HENDRIK COLIJN

Righteous Gentile

An interview August 26, 2004

By Idelle Packer

Idelle: Tell us about your early childhood, so we can learn more about you and the events that preceded your involvement in the Dutch Resistance Movement.

Hendrik: My father had a career in the Dutch East Indies. Our family moved there when I was 6 months old and I lived there with them until age 14. So, I grew up in the Dutch East Indies, what is now called Indonesia, on the Islands of Java and Sumatra. My parents, my younger siblings, Rob and Elizabeth, and I traveled to Austria in 1938 when I was 14, and then to the Netherlands as part of my parents' "home leave". This was the second time I could experience my homeland, the Netherlands. Rob and I stayed in the Netherlands for our high school education when my parents and Elizabeth returned to the Dutch East Indies in 1939.

Idelle: Who took care of you and Rob?

Hendrik: Some kind of foster parents, a family that my parents had asked to take care of me and Rob while we were left in the Netherlands. The family's name was Felderhof. They had 8 children: 3 daughters and 5 sons. Mr. Felderhof was an architect and had lost his job during the Depression. Boarding Rob and me gave his family some additional income. The youngest daughter, Anna Felderhof, was later to become my wife.

Idelle: What age were you and Rob in 1939?

Hendrik: I was 15. Rob was almost two years younger. So, we lived with the Felderhofs, our foster family, in the town of Haarlem, about 20 miles west of Amsterdam, and they took care of us.

Idelle: Was this family involved in the Resistance?

Hendrik: Oh yes. They had five boys, and three of them were involved in the Resistance. But we didn't know that of each other. Nobody spoke of it. It was too dangerous to tell people what you were doing. So, as a result, I only found out after the War that many of the people I had actually lived with or knew intimately at school were involved in some way in the Resistance Movement.

Idelle: What age were you when the Germans raided the Netherlands?

Hendrik: It was 1940 and I was 16. I was living with my foster family in the city of Haarlem and attending a Christian Lyceum, a school of secondary education. I became involved in the Resistance movement at that time.

Idelle: What was your motivation? When you think back to what you were like at age 15, 16, what were your influences? What values did your parents teach you, or did something you witnessed motivate you to risk your life for Jews in your country? Did you actually know Jewish people?

Hendrik: The events that I witnessed when I was in Austria with my family in 1938 at the age of 14 made a big impression. Germany occupied Austria: the period of Anschlutz. I met Nazis for the first time

Idelle: What events did you witness?

Hendrik: We were expected to say "Heil Hitler," when we greeted another person, especially if that person greeted us with "Heil Hitler." There was another greeting in Austria, the original Austrian greeting, "Gruss Gott." So whenever somebody said, "Heil Hitler," we would mock them with a funny face and with a return, "Gruss Got." The anti-Nazis warned us kids not to fool around with mocking gestures and words that could get us and our family into trouble. My mother admonished us, "Don't antagonize those people because we are foreigners and can disappear just as easy. Don't do anything out of line while you are here because if you get arrested there will be nobody who can help you." I realized that as a Dutch citizen the Germans could easily grab us up and send us off to a concentration camp as happened to so many others. In town we saw big signs: "only for Jews" and other signs on the theatre, "Jude Verboten". And I understood the racist activity going on. Exposure to all of these things in Austria influenced my thinking.

Idelle: Did you observe racism in the Netherlands, too?

Hendrik: By May, 1940, the Germans occupied Holland. I observed a lot of changes. Ordinances kept passing that limited the rights and privileges of Jews. I found out that Jewish teachers and professors were not permitted to teach any more. Jewish students could not attend school any more.

Idelle: Did you have Jewish teachers in your school?

Hendrik: Yes.

Idelle: So, you did know some Jewish people in that situation.

Hendrik: That's right. And then I found out other things like doctors could no longer treat Jewish patients. Jewish patients could not stay in the hospital anymore. Later on, you know, ordinances forbid mixed marriages. Jewish women already married to Gentiles had to be sterilized. That all became official. Then we witnessed the round-up of the Jews, and that didn't go so well here. Some were severely treated, and with any resistance the Nazi officers did not hesitate to throw you out of the window. This did something to me. I knew in my heart that this was not right. And then after the war I found out about Anne Frank. I had spent time probably about a block away from where Anne Frank's family was in hiding. I never knew that they were there.

Idelle: Did you know people that were part of Hitler Youth Movement that went along with the program?

Hendrik: No, not in my immediate environment. I knew of people that did collaborate with the Germans, but not in my immediate family and circle of friends.

Idelle: It sounds like you came across almost more resistance participation than you came across collaborators.

Hendrik: That's not exactly true because there were plenty of collaborators that made trouble for us.

Idelle: What age were you when you first got involved in the Resistance?

Hendrik: I was 17. I had not been contacted by the Resistance, nor did I know personally any Jewish people in hiding up to that time. But I learned that they were in hiding and that Jewish families needed food ration cards. And since they could not get them through official channels they had to be obtained by other ways. People asked me to help them get ration cards. That meant I had to start stealing them.

Idelle: Did somebody actually come up to you and ask you to steal those cards? Where did you meet this person?

