



Biography of Anne-Willem Meijer

Anne-Willem Meijer was born into a Dutch Reform Christian family in Haarlem, Netherlands in 1931. He was one of nineteen children. In Haarlem, religious groups tended to live in segregated communities, but co-existed. This quiet existence ended when the Germans invaded Holland in 1940. In 1941, anti-Jewish decrees were enacted, which took away basic civil liberties. A few of these restrictions included curfews, restricted shopping times, and Jewish children could no longer attend school. Jews were forced to wear yellow star badges on their clothing. Soon after, deportations to concentration and extermination camps began.

Corrie ten Boom, a neighbor and member of the Dutch underground, who with her family organized hiding places and procured food rations for Jews under their protection, asked Anne-Willem to be a “runner”. Meijer was responsible for delivering food coupons to families hiding the Jews. Against his family’s wishes, he agreed. At only 11 years old, he would travel by bike sometimes up to three hours, delivering rations to families. This was very dangerous, but essential so that everyone could eat. Eventually Corrie ten Boom, her family, and others involved in the resistance including Anne-Willem, were caught by the Gestapo. After being imprisoned and interrogated, Anne-Willem was sent to Vught, one of two transit camps in the Netherlands. Transit camps were set up to temporarily hold prisoners who were to be deported to extermination or concentration camps.

Conditions in the camp were terrible. Prisoners were subjected to harsh treatment, there was a shortage of clothing and food, polluted water, and infectious diseases ran rampant. Anne-Willem managed to escape the camp by being smuggled out with the trash. He traveled for three days on foot, hoping to be reunited with his family. He arrived home to find strangers living in his family’s house. Unable to find a place to stay, Anne-Willem lived on the streets begging for food, sometimes eating tulip bulbs.

He was in Rotterdam when the Dutch were liberated by the Canadian Army in March 1945. Anne-Willem, weighing 48 pounds, remained in Rotterdam where he later met his wife, Josephine. They were married in Rotterdam in 1952, and received a visa to come to the United States in 1957, settling in Indiana. The couple had six children and today, have many grandchildren. After the war, Anne-Willem found out what had happened to his family; they had also helped the Dutch resistance by hiding Jews and it cost them their lives. Of 19 siblings, only Anne-Willem, three sisters, and his grandparents had survived the war. Anne-Willem died in 2017 at the age of 86.