

Did You Know? More Stories of Women

Courageous Women of Peace Making, From Ancient Days to the Present

Part One: The Hebrew Midwives, Shiphrah and Puah

Part Two: Miriam, Jochebed, and the Daughter of Pharaoh Form a Conspiracy

Part Three: ETTY HILLESUM and Corrie Ten Boom Return Love for Hate

There are many men we honor for their extraordinary contributions to peace-making. And rightly so! Doesn't the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King immediately come to mind, for example? But, did you know that there are also many women in our long Judeo-Christian faith tradition, whose peace-making hearts and actions can *still* fill us with awe? No? Then together we journey to ancient days, well before the Exodus, that formational event in the life of Israel. It was this event, above all else, that revealed the God of Israel as a saving and compassionate God of Liberation. It was this event, above all else, that moved our ancestors to respond, out of profound gratitude, by worshiping this Holy One and serving God's people, especially the most vulnerable in their midst. It was this event, above all else, that aroused a heart for compassionate justice- or right relationship- in the hearts of the prophets. And, wonder of all wonders, even in the days well before this event, there were two women who intuitively acted out of love for this Living and True God. Who are they? Their story follows; come and see.

Part One: The Hebrew Midwives, Shiphrah and Puah

Today, in the city of Tel Aviv, on the corner of Shiphrah and Puah Streets, stands a women's hospital. It is named after two wondrous Hebrew midwives, who followed their hearts... whose story is told in the first chapter of the Book of Exodus (1:8-22)... who are said to be the earliest examples in the Bible of non-violent resistance to oppression. You've never heard of Shiphrah and Puah? That's easy to understand, since their names are blotted out of the weekday reading for Monday of the 15th week of the year. The reading from the Lectionary for that day, Exodus 1:8-14 and 22, totally removes all mention of their heroic deeds. What, exactly, is left out?

We are told that a Pharaoh came to power in Egypt, "who did not know Joseph" (son of Judah, sold by his brothers to Ishmaelites headed for Egypt, but gifted enough to become chief advisor to Pharaoh). We are also told that this new Pharaoh feared the shrewdness and power of the Israelites in his land, growing in number by leaps and bounds. So he set harsh taskmasters over them; but that didn't work. He commanded ruthless oppression upon them; but that didn't work. So, in desperation, he ordered Shiphrah and Puah: "when you act as midwives to the Hebrew women...if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But Shiphrah and Puah "feared God," we are told, and refused to execute this command. Summoned by the Pharaoh to explain themselves, they simply replied: "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." Because of their courage, God blessed these midwives with families, we are told. But Pharaoh persisted in his brutality... now ordering "all his people" to throw every newborn baby boy into the Nile... and to allow only girls to live. So it was that the legacy of Shiphrah and Puah was eventually transferred to three other women. Their story follows.

Part Two: Miriam, Jochebed, and the Daughter of Pharaoh Form a Conspiracy

Now the stage was set for Act Two: the birth of Moses, and the courageous conspiracy of three women: Miriam, the sister of Moses; Jochebed, the mother of Moses; and the unnamed daughter of Pharaoh. It would take the rabbinic tradition to name *her* Bithiah (or Bityah), meaning “daughter of God.”

Conspiracy. It literally means to “breathe with.” And Webster claims that a conspirator is a plotter. Here we have two Israelite women- mother and daughter, Jochebed and Miriam- who literally “breathe with”... plot with... a presumed enemy, the Egyptian daughter of Pharaoh. And their purpose in doing so? To save a precious life... the life of baby Moses. In the end, of course, their actions- unbeknownst to them- would set into motion the events that save a people from oppression. Their story is told in Exodus 2:1-10. Here’s how I tell it in my second book, *Walking with Wisdom’s Daughters*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2006), pp. 35-38.

