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The Lost Neshomeh
Experience of loneliness among five elderly Dutch Jewish widows

by
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Abstract

A recently published demographic study of the Jewish population in the Netherlands has described an ethnic minority which belongs to the social economic as well as intellectual upper class. In spite of this positive picture, loneliness was a problem perceived by many. A qualitative study of five elderly Jewish widows living in Amsterdam describes this loneliness as estrangement from family, community and the broader society. Discontinuity in their lives caused by the Holocaust is a theme which underlies each of the respondents stories. The confrontation with their Jewish identity is often ambivalent and related to loss, antisemitism and displacement whereas positive identifying factors remain principally in the realm of memories of a past life. Generative activity such as the passing on of traditions which would help to connect the elderly to life have been insufficient, causing impoverished personal relations. This study suggests that the concept of generativity as defined by Erikson and further developed by Kotre would provide an interesting orientation for further research on loneliness within a cultural context.
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I. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A recent demographic study of the Jewish population in the Netherlands has shown that Dutch Jews of all ages experience higher levels of loneliness than do members of the population in general as measured by the loneliness scale developed by de Jong Gierveld & van Tilburg (see Appendix I). The OJIN 1999 study (Onderzoek onder de joden in Nederland) concluded that the Jewish population, estimated at between 41,000 and 45,000, belongs to the social, economic as well as intellectual upper class. In spite of this, loneliness was a problem perceived by many (Solinge & de Vries, 2001: 44-45). The most probable cause for the high levels of loneliness suggested by the authors of the OJIN study were the lasting effects of World War II that resulted in the destruction of Jewish community life in the Netherlands. Members of a symposium held for the volunteers of the Jewish Social Services Foundation (JMW) in 2002 supported a similar interpretation. Loneliness came to the foreground as the most important topic. A number of factors were discussed that the participants felt were crucial to the Jewish experience of loneliness: fear of social isolation, relationship problems, issues of identity and the patchwork nature of Jewish life in the Netherlands (see Appendix II). As many of these interpretations are based on experiences of health professionals and volunteers working in the field, this study will be an attempt to elaborate on these findings by means of an in depth study of five elderly widows. The qualitative research findings will further be discussed within a theoretical framework.

Research to date has produced a mixed picture of the influence of culture on feelings of loneliness. The purpose of this study is to clarify some of the ambiguities.
The assumption underlying much of this previous research, that 'feelings of loneliness are expressive of the individual's relationship to the community' (Jylhä and Jokela, 1990: 297 and Rokach and Bacanli, 2001: 173), will be looked at more critically. Culture is an amorphous entity. Most people live their lives without awareness that many of their simplest daily activities are part of the culture to which they belong. It is the confrontation with 'the other' that makes cultural differences apparent. In the case of the Jewish people, reminders of their Jewish identity are ever present. Modern Jewish identities are said to be in transition but whatever expression they may take, most Jews are aware of the positive as well as the negative aspects of the legacy into which they were born. Those who follow the religious teachings with conviction may cherish positive feelings about their Jewish identity and enjoy a generally good relationship to the community, resulting in sufficient social support. Most Jews, however, are straddling two worlds and as such experience regular reminders of their position as a cultural minority especially during times when anti-Semitism is increasingly tangible. If indeed, loneliness is expressive of the individual's relationship to the community, it is relevant to examine this relationship.

This research will follow two lines of investigation. The main question concerns individual perceptions of loneliness: how do the informants understand and express their feelings of loneliness? The second line of inquiry will examine the individual's relationship to the community to which he is bound by culture as well as to the outside world. Data will be collected in the form of personal experiences. The concept of generativity, coined by Erikson and further developed by Kotre will be introduced for the purpose of data analysis. Finally, themes will be developed in order to provide a context for further research of loneliness within the cultural context.
II. Theory

Definitions and Paradigms

Definitions of loneliness

Loneliness research has intensified over the last 30 years and continues to open up new horizons in the investigation of human relationships. Most people have an intuitive sense of what loneliness means, but for purposes of research, many definitions have been proposed. The many conceptualizations on loneliness in past research converge on four basic assumptions:

(a) It involves deficiencies in social relations.
(b) It is subjective and dependent on an individual's expectations and perceptions.
(c) It is unpleasant.
(d) It motivates efforts to alleviate it. (Peplau & Perlman, 1982: ch.1)

Once a definition has been established, measurement is attempted. The loneliness model developed by de Jong Gierveld and van Tilburg (1999) was used to measure loneliness in the OJIN project. Based on the cognitive theoretical approach to loneliness, the emphasis is on the discrepancy between what one wants in terms of interpersonal affection and intimacy and what one has: the greater the discrepancy, the greater the loneliness. This model defines loneliness as a feeling resulting from an insufficiency in quantity and or quality of social contacts (de Jong Gierveld & van Tilburg, 1999: 3). The level of loneliness can then be said to be based on unmet expectations of emotional support. The goal of this research is to uncover a deeper understanding of why certain individuals have higher needs and or expectations for emotional support by investigating the influence of culture on loneliness perceptions. Openings for research in the cultural connection have been made by the introduction of the role of value systems and their subsequent affect on loneliness perception.
The influence of value systems on loneliness perception

Theoretical orientations lay the framework for the arguments that will be developed from the data collected in social science research. Johnson and Mullins (1987) have proposed a model for understanding loneliness that deals with cultural value systems as the basis for personality formation. They single out a dimension of value systems that help in understanding the problem of loneliness; the degree to which a society values individualism as opposed to communalism. It is based on the principle that a person’s needs and expectations for social interaction will reflect the cultural values that he has internalized. This model supports the idea that loneliness is more prevalent in communal societies simply because personalities are formed with higher needs for social interaction.

Mijuskovic however has proposed the opposite hypothesis. Using Tonnies’ distinction of the organic community and the atomistic society, Mijuskovic presents the following analysis. He argues that loneliness is more prevalent in atomistic societies that value individual freedom, than in organic communities which stress the unity of the whole (Mijuskovic, 1992). He claims that in the organic model, the tendency is toward less loneliness because a spirit of unity, mutual interdependence and reciprocal support is encouraged. On the other hand, in atomistic societies, contractual principles are the basis of human relationships that leads to relationships of rights rather than of duties. This in turn weakens the human bonds and increases the chance of loneliness.

Sociological models

Loneliness research that is rooted in sociological models with a focus on living arrangements and social networks generally support Johnson and Mullins. Jylhä and Jokela (1990) have argued that loneliness reflects the mutual relationship between the individual and the community and the extent to which the ideology of individualism
prevails in a society. Their study of living arrangements in six different regions of Europe demonstrates that feelings of loneliness were more prevalent in areas where living alone was rarest and community bonds were strongest. Living alone in these settings is a loneliness-provoking factor. Likewise, loneliness was less prevalent where living alone was most common. Analysis of social integration among the populations of the Netherlands and Northern Italy has also confirmed this viewpoint (van Tilburg, 1998). The conclusion that loneliness is less prevalent in individualistic societies is nevertheless contradicted by studies that are based in behavioral models.

**Psychological models**

Using psychological models, Rokach and others have supported the opposite position, that loneliness is more prevalent in individualistic societies. Rokach and Brock (1996) define loneliness as a multidimensional experience affected by one’s personality, history and background variables. Postulating that loneliness could be expressive of an individual’s relationship to the community, Rokach et al. (2001) have studied loneliness in various settings, comparing Canada with Croatia and in a further study, (Rokach & Bacanli, 2001), comparing Canada with Turkey and Argentina. The model of loneliness used in this research divides the experience of loneliness into five categories: emotional distress, social inadequacy and alienation, growth and discovery, interpersonal isolation and self-alienation. Using this model, these studies have shown that the experience of loneliness is significantly affected by cultural heritage, and is greater in societies such as the North American individualistic culture. This contradicting interpretation of these two models poses a true dilemma which reaches to the core of the definition of loneliness. A phenomenological approach will be used in this research to shed light on this conundrum.
Research as a volunteer

The motivation for this research project materialized from my work as a volunteer at the Jewish Social Services Foundation (JMW). The JMW, established in 1947 with a primary goal of helping Jews who had survived the Holocaust, has a long tradition of searching for specific solutions to the many problems faced by its target population. Before WW II, the Dutch Jews were an integrated and rapidly assimilating minority, enjoying the rights and privileges of all citizens, nevertheless still organizing much of their social life within their own family and religious community frameworks. This was in line with the political and social organization into pillars that was characteristic of the Netherlands at the time. With the deportation and murder of an estimated 80% of the Jewish population, the trauma to the individual as well as to the community was devastating, leaving scars and a void that are still present today.

One of the main functions of JMW throughout its short history was to deal with the emotional well being of these Holocaust survivors. Because of the lasting patchwork nature of the Jewish community, there was an obvious need for an alternative in providing the support that would have otherwise been available through the family and community. Volunteers were called upon as early as 1976 to fill these gaps. They form an organization whose purpose it is to provide companionship and help with small activities and errands, often when family support is insufficient or unavailable. Most of these requests for companionship come from elderly who are still living independently but whose physical condition has deteriorated and they find themselves becoming socially isolated. Those who take this step are truly missing quality contacts in their daily lives and they do often
describe themselves as lonely. It is the goal of the volunteers to support an individual over an extended period of time and this continuity often contributes to a deeper and trusting relationship. Because of the practical dimensions of experience and access, I have chosen to limit my research to the five elderly women whom I have assisted and come to know well as a volunteer during the past three years. All five women have agreed to participate in this research. They have little in common except that they are Jewish according to the Orthodox definition, that they are survivors of the Holocaust, and that they settled in Amsterdam after the war. Although their individual stories are unique, I will attempt to uncover certain themes that may be generally relevant to the Jewish experience of loneliness.

**Ethical considerations**

A special relationship based on understanding and trust has developed during the past few years of contact with the elderly who will participate in my research. I have been given access to some of their most private thoughts and personal moments and experiences. This gives me a special advantage as a researcher in a very delicate situation. Each informant has been given a clear explanation of the intention of this research and has been allowed to refuse without any negative repercussions. My ultimate concern is to protect my informants and their families from any potential negative effects that could possibly result from this research. They have agreed to the use of a pseudonym to protect their privacy.

