GOD'S GENERALS IN THE NETHERLANDS

VOLUME 1

Follow Their Faith

Eight Dutch men and women of God, from Heldring to Jan Zijlstra

Whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

Hebrews 13:7

WIM KAMPHORST

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Follow Their Faith. God's generals in the Netherlands, volume 1

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The sources consulted are listed after each chapter. Stories known only from a person's own testimony or from later tradition, or that cannot be verified, are marked as such in the text and in the overview at the end of each chapter.

This book can be read and downloaded free of charge at whispermagazine.org.

Introduction: heroes from our own country

In Haarlem, a city west of Amsterdam, there is a narrow house on the Barteljorisstraat. Downstairs there was once a watch shop. Upstairs, behind a wall that did not belong there, was a space where people hid from death. Today you can walk in and put your hand on that wall.

That is how close it is. Many of the great stories of faith we know take place in America or England. Anyone who reads Christian biographies soon comes across Roberts Liardon. In his book series *God's Generals* he describes the lives of preachers, evangelists and revival leaders. He tells how they were called, what God did through them, and also where they fell. That honesty makes his books strong. You see people of flesh and blood, not saints on a pedestal.

But the Netherlands has had such people too. A watchmaker from Haarlem who, after Ravensbrück, traveled the world to speak about forgiveness. A young man from the province of Noord-Holland who drove across the border of the Eastern Bloc in a Volkswagen full of Bibles. Evangelists who preached in tents and halls and prayed

for the sick. Men and women we often know only from a street name, a hymnbook or an old photograph.

This book is about them.

Why generals?

The word may sound too big. None of these people wore a uniform, and most of them would sooner call themselves servants than leaders. I still use it, like Liardon, because they went ahead of others. They went where others did not yet dare to go. They paid a price, and behind them others began to move.

The Bible tells us not to forget such people. The letter to the Hebrews says: *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.* (Hebrews 13:7). That is where the title of this book comes from. You do not have to copy their lives. Their time is not your time. But you may follow their faith.

Facts first

With the life stories of heroes of faith, something easily goes wrong. Stories are repeated in sermons and become a little more beautiful each time. A number grows. A saying gets a different owner. After a few generations nobody knows what really happened.

In this book I want to prevent that. For each person I have looked into what is certain: dates, places, names, archives, independent sources. Besides that, there are stories we know only because the person told them, in a book or in a talk. I tell those stories too, because they are often the heart of a life. But I do say that it is their own testimony. And if a story goes around but cannot be checked, or if historians see it differently, you will read that in the text.

After each chapter you will find a short overview: what is certain, what is told and what is uncertain. Then come the sources, so you can search further yourself.

I do not do this out of distrust. A testimony can be true, even if nobody else was there. But you deserve to know what you are building on. God does not need inflated stories to be great.

What you will not find here

I write about people who are no longer alive. Their work is finished, and we can look back on the outcome of their conduct, as Hebrews puts it. I leave living leaders out of this book.

I also tell about weakness and struggle, when it is widely known. Liardon does that too, and rightly so. Anyone who sees only the successes soon thinks that God works only with strong people. The opposite is true. But I am not looking for sensation. What I cannot support well, I leave out.

How you can read this book

Each chapter stands on its own. You can start with Corrie ten Boom or with someone you do not know yet. The order follows time, from a minister in the Betuwe, the river country in the middle of the Netherlands, around 1830 to an evangelist who died in 2021. Read it with an open Bible beside you, because these people had one.

And read it with a question in the back of your mind. What did God ask of them, and what is He asking of you? None of them started out as a general. They all began by listening to a voice they recognized, and by choosing to go.

Ottho Gerhard Heldring: the minister who had a well dug

One day in 1843, all of Hoenderloo stood around a hole in the ground. Old men, women with babies in their arms, children. The hamlet lay in the middle of the Veluwe, between heath and drifting sand, and it was made up of huts of sod. There was no school and no church. Until that day, the people had gotten their water from a rain barrel.

Now there was a well. A minister from the Betuwe, the river country to the south, had collected the money for it by asking in the popular almanac he edited himself. He stood in the middle of the crowd that day and invited everyone to help him empty the well. That is how he told it later. For two hours the buckets went up and down. It came to five hundred buckets. The well was still half full, and soon the water was back at its old level. "What a supply of water!" he wrote.

Then he took out his little Bible and opened it to John 4. There is a story about a well there too, he said, but about different water and a different thirst: a thirst for righteousness. He told them about Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and about the One who can quench that

thirst. *The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.* (John 4:14). Everyone listened in quiet awe, he wrote.

The minister was Ottho Gerhard Heldring. For forty years he was the pastor of Hemmen, a village in the Betuwe with about a hundred and fifty souls. From that small parsonage he began work that became known throughout the Netherlands: a home for women who wanted to leave prostitution, homes for neglected girls, a school, a church on a hill against the high water, and a mission festival that drew thousands. Later he was given the nickname father of the Inwendige Zending, the Home Mission: the work of the church among the poor and the lost in its own country.

Above the first page of his memoirs, as an old man, he wrote one line: "Eere Hem, die mij alzoo leidde." Honor to Him who led me so. By his own account, that leading began very early, in a neighbor's house.

The weaver's house

Ottho Gerhard Heldring was born on May 17, 1804, in the parsonage of Zevenaar. At that time the little town still belonged to Prussia. It only became Dutch in 1816. His father, who was also called Ottho Gerhard, was the minister there. His mother, Louisa Geertruida Janssen, was the daughter of the minister of Pfalzdorf, a village near Kleve on the German side of the border. The family tree was written in the back of a copy of Calvin's *Institutes*. A great-grandfather had read that book through seven times.

It was a simple house, without luxury and without the money for it. His mother was a believing woman from the pietist tradition, and from her he received the Bible. Years later, when he lost his faith as a student, his respect for that book remained. He was still living

on it, he wrote, when everything else had gone. His sister Louise taught him to love German poets. At the Latin school he learned Hebrew from a Jewish rabbi.

As a small child he was difficult. The most restless, loudest child she knew, his mother said later. That changed when he came to the neighbor, a poor weaver. At first he was carried over there, later he crawled and toddled there himself, as often as ten times a day. For hours he sat quietly among the work. In that house he learned to think, to play and to talk, he says in his memoirs, and there he became "the happiest, merriest child."

A year after Heldring's death, the poet and minister Nicolaas Beets wrote a memoir of him. In it is a sentence that Heldring often repeated: as a child he had learned to love "the life of the poor." At the weaver's, then, and among the children of craftsmen he played with. That sentence explains much of what came after.

He spent the vacations in Pfalzdorf, at his grandfather Janssen's. Grandfather had his own story there. Emigrants from the Palatinate, on their way to America, had been stranded on the heath near Goch. Young Pastor Janssen took their fate to heart and went with them to turn the wasteland into farmland. Houses, fields and a little church appeared. For more than sixty years he remained their pastor. The grandson looked around and remembered what he saw.

Spade and ax in Pfalzdorf

In September 1820 he left for Utrecht to study theology, together with his cousin Wilhelm Janssen. He was sixteen. It was not a happy time. The theology he heard there was rationalist and shaped by the Enlightenment. There was much talk about the virtue of man and little about God. With his cousin he read German thinkers such as Herder, and slowly he lost his faith in God's revelation. He stayed

away from lectures and received a stern reprimand from the faculty. Then he threw himself into his studies so hard, even at night, that his nerves gave way. Overworked and discouraged, he was stuck at the end of his studies.

The doctor prescribed half a year of rest. From March to September 1826 he lived with his grandfather in Pfalzdorf. He worked outdoors there, among the laborers, with spade, ax and shears. Beside him in the field stood a farmhand called Stoffel, a simple man of faith. From Stoffel he kept one thought: learning does not bring a person to God, a pure heart does. Heldring noticed that these laborers had more faith than the learned gentlemen in Utrecht. He recovered, and he became familiar for good with ordinary working people.

On the wall of the church in Pfalzdorf he read a saying that he never forgot: "Die Wüste soll zum Acker werden." The desert shall become a field. All around him lay the proof. Years later that sentence became his motto.

He would have liked to stay. A simple life of manual work, that was what he wanted. His father wanted something else, and he obeyed. On October 5, 1826, he took his proponentsexamen, the church exam that allowed him to be called as a minister, without much enthusiasm. That winter he still often stood in a carpenter's shop and at the lathe. On March 25, 1827, his father installed him as minister of Hemmen, in the Betuwe. He was twenty-two. His father gave him a word from Daniel to take with him: *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament* (Daniel 12:3).

Christmas in Hemmen

Hemmen was small: about a hundred and fifty souls, twenty-five families. The church had a choir from the fifteenth century, and the

parsonage lay in the shadow of the castle of the Van Lynden family. It would remain his only congregation.

He began with the little he was sure of. He had never wanted to become a minister, but he thought: "One thing I can do, practice love, proclaim love." His inaugural sermon was on the words: let us love one another.

In that first year something happened inside him. Toward Christmas 1827 he was working on his Christmas sermon and read a German sermon by the preacher Sack. It was about Christ being born as a child, as a poor child, so that a person might become poor in himself. It gripped him. He saw, he wrote later, "that the innermost motives of my heart were sinful and guilty." All his zeal and virtue could not save him. Only the righteousness of Christ could. What he had heard in Utrecht as doctrine, justification by faith alone, now became an experience. He had been brought from the way of virtue onto the way of faith, he said.

At Christmas he preached on the angel and the shepherds: *For there is born to you this day … a Savior* (Luke 2:11). A peace and a joy that he had not known filled him.

I find it striking how quiet this beginning is. No voice, no vision. A young minister in a small village reads someone else's sermon and suddenly sees his own heart. He did not make a show of it either. Only twelve years later did he tell it openly. Have you ever had such a moment, when a text you already knew was suddenly about you?

What could be seen afterward is certain. Already in his first year he saw the poverty in the Betuwe up close, and he never let it go. There was little work, and sometimes dozens of beggars stood at the door of the parsonage. On his salary of seven hundred guilders a year he could not help them. So he did what he had learned from his grandfather. He taught men to dig, gave out seed potatoes, devised a way

to grow berries and asparagus, and urged people to save. Alms did not help, he thought. Work did.

When his cousin Leonard Janssen became gloomy and ill in 1831, he took him into his home. He let him dig and walk, as he himself had done in Pfalzdorf. Leonard recovered and later became curator of the museum of antiquities in Leiden.

For six years Heldring lived alone in the parsonage. On October 24, 1833, he married Anna Elisabeth Deuffer Wiel, born in Schalkwijk. They had eight children, six sons and two daughters. They also took three wards into their home, boys whom he prepared for university himself.

Gin worse than cholera

Heldring became a writer for ordinary people, with humor and in the language of the Betuwe. In 1833 *De natuur en de mensch* (Nature and Man) appeared. After that came the *Winteravondlectuur van pachter Gerhard* (Winter Evening Reading of Tenant Farmer Gerhard), stories for farmers that were also about care for the poor. From 1835 to 1847 he edited the *Geldersche Volksalmanak*, a popular almanac for Gelderland. Later Beets and others would write such stories for the people too.

In 1838 he published a booklet with a title that stuck: *De jenever erger dan de cholera* (Gin Worse Than Cholera). He had collected figures from a hundred and eighteen municipalities in Gelderland, to show in black and white what drink was doing. Because of this he is regarded as one of the first in the Netherlands to fight against drink. He stood almost alone in it.

In 1839 he wrote *De nimmer rustende Israëliet tot rust gekomen* (The Never Resting Israelite Come to Rest), a story about the faith that gives rest. In that book he told openly for the first time what had

happened to him at Christmas 1827. It showed where he stood, and it cost him friends. He grew apart from Enlightenment societies such as the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen (the Society for the Common Good). The Society was willing to distribute his writings, if the all too Reformed expressions were removed. His former allies spoke about virtue. He now spoke about grace.

"Die Wüste soll zum Acker werden"

Heldring was a walker. He walked to speak with people and to search for antiquities, burial mounds and Roman coins. In 1841 he set out into the Veluwe with his friend Graadt Jonckers, at that time still a bare land of heath and drifting sand. Near Beekbergen, hut dwellers told them that further on lay a small colony, Hoenderloo. Twenty-four families had begun a few years earlier to cultivate the sandy ground. He wanted to see that.

On the way a sandstorm blew up. With a guide they reached the hamlet, their eyes inflamed by the sand. They found a small cluster of huts made of heath sod, with buckwheat and grain around them. In a small valley stood a barrel that caught the rainwater running down from the hill. That was all the drinking water. If the weather stayed dry, the people drank brackish water from the heath pools, or walked for hours to fetch better water. There was no school. The school of Beekbergen was often unreachable for the children because of the drifting sand. There was no church either.

Heldring thought of Pfalzdorf. There the desert had become a field. Why not here? At home he wrote about his journey in the *Geldersche Volksalmanak* and asked the readers for money for a well. He wrote to them that a spring would be one of the pillars on which this new settlement could grow, and that the heath dwellers would gratefully offer every giver a fresh drink.

The gifts came, from seventy-five cents to well over a thousand guilders. The digging went badly. The first water turned out not to be spring water and drained away when they dug deeper. Then the well stones were stolen. Only with a German well builder, Jan Paul, did it succeed. Heldring supervised the building himself. The well was placed where the rain barrel had stood.

So came, in 1843, the day of the five hundred buckets, with which this chapter began. Two years later Hoenderloo had three hundred and twenty inhabitants. Most of them lived in houses of brick.

Then the school. There was money left over from the well, but too little for a building. Heldring asked the Royal Household for a gift and wrote to the Gedeputeerde Staten, the provincial executive. A minister promised a hundred guilders a year for the teacher. At the laying of the first stone, Heldring spoke about the words of Jesus from Matthew 6: seek first the kingdom of God. In March 1846 the school opened.

The first teacher was B. Gangel. He had been a schoolmaster in Appeltern and had come into conflict there with the school inspectorate, over prayer and Bible reading in the classroom. When Heldring asked him for Hoenderloo, he saw God's hand in it. He taught, ran Sunday school and catechism classes, visited the sick and read the Bible with the people. His wife, the mother of six children, started a sewing school for the neighborhood. The children took the stories home, and so the parents also became curious about the Bible.

Later Queen Anna Paulowna came with the crown prince to see the school. She asked whether she might see the schoolbooks. Master Gangel pointed to the Bible: "Behold, Your Majesty, the best school-book."

In 1845 Heldring received a letter from a woman in The Hague. Did he know a home for a neglected girl whom she had taken under her wing? He thought of the Gangels at once, and they took the child in. More came, boys and girls. By 1849 there were forty-eight. W.H. Suringar, who had visited the Gangels, wrote to Heldring that he should found a Christian refuge in Hoenderloo. If God wills it, it will happen, Heldring answered, for it is time to act. Mr. Messchert van Vollenhoven supported the plan. In 1851 the Doorgangshuis, the transitional home for boys, opened, with Gangel as director. Children who often came straight from prison passed through it into working life. In 1858 the village got a church. From the home grew an institution for boys that still existed long after him.

The desert became a field. Hoenderloo is now a village.

The motto from Pfalzdorf sounds like an echo of the prophet Isaiah: *The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad* (Isaiah 35:1). In Isaiah it is God who does this. In Hoenderloo He used a well, a schoolmaster and a minister with a popular almanac.

To the friends of the Lord

Around 1840 Heldring came into contact with men of the Réveil, the revival movement mainly among well-to-do Protestants in Amsterdam and The Hague. He got to know Isaac da Costa, Abraham Capadose, Koenen and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. They spoke about personal faith and about Christ. Heldring believed that this faith had to do something. He laid his concerns before Groen.

In May 1845 he sent out a circular letter with the title *Aan de vrienden des Heeren* (To the Friends of the Lord). In it he called on fellow believers to undertake something together against the need in the country. So began the Christelijke Vrienden (Christian Friends), a circle that met twice a year in Amsterdam until 1854, with Heldring

at its center. He also edited their monthly magazine, for twenty-five years. Those who wrote about him later called him the bridge between the inward Réveil and the Réveil that went out into the street.

That same year the potato blight struck. In the Betuwe people went hungry. Heldring went to look, wrote down what he saw and sent it to the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, a national newspaper. He set out the facts, without fine words, and added that he could prove everything with names and details. Under the piece stood the date January 19, 1846. A lot of money came in, and he bought bread and handed it out. Some blamed him for turning citizens against the government. It hurt him. He knew he had done his duty before God and men, and he held to that.

In 1847 one of the stakeholders in the new Anna Paulownapolder in Noord-Holland asked whether he knew strong, reliable workers. Heldring went to look for himself. When he told about it at home, hungry fathers and mothers stood at his door begging to go along. He chose twenty-five families for the first trip. Friends paid for the ship. "I myself went with them," he wrote. That same year there were forty. The neighborhood where the families from the Betuwe came to live was called the Geldersche Buurt (Gelderland neighborhood). In 1849 he wrote down in *Christendom en armoede* (Christianity and Poverty) what he was convinced of: only work could solve poverty.

"I will not cast you out"

In 1847 Heldring visited the women's prison in Gouda. He came into a hall where seventy girls were held. The air was so foul that he had to go outside to keep from fainting. He also saw a woman there who intended to start a large brothel in The Hague and was looking for her victims among these girls. He understood what was going

to happen. Whoever had served one sentence here was marked for life. Behind the gate waited the beggars' colony, or prostitution.

Five girls begged him for help. What else could he answer, he wrote later, than: "I will not cast you out."

He had said it and did not know how to make it true. Soon afterward he was overworked and sought rest on the Rhine, in Marienburg near Boppard. One Sunday in Bad Ems he led a service for a small circle. He spoke on Ezekiel 34, where God rebukes the shepherds of Israel because they do not strengthen the weak, do not heal the sick and do not bring back the strayed. And then God says what He Himself will do: *I will seek what was lost* (Ezekiel 34:16). Heldring heard it as a word spoken directly to him. This and this alone, he wrote in his travel report, was the purpose for which Christ came to earth, and this was the work of everyone who bears His name. Whoever has himself been pulled out of the stream looks around for those who can still be saved.

At home three girls were waiting for him. Someone had sent them to him, hoping he knew of a family for them. A year earlier a society had been founded in Amsterdam to place such women with Christian families, but that worked poorly. Families were hard to find, and those who tried could not cope. Heldring came with a different plan: a house of their own, outside the city, where women could live, work and learn.

He already had that house, without knowing it. In Zetten, a village right next to Hemmen, he had been obliged to buy an old brewery called Steenbeek, for about twelve thousand guilders. What he was to do with it had never been clear to him. Now he knew.

In the autumn of 1847 he traveled throughout the country for months to raise money. Everywhere he preached on Ezekiel 34. Giving was generous. The Amsterdam society supported the plan,

and three of its board members joined the first board. Three letters were placed on the building: U.V.W. Uit verlies winst. Out of loss, gain.

Beets wrote later that the visit to Gouda was the foundation of everything that followed in Zetten.

A key on the inside

On January 1, 1848, the Steenbeek asylum opened. Asylum means refuge. Petronella Voûte became directress. She came from Amsterdam and was born in the same year as Heldring. It was a courageous step, because a respectable woman did not do such work in those days. She would stay almost thirty years, until her death in 1877.

At the beginning of 1848 the first girls came. In the course of that year there were twenty. It is regarded as the first home of its kind in the Netherlands. Some were sent by a society or a lady in the city. Others knocked at the gate themselves after running away.

Whoever came spoke first with the directress, was washed and received new clothes. The stay lasted two years in principle. They got up at five o'clock. First they spent two months learning to braid mats from rye straw. Then followed the sewing room, housekeeping, the washing of fine linen and the kitchen. Lessons were given in reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and Bible history, because many could not read. Every morning and evening Miss Voûte read from the Bible, and there was prayer and singing. After two years they could go to work as maids.

Leaving was always allowed. Every door could be opened from the inside: you only had to turn the key. The staff did their best to get someone to stay, but whoever really wanted to leave, left. Heldring

wanted it that way. Rescue, in his view, could only happen in freedom.

He also looked at these women differently from many of his contemporaries. Most were orphans or half orphans, raised in poverty, without upbringing and without a trade. To those who laid all the blame on them, he said that the seducer deserved more horror. He did not excuse sin. A respectable existence was too little for him as well: he wanted to bring them to Christ, who had forgiven Mary Magdalene much.

There was a lot of singing at Steenbeek. The hymn *Jezus neemt de zondaars aan* (Jesus receives sinners) was beloved, and Psalm 42. When it sounded across the fields, Heldring wrote, many a quiet tear flowed.

About a year after the opening he told Beets what he saw at Steenbeek: "a scene of grace and love." Miss Voûte he called a pearl that God had given. On August 8, 1850, the enlarged asylum was dedicated.

Not everything went smoothly. In the beginning Heldring asked every girl on Sunday evening how she stood before the Lord, converted or unconverted. He soon stopped. It made him a judge, he saw, and it bred pride and pretense. Conversion had to show in a life, in working, speaking and keeping silent. In 1851 he clashed with Voûte over the household. The board confirmed that Heldring had final responsibility. She said that she was attached to the house and did not intend to leave. A year later the relationship was good again. Two strong people under one roof: that sometimes causes friction, and that too belongs to this story.

Forty-nine fell back

After ten years Heldring took stock. Between 1848 and 1858, 277 girls had been taken in. Of them, 128 had done well: forty-one had married, sixty-four worked as maids, twenty-three lived with family or elsewhere. Nineteen had died. Forty-six had been lost from sight. Three were in the beggars' colony of Ommerschans. Thirty-two still lived there. And forty-nine had fallen back into their old lives.

That last line is simply there. Nobody polished it away. Similar homes elsewhere in Europe often reported high success rates. Heldring was annoyed when people wanted to measure the work by the number of those saved. He asked himself a different question: was he doing what he had been asked to do, seeking the one sheep that had strayed?

He lingered longer over the nineteen who had died. Four of them had had a deathbed that he never forgot. One girl died with a song on her lips, about the work that is finished. For those four alone, he wrote, all the labor, trouble and money had been worth it. He already saw them before him in eternity, in snow-white clothes, singing among the redeemed.

I find this one of the most beautiful things in his life. It is easy to tell about a work when everything succeeds. Heldring kept seeking, even when he knew that almost one in five would go back.

Jesus told of a shepherd with a hundred sheep, who loses one and then leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the lost one until he finds it (Luke 15:4). In that parable the shepherd does not count how many he has left. He counts who is missing. That is how Heldring looked at Steenbeek. He himself called the work a mustard seed.

Talitha cumi

More homes came. In 1856 he opened a home for neglected girls from twelve to sixteen years old. He called it Talitha Kumi. The name comes from the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus takes the little daughter of Jairus by the hand: *"Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."* (Mark 5:41).

In 1861 followed Bethel, for girls from sixteen to twenty who were in danger of ending up in prison or prostitution. The writer Henriëtte Langelaan became its first directress. In 1864 a Christian normal school was added, a training college for women teachers. So in Zetten a small world of homes grew, which would later be called the Heldringstichtingen (the Heldring Foundations). By 1870, 825 women had passed through Steenbeek alone.

Heldring also wrote about what he saw. In 1859 his pamphlet *Is er nog slavernij in Nederland?* (Is There Still Slavery in the Netherlands?) appeared, about brothels where girls were held against their will, about the trade in women and about a government that profited from it. In 1858 he was made a knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion.

Meanwhile, in 1854, the circle of the Christian Friends had fallen apart, over the question of how the church should be governed. Heldring still tried to mediate. He himself stayed in the Hervormde Kerk, the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1860 he helped found the Vereeniging voor Christelijk Nationaal Schoolonderwijs, an association for Christian national schooling. In 1864 he chaired the founding meeting of the Confessionele Vereniging, a confessional association within that church.

A summer day in Wolfheze

Mission was his great love. The cause is of God, he wrote in 1845 to the Christian Friends, and his heart trembled when he thought of the lukewarmness of his country. He looked up the German leader of the Home Mission, Johann Wichern in Hamburg, who sent him on to the missionary Gossner in Berlin. After that, Christian craftsmen and deaconesses from Gossner regularly came to Hemmen. They lived there, learned Dutch and left for the Dutch East Indies. About fifty were sent out in this way.

On August 6, 1863, thousands of Protestants gathered in the open air, on the estate of the dowager Baroness van Brakel Doorwerth near Wolfheze. It was the first Christelijk Nationaal Zendingsfeest, the Christian National Mission Festival. The plan came from Heldring. He was the first chairman of the committee and gave the opening speech. There were about ten thousand people.

The idea was simple. One day a year, Protestants from different churches came together, outdoors, to hear about mission in the Netherlands, in Africa and in the Dutch East Indies. Until the Second World War the festivals were held every year, each time on a different estate, with between six and fifteen thousand visitors.

A year after Wolfheze, he and others left the Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap (the Netherlands Missionary Society), because liberal members remained welcome there.

I dwell among my own people

On April 1, 1867, at his own request, Heldring took leave of Hemmen. He had been its minister for forty years. For his farewell he chose a text from 2 Kings 4. There the prophet Elisha offers a rich woman from Shunem that he will speak for her to the king. She declines: *I dwell among my own people.* (2 Kings 4:13). He moved with

his family to Zetten, to the new director's house among the homes he had founded. Every Sunday he preached there, at first in a hall of Talitha Kumi.

Meanwhile there was building going on. The Betuwe knew floods, and the people from the low villages did not always reach the dike in time. The national government, the province and the municipality together built an artificial hill. On it came a church, built from gifts, with an attic where people could take shelter during high water. In ordinary times it was the church of the institutions and the school. On June 19, 1870, the Vluchtheuvelkerk, the Church on the Refuge Hill, was dedicated. That evening his friend Beets read a poem in which he thanked God for the work. From his house, Heldring looked out on the church every day.

Three years later, on October 10, 1873, his wife Anna died in Zetten. She was buried at the foot of the Vluchtheuvel. He was no longer the man he had been after that, Beets writes.

A grave at the foot of the hill

Heldring was no saint, and nobody knew it better than he did. He reproached himself for ambition and vanity. Those who knew him described a man with a strong will, serious and hardworking, with humor and a warm heart, and with a strong sense of calling. A great theologian he was not. Questions of doctrine had never moved his heart very much, he admitted. He wanted to do what he believed. A critic after his death found him tense and strict in his orthodoxy, but acknowledged his compassion and his great gift for organizing things.

