True Story!

To the Other Side of the World

Ten Dutch people who went far away

10 true stories

WIM KAMPHORST

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True Story! To the Other Side of the World

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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 the best thing about the stories in this book? They all really happened.

Ten Dutch people who went to live very far away to tell others about Jesus and to help people. On islands, in the jungle, in big cities and small villages.

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 can read what we know for sure, and what we only know because someone told it later about themselves. Because that matters 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 for going to see a place 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 to children from about 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 you know what is coming.

Bible verses are from the New King James Version.

Robertus Junius: letters for a people without letters

A man comes on his own

It is 1640. On the island of Formosa a man comes up to a Dutch minister. He comes from the village of Soulang. He asks the minister to examine him. You see, he wants to be baptized.

The minister's name is Robertus Junius. He wrote this down himself, in a letter of October 23, 1640. It is one of the few times that someone from the island speaks for himself in the old papers.

Formosa is now called Taiwan. It lies on the other side of the world, close to China. How did a boy from Rotterdam end up there?

Robert becomes Robertus

He was born in 1606 in Rotterdam. His name was Robert de Jonghe. When he went to study, he turned it into a Latin name: Robertus Junius. Educated people often did that back then.

In Leiden a professor started a training course in his own home. Young men studied there to become ministers. Robertus was one of them. They all went to the same side of the world: to Asia, where the VOC traded.

The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) was a big Dutch trading company. It had ships, soldiers and forts. Most of all it wanted to make money. The ministers who went along were paid by the VOC.

In 1628 Robertus finished his studies. He did not write down why he wanted to go so far away.

A wedding and an island

In 1629 he arrived in Batavia, the city that is now called Jakarta. There he married Geertruyd van Nederhoven. That same year he traveled on to Formosa. He was only twenty-three.

On the island the VOC had built a castle: Zeelandia. On the plain lived the Siraya. They are a people who had lived

there for a very long time. They lived in villages, and those villages were often at war with each other.

The village of Sinkan was friends with the Dutch. The big village of Mattau was against them. In the year Junius arrived, warriors from Mattau killed about sixty Dutch soldiers.

A language without letters

For the first two years Junius preached in Dutch. But the people of the island did not speak Dutch. So he set out to learn their language. It was a hard language.

And there was something else. Siraya had never been written. There were no letters for it. The ministers started writing the language down with our letters: a, b, c. They also made a word list. That is how Siraya got its own alphabet.

Imagine that your language had never been written down. How would you keep a story then?

From 1631 Junius lived in Sinkan. He stayed there for twelve years. In 1634 he asked if he could take boys from Sinkan with him to the Netherlands. There they could become ministers, for their own people. We do not know if that ever happened.

A dark page

Now comes a part that is not nice. But it really happened.

Junius was a minister, but he also worked for the VOC. He often complained about Mattau. In November 1635 he went with VOC soldiers to that village. Warriors from Sinkan went along too. Nobody in Mattau fought back. Even so, twenty-six people were killed. The village burned down.

Junius wrote that Mattau had to be punished. Otherwise the other villages would not take the Dutch seriously. A week later Mattau made peace. After that many more villages promised that they would obey the VOC.

So faith and the power of the VOC came to the island at the same time. That is the shadow side of this story. What do you think about a minister going along with soldiers?

Fifty teachers

Junius also started schools. He made at least thirteen little books in the language of Sinkan. They had prayers in them, and questions and answers about the faith.

He trained people from the island to be schoolteachers. In 1643 about fifty Siraya were teaching at six schools. More than six hundred children learned to read and write there in their own language. Nobody knows anymore what those

teachers were called. That is a pity, because they were the ones standing in front of the class every day.

According to his own reports, Junius baptized more than five thousand people. Whether all those people really knew what they believed, nobody can find out now.

A painting and a blue plate

In 1643 Junius went back to the Netherlands. His health was poor and he was homesick. That same year a Chinese painter on Formosa made a painting of him. You can see him on it twice. At the top he is preaching. At the bottom he is baptizing a baby. A mother kneels and holds her little child up.

Junius became a minister in Delft. He lived on the Koornmarkt, in a house called Het Witte Hart (The White Hart). He did not forget the island. He wrote an ABC book for the schools there. In 1648 it arrived on Formosa by ship.

Later he became a minister in Amsterdam. There he trained young men who would go to Asia. He thought it was important that they learned the languages there well. In 1655 he died in Amsterdam.

Five years later someone painted his face in blue on an earthenware plate. That plate now belongs to the Rijksmuseum.

Letters that stayed

In 1661 a Chinese army attacked the island. In 1662 the Dutch had to leave. The church in Sinkan disappeared. In one village the people even destroyed the schoolbooks.

But the letters stayed. The Siraya kept writing their own language with the alphabet from back then. They wrote contracts with it. A contract is an agreement on paper. About one hundred and forty of them have been kept. The newest one is from 1813. That is more than one hundred and fifty years after the last Dutchman left!

True story?

Yes. Several sources tell us that Junius worked in Sinkan from 1631 to 1643, started schools, made little books in Siraya and went along to Mattau in 1635. The painting and the blue plate really exist. About the man from Soulang and the number of people baptized, we only know something from the letters and reports of Junius himself. Nobody wrote down what the people of Mattau and Sinkan themselves thought about it.

Talk about it

- Junius wrote down a language that had never been written before. Why is it good to be able to read in your own language?
- Faith and the soldiers came to the island at the same time. Why do you think that is hard?

From the Bible

And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14)

Go and see for yourself

In Delft, at Koornmarkt number 42, stands the house Het Witte Hart, where Junius lived. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam keeps the blue plate with his portrait.

Antonius Hambroek: the minister who went back

Two daughters around his neck

It is late May 1661. In Fort Zeelandia, on the island of Formosa, a minister is saying goodbye to his two daughters. They are both married. They cling to his neck and cry. They beg him to stay.

That is written in the diary the Dutch kept in the fort.

The minister's name is Antonius Hambroek. Outside the fort is a large Chinese army. His wife and two other children are being held prisoner there. The army commander has said that he will kill Hambroek if he does not like the answer. And the fort's answer is no.

Still, he goes back. How did a village minister from Holland end up in such a hard situation?

A minister in Schipluiden

Antonius was born around 1606 in Rotterdam. We do not know exactly how old he was. His name was also written in all sorts of ways: Hambroek, Hambroeck, Hambrouck.

He studied in Leiden to become a minister. In 1632 he became the minister in Schipluiden. That is a small village between The Hague and Rotterdam. He stayed there for fifteen years. He got married and had children. We do not know for sure if there were three or four. Their names have not been kept.

