

# The Story of Ellen Ruth Karpowitz Song

This was written by Ellen R. Song - our Mom.



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## BEFORE THE WAR

I was born in Berlin in December of 1929 and named Ellen-Ruth Karpowitz. My family was well-to-do, my father being a self-made business man and a hard worker. My mother came from a large and prosperous family in Danzig, a free-state at that time. My sister, Inge Johanna (now Channa) is 8 years older than I, my brother Heinz-Herbert (now Dr. John David Herbert) 6 years older.

My Mother's instincts so correctly warned her of the future! She persuaded my father to move out of Germany. We did not get any further than the Netherlands, even though she begged and pleaded with him to emigrate to America. My father did go to New York once, but had unpleasant experiences there, could not speak the language and worried about trying to establish himself all over again in a strange environment. He suggested my Mother should go to America with the children and he might follow later. But this did not happen. He had great faith in the German people, saying that good sense would prevail, and "we will march arm-in-arm through the Brandenburger Thor when this is all over."

## THE WAR YEARS

At dawn, in May of 1940, the first bombs fell on the soldier barracks across the street from where we lived. There was a small wooded area between the barracks and our home, but our windows shattered and we jumped out of bed and ran, not knowing where to run to. At that time, my Mother, Father, sister and I lived in the Hague, while my brother was in a boarding school in England.

My Father gathered us under the staircase and there we sat with pots and pans on our heads for protection against bullets and flying objects. We had found a bullet stuck in my Mother's ermine shawl in my sister's bedroom closet!

We had to get away from that house and its dangerous location, and with the help of a sympathetic cabby managed to reach my aunt's house. The Dutch had put roadblocks up all over town, and suspicious-appearing people were told to repeat hard-to-pronounce Dutch words, such as "achtentachtig" and "'sHertogenbos." It is near impossible to pronounce the hard Dutch "g" unless you are Dutch or speak a language that also contains such a sound.

Upon the surrender of the Dutch to the nazis, we returned to our own home. Difficulties began right away, earlier than for most Jews. My father had a friend who was an inventor and the Germans were eager to find him. He had invented something that enabled cars to run without the use of gasoline. My Father's name was in this man's address book. We did not know, that the inventor and his woman friend had fled to Dutch-held territory during the fighting. When that area was overrun by the Germans, they tried to flee back across the field at night to the Dutch-held land, but were shot by Dutch soldiers, who saw someone move in the dark fields and thought they were enemies.

Early on the Gestapo started coming to our home. They showed up one night, after I was already in bed and demanded to see my Father. My parents had heard them coming, and my Father hid in a pre-arranged hiding place up in our attic. Soon there was much shouting -- my Mother, usually a very soft-spoken lady, was shouting at the Germans, who tried to urge her not to make so much noise since they did not want the neighbors to hear them. However, my Mother yelled that it was fine with her if the neighbors heard what was going on. My sister went to the bathroom and would not come out, claiming she was sick. She was trying to avoid showing her ID papers, which were not as yet marked with the distinguishing "J" to identify her as a Jew. The man yelled and threatened to break down the bathroom door, but she kept saying she was sick and did not give in.

All of a sudden I heard one of the man say "Aha, now we've got you" and I thought they had found my Father. What they did find, was my Father's ID card, without which no Jew was allowed to be out of their home. My Mother had told them that my Father had gone to mail a letter.

One of the men came upstairs <sup>Ellen R. Souza</sup> entered my bedroom. He had dark staring, frightening eyes. <sup>12 Wildwood Drive Trumbull, Ct 06611</sup> He said to me, "You may as well tell me where your father is -- I know anyway." <sup>(203) 268-1358</sup> Knowing what my Mother had told them, I told the story I had been told to tell in case such an emergency arose. That was, that my Mother and Father had a big fight and that my Father had gone away. An unsuitable tale, to say the least. After looking around for a while, the man left to go into the attic as I remained shivering in my bed.

When they could not find my Father, they told my Mother to get ready and to go with them to jail. When my Mother protested that she could not leave her children, they told her that they would take the older one also, and would put the younger one in a home. After that she went without more protest. After they left, my Father also left the house. My sister and I, then 18 and 10 years old, put on our protective "amulets" -- in my case a little golden heart necklace with Hebrew letters on it, and waited and worried. A couple of days later my aunt came to stay with us.

