

Remarks by Mr. Haim Roet

I was born in Amsterdam in 1932 the youngest child in a family of six. My Parents Yohanna and Shlomo, my older sisters, Rozinna and Adela and my three brothers Yosef, Avraham and Aaron.

My parents were modern middle class orthodox Jews whose family can be traced in Holland back to the 17th century.

When I was born, my parents wanted to name me after my beloved Uncle- Isaack Roet. My uncle refused, saying that as a child, he suffered because of his Jewish name.

In 1927, this same uncle allocated a part of his estate to establish an international contest on the promotion of world peace through economic interaction. An issue that at that time was hardly dealt with but is very valid today. The University of Amsterdam continues to hold the Isaac Roet contest to this day.

My Uncle Isaack was murdered in Auschwitz.

Instead of being named after my uncle, I was given a Dutch name- Hendrik (Henk) after my Aunt Hendrika.

She was also murdered in Auschwitz.

I was 7 years old when the Germans entered Holland. The Nazis made life difficult for Jews, even for children. I had to wear the yellow Star of David on my shirt, on my sweater and my coat. This was a sign that I was a Jew, *with whom- "God forbid"- other children might play with.*

I was forbidden from playing in playgrounds, from visiting parks, from riding a bicycle, or even using public transportation.

Two years after the Nazi invasion, Jews were picked up on the streets and taken from their homes. My family was taken to the Jewish Theatre by a joint team of the SS and the Dutch Police. More than a thousand Jews were forced to stay there. The conditions in the theatre were horrendous.

After a week my family was allowed to leave and sent to a newly set up ghetto. Like many survivors, in my family the four children who survived the Holocaust never spoke with our parents about their experiences. For this reason till this day, I do not know why we were allowed to leave the theatre while the others were sent to Westerbork concentration camp and from there sent by cattle train to Auschwitz and other Concentration Camps.

In the Ghetto, we were allocated two very small apartments on the same floor. In one, lived my Grandfather with my two sisters, and in the other, my parents and the four boys.

In September 1943, on Rosh Hashana eve, the SS knocked on my grandfather and two sisters' door, ordering them to be ready to go with them within 10 minutes.

Before being taken away my sisters were able to warn my parents that the SS was coming. We never saw my sisters or my grandfather ever again. My parents did not open the door but the next morning, two SS men arrived again threatening to break the door down.

My parents had to open the door. My mother, who learned German at school shouted and argued with them. After a few minutes, one SS soldier said to the other- "Ich habe genug"- "I'm fed up", and closed the door behind him.

My mother's courage is one of the reasons that I can stand here today.

My parents did their utmost to rescue their remaining 4 children. They contacted the Resistance, which assisted in finding us places to hide. My brothers and I were hidden at different places all over the country without any contact with each other. My parents were hidden in a small attic.

I was moved from home to home in Nieuwlande, a small Protestant village where most of the residents rescued Jews.

Some may doubt that one person can make a difference. In Nieuwlande, there was such an individual. His name was Johannes Post, a farmer and father of 7 children who organized the efforts which saved over 100 Jews, including me.

He was assisted by two other resistance fighters. One was Arnold Douwes and the other was Max Leons, a twenty-one year old Jew. Max is now 95 years old and we are still in close touch.

Johannes Post, a hero of the Dutch resistance, was later captured and executed by the Nazis. After 2 months in hiding, the Resistance found me a new place with a family who owned a small bakery.

At the time I was 11 years old.

Alida and Anton Deesker risked their lives and the lives of their children by hiding me. They had three children: two older daughters, and a son, 4 years older than I with whom I shared a bed. He was not allowed to know I was a Jew. The fact I was circumcised made this extremely difficult.

I was introduced as a nephew, whose parents had died in the terrible German bombing of Rotterdam, when in one night 40,000 people were killed. Thanks to my uncle I had a Dutch name which was coincidentally the same name as my rescuer's son. This made the story much more plausible.

We were continuously afraid that we would be betrayed. Nevertheless, the family took-in two more Jews, a mother and her grown up son. The Deeskens were extremely kind to me. They tried to make me forget the thought that I was all alone in this world and afraid of being caught by the Germans or the Dutch Police.

The school principal, who suspected that I was Jewish, told me during a school assembly, that I was not welcome anymore at school. His actions put me and the Deesker's in grave danger.

Since I couldn't go anymore to school, I worked till the end of the war in the family's bakery and distributed bread to the farmers around the village.

After the liberation, a neighbor told my "aunt" that he had seen, glued on a tree, a Red Cross notice that the Roet Parents were looking for their children.

A year and a half after being torn from my family, thinking I was all alone in the world, I was reunited in the middle of the night, with my parents and my surviving brothers.

That same night, my parents told me that my two sisters, Rosientje and Adele, my adopted brother, Yossi and my grandfather had all perished- so did nearly all of my Uncles, Aunts and their families.

My mother showed us a postcards written by my sister Adela immediately after her liberation from Auschwitz.

This is what she wrote, translated from Dutch.

Auschwitz, March 12, 1945: "Dear loved ones, after a most terrible year in the Birkenau concentration camp, My sister Rosientje died in Auschwitz.

I was not present.

Grandpa and uncle Isaac were sent to the gas chambers upon arrival on February 2, 1944; aunt Riek died on April 21, 1943.

I survived because of willpower, the help of God, the unforgettable home memories of Friday nights and the holidays.

Looking everywhere for (my) father, mother and brothers.

Looking for help to return home soon, to see each other very soon, as soon as possible.

Adela

Two days after writing the postcard my sister Adela died.

Till her death, my mother kept Adele's postcard in her handbag.

After the war I moved to Israel, married my wife Naomi, had 3 children- Vardit, David and Avigail and have 8 grandchildren- Raz, Ruthie, Yotam, Oren, Ido, Dana, Nimrod and Tamar.

My experiences in the Holocaust led me think about how we can remember and what can be learned.

- What does it mean when we are told that six million Jews perished, can anyone really grasp it?

In his book "2 cents plain" Harry Golden wrote – and I quote:

"The great sadness of our history is that the moral imagination cannot summon the same grief for the casualties of an earthquake than it can for one little girl killed by a car".

I tried to find a way to make the Holocaust more personal, so people can understand the calamity of 6 million souls murdered for being Jewish. Thus I initiated the "Unto every Person There Is A Name" memorial project where the names of Nazi victims, their age, birth

and death place are read in public. These ceremonies are held throughout Israel and around the world.

- Another project I am working on is recognizing and publicizing the courageous rescue work done by thousands of Jews who saved Jews under the most difficult and dangerous situations. Their deeds have not been recognized and are mostly unknown.

In the last 25 years, I have concentrated my efforts to assist in fostering more empathy in society towards the sorrows of others and to encourage positive actions and good deeds. The social project in which I now spend most of my time and brings about very good results is Tseela. This NGO promotes the improvement teams methodology, previously used only in the business world, for dealing with major macro-social problems and in assisting NGOs.

A new project I am working on is the “Academia For Social Responsibility” which encourages universities to consider the improvement of society as a goal just as important as research work and preparing students for future employment.

Looking back 70 years, it is heart-breaking that as a world we did not learn enough from the Holocaust.

Genocides are still going on, and 11 year old kids like I was, are still killed and suffering in too many places.

Genocides must be stopped and prevented everywhere.

There are less and less survivors that can tell their stories. These stories must continue to be told so we can remember the victims and the communities that disappeared. But it is even more important that the lessons of the Holocaust serve as a warning of where blind hate and racism lead to.

Thank you