



## Watergoor, 1944

**I**n February of 1944, under the name Willie van Daalen—“Willie” was short for Wilhelmina, the name of our queen—I moved my base of operations to the home of Aalt and Alie Lozeman, a beautiful small farm just west of Nijkerk, Gelderland, on a quiet two-lane road that led to Bunschoten and Spakenburg. The farm itself we called “Watergoor.” It had a very long sandy driveway; tall trees stood a short distance away from the house, and there was a beautiful hedge of bushes alongside. It was a wonderful place, not fancy at all but always loving—a place that became not only a base of operations but a home for me.

With the generosity of the Lozemans, that house was open to anyone—shot-down pilots or *onderduikers* or Jews—anyone needing a place to hide. During that time, Aalt and Alie risked their lives continuously because the Germans had said that anyone aiding enemy flyers would be shot on the spot. But Aalt and Alie always told me, “Whoever you bring here—if you vouch for them—those people may sleep here.”

Aalt and Alie taught their two young children how to talk about all visitors: they never mentioned names of people in the house to those young kids. Farmers call their neighbors the *buurvrouw*, the neighbor woman, and the *buurman*, the neighbor man; when they use those terms, there is no need for names. So those little children, Frits and Rietje, two and three years old, al-

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ways spoke of Uncle Ben and his wife Marie, for example, as the *buurman* and *buurvrouw*. That way, if they were ever with others who didn't know that Aalt and Alie were hiding people on the farm, no one would suspect anything; the children were merely speaking of the neighbors.

Aiding downed pilots was especially dangerous, but we believed that if Allied pilots were risking their lives for us by flying bombing missions, the least we could do would be to see that they didn't fall into the hands of the enemy when their planes were shot down. After all, those pilots could have been sitting at home safely on the other side of the ocean. But they were trying to help us.

Those downed pilots would often hide in haystacks or barns unbeknownst to the farmer; once morning came, they would gamble on communicating with the farmer who came out to do his chores. Most of the people in that area would certainly know some member of the Resistance and knew how to contact a member of our group. We gave those pilots civilian clothing and hid them; then we handed them over to another Resistance group, who could get them to Portugal (a neutral country), where another group would help them on their journey back to England or Allied territory. Once we had delivered them, our part was finished. We had no idea what would happen to them; but we hoped, of course, that they would escape successfully.

One night, when Hein was at Watergoor and we were hiding some pilots, Hein's brother Henk happened to stop by. Hein had already told those pilots that his name was Pete (you never gave your real name). So when Henk came in, those pilots took one look at his face and couldn't believe their eyes. "If this is 'Pete,'" one of them said, pointing at Hein, "then this guy is 'Repeat.'"

Aalt and Alie kept a radio, which we listened to almost every night. The BBC always carried the news we wanted to hear, but in addition it often relayed messages to the Underground. In the middle of the broadcast we'd hear some odd phrase such as "the apples are green," a message meant for specific listeners

somewhere in occupied Europe. Three or four weeks after those pilots had laughed about Henk's resemblance to Hein, we were listening to the BBC broadcast one night, when suddenly we heard, "Regards to Pete and Repeat." We immediately thanked the Lord that those men had made it back to England safely.

People were coming and going all the time at the Lozemans' farm. But in addition to those who stayed for just a little while, Aalt and Alie were hiding Uncle Ben and his wife, the Jewish couple who had simply walked away from their own deportation more than a year earlier. All of the time Uncle Ben was in hiding at Aalt and Alie's, he kept working at falsifying the documents we would bring him. His wife learned to spin and knit; and she peeled potatoes and worked on the pears during canning time. Everyone helped out at Aalt and Alie's, and there were always people in hiding, sneaking in and sneaking out again.

Uncle Ben and Tante Marie had lots of work to do in that house, which was good, but they sometimes got on each other's nerves. Of course, most couples in that kind of cramped situation for two or three years—never seeing other people, locked up in a little room—would almost strangle each other in the end.

One day, while Uncle Ben was working hard at all of those documents and Marie was knitting and peeling, I brought him more things to do, and I found him very desperate.

