

Foreword

I wrote this book in memory of Shoshanna Litten, Kurt Reilinger and Ernst Hirsch, thanks to them the major part of the Gouda hachshara group was saved.

Shoshanna was the initiator, the inspiring person who ensured that every member of the Gouda group who wanted to go into hiding, was assisted. She was looking for the right contacts and connections and was immediately ready to use the work in France as a springboard for the escape to freedom.

Kurt Reilinger was the person who ensured that six members of our hachshara, together with many others, left Holland on their way to Belgium and France, with the intention to reach Palestine via Spain. He laid contacts with the French Résistance and the Maquis, and with their support he found the escape route to Spain. Sixty members of the Dutch hachshara were thus saved.

Ernst Hirsch turned out to be the cool-headed leader of the thirteen hachshara members who were arrested in Antwerpen and it was thanks to his presence of mind and charm that we were not sent to a concentration camp. Together with Kurt was he in charge of the escape route to Spain.

I wrote the following story in 1995, fifty-one years after my arrival in Palestine. The main part of this narrative is based on a diary that I wrote immediately after the arrival in Spain. At that moment the events were still fresh in my memory, but I cannot guarantee that there might be some inaccuracies.

This book is also written for our granddaughters, Chaja and Sharon Asscher, and for the whole post-war generation, so they should know and not forget!

למען ידעו דור אחרון בנים יולדו

יקומו ויספרו לבניהם.

(תהילים ע"ח/ו)

Opdat het volgende geslacht zal weten,

zonen zullen geboren worden,

zij zullen opstaan

en het aan hun kinderen doorgeven.

I was born in the Kazernestraat 6 in Amsterdam in 1924. I was the third out of four children and our family lived according to the Tora and tradition.

The Kazernestraat was a kind of a Jewish community, most of the inhabitants went to the same synagogue and during the years neighbours often became friends. Till I was a teenager, I hardly became in touch with non-Jews. My father worked in the Asscher diamond factory in the Tolstraat although he would have preferred studying at the Art Academy because of his great talent as amateur draftsman. The first years of my life passed carefree, after the kindergarden and the Herman Elte elementary school I went to the rabbi-and teacher seminary, but after having studied two years I left and went on Hachashara in Gouda.

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This document is a translation from "Van Mokum near Jerusalem (1924 - 1944) Berrie (Jissachar) Asscher. The first three chapters of his book are about his Jewish life at home and are not translated.

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Chapter IV HACHSHARA IN GOUDA

“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs (Psalm 126: 5)

The years I learned in the seminary coincided with the increasingly threatening war clouds over Europe. These were the years of the German occupation of the Rhineland, the massive rearmament of the German army, the 'Kristallnacht' in November 1938, when dozens of synagogues were burned in Germany, the first concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald were heard of, the capitulation of Chamberlain in Munich and the dismantling of Czechoslovakia became facts, as well as the German threat to Poland. Every day we read about the persecution of Jews, socialists and communists in Nazi Germany. To what extent was this a threat to our quiet life behind the 'safe' water line? Were we aware that the Netherlands is a very small country compared to the German giant? I believe that it slowly but surely dawned on us, but for most people it was easier to push off the idea assuming that the Netherlands, as it was between 1914 and 1918, would remain unaffected.

At home the mood was ambivalent, on the one hand, one became aware of the problems, especially because of the stream of Jewish refugees we got in touch with, while on the other hand one preferred thinking and convincing one selves that it was not so bad at all. We came aware of the refugee problem in 1937 when my parents gave home to Jo Dunner, a boy my age whose parents lived in Cologne. He stayed with us until his parents came to the Netherlands. In the end of 1938, Friedchen Laub, who was as old as my youngest sister Ro, became our foster sister and she stayed with us until mid 1943 when she went into hiding. She came with three sisters and two brothers from Mainz and all six found home at the various uncles and cousins of our family.

In 1936, Elie, my elder brother went on hachshara, an agricultural training as a preparation for his later work in Palestine. He first worked in a number of dairy-factories, later on he lived in a commune in Franeker, where he started

to learn farming. He was a member of the 'Bachad', the organisation of religious chaloetsiem (pioneers in training for Palestine), and there he came in contact with many refugees who were members of the same organisation. All those friends visited our house frequently and they told the terrifying stories about their experiences in Nazi Germany. That is why it is hard for me to believe that our parents did not suspect the danger hanging over our heads. If they then had known what was in store for the Jewish population of Europe in the camps of the East, that they would systematically be destroyed, they would probably have given Eli the permission to leave Holland and emigrate illegally to Palestine.

In July 1939, Dora, an illegal ship harboured in Amsterdam to board immigrants and bring them via Antwerp to Palestine. Elie was on top of the list of the candidates of the Bachad, but since he was still a minor of 19 years old, he asked my parents for permission. Unfortunately they refused, their main argument was that illegal business were absolutely unacceptable in our family. Only later it became clear how we had to pay dearly for this decision. If Elie would have left with the Dora, he would have arrived safely in Palestine and he would have been spared a terrible period in Bergen-Belsen. Elie endured the camp, but sadly died three months after the liberation in Eindhoven, due to the effect of hardships.

All of these developments on our eastern borders, the unrest in our home and among the friends, as well the departure of my brother to the hachshara, must have contributed to my decision to leave the seminary after two years of studying in order to join in Gouda the 'youth farm', officially called the Foundation for Jewish horticulture, livestock and dairy preparation which was founded in 1910 as a training centre for Dutch youths aged 15 to 17 years. The youth farm was officially opened in 1938 and due to political circumstances young people from Germany and Central Europe were accepted.

The board had some prominent figures of the Dutch Jewry, including Mr. L.E Visser, president of the Supreme Court, Jacobus Kann, banker and co-worker of Theodor Herzl, Mr. R.A Levisson, one of the leaders of the Liberal Judaism

in the Netherlands and later founder of the CIDI, Mr. H. Kaufman and Mrs. Anna Vroman, who as a resident of Gouda was in direct contact with the local authorities. When I went to Gouda in September 1939 the couple Shoshanna and Manfred Litten were the leaders. The agronomist Knol was in charge of the horticultural training and was assisted by two workers, Henk Raven and Frans Man. In 1941, a third worker, Dirk van Schaik who lived opposite the youth farm was added and would later play an important role in the illegal work. I knew Shoshanna Litten since I was a child and she a young girl. She was in the girls' orphanage in the Rapenburgerstraat, where my great-aunt, Rebecca Frank, was many years director, she was then still called Jansje Serlouis. In Amsterdam she met Dr. Manfred Litten, coming from Danzig, and after their marriage they worked a few years in Berlin. I think that one of the reasons that my parents consented to let me go to Gouda was that they knew Shoshanna so well. On September 1, I left for the first time my parents' house for a longer period. That same day Hitler invaded Poland, and two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. The Second World War, with all its misery and victims, had begun.

The transition from the protected family life in Amsterdam to a community life in Gouda affected me strongly in the beginning, and during the first weeks homesickness played tricks on me. But it did not take long before I felt completely at ease. The big difference with Amsterdam was the pluralistic nature of the community I was now part of. It contained both members of the ultra-orthodox right Agoedat Yisrael, as well as the most liberal Jews of the Poalei Zion. But there was a tolerance in Gouda which many can take as an example, and which facilitated life undeniably. One reason must have been the example of the couple Litten, because they themselves were two opposites, actually two worlds. Shoshanna was the woman of the world who played the piano and among other things sang beautiful songs of Schubert; Manfred was the introverted philosopher, bookworm, who with dedication took care of the rabbits he kept. Shoshanna also had more liberal views than Manfred with his Buber-Rosenzweig ideas and his commitment to religion and tradition.



*Shoshanna Litten-Serlouis (1911-1945)
Directrice van de jeugdfarm in Gouda.*



*De Catharina Hove, de behuizing van de Goudse
hachshara-groep*

*Shoshanna Litten-Serlouis, Director of the youth farm in Gouda.
The Catharine farm, the house of the youth group.*

It was the most natural thing that every morning a small number of residents, usually no more than three, got up half an hour earlier to lay phylacteries and pray the morning prayer. Shalom Weiss, one of my friends who came together with me to Gouda, could sit there quietly: not to pray, but to learn Iwrit (modern Hebrew) or copy a Hebrew dictionary. It was obvious that everybody respected the manner and opinion of the others.

