

-TITLE-ELIZABETH LABRUYERE
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-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-
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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
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-CORPORATE_NAME-
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-NOTES-
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Elizabeth Wilhelmina and Willem Labruyere (CR) were born 1909 and 1910 respectively. Both grew up in The Hague, and in their neighborhood it was irrelevant whether one was Jewish or not. The Labruyeres helped two Jewish girls during the war. The first girl, who came in 1942, was extremely spoiled and difficult. She was very careless and dangerous, so after three months they asked her to leave. In 1943 the couple received Dora, a thirty-five year old woman from Vienna. Dora meant a great deal to them and eventually became part of the family. Faith allowed the Labruyeres to make the decision to take Dora in. They "got down to the fundamentals" and did not let their fears get in the way of saving a life. They embodied the belief that Christianity is not merely a way of thinking: it is a way of doing and being.

01:00 Elizabeth Wilhelmina and Willem Labruyere, natives of the Netherlands, were asked by a friend if they would be willing to take a Jewish girl into their home.

02:00 The decision to harbor the Jewish refugee, Dora, was extremely difficult. The couple considered the dangers and risks, they also considered the fact that Dora would be sent to a concentration camp if she was not hidden. With this, it "came down to the fundamentals", and the Labruyeres knew they had no other choice but to take her in.

03:00 The Labruyere's strong believe in Christ gave them the formidable strength needed to make such a weighty decision. Fear was the reason why they hesitated to take Dora in, especially since Elizabeth was expecting her second child.

04:00 The relationship between Dora and the Labruyeres proved to be a mutually beneficial one; because a child was expected, Dora was a great help around the house. The couple knew very little about Dora. Dora came from Vienna, and was approximately thirty five years old.

05:00 Dora, of Polish origin, became an orphan after World War I and was driven to Vienna. After being moved to Holland, she was illegally adopted by a Jewish couple.

06:00 Dora lived with this Jewish couple for twenty years, and as far as the Labruyeres knew, had no other family.

07:00 The Jewish couple Dora lived with were not her real parents; they did not even adopt her legally.

08:00 It was extremely important that refugees had no connection with the host family.

09:00 Elizabeth Labruyere used to speak English well, but now has a very hard time with the language. Willem does most of the talking.

10:00 Again, lack of connections was essential, especially connections between the Labruyeres would be taken in, and Wilhelm does not believe he would have been strong enough to withstand the interrogation.

11:00 If they had been connected with the underground, many secrets may have been revealed during a brutal interrogation-- the entire underground resistance may have been betrayed. It was important to cut off all possibility of telling things that should not be told.

12:00 Dora stayed with the couple until after Liberation in 1945.

13:00 Dora was extremely careful not to be seen while living with the Labruyeres, staying away from the windows at all times.

14:00 On one occasion Dora made a remark to Willem about wanting to repay them for all they had done for her; Willem replied that it was neither possible nor necessary to repay them--it was their own concern. Dora never mentioned it again.

15:00 There were some stressful periods during Dora's stay, especially when relatives visited during the first part of the evacuation.

16:00 The Dutch had to evacuate themselves; the Nazis simply put up posters telling them they had to leave immediately.

17:00 The Labruyeres evacuated to a large farm owned by a Dutchman, along with many other refugees. There everyone took care of themselves; the Labruyeres stayed there for a few weeks.

18:00 They "naturally" took Dora along with them when they evacuated; could not leave her behind.

19:00 The couple moved to a second address, where they stayed until after liberation. When the war was over, Dora left them to stay with friends on the other side.

20:00 During her stay, Dora became a part of the Labruyere family; she was with them "on one level".

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22:00 The tension and stress of wartime were extraordinary.

23:00 The Labruyeres stayed in touch with Dora after the war. They were separated, but had very good connections. Wrote many letters.

24:00 Dora eventually got married. She moved to America because she had a brother in New York. Married a Jew, and was married for ten years before she died.

25:00 After Dora died, her widower wrote the Labruyeres thanking them for all they had done for Dora, granting them ten years of a happy marriage. The couple was very touched by this.

26:00 Dora and her husband visited three times. The last time was about two months before her death; Dora wanted to say goodbye.

27:00 Although the time Dora spent with them was very important, it did not make a significant difference in their lifestyle. Dora was like "having a niece visiting."

28:00 Dora meant a great deal to them; she was a part of the family, and was very important to them.

