

Hanna Kleerkoper

Title: *Recollections of My Century*

Author: Hanna Kleerkoper with Christine Mitchell

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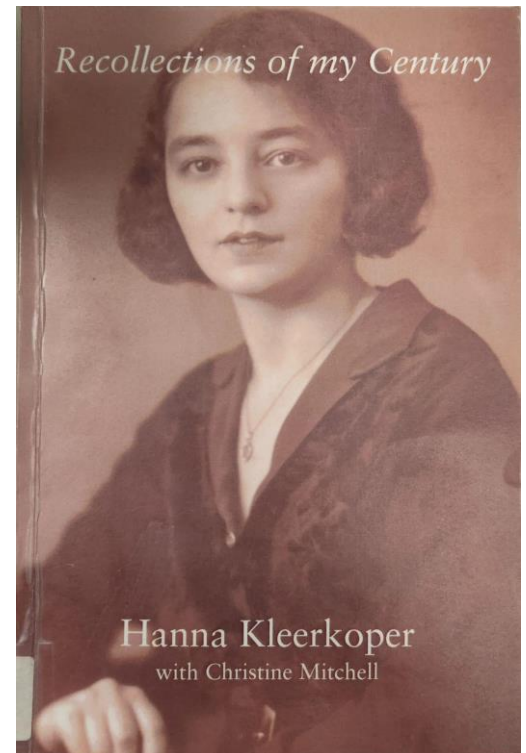
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne
Holocaust Museum, University of Queensland and other
public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Netherlands: Amsterdam; Germany:
Frankfurt; Australia: Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which
are most central to the narrative

Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: in-hiding; false papers; Dutch
Resistance.



Recollections of My Century is the 97-page memoir of Dutch-survivor, Hanna Kleerkoper, who took on a false identity and joined the Dutch resistance after placing her daughters in hiding. Initially reluctant to share her story, Hanna finally began writing her memoir at the age of ninety-three at the urging of her daughters.

Pages 1-16 recount the author's family and upbringing. Pages 17-29 describe her marriage and relocation to Frankfurt amidst the rise of Nazism. Pages 30-50 chronicle the Nazi invasion of Holland, Hanna's involvement with the Dutch resistance and her family's wartime experiences. Pages 51-61 describe liberation, her family's reunion and life in the post-war period. Pages 62-77 describe their emigration and life in Australia and New Zealand. Pages 78-97 discuss her husband's battle with Alzheimer's and subsequent death. It includes 82 family photographs and historical documents in Dutch, German and English.

Hanna Kleerkoper (née Rudelsheim) was born 5 December 1908 in Amsterdam, to Elisabeth Duizend and Moses Rudelsheim. The eldest of seven children, Hanna had two brothers (Michel and Samu) and four sisters (Jettie, Rose, Letty and Henny). Her father worked in the diamond industry and the family had a comfortable life. Hanna's father was religious, but her mother was not observant.

After matriculation, Hanna enrolled in a German-language school to better her employment prospects. There she met her future husband Siegmund (Sieg) Kleerkoper. After securing a position with the Dutch Chamber of Commerce in Frankfurt, Sieg relocated to Germany. In 1932 the couple were married and Hanna joined Sieg in Frankfurt.

After the victory of the Nazi Party in 1933 Jews faced increasing harassment; their once friendly neighbours became withdrawn, and Hanna was accosted on the street by Hitler Youth who ordered her to leave Germany. In the face of hostility, the director of the Chamber of Commerce closed the Frankfurt branch in April and relocated all employees to The Hague. Soon after their return to the Netherlands Hanna's father died of a stroke.

Two years later, the Kleerkopers returned to Amsterdam to establish their own rubber business and start a family. Their daughters, Marietta and Elisabeth (Elly), were born in 1937 and 1939.

On 5 May 1940, Sieg left for England on a business trip. Five days later, Nazi Germany invaded Holland. With Sieg stranded in England, Hanna moved in with her mother. As anti-Jewish measures were enacted, Hanna was forced to sell their business. By April 1942 Jews were forced to wear the Star of David and two months later, deportations to the camps began in earnest.

In England, Sieg desperately sought to return to the Netherlands without success, eventually joining the Dutch battalion of the British army. Rising to the rank of Sergeant in 1941, he volunteered to fight the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies but the region was occupied before their arrival and his unit was redeployed to Australia.

With the aid of Sieg's brother-in-law and his underground contacts Hanna made plans to go into hiding. Faced with a heart-wrenching decision, Hanna placed her two daughters, aged four and three, in hiding with total strangers. The girls, Marietta and Elly, were hidden with two non-related Jewish families, Dirk and Cor van de Kamp and Anton and Mien Heger. near Utrecht.

The girls were collected by a member of the underground and taken to their foster homes. It was the last Hanna saw her daughters for three years. To protect her children in the event of her capture, she did not ask where they were hiding and only corresponded infrequently with their rescuers.

After securing false papers for herself, Hanna adopted the identity of Ans de Bi and went into hiding in an attic. Stifled and humiliated in these primitive conditions, Hanna left to join a group with ties to the resistance. Though not involved in active missions, her small group of eight printed anti-Nazi leaflets and counterfeit ration-cards, distributed false papers, and escorted Jewish children to safehouses. Through her resistance activities, she often came face-to-face with Nazi soldiers but managed to escape detection. On one occasion, her safe house was raided. Under interrogation, she calmly convinced her interrogators that she was Aryan and was released.

Without a fixed address, Hanna moved between safe houses, spending much of her final year in-hiding with one family as a live-in-maid and nanny. Throughout her time in hiding, Hanna protected herself emotionally by repressing her Jewish identity and memories of her children.

Amsterdam was finally liberated in May 1945. Two weeks later Hanna made the journey to Utrecht to reunite with her daughters. After three years' separation, her youngest, Elly, had no recollection of her.

As survivors began returning from the concentration camps, Hanna shared an emotional reunion with her mother and surviving siblings who had endured Theresienstadt and various labour camps. Her apartment became a shelter for returning survivors who slept in every available space. Many had lost their entire families.

After being stationed in Indonesia with the Dutch army, Sieg finally returned to Holland in mid-1946. After a long separation, Sieg's return was challenging, and the couple spent years rebuilding their marriage and family unity. In late 1948 they were repatriated to Australia by the Dutch army, arriving in Melbourne aboard a military ship in January 1949. Sieg's family joined them in 1952.

At the age of 65, Sieg was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. After a seventeen-year-battle, he passed away in August 1992, a week after the couple's sixtieth wedding anniversary.

Recollections of My Century is a brief, deeply personal account of the author's wartime experiences. The memoir candidly portrays the lasting emotional and psychological pain of hiding, separation, and the challenges of rebuilding life, marriage, and family bonds after the war. Written late in the author's life, the memoir is not comprehensive, but restricted to memorable episodes. The narrative is supplemented by historical photographs, documents and chronologies, which aim to provide context and substantiation.