Once he went away from home for a few months. He sailed with the war fleet of Admiral Tromp, as the minister on board. The fleet was hunting pirates. After that he simply came back to Schipluiden.

To the other side of the world

In 1647 Hambroek was about forty. He had a church, a house and a family. Still, that year he left for Asia. The church sent him, and the VOC paid.

The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) was a big Dutch trading company. It had ships, soldiers and forts. The ministers in Asia were paid by the VOC. The VOC also decided where they had to work.

Why did Hambroek go so far away? He never wrote that down anywhere. The journey took almost a year. In 1648 he arrived on Formosa. That island is now called Taiwan.

Thirteen years in Mattau

Hambroek became the minister in Mattau. That was a village of the Siraya, the people who had lived there for a long time. Thirteen years earlier, soldiers of the VOC had gone to Mattau and set the village on fire. Now a minister came to live there. We do not know what the people of Mattau thought of him. Nobody from the village wrote about him.

Hambroek was not a strong man. In 1655 the government on the island wrote that he was very weak and often sick. Still, he stayed for six more years.

In 1657 a school was started to train men from the island to be schoolteachers. Hambroek had to make sure it went well. That way the Siraya could teach their own people. He worked in a language that was not his own.

In 1659 two of his daughters got married on the island, to Dutch men. Those two daughters later lived in or close to Fort Zeelandia.

The army of Koxinga

At that time there was a new emperor in power in China. One army commander, Koxinga, stayed loyal to the old imperial family. He had his own army and his own fleet.

In April 1661 Koxinga came to Formosa with his army. His men took about five hundred Dutch people prisoner. Hambroek tried to escape, but he did not make it. He was captured, together with his wife, his son and a daughter.

The two married daughters were in Fort Zeelandia. Koxinga's army was camped all around the fort.

A letter and a choice

Koxinga sent Hambroek to the fort with a letter. The letter said: surrender and leave the island. His wife and children had to stay behind with Koxinga.

Inside the fort Hambroek did something very brave. He advised the commander of the fort to hold out and not to surrender. That is what an old book about his life says. The Dutch said no to Koxinga.

Then came the goodbye. His daughters begged him to stay. In the fort he was safe for the time being. But he went back, with the answer no.

Why? Hambroek did not write it down himself. Later writers think he had given his word. And that he was afraid Koxinga would otherwise punish his wife and children.

What would you do, with your children around your neck and your wife on the other side of the wall?

Two sides

Back with Koxinga, Hambroek was locked up again. Later in 1661 he was killed, together with other prisoners. His son was killed too. Nobody knows for sure on which day it happened.

The fort held out for about nine months. In February 1662 the Dutch surrendered. They were allowed to leave.

In the Netherlands Hambroek later became a hero. A writer made a play about him and a painter made a big painting of the goodbye. In Taiwan, though, Koxinga is the hero. Children there learn that he took the island back from the Europeans. And the Siraya, who already lived there? Very little was told about them in either story.

A square in Schipluiden

In the old church of Schipluiden there is still the same pulpit where Hambroek preached for fifteen years. In 2018 a memorial for him was placed by the church. On it is a

verse from the Gospel of Matthew. It is written in old Dutch and in Siraya, the language of Mattau. Since then the square in front of the church has been called the Hambrouckplein.

True story?

Yes. Several sources tell us that Hambroek was a minister in Schipluiden and in Mattau, that he was sent to Fort Zeelandia with a letter, that he advised the Dutch to hold out and that he still went back. It is also certain that he was killed in 1661, but not the exact day. We know something about the goodbye to his daughters from the fort's diary. He never said himself why he went back. The play and the painting from later are art: they also show things that did not really happen that way.

Talk about it

- Hambroek could have stayed in the fort. Why do you think he went back anyway?
- In the Netherlands Hambroek is the hero, and in Taiwan Koxinga is the hero. How can that be?

From the Bible

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:13)

Go and see for yourself

By the old church of Schipluiden is the Hambrouckplein with the memorial. In the Laurenskerk in Rotterdam, the city where he was born, there are two large wall paintings about his story. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has the painting of the goodbye, made in 1810.

Joseph Kam: the minister with his own ship

On land at last

It is March 3, 1815. A man of 45 steps ashore on Ambon. Ambon is an island in the Moluccas, very far away. Today it belongs to Indonesia.

The man's name is Joseph Kam. He is a minister. Behind him lies a long, hard journey. It made him seasick.

Many Christians live on Ambon. But they have not had their own minister for a very long time. Nobody knows exactly how long. An old magazine speaks of more than twenty years.

By now Joseph has waited seven years. How did a man from Den Bosch end up on this island?

A shop full of leather

Joseph was born in September 1769, in 's-Hertogenbosch, a city in the south of the Netherlands that people often call Den Bosch. On September 19 he was baptized there. His father Joost had a leather business. Joseph worked in the shop.

Father Joost liked spending time with the Moravians (in Dutch, the hernhutters). They were Christians from Germany. They thought it was important to bring the gospel to peoples who did not know it yet. They had their own village in Zeist. Through them Joseph became interested in mission work. Mission work means going far away to tell people about Jesus.

According to an old story, Joseph wanted to become a missionary when he was young. But his father wanted him to go into business. And so he did.

Losing everything

When his parents died, the leather business closed. Joseph got a job at a court of law, first in The Hague and later in Amsterdam. It was a simple job. He was a kind of messenger or errand boy.

In 1804 he married Alida van Epen. They had a baby daughter. But in March 1806 Alida died, shortly after the

birth. The little girl went to live with family of Joseph's brother, in Berkel. She died there too.

Within a few years Joseph had lost everything. His parents, his business, his wife and his child.

What would you do if you lost so much?

An English magazine later wrote that Joseph saw it as a sign. He had to go abroad. According to a Bible society in Indonesia, he said: "I am now studying God's will and ways. I want to become a missionary."

Seven years of waiting

In 1808 Joseph signed up with the Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap (the Netherlands Missionary Society). That was a group that sent out missionaries. Joseph was almost forty then. He was accepted as a student.

But leaving was not possible. England and France were at war. The Netherlands was on the side of France. Ships to the Indies could not just set sail.

Joseph used the time to learn. He studied together with two young German men, Brückner and Supper. They also went to the Moravians in Zeist.

In 1812 the three of them went to England. One source says they were smuggled out of the country! In London Joseph became a minister in 1813. Then they sailed to

Java, a large island in the Indies. In 1814 they arrived in Batavia, the city that is now called Jakarta.

Joseph had to go to Ambon. But there was no ship going to the Moluccas. So he waited again, for months. In February 1815 he could finally go on.