In the meantime, my Mother was in jail and my Father hiding somewhere. My Mother, who was raised fastidiously, had to deal with criminals, rats, insecurity and fear.

One day, my Father ran into an old army comrade on the street. The man greeted him enthusiastically, recalling how they served together in World War I. My Father told him he was Jewish, and that the officer probably would not want to be seen with him. However, the soldier refused to pay attention to this and told my Father to contact him if he needed anything. My Father told him of my Mother's plight, and the influential officer took him to his office and made some phone calls. While this was going on, one of the other men asked my Father why he seemed so nervous. My Father told us later that he answered, "You think I am nervous, hand me a gun and I will show you how just nervous I really am." My Father was told my Mother would be released a few days hence.

My Father was still "underground" so on the day my Mother was to be released, knowing that the jailers could not be trusted and might take

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us also, my sister and I rode our bikes where we could watch the front of the jail. My Mother was actually released that afternoon.

One law followed another, mainly concerning Jews. Each new law was more severe than the previous one had been. Jews had to wear yellow cloth stars on all our outer clothing, surrender our bikes, radios, etc. I remember dumping our decorative ceremonial Japanese swords into a canal, rather than bringing them to the authorities as was demanded. We could only find a food shop in the late afternoon, and new restrictions followed at an ever increasing pace.

One of these laws was that Jews had to use special names as their middle names. Men had to sign their name with "Israel" added, women with the name "Sara."

It was also decreed that Jews could not live within a certain radius of the coastline. We lived a longish bike-ride away from Scheveningen, a sea resort, so we had to move.

We moved to the little village of Bilthoven, Province of Utrecht. It was a resort during the summer months. Transportation was by bike or walking -- there was train service to other towns. At first my sister and I could attend regular schools but soon it was forbidden for Jews to go to school with non-Jews. We then went to Jewish schools in the area. When it became unlawful for us to have a bike, many children roller-skated to school instead. The parents worried, whenever a child did not return home exactly on time. Finally, one Jewish teacher taught the Jewish children of all grades right in the village. Of these children, only my sister and I survived the war. Of the adults, only my mother and the father of one other family survived.

We also had a curfew, when all Jews had to be in their houses. Once I had gone cherry picking with some Christian children and we returned after my curfew time. My cousin, who was half-Jewish, found me and gave me a good thrashing!

My Father was still sought by the Gestapo in connection with his inventor friend. He had managed to escape so far, jumping over the backyard fence when we saw the Gestapo men coming.

However, one day his luck ran out. He was supposed to have traveled to Amsterdam to get his anti-diabetes shots, but stayed home instead. I was up in the attic, playing with a girlfriend and did not know what drama was playing out downstairs. The men came to the house and caught my father and took him off to jail. My Mother told us she had what felt like a sudden paralyzing stroke on one side of her body, which then passed. She realized the horror of the situation better than any of us. We never saw my Father again. We tried to see him in jail, but were not allowed to and soon they transported him to the Plotzensee jail in Berlin. We tried to find out the time the train would leave, so we could, perhaps get a glance of him at the station, but they would not tell us. My Mother was beside herself. She asked my sister to telephone the authorities and plead also, but my sister refused to plead in German, which my Mother was hoping would help. I had never seen my Mother violent but that day she nearly hit my sister, who escaped by outrunning her. We received letters for a while. It seemed as if my Father had broken some minor rules, probably to try to stay in that prison by having his sentence prolonged, rather than be transported to a concentration camp. My Mother tried to obtain money from America to pay the "ransom" the Germans claimed would assure my Father's freedom. My Father had secured some funds in the U.S. on the chance we might still move there. The American government would not release any money at that time. Often, the nazis would pick up the just-released prisoners and imprison them once more, hoping to obtain more money.

As far as we have been able to trace the end of my Father's life, he was transported to the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943 and murdered there in 1944. My Mother waited for his return and, after the war, was hesitant to move away, worrying that he would come back and would not be able to find us. Then we found out the horrible truth.