**Study design**

An exploratory study design is the method of choice in order to satisfy the main goal of understanding loneliness as felt by elderly Jews. Because the goal of this research is best achieved through an in-depth description, the small and self-selected ‘sample’ is justified. These women have indicated an insufficiency in their social networks and in fact two of the initial requests for a volunteer mentioned loneliness as the main
reason for taking this step. The possibility of bias must carefully be scrutinized. The
delicate balance created by this reciprocal relationship is based on a certain level of
trust and both participants, the ethnographer and the informant, may behave in such
a way as to protect that relationship rather than observing or providing the most
accurate information. This is a source of rich information that ultimately must be
used with the utmost discretion.

Data collection

Data collection was obtained by:

a) Scrutiny through participant observation with a unique dimension, that of a
reciprocal relationship between volunteer (ethnographer) and elderly (informant).
This observation is based on a relationship of trust that has developed over time,
spanning a period of between one and three years. This information is often based on
casual conversation occurring in the field, i.e. while on a shopping trip or during a
visit to the doctor or even having coffee in a restaurant. Eventually, themes are
repeated and become tacit knowledge within the relationship. This knowledge
undoubtedly holds some of the important insights for further development of
research topics on loneliness.

b) Semi-structured, open ended interviews have been conducted to explore the
quantity and quality of the informants' social relationships in relation to their feelings
about loneliness. In addition, afore mentioned themes, fear of social isolation,
relationship problems, issues of identity and the patchwork nature of Jewish life in
the Netherlands, suggested by the professionals and volunteers of JMW, have
provided guidelines for the interviews.

c) A third source of data are the stories told, the interpretation of which may
required use of cultural metaphors. There is little comparative research of relevance
on loneliness among Jews and that has required me to look beyond the obvious.
Data analysis

The concept of generativity coined by Erikson and further developed by Kotre will be introduced as a framework for interpreting some of the data collected. Generativity is the seventh or adult stage in Erikson’s model of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1997: 66 - 72). He defines it as the ability to originate, to produce, or procreate. Its antithesis is stagnation. The balance of the two creates a virtue of care that is of vital importance for group life, the opposite of care being rejection. Kotre expands on Erikson’s ideas taking them out of a static life-cycle framework, emphasizing the impulse of generativity that can be present at various times throughout the life cycle from the teen years on thus freeing this concept for a broader use. Kotre defines generativity as ‘a desire to invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self’ (Kotre, 1996: 10).

The four basic types are:

- Biological: begetting, bearing and nursing of offspring
- Parental: nurturing and disciplining offspring, initiating them into a family’s traditions
- Technical: teaching skills, the “body” of a culture, to successors, implicitly passing on the symbol system in which the skills are embedded
- Cultural: creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system, the “mind” of a culture, explicitly passing it on to successors

(Kotre, 1996: 12)

The central message of importance for this research is that generativity is not only essential for continuity but it provides for a vital involvement in life for those who have reached elderly status. Non-generative individuals experience a pervasive feeling of self-absorption, stagnation, and impoverished personal relations. Highlighting deficiencies in generative impulses in the elderly informants may, in some cases help to explain their loneliness.
IV. Jew and Netherlander

A Historical Perspective

Jewish Diaspora

Historians have described Jewish life in the Netherlands as one of the most positive of the Diaspora experiences. The tolerance, characteristic of Dutch society, allowed for an unprecedented degree of integration, assimilation and acculturation, permitting the Dutch Jews to thrive as a religious and ethnic minority until this trend was broken by the German occupation of the country during WW II, leading to the destruction of Jewish community life as it had developed over the previous 350 years. The explanation given by many JMW professionals and volunteers for the high levels of loneliness experienced by the Jewish population as a lasting effect of the war experience necessitates a historical perspective.

One of the most solemn days of remembrance for the Jewish people is Tisha B'Av or the 9th day of the month of Av. This day commemorates the destruction of the second temple in the year 70 CE and marks the beginning of the dispersion of the Jews. From that time on, Jews traveled the world, existing at the mercy of host societies, thriving in good times but, more often than not, subject to persecution and or banishment in bad times. By the time the Jews had re-established a homeland in 1948 with the declaration of the modern State of Israel, they had settled on all continents of the globe adopting different customs from the cultures in which they lived but maintaining separate identities and their ties with each other as the descendants of their biblical father, Abraham. These identities developed as a product of the environment in which they were formed through the process of assimilation and acculturation. For the Dutch Jews, this process was facilitated by the culture of tolerance that has a long history in the Netherlands.
Political tolerance was a minimum prerequisite for Jews to settle in most towns as far back as the Middle Ages. The Jews of Europe acquired the role of scapegoat for many of the social ills that were affecting the continent during this period in history and the Low Countries were no exception. It was an integral part of medieval folklore that Jews were guilty of deicide, infanticide, Satanic practices and spreading disease, so it was not surprising that they would not be openly welcomed by the masses. Nevertheless, by the 15th century, there were signs of flourishing Jewish settlements as far north as the territory that would become part of the modern Kingdom of the Netherlands. The permission to settle in certain towns had to be sanctioned by local rulers and was generally interrelated with the broader political and economic environment. These decisions were often revoked as the tide turned and most of these communities disappeared in time.

Jewish communities in the Netherlands
The first significant Jewish community to thrive and endure was established in Amsterdam at the beginning of the 17th century and developed as an indirect result of persecution of the Jews on the Iberian Peninsula during the Spanish Inquisition. Sephardic Jews were forced to convert or leave Spain and the adventurous often did both, first taking refuge in Portugal, then, by the middle of the 16th century, venturing north to Antwerp and finally to Amsterdam. This exodus coincided with the increasing prosperity, stimulated by international trade, around the port cities of Northern Europe. The Portuguese New Christians, as these converts were called, first came to Amsterdam as traders and eventually became the elites, capable of not only improving their own positions but also making a positive contribution to their new surroundings. Although they were in principle religious refugees, there is no evidence that they came seeking a haven of religious tolerance. It was only after they became established that they returned to the open practice of Judaism. This flourishing
economic environment coincided with the debate on toleration that created the right climate for this development.

**The toleration debate**

The Protestant Reformation provided the impulse for the toleration debate, its core being ultimately about the coexistence of different Christian denominations. The main focus of this debate was the relationship between the individual and the society in which he lived. It only indirectly and in the long term may have had some influence on the Christian view of Jews. But the short-term benefits were felt with the legalization of freedom of conscience in Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht in 1579:

> That every individual may be free in the exercise of his religion, and that no man may be molested or questioned because of his religion, in accordance with the aforesaid pacification agreed in Ghent (Blom et al. 2002: 63).

This treaty, resulting in the formation of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces was only a first step. Freedom of conscience did not yet mean the right to openly worship in any other than the Reform church, however the city fathers turned a blind eye to this restriction and by 1618 there were three established synagogues in Amsterdam. Religious leaders carried on the debate on a philosophical level but the local rulers brought it into practice. These city councilmen may have been pragmatic in their dealing with the Sephardic immigrants for they saw the benefit to the community at large.

The authorities in Holland looked upon the newcomers as ‘new Jews’... merchants, who as such were trusted much as merchants always trusted one another without prejudice, on the basis of transactions that quickly revealed the merits or faults of an individual. The basic trust was something the municipal authorities translated into a policy towards the Jews, based on many years of dealings that had given little cause for complaint (Blom et al. 2002: 76).
And this reputation served for the benefit of future generations of Jewish immigrants of all classes and ethnic backgrounds.

The growth and development of Jewish community life went hand in hand with the economic boom experienced in the Republic during the Golden Age. This economic success coupled with the attitude of tolerance created an environment for the development of one of the most influential Jewish communities in the world at this time. And this worked to promote a positive relationship between Jews and their Christian neighbors. By the time the Enlightenment drove the rulers of Europe to recognize basic human rights and to legalize these in the form of citizenship, the Dutch Jews were already experiencing the privilege of a safe environment.

**Integration, assimilation and acculturation**

Although a culture of toleration was already present by the late 18th century, political emancipation of the Jewish minority in 1796 provided a further impetus for their integration, assimilation and acculturation. At this time, most of the Sephardic Jews were speaking Dutch but the majority of Jews were Ashkenazi of eastern European descent, still living in dire poverty and speaking Yiddish. The authorities were not blind to the relationship between integration and social and economic status. A top down process in the style of the ruling French, acting by government authority and in particular through the educational system was introduced to promote integration. Introduction of the Dutch language in Jewish education as well as religious services was deemed the most decisive factor in facilitating assimilation. Within one generation, Dutch replaced Yiddish in the public sphere. A multifaceted process of acculturation developed a momentum that could no longer be stopped.

Civil rights provided the guarantee that integration would now be possible. But assimilation and acculturation is a class related social phenomenon. It took the economic expansion of the Industrial Revolution at the end of the 19th century to help stimulate these processes. Jobs created by an expanding industrial economy
brought Jews out of their self-made ghettos to mix with the general population. Just as the first Sephardic traders socialized with the privileged classes in the 17th century, economic progress in this period promoted integration which in turn facilitated assimilation and acculturation. By the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of Dutch Jews had become comfortable with a double identity, patriotic and assimilated citizens in the public arena with varying remnants of a Jewish tradition reserved for their private experience.

The characteristic of Dutch Jewish identity at this point in time is relevant because this is a part of the early life experience of the majority of the elderly cohort that this study is intended to represent. In spite of the growing anti-Semitism in Europe during the economic depression of the 1930's, the Dutch Jews felt secure. Most felt no urgent need to advance the cause of Zionism that was developing around them, and in spite of a depressed economy, there were no massive waves of emigration from the Netherlands at this time. Nevertheless, events affecting world Jewry began to spread a cloud over this feeling of security that privileged them. But most reacted to these signs too late. It is estimated that 80% of Dutch Jews were deported and murdered in concentration camps during WW II, the highest percentage in all of Europe. More than a half-century later, the elderly survivors live with the memories of the day their lives stopped and changed forever.

