

# Who Knew Not Joseph

By

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**Father in German  
Uniform. 1914 - 1918**

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## Why in English?

The first thing I have to explain is: why in English. Well it is really quite simple. Though of course German is my mother tongue, we left Germany in 1933; immigrated to Holland. So at the age of four I spoke German but then learned a new language: Dutch. At that age you do not consciously differentiate between languages, and so you speak whichever is spoken to you. So you become bi-lingual. But when I started going to the kindergarten and school, Dutch of course became the predominant language for me and also for my brother Arnold although he was seven years my senior. He wrote his dairies in Dutch. So actually *I* should be writing in Dutch. But then after the war, in England, I

went first to 'hachsharah' in Thaxted, and then in '47 to the Regent Street Polytechnic to study for my matriculation, which I completed in June 1949. It is these studies that made me think in English: when studying you have to be able to express yourself clearly and you also develop a larger vocabulary to that end. And so English, though not my mother-tongue is my first language. Which is rather typical; of all my development: what became my first language I acquired when already 16 years old, later of course I also learned and used Hebrew on a daily basis. Result: I speak several languages quite fluently but none really well. For the same reason I never feel *quite* at home wherever I am.

There is another reason why I write in English: Malli lives in the States now and who knows whether they'll ever come back to live in Israel. In the meantime the children are going to American schools and their first language is becoming English however hard Malli may try to keep their Hebrew alive. There may also be others who want to read this and not just the nearest family, to them Hebrew or Dutch would be useless.

.I.

### **Ramblings and Reflections.**

This whole enterprise has come about because Debby gave me a computer to play with. First I revised my Graduation Thesis, and it turned out to be quite neat. Now that this machine is sitting on the desk almost unused I decided to re-do 'Who Knew Not Joseph', and make it neat and more readable from a purely technical point of view. I must here make clear the significance of the title. The quotation is of course from the Bible. It relates of the new conditions under which the Israelites found themselves; a new Pharaoh had come to the throne who knew not - or did not want to know - what Joseph had done for Egypt. It is very similar to what happened to the Jews under Hitler in Germany. The German Jews had fought for Germany in W.W.I. My father was badly wounded. But when Hitler came to power "they knew not Joseph".

There can be no question of revision here: most of its contents were not written by me. Mother's evidence was given in English and must therefore be given verbatim as the original has it. Arnold's dairies are in Dutch and only the translation is mine. The only revision that can possibly be done here is a better choice of word here and there but only if I keep strictly to the original intention. And of course the same applies to my Grandmothers dairies. Those are written in German and the translation is mine. So the only real revision I can do is on my own memoirs. There too I shall restrict myself to typing and grammatical errors. Only if I suddenly remember something that I think worthwhile mentioning that I had not included before will I do so now. This may happen during the course of the work; old age has a trick of making less recent past clearer and clouding the very recent past.

That indeed is the purpose of this introductory section. Seeing the past from old age - and there is no denying that I am old - is like sitting on a mountain and looking out over the valley below and the way up. One sees the paths and ways which one has traveled, but not all of it because some is hidden behind clumps of trees or rocks. Some is obscured with mists swirling in the distance. Also one can see ways and crossroads not taken and wonder if they would not have been the easier or better ones to follow. But what is the use? You're here and you'll never have the answer to such questions because they are purely hypothetical. There is after all no going back, and if there were and you took another way up would you not sit here again wondering and regretting the choice of roads? Therefore the oft repeated question of 'do you regret anything?' is void of meaning. The only regret possible is for something done that has

hurt others and that could have been avoided. Even here the hurt done is usually done quite unknowingly, or through not foreseeing the consequences of ones actions. So, there is no point sitting here and regretting coming to Israel. One could have gone to America like the Novices (my cousin Ruth and her husband Meir himself a camp survivor), or one could have gone to Australia, New Zealand, stayed in England or gone back to Holland. Or could one? -[my computer tells me I've spelled Zeeland wrong: Well I've news for it *that* is the Dutch spelling and as it was originally Dutch that is the correct spelling; Zeeland is the most south-western province of Holland and 'new' should by rights be spelled 'nieuw'.] - You see why this chapter is headed 'ramblings'? Back to the question if one could have gone to all these places. Probably yes. But to return to the example of the Novices: they went to the States only in the late 50's or possibly in the early 60's. Ruth came to England when she was ten or eleven and as a British citizen because Uncle Henry was born in England and had a British passport. Meir came to England as a camp survivor and was send to a hostel for T.B. convalescence, where Eva was Matron (Ruth's sister). That is how they met. And Meir went on to University and then got a job in some electronics firm in Chelmsford. They went to America when he was offered a job there. In all these years they had plenty of time to reflect if Israel was a good choice or not. Eva on the other hand, who had an excellent British nursing qualifications, came to Israel in '52 and got a job as teaching matron at Sha'are Zedek in Jerusalem. Elizabeth and her husband Joseph always talked of Aliyah but the truth is they were too deeply buried in the yeshiva life of Gateshead. What am I driving at? Eva (who by the way was seven years my senior) and I were swept along by the same current of opinion then prevalent, I even more so. When we were repatriated to Holland after the war my mother naturally wanted to join the family in England; her parents who were still alive, her brother Norbert, and also her sister in law Anna Minden and her husband Henry.(Elisabeth's, Eva's and Ruth's parents). Also my mother had an aunt there; Aunt Blanche (grandmother's sister) and a cousin Fanny Moore (Blanches daughter). There was also a brother of grandmothers (Elkan Adler) and a lot of other relations. So it was the obvious choice for her. Also she had no language problems as she spoke fluent English (they spoke English at home; my grandmother was a daughter of the British Chief Rabbi Adler and a snob.) She also spoke a very good French and of course German as she was born and brought up inGermany. My grandparents met when my grandfather (Moses Caro) went



Sitting from left to right:

:Fanny Moor - May , (Blanches daughter) ,Blanche May - Adler, Phoebe Caro - Adler  
 Standing: Dick & Bertie Moor .

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from Hamburg to attend a wedding in England. Being a doctor and having a practice in Hamburg it was natural that they settled there. And as we're busy with Mishpochology (for none Yiddish speakers: genealogy): my grandfather had a sister who married a Cohn from Switzerland and they lived in Basel. This Cohn, after the establishment of the State of Israel, was invited to come to Israel to draft the legal code for the State. They lived in Jerusalem where we went and stayed a number of times. Etty Zangen is their Daughter. They also had a son but I can not remember ever meeting him. Now where were we? Ah yes, why my mother wanted to go to England after the war. And quite naturally so, moreover the family wanted us to come over. Now this was no simple matter then. England was exhausted financially, its infrastructure was in ruins and large numbers of demobilized personnel was released onto the labor market. So England wanted no immigrants or refugees. Moreover we



Grandparents Caro 1930's ?

were stateless. The Germans had rescinded citizenship of all Jews. My parents had applied for Dutch naturalization in '38 - that is after the statutory 5 years residency - but by the time the papers came before the naturalization board the second world war had broken out, or was about to break out. [September '39]. Though Holland stayed neutral till May '40, when the Germans over-run it without warning, the authorities didn't think, understandably, it wise to give Dutch passports to German subjects. My father had a cousin in Holland who had a lot of influence and he did try to help but to no avail. This cousin - there I go rambling again! - was Eddy Fuld. Eddy was director of the Dutch airlines K.L.M. and also director of the Bank Lipmann and Rosenthal. He was the son of Marianne Fuld sister of my grandmother Sophie Heilbut. The story as told by my grandmother is as follows: their parents [i.e. my great-grand parents], the Elias', died both when they were still quite young. The children were to be divided between various brothers and sisters of the parents. One daughter was to go to Holland to family Rosenthal. On the day that they came to fetch her, my grandmother who was supposed to have gone with them was not ready, but her sister Marianne was. So it was Marianne who went to Holland. One must of course understand that in those days (1860's ?) travel was still quite a undertaking whether by train or by stagecoach or private carriage. In this case it probably was by private carriage. Anyway Marianne went to Holland,

to the family of a wealthy banker. Later she married a Mister Fuld with whom she had several children. The oldest was Eddy, then there was I don't know in what order Jenny and Milly. (I don't think I forgot anyone). Jenny married a Hartogh and they had several children, one of whom I know died in Bergen-Belsen. The Hartoghs managed to escape to England and later America during the invasion of Holland. I know they took with them one daughter Katie who later worked for the "Joint" in Holland and who tried to help when we came back to Amsterdam. Milly married one Lessing and was long resident in England [it is possible that Lessing was already resident in England when they married] Lessing was a chemist and made a fortune. His best known service to mankind was the cleaning of coal. It was Lessing who got rid of London smog. The Lessings had one daughter who married Harry Blech. [Harry Blech was a well-known violinist. He formed a famous string quartet - the Blech quartet - and some time after the war formed a chamber orchestra called the Mozart players who he then conducted.] The Blech's had three children: Gemma, whom you all know and Joyce (who teaches piano at the Royal College of Music - [she was a brilliant pianist but is completely neurotic and so could not perform in public -] and Robin.) Back to Marianne, when her husband Fuld died she married a Dutch-Texan Jew by name of Nathusius who was anti-Jewish. They had one daughter Marie-Sophie Nathusius-Teulings. The 'Teulings' she acquired when she married the latter, a famous Dutch actor. She herself was an actress and dancer. Some of you have met her when she was on a visit in Israel. Shall I ramble even further from the point? Well as you have lost the thread by now anyway I may as well. In the 60's when we lived in Gedera, we used to play chamber music once a week. Players came from all over the place and one violinist was the vet from Beer-Tuvia. One day over the back of some cow in moshav Oroth I told the vet I was looking for a certain piece of music for us but couldn't find it. Ron - the vet - said I should go to a certain gentleman living in Oroth (I can not recall his name) who used to be opera and ballet producer and had the most fantastic library. Well I knocked on the door and got a doubtful reception from the lady of the house, but when she heard my errand - and my famous accent! - I was asked in and they soon wormed out of me that I was born in Hamburg. Where it seems the gentleman had been director of a theatre and he told me one of his former pupils and actresses was coming next week on a visit. Her name? Marie-Sophie Nathusius-Teulings! Now I had not seen or heard of her since we left Holland in '45, so you can imagine the surprise.

Now back to Holland '39. Though Eddy tried to obtain the naturalization for us he did not succeed. So when we were

repatriated to Holland we were, as said stateless, which of course complicated the procedure of bringing us to England. Luckily in mother's family there were a lot of influential people, especially Sir Cecil Kish and Bertie Moore. Sir Cecil had been Deputy Under-secretary of State for India. That may sound quite lowly a position but was indeed a very high post in what was then the India office. Exactly what he did during the war I have no idea but I think it was something in the treasury. Anyway he was a familiar face in the corridors of power. [His brother was Brigadier Fred Kish who has a corner in Zionist history and after whom the village of Kfar Kish is named - near Kfar Tabor] Cecil married a sister of my grandmother Phoebe (Caro). This sister was always hushed up because she committed suicide, which in those days was a great disgrace. I never learned why she did so. The other person of influence was Bertie Moore who had married my mother's cousin Fanny May. Bertie was permanent undersecretary to the Home-office, just the place to be if you wanted to pull strings for an immigrant. So it took a little time but they did get permits for mother and me to come to England. In the meantime whilst we were waiting for the permits to come through it was thought wise to find me some occupation. My ambition to become a vet of course had not disappeared but I was aware enough that at present at least nothing could be done about that. I had not enough schooling nor were there anything like the finances needed available. So Eddy Fuld's son, Max, took me around trying to place me with some farmer to work, because that is what I really wanted to do. But no farmer would have me. It is really not very surprising; I must have looked very weak and probably was. No good as a farmer's hand who would expect a lot of really hard physical work. But I must say that after recently reading an article in the quarterly of Oleh Holland I am wondering if there was not also some anti-Semitism that played a role there. So I was left to my own devices and free to rove round Amsterdam. This was [as I understand in retrospect] not very good for me. I was understandably completely confused, only beginning to recover from typhus, which I had contracted either in Bergen-Belsen or on that infamous 'lost train'. It is a nasty disease and amongst other things affects the functioning of the brain. On top of that I was now sixteen and adolescence must have brought about the usual hormonal changes which my battered body could ill afford to cope with. All this is of course wisdom of hindsight: I doubt that then anybody realized the problems, or if they did had either the time or the means to address them. Holland itself was in post-traumatic shock. The last year of the war if not the last two had been a terrible experience for all Dutch people. All, or nearly all that the rich agriculture of Holland produced was shipped off to

Germany. Men had been rounded up and send to forced labor. There was real heavy famine and there was no fuel for heating. The paving between tramlines was done with wood blocks. These had all been rooted up and burned by the populace as coal was unobtainable and the Dutch winters are harsh. The German had also taking away anything of industrial value. So the streets were partly or totally unpaved, nothing functioned properly, people were badly dressed. Of course the bureaucracy could not cope either. Short of trained staff and means and overwhelmed by returning forced labor, refugees and holocaust survivors. The place was in total chaos. In this I wandered around Amsterdam depressed and confused. I knew nobody; I went to our old synagogue but the half-dozen people that were there were all strangers to me. My old school was empty and taken over by some office or other. Most of the old neighbors in the Zuider Amstellaan [now Rooseveltlaan] had disappeared and the one old couple still in their flat did not or would not recognize me. [I believe they had some silver of ours.] I had one obsession on my mind: to find Elinoor. Any girl with a red jacket or black hair that I saw in the distance I followed till I saw her face and always of course that awful fall from hope to despair. Till one day I met Elinoor's grandmother and then I learned the truth of course. I knew it and I knew it to be true but I would not accept it. So I turned her into an Icon. She became and has remained a sort of Beatrice.[The reference is to the Italian poet Dante - 13<sup>th</sup> century - who fell in love with a girl he saw; it is possible he never even talked to her, she married and apparently died young. But Dante never forgot her; she was his inspiration to his dying day. In his great poem 'The Divine Comedy' Virgil guides him through hell and purgatory by but it is Beatrice who guides him through paradise.] I am no Dante but to a similar delusion I have to admit. However from the vantage point of old age I do now see that this and the eerie feeling, of a town I grew up in, having nobody in it that I knew, have bedeviled my relation with my fellow-men. Experience taught me that anyone one is really fond of dies. Of course I know this is irrational but I can't help myself. It is too late now. Nor do I think I am the only one with this unconscious fear. The recognition - if rather belatedly - that children of holocaust survivors have also suffered, is a recognition that these types of deep-seated fears have hindered relations and sometimes have actually been transferred to the next generation. As a result they have often been either smothered in suffocating love or felt a coldness that of course did not exist, but was the consequence of such fears as just now described.

Back to England of '45. Mother naturally went to live with her parents. But as they lived in a small flat in

Maida Vale and as there was also a live in housekeeper by the name of Sacha, there was no room for me. So I was quartered with the Mindens. Aunt Anna was father's sister; there were no other brothers or sisters. They received and treated me like their son, their only son Max had fallen in Italy. Elisabeth the eldest already lived in Gateshead. She was not married yet and I think she worked there as a housemother to a seminar. So she came home only for the occasional weekend. Eva was a nurse and was home with the irregularity that goes with that job. Only Ruth was home as regular as clockwork; she was then either finishing school or had started on her physiotherapy course. So I had a room of my own. Looking back I am not so sure that to separate mother and me after all that we had been through was a very clever thing to do. But one must also recognize the fact that there really was no other way of solving the accommodation problem. My grandparents lived on a pension provided by the Adler trust. Any pension my grandfather may have had from Germany of course stopped with the outbreak of war quite apart of whether he was Jewish or not. The Adler trust will need explaining. As mentioned before my grandmother was a daughter of the Chief-Rabbi of Great Britain. [There were two Adler Chief-Rabbis; Nathan and Marcus, brothers, one followed the other. But I can never remember who my Great-grandfather is.] Besides them receiving a neat salary as chief-rabbis they also had a lawyers office with a partner called Perowne. Adler and Perowne were one of the great City law firms. This firm was kept in the family for generations and only came to a sudden end when the last scion of that particular branch died. It was not his death that caused the liquidation of the firm; when after his demise the papers were sorted it became apparent the he had sold property in Spain that did not exist! End Adler & Perowne. His name was Bob Eichholz, and although he was but a distant cousin Norma and I always laughed when somebody said: "and Bob is your uncle" [a colloquialism meaning 'that settles it'.] Well anyway, in the good old Victorian days the Adlers made a tidy sum from their quite legal practice. They invested money in factories and property. My Great-grandfather left a will through which the estates were managed by a 'trust'. From this trust only incomes could be paid to the beneficiaries till the last of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation had died. Only then would it be possible to touch the capital or even break up the trust. Sir Cecil Kish was main trustee whilst the firm of Adler and Perowne were the administrators.[ No, no! you are wrong: Bob never touched a penny of this trust.] My grandparents lived of what the Adler trust was allowed to pay out to them, which can't have been much. The main property was in the city - Sun Street - which was completely destroyed during the German air-raids. So no

rent can have come in from that. The only income that could have come in must have been from the shares. I only know of shares in Hawker-Sidley and I do know when those were eventually sold they were not worth a lot.

Uncle Henry was by profession a lawyer. But he had no British license so he had gone into business. He certainly did not make a fortune that way, and it must have been extremely difficult to start any new business in '39, what with the war on the threshold. As this is a very disorganized rambling family account I may as well tell of the Mindens flight from Germany. Uncle Henry was born in England - why I don't really know; something to do with his father being a representative of some German firm in England - and so was a British citizen and all his family had British passport. In Hamburg he had been a successful and highly respected lawyer. During the Hitler years he specialized in the defense of opponents of the regime. One morning in his office in 1938 he got a message from a well-wisher saying that that evening the authorities were coming to arrest him. This can not have been quite unexpected, so he 'phoned home to say some urgent business had called him away and that he would stay with Ernest [his brother in London] ' for the night'. Then he went to the station and got on to the first train to Amsterdam. As he had no luggage at all with him he did not call any attention to himself at the border. He arrived tired but quite happy on our doorstep that same evening. Max, his son, was at that time on Hachsherah in Wieringermeer. Uncle Henry told him to get ready to join the family in England. In the meantime Aunt Anna had not been idle. She shipped the then sixteen-year old Eva of to Berlin were her sister Elizabeth was at some seminar or other. They had instructions to take the first train out of Berlin to Antwerp, Brussels or Zurich whichever left first and then go and embark at Ostende for England. May be they came to Holland first and stayed a while there; I don't rightly remember. She herself took the ten year old Ruth and stayed the night I know not where and the next day they too traveled on to Amsterdam. So you must understand that family Minden arrived in England with the clothe they had on their backs and nothing else. Whether it was still possible to transfer any money they may have had in the bank I know not.

