

# Escaping the Holocaust

## Survivor Anneke Bloomfield has packed house for presentation at Pendleton Library

BY JOHN TILLMAN

Hermiston Herald

Anneke Bloomfield was 5 years old in the Netherlands in May 1940 when Nazi Germany invaded her country.

The occupation regime ordered Dutch males ages 16-40 to turn themselves in for forced labor. German troops blocked off streets and searched houses. Bloomfield was traumatized when soldiers pounded on their door, demanded entry and searched every room, including hers.

"I was so scared when he came to my bedroom," Bloomfield said. "I had nightmares for a couple years after that."

Now 82 years later, Bloomfield, an outreach speaker for the Oregon Jewish Museum and Holocaust Education Center, recounted her young life under the Nazi occupation to a packed house Tuesday, May 31, at the Pendleton Public Library. The presentation was in conjunction with the traveling exhibit "Americans and the Holocaust," on display at the library until July 1.

Her partner, Jerry Paster, said Bloomfield dedicates her talks on her experiences in World War II to her father, Thomas Siebel. He worked for oil company Royal Dutch Shell. Her mother was a former school teacher.

### AVOIDING THE 'J' STAMP

Bloomfield was born in The Hague, seat of government of the Netherlands, in April 1935. She said her father saw the threat Nazis posed before the war began in 1939. He made every effort to remove Judaism from his family's life. They moved from the Jewish quarter of The Hague to a Christian neighborhood, where they bought a three-story house.

They stopped going to temple and instead attended church on Sundays. Her father started working in the church library, so community members would see him and think he was Christian.

Bloomfield and her siblings were taken out of Jewish day school and put into Christian schools.

"There was a big school open to all just two blocks away," she said, "but he sent me to a Christian school seven blocks away."

Bloomfield's maternal grandparents were rich but stuffy. She adored her father's poor but loving parents. Even though they lived in Delft, 7 miles distant by road, she visited them on the blue scooter she got from her rich grandparents on her fifth birthday.

Under the Nazis, everyone 10 and older had to get ID cards. By acting indignant when asked if he were Jewish, her father managed not to get a "J" stamped on his.

Bloomfield had three brothers, Claas, born in 1934, Bert in 1938 and Tom in 1940.

Their circumstances grew progressively worse. Her dad kept his job for a while. Shell continued to pay him, even

though he couldn't work later in the war. They suffered wartime food and fuel shortages and German soldiers conducting searches, sweeps and roundups. One neighbor was a Dutch collaborator with the occupiers.

### FAMILY SENDS HER AWAY

Shortages worsened. Bloomfield's father made her shoes from wooden planks in the attic floor.

Bloomfield said her family sent her three times to live with

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— Anneke Bloomfield, Holocaust survivor

strangers. Her parents feared the situation in The Hague had become too dangerous for her and her siblings to stay there. They might be outed as Jews at any time.

Her older brother was sent away first. Her parents didn't tell their children the real reason why they were being sent to the country. They said it was for lack of food.

"Imagine how little kids would feel," Paster said. "What did we do wrong? Don't you love us?"

The first time, Bloomfield went south to near the Belgian border, to stay with a couple without children. When it became riskier to hide children, they returned her home.

"In Eastern Europe, the Nazis killed people who hid children," Bloomfield said. "In the Netherlands, the penalty wasn't always death, but the consequences were severe."

Her family decided to send her away again, this time to a farm up north. There she stayed with a family that took good care of her. They had a daughter about her age. Bloomfield had never tasted pork, but loved it. The rich food made the starved little girl sick, so she was once again sent home.

Her father was in the Dutch Resistance. People could enter a library without suspicion, so he became a conduit of information for the Underground. At 8, Bloomfield said she carried two "newspapers" — filing cards with intelligence, to contacts after dark, but before the 8 p.m. curfew.

If out after then, she'd be shot.

She saw two men try to evade detention by German soldiers beneath an underpass.

"It didn't work," she said. "They got pushed up on the wall, and they got shot."

Bloomfield made it home without being caught, but she was too scared to work as a courier anymore. Her father decided she was no longer safe in The Hague.

### LEAVING A THIRD TIME

Her mother gave her a coat and a flannel sheet to make warm clothing. Her father acquired used shoes with the toes cut out.

The third time Bloomfield was sent away, she said she went north again to Heerenveen on a bus full of other children, and a man she knew. The bus was bombed. The man was bleeding from his ear. Her new coat was torn in many places, but she didn't get a scratch. She and another girl ran from the bus. They were let into the third

house they approached and waited until it was safe again.

When she returned to the bus, only seven children remained, but they resumed their journey. By the time Bloomfield arrived at her new refuge, she had lice and was hungry. Food and fuel were scarce. In the mornings she would go to the soup kitchen for food and warmth. There was no way for her to contact anyone she knew, so she continued to live in fear and hunger.

One day, she was told to report to a truck. There she met her youngest brother, now 5, who, unbeknownst to her, had also been sent north. They returned home together.

### NOTHING THE SAME AFTER LIBERATION

Back with her family, Bloomfield asked where her toys had gone, including her scooter. Her parents explained she now had a baby sister, Henny, but her starved mother couldn't make milk, so they farmed out the infant. The family that agreed to take her demanded all Bloomfield's toys.

"It took Anneke three years to reestablish a relationship with her father," Paster said. "They took long walks together, but she was never able to bond with her mother."

Bloomfield said that she wasn't able to eat normally until she was 31.

Her older brother was the most damaged, she said. He kept running away to the farm family that had fostered him. Then, at 18, he left for Alberta, finding work as a truck driver in Calgary.

When she turned 20, Bloomfield also went to Canada. She was able to track Claas down. Against her father's wishes, she stayed in Canada, married a Swede, adopted a son and moved to Phoenix, Arizona, with her family.

She relocated 19 years later to North Hollywood, California. Her husband died. She eventually retired to the Portland area.

"Some people claim you can't be a Holocaust survivor without having been in the concentration camps," Paster said. "But those who escaped capture suffered as well."



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Holocaust survivor Anneke Bloomfield shares her childhood memories to a large audience May 31, 2022, at the Pendleton Public Library.



Anneke Bloomfield/Contributed Photo

This photo on display May 31 2022, at the Pendleton Public Library shows Holocaust survivor Anneke Bloomfield as a young girl. Bloomfield was a child from the Netherlands who hid in safe houses to escape Nazis in World War II.

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