"She!"—and the poor frantic man pointed at his wife—"this woman? She has this *lap hangen* [a piece of cloth]," and he pointed at her tongue, making flapping motions with his hand—"and all day long, she yaps and yaps and yaps. I'm going absolutely crazy here!"

The two of them could not, of course, leave that house at all: they could leave that room during the day only to go to the toilet, and that was something they could do only at certain times. On many Dutch farms the animals were right in the back of the house during the winter, in an area whose doors are always open, called the *deel*. No farms had toilets back then. In the winter the *deel* is like a barn, with stables, where the cows are chained in their

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stanchions. All the manure falls into a trench and is then pushed out into the *grup*, a manure pit.

At the end of that trench is a little space like a small bathroom. In that space you would find a wooden cover that you lifted up, and that was where humans did their business. Uncle Ben and his wife had their own little room, but they did not have a bathroom. Sometimes, when nature called, there would be neighbors in the *deel*; perhaps Aalt was making a sale or trying to buy a horse or pig. The Jews would then have to hold back and squeeze because they absolutely could not go when someone else was in the *deel*. It is easy to realize how hard that was.

One day Uncle Ben had to go to the bathroom, and there he sat at that little end of the stable, far away from the room where he was supposed to be hiding. To get back to his hiding place, he would have to go through the whole *deel*, and then a little doorway, through a roomy kitchen where the women did all the housework, including sewing; and then he had to go through the door to what was called the *beerd*, the big, beautiful room in the front of the house that was used only for weddings or funerals.



Watergoor Farm, home of the Lozemans and a refuge for many during the Occupation.

In the *beerd* there were two doors that went to two small rooms: Uncle Ben and Marie had the left room off the *beerd*, and I had the room to the right when I slept there.

That day Uncle Ben was on the toilet, a long way from the *beerd*, out in the *deel*, and a neighbor came! Ben must have sat there in the *deel* for hours, because he had strict instructions never to come out if a neighbor was there. In the end he got very nervous. I went outside because I could move around, and I went to the little ventilation window in that cubicle.

“Can’t I get out of the window, and run out of here?” he said.

“No, you have to stay there until he leaves,” I said. We always had to keep our eye on people, always had to be very careful during the Occupation. Uncle Ben was ready to climb out of that window, even though it was very small. And if he were to get stuck or something, the commotion would certainly draw the neighbor’s attention.

In that little room where Uncle Ben and Tante Marie stayed, Aalt and Hein’s brother Henk had made a big opening in the floor: with a hook and a ring, they could lift a trapdoor on hinges, which opened to steps going down into a space where there was dry sand, a mat or a piece of linoleum, chairs, and a flashlight. There are no basements in the Netherlands, so no one would suspect a space there. If it became dangerous upstairs and they had to disappear quickly, Uncle Ben, Marie, and whoever might be in hiding at the Lozemans’ farm just then, could go down into that square hole and hide. Occasionally, we would all do a drill.

“Go, go,” we would say. “Danger is at the door.”

Because it was imperative for them to hide quickly, we timed the drill. (I didn’t have to hide, because it was widely known around Nijkerk that I was the maid at Aalt and Alie’s. Everyone knew I was from The Hague, but few there knew that I was a friend of Hein Sietsma. To most people I was simply the maid who helped Alie with her housework.)

Uncle Ben’s wife had been eating more and more the whole time she was there, getting heavier and heavier, her hips growing

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wider. All she did was spin and eat, sitting all the while—no real exercise at all. When she cleaned the potatoes, she didn't overeat; but when she peeled pears and apples, she ate very well. Eating was the only joy she had, and you couldn't blame her. And it was good food compared to what the rest of Holland was eating early in 1944.

So it got more and more difficult and time-consuming to get her down the steps quickly and into that hole. And when she finally did make it, she hated it down there. Anybody would! It wouldn't be two or three minutes before we would hear her call, "May I come out now?" Perhaps she had claustrophobia, and who could blame her?

"No, you may not come out yet," we said. "And you may not yell, because some day it won't be just a drill, and then if you call out like that, it will be all over—just like that. You may not yell."

We were very serious about the test, but often smiles would cross our faces then.

