Settling THE ACCOUNT

Listen carefully and don't forget that real stories must be told.
If you keep them to yourself, you commit treason.
Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov

Philip Staal

Settling *the* Account

(Mijn Erfenis)

PHILIP STAAL

Translated from the Dutch by Scott Rollins

iUniverse®

SETTLING THE ACCOUNT
(MIJN ERFENIS)

iUniverse books may be ordered through booksellers or by contacting:

iUniverse
1663 Liberty Drive
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.iuniverse.com
1-800-Authors (1-800-288-4677)

ISBN: 978-1-4917-5166-4 (sc)
ISBN: 978-1-4917-5165-7 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014955134

Printed in the United States of America.

iUniverse rev. date: 01/09/2015

In memory of my parents:
Isaac Staal
Anna Nathan (née Cohen).

To all war orphans.

For Henneke.

Listen carefully and don't forget that real stories must be told.
If you keep them to yourself, you commit treason.
—Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760)

Contents

Part 2: Restoration

Part 3: Restitution

Introduction

The persecution and extermination of the Jews from 1940–1945 was the means by which the Nazis plotted to bring about the "Final Solution of the Jewish question." This extermination was denoted by the terms *Holocaust* and *Shoah*.

Holocaust comes from the Greek word *holókauston*, which refers to a burnt offering to a God.

Shoah is Hebrew for destruction, extermination, downfall.

Seeing as how nothing was offered to any God whatsoever during World War II, but rather, everything was geared to the destruction of Judaism, the term Shoah is used in this book.

The Jews had to disappear but not what they owned. Before beginning the deportation and mass killings of the Jews, the German occupiers (with the help of their collaborators) made a point of looting their property.

The property stolen by the Nazis from the Dutch Jews during World War II equals at least forty-five billion euros in current value. After the war, the Dutch government took it upon itself to return the stolen property to the original owners. As of 1990, this postwar restoration of rights has been subject to extensive research.

As a result of the research findings, talks took place on the issue of restitution between the Dutch Jewish community and those institutions who still possessed remaining Jewish assets looted during World War II.

As one of the signatories of the agreement between the banks, the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, and the Jewish organizations—which in mid-2000 ensured restitution to Dutch Jews—I came to the conclusion at that time that no one had investigated the assets of the more than 1,300 underage Jewish war orphans at the conflict's end. I decided to investigate myself what had happened to the legacies of my parents.

In fact, even seventy years after the Second World War, the struggle of these war orphans to conduct independent investigations into the asset management of their estates has been impeded by countless obstacles and has still not taken place in a proper manner. This book examines in-depth the fundamental differences of opinion held by the opposing parties as to the very nature and desirability of such an investigation, including the historical backgrounds of those opinions.

My book is the first of its kind to examine the plight of the Dutch Jewish war orphans and, as such, it will also be of interest to those interested in the histories of child care and the treatment of trauma of children affected by war or conflict, as well as adding a unique chapter to the literature of the Shoah and its effects.

Settling the Account interweaves autobiographical narrative with historical facts and scholarly investigation into existing archives and documents. The historical facts and the quotes in this book have been taken from *Roestvrijstaal*, Staal 2008, Eburon, Delft, the Netherlands—a detailed and sound scholarly study based on historical documents. All documents are accessible on the website www.staal.bz/ enabling anyone to check the reliability of the source material.

Part one deals mainly with the personal narrative of my childhood, part two with the postwar restoration-of-rights process in the Netherlands, and part three with the restitution of those

remaining Jewish assets which were, in the year 2000, still present at the Dutch financial institution and with the government. The last part ends on a personal note in my quest to find out what had really happened not just to my parents but how my brother and my estate, as well as countless other war orphans, had been handled.

—Philip Staal

Part 1

REMINISCENCE

An Unexpected Meeting

I was born June 13, 1941, on a beautiful summer's day, in the Israelite hospital in Amsterdam, a city which was once referred to as the Jerusalem of the West. Mrs. Monnickendam, a midwife in the hospital, helped deliver me from the womb of my mother, Anna Staal, and laid me in her arms.

It took quite a long time, until the winter of 1985, before I met my mother's midwife again at the Tel Aviv concert hall. Not that I recognized her, after all it had been forty-four years since my first "traumatic" encounter with her. Crying, I had passed from the safe womb of my mother into the unsafe world of those days. At the time of my reunion with Mrs. Monnickendam, I was a married man and the father of four children.

For years, my wife, Henneke, and I, together with two other couples who were friends of ours, had a subscription to a series of concerts. In 1985, one of the couples had cancelled their subscription. Another, older, couple came and sat next to us. They soon noticed that I was speaking Dutch to Henneke. We chatted with them during intermission and before and after the subsequent series of concerts. He had been a doctor in Amsterdam and, when he retired, had decided to emigrate to Israel.

As is usually the case with people who have just met, we talked about everything under the sun. At a certain moment, one of them asked, "How did you survive the war?"

"The war?"

I had fought in the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and the Shalom Hagalil War in Lebanon. I had also experienced the Gulf War and the Intifada. But when Dutch people in Israel talk about "the war" it is clear to everyone they are referring to World War II. The doctor's wife started hesitantly asking me questions. Out of politeness, I told her about my childhood, my parents, and my grandparents. During intermissions at every new concert, her questions started to become more and more specific, questions that could only be asked by someone who had known my family. At one point, I understood they were rhetorical questions. She already knew the answers. Was she looking for confirmation that I was the person she thought I was? It took quite a few concerts and even more questions before she finally solved the mystery and said, "Then I was your midwife."

Stay of Execution

My parents were married on September 14, 1938. Isaac Staal was a diamond worker by profession, and during the Great Depression of the 1930s he had specialized in the manufacturing and painting of ornamental lamps. From this came the electric-lampshade-manufacturing firm, Modern, which in ten years' time had grown into a company that employed several workers. His hobby was painting all sorts of tableaus, which he framed in his atelier.

Anna Nathan brought furniture, paintings, etchings, jewelry, and carpets with her to the marriage. One of the works of art was a still life by the famous German painter Hanns Fay.

A couple of weeks later, the couple moved into a comfortable six-room house with a kitchen on Plantage Muidergracht in the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter. The cellar to this building ran underneath three separate houses, making the residence ideal as a workplace for the factory and atelier.

They lived together in this townhouse with their children. My brother, Marcel, was born on a Friday in September 1939 and I on the same day in June 1941. Isaac and Anna and both of their parents and grandparents had also been born in the Netherlands.

Isaac's business was prosperous. His capital was the company, which the Nazis expropriated in 1942. His funds were invested in diamonds, paintings, gold, and stocks. Before his business had been liquidated by the occupier, he had thought to transfer a great deal of money to a safe place. This cash afforded him the prospect of exempting his family from forced labor and deportation to the extermination camps. My father believed he would do so by buying a *Sperr* stamp (exemption stamp for his identification card), or by going into hiding. The occupier afforded the opportunity of being exempted from deportation by turning in diamonds and precious jewelry. This turned out to be quite temporary.

It struck Anna and Isaac that more and more of their Jewish neighbors were disappearing. Some of them had been taken away by the Dutch police, something which did not go unnoticed in the neighborhood. There were knocks on the door, orders shouted, and beatings meted out with billy clubs. The houses of the deported Jews were occupied by non-Jewish residents. They were rented out by real-estate agents who controlled Jewish finances and the houses of the deportees.

The "Jew hunters" at the Dutch police were paid well, but it was hatred toward Jews that really motivated them. They worked with special police units whose sole aim was to arrest as many Jews as possible, if need be with brute force, and then hand them over to the German Sicherheitsdienst, the Security Service.

But there were also Jewish families who had suddenly disappeared without a sound. This usually happened in the dead of night. They had vanished without anyone noticing. Nobody knew where they had gone. They had decided to go into hiding.

3

Jews Not Wanted

Because I am in the Netherlands on February 25, 2005, for a meeting, I am able to attend the commemoration of the February strike of 1941. The ceremony, near the Monument of the Dockworker at Amsterdam's Jonas Daniël Meijerplein, once the center of the Jewish Quarter, starts at five in the afternoon with the ringing of the bells of the Zuiderkerk. Job Cohen, Amsterdam's mayor and a member of the Dutch Labor Party, is one of the speakers. At places like this, my thoughts always wander back to my childhood.

I have reached the spot, I hear the speeches, but what is being said does not get through to me. Later on, I read a copy of Cohen's speech. What strikes me is that it is the same speech he gave to the meeting of the labor union held earlier that day—but then, with a reference to the role the country's Communist Party had played in 1941. *Apparently*, I mused, *he had considered it more politically correct and wise not to mention that at this commemoration*. Cohen ended with the words: "Only by standing shoulder to shoulder can we face opposition, combat intolerance, and resist discrimination. Shoulder to shoulder, racism never again." The mayor thanked everyone for their attention, which was clearly not intended for me.