A determination to rebuild

The unbraiding of religion and culture through secularization may have meant the natural demise of Jewish life as it was known in the Netherlands. This interruption in Dutch Jewish history during WW II however makes it impossible to interpret present circumstances with the assumption of a continuity that did not take place. A significant effect of the war experience for Dutch Jews was the realization that their history was no longer the same as that of their fellow countrymen. They had, willingly or not, become a part of the larger history of the Jewish people.
The past years have not only produced a persecution of a dimension which was never before known; they made an end to the tranquil inviolability of which many dreamed. Emancipation appears a delusion and assimilation, an impossibility (Jacob Soetendorp, Loeach 5706, in Fishman p. 8).

It can be said with certainty however, that this level of devastation had a traumatic effect on both the individual as well as the community. In spite of this however, both have displayed a stubborn determination to survive. The primary challenge of the individual survivors was to rebuild something of their former lives and many succeeded. Their children on the other hand, while contemplating the historical events that formed their legacy, began to redefine their Jewish identities. With the energy of a generation that had to do well and make good, they met the challenge of regaining a foothold in the economic and professional life of post-war Netherlands. Many returned to some active form of participation in Jewish life, through the synagogue, youth groups, Jewish education, charity work and many varieties of social, sports and Zionist organizations. As the third and fourth generation begins to marry and create families, a full-scale top-down effort continues to build new frameworks for Jewish identification within a modern secular society. It is certainly within the capacity of an inventive people to create the institutions necessary to meet the needs of its people. Yet still many were left suspended between two worlds and not really belonging to either. The question is whether the generative impulse will take hold at the grass roots level and provide a broad impetus necessary for growth rather than just stability of the community.
V. Anno 20000

The main goal of the JMW in commissioning the OJIN study was to gain a better perspective of the present and future size, composition and background of the Jewish population living in the Netherlands for the purpose of estimating future users of their services (Solingen & de Vries, 2001: 3). As a government subsidized social welfare organization, planning and justification are essential. Counting members of the various religious Jewish communities was no longer a realistic option. The link to religion is often weak or even non-existent. While membership in religious communities was declining, the informal Jewish networks seemed to be expanding, making an actual estimate of potential users of the social services difficult to assess. These realities necessitated the use of a broader definition of the target population; a deviation from the traditional halachic definition based on matrilineal descent was taken. All those persons with at least one Jewish parent, and all converts were included in the study population. The term ‘father-Jew’ was coined with the inclusion of all those whose Jewish identity derives from the father. This broadening of the definition takes into consideration the complexities of modern Jewish identities, but inevitably meets controversy when legitimacy in traditional organizations is considered.

The OJIN study sketches a varied population with an estimated total of between 40,000 and 45,000 individuals. The heterogeneity of the group is a reflection of historical events and social change of the times and must be considered if one accepts the premise that feelings of loneliness are expressive of the individual’s relationship to the community. Religious orientation defines a diminishing but nevertheless significant group. A recurring theme that will not be dealt with specifically in this research but is undoubtedly a significant factor deals with the
category ‘father Jews’, which is an estimated 29% of the total population. They are not recognized by the NIK (Nederlands-Israelitisch Kerkgenootschap) and are excluded from membership in all of the organizations which fall under their umbrella, most significantly the school system.

Migration continues to be a factor in Jewish life and this theme will be represented by one of the elderly responents. The OJIN study estimates that almost 30% of Jews living in the Netherlands have their roots elsewhere, the largest group being from Israel. The other two significant groups of non-native Jews living in the Netherlands were those who fled Germany just before the war, and those from the former Soviet Union who came just after the fall of the iron curtain at the end of the 1980’s. The remaining four respondents come from families whose roots in the Netherlands have spanned generations.

The setting
The setting for this research is Buitenveldert, a southern district of the city of Amsterdam. With a high concentration of Jewish facilities including a cultural center, schools, synagogues, a kosher supermarket and a home for the elderly, this area has become the main center of Jewish life in the Netherlands.

Beth Shalom is a modern, multi-functional care facility and nursing home for the elderly based in the Orthodox Jewish traditions and rules. It has 137 apartment units, mostly studio style with a small number of double rooms available for couples. In addition, there is an apartment complex attached with an inside entrance to the home, suitable for independent living yet allowing residents easy access to the facilities and communal activities organized within the complex. There are two large communal areas available for social activities, the ‘garden’ in the center of the building and the dining room, as well as many small sitting areas throughout the building. The garden is an open area visible from each floor and designed to provide maximum openness and opportunities for social contact.
The population

The effect of WW II on age structure of Dutch Jewry was to intensify the process of aging already observed in prewar days. This population remains subject to the general process of demographic decline brought on by falling birth rate, assimilation and intermarriage. The OJIN study estimates that 21% of the total Jewish population is over the age of 65. Although there has been substantial post war Jewish migration to the Netherlands, it is safe to conclude that most of the elderly are among the Dutch ‘survivors’. The five participants in this research range in age from 82 through 96 years old. Three of these elderly presently live in Beth Shalom, one lives in the attached apartment complex and the fifth participant lives nearby in Buitenveldert in a public housing project for the elderly.

The circumstances

Autonomy remains one of the most valued norms in Dutch society. Maintaining independence is one of the major concerns of most elderly persons that I have met. The expression ‘not wanting to be a burden’ comes easy to them. The Dutch welfare system goes far in providing resources in the form of universal pensions and health care and many forms of subsidized care for the elderly population which allows them to maintain an independent life style for as long as possible. Nevertheless the time does come when an elderly person reaches the threshold of dependency. Deterioration of physical health and mobility often resulting in increasing social isolation are the most common direct causes for requesting a volunteer.

The request for a volunteer is often done with a practical objective in mind, nevertheless a clear wish for companionship is often expressed. A typical request comes from those whose physical deterioration is such that they no longer feel safe going out alone. Accompanying the elderly to a doctor’s appointment, to do some shopping or even simply going for a walk or a cup of coffee are often stated objectives. Many requests however simply express loneliness and the desire for
someone to talk to. An effort is made to match the volunteer with the specific request. A relationship develops which is characterized by short-term reciprocity. Dignity and independence is maintained on the part of the elderly person by offering small gifts, paying the cost of the activities undertaken and moreover by heartfelt expressions of gratitude. The simple act of listening without judgment on the part of the volunteer acts to build trust in the relationship and the elderly individual begins to reveal more. The volunteer/client relationship, if successful, seems to offer solutions to the problems of both maintaining independence and easing loneliness.

The question to be asked is why is such an alternative needed? As Erikson (1997: 63) suggests: "... old people can and need to maintain a grand-generative function. For there can be little doubt that today the discontinuity of family life as a result of dislocation contributes greatly to the lack in old age of that minimum of vital involvement that is necessary for staying really alive". With the following personal stories, I hope to find support for the argument that a deficiency in generative functioning is an important antecedent in feelings of loneliness.
VI. Personal Stories

Considering that identity is a cultural attempt to make sense of the worlds in which we live, a reflection on the lives of the participants in this study will be a starting point for understanding their loneliness. Each of the women in this research project has a unique life history. They revealed much but not all of their entire story, some details would come later or not at all. The information that they withheld intrigued me as much as what they chose to share. I was amazed that the sudden death of her eight-year-old son was not a priority in Jetje’s story. I was curious about Naatje’s silence concerning her ex-husband. I was surprised when Marianne told me with a sense of secrecy that her son was adopted and thereafter avoided the subject. There remained gaps in Gize’s story when tears interrupted her long journey into the past. I tried to console Anna that her vision of the future for her grandchildren would not be a repeat of the events that she had experienced. In spite of the many gaps in their stories, I have collected a rich medley of information for which I am grateful. The following are their stories.

Jetje: *The lost ‘neshomeh’*

I met Jetje three years ago when she was still living in her ground floor apartment in the southern district of Amsterdam. Her original request for a volunteer was for companionship on what she described as her lonely Sunday afternoons. She was then 85 years old and still independent enough to drive to the area shops and to her favorite cafe in the neighborhood. She had enough distraction during the week but the Sundays were very lonely. Soon after I met her, Jetje suffered a fainting spell due to high blood pressure. A short hospital admission was followed by a period of
recuperation in one of the guest rooms of Beth Shalom. This incident activated a sincere safety concern in her children, and they helped organized a permanent move to the home. Beth Shalom could offer security as well as care in the traditional environment which Jetje was familiar with. Jetje has been in Beth Shalom for almost two years now and still has not adjusted to this fact of her life.

There are all of the recollections of a traditional Jewish life in Jetje’s story, told with the remnants of a Yiddish lexicon still so familiar to her; mishpocha (family) and neshomeh (soul) I soon learn, are key to her story of loneliness. She grew up in a middle class Jewish family in Utrecht where tradition played an important role. Jetje describes the lifestyle of a family whose wholesale meat business provided them good standing in the community as well as the security of never knowing hunger, even in her period of hiding during the war. They had strong ties to the Jewish community even though they were not orthodox in the strictest sense of the meaning. She talks about a warm home life where the Sabbath and the major holidays were celebrated and where guests were always welcome. Her fondest memories of her mother were that she was always busy in the kitchen. Her story of loneliness laments the loss of neshomeh that is part of the nostalgia of her youth.

I feel that the Jewish neshomeh has disappeared; our lives don’t count anymore... the emotional core of our life has disappeared.¹

This statement goes far in summing up what Jetje feels about her life. Defined simply as soul, neshomeh is a word that radiates emotion and can only fully be understood through description. For a deeper understanding of this concept, the following definitions were provided by an arbitrary sample of members of the Jewish Bridge Club (JBC).

¹ see Appendix III for original Dutch text.
Suzy:
For me, neshomeh is a Jewish feeling deep inside, that, whether there are tsores (problems) or joy, there will be mutual support, in good and bad times, from one’s heart, from one’s neshomeh.

