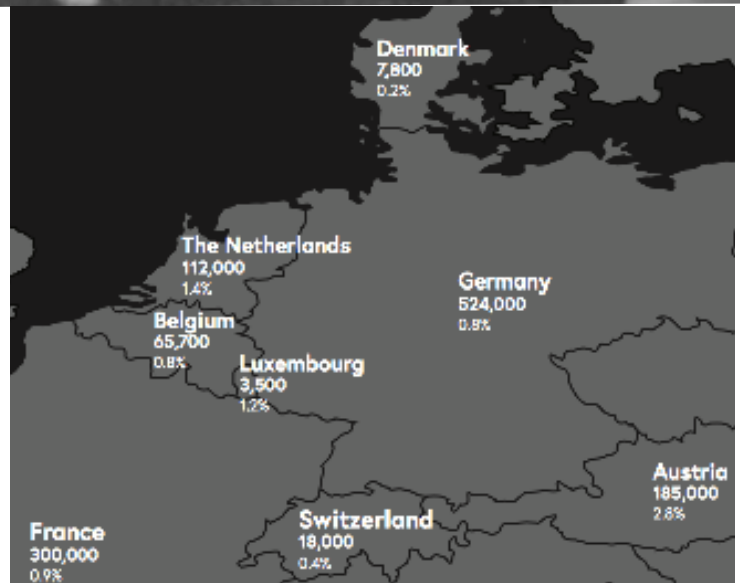


# Say I Love You: The Story of Betty Cohen

**AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS:** The Nazis occupied the Netherlands on May 10, 1940. The Dutch Jewish community traced their roots to the 16th century. At the time of the Holocaust, over 110,000 Dutch Jews lived in the country and roughly 75,000 lived in Amsterdam, the country's largest city, making up 10% of the city's population. Due to the geography of the Netherlands, escape was quite difficult. This coupled with the efficiency of the German administration and willing cooperation of the Dutch policemen and administration resulted in the murder of 80 % of the prewar Dutch Jewish community. Canadian forces liberated Amsterdam and the rest of the Netherlands in the spring of 1945.



Betty and her two brothers before the war. The majority of Betty's family perished in the Holocaust.

**BICYCLES:** Between October 1940 and August 1942, increasingly harsh restrictions were placed on Dutch Jews, including banning children from attending school, enforcing a curfew, and mandating that employers fire all Jewish employees.

A particularly dehumanizing measure for Dutch Jews was the mandate to turn in their bicycles. As Betty mentions, almost everyone in Amsterdam got around by bicycle and it was the primary method of travel. To be forced to give them up was to have all movement restricted, and the ability to see friends and family completely stymied.



**GESTAPO:** The German secret state police did not have legal oversight; they operated without fear of repercussion for their brutal actions. They used ruthless, inhumane, and torturous methods to identify and arrest political opponents and others who refused to conform to the policies and ideology of the Nazi regime. Though the Gestapo was a vital component of Nazi brutal repression, it had relatively few officers and relied heavily on cooperation and denunciations from members of the public.



**WESTERBORK:** The Westerbork camp was established by the Dutch government in October 1939 to intern Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. In 1942, following the Nazi invasion, Westerbork served as a transit camp for Jews being deported to killing centers in Poland. Most inmates stayed in the camp for only short periods of time before being deported, but there was also a “permanent” camp population of 2,000 people exploited for forced labor. In the end, however, most of these “permanent” inmates were also sent to the concentration and death camps in Eastern Europe.



**HIDING:** While the Germans alongside Dutch collaborators deported over 100,000 Dutch Jews, more than 25,000 Jews went into hiding assisted by the Dutch underground resistance. Two thirds of those who went into hiding survived, being hidden anywhere possible, including farms, empty buildings, and homes of Dutch citizens. There were many organizations and individuals who worked to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution. The Dutch Protestant Church openly condemned the deportation of Jews and pleaded with Dutch citizens to hide them and provide them with false identity papers.



