Jan de Vries

A Life in Healing

Jan de Vries

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JAN DE VRIES: A LIFE IN HEALING

Jan de Vries

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PART ONE

A STEP AT A TIME

Foreword

You will treasure this book. The life of Jan de Vries is enthralling. More importantly, his philosophy of life and healing are of the utmost value.

Jan de Vries was born in a small Dutch town in 1937. Under the Nazi occupation, he helped his mother find food for people she was hiding. Little Jan ran horrific risks; he still carries the mark of an explosion and he has a couple of squint fingers because his hands were frozen as he waited for hours in a queue for prunes for his grandmother. At one point in this hell, the child prayed that if his mother and he were saved, he would care about the well-being of people for the rest of his life.

Jan gained his degree when he was 21. He continued to pursue a special interest in pharmacy. In 1959 he was in Amsterdam, and he happened to go to a lecture that touched on homoeopathy.

‘What do you think?’ asked the man in the next seat.

‘This is for spinsters and old wives,’ said Jan.

‘You must have a very small mind,’ came the reply.

This was one of those moments that can galvanise and define a life. The man in the next seat was Alfred Vogel, the great authority on herbs, natural healing and homoeopathy. Jan’s heart and instincts, despite what he had said to Vogel, were passionately against the small-minded, and this passion is part of Jan’s creative life force today as much as when he was a student. Jan went on to study osteopathy in Germany and Holland. He managed to get into China, where he studied acupuncture. He worked in Taiwan. All his life, he has explored different modes of healing. He also worked

with Vogel, who had challenged him at the lecture; indeed, Jan became the only pupil whom Vogel ‘really taught’.

Some 40 years after the lecture in Amsterdam, Jan de Vries was in London. He made time in a crowded schedule for a stranger who had no appointment. That stranger was me. I had just been diagnosed with a malignant cancer of which a textbook writes that ‘the median survival time is under a year in untreated patients, and two to three years with treatment’. I was in despair. But I happened to read Jan de Vries’s book, *Cancer and Leukaemia*, and its account of an elaborate Chinese breathing exercise with visualisations. I tried the exercise and had a hunch that it was helping me. So I tracked down Dr de Vries.

I describe the meeting in my book, *Living Proof: A Medical Mutiny*:

> When my turn comes to see him, de Vries writes notes, as if there is not a second to spare, but he scarcely looks at the pad.
>
> His eyes focus on mine.
>
> For a whole minute.
>
> Perhaps more.
>
> I can hear his pen scratching, otherwise we might be anywhere. Then there is a shutdown of his concentration and he writes a prescription.
>
> ‘One look at you, and you do not need chemotherapy.’
>
> I am so surprised that I do not ask why. Dr de Vries’s extra-sensory minute, if it was that, is over. He is recharging his energy for the next patient . . .
>
> ‘You can sort out this melanoma. Goodbye.’

At the time of this meeting with Jan, five cancer specialists, independently of each other, were urging me to start chemotherapy: if I did not, they said, the probability was that I would be dead in a year. But I decided to follow the contrary advice of Jan. I felt, by instinct, that something radical had occurred during our meeting, an inner world had been pierced – I write about it further in *Living Proof: A Medical Mutiny*. Jan also prescribed potassium drops (to help alkalise the body) and endorsed the Chinese breathing

exercises and nutritional therapies which I was starting to follow.

Eight years on, I still have not had chemotherapy or radiotherapy. And I continue to do my job.

Living Proof: A Medical Mutiny, was published in March 2002. Jan read it and was astonished when he came to my account of our meeting because he discovered that I am the first patient, to his knowledge, to suspect that he has an extra sense of intuition that assists him in his work.

So this was another chance meeting that produced great results. Jan's generosity in 1994, when he fitted in a stranger with no appointment, helped to save my life, just as he helped his mother – although in a different way – to save lives when he was a boy under the Nazis. Also, *Living Proof* sparked off this magnificent autobiography by Jan, *A Step at a Time*.

A Step at a Time reveals that Jan became aware as a boy, at the age of about four or five, of his extra-sensory gifts. Yet, as I read his pages, I also think of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Jan was accorded a gift, but he turned it into an achievement. He treasured God's blessing but he also studied pharmacy, osteopathy, acupuncture, herbalism and many other approaches to healing. Like the good servants in Matthew, he laboured with hard work and humility to double the talent he was given. 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' says the Lord when he returns from the far country where he had travelled. And he also says to the servants who had worked, 'Enter thou into the joy of the Lord.'