I had been born in Amsterdam, which is sometimes called *Mokum,* the Hebrew word for place or safe haven. And so it was that for four centuries, from the time of the Spanish Inquisition until World War II, Jews had led integrated lives in Dutch society in this city. Beginning in 1941, harsher and increasingly restrictive measures were taken against Jews by the German occupier. And the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) eagerly joined in.

Civil disorder was not tolerated by the occupier. Unrest of any sort always resulted in reprisals that were gruesome and whose purpose was to restore "order" and discourage acts of resistance. Violence against Jews in the street was tolerated and even encouraged. Actions taken by the uniformed troops of the NSB became harsher and harsher. They provoked whole Jewish neighborhoods, threw stones through windows, and forced café owners to post bills that said "No Jews Allowed." This led to widespread street disorder in and around Rembrandtplein: there was a fight practically every day.

Today, the Noordermarkt is what the Waterlooplein used to be. But where you used to be able to pick up a nice little something for a song, now the special atmosphere, together with the Jewish merchant, has vanished. The humor has gone. Amsterdam is crying where it once used to laugh.

***

When Isaac looked out over the quiet Plantage Muidergracht from his living room together with his heavily pregnant wife on February 11, 1941, the peace was being disturbed. They heard noise in the street. Faintly at first, practically inaudible. Afterward, the noise of worked-up, shouting men came closer and closer. It took them a little while to realize it was a military unit singing at the top of its lungs while marching down Plantage Middenlaan, past the

Hollandsche Schouwburg, crossing over Nieuwe Herengracht, and via Amsterdam's Jewish Quarter, advancing toward Waterlooplein. Isaac could tell by their uniforms that they were NSB, and he mumbled, "They have come to beat up Jews. That's how the Krauts have been reacting to the disturbances in our neighborhood these past few days."

The next day, Isaac and Anna's landlord, Peter Dierdorp, told him that Communist strong-arm boys had been alerted and had come immediately to the aid of the Jews.

"People went at each other with batons, blackjacks, and iron bars." Even a bottle of bleach was used. Some witnesses testified that shots had been fired.

Once the fight, which had only lasted a few minutes, had ended, a NSB-man Koot lay on the street without moving. He had been beaten unconscious and died a couple of days later in the Binnengasthuis hospital of his wounds. Koot was a collaborator, a member of the NSB movement, and active in the Amsterdam Resilience Department. His funeral at Amsterdam's Zorgvlied cemetery was seized upon by the NSB as one huge publicity stunt to draw attention to the injustice they had suffered. The NSB claimed in its publications that Koot had been brutally murdered. His body supposedly exhibited multiple wounds. A Jew was reported to have been seen bending over Koot's inert body licking blood from his lips. Koot's nose and ears had reputedly been gnawed off, and the cause of death had been attributed to his larynx having been bitten in half. In fact, the Dutch policemen who found Koot reported he had suffered a single, fatal wound.

"This is not good; there's a pogrom coming," Isaac said to Anna. "Come, take our boy. We are going to stay in the Okeghemstraat for a couple of days. When things have calmed down in the neighborhood, we'll come back home."

Isaac was right. The death of the Dutchman Koot gave the Germans cause to brutally show who was boss. Not a week later, two raids took place. Doors to Jewish homes were kicked in, Jewish men were manhandled to the Jonas Daniël Meijerplein. More than four hundred of them between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five were taken as hostages. They were deported to the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Mauthausen, where after a year of maltreatment and deprivation, they would all succumb.

The manhunt in the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter had outraged the general population and was the direct cause of the February strike. Barely two weeks after the raids, a brief public meeting was held at Noordermarkt, attended by numerous city workers. Dirk van Nimwegen, employed by the Amsterdam sanitation department at Bilderdijkstraat, had been designated by the illegal Communist Party of the Netherlands to speak to those assembled that evening and call for a general strike. In utmost secrecy, nearly four hundred workers had come to the Noordermarkt. Dirk knew he would have hardly time to speak; it could only last a couple of minutes before authorities would be summoned. He stood on top of an air-raid shelter built out of mounds of earth and piles of wood, and he spoke in no uncertain terms, without a microphone. "We cannot allow these acts of terror against our Jews go unanswered. Tomorrow, we must strike, comrades."

To speak there took courage, and Dirk van Nimwegen knew all too well the kind of punishment his call would elicit. Those assembled went home in silence. Under their coats they carried the manifestos with the call to "Strike, strike, strike," which they were to distribute the next morning at their places of business.

It was a success. Amsterdam went out on strike. No trams were seen in the streets, no garbage was collected. The shipbuilding industry walked out, the girls in the sewing sweatshops went home,

construction sites emptied. In two days it grew into a massive protest, followed by more than 300,000 civil servants, workers, storekeepers, university students, and secondary-school pupils in the greater Amsterdam area. There was no work being done; it had turned into a general strike. That was the answer Amsterdam working men and women gave to the terror against the Jews: no racism or anti-Semitism in our city. It was a signal of national resistance against the occupier.

The Germans were stunned. Never before had a strike taken place against anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews. But the occupier quickly recovered and violently suppressed the strike. Nine people were killed and many were wounded. Arrests and executions soon followed. Countless strikers were imprisoned. Van Nimwegen was also arrested, but he escaped deportation. Two days later, the strike ended, under pressure of the Amsterdam City Council and with the help of the Amsterdam fire and police departments. Other cities that had taken part were fined heavily by the Germans. Amsterdam had to pay fifteen million guilders, approximately four million USD in 1941. Hunting season for members of the Communist Party of the Netherlands had been declared open. Because of this, another strike that had been planned was cancelled. And the systematic removal of Jews from society, their being stripped of their legal rights, robbed of their jobs and property, and deported to concentration camps continued without hindrance.

***

In the summer of 1942, Isaac Staal had become joint owner of the Herzberg Rest Home at 57 Van Eeghenstraat in Amsterdam. He assumed that his new role would exempt him from deportation. Hitler's army kept up the appearance that they were only interested

in people who were fit enough to be put to work in Germany. For the time being, they were not interested in anyone who was sick or in need of any kind of assistance. This new function did indeed afford my father an exemption in the form of a *Sperr* stamp. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1943, the rest home was invaded by the obliging Amsterdam police on orders from the German police. All its residents and personnel were taken away. As luck would have it, my father escaped, because he was not in the building at the time of the raid. It meant he got a temporary reprieve. This incident made my parents realize just how critical the situation for their family had become, and they started looking for a safe place to stay.

For parents with small children, it was a difficult, if not impossible task to find a place to hide. It was easy for a childless couple on their own but even easier for young children and babies without their parents, especially if they were blond and did not look Jewish. The motive for Dutch Christians to take someone into their homes was naturally to help save a fellow human being. Other considerations may have also been taken into account, especially when it came to young children or infants.

Isaac and Anna agonized for months—considering, rejecting, and reconsidering the idea—before finally deciding to make the extremely difficult decision to entrust my brother and me to strangers and seek another hiding place for themselves.

***

Late Friday evening on May 21, 1943, the time had come. My mother was the first to hear the faint knock on the door. Her heart beat wildly, she nodded at my father, they embraced, both listening intensely to hear whether this was the prearranged signal.

"Open up; it's good people," Aunt Cor whispered, a non-Jewish sister-in-law of Anna's father.

"Where are my little darlings? We have to keep it short; I have to be at the agreed-upon place in Amsterdam in fifteen minutes."

"They're still sleeping; I'll wake them. Here is a little bag with some toys and a teddy bear for them," said Anna.

Marcel and I saw Aunt Cor and Uncle Jaap, a brother of my mother's father, regularly. Sometimes we stayed with them for a couple of days; it was common and easy for us to say good-bye to our parents and go with them. That is why they had arranged for Cor to be the one to take us from the parental home to a place designated by the underground resistance in Amsterdam.

Dazed with sleep, we were given a last hug by Papa and Mama and put into the arms of Aunt Cor. She went out of the door softly, got on her bicycle with the two tiny tots, and vanished in the silent night.

Having arrived at the designated spot, not far from Plantage Muidergracht on the outskirts of the Jewish Quarter, Daan was waiting for Aunt Cor, my brother, and me. He should bring us the next morning to his sister Dina Hendrika van Woerden-Vingerhoets, who lived in the town of Soest.

War

Two days after German troops invaded Poland, the United Kingdom and France declared war against Germany. World War II had begun. The Netherlands, like they proclaimed in World War I, again declared itself neutral. This time, it made little difference. Our small country, just like Belgium and Luxembourg, was invaded by the German army on Friday morning on May 10, 1940. The poorly armed Dutch army was quickly overrun. At the Enclosure Dyke (Afsluitdijk), Grebbeberg, and Moerdijkbrug, the army put up a measure of resistance. Just three days after the German invasion, Prime Minister Max Steenberghe, in the name of the queen and cabinet, transferred government authority in the Netherlands to the commander-in-chief of the Dutch army. That same day, Queen Wilhelmina, together with the Dutch cabinet, fled to London. Crown Princess Juliana and her two daughters, Beatrix and Irene, had already left the country to Great Britain a day earlier and then gone on to Ottawa, Canada.

