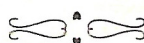




*Chocolate,  
The Taste of  
Freedom*



The Holocaust Memoir of a  
Hidden Dutch Child  
Maud Peper Dahme

# Chapter One



## *Bashert*

My story begins with my parents who were from two different countries but who, luckily for me, met and married. Their meeting was *bashert* (fated).

My father, Hartog Jacob Henri Peper, known as “Harry,” was born on January 5, 1913, in Hilversum, the Netherlands, 30 kilometers southeast of Amsterdam and 20 kilometers north of Utrecht. He was a Kohen. According to the article “Jewish Names,” “*kohein*, the Hebrew word for priest, and refers to patrilineal descendants of Aaron.”<sup>1</sup> His parents were Wolf Peper and Rebekka Peper-de Jong. My father had an older sister, Marie Evaline, or Miep, as she was called, born in 1908. My father’s nickname was Broertje, “little brother.” My mother, Lilli Eschwege, was born December 31, 1911, in Saar Louis, then a German territory, in an industrial region, *Le Territoire du Bassin de la Sarre* (The Territory of the Saar Basin),<sup>2</sup> so her first language was French; then her parents, Simon and Meta Eschwege, moved to Frankfurt am Main, Germany where my grandfather Simon was a cantor at the synagogue and taught at the *yeshiva* (Hebrew school).<sup>3</sup> My mother was their only child.

You may wonder how they met. Well, my mother came to the Netherlands for the Jewish holidays, visiting her parents’ friends. She met my dad there. He was younger than she;

therefore, his family made them wait until he was twenty-two years old to marry. They married on January 16, 1935. My mother became a Dutch citizen, and they moved to the B.W. Laan in Amersfoort, an ancient Dutch city in central Netherlands. It was, however, the largest garrison town in the Netherlands. Amersfoort was a smaller, less sophisticated city than Frankfurt. My mother, who wore the latest fashions, remembers wearing a hat with a veil and hearing the children yelling, "Look at the lady with the chicken wire on her face."

My father, who had studied to be a chef, worked with my grandfather, Wolf, in the family restaurant, Restaurant de Oude Tram, at the train and tram station in Amersfoort. Amersfoort had one of the largest railroad junctions in the country, so they had lots of business. My father had also learned how to roll cigars. He sold these, along with newspapers, candy, and cigarettes, at a kiosk, also owned by my grandfather, on the other side of the rail station. My mother, Lilli, was a homemaker. I remember that she was an avid bridge player.

I was born on January 24, 1936, and named Maud (Jewish name: Miriam) after Meta, my German grandmother. My mother did not like the name *Meta*, so she just used the M. My sister, Rita (Jewish name: Rebekka), after my paternal grandmother, was born on February 23, 1938. We were not given middle names. The feeling was that my father had too many middle names, and my parents, therefore, didn't want to burden us. I don't remember too much of my childhood before the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. At that time I was four, and Rita, two.



# Chapter Two



## Restrictions

The Dutch, neutral during World War I, hoped to maintain neutrality during World War II. Therefore, at the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the Netherlands again declared its neutrality. The Netherlands' neutrality was violated when Nazi Germany invaded as part of its western offensive. On May 10, 1940, the Germans attacked the Low Countries—The Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The German blitzkrieg (lightning war) devastated the Dutch army. Because of the military defeat, the horrendous bombing of the port city of Rotterdam, and the German threat of more bombings of large Dutch cities, the Dutch government surrendered after four days of war, on May 14, 1940. According to the article “The Invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg”:

The plan to seize Belgium and the Netherlands was considered in August 1938, when the attack on Czechoslovakia was being formulated, and the possibility of war with France and England was contemplated. The advantage to Germany of being able to use these countries for their own purposes, particularly as air bases in the war against England and France, was emphasized. In May 1939, when Hitler made his irrevocable decision to attack Poland, and foresaw the possibility at least of a war



with England and France in consequence, he told his military commanders: "Dutch and Belgian air bases must be occupied. Declarations of neutrality must be ignored."

In a series of orders, which were signed by [Generals] Keitel and Jodl, the attack was fixed for 10th November 1939, but it was postponed from time to time until May of 1940 on account of weather conditions and transport problems.

Queen Wilhelmina fled to England, accompanied by the Dutch cabinet. Her daughter, Princess Juliana, husband, Prince Bernhard, and their children settled in Ottawa, Canada. In London Queen Wilhelmina established a government-in-exile. In May 1940, Queen Wilhelmina issued a proclamation protesting the violation of Dutch neutrality:

BY THE QUEEN OF THE NETHERLANDS  
TO HER PEOPLE, MAY 10, 1940

I herewith launch a flaming protest against this unprecedented violation of all that is decent between cultured States. I and my Government will do our duty. Now do your duty. Everywhere, everyone to the post to which he has been appointed. Germany's sudden attack against our territory without warning was carried out notwithstanding her solemn promise that our neutrality would be respected.