It is the same gaze as at Christmas 1827, when he saw that the innermost motives of his heart were sinful and guilty. He never lost that gaze. Perhaps that was where his strength lay. Whoever knows

that he himself needs grace looks differently at the girls he met in the prison of Gouda.

In the spring of 1876 he fell ill. On June 20 he did his last work at the normal school: nine students made their profession of faith. It exhausted him. On the advice of the doctors he traveled to the spa Marienbad in Bohemia, in the hope of recovering. A few days after arriving, on July 11, 1876, he died. He was seventy-two.

On July 17 he was buried in Zetten, next to his wife, at the foot of the hill with the church. Hundreds of people wept for him. A week later Nicolaas Beets gave an address in the Vluchtheuvelkerk. The gravestone says that in his life he was shepherd and teacher of Hemmen. Behind the pulpit came a memorial stone, which calls him a friend of mankind, a benefactor of his people and an honor to Christ. Below it stands the text from Daniel with which his father had once installed him.

Next to him lies Petronella Voûte, who died nine months later. In the same place lies Hendrik Pierson, who carried on the work in Zetten from 1877 to 1914.

The foundations kept growing. A Magdalena home for unmarried mothers and a children's home were added. In Germany more than twenty homes were set up on the model of Steenbeek. The O.G. Heldring Stichting existed until 2020 and then became part of a larger care organization.

Perhaps you know someone who has been lost from sight. Perhaps it is you. Heldring wrote down who had done well. He also wrote down how many were still missing. And he kept seeking.

In Zetten the church still stands on its hill. During high water, that was the place you could flee to. At its foot lie the man and the

woman who made an old brewery into a home for girls who had nowhere else to go. A house with the key on the inside of the door.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth in Zevenaar on May 17, 1804; studies in Utrecht from 1820 and a crisis at the end of them; recovery through manual work in Pfalzdorf (1826); proponentsexamen 1826; minister of Hemmen from March 25, 1827, to April 1, 1867; marriage to Anna Elisabeth Deuffer Wiel and eight children; *De jenever erger dan de cholera* (1838); editor of the *Geldersche Volksalmanak* (1835 to 1847); the well (1843), school (1846) and church (1858) in Hoenderloo, with a talk on John 4 at the well; the visit of the queen and the crown prince to Hoenderloo; the circular letter of 1845 and the Christian Friends (1845 to 1854); help during the potato famine; the visit to the women's prison in Gouda (1847); the founding of Steenbeek (1847 and 1848) with Petronella Voûte as directress from January 1, 1848; the normal school (1864); the first Mission Festival in Wolfheze on August 6, 1863, with Heldring as chairman; the Vluchtheuvelkerk (1870); the death of his wife on October 10, 1873; his death in Marienbad on July 11, 1876, and his grave in Zetten.

From his own testimony (*Leven en Arbeid*, published by his son in 1881, and his own reports and letters): the weaver's house; his mother's influence on his bond with the Bible; the farmhand Stoffel; the saying from Pfalzdorf as his life motto; the thought at his installation and the installation text; the conversion at Christmas 1827 after reading a Christmas sermon by Sack, the quotation about his heart and the peace afterward; the journey to Hoenderloo with the sandstorm; the day at the well, with the five hundred buckets, his exclamation and his words on John 4; the trip with the families to the Anna Paulownapolder; what he saw in the prison at Gouda

and his answer to the five girls; the service in Bad Ems on Ezekiel 34; the four deathbeds at Steenbeek; his self-reproach about ambition and vanity. The sentence about learning to love the life of the poor has been handed down by Beets. I have read these memories in the quotations of later writers (see the sources), not in the book itself. The spoken sentences are, apart from the short quotations, retold.

From one source only (not independently checked): the appeal in the almanac and the gifts for the well, the setbacks during the digging and the well builder Jan Paul; the 320 inhabitants two years later; the story of Master Gangel in Appeltern, the letter from The Hague, the forty-eight children and the letter from Suringar (the source writes Suringa); the answer of Master Gangel to Queen Anna Paulowna; the beggars at the parsonage door and the salary of seven hundred guilders; the sickbed of cousin Leonard Janssen in the parsonage; the purchase price of Steenbeek; the fundraising journey of 1847 and the sermon on Ezekiel 34; the twenty girls in the first year; the key on the inside, the daily order and the songs at Steenbeek; the ten-year balance with 277 girls taken in (Heldring's own overview, summarized by historian O.W. Dubois from the reports and minutes); the conflict with Voûte in 1851; the fifty workers of Gossner; the farewell text from 2 Kings 4; ten thousand participants at the first Mission Festival; the nine students on June 20, 1876; the memorial stone behind the pulpit; the more than twenty German homes.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one reading each time):

- *Place in the family.* The third of five children (the old biographical dictionary), the third son (Biografisch Woordenboek Gelderland) or the fourth child (Reformatorisch Dagblad). Beets mentions five children: two sons, two daughters and Ottho.

- *Marriage.* October 24, 1833, according to the Biografisch Woordenboek Gelderland and the Reformatorisch Dagblad; October 1832, according to Beets and the old biographical dictionary. That he lived alone in the parsonage for six years fits 1833. His wife was born in Schalkwijk; the Gereformeerd Weekblad names Wijk bij Duurstede.
- *Hoenderloo.* Most sources give 1841 as the year of the discovery, the Reformatorisch Dagblad 1839. Heldring himself counted twenty-four families; Beets speaks of about fourteen huts.
- *The school.* Opened in March 1846; the Gereformeerd Weekblad places the building and the first stone in 1845.
- *The boys' home.* 1851 according to most sources; the Reformatorisch Dagblad gives 1849, the year in which forty-eight children already lived with Gangel.
- *Talitha Kumi and Bethel.* 1856 and 1861 according to Beets and the older sources; 1857 and 1863 according to the Biografisch Woordenboek Gelderland.
- *Steenbeek.* The old biographical dictionary places the purchase of the brewery in 1848; the Gereformeerd Weekblad has him owning the property earlier. According to Dubois the asylum was Heldring's idea, and Heldring himself said that the Amsterdam society had put him on the track.
- *Gossner.* The old biographical dictionary mentions a meeting in 1849; according to the Gereformeerd Weekblad Heldring first visited Wichern, at Easter 1850.
- *Petronella Voûte.* Her gravestone gives April 18, 1877 as the date of death; Dubois gives 1876 in his article.
- *The first Mission Festival.* About ten thousand participants according to the old biographical dictionary; other sources speak of thousands.
- *His death.* Only the Reformatorisch Dagblad names a brain disease as the cause.

Interpretation: the Christmas conversion of 1827 we know only from Heldring himself. Beets gives no date and writes only that his religious life awoke powerfully in these years. A reviewer who discussed his life story in 1881 found the conversion doubtful, more a sign of inner restlessness, and called Heldring tense and strict. I believe it with Heldring, and what followed could be seen by everyone. The most important modern study of the foundations, *Reddende liefde* (Saving Love) by O.W. Dubois (2010), is called too admiring, on the border of scholarship and hagiography, by historian Jeroen Dekker. Dekker does accept that Heldring was realistic about the relapses and in that differed from the high success rates of similar homes in Europe.

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Gerrit and Wilhelmine Polman: until He comes

On October 29, 1907, a friend of the Polman family came back to Amsterdam with news. He had been to Norway to see with his own eyes what was happening there. In Kristiania, today's Oslo, people were speaking in languages they had never learned, as in the book of Acts. He had investigated it, and his verdict was short: this was from God.

That evening a small group of people living in one household knelt down together to pray. It was no crowd. One of them was Wilhelmine Polman-Blekkink, the wife of a former officer of the Leger des Heils, the Salvation Army. Since 1906 they had been praying for something they had only read about.

That evening it happened. Wilhelmine was seized by the Holy Spirit. She spoke in a language she had never learned. She sang in the Spirit, a strong, high melody. She prophesied. Her husband Gerrit was there. Years later he was still searching for words for her joy. There were none, he wrote, and none for the days and months that followed.

He also wrote that on that day the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands began. Historians have taken over that date, and the Pinkstergemeente Amsterdam, the Pentecostal church of Amsterdam, calls October 29, 1907, its birthday. It began with a woman, in a living room, on her knees.

Within a few years the Polmans were leading a movement with congregations from Haarlem to the island of Terschelling, a magazine of its own, a mission school and a church hall for five hundred and fifty people. Gerrit became known throughout Europe as one of the fathers of the Pentecostal movement. His wife preached beside him, at a time when most churches did not allow a woman to do so.

In 1930 it all fell apart.

The Dutch church historian Cornelis van der Laan wrote a doctoral thesis about Gerrit Polman with the title *Sectarian Against His Will*. Anyone who follows the lives of the Polmans understands why. They did not want a new church. They wanted the churches that already existed to discover the power of the Spirit again.

It did not begin in Amsterdam, and not in a church either. It began in the Salvation Army.

Dreaming of the upper room

Gerrit Roelof Polman was born in 1868 and as a child was baptized in the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, the Dutch Reformed Church. He had a difficult childhood. In 1890 he joined the Salvation Army. He was trained as an officer in Rotterdam, and he rose through the ranks. His superior was Arthur Sydney Booth-Clibborn, a son-in-law of William Booth, the founder of the Army.

In the Army he met Wilhelmine Johanna Marie Blekkink. She was born around 1878, about ten years after him. Her father was Hen-

ricus Sophinus Blekkink, her mother Marie Henriëtte Wanrooij. In the Salvation Army of those years, women preached and led. That would later prove important.

About those first years Gerrit wrote later that they dreamed. They read about the beginning of the church, about the upper room in Jerusalem where the Spirit was poured out, about the work of the apostles. Then they looked at the Christianity around them, and it seemed too great to believe that they would experience something like it themselves. But deep inside them the longing remained: for a full salvation, for being filled with the Holy Spirit. Only God could still that hunger, he wrote.

That longing took them first to America.

A city in Illinois

Around 1900 a Scottish evangelist in America drew a lot of attention: John Alexander Dowie. He preached divine healing and in 1896 had founded his own church, the Christian Catholic Church. In 1900 he announced the building of his own city north of Chicago, Zion. A year later he called himself Elijah the Restorer.

Booth-Clibborn was impressed by Dowie. In January 1902 he left the Salvation Army with his family and went to Zion. That same year the Polmans followed their chief. They too left the Army, drawn by Dowie's message of healing.

In October 1903 Gerrit and Wilhelmine arrived in Zion City, Illinois. Gerrit went to study there. In July 1904 he was ordained a deacon in Dowie's church, and Wilhelmine a deaconess. They were allowed to lead services and preach. Gerrit also had himself baptized there, by full immersion.

Dowie was controversial. He rejected the help of doctors, and his title of Elijah went against the grain for many. In 1905 he suffered a stroke, and while he was recovering outside Zion, his right-hand man Wilbur Glenn Voliva took over the leadership from him in 1906. In March 1907 Dowie died.

By then the Polmans were already back in the Netherlands. In January 1906 Dowie's church had sent them to lead the work of Zion in Amsterdam. Gerrit took Dowie's belief in healing with him, but he left his aversion to doctors behind. That difference comes back later in this story.

A prayer circle on the Nieuwe Prinsengracht

In Amsterdam the couple met with a small group in a house at Nieuwe Prinsengracht 42. There were about twenty-five of them. They read the Bible, prayed and heard stories from abroad. In 1904 there had been a revival in Wales. In 1906 they were sent magazines from America. In them they read about the meetings on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, where God poured out His Spirit and people spoke in tongues. This had to be from God, Gerrit wrote, for so it stands in the Bible: *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.* (Acts 2:4).

He held on to that beginning later. In a letter from 1915 he corrected the account of the historian Geert Wumkes, who had named an American preacher as the founder. The movement, Gerrit wrote, had begun in 1906 in Los Angeles, among a group of converted African Americans who prayed for the Spirit.

The Amsterdam circle set aside a day for prayer and Bible study. The hunger grew, he wrote. And for months nothing happened that you could see.

I find it striking how ordinary that beginning is. No hall, no stage, no famous speaker. A few people in a house, who kept asking for the same thing for months. Jesus once told a parable *that men always ought to pray and not lose heart* (Luke 18:1). That sounds simple, until you have to do it for a year. How long would you keep going if you pray and nothing happens?

Then, in October 1907, that friend came back from Kristiania. His name was M.D. Voskuil, and like Gerrit he had been an officer in the Army. He had seen the revival around the minister Thomas Barratt. His report left no room for doubt: whoever received the baptism in the Spirit spoke in tongues. On October 29 they knelt, and Wilhelmine received what they had prayed for together.

What followed began as a great cleaning. Gerrit described it. People who thought of themselves as serious, devoted Christians saw that much still had to be torn down in them. Things they had always done with a clear conscience, they now recognized as sin. They confessed it, to God and to each other. Brothers who lived in enmity became friends. Debts were paid. Only when everything lay on the altar, he wrote, did the fire come. One after another was baptized with the Spirit, and many people came to repentance.

It did not go fast. The first man to speak in tongues was Arie Kok. That was on January 10, 1908, at a prayer meeting at home, after two months of waiting. Gerrit and Wilhelmine were there. The little hall, with about a hundred chairs, was by now full every evening. Many people had to go home again because there was no room.

A magazine named after rain

The first thing the Polmans did after that was write. In April 1908 the first issue of *Spade Regen* appeared, the first Pentecostal magazine in the Netherlands. Until 1931 it would appear every month.

The name came from the letter of James, where a farmer waits for his harvest: *See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.* (James 5:7). For Gerrit and Wilhelmine that latter rain, in old Dutch the spade regen, was a new outpouring of the Spirit just before the return of Christ. They expected Him soon.

Years later Gerrit adjusted that. He then preferred to speak about the drops that come before the latter rain rather than the rain itself. A modest correction, from a man who did not give up his expectation and did learn to wait.

There was something strange about that first issue. The man who filled it with reports about the baptism in the Spirit had not yet received that baptism himself. His wife had.

Sunderland, June 4, 1908

In the spring of 1908 an invitation came from England. In Sunderland, on the northeast coast, the Anglican vicar Alexander Boddy held a convention in his parish, All Saints in Monkwearmouth, in the week after Pentecost. It was the first of a series that returned every year until 1914.

It was Wilhelmine who cut the knot. He had to go, she said. He did not need to worry about the meetings: she would preach for him. He had to go to Sunderland and seek his baptism there.

On June 3, 1908, Gerrit arrived in Sunderland, together with Arie Kok. The next day there was a small prayer meeting in the vicarage. Alexander and Mary Boddy laid hands on him. Mary Boddy told him that the Holy Spirit already lived in him. When the power of God came over him, he was frightened and wanted to break it off. She reassured him. He did not need to be afraid. He could surrender.

He did. A great power of glory came over him, he wrote later. His body shook with it. He began to praise God and felt lost in Him. His tongue and his jaws began to move by themselves and formed another language, and he put his hands over his eyes. He spoke and sang in tongues, almost eight months after his wife.

Years later he summed up that day for American readers in one sentence: "God met me in a quiet way." God met him quietly. The commotion came when he was back home.

A summer full of meetings began there. Every day there were meetings, and the visitors came from all over the country. The sick were healed, Gerrit wrote. People were set free from demons. People who had been involved in spiritism were set free. Others came to faith. Wilhelmine described in a letter how intense it was, with visions, tongues and people shaking under the power of God. The rumor went around that she had the gift of healing. She wanted nothing to do with that. She kept to the Lord, she wrote that year. Jesus did it.

What stayed with Gerrit most was what the Spirit did to ordinary lives. Behavior changed, hearts changed. They worked for God and no longer did it in their own strength. They rested in the work, he wrote, and worked in the rest.

At the beginning of September Boddy himself came to Amsterdam. He advised people first to let their lives be cleansed and only then to seek the baptism in the Spirit, to meet in small prayer circles and to pray often for their pastor. In those prayer meetings at home, many found what they were seeking. Between November 1908 and July 1909 the congregation grew from fifty to a hundred and fifty members.

She preached when he was away

From 1908 on, Gerrit was often away. In February 1909 German brothers came to Amsterdam, and after that the Polmans were invited to Germany. Between 1908 and 1912 the couple traveled sixteen times to England, thirteen times to Germany and four times to Switzerland. Gerrit spoke at conferences and became a familiar face in the young Pentecostal movement of Europe. In May 1912 in Sunderland he signed, with Boddy and the English leader Cecil Polhill, the first declaration of an International Pentecostal Council. On December 4 and 5 of that year the council met in Amsterdam.

Boddy looked at Amsterdam with admiration. Under the leadership of Brother and Sister Polman, he wrote in 1909, the purest work in Europe was going on there. Two years later he called Gerrit a careful shepherd, who smelled a wolf even when it looked like a lamb. Whom he did not trust, he took to his study for a thorough questioning. Only after that was someone allowed to speak in the meeting.

When Gerrit was away, Wilhelmine preached. When he was there, she sometimes did too. She spoke at conferences at home and abroad and taught at the meetings for leaders. She prophesied, spoke in tongues and interpreted tongues. Van der Laan sums it up in one sentence: Sister Polman shared fully in her husband's ministry.

She was also careful. At a leaders' meeting in those years the talk turned to prophecies addressed to one person. Wilhelmine warned that you should not simply accept them. If they had accepted every prophecy that had been sent to them, she said, they would all have been dead already. Such messages went into the wastebasket with them. Boddy fully agreed with her in his magazine. In 1911 the Polmans acknowledged together that the baptism in the Spirit and

speaking in tongues do not always coincide. Why that was so, they left to the Lord. For a movement that had only just begun, those were sober words.

Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica: *Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.* (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). Wilhelmine did both. She prophesied herself, and she tested what others said. Openness to the Spirit and a sober mind went together in her.

In Haarlem a woman led the congregation, Riek Trompetter. She had received the Spirit under the laying on of hands by Wilhelmine. In The Hague Gerrit appointed two women as leaders.

I pause for a moment at Wilhelmine, because in many stories about the Pentecostal movement she disappears behind her husband. It began with her. She was the first to speak in tongues, she sent her husband to Sunderland, and she held the congregation together when he was away. Van der Laan observed that his book about Gerrit can also be read as a biography of her.

A stable for racehorses

The hall became too small. The Polmans lived by faith and asked nobody for money, Gerrit wrote. They prayed. What they received was a stable. A large, beautifully built stable where racehorses had stood, at Huidekoperstraat 22, but a stable nonetheless. The members of the congregation laid the floor themselves, painted and put in windows. In December 1909 the hall opened, with two hundred and forty places. The congregation then numbered about a hundred and fifty people who had received the baptism in the Spirit.

Advertising was not needed. Young and old brought family, neighbors and colleagues. English visitors, the Mogridges, described a Sunday evening when there was no time for a sermon. There

was prayer, singing and testimony. All over the hall people were seeking God, kneeling or sitting on the floor, in tears. On Tuesday evenings some forty children from ten to fourteen years old came, who prayed for one another. The visitors thought they had found the secret of the Netherlands: these people meant it, and they kept on until they found God.

In 1910 Arie Kok and his wife Elsje left as the first missionaries to China.

After two years the stable too was too small. In February 1911 the congregation bought an old building at Kerkstraat 342-344, a former liqueur distillery and picture-frame workshop. It cost 48,000 guilders, of which 40,000 was borrowed. For such a small group that was a fortune. The architect C. de Groot made a church out of it, with living space above. The Polmans moved into the first floor themselves.

On December 30, 1911, Wilhelmine laid the foundation stone. The text is still in the inventory of Amsterdam memorial stones: "Until HE comes / This memorial stone laid by / W.J.M. Polman-Blekkink / On the 30th of December 1911." Above the entrance came a name: Immanuël, God with us.

On June 1, 1912, the building opened. The hall seated five hundred and fifty people. Gerrit described the day: songs of praise and prayers of thanks in every corner of the building. Immanuel, God with us, so it had truly been, he wrote.

Behind the low platform lay a prayer room, which they called the upper room. Whoever responded to a call could go there, and many received the Spirit there. There were rooms for mission sisters and a rest home. In October 1912 a mission school began in the upper room. The first class consisted mostly of women. The only man

was Piet Klaver. He would later go to China, like Trijntje Bakker and Geertje Roos.

Not everyone in Amsterdam was happy with the new neighbors. In November 1913 the *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad* warned its Jewish readers about the tracts and invitations of the mission sisters from the Kerkstraat. There was also resistance from the established churches. Gerrit himself wrote about persecution and hatred, by churches and by the public. The little flock kept trusting the Lord, he added.

Peace in a time of war

In 1914 the First World War broke out. The unity that Gerrit valued so much came under heavy pressure. Pentecostal magazines in Germany and in England took the side of their own country and called for battle. The Netherlands remained neutral, and Gerrit chose the same line. He was a pacifist.

He kept traveling, now to the people nobody thought of. In Germany he visited English prisoners of war, and in England German ones. He worked among Belgian soldiers and wrote them letters. One of them wrote back that since Gerrit's letter he had been living as a new man. Another thanked him for the love that their wives and children had received as refugees in the Netherlands. At home Gerrit visited conscientious objectors in prison.

The war cut the congregation off from the brothers and sisters abroad. It became a time of money worries and spiritual struggle, he wrote later, but the Lord was with them. From 1915 he published a second magazine, *Klanken des Vredes* (Sounds of Peace), which would exist until 1929.

After the war the work revived. In 1918 a wave of blessing went through the congregation. The fire fell with power, Gerrit wrote,

and in 1919 God visited them again and led them deeper. It also brought new persecution and much misunderstanding. In those days they learned more of the secret of the cross. Suffering for Christ had become a source of joy, he wrote, because it brought them closer to Him.

In 1920 he founded the Nederlandsch Pinksterzendingsgenootschap, the Dutch Pentecostal Mission Society. Missionaries left for China, the Dutch East Indies, the Belgian Congo and South America. In 1921 an international convention was held in the Netherlands, with leaders from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, England, Scotland and America. People from countries that had shot at each other not long before sat in one hall.

In 1926 Gerrit wrote an overview of the work in the Netherlands for the American magazine *Pentecostal Evangel*. He called on Pentecostal believers everywhere to hold on to one another across national borders. Being a Christian, he held, had to weigh more heavily than loyalty to a country. American or Dutchman, Englishman or German: they were, he wrote, "one in Christ." The body of Christ he called a new people, born from heaven.

"And the upright will believe"

From Dowie, Gerrit had brought the belief in divine healing. In the meetings a full salvation was preached, for spirit, soul and body. On Monday afternoons there were meetings especially for the sick. He distinguished four ways: the prayer of faith, the intercession of two or more people, the anointing with oil by elders, and the laying on of hands.

He was no copy of Dowie. He did not reject the help of doctors, although he saw healing by faith alone as the higher way. Nor did he make a show of healings. People who were there told later that

many healings never made it into the magazine. In twenty-three years of *Spade Regen* there are twenty-one testimonies, mostly with name, date and place of residence.

In December 1922 he wrote his only piece on this subject. The teaching of bodily healing had done harm, he thought. It had been made into a doctrine, almost a sect, and whoever thought differently was condemned. Believers should show their faith in their deeds and not enter the fight against doctors. Whoever thought he knew better could show it:

"Let him who thinks he has something better bring it forward, and the upright will believe."

It is a sentence that I like to remember.

In 1925 a baptismal font and membership cards came to the Kerkstraat. Gerrit baptized by immersion, but he also recognized the baptism of people who had been sprinkled as children. To become a member or to take part in the Lord's Supper, you did not need to be baptized. In this too he remained someone who wanted to build bridges.

Sectarian against his will

Gerrit's great sorrow was that almost nobody crossed those bridges. He did not want a movement of his own. Because he believed that the time was short, he did not want to found a new church. He wanted to help the existing churches revive, and to open their eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, he said again and again, above all makes Christ known. The churches rejected it. Whoever was Pentecostal in those years was quickly regarded as a member of a sect.

Slowly what he did not want happened. Congregations of their own appeared, with elders whom he appointed. Magazines of their own, a school of their own, a mission society of their own, and finally membership cards. According to Van der Laan, the combination of his views kept the churches at a distance: his ecumenical heart, his pacifism, his expectation of the end and his international outlook. So he became a sectarian against his will.

Do you know that, that you begin something to connect, and it ends as something apart? It happened to the Polmans, and they could not stop it. Paul asks believers to be diligent, *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit* (Ephesians 4:3). To keep, it says. Unity cannot be forced on someone else. You can only keep your own side of the bridge open, and that is what Gerrit kept doing.

1930

In 1930 Gerrit's leadership came to an end. He had committed adultery, and he laid down his office.

I do not want to say more about it. It is established, it hurt many people, and it belongs to his life. Van der Laan described it in his thesis, carefully and with compassion.

For the young movement it was a heavy blow. The national cohesion was lost. People left the congregation, and the congregation left the building in the Kerkstraat. In 1931 a Reformed congregation took it over. On the back wall of the hall was a stained-glass window with the wise virgins from Matthew 25, waiting with burning lamps for the bridegroom. German friends had once given it to Polman as a gift. In 1931 the last issue of *Spade Regen* also appeared.

It hurts to read this about a man through whom so many people came to God. It is not here to condemn him. Paul wrote: *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Gifts of the Spirit say something about the goodness of God, not about the holiness of the one who receives them. Even someone whom God uses remains a person who can fall.

The historian Wumkes, who had followed the movement from the beginning, thought that the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands would die out.

Zandvoort and Baarn

In 1930 Gerrit and Wilhelmine moved together to Zandvoort. In 1932 Gerrit Roelof Polman died.

Wilhelmine lived almost thirty more years. Those years are quiet. There is only her death certificate. On April 17, 1961, Wilhelmine Johanna Marie Blekkink died in Baarn, eighty-three years old. In the certificate she is still listed as the wife of Gerrit Roelof Polman.

The movement did not die out. In Amsterdam the elder Jan Klaver led the congregation for a time. After that Piet Klaver became pastor, the man from the first class of the mission school. In Haarlem and Rotterdam Nico Vetter and Pieter van der Woude arose. After years of division the congregations found each other again in the 1940s and 1950s.

In September 2007 the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands celebrated its hundredth birthday in the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam. There the scriba of the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Dr. B. Plaisier, offered an apology for the contempt with which the churches had looked down on Pentecostal believers for so long. A century earlier Gerrit had wanted to have that conversation with the churches.

The building in the Kerkstraat is still there. After the Reformed came the Evangelische Broedergemeente, the Evangelical Brethren

congregation, and a Russian Orthodox parish. Now there are offices and homes. It is a municipal monument.