My Mother started to take in paying summer vacation guests and ran our house as a pension. She worked hard and cooked whatever food we could get into delicious meals. Sometimes we went into the beautiful woods to

gather mushrooms, from which she made a great variety of dishes. At this time the nazis had taken to making lists of all properties owned by Jews -- furnishings, cooking utensils, carpets, paintings, etc. Whenever a German officer moved into our area, they would consult their lists and pick out furnishing and collect these out of the Jewish homes. Once something was on their list, it better be there when they came for it! When my Mother protested that she needed dishes and utensils to serve her paying guests, one of the men sent to collect our possessions told her that he was not used to doing this kind of thing and was raised to act differently.

At the onset of the war between Germany and England, my brother, about 14 years old, was interned on the *Isle of Man* with the Germans who were rounded up. He was considered a German citizen by the British at that time. He was in preparatory school and the school officials managed to free him from the camp. However, he was stranded in England, without money, support, relatives. He worked in war industries and managed to work his way through-and-graduate-from the *London School of Economics*. Emotionally, he is a deeply scarred person. The years of isolation, lack of love and security in his teenage years have taken their toll. He cannot show emotions, is outwardly calm and cold. A big change from the warm-hearted boy I remember as a young child. He suffered through bomb attacks, food shortages and other war horrors. I do not even know what his life was like in those years. As an adult, he married and divorced twice and his two children from these marriages are not doing well nor functioning adequately. And now their next generation is troubled also. My brother achieved a Master Degree and his Doctorate. He taught school, which he enjoyed, but turned to more administrative positions to make a better living. He came to the U.S. and was the principal of a prestigious boarding school. Later he moved to Canada and was a professor at various Canadian universities. He is now retired but still very active with his various tasks -- does volunteer work for the United Nations, financial advising, etc. He is 73 years old.

My sister was the first one of us to receive the "transportation" notice. My Mother had not as yet decided what to do and various of our Jewish friends advised us that it should be all right to go on the forced transport. These people all were themselves killed in

concentration camps. My Mother had warm woolen dresses made for my sister and myself, in case we would go on the transport and we had a photo taken to send to my father in prison. The Jewish photographer was eventually shot in front of his own house while his family was inside.

My Mother decided we would not go on the transport to Poland should the call come. For a short time my sister hid at a Christian friend's house, but we knew this would not be a long-term arrangement. Over the next few years my sister hid at various Christian homes. Some of the people did this out of the goodness of their hearts, other did not. At one place she had to lock herself in whenever the wife went out to avoid sexual attack by the husband. She was a free baby-sitter, cook, cleaning woman and worked late into the night. My Mother paid those people also. At other times she experienced Christian religious pressures from people trying to scare her into conversion. After the war she went through various metamorphoses. Nearly became a Salvation Army recruit, for instance, but in the end turned to a medium orthodox Judaic lifestyle, keeping a kosher home. Upon my Mother's request she came to join us in New York, but a year later took my Mother up on her promise to finance her voyage to Israel, as she did not like it here. She first moved in with a schoolgirl friend of my Mother's and her family and later married "the boy next door." She has two sons, six grandchildren and they all live together on a small area of land in the village she emigrated to in 1949. She is now 75, and has suffered for many years from a nervous condition.

MY HIDDEN CHILD EXPERIENCES

Right from the start, I was easily recognized by German soldiers as a "Jewish type." I heard it as I was riding my bike past some soldiers congregating on the street. I heard it again on the school playground when I saw German soldiers talking and pointing at me. That time I was told what the soldier had said by another child on the playground. Whenever I heard this, I tried to melt back into the background. I was raised anyway, to never draw attention to myself, be soft-spoken, demure and try to avoid recognition. That day on the playground, the Germans were also overheard by the younger daughter of an outspoken foe of the Germans, a prominent Dutch judge, Mr. Visser, who lived in the village.



When the girl told about this experience on the playground during the dinner hour, her father asked his wife to go see my mother and to urge her that, should the time of my transport notice come, my Mother would send me to his house instead and they would hide me.