Jan's sense of joy in life was clear to me even in his hurried consultation over my cancer. His joy was a presence, a psychic reality, a catalyst for healing, an unspoken celebration. I wrote at the time that 'de Vries is generous', as in one of my favourite texts: 'So let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.'

(2 Corinthians 9:7) It is a quality you will find on every page of *A Step at a Time*.

Jan was a turning point in my own struggle with cancer, and I can try to state his philosophy by linking him with my next turning point, the senior Professor of Medicine in the University of Oxford, Sir David Weatherall FRS. In *Living Proof*, I describe how I sat in the Institute of Molecular Medicine, a world centre of advanced research, and told Sir David about Jan and the various therapies of diet and visualisation that I followed.

> 'Do you think I am mad to try what I am doing?' I ask.
>
> Sir David Weatherall is a man who thinks for as long as he wishes before he speaks. A minute or two pass.
>
> 'What you must understand, Mr Gearin-Tosh, is that we know so little about how the body works.'
>
> I am astonished.
>
> Sir David repeats his remark.
>
> 'We know so little about how the body works.'
>
> Nine short words.

It is in the context of these nine short words that doctors of vision, dedication and humility are so crucial. Jan pleads in *A Step at a Time* for so-called orthodox and complementary medicine to work together. He aptly quotes the biblical expression 'where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29:18). Sir David wrote for *Living Proof*, 'Though I do believe passionately in scientific medicine, I have not got to the stage of being so blinkered that I cannot believe that at least some aspects of the more complementary approach to medicine may have a lot to offer. I think they could be put to scientific test, and should be, but whether this will happen is far from clear.'

Mankind has always needed men and women of vision who step ahead of their time and who have the courage to do so. *A Step at a Time* is Jan's wise, proportionate and modest title. But its inner meaning is that of Sir David Weatherall: a step *ahead* of time. A step ahead of mere

convention. A step, certainly, ahead of small-mindedness, the peril which Alfred Vogel articulated to Jan almost half a century ago at that lecture in Amsterdam. A step that leads into the unknown. A step that others should follow.

Steps that lead forward have never been more necessary than they are today. They are the value and joy of Jan's life and of *A Step at a Time*.

Michael Gearin-Tosh,
St Catherine's College,
University of Oxford.

1

Second Fiddle to the Ironing Board

On a wintry, snowy day in January 1937 (and in Holland winter can be very, very cold), my mother started a chore that she had hated all her life but, nevertheless, always did herself – ironing! This was a job she really loathed, and in the company of a pound of cherry chocolates perched on the end of the ironing board, she tried to get through the pile of clothes as quickly as possible. However, right in the middle of this, she realised that she was going into labour. She sent my brother Nicolas, who was 13 at the time, to ask the local midwife (who lived just round the corner) to come. She hurried immediately to the house and not long after, at ten past four in the afternoon, I was born. (At that time in Holland, babies were always born at home.) There, by the River IJssel, which was completely frozen, in Voorstraat 51, a very healthy boy arrived. My mother's friend came in to help and, as soon as she got things settled, she left and walked up to my father's factory to tell him that he was richer by one son.

I was wanted very much by my mother when I was born, but I was a great disappointment to my father, because he had wanted a daughter. He was making his way home from work when my mother's friend met him in the street and told him the wonderful news. He was so disappointed that he went back to the factory straight away.

My father was very set in his ways and, although he was a proper gentleman, he lived in his own world, dominated by

music and religion. My mother, who had a very friendly, gentle character, coped with my father's ways. Nevertheless, she had to take the lead. She was a great personality and I was very close to her as I grew up. My mother was also a very hard-working woman, whilst my father went at a slower pace.

The little place in which I was born, Kampen, had a tremendous history. Although my father's profession – cigar-making – was the main industry of the area, enamel pots and pans were also manufactured, and agriculture played an important part too, being carried on from one generation to the next. Several large buildings – for instance, the local council hall and the church (which was almost as big as a cathedral) – dominated the town. There was a lot of life in that little place as people busied themselves with their merchandise. It was also a very close community. The people of Kampen are fiercely loyal to each other. Even today, if an outsider criticises a Kampenaar to another local, he will loyally defend him.