Lex:
To not act only with logic... you get a feeling throughout your entire body and then your soul also speaks. Who has neshomeh? Someone who is sentientive to the feelings of others, that is someone with neshomeh.

Sally:
Neshomeh comes from within, and it comes from a feeling, an emotional feeling; a warmth, a feeling that you must do something for another; be available for another; neshomeh defines the warmth that comes deep from within. Someone with neshomeh has a particular glow. It comes from within.

Bep:
Neshomeh is the representation of an ethic; and the ethic means respect for everything, that is neshomeh.

Neshomeh is not simply a soul but in its popular understanding describes a quality of interaction. It cannot simply be a matter of chance that the kosher restaurant in Beth Shalom is called Eettafel Nesjomelet. It is a place where people who are alone come together to eat their evening meal. It is not a coincidence that a meeting place for persons with a Jewish background should be called De Gooise Nesjomme. It is an organization that brings people together for social contact and activities. Neshomeh is not simply a soul but must be understood within the context of interaction; a good deed, sharing joy and sorrow and a moral obligation to help others are examples of the types of interaction that are understood when using the term neshomeh. With the following highlights of Jetje’s story, I hope to clarify what she means by the lost neshomeh.

Jetje’s memories of her youth were of a traditional Jewish home, warm and social. Although she has had her share of tragedy, Jetje focuses on the positive period of her life in an attempt to explain her loneliness, alluding to a lost sense of warmth and community exemplified by the extended family.
Judaism always encompassed a feeling of sensitivity, warmth, community and strong family ties. The P.'s, my husband's father and his brothers, came from a big family; that was sholem, (lit. peace), that was festive; when there was sholem, they gathered together; this doesn't exist any more. The Polish Jews still have this mishpache feeling, that togetherness. The Dutch have lost this. My husband Max always said Poleikim (Polish Jews) but that is not a curse word see, no, because he was one of them, in business, but they do have this fellowship.

Mishpache: family.

Of course mishpache means family, but who belongs to it? If someone has an aunt by marriage, whose second cousin had originally been married to the granddaughter of a great uncle on the mother’s side of his brother-in-law’s family through a second marriage, then the son of this granddaughter's sister is always mishpache (Herzberg, 1964: 34).

Jetje describes this kind of extended family with much enthusiasm but laments at having lost contact with most of them. She speaks very positively and with pride of her immediate family, her children and grandchildren and yet there is an undertone of frustration that they live modern lives with less tradition. She does not call her children for fear of being a burden on them. Her explanation is that they all have very busy lives. Deciphering the nuances of Jetje’s complaints leads ultimately to the perception of a loss of tradition, rich in family gatherings and communal values which she believes would have facilitated the relationship of warmth which she longs for with her children.

Jetje’s complaints of loneliness are not new, but they have not lessened since her move to Beth Shalom. Her children felt that she would be safer in the home and they ‘encouraged’ and organized the move. After a period of adjustment, her new home still does not provide her with the access to the social environment that she desires. Rather, her loneliness has now taken on the character of abandonment.
She [daughter] meant well but she never should have put me here.... I am so sad, I shouldn’t be here, and I don’t belong here yet. You lose your family, you’re isolated from society... you don’t count anymore.

This feeling of abandonment is further felt in her daily confrontation with the misery of the other inhabitants, in particular the dementing elderly. Rather than talking about the tragedies of her past as many of her friends do, Jetje focuses on the miseries of her present. Her loneliness is not due to lack of effort. She spends much of her time in the garden room trying to socialize with the other inhabitants: "You cannot always remain in your room; you then will become very lonely." While repeatedly looking for social contacts, she expresses her mixed feelings about the inhabitants and especially those who are exhibiting varying stages of dementia. She feels confronted with the problems of others.

Yes, I was also lonely in my other home, but in a very different way... at home I had my own *tsores* (troubles, misery), but not what I see here. You become immediately frustrated when you go downstairs. Then I think how have I earned this, to be in the middle of this? I don’t belong here at all. When you come downstairs to the garden room, *nebbish* (interjection which expresses sympathy)... I’m surrounded by.... everything is so depressing that you can hardly see a ray of hope.... as soon as I go downstairs, I get in a bad mood... I get the feeling of being in an institution... now, I think that I ended up in a kind of a mad house.

Not only does Jetje feel abandoned but she also cannot let go of the positive memories of her past.

I cannot forget my past, that is my character. I wouldn’t know... I wouldn’t know how to put the past behind me, and I don’t want to either. That is my character.
A second metaphor for Jetje's loneliness is palpable through her intense criticism of the food. She is sharp and consistent in her negative descriptions:

But, we had *perenkugel* (pear pastry) yes child, it was, it was poison... with brown chocolate pudding on top of a *perenkugel*... listen, you lose your appetite here... I don’t need fancy food as long as it is tasty... and if you are a little late for dinner in Beth Shalom, there may be no more soup or meat, unimaginable... we had beet stew, without gravy, without anything in it, and with a thin nasty sausage, kosher of course, you wouldn’t say so... we had cauliflower this afternoon; it was totally overcooked you know, you no longer could see that it was cauliflower, it was more like cauliflower sauce....

Food plays a central role in Jewish life. From slaughterhouse to the table, Jewish dietary laws dictate specific rules for every step of its preparation. But more importantly, it is the social significance of food which tradition encourages. The meal is not only a time for nourishment but also an occasion for socializing. The Friday evening meal is the ultimate expression of this tradition. This link between food, social, *neshomeh* and the Friday evening could not have been expressed more adeptly than in the following interview with B. Braasem about her unique restaurant.

The regular customers appreciate the Jewish atmosphere, an atmosphere with *neshomeh*. I cook Dutch-Jewish style, like I learned from my grandmother. I have dozens of customers who recognize that: they say, 'I used to eat that at my grandparent’s, and this starts up a conversation. I was born and raised in Amsterdam. My parents never went to *shul* (Synagogue), but we had to be home on Friday evening. That was not religious, it was simply a social happening (NIW March 21, 2003).

The Sabbath is the most important day of the week in traditional Jewish life. It is the day of rest, beginning just after sunset on Friday evening and ending at nightfall on Saturday. The Sabbath is not only a day of rest but also one of peace and joy. While work is prohibited on the Sabbath, pleasure is a requirement, so much
and joy. While work is prohibited on the Sabbath, pleasure is a requirement, so much so that it is considered a mitzvah (blessing, requirement) for couples to have sexual intercourse on the Sabbath. Legend has it that one acquires an extra soul, a neshomeh jeseire to savor the day (Vainstein, 1953: 92). Because work is forbidden on the Sabbath, all of the preparations must be made in advance. Even the most assimilated households admit to remnants of a Sabbath tradition. In the literature about pre-war Amsterdam it was the white tablecloth that remained a symbol of this special evening (Leydesdorff, 1987 & Gans, 1985). And even amidst the intense poverty that is often described, the Friday evening had the small extras that could be afforded.

The classic Dutch Jewish cookbook Wel moge het Ul bekomen gives not only a typical menu for the Friday evening meal but anecdotes and tips on the procedures and expectations during the course of the evening.

**Friday evening**

The Friday evening meal consisted of:

- **Challah** (ceremonial egg bread) with bone marrow, chicken livers or chopped chicken liver.
- **Chicken soup** (one does not eat the same on Friday evening as during the week)
- **Soup meat** with pickled vegetables, cucumbers, onions, olives and horseradish.
- **Vegetables**
- **Fried soup chicken** with fried potatoes, salad and pickles.

Around 8.30 after the main meal, tea was served in glasses. On the beautifully set table - a white damask table cloth - there were bowls with chocolates (milk and bitter), sourballs (pear and raspberry filled), fondant cookies, dates, figs and walnuts when in season, and peanuts of course, (Kassause mangelens) the good ones always had three nuts in one shell. On Friday afternoon, the Jewish men already began to crave their ‘three pit’. They chatted and were encouraged to nash (snack). Comments such as “your not having fun”, “your not taking”, “take! “why is it on the table? Not just for looks. It’s to eat”, didn’t come out of thin air. Fruit or fruit salad was served
around 10 o’clock; and at eleven o’clock, coffee with butter or ginger pastries. ‘That it may bring you satisfaction!’ (de Vries & Wertheim, 1977: 57).

What it meant for Jetje was to be together with family and the Friday evening was the ultimate expression of this tradition.

I honestly admit, we are not religious, but we had a Jewish core... I always had my Jewish atmosphere. But my mother was always in the kitchen, that was standard at our home, everyone was welcome.

A line can be drawn through Jetje’s story explaining the lost neshomeh that she laments. Her complaints can best be understood within the context of her childhood memories where tradition played an important role. Jetje’s complaints about food may ultimately reflect the social importance of the Friday evening, when the family gathers, guests are invited, the best foods are served, and when the Jewish identity is confirmed through ritual. The loss of this tradition has meant the loss of the neshomeh jesiere of the Friday evening.

Jetje’s story demonstrates the connection between generativity and loneliness. Jetje’s own recounting of her adult life suggests an attempt to hold onto the traditions of her childhood but her present situation makes it clear that what she longs for has faded. She describes a positive relationship with her son and daughter but they have followed the trend of modernization, resulting in more attention to work and career and less time for traditional home life. She laments a lost neshomeh and that “you cannot even drop by on your children because they are always too busy”. Without assigning blame, Jetje attributes her loneliness to the fact that values and traditions were not sufficiently passed on to foster the family and community life reminiscent of her youth.
Marianne: The ‘long shadow of trauma’

Marianne’s request for a volunteer stated the following:

Mrs. M. would strongly benefit from a friendly visit by a volunteer; someone to accompany her shopping or just to have coffee. She does not go out anymore.

One of the things that Marianne said to me during our first visit was that she was hoping that JMW would send her a friend. I noticed this poem about friendship hanging on the wall in her kitchen.