When the time came, I did go over to my protector's household, which consisted of him, his wife, who had been a nurse, but was now a homemaker, his older daughter who was about 17 years old and the younger daughter who was a little older than I was. I was about 12 years old by then. There also was a little dog, Teddy. In the beginning, conditions were not as harsh as they were going to get and I was allowed to go out after dark with Mr. Visser to walk the dog. But after the Germans started stopping people on the street, I did not get out at all. That is, unless there were reports of a possible razzia to be conducted in our neighborhood, at which time I would go into the backyard and sit in a tree until the rumors passed. As conditions worsened, and the Germans searched people and houses for all sorts of contraband, including young Dutch men who were trying to avoid being drafted into labor camps, it became too dangerous for me to be downstairs at all or eat with the family. A couple of times I was nearly seen by friends coming to visit my hosts. At first I had shared a room with the younger daughter, who thought it was fun to play games, such as that we were at a live-in boarding school, but soon she was bored with having me there and not friendly any longer. I briefly stayed in the older daughter's room, but then moved up into the attic, where I spent most of my days and nights from then on. Sometimes Len, the older daughter, would give me some lessons, sometimes I would help dust but most of the time I was in the attic where it was quite cold in the winter and quite hot in the summer. When I could not use the bathroom (because it might alert the neighbors if I flushed and every one had gone out, or there was someone visiting in the house, etc.) I had to use a pail with a cover on it.

The people had been collecting installments of stories that appeared in the daily newspapers and clipped them together to form books. I did a lot of reading and was very lucky to have those. I kept a diary in "code." I read poetry and tried to write stories myself, not successfully, as I had gotten too up-tight about grammar rules. I heard about the triumphs and mishaps of the family -- the younger daughter was

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not voted into the tennis club, devastating her for a long time. I yearned to have these "every-day" teen-age problems, instead of my own. Family life went on -- school, work, etc. I was included in many things, St. Nikolaas, for instance, a fun holiday when the Dutch make numerous small gift packages for their family and friends. These are often gag gifts, accompanied by a home-made poem and frequently wrapped in a clever way.

Of course, I could not go out with them when they went to deliver their gifts to friends' houses, ringing the doorbell and then hiding. The friends open the door and call out "Thank you Sinterklaas" and try to guess who the real donor is. In the meantime, other family members prepare a type of doughnut traditionally eaten on the holiday and when everyone returns, it is time to eat, open presents, laugh and enjoy. However, Christmas was a totally religious holiday and New Year's Eve was so personal to them, that they did not want me to attend that night.

Mr. Visser kept a small suitcase always ready and packed, in case he would have to flee unexpectedly. He was so outspoken, that there was a good chance this might happen. The suitcase was kept in the attic, where I "lived."

For a while a young Dutch man was also hiding at the house. It began to worry the mother to leave me alone with him, and so she would lock me into the attic whenever the family went out. I got along well with the young man and he was finally some company for me, so I was sorry not to be able to spend more time with him.

Another experience concerned dental problems I was developing. It became clear something needed to be done. The family contacted a dentist friend in another town and invited him over to the house. However, they did not dare tell him over the phone to bring his dental tools. When he arrived and we met, he decided that my tooth needed to be pulled. But how? I was warned not to cry out so people might hear me as he attempted to pull the tooth with an English wrench. The tooth would break off each time he attempted to pull it and it was a horrible experience indeed. That particular tooth never grew back in -- I don't blame it! It's companion on the other side, which was pulled

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after the war, also decided not to attempt a come-back.

For my birthday, my Mother managed to walk miles and miles from a neighboring town, where she was hiding, to see me. She had managed to bring some chocolate sprinkles -- don't know how she got hold of those. Food was scarce by that time and chocolate ..... She walked draped in a big dark shawl, so her face would not be seen. Otherwise our contact was my cousin. Somehow, being half Christian, and speaking German fluently without an accent, he managed to remain our only link during all of the war. And he did this faithfully. I do not know how we would have managed without him. For a while, while I was fleeing around so fast, he could not track me and my Mother was sure I had been caught by the Germans and that my cousin was just trying to spare her.

Before going into hiding, my Mother had asked me whether I wanted to be baptized as a Christian as, perhaps, it would avoid further threatening experiences. I turned that possibility down.

The loneliness became intense, locked up in my uncomfortable attic. At times I would look out of the slanted window and find it comforting to think I could climb out and jump if emergencies required it. I invented an imaginary friend, I still had my belief in God (which went after the war, when I met some of the returning camp survivors and heard their and other histories) but it was lonely. My fantasy was to one day be able to walk outdoors, in the rain, with my head held up high and not to have to hide myself nor my identity ever again.

