

-TITLE-BERTHA STENKES
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-
-IMAGE_QUALITY-
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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01:00 The first year they hid people it all went smooth. They had an emergency hiding place outside.

02:00 Only twice throughout the hold thing did they have to use the other hiding place. The people that stayed with them walked around their house like normal people would have.

03:00 They all became a family. It was very exciting. John never felt more alive then he did then.

04:30 After a while they were all such of a family that they stopped thinking of it as helping. They all went through the dangers together.

05:00 There were a lot of people who were able to do the same thing by hiding people but they didn't. You can't blame these people for being scared. They easily could have gone to the gas chambers.

05:30 They didn't do it to become heroes. Those people came to them and if they hadn't helped they would have gone to Auschwitz.

06:00 First, they were at John's sister Rosie's house for six weeks, but she couldn't keep them so she sent them to John and Bertha's. Rosie was afraid but John wasn't. "That's because of our different natures I guess".

09:00 In the beginning of the war there were no soldiers in their town, but when they did come some funny things happened.

10:00 John explains a story about a soldier. John walked to the train station, but he had a limp.

11:00 The soldier asked him what happened. They talked and the soldier was nice, he gave John a cigar.

13:00 The soldier went and got John's ticket because he felt sorry for him with his limp. Then when John offered him money the soldier refused to take it.

14:00 John was born in 1918 in the town of North Bargun. There were sixteen children in his family.

15:00 The town was very small. His father was a skipper of a small ship which transported coal.

16:00 There were only two children younger than him. He was the sixteenth child, There house was not very large, so sometimes they would have to sleep four to a bed. At that age he didn't know any better, you get so used to it in a large family.

17:00 His parents were very religious. They were Baptist. They went to Church every Sunday or even more sometimes. Growing up he was influenced more by his brothers and sisters than by his parents. He was closest to his brother that was two years older.

18:00 His father was helpful to other people, but he wouldn't talk about it. He knows his father helped some people out with money.

19:00 The morals he grew up with came out of the Bible. It was a guide for the entire family. His house didn't get electricity until he was about six year old.

21:00 There was only one Jewish man in the village that he was aware of when he was growing up. John lived in the same village until he was thirty two years old.

22:00 Bertha was born in 1920 in a village named Beenwouden. She was an only child which was unusual at the time. Her father worked in a dairy factory.

23:00 She was influenced mostly by her mother growing up. Her mother was a happy-go-lucky person. Her father was more of a pessimist. Her family was also Baptist, which taught high moral standards.

24:00 Her mother helped other sick people in the village when necessary. In a small town like that everyone helps out everyone else. She too, only knew one Jew. His name was Sammy and he had married a girl in the village.

25:00 During the war Sammy had to hide like any other Jew.

26:00 John and Bertha got married in 1940. Before the war started they knew what the Germans were up to, not the killings but everything else.

27:00 They knew of the persecution, everyone knew that. It wasn't until May of 1940 that the Germans invaded Holland.

28:00 Before the invasion, their village remained very peaceful. For a while they didn't even feel the impact of the invasion. At first the invasion had a positive effect on the country. People got jobs and made more money. All of a sudden, the Germans began to pickup people. It was only gypsies at first.

29:00 They listened to the English radio station for news. John ran a bakery. It was coincidence which led them into helping people.

30:00 John's brother came one day and said he was looking for a place for a woman and her two children to stay. His brother knew the Jewish family from his town.

31:00 At first they went to his sister's house for six weeks. Then they were going to rent a small apartment, but it was too dangerous. The children were called Jack and Anne because their Jewish names Ruth and Jacob were too risky.

33:00 John and Bertha offered to let them live at their house. They were a Dutch Jewish family. The mother was 43 years old, her name was Marie.

35:00 In Marie's village the Rabbi chose people to go to the camps from their congregation.

36:00 Marie was one of the 1st chosen to go because she was a teacher so they needed her to stay as long as possible. She was warned by someone who escaped before she went so she had time to go into hiding.

39:00 John and Bertha had a big house with three bathrooms so they were not cramped for space.

40:00 Marie and her children did not hide anywhere, they walked around the house like anyone else and even went to the Baptist church with them on Sunday.

41:00 A year after Marie and her children came to their house, the German soldiers came to their village.

42:00 June 9, 1944 was the first time they had to use the hiding place John had built.

43:00 The black market was what kept them all alive. Otherwise they would not have had enough food. The Germans never really bothered them. On a few occasions they actually helped them.