A printing press on the island

On Ambon Joseph started right away. According to an Indonesian study, he was already preaching two days after he arrived. On Ambon he also married again, to Sara Maria Timmerman. They had two sons.

Joseph had a problem. The Christian villages were on islands far apart from each other. He could not be everywhere at once.

So in 1819 he started a printing shop. He paid for the printing press himself. Four thousand little books were printed with questions and answers about the faith, in Malay. That was the language many people there spoke. He taught people from the islands to do the printing themselves.

He also started a school for teachers from the Moluccas. The teachers were Joseph, his wife Sara Maria and a Moluccan teacher, Mattheus Huwae. The students promised that they were willing to go anywhere. Then they went out as teachers to the faraway islands.

A ship called the Amboina

Some islands were very far away. Kisar, Leti, Moa, Banda, the Aru Islands. People lived there who had once been baptized. But they had not seen a minister in years.

So Joseph did something unusual. In 1825 he had his own ship built. It was a schooner: a small sailing ship with two masts. He called it the Amboina.

A minister with his own ship! With it he could reach the faraway islands. In 1829 the Amboina was wrecked near the island of Kisar. Joseph simply had a new ship built.

He also built a church on Ambon, mostly with his own money. And he made sure of something special for the singing in church: flute music.

Young missionaries from the Netherlands were allowed to live in his home. An old magazine wrote that he was like a father to them.

The rulers of the land

The Moluccas were a colony of the Netherlands back then. A colony is a land where another country is in charge. The church Joseph worked for was part of that Dutch government.

Sometimes Joseph traveled on the boats of that government. In 1821 he sailed with a fleet of 48 large

Moluccan rowing boats and a warship. They were boats with weapons.

The government did not always let Joseph do as he wished either. Most of all he wanted to go to people who had never heard of Jesus. But he had to take care mainly of the churches that were already there.

What did the Moluccans themselves think of his work? We hardly know. Their voices have not been kept in the old papers.

The last journey

In March 1833 Joseph set out once more on a journey along the islands. He was 63 now. On Banda he became ill. On July 14 he came back to Ambon, worn out. Four days later he died. His young friend Gericke was with him. Gericke took over his work.

So many people came to the funeral that they did not all fit in the church.

The church in the Moluccas has not forgotten Joseph Kam. In Indonesia they still call him Rasul Maluku. That means: apostle of the Moluccas.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell us that Joseph Kam lost his wife and baby daughter, arrived on Ambon in 1815, started a printing shop and had his own ship built. We only know what he said about becoming a missionary from an English translation by an Indonesian Bible society. The journey with the fleet in 1821 and the name of Mattheus Huwae are also found in only one source. Whether he already wanted to be a missionary as a child is an old story.

Talk about it

- Joseph had to wait seven years before he reached Ambon. Do you find waiting hard? What have you ever waited a long time for?
- Joseph taught people from the islands to do the printing and teaching themselves. Why do you think that was so smart?

From the Bible

The LORD reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad! (Psalm 97:1)

Go and see for yourself

Joseph Kam's grave is in the center of the city of Ambon, in Indonesia. It lies next to the building of the Protestant Church of the Moluccas.

Peerke Donders: the weaver who stayed

Three shots

It is October 8, 1842, at the end of the day. A boat is sailing on the Coppename River in Suriname. That is a country in South America.

Then three shots ring out.

On the riverbank a church bell starts to ring. People come out of their huts and down to the water. They are sick, and they live here because they are not allowed to live anywhere else.

In the boat sits a young priest from the Netherlands. His name is Petrus Donders, but later everyone calls him Peerke. He wrote in a letter that he could not hold back his tears when he saw those people.

How did a poor boy from Tilburg, a city in the south of the Netherlands, end up here?

A boy at the loom

Petrus was born on October 27, 1809, in Tilburg. His father was a weaver. A weaver makes cloth from thread, on a big wooden machine called a loom. The family was poor.

Petrus had to help with the work when he was still young. First he spun yarn, and later he learned to weave himself. But he had a big dream. He wanted to become a priest.

That was not easy. He was poor, and he was not strong. When he was 22, he was allowed to go to a school for priests. Not as a student, but as a servant. He helped out in the house and was allowed to study at the same time.

Too old

Petrus really wanted to join a monastery. He knocked on the door of the Jesuits. They said: you are too old. He tried two other religious orders. They would not let him in either.

How would you feel if you heard no three times?

Petrus did not give up. In a little magazine he read stories about priests who worked far away, in other countries. He wanted to go there too. In 1841 he became a priest. A

year later he boarded a ship to Suriname. On September 16, 1842, he arrived in Paramaribo, the capital.

With the slaves

Suriname was a colony of the Netherlands at that time. That means the Netherlands was in charge there. On big farms, called plantations, people worked who had been made into slaves. They were not free. They were bought and sold. They had to work hard, and they were often punished.

Peerke Donders worked in Paramaribo for fourteen years. He traveled in small boats along the rivers, past the plantations. Most of all he visited the slaves. He told them about Jesus and baptized people.

He thought what he saw was terrible. In 1846 he wrote a long letter to the Netherlands. He complained about the harsh punishments and about the tiny bit of food the slaves were given. He also wrote that faith could not grow there as long as there was slavery.

In 1863 slavery in Suriname was abolished. Peerke was still there then.

Batavia

In 1856 Peerke had to go to Batavia. That was the place of the three shots and the church bell. Batavia was an old plantation by the river, where people with leprosy had to live.

Leprosy is a disease of the skin and the nerves. It can give you patches on your skin and you can lose fingers or toes. People were very afraid of it back then. That is why the government sent the sick away, far from the city. There were almost no doctors. Today leprosy can be cured with medicine, but that medicine did not exist yet.

Peerke went to live there. For more than ten years he was the only priest. He wrote later that he was the only healthy person among all those sick people.

What did he do? He cared for the sick himself, because there were no nurses yet. He asked the government again and again for better care. And he held church services in the little wooden church.

Into the monastery after all

In 1866 priests from a religious order came to Suriname: the Redemptorists. Peerke asked if he could join them. Do you remember that he used to be too old? Now he was 57. And now he was allowed in.

Later he also traveled to the Indigenous peoples in the interior. Those are the peoples who already lived in Suriname before the Europeans came. He learned their languages.

On January 14, 1887, Peerke Donders died in Batavia, among the people he had cared for all those years. He was 77 years old.

A surprise in 2017

Many people thought that Peerke had caught leprosy himself. In 2017 scientists studied his bones. The result: he had not had leprosy.

