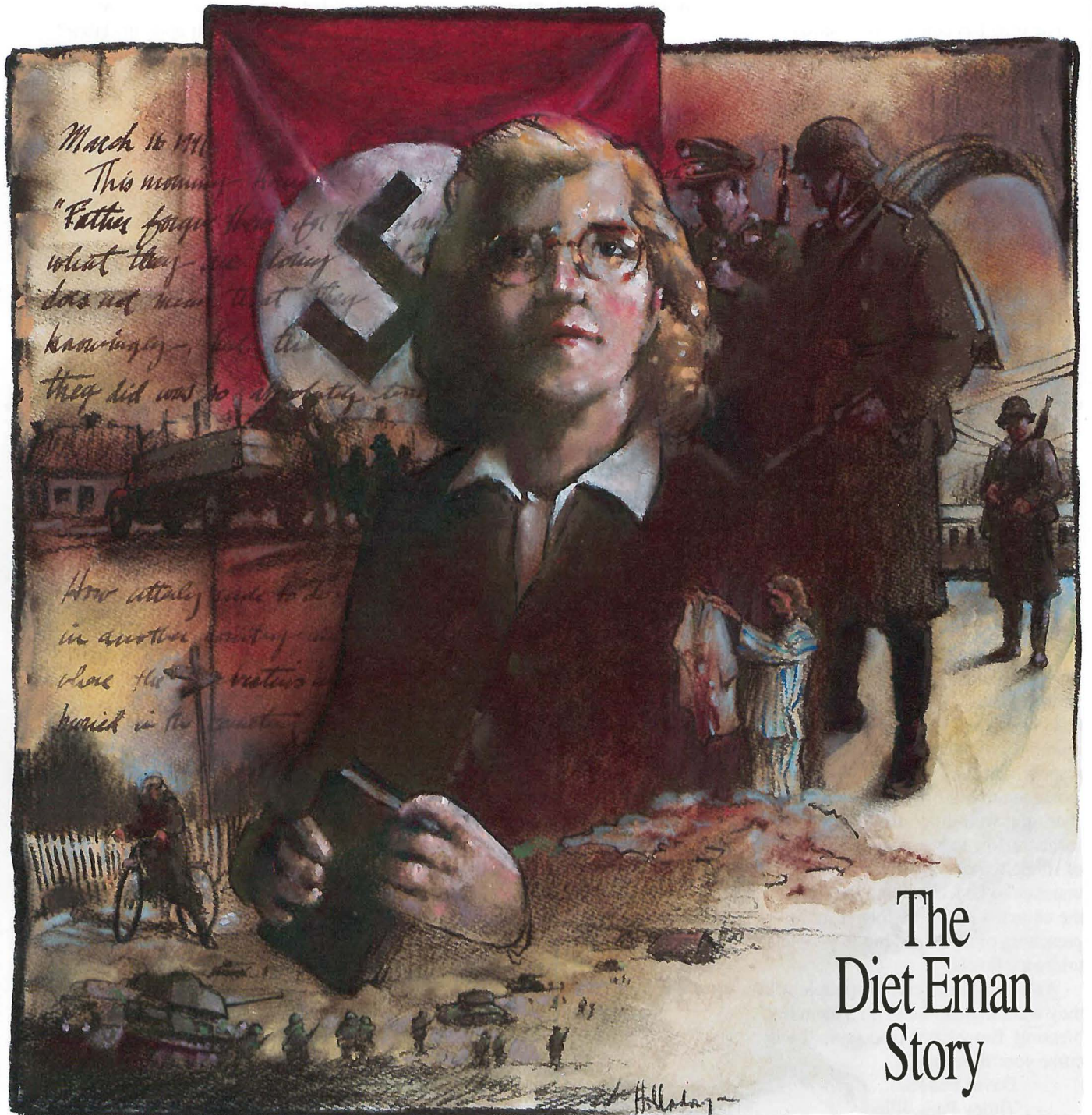


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NOVEMBER 8, 1993

WORLD HUNGER WEEK
MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



The
Diet Eman
Story

SUCH SMALL THINGS SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE



The Diet Eman Story

BY
JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP

This is the first of eight installments in the story of Diet Eman (pronounced DEET AY-MAHN), a woman who worked in the resistance movement in the Netherlands during World War II. Eman now lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she is a member of Seymour Christian Reformed Church. Her story, which she cowrote with author James Calvin Schaap, will be published in book form by Eerdmans Publishing Company in June 1994.



HERMAN

December 11, 1939

Again, a conversation with the doctor. We always come back to the same point: "The church may not mix in politics," he says. And I tell him that when you are a Christian and profess that God is almighty, there is no area in life where you can eliminate God. (From the diary of Diet Eman)

My friend Herman, from the bank in The Hague where both of us worked, played violin beautifully. Before the war, he would often come to our house and play trios with my brother Albert on cello and me on piano. Herman was a friend of mine, a friend of the whole family, and he was Jewish.

I remember standing outside the bank where we worked and feeling terrific anger when the Germans stomped into the city. Who had invited them? No one. Hitler himself had promised just the night before the invasion that he would never come into Holland.

But he came anyway, later that night. I stood there on the bank steps and watched their arrogance, and I swore to myself that as long as they were in our country, I would not speak a word of German.

It took some time before the

Jewish persecution began. We started seeing signs of it in little discriminatory laws. First, Jews weren't allowed in trams, buses, parks, and shops. We would see signs announcing these rules displayed on the trams or in shop windows. Soon, Jews weren't allowed to go certain places in the city, and they were permitted to shop only at Jewish businesses.

Herman and his family did not live in the Jewish area of the city, but they, like all Jews, were soon no longer allowed to visit non-Jewish people; he could no longer come to our house and play his violin. It was terrible.

Many of the Germans' regulations seemed only annoyances—the curfew, the prohibitions from listening to the BBC or wearing anything associated with the royal family—and we simply put up with them. But the laws they made for the Jewish people were not trifling; when Jews were restricted from this place or that place, it was for us Christians a principle that was at stake. We knew what had happened to the Jews in Germany.

Soon we began to see notices alleging that the Jews were infectious (the Germans called them lice and rats and all kinds of names) and saying that therefore they had to leave the Netherlands. At that point some of us began resisting the injustice.

My friend Herman and his family received notice to come late at night to a specific place in the city, bringing just one little suitcase apiece. They were going to be transported somewhere safe—at least that

was the excuse the Germans gave. Hitler's people claimed that all the Jews in Europe would be put in one country so that the only people they could harm would be each other.

That's when Herman asked me, "Diet, would you go?"

We were at our house. He had come at night, because at that time already it might have been dangerous for him, a Jew, to be seen at our home.

"No," I told him. "Everyone knows it is a lie."

He looked around nervously. He wasn't necessarily fearful. Herman was a strong human being. "Then what would you do?" he asked.

I didn't know exactly what he *should* do, but his predicament was something my fiancé, Hein Sietsma, and I had talked often about as the persecution of Jews began getting worse: What *could* Herman do? And what *could we* do for him?

That night Hein and I talked more about Herman. "If we don't do anything," Hein said, "when all of this is over, we won't be able to look each other in the eye." We knew we had to do something.

December 3, 1942

The Jews are walking with their yellow stars on, are not allowed outside after 8 p.m., are not allowed to visit non-Jews; some streets are forbidden to them.

O God, don't you see that they are touching the apple of your eye? Is it still not enough?

O let us, in the midst of all these things that drive us crazy, still remember that you are the Ruler of everything and that the punishment you will give the Nazis for these things will be more just than all the things we



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think of to punish them.

It is really ridiculous if you think for one moment that these people (IF you still can call them people) who are now harassing the Jews will themselves need a Jew to go to heaven. And it is unacceptable if you think that they are supposed to have been created in the image of God.

Please teach us Christians now to put into practice what we confess, especially to these Jews. (From the diary of Diet Eman)

Resisting. Hein said that out in the country, in the Veluwe, where his father was a Christian school principal, many Christian families would be happy to hide Jews. All of us thought that the war would be over quickly. After all, this little man Hitler was a barbarian, and we no longer lived in the dark ages. Surely the Americans would rid us of this tyrant within a year.

We were wrong. The occupation took five long years, five terrible years for our little country.

The next day I told Herman that we could find a place for him but that he would have to leave The Hague for Gelderland. There we would put him with a farm family who would keep him for the duration of the occupation.

"But I have a girlfriend, Ada," he said—and so we had another person to hide. "And my sister, Rosa," he told us later, "and she has a boyfriend." And so it went, on and on. In a matter of weeks we had fifty or sixty Jews who needed places.

Hein got on the train to Gelderland and talked to the farmers around Nijkerk and Barneveld and found places.

But almost immediately we ran into a problem. The Germans required the Jews to have fat, black *J*'s on their identification papers. So the farmers wanted the Jews they were hiding to carry false IDs. The Germans had made it clear that those caught hiding Jews would be treated like Jews—in other words, everything they owned would immediately be confiscated. To protect both the Jews in hiding and the farmers, we needed false IDs.

When Hein and I first started, when the number of Jewish people looking for a place to go was still small, we devised a crazy plan to get IDs.

In the Netherlands, people have big celebrations on birthdays. My father was a twin, and every year our family would throw a party on his and his sister's birthday. That year, the whole family met at our house for the event.

It was winter, and everybody doffed their jackets once they came inside. The place was full of people—the stove pouring out heat, jackets and coats hanging on the coat rack in the corridor, purses and handbags left lying around.

The opportunity was simply too rich.

"But should we tell them?" I asked Hein.

Hein rolled his eyes. "If we do and then they ask for new ones, the Germans will certainly ask them what happened to the originals," he said.

"Then they will have to lie," I told him.

"And what happens if they blush or squirm or their voices break?" Hein said. "It will put them in a very dangerous position." He shook his head. "For their own good, we won't tell them."

"After the war," I said. "We'll tell them all after the war."

It was not difficult for us to gather identification cards that night, not difficult at all. While everyone was having fun, we

That night dozens of Jewish people suddenly became my uncles and aunts.

felt through all those coats and handbags and came up with more than a dozen IDs. We were careful not to take too many from one specific area or household because we didn't want them talking to each other.

That night more than a dozen Jewish people suddenly became my uncles and aunts.