And so my tale goes back to the last quarter of '45. The first thing that I had to do was learn English. For this an old lady - the mother of Walter Leon - volunteered. She lived just of Park Lane which in those days must have been one of the poshest districts in London. But to tell the truth this was not really so. The house she lived in was a sort of pension for old gentry. It must have been quite expensive - because of the address - but in reality they got precious little for it. Mrs. Leon lived in one room

crowded with her possessions. If she wanted to make use of a living room she had to use the common one, which even to my eyes then seemed quite shabby. She surely could have got more comfortable accommodation in a less posh address. But this was rather typical of these old 'aristocrats' There would never be an outward show that money was not as easy as it used to be. Ah, well! Now this lady's idea of teaching English was reading *Shakespeare* to me! You can imagine how much I understood of that. But she did also explain what was happening, and from that I learned a little.

Ruth took me one evening to a concert; I believe it was mostly Handel and Beethoven but could not swear to that. It opened a new world to me and I soaked music up like a dry sponge. So my grandmother who was an excellent pianist and musician offered to teach me the piano. But as she was then already a very sick and frail old lady I declined. In retrospect this was a mistake firstly because surely she would have enjoyed it and secondly I could have acquired a good musical grounding much earlier, much more thoroughly, and much easier than I ever did. Grandmother died in '46 and by that time I was in Thaxted.

Thaxted is an ancient village in Essex some 50 Km north east of London. Just north of this village 'Bachad' [Brit Chalutzim Datiim - in other words: Bnei Akiva], had bought a rather run down farm for 'Hachsharah' purposes. The family had decided and quite properly so, that the best thing for me would be to go there. The Mindens and the Caros were all religious so no other place was considered. I was still far too confused to have a different opinion and tried very hard to really believe though even then there were the first glimmers of doubt.

The Bachad Farm consisted of an old farmhouse and some Nissan Huts for accommodation and some 480 acres of land [some 2000 dunam]. There was a milk-herd; chicken houses; a large barn with five tractors; a stable with three workhorses and a repair workshop. When I arrived things were still quite primitive. We had no mains electricity; the cows were of bad stock. The land in that area is very heavy clay and as England is a very wet country it was always a complete mud bath. Even the shortest distance had to be done in Wellington boots and after a few steps one always had several kilos of mud to drag along. And everything was almost permanently damp. Yet I had there one of the best years of my life. We were very busy upgrading the farm, draining the fields, building new sheds, replacing the old herd with pedigree stock. The whole enterprise was under the management of Kulli Landau and Aaron Ellern. Aaron had a degree in agriculture, but Kulli had a better head. He was a very bright businessman and a very good manager. He also could be very high handed as

people of that sort often are. Under their direction this run-down farm in the space of two years achieved several prestigious prizes.

The people on the farm were divided into two groups. The 'staff' were all somewhat older, in their twenties, some even in their later twenties and married, and the 'Chevrath Noar' usually sixteen to nineteen year olds. For these latter this was a school. And this was indeed the purpose for which the farm had been acquired. The Noar worked half day and studied half day. The subjects studied were agriculture [taught by Aaron] and Jewish studies [taught by Hershel Singer, a graduate from Jewish College]. I do not know how much we learned in these studies; I for one found it very difficult to stay awake during these lessons after hard work all morning on the farm. Add to that the meager knowledge I then had of English ..... . But as I said this was one of the best years of my life. I learned to milk cows and drive tractors but mostly I worked with the horses, all sorts of field work and carting. In fact I got on so well with the horses that I was put in charge of them. I stayed in Thaxted a year and a half as a special favor; because I had come in the middle of the term and I had missed a lot because of my lack of English. I finished my stint in Thaxted in spring '47 and it was decided to enroll me at the London Polytechnic to get my matriculation. By this time the idea that I might study to be a vet had come back into my head. So I went of to London to stay with the Mindens. Every morning I took bus no 13 to Regent Street where the 'Polly' was. At the preliminary interview with the principle of the matriculation department I was told that I would have to take a three-year course. But after half a years study I realized that it could be done in two, and so notified the principle, Mr.A.N.Moon M.A. He would have none of it, but at the end of two years when the time came to register with the University of London for the exams I registered, against his advice. The subject I most feared was mathematics. My mentor in that subject was a little Jewish fellow, called Herman, who told me I had nothing to fear and that I was going to sail through with all colors flying. But although that was the case with all other subjects during the math exams I was so stressed that I fainted and woke up in hospital. So I failed in math. But as I had failed due to 'ill health' I was given a second chance half a year later and passed (just). The Regent Street Polly also had departments of biology and chemistry where students were prepared for BSc's in those subjects. The teaching staff was generally very good. Most I learned from the chemistry master one Dr. Mitchell who taught me how to study.

During all this time I made good use of London. Uncle Henry gave me a generous allowance. I went to galleries and

concerts. The Wallace collection was only a short walk from the Polly so I could go there during lunch hours. Also there were lunch-hour gramophone concerts run by the students themselves, often with very interesting explanations. It should be understood that the Polly's matriculation course was geared to mature student; student who had been demobed from the army or for other reasons had not been able to complete their schooling during the war. The course was built in such a way that everybody could complete it at their own pace, depending on previous knowledge, and ability to study. There were those who had that ability but were hampered by family circumstances. It was an interesting crowd; each one with his own story to tell. There was a Josephs who used to disappear for weeks on end. Years later I discovered that he used to go on secret missions for the Irgun. Let's go rambling again. I ran into Josephs when we were in Manchester. He had been to Israel backwards and forwards several time during that space of time but did not find his niche. In Manchester he was then paying court to a girl that was also courted by an up and coming lawyer - who's name I've forgotten. She was nothing to write home about but it was all rather sad as she opted for the Money. And I had been made confidant and go between for Josephs. When the girl married he left in despair and disgust for, I believe, New Zealand. It was Josephs who put the idea into our heads for me to go and take a course in artificial insemination before going back to Israel in '58.

At the Polly and in the same class as I, was a Mister Matthews who was set on becoming a dentist. He played the horn and sung basso profundo in the then very well known Jacques orchestra and choir. I learned a lot about music from him. We usually shared a bench. He was kind and good fun but a little eccentric. When Christmas was approaching and the Jacques was going to 'do' the Bach B minor Mass at the Albert Hall, once in the middle of German class he burst out at full volume and in a really lovely basso: Quoniam tu solo sanctus. The lecturer called out "Mr. Matthews we all know you are working hard for the orchestra but here we are trying to learn German". Then there was a little Greek girl from Cyprus full of fun and charm. Cyprus was still under the British and very sympathetic to the Jewish cause in what was then still Palestine. Because of the proximity of the Polly to the Wigmore Hall I discovered madrigal music there. At that time there was a choir called the Dorian singers who specialized in Madrigals. They were under the direction of a Hungarian-Jewish composer called Mathias Seiber. He wrote some wonderful music though he is nowadays mostly forgotten. In my music library there is a quartet by him for recorder and string; absolutely wonderful. Once I discovered a little tucked away notice in

the Statesman & Nation (a weekly magazine) announcing chamber music concerts at the Conway hall in Red Lion Square. What a find! These concerts, which are still going strong, bring the finest artists at ridiculous low prices [in those days sixpence]. I heard there The Amadeus, Beaux Arts and many others. As often as my mother was free and well enough we went together to many concerts. But mother was far from well and loosing weight again. The doctors did not find anything and quietly maintained that it was psychosomatic. When finally she did succumb they insisted on a post-mortem which showed atrophy of the pancreas. A few years later this hospital refused to give a certificate of the cause of death, which we had requested for reparations purposes. Oh, yes anti-Semitism was and is rife in England; I have run into it over and over again.

So I spend a very crowded two years in London, studying and absorbing culture. I stuck to the religious habits of my betters and tried hard to really get into the spirit of it and believe, and for a while even succeeded. I was also involved in the activities of Bachad in London. The head offices were in Charing Cross road and as that was not far from school I often went there to help out with all sorts of little tasks. There were three gurus at the head of this organization. The top man was ArieH Handler and his two adjutants were Walter Hirschberg and Franz Kritsler. ArieH was a little older than most of us - late twenties or early thirties. He was constantly back and forth to Israel (and Palestine before that). Whenever he came back he used to tell us wonderful tales about the land of Milk and Honey. Those who were considering further studies he used to call to his office to convince them that Israel was full of qualified people; that what it really needed was kibbutzniks, workers of the land. I can not say that this contention was entirely unfounded; Israel was in need of working hands, certainly the agricultural sector. But it was wrong to keep people away from higher education. Actually he had tried hard to dissuade me from going for matriculation; now the pressure was on to keep me from entering university. Nor was I the only one, there were quite a few people whom he persuaded to go on aliyah without going to university first. Most of these later either went to the Hebrew University or went back to England to study. The majority of the latter did not return Israel . So on balance ArieH did a disservice to the country. But the worst of it is that ArieH never went on aliyah himself, nor did he ever intend too. I learned later that while he was drawing a salary from Bachad for running the show, he was also building up an insurance company with which he did very well later - thank you!. And for this I can not forgive him. We all make mistakes and follow wrong-headed policies, all of which may also touch other people's

life. But to promulgate policies and ways of life you do not yourself believe in is criminal. Nor can I understand what rationality there was behind it. The only thing I can think of was that he wanted to keep a cushy job whilst he was building up a business and so wanted to show what great numbers of people he send on aliyah. At least Walter and Franz believed in what they said and indeed made aliyah in '51 and '52 respectively. I too was persuaded to forgo a career as a vet. But to be honest Arie's persuasion only tipped the scale. I was now twenty and felt I could no longer be a burden on others financially. Whether this feeling was justified or no is not really to the point: that is how I felt. I could see that uncle Henry was struggling to keep his head above water. Aunt Anna used to take in needle-work to help out. From my grandfather I could not expect any financial help as I already explained and mother earned a pittance as secretary (with three main languages!) She always said she was lucky to have the job. May be she was right because she was often to unwell to go to work and yet they did not dismiss her. What I did not realize was that there was money I could have borrowed of the Adler trust. I am sure that if I had approached them they would have found a way. But it never occurred to me and if it did to mother she never mentioned it. I think she did not really understand the working of the trust, nor did any of the trustees approach me. There again that may have been pure ignorance; they may not have realized that I wanted to study nor that there were financial problems. The same sort of ignorance of conditions we run into when finally the Adler trust was dissolved. In '53 after grandfather died we had notice that the trust could be dissolved (though that I never quite understood; Aunt Blanche was still alive). Any way aunt Bertha and we needed the money to buy houses so we pressed for the winding up the estate. As I have already mentioned the main property was in Sun Street in the city. Cecil Kish kept on saying that it was a pity to sell the property because when, in a few years time, building would start in the city it would be very valuable. Doubtless he was right from an objective point of view - indeed the headquarters of one of the world's biggest banks stands on this very spot. But we needed the money now and not some time in the future. So it is quite possible that Cecil did not know of my predicament. There was a third problem: when coming to England I received an identity card for foreign residents and on it was stamped in large letters ENEMY ALIEN. That was because of my German birth. So when in London I had to report every three months to the police. On the farm I do not remember reporting. May be the police came to us, may be it being a teaching institute it wasn't necessary. Anyway with an I.D. card like that it was impossible and

unlawful to work. Bertie Moore did get my regular reporting rescinded but the enemy alien even he could not get removed. So there was I with a problem: how would I support myself for six years and find the steep university fees. Also, I must be honest, I may have feared the six years of hard studies themselves. So the upshot was clear, I relinquished the idea of studying.

So I went back to the Farm but now as staff. Mother died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1949. I remember I was in one of the outlying field supervising sugerbeet harvesting when I was called back to the farm office and shipped of to London. But of course I came too late.

Kulli and I did not always get on to well; I must have been quite difficult and irritable; Kulli could be very high-handed and would brook no arguments or opposition. So 'the powers that be' looked for ways of separating us; probably more accurately Kulli saw to it that another job was found for me. Now Bachad also run two hostels as hachsharah for those that were too old for Chevrath Noar or could not afford the fees; these hostels were self-supporting One of the hostels was in Buckinghamshire near Ayelesbury, the other was in Surrey near Farnham. It was just outside a hamlet called Dockenfield in a large Manor house with lots of rooms, large gardens and about an acre of vegetable gardens. At the bottom of the garden flowed a little river, a tributary to the river Weye. There was a large attic room in which some boys slept. [Solly Levinson who'd also been in Thaxted was one of them]. Off this large attic there was a small cubby-hole just large enough for a bed and a small cupboard, with a window overlooking the gardens and the neighboring farm. It also had a sloping roof. This room I commandeered. All the boys, or men if you prefer, worked either on some farm or at the Forestry Commission nurseries. There were two exceptions, Nechemia Hammond who worked the vegetable and flower gardens. And the manager of the "Baith", Herbert Laster, who later was one of the victims of the El-Al plane shot down over Bulgaria. Some of the girls worked in the kitchen and maintenance of the house, clothe repairs etc. But all those that were not needed for these tasks worked in agriculture just like the boys. The locals thought the whole thing was a kind of joke, though they were glad enough to make use of the farm hands available that way. The bus from Farnham - which is the nearest sizable town with a railway connection - stopped at the top of the road that led to the house. If anybody was expected at a particular hour Herbert would try and meet them at the bus stop with the run-down van that we had. If anybody asked to get off at this corner the conductor would call out "Paradise regained!" that is what the locals thought of the hostel.

I was send to Dockenfield ostensibly to help Herbert with 'chevra' problems. I don't think there really were any, but I did become a sort of father confessor for chaverim with personal problems (not many!). There was one particular problem that Herbert and I did work on very hard but failed. It was to prevent the marriage of a girl called Madeleine with a boy called Percy. She was penniless and shy and believed no boy would look at her (actually she was quite pretty but she was dumb). He had a filthy temper, came from a well to do family with whom he had quarreled and thought the world of himself. Every body thought the marriage would be a disaster and we tried hard to dissuade Madeleine. But to no avail. The marriage was a disaster; Percy beat Madeleine mercilessly and they were divorced quite soon after.

When I arrived in Dockenfield I worked first with the 'gang' at the Forestry Commission. But soon Herbert found me a job at a large fruit farm where I learned al sorts of useful things such as correct pruning, and grafting. It seems the farmer took a shine to me for he put me in charge of apple picking. A few months after I had arrived at Dockenfield, Norma joined the 'Baith'. And the rest is "written in the books of Chronicles".....

May 2001

**Memoirs**  
of  
**Robert Bar-Chaim**  
[Heilbut].



Mother



Father

I don't really remember my father very well. Which is strange as his influence on my development was quite strong. I remember that views on religion in our house were very tolerant. Those who did not keep Sabbath or otherwise had left Judaism, were not put beyond the pale but viewed as being the poorer for not having a religious experience. There were many visitors to our house who were not religious. I always suspected that my mother observed the customs not out of belief but from habit and education [what we call nowadays: conservative], and rather inclined to side with non-believers. Though I have no real evidence for that: it is just a hunch. She was a woman given to black moods and very pessimistic. She was doubtlessly deeply in love with my father and very happy with -or through- him. They never had an argument in front of me. Such there must have been, but were kept out of earshot or in the bedroom. Their bedroom was somehow a special place. It was not exactly out of bounds, but I at least did not enter it unless I had real business there. Mother used to like to stay in bed late and often I said good bye to her when she was in bed. All the same their bedroom was a sort of inner sanctum - to me at any rate.



Walter, Robert and Arnold (1932?)

