

# *The Scratches we accumulate*



*Juul Fleur de Nijs*

## **The scratches we accumulate**

**By Juul Fleur de Nijs**

### **BOMMEN**

De stad is stil.

De straten

hebben zich verbreed

Kangoeroes kijken door de

venstergaten

Een vrouw passeert.

De echo raapt gehaast

haar stappen op.

De stad is stil.

Een kat rolt stijf van het kozijn.

Het licht is als een blok

verplaatst.

Geruisloos vallen drie, vier

bommen op het plein

en drie huizen hijsen traag hun rode vlag<sup>i</sup>

## **Introduction to my story:**

It is clear by the research I have done that we, in the Netherlands, care very much about war victims and that we are willing to go the extra mile. Unlike many other countries that got struck by World War 2, the Netherlands has subsidised research on the causes and effects of war induced psychological traumas. We also support war victims in a way that goes far beyond the support these war victims receive in other countries, and we even have a law to make sure the victims are taken care of called 'The law of the persecuted' from 1973. This law speaks of 'a societal duty of solidarity with the victims of persecution'. This law forms the foundation of a system of aid, retirement arrangements, clinics and self-help groups.

In my research I discovered that not only the war generation, but even the generation born after the war, the ones who suffer from the 'don't see but hear' effect, can have war induced scars that can sometimes be so deep that they are passed on for generations. Someone I talked to rephrased this beautifully, at least I thought so, into: '*Mensen kunnen krassen oplopen.*' (People can accrue scratches). This can have variations of severeness, for example, the kind of scratches you get emotionally when you walk past a branch covered with

thorns, that only stings a little and are just annoying, to the kind that are so deep they probably won't heal anymore.

I learned from my investigations, but even more from talking to all these war victims, how to get out of the war. And by the way those people were sitting across from me, telling their story, I learned that the impact of the war and how to deal with it, completely depends on the person you are. Some have been through things so forceful and horrible that I would not be able to sit so calmly across a stranger, blurting all my deepest, darkest memories out. Nevertheless, they were all very willing to answer my dreadful questions in exchange for a little interest and their hope of helping someone (in this case me) with their story.

## **My interviews**

The interviews were all in Dutch, therefore the Dutch quotes. I translated the questions to English for my book. Doing my interviews, I started with a basic set of questions. I thought best to not incorporate all of those in my book because the story would not run as smoothly. I did however, want to state all my questions because they may help understand the story better. I never stuck to one basic set of questions for everyone because they all have a different that asks for a different approach. I also never used a certain order in questions, I just saw where the interview led me. Also, not all of these questions came back in each interview, sometimes I barely asked any, because people wanted to tell their own story and I went with the flow of their story. I sometimes stopped them to ask something for educational questions or to get insight in what drove them to a certain chose.

1. What had the biggest impact on you as a little kid?
2. How did the war affect daily life?
3. How does it feel being a child in the war?
4. Are there certain things you will never forget because they were, for example, very shocking or tragic?
5. Are there certain things you do to which you would say they were a consequence of the way?
6. How do you look back on your childhood and on that tragic time?
7. Do you notice any changes in yourself because of the war? If you do things in a certain way, talk in a certain way or how you see things?
8. Do you have any good memories about the war?

9. Are there things you do not do or have not done because of the war? Or have missed because of the war?
10. How did the war affect your children and your way of bringing them up?
11. Do you feel as if you have missed your childhood?
12. Have you ever felt ashamed of who you were?
13. Do you regret the things that have happened to you?

To the ones representing an older family member, so the ones who were second generation war victims, I also asked:

1. Have you ever noticed anything in your mother/father/grandmother that you think was a consequence of the war.

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## Introduction

This book is the final product of my profile piece. I decided to do it on the second world war because it is something I find really interesting and I still cannot comprehend why this has ever happened. I am an IB student and am therefore required to write my profile piece in English. However, I talked to Dutch people only, because their stories interested me. So I did my interviews in Dutch and wanted to quote them in Dutch to keep the essence of my story intact. My analysis is in English so my book became a mixture of two languages. Most of my sources are in English and some of them are in Dutch because they are discussing a Dutch subject that is not discussed in any other country and therefore only available in Dutch. In between my stories, there are dark grey pieces of text. This is the research information, it is your choice whether you read this immediately or stay with the story and read background information later. I hope you enjoy!

When the war goes down, it takes everyone down with it. After the war we often focus on what is wrong or broken and needs fixing.

We rebuild cities, houses and the economy. We try to heal the people and help them get over their loss. However, we only think of the physical aspects of their pain and loss, not the mental aspects. Even though, years later, these are often the ones where the pain keeps lingering. People need help learning to accept what happened and learn how to deal with it.

*“Het leven gaat zo en daar moet je echt wel eens even hard in zijn: je komt en je gaat, ja? De een gaat vroeg en de ander gaat laat. Maar als je daar nou altijd maar mee bezig bent, ik kan het van me afzetten... ja, de oorlog verhardt je wel, daarom hoop ik ook dat jullie het nooit meemaken. Is helemaal niet leuk hoor.”*

## Oma Jopie

87 years old, born the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1929 in Weesp.

I wanted to start this whole project by interviewing my great grandmother because she is closest to me and also because she is the reason I did my profile piece on the second world war. It was a very special talk and I felt very lucky to have this conversation with her because she usually is not willing to let people in like that. I was actually the first person (probably except for her husband but we don't know for sure) to learn the whole story and I have to say, I was quite intrigued.

Her background story: my great grandmother was a normal girl, eleven years old, when the war started. During the war her dad helped feed the Jews by slaughtering sheep for them and protecting them from the German soldiers. Eventually he got caught and was almost sent to France, but he luckily escaped. At thirteen years old, my great grandmother's mother died and her brother was sent to Germany to work there in one of the prison camps.

*“In ene `s morgens om 6 uur hoorden wij Duitse jagertjes overgaan en ergens bombarderen, weet je. Dan schrik je wel even. Toen was het wel erg want er zijn er heel veel doodgegaan hoor. Het is te hopen dat je het maar nooit meemaakt hoor, want nou wordt het veel erger.”*

That was the beginning of five years of an unbalanced household, the loss of her own mother and living with a constant awareness of upcoming danger.

Everyone who has experienced a war takes parts of it with him/her, maybe in a disturbing memory, or in a lack of education, or in the absence of a lost parent. A lot of research has been done about this impact and the most common effects on war victims are that they are harsher, paranoia, unable to show love and affection, and greediness. These are just some examples but they show how much impact the war can have on someone.<sup>ii</sup>

Talking to my great grandmother made me realise I would have to dig deep and ask a lot of questions to get some answers. I think she was 'putting up a wall' for self-protection. She was also finding it very hard to talk about her emotions, that is one thing she never learned. Things like this are psychological effects of the war.

"Children are dependent on the care, empathy, and attention of adults who love them. Their attachments are frequently disrupted in times of war, due to the loss of parents, extreme preoccupation of parents in protecting and finding subsistence for the family, and emotional unavailability."<sup>iii</sup>

These are all the things my great grandmother missed, she did not have enough care, attention, love and empathy and had thus not learned how to do these things on her own. When she had children she did not

know how to take care of them and how to show them love and affection or how to be a good mother. She lost her own mother in the war, so she could not have learned that.

Some other things I noticed, because I obviously spend a lot of time with her; She tends to be quite firm in her ways and is not easily persuaded out of her comfort zone, she is also quite prejudiced when it comes to the NSB or the Nazi's.

*"Ik snap het niet want ze zijn allemaal nog goed terecht gekomen ook, die NSB'ers. Die hebben nog een goede baan en alles, die waren er wel bij hoor."*

She realises she behaves like this but, looking at what the Nazi's did that affected her family, it makes sense she thinks and feels the way she does and there are actually loads of other war victims who feel the same way.

