

## THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS APPLICATION ON BEHALF OF ABRAHAM STAAL

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. This Application

My name is Lorri Staal and my father, Abraham Staal, was a Jewish Holocaust survivor, who was in hiding during World War II in Ermelo, the Netherlands.

I am submitting this application to nominate as Righteous Among the Nations the following people:

- **Anton Rook, Sr.** and his wife, **Bernardina Wilhelmina Rook-Aal**, who were active members of the underground in Ermelo, the Netherlands; they helped my father's family go into hiding in Ermelo and, later, after the family was captured by the Nazis and after my father escaped, they helped my father remain hidden during the remainder of the war;
- **Anton Rook, Jr.**, who befriended my father in Ermelo and later hid him in his own bedroom; and
- **Mr. Frederik Keijzer** and his wife, **Sophia Martina Keijzer-Bink**, who hid my father's family in their home in Ermelo until they were all arrested by the Nazis in 1943.

These families' extraordinary courage and generosity made it possible for my father to survive the war, at tremendous risk to themselves and their own families. They risked everything in order to save innocent Jewish lives. Without them, my father would not have survived.<sup>1</sup>

#### B. My Family's Background

My father was Abraham ("Aby" or "Andy") Staal. He was born on March 28, 1928 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He passed away in New York on June 7, 2011. My father was a stockbroker for most of his adult life.

My mother is Ursel Weinberg Staal. She was born in Koln, Germany. She left Germany in 1938, after Kristallnacht. My parents were married in New York City in 1960. My mother still lives in the same home she shared with my father for nearly 50 years, in Scarsdale, New York.

I was born in New York City in 1962 and am married to Steven Oyer (1955). I have twins from my first marriage, Hannah Staal Rosen and Benjamin Staal Rosen (1996); Steve has two children from his first marriage, Samuel Oyer (1984) and Benjamin Oyer (1986).

My brother, Elliott ("Levi") Staal (1965), is married to Kreina Benchetrit Staal (1969). They live in Chicago, Illinois and have eight children, Devorah Leah (1996), Chaya Mushka (1997), Yosef Avraham (1999), Yehuda Leib (2001), Menachem Mendel (2003), Chana (2005), Moshe (2008) and Rivka (2010).

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<sup>1</sup> My father's experiences are recorded in an interview conducted in 1998 through Steven Spielberg's "Shoah" project. Note: The Application was submitted to Yad Vashem in September 2016; it was modified in October 2016 to post on this website (certain contact and other personal information has been omitted).

## **II. THE EARLY WAR YEARS**

### **A. Growing up in Amsterdam**

At the beginning of the war, my father lived with his parents, Elisabeth (Liesje) Staal (born July 13, 1900) and Louis (Levie) Staal (September 1, 1900), and siblings Jacob (Jaapje) (February 4, 1932) and Betty (Betje) Staal (January 16, 1930). When my father was young, the family lived at Nieuwe Heerengracht 133 in Amsterdam. By 1941, the family had moved to Weteringschans 243 hs (ground floor). The family had an import-export business. My father's family was Orthodox. My father's maternal grandparents were Abraham Salomon Staal and Betje Morpurgo; his paternal grandparents were Jacob Staal and Miriam Springer.

### **B. The Family Staal's Move to Ermelo**

#### **1. Registered in Ermelo.**

In 1940, soon after the German invasion, my father's family tried to leave the country, but by the time they arrived at the harbor in IJmuiden, the port was closed.

On January 10, 1941, the Nazis instituted a requirement that all Jews must register with the authorities. Initially, the Staal family registered as living at Weteringschans 243, in Amsterdam.

In March, the family moved to Ermelo, the Netherlands, where they officially registered with the authorities on March 5, 1941. My father was 13 years old at the time and had recently become a bar mitzvah at a synagogue in Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup>

In Ermelo, the Staal family first lived at Oude Boschweg 28, in a house then called "De Hazenkamp," now on the corner of Russulalaan and Champignonlaan.<sup>3</sup> The family had a good relationship with Anton Rook, the head of the post office and also a member of the underground; the family also had a connection with the Ermelo police. The police there told my grandmother, Liesje, that if the Germans posed a threat in Ermelo, they would know about it in advance and would warn the family. My father's maternal grandmother, Betje Staal-Morpurgo, lived around the corner at "De Wulp," Boschlaan 5 (now Champignonlaan), and his uncle Salomon ("Charles") moved to Oude Boschweg 34 (now Russulalaan 34). At that time, the family was registered with the authorities and was not living underground. However, none of the Staal children wore a yellow star in school, despite the requirement at the time to do so.