The IJssel was very busy with ships going up and down the river. Money was spent on treasures that were housed in the old council hall and the church, thus helping to preserve the past for future generations, giving a picture of what life was like for their ancestors. Some very valuable pieces are still there today which show that, at the time, Kampen was one of the richest Hanze cities. The cigar industry was widespread and I remember well the hundreds and hundreds of cigar-makers who ensured that they produced the very best – even the cigars that Churchill smoked were made in our little town.

A number of very famous people were born in this town, including Professor Kolff, who invented the kidney dialysis machine in the 1940s, and whom I will talk more about later. It was well known for its two theological universities. Religion caused a lot of strife in the town and, although largely Protestant, there were large groups of many different

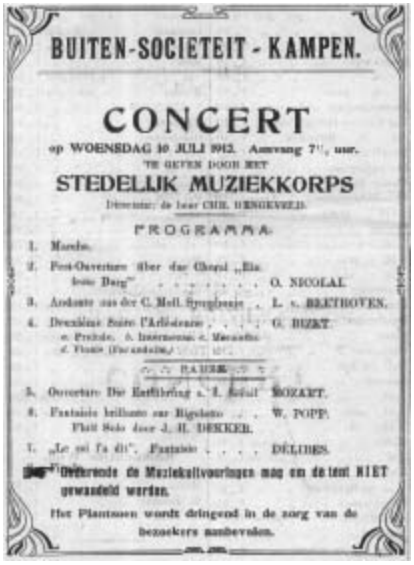
religious bodies in Kampen. At one time, standing on a bridge in the town, you could count 12 different places of worship and I don’t know how many manses for ministers and lay preachers. There were many divisions, and conflict about moral issues, right and wrong, dominated people’s thoughts. Perhaps that was the reason I began to question these things later on in life.

A military high school was located in the town, and some of my uncles (who were military officers) underwent training there. It became a very famous school as, even before the war, Germany sent soldiers there for training. Overall, our little town was booming and it certainly had a lot of positive energy.

My family’s roots were there. Many generations, both from my father’s and mother’s side, were born and brought up in Kampen, and they had a great influence on its history. The IJssel, stemming from the Rhine, was a great river for sailing along. I remember my father and I sailing there, enjoying the beauty of the scenery and the town.

My father was the product of a Jewish family from the beautiful town of Amsterdam. Although in her day it was somewhat unusual, my grandmother had married a much younger man; she was very good-looking. I remember her as a very kind-hearted person and, if we went to visit her on a Saturday, she would give us one or two pennies to make sure that we had enough money to buy some apples or other fruit when we returned – she didn’t like us to buy sweets. It was always a delight to visit my grandmother and see my grandfather smoking his very long pipe in the cosy atmosphere of their home. My grandfather on my mother’s side was in the cigar industry, and my grandmother was a great source of information. We loved to go and visit her and, later on in life, although she was nearly blind and we were grown up, she was still of tremendous help in answering any questions we had about our youth, as she was a fount of information. I used to kneel on the floor,

listening to her for hours, as she was also a wonderful storyteller. She told us all about the little town where I was born, and its rich history. She had a tremendous interest in military life and, because all her sons were in the army, she hoped that they would become military men of courage. She proudly told us that all her brothers were involved in music. One was a music teacher and the other two were conductors of well-known bands, and, during their lifetimes, their music was often to be heard on the radio. I still have some adverts which promoted them as being the best flute players in the country, and I thought I would take the opportunity to show one of these here.



BUITEN-SOCIETEIT - KAMPEN.

CONCERT

op WOENSDAG 10 JULI 1912. Aanvang 7½ uur.

TE GEVEN DOOR HET

STEDELIJK MUZIEKKORPS

Directeur: de Heer CHR. HENGEVELD.

PROGRAMMA.

1. Marsch.
2. Feest-Ouverture über das Choral „Ein feste Burg" . . . . . O. NICOLAI.
3. Andante aus der C. Moll. Symphonie . . L. v. BEETHOVEN.
4. Deuxième Suite l'Arlésienne . . . . . G. BIZET.
   a. Prélude. b. Intermezzo. c. Menuetto.
   d. Finale (Farandole.)

PAUZE.

5. Ouverture Die Entführung a. d. Serail . MOZART.
6. Fantasie brillante sur Rigoletto . . . W. POPP.
   Fluit Solo door J. H. DEKKER.
7. „Le roi l'a dit". Fantaisie . . . . . DELIBES.

