

CORRIE TEN BOOM

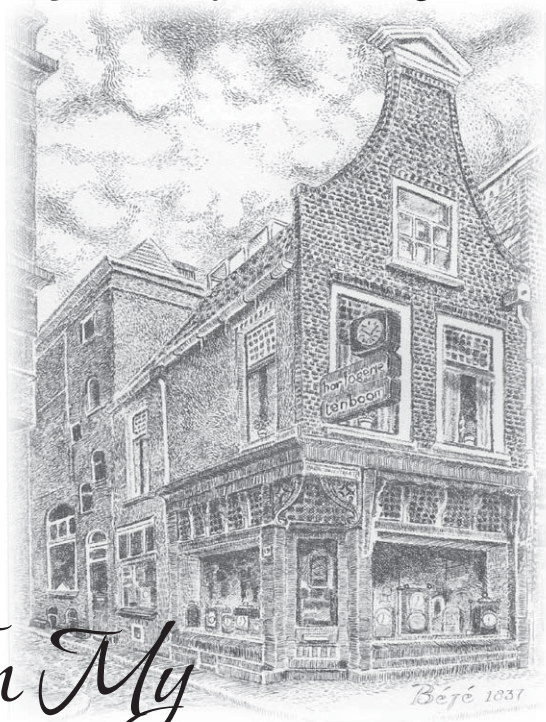
The Years Before The Hiding Place



In My
FATHER'S
HOUSE

CORRIE TEN BOOM

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FATHER'S HOUSE

Lighthouse Trails Publishing
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When my parents were married, many years ago, they claimed Psalm 32:8 as their “life verse,” the promise which they felt was God’s assurance for them.

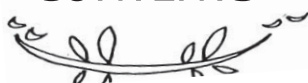
“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”



This promise became the special directive for my life as well.

Corrie ten Boom

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Cornelia (Corrie) ten Boom

Born April 15, 1892

Holland





INHERITANCE



REMARKABLE, extraordinary . . . Peter, where did Cook find strawberries in the midst of winter?" The Dutch merchant summoned his butler and pointed to the luscious fruit in the silver compote. Even in the home of great wealth this was an amazing luxury in the early 1800s.

"It's the gardener, sir . . . Ten Boom. He does some miraculous things in that hothouse of his."

"Ten Boom, you say. Hmm, must remember him. Astounding! Bring me some more, Peter, with lots of thick cream."

My great-grandfather Ten Boom grew those plump strawberries during the chilling months when ruddy-cheeked children skated over the canals. He was no ordinary gardener, but a master craftsman who caressed the soil into performing miracles. He experimented with plants, manipulating them between an ice cellar and a hothouse, until he produced the fruit which was served at the dinner table of his employer, one of the richest men in Hofstede, Bronstede, and Heemstede.

Those simple strawberries saved my great-grandfather from jail!

It was during the time of Napoleon; Europe was trembling from the onslaught of the evil little man from Corsica. Swaggering across the continent, victorious in war, the French emperor

conquered country after country and forced men into submission. The government of Holland was ruled by Napoleon's followers and their oppressive regime.

My great-grandfather was an independent man; he had spunk, but not much tact, I'm afraid. He refused to submit to men who denied freedom to other men. However, Hollanders at that time had two alternatives: they were either obedient to those who served the strutting dictator, or they faced what could be very severe punishment.

Tyranny at any time in man's history demands loyalty.

One Sunday, Great-grandfather went to his church and heard the minister announce the opening hymn; the theme was from Psalm 21, but as the congregation began to understand the words, one voice after another stopped. They realized it was a pointed description of their political situation. Nobody dared to continue.

But Great-grandfather and the minister sang louder, a defiant duet (translated from the Dutch):

The evil one considers himself to be free from all bondage,
and runs around, while he stirs the people. At the same time,
the bad people assume they hold the reins of government,
and they are being raised to the summits of honor.

Sad hearts and silent voices were encouraged by the bravery of the minister and the spunky gardener.