Jochebed, the mother of Moses

“Jochebed,¹ a Levite, the mother of Moses and wife of Amram, already has two children, Miriam and Aaron. Now a third is born to her, a beautiful baby boy. Like God at the dawn of creation, Jochebed pronounces with satisfaction, “How good (ki tob)!”² But, given the Pharaoh’s decree, what is she to do? She makes the dangerous decision to hide him at home for three months. “When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.”³ Is it possible to imagine the profound pain... and courage required... to release such a beautiful little baby into the unknown?

Scripture makes no mention whatsoever of the father. According to Jewish midrash-rabbinic commentary on the text- some of the Hebrew men are going along with the law and killing their baby boys. Not only that, they urge their wives to practice birth control and abortion. But the wives, in return, band together, refusing to sleep with their husbands. So the men divorce them and even sleep with Egyptian women. Miriam, according to this midrash, becomes an advocate in court for her mother and for all the women; in the end, she saves their marriages.⁴

Jochebed’s painful decision is rewarded, through the conspiring of her own daughter Miriam and the daughter of the Pharaoh. She will be paid by Pharaoh’s daughter to cuddle, care for and nurse her beloved son. And, though she will ultimately give him away once again, this time it will be into the safety of the Egyptian court.

The Daughter of Pharaoh

Scripture says little of her. Only this. That she is a woman of wealth and position, since she is daughter of Pharaoh, probably one in a court of many children, from several wives. That she is powerfully compassionate... enough to break her father’s despicable

¹ Jochebed is mentioned in two genealogies by name, Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59. She is a Levite who is married to Amram.

² See Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. Here I rely on Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 49; hereafter referred to as Nowell.

³ Exodus 2:3; the word for “basket” (tebah, literally, an ark) is only used one other place in Scripture, in Genesis 6:14, to describe Noah’s ark.

⁴ See Megan McKenna, *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 43-44; hereafter referred to as McKenna.

law, without a moment's hesitation.⁵ That she is the first single parent adopter in Scripture, taking in Moses as her very own. That she- a woman to whom no name is given- is precisely the one who names Moses. "I will call you Moses because in the language of my people, Moses means son. And you are the child I drew out of the water."⁶ That she is therefore a midwife, one who draws life out of the water of birth. That she pre-figures the Midwife God of Israel, who delivers the people of Israel through the Reed Sea, from slavery to freedom, from no people to God's people. And, finally, that she is a healing bridge between "enemy" cultures and religions.

But, the tradition asks, why does she- a woman of position and influence- act in such a healing, reconciling way? Why is she willing to disobey her own father? And, what becomes of this courageous woman?⁷ We don't know any of the answers for sure, but Megan McKenna suggests that she may have been motivated to act by a spirit of solidarity with the Hebrew people. She, too, might have known what it is to be without dignity, for any number of reasons. She might have been overlooked and disregarded, in a court of so many children. Or she might have borne a child that was deformed and therefore unwanted.⁸ In any case, she is revered among the Israelites. So much so, that in the tradition she becomes known as Bithiah (or Bityah), which means daughter of God. For she images the God of deliverance. According to Megan McKenna, the tradition maintains that she leaves Egypt with Moses and the others, adopting the God of the Israelites for her own.⁹ However, according to Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's midrash, Bithiah cannot bring herself to leave Egypt. Instead, she blesses Moses and his people on their way to freedom. Either way, she refuses to be party to the oppression. Either way, as an outsider, even an "enemy," she creates a bridge of compassion to *the* formative event of the people of Israel, the Exodus.

Miriam

Of the three, Scripture tells us the most about Miriam, sister of Moses.¹⁰ She is remembered as advocate, prophet, cultic leader, and leader of the Israelites- along with Moses and Aaron- throughout their wilderness wanderings. We first meet her as the young courageous girl at water's edge.¹¹ She stands "at a distance," watching, judging, discerning what will happen to her little baby brother, as he floats in his tiny ark among the reeds. Her courageous advocacy, boldly crossing religious and political boundaries to approach Pharaoh's daughter, has given birth to the midrash of her advocacy as a lawyer. According to McKenna, she is regarded as the first woman attorney, advocating for

⁵ Exodus 2:7. She takes Miriam up on her offer to "get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you."