One day the family all went out together. They came to the attic to warn me so I would be very quiet and stay away from the windows. I was in bed, trying to keep warm and heard them take off. A feeling of complete desolation and aloneness overwhelmed me and I started to scream. Believe me, it was not a silent scream! It came out so loud and desperate, they could hear me as they were already all the way down on the street. The older daughter, came back in and up the stairs. The moment I heard someone coming, I was quiet as a mouse, not making a sound, hardly breathing. When she called from the attic stairs asking what was the matter, I answered "nothing" and they left. And that was that. One of the tortures of a life in hiding is, that one never knows

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how long it will continue, or, for that matter, how it will end. There is no time limit that one knows one has to hold out to and then the status quo will end. It might be over tomorrow or, more likely, it might never end.

While I was up in the attic one morning, I suddenly heard unusual noises from down below. I was locked in the attic and only the older daughter, Len, was at home. I heard her say that she did not have a key to the attic door, as her mother always carried the key and I knew trouble had come. I moved over into a large box that was pushed under the eaves and which was my agreed-upon hiding spot. I closed the top as best I could and soon heard the sounds of the attic door being broken down. Up the stairs they came to search the attic. More than once did I see the shadow of the searcher over me. Luckily this was not the kind with bayonets, that they would poke into bails of hay, boxes, or any other place they suspected someone could be hiding. He found the little suitcase of the father, and was happy, he burped and farted and searched. To my salvation, he never did move the items in front of my hiding place. In the meantime, the daughter, to show how unconcerned she was, went to her piano and played (rather badly). When I noticed the man had left, after searching the attic a couple of separate times, I decided to get out of my hiding place, thinking next time he might search more thoroughly in my area. As I carefully made my way down the attic steps, Len came towards me. They had left one man on guard in the front yard to watch for the father (whom they were really searching for) and she was going to keep an eye on him while I ran down the stairs and out of the backdoor, into the wooded heather area behind the house. We succeeded, and I was barefoot in the outdoors, even in my troubles appreciating the fresh air and nature around me after all that time of being cooped up.

The family had an agreement, that if one of them was caught by the Dutch collaborators or by the Germans, no other family member would come to their rescue, figuring that then both people would be detained anyway. The searchers did take Len with them when no one showed up at the house that day, having been warned of what was going on. Mercifully, they released her the next day.

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I stayed in the woods the rest of the day, wandering carefully, barefooted and concerned.

I formed a plan whereby I would cross the street into the yard of friends of the family, who I knew had been informed about me, although I had never met them. They lived diagonally across the street from the other family, and I figured to do the crossing at dusk, before the, by now general, curfew started. Late enough so the street would be empty, but early enough not to break the curfew. I did do that and got across safely. They had been awaiting me and had even briefly searched the woods that day.

Minutes later, as I was standing at their kitchen table, eating a sandwich they had prepared for me as I had not eaten or had a drink all day, we heard a noise of people coming up the outside steps and knew there was trouble. I had not even been shown to a hiding place as yet! The man of the house shoved me up a staircase, but it was a winding one and being unfamiliar with it and it being dark, I kept on running into the wall and could not find the way the steps really went. He came up behind me, pushed me up and into a bedroom. It was dark, and I did not have time to decide about a hiding place that would not be obvious. The door opened and one of the searchers came in. I had dropped behind a bed and when he came over and asked me what I was doing there, I tried to look as idiotic as I could, held up my sandwich and said "I am eating a sandwich" and smiled, as I hoped, looking demented. He stared at me for a long moment, turned, and left the room without further search. The owner's hand came around the door, turning off the light. During the time the light had been on, I had noticed a big bed in the room. It was not made up, but I crawled into it, pulled the blanket over my face and pretended to be asleep. Finding a real hiding place would have been impossible. Soon the door opened again and another man came in. I made "little-girl-complaining sleepy noises," and crawled even deeper under the blanket. The man said "don't worry little girl, I just have to search the room and then I'll be gone and you can go back to sleep." He searched all the obvious places, such as the closet, under the bed, and behind curtains. He left, and the arm came from behind the door again, turning off the light in the room. It was our great luck that day that the third man, who came in and at once asked how many people there were

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in the house, why, if there were only two people in the house, were there three plates on the table, etc., was the one person that did not search that room.

The woman in the house figured that somehow her husband had gotten me out of the house, with sheets out of the window -- I don't know how she figured that could have been accomplished, but she said if she had known I was still in the house, she would have collapsed.