Four days after the beginning of their offensive, the Germans bombed Rotterdam, resulting in approximately 800 deaths and 78,000 becoming homeless. The German threat to do the same to other cities, starting with Utrecht, led to Dutch capitulation. A day later, General Winkelman signed the articles of surrender in the village of Rijsoord. Seyss-Inquart became Reich Commissioner of German-occupied Netherlands. He was officially installed

by German generals of the Wehrmacht and Dutch government officials in the Ridderzaal (Knight's Hall) in The Hague. From that day onward, he was responsible for government rule in the Netherlands.

Many considered Seyss-Inquart's transfer from Vienna to The Hague as a demotion. At first, he had been federal chancellor there and then governor of annexed Austria. He had the reputation in the German bureaucracy of being too moderate to deal effectively with "the Jewish problem" in Vienna. In the Netherlands, he showed his superiors they had been sorely mistaken.

As Reich commissioner, Seyss-Inquart immediately began deporting people to Germany to do forced labor.

Until 1942, working in Germany had been voluntary but in fact it had been forced because Dutch authorities ruled that workers who declined work in Germany would not qualify for unemployment benefits in the Netherlands. It wasn't until after the February Strike that Seyss-Inquart truly took his mask off. He took harsh and fanatic action against the Dutch resistance and formally made it, in spring 1942, mandatory for all Dutch men, to work in Germany. He gratefully made use of the Sicherheitspolizei (secret police), the Sicherheitsdienst (Secret Security Service), Dutch police, and civil servants to keep his orders from being evaded. During the occupation, more than 500,000 workers from the Netherlands were sent to the Reich, only a small percentage of whom were volunteers.

Seyss-Inquart exercised economic authority over the Netherlands without compliance to the rules laid down by the Second Hague Convention of 1907, which he deemed obsolete. Instead, a policy was instigated for the maximum exploitation of economic wealth of the country and carried out with scant regard to its effect on the population. Public and private property was confiscated on a mass scale, imbued with a semblance of legality by the new German regulations. Among the first measures was the introduction of a number of discriminatory and economic measures imposed solely on Jews. The occupier was assisted in this by the manipulations of Dutch civil servants and financial institutions. This was followed up by regulations that made

it mandatory for Jews to be registered, to live in enclosed "neighborhoods" or ghettos, and to wear the yellow Star of David to be readily identified. A more or less conclusive "legal" system was invented and declared applicable to Jewish property, robbing Jews of all their assets. But above all, it was Seyss-Inquart who was responsible for the deportation of 107,000 Dutch Jews, 245 Sinti and Roma (gypsies), and a few score resistance fighters to the concentration and extermination camps. Only two thousand of them would come back.

5

The Jewish Council

After the February riots on Amsterdam's Rembrandtplein and in the nearby Jewish Quarter, the Germans summoned a number of prominent Jews. They were instructed to form a Council for Amsterdam. This "Jewish Council" had to help restore peace and order. It eventually became the body that represented Jews to the German authorities and was charged with the task of ensuring that orders given by the occupier were followed. The well-known diamond merchant and chairman of the Dutch Israelite Synagogue, Abraham Asscher, and Professor David Cohen took on the task of cochairmanship. They had worked before the war on behalf of Jewish refugees. On February 13, 1941, the Jewish Council convened, comprising twenty members. The joint chairmen insisted that Jews hand in their weapons. Despite the circumstances, they wanted Jews to lead as normal an existence as possible. The Council's house organ, naturally with the consent of the German occupier, was called The Jewish Weekly (Het Joodsche Weekblad). From the spring of 1941 to the fall of 1943, this publication would be the mouthpiece with which the German occupier would announce its decrees to the Jewish community in the Netherlands.

The occupier granted more and more authority to the Jewish Council, whose power gradually increased and therefore its numbers. Whereas the council had twenty members at its founding, by the spring of 1943 it had

grown to over eight thousand. Departments, subdivisions, and committees were founded at various locations. The Jewish Council turned into a state within a state. It could be described as the Jewish government of the Netherlands. To be sure, this "government" only had powers to implement policy. Naturally, the legislative power lay solely in the hands of the German occupier. Slowly but surely, the council imperceptibly became an accessory to the German plans. Jews in the Netherlands were registered and isolated from the rest of the population.

A direct result of the politics of German occupation was the founding of the Joods Lyceum (Jewish Lyceum) in Amsterdam. At the end of 1941, Jewish children were removed from their schools and could only receive educational instruction from the Lyceum at 1 Voormalige Stadstimmertuin in Amsterdam. Its most well-known pupil is Anne Frank. The famous historian Jacques Presser was one of the teachers.

The Jewish Lyceum was a normal school with pupils who came late, were naughty, stayed after in detention, and were absent. But at this school, the absentees were of a different order altogether. Their absence was not just a case of staying home for a day. Every time there was a "disturbance" in the city, the next day there were empty desks in the classrooms. The children looked in silence at the empty places their boy and girl friends had once occupied. Their absence made painfully clear in a few seconds what had happened the night before. Looking at the empty desk, a classmate sometimes gave a slight wave of the hand. That meant gone into hiding. Sometimes he grabbed hold of the leg of a table—that stood for someone having been arrested. This pantomime was played out time and time again.

The pupils gathered in festive mood for their graduation ceremony toward the end of the 1942 school year. Together, they waited with their teachers for the arrival of their commencement speaker, Prof. David Cohen, the chairman of the Jewish Council. He was late, which was extremely unusual for him. Once Cohen had finally arrived and addressed the students, he said emotionally and without any explanation to Jacques Presser, "Every hour that this war lasts is

devastating." Only later did it become clear why the chairman had arrived late. Before coming to the lyceum, he had just received notice that the deportation was about to start. The foundation for the removal of the Jews had already been laid. A forced exodus that would cost the lives of approximately 105,000 Jews, already marked for a terrible death, seemingly safe together, but in reality helpless.

The timetable for the number of Jews to be delivered had been determined in Berlin by Adolf Eichmann. The raids were carried out by the Dutch police with the help of the local fire department. The first big raid took place in July 1942 in downtown Amsterdam, and in Amsterdam South. Thus began the final phase of the Endlösung der Judenfrage (Final Solution to the Jewish Question). The first trains with Dutch Jews departed on July 15 and 16 of that year from Westerbork and were bound for Auschwitz. Attempts by the Jewish Council to reduce the number of Jewish deportees came to nothing; however, the occupier did allow the council to set up a system of exemptions. The council itself had to select members themselves of those eligible to receive a Sperr stamp. It is understandable that when this became known, the Jewish Council was virtually stampeded. People tried to get a stamp that exempted them from deportation. When the raids did not result with the numbers the Germans had demanded, the occupier gave the council the order to fill up the quorum. In this way, the Jews themselves had to determine who would be put on the deportation lists. This is without a doubt one of the most disgusting, cruel, and inhuman acts the German occupier had devised. To prevent even worse from happening, the chairmen reasoned, they remained voluntarily carrying out their "function." The number of Jewish deportees had been converted into names.

***

Once the deportations of the Jews had begun, the Central Committee of the Jewish Council decided in its meeting of July 31, 1942, that

it was obligated to help those who [would be leaving] as much as possible. To this end, a special department was set up called "Aid to the Departing." Sam Roet was the financial manager of this new department. As counsel and chief inspector of the Commission for the Management of Financial Affairs of the Jewish Council, he was extremely qualified for the job. Sam was manager and administrator of the Camp Departments and was a well-known figure in the Jewish community.

Isaac Lipschits wrote in his book *Tzedakah*: "Thanks to documents that have been preserved—an extensive 'Report to the Chairmen,' dated November 29, 1942, by Sam Roet, the financial leader and his just-as-extensive monthly reports—we know about the great deal of work the Aid to the Departing department did on behalf of those Jews on the brink of their deportation."

The professionally organized department of Sam Roet consisted of two headquarters, six sub-departments, six district offices, a camp department for Westerbork, and one for Vught. Five hundred forty-seven people worked at the two headquarters, sixty-two of whom were paid. The 485 unpaid people worked for stamps that temporarily exempted them from deportation. Lipschits comes to the following conclusion:

> No matter what the final verdict may be concerning the Jewish Council as a whole, the social work that took place under its leadership and by its staff meant aid to persecuted Jews—moral and material support. Even though the moral support evaporated in the gas chambers, even though the material support was again stolen on the railroad platforms of the concentration camps—at the moment the support was given, it meant a great deal to those "persons in

> need," and the support given to the doomed was still a matter of justice, of tzedakah.

Reading this I ask myself, is this a form of a tzedakah?

How cynical, how sinister to refer to this support in this way. Tzedakah is the Jewish obligation to perform charity to those in need. The word is derived from the word *tzadik*, which in Hebrew means righteousness, charity. Tzedakah is not voluntary; it is an obligation in the Jewish religion. Even though every form of assistance is an obligation, Maimonides, a rabbi, philosopher, and medical doctor from the twelfth century, also known as Rambam—Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon—lists eight levels of giving tzedakah. The highest form of tzedakah is to prevent people from having to rely upon others by giving them a job or loaning them money to set up a business.