44:00 The Germans were only in their village for one year.

45:00 The soldiers arrived in the middle of the night, and they were sure it was the end for them. At that point they had another 'diver' living with them as well. A 'diver' is anyone who had to hide from the Germans.

46:00 That diver came in exchange for extra food stamps. So they had six people staying with them. Only four of them were Jewish.

47:00 Marie's husband had died in Auschwitz or in a mine, they can't remember which.

48:00 Five soldiers came and lived in the front room of their house. When they first came, the drivers all hid in the pit or in the field.

50:00 Then, the soldiers left for a while and they got everyone out of hiding, and when the soldiers returned they pretended they were all related somehow. The soldiers weren't suspicious.

51:00 Bertha says that she wasn't afraid because she was too young to know any better. She was only 23 years old at the time.

52:00 One time some soldiers held John at gunpoint in the village and Bertha rode her bicycle there and told them to let him go since it was time for lunch, and they did.

53:00 No one else in their village was hiding Jews. Some were hiding other divers. Their village only had about two thousand people.

55:00 They saw Nazi brutality, not alone, but some. Everyone had to be careful to stay out of the way of the machine gun. The SS were much crueler than the enlisted men. Some had tea at their house every once in a while and they were generally nice guys.

56:00 John and Bertha had to be friends with them so that they wouldn't find out about the people they were hiding. Fritz was one soldier who was very nice to them. Later they found out that he did know they were hiding Jews but that he never told on them.

57:00 The Jewish family staying with them got so used to having the soldiers around that they were never really scared. The boy Jack served food to them every night and they never knew it was a Jew who was touching their food.

59:00 John was not the type of person who would always stand up to people, but with the Germans you didn't have to. They were not all evil people.

1:00:00 The soldiers were afraid of the SS too. They didn't cooperate with each other. Those years were so complicated.

1:01:00 The Germans who lived in their house actually protected them and were good to them.

1:02:00 The Jewish girl, Anne, was very young then. One day an SS picked her up and put her on his lap. She hit him in the nose and he got really mad. She was only nine years old.

1:04:00 Once John took Jack with him to Amsterdam which was really dangerous. John was bringing food to his brother.

1:05:00 On the way back they went through inspection where they had to show their papers. Jack didn't have any so John said he was his son. The soldier called Jack "a beautiful Aryan". It was funny since John was only 24 years old and Jack was about 12.

1:06:00 Jack was slightly blond, but since he was circumcised there was always a risk. Anne has had mental problems ever since the war.

1:08:00 The mother Marie died when she was 80 in Israel. They went there in 1952.

1:09:00 Jack now lives in Tel Aviv. He has kept in touch all these years. He is 57 years old and has never been married.

1:13:00 John and Bertha have passed on their story to their children.

1:14:00 Their children have grown up with no prejudices with the influence of their parents.

1:16:00 It was not as hard to hide people in their small town as it was in a city like Amsterdam. Her uncle hid two Jewish children there but he never had any problems.

1:20:00 After the war, John worked on a chicken farm, and then they moved to Canada. A lot of people moved to Canada from their town.

1:21:00 Ontario was the cheapest place to go and a lot of farmers sponsored peoples trips over.

1:22:00 Later, the government began to sponsor and pay for people to go to Canada.

1:25:00 During the war, John and Bertha tried to buy Marie's parents out of the camps but they couldn't. They rarely talk about their experience to anyone outside of their family.

1:26:00 Bertha doesn't like to talk about it because she doesn't like to play hero.

1:27:00 The pains and problems never go away. They will only end once the whole family that lived through it has passed away.

1:29:00 John cheated the Germans out of money a few times.

1:32:00 The winter was not as bad in their village as it was in Amsterdam. But for the last six months there was no more black market because it was leaked to the Germans.

1:33:00 John and Bertha have four children, two boys and two girls.

1:35:00 The grandchildren are not really interested in their story, especially the boys.

1:36:00 Children today should know everything, the good and the bad.

1:38:00 A neighbor that John helped out a few times told the Germans that John sent food away.

1:39:00 They don't know why the Dutch people helped out the Germans. Perhaps it was just a mean streak in some people.

1:41:00 You had to be in the right place at the right time or else you could get killed.

1:42:00 Now both John and Bertha are very religious. They belong to a Gospel church in Canada.

1:47:00 When they first moved to Canada, they had three small children and they were very poor. Bertha had to work in the fields as well.

1:48:00 John shows a map of their village as the tape ends.
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