My father and his siblings attended the state primary school at Openbare Lagere School (public primary school) on Burgemeester Van Oordtstraat, formerly named Prof. Dr. Kohnstamm school. Professor Kohnstamm was Jewish, and so his name was banned from the school by the Germans. He lived in Ermelo and was of German origin. He survived the war.

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<sup>2</sup> On April 17, 1941, the family again registered as living at Weteringschans 243 in Amsterdam, perhaps in an effort to hide their move to Ermelo. On September 12, 1941, they again registered as living in Amsterdam. Their registration card bore the letters "NI J;" the "NI" stood for Nederland Israelitisch (Dutch Jew) and "J" for Jood (Jew).

<sup>3</sup> After WWII, the streets in Ermelo were renamed.

One of my father's classmates was Anton Rook, Jr. He was a year older than my father but was in the same class. They became good friends. Anton recalled, "As our lunch time at school was not all that long, I proposed to my father that they [Aby, Betje and Jaapje] have lunch at our house. Their home, 'Hazenkamp,' was way out of the center of the village. Our grade, which was the last grade before secondary education, was much too easy for Aby. He was there from March till June 1941."

Anton and my father ate lunch together at each other's houses; my father often went to Anton's home because it was closer to the school. The boys played often in the woods, building forts in the forest. Anton's father, Anton Rook, Sr., was the postmaster of the town of Ermelo and his family lived in the second floor of the post office. As discussed further below, he was active in the underground in Ermelo during the War.

Mr. Rook, Jr. said that he celebrated my father's birthday on March 28, 1942, at the Staals' house at De Hazenkamp; there was a small celebration with cake. He also said that my grandfather's hobby was building radios. He remembered my great grandmother, Betje Staal-Morpurgo, who came from Portugal.

Sometime in 1942, Mr. Rook, Sr. told Anton that the Staal family had moved to Jan van Malensteinweg 13, living in a summer house behind the main house. He said that they moved because the children would then be closer to school. He also said that it would be better if Anton no longer went to Aby's house to play because it was safer for him. Anton noticed that after the summer holidays in 1942 the Staal children stopped attending school, presumably for safety reasons. Anton was very aware that Aby was Jewish.

## 2. Hidden by the Keijzer family in Ermelo

In the summer of 1942, the Staal family went into hiding, in Ermelo. They moved to Watervalweg 110, a home called "Brem en Den," which was owned by Frederik Keijzer and his wife, Sophia Martina Keijzer-Bink, who were devout Christians. Brem en Den was their weekend home. Mr. Keijzer owned a mill in Utrecht, where the family's main residence was located.

According to Frank Siraa, one of Mr. Keijzer's grandsons, Brem en Den was remote, had 10 hectares (about 25 acres) of property, and evergreens and pines grew nearby, a clear creek ran along one boundary and across the creek was a small farm with crops and animals. The house was green and grey, was constructed of wood and stood on a stone foundation, with no electricity or running water. Outside there was a pump for water. The house was large, with a large kitchen and a brass hand pump, "polished to a shine." The house had a separate wing attached with a bedroom. There was a large bay window overlooking the heath.

I have not been able to find out how the Staal family and Keijzer family came to know one another, but I assume the "match" was made through Mr. Rook, Sr. and the underground in Ermelo. My father said that his mother had met a minister of a protestant church, who told her that his brother-in-law owned a house in the woodlands on the outskirts of Ermelo. The minister may have been Mr. Keijzer's son-in-law.

Most of the time, the Keijzer family was not present at the house and my father's family had to make sure the house appeared to be vacant. They could not go outside during the day and they had no light or heat. They had arrangements with the farmer across the street for certain produce and sometimes my father had to go to town after dark, riding a bicycle through the heather fields ("De Hei"), to get food from friendly

shopkeepers. Members of the underground, including Anton Rook, Sr., and Mr. B. Aarts,<sup>4</sup> a nurse in a psychiatric hospital, supplied ration cards. Once the family was settled at Brem en Den, they sent a message to my father's maternal grandmother, Betje Staal-Morpurgo, which stated that they had found a safe living spot and she joined them.

Living in Brem en Den was very tense. As a warning system, the family built a gate with a bell rigged behind a tree. Friends knew about the bell and would press the button, which would let the family know that the visitor was friendly.