Our daily schedule was in general as follows: in the morning from 8.00 am till 12:30 we worked in the horticultural which was behind the house and covered two hectares. The girls worked partly in the household and partly on the land. Most afternoons we learned from 14:00 till 17:00. The curriculum consisted, apart from many Judaica for which Manfred was responsible, also of agriculture, led by Mr. Knol, and later by his successor Mr. Middelburg. It was the first time in my life that I performed physical work, and I must say that I had no trouble. On about two-third of the two hectares we grew horticultural

crops in greenhouses and in garden beds outside. There was a shed for tools where we also ate during our breaks, an orchard and a vacant piece of land on which the sludge we had dredged from the surrounding ditches was spread. We worked hard and everything was done, three-deep spitting as well as dredging, the hardest and most dirty work.

Other activities were weeding, hoeing tomato 'thieves' (remove the unwanted lots), harvesting and packing. The packed boxes were loaded on a barge and were three times a week transported to the vegetable market near Reeuwijk. This task was fulfilled by the three oldest chaweriem (a Hebrew word, meaning member or friend) We, the young newcomers, were quite jealous, but our time would come, and in 1941 already, were we the ones who went to the weekly auction. It was customary to rag a new member of the community, and I was instructed to guard the orchard, where the last ripe fruit still hung in the twilight. Some chaweriem dressed up approached me, but I figured it out and laughed in their face. Another time, a few months later, the rag succeeded better. A newcomer was sent to some gardeners in the area to lend a strawberry ladder. The guy really went and was later the object of our laughter.

The winter months of 1940 till 1942 were very cold and therefore there was obviously no gardening work. Thus, job creation was made in the form of braiding mats in heated greenhouses, and of course there was much more time for skating and studying. Hebrew lessons were given at three levels. The most advanced group consisting of Shalom Weiss, Avraham Helmann and myself was taught by Manfred. Except for Tenach and grammar, we immersed ourselves in Jewish writers like Bialik, Achad Ha'am, Tchernichowsky and Shimonie. In some of the lessons we tried to use Hebrew, which was mediocre. That was especially noticeable during the Shabbat afternoon meals, which were considered to be a Seoeda Ivrieth(Hebrew meal), implying that only Ivrieth was spoken. It was quite a spectacle! It looked more like a meal in a Trappist monastery, where no one is allowed to speak than a gathering of a group of young people!

The house we lived in consisted of a living room, a large dining room and a kitchen. The kitchen had a door to the outside, and there was a second door that led into the shower for the boys. On the first floor was a room for the Littens and a second small room for their two year old son Gideon, known only by the name Bommeltje. It goes without saying that this only child among more than twenty young people and adults was really spoiled. Between the room of the Littens and Bommeltje's room was the bedroom of the girls, and since that room was not too large, there were never more than six or seven girls in Gouda.



Dirk van Schaik – na-oorlogse opname in zijn woning in Gouda.



Shalom Weiss, die onder meer na de arrestatie van Shoshanna haar taak overnam.



De ophaalbrug die de toegang vormde tot de hachshara jeugdfarm.

*Dirk van Schaik,
Shalom Weiss,
Gate entrance to the hachshara youth farm.*

On the third floor, actually the loft, the twelve boys slept in bunks to make the best use of the space. Obviously, the household was strictly kosher, and one

of our workers cycled every Friday night at half past eleven to turn off the light. Less nice was that a few times after this fellow had just turned his back, someone else once lit the lights again. He rightly complained to Manfred saying if this was going to happen again, he did not want to continue.

The religious among us visited the Turfmarkt in Gouda. The gazan was Victor de Vries, whom I already knew from the Commelinstraat in Amsterdam. His wife worked in the Jewish elderly home in Gouda. Not many chaweriem visited the Shabbat synagogue, only usually Awraham Helmann, Gabie Breuer and myself. According to the Jewish religion a practicing Jew is not allowed to carry anything on Shabbat in a non walled-in city such as Gouda. In some cities in the Netherlands, including Amsterdam, there was therefore a symbolic wall (eroew) constructed in order to permit carrying. I still remember a small pole somewhere along the Amstel River to indicate till where it was allowed to carry something. I did not take this all so seriously, certainly also because of the influences that I experienced in my new surroundings, but Abraham and Gabie thought otherwise, they even tied their handkerchief to their pants! The atmosphere at the youth farm was traditional, and so was the Shabbat by lighting candles, singing, a beautiful tablecloth on the table and tasty food. When the weather permitted it, we often went on an evening stroll after dinner. It was interesting that although the religious members among us were far the minority, they were not only tolerated, but many chaweriem were attracted to their lifestyle. Thus it happened that Manfred organised religious services on Jewish New Year and on the Day of Atonement and that many chaweriem who knew nothing at all, participated. The youth farm was like a small island surrounded by ditches. On either side were garden beds, and I remember especially the chicory which was a well known product. In front of the house was a drawbridge which served as access to the youth farm. It was drawn up whenever a boat had to pass and during the German occupation it would play an important role.

Chapter V THE NETHERLANDS UNDER THE GERMAN YOKE

“From freedom to slavery, from joy to sorrow, from celebration to mourning, from great light to darkness, from deliverance into bondage” (Inversion of a text of the Pesach Hagada).

In the winter of 1939-'40 the German threat became more noticeable, but nevertheless the invasion of the Netherlands on May 10, came as a bolt from the blue. On that Friday morning I was awakened at six o'clock by a monotonous drone, and when I opened the double doors of our bedroom and looked out, I was as riveted to the spot: formations of dozens of planes flew low over and the black crosses at the bottom on the left wing left no doubt that the German invasion had begun. I ran downstairs to warn the Littens but they were already listening to the radio. What we heard confirmed our most dreadful suspicions. Hundreds of parachutists had already landed on the coastal plain and near the strategic bridges over the main rivers. In between the tidings, coded messages were sent to various units of the Dutch army. We all dressed in no time and sat together listening to the messages. The bewilderment was great, and it did not take a long time till the first phone calls from several parents and other relatives came through. Most parents took no drastic measures and advised us to wait for the time being. But Sieg Weiss, who had studied with me in the same class of the Herman Elte school, had to pack his belongings and some hours later his father came to take him home in Amsterdam. He never returned to Gouda, but luckily he survived the war. My parents advised me not to take steps too hastily, since no one knew what the future would bring, thus almost all of us remained in Gouda, and our normal schedule was not interrupted thanks to the wise policy of the board.

The following day we went back to work but although we worked well, our heads were somewhere else. Transistor radios did not exist, and therefore one of us was by turns sent home to listen to the latest news. Some areas of

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the water line were considered to be unconquered because they were flooded, but the Germans did not care, they came by planes and parachuted their soldiers on the other side. The queen with her family fled to England and Rotterdam was brutally bombed. While that happened, we were working and as a northeasterly wind was blowing, a rain of burned and charred paper scraps downed on us. At the same time dozens of bombers flew in southwestern direction and we saw a huge smoke screen and a red glow rising. We did not know what exactly happened at that moment but we suspected the worst, and no need to mention that weeding and hoeing was not what kept our minds busy.

The first weeks and even months passed more easily than we initially expected. In the beginning the Germans were interested to provoke minimal turbulence and actually lulled the people and especially the Jews. Thus slowly but surely the opinion prevailed that it was not that bad and that in the mean time people could live with the new regime which was exactly the intention of the Germans. The result was that our life in the youth farm took its normal course again. The only thing in the first six months of the German occupation which should have roused our suspicions were two measures that would have far-reaching consequences. The first was the resignation of all the Jews in public services and the second was the forced Aryan declaration. This decree required everyone to declare who his ancestors were and anyone who had more than one full Jewish grandparent was considered 'full Jew'. I do not think it dawned on most people that by submitting this declaration they signed their own death and that of their children. After the war it was rather obvious that the few who did not sign this declaration had escaped the dance. The inevitable consequence of this declaration became clear six months later when the whole Dutch population was forced to carry identity cards, while those for the Jews had a thick black stamped J.

In spite of all this, the second half of 1940 was rather quiet, and the rhythm of our small community in Gouda resumed as usual. We worked and learned as if there were no war. We brought the harvested fruit to the auction in Reeuwijk and almost everyone spent the Jewish holidays in the fall off that year at

home. Bram Burger, one of my friends invited me to celebrate the holidays at his home. He was the son of the gazan of the local synagogue in Hoogezand-Sappemeer and a typical Jewish boy from the province.

Not only did he look like the famous movie star Fernandel, but sometimes he uttered extremely funny remarks. When his mother, a beautiful woman of forty years came to visit him in Gouda, he launched the following remark during lunch: "My father is very happy with her, but I also heard him say that he is ready to swap her for two of twenty." Another time he sat at the table next to Emmy Kaufmann, the wife of one of the board members, and since she was a moderate eater, she suggested Bram taking over some of her food. I will never forget his response: "What do you think of me, I'm not a garbage bin." With Bram I went to the North to spend the Feast of Tabernacles in his childhood home. It was the first time I realised what a gazan in such a small 'kille' (= Jewish community) means for his parishioners. He was actually a kind of Centipede and had to take care of everything, Jewish education for children, preparing boys for their bar-mitzvah and in addition he was the ritual slaughterer, gazan and mediator in internal disputes within his parish. We ate the meals in the tabernacle of the Hamburger family and they hosted me in the most hospitable way. This journey to the North included for me a visit to Franeker where my brother Elie was on hachshara where a group of Jewish youths from around twenty years lived in an old, discarded station. Almost all of them were working in farming, while Elie became an experienced milker. A large part of the group came from Germany and other Eastern European countries, and because of the absence of a synagogue in Franeker, services were held at home.