The council officials were fully informed about the German plans and knew what it meant to be someone who was deported. They knew where the journey would lead and the kind of horrible death that awaited the travelers.

Aid to the Departing raised a great deal of money and collected goods from Jews and in this way helped the departed. "For a family living in Balistraat, consisting of husband, wife and twelve children, clothing and undershirts and pants are requested for the children. A widow, whose husband was murdered in Mauthausen, was left behind with six children between the ages of one and fourteen, and she asked the department for clothing and shoes for her children."

The department of Aid to the Departing saw to answering the applications for help. What it in fact entailed was that this department deliberately gave the doomed false hope, *which made the deportations run more smoothly*. That is exactly what the occupier intended: everything had to be organized and implemented in an orderly fashion, those "departing" must certainly not get wind of the

gruesome lot that lay in store. Can the term righteousness, *tzedakah*, be used here? Would it not be a great deal more righteous and the highest level of tzedakah—together with the money collected—to make it possible to struggle out of the claws of the occupier and thereby prevent them from having to "depart"?

The surviving council members and personnel owe their lives and those of their families to their voluntarily having taken on the tasks mentioned. Naturally, no one could be blamed for wanting to save his or her own skin and those of his or her relatives. It just has to do with the way in which this is done. In this case, their lives were saved because they sacrificed other Jews. I am stating a fact. I pass no judgment on it. A saying in English goes "Charity begins at home." But this saying, this form of charity, is a far cry from the tzedakah that is obligatory in the Jewish religion.

***

The raids and fates of the deportees also left scars on the Jewish Counsil. On April 1, 1943, the number of personnel, the great majority of whom were unpaid, amounted to some eight thousand. Four months later, at the beginning of August, their numbers had been reduced to less than a thousand, 369 of whom earned salaries. By the end of August there were only ninety-two male and female regents of the Jewish community working for the council. Ironically, many of them would become board members of custodian organizations after the war. These were the very places where the most prominent members of the accounting department of the council actually worked after the war. Was that a coincidence?

The last Jews legally residing in Amsterdam were arrested and deported on September 29, 1943. With that, the Jewish Council ceased to exist. For services rendered, instead of being

sent to an extermination camp, the joint chairmen were sent to a concentration camp. It was certainly no picnic there either, but there was a great chance of survival. In 1944, a train stood at the platform in Westerbork waiting to take them to Theresienstadt. The joint chairmen would both come back from the camps alive.

Not everyone has the same opinion about the Jewish Council. Were there legitimate reasons for its existence? Could they be justified? Some people show sympathy. Others reproach the members of the council for being accessories to the robbery and murder of the Jews during the occupation. Sam de Wolff stated his view, to which I can wholly subscribe, in the November 11, 1947, issue of the Dutch weekly magazine *De Vlam* (*The Flame*):

> As to collective guilt, Asscher and Cohen may not be held accountable. Nor can a Dutch criminal judge rule on a special case of Jewish guilt. Judgment can only be passed by the Jewish people. And I believe, that one of the oldest nation on earth does not want to decide to further punish those whose terrible failure has already been put on trial by history.

The Looting

The murder of the Jews is the greatest disaster that ever befell the Jewish people. The Nazis wanted to exterminate them as the final solution to the Jewish question. They had to "disappear" but not what they owned. Prior to murdering the Jews, the primary task of the German occupier had been to get its hands on their possessions. Priority was therefore first given to the systematic robbery of all the earthly belongings of the Jewish population. The robbery committed against that segment of Dutch citizens, unions, and companies where Jews fulfilled an important function, was total. It encompassed every conceivable form of property: stocks, bank balances, cash, insurance policies, receivables, sold and liquidated companies, real-estate properties and mortgages, household effects, furnishings, jewelry, and other valuables.

***

A centuries-old and universally accepted phenomenon of war was the plundering of the vanquished people by the mercenaries of the victors. A definitive change was effected in 1907 with the specification of a revised version of the Laws and Customs of Wars on Land (LCWL) drawn up during

the First Hague Peace Conference. It was part of a treaty that regulated the laws and customs of wars on land. The Hague Conventions are a series of international treaties and declarations negotiated at two international peace conferences at The Hague in the Netherlands. The First Hague Conference was held in 1899 and the Second Hague Conference in 1907. Along with the Geneva Conventions, the Hague Conventions were among the first formal statements of the laws of war and war crimes in the body of international law. A third conference was planned for 1914 and later rescheduled for 1915, but it did not take place due to the start of World War I.

The LCWL, valid during World War II, had been cosigned by Germany. The robbery perpetrated against the Jews by the German occupier did not take place by violent force, but on the grounds of a series of regulations. Implementing them was therefore "lawful." Regulations also made it easier—as well as more bureaucratic, legal, and impersonal—for Dutch civil servants and financial institutions to act as accessories to the robbery on a mass scale.

Right from the very start Seyss-Inquart, appointed to rule the German-occupied Netherlands, systematically began persecuting the Jews during the first month of the occupation. By means of discriminatory ordinances, Jews were banned from public life. The goal of these measures was to strip them of their rights, not to mention their humanity. Expropriation of everything they owned was organized by specially established institutions and was supported by a series of seventeen ordinances. The Dutch had made it extremely easy for Seyss-Inquart to go about his business. On the index cards in the municipal registers were not only the names and addresses of the citizens in cities and towns but also their religious affiliation. So it was not difficult to track down the Jewish population in the Netherlands.

In order to make the wholesale robbery of Jewish assets legal, the term Jew first had to be defined. This took place in the fourth ordinance of October 22, 1940. Every business in which Jews had any interest was required by law to register this interest with the Wirtschaftsprüfstelle, Assessment Body Economy. Article 4 of this ordinance gave a precise definition of the term Jew.

Each new ordinance was intended to remove them even further from the existing rule of law, to deprive them of their rights. This process of deprivation went further to remove them from society. Once they had been expelled from the business world, social life, and the civil servant apparatus, their private property was next.

Plans to dispossess the Dutch Jews were, certainly at an early stage, veiled. The real intentions were camouflaged to avoid unrest. Words, such as robbery, plunder, or loot were never spoken, and made taboo. The German occupier had considered that concentrating Jewish wealth would make it easier to steal. In order to effectuate this, they decided to set up two looting bodies especially designed for it: Lippmann Rosenthal & Co. Sarphatistraat Bank (LIRO) and the Vermögensverwaltungs und Rentenanstalt, Institute for Management and Administration of Jewish Property, (VVRA). These two institutions dealt with the management and administration of Jewish property. Proceeds from the sale of businesses sold were deposited at the VVRA. Personal belongings had to be forfeited to the LIRO.

Since 1859, Lippmann Rosenthal & Co. had been a renowned banking house on Nieuwe Spiegelstraat in Amsterdam. It had good connections in Switzerland, England, and the United States. The bank had two business partners and in 1941 was saddled with a German administrator. That summer, the occupier gave this administrator orders to set up a new branch office. The location chosen was the branch office of the Amsterdam Bank at 47–55 Sarphatistraat in Amsterdam. The new institution was named Lippmann Rosenthal & Co. Sarphatistraat, and a German banker was appointed director. The new branch office was given the abbreviation LIRO and had nothing to do with the old trusted bank. It became a wholly different institution. The name was misused to foster a feeling of trust.

To avoid confusion about the names, in 1948 LIRO became known as the Liquidatie Van Verwaltung Sarphatistraat (LVVS) since it was unrelated to the old firm, which had resumed business after the war at its old address in Spiegelstraat.

In May 1941, the occupier established the VVRA foundation in accordance with to Dutch law. It did not pursue its own policy of actively robbing assets, but received liquid funds from other looting bodies, as well as stocks for investment purposes, mainly from the LIRO.

The so-called First LIRO Ordinance concerning the management of Jewish capital, dated August 8, 1941, meant that Jews were required to transfer or deposit all their possessions—cash, stocks, assets, and bank deposits (savings and otherwise from all monetary or credit institutions)—to the LIRO.

***

In the winter of 1941, Isaac too was forced to transfer his assets to the LIRO. He told his wife, "There's nothing wrong with that," or so he thought. "It is a branch office of Lippmann Rosenthal & Co., who I've done business with before. It's an ordinary bank, and it is close to home." Still, just in case, he did not transfer everything to the LIRO. His intuition did not let him down.

The occupier was able to camouflage its plans to strip the Jews of everything they owned through the end of 1942. The appearance was kept up that LIRO was a normal bank where administrative records were kept on individual accounts regarding the value of possessions that were deposited there. Money could still be withdrawn from these accounts to support oneself, pay taxes, make mortgage payments, and pay levies to the Jewish Council. But it gradually became apparent by the increasing number of ordinances, that the LIRO was not only the place where Jewish wealth was concentrated but also where it was definitively swindled from its owners. The LIRO turned out to be a looting bank. From 1943 onward, there were no individual accounts for Jews. The existing accounts were all deposited in a *Sammelkonto,* a collective account. This measure, in fact, confirmed that the accounts of individuals had been liquidated.

