

**Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**

**Marchiena Davis Interview**

**Conducted by Adina Langer**

**February 23, 2023**

**Transcribed by Charlsie Wemple**

Born in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 1953, Marchiena Boon Davis was the youngest of five children. The family moved to the United States when Marchiena was three years old. Marchiena's mother, Anna van de Steenoven Boon, was a native of Dutch colonial Indonesia. Studying in Holland at the start of World War II, Anna and her brother, Hans, returned to Indonesia on a special children's flight arranged by KLM. After the Japanese occupied Indonesia in 1942, Anna and her family endured 41 months in POW camps where they experienced harsh labor and starvation rations and were subject to punishments for breaking rules. After the war ended, Anna returned to Holland where she married Derk Jan Boon. Grandmother to eight and great-grandmother to fourteen, Anna "Anke" Boon died in Franklin, North Carolina, in 2019 at the age of 95. Her daughter, Marchiena, shared her story with the Museum of History and Holocaust Education in 2023.

**Full Transcript**

Interviewer: Today is Thursday, February 23rd 2023. My name is Adina Langer, I'm a curator at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University, and I'm here with Marchiena Davis, who will be recording a Legacy Series interview in memory of her mother Anna Boon. Can you start by stating your full name?

Davis: Yes, it's Marchiena Harmina Boon, and then my married name is Davis.

Interviewer: Okay, so Marchiena?

Davis: Marchiena. Not too many people say, can say 'ch', so I made it a 'k' sound, Americanized it a little bit.

Interviewer: I see. I-being a, you know, raised with Hebrew school I can do the full 'ch', but I don't know if that's too much.

Davis: No, no it's fine, my family usually calls me Marchien and that sounds kind of abrupt but, it's fine.

Interviewer: All right, great, and do you agree to this interview?

Davis: I do.

Interviewer: Wonderful. So can you start by telling me when and where you were born?

Davis: I was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. That's all I know, I don't know what part of it, just that's where I was born.

Interviewer: And when?

Davis: 1953. April 10th 1953.

Interviewer: Okay. And before we talk about your childhood, I'd like to go back and start with your mother's family. Can you please tell me your mother's full name?

Davis: Her full name is Anna Petronella van de Steenoven, and her married name Boon. We Americanized Boon [pronounced [bo:n]]<sup>1</sup> to be Boon when we came to the States, so I slip back and forth between Bo:n and Boon.

Interviewer: And when and where was she born?

Davis: She was born in Indonesia, Jakarta Indonesia<sup>2</sup>, and her birthday is October 11th, 1923.

Interviewer: And what were her parents' names?

Davis: Her mother's name was **Fenna** Gesina de Bruin van de Steenoven, and her father's name was Johan Hendrik van de Steenoven.

Interviewer: And do you know how they came to meet each other?

Davis: I don't, I never asked. I have no, no story for that.

Interviewer: Did your mother have any siblings?

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boon\\_\(surname\)#:~:text=The%20rather%20common%20Dutch%20name,of%20Boudewijn%2C%20Bonifacius%20or%20Bonaventure.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boon_(surname)#:~:text=The%20rather%20common%20Dutch%20name,of%20Boudewijn%2C%20Bonifacius%20or%20Bonaventure.)

2 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jakarta>

Davis: She had a younger brother five years younger and his name was Hans. Now I think he's probably a Johan and I'm not sure about that. I didn't check before I came, but we call him Oom Hans. (Oom means uncle)

Interviewer: And what was your grandfather's profession?

Davis: My grandfather started off working on sugar plantations in Indonesia, but then he was hired by the Dutch Shell oil company to be an engineer, and I think he was an oil expert engineer and the machinery on the plantations needed some expert engineering regarding oil.

Interviewer: Did they use a lot of machinery on the plantations at this point in time?

Davis: They must have if he was going from plantation to plantation, yeah.

Interviewer: And what was life like for them in Indonesia?

Davis: Well, it would be *the* life. If you know a little about Indonesia, actually the Europeans exploited the Indonesians because they had rubber, oil, sugar, and generally they became a colony of some European nation and it was Holland at the time, the Netherlands. And so, the foreigners, the people that were not Indonesian, lived in very nice houses, had servants, they didn't have to do too much housework for themselves, everything was taken care of them, for them, cooks, maids, childcare. And also, whenever they had their meals they were very formal with tablecloths and china and all those layers of china and goblets. So, that was *the* life.

Interviewer: Did your mother share any early childhood memories with you?

Davis: A little bit. She said she really enjoyed going to the plantations with her father. She liked to, you know, explore and meet the people and she was very friendly and enjoyed meeting all-people from all backgrounds. She played tennis, she was a swimmer, she showed off one time when I was in high school how she could do a back flip, I had no idea. She took classical voice lessons and so, she had a nice life, but she wasn't happy all the time, I think because of her mom.

Interviewer: What was their relationship like?

Davis: Well, my mother was born with red hair and freckles, and that was a little bit of a shock to my grandmother, who was fair, blonde-haired, and it was a-a problem for some reason. She would make my mother wear her hat all the time in the sun, but then I remember my mother telling me that one time she heard about a-a, or read about, a movie star that had freckles, and so she just threw her hat away. She-she just wasn't going to be obedient about that. I think her feeling was you just need to take me as I am, accept me, and I think that most mothers would, but then when Hans came along and he was blonde and blue-eyed, then, you know, he was like the favorite, I think.

Interviewer: Did religion play a role in the family at all?

Davis: Well, I don't know about the early days, but there was a time when my grandmother had a-a tropical disease and it was supposed to be incurable, and I think she even went back to the Netherlands to get taken care of or to get rest or whatever the remedy would be for that, or to help her over it anyway. And someone, now back in the 1920s there was a religion that was fairly new called Christian Science, and it was a healing religion. And, so a friend of hers suggested that she go and visit a, what we call a Christian Science practitioner, and, for healing, and she was amazed that she was healed of this disease, but she didn't want to go to church so she sent my mother and my uncle to Sunday school, which, Sunday school is until about 19, and that's where my mother pretty much learned most of her basic religious tenets. But after that and once going into the prisoner-of-war camp and after, I don't believe she followed a religion, but she did hold onto many of the spiritual truths that are pretty common to many religions.