⁶ Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, "Bityah, Daughter of God" in her *But God Remembered*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), p. 20; hereafter referred to as Sasso. Nowell, p. 50, adds that the later Hebrew understanding of his name means "to draw out."

⁷ Midrash is born out of this kind of attentive listening to the whispers in between the lines. It gives rise to possible explanations and stories, which are faithful to the tradition.

⁸ McKenna, pp. 47-48.

⁹ McKenna, p. 49.

¹⁰ See Exodus 2:7-8, Exodus 15:20-21, Numbers 12:1-16, Numbers 20:1, Numbers 26:59, 1 Chronicles 5:29 (or 6:3), and Micah 6:3-4.

¹¹ Note that all three women are connected with the water of new birth, which will become the water of deliverance in the Exodus.

justice on behalf of women whose husbands were divorcing them and on behalf of those who were poor.¹²

We next encounter her as prophet and cultic leader at the Exodus event itself.¹³ As prophet, she speaks (sings, dances) on God's behalf. Scholars today generally agree that Miriam is leading the people of Israel in a worship service, in praise of their Warrior God, who delivers them from oppression. Such a service may or may not have happened at the banks of the Reed Sea; more than likely, it happened at a place like Kadesh,¹⁴ where the people would gather to remember and make present the power of the God who had freed them from slavery. Dance and the music of the tambourine were two effective means of unleashing this divine power; for God "has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."¹⁵ Such praise became part of the tradition of Israel, as we see in Judith 15:12-16:2, in Psalms 20:5-9, 68:25, 81:1-2, 149:1-4, and 150 (especially 150:4) and in Judges 11:34 (though here the worship of Yahweh is indirect).¹⁶

Miriam is a significant leader of the Exodus and wilderness period, important enough to be included in two genealogies. But her joyful song hits a sour note with the question, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?"¹⁷ What is going on here? On the face of it, Miriam and Aaron "spoke against Moses because of the Cushite women whom he had married,"¹⁸ and God's anger "was kindled against them."¹⁹ But, Miriam alone is punished; for she "had become leprous, as white as snow."²⁰ Both Moses and Aaron intervene on her behalf, but God "shuts her out" of camp for seven days. It is noteworthy that "the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again."²¹ A feminist reading is suspicious of this story- and any story- that does not reflect the God of liberation. What *is* going on here? Some, like Scripture scholar Rita Burns, suggest that Miriam has been caught up in a much later power struggle, after the exile (6th century B.C.E.), when the Pentateuch was edited in its final form. It is a struggle between the Levite priests- represented by Moses- and the Aaronic priests- represented by Aaron and Miriam. The Levites were the winners. But, is there also a memory of Miriam suffering from leprosy? If so, what was its effect on the people who loved her? It's difficult to know for sure. But, we do know that Miriam died and was buried at the sacred place of Kadesh. And, when she died, the earth itself mourned, drying up for the one who had been so intimately associated with the water of life.²² Her memory persists among the people... and the prophets. The eighth century prophet Micah recalls the Exodus event,

¹² McKenna, p. 44.

¹³ See Exodus 15: 20-21, two of the most ancient verses in Scripture; some scholars believe that the Song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18, actually belong to Miriam, as well.

¹⁴ Kadesh is the place where Miriam died and was buried (Numbers 20:1). As Nowell points out (p. 54), it is a significant place for the Israelites. Its name means "sacred." It is there that the spies report to Moses and Aaron and all the people about the land of Canaan. It is there that the people murmur, wanting to return to Egypt, only to be told by God that they will need to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, a time of purging. It is from there that the final journey into the promised land will begin.

¹⁵ Exodus 15:21.

¹⁶ In the tradition, praise of a conquering hero was ultimately praise of God, the Divine Warrior.

¹⁷ See Numbers 12:2.

