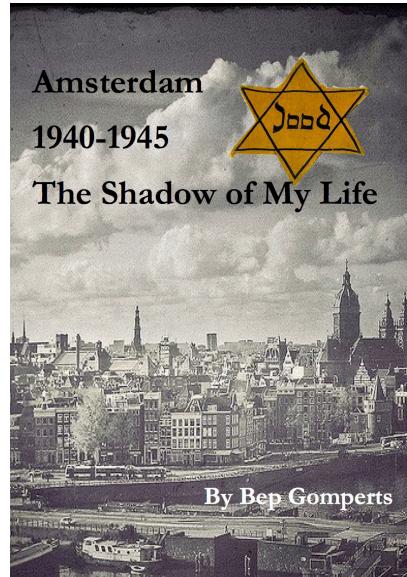
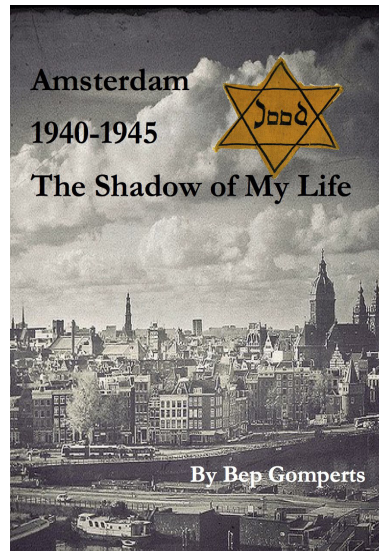


# LEARNING THROUGH MEMOIR

## 'Amsterdam 1940 - 1945: The Shadow of My Life' by Bep Gomperts



Bep Gomperts was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in 1938. She was two years old when the Netherlands was occupied by the Nazis. In 1942, Bep's father was arrested in one of the first roundups of Dutch Jews. He was sent to Auschwitz, where he was murdered. Bep and her mother went into hiding. When it became too dangerous to stay together, they separated. Bep stayed with a series of foster families. Her mother was arrested in 1944 and was taken to a transit camp, but was saved by the fact that the last train had left for the death camps the night before. Most of Bep's extended family was murdered during the Holocaust, but she was reunited with her mother after the war. Bep arrived in Australia with her husband and three children in 1979.



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**Theme:** Pre-War Jewish Life

**Context:** Bep describes her parents’ marriage, her birth in 1938, and the hopes and dreams her parents had before the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940.

**Page numbers:** p15 (“In the early twentieth century...”) to p16 (“... any more children.”)

**Approximate word count:** 280

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## GLOSSARY

**early twentieth century:** early 1900s

**liberal:** modern

**panned out:** worked out

**conceived:** created

**Pythagorasstraat nr 19:** their street address

**Amsterdam:** capital of the Netherlands

**furnish:** provide with furniture

**detract:** take away

**deteriorate:** get worse

**ailments:** sicknesses

**definitively:** clearly

**diagnosed:** identified

**blissful:** happy

**fervour:** intense feeling

**elation:** great happiness

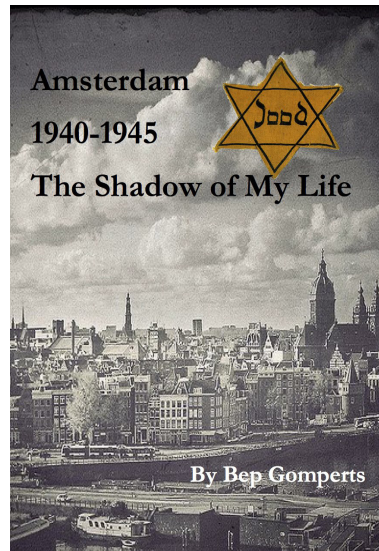
**unfolding:** developing; occurring

**backdrop:** setting; context

**looming:** about to happen

**prudent:** sensible





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**Theme:** Nazi Occupation

**Context:** Bep describes the German invasion of the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, and the immediate response of the Dutch population, including her family. Bep had just turned two.