When news of Ten Boom's traitorous act of defiance reached the authorities, he received a summons to appear at the town hall. He must have been prepared for the consequences, as he addressed the officer in charge.

"What does this Mr. Snotneus [snot-nose] want with me?"

First, he challenged the regime; then he hurled that contemptuous name at his accuser!

But where do strawberries fit into all this? Before Great-grandfather had a chance to be sentenced or taken to prison, his boss, who was a very influential citizen, interceded and had him pardoned. (A gardener couldn't grow fruit in jail, could he?)

INHERITANCE

My father told us this story of Great-grandfather and his personal challenge to the Napoleonic regime with a sense of joy.

“I’m glad he was a real man,” Father said.

Over a hundred years later when people said to Father, “Stop having Jews in your house—you will be sent to prison,” my father answered, “I am too old for prison life, but if that should happen, then it would be, for me, an honor to give my life for God’s ancient people, the Jews.”

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

WILLEM ten Boom, my grandfather, was not strong like his father, so he chose a work which was not physically difficult. In the year 1837, Grandfather purchased a little house in Haarlem for four hundred guilders and set up shop as a watchmaker.

It was in 1844 that Grandfather had a visit from his minister, Dominee Witteveen, who had a special request. “Willem, you know the Scriptures tell us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the blessing of the Jews.”

“Ah, yes, Dominee, I have always loved God’s ancient people—they gave us our Bible and our Savior.”

Beginning with this conversation, a prayer fellowship was started, with Grandfather and his friends praying for the Jewish people. This was an unusual idea among Christians at that time. The Jews were scattered throughout the world, without a country or a national identity; Jerusalem was a city torn by centuries of conflict. The attention



Grandfather Willem

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

of the world was not upon the Middle East, and yet a small group of Dutch believers met in a little Haarlem house, a watchmaker's shop (later called the Beje), to read the Scriptures and pray for the Jews.

In a divine way which is beyond our human understanding, God answered those prayers. It was in the same house, exactly one hundred years later, that Grandfather's son, my father, four of his grandchildren, and one great-grandson were arrested for helping save the lives of Jews during the German occupation of Holland.

Another strutting dictator, more arrogant and insane than Napoleon, had planned to exterminate every Jew in the world. When Holland was controlled by Hitler's troops, many Jews were killed.

For helping and hiding the Jews, my father, my brother's son, and my sister all died in prison. My brother survived his imprisonment, but died soon afterward. Only Nollie, my older sister, and I came out alive.

So many times we wonder why God allows certain things to happen to us. We try to understand the circumstances of our lives, and we are left wondering. But God's foolishness is so much wiser than our wisdom.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:25)

From generation to generation, from small beginnings and little lessons, He has a purpose for those who know and trust Him.

God has no problems—just plans!

Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. (Psalm 40:4)

BEGINNING WITH MAMA

MY mother was a woman with a loving sense of humor and a striking appearance. She had thick, dark, curly hair, and brilliant blue eyes—an unusual combination for a Hollander. She came from a large family and was left fatherless just after her mother gave birth to an eighth baby. While she was still very young, her mother and her brothers and sisters were forced to earn their own living.

One of her sisters, Jans, started a kindergarten where Cornelia (“Cor”—my mother) and another sister, Anna, became her assistants. I’m sure this experience helped my mother later in training her own children.

When Jans added a Sunday school to her kindergarten, she began to work with a young theology student, Hendrik Wildeboer, who became her special boyfriend. Cor caught the eye of a handsome teacher in the Sunday school by the name of Casper ten Boom, and they immediately found something in common—their birthdays were on the same day, May 18.

Romance grew between Cor and Casper; when Cor journeyed to Harderwijk to visit her grandmother, Casper was so lonely that he followed her the next day.

About fifty years later, I visited the quaint village of Harderwijk on the Zuider Zee with Father. As we walked along the Bruggestraat, Father said, “This is where I proposed to your mother. There were cobblestones instead of pavement at that time, but many of the old houses and the sea gate are still the same.”

