

SEE YOU TONIGHT AND
PROMISE TO BE A
GOOD BOY!

WAR MEMORIES

SALO MULLER

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For Conny

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PREFACE

After my parting words at my mother's funeral, or actually that of my aunt, a strange feeling came over me. I looked around. I was standing, with my wife and our two children, in the auditorium of the old Jewish cemetery at Muiderberg. My sister (my cousin) and her family, several other cousins and a few very dear friends and acquaintances were also present. So this was the remainder of my once large family.

As usual, my wife was standing right beside me. Alone. Yes, she was very much alone, without anyone there from her family. Her family did not exist any longer. She was the lonely remnant of her once large family.

We had become an appallingly small remainder that had to try to hold its own among the rest of the world's population. Maybe someday, by way of our children, this insignificant remainder may grow into a significant one again. This thought crossed my mind in what must have been the split second before the bier was rolled outside in the snow.

I dedicate this book to the man and woman who, through trial and error, raised me to become the person I am today. To you, Ju and

Louis. Furthermore, I dedicate my book to my father, mother, uncles, aunts, cousins and my wife's family – to those who did not survive the gas chambers.

To my wife, Conny.

To my children and grandchildren: 'Lest they forget.'

And to everyone, who at the risk of losing their own life, dared to save mine.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my wife, Conny. She spent many long evenings alone in our living room. But she never failed to support me in finishing this book.

Salo Muller

INTRODUCTION

Murdered in Auschwitz

Each time I read the beginning of *Extinction* by Dr. J. Presser, shivers run up and down my spine. He writes: ‘This book contains the history of a murder, premeditated mass murder on an unprecedented scale, executed in cold blood. The murderers were Germans, the victims were Jews.’

How was it possible that this deportation and the destruction that followed could have taken place? Who were these barbarians who had to answer for this? Didn’t anyone try to stop this slaughter? Why didn’t more Jews flee or hide? Six million people were cruelly killed. Murdered, gassed. Among those murdered were my parents. Yes, almost my entire large family, as well as my wife’s family. I saved the letters from the Red Cross. They contain just one mere sentence: the name of my mother, Lena Blitz, born October 20th, 1908, deceased in Auschwitz February 12th, 1943. The other letter mentions my father’s name in a similar manner: Louis Muller, born July 20th, 1903, deceased in Auschwitz April 30th, 1943.

I watched them standing on the stage of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, high above my head. I was not allowed to join them. I screamed for my mother but I was not allowed to go to her. They took me to a daycare center across the street, where I cried for three days and three nights. I screamed and called for my parents but to no avail. I never saw them again. They were first transported to Westerbork in the Netherlands and shortly after to Auschwitz.

How could this possibly have happened?

To this day, I ask myself this same question over and over again. I try to suppress the anger and especially the overpowering grief that has taken a complete hold of me. Hardly a day goes by when I don't shed a tear but, unfortunately, it doesn't change a thing.

Still, one way or another I have to create order within myself. I'll have to find peace at last, without the aid of pills and endless discussions with medical professionals, without short-term intervention. I have read everything about this horrible drama. I read extensively.

But now the time has come to free myself of the story, my story, which is the story of my life. Will it do any good? Will it free me? I wonder, but I will have to rid myself of it at last.

I have not tried to put this story into a chronological order, except for dates that were of great importance. However, everything else I remember has received its place during the course of the story, the way I still remember it today, more than seventy years after this downfall.

1 PUSHED ASIDE BY THE WORLD

Thursday, October 29th, 1929. It was a date that would spell doom. The stock market in New York collapsed. Within a matter of hours innumerable investors lost all their money.

They were still rich when morning broke, but by evening they were left destitute. The international financial traffic and economic trade were in turmoil and money had lost its value completely. Construction companies and factories went bankrupt, stores closed their doors. For the masses, laborers and the middle class hard-pressed times had begun. The government introduced measures to curtail skyrocketing prices. This policy was brought about by what would later become a worldwide concept, known as 'the crash' or 'the crises'. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their job and had to go on welfare. Professor Lou de Jong would later write about this period: 'The massive unemployment during the thirties became the most important factor of the social truth and, during the German occupation, remained one of the most important aspects on the minds of many: a phantom that once it had reared its ugly head, it would remain in the awareness of the common man.'

