

HUMANITY IN ACTION

PRESENTS

NARRATED BY PETER HEIN & DAVID HEIN



My Father's War

THREE GENERATIONS IN HIDING

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JUDITH GOLDSTEIN & IRENE BRAAM WRITTEN BY SAMUEL GEORGE

PRODUCER ANTJE SCHEIDLER ASSOCIATE PRODUCER MEITAL ROZENTAL

DIRECTED BY JUAN PABLO DE GAMBOA ILLUSTRATED BY LUISA MÉNDEZ S & LUISA ROJAS

ANIMATED BY OSCAR ORJUELA & JOHANA GARCÍA ORIGINAL SCORE NUPHAR FEY

HUMANITY IN ACTION

ALFRED LANDECKER FOUNDATION

criteria ANIMATION



PRODUCED BY DR. JUDITH S. GOLDSTEIN AND IRENE BRAAM

With the support of



25 minutes

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Synopsis

Some believe trauma is hereditary. That the deep emotional wounds of our forefathers are passed on to us, by how they talk and how they act; the stories they share and the memories they keep buried inside.

My Father's War, an animated documentary produced by Humanity in Action, brings to life the experiences of Peter Hein and his son David. As a Jewish toddler in the Netherlands in the 1940s, Peter was separated from his parents and whisked from hiding place to hiding place to escape deportation. From feigning scarlet fever to avoid a Nazi raid, to suffering crippling injuries during a bombing campaign, Peter somehow survives, one day at a time, even as capture and death surround him.

Meanwhile, the film also follows Peter's parents, who themselves must make a series of daring escapes as their hiding places are revealed to German forces and Dutch collaborators. By the end of the war, when Peter and his parents are finally reunited, Peter cannot even recognize them. "I just saw a strange man with long black hair and a little woman who was crying and trying to kiss me. I didn't want anything from them," Peter recalls in the film.

But for Peter's son David, his father's war stories once sounded widely exciting, and as a child, David longs for the opportunity to experience similar exhilaration. He fantasizes about what he would do if he had to go into hiding: With whom would he hide? And where would he do it?

What David did not realize is that, while his father's physical injuries healed, a deep psychological trauma lingered. Eventually, Peter's mental health buckles under the weight of his memories. He suffers an emotional breakdown; he cannot leave his bed, let alone continue his work as a doctor. The family's economic condition deteriorates as David watches his hero, his father, fade into a shell of his former self.

The film thus explores the hereditary trauma of the Holocaust: the deep emotional wounds of forefathers passed on to children and grandchildren. Peter's mental collapse jars David's childhood, and reveals to David the deep-seated impact conflict renders on those who suffer it. Ultimately, the experience inspires David to pursue a career bringing war criminals to justice.

Narrated by both Peter and David, *My Father's War* depicts an intergenerational conversation, reverberating across the decades. Developed by an international team of documentarians, researchers and animators, this film preserves these critical stories of our past to share with our future.

Production Context

My Father's War is a part of a trilogy of films produced by Humanity in Action that originated in a coincidental encounter of two Jews- Humanity in Action's founder and executive director Judith Goldstein and photographer Judy Glickman Lauder. A conversation between the two following the publication of *Beyond the Shadows*, a photography book by Lauder, which depicts the story of Jews in Denmark during WWII. That conversation inspired Judy Goldstein to contact her friend Rabbi Bent Melchior, whose family was smuggled to safety in Sweden in 1943. She asked for permission to bring the story of his family's remarkable rescue to life in the form of an animated film, and generously, he agreed.

Next, Irene Braam, the experienced Executive Director of the Bertelsmann Foundation (North America), got on board and brought along writer Samuel George and director of animation Juan Pablo de Gamboa. Together they produced the film *Voices in the Void*, released in 2020. The success of this first film encouraged the team to expand the project further and produce two additional films telling related, yet different, personal stories, *Two Trees in Jerusalem* and *My Father's War* (2021).

