True Story!

Heroes Close to Home

Ten people from the Netherlands who followed God

10 true stories

WIM KAMPHORST

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True Story! Heroes Close to Home

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The stories in this book are based on Wim Kamphorst's books for adults. The sources are listed there with each chapter.

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

For you

Do you know what the best thing is about the stories in this book? They all really happened.

Ten people from the Netherlands who followed God, even when it was hard. A woman who hid people behind her linen cupboard. A man who smuggled Bibles. A girl who became one of the most learned women in Europe.

Some stories are exciting. Some are sad. And some are a little bit funny too. But they are all true.

After each story there is a short part called **True story?** There you read what we know for sure, and what we only know because someone told it later themselves. Because that is important too: being honest about what you know.

Then come a few questions to talk about together, a verse from the Bible and sometimes a tip to go and see something for yourself.

Enjoy reading!

For parents and teachers

The stories are written for children of about 8 to 12 years old. You can read them aloud from about age 6. Each story takes about eight to ten minutes.

The stories come from Wim Kamphorst's books for adults. All the sources are listed there. Nothing has been made up: no conversations, no thoughts, no details that are not in a source. Hard subjects such as war, illness and death are told honestly, but without upsetting details. Feel free to read a story yourself first, so that you know what is coming.

Bible verses are from the New King James Version.

Anna Maria van Schurman: the student behind the curtain

A booth in the lecture hall

It is the seventeenth century, in Utrecht, a city in the middle of the Netherlands. The city has just been given a university. In a big hall, young men are listening to a professor. A professor is a teacher at a university.

But someone else is listening too. In the hall stands a kind of booth with a curtain in front of it. A woman is sitting inside. She can hear the professor. The boys in the hall cannot see her.

Her name is Anna Maria van Schurman. Utrecht University now calls her the first female student of the Netherlands. Maybe she was even the first in all of Europe.

Why was she sitting behind that curtain? And how did she get there? To find out, we go back to her first years.

By the stream

Anna Maria was born on November 5, 1607, in Cologne, a city in Germany. Her family came from Antwerp. They had left that city because they were Protestants. Anna Maria had three brothers. She was the only girl.

When she was very old, she wrote down something from her earliest years. She was not yet four. She was sitting by a stream with a servant girl, picking herbs. The girl asked her to say a question from the catechism by heart. A catechism is a little book with questions and answers about the faith.

The question was: what is your only comfort in life and in death? Anna Maria said the answer. The answer says that you do not belong to yourself, but to Jesus. At those words she was filled with joy, she wrote later. She felt very strongly how much Jesus loved her.

She never forgot that moment.

Latin from Father

In 1615 the family moved to Utrecht. Anna Maria lived there for most of her life.

Her father noticed that she learned very fast. He taught her himself. She learned Latin, the language of scholars. At eleven she was already reading a book by a Roman writer. She also learned Greek, French and German. She learned music, embroidery and drawing.

For a girl that was very unusual back then. Girls learned to read, to write and to run a household. The university was only for boys.

In 1623 her father died. Anna Maria never married.

A few years later she bought a house close to the Dom, the big church of Utrecht. She lived there for more than forty years.

Fourteen languages

Anna Maria became famous. She wrote poems in all kinds of languages. She made portraits, cut little figures out of paper and made engravings. An engraving is a picture you scratch into metal, so that you can print it.

Well-known men wrote her letters. The poet Jacob Cats, for example, and Constantijn Huygens. People gave her nicknames, such as the Star of Utrecht.

Around 1634 she got a new teacher: Gisbertus Voetius. He was a minister and lived next door to her. He taught her Hebrew, the language the Old Testament was written in. He also taught her theology. Theology is thinking about and studying God and the Bible.

She learned many more languages, such as Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopian. Someone who wrote a lot about her counted fourteen languages! How many languages do you know already?

A poem with a question

In 1636 Utrecht got a university. Voetius became a professor there. He asked Anna Maria to write a poem for the opening. She wrote a Latin poem of praise.

But she also put a question in it. The door of the new university was open to boys. Why not to girls?

The poem was printed and made her known all over Europe. And she was allowed to attend lectures. Only she had to sit in that booth, behind the curtain.

You could call that half a solution. But for Anna Maria it was a door, and she went through it.

A few years later she wrote a book about the question of whether women may study. Her answer was yes. Most of

all she wanted women to understand the Bible better. The book was translated into four other languages.

Everything sold

After her mother died, Anna Maria took care of two old aunts for many years. Because of that she had less time to study.

Her brother got to know a French minister, Jean de Labadie. Labadie dreamed of a church with only people who truly believed in Jesus. Anna Maria liked that. She did not want to belong with people who were Christians in name only.

In 1669 she made a big decision. She went to live with Labadie's small group, in Amsterdam. She had already sold her house, her books and her furniture. Almost everything she had, she gave to the group.

Many people did not understand it at all. The famous Star of Utrecht was suddenly living in a small group that many people thought was strange. The church in Utrecht wrote her a letter. They asked her to come back. She did not.

The best part

The group had to keep moving: to Germany, and after that to a place near Hamburg. There Anna Maria wrote a book

about her life. She told about the girl by the stream. And she explained why she had left everything behind.

In Dutch the book was called *Eucleria, of uitkiezing van het beste deel*, which means "Eucleria, or choosing the best part." That sounds a lot like what Jesus said about Mary, the sister of Martha. Martha was busy in the house. Mary sat with Jesus and listened.

What would you choose: being busy, or sitting still and listening?

In 1675 the group ended up in Friesland, a province in the north of the Netherlands, in the little village of Wieuwerd. They lived on an estate with farms around it. They shared everything they had. Anna Maria was almost seventy by then. She sat in a kind of wheelchair. But her hands stayed busy: she still painted tiny portraits.

Anna Maria van Schurman died in May 1678 in Wieuwerd. She was seventy years old. She had asked for a very simple grave herself. And so she was buried in the village churchyard.

Her story began by a stream, with a handful of herbs. A girl of almost four said out loud that she did not belong to herself. She held on to that her whole life.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Anna Maria van Schurman attended lectures behind a curtain, learned many languages and later joined Labadie. We only know the story by the stream because she wrote it down herself, more than sixty years later. The number of fourteen languages comes from one researcher. Whether she really thought of Mary and Martha when she chose the title of her book, she did not write; but the words are very much alike.

Talk about it

- Anna Maria was allowed to study, but only behind a curtain. What do you think of that?
- She sold all her things to live closer to God. What would you find hard to give away?

From the Bible

But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:42)

Go and see for yourself

In Utrecht, in the street called Achter de Dom, a stone in the front of a building reminds people of the house where she lived. In Museum Martena in Franeker hangs a

self-portrait she made in 1640. She is buried in the churchyard of Wieuwerd, in Friesland.

Ottho Heldring: the minister who had a well dug

Five hundred buckets

It is 1843, and in the middle of the Veluwe, a large area of woods and heath in the middle of the Netherlands, lies a hamlet out on the heath. A hamlet is a very small village, and this one is called Hoenderloo. The people there live in huts made of sods. Sods are pieces of heath ground, with the roots still in them.