But one has just so many relatives—certainly not enough for the growing number of Jewish people who wanted to refuse relocation. Our only hope to secure more false identification was robbery and forgery—stealing IDs and blank documents, and breaking into government offices to steal ration books.

We began to work with other resistance workers called *knokploegs*, who actually planned and carried out armed robberies. I remember attending their meetings, and always before they did their crimes, they got on their knees in prayer to God. I saw it with my own eyes. "Lord," they would say, "you know that we *have* to do this. Now please be with us."

And so our work—and the danger—grew quickly. What started with helping my friend Herman tied into an ever-widening operation of resistance against the Germans. It was a dangerous, full-time job for both of us—hiding Jews, keeping the families supplied, sneaking downed British and American pilots out of the Netherlands, and doing espionage necessary for the advance of the Allies.

No Other Name. We were young—in our early twenties—and when I think of it now, I can't imagine how we dared take on such dangerous and difficult work. I think of what I did during the war—of what we did, Hein and I. Then I look at young people today, and I realize how fast we had to grow up, how much of a beautiful part of life we missed

altogether.

We were committed to the work of our group, a group we called Group Hein. It was not named after my Hein; the name came from the first letters of *help elkander in nood*, which means "helping each other in need."

Hein and I were also committed to each other—even in long periods when we didn't see each other, when both of us were up to our necks in our work and, after our arrests, when we were suffering in the prison camps. All that time we were in love.

Most of all we were committed to doing what we thought was right in God's eyes. Through all of that time, God was with us.

All of the work, all of the fear and danger, and all of the good times too—everything that happened during that time—formed and shaped me completely, because so many times I had no other name to rely on in my distress than the name of the Lord.

June 4, 1940

Pentecost *I could not celebrate. War of five days, and we were conquered. Bitter I have been. Hate I felt. Courage, for I did not shrink from death. Only Diet was there—because of her I still was careful.*

I have been in the flames of the hell of Rotterdam. And the sun I saw through the black-gray column of smoke was changed into blood. It spoke to me.

Now we wait, sometimes impatiently, for we don't know the future. One day we will have peace again. One day we won't hear the engines of warplanes any longer. One day we will again live freely—lives of happiness and love and Dutch luxury. Maybe then people will acknowledge that neither the one, nor the other, but that he rules the world. (From the diary of Hein Sietsma) ○

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SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE**



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**THE
APARTMENT ON
REINKENSTRAAT**

March 16, 1941

This morning, Rev. Barkey Wolf [preached] on "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." "For they know not what they do" does not mean that they did it unknowingly, but that what they did was so absolutely horrible, the greatest crime that ever will happen on earth, that for this there was not even a punishment befitting. So it had to be forgiven so that nobody, ever, would think that for his or her sin there could be no forgiveness.

This afternoon to the



cemetery. The graves of Germans killed in the invasion were bursting with the most beautiful flowers and wreaths. Two large swastika flags hung. Also two soldiers stood at attention at a very large cross on which was engraved, "You died, so that Germany may live!"

How utterly rude to do such a thing in another country, and on top of this—it screams to heaven—to do it in the cemetery where the victims are buried of your cowardly invasion! And do I then have to pray for you and forgive what you did to us???

Yes, I will pray for you, but only if God will see the injustice and be our Judge and if He will take revenge—for us and the poor Jewish people, whom you are crushing under your boots, the people to whom also belonged Jesus, whom you will need for forgiveness of all your crimes.

How do I dare to use Your Name in what I just wrote? I do not show Your spirit of love. Teach me to remember that before You we are all the same—they and we: sinners.

(From the diary of Diet Eman)

During those first years of the occupation, I lived at my parents' house in The Hague. Hein had an apartment. Even though we were still hiding Jews in the Veluwe and bringing supplies regularly, I was able to stay at home with my parents.

What made me have to leave my home—and what made Hein have to leave The Hague altogether—was an incredible situation in an apartment on Reinkenstraat. We had established connections with other underground groups, and we had been asked to find places outside of the city for some of the Jewish people in hiding at this address.

When I came to the apartment on Reinkenstraat, I had to say some prearranged sentences to identify myself. I

rang the bell and said the correct words, and the lady, a woman named Mies, invited me in. I'll never forget that apartment—it was very small, designed for only one person, and it was built rather cheaply on the second floor of a six-story building.

Mies was a single woman in her fifties. When I first entered her apartment, I couldn't believe what I saw. She had a small living room, a tiny bedroom, a kitchenette, a shower and toilet; and in that little place, the first time I came, she had nineteen Jews hidden, right in the middle of the city of The Hague.

At farms out in the country, we never kept anywhere near that many—we wouldn't have placed that many in any one place, even if the address had been really out of the way.

Not Too Smart. The moment I saw how many people were there, I felt something tighten around my heart because all her guests were talking and talking, making all kinds of noise. Mies had mattresses piled up against the wall to look like a divan, so that they could sit comfortably. At night she would roll those mattresses out for them to sleep on.

She was a sweet woman and very brave, and she meant well—she really meant very well. But she wasn't smart. During the war, many problems began with people who had wonderful intentions.

Among those she was hiding were an elderly married couple and a young couple expecting a baby. In fact, there was a little of every kind of person at that place. Once, later on, a baby was born in that apartment, and once a man died—I had to arrange to sneak the body out of there. It was an incredible situation, and right away, the moment I stepped inside, I was afraid. I couldn't believe my eyes.

"How long have you lived here?" I said to Mies.

"About eight years," she said.

"And always alone?" I asked.



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She said yes.

While I was standing there, I heard next door—in an adjacent apartment—the hum of talking, so I knew that the walls were anything but soundproof.

"Do you know your neighbors?" I asked her.

"No, no," she said shyly.

"Do you know if they're German sympathizers?" I said.

She had no idea.

"Well, listen," I said, "can you hear them talk?"

She turned her head. "Why, yes," she said.

I was amazed. I said, "You mean you've lived here all those years alone, and now you have all these people in this apartment—almost twenty people!" To me, it was astounding. "This is so dangerous," I said. "Do you understand how dangerous this is?"

In the meantime I heard, next door, the toilet flush and the water run through the pipes.

"If I can hear them go to the bathroom next door," I said, "they certainly can hear you. Besides," I said, "when you are here alone, you flush the toilet—what?—maybe four times a day? With twenty people here, that toilet must be flushed eighty or ninety times. Do you understand how much danger you're in here?"

She didn't say anything.

"You're living on top of a volcano," I told her. I was nervous just standing there talking to her.

So I told her that I would take a lot of her Jews away and place them elsewhere in the country. "I'll leave you with two or three," I said, "and then you'll have to try to get those people through the war with you."

Call Me Toos. Mies meant well, but she never seemed to see the danger of her situation.

"How can I reach you?" she said.

This was such a dangerous address, I thought, that I really didn't dare to have *her* reach

me—except under the safest of circumstances. Besides, you never left your real name anywhere during the war—you never used your own name in resistance work.

The fact is, you didn't want to know anyone else's name. The more you knew during the war, the more dangerous it was for others, but the more dangerous it was for you too. If you were arrested, the Gestapo would pull one fingernail, then another, then another, until you talked. People talked—they couldn't hold back. So we didn't want to know anyone else's name. The less you knew, the safer it was for everyone.

So I told her, "You can call me Toos, and listen, I'll call you every morning before I go to work, and I'll call you an hour before my lunch break, and I will call you two hours before curfew. If you need me, I'll be here."

I was at that apartment three or four times a week under the name of Toos. I took Jews away, I brought ration cards, and I brought IDs without the *J*.

One day when I came to take some people out, she had taken six new ones in! I remember that at one time—after I'd warned her—she had twenty-seven Jews in that one little apartment.

It was so scary. I told her, "Mies, I am afraid to come here." I said, "From now on, before I come, I'm going to call you from a phone booth around the corner, and if you don't answer, I'm not coming."

I don't know if she ever understood how dangerous it was for her there.

"I have the feeling that one of these days I'm going to ring the bell here and I'm going to walk right into the hands of the Gestapo." That's what I told her.

The Gestapo. One day I phoned Mies to ask if she needed any supplies, and a man answered her phone. A few hours later, I called again, and a man answered again.

If you were arrested, the Gestapo would pull one fingernail, then another, then another, until you talked.

I didn't like that at all. I was scared.

So I called again later, and again a man answered.

Across from Mies's apartment was a little grocery store, and I thought that the best way for me to sense what might have happened would be to go there and just listen to what people were saying. If there had been a *razzia*, a Gestapo raid, at that address, the Germans would have blocked off the street and brought the soldiers and the trucks and the bayonets on the rifles. I was sure that if that had happened, the people in the neighborhood would still be talking about it.

So I took my ration cards and pretended to go shopping. Sure enough—they were all talking about the Jews that were arrested in the apartment across the street along with the woman who lived there. They all knew. It had happened, just as I had thought it would.

Hein had been to the apartment as well, so I told him right away, and we both disappeared. Instead of going home, I slept at the houses of friends. We thought it was the smartest thing to do—just in case. Neither of us were sure that we'd been found out, but it was the better part of wisdom for both of us to hide out for a while. For a few nights I slept at my cousin's.

Weeks passed, nothing happened, and we began to think that everything would be all right. We went back to our places—Hein to his apartment and me to my parents' house.

Then, one day, the Gestapo came to my parents' house while I was at work. Later we discovered they had found Mies's diary, where she had listed everything: "Toos here today"; "Toos brings papers"; "Toos has been here, brought IDs"; "Toos has been here, took Jews away." I was there four times a week for months. The things I brought to that apartment had all been stolen, so

the Germans knew that we had to have been in contact with the people who robbed their offices.

I was not home when they came—my brother Albert was. But his being home when they came was dangerous too; Albert himself had false papers at the time.

Albert let these men in, two Gestapo guys, and he spoke with them, and they asked for me. He told them that I was gone.

At first those two pretended they were looking for me to help them—that's what they said. They said they had heard that I was a person who did a lot of good things, helping people with problems and so forth. They did not say "Jews" or "Jewish people," but they acted as if there was an urgent reason for them to see me—they said they needed me to help them.