My great grandmother is a very strong person. She does not realize that, but I think she is this strong because she had to be back then. She had to do things for her dad, like buying tobacco, all the way across town on her own, so he could sell it and they would buy food. That may sound like some dull grocery shopping, but in that time it was extremely dangerous with all the bombing and the German enemy being everywhere.

She had to take care of an entire household at age thirteen. I realise this was not a normal childhood but it did make her a very strong person who was able to take care for herself and didn't need help from anyone. Of course, with this strong person also comes a certain harshness obtained from the war:

*“Maar het leven gaat zo en daar moet je echt weleens even hard zijn zijn. Je komt en je gaat. Ja? En de een gaat vroeg en de ander gaat laat. Maar, als je daar nou altijd mee bezig bent.. ik kan het van me af zetten.”*

After I asked if her strong personality and harshness were because of the war, she answered:

*“ja, de oorlog verhardt je nou eenmaal, daarom hoop ik dat jullie het nooit meemaken. Dat is helemaal niet leuk hoor.”*

It is clear the war had indeed touched something within her and she, like many others, wanted to forget about it as soon as possible. This is a very logic psychological reaction, if there is something dark and horrible that has happened, you put it somewhere deep and never talk about it . Sometimes those kinds of things stay locked away forever. However, I knew, talking to her ,there were things about her she was not telling me. To figure out what they were I talked to her daughter, my grandmother.

My grandmother told me she thinks that for the actual years of the war, my great grandmother got away relatively undamaged. But there are little things in her behaviour that gives away that she is a war victim. Little things like a having kind of greediness and a particular way of eating due to the war and she will probably keep on doing these things like that. We both think a psychiatrist would find more 'damage' than we can probably see. My grandmother told me:

*"Ik zeg wel eens, ze was niet heel afstandelijk maar ik heb altijd in oma Jopie gezien dat ze een eigen moeder heeft gemist. Ze heeft echt de liefde van een moeder gemist en doordat ze die heeft gemist, wist ze niet zo goed hoe het moest. Ze is nu veel liever dan dat ze vroeger was, toen moest ze heel hard werken en dan was er nooit genoeg tijd voor liefde en aandacht."*

I really enjoyed talking to Oma Jopie and I really felt as if made our bond stronger. I knew things no one else in

the family knew. I felt extremely privileged. Due to this project, we talk more and I really feel as if we are more connected. Just the other day I came by to show my new scooter, she wanted to see it, and also to ask her for a childhood picture of herself. I could practically see her face light up when I showed up to have a little chat, it was a lot of fun.

*“Alle mensen die de oorlog hebben meegemaakt, hebben hun portie gehad en die hebben daar altijd op een bepaalde manier last van ook al hebben ze er geen last van.”*



**Hans Jo Aussen**

90 years old, born the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1926 in Amsterdam.

Mr. Aussen is one of the guest speakers of the Steunpunt Kamp Westerbork group. He visited our school and was more than willing to help me with my profile piece. He really helped me shape the idea of my profile piece and the way I wanted to go.

*“Och.. het is verschrikkelijk moeilijk te zeggen hoe de oorlog het leven beïnvloedde, maar met een joodse achtergrond wist je wat er boven je hoofd speelde met de Jodenvervolgingen.”*

Soon after the war started, he and his family were called for transport. The Aussen family decided to hide themselves from the German enemy. That was a good decision; nobody on their train came back. He hid in a few places with his family and they were the only ones of the family to survive the war. He went in hiding for three years. He came home after bijltjesdag. This, of course, had quite an impact. Suddenly, as a sixteen year old, you're supposed to pack up everything and leave your home. He actually does not think he has a kind of trauma from the war because he has talked so much about it and that helps the healing process.

*“Ik kan me nu alleen nog bedenken dat ik misschien anders was geweest als het geen oorlog was geweest. Ik heb een Franse fabrikant die tegen me zei: 'Je choisi, vous êtes un peu timoré' (je bent een beetje beschroomd). Maar misschien was ik dat ook wel geweest vanwege mijn geboren karakter. Er zijn mensen*

*die echt een trauma van de oorlog hebben, dat heb ik niet, dat wil zeggen je praat er altijd over. Ik ben me niet bewust dat ik er wat van heb maar een psychiater zou er meer achter zoeken. Luister, alle mensen die de oorlog hebben meegemaakt, hebben hun portie gehad en die hebben daar altijd op een bepaalde manier nog last van ook al hebben ze er geen last meer van.”*

After a while he told me he only started to remember the events in the war around his sixties, this is around the year 1990. He wrote down everything he remembered to make sure he did not forget again. Because of this, I believe there was indeed a trauma otherwise you would not repress those memories and feelings for forty-five years. Mr. Aussen once went to the Anne Frank house because friends of his niece wanted to go there and he had to guide them but he hated going there. For a long time, he could not even pronounce the name of Camp Westerbork without getting overly emotional. He went there around 1990 for the first time, encouraged by his brother. He also searched high and low for his family members to find out which camp they were sent to and if there was a possibility that they were still alive. The Aussen family used to be very big but most of them were sent to the camps and only a few returned. He gave me a book called *In Memoriam*, where 102.000 names are written of all the Jews that were sent to the camps. In here, there is a long list of names, with the surname being

Aussen. I told him he had a very big family to which he answered:

*“ja, dat was een grote familie ja, allemaal omgekomen in de kampen.”*

I noticed this was a sensitive subject for him and let it rest.

I also asked him if he thought that he missed his youth because of the war. He answered me:

*“Het is natuurlijk logisch dat dat zo is, alles wat kinderen mochten doen heb ik gemist. Ik wist niks. Mijn volwassenheid was natuurlijk vertraagd. Ik was zo groen als gras toen ik uit de onderduik kwam.”*

To all of my interviewees, I ask the question: **Do you think the war has affected your children and your way of raising them?** Their answers told me much about what effect they believed the war had had on them. Everyone, even if they don't realise it, affects their children with their own war pain and trauma.

'Over wat zich in deze gezinnen met afspeelt, bestaat grote overeenstemming: ouders die overlevenden van de oorlog waren, die onuitwisbare beelden van angst en vernedering met mee droegen, die geplaagd werden door het besef dat familieleden vermoord en levensgemeenschappen kapotgemaakt waren en die de

vernietiging van alles wat hen vertrouwd was – inclusief de materiële grondslagen van hun bestaan – hadden meegemaakt, bleef geen andere keus dan alle daardoor opgeroepen gevoelens te verdringen om ten minste zo goed en zo kwaad als dat ging, verder te kunnen leven<sup>iv</sup>

Mr. Aussen answered me:

*“Eén van mijn dochters is zich op dit moment aan het voorbereiden om als tweede generatie mijn taak over te nemen. Verder, ze krijgen er natuurlijk altijd iets van mee maar er wordt nooit over gesproken. Ze hebben allemaal mijn verhaal aangehoord behalve mijn zoon, hij wil er niet aan.”*

It is clearly a sensitive subject in his household and I chose to ask a happier question next, hoping to keep the conversation light and going smoothly. I asked him if he had any good memories about the war and he answered me:

*“Al die mensen die zich ingezet hebben om ons te helpen. Mijn onderduikouders. Mevrouw Mulder was een schatje, die is gestorven toen we er waren maar ik zie haar nog zo voor me Gerda Mulder. Ik kijk terug op die tijd als gelukkig zijn dat ik er nog ben. Dat ik mijn moeder dankbaar mag zijn dat ze ons niet heeft laten gaan naar Duitsland want ik was er niet meer geweest.”*

He had clearly loved Mrs. Mulder very much and I wondered if he was that easily emotional or if she just meant the world him, because my great-grandmother was not emotional once in our conversation and I have actually never seen her get emotional. I asked him if he had the feeling the war had made him a harsher person, but he told me he was actually quite meek and was almost afraid to say it. We were also talking about personality changes because of the war but he said:

*"Ik heb geen idee of de oorlog op dit moment nog bij mij in mijn karaktervorming een fout heeft veroorzaakt."*

It was clear he did not think much of the psychological aspect of the war effects even though a lot of his days were spent talking about the war and what had happened to him. He knew that he had a passion for war-related things such as TV programs and books, lots and lots of books. I think he has about a hundred war-related books on his bookshelves.

