

Corrie ten Boom and Forgiveness

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In 1939 Corrie ten Boom was 47 years old and lived with her widowed 82 year old father and elder sister Betsie in Haarlem, in The Netherlands. Neither sister had ever married. Her father had a little watchmakers shop. It was the year the war came to Holland and with it much evil. The night the first bombs fell, Corrie had a dream. About a strange old farm wagon pulled by black horses across the city square. In it she saw herself, her father and Betsie amongst friends and other family members many of whom she recognised. They couldn't get off the wagon as it slowly was dragged across the square. But they didn't want to go and the wagon was taken them far far away...that dream proved to be prophetic.

It took 5 days until Holland surrendered. Initially business boomed but the streetscape changed as more and more German soldiers arrived and life became more and more controlled and frightening. A year into the invasion attacks on Jews became frequent. And the Ten Booms had friends and employees that were Jewish. Corrie's brother was the first to work with the Underground. People began to vanish. The first family member to be arrested was her nephew Peter. For defiantly playing the forbidden Dutch national anthem.

Slowly the family began helping Jewish people to escape. They created a hideout in their own home. In early 1944 the inevitable happened. Corrie, Betsie their father (now 87), their brother Willem and his wife, their sister Nollie and her husband, her nephew Peter and many others were arrested and transported by bus out of Haarlem and to the Hague. Bringing to pass Corrie's dream. From there by army truck to Scheveningen. Within 10 days of the arrest her father died. Later they were taken by train to a concentration camp in the Dutch town of Vught. And several months later, in September 1944 by train to Ravensbruck. And this is where my story begins.

I will leave to your imagination the atrocities that Corrie and her sister suffered. I want to tell you a story. A story that touched my heart so much that it cleansed me of feelings I had harboured for years.

On arrival at Ravensbruck the women were marched to the processing centre for new arrivals. Here they had to pile all of their belongings in the centre of the room and then strip naked and also add their clothes to the pile. Naked they had to walk under bright lights and past the scrutiny of a dozen guards towards the shower room. Using her ingenuity Corrie managed to take her sister into the shower room before undressing and in this way she managed to hide her bible, a bottle of vitamin pills inside a sweater which later her sister would wear. By this stage Betsie was emaciated and quite ill. The bible became Corrie's only comfort and daily she would read from it to herself and to the other women. Thus in that evil hell hole, Corrie's faith blossomed. And all the time she watched her sister get sicker and die an agonising death but never once wavering in her faith.

And then a miracle occurred. One day... for apparently no reason... Corrie was taken aside and given a card that said the one word RELEASED. At first it seemed someone had played a horrible joke on her because to be released she had to be declared "healthy" and she was suffering from edema. But in a few days the swelling went down and amazing wonder she was released out of that death-trap. It was New Years day in 1945. And Corrie's life as an evangelist began shortly after the war ended. She travelled all over the place talking about God's love. And about forgiveness. And here are Corrie's own words as she relates the experience which touched me so ...many many years later, when I read this story in Melbourne Australia. I was born in Germany and although my family migrated to Australia when I was only 11 years old, I carried with me for over 40 years of my life feelings of guilt and shame and a terrible hatred for Hitler and everything Nazi. Until I read Corrie's story:

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former SS man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing centre at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message Fräulein", he said "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your Forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

Corrie Ten Boom spent much of her life helping people in Holland and Germany after the war. As well as teaching about love and forgiveness she became the Director of a Relief Organisation.

To complete my story I would also like to share with you the following. I was born in Germany in 1950, after the war and all its atrocities were well and truly over. But I was not spared the feelings of shame and humiliation that were experienced by many of my country men. When I was 11 years old my family migrated to Australia. As I grew up and learnt about the war and what happened I was filled with hatred and anger against the Nazis. For the humiliation and suffering of their victims but also for the stigma and pain they inflicted on the entire German race. These feelings were always there ready to burst out at the slightest provocation.

One day someone told me about Corrie Ten Boom and I got hold of a copy of "the Hiding Place" and read it. I was so touched by the way she had handled herself both during and after her ordeal and that of her family that I was suddenly cleansed of this terrible feeling. It was as if her experience of love and forgiveness reached out to me too and I realised that if Corrie, who had SO MUCH to forgive, could find it in her heart to forgive even her captors, then I too must forgive. And this is the experience that cleansed me of all that hatred and anger. Often I thought about this and shared my story with people. Then a few week's ago I wrote a series of poems on "forgiveness". The first was forgiving those people who hurt you. The 2nd was forgiving those who hurt others, a poem I could only write because of my experience in reading Corrie's book. My 3rd poem is about forgiving yourself. These poems can also be found on the humiliationstudies website:

<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/intervention/peacelinguistics.php#danaher>

I urge you to read her book "the hiding place" to hear her full story. Find out more by visiting the [corrietenboom](http://www.corrietenboom.com) website. (Story retold by Inge Danaher as recounted by Corrie Ten Boom in her book)

Inge Danaher, Melbourne, Australia, July 2007