There is a statue of him in Tilburg. Some people find that statue difficult, because it shows Peerke standing over a kneeling Black man. Others point out that Peerke himself thought slavery was terrible. What do you think when you see the statue?

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell us that Peerke Donders was born in Tilburg, worked with the slaves and the people with leprosy in Suriname and died in Batavia in 1887. We know about the three shots, the church bell and his tears because he wrote about them himself in a letter. He also wrote himself that he was the only healthy person among the sick. In

1982 the pope declared him blessed. With that, the Catholic Church says he is an example for believers.

Talk about it

- Peerke heard no three times, but he did not give up. Is there something you really want, even when it is hard?
- People with leprosy were sent away. Peerke went to them instead. Who are the people today who are often left alone?

From the Bible

I was sick and you visited Me. (Matthew 25:36)

Go and see for yourself

In Tilburg, next to the house where he was born, there is a chapel in honor of Peerke Donders, from 1923. His statue stands in the Wilhelminapark. His grave is in Paramaribo, in Suriname.

Pieter Jansz: the schoolteacher who made the Bible sound like Javanese

Five on Easter morning

It is Easter, April 16, 1854. In Jepara, a port town on the island of Java, five people are baptized. They are Javanese. Almost everyone in their region is Muslim.

The man who baptizes them comes from the Netherlands. His name is Pieter Jansz. He has only lived on Java for two and a half years.

It is a small service. We no longer know the names of the five. But with them a church begins that is still there today.

How did a schoolteacher from Delft end up here?

A teacher who wrote children's books

Pieter Jansz was born on September 25, 1820, in Amsterdam. He became a teacher in Delft. He also wrote a schoolbook about the history of the Netherlands. It was for children from eight to eleven years old. Maybe just as old as you!

Pieter wanted children to understand what they read. That would become very important later on.

He was a Mennonite (in Dutch, doopsgezind). The Mennonites are a group of Protestant Christians. They do not baptize babies. They only baptize people who say themselves that they believe in Jesus.

A sad year

In 1848 Pieter's father died. In that same year his wife died too. They had only been married a short time.

A year earlier the Mennonites in the Netherlands had started a mission group. They wanted to send someone to a faraway country to tell people about Jesus. But they did not have anyone yet.

After that sad year Pieter signed up. He became the first missionary they sent out. First he learned the Javanese language.

In 1851 he married again, to Wilhelmina Schmilau. Two months later they left. On November 15, 1851, they arrived on Java. They never went back to the Netherlands.

A teacher instead of a missionary

Java was a colony of the Netherlands back then. A colony is a land where another country is in charge. The Dutch government was afraid of unrest. Missionaries needed permission. For teachers there were fewer rules.

So Pieter first looked for work as a teacher. He taught for a rich landowner near Jepara. But that went wrong. Pieter wanted something different from his boss. According to one source, that boss wanted to use faith to keep his workers quiet. Pieter left.

On Java at that time, farmers had to give part of their land and their work to the Dutch government. They had to grow sugar and coffee, for example. Those went by ship to Europe. Pieter saw up close what that did to the Javanese.

Slowly

After that first baptism, the church grew very slowly. In four years about twenty-seven members came together, with their children.

Why did it go so slowly? The region was almost entirely Muslim. And Pieter only baptized people who had come to faith themselves.

What would you do if you worked hard and almost nothing happened?

Pieter stayed. He taught and he wrote.

In the same period he met a Javanese teacher, Tunggul Wulung. He also told people about Jesus. But their first meeting went badly. Pieter thought that Tunggul Wulung mixed the faith with other religions. Tunggul Wulung thought Pieter was a proud Westerner. They each went their own way. Tunggul Wulung's groups grew faster. Even so, the groups of both men are now part of the same church.

A voice from Japara

Pieter did not keep quiet about what he saw. In 1863 he wrote a little book with a striking title: *De koloniën Nederland ten vloek of ten zegen?* (The colonies: a curse or a blessing to the Netherlands?) In 1870 another one came out: *Een stem uit Japara* (A voice from Japara).

He thought the Netherlands had to do things differently. He came up with a plan. Javanese Christians should get their own villages, on new land. There they could work their own land. Then nobody could force them.

In 1881 Pieter became too weak to keep doing the work. His son took it over. A year later that son founded such a Christian village, following his father's idea. It was called Margorejo.

Does it sound like Javanese?

Pieter had one more big job. He translated the Bible into Javanese.

There was already an older translation. It followed the words very exactly, word for word. Pieter wanted something different. He wrote that what matters is that people come to know the thoughts, not the words.

In 1887 Pieter and Wilhelmina moved to the city of Solo. There Pieter worked together with a Javanese scholar, Djojo Soepono. He read the translation aloud to Javanese listeners. That way they could hear if it sounded like real Javanese.

What a clever way to test a translation!

At the end of 1888 the New Testament was finished. Later the Old Testament followed. In 1895 the whole Bible came out, in fifteen volumes. Many people liked his translation better than the old one. He also wrote Javanese psalms, to tunes the Javanese knew.

For all that language work, Pieter was knighted by the Dutch government.

At the foot of the mountain

Pieter Jansz died on June 6, 1904. He was 83 years old. He had lived on Java for more than fifty years. Wilhelmina died five years later. They are buried together on Java.

The church that began with those five baptized people still exists. According to the church itself, it now has between forty and forty-five thousand members.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell us that Pieter Jansz was a teacher in Delft, went to Java, baptized five Javanese people on Easter 1854 and translated the Bible into Javanese. What he thought about his first boss and about the colonial government, we know from his own diary and reports. The first meeting with Tunggul Wulung is only described in one article. Nobody knows anymore what the five baptized people were called.

Talk about it

- Pieter had the Bible read aloud to hear if it sounded like real Javanese. Why is it good to read the Bible in your own language?
- Pieter and Tunggul Wulung both wanted to tell people about Jesus, but they could not work together. How do you think that could happen?

From the Bible

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field." (Matthew 13:31)

Go and see for yourself

The grave of Pieter Jansz and his wife is in Kayu Apu, near the city of Kudus on Java. It lies at the foot of Mount Muria.

Kaatje Dierkx: the girl from Ossendrecht who stayed

A name in Rome

It is November 7, 2000. In a big church in Rome sit pilgrims from the Netherlands. Pilgrims are people who travel to a holy place because of their faith.

The pope gives a speech. Halfway through he mentions one name: Sister Marie-Adolphine Dierckx. He calls her a "splendid figure".

Many people do not know that name. But in Ossendrecht, a village in Brabant in the south of the Netherlands, they know who she is. There she is simply called Kaatje.

