



LIFE IN THE NETHERLANDS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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MAMA

The room was dark. The curtains still closed though it was mid-morning. Mama was sitting in the big chair, holding tight onto the arms. She looked very sad. I stood in front of her and told her:

"I want to go outside and play!"

"No, not now", Mama said quietly.

I stomped my foot on the floor and said again:

"I want to go outside and play Mama."

She seemed far away in her thoughts. I felt something was wrong. I saw the tears on Mama's cheeks. I climbed up on Mama's lap and wiped them softly away with my fingers. Mama did not say anything. I slid down again, stood in front of Mama, put my hands on my hips and shouted:

"I want to go outside and play!"

There was still no answer. I yelled again,

"I want to go out Mama."

Then I pulled at Mama's skirt.

"Get up Mama, get my coat, I want to go out!"

Mama did not look at me. Her eyes were closed, silent tears rolled down her cheeks. I heard baby Vic crying upstairs.

"Should I get him, Mama?" I asked. No answer.

I went upstairs, opened up the side of the crib, and took my little brother out. I carried him to the stairs, sat down and, with him on my lap, slid down the stairs one by one, bouncing on my bottom. I held on tight to my little brother. I carried him to Mama and put him on her lap. Mama put her arms around the baby and held him, looking at him briefly. Finally she talked:

"Get him his bottle!" she said quietly.

She sounded very tired and far away. I went to the cellar and got his bottle from the shelf. I could just reach it standing on the tips of my toes. I closed the cellar door and put the bottle on the kitchen counter.

Then I pulled the kitchen chair close to the sink, climbed on it, grabbed the bottle and turned on the hot tap. With a whoosh, the single gas flame ignited the burner. It scared me a bit. I took a deep breath. Then I held the bottle under the hot tap for a little while. When the bottle felt warm I turned off the tap, climbed down from the chair and brought the bottle to the living room.

"Here Mama," I said proudly "here's his bottle." Mama did not seem to hear me. I took my brother and put him down on the floor and gave him his bottle. His diaper had left a wet patch on Mama's dress. Mama was sitting quietly and did not notice.

I moved to the window and pulled the curtain aside. No one was playing in the street. Everybody was in school. I put my face against the window and made a foggy patch with my breath. Then I drew a stick puppet, looked at it and wiped it off again. I fogged up another patch with my breath and drew a cat in it. I knew how to make ears and whiskers. Mama had shown me how.

I looked around at Mama, who was still sitting in the chair, not moving. I wondered if it would be lunchtime soon. My sisters would come home from school then. Jennie, who was nine, would know what to do, Jennie always knew!

I took a little book from the bookcase and started reading to my brother who listened quietly, while sucking on his empty bottle.

The doorbell rang. Should I go and see who it was? I got up and went to the front door, opening it a crack. Then I smiled and opened the door wider. Aunt Ali, with her little boy Eddie stood at the door. They lived next door and often came over so Eddie and I could play.

"Hi," said Aunt Ali. She pushed herself through the door and pulled Eddie in with her.

"Where is your Mama?" she asked.

I pointed silently to the front room and then told Eddie,

"Mama is sick, I think. She won't talk to me."

Eddie took my hand and said:

"Let's play" and together we went into the dining room where the toys were. The sliding doors between the living room and the dining room were open.

Aunt Ali was talking softly to the baby and brought him to the playpen close to the corner where we were playing. She told us:

"You play quietly now, while your Mama and I have a cup of coffee".

In the kitchen she made coffee poured it in two cups and then disappeared into the front room.

A while later I heard Jenny and Annie come home. They were arguing in the front hall. Aunt Ali called Jenny and told her to stay with Mama, so she could go next door to call Papa on the phone. I felt really bad. I was sure I had made Mama sick by wanting to go outside and stomping my foot. I went to Mama and stroked her hand still clutching the arm of the chair. Jenny was trying to make Mama drink from her coffee cup, but Mama turned her head away. Annie was softly crying on the couch, rocking back and forth, her arms wound tight around her body.

"Mama will be alright," Jenny told her, "she is just tired."

When Aunt Ali came back, she cheerfully started to make lunch in the kitchen. She slapped slices of bread and jam together and gave each child a sandwich, not bothering to cut them in half. Then she picked up the baby and went upstairs to change his diaper. When she came down with him he was happily chattering the sounds he knew. She put him in the high chair. She made some porridge and fed it to him, while talking to everyone in turn.

"Jenny, open up the curtains!"

"Annie, stop crying and go wash your face!"

"Eddie and Marietje come and eat your sandwich!" Meanwhile she was spooning porridge in the direction of the baby, who moved his mouth towards the spoon like a little bird.

She also talked to Mama, telling her to drink her coffee, but Mama was not listening, she was in a world of her own, far away from everyone around her. Her eyes were closed and her hands were still gripping the wooden arms of the chair.

Jennie and Aunt Ali argued about going back to school.

Jenny wanted to stay home but Aunt Ali did not want her to.

She told Jenny that our Papa would be home soon and Aunt Ali would stay until he came.

Annie and Jenny went back to school. Eddie and I played. A little while later Papa came home. He talked quietly to Aunt Ali. Then he came and gave me a hug, and sent me off to Aunt Ali's house with Eddie, the baby and Aunt Ali. He told me:

"Mama will be alright!"

I believed him.



Mama. Jenny, Annie, and Riet.

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

The long shrill ringing of the doorbell woke me up. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. I climbed on the chair to look out. It was still dark but by the light of the street lanterns I could see a taxi in front of our house. I bent over and flattened my nose against the window to look down at the front door. All I could see were a pair of navy blue trouser legs, standing under the overhang above the front door. I heard Papa running down the stairs, taking them two at a time. I heard him opening the front door. He murmured in his deep voice, too low for me to hear what was being said. Papa ran back upstairs again and knocked on the door of the little room where my grandmother slept.

I was curious now and opened our bedroom door, careful not to wake up my two sisters sleeping in the double bed opposite mine. Just when I opened the door I saw my grandmother, in her long white nightgown, her hair in a braid reaching to her seat, go into my parents' bedroom. A few minutes later Papa came out and hurried down the stairs with his shoes in one hand and his jacket and tie in the other. The door banged and I heard the taxi drive away.

My grandmother was about to go down the stairs when she noticed me. She told me to get back into bed, but I followed her down the stairs. I wanted to know why she looked worried and why Papa had left in a hurry. Oma put the kettle on for morning tea, though it really was too early to be up. Then she hugged me, but did not explain what was wrong. I knew it had to do with my mother, who had been in the hospital for several weeks.

Oma gave me a mug of tea, with more milk than tea in it and some bread and jam. We sat quietly at the kitchen table. After a while the doorbell rang again and our neighbor came to ask Oma to come to the telephone. My sisters, who had both woken up, came down and asked what had happened. Before I could tell them Oma came back. She was crying and told us that our mother had gone to heaven. Jenny and Annie both started to cry but I did not. I said convincingly to Jenny, "But she will come back!"

I remembered that Mama had gone to the hospital before, when I was three, but she had come back. My sister looked at me with disgust and said "Don't be so stupid", which made me cry. I hid my head in my grandmother's skirt, because my feelings were hurt.

Oma made us breakfast and told us to get ready for school. Jenny started to cry again:

"I don't want to go to school". she said.

Oma said:

"Yes you are going to school, your Dad insisted all three of you are to go to school and have a normal day".

We reluctantly went upstairs to get dressed and went off to school. Jenny had to drag and pull me all the way. When we came to her school I refused to go farther. My Kindergarten was a block down the road and I usually walked there by myself. That morning I would not let go of Jenny's hand, so she took me all the way. This made her late for school and very angry.

She handed me to the Kindergarten teacher and then ran back. Once in school, I stuck to my belief that Mama would come back soon and everything would be normal again.

THE FUNERAL

The next day, my grandfather and all my aunts and uncles arrived. My mother had four sisters and two brothers. My father had only one brother. When we came back from school we were sent to Aunt Ali, our next door neighbor. I liked it there because Eddie was my friend. Papa sent us to school every day.

The day of the funeral I was in class printing words on my slate, when the headmistress of the school, Sister Philomena, came to get me from class. She took my hand and we walked to the double door at the end of the hall and went outside. Then she picked me up to watch the funeral procession go by. The horses in front of the hearse had black covers over their heads. When I saw Papa. I called out "Papa!"

He looked up. His face looked as if it was carved out of stone and though he tried to wave, his hand did not make it up far enough.

There were several other men in the procession, all dressed in dark suits. They walked in twos and threes. My uncles, people from Philips where my father worked and some neighbors. When they turned the corner and the procession was out of sight, Sister Philomena put me down again, took me by the hand and led me back to the classroom. I went back to my seat and started writing again, not looking up from my slate till it was playtime. At recess we went out in the playground and played circle games. I stood in the circle and looked up at the clouds. I wondered if Mama was really up there. I could not believe that. God was there, and the angels but my Mama was sick in the hospital and Papa had told me she would come back. Papa never lied.

When somebody dropped the hanky behind me, the girl beside me had to push me because I did not notice. When I looked down I saw it was my turn to pick up the hanky and run around the circle. I happily skipped around and dropped the hanky behind Paula, who picked it up and ran after me. I ran as fast as I could but Paula could run faster and caught me. So I stood in her place in the circle and dreamily looked up at the sky again.

After school I walked home by myself. Papa opened the door before I even rang the bell. He had been sitting in the living room drinking coffee with Oma. They both were quiet. Oma's eyes were red and Papa's face looked sad. I climbed on his lap and stroked his forehead with my hands to wipe the frown away. He leaned his chin on my head and rocked me back and forth. Then he put me down, asked Oma to get lunch ready for us, and disappeared in the hall to put his coat on.

I followed:

"Where are you going, Papa?" I asked.

"I am going to work, I have to finish something" Papa answered.

I did not ask if I could come. We knew "work" was a place where children were not allowed.

"Will you be back later?" I asked.

Papa bent down, hugged me and said with a sigh:

"Yes doll, I will be back soon, you go and stand at the window and wave goodbye!"

I ran into the living room and pulled the curtain aside.

I waved and Papa waved back. I stood there until I could not see him any more.

BOARDING SCHOOL

In the next week, Papa was away a lot. Oma looked after us the same way she did before. My little brother was not at home. After my mother had gone to the hospital, my aunt from Maastricht had come to get him. I missed him. He was almost five years younger, and I had looked after him when Annie and Jenny were in school.

On Saturday, Papa and Oma took the three of us into town to a big children's wear store. With the help of the saleslady, we tried on several dresses, coats and hats. We got similar navy blue sailor suits and black stockings. Papa told us that was the uniform of the boarding school we were going to. It was called Heavenly Kingdom and I was convinced that was the place where my mother had gone.

The day before we were going to the convent school, Papa opened the three new brown suitcases on his double bed and with Oma's help, proceeded to pack them with underwear, stockings, dresses, and to my surprise a bathing suit.

"Are we going to swim, Papa?" I asked.

"I don't know!" Papa said. But the bathing suit is on the list.

I was sure that we would be going swimming, otherwise we would not need a bathing suit. Papa also packed towels and washcloths and we each got a new toothbrush. Mine had Snow White on top, Jenny had Dopey and Annie Sneezy. I really liked my new toothbrush.

Early the next morning, two taxis came to the house, one to take Oma and my uncle to the station to take the train to Maastricht and the other one to take Papa and the three of us to the boarding school. I hung on to Papa's hand. Jenny and Annie asked him a million questions but I just sat close to him in the taxi. I had to let go of his hand when the cabdriver handed him two of the suitcases but I followed him up the broad stairs of a big building, three storeys high, with an endless row of windows on each side of the double doors.

Jenny rang the bell. Soon the door was opened by a tiny little nun, no taller than Jenny. The little nun showed us into a reception room. I climbed on Papa's lap and clung to his tweed jacket, which felt cosy and rough against my cheek.

A few minutes later, another nun came in quietly. . Papa got up and shook her hand. Then he told us to shake hands with Sister Marie-Antoine.

"I am Jenny" Jenny said,

"I am Annie" Annie followed.

I slipped off my Dad's lap and shyly gave Sister my hand.

"This is Marietje", Papa told her.

Papa and Sister talked for a few minutes. Then she took us to the elevator. Papa put the suitcases in and Sister Marie Antoine and he went up in the elevator. Papa told us to walk up the stairs to the third storey. Papa and Sister were already waiting for us when we got there. Sister showed us a big room with six beds, where we were going to sleep. Papa put each suitcase near a bed, Annie's bed was in the middle, and Jenny's bed was near the dressers. .

Then we went for a tour of the building, beginning with the three other big halls with cells for sleeping on the same floor. We met four ladies who nodded at Papa and said "hello" to us. I said politely "Good Morning, Miss". All four of them giggled. I quickly took my Dad's hand again and he gave it a little squeeze.

One floor below was the chapel on one side of the big hall and on the other side were several big classrooms, study halls and near the end of the hall was the sickroom. I was pleased to know I had found where Mama was. I wanted to take a peek but Papa held on to my hand and we walked down the stairs.

Downstairs, we saw the living area, the dining area and the playground, which was empty. All the children were in school. We also walked through part of the big garden with vegetables, big trees, lots of berry bushes, and a real Lourdes grotto, with the Virgin Mary and Bernadette kneeling before her. I liked the grotto and stayed to look. I had to run after the others to catch up.

When we came to the hall leading to the reception room, Papa bent down and gave Jenny and Annie a kiss. At that moment I suddenly knew that he was not staying there with us. I clung to his long leg, screaming at the top of my lungs,

"Take me with you, Papa".

He looked at Annie and Jenny and quietly told them to take me along. They each grabbed one of my hands and pulled me away from him. I resisted, by hanging backwards between them like a dead weight and just saw my Dad's legs disappear around the corner of the hall.

Annie and Jenny pulled me sliding to the recreation hall and sister told me to look out the window and wave at Papa. My Dad walked by on the other side of the street. He took big steps and was almost running. He did not wave and I sat in the windowsill and cried for a long time. I wanted my Mama. I wanted my Papa. I wanted to go home.



Boarding school. Annie, Riet, Jenny.

SCHOOL

After a while Annie came and pulled me off the windowsill.

"We have to eat,"

she said. All the other girls silently filed into the dining hall. It had two long tables with benches. The benches had been pulled back, so everyone could stand in front of their plate setting. Sister showed us where to sit at the end of the table. Annie and I sat on one side and Jenny opposite us.

The sister prayed and after that the girls at each end of the benches pulled them closer. We all sat down and began to eat, still in silence. It was a hot meal, with soup, meat, potatoes and vegetables, and pudding for desert. I tried to eat it all, but my throat felt funny and my stomach was queasy.

Everyone stared at me, which did not help. When the nun was not looking, I gave some of my food to Annie but I still had quite a bit on my plate. The nun looked very disapproving at this, and told me next time to eat what was on my plate, or I would have to sit at the table till I was finished.

When the bell rang again, we could get up and talk. Immediately there was a lot of noise. Everyone seemed to gather around us and ask questions at the same time. Jenny answered some of them and when somebody asked her

"Which grade are you in?"

Jenny answered,

"Third"

Immediately one of the girls took her hand and said

"Me too".

Annie also had a classmate, but no one else was in grade one, so I tagged along with Annie for a while.

When the bell rang again, Sister Marie Antoine came to get us, to go to school for the afternoon. She took me by the hand and brought me to grade one. She spoke briefly with Miss Jongbloed, the grade one teacher. who sat behind her desk, looking very strict. When she got up, I had to look way up. She was as tall as my Dad, except she was big all around. In a deep voice, she said

"Go and sit in the fourth desk near the wall".

I slowly walked towards the wall and counted the desks. Almost immediately, a big bell rang in the playground at the other side of the school, meant for the neighborhood children, who were in day school. They all came in with much giggling and whispering, but fairly quiet. A girl sat down beside me. She had beautiful long red curly hair. I would have liked to touch, I had never seen such beautiful red hair.

The teacher passed out little copybooks, to all of us, and told us to write a sentence, copying from the board. In kindergarten, where I had been thus far, the teacher had told me I was smart. I knew all my letters and numbers, and could print them, but writing was something new for me. I felt my eyes fill up with tears, and a big drop splattered on my brand-new copybook. When everyone was busy, the teacher noticed I was not writing. She asked me why I was not doing what she had told us.

"I don't know how", I said, "I want to go back to Kindergarten".

That made all the kids laugh, which made me feel worse.

The teacher shushed them and then gave me a different copybook with just letters, and thin paper to trace them. For the next hour I traced letters in my copybook. After that we read from a reader, which I knew by heart. Both Jenny and Annie had had the same reader. When school was over I hurried to tell Annie and Jenny about my first day in real school. I begged them to teach me how to write, so I would not be laughed at in school.

I really did not need to worry about catching up in reading and writing with the other first graders. Nor did I have to worry about arithmetic and the catechism. Sister Marie-Antoine, who looked after us some of the time, took me under her wing at study time for two hours every night, between 4.30 and 6.30. Under her guidance I learned to write properly, do the additions and subtractions I needed to know. I learned the small catechism (standing at her side in the playground, while the other children were allowed to play).

Occasionally, I was allowed to help a tall nun, Sister Adriana, who taught Kindergarten in another building to prepare for class before school in the mornings. I loved that. Sister Adriana let me play with the different Kindergarten toys. The mosaic blocks, the braiding mats, through which you threaded different color strips of paper, the pictures to be colored, which you then pricked out, by poking holes close together along the edge of them.

Sometimes there was a little boy there. I thought he was helping too. One morning, when he was not there, Sister told me he was very smart, could do sixth grade math and read big books.

"Anyone that smart, will not live long", she told me "they burn themselves out".

I had a scary picture in my mind of this boy, with flames coming out of his mouth, nose and ears. I decided then and there, I was not ever going to be that smart.

Other mornings, the Home-Economics teacher would take me under her care. Most children had to do homework, between breakfast and school, but I was allowed to help Sister Maria Francisca to prepare the schoolrooms on the third floor for the big girls who were doing a home economics course. I was supposed to fill round basins with water at a low sink. Sister always laughed when I had to run to the bathroom, as soon as I turned on the water. I also was allowed to take the covers of the sewing machines in the other classroom. I had to make sure every machine had scissors, thread and a measuring tape near it. Sister was busy measuring out green soap flakes for every basin and sorting out laundry to be done by the pupils. She would send me downstairs just before the school bell rang.

Gradually I felt more at ease in grade one and got to know the other children. After a few days, Miss Jongbloed changed my seat to the front desk in the middle row. I sat beside a pretty girl with straight blond hair, cut in bangs over her forehead. She was called Ria van Geel and had a twin brother. She told me her little brothers at home were twins too.

