't know where I was. They were not in the house of this English Dutch woman anymore. They found another place, outside of this town in the house of a man who worked in a factory. He had a little piece of land there. He was a factory worker with a wife and two small children. And my parents could stay there. I was at first a little bit scared, but still he knew the birthday of my mother. And the people in the house said there was no problem and I should go. And he indeed brought me to my parents who were in his house and he was the man who did hide my parents. And of course we hadn't seen each other for a year, a year and a half, and it was emotional and I told them everything and I told them my parents about the German Luftwaffe that was there, the air force. I left again and went back and about three or four weeks later, the man came again and asked if I could come for the weekend to my parents and the people said sure. I went with him to my parents, and my mother say, no my father say you stay here don't go back, because we have talked to the underground. It's much too dangerous to be there with all the Germans and you can stay here. The people here will take you. The underground will take care of coupons.

He built for us, there's a marsh, it was all this is marshland, but he lived on a dike, and he built for us a little road too in the middle of the marsh where trees were and he built a little hut. But the hut was really only a bed with straw. And we had mice there not rats. Remember, mice were looking at you. I'm never scared of mice anymore or rats. And we slept in that because it was more secure than staying in the house. And my father fell and broke his leg. And the custom over there was every Tuesday and Friday the doctor drove, the doctor had still a car, drove over the dike because they lived on the dike and if you wanted a doctor, you put a white piece of cotton on your doorpost or on your gate and then the doctor stopped and came. So that's what they did with my father to set his leg. I'm sure that lots of neighbors knew about us, because people lived so close together but everybody was so against the Germans.

This went okay until the day before Christmas. There was really no food anymore. Now the Germans had taken away basically all the food. And I remember that the woman said to us and like I said it was the day before Christmas, "People, I'm very sorry but I've two children and we don't have much food anymore. And I would like you to find something else. Of course, you can stay till after Christmas, but that's the way it is." This is already what we called the hunger winter. I knew a woman who said to me that she knew somebody in the town of Utrecht, remember the town that's up already about ten or twelve miles away. She knew somebody who was a black market marketeer. And he had a little shed in the marsh and she said she would go with me to see how we could get that shed to live for us, because there was no underground anymore. We were lost.

We understood that the woman say we can't stay in her house we understood that her children came first. There was no question about it. I went with this woman to these people and I say like it's not for me, it's for a Jewish family for one week what would be ok, and the man gave us a key. The hut was I would say about six by eight yard, uh feet actually were not yard,

dirt floor, now it was in the middle of the winter. And there was a little in front little part of it in front built on that looked like a tent but it was made of plywood. And it was one of these little ovens that he sold actually that he made money with and he said you can put in anything you want and it burns and then it heats. Now we didn't have anything. We had a bag with twenty-five pounds of beans. And we'd hang this on the wall and we got from the woman who went with me an iron pot and they had used this for pig food and I remember my father cleaned it, because the water was all ice.

On the first of January we went into the little hut. We didn't there was no toilet. So we made out of a box, it wasn't even wood. He cut something out and we put a pail underneath and we used it behind. We had a bathroom that way. My mother and I went to steal wood. Now we couldn't burn or cook in the daytime, because then they would see from the dike that there was somebody living. So we only cooked at night. There was no bed, but we had a mattress. The mattress was standing on the wall. It was wet. And there was a sofa and one chair, I think. What we did is we took the mattress and we slept so that your legs came out off under the mattress so that all three of us could sleep. Because the sofa was so wet it had to dry up. There was snow outside, when we came it was ice actually. And in daytime we didn't have any heat, because we couldn't turn this little oven on. And we also stole, how do you call it's a vegetable that is a relative of a cabbage, Brussel sprouts and they were all frozen and there were lots of them on a stick and I remember us stealing them. And the big turnips what you do is you let them boil and it becomes sweet syrupy after, I don't know, many hours. So we had that and then we had 25 beans a person a day. That was our food. In April end of March an old man came to us and he was a fisherman, and he was in his 80's and he said, "people, you have to get out of here." And we said, "why?" And he said, "because the Germans they broke the dikes and everything will be under water. And we don't know how high the water will get yet. So, you see, you can't stay because you will drowned." But you can stay, I have a shed, and I have two goats and it will be only attic, because my shed will be under water too, and if you don't mind you can stay with the goats up on the shed. So we said yeah, we'd love to and thank you.