But one of them had a German accent; he could not speak Dutch well. So Albert was afraid and very suspicious. He thought there was something fishy about two guys at our door—that was not how Jewish people would operate. They never asked to be hidden in that way.

Once the two men left, my brother quickly phoned our office. I wasn't there. I was out at the government printing office. A good friend of mine named Nel worked there.

When my boss told Albert where I was, Albert phoned Nel. "Find Diet," he said. "I think we had the Gestapo at the door—I don't trust it. Tell her to call me."

I spoke with Nel, and when I left her office, I didn't go back to my own office for fear the Gestapo would next come there. I did stop to see my boss for a moment. I knocked on his door and stuck my head in. "I have to go," I told him. "See you after the war."

His mouth fell wide open.

Then I left. Of course, I didn't go home. I couldn't go back to my parents safely, not until after the war. ○

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DELFTSEPOORT STATION

**Sunday,
September 14, 1943**

How will it be exactly a year from today? Will I be with Hein in our own home? Will Jan be free again? Will we have heard from brother Arjen?

You know the answer to all these questions, Father, and we have to wait quietly, even though we are longing so much to know.

My peace [is] in your hands, Immanuel;

Break our chains and make all things well.

Tonight I would have loved to walk into the St. Gerardus Church just to pray quietly, alone. But it is always busy, always something to do, never a quiet moment. When at long last I go to bed, I am so sleepy, and in the morning again it is always a hurry. Still, during the day in my work, I am praying and singing. (From the diary of Diet Eman)

On April 26, 1944, Hein, my fiancé, was arrested in Leeuwarden, in Friesland, while carrying loads of ration cards and false identification. He was traveling under a false name, with papers that said he was a preacher. Preachers, unlike most

other able-bodied men at that time, were not routinely picked up and sent off to Germany to work in factories.

I was devastated, but the intensity of the work that had to be done kept me from slowing down.

Hein managed to sneak some instructions out of the prison where he was first kept. They were quite specific: he told our whole group that we had to empty the post-office box where we'd hidden illegal documents and materials, that we should notify everybody in our operation that he had been arrested and would likely not be released quickly, and that I should not, under any circumstances, go to Friesland because the Germans knew of specific instructions that he had given me. Hein said they would certainly be looking for me.

I was assigned to distribute the things we had hidden and to tell all the guys in Zwijndrecht and The Hague what had happened. I got the job because it was getting more and more dangerous for men to be on the street.

On May 8, I remember—a Monday—I was to travel around and distribute the things we'd emptied from the post-office box. I was also to tell the others more details of what had happened to Hein.

Black Underwear. That morning I had such a strong feeling—I don't know how to explain it. I knew I was going to be arrested. Hein and I had been engaged already for some time by May 1944, and I loved his ring on my finger. But I thought that if I was arrested—and that morning I was sure I would be—then the ring could be used

against me and against everyone else, too. The name *Hein* was engraved in it, after all. The Germans would surely ask, "So, Willie Laarman [my false name at the time], who is this Hein whose name is in your ring?"

So I took my ring off, which I'd never done before, and I hated, just hated to do it; but I did—and I gave it to Alie, my friend at whose house I had stayed the night. "Alie," I said, "today I am sure I am going to be arrested. Will you keep this ring?" I slipped it into her hand. "I'm sorry," I said, "but I have such sure feelings."

"Willie," she said, "you're nervous—that's all. With Hein arrested, you're just extra nervous."

"I'm very nervous," I told her.

But to me, even when I was getting dressed, it was very clear that I was about to be arrested. Almost all the underwear I had was light blue, but I had one pair that was black. I was so sure I was going to be arrested that I had thought it through in my mind: when you go to prison, at least you won't see all the dirt on black underwear. So that's what I wore.

Off I went that morning, in my black underwear, with no engagement ring on my finger. Inside I was torn to pieces by what I had learned about Hein. Everything I'd hoped for in the future, all of the plans I'd made—we'd made—all of that was put in jeopardy now. I knew even then that being caught in the way he was, carrying the things he was, knowing what he knew, Hein—the man I loved so much—was in very, very serious trouble.

I was carrying all the stolen stuff from the post-office box. I



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had placed it, as always, in an envelope in my bosom. It was very dangerous stuff—photographs for false IDs for Allied pilots, lots of ration cards, other false identification, and money—about 500 guilders.

False ID. When I got to the railroad station at Zwijndrecht, the train was standing there, even though I knew it wouldn't be leaving for forty-five minutes. During the war, the schedules were usually off.

The train was practically empty, so I took a window seat. I had a book—*Toen De Herten Riepen* ("When the Deer Called"). I'll never forget the title, even though I haven't the slightest memory of the story itself.

I sat and read as the train slowly filled up. Then, at about a quarter to two or so, it suddenly started moving, jarring me away from the book. Automatically I looked out of the window, and I saw six Gestapo guys right outside.

They jumped on and started checking everybody's IDs. The Gestapo often did random checks of trains—just here and there, hoping to come up with something.

They spread out over the whole train, each of them taking a car. One started checking identification right across the aisle from me.

"*Ausweispapiere!* (identification papers!)" he'd say to the passengers.

I was fluent in German, but I was determined to stick to my vow never to speak a word of German as long as those men occupied my country.

The lady across from me showed her ID, and he gave it back—and so it went with the

next passenger and the next. He went fast, really fast.

My heart was going bump, bump, bump because these guys had been looking for me for more than a year. It had been a year already since the raid at Mies's apartment. They'd been coming to my parents' home in The Hague every two or three weeks—sometimes at three in the morning, other times at four in the afternoon—always searching. Besides, I had false papers that I had just gotten, under the name Willie Laarman, and the envelope with all the stolen stuff.

I kept my head down, reading in my book, and when he finally got to me, I gave him my new ID. When he'd checked everyone else's IDs, he had just glanced down and given them back—but not mine.

"*Wann haben Sie das bekommen?*" he said.

I told him I didn't speak German.

He kept on jabbering at me. He seemed inflated with a sense of his own importance.

Then a helpful passenger said to me, "He wants to know when you got this ID."

I said, "Oh, the date of issue is on it. Everybody my age got it November 1941."

Then he wanted my ration card as well. In the meantime, the other five Gestapo had finished, and they all came to look at my ID. When they did, all of them started laughing.

You see, in 1943 the Germans had run out of IDs. They had handed out millions, to everyone in Holland age sixteen and older. Then they printed a whole new batch—millions of them—in a slightly different shade of gray.

The one I had was supposed to be an old ID, but it was printed on the new, slightly different paper. I had walked straight into their trap.

Miracle Raincoat. When the train stopped in Delftsepoort, the six Gestapo guys made me get

When you
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all the dirt
on black
underwear.

off and sit on a bench in the station and await another train. Dutch railroad stations are often cold and blustery and full of people sitting on benches or milling around on the platforms where trains arrive and depart.

Immediately I opened my blouse, even though it was a chilly day and I'd always hated my neck to be cold. I opened the buttons as if I were hot. I probably did have flames shooting out of me—those papers I was carrying were really my death warrant, as well as the death warrant of so many in our operation.

At home, my wedding dress was hanging. I didn't want to be arrested. I didn't want to die. I still had so much life in front of me. I was really scared to death.

So I prayed on that bench in Delftsepoort like I've never prayed in my life. I pleaded with God. I said, "Lord, if it's necessary, then we will give our lives, but if it is at all possible, grant that those six men give me a half a second so that I can get rid of this envelope."

But if one wasn't looking, the other one was. If it had been only one or two Gestapo, I think I would have had a chance, but six in half a circle around me was just too many.

It's easy to think that miracles don't happen anymore, but I found out that they still do. The tallest of those guys—he was far taller than six feet—wore a gray, shiny, plastic raincoat. We had never seen plastic before. It had just been discovered as a material for things like clothing.

One of the others said, "Is that one of those new coats? Is it really waterproof?"

Of course, I could understand every word they said.

The tall one said, "Yes. I've been in a terrific rainstorm, and it kept me perfectly dry."

And another said, "Oh, what a great coat—and it has so many pockets."

And then the tall guy said, "You think it has a lot of

pockets on the outside—you should see the inside." And just like that, he opened his belt and buttons and spread the coat out wide, and all those six heads—every one of them—gazed inside to see the pockets.

Now is that a miracle or not? While those men stood there peering inside that coat, I took my envelope and flung it away from me as hard as I could. I didn't want the stuff inside to fall right under the bench, so I threw it with force to where people were walking up and down all over. It was far enough away that those guys would never have known who threw it—they would have had to arrest all of the people in that station.

Once the envelope was off me, lying somewhere away from where I was sitting, I was still scared, believe me! But at least I knew this: I had a much greater chance of escaping with my life.

That one single moment changed my whole attitude. Later, when I was quiet in my cell, I thought, Yea, it says in the Bible, "Before you call, I will answer" (Isa. 65:24).

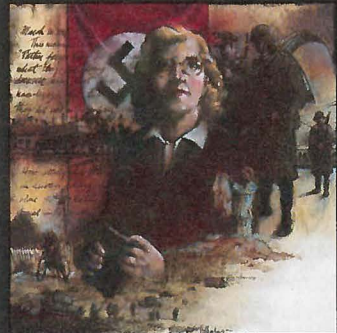
Here is the miracle: Already that morning, when I was so sure I'd be arrested that I'd dressed specially for it, one solitary Gestapo guy had put on his nice, new raincoat because it was a chilly day. But really, he'd put it on because God knew I would need this miraculous plastic raincoat.

That was the real miracle.

I was still arrested for my own false identification, and I still went to prison. But at that moment in Delftsepoort, I knew inside that my arrest would not necessarily mean my life would be over. I knew God was on his throne.