Watergoor was a wonderful place to stay, but it was very confining for the Jews. Life was like that for every Jewish person



Aalt and Alie Lozeman with their four children—1945

we hid—very difficult. But at least they were alive.

Late in the evenings, when the outside doors of that farmhouse were finally locked and the children were put to bed, Uncle Ben and Tante Marie could finally come out of their little room, their hiding place. Then we would all sit under the lamp around the big kitchen table and eat pears or, in the winter, apples, all of us in socks or slippers. Alie would read a little meditation while we were eating fruit, after things had grown quiet and seemed safer. It was a good time for our devotions. She would read something wonderful in the glow of that lamp. For all of us there—Aalt and Alie, Ben and Marie, other men and women there in hiding that night, and me—those were beautiful moments, safe in that warm farm home.

One Saturday night, after I had been there only a short while, we had to have our baths. There was no shower, of course; we all bathed in the warm kitchen, the only heated room. We took turns, and others stayed out of the kitchen while we bathed.

“We have so many people,” Alie said, “and we need to conserve as much wood as we can to heat the water with. Would you mind if we heat just one big tub, and if the two of us take a bath together using that water?”

I had just arrived there and felt somewhat self-conscious. Later I thought of Alie as a sister, and I still do; but I will never forget that first time we bathed together. There we sat, each on our knees with that big tub of hot water between us. We first washed our faces and hair, and then our shoulders, and then down a bit further, and down further. We went slowly—first this part, then that part. But we were in this whole odd business together. Later everything became natural, and everyone became very much like family in her home. But that first time it was almost funny. I have to laugh thinking about how we washed and scrubbed in stages, not looking at each other.

This young wife took loads of risks, especially with her two little children and a third on the way. She often gave away loads of provisions to those who stayed at that farmhouse, some of whom

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she didn't even know. She was—and still is—a wonderful woman.

During that period I was needed in the Underground work because of the danger for men to be seen anywhere on the road. So I was almost constantly on the go; but whenever I was at the farm I helped Alie. With her husband and two children, Uncle Ben and Tante Marie, two of Aalt's brothers who were helping out, and me, there were often ten or twelve people, not to mention those Resistance people who might be hiding or staying for just a night or two. I said to Alie when I first began my stay there, "You have the neighbors and the *buurman*, and you have pilots here, and you have me. Now listen, you tell me what a maid would do if you had one that you paid, and I'll do it. And if I don't know how, you teach me."

"I'll remember what you said," she told me. "But why don't you start with the laundry? That would be very helpful."

There was very little soap, only what you could receive on your ration card. That meant a lot of scrubbing, because the loads were huge and there was no washing machine, only big wooden tubs that held hundreds of liters of water. Alie usually let the laundry pile up to try to conserve what little soap she had. In perspective, by today's standards, if you are sweaty, you change clothes; and if you sweat every day, you change every day. But at that time we kept clothes on for a week, and socks too—sweat or not.

I was still a novice at housework. I had learned some city housework at Eindhoven, but when I got to Watergoor I learned the real ins and outs of a household, and I loved it. On those mornings when I did the laundry, Aalt woke me up when he went out to start milking—around 4:30. I had to go out and pump water from the spring in the *deel*, then carry the yoke on my shoulders, balancing two pails, just as you see the Dutch girls doing on postcards. I had to carry that water to an outside furnace to heat the water. Aalt had cut some kindling and started the fire already; then I stoked it with twigs, and when finally that water was practically boiling, I had to carry it inside to the tubs on the *deel*.

In the meantime, I grated soap from the big lumps of



brownish stuff they had made; it had to be grated or otherwise it wouldn't dissolve. Because there were so many people's clothes in that wash, we had to churn the heavy load with a large wooden paddle. Alie taught me every step. I had to start with all the white things, churning those clothes two hundred times to melt the soap and get them clean. Then I had to plop it all into the next tub, the rinse water; in the meantime I had to get more water warmed up. Then I repeated the same ritual with the medium-colored clothes, then the dark clothes, each load getting darker and darker, and finally the stinky socks. By that time, the water was dark and dirty.