How did a girl from a small village become so well known that the pope spoke about her?

A name full of letters

Kaatje was born on March 8, 1866, in Ossendrecht. That village lies close to the border with Belgium. Her real name was Anna Catharina.

All sorts of things went wrong with her last name. In old papers she appears as Dierkx, Dierckx, Dierks, Dirks and Dierk. The Vatican wrote "Ann Dierk". The pope said "Dierckx". Even now not everyone knows how to spell her name!

Kaatje had five brothers and sisters. Her mother was called Judoca. She died when Kaatje was still young. According to one source, the family was poor.

According to the stories of her religious order, her father could not take care of six children. Neighbors who followed Jesus took the children into their home. There Kaatje learned to pray and to know the Bible.

Who takes care of you when things are hard at home?

Work nobody sees

When Kaatje was old enough, she went to work. First in a factory. According to one source, chicory was made there. That is a roasted root. People back then drank a kind of fake coffee made from it.

After that she became a maid. She cleaned other people's houses. The days were long, and the pay was low. It was work nobody sees, as long as it is done well.

A new name

Kaatje wanted to give her whole life to God. She went to Antwerp, in Belgium. There she joined a religious order: the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. A religious order is a group of sisters who live and work together for God.

These sisters often went far away, to countries outside Europe. Anyone who joined them knew she might be sent very far away.

A sister often gets a new name. Kaatje became Sister Marie-Adolphine.

Seven sisters to China

In 1899 it happened. Kaatje was sent to China. She went together with six other sisters. They came from France, Italy and Belgium. Kaatje was the only one from the Netherlands.

Seven women from four countries traveled together to the north of China. They came to the city of Taiyuan. There was an orphanage there, a home for children without parents. The sisters went to take care of those children.

According to one source, there were about two hundred of them.

The sisters also nursed the sick. And they taught women to sew and embroider.

Danger

China was in turmoil at that time. Countries from the West were getting more and more power in China. Some Chinese people fought against that. The missionaries came from those same Western countries. That is why those opponents saw the churches as part of the West.

In 1900 a group called the Boxers became very strong. They attacked foreigners and Chinese Christians.

On July 1, 1900, the governor of the province gave a strict order. All foreign missionaries had to leave. Chinese Christians had to give up their faith, or they would be killed.

According to the stories of the religious order, the bishop told the sisters to hide. But their leader wanted to stay. We do not know what Kaatje herself said. We do know that the sisters did not flee.

On July 9, 1900, the sisters were killed, together with many other Christians. With them were two bishops, priests and

a group of Chinese believers. Protestant missionaries with their families also died that day. Kaatje was 34 years old.

According to the stories of her order, at the end the sisters sang an old hymn of praise to God. We do not know for sure if it really happened that way. We do know that they died together.

Declared a saint

In 1946 the pope declared Kaatje blessed. With that, the church says: she is with God, and believers may honor her. In 2000 she was declared a saint. That means she is honored as an example all over the world.

She was declared a saint together with 119 other people who had been killed in China for their faith. Among them were Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries.

Kaatje is the only woman from North Brabant who has been declared a saint.

In 1951 someone wrote a play about her. It was called *Ik ben uw brandhout* (I am your firewood). Firewood is nothing special. You no longer see it once the fire is burning.

A square with her name

In Ossendrecht they have not forgotten Kaatje. In 1954 they built a chapel on the spot where the house she was born in had stood. The house next to it was torn down. That made room for a square. It is now called the Adolphineplein.

In 1983 a new chapel was built. Inside stands a white statue of the sister.

In 2025 a work of art was added next to the chapel. The chairman of the foundation that keeps her memory alive called it "a simple little monument without glitter or glamour". He said that suited who she was.

How would you like to be remembered?

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell us that Kaatje was born in Ossendrecht, went to China as a sister and was killed in Taiyuan on July 9, 1900. Her being declared a saint in 2000 is also certain. That neighbors took her in, that the bishop advised the sisters to hide and that they sang a hymn of praise, we only know from stories of her own religious order. Historians do not agree about exactly how things went on that last day. Almost none of Kaatje's own words have been kept.

Talk about it

- Kaatje did a lot of work that nobody saw: in a factory, as a maid and in an orphanage. Is work that nobody sees important too?
- The sisters stayed with the children when it became dangerous. Why do you think they did that?

From the Bible

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. (John 12:24)

Go and see for yourself

In Ossendrecht the Adolphinekapel stands on the Adolphineplein, on the spot of the house where she was born. Next to the chapel is the work of art from 2025. In the village's Sint-Gertrudiskerk (St. Gertrude's Church) there are two more statues of her, one of stone and one of wood.

Margot Alt: Moesje and the orphans

Two days after her birthday

It is August 24, 1943. On the island of Java there is war. The Japanese army is in charge there.

Two days ago Margot Alt turned sixty. Now she is arrested by the Japanese. She is even sentenced to death. We do not know why.

But the sentence is not carried out. She does have to go to prison. Why is she no longer sentenced to death? Because she has just turned sixty. Her age saves her life.

On Java many people call her Moesje, a Dutch pet name for a mother, a bit like “Mommy”. She has taken in dozens of children who had no parents. How did a girl from The Hague become the mother of so many children?

A house full of children without a mother

Margot was born on August 22, 1883, in The Hague. Her father was a furniture maker. She had an older brother, Bram.

When Margot was three, her parents separated. About half a year later her mother died of tuberculosis. That is a serious disease of the lungs.

Margot and Bram went to live with their grandpa and grandma. Two cousins who had lost their mother lived there too. A house full of children without a mother.

When she was about twelve, Margot decided she wanted to become a missionary. A missionary goes to a faraway country to tell people about Jesus. And yet at that time she did not really believe herself.

Margot took singing lessons at a music school in The Hague. But she was not allowed to continue her training there. Just keep that in mind for now.

To the Indies

In 1903 Margot left for the Dutch East Indies. That was a colony of the Netherlands: a land where the Netherlands was in charge. Today it is called Indonesia. Margot went with a family, to look after the children.

Almost right away she caught malaria. That is a disease with a high fever. She would suffer from it for the rest of her life.

In 1906 she went to Lawang, a town in the mountains. There she became a nurse in a hospital for people with mental illnesses.

In those years faith did not mean much to her. She said later that through her brother she came into contact with spiritism. That is trying to make contact with the spirits of people who have died.

The night she knelt again

Around 1908 things went wrong. Margot became very afraid. She thought she was going mad. She could no longer eat or sleep.