Andréas ("André") Siraa, one of Mr. Keijzer's grandsons, lived in Utrecht, and remembers visiting Ermelo several times while the Staals were in Brem en Den. He remembers playing with my father and his sister, Betje. He was only about four years old at the time. He was allowed to come to Ermelo only when the weather was bad, because the railroads were bombed by the English during clear weather. When he came to Ermelo with his sisters, his grandfather, Frederik, used the grandchildren as a type of "decoy" to get additional food with his coupons. He would tell the authorities that he needed extra food because his grandchildren were visiting, and he would give the extra food to the Staal family. André remembers that my father's family could never go outside and had to live in the dark when they were there by themselves. When André's family was there, they could play, but they had to remain indoors at all times.

André remembers my grandmother as being very strict with her children; he remembers her forcing one of the children to eat a sandwich when they did not want to. André's sister, Martiene, told the following story about New Year's Eve, going into 1943: "Your grandparents and my grandparents celebrated the 1942-1943 New Year in Brem en Den.... During New Year's Eve, everybody did some plays and sketches to celebrate the coming 1943 New Year. After 24h00 people were prepared to go to bed, but my mother, Catharina, saw lots of dirty dishes in the kitchen; your grandfather walked in and my mother said to him, 'look at all these dirty dishes.' Your grandfather then said, 'Toos,' (my mother's nick-name) 'if you have a party, you get dirty dishes.' So in the early hours of the first of January 1943 your grandfather and my mother washed all the dishes, to start a clean 1943!!!"

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<sup>4</sup> We have been unable to determine Mr. B. Aarts' full name. Mr. Rook advised that it was a pseudonym used in connection with the underground. According to Mr. Peter Yska, the "Aarts" family moved from Ermelo to Australia on December 18, 1952.

### III. THE MURDER OF THE STAAL FAMILY AND MY FATHER'S ESCAPE

#### A. The Arrest of the Staal Family and My Father's Escape

In mid-March 1943, according to Anton Rook, Jr., in the evening after curfew, a Jewish man named Hugo Hirsch knocked on the front door of the post office. Mr. Rook, Sr. was furious because it was after curfew and he was worried that Mr. Hirsch may have attracted the attention of the authorities.<sup>5</sup>

On March 22, 1943, a group of Nazis came to Brem en Den to arrest the Staal family. In the house that evening were Mr. and Mrs. Keijzer, Mr. Hirsch, GMHR Meinlieff (a non-Jewish friend) and the Staal family.

According to the author, Peter Yska, the Nazi group included the NSB Mayor of Putten, Frederik Daniel Gijsbert Klinkenberg, who entered the living room with his gun drawn and ordered everyone to hold their hands up. Also with him were Jille Haaitsma, who was in the NSB, and Dirk Zehnpfennig, SS and deputy municipal superintendent in Putten.

When they arrived, there was a great commotion in the house, with my father's parents screaming. The Nazis found Betje, Jaapje and grandmother Betje in the hallway cupboard, where they were hiding. Stap, the NSB head sergeant of the military police, was alerted by phone, arrived from Putten and checked identity cards. The Jews were herded into the kitchen. Meanwhile, my father had hidden under a bed in the separate wing of the house. Soon thereafter, he saw a flashlight under the bed and Haaitsma commanded him to come out with his hands up.

My father came out from under the bed and, as he was being brought to the kitchen where the rest of the family was being held, he made a run for it out a side door into the woods. The Nazis shot after him, but my father kept running as fast as he could into the nearby woods. This was the last time he saw his family.

The rest of the Staals were shackled in two's, and they and Mr. Hirsch walked to the police station in Putten. Mr. and Mrs. Keijzer were also arrested and brought to the jail in Putten. After spending one night in jail, the Keijzers were released and they returned to Brem en Den; the Nazis had confiscated nearly all their belongings.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to data from Joods Monument, Hugo Hirsch, born in Dusseldorf on July 24, 1899, was killed in Bergen-Belsen on December 10, 1944; his mother, Selma Hirsch-Rosendahl, was killed on the same day as the Staal family, April 2, 1943, also in Sobibor. The Hirsch family had lived at Rijnstraat 145 I, Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Keijzers, like many other non-Jewish Dutch families, suffered during the war. Not only were Frederik and Sophia Keijzer arrested, but so was their son-in-law, Johannes Nicolaas Siraa (André Siraa's father). Johannes was arrested by the Nazis on the pretext of violating curfew, even though he had a curfew pass, due to his job as the electrical engineer in charge of the electric lines in Utrecht. He was sent to a transit camp in the city of Doesburg. André's uncle, J.J. Pieterse, was a physician married to his aunt Anneke (one of Frederik Keijzer's daughters). Dr. Pieterse learned that his brother-in-law, Johannes, was in the transit camp and asked the Germans for help to bury patients who had died of smallpox, of which the Germans were very afraid. With the Germans' permission, on the pretext of burying victims of smallpox, Dr. Pieterse chose some men, including Johannes, and he smuggled Johannes to Dr. Pieterse's home. In that house, the Germans used the ground floor, and the loft was used to hide people. Using false papers, Johannes returned to his own house and hid in an underground hiding spot there until liberation on May 5, 1945. André had had no idea his father had been hiding there.