The whole long job went in stages: first you churned and then you rinsed; then another rinse; then the white clothes went into the bleach—and it was real bleach—and then into something to get it whitish blue, *Reckits blaauw* it was called. In March and April I had to spread all the sheets and everything on the meadow. That was to make them whiter still, but it was done only in certain months of the year because the ozone in the air during those months would bleach the wash. I learned a lot from Alie.

I worked and worked until breakfast, which was around eight o'clock. As a city girl, I had always eaten a couple slices of bread for breakfast. On the farm, after all that work, I came to breakfast with my stomach craving bread. But my stomach sometimes had to get accustomed to heavier stuff, like *zuurkool* (sauerkraut) with potatoes, leftovers from the day before (which was called *muisje*). That kind of breakfast often felt as heavy as lead in my stomach, though to the men, who'd also been working for hours and were accustomed to that kind of breakfast, the meal was wonderful. There were many in the Netherlands who suffered hunger during those years; but I was never hungry at Watergoor.

In the spring, when all the cattle went out into the meadow, the stable walls were caked with cow manure and laced with cobwebs. So Alie said, "Yep, Willie, now we start." The two of us wore our babushkas around our heads, and we hauled in the garden hoses and the pump, and we cleaned all the walls and whitewashed them. Work, work, work. Alie was pregnant, so I

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tried to help as much as possible; sometimes her sister came to help as well. And it looked great after everything was clean.

Occasionally, the men would slaughter pigs and we would all make sausage. Even I did that, a city girl taking meat and pushing it into the intestines—but even worse, scraping those intestines clean! All through the period that I was staying at Watergoor, from February to May 1944, there was always work to do on that farm, hard work. Most of the time I worked for our Resistance group; but whenever I was needed on the farm, I worked with Alie and the men, and I loved it.

That Aalt and Alie would take in a city girl for a maid was rather surprising to some of those farm folks. After all, I didn't even speak their dialect. People probably thought I was a poor city girl who had come to The Veluwe because, at least in the country, there was enough to eat. To them I was Willie van Daalen, Alie Lozeman's help.

That spring their horse was expecting a foal. You can leave cows alone when they're calving, unless there is a specific problem; but the men on the farm told me that you have to watch a mare to make sure she bites the umbilical cord properly. The mare was about to foal at a time when the men were all busy with planting, so I told them I would sit with her at night. There I was out in the barn playing midwife to a pregnant mare. I remember sitting there, spinning yarn in the light of a little oil lamp, a city girl who knew nothing about farming, sitting on the *deel* beside that mother in pain, already beginning the birthing process. All around me there was darkness and perfect silence, except for the mother's pain. It was as if the war didn't exist in those hours. When the colt's time got very close, I had to wake the men up. The foal was born safely that night, a little mare foal that they called Kia.

Those everyday things happened in the middle of the war, in the midst of the danger I faced from day to day, while I was walking all over the country keeping our families supplied, playing mail carrier, and always lying. I loved some of the things I saw and felt and heard on that farm: the clothes in the tubs, the

darkness on the *deel*, the meadow grass full of white sheets. When I did the laundry, I wore an apron, and that colt, Kia, loved to nibble on the knot I had tied in the back. She'd keep taking off that apron, just as if she didn't want me to work.

I remember the men talking about a *neurende koe* (in their dialect, "a cow in heat"). To me *neurien* meant "humming"—singing without words. I wondered how a cow could hum. What they were talking about was a cow that wanted to be with the bull. And they laughed their heads off when they found out that I was listening for the cow to hum but didn't hear a thing. The whole world of the farm was wonderful and strange, and I loved it dearly because it was such a relief through those months.

When I think about that time now, on the farm with Aalt and Alie, with Uncle Ben and Tante Marie cooped up in rooms off the *beerd*, when I remember whitewashing the walls of the *deel*, then it seems odd that at that very time both Hein and I were getting deeper and deeper into the Resistance, working harder and harder out there in the country. Somehow, even though we were still in constant danger, Watergoor gave me a sense of safety and strength. It was a beautiful place, and Aalt and Alie were wonderful people.

