

# Curt Lowens

***“Now my head began to spin. I could not allow myself to be checked a second time. The ID card could be suspected as a fake, my bag contained papers revealing my activity, they could even discover that this young school teacher was a Jew traveling for the Resistance.”***

As a respected character actor, Curt Lowens has mastered the art of taking on another identity. Yet this profession was actually thrust upon him out of necessity. For Curt, a German Jew, taking on an assumed identity, that of a Dutch gentile schoolteacher, became a matter of survival.

Born November 17, 1925, in Allenstein, East Prussia (now Olstyn, Poland), Curt Loewenstein spent his childhood in a home filled with music and laughter, feeling loved and protected even after Hitler’s ascent to power in 1933 brought an unprecedented rise in antisemitism. Yet in time his parents could no longer shield their children from the growing hatred. Curt and his older brother were singled out for abuse at school and their father, whose services as an attorney were once in great demand, now became the “Jew lawyer” with no clients.

In 1936 the family moved to Berlin, hoping to find safety in the large Jewish community there. But conditions worsened daily, and with Curt’s brother Heinz safely in England, the Loewensteins began making plans to immigrate to the United States. At last, after months of waiting and red tape, the family received their visa, leaving Berlin for Rotterdam, where they were to board the SS *Veendam*, bound for America and a new life.

But the day before the family was to leave, May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Holland. Curt’s father secured a

position with the Jewish Council in Amsterdam which meant a temporary reprieve from deportation. But in June 1943 the family was caught in an unexpected roundup and sent to Westerbork, a transit camp, before deportation to Auschwitz. Luck intervened and the family was miraculously released. They wasted no time in going underground.



*Photo taken in 1944 of Curt Lowens by the Maas River with the satchel in which he carried documents for the Resistance.*

Curt was the first to be taken into hiding by the student resistance. He received a false identity card and the new name “Ben Joosten.” In January 1944, with his mother dead and his father safely hidden in the countryside, “Ben” became an active member of the resistance, carrying false documents, helping to hide Jewish children, and even

saving two downed American pilots from capture. In the vortex of danger, the 17-year-old showed courage and ingenuity far beyond his years. The British who liberated “Ben” found his knowledge of English, Dutch and German an invaluable asset and offered him the opportunity to join the British Eighth Corps as an interpreter. In a twist of fate beyond fiction, “Benny” served as the interpreter for two British officers of the Military Government Detachment who placed the leaders of the Nazi government under house arrest. Not yet 20 years old, Benny stood face to face with Grand Admiral Doenitz, Hitler’s successor. No longer did he have to hide his true identity.

In 1947, Curt, his father and stepmother immigrated to the United States. Curt found a job and explored his love of acting with night classes at New York’s famed Berghoff Studio. It was there he met Katherine Guilford, his scene partner, and later his wife. Now, in America, he was free to choose the roles he would play, from Broadway to film and television.