

**THE INCORPORATION OF WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES IN  
THE LIFE STORIES OF ALUMNI FROM THE VRIJE  
UNIVERSITY IN AMSTERDAM: AN EXPLORATION AT THE  
CROSSROADS BETWEEN NARRATIVE, IDENTITY, AND  
CULTURE**

A Dissertation

by

ROEMER MAARTEN SANDER VISSER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2007

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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## ABSTRACT

The Incorporation of World War II Experiences in the Life Stories of Alumni from the Vrije University in Amsterdam: An Exploration at the Crossroads Between Narrative, Identity, and Culture. (August 2007)

Roemer Maarten Sander Visser, M.A., Vrije Universiteit

Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. M. Carolyn Clark  
Dr. G. Patrick Slattery, Jr.

For this study, twelve life stories of alumni from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, who were enrolled during the Nazi Occupation between 1940 and 1945, were collected and analyzed. Besides exploring the extent to which the interviews were co-constructed jointly by the interviewer and interviewees, this study addresses three questions. First, it acknowledges methodological concerns associated with an overabundance of narrative data, and suggests a new method for arriving at a core narrative based on the distribution of time. This core narrative can then be analyzed further. Second, it is suggested that early memories serve as identity claims; because of their congruency with the remainder of the story, they appear to foreshadow what is to come. As a result, it is argued that childhood memories merit special attention in the analysis of narratives. Third, and finally, the constraints on narratives imposed by cultural conventions, or master narratives, are explored. Narrators use a variety of strategies in order to satisfy sometimes competing demands on their narratives. It is argued that culture makes its influence felt in ways that are not always obvious, particularly if the interviewee and interviewer share the same culture.

## **DEDICATION**

Voor Tessel en Clara:

Het is nu aan jullie om je eigen verhaal te schrijven.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are cliché. I almost never read them, and for the longest time I intended to refrain from including them. The obligation to include them felt like yet another constraint, another master narrative imposed on me in telling my story.

Now that the story is written, however, I realize that the credit is not mine to take. First, I would like to thank the participants in this study. Ik heb de vrijheid genomen om pseudoniemen voor U te gebruiken; ik was bang dat U uiteindelijk meer van Uzelf hebt blootgegeven dan wellicht aanvankelijk ingeschat. Uw (Engelse) pseudoniem begint met dezelfde letter als Uw echte naam, en dit geldt voor zowel de voornaam als de achternaam. Het heeft allemaal veel langer geduurd dan oorspronkelijk gepland; het leven heeft de vervelende neiging om bepaalde obstakels en andere afleidingen op je weg te brengen. Ik hoop oprecht dat ik voldoende recht heb gedaan aan Uw levensverhalen.

Second, I would like to thank my writing group: Jennifer Reyes and Merna Jacobsen. I will never forget the feeling of misery and imprisonment on all those Saturday afternoons in the office. Misery does not love company; it demands it, and you were there to share it with me. But I got done and so will you. It is no understatement that I would not be done if it weren't for the two of you. Long live Granite Shoals retreats!

Of course, I am eternally indebted to my co-chairs, Carolyn Clark and Patrick Slattery. Patrick, your unwavering support and optimism have always been a positive stimulus for me, even if I didn't always understand it. Carolyn, you went above and

beyond the call of duty. You placed your faith in me at a time when failure was a very real risk, which would have had repercussions for us both. I can only hope that this final product does justice to the risk you took.

There are many other people who have contributed to my success as well, either directly or indirectly. Mamma en pappa, hier is het tweede boek van mijn hand. Bedankt voor alle hulp, zorg, medeleven, en natuurlijk voor alles wat mij uiteindelijk in staat heeft gesteld om hier überhaupt aan te kunnen beginnen. Ik zal er alles aan doen om onze kinderen op eenzelfde manier op te voeden; als wij het half zo goed doen is het een groot succes.

Last, but not at all least, Lesley, my wife, my best friend, my love. You knew exactly what to do, what not to do, and when (not) to do it. You have the patience of an angel. Now that this is behind us, we can finally intertwine our stories more fully. I can't wait to start the next chapter.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### PROLOGUE

These words before you, whether on paper or on a screen, could represent many things. They could form a document, a dissertation, or a study. Depending on your background, they could also be inaccessible, unscientific, or simply recyclable paper. Regardless, it would be tough to argue one thing: that this is a story (though maybe not a good one).

I have had to construct this story within specific constraints. For one, I have had to tell my story primarily using the written word (and orally during the dissertation defense). Second, I have had to cast the story in the form most appropriate within the academic context. This means that I have had to connect my story to other stories by citing scholarly storytellers. At times, I have had to adopt language that enhances the power of this story in academic circles, but diminishes it in others. I have made strategic use of terms such as “hermeneutics” and “narrative analysis.” Bakhtin (1981) argues that such words are only half mine; that prior to my use of them, they existed “in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (p. 293). How curious, then, that within the academic context, this is not considered plagiarism.

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This dissertation follows the style of *Narrative Inquiry*.

Regardless, the current rules of the academic game are relatively clear. I have tried to tell my story in the grey area between the “conventional” way and the “inappropriate” way, trying to walk the line between following the rules and bending them. One way in which this manifests is this Prologue. Another is the personal nature of my writing. A third is the extensive use of quotes. I use these quotes for several reasons, despite the fact that they may make my story longer and more difficult to read. First, since this is a narrative study, it would seem appropriate to represent the narratives narratively. Second, building on Bakhtin, it is a way to play with authorship. Because inevitably, these authors do not just speak in the quotes. It is I who speaks through them. Third, using quotes is my way to pay homage to the people who spoke them (participants) and those who wrote them (scholars) – assuming that those words were ever theirs to begin with. I owe this to the storytellers on whose work mine rests.

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

### **Locating Myself**

May 9, 1940 – I am sitting in front of my window with a clear view of the Rotterdam Waalhaven airport, studying for my last French quiz. A few weeks from now, I’ll have my high school final exams, so it’s a suspenseful time. The next morning, about 5 a.m., the whole family is startled by the sound of airplanes – big black monsters that are flying very low and close to our home in the direction of Waalhaven. We quickly realize the incomprehensible, that this really is war. In the distance, we see white flakes suspended in the air; paratroopers. Not much later, the German soldiers are marching on the roads. And strangely enough, I am worrying about my French quiz!

This gorgeous day is followed by several days of fantastic weather, but on May 15th, the air is lead grey and charred shreds of paper and such are whirling from the sky.

Rotterdam is on fire after the bombing of the 14th. I am baffled, I don't understand that something like this can just happen, that nothing can be done against it.

But after the capitulation, strangely enough, things more or less go back to 'normal.' The school building still stands, but the bicycle ride there, along the smelly heaps of rubble, with frequent air-raid sirens, was horrific. There are students in my class who have lost everything, including their books. Still, there is a (short) final exam. And this is when my college days start, initially with lectures, initiation, exams, even modified parties, but the atmosphere becomes more and more threatening. I remember how shocked we are the Sunday morning that the Jews had to wear their star for the first time and how many we saw on our way to church.

- *Ellen Bergen*

It is 1995. I am a college student in the Netherlands, enrolled at the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) or *VU* in Amsterdam. I am enjoying my course of studies and all that student life has to offer. In fact, I am a member of a student organization called the Corps. Nearly every university in the Netherlands has a Corps associated with it. The VU-Corps is relatively small with its 900 members. The best way to describe the Corps would be to compare it to a small, self-contained Greek system with its own governance and its proprietary bar. The VU-Corps consists of male, female, and co-ed groups that are similar to fraternities and sororities, but are called oratory associations (OA). They have anywhere from a handful to fifty members. While each OA has its own distinct culture and traditions, they all in some way value and promote the development of oratory skills – a process ostensibly accelerated when the vocal chords are lubricated by significant amounts of beer or *jenever* (Dutch gin).

Besides belonging to OAs, many Corps members also serve on Corps-wide committees. The main executive committee is referred to as the Senate. The Senate oversees a host of other committees, including one responsible for creating and publishing the *Larinx*, a periodical that appears about five times per year. This year, I am the chair of the *Larinx* committee. This is also the year that the Netherlands will be marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi surrender in 1945, ending their five years of progressively brutal oppression of the Dutch. The *Larinx* committee decides to devote its April issue to the *VU-Corps* in wartime. We ask the question, what was it like to be a member of the Corps during the war? To that end, we approached a variety of alumni who were members during the war and asked them to contribute to our understanding. The result was ten letters and three interviews that together provided a powerful account of college life at the VU during the war. The excerpt above is from one of the written contributions to that issue.

Fast forward to 2007. As I am continuing the struggle with this behemoth called dissertation with the keyboard as the main battle field, I reflect on the significance of that special issue of the *Larinx* in my life – and, more importantly, for this dissertation.

I am loathe to use this document as an excuse to engage in navel-gazing – or, in Slattery's (2001) terms, "gratuitous self-indulgence" (p. 384). Such narcissistic exercises run counter to the sensibilities that contemporary Dutch culture has imbued me with, as the next section will demonstrate. But ignoring a brief reflection on this would simply be dishonest. I need to recognize and acknowledge that I am far from a neutral observer; instead, I am an actor on this stage along with the other participants. Despite

my best intentions, my positionality is always in the background and sometimes in the foreground, influencing everything about this study, from the research questions to the chosen methods; from the interpersonal dynamics during the interview to decisions on how to transcribe them; and from the theoretical framework for the study to the analysis and interpretation of the narratives. By locating myself within this study, I join the growing ranks of scholars who argue that it is not only appropriate to examine the researcher's subjectivity, but that it would be dishonest not to (Denzin, 1989; Vickers, 2002). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) poignantly say, "we are in the parade we presume to study" (p. 81). Given the interactive nature of life story interviews, even the distinction between researcher and participant becomes problematic (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillman-Healy, 1997; Vickers, 2002).

This study is, in some ways, a continuation of the Larinx project I referred to above. In fact, several of the participants were contributors to the Larinx in 1995. The difference, of course, is that the underlying question is different. In 1995, the question was, "what was it like to be a student at the VU and a member of the VU-Corps during the Occupation years of 1940-1945?" The topic was intriguing and the letters and interviews were fascinating. I remember distinctly having a brief but feverish kind of addiction to this project. For some reason, I was deeply moved by the contributions. I have since come to suspect that the question undergirding the project was not so much born out of an innocent curiosity as out of a desire to answer for myself the question, "what would I have done?"

Having parents and grandparents whose lives were deeply marked by the Occupation, and being raised within a community for whom the Occupation was one of the most traumatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (van der Horst, 2001; Zondergeld, 2002), I was constantly reminded of the injustices, the deprivations, and the challenges that the Occupation brought to the Dutch. Every year, the movie *The Longest Day* was shown on May 5<sup>th</sup>, which, at the time, was a national holiday celebrating Liberation. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, the whole country shut down for two minutes of silence at 8 pm in order to commemorate the fallen. This included traffic: cars pulled over to the side of the road and trains stopped. Everything came to a standstill. There was never a visit to my grandfather's house without an Occupation-related story. In fact, the Occupation contributed to the continued formation of the Dutch national identity: the Dutch coat of arms contains the phrase, "I shall overcome," a reference to the struggle for independence from the Spanish. The Occupation by the Nazis is something else that the Dutch collectively overcame, and in the process the experience was given a collective meaning. Blom (1995), an influential Dutch historian, words this as follows:

The Dutch, though few in number, defied the huge might of Spain; the tiny Netherlands succeeded in creating a Golden Age and in making a stand against superpowers as England and France [...] The tribulations of the war years fitted seamlessly into this self-image. The small peaceable Netherlands, scrupulously neutral, had been most scandalously attacked by a large, aggressive neighbor. Initially shocked and powerless, the Dutch people straightened their backs; this determination, and the heroic deeds of many people, enabled them to weather the storm (p. 66).

This resonates very strongly with my personal experience. The Germans were the bad guys, the Dutch the good ones. It is with that mindset that I started the Larinx project: I expected many stories of heroic acts and Resistance. Instead, I got something else: nuanced stories that reflected a reluctance to portray the Occupier in too negative a light, and a related reluctance to portray the Dutch in too positive a light. Instead of a black and white world, of simple right (*goed*) and wrong (*fout*), there were many shades of grey. I came to realize that I didn't know what I would have done had I been in that situation. I had to let go of the fantastic idea that I would have done the right thing, whatever that was.

In sum, the Larinx project had a profound, deeply personal effect on me, and since it has led more or less directly to this study, it would be dishonest not to bring this to the surface. The main difference between the Larinx project and this study is the question underlying it. Although the subsequent chapters are organized around distinct research questions that are informed by recent scholarly literature, the questions that were always in the background for me, as I conducted the interviews and as I transcribed and analyzed them, were: how did they cope with the ethical dilemmas that they were presented with because of the Occupation? How and where do you draw the line between the concessions you are willing to make, and those you are not? If you have regrets about any actions or inactions, how do you deal with those?

The main purpose of this first chapter is to provide enough background information in order to place the narratives in a proper context. Of course, locating myself in this study is not the only important piece of the puzzle. Other critical pieces



are the cultural and historical background that the participants all shared; an overview and description of student life at the VU during the 1940s; and a chronology and discussion of the major events in the five years of the Occupation most relevant to the VU. Those three pieces are provided next.

### **The Dutch and the Reformed in the 1930s and 1940s**

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a phenomenon occurred in the Netherlands that is referred to as pillarization (*verzuiling*) – a segmentation of society according to different comprehensive moral and/or religious doctrines (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). In fact, the very term was coined in the Netherlands in the 1950s (Hellemans, 1993). In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were three clearly discernible pillars: the Reformed, the Catholic, and the socialist. The various pillars supported the Dutch democracy and society as represented by the triangular capstone. Interaction between these pillars was limited to the political arena, where the now famous consensus model of decision-making proved its usefulness (van der Horst, 2001).

According to Dekker and Ester (1996), there are three lenses through which one can view and explain the existence of pillars. One is the emancipation hypothesis, which argues that pillarization is the result of an emancipation struggle by the disenfranchised. Amelink (2001) calls attention to the dire economic circumstances that the Reformed were confronted with during the Industrial Revolution. A second is called the protection hypothesis; pillarization is the result of an attempt to protect theological heritage and autonomy from ideas stemming from Enlightenment and liberalism. The isolationism

that characterizes many Calvinists certainly appears to validate this perspective. Third is the social control hypothesis, which frames pillarization as a deliberate, top-down attempt by those in power to maintain their status. Given the prescriptive nature of the Reformed culture, this lens also appears to be a good fit.

Differentiation according to religious beliefs alone does not make a society pillarized. It is the collection of organizations and structures that defines pillarization: “Each pillar not only had its own ideologically sensitive organizations (e.g., a political party, a youth movement, schools, a newspaper, libraries and a broadcasting company), they also established many organizations and institutions with purely secular social functions (e.g., hospitals, sport clubs, housing associations, insurance companies and even animal protection societies and associations of stamp collectors)” (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). The strict segregation between the pillars was made possible by the existence of this extensive set of organizations and services. Henk de Jonge (1992), an evangelical participant in this study who had sent me his published autobiography, describes the establishment of the Reformed pillar as follows:

In the nineteenth century our great grandparents and grandparents had fought a battle with the Government to be allowed to give their own children a Bible education at school. They won their sacrificial battles and believing parents formed local societies. Their boards appointed believing teachers and paid them a salary smaller than the state schools, because they could not afford more. The first hour of each day was instruction from the Bible and every week we had to learn a psalm stanza by heart (p. 100).

Not only were these pillars strictly segregated, they also were characterized by a certain measure of antipathy and distrust toward one another. For sure, they were

fundamentally incompatible with one another. The tension between the Protestants and the Catholics was a direct result of the eighty-year long struggle that led to independence from (Catholic) Spain in 1648. The revolt had been led by William of Orange, also known as William the Silent, a Protestant. The victory over the Spaniards led to the creation of the House of Orange (the Dutch royal family) and disproportionate Protestant political clout. The socialists, who saw society in terms of class struggle and were highly skeptical of both the royal family and organized religion, naturally had very little in common with either of the other religious pillars. One of the participants said that the feelings ran so deep that during the war many Protestants still despised the Catholics more than they did the Nazis.

Of course, it is important to keep in mind that the idea of pillarization is only an abstraction: the Protestant pillar may have looked homogeneous to an outsider, but within that pillar there were many theological and ideological differences that led to intensely emotional debates and fractures within the Protestant establishment. A major event was the so-called *kerkscheuring*, literally meaning church tearing, or rift, in 1944. This rift is referenced by several participants in the study. Although the nature of the theological debate is complex (Amelink, 2001) and outside the scope of this study, it is important to provide a brief discussion of the most important events in the theological domain as well. This is by no means meant to be an in-depth treatise, and this overview will no doubt fail to do justice to the nuances and shades of grey that are critical to a more in-depth understanding. I depend heavily on the work of Amelink (2001), van der Horst (2001), and Zondergeld (2002).

### *Protestantism in the Netherlands*

*A note on language.* My lack of knowledge of religious doctrine on the one hand and the need to translate the names of different denominations from Dutch into English on the other collude to make it impossible for me to do justice to this world I am so unfamiliar with. This discussion is therefore necessarily incomplete. For the translations of the three main Protestant denominations, I follow the terminology used by Dekker and Ester (1996).

There are two words in Dutch that refer to Protestantism: *Gereformeerd* and *Hervormd*. They literally mean the same thing – Reformed – but situated within the Dutch religious context, the two mean something significantly different. *Gereformeerd*, according to the dictionary, means “(Dutch) Reformed.” In contrast, *Hervormd* is supposed to mean “Protestant.” Back-translating “Protestant” into Dutch yields another word: *Protestant*. There is no way to do any real justice to the translation of these terms without a treatise on the debates and rifts that have occurred over time within the Dutch Reformed community. For the purpose of this study, I will distinguish between three categories of Protestant denominations. The most conservative denomination, called *vrijgemaakt* (literally, liberated, similar to the way the *Vrije Universiteit* was named – Free University), I will refer to as Calvinist. This particular denomination is not mentioned often outside two or three interviews. Generally, the Calvinists resist any kind of liberal interpretation of the Bible and insist that what is written is the word of God. Two of the participants, Michael Armstrong and Gerry Kosberg, are of this religious persuasion.

The next denomination, called *Gereformeerd*, is still rather conservative. I will refer to this one as Reformed. Although the people in this denomination at the time prior to the war on the whole did not believe that the snake in paradise spoke with a human voice, their religion is still very prescriptive, including the prohibition of work on Sundays, and of participation in dance, for example.

The third denomination is called *Hervormd* and is the most liberal-thinking Protestant denomination. They tend to be most accepting of other denominations and opinions and more “worldly” (as opposed to the Calvinists, who stressed that national laws are subservient to God’s laws). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to them by using the admittedly awkward term Protestant.

***Historical overview.*** Obviously, the term “Reformed” refers directly to Luther’s Reformation, associated with the date of October 31, 1517. Luther, of course, was not the only influential Protestant: in what is now the Netherlands, the Frenchman Calvin was much more influential. He emphasized the importance of a well-organized church, separate from government (Amelink, 2001). It is important to point out that at this time, the Republic of the Netherlands had not yet formed. The existing provinces and cities were loosely organized at best (Dekker & Ester, 1996). Calvin’s theology soon turned into the ideological basis for the struggle for independence, now referred to as the eighty-years’ war. Calvin’s successor Beza even postulated the right to revolt. Hence, the Protestant church soon grew to be the most influential church nationally and a major impetus in the defeat of the Spaniards and the subsequent unification of the provinces into the Republic of the Netherlands.

The Protestants were hardly a homogenous group of people. There were a variety of subgroups who were embattled with each other theologically. Generally, the conflict centered around the question of who goes to hell and who goes to heaven, and whether or not that was predestined or if humans might be able to affect that outcome by living their lives a certain way. In 1618 and 1619, the various denominations came together in a meeting to settle on this question. Although the differences in interpretation were not settled and would continue for centuries, a major outcome of this meeting was the decision to translate the Bible into Dutch. This publication deeply influenced the very language the Dutch speak today: it is even said that the translation partially created Dutch; all that had existed before then was a collection of related local dialects. Thus, calvinism not only played a major role in the struggle for independence; it also contributed to the existence of the very language the Dutch speak today.

After the establishment of the independent Republic of the Netherlands, a period of extraordinary wealth and prosperity began, also known as the Golden Age. This was the time of colonialization, of naval supremacy over Spain, Portugal, and England, and of painters, poets, and philosophers. While the Protestant church was by no means the only one, its role in the formation of both national identity and language and its implied responsibility for wealth and prosperity do explain why calvinism has had such a profound influence on Dutch society in all its facets – in spite of the relatively limited number of people adhering to its teachings. In spite of the heterogeneity of the Dutch society in religious terms, Protestantism was the official religion (Dekker & Ester, 1996).

The theological argument about predestination between those with a strict, literal interpretation of the Bible and those with a slightly more flexible interpretation continued. This split has persisted until today, although it has shifted form many times, and has been associated with different denominations. To add to the complexity, some denominations have split up into even smaller factions while others have joined forces over time. Generally, however, the Dutch Reformed culture was highly prescriptive, and the most visible differences between the various denominations were the amount and kind of activity allowed on Sundays. Some of the more stringent denominations, for example, allowed one to kill a louse on Sundays, but not a flea: hunting down the jumpy flea cost too much energy, and therefore was considered work (van der Horst, 2001).

*Abraham Kuyper.* Fast forward to the late nineteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution, agricultural crises, poverty, child labor, high mortality rates, bureaucratization, centralization of government, and urbanization were the main staples of the lived experience (Amelink, 2001; Dekker & Ester, 1996). The conflict between the denominations had persisted and had led to a schism in the Reformed Church. Those denominations that favored a more conservative interpretation of the scripture were fragmented and scattered. Abraham Kuyper was a preacher who had received his Ph.D. in theology by age 26. Now seen as a fundamentalist, Kuyper had been very impressed by the unaltered version of calvinism displayed by pockets of the poor, rural, often illiterate population. They had had their truths passed down to them by previous generations, and used these truths to resist contemporary interpretations of Scripture by the Reformed Church. Kuyper declared that through these people, he had seen “the

strength of the absolute” (Amelink, 2001) and decided he wanted to return the Reformed Church, if not all of the Netherlands, back to this original Calvinist form. After all, it had been the reason for the Dutch economic and political successes.

As scientist, journalist, editor, politician, and preacher, he got to work. It can be said that he single-handedly laid the foundations for the Reformed pillar. His motto was “sovereignty in your own circle” (van der Horst, 2001). Essentially, society consisted of circles – mainly science, family, church, and enterprise. Kuyper stated that there was no realm where Jesus would not be seen, so in the realm of science, the assumption was that God had given man rationality and curiosity, so it was their duty to explore. In the realm of enterprise, Kuyperian ideology favored a free-market approach. These circles operated according to different laws, all of which were divine in nature. Within these circles, therefore, one has sovereignty and owes allegiance only to God. There should be no governmental interference within these circles. These circles are intertwined, and taken together they keep society afloat. This is a critical point in his theology: society, including science, were within the world created by God (Zondergeld, 2002). As opposed to some who tended to withdraw from society to devote themselves to God, Kuyper took a decidedly different stance:

God has assigned humans to work in the world; they were not born to lock themselves up in their prayer cell. They who seclude themselves from the world, yield her to the pagans, the heathens, and that cannot be what was intended. God’s children must be willing to roll up their sleeves and enter into the confrontation (Amelink, 2001, p. 36).



Kuyper did not stop with rhetoric from the lectern. Fully committed to practicing what he preached, one of his first significant acts was to create a Reformed newspaper, *The Standard (De Standaard)*. The first edition appeared April 1, 1872, three hundred years to the day after the first successful Protestant conquest of a Spanish-occupied town in the eighty-years' war. In 1874, he was elected to Parliament. In 1879, he founded the first political party predicated on Reformed principles: the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). The name of the party was a direct reference to the revolution that had taken place in France. And in 1880, his ambition to provide higher education that was not influenced by enlightened, modern thinkers was realized: he founded the Vrije University (*Vrije Universiteit* or *VU*). The term “free” referred to the opportunity to conduct science without interference from church or state. After all, everyone – including scientists – owed their allegiance only to God; this was yet another manifestation of the sovereignty within the circle.

Still, Kuyper had more to do. He was of course the first president of the VU, and as such, had a profound impact on the faculty and the way they taught their students. He served as prime minister of the Netherlands – the ultimate political achievement – from 1901 until 1905. His key to success had been his ability to appeal to what he called “the little people” (*kleine luyden*), people who were not part of the elite in either church or society. While they were overwhelmingly poor and rural, and attracted to his message in the times of massive social change in the face of the Industrial Revolution, they did include some rich families. Nevertheless, the VU was founded completely with money collected from these little people for the cause. With the creation of the VU, *The*

*Standard*, and the ARP, and the adage of sovereignty within the circle, the Reformed pillar had in effect become a reality. The Catholics would soon emulate this formula, followed then by the socialists.

***Reformed culture.*** It is within this Reformed pillar, characterized by a rather coherent system of postulates and beliefs, and very prescriptive in nature, that my participants grew up. Van der Horst (2001) argues that the homogeneity within the pillar was a benefit to its members, simply because most were poor:

A modest financial position encouraged conformity. It is not advisable to place yourself outside the rest of the group because you might need them one day. The pillarized society possessed a wide range of sanctions for eccentric behaviour. Priests and preachers alike would tell their congregations from the pulpit – and this was still common practice in the 1950s – that they should give their custom only to fellow believers. And they would also make it clear that certain people were no longer considered to fall within this category. Socialist literature in particular is full of examples of members of the religious pillars who had been ruined after displaying too great a sympathy with “red” ideas. In short, for most people, non-conformity was a luxury they could not afford (p. 56).

All my participants attended the VU; in fact, that is how they were selected for this study. They all referred to their Reformed upbringing, some with mixed feelings. Even if they did not refer to it explicitly, their behavior during the interviews was indicative of their upbringing. In order to interpret the narratives appropriately, it is useful to examine the characteristics, in broad brushstrokes, of this culture. The interviews conducted for this study serve as a good source of information.

In one of the interviews, with Peter van Doorn, I had just expressed my awe at the fact that he had managed to continue his chemistry experiments in the middle of the

war, in a building that was partially occupied by German police and where electricity had been illegally tapped, and in a time of severe shortages of fuel and food:

I also think that that was because those life patterns, those cultures, more or less were fixed. There was a time for education, and then you had to find a job and make money, get married, have children, and then take care of them, you see. As for how you [earn] your money, it was nice if it was a little, or if it was fun, but that was not the primary thing. You were supposed to contribute to church, state, and society, that was a kind of guideline.

With that came the feeling of belonging to a church community, because despite the orthodoxy, with which I disagreed, there was of course also a social function of that church. I already mentioned the deacon who visited me, all of us were still Reformed. That provided a bit of stability: you understood each other. While now, I have the feeling that in the current culture, it is so fragmented...

The real Reformed aren't around anymore. The real Protestants also were a very clear support during pillarization, which in and of itself I don't think was all that bad. But, that is how we were raised in that village. It had a downside: Catholics were no good because they had that *reservatio mentalis*, see, you can't lie, but you don't have to speak the whole truth, you could say, "I was not there," and then you don't say, "on that day," you leave that out to give you a banal example. Moreover, the Catholics were dumb, because they worshipped statues. It's not worship of course it is more a, (inaudible), intermediaries.

You see, you knew where you were at with each other. I had a very good employee who joined me from Amsterdam and with whom I worked together for a long time, and we only needed half a word. I knew that if I was on vacation and he took over for me, that things would happen my way, without the idea that someone would trip you up in society or whatever. You could count on each other, this was of course true in the Resistance where the Reformed church also played such a big part. You could trust each other you had a certain climate, the Catholic climate was different, of course, the Fascist climate was altogether different that was completely on the fringes, and

you knew, more or less, where you were at, well, within that framework, there was a kind of program that you had to complete, so you had to have a job. Maybe you could have had something else, but that is what came your way. You make your money with it, you can prove yourself, and that was enough.

This quote provides a nice overview of the mutual understanding, if not psychological contract, that those from the Reformed community had with one another. It shows the prescriptive nature of it, what I shall refer to as “the Reformed path,” and also outlines the benefit: the ability to navigate an (increasingly complex) society. The Reformed path prescribed what to value, even how to live, and in the process reduced a significant amount of ambiguity. John Bounds commented on how this played out in his high school, or gymnasium:

It was a Reformed gymnasium, so it was a school that acted in accordance with its name, as a denominational, Christian school. [...] I remember that it was a very serious thing, from some of the remarks that the teachers would make about how to live your life and so on. The talk was not too pious, but every once in a while, when it came up in class, you were given a directive, like, “this is how you may, you could, and you should live your life,” and that information was passed on to you through faith.

Of course, those messages were not confined to high school. When John was a freshman at the VU, the VU-Corps celebrated another quinquennium. As part of the festivities, Hendrik Colijn, editor-in-chief of *The Standard*, prime minister of the Netherlands from 1933-1939 and one of the directors of the VU, stopped by to address the freshman class in the Corps:

It was the Corps’ quinquennium in 1940, and Hendrik Colijn was a part of that too, and so we had a dinner in the American Hotel in Amsterdam. So there we were, as

freshmen, in our own smaller room. Colijn had just addressed the main room and thought it beneficial to speak to us too. So we were [...] encouraged to think of our future, I don't remember exactly what he said but it was along those lines. We also had to, let me put it in silly terms, we had to become Calvinist scholars or something like that (laughs). I don't think he actually said that but you have to think in those terms, we also had to become principled people.

In the next quote, when Peter talks about life in hiding as a student during the Occupation, he describes nicely some of the characteristics that the Reformed generally shared.

Sometimes, during an [air raid] alarm, I had to stay somewhere in South, where I stayed in a room at an elderly lady's home. She was a kind of landlady and sometimes I'd get something to eat.

R: Did she know about your situation?

Yes, she did that at the request of the deacon, I think. Because the church was very important in the Resistance as well, you could count on them. I still find, if someone is Reformed, the funny thing is, I have more trust (laughs) than if that person is something else. I have hired quite a few analysts, and never asked them their religion, but they almost always turned out to be Reformed: dutiful, industrious, sensible, can be relied on. I still have notes from those girls, saying how much they enjoyed it... But still, the authority is clear.

As Peter's quote shows, the various pillars were networked to an extraordinary extent. Because of the shared understandings and the social pressures to conform, Peter was able to stay in a stranger's home whenever he was in danger. During the Occupation, however, the pillarized structure of society turned out to be an important defense against Nazi ideology. According to van der Horst (2001), the social

organizations taken over by the Nazis simply folded, with membership falling to practically nothing.

Besides outlining how membership in the Reformed community helped him navigate and survive the Occupation, Peter emphasizes reliability, industriousness, and trustworthiness, among others. The Reformed culture appears entirely consistent with the prototypical Protestant work ethic. Gary Vessels, another participant, explained his choice to study law at the VU, as opposed to Leiden University, which had a better reputation, as follows:

Listen, we were a Reformed family. We went to the Reformed church, voted ARP, read The Standard, so going to the VU was completely self-evident. We also supported the VU. Don't forget, the VU was, at that time, a non-subsidized institution that survived on the gifts from the Reformed community. This community was extraordinarily strong, and initiated an unbelievable amount of organizational activities. An amazing amount has been achieved by that community, which has been somewhat forgotten. But yes, that was self-evident: of course you went to the VU, that's what it was for. And for principled reasons, too, because it was assumed that the education would be informed by the [Reformed] principles – of course in a good way. Later that all changed a lot, but that was the pretense at the time. But again, attending the VU was absolutely self-evident during those days.

About the way the Reformed spent their Sundays, he said that

Sundays were spent inside. My father he occupied himself with collecting stamps, which I enjoyed very much but never got involved with since, and with chess and things like that. So on Sundays you had an Old Testament kind of rest. I don't know if you know that culture but that's how it was. There was no backwards kind of thinking or anything like that, not at all, but rest on Sunday was prescribed. You went to church twice and that was your Sunday. Beyond that we had to (inaudible) practicing was

absolutely out of the question, ruled out. They were pleasant times, so I was not to be pitied, but you asked, what was the climate, well, that was the climate.

Just like Peter, Gary also identifies a downside to the “Reformed path”:

In our home, music was well appreciated, especially classical music and, of course, Christian songs as well. But a lot of classical music, and Bach was a monument. Since I have been able to breathe, I have been able to understand what music was, I heard those notes, I mean, that was the culture.

You know, I also had an uncle, he was an incredible piano player, my uncle Albert, my mother’s youngest brother, he was an incredible piano player, although they all were very musically inclined. But because they were Reformed, and unwilling to perform on Sundays and so on, the world of the conservatory was completely avoided. That has been an enormous hindrance to the development of such musical people inside those circles, who were just limited to, let’s say church music. They were often church organ players, like my grandfather, like my uncle, and so on, and as such they were really quite something else, but they never advanced beyond that. As soon as you stepped out of those circles, you entered the world where, according to beliefs at the time, you would be expected to complete tasks that were prohibited on Sundays, such as playing at concerts.

When Michael Armstrong talked about his father he shared the following thoughts about the kind of people they were:

But he did not show his emotions much, not that easily. Look, those were tough people, of the old-fashioned kind, shall I say, who did not easily complain. They were industrious, they couldn’t stand it if you were puttering around or being lazy, they could not take that at all. They did take vacations and enjoyed them, for sure, but no, if you were wasting your time, my mother was completely incapable of doing so.

There is another characteristic of the Calvinists (and the Dutch in general) that is relevant for this study: their humility, or at least, their aversion to bragging and self-aggrandizing. In the Calvinist tradition, any talent or wealth you may have comes from God and is not yours to flaunt. As this tendency toward humility made itself felt throughout the course of the interviews, it is described in more detail in a subsequent section.

In sum, the Reformed can generally be described as tough (*stoer*), frugal (*zuinig*), industrious (*ijverig*), reliable (*betrouwbaar*), humble, and no frills (*sober*). They were respectful of lawful and divine authority, and sensitive to issues of status and class. They were very achievement-oriented and valued education highly as a means to get ahead.

***De-pillarization.*** The cracks in the system of beliefs had not disappeared, even during Kuyper's rule. The tensions and cracks in the foundations of Kuyper's absolute truth surfaced, but mostly they led to academic debates among the educated elite. This does not mean that these debates were not highly public, traumatic, or sometimes even literally a matter of life and death. But many Reformed were able to distance themselves from these debates or were not able to understand their theological finesses. However, this period of relative continuity ended fairly abruptly with the German Occupation of the Netherlands.

Even though the pillarization phenomenon continued until long after the war, the tensions between modernism and fundamentalism and the increasing differences of opinion about ethical issues – the independence of Indonesia, world peace, abortion, and



many others – introduced a quick and irreversible trend toward dissolution of the pillars in the 1960s (Dekker & Ester, 1996) and, in parallel, of the stronghold of the Reformed on Dutch society. By all accounts, the 1960s were characterized by a radical shift from a pillarized society to a de-pillarized, multi-ethnic society. The irony of pillarization was that it had contributed to the social emancipation of the Reformed and the Catholics. This emancipation, in turn, accelerated the process of de-pillarization (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). After all, according to the emancipation hypothesis (Dekker & Ester, 1996), the lack of emancipation was the main reason the pillar formed in the first place. Van der Horst (2001) concurs: he argues that the success of the pillars allowed the Dutch to “think and act more as individuals, who thought for themselves and were no longer just part of the group” (p. 59). The VU became a mainstream university, funded by government and bound by its guidelines. One of its theology professors recently declared, as professor emeritus, that man existed before God did and that God was a creation of man – absolute blasphemy in the Calvinist school of thought. This professor’s name, Kuitert, comes up in nearly half of my interviews. This is the VU I graduated from, which leads to one of the main differences between myself and the participants: I never had to deal with the upheaval in worldviews caused by the Occupation, or by the de-pillarization that soon followed. The participants did, and they did this in their individual ways: from a resolute rejection of everything the pillar stood for to a desperate attempt to preserve the faith in its purest form, and of course, much inbetween.

The unraveling of the pillars started during the stormy 1960s. While discussion of these events is outside the scope of this study, it is important to note that the sharp decline in affiliation with a religious doctrine did not mean that many of the associated values (industriousness, etc.) were abandoned as well. The Dutch, generally, are still frugal, industriousness, and averse to self-aggrandizing or bragging. The main difference, which is a direct consequence of the cultural shift in the 1960s, is that they are now – again, generally – distrustful of authority. This is relevant only because it describes the environment within which I grew up. Even though I have no religious inclination, I do realize that I was brought up in a Protestant culture. This is probably one of the reasons why I felt close to many of the participants in this study, in spite of our obvious generational differences. As strange as it may sound, it felt as though I knew them in some way. Perhaps better, the way in which they interacted with me felt normal to me, and it was this shared understanding that created this sense of closeness. The participants with whom I felt the greatest distance, where I felt like a stranger, were the ones who were most religious in their orientation.

### **Student Life at the VU in 1939**

#### ***The Education System***

The way the Dutch secondary and higher education system was organized prior to the war has largely stayed the same in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, it is important to note that there are various kinds of high school degrees: at the time, there were the *Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs* or *MULO*, *Hogere Burgerschool* or *HBS*, and gymnasium. The first, MULO, roughly translates into *Expanded Basic Education* and *HBS* means

*Higher-level Citizen School.* The three had a hierarchical relationship, with the gymnasium being the most prestigious high school degree and the only one that allowed entry to a university. The HBS allowed entry to higher education but not a university. The gymnasium curriculum was generally challenging, with two areas of emphasis. The “alpha” curriculum emphasized the liberal arts, such as history and languages. It also included a fair amount of Latin and Greek. The “beta” curriculum was oriented towards the sciences – math, physics, and chemistry. Gymnasium graduates were eligible for enrollment in any university; as long as they had followed the right curriculum, there was no competitive selection process.

At the time of the war, there were twelve universities in the Netherlands: one of them Reformed (the VU), one Catholic, and the others public. Graduating from a university meant having a Master’s degree (or equivalent). The first major step to graduation was passing the Candidate’s exam, comparable to orals or comps. This exam was administered after all coursework was finished, and then one entered the doctoral phase (note that this is different from the doctorate in the U.S.). Passing the doctoral exam meant officially graduating with a master’s equivalent. The title used at the time is *doctorandus*, abbreviated *drs.*, which literally means “on the way to becoming a doctor.” When I graduated with my master’s from the VU in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, I too got the *drs.* title.

### ***The VU by the Numbers***

Currently, the VU has approximately 18,000 students enrolled and 2,300 faculty members. During the academic year 1939-1940, the VU had a total of 561 students

enrolled and in pursuit of a degree (Zondergeld, 2002). Of these 561, nearly half (259) possessed their Candidate's degrees.

Nearly ninety percent of the students were of Calvinist persuasion. Nearly ten percent of the enrolled students were female. Only five theology students were female, even though the theology department had the largest enrollment at 241 total; this can be attributed to the fact that in those circles, women could not become preachers. As a result, they were forced to stop studying after getting their Candidate's degree.

The VU contained four departments: theology, law, the sciences, and liberal arts. The theology department had eight professors and 241 students. Professor Waterink is often referred to because of his vocal stance vis-à-vis the Occupiers and his influence on students. Michael Armstrong and Nancy van Eck are the two participants in this study who studied theology.

The law department had had five professors and 212 students. Two very often referenced faculty members are Oranje and Rutgers, both highly active in the Resistance. Prof. Rutgers did not survive the war after his arrest on the North Sea during an attempt to escape to the United Kingdom. He died of exhaustion in a German camp in 1945. Oranje, who was president of the VU during the second half of the Occupation, was also intimately involved in the Resistance and imprisoned several times. Even though he survived the war, he died within a year of the end of the war at the age of 47. Participants Walter Dickson, Lee Zunker, Gary Vessels, Jim Thurston, Alex Heller, and Lou Bounds all studied law.

The sciences department had eight faculty members for 104 students. By far the most famous faculty member was Coops, who headed up a laboratory and used that as a cover for a hub of Resistance activities. Coops was arrested and imprisoned. The VU negotiated with the Germans and managed to get Coops' life spared by paying the Germans a substantial amount of money (Zondergeld, 2002). Coops survived the imprisonment, though barely. Two of the participants studied in Coops' department: Gerry Kosberg and Peter van Doorn. Gerry was a physics major, while Peter, as a chemistry student, studied directly under Coops.

The liberal arts department had eight professors for 90 students. One famous professor was van Gelderen, who is often described as "odd" but surprised everyone after the war because he had had the head rabbi in hiding in his home all along. John Bounds is the one participant who graduated from this department.

The VU had a main building in the center of Amsterdam, where it housed all departments except for Sciences. Sciences had its own lab in a building on the south side of the center of Amsterdam. Attached to the main building was the dormitory, called *hospitium* and nicknamed the *Spie*. The *Spie* housed about 25 students in various parts of the building, and several of the participants had a bed in the *Spie*. Gerry Kosberg and Jim Thurston lived in the *Spie*.

### ***Close Connections with Faculty Members***

Due to the small amount of students at the VU at the time, there was ample opportunity for the students to mingle with the faculty outside of class. As a result, the connection between students and faculty was strong. Most of the faculty members were

themselves VU alumni and had been members of the Corps in their student days. It was not uncommon for a professor to show up for a social at the Corps bar and stay till the early hours of the morning. In the process, many faculty were in fact surrogate parents and several of the participants describe them in these terms. Exams were not written, but oral and oftentimes at the faculty member's home. Gerry Kosberg describes one such exam:

I also took exams at [professor] Koksma's home, and then in the afternoon I was invited: "just stay for dinner, that's fine."

Nearly every participant referred at one point or another to the fact that they were invited to faculty members' homes for formal dinners. Walter Dickson describes one such dinner:

At Diepenhorst's home, dinner was rather formal. So this [student] was going to add some soy sauce to his soup. There was one of those bottles with a silver holder, and he picked up the silver holder and the entire bottle fell into the soup, that was quite a consternation. But he also let the boys pour the wine and open the bottles and so on. He watched very carefully to see if you did that correctly.

This example shows that the socializing was not only for its own sake; it also had a pedagogical purpose. After all, many VU students hailed from modest backgrounds and had not been exposed to upper-class norms and customs. Given that the ability to attend a university was a privilege in and of itself, and expectations of the students after graduation were high, it makes sense that it was the professors who concerned themselves with the holistic development of the student body, and not just in an academic sense. The faculty did not merely teach the students; they groomed them for the lives they all aspired to have upon graduation.

These close connections between students and faculty are not merely an interesting sidenote. During the Occupation, these connections would prove to be a critical source of direction for the students.

### *The VU-Corps*

As pointed out in the introductory section of this chapter, there was also a student organization called the Student Corps at the Vrije University. From here on out, I will refer to it simply as “the Corps.” Whereas in the early 90s it had 900 members, in 1939 the Corps had 268 members. Thus, nearly half of the student body at the VU was in the Corps. Once new members were introduced to the Corps as a whole, they were then introduced to subunits called Oratory Associations OAs. Rather than a student organization of its own, the Corps as a whole functions more as a umbrella, or an infrastructure, for these much smaller OAs. Historically, the emphasis within these OAs had been on the development of oratory skills – leading meetings, making speeches, engaging in debates, and so on. Of course, socializing was an important part of OA life as well. In the 1990s, there was a wide variety of OAs – conservative, business-minded, left-leaning, subversive, same- or mixed gender. They varied in size from less than ten to around forty. Each OA has its own elected officers, its own meetings and mixers, and its own distinct culture. At the time that my participants were in the Corps, there were no co-ed OAs; in fact, there was but one female OA, called Pallas. Other OAs whose names surfaced in the course of the interviews were Forum, Areiopagos, Cato, Stoa, and Agora.

The Corps is run by an executive committee called the Senate. (Incidentally, it was the 2001-2002 Senate of the VU-Corps that provided me with the contact information for the participants, all of whom are alumni of the Corps.) The Corps also runs its own proprietary bar. Only Corps members and their guests are allowed to socialize on those premises and enjoy affordable drinks (mainly beer). Generally speaking, the Corps provides the physical and organizational structure for the OAs to be able to function. One cannot be a member of an OA without first joining the Corps. Although the OAs aim to teach and value oratory skills, they are primarily social in nature – most have mandatory weekly socials in a particular bar that they consider their home base.

When a student first signs up to join the Corps, there is generally a two-week period that serves to introduce each student to the various OAs. Usually however, this is not a friendly affair: this is the time when prospective members are hazed, humiliated, and exhausted (depending on the preferences of the particular OA). These two weeks are called *groentijd*, or “greentime.” The verb *groenen* (“to green”) effectively refers to the practice of hazing. Walter describes the general practice poignantly:

So you join the Corps, you enter greentime, you visit OAs... It was a matter of gathering at the Corps bar, where you were given a schedule. It told you to be here at this time, visit Demosthenes and then Stoa. So you ring a doorbell, at Stoa, and there are all kinds of people sitting in a circle, and then they try to tease you. That’s all it is, I never enjoyed it and afterwards I never participated in it, terrible.

And you were greened by the Corps as well [...] In the Corps bar you were supposed to crawl underneath the chairs, on which the members were sitting, and they would



grab you and pour beer over your head. You would just continue, you looked like an animal.

Peter van Doorn does not have the best memories of these practices either:

I remember [...] that after a while, I was both physically and emotionally completely spent, so I was making things up, to respond to questions. (Inaudible) humiliated, that's how it was done. That was a rather unique experience for me, and at one point you just shut down, and you think "whatever."

At the end of the two weeks, those who persist receive invitations to join a debating club. Based on those invitations, the student makes a selection and then commits. Too few invitations tend to be frowned upon, as it is perceived as the result of deficient social skills on the part of the student. It is not uncommon for a student to have no invitations after this two-week period, in which case the student gets forced into the OA of choice by the Senate. However, too many invitations (more than four or so) are also frowned upon, as the assumption is that the student merely wanted to please everyone and was not genuine.

Once admitted into the membership of an OA, the student has found a social home for the remaining college years. Activities include meetings, speeches and debates, committee work, and/or organizing events. Students can confine their activity level to their OA or they can serve on Corps-wide committees.

### **The Invasion, the Occupation, and the VU: A Chronology**

#### ***May 10, 1940: Invasion***

The description of the invasion at the beginning of this chapter is echoed by all of the participants. The Dutch were initially totally shocked. During World War I, the

Netherlands had managed to stay out of the conflict by remaining neutral, and the hope was that this strategy would work again. Hitler had even said that he would not attack the Netherlands, which for many was a reason to continue life as normal. When the Nazis did violate the border on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940, the shock was tremendous. Participant Alex Heller's reflection on that shock was as follows:

The outbreak of war was a tremendous shock. All of a sudden it was in the news and on the radio. German troops were coming down everywhere, so you were shocked... and then you let go of all your foundations. You can say "anything is possible, there is war, and anyone can come up and [...] can pull you off your bicycle," which was called confiscation. So you had lost all sense of certainty.

Similarly, Walter Dickson, another participant, refers to the sense of panic that he felt when he talked about the invasion:

I thought it was scary. You heard those airplanes and you realized that "something terrible can happen at any moment," and also because of the stories from the previous war of course: "The Germans are coming, they'll go to your basements, rape your women and drink your booze." But you saw quickly that that was not happening.