Just to give an impression: in December of 1930 the Netherlands had 136.000 registered unemployed people. In 1933 their number had increased to a terrifying 380.000. Only 135.000 received any financial support. A year before the war broke out, the registered number of unemployed people was 406.000.

It is important for the *petit histoire* of my family to refer to this difficult time. The unemployed lived in isolation. Every day they tried to make ends meet. There was no money for anything. Even a newspaper was a luxury. Consequently, one hardly knew what was happening. Lou De Jong writes: 'Pushed aside by the world, they pushed the world aside.'

In spite of the massive unemployment and the threat of war, the daily fight for survival ruled most people's lives. No one could have guessed the seriousness of the situation, especially since the Dutch counted on their government to remain neutral again in the case of war.

In Germany political and social events followed each other in rapid succession. In November of 1918, German pacifists raised the flag of the republic over the rubble of the First World War. Emperor Wilhelm suffered a crushing defeat and fled to the neutral Netherlands. But Germany had also paid a heavy price: a 13% loss of territory, a ban on re-armament and international isolation. During the winter of 1918 / 1919 things started to go sour. Left- and rightwing extremists bombarded the shaky peace accords and created even greater confusion. Due to tactical considerations, the young German Communist Party availed itself of right-extremist objectives. One of its leaders began to bolster anti-Semitism, which was very much alive in circles on the right. On November 9th, 1923, Adolf Hitler sent the first jolt through the country. He staged a coup in Munich with the aid of his extremist stormtroopers. He was the first member of the so-called National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist Labor Party) or NSDAP.

Mr. De Jong would later comment about this still rather unknown figure: 'There is too little known about Hitler's youth, particularly his early years, to indicate the psychological background of this monomaniacal obsession, the need to dominate bordering on madness, this almost ceaseless delight in feelings of hatred; these traits were characteristic for his personality, as would become evident through his life and career.

There is no other way than that the rise of Hitler can be seen as the prelude to the tragedy of the Second World War and particularly the deliberate murder of millions of Jews. The facts of his life tell the story of the annihilation of ordinary people. Hitler was born on April 10th, 1889 in Braunau on the German-Austrian border. His father was the illegitimate child of Maria Ann Schicklgruber, a servant. A certain Johann Georg Hiedler acknowledged Aloïs Schicklgruber as his son and changed the name Hiedler to Hitler. At the age of 48, Aloïs remarried for the third time, this time to Klara Pölzl. Their fourth child was named Adolf. Three siblings born earlier had died; a little sister, named Paula, was yet to follow.

There is little known about Adolf Hitler's youth. His mother seems to have been a gentle woman. Young Hitler, however, was restless, short-tempered and stubborn. He dreamed of becoming a famous painter.

2 THE TOTAL ERADICATION OF THE JEWS

In 1905 Hitler experienced his very first blow – being rejected for painting and architecture classes at the Academy of Vienna. It disturbed him greatly. Nevertheless he stayed in the Austrian capital. It was here that the first signs of his true nature began to manifest themselves. He disliked his father, as well as ordinary people. Jews and anybody who was better off than he were no good in his opinion. He adored his mother. After she was diagnosed with cancer, the Jewish physician stayed with her until her last day on this earth. Hitler never spoke badly about him, quite the contrary!

In addition, he targeted the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy and hated Czechs, Slovaks and Croats. He left Vienna as ‘an absolute anti-Semite, a mortal enemy of the Marxist worldview, but as a German chauvinist’, as he himself admitted.

In February of 1914 the army rejected Hitler in Salzburg, even to work in the military assistance. Infuriated, he enrolled as a volunteer in Bavaria. He considered the defeat of Germany in the First World War unnecessary. He blamed the Jews, socialists, politicians and non-Germans and spelt out the charges in popular speeches and

exhaustive arguments that would take him to the leadership of the NSDAP. In 1919 he wrote in a memorandum: 'The reasonable anti-Semitism needs to start with the declassification of the Jews. The ultimate goal, however, should be indisputably the total eradication of the Jews.'

