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*Hebt u 's avonds of in het  
weekend dringend een  
voorlichter nodig, belt u dan  
met het ministerie, telefoon  
(070) 340 79 11. Daar regelt  
men dat u wordt teruggebeld.*

Dr. Jet Bussemaker is the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, the public health authority of the Netherlands. Her Ministry's responsibilities include health care improvements, strengthening social infrastructure and encouraging participation in sports at all levels. From 1998 until 2007, Dr. Bussemaker was a member of the House of Representatives of the States General for the Labour Party (PvdA). She has also been secretary of the equal opportunities organization Stichting Landelijke Ombudsvrouw, chair of the practicing political scientists section of the Dutch Political Science Association, chair of the supervisory board of the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/Time Based Arts, and member of the advisory board of the Hugo Sinzheimer Institute.

It is with the generous support of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, that the publication of the second edition of the book on personal histories has been made possible.

## Speech

**to be given by the State Secretary for Health,  
Welfare and Sport, Jet Bussemaker, at the re-  
launch of the book, *Honour our past, celebrate  
the future: War memories of a Dutch-Canadian  
generation.***

**Toronto, 19 February 2010**

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the flight to Toronto, I had an opportunity to leaf through this marvellous book, not for the first time I may add. Of course, my copy is the first edition, not this brand new second edition. Once again, I was greatly moved by the stories it tells. Take Sam Sealtiel for example. As a very small boy, he was forced into hiding in a farmhouse in Limburg.

Toespraak

He writes:

*It will not be a good time; I am always hungry and cold, and when the doorbell rings they put me in the cellar. I am so very scared of the cellar.*

And then there is Miep Meihuizen who writes about her son Loetje, born in March 1943:

*After the baby was born I took a job as a barmaid, working for bar owner Mooie Manus. And I usually brought the baby who slept in a dog basket behind the bar as I served the Germans at the counter. They could not imagine the curses they got from me along with their drinks.*

These are just very short quotes from two Dutch people who emigrated to Canada after the war. I

could have chosen many more, all telling very different stories. The one hundred contributors to this impressive book tell us openly about their past. They lay bare the privations they endured, the fear, the anger, the injustices. Some describe 'everyday' life during the war, although there was certainly nothing everyday or ordinary about it.

Each and every one of these stories deserves to be read time and again. They must all be kept alive for future generations. Sam Sealtiel hopes that his daughters will then understand him better and appreciate why he is so "over-protective". Perhaps they will understand why his mood can change from one moment to the next. But, just as importantly, these stories give all young people – those of today and those yet to come – an idea of life in the war years.

I know how difficult it was for many of you to recall and record your experiences. It was as if you were re-living those desperate days all over again. No doubt many of you – just like my own father – had avoided talking about the war for many years, partly because you simply did not wish to burden others,

and partly because you were making a fresh start. You were building a new life in a new country. A life without war.

Toespraak

I can recognize this situation from my own family history. My paternal grandfather was a submarine captain. Three days after Japan declared war, his vessel was sunk and he perished at sea.

My father was just thirteen at the time, and was living in the Dutch East Indies, today's Indonesia. He was captured and interned. He spent the war in a series of camps in which he suffered both mental and physical abuse at the hands of the Japanese occupiers. After the war, he relocated to the Netherlands and began a new life, just as you have done here. But it did not mean that he could forget.

When I was very young, my father rarely spoke about the war. I knew that he had been a prisoner, but not much more than that. However, he certainly made no secret of his antipathy towards the Japanese.

Years later, when I was 25, he and I visited Indonesia together. He showed me the places he had

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lived and the sites of the prison camps in which he had been treated so brutally. It was then that my father finally opened up and shared his story. As you can imagine, it made an enormous impression, far more than any history book.

I am glad that my father told me his story so that I can pass it on - to my daughter, for example.

I am sure that it will make a lasting impression on her, too. And I am absolutely certain that your children and grandchildren are moved and touched by your stories.

If I had my way, *all* children in the Netherlands, Canada and everywhere else would learn about the Second World War from the survivors, the people who were actually there. Sadly, that is not possible. Moreover, we must accept that none of us is immortal. Sooner or later, there will be no more eye-witnesses left among us.

That is why I am so pleased that this book exists. It is also why the Netherlands is undertaking a full-scale project to collect and conserve our wartime heritage. We intend to ensure that future

generations can read your stories, and those of thousands of your contemporaries. Perhaps those future generations will see the war in a somewhat different light, given the passage of time. Perhaps they will have different questions to those that we tend to ask today.

It is our duty to ensure that they can find the answers to those questions. Your recollections will go a very long way towards fulfilling that duty, as will the tens of thousands of films, photographs, interviews and other resources, which the Wartime Heritage programme is to make available in perpetuity. Practically all those resources will be accessible online: this is the age of the Internet!

As you may have heard, a television series about the Second World War was broadcast on Dutch television late last year. Largely based on the diaries and recollections of the people who actually lived through the war, it was a 'living social history'. The series was very warmly received. Viewing figures were high by Dutch standards. Around one million people tuned in to each episode, of whom at least half were under the age of 65. For a factual programme, that is a

very respectable figure, especially when bearing in mind that the series was scheduled in the same time slot as the Netherlands' most popular programme, reality show *Farmer wants a wife*, which attracts an average of just 3.5 million viewers. (I believe Canada had its own version, broadcast on the CW Television Network.)

Ladies and gentlemen,

The first edition of *Honour our past, celebrate the future* has all but sold out. It is therefore only right that there should be a second edition. And who knows, perhaps there will be a third before long. In any event, I remain confident that your wartime recollections will make a lasting impression on everyone who reads them – in the Netherlands, in Canada and throughout the world. I therefore thank you most sincerely for having the courage to share them with us.