There were a few fierce battles fought, but after three days of fighting the attacker bombed Rotterdam on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Its historic center largely destroyed, the city lost nearly 25,000 homes and 800 of its citizens. The Dutch surrendered under the threat of the bombing of another city. Schools closed during these four days of combat, but otherwise life after that continued as normal. Most of the participants acknowledged in some way how strange it was, in hindsight, that life went on as usual. Participant Nancy van Eck recalls:

When the war broke out, your initial feeling was “now nothing will be the same.” Well, that turned out a little different. It was not so bad because the Krauts were not on top of things immediately, so you could still take your oral final exams. It was very strange, indeed it was very weird. The first few months you had the sense that “really nothing has changed I thought that everything would change but really not much did.”

Of course, it was not all peaceful at the beginning. The German Police, called *Sicherheitsdienst*, settled in a school on the south side of Amsterdam’s center. Peter van Doorn, another participant, describes an event that happened there early on in the

Occupation:

The German police, the Sicherheitsdienst, were much different than the Gruene Polizei (regular uniformed police), who were much more humane. One night, probably in 1940, there was a Resistance activity there. The Resistance cleaned house over there and got away. The Germans randomly took passers-by, who happened to be there at the time, and summarily executed them. Like, against the wall, bang, punishment, and I had been there myself about a half hour prior.

### ***November 26th, 1940***

In November of 1940, the first of many Nazi limitations on Dutch public life was introduced: all Jewish government workers were fired. This included faculty in institutions of Higher Education. The VU was unaffected for two reasons: it had no Jewish employees, and its private status sheltered it to some extent from too much meddling by the Dutch government, which at that point had been infiltrated by Dutch collaborators appointed by the German Nazis.

The Department of Law at Leiden University (a public institution) was considered the best in the country. One of its professors, Meyers, was very well-

respected by both students and peers. Because he was Jewish, he was fired, and a colleague, Cleveringa, held a passionate, famous speech that provided a major impetus to the soon-to-be-developing student Resistance. Below is an excerpt:

“I appear here before you today, at a time you usually find someone else in front of you: your teacher, and mine, Prof. Meyers. The reason for this is a letter that he received this morning directly from the Ministry of Education: ‘In compliance with the order from the Federal Commissioner for the occupied territory, regarding non-Arian government employees, and those equated with them, I hereby notify you, that starting today, you have been relieved of your position as professor at the University.’

I am recounting this notice in its naked austerity and will not attempt to qualify it further. I am afraid that the words, that I might be able to find, however I chose them, would insufficiently describe the painful and sour feelings that this notice has caused me and my colleagues to feel. [...]

It is this Netherlander, this noble and true son of our people, this human being, this student-father, this academic, that the stranger that currently oppresses us HAS RELIEVED FROM HIS POSITION! I told you I would not talk about my feelings; I will keep my word. Even though they seem, like boiling lava, to burst out of the crevices which it seems will form soon under pressure from my head and my heart.”

Alex Heller was an eye witness to this speech:

He had a lot of courage. I remember that he first notified us of Meyer’s termination and then I remember he said that if he thought about it, he would start to boil, so he was deeply insulted. Well, we all were, because Meyers was a wonderful professor, I later did my final exam with him.

As a result of this speech, the students at the Leiden and Delft universities went on strike, and in turn, those two universities were shut down and would remain that way

for the remainder of the Occupation. Alex, along with many other law students, transferred to the VU to continue his studies.

### ***December 1942***

The first two years are characterized by increasing scarcity of resources and increasing pressures on public life. A curfew had been established between 8 pm and 4 am; censorship was widespread and the major television and newspapers had been taken over by Nazi sympathizers; radios were not permitted and had to be handed in; meetings of any kind required prior written approval from the Nazis; and of course, the Jewish citizens had to wear their infamous stars. Nazi soldiers had permission to shoot at any group of three people or more who appeared to congregate. Nevertheless, life at the VU continued more or less as normal (given the circumstances). Generally, most of the Dutch had taken on “a kind of tactic of accommodation” (van der Horst, 2001), adapting to the changes as they were made as best they could. Only few chose either collaboration – through the *Nationaal-Socialistische Bond* or NSB, the Dutch political party that represented Nazi ideology – or Resistance. Adrian Kinslow, another participant, comments on the first few years as follows:

Let me say this about the war: It was rather deceitful, which was really everyone’s experience. The war started of course in May ’40, and many Dutch have the bombing of Rotterdam etched in their memories as something very significant. But during the first few years, the presence of the occupying forces brought little hardship. I think that they had a system for that: the Dutch were of course seriously taken aback by the fact that the Germans were there, so [they figured] “let them get used to it.” Yet, in secret, all kinds of measures were prepared. But in ’40 and ’41 and even in ’42, you noticed the war mostly because of the limited availability of goods.

What Adrian referred to was the German strategy to first appear friendly, after the initial shock of the invasion, so that the Dutch could get used to their presence and realize that they were not a threat. Slowly, they would start introducing measures increasingly restricting the civil liberties.

On December 9th, 1942, the presidents of all universities were called to a meeting at the Ministry of Education in The Hague. They were told that six to eight thousand students (half the Dutch student population) were to be sent to Germany to work in the factories. Most university presidents, among them Nauta, president of the VU, are outraged and object (Zondergeld, 2002). At the VU, Christmas recess starts immediately on December 10<sup>th</sup> in order to protect the students. In the meantime, word about this meeting has spread like wildfire among the students, some of whom are starting to get organized. Within the VU-Corps, the decision is taken to make the St. Nicholas celebration its last meeting, because given these circumstances, it is deemed better to disband the Corps. The Corps building closes after a very successful St. Nicholas party. Professor and honorary Corps member Waterink emotionally addresses the Corps members:

Friends!

We have celebrated. The walls of the Corps bar have shaken with laughter. We have spent time with each other, the way generations of students have spent time with each other. But there is one luxury, which previous generations of students have shared, that we have had to do without. We have not spent time in liberty.

Such is the tragedy of this evening: we have celebrated this evening and we all know that this party is the end of our social lives, for now. The Occupier's measures make

it desirable, they make it necessary that we stay one step ahead of them. This is not cowardice, it is not weakness, it is awareness of permanent Resistance [...]

Soon we will leave our Corps bar. Then it will be shut down, the party will be over for a while.

And then, friends... then... I don't know, what then. I sometimes fear the worst. We cannot trust the enemy even for a moment. We must be prepared for the very worst. My friends, we do not know, where we shall see each other again. Let us go home and then what? I am sometimes somber about the future. Only God knows which one of you will be deported to the enemy's land. Perhaps there are some among you, whose lives, lived according to God's will, will have to end because of a bomb, in one of the hot, dark factories in Germany, perhaps there are some whose lives will be ended by a bullet on the cold, white snow fields in Russia. We do not know. But we do know one thing. God remains true and we shall never renounce His Name.

We remain loyal to our country, loyal to our Queen. We will never renounce the principles of our University. This, we promise each other in this solemn moment.

And we shall not forget each other, we shall support each other, fight together for our country's freedom.

One thing, men, never yield even an inch to the enemy. Keep in mind, noblesse oblige, and carry high the nobility of your national heritage and of your Calvinist persuasion. Whatever the enemy asks for, no matter how he flatters, or how he downplays his own actions, how perhaps secretaries-general, professors from renowned universities, or men of influence confer or scheme, we know but one answer and that answer is: never! (Rutgers *et al.*, 1946, pp. 32-33).

On December 12, the university is ordered by telegram to send names and addresses of the students to the Department. That night, students at the University in Utrecht set the building, which houses the student information, ablaze. On December 13,

the administration buildings of all universities are put under police protection. On December 14, the presidents are notified that the plans have been scrapped – probably in order to get the student population to calm down. Over Christmas break, a lot of talks and considerations take place and students continue to organize.

***February 6th, 1943***

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1943, two people rang the doorbell at the residence of general Seyffardt. He was an active collaborator: a general in the German army, he was the leader of the Dutch volunteer (collaborator) legion on Germany's Eastern front. When he opened the door, he was shot and killed. Because this assassination was attributed to students from Leiden and Amsterdam (Neuman, 1967), this led to a chain of events that altered the face of the Occupation until the end of the war.

On Saturday morning, February 6<sup>th</sup>, participant Gerry Kosberg was in the physics lab. Without warning, German soldiers with bayonets on their rifles enter the classroom.

December was the critical time when word leaked out that thousands of students would have to go to Germany. That was a big scene then but I think it is all described in those books and in the Larinx. And then, at the end of December they suddenly said “it's not needed,” but we did not trust things at all anymore because they were completely unreliable. The Senate of the VU said, “vacation, immediately,” [...] because they were afraid of raids, and everyone was sent home.

In January, apparently there was the opportunity after all to go to class. It was all so vague and difficult. And February sixth is when those raids occurred, completely unexpected. Of course, we knew nothing about the immediate cause, that Seyffardt had been shot to death. We were having our normal Saturday morning class – a



stupid day for the Germans to pick because there were very few classes. Not a single law student had class on Saturday but we still did, and that was a physics class with professor Sizoo.

It is etched in my mind: I know exactly where I was standing when those folks came in. Then there was a loud yell from downstairs, you heard “Gestapo!” and immediately they were inside the classroom with bayonets on their rifles. It was during break; we had had our first lecture from 9:15 to 10, and break was from 10 to 10:15. We were standing around, looking at the machines on the tables, when they came in. A whistle was blown and then they all went back downstairs and then we tried to escape.

I briefly sat in one of those cabinets with jingling glassware (laughs), but it was no use, we could not get out. Everyone had decided what their escape route would be, thinking “if something happens then I need to see to it that I get there and then they won’t find me.” I had a spot like that of my own, but I could not get to it, and soon they came back upstairs (inaudible) along downstairs.

Then we were gathered there, about fifty of us, I don’t remember exactly, around that amount. And then that that German started telling us, in German of course, what was happening. We were not to flee; if we did we would be shot to death. Professor Sizoo had to translate that, I think I wrote about that in the Larinx, because he was probably afraid that we did not understand German, which was nonsense of course. So then we were put into those vehicles, and driven to the Euterpestraat [German police headquarters], but I was released there in the afternoon.

We did not understand at all, we had no idea why the raids occurred, it did not become clear until later on. Since I was Student [German] in my freshman year, I got a kick in my rear and (laughs) could get lost. They released the freshmen because of course it was all about the perpetrators of the assassination of Seyffardt. They realized that “the freshmen, well, they probably did not do it,” and later it turned out that it had been alumni.

All freshmen were released that same day. The others, about 70 VU students, were transported to a camp and imprisoned there for a few weeks, then released. The last group of students was released on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Regardless, this was a very clear signal that the Nazis were getting more serious and threatening.

***May 5th, 1943***

After the raids of February 6<sup>th</sup>, all students were required to sign a form in which they declared their loyalty to the occupying powers if they wanted to continue to be enrolled at the university. All students nationwide, females included, were to sign the declaration of loyalty by April 9<sup>th</sup>. This is where the close connections between the VU students and faculty had an effect: thirty-six male students signed the declaration – a significantly lower percentage than at any other university population with the exception of the students from the Catholic University in Nijmegen (the national average for male students was 14%).

At the end of April, the former prisoners of war – those Dutchmen who had been with the armed forces during the invasion – were required to report to the authorities. It was widely suspected that this was a ploy to ship them off to Germany to work in the factories. There was great social unrest and there were strikes. By this time, the Resistance was starting to get organized better and there were many underground publications that urged the students not to sign the declaration – or, for that matter, to comply with any demand placed upon them by the Nazis. The Nazis responded forcefully to the strikes, and the atmosphere was becoming more and more grim. Within that cycle of increased tension and retaliation, the Nazis ordered all male students who had not

declared their loyalty to report for duty. They did this by issuing a call in all major Dutch newspapers. The newspaper was issued on May 5<sup>th</sup>; the students were to report for duty the very next day, May 6<sup>th</sup>. The call to report for duty included an announcement that for any student who did not show, his parents or caretakers would be held accountable. For many students, including Gerry Kosberg, this was a very difficult episode for the entire family.

The effect: Look, if you get three days time to think it over, then you'll think to yourself "don't think so." But that was, bang! All of a sudden you were faced with this. Those guys were cunning, they did it suddenly and they gave you one night to think it over [...] My father wrote a letter [...] to my sister the next day. My younger sister was in Utrecht, and he wrote his letter: "I've never had as miserable a day in my life as I did yesterday, and I hope never to have a day like that again." Because his existence was at stake too. The whole family, the very existence of the family was at stake.

Many students (and/or their parents) caved under this kind of pressure, leading to nearly 4,000 students reporting for duty. Incidentally, even those who had signed the declaration of loyalty had to report for duty as well. Again, the number of VU students who reported was disproportionately small: Fifty-three students or five percent of those who had not signed went to Germany. Three of them would not return from Germany, due to the Allied forces' bombings in Germany.

Those who neither signed nor reported for duty had to find a residence to go into hiding. All in all, about 1,000 VU students scattered across the country to stay with family, work on a farm, or otherwise find a way to stay out of the Nazis' sight. Gerry comments on this rather bizarre situation:

I took the train from Zutphen to Ruderloo with a (inaudible). There were several guys in my coach that made me think “hey, they might just be my kind.” When I got out in Ruderloo, the bus was full; we could not all get on the bus. And then I saw this other guy with one of those suitcases. I said “what year were you born,” he says “1924,” (laughs) I say (laughs), (inaudible), another one who was also on his way to an address somewhere out there.

The VU had already been closed since the February raids, but after May 6<sup>th</sup>, the VU and all the other universities officially closed their doors for the remainder of the Occupation. Unofficially, however, school continued as usual, and even though classes were no longer held, the faculty continued to administer exams in the students’ homes or at their hiding addresses, or wherever the professor happened to be – at home, in hiding, or even in jail. These were the famous “black exams” that allowed the students to continue making academic progress under the extraordinary circumstances of the Occupation. Only those most active in the Resistance generally did not make any academic progress between 1943 and 1945. Regardless, the fact that these students were under constant pressure for two years was more than likely very stressful (op den Velde *et al.*, 1990). Peter van Doorn describes it as feeling hunted, like a rabbit. Lee Zunker initially went into hiding at his grandmother’s residence in Soestdijk, a small town in the center of the country. Here is how he describes his life in those days:

I had not signed that declaration of loyalty. Because of my age and because I had been in the military, I had to report, which I did not do. Fortunately, they didn’t catch me, even though sometimes I would leave the house in Soestdijk. After all, every once in a while I needed a haircut (laughs). So anyway, that was alright it was rather rural, so you could spot any looming danger.

I took several exams at my grandmother's home; the professors came and visited me. Especially professor Oranje, he came twice, and later a confidant of his came twice, I believe in 1945.

Generally, life in hiding was characterized by lack of stimulation, boredom, studying by daylight, and occasionally a scare or a close call with the German authorities. Alex Heller describes some of his experiences as follows:

I was in hiding at a cemetery, which was very pleasant because I had a friend with me, a medical student, who was a very good piano and organ player. Since we were at a cemetery, we were able to play the organ on the weekends, so he played enthusiastically. In that time period, I also asked my father for a typewriter so that I could learn to type blindly. That is how I learned to type, from a booklet, and that went so well that I was able to type letters in total darkness.

Participant Gary Vessels describes a close call he had with authorities when he was in hiding at home in Amsterdam:

It was all rather uneventful at my home. But once our house was raided by Germans. I was working in the back, and we had a maid [...] who was completely startled – me too, by the way. We lived way up, an upper level home in the Vossius street, and it had a very tall staircase, because everything was high in those old homes. From our floor, there was another staircase that allowed access to the roof. I went up those stairs and got onto the roof. When those guys entered [our home], they were so out of breath (panting) that they were panting. When they saw that they could go higher still, they gave up. I never knew why they came or who they were looking for. But that is the only thing that I uhm, experienced as rather unsettling, in that period. It was pretty scary, but then, life just continued as normal.

### ***September 19th, 1944***

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, the Allied Forces invaded the European continent in Normandy. They broke through the German defenses at a very high speed. They quickly liberated France and Belgium, and went on into the Netherlands. Unfortunately for many, things went wrong in Arnhem and Operation Market Garden was a failure. The Allied Forces were stopped on the south side of the Rhine.

However, news of the initial dramatic progress quickly made its way to the Dutch, in spite of the firm German grip on the mainstream media. Somehow, perhaps due to the difficulty in getting reliable news, word got out that the Occupation was about to end. On Tuesday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, this led to some bizarre scenes: spontaneous victory celebrations were taking place among the Dutch and even German soldiers panicked and left their posts. Unfortunately, none of this was true. Gary commented as follows:

In September 1944, in, we all thought that the English, under Montgomery's command, would continue to roll northward because that was progressing lightning-fast, it was unbelievable. Once the Germans could no longer hold the line in Normandy, that breakthrough was formidable until things went wrong at Arnhem. Those final weeks before Arnhem we all thought "well it's over." Of course, it was an unbelievable disappointment, but we had had a taste, and probably many bottles had already been opened, if you know what I mean [...]

That was truly crazy, there was a festive mood, and those rumors too, they were such crackpot ideas. The people said "they're already at Duivendrecht" [just outside Amsterdam] and so on. Of course that was nonsense: they were stuck in the mud in the south of the country.

Peter, too, was affected by the madness and, specifically, the disappointment that followed when all the rumors turned out to be false.

The rumor was going around that “the allied forces are already at the border, they’re already in Rotterdam, they’re coming to Amsterdam.” They were all rumors. But we all went into the streets, and then the Germans started shooting. I remember night. I slept in a room in the lab, and I thought “tomorrow we’ll be free.” I could not sleep all night, and then it turned out that it wasn’t happening. That was mad Tuesday, the Germans (inaudible) and returned to Dam square. People were shot again, and I remember that intense disappointment, “we have not been freed.”

### *May 5th, 1945*

On this day, the Nazis surrender and the war is over. The so-called “winter of famine” has passed. The winter had been especially cold, and with a shortage of fuel and of food, thousands of people had died of hunger in the central and northern parts of the country – including Amsterdam. Lee Zunker, who spent the latter part of his time in hiding in Amsterdam, described it as follows:

When I got up one morning and looked out my window, that tree that had been there in front of the house... it had completely disappeared. They had cut it down the night before. We had one of those small furnaces on the stovetop, and we used it to burn pieces of wood the size of matchsticks. That’s what we used to cook food [...]

I took a bicycle, and adapted it so that you could get the front wheel moving. That way you could use the dynamo on that wheel and could generate some electricity for a little light to read a book.

Participant Michael Armstrong had just gotten married and moved in to a room in a former hotel.

That's when I saw those hunger journeys pass by. People were pushing their carts with pianos on them and they would lug them up north [approximately 100 miles away] to trade their possessions for maybe some potatoes. They walked all the way up north to try and get something to eat.

Obviously, the Liberation was a very joyous occasion for most. But as Nancy van Eck points out, even this event had a scary side to it:

We were in church on Sunday when the service was discontinued, because they were saying "you must go home because the Allied Forces are in Leeuwarden, and they are moving for Sneek, and it is quite possible that the Germans who are still here will resist." So then the service was discontinued and (inaudible), that was scary, that was so very scary.

Gerry Kosberg was at home in the east of the country, in Zutphen, during the final days before the German surrender:

The Liberation was no fun either. In Zutphen we had to deal with very young boys, sixteen, seventeen years old, from the Hitler youth, who were defending themselves fanatically. I could write a book about what happened during and directly prior to Zutphen's Liberation. We had a train loaded with ammunition that exploded [...] those grenades landed six, nine, thirteen miles away.

And of course we had that major bombing of Zutphen. They tried to destroy the bridges, and although they weren't hit, the city center was partially destroyed with a hundred casualties.

As for the Liberation, well, our house was relatively unscathed, the roof tiles had shifted and the chimney had been blown off by a grenade [...] The whole family spent fourteen days in the basement. Those were very tense days, but eventually the Liberation did come.



Alex Heller was in his hometown of Haarlem during the Liberation. When I asked him to describe that moment, it was clear that it was not just scary, but for some it was also tragic:

We all walked into the street to celebrate, “God, you can just walk into the street.” But at that point shots were still being fired in parts of the city. It made you realize that “something’s not right over there because they are still shooting.” They still shot several people to death, or maimed them. Those were the Germans who, well, they went crazy and they would not let us go. But we all stormed outside like, “goddammit you can just, you can just walk outside in the streets.”

Similarly, Lee recalled a particular instance after the Liberation:

Those days were really hard to imagine. I remember once I walked into the street, this was probably right after the Liberation, when I was on my way to get a little food. I saw a woman fall down right in front of me and I think that she died of hunger.

### ***Post-War Reconstruction***

Nevertheless, the Liberation was a deliriously joyous occasion for most. The VU opened its doors again in June, and the Dutch collectively took to the task of reconstruction. First priority was to make sure that justice was served to those who collaborated. They created committees whose task was to “purify” institutions and rid them of people who had collaborated with the Germans. Many news media, for example, were either shut down or they changed hands due to their role in disseminating German propaganda. When the universities re-opened their doors after the war, returning students were screened for any activity that might indicate collaboration. Many students who had signed a declaration of loyalty (to the German authorities) were

suspended for a year or two, and those who had joined the NSB (the Dutch political party propagating Nazi ideology), or had otherwise actively colluded with the Nazis, were forbidden to continue their education after the war and had any exams taken after 1943 revoked from their records. Similarly, most job applicants were faced with purification committees and had to answer questions. Many of the participants in this study either served on, or testified to, one of these purification committees.

### **Conclusion**

What I have tried to illustrate is the extent to which the Occupation of the Netherlands by the German Nazis was a collective trauma, confronting nearly everyone with some tough dilemmas. In general, the Dutch adjusted and adapted as best they could. Some collaborated actively with the Occupier; some resisted strongly. Most, however, fell somewhere inbetween those two extremes.

For college students, the Occupation had a unique characteristic in that during the second half of the Occupation, they were sought after by the Nazis, making continued adaptation essentially impossible. The male students were needed to satisfy the German need for labor in their factories. Second, the universities had been a source of Resistance – sometimes public, sometimes in spirit only, but Resistance nevertheless. The second half of the Occupation was characterized by the closing of the universities and thousands of students going into hiding all over the country.

Of the fourteen participants whose stories are included in this study, two had reached the Candidate level in their studies before the universities closed. Their lives were disrupted slightly less than the others' because they did not have to go into hiding.

Another participant was spared the danger of arrest and deportation due to the fact that she was female. Female students were not considered a potential source of labor for the Germans. Of the remaining eleven students, all of whom went into hiding, one was actually captured and sent to Germany for labor. He was lucky to return from Germany unscathed in 1945. Three participants were highly active in the Resistance and are especially lucky to have survived the Occupation. Although the remaining seven participants were less active in the Resistance, if at all, the persistent danger of arrest and the isolation from their peers and even their families resulted in a stressful two years. For most, those two years were characterized by long periods of boredom and self-study, punctuated by brief episodes of high danger and close calls. Superimposed on these stressors were additional ones that all of the participants were exposed to: increasingly scarce resources such as food, paper, electricity, and fuel; increasingly severe restrictions on their freedom; and the ever-present risk of collateral damage during military combat, especially bombings by the Allied Forces. Within this context of Occupation, and within the contours of the Reformed pillar, the lives of these fourteen participants continued to unfold, as represented in the stories they related to me in the course of these interviews.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **A NARRATIVE ON NARRATIVES: WHOSE STORIES ARE THEY?**

This chapter serves two purposes. One is to explicate my theoretical position on the nature of interviewing in general and the life story interview in particular. I do this both by aligning myself with a school of thought and then I present evidence from the transcripts that illustrates the legitimacy of this position. My core argument is that my “fingerprints” are all over the data, in such a way that one could ask if the stories represented here are even the narrators’ at all anymore. The issue of authorship is a thorny one, yet critical to a proper interpretation of the narratives.

The second purpose is to provide details about the methods used in the collection of these life stories. Details about participant selection, interview questions, transcription, and translation are presented throughout the chapter.

First, it is helpful to define narrative. According to Brockmeier and Harré (1997), narrative could include countless genres and forms, and acknowledge that it is difficult to define narrative. They do, however, identify two fallacies: the ontological fallacy (the belief that there is a story to be uncovered prior to the narrative process), and the representation fallacy (the supposition that there is only one human reality to which all narratives must eventually conform). As much as this is consistent with my own position, it hardly constitutes a definition of narrative. For the purpose of this study, I will use story, life story, and narrative interchangeably, and adopt McAdams’ (2006) definition of a life story: “an internalized and evolving cognitive structure or script that

provides an individual's life with some degree of meaning and purpose while often mirroring the dominant and/or the subversive cultural narratives within which the individual's life is complexly situated" (p. 11).

## **INTERVIEWING AS CO-CONSTRUCTION**

Kvale (1996) introduces two metaphors of the research interviewer, the miner and the traveler, as follows:

In the miner metaphor, knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal. Some miners seek objective facts to be quantified, others seek nuggets of essential meaning. In both conceptions the knowledge is waiting in the subjects' interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner. The alternative traveler metaphor understands the interviewer as a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler's interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact on the listeners (pp. 3-4, emphasis original).

After outlining the essential differences between the two metaphors, he subsequently makes clear his own position, with which I align myself as well:

The inter-view is an inter-subjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach. His or her questions lead up to what aspects of a topic the subject will address, and the interviewer's active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation (p. 183).

Kvale is not alone in his position that interviews are co-productions. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) refer to this as the active interview:

The active view eschews the image of the vessel waiting to be tapped in favor of the notion that the subject's interpretive capabilities must be activated, stimulated, and cultivated. [...] The objective is not to dictate interpretation but to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not be confined by predetermined agendas (p. 17).

Mishler (1986) concurs, as does Bakhtin (1981): "One creates oneself through one's own use of language – but so is the other's language formative of the self, since an utterance is formulated only in the light of another's speech" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 60).

Sehulster (2001) puts it in plain language: "Characteristics of our relationships with others determine the content and extent of what thoughts and memories from our past, present, and future, indeed, what "self" we share with them" (p. 197).

My alignment with this position is not just based on a philosophical preference, however. In subsequent sections, in which I discuss a variety of influences on interviews, I aim to provide enough evidence of these influences, encountered in the course of this study, to make it clear that this position is not just legitimate, but necessary.

The discussion is structured and guided by Riessman's (1993) five levels of representation in the research process: Attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading.

### **Level One: Attending to Experience**

If we assume that there is such a thing as a pre-linguistic, primordial experience, located in the lived world of immediate, everyday life, then attending to experience amounts to directing attention to it: "reflecting, remembering, recollecting [the

experience] into observations” (Riessman, 1993, p. 9). This necessarily occurs prior to the telling of the experience. In this process, a selection takes place as meaning gets assigned to some parts of the primary experience and other parts are not reflected on. There is a longstanding philosophical debate about the possibility of pre-linguistic consciousness. I side with scholars such as Ricoeur (1992) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who are skeptical of the possibility of the existence of pre-linguistic (or non-linguistic) experience.

This might seem to have relatively little bearing on this study. However, even at this first level of representation, I contributed significantly to the data reduction that is part and parcel of the selection as described above: I selected some participants and not others. This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, as the purpose of this study is not to make generalized statements about the nature of the experience of the Occupation for the entire student population. Nevertheless, the effects of this (necessary) selection should be noted.

### ***Participant Selection***

In order to be considered for the study, the requirements were that the participants had to be alumni of the VU-Corps and that they were enrolled at the VU during World War II. Because of the gracious cooperation of the Senate of the VU-Corps, I was granted access to the Corps’ list of alumni. In order to ensure that they met the second criterion, I only requested the list of alumni who joined the Corps between 1937 and 1942 (the last cohort until after the war). This resulted in a list of 175 last names, first initials, and mailing addresses, many of which were incomplete or missing

altogether. The only way for me to contact these alumni by phone was to look them up in the phonebook. If no matching name and address was found, that person was scratched off the list.

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted. I called each prospective participant by telephone and introduced myself as an alumnus from the VU and the VU-Corps and a Doctoral student (*promovendus*) at Texas A&M University. I told them that I was doing a research project in which I was interested in examining the effect that the war had had on its survivors' lives. I told them that I would be happy to visit them at their homes, or any other location of their preference, and that I would ask them some questions, primarily focused on their wartime experiences.

Selection from the list was not entirely random. I started by approaching the people who had contributed to the Larinx in 1995. Unfortunately, several of them had passed away since then. Walter Dickson, Gerry Kosberg, Adrian Kinslow, Michael Armstrong, and Ellen Bergen (the author of the introductory paragraph in the first chapter) were among the prior contributors and all of them consented to participate in the interview. Lou Bounds was the founder of Cato, the OA of which I am an alumnus, so I was able to use that connection with him successfully as well. I had never met or corresponded with the other eleven people before. They were approached more or less according to their geographical distance from my temporary home in my aunt's house. Only three people declined. One person said he had no desire to conjure up those memories anymore; the other two declined because of poor health. The sixteen



participants are introduced briefly in Table 1 below, in the order in which they were interviewed.

**Table 1.** The Names and Main Characteristics of Participants in This Study

<i>Name</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Lou Bounds	Co-founder of the Oratory Association Cato; older brother of participant John Bounds; law degree; Frisian (northern); title for life story is <i>Searching for Concordia</i> ; interview videotaped
Jim Thurston	The only participant who requested a pseudonym; narrative of regret; law degree; title for life story is <i>The History of the Second Man</i> ; interview audiotaped only
Michael Armstrong	Calvinist preacher; doctorate in theology; title for life story is <i>Joyfully in the Ministry</i> ; interview videotaped
Gerry Kosberg	High school physics teacher; Calvinist persuasion; title for life story is <i>A Grateful Person</i> ; interview videotaped
Ellen Bergen	Interview was audiotaped only, and was lost due to malfunction in the tape recorder
Adrian Kinslow	Successful physician; active in the Resistance; interviewed in two sessions; title for life story is <i>A Realistic Idealist</i> ; interview videotaped
Alex Heller	Law professor; a spiritual journey; title for life story is <i>Surprise</i> ; interview videotaped
Gary Vessels	Co-founder of Cato; successful trial lawyer; doctorate in law; title for life story is <i>An Individualist with Limits to Teamwork</i> ; interview audiotaped only
John Bounds	High school Latin teacher; doctorate in classical languages; younger brother of Lou Bounds; Frisian (northern); title for life story is <i>A Sheltered, Joyful Life</i> ; interview videotaped
Jack Denninger	Interview was audiotaped only; was lost due to malfunction in the tape recorder
Peter van Doorn	Chemistry professor; existential struggle with religious doctrine; title for life story was <i>A Layered Life</i> ; interview videotaped
Will Barnes	Worked for Dutch equivalent of CIA; did not graduate from the VU; war combat and Resistance veteran; recovering from stroke at time of the interview; no title for life story; interview videotaped
Nancy van Eck	The first ordained female Reformed minister in the Netherlands; title for life story is <i>A Life to be Grateful for</i> ; interview audiotaped only
Walter Dickson	Justice of the Peace in the south of the country; title for life story is <i>Life is a Game, but Bridge is Serious</i> ; interview videotaped
Lee Zunker	Lifelong employment with a life insurance company; story of regret; title for life story is <i>Memories and Notes</i> ; interview videotaped
Hal Young	Calvinist, Evangelical Resistance veteran; did not graduate from the VU; only provided story of his wartime years; did not address interview questions; title for life story is <i>A Triumphant Life</i> ; interview was videotaped

## **Level Two: Telling the Experience**

The second level of representation is telling the experience. It is a process in which the events are re-presented to a listener. Inevitably, there is a gap between the lived experience and the narrative that relates it. Here, too, a selection takes place – if only because of the limits imposed on the narrator by language. At this level of representation, Riessman (1993) confirms the position taken by Fontana and Frey (2000), Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Kvale (1996), and Misher (1986): that it is critical to understand the importance of the social dynamic involved in the interaction between the teller and the listener(s). Thus, the story is told to a particular audience and for a particular purpose. In this case, these stories were told (primarily) to *me*. There are probably many ways in which I affected the narratives without knowing it, but there are two that are clear.

### ***Interview Structure***

One obvious way in which I helped to shape the narratives was by providing the overall structure of the interview. I used the same approach that Lieblich *et al.* (1998) used in their life history interviews. All participants were asked the same first question: “Imagine you were about to write a book about your life. What chapters would that book contain?” Within each life chapter, they were then asked the following questions:

- When did the chapter start and end?
- What were the main events in that chapter (plot)?
- Who were the most important people (characters)?
- How would you describe yourself in that chapter of your life?

- What title would you give that chapter?

I assumed that adopting this structure would help the narrators in sorting through the possibly overwhelming task of relating a life story on the spot. Using this interview structure for all the interviews also provided a possibility of comparison. Given my primary interest in their lives during the Occupation, I asked the participants for much more detail about that period in their lives than about the others. At the end of the interview, they were asked what might be a good title for the whole story. This might provide additional insight into the sense the narrators make of their lives (Kacen, 2002).

Obviously, this structure imposed on the participants' stories helped shape them (one notable exception was Hal Young, who did not "talk between the lines" by relating a story within this chapter structure). I will never know what they might have told me spontaneously if I had just turned on the *record* button and asked them to tell me their stories. I might have been given more details or fewer, the stories might have been simpler or more complex, or they might have been shorter or longer. But it is important to note that the imposition of this structure helped shape the narratives, both in form and in content, to a significant extent.

### ***Interviewer Characteristics***

Of course, as the primary audience member, I did not necessarily have to say or ask anything at all to influence the content and delivery of the stories. Even without responding verbally, the listener renders an interpretation of the narrative and in so doing, acts as a judge (McAdams, 1998). Certainly, the narrators continually monitored my verbal and non-verbal responses for cues for understanding and empathy. Moreover,

the narrators must have had a collection of assumptions about me that affected what they said and did not. These assumptions might have related to my interests, my prior knowledge about wartime events, or even about our cultural similarities (or lack thereof). Throughout the course of the interviews, those assumptions were often checked and adjusted by the narrator. This led to periodic continued checks between myself and the participant. The conversation with Jim Thurston is a good example. The very first words recorded on tape are as follows:

R: Do you have any other questions about this study?

J: No, no, I understand what the purpose is. No tales of heroics, right?

Jim's first question appears to be a subtle message to me that he does not think he was heroic in any way during the war. The question effectively serves as an invitation for me to put his anxiety to rest (which I did by confirming that his understanding was indeed correct). It also shows that he is concerned about meeting my needs: If I had wanted heroic tales, that would have been the place to stop.

Jim shows his concern for meeting my needs throughout the interview. The following examples, taken from various points in the interview, highlight his sensitivity to my needs:

Okay... but, first you want an overview of my life, right?

Do you want to know the remaining course of events, after my graduation?

Uhm, does this interest you, perhaps, or should I...?

I must say it was a very enjoyable time, a very harmonious family... But to come up with things that are interesting, that is something else"

But then, this may not be very useful to you, or is it(laughs)?

These examples, taken mostly from the first half of the interview, all have in common a concern with meeting my needs as a researcher and display a willingness to change course if needed. To some extent, this occurred with each participant (again, with the notable exception of Hal Young).

Speaking of my needs: this is another characteristic of the researcher that I would argue is salient in all social science research, but not often illuminated – the researcher's need for good data (whatever that looks like). There is no doubt that a good rapport between the interviewer and the participant enhances the quality of the interview (Ellis *et al.*, 1997). Participants are more likely to open up and share personal insights if they feel safe to do so, which in turn can add considerable depth to a life story.

In hindsight, I am a little conflicted about this study. I worry that, to some extent, I deceived the participants, or at least exploited them. Sure, they consented to participate and there were no surprises, but still, to overstate it, I felt like I was offering a false friendship. This friendship, this fleeting relationship, did not develop for its own sake (although in most cases it was very rewarding in and of itself); it served my purposes because it might lead to better interviews. Looking back on what happened, there is a part of me that feels a sense of guilt, that I have betrayed their trust by taking something that they gave freely and using it for my own personal, selfish purposes.

This does not mean that the respect, the affection, and the connections I felt to some extent with each and every one of them were not real. On the contrary, they were real, and in many cases I left their homes deeply moved by their stories. I was always

grateful that the tape recorder was doing its work as I was drawn into their stories for several hours and then left their homes either energized or exhausted – or both. But again, these connections did not exist for their own sakes. They served my purposes, because now I get to write about them, and expose their stories – some of them deeply personal – while hiding behind an academic, somewhat distant façade myself.

To avoid this lack of balance, and also to make a point about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participant, I will make myself vulnerable too. I will expose myself in not such a flattering light by sharing an example of the lengths to which I went to find that connection with a participant.

In general, I find it difficult to relate to religious people. I do not adhere to any religion and I tend to be rather distrustful of organized religion. Needless to say, my interview with Michael Armstrong, a Calvinist preacher, was very uncomfortable at times.

The following exchange is part of a longer stretch in which I am trying desperately to position myself as someone who has something important in common with Michael (thinking, of course, that the establishment of commonalities will lead to a better interview). And since the only thing of importance to Michael appears to be religion, this is obviously a struggle. Whenever I read through this stretch of the interview, I never know whether to laugh at myself or hide my head in shame. Directly prior to this exchange, Michael had asked me about my beliefs. I had already revealed myself to be rather ignorant about theological doctrine. But I ventured a risk and

answered his question truthfully, telling him that I did not attend church and that I kept a certain amount of critical distance from it. Michael responded as follows:

M: Yes but those Ten Commandments, they are universal, aren't they?

R: Yes, and I absolutely live in accordance with them, I mean, everyone makes mistakes, I'm not perfect either, but I always try to be very conscious of when I cross the line. Eventually, I hold myself accountable, that's deeply ingrained. Perhaps that's because of the Christian school I attended=

M: =Your parents, did they attend church?

R: (Sighs) No, my father never did, and neither did his parents

M: Oh

R: My mother did for some time, but at one point she turned her back on it after a very hurtful experience, so she was like "goodbye." Not to her beliefs, but to the church. So the way I was raised, I maybe attended church five times, very little

M: So how come you are doing your research at the VU, within these Reformed circles?

There are several other exchanges with a similar level of discomfort for me, where Michael effectively turned the tables and interviewed me. His questions never felt innocuous, however. They felt to me as though they were an assessment of my credibility as an interviewer. His last question in the above exchange confirmed that for me: he is puzzled about the apparent disconnect between my own beliefs and the circles within which I was doing my research.

More important, however, is what I said. I am still ashamed that I uttered the words "and I absolutely live in accordance with them" when talking about the Ten

Commandments. In truth, I couldn't name them, let alone make any credible case that I lived in accordance with them. I must have sensed that this grandiose statement was out of line because I then downplayed it by admitting that I am imperfect. (This was not a bad move culturally because it showed humility, which is so highly valued among the Reformed.) But then, before I ceded the floor back to him, I suggested that my morals are a result of having attended a Christian school! While it was technically true that I attended schools that were Christian in name, I would be hard-pressed to articulate how that affected the development of my own moral compass. In hindsight, it is painfully clear that I was desperate to make myself look as good in his eyes as possible. When he asked about my parents, I must have sensed I was in trouble because I sighed and confessed that neither of my parents were church-goers. I remember feeling a sense of panic during this exchange (and others) and fearing that the interview was slipping away from me. The last question from this exchange hammered this home for me. It seemed as though he was asking me, "Then what the heck are you doing here today?"

As said, there were other such exchanges in this interview that seemed to highlight differences rather than commonalities between Michael and myself. Each time, I tried to spin my response in the most favorable of lights. I do not believe that this is necessarily unethical (although my response above really did cross the line), but it does show, without a doubt, that I had an agenda and that this agenda helped shape the interview. Sharf (1990) refers to this as the "conjoint occurrence of intentionality and strategy," (p. 219.) This may come across as a somewhat cynical view of the relationship between researcher and participant, and it may not hold true for every



researcher. But surely, no one would argue that intimacy between researcher and participant is useful in and of itself. The authors who value such intimacy all place their comments within the implicitly overarching goal of conducting high-quality research projects.

Of course, I may not have been the only one who was trying to have needs met during the interview; the participants had their needs met too. (For example, Adrian Kinslow and Peter van Doorn gained source materials for a memoir; Will Barnes and Alex Heller participated because they thought it could have a healing effect.) But I cannot escape the suspicion that they gave me much more than they had intended to give. I can only hope that my depiction of their narratives does not exploit or betray their trust.

### *Narrator Characteristics*

So far, I have highlighted the extent to which I influenced the narratives, unwittingly or not. This does not mean, of course, that the narrator does not have an overriding influence on the narratives as they are created. The words captured on tape flowed, after all, from their mouths. The narrators are far from passive beings, responding exclusively to stimuli coming from the interviewer. If asked a question that they did not want to answer, they told me so. In Michael Armstrong's interview, he turned the tables on me and interviewed me for some time. There were two main characteristics of the narrator that helped shape the narratives: their perceptions of the audience and their apparent comfort level with asserting (and relinquishing) control.

Earlier, I referred to myself as the primary audience in the interaction with the narrators. If Bakhtin (1981) is correct in his assertion that each utterance (a word, a phrase, or a whole story) is always a response to another utterance and in anticipation of another utterance, then clearly my presence has an impact on the narrative. But who is the audience? I did not necessarily comprise the entire the audience. First, if BenEzer (1999), Birch and Miller (2000), Harvey *et al.* (1995), Harvey and Scott (1995), and Mishler (1999) are correct in suggesting that narrating a life story is a way to make sense of a life, then the participants themselves were the audience as well. As a consequence, we cannot assume that there was a pre-conceived narrative waiting for me, ready to be tapped with the right question. Instead, the conversation was the very space within which meaning was constructed. The simultaneous nature of the roles of narrator and audience (Ochberg, 1994) further problematizes the distinction between researcher and participant, much like the simultaneous roles of audience and author I had to play (Chase, 1995; Hermans, 1997)

Even so, the audience was comprised of more than just myself and the narrator. All participants were all fully aware that their stories would be represented to anyone who cares to read this study. All participants were asked if they wanted me to use a pseudonym, and surely the very question must have brought the gaze of the (anonymous) reader into the conversation. This must have been even more true for those whose interviews were videotaped; one of the participants, Nancy van Eck, declined to be videotaped because, as she described it, a camera is like a giant eye that stares at you and never blinks. Jim Thurston's narrative is fraught with examples of regret, of failure,

and of not living up to expectations. Jim declined to be videotaped and he was the only one who requested that I use a pseudonym for him. Although I will never know for sure, I have a strong feeling that Jim would not have self-disclosed to that extent had he not had the opportunity to protect his identity from this anonymous audience.

Aside from the anonymous reader, the participants' families sometimes also appeared to become the audience. Two of the participants requested copies of the transcripts and video tapes for their families' use. One participant, Adrian Kinslow, made some evaluative comments at several points in his interview that surprised me somewhat and made me wonder why he did that. Upon transcribing the interview, it became clear to me that he was speaking not to me, but through me, to his grandchildren. Adrian was a physician. In the following section, he starts by relating a conversation he had had with his superior in the post-war military.

[The superior] said, "do you know why I say that? Next week, we're going to Brussels to purchase some adrenaline, for the battlefields. It constricts the blood vessels, so that fewer people bleed to death. And I have already made reservations with a nice restaurant." And that, my son told me, is when the gentlemen go to eat. So that's the lesson I am glad I learned: enjoy the anticipation of fun events. So many people go on vacation with a sigh. When I [give] a booklet or (inaudible) to children, and tell them, "for anticipation, enjoy it now," [they have] so much fun. Often the [anticipation] is more fun than the disappointing [event]; the weather could be bad or the hotel might disappoint.

The switch from his post-war military experience, in which Adrian is busily positioning himself as a developing physician, to this life lesson about enjoying the anticipation of fun events, and relating it to children, is rather startling. There are a few

other examples in this transcript, and I believe it is no coincidence that they occur in the narrative of someone who asked, before the interview started, if he could have a copy of the transcript because his family had asked him to write his memoirs. These two examples do suggest that the kind of audience that the narrator envisions helps shape the narrative.

The narrators generally also did not refrain from asserting themselves through selective self-disclosure, or more accurately, selective *non*-disclosure – such as whenever a narrator declined to answer a question. One of the more gentle ways for the narrators to put up a “no entry” sign was to say they did not think the particular topic was all that relevant. Others were more direct by simply declining to talk about it. (Those instances invariably evoked a sense of shame, as if I had been caught snooping around. After a brief period of anxiety, I was then able to continue normally.) The interview with Lou Bounds contains a good example.

Lou had served in the Dutch military in Indonesia after the end of the war. I asked him if any events jumped out in his memory of those three years.

For example, when I was being trained as an officer, (unclear), the training was led by a non-commissioned officer of the KNIL, the Dutch army in Indonesia. He was really intent on absorbing us into the KNIL, but I and a few others resisted. That never would have led to anything anyway because the KNIL was not going to be continued. But you learned a lot about the society as far as it was determined by the Europeans in Indonesia. But look, I can spend several hours on all those events, but I don't think I'll do that. They're also not all that relevant, it seems to me.

His last comment had the effect of closing the door on that conversation, and this was the last that was said about his Indonesia days. I can speculate why he may have done so, but that would just remain speculation. In the end, I had to respect his wishes to not talk about Indonesia in any detail.

The interview with Nancy van Eck contains another good example of a “no entry” sign. The interview with her stands out in my mind because of its warmth and, to some extent, intimacy. She requested I address her on a first-name basis, the only one besides Lou, but this was due to our mutual affiliation with Cato. Nancy also had no reservations about sharing details of her childhood illnesses and how she was teased and bullied in elementary school. When I asked her about the main events in her childhood, she mentioned two foster sisters who lived with her family for several years. They were Dutch but had lived in Indonesia, and their parents, who were friends of the family, asked Nancy’s parents if the two sisters could stay with them so that they could attend school in Holland:

N: My parents, who weren’t thrilled about it at all, still thought that they should do this anyway, because they said, “Suppose that we have to send our children away, and there was a place that they really wanted to live but the people said no.” So they conscientiously consented, out of a sense of responsibility (inaudible), but we (inaudible) a lot of problems

R: Really? Such as?

N: Well, no, let’s not go there

Access denied. I remember feeling embarrassed about even daring to ask.

Again, as the interview progressed, the anxiety faded.

These are but two of many examples in which the narrator temporarily asserts control during the interview. But they illustrate nicely the choices I had to make, such as to either ask a follow-up question to an interesting lead, or not. There were times when I asked the question even though every fiber in my body screamed, “don’t go there!” Yet the participant answered it fully and without hesitation and I was relieved and happy that I had asked the question. There were also times when, in hindsight, I wished I had asked the question when I had refrained from asking it. And then there were times when I asked the question and the participant refused to answer, which invariably led to a blush accompanied by a sense of shame. I realize that this is part and parcel of a life story interview, and therefore I may not have to judge myself too harshly for being brazen.

***Co-authorship: Pilots and Co-pilots on a Joint Journey***

As a result, the name for this second level of data representation, “telling the experience,” may be a bit of a misnomer because it calls insufficient attention to the influence of the listener. The life story interview is a ritual of give-and-take that occurs in the context of a mutually respectful and generous, yet fleeting, relationship. Even though the primary roles are differentiated (teller and listener), they are more different in name than they are in content. As was already stated, narrators are as much tellers as they are audience. They actively select and ignore content and employ certain narrative strategies in order to persuade the researcher of something about themselves. This is possibly the primary need that the narrators have in the context of the interaction. As researcher, on the other hand, I am as much an editor as the receiver of the story. I also have needs – primarily to get good, rich data – and will do what I can, within the

constraints of propriety and protocol, to have my needs met. This includes follow-up questions, interruptions, and a host of active listening strategies such as humming, nodding, making eye contact, summarizing, and prodding.

