

-TITLE-KLAAS AND MARIA DEVRIES  
-I\_DATE-3 AND 4 SEPTEMBER 1990  
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-FAIR  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-GOOD  
-DURATION-  
-LANGUAGES-  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-

Klaas was born in Amsterdam in 1919. Maria, in Waddinksveen(ph) in 1912. In 1930, after Klaas' family had moved to Rotterdam, he first came into contact with Jehovah's Witnesses. He became a Witness as did his fiancée, Maria, his mother and brother. By 1933, Klaas and Maria were involved in Bible education work for the Witnesses. They married in 1937.

A German Witness named Winkler ran the Rotterdam branch. He asked Klaas where he was willing to go. Klaas said anywhere he was needed. Klaas and Maria became involved in pioneer work for the Witnesses, working on a ship in northern Holland. They had a system. One group would stay on board and wash clothes, prepare food, etc. Another would go out on their bicycles, no further than one hour's time, and preach to the people. After they had covered the territory, they would return to the ship and move along to the next village.

In 1940, when the Germans invaded, they were working on the ship in Groningen. They had to go underground because the police were cooperating with the Germans in arresting Witnesses. With four others, Klaas changed the color of the boat to gray and put a large sign on it saying it was a place where you could sharpen scissors and skates. The name of the ship was Light Bearer but they changed it to Corey(ph). The ship was right behind the police station where the Gestapo was but they never noticed it.

In mid-1940, Klaas was arrested when was bringing literature to another Witness, about 25 kilometers outside of Groningen. He had met another Witness along the way. When they got to the house, they were fed and treated well. As Klaas was putting three containers of literature in the attic, he felt two pistols in his neck and heard a voice which said, "Get out or we'll kill you right here." They asked if the person he had met on the road was his friend. Klaas told them that if they were arresting them, jeopardizing their lives, they would have a difficult time. After the war, Klaas learned that the policeman who had arrested them ended up in a mental institution.

Meanwhile, Maria had fled the boat in the middle of the night in the pouring rain and bicycled 32 kilometers to a cabin where Witnesses were. At 5:00 in the morning, the Gestapo came and looked for her with their bayonets but she was hiding and they didn't find her.

Klaas was interrogated from 1:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. and they beat him so badly that he was unconscious. He found himself in a small cell. They took him again at 9:00 and beat him with clubs and asked him where the boat was. All the time, it was right behind the police station where they were. They beat him so bad that by 11:00, they had to carry him out on a stretcher.

Another Witness wanted to go back to the boat and move it. Maria warned him not to do it, it was too risky. He tried to do it anyway and was arrested by the Gestapo. They confronted him with Klaas. They asked Klaas where his wife was. He told them how could he know, he was in jail for three weeks. The next jail Klaas was sent to was at Kupel(ph), a dome shaped building in Leeuwarden.

From there he was transported to Sachsenhausen with a group of Jews. He was chained to a Jewish professor and they talked. Klaas said he was not a literal Jew but a spiritual Jew, a Witness of Jehovah. He could not be a literal Jew because the Jews killed Christ. The professor became very angry at this. They entered the camp by an intimidating punishment. They had to roll through the mud and shit for about 25 meters. Klaas refused to do it.

Klaas was put in a labor camp nearby named Klinger(ph) where they made bricks. Fifty people died a day from the beatings. After a year he couldn't take it any longer and he prayed to Jehovah to take his life. One night, a Polish doctor woke him and told him of a way to get back to the main camp to be with the other Witnesses. He went back to the camp hidden under a load of dead bodies that had been rotting for days, wrapped in a blanket. The bodies were those of Russians who had been beaten to death. They were being sent to be cremated. The Polish doctor gave him a Russian name. The Witnesses had been expecting him to return this way and were looking for him every day. When he returned, he hid in a small room of a Witness who was a surgeon, under his bed. Klaas was hospitalized but there was no report of him coming in. The man who supervised the hospital was a Witness and he advised Klaas to tell them who he really was. When there was a check up, Klaas explained to an SS man what had happened and the man was very surprised. Klaas thought he would be shot but this was the only way. The SS man said that as soon as he recovered he would go back to Klinger.

But when he recovered, the Brother who supervised the hospital told him he was going to be a butler for a German officer who had been badly wounded, and he was not sent to Klinger. Klaas taught the officer the Bible every Sunday at 11:00 A.M. At one point, the officer said that when the war ended he would become a Witness.

Klaas was later sent to work on a ship where they had to load

bricks. He worked with a 26 year old Russian from Moscow and Klaas preached to him. The wife of the captain overheard him and asked if he was a Witness. She smuggled hot pancakes to him and the Russian. They had to swallow it right away. At one point, the Russian made a mistake and a pile of bricks collided and broke. The officers were so angry that they threw a brick into his head and killed him right away. Klaas was hit by a piece in the forehead but he was well taken care of because one of these officers had been listening to him preach and was interested in the Witnesses.