**BIRKENAU:** Located in Poland, the Auschwitz complex consisted of several camps opened over the course of 1940-1945. Auschwitz II or Auschwitz-Birkenau is the camp Betty and her family were taken to in 1944. Of all the Auschwitz complex camps, Birkenau had the largest population with specific sections for women, men, Roma, and families. During the first half of 1942, the SS moved gassing operations and mass murder to Birkenau and expanded gassing capabilities at the camp to accommodate the largescale murder of Jewish deportees arriving to the camp. The best estimates indicate that over 1 million Jews were killed at the complex.

**TATTOOED NUMBERS:** During the Holocaust, camp prisoners were stripped of their names and given only a number to identify them as a form of dehumanization. At Auschwitz, the Nazis tattooed prisoners selected for forced labor with their identification number. The practice of tattooing was done only within the Auschwitz complex due to its organization and vastness.



**FEMALE GUARDS:** Of the 55,000 concentration camp guards, about 3,700 identified as women. In 1942, the first female guards (called *Aufseherin*) arrived at Auschwitz and Majdanek from Ravensbrück, a concentration camp just for female prisoners.

**STERILIZATION EXPERIMENTS AT BLOCK 10:** At Auschwitz I, SS physicians carried out pseudoscientific medical experiments on prisoners. The most infamous of these physicians was SS Captain Dr. Josef Mengele, whom Betty mentions in her testimony.

German gynecologist, Dr. Carl Clauberg led a team of doctors in performing inhumane, forced sterilization experiments on several hundred Jewish female prisoners in Block 10. Betty was one of these women. Some women died from the experiences, others murdered for autopsies, and most who survived were left with permanent injuries.



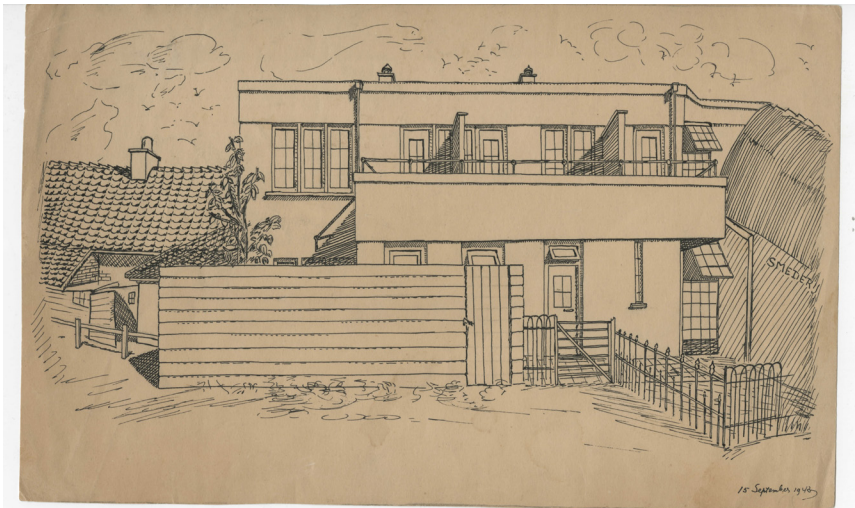
**DEATH MARCHES:** In January 1945, as Nazi Germany fought a multi-front war and stood on the verge of military defeat, the SS organized “death marches,” or forced evacuations of concentration camp inmates, in part to keep the large numbers of concentration camp prisoners from being liberated by the advancing Allied armies. The term “death march” was most likely coined by the victims and survivors themselves, as these marches were over long distances in extremely harsh conditions and under SS guards who brutally mistreated and oftentimes killed the prisoners.



