

FOR MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

Holland 1940-1945

I have now come to the end of writing about my personal experiences during the five years of occupation by the German armies and their evil leaders, who have brought so much misery and sorrow to millions of people all over Europe during World War II.

I wrote this for you, even though many of you who read this weren't even born yet.

You can see this as a piece of history that you will not read about in your history books at school.

I do hope that you will be interested in reading this.

With all my love,

Mother - Grandma

*Mother, Grandma. - Oma 12/16/94*

Rotterdam, May 10, 1940

It was very early in the morning, about three o'clock, when our lives and millions of others changed dramatically. We, Max, my husband and I, were awakened by loud noises and airplanes coming in low, and it was obvious that Hitler's Luftwaffe (German Airforce) had invaded the Netherlands. Everybody in our street came outside or looked through their windows. Only a short time later, the news came through the radio that, besides Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg (all neutral countries) were also invaded. Bombs fell on an airbase close to Rotterdam and destroyed our planes and killed or captured the people stationed at the airbase. Rotterdam is divided by the River Maas. The part of the city where we lived was called Rotterdam South. The airbase was also in that part, but a little outside the city. In only a few hours, Rotterdam South was occupied by German troops. They landed transport planes full of troops and materials like tanks and trucks. Max and I, married only a few months, wanted to see if we could find out what was going on. That was about 9 a.m., we walked for a while and came close to a road leading to where the Germans had landed. They were on their way to the bridge that connected the center of the city with Rotterdam South. They came down the road in tanks and trucks and were shooting at everybody that was moving, including us. We were very close to being hit because we could hear bullets hitting a wooden wall behind us. We weren't very close to the moving trucks and didn't go any farther. In fact, we hurried home and told our neighbors what we had seen, that was enough for all of us to go indoors and listen to the radio.

Everybody stayed close to home for the next few days while our marines fought to keep the enemy from taking the Maas bridge and occupy the rest of the City. On that same day, May 10th, the German Foreign Minister asked for a meeting with the Dutch Foreign Minister to give him an explanation. They said to be expecting that the government of the Netherlands would not try to stop the Germans from overtaking the country, which of course was denied and war was declared against Germany. We heard that a German General was shot down and captured close to the Hague. In his plane they

found his horse and complete plans for the arrest of the Queen and her Cabinet and as soon as possible to be taken to Berlin. But as we all know, that didn't happen. It was obvious that the armies of Holland and Belgium were unable to keep the enemy out and had to give up. Also, the marines couldn't stop the Germans for taking the bridge and Rotterdam. They bombed the center of Rotterdam after the Dutch had given up, and destroyed a big part of the city and many people were killed. The Hague and Amsterdam were occupied by the 16th of May, and that was the beginning of five agonizing years. The Rotterdam South part was not bombed because that was occupied the first few hours of the attack. But, we could see the bombs fall for several hours. It was so bad to see what was happening and to be so helpless to do anything. Many people who saw the bombs falling were terrified and worried about family and friends who lived there. We didn't have to worry about that because we were new in Rotterdam and we had no family there, only some people that Max knew from the place he worked. It took a long time before all the fires were out and the clean-up could begin.

Many people who lived in Rotterdam South, but worked in the city, were out of work because factories and shops were destroyed by the bombardments. But there was plenty of work to do, cleaning up the debris and repair as much as possible. For about a week, nobody was allowed across the Maas bridge to go into the city. But when the fires were out, our men went to help clean up. For as much as possible, people went to the places where they worked before the invasion. Max worked as a dye and toolmaker in a machine shop, and as soon as they could run the equipment, they were ordered to work for the enemy. Everybody hated that, obviously, except the Dutch Nazi Traitors. Now that the Germans were in command, some traitors came out in the open, but others waited until later to turn others in, to the Germans, as several people found out. During the bombing, several newspaper buildings were hit and their printing presses destroyed or badly damaged. Max had an even bigger reason not to work for the enemy, because he was Jewish. His company was to rebuild and repair the presses and he asked his boss if he could work on those as much as possible, instead of making parts for weapons

to be used against us and our Allies, to help them win the war. His boss agreed and Max worked on those presses for many months.

We all had heard things (when we were still free) that happened to people in Germany, especially to the Jews, but nobody knew how bad it was, or that it was even true. For several months, nothing much happened to worry about, except for the war itself of course. I guess they were too busy taking over the country and everything in it. They put Nazi's in all the highest places, especially government and soon everything was just as it was in Germany. The war news from the now German radio and newspapers were all about victories and the thousands and thousands of tons of ships they had sent to the bottom of the ocean, including hundreds of sailors. We thought it was mostly propoganda, but it really was bad news for us in the occupied countries, even though we did not know all that was going on and wouldn't for five long years. What we did know, was that things were gradually getting worse. The news that the British army was trying to flee Dunkirk because they were driven back to the sea by the enemy, was very disturbing. In the meantime, the Dutch police force had to take orders from the Germans and they got new bosses they had to answer to. Every day, there was news of more and more places they had occupied. An Italian newspaper wrote that the war on the continent was now over and the British islands look like they cannot stand a heavy attack from Germany. How wrong they were! An invasion of England never happened, but they tried.

In Holland, a supervisor of a factory who had urged his female workers not to date German soldiers, was sent to prison for three years. The Mayor of the Hague was fired because he didn't stop demonstrations for our Prince Bernhard. People could lose their possessions, property etc., if they demonstrated to be against the German people and their leaders. July 27, all soccer organizations were disbanded, new ones formed, and on and on it went. A few months went by and in August of that year, we went on a little vacation on our bicycles to a place in the middle of the country. We stayed in a home where more guests spend their vacation. Among them, a few Jewish couples. We took trips in the country together and discussed the situation.

Some of them were very pessimistic, and thought that this would be the last vacation of their lives. A very sad and scary thought. We lost track of them and don't know what happened to them. We could only guess.