When school was out, I decided to go home with Ria and live with her family. I followed her to the other door, crossed the playground for the neighborhood children and walked with Ria to the gate, where her mother was waiting with the twins in the stroller. When I asked Ria's Mother, if I could come home with her to live, she kindly explained to me that some time soon, I could come and play, but that now I had to go back to boarding school. She took me to the Kindergarten teacher, who was standing at the door closest to the gate. Ria's Mother did not tell her my idea about living with them, but simply explained that I had gone out the wrong door and was lost. Sister took me back into Kindergarten, where Annie came to find me. I did not tell Annie about my little adventure.



Pensionaat „St. Jozeph“ Hemelrijken, Eindhoven. Refter

Pensionaat, St. Jozeph, Hemelrijken, Eindhoven. Eetzaal



Pensionaat „St. Jozeph“ Hemelrijken, Eindhoven. Slaapzaal

Pensionaat, St. Jozeph, Hemelrijken, Eindhoven. Slaapzaal

LONG WALKS

Slowly the three of us got used to life in the convent school. Jenny and her friend Cecile, got along very well and soon she was up to her normal mischief making. Annie played with Jopie Baselmans, roller-skating, and other games. I helped Sister Marie-Antoine to unravel wool, Sister Johanna Francisca with home economics class, Sister Genevieve with cooking class and Sister Adriana with Kindergarten.

We went to school half a day on Wednesdays and half a day on Saturdays. On those free afternoons, we went for long walks with one or two of the nuns. The bigger girls walked in front, the younger ones in the back, three abreast, holding hands.

The Sister who took us most often was Sister Appolonia, the ninth grade teacher, who also taught phys-ed. She was tall and thin, very strict, but fair. I thought she looked quite old, her face was very wrinkled, but she had a nice smile.

Annie walked with Jopie, but Sister told me to take her hand and we closed the line. We walked for about an hour and a half. I was not a very good walker and soon I started to drag my feet. Sister told me stories, which made me forget how tired I was. She was a very good story teller and on those walks she told me all the fairy tales. Some I knew, some were brand-new to me. One day she told me about Puss-in-Boots, a story which I found quite fascinating. When I told Sister, I had to go to the bathroom, she told me to put my hand into my pocket and make a fist really tight. Trying hard to do that, I indeed managed to make it back to school without an accident.

THE BATHING SUIT

After the walk some girls were called to go and take a bath. Jenny, Annie and I were called too, so we went upstairs and waited our turn, since there were only two bathrooms. The other girls lined up to wash their feet in special foot-basins, about twelve in a row, in a long narrow room beside the bathrooms. To my surprise the nun told me to undress and get into my bathing suit. The bath had been drawn already and I was to get into the tub. The water was far too hot and I did not know how to turn on the cold tap.

I waited and waited, until finally Sister came to see if I was finished. She scolded me about being a slow-poke, then picked me up and put me in. I pulled my legs up and screamed, so she put me down again, and put some cold water in, just enough not to scald me, but still too hot for comfort.

For several years, we wore our bathing suits in the bathtub, until Sister Lisa was replaced by a younger nun, who told us to wash properly all over and never mind the bathing suit.

Saturday night the younger children were allowed to stay up an hour longer to play, like the bigger girls. They usually embroidered, knit, crocheted or played board games. The girl that we had met on the first day, when I said "Good morning Miss", thinking she was a teacher, came up to me. She picked me up and asked me to come and sit with her and her friends. Lizzy and Lisa, they were called, and the other two big girls were Mini and Mitzi, older sisters of Jenny's friend Cecile. Lizzy taught me a little German song:

"Hanschen klein

lief allein

in der weite welt hinein"

She was pleased when I could sing it with the proper accent. Papa and Mama came from Limburg and had taught us quite a few German songs.

After a while. Sister came and told me to play with the little girls and not to hang around the big girls. Lizzy gave her a dirty look, but patted my bottom and told me to go and play. Annie and her friend Jopie let me play dolls with them and soon it was bedtime.

The next day was visiting day. Jenny told me Papa was coming to see us. It was hard waiting till 3 o'clock. He waited for us in one of the visiting rooms and when we came in, he opened his arms wide, and all three of us ran into them.

He took us to visit a friend of his, who lived within walking distance of the boarding school. Annie and Jenny were chattering. I tried, but never got a word in edgewise. But every once in a while, Papa would look down at me and smile, which made me very happy.

We played at Papa's friend's house. They had seven children, five of them were boys. I found them too rough and came in to read Tintin books, sitting close to where Papa was talking with the

grown-ups. When it was time to go back, he made me promise I would not cry, and he promised to wave if I was a big girl and did not cry. I cried just a little, but he still waved this time.

When the bell rang for the evening meal, I could not eat my four slices of bread, because my stomach felt queasy and I had to stay at the table by myself when all the other girls could go out and play. Annie came to look for me and quickly grabbed one of my slices when Sister was not looking. Relieved I slowly finished the rest.

"SILENT SUNDAY"

The third Sunday of every month was called "Silent Sunday". It was a day of silent prayer for the nuns and we were not allowed to talk or play all day either. The only good thing about the third Sunday of the month was that after the vespers at 3 o'clock, we were allowed to read...

A special cupboard in the corner of the recreation hall was opened with a special key and we were handed one book each. We were to sit quietly at the tables and read until suppertime. The only drawback was that the books were not the usual children's books, with fairy tales, poems, nursery rhymes and stories, but all the books were about the lives of Saints. They were arranged alphabetically from St. Anna, the mother of Mary, to Zacharias, the really old husband of her cousin Elizabeth. When I was still in first grade, I could only look at the pictures, but pretty soon I could read the easier books and read about all these holy men and women. My favourite story was about Bernadette de Soubirous. There were several books about her and because of the grotto in the garden with her statue I was very interested in her life.

I also liked Theresa of Avila's story. She seemed to be just an average little girl like me, but she died very young. I thought that I would not try and be a saint. There was also a book about St. Christopher. It had a picture on the front cover, showing the Saint all bent over like my grandmother, because he was carrying the child Jesus, who carried the world in his hand.

Thomas d'Aquino came much later. It was a very difficult book, very big words and not much story. There was also a book about the children of Fatima, Lucia, Francesco and Jacinta. I always wondered what had become of these children, after seeing the lady over the bush, who told them to pray for peace.

Another book was about St. Nicholas. It had beautiful pictures and a border around every page of flowers and birds. It had some gruesome stories, about the three little boys in the tub, butchered and then rescued by the Saint. I also liked the story about the poor girls who needed a dowry, which the good man provided for them.

In Holland, St. Nicholas is a very well known Saint. Every December 6th, he arrives in Holland by boat from Spain, with his helper, Black Peter, to reward the good children and punish the bad ones by taking them back to Spain in a burlap sack Peter carries. I remembered our last St. Nicholas day when Mama was still at home. On December 6, 1938 when we came down our front room was full of presents for all four of us.

A scooter, a doll-carriage, a cradle, a blackboard and many other presents for each of us. I felt like crying when I thought back to that day and seeing Mama sitting in the chair with Vic on her lap, smiling and happy.

Over the years in boarding school, I read my way through all the Saints, Saint Willibrord, St. Paul, St. John the Baptist, St. Frances of Sales, St. Francis of Assisi, who talked to the birds and small animals in the woods, Maria Goretti, who was not a Saint yet, Saint Cecilia, who played the harp, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Augustine, who turned from a bad boy into a good Saint, St. Aloisius, St. Servatius, Saint Martinus, Joan of Arc and many others.

One day, by chance, I got a real book in between the saints. It was called "The happy silence". It was about a young girl, who lost her hearing through an illness. After a lot of anger, she gradually

adjusts to her fate. She learns to have happy thoughts in her "silence". I read that book at least a dozen times and just loved it every time.

At 6:30, the nun tapped her hands together (no bells allowed on Silent Sunday) and all the books were turned in again. Sister locked the cupboard, put the key on the ring dangling from her waist belt and the only books we were allowed to read during the next four weeks were our schoolbooks.

EASTER HOLIDAYS

Easter Holidays were coming up and everyone was excited about going home. Since we had no home to go to, we were supposed to stay at school. We had the whole place to ourselves. One of the nuns stayed with us at all times, usually Sister Lisa. They put us in one of the visiting rooms.

Sometimes Sister would read to us, at other times we played games and if the weather was good we played outside. Annie and Jenny did play with me now that their friends were not available. We rocked on the big rocking horse, a big wooden horse on which four people could sit. I was not scared in the middle but did not like to sit on the end. I learned to roller skate, falling a lot, making holes in my black-ribbed stockings and skinning my knees, when Annie and Jenny pulled me fast first and then let go of me.

After the first day Sister gave me leather kneepads to protect my stockings. I needed help putting them on but they did protect my knees a bit too. We also played with balls. We each had a net with four colored balls. St. Nicholas had brought them on the last December 6th at home. We bounced these balls against the wall, first one, and then two and later on three at a time singing different rhymes. I was not as good at this as my two sisters but very persistent and I slowly got better at it.

One morning in Chapel during Mass we heard an awful squeal. We looked at each other, wondering what it was. Later when we had had breakfast and were allowed to play outside, we ran to the back fence of the playground and saw Henry the gardener and handyman, who had slaughtered a pig and was catching its blood in a bucket. The pig was tied to a ladder and its tongue hung out of its mouth. I was fascinated and horrified at the same time.

Easter Sunday my Dad came and for once had a meal with us, served by one of the nuns. It was really different to eat at the same table with him. Afterwards we walked to the boarding house where he stayed. He had a furnished room upstairs in the front. It had a sofa bed against the far wall, a table and two chairs in front of the window, a low table and a comfortable chair and a chest of drawers. We inspected it all, especially the wedding picture of my Father and Mother and the picture of the whole family in the backyard where we used to live. On this picture, Baby Vic lay on his tummy on a table with us standing all around it.

The landlady brought us tea and cookies. When I went to the bathroom I could read a sign on the door, which said "Make the world better, start with yourself". When I asked my Dad what it meant, he said "Never mind, it is not meant for little girls".

Slowly the holidays passed. We were rather bored and pleased when the other girls returned full of stories. One of the girls had her little sister with her, who came because their mother was ill.

Jetje was seven, about a year older than I was and would be in first grade like me. I was pleased to have a friend at first, but she was half a head taller than I, much sturdier built and quite bossy, so we fought quite a bit. One day she took away my colored balls and I told her I was going to tell my Mother. She yelled at me

"Your Mother is dead".

I really got angry and went at her tooth and nail. I clawed at her face, pulled her hair, kicked her legs and would have gotten the better of her if Sister Lisa had not pulled us apart. When she asked both of us what the fighting was all about, neither Jetje nor I would tell, so we were both punished and each put in a piano practice room to calm down. I cried for a long while, finally realizing that Jetje was right. I thought of Mama, remembering going to the store with her, taking my brother to the clinic, remembered the grey shoes she bought for me, even though the lady in the store told her they were not really sturdy school shoes. Mama bought them for me anyway just because I liked them.

When I stopped crying I opened up the piano and amused myself for the next half hour trying to play a tune. My sisters pestered me for hours, asking what the fight was about but both Jetje and I kept mum and finally they lost interest.

That night I had a bad nightmare. I was standing in the dining hall, all by myself. The recreation hall was full of people looking at the cuckoo clock hanging on the wall. My Mother was standing in the middle of the crowd. I called her but at that moment the clock struck twelve and when the cuckoo appeared everyone dropped dead.

At that point I woke up from my own screaming and found myself standing beside my bed. Jenny, Annie and the three Baselmans girls were all sitting up wide-eyed in their beds and Sister came out from behind her screen with a candle. She told me to be quiet but I kept on screaming, until Annie got out of bed and held me tight, telling me over and over it was alright. Sister insisted I get back in bed, but I was afraid the dream would come back and stood beside my bed, quiet now, but stubbornly refusing to get back in. Finally Annie pushed my bed close to hers and I climbed in bed, clinging to her hand.

I stayed awake for a long time but eventually went back to sleep. I never told anyone what I had dreamt that night. I avoided Jetje as much as possible and every time the cuckoo clock sounded and the bird appeared I ran to the vestibule and hid behind the coats.



*Easter holidays, 1939.
Rocking horse on playground.*



*Easter holidays, 1939.
Jenny, Annie and Riet*

LITTLE BRIDES OF JESUS

All religious holidays were strictly observed. Ascension day, 10 days before Pentecost, was a school holiday, but as it fell on a Thursday, everyone stayed in the convent. There was a big procession on that day. The four smallest girls, Annie and I and Jopie and her sister Bernadette were chosen to be "little brides of Jesus". We were dressed in long white dresses. Annie had Jenny's first communion dress. I got Annie's and the Baselmans girls had white long dresses, which their mother had made for them. We also got a little crown on our heads, with little flowers and pearl beads. The best part for me was carrying a little basket with flower petals, which we were to scatter in front of the priest.

The night before the procession, at bedtime, Sister Lisa told me to sit on a chair in front of the medicine cupboard, in the big sleeping hall. To my surprise she combed my hair, which was long and blond. Then she separated it in bunches, took a bunch and wrapped it around a long white ribbon. Then she tied the two ends together on top of my head. It hurt a lot and when I protested, she said,

"If you want to be beautiful, you have to suffer".

I really did not want to be beautiful, but sat quietly through the ordeal. It was hard to sleep on the "papillottes" as Sister called them.

The next morning after we had put our dresses on, Sister combed out my curls and when she let me look in the little hand mirror, I thought I looked almost as pretty as the little redheaded girl in my class. We got our crowns and baskets and went down the back stairs to the chapel, where we were seated in the front row. First there was mass and then the procession started.

The choir sisters walked to the front singing in Latin and then all the other sisters followed. They went out the double doors of the chapel and lined up in the hall. All the girls followed, the oldest ones first, down to Jenny and Cecile, who were third-graders. Next were the altar boys in long red robes, with white surplices on top, two of them carrying big brass candlesticks with lighted candles. Two carried urns with incense. The urns were gold and could open up along chains, so they could let out more or less of the strong smelling incense. The boys swung them back and forth in front of us. The four little brides followed, scattering petals in front of the priest, who carried a big gold monstrans with the host.

We followed the choir through the center hall, down the back stairs and into the garden. The convent gardens took up a large city block and were tended very well by a gardener and some of the neighborhood boys. A path ran through the middle and smaller paths ran cross-wise. Every part had different bushes and flowers bordered by little liguster hedges. We slowly went up the big path and then turned left on a side-path, which ended at a beautiful little flower garden, in front of the statue of the Sacred Heart. It was big and had a red heart in the center of the chest, from which little drops of blood fell on the feet of the statue. One hand pointed to the sky and one held the heart.

We stopped there and the priest gave a little sermon. We sang a hymn and then walked back, now the altar boys in front, with the four of us and the priest following. Everyone else fell in behind him. We went back to the middle path and up the stairs to the chapel. From then on my big wish was to be an altar boy.

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Little Brides of Jesus

SUMMER HOLIDAYS

Everybody was excited when at the end of July Summer Holidays started. My Dad came to get us with his bike and put the suitcases on his luggage carrier, walking beside it. The school was not far from the station and when we arrived at the building, he left us for a few minutes with the suitcases and took his bike to a parking place specifically for bikes. When he came back, we walked to the wicket and Dad bought the tickets, full fare for him and half fare for all three of us,

We had gone to Maastricht before with the whole family, when Mama was still alive, so we knew to stand back on the platform till the train stopped. It was not too busy so we could all sit together, Annie and I sat at the window with Papa beside me and Jenny beside Annie.

We told Papa about the excitement that morning when all the girls left for home, some by train, some by bus, and some being picked up by their parents. We sang the song for him that the other kids had taught us:

"I wish the school was made of wax
and that the sun shone very hot
and there would be a puddle
where our school was not".

Papa smiled and asked me

"Do you like it at the boarding school?"

I told him that I liked it all right but I did not tell him about my nightmares and the crying behind the coats in the vestibule. I thought he would be sad to hear that and I wanted him to be happy on this holiday. When he asked Jenny and Annie whether they liked school, they just nodded. Papa looked out the window for a while and then asked who was hungry. All three of us were so Papa ordered sandwiches and milk from a man who came around with a tray.

While I ate, I looked out of the window. Soon I saw a canal and the train sounded real loud while it crossed over the bridge. Later we crossed the river Maas. We saw big boats on it.

In Maastricht, we took a taxi to my grandparents place. Papa and Jenny carried the two suitcases up the stairs.

Oma and Opa were happy to see us. I felt strange being there, without Mama. They had put a double mattress on the floor for us, beside their big sleigh bed. We were going to stay with them for several weeks, so Papa unpacked the suitcases and hung our dresses behind the curtain in the corner. We looked around a bit, had some more lunch and then were anxious to go and see Vic. Papa took us over the bridge into the heart of the city.

It was a Saturday, so many people were shopping in the main street. We turned a corner and Jenny rang the bell of #7, Dominicanerkerkstraat. My aunt could open the door with a string from the

third floor, so when we heard the click of the lock, we pushed the door open and ran up the two sets of stairs to where my little brother stood behind the gate on the third floor. My Aunt picked him up and opened the gate, waiting for Papa who walked up slowly. Then she closed the gate and handed Vic to Papa, who took him into the living room. Our uncle Edmund sat in a big rocking chair.

All three of us hugged Vic. He was not shy, but danced around excited, seeing all these people around him. His blue eyes shone and his sturdy legs were bare in his short knit pants. He was not quite two yet and could only say a few words. He showed us his toys and we played with him on the floor, while the grown-ups talked.

Aunt Helene told Papa about the different things Vic could say now. She showed him the scar on Vic's forehead, which was now healed. He had jumped on the couch and fallen with his head on the sewing machine. It had been quite a deep cut and had required stitches. Vic knew what they were talking about and went to the couch to show Papa how he had jumped. We quickly stopped him from jumping.

My uncle was a very gentle man. He never talked much and suffered from severe headaches. As a boy, he had fallen off his bicycle and hit his head on the curb. My Aunt told us this when we were older. He was kind, and we all liked him, but he was usually busy. He was an accountant and spent most of his time at his desk in the bedroom. Other times he would be resting on the bed with a severe headache.

That day he felt well though, and we all went to the square called Vrijthof, to feed the pigeons. Annie and I held Vic's hand when we walked there, but once on the square he could run around. Papa bought us each a little bag of corn and soon the pigeons were all around us. Papa took some pictures of all four of us feeding the pigeons. On three sides of the square were little stalls with French fries, waffles, ice cream, little games and toys, magazines and papers and second-hand books. There were jugglers in the square and a man eating flaming knives. Boys were flying kites and many kids had scooters to ride on.

Papa, Uncle Edmund and Aunt Helene went to sit at a table in front of a restaurant across the street. Two sides of the square were lined with pubs, cafes and restaurants. On one side stood two big churches, the big St. Servatius church and the St. John's church, which was Protestant.