Interviewer: What was your mother's family's relationship like with other Dutch families?

Davis: Well, there was a lot of bridge playing and parties and, you know, going to the club and all that stuff, which my mother didn't care for. She would rather just sort of go on her own and visit. My aunt called her the 'hi-bye' girl. She would come and go on her own terms, and so I think my mother was a little rebellious about all this extravagance and she would rather keep company with the servants and their children than with the-the other crowd.

Interviewer: So, she had relationships with Indonesian people, Indonesian families?

Davis: She did, she had an uncle that married an Indonesian woman, and so, she was

the type of person just accepted anyone, everyone as long as they were good people.

Interviewer: What was her education like? You mentioned some of the extracurriculars that she did. What was her basic education like?

Davis: Well, it seemed like they were going back and forth between Indonesia and the Netherlands, she and her brother, because my grandmother and grandfather felt they needed a, what they called a proper education. I would think that the education that they had in Indonesia would-would be fine. I've seen pictures of her with her class. So, it was kind of, a lot of back and forth. So, when she got to be sixteen, her mother said she didn't have the head for learning, so she should take a secretarial course, which was very disappointing to my mother because in actuality she was extremely intelligent and she did put herself through some college when she was an adult. But that was the time and, in fact, that was very helpful for her to have a secretarial course because she, during the early years of the, well when they were back in Indonesia in 1939, she took that class, she worked for a military personnel, and that gave her some compensation many years later because she worked for the military.

Interviewer: So then in 1939 she started that year in the Netherlands?

Davis: She was in the Netherlands. I think she was about fifteen, sixteen.

Interviewer: And how was the decision made for her to come back to Indonesia?

Davis: Well, since my grandfather worked for Dutch Shell Oil company, they made arrangements for the children of the personnel to be, if they were in the Netherlands, which was within months of Hitler, of the Germans occupying Holland. They left about six months before that time. Dutch Shell Oil made arrangements for this children's flight, and I think there were like thirteen or fourteen children and then a few adults, and a reporter, a newspaper reporter. So they made the arrangements with KLM, which was the Dutch Royal airline, and took them from-well they had to take a train from Holland to Naples because the airspace was closed. And then they were able to fly, took about four or five days to fly from Naples to Java.

Interviewer: And before I ask you a little bit more about the flight, how-how did news travel

back and forth between Europe and Indonesia, you know how, did they have radio, how did they learn about what was going on?

Davis: Well, I don't know personally, but I would assume a lot of radio communication. They probably had, you know, of course the newspapers and probably telegraphs, mail, all that kind of stuff, whatever it took to get the news out in a hurry. I believe that's what I would think.

Interviewer: And so, what-what did your mother tell you about her experience on the KLM children's flight?

Davis: Well, it was frightening at first because, you know, Poland had been invaded and it was pretty evident that Holland would be next. And Holland didn't have any army to fight this and so they surrendered after just a few days. So they kind of knew this would happen to Holland and so, on one hand they were glad to get out, but at the same time she was only sixteen and her brother was ten and they had to make this flight. Under the circumstances, it was probably a little scary for her, but he looked upon it as a big adventure. Yeah.

Interviewer: And they were together on the flight?

Davis: They were. He's five years younger.

Interviewer: So, what was life like for her when she came back to live with her family?

Davis: Well, it was pretty normal because they were out of the European theater by then and Japan had not entered the war, probably not for another couple years and so, that's when she took her secretarial course and she worked for the military and I think Hans was just in school and the bridge games kept on going, the parties kept going. But then, when Pearl Harbor happened then things changed pretty quickly, yeah.

Interviewer: And which, which military was she working for, the Dutch military?

Davis: Yes, yes because [for] the Dutch, Indonesia was the colony belonging to the Netherlands.

Interviewer: And after Germany occupied the Netherlands, the Dutch remained in control of Indonesia?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: And, did she tell you about, I'm just curious about what she liked to do for fun at that time, did she have any free time to hang out with other young people?

Davis: Well, I've seen pictures of her looking like she's having a fun time with other young people. They wore dresses a lot there, they weren't dressed up in blue jeans and stuff, they looked like they were always dressed nicely and having a good time. I have a picture of her holding her dress out like, she's very dramatic and. Oh, and her singing was a big thing, she liked to [sing] almost operatic, but, she was just seemed to enjoy what she could.

Interviewer: Did your mother and her family have any warning of the coming Japanese invasion?

Davis: I don't think that-well they did in a way because Japan made their way across the Indies and then it was-they could see that they were going to be coming into Indonesia for the very same reasons that the Dutch wanted Indonesia. The Japanese wanted the oil and the rubber and the sugar too.

Interviewer: And once the Japanese were there, did they have a sense that they were in danger?

Davis: Well, they didn't know what to expect, but what they did see were the Japanese soldiers appearing on trucks and then all this a lot of shouting and ordering people around and they would find the very nicest homes and take those for their own headquarters or for their officers or whoever, and then that meant that the people that lived in those homes that were used to that luxurious life suddenly had to take a bag, they were given some time to pack a bag and grab a mattress and be put on a truck and moved to another house and then more and more people coming from the mountains and other areas were just funneled into that larger city and had to share houses just in every little corner of the house.

Interviewer: And this was March of 1942 when the Japanese invaded?

Davis: It yes, well let's see, uh I think it was about six months after- October, November, was that May? Novem- I think it's around May, yeah, when all this happened. [Correction: Actually, the Japanese did invade Indonesia March 1942]

Interviewer: And did they witness any fighting?

Davis: I don't know. I- she never mentioned that.

Interviewer: So how did the Japanese soldiers notify your family that they had to leave their home?

Davis: I don't know if they had any Japanese that spoke Dutch that would seem kind of Strange, but maybe they had some Dutch people that spoke Japanese that would give out the warning that be ready and then I believe they could hear coming down the street, the truck and all the noise and people shoving their suitcases and mattresses up in a truck and then being moved elsewhere. That's my impression but she, you know we didn't hear much from her until maybe 20 years ago, and that's when she started sharing because we knew just not to ask. They didn't want to talk about that.

Interviewer: Once she did share some stories with you, did you talk at all about them trying to save any of their valuables or anything like that?