That moment to me was one of the most important miracles that happened in all those years of the occupation—and it was waiting in the empty inside pockets of a brand-new plastic raincoat. ○

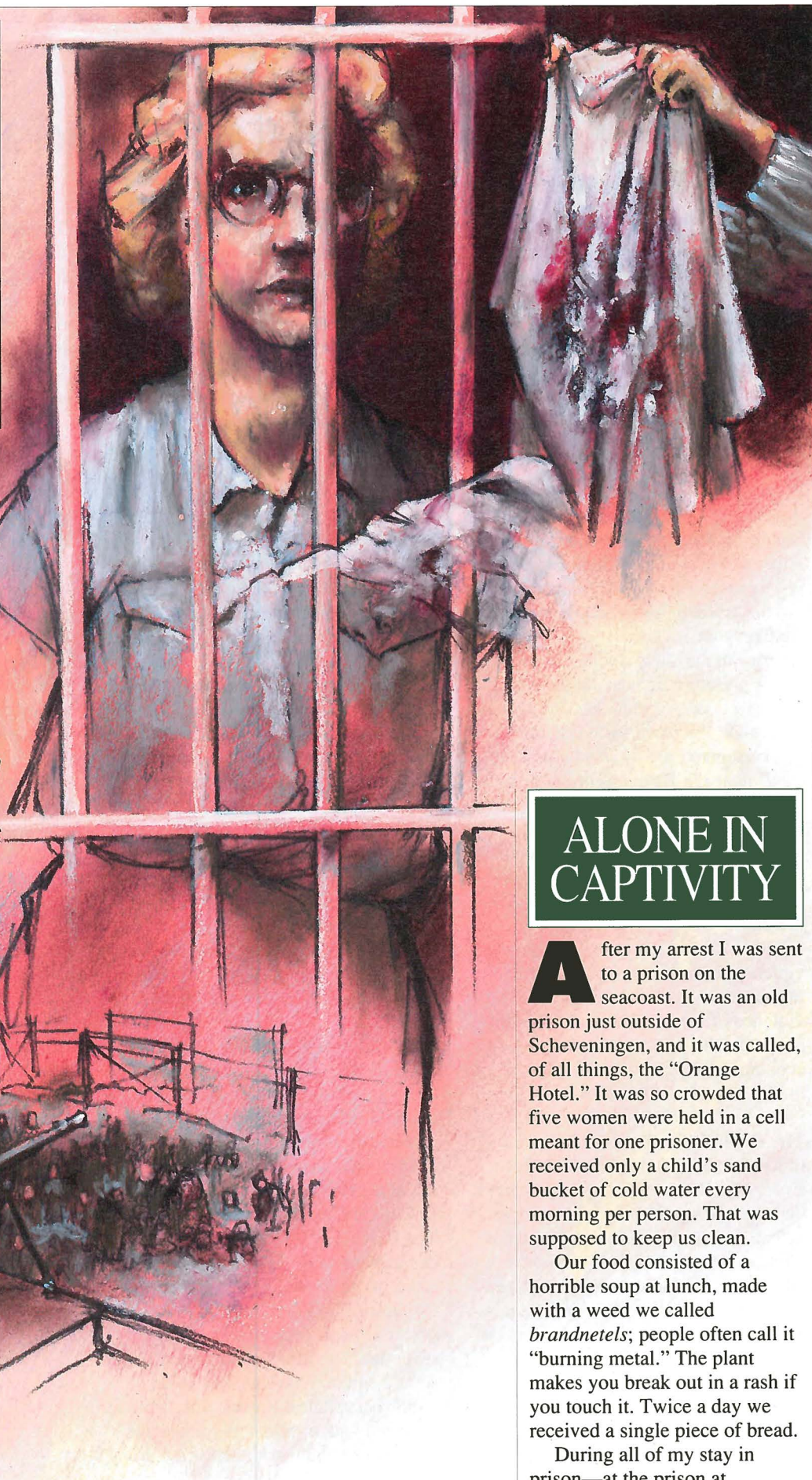
SUCH SMALL THINGS SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE



The Diet Eman Story

BY
JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP

This is the fourth of eight installments in the story of Diet Eman, a woman who worked in the resistance movement in the Netherlands during World War II. Eman now lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she is a member of Seymour Christian Reformed Church. Her story, which author James Calvin Schaap has written with her assistance, will be published in book form by Eerdmans Publishing Company in June 1994 and will be available through CRC Publications.



ALONE IN CAPTIVITY

After my arrest I was sent to a prison on the seacoast. It was an old prison just outside of Scheveningen, and it was called, of all things, the "Orange Hotel." It was so crowded that five women were held in a cell meant for one prisoner. We received only a child's sand bucket of cold water every morning per person. That was supposed to keep us clean.

Our food consisted of a horrible soup at lunch, made with a weed we called *brandnetels*; people often call it "burning metal." The plant makes you break out in a rash if you touch it. Twice a day we received a single piece of bread.

During all of my stay in prison—at the prison at

Scheveningen and the concentration camp at Vught—I had to play the role of Willie Laarman the maid, a girl born and raised in Suriname. That’s what my ID had said. Willie was slow mentally, knew nothing at all about the resistance, and cared little about politics. In the camps there were informers, so it was important that I keep up the Willie act even in front of other prisoners.

People the Germans arrested got locked up until they received their hearings. Until that time, one’s case was pending. To give away my true identity would have been very, very dangerous, so I played my role.

In June 1944, because of the D-day invasion on the coast of Normandy, the whole prison populace at Scheveningen was transported to a large concentration camp outside the village of Vught. There Willie Laarman the maid was often assigned to do laundry, while the rest of the women made twine ropes for the German war effort.

Washing Their Underwear.

My job at Vught was to scrub underwear, German underwear, with my bare hands. Sometimes the guard who watched us laundry workers got so bored that she would lock us up and leave. Then we’d have a breath of freedom.

Every undershirt we washed was marked with the insignia SS. Once the guard would leave, my helpers and I would take those SS shirts and hold them up. Then we would gather up a nice big glob of saliva, step back a few meters, and spit right at the SS sign. We got really good at it. Pow—we could hit that insignia every time.

It’s crazy now to think that spitting on somebody’s underwear could be so wonderful, but it was. Even today, thinking of it gives me thrills.

The whole day, we would do laundry—underwear, shirts, and briefs. We’d soak that stuff in the gutters where we had to wash ourselves in the morning. We had a tub too, but that was for laundry only, not for us. I can’t remember if we had hot water, but I know those clothes always had to be white and clean—that meant bleach, of course, and lots of scrubbing with our knuckles. For the Germans’ underwear we got soap—we never got it for ourselves.

Bloody Shirts. One day the wash included some shirts that were soaked with blood. I washed them, of course, and I even had some suspicions about the blood. But I wouldn’t have dared speak of it to anyone other than Frau Schenk, one of the guards—the only one who seemed to have some human qualities.

She was on duty one day when I had been thinking of something else, something good, and I simply started singing, which was quite unusual. Those guards never heard any singing. Normally they snap at you, “Keep your trap shut!” or something like that. But she said—and I still hear it—“*Du singst wie eine Heidelerche*” (You sing like a meadowlark).

Frau Schenk was on duty when those bloody shirts came through, so I dared to speak. “What happened here?” I asked.

“Oh,” she said, “two guys on a motorbike had a terrible accident, and we have them in



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the hospital here. We want this stuff clean when they come out.”

So I washed it, and it was taken away. Then the next day, there were many more bloodied articles of clothing, maybe eleven or twelve pieces of underwear and shirts—everything—socks too. All of it was covered with blood. Even some suits.

I didn’t dare ask Frau Schenk again about what I was washing, especially because I began to notice that those clothes had holes in them—what looked to me very much like bullet holes.

This was no motorbike accident. I became very nervous because I couldn’t help but wonder what was going on.

What happened at that time looms so dark in my mind that I still can’t talk about it much. It brought me to the limit of what I could take.

One night I tried to introduce the mystery of the blood into a conversation among prisoners. Even in the camp, speaking openly could be dangerous. There were always some people one simply didn’t trust.

Still, I told some of the others how the first time I’d seen blood the guard had told me it was from a motorcycle accident, but that now the bloody shirts and things just kept on coming. “One day,” I said, “there were thirty-six shirts, and it was just terrible.” There had been a river of blood in that laundry room. My nerves were so frayed I couldn’t sleep at night.

A Horrifying Discovery. And then Hanney spoke. Hanney was a snitch and was always proud to trumpet information none of the rest of us knew. “Oh,” she said, “those shirts are from guys

who are executed.”

I said, “But why do we have to wash their clothing?”

“Germany has no clothing whatsoever,” she said, “so it has to be washed and sent to Germany.”

I was horrified. I was shocked. After all, I had washed those bloody clothes myself, with my own hands. I had washed the clothes of guys the Germans had killed—*our* guys! And our guys’ clothes were being shipped back to Germany for them—for Nazis!

I can’t explain the horror that gripped me. That day—the day I realized my hands were in our guys’ blood—remains one of the most horrible days of my life. Those guys had been executed, and the Germans were sending their clothes—the clothes I had cleaned—back to Germany.

I did the wash one or two more days because I wanted to see if I could pick up any names on the bloody clothes. I started to look very closely at the holes. What I found was even more horrible. Sometimes the bullet holes were not at the heart level, as ordered by the Geneva conventions for humane executions. They were not at the heart at all, but at the stomach, which meant that the guys who died in those shirts probably suffered for hours before finally succumbing.

When I held up those shirts, looking for names and finding the bullet holes across the stomach, I felt an indescribable blackness. It was the most horrible time of my life.

I imagined how the men whose clothes these had been must have lain somewhere for hours before they died. Any one of the shirts might have belonged to someone I knew.

Could one of them have been Hein’s? Had he been taken from the camp at Amersfoort and put here in Vught? I would never have seen him, even though we would have been so close to each other in the same camp.

Among all this stuff might

What kept me going was a desire for revenge.

have been his clothes or Ab’s clothes, Adriaan’s clothes, Jantje’s clothes, clothes from any of the guys I’d worked with. I was so tense every day. I would go into the laundry room and say to myself, “Whose clothes will I find today among the bloody ones? Today will I see the clothes of the man I love, the man I would have married?”

Consumed by Hatred. At that moment I was filled with hatred, filled with it; and then I lost something—I couldn’t pray to ask the Lord to love my enemies anymore. I prayed instead for God’s damnation on the Germans. I prayed for a curse.

I couldn’t face anything anymore—it was just too much. After all my years in underground work, and then the tension of an entire year with the Gestapo constantly searching for me at my parents’ home; then Hein’s arrest; then mine; then waiting forever for a hearing that never came; and then these bloody clothes of men I might have known—at that moment life became absolutely unbearable for me.

It was the end of July 1944. At that point, I didn’t want to do anything anymore. I didn’t want to go on.