This rather quiet second half of the first year of the war ended with a few extremely freezing cold winter months which dominated our whole life. All the ditches around the farm were covered with thick layers of ice, and the whole program was adapted to these conditions, among others this included the weaving of reed mats in the heated greenhouses. In the mornings we now



Broer Elie aan het melken tijdens zijn hachshara in Franeker.



*Joachiem ('Schuschu') Simon (1919-1943)
De stuwende kracht bij de onderduik van de jeugd-
hachshara Loosdrecht.*

My brother Eli milking a cow during his hachshara in Franeker.

Joachiem (Schuschu) Simon (1913-1943) He was the driving force of the youth hachshara in Gouda.

studied Hebrew and agriculture and in the afternoon we got 'ice holiday' to go skating. We made wonderful trips on the frozen ditches and canals, and our greatest achievement was the track over the IJssel to Krimpen, a distance of twenty kilometre! The special treat was that we could still buy a hot chocolate drink which was a few months later only available on the black market.

We also often went to the lakes of Reeuwijk which formed a perfect skate area, not suspecting that this brief interlude of learning and fun on the skates would cruelly be disrupted.

The year 1941 is still alive in my memory as the year of the February strikes and Mauthausen. The February-strike erupted after the NSB (the Dutch Nazi Party) riots in the Jewish neighbourhood of Amsterdam, during which one of their front rank man named Koot, was killed. Especially the dockers expressed their sympathy for the persecuted Jewish fellow citizens in a general strike. As a reprisal the Germans ran in hundreds of young Jewish men, who were all sent to Mauthausen. A few weeks after their deportation their relatives in Amsterdam received the information that their loved ones had perished. During the same year there were four more deportations to Mauthausen: in June in Amsterdam, in September in Enschede, in October in the Achterhoek and in November in Arnhem. More than 900 young Jewish men perished that year in Mauthausen, the unbelievable truth was that all of them were murdered in the Mauthausen quarry. All these actions were a sign on the wall and had a great influence on our daily life in Gouda. Every night the bridge was raised, so that no uninvited guests could enter our yard. On days when rumours were circulating that German actions were approaching, a sign with the warning 'Dysentery' was put up near the bridge. Several times we even sent some of the farm residents with known infectious diseases to the St. Joseph's Pavilion, all with the full cooperation of the hospital management. On one of these occasions I hid myself in a furniture factory in the East Haven, where I stayed till the danger passed. False rumours were our daily fare, and when during 1941 obituaries from Mauthausen came in day by day, the relatively relaxed mood of autumn 1940 disappeared. In addition the anti-Jewish measures increased by the month. In April 1941, Jews were forbidden to enter hotels, restaurants, cinemas, libraries and swimming pools, and in the same month the regulation was that all radios must be handed in. In May, Jews could not go to sea, while entering parks and other public places was strictly prohibited. When one violated these

prohibitions, death penalty could be expected in the form of deportation to the East. In mid-1941 every Jew in the Netherlands knew what Mauthausen meant. Despite all this, our life was not all misery and stress. We lived in a community and we had each other, and especially the attitude of Shoshanna made it clear that she did not even consider us being sent to Germany. In late 1941 she began making contacts with the underground, so that our group at a later stage could go into hiding. Joachiem Simon, better known as "Schuschu" visited us several times and had long conversations with Shoshanna. Schuschu came from Germany, and he was one of the leaders of the 'Hechaloe'ts movement', the organisation of non-religious pioneers in training for Palestine. He was active in the underground from late 1941 on and would later pay for it with his life. We had no doubt that these conversations between Shoshanna and Schuschu were about the possibilities of hiding for our Gouda group .

Mid 1941 something happened that was so special and so hardly fit into the image of our grey world, that I would call it more a 'fairy tale'. Margith Wolf-Lichtenstein from Austria, who worked on the farm as head of the household, married by proxy because her fiancé lived in Haifa. Through international authorities she received official papers and a visa to travel to Palestine via the Balkans. Thanks to these papers she could leave the Netherlands. I will never forget our saying good-bye to her. It was as if a fairy tale figure instead of a human being was leaving us. Manfred gave her letters for his brother in Nahariya, and all the inhabitants of the farm waved her off, some with tears in their eyes. To my best knowledge events like this rarely occurred during the occupation.

But finally one of my dreams also came true when I for the first time was allowed to go the vegetable auction with a fully laden barge. Earlier I had been the help and handyman to get some experience, but this time it was serious and I went on my own. I had to use a barge pole, a long stick to set the boat in motion. This was done by stabbing the end of the shaped boom-hook in the bow of the boat, while I, walking on the side of the ditch, pushing the vessel. But in some parts of the journey this did not work so that I had to

jump on the boat while keeping the barge-pole in my hand in order to sail. The hardest part of these trips was crossing the many bridges, especially when I was pushing the boat from the edge. I deftly jumped on the boat again and after passing the bridge I immediately jumped back on the edge again. Arriving at the auction, I loaded the crates of fruit and vegetables, and I handed over the consignment notes. Then I loaded empty boxes again, and with a sigh of relief, I could start the return trip. It was a relief when I had not only unscathed accomplished this first expedition but also without having fallen into the ditch.

One of the heaviest work in Gouda, and for sure the dirtiest was dredging the ditches around our farm. All the boys got their turn, and I confess that I personally actually did not care at all. We wore our oldest work clothes and of course we were wearing waterproof boots. We were equipped with a long pole connected to a round net and so we dredged mud from the bottom of the ditch. Once the boat was full, we sailed to the most remote end of our terrain where the contents with a wooden shovel, also known as 'bats', was released. The discharged mud was extremely useful and was later used as humus. Just imagine how I looked after a day dredging, I could not even be compared to Zwarte Piet, the black servant of Santa Claus! Our clothes were covered with mud and our faces were unrecognisably. Luckily the shower cabinet for the boys was outside, so we did not have to enter the living area. In the same year, in 1941 while I was dredging, a friend with whom I had shared a few years in school came to visit us. He came with his parents and Manfred showed them around. The moment they saw my muddy appearance, the first question of his mother was. "Shall our son soon be doing the same dirty work?" When the answer was affirmative, the parents then decided that the farm was not the most suitable place for him, and he was not allowed to join us. The tragedy is that this family was deported and no one returned while we later on went into hiding in Gouda and the majority of the chaweriem survived the war. All this because of an unpresentable, muddy face!

1941 ended with an equally harsh winter as the previous one. We had less desire for fun and relaxation, and the skates were therefore much less often

tied on. The tension rose rapidly and it became apparent during the first months of 1942 that a catastrophe was imminent. New anti-Jewish measures followed one after the other. Our parents had to register their belongings and had to hand in their jewellery. Jews had to hand in their bikes, I hid my bike which I had taken with me to Gouda at Jan Blom, one of our fellow gardeners, who lived not far away from our farm.



Met groente naar de veiling. Het hanteren van de vaarboom vereist aanzienlijke behendigheid



De beruchte Jodenster

With vegetables to the auction. Working the punting pole needed a lot of skill. The well-known Jewish Star.

We were not allowed to move from one place to another without a special permit. Non-Jews were forbidden to work for Jews, while we were only allowed to buy in Jewish shops. Another regulation stated that Jews had to stay at home between eight o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning so we were also deprived from our last bit of freedom. This measure was undoubtedly the forerunner of the deportations that would follow a few

months later. We were trapped in our own homes, the victim had to wait patiently for his executioners. After eight o'clock in the evening we, on the farm, did not dare to be outside and although there were hardly any NSB men we refused to take the risk.

In May 1942 we were forced to sew the so known yellow star in the shape of the Star of David on our clothes, and if one did not comply with this medieval regulation, it could mean death. Again, we tried to live as good as possible with these regulations. The first day that we showed up with the Star of David was a spectacle. Many people greeted us very respectfully, some even took their hats off for us! What kept us busy was the question whether we had to walk around with a star on our own plot. It was decided not to do so, thus our work clothes were not included in this nuisance.

