

Introduction:

This is a translation (by Paul Rubens – paulrubens@icloud.com) of a booklet published by Jules Schelvis in 2014 of original letters written in 1945 from and between my mother Milly, her mother Esther, Milly's future husband Ruut (my father) and Ruut's brother Sal and himself. The letter dated 7th August especially describes the hell she lived through.

Jules call them "Documents Humaine".

Overview:

In the Second World War on the on 19th May 1944, my mother Milly and her parents were deported from Westerbork (a German camp in Holland) to Bergen Belsen in Germany. My father and his brother Si escaped to Switzerland but his 2 other sibling and both his parents were shipped to death camps and killed..Her father was sent to Sachsenhausen as a diamond worker on 4th December 1944 where 4 weeks later he died. From Bergen Belsen, Milly and her mother were send to the concentration camp Beendorf in mid-Germany on the 5th December 1944. On the 10th of April 1945 with countless other women they were sent in rail wagons to Hamburg to be handed over at the Danish border to the Red Cross. After 3 weeks in quarantine they found themselves in Goteborg.

Her brother Jules was freed via Sobibor and diverse other camps on the 8th April 1945 by the French.

Ruut and his brother Sal, managed to escape, each in their own way and using there own ingenuity and strength to Switzerland. Ruud returned twice to try and bring Milly out through occupied Germany, but she chose to stay with her parents.

Ruut died on 8th November 1993 in Berwick Australia from a serious illness, Esther died at 83 years of age in Springvale and Milly passed in 2017 aged 97 year . She was in Australia since 1953.

Jules Schelvis,

Amstelveen June 2014

Letters:

Dear Mother & Milly,

Amsterdam 2 July 1945

To my greatest relief I heard that you have made it to Sweden. Honestly I had no hope that you had survived, so we can see that world wonders are still possible. Unfortunately I have no word of my darling wife or my

father or even of my in-laws. Ruut is in Holland right now and will write and tell him the good news immediately. I was freed by the French in K.L.Vaihingen near Stuttgart. I am currently living with a family at 37 Nieuwe Prinsengracht (in Amsterdam). I will try and send a telegram to you in case this letter doesn't get to you. Are you coming home soon? I miss you so much.
Many kisses – Jules.

My darling brother,

Goteborg Sweden 27-7-45

We were so exceptionally happy with your telegram. Oh darling, we are so happy that you are still alive. Mother went half mad when she read your telegram. Father was with us till December 1944. The three of us were in Westerbork (camp) from 29/9/43 to 20/5/44, and from 20/4/44 to 5/12/44 in Bergen Belsen (camp) where it was a bit better as we had to work.

Father was then suddenly taken away – where we do not know. We have hope that he is in Odessa (Ukraine).

Mother and I were sent to Beendorf on 6/12 where we have been treated very badly, but we managed to get through it very well and neither of us had a day of sickness. On 10/4/45 we had to leave because the Americans were getting close. We then spent 3 weeks in cattle trucks. It was terrible and many women died of starvation on the way. Mother was so strong, and we were able to support each other to survive. The 1st of May was a beautiful day for us as the Red Cross took us and on the 3rd of May we arrived in Sweden – from Hell into Heaven. We were starving and covered in lice. Mother weighed just 81 pounds (37kg) and me 98 pounds (44kg). But we have recovered and now weigh 115 and 128 pounds. We received nice clothes and shoes from the Swedish government and would consider ourselves completely happy if we knew something about father, Ruut & Chel. Have you heard from Chel? And from her family? We long so much for your first letter and to our first meeting with you. In March 1944 I had my last news from Ruut and find it scary that I have heard nothing from him since. Louis Pool is in America. We received a telegram and 100kroner each from him. Just today we went shopping with the kroner and when we returned we found your telegram. We bought some lovely things for you too – socks, shirt, tie, jumper. Every week we get 10kroner. We can only right cards, not letters. A shame as I have a nice photo for you. We live here beautifully in the middle of a

forest near a lake. All small houses with 16 people living in a house. Very enjoyable with radio, good food, sweets – it just seems surreal. There is plenty of everything here. Liesje van Loggem is also here. I spend a lot of time with her. Next Sunday the first 12 women are returning to Holland and we hope to go in about 3-4 weeks. We are so impatient to return. Have you been to the van Leer family? They were so unbelievably kind to us. We received many parcels from them in Westerbork and even one on Bergen Belsen. And have you been to Van't Veld and Canes? Are you living with auntie Annie? There was no address on your telegram. I'll just let you know that I have 4 pr shoes, 5pr socks, 3 bags, 3 shirts, 3 jumpers etc. so plenty of clothes for the time being. Mother will send you a separate card. Your telegram was like a dream for us. In our heart we always believed you would survive because we received a letter from you from Radom (Poland). But we heard many terrible things from Poland and so it is like winning the lottery that you survived. We have to advise an address in Holland where we will go to, but we cannot as yet. My darling brother, I write as small as possible so that mother can add a few words. A thousand kisses till I see you soon from your loving sister – Milly.