During that time a lot of Resistance work had to be done regularly, certain things on certain days, and it involved walking all over the region. What I did was most often up to me because I was in charge of that part of Gelderland, and I knew where the Jews were; they were *my* Jews, so to speak. There might well have been other places in that area hiding Jews, but I knew only where the Jews that we had placed were in hiding. When we got the ration cards from the guys who had robbed the supply offices, and earlier from the men who were falsifying cards, then my job was to get those cards to the people who were in hiding for whatever reasons.

One day Hein told me about a family in Nijkerk, a wonderful Christian family, who he thought would help us. We had two Jewish sisters who had been at Mies' apartment on Reinkenstraat

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and whom we needed to hide. So I went to this fine Christian family, and the father, a very prominent man and a pillar of the church, met me at the door. I identified myself. He knew the Sietsma family, and he knew that Hein was engaged to me. I told him that we were desperate to get a place for these two Jewish girls. We *had* to find them a place.

“No,” he said, “I don’t want anything to do with it.”

So I started working on his status as a good Christian, and that this was part of his obligation to serve the Lord. I really pleaded with him. I begged.

Still he said no.

I was desperate. I came up with every argument I could, but he was adamant. He wouldn’t budge. He wouldn’t take any Jews, he said.

“Please, I beg you,” I said.

“No,” he said, and he shut the door of his house in my face.

When I left, I was furious with this supposedly fine man, a well-known Christian, a man of God, who wouldn’t help us.

After the war, I found out that this man already *had* Jewish people in his home, people whom he must have taken in from some other group working to hide Jews. But he wasn’t about to tell me that the reason he wouldn’t take those two sisters into his house was that he already had some Jews in hiding. I had not grown up in Nijkerk, and I was not an old-timer in the area, so he might have thought that he couldn’t really trust me totally. I didn’t know it, but I put him in a terribly difficult position. And why should he tell me he had Jews anyway? Even if he could trust me, what he would tell me would only add to what I knew, and the more you knew about the whole business the more dangerous it was. That man of God might even have thought that it was in my own best interests not to know. So he lied, perhaps even to protect *me!*

It was stupid of me to go on with my argument and not to think of that possibility. But I was a young girl, even though what I did through those years made me mature very quickly.

As our list grew, the people who were hiding Jews were no longer just farmers. Many of the addresses I had to supply were city addresses. Those families were also suffering hunger, and they would have been hungry even if they hadn't chosen to hide Jewish people. It was a starving time. We *had* to get those people ration cards; it was a matter of survival. It was risky enough, such a sacrifice, simply to hide Jews; and then there was often no food either. So we had to get them supplied as best we could.

But they also had to have money. At first, some of the Jewish people still had some money, but later there was just nothing at all; they had used it all. We had to keep our people supplied. We couldn't just send them out into the street with nothing. So we got into fundraising after some time, because there were many Christians who said to us: "Sorry, we are scared of taking people in, but we will help—here's five guilders."

So my job was to deliver ration cards and money when I could, but I also had to pick up stolen ration cards from addresses given to me, along with false identification. We didn't know where the robberies would take place, because we didn't pull those robberies ourselves. Our getting our hands on new ration cards depended on how close we were to the site of those robberies. Sometimes I had to hop on the train and take a bunch of ration cards along; sometimes Hein would come to the Lozemans' and bring a couple of hundred. Often I walked. During the war I walked all over the Netherlands.

Those ration books had to be distributed every month, so I made that the occasion for postal delivery too. Because the Jews were in such danger and, often as not, their families were broken up, they wanted to exchange letters with each other to find out how their loved ones were doing. For example, Ada, Herman's future wife, was hiding in one place, and her mother was in another. They needed to correspond with each other.

Usually I could make my own arrangements on where to go and what to do, and as a rule I did not feel that I was in real trouble all the time. For the men, the kind of traveling I did would

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have been much more dangerous, but for women it was not so. As a rule the Germans would not stop girls and start searching them. Nor were the Germans rapists, at least not typically; there was very stiff punishment for that kind of thing. Hitler wanted a pure race, of course, and while his soldiers may have raped Jewish girls in the camps in Germany, as far as I knew, such things did not happen in the Netherlands. It may have been because the Germans valued Aryan women, such as Dutch women, too highly. Even though we were their enemies, in the Netherlands they didn't have the reputation as rapists.