The coup staged in 1924 by Hitler and his cronies went up in smoke. Hitler ended up in prison where he wrote the first part of his life story and a political pogrom called *Mein Kampf*, with the help of his secretary, Rudolf Hess.

Five years later he was released from prison. He immediately demanded the leadership of the NSDAP, a growing movement with independent bodies of officials responsible for order and a Sturmabteilung, SA, under the leadership of Hermann Goering. Meanwhile in Germany in 1932, unemployment had reached six million, resulting in poverty, disorder and an incredible devaluation of the German mark. The norms of a rational society evaporated. That's why it was possible for the old Chancellor Von Hindenburg to appoint the emerging nationalist leader, Hitler, as his successor. This happened on January 31st, 1933.

The conservatives in the Reichstag, the German parliament, did not succeed in stopping Hitler. Hitler would not stand for half measures and directed Germany towards the abyss. He immediately had concentration camps built, where his political opponents, critical journalists and union members disappeared. Disappeared for good.

German society experienced a speedy metamorphosis and sank into a puddle of terror and fear. In the meantime, the Nazi party knew how to bring the admiration for the Führer to great heights. They gave the already dissatisfied people a sense of false hope.

The majority of the Germans sought refuge in their new leader. Hitler gave jobs to millions who were unemployed in the arms industry and the construction of highways, so that the army divisions that were being set up could move quickly. In 1933, a highly-regulated

Germany had only six army divisions. In 1939, at the start of the Second World War, 51 rolled and marched along the Autobahn! Meanwhile, Hitler took his power and influence across old borders. In 1935 he took away the buffer neutrality of the Saarland, which had been enforced by the Treaty of Versailles. In 1936 he occupied the Rhineland. In 1937 and 1938 he had his eye on his native country, Austria, bringing about the Anschluss (the annexation of Austria). After that he gave full rein to his aggression towards Czechoslovakia and the Sudetenland. On September 3rd, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. A few hours later Poland, England and France officially declared war on Germany.

In the Netherlands there was disbelief. The Dutch hoped that their so cherished neutral status would keep them out of this global conflict. After all, the last real hostilities on Dutch soil dated back to the Duke of Alba, the Spanish inquisitor of the 16th century and the archenemy of William of Orange. Therefore, the term 'war' was unknown to modern the Netherlands, contrary to their neighboring countries.

At first the Dutch newspapers paid plenty of attention to Hitler's takeover. They followed the evolution in Germany with increasing concern. Later on, strangely enough, they proceeded to act as though nothing had happened, as if they thought that things would turn out better than expected.

That was also the case for most of the Jews in the Netherlands. The author Geert Mak writes in his book *Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City*: 'Even the Jews, who had lived here peacefully for generations, could not imagine that it was that bad in Germany.'

It is a fact that many citizens of the Netherlands were not aware of what had happened in the thirties. As an example, in September of 1935 the German Reichstag had unanimously adopted the Nuremberg Laws, containing a number of anti-Jewish provisions. Laws that would change the everyday life for millions.

For one, Jews were no longer allowed to marry non-Jews and Jews were no longer allowed to hire non-Jewish domestic servants. Citizenship was taken away from them; they were no longer fellow citizens. They were no longer considered human beings. They became nobodies: 'Untermenschen'.

It all happened very fast. Men were forced to write the name Israel before their own name on all their documents and the women Sarah. That way the authorities would immediately know that they were dealing with Jews.

Signs appeared everywhere with the words: 'No Jews allowed'. The first appeared in 1936: the year I was born. Only a few years later, all of those laws and prohibitions would be indiscriminately adopted in the Netherlands as well.

November 10th, 1938 should not be allowed to ever be erased from memory. That's when the first pogrom took place, organized by the government. It is now known as the Kristallnacht. Synagogues were burned down. Stores and homes were destroyed, and Jewish men arrested and deported to concentration camps. 92 Jewish men were murdered. This has been described in a painful and distressing way in *Confrontation with Destiny*, a deposition detailing these events by my friend Werner Bloch.