My father believed that Mr. Hirsch was followed when he visited the Staal family at Bremen Den; in any event, someone told the Putten police about the Jews who were hidden there. Although the Ermelo police were friendly toward the Jews, the Putten authorities were allied with the Nazis. They overstepped their territory when they arrested my father's family, and they never notified the police in Ermelo that they intended to make the arrests.

As noted by my father in his Shoah interview, after the war, the Putten mayor was himself arrested. My father received a letter dated January 29, 1946, from G. Vos, of the "Political Investigation Department" in Harderwijk, which was addressed to him as "A. Staal, c/o Family Dunn."<sup>7</sup> It stated as follows: "In response to your writing of January 25<sup>th</sup> 1946, we notify you that the Ex-Mayor Klinkenberg from Putten at this time resides in the central local prison in this city [Harderwijk]. Within the next few weeks he will be brought before the special court in Arnhem to answer the accusations." Klinkenberg was the man who was responsible for arresting the Staal family.

## **B. The Murder of the Staal Family in Sobibor**

On March 25, 1943 the Staal family and other imprisoned Jews were put on a train in Putten that went to Westerbork. The train stopped in Ermelo on the way. Mr. Rook, Sr., wearing an armband of the Red Cross, was allowed to go on the train and he was able to tell my father's parents that my father was safe. Anton Rook, Jr. recalls, "My father, for some or other reason, was allowed to enter the station and also get close to the wagons guarded by the German security forces in which were the Jews. That's how he got the chance to inform the Staal family, who was on the train, that Aby was brought to safety."

My father's mother, Elisabeth, wrote a note to my father on toilet paper, which she gave to Mr. Rook. The note said, as translated by my father:

Dear Aby, we are very proud of your flight. You have done this very well. Keep this up your whole life and we are proud of you. We think of you always. Do not forget us. Many happy returns on your birthday. Many kisses. Father, Mother, Betty Jaapje.

*Lieve Aby, Wij zijn trots op je vlucht. Dat heb je zeer goed gedaan. Blijf altijd zoo flink. We denken altijd aan je. Vergeet ons niet. Hartelijk gefeliciteerd met je verjaardag. Vele kusjes. Vader, Moeder, Betty, Jaapje.*

Mr. Rook, Sr. gave that note to my father. It is pictured in the Shoah interview.

The Staal family stayed only a few days in Westerbork. On March 30, 1943, the family was deported to Sobibor. Just several days later, on April 2, the family arrived there and Levie (42 years), Elisabeth (42 years), Betje (13 years), Jacob (11 years) and grandmother Betje (almost 66 years) were murdered.

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<sup>7</sup> The letter was addressed to my father "c/o" the Family Dunn, Panhuysstraat 66, Noordwijk. As noted below, my father stayed with the Dunn family for several months after the war.

### C. My Father's Years in Hiding and the People Who Protected Him

After my father ran from the Nazis, at least nine families courageously helped and hid him, with Mr. Rook, Sr. facilitating nearly every move.

1. Aarts Family.

The day of the arrest, on March 22, my father ran into the woods and stayed in bushes near a small brook by the Ermelo train station. He eventually ran to the family of the Aarts. Mr. B. Aarts was a nurse who worked at a psychiatric hospital in Ermelo. My father knew that the Aarts's were involved in the underground and could be trusted. He knocked on their door at night. Mrs. Aarts took him in and gave him a bath and new clothes, while the adults, who were very upset by the arrests, discussed what to do. They were afraid that my father's family would be forced to reveal the names of people in the underground, so Mr. Aarts went into hiding. Mr. Rook, Jr. said that the Aarts family supplied ration cards or coupons for food for Jews in hiding.