Hendrik: Well, usually there was somebody in my neighborhood that during a conversation would say, "You know, I've been looking for some extra ration cards. Do you know where to get them?" That was how it started. And then I kept graduating from that moment on. So, I would say, "Well, I know somebody that I think can get them." I did not steal them initially, but I knew somebody that could get them. When I got the ration cards back I passed them on again. Then after a while the guy who got me the ration cards said on a certain day, "Hey, I need some help. Would you be willing to help?" And I answered, "Yeah. I'm willing to help." So, now instead of simply passing on the cards, I became involved in helping the guy get them. We broke in at the distribution offices and stole them and got them to the people who could distribute them to Jews. That was my beginning.

Idelle: And you knew what these cards were for right from the start?

Hendrik: Oh yes. I knew what they were for because I had them myself. Everyone needed ration cards to get food. The ration cards were issued on a monthly basis. So, that meant that you had to go after them all the time.

Idelle: I mean you knew that they were going to go to Jewish families that couldn't obtain them.

Hendrik: Yes. That was the hold the Germans had on the Dutch and the Jewish community. You either complied with the German decrees or you were completely left out, and, of course, the Jews were completely left out because they were not permitted to obtain ration cards. They had to fend for themselves and figure out how to get them or became dependent on others to get the ration cards for them. At a certain point, the Germans found out that a lot of those ration cards were being stolen. So, they started putting some kind of armed guards in the distribution offices.

Idelle: Did you continue to steal the cards?

Hendrik: Sure. The whole situation escalated. Initially those guards were Dutch and they did not resist very much when we broke in and took the cards. By the way, prior to the occupation, it was not part of our lifestyle to have weapons, so civilians in Holland did not have weapons. The Dutch guards gave us the opportunity to change that. When we stole the cards, we stole weapons, too. Then the Dutch guards would tell the German officers that the cards were missing because we had broken in and incapacitated them. Eventually, with continued theft of ration cards, the Germans saw that the Dutch could not run the distribution offices. So, Germans took over the guarding of the ration cards at the distribution offices. Then it became armed robbery and shoot-outs to get the cards, although I was never involved in such a shoot-out.

Idelle: What was your parents' attitude?

Hendrik: My parents were on the other side of the world. They were in Asia, the Dutch East Indies.

Idelle: So, they could not know what you were doing.

Hendrik: That's right.

Idelle: How did the Resistance work continue? Did other things happen after that?

Hendrik: Yes, of course. During the war there was continuing activity against the Jewish people. So, the underground work kept expanding. We had the news coming in from England.

The Germans had requisitioned all the radios, so any radio was contraband. It was against the law to listen to any broadcast from outside Germany. But I had my own home made radio, a crystal radio that could get the BBC broadcast. I listened to the news and then typed and stenciled newspapers and distributed them, all of which were capital offenses. So, that was one aspect of illegal work: the distribution of news from the allies. And the next thing, of course, was the passing of general information. If somebody asked, for instance, "Hey, what troops are in your area? Can you identify the unit?" I would look at the emblems on the sleeves of the German's uniforms and pass the information on to the party that was asking for it. What that party did with it, I was never told.

Back in 1940, the Germans appeared to be thinking, "Let's be nice to the Dutch population and release 400,000 Dutch prisoners of war." They wanted us to believe that we were of the same race as the Germans, that we were brothers, theoretically, and should be really thankful that they were protecting us against the British. But many Dutch never bought that philosophy.

In fact, after a while, the Dutch people organized protests against the German treatment of Jews. In February, 1941, during an altercation in Amsterdam between the Dutch Nazis and a group of Jewish youngsters in Amsterdam, one of the Nazi party members was killed. The Germans took reprisals by rounding up a couple of hundred Jewish men, boys and men, arresting them, and sending them to concentration camps. In response, the first general strike began in Amsterdam, a strike to protest the treatment of the Jews in Amsterdam by workers primarily from the buses, the street cars, and the stevedors (people who worked in the Harbor). And from that moment on, you know, things went downhill as far as the Germans' friendly attitude towards the Dutch. The Germans then arrested a number of the strike leaders and executed them.

In April, 1943 the Germans recalled the 400,000 Dutch Prisoners of War (that had been freed in 1940.) The Germans were in need of workers in the armament industry in Germany. So, they figured they could use these people as slave labor in Germany, although a prisoner of war was not supposed to do that kind of work. The Germans didn't seem to care about that. As the former Dutch Prisoners of War were being rounded up, the second major strike got under way, this time by railroad and factory workers. University student strikes followed.

Idelle: How old were you in at this time?

Hendrik: I was 19. During that period the German government called for a forced draft - an involuntary labor service- required of all males between 18 and 40. Some probably ended up in the armament industry in Germany; others dug trenches or other defensive operations. And at that time the Germans also started building up the Atlantic Wall. A lot of those laborers were forced to start working on the Atlantic Wall.

I was still in the last class at school when I received a summons to register for this slave labor and report to the Arbeits Einsatz, the recruitment office. I asked the Head of my school if I could stay to finish my last year of school. He was firm, "No, there can be no exception. You will have to register or jeopardize the welfare of the school. Think of your other school mates." At that time I got no support from the Head of school. I was told that I had to leave school and join the service. In my eyes he seemed too compliant to the Germans. Later, I learned that about a year after I left the school he challenged the Germans on some issue and was arrested.