Overtreding de Muziekuitvoeringen mag om de tent NIET gewandeld worden.

Het Plantsoen wordt dringend in de zorg van de bezoekers aanbevolen.

J.H. Dekker was my grandmother’s oldest brother, who was quite a famous musician in his day. He, together with two other brothers, also founded the City Music Orchestra.

My grandmother also related stories about her own life, especially about the time when she was employed as a nanny to care for the Lord Provost of Delft’s family. In those days, when she was young, that was quite an achievement. She would tell us some memorable stories about the times when King William III visited the Lord Provost Seimensvaders. When the old king died, she recalled, the

students climbed onto the roof of the house to see him being buried in the cathedral in Delft, and she remembered all the shouting and screaming that went on. When I think back to that story, I realise not a lot has changed. My grandmother was a wonderful cook, too, and we often enjoyed sumptuous meals with her.

I feel privileged to have had grandparents who took an interest in us as youngsters, and also to have been born in Kampen, which had a charm and vibrancy that is still very much in evidence today. I am always happy to return. However, not long after I was born, dark clouds slowly came over Holland as the Second World War loomed. It was not an easy world in which to grow up.

2

Batten Down the Hatches

The war started and misery was everywhere. Food was very restricted and the nights were dark, with no lights. People had no idea what was happening and I was too young to understand what was going on. However, as the war began to take its toll, I also came to experience the unhappiness that everybody was talking about. My father and brother were taken away by the Germans and deported. First of all, my father was sent to Apeldoorn in Holland and then Nicolas, my brother, was deported to Germany.

My mother, being kind-hearted, helped everybody around her and had a lot of people in danger from the Nazis staying in the house, even hiding them under the floorboards when she knew the Germans were after them. She was quite a forceful woman and, as she was very much against the Nazi regime, people from all sides turned to her for help. In her own quiet way, she worked tirelessly to ensure people's safety and played an important role in providing a safe shelter – not only in the short term, but sometimes also for longer periods.

Because I was very young – still only eight when the war ended – and could easily walk along the streets without causing suspicion, I was able to help in many ways and worked very hard to assist my mother. My mother knew of various sources she could rely on to obtain some food for the people she was hiding. One day, she told me to go to a certain farm – no questions asked, I was just told to do it. I

was informed that the farmer would be waiting for me with his hay cart and I was to direct him to our house. It is quite interesting to note that farms were very often located in the middle of our town and shelter was provided for the cattle in the backs of houses. People were accustomed to seeing hay being hauled up and put through upstairs windows to be used for feeding the animals. This was very much the done thing in those days, so a farmer with a full load of hay going through the streets was a common sight. The particular farmer I was sent to meet had a cart laden with hay, pulled by two horses. However, unknown to me, a Jewish girl was hiding among the hay and had to be transported to our house, where she remained in safety for quite some time. I never realised at that time that I was actually helping with the underground work, but in so doing I saved this girl's life, because she managed to survive the war without being caught. My mother took situations like this in her stride and we luckily managed to get enough food for the people living with us.

Food was hard to come by. As I mentioned earlier, my father was in the tobacco industry and a lot of people knew him. So, at around the age of five, I was frequently sent to try and get some milk from the nearby farms so that my mother could feed the people she was hiding. The farmers knew my father well and I was often lucky enough to get some milk from them, but it was a very, very sad time.

Two things happened during the Second World War that made me determined to help others. At the age of about four or five, I remember very clearly going with my mother one Sunday afternoon to visit an uncle of hers (a brother of my grandmother). I always loved to visit my great-uncles because they were, as I have said, very good musicians and all of them could play an instrument of some sort. It was marvellous to hear them playing the flute, the violin and the trumpet. Sadly, the uncle we had gone to visit that day was quite ill and, while I was at his house, something happened

which has stayed with me all my life. Because I had never visited a seriously ill person before, I was surprised when a very bitter taste suddenly came into my mouth, and I had to ask my mother if we could leave as I thought I was going to be sick. I was not actually sick at all, but the bitter taste remained in my mouth until we had returned home. The next day, my great-uncle died.