Once Klaas had to load four dead bodies on a wheel barrow at the end of the day. Klaas noticed that one of the bodies was not dead yet, a Polish man. Klaas took them to the place where the bodies went and was told to throw them off. But he gently placed the Polish man down, with his head resting on one of the bodies. An SS man saw what was happening and told Klaas he would die for this. Klaas was put on the gallows and a rope was placed around his neck. He stood there from 5:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. The officer came back but neither him nor the hangman wanted to kill him. Another officer saw this and told them to set Klaas free because he was a good worker. He was so tired that he couldn't stand on his feet and was already hanging. He prayed to Jehovah.

Klaas was in Sachsenhausen until his liberation, the famous death march epoch. Of the 45,000 in Sachsenhausen, 300 were Witnesses. When they started the march, one of the SS officers brought six girls who had worked in the households dressed in men's clothing to the Brothers, so they could return to Holland. They were protected by the Brothers. The marchers were surrounded by SS officers on motorcycles. The Brother named Winkler was carried on a cart. Not one Witness died on the march. They walked 400 kilometers in 14 days. At night they wrapped themselves in blankets under trees. The plan was to bring the Witnesses to a lake where there boats laced with ammunition, so they would be exploded together with the boats. But then, the Americans and the Canadians liberated them.

Along the way they got food from the villagers. The Witnesses held on to each other so they wouldn't fall down because if you fell down, you were shot. At the end of two weeks, the commanding officer told them they were free and gave them three loaves of bread and three sausages. This was cut into tiny pieces, as small as dice, and distributed. Each was allowed three pieces a day but it was distributed one at a time. After they ate, they sang and thanked Jehovah. Then they rested. When they were liberated by the Americans and Canadians, they were washed and housed in big stables and well taken care of. Only then were the six girls discovered. The Witnesses went out to the villages and preached, and the people gave them chocolates and food.

Seventeen of the Brothers were from Holland. From Enschede they were taken to Arnhem where they stayed in a castle and were spoiled. From there he was allowed to go back to Rotterdam. He wrote to the society and asked if there was a job for him. He was

assigned to Dordrecht and began preaching again from a ship. At this time, he knew nothing of his wife.

Maria was arrested due to betrayal and arrested in her father's house. For four months she was in the dungeons of a jail, alone. There was no light. Sometimes there was food. She was interrogated but she was not cooperative so she was beaten up. They asked for names of other Witnesses but Maria refused and that's when they beat her. Because of these beatings and the beatings at the camp, she is deaf in one ear.

She was transported to Ravensbrück. The first day, they were beaten and kicked by SS men. There were many female Witnesses from Germany and Holland. They were given zebra uniforms. In the beginning Maria was separated from the other Sisters but later she was brought together with them. Maria had to do a lot of cleaning, carrying buckets of water, also brick laying in the streets. She also had to crush the remains from the ovens with hammers.

The work day started at 3:00 in the morning and ended at 6:00 at night, and only then were they allowed to eat. A soup which was mostly water with bits of cabbage. After a while, some of the Brothers working in the laboratory discovered that sometimes there were pieces of meat in the soup; it was from human flesh. They told each other not to eat it.

It helped Maria to talk to the other Witnesses about the Bible and Jehovah. She was very outspoken and said what she thought and she received many beatings because of it. The Jews and the Witnesses received the worst treatment but everyone was treated badly. The German Witnesses were a great encouragement. They had spent a lot of time in the camp and were used to it. They said: "We survived all this time up until now, so if we did, you should too." They were always looking forward to seeing new Witnesses because they had the latest information.

There were 150 women in a barrack, two or three people to one bed. It was very dirty because some of the prisoners urinated in the bed. Male and female SS were always in charge. It got worse in 1945 near the end of the war because the Nazis couldn't stand that they were going to lose. They took revenge on the prisoners. Maria doesn't remember who liberated them but when they were, they danced and cried. The Red Cross was there and they treated them very well.

#### The Reunion

They knew nothing about what happened to each other. The SS told them that they had killed their spouses and that's what they believed. Maria was sent with female Witnesses to a hospital in Gottenborg, Sweden. She could hardly eat because of over-tension. Klaas was already in Holland. The Red Cross helped them contact each other. Klaas got a telegram from her from Sweden and he sent a telegram to her. He had returned to Holland in May 1945 and she

returned in October 1945. That is when they met each other at his mother's house. A neighbor was so impressed that she asked Klaas to help her study the Bible.  
.END.