There is no school and no church. There is not even a well. Anyone who needs water gets it from a rain barrel.

But today there is a celebration, because a well has been dug! A minister from the Betuwe, a river area further south, stands beside it and speaks to the people. He tells them the story from the Bible about a woman at a well.

Then the people draw water: within two hours they fill five hundred buckets. And the water in the well hardly goes down. Later the minister exclaimed what a supply of water that was.

That minister was Ottho Gerhard Heldring. How did he end up here?

Spade and axe

Ottho was born on May 17, 1804, in Zevenaar. That is in Gelderland, a province close to Germany. His father was a minister, and his mother also believed strongly in God. Ottho wrote later that she taught him to love the Bible.

He also said something else about his childhood later. As a child he had learned to love the lives of poor people. Exactly where that happened, we do not know. But remember it, because it says a lot about the rest of his life.

When he was sixteen, Ottho went to study in Utrecht. He wanted to become a minister, like his father, but it was not a happy time. He nearly lost his faith. He worked too hard and became tired and gloomy. By the end of his studies he was completely stuck.

Then he went to his grandfather in Germany for half a year, where he worked outdoors among the laborers. He worked with a spade, an axe and shears. And do you know what?

It made him feel better. He also learned how ordinary working people lived.

At his grandfather's, he read a German sentence somewhere. He never forgot it. In English it means: The desert shall become a field. A field is a piece of land where something grows.

A Christmas sermon

In 1827 Ottho became the minister in Hemmen, a little village in the Betuwe. He was only 22. The church was small, with only about 25 families. Still, he stayed there for forty years!

In his first year, at Christmas, he read a sermon by a German minister. Suddenly he saw something about himself. He wrote later that his own heart was not pure. He had been taught that God forgives people through faith. Now that became real for him.

There was no voice from heaven and no dream, just a young minister reading a sermon. Have you ever read something that suddenly seemed to be about you?

Gin and cholera

Ottho saw how poor many people in the Betuwe were. He started writing for ordinary people. He wrote stories for

farmers and a little book of stories that came out every year.

In 1838 he wrote a booklet with a strange title: De jenever erger dan de cholera, which means "Gin Worse than Cholera." Jenever is a strong Dutch gin. Cholera is a disease that many people died of back then. Ottho thought drink was even worse! He looked up figures from 118 villages and towns in Gelderland. That way he showed how much misery drink caused.

Ottho married Anna Deuffer Wiel and they had eight children.

On a trip across the Veluwe, Ottho discovered Hoenderloo. He wrote about the poor people there in his little book. People gave money, and that is how the well came. After that came a school, a home for boys who had no one, and a church. Do you remember that German sentence? The desert became a field. Hoenderloo is an ordinary village now.

A home for girls

In 1847 Ottho went to a women's prison in Gouda. What he saw there would not let him go. Many women and girls had gone down the wrong path. They wanted to start over, but where could they go?

Ottho had a plan: a home of their own outside the city, where they could live, work and learn. He traveled all over the country to raise money. Everywhere he preached about a passage from the Bible. In it God says that the shepherds must seek the lost sheep.

In the village of Zetten he bought an old brewery called Steenbeek. On January 1, 1848, Petronella Voûte came to lead it. She stayed there for almost thirty years.

Soon twenty girls were living there. They got up at five o'clock. They learned to sew, wash, cook and weave mats. After two years they could go and work in someone's house. Anyone who wanted to leave was always allowed to go.

Counting honestly

After ten years they counted how the girls were doing. There had been 277. For 128 it was going well: they were married or had work. But 49 girls had gone back to their old life.

They simply wrote that down, and nothing was made to look better. Other homes in Europe often said it almost always worked. Ottho was more honest. For him it was about one question. Was he seeking the one lost sheep, as God asked?

What do you think: has something failed if it does not work for everyone?

More homes came in Zetten. One home was for girls from twelve to sixteen. Ottho called it Talitha Kumi. That is what Jesus said to a girl who had died, and it means: Little girl, arise.

A church on a hill

In 1867 Ottho said goodbye to Hemmen and went to live in Zetten, among his homes.

In the Betuwe the water of the rivers could rise very high. Then the villages flooded, and that is why a hill was made in Zetten. On top of it came a church with a big attic. When the water was high, people could take shelter there. This Vluchtheuvelkerk, the Refuge Hill Church, opened in 1870.

Ottho was no saint, and he knew it himself. He wrote that he was sometimes proud and vain.

In 1876 he became ill. He traveled to a spa abroad to get better. A spa is a place where sick people went to rest. He died there on July 11, 1876, when he was 72. He was buried in Zetten, at the foot of the hill. Next to him lie his wife Anna and Petronella Voûte.

The work in Zetten went on for a very long time, until 2020.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Heldring was the minister in Hemmen for forty years, had the well in Hoenderloo dug, started the Steenbeek home in Zetten and had the Vluchtheuvelkerk built. About the Christmas sermon and his own heart, we only know what he wrote himself. The five hundred buckets and the figures about the 277 girls each come from one source. The sources give different years for when he discovered Hoenderloo.

Talk about it

- Ottho also wrote down what went wrong. Why do you think being honest is important?
- In Hoenderloo there was no water. What would you miss most without a tap?

From the Bible

"Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." (Mark 5:41)

Go and see for yourself

In Zetten the Vluchtheuvelkerk still stands on its hill. At the foot of it are the graves of Ottho Heldring, his wife

Anna and Petronella Voûte. Hoenderloo on the Veluwe is a village now.

Johannes de Heer: the organ man and the words on the wall

Words on a white wall

It is 1905, and in Wales, a part of Great Britain, something special is happening. Suddenly a great many people there are coming to believe in God. Everywhere there are church services and evenings where people tell what God is doing.

At one of those evenings sits a man from Rotterdam. He and a few friends took the boat to see it for themselves. He is looking at a white wall.

And then he sees words on that wall. They are a verse from the Bible. Nobody else in the hall sees it, only he does.

That is how he told it himself later, all his life long, and he never doubted it.

That man was Johannes de Heer. Maybe you have seen his name somewhere. Because on a thick Dutch songbook it still says: Johannes de Heer. But how did a music seller from Rotterdam end up in Wales?

The blacksmith's son

Johannes was born on May 23, 1866, in Rotterdam, and his father was a blacksmith. A blacksmith makes things out of iron, with fire and a hammer. When Johannes was about a year old, his mother died, and later he got a stepmother.

His father wanted him to become a blacksmith too. But Johannes loved music. A small organ came into the house, and he got a few lessons from a friend of the family. There was no money for real lessons, so he taught himself the rest.

When he was twelve or thirteen, he went to work in a music shop in Rotterdam. There were organs there and piles of sheet music. Sheet music is paper with musical notes on it.

In 1889 Johannes married Catharina, and in 1891 they had a little daughter, Dina.

A father with questions

Johannes went to church, but he had doubts. Had God really chosen him? That question would not let him go. Because of it, he did not really care that much. He wanted to enjoy life first. In his free time he played chess.

Then Dina became seriously ill. She was four years old. Johannes went to the church to ask people to pray for her. But Dina did not get better, and on January 3, 1896, she died.