It is strange that in a house where good music was much appreciated, none of us boys received music lessons. My mother played the piano, though in actual fact did so but

seldom and not at all after 1939. Her mother, Phoebe Caro, was a fantastic pianist and on the rare occasions that she visited us would play a Mozart or Beethoven sonata on the old ornate Victorian piano. My parents were regular concert goers and Walter was very musical. His girlfriend - and later fiancé - Annie van Gelder was an extremely competent pianist and I believe studied music professionally. I don't think that financial considerations caused this lack of musical instruction. I am sure things weren't any too good, yet on looking back, the mid thirties until 1939, cannot have been too bad. Yes, the furniture in the sitting room was distinctly shabby - but I can not remember ever being denied something for financial reasons. The street we lived on was good middle class and the flat quite adequate in size: three flights up and no lift. [But this was common and in those days in Holland at least lifts were a luxury]. On the right hand of the front door was Arnold's and my bedroom. It had two windows; two fold-away beds, a fair sized table, two chairs and two build-in cupboards with a wash basin, with hot and cold water, in between them. The next room along the passage was Walter's room. It was small with one window and a fold-away bed, a washbasin and a writing table with chair, all of which left hardly room to squeeze in between. After Walter's room, the passage led to the door of the sitting room with its shabby green three-piece suite, a big oak desk in the bay window and two large glass-fronted cupboards full of books. There was also a red mahogany table with folding blades, some chairs, some minor oil paintings and etchings on the walls. By the door there was a build-in cupboard which held amongst other things, which I do not remember, a 'chass' [a complete set of the Talmud]. The sitting room had folding glass doors that gave on to the dining room. Together these two rooms ran from the front of the flat, that looked on to the street, to the back veranda, with a large sunshade and some deckchairs that looked out over some waste land where we used to play. It was altogether a wonderful place as it was full of wild flowers and wild-life. The folding doors were usually open in summer and when there were a lot of visitors on special occasions. In winter they were usually closed. In the sitting room and the dining room, in the corner back to back and opposite the doors that lead into the passage, there were two large stoves - Kachels in Dutch - of the type unknown to the English but quite common on the continent.<sup>1</sup> On each mantel piece there was a clock; in the dining room a brass one with a turning pendulum, under glass. In the sitting room there was a black marble clock. The dining room had a large oak table with extension leaves and six [or possibly eight?] chairs. A chaise-lounge

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<sup>1</sup>Why these stoves are unknown in England is a mystery to me. May be they are too efficient?

covered with an imitation polar bear skin. Next which stood the piano whilst opposite stood an ornate sideboard with some good silver on and in it. Next to the sideboard there was a serving hatch giving onto the kitchen. Two wing doors lead out onto the balcony which besides overlooking the waste ground just mentioned also afforded a view of some fields as this part of town was on the edge of Amsterdam. In fact I remember sitting glued to the window of our first flat in Amsterdam, which was on the other side of the road, watching the building of the south side of the Zuider Amstellaan. This fascinated me because in Holland buildings have to be build on piles that are driven into the ground by heavy, huge steam-hammers.<sup>2</sup> This first flat was really cramped and as soon as the building was finished we moved across the road to number 89. I must then have been four or five years old. Not so very long after we had moved there the road was torn up again to lay the tram lines for extension for no. 8. The end of the line was then brought to the Merwedeplein. Up till then it run as far as the 'Wolkenkrabber (= literally skyscraper) it has all of eleven stories! This may give you an idea of the size of Amsterdam in those days. But come to think of it this must have been a little later when I went to school already. On the south side of the Merwedeplein, which is the end of the Zuider Amstellaan [now called Rooseveltlaan), there were open fields and bogs (moeras in Dutch) quite extensive ones with small hillocks and copses. They eventually led onto the Zuidelijke Wandelweg and the Ringdijk. The Wandelweg, which means walking-way, was at the bottom of the Ringdijk, a dike that literally rings Amsterdam from 't IJ right round back to 't IJ. This IJ is the mouth of the Amstel River from which Amsterdam gets its name.<sup>3</sup> [Well ringed, because the town has long since gone beyond this boundary.] For a fee one could walk on top of the Ringdijk which was very popular with us,- and others.[How did we obtain tickets on Shabbath? Did father buy them beforehand or did he carry money? I doubt that he would have carried money.] Often my friends and I would play behind the house or go to the bogs.

So; back to the flat. It was a perfectly rectangular shape and its internal lay-out was in the shape of the Hebrew 'Peh'. After passing Walters room the passage turned sharply left running alongside the living and dining rooms. The kitchen door was directly opposite the door to Walters's room. It too, was long and fairly narrow, the far end led out onto a balcony, and though this was really a continuation of the dining room balcony, it was partitioned from it, and shared this balcony with the Master-bedroom.

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<sup>2</sup>Holland proper, that is the province of Holland, is mostly below sea level and so foundations of buildings are supported by these piles.

<sup>3</sup>Originally *Amstel-dam*

The partition between the two balconies was a coal store. There was another coal store on the bedroom end. The dining room partition with the neighbors was but a wooden wall. This came in handy when Holland was invaded in May '40. This partition wall was sawn through and a door put in; a precaution in case of a bomb falling on the house. These neighbors did not share the same stairwell with us but that of the next house, it provided either of us with an alternative in emergencies. I think Walter slipped out that way the day Arnold was picked up.

The kitchen was squeezed in between the dinning room and the parents' bedroom. The latter had a door leading into the bathroom, which also had a door leading directly into the corridor. Next and separate from the bathroom was the toilet forming the incurved bit of the 'Peh'.



Arnold, Mother, Robert and Walter 1938

All the flats had attics which were reached by the common stairs. Every flat in the house had one room in this attic but for the topmost flat which had a sort of small flat. It was one flight of stairs above our flat leading to a landing that gave out onto all the attics. At the end of this landing was the entrance door to our attic flat. This consisted of two main rooms, which were right above our living and dining rooms. But in-between the two rooms there was a small windowless store room. To the right was the

front attic room with a tiny balcony and the hoist beam.<sup>4</sup>To the left there was the back room with a sloping ceiling a large build-in cupboard, wash stand and toilet. These rooms were used as guestrooms. One room was almost permanently occupied by the house-help. This was usually a girl from a good Jewish home who would learn housekeeping this way and earn a little money at the same time. How good my mother was is a moot point. Though now I come to think of it I believe she had a diploma in Home-Economics. These girls under normal circumstances would of course not stay more than a year or so; then they would go off to get married or back home to help their mother or possibly widowed father. Two of these girls I do remember. The first one, Ilse, must have been somewhat older than was usual; well into her twenties. I believe in her case there was also an element of charity, if my memory serves me right, she was a refugee from Germany in the late 30's and was thus offered a home and a small wage. She was engaged to be married to a fellow who had something to do with shipping or ship-yards. For I remember he took us to the launching of the 'Nieuw Amsterdam' the then flagship of the Dutch Merchant Marine. What sticks in my mind of that occasion is that we got a proper soaking. Obviously he was not important enough to get grandstand seats, but influential enough to get ringside seats. He should have known better - or was it his first launching? Anyway; when a huge ship like that slips into the estuary, an awful lot of water gets displaced and this water has to go somewhere in a hurry. So a large quantity in a really impressive wave rolled over the shore; hence our soaking. Ilse was a blonde (platinum blond?) and always heavily made up. Always giggling but not a favorite of mine - heavens knows why. The other girl I remember was Judith Wolff. She was the daughter of very good (school?) friends of my parents. Her father had by this time immigrated to the States and application had been made for her to join him. She did manage to get away at the beginning of the war.<sup>5</sup> She must then have been in her late teens or early twenties. Very dark and always good humored. She is now married to some scientist and lives in Rehovoth. She tried to make contact with me but I failed to respond.<sup>6</sup>

A charwoman came in once a week to 'do'. But Lien was actually much more than a charwoman. Very Dutch in looks and physique, and very lapsed Calvinist. She had one

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<sup>4</sup>The stairs in Dutch houses are extremely steep -almost ladders- and narrow, so it is impossible to carry furniture etc., up these stairs. Therefore Dutch houses have large beams with a hook at the end built into the roof. It is a distinguishing feature of houses in Holland. To these beams removing firms attach tackle and so hoist things up to a window and the furniture is hauled in through the windows.

<sup>5</sup>See also Arnold's dairies.

<sup>6</sup>Many years later, in the late 90's by some fluke I met her brother who is amongst the founders of Nahariyah, and so I did eventually meet her at her home now in Ramath Gan. On the same occasion she also invited Ruth Knoller, who surname is no longer Knoller. But that is another story altogether.

daughter much like her and no husband. What happened to the latter or if ever there was such an animal, I have no idea. I don't think Lien had an easy life. Yet I only remember her as cheerful and helpful and a real friend, besides being a very hard worker. Always ready to help on special occasions. She was the



L. to R. Walter, Arnold Robert. (1937?)

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only one that returned silver hidden with her and of course the poorest of all those who did take valuables for safe keeping. After the war I went visiting her. She was then an old woman - so she can have been no youngster just a few years earlier. Her daughter was with her on these occasions, also always cheerful, caring and married by then.

All in all ours was a household of the upper middle class. So how come we had no music lessons? With Arnold the answer is, I believe, quite straightforward. He was the scientific minded one in the house, mechanically inclined. He finished the H.B.S.<sup>7</sup> with flying colors in sciences and managed to do almost a year at the Institute for Technology before he was taken away. It was but a few weeks after that, that we got the notification of his death. How well I

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<sup>7</sup>Hogere Burger School i.e. High school with finals being university entrance exams.

remember that evening. By this time we all wore yellow stars and were not allowed on streets after dark. Public transport too was off limits to Jews. My parents had friends, the Wetselaars -Dutch Jews- who had one daughter and a dog. I had fallen in love with this dog -yes the dog!- and since there wasn't much entertainment open to Jews anymore, I often went and played with their dog in their garden. I suppose it was a mutually advantageous arrangement; they needed the dog exercising and Jews preferred not to be seen on the streets on 'empty' errands. I enjoyed keeping their dog fit in the back garden. Strange is it not, when thinking back like that; I can see questions loom large on how my parents educated us. My mother was brought up with dogs, my father loved them, which I noticed every time we visited the Fulds in Bussum [who had five dog!]. Why did we not have any animals in the house? Not even a cat? Anyway back to that terrible evening. I was on my way home from the Wetselaars when I noticed a 'razzia' going on. This was not the first one, though they were not yet a regular part of the scenery. I managed to stay always on the other side of the street from the SS and got home, where everything was in turmoil: Arnold had been taken away. They wanted Walter too but somehow he managed not to be home. I believe he slipped away via the neighbors. Afterwards the Fulds found him shelter in some village for a while. [12<sup>th</sup> June '41.]

Arnold's death certificate<sup>8</sup> said "shot whilst fleeing". This my parents would not accept. They always said that he was a good boy and would never attempt to flee [flee authority]. But in the wisdom of my experiences I am not at all so sure that the Germans didn't tell the truth. Arnold was a clever, kind boy very involved in engineering and chemistry. His spare time he devoted to Zionist activities [with Mizrachi] and amateur theatricals at the HBS. He played in Moliere's 'Miser', a play that got mention in one of the local papers it was so well done. It was directed, I believe, by a fellow pupil called Jacques Cavalho, a strange boy; a bit of a dreamer. It was during the rehearsals for this play that Arnold fell in love with Marianne who lived in our street. I don't know how much his affection was returned. I *do* know that he often was deeply miserable over her. His Zionism was deeply sincere and he was much involved with their activities; a boy with an open mind. It would therefore not be surprising if quite early on Arnold realized where things were leading, after his arrest, and *did* try to run away, with the full knowledge that there was nothing to loose. It shocked my father deeply and he never really got over it, although he carried on valiantly trying his best for his family. Mother was

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<sup>8</sup>Dated Mauthausen 26<sup>th</sup> June '41.

completely broken and her streak of pessimism became obsessive - and actually in the long run, quite prophetic. But I doubt that it was from considered analysis rather than intuition. How Walter reacted, I have never really known as I did not see him again till we were forced to move to Majuba Street, towards the end. For me it was also very traumatic; Arnold and I had been very close. With Walter I did not get on too well. Walter was too much the elder brother, with nine years between us. Also he was already living away from home when war broke out, in Rotterdam where he was then working. Arnold and I always shared a room since I can remember myself, he helped with my schoolwork, taught me how to build with Mechano. He shared his secrets with me and I mine with him even though he was seven years my senior. He took me to Mizrachi meetings and gave me my first glimpse of Zionism. He encouraged me and helped me with my nature interests, helped me keep my aquarium, grass snakes, toads, lizards, newts, sticklebacks, tadpoles and praying mantis. All of which - except the praying mantis - were captured in the bogs, the Amstel or one of the many canals.

So Arnold had no interest in music. Or rather, to define that more correctly, had no interest in making music, as opposed to listening for he was an avid listener. But Walter? Walter was very musical; it was he who made me listen to Rosini's William Tell overture and pointed out some of its beauties to me. Of course Annie heightened his awareness and love of music. These two were very much in love but sadly never made it to the 'chupah'. But as far as I can remember they did get a civil license when the two families judged it wise to do so. It was hoped that that would make it easier for them to stay together as a family when, as foreseen, forced migration would take place (1942?). I think there was never a religious ceremony because for that permission had to be obtained from the SS. This was either unobtainable or thought too dangerous to be applied for. But as Jews were not allowed to go out at night, it was customary to stay over with friends if you wanted to spend an evening together. So Annie often slept in the attic. Writing this I see there is some discrepancy between my thinking that Walter was hiding in the country and Annie's staying overnight. The more so as mother hinted to me later that they slept together in the attic. Did Walter come to town secretly to see Annie? Does my memory play me tricks? Was Walter actually at home and there is a mental lapsus? But no, his room was empty, the little one next to mine. A boy stayed there on the way to the States. But I may have gotten my dates mixed up a little here... Yes, Eli Samson must have been in Walter's room when he was in Rotterdam and that was until May '40. And Walter probably did not stay in hiding that long thus reconciling

these dates. [Anyway my chronology is not entirely to be relied upon; I was very confused after the war and never made an attempt to verify dates of events. But it does not matter that much: *when* things happened but rather *what* took place.] Of course we heard of the terrible bombing of Rotterdam on the radio. Mother was understandably in a terrible state. It is possibly one of the reasons why we did not flee to England - I am not sure. But I *do* know that the Hartoghs came and offered us a lift. It can not have been the whole Hartogh family as Henk was with us afterwards in Westerbork and died in Bergen-Belsen. Some people managed to cross to England in the two or three days that Holland tried to fend the Huns off. The Hartoghs did manage to get across, as already told. Later, that very evening of the destruction of Rotterdam, Walter appeared, bandaged, cut and bruised but with no serious injuries. As told before father's application for nationalization had been turned down. When the Huns invaded Holland all German passport carriers of military age were rounded up and interned. So Walter was held at some sort of police station and was sitting on his bed there when the station was bombed and the bedroom wall collapsed on him. He then made his way by lifts home. But why Walter was not taught music that I still don't understand. It can't have been economic reasons for Walter was 13 by the time we left Germany so he would have had plenty of time to have learned some music before the rise of Hitler. There is also the question why Walter did not go to University. The years '36, '37 and '38 were good years for father's business. In '36 or I rather think it was '37 we went to Luxembourg to a place called Echternacht for about two week's holiday. I remember long walks up the mountains and through woods alongside gently murmuring brooks. Also I remember playing some prank with another kid that nearly ended badly. I was asked if I was involved but denied it stoutly - which of course was a blatant lie. Arnold took me aside a few days later and told me that lying like that was bad. It was much better to face up to the music, because in the long run people would have confidence in me for being honest. That lectures of his left a lasting impression on me.

In '38 father went to Angola on business. In '39 his partner went. The partner took his entire family with him. But then he was younger and his children were still babies. I don't know if he also had a better nose than my parents. Did he know or have a hunch that he would not be able to come back? As the business was buying goods to trans-ship to Angola and selling to the natives, it collapsed when the war broke out in '39. Anyway where the Dutch end was concerned. Mr. Kahn, father's partner, was stuck in Angola and managed to develop the business during the war. After the war he paid my mother a few hundred pounds for my

father's shares. She reckoned it was a paltry sum but knew that he had no legal obligations. Herman Caro, her cousin, told me he thought it a generous settlement under the circumstances. Herman acted as my mother's adviser on many occasions after the war. He did not marry till after the war when he was no longer young. All those years he waited for Kate Diamond, who was stuck in Holland during the war whilst he was in the States. Kate was my 'madricha' when I went to summer school two consecutive years. I think '39 and '40. She was a cheerful person and a beautiful girl. I had a crush on her, though she must have been easily ten years older than I. But then these childhood crushes really do not mean anything. ('Purely hormonal' as Barbara used to say.) Kate's tragedy was that when she and Herman finally did marry she had a number of miscarriages but no live birth. I lost contact with them after mother's death. But I seem to have heard that theirs was a sad story indeed. If I mistake not she developed multiple sclerosis [this could account for the miscarriages] and their life was one long tale of physical misery. And don't tell me "A youth I was and have become old, I have not seen a Righteous man go hungry for want of bread". They may not have been in want of bread but that is of course not what that quotation means. And righteous they were; I've rarely seen people so prepared to help others.

The summer school was run by a Jewish woman called Betty Bing. She had a redheaded bad tempered husband. They had no children I believe. The husband was always Mrs.' Bing's husband! I don't know if he had a profession of his own. But he was always the factotum in the background. Betty Bing also had a children's choir during the year to which I was made to go. I was no good at singing and always out of tune [and well aware of that]. So I learned to mouth the songs but not to sing. I *hated* that choir and no effort was made to teach singing or anything about music at all. But her summer schools were great fun. There were two houses that she rented in Bergen-Binnen; the main house and the annex where the overflow slept. Everyday, or almost so anyway [barring Shabath of course] , we took a little two carriage narrow-gage railway to Bergen-op-Zee, to the sea. The engine had an old fashioned bulging funnel and it had a large brass bell which it rung whenever it approached a crossing, which was very frequent. What fun! It was here at Bing's Home that I met Renee` and his older sister Marianne. On her too I had a short-lived crush. It seems little boys are very polygamous! With Renee` I became very friendly, but we lived quite a distance apart so we did not meet too often once back in town. In Bergen-Belsen we lived in the same barrack and even our bunks were quite near each other. Renee` was worldly wise. When we were evacuated from Bergen-Belsen he told me



A "Bing Huis" group.

From L. to R.: Robert, Renee, Marian, Kate,  
unidentified.

Behind Marian: unidentified. Standing:  
Heinz Ellern.

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that he was dying and would not come. He advised me that under no circumstances should I try to walk to the railway station. He said my only chance of survival was to refuse to walk. Of course he did not go and never left his bunk and I know that he did not live to see the liberation of Belsen a few days later. Even if he had it would probably have been too late anyway.

Why I did not get any music lessons is quite clear: it was my fault. My parents suggested that I learn the piano, but I would have none of it. I had a class mate who lived next door - a very posh flat - all white leather, blue Chinese carpets, modern crystal figurines ('30's style) and a large (Bluthner?) black grand-piano. The poor sod - or so I thought - had piano lessons and always had to practice. What with homework and that we did not see much of him on the street where we played. ["Op de stoop", that is on and about those double outside stairs so typical of Dutch building]. I was a poor scholar and my homework took me ages and buckets of tears and my free time was precious to me. So I told my parents in no uncertain terms that I did not want piano lessons. With the wisdom of hindsight I think that they were mistaken in not making me. But they

obviously did not believe in imposing something that I had so forcefully said I did not want. (Interestingly that was also the how Syd Lawrence thought: he did not believe in making a child play and he was an expert educationalist. But that was in the late 60's).