Gouda was a small town with few Jews, and of course it was of the utmost importance for us to know what was happening in Amsterdam where the Jewish Council with all the other Jewish organisations were settled, where important decisions were taken. Our source was my father, who wrote each week a detailed letter with the latest breaking news and so we were less dependent what news concerned on the Jewish Weekly which was a censored and controlled newspaper. Every Shabbat morning I received a letter, which I often read aloud while we were having breakfast. Father received his information in the factory at the Tolstraat, where he had worked for over forty years. The director, his cousin Bram Asscher, together with David Cohen were the leaders of the Jewish Council, and thus we received the information firsthand. From July 1942 on, the tidings became more sombre, and from week to week it became more and more obvious that the Germans no longer struck at random but had started the final and systematic elimination of the Dutch Jews. They summoned the persons to report at a certain hour on a certain date either at the Central Railway station, or the Muiderpoort station or at the Polderweg for transit to Germany, where they were to perform ostensibly 'labor service'. In fact, they were sent to Westerbork, and instead of the labor service in Germany, the destination was one of the concentration camps in the East, where the gas chambers usually

were awaiting them. In the beginning the victims got calls which were delivered at home and in which they were told to report on the place of departure with a backpack or suitcase. But soon the occupants noticed that about 1000 summoned only 700 appeared, at which point they again resorted to the earlier used system, the Mauthausen deportations, which meant the round-ups. Raid cars appeared mostly in the evenings in the neighbourhoods where many Jews lived, and without pardon people were dragged from their homes. The big hunt began: none of us had any confidence in his life and instead of equal rights citizens of the Dutch State, we were pariahs. The word "call" became a magical sound and became the talk of the day. Instead of "Good morning" or "How are you," the most frequent question was: "Have you received a call ?"

In August my brother Elie was arrested during a raid in the streets of Amsterdam, he did not even have the 'privilege' to take a backpack! Fortunately, he was not immediately banished to the East but sent to Westerbork. My parents sent him clothes, toiletries, phylacteries as well as food parcels and books and when my family was deported to Westerbork in June 1943 they met again.

In the same month, something happened that would greatly affect the future of our Gouda group. The much larger group of the Loosdrecht hachshara, forty-eight young people our age, most of whom were refugees from Germany, went within three days into hiding. This hiding was organised at short notice by Schuschu Simon and Joop Westerweel, a teacher at the Kees Boekeschool in Bilthoven, a socialist and former conscientious objector. Eventually both would pay their underground work with their lives.



*Joop Westerweel (1899-1944)
Onze vrijheid kostte hem het leven*

He paid with his life for our freedom.

Because everything had to be done as quickly as possible and not all the hiding places turned out to be safe, fourteen chaweriem who were unfortunately caught, did not survive the war. About the same time the Jewish Council proceeded to put a special stamp on the identity card of some privileged that soon was known as the "Sperr." This stamp meant that the owner was temporarily exempted from deportation. The text stated: Inhaber Ausweises dieses ist bis auf weiteres vom Labor freigestellt (the owner of this pass is till later exempted from work). This stamp was issued to all potential officials, such as sector workers, nurses, people who performed important work for the economy and the German war effort, people in the diamond branch, the Jewish Council staff, and so on. The Sperr was during those nerve-racking days of deportations and raids the most coveted object in the world. In fact it was a reprieve, but at that time people did not realise that

although they feared it. A few chaweriem in Gouda managed to get such a stamp, but despite all efforts of the Littens they did not succeed to acquire such a stamp for every one of us. Especially three factors - the sudden hiding in Loosdrecht, the unstable condition of chaweriem who did not have such a stamp and the precarious position of the remaining small Jewish communities in the county, intensified Shoshana's preparations for the upcoming hiding. To minimise the risks it was decided that a number of gesperrden were temporarily moved to Amsterdam, while hiding places for those staying behind were searched. After talking to some parents and relatives it was decided that among others Heini Friedman and I would leave for Amsterdam in November, and that Heini would come to live with us at home. This was agreed by Heini's uncle, Dr. Taubus, a well-known personality in the Jewish community of Amsterdam. But it was also promised that the hiding preparations would remain valid for us and that we would disappear in due course together with the rest of the Gouda youth farm.

In late 1942, about a month before my departure to Amsterdam something happened in our family that all too clearly brought to light the low and brutal methods of the Germans. One evening after eight o'clock the doorbell suddenly rang, and to the horror of my parents and my foster sister Friedchen who was at home, the Germans came to take my youngest sister Ro, fourteen years old, for 'Labor in Deutschland'. The consternation was great, and no pleas from my parents could change the decision, even not the argument that they had an exemption. With the always ready rucksack on her back she went to the Dutch theater in the Plantsoen Middenlaan, the gathering place for all the deportees on their way to Westerbork and the distant, menacing and unknown East. What must have been the feelings of my parents that night when they looked out of the window seeing their youngest daughter, alone and abandoned, stepping into a German police van! It later turned out that more young boys and girls of the same age as Ro were picked up because the Germans took into account that the remaining part of the family would then voluntarily follow. And indeed this happened several times. Our parents did not go after Ro because of their Sperr and

because they counted on the good relations with the leadership of the Jewish Council who fortunately helped and the next morning Ro came unharmed back.

After spending more than three years in Gouda, a period on which I can only look back with great satisfaction, came to an end. Actually I was not looking forward to return to Amsterdam. The transition from a community life with friends and peers in the still fairly quiet provincial Gouda to Jewish Amsterdam where one lived in fear and panic frightened me. But I knew there was no other way out, and I relied on the promise that at a later stage Heini and I would go into hiding.

After having received travel permits and after saying goodbye to some friends in Gouda, we left mid-November for Amsterdam. Shoshanna took us to the station and the farewell was especially difficult because during those three years a close friendship had been founded. Traveling at that time was far from easy. Heini and I were on the train with our yellow David stars on our coat, people stared at us, often with curious faces. An important and instructive period of our life ended with this journey from Gouda to Amsterdam.

Chapter VI FIVE EMOTIONAL MONTHS IN AMSTERDAM (November 1942 - May 1943)

Terror and Pit and Snare (Isaiah 24:17)

For both Heini and me the transition to Amsterdam was not easy and it took us some time to get used to the new conditions. Our main concern was the fastest way to find a job. It was most dangerous in those days to walk idly and aimlessly around. Even though we were both 'gesperrt', this Sperr was only issued when one was having a certain job. The original identity card of that time is still in my possession, and it states 'Foreman Horticulture'. I wanted so much to work in horticulture again, but at that time that was totally impossible .

I always see in front of me the identity card with the words that evoke so many bittersweet memories. The title states: 'Department of the Interior,' and below the coat of arms of the Dutch State it shows two lions, the crown of the Kingdom with the subtitle *Je maintiendrai.* (I shall maintain).What shines next to this little known weapon, which was always a guarantee of freedom and democracy? A big, fat, black 'J' What a mockery! Incidentally, the German rulers must have been very optimistic, because the document was issued August 18,1941 and the date of expire was five years later, meaning till fifteen months after their defeat! In the box next to the two lions is the "Sperr" stamp so much in vain wanted by so many Jews, and below that stamp the signature of Der Befehlshaber of Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (The Commander of Security Police and the SD) and a swastika. In addition to the obligatory photo a second large 'J'! Did they perhaps having difficulties or problems with their eyes?

Because working in horticulture within the boundaries of Amsterdam was out of the question, we looked for another job. One profession especially suffered from acute shortage, namely a house servant. A year earlier, in October 1941, the Germans had decided that it was strictly prohibited for non-Jews to work at a Jewish family, so Jews were since then deprived of domestic help. It was for Heini and me no problem to start a new career, that of 'servant girl' or

rather 'servant boy' in a Jewish family. Getting work was easy, the candidates were literally waiting in line, but I limited myself to three families where I went to work once a week. I remember very well the Duizend family in the Grensstraat, warm people and family of my father, with whom I got along fine. The only problem was that Mrs. Duizend was very and utmost precise. When I had finished my work, she walked down the stairs with me, while she stuck her finger here and there in a few corners. Of course there was occasionally some dust to be found, always followed by a friendly but nonetheless serious reprimand. I cannot say that I liked this work but the few cents I earned were a welcome addition to mother's limited housekeeping money.



The Dutch identity card with the 'J', my sperr stamp and the mentioning of my profession: "vegetable grower and agricultural foreman".