Later Johannes said that their child's deathbed became the turning point of their lives. A turning point is a moment when everything changes.

He left the chessboard alone and began to read the Bible. On a Sunday evening in the spring of 1896 he asked God if he could become His child. From then on he believed that Jesus had saved him. The next day he was very happy, he said later.

Harmoniums at home

In 1898 Johannes started a music shop of his own, right in his house. He gave organ lessons and sold harmoniums. A harmonium is a kind of small organ that you have to pump with your feet. And he published sheet music with Christian songs.

Do you know what is fun? That shop with his name still exists, and it still sells organs!

Johannes also began to help a group in Rotterdam that told people about Jesus. He played the organ there when everyone sang together. Then he had an idea: he wanted to make a songbook of his own. He traveled to London and found an English songbook there. He translated many of its songs into Dutch.

Food for God's house

Then the news came from Wales. Johannes traveled there, and there he saw the words on the wall.

It was a sentence from the book of 1 Kings. There King Hiram tells King Solomon that he must give food for his household. Johannes saw it as a sign from God: his songbook had to be made. It would be food for God's house.

Can God speak like that, with words on a wall? Johannes was sure of it. A friend was with him, but only Johannes saw it.

The first songbook was printed five thousand times. After that things went fast, and hundreds of thousands were printed. They were simple songs. They were about Jesus, about the cross, about heaven. And about the day that

Jesus comes back. People sang them at home around the harmonium, and they are still sung today.

Seven people in Zeist

In 1915 Johannes became very ill. He lived in Zeist then, a town near Utrecht. Everyone thought he would die. Even his funeral had already been planned. But after prayer he got better, as a friend who worked with him told later.

Johannes started an evening in Zeist about the return of Jesus. He called it a Maranatha evening, and Maranatha means: the Lord is coming. Seven people came. Seven! Later these became big meetings, with very many people.

On July 1, 1919, the first issue of his own magazine came out: Het Zoeklicht, which means The Searchlight. It was about what was happening in the world and what the Bible says about it. At its peak it had forty thousand subscribers. He also wrote early on that the Jewish people would go back to Israel.

A voice on the radio

In 1924 radio was still very new, but Johannes was already speaking about God on the radio then. He also helped start a Christian radio broadcaster. He sang songs on the radio himself, and that way people heard his voice in their living rooms.

What would you tell people if you were allowed on the radio just once?

In 1928 his wife Catharina died. Johannes was living in Driebergen by then, and he kept writing and speaking until he was very old.

Johannes de Heer died on March 16, 1961, in Driebergen, at 94 years old. On his grave is a line from his own songbook.

The magazine Het Zoeklicht still exists. There is a big choir that carries his name. And in many homes an old songbook still stands in the cupboard, with a piano or organ beside it.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Johannes de Heer had a music shop, lost his daughter Dina, made a famous songbook and started Het Zoeklicht. It is also certain that he traveled to Wales and helped with Christian radio. About the words on the wall, his Sunday evening in 1896 and his healing in 1915, we only know what he told himself. The sources differ on whether he went to Wales in 1904 or 1905.

Talk about it

- Johannes was very sad when Dina died. Yet that was exactly when he started reading the Bible. Why might that be?
- Do you know a song that helps you when you are sad?

From the Bible

"Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)

Go and see for yourself

The grave of Johannes de Heer is in the Oude Algemene Begraafplaats (the Old General Cemetery) in Driebergen. On the grave monument is a line from song 523 of his own songbook.

Gerrit and Wilhelmine Polman: three words on a stone

A room in Amsterdam

It is October 29, 1907, and in a house in Amsterdam a small group of people is gathered. They are praying together. It is not a big church, just a few people who live in the same house.

For a very long time they have been praying for the same thing. They have read stories from other countries, where the Holy Spirit came to people in a special way. Now they are asking God if that may happen to them too.

One of them is Wilhelmine Polman. And on that day it happens, she and her husband said later. Wilhelmine

begins to speak in a language she has never learned, and that is called speaking in tongues. She also sings and she prophesies. Prophesying is saying something that you receive from God.

Her husband Gerrit wrote later that the Pentecostal movement in the Netherlands began on that day. The Pentecostal movement is a group of churches where the Holy Spirit is very important. There are still many of those churches today.

But how did Gerrit and Wilhelmine end up in that room? It began with the Salvation Army.

In the Salvation Army

Gerrit Polman was born in 1868, and in 1890 he joined the Leger des Heils (the Salvation Army). That is a church that works like an army, with uniforms and ranks. They help poor people and tell about Jesus. Gerrit became an officer there.

In the Army he met Wilhelmine Blekkink. She was about ten years younger than he was, and they got married.

In the Salvation Army women were allowed to preach and to lead. That was very unusual back then, because in most churches it was not allowed. Just remember that.

A trip to America

In America at that time there was a preacher who spoke a lot about healing: John Alexander Dowie. He even built a city of his own, Zion, close to Chicago.

Gerrit and Wilhelmine were impressed. In 1902 they left the Salvation Army. In October 1903 they arrived in Zion, where Gerrit went to study.

Dowie refused the help of doctors, and there was a lot of fuss about that. Gerrit later thought differently about it. He believed that God can heal, but he was not against doctors.

In January 1906 Gerrit and Wilhelmine were sent back to Amsterdam. There the little group that prayed began, with about 25 people. They kept on praying, until that day in October 1907.

How long would you keep on praying if nothing seemed to happen?

Spade Regen

In April 1908 Gerrit and Wilhelmine started a magazine called Spade Regen. That is old Dutch for “late rain,” and it comes from the Bible. There a farmer waits patiently for the rain, so that his harvest can grow. For Gerrit and

Wilhelmine it meant that God was giving His Spirit, just before Jesus comes back.

Soon after that came an invitation to a big meeting in Sunderland, in England. Wilhelmine told Gerrit that he should go. She would preach herself while he was away.

So Gerrit went, and on June 4, 1908, he spoke in tongues there himself as well. He wrote later that a great power of glory came over him.

She preached too

After that Gerrit traveled a lot, to England, Germany and Switzerland. He became known all over Europe.

And Wilhelmine? She preached when Gerrit was away, but sometimes also when he was there. She spoke at big meetings, in the Netherlands and abroad. An expert wrote later that she fully shared in her husband's work.

She was also wise and warned other leaders. You should not just believe everything someone says comes from God.

Actually, it all started with her. She was the first to speak in tongues. She sent Gerrit to England. And she kept the church together when he was away.

A church in an old distillery

The group grew. At first they met in an old stable for racehorses that had been turned into a hall.

In 1911 they bought an old building on the Kerkstraat in Amsterdam. Strong drink used to be made there, and now it became a church. Gerrit and Wilhelmine went to live upstairs.

On December 30, 1911, Wilhelmine laid the first stone. It has three Dutch words on it, Totdat Hij komt, which means Until He comes, with her name underneath. They believed that Jesus would come back very soon.

On June 1, 1912, the church opened, and it had room for 550 people. A school for missionaries started there too. Missionaries are people who go to other countries to tell about Jesus. A few of them went all the way to China.