In the middle of the square was a fountain and near it a bandstand, where the different music clubs of the City gave concerts on Saturday night. Now it was empty and Vic clambered up the three little wooden steps and peeked through the railing, enjoying his game of peek-a-boo. The square was always busy and everywhere there were little groups of people, talking and laughing. Some older people were sitting on the benches at the side of the square watching the children play and the buskers do their acts.

When the grown-ups came back, Papa bought us all a little bag of French-fries and then we walked back to my aunt's place. At the door, we promised Vic we would come back the next day and every day to play with him. My aunt was expecting a baby at the time and could not have us stay with her, but would be happy to have us come and play with Vic during the day.

Oma had the table all set. We three girls sat at the side of the bed, Papa on the stove side and Opa and Oma each at one end of the table. We all got a little mustard glass full of beer (it was free from the brewery downstairs) and we ate soup with meatballs and sandwiches with headcheese. Somehow the food tasted much better than in boarding school. I was happy sitting at the table across from Papa who smiled at me often.

Papa had to go back to Eindhoven on the Sunday to go to work, so after the family gathering in Oma's front room, with coffee and traditional rice-cake, we all went to take him to the station. My uncle and aunt went on to their house and Oma, Opa and the three of us went home to their place. We spent four happy weeks there, playing with our cousins who came over, taking walks with Opa along the canal, walking on the road between the river and the canal. Opa told us the road used to be a path for the horses to pull the boats through the canal.

We looked at the big weights that disappeared in a hole in the ground when the draw-bridge went up. Opa explained about the water levels in the locks of the canal and how they let water go through a hole in the big lock-doors, until the two levels were the same. Sometimes we walked all the way to the bear cave in the park. It was very smelly and I felt sorry for the poor bears all locked up in a small cave.

Papa came every weekend and one Saturday he took us on a boat trip to Vise, a little town just over the border of Belgium. A big swimming pool had been made in the river and we finally used our bathing suits for swimming. On Sunday after coffee and pie in the big front room, my father, his brother and my grandfather would take a walk and end up in one of the many pubs to have a few beers. When they came back they were jolly and talkative. My grandmother would shake her head and say "Boys will be boys".

When the three of us and the six cousins would get too noisy on those Sundays, she gave us each a penny to go to the candy store just around the corner. After looking for a long time my oldest cousin Lie, told us to hurry up and we would pick our treasure. We could have one magic ball, changing color whenever you licked off a layer or five small magic balls, or five strings of liquorice, or five pieces of sweet wood (it looked like a tree-branch but tasted sweet). There was also edible paper in different colors, a cent would give you two sheets of that. The candy was kept in big glass stop-bottles, so we could see but not touch.

When we made up our mind, the lady in the store would take the candy out of the bottle and hand it to us in exchange for the penny we clutched in our hand. We walked back slowly, everybody happily sucking or chewing or pulling with their teeth at the sweetwood, which was hard to chew. All in all, Oma had peace for an hour or so and we were all calmed down.

When the cousins left (four boys and two girls) and only the three of us were left Oma would say,

"Time to clean up".

"Boys know how to make a mess, but they don't know how to clean it up."

On one of the Saturdays, towards the end of our holidays, my Dad took the three of us to our first movie. "Snow White", a new movie from Walt Disney, was playing and as a special holiday treat, we went to see it. It was the summer of 1939, the last summer of peace. After we got into the movie theatre and settled ourselves in the red plush seats, the newsreels started. I saw crowds of people yelling "Sieg Heil" holding their arms straight out and singing "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles". Then there were parades of tanks and army trucks and goose-stepping soldiers. It frightened me badly.

I was glad when the news was over and the cartoon of Mickey Mouse began. We had coloring books of Mickey Mouse and I enjoyed the cartoon immensely. Then the real movie started and though I knew the story well, Papa had read it to us many times, this was a new experience. I felt I was right in the little house with Snow White and working in the mine with the seven dwarfs. I yelled with all the other children to warn Snow White not to eat the apple that her wicked stepmother gave her and cried

when she fell down dead across the little beds of the dwarves. When it was over, I was happy the prince made her alive and that they lived happily ever after.

I was holding on to Papa's hand when we started to walk down the aisle. Right away the newsreel started again. When I looked around, there they were again, the people yelling "Sieg Heil", the soldiers and the tanks and I started to cry. My Dad picked me up.

"Don't cry, Marietje", he said. "it is only a story" .

"It is real Papa, I am scared". I said, looking back at the screen. Papa did not know what I meant. He asked me if I would like an ice cream and we went to the little ice-cream cart on the Vrijthof where Papa bought us ice cream cones. Then we picked up Vic, who lived right across from the theatre, put him in his stroller and Jenny, Annie and I took turns pushing him to Opa and Oma's place.

A few days later, my Uncle Piet, my mother's brother, who owned a garage and gas station, drove Papa and us to Breda, where Uncle Jo and Aunt Annie lived. We were going to spend the last week of our holidays there with Papa. We did not see this uncle very often and I hardly knew him. As soon as we got there, my aunt told Papa they were listening to the news on the radio. She gave us each a spinning top and a little stick with a string, and sent us outside to play on the big sidewalk in front of their house. I had trouble learning how to make the top spin by hitting it with the string. First Jenny showed me, then Annie. I was just getting it to spin a bit, when my Dad came hurrying towards us.

"Come girls," he said "you have to go back to Eindhoven to boarding school, and I have to go to "The Hague".

"Why Papa?" Jenny asked, "What happened?"

"They called up the army, Hitler invaded Poland", Papa told Jenny. I did not understand. I had never heard of Poland. I knew about armies. I had played with the tin soldiers of my cousins. Jo and I would divide them up and let them attack other. When they fell over they were dead, but then we picked them up again and started over. I decided to ask Jenny later about Poland and invasion. Papa put the suitcases that had not yet been unpacked back in Uncle Piet's car. Uncle Piet drove us to Eindhoven to the "Heavenly Kingdom" as the school was popularly called, after the street it was on.

None of the other children were there yet, since the holidays would not be over for five more days. Papa talked to Sister Marie-Antoine, but we were sent outside to play first. He left without saying goodbye but Sister said he would come back later that day.

Papa came back dressed in his Corporal's uniform. I had never seen him in his uniform. He looked funny to me and not like my Papa at all. He told us to be good, since he had to go and serve in the army, which had been called up. He had to help defend our country.

. "When are you coming back, Papa?" I asked.

"I don't know." he answered. "I hope soon".

"I don't know whether I will be able to come and see you on visiting day but I will call on the telephone".

I had a big lump in my throat. Jenny and Annie looked sad too. Papa gave each of us a big hug. Then he left and I watched him from the window and cried. He did not even wave at me.



*Summer holidays, 1939.
Vic, Jenny, Annie, Riet*

SEPTEMBER 1939

After a few days all the other girls returned and also quite a few new ones arrived. All three of us had moved up one grade. Jenny was now in fourth, Annie in third and I was in second grade. Sister Marie-Antoine taught second grade and also looked after us in the boarding school. No longer was I the only boarding school girl in my grade. One of Jenny's friends brought her sister, Dinie, who was also in grade two.

Dinie had big brown eyes and dark brown hair, which was parted in the middle and hung in two long fat braids over her shoulders. She wore thick glasses, but behind those her eyes sparkled mischievously and reminded me of my cousin Jo. We were instant friends.

There were two new first graders too, both six years old. like me. Mientje van Gijssel who was very tall and thin and a younger sister of the Baselmans girls, called Felicia. Jenny and Bernadette were moved to the big dormitory. Annie and I still were together. My sisters no longer called me a "crybaby." Mientje and Felicia cried much more often. Mientje would not eat anything unless it had applesauce on it and everybody used to laugh at her. The first time dinner was put in front of her, she burst into tears and said loudly in the quiet dining hall:

"My mother always gives me applesauce".

After that we teased her by repeating this line whenever we had something to eat that no one liked.

Dinie and I played together all the time so my sisters were relieved not to have me hanging around. In bad weather we played inside with our dolls, feeding them water with a little bottle and making a hole in the celluloid bottom so they could wet. Outside in the playground Dinie was quite wild and taught me how to swing higher and roller skate faster. She also made me join the bigger girls when they were skipping rope. I slowly got better at skipping too, though I was not very good at it. My legs did not seem to work as well as Dinie's. She was seven and a half, almost a year older. Playing with balls and jacks I could teach her some new games.

Together we had fun and I learned to laugh again. Sister Marie-Antoine kept both of us after school most days to teach us math. Neither of us did very well in that.

I was also being prepared for my first communion, which I was supposed to do on my seventh birthday in January. I had to learn all the questions in the small catechism. Sister Marie-Antoine read bible stories to me. I had to colour many pictures of Jesus before I was prepared to receive Him in my heart. I did not mind doing this in study time, but was not happy when I had to do it in playtime.

Our playground only had one big tree. It was an old Dutch Elm tree with big branches that shaded the part of the playground near the grotto where Dinie and I liked to play. We spotted a nest in the tree and every day we ran to the tree at recess to see if the eggs had hatched, to let out the baby birds.

One day when Dinie and I were playing hopscotch under the tree, we noticed the big bird, a sparrow, fly to the nest with a worm in its beak. It was too noisy in the playground to hear anything that went on in the tree, but we were sure we saw a little beak raised over the rim of the nest, when the mother bird landed on it. We tried to climb up the chain link fence close to the tree, but our shoes were too big for the small square holes. We lost interest and played until the end of recess.

After school we went to look at the nest again. The mother bird was squawking very loud and we saw that one of the little naked pink baby birds had fallen on the ground. Its eyes were glazed and its neck was at a weird angle.

"It is dead" Dinie said.

"Dead?" I asked.

"We have to bury it" Dinie said, "Go and get a little box!"

I got an eraser box from my school bag and hurried back to Dinie. Dinie took out her hanky, wrapped the baby bird in it, and put it in the eraser box. With our hands we dug a hole beneath the tree and put the bird in it, and covered it up with sand. We found two little branches and made a cross to put on the little grave, then said a Hail Mary. When Sister came to see what we were doing so secretly, Dinie took my hand and we both ran off laughing, leaving Sister to wonder what mischief we had been up to.

Dinie had already done her first Communion the year before so she did not have to do all the preparing, I had to do. She had no one to play with when I was kept busy, because Annie and the other girls in grade three did not want her to play with them, she was not big enough for their games they told her.

Jenny and her friends were quite often in trouble for talking during silence, or fighting, or not being on time for study-period. Punishment was usually either lines they had to write or much worse "no candy". Three times a week we got a chocolate bar and some hard candies, except during lent.

The punished ones usually managed to scrounge some candy from their sisters or friends. Jenny always managed to get some from Annie and me

We missed Papa's Sunday visits. He sometimes showed up unexpectedly during the week in his uniform. The little nun, Sister Theodata, who answered the doorbell would come and get us from study hall or the playground and I would run and climb on his knee and stay there for the whole visit. Annie would sometimes climb on his other knee, but Annie never could sit still very long.

Papa usually had to travel back to The Hague the same day, but he came whenever he could. Sometimes they would call us to the phone to talk to Papa, but I had never talked on the phone before and could not hear what he said most of the time, so Jenny and Annie would do the talking. I always felt bad after those calls.

MINOR CHANGES

Minor changes were made around us. Sandbags were put on the grates covering the window wells of the basement. Sirens were put on the roof and sometimes they went off for try-out. Black paper blinds were installed in front of all the windows and everyone was supposed to have a packed suitcase at the foot of her bed.

No one made it clear to me what all this was about. All the nuns told us was to pray for peace. There was no radio in the school so we did not hear about war breaking out when Poland was invaded. I heard Jenny talk with her friends some times about invasion but did not really know what that meant. The bigger girls stood around talking during playtime but they would stop when I came near them.

Around my seventh birthday I was very ill. I ran a high fever and heard Jenny argue with the sister about calling the doctor. Sister told her that the doctor was called only when your temperature reached forty. Mine was 39.8, not quite high enough, to go to the expense of calling a doctor. I cried a lot and wanted my Papa.

I was feeling a bit better when Papa came on my birthday, but I was still in bed. He was surprised that I was sick and that my first communion had been put off until two weeks later. No one had told him.

He did come again two weeks later. I was quite upset that I had to wear my black uniform on that big day instead of a white dress, while my two sisters walked beside me into the chapel wearing long white dresses and flowers in their hair. The worst part was that Jenny fainted at the critical moment. Papa had to carry her out of the chapel just as the Priest was giving me the host. After all the preparation I did not really pray when I received Jesus in my heart.

We had a special breakfast with my Dad and some of the Sisters. Papa stayed the whole day. He took us for a walk into town to the ice cream parlor in the afternoon. I was very happy to be with him. I asked him about war and invasion but he only told me that he worked in an office in The Hague and that I did not have to worry.

By now I was quite used to boarding school. I had been there for almost a year. Jenny and Annie did not pay much attention to me and I did not hide any longer in the vestibule, to cry behind the coats. I was one of the crowd now. Number seven was marked on all my clothes, my cupboard and coat peg in the vestibule. Jenny was number five and Annie was number six.

WAR

One morning in early May, I woke up to find all the other children up already and lots of suitcases standing in the hall near the elevator. Some of the beds had been stripped as if it was holiday time. No one paid any attention to me so, still in my nightgown, I went to see Jenny in the big dormitory. She was not in her cubicle. I found Cecile and Jenny, hanging out of the window, yelling to boys across the road. They were altar boys at the convent. They yelled about invasion and soldiers, tanks and bombs. When I pulled at her arm Jenny told me to go away and not bother her. Amidst all the confusion in the dormitory with everyone running around with laundry, bedding, suitcases, I decided I better get dressed.

Soon the bell rang, but instead of going to chapel for Mass like usual, we all went straight to the dining hall. Sister had to ring the bell several times to get everybody quiet. Looking at a list in her hand, she called several girls, to go with Sister Appolonia to catch the seven o'clock train to Amsterdam. They all received a bag of sandwiches and then left immediately.

The next lot gathered around Sister Celestine when their names were called to catch the train to Rotterdam. So, in groups of ten or twelve, accompanied by one of the nuns, everyone left for the station.

About twenty girls were left. They had to wait for their fathers to pick them up. Dinie and her sister were allowed to walk home, because their Dad was too ill to come and get them. They did not live very far. Dr. Baselmans came to pick up his four girls in his big grey car and Mientje's father came to get her. By 8.30 everyone was gone except the three of us.

We were told to play quietly and not to go outside. Of course we did anyway and took a peek through a hole in the wooden fence, which separated our playground from the street. We did not see anything unusual so we went back in and played for a while. We heard a rumble in the distance and Jenny said that was the sound of the German tanks.

I was bored, and a little scared so I stuck close to Jenny and Annie. A little while later the sirens sounded the alarm and Sister Lisa herded us through the kitchen to the stairs to the fruit cellar. I had never been in the cellar, where only the nuns were allowed. It had an earthen floor and shelves with jars of fruits and vegetables. It smelled musty and damp and it was pitch dark.

Sister lit a candle. It made funny shadows on the walls so I hid behind Sister Lisa's skirts. The sisters prayed and made us pray too. I heard planes and some loud bangs. Finally the 'all clear' sounded and we could go upstairs again.

The next few days were very unusual. We had to go down into the cellar several more times. There was rumbling in the distance and we heard explosions, but no one told us what was going on. I asked Jenny:

"What is invasion?"

"The Germans have come to occupy Holland". she said, "just like they did Poland".

"Will we be killed?" I asked.

"No silly" she answered "we will all have to do what the Germans tell us". I thought of the newsreel with all the marching soldiers. There were so many of them, I did not think we had so many

Dutch soldiers in Holland. They could not win. My Papa would be killed fighting all those German soldiers. I was scared. I did not want to lose Papa too.

I learned what the black paper in front of all the windows was for. It was for "blackout" No lights were allowed on and we only had candles after dark. Jenny came and slept in our bedroom again, which made me feel a little better. We lived again in one of the visiting rooms and when it was quiet we were allowed outside to play.

Then one day there were no more sirens blaring. The sisters told us the fighting was over and the Germans had won. There had been a big bombardment of Rotterdam where quite a few of the girls came from. She told us to go and pray in the chapel for all the people killed.

Three German soldiers came and walked around the convent building, the school and the playground with the Priest and Mother Superior. The soldiers talked in loud voices but I could not understand them. One patted me on the head, when I passed them in the hall and called me "Liebchen". It sounded almost like Oma calling me "leebchen".

They took over part of the school. Partitions were put up on the stairs and in the hall so we could not see the soldiers. They lived in our dining hall and our recreation hall and they slept in the gymnasium of our school. They used our playground to march and some times sat on the benches in the sun. I could see them from the window of our bedroom. They took their shirts off and they all had chains around their neck. Some also had a cross like my first communion cross.

Soon all the other girls came back and life went on as before the soldiers came. We ate and played in one of the big study halls upstairs and were not allowed to play in our normal playground, but had to walk through the gardens to a playground belonging to another school.

Not all the girls came back. Lisa and Lizzie did not return and some of the other girls did not come back either.

Some of the girls lived in the country and their parents kept them home, hoping they would be safer. Dinie and her sister came back though and we had great fun together.

The bigger girls had made several peepholes in the partitions on the stairs and we took turns peeking at the soldiers down below. At night, after we had gone to bed, the soldiers sang in the playground, marching songs mostly. I liked their singing. One of the songs was:

"Lebwohl mein schatz, lehbwohl, lebe wohl.

I heard the refrain many times:

Und wir fahren,

Und wir fahren

Und wir fahren gegen Engeland, Engeland, Jawohl.

I did not understand why we were not allowed to look at them or talk to them. They did not seem as scary to me, as the ones on the newsreel in the movie.

A few weeks later my Dad came back to Eindhoven. He was no longer in uniform, but in his normal tweed jacket. I was so happy to see him alive and healthy that I cried. He told us that he could not come sooner because he had been sick in a hospital. He had caught a cold lying in a ditch near the

Grebbeberg and ended up with pneumonia. He recovered in a hospital in Arnhem. Now he was better and back in Eindhoven in the room he rented in a boarding house. He was working at Philips again.

After that Papa came regularly to pick us up on every second and fourth Sunday of the month. It was June by now the weather was nice and we often went for long walks and sometimes we visited his friends.

HOLIDAYS IN MAASTRICHT

When summer rolled around we stayed again in Maastricht with our grandparents, spending our days visiting with our little brother or our cousins. Aunt Helene where Vic stayed, had a baby of her own now, a little "brother" for Vic. My Dad took a few weeks holidays too and took us to different places, the swimming pool in Vise, the amusement park on top of Saint Pietersberg. We had lunch there with the whole family, my grandparents, my uncle and his wife and their six children, Papa, Vic and the three of us.

My cousin Jo, who was my age, and I had fun running around from swings to merry-go-round to seesaw. He dared me to go off the big slide, which was a bit scary, but I felt proud of myself when I did it.