Whoever looks over the life of the Polmans sees no heroes without blemish. A man who fell, a woman who was forgotten, a church building that now has offices. The work went on, among others with Piet Klaver, who had once been the only man in the first class of the mission school. Paul wrote that we have this treasure *in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us* (2 Corinthians 4:7). The vessel broke. The treasure remained.

The foundation stone is still there too, with the name of the woman who in 1907 was the first in the Netherlands to begin speaking in tongues. Whoever reads it does not see the name of the man who led the movement, nor the year 1930. Above her name stand three words, chiseled in a time when they still thought it would not be long.

Until He comes.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth year 1868 and death year 1932 of Gerrit Polman; officer in the Salvation Army until 1902; departure for Zion City in October 1903 and ordination as deacon in July 1904; return to Amsterdam in January 1906; Wilhelmine's speaking in tongues on October 29, 1907, as the beginning of the movement; *Spade Regen* from April 1908 to 1931; Gerrit's baptism in the Spirit in Sunderland in June 1908 and his contacts with Alexander Boddy; the Immanuël building in the Kerkstraat, the foundation stone of December 30, 1911, and the opening on June 1, 1912; his pacifism in the First World War; the founding of the mission society in 1920; his removal from office in 1930 because of adultery;

the death of Wilhelmine Johanna Marie Blekkink on April 17, 1961, in Baarn, aged 83.

From their own testimony or from their own congregation: what happened on October 29, 1907, with the high melody and the prophecy; the dreaming of the upper room and the magazines from America; the day of prayer; the time of confessing guilt and paying debts; the baptism in the Spirit of Arie Kok on January 10, 1908; Wilhelmine's urging to go to Sunderland; the laying on of hands by the Boddys, the words of Mary Boddy and Gerrit's description of what happened to him; the healings, deliverances and conversions in the summer of 1908 and Wilhelmine's letter about them; her words about the gift of healing; Boddy's visit in September 1908 and the growth from fifty to a hundred and fifty members; the number of trips abroad; living by faith, the stable in the Huidekoperstraat and the work of the members of the congregation; the reports of the Mogridges; the purchase price of the building; the joy at the opening; the letters of the Belgian soldiers; the blessing of 1918 and 1919. These stories come from Gerrit's own overview (included in the book by Stanley Frodsham and, in 1926, in the *Pentecostal Evangel*), from *Spade Regen* and from the historical writing of the Pinkstergemeente Amsterdam, which relies on *De Spade Regen* by Cornelis van der Laan (1989). Medical or other outside reports on the healings I have not found. The spoken sentences are, apart from the short quotations, retold.

Where the sources differ or are silent (in the story I have chosen one reading each time):

- *Gerrit's birth and youth.* The year 1868 appears in almost all sources; one review gives 1867. I have not been able to establish the place and day. Van der Laan describes a difficult childhood; the details are in his thesis, which I have not been able to consult. A study booklet from a Pentecostal church

gives 1888 as the year of his conversion. I have not found that anywhere else.

- *The marriage.* I have not found the date and place. Wilhelmine's year of birth (around 1878) follows from her death certificate and two later sources.
- *The prayer circle.* The number of about twenty-five comes from the Lucepedia, a theological encyclopedia that relies on Van der Laan.
- *The friend from Kristiania.* According to the Amsterdam congregation he returned himself on October 29; the historian David Bundy, who gives his name (M.D. Voskuil), says only October 1907. No names of the other members of the household that evening have come down to us.
- *The first little hall.* About a hundred chairs according to Gerrit himself, a hundred and sixty according to the Lucepedia.
- *Sunderland.* The vicarage and the date of June 4 come from Gerrit himself; the overview of the congregation gives June 3, the day of arrival. That he received the Spirit through the ministry of Mary Boddy is also in an article on the site Sporen van God.
- *Wilhelmine's warning.* Boddy discussed it in his magazine of February 1912; the meeting itself was shortly before.
- *The stable.* Two hundred and forty places according to the congregation, about two hundred and fifty according to Gerrit, who gives December 19, 1909, as the day of opening.
- *The mission school.* Five students at the start according to Gerrit, six or seven according to later sources.
- *His death.* The sources hold to 1932; an article from 1963 gives 1931. I have not been able to establish the day and the place.

Unconfirmed:

- *The adultery.* That Gerrit lost his office because of adultery appears in several sources. The Amsterdam congregation itself keeps it brief: there was a crisis, and the pastor laid down his office. A site on the history of Amsterdam buildings writes that it involved several female members of the congregation. I have found that detail in only one source.
- *Elijah.* One book on the history of the evangelical movement says that in his last years Gerrit came to see himself as the prophet Elijah. I have not found a second source for it, and it does not recur in the other sources.
- *Wilhelmine's quiet years.* About her life between 1930 and 1961 I have found nothing, apart from her death certificate.

Interpretation: that Polman became a sectarian against his will is the thesis of Cornelis van der Laan, which he also repeated in an interview in 2007. Other historians follow him in this, but it remains an interpretation of his life. Whether the healings were miracles and whether Wilhelmine's words came from God is a question of faith. I believe it with them.

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Johannes de Heer: the organ man who waited for the King

On February 17, 1905, in Vlissingen, a music dealer from Rotterdam boarded the boat to England. He was thirty-eight. With a few friends he traveled on through London to Wales, because a revival had broken out there, with Evan Roberts as its best-known face. He wanted to see it with his own eyes.

On one of those evenings he sat in a church, probably in Briton Ferry, next to his friend T. van Essen. It was a meeting with testimonies. Evan Roberts had let it be known that he would not come.

Then he saw it. Right across from him, on the white wall, something was being written. In flaming letters, he told later, like a neon sign. Letter by letter a sentence took shape. Nobody else in the church saw it.

He knew that sentence. Two years earlier he had read it at home at the table. He had even traveled to London because of it, had understood nothing of it and had slowly forgotten it. Now it stood before his eyes on a wall in Wales.

To Van Essen he said only: "As soon as we are home, I have to tell you something special."

The man was called Johannes de Heer. He became the maker of the songbook that still bears his name, and the man behind the magazine *Het Zoeklicht* (The Searchlight). At its height that magazine had forty thousand subscribers, and it kept returning to one message: Jesus is coming back. He stood at the cradle of Christian radio in the Netherlands. He lived to be ninety-four.

What stood on that wall, I will tell you soon. First you need to know where this man came from, and what he had lost nine years earlier.

The blacksmith's son

Johannes de Heer was born on May 23, 1866, in Rotterdam, the son of a blacksmith. He never knew his mother. She died when he was about a year old. What he knew of her was that she had been a believing, praying woman, and that she had died while singing Psalm 103. His father remarried. The new mother was also a praying woman, and she treated Johannes as her own child.

The family was Reformed, and at home things were serious, in the old Reformed style.

Until he was eleven he went to primary school. After that his father made him go into the smithy. He worked there, but it did not suit him. Johannes was musical. His parents bought a small seraphine, a little reed organ, and a shipbuilder friend gave him lessons. Soon there was nothing more he could teach him. There was no money for real music lessons, so he taught himself the rest. He played and harmonized from memory. Later he called himself a mediocre amateur, nothing more. But precisely because of that road of his own, he felt, he could accompany a hall in singing and put together a songbook.

In 1879, thirteen years old, he went to learn the trade at the music shop of Lichtenauer in Rotterdam. He started as the youngest clerk. There he came to know the operas that were popular then, and the musicians of the German opera who came into the shop. So began a life among organs, harmoniums and sheet music.

About his young years he said little later. There was a dark page, he wrote, and he kept it closed. Through wrong friends he had ended up in all kinds of sins. He believed they were all covered by the blood of Christ. He told no more about it, and we do not need to know more.

In 1886, twenty years old, he became head clerk at the music firm Alsbach & Co, also in Rotterdam. On October 30, 1889, he married Catharina Frederika Beindorff. In February 1891 their daughter Dina was born.

It was a happy marriage. Spiritually it was poor. Johannes was stuck on the question of election: had God chosen him at all? His answer was a shrug. If he was to be chosen anyway, he said, he would first enjoy some of the world. He had his concerts and his operas. In his free time he played chess.

Do you know that doubt? The question of whether the gospel is meant for you too can keep someone at a distance for years. With Johannes de Heer it lasted until he was thirty.

The little lamb

After Dina came a son. He died within nine months.

In November 1895 Dina too became seriously ill. She was four. In his distress Johannes went to the Gereformeerde Kerk in Rotterdam and asked whether prayer could be offered for his child. That Sunday Professor N. van Nes preached on Psalm 91, the psalm about the

shadow of the Almighty, and on the verse where God covers you under His wings. The father found strength and comfort in it.

His daughter did not get better. On January 3, 1896, she died.

A great emptiness had come into house and heart, he told later, and nothing of this world could fill it. What good were all that bustle of concerts and operas to him now? Only what was about heaven did him good.

Years later he used a story for it. A shepherd wants to bring his flock across a stream, and the mother sheep does not dare. Then he lifts the lamb and carries it to the other side. The sheep follows of itself. That was how it had gone with them, he said. God had taken their little lamb. She was with the Lord, and that was where they now wanted to be too.

He summed it up himself in one sentence: "The deathbed of our child also became the turning point of our life."

A Sunday evening in 1896

The chessboard stayed closed. Instead he read the Bible, and he could not get enough of it.

One Sunday evening in the spring of 1896 he knelt down. He himself no longer knew the exact date later, but he did know the words, roughly. He prayed: "Lord, I wish to become a child of Yours." And he decided to believe that Jesus Christ was his Savior too.

The next day everything was different. His heart rejoiced, and he could not keep it to himself.

Whoever begins like that goes looking for where to go on. Johannes attended the Bible studies of the Seventh-day Adventists and joined them, from 1896 to 1902. For years he kept the Sabbath and tried

to live by the law with great care. Until he saw that he was getting nowhere with it, and surrendered himself completely to the grace of Christ. He took his leave and explained his departure in a brochure with the title *Waarom ik op zaterdag niet meer gesloten ben* (Why I Am No Longer Closed on Saturday). You can hear the shopkeeper in it. Later he wanted nothing more to do with any kinship with the Adventists.

I find it beautiful that this stands so openly in his life story. He searched, went a way that he later left, and was not ashamed to explain it.

At Alsbach he could not stay in the meantime. He no longer stood behind the music he had to sell there, and he resigned. He gave up the profit from his own humorous pieces of music. In 1898 he started for himself, with a music shop at home. He gave organ lessons, published sheet music with Christian songs and sold harmoniums. It left him time to evangelize.

Around 1902 he came into contact with the Rotterdam city mission Jeruël. In 1903 he joined it, and soon he sat there behind the organ to accompany the congregational singing. There he found his spiritual home. He also went to meetings of the Salvation Army in Rotterdam, and in 1903 he saw General William Booth there.

One thing was missing at Jeruël. There was no good songbook.

Rafts across the sea

In the spring of 1903 Johannes de Heer was reading from the Bible at the meal. It was 1 Kings 5. King Hiram of Tyre promises Solomon the timber for the temple: he will have it brought on rafts across the sea. And he asks something in return: *And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household.* (1 Kings 5:9).

The words stuck. He experienced them as an assignment for himself, more a burden than a comfort. Food for God's house, from across the sea. He thought like a merchant: in England there had to be a musical instrument he could earn money with for the evangelistic work.

He packed a suitcase and crossed over. For eight days he went from shop to shop in London. He found nothing.

At home in Rotterdam his wife asked how it had gone. He did not understand it, he said. Perhaps "across the sea" referred to America. Catharina, who from the beginning had seen little in the trip, answered soberly that in that case it could also be Africa or Australia.

He let the plan rest, and the text sank away.

Later he was in London again. In Paternoster Row, the street of the booksellers and publishers, he saw a songbook lying in a shop window: *Victory Songs*, with more than eight hundred songs and choruses, gospel songs and revival songs. At that moment he knew what he had to do. The Netherlands had to have such a book.

He worked on it day and night. He included psalms and hymns, songs of Sankey, songs of the Salvation Army, Sunday school songs and simple evangelistic songs with short choruses. Much came from *Victory Songs*, from America, England and Wales, translated by himself and by others. At the end of December 1903 the manuscript was ready: 673 numbers. Why it was so urgent, he understood only later.

In the autumn of 1904 the reports came from Wales. And so he sat, in February 1905, in that church next to Van Essen, and read on the white wall the text he had forgotten two years earlier.

At home he told his friend the whole story. For him it was now clear. The spiritual food from across the sea was the songs, and he had to hand them out in the Netherlands. The evangelist in him also heard a calling in it: from now on he would give himself completely to the gospel. He never doubted it again.

Do you believe God speaks like that? I believe it with him. And I see what grew out of it: songs that have been sung in the Netherlands for more than a century.

Sheep, not giraffes

In 1905 the songbook appeared. The first edition with music numbered five thousand copies and was first used at a conference in Hilversum. De Heer saw the book as an instrument in God's hand.

After that it went fast. In the preface to the eighteenth printing, signed in Driebergen in the spring of 1955, he counted 185,000 copies with music and 640,000 text editions. In that preface he also told the story of the table, the suitcase and the wall. By 2016 the counter stood at more than thirty printings and well over 300,000 music editions. The thirtieth printing, from 2004, runs to number 1011.

They were simple songs, about Jesus, about the cross, about heaven and about the return. They were about conversion and a personal bond with Christ. Theologians and literary critics criticized the verses. De Heer had his answer ready: "God's flock does not consist of giraffes, but of sheep that His hand wants to feed." So the feeding trough must not hang too high.

Questions remained later too. Some songs have a Remonstrant coloring, and in experiential Reformed circles it was sometimes said: better not sing that verse.

The songs stayed. They sounded in evangelistic halls, in families around the harmonium, at the Evangelische Omroep, the Evangelical Broadcasting Company, and at funerals. In 2016, a hundred and fifty years after his birth, the Groot Johannes de Heer Koor (Great Johannes de Heer Choir) was founded.

A tent in Apeldoorn

After Wales, De Heer was an evangelist. When he came back, a wave of revival went through many congregations, and everywhere people came to faith. A friend who led a Christian young men's association wrote to him that within a few weeks two hundred young men had come to conversion.

In 1906 a Dutch tent mission arose, on a German model and carried by a committee of Christians from different churches. The German tent evangelist Jakob Vetter helped. De Heer went with the tent from place to place and usually stayed two weeks. In September 1906 the tent in Apeldoorn was officially opened, in the presence of Queen Wilhelmina.

In 1908 he moved to The Hague to lead the city mission there. His son-in-law took over the music business. In 1910 he traveled to Palestine with a German group.

In that same year he broke down physically. The work largely came to a halt. Somewhere in those years he did something that his surroundings must have found strange. He had a life insurance that would make him financially independent at fifty-five. He canceled it, because he felt it stood in the way of God's leading. The spiritual gain, he wrote, was greater than the money he lost.

Seven people in Zeist

In 1914 the First World War broke out. The Netherlands remained neutral, but the tension was everywhere. De Heer noticed that in such an uncertain time people were more open to the gospel, and it seemed as if his strength came back. He began to speak about the signs of the times. In the magazine *Maran-Atha*, the magazine of the tent mission, he wrote a series of articles about the return of Christ. Later he distanced himself from it, because pieces appeared in it that he did not stand behind.

Maranatha means: the Lord is coming. Zoeklicht editor J. Kits called it the cry of the first Christian church. With that cry the last book of the Bible closes: *Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20). It became the thread running through the rest of his life.

In 1915 he became critically ill. He was forty-nine and lay in his house on the Herenstraat in Zeist. Everyone counted on his death. The funeral had already been discussed, and he himself was prepared for it.

On that bed he prayed for a new task in life. That prayer, he told, was wonderfully answered. He recovered. He never became strong again. His health remained weak, and he worked through it for the rest of his life.

The new task came almost by itself. Friends in Zeist asked whether he would explain more about the prophecies. He began a Maranatha evening. Seven people came.

Seven people. It is a number that is easy to skip over. When the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt small and poor after the exile, God had the prophet Zechariah asked: *For who has despised the day of small*

things? (Zechariah 4:10). Much of what is described in this book began in a living room.

The seven became more. The evenings moved to larger halls, until the church of the Hernhutter Broedergemeente, the Moravian congregation, in Zeist was full. In 1920 a Maranatha conference followed in Arnhem, in 1921 in Doetinchem and Den Helder. He spoke in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Sneek. On those days he sang the evangelistic songs together with Catharina. In July 1927 the first Maranatha tent day was held in Zeist. Catharina sat behind the harmonium, and he spoke about a verse from Psalm 40, about the Messiah who says: behold, I come. Before the Second World War he led large conferences in Utrecht and in Zeist, there in the garden of hotel Boschlust.

After such a talk he invited people to raise a hand, or to stay behind for a conversation and prayer. He wrote a little book to go with it about how one comes to conversion, which went through many printings. A patient pastor he was not. Seekers he quickly passed on to his coworkers. Letters he did answer himself, and when he thought it necessary, he went to see someone himself.

The scholar of religion S.J. Vellenga wrote about it in 1998 as the Maranatha movement of Johannes de Heer. De Heer never wanted to make a church of it. All his life he remained a member of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk and took communion there. He spoke often in Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten, the Free Evangelical congregations, and at the Salvation Army. He called himself a man of the Alliance, of all Christians together. The expectation of the return had to come back into the churches that already existed.

Half past eleven on the clock

At the beginning of June 1919 an advertisement appeared in the newspapers. Johannes de Heer in Zeist announced a new Christian magazine, which would appear every two weeks. Whoever sent a card before June 15 received it free for three months. About five thousand requests came in.

On July 1, 1919, the first issue of *Het Zoeklicht* appeared, eight pages thick. At first it went along as a supplement to the Christian daily *De Amsterdammer* and other Christian papers, and that brought in another six thousand requests.

In that first issue he wrote that the magazine mainly wanted to examine the prophecies, in connection with what was happening in the world. The tone was his from the start: the time of cozy reflections and edifying little stories was over. In the masthead of the magazine stood a clock. The hands stood at about half past eleven.

In 1922 *De Amsterdammer* went bankrupt. De Heer took over the distribution and administration himself and went on publishing the magazine on his own. It already had ten thousand subscribers then. J.G. Guttling joined for the administration and recruiting. In the 1930s the circulation reached thirty thousand and the magazine thirty-two pages. With sales at station kiosks added, it sometimes came to forty thousand. There was even a Russian edition, in 18,500 copies.

Around his fifty-fifth year, about 1921, he moved to a villa in Driebergen. There he would live for the rest of his life.

Israel had a fixed place in the magazine. Already before the First World War, De Heer wrote about the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. In 1918 his brochure *Israëls herstel en terugkeer naar Palestina* (Israel's Restoration and Return to Palestine) appeared in

Rotterdam. In it he argued that the prophecies about Israel would be fulfilled literally. The little book was reprinted as late as 1990. He saw the national restoration of Israel as a sign of the end times. First the people would return in unbelief, then spiritual renewal would come.

In March 1937 the Dutch Jewish mission Elim asked theologians whether Christians might still expect a future for the Jewish people. De Heer answered with a clear yes. The situation of Israel was for him one of the clearest proofs of God's faithfulness to His people, and he pointed to the promises of restoration in Moses, Jeremiah and Amos. Eleven years later, in 1948, he lived to see the state of Israel proclaimed. It remained the great theme of *Het Zoeklicht*, even after his death.

Not everyone was enthusiastic. From the beginning, churches criticized the magazine: it was said to be one-sided and to have little regard for the confessions. In church papers the talk went around that he had set back the clock of *Het Zoeklicht*. That hurt him, because it damaged trust. He showed that the clock had always stood at about half past eleven.

In the 1930s the journalist P.H. Ritter Jr. wrote a book about him. A reviewer of that book called De Heer a radical figure. The same reviewer also saw where his strength lay. The power he had over the crowd, he wrote, came from the "musical inspiration" that radiated from him.

A voice through the air

On April 4, 1924, De Heer spoke for the Hilversumsche Draadloze Omroep, the Hilversum Wireless Broadcasting Company. His talk was called *Hoe wij door de draadloze de geestelijke dingen verstaan* (How

We Understand Spiritual Things Through the Wireless). It was the first Bible study that a Dutchman gave over the radio.

On November 15, 1924, the Nederlandsche Christelijke Radio Vereeniging, the NCRV, was founded in The Hague. De Heer stood at its cradle and for a long time sat on the executive committee. Before the war he gave 155 broadcasts, with lectures and morning devotions, and nearly a hundred song hours, in which he sang songs and explained them. They were heard abroad as well.

He sang himself, at the harmonium, clipped short and with every syllable clear. Not everyone found it beautiful. An Englishman wrote a letter to the NCRV asking who that singing goat was. Someone proposed replacing his solo singing with a choir. That did not go ahead, because with a choir you could no longer understand the words. And the words were what mattered to him.

So his voice and his songs sounded in living rooms where an evangelist never came through the door. Not everywhere was the radio welcome. On a Rotterdam family website is the story of church elders who came to visit to object to listening. As they stepped inside, De Heer was just singing through the room. The mother of the house left the radio on and asked the brothers to listen along. They had nothing to say against it.

So much still to do

In 1928 Catharina died. They had been married almost forty years, and the year before she had still sat behind the harmonium at the tent day in Zeist.

Ritter described the home of the widower in Driebergen as a very modest, friendly villa. By the desk hung the photographs of his late wife and of the children. De Heer himself looked at first sight

more like a businessman than an apostle, Ritter thought. Sober, and convincing.

His days followed a strict schedule. At half past eight he began. At half past ten the coworkers interrupted him for coffee. He worked on until twelve, rested after the meal, in summer outside on a deck chair, and drank tea in the afternoon. He wrote down every expense, down to a postage stamp. He was strict with others because he was strict with himself, and he did not like long conversations. A person is more likely to say too much than too little, he felt. Visitors rarely came. On trips he slept in a hotel, and everywhere a black bag full of magazines went along.

On Monday afternoons the editorial staff gathered in his living room for black tea and a cookie. They discussed the work and prayed together. He then mentioned the people by name before God. One prayer kept returning: that the Lord would take him, break him, fill him and send him.

He had humor too. When someone came in late to a meeting and the whole hall turned around, he said that this was not necessary. He would pass it on in a moment: a man or a woman, and the color of the hat.

He wrote a great deal. It came to more than fifty titles, with translations into German, Swedish and Russian, among others. His book *Het duizendjarig vrederijk* (The Thousand-Year Kingdom of Peace) counted as a standard work in his movement and was reprinted as late as 1984. He had not seen a school after he was eleven and called himself a self-made man. His way of reading the Bible was short: read what it says, believe what it says, and you have what it says.

In May 1940 Germany invaded the Netherlands. The last issue of *Het Zoeklicht* is dated May 11, the day after the invasion. The collaboration with Petrus Huigens, his secretary, who would later write

down his life story, also ended then. After the war the magazine returned.

He kept speaking and writing, into old age. His seventieth, eightieth and ninetieth birthdays received much attention in newspapers and on the radio. On July 5, 1947, he spoke at camp Mariënbosch near Nijmegen for missionaries who had returned. In the middle of his talk he suffered a heart attack. He never fully became his old self after that.

On his ninetieth birthday, in 1956, the synod of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk sent him a message of congratulation. It thanked him for his testimony about the return of Christ, and for the joy with which he went to meet that future. For a man who had received so much criticism from the churches, that said something. He also received a royal decoration, in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

On July 15, 1959, *Het Zoeklicht* celebrated its fortieth anniversary in the Ahoy hall in Rotterdam. De Heer was ninety-three. He gave his testimony there, and the radio broadcast it live.

After that he became hard to understand. He mixed up letters. His mind stayed clear, and again and again he sat down at his desk. There was still so much to do, he said. When a rag-and-bone man came to the door in Driebergen, he got the gospel to take along in his own language: a life in sin is like dirty rags, and whoever believes receives a wedding garment.

His last days were not easy. He was short of breath and under attack, and he often asked what it would be like, soon. On March 16, 1961, toward four o'clock in the afternoon, Reverend Glashouwer came to him. Together they prayed whether the Lord would now take him home.

Within half an hour he died. Johannes de Heer was ninety-four.

On March 21 he was buried in Driebergen, after a large service in the church. Glashouwer preached on a text that De Heer himself had chosen, from the last chapter of Revelation. He lies in the Oude Algemene Begraafplaats, the old general cemetery, in the family grave, next to his wife. On the grave monument is a line from his own songbook, from song 523: Veilig in Jezus' armen (Safe in Jesus' arms). The cabaret artist Fons Jansen later said of him that he was named De Heer, which means "the Lord," and served the Lord.

What remained is greater than he himself. *Het Zoeklicht* became an association, with conferences throughout the country. Its center later came to Het Brandpunt, a national monument in the woods near Doorn, where a chapel was opened at Pentecost 1976. In 1984 the association celebrated its sixty-fifth anniversary with more than three thousand visitors. A grandson, Lex de Heer, spoke there. The magazine still appears.

The music business that began at home in Rotterdam in 1898 also still exists. It bears his name and still sells organs. The choir that bears his name still sings. And in many homes a worn songbook stands in the cabinet, with a harmonium or a piano beside it.

Take the Name of Jesus with you

I think of the young father in Rotterdam, in the winter of 1895 into 1896. A man who played chess, sold music and was not sure whether God wanted him at all. A child who fell ill. A sermon on Psalm 91 that gave comfort, and a child who died anyway. You would expect such a man to become bitter.

He began to read. He knelt on a Sunday evening. And the man who did not get his daughter back told, for the rest of his life, that a day is coming when the Lord returns and makes everything new. She

was with the Lord, he had said, and that was where they wanted to be too. I hear the grief of 1896 through all that expectation.

In the last book of the Bible it stands: *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death* (Revelation 21:4). For anyone who has stood at the grave of a child, that is hope with a name attached.

Het Zoeklicht names as his life motto the line: "Take the Name of Jesus with you in a world full of evil."

In a cemetery in Driebergen stands his grave, with a line from song 523. And somewhere in the country, in a living room or a church hall, someone opens the same songbook.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on May 23, 1866, in Rotterdam as the son of a blacksmith; the work in the smithy; training in the Rotterdam music trade (Lichtenauer, Alsbach); marriage on October 30, 1889; the death of his little daughter at the beginning of 1896, four years old; temporary membership among the Seventh-day Adventists; his own music shop at home from 1898 (the firm Joh. de Heer writes on its website that its history began in 1898 in Rotterdam); joining the evangelistic work Jeruël (1903); the trip to the revival in Wales; the songbook and its print runs; the serious illness around 1915; *Het Zoeklicht* from July 1, 1919, at first as a supplement to *De Amsterdammer*, with around forty thousand subscribers at its height (the Reformatorisch Dagblad also named that number in 1979); the brochure on Israel from 1918; the radio talk in April 1924 and his role in the founding of the NCRV; lifelong membership of the Hervormde Kerk; the congratulations of the synod in 1956; death on March 16, 1961, in Driebergen and burial there.

