

Chapter Seven



Moop Winnink

One day Rita and I were sent away for the day to visit Tannie's relatives. When we came back, I knew that something had happened, so I asked questions. They took me outside to the barn where the wood for cooking and heating was stored; the woodpile was under the extended roof on back of the barn. We had no electricity or gas; therefore, wood was used for heating and cooking. The Spronks cleared away the wood, and I could see a trap door. It was opened, and I saw makeshift steps leading down to a room where there were candles and a mattress. Also I saw a young man in the underground room. Long after the war I learned his story.

In 1941, Moop was living in Amsterdam with his family in the Jewish quarter. His father had been picked up in a *razzia* (round up) and probably was sent to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, where many Dutch men were taken. (Mauthausen was an *Vernichtung durch arbeit*, extermination by work, camp.) The rest of the family, his mother, two younger brothers, and Moop hid in their apartment. On March 18, 1943, at 2:00 AM, the Nazis came for the rest of the family. They pounded on the door. Moop, then seventeen, said to his mother, "Let's go to the fire door and from there to the next apartment, which is empty." He told his mother they

could crawl through. His mother didn't want to go but gave him her blessing to go. Moop did crawl through and was not discovered. When he went back to their apartment, he saw that his mother and brothers were gone. No one was there. They had all been taken.

Moop discovered that his mother and brothers had been taken to the *Hollandse Schouwburg* (Dutch Theatre), as had many members of my family. Before World War II, according to "*Hollandsche Schouwburg*," many famous Jewish artistes performed in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*.

Plays by the Jewish dramatist Herman Heijermans (1864-1925) enjoyed their first performances here, including his famous *The Good Hope* about the harsh life of Dutch fishing folk, which premiered in 1900 Since 1962 the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* has been an official monument commemorating the 104,000 Dutch Jews killed in World War II. (See also note 6.)

Moop went to his aunt's apartment; she was married to a non-Jew. He stayed there until the next morning and then went back to the family apartment to gather a few things. He then walked over to the theatre to see if he could see his mother and brothers. While he was watching, a group of children were taken out of the building to get some air. Moop saw his little brother and asked him to come with him. The brother said that he wanted to stay with his mother. Moop's mother

and brothers were deported from the theatre and probably murdered in Sobibor Death Camp.

Moop, all alone, knew where to go. When he was a young boy, he had been sent on a summer vacation trip from the city to the country. The farm he had been sent to was the Spronk farm. When he was leaving the farm, Tannie had said to him, "If you ever need help, you will always be welcomed by us." Over the years, Moop had kept in contact with them. Therefore, years later he knew where he wanted to go—to the Spronk farm. He knew that if he got to their farm that the Spronks would hide him. And they did hide him—at first in the barn. Sometimes at night he slept in the meadows in case the barn was searched.

While he was in hiding in the barn, Moop found out that one of his friends from Amsterdam was being hidden on a neighboring farm. He took Tannie's brother, Oom Evert's bike. Because the bike belonged to a handicapped person, the sign on the back of the bike indicated that the biker could neither speak nor hear. Moop had not gone far when he was stopped by German soldiers who wanted his identity card. He didn't have an identification card; therefore, he kept pointing to the sign on the back of his bike, pretending that he could not speak nor hear. Finally they understood and let him go.

He went back to the farm and told Tannie and uncle what had happened. They decided it would be better to hide him under the wood pile. They sometimes let him out during the day to get some fresh air. Tannie and Oom decided that I should be the one to bring Moop something to eat once a day.

Everything was fine until this one day. As I came up from the hole in the ground, five or six German soldiers were standing there, curiously looking at me.

What should I do? I thought. I was perhaps seven and a half years old at the time, so I decided to pretend that they were not there staring at me. It must have been obvious to them what was happening—a little girl coming out of a hole in the ground. As they watched me, I put the trap door down, gathered the wood, and proceeded to cover the trap door. All the while they stood watching. I picked up the food pot and turned my back to them as I exited the area. I was very scared thinking that they would shoot me, but they did nothing and walked away. When Tannie and Oom returned from the fields, I told them what had happened. They realized that Moop had to be moved to another hiding place because the soldiers would have told a superior officer.

