



GOD SO
LOVED THE
WHOLE
WORLD

It was the winter of 1944—a very bad time. That winter was the worst for the Dutch people—of all the countries occupied by the Germans—because we had hoped in September that the invasion had come and we would be freed.

But American and British soldiers had been unable to break across the rivers during Operation Market Garden near

BY MARGARET
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Arnhem (the story told in *A Bridge Too Far*), and the northern provinces of the Netherlands were still occupied.

It was an extremely cold winter in my hometown of Groningen. We no longer had heat and we hardly had any food.

But we still had our Christmas Eve service in our church.

I was walking home—I had to rush because you had to be in at seven o'clock at night—and I had to pass the house where the German officers were quartered with their wives. It was one of the city's beautiful old historic buildings.

But I had to stop—first because of the smells of food. So I followed my nose and it took me to the windows of that building, and I stood there just smelling and trying to figure out what it was.

There was chicken, somehow, a very good

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smell. And so I could not really leave that spot. I had to stay

there—inhalé it.

And then they started to sing *Silent Night, Holy Night* and I thought:

What is this? This is my God and

my Jesus that was born, not theirs. They killed everybody; they ruined our country; they took away our freedom; they have food.

...then they started to sing *Silent Night, Holy Night* and I thought: *What is this? This is my God and my Jesus that was born, not theirs.*

And then a man started telling the Christmas story, and I thought, *This is too much.*

I went on home extremely angry because I had always felt that even during the worst of times, at least we had God—that God was on our side. I had felt very comforted by our church service. Almost everybody I knew was hungry. It was cold, and we still had a war. But God was with us.

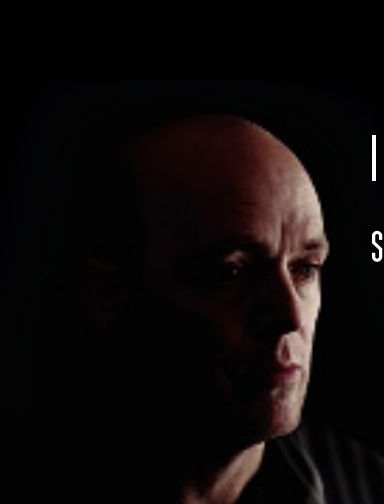
And then to come to that house and smell the food and hear the Christmas story made me very upset. I didn't want to share God's love with the Germans. I fell asleep cold and hungry—crying bitter tears of anger.

Then freedom came in the spring of 1945.

I had often talked to my uncle, who was the minister of the Baptist church, and told him how angry I had felt.

"I can understand, but God is the God of everyone," he told me. "He might not like their deeds, but he is God of everyone."

So Christmas came around, and it was so much better in 1945. We had CARE packages, and we were free, and we looked forward to



I will never forget them, all those people. Their heads were shaved, and they had striped suits on—men and women... I started to feel really bad because I had been sitting in judgment, and I felt a little guilty when I saw them.

Christmas. And we could be outside again, and it didn't matter how late because there was no curfew. And I was really happy.

Then, about two weeks before Christmas, my uncle called and said: "Margaret, I would like for you to come on Christmas Eve with me to a meeting and recite a poem."

So I asked, "What kind of meeting is it?" And he said, "Well, we have a camp for all the people who collaborated with the Germans."

Well, they were worse than the Germans as far as I was concerned, because if your own fellow countryman betrayed you.... I said: "Oh, no. I don't want to go. Why are you going to do that, Uncle?"

He said, "We're going to give them a Christmas Eve service."

And I said, "Just don't count on me."

"Well," he said, "I really think it would be good to do it because it's a very good poem that you should recite."

He said he would send it to me. It was a dialogue between Christ and Man. Man asked Christ: "Why did you come to this earth?"

And Christ said: "I came even if it is only one I can save, one, then I have not come in vain."

That was a time and age when you never said "no" to your superiors. But I hesitated a little bit, and my uncle said that he had a surprise for me.

"You don't have to come on the bicycle," he said. "You will go by car."

I hadn't been in a car for years and years and years. And so we drove out there to that camp.

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shaved, and they had striped suits on—men and women. They all came in, and our church had come to give them that Christmas Eve service.

No one dared to look up. They were extremely uneasy. This was the first time that they would meet fellow countrymen other than family members.

They all came into the room with their heads bowed down. I started to feel really bad because I had been sitting in judgment, and

I felt a little guilty when I saw them.

The room was not decorated, but there was a huge Christmas tree with big white candles—real candles. We did light the candles. We sang *Silent Night, Holy Night*, and then there was the Christmas story and there was "For God so loved the world."

And then I read my poem.

It ended with Christ saying: "Maybe you are the one who needs help. I am happy to give it to you."

It was very special, and after the meeting was over there was hope again in the eyes of the people. There had been a message of hope and forgiveness for everyone. And I felt I also needed forgiveness.

It had taken a long time for me to realize that God is also the God of the enemy. □

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Margaret Kiwiet was born and raised in the home of a Dutch Baptist minister's family. After World War II, Margaret was involved in convening religious retreats for young people, and it was there that she met her husband. She first came to the United States in 1962. The Kiwiets have five children and three grandchildren.