Friend
you need someone
quiet and sincere
who, when you need it
will pray or fight for you
only when you have someone
who laughs and cries with you
only then can you say: ‘I have a friend’
(Toon Hermans, 1982: 32)

Marianne is 81 years old and lives in the apartment complex attached to Beth Shalom. These apartments are in short supply and she considers herself fortunate that one was available shortly after her husband died several years ago. She has Parkinson’s disease but still manages to live independently with the help of the various home care services. Marianne expresses the feeling of security in a Jewish environment and she enjoys celebrating the holidays.

I feel very good about being in a Jewish environment; even in the kamp, we tried somewhat to celebrate the holidays.
This is all made easy by her present living arrangements. She eats her evening meal at the kosher restaurant Eettafel Nesjomelet that is situated within the complex. She also takes part in some of the day activities organized by Beth Simcha, the day center for the elderly. She makes a concerted effort to be around people and yet the feeling of loneliness is ever present.

During our first meeting, Marianne’s conversation centered on her family that was murdered in the war. She said that she had no one left. She repeatedly expressed feelings of loneliness that she attributed to the fact that she had no family. Photographs that adorned the room led Marianne to talk about her son, but she offers little information. She mentioned the fact of his adoption but she added no information. Her son is married and has two teenage children. The family visits as often as possible but Marianne is reluctant to ask for practical help because she understands that the children are very busy and have their own lives to lead. On the other hand, she is always preparing and looking forward to their visits. Her shopping list always includes the children’s favorite snacks and drinks. In spite of regular visits with her son and his family, the theme of having no family returns with almost every contact that I have with Marianne:

About family, I don’t have any. Because we don’t have any family, we also don’t have any acquaintances; because family brings a niece or a friend, and so on. If we wouldn’t have had all of those tsores (troubles), I could have given another answer. The destruction of the Jews, the six million. You know, your thoughts go to that horrible time, it always returns, whether you want it or not. You then end up in the camp; I have more of that part about the camp in my head.

Marianne grew up in a traditional family and the Jewish environment is a positive experience for her. She finds comfort in the traditions of her youth and yet deplores the symbol of this identity, a distinct Jewish surname that she passed on to her son and his family, a fear provoking generativity in her opinion.
Marianne (about her name):
It’s a terrible name... too Jewish; and now with that anti-Semitism, it’s terrible; fear always dominates; I see fear everywhere, persecution, terrible. It is partly due to Israel, because of the situation there. They also said then, see, the Jews this and the Jews that. Really, because of Israel, a lot is because of Israel.

Marianne reveals little of herself in conversation but, over time and due to our regular contacts, I come to know her. I accept that talking is difficult for her. Although she first expressed a desire for a friend, our interaction is of a practical nature. I accompany her on a regular basis to her favorite local shops. This would otherwise be impossible for her. She is very grateful for my help and often says that she does not know what she would do without me. She often offers to buy me sweets or pastries or flowers in return for my services that she sees as a rare kindness. We never sit and talk. Marianne complains of loneliness and desires friendship but will settle for practical assistance. In return she offers small gifts, overwhelming gratitude but no stories. Memories seem too painful for her.

Loss
The OJIN study concludes that loss of family during WW II cannot be seen as a direct cause of higher levels of loneliness among Dutch Jews. There is however a clear connection for those survivors and their children who have not reconciled with the past trauma. Loss of 80% of the Jewish population went even further than the individual experience however. This meant the loss of the social fabric of the community. This loss of people has been described as the empty social space that denies Jews a social framework for the construction of healthy Jewish identities (Benima, 1994). Although there has been a serious attempt by many at reconstruction of Jewish community life, it will inevitably take generations, even under the most positive circumstances, to realize this.
It is not in the scope of this study to analyze the psychological pain that Jews have suffered because of the senseless murder of their family members. It is simply my goal to record that Marianne’s perception of her loneliness is related to that fact. She is undoubtedly not the only one who sees life through this lens.

Naatje: Sounds of silence

Naatje is 93 years old and lives in a ground floor apartment for the elderly in Buitenveldert, not far from Beth Shalom. The layout of the complex seems ideal for neighborly contact. There is a covered terrace connecting the two wings of the building which makes it possible for residents to visit without going outside. The decorations of the inner terrace make it appear as an extension of the home. In spite of this, Naatje has little contact with her neighbors. She tells of her move to this apartment when it was first built 20 years ago. Speaking in the plural she talks about an unfulfilled goal of building a future: “We had the same goal, to build something together.” All of the original residents have moved and this goal has not materialized. Her present neighbors remain strangers to her. Her request for a volunteer states:

She would enjoy having a volunteer from JMW visit for a chat. She likes reading (is no longer able to) and music.

Naatje also needs more intensive care and is presently on a waiting list for an appropriate nursing home. She worries about the move and is willing to delay. She has two sons and five grandchildren who all live nearby but she hesitates to ask for help with the move. Their contact seems strained.

Naatje is silent about her own past. She told me about her escape to Switzerland and the birth of her two sons as simply a matter of fact. She tells her
story through others. I learn more of her background by reading one of her favorite authors, Sal Santen. In *Jullie is jodenvolk*, Santen describes his childhood and upbringing in the Jewish proletariat of Amsterdam in the period between the two world wars. Reading Santen’s book fills in some of the background of Naatje’s childhood environment. The Jews of Amsterdam during this period of time were concerned with escaping poverty and this usually meant integration and assimilation to a greater or lesser degree. But assimilation did not mean the loss of the Jewish identity. A mutation of Dutch and Jewish culture developed unique to the environment in which Naatje grew up as described by Gans (1985) and Leydesdorff (1987) in their respective volumes.

Naatje has a sharp intellect and loves music. She says that if it were not for the music, she would be very lonely. She sang in a choir as a child and regrets not having had the opportunity for a more active career in music. She spends her days listening to the classical radio station and watching the news. We talk about politics and music and our mutual acquaintances. She does not however dwell on the past and unlike most of the elderly people that I know, she has no memories that she is willing to share.

Naatje’s loneliness is palpable and interwoven within this silence. She lives in the present moment, from day to day. She seems to have broken with the past and does not want to confront the future. Past attempts at planning for the future have always turned to disappointment. She talks about the many regrets of her past. She admits that her one good prediction was the decision to leave for Switzerland. The rest of her family stayed behind until it was too late. Kotre attributes silence to such things as defeat and humiliation, failure to act or negative decisions resulting in harm to others, and perhaps simply for the protection of family secrets (Kotre 1996: 140 - 141). Breaking through this silence would need the cooperation of significant others, something which was beyond the scope of this study.
Gize: The immigrant experience

Gize is a 96-year-old recent widow who spent the last five years caring for her deaf husband. Until his health deteriorated, they had an active social life and even at her advanced age, she still has two good friends who visit her regularly. Her closest family consists of a sister who lives in Belgium and a nephew with his wife and two daughters who live in the USA. This nephew is like a son to her because she raised him during the war years in England. He is very attentive in every possible way but the distance between them makes practical help on a regular basis impossible.

Gize's family history is marked by tragedy followed by successful adaptation. Her parents fled the pogroms in Russia, settling in Belgium until WW I caused them to flee again, this time to England with their five young children, Gize being the oldest. She had her formative school years in England and was sheltered from the tragedies facing the European continent. The family returned to Belgium only to re-live the same drama once again. Gize was married but childless when she and her husband, her youngest sister and one nephew packed onto the overcrowded boat to England in 1939. She left many family members behind, never to see them again. Soon after her return to Belgium, tragedy struck again when Gize's husband died suddenly of a heart attack. She did not give up yet as she still had her young nephew to care for. After spending the next three years preparing to immigrate to the United States in order to join other family members, fate changed all and she met a Dutch Jew, the man who would become her second husband. At this moment in time, she felt that she had to give up the nephew for whom she had cared for during most of his life. She had mothered him for ten of his formative years but in honor of his biological parents, chose never to call him her son. They parted, he to start his future in the United States under the care of other family members and she in the Netherlands. I first met Gize when she was 95 years old, a year after her second husband had died after 50 years of marriage but still no children of their own.
In spite of all this tragedy, Gize talks about having had a good life. Both of her husbands had good professions and her material needs had always been met. She is a positive woman and has learned to fight on in the face of even the worst setbacks. Her decision to move to the nursing home was made because, in her words, 'it was the only choice I had' and she set her mind on accepting this fact. She has been invited to live with her nephew but declined because of not wanting to be a burden on the family. Gize considers herself an international citizen. She was born in Belgium, raised in England, and once cherished the dream of migrating to the United States. Gize describes her loneliness as the feeling of not belonging where she is. She feels very different than the people around her. She talks little about her Jewish roots except as a fact of her life.

Migration/Identity

Gize:

Now that I'm old; I've been here for 50 years and I miss my country. Belgium is not my country. Holland is not my country. Actually my country is England, the time of my youth. If I had known that, when I met my husband, that I was going to settle in Holland, I would never have come here. We had intended to go to America. My dream was to go to America. I've adapted myself to the Dutch way of living but this isn't the way that I lived before, totally different. ²

Migration remains a fact of Jewish life even since the establishment of the state of Israel. In the immediate aftermath of WW II, most of the movement was from the Netherlands to Israel and the United States. During the last 50 years however there has been considerable Jewish immigration into the Netherlands, foremost from those areas where threats to security have been perceived. The two largest immigrant

¹ Gize's interviews were conducted in English.
groups are from Israel and the former Soviet Union, but smaller groups of Jews from countries as diverse as Eastern Europe, Iraq and Iran as well as South Africa and the Americas are represented. Because of this high migration among Jews, families are often uprooted and separated from one another. But what does it actually mean to be a stranger in a foreign country?