I wondered why they had ignored the situation and never came back to the farm. I thought later that perhaps they had families of their own, so they closed their eyes. During that time there was a lot of evil in the world, but on that day goodness prevailed.

Chapter Eight



Elburg Fishing Village

When I was almost nine years old, in December 1944, we suddenly had to leave the farm. I remember two people came to the farm on bikes and told us we had to leave immediately. They put Rita and me on the back of their bikes and took us to a big house that had rhododendron shrubs in front of the house. We spent the night there.

I never asked why we were leaving, and I never knew the reason until twenty years ago when I found out what had happened. A high ranking German officer came into the village of Oldebroek and asked for directions to the Widow Spronk's (Tannie's) house. He was overheard by members of the Underground. Because the officer and his men were given wrong directions, it gave the Underground time to move us. I found out later from Tannie's nephew's wife Dirkje that the Germans did come twice to the farm searching for us. Fortunately we were gone, and there was no sign that we had been there.

It was common practice for German soldiers acting on a tip that Jews were hiding at a certain address to conduct a search. Many times people received a warning from the Underground and quickly hid the Jews. The soldiers would search and finding nothing would leave, returning later when the Jews were again out of their hiding place thinking it was

safe. During the second search they would most of the time catch the Jews.

The next morning they took us to Elburg, a fishing village. Elburg is a medieval village with a moat and a city built in the late fourteenth century. Elburg was located at the coast of the former Zuiderzee (Southern Sea), now a huge inland lake, IJsselmeer (Lake Yssel,) an artificial lake, a result of the damming of the Zuiderzee (Southern Sea) in 1932; gradually the salt water had changed to fresh (sweet) water. We stayed at Beekstraat 3, with the Westerink family, Jakob, the husband, Henriette Westerink-Iepenburg, his wife, and twenty-year-old daughter, Johanna, or Jo (pronounced Yo). We arrived there after Christmas in 1944.

We again had our names changed. Mine was Marie Hoogendoorn. The Westerinks had relatives by that name, so it was easy to remember. They told anyone who asked that we were their refugee relatives. Many people were homeless; their houses had been destroyed in the bombings.

There was very little to eat. The whole town was starving.¹¹ Mr. Westerink was a fisherman who fished for eel. We survived on eel, greasy and strong tasting. Fisherman bartered fish for food. The villagers also made soap out of fish fat. Ugh!

The Westerinks were Evangelists, as was Tannie. Mr. Westerink was a caretaker for the Evangelist church, which was in the attic of our apartment house. Their home was a staircase up in a second floor apartment. The apartment had a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms. The outhouse was downstairs and outside behind the building. There was no electricity or gas

during the war. In the evening the curtains were drawn and the rooms were lighted by kerosene lamps and candles. There was a curfew; we couldn't be outside after curfew or we would be punished. If the German patrol saw a light, they came into the home and confiscated the light source. The streets belonged to the Nazis.

There were no newspapers published. No one was allowed to listen to the radio because everyone was supposed to have turned them in, but people secretly had radios. The Dutch government was in exile in Britain and broadcast on *Radio Orange* (the color symbolic of the Netherlands and the royal family, the House of Orange).¹² Secretly some people listened to that and also *Radio Free Europe*.

The schools were closed because there was no wood to heat the school, nor were there teachers to teach. We were left to our own devices, playing outside a lot. There was little food, so we were always hungry. This was the time of the Hunger Winter; the Dutch all over the Netherlands were starving. We made little fires and put sticks through little fish or bugs and roasted them. We had to be careful outside because the Nazis had a custom of allowing horses to run wild through the village, scaring us all. To this day I am afraid of horses.