In 1914 the First World War began, but Gerrit was against war. He went to visit captured soldiers, from both sides.

It went wrong

Gerrit did not really want to start a new church. He hoped that all the churches would discover the power of the Holy Spirit. But the other churches rejected it, and they thought the Pentecostal people were strange. So separate Pentecostal churches came after all.

In 1930 it all went wrong. Gerrit did something very wrong: he was unfaithful to his wife. Because of that he was no longer allowed to be a pastor. Many people were very sad about it. They also had to leave the church on the Kerkstraat.

Gerrit and Wilhelmine went to live together in Zandvoort, and in 1932 Gerrit died. Wilhelmine lived almost thirty more years. She died in 1961 in Baarn, at 83 years old.

Some people thought the Pentecostal movement would now disappear. But that did not happen, because other people carried on. In 2007 Pentecostal believers celebrated their hundredth birthday in the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam.

What do you think: can God make something good grow, even when people make mistakes?

The building on the Kerkstraat is still there. And so is the first stone. With three words and Wilhelmine's name: Totdat Hij komt, Until He comes.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Wilhelmine spoke in tongues on October 29, 1907, that Gerrit went to Sunderland in 1908 and that the couple started the church on the Kerkstraat. It is also certain that Gerrit had to stop in 1930. What exactly happened in that room and what Gerrit felt in Sunderland, we know because they told it

themselves. When and where Gerrit and Wilhelmine got married is not known.

Talk about it

- Wilhelmine preached at a time when most churches did not allow it. What do you think of that?
- Gerrit wanted to bring churches together, but it turned into something separate instead. How would that have felt for him?

From the Bible

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)

Go and see for yourself

The building at Kerkstraat 342-344 in Amsterdam is still there. It is a protected city monument. The first stone with the words Totdat HIJ komt (Until HE comes) and Wilhelmine's name is still there.

Corrie ten Boom: the secret behind the linen cupboard

The doorbell rings

It is February 28, 1944. In the middle of Haarlem, a city near Amsterdam, stands a narrow old house. Downstairs is a shop full of clocks and watches. Everything is ticking.

Then some men come in. They are from the German police, together with Dutch officers. They are looking for something. Or to put it better: they are looking for someone.

Upstairs in the house, in a bedroom, stands a linen cupboard. Behind that cupboard is a wall that is not a real wall. And behind that wall six people are hiding. If the police find them, they will be taken away.

Who are those six people? And why do they have to hide? To find out, we first go back in time.

A house full of clocks

The Ten Boom family lived in that narrow house on the Barteljorisstraat. Grandpa Willem had started a clock shop there in 1837. After him came Father Casper. He repaired watches.

Casper had a youngest daughter: Corrie. She was born in 1892. Corrie loved watches, just like her father. She learned the trade so well that she earned a diploma for it. She was the first woman in the Netherlands to do that! Back then almost only men worked as watchmakers.

Corrie lived in the house with her father and her older sister Betsie. They were not married. Corrie was always busy. She started clubs for girls, where they sang, put on plays and heard about God.

War

In May 1940 the German army invaded the Netherlands. The country was occupied. That means the Germans were in charge.

They made cruel rules, especially for Jewish people. Jewish children were no longer allowed to go to an ordinary

school. Later Jewish families were rounded up and taken away. Most of them never came back.

The Ten Boom family wanted to help. They believed that God loves the Jewish people. Back in 1844 Grandpa Willem had already started a prayer group to pray for the Jewish people.

From 1941 on, Corrie and Betsie looked for hiding addresses. A hiding address is a house where someone can secretly live, so that the Germans do not find them. Corrie visited addresses to check whether they were safe. She also arranged ration coupons, because without coupons you could not buy food.

In 1943 people also came to live in their own house. Sometimes there were five or six at the same time.

The Engelenbak

They needed a secret place. A place where everyone could quickly hide if there was danger.

In Corrie's bedroom, at the very top of the house, an extra wall was built. Behind it was a narrow space. It was about 2.5 meters (8 feet) long and only 70 centimeters (just over 2 feet) wide. That is about as wide as a door. You got in through a little hatch at the bottom of the linen cupboard. They called it the Engelenbak, the angels' box.

In the shop window hung an advertising sign for watches, in the shape of a triangle. If the sign was there, it was safe. If it was gone, everyone knew: do not come in!

Try to imagine it. You live in a house with a secret room. Every time the doorbell rings, you jump. How would you feel?

Betrayed

On February 28, 1944, things went wrong. Someone had betrayed the family.

The police came in. They took Corrie, Betsie and their father Casper away. Other family members and friends who were in the house that day were arrested too. There were about thirty of them.

But they did not find the six people behind the wall.

The police kept guarding the house. The six sat in their tiny space and could not go anywhere. They stayed there for more than two days: 47 hours. Then two officers came who secretly belonged to the resistance. They got the six out and took them away. Four of them survived the war.

Fleas

For the Ten Boom family it ended badly. Father Casper was 84 years old. He died after about ten days in prison.

Corrie and Betsie stayed together. They were moved from one prison to another. In September 1944 they arrived at Ravensbrück, a big camp in Germany. There was little food. And their sleeping hall was full of fleas.

Later Corrie told what happened there. They had secretly kept a small Bible. Betsie read from it: in everything give thanks. Even for the fleas? Corrie asked. Yes, said Betsie, even for the fleas.

Corrie found that hard. But later they noticed something. The guards hardly ever came into their hall. Corrie thought it was because of the fleas. So in the evenings the women could quietly read the Bible and pray together.

On December 16, 1944, Betsie died in the camp. She was 59 years old.

Free

A few days after Christmas, Corrie was told she could leave. Years later she heard that it had happened because of a mistake in the papers. That is how she told it herself.

Back in the Netherlands, Corrie did something special. She opened a house in Bloemendaal for people who were broken by the war. After that she traveled around the world for more than thirty years. In more than sixty countries she told about Betsie, about the camp and about God's love.

She also told about forgiving. In 1947, after a talk in Germany, a man came up to her. He had been a guard at Ravensbrück. He asked her to forgive him. Corrie said later that at first she could not do it. She silently prayed for help. Then she shook his hand.

Corrie ten Boom died in 1983, on her 91st birthday.

Still there

The narrow house in Haarlem is still standing. It is a museum now. If you climb the stairs, you come to Corrie's bedroom. The linen cupboard is still there, and you can see the hiding place.

True story?

Yes. It is certain that the Ten Boom family hid Jewish people and others, that they were arrested on February 28, 1944, and that the six people in the hiding place escaped. Many sources say so. We know the story about the fleas, the mistake in the papers and the guard in 1947 because Corrie told it herself in her books. That Grandpa Willem started a prayer group in 1844 is what the museum tells. Nobody knows exactly how many people the family helped in all.

Talk about it

- Corrie and her family took a big risk to help others. Why do you think they did that?
- Betsie even thanked God for the fleas. Do you find it easy to give thanks when something is annoying?

From the Bible

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Go and see for yourself

The Corrie ten Boom House is at Barteljorisstraat 19 in Haarlem, close to the Grote Markt (the main square). You can go inside and see the hiding place. For opening times, look at the website of the Corrie ten Boom House.