Idelle: Did you sign up at the recruitment office?

Hendrik: No, I disappeared. I dropped out of school, and left my foster family. I literally disappeared out of society. This meant that I had to find another place to stay, and eventually might have to change to another identity. The first place I found was a farm in Friesland, a Northern Province of the Netherlands where I earned my stay by doing farm chores.

Idelle: How did you find them?

Hendrik: Some friends contacted them for me.

Idelle: And you were the only young person working there?

Hendrik: That's right. I was the hired hand. They gave me good shelter, and I gave them whatever labor I could provide. That was not an easy job for me because the farmer has six girls, age 5- 16, and they did not make life easy for me. (chuckle)

Idelle: What happened to your brother?

Hendrik: He was young enough, two years younger. So, he stayed on with the foster family attending school in Haarlem.

Idelle: Was this family aware that you were a Colijn?

Hendrik: Oh yeah. I was still using my own name at this point, and they all knew who I was – even the fact that I was the grandson of the former Prime Minister. In fact, they had voted for him. I did not have to keep this secret from them.

Idelle: What was your grandfather's name?

Hendrik: Hendrik Colijn

Idelle: You are his name sake.

Hendrik: As well as my father's.

Idelle: When did your grandfather leave office?

Hendrik: He had been prime Minister of the Netherlands until 1939, one year prior to Holland's surrender to the Germans.

Idelle: How long did you stay on the farm with the 6 daughters?

Hendrik: Only a short time. I moved on to a smaller farm in the same district, in part to get away from the 6 teasing, annoying daughters.

Idelle: What was life like on the second farm?

Hendrik: A lot more quiet! I have one lasting memory: The Germans periodically combed the country side looking for people that were hiding out on the farms. So, at some point we got word that the Germans were going to raid our area. The farmer insisted that I must hide out in his underground pig slaughter house. It was a safe hiding place, below ground level with sod over the roof… about eight feet by eight feet dug underground. Slaughtering pigs was an illegal operation the farmer kept clandestine by doing the slaughters underground. Well, I was to find out that I was not the only one. A former Dutch police officer, someone else I forgot who it was, and a Jewish couple were also in this hiding place. So, this was the first time I had personal contact with a Jewish family - right there in that hiding place. And we sat there for at least 36 hours in the pitch black in the excrement of all those pigs that had been slaughtered. The smell was unbelievable bad. We were really choking because of that bad air, but there we sat until the farmer told us that the coast was clear again. So, we climbed out and separated. The police officer went his way, and the Jewish couple went their way, and I went back to the farm.

Idelle: Did you ever meet those people again?

Hendrik: No. I never saw them again. I never even learned their names. This was something else in the underground: you minimized as much as possible getting to know each other for fear of identification. I have wondered about these people, but never saw them again.

Idelle: How long did you stay with this farmer?

Hendrik: Until my grandfather called for me in the spring of 1943. The Germans arrested my grandfather in 1941 and brought him to Berlin for a one year interrogation by the Gestapo. They were trying to prove that he was in cahoots with the British for a secret invasion of the Netherlands… which they never were able to do. After one year, my grandfather was transferred to a small mountain hotel in Thuringen, one of the central provinces in Germany where he was kept under guard.

At that time the Germans were severely beaten by the Russians in the Battle of Stalingrad, the turning point in the War. Himmler, the head of the Gestapo, saw the handwriting on the wall… that Germany would not make it. Now my grandfather had been an intermediary in the First World War between the German Kaiser and the allies, the British, and had gone back and forth between Germany and England as an intermediary to arrange an armistice after which the German Kaiser later found refuge in the Netherlands. Himmler knew that and probably had in mind to use my grandfather to arbitrate his refuge in the Netherlands as he had done for the Kaiser in World War I. Unfortunately for him, my grandfather did not survive the Second World War.

Idelle: Why did your grandfather call for you?

Hendrik: Actually, he first called for his wife (my grandmother). While under guard, the chief of the Gestapo asked him what could be done to make life a little bit more amicable for him in that little mountain hotel. He said, "The first thing you can do is let my wife come over from the Netherlands. Then I'm not so alone." So my grandmother was permitted to join him up there at the end of '42.

Idelle: What was her name?

Hendrik: Helena - maiden name Groenenberg. And then, in 1943, my grandparents were to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. So, again my grandfather made a request to the Gestapo, "Well, since you made life easier for me by letting my wife come over, would you allow my grandsons and my brother and his wife to come over for our anniversary?" Himmler agreed to his request. We were provided with permits to travel, a pass for me, my brother, Rob, and my great aunt and uncle to come to Germany. My grandfather did not know I was in the underground at that time when he contacted my foster family in Haarlem. While working on the farm in Friesland, I received a message from my foster parents that my grandfather was asking for me.

Idelle: Did you accept his invitation?

