

Resistance On A Bicycle

It is a story at once too horrific, too impassioned, and too triumphant to be true...and yet it is. Dirk Van Leenen's biography reads like a fictional masterpiece. "Resistance On A Bicycle" follows the story of young Cornelius (based on Van Leenen), his parents and the defiant Dutch town that gives up their own safety to protect the Jews during WWII.

Cornelius' mother is a Jew who, by a simple clerical error, didn't have her maiden name recorded in the official record when she married a gentile. It is that oversight that keeps her from being killed by the Nazis. It is her husband's kindness, charity and honor that keep his family – and the Jews hidden beneath his floorboards - alive.

"Once, when Cornelius was only three-years-old, he had thought they were playing a game of hide and seek and he was ready to help the soldiers, to give them hints where to look. His mother, Johanna, had quickly pulled him away from the scene, putting her finger on her mouth as a gesture which he understood very well: keep it a secret. That made the game even more exciting for him."

"Resistance On A Bicycle" is a novel, but all the stories are true. Many of the tales are compilations Van Leenen gathered from other WWII survivors. Each chapter is a movingly written saga in itself; the previously forgotten heroes who risked their own lives to save the lives of people they'd never met.

Van Leenen takes the reader along with the members of the Resistance as they dress Jews as farm workers and hide "God's Chosen People" on ambulance gurneys beneath real wounded soldiers. The reader watches as men are dressed as women and women as men to make fake ID's. The reader fears for the safety of the elderly Dutch neighbor who risks her own life purely for the payment of hearing someone she's aided has survived the war.

"The Resistance was everywhere and the Germans would never be able to defeat such a determined people."

"Resistance On a Bicycle" was written at the urging of Van Leenen's grandchildren – and is a poignant tribute to the author's father, "Kees." Early in the book the great man is handcuffed, thrown in jail, and questioned by the Gestapo. "When Kees was thrown into the cell," writes Van Leenen, "he fell on his knees and prayed for his enemy. 'Lord, give them compassion and wisdom. Please let them be humane.' The Gestapo was never humane."

It is a credit to Van Leenen's skill as a storyteller that Cornelius naïveté comes across even as the boy is witnessing unimaginable cruelty. It is a credit to Van Leenen's powerful words that the struggle of a father to both shelter his boy's innocence – and protect his boy from danger - is so clearly and painfully portrayed.

Eventually, Van Leenen relates Kees explaining to his child, "This is not a game son, this is called war."

"Resistance On A Bicycle" is more than a biography. It is more than a novel. It is the moving story of a father and son that will stay with every parent who turns its pages long after the saga has ended.

The reader has no choice but to reflect on whom their own life has touched, to question their own heroism and to wonder: Do any of us have the strength of character to risk our families to save the lives of families we've never met?

About the Author

Dirk Van Leenen was born in 1940, just after the war had begun in The Netherlands. He lives in Arizona with his wife of more than 3 decades, Cynthia June Van Leenen. Together they have 7 children and seventeen grandchildren...many of whom urged him to write this biography. Dirk has spent most of his life working with flowers, and has several degrees in Horticulture and floral design. Dirk has talked to many other Holocaust survivors and gathered stories which have never before been told. His second book "Resistance On A Bicycle, The Final Struggle" should hit bookstores later this year.

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