2. Elsgeest Family.

Soon thereafter, my father was taken to the home of Cornelis T. Elsgeest and Johanna Elsgeest-Borreman, who had a printing business where they lived, at Spoorlaan 56, close to the Ermelo train station. Mr. Elsgeest was very friendly with Mr. Rook, Sr., and the families vacationed together. Mr. Elsgeest, who joined the resistance, printed documents for Mr. Rook, presumably leaflets for the underground. He was arrested by the Nazis and transported to Amersfoort concentration camp; after a few weeks he was released and he returned to Ermelo.

Mr. Rook Jr. described how my father arrived at the Elsgeest family, as follows:<sup>8</sup> "After Aby's escape, he first waited until everything was quiet and then walked in the night to the railway. Once close to Ermelo station, he went to sit on the bank of the ditch De Maat to wait for daybreak. In the early morning he crossed the railway line to get to the home of my parents' friends, Uncle Cor and Aunt Jo Elsgeest who lived at Spoorlaan 56 (now Dr. Van Dalelaan). Aby knew them well and that is why he dared to knock on their door. He was quickly ushered inside but could not stay long due to the printing business at home. Elsgeest contacted my father to tell him Aby was with him and that for safety reasons he had to leave as soon as possible."

3. Anton and Bernardina Wilhelmina Rook and Anton Rook, Jr.

Mr. Rook had one of his postmen, Arie van den Berg, take the mail delivery tricycle to the Elsgeests, and my father got into the tricycle and was covered by a piece of canvas. Mr. van den Berg transported my father from the Elsgeests to the home of the Rooks, in the post office.

At the post office, my father was taken to the room of his good friend, Anton Rook, Jr. It was very secretive and even Anton's brother and sister did not know that my father was there. Anton ate half his meals, and brought the rest to my father up in Anton's room. My father had to stay away from the window in Anton's bedroom so that he would not be discovered.

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Rook's recollections about when my father arrived at the Elsgeests' home differ slightly from my father's recollections, but the differences are not material.

As Anton Rook, Jr., stated, "Father arranged for the reliable head postman, Arie van den Berg, who collected the post with a *bakfiets* [cargo bike] early every morning from the station, to stop by the C.T. Elsgest family home. There Aby stepped into the covered *bakfiets*, was taken to the back of the post office, quickly brought inside and brought to my room. He stayed there for two weeks. Even my brother and little sister did not know he was there."

Two weeks later, my father had to move locations because the Nazis took over the post office and the telephone lines that were located there. Mr. Rook said, "In the second week of Aby's stay with us, my father was ordered to billet Germans who were meant to be bugging the telephones. They wished to use the back room and conservatory (sunroom). Their presence endangered Aby, so he moved to Mrs. Aal (after the war she married Mr. Carel Dekker) from the tobacco shop (now Matrix)." Mr. Rook thus made arrangements for my father to move to the home of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Dekker-Aal.

4. Mrs. Rook's sister, Mrs. Petronella Dekker-Aal.

Petronella Aal, Mrs. Bernardina Rook-Aal's sister, lived above the tobacco shop she owned in the center of town in Ermelo. My father was given a very small room in the back of the house. Mrs. Aal had a small balcony on the second floor, which she covered with rugs so that my father could go outside for fresh air, undetected. She cooked special food for my father and treated him with great kindness. My father always felt indebted to her because of her warmth, generosity and maternal nature. My father, however, could not stay long there because the house was in the middle of town and was too exposed and dangerous. After the war, Ms. Aal married Mr. Carel Dekker.

5. A family in Harderwijk.

After staying with Mrs. Dekker-Aal, my father moved to Harderwijk, where a modest fisherman's family took him in. The family was very nervous about being arrested or killed and therefore my father could not stay there long.

6. The Brink family.

After that, he went to Apeldoorn, and stayed with the Brink family. Mr. Rook, Sr. brought my father there personally. The father was a carpenter and there were 10 children. The family was, as my father said, "very plain, simple people, very friendly, very religious." My father spent a lot of time with the foreman of the shop there and learned some carpentry.

Mr. Rook, Jr. said, "My father found a hiding place for him in Apeldoorn and brought Aby there himself by car. He was always able, for special occasions, to rent a car from Timmer of the VAD Garage. Aby ended up with a carpenter where he could work in the daytime at the workshop. This suited him very well because he had been sitting idle. Dad did get regular updates to hear how it was going with Aby."

One bitterly cold day, my father was busy in the workshop when two men came to the door. The foreman, looking out the window, told my father that he did not recognize the people and that my father should go outside. My father ran into the woods in his wooden shoes, through snow, and over barbed wire. In his flight, he lost one of his shoes but kept going. He stayed outside in the freezing cold until night-time and then returned to the shed. Eventually one of the sons came outside and said, using my father's underground name, "Piet, is that you?" It turned out that the police had come



to the house because Mr. Brink had illegally slaughtered a pig. It became too risky to stay at the Brinks, so he had to move again.