Hendrik: At first I did not dare to consider the trip. I told my foster parents in Haarlem, "I'm not going because the Germans are looking for me. Why should I report myself?" But my foster parents assured me that I would be safe… that the Gestapo in Germany did not communicate with the Gestapo in the Netherlands. Since the pass would come from the German Gestapo out of Berlin nobody in the Gestapo in Netherlands would interfere with that. I was encouraged and made myself ready to go to Germany. I came back to Haarlem to meet up with Rob and my Great Aunt and Uncle. We all left for Germany in the beginning of June '43 just before my 19th birthday for two weeks with my grandparents. That was the last time I saw my grandfather. He died of a heart attack in September 17, 1944, ironically the day when the Allies landed the paratroopers in Arnhem. He never saw the liberation.

Idelle: So, when you left your Grandparents in Germany, did you return to the farm?

Hendrik: No. When I came back from Germany I told my brother, "You know the pass I have is only good for my stay in Germany. As soon I am back in the Netherlands and I get off the train in The Hague, I'm sure that the Gestapo will be waiting there for me." I made a firm decision to jump the train as soon as we got to the border. And I did just that. At the border station in Oldenzaal at the German Dutch border, I said to Rob, "You don't see me anymore and you don't know where I am." And I jumped off the train on the other side from the platform. Nobody saw me getting off the train.

Idelle: Did you try to get back to the farm in Friesland?

Hendrik: No. At that point I was too far from Friesland. I stole a bicycle from the station and pedaled all the way to a small village in the Eastern part of the Netherlands where an uncle of mine was the burgomaster. That became my next hiding place.

Idelle: What is a burgomaster?

Hendrik: The burgomaster is a mayor. My uncle was a mayor of a small village. I hid at my uncle's home until he had his own problems with the Germans. My uncle had been helping allied fliers that were shot down over the Netherlands to escape. The Germans were combing the area looking for those American fliers. It was not safe for me to stay there. So, on that same stolen bike I pedaled all the way back to a small town near Amsterdam called Hilversum. There I found a pastor that was involved with an underground group, another cell. He invited me into his home saying, "You can stay with me, but you have to assume some domestic duties." So, I became some kind of a butler. The pastor felt I would be safer in operations in and out of the cities with a new identity, so he saw to it that I got my first set of false papers. With the pastor's Resistance cell I again had contact with Jewish people. These were merchants who had a shoe store or clothing store. They were forced by ordinance to give up the shop. They were desperately trying to get rid of their merchandise before the Germans took it. We figured we could pass on the shoes to others who needed them. So, at night we started stealing the merchandise from the owner (chuckle) with their permission.

There was a twist here: some of the Jewish merchants said, "We have everything already in suitcases to make it easier for you. You just pick up the suitcases." We discovered later on that all the left shoes are in one suitcase and all right shoes in another suitcase already given away to another group. Not one pair. The shoes were completely useless as far as the underground was concerned, as far as giving the shoes to others in need was concerned. And I found that a little bit of an unethical situation. We were risking our lives to help them, and it appeared that they were considering the importance of their shoes above our mission.

Idelle: Did you have further contact with the Jewish shoe merchants?

Hendrik: What happened to those people afterwards I don't know because the group that I was with that did the shoe caper was finally rounded up.

Idelle: What happened?

Hendrik: Our group was comprised of 7 or 8 people including the pastor from Hilversum, and one in the group was a woman. Suddenly we heard a report that this woman had been seen with German police officers in Amsterdam. Well, that meant there was a leak in our organization.

Idelle: What did your group do about it?

Hendrik: We met together and discussed what to do about her. We decided that in order to save the group, we had to get rid of her. So, then, at a certain point, the group drew lots, and my lot was to make sure that she was killed. Well, I was kind of chicken to go up and shoot somebody, so I subcontracted the job to a communist group in Amsterdam. I pointed out who she was, and they took care of her. But then, somehow, the rest of the group was rounded up any way. They disappeared. They must have been sent to a concentration camp.

Idelle: And do you think that was because of her leak?

Hendrik: I think so. Or it could have been another leak somewhere else. But I was not there at the time. At the time that the arrest was made I was visiting my foster family in Haarlem to spend time with Anna, my girlfriend (and future wife).

Idelle: Looks like Anna saved your life.

Hendrik: That's right. No doubt if I had been with the group I would have been sent away to a concentration camp.

Idelle: Now it was unsafe to stay in Hilversum.

Hendrik: That's right. Immediately, you know, I had to start getting new papers and find a place to hide. I was at high risk because the Germans knew the name I was using in Hilversum. I went back to Haarlem to do some work for the underground there. Before I got new papers, I became trapped in a street Razzia, which was an operation whereby the police blocked two ends of the street off and combed through the street stopping everybody and asking for identification papers. Anybody without the right papers was held prisoner. When they asked for my papers, I gave them my old papers with the false name, and they said, "Well, stay here." So, I was rounded up in the Razzia, with no apparent way for me to escape. I waited until these three or four German military policemen had about 20 of us so called suspects, people that they wanted to arrest. Well, I had mentally adjusted myself that once I was arrested, "Make a break for it that very minute. Don't wait. When I am somewhere in a military prison I never will have as good a

chance." So, while they continued checking other people, I broke loose and started zig-zagging, running on the street. In the meantime, many of the others arrested started doing the same thing. Suddenly the three or four Germans had a lot of people running around. Well, I think they shot at me once or twice trying to hit me, but they missed. So, now I was in Haarlem without papers. I was 19 years old, and it was 1943.