Loving, darling I feel so lucky that you are still alive after these unbelievable 2 years. We hope to see father, Chel and Ruut and more family very soon. You understand that I have so much to tell you and hope to be able to do so very soon. I so long to hug and kiss you. Are you strong enough to work yet? We were together in Westerbork with the family Lindebaum. He was sent to Theresienstadt (Germany). Now darling son, till we see each other soon, kisses from your loving mother. Many greetings to the Strosz family and others and neighbours. bye Nelisje, xxxxx kisses.

M & E Schelvis
Robertskojd 2
Goteborg
Sweden.

My darling brother

Goteborg 29/7/45

We give this letter to a lady who is going to Holland before us. Did you receive our postcard yet? In it we have written the most important things. How are you? Were you very weakened or not too bad? Are you fully recovered? We still can't believe we will be together again. I hope we will soon here from father, Chel and Ruut – then my most beloved will be

together. We hope to go to Holland in the next few weeks – probably by boat but maybe by flying machine. Last night we treated ourselves to old fashioned butter-cake and ate to your health. Sugar, flour, butter! Can you get that in Holland. Jules, I had your watch still with me when I was sent to Beendorf camp (Germany) in December 44. They took it off me there. I would have loved to return it to you. I wore it day and night and always thought about returning it to you in person. If we are still here for a few weeks, we will buy you a nice watch. I received your watch from Jo Worms who was also in Bergen Belsen. He and his brother and wife I believe are back in Holland. Jo Wolf and her sister are also still alive. Lili Brill and Mau Polak hidden in Holland and uncle Gaby was taken in June. What a shame. Do you know I was also in Vught camp (Holland) for 2 months and was allowed to go home. That was a party when I returned home! The whole Henrietta Ronner st was so excited. But after 3 days they took us again and sent us to Westerbork. We suffered greatly but were lucky not to be sent to Auswicz (Poland), because if you hear from the girls that worked at Philips what happened at Auswicz you get cold chills down your back. We really only had it very bad the last 5 months, but I would rather tell you that face to face. Do you know I still have photos of you, Chelly, Pa and Ruut even to Sweden? I have smuggled them through everywhere. That cost a lot of sweat drops. And now in Sweden I have lost them. They were burnt by mistake. I could have cried. First we were in Malmo (Sweden) in quarantine There was a great deal of Typhoid and Diptheria. In Malmo I befriended a lovely Swedish girl who has been so kind to mother and me. The first day that were allowed to be free on the streets, she invited us home to her house. We will never forget how well she treated us that day. It was not normal. We gave us so much and she is coming to visit us in Goteborg. I speak English with her. Also my bad German goes well and I even speak a bit of Swedish. “Jag art trut” – that means I am tired. You understand we say that a few times per day. Not because we are tired but because it is funny. Sweden is a beautiful country with many rocks and lakes. There is a lot a snacking happening here. If you have a coffee with someone you have to eat 7 types of cakes, or you insult them. So I make sure I never insult anyone!! Darling bother the other side of this letter is for mother. Goodbye loving brother, many kisses, till we see you soon. Regards to all the people our friends over there.

Your loving sister Milly.

Goteborg - Thursday Morning 29 July 1945

My dearest darling - Friday we sent you a telegram. By the time you receive this letter I hope we will know when we will be returning home. Darling boy, if only you knew how much I miss you. We have so much to tell each other. While I am writing I am having a nice cup of tea with a piece of Dutch Butter cake that I have baked especially in your honour. We have it very good here but now I know you are in Holland I cannot wait to fly to you, literally, which may be the case. This letter will also go in a flying machine. Write us another letter please. I want so much to hear from you. What a shame that we have not yet heard from Pa, Chelly and Ruut. Write immediately if you hear from them. My dear son, I hope you have not suffered as greatly as we have, because in Beendorf it was terrible, but I will talk to you about it face to face. Now darling give our best regards to all and especially the family Canes and the neighbours. Hugs and kisses from your loving mother. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Sunday afternoon 3.30pm 5th August '45

My dear boy (Jules)

From Milly's letter you naturally read much news. When we are together, and that is hopefully next week, we can talk much more. Can you imagine, your mother is going in a flying machine? Who would have thought? Have you still not heard from father? I refuse to give up! We received a letter from the Israels family. Their son came home after 4 1/2 years in the army. We also had letters from the van leer and Canes families. If you can, please go and see them and tell them how we are. They were particularly good to us and we will also appreciate that. Dear Jules, if you speak to Ruut give him especially my greeting and kisses. I will return them to you when I see you. Give our regards to all of our friends. You are in my thoughts – hugs and kisses – your loving flying mother.