The worst indignity I ever suffered in my travels was that they would confiscate my bicycle. Five times German soldiers stole my bike from me. If they were walking and they wanted to bike, they would simply stop me and steal it. But at least one time, I wasn't about to give up my bicycle to that rotten Hun. My hair went up that time. I was more timid if I had a lot of dangerous stuff on me, because if I were to give them some trouble at a time like that, I might risk a confrontation. Then they could easily search me and find all the illegal papers or whatever it was I had with me. But that time I had nothing dangerous on me, and I wasn't about to part with my bike.

"No, that's mine," I said when one of them commanded me to get off my bike. But the man had a revolver, and he fired a shot right next to my foot. In other words, he was saying, if you don't give it to me, the next bullet will go into your foot. So I gave it up.

After my bike was gone, I had to go to Amersfoort one time on foot to try to get some money from a wealthy family named Pon, people who owned a bicycle factory. By that time you couldn't get shoes anymore, so I was walking all over on the crummiest shoes. Your shoes wear out when you walk all those distances. When I got to the address, a beautiful house in Amersfoort, at 11:00 in the morning, Mrs. Pon said, "Come in. Come in. We are going to have lunch, and you can eat with us."

Now, I didn't know the people very well, even though I had been there now and then to ask for contributions. They were so

wonderful and warm, and they had a lively family of young kids. I heard Mr. Pon say something to his wife, and then I heard her say, “Ja, ja,” and then disappear. When she came back, looking at my feet, she carried in her hand a pair of the most gorgeous leather mountain-climbing shoes. It was her own pair of lined hiking boots, made of leather with thick soles.

“Are these your size?” Mrs. Pon asked. “They are my mountain shoes, and they’re just standing here doing nothing. We are not going anywhere. You put them on.”

They fit perfectly.

“You keep them,” she said.

Walking all over the Netherlands, even outside Gelderland, after that was a whole different experience with those new boots. I wore them until the end of the war, and they were a wonderful blessing.

Because I was seeing so much of what was happening in our little country, I began to work at times with a man we nicknamed “Klein Jantje,” a man who did a lot of espionage for the Underground and for the Allies as well. (*Jan* is a very common name in the Netherlands, and *klein* means small: “Little Jan.”) I respected him very highly because, when the South was liberated, he would cross from occupied territory to liberated territory in the south, across big, dangerous rivers, and back again to occupied territory. I used to wonder whether I was strong enough to do such a thing. I imagined myself free, somewhere in Belgium perhaps, and I found it very difficult, even in my imagination, to be strong enough to come back again into Nazi-occupied Netherlands when I could have put it all behind me. But Klein Jantje, one of the finest men I’ve ever known, risked great danger and did it several times, back and forth.

Sometimes I gathered information for him. He would give me maps plus descriptions and photos of military equipment—tanks, artillery, etc.—and the flags that referred to troop movements and the rank of the commanding officers. I would locate these German deployments on my trips and record what I saw on those military

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maps. I recorded, for example, what the Germans were building, their fortifications and troop movements, and coordinated on the maps how far apart they were in meters, in degrees and minutes, and so forth, so that the intelligence planners could draw it all out. I would take the map of Amersfoort, let's say, and draw out what I had seen around that city and return it to Klein Jantje and his spy network. The men in espionage would ask me to collect that kind of information because they knew I was walking all over the country by that time.

It was always exciting, but it was also always dangerous. And fear takes a toll finally: when you live in danger from moment to moment, the constant tension becomes very wearying. Every step I took on the roads of Gelderland was nerve-wracking, because I was secretly carrying the very material that could turn out to be my own death warrant.



*April 25, 1944*

What shall I write? That I am so very unquiet for the last couple of days, and that I yearn so much for the end of all this? I long so much for the end of the war, but I do not deserve it for lately I have not been praying for it. Still I cannot live without You, Lord. And when I hear now that a lot of action is happening again, the Allies making progress, I should be grateful for everything You're doing.

*from the journal of Diet Eman*

For more information on Diet Eman and her book, [click here](#).