She "made nice" to the police people, and they were delighted to have someone be nice to them. In time they left and we had to plan our next moves.

The attempt to find Mr. Visser had started off a razzia along the whole street, and the whole night the Dutch collaborator police (NSB) went up and down the street searching houses. They found a printing press and surely many other contraband items. Don't know if they caught any people who were in hiding, but don't believe so.

They even came back one more time to the house where I was, but did not search again. I guess the lady had been really friendly to them. We held vigil throughout the night and formed the plan that the next morning they would give me shoes and a big shawl or coat to wrap around me. I was to follow the man on foot staying well behind as he walked ahead of me to another house in the village. The people at that place had promised the Vissers that if the need ever arose, they would hide me until other arrangements could be made. If anything went wrong and I was picked up off the street, I was to act as if I was by myself and he would keep on walking away. We did get to her house safely, however, the wife there, was too afraid to let me into her house. She was afraid her young son might talk and give them away. She said I should hide in the bombed-out house next door, and she would bring me food until other arrangements were made. I stayed in the bombed out house and in the afternoon had to try to stay hidden from the owner of the house who came by to inspect the property and walked around assessing the damage, which was severe. By that time I was dirty and smelly, not having a change of clothing and being under so much stress. Going to the "bathroom" was

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also not easy, never knowing when someone might come by. Of course, there was not a real bathroom -- just the outdoors.

In the meantime the underground was contacted and they found a place for me to go. Len had been released from the police station, unharmed, except for some crude jokes she had to endure, and she came on her bike to pick me up and take me to the new place. As an older person, she said that had been the most memorable time of her life and the time she felt she was really doing something worthwhile. She said she never felt any fear at all.

The house was beautiful, damask drapes, rich furnishings, orchards, huge garden, servants and so on. We entered and a few minutes later, once again, we saw the NSB men coming up the path. I saw them first, from the room we had just been led into. Quite a coincidence, for they were not after me and this place was in another town

There were also two young Dutch men hiding and the hiding place was very well organized. It was part of an attic, and the ladder leading up and into the attic could be pulled up, heavy items were on the floor so that it should not sound hollow when banged against from below. There were supplies and beds. The young men pushed me up, pulled up the ladder and closed the attic opening. The searchers did not find us. They did find a fine wine cellar, and one of the officers told his orderly that they would secretly return later to pick up the wine. The lady of the house tried to tell them the wine was for medicinal purposes and that someone in the house had an ailment that required the intake of wine, but they certainly did not care about that.

After they had searched, taken some food and left, we climbed down from the attic. We knew at least the officer intended to come back later that night. The young men wanted to sleep in the hiding place with the ladder up and the opening closed, as well they should. The lady of the house refused to let me sleep with them up there. They said they did not want to risk their lives trying to handle the ladder in the middle of the night, should it become necessary. However, she was adamant. So the men went upstairs and she had me sleep with her maid, with the instructions that I should slip under the blanket and hide next to the

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maid if the men came into that room. At least I got some clean underwear from the young maid and so we "slept." All went well that night.

The next day I was allowed to go outside into the orchard and pick fruit in the beautiful garden. It was a wonderful experience but it was not to last. Because of the experiences the day before, the family decided it would not be safe for any of us if I stayed with them and a new place had to be found for me.

Mrs. Visser, the lady of the first house where I had been in hiding, contacted her cleaning lady, who did not officially know about me, and told her what had happened. Mrs. Visser said to her, "Trui, it is your turn now." I was the same age as her youngest daughter, and when she was asked in such a way, she saw her own daughter in need, and agreed. So Len once again picked me up on her bike and brought me part-way to the new town where Tante Trui and her eldest daughter met us. I transferred to the back of her bike, wrapped in a big black farmer shawl.

Now I was in Soest on a very small farm. The stable was right next to the kitchen, and the first day at dinner I wondered what the plopping noises were that I heard intermittently. I was told that was the sound of the cows baking pancakes. For a civilized, rather snobbish little girl it was quite a change of life. The mother and youngest daughter wanted me there and were good to me. The father only agreed because he was paid by my Mother, the older daughter was good-natured and OK with my being there. The grandmother, who ruled the place, was at first pleasant to me. That angered her favorite, the only son, and he soon convinced her to be unkind, which she was good at. The middle sister sided with her brother, so we had a divided household. The farm was very small, and the son also was angry because now his girlfriend could not sleep over. I slept with the youngest daughter in a small bed, whatever the circumstances. If one of us had a fever, or lice or whatever, it made no difference. When one of us turned, the other had to turn. Sometimes it bothered Corrie as I was a restless sleeper and she would go sleep with her mother.



