

## Louis (Levie) de Groot

Wartime Experience: Hidden by Christian Families

Born June 28, 1929, at Amersfoort, the Netherlands.

Father : Meijer de Groot, born October 9, 1897 at Utrecht, the Netherlands – Killed September 30, 1944, at Auschwitz.

Mother: Sophia de Groot - Swaab, born June 10, 1900, at Utrecht, the Netherlands – Killed May 22, 1944, at Auschwitz.

Sister: Rachel de Groot, born August 15, 1927 at Amersfoort, the Netherlands – Killed May 22, 1944, at Auschwitz.

Monday, November 16, 1942, the local policeman, whose beat included our street, stepped into our store in order to share with my parents his suspicion that the Germans were planning a roundup of Jews that evening in our city of Arnhem. My parents sold everything electrical, from flashlights to lampshades, selected tools and hardware as well as bicycle parts in their store. We lived in the spacious quarters above it at Rijnstraat 43 in Arnhem, where we moved in 1932. My sister Chelly as we called her and I were both born in Amersfoort. We were quite young when the family moved to Arnhem. The city is located on the Rhine River, not far from the German border, and about sixty miles southeast of Amsterdam. It is known for its beautiful parks and was the economic and governmental center for the surrounding rural areas.

My parents took the policeman's warning seriously and decided that it was time to leave home and go into hiding. With the aid of my father's older brother Isaac, who was in hiding already, Chelly found her first hiding place in Hilversum, a community just south of Amsterdam. My parents located a hiding place in Amsterdam on the Prinsengracht, a few blocks away but on the same canal where Anne Frank and her family were hiding. I went to Den Helder, a city known for its naval base, at the Northern point of the mainland of Western Holland. By New Year's day 1943, I was on my way to my third hiding place after having stayed a short while with my parents. These location changes were necessary because of changing conditions that threatened our safety and increased the risk of discovery.

I moved thirteen times that year. Sometimes I stayed with my parents. Chelly also moved around at least five times before settling down permanently with my parents in the summer of 1943. On Wednesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1943, at 9:30 in the morning, I said good-bye to my parents whose last words were a reminder to be polite with the people who were going to take me in and to remember always that they were risking their lives by opening their home to me. I assured them that I would be on my best behavior. When Chelly and I embraced, she said the two words that have stayed

with me: "Be strong". I was going to the agricultural province of Friesland, in the northeast of the country, where Rembrandt had married Saskia van Ulenborgh in 1635. The province had built up the reputation among of being a haven for people who needed to go into hiding.

My mother spoke at that time about the fact that, on November 16, 1942, when we left home, it had been her 16<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. She had set the mental goal for this hiding experience to last no longer than 16 months, 16 weeks and 16 days. She suggested that I keep this in mind in looking forward to an end to this separation. She said that, with such a target date in mind, it was easier to endure the hardships of confinement. It was the last time I saw them. Three and a half month later, on April 8, 1944, 16 months plus approximately 3½ weeks since we left home, they were denounced, arrested by collaborating Dutch policemen, and ultimately deported to Auschwitz where they were killed. I am the sole beneficiary of my parents' brave decision for the family to go into hiding. Every day I thank them for having had the courage to take that step while there were so many unknowns to deal with. They are my heroes.

They were aided in their attempt to save me by the "Righteous Gentiles", Anne and Dirk Onderweegs and their 4-year-old daughter Bonnette in whose house I arrived on January 3, 1944. They lived in the village of Lemmer, which once was an important port on the Zuiderzee. In February 1944, Dirk traveled to Amsterdam to meet my parents and to introduce himself as the person who was harboring their child. During that visit he prophetically assured them that if ever something would happen to them, his wife and he would take care of me as if I was their own son. In keeping with their noble character they fulfilled that commitment during and after the war. I lived with them for 16 months after the liberation while I attended high school and awaited word of the possible survival of members of my family. In August 1946, I decided that I wanted to return to a Jewish environment and practice the traditional Judaism I had experienced at home and which bound me to my roots. I moved to the Jewish Boys' Orphanage in Amsterdam.

My father's oldest brother, Uncle Isaac, became my guardian. He supported me in my decision to volunteer for service in the Haganah in early 1948 so that I could actively contribute to the founding of the new state of Israel. About twelve months later I returned to Holland and finished my high school education. At the suggestion of and with the help of Uncle Isaac, I immigrated to the USA in November 1950. On May 1, 1951, I was inducted into the US Army during the Korean conflict. I served in Germany and upon discharge used the GI Bill to earn a M.A. degree in economics at Columbia University in New York.

During that time I met my wife Barbara, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She made it possible for me to live with the painful losses I suffered and to build a family. We married in 1956 and have two sons, Marc and David. In 1987, I retired from an exciting and varied twenty-seven long year career as a business economist with the IBM Corporation.