**Page numbers:** p17 (“World War II began...”) to p19 (“...my escapades were at an end.”)

**Approximate word count:** 250

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## GLOSSARY

**western allies:** Britain, France and other countries that fought against Nazi Germany

**Luftwaffe:** German Airforce

**strategy:** plan

**Wehrmacht:** German Army

**submission:** surrendering to a stronger force

**paratroopers:** airborne military dropped from planes with parachutes

**institutions:** important places

**immobilise:** stop

**onslaught:** a fierce attack

**inevitability:** certain to happen

**capitulate:** surrender

**Queen Wilhelmina, Princess Juliana, Beatrix, Irene:** members of the Dutch royal family

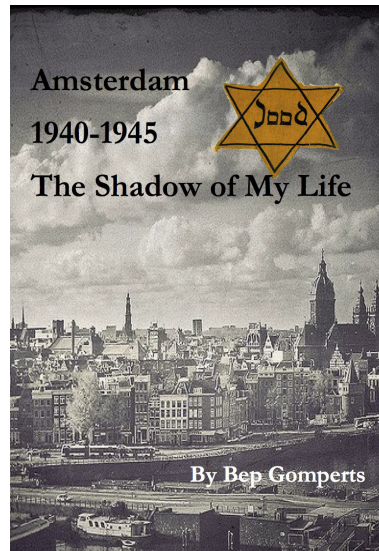
**Government in exile:** political group based in London that attempted to provide leadership for the Netherlands while it was under Nazi occupation

**inquisitive:** curious

**kiosk:** small shop

**escapades:** adventures





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**Theme:** Persecution

**Context:** Bep describes the various anti-Jewish laws that the Nazis introduced throughout the Netherlands and the impact these restrictions had on the Jewish population.

**Page numbers:** p19 (“In late 1941...”) to p20 (“...conduct spot checks.”)

**Approximate word count:** 340

### GLOSSARY

**edicts:** laws; orders

**professional:** worker with higher education

**post:** position

**negotiation:** discussion aimed at reaching agreement

**means:** way; method

**Nazi regime:** the Nazi government in control of the Netherlands

**appropriated:** taken over

**sympathizers:** people who support an idea

**vibrant:** full of life

**Spanish Inquisition:** persecution of non-Catholics in Spain, including Jews, who were forced to become Catholics

**Sephardic Jews:** Jewish people from the region around Spain

**Ashkenazi Jews:** Jewish people from Eastern Europe

**migrated:** move to another country

**tolerant:** get along well with other groups of people

**state-sanctioned:** supported by the government

**pogroms:** violent attacks against Jewish people

**predominantly:** mainly

**Waterlooplein:** an area of the city of Amsterdam

**patrons:** customers

**stallholders:** people selling their products

**spruik their wares:** trying to sell their products

**isolate:** keep apart

**Star of David:** Jewish symbol people were forced to wear to identify them as Jewish

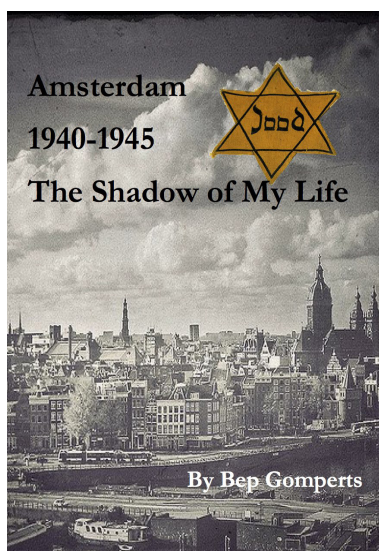
**stitched:** sewn

**increments:** small stages; gradually

**decree:** order

**ghetto:** poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food





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**Theme:** Fleeing Persecution

**Context:** Bep describes the challenges Dutch Jews faced when wanting to go into hiding to avoid being arrested by the Nazis. She also describes the tragic circumstances of her father’s arrest just before the family was due to go into hiding.

**Page numbers:** p20 (“By now it was 1942...”) p24 (“... after the war ended.”)

**Approximate word count:** 640

### GLOSSARY

**untenable:** unable to maintain

**Dutch underground resistance:** secret groups resisting the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands

**guilder:** Dutch currency

**guerrilla war:** small, secretive groups of people who took part in attacks against the German army and Nazis

**compassionate:** kind towards others

**sabotage:** undermine; damage

**Death Camps:** camps where Jewish people were sent to be murdered

**Final Solution:** The Nazi plan to murder all European Jews

**Aunt Bertha:** Bep’s mother’s sister

**Henk:** Bertha’s non-Jewish boyfriend

**Pacifist Movements:** groups of people who oppose war

**Communist party members:** people who belonged to the Communist Party, which wanted a political and economic system in which all property is owned by the state and, in theory, distributed equally, creating a classless society.