¹⁸ Numbers 12:1.

¹⁹ Numbers 12:9.

²⁰ Numbers 12:10.

²¹ Numbers 12:15.

²² Numbers 20:2.

led by “Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”²³ And, for Jeremiah, God tenderly recalls the cultic leadership of Miriam, without mentioning her by name.²⁴

All three women conspired to resist oppression by making peace. All three women courageously crossed boundaries that institutions had set for them. All three women refused to be oppressed. All three women took significant steps, one step at a time, beyond their knowing, to set in motion *the* formative event of the people of Israel. They participated in the traditioning of a God who sets people free, for the service of God and God’s people.”

Part Three: Two Twentieth Century Make Peace
Etty Hillesum and Corrie Ten Boom Return Love for Hate

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Fear can create havoc... death... destruction. It can be a cause for war... the hot, violent war that seeks to destroy all that lies in its wake... *and* the cold, buried-deep, silent war by refusing to speak out in the face of injustice. At first, it might seem so easy to play it safe. To go along with the crowd. To remain silent, even though one’s insides are fairly *bursting* to speak the truth that’s buried there. It’s so easy to pretend one hasn’t seen. To deny one hasn’t heard. To try to please others. To try to fit into a system that simply won’t budge. Just for security. Or status. Or comfort. Or complacency. It’s so easy to give into fear of any kind. Or so it seems. At first.

But, the truth is, it’s *not* so easy. It’s *not* of the Gospel. It’s *not* the way of Jesus. It’s *not* what he has in mind for any of us who follow him. The truth is: it diminishes everyone. Makes puny the human heart, mind and spirit. Leads to death rather than life. The truth is: it even- and especially- diminishes the power of God.

Perhaps that’s why the first words proclaimed at Easter to the women- “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary”- were these: “Do not be afraid.”²⁵ Words spoken, over and over, time and time again, by God, or God’s messengers, to people chosen for God’s work. Words spoken to Abraham, by then withered in age, with not a child in sight, despite the promises of God. “Do not be afraid, Abram.... Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.... So shall your descendants be.”²⁶ Words spoken to the broken, enslaved people of Israel through Moses: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today...”²⁷ Words tenderly spoken through the prophet Isaiah to a desolate people “stuck” in exile in Babylon, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”²⁸ Words spoken to a “perplexed” Mary, at her Annunciation, by Gabriel. “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”²⁹ Words spoken by Jesus to his first disciples, during his ministry: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”³⁰ Words we *all* need to hear, at one time or another, if we’re honest.

²³ Micah 6:4.

²⁴ Jeremiah 31:4.

²⁵ See Matthew 28:1, 5.

²⁶ See Genesis 15:1, 5.

²⁷ See Exodus 14:13.

²⁸ See Isaiah 43:1.

²⁹ See Luke 1:30.

³⁰ Luke 12:32.

There are women, age after age, as numerous as the stars in heaven, who have stood firm, despite great fear. Who have acted on behalf of life, on behalf of the truth as they understood it, on behalf of peace and love, no matter the cost. We know them personally. And/ or by reputation. Perpetua and Felicity. St. Joan of Arc. St. Teresa of Avila. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Women represented today by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, under the duress of a Vatican investigation... to name but a few. But there are two I focus on now. Women who knew the unimaginable, violent horror of the holocaust. Women who stood firm in their peace-making convictions. Women who returned hatred with love. They were both Dutch, one Jewish, the other Christian. Here are their stories.

Etty Hillesum

Her given name was Esther. But she is known to us as Etty Hillesum. And her story is found in her diary and Letters from Westerbork, a prison in the eastern part of the Netherlands, taken over by the Nazis as a holding camp for those headed east to the concentration camps. (See *An Interrupted Life*, published by Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1996.) Born on January 15, 1914, in the Netherlands, she was the daughter of a professor of classical languages, Louis Hillesum, and a Russian-born mother, who escaped that country after yet one more pogrom. She and her two brothers were brilliant and gifted. Etty's forte was in philosophy and psychology, Russian, and writing, above all else. Her brother Misha was a gifted musician, and her brother Joppe became a doctor. Truly a woman of the twentieth century, rooted in Judaism, she was transformed by suffering and love to embrace the God deep within, the One God of us all. In truth, she has made a home in my heart. So much so, that I was inspired to write this letter to her, in return.

