

Stories Among Us: Personal Accounts of Genocide

5

Every Wednesday through June 11, we hope you'll join us for Stories Among Us: Personal Accounts of Genocide, exploring past and present atrocities through the oral histories of genocide survivors in our region. Produced in partnership with the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.

Chapter Five

PETER'S STORY: A DUTCH HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

As spoken by Peter M. Written by Ilana Cone Kennedy, Director of Education, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

In May of 1940, German Nazi forces invaded the Netherlands. Two years later, when Peter was seven, the Nazis seized Peter's entire family, except for Peter and his mother. This is the story of one young Jewish boy who survived the Holocaust.

One night I was awakened sometime after midnight. I heard trucks pulling up in front of our apartment house. I remember hearing a metal door slamming and the harsh voices of young soldiers yelling "Juden raus!" Jews get out! I could hear kids crying and women screaming and doors being kicked in. I was seven years old.

My mom told me that Aunt Katie and Uncle Leo were gone. "What do you mean 'gone'?" I asked her.

A month later, Grandma and Grandpa M. were "gone." Then my father was "gone."

My mom recognized that it was just a matter of time before we were caught. She got a hold of the Dutch Underground. The Dutch Underground was a group of regular citizens willing to work together to resist the Nazi government. The Underground took care of providing false papers to Jews (papers that gave a different name or indicated the person was a religion other than Jewish), and they would help Jews find a place to hide.

The Underground arranged for us to stay with Klaas and Roefina Post on a small farm in the northeastern part of Holland. The Posts were very courageous — if we were caught hiding on their farm, we would all be killed.

The Nazis began to suspect that Jews were hiding on some of the farms and began going door to door raiding the farms.

The raids became so frequent that we could no longer hide in the house. Klaas went out and dug a little cave in the side of a hill in the forest next to the farm for us to hide in. It was just big enough for me and Mom to lie in snugly.



PHOTO: Peter M.,
1941 in Amsterdam

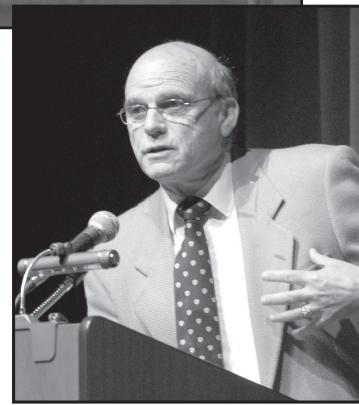


PHOTO: Peter M.,
2007 in Seattle.

Now when we heard the trucks coming, Mom and I would crawl in there. We spent many nights in that cave, hardly able to breathe because we were so afraid.

Mom and I were on that farm for 2 ½ years. It became increasingly dangerous for us to be there.

The Underground arranged false papers for us, and a small room with two women in The Hague. It was 1944 and I was nine years old. These women made my mom clean and scrub the apartment, but at least we were given shelter.

After about eight months, we found out that these women were going to turn us in. The Underground found us a safe place in Amsterdam, but we didn't have a way to get to Amsterdam. The highway to Amsterdam was to be used only by Nazis.

I woke up one night and saw my mom sitting by candlelight with a bunch of sheets in front of her. She was sewing — she made a skirt, a shirt and a hat on which she sewed a red cross. Around 3 o'clock in the morning, she put on these new clothes, bundled me up, and we went out into the snow. We walked toward the highway that led from The Hague to Amsterdam.

When we reached the highway, my mom stuck out her arm to flag down a ride. A flatbed truck stopped and a Nazi officer got out. The SS officer yelled at mom, "What are you doing with this child? This road is for the fatherland! No civilians allowed!"

My mom explained, "... his parents were killed. As you can see, I work for the International Red Cross and I am taking him to an orphanage in Amsterdam."

Mom sat between the two SS officers in the cab. I sat in the snow in the flatbed truck. They took us to Amsterdam.

On May 5, 1945, the Canadians liberated Holland. No one in my family returned. Mom and I were the only survivors. Three years later she remarried, and in 1949 we arrived in New York and then moved to California. I was 13-and-a-half. In 1999, I came to Seattle.

I truly believe that my mother and I belonged to the fortunate ones who survived the Holocaust because of the goodness of Klaas and Roefina Post. I will forever be in debt to them for what they did for my mother and me.

Peter M. is an active member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau. Read Peter's story online at www.wsaherc.org. For more information on this article, or others in this series, please contact the Holocaust Center: www.wsaherc.org or info@wsaherc.org.

MORE TO EXPLORE

- ❖ The Dutch Underground was a group of regular citizens willing to work together to resist the Nazi government and help Jewish people locate a safe place to hide. They were courageous and helped save many lives. Imagine that you are living in Holland in 1940, would you and your family put your own lives at risk to help those who had no place to go and if found, would be sent to a concentration camp? Please give detailed answers as to why you would help them, or not.
- ❖ Peter's mother sewed a white skirt, shirt and a hat on which she put a red cross. She pretended to be a nurse, telling the Nazi truck drivers that she was taking an abandoned child (her son) to an orphanage in Amsterdam. Here is another example of true courage. What do you think she was feeling as she boarded that truck with the SS officers? What does the "red cross" symbol mean and how did that help her and her son survive that trip?
- ❖ In today's newspaper, find an example of courage or heroism. Share the article with your class.