From his own testimony (preface to the eighteenth printing of the songbook, 1955, quoted on a Rotterdam family website): the text at the table in the spring of 1903; the eight days in London and his wife's sober answer; *Victory Songs* in the shop window in Paternoster Row; the work on the 673 numbers; the trip of February 17, 1905, from Vlissingen; the flaming letters on the white wall, which only he saw; what he said to T. van Essen. A report by Van Essen himself I have not found. The little organ, the shipbuilder and his judgment of his own playing also come from that website.

From his own testimony, via his own circle (Het Zoeklicht, 2011): his praying mother and the stepmother who treated him as her own child; his doubt about election and the chess; the great emptiness after the death of the children; the prayer on the Sunday evening in 1896 (the words have been handed down "roughly") and the joy of the next day; the six thousand extra requests for the magazine; his life motto. A second source for the stepmother I have not found.

Only with Petrus Huigens (German biography, 1967): Huigens was his secretary at *Het Zoeklicht*, worked with him until May 1940 and based himself largely on what De Heer told himself. Only with him stand: the mother who died singing Psalm 103; the dark page from his youth; the sermon of Prof. N. van Nes on Psalm 91 and the exact date of death of Dina (January 3, 1896); the story of the shepherd and the lamb; the sentence about the deathbed as turning point, which Huigens recorded in German; the profit given up from humorous music; William Booth in 1903; the two hundred converted young men; the tent mission of 1906, Jakob Vetter and the opening in Apeldoorn in the presence of Queen Wilhelmina; the city mission in The Hague (1908) and the son-in-law in the business; the trip to Palestine and the breakdown (1910); the canceled life insurance; the particulars of the illness in 1915 and the answered prayer; the seven people, the Moravian church and the conferences

of 1920, 1921 and 1927; the bankruptcy of *De Amsterdammer* in 1922, J.G. Guttling and the Russian edition; the survey of 1937; the claim that he gave the first radio Bible study in the Netherlands; the executive committee of the NCRV; the date of death of his wife (1928); his daily schedule, the Monday afternoons, his prayer, the hat and the clock; the more than fifty titles; the last issue of May 11, 1940; the heart attack of 1947; the Ahoy hall in 1959; the Order of Orange-Nassau; the deathbed with Reverend Glashouwer and the burial on March 21. A second source for these things I have not found. The story about the queen especially I would like to see confirmed in a newspaper from 1906. The biography is written in German; what De Heer says there is retold and not translated literally.

One source: the numbers of radio broadcasts, the letter of the Englishman, the proposal for a choir and the story of the elders (Rotterdam family website); that he later rejected any kinship with the Adventists (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 1979); the explanation of Maranatha by J. Kits (idem).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one reading each time):

- *The church of his youth.* Het Zoeklicht speaks of an upbringing in the old Reformed style, other sources call him Hervormd from home. I have read them together: Hervormd, in a serious, old Reformed atmosphere. It is not certain.
- *How old he was when he went to work.* Twelve (Huigens) or thirteen (Het Zoeklicht; the Rotterdam website gives 1879).
- *The order of the children who died.* Het Zoeklicht places the death of the little son before that of Dina; the Rotterdam website says he "later lost another child." It is certain that the young family lost two children, and that a son and a daughter came later.

- *The years among the Adventists.* One overview gives 1896 to 1902; Huigens speaks of about seven years of keeping the Sabbath.
- *The date of the trip to Wales.* Huigens speaks of the autumn of 1904. De Heer's own preface, Het Zoeklicht and the Rotterdam website give February 17, 1905. I follow his own preface: in the autumn of 1904 he heard of it, in February 1905 he went.
- *What happened that evening.* In the preface he sits next to Van Essen and names "probably" Briton Ferry as the place. With Huigens he is himself testifying in English when he sees the words, and Evan Roberts has let it be known that he is not coming.
- *What the text meant to him.* With Huigens it became the confirmation that he had to give himself fully as an evangelist. In his own preface and in Het Zoeklicht it confirmed his work on the songs: food for God's house. For him it evidently belonged together.
- *The year of the first printing.* 1905 (Reformatorisch Dagblad, MAX Vandaag) or 1904 (the website Prijs met Johannes de Heer). The manuscript was ready at the end of 1903, according to himself.
- *Victory Songs.* The preface speaks of more than eight hundred songs; his own book had 673.
- *The founding of the NCRV.* November 15, 1924 (DBNL chronicle); the Rotterdam website gives 1925 for his involvement.
- *The circulation of Het Zoeklicht.* Thirty thousand, sometimes forty thousand (Huigens); "once forty thousand subscribers" (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 1979).
- *The circulation of the songbook.* 185,000 music editions and 640,000 text editions (his own preface, 1955); about 200,000 at the nineteenth printing, with 882 numbers (Huigens); more

than thirty printings and well over 300,000 music editions (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2016).

Not found: what he wrote himself in 1948 about the state of Israel; how the magazine came through the occupation years, except that the last issue is dated May 11, 1940, according to Huigens, and that it came back after the war.

Interpretation: the center of Het Zoeklicht in Doorn came only after his death; he lived in Driebergen from about 1921. Whether the words on the wall in Wales came from God is a question of faith. I believe it with him. That he acted on it for the rest of his life is certain.

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Corrie ten Boom: the woman behind the false wardrobe

Corrie ten Boom was in bed with the flu when her sister Betsie came to bring her a cup of tea. A man was at the door looking for help. It was Monday, February 28, 1944, in the old house above the watch shop on the Barteljorisstraat in Haarlem.

Corrie did not know the man. His wife had been arrested for hiding Jews, he said, and with money he could bribe the police. She noticed that he did not look at her. That is how she told it herself later.

That same day the Sicherheitsdienst, the German security service, raided the house. About thirty people were arrested, among them Corrie, Betsie and their eighty-four-year-old father. Their brother Willem, their sister Nollie and Nollie's son Peter were taken as well. The people the raid was really about were not found. They were behind an extra wall in Corrie's bedroom: two Jewish men, two Jewish women and two people from the resistance. You got in through a linen closet. The space was two and a half meters long and seventy centimeters wide. The SD kept watching the house, so the six stayed where they were. After more than forty-seven hours, two po-

lice officers who belonged to the resistance, Jan Overzet and Theo Ederveen, got them out.

Three of the four Jewish people in hiding survived the war. Of the two resistance workers, one survived.

Corrie was fifty-one, Betsie fifty-eight. Corrie would lose her father in Scheveningen and her sister in Ravensbrück. After that she would travel the world for more than thirty years to tell what she had learned in that camp. Her book *The Hiding Place* was read by millions of people.

Where she got that faith from, you only see when you go back to a narrow bed in that same house, and to a father who came to sit on the edge of it.

The ticket for the train

The shop had been there since 1837. Corrie's grandfather Willem ten Boom started a business in clocks and watches that year, in a building from around 1600 that had been built for the schout of Haarlem, a kind of sheriff. He lived with his family above the shop. In 1844 he also began something else: a prayer group for the Jewish people and the peace of Jerusalem. Three generations of Ten Booms prayed for that for a hundred years.

In the Psalms stands the call: *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem* (Psalm 122:6). In this house, praying and doing lay close together. The family that prayed so long for the Jewish people hid Jewish people under its own roof during the war.

His son Casper, born in 1859, became a watchmaker, married Cornelia Luitingh in 1884 and started a business of his own in Amsterdam. There the children were born: Betsie in 1885, Willem in 1886, Nollie in 1890. A little son, Hendrik Jan, came in 1888 and lived only

six months. The youngest came on April 15, 1892, a month early and on Good Friday. Her name was Cornelia Arnolda Johanna. Everybody said Corrie.

In 1897 the family moved to Haarlem, where Casper took over his father's shop. The family called the house the Beje, after the street. A few aunts lived there too, it was cramped and there was little money.

Every morning at breakfast Father read from the Bible. In *The Hiding Place* Corrie describes the morning of her first day at school, in 1898. Father read from Psalm 119: *You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.* (Psalm 119:114). The six-year-old girl wondered what in the world you would have to hide from.

Once a week Casper took the train to Amsterdam to set his watch by the clock of the naval observatory. In summer Corrie was allowed to come along. On the way back she once asked about a word from a poem at school, a word a child can do nothing with yet. Father was silent. Then he pointed to his heavy case full of watches and parts, and asked whether she would carry it off the train. It was far too heavy for her. Some knowledge is like that too, he said. It is too heavy for a child, and for as long as that lasts, your father carries it for you. Corrie agreed. She left the question with him.

Another story from those years began with a dead baby. Mother visited a poor family in the neighborhood where a little child had died that night, and Corrie went along. While Mother comforted the young woman, Corrie touched the little hand. It was cold. Suddenly she understood that everyone could die. Father too. Mother too.

That evening she lay crying in bed. Casper came to sit on the edge. When we go to Amsterdam together, he asked, when do I give you

your ticket? Corrie thought. She said she got it just before they boarded.

Our Father in heaven does the same, he said. He knows when we need something. She must not run ahead of Him. When the time came that one of them had to die, she would find in her heart the strength she needed. Just in time.

Remember that ticket. You will meet it a few more times in this story.

Watches and a house full of people

Corrie learned her father's trade. In 1924 she earned her diploma, as the first woman in the Netherlands to become a certified watchmaker. Betsie, who had weak health all her life, ran the household, and Corrie stood beside Father in the shop. Mother Cornelia died in October 1921.

The house stayed full. In the 1920s and 1930s the Ten Booms took in children of missionaries. In the 1920s Corrie started clubs for girls, with Bible teaching, music, drama and handicrafts. For years she also taught religion to children with intellectual disabilities. That work would later come in handy in an interrogation room.

Her brother Willem became a minister. In 1928 he earned his doctorate in Leipzig with a thesis on the antisemitism he saw rising in Germany and France.

In 1937 the shop was a hundred years old. Corrie begins *The Hiding Place* with that celebration. All morning, bouquets were delivered for Father. So many guests came that Corrie cycled to Nollie to borrow cups. Willem came in with a Jewish man who had fled Germany in a milk wagon, and from that moment the conversation was about what was happening there.

"The greatest honor"

In May 1940 the Netherlands was occupied. The clubs were banned. In 1941 Corrie and Betsie began resistance work, and in 1942 the first Jewish woman stood at the door one evening. Her husband had been arrested, her shop had to close. Betsie gave her a room and asked whether she would help in the kitchen.

The house lay close to the police station, so Corrie looked for safer addresses. She went to look at them before anyone was sent there. For that she needed ration cards, and Jews were not given any. Corrie thought of a man at the distribution office whose daughter had been in her club. She told him what was going on. He asked how many cards she needed. She needed three. She said: a hundred. A week later he stood on the doorstep, with two black eyes from the robbery he had had staged on himself, and with a hundred cards.

Through the resistance an architect came through the door who called himself Smit. He chose Corrie's bedroom. Workmen with hidden tools built a wall in six days, and painted it so dirty that you could see no difference from the rest. The space behind it got a name, the Engelenbak, the Dutch word for the cheap top gallery of a theater. There was a radio there, to listen to Radio Oranje, the broadcasts of the Dutch government in exile. In the shop window came a triangular advertising sign for the watch brand Alpina. If it stood there, it was safe.

From the spring of 1943 there were regular people in hiding, usually five or six at a time. One of the first was Hans Poley, a student who did not want to report when the Germans called former soldiers back into captivity. Another was Meijer Mossel, cantor of an Amsterdam synagogue, a man with a long white beard and a pipe. Corrie called him Eusie. He and Father both knew the Psalms by heart, and in the evening Eusie read the Bible passage aloud with

his beautiful voice. A buzzer hung in the house. Corrie held drills until everyone was behind the wall within two minutes.

Around the Beje a network of some eighty people grew, later called the BéJé group. Hundreds of Jews and other persecuted people found a hiding place through them. The museum in her house puts it at about eight hundred.

One evening in June Corrie took in a young Jewish mother with a newborn child. A baby in a house full of people in hiding is dangerous, so when a friendly minister came by, she saw her chance. She fetched the child and laid it in his arms. He looked at it, but he refused. For this child they could all lose their lives, he said.

Then Father stood in the doorway. Casper took the baby. To give his life for this child, he said, would be the greatest honor that could come to his family.

The minister left quickly.

Tomorrow I will open the door again

After the raid the prisoners were taken to The Hague. In *The Hiding Place* Corrie tells what happened there. The man who led the interrogations was startled to see the old watchmaker standing before him. He offered to send him home, if he promised to cause no more trouble. Casper promised nothing. If he went home today, he said, tomorrow he would open his door again for any person in need.

He had to go back into the line.

That night buses drove them to the prison in Scheveningen, which was called the Oranjehotel. The women were separated from the men. Corrie called out to her father that God would be with him. He called quietly back the same. She never saw him again. Casper

ten Boom died on March 9, 1944, ten days after his arrest, in a hospital in The Hague. After the war he was reburied at the Nationaal Ereveld in Loenen, the national field of honor.

Corrie did not know that yet. She was sick, coughed blood and ended up in a cell alone. Nobody was allowed to talk to her. A nurse had secretly slipped her the four Gospels, in separate little booklets, and she read them again and again. When ants came into her cell, she laid down bread crumbs for them.

At the end of April a package came from Nollie, who had already been released. Willem was released later too. It held a blue sweater, cookies, vitamins and a needle. Corrie picked off the postage stamp. Underneath, in tiny letters, it said that all the watches in her closet were safe. The six were out. She burst into sobs.

Shortly afterward someone slid a letter under the door. Father had died. Corrie scratched the date into the wall of her cell, by the marks with which she counted the days. She called it the day of his release.

The ticket had come in time. For him, and for her too.

The German officer who interrogated her, Lieutenant Rahms, wanted to know what else she had done. Corrie told about her lessons to children with intellectual disabilities. He thought it a waste of effort. Corrie answered that God finds a person valuable because He made him. The next morning he had her brought again, and now he asked about the Bible.

Weeks later Rahms arranged for the family to come together, supposedly to have Father's will read out. While he stood with his back to them, Nollie pressed something small into Corrie's hand. A little Bible.

Thank God for the fleas

On June 6, 1944, Corrie and Betsie were transferred to camp Vught in Brabant. In September it went on, four days in a freight car, with almost no water. On September 8 they walked in through the gate of Ravensbrück, the big women's camp north of Berlin.

At registration every woman had to hand in everything, undress and walk past the guards to the shower room. Corrie had three things she did not want to lose: the blue sweater for the sick Betsie, a little bottle of vitamin drops and the little Bible. She asked whether she could go to the toilet. A guard sent her into the shower room, to the drains in the floor. There stood a pile of benches. When nobody was looking, she slid the three things underneath. After the shower, Betsie and she put them under their camp dresses.

At the exit every woman was searched. Corrie walked through. Nobody touched her. For her it was as clear as day: God wanted that book in the camp.

Later they came to barracks 28. It stank, half of the windowpanes were broken and the bunks stood three high. Corrie had barely climbed up when she felt something bite her leg. Fleas. She called to Betsie how in the world they were supposed to live here.

Betsie asked God out loud. Then she knew: it was in what they had read that day. Corrie took out the little Bible and read it once more, from the first letter to the Thessalonians: *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Betsie started with that. She gave thanks that they were together. She gave thanks for the Bible, which had come through the inspection. She gave thanks for the crowding, because so many women would hear it. And she gave thanks for the fleas. Corrie could not go along with that. Betsie held firm that it said "in everything."

In the evening, after work and the soup, the women in the barracks gathered. Roman Catholic women recited the Magnificat in Latin, Lutherans whispered a hymn, Orthodox women sang softly. Then Betsie or Corrie read aloud from the Dutch Bible and translated it aloud into German. You heard the words going through the rows: French, Polish, Russian, Czech, and back again into Dutch. Corrie described those evenings as a foretaste of heaven. No guard ever came in. They did not understand why.

The answer came later. Betsie had become too weak for heavy work and sat in the barracks knitting socks for German soldiers. One day she heard one of the supervisors say why none of them set foot across the threshold. It was crawling with fleas.

Can you give thanks for something you cannot yet see any reason for? Betsie did it before she understood.

Then there was the little bottle. It was a small bottle of Davitamon, and Betsie was not the only sick woman in the barracks. Corrie wanted to save the drops for Betsie. Betsie gave them out. Every day Corrie tilted the bottle, and every day another drop came. It should have been empty long ago. Betsie reminded her of the widow in the Bible whose oil in the jar did not run out. Corrie did not dare call it a miracle.

One day Mien, a young Dutch woman who worked in the sick barracks, brought a little bag of yeast that she had taken from there. Corrie decided to save the yeast until the bottle was empty. That evening she tilted it. Not a drop came out.

No pit so deep

Winter came. At the digging work outside the wall, Betsie could only carry small shovelfuls. A young guard mocked her and hit her

with a whip. Corrie wanted to fly at him. Betsie held her back, with blood on her cheek, and said she must look only at Jesus.

In those weeks Betsie began to talk about afterward. She spoke of it as if it already existed. A big house in the Netherlands, for people who had survived the camp, with inlaid wooden floors, a wide staircase and a garden where they could work until they were better. And a camp in Germany, a real concentration camp, but now under their management: with flower boxes at the windows and bright green paint, where people who had learned to hate could learn to love again.

One morning Betsie could no longer move her legs. Corrie carried her to roll call. Afterward she was taken to the sick barracks, and Corrie walked along. Betsie talked softly, between coughs. They had to go and tell people what they had learned here, she said. She said that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still. And before the new year they would both be free.

When Corrie looked in through the window of the sick barracks later, someone lay on the bed who looked like a little statue of ivory. It was Betsie. She had died. It was December 16, 1944, and she was fifty-nine.

Mien came to get Corrie and took her inside. What she saw there, she told for the rest of her life. Betsie's face had changed. The lines of worry and sorrow were gone, the hollows of hunger and illness too. She looked young, and full of peace.

A mistake in an office

Shortly afterward Corrie's name was called out at roll call. At the administration she received a paper with her name on it: a certificate of release. She was not free yet, because the camp only let healthy prisoners go and her legs were swollen with fluid. She ended up in

the sick barracks, among women who were worse off than anything she had seen until then. Nobody helped them. Corrie did what she could, on her painful feet. Her little Bible she gave to a young Dutch woman.

At the end of December she signed a form stating that she had been treated well in Ravensbrück. She got her clothes back and walked out through the gate. On New Year's Day 1945 she stood in a bombed-out station in Berlin. Betsie had been right.

On the way she lost her food coupons. In a hospital in Groningen a nurse gave her bread and tea and ran a bath for her. Corrie cried at so much kindness. After ten days she rode along with a food transport to the house of her brother Willem.

In 1959 she went back to Ravensbrück. That year she also heard how she had been released: by a mistake in the administration. And a week after she left, she tells in *Tramp for the Lord*, the women of her age were killed.

A mistake in an office, and just in time.

The house with the wooden floors

Back in Haarlem she repaired watches again. The Beje felt empty without Father and Betsie. And she did what Betsie had said: she went to tell it, in churches and small halls. She wrote it down too. *Gevangene en toch* (A Prisoner and Yet) became her first book.

After one of those evenings a rich widow from Bloemendaal came up to her, Mrs. Bierens de Haan. She had a large house, and she wanted to give it. Two weeks later Corrie stood at the door. Before she was even inside, she asked whether there were inlaid wooden floors. The widow looked surprised. Had she been here before? No, said Corrie, she had heard it from someone who had been there.

In May 1945, when the Netherlands was liberated, the house, villa Schapenduinen, filled up with people whom the war had left damaged. Many recovered by working in the garden, as Betsie had foreseen.

Forgiving proved hardest for them. The hatred of Dutch people who had collaborated with the Germans was fiercer than that against the Germans themselves. Corrie made the Beje a refuge for former NSB members, Dutch members of the Nazi party, and let the people in Bloemendaal go at their own pace. One day they brought vegetables from the garden to the house in Haarlem.

She herself wrote a letter on June 19, 1945, to Jan Vogel, the Dutchman who had betrayed her family. She wrote that she forgave him.

In 1946 she traveled to America, with fifty dollars and without a single address. God had told her that she must never ask for money, she tells, and she kept to that all her life. For ten months she spoke throughout America and Canada. She came back when her brother Willem died of tuberculosis in Hilversum on December 13, 1946. His son Christiaan, whom everyone called Kik, had not come back from German captivity. He had died in April 1945, twenty-four years old.

Then she went to the country she least wanted to go to.

A hand in Munich

It was 1947. Corrie was speaking in a church in Munich, in a hall in the basement. She had come from the Netherlands with the message that God forgives, and she used the image she liked best: when we confess our sins, God throws them into the deepest sea. The people listened in silence. Nobody asked questions. Afterward they stood up and went out quietly, past the rows of wooden chairs.

One man came forward against the stream. Balding, heavily built, a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat. She described it twenty-five years later in the magazine Guideposts and in *Tramp for the Lord*, and she still knew every detail.

For at the same moment she saw him in a blue uniform, with a cap bearing a skull. She saw the large room with the glaring light. The pile of dresses and shoes on the floor. She felt again the shame of walking naked past this man. And she saw her sister before her, so thin.

He did not recognize her. He held out his hand and thanked her for her message. How good to know that all our sins lie at the bottom of the sea.

Corrie fumbled in her purse. Her hand stayed where it was.

He told her he had been a guard in Ravensbrück. Since then he had become a Christian, and now he wanted to hear the forgiveness from her mouth too. Would she forgive him? Again that hand.

It lasted seconds. For her it was hours. Betsie had died there. Could he wipe that out by asking for it? She knew she had to. She had seen it with her own eyes in the Netherlands: whoever forgave could begin again, and whoever held on to his bitterness stayed trapped in it. And she knew the words of Jesus: *And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.* (Matthew 6:12).

Her heart stayed cold. Forgiving is an act of the will, she thought, and the will can do something while the heart feels nothing. In silence she prayed: "Jesus, help me!" Lifting her hand, she could do that. The feeling He had to give.

Woodenly, like a machine, she put her hand in his. Then it happened. A current went through her shoulder, down her arm, into their hands. A warmth filled her completely, and tears sprang to

her eyes. She said that she forgave him, with all her heart, and she called him brother.

For a long time they held each other's hand, the guard and the prisoner. She wrote that she had never known God's love so strongly as at that moment.

When I read this, what strikes me most is what she does not claim. She nowhere says that she managed it. She says that she lifted her hand, and that the love came from Another.

Tramp for the Lord

In Darmstadt they asked her to take charge of a shelter for refugees, in a former concentration camp with the barbed wire still around it. The grounds were rented. From 1949 about a hundred and sixty displaced people lived there. Corrie said right away what had to come. Flower boxes at the windows. And paint, in a cheerful spring green. The camp stayed open until 1960.

After that she traveled. She called herself a tramp for the Lord. In more than thirty years she went to more than sixty countries, on six continents. At the border at East Berlin guards held her for hours because of the Christian books in her luggage, and she used those hours to explain the gospel to them.

Her passports lie in the archive of Wheaton College in America. In 1948 the profession reads "Director of a sanatorium," in 1952 "Missionary," in 1963 "authoress" and in 1966 "evangelist." You can almost read her life from those four words. In that last year she spoke at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin.

For twelve years she traveled alone. Then, for the first time, she had a regular traveling companion, Conny van Hoogstraten, a young Dutch woman. In *Tramp for the Lord* Corrie tells how it went

on. Conny became engaged, and a Dutch nurse took her place. Two years after her wedding Conny became incurably ill. On her deathbed she asked the people around her to sing Psalm 23. Corrie called it a dying in victory.

At seventy-three Corrie herself fell ill. She took a year of rest, a sabbath year she called it, in a mission house in Uganda. When the year was over, she dreaded the traveling. She had grown used to sleeping in the same bed every night.

A saint she was not, and she thought so herself. In the same article in which she writes about Munich, she tells that Christians she loved had once hurt her deeply. For weeks she seethed inside. She forgave, and still lay awake at night replaying the whole story. A Lutheran minister helped her with an image. If you let go of the rope of a church bell, he said, the bell keeps ringing for a while. More and more slowly. You only have to stop taking hold of the rope.

Years later an American friend asked whether those people had accepted her forgiveness. According to them there was nothing to forgive, Corrie said, but she could prove it. She walked to her desk and took out their letters. He asked kindly whether her sins were also kept in black and white by God. That evening she burned the letters in the stove. She was seventy-eight.

On April 17, 1962, Queen Juliana appointed her a knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau. On December 12, 1967, Yad Vashem recognized her as Righteous Among the Nations, and she planted a tree in the Garden of the Righteous in Jerusalem. For her father and Betsie that recognition came forty years later, in 2007. In April 2008 the Israeli ambassador handed over the certificate in Haarlem to the family.

In November 1971 *The Hiding Place* appeared, written with John and Elizabeth Sherrill. The couple had come across her trail while do-

ing research for *God's Smuggler*, the book about Brother Andrew. In 1975 the film followed, with Jeannette Clift as Corrie and Julie Harris as Betsie. The old lady from Haarlem was suddenly known everywhere, and the fleas, the little bottle and the pit went around the world. At her death the news agency UPI counted eighteen books from her hand, of which more than seven million had been sold.

Five quiet years

In 1977 Corrie went to live in California, in Placentia. She was eighty-five.

On August 23, 1978, she had a stroke. She was admitted, exercised, learned to move a little again. Her speech did not come back. In October 1980 a second, severe stroke followed, and then more.

The woman who had addressed half the world could no longer say a sentence. Her English assistant, who stayed with her to the end and cared for her with a group of nurses and volunteers, later wrote a book about it: *The Five Silent Years of Corrie ten Boom*. She describes how Corrie spoke with her eyes and her hands. Whoever was with her had to guess what she meant, question after question, until it fit. And she prayed. Day in, day out, without a sound, for the people God brought to her mind. Visitors came to encourage her and went home encouraged.

It lasted five years. I sometimes wonder whether this was not her hardest obedience. In Ravensbrück she at least still had a voice.