The three films deal with this dark and horrifying time of WWII and the Shoah from three angles: *Voices in the Void* tells the story of a country that protected its Jews, *Two Trees in Jerusalem* tells the story of a German non-Jewish family that risked its life to save the lives of the persecuted, and *My Father's War* tells the story of a Dutch father-son dialogue looking at the effects of trauma on one Jewish family. In spite of the uniqueness of each story, all three carry a universal message that remains extremely relevant today. As authoritarian tendencies are on the rise in many parts of the world, these stories, with the historical and moral knowledge they provide and the sense of community they convey, allow a wide audience to empathize, learn and find inspiration for their own acts of resistance.

In order to do so, the films create a poetic yet direct line between the historical events and their impact on the future of next generations. *My Father's War* portrays the post-traumatic experience of Peter, who, many years after being separated from his parents and spending his childhood in hiding, deals with major depression that nearly destroys his own family. Peter carries in him his own trauma and that of his parents, and that trauma is then passed on to his son, David. As a child listening to his father's stories of the time, David yearned for a sense of adventure and excitement, but dealing with his father's mental collapse confronts him with the real ongoing effects of war on the survivors. When the time comes for him to choose his path as a young adult, he decides to dedicate his career to help those whose lives have been disrupted by war. As a criminal lawyer he joins the War Crimes Chambers in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later becomes the Head of the Defence Office of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, adjudicating cases concerning crimes committed in Kosovo before, during and after the war there.

Humanity in Action's mission, therefore, was to create a powerful visual narrative that would be truthful and represent the passion that Bent Melchior, Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen, and David and Peter Hein share in their own texts, and then to enable access to these stories to audiences that couldn't be

reached otherwise. This mission, says Judy Goldstein, goes back to the origins of Humanity in Action, which came into being to engage young adults in issues of resistance, of courage and of hope, and its goal of strengthening democracies that support diverse societies and protect vulnerable minorities.

The medium of animation, though usually associated with younger people, resonates with people of all ages due to its unique ability to add emotional depth to informative narratives and provide insights into the emotional world of the protagonists and into why people act as they do, in spite of the often heavy price they have to pay for staying true to their convictions. In addition, the multiplicity of the thousands of images that are manipulated to express emotion takes the viewer into another world, allowing them to imagine more than is seen. Through the dissolving and reemergence of time, the relevance of these historical narratives today is brought to the foreground. With this, the film series aims to reach, move, and inspire younger and older audiences to take action in the face of injustice. In our own times of growing instability, uncertainty and change.

JEWES IN THE NETHERLANDS DURING WWII

When Hitler rose to power in Germany in 1933, many Germans fled to the Netherlands. In 1939 a central internment camp was put up in Westerbork for those entering the country illegally. Soon after the outbreak of World War II that year, approximately 34,000 refugees entered the Netherlands.

Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940; four days later, the Dutch army surrendered. Hitler soon ordered the establishment of a German civil administration. At that time, the Netherlands had a Jewish population of 140,000; 75,000 Jews lived in Amsterdam. 15,000 were German Jews who have fled to the Netherlands believing it would stay a neutral country as it did in the Great War.

A series of anti-Jewish measures began in the fall of 1940. In September, almost all Jewish newspapers were shut down, and in November, all Jewish civil servants were fired, including Lodewijk Ernst Visser, the president of the Supreme Court. Soon the Germans began "aryanization" by ordering all Jewish business owners to register their enterprises. In January 1941 the Jews themselves were ordered to register with the government. A month later, the Germans arrested 389 young people and sent them to Buchenwald. While the Dutch civil administration displayed compliance with the German anti-Jewish measures, in a singular act of solidarity with the deported Jews, a three-day strike broke out throughout the Netherlands, beginning on February 25, 1941. Under strong pressure from the German occupiers, the initial public's indignation against the persecution of the Jews dissipated.

Parallel to the rise to power of the Nazi Party in Germany in the early 1930s, the Netherlands witnessed the forming of its own antisemitic, right-wing movements whose members strongly resented incoming Jewish refugees. On the other hand, many Dutch citizens, including many intellectuals, strenuously criticized the anti-Jewish measures being enacted.