After we came home, I discovered that I was pregnant. Things weren't so bad the first year of the war. There was still enough food, but some things were already rationed. All went well with me, and on April 27, 1941, Marcus was born. Slowly but surely, all kinds of new laws were made, mostly for Jews, like in June of that year, a new law forbade them to swim in public places, go to parks or hotels, and that was only the beginning. Everybody had to turn in their radio's, T.V. we did not have yet. We had two radios, we turned in one, and hid the other one in a closet behind some clothes, and we listened to Dutch broadcasts from England. At first, only the Jews had to turn in their radios. Even though I was not Jewish, all these laws affected me as well.

Then, before things would get too restricted, we decided to take a few days vacation. We went to the same place we were last year, we went by train this time. Marcus was about four months old. To make things easier for us and the baby, Max had made a baby carrier that may have been the first of its kind. Ours was rather primitive, but very useful. He made it at work out of pieces of pipe and painted it yellow. It had a handle on each side so that we could carry it together if we wanted to, and it had legs so we could put it on the floor, or on a table. We walked to a restaurant that was located on a hill. People were sitting outside at tables and were wondering what was coming up that hill. We were carrying it together. When we arrived there, people were amused to see a baby in it, and thought it was very clever, and so did I!

We felt fairly safe making this little trip. The police were not looking for him then, that came later. After this, we didn't go anywhere anymore and soon the second winter started.

Things were gradually getting worse. Max was not allowed to use public transportation and had no way to go to work. He took the street car (tram) anyway. His boss got him a special permit to use the tram, telling the people who were in charge that he needed him and had to have a way to get to work. It was only to go back and forth to work. We stayed home most of the time. We had friends coming over to play cards and we went to them. They lived nearby and we didn't need transportation.

It looked as if everybody had just settled down and taking every day one at a time. It only seemed that way. A lot was going on.

The Resistance organizations were very busy. We didn't know the people who were in the underground as we called it. I found out much later that our nearest neighbor was a member of the organization. They committed acts of sabotage against the enemy, helped English crews from planes that were shotdown, to hide, until they could through secret ways return to England. This was all very dangerous and many were caught and executed. Others took their places and fought the enemy anyway they could until the last days of the war.

On the street where we lived, our house was the last one before the corner of another street, on the corner itself was a small cigar etc., store. They had living space, but no back yard. The first house on that other street had a backyard and so did we. The two came together. We didn't see much of these neighbors the first five or six months that we lived there, because it had a fence between the two yards. When the war broke out, we all thought that it was a good idea to take part of the fence down, so that in case of an emergency, bombardments, or fires, we could escape through each others yards and houses if needed.

We became great friends. Their names were Cor, short for Cornelius, and Jean. They had four children, and more to come.

In 1942, I found out that I was having another baby and Corrie was born 28 August of 1942. We didn't see much of my husband's parents, because traveling was very dangerous if you happened to be Jewish. Even so, they came to see the new baby shortly after she was born. They said that this would be the only time because they were sure that soon they would be taken out of their home and taken to a concentration camp. Sadly, it happened very soon after their visit. We didn't hear from them anymore. They lived in a small town close to the Hague. They owned a small grocery store. Their neighbors next door were their friends of many years. They had given all their valuables to them to keep for them, in case they would some day come back. They didn't. After the war and many years later, I obtained a list of names and found out that they had died less than two months after they visited us. Both on the same day, October 12, 1942. The "friends" denied any knowledge of the valuables they had been trusted with. I found this out after the war. I didn't know these people, and I didn't do anything about it. I had no proof anyway.

The war went on. We didn't know much of what was going on. We only heard what the Germans wanted us to hear, nothing but victories on all fronts. Not all of that was true, but we didn't know any better at that time.

Month after month went by. Max kept working at the same place, and then it was 1944. I knew that they had a radio hidden at work. A few people, including Max, listened to the free radio from England every day. They took notes and typed pamphlets and distributed them to the people they trusted. This went on for a long time and they were not caught. Until January 19. That morning at about 11 a.m., Max came home to tell me that the radio was discovered. Several people were arrested. He managed to escape and didn't know if he was suspected. I found out then that he was connected with the Resistance, and so was Cor, our neighbor. There were already arrangements made for a hiding place in case he would have to go underground. He changed clothes and said he couldn't tell me where he was going for my own safety, and he would contact me. He left by our escape route through the back door and neighbors house to the street around the corner. He did that

in case somebody (like the police) would be watching our house. And a good thing it was.

Only a few minutes later the doorbell rang. I looked around to see what the children were doing and then opened the door. There were two men standing there and said they were from the police. I acted very surprised, why the police? One of them said, "Where is your husband?" I said, "My husband is at work." "No," they said, "He isn't." I said, "I don't know anything about this, he left for work this morning and as far as I know that's where he is." They came in the house and looked around. One of the men said, "We just wanted to talk to him and he had disappeared." I said, "If he knew the police were looking for him, I am not surprised he left." The other one said, "and why is that?" I said, "because he is Jewish and if you're Jewish and the police are looking for you, you better get out of the way even if you haven't done anything. When I asked why they wanted to talk to him, they didn't answer me. They headed for the back door via the kitchen. I froze when I saw that Max had left some keys and tobacco on the kitchen table. I placed myself quickly with my back to the table that was against the wall across from the counter and sink. I must have been so convincing saying what I did, because they didn't look any further and left, saying "We will be looking for him."

I was shaking like a leaf and thought what would have happened if they had seen those items, obviously belonging to a man.

Now, there I was, in a situation I had often thought about and hoping that it would never happen. When these men were out of sight, I went to see Jean. She was home when Max came to their door to let him go through. He could have anyway, because we left our doors unlocked, especially our back doors, so that there would never be a problem.