He paused to remember the youth, which had vanished, and his love for the gentle woman with the laughing eyes.

“Did Mother say *yes* immediately?” I asked.

“No, not until the next day, and I spent a very restless night waiting for that decision!”

When I asked him if he had ever regretted his decision to marry Mama, his voice was firm, “Never! Until the last day of her life, I was just as much in love with your mother as I was on that day in Harderwijk. We didn’t have an easy life—we had many sorrows—but God led us by His extraordinary providence.”

A LITTLE JEWELRY STORE

GRANDMOTHER died shortly before Casper and Cor were married. By then, Father had started a jewelry store in a small house in the heart of the Jewish section of Amsterdam.

Once a customer arrived who was a pastor from Ladysmith, South Africa. He came into the shop and asked Father to provide a clock and a bell for his church tower. This was a tremendous encouragement to a young merchant. The order was simple to fill; all Father had to do was to go to the factory in Brabant to make the selection; the manufacturer did all the installation. However, the commission from that sale provided enough money for the young couple to be married.

Uncle Hendrik, Jans' husband, was a minister in a little village near Amsterdam. Mother and Father had to go to the town hall first, to be registered and married in a civil ceremony. The man at the town hall who married them thought they were "high people" because they came from Amsterdam. He tried to be very dignified, in a manner suitable for this distinguished couple, and began the marriage speech with great airs.

"Honored bride and bridegroom . . . you are now . . . you are now gathered . . . you are now gathered here . . ." He stopped, looked around, and burst into tears.

Father said, "I'm so touched by your speech and tears, but we would like to be married."

The poor fellow finished the ceremony somehow, but Uncle Hendrik conducted the final marriage rites in his church—without tears.

The newlyweds moved into a shabby little house in Amsterdam after their wedding. It's probably just as well that the emotional clerk from the town hall didn't know of their humble means!

Mother had dreamed of a home with a small garden, for she loved flowers and the beauty of color.

"I love to see much of the sky," she often said.

The sky was there, if she stretched far enough to see it in the narrow street outside the old house. Their cramped home had a single room on each story, with worn-out furniture left by my grandmother.

Money was scarce, but happiness was abundant.



Mother with Willem and Betsie

The neighborhood of Jewish people made it possible for Father to participate in their Sabbaths and other holy days. He studied the Old Testament, their Talmud, with them, and was given opportunities to understand and explain the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

My father's love for the Jewish people was nurtured in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam during those first years of married life. Father and Mother lived on poverty's edge, and yet their contentment was not dependent upon their surroundings. Their relationship with each other and with the Lord gave them strength.

PLAN FOR PARENTHOOD

WHEN the first baby was expected, Mother was glad she had learned to sew. She had inherited an old sewing machine from her mother, and every moment she could find she stitched little garments for the baby. A Jewess who lived upstairs couldn't contain her curiosity and asked Mother if she was a seamstress.

"No," Mother answered proudly, "but I'm expecting my first baby. See the little dress I've made?" She held up a dainty garment tenderly.

The Jewess was astonished. "You're not sewing the clothes before the baby arrives! That is tempting God!"

Mother was puzzled, but this didn't stop her from preparing for her baby. However, she began to understand why Mary had only swaddling clothes for the Baby Jesus. It wasn't lack of money, but the Jewish custom not to sew the layette before the birth of the child. I've heard that Portuguese Jews maintain this tradition today.

When Betsie, the first child, was born, Mother became quite ill. She asked her youngest sister, Anna, to come for a few weeks to help with the new baby. Those few weeks stretched into forty years.

Mother and Anna had always been close, but when Mother married, Anna went to live with Jans and Uncle Hendrik. Anna, however, became very lonely for Cor and was delighted when Mother and Father invited her to stay with them in Amsterdam.

INHERITANCE

Within seven years, four more babies were born, but one didn't live. Father had to look for a cheaper house to accommodate his growing responsibilities.

