

IN THE JAPANESE CAMPS

Olga Moss

Prison	3
Samson	9
Crystal.....	12
Death.....	13
Bastille	16
Paralysis	16
Christmas	17
Storm.....	21
Uncle	22
Escape	22
Last Day.....	23
Tjinhapit	25
Hoarding	26
Transport.....	28
Arrival	28
First Days	31
The Next Few Weeks	32
The Japanese	34
Moon-Madness.....	35
Appendicitis	37
The Men's Camp	39
Benny and Freedom.....	40

Prison

In 1942 Java was occupied by the Japanese and all the Dutch people were put in camps, and some in prison. Bantjeuj is a large white walled prison in Bandoeng on Java. It was condemned by the Dutch as "unsuitable for human habitation." It was a pity the Dutch had not demolished this old prison by the time Java was occupied by the Japanese, because at once they made use of Bantjeuj by filling it up with prisoners-of-war.

Many times as a young girl of 14 and 15 years I had cycled past Bantjeuj. Never did I imagine for one moment that one day I would be prisoner in one of its cells myself! Our life in Java was carefree. School going, passing exams, playing tennis, swimming, going for long walks, spending holidays in mountain places seemed to be the order of the day and to continue forever.

Suddenly war was declared with Japan. In no time Java surrendered and the Japanese storm-troops rushed on motorcycles into the towns. The Japanese with their dark sunglasses and hats with ear flaps looked like species from another planet. Announcements were made over the radio, telling us how we should behave towards them. We were taught that we should bow for Japanese, as that was their custom, and women were not allowed to look in the face of a Japanese man when he spoke to her, but should answer him by looking down on the ground. Schools were closed. Overnight, life changed from living in freedom to imprisonment on this island. It seemed unreal and nightmarish, because the change had not come gradually, but like a thief in the night, we were unexpectedly robbed of our possessions, our way of life and most of all, of our loved ones.

One day, around 4 a.m. in the morning a truck stopped in front of our house and a Japanese soldier banged on our door, ordering my mother and I to follow him into the truck. We were allowed to take one small suitcase for each of us. Half an hour before the Japanese arrived, someone had "tipped us off" that we were going to be picked up; and we hurried to bring our little dogs to our neighbours, who were Chinese people. It was the custom of the Japanese, when they picked up people to lock up any pets, e.g. dogs, cats, birds, etc., inside the house and shut the doors of the house with a Japanese seal. So the poor animals just starved to death inside the house.

The truck was already quite full of people when my mother and I clambered into it. We continued to pick up some more people until our truck was absolutely full. Then we were brought to a large building somewhere in Bandung where we had to get our suitcases from the truck and were interrogated by various Japanese officers all day long in a mixture of Malayan, English and Japanese. Then towards the evening we were all told to get on to the truck again and we were driven off without our suitcases, which we were ordered to leave behind. Why were we told to bring them in the first place was a puzzle to us; was it for the sake of show?

We had no idea where we were being taken to, though we all presumed it was to a camp. Imagine our horror when we saw the large white building of the prison "Bantjeuj" looming up before us! We just could not believe it. Never will we forget that moment when the large double prison gates were opened with the rusty screeching of iron and we drove in. It was like going into the jaw of a great monster.

The truck drove into the courtyard and the Japanese yelled that we should get out of the truck. All around the courtyard, we saw cells, and behind the iron bars pale hollow faces were staring at us. They looked like death-masks and their expressions frightened us. They were expressions of despair, fear and anguish. The cells around the courtyard were for those in solitary confinement. Our hearts sank at the sight and our spirits, which were already weary and low after a whole day of interrogation, became even heavier with fear of the unknown. Then an Indonesian warden was summoned and led us to a cell about 17 ft. by 10 ft. (no. 4 on the sketch), and we were pushed in. It was a cell in the corner; two of our walls faced the outside world and on one side of an inner wall we had a cell full of women (no. 3 on the sketch), while on the other side was a narrow passage and next to that one we bordered to a cell full of men (no. 5 on the sketch).

The iron door was closed behind us and the rusty key turned and turned, locking us in. It was a horrible feeling. By that time it was dark, and only one miserable light bulb hang in the cell, enabling us to see what it was like. The thought stuck me suddenly; "I am a prisoner, I am locked in". We discovered that there were 33 of us. There were 5 children, 4 boys and a little girl, without a mother (she was in hospital dying). The eldest of these 5 children was Jonathan, 8 years old, followed by his 3 younger brothers, Karel, Tommy and James, and the youngest was Truusje: she was 2 years old and looked very delicate. Then there was a Mrs. O'Hara with us, wife of a doctor, with her 3 small children. We also had a young mother who was partly paralyzed through having caught infantile paralysis after she had given birth to a son. She was in the cell with her small boy. So we had 9 children and 24 adults in the cell.

There was a hole in the corner of the cell which served as a toilet. This was a condemned prison, quite obviously because of the bad sanitation system. There was an inch of water on the floor, coming out of the ground. As we had no mattresses, nor blankets, we looked in despair at the wet floor and decided we could not possibly lie on it. So we started by all standing together, close to each other for warmth and comfort. But as the hours went by, we could not keep it up and we sat down, leaning against one another. Towards the morning we were all lying on the ground and woke up when we heard the rusty sound of the key in the door. We were all wet and had to try to dry ourselves by walking in a little narrow strip outside our cell. This walkway was 17 ft. by 6 ft.

To our horror, during the night large sewer rats came into our cell; they seemed very large and had webbed feet. The warden had warned us about them, and said: "Don't move when the rats come, otherwise they'll bite you, which will give you a fever". While I was lying on my stomach towards the end of that memorable first night in Bantjeuj, suddenly I felt a rat walk over my legs. Should I scream or should I stay quiet? The thoughts raced through my head: "Don't go mad, just remember - even a rat is made by

God", and it helped me. I noticed it had a soft warm body and could feel its little webbed feet on my skin. I tried to forget what it looked like.

We had no ceiling above us. Instead we had wire netting with birds nests scattered on them. Above the wire netting we could see the tiles of the roof. As there were many tiles missing, we could see the beautiful starry sky above us. In the tropics one can often see the Milky Way and admire the millions of stars.

Soon after our doors were opened at 6 a.m. and we were led out to dry, some prisoners in brown clothing like pyjamas with large white numbers on their backs appeared and brought us food. Each of us received a tin plate with one spoonful of boiled rice and salt. This we were given three times a day. Prisoner number nine was called Samson. He had a smooth face with a constant grin on it, he was soft spoken and after a few days he told us why he was kept a prisoner by the Japanese. Apparently he had killed 9 women in cold blood. He proceeded to tell us calmly how he murdered each one of the women and gave as his motives: some bored him, some had angered him, others turned out to be a nuisance. Whether we wanted to listen to him or not, he insisted on telling us. We could not run away from him; we had to try to plug up our ears to avoid feeling sick at his descriptions. He took a sadistic pleasure in this.

After several days in prison, Samson continued to tell us the crimes of the other brown-clad prisoners who served us. It was obvious that they were highly dangerous criminals, to such a degree that even the Japanese did not dare to release them when they took over the prison from the Dutch. Some of the 'numbers' seemed to be raving mad, and were watched over carefully by the uniformed Indonesian wardens. Because they each had their own number in large white printing on the back of their pajama-tunics, it was easy to identify them to others. Messages to each other like "watch out for no. 9" or "no. 2 is nasty today, he tries to trip you when you go forward to get your tin of rice," were common among us.

Every morning the toilet in the corner of the cell was blocked, with the result that all its filthy contents floated among us on the ground-water. Thousands of flies and an unbearable stench were the result. Sure enough, about one or two hours after we were released from the cell to dry up on the court-strip, the long-awaited plumber would arrive armed with a crooked iron-stick in his hand. It was a pitiable sight to see this human wreck. He seemed reduced to shreds of flesh on bones, with hollow cheeks and large, sunken eyes. He was covered in sores and clothed in rags. Many flies were on him and followed him. He would start poking the toilet with his crooked stick to try to unblock the system. That usually did not work, so he would stand with both feet in the toilet hole and start stamping up-and-down. Then he would proceed to go on his knees to put his arm into the toilet right up to his shoulders. At last he got it unblocked and he would leave our cell, his shoulders rounded and slumping, looking at us. We wondered what dreadful crime he had committed to be allocated this hellish job. We called him the 'poop-trapper' or P.T. for short.

Before my Mother and I were picked up and put in Bantjeuj, we had helped out friends by smuggling into Bantjeuj medicines e.g. especially drugs against bacillair dysentrie, aspirins, quinine etc., and condensed foods like fudge, chocolate bars, condensed milk (like carnation milk). We conducted our smuggling through the aid of a warden who came once a week into our garden disguised as a tramp picking up sticks of wood in a large basket. We used to hide a small parcel under some leaves at the foot of the large Waringin tree in our garden. This we would put there in the midst of the night, making sure that the Japanese who occupied the house opposite us were asleep. Sometime during the following day this tramp would come to collect sticks of wood from all the front gardens of the houses on our street, eventually coming to our garden and swapping a short letter in a bamboo holder for our packet of medicines and food and money to pay his fee. This `tramp' was in fact a warden from Bantjeuj.

During the night I'd try to find the small bamboo container. Sometimes I managed to do it during the day under the very preening eyes of the Japanese who lived opposite our house by letting our dogs have a run around in the garden while I reclined with a book under the Waringin-tree. The letter from Bantjeuj told us whether our friends had received our previous parcel, who had died in their cell or in any of the other cells, and of course their requests for more supplies.