Anton said that his father “was informed of the events [at the Brinks] and went back to Apeldoorn. He sought out Aby and brought him in with an old single lady in Apeldoorn....”

My father stayed with the Brink family for about nine months.

#### 7. Three more homes in Apeldoorn.

From the Brink family, Mr. Rook brought my father to another family in Apeldoorn, whose name he did not recall during the Shoah interview; there was a single mother with three children. That family was hiding another Jewish couple from Turkey. After the son went into hiding to avoid forced labor by the Germans, my father had to leave.

Next, my father went to the family of the fiancé of one of the sisters of the prior family in Apeldoorn; he was not treated well there. After the fiancé received an anonymous note that the Germans knew he was hiding a Jew, my father left.

Finally, my father went to another family in Apeldoorn; it was a kind and large family, possibly with the name Boom or Baum. My father stayed there until the liberation.

#### **D. Liberation**

On May 5, 1945, Liberation Day, a cable arrived at the municipality of Ermelo from the Consul General in New York, which read: “*Please cable information if any about betje staal 5 boschweg and louis staal and family 28 Oudeboschlaan.*” This cable was sent by Flora Hartog-Staal, who was my grandmother Elisabeth’s sister. She and her husband, Jaap Hartog, along with their sons, Jack and Albert, left the Netherlands aboard the Johan de Wit on Monday, May 13, 1940 (shortly before my father’s family tried to leave the Netherlands).

Mr. Rook, Sr., through the Red Cross, contacted Flora and Jaap Hartog. My father found out that he would eventually be going to the Hartogs in New York. However, my father initially stayed for several months with Mr. and Mrs. Campbell Dunn and their two children Betty and Bob Dunn, in Noordwijk and he went to school there for a short time. He then spent time at an orphanage until he went to the Hartog family, in 1948.

After the war, my father visited the Rooks. He also visited Mr. Rook’s sister-in-law, Mrs. Dekker-Aal, after the war, when she was in a nursing home. He wrote letters to the Rooks after the war, but in 1952, when Mr. Rook, Sr. died and his wife had to leave the post office building, the letters were lost. In the 1980’s my father briefly saw Mr. Rook, Jr. while traveling through the Netherlands.

My father went to the funeral of Mr. Keijzer in 1946, so the family knew he had survived the war. However, after that, he lost touch with the family.

#### **IV. HONORING THE ROOKS AND THE KEIJZERS**

##### **A. The Rook Family**

As noted above, Anton Rook, Sr. and his wife, Bernardina Wilhelmina Aal, were active members of the underground in Ermelo. I do not know how many Jewish families Mr. Rook helped, but he was instrumental to the survival of my father. Mr. Rook was there to help at almost every step of the way. Mr. Rook helped my father's family find their first home in Ermelo. My father was welcome in the Rook household when he played with Anton, knowing well that my father was Jewish. Mr. Rook presumably helped my father's family find the Keijzers' home, Brem en Den, for hiding and helped provide the family with ration cards and other necessities. Mr. Rook found at least five or six places for my father to hide, including his own home, and was likely at least partially responsible for finding all of my father's hiding places. Mr. Rook personally took my father to most of these hiding places himself. In short, Mr. Rook assisted my father and his family from the time they first moved to Ermelo, throughout the war when my father was on his own, until he emigrated to the USA. In doing so, he and his wife repeatedly, generously and courageously put their own family and their own lives at extreme risk.

Their son, Anton Rook, Jr., played an important role as well, even though he was just a teenager at the time. He befriended my father before his family went underground. And when my father hid in the Rooks' home, he stayed in Anton Rook's room for two weeks; Anton secretly brought my father food and kept my father's presence a secret, even from his brother and sister.

##### **B. The Keijzer Family**

As noted above, Frederik Keijzer and his wife, Sophia Martina, hid my father's family in their home in Ermelo for approximately eight or nine months, at extreme risk to their own lives, as well as the lives of their children and grandchildren. Mr. Keijzer arranged for extra food rations for my father's family. They thus provided food and shelter for an extended time. Only because someone tipped off the authorities in Putten was the Staal family arrested.