Several times in Elburg we were in danger. I recently learned of an incident that I had forgotten: a friend of mine, Willem van Norel, was interviewing Jo van Gulick-Westerink, the daughter of the family, for a book about people in hiding in Elburg during World War II, and she told him the following anecdote. One Sunday morning a rumor spread through the

village that there would be a *razzia* (round up of Jews). The Westerinks decided that Rita and I must be hidden. Jacob Westerink had his fishing nets hanging in the rear of the first floor where there was a small enclosed area outside. They hid us among the nets. Later that day the Westerinks realized that the impending *razzia* was a false alarm, and we were allowed to come out of our hiding place.

Another time we were in danger was one day when the Westerinks asked Rita and me to walk to the next village to a neighboring farm to see if they would give us some eggs. We were then seven and nine, respectively. We started out for the farm. Once we had left the village we walked along the dike, with water on one side and meadows on the other side. We could see the village in the distance. Suddenly we were under an air attack. The Allies were bombing Harderwijk. Little German Messerschmitt Bf 109 planes would swoop down and pick people off, even shooting them off their bicycles. My sister and I lay alongside of the dike. Rita was trying to pick the blue cornflowers. I had to make her lie down. We never made it to the next village.

Another time, Jo, the Westerink's daughter, said that when she went to visit her girlfriend in the village, she had been introduced to an elderly couple who were evacuees. They questioned her about the two refugees, Rita and me. The woman said, "I think I know them." Jo gave them our "story." After the war was over, Jo found out that this couple was Jewish from Amersfoort but had not seen us since we were four and six years old. Therefore, they were not sure of our identity.

But we weren't so scared of causing our own danger. We were able to walk with Jo on the streets of Elburg because so many refugees had escaped from the fighting at Arnhem, fought from September 17 to 26, 1944. One day we were out walking and had just passed the mayor's house which was now occupied by the SD (German *Sicherheitsdienst*), the German Security Department. Rita and I began to argue and we started yelling and calling each other "dirty Jew." That really scared Jo who was afraid the SD would hear and arrest us. Luckily for us, they had not heard and we were safe once again.

Chapter Nine



Hunger Winter

The previous year when Rita and I were still in Oldebroek, people had heard on their secret radios that the Allies had invaded Normandy on June 6, 1944. Everyone was happy, figuring that the Netherlands would soon be freed of the German occupation. Then Belgium was freed in September of 1944, followed by the southern part of the Netherlands in the second half of 1944. The Allied advance towards the North came to a stop at the Waal and Rhine Rivers and the Battle of Arnhem.

The rest of the Netherlands, especially the west of the country, suffered from the Hunger Winter. I recall seeing people on the road, frozen and dead. According to L. H. Lumey, et al., in "The Dutch Hunger Winter Families Study":

In support of the Allied war effort, the Dutch government in exile in London had called for a national railway strike to hinder German military initiatives. In retaliation, in October 1944, the German authorities blocked all food supplies to the occupied West of the country.

Despite the war, nutrition in the Netherlands had generally been adequate up to October 1944.

Thereafter, food supplies became increasingly scarce. By November 26, 1944, official rations, which eventually consisted of little more than bread and potatoes, had fallen below 1000 kcal per day, and by April 1945, they were as low as 500 kcal per day. Widespread starvation was seen especially in the cities of the western Netherlands.

We had to become increasingly creative about food and recipes during the Hunger Winter. I remember eating sugar beet porridge and pancakes. The sugar beets supplemented our meager rations. However, what people remember most about that winter, besides the cold, hunger, and darkness, is eating tulip bulbs; according to van der Zee, “140 million were consumed that winter” (150). One tulip grower said that he had sold “2500 tons of bulbs—crocuses for coffee, daffodils and hyacinths for fodder, and tulips for the humans” (van der Zee 150). Van der Zee also discusses the plight of cats and dogs during the Hunger Winter. He explains that both were “widely hunted” (150). Both risked “ending up on someone’s dinner table” (150). Cats had the dubious distinction of being sold as “roof-rabbits” (150).