Gize:

Here in Holland, you must have a big family, because everything here is based on friends and family and 'visites'. The Belgians and the French don’t know that either. They meet each other outside in cafés, they have beautiful cafés. In winter and in summer, you can always go and meet people. But one thing I do know, and this is, I must say, here, when you have no family and you are left alone, then you are lonely. I don’t have to be alone a minute if I don’t want to, here. But, I restrict myself, because, first of all, my mentality is not Dutch. I adapted myself to the Dutch system but my inside is not Dutch. Now, the thing is this, I’m at a table with about six people, they are very nice, we have very good contact, fine people. Every Friday night after the meal... they know everybody, from school, their family, and they are not from Amsterdam; most of them are from all around Holland, so the people come here and they meet each other. So one lady said, “come and sit with us”. So I tried it a few times, but I can’t do it... so I went and sat with two ladies who asked me to sit and chat a little.... in no time there was a circle of 15 people and they talked about their children and they talked about their grandchildren and you remember this and you remember that. That’s not a conversation that I like. It doesn’t interest me, let me put it that way. I have no memories to share so I don’t do it any more.

Gize’s identification with the country of her youth has similarities with Jetje’s nostalgia about her past. This loss, provoking feelings of loneliness, is described by Eisenbruch (1990: 195) as cultural bereavement. Certain characteristics of cultural bereavement that would be applicable include “... comfort derived from traditional cultural rituals and or beliefs and thinking often about homeland and family”. At the
same time, her identification with the country of her dreams, the USA where her
nephew and grandchildren live, (they do call her grandma) highlights what she
cannot benefit from, the attention of those who care about her.

Autonomy / Fate

Autonomy is a highly valued social norm in Dutch society, and similarly among these
erly Dutch Jews. The ideology of a nation state is in one way reflected in the
manner in which it organizes its welfare system. The Dutch welfare state expresses
an ideology of collectivity based on autonomy of the individual. The redistribution of
resources are organized in such a way as to give individuals far reaching rights in
decision making about their own affairs.

With respect to the problem of loneliness, von Faber has found that elderly
consider social networking and maintaining of personal relationships in order to
prevent loneliness an individual responsibility (von Faber, 2002: 112). The elderly
informants in this research however seem to embrace the value of autonomy with one
added dimension. Fate plays a role in their life. They have consistently attributed
their present situation to their fate based on their Jewish identity. Gize:

Darling, remember one thing, you can plan for the future but from one day to
the next that can all change. You have nothing more to say.

Talking about the war was inevitable because it was the turning point in their lives
when their identity as Jews determined their tragic fate.
Anna: A consequence of fear

I am now in Beth Shalom. It is quite pleasant here. The food is very good. I have a beautiful room. The world outside is unreal. I am very frightened by the horrible things that are happening in the world. I fear a war between Moslems and Christians where the Jews will again get caught in the middle. I, together with many others, am afraid of the Islam. They are too afraid to talk about it. But I believe that we will eventually pay for this. I fear the worst.

These are Anna’s first thoughts from her Memoires van een oude vrouw. She had just moved to Beth Shalom and had expressed the sentiments that I had heard many times during our encounters of the past three years.

Anna had been a widow for twenty years when I first met her three years ago. She was very independent until her health began to deteriorate rapidly due to a heart condition and emphysema. At that time she was living alone in a ground floor apartment in the southern district of Amsterdam. Her desires were simple to satisfy. She enjoyed going out shopping and for lunch in her favorite café but was no longer able to do this on her own. Even taking taxis became difficult after a bad experience with an impatient driver. She is well known in the neighborhood and enjoys stopping to chat with acquaintances. She not only insists on treating me to lunch but she does not stop offering until I have eaten to her satisfaction, a typical ‘Yiddish’ mama. This became a weekly routine that we both enjoyed.

Anna grew up in the mediene, that is to say, outside of Amsterdam, an environment where Jewish community life was present but not dominant. Anna’s upbringing was not religious but her Jewish identity remains strong. As a young woman on the threshold of adulthood at the outbreak of the war, she managed to escape deportation by getting a job as a nurse in het Appeldoornsebos, the Jewish psychiatric hospital in the interior of the country. She admits to not understanding the consequences of what was happening around her at the time. When the hospital
was finally evacuated along with the personnel, Anna began to realize the seriousness of the situation that she confronted. She now understands her fate with the wisdom of hindsight.

We had a beautiful garden both in front and in the rear of the house. But the joy of the new house did not last long, no more than four years when the Germans came to claim our home during the war. Four Germans came in. I still see them now. The Jewish houses had to be cleaned and two cleaning ladies, armed with buckets and brooms marched in, one behind one the other. Meanwhile we had to leave. And we packed our shabby possessions onto a handcart. We had to move to another street because the Jews had to live together; all the easier for them to be rounded up. When we were finished loading the cart, a gypsy passed and said to my father, "Sir, can I predict your future?," to which my father answered, "Hitler has already predicted our future." If you give this kind of answer, it is unimaginable that he did not want to go into hiding during the war. He was afraid to go into hiding. He always said, "We Jews are as free as birds, they can do what they want with you". He was right about this but there were also good people who helped the Jews during the war.

Anna met her husband in camp Westerbork, a German Jew who had a position such that he could delay her deportation. German Jewish refugees were often given these positions of apparent authority because of their background and language skills. With hindsight again, she reflects on his status as stranger.

My husband was a German Jew who fled his country. It was very difficult for him here. He felt terrible that he spoke with a German accent; he was unhappy here and always felt like a stranger. He was a good and sensible man.

Our conversations are often about Israel and domestic Dutch politics as it affects the Jewish population. Anna fears what she sees as increasing anti-Semitism in Europe and more specifically in the Netherlands. The headscarf worn by increasing numbers
of young Moslem girls in the Netherlands is a disturbing symbol in her mind. She relates this to her worries about Moslem fundamentalism and this was confirmed to her by the international terrorism that hit close to her world on September 11, 2001. This was the turning point that accelerated Anna’s move to Beth Shalom. During the summer of 2001, Anna spent some time in a home for the treatment of her asthma and emphysema. It was a negative experience for her. Rather than seeing some improvement in her condition, she complained of lack of attention to her health problems. But she especially remembers feeling out of place and even very uncomfortable when group prayer was said before the meal. Upon returning home, she experienced an episode of extreme confusion for which she was admitted to the hospital. She described it as re-living the fears of her past. This episode initiated her move to Beth Shalom and what she considered as a retreat to a safe environment. She continues to worry about the world her grandchildren must live in.

Anna has regular contact with her only son, his wife and their four children. Her son is very attentive to his mother’s needs and in spite of his demanding job visits faithfully, usually on Sunday and often accompanied by one of the grandchildren. Anna is very proud of her four grandchildren and is continuously praising them. And yet in many ways, she remains disconnected. In spite of her attentive family, she often laments at not having a daughter. She observes that the daughters come to visit most often in Beth Shalom. I feel that she is putting me in that role when we are out together as she often suggests shopping for clothes and make-up. It is however more than this; Anna talks openly to me about her personal thoughts and has even shared her diary with me.

fear/ uncertainty

The present political turmoil in the Middle East has repercussions throughout the Diaspora. Anti-Semitism is again on the rise throughout Europe as well as in the Netherlands. Much of what is being called the new anti-Semitism has been attributed to the political unrest in the Middle East. Since the declaration of the state of Israel in
1948, Israel has been in a state of war with its neighboring Arab countries. The most recent conflicts have been in the form of suicide attacks by Palestinians against Israeli military as well as civilian targets. These events are in turn followed by a forceful counter attack by the Israeli army. This cycle of violence continues with far reaching consequences. This conflict has become a symbol of polarization, the West against the Moslem world. Stimulated by the presence of large Moslem minority populations in Europe, this political conflict has brought the clash of ideologies home to local communities.

The present stalemate in the Middle East peace process and the downward spiral of violence touches Jews around the world who harbor the hope that the existence of a safe haven will protect them in the face of future insecurities and tragedies. On the contrary, rather than hope and security, Israel has created division and anxiety among many Dutch Jews. Culture generativity is threatened in Anna’s worldview. She focuses on the negative, that the Jewish people, and in particular her grandchildren, are again in danger. She quietly questions the role of Zionism and its relationship with the present condition of the Jews in the Diaspora. She questions the wisdom of it all for the future of her children and her grandchildren.
VII. Conclusion: Discontinuity as antecedent for loneliness

More than a half century after the deportation and murder of 80% of Dutch Jews, a comprehensive demographic study of the Jewish population in the Netherlands was commissioned by the Jewish Social Services Foundation. The resulting OJIN study describes an ethnic minority of between 41,000 and 45,000 individuals belonging to the social, economic as well as intellectual upper class. In spite of this positive picture, loneliness was a problem perceived by many. When compared with the general Dutch population this group scored higher on the loneliness scale in all age categories. These findings provided a unique setting in which to investigate the relationship of culture on loneliness perceptions.

The OJIN study describes a heterogeneous population, probably as varied as the broader society itself. What can five stories told by a select sub-group of this population tell us about loneliness? As personal as these memories are, they offer several themes that are linked in a chain interlocked by identity and history. Jewish identity and the holocaust are essential background facts of the stories in which the main actors talk about feelings of estrangement on all levels, from family, community and the broader society. Although aging is certainly an important antecedent in these feelings of alienation, the informants' interpretations of loneliness also implicate identity, trauma, fear, loss and fate that are colored by the history unique to their lives as Jews. The holocaust forced a confrontation with a heritage that left many secular Jews hanging between two worlds, unable to shed their Jewish identity yet often feeling confronted as the 'other' in the context of the broader society. This generation of Jews has again been confronted with the harsh reality that identity is not only a self-definition but also the perception of the other. Assimilation for
younger generations may continue but for this group of elderly, their Jewish identity remains a product of their life experiences.

Continuity is the hallmark of Jewish history and culture. It is moreover a cumulative product of individual acts of generativity. If generativity is the quality that connects the individual to life and to the future, it follows that social isolation and loneliness can directly be related to a lack of generative activity. The example so memorable in Jetje’s story is the Sabbath tradition. She failed in passing on this tradition to her children thus taking away the weakly opportunity for a family social gathering. In addition, a modern life style prevented its replacement. Disconnected from their families in various ways, all of the informants expressed the common theme of ‘not wanting to be a burden’. They all voiced a strong reluctance to ask their families for help, fearing the inconvenience that this would create. Grandma may have the latest photographs of her grandchildren lined up on the bookshelf but it is the actual interaction, the regular visit and the interest in one another, willingness to give and receive help that creates a stronger bond. Intimacy at a distance is an oxymoron. In Jetje’s words, “the neshomeh has disappeared”.