Needless to say the warden-tramp had to be paid handsomely by us to render this service. For him it involved the risk of being tortured if he was ever caught! When we landed in Bantjeuj ourselves, we at once recognized one of the wardens as our obliging tramp. He tried to hide his shock and disappointment at seeing us there. His regular income had stopped now. We pretended not to recognize him. Whenever it was his duty to guard our cell, he would make a point never to talk to my mother or me out of fear that we would give him away. It was quite obvious the warden-tramp was petrified and would certainly not be willing to let the cell of men in no. 1 know that we ourselves were now in Bantjeuj. But we desperately desired to make contact with the other cells.

Suddenly a wonderful idea struck me. Why...the P.T. was the answer, as he visited all the cells each day. We had no paper, no books, no toothpaste, no tooth brushes nor soap with us. In my hair I had smuggled in a small pencil that fatal morning when we were 'tipped-off' that our turn had come to be picked up. But where was I to get the paper from? I plucked up courage when the P.T. came one morning and braced myself to go up to him, trying not to vomit in disgust at his appearance and stench, I asked him in Malayan whether he would be willing to give a message to cell no. 1 if he visited them. He first looked startled, then he nodded. Then I asked him if he could bring me some paper, pencil not needed, so I could scribble a note to them. Another nod. Then I moved away from him swiftly to be in the fresh air outside the cell. While I talked to this pathetic man, my mother looked out at the door to watch whether the warden or any of the 'numbers' were passing by.

Imagine our joy when next morning the infamous P.T. came with his entourage of flies and his wounds and he gave me a proud smile and carefully, very carefully took a roll of paper like a cigarette out of the torn border of his tunic. He did not wear long trousers or

a pyjama-uniform like the prisoners who served us but a short tunic so his bare legs and bare arms could help in his job with the prison toilets.

Quickly we wrote a message to the men in cell no. 1 telling them that we, my mother and I, had become prisoners ourselves. The next day, when the P.T. came we gave him the letter, which he dutifully passed on to the men of cell No. 1. Needless to say, their distress was great because it meant that their source for supplies from 'outside' now had ceased. They wrote us at once, using the same method, the P.T. man as 'courier'. Of course, from then onwards we wrote small letters to each other trying to encourage each other not to give up the fight for life.

We decided to change the name of the courier to Postillon d'amour and for short, "P.A." Of course, we could not pay him a penny. It impressed and moved us that this skeletal man with his sores was willing to risk his life by helping us in this way, without getting any financial reward for it. What he did receive was a complete change of attitude towards him, both from the women as well and the men of cell no. 1 who were treating him now with great respect, which he could feel. Suddenly he had become a V.I.P. for the prisoners of Bantjeuj.

After our first dreadful night in Bantjeuj, we began to notice more of the details of our surroundings. Our walls were covered with scribbled quotations from the Psalms and sayings from Christ, 'Come unto Me all ye that are heavy laden and burdened...' We said to each other that the people in the cell before us must have been a religious lot. But within 24 hours of arriving in Bantjeuj, we started to turn more and more towards the scribbles on the walls, and it penetrated our minds and souls that indeed our only hope was to receive strength and comfort from God to endure this situation. We had nothing to do and no books to read except for my New Testament Bible, which was returned to me by the Japanese Officer when I said to him: "You can't take this book from me because it's my Koran". As he could not read the Dutch, he paged through my Bible and was not convinced that it was the Koran and that I was Moslem; but decided to let me keep it. Other people had brought Bibles along, but they were all confiscated together with our other belongings.

We started to talk with each other, expressing our fears of sickness, death, or madness, wondering whether there is a God behind all creation Whom we would meet after death. There were violent arguments due to tense emotions. For myself, I was frightened and I knew that it was too much for me. I feared that I might go mad. I decided to put my trust in God and to draw strength from this Power. All sorts of arguments were voiced, that 'No one had ever seen God' and 'that there was no proof of His existence' and that 'if there was a God, who was called a God of Love, how could He allow evil and such situations like Bantjeuj?' Of course, it was also noticeable how the people who claimed to believe in God differed in their doctrines about God. One person would describe a God who was a rather insipid, weak character, one who allowed everyone to walk over Him and expected his followers also to become doormats. Another would describe a more Holy God, totally removed and "Wholly Other" in relation to His creation, a God who could show wrath and use strong words against people of the establishment, likening them to "whitened

sepulchres", all beautiful outside, but rotten from the inside. We discovered that we had as many different 'Christians' in our cells as 'believers'. We had an Anthroposophist, who kept telling us how Rudolf Steiner explained the Scriptures. We had a Rosicrucian, a Theosophist, Roman Catholics, a Lutheran, a Calvinist, a Russian Orthodox, a reformed Protestant, a Free Thinker etc. The atheists were two women. One went raving mad within 3 weeks and used to grip the iron-bars of our windows, trying to break them. She mocked the faith of those among us who believed in God and gave long speeches to us about 'the injustices in the world', 'the evils everywhere', etc. She taunted us, blasphemed God, and was driving us crazy. After a few days, the Japanese Officer who visited our cell every day, decided that she had to be taken away to be locked up in a mental asylum. When the wardens came to fetch her, she resisted them physically. She seemed to have supernatural strength, and they had to fetch many more wardens to overpower her and to drag her away. We watched her strength and her struggle with amazement. In her madness, she became incredibly strong. We were physically very weak after 3 weeks of hardly any food, 3 spoonfuls of rice a day with salt, and we wondered where she got her strength.

The other atheist was an American tourist, who complained every day about the injustice done to her, explaining that she was caught by the Japanese while she was touring Java. She could not care less about all the poor children in our cell. To our surprise, she was wearing cheap bracelets, necklaces and rings, which looked as if they were brought on the market. All our jewellery had been taken by the Japanese before we went to prison, and we asked her why she had been allowed to keep hers. She shrugged with her shoulders and told us that she had mockingly asked the Japanese whether they were really interested in her junk. The Japanese officer who was interrogating had become uncertain and he said "keep that cheap stuff". To our amazement, we saw her change daily before our eyes. She was very overweight and had rather striking red-chestnut brown hair. Her hair turned out to have been dyed and daily we saw more grey hair appearing at the roots. She lost weight rapidly, but her skin could not shrink with the same speed, which made her look a little like a turkey in her face. She refused to eat even 3 spoonfuls of rice and obviously she simply wanted to die to get out of the awful situation we were all in. Her selfishness was unbelievable; she did not take to heart what happened to the people around her, and she was occupied with herself all day long. We ended up ignoring her as she ignored us. Then we had some agnostics, who really started to think earnestly for the first time in their lives about whether there was a meaning to life, whether life continues beyond the grave, whether there is a God and if so, what is He like.

After a few weeks the American woman died in her sleep. We reported it to the morning-warden, who sent for some 'numbers' to fetch her body. They came with a bamboo stretcher and more or less threw her on to it without any respect for the dead. One of her arms flopped down from the narrow stretcher. Suddenly we saw one of the 'numbers' shoot forward and grab her cheap bracelet. He scratched with his nails on one of the beads, and something glistened and sparkled. He gave a big yell and the other numbers and the warden quickly came to see what all the excitement was about. Can you imagine our shock when we realized that she was loaded with diamonds, and that she had prepared herself for being 'picked up' by painting all her gems with nail-polish,

making them look like trash jewellery? The warden and two numbers departed with her corpse, laughing hysterically after, howling with glee, they ripped off her rings, bracelets and two necklaces. They held a fortune in their hands given by a corpse, whose intention it had been to take it all along with her into the grave. She was outwitted by fate, in the last minute! After they left, we sat in stunned silence; then some of us started to weep. Our first reaction was not anger but despair; those diamonds could have brought us food and medicines from the outside world into our dreadful prison. We could have paid the warden to smuggle food not only for ourselves but also for all those other cells with women and men. How much relief one diamond a time could have brought to all those suffering with illness, starving from hunger, or dying. Then some of us felt anger and hatred towards the dead woman. It helped to talk with each other about it. There were some who felt great fear at realizing how a human soul can become like a stone while the body is still alive. Had she been alive while she was with us in the cell or was she already dead for years? What is it to be 'alive', if you can remain unmoved when you see children suffer? Are you in that case not already a 'dead' person?

What a difference there was between her and the five children who were without a mother, in our cell. From the first night onwards, Jonathan would round up his three brothers and little sister in a circle around him. Then he would start the prayers and Ave Marias. If one of them started looking around, Jonathan would say; "You must not look at other people when you pray, you know what mommy has said to us, that Jesus is listening!" The Japanese had allowed them to have one large tube of toothpaste and one pot of jam. Jonathan offered to let us use their toothpaste and share the pot of jam with them. Of course, we declined and told him that neither the toothpaste nor the jam would last long, so they had better save them. As the days dragged on, the children got quieter and weaker. Jonathan became very sad, and every time someone died in our cell or in any other cell, he sighed; "wish it was me! I'd rather be with Jesus than here". It was caring for his three brothers and little sister that made him so weary. He told us that his ninth birthday was approaching. That particular day a whole string of awful things happened, and not one of us remembered it was Jonathan's birthday. And when the evening came he said, "it was my ninth birthday today". All of us were stricken with guilt for having forgotten it. We rushed up to him and tried to make a fuss of him. He smiled but his large brown eyes were sad. He said nothing and we all understood that we had failed him and that we were too late with our affections. How ashamed I felt, and guilty. The next day when we were 'drying-up' on our strip, I sidled up to him and said, "Jonathan, I am sorry, I can't put it right anymore; you know already that people let you down. It is because we all are so weak, selfish and need help, but Jesus never lets you down". He nodded and turned his face away to avoid showing me his tears of disillusionment with the 'grown-ups'.