A few days later, I received a note from him that he was safe for the moment and would try to find a way to meet me somewhere so that he could explain

what had happened. We met a few days later at a trusted friends house, not in our neighborhood.

It seemed that there was a leak somewhere. They didn't know who it was, but they were reported to the police who raided the place while some of them were listening to radio Orange, the Dutch station in England. They had taken turns to listen to the broadcast, and Max wasn't there at that time. As soon as he found out what was happening, he took off, so did a few others. Somebody had named names and that's how the police came to the house so fast. He told me again that he couldn't tell me where he was. That it was very close to home and when the war was over, he could be home in five minutes. This was a comforting thought. When the war is over. . .

A few weeks went by. The children were too young to know what was going on. Corrie was only sixteen months old and Marcus would be three in April.

We had good neighbors all over. Right across from our house lived a couple, older than we were. They had two grown children. They had no grandchildren. She (Nellie was her name) baby sat for me when I had other things to do. She was all too happy to do it, because she loved them a lot, and Marcus visited there often even if it wasn't needed.

One morning she came over to ask if I would come over for a cup of coffee. We didn't have real coffee anymore, but that didn't matter. I took the children and went over to her house.

To my big surprise, there was Max! They quickly explained why he was there. The people who were hiding him, were two older ladies who had to go to a wedding one day and overnight. The house he was in had neighbors below them. He couldn't stay alone in the house that was supposedly empty. If they should hear any noise at all, they would get suspicious, because they didn't know about Max being there. Nellie was taking a risk, but she was happy to let him stay for the night and the day. He would leave in the

evening after dark. Nobody else knew about it and he was happy to see his children for a few hours.

A few weeks after that, Nellie asked me if I would take Marcus to the Doctor. She was concerned because she thought he looked so pale and didn't want to eat. I thought at first, maybe he just ate at home. I took her advice anyway and went to see my Doctor. In those days children didn't get all the nutrients they needed to keep them healthy. I told the doctor that I wanted him to check Marcus out. He sent me to a clinic for a test for tuberculoses. It came back positive. The Doctor said, "Didn't I send you to have him checked before?" What a question to ask. I said, "No you haven't, or I would have gone of course."

The doctor arranged for Marcus to go right away to the hospital where he would be for nine long months. I was told that it was a mild case. I was devastated by the news and was torturing myself why I hadn't seen anything wrong. He had not acted sick at all, and hadn't complained about anything. I felt terribly guilty just the same.

There were strict visiting hours at the hospital, from 2 to 3 o'clock in the afternoon and from 7 till 8 p.m. I had Corrie and myself tested too, but ours came back negative. We had no city buses, only streetcars (trams). There was no tram going that way and I walked the 25 minutes back and forth twice a day. How lucky I was to have good friends who took care of Corrie while I was gone. Marcus went into the hospital March 18, 1944. There were eight to ten children in the ward, whos parents visited them, I was always alone. Seeing the fathers of other children, he began to ask why his father never came to see him. When Max heard about that, he wanted to go and see him.

During his resistance days he had received false papers that had a different name on it and an address in Amsterdam, while we lived in Rotterdam. He would not go during visiting hours, but say that he was an uncle from out of town. He got permission to see his "nephew" for a little while. The head nurse on that floor sensed that he was the father and not an uncle. She

begged him to please be careful, that not everybody at the hospital could be trusted. We had lived in the Hague for many years and we had friends there, also my parents and brothers and sisters lived there. He had told these ladies (where he was hiding) what he was going to do and would be gone all day. Obviously, I didn't go to the hospital with him, but we were planning to spend the rest of the day together. I was to meet him in the Hague, which was less than 40 minutes by train. We wouldn't travel together, but meet at a friends house. Soon after he had to go in hiding, he told me, that if he was ever going to be arrested and the police would force him to tell who had been hiding him, to say that he had been home all of this time, but the police just hadn't been around to check the house. I was supposed to say the same, as not to jeopardize the safety of these people. He didn't think that the police would be forever on the lookout for him and he talked me into doing this dangerous thing. And how dangerous it was, we found out that same day. It was the 4th of April, 1944. We had spent the afternoon at my friends house. We used to work together when I lived in the Hague. She had to go to work that day at 6 o'clock. We walked together to her place of work and after saying goodbye, we, Max and I, were going separately to the train station. It would be dark by the time we arrived in Rotterdam. No sooner after saying goodbye to Gerda (my friend) we were stopped by two men in plain clothes. They asked for our identification. We showed ours, they hardly looked at mine, his had a different name and address. Apparently they knew very well who we were and they escorted us to the closest police station, which was not far away. I can't describe what I felt and what he must have felt at that moment. We had to sit each on opposite sides of a table. Max had to empty his pockets and I my purse. It so happened that both of us were carrying the same pictures of our two children, what for them was enough proof that we were not just friends as we claimed, but man and wife. At first it looked as if they wanted to put me in jail too. One of the men said, "You shouldn't have lied to us. We knew all along who you were." I said, "I lied because I wanted to protect my husband." I was more defiant than scared at that moment. Max said, "Please, let my wife go, our little boy is in the hospital and the baby is with a neighbor. I will tell you what you want to know, but let my wife go home,

please!" What he would tell them later, was, what we had planned to say, that he had been home all the time. Then came the moment that I had to say goodbye to my husband and never to see him again. They didn't give us much time and they took him away. I was out on the street and on my own. I went to the train in a trance, didn't even go to my parents before going back to Rotterdam. I don't remember how I got home. I stayed with my neighbor that night, because Corrie was already asleep and Nellie didn't want me to be alone that night.