In my 2nd or 3rd year at school I caught scarlet fever. In those days that was still a major disease. The flat was put under official quarantine. Walter and Arnold were evacuated to the Hartogh's. Lien came daily (or did she sleep over?). Our doctor was a doctor Frank, a pleasant man with marvelous bedside manners, who always had time for his patients. He had an excellent name. -- In 1941 or '42 he was forced, through threats to his family, to perform an abortion on the daughter of a top Dutch Nazi official. Apparently the operation was done on advanced pregnancy. Abortions in those days were anyway dicey operations. Something went wrong, the girl died. He was publicly humiliated and struck of the register and send, a broken man, to concentration camp.--I was really very sick and took a long time recovering, and was terribly spoiled during those long weeks. I must have been a pest of a patient. But the worst after effect was that when I got back to school I was terribly behind. I had not been a brilliant scholar before but now I felt constantly shamed. At some stage Arnold was engaged at increased pocket money to coach me. But I remained down one year. That should have given me a good start but my self-confidence was undermined and I remained a 'slow' pupil. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade we had a teacher for 'nature' studies who was also our form master. He was a brilliant teacher and had a great love for nature. His classroom was full of tertaria, aquaria and potted plants. He instilled in me a profound respect and love for nature and nature study. Mijnheer van Moppes was his name and he was also a very brave person. When the train, taking him his young wife and baby to Westerbork, slowed down over some bridge he threw his wife into the river and jumped after her with the baby in his arms. They managed to get ashore safely and somehow got to Palestine. But I believe that after the war they went back to Holland.

The schools we went to were Jewish schools. They taught besides the required curriculum, religion; that is mumbled prayers with a vague attempt at translation, Tenach with all the juicy bits skirted around or ignored and an old fashioned sort of Hebrew. On the whole I disliked religious instruction; it was, to me at any rate, difficult, obtruse and boring. If I remember correctly Roegie took religious classes and that may have had something to do with my dislike of the subject. The school was closed on Saturdays and open half the day Sundays. Naturally it was also closed on Jewish holidays, but Christian holidays were normal schooldays for us. Dutch national holidays were strictly

observed and we were suitably prepared for them. The walk to school took some fifteen/twenty minutes. On the way we had to pass a Catholic school whose pupils were inclined to harass us. But the school adjoining ours was a Protestant one and gave us no trouble whatsoever. Actually the standard of the school was rather high though it varied a little of course from teacher to teacher. There is only one teacher whom I remember negatively; Mijnheer Roegie. He smoked in class, which was of course strictly forbidden, and used to shove his cigars into the drawer of his table whenever anybody approached. The story went about that once this caught fire, but I think this was wishful thinking. How he was never caught is a mystery to me, unless they didn't want to catch him. He also was quick on the draw with his ruler over the knuckles, picked his nose and was worst of all, a bore. The headmaster Mijnheer Stibbe was a stickler for discipline and had a lovely sense of humor. We feared and adored him at one and the same time. Except for Roegie I do not remember corporal punishment. The Joodse HBS<sup>9</sup> was the best high school in town. But my scholastic achievements did not lead there.

In either '37 or '38 my grandparents Caro left Germany and went to England. Grandmother was of course thoroughly English - scion of the Adler house. There was much to 'ing and fro'ing in those years. A lot of refugees on their way to the USA or England and a few to Palestine passed through Holland so our house was frequently full with lodgers. My grandparents stayed for quite a while whilst they were on their way to England. Grandfather used to sit in the big carved oak chair next to the desk and I on his knee. And so he introduced me to the wonders of the Odyssey. In an abbreviated version for children of course, but very lively and it certainly stuck in my mind. That must have been the year that I moved up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade and into the class of van Moppes. ('38?). There I became friendly with two boys; Asher Pinkhof (a cousin of Esther Dotan from Gedera.) and Shimon Rozenberg. But I think I'd better return first to the earlier classes of miss de Pauw and miss Fontein. I think that on the whole I was a spoiled brat and did not make friends easily. [I still don't]. Also I loved bossing others around - not a good way to make friends. I met my match though, in Trudy Solomons, my first 'girlfriend'. After the war she turned up quite unexpectedly in Dockenfield, where she was a member of a group of Dutch girls. Why they came there the Lord only knows and why there were only girls is as much a puzzle. From Dockenfield she went on Aliyah and joined Kibbutz Shluchoth and married there. I know nothing further about her. I only know that she got married there because Lavee send me down there in

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<sup>9</sup>HBS = Hogere Burger School, that is Gymnasium.

'52 to irrigate some fields that we had there that year and so I met her in the Chader Ochel. But all this is an aside. Trudy certainly knew how to boss others around. She was roly-poly girl with blond hair and a pink face, wholesome but no beauty. If she wasn't so Jewish I would have said typically Dutch. Why I liked playing with her God knows, but I did, and she was always on my beautiful scooter with rubber tires and a bell. We nearly always walked home from school together. May be I was impressed or cowed by her cleverness, because clever she no doubt was and she was always top in class.

About that time I had my first practical instruction in the differences of the sexes. A friend of Trudie's whom I did not really like, Sarah Heertjes, always hang out with us. She was an only daughter. A very dark girl, and not pretty by any means. Very pushy and always trying to come and play with me (or us?). One day when I had the sulks because I'd found a dead mouse in a trap, she came to play with me. But I wasn't having any; I wanted to sulk and all her suggestions fell on deaf ears. Suddenly she said "I tell you what, I show you my wee-wee and you show me yours." An idea I firmly rejected, not for lack of curiosity, but because of an inbred prudery and the novelty of the idea. "Oh," she said "you don't have to be ashamed, I know all about it, you boys have a long hose of a thing, I've seen it on my father." And without further ado she lowered her knickers. But now it was my turn, according to her. I did not consider that we'd struck a bargain and resisted. So she tried brute force. I was saved by someone coming through the front door. How old were we then? Seven? eight?, nine?. I can't remember but it made a sufficient impression on me to be remembered, as you can see.

Father thought I had not enough friends, so he brought home after synagogue two boys, twins, Joe and Willy Wolff. We became firm friends and were always in and out of each other's houses. They were older than me by a year or two. They had an older sister and quite a young mother, a very beautiful woman. Their father was quite mad, yet not so mad to prevent him from making a fortune as a lampshade manufacturer. Nor was he so mad that he didn't read the times correctly. He took his family to England and set up in London. Willy's and Joe's departure in '38 was a sad blow to me and one of the first sign in the wind if I could but have read it. Theirs was a mad household. Often they came to us for Sabbath Kiddush and so I had to go there from time to time. The father was visibly a nervous wreck constantly sniveling and hawing and altogether physically repulsive. Rumor had it that he got his wife because of the money and that she had a lover. In the end - in England - the old man had to be put away in an institution, but he



Me and my scooter.

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refused to divorce his wife. Eventually he did [or died] and she married her lover. So this time the rumors were right. I saw the twins again after the war but we lost contact again very quickly: our life histories had been so different from when they left Holland that we found no common grounds on which to reestablish our friendship. The twins never married because their father's illness was thought to be hereditary. Their sister did though; a Rabbi or Yeshiva Bochor from Gateshead.<sup>4</sup> As far as I know their children were all quite normal.

After Joe and Willy had left the friendship with Asher and Shimon blossomed. Asher was a Pinkhof; a large tribe of Dutch Jews who boasted poets and writers amongst them. Asher's father was curator at the fabulous botanic gardens of Amsterdam. He also wrote short stories. Shimon was a refugee from Germany who lived with the Heertjes. I wonder was Sarah as forward with Shimon as with me? Shimon was a clever boy and naturally very unhappy over having been made to part from his parents. This probably brought him early wisdom. He was also a year or two older than the rest of us; he was in our class because he had to learn Dutch and because of his removal from German school had lost some time. --It is quite possible that he did not go to school in Germany for some time: as a Jew he may have been denied entry into school. - Asher eventually went to the HBS but Shimon went with me to the MULO for some to me unknown reason.<sup>10</sup> This was also a Jewish school but its aims were more commercial and less academic than the HBS. A year or two at the MULO was often a stepping stone to the HBS.

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<sup>10</sup>MULO = Middelbaar Lager Uitgebreid Onderwijs, which means advanced secondary school.

Anyway before the event of going on to higher education we were much together. We formed a club called "Van Alles Wat" [something of everything]. Asher supplied us with stories that he wrote and acted out. He was also very clever in making little figures of clay, with which he used to illustrate his stories. I made for these figures Canadian type log houses out of twigs. Shimon got a library together and saw to it that we circulated the books. [this was my first encounter with almost all of Jules Verne.] We also wrote a fortnightly 'magazine' which we bashed out on an old typewriter that I had cadged of my grandmother Heilbut, who by now lived next door to us. They had come after repeated pleadings of my fathers. Finally he had to send them air tickets - or did he fly himself to Hamburg? I don't think he could have risked that being still a German citizen. The excitement was immense, not only for meeting the grandparents but also the treat of going to Schiphol airport. Schiphol was in those days one of our favorite Sunday outings. One could go by bus or by boat, down the Amstel, have tea in the reception lounge and watch the planes coming and going, trundling along the lawn-covered landing strips. Air travel was still in its infancy and if of an afternoon you saw three or four planes taking off or landing you were lucky. So imagine actually meeting some one you knew coming in one of these wonderful birds! In actual fact it was all rather sad and the child wondered why it was so. These old people, in their seventies, had to leave the town and the country they had spend all their lives in, coming to a country whose language they did not speak. Grandmother had but recently recovered from a bad car accident in which she lost an eye. Grandfather was not well either. I used to go for little walks with him. He complained all the time that I mumbled into my beard - which I thought funny - and tell me not to 'hmmm' between words: 'Think what you want to say before you say it". He did not live long after arriving in Holland, he died of cancer and he was the lucky one. After grandfather's death father engaged a companion to attend grandmother. She was a middle aged German Jewish widow who cooked and cleaned and read to grandmother whose eyesight was deteriorating fast. In return for her work she had a roof over her head, food, some pocket money and a warm Jewish home. Mrs. Magnus was her name. She had a brother in Amsterdam who had a laundry; we used to take our bed linen there to be pressed. That was hard work and always boiling hot because of those huge presses. Mrs. Magnus had a son in Sweden, who eventually send her a visa to join him. But although all the time she had hoped to join him, when she received the visa Mrs. Magnus would not leave grandmother whom she thought needed her more than her son. A noble, if foolish act, for it cost her, her life and did not save grandmother's. Though

doubtlessly it will have eased grandmother's last days during transport, for they were together till the end or so it was reported.

Our little club made a lot of outings to the bogs where besides acting out Karl May (a popular writer for the young) stories [Old Shatterhand and Ibn something or other] or listening to Asher's wonderful tales, we also did a lot of nature studies. We looked for flowers and small animal life, watched birds and identified them. One of Asher's uncles was an ornithologist. During the harsh winter of '40 he took us to where the Amstel ferry kept the frozen river open. This must have been one of the last activities of our little club. The break in the ice attracted a wealth of seagulls and waterfowls besides a host of other birds. That was the winter those photos, of Annie and Walter in the snow, were taken. It was I believe when they got their civil license. - We also took samples of water home and studied it under my little microscope, which Arnold had shown me how to use and how to prepare slides. We even did some simple chemical experiments, but I think the latter under Arnold's watchful eye. I possessed a very good library on biology, wildlife and chemistry for my age group of course, though I think some of the books were possibly a little advanced. These things were to me of much greater importance than music lessons, which would have made a great hole in the time for these activities.

Strangely I always was a bit of an idealist, though of no personal courage. Always ready to stand up for the suppressed possibly because of the shame I myself felt for being a poor pupil. There was in my class an ugly 'Goofy' sort of girl who wore glasses and who always was made fun of and pestered and often even physically jostled. Often I tried to ward off her tormentors. The whole matter came to a head when some boys forced her into the toilets and tried to strip her clothes off her. As I was both a coward and much outnumbered I decided to call in the authorities which did not endear me to some of my class mates. But of course the girl was grateful and always tried to be close to me. And the truth was I too could not stand her!

Father's office was somewhere in the city. When war broke out it immediately affected his work, even before the invasion of Holland. It was all about buying goods in one place and selling it in another. So father decided to save money and moved the office to the attic at home. The back room of the attic was turned into an office and the box room became the sample store: a veritable Aladdin's cave. I loved to go in there and find things. Sometimes I was even allowed to keep something. The other room remained for the house-help. But after Judith Wolff left for the USA, there were no others to replace her. Only Lien still came once a week, and I believe she came till we were made to move to

the 'getto' in east Amsterdam; Majubastraat. That street does no longer exist unless its name was changed. I think Lien helped with the move, which must have been at considerable personal risk, as by this time Jews were like lepers.

At first a secretary came every day, and then only twice weekly and I don't know how long it took for her stopping coming altogether. I don't know what my father did thereafter. However when the 'Joodse Raad' was formed, an organization to look after Jewish affairs, he got a job with them. Ostensibly the J.R. was as said, to look after Jewish affairs and be a liaison between that community and the German authorities. They arranged all sorts of things that Jews had to have under occupation, licenses etc. But in the end it turned out that its main purpose had been to provide the Huns with a good filing system with all the Jewish addresses on it etc. I think that towards the end of '41 beginning '42 father begun to realize the real purpose of the J.R. and was worried about it. But he must have been scared to resign - it would have drawn attention to him. May be he also needed the salary which must have been pitiful. We lived of capital and eventually father had to mortgage all insurances to make ends meet. It is also quite possible that he borrowed money of Eddie Fuld, but if he did nobody ever claimed anything, and mother never mentioned any fiscal debt to them. Yet I have a hunch that he did borrow money, he may not have worried mother with it.

Holland's collapse after the invasion took but a few days. There was a nameless fear in the air; there was black-out [i.e. all windows were covered with paper to prevent light seeping out etc.] paper strips were pasted over the windows to prevent shattering glass to injure people, and as told already, escape routes were opened out. The bombing raids on Amsterdam were fairly light though a few did fall in our neighborhood. There would be the terrible crash of a bomb exploding and possibly worse still the deadly silence that followed till the rescue services came. It was May and the sky was clear. Occasionally you could see a dog fight in the sky. Radio news was confused. The Jewish community was in panic. The 'sjoel' [synagogue] to which we belonged was almost round the corner. [In the Lekstraat; it is now the museum of Resistance]. It had been only recently finished and was very elegant with a white marble front and a large Menorah on the wall. Yet it was simple and gave no signs of opulence. Mr. Wetselaar sat next to my father in sjoel. This synagogue had a special feature that others should imitate: it was in fact two; the Big Sjoel and The Small sjoel. The Big one was for the Grown-ups and the Small one for the youngsters and the children who were big enough not to need constant parental

supervision. I don't know exactly where the division was, whether age or possibly marital status but it was a youth synagogue and wonderful. We had our own services, quite kosher, and though we had no rabbi of our own it was obviously well supervised. The services were short and less pompous (the reason for their brevity; there was no cutting of texts). There was not much 'chazanuth' the services were taken by the members themselves, one for 'Shacharith" and one for 'Musaf'. Anybody after barmitzwah who wanted to could take service. Novices who wanted the honor would be told well in advance when their turn would come. I remember Arnold very seriously preparing himself for some occasion. We also had Sabbath afternoon 'chugim' during which we learned Rashi and the like. But those bored me and held no interest for me. But that must have been my fault for they were well attended and most of the boys enjoyed them - I can't remember if girls took part in them also, though I should rather think they did. They may of course have had their own 'chugim' to prepare them to become good Jewish wives. Although it was not the practice for the small sjoel to hold ordinary weekday morning services, during the few active war days it ran its own 'minyan'. It was quite clear from these services that Jews tried to get out of Holland: on some days certain faces would be missing and people would say so-and-so has gone. But some faces would come back again having failed to obtain passage. There were two reasons for this: there was not enough transport available - I should imagine that during those few days all major ports were closed for security reasons - and then not everybody could obtain the necessary cash. Of course not everybody tried to flee. Many people preferred to stay with their property as is always the case and there must be hundreds of other reasons; an ill or absent relative that could not be contacted, parents too old to be moved in a hurry, and oh, so many more. Who could have known or foreseen that no excuse whatsoever was as anything to the evil to come? That the Hartoghs came and offered us a lift I have already told. But even if we had gone would the English have allowed us to land with our German passports? Then came the Capitulation and there were already horrific stories abroad about what happened to Rotterdam. Then the German troops marched in and the occupation started in earnest. At first nothing drastic happened. There was a lull, though there was a general air of apprehension - but it was really not too bad; just general resentment at being occupied and commanded by foreigners. Ration books and regulations. One could live with that. But then the orders started. Jews had to wear the Yellow star with 'Jood" on it, they were not allowed on public transport or use public facilities such as swimming pools etc. When the order to wear the star was first promulgated quite a few non-Jews

wore them too. But that did not last long, the Germans had their methods. Also a general strike was proclaimed in Amsterdam, and kept. The Germans were furious but in the long run this kind of demonstration carried no weight with them. They just rounded up people and send them to labor camps. That soon put an end to demonstrations. And then they started picking up Jews. At first it was young men and it was thought that they were send to labor camps.

Rationing too was introduced quite rapidly. And food was short, rumors were rife: that they were preparing to cross the channel. In fact the troops were singing a song about crossing the Channel to England. It was also whispered that the war was going badly for them, etc. With such rumors I learned - or rather did not learn - to live till my arrival in England October 1945. Most of such rumors were wishful thinking; some had a grain of truth in them. One did learn to distinguish between the varying elements of truth. Of course there was never certainty but one always hoped that the good rumors were true and so one believed them - or *hoped* one believed them - till a new disappointment confirmed the *bad* news. It was a school for pessimism; for the good rumors always turned to ashes and the bad ones always turned out to be true. One learned to believe the contrary of what was said.