June, 2010

Dear Etty,

I realize now that God has led me to you, as I pondered the words, "Do not be afraid." Who, of so many brave women, needed to hear them most? So many came to mind. Certainly Joan of Arc! Or, how about Theresa of Avila? But, then, here and there, *your* name came up. And I relished snippets of your writing. Words from your diary, *An Interrupted Life*, written from March 1941 to the fall of 1942. And then I knew. It must be *you*. A Dutch Jew, *you*, who came face to face with the obscene evil of the holocaust. And I looked no further. But the surprise, the God surprise, was how your words have landed in my heart. No, that *you* have made a home there!

It occurs to me, Etty, that we have shared a very brief time on this globe we call home: barely two and a half years in the early 1940's. Yet, so much separates us. Time. Culture. Faith tradition. First-hand experience of the holocaust. And more. At the same time, the truth of your soul resonates deep within my own. As I read, ingested, soaked up your words, I became more and more convinced: I've been there, with you. Especially on the journey of intentionally growing God deep within, as you did. All the while, trying to remain in the present moment. All the while, discovering beauty and meaning in a life where struggle- for me- and horror- for you- might have had the last word.

So it is that I *must* name the ways in which we are connected. We love books. We love to study. We love to write. Your phrase, seeking just the right word to "caress the

paper,” really resonated.³¹ I understand. Then there’s our appreciation of beauty in the little things. A few flowers. Wearing a pretty blouse, that becomes a source of celebration. Yes. And, I know well your excruciatingly honest efforts to be comfortable in your own skin, to accept your flaws, all the while claiming your “destiny,” rather than merely living “an accidental life.”³² Finally, I appreciate your comments about women being perceived as the “weaker sex.” Even now, some seventy years later, it might be said, as you did, that women “still have to be born as human beings.”³³ Yes, and I consider myself one of those midwives.

So, then, let me name the ways in which you stir my heart. In your compassion, not unlike that of God, in response to Abraham’s persistent plea, on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁴ Would God save Sodom, even if only fifty... forty-five... forty... or finally, even ten righteous people remained there? Yes... yes... and yes again. Or, as you put it, “hatred of Germans poisons everyone’s mind.” But, “if there were only one decent German, then he should be cherished despite that whole barbaric gang, and because of that one decent German it is wrong to pour hatred over an entire people.”³⁵

How, then, did you come to such compassion, even for the “enemy?” Your own words best describe this remarkable journey. In the beginning of your diary (March 9, 1941), you admitted: “...deep down something like a tightly wound ball of twine binds me relentlessly, and at times I am nothing more or less than a miserable, frightened creature, despite the clarity with which I can express myself.”³⁶ In your case, as with some of us, there was a person who served as teacher, guide, and friend. For you, he was also a lover... a complicated relationship that would bear much good fruit. His name was Julius Spear. And, of course, there was the turning to God... daily... more and more... evermore... that was the deciding factor. It began as half an hour every morning. And continued as a “sacred unease,” a desire to become God’s instrument in the world.³⁷ Oftentimes, you would simply fall onto your knees, calling yourself “a kneeler in training.”³⁸ What a powerful image! All the while, knowing, as you said, that “there is really a deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath.”³⁹ So it is, you said, that I must dig God out again. You could freely admit that this “striving after true inner freedom” is a “slow and painful process.”⁴⁰ But by November 1941 you would pray: “I only want to try to be true to that in me which seeks to fulfill its promise....”⁴¹ to develop “a central core of devotion and love.”⁴² And in return, you promised “to strive... for beauty and harmony and also humility and true love....”⁴³

³¹ The next footnotes all come from Ety’s diary, *An Interrupted Life*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996). This quote is found on p. 120.

