



Autograph Book

"This book belongs to Hester Waas."

January 25, 1939 - Hester was 12 years old when she received this journal.

Hester had her family members and friends sign the book with messages and drawings.

Hester's 15 year old brother Isaac wrote:

6 February 1939. There is in the world one pleasure for everybody whether happy or sad...Her name? Mother Nature!

Hester's brother and parents were deported to Auschwitz in 1942 and did not survive the Holocaust.

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Hester, 18 years old in 1945, taking care of the three van Westering children.

Hester Waas (now Hester Kool) grew up in the small coastal town of Zandvoort on the North Sea of The Netherlands.

Hester was thirteen years old when the Nazis invaded and occupied The Netherlands on May 10, 1940. The Nazis put in place new anti-Jewish laws, including forcing

Jews to wear a yellow star sewn to their clothes. In an effort to concentrate the Jewish population, the Nazis ordered all Jews to move to restricted areas within Amsterdam. In May 1942 Hester and her family moved from her home town of Zandvoort into her aunt's apartment in Amsterdam.

Hester and her family lived in Amsterdam for only a few months. In July 1942, the Nazis began mass roundups of Jews within Amsterdam. In one of these roundups, the Nazis ordered Hester's father, mother and brother, along with many other Jews, into the city's Opera House. Hester had a special work permit – her name was not on the Nazi's list of Jews to collect and deport.

The group was forced to stay in the Opera House for several days. They were all transported to Westerbork, a transit camp in The Netherlands, and then to Auschwitz. Hester's father, mother and brother were killed in Auschwitz.

"Shortly after my parents left, I was approached by my girlfriend, Rosa Cymbalist, who, to my surprise, worked for the Dutch Resistance. She found a place where I could go into hiding. I took my yellow star off and got a new identification card with a new name, 'Helen Waasdorp.' My girlfriend was my first rescuer. She was all of 15 years old. I will always remember her courage."

Hester was told to take the train to the city of Overveen in The Netherlands. There she was to meet Mr. van Westering, the local church organist, at the church in Overveen—he would then decide if he could take her in. "Because I did not 'look' or 'sound' Jewish, he accepted me." Hester went to live with the van Westering family.

"The van Westerings had three children and my duties involved taking care of them and cleaning the house. I was not allowed to leave the house. I ate alone and slept in a room in the attic. I was very lonely.

"I do not have fond memories of my time in hiding. In fact, I could not wait to leave. Many social workers were involved because he [Mr. van Westering] claimed he was my foster father and wanted me to stay. He said I was a part of their family. I never felt a part of their family. I only worked there and was not included in conversation or meals. I still feel bad about remembering this time because even though I am grateful for being rescued, my feelings toward him are not good."

After the war ended, Mr. van Westering worked hard to prevent Hester from leaving his home.

"My girlfriend was my first rescuer. She was all of 15 years old."

"I ran away to the home of my aunt, uncle, and cousin in Amsterdam. The thought of being caught filled me with fear. I was afraid of Mr. van Westering."

Hester stayed in Amsterdam for two years before immigrating to the United States in 1947. "There was nothing left for me in Holland. I wanted to start a new life."

One month after arriving in New Jersey, Hester married her husband, Sam Kool. Together they are now proud parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents.

Twenty years after her arrival, Hester and her husband ran across an old suitcase amidst their belongings. "There was my book," Hester recounts, "waiting for me to remember."

Hester began telling her story in 1995, encouraged by her children's questions and by seeing an image of Zandvoort at an Anne Frank exhibit. "It is important that kids hear from a survivor about what happened to us."



Hester, age 20, with her grandfather in New York, 1947. Hester had been in New York only about one week when this photo was taken. Hester's grandfather had come to the U.S. from Holland several years earlier.