It was terrible not knowing what was happening to him and what he must be feeling to be away from us. The next day, I called the police in Rotterdam to ask where my husband was. They said they would try and let me know. They never did. From an underground source, I found out a few days later that he was taken to the headquarters of the gestapo for interrogation. The most hated and feared German state police. I was hoping that he would stick to the story as to where he had been hiding and must have done so because these brave ladies were never harmed and neither did they come to my house for more information. I don't know what more he could have told them because he was only wanted for listening to the English radio and distributing the news they heard on the BBC. This was a big crime, but not as big as being a Jew. That was a death sentence. For three weeks after his arrest, I had no idea what they had done to him, until I received a letter from a camp that was in the middle of the country. It was called Westerbork, a concentration camp for Jews. Obviously he couldn't tell me anything. The letter was censored and I received one of these letters now and then. I could write him too, but couldn't tell him much either. Nothing good happened that I could write about to lift his spirits. A few times I received a letter apparently smuggled out of the camp and wrote what kind of work he did. He dismantled airplanes, shot down by the Germans over Holland. He also told me that he had befriended a little boy, about the same age as his own son. The times that I did write to him, I talked mostly about the children, how Marcus was doing in the hospital and Corrie growing and whatever else I could tell him safely. One time a middle aged man, I didn't know him, rang the bell and said he had a letter from Max. It seemed that

he was also a prisoner of the camp, but a little different. He was an industrialist whom the Germans needed for their purposes now and then. His business was taken by the Germans and he traveled back and forth. His family was also in the camp, so that they knew that he would come back after each mission, whatever that happened to be. He told me that Max was treated quite well, mostly because he was a skilled worker and they needed him. He promised me that he would take Max in his company if both of them would survive. I never knew if he did or not.

In the meantime, life went on, such as it was. Marcus wasn't getting any better or worse. There just was no progress. I hadn't seen my parents for a long time, because I couldn't get away since I wanted to visit Marcus in the hospital. My mother had come one time to see her grandchildren, but that was some time ago. I finally wrote to my mother that I was planning to come to the Hague for one day. I didn't say how I was going to get there. There was very little transportation. I also told her in my letter which day I was coming. I asked one mother of a child in the ward Marcus was in, if she would pay some attention to him the day that I wouldn't be there. She told me not to worry and she would bring him some candy. I told Marcus about my plan and he knew that I couldn't come one day.

Corrie was getting close to two years old, and I was going to walk to the Hague with Corrie in the baby carriage. It was approximately twenty miles from South Rotterdam to the Hague. I put a few food items that I got now and then from the underground organization and also some pieces of coal that I brought home from a railroad yard. But that is another story. So, one morning quite early. I put the stuff and Corrie in the carriage and was on my way. It took quite a while before I was out of Rotterdam. From where I lived I first had to walk to the Maas Tunnel. That tunnel obviously went under the Maas river, to the older part of the city. Before entering the tunnel, you had to get down some steps in order to get to the pedestrian path. That was the first time I had to ask for help to get me down the stairs. People helped me with it. The carriage was kind of heavy with the coal in it and a child. Walking through the tunnel was easy and I had to ask

for help again to get back on the street. I wasn't out of Rotterdam yet, but eventually I reached the highway that had a bicycle path all the way down. There wasn't much traffic because many people had used up their bicycles over the years and especially the tires. You couldn't get any new ones or other parts you may need. Corrie slept a big part of the way. When I was about half way, a military truck went by. There were German soldiers in it and the back of the truck was open. They saw me walking and they stopped. When I came closer they pointed at the carriage and the truck. They wanted me to get in and give me a ride. It would have been easier for me to accept, but I couldn't. I said something like, thanks, but no thanks. They took off and I walked on. I was already three hours on the road and didn't see the end of it yet. I finally got to my mother's house after about seven hours, I was going up the sixteen or so steps before reaching the front door of the etage (floor) where my parents lived, to get help. However, there were a few workmen sitting on the steps eating their lunch that I asked to help me, which they did. They couldn't believe that I had walked all the way from Rotterdam. I rang the bell, but no one answered the door. I couldn't understand it, I had written five days before that I was going to leave. Not many people had telephones in their homes in those days. When you absolutely needed to make a telephone call, you asked a store keeper or a neighbor that you knew had a telephone. Things were kind of slow, especially the mail, but five days!! I hadn't counted on the possibility that they hadn't received my letter, and for a moment I didn't know what to do. The men asked me what I was going to do now, and I said, "If you don't mind getting the kindergewagen (baby carriage) down again, I will see if my brother is home, who lives about 20 minutes from here." They felt so sorry for me and didn't know how they could help me any further. So, there I went, I was terrible tired and disappointed that my mother wasn't expecting me. Reaching my brother's house, I wasn't going to ask anybody this time to help me. I left the carriage down the stairs and I went up. I didn't expect my brother to be home, he would be at work, he owned a small mattress factory, but hoped that my sister-in-law would be home, and she was. She was very surprised and happy to see me and so was my mother who happened to be visiting there! She had no idea that I had plans to come to see her, my dad

and other family members. She asked "How did you get here? I pointed down the stairs where the carriage was with her granddaughter in it. Corrie had been so good all this time. The times she was awake during the trip, I talked and told her we were going to see grandma and grandpa and tried to keep her entertained and fed. Most of the day was gone already and I was planning to go home the next day. I didn't look forward to have to walk all the way back again, but didn't know what else to do. It turned out that there was another way. My mother had heard about people traveling (if you wanted to call it that) on a barge. A boat that was normally used to transport cargo through the many waterways that Holland had. My father went out to see if there was an opening for us the next day. Mother tried to talk me into staying another day. I wanted to, but my heart was in Rotterdam at the hospital where my son was and would miss me. My father came back and told me that there was no room on the barge for the next day, but had made a reservation for the day after. I don't remember anymore how we got word to a nurse at the hospital that I couldn't make it back the next day. I was glad in a way, but was still worried about Marcus. That trip back took longer than walking, nearly eight hours. It was so boring. The barge had benches on each side with a few small tables here and there. There wasn't much to eat or drink but we had some food with us. It must have been a terrible trip for that little girl. She could walk around a little bit, but I had to keep an eye on her all the time. She should be over it by now and I am sure she doesn't remember it.

