

-TITLE-AART BOUTER
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Father was Wilhelm Bouter. One brother, two sisters. Father worked in a factory that manufactured oils. Aart worked for a milk company and eventually went into sales.

Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Holland in August 1940. The first time Aart met them was when they came to his mother's door in July 1940. The Germans invaded Holland in May 1940. Aart remembers very well seeing in the newspapers announcements that the Witnesses were banned. He, his mother, and his fiance, his present wife, were still interested in becoming Witnesses. A year after he first met the Witnesses, Aart was secretly baptized in a house. Soon enough, he heard of brothers being arrested and transported.

One of the things that attracted Aart to the Witnesses was that they were different from the people involved in the war. The whole world was involved in the war except the Witnesses. They claimed that not one bomb dropped on Holland was done so by a Witness. The Witnesses refused military service and that attracted him to the Witnesses very much because Aart was to be called into service in July. But Germany invaded in May, so he was never called. But he learned from friends and schoolmates who were called up just before the invasion how they died and of the misery.

The Witnesses were considered the state enemy number 2. The Communists were number 1. The Witnesses were very much opposed to the idea of the Nazis. No one can bring 1000 years of peace except God. They stressed God's Kingdom and denounced human efforts that might trigger persecution. Only the Kingdom of God can solve problems like sickness and death.

He was invited into a house in Forshcholten on February 15, 1942, but they were not Witnesses. They were from National Socialist arty. There was a National Socialist movement in Holland that collaborated with the Germans. The man that arrested him was standing outside; it was about 6:00 p.m. He might have been from the Gestapo, he had the typical boots on. He immediately recognized another Witness from Germany who was also arrested, Andre Schouchfer. He told Aart not to do anything foolish. He died in the camps.

He was transported by tram to Den Haag to a place for interrogation, offices and things. He was interrogated by a Mr. Anelsmann, who was very interested in Schouchfer. He had been working at a Witness branch in Hamstad. He was not too interested in Aart since he was new. There was not enough food there. His cell-mate was a Communist and he could tell he had a lot of hunger. He stayed there six months.

At first he thought his whole world had collapsed. He thought his whole family would be arrested. He had been quite spoiled. He was the son of a widow, he had lived in a house with his mother, he was supported by his wife and mother. Being arrested was quite a shock. In the cell where he had no clean clothes, no food, he started to think about Peter the Apostle. The doors had opened for him and he was freed, so Aart thought it could happen to him too, though he didn't expect it. This thought stayed with him when he was in the other camps.

In the first camp in Amersfoort, there was terrible misery. This group of people, he won't mention who, they forgot about dignity. They ate pieces of onion that was floating in the sewage, in between the shit of people. They picked it out and ate it. That's how much hunger there was. He saw a clergyman eating a dead mouse. He saw that one of the people in charge, his name was Burch, a fat man, when he had smoked his cigar, he threw away the last part and people fought for it. He was happy to be a Witness because they didn't smoke and they tried to keep their dignity. In their prayers, they prayed for Jehovah to keep on. Other people would trade cigarettes for food and they died. There was a lively trade in cigarettes for food.

Aart witnessed the disappearance of Russian Mongols, from Mongolia. They were loaded in a truck. The only things that returned from them were their shoes and things. They were put into a mass grave.

As a group, the Witnesses encouraged each other to do whatever they could. Some people played with their food; they took it to bed, they made things out of it, but you spoil it that way and they died. The Witnesses encouraged each other not to do this.

It was very cold. He came to Amersfoort in March 1941. (1942?) It was a severe winter. He had to stand naked in the open air.

He was sent back to Schaegen. He found Schouchfer was still there. Aart smuggled names of brothers he saw at Amersfoort on a piece of paper to Schouchfer while they were taking a walk outside in the prison, by pretending to fasten his shoe laces.

He was taken to Bittenhuff, transported with Schouchfer. They were able to encourage each other. He was taken to interrogation. Aart refused to sign a statement denouncing the Witnesses and that he would betray them. He was beaten from one end of the room to the other.

He was asked to give the names of other Witnesses. Since he knew so many who were already in prison, he gave them those names.

He was transported from Schagen by train to Germany. He arrived on April 20, 1942. He remembers this well because it was Hitler's birthday. Through the openings of the train cars, he could see flags waving from the houses.

He went from Berlin to Sachsenhausen. Many people died because they had already come from other camps. Brothers from Amersfoort were on the train. Jews, of course, were a big group that was on this transport. He tells of an old Jewish man who was so sad. They tried to talk to him a lot. There were women, people from the Resistance, political prisoners, black marketeers.

When they arrived at Sachsenhausen, they were inspected like cattle. They had to pass through a door, and SS soldiers beat everyone. The treatment was so sadistic, at times he called out to his mother. He never thought this was possible. But he saw another Witness who had been in prison five years, so one way or another he didn't feel the pain anymore.

He had to load train cars and unload them. Some people worked in a garden where vegetables were grown. Some brothers worked in the kitchen. Some people's assignment was to walk in new shoes because they were too new, too stiff. It was very painful. For survival, it depended on what job you had.

Aart was not inclined to fight for food. He ate with the swine and he wished he was one of them because they had it better than he did.

The Witnesses held meetings in the camp; in the lion's den, they held meetings. On Sunday afternoons, they would discuss prophecies in the Book of Daniel. What was the meaning of the King of the North and the South. Literature was smuggled into the camp from sisters on the outside. Three hundred attended these meetings. They had guards watching out. The Witnesses were isolated from the others. The punishment for having literature and bibles was severe-beaten 25 times. One brother, 67 years old, said one way or another, he didn't feel it. Overseers were assigned over the barracks. Everything was well organized.

From Sachsenhausen, he was assigned to Czechoslovakia in 1944 with 15 other brothers, to a castle-to the widow, Frau Heydrich. She had to have servants because the Jews that were servants before were deported. He was assigned to work in the horse stables. Why did she ask for the Witnesses? Because she figured they wouldn't take revenge on her when the war was over and the Nazis lost.

He had to carry wood from the forest for fire. The local people were allowed only small pieces of wood, branches. The Witnesses helped them by putting big blocks of wood under the branches on the carts. That's how they won the sympathy of the local people. In return, they sometimes gave them bread and cake and warm food.

Near the end of the war, they were tested. A high officer told them to prepare wood from the forest to barricade the road to Dresden, to stop the Russians or Americans. Three brothers formed a committee to decide what to do. Based on bible principles, they said they could not take part in any war dealings. They refused to do it. The officer told them he would force them to do it, but strangely enough, he never did.

Also near the end of the war, Frau Heydrich figured when the Allies approached she would have to flee. She asked them to bring her to a place of safety; she would hide in the striped, zebra prison clothing of the Witnesses. The brothers talked it over and decided not to do it, but it wasn't sensible to tell her just yet. When the time would come, they would tell her.

The news broke that the Russians were approaching. At the time, they were slaughtering 6 pigs, so they had a lot of food. Frau Heydrich fled.

At the end of the war, one of the security guards showed them Heydrich's dressing room so they could have his clothes. Aart was dressed in Heydrich's white socks, shoes and hat. He looked very funny. Some people's feet were too small for Heydrich's shoes; the noses of the shoes came up. To make a joke, they said, "Be joyful with your noses up." The sense of humor of the Witnesses contributed to their survival.

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