

Yad Vashem Speech

Israeli Embassy representatives, Mayor Burmanje, Ms. Greving, Honorees and Families:

Goedemiddag.

בְּרוּכִים הַבָּאִים

Good afternoon.

My name is Lorri Staal and we are gathered here today because of my father, Abraham Staal, and the five families who helped save his life during the Holocaust.

It is an extraordinary honor to be here today with all of you and in this place, Ermelo, which has such special meaning for all of us.

It has been quite a journey to get here. It started with Dr. Andre Siraa's email to me in January 2016, which said simply that his grandparents, the Keijzers, hid my father in Ermelo during WWII.

I could not have known then that this surprising email would begin a journey that would lead me here, to meet each of you in this special place. It is remarkable and humbling.

The Holocaust caused unspeakable horrors of a magnitude that are impossible to describe in words. The death, the destruction, and evil are beyond comprehension.

And yet, there was light. In Ermelo and nearby villages, there were courageous and generous Dutch people, steadfast in their faith, who stood up to that darkness. They put everything they had at risk to save Jewish strangers, like my father. And their heroic legacy lives on in you, the descendants of the families being honored today.

I want to take a moment to mention briefly each of the honorees' roles:

In March of 1941, after the Nazis required that Jews register with the authorities, my father's family moved from Amsterdam to Ermelo.

1. In the summer of 1942, when danger was growing, the Staal family moved underground to Brem en Den, a home owned by **Frederik Keijzer and his wife Sophia Martina Keijzer-Bink**, who are being honored today. The Keijzer family provided shelter for my father and five other family members: my father's mother, **Leisje**, his father **Louis**, his sister **Betje**, his brother **Jaapje** and his grandmother **Betje Staal-Morpurgo**.

My father's family stayed in the Keijzers' home for 9 months, until the family was arrested by the SS in mid-March, 1943.

When the Nazis arrived, they arrested the Staal family, and they also arrested Fredrik and Sophia Martina Keijzer.

During the arrest, my father hid under a bed and ran out the back into the woods, as the Nazis fired their guns at him.

My father was 15. He never saw his family again. Thankfully, the Keijzers were released from prison, but their home was ransacked by the Nazi police.

Miraculously, they found a crystal candlestick that belonged to my great-grandmother, Betje, and they passed it down the generations for safe keeping. In 2016 **Martine Plaschkes-Siraa** graciously sent it to me during my visit to the Netherlands. I treasure it.

2. After running into the woods, my father's first stop was the home of other honorees today, **Barend & Willempje Aarts**. He was a nurse who was active in the underground. The Aarts family gave my father a bath and clean clothes and helped to find his next hiding place.
3. From there, my father was picked up by a postman in the underground, **Johannes Van den Berg**, who snuck my dad into his covered mail pouch on his mail delivery bicycle. Mr. van den Berg is another honoree today. He delivered my dad to the Ermelo post office at the direction of the postmaster, **Anton Rook**.
4. **Anton and Wilhelmina Rook**, are being honored today, along with their son, whose name is also **Anton**.

At the post office, My father hid under the son's bed, and Anton told me he brought my father half of his meager meals every day without his siblings knowing my father was there. But his brother, Ben, told me today that he knew everything the whole time! When the Nazis took over the post office, my father had to move again.

I had the privilege of meeting Anton Rook in 2016 and I am saddened that he passed away and is not able to receive this honor today in person. I am so glad Ben and his family are here today.

5. From the post office, Mr. Rook personally brought my father to the home of **Aart and Rinske van den Brink**, who lived in Apeldoorn. The van den Brinks had 10 children of their own. Despite scarce food and all other provisions, they took in my father and probably other Jewish children. The **van den Brink family** hid my father for approximately 9 mos.

Both Aart and his wife Rinske have been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in ceremonies in South Africa.

On May 5, 1945, Liberation Day, a cable was sent to the municipality of Ermelo asking for information about my father and his family. The cable was sent by Jaap and Flora Hartog, my father's aunt and uncle who had managed to escape to the US.

Eventually my father was able to emigrate to the US and the Hartog family generously took my father into their home and gave him the opportunity to start a new life.

Most of you did not know my father, so I just want to take a moment and tell you about him.

Despite the horrors of the war, my father somehow remained an optimist. He was a stockbroker by profession, but throughout his life he volunteered to help children in need. He loved to ski, play chess, draw, bike (of course), and build furniture. He enjoyed 50 years of marriage to my mother, Ursel Weinberg Staal, and took pride in his children and 12 grandchildren.

The Talmud teaches that if a person saves one life, it is as if they have saved an entire world.

I don't know how many people were saved by the courageous citizens of Ermelo, Apeldoorn and neighboring towns.

But I do know I would not be here today and my brother and our children would not be here today if it were not for each of the families being honored as Righteous Among the Nations.

Tomorrow is an auspicious day. It marks the beginning of **Yom Hashoah**, the day of remembrance of the Holocaust.

It is a day to remember millions of innocent people who were murdered, and thousands of individuals who courageously stood up for what is right, despite terrible risks. And it is a day to make real the call to "never forget."

My parents are no longer alive, but they would have been thrilled to know that each of the honorees are being recognized by Yad Vashem for their heroism.

I would like to thank a few people without whom this day could not have happened.

1. I would like to thank **Yad Vashem** for its research, support and recognition of the Righteous being honored today, including **Ruth Joaquim**.
2. I would like to thank the Israeli Embassy in the Netherlands, including **Natalie Baumgarten**, Ermelo Mayor Burmanje, for your support and arrangements today.
3. Thank you to **Andre Siraa and Tanya Siraa** for having the interest and perseverance to find me in 2016 and continue to support the journey that led us here.
4. Today would not have been possible without research by **Anje van Buuren Meinaardi, Peter Yska, Trynke Elbertsen and Henk Esselink**, who provided extensive information and connected me with families who helped my father.

We remember Henk with gratitude and a heavy heart, as he passed away just a few weeks ago.

5. I also want to recognize the Hartog family, including **Anne Stark Locher and Jackie Hartog**, who are here. After the war, their grandparents provided a home for my dad and a new beginning in New York.

My father's first cousin, Valerie Staal Borock, is also here today, with her husband, Morris.

The Righteous Among the Nations remind us of humanity's potential for goodness in the face of evil. May we always strive to live up to their example.

On behalf of my brother Leivi, and our families, I humbly thank you.