Samson

Samson was criminal no. 9, one of the numbers whom the Japanese did not dare to free. He was very friendly with the doctor of the prison, a fat bold man, who was immensely proud to have studied in Heidelberg, Germany. He was very pro-Nazi and looked like a German in spite of his black skin. We were allowed to see the doctor twice a week, if we

had any complaints. We were led by one of the wardens along passages and cells to the doctor's room. There we had to sit on a bench outside his room. He used to give us herbs in little paper-folders for headaches, diarrhoea, constipation etc. We very soon realized that the herbs he gave us made our conditions worse instead of better. This medicine was all phoney or intentionally spiteful. We still continued to go to him just to be able to stretch our legs and see a little of the prison and people. One day, it was my birthday and the warden came to fetch those of us who wanted to see the doctor. I went along. When I entered his room I saw a huge birthday cake on his table. I recognized it as the kind of home-made cake with nuts which my Italian friend Nora used to bake for me. At once I understood that she had delivered the cake for me at the gates of the prison. Samson was sitting as usual next to the doctor, and he was munching with great delight on a big slice of 'my' cake. The doctor grinned and looked at me, expecting a reaction. My stomach turned at the meanness of the two men. I pretended not to see the cake, but sure enough - Samson's voice drawled slowly: "Delicious cake, would you like a slice?!" My thoughts argued with each other as I tried to decide what to say. I was not going to fall into the trap. Samson had no intention of giving me a slice of 'my' birthday-cake and he knew that I knew that it was my cake. Like the doctor, he was waiting for an outburst from me, which they would both thoroughly enjoy. So I looked around blankly at him, and absent-mindedly asked: "Which cake?". The doctor slapped his knees and, laughing, he pointed to Samson with his fat finger: "Do you hear that? She does not recognize her own birthday cake!" By that time my mouth was watering watching the two men heartily consuming another slice of cake each. Inwardly I shook with fury at this injustice, and replied coolly; "Whose birthday is it? Samson stopped eating, and his eyes narrowed. He preened at me, licked the cream off his fingers and said: "What a pity you don't want any of this cake. It is really very nice." I ignored him, stated that I suffered headaches, accepted herbs in an envelope from the doctor and left the room. When I was back in the cell I cried. It was not because of the cake, but the hurt caused by the teasing of the two men. I detested Samson and hated the doctor with a real fear. Soon after this incident I fell ill with a fever. How happy I was! I did not struggle to get better and hoped that I would die. My mother was desperate. The warden and the numbers came with the tin plates with rice and salt. Samson asked my mother what was wrong with me and she told him that I had a high fever. He did not say anything, but left quietly. Then suddenly he returned and knelt on the ground next to me. He had some white pills in his hand. "Here", he said, "take these against the fever." I shook my head and pushing his hand away said: "I don't want any pills; I don't want to get better." He bent forward, got hold of my jaw and pushing the pills into my mouth said severely: "Swallow." I had to swallow, and was crazy with anger at him. Then Samson quickly disappeared. He never seemed to walk, but moved swiftly like a snake. My mother ran up to me and asked: "What did Samson do?" I answered: "He forced pills into my mouth either to kill me or make me better - I hate him!" After an hour I could feel the fever getting less and could tell that I was getting better.

Towards the evening Samson returned, knelt down on the ground beside me and ordered me to swallow another two pills. The next morning I was better, but very weak from the high fever. I wobbled out of the cell into the court-strip to dry up. When Samson appeared I ignored him. He too acted as if nothing had happened. What was his

motive for saving my life? Was it sadistic pleasure to force me to live when he knew very well that I wished to die? Or was it a genuine motive of compassion for me because I refused to beg for a piece of my own birthday cake?

Samson offered us some bars of soap, which we could buy from him if we had an address outside the prison where one of the wardens could go to get money. The Swiss, Germans, Italian and Swedes were free and were not put in camps. Many of them were willing to help us, especially if no risks were involved, for instance, they would pay money for us to be able to have soap. Our friends outside were willing to oblige. After we had been using the soap for some weeks, Samson with his secretive smile told us that the soap was given to him by the Japanese to wash the bodies of the dead before they were buried. We continued to use the soap for ourselves, feeling guilty towards the dead and thankful to our friends outside paying Samson for this service. The enigma of Samson - One day he came and asked: "Who would like to come to the doctor?" I should have known that something was up. Why was there eagerness in his voice? I went along with a few others and while I waited outside the doctor's room, I saw a young man of about 20 years old walking between two Kempetai officers towards and past us. His eyes were full of agony and his face was deathly white. Terrible fear took hold of my heart. I looked at the Kempetai officers and shivered. They had no expression either in their eyes or faces. They were just masks. One could not get through to these two men emotionally, because they were like walking corpses themselves. To my horror they turned to an open court-space (no. 6) opposite us and from a pole lowered a noose. We gasped and closed our eyes. Samson watched us and smiled. The anguish on the young man's face was terrible, but he was so brave, he did not shout, nor sob. We don't know what he had done, but he was slowly tortured to death in front of our eyes and, while we did not want to watch, we were forced by Samson to stay where we were with closed eyes, weeping for the young man. How we suffered for him, cold sweat was on our own faces and we waited and waited for his end to come. How I prayed for him: "God help him! God help him! God comfort him, please God let him not feel any pain, please God let him die soon..." I can't remember how long it took, but when it was all over, the world seemed different than ever before. Did people say that hell comes after death? Hell is already here on earth, even if it continues beyond the grave for some souls. Only the Power of God is greater than the power of hell. Only through Grace are we saved from this hell on earth, which is a huge grave-yard of humanity. I prayed to God not to let me go mad. I feared madness and admitted that it was all too much for me. My head reeled, my heart thumped with grim despair of human virtue. The world seemed to sweep over me, and I felt I would drown in it. Never will I forget the face and the eyes of that young man, nor of the two Kempetai officers. At least there was life in the face of the young man, but there was only death in the faces of the two officers. They killed his body, while their souls were already sick unto death. A drama there is concealed in life, a drama in which life and death take on new meaning.

When the war was over, I heard that Samson and the other 'numbers' had been released by the Japanese. So they were free again. They disappeared into the Campongs (villages) around the town of Bandoeng, and were as scorpions among the people.

Crystal

One does not realize how much one misses the sight of green grass, green trees, leaves and foliage until one is in a prison with grey walls. All we could see during the day was a strip of blue sky with occasional clouds. At night the stars shone beautiful stars which reminded us of Infinity and Eternity. We longed to see something green! One day Jonathan shouted; "Moss! There is some moss on the wall here." We quickly went to inspect the little green patch on the wall. How wonderful it was. I had never realized that moss was so velvety, had such shades of deep green and was so cool to the touch. Daily we watched our patch of moss grow and it was inspiring to see the rays of the sun on it. It produced little seeds on stalks which flowed to and fro gently. We all loved that patch of moss, and now when I see moss somewhere, especially the cushiony dark green velvety kind, I am back in the cell watching the sunlight dancing on our precious patch of moss. When we have got eyes to see, we take all the beauty of trees, grass, fields and flowers for granted until it is taken away from us. It is only then that we realize how great a loss it is when the things we get for free are removed. The stars made us wonder whether there is a difference between infinity and eternity, or are they bound together? If time and space were created and are dependent on each other, then their source must be one - Infinite Eternity. Is this God? Our eyes were drawn during the day and at night upwards away from the misery around us to gaze at either the blue sky or the starry night. Surely the "Infinity in a grain of sand" and "the Eternity in a flower" comes from above. So the stars seemed to tell us.

We had someone in the cell, Kathleen Smith, who was a great collector of Bohemian crystal. She told us how she had taken great pains and spent hours thinking up schemes to save her crystal collection during the Japanese occupation. She told us how the stars above us reminded her of her sparkling crystal-collection. She had buried her crystal pieces in different places in her garden, and made a map and list of where they were hidden. She made duplicates of the map and list and buried those too in different spots. Her husband was at home with her when they were picked up. He was put in cell no. 5. She was the only one who had her husband so close to her because the rest of the women in the cell had been without their husbands at their homes when the Japanese had come to pick them up. Their husbands had already been already imprisoned. Every day Kathleen would shout messages to her husband while we were out on the court-strip, and he could hear through three round ventilation holes on top of the wall. He would shout messages back from inside his cell, carried by echoes to his wife. One day he fell ill with bacillary dysentery and from then onwards it was awful for all of us to listen to the anguished shoutings as Kathleen tried to find out how he was feeling. After a few days he had no more strength, and one of the other men would answer Kathleen on behalf of her husband. It was obvious he was dying; he told her via the other man "to have courage." She paced up and down the strip wringing her hands in desperate frustration. He was so close to her, with only one wall between them, but she could not physically get closer to nurse and comfort him. The Japanese officer refused her permission to see her dying husband. Then the end came and when the voice of the friend shouted: "It's all over", Kathleen broke down and sobbed and sobbed. We felt it was a tremendous relief, not only for ourselves, but also for her. She cried and turned her tear-stained face to us; "To think that when the

war is over I will have saved all our crystal collection, but I have lost my husband." Then she said vehemently to us; "Let this teach all of you something! We care too much about material things and spend so much time and effort saving those, but what about things that matter? People, relationships? Oh God, how I wish I could have my husband alive and smash all the crystal! It is too late now, it is too late."