Hanney told me that at every sunset the Germans were executing people. We listened, and we heard machine guns. There would be no trial, no nothing—just pow, pow, pow.

To have to go through that, to hear those shots and to imagine what I imagined—that every day some of our boys were being murdered so close to us—was unbearable. Any one of them could have been Hein.

What kept me going was a desire for revenge. I knew that someday, when I got out, I had to report what I’d seen to the Red Cross. I wanted badly to find any names at all, written in or sewn into the suits that were full of holes.

Then I said to God, “How can you let this go on—all this

horror? How can you stand all this evil? This is *your* world—how can you stand it?”

Then I woke up one morning, and I absolutely could not move. I was totally paralyzed, lying on my side. I could not turn over. I couldn’t stand, not even to be on the roll call. I said to the others, “I can’t work. I can’t even move.”

They turned me over. I couldn’t even go to the bathroom. The guards came in. “You have to get up!” they yelled. “You have to do the laundry!”

I couldn’t. I honestly could not move. I did not fake it—I was completely paralyzed.

I have very vague impressions of the three days that followed, because it was a time of complete darkness. I couldn’t go on. My body and my mind fled into paralysis.

Sometime in everyone’s life, I believe, there comes a time when he or she is perfectly alone. It might be sickness, it might be divorce, it might be a job loss. But most often in such situations, people have friends or family, others who can support them and encourage them. During my time in the camp at Vught, I had nobody. I had some friends, a few who I dared talk to, but all the time I was trying to be Willie Laarman, a maid from Suriname with no close relatives—someone I wasn’t.

I was trying to keep up the act because I still had to have my hearing. And when it came, I wanted to have my story down solidly, with no hesitation, no gaps, no questions. Diet Eman had to hide in Willie Laarman.

All that time, I was totally dependent on God. The darkness buried me for three days, but I slowly regained my strength because even though I was so terribly alone in the prison at Vught, God never failed me.

Slowly God gave me enough strength to get out of bed. I had to go on. My hearing was yet to come. ○

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THE HEARING

One morning a man with boots and a uniform came marching into our barracks. When I saw him, a little voice in me said that after all these months and weeks, this man was here for me.

I went on sweeping, and the guard came looking. "Willie," she told me, "go with him."

A wonderful Roman Catholic friend of mine named Freddie saw what was happening. Immediately, she pretended she had diarrhea and flew toward me on her way to the toilets.

"Willie," she said as she went by, "I'm going to storm the gates of heaven for you."

I followed that officer. I didn't even see where I was going, I was so afraid.

And then suddenly, after what Freddie had said, real assurance came to me, almost in a whisper, a still voice: "Don't worry. If you have to appear before authorities and kings, I will give you the words. Not a hair of your head will be harmed without the will of your heavenly Father."

Then I talked to God as I was walking. I said, "Okay, Lord, I

have often broken my promises to you. But you say you'll never break your promises. Now *you* take over. You have promised it—now *you* have to do it.”

I was confronting him: “*You* do this now, God,” I said. “Now it’s in *your* hands.” I told God what to do.

Right then, my deep fear and my hatred seemed to melt away. “Don’t be afraid,” the little voice said. “They can’t hurt a hair on your head unless it’s the will of your heavenly Father.”

At that moment, I found comfort. Whoever I am going to see, I thought, and no matter how cruel they might be, and whatever will happen, nothing can touch me unless my God allows it. He is the one who rules.

My Life in Suriname. In that frame of mind I went into the courtroom, trusting in God to give me words. Seven guys were sitting there, all of them behind a table neatly set with a green felt cloth. The room was large, and there was a portrait of Hitler.

I had my prison dress on, and I had boils all over my face, just like everyone else—I was horrible looking. In four months I hadn’t had a shampoo—can you imagine how greasy my hair was? I was a sight. All of us were. But I had strength.

I had to sit on a kitchen chair quite a distance from where they sat. Immediately they started asking questions. But I had vowed never to speak German, so I shrugged my shoulders when they started. “I can’t understand you,” I told them. “I speak only Dutch.” I played the *stomme schaap*, the stupid sheep, and they had to go over my case very slowly.

I told them the story I’d been creating for weeks in my imagination, even though when they looked at me—and I heard them say this in German—they claimed I didn’t look like a maid. They told each other that I looked more like a teacher.

“Suriname?—that’s where you were born?” they asked.

“Yeah, I was born there,” I said.

“Your parents?”

I knew very little about life in Suriname, but I did know that almost everywhere people pay taxes. So I told them what I had planned to tell them—that my father was some kind of tax administrator.

“And where are your parents now?”

I told them that they’d died. I had thought out every question beforehand. I’d rehearsed the whole thing every night before I went to sleep. I told them my parents had both died in 1938, because in my story I’d come to the Netherlands in 1939.

They asked if I had uncles and aunts. “They’re all abroad,” I told them. They couldn’t check that, of course.

And then one said, “When did your father die?”

“December 5.” That was easy to remember—it was Dutch Sinter Klaas day. I had told myself that Father was Sinter Klaas. I had figured that they might ask me the date of his death, and I guessed that they might ask it more than once—they’d repeat the question just to be sure you weren’t making things up, so I could not choose just any day.

They said, “What did he die of?”—because he must have been rather young; at the time, I was in my early twenties.

“Snake bite,” I said. I figured



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that was a good explanation. It wasn’t something lots of people died from, and Suriname has many poisonous snakes.

Then one of them said, “Your mother?”

I said, “She died”—and I had thought to say ten days later—”on December 15, right after Father.”

He asked, “What of?”

I said, “She had a very weak heart, and when Father died so suddenly, she had heart failure and died ten days later.” After that, I said, I returned to Holland because there was no one left for me in Suriname.

But That Fake ID . . .

“But how did you get to have this ID?” one said.

So I told them I had bumped into a young guy while in an air-raid shelter, and we had started talking. When the sirens stopped, he asked me if we could meet again. He was a really nice-looking guy, I said, so I agreed.

They asked his name.

“Jan Schilder,” I said. *Jan* is a very common name, and *Schilder* was the name of one of the leaders who had just led our church through a bad split. So I said, “Jan Schilder.”

They asked what he looked like.

“Tall, blond, and blue eyes”—it was Hein. But three quarters of the men in the Netherlands are tall, blond, and blue-eyed.

And then they asked, “Well, how did you get these false papers?”

“One time when I visited him,” I said, “he had a little newspaper, one of those thrown out of the Allied planes. And when I left, he gave it to me.”

I told them he had said to

read it and bring it back to him. So I had that newspaper in my purse, where I also had my ID. I was out late that night, and I was terribly nervous because I was riding the last train. I'd never taken the last train.

I said, "It was so close to curfew that when the train stopped, I knew I had to run home to be in before curfew.

"When the train stopped at the station, I started running and running to be home before the curfew, and when I was home, I realized I left my purse in the train."

"Normally," I said, "you just go the next day to the police and say, 'I lost my purse with my ID.' But I didn't dare to do that because there was that newspaper in it that Jan had told me was dangerous.

"And I didn't even read it yet. I don't even know what it said." I wanted to be innocent, you know, a really scared and stupid girl. To be a *stomme schaap* was my only hope.

"I didn't know what to do," I told them. "I had scheduled a date with Jan again, so I went. And I told him what happened, and that I had now no ID, and that I didn't dare to go to the police because of the newspaper."

I told them that Jan didn't seem to be too worried about it. I said, "He asked, 'Do you have passport photos?'"

I said, 'I have some.' And he said to me, 'Bring them.'

"We had a date the next night," I said. "I was so lucky. He must have been working in the offices where they make those papers, because the next time I saw him, he came with this new one."

I told them he took my fingerprint, and he gave me my new ID, and I didn't have to go to the police!

I said it all as if I had never heard of falsified IDs. "I was just so lucky," I told them. "But now you say that there must be something wrong with it? I didn't know that." I played

"I can't put a needle in your story. But my sixth sense tells me that it's all made up."

really stupid.

That was my story. As I told it, my behavior was timid—shy and slow.

Think Fast, Write Slow. There they sat, discussing my case, all the time in German, and of course I could understand every word they said. And I thought, "Thank you, Lord."

They kept looking at me and asking each other whether they could believe I was a maid. Finally, one of them said, "We should give her a test."

He came with a magazine, a pad of paper, and a pencil, and he said, "Copy this."

I knew most maids didn't have much more than a sixth-grade education. In sixth grade, your own handwriting style hasn't yet been formed. At that time, schools required you to sit and write for a couple hours a week in order to get those beautiful curves in your handwriting.

So I thought that anyone who didn't write very often and had only a sixth-grade education would probably think of handwriting in that way—and he or she would write very gracefully, in a picture-perfect style.

So when they gave me that pencil and the notepad, I sat there and wrote as if it was a difficult task for me. I stuck out my tongue to make them think that I had to concentrate very hard in order to write beautifully, and I wrote the most beautiful school penmanship. It looked, of course, like the work of a sixth-grade girl.

They discussed what I'd written, and they put it aside. It was, I suppose, exactly the handwriting that they thought they would see from a maid.

In the end—and this to me is still the greatest miracle—even with all my hate, while I was outsmarting them, I felt pity for those guys because they were so deluded. They thought they had power, but really they had nothing. I pitied the men I hated.

That I will never forget.

At that point in the hearing—the hearing I had dreaded for months because it was so dangerous, not only for me but for Hein and all the guys and my parents too—all of a sudden I felt great peace. I can account for it only as a miracle of God's grace from the storm of prayers offered by my friend Freddie.

You Don't Fool Me. It worked. They were convinced. One of them, who wore a lot of decorations, looked at me and said, "I have done nothing else my whole life but hearings and interrogations. That is my area of expertise. I have developed a sixth sense. I can feel what is true and what isn't true."

He looked me straight in the eye. "I can't put a needle in your story," he said. "It fits, all over. But my sixth sense tells me that it's all made up."

When he said that, I was sure that after all the suffering in the camp, I was going to make it. Once again, I experienced a great feeling of security: I was being held in the hands of God.

Even today, I am convinced that I was.

September 8, 1944

How lucky I am. Everybody is so nice to me now that it makes me grateful for this all. This morning I went to Chaillet's wife. She cried for happiness when she saw me, and when I left, she and also Mrs. de Jong kissed me.