We are now in May 1945. The day of the liberation my father had been in the First World War. I have to tell you this to explain this. The liberation officially was not signed I think it was signed on the eighth of May and this was the sixth of May, seventh of May. Was already, but it was not signed yet. So people from the underground came from the town of Utrecht and we had soldiers in the little village and the people where we had been you know with this fisherman on the attic there was somebody else living very close by and right where there was some houses standing together and he was the head of the underground because they had a new underground formed. And they took the weapons away from the Germans. They had 72 Germans . I remember the figure. And I remember my father saying to the man, "don't do this." Soldiers don't want to give their weapons to people who are not soldiers. They feel that that's their dignity. But everybody was so over wonderful and you can do it and at last. So they did it. They came with three tanks from the bigger town and started shooting in the village and killed a

substantial amount of people. The day that was the last day one or two I think the last day before the official liberation, on the eighth of May, I know that day because it's my birthday so I have quite a lot of remembrance. I had a pair of shoes that I was wearing. Remember that I was at the house of the principal of the Bach children and when I came out to stay over there I did wear wooden shoes and saved these for liberation. And yes my father had a package of Camel cigarettes he saved for liberation and he opened and they were all green and completely gone. But my shoes, we decided to walk to the town of Utrecht about six or seven miles. I put my shoes on and said hey they got too small. My feet had grown. I left the wooden shoes to Utrecht.

The town of Utrecht was exciting. We got liberated by the Polish Army and what the Dutch did right away, and I've seen it. Dutch girls, there were lots of Dutch girls who dated German soldiers, for whatever reason. They got food, got pregnant also, liked to have sex or boyfriends or whatever. And the Dutch hated them, of course. So what did the Dutch do? They put them in the streets and they shaved their heads - that day of liberation. And I remember I think I have a picture even somewhere from it. And then for weeks you saw girls with something around their head and you know hey, that's one of the girls. The town, everybody was dancing, I saw columns with Germans without weapons with their hands over their heads. I've seen of course, everybody went to the soldiers that liberated. People went to them, kissed them. And somewhere, we talked earlier about this, you think ok now it's over. It's not over. It's really because there are no connection points anymore for life. A few days later, say something, maybe two three weeks later, my mother and I hitchhiked to The Hague. There was no transportation. You can't imagine how empty and how a country looks after something like this. There is nothing. Streets are broken because not anything was done for them plus heavy trucks on it and tanks. People are sick. People are all things. It was a very strange experience. We went to The Hague. We didn't know that our house was bombed. We go and we nearly couldn't find our own house. There was still one wall standing. And of course people had stolen. And we found, and I still have it about this big. My mother had a silver bread basket and she recognized it. The silver work looked black so nobody picked it up. That's all that we have left over. The woman next door, there was a sign that they lived now at another address. That's the way people did this. We went to her because they had quite a lot of stuff from us before we went away out of The Hague. And her husband had died and she said come and stay with us and sleep, but I don't have any of your stuff. And I remember that sleeping in sheets that had the initials of my mother embroidered in them.

So we decided not to talk about it and let it go. We went back, because there was nothing in The Hague and we went back to Utrecht. We got a house from a Nazi Dutchman, who was a Nazi who was in jail meanwhile. And that's where we stayed first, for quite sometime actually, for several years before we could finally buy our own house.

Source: Margalith Clarenberg video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/clarenbergmargalith/>