If cultural continuity is a cumulative result of individual acts, and we can determine that these activities are decreasing, it can be predicted that the culture will undergo changes or in other words, assimilation and acculturation will take place. In spite of a concerted top down effort to foster cultural generativity on the part of many individuals and groups in the Dutch Jewish community, the process has not taken hold in such a way as to breath vitality with the prospects of growth into the group as an entity. The population of Orthodox Jews has remained stable since the last census of 1966, partly due to the influx of Israelis and other immigrants but the number of mixed marriages is increasing (van Solinge & de Vries, 1999: ch. 7). This trend, together with the continued aging of the population will have consequences for the group’s stability in the future. Families with two Jewish parents are the most likely vehicles for passing on tradition and culture. Intermarriages will be one of the
main determinants of assimilation, causing a gradual decline in the Jewish population that has already been predicted over the next two decades. The broad picture is one where generativity is deficient on the individual level and this expresses its ultimate consequences on the community, leading to social death in both cases.

The conflicting results presented in the theoretical section concerning the effects of culture on loneliness lead me to question the many definition of loneliness. Loneliness is a concept that has come to mean many things to many people. It is also a concept similar to neshomeh which must be understood in terms of interaction. Beyond theoretical development, if our goals in understanding a phenomenon such as loneliness include alleviation and even prevention, how then should research continue? Although people generally understand and express their loneliness in terms of cause and effect, it remains unquestionably the product of a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and the social environment. Thoughts are often a product of what one wishes whereas action is necessary to achieve results and this is what counts in the final analysis, whether a person is engaged in those activities that will help prevent loneliness. Erikson’s position that generative functioning is necessary to keep elderly people really alive, seems to be advocating generative activity as a prevention to loneliness. Understanding the part that choice plays in this process would probably bring us closer to understanding loneliness. Is not wanting to be a burden a real choice or is it the internalization and acceptance of a desired behavior prescribed by societal norms? The answer to this question could bring us closer to understanding loneliness.
Appendix I

Feelings of Loneliness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Jewish Population living in the Netherlands</th>
<th>Total Dutch population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>men</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 yr. and older (&lt; 1925)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-74 yr. (1925-1944)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-54 yr. (1945-1964)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 34 yr. (≥ 1965)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: OJIN 1999
Discussiegroep I

Met 10 dames en 6 heren startten we de discussiegroep met als vraag: “Wat betekent de uitslag van het demografisch onderzoek voor ons werk?” De discussie leider was Tobias de Bruijn. Chris Kooyman, die het onderzoek had uitgevoerd, was eveneens aanwezig en rouieerde tussen de twee discussiegroepen. Hij nam daardoor tijdelijk deel aan het gesprek.

De eenzaamheid, verwoord in de eerste stelling, kwam naar voren als hoofdthema van deze bijeenkomst. Volgens een aantal deelnemers komt eenzaamheid voort uit gevoelens van angst; angst om alleen weg te gaan, maar ook angst om niet geaccepteerd te worden door reeds gevormde groepjes. Bij ouderen van 80 jaar en ouder speelt dit zeker een grote rol, huisbezoek is dan van groot belang omdat dit hun isolement juist doorbreekt.

Naar aanleiding van dit isolement werd ook opgemerkt dat een aantal deelnemers was opgevoed met de boodschap dat je vooral niet moest laten merken dat je joods was. Het verliefd worden en het trouwen met een niet-joodse partner, vooral na de oorlog, werd dan ook niet als een bewuste keuze ervaren. Later ervoer men dan toch de behoefte om zich alsnog te verdiepen in die verzwegen joodse achtergrond.

Verrassend was de uitkomst van het onderzoek op het punt eenzaamheid onder “jongeren”. De eenzaamheidsgevoelens van deze groep 30 tot 35 jarigen zijn vergelijkbaar met de gevoelens van Nederlandse ouderen van boven de 80. Jongeren van plus minus 30 jaar zijn vaak bewust actief, bewuster joods (in culturele zin) dan ouderen. Veel verschillende joodse organisaties zijn actief voor een relatief kleine groep. Jongeren hebben behoefte aan contact maar er is geen consistent draagvlak, het platform is te versnipperd. Wat verbazing wekt is de bestaande hokjesgeest.
waardoor men elkaar buitenluit. Of wij ons die versnippering zelf aandoen, is de vraag die hieruit naar voren kwam.

Een ander punt is de aantrekkelijkheid van Amsterdam voor wat betreft het aantal jongeren. Er is dus veel meer keuze voor een partner, etc. In de Mediene is die groep heel klein. Een idee was om jongeren vanuit Amsterdam eens naar de Mediene te halen. Kan en mag JMW hierin een taak hebben? Of wordt JMW misschien teveel in verband gebracht met hulpverlening waardoor het jongeren juist afschrikt.

Waar ligt nu eigenlijk de oorzaak van deze gevoelens van eenzaamheid? Dit werd herleid tot een uitvloeisel van de oorlog, o.a. de problematische achtergrond van de ouders die als kind in de oorlog zijn opgegroeid. Deze traumatische ervaring heeft weer geleid tot identiteitsproblemen bij hun kinderen. Hierdoor kwamen we bij een ander joods probleem, de relatief grote groep mensen (10 à 15%) die in een uitkeringssituatie verkeert. Opgevallen was dat zich onder de bezoekers van de joodse cafés relatief veel WAO-ers bevonden. Naar voren kwam dat vooral deze groep dertigers een zoekende, nog niet gesettelde groep vormt die moeilijk te bereiken is. Probleem is hoe bereik je eenzame mensen? De reeds gevormde netwerken vormen een drempel voor hen die nog geen aansluiting hebben gevonden. Het is juist voor hen moeilijk om op anderen af te stappen. Zou een cursus assertiviteit daar een positieve bijdrage aan kunnen leveren? Een andere drempel is de regelmatig terugkerende vraag "ben ik wel joods genoeg?" Zelfs halachische joden schijnen zichzelf deze vraag nog te stellen.

Laagdrempelige, regionale activiteiten zouden ertoe kunnen bijdragen om zoveel mensen met een joodse achtergrond te bereiken. De koffieochtenden en de cafés worden als laagdrempelig beschouwd. Met name door vaderjoden die 29% van de totale populatie innemen, een percentage dat elk jaar toeneemt. Het is belangrijk om hierbij stil te staan. Chris gaf aan dat het Joods Historisch Museum (JHM) het meest laagdrempelig blijkt te zijn, de meerderheid van de eerder genoemde groep is er wel eens geweest. Hij vraagt ons dan ook na te denken over wat het JHM heeft waardoor mensen daar wel naartoe komen. De anonimiteit en het ontbreken van de noodzaak om op vragen hieromtrent te moeten antwoorden vormen de vermoedelijke redenen.

Het is van belang om te benadrukken dat actief zijn binnen de joodse gemeenschap vrijwel nooit per definitie samenhangt met religiositeit. Door de media wordt dit
beeld echter wat vervormd door bijvoorbeeld het plaatsen van foto’s van rabbijn
zodra een joods thema behandeld wordt.

Mogelikheden om mensen die “buiten de boot vallen” bij activiteiten te betrekken,
blijken niet eenvoudig te realiseren. Deze “verborgen groep” is niet te bereiken door
PR - activiteiten tijdens bijvoorbeeld Jom Ha Voetbal. Bezoekers van dit
internationale toernooi evenals “kerkelijke” joden weten de weg wel. Hoe kunnen we
dezelf groep dan wel bereiken? Naar voren kwam o.a. het meer naar buiten treden van
JMW als organisatie, ook in de regionale kranten; het als vrijwilliger meer met de
deelnemers praten: wat willen jullie? Meer gebruik maken van het internet (digitale
nieuwsbrief opstellen, chat-mogelijkheden creëren); folders neerleggen bij het JMW.
Deelname aan een televisieprogramma van bijvoorbeeld Hanneke Groenteman werd
ook genoemd. Gevaar zou kunnen zijn dat dit juist een drempelverhogend effect zou
kunnen hebben.

Conclusie was dat mensen wel iets willen maar dat het vooral vrijblijvend en
toegekend moet zijn. Maar desondanks is laagdrempeligheid geen garantie voor
continuering van de groepen. Het Joodse café in Amsterdam is gestopt vanwege het
teruglopend aantal bezoekers. Maar om welke redenen en wanneer gij noch door in
zo’n situatie? Is men in de Mediene, vanwege het geringe aanbod, meer geneigd om
door te gaan dan in Amsterdam? Het (tijdelijk) stoppen van een activiteit betekent
niet per definitie dat deze niet als succesvol beschouwd kan worden. Groepen
cunnen in aantal teruglopen omdat bepaalde wensen inmiddels zijn vervuld.
Eventueel kan er dan maar een andere vorm worden gezocht. Het is mogelijk dat
groepen aan hun eigen succes ten onder gaan. Men is verwend en blasé geraakt.
Ondanks het feit dat de eerste stelling de groep het meest aanspraak kwam ook de
verhouding Mediene-Amsterdam aan de orde. Welke doelgroepen willen wij
bereiken, moeten wij deze mensen naar Amsterdam halen? Dit leidde tot een levendig
discussie.

De steeds terugkerende paradox; iets joods te willen doen terwijl dat tegelijkertijd
weerstand kan oproepen kwam regelmatig terug. Op de vraag of het erg was dat het
aantal joden zou afnemen bleek 80% van de respondenten het jammer tot zeer
jammer te vinden wanneer deze groep zou assimileren. Deze mening werd ook gedeeld
binnen deze discussiegroep.
Appendix III: Original Dutch quotations

p. 21  "Ik vind de joodse nesjomme weg; onze levens tellen helemaal niet meer... het gevoelsleven is weg."