Mijnheer Stibbe the elementary school-principal always took the sixth form. He prepared us for secondary education where greater responsibility fell on the pupil: no longer would we be spoon-fed information but we would have to start ferreting out facts for ourselves. It was Stibbe that used to call parents to school to advise them on the next step on the educational ladder for their child. Of course 1940 did not leave much choice; only the Joodse HBS and the Joodse MULO were open to Jewish children, and incidentally closed to non-Jews, which had not been the *official* case till the war. I don't know how many non-Jews took advantage of these schools; I certainly do not remember any as school mates. But the HBS may have been another matter; it was considered the best gymnasium in town - and the most difficult. The advice that my parents received was as if they didn't know already, that I was not good enough for the HBS. But I had my heart set on becoming a vet. So it was decided to send me for a year to the MULO in the hope that after a year I would be able to go to the HBS. There was no chance of getting into University from the MULO.

The previous summer vacation I had spent, for the second time, at the Bing home in Bergen-Binnen. But we knew in our hearts that it would be the last time. There was a constant fear that the Huns would break it up in the middle - this was before the yellow star and Arnold's deportation.

I finished elementary school July '42 and the summer month till my going back to school in September, was spend

in various ways. There were all sorts of activities laid on, I believe by the school, handicrafts and the like. I remember going to a tinsmith class, which, it was thought, might be useful. Father always maintained that everybody should learn a handicraft; one would never know when it would come in handy in days of stress. Walter was apprenticed to a cobbler for a while for this very purpose. As Arnold went after the HBS to an engineering school this was not thought necessary as he learned all sorts of handicrafts there anyway.



Annie

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My Barmitswah<sup>11</sup> seemed to follow soon after Arnold's murder but looking at the dates now it was nearly a year. It is evidence of the depression that had settled on our home. I studied my 'portion' at school with a teacher who prepared all the boys for their barmitswah. I can not remember who it was, nor do I remember what the rabbi said - which he did at great length! But I *do* remember the great effort my parents made to make it a memorable occasion. Arnold's barmitswah I remember as a quite grand affair, with lovely presents; a watch and a bicycle.<sup>12</sup> Father told me it just could not be the same, which of course I had realized already, but that no reasonable effort would be spared. Nor was it. All my friends were invited for Kiddush and lunch, as were those of the

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<sup>11</sup>May 1942.

<sup>12</sup>1935



Walter

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family that could come. [The Dutch Heilbut (mothers cousins!), Grandmother Heilbut, Annie of course, Mrs. Magnus]. The presents may have not been sumptuous but they were lovely all the same. The traditional barmitswah presents apart from Tallith and Tefillin were absent; no watch or bicycle and no camera but books galore. A few were the usual boy's stories and romances but most of them were books on biology, wild and plant life. Also Arnold's set of machzorim was given to me. And two pocket Sidurim one of which I still have. I managed to keep it with me, don't ask how, throughout camp life. The other one I smuggled to poor a dying man in Belsen when I was a messenger boy there.

It must have been about the time of my Barmitswah that father tried to enlighten me on the matter of sex. A curious affair. It may have been a family walk during which we split into two groups or it may have been the three of us from the beginning; Father Annie and I. I can not really remember what father told me, whether it was all couched in rather general terms or what? I do remember Annie's embarrassment and possibly father was a little diffident



Father and Mother

All the above photos were taken after Arnolds death  
1941

And everybody received a copy -  
Just in case.....

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too. In retrospect choosing this moment to enlighten me was probably more chosen for Annie's benefit than mine. Annie father was a widower and he may have found it difficult to enlighten his daughter. Father may have done this on his own initiative or possibly in consort with Mijnheer van Gelder, Annie's father. There we were, walking along the Amstelkade, me nodding my head sagely. In fact I had quite a few of the biological facts already from my quite extensive reading, and the usual school grapevine. What I was quite unable to do was visualize this theoretical information into reality.<sup>13</sup> But my biggest problem was to understand how a quite sizable baby could travel down the birth canal. On these points I definitely got no enlightenment from father. It took some years for the penny really to drop.

The Joodse MULO was on the Weteringschans. Behind this the old city began with its ring of grachten and patrician houses. The school was quite near the offices of the Joodse Raad. Bicycle I had none.[I believe it was forbidden for Jews to ride bikes by this time or else they had all been

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<sup>13</sup>Don't forget we had no sister; it was a male household.

confiscated. Otherwise I could have used Arnold's bike. So it was not till Thaxted that I learned to ride a bike. I was then put before a fait accompli: one of the boys, Judy, with whom I was then working at Coney's farm, said to me on Erev Pesach - when of course we could not take sandwiches - "either we bike to Coney's so we can come back for lunch, or we fast". I had to come off at corners, but I did have lunch!] Walking to school would have made a large hole in the day, so out came my trusty old scooter, which can actually be quite a speedy way of transport. May be it had another advantage; it made us look younger to any passing SS officer. 'We' because Shimon Rozenberg who lived literally around the corner, had of course the same problem; so we rode in tandem. Shimon treading with one foot I with the other, and so we got quite some power and speed out of this 'toy'.

So we come to one of the most central events of my life. Elinoor. Calf love, yes so it may have been, but that notwithstanding her image sustained me through camp and has remained with me ever since. To day I would not be able to draw a picture of her. That physical image has faded long, long, ago. And I know of no photo of hers, and this is a deep regret. But as her real picture faded so a symbol of Womanhood took its place and that is still Elinoor to me. She became my 'Beatrice', an ideal and idyll, a goddess, myth all those things but for all that to me very real and necessary.

Our first day at the MULO: The class tutor came in and introduced himself and said we were to choose our own seating arrangement, "just sit anywhere you like and make yourselves comfortable. Sit with a friend, just as you like. If later for any reason we find that we need to make adjustments to the seating arrangements I am sure we can do so quite amicably". He turned out to be a very good teacher. He had a young wife and young children. He was one of the first to disappear. I choose a bench towards the back - to this day I don't like front rows. It was the inside seat on a two-seater bench, on the window side. Shimon took a seat behind me. I can't remember the name of the form teacher though I recall his face quite vividly; an open, rounded face with rimless glasses. (Was it a Dasberg?). I remember we had Bing for biology and physics. - No not the same Bing. He was a big kindly man, knowledgeable with a great sense of humor, a marvelous teacher. In fact most of the teachers were good: Dasberg in history, Mrs. Goldsmith for French. She was not a good teacher, at least for me. We didn't get on at all well. But the fault may have been mine; I learned no French, in fact I never did. If my antipathy to her was the cause or whatever it was, I always had very bad, none passing marks, in French. Otherwise I did better than expected, even

surprising myself. The form teacher [damn it what was his name?] suggested all sorts of social activities for the class. Amongst these was a wall journal.<sup>14</sup> Shimon jumped at the idea and suggested me as editor. He said I had 'experience' [referring of course to 'Van Alles Wat']. So I was elected, kept it going to the last too. May be I was not too bad an editor, or else Elinoor's presence egged me on. On the other side of the gangway, to my right, a girl sat down. She looked at me, then I at her and told her I knew her from somewhere, but knew not her name nor could remember where we might have met. "Well I'll tell you" she said. Now it must be understood that in Holland the feast of St. Nicholas is of great importance. This saint is supposed to be the protector of children. I won't go into the background to this story as anyway it is typical of middleaval Catholic nonsense. But this day is kept in Holland for the children; the saint arrives by boat in Amsterdam harbor where the Burghermaster officially receives him. St. Nicholas has a black servant with him, Zwarte Peter, who carries a sack full of presents for the good children and in his other hand he carries a birch wherewith to chastise the bad ones. Everywhere there are children's parties where the good saint is expected. Another feature of this good saint was that one could observe him on rooftops dropping presents through the chimneys, often in more than one place at



Elinoor <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>A wall journal because if we had made several copies it would have been considered a news sheet and for that we would have needed permission from the Huns.

<sup>15</sup> See also "addenda" 2005 and appendix. II.

the same time. How is it that we children did not cotton on to that one? This feast is on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. Its nearness to Christmas leaves that festival free from commercialism - all the presents are given already - and so Dutch Christmas is a truly religious festival. Or so it was, I can't vouch for to day. Anyway the point is Dutch Jewry had adopted the saint and his feast. So it was that when I was five years old I was taken to such a St. Nicholas party [a year after we arrived in Holland.] My turn came to go up to the Saint and his slave. The usual questions were asked and I was told to be nice to my mother (was I always bad to my mother?) and given a large blue ball. Next to me sat a little girl with an identical but red ball. I loved red - and still do. She asked me did I like her red ball for if so she liked my blue one and we could swap, and so we did. That was the best swap of my life, I never regretted it. I had that ball for many years. And Elinoor remembered all those years - yes, eight years in childhood is an eternity. I don't know and I don't remember if it was at first sight or if it took a few weeks to sink in, but smitten I surely was. Elinoor was a beautiful girl, tall, well developed, a brunette with curly hair and dark brown eyes. She was left handed and therefore printed her letters. It was a beautiful clear bold handwriting. It must have been the real thing for mother soon realized what was going on. One didn't boast about having a girlfriend in those days, it was something you kept secret. In fact when a boy and girl went out walking together there was usually some riling and teasing sometimes even quite vicious. It was 'sissy' to have a girl friend - at any rate in my age group. I don't know if this was a specific Dutch behavior pattern or if it existed in other societies. Nor do I understand the rationale behind it. May be it was confined to the younger age group - early puberty, with its confusion of growing sexual awareness. Soon mother wormed out of me whom my attentions were fixed on. I can still see her standing in the kitchen plying me with questions and 'come out with it' sort of inquiry. When she knew who it was she was delighted. She told me the Oettingers were very good friend of theirs and that Elinoor was a nice girl. When I later met the Oettingers - when and where I do not remember but certainly before Westerbork - I found that Mrs. Oettinger was a statuesque woman with mousy colored hair that she wore long. Her husband must have been quite a few years older. He also was good looking but dark. He was probably some years younger than my father, but he too fought in W.W.I. on the German side and like my father had an Iron Cross medal. Father was twenty seven old when the Great War ended. Elinoor was the eldest of two, and but six month my junior. I was the youngest of three and there were

seven years between Arnold and me. Elinoor's brother Ralph was three or four years younger.

I had a hard time of it. During this school year, Elinoor did not for one moment let me think that I was the only fish in the sea. She acted like a coquette. I would not know whether this was calculated or not. It is clear to me now, but wasn't then, that there was no real rival. Had there been I would probably not have been so persistent, but the fear that there might be, probably made me more ardent. So if calculated; it worked, but if it was according to nature dictates one can but wonder at her craftiness. In the meantime I had plenty of heartache. Although my mother approved there was never any suggestion of tea together or anything like that; this may well have been because of the bad times. One did not like being away from home or on the street unless really necessary. Arnold's girlfriend, who lived only a few houses away from us, also had not been a frequent visitor. And things had not been so bad yet. But then there is reason to doubt that she returned Arnold's affection.<sup>16</sup> Annie of course was always at our house but then they were much older and engaged and had long been recognized as a couple, even at the HBS, where they had been class mates. But the Oettingers lived in the Beethovenstraat, in what was then Oud Zuid quite a long way from us.

School was very difficult every morning; we looked around to see if everybody was present. As the year passed the class grew smaller and smaller. Teachers failed to turn up. Whilst writing this, I realize that the German teacher was not our form teacher but Dasberg. It was he who told us one morning that he was sorry to have to tell us that the German teacher, his wife and baby had been arrested the previous evening and deported. Bing was next. I can't remember who took their classes instead. But as the classes dwindled in size we started to take some classes together with the eighth grade. It was no problem as the classes were now quite small; no more than twenty pupils.

Then one day I was stopped by an SS officer, who asked me if I was aware that Jews were not allowed to use private vehicles (we also were not allowed on public transport!). I told him that I was sorry but that I thought a scooter was a toy, to which he rejoined "not the way you are using it". So we started walking to school. One night the Heertjes were picked up and with them Shimon. - This may have been before the incident with the SS officer, as I really can't recall Shimon being with me on that occasion. Then came a proclamation that all Jews living in the Nieuw Zuid [new south] quarter of Amsterdam had to move to east Amsterdam. Father found a flat in

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<sup>16</sup>See Arnold's dairies.

Majubastraat. I remember the move there. The day before the move I took all the contents of my terrarium and aquaria and emptied them in the field and Amstel. It was hard for me to do so but I feared that we too would be picked up and that the animals would starve. Father when he had heard of this decision of mine, encouraged me saying he knew how hard it would be, but that the reasoning behind it was right. Slowly our movements were more and more restricted. Well before this I had been locked out of the Youth Allotments Club to which father had enrolled me. I believe I started going during the last year at elementary school. Once a week we used to go to these allotments and dig and sow, and take vegetables home from our little plot of land. We also had short lectures in the clubhouse. All was done under expert supervision and was great fun, besides being very instructive and also useful in times of food shortages. One week before we were going to go down to our plots the Principle announced that he was extremely sorry but he had been instructed that all Jews must be expelled. (I think there were only two of us.) He therefore suggested that this week there would be no ordinary work. All members were to help the expelled members to empty their plots. Moreover he would like everybody to give them something from their own plot. It was a magnificent gesture: if any of the kids were Nazi children and told their parents he would be in very hot water. It was the biggest protest he could make without also endangering the whole project and even the children.

The Majubastraat flat was not a bad flat but much smaller than we were used to. The area was obviously being turned into a ghetto though it was never properly that for a lot gentiles lived there and I think the authorities did just not dare moving these with all that that would entail. At the same time the MULO was told to move to new premises in east Amsterdam. The HBS had already been closed altogether. I can't tell whether by edict or simply through a lack of teachers, or because it was feared it was too much a concentration of youth who might thus been endangered. The move of the MULO was a major upheaval for many of the pupils. Those living in Oud Zuid would find it almost too far, indeed even by public transport it would have been quite a journey. For me it would be much easier as it was almost round the corner of the Majubastraat flat. We also knew that we would be losing the facilities that we had at the Weteringschans as well as losing the beloved building. We sat around and discussed the move, when Elinoor announced that the parents of Oud Zuid had got together and were to run a gymnasium from home, as it would be impossible for them to walk all that way to school. A black day for me as my only chance of seeing her was at school, even if it often meant just watching her and some

girls giggling, or lording it amongst a group of boys. There was another fear never voiced aloud: several times when someone got wind of a 'razzia', school was let out; not all at once but in small groups of a few pupils so as not to draw attention. Of course the older pupils were let out first. It was quite easy to melt away amongst the small side streets and grachten or in the hustle and bustle of the Schans. On two occasions I took Elinoor to the offices of the Joodse Raad where father worked when we felt that otherwise we might run into roadblocks. We knew all the small, narrow passages that we reckoned the Germans would not close. The Joodse Raad was thought safe and indeed was so till we were deported. Now the new school would have no such good position, it was in fact easy to surround it and cordon it off. Imagine my surprise then, when on the first morning at the new school building I found Elinoor in class, dressed in a bright red new windjammer. [Not really very clever to walk all that way with such a bright eye-catcher under the noses of the Huns. Or was it a gesture of defiance? Or was it much cleverer than that; on the principle of Emil and the detectives?: making yourselves so obvious that you would be ignored.] She told me she had decided at the last minute not to go to the teach-in, she wanted to be with her school friends. Think of it what you will. Was that in itself a gesture of defiance? What did her parents think of this? I never asked her, but it would seem that they agreed if not actually encouraged her in this high spirited defense of freedom. Again the question of chronology raises its head. If the windjammer was a birthday present - what else could it have been in those days?- then we are talking of the end of the year because Elinoor's birthday was the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. We were all deported to Westerbork on the 21<sup>st</sup> June '43. In which case we were all winter in the new school building. To me it seems that we were there but a very short while. But I have to admit that dating from this point is getting very confused with me. Even when after I have consulted documents that have given me exact days for some of the events, I do not find that they have enlightened my memory. I give dates but to me they mean little and it is how I feel about events that I think are really significant in these memories. On the whole I seem to be short of a year. Did it all go so much quicker? Did those awful times stretch out so much longer than they really lasted? The Majuba street days almost completely elude me. I do remember the flat was in a bend of the street and I can visualize the entrance to the flat but little else. Also I remember that we had a small attic and that I made an intercom from there to the flat. But I can't remember where we went to 'sjoel'. Did we trundle all the way to the Lekstraat? Did we always play inside? I remember no street-

games. It seems I must have mostly tinkered with Mecano<sup>17</sup>, read and pottered with low voltage electrical installations such as the intercom, which I proudly showed to Elinoor. So she must have been at our place at least once.

The fateful day is quite clear to me. It was a beautiful day. Walter came home from Annie's quite out of breath. He had run most of the way. The SS were blocking off all the south-east of Amsterdam. The bridges were being closed just as he managed to get across. Then we heard loudspeakers announcing a total curfew on Amsterdam. There had been one or two similar occasions when similar curfews were announced, when we still lived in the Zuider Amstellaan. On both occasions goishke neighbors came and took me away to their flat, which was two flights down on the same common entrance level but not sharing a front door with us. I spend several nights with them under an assumed name. I remember sitting with them and learning this new name which I can't recall. They asked me if I would remember who I was supposed to be, if asked. I assured them that I would but in my hearts of hearts I knew that under the pressure of fear I might well blab the wrong name or relationship. What risk these good people took! not only for themselves but for their children. They had a son called Adriaan and a daughter whose name I've forgotten as have I their family name. One of Adriaan's hands was deformed; it had but two fingers. The father was an artist and the house was full of the most exquisite appliqué tapestry. The children's room had one entire wall covered with a scene depicting the Ark. How come I remember so little of these good people? This time there were no neighbors to run to. Firstly such non-Jewish neighbors as we had, very really scared this time, and secondly I don't think we had enough time to establish good relationships. This 'razzia' was unprecedented in scale. All of Amsterdam's public transport had been commandeered. Nobody was allowed on the streets except under escort. Two neighbors [within the same building] came and offered to take valuables. I do not know if they were given anything; if they did we never saw any back. But of course it must be remembered that any monogrammed silver or other precious things with names had to be hidden either very well or be plausible if found. So last minute removal of silver would have to be plain and so hard to identify, and so some things may have been lost in all good faith through people just not remembering what was theirs and what was not. We realized this time it was IT. We packed; this was done with a view to what would be likely that we be allowed to take and what we thought practical. Of course I can recall no details. As a matter of fact the SS never searched our luggage - not till the very end. They probably

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<sup>17</sup>As its name implies a mechanical game for constructing all sorts of machinery and buildings.

figured, rightly, that as we had to carry our stuff we would only take such things as were used daily. With time things dwindled; sold; lost; used up; too heavy to move (as we came weaker) or just plain stolen.