Alida Bosshardt: the major and the princess in disguise

A new helper

It is April 28, 1965, in Amsterdam. A woman in uniform is walking through the old streets of the Wallen. She is Major Bosshardt of the Leger des Heils (the Salvation Army). Next to her walks a young woman in disguise. She is selling the Army's paper, De Strijdkreet (The War Cry), in the cafés.

Anyone who sees her thinks: that must be the major's new helper.

But a photographer looks more closely. He recognizes her and takes pictures. They appear in the newspaper, and then the whole of the Netherlands knows. The new helper is Princess Beatrix! Later she became queen.

Who was this major, who walked through the city with a princess? To find out, we go back to Utrecht.

Too weak

Alida Bosshardt was born on June 8, 1913, in Utrecht. She had one brother, Henk. The family moved often, and things were not always easy.

Alida wanted to become a nurse. But she was not accepted. She was often ill and could see badly with one eye. Later she said it very simply herself: she had been found too weak.

Anyone who saw her later would hardly believe it. Because later she walked through the city day and night, until she was very old.

A church service in the street

When Alida was eighteen, she went to the Salvation Army with a friend. The Salvation Army is a church that works like an army, with uniforms and ranks. They help poor and lonely people, and they tell about God.

The Army held services in the open air, with music and a short sermon. At one of those services Alida was deeply touched by God's love. That is how the museum that is now in her old house tells it.

In 1932 she became a soldier of the Army. That is what a member of the Army is called. Her father bought her uniform and the hat that went with it. Later she became an officer. An officer is a leader in the Army.

Who has ever helped you with something you really wanted? Sometimes there is someone beside you whom you hardly notice.

Children on the bicycle

Alida went to work in Amsterdam, in a children's home. It was right in the middle of a neighborhood where many Jewish people lived.

In May 1940 the German army invaded the Netherlands. The Germans made cruel rules, especially for Jewish people. In 1941 they banned the Salvation Army. Wearing a uniform was no longer allowed. The children's home carried on as an ordinary house.

That same year three Jewish sisters came to the home. Their mother was also given a place there for a while. Soon after, a fourth little sister was born.

After that the children had to keep moving. They traveled by train and on foot to ten different places. Every time they moved, the Jewish baby sister was tucked under blankets. That way nobody saw her.

The oldest child carried a copper kettle. It looked like an ordinary pot. But money and ration coupons were hidden in that kettle. Without coupons you could not buy food during the war.

Alida also took Jewish children on her bicycle to a safe place. Often she did not even know their names. That was on purpose. She did not write down names and addresses. What was not on paper, the enemy could not find either.

Once Alida was betrayed and arrested. After two weeks she was able to walk away. The man questioning her had not locked the door! Did he forget, or did he do it on purpose? Nobody knows.

In the last winter of the war there was almost no food. Alida cycled out into the countryside, on a bicycle with wooden tires. She traded cigarettes for potatoes. She did not tell her leaders. The Army had a strict ban on smoking, you see!

The four sisters stayed together the whole war. Alida made sure of that. Later they wrote that she was like a mother to them.

A hundred guilders and a flag

After the war Alida worked at the Army's headquarters in Amsterdam. There she noticed something. The Army was doing nothing on the Wallen.

The Wallen is an old neighborhood in Amsterdam. There were many bars there. Women also worked there in prostitution. That means they earned money with their bodies. And people lived there who had no home, or who were addicted to drink.

Alida kept asking if she could start working there. On October 8, 1948, she got her way. Her leaders gave her a hundred guilders (Dutch money back then) and a flag. Nothing more.

With that she went out into the street. She sold De Strijdkreet in the bars. She talked with everyone. She gave people a place to sleep, food and clothes. Sometimes she took someone home to her own house.

In 1951 she got a building of her own, right in the middle of the Wallen. It is called the oldest stone house in Amsterdam. She lived and worked there for many years.

Her motto was: "Serving God is serving people, serving people is serving God."

A bath on television

Alida became better and better known. She appeared on television and gave talks all over the country. After that walk with Princess Beatrix, they became friends. For years they wrote each other letters and cards.

She was given a higher rank. But for the whole of the Netherlands she simply stayed the major.

In 1978 she retired. But she did not stop. She kept selling De Strijdkreet until she was ninety-two.

Once she was on a TV program with the rock singer Herman Brood. She gave him a bath, in front of the camera! They became friends. Talking with people like that was something she could do like nobody else.

In 2004 she received a medal from Israel. It thanked her for what she had done for Jewish children during the war. When people praised her, she pointed to God. "Not to me, but to Him belongs all the honor," she said.

The greatest Amsterdammer

On June 25, 2007, Alida Bosshardt died in Amsterdam. She was ninety-four years old. Her funeral was shown live on television.

In 2009 the people of Amsterdam chose her as the greatest Amsterdammer of all time. She beat the soccer player Johan Cruijff and the singer André Hazes!

A bridge on the Wallen is named after her. In 2022 Queen Máxima opened a museum in her old house. Inside there is a wax figure of the major, in her uniform.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Alida Bosshardt started on the Wallen in 1948, went out with Princess Beatrix and helped Jewish children during the war. We know the stories about the copper kettle, the unlocked door and the cigarettes from what the Salvation Army told later, and from a letter by the four sisters. Nobody knows exactly how many children she helped in all, because she wrote nothing down.

Talk about it

- Alida did not write down the children's names, on purpose. Why was that so clever?
- She went to people that others did not want to talk with. Who are those people in your neighborhood or at your school?

From the Bible

Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. (Matthew 25:40)

Go and see for yourself

The Majoor Bosshardthuis (the Major Bosshardt House) is at Oudezijds Voorburgwal 14 in Amsterdam, right in the

middle of the Wallen. It was her home. There is a wax figure of the major, and there are guided tours. She is buried at the Nieuwe Oosterbegraafplaats, a cemetery in Amsterdam.

Hebe Kohlbrugge: the woman who said good morning

No Hitler salute

It is 1938. We are in Fehrbellin, a small town in Germany, not far from Berlin. A young Dutch woman works there for a minister.

Two policemen speak to her. They expect the Hitler salute. That is a greeting with your arm raised up at an angle, for the leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler.

But the woman does not do it. Later she wrote down what she said to the men. She asked if "guten Morgen" was not a fine greeting, then. That is German for good morning.

The policemen take her away. Her name is Hebe Kohlbrugge. And this is only the beginning of her story.

Five girls

Hebe was born on April 8, 1914, in Utrecht. She was the youngest of five sisters. Her father was a chemist and a teacher. The family had German relatives.

Her great-grandfather was a famous minister in Germany. He was called the Lion of Elberfeld. Hebe later read a few of his sermons. A newspaper wrote that being unbending ran in the family. That means: not giving in when something is not right. Anyone who knows her life will understand that.

After school Hebe went to England. There she looked after children for a family. She said later that they were relatives of Winston Churchill, a famous English politician. She found Winston unfriendly, she added dryly.

A flag off the wall

In 1936 Hebe went to Berlin. She trained there for church work. In Germany, Hitler was in charge.