3 JEWISH AMSTERDAM

How did the Netherlands, and especially Amsterdam since this was the city where most of the Jews lived, cope during this period? Around 1940 our country counted approximately 140.000 Jews that were either members of a Jewish community or a religious organization. Approximately 80.000 Jews resided in the capital and of these more than 10.000 were not Dutch nationals. The makeup of the Jewish communities was diverse. Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent (Sephardic) were mainly living in Amsterdam, while German and East European Jews (Ashkenazi), descendants of Jews who had fled to the Netherlands in the 17th century, were spread out across the country. In 1796 the National Assembly acknowledged all Jews living in our country as Dutch citizens. To mark this merger, a census taken in 1797 showed approximately 20.000 Ashkenazi and 2.800 Portuguese Jews in a total population of 200.000. These Jews had been living peacefully in our country for generations. The Dutch government had never drawn a line between Jews and non-Jews. This would only come about when the so-called mandatory 'Declaration of Aryan origin' was brought into existence by the occupying forces.

Social changes followed at a very slow pace. Many Jews in Amsterdam were living on welfare, and had settled in the neighborhood of Waterlooplein, a mixed area of Jews and non-Jews. Increasingly more Jews became interested in the medical profession, the legal profession and journalism, but the majority still lived in poverty. A cultural change also became noticeable when Jewish schools replaced Yiddish with Dutch. Steadily more and more Jews left for municipal schools for the poor. The government gave this development its full support, thinking that it would speed up integration. After 1850 Dutch became the accepted language for Amsterdam Jews, even though many Yiddish words and expressions remain part of the everyday spoken language to this day.

Due to changes in the world of business and the expansion of trade, a large number of Jews were able to further themselves to become important businessmen. For example, Asscher, a leading company in the diamond trade, was able to put hundreds of diamond cutters to work, allowing them to earn a proper living. And a small dry goods store located at de Nieuwendijk called de Bijenkorf grew into a large chain that still carries the same name today. Enterprising Jews dominated the textile industry and the antiques business. But still only a small portion of Jewish citizens was offered opportunities. As a result their lives improved very slowly. In 1914 more than half of the Jews in Amsterdam were working in the diamond industry. Outside of their religious communities they had started to become involved in the social welfare of the Jews. It appeared that the distance between Jews and non-Jews was getting progressively smaller. Consequently, interracial marriages were on the up and the majority of Jews in the capital felt foremost like citizens of Amsterdam, or Amsterdammers as they're known to the general public. This was undoubtedly the situation until 1940. One felt safe in one's own city, in neutral Holland. What could possibly happen to us?

Jews listened with a sympathetic ear to the stories of Jewish and other refugees from Germany and Austria, but overall these tales were

taken with a grain of salt and received with skepticism. Exaggerated, they'd say! Could it really be as dangerous as they claimed? This mentality may have contributed to the fact that the percentage of Dutch Jews murdered by the Germans was the highest of any west European country.

When 1940 rolled around, it became apparent that the Jews as well as the rest of the Dutch citizens were totally unprepared for a German attack.

To paint a picture of the prewar coexistence between Jews and non-Jews in the Netherlands I need to mention the Nationaal Socialistische Beweging founded by Anton Mussert, an engineer with the Provincial Ministry of Transport and Public Works. His program capitalized on the massive unemployment and poverty, taking a page from Hitler's book. At the time of the provincial state elections in 1935 his party, the NSB, obtained as many as 44 seats. As a result 50.000 Dutch citizens were swayed to become members.

Still, there were those who warned against the dangerous conduct of the NSB, which resulted in the loss of half of their seats at the next election to the Dutch parliament.

May 10th, 1940. A crucial moment in our history. The Germans attacked their neighboring countries on the western borders. The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France met with defeat. A secret report later showed that the attack had been prepared as early as in 1939. In the early days of the war, the 105 French, 9 British, 22 Belgian and 10 Dutch divisions were facing 136 German divisions. They were no match for the German war machine.

4 THE FLIGHT OF QUEEN WILHELMINA

I believe that the flight of Queen Wilhelmina and a number of her ministers to England contributed to the fact that our country was immediately overrun. At the time of her installation in 1898, she had talked about 'her calling, her life's task and duty and that the House of Orange would never, no, never be able to do enough for the Netherlands'. Did she indeed do everything within her power to protect and help her Jewish citizens? I hope that it will become clear from my story that it was only a handful of individuals that helped the Jews. However, I would still like to mention the following about Wilhelmina: she was strong, temperamental, intelligent and maybe 'courageous'. She was an only child, who had been through a strict upbringing surrounded by governesses. Once she became queen, her life turned into nothing but protocol. Openly addressing her was not allowed, not to mention disagreeing with her. She was deeply religious, with the Bible as her support and refuge. From her mother's as well as her father's side she became very well acquainted with Germany and the Germans. Furthermore, she often visited Germany.