We could hear the SS going from door to door. From the window we saw groups of people with their bundles going down the street under SS guard. It was by now evening and we - at least I - had started to hope, when the doorbell rang. Father opened. "Sind Sie Hausherr?", "Jawohl". "Also raus!! Raus, aber geschwind! mit dem ganzen gesiedel! In fünf minuten ist die ganze Wohnung leer. Ihren Hausschlüssel!"<sup>18</sup> There would have been no point to hide; they would have the house upside down as soon as we were downstairs. And so we marched down the street to the square where a row of trams were parked already crowded with fellow Jews. As soon as one



Razzia photographed by unknown  
photographer on the 21th June '43.  
Uiterwaarden straat corner Gaaspstraat.

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was full it drove off. We were herded off at the station. There was a long, long line in the tunnel leading to the platform, thousands upon thousands of people, pregnant women, babies, nobody was spared. We stood about fifteen deep and the line just did not move; and we stood as there was no room to sit. People fainted with fatigue and fear. No help could be given. We were thirsty - no drinks could be had, except for those like my mother who had thought that drink might be needed and taken some. (I think she was very clever that way, possibly learned in the First World

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<sup>18</sup>"Are you the home owner?" "yes" "So get out! But quickly with the whole the whole rabble! In five minutes the flat is completely empty! Your house keys!"

War, when I believe she worked as a kind of auxiliary nurse.) It must have been late evening or even night before we were shoved into cattle trucks. There must have been 50/60 people in each truck: the usual complement - too full. We had to crouch on the floor as best we could. There was just no room. One found a position but then could not alter it because the neighbor would complain or be hurt by any shifting. And so we sat for ages till the train pulled out of the station. The doors were shut but apparently not sealed. Otherwise van Moppes could not have jumped out as he did. We were all exhausted: hours of apprehension before being picked up; hours of standing in the queue in the station and hours in the cramped cattle trucks. It was midmorning or midday when we arrived in Westerbork. [Westerbork is in Drenthe in north-east Netherlands]. There we were met by the Dutch Marechaussee. This raises some question. Were they forced to act as guards, or had they manipulated it so that they were enabled to soften the regime somewhat. It must be understood that Westerbork had been set up by the Dutch government, *before* the war, as a reception camp for refugees from Germany. So the Marechaussee may have been present there anyway. The Marechaussee seems to have been responsible for the perimeter of the camp, everything else was run by the SS. There were not too many SS officers and a lot of the daily organization of the camp was done by the inmates themselves. The original inmates of this camp [i.e. those that had arrived before the war and had not yet found a niche outside the camp] lived in little huts that had one or two rooms per family. And so we joined these poor souls who had pined in this refugee camp. Now they suddenly found themselves in the position somewhat akin to the Old Timers in a kibbutz. That comparison has been advisedly chosen for there was a certain kibbutz-like organization and quality amongst these old-timers and indeed a lot of Zionist activity. The latter was of course underground since the German occupation. For the new arrivals there were long barracks made of wood, arranged in sets of six or eight, two deep, at the end of those rows of barracks, but well separate, stood the latrines. Each of these barracks had a main entrance in the middle with a secondary entrance to the left and right, leading respectively to the women's and men's wing. At each end there were army-style washstands; rows of taps (cold of course) and a long sink made up of halved oil drums. Each section must have housed about 150/200 men or women. The bunks, two or three stories high, were arranged in tiers of two and formed cubicles. Two bunks back to back with a table in the middle of this cubicle and two benches either side of the table. Further there were two rows of bunks running down the middle forming an open U with gangways on either side. Somewhere

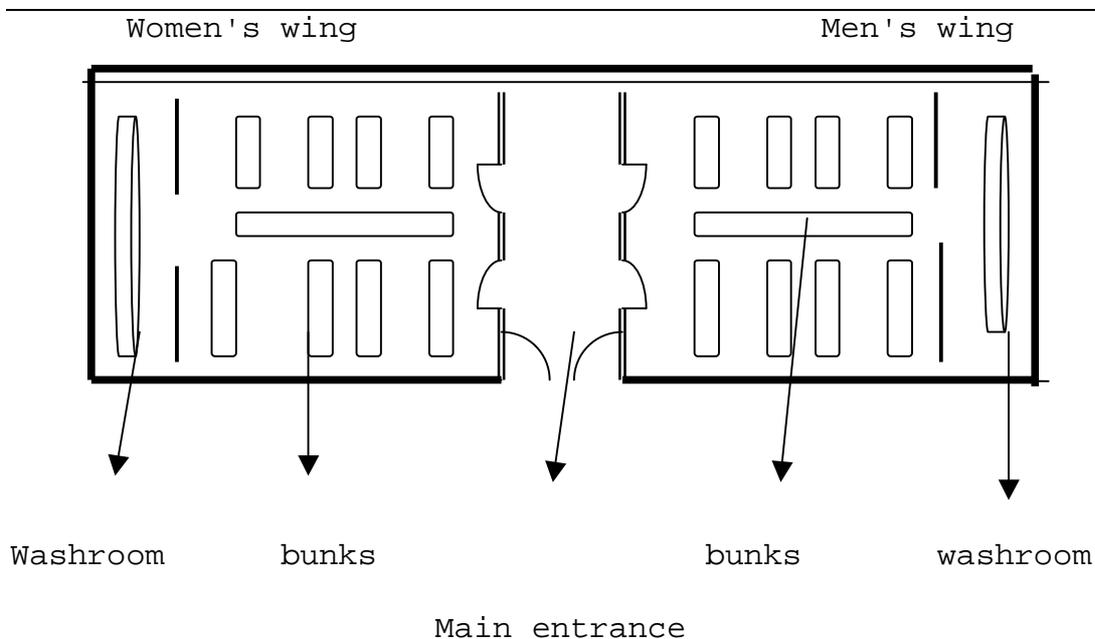
down the middle there was an open space - not large - with a black kachel (stove) whose flue was a simple chimney through the roof.

There was a curfew every night, but as far as I can remember it started rather late, [11 or 12 at night till 5 in the morning] and during certain hours entrance to the barracks was restricted to the inmates of that barracks only, not even cross over from the men's section to the women's section was allowed then. This was of course to give the sexes some time to attend to their bodies without interruption or stares from the other sex. The rest of the day the barracks were crowded with teeming humanity. Even during curfew hours there was no feeling of space, the beds were full of clothes, suitcases etc. The old-timers had lawns and flower beds

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schematic presentation of barracks.

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Schematic presentation of barracks arrangement. The number of cubicles was much greater than here represented: 13 to 20 in each row.]

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but I do not recall any vegetation else- where in the camp. Westerbork camp had within its perimeter some industry. I do not remember what, but I do remember a toy factory where I worked for some time. Also there were gangs of laborers that worked outside camp, under guard of course, to help farmers in the surrounding district. I think this was one of the ways contact was kept with the outside world. So Westerbork was a relatively 'open' camp, nevertheless escapes were few if any; the guards on outside work were German and heavily armed. The accommodation in Westerbork

was "luxurious" compared with what we had later, but that of course we did not know then. From what I heard on the grapevine and from what I was told later the other Dutch camp, which was notorious throughout Holland was far, far worse. It was not for Jews only and torture there was common. It was a horror camp but later forgotten or overshadowed by the revelations of the horrors perpetrated further east. Westerbork had its own theatre with regular performances - always vaudeville, written by some of the inmates, and sometimes rather near the bones. There were concerts too, but much more restricted and possibly less professional. I never went to any of them though I did go several times to the vaudeville. On the morning after our arrival as I came from the latrines, I saw in the distance a bright red windjammer. There could only be one like that. So I hastened to follow it and found the block it had entered. Elinoor was sitting on a top bed with two girls. When I greeted her she completely ignored me - if ever I was given the cold shoulder this was IT. And if I had not been so serious about her, I would have dropped her then and there. With hindsight and mature years I can guess what happened. A complex of reasons: firstly there was the bewilderment of the 'razzia' and the incarceration in camp. The shock of this put years on all of us. We all had matured over night, though this showed itself in contradictory ways. There was more mature cognizance of facts and more mature behavior. On the other hand there was the pressure of fear and unpredictability which caused childishness; a running to skirts and for warmth of parental protection. Both kinds of behavior would be found side by side and in the same individual making adolescents even more volatile than normally. Secondly I should imagine that in some sense she had become a fully grown woman overnight - not in a physical sense, which in all likelihood she was already - but in an emotional way. It is likely that in consideration of the hazards of camp life her mother had fully enlightened her on sexual matters. This in itself would probably have been quite a shock considering the sheltered life and upbringing we had enjoyed. And lastly there was the fact of all the teeming humanity about. A dense moving mass of humanity seeking relatives or friends, talking, shouting, doing small chores of living, a total lack of any privacy. In some way it was as if one was constantly exposed, naked almost. One does get used to this, to some degree, with time, but never quite. It was a thing that always bothered me in later life and why I so hated the army; the total lack of privacy even in ones most intimates moments; the latrines and wash rooms, the eating under hundreds of strange eyes



A glimpse down a barracks

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and sleeping with the noises of such a crowd of humanity.

I found Ralph, Elinoor's younger brother, some time later and chatted him up. Through him I managed to re-establish contact with Elinoor. Renee was there as well. As he came from a very debonair family and was so himself he was also a great help in breaking the ice between Elinoor and me. In fact Renee became my confidant. But the fact that Elinoor and I kept meeting at certain 'chugim' was the real bridge. There was a strong Zionist group in which she became very active and to which I regularly went. Both of us were interested in the Kibbutz idea and both of us believed in the necessity of Jews returning to work the land themselves. Though with me the idea originated in my concern for animal welfare with her it was based on the growing conviction in the correctness of the ideological conception of going back to the roots of labor and working the land with your own hands. A far more mature attitude than mine and more philosophically based. It is through her that I began to perceive Aliyah in practical terms rather than some vague mythical idealism.

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Renee

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For some time I worked at the toy factory. It was my main job to light the stoves in the morning before the other workers came. So I used to get there very early. Sometimes Elinoor came to help me light the stoves and talk to me. My other duties were mainly cleaning. The toy factory produced mainly wooden baby rattles beautifully hand-decorated by a number of artists. But there also were custom-made toys such as rocking horses, cradles and toy trains.

The inevitable happened; a jaundice epidemic broke out. First to go down with it was Walter. On Yom Kippur I felt faint but put it down to the fast, but when I keeled over the doctor reckoned otherwise and I found myself in a 'hospital' bunk bed under to Walter. Of course this hospital was but very primitive and was just another barracks but as all the workers were camp inmates the care was very good. Visiting hours came and went and though there were visitors the list was never complete. Walter used to ask me whom I was waiting for - because I was always watching the door. Well she did come in the end but never stayed long, she was shy or uncomfortable to be in a male ward, shy to be with me in company of others with the express purpose of being with me. She was never shy when we in company for different reasons - at meetings, chugim etc. Of course I can't remember everything of those long months in Westerbork. This period seemed so long that originally I wrote 12 to 14 month, but consulting records proved that there were only eight month. After I came out of hospital there must have been the potato harvest for which I volunteered. [Or did father urge me to go, or was there a general recruitment? I don't really recall.] Elinoor was there and we teamed up working together throughout these few short weeks. In this time we became closer. We had long talks of which a lot, I am sure, must have been quite childish. But a picture did emerge of what we would do after the war. We would go to a kibbutz and work the land. That at any rate we got right. There were no elusions there; we could see from this potato harvest that farming was hard and backbreaking, often boring and repetitive. We would build a beautiful house with a large garden and lots of dogs. No we had not quite absorbed all the kibbutz ideas! Anyway that last contribution was probably mine: I always dreamed of a place like Eddy Fuld's "Bergerac", a huge two storied villa with acres of gardens that bordered on a stream. Then Elinoor got jaundice. We had just received a food parcel. There was indeed regular post, quite official (and some not so official that somehow the Dutch managed to smuggle in.). We got parcels from Portugal (from the Kahns?) and the Fulds, also from a former employee or colleague of father's one mijnheer Kok. There were others whom I can but vaguely recall. Anyway mother

asked me if I was going to visit Elinoor, which of course I was. So she gave me a packet of raisins and nuts to give to her; a great luxury. My Mother was always good to me, why was I such a lousy son?

I can very clearly remember how Elinoor clasped her night-gown to her chest as I walked into the ward. Again she was much cooler to me in company. All these events must have followed each other in quite rapid succession, for we saw snow as we were transported east to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>19</sup> In Westerbork we lived like the people in Wells' "Time Machine" relatively carefree during the day and six nights a week. Once a week, at night, there was a roll-call at each barracks and a long list of names was read out of those who would have to leave in the morning with the train that had arrived the previous day in Westerbork camp. It stood there at the end of one row of barracks. There were not many surprises on these lists. Most names were well known a few days before hand. More often there were surprises at names left out, rather than unexpected additions. Yet the whole procedure was quite terrible. Partly I guess, because of the perpetual hope that one would be lucky this time and be left of the list. And of course there was the fear to find oneself unexpectedly on it. That probably was the purpose of those alterations to these lists: German torture could be very refined.

Father had not sat idle all this while. He probably started various balls rolling when still in Amsterdam. He got an affidavit for the whole family for being on the official list for immigration to Palestine. [Remember the White Paper! Therefore it was quite an achievement.] Also he obtained, with many other like-minded people, citizenship and passports of Paraguay. There was a polio cripple who lived in our barrack by the name of Steiner. Walter was a good friend of his. He had married his nurse and a special cubicle was made out of bunks where he and his wife lived in the male section of the barrack. Sometimes I would help lifting him out of or into bed, and take him for walks in his wheelchair. They were both people of great courage, and extremely clever. I think it is from him that I learned to manipulate the Huns. (Well, to some extend.) We were together till almost the very end and always in the same block. The Steiners went out with the last exchange from Belsen to Switzerland and from there to Paraguay where in fact they settled, all this on the strength of just such a passport. There was a third string to fathers bow: The Iron Cross he had received during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War for being badly wounded at the front. Thus we were in the 'privileged' position that we could 'choose' which camp we preferred to go to. This was not exactly a

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<sup>19</sup>Not really surprising as it was February so I find on consulting documents.

choice from a holiday brochure. With the affidavit for Palestine and with the Paraguayan citizenship we could go to Belsen which was presented as an exchange camp. [Which our section actually was.....for a while.] With the Iron cross we could have the 'privilege' of going to Theresianstadt. This was advertised as a "privileged" camp. Theresian Stadt was set up as a front. It was run by a Jewish council, had a symphony orchestra, theatre, library - you name it. Red Cross officials would be taken there to have the wool pulled over their eyes. If they saw behind the facade they never let on.<sup>20</sup> But in fact there was regular traffic from there to Auschwitz and Birkenau. And even in Theresianstadt itself things were not as good as they were made out to be. My parents choose Bergen-Belsen because I think they did not really trust the 'privilege' based on the Iron Cross. But it must have been an extremely hard choice to make. There were reports about Theresianstadt just as the Huns would have liked to represent it. Whether this was through the grapevine or through the post I would not know, but I suspect the latter, what can you write in a letter that you know will be censored? Walter had the additional choice before him of going with Annie. He (in conjunction with my parents or possibly under pressure from them?) chose to stay with us. I have no idea what made them come to that decision, though it must have been a heartbreaking one either way and with the wisdom of hindsight the wrong one, even though Walter was good and very helpful. A real crutch when father died. He was a hero in his own genteel way. But he always pined for Annie. When he heard on the bush-telegraph that Annie had been gassed he utterly collapsed. Yes, of course he had been getting weaker before that. But both mother and I knew that it was that, that killed him. He told us about Annie and we could see him going under by the hour; he had lost all will to live. This rapid deterioration prevented him from passing the rather cursory medical examination which we had to pass to go to Switzerland on the same transport as the Steiners. We had been roll-called on the list of passengers to Switzerland. In the afternoon we had the medical 'examination' to our fitness to travel; which consisted of our walking past the medical officer. We hoped that they would not notice that mother and I propped Walter up between us. In the evening we were "packed" and ready to go. But when the final boarding list was read out we were no longer on it. I even had the temerity to go up to the officer and say that a mistake had been made, that in the morning we had been on the list, and he even checked! But no! A proper train - not cattle trucks - with passenger carriages and sleeping berth

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<sup>20</sup>I do no longer believe that the Red Cross was hoodwinked. The staff came from 'neutral' countries; Sweden and Switzerland, both countries with a considerable anti-Semitic record. Like the Vatican and like the Vatican I now think they quite well knew what was going on but kept mum.

left Belsen that night, but without the Heilbutts. So we were cheated of our desperate hopes and mother and I had to go through the last two month of nether hell. Again things were so bad that originally I wrote six month, but dates show that it was but a short month to our evacuation from Belsen. Going with Annie would have saved neither him nor her, nor would it have made a great difference to mother or me in the end. But it would have saved Walter a lot of suffering from his separation from Annie.