Corrie ten Boom died on April 15, 1983, at eleven o'clock in the evening. It was her ninety-first birthday. The funeral was private. She was buried at Fairhaven Memorial Park in Santa Ana, California.

On the same date, five years later, on April 15, 1988, the Beje opened as a museum. Since then almost half a million people have walked through it, the museum writes. They stand in the bedroom where six people waited forty-seven hours behind a wall. Outside, on the side wall, hangs a plaque with the names of her family. The monument calls Casper a former chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. The last line reads: "They died in the faith that the best is yet to come."

Somewhere in that house once stood a narrow bed, with a crying girl in it and a watchmaker on the edge. You get the ticket just before you board, he said.

She got it every time.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on April 15, 1892; the watch shop on the Barteljorisstraat since 1837; Corrie as the first woman certified watchmaker in the Netherlands; people in hiding in the house in 1943 and 1944 and the hiding place in her bedroom; the raid on February 28, 1944, and the release of the six people in hiding after more than 47 hours; the death of Casper on March 9, 1944; Scheveningen, Vught (from June 6, 1944) and Ravensbrück (from the beginning of September 1944); the death of Betsie on December 16, 1944; Corrie's release at the end of December 1944; the death of Kik in 1945; the recovery house in Bloemendaal and the refugee camp in Darmstadt (1949 to 1960); Hans Poley and Meijer Mossel as people in hiding from the spring of 1943; the passports in the archive of Wheaton College; the travels to more than sixty countries; the recognition by Yad Vashem on December 12, 1967; *The Hiding Place* (1971) and the film (1975); the move to California in 1977, the strokes from 1978 and her death on April 15, 1983.

From her own testimony (*The Hiding Place*, 1971, written with John and Elizabeth Sherrill): the celebration in 1937 for the hundredth anniversary of the shop; the case and the train ticket; Psalm 119 on her first day of school; the hundred ration cards; the minister, the baby and her father's answer; Casper's words in The Hague and the farewell in Scheveningen; the ants, the note under the postage stamp and the conversations with Lieutenant Rahms; the little Bible that came past the inspection; the prayer of thanks for the fleas and the reason the guards stayed away; the evening services in barracks 28; the bottle of Davitamon; the whip stroke; Betsie's visions, her last words and her face after her death; the certificate of release, the sick barracks and the journey home; the gift of the house in Bloemendaal. About Ravensbrück she had already written in *Gevangene en toch*, her first book. Nobody else could retell these stories. The book was written down almost thirty years after the war. I have used it through detailed chapter summaries and reviews (see the sources), and the spoken sentences are retold from them, not translated literally.

From her own testimony (Guideposts, November 1972, and *Tramp for the Lord*, 1974): the meeting in Munich in 1947, with everything that was said and felt there; the church bell and the burned letters; the fifty dollars and the agreement never to ask for money; the border at Berlin; the twelve years of traveling alone, Conny van Hoogstraten and her deathbed; the year of rest in Uganda when she was seventy-three (my source gives no year); the flower boxes and the green paint in Darmstadt. Who the guard in Munich was is not known.

Only from the circle around Corrie or the museum: the prayer group for the Jewish people since 1844; Good Friday as her birthday; Willem's doctorate in Leipzig in 1928; the children of missionaries in the house; the names of the two police officers; the knight-

hood of April 17, 1962 (the news agency UPI says only that she was knighted); the number of almost half a million visitors; the eighteen books and seven million copies (her spokesman, via UPI); the World Congress in Berlin in 1966 (only the archive in Wheaton); the museum names Betsie's sentence about the pit as the core of what Corrie told everywhere afterward; the letter to Jan Vogel of June 19, 1945; the hour of her death. The quiet years we know mostly from the book of her assistant Pamela Rosewell Moore.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have chosen one reading each time):

- *Place of birth.* The museum and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington name Amsterdam, which fits the years in which the family lived there. Other reference works name Haarlem.
- *Diploma.* The museum and the Haarlem newspaper give 1924, English-language reference works 1922.
- *Death of her mother.* The museum gives October 17, 1921, an English-language reference work 1919.
- *Number of people saved.* The museum writes "probably some 800 Jews and other fugitives," saved by the family, her friends and the BéJé group together. Her spokesman named more than seven hundred in 1983, the Holocaust Memorial Museum keeps it at hundreds, the Holocaust Museum in Houston speaks of dozens in the house itself. A count with names does not exist as far as I could find out.
- *Number of arrests on February 28, 1944.* More than thirty (museum), about thirty (Holocaust Memorial Museum) or twenty-one (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei, the National Committee for the commemoration of May 4 and 5).

- *Where Casper died.* In The Hague, after nine or ten days of imprisonment; as the place, the municipal hospital, a clinic in Loosduinen and a hospital corridor are named.
- *The journey to Ravensbrück.* The museum speaks of a cattle car, the summaries of her book of a freight car.
- *Gevangene en toch.* Published in June 1945 according to one reference work, in 1946 according to the archive in Wheaton.
- *Day of release.* The museum gives December 28, 1944, twelve days after Betsie's death, other sources December 30 or 31. It is certain that she was in Berlin on January 1, 1945.
- *Kik ten Boom.* The plaque in Haarlem gives April 1945 as the date of death, the afterword of *The Hiding Place* 1944.
- *Willem ten Boom.* Died on December 13, 1946 according to most sources; the plaque gives April 1946.
- *The house in Bloemendaal.* The museum writes that Corrie was given villa Schapenduinen; other reference works speak of renting. According to some sources people who had collaborated with the occupier were also taken in; in her own book that happened in the Beje.
- *Darmstadt.* The museum and the archive of Wheaton College give 1949 to 1960; *The Hiding Place* has the work begin in 1946. One source says she rented the camp, another that she raised money for it from 1949.
- *Yad Vashem.* The recognition dates from December 12, 1967. The museum gives February 28, 1968 as the day of the ceremony in Jerusalem, the archive in Wheaton December 1967, a reference work 1968.
- *Place of death.* Placentia according to the news agency UPI, Orange in California according to the museum.
- *Return to Ravensbrück.* 1959 according to the museum and her book; the archive in Wheaton also names a visit in 1964.

Unconfirmed:

- *The administrative error.* Corrie told that she heard this in 1959. The Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei names an error "probably." A document from the camp I have not found.
- *The women of her age.* That they were killed shortly after her departure comes from her own account. The versions differ (a week later, or the day after according to her spokesman in 1983), and it is not confirmed by documents. Ravensbrück did get a gas chamber around that time, but its date too differs by source.
- *Jan Vogel.* The museum tells that he came to faith and was then put to death. A sentence or a report of an execution I have not found. In the story, then, there is only the letter.

Interpretation: whether the little bottle was a miracle and whether Betsie's words came from God is a question of faith. I believe it with Corrie. The historical sources confirm that the house in Bloemendaal and the camp in Darmstadt really came into being after the war.

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Diet Eman: the woman with the false name

One evening in April 1944, two people who were engaged rode their bicycles along a road near Barneveld. His name was Hein, hers was Diet. Both were on the Germans' wanted list, both lived under false names, and they rarely saw each other. They had spent that day together, and it had been a good day.

As they rode, Hein began to talk about what should happen if he were arrested. Or killed.

Then Diet heard a voice. That is how she told it herself later, in her book. The voice said: take a good long look at him.

Three days later Hein was pulled off a train in Friesland. She never saw him again on this earth.

The woman on that bicycle was named Berendina Eman, but everyone called her Diet. Within two weeks she was behind bars herself, first in the prison at Scheveningen and then in camp Vught. She lived to be ninety-nine, spent the second half of her life in the United States, and kept silent for more than thirty years about what she had been through. When she finally began to tell it, there came a book,

a film, recognition from Yad Vashem, and a king who called her one of the national heroes of the Netherlands.

It began with a boy who came to live with her parents. She was not happy about it.

One more son

Diet Eman was born on April 30, 1920, in Den Haag (The Hague). Her full name was Berendina Roeloffina Hendrika Eman, and she was the third of four children: after Fanny and Arjan, and before Albert. Her father had a home furnishing business. In the Depression years of the 1930s the business struggled and money was scarce, but Diet remembered her childhood as happy and free. Her hair was always a mess, she wrote. She climbed trees, jumped over ditches, and cycled with friends to the villages and farms outside the city. The family was Christian. She went to a Christian school, and church was part of ordinary life.

In 1937, when Diet was seventeen, a man from the church asked her parents if they would take in a young man. He had just lost his mother and had found work in Den Haag. Mother Eman did not want a boarder. But one more son, that she could manage.

The boy's name was Hein Sietsma. He was born on October 15, 1919, in Marum, in the Westerkwartier region of the province of Groningen, and came from a large Frisian family. His father Jilt had thirteen children from two marriages. Hein's mother had died in 1936. In Den Haag he became an office clerk at the Bataafsche Petroleum Maatschappij (part of Shell).

Diet was furious. A strange boy in the house, and there went her freedom. His name alone: Hein, that sounded like a farmer from far outside the city. She thought their first bike ride together was

dull. She did her best not to like him, and soon had to admit that he was a nice boy.

After a year Hein moved to another home. Then Diet noticed that she missed him.

He was called up for the army. In November 1939 he wrote in his diary about her childlike faith, and that he longed for a word from her. They fell in love. When he came to visit her alone one time, Diet kissed him, and she knew this would last. Later they got engaged. They exchanged the rings on the tram.

After school Diet had gone to work at a bank in Den Haag. One of her colleagues was a young Jewish man who played the violin. His name was Herman. Remember his name, because everything began with him.

Five days in May

In the early morning of May 10, 1940, Diet woke to gunfire and airplanes. The family ran outside. On the radio they heard that German paratroopers had landed. Diet was twenty, and she thought of Hein, who was a soldier.

The Dutch army held out for five days. Diet's brother-in-law was killed on the first day. After the bombing of Rotterdam the Netherlands surrendered, and Queen Wilhelmina left for England with her government. A few days later a card came from Hein, with soot smudges on it. He had survived the bombing. He had seen the fires, had been taken prisoner by the Germans, and was released soon afterward.

Soon Diet, Hein and a few friends began with something small. They gathered at the home of a colleague from the bank. They listened to the forbidden broadcasts of the BBC and spread the news.

Diet typed out the reports. Hein had read *Mein Kampf* and warned that Hitler was going to do something terrible. He even tried to get to England.

For these young Christians, resistance was not an obvious choice. There were Dutch Christians who said that you must submit to the government, even to an occupier. Diet and Hein read the Bible together to find out what God asked of them, and they came to a different conclusion. Their loyalty lay with Queen Wilhelmina, and they saw that loyalty as a duty toward God. They felt they had to do something.

How would you have chosen in that time? To be honest, I do not know about myself. Looking back, everything is clear. At the time, Christians thought differently about it.

Herman asks what she would do

The anti-Jewish measures grew harsher. Jews were given a J in their identity cards and had to wear a yellow star. In 1942 the transports to the Westerbork transit camp began.

In that period Herman received the order to report with his family for transport to the east. He asked Diet what she would do in his place. She probably would not go, she said. Then she put the question to Hein. He felt the same.

This is where their resistance work truly began. Hein came from the countryside, where you rarely saw a German soldier, and he found a farmer who was willing to take Herman in. Then Herman came with a new question: his sister, his fiancée and his fiancée's mother. They found farmers for them too. It did not stay among themselves. Within a few weeks there were sixty people on their list.

From that moment Diet and Hein had one goal: to find a hiding place for as many Jews as possible. They postponed the wedding.

In an interview in 2017 she said it plainly: they had to help the Jews. For her there was no other choice. You do not know at the beginning what risk you are taking, she also said once, and when you are in the middle of it, you cannot go back. When the Acton Institute gave her an award in 2015, she waved the praise away. Anyone with Jewish friends in need would have done the same. She did not think it was anything special.

Things you could not say

Together with friends, Hein and his brother Henk set up a resistance group. They named it after Hein: Groep HEIN. The letters stood for Helpt Elkander In Nood, "Help One Another In Need." Members included Harry Aldenzee, Jan and Dinie van Meerveld, Ab and Hendrika van Meerveld-van 't Hof, Aalt and Alie Lozeman and Piet Hartog.

The group looked for hiding places, arranged ration coupons, made false identity cards and helped Allied pilots who had been shot down. Diet was a courier. As a woman she attracted less attention than a man. On foot, by bicycle and by train she carried mail, messages, ration cards and papers all over the country. Sometimes she hid them in the handlebars of her bicycle, sometimes she wore them on her body. She called the work a game of chess.

All those people in hiding had to eat, and without ration cards there was no food. One day they did not know what to do. The group went down on their knees. Diet prayed: Lord, we do not know what to do anymore, but You know they need food. After that prayer they made a decision: they would steal ration cards. Whoever was

robbed could get new ones, they reasoned. After that, three men from the group took hundreds of cards every month.

In 1943 the network Diet belonged to needed more than eight hundred identity cards a month. The men of a knokploeg (an armed resistance squad) saw to it. It was deadly dangerous work, and they did not do it for the thrill. Diet sat in on a few of their meetings. Before they began, she tells in her book, those men knelt to ask God for protection and help.

One story from that time later gave her book its title. Diet pleaded with a Christian she held in high regard to take in people in hiding. He refused. She was furious with him. After the war she heard that all that time he had been hiding a Jewish family. He had not been able to tell her.

At the end of 1942 Diet regularly brought food and support to a small apartment in Den Haag. A woman named Mies lived there with twenty-seven Jewish people in hiding. Every time Diet found another address for a few of them, Mies took in new people. Diet was deeply worried. It went wrong. Mies and the people in her apartment were arrested. Diet had never told Mies her real name. But a supplier whom Hein trusted, and who was himself threatened with deportation, gave her name and address under pressure.

In the spring of 1943 the Gestapo stood at the door of the Eman family. Only Albert, her younger brother, was home. He phoned Diet to tell her not to come home. Later her parents were questioned. They acted as if they knew nothing about an engagement and had no idea where their daughter was. The Germans believed them and kept coming back anyway. For the rest of the war Diet could only come home briefly and in secret.

She went into hiding herself. First she worked as a maid for a well-to-do family and helped care for a little boy with a disability. Then

Hein found a place for her on a dairy farm, the farm of Aalt and Alie Lozeman, who had children and were hiding Jews themselves. From that farm she did her courier work and kept track of which German troops and transports passed by. She lived under false names. Years later, speaking to the NOS (the Dutch public broadcaster), she sounded almost lighthearted about it: she had had so many different names.

Later Diet compared her life in those months to that of David, who was fleeing from Saul and living in caves. According to its heading, David prayed the words of Psalm 57 in such a cave: *And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by* (Psalm 57:1). It is the prayer of someone who must hide and knows where his true shelter is.

Hein and she saw each other rarely. In January 1944 he wrote to her that he had called out for her, in a place where no one could hear.

A plastic raincoat

On April 26, 1944, three days after the bike ride near Barneveld, Hein was arrested in Friesland at a train check. He was traveling under the alias Hendrik de Jong and was carrying incriminating papers.

Diet had to warn everyone who was in danger because of those papers. On Hein's instructions she emptied a post office box where even more was waiting. She changed her appearance and got a new identity card. From then on she was Willie Laarman. The first name was a wink at Queen Wilhelmina.

In early May a friend asked her to deliver illegal papers one more time. She sat on the train with the false identity card in her pocket. Under her blouse she wore a large envelope: stolen ration cards and materials for making false identity cards for Allied pilots who

had been shot down over the Netherlands. Six men of the Gestapo checked the train. They looked at her card. The forger had made a mistake: the nationality was filled in with black ink, and it should have been purple.

At the station she was told to sit down on a bench. The six men stood around her and did not let her out of their sight for a moment. Soon she would be searched. If that envelope was found, she almost certainly would not survive it.

She prayed. Lord, if it is necessary, we give our lives. But give me half a minute to get rid of this envelope.

One of the six was a tall man in a shiny gray raincoat. Plastic, something you hardly saw anywhere at that time. Another asked if that thing was really waterproof. The tall man opened his coat to show how many inside pockets it had. Five heads leaned forward.

Diet threw away the envelope.

Later she called this the greatest miracle of her whole war. I do not know how you read a story like that. A man showing off his new coat, at the one moment that counts. You can call it coincidence. Diet never did, all her life. She had asked for half a minute, and she got it.

It changed her whole attitude. She decided to play dumb, and she kept that up to the end.

They took her along on the tram, through Den Haag. Diet was afraid someone would recognize her. When the conductor asked for her ticket, she refused to pay. She was sitting here against her will, she said, and she pointed at the Gestapo men, who were the last people who wanted to stand out. The conductor told one of them that he would have to pay. He did.

At the police station she had to wait while a German sat at his desk writing reports. Then something came back to her. In her suitcase was a jar of vitamins from the family doctor, with a label: Mrs. Eman. She asked if she could take a sandwich out of her suitcase. While she ate, she scraped the label off with her fingernail.

The young officer who questioned her was sure of his case. If she told him how she had come by that identity card, she would get preferential treatment and could eat whatever she liked. Diet pretended to go along, and asked for applesauce. She herself thought it a silly word. At the prison door he held his finger over the bell: this was her last chance to talk. Diet pressed the button herself. He struck her in the face. She had peace, she told later.

The prison was the one at Scheveningen, the Oranjehotel (the "Orange Hotel," as the Dutch called it). The cell had no toilet and no paper, and there was hardly any food. The women killed time with homemade playing cards and little dolls made from pencil stubs. Diet remained Willie Laarman, a simple maid who had been given her card by a man she had met, and who had noticed nothing at all. She did not consider lying a small matter. She struggled with the question of whether, as a Christian, she was allowed to use a false name and speak untruth. A fellow prisoner convinced her that it was allowed, to save lives. After that she built a whole past for Willie, and she forbade herself to think about her real life anymore.

In that cell she did something she never forgot. With a hairpin she scratched a promise of Jesus into the bricks: *And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). Of all the promises from that time, this was the one she carried the longest. Into old age she passed it on to young people.

The clothes in Vught

On June 6, 1944, the day the Allies landed in Normandy, the prison was emptied. About sixteen hundred prisoners were herded onto trains. Corrie and Betsie ten Boom were among them.

On the way Diet noticed that one woman stayed in the toilet for a very long time. At a bend where the train slowed and the bushes stood close along the track, that woman jumped out through the open window. Diet stood in front of the door so that no one would go in. In this way about eight escaped.

In camp Vught the women had to undress and were given camp dresses. Anyone who tried to escape was shot dead, they were told. Diet was put in barracks 4, with a hundred and seventy-five other women. There was no soap.

Corrie and Betsie ten Boom gave Bible lessons in the camp. At night loose pages from Corrie's Bible went from hand to hand, and each woman could read in it for about five minutes. Later the sisters were taken to another part of the camp. Their names also appear in the description of the long interview that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recorded with Diet in 2003.

Diet spoke fluent German. At the beginning of the war she had resolved not to speak a word of German as long as the occupier was in the country. So when a guard shouted that she should stand up straight or take her hands out of her pockets, she acted as if she understood none of it. It suited Willie well.

Every evening she prayed for her family and friends. Beyond that she tried not to think about them. Her parents were in danger because of her: Hein and she had buried guns and revolvers in their garden, and the penalty for possessing weapons was a bullet.

She got work in the laundry. One night she heard machine gun fire. The next day there was clothing in the wash with blood in it. They were the clothes of prisoners who had been shot. The bullet holes were in the stomach. She understood what that meant: those men had lain dying for hours. A day later even more came. Thirty-six sets of clothes. Was Hein among them? She did not know where he was.

The blood of our own boys on her hands, that is how she put it later. It was among the worst things she ever went through.

Something broke in her there. She could no longer pray for love for her enemies. She prayed that God would curse the Nazis. And she put to Him the question that so many people in camps have asked: how could He let this horror go on? Soon after, one morning she woke up and could not move her body. For three days she lay paralyzed on her bunk. Then it passed. She was spent, in body and soul.

I am glad she did not later wipe that away. A hero of the faith who never doubted, I would not believe. Diet showed that faith can also live in a woman who is angry with God and tells Him so.

A sunny Saturday

Then came the day of her interrogation. As she was being led away, Freddy ran past, a Roman Catholic girl from the barracks whom she trusted. She whispered that she was going to storm the gates of heaven for Diet.

The fear came back. As she walked, Diet thought of what Jesus had promised His disciples for the hour when they would stand before the judge. That they need not worry about what to say. And this: *But not a hair of your head shall be lost* (Luke 21:18). A soft voice inside

her said she need not be afraid. The hatred drained away as she walked through the camp.

She prayed the way you only pray when you have nothing left. She had often broken her own promises to God, she told Him. But He would keep His. Now He had to do it, and she held Him to His word.

There she sat, in a filthy camp dress, with greasy hair and sores on her face, across from well-fed Germans. She felt sorry for them. They would have to answer for it one day. She played Willie Laarman, the maid who knew nothing and had nothing to do with Jews. They found no hole in her story. One officer said that it all added up, but that his sixth sense told him it was nonsense.

On the way back to the barracks she heard Allied planes passing overhead.

Someone had once asked her on which day she would most like to be released. Diet knew exactly. A sunny Saturday. Then she could take a bath, put on clean clothes, and go to church on Sunday to thank God. She had added that a rainy Monday would be fine too.

On Saturday, August 19, 1944, Diet Eman walked out of the gate of Vught. The sun was shining.

At home in Den Haag her mother wrapped her in her arms, and they talked for a long time. Her father cried. She had never seen him do that. Albert hugged her so hard that she got bruises.

She could not stay. She went back to the farm of Aalt and Alie, and back to the resistance work. One of the ministers of her church said at her funeral that he had been amazed. In the Bible devotional her parents had given her, she found a line about Gideon's exhausted men: *exhausted but still in pursuit* (Judges 8:4).

They were hard months. She worked alone, she was always afraid, and often she felt far from God and could not pray. The Germans shot a good friend of the family, a father of seven children. She did not understand it. In a time like that she prayed that God would teach her to see that He held this too in His hands, so that she could find peace in His plans.

For a while Hein and she could still write to each other. A man smuggled notes into and out of the camp, hidden under potato peelings. In one of her letters Diet wrote that she had become hard, and tired. He would not recognize her if he came back.

Through camp Amersfoort Hein went on October 11, 1944, to Neuengamme. On December 22, 1944, he arrived in Dachau, as prisoner number 136807.

On a Canadian tank

One Sunday afternoon Diet sat at the farm bent over military maps that she was to pass on to a friend who was spying for the Allies. Then at the end of the driveway she saw two Dutch Nazis standing. She hid the maps and sent another girl to the Jews in hiding. The men searched the farm. They found bicycles, butter and a pig. They did not find the people in hiding, and not the man who was sitting there making false identity cards.

Diet thought of something Betsie ten Boom had said in Vught: that in God's world there are no "ifs."

In April 1945 the front came closer. For three days Diet and the others sat in a hole under the kitchen stairs while the guns came ever nearer. On April 20 it went quiet. Outside lay dead cows everywhere. And as far as she could see, there were Canadian tanks.

Then she saw three German snipers, camouflaged, in a stream under the weeping willows. They saw that she saw them. Zigzagging, she ran to the tanks and told a soldier what she had seen. He told her to climb up. So Diet Eman rode forward on top of a tank. The gun barrels turned, and the three Germans put their hands up. She felt, she said, that she had won the war.

That evening there was a service of thanksgiving. The village sang the Wilhelmus, the Dutch national anthem, in tears. The next day there was food in abundance, from the cows.

After that Diet went to see the people she had hidden. They were all still alive.

She was not yet allowed to travel to Den Haag. She went anyway. For part of the way she sat in a truck next to a coffin. At a bridge Dutch officials stopped her, and she walked along the river until she found a place where she could cross on foot.

At home the news was waiting. Hein's father had had it brought. Hein was dead.

He had died on January 21, 1945, in Dachau, partly of tuberculosis of the lungs. He was twenty-five. In the camp he had become too weak to work, and in January they had taken him from his barracks. Diet said later that on the night of his death she had already felt that something had happened to him.

He was not the only one. His brother Jan Thijmen died in the camp at Ziegenhain. His uncle, the Amsterdam minister Kees Sietsma, also died in Dachau. Only Henk came back, and he carried for the rest of his life what he had seen in the camp. Of the members of Groep HEIN, eight had died, in prisons and camps or before the firing squad. Diet's own brother Arjan had died in a Japanese camp in the Dutch East Indies. Many friends were gone.

For weeks Diet was furious, at God too. Because He had taken Hein, and because He had let him suffer so in his last months. All her dreams lay in pieces.

Then letters came. Men who had been imprisoned with Hein wrote to her. They described him as a light in their darkness. One of them called him the finest fellow prisoner he had known, someone who loved life and loved Christ. It fit a line from Hein's own diary: God is with me, therefore I am glad and try to see the good in everyone.

And there was the note. Hein had written it in pencil on a piece of toilet paper and, on the way to a camp, thrown it outside through a gap between the planks of a freight car. Someone who knew Diet's father picked it up, and so it reached her.

We do not determine our own lives, Hein wrote. Even if they never saw each other again on this earth, they would never regret the choice they had made. And he loved her most.

It sounds like an echo of Proverbs: *A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps* (Proverbs 16:9). His own plans, a wedding and a life with Diet, lay behind him. He took his trust with him, and he threw it to her through a crack.

She kept the note all her life.

Silence in Venezuela

In 1946 she received a letter of thanks from General Eisenhower. She put it away. Decades later it lay in a kitchen drawer.

After the war she left the Netherlands. She earned her nursing diploma and went to work for Shell in Venezuela, for about ten years. In South America she met the American engineer Egon Erlich. They married in 1959. She was thirty-nine. They had two children, and the family lived in New York. The marriage ended

in divorce. Diet moved with her children to Grand Rapids, Michigan, a city where many Dutch people had settled. Family of hers lived there, and she loved the church life she found. She became a member of Seymour Christian Reformed Church, a church from the Dutch Reformed tradition. She worked as a translator at Kelvinator, a maker of household appliances, and did volunteer work for the Red Cross. After her retirement she interpreted for Christian doctors and aid organizations.

All those years she told almost no one what she had been through in the war. She suffered from what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder. At ninety-seven she still had trouble with it.

"Tell Your Children"

In 1978 she heard Corrie ten Boom speak, the woman she knew from Vught. After that it would not let her go. She had always thought that God still had something for her to do. Now she saw what it was.

In her church a minister asked the congregation to tell what they had experienced with God. If something unusual has happened in your life and God was there, he said, you must tell it. And she heard that one in five Americans did not believe that the Holocaust had taken place. That hit hard.