Due to the variety of the roles that both the narrator and the listener play in the co-creation of the narrative, the terms usually used to describe the roles are insufficient. The terms “narrator” and “teller” are more appropriate when a story is told in a setting with much less personal interaction, such as addressing large audiences. The same is true for the terms “listener” and “audience,” as they imply a certain passivity on the part of the “listener” that belies the reality of the life story interview.

Similarly, the term “participant” is problematic because it suggests that the other person – usually referred to as interviewer or researcher – does not participate. The terms “researcher” and, to a lesser extent “interviewer,” invoke a sense of power and privilege involving leadership, expertise, and permission to pursue an agenda (if only a “research agenda”). In turn, it places the “participant” in a position of subservience to the “researcher.” For sure, the term “participant” is vastly preferable to the term “subject,” and there are many interview settings in which this power difference connotated by the terms “participant” and “researcher” is an appropriate reflection of the interview reality. But the life story interview is characterized by an exchange, not just of words and pleasantries, but of power and authority. Mishler (1999) points out that it is not only the researcher who does the theorizing; narrators engage in this as well, by reframing their experiences to fit the immediate context. Thus, these life stories are co-authored by the “participant” and the “researcher” in a way that appears to be much

more far-reaching than in the case of the traditional interview. This give-and-take of power and authorship occurred in some way with all of the interviews in this study. For the purpose of this discussion, I have identified two main ways in which this manifests: negotiation and intentional or conscious co-authorship of the story.

Fontana and Frey (2000) introduce the concept of negotiation eloquently in their own terms: “Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 646). What I mean by negotiation is setting and managing expectations, it is the entire exchange between the narrator and the listener. Below are examples taken from two interviews.

The first is an excerpt from the interview with Gary Vessels. This more or less textbook example of setting and clarifying expectations is self-evident. It suggests that what is really negotiated is the parameters of the interview, including power and control. The interview will not be successful unless agreement has been reached on who is in charge and what is talked about. This negotiation was more or less on equal footing, with an equal distribution of power and a quick resolution. This next excerpt is from the first few minutes of the interview.

R: Okay, perhaps we can go through each [life] chapter briefly, as an overview then=

G: =no problem=

R: =the result will hopefully be a kind of uhm, well=

G: =I thought we would focus specifically on the war period=



R: =and then, especially

G: Oh, that's why

R: Okay well it, it gives me a context

G: Fine

R: within which you experienced what you did... is that alright?

G: No problem

R: Alright, alright

G: I have no secrets really

R: (Laughs) alright

G: At least not in this conversation, no

R: By the way, speaking of secrets (laughs), would you like me to use a pseudonym for you when transcribing this interview and writing the dissertation? Or does it not matter to you?

G: Thus far it's all the same to me. But if during the course of the interview, the heat gets turned on, then I will revisit that

R: (Laughs) That is not my intent

G: No

R: That is purely=

G: =I don't expect that either

R: No

G: But I am, I uhm, I, I don't see any problem

R: Alright

G: with it, no

R: Good

From here on out, the interview went rather smoothly, characterized by a few periodic checkups by the narrator and a decreasing distance between him and myself.

This second example is from the interview with Michael Armstrong. The exchange referred to earlier, where Michael asks me about the universality of the ten commandments, is a good example of how comfortable he was in shifting from the role of narrator to interviewer, effectively stripping power from me and taking control himself, putting me in a position of discomfort because of the topic (and my desire to have a good interview). This give-and-take of the microphone, so to speak, continued throughout the interview. Below is another example:

M: The Geelkerken controversy, surely you know about that

R: Geelkerken? No, I'm sorry

M: Oh, you're no theologian, are you?

R: No

M: No you are=

R: =I am really the modern variety of the VU student and that is=

M: =Oh you are ehm

R: On paper, I am Reformed

M: Yes

R: But I have to say that that's pretty much where it ends

M: Oh so you don't go to church

R: No, no

M: O I see, I see

R: I hope that doesn't insult you

M: No no that does not insult me, it's just that I think it's a shame you know

What started as an innocent check to verify that I had the requisite knowledge about the Geelkerken controversy turned into a role-reversal, with Michael asking the questions and myself acting as respondent. Soon after, the following took place:

M: Well it's a shame that you no longer attend church  
(laughs)

R: I am=

M: =If you went to church, where do you think you'd go, or do you not have any need

R: Well, need is a big word

M: To pray, to pray or something?

R: Yes but to do that I don't have to go to church, I can I can do that myself

M: Oh, you pray for yourself

Ouch. The conversation kept moving and by the time I realized that the final comment stung, we had moved on. Michael held control of the conversation and I had no choice but to wait until he yielded back to me. For a good five to ten minutes, he expressed frustration with the liberalization of the church and with atheists, leaving me little choice but to accompany him on that ride, uncomfortable as it was. Below is the last part of this conversation:

No, you're no atheist, but look: You can criticize the church, we're all sinful people. But you need your fellow people, don't you? On your own, you can't, say, save the

economy single-handedly. And that's how it goes in life too, you need each other in life, just like religious people need each other. Sure, sometimes things may go wrong, but there is also so much hope. You often get so much sympathy from brothers and sisters, but also a lot of heartache. People inflict pain, but this happens in ordinary life too. People are always uhm, well, perhaps I am taking you off topic now.

These last few words were the signal that he was getting ready to hand control back to me. This exchange of control happened on several occasions during the interview.

Beside negotiation, intentional or conscious co-authorship of the story was another way in which the stories were co-constructed. Life stories are of course always co-constructed, but co-construction is not always done consciously or intentionally. In this case, I mean co-authoring as co-narrating in an overt sense. Although this only happened in a few interviews, the two examples are quite telling and illustrate the extent to which the give-and-take in life story interviews transcends the exchange of information.

The first example of co-authoring is from the very final phase of the interview with Adrian Kinslow. I asked him to think of a title for the book – arguably the most significant question because respondents are essentially asked to summarize their lives into just a few words (Kacem, 2002):

R: Okay, then the final question I have about this is, what might be an adequate title for the book?

A: (Mumbles) Well, you know what makes me sort of dizzy, recently there was an article in Het Parool [a major Dutch newspaper]. Very sweet with a photo, just two years ago, a life for the disabled, and I find that a bit tacky

you know. Uhm... No, I think that is difficult, but you should, you can [come up with a title] too

R: Well, I'm most interested in what you come up with [...]

A: Alright, I understand. Perhaps you could write something along the lines of ideals, idealist. Do you think it's weird to say (laughs) – you should do this yourself – a realistic idealist?

In this brief excerpt, the Adrian twice invites me to come up with a title for his story. Had I accepted the challenge, he probably would have had to give his blessing in order for me to use it, but still, an invitation from a narrator to come up with a fitting title for the story is a striking example of the extent to which the narrative is co-authored, literally.

The second example of co-authoring, from the interview with Walter Dickson, draws primarily on what transpired after the interview. The final part of the transcript translates as follows:

R: Well, the final question is, if you consider the entire book as a whole, can you think of a title?

W: I find thinking of titles very difficult

R: Yes, yes, it is, they are not easy questions

W: (Pauses) So a title for the whole, the whole thing

R: Yes

W: (Pauses) Something like that just has to occur to you

R: Hm hm

W: (Pauses) Maybe later

R: Okay

W: Go ahead and turn it off

R: Okay (end of tape)

After the interview, I stayed for dinner. The following is a translation of notes I made by speaking them into the tape recorder directly after my visit:

I asked him for a title for the book, and he couldn't think of one and said, "maybe later." Well we sat down for dinner, had a nice time, and we never revisited the interview. But when they were about to drive me back to my car, I walked past a piece of paper inside a plastic sleeve that would allow you to put it in a binder. It was leaning against the wall, on a table, and it said, with big letters, "life is a game, but bridge is serious." I asked him how he got it, and whether it was given to him or to his wife. He did not remember, but he had to laugh at it a little and then his wife said to him, "no no no, it was given to you." So I replied "then maybe that would make a nice title for the book?" He then said "Yes! Yes! That is a nice title for the book."

Whereas I refrained from accepting Adrian's invitation to create a title to his life story, in Walter's case I took the initiative to suggest one, thinking that having one that I thought of, and he agreed with, was better than not having one at all. This blurs the boundaries between narrator and listener. In this instance, I became, again literally, a co-author.

Hopefully, these examples of negotiation and co-authorship have brought the idea of co-constructing narratives from the conceptual, philosophical level to the level of lived experience, thereby providing strong evidence that the miner metaphor for interview research is simply not workable – certainly not in the case of in-depth, life story interviews. Instead, as Kvale (1996) argues, the metaphor of the traveler is a much better fit. Earlier, I outlined my objections to the terms traditionally employed to

describe the roles in interview research (researcher, participant, listener, teller, narrator, etc.). Instead, I suggest two terms that build on the traveler metaphor: pilot and co-pilot.

The pilot of this vehicle called the life story interview represents the narrator. If life is a journey, taken “on foot,” at a regular pace, then a life story interview is a flight that recreates the essence of the journey in only a fraction of the time. It starts at some meaningful beginning, and even though it travels back and forth in time, it invariably ends in the present. As Kvale suggests through the use of the traveler metaphor, the “flight” becomes a journey in and of itself. The pilot is primarily in charge and determines how high and fast to travel, where to stop, and when and where to drop altitude.

The interviewer may be a passenger on this journey, but not in any passive sense. The continued probing, questioning, suggesting, even challenging of the pilot throughout the journey makes the image of co-pilot a better fit than that of passenger. The co-pilot sits up front with the pilot, sees what the pilot sees, and observes the pilot go through all the motions necessary to recreate the experience – at times even briefly taking over for the pilot. In a subsequent chapter, I will expand on the metaphor of the journey in the explanation of a method to reduce narrative data. To defer to convention, I will continue to use the terms interviewee, narrator, and participant interchangeably, as well as the terms interviewer, listener, and researcher. I do wish to emphasize that my conceptualization of the life story interview is that it is experiential in nature; it is fleeting, it is a process, and it is in many ways unpredictable and spontaneous. Within

that ethereal journey, roles can switch easily and often between the narrator and the interviewer.

### **Level Three: Transcription**

The first two levels of representation involved a certain selection or reduction in data when compared to the prior level. Transcribing, the third level of representation, similarly involves a reduction in data (Riessman, 1993). If the interview is audiotaped, all visual cues, part of the experience, are lost. Yet even if the interview is videotaped, the live, spontaneous event is transformed into one that is fixed. Subsequent transcription then removes the visual cues after all. As Lapadat (2000) puts it, “Verbatim transcription serves the purpose of taking speech, which is fleeting, aural, performative, and heavily contextualized within its situational and social context of use, and freezing it into a static, permanent, and manipulable form” (p. 204).

For this study, I went on a journey with sixteen pilots. In all cases, the interviews were captured on audiotape. In the eleven cases where the narrators gave permission, the interviews were also videotaped. (The rationale for the videotaping was that it would capture some of the nonverbal dimensions of the narrative performance.) Unfortunately, due to a malfunction in the audio tape recorder, two were lost (neither of them were videotaped). One was with Ellen Berger, one of the two women who consented to participate in this study and also a contributor to the *Larinx* in 1995.

The remaining fourteen narratives were transcribed in Dutch. The transcriptions were as “true” to the spoken interviews as I could reasonably get them – keeping in mind that Ellis & Bochner (1996, p. 26) warn that transcripts are “a second-order reality that



reshapes the events it depicts.” This means that I included the uhms, I inserted commas whenever the pilots paused, and I used an equal sign (“=”) whenever one party interrupted the other. I captured half-words to the best of my abilities and I also refrained from using periods in the transcription. The reason for that is that with the many false starts and half sentences, it was often impossible to ascertain whether or not a period belonged here. In order to reflect the emphasis that the narrator sometimes placed on a word or syllable, I used italics in those instances. I made these decisions in part to expedite the enormous task of transcribing the narratives. Cleaning up the transcripts by making them conform to the conventions of written language would have taken significantly more time. However, Kvale (1996) warns that “attempts at verbatim interview transcriptions produce hybrids, artificial constructs that are adequate to neither the lived oral conversation nor the formal style of written texts” (p. 166). Since transcriptions are, in fact, translations from one language to another, it makes little sense to try and do justice to the original (spoken) language by violating the new (written) language. What’s more, such accounts are difficult to read and become annoying to the reader. As a result, verbal interactions appear disjointed, inarticulate, and incoherent when translated verbatim into written language (Poland, 2002) and clearly do not place the narrator in a flattering light (Kvale, 1996).

Bakhtin (1981) asserts that “all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve” (p. 428). This is what I already referred to in the Prologue: I cannot claim all the words in this document as mine. Similarly, we cannot assume that all the words uttered by the

narrators in this study are theirs. If they are not theirs to begin with, why worry about verisimilitude? This may sound abstract, but Schiff, Noy, and Cohler (2001) found that several participants related personal stories of events that they could not possibly have experienced themselves. Yet, those stories had been assimilated into their life stories over time.

This does not mean that I am absolved of any responsibility to stay “true” to the “original,” however those two terms are defined. But it does call into question the usefulness of the quest for verisimilitude. For that reason, among others, I have “polished” the representations of the narratives included in this study (Atkinson, 1998).

On another note, Atkinson (1998) suggests removing the co-pilot’s questions from the transcripts altogether, in order to “end up with a flowing narrative in the words of the person telling the story” (p. 56). I take issue with this approach because it risks the perpetuation of the naïve and fallacious assumption that the story was told by the “teller,” rather than co-created by both parties. In the transcripts represented here, I did remove all my encouraging remarks such as “hm hm,” “yes,” and “okay.” But whenever I intervened by asking a follow-up question or making a specific comment, I included this as part of the co-authored narrative. In the end, I attempted to strike the balance between faithfulness and readability, keeping in mind that it was important to me to reflect, to the best of my abilities, the eloquence that many of the people exhibited.

Obviously, such decisions are not trivial. Along with Riessman (1993), Kvale (1996), Lapadat (2000), Mishler (1991), and Poland (2002) argue that transcription is an interpretive act in and of itself. During the course of my transcriptions, I was confronted

with the extent to which they are right. Transcription is not a neutral translation from the spoken to the written word; instead, it is an (often unconscious) act of interpretation. I will present several examples from the interview with Peter van Doorn.

As said earlier, all interviews were audiotaped and many were videotaped. The audio tape recorder had an external, high-quality microphone built in, and was always doing its work close to the narrator. Overall, the quality of the sound recording was high. But of course, the video recorder also recorded sound. Since it is very labor-intensive to transcribe a video tape (compared to the ease of transcribing an audiotape), I only played the video at those times when the audio tapes were being turned over or replaced in the interview. That way, I was able to get a seamless transition between two audio tapes.

Surprisingly, the sound quality on the video tape was usually actually higher than that of the audio tape – in spite of the fact that the video camera was always located farther away from the narrator. Moreover, even if the sound quality was similar, I was able to see the narrator's mouth on the screen, providing clarity on any particular letter. For example, Michael Armstrong talked about death and union – apparently a theological construct of which I had no prior knowledge. At least, I thought he did. The Dutch word for death is dood. Upon reviewing the tape, I was able to discern that, instead, he was talking about doop, which means baptism. Perhaps this mistake would not have significantly altered the overall interpretation of the narrative. But an accumulation of such instances just might do so, calling into question the validity of these transcripts that are so often taken for granted.

After I finished transcribing all the audiotaped interviews, I printed them out and made myself comfortable on the couch. I had also transferred the video tapes from digital VHS to DVD. I watched each of the eleven interviews intently while checking the transcript. In most cases, I ended up reviewing the interview several times. In virtually all cases, corrections had to be made. In the case of Peter van Doorn, I decided, for the purpose of illustration, to keep the original transcript, completed on the basis of the audio tape, as well as the corrected one. Most corrections were of words that had previously been marked as inaudible, that were subsequently clearly understandable. But in some cases, words that I thought I had transcribed correctly turned out to have been wrong. Below, in Table 2, are three examples of such corrections that were made. The text in the left column is the translation of the audio-based transcript, while the text in the right column contains the corrections made from listening to and watching the videotape.

There are many more such examples where the corrected transcript clarifies or changes the meaning of the earlier version based solely on the audio tape. And if the English words above are completely different from one version to another, in most cases the same is true for the Dutch words as well. Many times I was left to wonder, how in the world did I come to think that this is what Peter said? It goes to show, at least in my case, the extent to which transcription is guesswork, and perhaps even that the words that make it into the document are as much a function of what I anticipated they would say (because that's how I would then listen to the words) as what they actually said. Poland (2002) presents a similar case of two different transcripts, created by two

**Table 2.** Comparison of an Audio-tape-based Transcript to a Video-tape-based Transcript

<i>Transcript based on the audio tape only</i>	<i>Corrected transcript based on the video tape</i>
<p>He read The Standard, of course. I was mostly able to construct my inner world, and return a favor to the dogma and the (inaudible). In hindsight you think “isn’t that a little (inaudible) equivocal,” and (inaudible, mumbles) could not risk, you always knew that the pressure was so high that you could not exist without (inaudible).</p>	<p>you read The Standard of course back then. I was able to completely construct my inner world, pay lip service to the dogma and the (inaudible). In hindsight you think “isn’t that a little (inaudible) equivocal,” and (inaudible, mumbles) that was impossible. The pressure was so high that you could not exist without at least paying lip service.</p>
<p>So he (inaudible) my father, “that boy needs to go to, let him go to [intermediate] high school for three years, and then uhm, and then he can.” After those three years, without much effort really, he then said “now two more years [advanced] high school, that should be possible.” But then every once in a while I needed a job.</p>	<p>so he worked on my, my father “that boy needs to go to, let him go to [intermediate] high school for three years, then he will have some skills.” After those three years, without much effort really, he then said “now two more years [advanced] high school, that should not be a problem.” But then the money was spent and I needed a job.</p>
<p>But that, that knew, after all, because I had military (?), I inherited, and uhm, the circumstances in in which my father and mother at first were no, no, (inaudible) people, but practical Christians. It stood free for my father feeling (?) so that I, I alone at school the library, opened the world of books to me, and that’s where I (inaudible) my life, which was separate from how I presented myself as (inaudible). Once, during confirmation classes, I said “the Bible is not right” and I was expelled from that class. Also in the church of course I was (inaudible) through Christ (?) (inaudible) show uhm, take part (inaudible), in singing and the Bible, and the other, talk (inaudible) you learned a lot from it, and that whole, public corrective (?) action. It is, a beautiful, rationally, it is a beautiful thing, this Calvinism, it all adds up beautifully, but you have to accept certain premises</p>	<p>But that’s within what I inherited through genetics and the circumstances in which, like I said, my father and mother were no dogmatic, inflexible people, but practical Christians. When my father sensed that I was not going to be a market gardener, he opened the world of books to me. And that’s where I lived my life, which was separate from how I presented myself as a rather well-behaved kid, who only once said something during confirmation classes. I said “the Bible is not right,” and I was expelled from that class. Also in the church of course I was on pins and needles, but I was able to cope with that by splitting (inaudible). Take part, formally, in singing and the Bible, and the other, talk (inaudible) you learned a lot from it. That whole [system], publicly I could not do anything against it; rationally, it is a beautiful thing, this Calvinism, it all adds up beautifully, so long as you accept certain premises</p>

different people, of the same interview. He uses that to debunk the ideal of verisimilitude in transcriptions. I have already referred to the concept of co-authorship of a story at a rather conceptual level in the context of a conversation about truth and/or validity. But the examples above show that even at the basic, nuts-and-bolts level of this study – transcription – I am a co-author in a very literal sense of the term.

There is another layer to this transcription puzzle. The examples from Peter's interview are consequences of imperfect recording technology. I attempted to minimize such misinterpretations by scrupulously examining the video tapes when available and did so in good faith. But that does not make me innocent. As Riessman (1993) and Mishler (1991) point out, decisions about how to transcribe, and how to subsequently represent the narratives, are rhetorical in nature. “[B]y displaying text in particular ways, we provide grounds for our arguments, just like a photographer guides the viewer's eye with lenses and by cropping images” (Riessman, 1993, p. 13). And if in the process of transcribing the narrative, I am making all kinds of judgments and interpretations, in fact translating the spoken text into written text, I am engaged in storytelling myself. In the process of moving from the second to the third level of representation, my role shifted from co-pilot to pilot. I now narrate their stories in the imaginary presence of my own primary audience: my dissertation committee, the participants in this study, and, of course, myself.

### ***Translation***

The transcripts represented in this document are, of course, in English. I decided against including the Dutch counterversions only to prevent this document from

becoming overly lengthy. This does not mean, however, that the translations are unproblematic. In all cases, the translations are my own and I am fully aware that in many cases I have not done justice to their words. Even though I am confident that, on the whole, my translations convey meaning consistent with the way the narrators would have intended, the narrators' eloquence and the subtle distinctions in meaning through the masterful use of narrative strategies are lost in translation. For example, even though I speak Dutch fluently, my language is literally of a different generation than theirs, and to do justice to their older Dutch – in English – would have been an impossible task for me.

What this means, in the case of the transcripts represented in this document, is that the (English) words you read are in fact mine, not theirs. It is yet another way in which my fingerprints are all over the data. The decisions that I constantly had to take in translating the transcripts added another layer of complexity to the already thorny issue of transcription as described above. What guidance is there for me in this arena? How do I make sure that I do justice to the transcripts?

There is not an abundance of literature on the topic of doing research in different languages (Temple & Edwards, 2002). Hardwick (2000) introduces the variety and complexity of issues involved in translation by presenting three different translations of the same three lines from the Aeneid of Virgil. All three translations are considered to have “lexical accuracy” (p. 9) yet are very different in their tone and effect. The implication is that even if lexical accuracy can be attained, it is not a sufficient criterion for a high-quality translation. She calls attention to a complicated relationship between

the source text in the original language and the target language. This relationship is affected by the translator's purpose in writing, the translator's perceptions of the target reader or audience, and her interpretation of the meaning of the source text. Moreover, the relationship between source text and target language is influenced by the audience, who read and interpret the new version and assign it meaning on their own.

Immediately, the notion of quality in translation becomes highly problematic: what is the translator to remain loyal to? If closeness to the form and vocabulary conflicts with readability, which to choose?

As if things were not already complex enough, Hardwick (2000) also reminds us that translations do not only take place across languages, but also “across time, place, beliefs and cultures” (p. 17). Maffie (2002) and Zhifang (2002) both point to the relationship between a culture's language and its metaphysics. Incommensurable world views lead to significant additional challenges in translation.

Translations between Western languages, such as Dutch and English (presumably characterized by compatible underlying world views), are not without problems either. Homem (2001) provides a fascinating example of King Luís of Portugal, who in the late nineteenth century translated Shakespeare from English to Portuguese. In the process, Shakespeare was “domesticated,” meaning that the translation was guided significantly by the prevailing norms and values at the time in Portugal (and, particularly, in the royal family). As a result, issues of power, race, and sex are ever-present in the translation. Perhaps it took a twenty-first century review of that translation to expose those issues. Similarly, Schmitz (1998) provides various



examples of translations into the same language by different translators in different countries (e.g., American English and British English). He shows the extent to which objectionable language is censored depends on prevailing cultural norms, which leads to differences in those translations. This sheds light on the translator's hidden – or not so hidden – agenda. In Hönig's (1997) words: "The function of translated texts, then, is not to provoke those who have the power to chastise" the translator (p. 22). This, in turn, raises questions about the ethics of translation. Gouanvic (2001) provides an intriguing example of what can happen if this is taken to the extreme. He discusses the translation of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* into French, carried out in occupied Belgium in 1944 under the auspices of Nazi Germany. The sentence "we lost our land" was translated to "nous avons perdu notre pays," which back-translates into "we lost our country." References to Marx and Lenin and the workers' movement had all been removed. Clearly, Gouanvic (2001) argues, this translation served the interests of Nazi Germany. Obviously, I did not conduct my research in such an extremely oppressive political system, but then again, I cannot ignore the existing power structures within which this research took place. In translating the Dutch transcripts, I did indeed take care not to provoke those who have the power to chastise.

Much of the conversation around translation and faithfulness, lexical accuracy, veracity, and translatability is based on the assumption that the source text contains a self-evident meaning to begin with. Sarukkai (2001) calls this view naïve. Although this might appear to make the whole enterprise of translation hopeless, in fact it creates opportunity. "The concept of [an] original whose transcendence is not in doubt but

whose self-identity is, creates a space unique to translation. [...] Since the original is the site of plurality, translation explicitly becomes interpretation” (Sarukkai, 2001, pp. 657-658). I take this as permission to deviate from too literal of an approach to translating the transcripts. I also take this as permission to not triangulate my translations by inviting another person to vet my work – a recommendation that Atkinson (1998) makes in the context of transcription. After all, if there is no meaning inherent in the text, then the problem of maintaining fidelity to the text, in the traditional sense, all of a sudden is no longer. Moreover, Birbili (2000) lists three factors that determine the quality of the translation: the autobiography of the researcher-translator; the researcher’s knowledge of the language and the culture of the people under study; and the researcher’s fluency in the language of the write-up. I will assume that what I bring to the table in this respect qualifies me, as much as anyone else, to translate the transcripts to English in such a way that they maintain a level of equivalence. Hardwick (2000) argues that a result of greater awareness of the dilemmas and scope of translation has been a shift from fidelity to equivalence as a criterion of translation quality.

The need to translate the transcripts from Dutch to English sheds a bright spotlight on the intractable dilemmas associated with translation. These debates deserve more attention in the scholarly literature in general and in this dissertation in particular. But it should be noted that these dilemmas are strikingly similar to the dilemmas involved in transcription. By adding punctuation to and removing “uhs” from the transcripts, I have, in fact, sacrificed some accuracy or verisimilitude in exchange for increased readability. Certain aspects of the interview were forever lost in the

translation from oral to written language. On the other hand, something was added in return. Besides increased readability, the transcripts appeared more coherent and thereby put the narrator in a more favorable light than if the transcription had remained as close to the spoken interview as possible. This could be seen as one kind of equivalence that was maintained. Fortunately, I feel validated by Sarukkai (2001) who says that “in every good translation, one is as much adding to the original as ‘representing’ it” (p. 661).

What I am arguing is that the dilemmas, described above in the context of translation, are not new or unique in any way; they are merely a different manifestation of the same dilemmas involved in conducting qualitative research. If qualitative research fundamentally involves interpretation, then *all* qualitative studies are exposed to this dilemma to some extent. Sarukkai (2001) refers to this as intralingual translation. The difference is that in same-language research, it is easier to disregard these dilemmas and assume that there is no translation at play during the data gathering or the transcription. Lapadat (2000) points out that not enough researchers pay attention to the consequences of choices they make in transcribing narrative data. Perhaps a similar claim could be made for the interview process itself: I may speak the same language as the participant does, but who am I to think that I can properly interpret what she is telling me? This becomes especially difficult when interviews take place across the boundaries of class, gender, or race. Even my own experience has shown that the Dutch I speak is different than the Dutch that my participants spoke.

In sum, I would argue that the translation problem I faced in this study exposes similar problems inherent in all qualitative research. The fact that the problem was so much more obvious in my case, because I had to mediate between two completely different languages, does not negate that this is a matter of degree, not a matter of kind. Every researcher, at some level, has to translate and serve as mediator between the participant(s) and the audience, and to serve as the bridge between (sub)cultures.

As for this study: the implications are clear. The spoken narratives first had my Dutch written words superimposed on their spoken ones, and then my English words on top of those. A significant amount of meaning has been lost in this process, with a concomitant amount of meaning added.

#### **Level Four: Analysis**

If I was already present during the course of the transcriptions and translations, taking on the role of narrator myself, I am much more visibly present in this next level of representation (discussed in subsequent chapters). Whereas I had been bound to some extent to the words uttered by the narrator, and served as a conveyor of the narrator's (presumably) intended meaning, I now have the opportunity (and obligation) to question and challenge the data. The switch from the third level to the fourth level of representation involves a switch from "the hermeneutics of faith" to "the hermeneutics of suspicion." The former is an interpretive effort to examine the various messages in a narrative and, in the process, give voice to the participants. In the latter, the interpreter is skeptical of those apparent meanings in the text and attempts to decode or problematize them (Josselson, 2004).

The analysis is not only a distant, rational, and emotionally detached cerebral exercise – in spite of Riessman’s (1993) claim that the challenge here is to identify similarities across the moments. I must also tend to the experience of co-creating these narratives. As subsequent chapters will show, I sometimes experienced powerful, visceral responses during the course of the interviews. Without a doubt, they will color my analysis to some extent. This suggests that in some ways the analysis is characterized by a concurrent presence in two levels of representation: Attending to the experience as well as analyzing the transcripts.

As with previous levels of representation, this step from third to fourth level introduces, again, a reduction in data. After transcribing all the narratives, I had such an enormous amount of data that data reduction became a primary concern (I explore this at length in the next chapter). Suffice it to say that the data presented in this document are necessarily selective and cannot possibly be analyzed fully and completely. Even though I have made every attempt to be thoughtful, transparent, and balanced, the analysis, at the end of the day, was informed by my own sensibilities. However, this does not only represent a loss or error. It also created an opportunity – for me to add something to the data, much like in the case of the translations of the transcripts.

Speaking of transcripts: of the fourteen narratives that were transcribed, two were excluded from this study (another reduction of data): Those with Will Barnes and Hal Young. Will Barnes was recovering from a stroke at the time of the interview and struggled to weave his fragmented recollections into a story. His wife, who was present during the entire interview, prompted him and at times told the story for him. At one

hour and fifteen minutes, Will's was the shortest interview. It was also one of the most difficult ones for me because it was so sad to witness a giant struggle to recreate himself. He and his family had thought about whether or not to participate in the study and decided that it might be therapeutic for him to do so. Unfortunately, his memories, though at times vivid and detailed, remained fragmented. Will was an officer in the military when the war broke out. He is one of the few survivors left of the fierce battle at the *Grebbeberg*, a hill in the center of the country where the Germans' progress was slowed down, which led to the decision to bomb Rotterdam. During the war, he studied chemistry with Coops until the VU shut down for the war. He then got actively involved in the Resistance through the legendary *Albrecht* group. At its peak, the Albrecht group had around 800 members and its main activity was spying on German activities and getting that information to the Allied Forces in England. After the war, the contributions of the Albrecht group led to the creation of the Domestic Security Service (*Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst* or *BVD*), the Dutch equivalent of the CIA. Will is one of only two participants who never graduated. Instead, he spent his working life with the BVD.

Albrecht was the pseudonym for the leader and founder of that group – Hal Young. Hal's interview is the other one excluded from this study. (Incidentally, Hal is the other participant who never graduated from the VU.) A deeply religious, evangelical man, Hal Young told a story that was extraordinary in many ways, not in the least because of the trials and tribulations that he related to me. His story included espionage, microfilms, marches across the Pyrenees to get to Spain and then England, betrayal, arrest, torture, a death sentence that was not carried out, a death march, and eventually,

freedom. As opposed to the other participants, Hal provided me with no information about anything other than his wartime experiences – nothing about his childhood or the way the rest of his life unfolded. In fact, he never answered the first question I asked him, about the chapter structure for his life story. Instead, he talked for two-and-a-half hours straight, after which both of us were exhausted. Because the structure of this interview is so different from all the others, it does not lend itself to inclusion in subsequent chapters. I hope to tell his story – or, rather, my story about his story – in a different context.

This leaves twelve interviews that were included in this study. On average, they lasted between two-and-a-half and three hours, with Adrian Kinslow's interview being the longest at four hours. Naturally, they were conducted in Dutch. Their English names are pseudonyms. Although only one of the participants – Jim Thurston – requested that I use a pseudonym for him, I decided to use pseudonyms for all of them anyway. For one, using English names makes this dissertation easier to read. But it is also a way for me to ensure that I do not breach their trust. If in hindsight, any of the participants disclosed more to me than they had been prepared to disclose, and on top of that I render an interpretation that they might not have foreseen, then there will be little or no risk of adverse consequences.

In sum, at this level of representation, I have a lot more freedom to tell my story than I did at the previous level of transcription and translation. The constraints are imposed by the very real presence of the primary audience – my dissertation committee. Therefore, the analysis needs to be conducted carefully, based on a theoretical

framework, rooted in scholarly precedent, and of course, firmly grounded in the narratives. Nevertheless, the analysis phase is where I arguably have the least constraints and where the reduction in data may be most significant (and troublesome). This means that my fingerprints are most prevalent at this level of representation.

### **Level Five: Reading the Text**

At this level, the distance from the original experience is greater still. This document has been through several editing cycles, and each time something was removed while something else was added. The co-chairs of my dissertation committee provided feedback on earlier drafts, and in so doing, they became co-authors themselves.

This distance increases further still whenever this document is read: as you, the audience, read the text, you bring your own meanings to bear on it. Because of your background, you may see something that I have not pointed out. Or you may not accept something that I have emphasized. Each time this text is read, something is added and removed in the process. This brings Sarukkai's (2001) argument to mind that there is no meaning embedded in any text. I agree with Riessman (1993), who says that "all texts stand on moving ground; there is no master narrative, we cannot speak, finally and with ultimate authority, for others" (p. 15).

So if, as we progress through each level of representation, we make some kind of translation, removing something from the "original" yet adding something to it at every turn, it begs the question: What is this document? What is the nature of the "data" that I have "collected"? When all is said and done, what remains?



For sure, I can never claim I have simply recorded fourteen life stories. Instead, I have constructed particular versions of those stories. As said before, it must always be remembered that they were told to me (and by me), with a particular purpose (conscious or not), within certain time constraints, and – critically – within a broader, shared cultural context.

### **CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INTERVIEWS**

I will leave the question of what remains for the end of the chapter. First, I call attention to the cultural contexts (and constraints) within which these narratives were co-created. Even though these systems, beliefs and values lie outside of the influence of the individual narrators, they have significant power over how the narrative is constructed. This specifically includes factors such as gender (Cavallaro Johnson, 1999; Chase, 1995; Pillemer, Wink, DiDonato, & Sanborn, 2003; Riessman, 1990; Williams & Heikes, 1993), and race (Gubrium, 2006; Lapadat, 2000; Riessman, 1993; Tappan, 2005; Wilson, 1999), or any combination thereof (Black & Rubinstein, 1999).

In fact, the narrators and I performed our shared culture through the “proper” adherence to the rules concerning nonverbals, the exchange of pleasantries, the rules of engagement in conversation, and shared conceptions of propriety, among others. While most influences of this kind remain beneath the surface, making their presence felt in ways perhaps too subtle to notice, some are clearly manifest.

For the purpose of this discussion, I distinguish between the broader, Dutch, modernist culture and mindset on the one hand, and the culture of the Reformed pillar on the other. Of course, the Dutch culture is firmly embedded within the broader cultural

parameters usually identified as Western, but making the distinction is useful. The reason is that I am an insider within this Dutch culture, as are the narrators. Therefore, the narrative developed based on shared understandings, many of which I myself am not aware. It is nearly impossible for me to identify examples of ways in which the narratives were shaped by this larger culture, so I rely on the scholarly literature to call attention to these dynamics. In contrast, I am a (relative) outsider to the culture of the Reformed pillar. As pointed out earlier, I am of an entirely different generation that grew up in the de-pillarizing society. Because of this outsider status, I have been able to identify some narrative strategies that many narrators employed during the interviews. These strategies, I suggest, reveal their Reformed upbringing, and thereby provide specific examples of how culture helps shape narrative in spite of (and because of) the narrator's best intentions.

### **Influences of Western Culture on Narrative**

Linde (1993) provides insight into one of those cultural values: the demand for coherence in a story. The process of creating coherence is not a light matter; it is a social obligation that must be fulfilled in order for the participants to appear as competent members of their culture. Androutsopoulou, Thanopoulou, Economou and Bafiti (2004), Riessman (2002b) and Wigren (1994) even argue that the creation of coherence is a key task in therapy, as it carries significant advantages, such as intrapersonal advantages (creating a sense of continuity) and interpersonal ones (appearing intelligible and successfully negotiating social life). Usually, coherence is

in the form of a chain of causality or series of events related in temporal sequence. If (in the estimation of a

given addressee) this obligation is not met, the speaker is liable to be criticized or corrected by the addressee. Such examples are rather rare, since we are excellent at the task of constructing coherence and normally accomplish it unnoticeably and without difficulty” (Linde, 1993, p. 16).

But Harvey, Mishler, Koenen, and Harney (2000) do place a note of caution:

“Our own needs for coherence pressed us toward helping these survivors achieve it” (p. 295).

It should be noted, however, that the notion of coherence in narratives is not universally accepted. Mishler (1999) argues that texts are not in and of themselves coherent, but that “we make them so” (p. 85). He argues that the lack of a widely accepted definition of the term coherence means that coherence is in the eye of the beholder. And since, Mishler argues, any kind of text could conceivably be interpreted as coherent, the term loses its meaningfulness.

Although Mishler argues persuasively, he does not completely negate Linde’s position. Just because the listener is the ultimate judge of whether or not a story is coherent does not mean that the teller does not use narrative strategies to present the narrative to the listener in such a way that maximizes the chances that the listener perceives coherence.

Atkinson and Delamont (2006) point out that all cultures and subcultures have narrative conventions. Foxen (2000) provides a specific example. The trauma-related narrative from a K’iche Mayan made no “sense,” as it included descriptions of visits by people, spirits, and animals in the hospital. In the narrative, these characters interacted with each other as well as with the narrator. In our Western system, such discourse

would not be considered coherent. Lapadat (2000) shows that even within the U.S., different racial groups have different ways of constructing coherence. Linde (1993) agrees that coherence is, indeed, a cultural construct. One often-used coherence system is Freudian psychology, including the splitting of the self into component parts that are in conflict with each other, and the notion that real causes are to be found in childhood experiences. As subsequent chapters will show, the former is the backbone of Peter van Doorn's narrative, while the latter is the basis for Jim Thurston's.

Beyond coherence, which Linde argues is negotiated between speaker and addressee, the literature reveals that there are many other cultural influences on narrative. Harvey *et al.* (2000) suggest that we are partial to stories of overcoming odds and positive outcomes. We love happy endings and as interviewers, we may collectively push the participant to find meaning and find a happy ending, rather than truly listen. According to Becker (1997), there are cultural norms in the U.S. that govern the expression of distress: "Here, there is an underlying ideology (Puritan) that values communication through mental rather than bodily activity, that values thinking more highly than feeling. [...] Embodied distress may be difficult to access through language and may remain muted and unarticulated" (p. 11). This is particularly poignant, given that I did this study based on the assumption that the Occupation was very disruptive (if not traumatic) for the Dutch collectively. As I describe below, the narratives were generally replete with curious understatements.

There is an even more foundational assumption that is typical of the modern, Western culture: the assumption of the empowered individual (Becker, 1997; Foxen,

2000; Nader, 1999; Zarowsky, 2000). This assumption underpins the very premise of this study; the possibility of having individuals telling me “their” stories.

### **Cultural Influence: Calvinist Tradition**

It is not until there is a noticeable difference in culture that its influence becomes more readily apparent. The participants’ cultural backgrounds differed from mine in one important way: generation, and, in some cases, religion. The participants all grew up during the period of pillarization and had been completely immersed in the Reformed culture in their youths. I, on the other hand, represent a new generation of VU students: secular. During the interviews, the differences between the participants’ cultures and mine were sometimes very clear. I have already commented on the difference in religion. For the remainder of this discussion, I will focus on Reformed values and how they made themselves known during the course of the interviews.

In the first chapter, I described the Reformed as tough (*stoer*), frugal (*zuinig*), industrious (*ijverig*), reliable (*betrouwbaar*), humble (*nederig*), and no frills (*sober*). They are respectful of lawful and divine authority, and sensitive to issues of status and class. They are very achievement-oriented and value education highly as a means to climb the social ladder. It should be noted that in many cases these characteristics may describe the entire Dutch population of that time rather than just the Reformed; there is overlap between the specifically Calvinist traits (such as respect for authority and patriotism) and the *Zeitgeist* of their generation (such as frugality and integrity).

I perceived three main ways in which the Reformed culture made its influence felt throughout the interview. One was the eloquence of the narrators. Unfortunately, it

is impossible to provide examples of their eloquence, due to the dilemma of translation noted earlier. However, it is worth noting that this was a highly privileged group: the sheer ability to go to college in those days was an honor and not to be taken for granted, particularly if the student's family was of modest means. Most of the participants indeed came from modest or downright poor backgrounds, like the *kleine luyden* described in Chapter I. Of the twelve narrators whose transcripts were included in this study, all graduated from the VU with their *doctoraal* degree. Strikingly, seven of them also had a terminal degree, and two more seriously considered pursuing one at some point in their lives. All of them spoke without any kind of dialect that might betray an affiliation with a particular geographic region. Even the Bounds brothers, native speakers of Frisian, spoke without a hint of an accent.

The second way in which the Reformed culture helped shaped their narratives clearly came through in the transcripts. It is a Calvinistic trait to be modest, humble, and to avoid self-aggrandizing. This is perhaps best illustrated by Hal Young's comments to me in a letter confirming the scheduling of the interview. Included with the letter was his published autobiography, which he recommended I read prior to the interview. The very idea of an evangelical Calvinist writing memoirs, or narrating a life story, creates a tension because it could be violating the demand to show humility. This is particularly true in Hal's case, as his activities in the Resistance and the ensuing hardships he endured cannot but make him a hero. (In fact, he was decorated by the Queen after the war for his role in the Resistance.) This is how he reconciles this tension in his letter to me:

Dear Roemer Visser,

Herewith I am sending you the book I promised.

I had never wanted to write an autobiography, even though our lives have been plenty stirring. When I heard within from the Holy Spirit that I had to write it, I waited. The anxiety remained, upon which I said: "LORD JESUS, Your Word says that a Word consists of 2 to 3 witnesses. Would You give me a second word?" It came: "He who obeys an order shall not encounter evil." I knew this from the Bible! Then I begged, can I write to God's honor, my "I" is dead. A reborn person gets a new I-in-Jesus Christ!

By constructing the rationale for writing an autobiography – and, by extension, participating in a life story interview – in this way, Hal is able to tell his story while still showing the humility that is called for. In the process, he perceives his story not to be about himself, but about (the glorification) of God. This way, truth and humility, the two values in potential conflict, could co-exist.

During the course of the interviews, there were many instances where the interviewees struggled with the tension between truthfulness and humility. Invariably, these moments occurred when they were asked to talk about themselves. (When talking about others, the tension between humility and truthfulness disappeared.) This occurred with such a frequency that it really leapt out of the transcripts. Below are three such examples.

**Example 1: Gerry Kosberg.** Gerry is one of the two high school teachers in the group of participants, and he is married to Claire. When I asked him how the average student might describe him as a teacher, the following exchange occurred:

I had a colleague who said, "what is it that allows you to hook those students, what, what is it?" I said "I'm not sure

myself either.” He said “I think I know, it is your tone, your way of speaking.” Apparently I have that characteristic, I can’t help it either. I may be boasting a bit, but (laughs), I can’t help it. That’s the way it was, I just speak the truth

R: Of course. Except, I would still like to revisit that question of, who were you, you know, in that period

G: Hm, who was I

R: Yes

G: And you have to capture that succinctly... Claire!

C: (From other room) Yes?

R: (laughs)

G: Come over here please you can summarize this (laughs)

C: What?

G: You can summarize this

C: Do I have to do something?

G: Yes, summarize succinctly what kind of teacher I was

R: As a person

C: Well, there are teachers for whom the curriculum is more important than anything. Not Gerry. He treated the kids as, living, human beings.

G: Stay honest

C: He took their backgrounds into account, you know, like in the case of that boy from Spakenburg (both Claire and Gerry laugh). He said to my husband in class, “you must teach in such a way that I don’t have to do any homework.” (all laugh) Well, that kid, failed his final exam.

G: He had to take his physics final again (laughs)



C: He had to take his physics final again, and he came back, all humbled, “sir, will you please tutor me?” And that’s what he did. You see, another might say, “well, you didn’t need me before,” but not Gerry. Later, the boy came and visited us with his father. He had passed his second final, and they gave us a delicious smoked eel. They were so grateful for the way things had gone.

G: Yes, a lot of kids tell me, “you explain things in such a way, that we don’t have to do anything at home anymore.” Apparently I’ve got that skill.

In the first words Gerry uttered, he apologizes for “boasting” but then justifies it because he tells the truth. Thus, the conflicting demands of humility and truthfulness are acknowledged. Gerry’s strategy to resolve the tension is as simple as it is brilliant: he asks his wife to describe him instead. If his wife speaks highly of him, it would not violate the demand for humility and it would get the truth across about a person who clearly has a special knack for teaching. Moreover, Gerry ensures that I do not just have to take his wife’s words for it: he also invokes a fellow teacher and former students who all add to the credibility of the core message, which is that Gerry was a great teacher. If all these people say it’s true, surely it must be so. This removes any grounds for suspicion of boasting or self-aggrandizing.

**Example 2: Walter Dickson.** Just like I asked Gerry to describe himself, I asked Walter Dickson to do the same as he reflected on his childhood.

As, someone who, well, it’s a bit difficult to talk about yourself because you quickly run into an aversion against self-aggrandizing. But I was someone who could perform well but did not actually do so. I was always quite satisfied with a passing grade, and I’ve kept that my whole life.

In this case, Walter circumvents the conflict by first giving the disclaimer and then answering the question truthfully. The danger of violating the demand for humility is reduced because of Walter's emphasis on underachievement. Downplaying the importance of a particular talent is a very smart way to highlight its existence in the first place without appearing conceited.

**Example 3: Adrian Kinslow.** Adrian's story is extraordinary in many ways. He was highly active in the Resistance during the Occupation; he knew and befriended the Queen personally, which meant he had reached the highest echelons of Dutch society; and he was highly successful in his profession – so much so that he is well-known, perhaps even a celebrity. This may explain why the narrative is filled with references to humility; it's a way to restore balance. In the section below, he refers to his time spent in the military, after the war. He had already finished his studies and become a medical doctor, when he was in training as a lieutenant. He and several others were being trained by a sergeant-major, a non-commissioned officer. This led to the potentially awkward situation of a subordinate person (in terms of rank) training someone far superior within the context of a traditionally hierarchical organization. For Adrian, however, this was no problem:

We were marching with several other men, whom I knew from Amsterdam and Leiden. It was beautiful weather, and when we were close to Amersfoort [...] we passed by [...] an attractive, well-situated (for Dutch standards) café. I said to that good sergeant-major, who had to teach us everything, and compared to whom we were nothing, “say, Wim, don't you think we've already marched a long distance?” It was a 25-kilometer march, ordered by higher-ups. “If we could, you can just join us and have a glass of beer.” I can still see the look on his face. He

thought “if I say no, then he’ll say, ‘uhm, didn’t you see these stars?’” That was because of the hierarchy, ridiculous really.