Well our turn came. The train came; a proper passenger train; a good omen; a sign that the parents had chosen well. The Oettingers had not, I believe had the choice that we had and they were therefore granted the 'privilege' of going to Theresian Stadt at a later date. In the evening I went to say good-bye to those of our friends who would not be on our train, primarily to the Oettingers and especially Elinoor. Mr. Oettinger was post master of their block, the area or even camp, I can not recall exactly which, but at any rate it meant that his cubicle had a curtain across it, thus giving it greater privacy. When I came, Mr. Oettinger suddenly remembered some errand or other so he had to leave us for a few minutes. Ralph was not there and I never said good bye to him. I don't know where Mrs. Oettinger was or if she too found errands to do. Nor do I remember how long Elinoor and I sat together all alone, but probably but a short while. To understand the psychology of these moments it has to be realized that in those days, in our society at any rate, one just did not kiss and cuddle in company, or public. The pressure of the camp somewhat lessened this reticence. Young couples even found ways of going to bed together by hanging blankets from the upper bunks. Sometimes even without these precautions but those were the exception; however nobody made a scandal of it, at least not to my knowledge. This did instruct me in the true relations of the sexes and also solved the till then to me unresolved problem of children out of wedlock. But generally one did not see people kissing except the occasional fraternal or curtesy kiss. People would go arm in arm, lean heavily on each other, spreading an obvious aura of love about them but rarely be more demonstrative than that. I never even saw Walter and Annie kiss! And surely they must have done so frequently enough. So it is not surprising that Elinoor and I did not fall into each others arms the moment we were left alone, though I am quite sure now, that was what had been expected. When we finally did embrace each other to kiss, Mr. Oettinger entered. [I am sure it was quit innocent, he just thought we would have been quicker about it, possibly not suspecting that we were absolute novices.] That first un-kissed kiss has burned deep into my soul. It was to be a seal on our promise to seek each other out after the war

was over and start life again together in Palestine. This bond proved to be stronger than any seal. Seals can be broken, but a non-existent seal can not be broken. Elinoor was the goal I survived for, even in those moments when my body was ready to give up, and even when that final usually fatal lethargy set in.

Although we entrained in the morning it was late afternoon before the train pulled out of Westerbork.<sup>21</sup> It was a long journey and damnable cold. We saw the first snow as we traveled further east. As it was mid February (the 15<sup>th</sup>) this was hardly surprising; if there was any surprise it is that I can not remember snow in Westerbork. I remember it was cold and windy but snow I don't remember. The journey took for ever. Why it took so long I have no idea, after all Bergen-Belsen is not *that* far eastwards: it is on the Luneburgher heath south of Hanover. In fact we saw the glow of Hanover burning, from Belsen. The arrival was traumatic. We were greeted by SS troops with blood hounds and yells of 'lively' [schnell, schnell] "come on you rot Jews", etc. We were made to stand in army like formation, five deep to be counted. Then we were herded onto lorries and driven through the village [- how come the Germans "never knew"? - "Wir haben es nicht gewusst", -] to the camp.<sup>22</sup> Outside the camp we had to stand in formation again. As we stood there a troop of women prisoners in striped prison suits passed behind us. A old man tried to talk to them and was whipped for his pains. Then we were marched of to an enclosure. At the other side of the fence from our enclosure was a small hut or barrack and through a window in this hut an acquaintance peeped and told us "welcome to Hell". When asked if she really meant that she affirmed that the camp was truly horrendous. By evening we were settled in the few barracks of our small enclosure. Here we stayed for a few weeks only. We were evidently treated 'favorably'. We may have had a little more food, and fewer counting parades ['Appells'] nor did we any work except sanitation work in and around our barracks. I suppose that at that time there were some negotiations, for lorries, going on which eventually did succeed in freeing some as already related. But this particular balloon seems to have failed to go up and after a short while one fence came down and we became part of a larger section. This was also supposed to be 'Privileged' camp. There were a lot compounds within the perimeter of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp: Russian war prisoners, Polish Jews, one compound for men one for woman, political prisoners, criminal prisoners etc.

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<sup>21</sup>Annie had gone a few weeks before us with her father.

<sup>22</sup>Unlike most other camps Bergen-Belsen does not seem to have had its own railway line, at any rate I never saw one. Both on arrival and leaving we had to pass through the village.

The food was totally inadequate and became rapidly less. In the beginning we received a half loaf of bread daily, a small cube of butter, and a tablespoon of beetroot jam. Twice daily we had a bowl of beetroot soup with kohlrabi and with some luck some meat would float in it too. By the end we had about half a loaf of bread once a week or ten days with very irregular distribution. Once a day we received a very watery bowl of soup, but often the kitchen would 'brake down' and then of course we would get nothing. It was the heavy, strong people who succumbed first to this regime, and so father went down hill very rapidly. Soon he was 'hospitalized' and he knew he was dying. I was called from the 'shoe-commando' to say farewell to him. [This too was privileged treatment!]. But he would not allow me to stay with him during his last hours, only mother and Walter were there. We were of course privileged in so far that families stayed in the same camp enclosure, and so could meet daily. This was certainly not done for humanitarian considerations but because the Huns still hoped to use us as exchange hostages, and for that they needed the families together.

There were all sorts of work details, such as kitchen work and the like, the shoe-commando for men and the clothing-commando for women. We were marched to and fro to our workplaces four times a day. Every march was preceded by a long 'appell'. These 'appells' meant standing in military formation to be counted, in strictly segregated groups. It was forbidden to talk to outsiders on these marches, but the bush telegraph can not be silenced. How it worked I have no idea but there is no doubt that information got through and was passed from mouth to mouth. Even from outside news filtered through, not always reliable but news all the same. Possibly the guards themselves did on occasion drop a word, and passing prisoners might drop a word. Then through the fences separating the various compounds a word might be whispered in the evening etc. The clothing commando ripped apart items of clothing - probably from the extermination camps - but there were also old army uniforms amongst them. It occurs to me that that may have been one of the ways information got through; by notes or forgotten documents etc. in the clothes. The woman had no access of course, to sanitary towels so they used strips of cloth from work. One day a SS officer 'discovered' this and made a group of woman climb naked into the pit of the latrines to fish out the offending cloth. I do not know if anyone survived this ordeal and if they did how soon they were infected by the filth they must have swallowed.

I worked in the shoe-commando. These shoes and boots came from the same sources as the clothing; they too had to be taken apart into their various sections. There were two

rooms in which the men sat at tables doing this work. In one room the soles were taken of the shoes in the other room the upper leather was dismantled into its separate sections. I worked together with Renee and our job was to supply tables with shoes, take the separated soles out into a marquee, and the upper leather into the next room, distribute these, and take the dismembered pieces out into the same marquee. For the shifting of these items we had a sort of tea-chest with two poles that we carried between us. Also I had to keep a tally of the shoes torn apart at each table. I'm thankful to be able to say that this tally I kept most dishonestly, so that my work mates would not have to tear their fingers out. Whenever a tea-chest was full Renee and I carried it to this huge marquee where there were mountains of various parts of shoes. [Someone must have been at this for quite a while before we came to Belsen, to create such mountains]. We had to climb up one of these heaps with the chest to empty our load on top of it, and also build up the edges so that a rather squarish pyramid resulted. Whenever we thought it safe we would rest up there; it was an excellent hiding place. Till one day we were discovered. How we got away without a beating I know not but we did, or so I think as I don't remember one. But then it is just possible that we got such a beating that I lost consciousness and therefore can not remember. Then one day two SS officers laid bets how long it would take to move all the stuff out of the marquee and build a pyramid with it. One of these officers was called Fritz. (We knew their names from their addressing each other but of course we addressed them only by their ranks). Fritz was a former butcher, big, heavy, and coarse and a bully-boy with a red face but really rather stupid and one usually knew what to expect of him. The other was Oberscharfuhrer (major?) Heinz, formerly a teacher; quiet and nearly always polite - even if it was a sarcastic politeness. He wore glasses and was slim and athletic; he was by far more the dangerous of the two, because his actions were premeditated. It was his idea of course, this imitation of the pharos. Renee and I were detailed to this task. We were driven mercilessly and any slackening meant a whipping. Then somebody decided that I should hide in the morning during work-appell and so get out of this job. This hiding was done by standing inconspicuously in the back row, between tall grown up men and moving places whenever none of the officers was looking. These appells lasted literally for hours. They were ostensibly to count us; the numbers never tallied, but it was really a form of torture. We had to stand in rain, snow or burning sun without any relief. They were called any time during day or night whenever some officers took a fancy to the idea. Of course this hide and seek could not last for ever and after ten days or so I was spotted.

Fortunately the officer did not realize that I had played truant - he probably thought me younger than I was - and detailed me as gate runner. This meant I stood outside the gate by the little watchman's hut; this was the shelter of the compound guards officer. My task was to run errands for him or any other officer who commanded me to do so through the officer in charge. It was my luck that one of these officers was not an SS man but a sort of home-guards officer. [The Huns were beginning to run short of manpower and recruited anything that wasn't a suckling or a geriatric wreck.] He was an elderly man, quite humane who I believe was there quite against his will and conscience. So whenever he was on duty he used to be rather short on appetite and then made me clean the hut after lunch.<sup>23</sup>

Outside the compound there was a small hut in which lived four Jewish boys. They had all the food they needed. The Sonder-commando [special unit]. Theirs was a terrible job; they kept the crematoria going. Moreover they knew they were but fattening pigs. Every few month they were changed, but then there was of course always the hope that their particular few months would not run the full course before liberation. Some girls also had 'privileged' jobs. Some survived I know. Whether they submitted voluntarily or not I know not. I suppose a mixture if you can call the drive for survival voluntary. But the scars.....Renee's sister survived. She arrived together with us in Belsen and I did not see her again till after the liberation in Amsterdam. I met her in some square. Still beautiful. She fastened on to me, told me she was engaged to be married but did not know if with her history she could go through with it. Who was I with my confusion then, to advise her? I never met her again and do not know what happened to her eventually; if she managed to stay alive ....., get married..... even have children.....think of the confusion of mind of so basically an innocent a person.

On several occasions I was send to find an officer in a different compound. The scene was always the same; totally emaciated men or women, standing on appell and collapsing. Some were held upright by comrades. For collapse usually meant a bullet, though sometimes even such mercy was thought superfluous and the living corpse was left, till the death squads removed it, possibly to shove it still slightly living into the crematorium furnaces. Once I passed a man lying on the ground who said in Yiddish (it was near enough German for me to understand) please bring me a siddur. Of these I had two from my barmitzwah, identical pocket ones, that somehow I had managed to keep. I secreted one in my clothing [another sign of our

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<sup>23</sup>For those who are short of imagination: he deliberately left food for me to find and eat whilst I was cleaning. There was of course no way I could have removed food from the hut and taken into the camp, endangering both myself and him.

'privileged standing: we never wore camp uniforms], and a short time later was sent to the same compound. Luckily - or rather sadly - I found the man in the same spot (he probably never moved from the spot) and in passing let the siddur fall. I heard his blessing and then a shot. But I was too scared to look back. So I don't know if that shot was for him or not .....

A transport of Jews from Saloniki came to our camp. [I think Enrico Marco from Gadera must have been amongst them.] There was with them a rabbi who originated from Hamburg who mother knew well. They got together and she taught him English and he taught her, I believe, French and Talmud. How remarkable that under these terrible conditions with such crushing grief and misery on and about us, some people still found the strength to nourish their souls!

One day I was detailed to be messenger boy to a visiting officer. All the camp knew he boded no good, though some believed it would herald the release - for exchange. The officer: Eichmann. He came with a retinue of two or three officers one of whom was a woman, his secretary or possibly second in command on this mission. Of course I had to stand way off so I never heard what was being said. Whenever Eichman turned to me to have me do something or other he was always very courteous. The woman however treated me like dirt.

Camp was getting more and more crowded. Hungarians joined us now. Mother became friendly with a woman whose son was in America. I think she taught her English too. Somewhere in our photo albums there is a photo of this lady with her son after liberation; her son in American army uniform. Conditions were deteriorating. We now slept in bunks four/five stories high. Lice were all over us, because of the appalling sanitary conditions. Food supplies were constantly reduced and fitfully supplied. This doubtfully was another form of torture. If you are terribly hungry and given half a loaf of bread you will eat most of it straight away even if you don't know when the next loaf is forthcoming. There is also an element of fear involved: if people are desperately hungry they will do anything to obtain food, which means stealing so it was no good trying to conceal any bread in your blanket, the only possible place to hide food.

Sometimes we were taken to showers on the perimeter of the camp, and had our clothes disinfected. This was always done in a strictly segregated manner. (The Germans were terrible prudes.) It was always a traumatic experience. We stripped off and all the clothes were put into some form of heat-disinfectant oven or appliance. There we stood stark naked, hundreds of emaciated men and boys - not a pretty sight. Then we were herded into the shower hall, a large low structure with shower roses in the ceilings. Sometimes

we were even given soap! Waiting for the water was always the most terrifying thing. One was always convinced that this time there would be no water but gas. After washing we were crowded into the drying room - no towels. We just dried by being so many in a small room. There too one would fear gassing. But these infrequent hygiene expeditions could not keep the lice away.

All of a sudden some of us started to receive food parcels from Sweden. They contained Knakebrod, milk-powder, chocolate, sugar and egg-powder. Soon after that the transport left for Switzerland, as already told. Once they had gone these parcels stopped again. On reflection I believe that these parcels had been arriving regularly but were stolen by the SS. These parcels were funded by relatives abroad and were personally addressed when we did get them, which is the reason that I now think the bastards withheld them. But when they thought that we should look a little better on arrival and be asked also about the parcels, then they delivered them for a little while. After the transport had left for Switzerland we were crowded into an even smaller compound. For sometime I had not had my job by the gate. [After Eichmann had gone?] I suppose I was too weak to run by now. Walter was dying and I remember sitting by his side and there being but one thought in my head: as soon as he is dead I can have that half loaf of bread that he keeps under his blanket.<sup>24</sup> And so I did. That is the level we had fallen to.

Then the capos came.<sup>25</sup> They tore into the camp with terrible screams and beatings. They were to run the compound now. Themselves criminals -often violent ones at that - they wore prison uniforms and had shaven heads. In the first few weeks [or was it days?] they were even worse than the SS. But then they calmed down. I believe even they were shaken by what they found. Nobody did anything anymore; I think nobody was capable of doing anything anymore. Once every day or two some soup, well if you can call it soup - it was more like lukewarm water with the odd beetroot floating in it. It was brought to the camp, but nobody came in with it. In fact nobody entered the compound anymore. It had turned into an absolute pigsty - in fact pigs would have been offended by it. Once in a while bread was distributed quarter of a loaf or so. One evening someone [I think it was her Hungarian friend] came and told me that mother was buying aspirins, or sleeping pills, with her recently received bread ration. It was probably the greatest crime I ever committed and utterly selfish, but I went and stopped the deal. And what did I give her in return? Ignored her when I was in Thaxted? Ignored her when

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<sup>24</sup>Walter died 13<sup>th</sup> March '45

<sup>25</sup>Capo from the Italian 'chief' 'boss', were section and compound 'heads' much feared, they had considerable and arbitrary power.

she advised me? Alright she was a sick woman by then and, yes, she had a persecution complex [any wonder?] but I did not return her love as I should have; a bad son. What was there left for her? She had lost two sons and her husband whom she utterly adored. Nothing but pain and sickness for the rest of her life. All that for naught. She was right and I should have let her do what she wanted to do. Writing these things down I begin to realize why most people are loath to speak about the camps. Communication is about happenings, about movement. It is impossible to communicate the non-event. We can tell of cruelty and murder, of rape and violence, but we can not tell of the calm in between. How describe the long hours standing on appeal? Squatting in long rows over the holes in the latrines with your stomach running out on you, with rows of other wrecks of humanity at the same activity, the long hours of nothing, picking of nits, squashing of lice in the seams of you clothe? The dreams and interminable conversations over meals we would have? and the ever constant companion; hunger? How can one tell of that constant feeling of dread, hopelessness, of the breakdown of ones self esteem? of the long, long empty, mindless hours? How can one describe the slow realization that this is not just a nightmare that would end with breaking of dawn, indeed that there was no guarantee at all that it ever would end at all. It can't be done, we can only tell of the movement between nothing and nothing. Terrible as the action was, the inaction was equally horrible and can not be told. May be it would be better to shut up.

The war was coming to an end and this fact was beginning to filter through. We could hear and see the massive flights of the allied attacks. We could see the red glow of Hanover burning, (who was is that told us it was Hanover?). Then we could hear the guns of the front coming nearer. The camp was in utter chaos. Nobody entered unless they absolutely had to. Food - such as it was - was delivered very fitfully and irregularly. It was just dumped outside the gates and a couple of inmates were then allowed to haul it inside. How the distribution from thereon was affected I can not remember. Possibly it was the Capos, but then I seem to remember that even these had been withdrawn from the camp. Then one morning when the gun-fire was getting really near came the order for everybody to assemble outside the compound gate: we were to be taken to Theresianstadt for recuperation! So we were told by some of the officers. [This of course was a lie, our real destination was Auschwitz but that we didn't know till it mattered no more.] Of course I wanted to go to Theresianstadt - Elinoor! So I was ready to go though I could hardly drag myself around; to mother it mattered not, though she did not believe the recuperation bit from the

beginning. I went to see Renee who was in bed and in no state at all to go, in fact he knew he was dying and had but a few days left at best (as he put it "at worst"). He said to me: "if you must go, go, but don't attempt to walk to the station: you can't make it". Mother and I with all those others who could still walk, went outside the gates, with the few possessions left: possibly a change of clothes a few personal items such as my red siddur, food-bowl and spoon, a cup and may be a knife. Then once outside we were told that we must walk to the station or be shot. About half the people there went on their way, only a fraction of these ever made it to the station. Mother said we must go, I refused. She said they will shoot us. I said let them. In fact at that moment I was not afraid of being shot, that would make an end. Also I realized that Renee was right; either they took us by transport or shot us, walking would only have prolonged the agony. At that moment not even the image of Elinor could have made me go because I knew that I would not be able to reach her that way. We had sat down because everything fatigued us in no time. An officer came with a pistol in his hand: "get up". I refused. "I'll shoot", "shoot", no, I don't think I actually said that; I probably just kept quiet, but I thought it. Well they did not shoot; and I've never understood what stopped them unless they were desperately short of ammunition. Bergen-Belsen fell to the British only a few days after we left.