At Dordt College in Iowa a gathering was held about suffering and survival. People who had lived through the war would speak there to students. The keynote speaker canceled. A chicken farmer from the area, who knew Diet from a mission trip, mentioned her name. She had told her story in public only once before. The hall listened breathlessly.

One of the listeners was the writer James Schaap, a teacher of English at the college. He offered to write her story down. Diet did not say yes.

Half a year later the congregation in Seymour sang a song from their church's psalm book one Sunday: *Tell Your Children*. Diet decided that her children had to know her story. That evening, after the church service, she called Schaap.

When he came to her home, she gave him a box. It had been closed for fifty years and she had opened it only the night before. In it were the letters Hein had written to her during the war. Schaap switched on his tape recorder and asked one question.

In November and December 1993 The Banner, the magazine of her church, published a preview in eight parts. In 1994 the book appeared with Eerdmans in Grand Rapids: *Things We Couldn't Say*, by Diet Eman with James C. Schaap.

Looking back, she said something you might not expect. Fifty years later she still cried over that time, and she would not have wanted to miss it. In those years of fear she had lived very close to God. She had come to know His faithfulness up close. Three times she had been spared when she thought the end had come. In 1995, at fifty years of liberation, she wrote in The Banner that, looking back on those years of terror, she could only thank God for the precious gift of freedom.

In 1998 Yad Vashem awarded her the title Righteous Among the Nations. Hein and Henk Sietsma had received that recognition in April 1977. In 2003 came the interview for the museum in Washington. In 2007 the documentary *The Reckoning* by John Evans was released, and in that same year she became an American citizen. For the film she traveled for five weeks with Evans to the places of those days. He came to know her as a woman who went straight for her

goal and condemned no one. After her death he said that for her two things mattered most: “Jesus and justice.”

From the beginning of this century she spoke regularly, first in Michigan and then farther afield, from elementary schools to business clubs. It was always deathly quiet. She wanted young people to know that God keeps His promises.

On June 2, 2015, King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima visited Grand Rapids. Diet was ninety-five. That day she wore a medal she had received from Prince Bernhard. Dancers from a dance school performed a ballet about her life, titled *It Is Well*. The king called her one of the national heroes of the Netherlands. When he had heard her story, he asked her to come and sit next to him at the dinner.

She stayed the same. The award from the Acton Institute, in that same year, she accepted with the remark that it had been nothing special. The letter from Eisenhower only came out of the kitchen drawer when her old boss from Kelvinator found it. After some urging he was allowed to hang it in the hallway. In an interview from 2013 she said that the Bible nowhere allows you to sit back in your old age. She was glad that God still wanted to use her, even though He did not need her. At ninety-seven she was still working with children in the Dominican Republic, and she wanted to go back.

Her papers, letters and notes, from 1939 to 2014, went to Heritage Hall in the library of Calvin University in Grand Rapids. They fill eight boxes. There are photographs of Diet and Hein.

Psalm 27

On Tuesday, September 3, 2019, Diet Eman died in a care center in Grand Rapids. She was ninety-nine. The NOS reported her death the next evening. Her family said that she was now with Hein again.

On Sunday, September 8, there was a service in Seymour Christian Reformed Church. More than three hundred people filled the church and the choir loft. James Schaap spoke, and read aloud the story of the man who could not say whom he had in his house. Her former boss at Kelvinator spoke. One of the ministers said that the Holy Spirit had worked in her life in many wonderful ways. The other quoted a question from her diary: why did so many Christians do nothing when the Nazis came?

A granddaughter read her favorite psalm, Psalm 27. It contains a verse that could have been written about her life: *Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident* (Psalm 27:3).

Her heart did know fear, and she never hid that. She sat on a bench among six men of the Gestapo, broke down in Vught, was angry with God, and kept silent for decades in America. But she kept coming back to the promise she had scratched with a hairpin into the wall of her cell.

In the library of Calvin University in Grand Rapids lie photographs of a young couple from Den Haag. He became twenty-five. She became ninety-nine. She had taken a good look at him, that evening on the bicycle, and she told their story to the end.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on April 30, 1920, in Den Haag; Christian family; Hein Sietsma (born October 15, 1919,

in Marum) lived with the Eman family from 1937; the engagement; Groep HEIN (Helpt Elkander In Nood) with Hein and Henk Sietsma; help for people in hiding and for pilots; her colleague Herman as the first person in hiding; the alias Willie Laarman; Hein's arrest at the end of April 1944 in Friesland; Diet's arrest in May 1944 at a train check; imprisonment in Scheveningen and Vught; meeting Corrie and Betsie ten Boom; washing the clothes of people who had been shot; her release because she posed as a maid; her return to the resistance; Hein's death in Dachau on January 21, 1945 (Dutch War Graves Foundation and the Dutch Resistance Museum, which also give his alias, his camp number and the dates of Neuengamme and Dachau); the deaths of his brother and his uncle; the letter from Eisenhower (1946); work as a nurse for Shell; marriage to Egon Erlich and two children; the book *Things We Couldn't Say* (1994, with James C. Schaap) and the preview in The Banner; Yad Vashem recognition in 1998 (Hein and Henk in 1977); the interview of 2003; the documentary of 2007; the visit of the king in 2015; the collection in Heritage Hall; death on September 3, 2019, in Grand Rapids and the service of September 8.

Only from own testimony (*Things We Couldn't Say*, 1994): I have used the book through detailed retellings and reviews (see the sources), and what is said and prayed has been retold from them and not translated word for word. From the book come: her childhood, Hein's arrival and her annoyance; the rings on the tram; Herman's question; the Bible reading and the loyalty to the queen; the prayer for food and the decision to steal ration cards; the kneeling men of the knokploeg and the eight hundred identity cards a month; the man who refused and still hid a Jewish family; Mies's apartment with twenty-seven people in hiding, the betrayal and Albert's phone call; the voice on the bicycle; the prayer at the station, the raincoat and the envelope; the tram, the vitamin jar, the

applesauce and the bell; the text in the cell wall; the train to Vught and the women who jumped; the Bible pages of Corrie ten Boom; the German she refused to understand; the weapons in the garden; the thirty-six sets of clothes, her prayer for a curse and the three days of paralysis; Freddy, the voice and the prayer on the way to the interrogation; the sunny Saturday and the reunion at home; Judges 8:4; the shooting of the family friend; the notes under potato peelings; the maps and the search; the liberation, the snipers and the tank; the coffin and the bridge; her premonition on the night of Hein's death, her anger and the letters from his fellow prisoners; the contents of the note from the train. Nobody else could retell most of these stories. The book was written down almost fifty years after the war, with her diary and Hein's letters at hand.

From interviews and from her circle: her prayer during the arrest for one moment when no one was looking at her, the quotation from Hein's diary, the three times she was spared and her calling after 1978 (Christianity Today, 2015); the comparison with David, the struggle with lying and the interview of 2013 (Place for Truth); the minister's appeal (Smithsonian Magazine and FOX17); the song, the phone call to Schaap, the conference at Dordt College, the kitchen drawer and the Dominican Republic (her church, at the funeral); the box of letters (Schaap, via the radio station KWIT); the medal from Prince Bernhard (Acton Institute); the seat at the dinner (FOX17); "Jesus and justice" and the five weeks of filming (John Evans, on the CBC).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one version):

- *Hein's background.* The Dutch War Graves Foundation names Marum and a father, Jilt, with thirteen children. Christianity Today has him grow up in Friesland as the oldest son of a school principal, and an American broadcaster calls his father

a farmer. According to Christianity Today Hein was nineteen when he came to the Emans, and his family found the address through a family friend; the retelling of the book speaks of a man from the church.

- *The first people in hiding.* Sixty people "within two weeks" (Smithsonian Magazine, after the Washington Post) or "within a few weeks" (the retellings of the book). Christianity Today places Herman's farmer in Friesland. According to the CBC, Herman one day stopped showing up at the bank; in the book he asks Diet herself for advice.
- *The size of the group.* Fifteen members (Christianity Today) or sixteen (Acton Institute), of whom eight died. The CBC speaks of a cell of about seven.
- *How many people were saved.* American newspapers and the NOS wrote of hundreds of Jews at her death. Henk Sietsma later estimated, according to Yad Vashem, that the group had saved at least nine families and eleven individuals, besides many British and American pilots. I keep to those numbers, because Yad Vashem gives them.
- *How her name became known.* In the book, through a supplier who talked under pressure. An American website writes that the Gestapo found her diary during a raid.
- *When she became Willie Laarman.* When she went into hiding in 1943, or only after Hein's arrest (Christianity Today). She herself said she had had many names.
- *The day of Hein's arrest.* April 26, 1944 (most sources) or April 28 (Yad Vashem). The Dutch Resistance Museum leaves both dates open.
- *The day of her own arrest.* May 8, 1944 (retelling of the book) or May 4 (CBC). Smithsonian Magazine writes that it was about a month after Hein.

- *Where the envelope ended up.* Behind a bush (CBC) or in a trash can (an American website). The retelling of the book says only that she threw it away.
- *How long she was held.* In the retelling of the book she is released on Saturday, August 19, 1944, a little over three months after her arrest. That fits the sources that say three months. Christianity Today writes that she was released about two weeks after her interrogation. The CBC says six months. According to the CBC she spoke only French in the camp.
- *Another story about her release.* An American television station reported in 2017 that she escaped on a manure cart when Allied fire reached the camp. I find that nowhere else. The description at the Holocaust Memorial Museum says that she was liberated by Canadians on April 20, 1945. That agrees with the book, but it concerns the farm and not the camp.
- *The note from the train.* In pencil (CBC), on toilet paper (Smithsonian Magazine and others). When it reached her is not clear: before or after the news of his death.
- *The news of Hein's death.* By a messenger from his father, or by letter from his father; the retelling of the book has her hear it at home in Den Haag.
- *After the war.* Most sources name Venezuela; her old boss spoke of Argentina at the funeral. Translator at Kelvinator (her church) or export manager (Place for Truth).
- *When she began to speak.* In 1978 she heard Corrie ten Boom. Wikipedia also places the conference with Schaap in that year. Another source says she only went public from 1990, her church that she spoke regularly from the start of this century. The box that had been closed for fifty years and the book of 1994 point to a later year than 1978 for the conference.

Thinly supported: that her brother-in-law was killed on May 10, 1940, appears in three English-language texts that probably go back to each other; I have not found a Dutch source for it. The death of her brother Arjan in a Japanese camp is known only from the retelling of the book. There is no other source for the text in the cell wall than her own story.

Interpretation: that the voice on the bicycle, the raincoat and her other rescues were God's guidance is her own reading of her faith. I believe it along with her. The sources describe what happened; the meaning she gave it herself.

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Karel and Ben Hoekendijk: the painter and the tent preacher

One Saturday evening in Utrecht, sometime in the early days after 1953, a bargeman from Deventer came into a hall where Jesus was being preached. He was paralyzed and had been in a wheelchair for fourteen years. Through his niece he had come to believe that God could heal him. At the door stood a boy who was the door-keeper that evening, the youngest son of the preacher. He gave the bargeman a place in the front row.

At the front stood a man of about fifty, an artist who had only recently begun to preach. Halfway through, the bargeman could stand it no longer. How long was this sermon going to last, he called across the hall. Could the preacher not go ahead and pray?

The preacher came over to him. The bargeman reached for his cane. The preacher took the cane away and broke it over his knee. Walk, he said, in the name of Jesus.

And the man walked. At first hesitantly, then more and more steadily. His niece sat crying. The night after, he jumped over the

little gate of his own garden at home. That is how Elisabeth, the preacher's wife, wrote it down later.

The painter was named Karel Hoekendijk. Out of his Saturday evenings grew Stromen van Kracht (Streams of Power), a movement from which numerous Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands have come. The boy at the door was named Ben. He would travel the country with a tent, start a magazine and set up conferences that tens of thousands of people later attended. From his work grew Stichting Opwekking (the Revival Foundation), the one behind the songbook and the Pentecost conference.

A father and a son, then. And it begins with the father, long before he broke a cane over his knee.

A missionary's child with a drawing pen

Karel Hoekendijk was born in 1904. His father, C.J. Hoekendijk, was a preacher of the Vrije Evangelische Gemeente (Free Evangelical Congregation) and a close associate of Johannes de Heer. Karel was a baby of a few weeks when the family left for Indonesia, where his father went to work as a missionary. Until he was eleven he grew up in a village in the mountains.

When he was twelve, he stayed behind in the Netherlands, in a strict mission home. He was deeply unhappy there and began to stutter. At nineteen he was unexpectedly allowed to go back. On the boat to Indonesia he happened to overhear a conversation between a missionary and a man who did not believe. It touched him so deeply that he gave his life to the Lord.

In Indonesia he worked as an architectural draftsman and designed houses. He led a group of young people there. The stuttering was gone.

When his mother fell ill, the family returned to the Netherlands. Karel went to the Academy of Fine Arts. After a clash with his father over the tuition, he had to leave home. He paid for his studies by painting lampshades.

At that academy there was also a girl who had been born in Rotterdam in 1910: Elisabeth La Rivière. From her mother she had learned to pray as a child. As a girl of about ten she came into the meetings of the Salvation Army. One Wednesday afternoon she surrendered herself to the Lord and asked Him for a new heart. She was glad, and sure that she was His child.

She was sixteen when Karel waited for her after evening school. He asked if they could get to know each other better. She said no. She thought herself too young, and Karel went off disappointed. That evening she prayed about it. She received a clear answer, she wrote later: this was the man God had meant for her. Through a friend it worked out after all. They courted for about four years.

In those years something happened that you must remember. At the home of friends in Kampen, Karel told them that he felt called to preach. He had talked about it with his father, but his father would hear nothing of it. The friends grew serious. He could not simply let that pass, they thought. Elisabeth suggested asking God for a clear answer. Together they went out into the meadows and prayed until the certainty came. Karel was called to the service of God.

After that, for more than twenty years, nothing came of it.

After a long search Karel found work as a draftsman and designer at the publishing house Samson in Alphen aan den Rijn. They married when Elisabeth was twenty. Their first home was called Windekind, a simple little house on the Kromme Aar near Alphen, without running water. Later Karel worked as a designer for a publisher in

Baarn, and the family moved with him. Four children came: Lioba, Frans, Else and Ben.

Ben was the youngest. He was born on June 30, 1938, in Baarn.

Eel from Spakenburg

From the outside it looked like an ordinary artist's life. Karel was a painter by trade; that is how the newspaper still described him at his death. On the inside things went less well. Elisabeth is honest about that in her life story. In Baarn their faith faded. There were quarrels, there was too little money, and they no longer understood each other. She herself began to doubt the Bible.

An older woman helped her back. Elisabeth called her Aunt Bets. She lived on a houseboat on the Eem, and together they read the prophets. Elisabeth became convinced that the Bible was meant literally.

Then came the war. Aunt Bets's houseboat was sunk. Shells fell near the Hoekendijks' house. Karel rode his bicycle on wooden tires past the farmers to find food, as far as the IJssel. For fishermen in Spakenburg he painted portraits, and he got eel in return. The family came through the war.

After the war Karel went back to Indonesia for a few years, from 1948 to 1951, as head of the visual production department of the Government Information Service. Elisabeth stayed in the Netherlands with the children.

Meanwhile she kept searching. For years she had longed for what she read in the Bible about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In 1952 the Canadian evangelist B.G. Leonard came to the Netherlands. In Zeist he gave Bible studies on the nine gifts of the Spirit. One evening he challenged the group to step forward. Elisabeth did it.

That evening she spoke in new tongues, and she describes a joy without limit.

At home she was laughed at for it, by her husband and by her children. She believed their time would come too.

Karel was not there yet.

"I have called you"

It was a summer evening in 1953. Karel suddenly had a heart attack. He could hardly breathe and thought he would not live through the evening. The family doctor was on vacation.

Elisabeth kept the conversation of that evening. Which doctor was he supposed to ask now, Karel got out. She answered that he knew very well which doctor she believed in. And then he cried it out: yes, he wanted to be healed by the Lord.

She phoned a friend, a woman who was filled with the Spirit and had faith for the sick. The friend came at once. She had a message for Karel, and she spoke it as a word from God Himself: "I have called you and you know that very well." If he surrendered everything to Him, God would heal him.

Karel did indeed know. He had known it since Kampen, since the meadows. For a long time he had resisted everything his wife told him about the Holy Spirit. That evening he surrendered.

And he was healed. Soon after, he himself was also filled with the Spirit.

He was almost fifty. He had a trade, work as a designer and a family with four children. From that evening his life went in a different direction. At home you could see it. The drink and the cigarettes went out the door, Elisabeth writes, and Bibles came in their place.

The children followed, one after the other. Ben said later that first his brother and sisters came to surrender, and then he did.

There was someone else sick in the house. Elisabeth had anemia and a throat that kept becoming inflamed, and she was growing weaker. Karel had asked God for proof that he was truly allowed to pray for the sick. One day Elisabeth prayed silently that God would heal her completely if her husband laid hands on her that evening.

He did it. While he prayed, the Lord showed him where the trouble was, she tells: a cancer at the outlet of her stomach. He saw it disappear. That same night she became well. She writes that afterward she was hardly ever sick again.

I tell it as she told it, and I believe her. What touches me most is that one sentence from the friend. God had not forgotten Karel in all those years of drawing and designing. Is there something you have known for a long time to be true, too?

All nine gifts

Still in 1953, Karel began the movement he called Stromen van Kracht. It began with those Saturday evening meetings in Utrecht, and they grew fast. The story of the bargeman went around. A relative in Amsterdam asked the couple to come there too. At first they met in a house, later on Friday evenings in the Lutherkapel (Lutheran Chapel). There were people who traveled back and forth between Amsterdam and Utrecht every week.

They never met on Sundays. Karel and Elisabeth wanted people to stay in their own church. He wanted to help them become living members of it, the magazine Ambtelijk Contact wrote in 1963.

They preached repentance, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the use of all nine gifts of the Spirit. In their circle it was put simply:

the gifts were lying ready, all nine, and you were welcome to come and get them. Leonard had charged them to pass that teaching on. Elisabeth turned it into a Bible course, every two weeks, and she gave it for forty years. Karel traveled around as an evangelist.

Remarkable was who came. Stromen van Kracht drew more educated people than the older Pentecostal churches, Jo van den Brink wrote later. On the Saturday evenings in Utrecht the later ministers Albert van den Heuvel and Willem Verhoef sat in the hall, Ben told in 1986. Verhoef worked among students as a student himself, among other things.

And the youth went out onto the street. From 1956 Ben went through Utrecht with his youth group, De Gideons, to preach. In Amsterdam a girl named Wiesje Hijink did the same: every Sunday into the city with young people and guitars. Anyone who wanted could pray with them on the spot.

The churches at first looked on with goodwill. That changed when Stromen van Kracht began to baptize on its own. The first baptism service was during a conference on the Harskamp (a military training area). From that moment the Reformed churches turned away.

Criticism came from within the Pentecostal movement too. Jo van den Brink, editor in chief of the magazine Kracht van Omhoog, looked back on it in 1976. The teaching of Stromen van Kracht came, in his view, from a different corner than that of the older Pentecostal churches. He pointed to the influence of Leonard, who according to him denied the Trinity and rebaptized people. Karel later let go of that rebaptizing, Van den Brink said. In earlier years Karel himself had written in Kracht van Omhoog. It was a small world in which everyone sat close together, and it was not always easy.

From 1953 to 1960 Karel led the national work and was editor in chief of the magazine Stromen van Kracht. Independent congregations grew out of the movement, spread across the country. One of them was in Den Haag.

Twenty years old on the Malieveld

There Ben stood in 1958, as pastor. He was twenty. The year before he had done alternative military service at the Postal Giro Service.

That summer the American evangelist T.L. Osborn came to Den Haag. The initiative came from Jo van den Brink, the man of Kracht van Omhoog. An interchurch committee led by the Dutch Reformed Den Haag minister P.C. van Leeuwen prepared the campaign. On August 18 the NCRV (a Dutch Christian broadcaster) aired footage of Osborn's campaigns in Belgium. A few days later he stood on the Malieveld.

From August 22 through 31, 1958, Osborn preached there about Jesus and about healing. The theme came from the letter to the Hebrews: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). On some evenings more than a hundred thousand people stood on the field. Johan Maasbach interpreted, but he was not the only interpreter. One of the others was the twenty-year-old pastor from Den Haag.

Imagine what that does to a young man. At home his father had risen from a sickbed. In Utrecht he had brought a paralyzed man to the front row and seen him walk. Now he stood on a field full of people and helped pass on Osborn's words.

Osborn asked the sick to believe that they were already healed, even if they noticed nothing of it yet. If the healing did not come, then according to him the fault lay with the sick person. That thought

returned in many Pentecostal churches in the years that followed. Ben too would preach a firm teaching on healing for years.

Not everyone saw a miracle that summer. The journalist H.J.A. Hofland walked past the tents with the sick for the Rotterdamsche Courant. That evening he saw no one suddenly healed. A little girl walked a few steps holding her father's hand. Then she collapsed again. Hofland wrote it down as he saw it.

For the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands, 1958 became a turning point. The campaign drew great interest, and in the years after, the movement grew quickly: from about 7,500 Pentecostal believers in 1960 to more than 34,000 in 1981. Wiesje Hijink told Groot Nieuws Radio in 2020 that those large gatherings of Osborn had set them on fire.

The wedding money

In 1959 Ben married Wiesje. They had three children and went to live in Putten.

The money they received for their wedding, so it is told, Ben put into a tent. In August 1959 he held his first tent campaign, on the Janskerkhof in Utrecht. The work was given the name Ben Hoekendijk Evangelisatie Campagnes (Ben Hoekendijk Evangelism Campaigns). Until 1974 he traveled the country with that tent, and Wiesje joined him. In 1960 he started a magazine. He called it Opwekking (Revival).

Committees and meetings had nothing to do with it, Wiesje told sixty years later. Everyone wanted to pass on what he himself had received. That was how her husband worked: "You had a plan and you did it." To their own surprise it worked, too. She saw something of the Holy Spirit in it, she said, and perhaps something of their youthful enthusiasm.

That year his father also took a different road. From 1959 Karel shifted his work abroad, and from 1960 he and Elisabeth traveled the world for evangelistic campaigns until his death. In the 1960s the magazine Stromen van Kracht became a newsletter of the couple.

An old theater in Paramaribo

In 1961 Karel and Elisabeth came to Suriname. In Paramaribo Karel could not rent a church or a hall. He rented Thalia, an old theater that was no longer in use.

Every evening the hall was packed to overflowing, Elisabeth writes. Outside, hundreds of people stood at the open windows listening. She tells that the blind began to see, that the paralyzed walked and that lepers were cleansed. Because so many people wanted to be baptized, they rented a swimming pool. Hundreds went into the water there.

In 1962 Karel made the news in the Netherlands: the Surinamese government refused him entry to the country. Elisabeth describes how, in her view, it came to that. The minister of the largest church in Paramaribo had turned other ministers, doctors and the government against them, and their visas were not renewed. About ten years later a new government invited them again, she says, and they went back.

Journeys to far-off countries followed. Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Batakland, New Zealand, South Africa. The three Guianas, Saint Vincent, Saint Lucia, the Netherlands Antilles. Their sons helped: Frans in British Guiana, Ben in French Guiana. About various journeys Karel and Elisabeth wrote booklets, with titles like *Japan*, *India* and *Gods werk in de 3 Guyana's* (God's Work in the 3 Guianas).

There is one of those stories I do not want to keep from you. On the island of Saint Vincent Karel had a vision. He saw a stream of people walking, and he understood that they were on their way to a meeting. A revival would come. When he saw the island's sports field, he knew this was the place. He rented the stadium for a month.

In those days Elisabeth walked through the market and spoke to a woman who could not walk. She told her to ask someone to bring her to the meeting, because the Lord wanted to heal her. The first evening there were a few hundred people. The woman from the market came too. Karel laid hands on her and said she could walk, in the name of Jesus. She walked away with her crutches over her shoulder.

After that a few thousand people came. Then ten thousand. Then fourteen thousand. A little boy who was deaf and could not speak said his first words into the microphone after prayer. In one day they baptized a thousand people.

In the Netherlands the work meanwhile went its own way. The congregations that had grown out of Karel's movement joined together in 1972 to form the Federatie van Volle Evangelie Gemeenten (Federation of Full Gospel Churches), which later merged into Volle Evangelie Gemeenten Nederland. The Reformatorisch Dagblad wrote in 1979 that Karel's work had been the main source of that federation. He himself was that year the pastor of a Stromen van Kracht church in Zwolle, which stood apart from the federation.

Four hundred people in Vierhouten

Ben kept building. His name as a tent evangelist grew, and he was asked to speak all over the country. At Pentecost 1971 he organized a conference of a few days in Vierhouten. A few hundred people

came, about four hundred. It became an annual tradition. Later fifteen to twenty thousand people came every year, from traditional churches and from free groups.

From 1972 he also organized the One Way Days for young people in the Jaarbeurs (the large trade fair hall) in Utrecht. On Saturday, October 23, 1976, it was the fifth time. An estimated fifteen thousand people came, many of them young. The posters showed a raised finger with the words "Jesus saves." A choir of six hundred and fifty sang. Ben, thirty-eight, an evangelist from Putten, spoke that morning about Esther, who held on to her convictions. After the talk young people were invited to come forward. To the reporter of the Reformatorisch Dagblad he said: "We are not afraid of emotionality."

They were his busiest years. In 1974 he spoke at a charismatic world conference in Jerusalem, in 1976 at Eurofest in Brussels, a youth festival of Billy Graham. In 1974 the foundation also took the name of the magazine: Opwekking.

That magazine came out of Putten. His brother-in-law and sister, Peter and Else Vlug, helped build up the foundation. Else laid the basis for the children's work at the conferences.

In different ways

In 1968 Ben had written a book titled *Genezing in de verzoening* (Healing in the Atonement). Satan was the source of every sickness, he wrote there. It lay close to what Osborn had preached in 1958 on the Malieveld.

Thirteen years later, in 1981, he wrote something different in his magazine. The piece became known as the Vierhouten Declaration. He wrote: "God's healing power works in different ways, and is always wonderful." He asked for a pastoral attitude toward the sick

who are not healed: comfort instead of the reproach of unbelief. And he pleaded for a more positive attitude toward doctors and hospitals. A doctor was not an enemy. He was an ally in the fight against suffering.

