



Where Did She Find the Courage?

By Marti Ensign

There are few autobiographies as captivating as *The Hiding Place*—a true story of faith and perseverance in the life of one of God’s real saints. What you may not know, though, is that when Corrie ten Boom first wrote her story down, it was called, *A Prisoner and Yet*. It was first printed in 1947, and it documented her memories of the horror that she had been through under Nazi domination.

On the cover of my copy of the small paper bound book are the words, “Where did this gentle, undemanding woman find the courage to resist ... to suffer ... yet to endure?”

Endure she did—and, what’s even more remarkable, as the publisher’s notes point out, “her mind remained intact and her soul remained free.” Out of a period of almost unimaginable tragedy and evil has come one of the most inspiring and faith-giving stories of modern times. How did she come to have the courage to face those dark times and share her story with the world?

Tante Corrie once told me that when she returned to Holland after being released on December 28, 1944, she had terrible trouble sleeping through the night. She would fret, and pace, and wander about, unable to release enough of her memories to be able to fall asleep. But then, she began to use these times of unrest to get up and write down specific memories of her imprisonment in the camps. This brought her peace—and now we have some very detailed and accurate accounts of her time there. Though many of these stories were incorporated later into *The Hiding Place*, some are only recorded in *A Prisoner and Yet*, such as this instance of casual cruelty Corrie eventually encountered at Ravensbruck:

I was panting from the hard work. An *Aufseherin* saw it and said, sneeringly, “Oh, perhaps the hands of Madame Baroness are too delicate for such work?”

“Madame Baroness”? I looked at myself. My coat was soiled and frayed; the hem was out. I had left it that way because it was much too short. On my hands were parts of a worn-out stocking. My legs were covered with pieces of knitted stuff, tied on with rope; my shoes were completely worn out, the soles dangling loosely, my toes protruding. On my head was a dark, checked cloth cap. “Madame Baroness”? I was poorer than the poorest beggar in the Netherlands.

A woman shoved a large basket into my hands. She then shoveled potatoes into it, and a Polish prisoner and I had to carry it up the hill. I could scarcely lift it; after twenty steps I stopped and could go no further.

“*Schneller, aber schneller!*” screamed the forewoman. Forewomen were fellow prisoners who had charge of the division of labor and the tempo at which work was to be done, and so bore the responsibility for it. Their wages consisted of an extra allowance of food. If not enough work was done, they were beaten; and fear made them drive us on. German forewomen were usually hard and cruel, walking around with whips in their hands.

I toiled up the hill. There the potatoes were dumped into long trenches. Slowly I walked back; but the Polish woman, with whom I was carrying the basket, pulled me along, looking



at me with hostile eyes. She herself was strong and evidently used to hard work; she didn't understand that I was not unwilling, but unable, to move faster. ...

Long furrows had been made against a slope, and I walked up carrying a small basket of potatoes. An *Aufseherin* called out something and five or six women got together and pointed at me in derision. "Look at that; there is a Hollander for you, daring to come up with a little basket of potatoes! She is too lazy to exert herself."

"Say, are you afraid we'll finish too soon?"

"May I empty your basket for you, Madame Baroness?"

The basket was torn out of my hands, emptied and thrown at me. One woman pushed me, and as I walked back I could hear their shrieking laughter following me. I felt only disdain for the women who treated me so. It was no fault of mine that I was weak and unable to walk, but rather the maltreatment of their own countrymen. I thought of One who had endured scorn and derision for me. No, these women could do me no enduring harm ... (126-127).

Of course, the chapters you are reading this week depict earlier, happier times. One of the great values of Elizabeth and John Sherrill's carefully researched edition of *The Hiding Place* is the background they give to Tante Corrie's home life before the war. They were even able to coax out details of her love life—a true feat indeed, for Corrie would not have otherwise shared such a personal story with others.

To really appreciate Corrie's character, it is helpful to the reader to understand how secure and content and loved she felt in her home life, even though the family had her mother's three spinster sisters living with them. These difficult and demanding women (who were able to procure through sheer force of personality the choice front bedrooms in the crowded ten Boom house in the Beje) could not overshadow the rich spirit of love in the home. Corrie remembers them fondly.

The family was not rich, but they were resourceful. They all had a love for great music, and before they got a radio, Tante Corrie recalled, they would wrap up tight on cold winter nights and go downtown in Haarlem to the Opera House. Then, they would huddle together on the steps to the stage door and listen to the concerts (recounted as well on pp. 42-43 in *The Hiding Place*). She told me that in doing this they "could hear pretty good," but all of them were thrilled when they finally did get a big radio (recounted on p. 71 in *The Hiding Place*).

As we continue on through the chapters, watch for the carefully woven stories about how God provided contacts in the most unusual and surprising ways that ended up being literally life-saving—people who could provide for the dire needs Corrie's family and people they sheltered.

Before you come to the end of Division I you will read what is perhaps the most important emotional event of Corrie's young life. Then, take a moment to look at the picture of Corrie on page 61. One picture is worth a thousand words, but you get the 1000 words, too.

If you are one who has difficulty believing that God can do anything, even bring good and salvation out of the darkest of prison camps, then read on.