This activity as 'servant boy' was inconsistent with the Sperr-stamp in my identity, so I was always looking for a more essential job. A few weeks later, in mid-December I found a better job in the Jewish Hospital. After meeting the director, Dr. Buzaglo, it was decided that I would start as lift-boy. This

stupefying work lasted a few weeks and although it was not exactly up to my expectations, I fulfilled my job as best as I could. Countless times I whizzed from bottom to top and vice versa, helped oldies and patients with their wheelchairs and dragged suitcases and linens until I was completely exhausted in the evening. No wonder I soon longed for something more productive and interesting and so I asked Dr. Buzaglo to allow me to cheer up the wards with plants and flowers. During my visits to some inmates, including a sister of my father, I had noticed that the lack of something colourful and blooming could invigorate the rather depressive mood. Dr. Buzaglo accepted my proposal with both hands, and after he had provided me with a large budget, I immediately began my new job. I regularly visited the flower market on the Singel, and since we Jews were not allowed to use public transport, I dragged all my purchases myself to the Weesperplein where the Jewish Hospital was located. Slowly but surely, the department got another look, and many inmates expressed their satisfaction about this metamorphosis. But this improved atmosphere did not last long. Several weeks later something terrible happened in another institute and the word spread in no time throughout the country, thus also reaching the Jewish Hospital.

In the end of January 1943, patients of the 'Apeldoorn Forest', an institute where more than a thousand Jewish mentally disabled were treated, were without any prior warning deported to the unknown east. About fifteen hundred souls of whom four hundred staff, were led away from the station in Apeldoorn. A hundred nurses managed to escape in time, while others preferred staying with their patients. But I remember what a consternation this caused when this news reached the Jewish Hospital. The people who could still walk, stormed into the director's office without finding the least comfort. The majority concluded therefore: "If something happens to the disabled, will our fate be better?"

During my time at the Jewish Hospital, I was also in regular contact with the JCB, the Jewish Central Office for Vocational Training which was located in the Hemonylaan. The JCB, formed in 1940 was led by Ru Cohen and Lex

Cohen, and was involved in the professional education and the hachshara. What the occupier luckily not knew was that the attic of the building served as a center for the illegal activities of the Hechaluts movement. There I met several times the chawerim Kurt Hannemann, Kurt Reilinger and Gideon Drach, who among other things dealt with providing forged papers. It was agreed that in due time Kurt Reilinger would use my Dutch passport, after the necessary cosmetic changes would have been made of course and I would get a false identity. I was also asked to supply a decent sum of money, since illegal work and everything connected swallowed enormous sums. Another reason why Heini and I came to the JCB was that we were told by Lex Cohen that a nursery near the Zeeburgerdijk might soon be opened. Thanks to our past in Gouda, we were considered to be more or less the first qualified people to work there.

One of the problems we faced during our time in Amsterdam was leisure time. After a day of heavy work when we had walked back and forth, there really was no amusement. Swimming, cycling, cinema, walking in parks, everything was forbidden for Jews. A free press no longer existed and the only news for us were censored newspapers filled with German successes and victories. We had radio distribution, today known as 'cable' to which we could listen, but of course these broadcasts were censored as well. What did we actually do in our free time?

On Shabbat mornings we visited the services the Zichron Ja'akov movement still organised in the Lutmastraat, but it was depressing to note how our group decreased by the week. The nights were the worst for us. In the evenings we were confined to our house. Sitting in front of the windows we could see whether the Green Police was busy captivating Jewish victims. They came with their police vans and we could hear their screams from afar. We took pains to keep father away from the windows, because every agitation could be detrimental to his health.



Kurt Hannemann (1916-1944) one of the leading chaloetsiem in Holland.

Kurt Reilinger (alias Nanno, 1917-1945) One of the main persons in our French period.

Ernst Hirsch (alias Willy, 1916-1945) Together with Kurt he found the way to Spain for 60 chaweriem.

Our house was in the centre of the Riviere buurt where many Jews lived, thus these macabre nights were warp and weft. I will never forget those evenings when these miserable people with their backpacks, blankets and poor belongings were dragged from their homes.

The moment the last resident had left the house, the Germans closed and sealed the door and a few days later the trucks would come to remove the entire contents which were sent to Germany. The firm in charge was called Pulse, and so the Dutch language became enriched with a new verb: 'pulsen' meaning 'plundering'.

The most tragic cases occurred in our immediate environment. One of the undoubtedly grimmest, concerned our maternal grandfather, Louis van Gelder

about seventy years old. While he was away, his front door was smashed, then closed and sealed. Coming back home, the man stood in the street, his only possession the clothes he was wearing. Friends and family provided him with the elementary necessities and the same happened again a few weeks later after he had found another shelter, once more he was roofless. Only at his third temporary dwelling, he was taken away by the Grüne Polizei to be sent towards the East.

Like all Jewish residents of the Netherlands, we made ourselves ready for possible deportation. Everyone had his backpack with the most necessary items ready; warm clothes, towels, toiletries, socks and underwear, vitamins, while coats and blankets were tied to the outside. Father had also medicines, phylacteries, prayer books and drawing paper in his backpack, 25 sheets of paper and pieces of charcoal in addition to the items required. And the remarkable thing was that against all expectations he would use it at a later stage! The about forty drawings he made survived the war and some of them are exhibited in Jad Washem, in the museum in Bergen-Belsen, in the Ghetto Fighter's house museum (Lochme ha Ghetta'ot) in Israel and in the Jewish museum in Amsterdam. Valuables such as beautiful crockery, silverware, jewellery and drawings made by father, were hidden at our friends, the Olie family who did not live far from us in the Waalstraat. Unlike many others, this family handed us everything back after the war. Although we did not yet suffer from shortage or hunger in that spring of 1943, we were obviously on short comings, but Mother being a good housewife had ensured a decent stock during the years, so we were never really hungry. Everything, both clothing and food was rationed, and one barely saw products such as meat, butter, cheese and eggs. I remember very well that on my nineteenth birthday I got a whole egg as a birthday gift! It also happened sometimes that in an exuberant mood I went somewhere to buy a piece of cake on the black market. This cake was a brown substance, really unpalatable, but under the prevailing conditions it meant better something than nothing.


A few months later, when I was in Belgium, I became aware of the difference between the abundance there and scarcity in the Netherlands. Only then did I

begin to understand that Holland was plundered by the Germans, which was absolutely not the case in Belgium.

The Zionist veterans lists (or in Hebrew (Vatikiemlists), became one of the most important topics at home in spring 1943. Through the agency of the Red Cross, Mrs. van Tijn of the Jewish Council and several former Dutch people living in Palestine including Sally de Beer and Mirjam Gerzon, lists were drawn up of people who for years had full-filled leading positions in the Zionist movement. The intention was that these people would be sent to a separate internment camp in Germany and at a certain time would be exchanged for Germans in Palestine. It was understandable that being placed on this list was everybody's wish.

And indeed, my father received by means of the Red Cross in Geneva a telegram coming from Palestine:

MESSAGE; YOUR FAMILY IMMIGRATION PERMIT (CERTIFICATE) FOR PALESTINE BEARS OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT CODE M/438/43/B/7. KEEP HEART. EXPECT MEETING SOON. FAMILY, FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES WELL. SALLY DE BEER

 7 JUL 1943

Het Nederlandsche Rode Kruis

No. 2855

Formulier na invulling, in te zenden aan het CORRESPONDENTIE-BUREAU van het Nederlandsche Rode Kruis, Jan Pieterz. Coenstraat 10, Den Haag, Tel. 770517.

VERZOEK
door tussenkomst van het Duitse Rode Kruis aan het Internationale Comité van het Rode Kruis te Genève om inlichtingen.

ANTRAG
durch das Deutsche Rote Kreuz an das Internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz in Genf auf Nachrichtenvermittlung.

1. Afzender ELIE ASSCHER BARAK 35
Absender (naam, voornaam en adres)
(Name, Taufname und Adresse)
LAGER WESTERBORK-HOOGHALEN-OOST (DRENTE)
HOLLAND

Verzocht aan
Bittet an

2. Geadresseerde ISRAEL DINNER
Empfänger (naam, voornaam en adres)
(Name, Taufname und Adresse)
KFAR CHASSIEDDEM NEAR HAIFA
PALESTINE

het volgende mede te deelen:
folgendes zu übermitteln:

(ten hoogste 25 woorden uitsluitend persoonlijke en familieaangelegenheden betreffende)
(Höchstzahl 25 Worte nur persönliche und Familienangelegenheiten betreffend)

ouders, kinderen en alle familieleden
hier, allen hier gezond. Heden bericht
ontvangen wy door Jewish Agency by
Palestina Regeering zyn voorgedragen
voor certificaat. Bericht broer Joseph
28-6-43

3. Geadresseerde antwoordt aan ommezijde:
Empfänger antwortet umseitig

Handteekening
Unterschrift
29 JULI 1943

De felbegeerde bevestiging van het Rode Kruis dat mijn familie op de 'Veteranenlijst' was opgenomen.

The so conveyed announcement.

My brother Eli in barrack 35 in Westerbork sent this so coveted affirmation of the Red Cross that my family was included in the Veterans list.