At her school hung a flag with the swastika, Hitler's sign. According to her own story, one day Hebe took it down.

She was punished, and the flag was soon hanging there again.

Hebe started going to the church of Martin Niemöller. He belonged to the Christians who did not want Hitler to be the boss of the church. Hebe went to his Bible classes and handed out his sermons.

After that she went to work in Fehrbellin. That is where the morning with the two policemen happened. The Dutch embassy got her released. But there was one condition. She was never allowed in Germany again.

What would you have done, if you were young and far from home?

A leaflet and an attic

In May 1940 the German army invaded the Netherlands. Hebe was living in Amsterdam then. She worked as a secretary for the church.

As early as July 1940 she helped start a group of people who wanted to resist. The resistance were people who secretly worked against the Germans.

She also helped spread a leaflet. A leaflet is a sheet of paper with a message. It was called *Bijna te laat*, which means *Almost Too Late*. It told ordinary Dutch people: you do not have to answer every question the occupiers ask.

In February 1942 the German secret police burst into the office where she worked. According to her own story, she hid in an attic for hours. They did not find her!

In the summer of 1942 Hebe went on a secret journey. She had to pass on messages to the Dutch government in London. They chose a woman, because a woman was less noticeable. She traveled through Belgium and France to Switzerland. She walked a large part of the way, she said later.

There she spoke with Karl Barth, a famous scholar who wrote about God and the Bible. Barth gave the Dutch resistance his blessing, she wrote later. It came down to this: God's law was not against them. That meant a lot to her.

Back in the Netherlands she worked for a resistance group. She drew maps of where the Germans had their army posts. According to her own story, she also smuggled microfilms to London. A microfilm is a tiny little film with photos of papers.

Christine Doorman

In April 1944 Hebe was on the train again. She carried a fake identity card, in the name of Christine Doorman. But it was not right. At a check she was arrested.

She also had microfilms with her. According to her own story, she secretly slipped them into someone else's coat on the train!

Hebe went to prison. After that she was sent to a camp in the Netherlands. In September 1944 she had to go to Ravensbrück, a big camp for women in Germany.

There she had to look after newborn babies. There was little food, and many babies were ill. She saw that some babies did not make it. She was still telling about that when she was one hundred and two.

Hebe became very ill herself too. Two Czech women in the camp took care of her. Thanks to them she stayed alive.

Corrie ten Boom was in Ravensbrück too, and you can read about her in this book as well. Hebe said later that she was there when Corrie heard she would be set free.

In January 1945 Hebe was set free herself as well. Exactly how that came about, we do not know. By a roundabout way she got back to the Netherlands.

Bridges to the east

After the war Hebe first had to get well. Then she did something almost nobody wanted to do. Sent by the church, she went to Germany, to make peace with the Christians there.

Later she traveled to countries behind the Iron Curtain. That is what people called the border between the free West and the countries in the East. The communists were in charge there. Christians had a hard time.

Hebe sent more than eighty Dutch students to those countries. First every student came to talk with her at home, in her living room in Utrecht. She also smuggled Bibles and books to her friends in the East.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. Hebe was seventy-five by then. The friends she had visited all those years were free.

She called her book about her life *Tweemaal twee is vijf*, which means *Two Times Two Is Five*. Because life almost never goes the way you work it out.

One hundred and two years

Hebe lived together with her sister Hanna for almost fifty years. In 1999 Hanna was hit by a delivery van near their house, and she died. In the quiet evenings after that, Hebe began to write her book.

Even when she was very old, she kept busy. Every morning she walked along the Maliebaan in Utrecht. On May 4, 2016, she laid a wreath on the Domplein on behalf of the old resistance. May 4 is the day the Netherlands remembers its war dead. "We must remember. As much as possible," she said.

A week before she died, she sent her last Christmas letter. On it was a sun against a sky full of stars. Hebe Kohlbrugge died in December 2016, one hundred and two years old.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Hebe was in the resistance, was a prisoner in Ravensbrück and after the war sent students to Eastern Europe. We know about the good morning to the police, the flag, the attic and the microfilms in the coat because she told it herself. The sources tell in different ways why exactly she was arrested in Germany.

Talk about it

- Hebe said a friendly good morning, but did not give the Hitler salute. When is it right to say no, even when everyone else says yes?
- After the war Hebe went to Germany of all places, to make peace. Why would she have done that?

From the Bible

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.
(Genesis 1:3)

Go and see for yourself

In Utrecht a street is named after Hebe Kohlbrugge. On the Domplein, where she laid her wreath, the Dodenherdenking (the Remembrance of the Dead) is held every year on May 4.

Diet Eman: the plastic raincoat

Six men and an envelope

It is May 1944, and on a train in the Netherlands sits a young woman of 24. In her pocket is a fake identity card. An identity card is a card that shows who you are. Her card has a name on it that is not really hers.

Under her clothes she is wearing an envelope. Inside are forbidden papers. There are stolen ration cards in it, and things for making fake cards. Those fake cards are for pilots who have been shot down over the Netherlands and need to hide.

At a check, something about her card stands out. One little thing is not right, and she has to get off the train.

A little later she is standing among six men of the Gestapo. That was the secret police of the Germans. If they find the envelope, things will go badly for her.

Then one of the men does something strange. He shows off his new raincoat. A raincoat made of plastic! The other men look at it, and in those few seconds the woman gets rid of the envelope.

That is how she told it herself later. She called it the greatest miracle of her whole war. She saw the hand of God in it.

Who was this woman? To find out, we go back to The Hague.

A boy at the table

Her name was Berendina Eman, but everyone called her Diet. She was born on April 30, 1920, in The Hague. She was the third of four children in a family that believed in God. Church was part of ordinary life.

In 1937 a boy came to live with them. His name was Hein Sietsma. He had found work in The Hague, and the Eman family knew him from church. Someone like that is called a boarder: he lives and eats with another family.

At first Diet was not happy at all about that boarder. A magazine wrote that later. But that changed! Diet and

Hein fell in love and got engaged. That means they promised to marry each other.

Diet went to work at a bank. There she had a Jewish colleague who played the violin. His name was Herman. Just remember his name, because everything began with him.

War

On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands. After five days the Netherlands surrendered. Queen Wilhelmina went to England.

Diet and Hein began with something small. They listened to the radio from England, the BBC, and that was forbidden. Diet typed out the reports, so that others could read the news too.

That was not an easy choice. Some Christians said you had to do what the rulers of the country said. Even if those were the Germans. Diet and Hein read the Bible together, because they wanted to know what God was asking of them. They believed they had to stay loyal to Queen Wilhelmina. They saw that as something they had to do for God.

Things got harder and harder for Jewish people, and they had to wear a yellow star. In 1942 they were taken away to camps. Herman got a summons too: he had to report.

Diet and Hein found a place for Herman with farmers outside the city. There he could go into hiding. Going into hiding means secretly living in a place where the Germans cannot find you. Then came his sister, his fiancée and her mother. And then many more people. Within two weeks they were looking for shelter for sixty people.

Diet and Hein put off their wedding.