I find that a courageous step. Someone who for years has preached that every sickness comes from Satan must overcome something to write in his own magazine that it is more nuanced. Ben did it. The man who as a boy had seen a paralyzed bargeman walk held on to that miracle and made room for those who stayed sick.

In 1986 a reporter of the Reformatorisch Dagblad spoke with him again. Ben no longer felt at home with the label Pentecostal movement. In Vierhouten he prayed with people from Reformed and Roman Catholic churches, and it hardly mattered to him with whom he praised God. About a third of the visitors were Reformed, he estimated. About speaking in tongues he said that love weighed more. He would rather have "someone from the Salvation Army with love" than someone who spoke in tongues without love.

In saying so he said nothing new. Paul had already written it to the church in Corinth, a church full of gifts: *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal* (1 Corinthians 13:1). His mother had come to faith as a girl in the Salvation Army. Whether he thought of that, I do not know.

The mantle of Elijah

Karel Hoekendijk kept preaching to the end. He was eighty-two when the Pentecost weekend of 1987 arrived.

On Friday evening he stood in Vierhouten, in the big tent of the conference his son had built. Ben had asked his father to open the Lord's Supper. I like to picture them standing there, those two. The

painter who broke a cane over his knee, and the doorkeeper who brought the bargeman to the front, more than thirty years later together at one table.

On Pentecost Sunday Karel spoke in Rotterdam. He preached about the mantle of Elijah, the cloak the old prophet left behind for whoever came after him (2 Kings 2).

That evening he had a stroke. Within a few weeks he was gone.

He died in June 1987 in Harderwijk. On June 17 the Reformatorisch Dagblad reported that he had died suddenly. The report called him a painter who had become an evangelist after a serious illness, and the founder of a movement from which numerous Pentecostal churches had come.

He called himself a missionary and an evangelist. His father had been a missionary too.

Given back

Three years later the work Ben had built came to an end for him. In February 1990 Ben and Wiesje announced that they were leaving Stichting Opwekking. They said they had "given their work in Opwekking back to the Lord." Ben was fifty-one. He wanted, he said, to follow a new wind of the Spirit, and he would continue through Stichting Shalom.

More was going on. There were personal problems, which later led to a divorce. How exactly it went, I leave alone. Wiesje told in 2020 that the word divorce had not been in her vocabulary, and that it was a deep valley. God was the ground under her feet in those years, she said. Later Ben and Wiesje reconciled. The tension with his sister and brother-in-law was also resolved, years before his death.

Peter Vlug took over the leadership of Opwekking. The Pentecost conference grew further, to more than sixty thousand visitors a year.

Ben had chosen the words himself: given back to the Lord. Whatever the reasons for his departure, the work he had built turned out not to depend on him. At his death the foundation wrote that God works through people, even when they make mistakes. Perhaps that is the most honest thing you can say about spiritual work. It is carried by people, and it belongs to God.

Shalom IV

Ben took to the sea. Sailing became his second life. For thirty years he wrote for the magazine Waterkampioen (a Dutch boating magazine), under the pen name Toerzeiler (Touring Sailor). He took part in the first solo sailing races across the North Sea and later organized one himself. He translated pilot guides and wrote books about watersports. His best-known book was titled *Was het toeval of een glimlachje van de Hemel* (Was It Chance or a Smile from Heaven, 1997). He also published books about Israel.

All his boats were named Shalom. With the first, a small Delta, he sailed to England for the first time. With the last, the Shalom IV, he sailed with his son to Spitsbergen.

In 2011 he was made a knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau, for his work in the field of theology and sailing.

Ben Hoekendijk died on May 1, 2020, in Harderwijk, eighty-one years old. Stichting Opwekking announced his death and thanked God for his life. A fellow preacher called him one of the best evangelists in the Netherlands. It was the year the foundation turned sixty.

A man with a drawing pen, a boy at the door

Their lives do not run in a straight line. There are breaks in them: between churches, between movements, within the family and within a marriage. I have not made them larger than the sources allow.

Whoever opens a songbook at Pentecost today, or hears prayer for a sick person in an ordinary church, stands somewhere downstream from what a painter began in Utrecht in 1953. And from what his son, twenty years old, heard on a field in Den Haag and then went on to tell in a tent.

I see Karel standing on a Saturday evening in Utrecht, an artist who had traded his drawing pen for a Bible, with a broken walking cane in his hands. And I see Ben, years later, at the helm of a boat called Shalom, with his son beside him, on his way north.

Somewhere a bargeman is jumping over his garden gate.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): Karel Hoekendijk born in 1904, son of C.J. Hoekendijk; painter by trade, after the war a few years with the Government Information Service in Indonesia; recovery from a serious illness and then the choice for preaching the gospel; founding of Stromen van Kracht in 1953 and leadership of the national work until 1960; refusal of entry to Suriname in 1962; pastor in Zwolle in 1979; died in June 1987 in Harderwijk, aged 82. Ben Hoekendijk born on June 30, 1938, in Baarn; in 1958 pastor of a Stromen van Kracht church in Den Haag; the Osborn campaign on the Malieveld (August 22 through 31, 1958, more than 100,000 people on some evenings); marriage to Wiesje Hijink in 1959; the magazine Opwekking from 1960; tent campaigns; Vierhouten from 1971; the One Way Day of 1976; the Vierhouten Declaration of 1981; de-

parture from Opwekking in 1990; sailing and writing; knighthood in 2011; died on May 1, 2020, in Harderwijk, aged 81.

From the life story of Elisabeth Hoekendijk (published on the Stromen van Kracht blog): the healing of the bargeman from Deventer in Utrecht, with Ben as doorkeeper; Karel's youth in Indonesia, the mission home, the stuttering and his conversion on the boat; the clash with his father over the tuition; her own conversion at the Salvation Army; the meeting at the art academy and her prayer; the calling in Kampen and the praying in the meadows; the little house on the Kromme Aar and the work at Samson; the difficult years in Baarn, Aunt Bets and the war; the baptism in the Spirit through Leonard in Zeist; Karel's heart attack, the conversation of that evening and the message of the friend; the healing of her stomach illness; the drink and cigarettes that went out the door; the choice never to meet on Sundays and the first baptism service on the Harskamp; her Bible course of forty years; the campaign in theater Thalia, the explanation of the refused visas and the return after ten years; the journeys to Asia and the Caribbean; the vision, the stadium and the healings on Saint Vincent; the Lord's Supper in Vierhouten, the sermon on the mantle of Elijah on Pentecost Sunday 1987 and the stroke that evening. Nobody else has recorded these stories. There are no medical reports or counts. The spoken sentences are retold; only the friend's message is quoted literally. The bargeman is named in her account; I have left out his name.

From sources with a single origin: that Ben came to surrender after his brother and sisters, went through Utrecht from 1956 with the youth group De Gideons, did alternative service at the Postal Giro Service, held his first tent campaign in August 1959 on the Janskerkhof and went to live in Putten, and that he spoke in Jerusalem in 1974 and at Eurofest in Brussels in 1976 (English Wikipedia, in part also Worthy News); that the wedding money

went into the tent campaigns (Worthy News, which presents it as a tradition handed down); the street evangelism in Amsterdam, the way of working without meetings and her words about the divorce (Wiesje Hijink on Groot Nieuws Radio, 2020); that the tension with his sister and brother-in-law was resolved and the words of the fellow preacher (Worthy News); the words of Stichting Opwekking at his death (Revive).

Where the sources differ or are silent (in the story I have always chosen one version):

- *Year of Karel's healing.* The Reformatorisch Dagblad gave 1952 at his death, Elisabeth's own account the summer of 1953. Several sources confirm that around this time he recovered from a serious illness and then chose to preach the gospel. I have kept her year.
- *Karel's date and place of birth.* Not established. His departure for Indonesia as a baby, the years 1948 to 1951 and the work as an architectural draftsman come from his wife's account.
- *The evangelist Leonard.* Elisabeth writes his initials as B.C., other sources as B.G.
- *The Malieveld.* The figure of more than a hundred thousand people comes from the scholar of religion Sipco Vellenga and the Reformatorisch Dagblad. That Ben was one of the interpreters is stated by the historian Paul van der Laan. What exactly he translated and on which evenings is not known. A story goes around that he can also be seen as a young reporter in the film about the campaign. That comes from a comment under a blog post and cannot be checked. About Karel's role in the campaign I have found no source. Hofland's report is dated September 6, 1958, on the page where I read it.
- *Growth of the Pentecostal movement.* The figures 7,500 (1960) and more than 34,000 (1981) are from Vellenga. The remark

about educated visitors is from Jo van den Brink, the quotation about the nine gifts is in Vellenga.

- *Vierhouten.* The figure of about four hundred visitors in 1971 is a later estimate; English Wikipedia gives about five hundred and 1972. The fifteen to twenty thousand visitors are from Vellenga. The statement from *Genezing in de verzoening* is quoted by Vellenga.
- *One Way Days.* The year in which they stopped differs by source (1979 or 1985).
- *Federation.* The merger into Volle Evangelie Gemeenten Nederland is placed in 1978 or in 1980.
- *Departure from Opwekking.* The newspaper of February 1990 gives 1990; some sources give 1992. That there were personal problems and that Ben and Wiesje later reconciled is in the Nederlands Dagblad and on Veluwe FM.
- *Ben's death.* One source gives 2021; all others May 1, 2020.

Interpretation: whether the healings in the lives of Karel and Elisabeth and in the campaigns were an intervention of God is a question of faith. I believe it along with them. No medical reports were found. Hofland's eyewitness account describes an evening on the Malieveld without visible healings.

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Anne van der Bijl: the smuggler who prayed for blind eyes

In 1957 a blue Volkswagen Beetle stood in line at the border of Yugoslavia. Behind the wheel sat a Dutchman not yet thirty. It was the first time he was entering a communist country on his own. Between the folds of his tent and his sleeping bag, boxes of tracts were hidden. In his suitcase, under a few shirts, lay stacks of literature in two Yugoslav languages. Printed Christian texts were confiscated at this border, however little it was.

While the border guards searched the cars ahead of him, he prayed. He told God that he had Scripture with him for His children on the other side. When Jesus was on earth, He had made blind eyes see. Now he asked the opposite: "Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind." Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see.

It was his turn. A border guard began to search among the camping gear and asked if he had anything to declare. His money, said the Dutchman, a wristwatch and a camera. He had to open a suitcase. The Dutchman started talking to the other guard about the weather. Dry for the time of year, he thought, and he told about the wet polders back home. The first guard did not look at the suitcase. Did he

have anything else to declare? Only small things. They would not bother with those, said the man, and he nodded that the suitcase could stay closed.

That is how he told it himself later, in a book that sold more than ten million copies. All over the world they knew him as Brother Andrew. He brought Bibles to countries where they were forbidden, and from his work grew Open Doors, which supports persecuted Christians in dozens of countries. In North Holland he was simply Anne van der Bijl, the blacksmith's son.

A blacksmith, a sick mother and an organ

Anne van der Bijl was born on May 11, 1928, in Sint Pancras, a village close to Alkmaar. He was the fourth of six children. His father was a blacksmith and hard of hearing, his mother had a weak heart. The family was poor.

In *Gods smokkelaar*, the Dutch edition of his book, he describes a Reformed family on the Bovenweg. Every day his father cycled to a smithy in Alkmaar, six kilometers away, and he weeded the vegetable garden the children ate from. His mother sat in her chair most of the day and listened to the Christian radio. Whoever knocked got something to eat: beggars, traveling evangelists, whoever came. Then the slices of cheese got thinner and the soup more watery. No one was sent away.

Then there was his oldest brother Bas. Bas could hardly speak and could not dress himself. All day he stood outside under an elm by the road and greeted the people of the village. In the living room stood a pedal organ. Father was the only one who could read notes, and he played in the evening with many mistakes. Then Bas would crouch beside him and gently push against his shoulder. After that he played himself, without one mistake, even when the book stood

upside down. People stopped in the street and cried. It was, Anne wrote, as if an angel sat behind the organ.

Bas died in 1939 of tuberculosis. Anne felt abandoned by God.

He was not a good boy himself. In his own story he teases the neighbors, a believing family who were too pious for him: he lays a pane of glass on their chimney and watches from a distance as the kitchen fills with smoke. He smashes his brother's piggy bank and lies about the money. During the church service he slips away to the ditches and the fields. Afterward he secretly sits with the men who discuss the sermon over coffee and cigars, so that at home he can pretend he paid attention. His family always believed him, and he was ashamed of that.

He dreamed of becoming a spy. A lone scout, deep in enemy territory.

Tulip bulbs and a rifle

In May 1940 the German army invaded the Netherlands. Anne was twelve. After sixth grade he left school. During the war he hid in ditches so as not to be picked up for forced labor. In the Hunger Winter of 1944 the family ate tulip bulbs. When the liberators came in the spring of 1945, he ran for miles to ask the soldiers for bread for his weakened mother.

In 1946 he joined the army. He was sent to the Dutch East Indies, where the Netherlands was fighting against Indonesian independence, and trained as a commando. He found it exciting, until real shooting began.

What he went through there, he never made prettier than it was. His unit was involved in the killing of the inhabitants of an entire village. He told that himself. Afterward he found a young mother

and her baby, killed by the same bullet. He never got rid of that image. He began to drink and took needless risks. Wearing a conspicuous straw hat he walked into the jungle, hoping someone would shoot him. By letter he heard that his mother had died.

In 1949 a bullet shattered his ankle. The doctors said he would never walk again without a cane. His time as a soldier was over. He came back to the Netherlands with a ruined foot and no idea what to do with his life.

He recovered in a Catholic hospital, with Franciscan sisters. There he picked up the Bible his mother had given him and that he had left lying all that time. The sisters encouraged him. And there was a girl he had gotten to know during his training. He had written her a letter in which he confessed everything. A comrade mailed it by accident. She did not drop him. She wrote back, and she sent along a schedule for studying the Bible.

A Bible that had traveled along unread for years became, in a hospital bed, the beginning of everything. His mother, who had given him the book, did not live to see it.

Years later he went back to Indonesia. There he apologized for what the Dutch army had done.

A January night in 1950

Back in Sint Pancras he at first still mocked faith. Then a song stuck in his head, about God's people who were to be set free, and a hunger rose in him that he did not know. He went to church as often as he could: to every church and every meeting. His family grew worried.

At the beginning of 1950 he gave his life to God. It was a stormy January night and he lay in bed. Sleet beat against the house. He

prayed a short prayer: Lord, if You show me the way, I will follow You.

I find that prayer beautiful for what is missing from it. There is no promise to become great, and no plan. Only a man with a broken ankle who says he wants to follow if God shows the way. The rest of his life was about that one condition.

Chocolate and a deal about school fees

After his conversion Anne went to work at the Ringers chocolate factory in Alkmaar. There he met Corry van Dam again, a young woman who had caught his eye earlier at a tent meeting. She worked at the factory in the office that kept track of working hours.

At that factory he learned something about listening. A woman worked there who in his book is called Geertje, loud and foul-mouthed. One day when she was carrying on badly, he felt the Lord give him something he would never have thought of himself. He told her to keep her mouth shut, and to be ready on Saturday for the bus to a revival meeting. She was silent. And she got on.

After the meeting he took her home on his motorcycle. He planned to talk with her about Jesus. Again he felt a prompting: talk about something else. He did. Geertje lay awake all night. If even he did not bring it up, she thought, she surely had gone too far to be forgiven. She cried and prayed for salvation. Everyone was amazed at the change in her.

Not long after, he prayed beside a canal and gave himself to God without conditions. His ankle, he tells, began to heal. Against the doctors' prediction he walked again without a cane.

He heard of a mission school in Glasgow, of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, WEC for short. The school wrote back that there

was no room yet. He was sure that God wanted him there, and went anyway. In May 1953 he began the training. He stayed about two years and learned English there.

In Glasgow he made a deal with God. If he were even one day late with the school fees, he would go back to the factory. Asking for money or hinting for it he would not do. He called it the Royal Way. For two years the money arrived exactly on time, every time from a corner where he did not expect it.

An officer of the Salvation Army taught the students that in a crowd of a thousand people the Spirit prepares the heart of one. Anne drew his own lesson from it. From then on he wanted to look for that one, and let the Spirit show him who it was.

And there was a world map hanging in the school. He saw how many countries were communist. From those countries no missionaries ever came to visit, he noticed.

Warsaw, July 1955

Back in his village his eye fell on an advertisement. Students could go to the Fifth World Festival of Youth in Warsaw, a large event of communist young people from all over the world. He signed up and was allowed to go, with a Dutch group. On July 15, 1955, he passed through the Iron Curtain for the first time. In his suitcase was Christian literature, in various languages.

He did not stick to the official program. He looked up churches and spoke in a Baptist congregation in Warsaw. A Christian bookseller told him that there were almost no Bibles left to be had in the Soviet Union.

On his last morning he watched the marching young people and read in the Bible. A verse from Revelation struck him like an as-

signment: *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die* (Revelation 3:2). He read it as a calling for the churches behind the Iron Curtain, cut off from the rest of the world. How one person could change anything there, he did not see.

That same year he went to Czechoslovakia. In Prague he left the official group behind and preached to Christians. He saw there how the government kept the church small: people were working on a Bible dictionary in a country where almost no Bible could be had. Young Christians gave him a silver pin, a cup, the sign of suffering. After that he was kept out of the country for a time.

After the Hungarian uprising of 1956 he worked in refugee camps. He gave Bible lessons there to people from Hungary, East Germany and Yugoslavia. After one of those lessons an old man said he wished he had known this years earlier, at home, in Yugoslavia.

Still in the 1950s he began in the Netherlands a work that was first called De Akker is de Wereld (The Field Is the World), and also Kruistochten (Crusades). A prayer group in Amersfoort carried him. Later the work was given the name Open Doors. That name came from Johannesburg, where a minister had started a support point with it.

"Make seeing eyes blind"

One thing was still missing: a car. A couple who had long supported his family gave him theirs. It was an almost new blue Volkswagen. Later that Beetle would become the best-known symbol of Open Doors.

So in 1957 he came to the border where this chapter began, with Bibles and portions of Scripture among his luggage. The prayer he prayed there has stayed attached to his name. He prayed it after-

ward at border after border, and it became the prayer of a whole movement.

You can dismiss a story like that as luck, or as a tired customs officer. Anne saw it differently. For him it was simple: he had asked for something and God had given it. The prayer is not as strange as it sounds, either. In the second book of Kings the prophet Elisha prays that God will strike the soldiers of the king of Syria with blindness, and it happens (2 Kings 6:18).

In seven weeks he held more than eighty meetings in Yugoslavia. The roads were bad and the dust ate at the engine. Every morning he prayed with his travel companion that the car would keep going, because there was no money or time for a garage. He mentioned that somewhere in a meeting. Soon after, a truck driver stopped him on a mountain road. The man was a mechanic, he had heard of that prayer and wanted to see the engine. He looked for a long time. This engine could not possibly run, he said then. He asked if he could clean it. It hurt him to see a miracle being abused, he said. That night, while Anne preached, he took the engine apart and changed the oil.

In a church in Belgrade Anne asked who had a Bible of their own. Seven people raised their hands. From that moment he wanted to bring Bibles, as many as he could.

In the years after, he went further east. In Bulgaria he met an old believer who was retyping missing books of the Bible for churches that had nothing. When Anne unpacked his boxes, the man cried. In Hungary, after a series of meetings, he was summoned to the secret police. Seven Christians prayed that night. The next morning the official who wanted to take him on was sick, and his replacement let him go.

At the Romanian border stood a line of cars. It was agonizingly slow. Everything had to come out. At the fourth car the hubcaps came off, the seats came out and the engine was taken apart. What should he do now, Anne prayed. Then he decided to take a few Bibles out of their hiding place and lay them out in the open beside him. Hiding had no point here. It had to come from God.

He drove forward and handed over his papers. He wanted to get out, but the border guard's knee was against the door. The man looked in the passport and waved him through. It had taken a few seconds.

In Moscow, later, he and a Dutch traveling companion looked for someone to whom they could entrust their Bibles. They prayed that God would point him out. Each from a different spot in the crowd, they felt drawn to the same man: thin, balding. He turned out to be a pastor from Siberia, from a congregation of a hundred and fifty people without a single Bible. He had traveled two thousand miles. In a dream he had been told that he would find a Bible in Moscow.

Corry

Anne and Corry married on June 27, 1958. He had asked her to marry him just before he left for Hungary. Then she would know what it meant to live with him: saying goodbye, waiting, not knowing when he would be back.

They had five children. The first, a son, was born in 1959.

The family lived in Sint Pancras. Jan Zwart described in 2024 how as a boy he went there with his father for lunch. His parents had a house church in Zaandam, on Tuesday evenings, with ten rented folding chairs. They were among the first three couples who supported Anne with prayer and money. For the boy he was "Uncle Anne." After a trip he sat with his eyes closed in Father Zwart's arm-

chair and told how God had kept him and his Bibles. The blue Beetle would be standing in front of the house, covered in mud. Above the boy's bed a slip of paper was hung: pray for Albania.

In Sint Pancras you went around the back. Jan found Uncle Anne on his knees in the vegetable garden. Corry was busy in the kitchen with the children. The furniture was old, the rug worn, the dining table bare wood. Corry told that someone had come that morning to bring food, with cookies. They were grateful for it. At lunch the talk was of the Bibles that had just been taken to Czechoslovakia. In the garden a pile of seed potatoes still lay waiting. Two days later Anne would leave again for Eastern Europe.

Anne was often away. Before a dangerous trip they prayed together, and Anne laid his hands on Corry. She always let him go, he said later, but it was not always without a struggle. About her own life the sources say little. When she died, Open Doors wrote that she had served the Lord faithfully. They were married for fifty-nine years.

A book that closed the borders

The work grew. Anne traveled to Cuba, Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet Union. He wanted Russian Bibles printed in pocket size, which were easier to hide. Corry and he considered selling their house for it. Then the Netherlands Bible Society offered to pay half. In 1964 the little Bibles came, and the team by then numbered twelve people. In 1965 he went to China for the first time. People politely handed back the Bibles he offered.

In 1967 *God's Smuggler* appeared, written with the American authors John and Elizabeth Sherrill. The book became a worldwide success: more than ten million copies, in at least thirty-five languages.

In Dutch it did not appear for a long time. For safety reasons it had been agreed that Open Doors would publish it in his own language only after his death. In 2023 it came out, as *Gods smokkelaar*.

The success had a price. Traveling to communist countries became harder after the book. Everyone now knew who Brother Andrew was. When the Iron Curtain had fallen, he got hold of the East German secret service's reports on him: more than a hundred and fifty pages. It amazed him how much they had known. Stop him they had not been able to do.

He became a man who sent others. His coworkers traveled in pairs, like couples on a honeymoon, and sought out the remote border posts. Open Doors organized conferences in Asia and Africa and looked up churches that were under pressure. In 1977 he visited the church in Uganda, during the purges of Idi Amin. Afterward he heard that his name was on a list of people to be arrested and killed. A copy of that list was still lying somewhere in his office, he said.

The name Open Doors meant something simple to him. Every door was open, he said, as long as you were willing to go. He did not want to be called a stuntman.

Two hours on a Chinese beach

The greatest venture began with a request from China itself. The husband of a Chinese woman, known as Mama Kwang, was in prison for his faith, and she was now leading his house churches. Open Doors had already carried tens of thousands of New Testaments into the country in suitcases. She asked for more: they needed a million, and they wanted whole Bibles.

Anne devised the plan together with Ed Neteland, vice president of Open Doors. It was given the name Project Pearl. The Chinese

Bibles were printed in America and packed into 232 waterproof packages of about a ton each, which could float. An international crew of twenty would bring them, led by someone known only as Brother David. Many of them had never been at sea before. Before departure everyone was allowed to withdraw. No one did.

On the evening of June 18, 1981, a tugboat with a large barge lay off the coast of China, near the city of Shantou. Around a quarter to eight, Chinese patrol boats came into view. One headed straight for them. The crew prayed. The boat sailed past without raising the alarm.

Around nine o'clock the lights went out. The barge glided at high tide into a small bay. From the beach came the signal: three flashes of a flashlight. Chinese Christians were waiting there, more than two thousand according to the crew. Men waded in up to their necks to bring in the packages. They cut them open, and in a human chain the boxes went up the beach, as far as the trees. There bicycles and cars stood ready.

After a good two hours everything was unloaded. Around half past one at night the barge was back in international waters. On board they told each other what they had seen. Someone had heard about a woman who had come to this beach every day for two years, to pray that God would send His Word to the church in China.

The man who had helped devise it probably was not on that barge that night. He was fifty-three and led the organization he had started years earlier with a suitcase full of booklets.

It did not end without trouble. Fishermen reported the operation. Soldiers came, and part of the Bibles was burned or thrown into the water. A downpour put out the fire, Open Doors tells, and the current drove the boxes into the next bay. Fishermen picked them up, dried the Bibles and sold them on. Open Doors estimated that up

to eighty percent reached Chinese Christians. A representative of the official China Christian Council felt, on the contrary, that such actions made the faith look more suspect in the eyes of the government.

One night, a million Bibles, and people wading into the water to bring them in.

At home with the enemy

When the Iron Curtain fell, Anne shifted his attention. In the Islamic world he saw the great new question for freedom of religion. Already in the 1970s and 1980s he had been regularly in Lebanon, in the middle of the civil war, speaking there with leaders of all kinds of groups.

In 1992 Israel expelled more than four hundred Hamas members from the country, to a mountainside in southern Lebanon. Anne went to them, with tents, food and medicine. Around 1997 the Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin received him at his home. Yasser Arafat gave him permission for a Christian bookstore in Gaza. At the Islamic University he spoke about the Christian faith.

Once he rode with two Palestinian Christians in a taxi to Hebron while a curfew was in force. They had Bibles with them and Arabic copies of his book. More than a hundred Hamas supporters crowded around them. Their leader calmed the crowd. This man, he said, had helped them when they were in need. Anne handed out the books and spoke openly about the cross.

Many Christians did not understand that. He explained it himself: the best way to help Israel was to lead her enemies to Jesus. Terrorists did not exist for him. There were only people who needed Jesus. To American Christians he asked whether they had ever prayed for

Osama bin Laden. He did not seek political correctness. He sought people.

It is perhaps the hardest thing Jesus asks of His followers: *Love your enemies, bless those who curse you* (Matthew 5:44). Many Christians read those words with approval. Anne took them to Gaza. Is there someone you have never prayed for, because he stands on the wrong side?