We talked about literature for a while and he told me about this poem, called Vrede by Leo Vroman.

Kom vanavond met verhalen  
hoe de oorlog is verdwenen,  
en herhaal ze honderd malen:  
alle malen zal ik wenen.

He recited the short poem to me but was unable to even finish those four short lines. Mr. Aussen got very emotional and a little upset at the fact he got emotional. Considering there was a ninety-year old man in tears sitting next to me and I had no idea what to do aside from putting my hand on his arm to show him it was okay to not be okay for a while. We both just waited for him to calm down and relax again.

He said: "*Stom he? Dat had ik nou niet moeten doen. Zo'n simpele tekst is dat maar zo ongelofelijk schitterend.*"



I knew this poem hit him right in that spot where, no matter how good of a recovery you have made and how much you talk about it, it just always has a huge impact on you. You will always get emotional hearing it and reciting it even more as it shows.

I really liked doing this interview with Mr. Aussen. It was my first interview with someone I did not know and was very nervous. Luckily, I already knew he was very nice and has an interesting story. During the interview, everything went smooth and easy. Mr. Aussen is really sweet and I personally loved the fact that he constantly said, while referring to the online story on his website, '*Op de Google*'. He also explained to me how to use google and I just thought it was adorable that someone who is ninety years old was explaining to me how to use google images.

*Mijn oma is altijd een positief iemand geweest met angst voor de wereld maar geen angst voor zichzelf. Ik kan het 'no matter what' en dat was ook zo. Al viel de hele wereld neer, zij kon het wel. Alleen.*



**Natasja van der Loo**

46 years old, born the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 1970

Natasja is a dear friend of my mother and I know her very well too. We go way back. When I was looking for people to interview my mother told me Natasja might want to do it. I believe I said something along the lines of; you do realise she is not at all old enough to be of help, right? In hindsight, she actually helped me a lot. She represents her mother, who has already been gone about fifteen years and she tells the story of how an entire family can be haunted by the war.

Her grandparents were both in one of the camps, she thought it was Westerbork but she is not sure. Her grandfather had to work there, forced by the Germans, and her grandmother was put in the camp because she did not agree with the German government. She was very Left in politics and did not agree with the Nazi's at all. They had a baby there. Eventually, her grandfather

gave her grandmother false papers and she was able to go to the Netherlands. After the war, when he returned, they continued their relationship with their kids even though he already had another wife with kids.

*“Dat is natuurlijk een hele rare relatiestart. De een helpt de ander overleven en je bent tot elkaar veroordeeld.”*

They had seen horrific things and had lived through horrible conditions. This of course had an impact on them. The one most damaged was her grandmother, who suffered from depression and was unable to show love and affection for her own children. She was so hurt by the fact that there were people who could have actually done all those awful things and she was ashamed to be German.

*“Het waren hele bizarre dingen: bevallen in de bunker en dan is je kind eruit en dan moet je weer door. Een bombardement in Duitsland en dan moest ze vluchten en haar baby lag in de kinderwagen en op straat lagen allemaal dode mensen. Zij moest op blote voeten over die dode mensen vluchten. Ze zei wel eens: 'Ik kan het nog voelen, dode mensen aan mijn voeten. Ik kan het ruiken, dode mensen.'”*

*“Mijn opa en oma hebben de heftigste krassen opgelopen want die hebben het gezien, die zaten erin. Maar voor de generatie daarna, die het niet hebben meegemaakt, kunnen het met de beste*

*verbeeldingskracht en de beste wil van de wereld niet voorstellen. Weet je, een film is niet daarin zitten, dat is niet hetzelfde. Maar ze zitten wel met de gebakken peren."*

She told me she knew it had very much influenced her own mother, partially because it wasn't even talked about in her home.

*"Er was een heel groot ding maar daar werd niet over gesproken en iedereen wist dat er iets was."*

Often, as I am sure was the case in her mother's household, the children who did not survive the war are in fact having trouble coping with the war. This is because the war will have probably changed their parents and most of the time, this is not in a good way. However, the children do not know what is going on aside from the fact that it is something big and scary.

De kinderen die zij na de oorlog kregen, worden vaak 'memorial candles' genoemd, omdat ze voor de ouders de herinnering belichamen aan vermoorde familieleden, naar wie ze vaak ook nog vernoemd zijn. Ze geven uitdrukking aan de behoefte van ouders aan geruststelling, hoop en houvast. Kinderen uit een dergelijke omgeving krijgen al op jonge leeftijd zware lasten te dragen. 'De oorlog' is een alom aanwezige, stille dreiging, een onheilspellend familieheim

waaromheen het kind fantasieën weeft die des te beklemmender zijn naarmate ze minder geuit kunnen worden. 'Kinderen van overlevenden' kunnen vaak niet zeggen wanneer ze voor het eerst iets te weten kwamen over de Holocaust, omdat ze zich niet kunnen voorstellen dat er ooit een tijd is geweest in hun leven waarin zij zich niet bewust waren van de geschiedenis van hun ouders. Dit weten van de Holocaust is vaak een integraal en onbetwistbaar deel van hun identiteit, iets dat voortdurend aanwezig is als een soort achtergrond waartegen al het andere wordt waargenomen en beoordeeld. Zelfs als openlijke besprekking van dit onderwerp taboe is of wordt ontmoedigd hebben kinderen zich in een of andere vorm een mentale representatie van de Holocaust eigen gemaakt.<sup>v</sup>

Just like many other children, Natasja's mother had also made up a vision of what the war had looked like. However, they were not able to imagine the horrors her grandmother had to go through. They could therefore also not understand why she had a mental breakdown, suffered from depression and eventually had to go to a psychiatric hospital. No matter that it wasn't her fault, if you are sixteen years old and your mother is not there for you, you will feel abandoned. They had nightmares, shame and humiliation, simply based on the fact they had German names or surnames and were part of the family of the 'moffenhoer' which is a Dutch noun used after the war for a woman who is German or (supposedly) slept with a German.

We talked about what her grandmother had missed in her life and she (Natasja) said it was her education. Her grandmother was a smart woman and would have probably went on to study. She had now learned bookbinding but, had everything been normal, she would have studied because she was a smart woman.

The destruction of educational infrastructures represents one of the greatest development setbacks for countries affected by conflict. Years of lost schooling and vocational skills will take an equivalent of years to replace and their absence imposes a greater vulnerability on the ability of societies to recover after the war.<sup>vi</sup>

Large-scale physical destruction had detrimental effects on education, health and labour market outcomes even after 40 years. First, children who were school-aged during WWII had 0.4 fewer years of schooling on average in adulthood, with those in hard-hit cities completing 1.2 fewer years. Also, war destruction led to worse health in adulthood for those who were children during WWII, these children are shorter, report lower satisfaction with their health and are more likely to die.<sup>vii</sup>

Living in a war-torn country increased the likelihood of physical and mental problems later in life. People who experienced the war were 3% more likely to have diabetes as adults and nearly 6% more likely to

have depression. In addition, people exposed to the war had lower education levels as adults, took more years to acquire that education, were less likely to marry, and were less satisfied with their lives as older adults. War has many noticeable consequences, but it also takes a toll on the health and well-being of survivors over the course of their lives. Instead, poor mental and physical health later in life appears to be linked to lower education, changing gender ratios caused by high rates of deaths among men, wartime hunger and long-term stress leading to adult depression and lower marriage rates. The one notable exception is depression, which is significantly higher for those respondents who lived in regions with heavy combat action.<sup>viii</sup>

We talked about what the war did on her grandmother, what kind of an impact it had had on her and what made her go off the deep end.