**compatriots:** fellow citizens

**tactic:** a planned way of doing something

**forging:** making something false

**ID papers:** identification documents

**genuine:** real

**ingenious:** clever

**thwart:** hinder; obstruct

**Dam Square:** town square in central Amsterdam

**rounding up:** arresting

**vicinity:** area

**melee:** a confused fight or scuffle

**Auschwitz concentration camp:** Nazi camp in Poland where Jewish people were murdered in gas chambers or used for slave labour

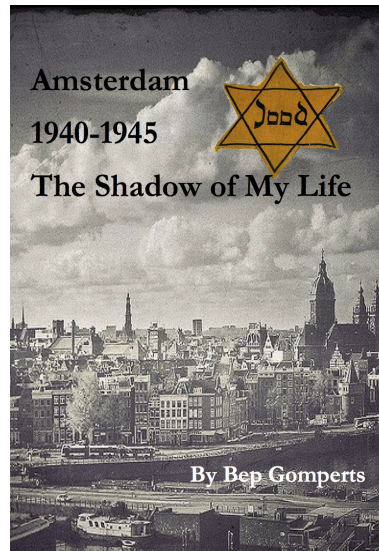
**transit camp:** a camp where Jewish people were held until they were sent to camps for other purposes (eg: death, work, concentration)

**Westerbork:** a transit camp in the Netherlands

**mustered:** gathered

**livestock:** cattle





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**Theme:** Courage

**Context:** Bep describes how two Dutchmen arrived at her home to arrest her mother for being Jewish, and how her mother responded.

**Page numbers:** p25 (“But that would not be the worst of it..”) to p.28 (“...in the hands of others.”)

**Approximate word count:** 600

### GLOSSARY

**unperturbed:** not worried

**collaborators:** people who supported and worked with the Nazis

**authorities:** people in charge

**doomed:** condemned to a terrible fate

**unconscious:** not responsive

**GP:** General Practitioner

**grasped:** understood

**muster:** gather

**rummaged:** searched

**stethoscope:** medical instrument used to check the heartbeat

**syringe:** medical needle

**vial:** a small container holding liquid medicine

**contagious:** having a disease that can spread quickly to others

**contracting a disease:** getting sick from someone else

**acquaintances:** people you know

**intelligentsia:** class of highly educated people

**indecision:** inability to make a decision

**Nazis:** in this case, the German occupiers of the Netherlands

**processing the neighbourhood:** rounding up Jews in the area

**ghetto:** poor part of a city or town where Jewish people were forced to live in isolation from the rest of the population in over-crowded conditions and with inadequate food

**death trains:** trains taking Jewish people to their death at extermination camps

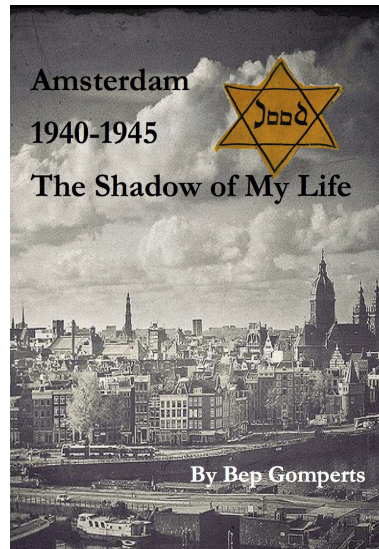
**Dutch Resistance:** secret groups resisting the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands

**forged:** fake

**identification papers:** compulsory papers to prove your identity

**furtively:** secretly





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**Theme:** Resistance

**Context:** Bep describes how the Dutch resistance helped her and her mother hide in an attic in Amsterdam before they were both sent to hide with a family in The Hague, and later in a village by the sea. She was five at the time.

**Page numbers:** p28 ("The Dutch Underground fighters...") to p30 ("... thank them for their compliment.")

**Approximate word count:** 380

## GLOSSARY

**Dutch Underground:** secret groups resisting the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands

**attic:** space or room directly below the roof

**safe house:** a place used by the Dutch Underground to hide Jewish people and others fleeing the Nazis

**curfew:** regulation forcing people to stay inside at certain times, typically at night

**imposed:** enforced

**traverse:** to cross over

**gradients:** angles; slopes

**perilous:** dangerous

**betrayal:** informing the Nazis of the location of hidden Jewish people

**suspicion:** believing something to be not as it seems

**sociable:** friendly

**street lanterns:** streetlamps

**Star of David:** six-pointed Jewish symbol people were forced to wear to identify them as Jewish

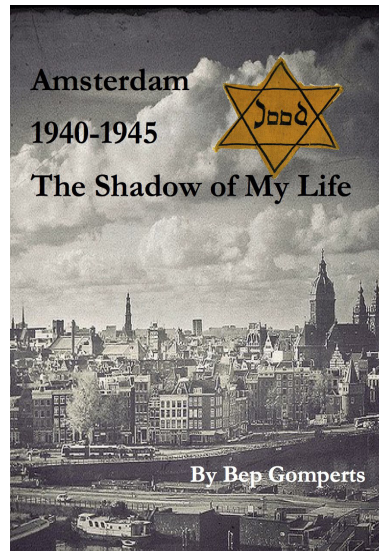
**The Hague:** city in the Netherlands

**inconspicuous:** unremarkable; not attracting attention

**encounter:** meet; come across

**compliment:** a positive comment





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**Theme:** Hiding

**Context:** Bep describes her life in hiding with a non-Jewish Dutch couple, whom she came to know as 'Aunty Bep' and 'Uncle Jo'. Bep, then almost six years old, was sent to live with the couple in April 1944 after it was decided that it was safer than remaining with her mother.