We had left my parents house real early that day and were still home early enough for the evening visiting hour. I found out that I had worried for nothing. Other people had taken my place at his bedside and he had been OK. Looking back, that trip home to see my parents, was worth all the trouble I went through and to know that they were still in good health.

When I went to the hospital the next day, the head nurse told me that the doctor wanted to talk to me. It startled me, but the nurse said that it wasn't bad news, and it wasn't. The doctor said that finally, after about four and a half months, Marcus showed some progress. It would still take several more

months before he could come home, but it was a good sign. It was now the beginning of September 1944. Since the invasion that started June 6, 1944, they didn't give us (in the occupied countries) a lot of news. The war raged on, but we didn't know much about what was going on, nor did we have any idea when it would end for us. During the first days of September, rumors were flying that the allies had launched an attack on Arnhem in the east part of Holland and in a matter of days we would be liberated. The attack was true, but it didn't work and there was no liberation. It seemed, what we heard, (after the war) was that there were mistakes made, and underestimating the strength of the military in that part of the country. It was a bitter disappointment and it would still take from September 1944, until May 5, before the war was over.

This was the time that Max would be transported to Auschwitz from Westerbork where he was at the time. I received a short (smuggled) letter from him in which he said, "I am sure that I will be deported to a camp in Germany and don't know what will happen."

He begged me to wait for him, that he would be home, even if it takes two years, "don't give up on me. I will come back to you and my children." This was the last I heard from him, ever! That last winter was the worst of the whole war. I said earlier something about some pieces of coal I had taken with me when I walked to the Hague. I had a cooking stove in the living room, it was the only source of heat we had and later on also the only way to cook. That stove took coal or wood and there wasn't much of that. I lived in a small two bedroom house. Above me lived another family. We had our separate front doors. The people that lived in upstairs homes also had an attic with wooden stairs. The reason I mention this, is that the fuel situation was so bad that people cut up extra doors they had, stairs to the attic and even some beams that supported the roof. They used the wood to burn in their stoves. Needless to say that this "available" wood didn't last long. In my apartment there wasn't anything to burn, so I had to look for other sources.

Not too far from where I lived, about a 20 minute walk, was a railroad yard. For many years, coal that was used in locomotives that pulled the trains, was deposited in different spots in the railroad yard and abandoned. It was in between old tracks and nobody paid any attention to it. Until the winter of 1944 - 1945.

People found out that not all the discarded coal was completely burned up and many found ways to salvage some of it to use for fuel. They had make shift sieves that they filled and took out usable pieces of coal and took them home. More and more people went there every day and soon there wasn't much more to be found. I didn't have a sieve, but took an old colander, made some of the holes bigger and tried my "luck" too, as so many others. It was every man for himself. I had to go alone of course and Corrie was taken care of by my neighbors. This was a terrible and demeaning job. Even more if you started to think of the people who made us do this, n.l. the Germans. They were the reason that we were hungry and cold and desperate. How much more could we take? There was more! On November 10, 1944, we all woke up by loud yelling and German soldiers knocking on doors. They were rounding up all the men they found who happened to be home at that time. The news spread like wild fire and many went into their hiding places they had prepared for themselves. They hid under floors, in closets, anything they had available. Many were found however. A family who lived a few houses from me had two young men, about 18 and 20 years old. They managed to escape their house unseen and thought they would be safe at the girlfriends house of one of the men. There were no men living in that household and the soldiers would not search that house. They were very wrong. The soldiers did not come to their mothers house, but searched the house the two were hiding in. This went on for several hours. Another family close to me was also searched. These people had eight children and the man was not young. They took him too.

Hundreds of men were lined up and marched to our soccer stadium and later transported in barges and freight trains to germany and other places that the germans had occupied. The reason for this was they needed the men to work

in their factories and also to get as many men away from the coastal areas in case of an attack on the Dutch coast by the allies. Many wives and mothers walked besides their men to the stadium. This was a terrible day. The next day, I saw the father of the eight children on his balcony at the back of his house. I could see their balcony from my backyard. This wife who had been walking beside him, had been looking for an opportunity. When no one was watching her, she pulled her husband out of the line and they walked away. This was a one day event and the soldiers didn't come back to search the same houses again. We heard in the following days more of these stories of people escaping. The soldiers had lined up so many people that they couldn't watch them all. Those were some of the lucky ones. The two men I mentioned who were caught and sent to Germany were killed by allied bombers who were attacking railroads and waterways only two days later. If they only had stayed home. How tragic.

Then came the middle of December 1944. Marcus was still in the hospital and got better by the day. What I thought would be one of the happiest days of my life (in spite of the circumstances) was when he would come home. However, when that day finally arrived, the 15th of December, I had no reason whatsoever to be happy. The food situation was so bad that I had no idea what to feed him when he got home. The patients in the hospitals didn't get a lot to eat, but most likely more than I could give him.

They gave me coupons for butter and milk for him, but there wasn't any in the stores. There were no big supermarkets as we now have, just small neighborhood stores. There wasn't much choice, I took my coupons, but no luck most of the time. When the storekeeper received some supplies, it was never enough. Most likely a lot of it ended up on the black market. I could hardly do anything with the coupons and sometimes I gave the man two coupons for one half a pound of butter and some milk. It was better than nothing. How lucky I was that Cor was never caught for the work that he did in the Resistance. He saw to it that I got some help. It still wasn't enough, but help it was. Also by a nurse that took care of Marcus in the hospital. She was very fond of him. She lived in the country and had

access to more food than we had in the cities. Her parents wanted her to quit the hospital. She refused so long as Marcus was still there. After he was released she finally gave up. Not long after he was home, she came to visit and brought some potatoes, bread and vegetables. She said, "I was so worried about him, thinking that he may get sick again that I had to come and see for myself." She had some eggs too, but had to give them up at a check point into the city to the soldiers, and then she was allowed to take the other things. She said, "I would have liked to throw the eggs in their faces, but that wouldn't have helped any." It seemed that the soldiers didn't get enough to eat either so close to the end of the war. I am sure that they still had more than we did. They could steal it, we couldn't. She stayed overnight with us and left on her bicycle the next morning. She came several more times and we had a lot to be thankful for. Corrie and I benefitted from the gifts too, and with the added help of the Resistance people now and then, we struggled along for the next four months of the winter, but survived in not too bad a shape.