Adrian goes out of his way to emphasize that he had all respect for the sergeant-major and his experience, and little or no respect for formal hierarchy. He even goes so far as to say that he was nothing compared to this man. Even though Adrian is technically not speaking about himself, in the way that Gerry and Walter did above, he achieves a similar effect of humility by heaping praise on other people.

Further along in the interview I asked him how he got involved in Resistance work. I had noticed that up to that point in the narrative, Adrian had never referred to any doubt about whether or not to join those efforts, even though most other respondents had focused on coping and surviving instead.

A: What do you do in a time of war, when it is dangerous to do nothing? To present yourself on a platter, because you have to sign Hitler’s declaration of loyalty in order to continue studying? Or to get caught and be put to work for the German war industry? Well, you quickly realize that you might as well make yourself useful in the Resistance.

R: But there aren’t many who reached the same conclusion. Most just went into hiding and focused on survival.

A: Well, I’ll tell you, that makes me look so courageous, but you mustn’t conclude that. I just did not spend much time thinking about it.

In this instance, Adrian employs yet another strategy to contrast his decision to become active in the Resistance with an appropriate sense of humility: to downplay the extent to which he can take credit for the decision by suggesting that it simply was not

an issue. I find it hard to believe that his decision was made so quickly and so easily – although it very well may have happened that way – without consulting with parents or friends, or without thinking it through carefully. Of course, the answer will never be known, but it is undeniable that casting the decision to join the Resistance in a different light would have had the effect of making Adrian look more courageous than he was comfortable with. In this case, he could simply have written it off as youthful, idealistic recklessness (and in fact, he does this at several points during the interview).

The third way in which the Reformed culture made its influence felt in these narratives was through an emotional detachment through the use of understatement. This is a manifestation, it seems, of the “toughness” that was identified as a common trait among the Reformed. Although I have no empirical data to back this up, I do, however, suspect that gender identities come into play in this case. But that is outside the scope of this study.

**Example 1: Lee Zunker.** In this excerpt, Lee talks about the period just after the end of the war, in May 1945.

L: Then I really was finished (with college). There was of course a lot of chaos in Amsterdam, after that winter of famine. That had been no fun at all.

No fun at all? This is the same narrator who described seeing a woman collapse and die, presumably of hunger, shortly after the Liberation. To refer to this period as “no fun at all” is a rather stunning use of understatement.

**Example 2: Nancy van Eck.** It might be tempting to suspect that this tendency to understate is not only informed by the Reformed culture, but also by norms guiding

masculine behavior. But even Nancy, the only female in this study, used understatement poignantly. In the excerpt below, Nancy commented on how she was teased in elementary school. She had already disclosed that she had no friends at all.

R: How would you describe yourself in that period [elementary school], what kind of girl were=

N: A shy child, a terribly shy child: boring, straight hair, my curls that would never stay

(interruption due to switching of the tape)

R: What did they tease you for? Straight hair?

N: Having straight hair, being boring. Oh yes, I always had to wear a bonnet. And so on. No, that was not the best time (laughs)

Just like Lee above, she describes what, no doubt, must have been a very painful, difficult time for her as “not the best time.” Most, if not all of the interviews were replete with examples of such understatement.

In conclusion, narratives are not “merely” co-constructed by the narrator and the interviewer, with the ever-present audience looming in the background for both. Instead, narratives are created within a context that is culturally determined. This cultural context prescribes the coherence system, the language, rules of engagement, and the norms regarding respect, participation, and propriety to be used (and probably much more). The examples of how the Reformed culture affects the creation of the life stories in this study is likely just the tip of the iceberg. They serve only to illustrate that culture affects narrative (and that culture is performed through narrative), in multiple ways.

## THE NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

This one important pieces of the puzzle that needs to be addressed. A central premise to this study is that the narrator creates a particular identity in the performance of a life story interview. This was already alluded to earlier in the chapter, but it deserves further elaboration.

A traditional view of the life story interview is that the transcript somehow is a more or less accurate representation of what actually happened and of the meaning that the narrator assigned to those events. As a result, life stories supposedly provide a window to the identity of the narrator. This (single) identity is often assumed to exist independently of the narrative and independently of the context within which the narrative unfolds.

Just like assuming that a text has an inherent meaning is naïve, as described above in the conversation about translation, it may be equally naïve to assume that there is an inherent identity that is somehow embedded in the narrator and comes through in the narrative (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lindemann Nelson, 2001; Lucius-Hoene & Depperman, 2000; Mishler, 1999; Wortham, 2000). The idea that identities are created, or performed, is hardly new. Goffman (1959) calls attention to the performative aspects of the identity game in everyday life. In his metaphor, the world is a stage and we are actors. We wear different masks and use a range of dramaturgical tools to create social “fronts” (p. 22), usually with the intent to have the audience think highly of the actor, or at least to have the audience think that the actor thinks highly of the audience. Although that sounds rather calculating, Goffman explains that while there are instances of such

calculating, if not manipulative behavior, in many other instances the actor is unaware of the calculations involved.

Immediately, this raises a critical question: then who is doing the calculating? If Goffman is right, there cannot be one singular, coherent “self” that is “in control.” It opens up the possibility that actors send mixed messages because their nonverbals do not correspond to their verbal messages (as he indeed points out); that they appear to be different people depending on context and circumstance; and that their level of control over their own performance is limited at best, given the social conventions that create the space for the performance and govern it at the same time.

As the primary writer of this story (which is co-authored by my committee, the narrators in this study, and you, the audience), I am not exempt from this phenomenon. Through this document, I am trying to prove myself worthy of the doctorate degree. The idea of narrative as a performance of identity meshes seamlessly with the assertion that narratives always serve a rhetorical purpose – to convince the audience of something about the narrator (Linde, 1993). In fact, narrative as a performance of identity is a logical extension of that train of thought. My narrative *is* a performance. I have attempted to adhere to the most important conventions governing dissertations, such as citing other scholars; creating a more or less logical structure in the document that allows the arguments to progress transparently; refraining from using inappropriate language such as slang; presenting “data;” and so on. I have taken pains to create a believable impression that I am not just an aspiring researcher, but that in fact I already

*am* a researcher. If I can play the part successfully, what else do I need to prove? My expectation is that playing this part successfully will help me attain my goal.

But the scholar is not my only identity. In a different context, I may wish to portray myself as knowledgeable and caring about dogs, as a loving husband, or a reliable, even-tempered co-worker. Or a rowdy, fun-loving party animal. And so on. This document is simply not the proper context for any of those identities to emerge. The notion that people have multiple identities, rather than a singular one, has received support from a variety of scholars (e.g., Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bloom, 1998; Clark, 1999; Mishler, 1999; Raggatt, 2002; Slattery, 2001).

Just because there is not one “true” identity that we can ascribe to an individual does not mean that we cannot render an interpretation of the performance. The only caveat is that the performance be interpreted in the context within which it occurred. This is why I have taken such great pains in this chapter and the previous one to create a sense of that context. If my written performance (combined with my oral performance at the dissertation defense) is successful, and I attain the doctorate, then I can consider myself a scholar. This is a safe conclusion, and the fact that I am also deeply invested in many other identities takes nothing away from this.

It can become problematic, however, if the various identities clash in a single context. For example, I cannot claim to be both honest and a thief. Unless, of course, I am honest about my thieving, but it might take some masterful narration in order to reconcile the two. There is an intriguing example of this in Adrian Kinslow’s interview. All along, he had been presenting himself to me as a budding physician, completely



committed to humanism and portraying himself as a trusting and trustworthy human being. As he is telling me about Resistance activities, he reveals that he received orders from the Dutch government in exile to kill an infiltrant in his Resistance organization. Clearly, this identity of a patriot who is willing to take a human life in order to achieve a political or ideological goal is in sharp contrast with the identity of a physician who has completely committed himself to healing and relieving a patient's pain, regardless of the person's ideological persuasion. In the telling of his story, he identifies the clash but does not dwell on it (he is not the one who actually carried out the assault, but his complicity in the act is still severely problematic). Interestingly, the title of his life story is "a realistic idealist." It would appear that the tension between those two identities has not been resolved.

A full discussion of clashing identities falls outside the scope of this study. The above example only served to underscore the argument that people perform multiple identities. This has consequences for this study, too. The assertion that all my participants performed a certain identity (or, at least one dominant one, as would be required by our demands for coherence) means that I not only have permission to apply a hermeneutic of distrust (Josselson, 2004), but that I have an obligation to do so. After all, those identities were performed, in part, for me.

Of course, one of the major ways an identity is performed in the context of a life story interview is the elimination of "material" that may not support the identity that the narrator has "decided" to perform. Naturally, this is impossible to determine. Another critically important mechanism – probably equally difficult to detect – is the way the

meaning, that is assigned to an event, helps the narrator perform the identity. In order to detect this, one needs several people who experienced the same event. Fortunately, there is one example in the transcripts that is strongly indicative of strategic censorship, and there are several instances where two people experienced the same event, yet came away with very different interpretations. These interpretations are partially enabled by the highlighting of some information while downplaying, or even discarding, other information.

*Example 1: Jim Thurston.* As a subsequent chapter will show in detail, the narrative constructed by Jim Thurston was strikingly coherent. The thread of the plot started in his childhood years and led straight through his student and adult years, into retirement. This thread is one of disappointment, of not living up to expectations and missed opportunities. It is a story of regret.

Once the interview was over and the tape recorder had been turned off, he showed me three items that he had dug up from his personal archives for the interview. I took photographs of all three: a collection jar for the VU, which every Reformed family had on their mantelpiece, his Ausweis, or German-issued ID, and a pink print-through receipt. When I asked him what that receipt was for, he was startled, his face expressing surprise, he slapped himself on the forehead and said “That’s right! I should have mentioned that as the most important event during the war.” Apparently Jim had wanted to commit an act of Resistance, so he wrote a letter to the general population in the city of Emmen, urging them not to comply with the German demand to hand over all rubber

tires. That letter was traced back to him and he was subsequently arrested. He spent three weeks in jail. The pink print-trough receipt was for 100 guilders in bail.

This event was in sharp contrast with, if not in conflict with, the narrative performed and captured on audio tape. Was this simply forgetfulness? It is possible, but it appears unlikely. Especially when he himself described his strategy of adjusting to the Occupation as “by not annoying the Germans.” It appears, then, that Jim was performing one identity among several possibilities, and that it was necessary to “edit” this incident out of the narrative. Even the pseudonym that he chose to use is telling: Alter Ego. (I decided not to refer to him as such because I ended up giving him a fictitious English name anyway.) That name is a strikingly relevant reference to alternate identities.

This is not to suggest that he *consciously* edited the incident out of the narrative. I will never know this for sure, but his facial expression left no doubt in my mind that he was genuinely startled. It suggests that there are indeed many layers to identity and to its performance through narrative.

***Example 2: Hal Young versus Will Barnes.*** Hal’s story, as may have become clear from the letter he wrote to me, is a testament to his belief in God. The primary identity that he performs is that of the evangelical. The Resistance hero also comes through in the story, but clearly in a secondary position. By the way, this is consistent with Adrian’s narrative strategy of being reluctant to take the credit he deserves. Hal achieves the same effect by attributing everything to God.

In Will's case, it is unclear what identity is performed. At the time of the interview, Will was recovering from a stroke. His memory was sketchy at best, and his wife was part of the conversation and helped it along by prodding him in an attempt to trigger additional memories.

Hal and Will, both espionage pioneers during the war, knew each other in college and when the war broke out, they quickly decided to join forces in fighting the enemy. However, their disagreement on how to do that led to a conflict between the two that surfaced in each of their narratives. Hal relates the following:

Look, it was like this for me: I cannot engage in Resistance, like others were going to do, unless I know that God wants those Nazis to leave. [...] So it was already in my heart: "what, what do you want?" I begged for an answer, and then I had a spiritual experience, difficult to explain. It was a wintery day with heavy snow, and it was dark of course in my little room because you couldn't use a lot of electricity. But there was a little light there. Then it became light around me, and I realized, since God works with angels, that this was an angel giving me the message that my prayer had been heard and that we would regain freedom. Well, that was a revelation. I was so happy, I went outside in the snow in the Vondelpark, there was lots of snow. No one could see me, but I hopped and skipped and I sang psalms to God's glory there.

And that's how I got started with a Resistance group with several people (unclear), different students, some of whom I knew. I spoke to Will Barnes, who was one of the first, and then others. I was a member of an OA, Cicero, and so were others. Eventually others also joined [...] I wanted to try and start a kind of Resistance group, not seeing all that clearly what exactly we would do.

I went to a Reformed preacher with my experience, of which I said that it was an angel. I asked him what he thought of that, and he said, "God used to work like that but he does that no longer," and "what you are telling me

cannot be true” that’s how he said it to me. Well, I was, I had respect for him, so I said “I can see how you would say this, but you did not ask God. You and I, we could ask the Lord together.” [...] “I don’t have to because I already know,” that was it for him.

So then I told Will Barnes of my experience, I told him “Now, I would like you to do this through prayer, because if you do this through prayer too, then we stand together. You must be certain.” He was also a very serious young man, I was younger than he was. I also told him about the preacher. He went to that preacher, who told Will, “Hal upset you a little and created trouble by telling you all of that.”

Anyway, the preacher knew what he had to do. He went and talked to a psychiatrist at a Reformed psychiatric hospital. The psychiatrists were all from the same church, so they knew each other. One of those psychiatrists said, “I know what we’ll do about that.”

I had a student friend in Amsterdam who had been told that if he saw me, he should tell me that there was a doctor in Amsterdam who would like to talk to me about the Resistance. So when I saw him, he told me this and gave the address. I investigated through prayer and I got the realization that I had to go and visit with him.

On the way there, it became clear in my heart that God is my father, which is said in the scripture too, and that if I got in trouble, God as my father would take care of me anyway. I had an uneasy feeling about this. So I arrived at the hospital there, and I rang the bell. A large lady opened, locked the door behind me so that none of the patients could walk out, and then brought me to a room.

When that doctor came, he talked to me about the Resistance, but I did not think this talk was about the Resistance. He was not all that reliable, because he looked at me, into my eyes, as if he was examining my eyes for what might be wrong with me psychically. I thought “He is not very forthright, with this conversation about the war. He has something else in mind.” He said, “We will go somewhere else now to continue the conversation over

there,” and he opened the door, pushed me in, closed the door behind me, he was outside but I was inside.

Hal ended up being locked in the institution for several months. Clearly, this excerpt demonstrates the extent to which the event and the accompanying doubts and questions Hal describes are a test of – and tribute to – his faith. One clue is the complete lack of anger with his friend who brought him there. The more obvious one is that in the narrative, he places his trust in God as his father who will take care of him. Later events in the narrative show how this trust in God was justified:

I read in the newspaper that on a particular date all professional military officers [which Hal was] had to report at one of five military bases. We had already been reporting for roll call once a year, but each time we were put up in a hotel. When I read that the officers now had to report at a military base, I knew in my heart, “ah, that will lead to arrest, they will be shipped to Germany from there.”

So then I told the doctor, “These are my colleagues, I want to go too,” but he said “We will not let you go. We will report this to the Department of Defense, so if they want you they will have to come and get you. But I will not release you.”

They all were arrested... not me. And that’s when I realized that the Lord had intended for me not to be among them.

This friend who took Hal to the hospital was Will Barnes. I only know this because of Will’s story. His view of the incarceration event is quite different. The excerpt below is the response to my question about how Will got involved in Resistance work. The letter W refers to Will; the letter S refers to his spouse.

S (speaking to Will): I can still see Hal Young come over to ask you to join him. Niek van de Blom was also invited

and joined the Resistance. Hal Young had such strange stories, right? About those Germans in Scheveningen, a boat, right? Why don't you tell that story?

W: Well, he came to the door, at my parents' house, and I was studying for an exam upstairs. My mother calls me, "there is a reverend van Vliet to see you." So I went downstairs, and there was Hal Young, smiling, and he asked me if I wanted to collaborate on a robbery of a German speedboat in Hook of Holland. I remember he told me, "I have already arranged for a German truck, and then we'll drive over there, and we'll jump out of the truck, and like a Gideon's gang we will charge for the speedboat, and we'll take it to England."

I thought that was a rather strange story, much too risky. A fellow student, Niek van der Blom, said to me, "did Hal Young visit you too?" I said "yes," "Well that won't work," he said, "we have to see to it that we accommodate him somewhere," and he called a psychologist at the VU and told him the story. The psychologist said, "bring him by," and that's what I did, I brought him there.

S: Didn't you also speak to the preacher? The preacher, what did he think?

W: Reverend de Graaf, yes, the student preacher, he told me, "I'm glad you called, because I'm worried too. That's going to go totally wrong, and it will get him killed if he goes through with it." Then the preacher called the psychologist, and I brought Hal Young there with the excuse that there was someone who was interested in his story. I remember the psychologist saying, "Mister Young, you have an interesting story, could you tell it to me as well," and he did. The psychologist then looked at him and said "I think it would be better if you stayed here a little while." I can still see clearly how Hal was petrified, but he said, "Well alright, if you think so, then I'll stay." There were already security guards outside, just in case he would make a scene.

Although Will's recount of the same event also highlights the role of Hal's faith, it differs substantially from Hal's in that the decision to admit him in a psychiatric clinic

was to protect him from himself. It suggests that Hal had reckless plans. The details of this plan were very relevant in explaining an act that otherwise would have simply been the betrayal of a friend.

Hal, in contrast, had left the details about his escape plan out of the narrative. In the context of the performance of the evangelical, those details would of course have been rather irrelevant, especially when compared to the incarceration episode itself.

Obviously, narrators have to select content at the expense of other content if they are going to be successful in creating a life narrative in the space of three to four hours – no surprise there. But I would argue that this example shows that this selection is strategic, with the intent of making the performance as compelling as possible within the given constraints.

***Example 3: Lou Bounds and Gary Vessels.*** Lou Bounds is one of the five founders of my OA, called Cato. When I was a member of Cato in the early 1990s, it was clearly one of the most counter-cultural OAs in the Corps. It was somewhat subversive, never leaving an opportunity to challenge the status quo within the Corps. Not surprisingly, very few members of Cato were invited as part of the leadership in the Corps. Incidentally, Lou was the author of Cato's motto: *Ceterum censeo discordiam delendam*, or, *In addition, I believe that the discord should be destroyed.*

Lou's narrative, highlighted in a subsequent chapter, is one of building bridges, resolving conflict, and generally, getting along. No surprise, then, that Cato's motto was penned by Lou. When I asked him what the discord was that the motto referred to, he said



Oh that referred to the general atmosphere that we believed existed [in the Corps]. People didn't get along, and there generally was a kind of scattered atmosphere, of not liking each other or something like that. It was probably more true on the surface than in reality, but we thought, "That is a kind of discord that we have to resist."

Again, no surprise here. However, my seventh interview was with Gary Vessels, another one of the five founders of Cato. I asked Gary how he would describe Cato in its first few years:

As oppositional. Don't forget that Cato himself was a character who himself was very controversial. He was a born moaner and we too had all kinds of complaints against the Corps – one had this one, the other had that one, about how it functioned.

After all this time, I'm unable to be more specific. But all kinds of things had occurred that caused a certain aversion against the way the Corps functioned. That was also the reason why these people, including myself, had not entered into an existing organization, but found their own way. That resulted in Cato's motto, in which Cato's famous tagline, in addition I believe Carthage should be destroyed, was adjusted by the latinists among us to say that that discord needed to be destroyed. It was basically an expression of a controversial attitude.

The difference in interpretation of the same motto is simply striking, especially since Lou and Gary were two of the five founders of Cato. But as with the prior example of the incarceration episode, the difference in interpretation can be explained by applying the lens of the performance of an identity. Whereas Lou's narrative is one that is firmly grounded in getting along, Gary Vessels had been a very successful trial lawyer in private practice for 52 years. I already presented an excerpt from the initial exchange with Gary when I talked about negotiation. When I asked him if he wanted me to use a

pseudonym for him, he said no, “but if during the course of the interview, the heat gets turned on, then I will revisit that.” Clearly, this is the lawyer speaking. For him, certainly in the beginning of the interview, there was less of a collaborative creation of a narrative than there was a cross-examination. It is only logical, after fifty-two years in practice as a trial lawyer, that this becomes an identity that is (unwittingly, perhaps) performed during the interview. The example about Cato’s tagline suggests that there may be a close relationship between the identity that is being performed and the way in which past events are interpreted.

In conclusion, the life story interview is one setting in which identities are performed. What remains is the question about whether or not the identity existed prior to, or outside of, the narrative. Along with Lieblich *et al.* (1998), I take a middle view. On the one hand, I do not believe that the identity pre-existed somewhere “inside the narrator,” especially if that identity is assumed to be singular and unchanging. On the other hand, I also do not believe that identities are completely fabricated on the spot. There is ample evidence that life stories display a remarkable consistency over time.

### **NARRATIVE TRUTH**

The suggestion that life stories are performances, influenced by a host of factors, including the narrator’s agenda, feelings, even mood, leads to the inevitable conclusion that life stories are just that – stories. They are fabricated within cultural and social constraints (Peterson & Langellier, 2006) and carefully constructed to maximize their rhetorical power. This makes it more likely that the audience will perceive the narrators as they wish to be perceived.

Arguing that stories are fabricated is not the same thing as arguing that they are untrue. Some might suggest that making this claim is tantamount to calling the narrators liars. These stories are true when considered in their local, particular context. It is the notion of general, universal truth that is problematic; how can a story contain any truth when it fluxes over time? If a story changes, how do we know which story was “better”? Such questions reflect a Western, modernist, essentialist mindset that is so common to inquiry in the social sciences. When using the concept of truth in the context of narrative, it becomes necessary to abandon the notion of truth as universal and transcending time, and instead adopting the concept of narrative truth. I align myself with the Personal Narratives Group’s position as quoted in Riessman (2002b): “[t]he truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them” (p. 235).

This does not mean, however, that I abandon the notion of truth altogether. To position truth as exclusively local and particular in nature negates the value of this study, because I would have no answer to the question, “so what?” I align myself, again, with Lieblich *et al.* (1998) :

We do not advocate total relativism that treats all narratives as texts of fiction. On the other hand, we do not take narratives at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality. We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these “remembered facts” (p. 8)

Finally, a comment about facts: facts, as events, things that actually have occurred, are not challenged. I do not subscribe to the viewpoint that facts do not exist. If someone tells me she was born in 1923, and married in 1946, I am in no position to challenge that on the grounds that this is made up. However, my position is that facts in and of themselves are neither interesting nor relevant: two people may experience the very same event yet come away with different interpretations. It is the interpretations of those events that matter; they are weaved into the continuing story; these are what trigger revisions of previous interpretations; and these are most likely going to be revised at some point down the road in light of subsequent events.

### **SO NOW WHAT?**

If narratives are built on shifting sands, are spaces within which multiple identities can be performed, and are edited and co-created by an interviewer with an agenda, within the constraints imposed on both by their shared and individual cultures, and with future audiences staring at both parties in the background, what does that mean?

If the transcripts, which we consider “data,” are incomplete, if not manipulative, representations due to the multiple prunings and additions, driven by another set of theoretical, social, and political decisions, what is left? What kind of claims can I make about these “data,” these (written representations of the) narratives? What if there is no meaning embedded within these texts? Does that not mean that they reflect back to me whatever I think into it? Is this entire project an exercise in solipsism?

I cannot adopt the traditional view, that there is, somehow, some kind of Truth that can be uncovered by a rigorous analysis of the text. After all, I have just gone to great lengths to show the multitude of ways in which my footprints are all over the place. Taking the traditional view means disregarding all that.

But taking the opposite stance, claiming that everything is relative and in the eye of the beholder, and that there is no meaning embedded in a text, is equally problematic. What would give me the right to disregard the words uttered by the narrators and dismiss them as meaningless in and of themselves? That, to me, would seem to be the ultimate travesty, even a breach of trust with the narrators.

My answer, perhaps predictably, is that both are partially correct. The matter is still subject of current debate (Redman, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Even if it is impossible to precisely define identity or self, it is equally untenable to suggest that nothing about our identity remains stable over time. Confirming this stance from an empirical perspective, Schiff, Skillingstead, Archibald, Arasim, and Peterson (2006) compared the narratives of Holocaust survivors, told in the 1970s and early 1980s, to the narratives of those same survivors, told in the 1990s. What they found was that the narratives were remarkably similar, causing them to speculate that “critical aspects of our identities endure over long periods of time” (p. 349).

On the other hand, the performative, spontaneous, complex, even playful component of narrative identity cannot be ignored either. In the same study with Holocaust survival narratives, Schiff *et al.* (2006) reported various changes that in turn affect the interpretation of the narrative.

This negotiation of two extremes by disavowing either alone, yet validating both, is also apparent in Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1992). It accepts that there are indeed meanings which may be immediately apparent in a text, yet also distrusts them. In other words, the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion can be called a conversation with the data. This is consistent with the holistic-content category of narrative analysis methods as presented by Lieblich *et al.* (1998), which is presented in a subsequent chapter.

Still, there is another reason why I straddle the two extremes: it was I, Roemer Visser, and not anyone else, who inhabited the hermeneutic space with all sixteen participants in the study. As a result, as said before, I have an obligation to render an interpretation. I will do this through story, performing my identity of aspiring scholar in the process. The "truth" of my story is going to depend, to a large extent, on how compelling it is to you. To Eisner (1997), what matters is deepening meaning, expanding awareness, and enlarging understanding. In other words, creating a connection between myself and you about something that resonates with you is at least as important as creating a connection between this study and a particular body of literature. Just like I was a co-pilot during the journeys undertaken with the narrators, you are now the co-pilot as I take you on this airplane and reconstruct the journeys I have taken since the fall of 2002. I will perform this act to the best of my abilities, while inviting you to adopt your own hermeneutic of suspicion.

## CHAPTER III

### TOUCHDOWNS, VIGNETTES, AND DISTILLATIONS: A METHOD FOR HOLISTICALLY REDUCING NARRATIVE DATA

The analysis of narrative data can be a challenge for a variety of reasons. One of those is choosing the most appropriate method(s) for conducting the analysis. The choice is influenced by the researcher's academic discipline, salient features in the data that become apparent after repeated readings, and most importantly, the research questions. The breadth of such questions is rather wide. Consider Lieblich *et al.*'s definition of narrative research:

*Narrative research*, according to our definition, refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her own observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. Our proposed model can be used for the analysis of a wide spectrum of narratives, from literary works to diaries and written autobiographies, conversations, or oral life stories obtained in interviews. Naturally, such studies belong to several disciplines: literature, history, psychology, anthropology, and so forth. (1998, pp. 2-3, emphasis original)

Not surprisingly, the breadth of narrative analysis methods mirrors the breadth of the definition of narrative itself (Riessman, 1993). Lieblich *et al.* (1998) present a typology that may be helpful in conceptualizing the main differences between the various approaches. It should be said that casting these different methods into a simple

typology cannot do justice to every single method. Nevertheless, this typology is a good point of departure for a comparison of the different approaches.

### **CATEGORICAL APPROACHES**

Lieblich *et al.* (1998) distinguish between two basic approaches: holistic and categorical. The main difference between the two approaches is determined by the unit of analysis: in categorical approaches, this unit might be a word, an utterance, or a section abstracted from the narrative. Holistic approaches, in contrast, treat the entire narrative as the unit of analysis. When the categorical approach is taken, “the original story is dissected, and sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story or from several texts belonging to a number of narrators” (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 12). This approach may be most appropriate if the researcher is interested in experiences shared by a number of people.

Within this categorically oriented group of methods, the authors make another distinction based on whether they are primarily concerned with form or with content. Content refers to themes, plot, or meanings associated with the story as seen from the teller’s perspective. Form, on the other hand, refers to the structure of the story, the sequencing of events, its coherence, or the use of metaphor and imagery in the story, among other things. The authors provide two detailed examples of categorical approaches that primarily examine formal aspects of the life story. In the first, they analyzed transitions between concrete and abstract modes of thinking, assuming that the successful use of repeated transitions between the two is indicative of cognitive development. Given the level of detail involved in such analysis, the authors necessarily



had to limit the amount of data to be analyzed; otherwise the analysis would be lengthy and unwieldy. Since the focus was on indicators of effective thinking, it was entirely appropriate to select only a part of the entire story and subject it to analysis.

In the second example of form-oriented categorical methods of analysis, the authors examine difficult episodes from life stories for their emotional content. The emotional charge associated with an event is often revealed by an examination of the linguistic features of the narrative. According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998) such features can include markers that refer to surprise (“suddenly”); specific time and place; switches in verb tenses – between active and passive, and between first, second, and third person; intensifiers (“really”); the causal progression of events; repetitions; level of detail in description; and others. In the example provided by the authors, the life stories of adult women were scanned for difficult episodes, such as those dealing with loss or pain. They conclude that this approach is particularly useful for examining the emotional charge of an event, particularly if the narrator is unaware of, or denies, its emotional weight.

On the other end of the spectrum within the categorical umbrella are the content-oriented approaches. There is a wide variety of methods available within this group, both from the positivistic and interpretive sides of the epistemological divide. But Lieblich *et al.* (1998) argue that regardless of the researcher’s epistemological persuasion, the basic process falls into four basic steps: (1) Selecting the subtext; (2) defining the content categories; (3) sorting the material into the categories; and (4) drawing conclusions. At every step, the research questions, the theoretical framework,

and practical considerations combine to guide the researcher in the process. As in the categorical-form group above, the authors present two specific examples of categorical-content approaches.

In one example, the researchers were interested in the subjective impact of the high school experience from the perspective of young and midlife adults. They lifted the sentences that dealt with the high school experience from the transcripts and judged them as positive, neutral, or negative. They were also placed in a content category (such as social relations, uniqueness of the self, or pride in the school). These categories were not unique to each individual; rather, they were groupings that allowed for the detection of group differences. This is a good example of how a categorical approach works: the decontextualization of the content allows for comparisons between groups or narratives.

The use of categorically oriented methods has two main advantages: they can facilitate comparisons between participants or groups and they can allow for detailed analyses that would not be practical if applied to the narratives in their entirety. The drawback, however, is that the sense of the whole is sacrificed for a better understanding of the part, whether form or content. Depending on the research question, this drawback may or may not be relevant.

In the case of this study, categorical approaches would not have been appropriate. After all, what I was trying to ascertain was the identities that the narrators were performing in the context of their interviews with me. For that reason, I was unable to dissect the narratives and needed to select a method of analysis that was holistic in nature.

## HOLISTIC APPROACHES

In the holistic approach, the entire narrative is the unit of approach and is left intact. Some questions for which this approach might be more appropriate are, What is going on here? What is the “point” of this story? What identity is the narrator performing? What is the narrator persuading me to believe about him or her? Interpretations of certain sections are rendered within the context of the remainder of the narrative.

Similar to the categorical approach, the holistic approach can be subdivided into approaches that examine form and those that examine content. In holistic-form readings of a text, the structure of the entire narrative is examined. The assumption is that the structure of the story will “reveal the individual’s personal construction of his or her evolving life experience” (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 88). The authors identify three basic analytic strategies.

The first is a consideration of the narrative typology. They identify four basic structures (although they acknowledge that deviations from these four, though rare, do occur). One is the romance, in which a hero overcomes adversity to achieve a personal goal. In the comedy, the hero applies social skills successfully, restoring social order. Both of these are stories of success. The other two are tragedy, in which the hero is defeated and ostracized, and satire, defined as “a cynical perspective on social hegemony” (p. 88).

A second analysis method in this category is an examination of cohesiveness. The elements that make the story a good one are also the ones who create cohesiveness.

These include plot, objective, a series of temporally sequenced events that progress toward the objective, and causal relations among those events.

A third method examines the progression of the narrative, or the development of the plot over time. Does the plot progress? Or does it regress, meaning some kind of deterioration? Or is it perhaps mostly stable? The resulting graph could have any shape, going up and down over time to reflect the vicissitudes of the narrator's life, or going straight up or down.

As for the content-oriented methods under the holistic umbrella, the authors suggest reading the material several times until a pattern emerges. "Read or listen carefully, with an open mind. Believe in your ability to detect the meaning of the text, and it will "speak" to you. There are no clear directions for this stage" (p. 62). Next, they suggest, write down the impressions, decide on special foci of content or themes in the text, and mark them with different colored markers. Finally, keep track of the results in multiple ways.

This is a disciplined, iterative approach to interpreting the narrative. Each emerging theme becomes the lens through which the narrative is interpreted the next time around. The authors present an example of a holistic-content interpretation of a narrative. They identify four salient themes and in their discussion they present evidence of how these themes were manifest in the narrative. These four themes allowed for "a complete representation of the story" (p. 76).

A second example of a holistic-content approach relates specifically to early memories in a narrative. These early memories (not the earliest chronological

memories, but the ones first mentioned in the narratives) are seen as shedding light on the story as a whole. In other words, early memories are a key to the whole narrative. This method is examined and applied in more detail in the next chapter.

Given that for the purpose of this study, a holistic analysis is more appropriate than a categorical one, the question might then become how to choose between analyzing form and analyzing content. The answer is to not choose. Mishler (1999) reminds us that “narratives are fusions of form and content” (p. 20). Thus, an understanding of a narrative presupposes an analysis of both dimensions. Moreover, Lieblich *et al.* (1998) are quite clear that the different approaches are not so much discrete cells as they are variations on a continuum. Most analyses will probably draw on a mixture of approaches:

Focusing on a “categorical” rather than a “holistic” perspective means extracting parts of the life story out of the whole and disregarding contextual factors. This may be problematic; when interpretations are proposed, one should also try to take into account holistic and contextual factors. Similarly, in paying attention to “content” and not to “form,” an important source of information may be lost” (p. 126).

In other words, a good analysis will draw on approaches from two or more “cells” in their model. But this leads to a conundrum: A categorical analysis of form or content is not feasible for an entire narrative. Therefore, certain segments of the text will have to be selected at the expense of the others. This could be counterproductive to a holistic interpretation.

On the other hand, a holistic analysis of content will lead to a series of themes that characterize the narrative, supported by multiple quotes. Those quotes could of

course be subjected to more detailed analysis of form and content, but this might not be useful because those quotes had already been selected for inclusion based on their illustrative power of the identified themes. A holistic analysis of structure will lead to an extremely succinct (and useful) summary or classification of the narrative (e.g., a tragedy). But this summary is an end product in and of itself and does not lend itself to further analysis. In the case of the holistic methods, the analysis inevitably results in the researcher who, in the act of rendering an interpretation, speaks on behalf of the participant. The voice of the participant is drowned out in the process and serves, at best, to illustrate the researcher's interpretation.

A way out of this conundrum might be to devise another way to create a "complete representation of the story:" a core narrative that reflects the holistic nature of the story, yet lends itself to additional analysis because it retains the voice of the participant. Labov and Waletzky (1997) pioneered the idea of a core narrative, but their method appears to be best suited to extract subnarratives (discrete episodes that unfold within the context of the larger life story). Thus, applying the Labov and Waletzky lens would lead to a fragmentation of the life story.

In the remainder of this chapter, I propose a method to identify core narrative in a life story. This method, which I call distillation, is a preliminary analysis that includes certain parts of the narrative and assumes that the other segments are not as important or relevant. The resulting core narrative is in the words of the narrator and can therefore be subjected to further analysis.

The distillation method is not intended to be an incursion of the positivist mindset into narrative territory. As said in the previous chapter, I do not subscribe to the assumption that there is one truth “out there,” or, in the context of narrative analysis, one correct interpretation of a text. However, this does not preclude the possibility of a method or set of methods to assist the researcher in rendering an interpretation. After all, in the words of Lieblich *et al.* (1998), “researchers are responsible for providing a systematic and coherent rationale for their choice of methods as well as a clear exposition of the selected processes that have produced their results” (p. 2). It is in line with their argument that this distillation method is presented.

#### **DISTILLATION METHOD: DESCRIPTION**

A guiding image that might help make the method more accessible was already referred to in the previous chapter. To some extent, it was inspired by Kvale’s (1996) use of the traveler metaphor to describe the interviewer.

The same metaphor of journey can be applied to life as well. Imagine undertaking a jogging marathon from the East Coast to the West Coast. In terms of this metaphor, my participants are somewhere in California at the time of the interview; they are close to completion of the marathon. As I meet them near the coast, I ask them what their journey has been like.

For the interviews, we generally had one afternoon – between three and four hours – to cover between 75 and 90 years of lifetime. How does the narrator handle those conflicting demands between on the one hand, (re)creating the essence of the experience, yet on the other, maintaining expediency?

In the metaphor of the journey, this is what happens: I meet the narrator in California, where we get onto a chartered jet airplane. The narrator flies the plane, and I take the co-pilot's seat. The pilot creates a flight plan, picks out the most important places for a brief stopover, decides where to do a slow and low flyover, and also chooses which places are not at all important. The goal is to summarize the journey as compellingly as possible, while returning to California within three to four hours.

We take off and go straight to a meaningful point of beginning. This could be the starting location of the journey, but would not have to be. We make a very brief stop at that beginning, and the journey continues, going west, then back east, and west again. There are stretches where we are flying at high altitude and high speed. Then there are episodes where the pilot drops in altitude in order to show something a little more up close. Obviously, the airplane slows down accordingly, so that I can see what the pilot wants me to see while commenting on it. And then there are places where the airplane briefly touches down for an up-close and personal view for the co-pilot.

In the interview, this manifests as a vast variation in correspondence between the time spent narrating the story (narrating time, or NT) and the time lapsed in the story (story time, or ST) (Genette, 1980). Perhaps pace is a simpler term. Narrators will spend significant time talking about something that happened one particular morning, and then devote only a few seconds to the next twenty years. These accelerations and slowdowns, and the corresponding expansion and compression of story time, vary throughout the interview. Consider, for example, the first words of the interview with Hal Young:



Hal: Something that I should clarify, is that we have lived extraordinarily religious lives

Hal's wife (to me): Have you started yet?

R: Yes

Hal: That is because of the war... I don't know if it means anything to you, but we were raised Dutch Reformed, so was Will Barnes and there were several students like that. And well, we were very dutiful in that respect. At least, I was very obedient. And when I had to enter the military service, my problem was [...]

By the time Hal entered the military, he was eighteen years old. The rest of the interview deals with the military service and his life during the war, so these first utterances in the interview were the only comments he made about his youth.

Essentially, he covered the first eighteen years of his life in approximately 62 words, some of which were devoted to his friend Will Barnes and other students. He then proceeds to "spend" more than 350 words on what happened to him one afternoon.

Genette (1980) defines this variation in density of time as duration of a narrative (Meyerson, 2004).

It is neither practical nor, in my view, possible to map duration accurately throughout the interview, with the notable exception of one case: when story time equals narrative time. In such cases, the time it takes to narrate the experience is more or less the same as the amount of time the original event took ( $NT=ST$ ). Genette (1980) identifies such moments as isochronous, and calls them scenes. In order to avoid confusion with Riessman's (2002a)'s use of the same term, I will instead use a different term: "touchdown."

In the flight metaphor, isochronous moments occur when the airplane touches ground on the runway and the tires screech. For a fleeting moment, the airplane travels about as fast as the narrator herself did when she passed that location earlier in life (at least, so she would have us believe). The plane could either come to a complete standstill (a “pause,” in Genette’s (1980) terms) or it could never really land and continue its journey after the briefest touchdown on the tarmac. An example of the latter is from the interview with Walter Dickson:

What was terrible of course was that in the end, on the day of Liberation, many people were killed by Germans who were at Dam Square and “rrrt” mowed down some people

In this case, the reconstruction of the sound of the machine gun constitutes the touchdown. It is instantaneous and does not involve any reported human speech. In the transcripts, these touchdowns can be easily and reliably marked: they are instances of reported speech, reported thoughts, and imitations of sounds such as the machine gun example above.

Touchdowns are intriguing for the following reason: Every time the narrator uses one, particularly one involving a reconstructed conversation, he has to ignore or gloss over other events or eras in order to finish on time. Based on the “expense” of such occurrences, it would seem fair to assume that the use of these touchdowns is not coincidental or merely for the purpose of illustration. They are of strategic importance in the telling of the story and the performance of the narrative. Particularly in the case of reported speech, a hallmark of isochronicity, the narrator can “impart an aura of authenticity to what was originally said” (Matoesian, 1999), p. 494). It allows the

narrator to present a multitude of voices (Gwyn, 2000) which, in turn, can be a very effective rhetorical device (Lea & Auburn, 2001; Tholander, 2003).

### **Distillation: Main Assumption**

This brings me to the main assumption of the distillation method: the closer the correspondence between the time spent in the interview and the amount of time covered in life by that part of the interview, the more important the experience is to the narrator. There is something that the narrator wants me to know, realize, suspect, or feel. Incidentally, (Meyerson, 2004) used the same assumption to guide his analysis of how narrators use time to communicate meaning in life stories: He hypothesized that “duration of events identified by participants as critical events would be greater than duration of noncritical events, reflecting the greater importance that critical events have for participants” (p. 275). While most of his efforts were focused on the temporal sequencing used in narratives, rather than duration, he did find some evidence in support of that hypothesis.

Schrauf and Rubin (2001) examined the distribution of autobiographical memory over the lifespan of Hispanic immigrants to the United States. In the study, they considered immigration to be a traumatic event. They report that their participants “showed an increase in autobiographical recalls corresponding to their ages at immigration” (p. S75). If, as the authors suggest, immigration is indeed a traumatic event, then this spike in autobiographical recalls suggests that an increased level in detail (and concomitant distribution of time in the narrative) is indicative of issues that warrant further examination by the researcher.

Riessman (2002b) introduces personal narratives as follows: “[Personal narratives] are ubiquitous in everyday life. We can all think of a conversation when someone told in exquisite detail what she said, what he said, what happened next – a recapitulation of every nuance of a moment *that had special meaning for her*”, p. 219, emphasis added). Elsewhere, she connects a higher level of detail with importance or meaning, when discussing the scenes from a transcript. “The final scene is most elaborate, suggesting importance.” The “performance of identity is most vivid here” (Riessman, 2002a, p. 703). If it is indeed true that narrators use more detail for such special moments than for others, then we can assume that the more detailed an event is narrated, the more meaning it has for the narrator – which is the very assumption underpinning the distillation method.

### **Touchdowns**

Back to the transcripts: I analyzed them multiple times, reading them very closely for hints of reported speech or otherwise reconstructed sounds, and underlined each instance. I found many instances, the vast majority of which involved reported speech or reported thought. An example of the latter might be: *And I thought to myself, “I have to get out of here.”* But this begged the question: to what extent is reported speech or thought determined by the participant’s preferred narration style? I would not want to overlook certain touchdowns just because they do not look like reported speech or thought. After all, I am trying to identify those moments of isochronicity, *not* necessarily reported speech. Might there be another way that touchdowns present themselves?

The answer, I found, was yes. The transcripts were replete with what I will refer to as implied speech or thought. An example of this might be: *And I realized that I had better get out of there.* The message is the same as above, it takes about the same amount of time to narrate it, but there are no quotation marks implied. I then read all the transcripts again, reading them through the looking-glass of implied speech or thought. In most cases, it turned out that the verbs usually involved in reported speech (*I thought, I said, I asked, I wondered, I realized*) were coupled with *that* to create implied speech: *I thought that, I realized that, I wondered if, I believed that, I said that, I told that,* etc.). This led to a significant expansion of the amount of touchdowns identified in the narratives.

### Vignettes

The touchdowns, mostly instances of reported or implied speech or thought, were meaningless in and of themselves. A touchdown might look like this: “you will leave this afternoon.” Obviously, because this touchdown has been completely decontextualized, it has lost all its meaning. We do not know who reportedly said it, to whom it was said, or why and in what context. In order to ensure that the touchdown retained a basic amount of context, I marked some surrounding text to be included. This was an admittedly difficult process. I aimed to balance the need to provide sufficient contextual information with the need to reduce data. The above example, taken from Gerry Kosberg’s interview, came to look like this:

I don’t know, I don’t even remember exactly how that came about but I came home and they told me “you will leave this afternoon.” So I packed my bags and was off to Amsterdam. My mother stood by the train with tears in

her eyes. The war had already broken out, that night there was an alarm, a bombing of Amsterdam Airport.

Within this context, the touchdown now takes on meaning. Even though we still do not know why Gerry had to go to Amsterdam or when in his life this event took place, the touchdown, embedded within its context, does have a specific feel or rhetorical effect.

I call such units of meaning, that have a rhetorical impact on the listener, vignettes. In fact, I propose that this rhetorical effect makes a vignette what it is, and what sets each vignette apart from another. Each vignette can be located in the narrative's space and/or time. But because the criterion for its existence is the touchdown, the vignette does not have to describe an event or story of its own, with beginning and ending. Plot is not necessarily relevant. Meaning, however, is relevant.

I do not mean to suggest that these vignettes contain any embedded meaning; I do suggest that the existence of a touchdown is a thinly disguised marker of meaning in the eyes of the narrator. The vignette, then, needs to be detailed and rich enough to allow the reader to render a tentative interpretation.

### **Distillations**

What I refer to as the distillation is the chronologically sequenced listing of vignettes. In terms of the metaphor of the journey, it is a "touchdown trail." If the underpinning assumption is valid, these are among the most important parts of the life story, not as determined by me (for example, on the basis of plot development or emotional intensity) but as determined by the narrator by virtue of the existence of the touchdown.

Earlier, I argued that any touchdown loses meaning unless it is embedded within its context – this is what led to the creation of vignettes. Of course, lifting the vignette out of the transcript has a similar effect: because it has been decontextualized, we do not quite know what Gerry’s vignette (above) is really all about. This is where the distillation proves its value: the other vignettes, listed chronologically, provide the context that lend credence to its interpretation.

The distillations of the various interviews contained between 22 and 95 vignettes. Many vignettes contained more than one touchdown. Some vignettes were lengthy; others very short. But invariably, the reduction in data was significant: by a simple word count in the word processor, the distillations were on average one fifth the size of the whole transcript – an eighty percent reduction in data. A sixty-page transcript was thus reduced to twelve pages.

### **APPLYING DISTILLATION**

The proof, of course, is in the pudding. In this section, I present the distillation of one of the narratives – the interview with Alex Heller. After rendering an interpretation of the distillation, I compare the distillation to the intact, original narrative in terms of its overall meaning. In practical terms, I examine the material left on the cutting-room floor for any “evidence” that runs contrary to the distillation-based interpretation.

From the information contained in the entire narrative, I was able to determine in which life chapter each vignette belonged. For most vignettes, I knew the year and sometimes even the month that was associated with them. This helped to determine the

sequence in which they were to be listed within the life chapters. However, for some of the vignettes, I did not have that information. Whenever that happened, I listed the vignettes in a way that maximized the coherence. Most often, it meant that I grouped the vignettes together that dealt with the same event or theme.

In this distillation, the touchdowns are noted in quotes if reported speech or thought, and italics if implied. If the chapter title is in square brackets, it means that I did not get a chapter title from him in that case, and created a generic one of my own.

### **Distillation: Alex Heller**

#### **Alex Heller: Surprise**

##### **Hoofdstuk 1: The Realization that You're Different from Someone Else (1921-1934)**

My father was macho, he was a masculine man, afraid of nothing, and I was a feminine boy, so I didn't fight. And my father disapproved and assumed "this won't do," and so I grew up as a boy under the care of a father who thought "no good will come of him." My psychiatrist friend explained to me later that if that's how you grow up, then your entire life you have the feeling that "soon I'll be found out."

