



When I was a little girl, my grandmother told me how she barely survived on eating roots from their desolate farm in Nazi-occupied Holland. The Nazis killed her husband; she was starving and eight months pregnant with my mother. She prayed each night for something, anything, to eat. She reached a point of utter despair and had given up hope of surviving through another night. The next morning, she looked out from her open door and there, in a distant field, were torn cardboard boxes containing dented cans of food.

I would not exist if it were not for those compassionate B-17 airmen. I hope one day I could tell them, Thank you for giving me a wonderful life.



Woman in Amsterdam

Ben

In 1927, at three years of age, he left Moldova with his parents, and his character was forged growing up on the rough and tumble cobblestone streets of the Bronx during the Great Depression.

Ben was twenty-one in 1944 and a member of the 95th Bomb Group, based in Harham, England. As a radio operator / gunner, one of nine crew members of a B-17, he flew thirty-plus missions over Nazi-occupied territories to and from Berlin. During these 10-hour bombing runs, Ben would play his Hohner accordion to entertain the others when they were not being fired upon, which was often. On their return trips, the B-17 would fly at the death-defying altitude of 500 feet, taking hostile fire while crew members dropped their 25 boxes of food supplies from the bomb bay doors to the starving people of Nazi-occupied Holland.

Thirty-two years ago, Ben's younger brother Murray met Loek, a Dutch woman vacationing in the United States. She had lived through these horrible times and was helped by the B-17 humanitarian flights called Operation Manna and Operation Chowhound. Since that first encounter, Murray and Loek have been a couple and are still going strong today. At 91, Ben is the Commander of VFW Post 7462 in Piermont, New York, and visits veterans in hospitals, saying to them, "Tell your story. Don't let the story die with you."



Ben - B-17 Crewmember