After the invasion of June 6, 1944, we heard only the news on the Dutch-German radio. Somehow we were aware of the progress the allies were making via the resistance who had their own ways of finding out. Our neighbor and friend Cor, who worked for them was able to relay to me some news that they heard on the free radio. Everything seemed to take so long. The invasion had begun June 1944, and the war was still not over and the food situation was at its lowest. Many people, especially older people, died from malnutrition in those last months. The Germans didn't tell us how bad it was for them and were still saying that they would win the war. But then at last! The war was over! Some parts of Holland were liberated before the people on the west coast, where we lived. May 5, 1945 was the official liberation day. There are no ways to describe the feelings of relief and happiness after five years of occupation. All these years we had to blacken our windows at night, so that no light could be seen from the outside. Most of us had frames, covered with black paper that we put in the windows and took down in the morning. After a few hours of disbelief that the war was really over, people took to the streets to celebrate. We saw truckloads of German soldiers (without their

weapons) taken to the same stadium where they had taken our men on November 10, 1944.

When it got dark, most of us took our frames, with the black paper, took them outside and started a bonfire. Yes, we were still hungry, but filled with hope that things would soon get better.

A few days after the war was over, men started to come home. Those were the ones who were working only a short distance across the German border. It took them only a few days to get home.

Personally, I didn't expect people out of concentration camps to be home that soon.

I had another girlfriend who lived close by whose husband was also a Jew, but my girlfriend was not. It was the same situation as ours was. He (Martinus) had also managed to stay out of the hands of the Nazi's, until April 1944. I have mentioned earlier that Jews weren't allowed in public places, included movie theaters. We couldn't imagine why people would even want to see the German propaganda movies. Obviously, there were no English or American movies. Martinus however, went to see a movie one evening. He was spotted by a Nazi sympathizer who knew him and had him arrested. What a waste, to risk your life for no good reason. My friend, Lena, was pessimistic right from the start that he wouldn't come back. As for myself, I didn't feel that way and got her out of her somber moods many times. She would tell me later that I had helped her a lot through those months of not knowing where he was and if he was alive or not. I didn't know it either about my husband, but I kept my spirits up. Things started to get slowly back to normal. My parents and my brothers and sisters were all OK except for one brother who was an officer in the Merchant Marines. He had gone to sea before the war broke out and when it did, he couldn't come home until the end of the war. We all knew that and for five long years we didn't know if he was dead or alive. It was not until several months after the war that the shipping company he worked for informed my parents that their son had

died on May 5, 1945. The day that we were liberated. They learned later from a man who had survived and visited my parents to tell them what had happened to their son. He was only 25 years old when he died in a Japanese POW camp. When the war with Japan broke out, his ship was in an Indonesian port. Soon, it was occupied by the Japanese and he was declared a prisoner of war. for several months, he was taken in by a Dutch family until it got too dangerous for them to keep hiding him. They expected that they themselves would be interned soon. And this most likely happened. He left that family as not to bring them in any unnecessary danger and he was captured by the Japanese and placed in a camp. We don't know how long he was there, but one day the men were transported to another island by the Japanese. The ship they were on was hit by allied bombers or ships and he ended up in the water. However, he was rescued by the Japanese and placed in another camp. The man who told my parents about Hendrik (Henk) had been an orderly in the camp. He had been taking care of him when Henk became ill. He said that, one moment he had been talking to him and seemed to get a little better. He left to get him something to drink and when he came back, Henk had died. To think that on the same date we were celebrating our freedom. The war with Japan was not over at that time and that's why it took the shipping company so long to find out what had happened to their people who were caught up in the war.

Weeks went by and more people came home from where they were sent that fateful day of November 10, 1944. Some of them were put to work in the Eastern occupied countries. My brother Wim who was taken while he and his wife were hunting for some food in the country. They were so "nice" to let him go home but he had to report for work the next day. He had no way of avoiding to go and he ended up in Austria. It took a long time, about two months, before he made it home. Roads and railroads were in ruins all over Europe and their departure was postponed many times. In the meantime people who were closer to Holland were coming home. We witnessed many happy reunions in our neighborhood. With "we" I mean, the children and I. Corrie was about two and a half and didn't know much of what was going on, she clapped her little hands every time we did, when we saw somebody come

home that I know. Marcus, who was now four years old, had heard enough to ask when his father was coming home. I had no answer to that. We were always sitting, mostly me, facing the street as not to miss anything.

June, July, and August came and went and still no word from or about my husband. Common sense should have told me that there wasn't much hope left. After all this time, I should have heard something one way or another. I just couldn't make myself believe it. My Friend Lena, had already received word that her husband had died. I, who was always the optimist, hadn't.

I had a brother, Karel who lived in another part of the country. The town he lived in was called Middelburg in the Province Zeeland. This was close to the Belgian border and was liberated several months before we were. One day, I received a letter from him in which he asked to come and visit him and his wife, Marie. He said, "I know you are waiting for Max to come home. We understand that you would want to be home if this should happen. We would get you home as soon as possible in that case. We heard that you haven't been anywhere since May." It was then at the end of September. I started to think about it. All these months I stayed home, didn't even go to the Hague where my parents lived and practically every other member of my family. They would visit me, but I stayed home.