Death

The first two people who died in our cell were two old ladies, sisters together in Bantjeuj. One was 81 years old and the other 73 years. I had never witnessed death before. When the 81 year old was dying, she talked incessantly while unconscious. What she said sounded very sweet. She kept thanking God for all the good things he had given her in her life and thanked Him for preventing her from landing "in the gutter." She kept mentioning "the gutter" and obviously she had been frightened throughout her life of ending up in it. One morning I woke up early, sat up and looked in her direction. She was lying with her back towards me on her side and I knew she was dead. This was strange because I could not see her face. Betty who was lying next to me and who was a few years older than I, woke up too and sat up. She whispered to me: "She's dead." I told her that I thought the same thing although I was puzzled about why I thought so. There was a quiet lovely atmosphere in the cell in spite of flies, stench and ground water. She had indeed died. A week later her sister of 73 years was dying and the contrast between the two death scenes was very great. This one was cursing God while she was unconscious, blaspheming Him in foul language. We could not get away even for five minutes to be out of ear-shot. She was 'demanding' things, which we were unable to give her and when she died it seemed that the temperature had dropped in the cell: we all shivered. It was as if demons had come in to fetch her soul.

It was through this kind of death scene that I became convinced that there are invisible powers or consciousnesses, dark and light angels who come and fetch the souls of a departed person. We all noticed the differences in the atmosphere. As we had nothing to do or to read, we had all the time in the world to think and the topic which interested us most was religion, because we were confronted with life and death problems daily. We realized there were only two possibilities; either there is a God or there is no God! Every time I looked down at yet another dead body I was struck by the mystery of where that life-energy had gone, that part which had self-consciousness, which could reason and which made the body 'alive.' The body had not 'disappeared' at the moment of death. How could the 'person' that activated the body suddenly become 'extinct?' It made no sense. If the law of indestructibility applies to all matter and energy, why should life-energy fall 'outside' this law? To me it seemed like a driver who got out of his car, leaving his car behind, while he went elsewhere. Surely the driver is more important than his car. Admittedly without his car he can not drive around, but there are other activities he can do: walk, fly in a plane, swim, etc. To walk this earth in these dimensions of ours we need a body, but just as one can get different wave-lengths on the radio without moving one's position, by simply turning different knobs, one realizes that different wave-lengths exist simultaneously and interpenetrate each other at certain points. But while you are tuned in on one wave-length, you are not aware of what is going on on another wave-length,

unless you switch over. So it makes sense that there could be other planes of existence, dimensions of which we are unaware, but which penetrate into ours. Some argued that we have no proof for God's existence, as if the whole of Creation, His handy-work is not a witness, proof of a Creator? The ones who professed to be atheists themselves are believers, because they 'believed' that Creation has come into being by itself, out of nothing, which they could not prove either. To see the plan, a Divine Plan at work in this world, in nature, in the discoveries of science, is a witness in itself. Some said they could only believe in God once they had knowledge of Him, proof of Him. But how does one get knowledge of a person, when one wants to know the other person and enter into a relationship? Surely it starts with an act of faith, with trust and a desire to know the other. Then one not only looks at that person, trying to learn from expressions of their face and eyes, one also listens intently to what he has to say. Surely you can not get to know a person without him being willing to reveal his thoughts, his emotions, his invisible inner self to you. So to get knowledge and proof of this invisible God, don't we have to start by looking around us, at the stars, the trees, the birds, at all the manifestations of creation. Don't we have to learn through the sunsets through the eyes of children, what this invisible God is like, who expresses Himself in myriad ways? Should we not start trusting Him and 'listening' in the hope that He will choose to reveal Himself to us by sharing with us some of His thoughts (to the extent that we can receive them). Surely trusting Him, depending on Him, asking Him for strength and guidance is the only way we will ever receive it, know Him to be trustworthy, and to be our source of wisdom. If there is indeed no God then there will be no response, no guidance, no strength coming to us. It is like tuning-in on a wave-length which does not exist. Faith is to believe in something which you cannot prove. You just act upon it. Through faith knowledge comes, if your faith is right and true. Even if you have faith in a falsehood, the results, the fruits of it, will be the proof of the falsehood of that faith.

In Bantjeuj we used to be interrogated. Sometimes in the middle of the night we were woken up by a torch and a commanding voice calling one of us to come out for questioning. On one occasion, my name was called out; my mother was very frightened and her whole body shook from fear. This affected me and made me tremble. My legs felt weak. I walked behind the uniformed warden and he led me to an enormous hall. At the end of the hall was a platform on which a table was set with four Japanese officers sitting around it. Huge whips lay across the table. My legs became like macaroni and I could hardly walk. When I entered the hall I noticed that the walls on either side of me were flanked with mirrors, so I saw my reflection and did not recognize myself at first. I looked on the verge of death, scraggy with very large hollow eyes. The thought struck me: well I haven't got much longer to live. Then came the realization that the Japanese with the ships were watching and awaiting me. I felt the cold sweat drip down from my shoulders down my back, and my face was wet with perspiration from fear. In despair my heart cried out to God: "Please help me!", while my mind remembered that Christ had promised us: "When they bring you before Councils do not contemplate what to say, but have faith and I will guide you in all your ways," and I also remembered His words, "He who puts his trust in Me shall not be made ashamed." As soon as I remembered those words and promise and prayed, an amazing thing happened to me. It was as if an invisible wall was formed circling around me. It seemed as if I was lifted an inch from the

ground and instead of walking, I seemed to be gliding over the floor towards the Japanese. Their voices seemed to be coming from a distance, faraway. It was wonderful; I felt protected and the spirit of fear left me, giving way to a spirit of rest in my soul. It was as if I was in a little house in the midst of a raging storm, like Noah's Ark in the Flood. Noah, like me, was helpless and I think scared too in the face of the raging elements, but he "rested in the Ark" as I had to do.

When I had reached the end of the hall, I saw one of the Japanese officers come down from the platform and start to walk around me, while he whipped the air. I saw that the whip had many corks at the end of each string to add sting, but I remained calm. Then he started putting questions to me in a mixture of Japanese, Malayan and English. I had to remember not to look in his face when I answered him, as I was a woman and he would slap me in the face if I did. This is what a Japanese man outside the prison would do to a woman if she looked into his face when she answered him. I tried to understand what he was asking me and quite definitely I was guided by someone, an angel perhaps, who knew more about Japanese characters than I did, because I was made to understand by an inner voice. Thus I could answer the Japanese officer without letting him wait or making him repeat his question. He should not be made to feel that his inadequacy at speaking either Malayan or English was obvious. So even if I gave the wrong answer to his question, that gave him an opportunity to call me stupid and repeat his question in a different way. By myself, I would never have hit on this solution. He was pleased that I kept getting things wrong because of my stupidity and not due to his incomprehensible language. Suddenly he started asking me questions about my maternal and paternal grandparents. He wanted to know their full Christian names and dates of birth. I did not have any notion, as I had never known personally any of my grandparents. So a voice inside me told me to make up their Christian names and dates of birth. One of the Japanese officers at the table scribbled down my answers. Then suddenly after having asked me all sorts of other questions, he returned to the Christian names and dates of birth of my grandparents. As I could not remember them anymore, I made up new names and new birth dates. Nothing moved me to fear. His voice came from afar, although I knew he was shouting at me. I knew what to say: "I did not know their names nor birth dates when you asked me before." He replied: "Why did you give false names and dates?" and I replied calmly looking at his boots, "Because I did not want to offend you with my ignorance." He shot into laughter as did the other officers, and then he went on with his interrogation.

Finally he stopped and the warden was told to lead me back to the cell. As soon as I came out of the huge hall, my invisible wall left me. I seemed to drop down and could feel the ground again. Sounds came rushing towards me. Then I knew for certain: God truly helps people in their distress, if they trust in His Word and remember that although man is not always faithful, God always is, He truly keeps His promises and He alone is the forever Faithful. When I was back in the cell my mother was overjoyed that nothing terrible had befallen me, not even a slap in the face. How grateful she was, giving thanks and crossing herself (a practice among Russian Orthodox).

Bastille

We had a cell which bordered a street and a big square, and we could hear cars passing by and the shouts of salesmen, but above all we could smell the delicious Satl'h (kebabs) being grilled over charcoals. On Java a lot of food is cooked and sold along the streets, at markets and on squares. The food was sold in banana leaf folded to make the shape of a bowl.

One day loudspeakers were put on the square and we could hear that a large crowd was assembling. We heard it announce that Sukarno was coming to speak to them. Sukarno was an Indonesian whom the Japanese used to lead the mixed population of Java. The crowd was getting more and more agitated, cars were hooting, cyclists were ringing their bells and suddenly a voice was thundering over the microphone: Sukarno had arrived. Then we listened to the speech Sukarno delivered in Malayan. He was trying to stimulate hatred towards "all whites." The words I remember most clearly were: "The time of the whites is over! Now our time has arrived! We must wipe out the whites, whether they are Dutch, English, American, it doesn't matter. If they belong to the white race of any nation, we should finish with them. We do not need rifles to do this or any arms. We can use simple methods like cutting off their heads. They'll soon bleed to death that way. Or one can put bamboo-hairs in their food", etc. Sukarno went on and on describing many different ways to eliminate "the whites." Of course, the crowd got agitated, till they began to hammer with their fists on the walls of the prison, knowing that it was full of "whites." We all thought of the Bastille and we were petrified. How was I going to die, I wondered, having my hands cut off, my face slashed or a knife in my throat? The excitement outside our prison grew and grew like an approaching storm. We had the feeling that the walls of Bantjeuj were going to crumble down from all the fists hammering on them, and that we would be lynched by the crowd.

Suddenly we heard a new sound; tanks were arriving. Japanese voices were telling the crowd to disperse, and we realized the amazing fact that this time we had in fact been saved by the Japanese who were afraid of a massacre and the opinion of the outside world. Imagine the headline news in foreign papers: "Dutch massacred in prison by mob. Japanese incapable of controlling the tragedy." We heard cars driving away, voices fading in the distance and at long last silence, the stillness after a storm. We all laid down to sleep exhausted from the fearful nightmare we had lived through.