Later she wrote down herself what happened then. She saw everything she had done wrong pass before her, like in a film. She knelt, for the first time in years. She prayed for a very long time. Then she fell asleep. When she woke up, she knew that Jesus had forgiven her.

After that she stopped with spiritism. She chose a motto for her life: “Jesus alone”.

Have you ever had a night when you did not know what to do anymore? What helped you then?

Margot was engaged to her childhood sweetheart. But he did not share her faith. In 1910 she broke it off. She never married. In March 1910 she was baptized.

Moesje

Margot went to work in a village for poor Javanese people who had nowhere else to go. In 1912 she took in her first foster daughter: Annie, a girl of three.

In 1914 she got a place of her own: Gambang Waloeh. It was an abandoned coffee plantation. A plantation is a big farm for one kind of crop. The people in the area were almost all Muslim.

Margot told people there about Jesus. She started a church and a school. She took orphans into her home. She also took in people with an intellectual disability, when there was no other place for them. Sometimes she cared for as many as thirty children at once! She got a second foster daughter, Dora. She called her Zusje, which means "little sister".

Margot herself got a nickname there: Moes, or Moesje.

At that time the Netherlands was in charge on Java. So a Dutch woman who led a place like that had power, even though she lived among poor people. We do not know what the Javanese themselves thought of her. Their voices have not been kept.

Songs for a whole movement

In 1921 Pentecostal missionaries came to the Indies. Pentecostal believers think it is very important that the Holy Spirit gives power. Sometimes people then start praying in a language they have never learned.

In 1926 Margot experienced that herself. Later she said that she spoke and sang in sounds she did not know. She called her "family" together: forty-six children! She told them what had happened. After that many people in Gambang Waloeh experienced the same thing.

Margot became an evangelist. She traveled around to preach. She made a magazine, and a little daily devotional book with a Bible verse for every day. In 1930 her songbook came out: *Glorieklokken* (Glory Bells). It became the book that Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands sang from.

Do you remember? The girl who was not allowed to continue at the music school now decided what a whole movement sang.

From 1932 to 1936 she led a church in the city of Kediri. She lived there with her orphans. But in 1934 she broke with her denomination. One important reason was that some leaders found it hard that a woman was in charge.

Then Margot and others started their own mission group. She became the chairwoman. Around 1940 about sixty churches belonged to it.

The sentence

In 1942 Japan invaded the Dutch East Indies. In 1943 Margot was arrested and sentenced to death, but the sentence was not carried out. She had to go to Japanese camps for women. While she was a prisoner, she wrote the story of her life.

In 1945 the war with Japan was over. But now Indonesia wanted to rule itself, and the Netherlands wanted the land back. There was new fighting. Margot stayed in camps until June 1947.

Starting again

In 1951 Margot went to New Guinea, a large island that still belonged to the Netherlands. That year she turned 68. Still, she started all over again, near the town of Manokwari. The church there grew to a few hundred people.

In 1961 she had to leave, because of tension between the Netherlands and Indonesia over the island. On October 23, 1961, she came back to the Netherlands. She had been away for fifty-eight years!

She went to live in Arnhem and still preached in churches. On March 22, 1962, she died unexpectedly. She was 78 years old.

Her gravestone has only two words on it. They are the same words she chose as a young nurse: "Jezus alleen", Dutch for "Jesus alone".

In 2016 a museum with her name opened in Gambang Waloeh.

True story?

Yes. It is certain that Margot Alt took in orphans on Java, made *Glorieklokken*, was sentenced to death in 1943 without the sentence being carried out and died in Arnhem in 1962. Still, much of what we know comes from one researcher, who studied her papers. What happened on the night she came to faith and what she experienced in 1926, we only know because she told it herself. Nobody knows anymore why the Japanese arrested her.

Talk about it

- Margot lost her mother as a child. Later she became a kind of mother herself for very many children. What do you think about that?
- Margot started all over again at 68. Are you ever too old to start something new?

From the Bible

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (Psalm 68:5)

Go and see for yourself

In Gambang Waloeh, on the island of Java in Indonesia, there has been a museum bearing her name since 2016.

Riek Luinenburg-Pelle: the bride without a groom

Married by proxy

It is December 3, 1921. In Eibergen, in the Achterhoek, a rural region in the east of the Netherlands, a young woman is getting married. Her name is Hendrika Johanna Pelle, but everyone calls her Riek. She is twenty-six.

There is just one problem. The groom is not there. He is on the other side of the world, on the island of Java.

How can you get married then? According to the family, another man stood in his place: the man the groom had grown up with. That man had a special paper. It said he was allowed to say yes on behalf of the groom. In Dutch this was called trouwen met de handschoen, "marrying with the glove".

How did it come to this?

A nurse and a patient

Riek was born on January 3, 1895, in Eibergen. Her father was a farmer. We know almost nothing about her childhood and her school.

Riek became a nurse. She worked in Rekken, a village close to Eibergen, near the German border. A young man with weak health came there for tests and treatment. His name was Otto Luinenburg.

Otto had been born on Java, in the village of Modjowarno. His father was a missionary there. A missionary is someone who goes to a faraway country to tell people about Jesus. Otto had grown up in the Netherlands.

That is how Riek and Otto got to know each other. In 1920 Otto went back to Java. A year later they got married: he on Java, she in Eibergen.

A land ruled by the Netherlands

After that, Riek traveled after her husband. Java belonged to the Dutch East Indies. That was a colony of the Netherlands. A colony is a land that is ruled by another country. Today it is called Indonesia, and it is a country of its own.

At first Otto worked on a tea plantation, a big farm with tea bushes. The first thing the family tells about their life together is sad. Riek caught malaria when she was pregnant. Malaria is a disease you can get from a mosquito bite. The baby was born and died four days later.

After that they had six more children.

A village with a church and a hospital

In 1928 the family moved to Modjowarno, the village where Otto was born. There Otto became head of the hospital's administration.

Modjowarno was a special village. It had not been started by Dutch people. Javanese people had cleared a piece of forest themselves and built a village there. They were baptized. Later they built a big church. Some Christians even sold their rice fields for it. In the church you could hear a gamelan, a Javanese orchestra with gongs.

Next to the church stood a hospital. Doctors and nurses worked there. The leaders were Dutch, in a land that was ruled by the Netherlands.

Did Riek help in the hospital too? We do not know. Maybe she had her hands full with her big family.

There is one photo of her. It was taken around 1935 at a baptism service in the church. Otto is holding their

youngest son in his arms. Riek stands beside him, with her little daughter who can already stand on her own.

Goodbye to two boys

In 1936 the family went on leave to the Netherlands. Their youngest child was born there. In 1938 they went back to Java.