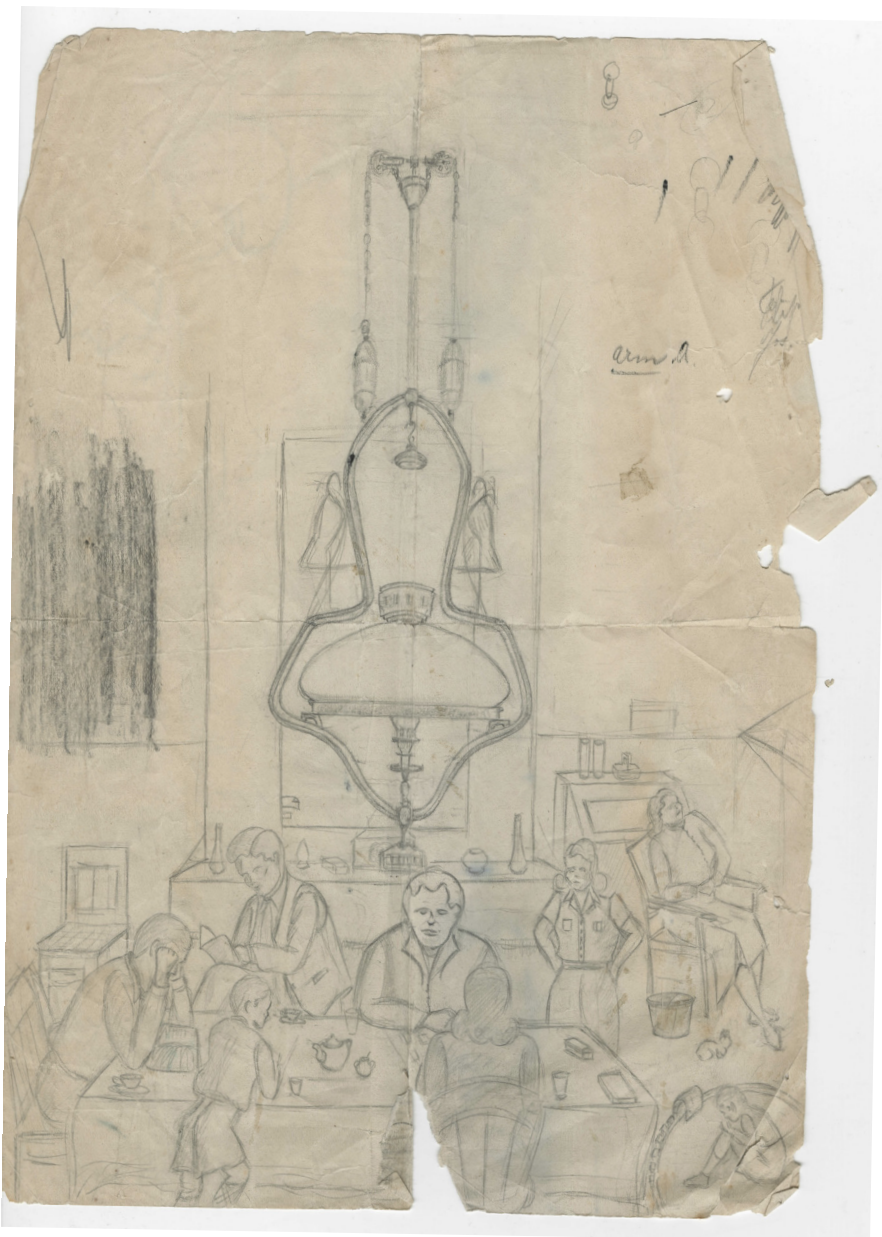
## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What surprised you about Betty's story? Were there any parts of her story that disrupted a notion you had of what happened during the Holocaust, or what life was like at Auschwitz?
2. Can you name a few of the measures that Betty mentioned the Nazis taking to dehumanize Jews? What are other ways the Nazis took away the humanity and identity of Jews during the Holocaust?
3. What do you think is the impact of dehumanization—both on the individual spirit, and on a person's status in society? Can you think of instances in American history when individuals were stripped of their humanity?
4. At the beginning of the video, Betty points out a bracelet that her husband Al gave to her, that she was able to get back after the Holocaust. Is there an object or photograph that is particularly special to you? How can your identity and/or history be linked to objects? Think about how this relates to the artifacts you might find in a museum.
5. Betty urges us all to tell our loved ones that we love them, and to not leave the house angry. Do you have a personal motto like this? If not, think about an idea or statement that you might want to carry with you. Try to live your words!





Betty's brother drew these images while the family was in hiding. They were eventually denounced and deported. The majority of Betty's family was murdered. A neighbor returned these drawings to Betty after the war.



#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the importance of an object or artifact?
2. How is Betty's brother immortalized through his drawings?
3. Why do you think he drew these images?
4. How do you think the meaning of these drawings changed to Betty- what did they mean while in hiding and what did they mean after the Holocaust when she learned that her brother had been murdered?