Davis: Yes, they did have plans worked out with neighbors. Some neighbors were not, they didn't have to move because they weren't considered the enemy, perhaps a Swiss family or a half Indonesian or Indonesian family that was still living in the same level of income, but they were able to stay. And so generally they made arrangements with neighbors to throw stuff over their walls, they had a very high- I don't know if it was concrete, I think they're concrete walls, plastered over- and they would just throw stuff over and then the people knew to keep it safe for them until they came back. And they had no idea it would be so long before they'd come back.

Interviewer: So, what did your mother tell you about the first camp where she was incarcerated?

Davis: Well, it wasn't what we would see on the TV about prisoner of war camps. It was more an area or a district that was wired off with barbed wire, and they had to stay in that area, and there were guards that would watch their movements. They were allowed to leave to go get food, but maybe once a week or something like that, so it was sort of containing them in one area and more and more people would be added to that district from other, you know, outlying areas.



Interviewer: And was she separated from her father and her brother right away?

Davis: Not at that point. It wasn't until they took them to the actual prisoner prison in Banjoe Biroe

Interviewer: And once that happened were the women able to communicate with the men at all?

Davis: A little bit at first, they were able to walk down to the, the area that the men's prison was. Once a child or a boy was ten, they had to go to the men's prison. Sometimes the moms, since their children were so small, would hide the fact that they had reached ten. But also they didn't grow that much because they didn't have much food. So they did try to keep- hang on to their boys as long as possible. So yes, they were able to go down, walk down to the men's prison and see their servants that they had met left behind and their pets and stuff, but that didn't last very long.

Interviewer: And, in some of your mother's writing she talked about um **de Wijk** as the first place where they were located, it being called **de Wijk** do you know if they were given any warning that they were going to be transferred to a different camp?

Davis: Well, that was actually, **de Wijk** means district. I had to look that up, so I'm glad I did because that made sense that that was the area that was the district that was barb wired off, where they were contained. So, yes, they were considered prisoners of war, but it wasn't like what we think of prisoners of war area. It was like the first area I suppose.

Interviewer: Yeah, almost like a ghetto.

Davis: Yeah.

Interviewer: So then once they were transferred to Banjoe Biroe what were your mother's first impressions?

Davis: When they got to Banjoe Biroe?

Interviewer: Mmhm

Davis: Well, she said that was a real prison, with thick walls and different stories and cells. Not that they were locked in the cells, but they were put, they were assigned different cells, and the cells were small. Some were a little bit bigger but I think the first cell that she was in was for like a two-person cell.

Interviewer: And was she with her mother?

Davis: Yes. They stayed together.

Interviewer: What kind of work did your mother do in the prison camp?

Davis: Well, she did about everything she could to get another morsel of food and she was one of the stronger workers. Also, she was one of those that just, 'well yeah I'll do it', you just, she just did what she had to do. And she kept, she supervised the two- and three-year-old children while their mothers were out working in the fields or cleaning up the sewers or whatever they- the Japanese wanted them to do for work. She washed dishes in the hospital, and of course the patients weren't very hungry, so she ate what was- whatever was leftover on the plate. She wasn't afraid of whatever disease they had, there was tuberculosis, there was diphtheria, there was you know, very many contagious diseases. She just, that didn't bother her, she was going to eat. She and some children minded some pigs that were um Japanese because the Indonesians were mostly Muslim and they didn't eat pork. But the Japanese did and so they gave that job to the prisoners and my mom and her mother and some children looked after the pigs. But the food first came from the prisoners and of course the pigs were as hungry as the prisoners because there was no food leftover, so then the Japanese soldiers told them 'well, come get our leftovers and give those to the pigs.' So, my mother and the children, whoever was around taking care of those pigs took- took advantage of the leftovers and ate their leftovers too. And there was a very unpleasant thing that happened was that when the soldiers found out they were doing that, they urinated into their food, but that didn't stop my mother from eating it. They just put it out in the sun and let it dry out and she thinks the sun is a, you know the grand sanitizer, as we all know is, and so it didn't affect her health. That's why she was strong enough. Also, she carried out dead- the dead, and she carried out the waste product from the hospital patients, carried them out in barrels that had holes in them where a bamboo stick was thrust through it and two girls had to carry it out like that. That gave her some opportunities to do some smuggling.

Interviewer: And how did she smuggle using those barrels?

Davis: Well, that is interesting I didn't even know that until maybe just a few years ago what they did because it never occurred to me to ask, you know "wait a minute, what did you do?" Well, the Indonesian natives were in need of fabric, I'm not sure why it had to be particularly fabric, but that's what they were looking for mostly, and the Indonesian natives had something in turn they could swap some food or some fruit or a cake of brown sugar, something like that. So they came up with- somehow, I don't know how it evolved because I don't think they were talking to each other, but somehow they arranged for when the two women, or the women that brought out the poep ton is what they called it, they would dump it the sometimes they had a guard that would look the other way, and then they would quickly put some grass into the bottom of it, and then she would throw the towel or the fabric from her- that she had wrapped around her head into the grass, and then the um Indonesian native would throw whatever they had back at them and then she would quickly put it in the poep ton that had been emptied and then covered with a little more grass. But if you got caught, then you were in trouble.

Interviewer: And, um, your mother told you about a time that she was caught, what happened when- when she was caught?

Davis: Well at the time her mother was second-in-command, they had some hierarchy there so that the communication would be to the person in command and my grandmother was the second-in-command. When my mother was caught smuggling, she and three other girls, I guess they were like 19, yeah ladies, they were made an example to the rest of the camp: 'this is what happens to you if you try to smuggle.' Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were hung by their hands and wrists and high enough where just their toes touched the ground, and they were then wacked and beaten 'till they were bleeding and then they were just left out there to hang and then finally cut down. And my mom said when they were cut down, they had no feeling in their arms, legs, feet, it was pretty bad. And then my grandmother got demoted, so then they had to move into, a worse living situation. They were doing okay and now they had to be in an even smaller cell where there was just one bed and my mom slept on the floor.

Interviewer: Was there a camp doctor who took care of people after these kinds of punishments?

Davis: There- there were nuns and doctors in the hospital, but if you weren't unconscious or whatever wounds you got you wouldn't die from, you just had to take care of yourself and they would just hope that the wounds would heal up.