The mother was a deeply good and understanding person. She had unbelievable impulses on acting in the most considerate and loving way. Her daughter acted as a real friend to me. At one point, they figured I needed something of my own to love and gave me a kitten. I doted on the kitten but when I woke up one morning it was nowhere to be found. Later I learned that the son had put the kitten into a bag and banged it against a wall until it was dead.

The mother arranged for a teacher to come in once week or so, again a remarkably brave and loving thing to do. When I sat at the table with my books and study materials and the son came into the room, he would sweep all the books and papers off the table unto the floor. His little sister had no fear of him and would attack him and fight him on many occasions.

We washed at an outdoor pump. Once a week we filled a basin with hot water and took turns taking a bath behind a curtain. We knitted and wore woolen undershirts. Because of the lack of electricity during the war, we would take turns turning the pedals of a bike, which had a lamp hooked up. This gave an unsteady and wavering soft light, but we could do some things by it.

While I was there, a pig was slaughtered. Luckily I could not go outside. I could hear the animal's desperate squealing as they chased it around. Once it was killed the son and other man ran after the shrieking girls to smear them with blood.

For me, the son took the pig's eyes out and put them on the inside table. He then had someone call me downstairs, saying there was a surprise waiting for me on the table. I was somewhat forewarned, as I knew better than to expect pleasant surprises from that quarter.

The grandmother made blood sausage and all the portions of the pig were prepared and used. Women were not allowed in the area where the meat was kept when they had their period. The belief was that they would "turn" the meat bad.

We had vegetables from the farm, so as far as food was concerned we were luckier than many other people, who were eating sugar beets by that time.

My Mother, with my cousin's help, managed to buy black-market food rationing coupons for us during most of the years I was in hiding. Twice the Red Cross dropped off food -- truly white bread (not full of straw or some filler like that) and butter. The farm had cows, so we also had dairy products.

Laundry was done once a week, boiled in huge containers and hand-washed in this extremely hot water.

Over the years, all sort of things had fallen into the well, our only source of water. I fell ill and Tante Trui managed to get a doctor for me. He said I should not drink the well water as it was making me sick. So they gathered rainwater for me. As this was not sufficient, Tante Trui somehow arranged to bring water from the tap in the houses where she worked. This could have also put her in danger, of course. Corrie, the youngest daughter, and I played together and she later told me she enjoyed having a sister her age around.

Tante Trui had a hard life, I never saw her in those days when she was not sweating. Her mother-in-law was ghastly, and her husband listened to his mother, who was clearly the boss in the house. Tante Trui worked hard as a cleaning lady. In those days there was a strict class code and even a benevolent boss would be condescending towards "the help." At home she had a tough life and very little pleasure or beauty to cheer her soul. Both she and her youngest daughter Corrie, have a great talent -- recognizing the needs of the soul in others and knowing how to fulfill them in a non-conventional way. I learned my most important life lesson in human values at that farm. After her mother-in-law's and her husband's deaths, Tante Trui soon started a wonderful life, living with her youngest daughter and being cared for and cherished. It was so good to see her so contented and happy.

The situation at the farm became too charged and the father said I had to go. There was also a possibility of Germans being quartered in on the

farm. The son told me that after the war, all Jews would be shipped off to Palestine and out of Holland. A nice parting shot, but even in one of my other hiding places, after I had done something naughty, I was told that the people there were not hiding me because I was a Jew -- they did not like Jews either, but as resistance against the nazis.

I made my last move, as Tante Trui cried, touching me deeply, and moved to another town to the same apartment where my mother was staying. Two ladies lived there and we did not get along too well. I should have been more appreciative of what danger they were exposing themselves to, I believe now. Here we did eat sugar beets and had a bad food shortage. Soon afterwards, we were liberated. We were very cautious at first, for we had heard how Jewish people had come out of houses in other places, having been told the Allies had come, but it had been premature and they were caught. But this time it was true and the Canadian soldiers had arrived.