Tomorrow I am going on a bike to Amersfoort to wait for the liberation of my Hein. In what a sensational time we live, and how our little group has been protected from death up till now.

He who dwells
in the shelter of the most
High
will rest
in the shadow of the
Almighty. What a pity I could
not keep a diary in prison.

(From the diary of Diet
Eman) ○

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SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE**



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**CROSSING
THE
RIVER**

Once I was released, the Red Cross in the town of Vught bought me a train ticket. Vary warily, I made my way home to my parents. I stayed with them for only one night, fearful that the Gestapo was still looking for me as Diet Eman.

I was overjoyed to find my parents safe. But the experience of the prisons had made me more sure that the German occupation was evil—I had now experienced the treachery firsthand. So once I had sneaked into The Hague to greet my parents, I went back out to the Veluwe. There I once more made my base of operations the lovely farm of Aalt and Alie. They gave refuge to all manner of people—an old Jewish couple who'd been there for years, a refugee family from Arnhem, a few *passanten* (people searching for food). Every now and then there would even be an Allied pilot.

Before long, the Germans announced that the bridges over the IJssel, a river that runs north and south in Holland, were going to be closed. The river would become like the wall in East Germany—something that stopped any kind of movement.

We had so many people keeping Jews on the other side of the IJssel that its closing was a terrible problem. "Diet," the guys said, "you have to go once more." It was dangerous, of course, but safest for a woman.

I had only three days: one day to get to the river, one day to do all the things I had to do in Friesland, and one day to get back—then the Germans would close the bridges.

An Impossible Obstacle. That day when I came to the mouth of the river, at Zwartsluis, I stopped to look across. The place I had to go was a restricted zone. To get into it, you needed a special permit, and I didn't have one. Yet I knew that if I was to get where our Jews were hidden, I'd have to go in that

direction.

A ferryboat that held about fifty or sixty people crossed the river. To get to the boat, you had to go down a bank to the river's edge. There people would stand on a wooden platform to wait.

I watched a full load of people cross the river, then get out and go up a road on the bank on the other side. A guardhouse stood there. A single guard, armed with a rifle, sat inside.

It was raining, and he waited out of the rain until the passengers came up from the river toward him. Then he came out and checked their permits to enter the restricted zone—which, of course, I did not have. The guardhouse stood where the road split—one way went left into forbidden territory; the other went right, where anyone could go.

Once more, I felt as if my life was in jeopardy. I assumed that if I was going to get through this danger, like I'd been through the arrest and the hearing and so many difficult situations, it was going to be only because the Lord wanted me to do his work over there.

So I prayed. "You know, Lord," I said, "I *have* to get across. You know that tomorrow the IJssel is going to be closed, and I *must* get to the other side. I don't have the time to go back to Zwolle or anything—I have to go now."

It was one of those prayers that seemed disrespectful and demanding. I once heard a pastor say, though, that God loves it when we hold him to his promises.

When the ferry came back, I got on. As we crossed the river, I wriggled my way through the crowd to the very front. When we landed, I saw that the soldier was once again inside the little shack, trying to stay out of the rain. I knew that he wouldn't see us right away, because he was waiting until the whole bunch climbed the long hill to pass his post.

Halt! I was the first one off the ferry. I tore off quickly on my bike, then shot up the hill—leaving all the rest of the passengers at the bottom behind me. I pedaled as fast as I could. I was hoping the guard would time his coming out to correspond to the crowd coming up the hill. He didn't want to get wet.

He must have seen one figure coming up the road, but he was still inside. He probably wasn't interested in getting wet for just one person when he could see another fifty coming behind.

I pedaled hard, and he came out and yelled, "Halt, halt, halt!" I didn't slow a bit. I took the left fork into the forbidden territory. I even zigzagged to make myself a tough target.

He could have shot me, I'm sure. But he didn't. I'll never know why. Once again I was delivered.

I had to make this trip because I had the last bunch of ration cards, more instructions, and messages—loads of stuff. I would be the last contact with the people we worked with in Friesland.

I made it, distributed the ration cards, and said goodbye. That was a sad time, but it was also hopeful. When I was there talking to those people, we all knew we wouldn't see each other again until liberation. We knew that would be soon, because the Germans would not be closing the IJssel otherwise. The end of the war was imminent.

Let Me Go, God. My errands took me all day. Coming back, it was not dangerous to get across the bridge at Zwolle. But I remember that afternoon because by the time I got to the river, the line of people was endless. It was a swarm of those who didn't want to be on the German side once the IJssel closed. Many had come miles away from their homes in The Hague or in Rotterdam, and they saw this as their last chance to



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get back home to their families. I had to stand forever in that line.

I didn't worry as the Germans checked our papers, but I was at the end of my stamina. In fact, I was exhausted. I'd had enough. Right then, standing in that endless line of people, I asked God for something more than just safety this time. I asked God to get me out of the work.

What never stopped in resistance work was the exhausting tension of knowing that at any time you could be caught and killed, along with others you loved. That fear never diminished. It was relentless. You lived with it always, even in sleep.

I told God that I wanted to drop the whole thing. I wanted to go somewhere where there was peace and quiet and safety. I wanted to just read a book. "I don't want it any longer, God!" I told him. "I've had it."

There I stood, and I began to feel terrible cramps and the pressure of diarrhea. There were no public bathrooms anywhere—nothing. I was miserable. My wait at that bridge lasted forever. Afterward, when I had finally crossed and was on my bike again, I did not dare to get off. I had such horrible cramps. I couldn't simply step off the road to relieve myself, either; hundreds of people were riding their bikes and walking westward. It was awful. All I could think of was getting back safely to Aalt and Alie's farm.

Letting Go. I was riding a very old, rusty bike of Aalt's. It was a man's bike with a bar you had to swing your leg over. I made it back to Nijkerk on that thing, feeling just terrible, physically and mentally. I came up the cobblestone street, so close to Aalt and Alie's farm that I could see it in the distance. I felt so miserable all over. I had such deep cramps that I didn't dare get off that bike.

Then, right there on that plaza, within viewing distance of Aalt and Alie's, an old man stepped off the curb right in front of me.

I lost what little speed I had, and I had to jump off the bike. I had a terrific accident, right then and there on the cobblestone street in Nijkerk, so close to Aalt and Alie's that I could see the house.

I did it in my pants—diarrhea. It was the most humiliating thing that could have happened. All day long I had been sitting and squeezing, holding it in, with such terrible cramps, and then when I was just about home, I lost it.

I stood there in the street, simply miserable. There I was, twenty-four years old, standing in the street in soiled pants. "Lord," I said, "why did you have to let this happen?" I was angry. This was not necessary. If God could do everything, I thought, then why on earth couldn't he at least have kept that man out of my way?

I got back on my bike, and it was terrible, as you can imagine, to sit back on the seat again. I did, though, but I had absolutely no speed. I had no strength. I was angry, and I was depressed.

So I started out slowly. Then, just like that, something cracked, and I found myself holding the whole steering column in my hand! That rusty, old bike had cracked in half—and I looked down to see a sharp piece of old iron sticking straight up at me.

I realized that if I had gathered any speed, I could have been killed. When the bike broke, I would have fallen forward, and I would have caught that rusty metal shaft right in my chest.

I don't think my accident was a coincidence. For the past three days, I'd been pedaling that bike as fast as I could, and now, just after I'd been so awfully halted, it broke in two pieces.

I put the two halves of the bike on the curb and walked to

The fear never diminished. You lived with it always, even in sleep.

the farm in my dirty pants.

A Hot Bath. It was very dark by then. When Alie saw me, she didn't know what she saw, she told me later. I must have looked as if I was at the limit of everything—physically, emotionally, spiritually. I was just exhausted. After four years of this dangerous work, I had had it.

"Diet," she said, "you look terrible."

I thought, You should know how I feel.

"Sit down, sit down," she said.

But I couldn't sit. So I just broke down and cried and cried and cried. I couldn't hold it anymore. That was unusual for me. I only cried that way once before—one morning in the Vught prison, when I was all alone scrubbing the bathroom floor. I just let go and bawled where no one could see me.

Alie knew how broken I was, so she heated a whole tub of water for me. Even though during that time we usually split a bath to conserve the warm water, that night she said, "This bath, Diet, is just for you."

I said to Alie that I had had enough of the whole business. I was cold, and I was dirty, and I couldn't do it anymore, and I wanted the war to be over, and . . .

Alie hushed me and consoled me. She talked to me that night, made me the bath, and after a while, I put on clean clothes, and I felt better. I was almost like a child, if you can imagine it. Even though I had lived in the past few days with all that tension and danger, I felt that night like a child.

That night I read my little diary that I'd received from my parents when I'd left home. It was a little Bible diary that was always like something of my mother and father, wherever I was. This was all at the end of February 1945—and when that night I opened that book, it said, "Being tired, in spite of it, go

on." (Judg. 8:4).

Even after what I had said of wanting out, even after the humiliation, the physical exhaustion, the despair—the deep despair—those words were like new marching orders. So the next morning, I swung my backpack over my shoulders, and I was off again.

December 26, 1944

Dear Hein, I miss you everywhere. It hurts so much inside from longing for you, so I will take refuge in putting down my thoughts on paper.

If only I could talk a while with you, for sometimes I feel that I am choking on all the troubles and problems.

Mijn jongen [my dear boy], I am getting so hard. I long so much for you; sometimes I long to cry and cry and cry, but I may not, especially for all the people around me who would suffer so much if I did.

Jongen, if for a moment I think of the possibility that you won't come back, it is like I will fall in a bottomless pit! What must I do without you? You evoked the best in me, and if in the past we sometimes had quarrels and were angry with each other, mostly because things were stressful and dangerous, then we talked it out, prayed together, and started all over again with renewed courage.

And now I have to plod on, alone.

But one thing we know and cling to like a drowning person to a buoy: You [God] will lead with your counsel (Ps. 73:24), and, He is love, and if we pray for something according to his will, he will give that.

How happy we will be and how we will tell our children, when they are able to understand, that God through all centuries and generations remains the same. Even in the smallest details, he took care of us.

