

Speech
Pauline Touber
Daughter of a former Dutch forced labourer

My father was a man with two faces. When we had company he was always talkative, but otherwise he was mostly silent and introspective. You never really knew where you stood with him. Something that was fine one day could spark an argument the next, or leave him sulking.

My mother tried to draw him into family life by getting him to make decisions. For instance, if I asked her if I could come home late she would sometimes say, "Go ask your father." And without fail, he would say, "If your mother says you may, then it is fine with me too."

On the other hand, he would do anything for you. He made little clothes for my Barbie, and a pirate's chest. When Father Christmas brought me a painting set with oil paints, he started painting with me. It became a sort of release for him, alongside his writing. Later he always helped me with odd jobs around the house, painted my window frames. Nothing was ever too much for him.

When I was 22 I got my driving license, and then I began driving my parents when they went on holiday. That is, I drove my mother, since my father rode his bike or took the train. My mother told me that he couldn't stand it if there were a lot of trucks on the road. He would go completely rigid. It was some association with the war.

I also found out from my mother that he often had nightmares. He never talked about that then.

When he was working to be recognised as a victim of the civil war and was in a discussion group, he did talk a bit about the war. But never the really bad things. One day I asked him what else had happened during the war. He answered, "Just read my book." To which I replied that I wanted to hear it directly from him. I think he was not

yet able to cope with that.

Much later he did talk about the wagons full of sand and bricks that they had to push up, and the people who dropped dead of exhaustion doing it. That no one was allowed to help them. For him, I think, that not being allowed to help was the hardest thing.

It was only when he was very old that he told me what happened during the argument in the dockyard canteen, and about his friend who was taken away and never came back. And about how they had to watch as someone was kicked to death, here, near the bunker.

He had told me how big the bunker was, but I only saw what a huge building it actually is when I saw it for the first time last year. If you have not seen it for yourself, you cannot possibly imagine just how enormous it really is.

His status as a recognised victim of civil war, including by Germany, gave him a measure of peace. And I believe that meeting people here who were sincerely interested in his story gave him the strength to give the interviews. Unfortunately, it is too late for him to be at this opening. It is a good thing that this memorial has been created. Not only does it recognise the many victims among the forced labourers, but also those who survived but were left deeply traumatised by the Second World War.