My Dad seemed more cheerful on this holiday. When he got together with his Dad and his brother they always had a lot of stories to tell about their childhood. They were close in age and apparently fought a lot. The front parlour used to be their bedroom when they were young. One time when my Dad threatened to kill his brother, Uncle Eduard said he would jump out of the window and promptly did so. My Dad thought he had killed his brother but when he looked down, there was a grain wagon loaded high going into the brewery below and his brother sat in the middle of the grain thumbing his nose at my Dad.

They must have been quite a pair, my Dad studious, bright, but with a quick temper, and my uncle, equally bright, but a bit of a clown and full of tricks, charming my grandmother right out of her shoes. Even his wife, who did not laugh that often, would have tears running down her cheeks from laughter at the stories of their pranks.

Holidays went too fast. This time we saw lots of soldiers in the streets and tanks going over the bridge. Everyone had to be inside at eight o'clock at night, which was a nuisance for the grownups but did not make much difference for us kids.

SEPTEMBER 1940

When we came back to boarding school, early in September, the soldiers were gone out of the school. Workmen had refinished the parquet floors, which had been badly damaged by the soldier's boots. The wooden tables and benches had also been varnished. The cuckoo clock had disappeared and a different clock hung on the wall. We ate again in the dining area and played in the recreation area, where the grand piano still stood in the corner.

The playground was the same, even the rocking horse was there. Not for long though. One day some of the bigger girls rocked so hard it toppled over and one of them had a concussion. After that the rocking horse was given away to a boys' school. Since I was too big for it now I did not mind.

I was seven, in third grade with my friend Dinie and a new girl called Corrie. Dinie and I thought she was nice but different. She had been adopted by rich cigar factory owners. Her Mother had died when Corrie was born. Sister Lisa who used to call us orphans, when we first came, insisted on calling Corrie by her birth name, which upset her. She was quiet, studious and did not share in our rough games, but when we played ball or jacks we let her play.

We did not have much playtime. We started rehearsing a big play for Mother Superior's seventieth birthday. Cecile and Jenny had the main roles. They drove poor sister Ignatia out of her mind with their running around. One time Sister completely lost her patience and slapped both of them on their faces. Everyone was shocked. Hitting the children was not allowed. After that incident there were always two nuns at our rehearsals.

The performance was a success, all the pixies were dressed in bright red suits, pointed hats, white beards and soft pointed shoes with bells. Everybody did well and even Jenny and Cecile behaved themselves and never missed a line. All the parents were there and applauded loudly. Afterwards everyone ate birthday cake and drank lemonade.

Dinie's younger sister was in boarding school too now. Their father was seriously ill, Dinie told me he was going to die. Johanna was in grade two, seven years old, even wilder than Dinie and we let her play with us sometimes. Both her sisters slept in the big dormitory, so she slept there too.

One morning when we came back from chapel into the dormitory, Johanna was standing on a chair with a sheet draped over her, to show everyone passing that she had wet her bed. I was really scared. This could have happened to me, I still had the odd accident at night.

Everyone was embarrassed and walked past quickly, without looking. When Rikie and Dinie, who were near the end of the line, saw their sister, they pulled her off the chair, pulled down the sheet and without a word, all three of them ran down the backstairs to the backdoor, out into the street. They went home to tell their mother what had happened.

The three girls never came back to boarding school, Sister Lisa was transferred to another convent and much whispering went on among the older girls.

I was very sad to lose my best friend. For the past year and a half we had been inseparable. I still had Corrie but she was a bit of a goody-two-shoes and she could not run fast, swing high, or roller-skate with me.

A NEW MOTHER?

One Sunday in March my Dad told us, when we were walking on the other side of the street after just leaving the school, that he was getting married again. That day we were going to the hospital where Jannie worked as a nurse. She was a patient at that time, recuperating from having her tonsils out. Papa was taking us to the hospital to meet her. Jenny and Annie asked all kinds of questions:

"Is she pretty?" Jenny asked.

"Yes" said my Dad.

"Is she Catholic"? Annie asked

"No" was the answer.

"Will we all live together"? Jenny again,

"Soon" said my Dad.

I was stunned, did not ask any questions, just held on to his hand tight and swallowed the big lump in my throat. My stomach felt funny and my feet dragged. I could not understand how Papa could do this. Had he forgotten Mama already?

Papa stopped, took a look at my face, asked if I would like a peppermint and took a roll out of his pocket and gave me a peppermint. After we all had a peppermint to suck on, we walked on to the hospital. Papa left us in the hall and after a few minutes told us to come in. Jenny walked around the bed and gave the lady her hand

"That is my oldest, Jenny" Papa said "she is ten".

Then Annie stepped forward and shook hands with the lady.

"That is Annie" Papa said "she is nine".

"And this is Marietje" Papa said, pushing me forward. I politely shook the lady's hand and then stood back close to the door. I did not say anything but looked at this lady who was going to be our new mother.

She was pretty, had very dark straight hair, woven in a long braid, and brown eyes. She smiled at me with her mouth, but not with her eyes. Papa talked with her and she asked Annie and Jenny some questions about school. She showed us a stuffed elephant she was making for Vic. It was very nice. When we left, we all shook hands again and then we went for a long walk to the house that was going to be our new home, after my Dad remarried.

It was in a new area at the edge of the city. The houses were not quite finished. We had to step on boards to get to the front door, and the hall and kitchen had boards too. It was almost like our old house, 3 bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, an attic with two more bedrooms on the third floor under the roof with dormer windows and slanted walls. This house was slightly bigger and it had big bay windows in the living room. It had a front and backyard and all the houses were painted white, except

for the bottom rows of bricks, these were black. Philips owned these houses and because Papa had worked for Philips for thirteen years, he could rent one.

In the middle of the area of white row houses was a square with grass and young trees. At the end of our street was a truck factory. It was closed because it was Sunday. The D.A.F. Truck factory, at the end of our street, owned the lots on the other side of the street, no houses were built there and the area was overgrown with weeds and bushes. If we looked out of the front bedroom window, which was to be our room according to Dad, we could see the graveyard behind the wall.

When we had seen and explored the place, used the bathroom and had a drink of water, we started our way back. It was a half-hour walk, right through town. The main street seemed unusually busy and when we came near the big stores on the Demer, there seemed to be a dense crowd. Papa told Annie and Jenny to stick close to him and pushed his way through the crowd. All of a sudden I heard a loud bang and through the legs of the people in front of me I saw a man fall down on the sidewalk. A soldier had shot him in the head.

My Dad covered my eyes and pushed us into the ice-cream parlor on the other side of the street. He told us to sit at one of the tables in the back and went to order ice-cream. He looked angry and upset and when he got our ice-cream he told us to hurry and eat it. Many other people crowded into the store to get off the street. I could not eat my ice-cream so Jenny finished it.

Then we walked through a different street to the railway crossing and back to the boarding school. I could not get the picture of the man with the broken head on the sidewalk out of my mind. Papa had not covered my eyes soon enough.

Jenny asked him:

"What happened Papa, did someone get shot?"

Papa just nodded his head.

"Why Papa?" Annie asked.

"I don't know" Papa said, "someone said he wore an orange button and would not take it off".

I had to think hard about that, what difference did an orange button make? I could not understand why someone would get shot just because he wore a button.

MY DAD GETS MARRIED

On April 16th, 1941 my Dad remarried. We were not present. We saw the pictures later. All the nurses at the Hospital stood in two rows on the steps of the main entrance when my father and his bride came down the steps. They were a handsome couple, my Dad in morning suit and his bride in a long white gown with a veil trailing on the steps. They went to city hall in a horse-drawn carriage and had a small reception at a hotel. Then they went on a week's honeymoon to a small village near Hilversum.

After the honeymoon they moved into the new house in the "white village", popularly called that, because all the houses were painted white on the outskirts of Eindhoven.

The next visiting day my Dad came on his bike to get us. When we got to the new house, all finished now, Jannie let us in and told us to hang up our coats on pegs in the vestibule. Then she told us to go into the living room. My Dad sat down in a big new chair, Annie and Jenny sat down on the new chesterfield. I climbed on Papa's knee. After she put on the kettle for tea, my stepmother came in from the kitchen. Her eyebrows went up and she said in a very disapproving voice:

"Such a big girl to still sit on her Dad's lap!"

I turned around and looked at my Dad and he looked at me. We both were rather shocked. Papa gave me a slight push and I slid off his knee and almost ran to the chesterfield to sit beside Annie, who put her arm around me. We had tea, and then sat at the dining room table to play monopoly. My Dad played too. I hated Monopoly. I lost as usual. The afternoon seemed long and I was relieved when my Dad took us back to school.

On the way back Papa asked:

"Would you call my new wife "Aunt Jannie?"

Jenny and Annie answered: "Yes, Papa".

I just nodded.

Jenny asked:

"When can we come and live at home too?"

Papa was quiet for a minute. I looked up at him waiting for his answer.

He looked at each of us in turn and then said:

"First I have to get Vic back from Maastricht to live with us. Maybe when school is out you three can come home too". It was April so I thought three more months in boarding school. Then we would be able to go to a normal school and live in a normal house.

I tried hard to like "Aunt Jannie", because I wanted my Dad to be happy, but I had a feeling she did not like me much and only tolerated the three of us because of my Dad.

Two weeks later my little brother came with my Dad on visiting Sunday. Dad had put him in a seat on the back of his bike and as soon as Papa lifted him off, Vic ran to us on his short legs. We were all happy to see him and he seemed cheerful and talkative, talking in Limburg dialect, which he had spoken with my Aunt. This was a big stumbling block for my stepmother, She could not understand him and in the first few weeks always had to ask Papa what he was saying.

Once I heard them talking in the backyard. Aunt Jannie told Papa she was not used to children, did not like them particularly. When she was a nurse, she hated duty on the children's ward.

We took Vic to the park, took old bread to feed the ducks and played with him on the swings. We all laughed with him and seemed for a while like a real family. The Sunday visits to our new home became a bit of a routine. We would first have tea, then either go to the park, or in bad weather play in the dining room at the table. Often I would play on the floor with Vic with little cars or blocks.

The neighbourhood gradually filled up, many families with children moved in. Jenny and Annie soon found friends to play with on the Sunday afternoons and I usually played with Vic. We played on the swings next-door, where they had a boy my age and a girl two years younger.

No one mentioned us coming home to live. In the summer holidays we went to Maastricht for a few weeks, then spent the rest of the time at home, getting to know "Aunt Jannie". She was strict and impatient with us. When she sent me to the store for something and I brought back the wrong thing, she would call me dumb and useless.

When at the end of the holidays Jenny asked Papa: "Are we going to stay home and go to a day school, Papa?"

Papa answered, "Maybe next year, but not yet!"

So after the holidays, in September 1941, all three of us went back to boarding school. Jenny was now in sixth grade, Annie in fifth and I in grade four. The new Home Economics school was finished. It was built beside the boarding school on the site where some old houses had been damaged by bombs in May 1940.

There seemed to be more girls than before the holidays. Sister gave us a tour of the new building but then told us we were not allowed in there. Just the bigger girls who took the Home Economics course were allowed in the new building.

I no longer slept in the room with the smallest girls but in a new dormitory that had been made where the sewing class used to be. There were no cubicles, just two rows of six beds with a curtained off area for the sister who slept in a corner, behind a screen.

Occasionally the alarms would sound when planes flew overhead to go to England. Except for this reminder, we did not hear much about the war, forgot there was a war on. Some of the girls came from farms and their parents sent food to the school: We ate more fish, cod mostly, boiled in water. I hated it. The smell went through the whole school. One day there was a particularly bad smell. When we sat down for our midday dinner, in front of a plate of potatoes, carrots and something that looked like lima beans but greyish pink in colour, I asked Annie:

"What is that?"

Annie shrugged her shoulders and whispered back:

"I don't know. I'll try it".

She picked up one of the large pink lima bean shaped things with her fork and bit off half. I watched her carefully.

"Not too bad" she whispered. "Try one".

I picked up my fork, pricked into the "thing" and looked at it closely. It smelled very fishy, more so than the boiled cod which was the usual Friday fare. This smelled stronger, tangier.

I slowly brought the fork to my mouth, noticing the brown specks in the pale pink flesh. My stomach heaved and I quickly put the ugly thing back on my plate. I ate some carrots and some potatoes. When the bell rang and we could talk Corrie asked:

Don't you like mussels?"

So that's what they were called.

"Will you take one?" I asked.

"Sure" she said, "but be careful".

I watched Sister and when I saw my chance I quickly slid one of the three mussels onto Corrie's plate.

I looked at Annie who had finished all three mussels and asked her

"Will you eat one?"

"All right" she said and when Sister turned her back pricked one of them with her fork and without blinking an eye put the whole ugly smelly thing into her mouth.

Jenny and Cecile, who sat across the table, had been busy talking, but suddenly looked up. I noticed Sister was now standing behind me.

"Eat your last mussel, Marietje", she said in her strict voice. I despaired.

"I can't", I said, "they make me sick".

"Nonsense" said Sister Lisa, and picked up my fork, pricked the last mussel and shoved it into my mouth. I chewed and gagged, chewed and gagged. I knew I was going to throw up. Quickly I tried to climb over the back of the bench but with only one leg over I suddenly vomited all over Sister Lisa's black apron. She raised her arm as if to hit me, but slowly lowered it again. "Well you dirty girl," she said, but I did not stop to listen. I raced to my secret hiding place, behind the door in the vestibule, under the coats of the big girls. When Annie finally found me there, she told me

"It served her right, everybody laughed after!"

I did not think it was funny. I was afraid I would be punished and stayed far away from Sister Lisa for the rest of the day.

Occasionally there was an outbreak of head lice among the girls. It would spread rapidly and one by one we had to have our hair washed with strong carbolic soap, which stung your head and made your eyes water. Afterwards we sat with a towel around our head for a long time, then the nun fine combed our hair to make sure our heads were free of the little beasties.

After the outbreak everyone's hair had to be cut short, even Therese Rademakers, who had long black curls and swore she would never let it be cut. Her parents owned a hotel on the market square and everyone thought she was a bit spoiled. Papa knew her Father and we had been to play in the

hotel one Sunday afternoon, before Papa married again. We had enjoyed running around the billiard tables and climbing over stacked chairs, while Papa talked with her parents in their living room.

Therese was in fourth grade like Annie. One day, when we were going for our walk, I noticed a funny yellow star on Therese's coat. I asked her:

"What is that?"

She shook her head, did not answer and ran out to the playground. She did not come for the walk with us. A few months later, she did not come back after a visiting Sunday. No one knew where she was, even Annie did not know.

Toward the end of that school year, Jenny had to go for a special test and Papa told us that she would go to a different school in September and would come to live at home. Annie and I would still stay in boarding school.

THE BOMBING

In grade five I had a lay-teacher for the first time since grade one. She was tiny and pretty and I liked her right away. She seemed to like me too and gave me special jobs to do, like running around the school to bring messages to other classes, cleaning the blackboard after school and watering the plants in the window.

While I did these tasks, Miss van Kraay sat at her desk and talked with me. She asked me "How do you like it in boarding school?"

I shrugged my shoulders, told her "It's alright."

She also asked me "What do you want to do when you grow up?"

It was the first time a grown-up had actually shown an interest in my thoughts and plans. I told her my dream of becoming a Kindergarten teacher and she told me I would be very good at it. She said I should work hard at my schoolwork so I could realize my dream.

As a result of that chat, I started to pay attention in class and stopped dreaming so much. I did really well in grade five, coming in second, after Ria van Geel, who was always first.

I missed Jenny now and then, but Annie was still in school with me, so I was not alone. Corrie was in fifth grade too and a new girl called Nellie. I liked her and we had fun playing together. Cecile's sister Bettie had come to Boarding school too. Cecile was in grade seven now and Betty was with me in grade five. The four of us played together and we even joined the bigger girls when they played "hit-ball", with a big round ball that you had to avoid entirely or catch. Betty, Nellie and I liked it, but Corrie usually stood and watched.

Jenny went to a High school just for girls. It was a Catholic school for boys and girls, but the two schools were separated with offices and a big hall, dividing the boys from the girls. Even the playgrounds were separate. It was a twenty minute walk from our house and quite a few children from the neighbourhood went there.

Soon Jenny made new friends, played hockey after school, got interested in boys and adjusted to living in the family. She got along well with my stepmother and my Dad. Dad was away quite a bit though at night, working overtime he said.

Jenny played with Vic, and mothered him a bit. Aunt Jannie looked after him well enough, but did not give him any warmth, hugs or kisses. She was generally quite strict with him, saying he was spoiled by my aunt, and he was less cheerful than he used to be.

St. Nicholas day, December 6th, was on a Friday that year and we were allowed to go home and stay overnight. Schools, stores and factories were closed as if it were Sunday. On the night of the 5th everyone celebrated "Surprise Evening". Everyone made gifts, preferably disguised as something else, or wrapped in a funny way. Every gift had to have a poem included, giving some clues as to what was inside the parcel. Aunt Jannie had made chocolate milk and we ate spice cookies in the form of St. Nicholas or Black Peter.

Vic had put his little shoe near the stove with a carrot and some straw for St. Nicholas' white horse. He went to bed quite excited about what St. Nicholas was going to bring him. We three girls stayed up for the surprise evening. We each got a pair of mittens and a book. It was the first book I ever owned and I read it so many times that winter, I almost knew it by heart.

In the morning we heard Vic's excited chattering as he went to see what St. Nicholas had brought him. We got up quickly to see his reaction. He got a little wooden train with a round set of rails, which was all set up, and a wagon with coloured wooden blocks. He was delighted and spent most of the time on the floor near the window, running his little train around the tracks.

In the early afternoon I was sitting on the floor with him, when the sirens went off and almost immediately planes came over very low. Papa came running out of the front room and yelled at us to get under the table. Annie and Jenny came in from the kitchen and joined Vic and me. Papa opened all the windows and doors and he and Aunt Jannie, stood in the hall.

Within seconds there were loud explosions that sounded quite close. After a short interval more planes came and more explosions followed. Vic kept saying "boom" every time, I held him close and we stayed crouched under the table. We heard fire engines, then the sirens sounding the "All Clear".

We came out from under the table. Papa went outside to talk with some of the neighbours. When he came back in, he told Aunt Jannie he was going to see what had happened. He took his bike out of the shed and was gone.

He came back a few hours later, dirty and tired. He said that the English planes had meant to bomb Philips, the factories that made equipment for the Germans, but had missed, except for the glass factory, and instead completely flattened the main street of the town, the shopping area. Many people who lived above their stores had been killed and wounded. On any other day it would have been much worse because the shoppers would have been killed too. Because of the holiday, everyone else was at home with their families. There had been no one working in the factory either.

Papa walked us back to boarding school via a detour, a different street than usual. When we crossed the Railway tracks, we could see the ruins of the inner city, smoke rising up in different places and many people busy, trying to clear away rubble from basement openings, though there had not been enough time for people to get to their basements. I shuddered to think of how close we had come to being killed.

