Erica Herz Van Adelsberg was born on October 2, 1928 in Munich, Germany. In 1933, she moved with her parents and brother to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where she started elementary school. Life was normal until May 1940 when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands.

When she was thirteen years old, the Nazis transported Erica and her family to Westerbork, a transit concentration camp. They remained there for two years while her parents worked grueling hours and she worked in the camp hospital lab. On the weekends, without interference from the Camp Commandant, she joined a Youth Group for discussions, observance, and Judaic studies.

In February 1944, the Nazis deported her family to Bergen-Belsen where food rations were below minimal. Here, thousands died from starvation, including her grandfather.

On April 9, 1945, the Nazis forced Erica, sick, dehydrated, and starved to march 7 kilometers and board a cattle car with 2500 other inmates, destination unknown. For 14 days they rode east under conditions so horrendous that hundreds died, including her grandmother. On April 23, 1945, two Russian soldiers on horseback liberated the remaining prisoners, including Erica, her brother, and her parents. This became known as the “Lost Transport.”

They returned to Amsterdam where Erica gratefully attended high school after missing three and a half years of school. An Uncle in Vineland, New Jersey and the Friends Service Committee helped bring Erica to Philadelphia in 1946, where she received her bachelors and masters degrees and pursued a career in education. Erica is married to another Holocaust survivor and has two children and four grandchildren.

Now retired, Erica is involved in several community projects and speaks several times a year to groups about her story. She always asks her audiences to define persecutor, victim, bystander, and rescuer, and it is her hope to make the audience understand them because these terms apply to all acts of violence.

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Witness to History Project:

The Witness To History Project is designed to further the message and lessons of the Holocaust by direct interaction between students or interested adults and Holocaust survivors. Participants "adopt" a survivor by learning his or her unique account of via listening to the survivor tell his/her story, asking questions, writing a biography, reviewing a videotape, and memorizing and re-telling the story to others. Ultimately, the participant will have the lifelong job of educating others about the Holocaust by sharing this personal narrative. Contact the Holocaust Awareness Museum to participate.