

*"Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews"*

**Adolf Hitler**



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**Joseph B. Koek**  
**Jewish Survivor**

Joe Koek was born in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1930. He had a happy life; a lovely childhood with a wonderful Jewish family. He had a mother and father and two sisters who loved him. After the Nazi invasion, everything changed.

His parents made the difficult decision to have their children hide in the Dutch underground during World War II. At only 11 years old, Joe felt there was no way to prepare for the separation from their parents and they only had 24 hours notice. His father told them a lady would come pick them up and that is exactly what happened. The children would never see their parents again.

While their parents were arrested and deported to a concentration camp, the three children were moved from location to location as they waited for the Allied victory and Holland to be free again. One hiding place was a three story building where a school occupied the first floor. A family resided on the second and Joe, his sisters and several other Jewish hideaways spent most of their time on the top floor. During school hours, they had to be so quiet they couldn't wear shoes or use the bathroom.

Joe couldn't play like a normal kid or even fight with his sisters like a regular kid. He learned how to knit because it was quiet and would kill time. He played cards and Monopoly, but learned to keep his voice low.

Joe Koek always seemed to have luck in avoiding the Nazis. Once, he broke his leg and was hospitalized. This tragedy turned out to be a good thing when the Nazis invaded the farm country looking for families committing a

“crime”. If the family hiding him would have been caught, they would have been killed for hiding Joe. Since he was in the hospital, they were safe.

Finally, the war was over and he and his sisters were survivors. They realized their parents were dead. "The Red Cross told us they had information they were killed in a concentration camp, but I never wanted to believe that," he said. "I always thought they were alive and looking for me. As time goes on, you realize the information from the Red Cross must be true and you eventually understand there is no point in continuing to hunt for them."

Eventually, he moved to Amsterdam and then to Chicago, where he still lives today. He reunited with his sisters (one who still lives in Amsterdam and one who lives in Chicago). After years of counseling, he realizes there are some questions that never will be answered.

Today he enjoys his family, talking to students about his experiences in the war so they might learn from it and volunteering at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.



**“In Remembrance There Is Life”**