A NEW LITTLE SISTER

A few months later in February of 1943, my little sister was born. Papa had told us that there was going to be a new baby soon. We happened to have a visiting day the Sunday after she was born and were allowed to go upstairs to see Aunt Jannie and the new baby. She was beautiful, with black hair, dark blue eyes, a little round face and peachy skin. Aunt Jannie looked happy and the nurse who stayed with her let us hold the baby for a few minutes.

Sister Gerda, the nurse, was jolly and fun. We were allowed to stay for supper and we actually laughed at the table. When Papa walked Annie and me back to Boarding School, he asked us if we could call Aunt Jannie "Mama" from now on. Vic already did, and Adri the new baby would not get confused later. We said "yes" of course.

From then on I liked our Sunday visits better. I loved babies and had been very upset when Vic had been taken to Maastricht by my aunt. Now there was another baby around and I was allowed to take her for walks around the block in the blue second hand carriage. Though my Dad had a good job, food prices were very high and to get extra food from the farmers around without coupons people had to pay double. Just getting a layette together for the baby had cost a fortune. The nurses from the hospital where Mama used to work had all given something so Adri had lots of little clothes anyway.

That spring of 1943 the British made many bombing raids on Germany, mainly the industrial areas. They flew over the city and many nights the sirens would go off. To be prepared for these raids, every night before we all went upstairs to bed, we had to take a chair from the recreation area and put it against the wall in the hall. The nuns did the same in the part of the hall where the visiting rooms were. Before climbing into bed, we made sure we had our coats and shoes handy.

When we were rudely wakened by blaring sirens, we jumped out of bed, put on shoes and a coat over our nightgown and lined up at the door near the stairs. With candles the nuns guided us down the stairs and we took our seats in the hall. There was strict silence going down and right away Sister Marie-Antoine started praying the rosary. We answered in sleepy voices.

Many nights the planes would make a steady droning sound and fly right over. Some nights however, the machine guns at the airport hit one of them and it would come down, first dropping its bombs and then the plane crashed. If this happened, during the praying, when almost everyone was half asleep, Sister Marie-Antoine would ring the bell and give us permission to talk. Soon the talking got louder and drowned out the noise of the planes making us less frightened.

When the 'all-clear' sounded, a straight high sound, different from the up and down wail of the alarm sound, Sister said a prayer of thanks that we had been saved by the grace of God. Then we went back to bed, and tried to get back to sleep. I usually took a long time to get to sleep, lying there worrying and wondering where the bombs had fallen.

On our walks on Wednesday and Saturday, we passed the sites where the bombs had flattened some houses, or the crashed plane had caused a fire, leaving charred ruins and a big hole in the ground.

School went on as usual. Our history books were censored, all references to the House of Orange (our Queen's family) had been cut out or blacked out with printer's ink. Our Geography books had pages missing and different pages put in with the boundaries of the German Reich taking up most of Europe. Occasionally German officers came in the school to inspect the books and the classrooms and halls to see if the forbidden royal pictures were hanging anywhere or Dutch flags were displayed.

Some of the girls in my class joined the youth groups from the N.S.B, the Dutch socialist party that cooperated with the Germans. They marched through the streets in orange and black uniforms behind the German flag. The other girls in the class would not let these girls play with them in the playground. I was in the boarding school playground and did not know this, but I had a vague feeling these girls were not to be trusted.

At the end of July we went home again for the summer holidays. We did not go to Maastricht that summer. Annie and I went to a camp organized by the Dutch-Reformed Church my stepmother belonged to. It was a very different experience for us. The camp was in a village not too far from Eindhoven, on a farm. We slept in the barn on straw, in sleeping bags made from blankets and sheets, sewn together.

The farmer provided the food, so the meals were delicious, real eggs, home baked bread with jam. We put potatoes on a stick and cooked them over a campfire. We could eat apples and pears from the orchard. We went on hikes, swam in a pond and sang around a campfire. I did not know too many songs. They were mostly hymns, but I learned them fairly quickly and enjoyed the singing. One song stuck with me:

"Thoughts are free
Who can guess them inside you
No one can take them from you
No hunter can shoot them
Thoughts are free, thoughts are free."

It was an innocent song, but the enthusiasm with which everyone sang it, in a country that was not free, made it our theme song.

I made a friend, called "Riet" like me, because it caused confusion they called her "Piet", which was a boy's name. We two were both ten and the youngest girls in the camp. They let us come along because we both had a 12 year old sister. All the other girls were between twelve and fourteen. Piet and I stuck together through the two weeks, laughed and giggled at night in our sleeping bags in the corner. I learned that being Protestant or Catholic did not matter, if you get along a friend is a friend.

We came back healthier and a little tanned. The rest of the holiday I played with the little kids. I walked with Adri in the carriage and Vic on his tricycle around the neighbourhood and read books borrowed from a neighbour boy, who had many lovely books. One day Vic, who was five, fell from the swing next-door, Jenny and I were there. Jenny picked him up and carried him through the back alley, into our yard and house. Vic cried loud and asked:

"Will I get spanked"?

That really made me feel bad. His leg was broken. He had fallen on the wooden shoe he had been wearing. His leg had snapped in two places. Mama phoned Papa and the doctor and they took him to the hospital in the doctor's car. Doctors were the only people who had gasoline coupons for their cars.

Poor Vic had to stay in bed, with his leg in a cast, for six weeks. Papa put the big green wooden crib downstairs in the dining room. We played with him, as much as we could, until the holidays were over.

GRADE SIX

In grade six Sister Leonie taught us. She was very strict and very mean. If you looked out the window and did not pay attention, she would hit you on the head with the pointer-stick. If she caught you talking, she would take a bit of the skin of your upper arm and twist it around. She terrified me and I again worked very hard, this time from fear, rather than trying to please the teacher.

Sixth grade was quite a lot of fun nevertheless. Besides Bettie, Corrie, Nellie and me, Nellie's older sister, who had to repeat the year, and two new girls were all in grade six. Nellie and Jeanne were from Oirschot where their parents had a furniture factory and were well-to-do.

They always had beautiful clothes. They were allowed to go home for the whole weekend. Jeanne sat beside me on the front seat in the middle row. On Mondays she would unwrap delicious fried egg sandwiches on the seat between us and invite me to share it. We had to be very careful not to get caught by Sister Leonie but if she came near our seat, Jeanne's sister would distract her by asking a question and we could quickly cover up the sandwich with a copybook. I loved fried egg sandwiches and the sneaky feeling of fooling Sister Leonie.

Annie was in seventh grade now and belonged to the big girls. I did not see as much of her. There were twelve seventh graders in the boarding school so she had many friends to play with. She also spent a lot of time talking with Sister Christophora, nicknamed "Stoof".

One day Annie took me aside and told me she had her period. She explained a little bit what would happen and told me not to be scared. I would get it too when I was thirteen. It was normal she said.

Her information came none too soon. A few months later I also got my period. The nun did not believe me when I told her. I was barely eleven, small, skinny, not developed at all, so she made me show her. I was terribly embarrassed but needed the pads only the nun could provide. They were kept in a locked cupboard and were the terry cloth washable kind. They chafed badly and if we had to go for long walks I was very uncomfortable but did not dare mention it to anyone.

One day one of the girls in Annie's grade, Jeanette got very sick. They put her in the sickroom, which was only used for serious cases. Then an ambulance came and took her to the hospital and a day later she died. "Brainfever", said the nuns. On Wednesday, we all went to the hospital where Jeanette was laid out in a little chapel. I found it hard to see her lying there, she looked like she was sleeping. I felt guilty because we used to tease her when we played "hit ball", since she was gangly and awkward and always got hit first. On the way back I did not talk to anyone and for the first time in a long while I went to hide in the vestibule under the coats behind the door, to cry.

Not long after that another girl in grade seven got sick and died in the sickroom. Her heart stopped, the nuns said, she had had rheumatic fever and had a weak heart. We went to "say good-bye": to her also, filing past the bed in single file. I was really scared, who would be next?

All of a sudden I could not eat any more, my throat felt as if it was closed up and it hurt to swallow. After a week of only eating soup and mashed potatoes, at the nun's request, my stepmother took me to the doctor. The doctor decided my tonsils had to come out. I would have to go to the hospital. Mama took me to the Diaconessen hospital.

"Promise me that you will be brave and not cry", she said. "you are eleven now, and too big to cry".

"Will it hurt?" I asked.

"A little" she said.

Then a nurse came and took me up the stairs to a big room.

She told me to sit down in a big chair and a doctor came in. He put a strong smelling cloth over my nose and mouth and made me breathe in something.

"Take a deep breath", he said. I did. I dreamt my throat was caught on a chain in the swimming pool and I was drowning. I awoke to my own screaming.

"Did I cry?" I asked the doctor.

"No" he lied, "you were a big girl" and gave me a big wink.

I had to stay in the hospital for three days. I was put in the children's ward with eleven other children. My bed was near the window. Beside me was a thirteen year old boy, who had stomach pains. They came to put a tube down his throat, while all of us watched. The boy in the next bed had a big open wound on his leg. It had to be dressed twice a day under supervision of a doctor. We all put our hands on our ears to drown out his screaming.

Papa came to visit and brought me a puzzle. I did not feel like doing it, felt quite queasy and tired. On the third day I was allowed to get dressed and walk around. The nurse told me Papa would come to get me in the afternoon.

We had bean soup for lunch. Everybody hated it and when the nurse left the ward, I ran back and forth to the bathroom with bowls of soup, flushing them down the toilet. When the nurse came back we all looked angelic and the bowls were empty.

When Papa came to get me he put me on the back of the bike while he walked beside it, holding on to me instead of riding the bike. I stayed home from boarding school for another week, until I could eat normal food again, I had lost weight and was even skinnier, but now I could eat again.

The food in the boarding school was still adequate. The parents of the children who lived in the country brought extra food. We also got honeycake, provided by the Peynenburg factory. Three of the Peynenburg girls were in our school. Fruit and vegetables came out of the gardens, which had fewer flowers and more vegetables now. The porridge was more watery, the government bread had a funny sticky greenish stripe in it. We drank water with our meals instead of milk. Since I hated milk I thought that was just fine. We did not really know of the trouble other people had to put food on the table.

At night the sirens went off again as V-1's and V-2's flew over to bomb London. Some did not make it there, one landed right behind the gardens of the boarding school. They made a peculiar whining sound when they came over and if that sound stopped suddenly, we knew it was coming down near us. There was complete silence in the hall for a few minutes until we heard the explosion. The whole building shook and the windows rattled. Sister even stopped praying. The flying bomb flattened about fifteen houses and killed several people. The next day when we walked through the gardens to the other playground, we saw the damage in the street behind the school.

"That was real close", Nell said, "I want to go home".

THE RETREAT

In the spring we had our first "retreat". The grade six girls were going to be confirmed by the bishop. The retreat was just for the girls from grades six to ten, those who lived in the boarding school. It meant no school for two days and complete silence for three days. Two sermons were given every day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The rest of the time was spent praying, meditating, and reading books of Saints. The meals were eaten in silence while one of the nuns read to us about St. Thomas Aquino, or some other clever Saint. Our regular priest did not give the retreat but a Franciscan Father with a round face, twinkling eyes and a curly brown beard. The stories he told amused me and he kept my attention throughout his long sermons.

On the last day we all had to go to confession. While I was reading in the recreation hall, Sister Marie-Antoine came to get me and said Father Laurianus wanted to see me. I was really upset and wondered why I was being singled out this way. I hesitantly went in to the visiting room.

Father Laurianus was sitting at the side of the table and pushed the big chair at the end out, saying "Sit down little girl".

Then he asked me some questions, about the length of my stay in boarding school, did I like it there, and some other questions about my family.

I answered with "Yes" or "No" only.

After a long silence, he asked me if I had any questions about becoming a woman and about having babies. I did not dare to look at him, traced the Moroccan pattern of the tablecloth with my finger. I did have a question. I had seen my stepmother nurse Adri and wondered how the milk could come out.

"How do they make the hole in the breasts?" I asked.

There was a pause, I kept looking down. When I looked up, his eyes twinkled while he said kindly:

"There is a hole in your breasts already, did you think that was one more torture you girls have to go through?"

I nodded but did not dare ask any more questions.

"Can I please go now" I asked. Father Laurianus nodded and I went back to the recreation hall where everyone was still reading. I felt foolish. Why had I asked that question? Father must have thought me really dumb.

I was relieved some other girls went one by one to the visiting room to talk with the priest. I was not the only one.

The older girls living in the country, some on farms, were much better informed. They whispered among themselves.

One day in study class Cecile got caught with a drawing that had something to do with sex, Betty told me later. Cecile's friend has passed it to her. Sister Marie Antoine caught her, took it away from her and send Cecile to stand in the hall. Then at dinner some one had to confess who had made the drawing but no one did. Poor Cecile had to stay in the visiting room for two weeks every day during

playtime, writing out of the catechism. Sister said she had to tell who gave her the drawing but Cecile would not tell.

Betty asked me to go and tell her sister to not be so foolish and tell who did it.

I snuck into the room and asked:

"Why don't you tell, Cecile, Betty wants to know".

"Go away", Cecile said, "you don't understand".

"I saw who gave it to you" I told her, "but I won't tell."

"What was it?" I asked

"None of your business" she said.

I felt hurt and went back to the big hall, where everyone else was. I told Betty:

"She won't tell, you go and ask her". We did not see much of Cecile for a week. Her friend did not get in trouble so she must have kept her word. I did not know what the big deal was.

Early in June everybody was very excited. Even the nuns were in a good mood. The invasion had begun they told us, in Normandy in France. Soon they would liberate Belgium and then the Netherlands. The nuns declared a day of fasting, for everybody, to ask God to help the soldiers. We only got two slices of bread and water that day, but everyone thought it was a good thing to do, so no one objected. The priest, who was the only one who had contact outside the convent, came regularly to keep the Sisters posted. All of a sudden everyone seemed more cheerful and they told us the war would soon be over.

Before the summer holidays we had to clear out our class completely since the liberation army was nearing Paris and could cross Belgium any time. The school might be occupied by soldiers again. I left behind my cotton slip, painstakingly made by hand, with an open hem at the bottom and a lace border, crocheted from thin cotton, at the top. It had taken me all year in sewing class and earned me a measly six. By the time it showed up in grade eight it did not fit me any more.

RAZZIA

Some families on our street had disappeared when we came home that summer. When I asked my Dad where they had gone, he paused before he said "They moved away".

One rainy day when we were playing at the table in the dining room, a neighbour came to tell my Dad the Germans were having a "razzia". They blocked off both ends of the street with big army trucks and rounded up all the men between sixteen and sixty.

Papa ran to the shed, grabbed his bike and disappeared through the back alley. Mama told us "Go and play in the dining room and do not say anything to anyone". Then the bell rang. Mama picked up Adri who was about a year and a half, and slowly went to answer the door. Two soldiers pushed their way into the house and searched it from top to bottom. All they found was one pregnant lady and five children.

The men and boys they did find in other houses were put into the truck and transported to Germany, to work in the factories there, because all the German men were fighting the war. Even the Hitler Jugend, boys between twelve and sixteen were fighting by then.

My uncle was picked up in a similar razzia in Maastricht. He spent some time in Germany running a streetcar in Aachen. He was never one to stick by rules and one day when some Dutch people got on, saying they had to catch the train to Maastricht, he ran the streetcar without stopping to the station, while the other passengers frantically rang the cords for their stops.

Now that Annie and I were home, food was even more of a problem. My stepmother spent hours cutting out food stamps. They were needed to buy the little bit of meat, vegetables and potatoes available in the stores. Two extra mouths to feed made a difference.

One of my Dad's colleagues lived on the square at the end of our street. They had no children and had bought some potatoes from a farmer. Mr. Smits told Papa to send Annie and me to his wife so we could pick out the small potatoes. Annie and I spent hours sorting through a big mountain of potatoes, picking out the small ones. Then the Lady came to check and threw half of them back. She told us they were big enough for her to use. When we came home with a small bag of potatoes we did not talk about that to our parents.

My Dad who was six foot tall weighed less than 100 lbs and none of his suits fit any more. One day when he and Jenny had gone to the woods at the edge of town, with a borrowed saw to get some wood, he passed out suddenly. Some one called an ambulance and they took him to the hospital. Jenny ran home to tell Mama they had taken him to the hospital. Some of the people who had been in the woods too, pushed the carriage with wood to our home. Mama was very grateful.

The doctor kept Papa in the Hospital for two weeks, gave him extra rations and did some tests. When he came home again, my stepmother made sure that he ate his fair share and did not divide his portion of bread up between the three of us. She also had to eat properly. Another baby was expected in November. This time I realized what was going on. I saw Mama's stomach getting bigger. I just did not know how a baby could come out.

GATHERING POTATOES

Around the middle of September my Dad took Annie and me on a long hike to the canal near Son. We were going to pick left-over potatoes in a farmer's field. The Germans had already gathered them with machines, but there were always some potatoes left and Papa had heard about this from some one at work.

We walked for an hour and a half until we could see the canal. Papa told us to each take a row of loose earth from which the potato plants had been pulled by a machine and soon we found some potatoes. They were little and some were pierced but in about two hours we gathered enough to fill our big burlap sack. We had taken Adri's baby carriage and Dad put the sack in it. We were tired and thirsty. We drank some water from a milk bottle we had taken from home and started down the road on our way back.

All of a sudden German planes were coming over low and machine gun bullets hit the road in front of us. Papa pushed Annie and me into the dry ditch at the side of the road, jumped in himself and threw himself down on top of us. I lifted my head up to see, but Dad's hand pushed it down, saying "Kop omlaag" "(head down)".

All I heard was the ticking of the bullets on the road and the roaring of the planes when they came close, circled around and dove down again. We learned later that Allied parachutists had landed on our side of the canal and the Germans mistook the people gathering potatoes for paratroopers.

After it had been quiet for a while, we got up and clambered out of the ditch. We dusted ourselves off, had another drink of water and Papa looked around to see if anyone had been hit. There were not many people on the road and everyone looked scared but no one was hurt.

"Let's go home" Papa said with a big sigh and started to push the carriage. Annie walked on one side and I on the other. We put one foot in front of the other and Papa sang to us to keep us going. By the time we were halfway through the city and only fifteen minutes away from home, I could not move my feet any more and sat down on the curb.

"You go on home, Papa, I will just stay here!" I said.

"No way," Papa said "We went out together, we'll come home together." Then he lifted me up and put me on top of the potatoes in the baby-carriage. Together He and Annie pushed me home.

THE BOMBING OF EINDHOVEN

We stood with Papa in the crowd, two blocks from our house. Everyone from our neighborhood had gathered at the side of the main road coming from Geldrop, a village just south of Eindhoven. Freda was there with her parents, Hans from next door with his parents and his little sister.