My closest neighbors, besides Cor and Jean, were Mies and Ben VanThright. He owned the cigar store on the corner. Ben had a key to the house. I know if Max would come home and I wasn't there, that would be the first place he would go.

After a while I decided to go. With the transportation as it was, I knew it wouldn't be easy. We would go part by train and over water in a barge, because many rail road tracks and bridges weren't repaired yet. It was something different for the children and for me too. It was still a long and not too comfortable trip. I put some clothes and socks on a chair and shoes underneath, just in case. . . and we went. I hadn't seen my brother and his wife since the war started and they hadn't even seen my children. This was

more than five years. When I was there about a week, I received a letter from Ben, telling me that everything was OK at home. He went on to say that he thought I should get used to the idea that Max was not coming home because it had been so long and I should have heard something by now. I am sure that my family and others were thinking the same thing. I could easily understand that, because I had been thinking that myself too. But why hadn't I heard anything so many months after the war?

I thought it was kind of strange that he would write to me in this manner. He had not said that while I was home. Nobody had for that matter.

After a few more days I started to get restless and we went home. I found out after I got home why he wrote me. After all the time that I was home and never went anywhere, two people from the Red Cross has been at the house and I wasn't there.

They had told Ben that they would be back and left it up to him to tell me or not. About a week later the Red Cross people came back to tell me that I already knew.

I shall never forget this sad journey as long as I live. It was the last part of October 1945. I had returned from a short visit to my brother in Middelburg and people from the Red Cross had brought me the final bad news that Max had died April the 30th in the concentration camp in Dachau, West Germany. That is the way I found out that he had died a long way from Auschwitz in Poland where he was sent in September of 1944. I could only guess why he hadn't survived the eight months in Auschwitz. I learned about that later. During the months since the war was over, many people had returned from where they had been sent after the raid of the 10th of November 1944. Also prisoners of concentration camps who had survived came home. The ones who knew that their loved ones had died, were waiting to hear from someone about the circumstances under which they had died.

The radio stations in the country were sending out a program of one half an hour to ask former prisoners who had information about people they knew and had been in the same camp, to come forward and try to contact the families. So, every day they had names from people who wanted to do just that. I didn't know much about that because I did not have a radio. The one that we had hidden in a closet, I disposed of after Max was arrested in case they would come back to get more information from me and possibly search the house. This never happened however. Then, one afternoon the daughter of my friend who lived around the corner from me came running and said, come quick, there is a message about uncle Max. I ran over, but by the time I got there, it was over. My friend, Lena, had listened and wrote down the message. It was about someone who wanted to contact the family of Max Rood in Rotterdam. He was in a sanatorium for patients with tuberculoses in Vaals, a small town in the Province of Limburg, close to the German border. In no time, several people who had heard it too, and knew us, came on their bicycles to tell me about it in case I hadn't heard it myself. Some of my friends and neighbors were getting all excited, except me. If Max was alive why wasn't he home? No, I knew it must be someone who had been close to him and did not know how to contact his family until he heard about this radio program. Obviously, I would want to go and meet this person. I also knew it wouldn't be easy. The transportation was still not very good and I didn't know how to go about it. The neighbors took care of my children, something they had done many times the years that I was alone.

The first thing I did was going to the Hague to my parents. Trains ran short distances. From Rotterdam to the Hague was less than 40 minutes. Before going home, I decided to go to a military post to see if I could possibly get a ride with somebody. I found out where one was located. It was already late in the afternoon, and I didn't plan to go any further that same day. I told a guard at the gate what I wanted. He called and a sergeant came to talk to me. I explained the situation and he told me that he was going part of the way I was going and agreed to take me as far as he had to go. He even would pick me up at my mother's house. I took a bus home and they were surprised to see me. I had no way to let them know that I was coming.

One of my sisters who had heard the message that afternoon had hitchhiked to Rotterdam, but I had already left. She wasn't even back yet when I got there, but she arrived shortly after that. I would have loved for her to go with me, but the sergeant had said that he could not take more than one person. This was already against the rules, but he wanted to help me. He came to get me the next morning and we were on our way. We talked a lot about just everything! It took several hours before we got to Nijmegen where he had to leave me. This was only a small part of the way I had to go. It would take many more hours. He told me that there were trucks converted to buses and he brought me to a place where there was one I could take. Not right away however. They didn't go every 20 minutes, more like every two hours or so. It didn't even take me very far, about 25 kilometers to another town, of which I don't remember the name. Then another "bus" took me to a bigger city where I could possibly take a train. That city was Maastricht in the Province Limburg.

I was lucky to get a train that was leaving in about half an hour. It was October and it was getting dark already. Also, it started to rain and it was chilly. The train didn't take me to Vaals where I had to go. Arriving at the place where the train didn't go any further, I was out in the rain and didn't know what to do next. I was standing there for a while and noticed a few nuns, who were met by a priest with a car. I was desperate enough to ask them if they would take me as far as they had to go. I told them the reason why I was there and had to go to Vaals which was still about 20 kilometers away. They were very sympathetic, and agreed to give me a lift. They couldn't take me very far, because they didn't have enough gasoline to go that far. I was grateful for whatever they could do for me and with about 6 kilometers to go, I was out in the rain again. There is no way I can describe what I felt. Wet and cold on a dark and strange road, trying to find my way. There was hardly any traffic, also due to the gasoline shortage. I was prepared to walk the rest of the way. I looked back once in a while to see if a car was coming. Finally, I saw lights coming down the road. It looked like the headlights of a truck, and it was. I didn't care at that point what it was, so long as it had wheels. I stopped practically in the middle of

the road and was hoping that the driver would see me. He did and he stopped. It was a milk truck and he had to stop in Vaals. He knew where the sanatorium was and dropped me off at the front door. I was wet and cold and miserable and very nervous. It was about 8 p.m. when I rang the bell and asked to see Mr. Bernhard Herts. I was led to a private room. He was sitting up in bed. I told him who I was and he said "Yes, I know." After a few words about the weather and how I got there etc., he told me what had happened.