So he thinks, "he's a softy, that kid, no good will come of him." He was disappointed. Once, on the beach, he picked me up, as a very small child, walked into the sea, and pushed me under once, twice in the sea water. I had no idea what was happening to me, he thought "well then he'll harden a bit." So he made mistakes.

During those times the insecurity started, because my father had *no* faith in me, "no good will come of you."

*R: Did he tell you this verbatim?*

Yes, absolutely, "no good will come." The reason was that I wouldn't fight.

I was enrolled in a public school in IJmuiden, and I was the lawyer's son. In that environment, that's a reason to tease you, to pull you off your bicycle and things like that. So that was a bit annoying and I was no fighter; my father



always said “you, you don’t fight.” No, I found fighting to be an utterly useless activity (laughs).

My sister was a year older than me, but because I had skipped a year, we were both in the same class in elementary school. She would pull my hair and so on... “little brother, I’ll poke him.”

And then it became too much for my father. He said “are you out of your mind?” and he walked out on the Reformed Church, and became Protestant.

My father and mother always had assigned seats in the Protestant church in IJmuiden. During church service, only my mother would sit there, because my father sat close to the exit. That way, if he thought, “I couldn’t care less about what this preacher is telling me,” he would leave and go home.

### **Hoofdstuk 2: Forming (1934-1940)**

When my mother brought me to the door, before I cycled to Haarlem, she said “will you live by prayer.”

Then I said to my mother, for whom everything in the Bible was true, “tell me, it says in the Bible, that God stalled the sun for one hour to give the Israeli’s an opportunity to chop the heads off the (inaudible).” I said to her “but that is impossible, if you stall the sun then the whole shebang collapses, because everything revolves around everything else and then you get that gravitational pull, which you cannot stall. So what it says there cannot be true,” and my mother said “God can make anything happen, all things are possible.” I said “well you may think so but he cannot act in contradiction with his own laws.”

You see immediately someone critical arrives in a Christian milieu, and starts to think, “this is nonsense.”

I also saw him in a conversation on the television, that Kuitert says, “God, as a concept, is nonsense,” [...] he was professor in his field, but he said “God is nonsense.” So you see that things happen around you that make you think, “what are we doing?”

So I said, “that nonsense, that stuff in the Bible, that is impossible,” and mother said “everything in the Bible is God’s word, and is, therefore, true.” I said “well, that is

nonsense, that is impossible,” so I, I was critical, and I always remained critical.

And toward the end uhm, I got the impression that “this is nonsense, what you’re doing here” so I went to my father and said, “I would like to study law.”

So I knew “really, I’m an alpha,” and then I told my father that I wanted to study law, then he said “what do you want to be?” I said, “attorney,” then he said “well, I’m not happy about that, but look if you ever decide to do this, promise me one thing, *never* do it for the money, you have to compare an attorney to a doctor and a preacher, they got their education to serve their generation and that is also true for an attorney.” He sure got that right, because today, every attorney is in the business for the money, while he had said, “for God’s sake, never do it for the money.”

And then he would teach me lessons and he said “look, a settled case is better than a victory in court.” I said, “explain that to me,” he said, “well, a settled case, that is where both parties go home satisfied, and think, ‘well, I have arranged this quite nicely,’ while if you have a victory, then the other attorney lost and will seek to get even, they are always peers,” so he says, “a settled case is always better than a victory.” Those are some of the things I later would tell my students, they were (inaudible) from my father.

### **Hoofdstuk 3: [Studententijd] / [College Life] (1940-1946)**

The Germans’ invasion into the Netherlands, that was terrifying. I didn’t know anything like that was even possible... And then you view all those Germans as completely diabolic, which of course is not true, because I experienced a confiscation where Germans came and stayed (inaudible) in that house, and there were some very nice people among them. While in principle you think “every German is the devil,” there were very nice people among them.

The war breaking out was shocking, all of a sudden it was in the newspapers and on the radio. German troops were coming down everywhere, you were completely shocked... and so then you let go of all foundations. You

could say “anything is possible, there is a war, and anyone can get up and (inaudible).” So at that moment it it, it was, they could just take you off your bicycle, confiscation is what that was called, so you had lost *all* sense of security.

So that (laughs) was a time of “well, try to get by.”

Then you [meet] people your age, and of comparable development. You meet those men and women, with whom you have a conversation and you think “gosh, that is a neat conversation.”

And then he would say “so you do not know that either,” and so *continuously* during your exams, you would hear “oh, so you don’t know.”

Someone purposely bumped into me, and then they started chanting around me, “sidewalk, sidewalk.” Sidewalk, I didn’t know what that was, but the idea is that when students bump into you like that, you settle it through a fight outside on the sidewalk, and then I turned around and said, “[that’s pathetic].”

Of course, after Cleveringa’s speech, all those students said, “well goddammit” so they went, they carried weapons in violin cases and so on, those kinds of things. They, really, they were capable of *violence*.

During those times you’re of course always wondering, “what am I doing?” Now of course I know, but back then, “what are you doing? yes I am studying, but what is that? what are you studying? And why are you studying it?”

When I was in hiding in the Wieringermeer, I got a note from my father, saying that he had registered me as a member of some kind of Reformed youth group. I wrote back to him *had he lost his marbles*, that *I had not registered with that club* and that *he had no business registering me for other clubs*, so it was, I remember thinking “are you completely out of your mind?”

I said “sorry, that is the last thing I would choose,” so I got extremely pissed at my father (inaudible), “are you out of your *mind*?”

At one point I was in hiding in the ten Boom residence [...] I tended to talk a lot in those days, and grandpa ten Boom (inaudible), “give that boy an apple.” He was kind; fortunately he died immediately after he was sent to jail.

He was a very unique (?) man, and then there were Corrie and her sister Beppie. Cor was with the youth movement, and Beppie took care of the kitchen, so even now when Meals on Wheels brings me Queen's soup, I think "oh, that is Corrie's soup."

We all walked into the street to celebrate, "God, you can just walk into the street," but at that point shots were still being fired in parts of the city. You thought "something's not right over there because they are still shooting." They still shot several people to death, or maimed them. Those were the Germans who, well they went crazy... and they would not let us go. But we all stormed outside like, "goddammit you can just, you can just walk outside in the streets."

After the war, at one point I was (inaudible), they had these pranks, you had to get up on a table and undress and that kind of nonsense. Then one time I snapped and said "well I'm too old for that now because I lived through the war," and you can't take that anymore. I still remember that at one point I snapped and said, "well, goddammit, I will not take part in this."

#### **Hoofdstuk 4: Caring (1946-1956)**

I looked in the drawer of his desk and there was a gun, with ammunition, I say "how did you get a gun?" My father was sort of an American attorney, so if he had a particular case he did not know what to do with, he went to a bar, and there he would talk with the people from the village of IJmuiden, to find out what was going on. So then someone told him *so-and-so was going to go to his office and, shoot him...* My father said later, "if you're afraid kid, you'll go nowhere," so he knew, (inaudible) afraid, so he thought "if someone wants to shoot me to death then I'd like to, not be without, if someone pulls a gun then I also want to be able to pull a gun."

It was so crazy that at one point I asked her, "for God's sake why did you marry me?" and she said "my mother thought you were a good match."

She came in, and said *that she wanted a divorce*. [I realized] "that is, that is my wife" [...] but I was 33, and she was 40... and she placed her driver's license on my desk, and when she left, she left her license behind. That

was damned dangerous because I think “well, if you drive without your license, then you are not insured,” so that is very dangerous. So then I had to return it to her house... and I said “yes, I am going to return that driver’s license (inaudible) to that woman... so then I had ample opportunity to look at her, “*God* almighty what a beautiful woman.”

I arrived at her door and I said “I came to return your driver’s license,” and she said, “why don’t you come in.” Well, then you have to talk about something, so I said “so you have been with the Oxford group. I am Remonstrant.” She said “what is that, Remonstrant,” I said “that is a liberal church, but, Remonstrant, (inaudible). Every once in a while, on top of the regular church services, we have weekends, where you talk to one another.” Then I said, “We really should not take that too seriously, because we bring along a bottle of liquor.” Then she said, “I understand your hint: you would like a glass of gin.”

Then I married her, as a young 33-year old attorney, marrying a 40-year old client who had three sons. So everyone said “that man is insane,” and later, my friend Dien Cleveringa met one of the judges in The Hague [...] he asked, “are they still together,” she said “yes they’re still together,” well they are still together that is, we were married fifty years ago.

One young man after the other, they all had the same attorney. You’d say “how is that possible,” because (laughs) none of those suspects had any money so they had to request a court-appointed lawyer. And my peers knew I was crazy about trial law, and so they said “uhm, Alex, we have another one,” and “would you mind replacing me” I said “sure, hand it over.”

### **Hoofdstuk 5: Searching for Future (1956-1960)**

At the Institute for the Tropics, certain things happened because I was being underestimated there by the General Secretary. That General Secretary thinks, “ah, dat little fellow, no good will come of him.”

I was deprived of legal material, and because I was not getting enough law, I asked Cleveringa *if there was a topic, that would allow me to work in my profession*, just a topic that you could study. And then, because I was

working at the Royal Institute for the Tropics, I ended up with private international law.

In that time I met Cleveringa and he said, “do you have a topic,” to work on, because I wanted to continue practicing the profession. I say “well, I work at the Institute for the Tropics, I give international, technical assistance,” so then he said “o that could be private international law.”

[I] went to Cleveringa, and said “I have something, administrative work but I would like to have something that I could study.” He said, “you must pick a topic, you must write a chapter, and then I’ll send you to the professor with that specialty.” Because of the Institute for the Tropics, we ended up (inaudible) with private international law and then he said “I will introduce you to a mister LeMère.”

And so he also guided me later, like, “you must look in this direction” or “that topic” and so then I defended, still under Cleveringa’s direction.

And so I told him that, Lemère’s work (inaudible), he said “let me read it,” and I let him read it and he said “well, that is a good start, continue.” And that is how I ended up with, with Sauve Planne to, to defend because he’s the one who told me “good start, continue.”

Dien Cleveringa, she said “there is someone from Utrecht, who came to Leiden, and now there is a position in Utrecht. Is that something you might be interested in?” I said “I don’t think so because I am not scientific.” She said “do you know anyone from that department?” “No, how would I,” then she said “well uhm, you, Lijksma (?)” I said, “I’ll be damned! I do know someone, from church, that is Tjalling Dorhout Mees.”

That telephone call from those teachers in (inaudible), “just go and talk to someone” and I thought “I don’t know him,” but that turned out to be Tjalling Dorhout Mees and we became, very close friends.

He met my wife and thought immediately “well, she would be a nice, asset to the professors’ wives,” so that’s how I [rolled] from one thing to another (?), so without my wife, I don’t think I would have ever become a professor

I visited with Tjalling and I said “this is the idea,” he said “you’ll visit with Heinoud van den Berg, and he has been an attorney, so he will ask you why you left your practice,” so I said “well I’ll say this and that, and then I’ll say that.” Then he said “that first thing, you won’t say that at all because it will be misunderstood. The second, you will say but in a different manner than you just told me, and the third, you will never mention again.”

I visited with Heinoud van den Berg, and at one point he said “you’re a little old,” I was 33, “and you have to advise students.” I said “yes I know, I have the advantage that I was an attorney for ten years,” then he said “damn, so you know what you’re talking about,” and that is how I got in with him.

### **Hoofdstuk 6: “Like God in France” (1961-1991)**

When I was hired I arrived there at 8:30, and they said, “what are you doing here?” I say, “I’ve been hired here, I thought I had to be here at 8:30,” then the (inaudible) said, “it’s like a dovecot here, sometimes people come in here but then they fly away again.” I say “I can’t afford to do that, because I have a lot of reading to do. I have been given a lot of topics that I know nothing about.” I had to teach personal law and law of inheritance, and law of evidence, “I have never heard of those,” so I said, “I’m going to study these topics mornings, afternoons, and evenings (inaudible).” They said “then we’ll get you the key to the front door and to the library because it has its own lock,” I said “thanks” so yes, I was there in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings, then I thought “law of evidence, Scheltema [author], look, God that is a fun book,” so I spent all day reading and I got *to-tal-ly* hooked on the profession, totally hooked, and my, my [son] Duco experienced that in his own field, the same way. At one point he was totally, “I’m out of control” and “God that is a damned beautiful profession.”

I was working on it, but then in Utrecht I, I ran into Sauve Planne, he said “let me read what you’ve written,” I let him read it and then he returned it and said “you should continue because it is a good start.”

And then I remember that one of the, professors in, in Utrecht approached me and said “now that you have your Ph.D., when they start to tug at you, what will you do?”

and I said “what do you mean?” He said “well, if you get an offer to go to Leiden, what will you do? Or will you stay here?” I said “I would rather stay lecturer here in Utrecht than become professor in Leiden.”

At my dinner, after my defense, Godfried told me “look, that uhm, I have no knowledge of that field of yours, but that thesis, is nonsense.”

So they noticed that “that fellow is going to teach, and one student after another (laughs) passes,” and then they thought “damn where did he learn that?” and that’s when I got the reputation “that guy knows how to teach.”

I once taught a seminar and I said “guys there are a lot of people in the world, there are a lot of differences, and so they will always be in conflict with one another. And when you have a conflict, and you know ‘this one is right and that one is wrong,’ then there is no problem; you can go home and have a drink, it does not matter. But when the one conflicting party has a good argument, and the other also has a good argument, then all kinds of red lights light up in my head. Then you have centuries worth of jurisprudence, you have files full of index cards with jurisprudence from high court to low, and so that’s when the world opens up.” And that never changed, I was *crazy* about the profession, and that is what I tried to tell my students, that “that is a *magnificent* profession, you can’t imagine anything more wonderful.”

A student approached me at the end of that hour, and he said, “until now, I did not know what I was going to do with this major, but now I know.” I said, “What will it be?” He said, “attorney.” Well, those are moments you will never forget you know, fantastic of course (inaudible), said “God, that guy suddenly recognized, that is the direction he wants to pursue.”

I’ll never forget (laughs), we were ending, I was ending class, until September, so I said, “fellows, it is over for this year this is the last lecture,” and then that *entire* hall, they rose to their feet and applauded, and damned if you know what to do in such a moment.

Then they said “if you could stay until your 70<sup>th</sup>, complete your 25 years, then we’re okay with that.”



Then I went to that psychic and the man who referred me had said, “you take your watch there, you give it to her, but you don’t ask any questions.” He said “just let her talk, and remember what she says,” and that’s what I did. She held that watch, and then all of a sudden she said “your father is here.” I said “my father... what does he want?” She said “he is so sorry...” “What is he sorry for?” She said, “He’s been too hard on you... he’d want to get down on his knees, he thinks it is terrible.” So all of a sudden I had a father! I don’t know how I made the drive back; I was crying the whole way because all of a sudden I had a father, and I went to my mother I say “do you have a photo of my father,” she said “no,” she didn’t have one, so then I had one made with a, with a (inaudible) he was photographer. There’s one over there, cut off from another photo, and then they create a negative so I have collected about three or four photos of father, and so as a professor I hung those photos in my office. One of my co-workers came into the office... and said “who is that?” I said “that is my father,” “what was he?” “he was attorney...” well uhm, that was the surprise for me all of a sudden I had a father.

Later on I talked to him a lot. He had been dead for a long time, but when I went to teach a difficult lecture and thought “I have to start here, by the break I have to there, and I have to end the class there,” then I would say to my father “you have to help me out a little.”

When she lived in France, she lived with her father. She was called Mademoiselle something or another at the time. Well, at one point, she knew exactly what town it was. We went there to look for her grave, because she assumed, “it has to be there.” So I did see those gravestones, but it was all, they were covered in moss you couldn’t read a single letter. Then we walked to the church, we were on the church square in front of the church, and she said, “I recognize this.”

I remember (laughs), I made horoscopes, explained them too. So at one point, in Utrecht, I walked into the department’s administration. Behind the desk was a gorgeous young woman. I knew that she lived together with her boyfriend, and every once in a while we would talk. So at one point I said to her “how is it going,” and she said “well not so well.” I said “what’s wrong, have

you been ill?" "no... no," she said, "I guess I can tell you, but I've attempted suicide." "*Mo-ther*," so I said "and your boyfriend, he understands this?" "no, not at all," "do you have a pastor, a doctor, a psychologist or psychiatrist closeby with whom you can talk about this?" "no," all she had was a horoscope. "And this horoscope, does it have any explanation?" "no, it's a drawing, and it is of no use to me," I said, "why don't you (inaudible) bring that horoscope? Can I come up with an interpretation?" She was amenable to that, so I got to take that woman's horoscope, home ... I returned the horoscope to her with the interpretation... and then later I ran into her and I said, "how was that, the horoscope," she said, "it scared me to death," I said "scared? why?" she said, "it's scary, you're scared to death to be confronted with yourself."

When I got the job I told my wife, "no good will come of this because I can't do this at all"... and then later you think, "well, this is exactly what continues to happen: you walk into something, you try it anyway, and it turns out to be a path that takes you straight to the university."

When I look back I say "it is a complete mystery to me," because [professor] Meijers was some kind of deity, I once saw him cross the road, there was a lot of traffic, and I think "we now need a police officer to stop the traffic because Meijers wants to cross the road." They were gods, they were somewhere beyond the horizon, and that I could ever do Meijers' work in Utrecht, that seemed totally impossible, yet it happened.

### **Hoofdstuk 7: In Conversation With My Guardian Angel (1991-current)**

I visited her every day for the first five years, every day, and then they said, they told me "you need to be careful because you will go under" [...] so I visited her every day for five years, but we could not keep it up. Every day, I would find my wife among people who were mentally completely ill, and you can't keep that up.

I was with her last Saturday, (laughs), and all staff know, "we know this by now; we will put her on a couch over there" so that I can sit next to her, and then I put my arm around her, and she loves that. She always says, "there, we're together again, just like it should be," and then (laughs) I say, "yes, do you know how long ago we got

married?” and she can’t remember, “that was fifty years ago,” and there was a woman sitting across from me who overheard all that. She said “you don’t see that very often (laughs) anymore these days.”

She experienced that Martin fell, and he died within two minutes... and Hetty said later that, “when Martin was buried, I so wanted to be buried with him, and then I knew,” she said, “that Martin would not approve,” so she *continued*, with comedy, now on her own. When she is asked, “how did you find the strength to do that,” and “how did you do that,” she follows the same argument that I have always used for myself: she got a serious blow, and she continued.

I put these things to my guardian angel. I present the things I can’t figure out myself and say, “how about you answer this one,” so now I am in conversation with my guardian angel, in preparation for a next life.

I know what I want to study in my next life. I told my son, “I will study international law.” I started with private law, I got my Ph.D. in international private law, so until now I have just taught regular private law. When I return I would like to transition into international law, and then you see very clearly, you think “international law is what it is going to be.”

I agree with Harry Kuitert, “the concept of God is meaningless, you can’t do anything with it, it plays out outside of time and space and we cannot think outside time and space, so the concept is nonsense.” That’s what Harry Kuitert, theologian, professor at the VU, claimed, he says “that is nonsense that whole, that is just nonsense.” Well, then when you think about it “yes Harry you are right, that is nonsense. Then what remains?”

So there you have an example of how in life all kinds of things happen that you hadn’t suspected would occur. They cross your path and you just go from the one to the other. And then it turns out, when you look back, you think “that was not in vain, nothing that happens in life was in vain,” so somehow you have some kind of guidance in your life, and it is marked, so that later you can look back and realize “that happened then and then and then, and none of it was in vain.”

When you start to get a feel for that, when you say “there is no coincidence,” then there is a thread, and that thread comes from elsewhere. As small children will say, “you come from the light and you will return to the light.”

I have also surprised my environment because when I was attorney, nobody ever, they all thought (?) “we hope he’ll turn out well.” And then I became full professor and that is just, the most complete surprise, “that, that is impossible, what is happening there is impossible.” I think this is the title of the book: surprise. Things happen that make you say, “that is totally impossible, get out of here, impossible,” yet it still happens.

Given the sheer amount of vignettes, it would probably not be helpful to discuss each and every one individually to examine its rhetorical power or purpose. Instead, I will treat this distillation more holistically.

It is clear that the journey described in this narrative is not as much a professional one as it is a deeply personal and spiritual one. The first chapter’s vignettes deal almost exclusively with hardship, with not living up to expectations, and, as the chapter title suggests, realizing that Alex was different than others. His father treats him rather harshly, but the maltreatment is not limited to his father. Other actors include his fellow school children and even his sister. The two vignettes that do not deal with hardship describe his father’s troubled relationship with the Reformed Church. His mother is mentioned only once in this chapter: she is described only as someone who did sit in her assigned seat in the Protestant Church. The absence of his mother from the vignettes in Chapter One is, I believe, significant. I will get back to that later. But the bottom line is, hardship due to difference, a struggle with pre-defined gender roles (masculine versus

feminine), and the backdrop against which the struggle with religion will continue to unfold.

The second chapter, the title of which translates into either Development, Shaping, and/or Formation (similar to the German equivalent “Bildung”), features his mother more prominently. But as in the previous chapter, her role is limited to someone that Alex has a struggle with when it comes to religion. Of the eight vignettes describing his six years of secondary school, five focus on religion. Harry Kuitert, whom he mentions, was a theology professor at the VU who symbolizes the direction that the university (if not the country) has taken with respect to religion. Kuitert is only a few years younger than most my interviewees: he was born in 1924, became a preacher, and eventually he became a professor of theology at the VU in 1967. His name is mentioned in several of my interviews, and without exception, it is because of his spiritual journey from a Reformed scholar to someone who argues that Jesus is not God, and that God is a human creation. In this case, Alex uses Kuitert as a means to legitimize his own doubts about organized religion. The other three vignettes deal with his choice of major when planning to go to college, and his asking for (and receiving) his father’s blessing for his choice to become an attorney.

Chapter three, to which he did not assign a title, cover another six years of his life – this time, it’s his time in college, coinciding almost completely with World War II. Of the thirteen vignettes, the first three deal with the shock of the invasion. Anything can happen, he lost all sense of security, and the implied message here is that religion did not help him make sense. Even viewing the Germans as diabolic turned out to be

problematic when he found that there were very nice people among them. The subsequent vignettes describe his early interactions at the university of Leiden (not the VU in Amsterdam): meeting fellow students, taking oral exams with professors, and immersing himself in student life in general. Note that the theme of violence is never far away after the stage was set in chapter one with his father disapproving of his unwillingness to fight. This is particularly true for the vignette in which he mentions the students who were capable of violence: he refers to them as “those students,” in spite of him being a student as well. Using that language allows him to make a distinction between them and himself, a continuation of the theme that he is different from someone else. It is significant that given these extraordinary circumstances, when emotions were clearly running high, Alex makes it clear that he would have nothing to do with violence.

The following vignettes deal with fond memories of the ten Boom family (an old-school, Reformed family that was very active in hosting Jews and helping them escape the country and featured in the motion picture *The Hiding Place*), a conflict he had with his father about membership in a religious youth organization, and the Liberation. The Liberation vignette is interesting because it is a complement to the earlier vignette about the invasion: whereas during the invasion, not all Germans were bad, the Liberation was also not a clear cause for joy because some of the Germans were indeed malicious. The final vignette describes a memory associated with student life after the conclusion of the war; he makes it clear that he will not stand for anything humiliating. Overall, there does not appear to be a clear pattern, or theme, to chapter three, unlike the two preceding chapters.

Chapter four, titled *Caring*, spans the ten years that Alex was in private law practice with his father. Of the six vignettes, two deal with the practice of law. In one of them, the thread started in chapter one (his father being fearless) is continued in the description of why his father chose to have a loaded pistol in his desk. The other vignette describes how much he cared about those defendants who needed court-appointed lawyers. More importantly, though, his law practice was the vehicle by which he met his second wife. His first wife is mentioned only once in the entire distillation, and she is given only a brief vignette in which she explains to him why she married him in the first place. The subsequent divorce is implied. The three remaining vignettes touchingly narrate how he met his second wife, the consequences associated with the new relationship (disapproval from the community because she was divorced, older, a client, and had three children), and of course, vindication because they've been married fifty years.

Chapter Five (*Searching for Future*) contains eleven vignettes. In this chapter, he has found a position in the Royal Institute for the Tropics, and significantly, he runs into a supervisor who thinks of him in the same way as his father did – “no good will come of him.” The next four vignettes tell the story of how he went to Cleveringa – the same Cleveringa who delivered the fiery speech in November 1940 – for advice on how to start on a dissertation. This is followed by the introduction of two other characters, LeMère and Sauve Planne, who also coached and guided him. It was Cleveringa's daughter Dien who called his attention to a position in Leiden as a lecturer. Alex's second wife plays a minor, but critical role in this chapter because he basically owes his

job in Utrecht to Sauve Planne's approval of her when they met. In turn, Sauve Planne coached Alex on what to say and what not to say during the job interview, leading to Alex being given the job. In sum, Chapter Five has an apt title. Alex is in a job where he is not appreciated, he initiates contact with a law professor, and this contact leads to contacts with other people which, in turn, and in part due to his second wife, leads to a job with the university.

The title of Chapter Six refers to an expression in Dutch: to live like a God in France is essentially to have supreme happiness or bliss. It refers to the good life that everyone envies you for. The chapter contains fifteen vignettes covering thirty years. The first nine outline his development as a professor. He gets completely hooked on teaching and on law; he successfully defends his dissertation; he gets to teach until the age of 70 (significantly beyond the normal retirement age); and he is recognized by his peers and his students for his ability to teach. The next six vignettes take a surprise turn. Two of them tell the very powerful story of posthumous reconciliation with his father. The next two detail his trip to France with his wife, to find the location she grew up in a previous life, and an instance where he was able to help a woman who had attempted suicide by interpreting her horoscope for her. Since these kinds of events would ordinarily not be featured in the narrative of someone who belongs to the Reformed church, they showcase the extent to which Alex's religious and spiritual views have changed over time. The final two vignettes relate to the title of the story (surprise). He says he would never have thought he could be a professor or do Meijers' kind of work in Utrecht. The interpretation is deeply spiritual as he acknowledges that somehow, there



is a bigger plan out there. This sets the stage for the final spiritual challenge in chapter seven.

The final chapter consists of nine vignettes, the first two of which reveal that his wife is now living in a nursing home and battles with dementia. He tried to visit her every day as long as he could but he had to face the fact that he couldn't keep that up. The third vignette refers to a television program in which a performing artist, Hetty, is interviewed about how she coped with the sudden loss of her performing arts husband. Her way of coping – to continue, to not give up in spite of a severe blow – is used as an illustration of his own approach. Of course, the blow he is referring to is effectively losing the great love of his life. The following vignettes, as a whole, all reflect interpretations that are employed to reduce pain: preparing to return (presumably so he can be with his wife again, although this is ambiguous), putting the final nail in the coffin of old-school Christian ideology by rejecting the notion of God, and positing that nothing in life happens in vain, that there is no such thing coincidence. There is little doubt in my mind that this belief is the essence of his new religion and that it helps him make sense of what are arguably the darkest days of his life; days that are spent in loneliness and in search of a purpose.

All in all, this narrative appears to be one of reconciliation – reconciliation between his father and himself; between the masculine and the feminine; and between religion and lived experience. It is also a story about love. Significantly, his mother plays almost no part in his narrative and is mostly portrayed as someone who cannot relate to Alex because of her devotion to religion. One is not left with the impression

that there was a lot of warmth between Alex and his mother. This is even more clearly so with respect to his father, who treats him harshly and has no confidence in him whatsoever. His sister, only mentioned once, is portrayed as someone who joined the other elementary school kids in teasing and bullying him. Thus, his early childhood is characterized by a complete lack of love. This continues into early adulthood, when he marries someone whose mother thought he would be a good partner for her, and subsequently divorces her. His supervisor at the Royal Institute for the Tropics was essentially a reincarnation of his father. And then, when he meets his second wife, everything changes. She is clearly the love of his life, and in part due to her, he lands a job he falls head over heels in love with. This is also the time of Alex's posthumous reconciliation with his father. And in the final chapter of his life, he loses her.

### **What Is Lost?**

So, what's missing in this distillation that was present in the narrative? For one, certain plot elements are missing. For example, it is unclear from the distillation why the law practice with his father ended. The full narrative contains this information: his father had a kidney disease and because of that, he got confused. He started to file documents in the wrong places and eventually this led to the demise of the practice.

There are other valuables scattered on the cutting room floor. There are a total of eleven of them, and I will highlight each one briefly below.

When I asked Alex who the most important people were from his first chapter, the following exchange took place:

Let me see... it was in Zeist, high school, right?

R: No, elementary school... Youth, in general

I no longer remember that particular person in elementary school, no... No, I was a, a very—uhm, no, I was hugged by a [female] teacher in school. But, I have no recollection whatsoever [who she was].

This recollection of receiving a hug from a school teacher must be significant in some way, even though it does not receive a vignette. Alex downplays its importance by not integrating it in the narrative in any meaningful way and thus orphaning it. Not remembering who the teacher was also does not help, of course. Still, it is difficult to believe that an event such as this one, a childhood memory of someone giving him affection at a time he was so starved of it, is not significant. How much importance to assign to this event is difficult, just as it was for Jim Thurston's childhood event of the rat biting him in the hand after being caught. On the one hand, the premise stands that the narrator will devote vignettes to the most important episodes. On the other hand, there still is the possibility that there may be other, less-than-conscious forces at play in relating the story. I cannot help but notice that in both cases, these events are almost poetically symbolic in the way that they represent core issues in the narrators' lives.

Shortly after the above exchange, I confirmed that his father was an attorney and a traditionally masculine person. I then asked him to describe his relationship with his mother:

When I became an attorney, [my father] and I became partners, so then I could say [informal "you"] to him. But I was never allowed to say [informal "you"] to my mother; no, that was [formal "you"] until the end of her life.

Given the preliminary analysis that the narrative is in important ways a story about the search for love, this is significant because it extends the lack of affection from his mother, so clearly described in the first chapter, throughout the rest of his life, shutting the door on any prospect of reconciliation. This serves two purposes: it makes the reconciliation with his father more important and it puts into sharp relief the difference between his mother and his second wife.

After Alex told me about his father dunking him in the sea, I asked him what that did to him:

A: Afraid.

R: Afraid of your father?

A: Well, afraid also of other things. I remember one time, as a very young child, I was asleep on the beach, and then a large black dog came over and sniffed me. I opened my eyes and all of a sudden I saw this dog's head above me, it scared me half to *death*.

This specific event illustrates how fearful Alex has become as a result of his father's mistakes. It adds dramatic effect (and rhetorical power) to the narrative.

Another segment that was lost in the distillation deals with his choice of major in high school. In the Netherlands, there are three clusters of majors: there are the alphas, which correspond to the liberal arts, including law; the betas, which include the natural sciences and engineering; and the gammas, referring to the social sciences. These Greek letters are used to refer not only to majors, but also to the people in those majors, as the example below shows:

[At] gymnasium, I chose beta, even though I am a typical alpha. But we really believed that alphas were softies,

alphas were worthless. I chose beta only because I did not want to be a softy

The effect of this segment is rather self-explanatory: it highlights the power of socialization and the difference between how he was being raised and who he really was. It sets the stage for the reconciliation that occurs when he later asks his father for his blessing to study law (and the reward that follows later when he becomes professor).

A fifth piece left behind relates to his wife's current heart-wrenching condition:

So I looked her up every day, but we could not keep that up. Every day I would find my wife among completely insane people. You can't keep that up. So then I became depressed, and when you become depressed you make suicide attempts and things like that. So I am still taking anti-depressants because I was not able to keep that up. But still, she is, for me, the woman of my life.

The very thought that Alex would rather not live at all than live without his wife is by far the most dramatic evidence of the extent of the loss that he is experiencing. In a very tragic sense, it adds a sense of climax to his narrative: the battles started with his mother (through religion) and his father, and continued in some form throughout much of his life, but none compare to the one he is facing now.

A related section that was cut explains the meaning he is making of this struggle:

My wife became demented, and I could no longer leave her alone. That was a horrible experience, because when she was admitted, I was in this house, alone, with no one to talk to. And I have a very, very difficult time with that. And so you see, that is exactly what I have to learn. It's also written in the Bible that at one point you have to go into the desert, you have to trek into the desert. That's where I am right now. I'll continue on but I can't find a single tree.

Given Alex's journey away from christianity, this religious imagery is striking. It underscores the reconciliation theme referred to earlier. Later, when I asked him if in the desert would be his choice for title of the final chapter, he said

Yes, because I have great difficulty with being lonely and being alone, and not having a conversation. So as far as that's concerned, [I have] to learn to be alone. But on the other hand, there is a new but rock-solid belief that you are never alone, that there is always an entity that guides you. I call it my guardian angel.

This rock-solid belief in guardian angels appears to be another way for Alex to cope with the loss of his wife and the subsequent loneliness. Like the previous segment, this one shows how he makes sense of his situation and how he finds the strength to continue the struggle.

Speaking of struggles, there was the one with his supervisor in the Institute for the Tropics. I asked him about that and commented that his supervisor appeared to be a reincarnation of his father. He responded as follows:

You could say reincarnation. It is of course not his reincarnation, but you could say that in your life, certain things will start to bother you, and they keep coming back. And that means that you have to learn something. You learn something through Resistance; if everything goes well, you learn nothing. Heaven is a place that must get very boring in due time... So you keep getting hit in a particular spot, and so, I know which spots I'm getting hit.

It would appear that this is, in a sense, the key to his entire narrative: everything happens for a reason, there is no coincidence, life has a plan for you, to learn and to grow, and you do this through suffering. This kind of reasoning allows Alex to assign

positive meaning to all the suffering he has experienced and may even help give his life a purpose. This is entirely consistent with the vignettes in his distillation.

Another by-product of the distillation is the following commentary on his successful dissertation defense and subsequent appointment as professor:

First I got my Ph.D., and then I became full professor, and I was dumbfounded. By the way, so was every one around me: they were also completely surprised that I had become professor, you know, it was really very unlikely. So, I am still totally amazed.

This section underscores and duplicates the last vignette of the narrative, and implicitly validates the worldview that life has its own plan.

Finally, Alex commented twice on the experience of the Occupation. When I asked him how he experienced it, he said

War... well, that's when you're confronted with evil, with real evil, with SS and Gestapo and security forces and those kinds of terrible things. The war was a battle between the real hell, and I did not mean that in the literal sense; the devil is also not to be taken literally. But there is a human tendency that is terrible, and you see this over and over, every day, with children who are raped and murdered, I can't stand the thought of it. You can't dwell on it, but it does happen.

And, more specifically, about the invasion:

The invasion of the Netherlands by Germany was horrific. I was not aware that anything like that was even possible... And then you see all those Germans as completely diabolical, which of course is not true either, because I experienced a billeting by a German, and he was a very kind man.

Individually and as a whole, these eleven segments of the transcript that were left out of the distillation confirm and reinforce the themes of love and reconciliation

identified earlier. They have high rhetorical power and/or carry significant symbolical weight. Particularly the segments that outline Alex's current beliefs about the world and show how he makes sense of it all are poignant and relevant.

Nevertheless, the distillation appeared to successfully catch the essence of this transcript. The sheer amount of vignettes (69) it contained may very well have contributed to this apparent accuracy. Alex Heller's is not the only distillation which I compared in depth to its original transcript; I did the same thing for the Jim Thurston transcript (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Whereas Alex's interview yielded 69 vignettes, the one with Jim only led to 21 vignettes. This would suggest that the distillation method left much more valuable material out.

A close analysis reveals that much of what was left out is of relatively little value. Examples are small talk (building rapport), distractions (such as a telephone ringing), additional information (historical context), and chronicling (the listing of years, job titles, and places). But many other segments that did not make it to the distillation are quite meaningful and relevant. These valuable sources of meaning can be categorized into two groups: events and attributions.

Events are occurrences that, like vignettes, can be placed in a particular place and time but have no touchdown associated with them. A childhood memory of Jim's did not make it to the distillation, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In terms of the airplane metaphor, events are when the plane flies over very low and very slowly and all but touches the ground. Other than this childhood memory, Jim's narrative did not contain any other meaningful events.



In contrast, there were many statements of causal attribution that did not make it into the distillation but contained critical clues to how Jim apparently hoped I would interpret his story. While many such attributions were relatively inconsequential, some of them were not: they were, in fact, Jim's interpretations of his life. Consider the following example:

I really did not have what it takes for that, I have to say. There were very few debates in our family, you know. It was a quiet family, where no abnormal things happened, everyone (laughs) walked the Reformed path. If only someone had had some sympathy for the NSB [the Dutch political organization founded on Nazi ideology] for example, you know, or like today, what's it called, the Socialist Party for example, or if you had leaned towards socialism, or liberalism, then you would have had debates. Then the matter of religion would have been raised, you know? But there was none of that, we were all dancing to the same tune [my interpretation of a Dutch idiom that translates literally into cuckoo one-song] (laughs). Everyone loyally went along to church, and everyone was educated in religion, in music on top of that, that was all exemplary. But then later on you sometimes regret not having learned to debate. For example, my eldest brother, whom I just mentioned, has children who are professors – at the VU by the way (laughs). Anyway, they debated you know, (laughs) at the dinner table, over a meal. But in my home, my mother played such an important part in all of that, she corrected us if anything indecent was said.

As I will argue in the next chapter, Jim Thurston's narrative is essentially a story of regret: He has not achieved in life what he thought he should have achieved. Even though the distillation clearly shows the magnitude of Jim's regret, and his perceived lack of skills, it does not show how he attributes this lack of skills to his dominant mother. There are nine such commentaries about his lack of skills, which then became

an impediment to his success. This is another example: “If I had learned and practiced more to defend myself verbally, earlier on, then that would have helped me even today.”

The point of this brief discussion here is that the different ways in which the narratives are delivered leads to differences in the materials that get left out in the distillation process. Therefore, no distillation is unproblematic or fool-proof.

On the other hand, the encouraging news is that none of the materials left out of the distillation contradicted the interpretation based solely on the distillation. Does that mean that this method is universally applicable and appropriate? Certainly not. But the Alex Heller transcript analyzed here does not raise fundamental concerns with the method when compared to its distillation. It is undeniable that valuable material gets lost in the distillation process, and that the nature of that material varies with each transcript. As the above analysis shows, distilling a narrative according to this method does not absolve the researcher from examining and sifting through the discarded material. However, it does provide a potentially useful way to focus on the most significant parts of the transcript – as determined by the narrator, by virtue of the fact that a touchdown was created – and in the process it maintains the integrity of the transcript.

### **CONCLUSION: ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS**

Before closing this chapter on an optimistic note about the virtues and potential of the distillation method, it is important to highlight its drawbacks and limitations.

First of all, there is no such thing as a reduction in data without some kind of analysis taking place. So when I claim that the distillation method enables a holistic

analysis, I do not mean to overlook the fact that this reduction is an analysis in and of itself. The assumption, upon which the method is based, is in fact a theory that is certainly debatable. The legitimacy of this assumption determines whether or not the subsequent analysis is legitimate or not.

Second, the notion of touchdown may work best (or even exclusively) with narratives performed in the Western cultural context and the coherence systems that are so prevalent within it. As a matter of fact, the distillation method could itself be considered a coherence system (after all, it is based on the assumption of an empowered, independent individual with a high degree of freedom of choice to narrate the story as she sees fit). Even though Glenister Roberts (2004) claims that the use of reported speech happens in every human language, and therefore this method may have merits outside of the limited cultural context within which it was applied, it must be emphasized that only further study can ascertain how useful the method is in other contexts. Until then, any legitimacy claims made about this method can only be made within the “Western” cultural and social context.

Third, the distillation method might work better if the narratives are characterized by a chapter structure analogous to the one used in this study. Particularly the use of chapter titles is valuable, as these titles provide an additional “data source” that can be compared and contrasted with the interpretations of the vignettes contained within them.

Fourth, I do not intend to imply that the narrative material left on the cutting room floor is not valuable. There are many examples of sections and events that were

left out that, on face value, appear to be very meaningful, but were left out because there was no touchdown associated with them. For example, early childhood memories, which in the Freudian tradition could be very meaningful, are filtered out unless there is a touchdown associated with it. There can be little doubt that this, in turn, affects the interpretation of the distillation in some way.

Last, the distillation method filters out the interviewer's words, and by extension, the interviewer's (conspicuous) presence. Even though this is common practice even at the level of transcription (Atkinson, 1998), the effect might still be a decontextualization of the narrative because it is separated from the particular time and place in which it was performed. It must be kept in mind that the words contained in the vignettes cannot be attributed exclusively to the narrator. The researcher's questions, presence, transcription decisions, and in the case of this study, translation decisions all have a significant influence as well. In other words, filtering out the interviewer's words creates the impression that the interview took place in a vacuum, rather than having been co-constructed with the interviewer in a particular social and cultural context.

Even though these limitations are not trivial, there are equally attractive advantages to the use of the distillation method. First, this is a method that achieves great reduction in data while only minimally interpreting them. The data reduction methods described above have as their primary purpose the analysis or interpretation, and reduction in data is usually a side-effect. In this case, reduction in data is the primary objective, and while analysis or interpretation takes place in the process, *it* is now the side-effect.

Second, the distillation method refrains from emphasizing structural factors, such as plot, at the expense of what is not considered plot. There is no assumption that there is more meaning embedded in, say, plot or evaluation than in small talk, distractions, or other exchanges that take place during the course of a narrative. Sections of the narrative that initially appear to be merely distractions (and could therefore be filtered out) can also be included in the distillation. There is also no need to distinguish between spontaneous speech or responses triggered by the interviewer's question. As long as the narrative contains a touchdown, it gets included.

A second advantage is that the distillation represents the narrative in the words of the narrator. Keeping in mind the philosophical question of whose words they really are, the voice – or rather, the multiple voices – of the narrator are to some extent preserved. This representation does not get limited to only one of the narrator's voices, privileged by the researcher at the expense of the other voices.

But the most important advantage of the distillation is that the sharp reduction in data makes it possible to present an entire distillation in an article, book chapter, or dissertation, while maintaining the holistic character of the narrative. This, in turn, allows a level of transparency that is often warranted but not always achieved. This transparency, then, allows the reader to question the researcher's interpretation and engage in a conversation with both the data and the researcher.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHILDHOOD MEMORIES AS IDENTITY CLAIMS

Each of the twelve distillations was subjected to a rather close reading to discern how, in broad terms, what identity (or identities) the narrators were performing to me in the context of the interviews. I examined each vignette for its rhetorical effect or function within the context of the distillation. I then read those interpretations for recurring themes.

One thing became clear to me in this process: that the earliest event featured in the narrative had an often poetic congruence with the “point” of the story. This observation appeared to hold, whether the event made it to the distillation (because of a touchdown) or was left on the cutting room floor.

This was to some extent true for nine of the twelve narratives. The three remaining narratives had in common that they contained no specific childhood events. These participants tended to answer childhood-related questions in general, evaluative terms. Consider, for example, Gerry Kosberg’s response when I asked him if there were any specific recollections or events that he could think of as he reflected back on his childhood chapter:

I had a very happy childhood, with a pleasant family. Nothing shocking happened during those days, so it all went very smoothly. It was a very ordinary, Reformed family, characterized by openness and patience for each other. I come from a, really a very good family.

The response was thoughtful and evaluative, but it did not contain any specific events. Compare this to Alex Heller's childhood memory of his father, presented in his distillation in the previous chapter:

Once, on the beach, he picked me up, as a very small child, walked into the sea, and pushed me under once, twice in the sea water. I had no idea what was happening to me, he thought "well then he'll harden a bit."

Nine of the twelve narrators produced specific events that occurred within the first chapters of their lives. Could it be that such memories are identity markers? If so, that would suggest that they may be useful for deepening the understanding of the narrated identity.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In the analysis of craftartists' life stories, Mishler (1999) pays close attention to early memories, calling them "identity claims" (p. 22). He cautions against reading too much into these memories. But in Mishler's case, the respondents were asked specifically about early memories of interest in the arts. The apparent assumption was that an interest in a career as a craftartist may very well have started early in life. In my case, however, I asked for childhood memories in general. That made my question more "innocent." It gave the narrator much more free reign than Mishler's question did, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that the response is indeed an identity claim.

Lieblich *et al.* (1998) are more forthcoming in their claim that early memories are a key to the holistic-content approach. Rooting their rationale in psychoanalytic theory, they suggest that "memories are always emotionally significant, even when they do not seem important. Memories are personal creations; they consist of choices,

distortions, and inventions of past events in a manner that befits the individual's current goals, interests, or moods" (p. 79).

In this chapter, I follow Lieblich *et al.*'s (1998) example by defining a memory as "a discrete episode rather than a generalized impression" (p. 80). In other words, specific memories can be associated with a specific time and place. They present a detailed interpretation of the earliest memories, in the context of the life story, of two participants – Sara and Jacob. In both cases, the early memories were clearly and powerfully connected to the rest of the narratives. They conclude that "the spontaneous choice of a first memory to be narrated – and not necessarily the earliest one – can be of great significance" (p. 86).

Very quickly, (Linde, 1993)'s warning comes to mind about the use of popular Freudian psychology as a coherence system that is widely in use today. According to that coherence system, one can "logically" trace one's current state back to key formative childhood experiences. It is important to note that this is not the case: by positioning childhood memories as identity claims, I do not mean to use the Freudian coherence system as a standard for coherence. In fact, as Lieblich *et al.* (1998) suggest, it is quite the opposite. Brockmeier (1997) explains this eloquently:

The practice of autobiography involves, therefore, not so much documenting past events but positing possible pasts and possible beginnings in light of the end. Since the end is but the present of the story at the time of its telling, the whole construction develops along the lines of a "retrospective teleology" (p. 176).



In other words, while popular psychology suggests that we can explain who we are today by looking at our past, inverting it reveals the opposite: that who we were in the past can be explained by who we are today.

Brockmeier and Lieblich *et al.* are not alone in this key assertion. Bruner (2003) claims that the self “relies on selective remembering to adjust the past to the demands of the present and the anticipated future” (p. 213). Riessman (2002a) echoes this by suggesting that “ends beget beginnings” (p. 695).

In her study on the life stories of Japanese Canadian women who had been interned during and after World War II, Sugiman (2004) observed that “memory is shaped by the audience” (p. 364). “Memories, in the sense of a narrative offered to a listener-reader, are constantly made and remade as people attempt to make sense of a past in a changing present” (p. 384).

If these scholars (and others such as Cronon, 1992; McAdams, 2003; and Rosenthal, 1993) are correct, then perhaps childhood memories can legitimately be viewed with interest as potential early identity claims. Add to this mix McAdams’s (2003) suggestion that reconstruction has a distorting effect on memories, especially those from long ago, and even the apparently innocuous childhood memories may in fact lose some of their innocence.

Based on these observations, I consider early memories in the narratives to be deserving of a closer look because they may be identity claims. I argue that such memories, regardless of the supposed intention of the narrator, in effect foreshadow what is to come – even if in the most subtle or poetic ways.

Below, I present my interpretation of three participants' narrated identities, followed by the earliest childhood memory or memories. For the purpose of brevity, I will present only one full distillation; for the other two I will select some of the vignettes for inclusion.