Later in life, I realised that a bitter taste always appears in my mouth when somebody is dying. I really didn't understand its significance at first, but then I noticed that, wherever we were, if there was somebody there who was very ill and I got this taste in my mouth, then usually the next day that person would die. It is a great gift, because if I meet patients and am uncertain about their health, but get that taste in my mouth, I always send them immediately to their doctor or the hospital. Very often, I have not even needed to examine these patients or manipulate them in any way, because I knew that they were very seriously ill. This particular phenomenon has stayed with me throughout my life.

Another very peculiar thing happened during the winter of 1944. At that time, we often had to live in darkness. When there was a threat of bombardment, we were naturally completely cut off from electricity. In addition to this, our windows had to be covered with thick black paper during the black-out so that no light was visible from the houses. We had no candles to provide us with light. We did, however, have a little windmill at home, which helped a bit with this problem. During air raids we were locked in underground shelters. I noticed that when I was sitting across from people, if it was pitch dark, I could see colours around them. Later on in life, when I learned that everybody has an aura, I realised that was what I could see. Occasionally some people can see these colours. When I learned about Kirlian photography (which can be used to photograph auras), I realised that this was not so odd, but a

science that existed, although auras are not seen by everybody. I was aware that these things were gifts that God had entrusted to me, which I could use in the future to benefit others. My perception of things became so strong that usually I could intuitively tell my mother when there was danger around.

Because I was very underweight and, as the doctor had told my mother, completely undernourished, I became quite nervous. As a result of this nervous condition, I often became uncontrollable and difficult to handle. In fact, I was always looking for something to do, as I got bored very quickly. I realised what the Germans were capable of, though, and knew very well that I could not do anything wrong or they would shoot me. I became more aware of this when I heard of acquaintances of my mother's who were shot because of their underground work in the Resistance. My mother had to be very careful of the dangers involved when protecting others against the enemy.

One day, I put the whole town under tremendous stress. My mother, who was trying to get coupons for the many people she was looking after, was standing in a queue at the distribution office. As my father's youngest brother was a civil servant and in charge of distributing these coupons, I knew that he would help my mother to the best of his ability. Naturally, after a while of waiting in the queue, I got very bored. I noticed a bell quite high up by a drainpipe and, to relieve my boredom, quickly climbed up the pipe and pressed the bell. It turned out to be an air raid alarm and the whole town was thrown into a state of panic. The Germans were raging and everybody was greatly distressed. My uncle, I remember, came out of his office, shouting about what could have happened. They knew that as the alarm had gone off from that distribution office, somebody must have touched the bell. Until today, nobody ever found out who did it because I was like quicksilver, and speedily

hid myself under my mother's big raincoat! The newspapers reported the alarm but, as nobody knew who had set it off, luckily I escaped notice.

That was the sort of thing I got up to and my mother, I am sure, had quite a job keeping me under control. When it came to pestering the Germans, I was always number one, because I really hated them, knowing how much harm they were doing to our town and its people. Usually, when they marched along the street, as boys we would yell at them, singing '*Tom Tom kijk eens om, kijk eens naar beneden. Kijk eens naar die grote stad. Heel Berlin is plat*.' The words meant that when the English (Tommies) flew over our town, they were to look down, see what the Germans had done and then go and flatten Berlin. This made the Germans absolutely furious and usually we had to run away very quickly, otherwise they would have shot us. At the beginning of the war they were not so vicious, but as the war heightened they became more and more frightening.

Food was always in short supply. I remember once, when we were very hungry, I heard that a greengrocer had prunes. I had never seen a prune in all my life but stood the whole day in the fierce cold waiting in a queue to get some as a surprise for my grandmother. After standing there all morning and afternoon, at seven o'clock at night, I was so disappointed when the greengrocer's wife told all the people who had been waiting patiently in the cold that her husband hadn't come back, so there would be no prunes for them. When I went to my grandmother's house, she noticed that both my little fingers were almost frozen and managed to save them, although they have been squint ever since. If anybody asks me why I don't have straight pinkies, I explain to them that it happened during the war.

The war kept raging on. Things became more and more difficult and many Dutch people were half-starved. Schooling was almost impossible. My school was taken over by the Germans and used as a pigsty, so it became

redundant. In the midst of all this turmoil, there was a little bright point. On a very wintry day, during an air raid, my little sister was born. I knew there was something going on as I was put out of the house. A short time later, I heard that I had a little sister, which would have delighted my father but, by this time, he had been taken away by the Germans, together with my brother. I can still remember the posters that were put up on noticeboards throughout the town decreeing that all men under the age of 65 had to enlist with the Germans, either in Holland or in Germany. Although a lot of men were deported to Germany, many remained in Holland. However, those who did not enlist ran the risk of being picked up and classed as an anti-Nazi. The difficult part was recognising collaborators, as you never knew who they were. They would then report you to the Germans for not having signed up and these people were then caught and deported, like my father and brother – some of them had to endure great hardship.