During the summer of 1941, Jews were banned from public places, subjected to a night curfew and travel restrictions, thrown out of schools and universities, and had their art and property plundered. In winter, the Germans opened forced labor camps. In March 1942, the German administration started confiscating Jewish property. The Jewish badge was introduced in April. Many non-Jews protested this decree, and some even wore Jewish badges in solidarity with their country's Jews.

Deportations began in the summer of 1942. Jews were taken to Westerbork, and from there, to Auschwitz and Sobibor. During that summer the Germans also began confiscating Jewish money. When the deportations to the death camps began, the Catholic churches protested, and in retaliation, the Germans deported the Jews that were baptized to Catholicism. A few Dutch rescue groups of students and of church circles came into being spontaneously and sporadically and helped find shelter for Jews, especially for children, but during the first and most crucial period of deportation, most Jews could only rely on themselves to find hiding places. The situation became more dangerous after September 1942, when special units were formed, made up of Dutch collaborators that began hunting for hiding Jews. By April 1943 Jews were only allowed to live in Amsterdam, in the Vught and Westerbork camps. Organized and centrally coordinated Dutch resistance came into being that year, after the Germans began to conscript Dutch men for forced labor. By that time most of the Jews had already been deported.

The last transport left the Netherlands in September 1944. By then, a total of 107,000 Jews had been deported to the extermination camps. Only 5,000 of them returned after the war. More than 75% of Dutch Jews perished in the Holocaust.

Some 25,000 Dutch Jews managed to go into hiding after being ordered to report for forced labor or deportation; about one-third were eventually discovered by the Germans, mostly with the aid of local informants. Many Jews were helped into hiding by non-Jewish contacts who would help Jews move from hideout to hideout, and provide food, ration cards, and forged identity documents. All those who helped Jews were in danger of being deported to concentration camps. Many children were also hidden with non-Jewish families; in all, 4,500 children were taken in, of whom only a few were discovered by the Germans.

(Adapted from [Shoah Resource Center, The International School for Holocaust Studies](#) and [Yad Vashem](#))

Film Stills



Young David



Young Peter, his hair coloured blond, hiding from Nazi soldiers



Peter telling David about his childhood while hiding his trauma



The impact of the past on David's career choice to become a lawyer in Sarajevo



Peter's father, Paul, a German-Jewish refugee, watching the Nazi invasion of Rotterdam



Auschwitz extermination camp, where the majority of Dutch Jews and their helpers were murdered

About the Protagonists

NETTA AND PAUL HEIN



Paul Hein was born in 1904 in the harbour city of Emden in Ostfriesland, Germany. Together with his father, he worked as a carpenter and upholsterer in the family business.

A few months after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Paul was attacked and badly beaten by an antisemitic mob of his former colleagues. Following the incident, he decided to flee across the border to the Netherlands. He settled in the wealthy city of the Haag, where he was able to make a good living as a carpenter and interior designer. In 1937 he married Netta Jakobs and in 1939 they had Peter, their only child.

Jeanette (Netta) Hein (nee. Jakobs) was born in 1907 in Lathen, also in Ostfriesland, to a large and respected Jewish family. Her father Jacob was a cattle dealer and horse trader. After his unexpected passing in 1912, the family moved to the mother's hometown, Weener. During the early 1930s Netta worked as a nanny Paderborn, Frankfurt und Berlin.

In the first years after the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in 1940, the small family were protected from deportation due to Netta's severe case of tuberculosis. From mid-April 1943 until the end of the

war Paul and Netta separated from their four-year-old son and went into hiding, where Netta miraculously recovered from her illness. Over the next two years, the couple hid in twelve different hiding places and with great resourcefulness, courage and luck, succeeded to avoid capture. Both Netta's and Paul's fathers passed away before the war. Their mothers, like many other family members, were murdered in the holocaust. Paul's three brothers managed to escape to Palestine, while Netta's brother Jacob escaped to Argentina, and her other brother Albert also escaped to the Netherlands and survived the war in hiding. After the war, Albert set up a business together with Netta and Paul weaving and sewing gloves and knitwear. Paul passed away in Utrecht in December, 1987, at the age of 83. Netta passed away in the Haag in May 2000 at the age of 93.