By the time I was born, they were living on the Korte Prinsen-gracht, in a house at the very end of the canal, where few people passed the shop. Business was at its lowest ebb.

I was a premature baby, with blue skin and pinched features. When Uncle Hendrik saw me, he shook his head sadly. "I hope the Lord will quickly take this poor little creature to His home in heaven," he said.

Fortunately, my parents didn't feel the same as Uncle Hendrik. They surrounded me with love and good care. There were no incubators in those days, and one of the greatest problems was keeping me warm. I cried so pitifully from the cold that Tante (aunt) Anna rolled me in her apron and tied me against her body, then I became warm and quiet.

Many years later while I was in Africa, I met a missionary family whose baby could not be comforted, until a native girl bound the child to her back with a piece of cloth. The baby became calm, secure in the closeness to the body of a person who loved him.

I must have felt that same way bound snugly in Tante Anna's apron.

Throughout the first year of my life, I was a poor, sickly-looking creature. Mother told me that, once she was travelling by train with a friend who held a beautiful, plump baby on her lap. The baby's name was Rika, and the people in the coach were giving her many admiring glances and comments. They would look at me in my mother's arms and then turn away, unable to find anything positive to say.

Mother told me this bothered her at first, but then she would hug me and whisper, "I wouldn't exchange you for anyone in the whole world, you darling ugly baby with the beautiful eyes."

When Rika was two years old, she began having epileptic seizures. I played with her all through my childhood, but I remember how aware I was that her little face would change so drastically as the sickness would overpower her. Mother was always ready to care for Rika, throughout her life. Mother taught us to be helpful and loving toward those who were weak or abnormal.



1895—Corrie and Betsie

HAARLEM INHERITANCE

GRANDFATHER Willem died when I was six months old, leaving Father his shop in Haarlem. We moved into the house, which wasn't very large, and poor Mother still didn't have her garden. She put some flower pots on the flat roof and called this her garden. She had geraniums in clay pots, hanging fuchsia, and some ivy climbing the brick wall. She developed a roof garden long before the modern penthouse dwellers thought of such a thing.

Even in the "new" house in Haarlem, she could see only a small piece of the sky she loved. The roof became her "outdoors" when she became too weak to take her daily walks in the street.

INHERITANCE

During those first years of their marriage, the financial situation must have been very serious. Anna worked night and day to nurse Mother when she was ill and to care for four children.

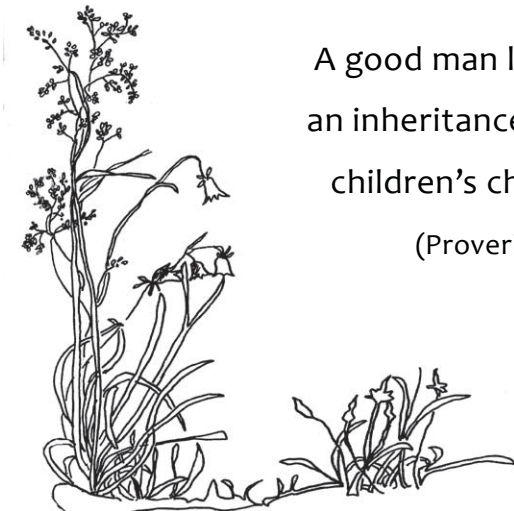
She earned the grand sum of one guilder (about thirty cents) a week. Father gave her this magnificent salary each Saturday, but often by the following Wednesday the finances would become so desperate that Father would have to go to the kitchen and ask, “Anna, do you still have your guilder?”

Anna always had the guilder available, and it often bought the food for the family on that day. This was certainly “blessed money.”

This was the beginning of my rich inheritance. When I remember my family life, I realize that my parents and my aunts had truly mastered the art of living. They enjoyed life and they loved children.

“We never laughed so much as when you children were small,” Tante Anna often said.

In our hearts we must have stored some of the memory of laughter to be brought out in later years, when the sounds of happy voices were scarce in our beloved land.



A good man leaveth
an inheritance to his
children's children.

(Proverbs 13:22)