*“Ze is zwaar beschadigd geweest maar echt zwaar beschadigd. Ze was een binnenvetter. Je ziet, als je opgroeit met geheimen, dat je dat zelf voortzet. Grote dingen heb je het niet over, slik je door, wordt je ziek van maar vertel je niet. Al die drama's leidden ook tot schuldgevoel. Wat ik altijd hoorde is dat oma het moeilijk vond om affectie te tonen. Bij de volkstelling in '71 sloeg de paniek door en dacht ze; ik ben traceerbaar en straks komen ze erachter dat ik Duits ben en wie weet wat voor verhalen dat allemaal met zich meebrengt.*

*Toen zijn de stoppen doorgeslagen en is ze in een inrichting gekomen.”*

But she did manage to push through it and managed to heal and get better. Or at least, as Natasja said:

*“Nou misschien ook niet loslaten hoor maar dat je in ieder geval beter genoeg bent dat het je functioneren niet in de weg staat.”*

We spoke about how she managed to do this and what kind of a person she was to be that strong that you can break through all the fears and the pain and the memories.

*“Mijn oma is altijd een positief iemand geweest met angst voor de wereld maar geen angst voor zichzelf. Ik kan het 'no matter what' en dat was ook zo. Al viel de hele wereld neer, zij kon het wel. Alleen. Dat was haar instelling denk ik ook, altijd het glas halfvol. Zij genoot ook van de kleine dingen. Zij heeft geleerd: Je moet altijd voor jezelf kunnen zorgen en niet afhankelijk zijn van andere mensen. Zij heeft zich ook heel erg geschaamd voor die periode waarin er mensen waren die dat gekund hebben. **In ieder mens schuilt iets goeds**, dat kreeg ik al mee toen ik nog heel klein was.*

*Alles wat met ongelijkwaardigheid te maken had, daar kon zij niet tegen. Volgens mij heeft zij het feminism uitgevonden!*

*Ook mijn moeder en de anderen zijn grootgebracht, en dat zal wel mijn oma zijn want mijn opa was altijd aan het werk, met: iedereen is evenveel waard, niet iedereen is hetzelfde. Niet iedereen is gelijk maar wel evenveel waard.”*

**‘When elephants fight, it’s the grass that suffers’.** It’s an African quote from the Rwanda war but I felt it was quite applicable to the Second World War. When two countries fight, the people suffer. Natasja’s answer to this:

*“Ja, zeker. Ze stampen alles plat, letterlijk. De aarde heeft daar niet om gevraagd en de mensen die daar wonen ook niet.”*

I thought this answer was very yoga of her and I am sure it, and her basic view of the world, would have made her grandma very proud.



*“Voor het eerst kreeg ik inzicht, het was voor het eerst dat ik aan hem dacht. Ik heb altijd aan hem gedacht in relatie tot mij maar nu was ik er alleen voor hem. Ik liep eigenlijk over van deernis. Ik begreep gewoon ineens hoe moeilijk dat voor hem was en dat door hoe hij was hij zelfs het contact met zijn kinderen verloor. Hij verloor de oorlog, zijn kinderen, zijn thuis, hij was alles kwijtgeraakt. Nu lag hij helemaal alleen in de bush, deze man die altijd zo'n mensenman was geweest.”*

**Annemarie ten Brink**

85 years old, born in 1931 in Dutch East Indies

Before starting her chapter I wanted to explain that some of her quotes might seem a little off because of the way she

talks. She spent almost her entire youth in the Dutch East Indies and has adopted some of their language quirks. This may take some adjustment reading but I wanted to leave her quotes intact for the essence of my story.

She was born in the Dutch East Indies and stayed there with her family until the end of world war two. They then moved back to the Netherlands.

The family – mother, dad and their four children live in Soerabaja on Java. Mrs. Ten Brink is eleven years old when the Japanese concur the Dutch East Indies. Her dad is a navy officer and is told to work on sea in the ‘Battle on the Java Sea’. But, when he comes home, he is not the same. He doesn’t stay home for long because he is caught and put in a prison camp, where he dies due to lack of medicine. Mrs. Ten Brink, her mother and the other children are sent to Camp Ambarawa Camp six, with horrible circumstances. After the end of the war, they are sent to the Netherlands for their safety. Indonesia was in a phase of rebellion against its Dutch government so Dutch people weren’t welcome anymore.

What Mrs. Ten Brink learned from the war:

First of all:

*“In elk geval heeft de oorlog me geleerd dat je heel weinig nodig hebt.”*

And also:

*“Dat de vijand, de Japanners in dit geval, ook gewone mensen zijn met goede en slechte eigenschappen die*

*verlangen naar veiligheid en geluk, maar gestuurd zijn om de vijand te verslaan en onder de duim te houden.*

*Dat oorlog het slechtste uit de mens haalt, ook bij onszelf. Als we dat begrijpen kunnen we de oorlog uit onszelf bannen".*

Mrs. Ten Brink is also one of the guest speakers of Steunpunt Kamp Westerbork. I asked her why she started to be a guest speaker, her answer:

*"Ik ben dus begonnen met die gastlessen omdat ik het naar mijn gevoel heel goed verwerkt heb omdat ik er heel hard aan gewerkt heb. Maar ook omdat ik er zo veel in te geven heb. Ik geef ook Nederlands les aan vluchtelingen, ik heb het gevoel dat ik hen zo goed begrijp. Als ik mensen ontmoet die hetzelfde hebben meegemaakt, ook al ken ik hen niet, dan voel ik meteen een enorme verwantschap."*

She had always felt a little lost in her life. I think it had something to do with her growing-up in a different country, then losing her dad and a forced move back to the Netherlands where no one wanted to listen to her story.

*"Wij konden met ons oorlogsverhaal nergens naartoe, wij hielden maar onze mond. En altijd aanpassen hè?"*

People in that time did not want to listen to the story of Dutch people from other countries. Especially from the

Dutch East Indies because ‘there may have been a war there but it could never have been as bad as here’. They were often told: You didn’t experience the hunger winter (1944-45), you did not have Germany invade your country and take away almost all of the Jews, and you did not have Auschwitz. Well, in Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) they did have camps where they were treated as badly. The circumstances were terrible, people were beaten, people were sexually harassed and/or raped.<sup>ix</sup>

*“Je had in eerste instantie de bommenaanval en onmiddellijk kwamen er schildwachten op alle belangrijke hoeken van de straat. Daar moest je voor buigen. Ook kwamen er kennissen bij ons omdat hun huis geconfisqueerd was en de school was na de eerste bombardementen al gestopt. Zij gaven ook een demonstratie van gewelddadigheid als je niet luisterde en weigerde te buigen. Ik heb het wel eens gezien hoor, dan lieten ze mensen in de brandende zon staan tot er een rijkje was van tien en dan werd er vaak één in elkaar geslagen en dan mochten ze weer naar huis. Het was gewoon een hele andere oorlog.”*

What stood out to me is that she does not have an actual trauma from the war, all those horrific, terrifying times in the camp did not seem to bother her anymore these days. They will, at an earlier point in life, obviously have been nasty memories but she did not seem very affected by them. Her war trauma is actually indirectly

linked to the war. Her dad had to fight the battle of the Java sea:

The campaign against Java and the Dutch East Indies in early 1942 demonstrated to the Allies, if any confirmation were still needed, that Pearl Harbour and the destruction of Force Z were anything but flukes. The Allied command, named ABDA for its American, British, Dutch, and Australian components, was by definition a polyglot force which suffered from all the normal disadvantages of differences in languages and lack of common training. By contrast, the Japanese forces ABDA would face were finely honed and supported by vastly superior airpower. The campaign that was about to unfold would reflect these disparities in full measure.<sup>x</sup>

After the battle, her father came home, jumping in and out of trains to avoid being caught by the Japanese. He had changed completely; he was a stranger to Mrs. Ten Brink. He suffered from PTSD, but they did not know that at the time of course, they just did not understand. PTSD was a very regular, normal disease caused by forceful events such as WWII.