Through the ordinance dated August 11, 1941, the Niederländische Grundstückverwaltung (NGV—the Dutch Real-Estate-Management Agency), was put in charge of the liquidation of real estate and mortgages of Jewish property. There were approximately 12,000 parcels of land and approximately 6,000 mortgages registered at the NGV with a total value of roughly 172 million guilders, 150 million of which involved real estate. After the real estate and mortgages had been duly registered, the NGV proceeded to sell the buildings and collect the interest and repayments of the confiscated mortgages. Proceeds were transferred to the VVRA.

The confiscated mortgages were initially managed by the NGV, but all-too-soon, management was transferred to the administrative office of Nobiscum and the General Dutch Real-Estate-Management Authority (ANBO). ANBO sold the houses on to other clients. Both firms, affiliated with the NSB, in turn, appointed their own sub-managers.

Agrarian property had already been registered. Jewish owners had to sell their land to non-Jewish buyers before the end of 1941. The value of agrarian properties was estimated to be seventeen million guilders. This capital also went to the VVRA.

The isolation of the Jewish community had been completed. They were excluded from the job and capital markets, had no more money, and therefore were made completely dependent for their livelihood on the Jewish Council, which received a monthly allowance from the LIRO to pay out benefits.

A 1946 US government report, published in May 2000, called the Dutch financial institutions who robbed Jewish properties on behalf of the Nazis, "the greatest crooks of modern times." The booty was estimated in 1946 to be three billion guilders. At present-day rates, that would reach approximately forty-five billion euro or sixty billion USD.

ז
Uncle Jaap

In 1978, Henneke and I are in the Netherlands on business. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to start getting answers to my many still-unanswered questions. Family members I had met at one time or another had never talked to me about my wartime past and I had not ever been ready to handle it. But at thirty-seven years of age, I figure the time is ripe and start gathering information about my forebears. I have already exchanged correspondence with several institutions. Haim van der Velde, a friend of mine and a fanatic genealogical researcher, had even provided me with my family tree.

I first decide to pay a visit to the Amsterdam municipal register and take tram 2 to Central Station. I then proceed to walk through the city on the way to Herengracht. The Amsterdam city center is rich in contrasts. On the one hand, this neighborhood is known for its monumental canal houses with their unique gables from the Golden Age, the Royal Palace on Dam Square, and the remnants of old cloisters and synagogues. On the other hand, it is full of sex shops, window prostitutes, peep shows, whorehouses, marijuana cafés, and coffee shops. In Amsterdam there are around three hundred coffees shops where cannabis can legally be sold and smoked. I stroll through the city and arrive at my destination an hour later.

The municipal registration office is housed in a beautiful structure, and I am not surprised to see it on the list of national monuments and historic buildings. I walk up a short flight of stairs and enter a large, open reception area with an information desk in the middle.

"Which window do I have to go to get a copy of certificates from the registry?

"Any window is fine, but you first have to take a number," a lady replies.

I take number 365 and wait patiently for my turn. My number comes up on the screen, indicating I must go to window 2, where a middle-aged woman awaits.

"I would like a certificate of residence for my parents, Isaac and Anna, and information about my family."

"Where were they born?"

"My parents were born in Mokum, and their last address in Amsterdam was on Plantage Muidergracht."

"I see in the computer that they both died in Sobibor on June 11, 1943," says the civil servant.

"You mean murdered; they were murdered," I react, irritated. "Can I get a copy of the certificate?"

"One moment please," the woman mumbles and walks away.

A few minutes later, she comes back into the reception hall with an older man dressed in a black suit with a blue necktie.

"Pleased to meet you; my name is Gerritsen, and I am head of this department."

"I am Philip, the son of Isaac and Anna Staal, and I would like some information about my family."

"Shall we go to my office? We'll be able to talk there more quietly."

"That's fine," I reply and together we walk down a lengthy corridor to his office.

"Please be seated. How can I be of assistance?" asks Gerritsen.

I briefly tell him my life history, give him my family tree, and say, "I am looking for any family members of mine who may still be alive. I have underlined a couple of names and would like to pay them a visit."

"I understand and will do my best to help you further. Please remain seated; I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

In 1937, the Dutch government issued guidelines as to what constituted the "ideal conduct" of civil servants. They were not disseminated widely, and therefore, practically no one knew of their existence during the German occupation. It is always easy in hindsight to judge the proper way a civil servant should have conducted himself or herself when dealing with the occupier. But there were, of course, civil servants who had been all-too-willing to work for the Germans. I ask myself whether Gerritsen was one of them. My musings are interrupted when he returns and starts to talk.

"I can only help you with the address of Jaap Cohen, your grandfather's brother on your mother's side. Unfortunately, his wife and the other underlined family members have all passed away.

"During the war, Cor and Jaap lived on Amstellaan in Amsterdam. But," Gerritsen continued, "that avenue no longer exists. I have been a city civil servant since 1939, and I remember that a number of streets in the Rivierenbuurt were renamed in 1945 to honor Allied leaders who had defeated Nazi Germany. Winston Churchill and Roosevelt both had avenues named after them and Amstellaan was renamed Stalinlaan. These three avenues all ran into the Victorieplein (Victory Square), named after victory. One day in November 1956, it turned out that two street name signs in the Amsterdam Stalinlaan had been changed to the Vier Novemberlaan (Fourth of November). It was a protest by a local resident against

the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary. A day later, the Amsterdam City Council decided to change the name to Vrijheidslaan (Freedom Avenue)."

"So since 1956, there have only been two Allied leaders with avenues running into the Victorieplein?" I ask.

"That's right," says Gerritsen.

"Oh," I conclude "if I understand you correctly, Jaap and Cor lived on Amstellaan until 1945, my aunt Cor deceased at Vrijheidslaan, and in between they also lived on Stalinlaan. So they lived at three different addresses without having moved once?"

"Right again," Gerritsen echoes.

"During that same period, I moved twenty-two times."

The next day, I telephone Uncle Jaap, tell him who I am and that I would love to see him.

"Where are you now?"

"In Amsterdam."

"Can you come right away?"

"Is it okay with you if I bring my wife?"

"Fine. You have to take the 25 tram going to Berlagebrug and get out at the Rijnstraat," Jaap explains.

***

It is a hot, summer day, and I am glad when I am able to step out of the stifling streetcar and take a breath of fresh air again. The Vrijheidslaan is recognizable by the distinctive architectural design of Michel de Klerk known as the Amsterdam School. He was born in 1884 and died of pneumonia on his thirty-ninth birthday. His wife and youngest son were murdered in World War II in German extermination camps: Lea in Auschwitz and Edo in Sobibor.

I look for Jaap's house number when I reach Vrijheidslaan. Uncle Jaap is still living at Vrijheidslaan on the corner of Vechtstraat. I ring the doorbell, and a minute later the door opens.

"Philip, is that you?" a man calls out at the top of a flight of stairs.

"Yes."

"Come in."

Once upstairs, I extend my hand, which Jaap takes firmly in his grasp.

"So you are Philip."

"Yes, I sure am."

Jaap pulls my hand to him, embraces me, and says with a lump in his throat, "Such a long time. It's so good to see you again, boy. How are you? Come in. It's a pity my wife passed a few years back; she used to talk about your family often. She wondered where you and your brother had got to and how you were both doing. I still miss her."

"This is Henneke, my wife," I say, and Jaap kisses her on each cheek. He walks into his apartment ahead of us and asks: "What would you like to drink?"

"A cup of tea," Henneke and I answer in unison.

The living room faces the street. There is a television, a tape recorder, and a sitting area with a sofa and chairs. Next to the living room is a bedroom with an adjoining bathroom. "You have a nice view of the square from here," Henneke says when he comes in with the tea.

Uncle Jaap sits down and starts telling us things with a sigh. "It's been such a long time, much too long since I've seen you. How are you? And how is your brother, Marcel?"

"Fine," I reply and tell him about the orphanages, my family, my work, and my studies.

"We—your aunt Cor and I—got along well with your parents. We saw you often. Since I was married to a non-Jewish woman, I did not fall under the Nuremberg race laws. And so me being Jewish did not have any consequences during German occupation.

"In the spring of 1943, when the raids were at their height, your parents decided to go into hiding. They had found a place for themselves and another for you and your brother. Everything had been arranged. I remember it like it was yesterday. It was Friday, May 21, 1943, when Cor left home on her bike. There was a baby seat for you on the front and one on the back for your brother. She had an appointment with a certain Daan somewhere in Amsterdam. I didn't know any more, nor was I allowed to know any more than that. When she got back home late in the evening, all she told me was that everything had gone well and that the two of you were safe."