Paralysis

We had a young partly paralyzed mother in the cell with her little son of five years. It was wonderful how this little boy did everything for his mother, bringing her her tinned plate of rice, helping her to get up with her crutches. He was her legs and hands. Apparently she had suffered infantile paralysis when he was still a baby, so he had been accustomed from very early on to take care of his mother. At times the mother seemed hard on her small son, but she said ruefully to us: "I have to be tough on him for his own sake, otherwise, as I am so handicapped, he won't survive. The quicker he can look after himself the better, as he may have to face the world alone without even me in the days

ahead." He never sulked nor complained, and he was an amazingly independent, calm character. In spite of being only five years old, he seemed to have already an inner source of strength. He never turned to any of us for help. It never entered his mind that he had a lot of capable adults in the cell who could give him a hand; instead he considered his mother to be his responsibility.

All the children in the cell were an example for us. They never complained nor asked for food, knowing it was useless. They accepted everything with much more grace than the adults. By watching this partly paralyzed mother coping with life in a prison cell we became aware that each one of us was in part paralyzed spiritually. Some of us could cope with broken sleep, but not with the hunger. Others managed the interrogations but suffered deep depressions caused by the uncertainty of our future. We were all being trained in endurance, patience, and the will to fight against all sorts of fears, despair and anger. What differences there were among people in terms of inner resources of strength. Those who had never given a thought to anything else but the gaining of material wealth, careers, sport, art, marriage, social life and children were bewildered and broke down the quickest. It taught me that life on earth is like a school where, at times, examinations take place. It is no good not preparing for them because it only means failure and setbacks. Prison taught me that life is full of various crises and that the only thing we are certain about is that we are going to die. In that case surely we should prepare for death as we do for an examination. It does not mean that one stops living life to the full, while realizing that one is moving towards death during one's life on earth. Death is not the end of things, but the beginning of something new. How marvellous or terrible this new beginning will be, depends on our death. Didn't Christ say: "I shall judge you in the way I find you?" All through life we have to fight many battles, but the most important battle is the Last Battle. If we have not got hold of Eternity while we are in Time, then we have missed out and failed to realize that Eternity is the Infinite God.

By being put in prison without books, radio, T.V., sport, art, etc., we had been put on a great fast. We realized through this, that all that this world has to offer us belongs to Time and is vanity, because when Time is no more, and death comes, all these things (sport, science, arts, career, etc.) cease to have any significance. It is never too late to start preparing for death. Death is a birth into a full life where we will be able to understand what is impossible to grasp here. Death is like a final examination when the Judge will determine which of us can move from being merely human beings to being sons of God. In the womb a baby sleeps constantly, until born on earth. Our life is partly being asleep, partly awake. After death there will be a constant awakening. Instead of living in time, subject to change and decay, one is in Eternity. It is a state of being instead of becoming.

Christmas

We had a Mrs. O'Hara, who had three children with us in our cell. She had started to cough up blood and every day she worried about what would happen to her three children when she died. We could offer her no solution, no comfort.

On the morning of Christmas eve we woke up to find her lying quietly with a smile on her face while she looked tenderly at her children. Then she turned towards us and asked us: "Aren't you surprised that I am not worrying today about my children?" We agreed; we had noticed it, but were glad for her sake that she was at peace. She then told us how during the night she had been worrying about her children while she was gazing up at the starry sky through one of the holes of our roof. She wept from fear for her children. Suddenly she heard a voice asking her: "Do you believe in God?" She answered inwardly: "Yes". Then the voice made it clear to her that if she truly believed in God, did she think that God could not take care of her three children, while He did manage to look after the Milky Way? A rush of deep peace and joy entered her heart and whole being, she surrendered all her anxieties into the Hands of God, the Mighty Creator not only of the Milky Way with its millions of solar systems, but of all the galaxies in the universe. Mrs. O'Hara managed to have her first deep restful sleep since weeks.

We were very glad for her; she was convinced of the Power of God to take care of everything, and the comfort she received from this was spiritual strength.

The eve of Christmas was beginning when one of the wardens came and brought a candle to be our "Christmas tree". We put it on the water barrel in the corner of our cell, and he also provided us with a box of matches so that we could light it. When darkness fell we lit our "tree" and it was amazing how much light that one candle gave out in our dark cell. All our eyes were drawn towards it instead of upwards to look at the starry sky. To me, the cell seemed to have been transformed to a painting from Rembrandt. Here and there the weak light of the bare bulb and the soft radiating light from the candle lit up the faces of some of the people in the cell. Their expressions were pensive and restful. I suddenly realized how about 2000 years ago God chose to be born in a stable like ours, admittedly without ground-water, flies, and a stinking toilet but nevertheless it was a most humble cave inhabited by animals, because there was "no room in the inn" for the Lord of Glory, Who has created all and for Whom not a Palace on earth would have sufficed. So He was laid not in a royal cradle, hand carved, inlaid with gold or set with precious stones, but a manger. A manger, of course, is a Sepulchre in miniature, prefiguring what He was born for, to die and overcome death for us. God's greatness truly is expressed in His humility, which we see reflected in the care He takes for minute details in His creation: a ladybird, a patch of moss, and all the finishing touches we find even in the most common flowers like buttercups or daisies.

Suddenly I felt that the Person of Christ had entered our cell and I even knew where He was standing: not in the middle of the cell, but on the left hand side near the door. Unspeakable Joy and Peace entered my heart and suddenly nothing mattered anymore, neither the rats, ground-water, Japanese, sickness, death, interrogations nor fears, all that was life-giving and truly mattered was to be close to His Presence and to know that Eternal Bliss, to be without Him will be Hell. I understood now His words: "In My Presence is the fullness of Joy". Just as infinity and eternity are of the same source, so time and death depend on each other, devour each other. As time moves on, everything decays, and even the strongest buildings eventually crumble.

While it was quiet in our cell, we heard people in the cell next to us start singing: "Silent Night, Holy Night." When they had finished, our cell took over and when we had finished, the other cell of the men started it. The whole prison of Bantjeuj was praising God like the angels for His Good Will towards men shown by giving us His greatest gift, His Son. His Son is the "Peace" of the Father which passeth all understanding, Peace in Person, the Person of Christ within our soul since He came to be with us. It is not the peace which is between people with good will towards each other. It is a much greater gift, a God-given gift. One of the wardens told us the next day how he had wept when he was approaching for night-duty and heard the voices singing "Silent Night, Holy Night". That great big white condemned prison sent up its praises to God in the Highest and there in moon-light it was bathed in beauty. Manure is good for growth and in that condemned prison many souls were drawn upwards to God.

When we woke up the next morning, Christmas Day, we discovered from each other, that almost everyone had felt the Presence of Christ in the cell the evening before. We also knew when He left our cell, leaving us with a deep gratitude and joyful Hope behind. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength. In returning and in rest shall you be saved." Like Noah, all the faithful have shown to us the Way to travel through this life on earth, towards the Kingdom.

While we were talking with each other about this most beautiful Christmas we had ever known, we heard children start sobbing. They were Mrs. O'Hara's three little ones. The eldest boy was about nine years old. She had died and she looked as if she was in a peaceful sleep; her face was relaxed and calm. We were suddenly all in deep grief, forgetting the previous evening. Suddenly the doors were opened with their usual rusty screeching noise and the warden was there with a Japanese officer next to him. The Japanese looked at the woman and the sobbing children and pointed towards their mother, asking what was the matter with her. Before anyone of us could answer him one of the women jumped up and screamed at him: "She is dead! She is dead and it is all your fault, because the water killed her!" She was in her early thirties and she had caught tuberculosis. The Japanese officer took out a short whip which was stuck in his belt and he raised his arm to whip her. But the woman was beside herself and shouted to him: "Go on, whip me, whip me! You're not scared of me, but out there is One of Whom you should be scared, that is..." At this point she pointed with her finger upwards: - Allah!" The officer stopped in mid-air, gaped at her and slowly brought his arm down with the whip. Then he turned and walked away quickly. We were all dumbfounded. The woman in question, sat down and wept from nerves and emotion. We were all shaken, and wondered if there would be a reprisal from the Japanese officer.

Sure enough, after about ten minutes the warden returned and asked the woman to follow him together with the three children of Mrs. O'Hara. They timidly and dumb with grief followed him while we stayed behind panic stricken. What was happening with them? Were they being beaten up? We were getting more and more depressed as time went on! In the meantime the warden and some numbers came to carry the body of Mrs. O'Hara away. Worry gnawed at us. After about two hours, to our surprise, the woman

without the children returned to our cell. Her face was beaming. She then told us that when she was led to the Japanese officer he had asked her whether the children had any family outside, and she had told him that their grandmother was still free and had not yet been put in a camp. To her surprise, the Japanese officer then told her that he had decided to allow the children to leave Bantjeuj and to be looked after by their grandmother until the end of the war. He wrote something in Japanese on a piece of paper, signed it and handed it over to her with the words: "Give this paper with my signature to the grandmother. This will keep her out of the camps, as I have given my permission to her personally to stay with these three children outside the camps. I want you to bring these children accompanied by the warden to the grandmother and hand them over to her. Then you alone return here."

What happened was as follows. They set off together in a sado (cart and horse), and when they arrived at the grandmother's, she broke the news of her daughter's death to her. What a Christmas present to receive on December the 25th! The grandmother broke down and wept, hugged the children closely and took the official Japanese paper granting her permission to remain outside the camps for the duration of the war.

We moved from utmost despair to incredulous joy. Surely God had proved to Mrs. O'Hara and us that indeed He can take care of three children and can move the heart of a Japanese officer to act as He wishes him to do. Within 12 hours of her death, the children were free! Who is a God like unto our God?