Then a few Lorries were brought and those of us who had not started on the march were loaded on to these and driven to the station. The road to the station was littered with the dead and dying who were attempting to go in both directions: from the station to camp and from camp to the station. German reasoning had completely broken down, unless the reasoning was that moving exhausted people killed them. At the station platform there were two cattle-trains on either side. One had just been emptied of its human cargo. Capos were busy slinging the just alive and dead in heaps onto cattle Lorries. The other train was just disembarking, a few souls staggering about on their feet, most just crawling about on all fours or dragging themselves on their bellies, with but few hours of life left to them, if that can be called life. The empty train was allocated to us; fifty men, women and children to a truck. We were given a whole loaf of bread [Oh! What riches - but then nobody told us this would be the last handout], and a few raw potatoes. (We hadn't seen potatoes in ages). There was a large heap of beetroot behind one of the trains and some of us started to creep under the wagons to filch. A few shots were fired but I don't recall anybody being hit, it certainly did not deter anybody. I came back with a few roots, all I was able to carry in my state. I passed a man lying on the platform, he stretched out one hand to me,

dumb, and I gave him one beetroot. A shot rang out and he was dead. I am not quite sure whom the bullet was intended for; me the filcher and donor, or that poor soul the beggar. The journey lasted ten, fourteen days I really can not recall, and the actual time span is really of no consequence. We never went further east than Trobitz, in the district of Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, [not the famous Frankfort-an-der-Rhein], east of Berlin, normally a six hour journey in those days. We moved comparatively little and that a lot of backwards and forwards. It is difficult to understand the minds that tried to shift an absolutely useless cargo against all hope on a railway system that was rapidly breaking down. At one point the locomotive engineer mutinied, unhooked the engine and drove off. But they found another one. On the first couple of days the trucks remained locked for many hours. But the guards discipline rapidly deteriorated and became lax, so that the doors remained open most of the time when stationary and sometimes even whilst moving. The overcrowding in the trucks was terrible in the beginning, but soon eased. Every morning we would push the dead bodies out of the truck onto the railway embankment. We were allowed water from local brooks and rivers or even from standpipes at signal boxes. Our bread run out in no time, we cooked our few potatoes and beetroots over campfires made from brushwood found alongside the railway line. But soon we were eating grass and anything else that we could find. This must have been contributory cause to the deadly diarrhea. At some villages the farmers came to sell food. I bartered Walters golden wristwatch (a barmitzwah present) for half a loaf of bread. That was the last valuable we had. In the light of the food stores we later found with the farmers that must have been about the equivalent of \$1200 [of current money in 2001] for half a loaf of bread. "Oh! Wir wusten es nicht!" - Oh, we didn't know!-. Once we stopped between ammunition trains when an air attack started. Luckily they did not hit anything. But neither the guard nor the engine driver liked standing between these trains so we pulled out of the station. A short while afterwards the attack was renewed and the station blown up. We traveled through what I took to be Berlin. I am now told it was not Berlin, but it was at any rate a very large town. The place was completely blown to bits, all was ruins around us. We parked there during the night and even experienced an air attack there, though it was not on the area where we were. I believe it was there that we were parked next to a supply train. Somehow we managed to collect some barley which we roasted and ate. You can not eat a lot of unshelled roasted barley especially if you have little strength to chew. Once we stood near a forest when we were attacked by spitfires - who probably thought we were a troop transport. It was

sudden and out of the blue. The fellow who was sitting next to me slumped forwards; hit by a bullet. We scrambled out as best as we could between the swoops of the planes and made for the woods. After that we managed to find some sheets which the guards helped us drape over the wagons. We were not attacked again. Towards the end of our Odyssey when we thought it was the end, guards and engine disappeared. We waited in vain for our liberators. Then the guards reappeared with a new engine. Again we moved a few kilometers then stopped. When the wagon-gates were opened the next morning we were told that the Russians had come and that we were free. I replied that I'd heard that one before and went back to sleep. Soon after a Russian soldier woke me. We were told we could go to the next village of Trobitz and requisition any house we fancied and stay there till things were cleared up.<sup>26</sup>

In the same truck with mother and me, there was Hanneli Goslar.<sup>27</sup> Hanneli is a year older than I, or so it would seem from Anne Frank's dairy. Her parents had been good friends of my parents and they lived not far from us on the other side of the Zuider Amstellaan. She had lost both parents in camp and mother had taken her under her wing.<sup>28</sup> Mother was by now very weak and found movement difficult. So Hanneli and I went to Trobitz leaving mother in the train. I think the train can not have been more than a kilometer or so from the village, but the walk there seemed several times longer, we were so weak. We also had lost precious time through my disbelief in liberation. There were but a few hundred survivors but most had reached the village before us. The houses had all been looted, mostly for food and people had requisitioned them. Most of the inhabitants must have fled before the advance of the Russian troops though by no means all. At one of the first houses we got to [if not the first] we found some cheese and milk and bread in the kitchen. A woman came in and pleaded with us that that all that was left for her baby and we *did not take it*. Her cellar had been completely ransacked as we found to our chagrin. We were slow and tired and exhausted and found but little food because all the houses were already occupied. These houses were all well stocked with the most delicious food - by any standards, but none of it could we claim. Somebody directed us to a neighboring village, were the Russians allowed the

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<sup>26</sup>By checking dates on documents I find that liberation was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April '45. As the same documents give the 10<sup>th</sup> of April as entrainment, we were 13 days under way.

<sup>27</sup>This is the same Hanneli Goslar mentioned in Anne Frank's Dairy. We met strangely enough, years later on some trip to the Negev. It may have been Arad. We were with our kids and she with hers, it was Hanneli who recognized me, and I did not recognize her.

<sup>28</sup>Someone tells me Hanneli had a little sister with her, I can not remember her during all the time that we were together after liberation, but this does not necessarily mean that it was not so. Some of my memories are after all somewhat confused.

overflow to go. In the end three or four 'families' lived there. So we made our way to this village and at the first farmstead pleaded for food and room. We were given pancakes to eat [heavenly!] but firmly refused shelter. However they did direct us to the house of the burgomaster, who apparently had been a Nazi officer. When we reached the house we found that it had been ransacked and vandalized but apparently not by liberated fellow internees, but by the local population. The cellars were in a good state and the damage was not in the removal of goods but in the destruction thereof. We laid claim to this house. This house had a common courtyard with another one adjoining at an angle forming an 'L'. This latter had not been vandalized and was occupied by a Hungarian lady and her child (I can't remember its gender) they also came from the train. We told her of our stake and she promised to keep people out whilst we went to collect mother. [Amazingly enough there was later constant friction over 'property rights' with this neighbor. She claimed some of 'our' cellars belonged to her.] We found one of those small ladder-wagons that east-European peasants have, and which they pull themselves. This we took back with us and on this we brought mother back to the house.

A lot of clearing needed to be done; there was a lot of rubbish around and a great deal of broken glass. I don't know how long it took us to but just before we had finished the work I said "I can't carry on any longer" and the next thing I remember is a doctor at the foot of the bed. He said "stick your tongue out". "Hmm... well there are two possibilities: one is scarlet fever the other is typhoid". Mother told him that I had had scarlet fever, so he said "well, yes, I'd really thought all along that it was typhoid for half of Trobitz is down with it". What he didn't say that people there were dying like flies. That of course was the reason for his perfunctory performance at the foot of the bed. I remember very little of my illness. Mother told me afterwards that during that period some Russian soldiers came and wanted to rape Hanneli, but she showed them me hallucinating in bed and they flew in panic. Oddly enough I remember some of my hallucinations. The burden of that was that I was kept in some tower or windmill and that I had to clamber out through the window and find Elinoor and then Eddie Fuld. Mother told me that I did climb out of the window several times and run away. [Quite a feat as the window was about one, two meters above the ground.]

My convalescence was a quiet time, waiting for the authorities to decide what was to be done with us. Mother went several times to Trobitz to find out what was going on. It was definitely within walking distance, but I think that she usually commandeered a farm cart to take her. The

Russian occupation troops behaved very well to us on the whole. Whenever they saw us they would press bread on us [their own] or force some farmer to slaughter a chicken for us or give us milk. The commanding officer - I believe a major - spoke some German, which was a help. But it became soon clear that his German wasn't German but Yiddish. When someone mentioned this he said yes it was true but he did not want it to be known that he was Jewish as there was a lot of anti-Semitism in Russia, and please to shut up.

A young couple had decided that they were fed up waiting around for the authorities to move themselves, and also did not quite trust the Russians. They managed to find their way back to Holland through all the confusion and zones. As the story goes they were stopped by Canadian troops in Eindhoven. The British liaison officer to these troops was Walter Lion [a first cousin of mother's he later married May Moore, Fanny and Bertie Moore's daughter.] Walter interviewed them and contacted Sir Cecil Kish, and his prospective father in law, Bertie Moore, who at that time was permanent under secretary to the home office. They all believed that we were amongst the survivors of the 'lost train' as our group became to be called. But of course it was only from hearsay through an adventurous couple. They could not be sure till they had official name lists. The name 'lost train' came about because the authorities knew a train had left Bergen-Belsen shortly before its liberation, but nobody seemed to know what had happened to it. But now that its whereabouts was discovered and high British officials were interesting themselves in it, things started moving. They got the ball rolling and in consequence the Americans demanded that we be handed over to them. [I believe it was the Americans because their zone bordered on this area of the Russian zone and also possibly because there was political horse trading going on. This part of the story I was told later by Walter over a cup of tea in their Barnes home. It shows how strange coincidences can shape events.

The first sign that things were beginning to move came when we were told to move to Trobitz itself. This was no longer a problem for about a third of the survivors from the train had succumbed to over-eating and typhoid.<sup>29</sup> And then we were told that we would be collected by American troops who would take us home. They came in Lorries all driven by what we call to day African Americans who throughout the journey entertained us with acrobatics in and on their vehicles. We were taken to Leipzig where we were registered and de-loused, though we had done that already long since. I wore a SS uniform, without insignia

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<sup>29</sup>Over eating not in the normal sense; over eating after long starvation is not necessarily due to large quantities of food, it the result of the stomach no longer capable of handling normal quantities.

of course, having burned all the clothes we were liberated in the delousing process. The SS uniform was the only clothes we found for me. They gave us new clothing and housed us comfortably, but of course we now wanted to move on. However the authorities, to whom mother acted as interpreter having fluent English, Dutch and German, told us that we were in no fit state to travel and that they wanted us to stay a little longer to feed us up under medical supervision. We really did not do much except the occasional walk. Two things struck me on these walks; the wide spread destruction of the city and the poverty of the citizens. The girls sold themselves to the soldiers for a bar of chocolate or a packet of cigarettes. Of course both were barter-money as well; a few cigarettes would buy all sorts of things, as we had already learned in Trobitz. The Russians inundated us with gifts of cigarettes. (Which by the way started me smoking.) It dawned on me that the Americans army was practicing a color bar. Something I did not like nor could understand but of course could do nothing about.

Then the Americans agreed to hand over Leipzig to the Russians and had to leave town. So we were embarked onto a hospital train beautifully equipped and comfortable with constant medical attention. The nurses spoiled us, all those days we spend aboard this train. I don't remember how long it took us, but everything was chaotic and I should imagine that our train had no priority whatsoever. There was nobody aboard that needed urgent operations or anything like that, and the train was after all a fully equipped hospital train. They were supposed to take us to Amsterdam, but for some reason unknown to me, we had to disembark in Maastricht, which is the southern most corner of Holland and therefore almost as far as you can get from Amsterdam without leaving Holland. The following story is, according to Max Fuld, a hallucination though I am convinced it is true.<sup>30</sup> On arrival we were housed in a requisitioned convent<sup>31</sup> and it was administered and supervised by a group of special police or Marechausse. The commander, so it seemed to me, was a NSB member (Dutch Nazi Party), not yet caught. The conditions at this convent were poor, and worse there was an atmosphere of fear. We were not allowed out of the compound, i.e.: we were prisoners again. I smuggled a letter out to Eddie Fuld. [Max described this later as 'a very strange epistle indeed'.] Eddie was at that time actually incommunicado as he had had a very severe nervous

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<sup>30</sup>In a recently published article [Aleh, March 2001] I find myself vindicated: the article deals with the immediate post war period and the amazing number of Nazi officials that remained in key positions in Holland and their influence on the development of Dutch anti-Semitism to the present day and indeed their being in command positions at reception camps.

<sup>31</sup>The Dutch province of Limburg of which Maastricht is the capital remained throughout Dutch history predominantly Catholic.

breakdown. So it was Max who dealt with all their business. After a few days we were indeed taken from Maastricht - as I thought at the time, a result of my letter.<sup>32</sup> We passed through Amersfoort where again I saw a concentration camp before me, but it was in fact only for medical examination and registration. In Amsterdam we were put into a hostel for returning refugees. It was a medley crowd. Kitty Hartogh (a granddaughter of Marianne - grandmother's sister) was in Amsterdam as an officer of the "Joint" and immediately made contact with us. She helped us a great deal with formalities and food. She also helped mother with contact at the British embassy.<sup>33</sup> I do not remember a great deal about this period. We were in this hostel for a few weeks, after which we were allocated two attic rooms and a kitchen in the flat of a family Roubos on the Amstelkade. An attic flat rather like the one I described in the Zuider Amstellaan. They were a nice couple with a daughter of about sixteen whom as they put it: "made them grandparents to some unknown Canadian." Amsterdam was full of Canadian soldiers who had lots of money, cigarettes and chocolates. I don't know how mother spend her time besides a lot of reading. She must have written a lot of letters, re-establishing contacts with a wide flung family and trying to repossess valuables mostly unsuccessfully. We spend a few weekends in Naarden at the Fulds. Max used to collect us in the car. Eddy came down only for meals and a short while in the evenings. The beautiful gardens had been ploughed up for food production. There were no servants and only one wing of the house was in use. A sad house with only two dogs, old Babs the terrier was still alive but he too was now a sad old dog.<sup>34</sup>

I spend most of my time wandering the streets of Amsterdam Zuid, looking for Elinoor. Till one day I ran into Elinoor's grandmother on a street corner. She told me how Elinoor had been active in the Zionist organization in Theresian Stadt and had 'studied' farming. They had all been taken to Auschwitz except for the old lady: "Why, oh why, was only I left - a useless old woman and all that youth destroyed?" She kept on repeating this over and over again. The bottom fell out of the little of world left to me. I wrote to the Red Cross who in a short while confirmed her story. Yet I could not, would not believe it. I kept on

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<sup>32</sup> Since publishing this [2001] I have learned that my story is quite correct: we actually were lucky that we were detained in that camp only a few days. Some returnees were incarcerated there for weeks before the authorities realized what was happening. This of course also explains the atmosphere of fear in the camp. My letter had nothing to do with our release as Max thought it the ravings of an unbalanced mind. (Which in part it possibly was.)

<sup>33</sup> Amsterdam is not the capital of Holland but the Hague, which of course means the embassies are based there, not easy to reach during the post war period.

<sup>34</sup> After Eddy, Marie - his wife - and their daughter Milly were killed in an air crash over Scotland, Max sold the house, it being too large for his family and too costly to keep.

wandering about Amsterdam looking for a ghost. Every dark haired girl on a tram, at a street corner became Elinoor till I saw her face. I lived in a haze. I believe that I must have tried suicide because I remember being given a long lecture (from a Rabbi?) about youth and the wonderful things the world still had in store for me. He was of course right on at least one level, yet looking at the world of today I wonder if his premises were correct after all. Look at what has become of the 'free world'. Look at Israel and how our dreams are turning to dust; like Sodom Apples.

Amsterdam became repulsive to me, too many memories on every street corner. Once mother and I went to sjoel in the Lekstraat. It was traumatic. That large synagogue had hardly a 'minyan'<sup>35</sup> on Shabbath. Not one familiar face, everybody looked furtive, persecuted still. I was not sorry when our visas to England arrived. Mother was indeed very happy. I was apprehensive about going to a new country whose language I did not speak. Glad to get out of Amsterdam, yet sorry to leave Holland. Max had tried to place me with some farmers to learn farming - my wish. But the farmers gave one look at me and turned me down. So I had come to a complete dead end and nothing to occupy me.

The crossing was on an old troop ship. Mother stayed below deck in her cabin all night. I spend most of the splendid moonlit night on deck mildly flirting with some red-head whom I had met at the 'Joint' headquarters and who was on her way to Palestine via England. [Aliyah B.?)

Gravesend in 1945 at low tide was a horrendous welcome to England, after tidy, clean Holland: All grim pylons of rusty iron, peeling girders and grey, grey houses; thoroughly depressing. But the sight of Aunt Anna at the quayside was of great relief.

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<sup>35</sup> A congregation that has at least ten adult males (over 13 years of age).

## Essential dates.

The following dates have all been checked against documents and are therefore the correct ones. Any dates given in any of these memories that do not fit those dates given here must be adjusted accordingly.

My Father; Heinrich Martin Heilbut  
Born Hamburg - 28.05.1891 - died Bergen-Belsen -  
21.06.1944.

My Mother; Fanny Heilbut - Caro  
Born Hamburg - 02.03.1893 - died London 10.11.1949.

My Brother Walter Heilbut  
Born Hamburg - 30.07.1920 - died Bergen-Belsen 13.03.1945.

My brother Arnold Heilbut  
Born Hamburg - 22.12.1922 - died Mauthausen 26.06.1941.

Annie van Gelder (Walters fiancée)  
Born Amsterdam - ???.?.1921 - died Auschwitz ???.?.1943.

Arnold's arrest and incarceration	12.06.1941
My Barmitzwah	May 1942.
I finished elementary school	July 1942.
Started High school [M.U.L.O.]	Sept. 1942.
Grandmother Heilbut and Mrs. Magnus'	
Deportation	25.05.1943.
Grandmother died (gassed) Sobibor	23.07.1943.
The big Razzia and our deportation to Westerbork,	21.06.1943.
Our deportation to Bergen-Belsen	15.02.1944.
Father died	21.06.1944.
Walter died	13.03.1945.
Deportation from Bergen-Belsen the lost train)	10.04.1945.
Liberation(by Russians)	23.04.1945.
Repatriation and arrival in Holland	02.07.1945.
Emigration to England	October 1945.

**Robert Bar-Chain (Heilbut)**