Hein, his brother Henk and some friends started a resistance group. They named it after Hein: Groep HEIN. The letters stood for Helpt Elkander In Nood, which means Help Each Other In Need. Elkander is an old Dutch word for each other.

The group found hiding places, arranged coupons for food and made fake cards. They also helped pilots who had been shot down. Diet was a courier. A courier carries things from place to place. As a woman she was less noticeable than a man. She went by bike and by train. Sometimes she hid the papers in the handlebars of her bike, she said later.

What would you do if a friend of yours was in danger?

Diet said later that they had to help the Jews. For her there was no other choice. She did not think it was anything special.

Willie Laarman

The work was dangerous, and in 1943 the Gestapo came to the house of Diet's parents. They were looking for Diet. Her younger brother Albert phoned her to tell her not to come home.

Diet went into hiding herself. She got a new name: Willie Laarman. That name was a little joke, because Willie sounded like Wilhelmina, the queen.

At first she worked as a maid for a family. Later she went to a farm with cows. Aalt and Alie Lozeman lived there. They were hiding Jewish people themselves too.

Diet did not really think lying was right. As a Christian, was she allowed to use a false name? She struggled with that. Years later she said she had had so many different names.

Words in the wall

At the end of April 1944, Hein was arrested. Soon after that, Diet was on the train. Then came the moment with the raincoat.

She was taken to the prison in Scheveningen, by the sea near The Hague. There she kept saying that she was Willie Laarman, an ordinary maid.

In her cell she did something she never forgot. With a hairpin she scratched a verse from the Bible into the wall. It was a promise of Jesus: I am with you always.

After that she went to Camp Vught. There she met Corrie and Betsie ten Boom. There is a story about them in this book too.

In Vught Diet had to wash the clothes of men who had been shot dead. That was so terrible that she broke down. For three days she could not move, she said later. She was also honest about her faith in that time. She was angry with God and asked Him how He could let all this happen.

When she was questioned, she kept saying she was Willie. And it worked: she was set free! Straight away she went on with the resistance work.

A note from the train

One day Diet got a note from Hein. He had written it in pencil and thrown it out of a train, on the way to a camp. Someone who knew Diet's father picked it up.

Hein wrote that they would never regret their choice. Not even if they did not see each other again on earth. And he wrote that he loved her most of all.

On January 21, 1945, Hein died in the Dachau camp, in Germany. He had become very ill and was only 25 years old.

Tell your children

After the war Diet became a nurse and went to work in South America. There she got married and had two children. Later she lived in the city of Grand Rapids, in America.

For more than thirty years she told almost nobody about the war.

Then one Sunday her church sang a song called Tell Your Children. Diet decided that her children had to know her story. A book was written. She gave the writer a box that had been closed for fifty years. Inside were Hein's letters.

In 2015 King Willem-Alexander came to Grand Rapids. Diet was 95 by then. The king called her one of the national heroes of the Netherlands.

Diet died on September 3, 2019. She lived to be 99. Her letters and papers are now in eight boxes in a library in Grand Rapids. There are also photos of a young couple from The Hague. He lived to be 25. She told their story until the end.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Diet and Hein helped people in hiding and pilots with Groep HEIN, that they were both arrested in 1944 and that Hein died in Dachau. We know the story of the raincoat, the words in the wall, the three days in Vught and the note from the train because Diet told it herself. The sources differ on the day she was arrested and how long she was held.

Talk about it

- Diet and Hein put off their wedding to help others. What do you think of that?
- In the camp Diet was angry with God and told Him so. Do you think that is allowed?

From the Bible

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Anne van der Bijl: the smuggler with the blue Beetle

A car full of Bibles

It is 1957. A blue Volkswagen Beetle drives toward the border of Yugoslavia. Back then that was a country in the east of Europe, with a communist government. That government did not want people to believe in God.

In the car sits a man from Noord-Holland, a province in the west of the Netherlands, and Bibles are hidden among his luggage. At the border such books were often taken away.

At the border the man prays a short prayer. He asks God to keep the border guards from seeing what God does not

want them to see. Later one sentence from that prayer became famous: Make seeing eyes blind, I pray.

Do you know what is so funny? When Jesus was on earth, He made blind people see again. Now this man asked Him for the opposite!

And he got through. Who was that man? All over the world he was later called Brother Andrew. But in his village he was just Anne van der Bijl, the blacksmith's son.

The blacksmith's son

Anne was born on May 11, 1928, in Sint Pancras, a village close to Alkmaar. He was the fourth of six children, and his father was a blacksmith. A blacksmith makes things out of iron, with fire and a hammer. His father could hardly hear and his mother had a weak heart. The family was poor.

Anne had an older brother, Bas. Bas could not talk, but on the organ in the living room he played without a single mistake. People would stop in the street to listen, Anne said later.

Anne himself was not a well-behaved boy. He played tricks on the neighbors, and he dreamed of becoming a spy. He said so himself in his book.

A bullet and a Bible

In 1940 the war began in the Netherlands, when Anne was twelve. In the Hunger Winter of 1944 there was almost no food. His family ate tulip bulbs then.

After the war Anne joined the army. He was sent to the Dutch East Indies, as Indonesia was called back then. The Netherlands was fighting there against people who wanted to make their country free. Terrible things happened there. Anne's group of soldiers killed the people of a village. Anne later told about it honestly himself. Years later he went back to Indonesia. There he said sorry for what the Dutch army had done.

In 1949 Anne was wounded. A bullet shattered his ankle. He had to go back to the Netherlands.

In the hospital he lay in bed for a long time. His mother had given him a Bible that he had never read. Now he began to read.

At the beginning of 1950 he was lying in bed at home. It was a stormy night in January and wet snow was beating against the house. Then he prayed a short prayer. It went something like this: Lord, if You show me the way, I will follow You.

That was all, no big plan. Just a young man with a broken ankle who wanted to follow God. That is how he told it himself later.

Anne went to work in a chocolate factory in Alkmaar. There he saw Corry again, a girl he had met before. Later they would get married.

Anne wanted to learn how to tell others about God. So in 1953 he went to a school in Glasgow, in Scotland, where he also learned English.

He had no money. He made a deal with God, he said later. If he was even one day late with the school fees, he would go back to the factory. But the money came on time every time, often from a place he did not expect.

At the school hung a map of the world. Anne saw how many countries were communist. Nobody ever went there to visit the Christians. He noticed that.

Warsaw

In 1955 Anne went to Warsaw, in Poland. There was a big festival there for communist young people from all over the world. Anne brought a suitcase full of Christian booklets.

He did not join the normal program, but looked for churches. A man with a Christian bookshop told him

something terrible. In the Soviet Union it was almost impossible to get a Bible anymore.

On his last morning Anne read a passage from the Bible. It was a verse from Revelation, and to him it felt like an assignment. He had to help the Christians who lived behind the Iron Curtain. The Iron Curtain was a kind of border right across Europe. On one side were the communist countries, and people who lived there could not just leave.

Soon after that Anne started a small work in the Netherlands. Later it was given the name Open Doors.

Seven hands

Then came that trip in the blue Beetle. He had been given the car by people who had helped his family for a long time. Later that blue Beetle became the best-known symbol of Open Doors.