Everybody was delighted by the birth of my sister, until clouds gathered over that happiness. The doctor who was in charge of the birth found that she had been born with a cancerous tumour on her back. My mother, being as strong as ever, arranged a meeting that morning, took things in hand and said to the doctor that she would try and get some advice from Professor Kolff, a well-known surgeon and the inventor of the artificial kidney machine, now known as kidney dialysis. He examined my sister and told my mother that the tumour had been caused by an unbalanced food pattern – the result, in other words, of the limited variety of food available during the war. This had made our diet very one-sided. I often thought later that he was one of the first orthodox doctors who recognised how important food was in relation to good health, and that unbalanced food patterns can cause problems and possibly disease.

Our doctor and Professor Kolff decided that my sister would have to go to nearby Zwolle for treatment.

Unfortunately, the doctor sympathised with the Germans but, fortunately for my mother, he managed to get transport to take my sister there, where she became the youngest person in the world to receive radium treatment, which was successful. My sister was saved, and is still alive and kicking.

After the birth of my sister, when things got back to normal a bit, I had more and more free time and was usually quick to get into mischief. One day I had a tremendous shock when some boys and I were searching for food. I remember being very hungry, because I had been sitting on the refuse heap at the local milk factory all morning looking for little pieces of black coal that had not been burned, so that I could give these to my poor old grandmother. I sat there for many hours and came home with no more than a pound of little pieces of black coal. In the afternoon, we went around rooting for food and I remember, as so often happened, that I had been eating grass to keep my rumbling tummy quiet. During our search, we came across an enormous car, full of food. I was amazed at what was in that car and had never seen the likes of it before – there were tins and packets, sugar and butter of unknown quantity. It was like paradise, and not a German in sight. Because I was small and very quick, I went into the car and started to throw out the food. After a while, planes came over and started to shoot at the car. Our lives were really in danger at that moment, and we crawled to the river where we hid ourselves in the rushes, terrified that they would find us and we would be shot. That experience left me with a small dent in my head where one of the grenade pieces hit it but I was lucky because it did not do any real damage. Amazingly, that was the only physical war wound I received. Often when people make fun of alternative medicine, I say to them, ‘This is one of the reasons I have a hole in my head,’ and let them feel the dent on top of my skull.

There were many great miracles in the Second World War, and one I shall never forget happened very late one night. At the time my mother was hiding quite a number of people in the house. The doorbell rang and I awakened to hear my mother going to the door. There stood a man wearing one clog and one normal shoe. He took a piece of paper out of his pocket and said to my mother that he had been given her address as a safe place to go to, and could he please come in as he had escaped from a ship which was taking him to a concentration camp. My mother let him in. He had scabies from top to toe, but she covered him with ichthyol ointment, which is still used today for scabies. It was lucky that she dealt with the man so quickly, because my aunt came over to warn my mother of a commotion in the street. The Germans were looking for a man who had escaped. My mother hid him under the floorboards, where he joined the other people already hiding there, and said to me, ‘Now we have to go down on our knees and pray very hard that God will save us.’ The Germans were going around like lions turning over every house from top to bottom. Then the miracle happened. Although they turned over every other house, they never even touched our front door – one of the real miracles that I experienced during the war.

Not long after, my mother was asked to go to Arnhem Oosterbeek to help out in a home for elderly people. Although there were people in our home being hidden from the Germans, my mother was needed there, so we had to go. We went to Arnhem Oosterbeek, where my mother’s friend was the assistant matron; she also played a role in the work of the Resistance.

This brought about a turning point in my life. Again, there was no school there for me to attend, but next to the house was a big monastery which housed a lot of monks, and I got friendly with one of them. He played a great part in my young life. I must have been intelligent enough to take in what he said as he taught me a lot and made a very big

impression on me. Although I was only very young, while we stayed there I went to help him in the herb garden every day. He told me all about herbs and plants, roots and trees, and what they were used for. With great passion, he taught me of God's creation and the wonders of nature. This instilled in me a great love for man and nature.