(From the diary of Diet Eman) ○

SUCH SMALL THINGS SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE



The Diet Eman Story BY JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP

This is the seventh of eight installments in the story of Diet Eman, a woman who worked in the resistance movement in the Netherlands during World War II. Eman now lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she is a member of Seymour Christian Reformed Church. Her story, which author James Calvin Schaap has written with her assistance, will be published in book form by Eerdmans Publishing Company in June 1994 and will be available through CRC Publications.

LIBERATION

March 24, 1945

Things are going so fast. Troops are all over and everywhere crossing the Rhine. The radio says that liberation will come in only a few days. Oh, God, make the end come soon. Please help those who are fighting for us. You have made the weather so good—let it please stay that way.

(From the diary of Diet Eman)

In April 1945, when everyone knew the Allies were coming closer and closer every day to the Veluwe, the Germans found out that a father of seven in the nearby town of Barneveld—Dries Klooster—had been hiding Allied pilots.

I'd been at Klooster's several times, and I noticed that those seven kids knew everything. I considered that very dangerous. The children would joke openly with the Allied pilots. They learned lots and lots of English words, which all by itself proved the family had been in contact with the Allies.

The father, Dries, was very much loved in Barneveld. He worked in the post office, and many people knew him. When he was warned that he was under suspicion, we moved the pilots out, and Dries himself went into hiding. At that time we knew the end of the war was just around the corner—it was just a matter of days.

When the Gestapo came to

search for Dries, he wasn't home, so they took his wife. That's what the Gestapo often did, because the men were likely to turn themselves in to save their spouses. There was no prison in Barneveld, so they took her to Apeldoorn. What that meant, of course, was that all those kids were alone—their father in hiding and their mother arrested.

We told Dries that his wife had been taken prisoner. The Germans assumed that he would turn himself in, but we warned him not to do it. We were convinced that liberation was only a few days away.

Having his wife in Gestapo hands was very hard on Dries. I went to Barneveld to be with the children. I knew the family because I had lived with them before.

By that time, the Canadian Army was advancing already, and the whole area was constantly being shelled. That's how close the liberation was.

Incredibly, one of the Canadian shells hit directly on the farm where Dries was hiding, and Dries—such a good man—was killed instantly.

Why? I can't explain how horrible his death was to me. Many, many people were killed during the occupation—hundreds of thousands. But this death, after all our suffering, with the end so close, seemed more horrible, more a waste, more absolutely unnecessary than others that were just as awful and just as costly. This one hit all of us terribly hard.

"Why, Lord?" I asked then—and everybody did. This was a father of seven kids, and he'd done so much good during the war. Why did this man have to

die just days before the end? And by our own friends' shells?

The underground sent a message to Apeldoorn via the Red Cross. We asked the commandant of the prison there to let the mother free because her husband had been killed. Even if the Germans wanted him, it was too late, we said. And there were seven children left without a parent at home.

They let her go. The Germans knew that they only had a few days.

I went back to Aalt and Alie's. The whole area was very tense because the shelling was getting closer. At one point we were directly in the range of the Allied artillery, and for three days and three nights we all sat in that house with the shells falling all around. They made a distinct sound: "SSSHHHHEEEEEEE-boom!"

You could hear them whistling, every one of them, and you never knew where they would hit. You only knew after one went off that it didn't hit you. Our ordeal went on for three days and three nights—from April 17 to 20, I believe.

April 19, 1945

I think the Allies will be here tomorrow! Wageningen and Ede are also liberated. How long still before Holland is free?

Hein, have you already been liberated—are you free? They are 25 kilometers from Hamburg, and Bremen has been surrounded. Many prisoners are free already. But WHERE ARE YOU?

When I heard about Buchenwald, I turned ice-cold, but then I remembered Psalm 91: "Because he loves me," says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he



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acknowledges my name.' A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."

Oh, darling, how happy we will be.

(From the diary of Diet Eman)

During the shelling, all of the people staying at Aalt and Alie's sat for three days and three nights crowded into a tiny space. It was a small area we called the *kelder*, a narrow space down from the kitchen stairs. We had food enough for a little while, but I don't think the men even went out to milk. You simply didn't know what would happen.

Then, after three days, on April 20, all the bombardment stopped. Suddenly there was nothing—just silence, deadly silence. We didn't know what was happening outside—we hadn't been out for several days.

My Personal Victory. Finally I announced I was going out—the pigeon sent forth from the ark. I wanted to see what was going on. "Diet, be careful," everyone said.

But someone had to go, and Aalt and Alie had three kids. The Jews couldn't go out either, so I figured it was best if I went.

Everywhere I looked there were dead cows with swollen bellies. They lay on the ground with their hooves in the air. They'd been killed by shells. It was a picture I'll never forget.

I left the house, and all of a sudden I couldn't believe my eyes: as far as I could see, there were tanks, tanks, tanks—Canadian tanks, coming from the east.

I wanted to run back to the farm and say to the Jews that

they could come out now, because it was over. Their long captivity was finally coming to an end. I wanted to scream it out—"It's over, it's all over!"

But when I turned around, I saw something dangerous. In a row of weeping willows along the nearby creek were three heavily armed German snipers covered with camouflage.

They saw that I had seen them. For me to run to the farm would put my life in danger—they would probably try to shoot me.

So I turned the other way and ran as fast as I could toward the tanks, zigzagging in case the snipers started shooting.

I could speak English, so when I got to the first of the tanks, I stopped it and told the soldier on top that there were snipers ahead.

"Where?" the man said.

I pointed. "In those trees," I said, "and they are heavily camouflaged."

Right away he said, "Okay, hop on," and he pointed to the back of the tank. So I actually hopped on the first Canadian tank I had seen.

The whole column kept moving, but the first three tanks, including the one I was riding, veered out. They moved so slowly, like elephants. They turned off the road and went up into the meadow. We rolled along until we were right up to the creek.

"There they are!" I screamed. "There they are—do you see them?"

The tanks stopped, and the big turrets turned to aim their guns directly at those Germans, who'd been sitting there just watching all of this happen. When they were faced by those tanks, the Germans just threw up

I felt at that moment as if I had won the war all by myself.

their hands.

And there I sat on a tank, watching it all. After all I'd been through from the moment the German army first marched into The Hague while I watched from the steps of the bank, this moment was my own private triumph. I felt as if I had won the war all by myself. I was so happy.

The Canadians took those Germans and put each one on the front of a tank—like trophies—and swung back up to the road.

That was liberation day for me. Everyone in Holland has a different memory of liberation. For me, sitting on the back of that tank and rolling through that field to capture those three Germans was the day I won the war.

Freedom. The Canadian soldiers told me the liberators would hold a big thanksgiving service on the plaza in Barneveld. One of their chaplains would be there, and they would sound the church chimes to announce the service.

I flew back to the farmhouse, and I told everybody what had happened—the three Germans and the tanks and the liberation—and everyone finally came out. The Jews could walk around, and everybody who was in hiding could come out. The kids didn't have to stay inside anymore. There was great, great joy.

That evening we went to the plaza, and we sang the Dutch national hymn. You can imagine how the tears streamed down our cheeks. We hadn't been allowed to sing that hymn for five years.

By nightfall, lots of Allied soldiers had arrived, and the

Dutch girls kissed everybody. We invited the troops into our homes. There was so much fun.

The next day, because of all those dead cows, we had lots and lots to eat for once. None of the cows had been killed by disease, so the farmers started butchering those that had been killed most recently. It was a big loss, of course; whole herds had been killed. But it felt like nothing at all because at long last we were free!

I got back on my bike and went here and there to see how all our Jews were. It was just wonderful. The war was over, and all the Jews could come out. You could speak to them openly, and they could speak to each other. They hadn't seen each other for a long time. A great cloud was lifted, and we were finally free.

After liberation, the only opportunity for more joy would come when Hein would return. After all the time we'd spent apart, we would finally be together again.

Sunday, April 22, 1945

What am I supposed to do now?

Go to Barneveld because Mother Klooster is so tired? Stay with Alie, who counts on my not leaving her right away?

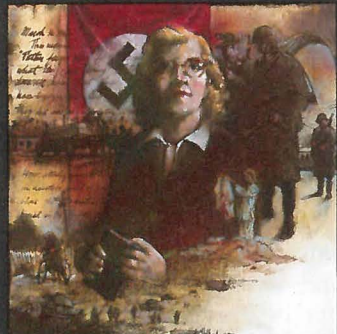
Go to my parents, for whom I am longing so much and who may need me if things are getting difficult there?

Oh, my darling, I cannot enjoy liberation to the fullest now because you are not here to celebrate it with me. I feel just as restless as I did when I first got out of the concentration camp. Nowhere do I feel at rest.

Please show me what I am supposed to do.

(From the diary of Diet Eman) ○

**SUCH SMALL THINGS
SUCH ORDINARY PEOPLE**



The Diet Eman Story
BY
JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP

This is the last of eight installments in the story of Diet Eman, a woman who worked in the resistance movement in the Netherlands during World War II. Eman now lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she is a member of Seymour Christian Reformed Church. Her story, which author James Calvin Schaap has written with her assistance, will be published in book form by Eerdmans Publishing Company in June 1994 and will be available through CRC Publications.



**PICKING UP
THE PIECES**

April 26, 1945

It is a year ago that you were arrested, dearest. How much has happened! And now, within a little while, I should be hearing something from you.

Spoke to Riek, went to Barneveld. Everything okay also at Hyumen and Wim's.

April 28, 1945

A year ago now, you were arrested. Rumors about complete surrender by Himmler!

Everybody is pulling me to come and work for them: The Netherlands military forces in Barneveld, the Klooster family, Alie, the military in Nijkerk.

But I don't want to bind myself to anything, for when you come back, I want to be free!

April 29, 1945

At church, Rev. Brinkman preached on Isaiah 26. We sang Psalm 66 and in the end the Wilhelmus [national anthem].

April 30, 1945

At the synagogue in Nijkerk, the Dutch Nazis had to clean the building, and all the people shouted for joy. The Jewish

military screamed, "Schnell, schnell, schnell!" and drove them faster, mimicking the Germans'

own manners. It was being filmed.

Still, something inside of me did not feel good about it. Covenant people of the Lord were standing there with such satisfaction and such unholy glee. However, it is understandable.