##### **C. Honoring the Rooks and Keijzers**

My father would be extremely pleased to know that the Rook and Keijzer families are being honored. At the end of his Shoah interview, he spoke about the genocide in the world today and the fact that the "world just stands by." He then spoke about the courage of the people who saved the Jews during the Holocaust, as follows:

***The people that saved us, the few people that went out there to risk their personal lives and the lives of their families to save one Jew they kept in their house. They risked their lives; they had the moral values and rectitude to stand up to danger, to expose their own safety to save a human being.***

This heroism gave my father hope for humanity. The Rooks and Keijzers were such heroes.

## **V. MY RECENT MEETING WITH DR. SIRAA (THE KEIJZERS' GRANDSON) AND ANTON ROOK, JR.**

### **A. Initial Contact with Dr. Siraa and Mr. Rook**

On January 10, 2016, out of the blue, I received an email from Dr. André Siraa, whose name I did not recognize. He provided a brief introduction and stated that his family knew my father in Ermelo. In the email, he told me that for the past decades, he had been wondering what had happened to my father; he knew my father had survived the war and had gone to the US, but lost track of my father after his grandfather died in 1946. What follows is a description of how Dr. Siraa contacted me and then how I was able to contact Anton Rook, Jr.

In December 2015, Dr. Siraa was visiting friends in Europe, Aline van Buuren and her husband Hans, and he told them that he still wondered what had happened to my father. Aline put Dr. Siraa in touch with her sister-in-law, Anje van Buuren-Meinardi, who researches Dutch Jews and wrote a book about the Jewish families in Bergen op Zoom in the south of the Netherlands. At André's request, Anje van Buuren-Meinardi started to research the Staal family and she told Dr. Siraa that there was a Shoah interview of an Abraham Staal, but at that point, they were not sure it was the same "Aby Staal" hidden by the Keijzers. Dr. Siraa's daughter, Tanya, was very interested in the story, and wanted to watch the Shoah interview, but there is no place to view it in Geneva, where she lives. However, she happened to be visiting the USA in December 2015 and she decided to go to Los Angeles for the specific purpose of viewing the video at the Holocaust museum there; after she watched the video and heard my father's story, she was convinced that it was the "right" Abraham Staal. My father mentioned my name in the interview, Tanya then Googled me and found my email address. That is how Dr. Siraa was able to email me earlier this year.

Soon after I was contacted by Dr. Siraa, he sent me an article that was given to him by Anje van Buuren-Meinardi, *Het Wegvoeren van de joodse familie Staal*, by Peter Yska, which was published just a few years ago in the June 2010 issue of *Van 't Erf van Ermel*. In the article, Mr. Yska interviewed Anton Rook, Jr. about the Staal family and his father's role in hiding the Staals. Most of the details in Mr. Rook's interview matched what my father said in his Shoah interview. That was how I first learned of Mr. Rook, Sr.'s son. Through Ms. van Buuren-Meinardi, I was able to contact Mr. Yska and, eventually, Mr. Rook, Jr. When I emailed Mr. Rook, he was very surprised, but very pleased and remembered his old friend Aby very well.

### **B. Meeting in the Netherlands in July, 2016**

After many email exchanges with Dr. Siraa, Tanya, Anton Rook, Peter Yska and Anje van Buuren-Meinardi during the early part of 2016, I discovered that they would all be in the Netherlands at the end of July, 2016. I quickly decided to journey to the Netherlands to meet everyone. My daughter, Hannah Rosen, who is 20 years old, came with us as well. We stayed for two nights in Amsterdam with the Siraa family, on July 23 and July 24, and then on July 25, everyone mentioned above met in Ermelo. During the day-long visit, which was meticulously planned by Peter Yska, we saw many of the places where my father and his other relatives hid during the war, including the site of Brem en Den (which is now a campground), and the former post office building. While in Ermelo, I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Rook and Dr. Siraa about their war-time experiences, and those of their families, in connection with my father.

### **C. The Candlestick**

One evening while my daughter, Hannah, and I stayed in Amsterdam with Dr. Siraa and his daughter, Tanya, Dr. Siraa surprised me and said he had something very special to give me. I could not imagine what he might have. He then presented me with a beautiful crystal, etched candlestick, about four inches high, with brass filigree. He said that after his grandparents were arrested, they somehow convinced the authorities to release them after one night. From the jail in Putten, they returned to Brem en Den only to find that the Nazis had ransacked their house. The only item remaining was the one crystal candlestick. Dr. Siraa explained that the candlestick had belonged to my great-grandmother, Betje Staal-Morpurgo. Mrs. Keijzer kept the candlestick and later gave it to her daughter, Catharina. She told Catharina that the candlestick was in their family, but it did not belong to them; it belonged to the Family Staal. Catharina passed the candlestick to her daughter, Martiene (Dr. Siraa's sister), with the same message. And at the end of July, 2016, Martiene gave it to Dr. Siraa, who gave it to me. Martiene, who converted to Judaism years ago, had been using the candlestick for Jewish holidays. In her note to me, she said, "My mother would be very happy to know we could return it to the rightful owner, the Family Staal."