**Page numbers:** p45 ("I was encouraged to play...") to p46 ("...and so was I.")

**Approximate word count:** 420

## GLOSSARY

**baptised:** ceremonially admitted into a Christian church

**authorities:** people in charge

**christening:** ceremony in which a child is given a Christian name, usually at the same time as their baptism

**Heemstede:** Dutch village where Bep lived with 'Aunty Bep' and 'Uncle Jo'

**scuttled:** ran hurriedly

**frogspawn:** eggs of a frog, surrounded by a transparent jelly

**repulsive:** disgusting

**humiliated:** embarrassed

**crestfallen:** sad

**Aunty Bep:** non-Jewish Dutch woman who was looking after Bep

**no mean feat:** not an easy task

**vat:** large tub

**laundering:** washing clothes

**Uncle Jo:** non-Jewish Dutch man who was looking after Bep

**dread:** fear

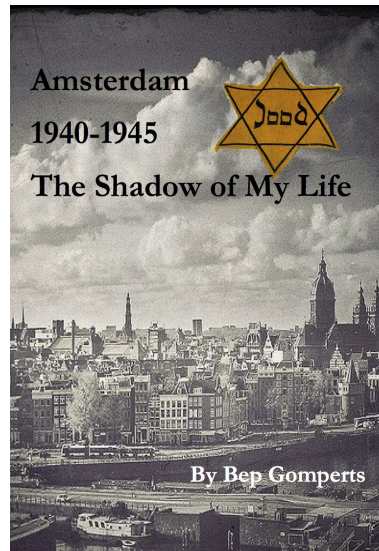
**consciously:** knowingly; intentionally

**stench:** strong and unpleasant smell

**putrid:** disgusting

**berate:** get cross or angry with





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**Theme:** Deportation

**Context:** Bep describes the arrest of her mother in September 1944. Her mother was first sent to a prison in the Netherlands where she was reunited with her sister Bertha. Both women were then deported to a transit camp in the Netherlands called Westerbork where train loads of Jewish people were then sent to extermination camps in Poland. Due to the continual bombing by the Allies of trains and railways, both women avoided being sent to the extermination camps. Westerbork was liberated in April 1945. While this was happening, Bep remained in hiding with a non-Jewish Dutch couple. Bep was six when her mother was arrested and deported.

**Page numbers:** p48 ("September was not a good month...") to p49 ("...13th April 1945")

**Approximate word count:** 300

## GLOSSARY

**Scheveningen:** seaside town in the Netherlands

**The Hague:** large city in the Netherlands

**inmates:** prisoners

**incarcerated:** put in jail

**dreaded:** feared

**Westerbork:** transit camp in the Netherlands where Dutch Jews were held before being sent to death or work camps in Poland

**gypsies:** Sinti and Roma people who lived throughout Europe, traditionally moving from place to place; the term 'gypsy' is no longer considered appropriate

**undesirable:** unwanted

**The Allies:** group of countries fighting against

Nazi Germany

**Yiddish:** language used by many Jewish people in central and eastern Europe

**tuchis:** buttocks

**Gallows humour:** dark humour that makes light of painful or dark subject matter

**ghettoised:** the process of being forced by the Nazis into a ghetto (a fenced off area of a city or town) with limited access to food and medicine

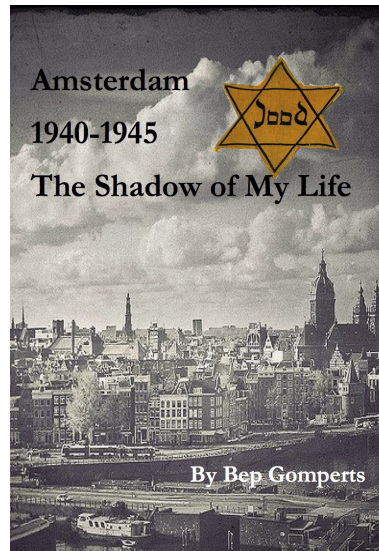
**modesty:** shyness; fear of embarrassment

**go to the East:** be sent to death or work camps in Poland

**bombardments:** intense bombing

**liberated:** freed





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**Theme:** Liberation

**Context:** Bep describes her grandparents’ survival through hiding and the struggles they faced returning to their home after liberation.

