

Speech by Claire Freeman

Struikelstenen Koningsweg 111

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Thoughts and memories:

- The difficulty with this moment is: how do you have remembrances for family that we were deprived of ever knowing?
- Other than what our parents may have told us about them, we never could give or receive that all loving hug, sit and share a simple cup of tea or a meal together
- Our mother and father definitely felt the loss of their parents and in this case, Judic's mother Clara de Vries-Visser, her beloved 10-year-older-than-her brother Emanuel (Max) de Vries, and her wise and loving father Isaac de Vries, which is a burden I feel she carried with her daily.
- Not having had the privilege of ever knowing them in person, we rely mostly on documentation from the Holocaust Museum and our mother's recently published memoir *The Link in the Chain*.
- **Clara Visser** was an elegant woman with wavy silver-grey hair, a young complexion and a rather slim figure.
- **Isaac de Vries**, was asthmatic; a generous man who believed in punctuality; he was a well built; slightly overweight, with a good head of hair and a smile that showed a sense of humour.
- He was a very sensitive man who even fainted after his new son-in-law broke the traditional glass when his daughter Judic (our mother) got married.
- Our mother's relationship with her brother **Max** was of admiration, mutual respect and full of love.
- Max was a slim man with a soft look in his blue eyes and an easy smile who, at the time, often chaperoned his sister when courted by our father, Abraham Wijnberg
- Her parents had a large store in Downtown Utrecht, not far from the Dom (the churchtower in the centre of town), well stocked with fabrics.
- Business was good for them as well as for her brother who had his own store in Zeist.
- They all worked hard and life was good to them.....until the rise of Nazism in Germany and the invasion of other countries began.
- At that time Clara wanted to go back to Amsterdam to be with her brothers and sisters, so they moved but Isaac commuted daily to the store in Utrecht.
- Then Max joined the Dutch resistance and was stationed in Soesterberg with the responsibility of being a morse code and radio communications operator. He even built a small crystal radio. After Holland surrendered to Nazi occupation, he showed his sister and new brother in law (my parents) where he had buried some guns and ammunition in the woods – just in case
- Max was a young man full of love and a feeling of responsibility
- At this point in time Max and his parents moved from the apartment in Amsterdam to this house in Koningsweg, where our parents soon joined them – and from then on they all waited for their fate to unfold – which it did soon enough.
- Meanwhile they continued working in their fabric store in Utrecht, even when being confronted with having to serve fully armed Nazi's that came in to buy fabric.
- Then the anti-Jew laws came into effect stating that they were not allowed to own stores, which were offered to Aryans who applied to take them over.
- My Opa and Oma only received an insulting 100 guilders for their well stocked store
- While the whole family lived together here, my mother gave birth to my brother Leo and 11 months later a second son, Jack, making Isaac & Clara an Opa & Oma.

- Isolation, disconnection and complete separation of the Jewish population now became the norm
- And then life became more dangerous, with Jewish homes being raided by the Nazis and people taken away, and the family had to look for a place to escape or hide out.
- For those that were involved in the early underground, life was tense, but most people did not want to know. It was difficult to know who to trust.
- Bravely taking off their yellow star of David, Clara and Isaac understood that they had to walk away from all they had built, loved and knew to go into hiding. Escorted by a 12-year-old boy, they found a place with the family Gerritse.
- After our parents and their two little boys went to a different address, Max did the final lonely walk through the house to make sure nothing was left behind which might betray them, and then also went into hiding. Max was a quiet, sensitive man who also had good insight into what was happening –doing his share of fighting in the resistance, but making sure not to involve his family so that they would not be endangered.
- In fact, after the war a strange man who knew Max told our mother (his sister) Judic that “your brother Max was a respected man in the resistance. He did some important things. I want you to know that.”
- In one final act of love, Clara, Isaac and Max protected my parents when they were reported to the Nazis by the Dutch man who had been hiding the five of them in his home. They chose to send Judic and Bram away to have a chance at life with their two babies, while the three of them awaited their fate. Clara guessed then, and was right, that they would never see each other again.
- My parents later learned that Isaac, Clara and Max were transported to the concentration camp at Westerbork, to be killed later at the death camp Sobibor.
- For our parents, as survivors, these three, Clara, Isaac and Max, as people and as family members, would always be missed and needed.
- Our parents never went back to the home where they had all lived together, or to the street where they had the store. It was too difficult to face all that was lost. What made it harder to accept was that there were not even gravestones to visit. That is why these stumble stones are so very important to our family.
- What happened to those few Jews who survived was a feeling of a missed sense of belonging. Which is something we all take for granted and anytime that someone mentioned the word family it was and is still very painful even for us.....the next generation.
- Saying that you don’t miss what you never had is definitely not the case here. These three precious family members may be gone, but will never be forgotten.