Suzy:
"Nesjama (spoken in alternative spelling) is voor mij een joods gevoel van binnen, dat als er sores zijn of er is vreugde, dat je elkaar steunt in voor en tegenspoed, vanuit je hart, dus vanuit je nesjoma."

Lex:
"Om niet alleen met je verstand dingen te doen... dat je het gevoel heb, dat je buik aan het trillen brengt. En dan spreekt ook je ziel. Wie heeft nesjomme? Nesjomme heeft diegene die al zijn zintuigen wakker heeft en op kan gaan in wat de ander voelt."

Sally:
"Nesjomme komt van binnen uit, vanuit je binnenste, en het komt van uit je gevoel, het is een gevoelskwestie; een warmte, een gevoel, iets dat je denkt dat je moet doen voor jezelf, voor een ander; voor anderen klaar staan; nesjomme bepaalt de warmte die van binnen uit komt. Iemand die nesjomme heeft, heeft een bepaalde uitstraling. Het komt echt van binnen uit."

Bep:
"Nesjoma is de vertegenwoordiging van een ethiek; en de ethiek betekent respect voor alles, dat is nesjomme."

p. 23  "Het jodendom bestond altijd uit, dat ze gevoelig waren, en zo op elkaar ingesteld, en zo familieziek, en de band was niet te breken... en de familie P. vroeger, zal ik maar zeggen, de vader van mijn man, die broers samen, was een grote familie, dat was sjolem (lit. peace), dat was een feest, als er sjolem was dan kwamen ze allemaal bij elkaar; dat bestaat nou niet meer. De Poolse joden, die hebben dat nog, die hebben dat misjpooshe gevoel, 'that together', heb (heeft) Nederland niet meer. Max [haar man] zei altijd Poleikim, maar dat is geen scheldwoord hoor, nee, omdat hij daar altijd tussen heb gezeten, ook in handel, maar die hebben toch weer een saamhorigheid."
Misjpoche: extended family.
Natuurlijk misjpoche betekent familie, maar wie behoort daartoe? Als iemand een aangetrouwde tante heeft die met de kleindochter van een oudoom van moederszijde van diens zwager uit een tweede huwelijk, dan was de vrouw van de zoon van de zuster van die kleindochter altijd misjpoche. (Herzberg, 1964: 34)

"Zij [dochter] heeft het goed bedoeld maar zij had mij daar nooit moeten zetten... ik kan niet huilen van verdriet, had hier nooit moeten zijn, ik hoor hier ook nog niet. Je ben je gezin toch kwijt, je staat buiten de maatschappij... wij tellen niet mee."

"Ja, ik was in dat andere huis ook eenzaam, maar op een heel andere manier... thuis had ik mijn eigen tsores (leed, smarten) maar niet wat ik hier allemaal hoor. Als je beneden komt, dan ben je meteen gefrustreerd. Dan denk ik waar heb ik het aan te danken dat ik hier tussen zit. Ik hoor hier helemaal niet. Als je beneden komt in die binnentuin, nebbisch (interjection that expresses sympathy)... ik word hier omringd door... alles is zo deprimerend hier dat je op het laatst geen lichtpunt meer ziet... zodra ik naar beneden ga, is mijn humeur helemaal weg... ik heb het gevoel dat ik in een gesticht zit... nou, ik dacht wel, ik ben in een soort gekkenhuis terechtgekomen."

"Ik kan die knop niet omdraaien, ik heb de knop maar die draai ik niet om. Dat is het karakter. Ik zou het niet weten, ik zou het niet weten hoe ik mijn verleden weg kan zetten, dat wil ik ook niet."

"Maar, wij kregen perenkugel, nou ja kind, het was, 't was vergif... dat bruine chocolade vla over een perenkugel... dat eten verleer je hier hoor... ik hoef geen luxe eten als het maar smakelijk is... en als je nou te laat in het huis, Beth Shalom, te laat aan tafel komt, is de soep op, of het vlees is op, dat is onbegrijpelijk... wel gisteren, dan hadden wij bietenstamppot, dat heb ik nog nooit van mijn leven gegeten; bietenstamppot, zonder jus, zonder iets erin, en met een vies worstje, zo'n dun vies worstje, natuurlijk kosjer, zou je niet zeggen... vanmiddag hadden wij nou bloemkool; het was helemaal verkookt weet je, je kon helemaal niet meer zien dat het bloemkool was, het was meer bloemkoolmoes."
p. 25  "De vaste klanten waarderen de joodse sfeer, een sfeer met nesjomme. Ik kook Hollands-joodse pot, zoals ik het van mijn moeder geleerd heb. Ik heb tientallen klanten die dat herkennen: 'Hé, dat at ik bij mijn opa en oma ook altijd' en dan raak je aan de praat. Ik kom uit een echte Amsterdamse familie. Mijn ouders gingen nooit naar sjoel (synagoge), maar op vrijdagavond moesten we thuis zijn. Dat was niet religieus, het was gewoon een sociaal gebeuren."

p. 26  **vrijdagavond**
Men at als vrijdagavond maaltijd:
Een boterham (challebrood) met merg, kippenlevertjes of gehakte levertjes.
Kippensoep (Men eet op sjabbes niet wat men de hele week eet!)
Soepvlees met zuur. Pekelaugurk, uitjes, olijven, pekelkomkommer, lemoen of mierik.
Groenten
Opgebakken soepkip met gebakken aardappeltjes met sla of zuur.
Taart
'We! moge het u bekomen!'

de Vries & Wertheim, 1977: 57

p. 27  "Wij zijn niet vroom, zeg ik eerlijk, maar we hadden een joodse kern... altijd, ik had altijd mijn joodse sfeer. Maar mijn moeder stond altijd te koken, want dat kon altijd bij ons, iedereen kon mee-eten."
p. 28  "Mevrouw heeft behoefte aan vriendschappelijk huisbezoek: samen een kopje koffie drinken of gezellig samen gaan winkelen. Mevrouw komt nu nergens meer".

Vriend

p. 28  je hebt iemand nodig
stil en oprecht
die als het erop aan komt
voor je bidt of voor je vecht
pas als je iemand hebt
die met je lacht en met je grient
dan pas kun je zeggen: ‘k heb een vriend
(Toon Hermans, 1982: 32)

p. 28  "Dat vind ik wel fijn dat ik in een joods omgeving ben; in het kamp hebben wij ook nog zelfs een klein beetje geprobeerd feest te houden'.

p. 29  "Wat familie betreft, heb ik niemand meer. Omdat wij geen familie meer hebben, hebben wij ook geen kennissen; want die nemen een nichtje mee en die nemen een vriendinnetje mee en die nemen een vriend mee. Als die ‘sores’ niet waren gekomen, had ik een andere antwoord kunnen geven. De vernietiging van al de Joden, van zes miljoen. Toen moest ik er helemaal inkomen, weet je, en gaat toch weer gedachte aan die rottige tijd, die komen altijd boven, of je het wil of niet. Dan kom je in de kampen terecht; ik heb meer dat gedeelte van de kampen in mijn hoofd. Er zijn veel hier, en dan voel jij je samen verwant weet je. Vele die geen familie meer hebben”.

p. 30  "Ik vind het een vreselijke naam,... te Joods; en nu met dat antisemitisme, ik vindt het vreselijk; angst overheerst altijd; ik zie overal angsten, vervolgingen, vreselijk. Het komt gedeeltelijk door Israël, door de toestand daar. Toen zeiden ze ook, zie je wel, de joden weer dit en de joden weer dat. Echt door Israël, veel komt door Israël.”

p. 31  "Wij hadden dezelfde doelstelling, om samen iets op te bouwen.”
p. 31  “Zou het prettig vinden als een vrijwilliger van JMW haar kan bezoeken voor een gezellig praatje. Ze houdt van lezen (kan niet meer) en van muziek.”

p. 37  “Ik ben nu in Beth Shalom. Het is hier wel prettig. Het eten is erg goed. Ik heb een mooie kamer. De wereld buiten is onwerkelijk. Er gebeuren nare dingen in de wereld, waarvoor ik erg bang ben. Ik vrees een grote oorlog tussen moslims en christenen, waartussen de joden zitten. Ik ben bang voor de islam, en veel mensen met mij. Ze zijn te bang om hierover iets te zeggen. Maar ik geloof dat wij de rekening hiervoor gepresenteerd zullen krijgen. Ik vrees het ergste”.

p. 38  “Wij hadden een prachtig voor-en achtertuin. Maar de vreugde van het nieuwe huis duurde niet lang, hooguit vier jaar. Toen kwamen in de oorlog de Duitsers beslag op ons huis leggen. Er kwamen vier Duitsers in. Ik zie ze nog voor me. Het huis van de joden moest schoongemaakt worden en twee poetsvrouwen gewapend met emmers en bezems marcheerden achter elkaar het huis binnen. Maar intussen moesten wij eruit en onze schamele bezittingen op een handkar laden, wij moesten naar een andere straat want de joden moesten bij elkaar wonen; des te makkelijker konden ze dan opgepakt worden. Toen wij de boel op de kar aan het laden waren, kwam er een zigeunerin aan, ze zei tegen mijn vader, “Mijnheer mag ik U de toekomst voorspellen?”, waarop mijn vader antwoordde: “Dat hoeft niet, Hitler heeft ons al de toekomst voorspeld.” Als je nou toch zo iets antwoordt, dan begrijp je niet waarom hij niet tijdens de oorlog wilde onderduiken. Hij was bang om onder te duiken. Hij zei altijd wij joden zijn vogelvrij ze kunnen met je doen wat ze willen. Hij had hierin wel gelijk maar er waren toch ook goede mensen, die de joden in de oorlog geholpen hebben”.

p. 38  “Mijn man was een Duitse jood gevlucht uit zijn land. Hij heeft het hier heel moeilijk gehad. Hij vond het vreselijk dat hij met een Duits accent sprak, hij was ongelukkig hier en heeft zich altijd als een vreemde gevoeld… Hij was een goed en verstandig mens”.
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