Never will I forget this amazing Christmas when the single candle on the barrel reminded us that God is the true light of the World and in Him there is no darkness. St. Isaac the Syrian once said: "O Lord, the Martyrs can show thee their wounds, which prove their love for Thee; the Saints show their virtues acquired through hope in the Joy of Thy Kingdom; the confessors offer their undying struggles for the Truth as proof of their faith in Thee. But I, O Lord, what do I offer up to Thee to show my love, hope and faith for having overcome death for me? I have neither wounds, nor virtues, nor ceaseless struggles to offer Thee as have the Martyrs, Saints and Confessors. All I can do is to plead for Thy Mercy towards me, a sinner, and to send me Thy Holy Spirit to teach me how to walk on the path of humility which is the only way left for me to enter Thy Kingdom."

We have to choose our loyalties, we cannot have a foot in two opposing camps. When Christ, the Head of the Christians, was crucified, there was only a faithful remnant left at the foot of His Cross. So it is today with the True Church of Christ. She is very small, greatly outnumbered by unbelievers of all kinds. We have to choose whether we want to belong to the sheep and be saved, or to be numbered among the goats. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers," is the warning. How many of us take heed and leave churches which are corpses in search of the True Living Church? "He who seeks shall find."

He gave us a most beautiful gift by proving to us that what is impossible for man is possible for God. God can open doors or shut them for us as He wishes and just as he sent an angel to release Peter from prison, so He moved the heart of the Japanese officer to

let these three children go. As it had been promised to their dying mother, God is quite capable of looking after three children as He manages the Milky Way, with all the other galaxies.

Storm

One night in January a terrible storm was raging outside. As we had here and there a tile missing, the rain came into our cell. It was the worst experience of my life up to then. My mother was ill with a high temperature, all around me people were sick. Betty and I were the only two who were not ill. People were groaning and all we could do was to go up to them, say a few comforting words and help to turn them to another positions. One can not imagine the conditions. We had various cases of dysentery, which meant diarrhoea. We had no water, a few bars of soap from Samson which we could only use in dry-time when we had water flowing in from outside in a stone water-trench on one court-strip. We had no towels and no change of clothing, so what nursing could we do! But when you heard pleas and groanings: "Come to me! Please come to me!..." You had to go and stroke the hair of the sufferer, move their position or rub their arms or legs if they were suffering from cramp.

Suddenly the wind blew off a few tiles above my mother's head and water came down on her and me. I was frantic while looking down at my feverish mother soaked in water and I thought at that moment that I was going mad. My head reeled and I could not think nor feel anything and a great fear overcame me: "Please God", I whispered, "don't let me go mad, let me die, don't let me go mad..." I was crying loudly, maybe howling; I don't know. There was so much noise with the raging storm above us, the rain pouring in all over the cell. From exhaustion I dropped down and fell into a sort of dazed sleep. Then I was woken up by a prodding from my mother and I knew what that meant. People were groaning and they wanted me to come and comfort them. I whispered to my mother: "I am too worn out! I can't do anything!" My mother, although very weak, said in a stern voice: "Get up and go." For a moment astonishment and indignation overwhelmed me. How could my mother expect this from me? Then an inner conviction that she was right (although I judged her to be harsh) made me stumble to my feet. I swayed, half-drunk from tiredness and despair and went over to one of the voices to do my feeble best. Then I went to another one and another one and another one. At last it was still again in the cell; I slumped down next to my mother and fell asleep.

In the morning we went out to our court-strip to dry up. The sick we dragged along the floor to lay them down outside. The warden came with some numbers and brooms to sweep away the water and the P.A. visited us for his daily call. I can't remember how many of us were still alive by that time.

Now and again I think back of that incredible, terrible night and I am thankful to my mother, because she saved me from the shame I would have felt if I had not forced myself to comfort the sick.

Uncle

Just before my mother's illness we were desperately trying to find a warden who would be willing to bring us supplies of medicine from 'outside' the prison. We looked at the faces of our various wardens but did not dare to trust them, except for one huge black portly warden whom the children called "Uncle." I don't know why they called him "Uncle." He had a broad wide smile that showed white teeth. I decided to test him, going by the judgment of the children who trusted him, so I strolled up to him and whispered: "Do you think you could bring us some medicines from outside? We have an address outside and you will be paid for it." Great shock registered on his face. He quickly walked away from me and I hoped fervently he was not going to report me to the Japanese. Nothing happened in the following days. When Uncle was on duty, he looked away from me and I did not dare to repeat our question. About a week later he walked close to me and whispered the name of the people and their address outside, I told him that I would give him a slip of paper to give to these people. He nodded and I went into the cell and quickly wrote on the paper supplied by the P.A., a plea for help from our friends outside, asking for medicines against dysentery, fever, etc. Then I went out of the cell, stood next to Uncle and when no one was looking I slipped the roll of paper into his hand. We never managed to find out how Uncle operated his mission outside. We never could have long talks with him. He brought in the medicines and I let the men's cell (no. 1) know that Uncle was willing to help. So when my mother fell ill with dysentery she was saved by the medicines smuggled in by Uncle. How deeply grateful we felt towards this tall, very kind man. When the war was over, I heard from the men who were still in Bantjeuj alive, that several months after we had been transferred to a camp, Uncle had been caught smuggling by the Japanese. He was hanged. When I heard this I cried and cried and even now when I think of this man the tears come to my eyes. Your see, I was responsible for his death, because I asked him to start smuggling in medicines. But if he did so for love of Christ, then God the Righteous Judge will reward him accordingly.

Escape

One evening we heard a lot of shouting going on and search lights from the four towers of the prison were streaming across the sky. We heard the sound of running footsteps, boots and screams. Then we saw some shadowy figures on the wall near us and we heard someone falling on our roof. Obviously a chase was going on. At last the poor victim was caught and severely punished by the Japanese.

How could he, a white person, think he could escape from a prison set amongst the black population of the town? What made him take this mad risk? We were all hoping and praying that he would succeed, but we were helpless, locked up in our cell. We all started to think about escape. Can we escape anything in this life, or is it madness to try to escape the inevitable? We are all prisoners in this life on earth, we all face death sooner or later. Can we escape death? All the physical exercises in the world will not ward off death in the end. It is just an illusion to think otherwise. Why not look at the examples of the lives of Saints who tackled death in another way: by accepting this great moment-to-come, they prepared and overcame it through faith. They got hold of true life instead of

vanity and found the way of overcoming death through life. There is a spiritual light in their old faces instead of the ironed-out masks of the faces of so many modern people, who try to achieve this by plastic surgery and other artificial means. There is holiness and character in Saints' faces expressing the touching of their souls with an Eternal quality, instead of chocolate-box film star looks. Are we not all escaping from the truth, merely preferring to live in fools' paradises instead of facing the reality that life on earth is as short as grass: here today, gone tomorrow? Do we face up to the fact that this earth is a huge grave-yard and we are the people living in the shadow of death, in the valley of darkness? Our hope surely lies beyond the grave, because that life is Eternal and so the meaning of life here must be to prepare for an Eternal Life.

No child will say to you that the meaning of life on earth is to go to school, because he or she realizes that school-time is a preparation for the time after school. Surely this earthly existence, being so short, is a preparation and a test for the time afterwards? We take care of so many earthly insurances; what about our Eternal Insurance? Some people in our prison mentioned the idea of the reincarnation of human beings, and the notion that we can improve ourselves through many lives. Has humanity got better over the years? Are there more Saints today than in the past? It is like trying to life by one's own boot strings. If we do not remember past lives, how can we benefit from the lessons in those lives? How terrible it would be if reincarnation destroyed all relationships of love. The one who is my mother in this life, I will never meet again, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, because she will be someone else in another life. The joy of meeting up and being re-united with loved ones is taken away by reincarnation. In this doctrine, there is no need for God to come to the help of mankind. There is no need for grace.

Last Day

We had been 99 days in Bantjeuj. By now we were left with 13 people: 6 children and 7 adults. We came in with 33 people: one person had gone mad and the three children of Mrs. O'Hara had been released, sixteen had died.

We thought it was a day like other days, but suddenly at about midnight 'Uncle' woke us up by speaking through the bars to us: "Tomorrow you are leaving, you are going to be transported. The Japanese officer has just told us that a truck is coming to fetch you." That was all; he was gone.

We all sat up and shivered. None of us could sleep anymore. How scared we were for the future. We were imagining all sorts of horrible things that could befall us. Really it was madness because conditions could not get much worse than what we were already experiencing. Sleeping on a soaked cold ground with rats moving around us at night, the toilet blocked and overflowing, swarms of flies and diseases, no water to wash ourselves, no change of clothing for 99 days, interrogation and little food...that was our life in Bantjeuj. So little hope and trust did we have in better things to come. We are more inclined to descend into gloominess than to hope for joy ahead. We had fleas in our hair, we smelt, and it was with shaky legs that we followed the warden the next morning to the awaiting truck. We said good-bye to the hollow faces behind the bars of the cells which

we passed on our way to the inner courtyard. The voices whispered: "God bless you!" - "God protect you!"

The gates opened with a loud rusty screeching noise and off we went out of the jaws of the monster into the world outside. How wonderful, how wonderful to see such an expansion of sky, to see trees and grass even flowers, to see people on cycles in cars and walking. Oh how wonderful the world is with all its vanities and colours. Then we saw a big notice up in the distance 'Tjihajit' and we laughed from relief, as we had been brought to a camp.