The scarcity of food was compounded by the severe cold weather of the winter of 1944-1945. The Dutch royal family in exile tried to alleviate the situation. In an article “Operation Manna and Chowhound,” Hickman explains that in April, the Dutch Royal family’s Prince Bernard, in London, asked the Allies for help getting food to the Dutch. With the help of

the U.S. and Great Britain, Operation Manna was organized, and the Royal Air Force began relief flights early on April 29. Despite the lack of an official truce, the planes were not fired on by the Germans. Later that day aircraft food was dropped at zones at Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Gouda. On May 2, *Reichskommissar* Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the German governor of the Netherlands, agreed to a truce and to increase the number of drop zones to ten.

Hickman writes, "The next day, American B-17s joined the effort under the name Operation Chowhound." These aircraft doubled the amount of food being dropped. From April 29 to May 8, the day Germany surrendered, Operations Manna and Chowhound had "delivered 6,680 and 4,000 tons of food respectively" (Hickman). These efforts saved many people; nonetheless, 18,000 Dutch starved to death during the Hunger Winter (van der Zee 305).

By May 5, 1945, the rest of the Netherlands was liberated by the Allied Forces, and food supplies were immediately restored. Trucks laden with food arrived daily. This was difficult to manage because many bridges over our waterways had been blown up. Therefore, many river crossings had pontoon bridges so the trucks could cross over to deliver the food.

Chapter Ten



The Taste of Freedom

In Elburg, we heard that the Germans had mounted a huge defensive effort; however, the Allies had broken through. Then we heard that the Canadians were moving northward, and we knew we would soon be freed.

As the Canadians came closer, the villages south of us were freed. If we put our ears to the dike, we could hear the rumbling of the tanks. At this time the Germans retreated from our village. Everybody put out their Dutch flags or at least something orange. Everyone was happy, celebrating.

Then the Germans marched back into Elburg. There was much shooting. It was horrible. We ran for our homes. Then the Germans marched out again. We gathered up the dead and wounded. Then again people retreated inside their homes. This time we didn't go out for a long time, fearing the Germans would come back.

I was watching from a window in our apartment at a spot where I was told our liberators would first be seen. I saw men wearing blue coveralls riding in an open truck—these were the Dutch Underground fighters leading the Canadians. The Allies had given them the honor of entering the village first. Then I saw Canadian tanks. We were joyful! After five years, on April 19, 1945, we were liberated.¹³ Such joy. To suddenly

realize that we were free! I can't fully describe our feelings of joy. People were hugging and kissing. The soldiers were almost crushed to death by our hugs.

The soldiers threw us chocolate bars; I had no idea what these were. One of the soldiers had offered me a chocolate bar. I didn't want to accept it. I had not had chocolate, no sweets. Jo knew what it was. After she had unwrapped the chocolate bar, I still would not accept the chocolate. Jo broke off a piece and shoved it into my mouth. I thought, "What a good taste." To this day I love chocolate. To me, it is the taste of freedom.

Not everyone was happy the war was over. The villagers took all the women who had fraternized with the Nazis to a gazebo in the middle of the market. They shaved their heads to mark them as collaborators; these women had cooperated treasonously with the German occupation. I saw this from the window.¹⁴

The Underground thought it would be best if we returned to Tannie on the farm in Oldebroek. We were to wait with Tannie until our parents came for us. Jo rode us back to Oldebroek. She was very upset that we were leaving because she had become attached to us; we were like her little sisters.

Once we were back with Tannie on the farm, we heard the news that our parents had survived the war and were planning to come to us.

Chapter Eleven



Parents in Hiding

Where had my parents been while we were in hiding? The same night my sister and I left Amersfoort, after we had been taken to the Spronk farm to hide, Christian friends snuck into our house to see my parents. My mother told them that Rita and I had left. They asked her where she and my father were going. My parents answered that they had no place to go.

They offered my parents a place with them. They lived at the other end of our town, Amersfoort. They had an apartment above their Wilco Ford dealership with a service area in the back. Their Christian friends, Hennie and Lies Lippinghof, told my parents that they would take them in, but that there was only one problem—two German officers were living in one of their bedrooms. At this time officers were being billeted in Dutch homes. They said that my parents would be in an attic over the garage separate from the apartment, but they had to be very careful. My parents discussed and then accepted their offer. My mother burnt all our important documents, birth certificates, insurance information, etc. They packed a few other things, closed the door, left everything else in the house, and went to her friends' home. The Underground knew where they were; however, my parents had no idea where their children were.