About this work he wrote books, such as *Light Force* in 2004 and *Secret Believers* in 2007, both with Al Janssen. The latter was about Muslims who quietly came to believe in Jesus. At about ninety years of age he still traveled to Pakistan, hoping to speak with leaders of the Taliban.

In those years recognition came too. Queen Beatrix gave him a royal decoration. In 1997 he received an international prize for his work for religious freedom. He himself kept seeing himself as an ordinary man. What he did, he said, anyone could do.

Harderwijk, September 27, 2022

On January 23, 2018, Corry died. At the end of his life Anne lived in Harderwijk, not far from the Dutch office of Open Doors in Ermelo.

Someone once asked him whether he had regrets. If he could live his life over, he said, he would be a good deal more radical.

On Tuesday, September 27, 2022, he died at home in Harderwijk, ninety-four years old. It was shortly after two in the afternoon. He left five children and eleven grandchildren. Dan Ole Shani, the director of Open Doors International, said at his death that he had lived for Christ and died in Christ.

The NOS carried the news. Newspapers in Europe, America and Australia wrote obituaries. His own book had not yet appeared in his own language.

The blue Beetle

When Anne began, there was a suitcase with booklets. At his death Open Doors was working in more than sixty countries, with about a thousand staff. Every year the organization publishes a list of the countries where Christians are persecuted most severely.

Much of what you read in this chapter we know only from him. That goes with him. He worked in countries where nobody wrote anything down and where reports were dangerous. What we have from him is often his own word. And that word began with a short prayer on a January night: if You show the way, I will follow.

Perhaps you are standing before a border somewhere. Not a barrier with a guardhouse, but something you do not dare to get past. Anne van der Bijl began without a plan and without money. He had a broken ankle, a Bible from his mother and later a blue car.

Jan Zwart still remembered that car when he wrote his book in 2024. A blue Volkswagen Beetle in front of a house in Zaandam, under the mud of the last trip.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on May 11, 1928, in Sint Pancras; father a blacksmith, mother sick; military service in the Dutch East Indies from 1946 and involvement in the killing of villagers (acknowledged by himself and widely reported); ankle injury in 1949 and reading his mother's Bible during recovery; conversion in 1950; WEC training in Glasgow from 1953; the World Festival of Youth in Warsaw in July 1955 and the Bible shortage he heard

about there; the trip with the blue Volkswagen to Yugoslavia in 1957; marriage to Corry in 1958, five children; *God's Smuggler* (1967) with John and Elizabeth Sherrill; Project Pearl on June 18, 1981, at Shantou with about a million Bibles and a crew of twenty; contacts with Hamas, Yassin and Arafat; the death of Corry on January 23, 2018; his own death on September 27, 2022, at home in Harderwijk.

Only from own testimony (*God's Smuggler*, 1967, written with John and Elizabeth Sherrill; in Dutch *Gods smokkelaar*, 2023): his childhood memories (Bas, the organ, the pranks, his mother's hospitality); the death of Bas in 1939; the hiding in ditches, the tulip bulbs and the bread at the liberation; the young mother and her baby in the Indies and the straw hat; the sisters in the hospital, the letter and the girl with the study schedule; the details of his conversion (the song, the January night, the sleet, the prayer); the meeting with Corry at Ringers and her maiden name Van Dam; the story of Geertje; the prayer beside the canal and the healing of his ankle; the deal about the school fees and the Royal Way; the advertisement and Revelation 3:2 on the last morning in Warsaw; the pin from Prague; the origin of the Beetle; the prayer and the conversation with the border guards in Yugoslavia; the mechanic; the eighty meetings and the seven Bibles in Belgrade; the old believer in Bulgaria; the secret police in Hungary; the Romanian border; the pastor from Siberia; the exact wedding date and the birth year of his first son; the pocket Bibles and the team of twelve; the first trip to China. Nobody else was there, and the communist border services left no report of it that I have been able to find. I have used the book through the published excerpt of the Dutch edition and through summaries and reviews (see the sources). What is said has been retold from them, not translated word for word. In the English edition his village is called Witte and some people have a different name; Geertje is the name from the book.

From his own organization or from one source: that he left school after sixth grade, his apology in Indonesia, the world map in Glasgow, the Stasi file, the list of Amin, the conversations in Lebanon and the name Open Doors from Johannesburg (Open Doors); the time of death (Open Doors Philippines); that Open Doors would publish the Dutch edition only after his death (publisher Gideon); that traveling became harder after the book (NOS); the figures on print run and languages (Open Doors and various newspapers); the conversion prayer, the lesson of the Salvation Army officer, the traveling couples, Bin Laden and his words about regret (Christianity Today); the taxi ride to Hebron and his statement about Israel (Christianity Today, on the Middle East); the lunch in Sint Pancras, the house church in Zaandam and his words about Corry (Jan Zwart, 2024, an independent witness); the refugee camps (Hungarian Review, and an American retelling of his book); his statement that anyone could do what he did (quoted by the Cato Institute); the sentence about his homecoming from the Indies (Vatican News); the number of countries and staff of Open Doors (own figures). The border prayer is quoted as Open Doors in South Africa still quotes it. Quotations from English-language sources I translated myself.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one version or left out the year):

- *The German invasion.* His book has the invasion fall on his twelfth birthday, May 10, 1940. His birth date is May 11.
- *Founding of his first foundation.* Open Doors keeps 1955, the year of Warsaw; the NOS gave 1957.
- *How long he was kept out of Czechoslovakia.* One source gives five years.
- *The Beetle and Moscow.* Some reference works have him driving the Beetle to Moscow already in 1956 or 1957.

- *Project Pearl, his role.* According to the magazine Mental Floss he devised it with Ed Neteland and was not on board; The Tablet writes that he led it. A British account names the then Asia director of Open Doors as the man who dared to go through with it.
- *Project Pearl, the numbers.* On the beach stood more than two thousand people (the crew, via Open Doors), "thousands," or ten thousand (Wikipedia). The weight of the cargo is given as 232 tons or 139 tons. How many Bibles finally arrived is an estimate by Open Doors. The timeline of the night is from Open Doors Australia. Chinese eyewitnesses later said that the soldiers only came after hours.
- *The deported Hamas members.* Christianity Today gives 1992, Open Doors 1993.
- *The royal decoration.* The NOS gives 1994 and the rank of officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau; Open Doors gives 1993 and speaks of knight.
- *The resistance.* A few obituaries write that as a boy he belonged to the resistance. He himself told only about the ditches.

Interpretation: whether God really made the border guards blind is a question of faith. I believe it along with him. Historians point out that most stories about Bible smuggling come from the memoirs of the smugglers themselves and that independent studies are scarce. Bible societies and mission organizations in those years sometimes considered smuggling dangerous for the Christians on the spot.

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Jan Zijlstra: the butcher's son who prayed for the sick

On Sunday, March 4, 2007, Janneke Vlot from Bleskensgraaf went to a healing service of De Levensstroom (The Stream of Life), a church in Leiderdorp. She brought a pair of new boots. Whoever goes to pray for a miracle, she felt, should allow for the possibility that it happens.

She had by then been sick for almost eighteen years. In 1989 she had fallen in her kitchen. It seemed no more than a bruise. It became post-traumatic dystrophy, a condition that hurt her body and made her life small. At the Erasmus MC in Rotterdam she had been told there was no hope of recovery. Her right leg was red and swollen, the skin sometimes split, and a breath of wind was enough to cause pain. She took morphine. In the last years she lay in bed most of the time.

That evening the evangelist Jan Zijlstra prayed for the sick. During the prayer she stood up.

The next morning, very early, she phoned her family doctor. Dick Kruijthoff had known her for years. Shortly before, he had still sus-

pected thrombosis in that leg. Now she told him that the day before she had been healed in a prayer service, and that she had stopped all her medication. That afternoon he visited her. The swelling and the discoloration were gone. She suffered nothing from suddenly stopping heavy medication. Later the Erasmus MC did new tests with video thermography, a measurement of heat in the body. No abnormality was found anymore.

Ten years later Janneke and her husband Teus still talked about it in the local newspaper. She had stayed well. Every morning when she got up she thought of it. "The miracle has only become more beautiful and more precious," she said.

The man who prayed for her had by then been preaching for fifty years about a God who heals. At his death the NOS and the Reformatorisch Dagblad (a conservative Reformed daily newspaper) wrote that he was best known for his services of healing prayer. Hundreds of thousands of people have attended those services, says his foundation. Others looked at them with suspicion. He kept telling about Jesus until he was eighty-two.

It began in a butcher shop in Hillegom.

The fourth child of ten

Jan Piet Hessel Zijlstra was born on September 20, 1938, in the home above his parents' butcher shop on the Meerstraat in Hillegom. He was the fourth of ten children. His father, Otte Hessel Zijlstra, and his mother, Maria Zijlstra-Bakker, had come in 1931 from Medemblik to the Bollenstreek (the bulb-growing region).

It is told that his great-grandfather, an evangelist in Boelenslaan in Friesland, took the baby in his arms and spoke a word over him. This boy would bring many people in the Netherlands to Jesus, and

miracles would happen. Jan later saw his life as the fulfillment of that word.

It was a Dutch Reformed family. Jan went to the Julianaschool, learned to swim in the old pool on the Mockkade and played soccer at SIZO: an ordinary boy from a village among the bulb fields. During the war he caught diphtheria, a disease that killed children in those years. He survived. God had healed him, he said later.

In those war years the butcher shop was more than a store. In the family it is told that the big house on the Meerstraat hid people in hiding, and that Father Otte helped people in need with food.

After the war the business went well. The butcher shop was known for its ground meat, which customers came for from outside the village. Jan helped in the shop and boned the meat. With the cargo bike he delivered orders, in all weather, as far as De Zilk and along the Leidsevaart. In Hillegom they still remember that he always had an extra piece of meat with him. That was for the watchdogs on the farms.

A question about heaven

On May 25, 1956, Jan was seventeen. That day a question came to him that would not let go: was he actually already on his way to heaven? He did not know the answer. That same evening he gave his heart to Jesus. He also stopped smoking right away, he added.

A few months later, on September 9, he met a girl from Sassenheim. Her name was Herma van der Laan. That same year they were both baptized. She would become his wife.

Around that time he also came into contact with the Pentecostal church of Johan Maasbach, in those years one of the first evangelists

in the Netherlands to pray openly for the sick. Jan would work with him for more than thirty years.

A butcher for God?

In Hillegom a lovely story goes around about what happened in him next. Jan got a great desire to know the Bible. He read how Jesus called fishermen. He read about shepherds and farmers. And he wondered whether God might also want to employ a butcher. He did not take over his father's business.

He himself kept the moment of his calling exactly. On November 24, 1957, he was praying in his room. Then he heard in his heart the voice of the Lord: I call you to work for Me. He was to dedicate his life to Him. The words of his great-grandfather would be fulfilled, and God Himself would take care of him.

Jan Zijlstra never doubted Who had spoken there. He was nineteen. He took the word and began. Still in 1957 he set out with Herma as an evangelist. At his death the NOS wrote that he had proclaimed the gospel for sixty-four years.

In the name of Jesus

From that same year, 1957, comes the most astonishing story of his life. An epidemic was sweeping through Europe, the Asian flu, and Father Otte fell sick. He died of it, Jan told.

Jan and his mother called on God. In that first year he had learned that faith can move mountains, and now he stood at the bed of his own father. The presence of God filled the room. Jan took his father by the shoulders and called him back, in the name of Jesus.

Otte Zijlstra opened his eyes. And he began to praise God.

That is how Jan told it all his life, and that is how it stands in the magazine his foundation published after his death. On August 18, 1958, Jan and his parents told it together in a television program of the NCRV (a Dutch Christian broadcaster). Father was there himself.

You may be startled by this story. I leave it as he gave it, as the testimony of a nineteen-year-old who did what he had read in the Bible.

Brussels, Gouda and the baptism in the Spirit

On September 19, 1958, Jan began at a Bible institute in Brussels. He did not stay long. The school taught that miracles belonged to the past and that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was not from God. Jan laid that beside the Bible, got into discussions and did not feel at home. He believed that the power from the book of Acts was still there. He had seen it at home.

On April 25, 1959, he settled in Gouda, the city where Johan Maasbach had also begun his work. He worked there for the Volle Evangelie Zending (Full Gospel Mission): on the street, among young people, with film evenings and evangelistic services in Gouda and Leiden. In services of the evangelist Cornelius Eijlander, Jan and Herma received the baptism in the Spirit, as Pentecostal believers call it.

On May 15, 1961, Jan and Herma married in Sassenheim. They had three children: André, Sharon-Rose and Richard. Herma would stand beside him for the rest of his life, in church and on the platform. Sixty years later, in May 2021, they celebrated their wedding anniversary.

The Bethlehemskerk in Leiden

From 1960 Jan traveled as an evangelist and was also the pastor of a congregation. In 1967 that congregation ended up in Leiden, on the Zijlsingel. It belonged to the Johan Maasbach Wereldzending (World Mission) and later got a different building, the Bethlehemskerk on the Lammermarkt. Jan was shepherd and pastor there, and he became known as Maasbach's right hand.

In those years the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands was still small, and it was often dismissed as a sect. Whoever stood in a small hall in those days and prayed aloud for the sick was met with ridicule. Jan did it, year after year.

From his Leiden time his foundation still keeps a story. A brother from Middelburg was taken to the hospital. On arrival they established that he had died. Jan called him back in the name of Jesus, as he had done with his father, and the man opened his eyes.

Around the turn of the year 1991 to 1992 something changed. In the meetings, healings took place such as he had not seen before, he told. In February 1992 the renewal services in Leiden were renamed healing services. The halls filled up.

Sunday, August 16, 1992

Half a year later came the break. On Sunday, August 16, 1992, Johan Maasbach stood unannounced in the Bethlehemskerk. That summer a partnership of more than thirty years ended.

It is a painful moment in the lives of two men who both did a great deal for the gospel in the Netherlands. I will not pass judgment on it. Whoever works side by side for thirty years and then parts carries that along, and that was true for both.

Jan and Herma started over. Still in 1992 they founded De Levensstroom Gemeente in Leiderdorp. The first services were in a hall on the Touwbaan, on the business park De Baanderij. There was no church tower and no organ. There were people who came because they were sick, or because someone who had been sick had brought them.

"Go to Suriname"

In the spring of 1993 Jan heard in his inner being an assignment of three words. He had to go to Suriname. The country was in an economic crisis and poverty was great. He went, and held a large campaign there. God worked there with mighty miracles and signs, his foundation tells.

In the same way he later spoke about France. Through his mother he had French blood: his great-great-grandparents were Huguenots who had fled from Sedan to the Netherlands. Now God was sending him back, he said, to the region around Carcassonne. Local officials and media tried to stop his coming. The campaign took place, and a church was founded.

That is how it worked with him. He heard a short assignment, he went, and afterward he told what God had done. In Indonesia thousands of people came to the campaigns, in several cities. The blind saw, the deaf heard and the lame walked, writes his foundation. He preached in Belgium. In Curaçao, Bonaire, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Nepal he gave trainings. All together it involved about twenty countries.

In the Netherlands too he traveled around. The healing services on Sunday evening grew into large campaigns in sports halls throughout the country. A permanent team traveled along that prayed and

received people afterward. And there was always that long line. Jan laid hands himself on everyone who came forward.

A church for fifteen hundred people

De Levensstroom grew. In October 2006 the congregation moved into a new building on the Elisabethhof in Leiderdorp, with about fifteen hundred seats. For a Pentecostal church in the Netherlands that was large.

In 2007 television broadcast several services from the church. That same year the program Netwerk made a report on the healings, which also showed people who did not get better, or only for a while. Here lies the hardest side of this work, and Jan knew it. In an interview with the Reformatorisch Dagblad in 2013 he said that sickness can return. The cause he then sought in unbelief or in sin that had not been confessed. Many Christians found that too harsh, and within the evangelical world too there were questions. How do you go on when you are not healed and you hear that it is your fault?

I think that question may be asked honestly, also in a book about his life. Jan himself held that healing belongs to the gospel. He pointed to Isaiah, who writes about the suffering Servant: *The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5). Honor he did not want for himself. Whoever thanked him, he pointed back to God. The most important thing, he said, was that someone was saved and that Christ was made great. A healed body was to him a sign of the Kingdom. It was never the goal.

In the Bible there is another story too. Paul prayed three times that God would take a thorn in his flesh away. The answer was: *My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness* (2

Corinthians 12:9). That too belongs to the gospel, next to the stories of healing.

And then, on a Sunday evening in March, Janneke Vlot stood up.

What the Alblasserwaard saw

A local newspaper wrote about it. Then the national newspapers followed, and within a few weeks the whole Netherlands knew the story. It came at a moment when the discussion about healing prayer was fierce. The Nederlands Dagblad, the Reformatorisch Dagblad and Terdege wrote about it. The hospital confirmed the recovery to the Algemeen Dagblad. In 2010 Terdege published another long article.

Remarkable was that her own family doctor openly told what he had seen. He had her file, with all the results from before and after that Sunday. Janneke and Teus, members of the Dutch Reformed congregation of Bleskensgraaf, themselves organized a thanksgiving service in Gorinchem. It was attended by a great crowd. A booklet also appeared under Jan's name about her healing.

Not everyone was glad. Janneke had to hear unbelief and reproaches, also from Christians. Some doctors saw in most healings at such services complaints that can change from within, without anything supernatural happening. The Vereniging tegen de Kwakzalverij (the Society Against Quackery) turned against his services.

One spectator was there that evening for the first time. The scholar of religion Miranda Klaver was researching the Pentecostal movement and visited a service of Zijlstra. It turned out to be the evening of Janneke Vlot. She still wonders how that could be, she said at his death, that she as a researcher was there just then. In her view, after

this healing there was far more room in ordinary churches to pray for the sick.

Perhaps there lies his greatest legacy. In the 1950s almost no one did it. Half a century later, prayer for the sick was offered in many congregations in the Netherlands, often without a platform or a microphone.

Letting go

In February 2010 Jan handed the pastorate of De Levensstroom over to Arno van der Knaap. He had come to faith in 1998, had worked for the congregation since 2001 and was seen as Jan's right hand, his spiritual son. Jan himself became overseer.

It went wrong. Jan wanted more room for the healing services. In July 2011 the congregation split. Van der Knaap started a new congregation in Warmond, and about half of the people went with him.

Then came a conflict with the board. In May 2013 the court in Den Haag ruled that the board had rightly removed him as apostolic overseer. He lost the building he had helped to build. He himself spoke of a coup. Later the church continued under the name Power City Church.

They are not pleasant years to read about. They were in the newspaper, so they belong in this chapter. The story just does not end here.

Starting over at seventy-five

Jan turned seventy-five that year. Many people would have left it at that. With Herma he founded Stichting Wings of Healing in Warmond. The first healing service was held in a party center, with about two hundred fifty people. After that there were two healing services every month and a service with Bible teaching. More than

five hundred fifty people took the training he gave. The magazine of the foundation he wrote and edited himself, almost to the end.

In his life he also wrote an autobiography, *Gods plan met mijn leven* (God's Plan with My Life), and about fifteen other books. Titles such as *De God van wonderen* (The God of Wonders), *Twijfel, hoe deze te overwinnen* (Doubt, How to Overcome It) and *Laat uw verleden niet over uw heden heersen* (Do Not Let Your Past Rule Your Present) show what occupied him.

That last title he still had to make true himself.

He had forgiven Arno van der Knaap right away, he said. He did not walk around with bitterness. But forgiving you can do alone, and for reconciliation it takes two. Around 2017 a card dropped on the doormat. Van der Knaap sent a greeting, and thanks for what Jan had meant to him. About six weeks later they sat together and the pain came onto the table. After that it stayed quiet for three more years.

In the fall of 2020 Van der Knaap felt a longing to invite his old pastor to his own congregation. At the beginning of October they spoke again. There was crying and there was laughter, he told, and they decided to leave the past behind. The Christian platform Revive spoke with both of them. "I want to be able to look everyone straight in the eye," said Jan. He thought of the prodigal son. When he came home, there was a feast.

Shortly after, Jan, eighty-two years old, preached in the congregation of his former successor. Herma went along, and they were to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Both men spoke of great joy.

People without breaks do not exist. There are people who, at the end of their lives, take the trouble to mend them. Jesus called such

people blessed: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God* (Matthew 5:9).

Is there someone to whom you still ought to drop a card on the doormat?

The last year

On February 28, 2021, Armand and Natalie Lefeu were blessed in as pastors of Wings of Healing. This time Jan arranged his succession himself, and in time. In May he and Herma celebrated sixty years of marriage.

That spring he asked his congregation to keep a date free: Sunday morning, September 12. He would have an important message then.

At the beginning of September he was admitted to the hospital with Covid. On Thursday, September 9, 2021, he died, eighty-two years old, three days before that Sunday. His family was around him. His son held his hand. He wrote later that in those last moments his father saw angels forming a guard of honor for him, and Jesus leading him in.

The notes for the sermon of September 12 were found. They were about Lot's wife, the woman who looked back.

On September 15 there was a memorial service in Barneveld, at the congregation De Doorbrekers (The Breakthroughs), broadcast over the internet. On his stone it says that he went for the best.

After his death Wings of Healing got an overseer from Curaçao, Raimy Juliet, with his wife Arlette. Armand Lefeu leads the healing services.

A butcher who saw it

Jan Zijlstra was not a learned theologian. He was an evangelist who believed that what stands in the Bible is true today as well. By his own account he told people what they needed to hear, even when they wanted to hear something else. That made him loved, and that made him controversial.

His services also drew many Roman Catholics. So he regularly read aloud from the Willibrord translation, the Bible they knew. He wanted people to understand it.

Perhaps you struggle with healing services. Perhaps you once went forward yourself and came back the way you went. Then you may keep that question. Jan too did not have an answer to everything. But look also at what he did with the short sentence he heard in prayer in 1957. He was nineteen. He had a trade, a business waiting for him and a village where everyone knew him. He left it and went.

Sixty-four years later he died, and the newspaper said that he had proclaimed Jesus to the end.

In Hillegom they wrote it in their own way. The butcher boy with the cargo bike had finished his round.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): birth on September 20, 1938, in Hillegom; Dutch Reformed family; conversion in 1956; start as an evangelist in 1957 with Herma van der Laan; years of cooperation with Johan Maasbach and the break in 1992; founding of De Levensstroom in Leiderdorp (1992); new church building in 2006; the recovery of Janneke Vlot in 2007 and the statement of her family doctor; succession in 2010, split in 2011, court case in 2013; Wings of Healing (2013); reconciliation with Van der Knaap

(2020); death on September 9, 2021, after a hospital admission with Covid.

Only from own testimony or his foundation (mainly the in memoriam magazine of Wings of Healing, December 2021): the prophetic word of his great-grandfather; the healing from diphtheria; the exact date and details of his conversion and the quitting of smoking; the meeting with Herma on September 9, 1956, and their baptism; the calling voice on November 24, 1957, and what was promised with it; the period in Brussels and Gouda and the baptism in the Spirit with the evangelist Eijlander; the wedding date; the settling in Leiden in 1967; the brother from Middelburg; the healings around the turn of the year 1991-1992; the inner assignments for Suriname and France, the Huguenots in his ancestry and the opposition in Carcassonne; the campaigns in Indonesia and the trainings in other countries (years and numbers of visitors are mostly not known); the way of working with a permanent team and the prayer line; the figure of hundreds of thousands of visitors and of over 550 participants in the training; the blessing of his successors; the announced message of September 12 and the notes that were found; the last moments, as his son described them; the memorial service and the text on his stone; the overseer after his death. The conversion year 1956 also returns in a report of the television program Netwerk.

From Hillegom (in memoriam in the local newspaper, October 2021): school, swimming pool and soccer club; the cargo bike, the ground meat and the meat for the dogs; the question whether God could use a butcher; the people in hiding in his parental home and the food his father handed out. That last is family tradition; I have found no other sources for it.

About Janneke Vlot: the fall in 1989, the illness and the date of March 4, 2007, appear in an article by the EO; the new boots, the

reactions and her words ten years later in Het Kontakt (2017); the phone call, the visit of the family doctor, the tests at the Erasmus MC, the confirmation to the Algemeen Dagblad and the thanksgiving service in Gorinchem in Terdege (2010); the presence of Miranda Klaver on Groot Nieuws Radio (2021). The EO speaks of a path of suffering of seventeen years, the other sources of almost eighteen years.

Unconfirmed:

- *The raising of his father from the dead in 1957 and the NCRV broadcast of August 18, 1958.* This story comes from Jan himself and from his foundation. Outside that circle I have found no source for it: no medical report, no newspaper report and no footage of the broadcast. Perhaps these are still in an archive. Until they are found, this is a testimony that nobody else has been able to check. The same goes for the brother from Middelburg.
- *What exactly was said on August 16, 1992.* We know that mainly from a video that appeared on the internet in 2016, and from what others wrote about it.
- *Gouda and Maasbach.* Probably Jan's work for the Volle Evangelie Zending in Gouda belonged to Maasbach's network, but the source does not say so in so many words.

Interpretation: whether the recovery of Janneke Vlot and other healings were a miracle of God is a question of faith. Doctors could describe her recovery; whether it was a miracle, no scan can establish. For Janneke the answer was clear, and for the man who prayed for her too. I believe it along with them. Whether a voice heard in prayer comes from God, an outsider cannot establish either. Jan Zijlstra himself did not doubt it.

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16. Revive, 6 november 2020
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19. Herziene Statenvertaling, Jesaja 53:5
20. Herziene Statenvertaling, 2 Korinthe 12:9
21. Herziene Statenvertaling, Mattheüs 5:9

Afterword

Eight lives, from Zevenaar in 1804 to Warmond in 2021. A minister who had a well dug. A woman in an Amsterdam living room who was the first to speak in tongues. A music dealer who, after the death of his daughter, began to sing about the return of Jesus. Two sisters in Ravensbrück. A courier with a false name. A painter and his son. A smuggler with a blue Beetle. A butcher's son who prayed for the sick.

They differ enormously. Dutch Reformed, Reformed, Pentecostal, evangelical. They would have disagreed with one another about many things. What they share is that somewhere they heard a voice they recognized, and that they went.

I have tried to be honest about what we know and what we have only from them. That does not make their stories smaller. You can now check for yourself what you are building on. The sources are given with each chapter.

There are many more Dutch men and women of God about whom a chapter could be written. Maybe you know one from your own village or your own church, whose name is almost forgotten.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. (Hebrews 13:7)