Idelle: What did you do?

Hendrik: I sought out a friend that was once our house doctor, Dr. Hage, who, as it turned out, was also in the underground.

Idelle: Did you know that when you went to him?

Hendrik: No. He was simply the only one I could think of to get help in this situation. I knocked on his door and said, "I need help, and you are the house closest to me." He said, "Sure, I'll take care of you." So, I stayed there for about two weeks, and he saw to it that I got another set of identity papers through his contacts. Then I could get out again. I went back to Amsterdam. I found another hiding place with the Chief Justice of the Amsterdam court. He was a friend of my grandfather. He took me in. He was also Chairman of the School Board of the Gymnasium, a high school in Amsterdam specializing in classic languages. He convinced me to register in school again. "You have to finish your education," he said. "This war is not going to last forever, and if you do not have a certificate that you graduated from High School you have no way of getting into college." So, he registered me as a student of the Gymnasium.

Idelle: And this time it was your real name?

Hendrik: No. It was not - still a false name. However, the man who cleaned the school, the custodian, knew my right name. He was instructed to contact me if the Germans entered the school and help me escape. Well, that is all very good, but I never spent much time there because I became involved again with a new cell of the underground for which I needed an ID card at the University. So, even though I was registered at the Gymnasium, I also registered as a student of ethnology at the University of Amsterdam. I had to sign the loyalty oath to the Germans that I would never do anything that would harm the Germans, a signed oath required of all students. Under a false name I didn't mind signing anything. And with my permit as a student of the University of Amsterdam I could move around fairly freely. So, on paper, I was a high school student and a college student at the same time.

Idelle: What is the study of ethnology?

Hendrik: It is the study of foreign ethnic and cultural groups. The whole thing was a cover for my illegal work participating in a resistance cell that met on an upper floor at the Colonial Institute of Amsterdam. This institute documented the Colonial affairs of the Netherlands including the history of the Dutch East Indies. My project was completely bogus, a

way for me to enter the building and participate in the Resistance activities. The pretext was a research project of the old Empire of Majaphit that existed from the 13th to the 16th century after Christ. So, that was my bogus job at the Colonial Institute: student of Ethnology of Amsterdam University, registered under a false name. I could enter and leave the building to do my research, but really to attend clandestine meetings.

Idelle: Did you have to spend time at the High School, as well?

Hendrik: Yes, I put in a couple of hours each week at the high school, just to keep up with the work there. It was good that I did because when the war ended all the registrants that were in the final class received a diploma. When I registered I didn't know that was going to happen. The government in London decided the older students who had registered at the Gymnasium were exempt from final exams and would automatically get their graduation certificate. So, in July of 1945 I received a London High School diploma.

Idelle: I am curious. Did the diploma have your real name?

Hendrik: Yes, because by the end of the war I had my real name back, and of course, the Judge who registered me at the Gymnasium had been a friend of my grandfather. He made sure that my real name appeared on the diploma.

Idelle: What was the work of your Resistance cell at the Colonial Institute?

Hendrik: We worked primarily at weapons smuggling, mostly hand guns, pistols, and revolvers. I made deliveries of these weapons to certain groups of people that needed them. One time I was sitting on a tram (street car) with a briefcase full of pistols, going from Amsterdam to Haarlem to make a delivery up there. Suddenly the tram stopped and German Patrols entered from both sides at the same time blocking off all exits. I was sitting in the middle, and it was obvious there was no way for me to escape. So, I sat in my seat. When they got to me, they asked for my papers. I gave them my false student papers. This kind of permit seemed okay. And then they asked, "What do you have in the briefcase." I answered, "What do you think? Pistols." And they said, "Oh, funny." And they walked off. Well, I felt my heart beat in my throat. They never asked me to open the briefcase. So, I made the delivery in Haarlem. It was another narrow escape.

Idelle: Did you continue to work for the cell at the Colonial Institute?

Hendrik: Yes, and then in a month's time… it was now 1944 …I don't know if it was before or after D-Day, when the Allies land in Normandy… I think it must have been a little bit before that… I was on the top floor of the Colonial Institute working on my so-called research with a clerk in the room who was not a part of the resistance and was unaware of my role. I happened to glance out the window and saw German police surrounding the building. I had to think fast. In a split second I concluded that somebody had betrayed my group, and I packed up

everything that had to be kept out of German hands into an envelope as fast as I could and without causing the clerk to suspect anything was wrong. I didn't have a chance to look through the entire upstairs to warn others who might be in any number of rooms. It was a very large upper floor area. I descended the big staircase of the Institute… I was to learn that it was just in the nick of time. As I passed the Germans coming up I gave each a friendly greeting. They greeted me back. They had my false name from my University permit on a piece of paper. They were looking for me, but they didn't know what I looked like. They thought I was with others upstairs. By the time I got downstairs the doors of the Institute were blocked. I couldn't leave the building by the front door. The Colonial Institute was also part of a museum with the institute and the museum right next to each other. So, I took the elevator that led to the basement of the Institute and made my way through a dark storage area filled with museum articles and very old artifacts, across the floor to another elevator that led up to the museum lobby. As I came into the museum the Germans were throwing all the museum visitors out of the building. So, I was thrown out by the Germans with my envelope of papers in my pocket.

