

How I Knew and When

Age 8 – My father hangs upside down on a pipe that was part of a fence that separated our street from the next. All of his change falls from his pockets. He looks so young.

Age 15 – “There were one hundred and four girls in the Israelitisch Meisjes Weeshuis orphanage in Amsterdam. Four survived,” my mother says.
“I remember Juffrouw Frank, the headmistress. She made us drink cod-liver oil each morning. She said it was healthy for us.”

Age 17 – My father tells me his father and sister, Ruth, got out of Germany and went to Rotterdam. They were supposed to leave on May 11, 1940, for America. The Nazis invaded on May 10.

Age 21 – My mother tells me Tante Amalia told her that on the Queen Elizabeth to America in 1947, after she and Onkel David were released from an internment camp on the Isle of Man, she was so hungry she ate twelve rolls every day at breakfast. She said it was the best time she ever had.

Age 24 – My father tells me, “Otto Reis got out of Germany in 1941. He took a train to Moscow, the Trans-Siberian railroad to Vladivostok, a boat to Shanghai, a boat to Yokohama, a boat to San Francisco, and a bus to Philadelphia, his wife and three sons staying behind. Carola Stein signed affidavits for them, but the government said she didn’t make enough money.”

Age 31 – My mother’s cousin refuses to accept money a rich woman left him. He says the money has too much blood on it. My mother tells me that in 1939 her cousin had asked this woman to sign affidavits for his wife and two daughters. She said no.

Age 33 – My father asks me to dial the number. His hands shake. He asks my cousin Judy if she wants to send her three children out of Israel during the Gulf War. She says she can’t let them go.

Age 42 – A waiter in a Jerusalem hotel tells my father he should come to live in Israel, because it’s home. My father tells him, “Home is anywhere they let you in.”