



Behind the Fireplace: Memoirs of a girl working in the Dutch Restance

Andrew Scott

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As World War 2 progressed, the Okma family took in six Jewish refugees into their house, hiding them in a secret room behind their fireplace. The youngest daughter, Kieks, joined the Resistance, delivering illegal newspapers, guiding British parachutists around The Hague and preparing safe houses for when Special Forces were dropped in from England. As the War continued, she fell in love with a Resistance commander, and worked with him to rescue wounded colleagues, steal weapons from German arms dumps and move weapons around the country. They had a tumultuous parting and she continued her work, acting as a courier with a two hundred km bike ride to the north of Holland. When she returned home, she appreciated how much the war had changed her and her boyfriend, and prepared to try a reconciliation.

She escaped a firing squad four times, and survived the war, mentally scarred by her experiences. She sought help, but the help she was offered came in a poisoned chalice, and she kept her secret to herself for almost fifty years.

Her family in Holland was recognised by Yad Vashem, the Israeli organisation which records those who saved Jews from the Holocaust, and she was awarded a pension for her work in the Resistance by the Dutch foundation Stichting 1940-1945. It was only when these organisations acknowledged the truth of her claims that she had the confidence to tell her family of the events from long ago.

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