Interviewer: Did the women in this camp fear abuse from the guards?

Davis: There were some mean guards but generally, my mom said that their camp was fortunate that the guards were, they didn't take advantage of the women, they didn't make any sex slaves. They had heard about that I guess, I don't know how they would've heard about it but somehow they heard about these other issues at other camps where they had really mean commanders and whoever was in charge, so she felt they were pretty fortunate if you can be fortunate in that situation that they didn't have all of that horrible malicious stuff going on. They were just starved, is what, yeah.

Interviewer: And were-were the guards only men or were there women too?

Davis: No, they were men and they were Indonesian and Japanese.

Interviewer: And how did they communicate with the guards, both Japanese and Indonesian? Did they speak-did they learn Japanese?

Davis: The only thing Japanese my mother knew was to count off and then there was something they had to say when they were approached by, a Japanese soldier where they had to stop what they were doing and lean over and put their hands by their side out of respect, and they had some phrase they had to say. I don't know what the phrase meant, and I don't know that she did either. They just memorized it. I don't know how they communicated, other than body language or just gestures or the- the tone of their voice. I think you can kind of get what the message is by that.

Interviewer: So, how was it that your mother and grandmother came to take care of two little girls?

Davis: Well, their mother died and so, when these children were left motherless then someone fostered them, and they were sort of offered to my mother and my grandmother, and so my grandmother said "well sure we'll take them" because that means that'd be two more mouths that we get- get food for and my mother

was horrified that her mother even suggested that she would take food out of the mouths of these children. So, my mother stood up to her mother, said “I’m going to take care of the children and you just stay out of it” and so that’s how they- then my mother kept care of Tonica and Monica the whole time, and even at the end of the war escorted them home on the ship.

Interviewer: And, you also told me a story about a little boy who later died in the camp. What- what was your mother’s experience with him?

Davis: Well, he was a young cousin of my mother, and she, she adored him and felt like, she pretended that was her little boy. Blonde hair, blue eyes, adorable little boy, but he got sick and of diphtheria, and so he was taken to the hospital and it just devastated her when he died not too long after that. But the children, you know, they didn’t have the nutrition they needed and they were more vulnerable. I remember her telling me, which explained a lot, she said “after Dickie died, I vowed I would not get close to even my own children.” So, I-I don’t blame her, and we accepted that. We just kind of knew as we were growing up.

Interviewer: And, she spent so much time with these kids, you know was there, was there something that they did to try to ease the children’s experience, you know, games or-

Davis: Yes, I just read about that in one of her communications with somebody, I decided to look over things a little more carefully, things that I didn’t even know about until this project. She said that she would um- oh I remember her telling me they would draw in the dirt with sticks, they would collect leaves, they would find little objects and- and just make them just look at nature. She knew a lot of children’s songs and little games and she would play as best she could with them and keep them occupied. So pretty much, she kept- tried to keep them in the shade, but she also told me that there was no bug or leaf safe because they would eat them. I mean if they- they were given their rice it was more like glue than rice and if there were bugs in it they said “okay, protein.” So, if they were under a shady tree, it was because there were- it was a tall one that they didn’t get a hold of those leaves. I think they even may have made tea out of leaves or something you know.

Interviewer: Anything to fill their stomachs?

Davis: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was there any attempt made to educate the kids during this time?

Davis: That I don't know, but I think she was mostly with the very young- young ones. The mothers were not available to educate them, but that was one of the things that my uncle said was he got compensation because he said that his education was disrupted, so I kind of think they didn't, they didn't learn anything but survival skills.

Interviewer: So, what were your mother's memories of the end of the war?

Davis: Well, it was interesting because towards the end of the war she was not as strong. They kept-they kept more and more food away from them. Their thought, the Japanese, the thought was 'let's starve them and that's less people to be worried about' and actually there was even a plan to kill all of the prisoners about two weeks, the date was about two weeks after Hiroshima. And she said that, she had a dream that there was an Australian soldier that came and told them that the war was over and then there was another girl that woke up from a dream saying she smelled bacon, and it was the day of the- that was close to the time that end of the war was from Japan.

Interviewer: That's quite an experience to- to have that vision of- of what was to come.

Davis: Yeah, nobody believed her but she kind of felt like that was a sort of an omen.

Interviewer: So how did she find out about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Davis: They didn't know for a couple of more weeks. What they did notice was there weren't as many guards, they were more relaxed and so then the prisoners got a little more bold about congregating and, you know, outwardly smuggling. So I mean they just tried the boundaries there, and that was their hint that- oh and then airplanes would drop leaflets, and mostly the leaflets said that they were free but to stay put because there was a rebellion going on amongst the Indonesians and they were very angry at the Europeans and to stay put, that the Japanese were to guard them. And there were messages of encouragement too.

Interviewer: And-and these came from the Allies?

Davis: Yes. Probably Australian, yeah.

Interviewer: What did she remember ultimately about the, I guess the official liberation of the camp or was there an official liberation of the camp?

Davis: I really don't know, but I know that they were removed from the- Banjoe Biroe to another camp that was more like that district kind of camp. **Ambarawa** I think is the name of it. That was the area that they were moved to. And they were able to go out and get food at their own risk.

Interviewer: And, what did- what did your mother and grandmother do once they were liberated?

Davis: Well, my grandmother actually stayed in the Banjoe Biroe area, my- my mother was more brave to go out and took the two little girls to the **Ambarawa** location. I don't know when they all got back together again, but it was closer to the men's camp there, and then they all- then the men's camp came to that area too. So, they all- the family members finally got together and most everybody survived, except for Dickie.

Interviewer: And, in some of your-your recollections to me and your mother's writings she- she mentions there was a- a restaurant that was owned by um by a- by a cousin who was married to an Indonesian person?

Davis: Yes, her cousin or- maybe it was a cousin- some family member. He married an Indonesian woman, but he had to go to the prison, but, his wife and children who were, their skin, it depended on your skin color whether you got to stay or go, and they kept that bakery going. I think it must have been a bakery kind of restaurant place and that's- they were able to leave some of their possessions with them, too, and because of that they were able- my mother was able to say "we have family in Malang", she was able to move to the Malang area, and they were put into a motel by some rich person. I can't remember what country it was from, I thought it was a Middle Eastern country, and he paid for their food and motel for- on temporary terms, and so she said she doesn't remember where she got money from to buy, it might've been her- her aunt, her Indonesian aunt that provided some money. It wasn't real clear to her.