Again, I would like to quote Lou de Jong: ‘The constitutional king is entirely authorized, within the boundaries of the ministerial responsibilities to exert his influence. He may be or become a puppet but he is not forced to. Neither a single bill, nor a single royal decree needs his automatic signature. He may either raise objections or urge for reconsideration. Besides other privileges, there is the privilege to be consulted.’

In 1938 Queen Wilhelmina put pressure on Prime Minister Hendrikus Colijn. She insisted on strengthening the country’s defense, but Colijn ignored her. Wilhelmina called this refusal irresponsible. The constant differences of opinion on this subject were rarely, if ever, brought out into the open. In this case the queen would turn out to be right. Four days after the Germans crossed the border, the Netherlands had to give up the fight. The army was ill-equipped to withstand invasion.

The armament did not start until 1937, which was much too late because at that point suppliers were no longer able to deliver what the Dutch army needed. The air force did not amount to much with only 104 planes, of which only 52 were modern ones. The Germans destroyed part of this fleet almost immediately. Tanks and anti-aircraft artillery were highly inadequate and to top it all off there was the departure of the royal family to England. On May 12th, 1940 under pressure from Queen Wilhelmina, Princess Juliana left. At first she was accompanied by Prince Bernhard, who was an officer in active service and whose wish it was to stay in the Netherlands. He would indeed quickly return because what kind of shameful impression would he have made he had he gone to England to take his wife and children out of harm’s way while the country was at war? In the armed forces one could not take one’s family into consideration.

I like to point out that this would have been the day on which the Jews should have realized that maybe they should also start thinking about their safety. But they were not advised to do so, not even by their queen. If the royal family didn’t deem it safe any longer, could

they not have realized what was in store for the Jews? Especially after what they had learned about the events taking place in Germany. The royals' despair was evident in the futile telegrams for help that the queen tried to send to friendly monarchies and internationally influential individuals.

Concerning her departure, Lou de Jong writes: 'Stay and become captured? Never! Did Willem de Zwijger wait for the arrival of Alba? Was Hitler not the same demonic figure as this Spanish tyrant? Queen Wilhelmina herself noted: "It did not make any sense to allow myself being captured and sent to Berlin, separated from my people. In such case, I would not have been able to do anything at all. So I had to leave."'

In regard to this, a board of inquiry would later conclude 'that the Government Policy '40-'45 of the House of Commons, taken on May 13th, 1940 at the Hoek van Holland to move the seat of Government to England, had been one of the most important decisions of the entire war era'.

In my estimation this was an extremely exaggerated and a truly absurd conclusion. The queen, without consulting her ministers in any way, just fled to England. And I would like to call to mind her oath! Should it not have been her duty to support the troops, so her citizens would have understood that she was not going to give in to the demands of the wicked occupiers? Neither the troops nor the citizens were aware of her departure, let alone were there words of warning from the queen and her ministers from which the Jewish citizens could have concluded that their lives might be in danger, and not to expect any help from their own government. The authorities that were left behind would not hinder the Germans from doing what they pleased!

We have now come to realize what the consequences were going to be for millions of people.

The invasion itself on May 10th, 1940, despite the strategically best positioning of our troops, could only lead to a quick capitulation, notwithstanding the Grebbelinie, de Oud-Hollandse Waterlinie, de Betuwe, Maas and Waal rivers, de Peel and a few divisions in the west. In addition we had to combat the German collaborators, the so-called fifth column. We would later find out that the Germans had threatened to release paratroops to imprison the royal family, ministers and high-ranking military personnel.

What had happened in those few days of trying to stand up for ourselves? 2.500 soldiers had been killed, as well as many citizens, and hundreds had tried to commit suicide. On May 14th, a bright, sunny day, the Germans broke through near Rotterdam and bombed the city, killing hundreds of people. When they threatened to flatten Utrecht and other cities as well, General Winkelman was left no other choice than to surrender.