Idelle: As a visitor?

Hendrik: As a visitor. Another close escape, and of course, I lost my identity as a University student. The Germans had my name on their list. I could not use that ID card and I could not return to that cell. I learned later that the Germans arrested many in that cell. What happened to any of them, I don't know. I never hear from anyone from that group at the Colonial Institute again.

Idelle: What did you do?

Hendrik: I went back to Haarlem to my foster family to hide again until I could get some other papers. Those student papers by the end of '44 didn't do that much good anyway. The only thing I could do was get another name without any specific permit. At a certain point in the fall of 1944 I learned that my friend, the Chief Justice of the Amsterdam court, knew a tenant farmer from Monnikendam, a town north of Amsterdam. He made an arrangement that this tenant farmer would take me in, so through the kindness of the judge, I had another place to go. It was very risky to travel because I didn't have new papers. Yet, I knew I had better get out of Haarlem to a new hiding place. I got on my bicycle that had no tires and rode off on the steel rims only, which killed my kidneys on the cobble stones. I had moved only about 2 or 300 feet out of a little side street into the main street when two young German SS officers, maybe 17 or 18 years old, came up on their bicycles with tires, and seeing me, immediately turned to block me in on both sides. With no papers, I was arrested. I knew I was in deep trouble.

Idelle: That's the first time you were actually arrested.

Hendrik: That's right, except for the time when I was stopped by the Germans and got away by running and creating chaos that helped me escape. This time there was nowhere to run. I was the only one, unable to move with two machine guns pointing at me. Suddenly, Anna, my

girlfriend (and future wife) yelled, “Oh, they are arresting him.” She and her sister, Ida, saw me from the house. Ida walked out of the house and started pleading with the guys to let me go. The two guys kept looking at each other and to Ida, a nice young girl. And suddenly one soldier said, “We really don’t have a quota tonight.” And they spoke among themselves about what it would take to let me go. Then they seemed to come to an idea and one of the soldiers asked, “Do you have real coffee made from coffee beans?” These youngsters had never tasted in their whole life real coffee from coffee beans. Chicory was used in Germany during war time. Ida said, “Yeah, we’ve got some coffee beans.” These were coffee beans sent by my parents five years earlier out of the Dutch East Indies to give to my foster family, a whole crate with tea and coffee beans. These supplies had been used throughout the war as barter, along with cheese. And there were still a few coffee beans left, maybe a handful of coffee beans. So, we went back to the house and Ida said sweetly, “Yes, come right in the house.” I could hardly believe it.

Idelle: This time your parents saved your life with their coffee.

Hendrik: That’s right. I’m very apt to go for a cup of coffee. Every time I see a cup of coffee I think, “This is what saved my life.” So, we went in the house. The Germans sat down, put their machine guns in the corner, and told me to watch them. So, there I stood with those loaded machine guns. I could have shot the heck out of them, but that would have killed the whole family. Running would do nothing because they knew where I was staying. We all waited while the girls ground the coffee with the old coffee grinder, a box with a handle, and the water was boiled and poured through the coffee grounds. And then the coffee had to set. It took about an hour and a half all told. In the meantime, I was sitting in the corner like a dunce, like a school boy, waiting and knowing that they could finish the coffee and still take me. There would be no way to prevent that. When they had their fill and were ready to leave, they said to me, “Don’t let us see you again because the next time we’ll not be so easy on you.”

Idelle: Did you ever hear from them again?

Hendrik: No, because I didn’t stay long enough to find out if they might come back. When the soldiers left I told my foster family, “I cannot stay here. The next time they have a quota they know where to find me. I better leave for the farm north of Amsterdam as soon as possible.” So, my future wife, Anna, decided to drive a few hundred yards ahead of me to be able to warn me if there were any more German patrols.

We rode to the farm in Monnikendam, both of us on bikes without tires. I had the address. Anna dropped me off and then pedaled all the way back. Later on, I met a widow of one of the resistance leaders that had been executed in Haarlem as a public reprisal; 20 people in all were shot. And the widow was now living in Edam with a couple of small kids and was looking for some domestic help. So, I suggested to Anna to come up again and stay with that family. Mr. Felderhof, Anna’s father, had died in 1942, and her mother was bringing up all those children by herself. During that severe winter of “44 thousands of people in Amsterdam were starving. Many died of starvation. I thought, “Even though it is a small house and broken down, at least she will

be out of the Haarlem area. Her mother will have one less mouth to feed, and in Edam Anna will have enough food and she will not starve." I brought her up and she stayed through the rest of the war.

In the meantime, I found out again, though I was not looking for it, that that farm where I was staying in Monnikendam was used for weapons droppings from the Royal Air Force. So I joined the group that was receiving the weapons there. I became part of what they called KP, an abbreviation for an armed resistance group. I did that for the rest of the winter, working on the farm during the day milking cows, and going down to the meadows at night to retrieve 5 or 6 weapon droppings by parachute.

Idelle: The Royal Air Force was dropping weapons by parachute and you were running out to get them?