Interviewer: And there was this recovery process then I think some- somewhere in the writings, your mother mentioned that she was only eighty pounds when she initially left Banjoe Biroe?

Davis: Yes, she was yeah. When she passed on, she was eighty pounds, so I know how thin that was, and she was my size, really, you know, my height and everything, so eighty pounds is not a lot, some skin and bones.

Interviewer: Yeah, so, going back just a little bit to, you know you were talking about the leaflets being dropped, you were-

Davis: Oh yeah

Interviewer: -you told me a story about her picking up a leaflet and then being punished by a Japanese soldier, what happened there?

Davis: Yes, they were not to pick up these leaflets, and if they were caught then they would be punished, but she picked up one and stuck it in the crotch of her shorts, and the guard, confronted her and she denied that she had it. He got so angry because he felt like she did have it that he stabbed her in the leg, the lower leg, like the shin area. I remember where her scar was and the indication was where she had that injury. It was a bamboo spear, and if you know anything about being injured by any kind of wood, it becomes infected quickly, and so her leg was very painful and it was infected. But she was friendly with the daughter of the doctor and the daughter said "you've got to go see my dad and get this new medicine put on called penicillin." And now this doctor was sort of ostracized because he cooperated with the Japanese, but I believe he did because he was there to save lives no matter what-who. And so my mother said "I don't care I- [laughs]- I'm going to go for this medicine." And that is what would save her leg, but she still had after effects from it because I remember when we were young and living in Massachusetts we would ice skate and it was difficult for her to put the, you know, you tie your skate- lace your skate up and it got to that point and she couldn't take the pressure, it was painful for her all those many years later.

Interviewer: And um, how- how did life sort of slowly change or go back to normal? Was there any new normal that kind of came about after the- the Japanese had left and the Indonesians were kind of taking control or-?

Davis: Well, what happened was they were supposed to still stay in contained area because of the revolutionary Indonesians. They survived 41 months of starving and then you faced the other danger of perhaps as your truck was going down to the ships, the rescue ships, that you might be attacked and killed then. So they-



they pretty much stayed huddled down until they were rescued. They were not going to stay after they were not welcome to stay anymore, so their next challenge was to stay alive and get down to the rescue ships.

Interviewer: And who was sending rescue ships?

Davis: The Dutch army- or navy, sorry, wouldn't be the army would it [laughs] the navy.

Interviewer: So, how did your mother then eventually come to return to Holland on one of those ships?

Davis: She did, she told her mother she was going to go ahead and go down to the rescue ships, take Monica and Tonika, because their father, his name was Fritz, could not be with the children on the ship, so who would take care of these two little girls, unless they had a- a woman to care for them. So, my mother volunteered to return to the Netherlands on this rescue ship. And, so they were in, I have no idea which harbor they were, but what happened was that, at that time there was a strike of the crew members and they usually, I think they were Indonesian crew members, and so they got the college students from Holland to volunteer to crew these ships, and my father was one of those college students. But my father already knew my mother from when she-one of her sporadic trips back and forth for her education. He was a year behind her because when he was young, he had tuberculosis and he had to stay out of school for a year to recover, so they happened to be in the same grade even though they were a year-he was a year older. And she said that-or he said that she was the only one that gave him the time of day, gave him a little attention because he was very studious and serious and one of those genius-kind of people, that are engineers and inventors and they might not know how to act around other people. He saw her on the ship and recognized her red hair- auburn red hair, it wasn't that bright red hair. She told me she was so happy to be on this ship that she broke out into song and I'm thinking "boy this sounds like a movie doesn't it?" but I- I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't do that, and that caught his attention and then he recognized her even though she'd been through all that, you know, horrible time. They didn't get together immediately but they stayed in touch and then eventually got married, a couple- a couple, three years later.

Interviewer: And what was his name?

Davis: Oh, his name was Derk D-E-R-K Jan Boon.

Interviewer: And when-what year was this when she was on the ship?

Davis: Uh 1945, yeah 1945.

Interviewer: So, what-what was their relationship like when they got married?

Davis: Uh, it wasn't good. I think my mother was very vivacious and he was subdued and I think she probably irritated him [laughs]. But they had five children within five years. I mean, my sisters are 11 months apart, and then my sister and brother are 11 months apart and then there's a year and a half between the two brothers and a year and half between me and my brother. So, five kids within five years. We just knew to kind of stay out of his way, wasn't much for-for kids, and he would come and go. So, they did divorce when I was a baby, and he moved to Denmark. He was hired as an engineer. He was into chemical-chemicals and plastics and stuff, and he left Denmark and then he was recruited by quite a few companies in different countries to come work for them. Now, if you have an opportunity to leave Holland after all that bombing and still rationing of food and very little employment there you take it, and he chose to go to the United States. I do remember living in Holland in very small quarters and a shared bathroom down the hall and, my mother said if the sun came out, we just dropped everything and went outside because she just-she missed Indonesia and the sun and everything. The contrast between Indonesia and Holland is great you know, the mountains and the sunshine and the jungle versus the flat and the cold windy rain, green but [laughs], and there were-there was nice weather there too but she was homesick for Indonesia.

Interviewer: So where-where do you fit into this group of five kids?

Davis: I'm the youngest.

Interviewer: Um, so-so they divorced, but then they got back together?

Davis: Well, they kind of had to get back together because my dad lived in the United States for a year, and if you can imagine moving from tight quarters to a small town in Pennsylvania where you could have your own freestanding home and a yard, lots of food, clean. He thought that would be best for the kids to come over. But my mother, since they were divorced, she couldn't come unless she

remarried him, so they got married again in 1956. Yeah, right before we-we moved, yeah.

Interviewer: So, what was the journey over like? How did you go from Holland to the United States?