Understandable that my parents tried to convince me that the Veterans list was much safer than any hiding. But I felt that it was impossible to rely on German promises and asked them to let me go my own way. After many discussions my parents agreed that I would continue with preparations for my hiding but under one condition. They feared that my sudden disappearance could put our family at risk, meaning that the Germans would take retaliation measures. So they wanted to have a document from an official institute which

would declare my disappearance. I therefor got in touch with Erika Blütt, who had an important position in the Expositor. This department of the Jewish Council, which popularly was called 'Expo', was a kind of a 'department of foreign affairs' of the Jewish Council, and had enormous influence. Their officials maintained close contacts with the German rulers. In her office at the Jan van Eyck Straat I discussed my problem with Erica and since she also was involved with the hachshara and knew my fame well, she had a lot of understanding for my request. I immediately got an official letter stating that Bernard Asscher was probably arrested in a raid, that it was not clear where he was at the moment, so his current address was unknown. That letter assured my parents and a major obstacle to my hiding plans was removed. Meanwhile my work in the Jewish Hospital continued unchanged, but in February the overall mood was down, especially influenced by the events in Apeldoorn.

On Monday, March 1, I went like every day to work, and what we had feared so long, appeared to have become reality. All the entrances to Weesperplein were blocked and swarming with Germans and their henchmen, plus a large number of police vans. I immediately understood that this time the residents of the Jewish Hospital were to be removed. A feeling of helplessness, worry and anger took hold of me. Hundreds of disabled, sick and elderly people had to be sent to Germany for 'Labor'?! Of course not: I now knew better, and this strengthened even more my intention to do everything in my power to go as soon as possible into hiding. My job in the Jewish Hospital was over, and again we turned to the JCB to hear if there was news concerning the Zeeburgerdijk. This time we were lucky, we heard that we could start the next week. The relevant horticulture company lay next to the not in use Jewish cemetery, about five and a half kilometre from our house, meaning a daily walk of eleven kilometres, which absolutely was no futility. However, Heini and I walked provided with sandwiches and drinks, the next two and a half months to the Zeeburgerdijk to work again in our old and trusted profession. We were glad to do something productive apart from the fact that we may occasionally took some vegetables home, something that would mother

certainly make happy at the time of shortage. It were fatiguing days and when we came home in the evening we were deadly tired.

During these months we also visited regularly the Hemonylaan to hear any news concerning our false identity. The intention was that the pioneers of the Gouda farm would go into hiding by mid April, so not too much time was left especially because the hunt for Jews intensified day by day. One of our workers in Gouda, Dirk van Schaik, came to visit us, and together we discussed the logistics as itinerary, luggage, place of encounter and so on. Kurt Reilinger and Gideon Drach promised us that our false papers would be ready by mid-May. They again called for a significant financial contribution, because the movement was in great need of money. Since my parents did not have that much spare money, mother turned to a good friend of us, the young rabbi Jo Dünner, who managed via a good relation to obtain five hundred guilders, which was a considerable amount of money in those days.

During these months the most fantastic rumours about the most different subjects were heard. One knew that the invasion was near, another one knew that a certain list stopped being valid, meaning the list in German eyes had become worthless and that people who appeared on that list were about to be deported and another rumour said it was now East Amsterdam to be deported. The best was to take these stories with a grain of salt, but most people did not do so, they were gullible. In a sense, such rumours were, especially if it were good ones, a psychological necessity of life for the people. In mid-May we finally heard that our identity was ready. With a capital of 500 guilders and my Dutch passport, we went to the Hemonylaan, where we met our new alter egos: Heini Friedmann became Arie Pons Holderman, and Berrie Asscher was from now on called Jan Berend Hassink, living in the C. Beermanstraat 72a in Rotterdam. Everything was expertly made with my own photo and even my fingerprint was real. I only did not know what the 'C' in C.Beermanstraat stood for. Only much later would I find out, and until then I walked around with the unpleasant feeling that I did not know anything about my own street.

The last two weeks of our legal residence in Amsterdam were intensive. It was agreed that Heini would be picked up by Dirk van Schaik on Friday, May 28, and on Monday, May 31 Dirk would return to take me. The intensification of deportations made it necessary to close the horticulture company on the Zeeburgerdijk because every day fewer chaweriem came to work. Most went into hiding, while others, like Heini and I were busy with our final preparations. On Wednesday before our departure the tension increased sky high. The Jewish Quarter in the centre of the city was radically emptied. Sperr or not, everyone had to go. All bridges were blocked and by means of speakers people were called to prepare themselves for their departure. No one could escape and with the exception of those who managed to hide, everyone disappeared. So the old and familiar Jewish neighbourhood became 'Judenrein' (clean of Jews).

We were wondering if we could still get away in time. Except for being in the Hemonylaan, we spent a lot of time in the Christiaan de Wetstraat at Beth halutz, a sort of clubhouse for chaloetsiem. It was a coming and going, saying goodbye to those who went into hiding or tried to cross the border. We met there Awraham Helmann, who like us wanted to go into hiding and who waited for his identity card. Against expectations, everything went according to plan, and Heini left on Friday with Dirk van Schaik for Gouda. Three days later it was my turn, and now it was the time I had been looking for so long, but at the same time I was afraid of. Dirk came around noon and stayed for lunch. Then my parents took me to another room to say goodbye. My father blessed me with the traditional blessing and warned me to be careful. Both mother and father did not shed a tear, they were tremendously brave. But it is difficult to express in words what the three of us felt at that moment.

Undoubtedly, we wondered if we ever would see each other again. The inability of my parents was all too clear: their eldest son was already ten months in Westerbork, and now their youngest son had all by himself to face an uncertain and dangerous future. Their greatest fear was that I would be caught and as an 'S' case would be deported to the East. The 'S' meant the word Strafe (punishment), which was sewn on the clothes of every one who was caught in hiding. They were sent in a separate wagon to Westerbork and

no intervention could save them from deportation. Thus, the Germans tried to intimidate potential hiders. What we did not know at that time but what we heard after the war was that the fate of the 'S' case was no different from the others, the gas chambers were waiting for everyone.

After this goodbye which I cannot describe in words, Dirk and I left the house. We crossed the Merwedeplein on our way to the Zuideramstellaan where on the corner of the building the handicraft shop was located. There I would take off the star of David. We checked immediately whether the place where the star had been sawn was not contrasted in colour from the rest. Fortunately no sign was seen.

Chapter VII NINE MONTHS BEING JAN BEREND HASSINK (31 May 1943-4 March 1944)

When the wicked rise, man hides (Proverbs 28:28)'

For the first time after so many months I walked around without a star, and I felt as if everyone was looking at me. I felt particularly unsafe in my own neighbourhood where I had lived for so many years and where many people knew me, so to be sure I clutched my bag at the spot where a few minutes ago my star still had been for so long.

The quickest way to reach Reeuwijk was by train via the Central Station in Amsterdam to Gouda, and from there by bus. But given the number of checks at the Central Station we had to make a big detour. We took tram line 4 to Amsterdam West, and from there we went by the so called Haarlem tram to Haarlem. It was a strange feeling to be back in the tram after such a long time! From Haarlem we went by bus to Leiden, where we took the train to Bodegraven. I bought a newspaper which I read without end in order to prevent conversations with fellow passengers, but it failed. In our compartment was a young man holding a large suitcase. It soon became clear that he had been on leave in the Netherlands and now he returned to the compulsory labor service in Germany. He complained bitterly and asked me if I had not received a call for labor service. I replied that I had a relief because I had important work concerning food supply and so I endured without a hitch my first acid test as Jan Berend Hassink. From Bodegraven we went by bus to Reeuwijk and from there on foot to the house of the widow de With, where Shoshanna had a whole attic to her disposal where she lived with her son, nicknamed Bommeltje and Shalom Weiss. The reunion was unbelievable, we had so much to tell each other. The important news for me was that I would stay two nights in Reeuwijk and on Wednesday, together with Awraham Helmann and two others, we would try to reach France via Belgium. Thousands of young Dutch were sent to Germany as forced

labourers and in order to escape that lot, many had found a way out in the last recent months. They left illegally to France, where they without any problems were employed at the OT (Organisation Todt) since there was a great shortage of labourers. Not only did they earn pretty decently, but when they had been registered officially as foreign workers, they were allowed every six months to visit the Netherlands on a paid leave. The Organisation Todt was a German construction company whose main occupation was the construction of fortifications and defensive works, and because many did not want to continue working for a German company they sought workers by French contractors who were only too happy with these workers.