Overall, 25% of casualties were caused by war trauma, and this rate was even higher— 50%— for soldiers engaged in long, intense fighting. In fact, so many soldiers were affected that psychiatrists were confronted with the reality that psychological weakness had little to do with subsequent distress in combat. Thus, terminology changed from “combat neurosis” to

“battle fatigue”. Reflecting the consensus that all soldiers were vulnerable to battle fatigue due to their environments, the U.S. Army adopted the official slogan, “Every man has his breaking point” The consensus at that time was that no one is immune to mental illness, and that environmental factors play a large role in the development of psychological problems. Combat exhaustion was thought to encompass such symptoms as hypervigilance, paranoia, depression, loss of memory, and conversion.<sup>xi</sup>

*“Hij is mijn oorlogstrauma. Hij was heel erg veranderd; hij was kortaf en sloeg makkelijk en vond mij lastig. Hij legde compleet beslag op mijn moeder en wij mochten helemaal niets meer. Toen hij opgepakt werd dacht ik: (ja het is nog steeds moeilijk) opgeruimd is netjes. Ik kon er geen traan om laten. Maar hij was wel in vier maanden dood. Het drong gewoon niet tot ons door. Toen begon ook, en dat heb ik heel lang weggedrongen, de schuld en het geloof dat ik hem vervloekt had. Ik heb er niet mee kunnen leven.”*

She had experienced many years of guilt and sadness over what had happened. She truly believed she had killed her father with her “I don’t care” attitude towards his imprisonment and death. She solved this by talking to her psychiatrist and a spiritual teacher who told her: Do you really think you have that much power that it could kill a man? And then she looked right through it.

She understood it was insane to think she was to blame for her father's death.

She also said she, just like Miss Kats, she suffered from adjustment issues. However, I don't mean she could not adjust, her problem was adjusting too well. Adjusting too everything and everyone to the point where it's just a habit. You cannot even stop doing it and it usually takes years before people know how to stop adjusting. Miss ten Brink learned to adjust when her first marriage ended. She married quite young and she said herself she was in love with love. She knew from the beginning there were things about her man that she did not like but she just adjusted to him.

*"Ik trouwde met een man die me sloeg. Ik had het niet bewust gemaakt en verdrongen. **Slaan moet dan wel liefde betekenen.** Toen ik van hem ging scheiden heb ik het mij bewust gemaakt en heb ik een psychiater erbij gehaald."*

We talked about this and what immediately struck me, but what she had not thought of that much, was that the personality traits her dad had gotten because of his PTSD were traits her husband had had all along. She chose to settle for him because it was familiar. She knew what was coming and had fallen into this pattern of loving someone you know is going to hurt you, emotionally and in her case also physically.

After her divorce she actually became a feminist. She first joined the women's group of the Labour Party PvdA but left as it slowly bled out. She then joined the Dolle Mina's, an infamous Dutch, Left-winged extremist feminist group known to anger the entire world.

Their purpose:

Ervan uitgaande dat een roverdeling tussen man en vrouw niet te verdedigen is op grond van biologisch onderscheid, stelt Dolle Mina zich een maatschappijverandering ten doel, die gelijke ontplooiingskansen voor iedereen en onafhankelijk van sekse mogelijk maakt. Dit kan worden verwezenlijkt door middel van sociale strijd, bewustwording en mentaliteitsverandering en daardoor beëindiging van de sociaal-economische ondergeschiktheid zowel van man als vrouw.<sup>xi</sup>

*"Ons gezin was natuurlijk erg op vrouwen gericht. Wij zijn eigenlijk zonder vader opgegroeid. Mijn broertje was de jongste. Het kwam eigenlijk niet in me op dat er een verschil was en werd gemaakt tussen mannen en vrouwen. Voor mijn huwelijk heb ik nooit verschild gevoeld. Ik ben na mijn scheiding gaan vechten voor vrouwemancipatie. Ik heb een ontzettend leuke tijd gehad bij de Dolle Mina's! Ik zag dat niet de maatschappij moest veranderen, wij moeten veranderen. Vrouwen moeten niet zomaar meer*

*accepteren dat de verhoudingen scheef zijn en dat wij niet gelijk zijn.”*

*“Ik werd door mijn vader geslagen en ik werd in mijn huwelijk geslagen.*

*Toen ik gescheiden was, ben ik gaan werken en toen pas kwam ik tot de ervaring dat ze me het echt moeilijk maakten. Ik begon de wereld eigenlijk toen pas te zien en te zien hoe de verhoudingen niet klopten. Ik begon de ongelijkheid te zien en te zien hoe mijn huwelijk eigenlijk heel eenzaam was. Al die vrouwen werkten niet en waren elkaars concurrenten. Pas toen ik ging werken, kreeg ik weer vrienden.”*

She also told me she felt free once her marriage ended. It was a very hard time for her though; her children chose the side of their dad, who had treated her so badly. She just was not sure of what to do or who to be, their dad did so they chose the safe and strong side. However, on the other side she did not have to adjust to everyone anymore.

*“Ik heb zes kinderen en een moeder van zes die niet meer door wil gaan met het huwelijk, de wereld schrok zich een hoedje. We woonden in een dorp en mensen staken de straat over omdat ze niet wisten of ze me wel wilden groeten. Weet je wat het interessante was? Ik voelde me vrij. Ik hoefde tegen niemand meer aardig te doen en te doen alsof alles koek en ei was. Ik hoefde niets meer op*

*te houden. Het maakte heel sterk. Ik wist, ik sta alleen. Ik ben er heel sterk uitgekomen.”*

She was a real feminist fighting for the female gender with her group the Dolle Mina's, but also in real life when raising her sons. They are all very adequate at cooking, the task of doing the dishes rotated in their home, and they had to clean up their own mess, those kinds of things. Her sons eventually all married conscious women who wanted to work as well. She believes she has brought the evolution in her home, I agree completely.

Her mother was also a big factor in Mrs. Ter Brink being a feminist. She had not previously thought of her like that but when we talked about her, I realised that what her mother did, sounded very feminist. She used to say:

*“Als ze iets van ons willen, dan moeten ze het maar brengen.”*

Mrs. Ter Brink also told me her mother was one of the strongest people she had ever met. After the war, she had lost the love of her life, whom she looked up to very much. She had lost her home and all her belongings.