## **PARTICIPANT 1: JIM THURSTON**

### **Distillation**

#### **Jim Thurston: History of the second man**

##### **Hoofdstuk 1: Forming (1917-1942)**

1. My mother often had this notion that “Jim should go into politics when he’s older.” She was a great fan of Colijn’s; I think she probably would have wanted to marry him. She had more or less thought *that one of her sons could achieve that as well*, but that turned out differently.
2. In those days, Colijn was much talked about as prime minister, very popular as you know, among the Reformed population, at least the anti-revolutionary part of it. As a boy, I thought it was quite something to even *see* that man and his posture, on the stage. He appealed to me very much, I must say, and then he came down from the stage, and as he was leaving the room, at the end of the speech, in the middle of the room, [he said] “dear audience, may you receive the Lord’s blessing” – and then he stood still, right next to me!
3. What tipped the scale was... In ’36-’37, when I was in the military in Bergen op Zoom [...], I was visiting an uncle of mine who lived there. He had a son-in-law who was there as well, and he was professor in Leiden, and he said “well if you are unsure Jim, you should study law, because that allows you a lot of flexibility. So far, there has been no overproduction of lawyers, so that offers you the best odds, at least for landing a job.”
4. I had received a small stipend from the VU scholarship foundation, I think 150 guilders per year. And there you had the so-called dorm baptism, you probably heard of that

right? You were awakened in the middle of the night and you were dragged along, while they chanted “Keizers canal, Keizers canal.” Then you ended up in the bath tub (laughs).

5. October 4, 1937, I believe, I joined the second round of pledgship, and there were many Oratory Associations that had apparently not had the success that they thought they (inaudible) [in the first round]. So they thought “well, let’s give this a shot” (laughs), and that’s how I got seven invitations.

6. I had joined Areiopagos and had to make a speech about the question, “should we, as Reformed, participate in dance?” (laughs) I had to defend, of course, *that it was not allowed to participate* and sure enough, I had completed the first round, and my opponent had had his say, and then it was my turn. And to this day I am ashamed of this, I said, “well, that’s it, I give up” (laughs).

7. You were generally treated as a gentleman in the village. We also lived in a mansion, a very large house. I don’t know how my father arranged that financially, but yes, you thought you were a big shot in that village. Moreover you had the church, the Reformed Youth Association that you were secretary of, where you were a big shot. But when I later arrived in Amsterdam, I thought “well that is an entirely different atmosphere.” Perhaps that is why I [was not such a good fit with Areiopagos], and also why I initially did not feel at home in that group.

8. I must say, that OA was rather swaggery in character (laughs), a bit swaggery. Very good relationships I must say, but not all that interested in deep conversations. A bit, a bit superficial shall I say (laughs)... At the time I was able to appreciate it although every once in a while I [would hear], “Thurston tends to stay in the background” (laughs). I had also heard, “he does not know how to participate,” so, it was not all perfect harmony. I remember, there were seven of us who joined the OA as freshmen, and among us we always had good, good friendships, but [I was not elected] president or officer, or anything (laughs).

9. Among the law students, it was like this: There was a kind of culture of doing nothing, “to be up to nothing,” that’s what they called it, being up to nothing. You were quite a big shot if you were up to nothing, a very strange mentality, but that’s why my father said, “for your second year, you’ll live with your uncle such-and-such, in Heemstede. Then you can roll up your sleeves.”

10. I remember, in ’40-’41, we would go for an evening walk together. Well that was a bit conventional really, going for an evening walk (laughs). I had some conventional traits in me in my student days, I must say (laughs). It’s interesting that, through a roundabout way, my father heard that *Jim wasn’t really a true student*.

11. In that dorm where I (inaudible) lived for a while, there was someone who was in the Resistance, and we all knew about that, but we were *never* to ask that man anything. I can remember him quite well, his name was Young, Hal Young. I can remember him quite well, but later I never did hear whether or not he was arrested, or whatever, or if they, I never did run into him again. But everyone knew that he was in the Resistance. There was a general agreement, “you must not ask him anything at all, you may not ask him anything.”

## **Hoofdstuk 2: Independent (1942-1950)**

12. In Indonesia, in Bandung, so I’m talking about the time from ’48 to ’50, as secretary of the court martial there, I uhm... had a conflict with the fiscal, that was the public prosecutor. It was about authority, and that man was a captain and I was second lieutenant. I resisted strongly and I said more than what would be appropriate for a lieutenant to say to a captain, and the result was that the captain complained to the president of the court martial. I was called in and told *that as a lieutenant, I had acted inappropriately to a captain*, and I was given a very, very serious reprimand... so that led to the conflict with the, with that major (laughs), with the president of the court martial.

13. He had the rank of major and was president of the court martial in Bandung, and he was a baron on top of that, and one evening, when he called me to him, he

scolded me harshly, you know, *I was not a good military officer* and *I had, he should have punished me, but he did not want to do that, but I was also totally unfit for [service in] Indonesia*. That, that completely shook me up.

14. (laughs) And so he was transferred and I stay put, so somehow that suggests, uhm, later the chief president, in Batavia, he also said to me, when his successor was appointed, “he *understands* you better” (laughs), you see? (laughs) So this is how he told me, in effect, “it’s really somewhat the major’s fault that the conflict arose,” you know, “he had misunderstood you.”

15. They did ask the question, “then you ended up with the Emmen municipal court, and you applied for a position with mister Schrikke,” Schrikke was secretary-general of Justice, and he was NSB’er [a collaborator with the Germans], “and what did you say there?” (laughs) I remember that I had to declare with my hand on my heart that to Schrikke’s question – “are you in support of the new order” – I had unambiguously said “no, I am against that.” I was able to tell that to the person questioning me, and he believed me, so as for the hard liners... Like the local Reformed preacher, he said, “I think it is so-so, that you went to Schrikke, an NSB’er, and received a *favor*... from the [collaborator]” you know, he thought *that was so-so*.

### **Hoofdstuk 3: Closure (1950-1982)**

16. What I forgot to mention, is that during my military time in Indonesia, I was *fired* from [the Ministry of] Agriculture, and that was unlawful, [I] believe... But it was because of the elimination of the division where I was employed. It was a central control division, which had been eliminated, and that’s why I was fired. That was not a good thing you know, when you’re in Indonesia and you get [fired]. That’s why when I got the offer from [the Ministry of] Public Housing I thought “no, I don’t want to be fired again,” you see? But I tried to find something else along those lines, but that did not work out, they were always better (laughs) [...] You’d get a note from Agriculture, for example, where I had been employed previously, “despite this or that, we do not believe you are

the exact person we are looking for” or something like that, you know, a very polite note (laughs).

#### **Hoofdstuk 4: Aging Pleasantly (1982-current)**

**17.** “Of course not all Dutch were heroes,” he says, and they do not all need to be, but that is what he emphasizes, *that all the Dutch, tried to get through the war as safely as possible, you see?*

**18.** There was the Unikabo, the Catholic Elderly Association, and as I said, I was asked to serve as secretary (inaudible), so that’s how well-known it apparently was, here in Leidschendam, that “if you need a secretary you need to see Thurston.”

**19.** A conflict with the municipality had arisen, about the procurement of a plot of land, and I believed *the municipality had charged 5000 guilders too much*, and so then I was able to show, with the book of law in my hand, *that they had indeed done that.*

**20.** So that will was really invalid, see? I was able to shape it in such a way that I, I asked the other heirs, “do you object to this?” They then told me “no, we are okay with this,” and that is how the inheritance went to the center after all. I thought those were a few good... (laughs) Well, it gives you a certain satisfaction, that even after your active period [of working] you can still make your knowledge useful. By the way, I was also able to [help] my daughter. She had a conflict with her travel [agent] – she had paid too much – and I won that too (laughs). So those are things that stand out for me, but when I turned 75, my wife urged me, as I said before, she really thought, she said, “you’re 75 now, it’s time to quit, because this is getting to be too much.”

**21.** A fit fellow, at least, that’s what they always tell me, “you are, you don’t look like you’re 85.”

So what to make of this distillation? To answer this, I examine each of these vignettes for their “point,” or their rhetorical function. In the very first vignette, Jim refers to his mother’s hopes for him and how “things turned out differently.” The reader

is forewarned that this is not going to be a story of extraordinary achievement. In the second, Jim talks about how thrilling it was to even *see* this influential politician. In doing so, he creates a distance between himself and Colijn. More accurately, he erects a barrier that, like the previous vignette, suggests that he and Colijn are in different leagues altogether. In vignette 3, Jim mentions a far-removed cousin who gives him career advice. In and of itself, this may not be significant, but the fact that this person was a professor at the University of Leiden is. Someone in a prestigious position in society gives Jim career advice that tips the scale and gets him to commit. It echoes the previous two vignettes in terms of the appeal that social standing has.

The next four vignettes deal with the first few months for him at the VU. While the first of these (#4) is entertaining and thereby serves to let the reader know that he enjoyed much of what that life had to offer, in vignette #5, he mentions getting seven invitations. This merits some explanation: Generally, new students receive between one and three invitations from Oratory Associations. Some receive none at all, because either the OAs are all full or the student is wildly unpopular, and others receive more. Jim's seven invitations were exceptional by any standard in this context. It would have been quite possible for Jim to attribute the amount of his invitations at least in part to his own popularity. Instead, he takes no such credit and attributes it to the fact that these OAs were desperate for members. They did not merely lower their standards; they gambled. What I had translated as "giving this a shot" literally translates into "let's give this a throw," a reference to the rolling of the dice, suggesting that this was a random act that Jim could take no credit for whatsoever.

Then, in vignette 6, he describes a painful instance of (perceived) failure – one he regrets to this day: he declined to further participate in the debate (and calls it giving up). This is the first confirmation of the message embedded in the first vignette: that regret will be a salient theme.

The next two vignettes (7 & 8) focus on his struggle in adjusting to that debating club. He attributes the struggle to the fact that he had been a spoiled village kid – an explanation that is consistent with the suggestion present in the narrative, namely that his family was so harmonious that nothing ever happened (and as a result he failed to develop oratory skills necessary to succeed in life). In the second vignette outlining his adjustment struggles, he uses his emerging reputation to describe himself as someone who did not participate, as a background character.

The struggles were not limited to adjusting to Areiopagos, however. Jim also struggled with the academic content. The next vignette highlights the existing culture among law students, which valued being idle over studying hard. His father then intervenes and sends him to his uncle to “roll up his sleeves.” Given the Reformed context within which Jim grew up, the prototypical Protestant work ethic that values industriousness and integrity more than almost anything, being sent to his uncle’s residence to roll up his sleeve could not have felt like a victory. This is the second instance of failure, though clearly less traumatic than his giving up on a debate.

After that one year, he was able to move back to Amsterdam and move into a room of his own in the Helmersstraat where he stayed for another two years. Vignette 10 mentions the evening walks he made with his roommate during that time. The



critical word here, *burgerlijk*, is the one I translated as conventional. This is a dictionary translation that does not completely capture the charge or connotation that the word has: it refers to being boring, average, ordinary, uneventful, middle-class, small-minded, and nondescript. Being called *burgerlijk* is nearly always an insult, particularly if the person being called *burgerlijk* is a college student. After all, college students were (and to some extent, still are) considered the cream of the crop, the ones on whose shoulders the future of the nation rests. So for Jim to take ownership of that term and refer to his own *burgerlijk* characteristics during college is very significant and suggests he does not have a high opinion of himself during that time. This is enhanced by the fact that even his father – the one paying for part of his education – hears that Jim is not a “true” or “real” student. By this time, the reputation that was developing among his peers a few vignettes prior has made it to his father. This creates a sense of finality: Jim blew his chances, his reputation got out, the damage is done, even the father now knows. It is as if the tracks have now been laid down on which the rest of his life are to unfold.

The final vignette from his long first chapter (spanning twenty-five years) is about a fellow student who was active in the Resistance. (By the way, this student is the same Hal Young who is listed as participant in this study.) The point that this vignette appears to make is that there was a distance between himself and those active in the Resistance that could not be bridged – very similar to the distance between himself and prime minister Colijn in the second vignette. The subtle message here is that for acts of courage, we need not look to Jim. Jim is *burgerlijk*.

By this point, the message is quite clear – Jim did not have what it took; he did not deserve to be counted in the same league with Hal Young and Hendrik Colijn. There were missed chances, and then there were more missed chances. These missed chances were largely the basis for Jim’s reputation that eventually reached his father. Of the twenty total vignettes, eleven were dedicated to the first 25 years of his life, or his first life chapter. The next chapter, spanning from 1942 to 1950, only has four vignettes devoted to it.

The first three deal entirely with the conflict that he had with the president of the court martial in Bandung – his boss. The Reformed community is generally very respectful towards authority and sensitive to status, so getting reprimanded by someone superior must have been more painful for Jim than it might have been for someone else. Not only did his boss outrank him, he was a nobleman to boot. Given the loyalty that the Reformed community traditionally has had for the House of Orange, Jim’s boss must at some level have represented more than just an ordinary boss. Perhaps in part this explains the extent to which the reprimand hurt him. Still, the rhetorical power of these two vignettes is rather vague; the reader now knows what happened and has an inclining of the impact it had. The third vignette in the second chapter is about redemption: not only does his boss get transferred, while he gets to stay put, but the chief president attributes the conflict to the boss rather than to Jim. What is unclear from this vignette is the extent to which this outcome served as justice for Jim. He refers to a favorable outcome, in the end, but there is no real sense of victory here. One is left to wonder, was this resolved?

The final vignette in this chapter, and the only one not dealing with this conflict, refers to the questions he was asked when applying for a position after the war. It shows a certain amount of ambivalence about his work in Emmen under the supervision of a collaborator during the war. On the one hand, the fact that he dwells on those who disapproved of that work experience shows that he is at least to some extent uncertain about the moral justification for it. Anyone else might have said that they were cleared easily, and not pay attention to a single dissenter. (Jim was cleared and hired, as we know from the whole narrative.) It should be noted that the person asking the questions was a preacher, which is a highly regarded position in the Reformed community of those days, along with mayor and physician. So this was an authority figure. On the other hand, Jim referred to him as a hard-liner, taking distance from the preacher who is apparently unable to perceive nuance or shades of grey. In doing so, he also makes it clear that he does not agree with the preacher's assessment.

It is interesting to observe that this chapter, which spans the years from 1942 to 1950, also covers the final three years of the Occupation. By all accounts, these were the most dramatic times of the Occupation, so it is intriguing that no vignettes are devoted to the Occupation or the war. Instead, three of the four vignettes deal with the conflict he experienced in Indonesia after the war was over. For one, it goes to show how traumatic that conflict must have been for him, particularly given the repetition. But the absence of any war-related vignettes may also have other reasons. First, this chapter would have housed the story of his arrest by the Germans in 1944 – had he chosen to mention it (as discussed in Chapter II). I suggested earlier that this omission made sense because it

would likely have weakened the impression that his life was worthy only of regret. There may also be other reasons, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter V. Regardless, the picture that emerges from these four vignettes is one of uncertainty when it comes to dealing with conflict, especially where conflict and authority coincide. In the previous chapter, it seemed as though Jim was able to function to some extent as a background character. Conflicts such as the ones described in his second chapter pull him out of the anonymity that had given him some shelter, and the result was not positive.

The following chapter is the longest, lasting from 1950 to 1982. Yet, it only has one vignette devoted to it, and it refers to Jim's failure to land better jobs. The off-hand phrase "they were always better" speaks volumes in this context. It serves as evidence that Jim is indeed *burgerlijk*, that he is average at best. The vignette also has a strong flavor of regret: He had an offer, but turned it down. (In the narrative, he explains that he turned it down because he was not sure if the Department of Housing would be around, and he did not want to be laid off again.) But with the power of hindsight, what may have seemed like a wise move at the time was, similar to the instance of the debate, a missed opportunity. Because of this one mistake, he was effectively "sentenced" to a lifelong career with the same employer, in spite of his efforts to find something else. If there was any doubt about the first chapter setting the reader up for a story of failed expectations, surely, that doubt now is removed.

By this time, the distillation is taking on a heavy, depressing, if not suffocating feel. As I type these words, I feel my breathing becoming more shallow, as though I

cannot take full, deep breaths. I should also comment on the title of this chapter, closure. Whereas the previous two chapter titles were rather predictable, this one stands out like a sore thumb. Other participants have similar chapter titles for their retirement years, but not one applied it to their working lives. It adds to the impression that the course of the rest of his life had been determined before he even started the job. It emphasizes that the clock cannot be turned back, which in turn enhances the sense of finality, of missed opportunities, of regret.

The final chapter contains four vignettes. The first vignette is very important and deserves elaboration. It was taken from our conversation about a book about the war. This conversation actually happened in the first few minutes of the interview, but because it is about a book released after 1982, I put it in this final life chapter.

There is a very famous historian, Dr. Lou de Jong, who is the by far the most influential scholar on historical matters involving World War II. A Dutch Jew, he fled to England during the war and joined the Resistance by transmitting messages from England by radio. He also collected an enormous amount of materials which helped lead to his subsequent success as historian. No one in de Jong's family survived the war – they stayed in Holland and chose not to flee. Fiercely loyal to the House of Orange, he wrote the definitive book series on World War II in the Netherlands. He also founded an institution called the Royal Institute for War Documentation. This is being highlighted only to convey the influence that de Jong has had on the way the Dutch have written their collective war history. De Jong, and in his wake, the majority of the population, spoke in terms of right (“goed”) and wrong (“fout”). Those adjectives were applied to

people to describe their wartime attitudes. Those who were *fout* were put on trial, fired, or excluded from positions of privilege in society after the war – including the ability to go to college. Those who were *goed* served on so-called “purification committees,” were awarded medals, promotions, and had many favors coming their way. The point here is that the main way to describe people’s attitudes during the war was, and still is, an either-or, *goed* or *fout*. The book that Jim refers to is called *Een Grijs Verleden*, which is a play on words. Effectively, it means “a distant past,” but literally it translates into “a gray past,” which, of course, is a subtle challenge of the oversimplified black-or-white kind of thinking that long dominated the discourse. The fact that Jim talks about the book in this vignette can be seen as a vindication for his own attitude and strategies. It is a justification for his lack of heroism, and by claiming that only very few were heroes (just as very few were collaborators), he can find comfort in knowing that he was not alone in just trying to get through alive. Interestingly, he refers to *all* Dutch when he might have intended to refer to the majority. This justification, in turn, suggests that there still is a trace of doubt in Jim’s mind about the way in which he handled himself during the war. Alternatively, it suggests that there is a powerful master narrative at play, a metaphorical purification committee, that holds him accountable and triggers a justification for his behavior even when I did not ask him about it. Jim was not a hero; he was not extraordinary; he was *burgerlijk*. What serves, on the surface, to justify his position during the Occupation – the fact that the majority of people were like him – ironically also by definition describes him as *burgerlijk*. It is the heavy price he pays for alleviating his conscience.

The second vignette harkens back to an earlier theme, Jim's reputation. In this vignette, the earlier reputation of someone who stayed in the background has morphed into someone who could serve as secretary – the “second man.” The reputation followed him from Amsterdam to Leidschendam, his current place of residence, where the whole town knows – even the Catholics. While Jim's willingness to serve on a Catholic board could in other narratives be taken as evidence of open-mindedness and transcending the beaten path that the Reformed tended to walk, the complete absence of religion from both the vignettes and the whole narrative makes this an unlikely interpretation. The relevance appears to stem from an implicit argument that says something like, “if even the Catholics know to come to me, then my reputation must really be set in stone,” and, by extension, “By the time I had retired, I had not been able to transcend or overcome the reputation I gained while in college.” The sense of finality that the reader had earlier, when his reputation had somehow made its way to Jim's father, is again justified.

Given this context, the third and fourth vignettes are surprising as they appear to convey a sense of ambivalence. They carry an entirely different message than most of the other vignettes – one of victory. In these two vignettes, Jim describes three legal conflicts in which he successfully intervened on behalf of his clients. If chapter two portrayed Jim as uncertain about handling conflict, these late victories suggest that this may no longer be an issue. These seemingly innocuous victories provide a measure of light at the end of the long, dark tunnel and provide hope that Jim might see his life in a slightly different light eventually. I use the term innocuous only because of the limited pleasure he derives from his victories: “Well, it gives you a certain satisfaction...” And,

“So those are things that stand out for me, but...” The fact that Jim followed up these two positive statements with “but,” followed by a reference to his wife urging him to quit, doesn’t exactly raise expectations here. In spite of the positive nature of these vignettes, the fact that they are the first ones that are truly positively charged yet so late in life feels as though Jim is saying “it’s nice, but it’s too little, too late.”

Finally, the last vignette, as brief as it is, refers to his long life and good health. It is short and appears to be insufficiently connected with the rest of the vignettes. In the narrative, he mentions a sense of pride that he’s still around while so many of his peers have passed away. Within that context, and given the rest of the narrative, it would seem to suggest that living longer than most is the one thing Jim has achieved that conjures up a sense of pride.

All in all, I would argue that the distillation is one of regret – regret at not having performed as well or achieved as much as he would have liked to. The gestalt that emerges is one of mediocrity: he was never an officer in college, or beyond – with the notable exception of secretary (hence, the title “second man”); he was never an elected politician, in spite of the dreams that he and/or his mother had with regard to politics; and eventually, he was stuck in a career path, choosing safety (turning down the Public Housing offer) but accepting that there were always better candidates.

This story was a painful one to hear. During the interview, I felt a strong tendency to counsel him. I wanted to point out that the legal victory he achieved for the nursing home was evidence to the contrary. Of course, any attempt to counsel him would have been inappropriate, but the desire to do so spoke volumes about my empathy



for him. In him, I saw a possibility of myself fifty years down the road, and I knew that this cannot become my story.

### **Early Memories**

Jim's narrative contains two specific childhood memories. (Those would be events that have a specific time and place associated with them. General overviews or evaluative statements were not considered childhood memories.) A very powerful one is already included in the distillation: it is the second vignette, where he describes being in awe of Colijn's presence. Hopefully, it will already have become clear how rich that vignette was and the extent to which it foreshadowed what was yet to come.

The other childhood memory, in contrast, did not make it into the distillation because there was no touchdown associated with it. However, it is the first memory presented in the narrative, which, according to Lieblich *et al.* (1998), makes this memory all the more interesting. Early in the interview, I asked Jim if he had favorite siblings as a child. He talked a little bit about some of his brothers, then turned off his hearing aid, talked about that a little bit, and then spontaneously picked up the thread:

Uhm... Special stories... We had rats in the yard, and one time I caught a rat... and it bit me in the hand (laughs)... and my younger brothers, this might be of interest, at night, at bedtime, I would tell my younger brothers tall tales about the seven-headed dragon.

I included the second part of this section to show that Jim does not appear to give much weight to the story of the rat. It is a very brief event and he immediately moves on to another topic. Yet, I would argue that it is remarkably consistent with the distillation.

As said earlier, I believe that Jim's narrative is one of lost opportunities, which leads to a sense of regret. In this early memory, Jim is obviously curious and active, and he catches a rat. That was something that probably not a lot of children would dare to do. Jim did; he took a risk and acted spontaneously. With as the result that it came back to bite him.

The event in the distillation that clearly mirrors the rat story is the conflict he had in Indonesia: He "resisted strongly," against an authority figure, and it, too, came back to bite him. The eventual resolution through the transfer of that superior does little to change the direct outcome of taking the risk: pain.

The second event that also mirrors the rat story is the story that was edited out of the narrative altogether: the story of his arrest. He had wanted to commit an act of Resistance and wrote a letter urging the Dutch population not to comply with the German demand to surrender their rubber tires. He took a risk. The letter was traced back to him and he was arrested and jailed for about three weeks. It came back to bite him.

Jim seemed to have learned that taking risk will hurt him. For that reason, he did not accept the job offer from the Ministry of Housing. What makes this story so sad and gives it this heaviness, is that this was no solution either. In this case, life came back to bite him because he did *not* take the risk. Unwittingly it seems, Jim acted out the very reputation he gained in college, the very reputation he appears to resent: "Thurston tends to stay in the background," "he does not know how to participate." Could this be what the somewhat odd chapter title, "closure," refers to?

## **PARTICIPANT 2: NANCY VAN ECK**

Nancy is the only female participant. (There was one other, but due to a malfunction in the recording equipment, that entire interview was lost.) She is the only one who suggested that we address each other by our first names and with the informal “you,” which instantly created a lot of warmth. Nancy’s great public accomplishment is that she is the first woman to have been ordained as a preacher in the Netherlands.

A brief overview of the distillation might be as follows. She and her sister grew up in an ecumenical household. Her father did not read *The Standard*, as every good Reformed was supposed to, and he sang in a Protestant choir. Thus, her family was more liberal in religious orientation than many of the other participants’. She grew up, in her own terms, a boring child. She had pleurisy at age five, causing her to be bedridden for a long time. She had straight hair, was shy, had no friends, and was teased and bullied. It was not until she came to college and made friends that she started to blossom.

Similar to Jim Thurston, her narrative contains two key early memories. One of them shows up in the distillation as follows:

when you were in church, and there were always men at the pulpit, you wondered “uh, why, why can I not speak of the gospel?”

This event leads to an early commitment to study theology, in spite of a high school teachers’ advice to go into the sciences. Her father is supportive of the decision.

Her next chapter, whose beginning coincides with the Occupation, is called “pressure and Liberation.” In college, she develops jaundice. When the VU shut down

for the remainder of the war, Nancy did not have to go into hiding because women were not in danger of deportation to Germany. Instead, Nancy spent more than a year caring for her mother, who died of cancer in 1944. At the same time, her father was active in Resistance activities.

I still remember that uhm, 6<sup>th</sup> of June, when my mother was in her final phase, that I had to cycle to one of those aldermen to tell him *that should he have to flee, that he would be welcome at such and such location*, and that was of course a [trap] He would be caught [...] a location he thought to be safe but would not have been [...] It was a collaborating alderman, and it was D-day, the first invasion by the British that led to the Liberation of the southern parts of the Netherlands, and they thought of course *that they would continue advancing*, so those collaborators were very scared.

It may seem that Nancy was active in the Resistance, but this reference above is the only one in the narrative that suggests that kind of activity. While her father was indeed active, Nancy was preoccupied with the care for her mother. I asked her what a typical day looked like for her after May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1943, when the VU closed its doors:

N: Uhm, during the day, I took care of my mother and did household chores, preparing food and doing laundry by hand.

R: Was it safe for you to go out into the street?

N: Yes, except I did not have much opportunity to go out except if I had to get groceries. Because you know, you don't let your mother behind by herself.

After her mother's funeral, her father moved the family up north for recovery and a break from the Resistance. It was here, in this strange town, that she experienced Liberation:

That was so much fun... All of a sudden all those guys who had been in hiding came to church. They were all strangers to us of course, but you could just see those girls, who recognized their friends, “so *that’s* where you’ve been.”

After the war, she quickly finished her studies, up to and including her Candidate’s degree. She was not allowed to finish completely because she was barred from doing a practicum as a preacher. She struggled to find employment, but refused to give up hopes of working as a spiritual caretaker. At one point, she considered getting a diploma as a typist, to at least be able to generate income. But then she did something rather unconventional:

There was a great shortage of preachers, but those were men. So at one point I placed an advertisement, that some people strongly resented me for: “Theological Candidate in search of employment.” (laughs) I thought, “it really is baffling that there is such a shortage of people, and that as a woman, you are not allowed to do this work.” I got three responses, so that was really quite enjoyable. A preacher’s wife wrote “you can come over and do a lecture with us,” “well,” I thought, “very nice, something like that makes a real difference,” (laughs) but I also had offers to be an evangelist in Zaandam and to be a preacher’s assistant in Hengelo, in [the province of] Overijssel. And since I thought, I have always had the feeling, “you must keep clear the path that leads to being a preacher, you cannot put that aside, *that’s* where you have to go, it has to happen some time,” that’s how I chose for Hengelo.

From 1947 to 1965, nearly twenty years, Nancy struggled to get the recognition that she wanted. At times, that was frustrating. She never achieved equity, and always had “assistant” in her job title.

All the while I was an assistant, that was rather frustrating. Every once in a while you had to vent your frustration about that, but once you did, you could cheerfully continue

(laughs), because, you had the strong sense of course that “you must not become an embittered person, because then you will be completely unfit for your job.”

And finally, in 1965, the church decides to give her the recognition that she deserves and admits her to take the final exams.

When I was called to be a minister, I still had to take my ecclesiastical exams, because women had not been allowed to take them. And for that particular synod, I had already taught classes in Kampen. So now, those people who had taken my classes had to grade me. That was just *ridiculous*, and it embarrassed them some, of course, but they couldn't help it either and I said “well guys, we have to play the game.”

Naturally, she passed and was ordained. This led to a firestorm in the media.

There was something about it, like, “it's about time.” I did not enjoy it all that much, personally, well I did of course, but the main thing was “let it be made very clear that this milestone has been reached.” Of course I got a lot of questions, like “As a woman, how do you feel about this?”

With the final hurdle cleared, she could finally be on the lookout for a congregation.

In 1974, nearly thirty years after finishing her Candidate's degree, she found one in Amstelveen:

That came to be because I was at a meeting and I knew that a former envoy of mine in Amstelveen... (laughs) had left. And I was sitting next to one of his colleagues, and said, “do you already have someone else?” *No they did not they were busy working on it*, and he said, “would that be something you're interested in?” “Well, naturally I would have to think about that,” but of course I did ask on purpose.

The move to this congregation starts a chapter called “finally at home in what you had been searching for.” Nancy describes it as a wonderful, rewarding time:

all of it, really, was quite special shall I say... it was like, let's say, "home at last"

But it also took a toll on her. She never married, and because of that had to manage both her social life and the job. The fact that the congregation was one of the biggest around did not help. She was also invited to complete a doctorate, but declined because of the sacrifice it would take in terms of her social life. Seven years later, in 1981, she transitioned to a position as spiritual caretaker in a mental hospital:

I had a wonderful time, but around 1980, 1981, I started thinking "well, I am 59 now. Can I keep this up, such a busy job with such an emphasis on the evenings?" Because as a preacher, you're always busy in the evenings and I don't sleep all that well, so that was not all that good for (laughs) me, "I won't be able to keep this up." So at one point, I saw an advertisement from the Foundation Mental Care in De Bilt/Bilthoven, and they were looking for someone to administer spiritual care for their small hospital Berg en Bosch as well as several psychogeriatric hospitals. I thought "I should try to become (inaudible) because then you have, it's still a busy job, but you'll have the evenings to yourself" because that's when the people sleep of course

This job had fewer pressures and regular hours. She stayed there until her retirement in 1986. Her final chapter, "without vocation," contains no vignettes but is characterized by a sense of satisfaction. She keeps in regular contact with her friends, she travels, and reads as she pleases. Nancy looks back on her life with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, giving it the title "A life to be grateful for."

Several observations leapt out of the transcript and the distillation. First, more than perhaps any other distillation, Nancy's is so clearly human. It is replete with references to feelings of fear, of joy, of doubt, and sadness. It is a much more intimate conversation

than most of the others, and it is impossible not to relate to her story for that reason.

Nancy's story is of a struggle for equal rights between men and women, a struggle where the man was both the oppressor and the ally. In that sense, the title of her third chapter (*Pressure and Liberation*), the one relating to the war, might also apply to her life: ever since her decision to study theology, she was limited in her professional choices because of an oppressive system. Much later, fortunately, Liberation came in the form of her confirmation as active preacher (and all the accompanying media hoopla). In that sense, the Occupation of the Netherlands for five years was symbolic for her own life course – except that the battles took longer and were more subtle. But the point I am trying to make here is that the way her struggle is narrated is so human, so devoid of ideological rhetoric that it becomes impossible not to sympathize with her and root for her in the process. I suspect that this is one of the ways in which Nancy performed her gender in the narration of her story. Her request for us to address each other by our first names certainly supports this interpretation, but I hesitate to make more sweeping claims because Nancy is the only female participant.

In terms of themes, one that becomes clear is that of the tension between the man as oppressor and the man as ally. The patriarchal system conspired to keep her down, but it was her father who supported her fully throughout her life (in spite of a brief time of doubt in 1947). It would appear that the values that her parents embodied (at least, in the distillation) – inclusion, compassion, love, humility, and of course hard work – were Nancy's compass in her adult life. Significantly, though, these values also translated into the manner in which she fought her battle. In her distillation, Nancy displayed



compassion for those who stood in her way (for example, she said that her examiners couldn't help the situation either) and expressed tremendous respect for those who helped her. By doing so, she never showed anger or bitterness, even though she had every reason to do so. But then, she might have violated the very values she held dear. In her own words, that would have made her unfit for the job. By being patient, loving, compassionate, and by working hard, she eventually achieved a milestone that was significant not just in her own personal life but for Dutch society as a whole.

The second major theme is that of Nancy the outsider. It starts early on in the distillation, with the question why she could not talk about the gospel. This inability – or lack of permission – to participate continued in some form until 1974, when she was 52 years old. All throughout her pre-college life, she had had very few friends and she refers to herself as boring. It was not until she went to the VU and developed a circle of friends of her own that she started participating more fully in what life had to offer.

Even in the delirious joy that came with the Liberation, her description of that experience is telling: she does not know any of those students up north, who finally saw each other for the first time in two years, but she enjoyed the spectacle. The joy was not so much hers as it was someone else's. In many ways, Nancy's story is of the outsider looking in. Through patience, perseverance, forgiveness, and after enduring marginal participation for the majority of her working life, she finally was rewarded with full permission in 1974.

### Early Memories

One of the early memories has already been incorporated into the distillation: seeing men preach and wondering why she can't do that. But there is another memory that shows up in the narrative that is probably earlier (at age five). As with Jim Thurston's rat story, this one too did not make it to the distillation due to the absence of a touchdown. Moreover, just as in Jim's case, this memory was the first to be featured in the narrative. I asked her what the main recollections were from her first life chapter, which concluded at the end of elementary school:

Something major was that I developed a serious case of pleurisy at the age of five. So as an active child I was bedridden. At the same time, we were moving, which had been arranged before I got sick. And something that I still remember very clearly is that when we were living in this new house, I only knew part of the house. I also did not get to know the kids from that area that my sister played with. My sister was two years younger and got to play with them, so yes, I was completely outside all of that.

This early childhood memory is simply striking in terms of its congruence with the rest of the story. The first sentence reveals that Nancy was introduced early to illness. Later on, during the Occupation, she first contracted jaundice and later scarlet fever. And of course, during that time she took care of her mother who was dying of cancer.

The second sentence refers to her being bedridden as an active child. This experience must have felt terribly confining and torturous, especially to a child. Could this be similar to what she experienced as an adult? After all, she was "bedridden" for the majority of her professional life, not allowed to conduct services and held back by

the perennial “assistant” as part of her job title. Until finally, in 1974, when she was finally able to “play” and release all her energy.

The next part of the memory, about only knowing part of the house, is also revealing. It must be strange to know only part of the home you inhabit. This may be how she felt in those thirty or so years between getting her Candidate’s degree and finally becoming a fully fledged ordained preacher. It is consistent with the title of that chapter in life: *Finally at home in what you had been looking for*. Just like she was able to explore the unknown parts of her home when she got better, she was able to explore these new parts of her professional home when society stopped holding her down.

The last comment about being outside it all fits right in with this interpretation. It is echoed in the narrative when she describes the joy she felt when she witnessed the students meet each other again after the Liberation. The acknowledgement that they were strangers drives home the point that she felt outside of it all. In this instance, being an outsider did not appear to limit her joy, but being the outsider in her subsequent profession of course did.

The congruence between this childhood memory and a major thrust in Nancy’s story is so clear that I wonder if I am missing anything. But if not, it certainly would appear to validate Lieblich *et al.*’s (1998) assertion that the first memory narrated in a life story is of special significance that is worthy of further exploration.

### **PARTICIPANT 3: LEE ZUNKER**

Like Jim Thurston’s, Lee Zunker’s narrative is one of regret. It is held together by a consistent (perceived) failure to meet expectations. The word that kept jumping to my

mind was headwind. The picture that emerged was of a well-willing, capable individual who has been bogged down his whole life by lack of opportunity, gatekeepers, or other kinds of bad luck. The main difference between Jim's story and Lee's is that Jim attributed the lack of results to his own lack of talent. Lee's story, in contrast, paints life as simply unfair.

Born and raised in Amsterdam, Lee grew up in a Reformed household. His whole life he would remain somehow affiliated with institutions from the Reformed pillar – churches, volunteering for the Reformed high school, etc. His father was a grocer. The following vignette came from his first chapter

When I finished elementary school, my father said “you have to continue to study,” because he believed that knowledge is power. It was a bit overstated really, I believe, in hindsight, but he said, “just go and study and you'll succeed in life,” as a matter of speech.

This intriguing vignette sets the reader up for disappointment. It suggests that Lee studied a lot and was disappointed. In fact, this is what happened: Lee got his Ph.D., the highest level of education available, but never got the recognition and status that he desired.

Lee graduated from high school (gymnasium beta, which had emphasis on the sciences) in 1939. This is how he describes how he experienced those days:

After I graduated high school in '39, I spent a year in the military service. I had tried to find a job, because my father said “there is no way you're going to college, I cannot afford it,” at least, that's what he said (laughs). I applied like crazy, I think I applied for ten jobs a day, but I was unsuccessful because it was still in the tail end of the depression, and since I had already had my physical for the

military service, I said “well, let me take care of that military service first, and I’ll worry about the rest later.”

It is clear that his first choice would have been to go to college, but his father prevented it. His second choice would have been to get a job, but the economy prevented it. Given the ten applications per day, it was clearly not for a lack of trying. With the mandatory draft, he puts a positive spin on the only option that appears open to him and says that he might as well do that first to get it out of the way.

It is noteworthy that Lee was active in the military during the invasion on May 10th, 1940. Yet, this does not become obvious in the distillation. In the entire narrative, Lee does not appear to want to talk about that much:

August 19<sup>th</sup> was the date of general mobilization, and I went into active duty in October. Eventually I became a corporal (laughs), so I was not on track to become an officer. I was at war, between quotation marks, in the little town of Born, in Limburg. That’s where I experienced the 10th [of May]. Well, that’s an entire story in and of itself, I won’t elaborate on that but of course I did describe it.

Lee knew the focus of my study: wartime experiences. So why would he not talk about them? Perhaps because of trauma. But then, why would he allude to those experiences only to tell me he won’t talk about them? He mentioned that he “described” those experiences. In this comment, he referred to his memoirs, which he had written after his retirement. I can understand why he would not want to share his memoirs with anyone except his family; after all, they may contain deeply personal content. But this does not explain why he has to refer to those memoirs, let alone why he had to have the book on the coffee table! Why would you bring out the book and not offer to share at least some of the contents? And then refer to the contents of the book in the interview?

I found – and find – this rather puzzling, and it certainly contributed to the sense of distance that I felt during and after the interview.

There are two messages embedded in this last quote: first, that he is disappointed or ashamed that he did not have the opportunity to become an officer; and second, that he might officially have been at war but in that in practice it hardly meant anything at all (the major battles were not fought where he was stationed in Limburg).

After being released from the military, Lee managed to convince his father to let him go to college:

In June 1940, there still were no prospects for employment, so I insisted to my father *that I wanted to go to college*. I visited with professor Coops at the VU, because I really wanted to study chemistry. That was my hobby, I had even built a laboratory at home where I had done all sorts of experiments. But that professor said “your science grades are not high enough to warrant a recommendation for you to study chemistry,” so then I registered for law instead.

Whereas earlier, his father had been gatekeeper, this time it was Professor Coops who kept him from reaching his goal of becoming a chemist. Lee’s highlighting of his own chemistry lab suggests that his interest in chemistry was legitimate and that his disappointment was significant. But again, it was not because of lack of trying.

Similar to the decision to enter the army, he takes a practical approach and studies law. He joins the VU-Corps and ends up a member of Agora, one of the Oratory Associations.

The funny thing is, I became president of my Oratory Association, Agora, after only one year. I don’t really remember why; apparently there was no better alternative. I was somehow chosen, even though I told them “but I just

joined, I don't know enough about it." But I did it anyway and that was a good learning experience, because there is a lot you have to swallow as president (laughs). After six months you would immediately receive a vote of no-confidence, which was customary, so of course you say "well, then I will step down," and they say, "no you cannot step down just yet, you need to wait for the new set of officers," which of course happened the following year you see (laughs), it was just a game.

This vignette runs counter to the headwind theme. It was – and still is – highly unusual for anyone to be elected president of an Oratory Association prior to the third year in college. Interestingly, Lee attributes this to the absence of better alternatives rather than to his own qualities. He does not even mention the fact that he (obviously) had decided to run for that office, which is of course a testament to his level of ambition. His choice of the word "funny" to describe this event calls to mind the extent to which he thinks this was a joke, or at least an outlier in a set of life experiences that generally are not characterized by success as he saw it.

The Occupation is not at all featured prominently in Lee's distillation (more on that in the next chapter). He does comment on his choice not to enter the Resistance:

I really did not participate in Resistance activities, my (inaudible) "just be sure to stay away, and don't get caught"... I am not the kind who will say, "I am going to join the underground Resistance," I also don't think that's my nature... It's not in my nature to go at things so actively... Inert and passive, I would say.

Inert and passive are hardly favorable terms, but these are the ones Lee uses to describe himself. But rather than attributing it to a choice or a line of reasoning, he attributes this to his nature – something outside of his control that he cannot be held accountable for.

While in hiding, Lee takes the initiative to learn bookkeeping:

I thought “when I graduate down the road,” because that was the problem, “what am I going to do? Will I become a mayor? Will I be in a city government, or what will I do?” You have no idea, so I thought “as attorney I have to know about bookkeeping. I know nothing of bookkeeping, I never went to vocational school,” so I taught myself bookkeeping... for months, along with my regular college education, bookkeeping, and that’s not easy, but anyway, after the war, in ’46, I got my certificate in bookkeeping, and well I uhm, I passed, on the first try.

This vignette is also revealing. First of all, it shows that he did not have a clear idea of his career goals, except that he wanted to get ahead (in the Netherlands, mayors are appointed, not elected, so setting that as a possible goal is particularly interesting).

Second, it shows his level of initiative; he decided to learn bookkeeping on his own.

Third, it is an opportunity to highlight the victory. He tells me that bookkeeping is not easy and that he passed on his first try. It is as if he is telling me, “look, I played my part, I showed initiative, and I worked hard,” with an important part unsaid: “so I deserved whatever it is I didn’t get.”

After graduation, he served as a secretary on a purification committee and then landed a job with an insurance company in Amsterdam. He turned down an offer to go to The Hague to work for the Ministry of Finance.

I turned it down because there were no trains between The Hague and Amsterdam, so I would have had to find a place to live in The Hague. I was young and inexperienced, because I had been in hiding at home, and so of course I have no, no foundation. So I turned it down, which I regret in hindsight because I always enjoyed tax law.



In this case, the theme of regret surfaces explicitly. He simply did not think that he had what it would have taken to succeed. Interestingly, he served as his own gatekeeper in this instance. Lee decided to stay in Amsterdam and join a life insurance company as a chief attorney. This is how he described the first twelve years of his career:

I think I enjoyed my position as chief lawyer the most...  
that's where you were comfortable, you enjoyed it and  
uhm you thought "well, this is it."

Again, the reader is forewarned that things go downhill from there. In 1958, Lee got his Ph.D. This is how his employer responded:

After the [dissertation] defense, you could say in '58,  
(inaudible) that's when they apparently said, "we'll just  
make you a manager."

The way Lee represents this in his narrative makes the promotion feel like a consolation prize. From then on, it's downhill in his career, even though he tries to put a positive spin wherever he can:

That period of time, when I was deputy director, with four  
departments of thirty people each, for a total of about 120  
people reporting to me, that was a pleasant period even  
though it was difficult too. I mean, you have to appraise  
people's performance at the end of the year, which was  
done by the department heads, and when people  
complained about that they would come and cry to me. I  
was visited by ladies, all teared up, "I got a bad appraisal,  
but I try so hard," (laughs) all that stuff happens.

This vignette is also revealing: his emphasis on title and how many people reported to him shows that this is what he valued; for Lee, success was measured in how many direct reports. His description of teared-up ladies coming to him to complain suggests that he was a benevolent ruler whose decisions mattered. The message here was, I made

decisions that mattered to many people, and this was pleasant. The pleasantness appears to have had little to do with the nature of the work.

But then, due to mergers and acquisitions, his job changed and he was promoted from line manager to head of the Training and Development department. But:

They never told me it was a promotion. They tell you “go ahead and tackle that.” In that integration, and merging of departments, we had two deputy directors. One of them, the other, continued; at least, they chose him and I was to be given something else. So then you can say “I’m going to the union or to an attorney,” but that’s not going to get you anywhere.

The gatekeeper is back, this time in the form of his employer. The other deputy director was chosen over him. He indicates his powerlessness over the situation and sees no choice but to make the best of it (just like his choice to go into the military or to study law instead of chemistry). But making the best of it was difficult:

In the company, they would often push people my way who were competent in their fields, but could not work well with others. They would be told, “why don’t you take some training?” So I felt like I was some sort of trash can for the company: “Good luck working with a lot of difficult people.” That generated a lot of stress for me so it really was not a very good period of time. At the end of the day, I had accepted the position and thought “I am going to build something, make something new.” I wrote a lot of reports to the administration, “let’s do this” and “let’s do that.” I saw that other insurance companies had a training center outside the city, where they would receive people all the time, and I said “I would like that too, that should not be a problem, we have 4,000 employees it should not be a problem”... nothing.

By this time, it is clear that Lee is feeling cheated. This pattern of victimization is consistent throughout the interview. Naturally, Lee tried to find employment elsewhere.

I started applying with other companies very early on, but I never succeeded, that was also very, very annoying. I interviewed with one company, including its senior administrators, and had interesting conversations. They said “we can have a second director, beside the current director.” But when push came to shove, they said “we have to cancel those plans.” “Why?” They said “we have decided not to appoint a second director.” They had called the board of trustees, called or written them (?) (inaudible) I had also talked to the chair of the board of trustees “mister (inaudible), this won’t do,” “yes, yes yes,” but anyway, it all amounted to nothing.

In this case, it’s not just a matter of Lee not measuring up, the way Jim Thurston had describe his own case. Instead, Lee was cheated out of an opportunity that they had more or less committed to.

And in the final phase of his career, his employer added insult to injury by not allowing Lee to take early retirement.

I remember, I really wanted to exit early, you could petition the administration for permission, “may I retire early,” but they did not approve.

This brief vignette powerfully complements the previous one: Lee was not allowed admission elsewhere, yet he also was not allowed to leave his current situation. The feeling that this evokes is one of imprisonment and of flagrant unfairness.

In the final chapter, the vignettes that surface deal with traveling and with writing his memoirs. They suggest a rather uneventful chapter, which shouldn’t be surprising, perhaps, given that the suffering, the struggle had ended by that time.

Clearly, Lee is unhappy with the difference between what was and what could have been, and he appears to be struggling to make sense of it (which is also reflected in the rather harmless title for the life story: *Memories and Notes*). As opposed to Jim, who

attributes this to the lack of any special qualities (a particularly harsh and heart-wrenching attribution), Lee is not quite sure what to make of it. Jim seemed to tell me that he was a failure in life because he did not have what it took to succeed. Lee seemed to tell me that he was a failure because he had never been given a fair chance.

### **Early Memories**

Given that the main thrust of Lee's story was disappointment and unfairness, his early memory speaks volumes. In this memory, which made it to the distillation, he describes a visit at Miss Haspers' house. Miss Haspers was Lee's high school German teacher.