A group of teenagers, friends of Jenny, stood close to them. They all waved little Dutch flags or orange banners.

The troops rolled in to Eindhoven on September 18th, 1944 and freed the city from four years of German occupation. People hung out Dutch flags for the first time since May 1940 when the German army had invaded Holland.

First came the big tanks. I could hear them coming from far away. I counted fifteen tanks. They made the cobblestone road shake and my feet tingle. The soldiers in the tanks wore black berets. Only the top half of their bodies showed through the round hatches in the front part of the tank. They waved and smiled, throwing chocolate bars, candies and gum to the cheering crowd.

All the children scrambled happily to get some of the candy. I saw a chocolate bar right at my feet. Then I found some gum. I unwrapped a piece. When I put it in my mouth it tasted like strawberries, delicious. Annie and Jenny also found several candy bars and packages of gum. I decided to keep some for my little brother Vic who was at home.

Behind the tanks came army trucks. About twenty soldiers were seated on opposite sides in each truck. I tried to count the trucks but there were too many. The soldiers in the trucks had guns and wore helmets. Their uniforms were different colors green.

Jenny's friends ran to the trucks and several girls climbed in, assisted by laughing soldiers. They jumped on the soldiers' laps, hugging and kissing them. Jenny wanted to join her friends and started to move forward but Papa quickly grabbed her arm saying, "Stay right with me, young lady!" Jenny looked angry and mumbled, "I am never allowed to do anything fun."

When all the tanks and trucks had gone by, some armored cars followed and then several jeeps with officers. Some wore flat caps and some wore white helmets. They waved and smiled at the crowd but the officers did not throw candies. Many people followed the troops into the heart of town but Papa decided we should go home.

In the afternoon all the children went to watch the soldiers put up their camp in the fields bordering our neighborhood, at the south edge of the City.

I wandered around for a while by myself. Annie and Jenny went off with their friends. I stopped to watch a group of soldiers. They were putting up a big tent. They hoisted up two big poles with a green canvas tent hanging loosely down from the top. Then every soldier took hold of a corner of the canvas and attached it to smaller poles set all around the big ones.

They hammered stakes in the ground to fasten the tie ropes and in a very short time the big tent was standing in the middle of the field. Then the soldiers put up long folding tables and hauled benches from the trucks and put them on each side of the tables. I realized this was the dining tent.

A British soldier, in a smaller tent, offered me some tea with powdered milk and lots of sugar. It tasted very good. I was happy and excited and forgot all about the time.

Suddenly I heard Papa calling, "Marietje, Time to come home!" When he was closer he said: "Your sisters are home already and Mama is waiting for you." I was too excited to notice Papa's impatient frown. Pointing at the big tent I said, "I saw them put up that big tent Papa, I saw how they hoisted up the poles and hammered in the stakes."

When I arrived home Mama scolded me for being late while she dished up the meager supper of white beans and nettles.

The next morning I woke up to Papa's whistling while he was shaving in the bathroom. I had not heard Papa whistle for a long time. It made me feel really happy. Before he left for work, he hung out the flag he had kept hidden in the attic all these years. The red white and blue flag rippled in the slight breeze.

That night after supper, Papa said: "Let's all go for a walk!" Waiting for Mama and her sisters in front of the house with Papa and Vic, I saw some of the neighbors pointing to the sky. I looked up and saw many planes in V-formation, dropping fiery red balls.

"Fireworks Papa!" I yelled, "Look!"

Everyone standing in the street thought the planes were British or American. Vic and I jumped up and down waving enthusiastically as the planes came closer. Jenny and Annie had come out too. Suddenly Papa yelled: "Everybody into the house! Quick!"

He pushed Vic and me towards the door and herded everyone into the hall, leaving the front door wide open. He ran through the kitchen to open the back door, shouting at Mama, "Go stand in the small bathroom with Adri. Marietje, Jenny, Annie, and Vic get into the cellar."

Annie and Jenny ran down the cellar steps. I stood on the steps holding on to my little brother. Papa stayed in the hallway. He kept the cellar door open so I could see him. That made me feel safer.

I now heard the planes roaring overhead. The bombs exploded very close. I felt the house shake. I felt the push of the air pressure in my ears. It blew out some of our windows, probably in the front room. I could hear glass breaking, but I could only see Papa in the hall. The bombs kept on falling for a long time.

Some of the jars fell off the shelf in the cellar breaking on the cement floor. Plaster fell from the hall ceiling on Papa's head, making his hair look grey. The hall chandelier swayed back and forth. A picture fell from the wall, breaking the glass.

I could not believe that the Germans would still bomb our city, when the British army already had arrived. "It will be over soon," I told my shaking brother, Vic. "We will be alright."

When there was a slight lull in the bombing, Papa shouted, "Everyone run to the shed. If the house falls on us, we don't have a chance. The shed only has a flat roof, and we can survive if it falls on us."

Mama, with Adri on her arm ran first to the shed, Vic and I followed. Jenny and Annie ran after them. Papa came last.

I looked fearfully up at the sky as we ran to the shed. Were the planes dropping more bombs? Were we all going to be killed?

Once we were all in the shed Mama put Adri in the baby carriage that was stored there. My sisters and I sat in a row on the empty wooden coal container. Vic held tight on to my hand. Then Papa asked: "Who is coming with me to get the suitcases?" The packed suitcases were standing in the front hall, ready for an evacuation. I looked at my sisters. Jenny shook her head. "No, Papa, I am too scared."

Taking a deep breath, Annie said, "I'll go Papa." Together they ran to the house. Papa grabbed the two big suitcases and Annie carried the smaller one. They had just reached the shed when another wave of German bombers came over, dropping more bombs.

Back in the shed Papa told them, "They must be bombing the main roads, trying to stop the Allied army from advancing".

I heard an eerie moaning sound just before the bombs hit their target. The explosions were very loud. The ground shook. I covered my ears with my hands.

A very loud crash shook the shed. "Look they hit the church," Annie shouted. I quickly joined her at the open shed door. The back door and the front door of our house were both open. Through the hall I could see that the big Gothic church steeple had disappeared in a column of dust and smoke. When the dust cleared, I found out that the Saint Joris Church was still there. Two big bombs had exploded in the graveyard of the church, right across the street from our house.

"Better them than us," said Papa, with his wry sense of humor.

I did not feel like laughing. My stomach hurt and I was biting my bottom lip, trying not to cry. Baby Adri sat happily in her carriage, her dark eyes shining bright. Every time a bomb fell she said "Boom!" For her, this was just a great game.

When it was quiet again for a while, I asked: "Papa, can we go to the bomb shelter at the end of the street, would we not be safer there?"

Papa stepped out of the shed and looked at the sky. He looked worried and scratched his head. Then he said "It is likely a third round of bombers will come. If we hurry we can make it to the shelter. Marietje you push Adri in the carriage through the alley. We will all run through the house and meet you in the street."

I was not happy to be away from Papa, even for a short while. I ran through the alley, pushing Adri in the carriage. I was relieved when I caught up with the others.

We walked fast to the end of the street, trying to avoid the broken glass. I looked anxiously at the darkening sky. I wondered if we would make it to the shelter near the DAF factory, before the planes came again. I saw a burned motor cycle lying in the middle of the street. A big crater in the cobblestones showed where a bomb had fallen. We hurried on. I wondered if the motor cyclist had been killed. I did not see a body lying anywhere near the bike. Maybe just the bike was burned. The soldier must have jumped off before the bombs fell. When we arrived at the shelter we saw it was already quite crowded. Papa found some room towards the middle of the narrow tunnel structure. He made sure we all had a place to sit on the hard cement benches on each side. Then he left the shelter.

Baby Adri immediately fell asleep on Mama's lap. Soon Jenny curled up on the bench beside them and went to sleep too. Annie and I sat on the opposite bench, with our little brother between us. I was very scared. I could not sleep. The cement benches were hard and uncomfortable. I decided to pray, just as we had done in boarding school during previous bombings.

Halfway through my first "Our Father," I heard the droning of the planes again. This time the bombs did not seem to fall quite as close. I wished Papa were with us. Why had he left? After about fifteen minutes that seemed endless, it was quiet again. We stayed in the shelter all night long.

When Papa finally came back, I heard him say quietly to Mama, "The van den Berg boy has been seriously hurt. I stayed with them until the ambulance came. A fragment of the bomb that fell in our street hit him, just when they were ready to go to the shelter." I was shocked, I knew Jan. He lived only a few houses away from us. He was fourteen and his brother was twelve.

"It is getting light, we can go home now," Papa told them. Some of the other people who had spent the night in the shelter had gone home already. Walking slowly along the street, on tired legs, pushing Adri's carriage, I smelled smoke and saw fires in the distance. A red haze hung over the city.

Miraculously none of the houses in our neighborhood had been hit. Papa told us a firebomb had hit a shed in the next street, but no one had been in it at the time. I was relieved to be home. I was really tired. Mama sent us all to bed for a few hours, to catch up on our missed night's sleep.

I woke up from a deep sleep hearing people talk in the street below my open window. Someone said on the Geldropse Weg a whole row of houses were demolished. I got out of bed and after a bit of lunch went outside.

Police, Firemen and soldiers were barricading the bomb sites as some of the walls that were still standing might crumble.

I heard some neighborhood kids say that a few kilometers farther a big bomb had fallen right next to a shelter and thirty people in it had suffocated.

I was horrified. That could have happened to us, while we were in the shelter. Fires still smoldered everywhere.

I heard the sirens of fire engines and ambulances for most of the day. Papa told them that the theatre, about a ten minute walk from our house, had burned to the ground. A few of the Philips Factory buildings had been hit, without casualties. Everyone had been at home. Few soldiers were killed. More than two hundred people died and fifty-five were still missing, buried under the rubble. All the flags came down and the city mourned its dead.

THE WINTER OF HUNGER 1944-45

Everyone had been convinced that the British and Canadian troops would push on victoriously to liberate all of Holland before the winter of 1944, but it turned out very different. The battle of Arnhem, where thousands of soldiers and civilians lost their lives, stopped the allied troops and winter set in with the South of Holland, where we lived, free and the North, above the big Rivers still occupied by the Germans.

The day after the bombing on September 19th, everyone was subdued and most of the flags were taken down or hung at half-mast. We kids went to look at the bombsites on the road near us, but were stopped by soldiers, who were putting up barricades. We also went to the graveyard to look at the two big bomb-craters there. The boys dared the girls to look into the holes where tombstones and human bones were visible. I took a quick look and felt sick. I told the other children that I had to go home and ran as fast as I could out of the graveyard.

Papa told me that the Germans had bombed Eindhoven to stop the Allied troops from going to Nijmegen and Arnhem to cross the big rivers, in order to liberate the North of Holland.

Torn apart houses, cracked walls, and hanging ceilings made it dangerous to walk. We helped sweep up all the glass from our street and the men put boards in the window frames that had broken panes. A few weeks later we were the first people in the street to get a new big front window, since ours had been broken before the bombardment. We were the envy of the neighbourhood.

British or Canadian soldiers stayed in almost every house in the area. We had William, the soldier who had given me some British tea, staying at our house. Papa had told me I could ask him to come and stay with us.

Two doors away, one of the Canadian soldiers had been sleeping in the house when the bombardment started. He did not have his helmet with him, so he grabbed a big cast-iron pan from the shelf, not realizing it had gravy in it. The gravy ran down his face and made everyone laugh, though the bombs were falling and they were really scared. It was a story that got told around the neighbourhood.

Our William came the day after the bombing and brought corned beef and coffee with him. He was a big man, with a fair complexion, bald at the front of his head. When I had invited him, he had asked me if my Dad smoked and when I told him "Yes", one of the few words of English I knew, he had brought Papa a package of Players, even though William did not smoke. We kids got gum and I was allowed to sit beside him at dinner. I felt really proud.

We did not have much food to give him, but in a family of seven one more person did not make much difference. He talked to Papa and told him he had two girls of his own in England and he missed them very much.

The day after the liberation Papa brought a small radio home from work. During the occupation radios had been forbidden and though many people kept them hidden in their house, we had not had one. Papa thought it was too dangerous. Now we could listen to the BBC news. The news was not very good. The Germans had stopped the Allied troops near Arnhem. They could not liberate the North of Holland before the winter, which had been the original plan. Operation Marketgarden had been a failure.

The army trucks and tanks were still in the field and some of the soldiers camped there, to keep an eye on their equipment. Even though, we children explored all the trucks and tanks, the jeeps and armored vehicles that were parked the duration of that winter. Some of the big boys were allowed to ride with the soldiers in the jeeps. Other boys climbed in the tanks and made the turrets move around, pretending to shoot at the enemy. It was an exciting playground, until one day two boys in a tank exploded something that caused a fire and they were badly burned. Henny Buisink's leg took a long time to heal and he always wore long pants after to hide the scars.

After that event we were strictly forbidden to play in the field and the younger kids obeyed that rule. The older ones, Jenny's age group, snuck in the trucks and tanks anyway. They had a great time stealing headphones, wire and other radio-equipment. The teenagers made a network of telegraph wire from roof to roof, where ever a member of their club lived. The main

telegraph board was at Jopie Klaassens' house, because he had tuberculosis and had been in bed for the last several months.

His parents did not seem to mind everyone traipsing into their house. Jenny was part of this group and had a headphone and wiring on the roof, outside the dormer window of the attic bedroom where she and Vic slept. After bedtime she would talk via her telegraph system to her friends till late. The wiring spanned all of the white houses and most of the grownups thought it was for the soldiers who were bunking in the houses in our area. Jenny showed me her gear once and forbade me to tell any-one, especially Papa.

One night, soon after the bombing, Jenny was late coming home and Papa was very upset. When she came in at half nine, half an hour after our curfew, she limped into the house and Papa yelled at her, asking where she had been. Jenny said they had been playing and she had hurt her ankle. It was indeed swollen and looked sprained. She got away with her excuse. Much later she told me, they had been in a house down the street, where the local Commander of the N.S.B. (the Organization that sided with the Germans) had lived. The family had quickly vacated the day before the Allied troops came. In the basement they had raided the stored jars of fruit and vegetables, eating everything they could manage. She had hurt her ankle running up the cellar stairs when they heard someone. She knew my Dad would have been very angry if she had told him the truth. She swore me to secrecy.

Since all the schools were occupied by the British and Canadian troops, everyone had a great deal of freedom. No homework, no school, very little supervision. There were about thirty teenagers in the area who hung out together. Younger brothers and sisters occasionally were allowed to join in their expeditions.

Sometimes we stole potatoes from the fields and roasted them over a fire. Sometimes we went to steal apples from "The Burgh". This was a small castle behind our area, where nuns looked after mentally handicapped people. The gardens had a large orchard and the garages of our area looked out over this orchard. We climbed on top of the garage where we younger ones were supposed to be lookouts while the bigger kids all jumped into the orchard and picked apples, pears, plums and berries until Eddie, who was my age, whistled to warn them the gardener was on his way with his big stick. Then everyone had to be pulled up over the wall or on top of the garages while the gardener swore at us.

One time Jenny was caught astride the wall, with the gardener pulling her one leg, while two boys pulled her other leg, until she finally toppled over on our side of the wall. They caught her before she hit the ground. She had scraped her legs pretty bad, but her skirt hid most of it.

Most of the time though I played with Vic, or walked with Adri in the carriage. Sometimes I walked other babies in the street and played school with some of Vic's little friends.

Around the middle of November, Jenny and most of the other kids in High school had classes again. Some in basements, some in churches and Jenny had her classes in an old factory. The stairs to the second floor were pretty rickety and one day she came home giggling and laughing with her friend. She told us one of the boys had fallen down the stairs and broken his leg. This made his friend laugh so much, he fell down too and also broke a leg. The whole crowd laughed hysterically until a teacher went to call an ambulance and both boys were taken to the hospital.

Telling the story later to Papa, Jenny laughed again until tears ran down her face and we all could not help but laugh with her. After that incident other quarters were found for their class and serious studying had to be done since they had missed several months of school. Jenny had passed provisionally, which had gained her a severe talking to from my Dad, she had to pull up her marks to stay in third grade of the lyceum she went to.

While some of the children went to school, Annie and I did not go yet. Our boarding school was still occupied by the soldiers and we were quite bored.

On November 18th my little brother was born. Just like all of us, he was born at home with a doctor in attendance. An other friend of Mama from the Hospital came to stay with us for ten days, to look after mother and baby and also take care of the rest of the family. Sister Siem was not nearly as much fun as Sister Gerda had been. She was very strict and made us do lots of chores, but it was fun helping her bathe the baby and watching her dress him. I looked after Adri much more now and sometimes was allowed to take both of them, to the park with Frits in the carriage and Adri sitting in a little seat on top of the carriage.

THE WINTER OF HUNGER

The winter of 1944-1945 was a very cold one, colder than we had had in years. The canal froze over and the pond behind the Burgh. Though we were free and did not live in fear any more, there was very little food, and we were lucky the army shared some of their rations with us. The army made food-depots at the schools where they lived and we took turns going to get a meal in a little blue bucket. Annie and I stood in line often. The food was a mixture of potatoes and carrots. Sometimes there was a little meat in it, most often not. We ate it, since everyone was hungry all the time, but we did not like it. When we all got very ill one day, since the food had gone bad, Mama decided that this food kitchen was not a good idea.

Everything was in short supply. We had to line up with coupons at the butcher's for a few ounces of sausage, at the greengrocer for some cabbage or sauerkraut, at the grocery store for flour or sugar. Coffee and tea were not to be had, so we had a substitute called "chicory" which was barely drinkable, but it was hot and warmed you for a short time.

Annie and I were sent to the different stores to line up. I hated it, since invariably people would start to push and shove. Being small and not very sturdy I always got pushed to the end of the line. By the time it was my turn there usually was nothing left and I would come home empty handed which earned me criticism.

"Useless", my stepmother said "I should have gone myself".

The worst place to go was to the rectory where they sold candles, since the electricity was not restored yet. Only once did I manage to get a candle, because Annie went with me, since we would get two candles that way. Annie was tougher and just enough bigger that she could shove back, so we kept our place in the lineup.

In the middle of December it got very cold and the little wood we had was soon used up. Our stove was really meant for coal but that was not available, so we used whatever we could find in the woods. Papa used up the wooden divider in the shed and some old chairs that were in the attic but most of the day the house was cold and everyone walked around with their coats on or several big sweaters.

The gas and electricity were only turned on for an hour each day, which meant during that hour, the meal of potatoes and carrots or turnips had to be cooked, two big pots of water heated for sponge baths and dishes, and the oven was lit and open to provide a little heat.