*“Mijn moeder heeft er heel lang treurig uitgezien (een voorbeeld hiervan is de foto aan het begin van dit hoofdstuk), dat zagen wij toen niet maar toen wij terugkeken op de foto's zagen wij het ineens. Maar ze heeft nooit geklaagd. Ze was heel sterk.”*

She eventually made peace with her father and this also meant she made peace with her inner demons and war trauma. She finally managed to leave it behind. This was with the help of a psychiatrist, many spiritual teacher, lots of talking and one trip to Indonesia:

*"Ik ben naar Indonesië geweest op zoek naar zijn graf maar toen heb ik het niet kunnen vinden. Toen ben ik gaan zitten op de begraafplaats. Het waren een paar kleine kruisjes die helemaal vermolmd waren, ik heb het niet kunnen vinden. Bij het donker worden ben ik daar gaan mediteren op een chinees graf dat een grote steen erop had. Daar ben ik gaan mediteren en voor het eerst kreeg ik inzicht dat het voor het eerst was dat ik aan hem dacht. Ik heb altijd aan hem gedacht in relatie tot mij maar nu was ik er alleen maar voor hem. Ik liep eigenlijk over van deernis. Ik begreep gewoon ineens hoe moeilijk dat voor hem was en dat door hoe hij was hij zelfs het contact met zijn kinderen verloor. Hij verloor de oorlog, zijn kinderen, zijn thuis, hij was eigenlijk alles kwijtgeraakt. Nu lag hij helemaal in de bush, deze man die altijd zo'n mensenman was geweest. **Toen heeft u dus pas de man gezien die hij eigenlijk was zonder het trauma.** Ja, ik zag hem voor het eerst. Mijn hart liep over van verdriet voor hem. En dat hij ook nog zo ver van de zee was... toen hoorde ik een rinkelend riviertje, zo'n piepklein riviertje. Toen heb ik, dat klinkt heel dom want we weten dat, begrepen dat al het water naar de zee*

*gaat. Dus dat hij de weg helemaal niet kwijt is en dat was echt gewoon een spirituele ervaring. Het was echt een heel diep inzicht.”*

Besides her fabulous career as a Dolle mina, something I was stunned and pleasantly surprised by, she did not stop fighting for humans after she left the group. She now teaches refugees Dutch and is often at the refugee centre trying to bring the refugees and the little kids there some joy.

I loved her spirit and the way she was able to crack jokes with me about things that had once caused her immense pain showed she was a very strong person. It does not hurt anymore:

*“Mijn vader is mijn pijn geweest. Je ziet wel, het emotioneert me nog maar ik heb er geen pijn meer van. Het zit aan de buitenkant laat ik het zo zeggen.”*

She came back from all the pain stronger than ever.

*“Ik heb echt door de oorlog heen gekeken. Ik heb het gezien; landen verklaren elkaar de oorlog, maar mensen doen het. Ze worden tegen elkaar opgezet, wij tegen de Japanner en zij tegen ons want zij waren bang voor ons. Er wordt ook naar oorlog gekeken van de kant waar jij staat.*

*Ik zeg altijd; je moet er sterk uitkomen. Je moet je niet gek laten worden door die mind*

(Every time Mrs. Ten Brink said the mind, she tapped her head with her index finger, I thought this was really cute)

*want je mind gaat almaar hetzelfde liedje afspelen en je denkt dat het elke keer anders is maar het is hetzelfde. Die mind maakt je gek en het is heel moeilijk als je zo zit te tobben, om iets te gaan doen om die mind af te leiden. Het is heel moeilijk, maar wel belangrijk want je moet er gezond uitkomen. Met gezond bedoel ik natuurlijk ook het lichaam, maar écht gezond is in je hoofd. De enige verantwoordelijkheid die je hebt is dat je iets gaat doen wanneer je hoofd je gek aan het maken is. Ga iets moeilijks doen, zet die mind aan het werk want anders wordt je er gek van. Dat geeft het weer zin. Een mens is veel sterker dan hij denkt. Het is de mind; als je je zorgen gaat maken over morgen, dan heb je het vandaag ook al slecht. Je kan het niet regelen vandaag, maar als het morgen gebeurt dan heb je er morgen de kracht voor.*

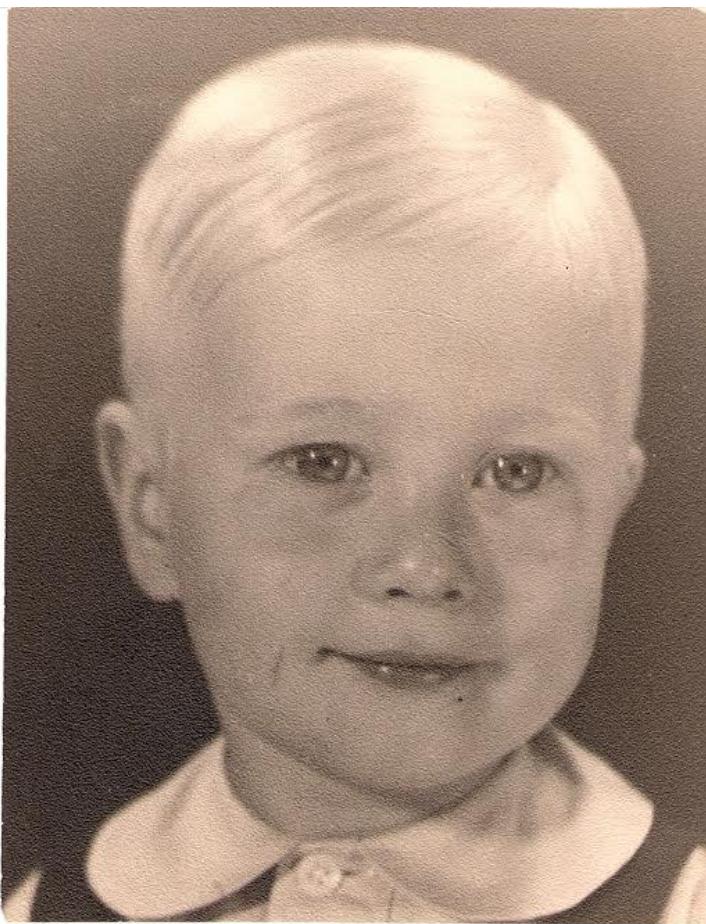
*Dat ik vrede kon sluiten met Japan, dat heeft een einde gemaakt aan de oorlog in mij zelf.”*

As usual, I had asked her my question about the way the war influenced her kids and her way of bringing them up. As we were talking about it I realised she did not pass anything bad from the war down to her children, like most people (unwillingly) do. She noticed what was wrong and what went wrong and decided she did not want to do anything with. She made sure her children learned from previous mistakes and were conscious and

good human beings. She changed for the better and makes sure everyone she talks to does as well.

I loved the fact that I got to talk to her. She was such a kind person and tried to really set a pleasant, casual mood for a quite dark story so I would not feel out of place or at discomfort. She told me all of these life lessons and shared so much of her thoughts and feelings with me without even hesitating because she was talking to a stranger. I could tell she, even though it was not a fun subject, really enjoyed talking to me and sharing her story and wisdom. I want to be able to tell like that and be like that when I reach that age. She made so much of her life even though she had such an awful start. She has since dedicated her life to improving people's well-being and fighting their battles for them if they cannot.

*“Dan ging ik naar de buren en zeiden ze: “Oh daar komt het moffenjong weer aan.” Dat zei me in wezen niet zoveel toen ik een jaar of vier/vijf was. Ik dacht dat het een benaming was voor ondeugend jongetje.”*



**Albert Alfred van Aldijk**  
Born may of 1942, in Haarlem

Mr. van Aldijk was born in 1942, as the son of a German soldier and a Dutch girl. He does not actually remember anything from the war or as he said himself:

*"De oorlog begon voor mij pas na 1945"*

He found out about his real identity around his twenty-seventh but had, since he was a little kid, known he was not who his parents – who he knew weren't his actual parents – told him he was. They told him around his sixteenth that they were not his actual parents but had never wanted to tell more or answer his questions. He did not have a happy childhood, he was bullied and left out, not just at school but everywhere in his town and by everyone. His home was also not a place of comfort, his foster parents weren't good to him. He eventually went to a psychiatrist who helped him open up and talk about what had happened.

*"Mijn jeugd was niet goed. Ik was gehard. Dat maakt je geen mooier mens hoor, dat zal ik niet zeggen maar dat was mijn manier van overleven zeg maar. Ik ben verhard door al die dingen. Ik maak slecht contacten. Ik houd slecht vrienden, daar moet je in investeren en dat doe ik nooit. Het verwatert toch uiteindelijk allemaal. Hechtingsproblemen noemen ze dat."*

Safe to say, Mr. van Aldijk has had a rough life and is obviously scarred by what has happened to him. But after hearing his story, who could blame him? He has been bullied for the first eighteen years of his life, was

excluded by everyone from everything and his parents were awful.