Davis: We flew into-was there an airport called Idlewi-Idlewild? Yes, okay, yeah I remember reading something about that. We flew in there and I do remember the stories that we were so excited because that was New York City, that we had to take a taxi to a hotel and my brother Rick, who is Johan Hendrick, was a year and a half older than I, he was so excited he kept telling the taxi driver in Dutch that they just- "they flew in an airplane, they flew in an airplane!", And the taxi driver says "gotcha, gotcha" so my mother said to my dad, "what's gotcha, gotcha?" and so my dad had to explain, so I think he was just kind of like, you know, get the kid to stop saying the same thing over and over again. That was kind of a funny story.

Interviewer: So, what were your first impressions of the United States?

Davis: Well, I was only three, but the stories I've heard were, you know, we-just, my mother loved it because there were- in Pennsylvania there were mountains not too far away. My dad worked for Curtiss Wright for a government contract near Clearfield, Pennsylvania and since then I've found out that site where he worked is contaminated with uranium and cobalt and something else, and he died kind of young, at age 62 of leukemia, so I'm thinking "what if there's a connection?" He was in the plastics department that Curtiss Wright was-you think of Curtiss Wright as airplanes, but I've found out since that they did these other oil and plastics and nucleo-nuc-nucleonics-never heard of that but that's apparently something to do with nuclear power.

Interviewer: And, you and your family lived in a house with a yard, what was your neighborhood like?

Davis: I think it was just sidewalks and, you know, like Beaver Cleaver kind of, neighborhood, yeah. Kids went- my sisters and brothers went right to school, immersed and learned English very quickly. They didn't have, you know, ESL or anything like that, they just- and I remember first Halloween where my mother sat down and sewed all these costumes for us, because we were in America now we were going to do the same thing. But she did not let us have Easter baskets

because she felt like Easter was a holy day and we shouldn't be doing that, so we didn't get our first Easter basket, I don't think, until I was in 3rd or 4th grade when a neighbor felt sorry for us.

Interviewer: Did-did she join a church or something like that?

Davis: Well, she was invited to a lecture that was associated with the Christian Science religion and then a neighbor invited her to it she said "oh that sounds very familiar" and so she put two and two together and so she was a lifelong-after that a lifelong Christian Scientist and we were all raised in the same church, but most of us have left that.

Interviewer: And, what was your relationship like with your mother?

Davis: Well, I was the youngest and, you know, I was still a silly girl or something I don't know what-what she thought of me. I think she appreciated me because the last three years of her life I moved up to Franklin, North Carolina where she was living and was nearby, just so she could live in her home as long as possible and most of the time she listened to me but there were times I'd have to call my sister who lives in Holland-to talk to Mom about this and that, so we worked it out. You know, we all had our role as the five kids, we all had a different relationship with my mother. But she just was very practical, and I was able to talk to her about things coming kind of in the back door way so she would understand maybe what would be better thing to do. I sound like I'm talking in code because I can't give you specific things, it was just the way I had to work around it.

Interviewer: Yeah. When did you first learn about your mother's experience in-in the POW camps?

Davis: Well, we knew about it uh pretty much our whole childhood because she had some certain strange habits, um, which are understandable. We-we couldn't waste food. If there was any food, even a crumb left on any of our plates she would eat it. It was like she was going back to the kitchens in-in camp. If we did want to throw away our food, we had to sneak it into the trash and hide it underneath something, if it was just maybe, a rotten grape or something that. "Ew, we don't want to eat that." She would hoard food if there was a sale, like of sugar, something that wasn't perishable, she would hoard it and it was embarrassing to open up hallway cabinets and have you know, seventy pounds of sugar in there, you know, in five-pound bags. Those kind of things. She was, I remember one of

my boys threw away a half of a pear into the trash and she fetched it out, washed it off, and ate the rest of it. We understood, I mean, we weren't going to blame her for that. But she did say that she gained a lot of weight when she came to the United States because suddenly there was all this food, and in Holland we ate stuff like red cabbage. We didn't have meat very often. Potatoes, uh, just real healthy root vegetables and-and a little bit of fruit. We come to the States and all this bounty of sweets and sugar and floury things, she did gain quite a bit of weight.

Interviewer: And, uh, were there other ways that you think her experiences as a young-young girl and a young woman in Indonesia affected the rest of her life?

Davis: Well, I'll tell you it affected us because she- there was a story that I didn't mention where they would smuggle water. They would take four hour shifts at nighttime and put a-a piece of bamboo that was like just a half a piece where there's just like cupped out along and add a little piece of fabric at the end so they could fill vessels with water from the faucet in the nighttime and then if they saw a guard coming they would run out and say "oh everything's fine", you know, whatever they had to say and then, they were able to get away with that so water was a big thing. If we took a shower that was longer than she thought it should be, she would be pounding on the door, saying "turn off the water." We weren't allowed to let water run. Anything that was left in a glass that was water she would water her plants. You know that was a big thing, the water.

Interviewer: Did she harbor ill will toward the Japanese or anything like that from her experience?

Davis: She did not, and she told me they had to do what they had to do and she had to do what she had to do. And later on in life, I remember in high school, my dad had to go to Japan because he was working on a project with a Japanese company and associated with his company, foam plastics at the time, and he went to Japan and then they visited us. I see pictures of my mom standing with these Japanese businessmen and they would take them sight-seeing, have them over for dinner, all this stuff and she acted like everything was just fine. Very forgiving in that way.

Interviewer: What was-what was your education like?

Davis: My education was pretty normal for American-you know an American uh girl.

When I got to be 18, we all knew that we needed to leave the house. Either go to college or go out and get a job and, find our own way. And, for some reason, this is kind of personal but, I kept getting this message from my parents that college wasn't for everybody. Well, so I went to my high school counselor and said "I don't know but my parents don't think I should go to college." He said, "What are you talking about? Look at your SAT scores, your grades. No, you're college material." But I didn't want to push it, and so I had a feeling that maybe money was tight and that-so I, at age 19, I did leave and well, it was kind of funny, I think my dad told my mom, you know, "it's time for her to go" so my mom said "well I heard about in Atlanta, Marta is 15 cents a ride", and I could afford 15 cents, 30 cents a day for that, and so she and I got on a Greyhound bus-or Trailways or whatever it was-from Charlotte, North Carolina, and came to Atlanta. The Trailways- the bus station was downtown. She found the Christian Science reading room and that lady there offered us a place to stay with her that night, so that was taken care of. I went to Davidson's department store, which is now Macy's downtown, and went to the employment office on a Saturday and got a job working in one of the offices. She and I found a place in North Highland in a boarding house for ladies, young ladies, but remember this is 1972 or something, and I got a room there, shared a room, and it was right on the bus line, and so, that's how I've been in the Atlanta area pretty much my whole life except 4 years in Houston.