Netta and son Peter, 1941

PETER HEIN



Peter Hein (b. 1939) was an associate professor and senior lecturer of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University Nijmegen until his retirement. He is happily married with three children and eight grandchildren and lives in the countryside of (West) Friesland.

Today he is occupied in maintaining the memories of the fate of the Jews during WWII in the Netherlands and is disseminating knowledge concerning the Holocaust. He is a guest-speaker throughout the country on these topics and on the effects of war trauma on his generation and the next ones. Moreover, he is now a writer whose short stories have been published in Netherlands' finest media *Vrij Nederland*, *NRC Handelsblad* en *Kunst en Wetenschap*. He is also a professional sculptor of bronze sculptures with several exhibitions a year in well-known galleries.

Peter's books:

[The sixth year](#) (2014) is the story about the unreal and confusing world of the seven-year-old Jewish boy Peter Hein who went from hiding place to hiding place during the Second World War without his parents. What does he understand about what happened to him? What was wrong with his dark eyes and black hair? In 1945 the war is over. But the post-war years are equally difficult. Family has died, there is no money, life has to be picked up again. His parents are strangers to him. It feels like he's hiding again. In *The Sixth Year*, Peter Hein impressively shows what war does to a child.

[The people in hiding](#) (2014)- The hiding of the parents of Peter Hein, at twelve addresses, turns out to be one long story of betrayal and escape, wanderings, despair, hunger, cold and betrayal again. The

author also came across an undisclosed issue: his parents were accused of betraying a hiding place, which killed four people. After the war, Peter Hein's mother only talked about the war, while his father avoided the subject. Hein wanted to clarify the whole story of his parents and interviewed them. In “De onderduikers” Hein tells the fascinating story of his parents in hiding and goes in search of the real traitor.

[The misunderstanding- A town, two deaths and the rise of Nazism](#) (2017) is the True Story of a Murder in a Jewish Community During the Rising Nazism. During the search for his Jewish roots, Peter Hein comes across various stories about the murder of his great-uncle. In the idyllic German harbor town of Weener, Wolf de Jonge was murdered in broad daylight in September 1933 by a man named Joël Pinto. Hein's mother was always secretive about it and everyone was convinced that the victim should have been Albert de Jonge, Hein's second cousin. There was a long-standing feud between him and the killer. But Hein finds out that history is very different from what he has always been told. The romantic town was not so idyllic. The threat of rising Nazism was felt everywhere. And who was Pinto really after? The Misunderstanding is a true historical story about a Jewish community in the tumultuous time following Hitler's seizure of power.

DAVID HEIN



David Hein is the Head of the Defence Office of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC), an international court in The Hague tasked with adjudicating cases concerning international crimes

committed in Kosovo before, during and after the war there. He is a law school graduate of the University of Groningen and holds an LL.M from the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland. Before he worked at the KSC, he was a criminal defence lawyer in Amsterdam for over eight years, worked for a private equity firm and worked as legal officer at the War Crimes Chambers in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He published on national and international criminal law in several law journals.

David did internships at the Dutch mission to the UN in New York, and at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. He was chairman of a foundation, called 'Young Urban Achievers', which supports young people in setting up cultural enterprises. YUA works in regions with high youth unemployment, and with a focus on urban surroundings. He does this all whilst juggling family life with two young children, together with his girlfriend.

David's book:

[A War to Call my Own \(2008\)](#) (Een oorlog die de mijne zou zijn-) A recent law school graduate, David P. Hein goes to Sarajevo in 2004 to help build the Bosnian war crimes court. Reckless, green as grass and overconfident, he begins his job. In *A War to Call my Own*, David recounts his life in Sarajevo. Gradually it becomes clear to him that his arrival in Sarajevo was not as coincidental as he initially thought, but the sum of choices he made, influenced by his family history. With astonishing honesty he describes what it does to him to be involved day in and day out with a war that took place more than ten years ago, but that does not seem to be over for him. He interweaves his family history with his time in Sarajevo, slowly but surely bringing to the surface his obsession with the war. Hein not only offers an interesting look into setting up a war crimes tribunal and trying war criminals, but also provides insight into life in a post-conflict area and the mental effects of war.