Jaap was a talented violinist and founder and bandmaster of the Jackson Trio, renowned in the Netherlands. With pride, he showed me the Stradivarius with which he had earned his living. "Those were better times for me," Uncle Jaap whispers with a sad look on his face, before continuing. "This living room still has the double ceiling from the war years. That's where I had your parents' valuables that they gave me for safekeeping. It is a pity though—I had to sell a great deal of them, including Isaac's precious stamp collection, during the war. It was cold, and there were no jobs. We needed the money to eat and to be able to pay for your hiding place."

"What kind of people were my parents, and how did they make their living?" I ask.

"Your parents were sweet people and with a strong social conscience. Your father was a member of the Ancient Order of Foresters, a brotherhood based on the principles of sympathy, public welfare, and the essential unity of human beings. He worked in the diamond industry, and he loved to paint. He was also a talented

athlete and member of the Amsterdam Athletic Club. During the depression in the thirties, he made a profession out of his hobby. It all began with painting lampshades made out of parchment, and in a few years, he had built up quite a good business."

"How come you never came to visit us?"

"We weren't allowed to; your guardian strictly forbade it. But we kept on insisting and did come to visit you once in the Rudelsheim Foundation. When we wanted to make a second appointment, they told us you both had emigrated to Israel. We heard the same story from your stepmother—at your place of hiding—and from the brother of your joint guardian."

"It wasn't until after our marriage, when I was twenty-two, that Henneke and I went to Israel," I say, taken aback with surprise.

After a couple of hours of talking and especially listening, we leave. Jaap gives me a picture postcard of the Jackson Trio as a souvenir from a bygone era. I also get the remains of the stamp collection. It's a pity the album means nothing to me. It is empty and nothing in it reminds me that it belonged to my father.

After that particular day when they visited in May 1943, I only saw my aunt Cor one more time, sometime at the beginning of 1950. My great-aunt and uncle, my brother, and I were victims of the pseudo-psychologists who thought it better for orphans not to be confronted with the past. Aunt Cor and Uncle Jaap were not allowed to visit us children. There was no one around to tell us about what was happening in their lives. Thirty-five years after my aunt Cor had brought my brother and me to a safe place, I found my first piece of the puzzle.

No One Protested

On May 21, 1943 Anna and Isaac paced nervously back and forth through the house. A silence reigned unbroken by the sounds of children's voices. They knew they had acted wisely; after all, the most important thing was that their children were safe. It was only going to be for a short while; the war would not last much longer, and then they would have their little darlings with them again.

My parents would themselves be in a safe place within a few hours. They were ready for the trip to their place of hiding with the De Haan family in Hilversum. Everything had been arranged. Together with the blond-haired Bets, who had been their fulltime domestic help for years, they had buried a chest containing numerous valuable belongings. A small suitcase was packed and ready to go with them to their place of hiding. Their cash, gold, silver, and paintings had already been given to a *bewariër* (custodian) for safekeeping. Payment for the house where they would go into hiding had also been made. My parents were, as the expression goes, flush with money. Our expenses for going into hiding could be paid for in a number of different ways. Cash was set aside for us children. For their own needs, they had decided to offer a painting. De Haan was invited to pick out a painting from their collection. He chose one

by the renowned German painter Hanns Fay. A stunning still life of flowers in a vase. The purchase agreement was signed in triplicate, and it was agreed that my parents would bring the painting with them when they came.

In the frame of the painting, Isaac had hidden a map as to the whereabouts and description of the contents of the buried chest. He thought it would be safe there. After all, no one would take a famous painting out of its frame, and then it could easily be found. Exhausted from the long and emotional day of preparations, Anna and Isaac fell asleep crying in each other's embrace.

For the second time that night, there was a knock on the door. Anna, groggy with sleep, thought that Cor had forgotten something and woke up Isaac. But these were no discreet knocks. The door was being pounded on. The voices sounded loud and harsh in the silent night.

"Open up! Now! Open up! Police!"

They looked at one another with fear. A shock ran through Anna's body; her throat went dry, her face paled.

"They have arrested Cor with the children, and now they are coming to get us," she whispered in Isaac's ear.

The past few months they had often talked to one another about the raids, the camps, and the possibility of going into hiding. As soon as night had merged into dawn, they would be on their way to their hiding place. They were not prepared for this change in their plans for the future.

"What do you want?" Isaac asked without touching the doorknob.

"Are you Isaac?" someone shouted in a flawless Dutch accent on the other side of the door. Again, another violent round of pounding on the door.

Isaac opened it and saw two men standing there. One of them in a German police uniform, the other in black with a flat cap, the uniform of the Amsterdam police. The man in black barked, "Your identification cards." As soon as they were handed over, he checked the names he had on a crumpled sheet of yellow paper.

"The two of you are coming with us. If my information is correct, you are ready to travel." Pointing at the suitcase in the hall, the police officer asked with a cruel grin on his face, "Is that already packed and ready to go?" Without waiting for an answer, he shouted, "Where are your children?"

Anna and Isaac looked at each other with relief. They were happy the children were safe. "They went to Limburg last week with a couple of friends of ours," Anna replied without batting an eyelash.

The man in the black suit pushed Isaac aside, strode through the house, throwing open doors to all the rooms and searched in closets. Having gone downstairs he stepped into the stockroom, leering between the stacks of painted lampshades. When he came back upstairs he said to the German, "Their children are not here; we can leave," roughly manhandling Isaac and Anna outside.

The neighbors were hanging out of the windows and watching what was going on. Nobody protested or asked questions. They had seen this all before, and maybe they were thinking, *Another house for sale or rent for our family or friends.*

"Lock the door and give me the keys," the policeman ordered.

Once outside, on the corner of Muidergracht, Isaac saw his landlord, Peter, who lived nearby. His real-estate office was at home. That had made him feel he could trust the situation. They knew each other well; Isaac had even given him a number of valuables for safekeeping. Peter came over to them. When Isaac gave him a questioning look, his trust was betrayed. The policeman handed the

keys to Peter, who turned around and walked away without looking his tenants in the eyes.

Was it coincidence, luck, or otherwise significant that my brother and I had just barely managed to escape? Had the neighbors heard or seen something? Or was it the people we had entrusted with our valuables who gave us away? There were no general raids that night in Amsterdam. "Decent" Dutch citizens must have ensured that my parents' trip to their hiding place turned into a one-way ticket to Sobibor in Poland.

Just the day before, the doorbell had rung. Isaac, as usual, looked through the little window in the front door. He saw a young man standing there. Even though it had not been raining, the man was wearing a beige raincoat and a hat. Isaac opened the little window and said, "Good morning, what can I do for you?"

The man answered: "I'm Bert de Haan. I had to be in Amsterdam, and my father asked me if I could come and pick up the painting."

Isaac was startled but did not show it. Quickly recovering, he said quasi-nonchalantly, "What painting are you talking about?"

The young man took out the purchase agreement and showed it to Isaac.

"Okay, come in," Isaac said, opening the door. "It's not a good idea that anyone sees you here."

"Ah," said Bert, "nobody knows I'm here. And, I'm not a Jew," he explained with a smile.

"The deal was that we were to bring it Friday night to your father when we came," said Isaac.

"I know," Bert reacted. "But my father had second thoughts—that it might not be such a good idea and even dangerous for a Jew to be walking through Amsterdam with an expensive painting under his arm."

On the third copy of the purchase agreement, Isaac wrote: Painting received Thursday May 20, 1943, by Bert de Haan. And Bert signed it. My father wrapped the painting and mumbled, "Be careful, see you tomorrow, and say hello to your parents."

In those days, a Jew wasn't worth very much. The Germans paid anyone who turned in Jews at least seven and a half guilders per "head." This bounty could rise to forty guilders per detainee. This "bounty on their heads," in today's money would be anywhere between one hundred euros and five hundred euros. Industrious, hard-working Dutch citizens could "earn" a decent monthly salary with this bounty. And, those who could manage it, could also feather their own nests with stolen money, jewelry, and household furniture. Moreover, as an extra incentive to those entrusted with valuables for safekeeping, they would never have to return the possessions of the Jewish deportees. After all, for the "departed," as the Jewish Council referred to them, it was a one-way ticket to eternity.

After a few minutes' walk, Anna and Isaac arrived at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the Jewish cultural center. The building was guarded by the Nazi SS with the assistance of the Dutch NSB. These collaborators were enlisted in 1943 to track down Jews who had gone into hiding. The arresting policemen made it clear to the married couple they were not to talk to the guards. Any questions they may have were to be put to staff members of the Jewish Council who were present in the building.

My parents were familiar with this theater through concerts and stage plays. But this was something unexpected. They couldn't believe their eyes and were scared out of their wits. The building looked like it had been looted by burglars. The stage had been stripped of its sets, and all props had been removed. Electrical wiring dangled from the light installation high in the ceiling. Paintings and statues had

vanished. Chairs from the orchestra pit and in the auditorium had been ripped out of the floor and stacked against the walls. Every light, except for the emergency lighting, had been extinguished. It was insanely busy—masses and masses of people were crammed together. People could hardly move. Isaac estimated that there were more than one thousand people in the small auditorium. And it was hot, close, and filthy. Most of the people were in the main hall, on the stairs, in the balconies, and in the box seats. Some of them were making the rounds of the building. The former refreshment room was now the infirmary. A couple of old women lay there sleeping. Staff members of the Jewish Council were handing out meals.