**Page numbers:** p52 (“My Oma and Opa...”) to p53 (“...and always felt welcome.”)

**Approximate word count:** 270

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## GLOSSARY

**Oma and Opa Gerritse:** Bep’s father’s parents (Bep’s grandmother and grandfather)

**channels:** processes

**Uncle Henk:** non-Jewish boyfriend and later husband of Bep’s Aunt Bertha who helped family members go into hiding

**intervention:** involvement

**Mrs Voogd:** a non-Jewish Dutch woman who hid Oma and Opa Gerritse

**Maastraat, Amsterdam:** a street in the capital city of the Netherlands

**guilder:** Dutch currency

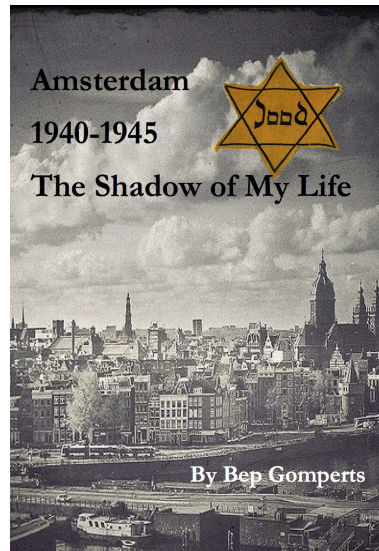
**Stadionweg:** a road in Amsterdam

**proximity:** closeness

**intolerable:** impossible to put up with

**refuge:** safe place





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**Theme:** Return to life

**Context:** Bep describes the adjustments she faced after the war. These included the reunion with her mother, who had been liberated from Westerbork transit camp where she was working as a slave labourer. Bep turned seven on the same day that the Netherlands was liberated, 4 May 1945.

**Page numbers:** p54 (“I think of May 4th 1945....”) to p56 (“...could be felt everywhere.”)

**Approximate word count:** 500

## GLOSSARY

**Aunty Bep and Uncle Jo:** the non-Jewish Dutch couple who hid Bep

**nonchalantly:** a calm and relaxed manner

**underwhelmed:** unimpressed

**reunion:** meeting again

**Heemstede:** the Dutch village where Bep lived with ‘Aunty Bep’ and ‘Uncle Jo’

**Aunty Bertha and Uncle Henk:** the sister of Bep’s mother and her non-Jewish husband

**Underground:** groups of civilians who attempted to resist the Nazis

**speculated:** wondered

**animated:** lively

**petrified:** extremely scared

**scuffling:** shuffling

**yapping away:** talking nonstop

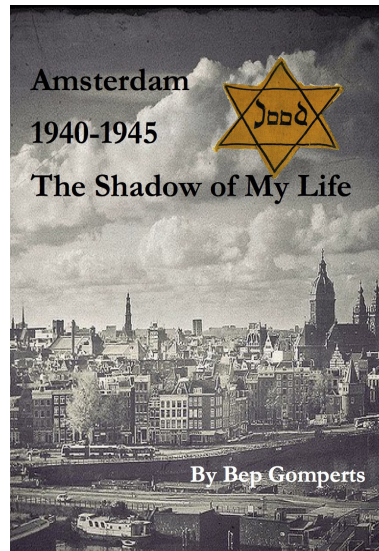
**deluge:** flood (of words)

**bookkeeper:** someone who keeps financial records

**Communist Labour Union:** political group that fought for the rights of workers

**engrossed:** fully attentive





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**Theme:** Legacy and Life Lessons

**Context:** Bep reflects on the loss of murdered family members and describes her post-war relationship with the Heemstede family, ‘Aunty Bep’ and ‘Uncle Jo’, the non-Jewish Dutch couple who hid her during the war.

**Page numbers:** p64 (Now I had two...) to p65 (“...perished in Death Camps.”)

**Approximate word count:** 220

## GLOSSARY

**surrogate families:** families that hid and raised Bep during the war

**Heemstede family:** the non-Jewish Dutch couple, ‘Aunty Bep’ and ‘Uncle Jo’, who hid Bep

**Remembrance Day:** 4 May, the Netherlands’ national day of remembrance, held on the anniversary of its liberation from Nazi occupation

**street lanterns:** streetlights

**Illuminated:** lit up

**poignant:** evoking a sense of deep feeling or sadness

**paternal grandfather and grandmother:** Bep’s father’s parents

**perished:** murdered