But not everyone went with them. The two oldest sons were about fourteen and twelve. They stayed in the Netherlands to go to school. They lived at a boarding school in Utrecht. That is a school where you also sleep. As far as we know, Riek never saw them again.

How would it feel to wave goodbye to your mother, without knowing it was forever?

The war comes

In 1942 the Japanese army took over Java. The Japanese locked up the Europeans in camps. On July 22, 1942, Otto was taken away. Two men wrote a letter to try to get him released: Reverend Hildering and a doctor. It did not help. Otto had to go to a camp where the men had to work on the land.

Riek stayed at home with four children.

Later the family thought that Otto had been in the resistance. The resistance were people who secretly worked against the occupiers. We do not know if that was really true. At home it was never talked about.

In the camp a group of men was betrayed. Otto was taken to the Japanese military police. He was questioned and beaten. On Sunday, April 4, 1943, he died in the hospital in Bondowoso.

The family kept what he said just before, in Javanese. A Javanese nurse heard it. Otto said that he would soon be in his Father's house.

Riek is arrested

Soon after that Riek was arrested too. Another nurse was arrested together with her. The Japanese suspected them of sabotage. That is secretly breaking things to get in the enemy's way. Riek was held prisoner for a while in the city of Jember. We do not know what happened to her there.

Her four children were taken in by the family of Reverend Hildering. He was the minister who had written for Otto before.

In 1943 Riek was killed by the Japanese occupiers. The other nurse and a group of men from the camp were killed with her. No trial is known. Riek was forty-eight years old.

It is not certain on which day it happened. The papers give three different dates.

Four orphans

The war lasted more than two more years. All that time the four children stayed with the Hildering family. In November 1945 Reverend Hildering sent a telegram to the Netherlands. A telegram is a very short message. It was in English. It said: the family is complete, with four Luinenburg orphans added. They were safe in a camp in Singapore.

An orphan is a child whose father and mother have died.

In 1949 Riek was given a new grave with military honors, in a cemetery in Jakarta. On the list, after her name, was the work with which the story in Rekken began: nurse.

True story?

Yes, but we know very little. The old records show that Riek was born in Eibergen in 1895 and got married in 1921 while Otto was on Java. Almost everything else comes from the archive of the Luinenburg family. The sources do not agree about the day she died and why she was arrested. No letters or words of Riek herself have been kept.

Talk about it

- The Hildering family cared for four children who were not their own for years. What do you think about that?
- Just before he died, Otto said that he was going to his Father's house. What do you think he meant?

From the Bible

In My Father's house are many mansions. (John 14:2)

Go and see for yourself

Riek is buried at Ereveld Antjol in Jakarta, in Indonesia. An ereveld (field of honor) is a cemetery for people who died in the war.

Izaak Kijne: the teacher with the song about Papua

Bach, very far away

Somewhere in New Guinea a choir of young Papuans is standing together. New Guinea is a huge island, north of Australia. The Papuans are the people who have lived there for centuries.

The choir is singing the St. Matthew Passion. That is music by Johann Sebastian Bach, from Germany. The story of Jesus' suffering, set to music. Bach wrote it long ago, in the German city of Leipzig. And now it sounds here, far away from any concert hall.

In front of the choir stands a Dutchman. His name is Izaak Samuel Kijne. He has perfect pitch. That means he can recognize every note exactly, without any help.

We no longer know exactly where and when the choir sang. But it tells us a lot about teacher Kijne. He gave his students the best he knew. And he trusted that they could do it.

A boy in Nijmegen

Izaak Kijne was born on May 1, 1899. When he was about eleven, he lived in Nijmegen, a city in the east of the Netherlands.

We know almost nothing more about his childhood. Nowhere does it say how he came to faith. Or why he wanted to become a missionary. A missionary goes to a faraway country to tell people about Jesus. A historian has started writing a book about him. Maybe one day we will find out.

A school on an island

In June 1923 Izaak Kijne arrived on Mansinam. That is a small island off the coast of New Guinea. He was 24 years old.

He became the head of a school for gurus. That was the name for the teachers from Papua who taught in the villages. Often they also led the church services.

At that time the area belonged to the Dutch East Indies. That was a colony of the Netherlands. A colony is a land where another country is in charge. The mission worked under that Dutch government.

Historians say two things about that. Missions often helped to make Dutch rule look good. But missionaries also brought ideas that later made Papuans proud of their own people. With Kijne you can see both.

Learning for yourself, teaching your own

Kijne had a clear opinion. Papuan children had to learn to live on their own two feet. He would rather have teachers from Papua itself than teachers from somewhere else. Papuans had to teach their own people, in their own villages.

An Indonesian news site tells what he once said about his students. “Papuan children work hard.” They could work for their own land and their own people.

What do you think? Would you rather learn from someone from your own village, or from someone from far away?

The stone on the hill

In October 1925 Kijne made a big decision. He moved his school, with all the students, to Miei. That village lies on a

large bay. The school was built at the foot of a hill called Aitumieri.

Near that hill lies a stone. In Papua it is now called the stone of civilization.

According to an old story in Papua, Kijne stood on that stone when he taught or prayed. His students stood around him. On that stone he is said to have said something special. Later, people would come with more knowledge and wisdom. But the Papuan people themselves would rise up and lead themselves.

Many Papuans see those words as a prophecy. A prophecy is a message about the future. But we do not know for sure if Kijne really said it like that. The story only appears in Indonesian books and articles from recent years. It has not been found in old Dutch papers.

The place has become very important in Papua. Money is being given to restore it. In 2025 there was even a celebration in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. It was called: one hundred years of civilization in Papua. By civilization they mean reading, writing and education.

A song for the land

He wrote a song in Indonesian. It begins with *Hai Tanahku Papua*. That means: O my land Papua. The song is about the land itself.

Kijne wrote it for his school. But later the song had a much bigger life.

In 1961 the representatives of New Guinea chose their own flag and national anthem. That anthem became Kijne's song!

It did not last long. In 1963 the area came under the rule of Indonesia. The song became a sign for people who want their own free Papua. The Indonesian government has banned it in Papua. To this day people disagree about the future of Papua. Kijne wrote his song for his students. What happened to it after that was out of his hands.

Students who became leaders

For thirty-five years Kijne trained teachers. Hundreds of Papuans were in his classes. Many of them later became politicians, officials and church leaders.

In 1954 a school for ministers in the city of Jayapura was named after him. That school still exists.

In 1958 Kijne had to go back to the Netherlands. He did not want to. He went to live in Oegstgeest, near Leiden. There he kept teaching until 1969.