5 A TALK WITH HITLER?

In the meantime Belgium had also surrendered and not quite a month later Paris was conquered. Contrary to his actions in France, however, Hitler decided to release our prisoners of war. It seemed like a generous act, but soon he would demonstrate his cruelty to the Russian soldiers, who were murdered and starved to death by the thousands. He put a new person in charge of the Netherlands, Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a member of the German government, with the official and pretentious title of 'State Commissioner of the Dutch Occupied Territories'. This Austrian lawyer had previously played a not so nice part in the annexation of Austria in March of 1938. Seyss-Inquart moved with his family to The Hague and initially governed the country using appropriated Dutch channels. However, the Germans were the ones who made the decisions. They checked everything, gave the orders but left the implementation to our authorities.

Again, there was the question of how to deal with it all. Should all orders be indiscriminately carried out? Would it be possible to negotiate with this man, Hitler? By now it was known that he ignored international laws.

Professor Mr. Robert Regout was one of the first ones to point out that there were applicable international laws in one of his articles. In the end, he had to pay for it with his life. Following a journey through several prisons, he died in the hell of Dachau.

During those difficult times, the business world tried to maintain and continue its activities as well as it knew how. As a result, one could not expect any protests or action from them. On the contrary, they accepted military orders from the Germans.

How did the Jews react to this chaotic situation? In the early stages of the occupation the fear hit home. They realized that the anti-Semitism of Hitler would become a vital issue. On the other hand, however, they allowed themselves to be appeased. For instance, in an article in *Het Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad* (1938) with a circulation of 15.000 copies the author insisted that 'not everything about Nazism was to be condemned'. Did this mean that there was no reason to be afraid, maybe?

Could they possibly not have been aware of Hitler's address to the Reichstag on January 30th, 1939 concerning the extermination of the Jews? The text reads: 'The Jewish people must be exterminated. Himmler must carry it out.' People must have heard about it, but they did not comprehend its true meaning and significance.

In the fall of 1940 the Netherlands began to recognize, for the very first time, a distinction between Jews and non-Jews. On October 18th, all public officials received a form that they needed to complete before October 26th. Are you Aryan or non-Aryan? Ancestry needed to be carefully investigated. Do you have Jewish ancestors? This piece of paper was dutifully signed by the Jews, afraid of consequences. Regret would follow!

The Amsterdam Lyceum, the school that I would be attending for three years after the war, never signed this 'Declaration of Aryan Origin'. This was an exception!

6 ROUNDUPS

In January of 1941 the Germans began to step up their actions. All Jewish government officials were fired. They unveiled their plan to drive the Jews out of The Hague and the coastal area. Ritual slaughter was forbidden. The Joodse Raad (Jewish Council) came into being, a hideous institution. The Germans provoked anti-Semitic street riots in Amsterdam, kicked off by the NSB. This intensified the resistance from Jewish assault groups, but the Germans could count on a lot of support from the followers of the new order, and the NSB and its cronies.

In addition the Germans organized a huge riot in Amsterdam and arrested numerous defenseless Jewish people, among them my parents. That's when it really began. In the course of 1941 the Germans robbed the Jews of all their possessions, not only those pertaining to their business, but real estate and other belongings as well. To any Jewish business they appointed a manager, a so-called *Verwalter*. In addition, Amsterdam now had its own Jewish quarter and public notices that read 'No Jews allowed' appeared everywhere. Jews were only to receive services from Jewish doctors, pharmacists,

lawyers and teachers. They were no longer allowed in movie theaters, restaurants, the zoo, parks, swimming pools, sports, playing or athletic fields, museums and other public buildings. As of September, 1941, Jewish children were only permitted to attend Jewish schools. All these changes happened in rapid succession. Life had turned into a hell!

Still, there were a lot of people who believed that the war would soon pass. They were under the assumption that Hitler and his cronies could not continue this way, but meanwhile the Jews were left to fend for themselves. The government offered no protection and they grew to endure the discrimination against the Jews. You could summarize the mood of the Jews in a few words: they were afraid, shortsighted and submissive. They acted like sheep without the slightest hint of protest. The orders of the occupiers were carefully passed on by the Jewish Council to the person or persons concerned.