My parents knew where all these people had to go to relieve themselves. But it was quite easy even for those victims unfamiliar with the building, since they had never been there before, to find the lavatories with their eyes closed. All they had to do was follow their noses to the stench. There were not enough toilets to accommodate so many people: two men's rooms and three ladies' rooms, two of which were out of order. Just like everyone else, my parents had no idea what was going to happen to them. They noticed a group of elderly, crippled, and blind people. One in more need of assistance than the other. They also noticed there were no children in the building. Isaac wondered, *Are these, as they were called, the* work *deportees? What is going to happen to us and all these people? I can declare that young people are able to work. But what I see here is terrifying.* One thing he knew for certain: it did not foretell of good things in the future.

***

The deportation of Dutch Jews mostly took place from the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam, where they were temporarily housed. Before the

war, it had been a popular theater in the Plantage neighborhood in Amsterdam. In 1941, the German occupier changed its name to Joodsche Schouwburg (Jewish Theater). From that moment on, only Jewish musicians and artists were allowed to perform there and only for Jewish audiences.

A year later, the theater was assigned another function by the occupier. Jews from Amsterdam and its surroundings had to report there for deportation or were brought there by force. Young children were separated from their parents and put into a day care center across the street from the theater. On the day they were to leave, the children were reunited with their parents. Roughly six hundred of these children were smuggled out of the day care center by the so-called "children's groups" of the resistance movement. They had tampered with the list of persons in such a way that the children had vanished off the administrative radar, whereby, with their parents' permission, they were placed in hiding with foster families, directly from the day care center.

The building was in the center of Amsterdam on the fringes of the Jewish Quarter, in a busy residential area where lots of non-Jews also lived. This attests to the self-confidence and arrogance with which the persecutors carried out their murderous plans. In a year's time, nearly sixty thousand men, women, and children had been deported to the extermination and concentration camps via the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

In the theater, Jewish artists were confronted with the impossible task of helping, upon arrival, the vast group of people forced to come here. If they refused, they would immediately be put on the transports themselves.

Walter Süskind was appointed chief of personnel. He had been born in 1906 in Germany of Dutch parents. He was dismissed from his position in 1938, because he was a Jew. Together with his wife he had fled to the Dutch town of Bergen op Zoom. Four years later, the occupier forced him to live in Amsterdam, where he settled at Nieuwe Prinsengracht. Like many other Jews at the time, he too worked for the Jewish Council. They appointed him director of the Hollandsche Schouwburg once it had become a human warehouse. He was responsible for the management of the daily running of the building and

Jewish personnel, consisting of doctors, nurses, janitors, and the Department of Aid to the Departed.

Amsterdam Jews were not the only ones locked up in the theater; Jews from the provinces were warehoused there as well. Among the prisoners were those with exemption (Sperr) stamps, the elderly, children, and non-Dutch Jews. The latter group had fled to the Netherlands before 1940, for the most part from Germany and Austria. They had once again fallen into the Nazi trap.

Everyone in the Umschlagplatz Plantage Middenlaan (Collection Point Plantage Middenlaan), the term the Germans also used to denote the Hollandsche Schouwburg, was registered upon arrival. Victims were here because of treachery, summons, or raid. Once there, the waiting began. Many prisoners made feverish attempts at organizing exemptions through the Jewish Council. Some attempted to escape their fate. Most of the time, they were unsuccessful. Their stay in the theater lasted days and sometimes even weeks.

Amidst the chaos, human misery, and cruel oppression by the SS, Süskind's presence in the theater seemed like an oasis of calm deliberation. Practically no one knew that under his leadership, hundreds of adults, children, and infants had been rescued out of the theater. The tampering with the numbers and personal details began right from the start, upon registration. Süskind spoke fluent German and was familiar with the mentality of the occupier. In that way, he was able to gain the trust of the German guards. Because of his position, he was especially able to falsify information about children. His good relations with the German authorities also held him in good stead with the Dutch resistance.

He even had cordial relations with Ferdinand Aus der Fünten, the SS man in Amsterdam, in charge of Jewish deportation. In Germany, Süskind had gone to the same school as he had, and he used that as a distraction. He confirmed, denied, selected, and made life-and-death decisions. He got the Germans drunk, forged fake names on the lists, used every trick in the book, cooked up new ones, and knew on which nights something was possible. Süskind always succeeded. Aus der Fünten never found out that the card index did not tally.

30

The Scar Has Remained as a Memory

Up until the 1980s, very few memories came to mind whenever I thought about my childhood. Some people have photographic memories—they can remember events from days long gone down to the smallest detail. I had never really given much thought to my childhood, instead keeping myself occupied with the future. That is the place where you spend the most time when you are young. *Why should I worry about what happened in the past? It makes you weak and vulnerable,* is what went through my mind, and I asked myself, *Can you just carry on living if you keep brooding over traumatic experiences in your life?*

It must probably be some built-in mechanism in a human being that ensures that you are able to forget the distressing events in your life: *It can't be true, can it, that my parents, grandparents, and family members were so thoroughly humiliated and then murdered. They escaped, are now living in Russia, behind the Iron Curtain—they cannot contact my brother and me, but one day they will show up on our doorstep.*

By taking on this conviction, I avoided the other, much more painful alternative, the doctrine of the Orthodox Jewish orphanage

where I was being raised: *Everything is in the hands of the Almighty, and he has a reason for everything. We do not always fathom why he acts the way he does, but that does not mean to say he acts without thinking.*

This meant, or so I thought as a child, that we deserved to grow up unloved and to go through life without parents or grandparents. There were other children—like the director's children—who were better than we were, because they did have parents. All we were was just poor, dumb, little orphans.

***

One of the most important subjects I took at university was psychology. In 1977, after successfully taking a second degree in economics and statistics, I was back again in Israel, and with self-analysis and professional help, I was able to accept life as it is. I had finally taken my grief out of its hiding place and looked it straight in the eye. Before that, it had lain dormant exactly where I had put it as a two-year-old toddler. Put it with the unconscious patterns that rule this life. With such processes as breathing, the digestion of food, circulation of blood, and a myriad of other patterns of which we are fortunately unaware—until something goes wrong.

Don't think about grief; don't talk about it; get on with your life as if nothing has happened. In my brain, I had erased the hard disc of my childhood. That way, my war trauma would leave me alone. And maybe I would find a magic switch which would turn back everything. Back to the two-year-old who was still living inside me. Back to my family, that is what I dreamt. But in reality things were different.

My inability to come to terms with my sorrow blocked me from being able to make use of my newly acquired knowledge and stature. In hindsight, the timing of my breakdown was of course logical.

I had successfully completed my studies and had reached the age my father never had. But the questions from my childhood still remained unanswered, and there was no magic switch.

Grief is like a weed. If you don't deal with it, it overgrows everything; it takes root in the ground. Then there is no room for other plants, flowers, and vegetables. The time it takes before there are only weeds left, depends on the surroundings. The wound the war had inflicted, had never been treated; it had not healed and began to fester. The pain this caused made it impossible to function properly. It took me a couple of years of therapy to be able to live without feelings of guilt. The guilt feelings, having arisen from unconscious patterns that controlled my life, resulted in my giving the wrong answers to my questions.

I started searching for my past, becoming conscious of my childhood. The process took a long time and unleashed a torrent of emotions. But I had decided not to suppress my emotional anguish by taking pills. After a time, I was finally able to put my grief in its proper place. Not that it has been forgotten. The open wound has healed. The scar remains as a memory, but does not hurt when touched. I know how to live with all the unanswered questions; the unconscious part of my life has been made conscious and has therefore lost its blocking effect. Still, not a day goes by that I don't think about my parents and other murdered members of my family. I know now that it was not some punitive measure because of disobedience or stupidity—theirs or mine. And that it was not because I was not loved or because my parents had "given me away." It wasn't because of me that my parents were arrested and murdered. I know my parents acted and sacrificed themselves out of love for my brother and me.

My caregivers in the Rudelsheim Foundation, the psychologists, and the authorities found it easier not to talk about such nasty and

difficult things as the Shoah and mass death. For forty years, I felt guilty about having survived the war. I felt contempt and rage against mankind in general, that human beings had conceived of and carried out such a horrible thing as the Shoah.

It had cost nearly forty years before I felt strong enough to face the truth. At the end of the 1970s, Henneke and I went to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. In that institute, museum, and monument to commemorate the Shoah, there in black and white was that which I had known about all those years, but did not want to know. For a long time, I had hoped against my better judgment that one day my parents would return. Not only did the books in Yad Vashem indicate where they were murdered but the exact date. The freight train left Westerbork on June 8, 1943, with 3,017 deportees. No one in this transport survived the war. They were gassed immediately upon arrival on June 11, 1943. My grandparents did not survive the Nazi regime either; both my grandfathers were murdered in Auschwitz in 1942; both grandmothers underwent the same fate in the spring of 1943 in Sobibor.