He had been in the camp Westerbark in Holland with his wife and two children when Max was there too. They became friends. In September, 1944, I think it was the 3rd, after the failed attack on Arnhem by the allies, they were transported to Auschwitz in Poland. As soon as they arrived, he was separated from his wife and children. He never saw them again. He and Max were put to work in a factory. That lasted a few months. They didn't hear much of how the war was going until the 19th of January 1945.

The Russians were coming closer and closer and it was time for the camp commandant to abandon the camp. Not before they killed more people in the last hours and sent many prisoners out of the camp to march towards the west. Bernhard said that they went from camp to camp. Walking and in freight trains. Many died on the way. When they couldn't go any further, they were shot, or just left to die.

After about three months they arrived at the concentration camp Dachau, in West Germany. There were not many of them left and most were ill. It was toward the last days of April and the allies were already in Germany which was ready to collapse.

He went on to say that there was no doubt in his mind that Max was dead. He saw him last the 29th of April in such condition that there was no way he could have survived. He said, "I have not seen him dead, but I am so sure, that I can put the date of his death at the 30th of April, 1945. I have seen too many of the prisoners in that condition for not to be certain of that."

He was very ill himself and was finally liberated by the allies a few days later and sent to this sanatorium in Vaals.

I had some pictures with me of Marcus and Corrie that I knew Max had too at one time. I showed them to him and he said, "Yes, he had these pictures for a long time. After every inspection and search we had to go through, he still had them, until one time he had left them in a jacket and they were lost." He said Max was talking about his family all the time and made all kinds of plans of what he was going to do if he should survive this terrible ordeal.

We talked for a long time and I felt so very sorry for this young man. Yes, he survived, but had no one to go home to after his release from the hospital. I cried for him too. It was all so sad. If they had only left those men in Auschwitz, they would have been rescued by the Russian troops and everything would have been so different. My whole life would have been different, but it was not to be.

I finally felt that I should leave, he was getting tired. He asked where I was going to stay that night. It was close to ten o'clock. I had no idea where I would spend the night, but I said that I would ask somebody in the office. We said goodbye and he promised to visit me someday when he was out of the hospital and knew what he was going to do with his life. I left the room and asked a nurse if she knew of a hotel close by. She didn't know of any, but there was a convent not too far away and she thought that they would give me a place to sleep. The nurse said that it would be about 15 or 20 minutes away. It was a dark and dreary October night and it was still raining. I had no choice but to start walking and try to find the place. I walked more than 20 minutes and finally saw the building the nurse had described. I didn't see anybody and went in. I was afraid that everybody was already in bed and asleep. I found my way down a long hall to a small office where a nun apparently was working. I asked if they had a room for me and told my story again. The nun was very nice and she took me to a room. I had to pay one guilder for it, in advance. I was happy to do that, naturally. I

hadn't had any food for many hours and wasn't offered any either. I was so tired and sad from all I had heard that night, but was thankful to be able to get some rest. I slept better than I thought I would.

When I woke up, it was light. There was no shower or anything, only a big china bowl and a large pitcher that had water in it. I washed my hands and face and got dressed. I had taken a few clothes with me, including a night gown, knowing that I had to stay overnight somewhere.

I left the room and found my way out. I was looking for somebody to thank for the hospitality, but saw no one at all. They were probably having breakfast or maybe in the chapel. There was no sound, except my footsteps in those halls. So, I just walked out. The rain had stopped and the sun was shining, that was encouraging.

First I started to look for a coffee shop to get something to eat. This didn't take long. It was a small cafe and had only a few customers. I ordered some breakfast and hot tea. I felt a lot better after that, but still didn't know where to go from there. Outside again, I saw a group of men standing around. They were waiting for a bus that would take them to work and they thought that I could take that bus as well. It was going to Maastricht, the place I had left the train the night before. This was fine with me, because I knew that there were trains going that would take me closer to Rotterdam.

I had to wait several hours again. I longed to be home and with my children. Everything was just getting too much for me and I couldn't take much more. We finally took off, the train went in a different direction than the one I came from the day before and it took me further towards the west. I still had to take two different buses before I could make a connection and at last would take me to Rotterdam. I had traveled many hours again and it was already dark when I arrived. I was glad in a way, now I didn't have to face half the neighborhood waiting for me to come home and answer all their questions. I went straight to the house of my friend Lena where I had left the children. They were not in bed yet. It was not very late, only it gets dark early in

the evening. There really wasn't much to tell. Well, there was, but nothing good.

I was very tired and they understood that I wanted to go to bed. I took the children home and that was the end of a very difficult and emotional two days. I now knew what I had wanted to know for many months. I had a good feeling that I had gone to meet Bernhard. Not that it made me feel any better. All my hope was gone now, but I had to know. I had to face the fact that I was a widow at age 34, with two small children to raise by myself.

After Marcus and Corrie were asleep, I went to bed totally exhausted. I had a good cry and finally fell asleep. The next few days I had to tell the story over and over again to my friends and neighbors who were so anxious to know what I had learned about the fate of my husband (from the person who was the last one who had seen him alive).

Bernhard came to see me and the children a few months later. He was physically recovered from his illness and was trying to emigrate to the United States where he had some distant relatives.

Some time later when he was ready to go to New York, he came to say goodbye. I received a few postcards over several months, but then I lost track of him. I assumed that he was trying to put the past behind him in his new country and start his life over again. If it was possible to get over what he had been through and the loss of his entire family, seems doubtful to me. I sincerely hope that he has found some happiness again.