Our illegal movement, which nowadays is usually called the 'Westerweel Group'; after the aforementioned Joop Westerweel, saw now a golden opportunity for the friends who lived in hiding in Holland to come to France where they could find temporary employment. First, France is a big country where illegal immigrants could move much easier than in the small, densely populated Netherlands; secondly, the German regime was there less centralised; and thirdly France had common borders with two non-belligerent countries which was especially important because the organisation wanted at a later stage the hiding chaweriem to move to Switzerland or Spain.

Shoshanna told me that Erich Sanders, alias Henk van der Luit and Alfred Dubowsky, alias Anton van Leeuwen, both chaweriem from Gouda, accompanied by a bribed OT man, had some days earlier legally traveled to France and had arrived safely. The story that the OT man had told was that Henk and Anton had left their jobs in France and were now brought back to their base again. The next day Avraham arrived accompanied by Dirk. Early Wednesday morning we said goodbye to Shoshanna, Shalom and Bommeltje and started our way to Rotterdam.

Chapter VIII A SLEEPLESS NIGHT IN KATENDRECHT

At two o'clock in the afternoon we were expected at the Delft Gate station and since we were too early, we wandered around in the city. It was our first visit to Rotterdam after the bombing of May 1940. We could not believe our eyes: everywhere were still ruins and only the main roads were made passable again. Whenever we encountered a policeman I thought he would stop us and I avoided his look but soon I learned that this was most stupid to do under the given circumstances and from then on I looked them straight in the face.

Right on time we were back at the station where we saw two chaweriem with a pronounced dark appearance. Without knowing it, we knew that they were part of our party. They were Ludi Rosenberg - alias Henk van Putten - who shortly thereafter was given the nickname 'Henkie Peuki', and Benjamin Ginzburg, usually called Benjomin with the emphasis on jó'. Moments later Kurt Reilinger - alias Nanno - and Karel Kaufmann - alias Piet Both arrived. Nanno as well as Piet had bad news for us, the bribed OT man had not shown up so in the mean time there was a delay of one day, we would have to try again the next morning. Each of us had to look individually for accommodation for that night. Avraham and I looked somewhat confused at each other, we had hoped for a better start for our escape.

We walked from one hotel to another, but the rooms were either too expensive or occupied. After a while we went to search the slums, but we could not find anything. The reason was that the whole centre of Rotterdam was wiped out, the city had too little room in relation to the many travellers who passed through the busy harbour. It was near eight o'clock and since Sperr time was at 20:00 p.m. when no one was supposed to be on the street, we were worried. In desperation we asked a worker if he knew a cheap hotel, to which he replied with a knowing smile: "Well dude, go to Katendrecht". We had more than once heard about this quarter with its dubious reputation but under the circumstances we had no choice, so we crossed by ferry the

Meuse, on the way to our new destination. We indeed found pretty quick a simple guest house with a double bed room. Happy that we had solved our problems we asked for the key, but now our problems just only began. First of all the hotel manager asked for our identity cards to register us in the hotel register. He said he had to hand over all entries to the police every evening at eleven o'clock, so that every citizen who did not sleep at home could be controlled. At the moment he looked into our identity papers he asked. "But you both live Rotterdam. Why aren't you sleeping at home with your parents". We had not counted on such a question, so we concocted a story that made a great show. We told him that the next morning we had to be very early near Katendrecht and our parents were not in town. The hotel manager did not believe a single word and he made it clear that it was just clear nonsense. "Maybe you run away from your compulsory labor service in Germany?" he asked straight away. We denied it by all means and retold the story of our work at a food supply company. Even that was not sufficient because in the meantime he had discovered that Jacob van Weelden (Abraham) was not yet eighteen, and so without parental consent could not sleep outdoors. But ... he wanted to earn some money and came up with the following proposal: we could get the room for a night, and he should go to the police at eleven o'clock and tell that those two guys had just missed the last boat and therefore could not go home. Lacking any other alternative we accepted his offer with both hands. We had the impression that he himself 'was good', but we had of course no certainty that the police would believe his story. It was for both of us a sleepless night, every footstep on the stairs pierced us to the very marrow. The following morning at six o'clock we left our hotel and when the door closed behind us we were free again we felt reborn.

Chapter IX FIVE DAYS HIDING IN GOUDA

Of course we were too early back in the centre of Rotterdam, so we decided to pass the time with questioning people where 'our streets' were. Abraham quickly discovered where his street was, but I did not get much further. Some had heard of the C. Beerman Street, but no one knew exactly where it was. I concluded that it must be a fairly unknown street, what later proved to be a great advantage. At the appointed time we met Nanno and Piet, who came with Ernst Hirsch - aka Willy Jacobs-who had come illegally the day before from Antwerp. He had been stuck there with four chaweriem because they still had not found a safe crossing to France. Nanno, Piet and Willy had an appointment in South Rotterdam and suggested that we would come, and would wait in a cafe for their return. We broke up into small groups, and as I was this time with Henkie Peuki, I did not feel very comfortable. Henkie was small, with jet black hair and brown eyes. He looked like ten Jews, but luckily with a straight nose. The worst part was that he absolutely did not take his Jewish appearance into account, he chatted with all and sundry, and all that still in Dutch peppered with German words. No wonder I had to tell him to shut his mouth. But apart from the fears Henkie Peuki gave me, this was a first visit to a café after two years. Finally I could like other Dutch, sit in a cafe and drink a beer. After some time Nanno, Piet and Willy returned with the news that our trip to Belgium was postponed until next week. The original plans were canceled, and instead of legally crossing the border, we would be smuggled across the border by a certain Theo who according to say had already done this more often and was considered an expert in his field. Theo would give us further instructions about the border crossings into France and about the German company where we might find work. Willy would take over the lead in Antwerp where he would join us together with the other chaweriem who were already there. We said goodbye to each other and everyone went back to his last hiding place. Abraham and I returned along the same detour to Reeuwijk, where Shoshanna was shocked when she saw us; she had presumed us to be in Belgium. Abraham would stay until Monday at the family

where Rachel, one of the girls from the farm was already a few weeks in hiding. I was that night, after the fall of darkness picked up by bike and taken to the Van Norden family in Gouda whose youngest daughter Hilda was very active in the underground. It was an artistic family; both the father and Hilda painted and the rooms were full of their own portraits and drawings. The family was strict vegetarian, and never before had I consumed such amounts of lettuce and vinegar as at the Van Nordens. On Sunday Hilda went to a meeting in Rotterdam and came back with the news that everything was settled and the next day we could get started. Immediately after her return she went to Heini and to Abraham and instructed them to wait for us on early Monday morning in a side street of the Florisweg.

Early Monday morning I said goodbye to the Van Nordens and followed Hilda who walked ahead of me. She took me to the corner of the Florisweg where Heini and Avraham were already waiting at the bus stop. None of the three of us felt at ease. We had lived more than three years in Gouda and a lot of people knew us. To our luck there was a shop window and we studied long and thoroughly the little that was displayed. While we were there one of our workers, Frans Man cycled past but luckily did not see us. Finally the long awaited bus arrived and together with Piet who in the mean time had joined us, we left Gouda with a sigh of relief.

On arriving safely in Rotterdam we said goodbye to Hilda and Piet. Luckily we did not know then that Piet was a double agent who was in league with the Germans. At a later stage, another group where Piet had to deal with too, was caught on the Belgian border and only then became it clear that he could not be trusted, so all contact with him was cut off. Piet did not survive the war, but it is not clear who liquidated him, either the underground or his German employers.

Before we went to the station, we bough some supplies for on the way. After we had stopped them in our backpacks, it was time to go to the platform for the train to Dordrecht and Bergen-op-Zoom. We saw immediately that we were not the only ones who wanted to leave the country. We knew some of the chaweriem walking around, but there were others who had a Jewish

appearance and in addition were carrying lots of luggage. It was a hot June day, but nevertheless Leo Laub, the brother of our foster sister Friedchen, who formerly was in Gouda, wore two thick coats one over the other, what immediately struck. We did not talk and pretended we did not know each other. After taking leave of Nanno, we entered various compartments. Along the way we experienced our first fire test in the form of an identity check by the Green Police, which ended well and proved that our papers were reliable. In Dordrecht Theo joined us, and when we left the train in Bergen op Zoom, he took us to a cafe. He did not know how long he would stay away, but he asked us urgently not to go outside and stick together. Theo stayed away much longer than expected, and some chaweriem became impatient. Despite Theo's request, Leo and Benjomin decided to walk a little, and when Theo finally got back and wanted to leave for the border, the two hikers were still not there. We became seriously worried but finally, after a long wait, Benjomin returned with the sad story that they were arrested, but he had managed to get released with quite a convincing story.