I went to her home one evening, and that was pretty fascinating: you were sitting there with your friends, and maybe you got some lemonade and a cup of tea. She had a little jar with pretzels that she put on the table. There were maybe three, four students, and I took one pretzel, another took one, but my friend, he took several hands *full*. I thought, "gosh, is *that* how it works."

This is the only specific memory from Lee's first life chapter that clearly can be placed within a specific context of space and time. It was in the context of a response to my question about the most important characters in his first life chapter, which ran up to and including high school graduation. He had said that his teachers at the gymnasium had impressed him. He first mentioned his English teacher, who ran a youth shelter which Lee said he never visited, and then he mentioned Miss Haspers. In turn, that triggered the memory associated with the pretzels. He then went on to list three more teachers and then the principals, whom he looked up to.

As in Nancy's interview, the consonance between this youth memory and the main thrust of the narrative is striking. In and of itself, this memory may not have meant much. In another narrative, the same vignette could have served to let the reader know that the narrator was made aware that sometimes you have to be bold or break the rules to get ahead. But what is clear in this instance is that Lee simply realized that not everyone is treated the same. Put differently, not everyone plays by the same rules.

Obedience and playing by the rules, Calvinist mandates in and of themselves, certainly appear to be a thread in Lee's narrative. In this childhood instance, he played by his rules and ended up with one pretzel. His friend ended up with a whole handful. Later in life, he played by the rules by applying for jobs after graduating high school, and by applying to the chemistry program at the VU. In both cases, the attempts were unsuccessful. Later still, he played by the rules and got a Doctorate. He ended up with a promotion that did not feel like one – one lousy pretzel. Someone else (who remained anonymous in the narrative) got the handful of pretzels and got the real promotion. Lee continued to play by the rules by applying for other jobs, requesting funding for a central training facility, and requesting permission to retire early. Every time, Lee was frustrated in his attempts to make something happen. Obviously, life is unfair. Some people simply get the pretzels, others don't.

It would appear that in Lee's case, just like Jim's and Nancy's narratives, the earliest memory is meaningfully indicative of what is to come in the remainder of the narrative. Before any tentative conclusion can be drawn from these data, it may be wise to examine the other narratives for evidence of such congruency.

## **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

For the purpose of this chapter, I selected the narratives from Jim Thurston, Nancy van Eck, and Lee Zunker to highlight the connection between the early memory (memories) and the thrust of the story. I could have easily picked any of the others. For each of them, I briefly present these “thrusts” and then I present the early memory or memories.

### **Alex Heller**

I presented Alex Heller’s distillation in the previous chapter. One childhood memory is featured in the distillation: the time when his father dunked him in the North Sea in order to toughen him up. As became clear from the ensuing interpretation of the distillation, reconciliation with his father was a major theme in the narrative. Alex had rejected traditional (Reformed) religion, apparently early on, and eventually he rejected the traditional notion of God altogether. Over the course of his life, he shifted to a different world view; one in which suffering is explained as a learning experience, in which life is about learning, in which reincarnation is part of the cycle of life, and in which each return to life is characterized by additional challenges.

His father was not the only challenge for him, however. Alex also struggled with notions of masculinity and femininity. He described himself as a feminine boy who refused to fight (and therefore lost his father’s confidence). He was afraid, while his father showed no fear. His mother is notably absent from his narrative; apparently her only concern was that he live a Christian life – which he did not do. His first marriage was a disaster and led to divorce; the only time his first wife was featured in the

narrative was when she asked for a divorce and said that she only married him because her mother thought that Alex would be a good fit for her. But then his second wife entered the scene.

It is clear from the way he described her, from the moment he first saw her, that he adored her. One could argue that in fact she saved his life: his dream job, which he was able to do for twenty-five years (*Living Like a God in France*) is attributed in large part to her (as represented by the fact that the hiring professor came over to meet her and decided that she would be a “good asset” to the other faculty wives). She opened his eyes to this other world view of reincarnation, as she was psychic (they went to visit her hometown from a previous life), she analyzed handwriting, and she introduced him to astrology, which he practiced himself. Interestingly, she was older than he was and already a mother of three. One cannot help but contrast the absence of his mother with the role that his second wife played in his narrative. The intersection of these three themes – his father, the masculine and the feminine, and fear – are clear in the following response. I had asked him about the chapter structure of his hypothetical autobiographical book:

Well, that would be a very complicated book because my father, he was macho, a masculine man who was not afraid of anything. I was a feminine boy who didn't fight, and my father disapproved.

There were two other childhood memories that appeared in the narrative but that did not make it to the distillation. Both of these, it seems, are valuable for the interpretation of the narrative. It is unclear which is the earliest memory. I am unconvinced, however, that determining the exact chronological order is all that important.

After he told me about his father dunking him in the sea, I asked him what that did for him, or to him. The following exchange ensued:

A: Afraid

R: Afraid of your father?

A: Well, afraid also of other things. I remember one time, as a very young child, I was asleep on the beach, and then a large black dog came over and sniffed me. I opened my eyes and all of a sudden I saw this dog's head above me, it scared me half to *death*. So there are things like that. If you combine that with my father, he was afraid of nothing, and he *remained* that way.

Throughout the rest of the narrative, no dog is featured at all. It would appear, then, that the memory of the dog sniffing him on the beach was not about dogs so much as it was about fear. Alex himself contrasts his own fear and femininity with his father's masculinity and fearlessness.

The other childhood memory is much more subtle, but possibly just as meaningful. I asked him if there were any other people who stood out for him in his recollections of life in elementary school:

I don't remember that particular person in elementary school, no... No, I was a very – at school I had... no, I was hugged by a [female] teacher. But I have no other recollections, I don't remember enough of my elementary school days.

Given the rest of Alex' story, I would argue that this is a highly significant event, which he honors by bringing it into his narrative: a woman who shows affection. Perhaps being hugged by a teacher is something that many people experience. But it is unlikely that it would be remembered in a life story nearly eighty years later. Alex does



not remember the name of the teacher and he does not dwell on what the hug meant. But its apparently innocuous presence throws into sharp relief the emotional absence of his mother in his life. Obviously, Alex was starved of something critical until the moment that he laid eyes on his second wife. That is when everything changed: it is when he was loved for who he was rather than rejected for who he was not.

### **Peter van Doorn**

Peter van Doorn's childhood memories made it to the distillation; it was apparent that he himself was fully aware of the significance of these events. His life story was titled "living in layers," a direct reference to the childhood experiences in the distillation.

Peter grew up in a very conservative, rural Reformed community. His father (like most people in that region of the country) was a market gardener and his brothers were being groomed to follow in their father's footsteps. Peter, however, had no talent for or interest in gardens and was drawn to the world of ideas early on. Peter's high school teacher persuaded Peter's father to let him continue high school, where he was drawn to chemistry. With the help of Coops as both teacher and father figure, Peter graduated from the VU and later got his Ph.D. from Leiden. He was a pioneer in bridging analytical chemistry and biochemistry, which in turn contributed to his membership in the Royal Academy of Sciences.

Peter's story is characterized by tension: It is replete with references to tension between polar opposites. Whether it is the tension between rationality and faith (early on), rationality and emotion (when he fell in love with his wife), theory and practice (when he got involved in public debates about experimental research and ethics),

materialism and idealism (market gardening versus the academic world of ideas), the tension seems to be omnipresent.

There are two separate childhood experiences, both of which made it into the distillation, and both of which deal with religious doctrine. It started with an encounter with what he called the village idiot:

Elementary school was finished that day, and the village idiot chased us. He was often jeered at by the youth. He gave me a shove in the back and when I got home I was paralyzed... I was no longer able to walk. My father said "I will put a dime on the mantelpiece. If you walk over there I'll give you a dime." I was able to do that, and when they took x-rays, nothing was ever found. In hindsight, that clearly was a psychotrauma.

Based on an encounter, he started to develop doubts about the extent to which the religious doctrine added up:

That's when I found those orthodox sermons threatening, because you had to believe, otherwise you were going to go to hell. But they did not add up. For starters, I had the sense that "that village idiot, he's definitely going to hell because he cannot understand the confirmation classes." And I, for example, I had an ethical objection ... I could not accept what it said in the Bible, so I rather had the sense that "things are going to go wrong with me too." I was in mortal fear sometimes, in church, so much so that I was in a cold sweat. Also at night, in bed, I felt that "if my heart stops beating, I will roll directly (inaudible) into hell's fire," that was very realistic for me.

Then, against this backdrop, he attended the funeral of a girl from his class:

I remember that, I can still (inaudible): she was buried, and then that minister gave us a sermon by the grave. We had to sing psalm 103, and I was standing there, thinking, "things are going to go wrong with you" [...] Because you only went to heaven if you took the entire Bible literally, and I had already started to have doubts. So from that

moment I split myself in two. I took part in praying and singing and everything, in the family, for the minister, during confirmation classes, and in school. All along I had the strong feeling that “something does not add up here,” and I underwent my own development, fed also by the fact that I was able to do an extraordinary amount of reading. I really lived in two worlds, an inner world and an outer world.

It is this Cartesian, dualistic split that is the thread throughout the rest of Peter’s narrative. It is clear from his own analysis that the encounter with the village idiot, the subsequent doubts about his faith, and then the burial of the young girl had a profound impact on his psyche. Even though Peter’s life was highly successful in many ways, he never seems to have restored the sense of wholeness or unity that he must have felt before the split.

#### **Adrian Kinslow**

Like Peter van Doorn, Adrian also acknowledges the importance of his earliest childhood memory. Not unlike Jacob in Lieblich *et al.* (1998), this memory is relatively late in life – Adrian is fifteen years old.

Adrian’s story is extraordinary. As a physician, clearly driven by a set of humanistic values (equal opportunity, human rights, dignity, and self-actualization), he devoted his career to the fate of the disabled. He imagined, negotiated, raised funds for, and oversaw the building of an entire village where people with disabilities could reside and participate fully in public life. The funding came to an important extent from a twenty-four-hour television broadcast in which he made public the circumstances in which the disabled had been living. It has been said that that event, which took place in the 1960s, was the single-most important event in the history of the emancipation of the

disabled in the Netherlands. To this day, Adrian enjoys a measure of celebrity status. His mantra, which he emphasized multiple times in the interview, has always been a holistic approach to rehabilitation: to strive for physical, mental, spiritual, and societal well-being.

In that light, his childhood memory is probably not a big surprise (he even identifies it as a “main memory” himself):

A main memory, which I cannot help but share: when I was in eighth grade – I think I was sensitive to things that were or appeared emotional in nature – my mother gave me a book by Albert Schweitzer, “on the road to Ambarene.” From that moment on, I think I was fifteen or so, I simply thought, “nice... that’s what I want to be.” My parents approved, and that has been my life, it was life-long.

This probably does not need much elaboration; Adrian is clear, in this vignette, that everything that happens in his life since is a consequence of this pivotal moment.

### **Walter Dickson**

Walter’s is also a story of success. After a period of floundering, not because of lack of talent but because of lack of effort, he ended up a Justice of the Peace in the southern city of Den Bosch. In his narrative, he tended to describe events that were rather serious in nature in a rather humorous way. This makes Walter’s narrative different from any of the others. One example is when as a student he goes into hiding, and his doctor forges a note that gets him admitted into the local hospital (and therefore exempts him from the need to report for duty):

My father reported that I was sick, so he needed a doctor’s note, and he asked the police doctor for one and got it. So I spent a couple of weeks in the hospital, perfectly healthy

[...] Of course, the family physician had said, “beware, when you are admitted, that you are ill,” and I tend to have a brown hue quickly, “and of course you also have a higher temperature.” I said “how do I do that?” “Well, they’ll take your temperature, but then you’ll have to send those nurses away, and then you can rub the bed sheets on the thermometer, and then it’ll go up a little,” so that’s what happened. I said to the nurse “please grab something from the closet,” I had come up with an excuse. She turned around and quick-quick-quick (laughs). She returned, took the thermometer and went to the light, and as she shook it she said “well, this is not a good reading, let’s do it again,” I said “why?” she said, “it’s all the way at the top” (laughs). So then I said “listen, you’ve caught me, and I hope you [don’t sympathize with the Germans], but I am here for such and such reason, and please don’t tell the other nurses” and so on. But of course, word spread rapidly, so they would take turns in taking a look.

This vignette, taken from the distillation, is a good example of a potentially serious event described in a very light-hearted way. It is as though Walter was trying to tell me not to take this too seriously (or, for that matter, not to take ourselves too seriously). Through the distillation, he appears to be making an argument that the things that we (or rather, he himself) were brought up to care about don’t really matter, and the things we may think don’t matter really do. For example, religion does not matter to Walter. In fact, anything that is taken too seriously is probably suspect in the eyes of Walter. At first, I suspected that Walter’s use of humor was a superficial detachment from a situation that carried a strong emotional charge; a defense mechanism, perhaps. But his deliberate use of strong words and the absence of any humorous references in the most serious of his vignettes gave me pause. He obviously fully realized the pain associated with those events.

Upon examining the distillation numerous times, it became clear that Walter sees life as a game to be played. He got through college knowing exactly how much effort to exert in order to get what he needed, and this continued through his career as well. The vignette above is just one example of this. It is not until later in life that he gets serious (when he becomes a judge). But his true passion, it seems, is with fun and games.

He met his wife just after the war. She was the daughter of the owners of the hotel where Walter stayed one summer. This is how he describes how they met:

The Hollander family ran that hotel, and one of their daughters also served us, and I liked her. So some acquaintances of mine were on the beach and said “how do you like that Hollander girl?” I said “I think she’s a nice girl,” “how about asking her to come for a swim?” I said “well, why not?” Well, she did go for a swim, even though she hated swimming because her lips would always turn blue, but she did it anyway, so then I could see the writing on the wall. At the end of the season, when the hotel shut down, they always threw a party and she invited me to come. I did, and it was very nice, really, a gorgeous hotel with plenty of space, to play ping pong, to bowl in those long hallways, that was a lot of fun... We got engaged fairly soon after the war, let’s see... engaged in ’46, ’47, married in ’48... And she was my wife until January, 1996.

It was initially through swimming, and later through other fun and game activities that Walter met and got to know his wife. She died of cancer in 1996, something that Walter describes as extremely painful.

An examination of the distillation through the game lens reveals that this theme permeates the story: as a child, he saw his father successfully “play the game” of bailiff during a potentially explosive neighborhood rent strike. He was able to escape his parents’ scrutiny and, later, a significant amount of abuse during the “greening” sessions

at the Corps by making himself invisible and not overperforming or underperforming. This is not inconsistent with a game approach to life itself. He describes the strategies he used when taking oral exams or procuring liquor from a distiller during the war. Even escaping the grip of the Nazi is described as a game (particularly the hospital stay mentioned above). As attorney with the NATU, he played the game by leading his clients on for two weeks, letting them think he was seriously contemplating their case.

At the time of the interview, Walter was married. He described to me how he met his second wife:

I have a lot of acquaintances because I play a lot of sports. I am a member of three tennis clubs and bridge clubs. At that time, I already knew her somewhat, because I had competed for her club. I had seen her a few times, and I liked her. So then someone from the tennis club who also knew her, he called her and said, "won't you join us for a weekend in Turnhout, to play bridge?" That was one of those long bridge (inaudible) and she said "I'll bridge with anyone, why not?" When I heard that, I said (inaudible) "you know what, we need to practice beforehand." We practiced here, against two others, and a week later, when I talked to one of those two others at the tennis club, are you recording this?

At that point, he asked me to turn off the tape recorder and told me the rest of the story. The relevant point here is that he met his second wife through sports and games as well. At one point, toward the end of the interview, Walter volunteered this additional bit of information about himself to me:

As for me personally, what I haven't told you yet is that I spend a lot of time playing sports and games... I have played chess, checkers, ping pong, tennis, bridge, billiards, I have been a member of various billiards clubs. I have done *all* kinds of sports and games. I am totally crazy

about it; I would have really loved to be a professional bridge player.

By now, it is clear that the fun and games approach is not just an entertaining way to tell his life story; it *is* his story. The title of the distillation drives the point home: “Life is a game, but bridge is serious.”

Against this backdrop, his earliest memory is quite telling:

I can tell you that until the age of five, I almost never went outside during the winter, because of my asthmatic bronchitis and the perpetual fever... The doctor said, “it would be best if he could go to southern France, this climate is no good for him,” but my father was unable to do this. But I then overcame that through swimming

By now, it is clear that sports and games have, in a very real sense, saved his life. He beat back a disease that kept him pent up inside; he met his first wife; and then he met his second wife, all as a direct consequence of engaging in sports and games.

### **John Bounds**

Throughout the interview, John dropped cues and hints that suggested that he was not interested in talking about himself or his life. For example, when we resumed the interview after a short break, he commented “we’re only still in 1945, but maybe that’s the most important part right, this time period.” This felt like a subtle but clear reminder that he did not wish to go into as much detail for the post-war period as he just had for his wartime experiences. As we wrapped up the wartime chapter (“the great adventure”), I said to John, “I see... okay, so there are four remaining chapters, but we will go over those in far less detail,” to which he replied, “yes I would do that.” Again, I



felt like I was being put on notice, *hurry up*. Then towards the end of the interview, he said, “so, I guess we’re pretty much done,” which reinforced all the previous messages.

Being kept at arms’ length makes it of course difficult to render an interpretation of the narrative. For example, John’s interview was about as long as the one with Alex Heller. But whereas Alex’s narrative yielded 69 vignettes, John’s only resulted in 37. On the surface, the narrative appears to be centered around his development as a teacher – from insecure to someone who used humor and other non-traditional techniques to reach the students.

There is another interesting dynamic at play in the distillation: the chapter titles do not intuitively cover the contents of the chapters. Chapter five, which covers his return to college after military duty in Indonesia, is titled “freedom.” But the two vignettes deal with the struggle associated with adjusting from the military life to getting back into the rhythm of studying in college. It reads as if the outside life of the military offered more freedom than the desk life required to succeed in college. Four out of the five vignettes in Chapter six, “flourishing in love,” focus exclusively on his development as a teacher. The fifth vignette touches on his journey to get his Ph.D. None of the vignettes contain any reference to the source of the love in the title – his family. Perhaps most striking is the title of his wartime chapter (1940-1945): “The great adventure.”

John was actually caught and arrested in a routine ID check in 1943. He and his friend were both shipped off to Germany after spending several weeks at a penitentiary camp in the Netherlands. John spent nearly two years in forced labor at various locations in Germany. The chapter reads more like a chronicle, a commentary, narrated

in a rather impersonal voice, as if John was emotionally disconnected from those experiences. John's apparent penchant for understatement certainly adds to that, but given the amount of detail in the chapter, this is still surprising. For example, in one of the vignettes (where he splits a Dutch flag with French prisoners), he uses the word "scene." Apparently, the vantage point moved from his own body to a disembodied John who could see the whole set, with him in it. John provides plenty of details, just very few cues as to how he experienced these two.

Furthermore, one could safely remove the war chapter completely from the distillation without changing the essence of it – assuming that the essence is indeed John's journey of becoming a teacher. This takes away from the sense of coherence, and away from the ability to follow a thread. It feels as though the period from 1940 to 1945 was a detour for him and no more than that. There is no sense of continuity throughout this period, and his distance makes it somewhat impossible to determine why that might be.

Given this reduced ability to ascertain a particular "thrust," of course it becomes equally difficult to link it to the early memories. But if I am correct in suggesting that this story is about his development as a teacher, then the early memories still shed light on that development.

In the final minutes of the interview, I asked him how he would describe his development during his thirty-one years as a teacher:

(Hesitating) from a hesitant person initially, to a more or less... capable character, I'll, I'll put it modestly. At the end of my career, I had the idea that I understood what it was about. I think you need to take it seriously: the

profession deals with transfer of knowledge, and that has everything to do with the recipient. You must not devalue the recipient, and if you can combine those two things, then you feel that things are alright. Then you start to enjoy it more.

Apparently, John's career got off to a shaky start in terms of his teaching skills.

Right after this exchange, I asked him how he chose to become a teacher:

That was somewhat out of laziness. When I had to pick my major, I thought about theology, and since my father was teacher, and taught classical languages... I still hadn't really figured it out in my freshman year so I took a double major and even completed my first-year exam in theology. But I quickly realized that I didn't feel quite at home among the theologians. When I saw what preachers did, I did not feel that I was a good fit, at the end of the day you have to have the gift of gab (laughs), and I've never had that gift. That's not the only qualification to be a good preacher, you have to be a good listener too, and I later discovered that that is something that I do very well. But the place you take in a congregation and so on, that you are a community leader, and that you have to go after things and that you have to put an enormous amount of effort into it, I didn't see myself succeed. I thought that goal was a bit too high.

This answer was strikingly similar to Jim Thurston's rationale for not becoming an attorney. Rather than living in a world of possibility, when in college, John appears to be confronted with limitations. This lack of skills could be traced back to high school. One of the vignettes from his high school chapter refers to these limitations:

You also get self-knowledge. You realize "oh yes, of course, perhaps I am not the brilliant character that I thought I was." And so on. So you also learn modesty.

When I asked him how he would describe himself in his second chapter (covering his high school days), he responded as follows:

I was a bit of a secondary character. There were some things (laughs) that I enjoyed, but then I didn't immediately show any kind of initiative, and I did not [develop that] until a later stage. So, a bit of a secondary character... Some things passed me by. I thoroughly enjoyed that period, but of course that is not such a clear answer... I was industrious and ambitious, I discovered my music. I started to play the violin in those days, which never amounted to much, but it was very enjoyable. I was part of a very small group that practiced once a week, directed by a teacher who taught the violin. So, yes I'd say that I was ambitious, but no success just yet. I was not elected president of the student club or anything. In the senior year you had this group that got together once every two weeks, and of course most of the students who lived in that town were a part of that group. But I never made it to the top or anything. I had a certain amount of ambition but I learned to live with it.

Tracing this thread back in time, the two vignettes from his earliest chapter are totally consistent with this sense of insufficiency.

I had a little brother who was four years younger. I was playing in the garden and he was driving his stroller so hard that he and the stroller fell over into the roses. I did not yet feel that I was capable of helping him, which I always thought was strange, but that was such a big scare that I quickly ran to the maid and said "this and that."

Obviously, this sense of not being capable, of not being good enough, started early.

A similar feeling comes from his second childhood memory:

I was eight years old then, and my [older] brother had to go house to house in the neighborhood to say "we got a little sister." He had to ring the doorbell, and when the door opened he would say "we now have a little sister, her name is such and such." There is no way I would have dared to do that.

On top of not feeling quite adequate, John also suggests that he grew up in the long shadow of his elder brother Lou. In the narrative, John makes a few other comparisons with his Lou, and every time Lou gets the favorable review.

Fortunately, the tone changes somewhat later in his life chapters, when John comments on how wonderful it can be to be a teacher:

That is such a great profession. You get to interact with boys and girls at the age where they still expect all kinds of things, and whom you can help shape and give direction. A colleague said “every once in a while you thrust open a window, so that they get a new perspective.”

All in all, the gestalt that emerges from the fog is that of someone who finds a niche and develops himself into a capable professional. This development occurred later than he would have hoped and as a result, certain opportunities were denied (such as being a preacher). Although he appears to be at peace with how things turned out, he started with a deficit as represented in the childhood memories.

### **Michael Armstrong**

On the surface, Michael’s story was about keeping the faith – literally, in the face of increasing liberalization in the Protestant denominations and increasing modernization generally. Michael repeatedly expresses sorrow about the way the various denominations split apart over theological debates, yet he is proud that he held firm. It shows him to be a man of principle and integrity. In other words, his loss in the battle is cause for regret yet at the same time, gives his story meaning. Michael Armstrong is, in a sense, Don Quixote.

Given that broad description of what the narrative is all about, one of the two childhood memories does not immediately make much sense – this is how Michael’s story is different than any of the others. One of the memories should not be surprising given the overall plotline:

There was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and you were not allowed to eat from it or else you would suffer death. So then the fall happened. The devil appeared in the shape of a snake and he spoke to Eve, “it’s not so bad you’ll be just like God, knowing good and evil.” In this matter it was about whether or not these were really trees and whether or not it was truly a speaking snake. The Synod said, “look you have to take that literally, otherwise the entire authority of the Bible is at stake,” and that’s how Geelkerken was removed as minister and that created a lot of commotion.

This was an infamous debate that took place in the mid-1920s, when Michael was in his early teens, that led to a split in the Reformed church. One might have expected the other childhood memory to feature religion as well, but this is not the case:

My father was trader in securities, but had been without employment for a while. Then he found a good job, which, you understand, meant that there was an opportunity for me (laughs) to go to college. But I remember, it was an event that deeply affected me. I was a boy, and when my father emerged from that anxiety and trouble (laughs), he had us sing a psalm, Psalm 66. It had the old wording, “[having avoided violence, I shall enjoy gratitude, appear in front of His Holy Eyes, with sacrificial songs, I shall, now that I can breathe, after so much fearful misfortune, fulfill all my promises to you, who have protected me in times of need].” I remember that my father was unable to maintain composure, none of us could, since he... Well anyway, that is just an occurrence, but one that leaves an impression you know. But that’s really quite peculiar.

He later said that his father never showed any emotion, that he was the old-fashioned, tough kind of Reformed man. So why would this memory come up, especially considering the fact that he himself appears puzzled about it? After repeated readings of the transcript, I started to suspect that this was about (the expression of) intimacy. As stern as he portrays his father, that's how composed and detached Michael was throughout the interview.

At one point, Michael was telling me that as a preacher, he always hated funerals of children. He said that no matter what he said to the parents, they were never quite comforted. And then he said:

We also went through a lot: four children but we've had to miss two of them. They only lived to be seven and eight years old and both were ill for three years. My wife (inaudible) enormous, she got educated as a nurse and nursed them herself for a long time. All that marks you for life, and that's why you're better able to understand someone else's pain. I have had to bury children, I always thought that was terrible, you'd say "but people, you can rest assured that your little one is saved, that they are saved forever." They accepted that, but I noticed that that was not truly any consolation to them. Later I was able to understand that better: I had not [understood] those people properly, in their grief. If you go through that yourself then you say "I had not completely understood." If you experience something yourself it is different, so pastoral care, that agreed with me.

This may be one of the most powerful vignettes in the distillation and it serves two purposes. First, this is the only time in the entire interview that Michael mentions that he has children. He mentions almost casually that he lost two of them after what must have been years of terrible agony. One would expect that this could be a defining moment in his life, which he alludes to by saying that it left a mark. But mostly, he uses

it to support his assertion that over time, he was better able to relate to the people he served – and, by extension, that losing two of his children made him a better preacher.

When he said this to me, he was completely straight-faced, without a hint of emotion. The same thing happened when he described the German authorities coming to his home and arresting his younger brother, who was imprisoned in Germany for several years. That too must have been a terrifying experience, but he reconstructs the conversation with ease:

My brother was imprisoned several years. He distributed Vrij Nederland [an anti-German periodical], and they found him out. They had apparently been given his name. They came to arrest him, they searched the house, and they took him with them... and when those folks left, I asked those two German officers, “[German] when will he be back?” He says “not for the next few years...” I say “Oh, so much for justice,” and then they got so angry, those guys, they turned around and said “[come] along.” I had to come along; I was imprisoned for one day but then they released me.

In this instance, Michael portrays himself as unshakable, righteous, and willing to speak on principle even if it comes at a price – the ultimate Calvinist trait. And of course the lack of emotion in his performance shows that he is tough, that he can describe in a factual way an event that must have made him feel powerless and distraught.

This narrative is as difficult to interpret as the previous one with John. On the one hand, I had the distinct feeling that the childhood memory of his father was not so much relevant for the content of the rest of the narrative as it was for the delivery. I sensed someone who is conflicted about intimacy; someone who wants it but rejects it at the



same time. Certainly, there was very little intimacy between himself and me. In that sense, he performed the idealized identity of the tough Reformed the way he saw his father. He was in a self-imposed prison.

This lack of intimacy may not have been because of Michael's inability, however. He might simply have been *unwilling*, for any variety of reasons (not the least of which was the fact that our religious beliefs were far apart – he even observed that during the interview). I do not think that I will ever know, and for that reason, this interview retains a certain level of indeterminacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

All in all, it appears that early memories may indeed be identity claims, as Lieblich *et al.* (1998) and Mishler (1999) suggest. The correspondence between these early memories and the thrust of the narratives was very clear. This was true for all interviews except those that featured no early memories (Gary Vessels, Lou Bounds, and Gerry Kosberg) and those characterized by the narrator's guardedness or reluctance to self-disclose (Michael Armstrong and John Bounds).

Since examining the correspondence between early memories and the rest of the narrative was not the primary purpose of the study, further research is needed to explore this relationship in more depth and detail. On the other hand, given that this was not the primary purpose of the study, the fact that this correspondence was so clear for the majority of interviews makes the finding all the more intriguing.

Studying early memories could be a powerful tool to use in conjunction with the distillation method (especially for those memories that do not get included in the

distillation). If a reasonable congruence can be established between the interpretation of the distillation and that of the early memory, then that would effectively serve to triangulate the distillation's interpretation. In turn, that would mean that another useful tool has become available to narrative researchers who wish to conduct holistic interpretations of narratives.

## CHAPTER V

### PERFORMING CULTURE THROUGH NARRATIVE:

#### *“DOE MAAR NORMAAL, DAN DOE JE GEK GENOEG”*

In Chapter II, I introduced cultural factors that influenced the narratives. I positioned myself as an insider within the broader Dutch cultural frame of reference, yet a relative outsider within the Calvinist culture. I argued that my outsider status in the latter subculture allowed me to notice narrative strategies employed by the narrators that were reflective of that culture, such as the need to show humility. On the other hand, my insider status as a Dutchman made it difficult to detect what, if anything, made the interview “typically” Dutch. As a result, I treated the broader Dutch culture as interchangeable with the “Western” culture that is characterized by the assumption of an empowered individual (Becker, 1997; Foxen, 2000; Nader, 1999; Zarowsky, 2000). In this chapter, I will trouble this interchangeability and suggest that there is at least one feature of these narratives that is typically Dutch (or, at least, Northern European) and might not be found as easily in narratives from other Western cultures.

In recent literature, more and more scholars have pointed out the need to consider how culture informs the ways that narratives are performed. As McAdams (2003) points out, “[l]ife stories mirror the culture wherein the story is made and told. Stories live in culture. They are born, they grow, they proliferate, and they eventually die according to the norms, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society” (p. 20). Bruner (2003) agrees: the stories that “make and remake our selves are ones we gain from the culture

in which we live” (p. 223). An example that relates to the previous chapter on childhood memories is as follows:

While the first memory – a typical memory of Americans – is early-dated, elaborate, self-focused, concerning a personal experience that took place at a particular time and place, the second memory – a typical Chinese one – is later-dated, brief, centering on a social interaction or collective activity that took place regularly or on multiple occasions. The American memory has the individual highlighted as the leading character of the story. In contrast, the Chinese memory shows a heightened sensitivity to information about significant others or about the self in relation to others (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p. 49).

Nelson & Fivush (2004) found similar differences between European American cultures and Asian cultures. They assert that children’s development is characterized by continuity “within a social cultural context, in which new functions and competencies emerge and blend with the old, supported and enriched by the contributions of the *social, linguistic, and cultural world*” (p. 507, emphasis original).

The way people tell stories does not just vary between cultures, but also between subcultures (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Foxen, 2000; Lapadat, 2000; Minami, 2000). Even though identifying specific influences of culture or subculture is difficult and elusive (Minami, 2000), there are some findings that appear to establish such relationships. Bernsten and Rubin (2002) found that recollections from early adulthood tended to be associated with happy and important events, at the expense of sad or traumatic memories. They attribute this pattern to “the assumption that autobiographical memory is organized by culturally shared life scripts that do not include emotionally negative events while allocating important positive events to young adulthood” (pp. 649-

650). In turn, this is consistent with Harvey, Stein, Olsen *et al.* (1995) who suggest that audiences are partial to stories of overcoming odds and positive outcomes.

Similarly, Thorne & McLean (2003) call attention to master narratives as culturally valued positions. These narratives “function as cultural standards against which community members feel compelled to position their personal experience” (p. 171). They use gender differences in the telling of emotional events as an example, pointing out that boys are much more stoic than are girls. This stoicism “exemplifies a cultural convention about how European-American males are supposed to deal with tragic events” (p. 172). Gregg (1998) examined the life narratives of several North African people. He concludes that in the construction of their life stories, the narrators selected different subsets of features of North African culture (e.g., Ramadan, justice, bounty, pollution vs. purification, etc.) to fashion their identities.

As I argued in Chapter II, it is easy to identify differences in culture. It is much more difficult, however, to identify similarities. Therefore, I framed myself as an outsider in the context of the Reformed culture, but an insider within the broader Dutch and Western culture. In fact, I implicitly suggested that the Dutch culture was representative of the broader, Western, modern mindset that presupposes an empowered individual among other things. But compatibility between the Dutch and the Western mindset is not the same thing as interchangeability. The Dutch (and, for that matter, the Northern Europeans such as the Germans and the Scandinavians) do have cultural idiosyncrasies of their own that shape life stories in ways that are difficult to identify by any insider, whether narrator or listener.

Due to my own transition to the United States – both a physical move and a cultural adjustment – I have, over time, come to distance myself from the Dutch culture. I am still Dutch – it is a key identifier for me – but the distance has allowed me to ask questions that I might not have asked had I not moved to the United States. While remaining an insider within the Dutch culture, I seem to have developed the ability to step outside of it to some extent. This has sensitized me to some of the Dutch idiosyncrasies that I had taken for granted beforehand, and in turn, this increased awareness has alerted me to a dynamic in these life stories that I almost missed: that the stories were not “merely” a performance of identity, but also a performance of culture because of their adherence or resistance to a master narrative.

#### **A DUTCH CULTURAL MASTER NARRATIVE: EGALITARIANISM**

According to van der Horst (2001), who bases his position on research conducted by the (Dutch) Royal Institute for the Tropics, the mainstream Dutch culture can be described in five terms: egalitarian, utilitarian, organized, trade-oriented, and privacy-minded. Of these five, the first, egalitarian, appears to be most relevant for this study.

Van der Horst is not alone in observing egalitarianism among the Dutch. In the context of education, for example, Sturm, Groenendijk, Kruithof, and Rens (1998) identify that the legal restrictions on fees, tuition, teacher salary, and investments “have caused the Dutch provision of schools to be extremely egalitarian: prestigious schools for social élites are very rare in the Netherlands” (p. 284). De Graaf, de Graaf, and Kraaykamp (2000) also attribute this lack of private schools to “the egalitarian Dutch social policy since the 1950s, whose aim has been to eliminate financial barriers to

education for low-income groups” (p. 95). Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1994) compared seven different cultures in terms of how they deal with wealth: the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands. They conclude that “the Dutch are more egalitarian and less hierarchical than any culture in our survey. ... No one is permitted to rise too high” (pp. 269-270).

This is consistent with van der Horst’s observation that “the average company director – and the same is true of politicians and top civil servants – will not often attribute his successes to his own talents. At least, not in public” (p. 23). This last sentence is an important nuance: privately, the Dutch are allowed to be as conceited or arrogant as they want. But their public lives are subject to a collective scrutiny that is sensitive to people who appear to think highly of themselves. After all, everyone is equal (in principle). Perhaps more accurately, everyone is equivalent. Everyone matters, everyone has inherent worth, and everyone has a unique set of talents. As a result, there is pressure on the successful and the wealthy to take care in how they lead their lives. The saying *doe maar normaal, dan doe je gek genoeg* translates into *just act normally, that’s crazy enough*. The irony in that statement is not lost on the Dutch. When they invoke this saying, it is invariably a statement of disapproval. We’re all “crazy” (in the sense that we’re all different from the norm in some way), so get over it. For the successful, it means *don’t let your success go to your head*. If you rise too far above the masses, you will be subject to distrust or scorn. In Dutch organizations, for example, this translates into a decision-making process highly focused on getting everyone’s input. These processes are slow, but if done right, have enough buy-in to

ensure successful implementation. But any unilateral decision of importance made by a supervisor is sure to lead to workplace conflict. *Doe maar normaal, dan doe je gek genoeg.*

Obviously, this kind of scrutiny can be confining. The wealthy upper-class has adjusted, however. These “few, the super-rich, are not so easy to recognize. For the genuinely rich, a low profile is practically a commandment” (van der Horst, 2001, p. 22). To outsiders, the Dutch can come across as dull, conformist, and colorless. But there is a flipside to this egalitarian coin, which is that if you fall below the masses, they will pick you back up. Consider the following description of available pensions:

These days, nearly every sector has its own pension fund, into which both employers and employees pay high contributions. ... Those who pay into them accumulate rights based on the number of years they pay their contributions. The pensions are supplementary to the state pension to which everyone is entitled under [Dutch law]; they are, as it were, the jam on the bread. Any holes in this safety net are filled by the government. Anyone who is no longer entitled to an unemployment benefit under [a Dutch law] receives a supplementary benefit which is funded from tax revenues (van der Horst, 2001, pp. 66-67).

The Dutch have built much of their contemporary society based on the fundamental belief that the strongest shoulders should carry the heaviest burden. As a result, “you really have to work hard to hit rock bottom. In fact, only drug addicts, alcoholics or those suffering from psychic problems ever actually get this far. [All] who [are] able to support [themselves] will always receive a benefit from some anonymous scheme or another. No one is dependent on charity” (van der Horst, 2001, p. 68).



The resulting gravitational pull toward the mean, or toward the normal, is a direct result of the Dutch egalitarian belief that everyone's inherent worth is equal. This belief manifests in a variety of ways. Beyond the embarrassment of riches for the wealthy and the welfare system for the less fortunate, there is an unspoken rule that an assessment of anything – people, work performance, ideas, products, etc. – is not genuine unless it is balanced. As much as the Dutch are turned off by criticism and negativity across the board, they are also distrustful of limitless praise. In fact, “not bad” usually counts as a compliment. A good assessment is a fair one, and a fair assessment is balanced by pointing out both pros and cons.

What I will suggest is that the narratives included in this study reflected the egalitarian Dutch beliefs. Because of this phenomenon, they should not just be seen as performances of identity only, but of culture as well (a feature true of all narrative). Most of the narratives were indeed characterized by a mixture of success and pride on the one hand, and criticism or regret on the other. Perhaps these narratives were cast in a form that was acceptable to a wider (Dutch) audience even though the narrator's “true” feelings were farther removed from the middle. But then again, these moderate narratives may well have accurately reflected the narrators' positions. This is what makes the cultural influences so elusive.

However, the effects of the egalitarian master narrative are more apparent in the narratives on the fringes: the stories of success and those of regret. If your life is characterized by nearly limitless success or by consistent (perceptions of) failure, it might be more difficult to be fair in assessing it than if the story conforms better to the

norm. In those cases, it might take some ingenious narrative strategies to make the story fit.

### **A WARTIME MASTER NARRATIVE: HEROES VERSUS COWARDS**

There is another master narrative at work in these life stories, however, that also has a powerful effect. It has everything to do with the official history of World War II as written and documented by historian Lou de Jong. In the previous chapter, I described him briefly as well as the effect that his work has had on how the Dutch view the war. One was either *goed* or *fout*; those who were *goed* were active in the Resistance, and those who were *fout* collaborated or sympathized with the Nazis. This oversimplification created pressure on the majority of people who were somewhere in the middle – anti-German in spirit but by-and-large compliant in their behavior. In his interview with me, Walter Dickson referred to the “post-war Resistance,” because by that time “everyone was courageous.” It could very well be that this collective post-war assessment, embodied in the purification committees described earlier on, which at times looked like a witch hunt, was as traumatic as the Occupation itself.

Later in the interview with Walter, we briefly talked about Reverend Ferwerda in the Calvinist church with strong ties to the VU. The church was around the corner from the university, and Ferwerda was an alumnus from the VU and from Walter’s Oratory Association in the Corps. Thus, Walter knew Ferwerda personally. At one point, the Nazis raided the church and found a cache of firearms. Ferwerda, who had nothing to do with those guns or the Resistance whose purposes they served, was in the church at the time. The Nazis took him outside and executed him. In the words of Michael

Armstrong, they “shot him like a dog.” When Walter mentioned this, I told him that I could imagine that something like that would make him very angry and might cause him to do “crazy things.” I was asking him indirectly whether or not this event made him decide to join the Resistance. He responded, before I even finished my question, as follows:

You know, the thing is, you *know* of course that you are powerless. You could join the Resistance, and think you might do some damage to the Germans, but if you think about it you realize “what difference does distributing flyers make to the Germans? That’s not going to win you the war.” They had to be destroyed, those Germans, and you simply did not have that ability. So it was really a rational choice, to consider “how do I get through.” I can completely understand if people are upset and say – uhm, I read a book, *Follow the track back*, by J. P. Charles, a pseudonym. [...] It was a beautiful book that had a tremendous impact on me. It was one of the few books that really turned my world upside down. [The author] was so angry that he simply *had* to join the Resistance, whether he wanted to or not, and he wrote a book about it. Well, I have great admiration for that, but again, rationally speaking, I don’t think it was, it was just not useful.

R: How come the book had such an impact on you?

W: Well, it’s the confrontation with your own attitude, as it relates to the Resistance. And sometimes, I would read that book with a sense of shame, like, “God, compared to what this man dared and did, what did I do, really?” So, my wartime attitude was rather cowardly, I will readily admit that.

This is a very good example of the wartime master narrative at work: if master narratives are indeed cultural standards against which community members feel compelled to position their personal experience, as Thorne and McLean (2003) suggest, then it is clear that Walter holds himself up to the highest standard – hero – and

concludes, rather harshly, that he was a coward. If he cannot be *goed*, he must be *fout*. It is an extension of the black-and-white thinking that characterizes Lou de Jong's history of the war.

What makes this response so striking, and so relevant to the discussion about the wartime master narrative, is its spontaneity and its intensity. This suggests that Walter had been anticipating a question about joining the Resistance, which in turn means that this master narrative is both very real and very difficult. It is charged with all kinds of unsaid (and, from my end, unintended) negative connotations.

But there is a second reason for introducing this exchange: by evaluating his own stance during the war rather harshly, he creates balance in a narrative that is otherwise slanted toward the positive. If Walter's narrative were represented by a graph, as in Lieblich *et al.*'s (1998) holistic-form method of analysis, it would start off rather flat with some ups and downs. Walter never performed up to his potential in high school and college; he actually intentionally failed his course work in high school so that he had to repeat the year.

I graduated gymnasium in seven years. I had to repeat 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but that was more or less intentional. All my friends and I had decided to fail 11<sup>th</sup> grade, because by repeating it you would be better prepared for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade final exams.

On several occasions, Walter made reference to accepting his lot in life. Invariably, this was in the context of his bailiff father who wanted him to be an attorney. He then tried criminal law, hated it, and within a few years he ended up working as a civil attorney for an organization in the socialist pillar. He rather enjoyed parts of the

job, but he had trouble erasing the reputational stain that came with working for a “red” organization. (The term “red” is used to describe institutions and ideologies associated with the socialist pillar. This socialist pillar was antithetical to the Reformed pillar, primarily because of the perceived absence of religion in socialism.)

All along, the graph remains rather flat, until the point comes where he finally succeeds in becoming a judge. This is when he found his groove and he enjoyed it and he performed up to his potential. Therefore, he was a rather late bloomer in terms of his professional development. By judging himself harshly about his wartime attitude, justifiably or not, Walter creates space in the remainder of the story to highlight the positive. Moreover, there is enhanced credibility: his willingness to judge himself harshly makes his positive evaluations that much more credible (more so than if he had only evaluated everything in a positive light).

There is another way to look at his harsh judgment, however. The egalitarian lens also suggests that Walter could *afford* to portray himself in a negative light in this case, because he had enough positive material from his later life to offset it. In turn, it begs the question: had Walter never become a judge and always remained stuck with the “red” organization, would he have refrained from judging himself harshly during the war?

Obviously, I will never know the answer to this question. But a closer examination of a narrative of success and a narrative of regret might shed some more light on how balance is retained. Among the interviews conducted for the purpose of this study, there was great variety in the extent to which they were stories of success. On

one end of the spectrum, we have Adrian Kinslow, introduced earlier in Chapter II. His life has been an extraordinary success in many ways: war Resistance hero; physician; the nation's first rehabilitation expert; personal ties to the Dutch Royal family; a statue erected in his hometown; financial success; a clear societal legacy; a long and happy marriage; and celebrity status. It is enough to make you wonder if he ever failed to achieve anything.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have Lee Zunker's story of regret. Lee was denied access to chemistry, and studied law instead. Upon graduation, he turned down a job he was most interested in because he did not think he had the requisite skills to live by himself. He took a job with a local life insurance company instead. He got his Ph.D. but it did not yield him the kind of success or recognition he was hoping for. He applied for other jobs, but always unsuccessfully. He was very unhappy throughout most of his career, so in contrast to Adrian, Lee makes you wonder what he has achieved in life that he is proud of. The narrative emphasizes lost opportunities, insufficient skill, bad luck, or any combination of those.

### **STORY OF SUCCESS: ADRIAN KINSLOW**

Adrian's interview was the longest of them all. It is the only one that needed two appointments to complete it and it resulted in the longest transcript by far. Consequently, it also resulted in the longest distillation, with 95 vignettes. For that reason, I will not present the entire distillation, but I will summarize it by highlighting only the most relevant events or trends.

His first chapter, titled “Run-up,” runs from 1922 to his high school graduation in 1941. The main event there is a memory of how his mother gave him a book to read:

I cannot help but share a main memory from when I was in eighth grade. I think I was in a phase in my life where I was sensitive to things that were or appeared emotional in nature, and my mother gave me an Albert Schweitzer book, *On the road to Ambarene*. From that moment on, you’re just fifteen, something like that, I simply thought, “nice, that’s what I want to be.” My parents approved, and that has been my life; it was life-long, aside from the pivotal point with Waterink.

This first vignette from the distillation sets the tone for the rest of the interview: Adrian’s use of Albert Schweitzer as a role model means that he will be a physician with a humanist slant. The other vignettes in his first chapter refer to the development of an appreciation for good, all-round education.

His second chapter is titled “War and Resistance” and contains twenty-four vignettes. The most important ones refer to his actions in the war.

I was in Kampen when the war broke out in Holland. For two days – this was rather reckless really, in hindsight – I cycled back to the Hague, where my parents lived. It was unbelievable, I crossed the lines of defense, and [the soldiers] were all very kind. The army was not all that professional, which would have increased the distance between them and civilians. Instead, they say “hey, please step aside for a moment, because we have to place these trees on the road,” you see?

This first vignette is similar to the next ones in the sense that a rather extraordinary feat – a two-day bicycle ride by an eleventh-grader across the country, with the military defenses erecting barriers– is simply described as “rather reckless.” It would have been very easy to elevate this story rather than downplaying it. Instead, he

ascribes his actions not to his own qualities, but to recklessness. And in the process, he manages to compliment the Dutch armed forces.

Later during the war, Adrian joined the Resistance. As the second chapter showed, he downplays the significance of that decision by claiming he did not spend any time thinking about it. The distillation contains a vignette that confirms this impression because of its matter-of-factly tone:

I reported to a contact person who was underground, and he said “hey, here is this organization, that had a student from Leiden, a medicine student also. He just got caught and taken away” – later he was murdered – “that slot is open, are you interested?” well, that appealed to me.