When we clambered down from the truck, women came rushing up to us and it was like Paradise. First of all we were scrubbed and scrubbed and de-flead. Food was offered to us, rice with cabbage, and we talked and told them how lucky they were to be in Tjihajit-camp instead of Bantjeuj prison. One hundred days in Bantjeuj was like a life of its own. I always think of my life before Bantjeuj - then Bantjeuj as a life of its own, one hundred days in Bantjeuj - then life after Bantjeuj. Towards the Japanese I do not feel a hatred or a need for revenge, because owing to Bantjeuj I learned what the significance of life is, to prepare for death, which is the beginning of the real, true, full life. I know the Japanese did not set out purposely to teach me the meaning of life, but I am so grateful for what I received spiritually. I hope this may off set the darkness of their souls, their cruel inflicting of needless suffering.

I felt desperately lonely in the cell in spite of all the people, because everyone had become like an island trying to survive in terrible conditions. And in a lonely life one has the chance to seek communion with God, who is literally 'at hand', whose Grace is within reach. I realized that I was being prepared in prison, later in the camps, for both life and death. To leave this earth and be with Christ is far better, but life with Him here on earth is also wonderful and a preparation for a greater communion with Him in His Kingdom. Psalm 32: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with Mine Eye".

Memories are not the key to the past but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work He will give us to do. Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives, is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see.

In Bantjeuj I kept my eyes all day fixed on that bit of heaven. At night looking at the stars, in day time sometimes clouds moved across, white or pink or edged with gold. All this that seemed so wasteful and so needless - this war - this Bantjeuj prison, this very cell, none of it was unforeseen or accidental. There is a Mighty Plan, a Designer behind the Plan. It is not a matter of punishment, it is a matter of "refining the silver" and all that is dross must be burned away.

In days, hours and months like these, you discover your real self through God. He allows circumstances or people to affect us and gives us an opportunity to effect them. We discover our lack of faith, our impatience, our fears, our despair in the face of defeats

or personal comforts. We pray: "God give me patience", but we are in a hurry to receive this virtue.

Who of us, when we come to our senses prefers to have a fur-coat or a Rolls-Royce in preference to our eye-sight, which is free? Imagine living in darkness and missing out on the beauty of nature, of colours, of the expressions on the faces of people. Who would prefer being a champion in any sport, or art, or science to being able to hear the sounds of voices?

We spend quite a lot of money on food, considerably less on water and nothing on air. But we can only live without air for a few minutes, a longer time without water and yet several weeks without food. So we do not pay any money for the air which is most essential for us, and therefore we take it for granted and think nothing of its value. The fool says in his heart: "There is no God", but those of us who have come to our senses, re-think the priorities and values of our life and repent. We should in that case become like the man who has found the Priceless Pearl and for whom nothing else matters anymore than to sell everything so as to obtain this Priceless Pearl, God's grace.

We have to learn the example of Job, who praised God in all the circumstances of his life. Job praised God not only for all the blessings that came his way. When evil befell him he also praised God Who allowed these things to happen in his life. And he said: "Should I receive only the good things from God and not the evil things, if God so chooses to send them to me?"

It is no good, then, denying there is evil in the world, being like an ostrich and burying our heads in the sand in the hope that it will then disappear. My mother taught me to say to myself: "The Devil is mighty - but God is Almighty".

Tjinhapit

My mother and I were exactly one hundred days (three-and-a-half months) in the prison "Bantjeuj" in Bandung on Java. When we were transported to the camp Tjinhapit it seemed like paradise to us in comparison with the prison. Imagine being able to see a vast stretch of sky instead of a small rectangular bit of it! Imagine being able to see trees, grass, even flowers, and to be able to walk for hours if you wished around the camp, instead of pacing up and down in the prison courtyard like an animal in a cage! Imagine being able to shut the door and be alone when going to the toilet!

We arrived in the camp stinking and full of fleas as we had been wearing the same clothes for a hundred days without having a bath. So we were scrubbed and de-fleaed - wonderful! Afterwards we walked as if on air.

As soon as we clambered down from the truck, the waiting Roman Catholic nuns who lived in the camp embraced Jonathan and his three brothers and sister and took them quickly to the hospital to see their dying mother. Apparently she had been told that her five children had been put in "Bantjeuj" and she had struggled to stay alive during the last

hundred days in order to be able to see them. Her indescribable joy and gratitude on seeing her little ones made the nuns who were present weep. She stroked Jonathan's hair and whispered to him, and he talked to her. Nobody heard what they said. I can't remember how long the children stayed with her. She died the same day, reassured by the nuns that they would take care of her children until the end of the war.

In this camp Tjihapit we lived in houses - lots and lots of people in one house, with many sleeping in one room. All around the camp was a huge double fence, and Japanese soldiers stood on guard in between the fences. They patrolled in twos and threes.

The camp was situated in the town of Bandung. The Japanese had chosen a certain part of the town for a camp and had built the double fence around it. At the entrance there were large gates patrolled by soldiers. We were all given work to do, and I was appointed a "house-mother" who was in charge of houses full of boys between eight and twelve years old. As soon as a boy became twelve years old, he was transferred to a men's camp. We were glad to work, because while we had been in prison we had had nothing to do and time had passed very, very slowly. However, this enforced idleness had been something of a blessing in disguise, because we had been forced to plunge into the depths of our souls, whereas in ordinary life you have no time to think.

As I was a newcomer, I was a welcome change for the boys, and they offered me something nice to eat with my rice and cabbage. It tasted good, I enjoyed it, but then they told me that it was dog's meat. Of course, I was repelled by this, and I then discovered that I had not seen many cats or dogs in the camp. The women told me that the boys had caught them when their owners were not watching and then had killed and eaten them. We had several outbursts of tears from women who could not find their dog or cat and feared that it had been killed and eaten by the boys.

Rats were also eaten - there was a large notice in the camp which said:

"Any rat caught should be given to the hospital for the sick..."

Hoarding

While my mother and I were still "outside", before we were put into prison, we used to smuggle in large tins of oil and flour to my sister, so that she could make pancakes or bread. At the beginning of the occupation it was still possible to smuggle food and medicines into the camps, but not into the prisons, which were strictly guarded by the Japanese. Some women swam through the sewage at night and received parcels in that way before swimming back into the camp.

When my mother and I joined my sister in the camp Tjihapit, my mother asked her to make some pancakes for us. To our surprise, she said that she had finished up all the oil and flour or given it away. My mother was amazed, since she had sent huge quantities to her. However, she accepted regretfully that nothing was left.

Suddenly the Japs announced that we were being transported the next day to another camp. We were told that we were allowed to take with us only one flask-like container of water and one roll of bread. Panic spread through the camp. The women who had been secretly listening to the radios and who informed us of the news from abroad, quickly dismantled the radios and went to the kitchen to have the parts baked in various rolls so that they could re-assemble them once they had arrived in the new camp. In fact the Japs divided us into two camps, so that we did not have all the necessary parts. This was truly awful, for not being able to hear how the Allies were getting on plunged many people into despair. They committed suicide as they lost hope that peace was coming.

It was then that I understood that one's faith and moral strength is tested most when one lives in uncertainty and has no idea where one is going or what is going on around one. One lives from day to day and from hour to hour, waiting on God since there is no human being one can turn to or depend on. One has to be like a child clutching the Hand of the Father. The remarkable thing is that when one truly surrenders with perfect faith, with the trust and simplicity of a child, the situation is transformed from depressing frustration to freedom, and one is filled with a deep gratitude and joy that one is no longer in charge of one's life but that Someone else Who is greater and wiser is in charge of it. This surrender is followed by the certainty that whatever happens is "good", for one is accepting it from the Hands of God and not blaming other people for it.

We men, having been given freewill by the Creator, have made a mess of the world and our relationships with each other because of our loss of God. If we return to God and beseech Him for help, then a deep, joyful peace enters our being, for God is good and the way He will choose to deal with this evil world of ours will be in accordance with His Wisdom and Love. But at the same time we must remember His words:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, and My ways and not your ways..."

When it was announced that we were being transported the next day, my sister suddenly produced oil and flour to make pancakes. We then realized that she had been hoarding it "for the crisis day". The sad thing was that "the crisis day" had already passed, and she had not recognized it. If she had allowed us to eat a little of it every day, we would have been strengthened by it. But now we had to eat it in a hurry, pancake after pancake, and share it with others. This caused us to have diarrhoea, and instead of being strengthened by it we were weakened. The lesson to be learned:

"Lay not up treasure on earth, where moth doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal..."

And another lesson: we must be able to recognize the time of crisis. I think that if we strive each day to love the truth more than the lie, which is possible only with the help of the Spirit of truth, then we become aware of what is going on, recognize the crisis and are able to respond to it in a constructive way. But if, on the other hand, we bury our heads in the sand like ostriches and pretend that the problems will do not exist, we will be caught off guard.

There is a saying: "Look Fate in the face and it will lower its lids." If one has the courage with God's help to face up to the worst, then one finds ways of dealing with it.

Transport

The next day, the Japs ordered us to stand in rows before being marched off through the gates to the world outside. We had to walk from the camp to the railway-station. It was a long walk and we had children and old people with us. Each of us had one bread roll and one flask of water for the journey. The streets were lined with Indonesians, who watched us in silence. It was humiliating for us as white people to be seen by the natives as prisoners of war of the Japanese. They saw how we were treated and how the Japs cursed and shouted at us. At last we arrived at the station and were put into cattle-trucks. All the wooden shutters of the windows had to be closed, and we were sitting crowded together on benches with sick people lying on the floor between us. It was suffocatingly hot. At last the train moved off, and but it kept going in different directions, so we became confused and did not know where we were going.

The conditions were so terrible that I did nothing but pass in and out of consciousness. The whole transport was a nightmare, and I kept thinking:

"Hell is already on earth! You don't have to wait until death to enter it!"