About the Filmmakers



Executive producer **Dr. Judith S. Goldstein** received a Bachelors degree from Cornell University in 1962 with a concentration on European and American history. As a Woodrow Wilson Scholar at Columbia University, she then studied for a Masters degree in European history. In 1972, Judith completed her doctoral studies at Columbia University after writing her dissertation on “The Politics of Ethnic Pressure: The American Jewish Committee Fight Against Immigration Restriction: 1906-1917.” This work was the beginning of a sustained concentration on immigration and diversity in America and Europe. She then continued to work at Columbia University over 10

years by focusing on an oral history project on Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy. In 1992, William Morrow published her book *Crossing Lines: Histories of Jews and Gentiles in Three Communities*. In 2006, Rutger University Press published *Inventing Great Neck: Jewish Identity and American Dreams*.

Judith worked as the Executive Director of *Thanks To Scandinavia*, started by the Danish pianist Victor Borge to acknowledge Scandinavians who resisted Nazism and protected Jews during the Second World War. In 1997, Judith founded *Humanity in Action* and has served as its Executive Director ever since. Programs have included fellowships and internships in Europe and the United States, annual publications, photography exhibitions, films, and conferences. Over 23 years the organization has engaged over 2,500 college and university students in its programs and raised over \$31 million. Judith serves on the Board of *The Frances Perkins Foundation* and the *Somes Pond Center*, and is a member of the *Council on Foreign Relations*.



Executive producer **Irene Braam** joined the Bertelsmann Foundation (North America), Inc. as Executive Director in April 2016. She is also the first vice president and board director of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. Since joining the Bertelsmann Foundation she has overseen the transformation from a traditional Washington think tank to a pioneer in tackling complicated policy issues on film. During that time, she executive produced 12 documentary films.

Irene is an experienced lawyer and media expert, and worked for over ten years with the Bertelsmann company. She began as director of government relations of the Brussels Liaison Office in 2005 and became senior vice president of government relations in 2011. After studying law at Maastricht University, the Dutch native began her professional career in the music industry. Irene was head of international, legal and business affairs at Naïve Records in Paris, in charge of business development

for Midbar Tech Ltd. in Tel Aviv, and served as both director of public policy and government affairs, and director of legal and business affairs at the Universal Music Group in London and Brussels.



Producer **Antje Scheidler** recently joined Humanity in Action's team of film co-producers and has been with the organization since 2001. Her understanding of the power of images dates back to when she experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall as a teenager in East Berlin. Antje studied English and American Studies and Social Sciences at Humboldt University Berlin and the University of Toronto. She became very interested in migration related issues and matters of social cohesion, inclusion and identity formation. Apart from heading the German chapter of the organization, Antje also oversees the international programs of Humanity in Action.



Director of animation **Juan Pablo de Gamboa** is a seasoned storyteller with a special interest for animated documentary films. With more than 20 years of experience writing, directing and producing stories all around the world, he has developed a distinctive approach to the creative process that makes his films stand out. Powered by passion, inspired by the ordinary, Juan Pablo has developed an international network of artists who collaborate consistently across many projects, always with a clear goal in mind: to make every film unique.



Writer **Samuel George** is a documentary filmmaker, writer, and analyst of international affairs. His films bring viewers up close and personal to people and communities facing the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. From the Turkish-Syrian border, to the maquiladora districts of Juarez, Mexico, to incipient political movements in Naples, Italy, George's films offer candid reflections of daily life that allow viewers to draw their own conclusions. Serving as the Bertelsmann Foundation's Global Market & Digital Advisor, his recent documentaries include *Out to Vote*, *Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC*, and *Swing State*

Florida. His written projects include the graphic book *The No Collar Economy*, and its follow-up, *Our Digital World*. George holds a master's degree in international politics and economics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, DC. He is currently completing a PhD at that same institution.

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