³² p. 130.

³³ p. 34.

³⁴ See Genesis 18:16-33.

³⁵ p. 11.

³⁶ p. 3.

³⁷ p. 32.

³⁸ p. 73.

³⁹ p. 44.

⁴⁰ p. 56.

⁴¹ p. 63.

⁴² p. 70.

⁴³ p. 73.

But here's what I *really* love. This was not some kind of pious "stuff," the prayer of a person disengaged from reality. On the contrary! You struggled your way through the tightening of the Nazi noose around the Jewish community in Amsterdam and beyond. Indeed, you could proclaim: "Through suffering I have learned that we must share our love with the whole of creation."⁴⁴ But, as you put it, it must be *real* suffering, not *imagined* suffering. By *that* you meant the *fear* of suffering, which could not possibly be redemptive. But, "reality is something one shoulders together with all the suffering that goes with it, and with all the difficulties. And as one shoulders them, so one's resilience grows stronger."⁴⁵ By December, 1942, you could say more about redemptive suffering. "I sometimes think that every new situation, good or bad, can enrich us with new insights. But if we abandon the hard facts that we are forced to face, if we give them no shelter in our heads and hearts, do not allow them to settle and change into impulses through which we can grow and from which we can draw meaning- then we are not a viable generation."⁴⁶ In fact, as you saw it, "New thoughts will have to radiate outward from the camps themselves, new insights, spreading lucidity, will have to cross the barbed wire enclosing us and join with the insights that people outside will have to earn just as bloodily, in circumstances that are slowly becoming just as difficult."⁴⁷ It's almost as though you had heard "the Jew Paul," as you named him, whisper into your heart: "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."⁴⁸ Yes, you, rooted in Judaism, were familiar with Paul; and you often quoted Matthew, the evangelist, from whom you also drew strength and comfort.

In the end, you witnessed mightily to peace and love. You claimed responsibility for your true self, no matter the circumstances, and you urge us to do the same. "They [the Nazis] can harass us, they can rob us of our material goods, of our freedom of movement, but we ourselves forfeit our greatest assets by our misguided compliance.... True peace will come only when every individual finds peace within himself; when we have all vanquished and transformed our hatred for our fellow human beings of whatever race- even into love one day, although perhaps that is asking too much. It is however, the only solution. I am a happy person and I hold life dear indeed, in this year of Our Lord 1942, the umpteenth year of the war."⁴⁹ As you wrestled with this process, you shared some of your wisdom with the rest of us. Stay in the day. Do only what each day requires. Fight "daily" worries, "those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies."⁵⁰ "Ultimately," you proclaimed, "we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world."⁵¹

⁴⁴ p. 147.

⁴⁵ p. 220.

⁴⁶ Etty Hillesum, *Letters from Westerbork*, in the same volume with her *Interrupted Life*, p. 250.

⁴⁷ pp. 250-251.

⁴⁸ Romans 5:3-5.

⁴⁹ pp. 144.

⁵⁰ p. 218.

⁵¹ p. 218.

Your last entry left me in awe. Once again, you expressed your love of Rilke's poetry. Surely, you said, the work of a gentle monastic, like Rilke, has a place in an anguished world like ours. Surely, just as you had found beauty, harmony and peace in his words, so others could benefit, as well. And you then concluded, "We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds."⁵²

So, dear Etty, your powerful witness, during a time of such horrific evil, lives on in my heart. And I feel drawn to you, ever more closely, day by day. Indeed, you challenge me to go and do the same. Now, my struggle is with some of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church... to resist compliance on issues born out of fear and control, like the place of women and the new Roman Missal. But always, my struggle is to resist abusive control, from that same God space deep within, where peace and love can grow. Because of *your* courage and faithfulness in *your* struggle, I can accept this challenge. Thank you, Etty, with all my heart.