Hendrik: Yes, by parachutes, they dropped large cigar-shaped containers, 8 feet long and about 24 inches in diameter. Some of them were dropped without the parachute opening. These were lost into the meadows and we couldn't retrieve them.

Idelle: Where did you bring the ones you recovered?

Hendrik: We piled them into a barn, buried the parachutes, and also later on buried the containers themselves. The weapons were all heavily greased and had to be cleaned and then shipped in milk cans to the resistance movement in Amsterdam. In the meantime we did some self-instructed weapons training among ourselves in the barn. We learned how to operate weapons such as stenguns and bazookas with pictures as small as comic strips for directions. Occasionally there was a wrong shipment meant for somewhere like Yugoslavia. All the directions were in Yugoslavian which we couldn't read. Then, we had to experiment to figure out how to use these weapons. One time someone inadvertently pulled the trigger and shot about 38 bullets all around. Miraculously, nobody got hurt. Another time we had a bazooka, and someone said, "Let's see what happens if I pull this trigger." He had no idea that a big flame comes out of the back end of this kind of bazooka. We nearly burnt the barn down. I don't know how we survived those self-instructed sessions in weapons training.

Idelle: When did you ever see your brother again?

Hendrik: I saw him at the end of the war in the spring of '45. He came up from Haarlem to see me in Monnikendam. We sat on the big dike of the Ijselmeer. Across the Ijselmeer on the horizon we could see the fire of gun flames. It was the Canadian Army moving at that time on the East side and actually cutting Holland off. They didn't want to jeopardize the millions of people that were where we were in the West. The Canadians were sweeping around the Ijselmeer isolating the Western part of the Netherlands and the few remaining German divisions there. Even though we could see that gunfire across the lake, my brother asked, "Why don't we steal a rowboat and go over to the other side." I said, "There is no way." I knew that a German

company of SS Wasser Schutz Polizei had come across to our side trying to escape from the Canadians, and had just taken over a school in Monnikendam. I went on, “With those Germans having patrol boats, and us in a row boat, we would never make it. They would shoot us if they notice us trying to get to the other side.” So, I discouraged him from going over to the other side. That is the last time I saw him during the war. I did see him later on when I came back to Haarlem.

Idelle: Did the Canadians overtake the Germans in that school?

Hendrik: Later I was involved in that situation. Our resistance group surrounded the school where the Germans were staying. It became a stalemate because there was a square in front of the school. If we showed our faces they could shoot at us and if they showed their faces we could shoot at them. So, it remained a stalemate… until the liberation. The first day went by and we didn’t see any of the allied troops. Amsterdam was full of Canadians, and still, the second day went by we don’t see anybody, and then suddenly on the third day, a small patrol wagon from the Canadian Army stopped in the middle of that square to survey the situation, and then disappeared. We thought, “What the heck are we going to do now?” A couple of hours later a whole company of French-Canadian troops came into the square with their wheeled tanks, cannons and machine guns, and suddenly turned all weapons, not at the Germans, but at us. We were disarmed. We are the dangerous people according to the French-Canadians, not the Germans.

Idelle: What happened after you were disarmed?

Hendrik: It took a long while to get over this disappointment. After holding out for days, we thought at last the Allies would beat the hell out of the Germans. Instead, we were the ones disarmed. After I overcame that kind of a letdown, I went to Anna who was still staying in Edam. I suggested, “Let’s go back to Haarlem where I can join a new commando battalion that is being formed.” I intended to liberate my parents who were prisoners of the Japanese in concentration camps in the Dutch East Indies.

Idelle: How did you learn what had happened to them?

Hendrik: I assumed they were alive, although at this time I did not know for sure. In November, 1945 I had received a telegram from the Red Cross stating that my mother and sister were alive in a concentration camp and that my father was still alive in a prison in the city of Bandung.

Idelle: Did you join the battalion that you thought would lead you to your parents?

Hendrik: Yes, but during a military exercise I was shot in the hand. The injury disqualified me from going with the battalion to Australia. At that time my grandmother came back from Germany. My grandfather had died in September ’44. We cried on each other’s

shoulders for a while, and then she made a proposal that I return to college. She actually made it possible for me to go to the University of Delft to get my Engineering degree. Looking back on it, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. But at that time, I was deeply disappointed that I could not serve in the army to liberate my parents.

Idelle: You still wanted to fight and make another mark in history.

Hendrik: That's right, but particularly to liberate my parents.

Idelle: And what happened to your parents?

Hendrik: Well, I learned their full story after the war when we were united. My parents had been captured on the Island of Java by the Japanese in March of '41. My father was managing Director of Aneta, the Dutch News Agency. So, he had access to a lot of radio equipment including radio transmitters. After the surrender of the Dutch army in the Dutch East Indies he utilized those transmitters to keep in touch with the exiled government workers in Australia. And somebody told on him. He was arrested. After severe torture he was finally sentenced to death. For some reason it was changed to life-long imprisonment. So, he was placed in military prison in the city of Bandung on the Island of Java where he was pretty much chained to a wall for one or two years. Meanwhile, my mother, a Red Cross Nurse, was sent about 400 miles away to a concentration camp in Batavia (now called Djakarta) along with her sister and my sister, Elizabeth.