For the first time in my life, on June 11, 1980, I lit a candle to commemorate my parents and the other murder victims of the Shoah. To close the circle, I had to go to Sobibor. At the time, Israel had no diplomatic relations with Poland, so it was impossible for me to go to that country.

An unexpected opportunity arose seven years later. The European Economic Agricultural Conference was held in Poland in 1987. The Ministry of Agriculture invited me to be a member of the Israeli delegation to be sent there. We were picked up at the airport in Warsaw by congressional representatives and driven to the campus of the University of Warsaw. The tenth and top floor of the building was reserved for the Israeli delegation. That would not have

been so unpleasant if there had been an elevator. But the building was brand new and not quite finished, and the elevator didn't work.

On the days I went to the conference, Henneke went on short sightseeing jaunts around Warsaw. Seventeen museums, churches, and palaces were all within a radius of a kilometer from the university. However, Henneke gave priority to getting a hold of travel information about the concentration and death camps during the Shoah. How could you get there? She asked the university personnel and tourist offices. Every time, with the same answer: "I don't know what you are talking about. There were no concentration camps in Poland; no Jews were murdered here." After frequent attempts to no avail and a couple of days later, she tried her luck one last time at the university:

"Madame, could you please tell me how to get to Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Sobibor?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Henneke heard for the umpteenth time.

"You know very well what I'm talking about. You know very well that millions of Jews were murdered, and I demand to get information about how to get there."

The woman behind the counter said nothing, bent over, and took a few brochures out of a cabinet, which she flung on the table. Without a word, Henneke picked them up and went back to her room.

After the conference had ended, the Israeli delegation spent days paying visits to Sobibor, Auschwitz, and Majdanek. They also went to Cracow, the center of Eastern European Jewry. In the concentration and death camps, I wanted to be alone with Henneke.

In the year and a half of the existence of Sobibor, 250,000 Jews were gassed and incinerated, 33,000 of whom were Dutch. Standing by the ashes of the murdered Jews, where trees were now growing,

I said the Kaddish. The Kaddish, one of Judaism's most important prayers to commemorate the dead, is said by the mourner. The special thing about this prayer is that no reference is made to the deceased. And it is also a great exception in Judaic liturgy, because it is not directed to the Almighty but to those present. The survivor tells those gathered that despite the loss and possible anger at God and the whole world, he has not lost faith in the future.

It took me forty-five years after the fact to say my prayer. I was there just with Henneke, but I felt the presence of all the Jewish survivors of the Shoah.

Epilogue

This book is my homage to the Second World War orphans and their murdered parents.

I have considered it an honor, together with others, to be allowed to represent the Jewish community and, in so doing, offer my small contribution to the restoration of Jewish property during the years 1997–2005.

A researcher is always dependent on the sources that are available to him or her. It became apparent to me quite soon that there were no lack of sources on the subject of looting and restoration of rights.

I have only used a small fraction of the information that I have in my possession in the writing of this book. The source material that was used and analyzed has indeed been a personal choice. These thousands of pages of documents can all be seen on my Internet site, www.staal.bz/.

I did not always make detailed notes concerning all the events described in this book, which meant here and there I had to rely on my memory. To the best of my knowledge, the described events actually happened, and I take sole responsibility for the accuracy in rendering them.

This book began in the Second World War with the fact that my brother and I owe our lives to people who risked their own lives (out of free will) to save Jews. This book also began with the fact that "well-intentioned" Dutch men and women informed the occupier of Isaac and Anna's plans to go into hiding, resulting in their being

deported to Sobibor. My brother and I are indebted to the former group, the heroes. That we were robbed of our loved ones is partially thanks to that second group.

Many children lost their parents as a result of the war. The Jewish community in the Netherlands had to conduct a bitter struggle to have these children brought up in Jewish surroundings. I think it is necessary to repeat that fact here. I would also like to add that Jewish institutions, with a great deal of effort and love for their fellow man, took care of the war orphans. These institutions gave them a place to live, saw to their education, and provided material needs to underage orphans resident in the Netherlands. The Jewish custodian organizations took the education of the war orphans upon themselves and, in so doing, received scant support from the Dutch government.

But this book is predominately about the asset management of war orphans by their guardians. About the fact that in the 1990s the Dutch government commissioned an investigation into the postwar restoration of rights. About the fact that (practically) all financial institutions were placed under review. About my finding that Jewish custodian organizations were not being investigated.

After having been deprived of my material and immaterial possessions as an infant and, later, a child after World War II, and confronted by ultimate evil, I can no longer believe in order and morality as ordained by God. I do not want to accept that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Sarah, Rachel, and Leah could have conceived of or wanted this to happen. If that were to be the case, then the Almighty would be nothing less than a devil. My conclusion is that evil is within man himself. Man is his own devil. In this world, one can choose between good and evil. It is up to man to fight against the evil powers, in Hebrew known as *yetzer hara*.

I did not reach this insight because I had become aware that the world had kept silent when Jewish families were being robbed of their earthly possessions, removed from their homes by force, deported, and finally murdered in extermination camps. Nor did I have these feelings because of the infernal German occupier with their Nazi racism, and not even because of the stories told by the camp survivors about the Jewish Council and their fellow camp prisoners. Fellow prisoners who were willing to lie for a crust of bread, to betray other prisoners, to steal. To put it briefly, to sell their soul to the devil and, in so doing, increase their chances of survival. The instinct for survival causes this sort of behavior in human beings. It is the survival instinct of primal man. The words from the Mishnah's *Ethics of the Fathers* (Pirkei Avot) apply here: "Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place" (2:4).

My insight that evil is in man grew out of my research into the looting that had taken place during the war and the postwar restoration of rights by the Dutch government and financial institutions.

Ultimate evil is an evil act or deed committed when one is *not* in an extremely hazardous situation. Absolute evil is a bad deed a man commits to gain financial profit or from the simple fact he enjoys inflicting pain and injury on his fellow man.

I reached the conclusion that evil was in man through certain behaviors (during the war):

- those traitors who deprived Jews of hiding places, and
- those Dutch people who informed the German occupier about others' (primarily Jews as targets of the Nazis) plans to go into hiding, resulting in my parents' and other people's deportation to camps in Eastern Europe.

I also reached this conclusion because of the way the regents behaved with regard to managing the assets of underage war orphans, who consciously "earned" money at the expense of war victims, enlarging our grief to irreparable proportions. That their acts (partly) were in agreement with laws that applied at the time does not make it any easier to make a judgment on this. These postwar laws were designed to restore the Netherlands as quickly as possible—in the full knowledge that this would be at the expense of restoration of property rights for Jews.

Consequently, any judgments made about postwar restoration of rights therefore means it entails judgment on the norms of Dutch society. And, that, in this connection, postwar restoration of rights, failed. The postwar restoration of rights of Jewish war orphans was a catastrophe.

The Jewish Social Work (JMW) is not to blame for this. After all, management of the assets of Jewish war orphans had already taken place before JMW became the legal successor to the custodian organizations. JMW is not responsible for the acts of former custodian institutions. However, subsequent actions on their part committed in the final decade of the previous century and the first years of this one make them (moral) accomplices. In legal and financial terms, JMW acted correctly; in social and moral terms, JMW acted monstrously.

During my journey into the past, I came to the realization that reality was much worse and more traumatic than I could have ever imagined in my wildest dreams. Compared to the larger reality, my story as related here is a veritable romance.

As a baby, the only "crime" I committed was simply being born a Jew. It was my bad luck that this happened in the Netherlands.

It was 1942 in Amsterdam when Isaac and Anna Staal began noticing their Jewish neighbors disappearing. Some were taken away by Dutch police. Some vanished in the middle of the night. As the Nazis embarked on a manhunt for Dutch Jews, Isaac and Anna made the agonizing decision to entrust their children to strangers and seek another hiding place for themselves. On May 21, 1943, the time had come. Dazed with sleep, Philip and his brother were given a last hug by their parents and put in the arms of an aunt who went out the door softly, got on her bicycle with the two tiny tots, and disappeared in the silent night.

Sixty years later, Philip was commissioned to work for the restoration of rights in the Netherlands. When looking through archives and records, he discovered the well-kept secret of the war orphans' guardians' organization.

In his compelling story that weaves between past and present, Staal not only shares a heartbreaking narrative of his childhood as a toddler separated from his parents during World War II and forced to live in orphanages after years of hiding but also how he eventually made it his personal mission to reimburse assets and restore rights lost by Dutch victims of persecution, and search for the legacies of war orphans' parents, including his own.

Settling the Account shares poignant personal narrative, historical facts, and one man's determined pursuit to bring justice to Dutch-Jewish war orphans, and their murdered parents and resolve the mystery of his past.

Philip Staal is one of the signatories of the agreement between the Dutch financial institutions and the Jewish organizations that ensured restitution to the Dutch Jewish victims. Staal, who lives in Israel with his wife, is appointed by the Queen of the Netherlands to Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

iUniverse®
www.iuniverse.com