My sister joined my Mother and myself in Utrecht where we stayed for a while. She and I wanted to be outdoors all the time. My ankles had become weak from lack of use and I would fall constantly, always hitting the same swollen knee. This lasted quite a while, but did not stop me much. At times I could not bear wearing shoes either. By that time my sister was 21 and I was 15 years old.

Zionist organizations were formed, giving us a chance to mingle with other young Jewish survivors. We were greatly encouraged by the young soldiers from the Palestine Corps of the British army. Here were young Jewish men, healthy, good-looking and self-confident and this was a new experience for us. Most of us had only horrifying stories to tell, should we have chosen to.

In time we were able to return to the house in Bilthoven. Much work needed to be done, as German soldiers had been housed there. Our original neighbor, who during the war had agreed to hide some things for us but then reneged and put them all back on our side of our backyard fence, turned out to have collaborated with the nazis. He was jailed for a while and I felt quite bitter when he returned home while my Father and so many other relatives would never do so.

There were good people who returned the items they were holding for us. Some others had quite gotten used to the idea we would not return and they would be able to keep our things. When I unexpectedly called on one woman around coffee-time, there was coffee being served in our china, which she had claimed had all broken when the boxes containing the china fell down the stairs.

I started school again. Since I missed so many years, there was a lot of catching up to do. I was entered straight into high school and the teachers promised to give me extra help as needed. I became a serious student. I also became more athletic and swam in the local outdoor pool in the morning before school.

When I decided to try out for a role in the school play, it turned out to be a Passion play, and the Jewish figures were represented in a humiliating way. It was a lesson. There still was a great deal of ignorance regarding Jews. When I worried about passing a math exam, the mother of one of my school friends told me I had nothing to worry about. After all, I was Jewish and Jews did not fail math. Another time a schoolmate recoiled in horror when offered a taste of matzoh -- fearing terrible consequences should she accept.

The German government offered to return German citizenship to us, which would have meant moving to Germany. We chose not to accept, and in this manner became "stateless." Not a good position to be in, although it did help us with our immigration into America. My Mother had many relatives in America and was eager to join them. In June of 1947 my Mother and I left for America. We smuggled out of Holland, since the Dutch wanted to collect back taxes for the war years, and my Mother did not intend to pay these. We were smuggled over the border into Belgium at night, another scary experience. We were amazed how much recovery there already was in Belgium -- foods we were still only dreaming of in Holland were readily available in Belgium. From Belgium we took the boat across the Channel, saw my brother in England and then legally entered the U.S.

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We lived in New York City's Washington Heights section for many years. I started to work, later moved to Yonkers and, after my marriage, to Connecticut. I have now lived in Trumbull for 32 years, have three wonderful children, two girls and a boy, who give me much joy. I have walked in the rain, although I now prefer the sun. My younger daughter and I have had fun out in the rain as well. I regularly correspond with most of my Dutch rescuers and have seen them a few times also.

A few years ago I went to the Hague to join my surviving rescuers (now in their 70's and 90's) and their families and guests while they were being honored, at my request, by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Gentiles." Two other people that I had also nominated received this honor post-humously. They received a medal and a "Certificate of Honor" at this solemn but festive occasion. In the back of the room a class of Gymnasium (Dutch High School) students attended, as a history lesson. I had invited everyone to a lovely luncheon afterwards and it was a most meaningful day for all of us. My son, Michael, accompanied me as the children felt I should not go alone. He showed wonderful empathy and was of great help to me. My daughters supported me from here in every way they could by showing love, encouragement and even giving me money towards the expenses. Some Christian friends also wanted to show their support and gave me a check. While I was in Holland, the people I came to honor could not do enough for me and offered unbelievable hospitality as well as financial contributions.

Yes, it was a most meaningful experience!!

THE TWO MAIN RESCUER-FAMILIES WHERE I LIVED IN HIDING

Bilthoven, the Netherlands

Mr. Delinus Visser and his wife Johanna Visser  
their two daughters, Len and Susan Visser

Soest, the Netherlands

Mr. Gerrit v.d. Haar and his wife Geertruide v.d. Haar  
their children Jannie, Ernst, Naatje (now Nell), and Corrie v.d. Haar  
Opoe, the grandmother

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Trumbull, Connecticut, U.S.A. - March, 1997