While my parents were in hiding, my Dutch grandmother, my dad's mother, Rebekka, was in the Catholic Hospital in Amersfoort. She had suffered a heart attack. Evidently both she and my grandfather Wolf Peper were ordered to come to the train station to be evacuated to Amsterdam. Instead, my grandfather hired an ambulance that took him and my grandmother to Amsterdam. They were housed with many others in the Jewish Quarter at the address 110 Waterloo Plein. Rebekka died in Amsterdam on December 5, 1942, and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Diemen.

My father never went outside for the whole three years. It would have been dangerous because most Dutch men his age had been drafted into the German army and sent to the Eastern Front or sent to labor camps. Very few men were around on the streets. Many Dutch men were in hiding. But most of all, this was his hometown, so my dad would have been recognized and probably immediately arrested.

My mother was able to leave the apartment at times. She went out dressed as a nurse and would try to get food for them and for their friends who were hiding them. She would also take messages for the Underground. The Germans flirted with her and would give her cigarettes. She smoked part of the cigarette and saved the rest for my father. It was difficult for her not to respond in German, a language she knew very well. She had to pretend that she didn't understand them.

Happily my parents survived the war. By May 5, 1945, the country was mainly liberated by the Canadians with help from the Americans, the British, and the French. It took them a while, however, to be reunited with Rita and me.

Chapter Twelve



Reunion

After Elburg was liberated and we had returned to the farm in Oldebroek, Tannie told us that our parents were alive. It had been almost three years since I had last seen them, so I didn't remember much about them. By this time, at age nine, I was a very devout Christian. I did remember that my mother smoked and wore lipstick. According to my religious upbringing for the last three years, these were sins for a woman.

At war's end, my parents were told that their children were alive and well. Imagine how happy our parents were to discover that their children, now nine and seven years old, had survived. However, the Dutch government made it difficult for parents and children to be reunited. They had passed a law that the father and/or mother had to be able to provide for their child or children. The parents also had to prove that the children's religion was Judaism. Otherwise, the children had to stay with the rescuing Dutch Christian parents. My parents had no money, and my mother had burnt our birth certificates and other documents so the Nazis could not use the information against us. Nonetheless, my parents were determined to be reunited with their children.

Many bridges in the Netherlands had been bombed, so it took my parents time to get to the farm. After liberation, few

people had cars. Bikes did not have rubber tires; people rode on metal rims or on wood rims--very uncomfortable. Therefore, my parents hitchhiked on trucks to the farm.

When they arrived on the farm, I remember that I was in the pump room where we got water. The pump room was separate from the house, which was in front of it. I looked up and saw two people standing in the doorway of the pump house. I did not recognize them. Rita and I hid behind Tannie, who was wearing a voluminous skirt and headdress, the traditional costume. Rita hid on her left side behind the skirt; I on her right. She said to us, "These are your mommy and daddy. Maud, go and shake their hands." Timidly I went and shook their hands. I then ran back and hid behind Tannie.

Rita and I did not remember them at all. My parents, therefore, decided to stay on the farm with us for a while so we could be reacquainted. We showed our parents around the farm.

I took Father to see my toys—the ammunition I had collected and stored on a "secret" shelf in the barn. Those "toys" were grenades, gun powder, and ammunition; some, live ammunition. Naturally my dad was shocked to discover that many of my "toys" were live ammunition. Not surprisingly, the next time I went to play with them they were gone.

All the time we were in hiding, I had been Rita's mother, so I negotiated our future. At first, I said no, we wouldn't go home with our parents. My mother confided to me later that we had told them we didn't want them anymore because we felt that they had abandoned us.

This was a very difficult time for Tannie as well. We had been her children for most of the three years we were in hiding. She had lost her husband; therefore, when we left, she would be alone.

After a while I made a bargain with my parents. I told them that we would go home with them; however, if we didn't like living with them, we would come back to live with Tannie. They said that they agreed.