29:00 Willem was born in 1910; Elizabeth in 1909. Both grew up in the Hague. Growing up, it was irrelevant whether or not one was Jewish.

30:00 Religion was a very important aspect of their lives growing up. Willem's father was a teacher.

31:00 At the time, those who taught in a Christian school received about half the salary of public school teachers. Nevertheless, because of his convictions Willem taught in a Protestant school.

32:00 Willem had a very hard time responding to the question, "What was your father like?" Willem's father was a very good person, but rather hard to get along with.

33:00 Willem's relationship with his father was far from easy; he was a man of principle, and was very strict with his children. Though Willem was a very different person than his father, it was possible for them to get along.

34:00 Willem admits that he is far from the same person he was fifty years ago during the war.

35:00 It is difficult for him to pinpoint exactly how he is different.

36:00 Bach then, Willem was "more in line" with his father. That is, he followed the more straight path of his parents, making it possible to get down to basic principles when deciding whether or not to accept Dora.

37:00 Because he was able to get down to principles, Willem was not swayed by fear of the concentration camps.

38:00 Willem realized back then that when life is at stake, the dangers are not important. He feels he was closer to what his father was like during the war period.

39:00 Willem's father, though hard to get along with, was a good man and could sometimes be very nice. Willem's mother was strong some of the time, but not always.

40:00 When the Germans first invaded it was very much "like a football match" -- they were simply defeated, and that was that. They had no idea what was really going on with the S.S., etc.

41:00 It is quite incomprehensible in the United States that they could have lived so close to Germany and not know what was really going on but that is what happened. With the invasion, many people began to realize that one's basic principles should not be influenced by fear, dangers, profits, or anything else.

42:00 The Labruyeres began to realize what the Germans were really doing after the first six months after the invasion, especially since there were S.S. men in their own town.

43:00 The couple was supposed to move to Indonesia because of a teaching job for Willem, but missed the boat as a result of the invasion. They realize now how lucky they were to have missed that boat, because they would have been put in a Japanese concentration camp.

44:00 As far as they knew, no one knew about Dora. She was careful to go out only at night, and did not even do any if the shopping because it was too risky.

45:00 Willem was a high school physics and chemistry teacher; he taught from 1940-1975.

46:00 Willem wanted to be a good teacher. He had many pupils, and all of the class reunions were very moving.

47:00 Willem first got an idea of what an impression he made on his students when he saw how many returned for the reunions. It made him very happy that he was a teacher for so long.

48:00 Willem found it very interesting to see how all of his students grew up.

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51:00 Willem moved around a lot and taught physics and chemistry at many different schools.

52:00 The Labruyeres were able to make the discission to keep Dora through inspiration by the Lord.

53:00 God helped them make the decision. They realized that they would have to live with themselves later on. If they did not take Dora in, and she did not survive the war, they would "be like murderers."

54:00 One must get down to the fundamentals in spite of the dangers, Though they lived in perpetual fear of being discovered by the Germans, they closed their eyes to the risks.

55:00 The Labruyeres has one close encounter with the Gestapo. One afternoon at approximately two o'clock the SD came to the door wanting to speak with Willem at four o'clock. Should Willem take the chance and speak with them, or should he simply "disappear?"

56:00 That morning a youth connected with the resistance had come to their door, and was sleeping upstairs when the SD came at two o'clock.

57:00 Labruyeres were able to send Dora away to the neighbors house with her belongings.

58:00 When the SD came back at four o'clock, they interrogated Willem about the boy for two hours. Willem maintains, however, that he was not mistreated during these two hours.

59:00 Willem had not give the SD directions as to where the boy had gone, but did not write anything down.

60:00 Willem told the SD that the boy was simply one of his pupils. He did not remember his name because he had two hundred and fifty pupils; if he could not remember three or four names, what of it?

1:01:00 He was very shaken after the interrogation. It was essential to remember exactly what you told the SD.

1:02:00 One of the SD men was German, the other Dutch. They tried to shake Willem; Willem did not believe he could have withstood torture.

1:03:00 Dora returned to the Labruyeres after a fortnight. The worst part of the war was the perpetual uncertainty--uncertainty about their very own survival.

1:04:00 A very strict curfew was imposed during the war, which was very frightening. No one knew when the war would end.

1:05:00 The Labruyeres do not think of the war years often, but have been reminded constantly in the recent years because of the renewed interest of the newspapers and news publications.