Interviewer: What-what were your impressions of Atlanta in the early '70s?

Davis: There was a lot of hippies around on Ponce- Ponce de Leon, what's all they say Ponce de Leon here. And so that was kind of, you know but, you know it was the- the age of the hippies and my sister would dress- blue jeans, bell bottom blue jeans and the madras and the hair and everything, so I kind of had a little clue about that. I wasn't afraid or anything, but it was just, that part of town that I was living in. It wasn't my lifestyle, but I just got on the bus and went to work and came back, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you- did you see a lot of uh Vietnam War protesters?

Davis: Uh no, but I do remember my sister protesting when she was in college and my dad told her that if she did that again she was going to be cut off.

Interviewer: Um, what- did your parents share their political beliefs or- with you?

Davis: Pretty conservative, both of them. They couldn't believe that Nixon could do anything wrong, you know. But, yeah, conservative. But I have family members that are all over the place, even my own sons, so.

Interviewer: Did they- did they have feelings about Russia or the Cold War that was going on?

Davis: Not that I know of. We listened to Walter Cronkite, that was 30 minutes a day, that was about it. We didn't have like, all this 24-hour news.

Interviewer: And did you- did you have sort of exposure to the civil rights movement that was you know, happening-

Davis: Oh

Interviewer: -before you got to Atlanta?

Davis: Yes, yes, we lived in New England, and then my dad got a job in Morristown, Tennessee, which is not too far from Knoxville. It's a very small town, and it was a culture shock. First of all, we weren't living in Massachusetts on ten acres of wooded land where we could run wild and "why are you in the house?" you know that kind of thing. We lived on a tract-a tract home, no trees, downtown. We saw a lot of beggars. The teachers called us Yankees. They weren't- they didn't treat us very nicely, but the worst part was when I went over to a water fountain that said "colored water." I wanted to see what color water would come out, and I could hear my mother gasp at that "what am I doing wrong?", you know. We just-we just didn't know that, and so that was when it was more evident, and also when I realized Alabama was just not too far away from where we lived, and my impression, as a very young girl, eight years old or so was, if I even put a toe into Alabama, I could get killed, or there would be trouble, but I didn't know why. Those images on-on the news. But no, my parents didn't really explain any of it to us.

Interviewer: Did you-did you know anyone who was black?

Davis: Oh, yes, yes, my mother was friendly with everyone because she was raised in-in a multicultural setting there. There were children in my third grade classroom, and I remember just being friendly with this one little boy that was caddy corner to me and- and he just didn't really want to talk to me but I (thought) why didn't he talk to me? So, I didn't understand and I didn't-I didn't ask my mom about any of that.

Now as- you know- later on and as an adult and then learning about those things in school, I could understand much better what was going on and, how I appreciate the movement and this peaceful marching and the effect it had so, but at that time-

Interviewer: It was mostly impressions, you're kind of just-

Davis: Yeah, yeah

Interviewer: -plunged into it, yeah.

Davis: Kind of scary to me was, as a child, yeah.

Interviewer: So, when-when did you first learn about the history of World War II?

Davis: Oh, just the usual stuff in high school where you had to take US history and world history and all that, but it focused on the, you know, the European theater. I knew about the bomb, but I didn't know how the Japanese were involved. I didn't know that they didn't enter the war a couple-until a couple of years later. No, I didn't really know a lot.

Interviewer: Did you learn about the Holocaust at all?

Davis: Uh, well we read about, you know-we read Anne Frank and I visited the Anne Frank House- Museum in Amsterdam and that gave us way more information than what we learned. It seemed like we just skimmed, you know. It was a lot of history to cover and we skimmed through that, but I'm glad to see that now the studies are a lot more, focused on certain areas.

Interviewer: And all of that, and even, you know, if you're learning about Anne Frank, were you ever taught about the experiences of people like your mother, in-in, you know, held in civilian-

Davis: A lot of people-a lot of people don't know about it even now, and I have done, presentations to fifth grade if the teachers have the time or interest to hear about it. And the letters that I got back from these students, fifth grade students, are like "wow, I didn't know that your mother was so brave and I don't think I could've done that, well but, thinking about her, maybe I could." So, it made an impression



on fifth graders because that's the time of their life when they're starting to think about life and what's coming at them and-and making sense of life.

Interviewer: So, what-why do you think it's important for students to learn about the history of World War II then?

Davis: Well, we-we have to learn from our history and our mistakes, and when we keep doing the same thing over and over again. Also, I remember reading somewhere that the Holocaust would not happen again and we would not let that happen again, but there are so many parts of the world that do have people that are imprisoned or considered slaves, and so we couldn't keep our-that promise was not kept. It's still going on, but people don't know about it or they're not interested, they don't want to know about it.

Interviewer: So, then what do you hope students will take away from learning about your family's history?

Davis: That people are more resilient than you ever know, that they can dig deep and survive too, and do what they have to do. Just, even in ordinary life, dig in and dig deep, they can do it.

Interviewer: Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you want to share?

Davis: Oh, gosh. The only thing is that my dad worked for the Dutch Underground, and I don't know if I mentioned that to you and I don't even know if this is the appropriate time to talk about it. He did not tell us much, but there were a couple of things that he did mention. I don't know if he was just saying it to get us to quit asking even the smallest questions but, he said he learned German, he knew quite a few. He knew English, Dutch, German, French, and a little bit of Japanese because when you're in Europe you- kind of- the countries are so close together you kind of have to learn these languages. He was a language person, very smart. He was always fascinated with guns and rifles. When he was a little boy, he had that tuberculosis. His parents gave him radios to take apart and put back together, so he knew a lot about radios and that came in handy during his time working for the Dutch Underground. Now the Dutch Underground had different levels of organization. It was as much as just try to you know, irritate a German or to actually do something like a big plan in place to do- to thwart their efforts. My dad said he would steal radios from the Germans and then, place them in people's homes after, because the Germans undo something, maybe some tube or

something (so) that they couldn't hear BBC, and it was very important for them to hear the news from Great Britain, and so he fixed those radios in that way. Now, he said he learned German because eventually he got sent to a German potato farm because you know the German soldiers were sent off to war, nobody to do the farming, so he did that. I'm not sure if that's true or not because it seemed like he was also getting his education at the same time in- in college in Holland, so I don't know what the potato farm thing was about. And then my brother said "well, daddy told me that, he would teach people how to kill Germans quietly." I don't know, that's all I know. That's what one of my brothers said. I don't know the truth. We will never know the truth.