On May 13, the queen issued another proclamation explaining her reasons for leaving the Netherlands:

BY THE QUEEN OF THE NETHERLANDS  
TO HER PEOPLE, DATED FROM LONDON,  
MAY 13th, 1940

After it had become absolutely certain that We and Our Ministers could no longer continue freely to exercise state authority in the Netherlands, the hard, but necessary, decision had to be taken of removing the seat of Government abroad for as long as will prove inevitable, with the intention of returning immediately to the Netherlands as soon as this is at all possible.

The Government is at present in England. As a Government it does not wish to capitulate. Thereby the Netherlands territories which remain in Dutch hands, in Europe as well as in the East and West Indies, continue to be a sovereign state, which will continue to raise its voice and to assert its position, especially in the joint deliberations of the Allies, as a fully recognized member of the community of states.

The military authorities, and in the highest instance the Commander in Chief of the Naval and Land forces, will from now on judge what measures are necessary and justifiable from a military point of view. Where the invader is in power, the local civil authorities must continue to take those measures which may be useful in the interests of the population. They should in the first place contribute towards preserving law and order.

Our heart goes out to our compatriots, who will pass through hard times in our country. But the time will come when the Netherlands, with God's help, will regain their European

territory. Remember catastrophes in former centuries, and the resurrection of the Netherlands which followed. Thus it will also be this time.

Let no one despair. Let everybody do his utmost in the well-understood interests of the country. We do Ours. Long live the Netherlands!

My hometown was a military town. The article "Amersfoort: Second World War" explains that Amersfoort was part of the main line of defense. Because of its military bases and the train station, Amersfoort was valuable to the Germans. I do remember the sirens, the bombings, and going down to the root cellar with my parents for safety. When the all-clear sounded we could go back upstairs. I also remember the troops marching in and the paratroopers being dropped from planes.

After the Dutch surrender, the Germans took over all the military bases in and around our town. One of the first things they did was to register the Jews of Amersfoort, who numbered about 731. In 1930 there had been about 400 Jews in Amersfoort, but the arrival of German refugees had increased their numbers. The Jews of Amersfoort complied. Who would have thought what horrors would happen to us.

In 1939, after The November Pogrom of 1938 (Kristallnacht), my father went via train to Frankfurt am Main in Germany and brought my German grandparents, Simon and Meta, to Amersfoort. It was dangerous for them in Frankfurt. My grandfather had been picked up three times by the Nazis and questioned but fortunately released. Since the boycotts of 1933 and the November pogrom, many Jews had emigrated



from Frankfurt's large Jewish community to other "safe" countries. Meta and Simon came to live with us thinking they would be safer in the Netherlands: the Netherlands had had a history of tolerance that went back to the sixteenth century. Moreover, the Germans had honored Dutch neutrality during World War I. When they moved to Amersfoort, they lived with us at Celsiusstraat 35. Because of the bombings—our previous house on the BW Laan across from the train station was an Allied target and continually being bombed—we had moved to a rented house on the other side of town, at Celsiusstraat 35.

There were many restrictions on the Jews of Amersfoort. In May 1940, Amersfoort Jews had to be registered with the authorities. On February 25, 1941, a protest strike in Amsterdam against Nazi brutality paralyzed the city. According to the article "Amsterdam," "Communist activists organized a general strike, joined by many other worker organizations. Major factories, the transportation system, and most public services came to a standstill. The Germans brutally suppressed the strike after three days, crippling Dutch resistance organizations in the process." By May, there were signs in the parks: "*Voor Joden Verboden*" (Forbidden to Jews). In July of 1941, we were ordered to have a big J stamped on our identity cards, and for this we had to pay one guilder. In the restaurants, they had signs that read, "Jews not wanted." In fact, because of those signs, there were protests in some cities. On September 15, 1941; Dutch demonstrators crossed out the "not" in "not wanted."

In the fall of 1941, I started kindergarten in public school. The school was near my home—on the next street. I was so excited to attend. I adored my teacher, Eva Schnell. She had also migrated from Germany with her husband, Alfred.

By February 1942, Jews were told they couldn't go to school anymore. Can you imagine not being allowed to attend school just because of your religion? My mother, Mrs. Schnell, my kindergarten teacher, and some other Jewish teachers, who were only allowed to teach Jewish children, rented rooms in a building and set up a school. I have a school photograph with my sister, Rita, and me among the other children.

By May 3, 1942, anyone over the age of six had to wear the Jewish Star with *Jood* written in the center. My mother had to buy the stars. I was thrilled because I was six years old, old enough to wear a star, and I was proud of it, not realizing what it meant. To me wearing a star was a sign of being grown up. However, my sister threw a tantrum. Rita was only four and didn't have to wear one, but my mother relented and sewed one on her jacket any way. Then Rita was happy. My mother told me that the non-Jewish children would not play with us anymore. Their parents told them that they could not associate with us.