May 1, 1945

In the morning I saw Riek and

went for my residence permit and an application for a ration card under my real name.

Today I feel so much like having a good, good cry. I must be crazy—I have all reasons to be happy.

Darling, please come soon.

May 4, 1945

I did not write for a few days. At 8:45 p.m. the radio told us that the Germans had capitulated in the Netherlands, Denmark, and northwestern Germany. We raced to Nijkerk, and there everyone was celebrating—crazy, happy, jigging and dancing around. All the church bells were ringing and everywhere were flags!

When we came home, the radio played all national songs, and we all joined in singing them. Then Aalt read Psalm 103, and we sang “Now Thank We All Our God.”

(From the diary of Diet Eman)

Clinging to God’s Promise.

I had no idea where Hein was, but I thought that everything would be okay.

Ab van Meerveld, Hein’s best friend and the main leader of our resistance group, was missing too. Ab had been arrested when he visited the house of Dries Klooster.

Once the fighting was over, Ab’s wife, Riek, and I often went together to the church in Zwartebroek. We had long conversations, and we would read to each other, especially Psalm 91: “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will *not* come near you. . . . ‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. . . . With long life will I satisfy him.’”

We would tell each other that we must cling to that promise, you know, just cling to what the Bible says. Riek was hoping so hard, with so much emotion, that she sometimes frightened me.

She wanted badly to convince me that we’d both get our guys back. I’d sometimes tell her that it could be God’s will, perhaps, that they would not come back. We had to consider the possibility.

But you couldn’t say those things very easily then, because saying them almost indicated a lack of faith. We had long and deep conversations about all of that while we waited for some news, any news, about Hein and Ab.

Pages of Obituaries. Soon the papers started showing the horror of what had been found in the concentration camps. The Americans who opened those camps were shocked at what they had stumbled upon.

I loved the story of one of the American generals: After he and his soldiers found all the dead and suffering, he went into the nearest German village and got every last person from town—even the mayor—and made them all, every last one of them, walk through that camp so they would all see what they had done and never, ever forget.

Many of those who had been sick in the camps died after the liberation. When news came in of what had really happened in the camps, we started to get notices from the Red Cross that this one and that one—men and women—wouldn’t come back at all, that each had died somewhere. We would receive notices that such-and-such a man would not come back—twenty-two years old, twenty-three years old, twenty-one years old. All of them had given their lives for their country.

It was overwhelming. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. During those weeks the notices kept on coming; the papers were full of obituaries of young men—pages were full!

For me, reading those notices was difficult. The whole of the Netherlands didn’t really know what to do, where to turn. Until I knew something of Hein, I was

really unable to do anything at all.

I’d tell myself that Hein wasn’t dead. We’d heard that the Russians had taken loads of prisoners that should have gotten free, and I’d tell myself that maybe he was one of them, that soon he would be back.

But What of Hein? I was finally back in The Hague when on June 5, in the evening, the doorbell rang. It was a Mr. Dekker. In our underground work, Hein had often mentioned a Wim Dekker from the Eindhoven area. Hein had become friends with him and had often worked with him in the underground.

“Well,” Mr. Dekker said, “I’ve just been in Nijkerk, and I thought I’d stop by here.”

“Isn’t it great that now the guys are coming back?” I said. I was just bubbling over with happiness.

He said, “Yes, yes, but of course you have to realize that some of them will not be coming back.”

I didn’t want to think of that, so I changed the subject. “Yes, but isn’t it wonderful that the Germans have been defeated?” I said.

Then he said, “I have just come from Nijkerk, and I have a letter from Hein’s father for you, and the news is not good.”

I must have made it very, very difficult for this man. I was standing there bubbling at the door—“Yeah, isn’t it great the boys are coming home?”—and here he had come with the worst news. He tried hard to break it softly by saying what I used to say to Ab’s wife: “Not everyone will come back.”

Then he gave me the letter from Hein’s father that said that he had received notice from the Red Cross that Hein had died, and that Jan, his middle son, had also died.

Hein’s father wrote that Rev. De Ruyg had come back from Dachau and that he had known Hein there. Hein had died on the



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night of January 20 or 21, 1945.

After Mr. Dekker left, I went into my room at home, and I wouldn't see anyone. Father and Mother came in and wanted to stay with me, but I wanted to be alone. I had to be alone. Many people came to express condolences, but I could not face anyone. I had to be alone.

A couple of very bad days passed, days when I couldn't even think. Everything from that time is vague.

June 5, 1945

O God, why?

Why did I have to come through it all? Why could I not also have died?

Hein, why did you leave me alone? I cannot live without you. What am I going to do without you? But I am happy that I can go to Rev. De Ruyg and hear about you.

To be a survivor is the most difficult. Yet I am happy that I am the one. For it also would have been so difficult for you if the situation were now the opposite. May I be so self-centered as to wish you back here?—for now you are in heaven.

You were ready.

Jongen, why did you read John 14 the last time that we saw each other? And why was there all the time a voice that said clearly, "Take a good look at him," when you brought me back to Aalt and Alie's farm? You noticed it yourself and started to laugh: "Why are you all the time staring at me?"

Now I will have to put into practice what I once told you: "Even if something should happen to us, we still have to be very grateful for these beautiful years we had. These few years will be worth all the rest of my

The papers were full of obituaries of young men—pages were full!

life—and the sorrow."

God give me strength to go on from day to day, from hour to hour. Show me the way you want me to go.

(From the diary of Diet Eman)

So Many Made It. It was hard on me to see life continue all around. A few days passed, and I took off on my bike to see Uncle Frits, who had helped us so much. He had survived. Aunt Lenie had survived. Herman, my friend from the bank, the first one we hid, came back to The Hague. His sister Rosa came back, along with Herman's girlfriend and her mother. For the most part they had stayed in the same place we had put them at the beginning of the hiding.

These were the people we had first hidden when the whole project began, and they had all made it, thank God. Some of the Jews who had been at Mies's apartment on Reinkenstraat had been arrested, but we had not placed people there ourselves originally.

All of the Jews we hid made it, every one. Every single one who had been placed with Christian farm families had made it.

None of the people we hid knew what to say to me. They had come through it safely, but I had lost. The war was very difficult for them—and for me—and it was likewise difficult for them to deal with what had happened. I wasn't bitter, but it was such an irony, you know. They all knew it, too. We knew when we started that this could be the price we would have to pay.

Someplace in Holland, from one of those horrible trains the

Germans used to transport prisoners, Hein wrote me a letter on a single piece of toilet paper he had been given by the Red Cross. That little letter he folded into an envelope he had fashioned from the kind of brown tape you use to seal packages.

Then he addressed it to me and dropped it from that boxcar along the side of the tracks. Someone picked it up, and later I received it. It was his last letter. I received it long after he had left the prison at Amersfoort. This is what it said:

Dear Diet,

It's happened quite unexpectedly. We didn't think that it would happen anymore. But I am happy that we have said farewell to Amersfoort.

Yesterday about nine in the evening, we left, and now it's seven in the morning. I think that the trip will be quite long.

Darling, don't count on it that we will see each other again soon. I now have the feeling that it will take at least a year. But we are here with friends altogether—he knew some of the other prisoners—and you will soon be in a free country. So we have many reasons to be optimistic.

And here we see again that we do not decide our own lives. Dienneke—that was always a kind of pet name for me—keep courage. Even if we won't see each other on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand. And know, Diet, that I always, of every last person in the world, loved you the most. It is still my desire that we together will form someday a happy family.

That is the letter he sent, the last letter, the letter he left along

Diet Eman Today: Caring for the Least



Each year, the University of Cincinnati (Ohio) Medical School sends its graduating class to work for a while among people in deep poverty. The school believes the experience is essential before its graduates begin to practice medicine. This year, professors from the school took their students to mountainous border country in El Salvador, to a village named Santa Lucia. This year, like last year, they begged Diet Eman to come along.

They need volunteers like Eman—nurses who know Spanish and who will not flinch if a stray scorpion scampers across their sleeping bags some night. They know Eman won't.

Eman should probably be playing shuffleboard beneath neatly trimmed Florida palms. After all, she's seventy-three years old. But just two months ago, she was in El Salvador with those medical students, again.

Getting to Santa Lucia took hiking almost straight up a mountain. There Eman spent two weeks helping fearful Salvadorans explain their medical problems to the relief team. She said later that some

Diet Eman

Eman is often away from home so much that her closest friends literally don't know where on earth she is.

days, she translated so long and so much that she ended the day speaking in little more than a whisper.

Eman is often away from her home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on similar relief trips—so much so that her closest friends literally don't know where on earth she is. Obviously the dedication she showed to people in need during World War II hasn't waned over the past fifty years. Now, even though she's been retired for seven years from her job as export manager for Werner Lehara of Grand Rapids, she hasn't stopped helping others.

The organizations she serves include the Luke Society, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the Red Cross, and the Christian Medical Society. She's made numerous trips to Ecuador and Guatemala, translated for medical-service teams in Honduras almost a dozen times, and helped California farm workers left homeless by a monster earthquake.

Almost fifty years ago, Eman looked over the mess Hitler had created and decided that the only

way to go on was to start over. When she knew that Hein Sietsma was not going to return, she began nurses' training.

Her training completed, she looked to leave Europe. She took an opportunity that arose at a Shell Oil compound in Venezuela. Several years later she met a man she eventually married and then eventually divorced. Meanwhile, two children, Mark and Joy, were born. Today they live on either edge of North America. Mark calls home frequently, and Diet and Joy are often traveling companions: Joy is a flight attendant for Northwest Airlines.

When Eman was a girl, a teacher once asked her class what each of them would like to do with their lives. Eman told that teacher she really didn't care what she did as long as her life wasn't boring. It hasn't been.

But her life hasn't simply been a matter of avoiding boredom. The medical school in Cincinnati has learned something about Eman that keeps them calling her back. It's something her friends know, something hundreds of surviving Dutch Jews know, something dozens and dozens of people around the world know as well: Diet Eman, a woman who knows from her own life the meaning of *Immanuel*, deeply cares for those people Christ himself once described as "the least of these my brethren."

You can safely assume that she'll plan to go with the medical students again next year. What's another year when you're already seventy-four? That's probably what she'll tell those professors when they call.—James C. Schaap ○