That year there was a vote in Papua. Just over a thousand tribal chiefs voted on whether the area would belong to Indonesia. They all voted yes. People still disagree about

that vote. Critics think it was not a fair choice. For Indonesia, the result is the basis of its authority over Papua.

On March 12, 1970, Izaak Kijne died. He was seventy years old. Someone who is writing a book about him says that he died in sorrow.

One hundred years later

In the Netherlands almost nobody remembers Kijne anymore. In Papua it is different. Children there are still named after him!

In October 2025 the church in Papua celebrated that Kijne had started his work one hundred years earlier. A large worldwide organization of churches sent a letter. In it they called him a forefather for faith and justice.

Would you like it if people still sang a song of yours after one hundred years?

True story?

Yes. Several sources tell us that Kijne came to New Guinea in 1923, trained teachers, moved his school to Miei in 1925 and wrote the song *Hai Tanahku Papua*. We know about the choir with Bach's music from the account of one historian. The words he is said to have spoken on the stone

are a story from Papua that we cannot check. Nobody knows for sure exactly when he wrote the song.

Talk about it

- Kijne wanted Papuans to become teachers for their own people. Why do you think he thought that was important?
- Kijne's song later became a song of struggle. Can something you make end up having a very different life than you meant?

From the Bible

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. (Psalm 96:1)

Go and see for yourself

Near Miei, in the Teluk Wondama region of Papua (Indonesia), lies the hill Aitumieri with the stone that Kijne stood on according to the story. In the city of Jayapura is the theological college that bears his name.

Truus Lemmens: Mama in Karachi

A party without Mama

It is a Saturday evening in December 2004. In Karachi, a big city in Pakistan, a new building is being opened. It stands next to an old house that has become too small.

Almost one hundred and fifty people live in that old house. They are children and adults with a disability. Some cannot walk well. Others find it hard to learn or think. Many of them were once left behind by their families.

That evening the residents sing and dance for the guests. A young woman dances to a folk song and gets a long round of applause. A newspaper in Pakistan writes an article about it.

Much of the money for the new building comes from the Netherlands. The Dutch hockey association saved up for it. Why are Dutch people helping a home in Pakistan?

It is because of a woman who is no longer there that evening. The residents called her Mama.

A girl from Venray

She was born on July 1, 1914, in Venray, in Limburg, the southernmost province of the Netherlands. Her parents named her Gertruda Maria Johanna Lemmens. She was called Truus.

It was a Catholic family. Truus had a brother who was ten years older. He became a minderbroeder. That is what the Franciscans are called in the Netherlands. They are a group of men who live like Francis of Assisi: simply, and ready to help others. As a Franciscan his name was Salesius.

In 1935 Salesius left for Karachi. At that time the city was still in British India, an area ruled by England. Only later did Karachi become part of Pakistan.

Salesius soon became the leader of the Catholic Church in that region. Together with a sister from India, he started a new group of sisters. The special thing was this: they were sisters from that country itself.

A visit of one month

In October 1939 Truus went to visit her brother. She was twenty-five. She stayed about a month.

According to the stories about her life, she walked with Salesius through the poor neighborhoods. There she saw children with an intellectual disability. Sometimes they were put on a chain. Sometimes they had to live outside, on the porch, as if they did not belong to the family.

Have you ever seen something that you could not forget afterward? Truus could not forget it, that much is clear.

She went back to the Netherlands. According to the stories, she was engaged to a professor. She broke it off. Then she went back to Karachi, and she stayed.

A white sari

Truus became a sister in the group her brother had helped to start. So a Dutch woman went to live among sisters from India and Pakistan. In Karachi she was from then on called Sister Gertrude.

The sisters wore a white sari. A sari is a long cloth that women there wrap around their bodies. Along the edge were three red lines. According to the sisters, they stand for the three promises a sister makes.

On March 21, 1942, Salesius went swimming in the harbor of Karachi. He drowned. He was thirty-seven. Truus was twenty-seven then, far from home, and there was a war. Her brother was gone. Still, she stayed.

Lessons and slums

We do not know much about the years after that. According to the stories, she taught English at a school in the mornings. In the afternoons she went into the slums to help people. A slum is a poor neighborhood with shacks and tiny houses. She also learned Urdu, the language of the people around her.

In 1947 Karachi became the first capital of the new country of Pakistan. Most people there are Muslim. Truus kept living there, as a Catholic sister among Muslims.

The House of Peace

In 1969 Truus was fifty-four. At that age many people are already thinking about stopping work. But for Truus the biggest work of her life was only just beginning.

The bishop of Karachi had bought a house on Kashmir Road. He wanted to start a school there. According to the stories, Truus asked if she could use the house for children with a disability. The bishop said yes.

On February 17, 1969, the house opened. Truus called it Dar-ul-Sukun. That means: House of Peace. At first eight children lived there.

She had help. From the start two sisters helped out. One of them was Ruth Lewis, a young woman from Pakistan. Ruth said later that Truus was her inspiration. So the house really had two mothers: one Dutch and one Pakistani.

Children at the gate

The house grew fast. Some children were left at the gate. Others were found in a hospital bed, where nobody came for them anymore. And some were found at home, chained up.

More houses were added: for orphans, for old people without a home and for people who could not walk well. Most of the residents were Muslim. That did not matter. Anyone who needed help was let in.

Help also came from the Netherlands. A foundation with her name was started there: Stichting Thuisfront Zuster Lemmens. A thuisfront (home front) is a group of people at home who pray, raise money and keep in touch with someone far away.

The residents simply called Truus Mama. Her colleagues found her kind, warm and funny.

A star

In 1989 Truus received a high award from Pakistan. It was a star, for her work in the House of Peace.

In October 2000 Truus died in Karachi. She was eighty-six. She had lived in the city for about sixty years.

Ruth Lewis took over the work. She led the house for another twenty years. She did not have her own room. She slept in a corner behind a curtain, close to the children's beds. In 2020 children in the house became ill with COVID. Ruth cared for them herself. She became ill too and died.

On that evening in December 2004, Ruth said that the new building had been Truus's dream. Truus did not live to see it. But her children danced in it.

True story?

Yes. Her birth certificate shows that Truus was born in Venray in 1914. Several newspapers tell us that she started the House of Peace in 1969, that the residents called her Mama and that she died in Karachi in 2000. What she saw in 1939 and the story of the professor come from life stories written in English. We cannot check those well. There is no book or diary by Truus herself.

Talk about it

- Truus was fifty-four when she started something new. Can you ever be too old to start something good?
- In the House of Peace, everyone who needed help was let in. Who would you let in?

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)