Apparently, it was just that simple. There was a vacancy, he expressed interest, and that was it: Adrian was now in the Resistance. As a consequence, he gets to trust and work together with people from all walks of life.

Speaking of these Protestant denominations: a young man in my Resistance group was pursuing a girl from Article 31 [a conservative Calvinist denomination]. ... That boy, who tried to conquer the girl whose parents were Article 31, was hated more, he told me, than they hated the Germans. Now I don’t think there’s a reason to hate anyone like that, but in the war, World War II, the German was of course the bogey, especially an SS’er.

Obviously, Adrian positions himself as someone who has transcended the boundaries of the pillarized society as they existed during and after the war. Then there are three events, each of which is described in several vignettes, in which things got serious. The first one was when his Resistance group identified a Dutch spy working for the Nazis, who had infiltrated Adrian’s organization:



We did not like him very much. He claimed that in '37 he had driven in the rally of Monte Carlo with Bakker Schut, a famous driver, and that he had won. This [other] man, who had a book that mentioned this rally, said, "hey, this is nonsense, because [the book] mentioned an entirely different name," and other things like that. I was in contact with people from other [Resistance groups], such as the LOLKP, [national organization for people in hiding] and LKP, [national assault groups] ... So at one point, he said "uhm, Adrian, are you convinced this man has to be evicted?" "Yes." "Why?" "Such and such." "Well, objectively I also believe this, you believe that," three (inaudible) report to radio Oranje [the exiled government in London], and we [received the message], "kill him..." Those are things that you cannot fathom emotionally, killing someone, but you were confronted with (inaudible) that these agents generally worked as follows: they had booklets, as small as possible, with all the names they had come across. If you waited too long, they could [round up] the entire organization in one swoop, so we carried out [the order]. One of the people said "you will start by taking him to such and such location" ... and that man was struck in the neck. He was carried off to the Zuidwal Hospital in The Hague, in deplorable condition. And then we heard from our organization, "the man is in the Zuidwal Hospital, two SS'ers in his room, and one SS'er at the front desk." I have to tell you that I received this message as a gift, because I was deep in hiding, and I said, "God be praised," because imagine if you were wrong or something... that was one of those experiences, then we had to get out of The Hague.

The role that Adrian has to play here runs counter to every sensibility he has as an aspiring physician. He points out that he could not fathom this emotionally. He also shifts from first-person singular to first-person plural in telling the story ("we carried out the order"). The actual assault was related in a passive voice: "That man was struck in the neck" sounds a lot more clinical and distant than does something like "my friend struck that man in the neck." In his description of the receipt of the message that there

were SS'ers in the room (and therefore the victim was indeed an infiltrant), he shifts back to first-person singular.

But the events did not stop when Adrian and his group left The Hague. When they went to visit a friend in Limburg, in the south of the country, things very nearly went wrong:

We were in Limburg, where a good friend of mine lived, from the war, also a Resistance member. ... I had spoken with him previously, even periodically; I still have a telegram he sent to me, saying "this is how we will do this." So, I was in Venlo, 7:45 pm, in front of a house ... He lived at number eight, a large, stately home. I think that he had been a priest so I think – it doesn't matter. I was accompanied by another guy from our organization, an Indonesian Army officer, a man of color. He had dark skin so he had to really watch out of course, that is really tough to be up against, "you are not white." But [he was] a phenomenal man and he stayed behind. ... I ring the doorbell at 7:45, and here is this man – I still wonder because later I experienced something similar, that those people dolled themselves up so elaborately with stars and awards [on their uniforms] – and he stands there. Had that been a man in ordinary clothing, I would have been caught, but this is so notorious, I want nothing to do with it, so I say to that man in my, my fortunately not-so-nervous German, "uhm, please excuse me, but I need to be at number six, is that here?" A big, big eight over here, so... "Oh you dummy," so to speak, "can't you see this is number eight?" Uhm, that man should have been fired.

Adrian only escapes arrest in this case because of the stupidity of this SS officer who is dressed in full regalia and does not stop to wonder why a young man of Adrian's age would ring anyone's doorbell fifteen minutes before curfew. Still, Adrian had to report to the local authorities (the Ortskomandant) because he was about to violate that curfew.

We arrived at the Ortskommandant, and he had a clever trick. We arrived there together, and he joined us in a room. Let's say you are the Ortskommandant, table, thingy, here's the counter with one of those folding doors. I had to stand in front of the counter. "So, who are you? ID? What do you want?" "Please, we are delayed, can you give us a permit so that we can spend the night in a hotel?" He was quite clever, because I had three IDs ... Stupid of me, I had failed to tell Hugo [the KNIL army officer], who was with me, which ID I had with me. And so this is a miracle of God: that man, Hugo, approaches, and I will call that a natural talent, also in the way he moved, he is standing here, and then the Ortskommandant asks, "What is your friend's Occupation?" Hugo opens the folding door, and to do that you have to radiate something already, because otherwise it's "stay over there," you see, but he opens the door, approaches the Ortskommandant and says [German], "but Mister Ortskommandant, you can see right here on the ID," and that's when he read it himself, "he is a teacher." My Gosh, I could have hugged that man.

In this vignette, the dark-skinned man (a "phenomenal man" who would not have been considered part of the Reformed pillar) saves Adrian's life. The role of the Other in Adrian's Resistance work does not stop here. A few weeks after the assault on the infiltrant and the escape to Limburg, he returned to The Hague to continue his work in the Resistance. He was at his parents' house when the following occurred:

We were having coffee. The window was over here, in the front, and there was (inaudible) something by that wall, and we were having coffee over there. All of a sudden I see another SS man with full glamor and everything, and he walks up to the front door. "My God," I have never jumped up so fast, out through the back door, through the yard, and then there is a fence. I still do not know how I managed to climb the fence ... The neighbor was startled: all of a sudden some man appears. We did not know each other well, especially me because I had been in Kampen for the first one-and-a-half, two years, and then I went to the VU, so she may not even have known that the Kinslow parents had such a kid. Imagine if she had locked the

door. “Let me go, nothing special, I want out,” and fortunately she [let me pass]. Later I saw the Germans arriving ... so I [went] to my hiding place, an address with a fantastic woman, she was the daughter of a general in the Dutch-Indonesian Army, and she later married a general in the Dutch-Indonesian Army, and her stance was incredibly good, she said “you may always stay with me.”

Above, Adrian’s life was saved by Hugo, and this time, his life was saved by a neighbor who did not even know him. His neighbor’s act probably took less courage than what Hugo did in the Ortskommandant’s office, but that appears irrelevant in this vignette as Adrian heaps praise on everyone around him.

What these three vignettes have in common is that Adrian appears to be less of a protagonist than the people he surrounded himself with. As I suggested in Chapter II, his praise for others and his humility regarding his own actions allows him to express the humility that is usually required in Dutch Reformed circles. At the same time, however, it also maintains a sense of balance and therefore conforms with the egalitarian demand. The wartime master narrative that created a tension that Walter Dickson needed to manage created no such tension for Adrian, as he is clearly one of the heroes. There is no guilt, regret, or second-guessing in the narrative. The tension, instead, is between truthfulness and humility and, simultaneously, truthfulness and egalitarianism.

After the war, Adrian went back to medical school and became a physician. His accomplishments were many, but the most famous is the creation of an entire village, integrated in a larger urban area, where people with disabilities can develop to their maximum potential. This area, called “The Village,” was built in the 1960s. At the time, he was running a rehabilitation center whose budget was already stretched.

I would lie awake at night, “for God’s sake, when every meeting, you already [ask for] so many millions, how dare you,” how did I dare start talking about the village, so I thought “to start, I am going to try and build that village outside of the revenue stream for the rehabilitation center...” I thought an ideal location was where The Village was later built. ... So I thought “if I could just get the land for free, then I lose that heavy burden of ‘I don’t have the courage to ask that anymore.’”

He acted on his vision with the bold step of asking a landowner and developer to donate to him a large piece of land.

I visited that man three times. He said “have a seat in my chair,” and then he would pace in front of his bookshelf, “but what will you do with that?” and “How will you solve this?” “Well, I no longer have any time for you.” I had been there in The Hague for an hour and then I would return, that’s how I went there three times. Then, during ... Christmas ’69, he called me and I thought “how could you disturb people on second Christmas day?” He said, “I am disturbing you with very pleasant news, you will acquire the land at no cost, but you may tell no one.”

Just like his activities in the Resistance, this extraordinary feat sounds so simple. It also appears that the land developer is the hero of this vignette, and not Adrian. With the land donated, he now had something to work with. To make a long story short, there was a major network that was about to celebrate its fortieth birthday. Adrian saw another opportunity:

Then it gained momentum. I had the land, and I had a friend who said, “the AVRO wants to celebrate its 40th anniversary in a very spectacular fashion.” I thought “I’ve got something I can talk to them about.” The AVRO executives and administration came to the Johanna Foundation [rehabilitation clinic] and I talked to them about what it means to be disabled, rehabilitable, permanently disabled, and that [we need] another... Bull’s eye. Then I called the television “we want to do a special

program, and I would like to ask the Minister for 24 hours of television.”

Adrian organized a twenty-four hour television marathon, which had been unheard of before then. He recorded an interview, in which he addressed the Dutch people directly and personally, appealing to their sense of fairness, and asked them to donate money to build this village for the disabled. The problem, of course, was how to collect the money. Adrian decided that pledges would not do; donors might not follow through and make payment. But the television show was to be broadcast at night, when everything was closed.

We were worried, “how will people donate their money? They can always transfer funds, but that is an intent, they may not do it, so we need something.” The matchbox was to be that vehicle. “But where are they to bring it?” “Well, everything must be open, Post Offices must be open.” So, you go on your way and you think, “Now I must visit with the executives of the Postal Service.” ... I had to be there one afternoon around five, and I can still draw that environment: there was a long table with many dark suits, because they were the directors of the postal districts in the Netherlands, and the main director chaired the meeting. And he had done his good deed, because how else could I have been there, and I went, I stood here, the table over there. You have to [consider] the strategy of your speech. I was given twenty minutes, so “the breaking point must occur within ten minutes.” So I held this clock, and I can still see it: When I said all this, there was an eery silence. I worked to this point – I said “the only thing you need to do, and I think your people will be happy to do it, is to be at the post office from eight till nine thirty, and we will take care of collecting all the matchboxes and other packets from all the post offices, so that we can announce on television that evening (inaudible). The man in black and white, said “Uhm, gentlemen, do we need to talk about this much longer?” He said “Mister Kinslow, best of luck, we will be glad to participate.” That’s how it went... ditto the grocery stores, the bank, it is

unbelievable, so that was all, it was ready, and when people have a sense for these things they happen automatically.

In this vignette that describes a truly remarkable achievement, Adrian gives all the credit to the chief executive officer of the Dutch Postal Services. And then, when others join in, he attributes it to the goodness of the people. The word “automatically” suggests that all was rather effortless; it was out of his hands and things took care of themselves. But his success did not stop here:

All kinds of celebrities of those days came, like uhm, Toon Hermans, and Wim Kan. What was very moving was that at midnight, it was unbelievable, the entire orchestra came from the van Baerlestraat to the [set], bringing grand pianos, trumpets, and violins, and performed the national anthem there. When it was midnight, I asked for a few moments of silence, because a telegram had just arrived from the Queen: “Unfortunately am not able to be with you.”

There could be no more powerful signal of success than a telegram from the Queen. All evening long, the collections were gathered all over the country and moved to a central location in the country.

The couriers took the money to a central location so that at midnight, the money was announced. The special event unfolded with the matchboxes, and without hysteria or manipulation of people. It was simple: we had seen a film, “please go to the post office,” and “that is six and a quarter million.” That is one-fourth of the total yield of the program, which was [donated] within one hour by the people of the Netherlands. And then I say “that is some people.”

Similar to the previous vignettes, the credit goes to others – in this case, to the Dutch people. The money was raised, The Village was built, and the disabled are

emancipated. Adrian becomes world-renowned and is invited to lecture all over Europe, in the United States, and in Japan. He then expanded his scope across borders by working with the Paralympics. Adrian comments on his celebrity status as follows:

My children sometimes found it a nuisance because we would walk in the street and then they would walk behind us, (whispering) “yes, that is doctor Kinslow.”

In truly humble fashion, Adrian portrays his newfound status as a nuisance to his children. In doing so, he respects the egalitarian adage by showing that he did not let success go to his head. Adrian is really telling me that in spite of the achievements that are attributed to him, he is really still an ordinary guy who happened to have been helped by many extraordinary people.

As discussed in Chapter II, Adrian’s narrative strategy of expressing humility, self-effacing, and pouring lavish praise on those around him is how he negotiates the tension between the conflicting demands for truthfulness and humility. It is also, however, a way to conform to the broader egalitarian dictum.

A reflection on Adrian’s wartime experiences leads to a question. His wartime experiences are relatively independent from the way the rest of his life unfolded. That is, he was a medical student in the first part of the war, he joined the Resistance simply because he was unable to continue studying medicine, and after the war he continued his studies. He could just as easily have left his wartime experiences out of the narrative altogether, and his story would still have been one of success. So why include the war-related experiences? Especially if it puts Adrian at risk of being over-the-top successful rather than extraordinarily successful?



I believe the answer is twofold. First, his wartime experiences are used not to highlight his own experiences, but to emphasize the special qualities of those around him. Incidentally, many of these people are not from the Reformed pillar – particularly Hugo, the Indonesian, and his former-priest-friend in Limburg. Thus, his wartime experiences serve to allow Adrian to portray himself as having transcended the boundaries imposed by the Reformed pillar. The second reason is that Adrian knew that my interest was in war-related experiences. Given the context for the interview, it would have been very awkward for him to leave these wartime experiences out, especially since the wartime master narrative caused no concerns for him. While this is an admittedly straightforward explanation in Adrian's case, it does not appear to be as straightforward in Lee Zunker's case.

#### **STORY OF REGRET: LEE ZUNKER**

Just like Adrian, Lee had to engage in some narrative “acrobatics” in order to avoid drifting too far from the norm. But the drift was in the opposite direction: whereas Adrian was confronted with a tension between truthfulness and humility, Lee's tension was the inverse – between truthfulness and the egalitarian norm. Too much truthfulness might have put him too far below this norm. As might be expected, his strategy was to “build himself up” whenever he could.

What stands out most in my memory of Lee's interview were the subtle and not-so-subtle references to his own efforts or successes. They were scattered throughout the interview and they puzzled me. Frankly, they annoyed me at times. I remember thinking during the interview as well as during the transcription, “why is he telling me

this?” In hindsight, I realize that the fact that I got annoyed with him means that Lee violated some kind of unspoken expectation of mine – the (cultural) expectation of a fair, balanced portrayal of his life. The following are literally the first words captured on tape, as I was talking about when I hoped to defend:

R: I [hope] to defend next year May, but given the amount of work involved, I am not sure if it is doable. I will soon have fifteen interviews, on average about two-and-a-half to three hours each, and some a little shorter, some longer. For each hour of interviewing I’ll probably be transcribing six to eight hours (laughs) so that’s going to be a yoman’s task just to get it on paper

L: I see.

R: And then I have to analyze those stories, and it takes time to let that all sink in. It’s not always, it’s somewhat of a creative process, it’s not necessarily easily managed. But the goal remains (laughs) May of next year.

L: Well, it’s nice that you can do that full-time.

R: Yes, that’s a=

L: =I got my Ph.D. too, and I did it in the evening hours, on top of my regular job, within a year and a half.

I remember wondering if he was trying to one-up me somehow; I was truly puzzled and a little taken aback by what felt like bragging. The interview contains many such instances. A corollary strategy was to place blame for his predicament on tough breaks and gatekeepers. In terms of the egalitarian master narrative, it felt as though he was telling me “I was not brilliant, but not bad either, and I really tried. Because of that, I am entitled to some recognition.” Just like the Dutch welfare system entitles its citizens to a multitude of government support services, the egalitarian master narrative entitles Lee to “violate” the Reformed need to express humility. This mechanism is

consistent with the narrative repair of threatened identity (Schrauf, 2000) and self-aggrandizement in storytelling (Oliveira, 1999).

By the way, later in the interview, Lee spontaneously downplayed the significance of his Ph.D. as follows:

So I wrote for uhm, a year and a half and I took it to Hellema who said “it looks good, just do this, do that,” so that was taken care of quickly. Even though my fellow students, especially the theologians, had always told me that you’d be working on it for years, because the professor will say “do this” and then “do that,” and then you can start all over again, so to speak. But I really did not write such a wonderful dissertation. In fact, I’m surprised that Hellema even said “this is okay.” ... He could have told me “this topic is not of sufficient interest” or “not sufficiently scientific.”

Although it is difficult to say why he would bring this up (after all, I never challenged the legitimacy of his dissertation; he volunteered this information) I do suspect that it had something to do with the remark with which he opened the interview. With the first remark, he was able to establish himself in the interview as a competent scholar; with this second remark, he establishes himself as someone with a critical mindset and the capability for a fair assessment.

In Chapter IV, I pointed out some of the ways in which the gatekeeper played a role in his story. I did not, however, illustrate the ways in which he built himself up throughout the interview. There are many such examples. For one, in the following exchange Lee had just told me about how Coops had kept him from enrolling as a chemistry student.

So then I went ahead and declared law as my major, which I started in 1940 at the VU in the center of Amsterdam. I

joined the Corps and also the Oratory Association Agora...  
 And I took classes as long as it was possible; I passed my  
 Candidate's exam on February 19th, 1942. In those days,  
 that was rather quick. It was supposed to take you two  
 years but it took me a year and a half.

Given the thrust of the conversation at the time, the reference to the quickness of his exam does not appear relevant. Something similar happened when he talked about the declaration of loyalty that the Nazis expected him to sign: "I refused to sign it even though my father tried to persuade me to do so." After refusing to sign, he went into hiding at his grandmother's house in Soestdijk, approximately 40 miles from Amsterdam. Some months later, he went back home: in September 1944 "I cycled back from Soestdijk to Amsterdam, in spite of the fact that it was rather dangerous because the Germans could spot you and always appeared interested in you." At home in Amsterdam, he studied and took clandestine exams with VU professors. Professor Diepenhorst "visited me once or twice. I took several exams over there which was not at all that easy, because you had never gone to class. You only had the books and, well, that was not that easy, but anyway, it went reasonably well." He studied Roman law "a thick book, of one thousand pages, in French, *droit Romain*. I worked my way through the entire book, even though there were probably Dutch books as well, but this was recommended to me. So eventually I had to delve tremendously deep into it. The French was not too bad, after all I had graduated from gymnasium, but you still had to work your way through it all." And he studied a particular kind of tax law, which was "a very difficult law." When he took an exam in tax law, he said it was the exam he enjoyed the most:

In the spring, during the Occupation, I went to professor Hellema's house, in the Van Eeghenstraat. That's where I took my last exam, which was the most enjoyable exam I ever took, because when I got there, around 9:30 am, I said "professor, I know I need to take the exam, but I still have so many questions. ... Things I'd like to know but can't seem to find out." So he grilled me for an hour and then he said "now it's your turn." So I asked him all the questions I wanted to ask him, that I had no complete answer to, and the funny thing was that at one moment he didn't quite know either, and he climbed his ladder in his study, grabbed a book and read a bit, and said "well, it's probably like this" (laughs), and those are some, things you remember, but so after two hours, I, because I think I interrogated him myself for an hour.

It seems that the reason Lee enjoyed this exam so much was not that it was easy or he earned a high grade; it was because he interacted with his professor on a peer-to-peer level, "interrogating" him after having been "grilled" himself. Perhaps this is one of the instances where Lee briefly tasted success. Success, in this case, has everything to do with societal status. There is a similar example later on in the transcript. He had just described reprimanding a supervisee: the skill level of this new employee appeared to be below par, and when faced with a question he would call his friend on the phone for the answer. Lee made sure that he knew he was supposed to find out for himself. And then in 1948, Queen Wilhelmina abdicated the throne; she had reigned for fifty years and was ageing. Her daughter Juliana was to take over in a formal coronation ceremony:

that same man said [...] "gosh, it says here in the constitution, that when Her Majesty is to be inaugurated at the sworn meeting of the States General in Amsterdam, it's open to the public. Let me call the parliamentary clerk, because I would like to attend." I said, "me too!" So we both got invitations, and we went to the Nieuwe Kerk [church] in Amsterdam, and we attended the inauguration. They had put me behind a pillar I didn't see a thing

(laughs), but in and of itself it was of course a very special day. You weren't allowed into the city center, but when we arrived at the Weteringschans [police] came over. "Look, here is our invitation." "Oh, gentlemen, please continue." They were all in a black suit, and I remember what I experienced there, it was the procession, there at the palace on Dam square. [We had a] reserved spot on Damrak road, so of course that's where I was perfectly able to watch that procession [...] But anyway this same man whom I had to slap on the wrist, saying "don't call your buddy, figure it out for yourself," he's the one who said "ah, wouldn't we like to attend."

The emphasis in this vignette is not so much on attending the event as it is on the privilege that came with the special status accorded to them by virtue of the invitation to attend. He was able to mingle in the highest circles of society, which appears more important than attending the actual event.

After he got his Ph.D., he became a manager in the life insurance company he worked for.

I had to write the annual report for the Personnel Department. I asked each department head for a contribution, and when I talked to the head of Medical Services he said "but I cannot write that." So I interviewed him, wrote everything down, and checked to see if he agreed with what I had written.

The unfairness clearly comes through in this vignette, in which Lee positions himself as more competent than the Head of Medical Services, who apparently was not confident in his writing. It is also consistent with Lee's childhood memory as outlined in Chapter IV: Lee only took one pretzel at his teacher's house, while another student took a whole handful. I asked him what he did not like about his job as manager of

training and development: “Well, to be honest, I felt kind of shoved to the side, and that was a continuous feeling.” He explained:

When I took that job there was nothing in place, only a bunch of different divisions. So I had to put those people together from very different backgrounds and cultures, and create some unity. Eventually I had twelve employees, which is not much but still fairly large for a training department. They would often push people my way, in the company, who were competent in their fields but could not work well with others and they would be told “why don’t you take some training,” so I felt like I was some sort of trash can for the company. “Good luck working with a lot of difficult people.” That generated a lot of worry for me so it really was not a very good time period. Moreover, at the end of the day I did accept the position and thought “I am going to build something, make something new.” I had written a lot of reports to the administration, “let’s do this” and “let’s do that.” I saw that other insurance companies had a training center outside the city, where they would receive people all the time, and I said “I would like that too, that should not be a problem, we have 4,000 employees it should not be a problem”... Nothing.

The image of the company trash can is of course very telling here; Lee’s bitterness with the situation and his leadership’s lack of responsiveness is palpable here. Still, he manages to add that his department was really quite large, given the circumstances. Just as above, where Lee treasured the opportunity to attend the coronation, in this case he derives a sense of satisfaction from overseeing a relatively large department. When I asked him what particular events from his work chapter jumped out in his memory, he said:

Well, I would say that the time when I reported to the assistant director as manager, when I had four departments of about thirty people each, so in total about 120 people, that was a time I enjoyed although it was difficult too.

Hopefully, by now Lee's narrative pattern is clear: he counters a narrative of dissatisfaction with instances of success, by highlighting the times he got close to where he wanted to be. Ironically, this sets the reader up for disappointment even more because those instances invariably are fleeting. This is particularly true for his attendance at the coronation ceremony, but this is not the only instance by any means. Lee is "on welfare," and is entitled to emphasize his successes, no matter how relevant, in order to end up with a balanced narrative. It is as though he is telling me that his public life lacked the success that he had hoped for, but that this was not due to a lack of trying or even a lack of talent. Everyone in the Netherlands is, in principle, equivalent.

Against this backdrop, it may be useful to examine how the Occupation is featured in Lee's distillation. Adrian's distillation contained numerous vignettes that dealt directly with the Occupation. Just like Adrian, Lee devoted his second life chapter to the war years, 1940-1945. His second chapter, which was untitled, contains the following vignettes:

1. I remember when I asked him, and my father finally said "go ahead and do it." My maternal grandfather said to my father, who owned a wholesaling business, "how *could* you let your son go to college? Have him work for the business. You have to bring your son into the business, he is your successor." But I was not at all interested in entering the world of trade, I also don't think I would have ever been successful, I don't have much of a trading mindset.
2. June 1940, because there still were no prospects for employment, I insisted to my father *that I could, wanted to go to college*. I visited with professor Coops at the VU, because I really wanted to study chemistry. That was my hobby, I had even built a laboratory at home where I had done all sorts of experiments. But that professor said



“well, your science grades are not high enough to warrant a recommendation for you to study chemistry.” So then I registered for law instead.

**3.** Kind of like, “if it can’t be chemistry,” ... law is often the remaining choice ... and they said, “this major does not take long to complete and it is affordable” (laughs) and so on.

**4.** You had to (inaudible) drink beer, which wasn’t all that bad but beside that you had to visit a variety of Oratory Associations, mostly during the day and in the evening. You had to wait until you were given an invitation, by that OA, whether or not they thought “that is a nice kid, he can join our club.”

**5.** The funny thing is, I became president of my OA, Agora, after only one year. I don’t really remember why, apparently there was no better alternative, or at least I was somehow chosen. I did tell them “but I just joined, I don’t know enough about it,” but I did it anyway and that was a good learning experience, because there is a lot you have to swallow, as president (laughs). After six months you would immediately receive a vote of no-confidence, which was customary, so of course you say “well, then I will step down,” and they say, “no you cannot step down just yet, you need to wait for the new set of officers,” which of course happened the following year you see (laughs), it was just a game.

**6.** By the way, that was an enjoyable time because those professors, they would receive you at their homes for the oral exams, it was still, you had to write a nice note and you’d get an answer “come over then and then.”

**7.** How I ended up with that life insurance company was coincidental. Before I went into hiding, I took a year-long class at the VU in the mathematics of life insurance. How did I get the idea to study the mathematics of life insurance, probably because I had taken the sciences curriculum in high school, and I thought “that seems fun to take a closer look at,” so I took the class, a year-long series of lectures on Saturday afternoons.

**8.** In the spring, during the Occupation, I went to professor Hellema’s house, in the Van Eeghenstraat. That’s where I took my last exam, which was the most enjoyable exam I

ever took, because when I got there, around 9:30 am, I said “professor, I know I need to take the exam, but I still have so many questions ... Things I’d like to know but can’t seem to find out.” So he grilled me for an hour and then he said “now it’s your turn.” So I asked him all the questions I wanted to ask him, that I had no complete answer to, and the funny thing was that at one moment he didn’t quite know either, and he climbed his ladder in his study, grabbed a book and read a bit, and said “well, it’s probably like this” (laughs), and those are some, things you remember, but so after two hours, I, because I think I interrogated him myself for an hour.

9. I really did not participate in Resistance activities, my (inaudible) “just be sure to stay away, and don’t get caught” ... I am not the kind who will say, “I am going to (inaudible) that, join the underground Resistance,” I also don’t think that’s my nature ... It’s not in my nature to go at things so actively ... Inert and passive, I would say.

10. I thought “when I become an attorney down the road,” because that was the problem, “what am I going to do? Will I become a mayor, will I be in a city government, or what will I do?” You have no idea, so I thought “as attorney I have to know about bookkeeping, I know nothing of bookkeeping, I never went to vocational school.” So I taught myself bookkeeping... for months, along with my regular college education, bookkeeping, and that’s not easy, but anyway, after the war, in ’46, I got my certificate in bookkeeping, and I passed, on the first try.

11. then the Liberation came and I could take my finals, but that was just a formality because they said “you have passed all your exams and uhm, we’ll give you your degree,” and that was of course something special ... where, because of the times, they said “well, we think we’ll pack it in, you passed all your exams so this is fine”

What is particularly striking in this series of vignettes is what’s *not* here. This is especially poignant considering that Lee knew that my primary interest was in wartime events. Only one vignette is directly linked to the Occupation, and it is an explanation of

why Lee did not enter the Resistance. The full exchange was as follows. I had asked him if he had ever considered spreading leaflets or things like that:

Well, I was very, very pro-Allies. In the time that I was in hiding I could not do much, but I do remember that when I returned to Amsterdam, in September 1944, that I distributed some [underground] newspapers. Once, I went to Professor Waterink's house to bring him some food for my father, who was a little involved in Resistance work. I lived in the Johannes Vermeerstraat and had to go to the Vondelpark, which was quite a distance. I can remember that but beyond that, I really did not participate in Resistance activities, my (inaudible) "just be sure to stay away, and don't get caught" ... I am not the kind who will say, "I am going to (inaudible) that, join the underground Resistance," I also don't think that's my nature ... it's not in my nature to go at things so actively ... inert and passive I would say.

It is an interesting response, not so much to my question as to the wartime master narrative. He emphasizes the distance he had to travel within Amsterdam to get food to Dr. Waterink. It is as though he is saying that he may not have done much, but what he did counted. At the same time, he concludes by calling himself "inert and passive," hardly a compliment. He bows to the master narrative here that says if you were not a hero, if you were not *goed*, then you were *fout*. Lee was not *fout* in terms of his attitude (after all, he did not at all sympathize with the Nazis), but he judges himself harshly in light of an apparent lack of activity. Similarly to Jim Thurston, he mitigates the damage to his identity by ascribing this to his nature, which is outside of his control. But the price he pays here, of course, is a less-than-flattering portrayal of himself.

This exchange is a microcosm of the entire narrative: overall, it is a rather negative assessment, but because he highlights something positive as well, he achieves a

semblance of balance. He simultaneously bows to the wartime master narrative and satisfies the egalitarian master narrative.

As for the other narratives, there is nothing here about the threat of retaliation or about the shortage of food and resources. This is not just true for the distillation, but also for the narrative. One example is from the time he was in hiding in Soestdijk, at his grandmother's house:

I had to go into hiding because I had not signed the declaration of loyalty, because of my age, which made me eligible for the labor service, and because I had been in the military. I was called in to report which I had not done. Fortunately, they never caught me, even though every so often I had to go outside in Soestdijk. After all, I sometimes needed a haircut.

A haircut? If it was safe enough for Lee to step out to get a haircut, maybe it was not so dangerous after all. Or was it? I found this to be rather puzzling. But this is the only reference in the narrative to danger. My point is that there were no war-related events that were left out in the distillation process. It would appear that for the war years, Lee's lens is pointed inward, focusing on his own doubts and questions as he prepares for life after graduation.

It is of course difficult to explain the absence of something. It could very well be that the Occupation was not at all important in his daily life. His father was relatively well off, so Lee probably was able to eat better than most who were in Amsterdam during the winter of famine. Lee may never have seen a machine gun or experienced a bombing. But this is highly unlikely, especially for someone who lived in a city deprived of fuel, of food, and of the basic measures of safety.

Another explanation is that Lee was so preoccupied with his Occupational choice that the Occupation was simply less important and therefore less deserving of vignettes. If true, then this suggests that Lee's story is characterized by a prolonged and serious existential struggle full of disappointment.

An additional explanation is that Lee has had to go to great lengths to restore a sense of balance and fairness in his assessment. He has done so by highlighting everything positive, and so much so that he risked being perceived as bragging – a cultural breach. Devoting any more attention to wartime events might well have exacerbated this dilemma. If Lee finds little opportunity for narrative repair in wartime, or worse, if wartime experiences only serve to further damage his identity, it makes sense that they would not be featured in his narrative. After all, this is a public performance and that means that there shall be balance. *Doe maar normaal, dan doe je gek genoeg.*

## CONCLUSION

What I have attempted to show is that both of these narratives had to deal with tensions imposed on them by the Dutch mainstream culture. Adrian had to balance truthfulness with humility, a feat not easily achieved given his successes. He does so by giving others credit wherever he can. Lee, in contrast, had to find a way to repair his damaged narrative identity and does so by highlighting the small successes wherever he can.

As a result, both narrators are able to maintain a sense of balance, a sense of critical distance and honest reflection. They are performing the *doe maar normaal, dan*

*doe je gek genoeg* mantra. In order to do so, Adrian has to self-efface; whenever forced to choose between truthfulness and humility, he chooses humility – straining truthfulness – and this way avoids being perceived as snooty or arrogant, because he maintains the balance. Such humility is generally greatly rewarded. Lee, in contrast, finds himself having to strain humility in order to maintain that same sense of balance.

This mechanism of maintaining balance is most apparent for these two stories at the opposite ends of the spectrum, which by definition means that they are outside the norm. But the other participants are not immune from this either; they too must maintain balance, but it is much easier for them to do so than for Lee and Adrian. Walter counters his success as a judge with a rather harsh assessment of his wartime attitude. At one time or another, all of the other participants judge themselves or their actions rather harshly. Such judgments are sacrifices made at the altar of credibility, because in the Dutch mainstream culture, if everything is positive or everything is negative, surely you were not paying attention.

The implication is that life stories are more than performances of identity; they are also performances of culture. And this immediately introduces a dilemma. If the researcher has much in common with the participants, then it is easier to build rapport and have a good interview. But in such situations it is highly likely that the cultural context of the interview is either overlooked or underestimated. On the other hand, an examination of the cultural influences is best done in situations where the researcher and the participants have different cultural backgrounds. But the issue in these cases is that

it can be much more difficult to build rapport, which in turn can have a significant effect on the way the interview progresses (as I noticed with Michael Armstrong).

A second implication is that identity is bound by culture. I am not suggesting that cultural conventions shaping the interview introduce “error” which might reduce the accuracy with which the narrator’s identity can be identified. What I am suggesting, however, is that this identity itself is shaped by such cultural conventions. In turn, this poses a challenge to the common, Western assumption that the narrator is an empowered individual who exists independently of the culture within which the exchange takes place.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

This has been a difficult study. Navigating and cutting my way through the thicket of theories and overwhelming amounts of narrative data was exhausting, challenging, and, at times, outright frustrating. There were many other paths I could have created that would eventually have taken me out of the dense forest. Every time I re-read a transcript I see something new. This leads to the possibility that the narratives performed as part of this study could serve as a nearly endless supply of additional analyses, findings, and articles.

For example, the distillation method is based on touchdowns and vignettes. It might be worthwhile to further explore this notion of touchdowns and examine whether or not the amount of touchdowns – particularly those created by reconstructed conversation – could serve as an indicator of richness of an interview. While quality criteria are, more often than not, suspect, it is hard to deny that some interviews are simply better (whatever “better” means in that particular research context) than others. In my case, I noticed that as the narratives contained more reconstructed conversations, I became more engaged with the narrative. It is as though the narrator created a window through which I was allowed to look directly at the lived experience, rather than having to take the narrator’s word for it through general, evaluative statements. To take a banal example, I might say *And I said to the student, “well, you need to be on time from now on.”* I could also say *I expressed my displeasure to the student about tardiness.* Both



examples get the point across, but the touchdown contained in the first example makes it richer. I am not suggesting that reconstructed conversations provide access to some kind of unfiltered, pure lived experience – on the contrary. Reconstructed conversations are just as rhetorical as evaluative statements are. But reconstructed conversations do allow for a more thorough analysis. On that basis, it might be interesting to see whether touchdowns could be an indicator of interview richness. If so, it might provide an additional way to select which transcripts to start with after the transcription process is complete.

Second, I have argued that the distillation method is a useful means of arriving at a core narrative that captures the essence of the whole narrative in the words of the narrator. It is unclear, at this point, how well this claim holds up in other contexts – particularly other cultural contexts. Can this method be applied to similar narratives from India, or Mexico? Can it be applied to people from underrepresented populations? In this group of people especially, one might expect that master narratives are at work that constrain the narrative liberties that people from majority populations enjoy. If the distillation method holds up for a variety of different populations, it might have some promise, but at this point it is a question that requires a significant amount of further study.

A similar question presents itself about the nature of the childhood memory. Are early childhood memories identity claims in other cultural contexts as well? Or are early childhood memories simply a manifestation of a deeply entrenched coherence system in Western culture – Freudian psychology? This is a question of the chicken and the egg:

did Freud discover the importance of childhood experiences, which in turn lay the foundation of psychotherapy? Or did the popularity of his work lead to the commonly accepted premise that one needs to look to childhood to explain the present? If the latter is true, then childhood memories included in a narrative reflect a strategic choice made by the narrator in order to increase the persuasiveness of the story. Moreover, childhood memories might then serve a different purpose in cultures where Freud is not as well known as in the West. It would be very interesting to examine what rhetorical purpose (if any) early childhood memories serve in narratives from different parts of the world.

Obviously, the cultural context within which the interview takes place has a profound effect on the way the narrative is performed. I provided some evidence of this in Chapter IV. My hunch is that the surface of this topic has barely even been scratched. In the research literature, life history narratives are often positioned as performances of identity. This is the foundation for the concept of narrative identity in the first place. But if culture and context are not sufficiently taken into account, we are at risk of continuing to impose our Western views on individuality on the population we seek to study. While culture is indeed often pointed out to be relevant, usually it is merely a side note; it is a unique context within which the individual seeks to define himself or herself. As a result, culture provides a set of parameters for the narrator within which identity is to be performed. The question that merits further attention is the extent to which identity and culture are intertwined. If culture is a context within which identity is performed, then the implicit assumption is that there is something about this identity that transcends its culture. Culture becomes a variable to be controlled and accounted for. But if culture

and identity are fully intertwined, and one cannot exist without the other, then what remains of the concept of identity? In recent years, the modernist conception of the monolithic, coherent self has lost a lot of ground in academic debates. Consequently, identity was usually conceived as complex and multi-layered. In the narrative turn, identity was no longer something that was somehow “within” the individual, but it emerged and re-emerged constantly in the hermeneutic space between the narrator and the listener, and between the text and the reader. Identity, thus, is neither within the person nor within the text; it is the result of a negotiation process within a broader social context. An increased emphasis on culture might then destabilize the notion of identity even further. Identity is, by definition, something associated with an individual. Culture, in contrast, is associated with the collective. If narratives are now seen as performances of identity *and* as performances of culture, then this introduces additional strain on the construct of identity.

A related fundamental question that is worthy of a lifetime of further study has to do with the nature of the research process. How close can we come to knowing the other? It would appear that there are limits that have not always been acknowledged. On the one hand, there is the strand of literature in qualitative research that claims that building rapport with participants results in better data. In this case, “better” usually refers to the participants’ willingness to self-disclose if there is a warm, mutually nurturing relationship between the researcher and the participant. Another way to frame this relationship might be to call it sameness: the more similar you are to your participants (in relevant ways), the more likely they are to participate fully. It is no

coincidence that many researchers who study women's issues are women. It is also no coincidence that I, as a Dutchman, conducted this study. Given the context of World War II in my case, a German researcher might have come away with a different set of data. In my case, my personal history in the Netherlands and my command of the language were the most important dimensions of "sameness" that I shared with my participants. Some measure of sameness, it seems, is critical in order to get to know your participant.

On the other hand, culture now throws a wrench in this system. It takes someone from a different culture to see how culture manifests in the first place; if the participant and the researcher both share the same views, this will be taken for granted and will not be considered an issue in the researcher's final product. If they do not share the same culture, the cultural manifestations of narrative are much more easily identified. But then, the researcher and participant are, in important ways, strangers to each other, which might reduce the extent to which the participant is willing to self-disclose.

In other words, sameness between participant and researcher leads to a better analysis of identity, at the expense of the consideration of culture. This can seduce the researcher into thinking that the participant is knowable. Difference between participant and researcher, in contrast, reveals some of the cultural dimensions of the narrative, but this occurs at the expense of the researcher's access to the participant's willingness to self-disclose.

Last, it should be noted that this dissertation is an unfinished product. There is more analysis and more meaning-making to be done. For example, for some of the

participants, the Occupation was indeed the dramatic, if not traumatic experience that I had assumed it would be. For Hal Young, it was a test of – and testament to – his faith. For Adrian Kinslow, it was a time of personal danger as well as personal growth, since that was the first time (at least, in the narrative) that he had any significant experience working with people from outside his pillar. This helped him embrace the humanist world view that guided him throughout his professional career. On the other hand, there are other participants for whom the Occupation did not appear to have such an effect. Nancy van Eck, for example, took care of her dying mother during some of the darkest times of the Occupation. Lee Zunker appeared to be focused primarily on his own professional development. Gerald Kosberg told me that the Occupation never tested his faith; in fact, he said that the Occupation was actually given meaning because of his faith. From the narratives, it appears that the Occupation had a rather different meaning for each of the participants, in spite of the shared nature of that experience. Clearly this is deserving of further attention in the future. It will be a next chapter to this story.

#### **EPILOOG: REFLECTIONS ON MY PERSONAL JOURNEY**

Earlier, I alluded to the image of having to find my way out of the forest by carving a path. The path I carved is very different from the one I had originally planned. At the outset of this study, the intent had been to examine any evidence of transformative learning in the life stories of the participants, based on the assumption that the war was a critical, if not transformative event for each of them. Soon after completing the transcriptions and reading them multiple times for such evidence, I realized that most of the transcripts contained no such evidence. For the majority of the

participants, the thread(s) of the stories began in early childhood, continued through the war period, and ended up in the present. The Occupation appeared to be little more than an interesting, if dramatic, context within which their lives continued to unfold. This was true even for Adrian Kinslow, the Resistance veteran: He had committed to becoming a physician at age fifteen, became involved in the Resistance when it was no longer possible to continue his course of studies, and when he was presented with several unique opportunities – to become editor-in-chief of a major newspaper and, later, to serve in the Dutch Foreign Service – he chose to go back to college anyway to complete his education.

This left me with the nagging problem of having to retrofit the research questions to fit the data. The problem was not so much coming up with a question as it was narrowing it down to one or a few: the overwhelming sense of possibility created a sense of paralysis. Each alternative appeared to have merit, which, in practical terms, meant that none of them had sufficient merit. This is a major reason why so much time has passed between conducting the interviews (Fall, 2002) and writing this chapter (Spring 2007).

To make a long – *very* long – story short, I have had to let go of the script that dictated that I am supposed to be in control here. A dissertation is an exercise in rationality, summarizing and synthesizing literature, being intentional and consistent about the way in which the “data” are “gathered,” presenting “findings” clearly and truthfully, and linking these findings back to the literature. In short, a dissertation was to be the ultimate left-brain exercise. Doing it using narrative was simply more engaging –

both for the reader and for myself. But the struggle to identify “the” research question eventually led me to realize that as long as I positioned myself as the one in control, with these data at my disposal to do with as I saw fit, I was not going to go anywhere. With help from Dr. Clark, I shifted to a different kind of position, in which I relinquished control to the data. Instead of parsing up and analyzing the data, it was more an exercise in conversing with the data. I had been exposed to that description before in my coursework, and I had appreciated what it meant, but in hindsight, I think that this is the moment where it became more real. Instead of asking the data what I could get out of it (the miner metaphor, described in Chapter II), I asked it what it had to offer me. Once I viewed the data as a conversation partner, to be respected and to be listened to, I was open to a set of possibilities that I could never have dreamed up by determining a “better” research question beforehand. These possibilities translated into Chapters III through V, and as said earlier, could have spawned many more.

Control was not the only thing I have had to let go. Perfectionism was another master narrative that had taken a strong foothold in my consciousness. Anything less than excellent simply would not do. One way in which excellence would manifest, in my mind, was if I could do justice to each and every narrative. The stories that the participants weaved in my presence were gifts, and some of them were jewels. How could I not share all this splendor with the audience? I simply had to share every bit of it in the dissertation. That is, until I started writing it. I am still sad that I was able to highlight only parts of some of the stories, but I now realize that I had to if I was ever going to finish. The desire to share these stories was born out of a commitment I had

made to the participants. What I had overlooked was that a dissertation involves an equal commitment to the audience – who may not share my commitment to the participants.

A third script I have had to let go of, that relates to the perfectionist script, is simply the idea of being done. As I said above, every time I read a transcript, a new insight emerged. This was always intriguing and almost always frustrating. At some point, I should just know the text, right? Obviously, if a new insight emerged, I had not read the transcript often enough. But as it turns out, each door has another door behind it, and there is no such thing as a definitive interpretation of a text. The transcripts were like kaleidoscopes, presenting different patterns every time I take another look at them. I had already found myself gravitating more and more toward postmodern notions of “text” (at least, what I understand to be postmodern): I had developed sympathy for the view that essentially claimed that there is no such thing as a text, other than what the reader reads into it. I enjoyed how radical and outrageous it was, but I was not ready to fully embrace it due to the unsettling consequences. After all, how can we simply do away with the author? That may be a logical consequence of a philosophical line of reasoning, but it is very far removed from daily life as I saw it. After all, it would mean that I might have to disregard the existence of the narrator in interpreting the transcript. And since those people really existed, sitting directly across from me narrating their stories, this seemed like a preposterous claim. Thus, these views represented ivory tower rhetoric, disconnected from a grounded sense of reality as it is lived every day.



But having written this dissertation, I have come to appreciate how relevant this view is to daily life. It is apparent every day, in interpretations of Scripture, of the U.S. Constitution, and of the myriad texts that we encounter every day. Quite often, recent events will trigger new interpretations. If, for example, the shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech leads to tighter gun control measures, it is quite possible that this event could eventually lead to a new interpretation of the Second Amendment of the Constitution.

Fourth, I have had to let go of the ideology, if I can call it that, of the single author – and, by extension, of the individual. As a result of writing this dissertation, I have become much more aware of Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia. Whereas initially I acknowledged it at a theoretical, conceptual level, I now cannot read my own work without hearing – loudly – the astounding variety of voices represented in it. Theoreticians, participants, committee members, researchers, and historians, among others, all have contributed to this text that is now before you. Every time I start reading I hear a deafening cacophony of voices and it makes me wonder what remains of the “I” who did the writing. Again, Bakhtin’s words ring true: the words I have used to create this document are only partially mine. And if a dissertation is supposed to be the crowning individual scholarly accomplishment, just how individual is this accomplishment?

I do not intend to downplay the work that went into the creation of this dissertation. That work was real and the burden was mine to carry. But the saying “standing on the shoulders of giants” is all of a sudden true at a much deeper level than it had been before. It is both a rewarding and a humbling insight. As a result, I am much

more cognizant of the various influences in my life that have brought me to where I am. None of it has been a completely individual achievement, which is both comforting and disorienting at the same time.

When I say I have let go of some scripts, I do not mean that they are no longer around, playing a role in my daily life. It's not that simple. I am not ready to completely disavow the existence of the empowered individual, or, for that matter, the intent of the narrator or author. But what it does mean is that they have been moved off-center. The foundation has been cracked, but the building still stands (and it still gives me shelter). But a process has been set into motion, and it is anyone's guess where it will take me. Only now, upon completing this document, can I start making sense of how I carved myself a path out of the forest. Similarly, only later in life will I be able to articulate where this journey has taken me. But there is no doubt that it has started (or, rather, accelerated).

This process of letting go has been (and still is) both exhilarating and strangely comforting. It involved letting go of terra firma, of any traditional kind of certainty or security. In exchange, I ended up embracing ambiguity and adopting a position of vulnerability. And in the process, I think I may have found my voice.

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## **APPENDIX A**

Contained in a separate file is the PowerPoint presentation that was used during the dissertation defense. It mostly contains photographic material that accompanies the narrative in Chapter I, with brief commentary on the photos included. It also contains brief segments of each videotaped interview (for a total of eleven such segments) that introduce the participants with sight and sound.

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