I remember that in the summer of 1942, after my Dutch grandmother had her heart attack, my mother, sister, and I were going to visit her in the hospital. As Jews we were not permitted to take public transportation, so the shortest way was through the park where Jews were forbidden to go. My mother said to Rita and me, "It's hot. Let's take off our jackets"; Rita and I were wearing bolero jackets with the stars sewn on. We took them off and took the shortcut through the park. No one saw that we did not have our stars on, and we did not meet anyone who knew us.

Other restrictions followed: We couldn't be patients in the hospitals; in Amersfoort this was ignored. By July 1942, we were forbidden to associate with non-Jews—no visiting our

non-Jewish friends. A Dutch Nazi *Treuhänder* (a trustee) was appointed to oversee our restaurant and cigar shop.<sup>4</sup> *After the war this man would not give the restaurant back to my father because he had no proof of ownership. My grandfather had been murdered. And my mother had burned all our documents when she and my father went into hiding.*

On August 16, 1942, all Jewish males between the ages of 18 and 45 were told to report for forced labor in Germany—*Arbeitseinsatz*. The young men were told that they were going to work camps. They did not want to go into hiding because they would have no freedom, so they went to the work camps. Many Jewish males left on August 18 for unknown locations. Amersfoort citizens stood along the streets crying; they were so moved by the deportations of people they had known for years.

All other Jews were to be deported by the Nazis on August 21, 1942, to Amsterdam. There were then 120 Amersfoort Jews left—the old and ill as well as those married to Christians. Some Jews began to go into hiding. On April 13, 1943, the Germans ordered that Amersfoort be *Judenrein* (Jew free) by April 15, 1943. By May the remaining Jews had been taken from Amersfoort to the Westerbork Transit Camp. From there, in the summer of 1943, most were deported to Sobibor Death Camp. The butcher and his wife were deported, and on their journey to Sobibor, they threw a postcard out of the train with the message: “whoever finds this mail it.” They were murdered in Sobibor along with the other Amersfoort Jews who had been arrested.

My Aunt Miep, my father’s sister, had married Salomon Cohen, a cigar merchant; they had an address for their three children to go into hiding. However, Aunt Miep wanted to have her children with her a little longer, so they kept procrastinating



until it was too late. The family was first taken from Amersfoort by train to Amsterdam and then confined in the Jewish quarter located in the present-day museum area; this area, near the Portuguese Synagogue, is called Waterlooplein. The *Jodenbuurt* (Jewish Quarter) was centered on Waterlooplein. *Years after I tried to find the house at Waterlooplein 110 III hoog (3<sup>rd</sup> floor) where my German grandparents had temporarily lived. The house was gone; there were new buildings there.*

There are accounts that my Uncle Salomon worked for the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council). Most likely he thought that this would exempt his family from being sent East. Tragically, the whole family was deported; Solomon, 37, Miep, 35, and my cousins who were my age, Hartog, 9, Wolf, 7, and Marjan, 5, were murdered in Sobibor on July 2, 1943.

Despite the 1941 February Strike by Amsterdam workers protesting the Nazis' persecution of Jews,<sup>5</sup> the Jews were sent from the ghetto to the collection point, the Dutch Theatre, *Hollandse Schouwburg* (Dutch Theatre) or *Joodsche Schouwburg*.<sup>6</sup> From there my family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—was transported to the train station and then deported to Sobibor Death Camp via Westerbork Transit Camp. The USHMM article “Amsterdam” explains, “The city administration, the Dutch municipal police, and Dutch railway workers all cooperated in the deportations, as did the Dutch Nazi party (NSB).”

My Dutch grandfather, Wolf, chose to wait until all the children and grandchildren were safe. After this, he said, he would look for a place to hide. He too was deported. Initially he was sent to Amsterdam and from there via the *Schouwburg* to Westerbork. Once he arrived there he was immediately put on a transport to Sobibor, and on May 21, 1943, at the age of

61 was murdered.

My grandmother Rebekka had been in the hospital; she had had a heart attack. She was evacuated with my grandfather to Amsterdam where she died on December 5, 1942. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Diemen, The Netherlands.

My German grandparents, Simon, 64, and Meta, 61, had no place to go, so they too were taken first to Amsterdam, then Westerbork, and from there were transported to Sobibor where they were murdered in Sobibor on May 7, 1943.

The oldest Amersfoort Jew deported was ninety-two; the youngest, thirteen months. Three-hundred and sixty-five Jews did not return to Amersfoort. They are remembered at the museum at Kamp Amersfoort on a scroll that symbolizes the Torah.