*“Ik wist het al toen ik een jaar of vijf was, door de buren denk ik. Ik speelde ook altijd Duits soldaatje. Dan ging ik door de duinen wandelen en dan speelde ik dat ik een Duitse soldaat was en dat ik naar Duitsland vertrok. Ja, hoe kom je aan die fantasie? Daar moet grond voor zijn geweest. Ik denk door de buren. Ik werd namelijk nergens binnengelaten. Ik werd altijd min of meer als een paria gezien. Ik had heel weinig of nauwelijks vriendjes. Ik moest mezelf altijd vermaken. Dan verstop je jezelf al snel in de fantasie, maar wel waar een basis voor gelegd is.*

*De basisschool is een ramp geweest, want de leraren gingen in het verzet in '48 want er was een moffenjong gekomen. Dat werd tegen alle andere ouders ook verteld met het gevolg dat ik nergens en nooit werd uitgenodigd. Het kwam niet in ze op dat ze niet met een dader te maken hadden, maar met het onschuldige kind van een dader.*

*Dan ging ik naar de buren en zeiden ze: “Oh daar komt het moffenjong weer aan.” Dat zei me in wezen niet zoveel toen ik een jaar of vier/vijf was. Ik dacht dat het een benaming was voor ondeugend jongetje. Ik snapte niet waarom ze altijd zo afwijzend en lelijk tegen me deden.”*

I had asked him what had had the biggest impact on him and what he would never forget. He answered me it was his elementary school. He experienced it as extraordinary bad. He told me he never understood why his son liked to go to school so much because he just never knew that feeling.

Maar liefst 85 procent van de respondenten heeft na de oorlog psychische problemen gekregen. Van die groep heeft wederom 85 procent professionele hulp ingeroepen. De meeste klachten hebben te maken met gebrek aan zelfvertrouwen, neerslachtigheid en angst. Enkelen hebben een of meer pogingen tot zelfmoord achter de rug. Veel respondenten hebben moeite met intieme relaties.<sup>xiii</sup>

'Wij hadden altijd moeten zwijgen, thuis en naar buiten toe. Kinderen van "foute" ouders werden veel gepest, ook door volwassenen. Bovendien stuitte de oprichting van de Stichting – Herkenning in 1981 op veel onbegrip. Toch zijn er volgens haar ook overeenkomsten aan te wijzen. 'Toen ik in contact kwam met Joodse tweede generatieslachtoffers herkenden we veel van elkaar, voornamelijk op het gebied van de desintegratie van gezinnen en de ontworteling die je als kind meemaakte.' Als het gaat om kinderen van 'foute' ouders kun je niet spreken van lotgenoten, van een groep met één identiteit, vindt Enning. Holthuis: 'Het buitenstaanderschap hebben de leden gemeenschappelijk. Het gevoel dat je er niet over kon

praten, dat je sociaal werd uitgesloten. Je kreeg de schuld terwijl je onschuldig was.<sup>xiv</sup>

I asked him how he went about in his research and he told me he basically forced the archive in Haarlem to help him because they were very reluctant. He found out he had a half-brother. He first contacted his brother, who kept his distance for a year but eventually trusted him enough to visit their mother together. When they came to his mother, who neither of them liked by the way because she was a very cold, unloving person, Mr. van Aldijk learned who his father was or at least his name. It was the wrong name but his mother probably did not even remember. So now, he had the name Wiederhof which turned out to be Wiederhöft, and contacted the Berlin archive. However, they were also not able to help him because he did not have enough information about his father. Eventually he succeeded, with the help of Stichting Herkenning, a foundation for children of whom one or both parents were German/German soldiers. He found out his father was a German soldier who had served the Kriegsmarine (German navy) and had had an entire family after Mr. van Aldijk was born. He got the information of the eldest son and contacted him. At first, everything was well and they actually had great contact. However suddenly he got a letter from the son saying he was not allowed to contact anymore; Das war einmal. I asked him if he knew why he was not allowed back into his own family to learn about his dad:

*"Ik weet het niet, maar ik heb wel een vermoeden. In Duitsland heb je erfrecht, zolang je bloedverwant bent heb je rechten. Ik heb ze ook geschreven: 'ik wil geen geld, ik vraag nergens naar! Ik wil gewoon contact hebben. Ik wil weten wat voor man het was, mijn vader."*

But this was not even the worst to happen to him, being excluded from his own family. His half-brother Frits, with whom he got along great and who he loved very much, had psychological issues. He had promised to find Frits' dad for him and eventually found out that, unlike Frits had always been led to believe, he was not German at all. His dad was a normal Dutch man. This was very hard on him as he had based his whole identity on being German. This eventually led to a call from Frits telling Mr. van Aldijk he was going to commit suicide. Mr. van Aldijk tried to help him and told him to go to a doctor. He thought it was just a phase and did not want to drive 800km for a phase. Turns out, a month later the police entered his office to tell him Frits had jumped in front of a train. Mr. van Aldijk has always blamed himself for this and it is still a very sensitive subject and hard for him to deal with.

We talked about it some more and I could see this made him very sad. I could see the guilt was still eating at him. We talked a little more about Frits, his relationship with Frits and the model trains he got as an heirloom from

Frits. I believe it did him well to talk to someone who understood and just listened to his side of the story without pushing him by saying things like: "Suicidal people will kill themselves anyway, you could not have helped." He does not need to hear this as he truly believes it may have helped. Therefore I made the decision to listen and accept what he believed without having to rebuttal to make him feel better.

I asked him how he looked back on his youth, where he had missed the very much needed love.

*"Ik kan het moeilijk onder woorden brengen. Ik ben gewoon daardoor slecht in het maken en onderhouden van contacten. Ik vertrouw mensen gewoon niet. Het is een soort wantrouwen naar iedereen toe. Geen wantrouwen naar jou toe want jij bent nog jong en jongeren staan over het algemeen wat meer blanco in het leven. Volwassen hebben altijd iets waardoor ik ze ervan verdenk dat ze een dubbele agenda hebben waar ik niet van weet. Dat is natuurlijk lastig want dat straal je uit."*

I told him it was a very logical thing to distrust if you had been treated like that and that many other children from 'foute ouders' (bad parents) had similar issues. I explained it probably became a habit to be on your own if you learn so early on that that is best for you.

*“Ja, ik heb als kind natuurlijk veel in de duinen gespeeld. Ik was altijd in de natuur bezig en heb daar gelukkig ook mijn werk van kunnen maken. Ik heb het grootste deel van mijn leven in de duinen rondgehuppeld met weinig contacten”*

He told me he changed his name after his foster parents' death. He, in his own words, thought:

*“Ik neem een andere naam. Ik laat al mijn verbrande schepen achter en ik begin opnieuw.  
Nou ... dat kun je vergeten. Zo werkt dat niet.”*

His name is Albert Alfred, his biological father was called Alfred and his son is called Alfred too. He changed his surname to van Aldijk. He started his life with his mother's surname but soon, as his foster parents adopted him, had their surname. He wanted to take on his father's surname Wiederhöft but he was unable to because his father had never legitimized me and his family was unwilling to let him be part of his legacy. He therefore settled on a Dutch, this was obligated, surname he chose with his wife and son.