With eternal gratitude,
Gloria

Corrie Ten Boom

Her story can be found in *The Hiding Place*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, © 1971, 1984, 2006). Corrie- given name Cornelia- was named after her mother. A woman of wisdom, kindness and love. And she passed on that quiet strength and wisdom to Corrie (p, 50): "Happiness isn't something that depends on our surroundings, Corrie. It's something we make inside ourselves." Her father, Casper, a watchmaker and clockmaker, was revered in their town of Haarlem, not far from Amsterdam. He was the one who led the family in prayer and Bible study on a daily basis. Two sisters and a brother completed this remarkable family. But it was her older sister Betsie who would be her everlasting inspiration during the harshest, and seemingly interminable, days of the war. I imagined that Corrie might tell us a little about herself in this way.

"You might well be wondering: how did I ever learn to offer love instead of hate? Especially back then. Especially when our beloved Netherlands was ruled by the Nazis. Especially during our time in that concentration camp of Ravensbruck, that hell hole on earth. How?! Only with much difficulty. *And*, above all, the grace of God!

As you may know, I was part of the underground in my beloved Netherlands during World War II. We-my whole family- hid Jewish people in our home... that is, until the German officials caught up with us and put us all in prison. Oh, yes, I'll *never* forget that day in February, 1944. But, I'm getting ahead of myself. I must tell you about the kind of family I grew up in. I must tell you about my father... his abundant kindness, his great wisdom. The time came when I fell in love with a young man named Karel. He was the love of my life! There would never be another for me, and I knew it. We spent so many soul-connecting moments... lovely moments. Then we were separated for awhile by time and space. Gradually I heard less and less from him, until one day, when he showed up at our doorstep, to introduce us to his fiancée. Afterwards, I went up to my room and sobbed my heart out. My father wisely waited... then came up to console me with these words (p. 60), "Corrie, love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked, that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill the love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or, Corrie, we can

⁵² p. 231.

ask God to open up another route for that love to travel.” And God will do it. I knew he was right, and his words would become my bulwark during our imprisonment.

How could people inflict such brutality on others! I agonized over that question again and again and again. For we were sandwiched in, literally one upon another.

Everywhere was dirt... filth... lice... the sneering grins of German guards every Friday as they marched us naked for our “health check up.” I remember times of inflamed rage... only to be calmed by my beloved sister Betsie. She was the one who introduced prayer and bible study. She was the one who brought a healing presence. She was the one who would pray for the perpetrator, while I was praying for the victim of someone’s brutishness. She was the one who kept saying to me (p. 188), “Corrie, if people can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love! We must find the way, you and I, no matter how long it takes...” But the evils of the camp were too much for her. And I’ll never forget the day she died. I couldn’t bear to see her, so skeletal, so diseased. But one of the guards insisted. And I gasped. “Lord Jesus, what have you done? Oh, Lord, what are you saying? What are you giving me?” For the Betsie I saw in death was “the Betsie of Haarlem, happy and at peace... the Betsie of heaven, bursting with joy and health. Even her hair was graciously in place as if an angel had ministered to her.” (See pages 229-230.)

After I was released, myself, just before the new year of 1945, I finally discovered some two years later, that it was through a “clerical error.” But by then, I had already begun to tell others what Betsie had insisted upon... all over the place... throughout Europe, and yes, even in Germany... and the United States. Hatred *must* be returned with love! Until one day, speaking at a church in Germany, I saw one of those German guards, one who had leered at us. He stuck out his hand to me afterwards, so grateful, he said, to know of God’s forgiveness. But I couldn’t lift my arm. It just wouldn’t move. “Lord Jesus,” I prayed, “forgive me and help me to forgive him.” My arm still wouldn’t move. So I breathed a silent prayer again, “Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give Your forgiveness.” Then, as I finally took his hand, something like an electric shock went through me... followed by a burst of love, even for this man. “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.” (See pages 247-248.) And this I know to be true.”