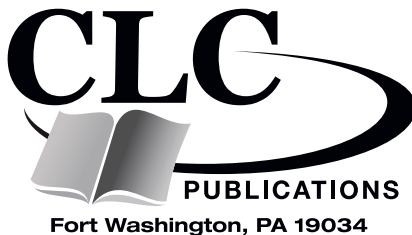


Corrie ten Boom's

**PRISON
LETTERS**

Corrie ten Boom



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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version of the Bible, 1611.

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These letters, sketches, and diary entries have been shared generously by Corrie ten Boom over the years. This material has been translated by different people at different times and in different places, and comparisons may sometimes suggest discrepancies in the presentations. All are agreed that the courage, the stamina, and the faith are undiminished—no matter the cell number, the date, or the interpretation.

To my family on earth
and in heaven
whose testimony lives on through these letters
and through my life.

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INTRODUCTION

During the last world war, as the German armies rolled over most of Europe, crushing countries in their path, Adolf Hitler set into operation a plan to exterminate all Jews. Many of the people of Holland responded by doing their utmost to help Dutch Jews escape this peril. My own family and my friends and I did all that we could do to save Jewish lives until we were betrayed and arrested.

At that time my father was eighty-four years of age, and friends had often warned him that if he persisted in hiding Jews in his home under the very eye of the occupying armies, he could surely face imprisonment.

“I am too old for prison life,” my father replied, “but if that should happen, then it would be, for me, an honor to give my life for God’s ancient people, the Jews.” I recall with great clarity the day, February 28, 1944, that we went down the winding staircase with our whole family and our friends. For some of them, it was the last time they would ever feel the worn staircase railing of the beloved Beje—name for our home, located in the Barteljorisstraat—in their hands.

Father leaned heavily on my arm, and, passing the large Frisian clock in the hall, he suggested that I pull up the weights to wind it. He could not realize that the next day when the clock unwound, there would be no one, only silence, in that so recently crowded, lively, and joyful house and that never

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again as a family would we enter Father's beloved house with its many clocks.

Thirty-five of our family and friends were led through the Smedestraat toward the police station that day. We then entered a large gymnastics room and sat down together as a family on one of the gymnasium mats that were spread out on the floor.

That night God used Father to prepare each of us in a special way for the unknown times that lay ahead. Father asked my brother Willem to read Psalm 91, and then Father prayed.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. (91:1-4)

That night in the police station was long and full of tension, but we were able to discuss the most important matters facing us. As we were loaded into the police van the next morning on our way to the Scheveningen prison, people of our town of Haarlem stood quietly in the street with tears in their eyes. It was the last time they would see Father, the "grand old man of Haarlem."

After an hour's ride the van door opened, and the gates of the prison closed behind us. We were ordered to stand with our faces pressed against the red brick wall. When our names were called, I passed by Father, who was sitting on a chair. He looked up, and we heard him softly saying, "The Lord be with you, my daughters."

Introduction

From that moment forward, everything in our lives was changed. We did not know what was ahead of us, but I was certain of one thing: that Jesus would never leave us or forsake us and that, for a child of God, no pit could be so deep that Jesus was not deeper still.

During my months of solitary confinement, I often felt lonely and afraid. In such moments I recalled that last night with my elderly father sharing Psalm 91 and praying. I could remember some of those verses, especially that “he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” I would close my eyes and visualize that kind of protection, “he shall cover thee with his feathers,” and with that thought in mind, I would fall asleep.

The letters in the first half of this book were written from the Scheveningen prison, where my sister Betsie was confined in a cell with other prisoners, while I was kept in solitary confinement. There are also letters that were sent to us by my sister, Nollie, and her husband, Flip, and their children; some written by my brother, Willem, and his wife, Tine, and their family; and others written by various relatives and friends. We were detained in Scheveningen from February 29, 1944, to June 5, 1944.

Prisoners were permitted to receive very few letters in both the Scheveningen prison and in the Vught prison, where we were later sent. Thus, sometimes many people shared in the writing of one letter, just as Betsie and I would write one letter to many people. The brief sketches included in this book are added feelings of my own on life in the prisons. I was able to include them in letters I sent home.

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When on June 6 Betsie and I were suddenly transported together to Vught, a German concentration camp in Holland, we were much happier in the sense that we were once again together after a long and difficult separation. I was in my early fifties then, and Betsie was seven years older. Betsie was chronically ill from pernicious anemia, and the prison diet adversely affected this disease, so she was occasionally treated by a prison doctor. However, one only requested to see a doctor when very ill, for even the sickest patients were discouraged by such cruelties as having to stand at attention throughout their wait for medical help. Betsie and I had been very close over many years and had learned to depend on each other for many little things.



The brief sketches included in this book are added feelings of my own on life in the prisons. I was able to include them in letters I sent home.



It was a great comfort and blessing to be together at Vught and no longer confined to cells. Still, barracks life, with its long work hours under the pressures of both mental and physical cruelties, was not easy, and our lives were in constant danger, for we were in the grip of an enemy who could, at the slightest whim, do whatever he wished with us. It was typical of the sadistic mind to provide, for show, the niceties of massage and other sophisticated medical care, while for the prisoner, punishment and relentless hunger and neglect were the routine practice.

Introduction

Betsie and I wrote several letters from Vught. We were, technically, permitted to write one letter every two weeks. This letter was, of course, censored by prison authorities, and if individuals or groups were receiving special punishment, we could often neither send nor receive mail at all. Recognizing this censorship and also the great concern of our family for our well-being, we did not feel free to express in letters the harder side of prison life. However, in both the letters from Scheveningen and from Vught, we worked out a simple code to replace terms that we felt would be censored or do us harm. I have explained some of this in brackets in the letters.

Most of the letters in this book were smuggled out of Vught by a German soldier who hid them in clean laundry that we prisoners washed for the Germans. This young man also took the enclosed sketches for me. Some of these I had written on toilet paper in my cell at Scheveningen and hidden under my clothing all that time while in camp at Vught. I had the opportunity, through this sympathetic soldier, to send them to my sister. It was a dangerous procedure. If one letter were intercepted, the penalty would be at least prolonged imprisonment. But we took the risk to send the letters and sketches out.

Nollie saved every note, including bits and pieces of a kind of diary that Betsie kept, and gave them to me after the war. It was only a year ago (1974) that, after many years, I read through all these letters and notes and saw what a precious remembrance they are.

In September 1944 the allied forces liberated part of Holland. When they attacked the Germans in Holland, countless numbers of Dutch prisoners were hastily sent to Germany. Thousands were killed, and no one knows how many were transported in boxcars to concentration camps deep inside

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Germany. On September 4, 1944, many women, including Betsie and me, were shipped to Ravensbrück, north of Berlin. Prisoners there were forbidden contact with the outside world, and thus we have no letters from that time.

I feel fortunate though, that the letters presented here have been preserved. Many letters sent to Betsie and me and many letters that we wrote while in prison, of course, never did reach their destination. Other letters were so thoroughly censored that little was left of them.

But God, I know, helped to keep the ones in this book safe, surely for the purpose of my one day presenting them to others as a reminder of the great love He gave us and the comfort of His presence wherever we were.