1:06:00 Their experience, though not a nice one, was not marked by many traumas. The couple was happily married, and they were much too busy to be traumatized.

1:07:00 Dora was not the first Jew the Labruyeres helped. They had a Jewish girl in 1942, the daughter of a Polish post master. This girl was incredibly spoiled and difficult. The girl was much too spoiled not to be dangerous.

1:08:00 The girl often went to the green grocer during the day, asking for apples, though she had no ration card, making the fact that she was Jewish quite obvious. Finally after three months the Labruyeres asked if she could be moved out of the house.

1:09:00 The Jewish girl somehow managed to survive the war-- the "guardian angels must have done overtime saving her." After the war she returned to thank the Labruyeres and to apologize for being so intolerable. She was the complete opposite of Dora.

1:10:00 The decision to take in the first girl was not as much of a dilemma as the decision to take Dora; it seemed like more of a sport back then. It was not until 1943 that reality hit. Until then they thought that the stories of concentration camps was merely propaganda.

1:11:00 No one believed the concentration camps stories at first-- it was simply too incredible. Even after speaking with a prisoner of a camp, Willem did not fully believe that the man could be completely innocent.

1:12:00 Today, however, he would believe the stories. The war changed both of them--they got to really know themselves.

1:13:00 Considering the mentality of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis with their doctrine against the Jews, the concentration camps were not incomprehensible. Their way of thinking justified, in their minds, their actions.

1:14:00 Willem believe that everyone has such thoughts buried deep down inside of them, though they may never come up to the surface. Everyone has the potential think the way the Nazis thought.

1:15:00 The Nazis were successful because they broke down people's barriers and hateful feelings were brought up to the surface. Under Nazism, people were obligated to hate the Jews.

1:16:00 Elizabeth and Willem Labruyere have four daughters; they know about Dora but not all the stories because they were very little. Elizabeth and Willem have not told their children the stories--they should have asked!

1:17:00 Their eldest daughter works for an international medical service in Nigeria, a Dutch program in Africa.

1:18:00 She is married; is 46 years old. She has spent the last four and a half years in Nigeria.

1:19:00 The next oldest daughter is a teacher; the third daughter is a part time recreational therapist in Amsterdam, and has three children the youngest daughter is a housewife with four children.

1:20:00 One of the daughter's sons got in an accident, and now has some handicaps.

1:21:00 The Labruyeres feel they see their children enough; they have been visiting more frequently in the past years.

1:22:00 They know they should tell their children about Dora, but never really think about it when they are visiting.

1:23:00 They realize that they risked their lives to save another life, but feel they had no choice -- it was not because they were so brave.

1:24:00 The Labruyeres had not choice but to live by their principles.

1:25:00 Because they lived by their principles, they helped preserve the Jewish people, even though they only helped two Jews. They simply tried to be Christians, and as Christians they could not do less.

1:26:00 As a Christian one can not consciously overlook other people, especially since there are so many people who need help.

1:27:00 The Labruyeres have no regrets about what they did; they would not have chosen that kind of life, but they do not regret it. They would do the same thing today.

1:28:00 Whenever they need help with their situation, they always received it, especially towards the end of the war.

1:29:00 One surprising aspect was the help they received from the most unexpected sources, especially from people they did not know.

1:30:00 There were some very important lessons Willem learned from his experiences. The first was that when it is possible to give your help, give it.

1:31:00 The second lesson is to enjoy what you have when you have it, but do not set your heart on it, or place too much value on material things.

1:32:00 Another valuable lesson Willem learned is that you should live out your beliefs. It is important to teach children that Christianity is not merely a theology or a way of thinking-- it is a way of acting and being.

1:33:00 As a Christian BEING is essential; this belief made the decision for the Labruyeres to keep Dora very clear.

1:34:00 Neither of the Labruyeres had ever been interviewed before about their experiences. On one occasion Willem taught his class about living by one's principles, though he did not mention his specific situation.

1:35:00 It took a great deal of courage to accept their responsibility to Dora. Faith provided them with their strength.

1:36:00 Elizabeth's faith would not have allowed her to neglect her responsibility to others; she would like her children to have the same faith.

1:37:00 The Labruyeres admit that they have forgotten a great deal. Willem remarks that it has taken decades of immigration to the United States for these stories to be heard in America. It is essential for these stories to be heard, and not forgotten.
.END.