Goteborg 6.8.'45

My dearest brother,

We give this letter to a lady that is going on the flying machine. We are coming 2 planes later. How great is that? That is possibly next week. Most people go by train, boat and bus, but because mother is older she can go by plane and because I am her daughter I can go with her. Previously I would have been terrified., but now I think it is marvellous. We have received your 3rd, 4th and 5th cards. Therefore your 1st and 2nd

did not arrive. I have still not heard from Ruut at all. Jules, what is the situation? Do we have a house or a room? Mrs Canes wrote that she expects us to live at her house. I don't know if that means with a short time or what. Or does auntie Annie have her large upstairs room free? The Swedish government is giving us a nice food packet to take home, great eh! We also have nice things for your and Ruut. What? That remains a surprise. The longer it takes the more nervous I get. I wake 5am in the mornings. A few days ago we received a nice letter from Louis Pool. He wrote that he heard there were still many Jewish men in Odessa. Maybe there is still hope that pa is still alive. How terrible about Leo de Vries. The last 3 months in the camp were the worst. The hunger and the lice were the worst and many died of starvation and typhoid. It is a wonder how mother and I survived. Mother would not have survived another month. She was so thin - just flesh on bones. You should see her now though, the real chubby mother of old. Luckily we were not in Auswich and they did not take our hair. We were also not beaten terribly like many others. I always took care to be out of the way but you could not always be invisible. Our welcome in Sweden was unbelievable. It was like a dream. In the camps I rarely shed a tear, but when we crossed the Danish – German border, in the border town of Padborg it was too much for me. We then went straight across Denmark, a beautiful country, and then with the boat from Copenhagen to Malmo, where we stayed in quarantine for 6 weeks. Malmo is a very lovely modern city with large parks. Unfortunately we could only walk around there once as we were sent to Goteborg straight after quarantine. Here we were completely free and if we had money we could take the tram like real people to the city. It cost 40ore. I can now speak quite a few words of Swedish. And my English and German works very well too. Sometimes I get mixed up and speak them all together. I would love to walk the entire city. Everything, and I mean everything, is for sale here. A bit dearer than in Holland before the war, but I remember there was nothing available there then. Dearest Jules, I hope to be able to tell you more in detail later. Let Ruut read this letter also please. The best regards for auntie Annie, uncle Les and little Karel. Many kisses from the one who loves you.

Milly

Dear Sal,

Goteberg Sweden 7th August 1945

After 3 months in Sweden, I received the letter from Ruut. I am so happy and lucky that you both are healthy. My mother and I arrived in Sweden on May 3rd, saved from the German claws. As you may know we were in Bergen Belsen where it was at least bearable compared to the last 5 months (of the war). Mother and I were sent to another camp for those months. There we had to work in an ammunition factory, 600 meters under the ground – very unhealthy conditions as you may expect. In the mornings we were woken at 3am and made to stand at attention for 2 hours for no real reason, then marched for 2 hours under the ground through small, sometimes very narrow tunnels with rails with guards yelling and pushing. We had to work till 6pm in the evening on 3/4litres of cool water. When we returned to our prison at night we had a lump of bread shoved in our hands with a beating to go with as well. Because of bombers the lights were then usually turned off and we had to go to bed in the pitch dark. With the 2 of us in one bed, 3 beds against each other then in 4 square meters 12 people could sleep and there were about 200 people in one small cage. The hygiene was terrible. No water, soap, no towel. Never clean clothes. We were so filthy and totally covered in lice. Imagine Sal, we never expected to come out alive. It was a miracle that my mother and I never contracted a disease. In the winter months we only had a singlet and a summer dress, no socks, no pants and either broken or completely no shoes. We were lucky that in the salt mine it was warm but because of this we had terrible thirst and we were not allowed to drink just out of pure meanness.

When the allied forces came closer, we were forced to take flight, and that was the worst. For fourteen long days we were transported in cattle wagons. A total of 5000 people were transported on the train, with 220 people per wagon. We were barely able to stand, let alone sit or lie down and no meals at all as you can understand. The first few days a small piece of bread, then one potato or a handful of raw macaroni, then the last three and a half days, nothing. Hundreds of people died because people went mad of thirst and hunger and literally murdered each other. It was actually indescribable and you cannot even begin to imagine it if you were not there to see it.