We all ate in the small kitchen around the wooden table, small portions rationed out by my stepmother. Baby Frits was asleep upstairs, Adri who was almost two, sat in the high chair, Jenny and Annie sat near the stove, Vic and I across from them, Papa and Mama each at one end of the table. It was quiet while we ate. I noticed my little brother was not eating. I looked at him and saw that he was very pale. Suddenly he slumped off his chair onto the ground. My Dad quickly picked him up and just when he was about to run some water from the tap, Jenny fainted and slipped off her chair onto the floor.

"What the devil!!"

"Gas" my Dad yelled. "Open the door! Everybody outside!"

I was closest to the door and jumped up from my chair. I opened the kitchen door wide. Dad carried Vic and Jenny out on the grass in the backyard and went back in to turn off the main gas line, which was beside the stove.

We lived in our sweaters and coats that winter since there was no heat in the house and were chilly but not too cold outside. Vic came to as soon as he was outside and Jenny a few minutes later. Annie and I were all right. My head felt a bit funny but the air made it feel better.

We stayed outside until the whole house had been aired thoroughly. Baby Frits was all right in the upstairs bedroom. My Stepmother had run upstairs, wrapped him in his blankets and brought him outside. Jenny and Vic still looked very pale and drawn. Dad brought us some blankets and we sat quietly together wondering why this had happened. A leak in the rubber connection caused the kitchen to fill with gas. It was one of the scariest things that happened during that winter.

When Jenny was in school I could sometimes borrow her skates and go to the Pond behind the Burgh to try and learn to skate. The nuns let everyone in for a quarter and I had a good time learning how to skate. Some of the kids my age were surprised I did not know how, but this was my first time and slowly but surely I got better at keeping my balance. My roller skating experience helped so when I could skate all the way around the little island, I felt really good. It was a bit like flying I thought. When my feet got too cold, I went home, but in a cold house it took forever to warm them and the pain was intense.

Papa had made a little brick barbeque in the backyard. It was only big enough for one pot and Mama made a sort of soup from whatever there happened to be that day. Our neighbour at the back, across the alley, had been a ship's captain before the war. He had managed to get a ship's "kombuis" (a big stove) and he put it close to the gate in his backyard. He invited all the neighbours to bring their pots to put on around six o'clock and often there were at least ten different pots on the black stovetop. Different people brought chunks of wood to keep the fire going. It was quite a social event, with laughter and jokes, despite the cold and the misery.

Early in January we had a big snowfall, unusual for Holland where normally it rains in winter. I played with Vic and his friends in the field across from our house. We made a big fort against the wall of the graveyard. We had no boots and our feet got very cold in our shoes. I ended up with a bad cold, which turned into bronchitis. The doctor told me to stay in bed and breathe in a very strong camphor. Three times a day I sat with a towel over my head, breathing over a bowl of hot water with camphor which made my eyes water.

] Jenny and Anny came to visit with me, once or twice a day. They were jealous since I at least was warm in bed. They had to do dishes with cold water. Jenny had to do her homework with freezing cold hands and even little Frits had mittens on in his cradle since he would not keep his hands under the blanket and they got too cold.

After six weeks I was allowed downstairs for supper. I was very tired by the time I got dressed but made it downstairs. As soon as I sat down at the table Jenny said: "Boy, does she look yellow". ,

Mama, who was a nurse, had not noticed but indeed I had jaundice and promptly got sent back to bed, where I had to stay for another six weeks.

When I felt a little better, I read books that a friend I had played with brought me. First I read her own books, then her brother's books. The whole series of Karl May about the wild west. Winnetou and Old Shatterhand and other Indians of the American Wild West fascinated me. I also read bound Panoramas, a news magazine, back to 1914.

My eyes started to bother me when I read though and the doctor forbade me to read. Mama put drops in my eyes and the last few weeks in bed were very boring indeed. Now and then Annie or Jenny would come up and crawl in bed with me to get warm. They would read to me then but never for long. They had to do the chores and go to the stores to stand in the line-ups.

When I was allowed up the second time it was the middle of April. Crocuses were blooming, tulips and daffodils were coming up, the trees were getting green and the worst winter of our lives was over. The troops were advancing fast in the North of Holland to liberate the people there who had suffered far more from cold and hunger. The American troops were nearing Berlin and finally on May 5th, the war was officially over.

Right away the grownups organized a big celebration with dancing on the Burghplein. The children decorated wagons and tricycles, A few even had bicycles, hidden during the war. They held a parade with prizes for the best decorated wagon or tricycle. Jenny's group of friends rigged up loudspeakers and danced on the square. People generally seemed cheerier even though there was still not much food. Everyone was optimistic and plans were being made to restore the damage done.

SEX EDUCATION

That spring our school started again. It was held in the dining hall and the recreation hall of the boarding school. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, grade seven and nine spent two hours copying from the blackboard. We copied down the homework assignments for the seven different subjects: math, history, geography, Dutch, French, English and German. Miss Seegers was our teacher. She was a tall stately woman with not even a trace of a sense of humor. She was all business and very strict.

The only girl in my class I knew well was Willy Peel who had been in boarding school with me in grade six. We tried to sit together and talked and giggled, which frequently gained us extra work.

"Write 'I must not talk during class and pay attention' 100 times" Miss Seegers would say. I learned to tie three pencils together, with an elastic band, which made the lines go faster.

After school, Willy and I walked home together, since we both lived at the other end of the city, a half hour walk. Usually it took us much longer. We stopped to look at the St. Antonius Church which had a hole in its side where a bomb had hit. We also stopped to look on the Demer, the main street, where all the rubble had been removed and weeds sprouted up in between the concrete slabs where stores had been before the St. Nicholas Day bombardment. We still could not walk on the main road, called "Geldropse weg". It was still barricaded while people cleared away the rubble of the bombed houses.

Willy was about a year older than I and much more worldly. She had lived at home with her father and two older brothers until grade six. A housekeeper lived with them, since her Mother had died when Willy was born. Willy's left hand was missing and she always wore long-sleeved dresses to hide the stump. She could play the piano using her left arm to play the chords and her right hand for the melody. She was very gifted musically and played better than anyone else in boarding school, when she was there in grade six. I loved it when she played for us during dinner on Sundays.

Willy always knew more about everything than I did. Walking home from school, one afternoon, she pulled something out of her pocket and said "Look what I've got".

I looked at it but had no idea what it was. It looked like a little ring made out of rubber with white stuff around it.

"Where did you get it?" I asked, not wanting to admit that I did not know what it was.

"I found it in my brother's room" she said "where the Canadians, who board with us sleep. I went to make their beds and found it on the night table".

"Don't tell my Dad", she said "he would kill me if he knew I took it". She went on "My Dad thinks I am still a little girl, but I am thirteen and I know everything about sex. I listen to my brothers talk all the time when they think I am asleep".

Now at least I had a clue that whatever she had, had to do with sex. I still did not know what it was, knowing nothing about "sex" but I tried to hide my ignorance. I just listened to her talking about the goings on in her house, adding "yes" or "no" in the appropriate places.

When we got to the big St. Joris church, I had to turn left, while she had to go straight.

"See you Thursday!" I said and walked on by myself, deep in thought, trying to figure out what it was Willy had in her possession and why she thought I would know what it was.

MATH PROBLEMS

Schoolwork without a teacher was hard. Most subjects were easy enough to do on your own without instruction, but math was impossible for me and reduced me to tears several times. Some times Jenny came to my rescue but often my Dad tried to help me. His advanced theories and technical terms did not do anything for me, so in the end I struggled on my own, never quite grasping the new concepts and adding to the confusion all the time. I was quite conscientious about my homework and quite liked learning lists of foreign words, translating from Dutch into another language and vice versa.

Geography was my favourite subject. Since after the liberation everyone had maps pinned up with coloured pins or ink marking the positions of the different armies, I could visualize Europe quite well. Indonesia was also quite familiar and I always liked studying maps and planned on traveling when I was grown up.

On the days I had to walk home from "Heavenly Kingdom", I some times met up with my Dad on the corner just across the tracks and we walked home together. Those were good times. I very seldom got a chance to be alone with Papa. I told him about the different kids in my class, the things I had to do, how many lines I had to write and why, which made him smile.

He told me things about his work, some stories about his work with the underground. He told me that when they had to make headphones or radios for the Germans, who had taken over the factories in 1940, they drew up the plans exactly as instructed, brought them to the German Commander to be approved and then altered the drawing very slightly to make the equipment useless. I felt close to him on those walks because he trusted me enough to tell me this.

One day there was a big parade because Montgomery and Eisenhower were coming through the town. All the bands, youth groups (scouts and guides) some tanks still around, lots of trucks with American soldiers and the two most important people, Ike with his general's hat and Monty with his black beret, seated together in the back of an open jeep, drove by waving at a very enthusiastic crowd.

Annie and I sat on one of the stone horses in front of the Van Abbe Museum, when the parade passed and if my eyesight had been better I would have seen them.

Jenny's High school was ready for use soon after the end of the war, so she had regular school hours for a few months that year, starting the middle of May. The fifth graders in her lyceum who were supposed to do their final exams were exempted and got their diplomas without exams. Jenny passed into grade four of the Lyceum without any trouble and did well in the next two years.

Annie and I wondered whether we could stay home now. I asked Papa if we could go to Jenny's school or even another school in the neighbourhood, so we could stay home. He said he would talk it over with Mama.

In the end they decided that we would go back to Boarding School since the food would be better there. We did not argue with my autocratic Dad and prepared ourselves for another three years at the convent.

SUMMER OF 1945

That summer Uncle Piet, my mother's half-brother, invited Annie and me to come and stay with them for two weeks, while Jenny went to Mama's youngest sister during that time. Maastricht had not suffered as much damage in the war. The bridges had been blown, when the Germans retreated scaring my grandparents who lived in between the two bridges, but otherwise not much damage had been done.

They had come to warn my grandparents when the bridges were going to be blown and told them to evacuate immediately. My grandmother, however wanted to dress in her best coat and hat. She had just put her hatbox on the round table in the parlor, when they blew up both bridges. Neither Oma or Opa were hurt, but her best hat blew out the window, into the Maas. She was very upset about that.

My uncle had connections since he had a gas station and looked after army vehicles. They still had an army jeep which had been "forgotten" in which Jeff, our seventeen year old cousin drove us around now and then. He took Annie and me on a harrowing ride on top of the St. Pietersberg over fields and gullies, stopping just before the steep drop where the cement factory took gravel. At twelve and fourteen Annie and I got a big thrill riding around in the jeep.

Sometimes we went to see Aunt Bertha where Jenny stayed. Aunt Bertha made the best French Fries I ever tasted and we could eat as much as we liked, something unheard of in the last two years at home. The food at my uncle's was also much better than we had eaten. All three of us gained some weight and strength, which apparently was the whole idea behind the invitation.

We visited with Aunt Helene too, though my little brother was now at home in Eindhoven. Aunt Jeanne visited there often and while I played with little Eddie, my cousin who was four, the aunts sat at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee, gossiping about the family. They talked about Aunt Marie's girls, who were a few years older than Jenny, who was fifteen. Apparently they went out with the soldiers. The young people went to the tunnels in the St. Pietersberg. There was a lot of whispering so I never heard what they did there. I just overheard my aunt say in a shocked tone that "Jannie" had come home without her panties. That really puzzled me, I wondered if the elastic had broken. I wanted to ask Annie, but she had gone to the store.

Our trip to Maastricht had been a very slow one. We had come on the train. It had taken hours. All the bridges had been blown, when the Germans retreated and now there was only one track repaired. The railroad bridges had been replaced by pontoon-bridges (flat boats lying beside each other, held together with chains), with temporary tracks over them. It felt awful close to the water going over them in the train and it was a bit scary.

Uncle Piet decided to bring us home in his car and loaded in a few extra groceries from their supplies, which earned him the eternal gratitude of my stepmother.

The last few weeks of August at home we went often to the outdoor swimming pool with a whole group of kids from the neighbourhood. We all gathered near the farm field, crossing through the middle of the fields for a shortcut, singing, laughing, joking, running and just being young and happy.

I had learned to swim the summer before and now could swim in the deep end, a big area with a float in the middle. I just hung on to the float when I got there. I did not climb on because I did not like being pushed off by the boys. I spent long times just slowly swimming around on my back, enjoying the sun on my face, the feel of the water and the freedom.

The walk back was somehow much longer, our wooden platform shoes broke often, so we would just walk barefoot, but the sharp grass was painful so we had to rest much more often than the bigger kids who would arrive home much earlier.

At night my Dad would try to repair the wooden platform shoes, swearing under his breath, trying to find a spot in the wooden sole where no hole had been before, to attach the linen strips for the toe and heel.

BACK AT SCHOOL

It was strange to be back in Boarding School in September. Annie and I were both in grade eight. The nuns decided she was not ready for grade nine, because she had spent very little time doing homework the year before. There was also a new rule that there would not be any more young children in boarding school, so the youngest new girls were in sixth grade. There were about ten girls in grade six, twelve in grade seven, six in grade eight and the same number in grades nine and ten, forty in all. The rest of the girls, another forty, were in the Home Economics School. Some in the Junior School, starting after grade eight and some in the Senior School, after grade ten, learning to be teachers in Home Economics.

The recreation hall had changed completely. The grand piano was still in the corner by the window, but instead of the long tables and benches, there were round tables with eight chairs around each, like a sitting room. At night after supper, in the free time, different groups would form, mostly by grade, but I always sat with the grade sevens, they were my age and more fun than the few girls in grade eight.

I played with them outside too. They still played active games, ballgames, roller-skating and skipping with two ropes. We also had a new game, jumping over the outside stools. We would stand in a row and one by one jump, first over one stool, eliminating some that could not do that, then two stools, eliminating some more girls. I could manage three but never more. Some long legged girls could make four and very few five.

One day Betty, Cecile's sister and my friend, decided to try to jump over six stools. All the girls came to watch this feat. She did not make it. She landed hard on her knee. It was not broken but swelled up to twice its normal size. She had to spend six weeks in bed in the sickroom. We were allowed to visit her at night, two at a time. Usually this ended up with about ten kids in her room, having fun, jumping on her bed until a nun came to chase us all away.

For my thirteenth birthday all the girls in grade seven got together and bought me a pair of silk stockings. They knew how I hated the black rib stockings. My stepmother did not think it mattered much what I wore in school and did not bother to buy me normal beige silk stockings, which were now allowed by the nuns. I treasured this first pair of silk stockings, washing them every night, wearing them again next day, some times with the toes still damp.

That winter Annie and I both had big sores on our feet called winter-feet. The doctor said it was a lack of vitamins and once a week we walked to his office, close to where we lived, and got a vitamin shot. He would also take the bandages off our feet, swab all the infected areas with painful disinfectant and then we had to walk back on freshly bandaged, very painful feet, limping because of a sore hip from the shot.

Towards the end of the school year, my Dad went on a trip to America, which is what we called the United States. It had to do with the Marshall Plan. As President of the Union of St. Bernulphus, the Catholic Union for higher technical people, he went with a group of people from all different unions. They traveled to different factories in the States, meeting with American Union leaders, even meeting the President at a special dinner in Washington. This visit of Union leaders helped to get the industry in Holland going again after the war. It took years before the bombed buildings were restored and the housing shortage stayed a problem for several decades.

The Marshall plan helped with loans and grants to gradually get the industry back on track.

I missed Papa for the six weeks he was gone, but he was back in time for the holidays and brought us each a genuine Parker gold fountain pen, green for Jenny, maroon for Annie and blue for me. I used that pen for the rest of my schooldays, dropping it several times so it had a crack, giving me a permanent ink stain on my finger.

We had to work very hard in grade eight to make up for the time lost in grade seven. With lots of struggles I ended up with a seven in math. The rest of my marks were better. I even did well in music, since I sang in the choir where we learned five Gregorian Masses. For my test I sang a song the nun did not know. It was a song I had learned in the camp organized by my mother's church. It was about a Chestnut tree and went:

Fier and stil te bloeien
Ongerept in wind
En in Zonnegloeien
Argloos als een kind
Hoog je kaars te dragen
Aan een donkere boom
Van je levensdagen
Wijden daad en droom.

The last four lines was the refrain, about carrying your candle high just like the chestnut tree. That suited my philosophy and I sang it with enthusiasm. I guess I surprised her with it, she gave me a nine.

THE NEW GIRL

She arrived one night, just when we were all finishing supper, a few weeks after school had started again. A thirteen year old girl from Curacao. Her colour was deep brown, her long black hair curly but not frizzy, her skin glowing and healthy. Her mouth had thick lips and gleaming white teeth and she looked ill at ease. She was mature looking. Her figure fully developed, big breasts, thin waist, curvy hips. Her arms were long and thin with strong looking long hands and fingers with barely noticeable pink nail polish on the nails.

She wore a pleated plaid skirt and an angora sweater, beautiful pale pink with a little white collar around the neck edge. She looked very well dressed for a child coming into Boarding School I thought.

The nun introduced her,

"This is Yvonne Hart," she said, "who has come to stay with us. She has come from Curacao, an Island in the West Indies. Her Mother is ill and her father has sent her here to complete her schooling. She will be in grade seven."

I had hoped she would be in grade eight like me but since I always played with the seventh graders anyway it did not matter. As soon as the bell rang after supper, meaning we could go outside and play for an hour, we all rushed outside and gathered around the new girl. It was always exciting when a new girl arrived but Yvonne was really different. Trees Peynenburg, the most popular girl in grade seven, who was also thirteen, placed herself beside Yvonne as if to protect her from all the stares and questions.

All the girls wanted to know everything about her. "Where did you learn to speak Dutch?" someone asked.

"We learn it in school at home" Yvonne said.

"What other language can you speak?" some one else asked.

"We speak Papiamento at home" Yvonne answered. "We also learned some English in school".

I was intrigued with the word "Papiamento" and that gave me the courage to speak up.

"Could you please say something in Papiamento?" I asked. Yvonne smiled at me and said a whole sentence. I did not understand any of it but some words sounded familiar.

"Thank you" I said and smiled back at her. Then I stepped back a bit so someone else could ask a question.

All of a sudden Trees said "Enough questions, let us play hit ball. It is still light, soon enough we won't be able to play outside after supper".

We chose two teams and some one used chalk to draw the two areas for the opposing teams. Betty threw the big volley ball in the air and whoever caught it could start, which would give that team an advantage. Being short I never caught the first ball. It was quite a wild game and we all liked it, even the ninth and tenth graders played with us some times. Yvonne caught on quickly. Though she was new

at the game she was fast and avoided being "out" successfully until only two people were left on her team. On ours too, just Trees and me. I caught the ball and hit one of the other team, which made us the winners. We were jumping up and down when the bell rang and we all lined up, hot and sweaty with red faces but giggling and happy.

First we went upstairs to the chapel on the second floor for evening prayers and then to the third floor dormitories. Yvonne got an empty cell on the window side, close to Trees who was also on that side. My cubicle was on the inside, next to the sister's cell, opposite the row of sinks because I did not have a dressing gown. We undressed in silence, brushed our teeth and climbed into our beds. When the lights were turned off there was complete silence. Anyone caught talking or out of their cell got severely punished. Occasionally we would sneak a peak over the dividers to whisper something but we usually were tired and went to sleep.