In Yugoslavia Anne preached more than eighty times in seven weeks. In a church in the city of Belgrade he asked a question. Who here has a Bible of their own? Seven people raised their hands. Seven, in a whole church!

From that moment on, he wanted to bring Bibles. As many as he could.

How would you feel if you were not allowed to have a Bible of your own?

In 1958 Anne and Corry got married. They had five children and lived in Sint Pancras. Anne was often away, sometimes for a long time. After a trip the blue Beetle would be covered in mud.

A book and a beach

In 1967 a book came out about his travels: God's Smuggler. It became famous around the world: more than ten million copies have been sold! But now everyone knew who he was. That made traveling harder. Other people from Open Doors carried on.

In June 1981 something big happened. Anne had helped come up with the plan. A boat towed a big floating platform to a beach in China. On it were a million Bibles, in boxes that could float. On the beach a great many Chinese Christians stood waiting. They walked into the water. Hand to hand, the boxes went to the beach. After a little more than two hours everything was unloaded.

At the end of his life Anne lived in Harderwijk, a town in the middle of the Netherlands, where he died on September 27, 2022. He was 94 years old. Open Doors now works in more than sixty countries. And it started with a suitcase full of booklets and a blue car.

True story?

Yes. Many sources say that Anne was born in Sint Pancras, was a soldier in the Indies, drove a Beetle full of Bibles to Yugoslavia in 1957 and started Open Doors. The night with a million Bibles in China is certain too. We only know about his prayer on the January night, the school fees, the border guards and the seven hands in Belgrade because he told it himself. There was almost never anyone else with him.

Talk about it

- Anne prayed: if You show me the way, I will follow You. What does that mean for you?
- In a whole church only seven people had a Bible. How many Bibles are there in your home?

From the Bible

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. (Revelation 3:2)

Jan Zijlstra: can God use a butcher too?

A voice in prayer

It is November 24, 1957. Jan Zijlstra is nineteen years old. He is praying.

Then he hears something. Later he said that the Lord told him: "I am calling you to work for Me."

Jan had a trade, and a shop was waiting for him. Everyone in his village knew him. Still, from that moment on he knew where his life was going.

How did a boy from a butcher's shop come to that point? To find out, we go back to the beginning.

Above the butcher's shop

Jan was born on September 20, 1938, in Hillegom. That is a village among the flower bulb fields. He was born in the house above his parents' butcher's shop, on the Meerstraat.

Jan was the fourth child. After him came six more, so there were ten of them!

Jan went to the Julianaschool and played soccer for the club SIZO. And he helped in his father's shop. A butcher sells meat, and there is always work to do.

As a child Jan became very ill with diphtheria. That is a disease that children died of in those days. Jan got better, and later he said that he saw the hand of God in it.

On the way to heaven?

On May 25, 1956, Jan was seventeen. Someone asked him a question: was he actually on the way to heaven?

Jan did not know the answer, and that question would not let him go. That day he gave his life to Jesus. That is how he told it himself. He also said that he stopped smoking the same evening.

That year he was baptized. A girl called Herma van der Laan was baptized together with him. Later she became his wife.

In Hillegom people still tell a nice story about Jan. He read in the Bible that Jesus called fishermen to follow Him. He also read about shepherds. And then Jan wondered: can God use a butcher too?

What do you think? Can God use someone with your hobby or your job?

Jan did not take over his father's butcher's shop. After that voice in prayer, he set out with Herma. He became an evangelist. An evangelist is someone who travels around to tell about Jesus.

Praying for the sick

Jan joined the church of Johan Maasbach. Maasbach was one of the first preachers in the Netherlands who prayed out loud for sick people. Jan worked with him for more than thirty years.

On May 15, 1961, Jan and Herma got married, and they had three children.

In 1967 Jan became the pastor of a church in Leiden. A pastor leads the church services in a congregation. His church was called the Bethlehemskerk (the Bethlehem Church).

In those days the Pentecostal church in the Netherlands was still small, and many people laughed at it. Anyone who

prayed for sick people in a little hall got mocked. Jan did it anyway, year after year.

Starting over

In 1992 things went wrong between Jan and Johan Maasbach. After more than thirty years, they stopped working together. We do not really know what exactly was said. It was painful for both of them.

Jan and Herma started over. They began a new church in Leiderdorp: De Levensstroom (The Stream of Life). The first services were in a hall on a business park. There was no church tower and no organ, but people came who were sick.

The church grew and grew. In 2006 it got a new building with about fifteen hundred seats. That is a whole lot of seats!

Jan also traveled to other countries. In 1993 he went to Suriname, a country in South America. He said that he had heard inside himself: "Go to Suriname." That is often how it worked for him. He heard a short instruction, and then he simply went.

A woman stands up

In March 2007 a woman from Bleskensgraaf was sitting in one of Jan's services. She had been ill for almost eighteen years. Her whole body hurt, and there were a great many things she could no longer do.

Jan prayed for the sick, and during that prayer the woman stood up.

Her own family doctor saw that she got better from that moment on. Later a big hospital in Rotterdam examined her, but the doctors found nothing wrong anymore. Ten years later she told the newspaper that she was still well.

Was it a miracle? A doctor can see that someone gets better. Why it happened, no machine can measure. For the woman the answer was clear, and for Jan too.

But not everyone got better. A TV program also showed people whose illness stayed, or came back. There were many questions about that, among Christians too. Jan did not want any honor for himself. When people thanked him, he pointed to God.

Quarrel and peace

When Jan got older, he handed his church over to a younger pastor. That did not go well. Jan wanted more room for the services for the sick, and the church split in

two. After that there was also a quarrel with the church board. Even a judge had to make a ruling. Jan lost the church building he had helped to build.

He was seventy-five by then. Many people would stop at that age, but not Jan. With Herma he started a new foundation: Wings of Healing. The first service was in a party center, and about two hundred and fifty people came.

And now comes the best part. In 2020 Jan and the younger pastor went to see each other again. They made up after their quarrel. After that Jan was allowed to preach in the church of the man who had come after him. Both of them said they were very happy about it.

Do you know that feeling? That you have had a fight, and that making up is actually pretty hard?

In May 2021 Jan and Herma had been married for sixty years. In September of that year Jan became ill with COVID. He had to go to the hospital, and on September 9, 2021, he died. He was eighty-two years old.

For sixty-four years he had told people about Jesus. The boy from the butcher's shop had left his shop behind and gone. His foundation Wings of Healing still carries on.

True story?

Yes. Many newspapers say that Jan Zijlstra was born in Hillegom, became a Christian in 1956 and prayed for the sick as an evangelist for decades. The recovery of the woman from Bleskensgraaf and the making up after the quarrel in 2020 are certain too. We only know about the voice in prayer, the diphtheria and the instruction "Go to Suriname" because Jan told it himself. The story about the butcher who saw the fishermen and shepherds is a story that goes around in Hillegom. Whether the recovery was a miracle of God, no doctor can prove; that is a question of faith.

Talk about it

- Jan left his shop behind to work for God. What would you find hard to let go of?
- At the end of his life Jan made up after an old quarrel. Why is making up sometimes so hard?

From the Bible

The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)