I still remember how heartbreaking it was when my mother came one day and said that we had to move, and fast. I never saw a place empty so quickly as then, which was very sad, but right under the eyes of the Germans everybody was led to safety for another day. Hitler bombarded Oosterbeek nearly to the ground. The house we had been living in was completely flattened. I remember a little friend, who was really good to me and still is. She and I were allowed, after these great bombardments, to see the damage. The death and destruction that the Nazis had wreaked was overwhelming. With my instilled love for God and creation, I could not understand why this was happening. That same day I promised God that if my mother and I were saved from this terrible hell, I would care about the well-being of people for the rest of my life. I hope I have kept that promise in the many years I have devoted to helping people and I will continue to do so until my dying day – I want to fulfil that promise to do what I can to help the less privileged, not only in this country but in others as well, and especially in the Third World.

The war raged on, but Hitler was losing ground. Finally, on 17 April 1945, our little town of Kampen was liberated by the Canadian and Scots troops. I can still picture them coming in their jeeps. That was the first time in my life that I had seen chocolate. When I was given some by one of the soldiers I took it home and showed it to my mother! She broke off a little piece and said 'Taste it!' I told my mother how wonderful it was and she said to me, 'Respect it all your life and never eat too much of it.' Nowadays, when I see the

half- or one-metre bars of chocolate people buy, I still get shocked.

I remember my father came back from Germany in very poor health, his arms and legs thinner than a baby's. However, my mother fed him up as best she could from the little food we had and he survived. Every day, I went onto the street to watch people arriving back from concentration camps and places they had been hiding, and every day I looked to see if my brother was amongst them. Every day, I returned home without my brother and saw my mother crying in the hope that one day he would return. Finally, when he did come home, holding a bundle of coupons in his hand, he looked as if there had never been a war. He told my mother that he had been to every distribution office, telling them that he had just come back from Germany and needed coupons. He told my mother that we could have a big party now, as we had plenty of coupons.

He had been very lucky. Because he had told the Germans that he was a first-class cook, he landed work in the kitchen. Uppermost in his mind at that time was that he had to be able to eat if he was to survive his time in Germany, so he ended up in the best place.

I remember the marvellous party there was after we were all reunited and the war was over. The whole Dutch nation was full of promise – everybody wanted a united Holland, with one religion, one political party and the guarantee that there would never be a war again. People were so thankful that the war had ended that there was much harmony and togetherness. When I think of those parties and the wonderful festivities we had at that time, and the religious battles that Holland has had over the years and the tremendous number of political parties now, it is clear that those promises have long been forgotten. Holland is more divided now than it ever was before the Second World War.

When I see how people take food for granted and their disrespect for it, I still remember the days when we would

have been so happy just to have a crumb to eat. Nowadays people throw away good food with no gratitude for what they have been given and no thought of the many people in the world suffering from hunger, who would give anything for that food. Important lessons have to be learned.

I suppose that my experiences during the war, of which I have given only a few examples in this chapter, taught me to respect life and to fight for it. Life is very valuable. When I look around and see how life is taken for granted in many people's eyes, I am often reminded of those days when life was so precious and how many people were cut down in their prime by the Nazi monsters. As the war progressed, things got so difficult that people started to eat tulip bulbs – and even their own dogs and cats – because they were so hungry. Luckily, by this stage the war was coming to an end.

Before it ended, however, something happened which would determine my future. It was an accident which took place during the summer of 1943. I never would have thought then, because of that accident, I would end up spending most of my life in Britain. I must have been about six years of age when we saw a bomber on fire going down over our town. The plane took a nosedive into the beautiful IJssel. When the bodies were dredged from the water, I saw the full horror: the six military men in the plane, who had been transporting bombs, had been shot down by the Germans and lost their lives. They were buried in the nearby cemetery and, after some time, I was asked to look after the grave of the navigator, Charlie Young. His full title was Flying Officer C.W.R. Young, Air Bomber, Royal Air Force, who died 13 June 1943, aged 27. I did this faithfully, and every Sunday went up to the cemetery, taking some flowers with me. With great devotion, I took this job upon myself and looked after that grave with great care. There were simple little crosses upon each grave, and flowers on each one. Later on, proper gravestones replaced these crosses, very nicely done and all in keeping with each other. The