Interviewer: And do you know anything about that technique, what-what that meant?

Davis: I didn't I don't know [laughs]. I don't know, maybe we should research it.

Interviewer: That's very interesting, um.

Davis: Yeah

Interviewer: And so you talked more to your brother about that than you did to-

Davis: Well, my brothers were into rifles and guns and all that stuff too, and they would go hunting. I don't know what my dad- you know, sometimes I think my dad just said stuff for effect, so take it with a grain of salt, everybody.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much for your time and for-

Davis: Sure.

Interviewer: -sharing your family's story and for sharing the artifacts. Do you want to just talk a little for the camera, you know-

Davis: Oh

Interviewer: - just about that artifacts that-

Davis: Yeah

Interviewer: - you shared with us?

Davis: Yes, well see, there was more! The prisoners of war, when they packed their bags, they didn't know how long they were going to be gone, so they would throw whatever their hobby interests were, too. They didn't know they were going to be gone for 41 months, and they probably would've taken other things rather than maybe the paint and you know, charcoal or whatever it was that they had as artists. So, but then at the same time, they would take whatever tin can or whatever materials they had (in camp) and form them into something artistic that they could barter because they didn't have money. So, my mother and grandmother had a lot of these little decorative pins that some artist, must've been the same artist or maybe a group of them, and they were actually on safety pins. You could wear them a little- a little decorative thing and they would paint it and they were carved out of wood or- or shaped out of a tin can or something. So we had those and then some artists would do little pottery. Now, Indonesia has red clay, and that's one of the reasons my mom loved the South, because of the red clay and the mountains and I thought "I didn't know there was red clay anywhere but in Georgia." So, some of the people in the camp would make little dishes or whatever and- I don't know how they fired them though, maybe they had their way- and decorate them and they had scenes of camp life there, a dog trying to get through barbed wire. My mother said "well the dogs would come in and we were sad to see them go because we wanted to keep the-the dogs as a pet," but the dogs eventually disappeared, you know, who knows where they went. We can guess.

Interviewer: And one-one last thing on that front, um, can you talk a little bit about the rug?

Davis: Oh, of course, the rug, that was so important, too. How could we have forgotten that? I'm glad you remembered. Okay, so when they packed up their things, they took clothes and for some reason my mother and grandmother took this Persian rug and it had, I believe, natural dyes in it, it was very old, and that's what they slept on, in **Banjoe Biroe** particularly, when they probably didn't have mattresses anymore. I think they slept right on bamboo slats. My mother and her mother shared this Persian rug and it kept the lice and the fleas off of them, but then there were still bugs that would fall down from the covering of the shelter. So, they felt that they could get their rest because they weren't being, you know, these fleas and lice were not in their hair or on their body biting like crazy, and of course that gets infected too. So, that was pretty amazing to her, and that's one of the artifacts that I have donated because it was a big part of, part of- and it's not very wide, two people on that.

Interviewer: I know mosquitos were still an issue, right?

Davis: Yes, yes

Interviewer: And your mother did get malaria at some point?

Davis: She did. There's some malaria that you cannot shake and there's some malaria that's temporary. I don't know what kind she had, but she said that she didn't have malaria for very long and I don't remember that she had malaria as we were growing up, so it must've been-or she prayed a lot, could be.

Interviewer: Well, thank you again-

Davis: Sure.

Interviewer: -for sharing all of these stories with us, um

Davis: Yeah

Interviewer: It's an honor to be able to preserve your family's story.

Davis: Thank you for letting me share.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Notes added to this transcript by Marchiena Davis, May 16, 2023:

To be clear, Fritz was on the rescue ship, but had to travel separately from the women and children. The women looked after the children on the ship.

The actual date of the Japanese invasion of Indonesia was March 1942. I believe it took some time to reach all the islands that comprised Indonesia.

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When my mother was suffering from Malaria, there was a kind Indonesian guard who checked on her well-being. He brought her water and food. Tonika, as a young girl, nursed my mother during that time.

At the end of the war, my mother got Beri-Beri- a disease due to malnutrition, with water retention, making the legs look like elephant legs. It was a painful condition.

Doctors thought that the women that had this long experience of malnutrition would never be able to bear children because their menstrual cycles stopped. My mother viewed that as a blessing. When the women had a normal diet and gained weight, they, for the most part returned to their normal cycles.

Tonika and Monica eventually moved to Australia. They were not interested in recalling their experiences about the POW time of their lives.

When the rescue ships traveled to Holland, they stopped at the Suez Canal, I believe it was the Suez Canal, where the Red Cross provided warm clothing and shoes for the prisoners. It was hard to adjust to wearing shoes again since they mostly went barefoot and grew thick calluses as protection. If there was a split on the bottom of their bare feet, they used the Indonesian red clay as a plaster to help heal the injury.

The artifacts donated included a small aluminum pail that was the ration cup used for their meals. My mom scratched her name into the metal, something that is hard to see without a magnifying glass. If a prisoner lost their pail, they had to use a coconut shell as a substitute.

Another artifact was a small wooden ID tag with a hole drilled in the top with a cord through the hole to be able to give to the guard to hang in the guard hut as the prisoner left the camp. The tag had inked on it the name, address, and birthdate of the prisoner. If the tag was still there at the end of the day, that meant the prisoner was breaking the curfew, for which there was a punishment. This was during the time they were in the barbed wire area from which they could leave from time to time.

The pins that were made by prisoners for bartering, were mostly decorative, carved from wood, painted with details, and some had a bit of ribbon attached. For example, the pins held miniature carved wooden shoes, a dustpan and brush, flowers, miniature folded fabric with a broom- mostly depicting household items. The items were made from found objects in camp and bits of fabric that were squirreled away.