

The Holocaust in Holland

We arrived in The Netherlands in the spring of 1939. About 140,000 Jews lived there, 15,000 of them refugees like us. We moved to a small apartment in Amsterdam and were supported by the Dutch Jewish community. My grandmother took care of me while my mother spent her days looking for work and seeking ways to get back across the Atlantic Ocean to my father. WWII began on September 1, 1939, and all hope evaporated when the Nazis invaded Holland on May 10, 1940. Every single Jew in Nazi controlled areas were victims of their hateful racist policies.

Once the Queen of the Netherlands had fled her country, the Nazis developed a strong Dutch following. By the end of the war, 90% of all the Jews that lived in The Netherlands were murdered by the Nazis—one of the highest rates of all Nazi-occupied nations.

Registration of all Jews, their properties and economic assets was the first step in the Nuremberg Laws. This economic destruction led to physical annihilation. In 1941, Jews were banned from public life. We were not allowed to walk on sidewalks, sit on park benches or play in playgrounds. Jews were restricted to living in certain areas of the city. The Nazi Gestapo, in cooperation with the Dutch police under the Nazi-controlled administration, took Jews right off the streets and from their homes daily. We did not know what happened to people; they 'disappeared'.

“When we heard about the conditions in the concentration camps, we thought it was impossible. Now that I am experiencing it myself, the question that I ask is: how can this happen in the 20th century?”

*—letter from Julius Hermanns,
St. Louis passenger*

*Grandma Regina,
died in Westerbork Camp*

I was 6-years-old in April 1942, when we were ordered to wear a yellow star with the word “Jew” (in Dutch, “Jood”) on our clothing. My grandma sewed them carefully onto my coat and let me play out on the street below. She sat worriedly at our third story window, watching me, calling my name and waving.

One day I was sitting with Grandma in our apartment when men began banging and yelling at our door. My Grandma hid me in the broom closet while she opened the door. She must have convinced them that she was alone, and saved my life. I never saw her again. When my mother got home, she grabbed me, packed a few things, and we were on the run, hiding in many different places.