### **VI. DETAILS ABOUT THE ROOKS, AALS AND THE KEIJZERS, INCLUDING CONTACT INFORMATION**

#### **A. Anton Rook, Sr. and Bernardina Wilhelmina Aal**

- Anton, b. Nov. 20, 1901 in Kamperveen, d. June 11, 1952 in Ermelo
- Bernardina Wilhelmina Aal, b. Feb. 7, 1906 in Amsterdam, d. May 13, 2000 in Ermelo
- Occupation: Director of the Post Office in Ermelo
- Children: Anton Rook, Jr., Theodoor Cornelis (deceased), Petronella (deceased), Bernard Wilhelm and Hendrik Jan (deceased)

#### **B. Petronella Dekker-Aal**

- Born May 20, 1907, d. Aug. 5, 1990, m. Carel Dekker

#### **C. Anton Rook, Jr.**

- Born Aug. 13, 1929 in Ermelo
- Wife: Janny Rook-van de Roest, b. May 22, 1937
- Occupation: Retired; previously electronics, including research on telephonic transmissions.
- Sons: Arnoud Rook, email: aar1@xs4all.nl; Erwin Rook (died Sept. 6, 1999)
- Daughter: Sandra, lives in the Hague

#### **D. Mr. Frederik Keijzer and Sophia Martina Keijzer-Bink**

- Frederik Keijzer, b. Oct. 22, 1881 in Amsterdam, d. July 7, 1946 in Maartensdijk
- Sophia Martina Keijzer-Bink, b. Feb. 3, 1881 in Den Haag, died Nov. 7, 1947 in Maartensdijk
- Home during the war: Utrecht, with a country home, Brem en Den, in Ermelo
- Occupation: Owner of a saw mill in Utrecht
- Children (there were eight children, including the following):
  - Catharina Keijzer, b. Dec. 19, 1905 in Amsterdam, d. Dec. 29, 1983 in Koog aan de Zaan. Married Johannes Nicolaas Siraa, b. Jun. 27, 1904, d. Nov. 12, 1976. Marriage was Oct. 6, 1932 in Utrecht
  - Mieke; after WWII she moved to South Africa
  - Anneke, m. to Dr. J.J. Pieterse
  - Maartje Sophia Martina
  - Frederika

- Jeanne Keijzer, b. Dec. 5, 1911 in Utrecht, d. Dec. 24, 1995, m. Arie Frederik Nelis Lekkerkerken, b. on Mar. 5, 1913 in Hei en Boeicop, d. Dec. 27, 1972, wedding was Sept. 23, 1936 in Utrecht; Arie was a preacher, became a professor at Groningen University and wrote books on theology.
- Grandchildren (children of Catharina and Johannes Siraa)
  - Andréas (“André”) Siraa, b. 1938 in Maarensdijk; m. Pauline (“Polleke”) Emma Korevaar, m. Aug. 8, 1968. André immigrated to the USA in 1967 when he received a green card; their daughters are Tanya Siraa (b. 1973) and Marielle Siraa (b. 1972).
  - Frederik (“Frank” “Freek”) Theodoor Siraa, b. Nov. 23, 1940; m. Jantje Mellema, b. 1941), lives in New Zealand; 4 children.
  - Martiene Henriette Siraa, b. 1944, m. Arnon Plaschkes (Israeli), b. 1945), lives in Koog aan de Zaan, NL; 3 children.

**Sources of Information for this application:** The interview of Abraham Staal in 1998 through the Shoah project; *Het Wegvoeren van de joodse familie Staal*, by Peter Yska, published in the June 2010 issue of *Van ‘t Erf van Ermel*; emails in 2016 with Dr. André Siraa, Tanya Siraa, Frank Siraa, Peter Yska, Anje van Buuren-Meinardi and Anton Rook, Jr.; telephone calls in 2016 with Dr. Siraa and Tanya Siraa, and in-person interviews of Dr. Siraa, Tanya Siraa and Mr. Rook.

***Thank you for your consideration of this Application.***