At the end of 1941 all unemployed Jews were facing the camps. The Jewish Council advised Jews to register and definitely not try to steer clear of attention. *Het Joodsche Weekblad* also published these instructions, which intimidated many.

The ordinances to isolate the Jews were issued in stages. It all began on May 2nd, 1942 with the Star of David, which all Jews had to wear on their outer garments for immediate recognition. Because of this action their freedom of movement, or whatever was left of it, became very restricted. On June 30th, 1942 another heartless verdict was issued: Jews were no longer allowed to make use of trains, streetcars, bicycles, taxicabs or public telephones. It seems incomprehensible that someone can come up with something like this to eliminate a group of fellow citizens and countrymen without anyone rebelling against it. But it happened. And the Germans were not yet finished.

Jews were no longer allowed to pay visits to non-Jews, nor enter their homes. A curfew was instated from 8 p.m. till 6 a.m. Even Jewish

doctors were no longer allowed to go out to care for their patients during these hours. It goes without saying that these actions became the talk of the town. One couldn't think of anything else. What to do next?

7 BORN ON A LEAP DAY

I was born on February 29th, 1936 – a leap year – at home on Molenbeekstraat 34 in Amsterdam. I enjoyed wonderful preschool years, with great birthdays; everyone spoiled me.

It was a house filled with family and friends, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles and cousins. I was terribly spoiled by everyone. Even though my parents cherished their Jewish identity, they definitely didn't come across as being orthodox. Every Saturday morning I went with Grandpa Barend Muller to Sjoel. He was a cantor in the then famous choir of Engeland, where he had discovered his love for music. On my fourth birthday he gave me a small drum set with beautiful, shiny drums. Whenever I had a chance I would play them, which meant almost every moment of the day.

My parents were employed by De Vries van Buuren, a well-known textile wholesale firm in Amsterdam. My father was the purchaser of the socks and stockings department while my mother worked in the sales department. Time moved along without complications, or so it seemed. I was an affectionate and sweet little boy, who was very satisfied with his life. I knew exactly when my dad was coming home

from work as he always whistled a particular opera jingle when he turned the corner of our street. What a wonderful moment it was! I even heard the tune in my sleep. My parents really spoiled me and buried me under a mountain of toys. In addition, I had my own beautiful room that looked out on our street. Our home carried the signature of the well-known interior designer Bueno de Mesquita, who had drawn up and arranged everything with my mother. Beautiful pictures of beach scenes and seascapes adorned our walls. I specifically remember the organized manner in which my toys were put away. There were the balls, the toy trains, the toy cars and especially the books. I devoured them, especially my *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Every evening I would look at the pictures and my father and mother would read to me. It was the highlight of my day.

Our family and our extended family were very close. We would visit each other every Saturday, either at the home of my father's parents in Lepelstraat or at the home of my grandmother in Blasiusstraat, where she ran a small store. A plaque above the door of the store had a wonderful message that read: 'He who is willing to sacrifice will achieve'. It was the very first sentence I learned to read! But my carefree youth ended abruptly.

Even though my family, for the sake of my grandparents, lived a conservative lifestyle, we suddenly began to listen to the radio on Saturdays. We bought newspapers from which the news was read out loud. We yelled, made a lot of telephone calls and hardly got out of the house anymore, not even to visit grandma and grandpa. There was often whispering about things not intended for a child's ears. Thankfully, the daily visits that I enjoyed so much continued. I loved people and liked to sit on their lap and relished the times when they played games with me. They always insisted I do a drum solo for them. I seemed to notice, however, that they did not really come for me but for something else. They signed papers, listened to the radio and at times cried together.

When evening fell, the curtains were carefully drawn. I didn't like it; it made the room so dark.

I attended kindergarten at Victorieplein. Every morning, either my father or my mother would take me to school. I just wanted to love everybody and had my own circle of friends. And I still remember a beautiful girl named Roosje. Her mother and my mother were best friends. She now lives in the United States with her husband, children and grandchildren.

This idyllic period was rudely disturbed. I entered a chapter of my life that I would carry with me forever and that I can never forget. I remember exactly how it all began...