Theo decided to leave the bar immediately in order not to bring the remaining eight chaweriem in danger in case Leo would tell where the group was staying. With two taxis we drove to the border, where we had to wait until half past one at night. In the meantime, Theo returned to Bergen op Zoom to find out what exactly was happening with Leo. It became clear that the Germans did not trust him, and that there was no chance that he would be released. Only much later did we hear that he was via camps in the Netherlands deported to the East, where he unfortunately died.

Chapter X The BELGIAN INTERMEZZO (8 June - 2 July 1944)

At half past two, after we had tried to sleep somewhat in the forest, Theo gave his final instructions. He should always be ahead of us, we had to follow him, walking one after the other. It was forbidden to speak during the trip, we had to walk as carefully as possible and especially avoid stepping on creaking branches. Along the way we would pass a farmyard and the dogs would bark, but we did not have to be afraid because the farmer was in the plot. After we had listened carefully, we set out. The weather was fairly clear and the view was not bad. We were accustomed to the darkness throughout our long stay in the open air.

After a long trek through the forest, we finally arrived at the farm where everything went according to plan. The farmer had opened a couple of fences and we passed without problems. After a brisk walk we reached the edge of the forest. In front of us lay a large open area where the border was intensively controlled by the German border guard. We hid among the trees and by turn we bowed and quickly crossed the plain. The tension was nearly unbearable, one after the other crossed the spot while Theo on his gun at the ready, waited for the last of us to reach safely the other edge of the forest .

Everything went well and we were already quite far on Belgian ground when a few hundred meters away from us two German soldiers on a bike came in our direction. Theo immediately ordered us to lie down, but the Germans had already spotted us. We lay there without moving, and when we thought that it was all over for us, the Germans continued to our big surprise as if they had not seen anything and a few minutes later they were out of sight.

What a relief! Later Theo explained the reason for the German retreat: we lay on the ground, so the Germans on their high bikes were an easy target. In addition we outnumbered them and so to our luck they decided to be better safe than sorry. We waited till dawn, it was most important for all of us to reach the inhabited world as quickly as possible in order to avoid a possible raid of already warned Germans. At an accelerated pace we reached the

Belgian border village of Stabroek, where we took the tram to Antwerpen. Once there we headed straight to hotel Derby in a side street of the Keyserlei. Willy, who meanwhile had returned to Antwerpen to find a place for us to stay, was awaiting us. He said that we could stay in hotel Derby one night while he was busy finding shelter for the group which now numbered thirteen chaweriem. In the afternoon we got time off, and two by two went exploring Antwerpen. That was quite something special for me because it was the first time in my life being abroad. All the others were from Germany or Austria, and for them it was not so special.

I set out with Heini and we could hardly believe our eyes. Belgium was a different world compared to Holland. The mood was much more relaxed and hundreds local people were strolling on the Keyserlei, the Meir and Grote Markt. For the first time since years we had a delicious Italian ice cream, something we had neither seen nor tasted in ages. Most people were also better dressed than in Holland and fewer German soldiers were seen. Since we had no slept the previous night, we slept that night as we had not slept in a long time but early the next morning we were suddenly awakened by a loud noise. We heard shouting in German, banging on doors and boots banging on the stairs. We speedily dressed and expected the worst. No one dared to leave his room, because we were worried that the hotel was surrounded. After a few minutes, which seemed like hours, the noise subsided, we heard people going down the stairs and the door was noisily slapped. When we left our rooms a few moments later we heard that Theo had been arrested. The night before he had gone to a bar where he apparently had too much to drink and the evening had ended in some blows with other pub gangers . We decided to leave the hotel as soon as possible, because if Theo should start talking, the Germans could any time be expected in the hotel. Outside we met Willy who fortunately could tell us that he managed renting an attic where all thirteen of us could temporarily live. He suggested we should take our luggage which we had with us to our new home. It was an unfurnished room on the second floor of the Falconrui, a street in the harbour area. On the ground floor was a pub, "Chez Julia" where prostitutes worked. On the first floor was another empty room that could sleep three chaweriem, while the

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rest of our group lived at the attic. It was a radical change, from our house on the Merwedeplein to a whore pub in Antwerpen. I immediately thought of one of the admonitions which my father had given me the day of my departure, "Never go to a prostitute, because you can get infected with diseases." I believe that that was the only sex education ever given to me at home, the subject was taboo and was never discussed. Our room had a wooden floor with a little mattress and some blankets, but otherwise it was empty, no chair or cabinet. We slept like sardines in a box and getting up was almost impossible because you nearly always stepped on somebody.

However, Willy told us the same day that in the mean time we had to do with this room. We had to avoid attracting attention, we had to keep silent so he suggested that indoors we should take off our shoes. In order not to stand out in the neighbourhood as a large group of young people, we had to stay indoors as much as possible. Day by day only two chaweriem were allowed to go to town and two others had chores to buy the necessary food.

Obviously there was no hot food, so we mainly ate bread, sometimes with some cheese. Only those who were in town could buy a hot meal, but usually there was nothing to obtain because our financial resources were very limited.

Willy was mostly gone, busy searching for an illegal border crossing between Belgium and France. Each time he returned, he had hopeful messages and according to him it would not last long till we could leave Antwerpen. Meanwhile it appeared that the prostitutes had also German customers, which increased the tension under which we lived. In late June Willy came back again from one of his trips. This time he had been in Holland. He told us the Job's news, all the remaining Jews in Amsterdam South were rounded up on June 20, and all were sent to Westerbork. That meant that my parents and two sisters were also included and I was very worried and down.

We were already more than two weeks in the Falconrui and it seemed that only early July we could leave for France. Since there always existed a danger that we would get caught, Willy instructed us thoroughly so we knew

exactly how we could explain to the Germans why we, thirteen people, were hiding in Antwerpen. According to this version, we were Dutch workers who were working for the Organisation Todt in Dannes Camiers, which is located at the English Channel. Because we were longing for home, we illegally spent a few weeks in Holland. We were now on our way back to Dannes Camiers, and we failed to pass the Belgian-French border illegally.

It was good that we all knew this story, because we would need it sooner than we thought. On Sunday, June 27, a beautiful sunny day, there was suddenly a knock on our door and the woman from beneath us told us that there were Germans in the pub so we had to keep mouse quiet. Unfortunately, this warning came too late, and even though we were quiet, we sat like mice in a trap. We heard shouting in German and moments later the door flung open and two Germans with revolvers drawn stood in front of us. Some chaweriem climbed via the window frame into the gutter, and we held our breath in case the gutter would collapse under the weight. But within a few minutes the Germans noticed them and ordered them to enter. Luckily it was not the SD-the Security Service-but the so called Green Police, who were less extreme. Willy immediately became our spokesman and I shall never forget how calm and quiet he handled the conversation. It has to be said that Willy was born in Germany, he spoke perfect German and talked in such a nonchalant manner, that we all were amazed. He must have had nerves of steel! He told the story about our illegal furlough in Holland with such conviction that the agents seemed to believe it. After a short time a German truck appeared with armed men and we were all transferred to the barracks in the Van Diepenbeekstraat. Some months earlier the Jews of Antwerpen were deported from the same barracks and now another thirteen Jews arrived at the same location, with the difference that to our happiness the Germans had not noticed our origin.

The picture of that ride through the streets of Antwerpen accompanied by armed Germans will stay with me forever. The question: 'will the Germans believe Willy's story' haunted our minds. When we were interrogated in the barracks, the interrogators were told thirteen identical stories, but then four nerve-racking days started during which all possible scenarios were

examined. The pessimists saw us deported to the East; the realists thought about a labor camp in Germany; and the optimists hoped that the Germans would bring us back to France. This would obviate the need for a dangerous illegal border crossing, and of course we preferred a legal transition under German protection. It was on Thursday when we were informed that the next day we would be returned to France under German armed escort. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief until we learned that we had to be tested if we had any venereal diseases. This prospect of view was for us, thirteen Jews not very encouraging. Before this physical check was performed, we discussed in what order we should stand in row. We all agreed that Manfred Paul alias Marius Pietersen who only was addressed as Marietje had to stand in the middle. He was as a matter of fact the only one of our group who was not circumcised, even though he with his long crooked nose was the prototype of a Jew. We teased him often saying that in these hard times of Jews prosecution he could better swap his nose with his genitals. That's why we thought it was at least better that one uncircumcised would stand in the middle thus interrupting the monotone image

When the frightening moment finally was there, a caregiver came instead of a doctor. He asked us to stand one behind the other. I was the second, and when I heard the command "hosen herunter", (trousers down) my heart beat faster. The man asked: "Haben Sie mahl schmerzen?" (do you have pain sometimes) and when I answered negatively all he said was, "Weiter." (go on) And so we all examined and were told that we were healthy and allowed to leave for France the next day. Nobody understood how this could have happened, we all had expected the worst, and most had been convinced that after such an physical check, only a train ride to a concentration camp would have been the end.