We also talked about his dog, Midas. I asked him if he thought Midas helped him in contacting people because dogs usually like everyone and walk up to random people. He answered he didn't really think like that but he did say:

*“Dat is mijn maatje. Die gaat overal mee naartoe. Als de hond niet welkom is, ben ik dat ook niet. Je kan ook wel leuteren tegen zo'n dode hertenkop maar dat doet natuurlijk niets.”*

I told him about my secret wish for a dog but explained that, in my household, it is just too crowded for a dog with my little brother and sister. He was, as people usually are, at their age in comparison to mine and I explained they have a different father than me. I could see he immediately felt a connection to me:

*“dus jij komt van oorsprong ook uit een gebroken gezin.”*  
I said it was for the better though, everyone was happier this way. *“Ja, dat begrijp ik. Maar het mooiste is natuurlijk als je zo'n gezin bij elkaar kan houden. Het geeft ook wel weer veel spanning die je ook allemaal moet verwerken.”*

I really liked how he immediately understood that underneath this cheerfulness and I telling him it was for the better, he realised there once was a time when I did not feel that way. When I hated what happened and suffered because of it. He knew I understood him because he could see it in me and we formed that kind of connection that, even though you barely know each other, you deeply understand what moves the other person because you know a similar pain. (Although mine is obviously nothing in comparison to his.)

In that moment, my heart swelled with compassion and this sudden feeling of sadness came over me. I realised what a nice man he was and saw how kind, wondering if I was okay whereas we were to talk about his life-long trauma. He was all alone with just his dog and he had been treated so badly throughout his whole life to the point of him not trusting anyone because they might have a hidden agenda. He always saw the worst in people, except in youth because he felt we have a more blank and neutral view on life, not because he is a bad man but just because he had needed to self-defence for so long and put up a wall for everyone. Everyone except his brother and his brother killed himself. I wanted to give him a hug and become his friend because he did nothing to deserve this, I know we only talked for an hour and a half but I could feel he was a good person. He is also a guest speaker for Steunpunt Kamp Westerbork and likes to go to group 7/8 because they just have the sweetest reactions. His message to the classes and the children.

*“Ik maak duidelijk dat als je steeds maar een kind vreselijk pest, gaat het mis en dat pesten een heel, heel gevaarlijk iets is.”*

It was all started because his dad was a German soldier and that was not his fault. People were mean, calling him names and excluding him and he still suffers from it. It will most likely never go away any more, too much

time has passed and too much has happened. I think he will be okay though, for I have seen that he slowly, very slowly, understands that not the whole world is against him and that there are people out there on his side. Starting with me.

### **Conclusion**

I'd like to start by saying I only interviewed six people. I tried to make their stories as diverse as possible, for matters of interest but also for educational purposes. However, this is only six out of millions of people who experienced the war. I do believe that I, with my interviews and the many, many hours spent on researching this subject, have a pretty complete overview of the effects. Still, I and my interviewees cannot speak for the millions of others.

No one walks away from a war unharmed. Just like the Americans stated; "*Every man has his breaking point*", when they acknowledged the realness of PTSD, a trauma typically occurring from a violent event such as a war. Whether it be adjustment issues, abandonment issues,

odd eating habits, greediness, paranoia, harshness or something else. There is always something different in a person, a little piece of you, you leave behind. You will never fully be you again, the scratches can turn into scars and the scars can fade away. But the memory and the presence of those scars will always be there.

No matter how well the people I talked to thought they had dealt with and had gotten over it, there was always one subject in our conversation very painful or emotional. I am not saying this is bad, it is good to have some things in us that will always call for a certain specific, intense emotion. For Mr. Aussen this was an intense feeling of sadness that came over him when he recited the poem Vrede, for Mrs. Ten Brink it was talking about her dad, for Mrs. Kats it was talking about how her mother finally said her real name. These were not all bad emotions, Mrs. Kats was happy emotional because she had been given the greatest gift, to be allowed to be herself, the way she was always meant to be. For my grandmother, who had built up a wall to keep the emotions out during our talk, emotions appeared on the surface when she talked about how hard it was to keep an entire household together at the mere age of thirteen.

All of the people I talked to however, agreed the war did not bring out the best in people at all. The thing is, after the war, you have to decide how you are going to handle it. Some of them needed to go through something

intense, like Natasja's grandmother's breakdown, to get better. Some of them decided to do a 180 degree turn and change everything they had to go through or had been taught. Like Mr. Van Aldijk who swore he would never let anything discriminating or bad happen to his little boy and was willing to go all the way to protect him. Or Mrs. Ten Brink who became a feminist no matter what anyone thought, fighting for women's rights and her own and fighting for a better world.

Almost all of these people, except for my grandmother, had chosen to enlighten the world with some of their acquired knowledge. They wanted to turn something awful, into something to be learned from. Four out of five people was a guest speaker at schools. The other, my mum's friend Natasja, was a yoga teacher who teaches people everyone is equal and should be treated equally. One of those guest speakers was (and still is) a feminist fighting for women's rights, she goes weekly to a refugee camp to teach the refugees Dutch and teaches them to keep their mind educated and busy to stay healthy.

I also learned that war traumas are not always direct traumas from for example; the bombardment on Rotterdam or the death of (Jewish) neighbours who could not be saved. Often, like with many of these people, they suffer because someone else they loved suffered from direct war trauma. Mrs. Kats suffered because her parents never came back. Oma Jopie

suffered because her mother died, and her brother was shipped away so she was all on her own. Mrs. Ten Brink suffered because her dad suffered from PTSD and had become a stranger to her.

The war had affected all the victims - or as I like to call them, survivors – aside from Mrs. Kats, who was very aware of the psychological effects, more than they realised. It took some of them half of their life to make peace with themselves and make peace with what had happened.

## **Evaluation**

After talking to all of these people I realised how much more meaning they had given to my life. How much I had learned from them. To want to talk to a sixteen year old, who most of them did not even know, and expose your most inner thoughts and bare your deepest secrets. I respect all of them so much. I feel extremely honoured they wanted to do this with me and go through this with me because things got personal .. for both of us.

When I first started this project, nobody (except for me and parents) thought I could handle it. It was such a broad subject and a big project, there were afraid I would get lost. However, with every interview I did, I gained more confidence. I gained more confidence

because; if they could go through all of that, digging in their own mind for me, for a total stranger then I should surely be able to do this with all the help they offered.

This project made me realise how strong people are and how we bounce back from just about anything. Mrs. Ten Brink learned me that if something bad happens to you, and you feel alone or are alone, you have a new opportunity to find yourself and to better yourself and others.

I cannot thank all of these people enough for the life lessons they have provided me with. In the short amount of time I had for each interview, I felt as if I connected with each and every one of them. They made me realise how much joy I take in doing this with people and how important it is to pass your wisdom on to the next generation, to ensure they learn from previous mistakes.

### **The biggest possible thank you to:**

**Oma jopie:** for providing me with a bunch of laughter making me realise we really should spend more time together and that the interviews did not necessarily have to be a dark and broody conversation. I could have fun with somebody and laugh and connect.

**Mr. Aussen:** For really helping me set up the basics of my profile peace and for showing me where I wanted to

go with it. Also, for your incredible ‘on the google’ help, I would be lost without your internet help.

**Mrs. Kats:** for knowing exactly what I needed and helping me with new and interesting perspectives and stories. For the kind words. And of course for the amazing little German cookies I kept on eating.

**Natasja:** For making the time for me with your busy schedule to dig deep into your brain for your entire family’s history and feelings. Namasté.

**Mrs. Ten Brink:** for teaching me that you can do amazing things if you just keep the mind busy and choose what you want to do in life. And also, that you can be 85 years old and be a total badass, having been in the Dolle Mina’s and teaching me what a liberating feeling it can be to not care what anyone says or thinks. Lastly, not to forget,

For the amazing life lessons I will cherish.

**Mr. Van Aldijk:** For your trust in children, even though they were not always kind. For cracking jokes about your dog and so kindly sharing the most painful memories without making me feel like an intriguere in your story. And, most importantly, for thinking about me and my divorced parents when we were talking about your life of difficulties.

Thank you all so much for your warm welcome, pleasant conversation and endless interest. Thank you for going through so much trouble to make my profile piece great.

My book would not be this interesting and broad if you would not have opened up to a stranger.

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