Finally my father was rescued by troops that let him out of the prison. When he was pulled out from his position chained to the wall, he was more dead than alive, his muscles atrophied. He was placed with 12 other dying patients in a small hospital pretty much to die.

My mother, still some 400 miles away in the concentration camp, heard by some rumor that her husband was in this little hospital. She left Elizabeth with her aunt in Batavia and moved through enemy territory - rebel territory. How she did it, I don't know. But she came to that hospital, walked along the 12 beds and did not recognize her husband. When she had last seen my father he was a good 200 pound man. In his hospital bed he was a mere 80 pounds of skin and bones with a white beard. It was he who recognized my mother. He lifted up his hands, and then she recognized him. She asked permission of the hospital doctor, as a nurse, to be able to treat those 12 patients. My father was the only survivor. The others had no will to live. My father now had beri-beri, a sickness that swells the body with water and weakens the heart. There was no penicillin at the time. So, she treated him with sulfur medication, enough to kill a horse, because he had about every tropical disease in the book.

When he was finally well enough to the point we could transport him, sometime in November, 1945, he and my mother were transported in British Indian Army military trucks from Bandung to Batavia. A few weeks later my father was evacuated by plane to the Netherlands. The British did not non-military personnel to leave by plane, so my mother and sister and aunt had to wait

about 6 more months to get passage to the Netherlands, this time by ship, a returning troop carrier from the Dutch Navy which had landed fresh troops on Java. Finally my family was united in the Netherlands.

Idelle: What was it like to see your father?

Hendrik: When I saw my father in January of 1946, he was terribly changed. He was only 47 years old, but he looked like a man of 90. He lived to see my mother and sister arrive in the Netherlands, but died fairly soon afterwards form his failing heart, the result of beri-beri, and the assault on his body from other tropical diseases and the muscle atrophy of all his muscles from being hung upside down in prison.

Idelle: Where did your family live upon returning to the Netherlands?

Hendrik: Housing was a terrible difficulty at that time. The house of my grandparents had been completely demolished by the Germans to build a tank ditch. Fortunately, through a government benefit my grandmother was given a house. Rob continued to live with the Felderhof family. My grandmother, mother, father, sister and I all lived in this house. Eventually my bride, Anna, moved in, too. We were three generations living in this house until I finally decided to emigrate first to England for one year and then to the United States in 1953.

Idelle: Where were your children born and raised? How did you choose where to live in the US? And when did you move to Western North Carolina?

Hendrik: My first son, Hendrik, was born in England where we lived for one year while I worked for the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. My other four children were born in the United States where we were able to be transferred by Goodyear. We lived in Akron, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and moved to western North Carolina in 1993. Our children live in the United States and we have 7 grandchildren and 8th on the way, a girl soon to be adopted.

Idelle: Pretty amazing story.

Hendrik: And then after the war, after I came to the United States, I made a trip to Spain where I met Judge Wapner. Judge Wapner was a Jew. When he retired he accepted a job as the host of a television program where he became a judge for the common people. I met him on this trip to Spain when I was on vacation. When he heard my story, he gave me a title I had never heard before a …

Idelle: A righteous gentile.

Hendrik: That's right. And I said, "What does that mean?" He explained, "This is the title we give to people who help the Jewish people." I reflected, "It sounds like an honorable title. I'll accept it."

Idelle: Yes, it's definitely an honorable title. And, in fact, on the website there are stories of Holocaust survivors, but no story of a gentile who lived through the same period fighting for the Resistance. When I met you I felt curious to hear your story. I decided, "I am going to interview you and find out how you helped my people."

Hendrik: Although I had relatively little contact with Jews – I witnessed events from a distance and heard stories of what was happening to the Jews. It was in this way that I was confronted with their tribulations every day. So, I did not meet a lot of Jewish people, but I helped a lot of Jewish people - people that I had never met.

Idelle: That's right. And you risked your own life many times. But the alternative was to surrender to the program of the Nazis, and that was unthinkable to you.

Hendrik: Definitely.

Idelle: I think your parents instilled in you a very strong sense of right and wrong. After all, their own bold actions caused them to be arrested and sent to camps.

Hendrik: When I saw my parents, they were amazed that I was still alive because they expected that I would not collaborate with the Germans, and they knew the stakes were very high if I chose to work against the Germans.

Idelle: Did you stay in touch with Anna's family? Have you both returned to the Netherlands over the years since you have lived in the United States? What happened to Elizabeth and Rob? Are they still living?

Hendrik: Yes. We have made frequent trips to see Anna's family. My sister, Elizabeth, lives in the Netherlands, and my brother, Rob, who first emigrated to Brazil, now lives in California. He is visiting me next week!

Idelle: Any other thoughts?

Hendrik: I want to add that in spite of the efforts of the Dutch Resistance, the Jews did very poorly in the Netherlands. The survival rate of the Netherlands was 25% of the 140,000 Jews, about 35,000. I believe the ability for the Jews to hide in Holland was made more difficult because 2/3 of Holland is below sea level. There are no mountains, no big forests where people can hide. In Belgium and France there were both mountains and forests, and as a result of that, I believe, the survival rate of the Jews in Belgium was 60% and in France 75% simply because there were more places to hide.

Idelle: Thank you for sharing your experiences and insights with us.