On the 1st of May in Hamburg, that beautiful day, we were rescued by the Red Cross, and on May 3rd we arrived in Sweden. We were received with unbelievable love. One of the most wonderful moments of my life was when I was able to stand under a hot shower and wash myself with real soap, and was then given a warm towel and new clothes to wear. We

were given new clothes and shoes to wear. From mother's nephew in America, we received some money, and with that we bought clothes. In Holland there is still nothing to buy but I do not have to worry about that for the next years. Mother only weighs 80 pounds and I 98 pounds. But now we are gaining weight.

We hope to go to Holland next week, maybe by flying machine.

My brother Jules has returned from Poland after nearly 2 years. One chance in one hundred-thousand. He worked as a printer. I am really fortunate that till now at least I still have Ruut, Jules and my mother. My father was sent from Bergen Belsen to Sacherhausen. I have still not heard anything from him. We are hoping against hope that he has been rescued by the Russians and is in Odessa. We have heard nothing from Pa, Moe, Lena and Juut. We must not get our hopes up too high.

Ruut wrote that the family in Apeldoorn are alright as well as the family Presburg and Sachin.

Did you ever think that you would ever be in Australia, Sal. Please come back to Holland as soon as you can. I really miss you and want to see you again. Now that I have heard from Ruud, I am so impatient and nervous. I just can't wait. We will get married as soon as possible, and I would think it such a disappointment if you were not there. If you write back to me, send the letter to HA Strosz New Prinsengracht, Amsterdam.

Dearest Sal, keep strong. My mother sends her love and a huge hug from your sister in law... Milly

Venlo – Blerick , 7 July 1945 – R. Rubens

Dear Jules,

That I really did not expect! I shall say it honestly, but that was the last thing that I had expected. Congratulations! About Milly and her mother also, how wonderful for me! On January 13th this year I received a card from Milly from Bergen Belsen. A card like the tens of cards that I had already received... "Wir dürfen Karten und Postpakete empfangen".

(basically just the Germans acknowledging that a parcel or card had been received at the camp – but they were never received by Milly).

Apart from this nothing from Milly. I sent many packages from Switzerland but have no idea if any have been received. I hope that Chelly will visit me soon. It is quite possible that I will visit you one of these days, because I have 7 days leave owing. You know that I was on Mokum. I really don't know why Miep (*a per name for Milly*) has not written to me. She could have written to den Bosch via Amsterdam or

otherwise via Switzerland. I am not in the Canadian Army, but in the Dutch Army in the 21st infantry. I am already a long time in service and feel very strong. If you can manage to come here, via Nijmegen and from there a bus and train to the barracks, I will see to it that you are well fed and I will see to a few cigarettes for you also. If I come to you in Amsterdam I will bring a few 'stink sticks' there for you. I have official holidays from 11 -17 July, so you can expect me then. From our 'things' a few items have been saved. Milly's cassette is intact and I have been able to arrange a few small things from Germany – a fireplace, a rug etc. I would really like to know if Milly has written to you herself, because I will only feel safe when I see her standing in front of me. The lists of Jewish survivors at the Jewish Council in Eindhoven are so unreliable. You are not on the list, and on the list from Sweden only an Esther Scholvis 1940. "Dus kloote met en rietje" (*can't translate that*). Give them your name in Eindhoven please. This is important – the address is Jan Luijken st. 24. I have been in Holland for and my name was still not on the list. Bureaucrats? Now Jules, I hope to experience to many more such surprises. I would love to know what you are doing or intend to do. If you write to Sweden send my love, I will also, straight away. Till next time my skinny panlat??
A strong fist from Ruut.
Ps visit the Canes and give them my regards. I have very little time today. If you need something – write.

*** Concentration Camp – Beendorf. - Overview by Jules Schelvis

This camp was hardly known in Holland. On 5th December 1944 hundred of Dutch women including Milly and her mother Esther were sent there from Bergen Belsen. There were underground tunnels, deep in the ground for protections against bombing. The prisoners had to work 12 hours per day. Their job was – in thin clothing and in cold temperatures – making parts for the German Air-force (the Luftwaffe). The hygiene was terrible, no water, soap, towels and never clean clothing. The prisoners only wore a singlet and a summer dress. They had no underpants and tattered or no shoes. The women were guarded above ground by female warders after work. The guards had clubs that they used regularly. The commandant was Gerhard Poppenhagen. The later jailed SS man Jansen Brunken terrorised them daily. On 10th April 1945 the camp was emptied because of the allied troops were nearing. In mid April 1945, under the most

wretched condition, the women were transported north in open coal rail wagons. About 500 died of starvation or exhaustion or were crushed to death in the over filled wagons. The Block Fuhrer received the death penalty for multiple murders after the war. The commandant received 15 years in prison.