In the next few weeks Yvonne became very popular. Trees was definitely her best friend, but everyone else liked Yvonne too since she was fun to be with, laughed heartily and got away with murder with the nuns which brought some excitement in our boring existence.

I had to do more homework than the seventh graders. Many times I had to go to study hall after supper and could not play with them or sit with them. They all sat around one of the round tables which were new after the war and embroidered or did crochet or knitting. Yvonne liked to draw caricatures and was clever at it. She would do our portraits or sometimes the nuns, exaggerating their features but leaving them real enough so we could recognize them.

Trees and Yvonne always sat together, they giggled and laughed a lot, whispered behind their hands and passed little notes back and forth in study hall. When you are thirteen there are many things to share with your best friend. I did not have a best friend, but Betty, Linie, Ans and I were a foursome who played together a lot since we all liked wild games, jumping over stools, rollerskating, basketball and other ball games.

One day in the spring there was a lot of whispering going on between the older girls. They all stood in groups of two and three in the playground but stopped talking if a younger girl approached them. Even Annie did not say anything to me when I asked her what was going on.

During study hall time many notes went back and forth. Sister Marie-Antoine who was supervising us got called away and left the eldest girl in charge, which resulted in total bedlam. I asked around what happened, but no one would tell me. During supper there was silence and when we were finished Sister told Trees and Yvonne to come and see her in the visiting room promptly. Everyone else could go in the recreation hall. I asked my grade seven friends what had happened but no one was sure.

"Sister Cunera caught Trees and Yvonne in Trees' cell in the dormitory," Ans said. Then Betty said "They were kissing".

I did not think that was such a big deal. "So what?" I said "What is so bad about that?" Some of the girls looked at me as if I was an ignorant little kid, so I kept quiet. I wondered what they knew that I did not. We were all subdued and no one talked. After about an hour Yvonne and Trees came back with red faces, red eyes and both very upset.

"We were sent to the Rector." said Trees but did not explain further.

"They phoned my father" Yvonne said.

They both started to cry again and none of us knew what to say or do. Soon the bell rang for chapel and bed. I lay in bed awake for a long time wondering what they could have done to be sent to the Rector. Only big girls got sent to the Rectory some times, never seventh graders.

The next day all seemed normal again. Trees and Yvonne ate breakfast and went to school with us. They did not talk to us or to each other. At suppertime, Sister Theodata came to get Yvonne out of the dining hall. Her father was there and wanted to speak to her the little nun said. Yvonne looked at Trees, tears streaming down her face. Trees looked back very sad and clasped the fingers of both her hands together in a tight grip, showing her friendship.

Yvonne did not come back. I heard her Dad had taken her back to Curacao and then sent her to a school in the States. Trees was very quiet for the next few weeks. She did not play ball with us, talked very little and sat quietly around the table at night to embroider. I tried to cheer her up and her other friends tried as well. One day when we were alone together, I asked her "What happened? What did you do?"

"Nothing" said Trees, "that is the truth, but they would not believe us. I lost the best friend I ever had and my parents are very angry with me".

I did not understand at all what this was all about.

ANNIE GOES HOME

When I came out of school one day, I saw a group of my friends from grade seven standing in a circle on the playground near the entrance door to the dining hall. Their heads were close together and they looked as if they were gossiping about some one. When I came closer, Betty noticed me. They all looked at me in a funny way when I joined them,

"What's up?" I asked "who's in trouble?"

"No one" Betty said, "at least not one of us".

"Who then?" I asked, but at that moment the bell rang and we lined up to enter the dining room in silence.

The four o'clock snack consisted of four slices of bread with a small dollop of jam, hardly enough to cover one slice. We also had to drink a large glass of almost curdled milk, which left a large rim in the glass. The nun was in a bad mood and we did not get permission to talk but had to eat in silence. I looked at Betty who sat across from me and raised my eyebrows with a questioning look. She shook her head "no" and looked toward the place where my sister normally sat, farther along on my side of the long table. I looked too and noticed Annie was not there, her space was empty. Where was she, was she sick? Looking back at Betty I raised my eyebrows again and Betty lifted both hands palm upwards shrugging her shoulders to let me know that she had no idea where Annie was.

We finished our meal in silence and then lined up to go back to school for the study-hall session. I tried to whisper to Betty, but Sister Leonie pulled me back in my proper place. I stayed since I wanted to avoid her mean pinch. Once settled in my desk I quickly wrote a note to Betty, which I passed along to the girl in front of me to give to Betty who sat in the first row.

"Is Annie sick?" the note asked and I waited for Betty to turn around which she promptly did. She shook her head "No" but I still did not know where Annie was then. Maybe she had run away again. When Annie was in trouble she frequently ran home and then Papa brought her back.

I had a lot of homework so I concentrated on my French translation, my German wordlist and my history book. I quite liked school and history was my favourite subject, so the bell surprised me at seven o'clock. We went back to the dining hall for our evening meal, another four slices of bread with cheese or meat. This time the nun let us talk after a while and I immediately asked Betty "What happened, is it about Annie?"

"Yes", said Betty, "we think she is in trouble"

"What has she done?" I asked "is it serious?"

"I don't know" Betty said. "but the nun asked each of us if we had seen her since lunch."

It struck me then that I had not noticed her in school that afternoon but I did not always look around to her seat in the back of the class near the window. I had to squint at the blackboard to try and copy from it from my front seat. I had glasses since grade six but did not wear them because some one

had told me "Boy do you look ugly" when I first put them on in class. So I sat in the front seat and squinted.

Annie and I were both in grade eight, but other than in class we hardly ever were together. She stayed with the eighth graders, I stayed with the seventh graders who were my age. I had not missed her in the study room either since she often came late. Annie did not like studying much and tried to do as little as possible.

I was still looking puzzled at Betty when Sister Theodata, the portress nun, tapped me on the shoulder saying "Marietje you have a visitor".

"I do?" I asked surprised. This was highly unusual, a visitor on a school day at supper time. I followed the little nun to the visiting room and when she opened the door for me I saw Papa sitting in the armchair at the end of the big table. I went over to him and kissed his cheek.

"What are you doing here Papa" I asked "is everything alright, is anybody sick, where is Annie?"

My Dad smiled a little and shook his head.

"No one is sick" he answered "everybody is fine".

"What is the matter then" I said, "Is Annie in trouble?"

"Sit down doll", my Dad said, using his pet name for me. "Annie came home this afternoon and seemed quite upset. She had a run-in with one of the sisters and would like to stay home from now on".

"How about school?" I asked.

"There is a school in the Villapark which is a Catholic school too. She'll be going there"

I was quite stunned. Annie and I had always been together in boarding school. We always did the same things. We wore the same clothes, we were always treated exactly alike.

"Why now, Papa?" I asked, looking at my Dad's serious face. He did not explain.

"Did she get expelled?" I asked "What did she do?"

"Nothing" my Dad said, "she just wants to come home".

"Mama and I were talking about it and Mama thought that you would probably want to come home too. Would you?"

I stayed silent for a long while. I thought about starting all over in a new school, having to make new friends. I did not know what to say. I would live at home and walk to school every day. I was used to the routine of boarding school again and my friends here.

"No" I said, "I want to stay here". My Dad's face fell. He closed his eyes a minute and coughed turning his head away. When he looked at me again his eyes looked sad but his mouth smiled a tiny smile.

"All right" he said "if that is what you want. Don't you want to think about it? Mama and I thought you might be lonely here without Annie and that you would like to live at home".

"Papa" I said "when we were home in grade seven, because there was no school, I asked if I could stay home and go to Jenny's school like other children, but Mama and you said no, Annie and I

had to go back to Boarding school so we went. Now I am used to school again. I have a lot of nice friends. We are planning to go camping with six of my friends in the summer. Going to a new school where I do not know anyone would be too hard. I would like to stay here now. In Boarding School".

Papa slowly got up from his chair. He pulled me towards him and gave me a small hug.

"If that is what you want, you can stay here through grades nine and ten. I will tell Mama", he said "she will be surprised." When I walked with him to the front door he looked kind of sad. I felt terrible, felt like I had let him down by preferring the company of my friends to that of my family. I felt he did not understand my fear of the outside world, but I could not tell him.

CAMPING

Dinner was over and Sister rang the bell, giving all eighty girls permission to go outside for a period of recreation before bedtime. My friends and I ran to the farthest corner of the playground and huddled together to talk about our holiday plans. Betty, Jeanne, Ans, Nelly, Linie and I were going to camp for a week. We were all thirteen or fourteen. Only two weeks to go before the summer holidays started and we still had much to decide.

We had overcome the first hurdle, getting permission of our parents. I had had to beg my Dad to let me go, but my strict autocratic Dad did not allow me to go, unless we had an adult chaperone. That problem was solved now. Betty had two cousins in their early twenties who would come with us.

Now I still had a big problem. I did not own a bike, I could not afford to rent one and my two sisters did not own bikes either. After some discussion my friends suggested I ask Jenny, my oldest sister, to see if one of her friends would lend me her bike for a week. None of my friends even gave a thought to the fact that I could not ride a bike. They just assumed I did know how. I was the only one of the group in grade eight, but younger than all of them. Having been in Boarding school since I was six, I never had a chance to learn.

Sister Cunera was heading our way, so we all sauntered to the girls playing basket ball and joined in the game for the rest of the hour. I liked playing basket ball, I was short but quick and quite accurate in my throwing. Soon I was yelling enthusiastically when our side made a hit. At 8:45 the bell rang and we lined up to go to Chapel for evening prayers.

Settled in my bed later in my little cubicle, I thought about the bike problem. I had ridden a bike once when I was five. My sisters had put me on my aunt's bike, and told me to peddle while they held on to the bike. I got going and both of them let go. The street ran slightly downhill towards the canal and both Jenny and Annie yelled at me to stop. I did not know how and finally let myself fall just at the edge of the canal. The bike made a half-circle and ended up halfway over the edge, the front wheel turning still. That was my only biking experience and now I planned to ride 150 kilometers on somebody else's bike.

Three weeks later I was ready to go. I had borrowed a bike from Jenny's friend Thea. I had a suitcase packed on the luggage rack, a blanket roll on top. My Dad and Stepmother stood in front of the house to see me off. Dad had given me an Alka-Seltzer, left over from his American trip, because my stomach hurt terribly. He gave me a hug and I stepped on the pedal. I promptly fell over since the weight of the suitcase made me lose my balance. My knees were scraped and Mama got a band-aid.

My Dad shook his head when I got up to start again. He held on to the bike for a minute and this time I got going, slightly wobbly, but slowly getting more confident. I did not dare look back and wave, but I knew my Dad was anxiously watching me till I rounded the corner.

Except for the first twenty minutes, crossing the city, much of which I did on foot, I could ride a bicycle path all the way to Oirschot where Nelly and Jeanne lived and where we all were to meet. Nelly's Mother gave us some milk and sandwiches and then the six of us rode in single file on the road, since there was no bicycle path from here on.

I was proud of myself, all was going well until we tried to pass a wagon with hay, drawn by horses. It was wider than a truck and from the opposite side a big bus came our way. The others all stopped quickly and jumped off their bikes, but I did not have that expertise and rode into the ditch at the side of the road. It was dry but quite deep and for a minute I lay there thinking I could not get up.

The bus driver had stopped and came to see if I was hurt. He lifted the bike out of the ditch, made sure the spokes were not bent and the handlebar was straight. My friends did a thorough inspection of my legs and arms. Except for a few scratches here and there I was all right. The hay wagon was turning into a side road and the bus took off.

We all climbed back on our bikes and continued our ride. Betty decided to stay behind me just in case. I fell quite a few more times, seven in all, but by the time we got to our campground I was a confident cyclist, ready for the Tour de France, I thought.

Betty's cousins were already there and had made supper. We set up our tents and after eating supper we sat around the campfire, making plans for the week.

The week flew by. We swam in the big outdoor pool, rented row boats and rowed on the big lake, we hiked long distances and had nightly campfires, singing and talking. Betty's cousins more or less left us to our own devices and their supervision was minimal. At the end of the week we all rode our bikes home. I never fell once, felt I was as capable as all of my friends. A regular teenager.

FINAL EXAM

It was the 28th of July, the day we had anxiously waited for. The day of the final oral exam of the Junior High School. We six 10th graders had been the only ones left in boarding school for the last week, studying a bit and talking a great deal. All the other children had gone home for the summer holidays.

This morning we all dressed up because exams were formal affairs. The two sisters Meeuwis, Nelly and Jeanne had beautiful plaid skirts and angora sweaters, one pink, one light green. Jeanne was seventeen and Nelly sixteen. Tinie who was twenty-two, had a navy blue suit on with a white blouse. She looked like a teacher, but she was nice, we all liked her, even though she was much older. Corrie who was sixteen had a navy blue dress on with a silver locket holding a picture of her mother.

The other Corrie who was also sixteen had a pink dress with little flowers on it. I had a dress on that Jenny had loaned me since I had nothing suitable to wear. I thought I looked great in this rose taffeta dress, even though the hem hung a bit uneven. It had a large white collar that fell over the shoulders and a V-neck. I wore my mother's necklace with the garnet, which my Dad had given me the week before.

Sister Appolonia came into the visiting room where we had our breakfast and told us she would accompany us to the school where the exam was being held. We had hoped they would let us go on our own, but I guess the nuns felt they were still responsible for us until we passed the exam and were officially out of the boarding school.

We walked three abreast with Corrie and me beside Sister. She had known me since I was six and liked me. I quite liked her too since she was strict but fair. When we got to the Sacred Heart School, where the exam was being held, she told us all to think before we spoke and wished us luck. Then she left.

We all filed into a big cafeteria and stood around not knowing what was expected of us. A teacher rang a bell and told us to take a seat on the benches until our name was called. Then we would proceed into the gym where the exam was being held. Then she called twenty names starting with the letters A to H, which included Corrie van Hoorn and Tinie van Hutte.

The four of us were left sitting at the end of the table. We looked around at all the other girls. I waved at a few girls who were in our class. They were not in Boarding School but were day students and we did not have much contact with them except in class.

"Let's play cards", I suggested, "it will pass the time."

Jeanne widened her eyes and said disbelieving, "You brought the cards?"

I pulled the deck of illegal cards out of the pocket of Jenny's dress and dealt thirteen cards after shuffling expertly. We played hearts and stopped only to listen when the next twenty girls were called after the first twenty came out of the gymnasium. The next batch came out around 10:30 followed by all the

officials who were having a coffee break. They all went into the Principal's Office, but one of them stopped by our table when he saw us playing cards.

"You girls must have nerves of steel." he said laughing "I have never seen anyone playing cards while waiting for an exam". I thought 'what does he know!' We played cards because we were nervous.

When recess was over all the officials filed back into the gym and the next twenty names were called. Jeanne, Nelly and I were all three on that list. Just inside the gym we had to give our name and school to two teachers sitting at a table. Then each of us got a list of ten numbers in different order. My first number was three and I proceeded to the table with a number 3 on a little flag post. The subject was Religion and a Priest and a Nun immediately started to ask me questions.

I had been in Boarding School for almost ten years, taught by nuns, going to mass every morning, having sermons galore and the only books we were allowed to read were books about Saints. I had no trouble at all answering the questions and began to feel very confident. This exam business would be a cinch. The Priest smiled broadly at me when the little bell rang, indicating everyone had to switch tables. He asked me if I would like to be a nun. Shaking my head very firmly I answered: "No, I am going to get married and have six kids". They both smiled then and wished me luck.

I hurried to table four where two serious men in blue suits made me translate a paragraph of "Mon Oncle et mon Cure" and then asked me some questions in French about the main character in the book. Since I had loved the book and had much empathy for the orphaned girl, this was easy.

By now I was feeling much better. My stomach felt less tight and the band around my head had loosened up. I actually could smile when I reached the next table. It was Physics and the man asked me to draw an iron. "Inside or outside"? I joked, knowing full well he meant the element inside. They both laughed and looked less stern and then asked several more questions about lightning, hail, the law of Archimedes, electricity, and radio transmissions. Nothing I could not handle. When I was finished I wondered why I had studied so hard on that subject since they did not ask me a tenth of what I knew.

This was the way it went at all the other tables, History, Geography, English, Dutch Literature. My last table was math and they handed me a pencil and a piece of paper. Then they asked me a math problem, the kind I hate figuring out, the speed of a train with opposing wind and curving track. I really knew how to do this, but my figures never came out quite right. The same thing happened with several other problems. I thought by then I had failed math completely. I walked out of the gym quite dejected. The others looked at my face and asked what was wrong. Then Corrie Wintermans had to go in and five of us compared notes.

We ate our lunch and then walked around the playground. It was a beautiful day but soon we went back inside. We were relaxed enough now to talk about the examiners, about who was cute and who was ugly, who was mean and who was nice. Gradually we got laughing so loud that a teacher came to tell us to be quiet.

Finally it was four o'clock and a bell rang. One of the officials came out and called out several names. When these girls came out some of them were crying. They had failed the exam.

Then everyone else was called into the gym and one by one we were handed our diploma and our list of marks. I looked at my mark in Math and saw I had a seven. I could not believe it. I ran outside, where Papa and Annie were waiting. Papa handed me a bouquet of flowers and kissed me. "I had no doubt about you passing" he said.

Papa looked at my list of marks and said smiling

"Just as well you are coming out of that Convent, a ten for Religion is just too good to be true. With these marks they will accept you in Jenny's school without any problem. I waved at my class mates who all had family around them.

Some were being picked up in cars. All of a sudden I realized I would not see them again. None of them lived in the city, they were going home to a different life. I too would have a completely different life from now on. I would be in a normal family, going to school during the day and coming home every day after school.

I would also have no friends. I would go to a different school where I would know no one. I got quite scared and I slowed down a bit. Papa looked at me and asked "Is something wrong?"

I told him I would miss my friends from boarding school.

"You will be able to go and visit them once in a while" he said "and soon you will make new friends".

Annie came to walk beside me and put her arm around me. "I am so glad you are going to be home" she said, "we will be able to do things together"

"First you have to do your exam tomorrow Annie", Papa said, "I am sure you will do fine too".

Annie was not going to another school after her exam. She was sixteen and was going to get a job. She wanted to become a nurse but had to be eighteen before she could start her nursing studies at a hospital.

I still was anxious, but I could not tell Papa my other worries. I was not sure how I would get along with my stepmother. I knew she did not really like me. Would she even be more critical when I lived at home? I would have to try and be careful to do things right. Annie and Jenny would help me to get used to the outside world. It would take some time after almost ten years in the Heavenly Kingdom, but as Papa said, I could not stay there forever. He smiled at me and told me "It will be great to have all my children at home from now on."