The sick people died from suffocation, and at once began to stink. Then one of us would pull the communication cord. The train would come to a halt and a Japanese officer would go from coach to coach to find out who had given the alarm. The dead body then had to be lifted up and passed over the women to the door. Some soldiers would quickly dig a shallow grave alongside the railway track. It was hell when a child died, for the mother would refuse to part with his dead body, and some of them would become hysterical. Then a tug-of-war would ensue with the women trying to wrench the child's body from the mother, while others would hold back the mother. All this wrestling was done with shouts and screams and pleadings, with the Japanese furiously trying to hurry us on. It was so terrible that I was grateful for the times I passed out. Now and then the train would stop, and we were able to go to the toilet on the ground next to the train, while the natives assembled from the villages to watch this extraordinary phenomenon of white women going publicly to the toilet. We had no toilet paper or water, soap or towels, and most of us like myself were suffering from diarrhoea, so one can imagine the smell in our cattle-truck. To add to the horror, some people vomited during the journey from exhaustion and despair. The journey from Bandung to Batavia (now Djakarta) lasted thirty-eight hours.

Arrival

Towards evening on the second day, we arrived at our new camp, which was called Kampong Makassar. As we went through the gates the Japanese subjected us to a body search. In the camp we saw bamboo buildings under coconut trees.

The moon was shining, and we could hear frogs croaking. At the sound of the frogs our spirits rose somewhat, for we knew that we could catch them and eat them. It took us only three days to catch every frog in the camp. So at night their cheerful croaking could be heard no more. Toads are poisonous, so we did not catch them. If in doubt, we used to tickle the animal. If it jumped it was a frog; but if it waddled away it was a toad.

We went to the barracks, where we had to sleep on bamboo beds (there were no mattresses). As we were all very thin, it was very painful to lie on these beds. One tried to find a position where one's hip-bone could fit in between two bamboos. We fell down exhausted and went to sleep.

During the first night my stomach was upset, so I woke up and set off for the latrines. We had been told that they had latrines where we sat in rows one behind another over a narrow latrine trench. I hated to be seen from behind by another woman. The only way to avoid that was to get the last place in the latrine, but that was always occupied because it was the favourite spot!

The night was dark with only a few stars shining. I stumbled, half drunk from exhaustion, out of the barracks. I tried to remember where the latrines were. I thought they were somewhere to the left. Suddenly I slipped on the red-brown sticky clay, and to my horror I saw great big sausages floating around me, and I smelt a terrible smell. I realized that I had fallen into the camp's cesspool.

How can I describe the turmoil, anguish and bewilderment in my heart! At first I refused to believe it. But then I raised an arm in the air and saw that it was covered with slime. I was so exhausted and dispirited that I just gave up. I started to drown with the slime in my hair and face. I didn't care.

I thought: "This is no life, let me die."

Suddenly I heard a voice saying to me:

"Do you believe in God?"

The voice seemed to be coming from high above me. I took it to be the voice of an angel.

Inwardly I answered:

"Yes."

Then the voice calmly but sternly reminded me that I had no right to take my own life, that I would continue to struggle to get out of the cesspool, and that if I let myself drown out of despair I would not get out of my difficulties. For whatever I had not been able to face in this life I would encounter after my death in the next life. And it would be far worse! I cannot remember the exact words, but I remember the grave words as if it were

yesterday. And I remember the warning that I would be disobeying God's commandment that we are not allowed to take our own lives. A fear surged into my heart which proved to be greater than my despair, a fear of going against the will of God, Who is not only my Creator but also my Judge, and Whom I would have to face after my death.

I called out in my heart:

"Do you call this life?"

No answer was given, no voice was heard, just a terrible, terrible silence, and the black stinking pool in which I was paddling. I felt my strength going, and in sheer anguish of soul I determined to get out of the cesspool. My hands grabbed the edge, but I could not get hold of it, it was all slimy, there was nothing solid to hold on to. Then my feet tried to touch the bottom so that I could take a jump and throw myself out of the pool and onto the ground. But as my feet searched in the depth, I felt only thick slime, no hard bottom to rest on and push myself up from. What was I to do? There was no way of getting out. If I tried to shout, nobody would hear me. In any case, my voice would be so weak - I was worn out. Thoughts raced through my head. I was now very aware that I might drown after all, and I prayed intensely:

"O God, God, help me! You can see that I am really trying, but it is impossible for me!"

And suddenly I felt two hands underneath my elbows lift me up as if I were a feather and lay me on the ground. It happened very quickly and I think I fainted, because when I opened my eyes and saw the few stars in the sky I said to myself:

"What happened? Where are you?"

Then I remembered it all, the nightmare of the struggle in the pool. And with amazement I recalled the two hands, and in fact it seemed to me that I had been lifted out by two angels each having one finger. I wept and wept. In the end I made myself get up and waddle to the barracks where my mother and sister were fast asleep. I prodded my sister, who woke up dazed and said:

"What's the matter? What do you want?"

I could not speak. I just sobbed. Suddenly she saw this strange muddy phenomenon and smelled the stink and understood at once what had happened. She jumped up from the bamboo bed and put her arm around me and wept:

"O you darling! Never mind, I'll take you to the bathroom and scrub and scrub you!"

Never will I forget the love of my sister, which so great that she managed to lead me to the bathroom while her arm remained firmly around me, supporting and comforting me. Thank God, in the camp Makasser we had an enormous communal bathroom where we had running water gushing down from a bamboo holder. She stood underneath it, and

told me to wait there while she went in search of the kitchens to find cooking-salt to scrub me with.

How long she stayed away I don't know. I just let the cold, strong running water gush over me, through my hair, over my face, while I cried incessantly. I had been through so much, but I was unable to tell anybody about what I had experienced, and the tears were an expression both of relief and of sadness about the tragedy of the world. My soul had become aware that the cesspool was just a small part of that world which lies in iniquity. My sister returned and scrubbed and scrubbed me. I let her get on with it, while I went on crying. She was so sweet, she tried to stop me crying by assuring me that everything was alright now, and that it would not happen again. She tried to make a joke, that she was sure I would make sure never to fall into the cesspool again! I went on sobbing, and after she had scrubbed and bathed herself she led me gently back to the barracks. Like a mother she kept repeating to me:

"It's all over now! Have a good sleep! Tomorrow is another day!"

My heart cried: "Yes, tomorrow is another day, but still in this world, which is a cesspool."

I fell asleep at once.

First Days

The next morning we all had to line up at 6 a.m. to be inspected by a Japanese officer. We each had a number which we had to call out, while he checked that everyone on his roll was present. Every time a person died, that number was crossed out, it ceased to exist. We had to call out our number in Japanese, and we had to wear it on our clothes.

We were all allocated jobs. My mother had to make fish-nets with a number of other women. My sister had to look after the pigs kept by the Japanese, and she grew very fond of one of them, a very funny little piglet called "Wainka". One day the Japanese picked Wainka for slaughter, and my sister was heart-broken.

I was told to look after the huge fish-ponds of the Japanese. I also had to cut the coarse grass, which grew very fast and had to be cut all the day long! Otherwise it would spread into the pools and smother the fish. With one hand I held one bunch of grass, while with the other I cut it with the sickle. During the first two weeks my hands bled, but then they got hardened and tough, so it didn't hurt anymore. I liked my job in a way, because it did not involve getting fond of an animal which would later be slaughtered. Apart from the fish, the only animals I saw were the frogs swimming in the fish-ponds. But one could not get emotionally involved with frogs.

Now and again a group of Japanese would arrive in a party to catch fish. They would strip themselves, leaving only a towel round their loins, and wade through the water shouting and laughing. To our surprise, they would catch the fish with their hands,

throwing them into buckets of water which stood on the edge of the pool nearby. Their hands and legs would be covered with blood as the fish had nasty fins and spikes. But the Japanese did not mind. When they had caught enough of them, they would stop, and, laughing hilariously, would disappear with their buckets of fish.

We never tried to catch a fish because we had a guard watching over us and the fish belonged to the Japanese officers. In any case, I doubt whether I would ever have been able to catch one, for they were large and slippery and one would be stung and bitten in the process.

The fish were fed on "bunkil", large, flat cakes full of holes and worms. We had to go and get the "bunkil", which were in a shed outside the women's camp. On re-entering the camp, we were searched by a Japanese soldier. At the end of the first day we told the other women about the bunkil, and they begged us to smuggle some back into the camp for them. However, we had some women doctors who warned us severely not to eat any of the bunkil as it was poisonous for human consumption, even if we boiled and boiled it. Nevertheless, my sister begged me to bring her a small piece.

The next day, some of the other women with whom I worked brought some bunkil into the camp. I also brought in a small piece for my sister, but at the last moment I threw it away in the bushes remembering the doctors' warning. My sister was furious and shouted at me that her body was her responsibility and not mine, and that I jolly well had to bring her a piece the next day. I was mad with her and said to myself that I would bring her a huge piece and good luck to her!

In that frame of mind we went to sleep on our bamboo beds. In the night, however, we woken up by the screams of the women who had eaten some bunkil after boiling it in water for a long time. Their stomachs were swollen and perspiration ran down their faces from the pain. Some died, and those who survived suffered the consequences for the rest of their lives. How terrified I was that the same thing could have happened to my sister, and I thanked God that it happened before I gave any to her. It proved that we are responsible for each other and that if we can prevent someone from being poisoned we should do so. We cannot act like Pontius Pilate when we are instrumental in the suffering of another person. I often think back on those screams and shiver, reflecting that I almost became guilty of giving my sister poison to eat. If she had died or suffered for the rest of her life, it would have haunted me all my days, all the remaining hours of my life. Imagine: a weakening, a decision made in a few minutes, can result in years of suffering!

The Next Few Weeks

The camp barracks were situated under coconut trees on a site of red clay, and had been made of bamboo by Dutch prisoners under the supervision of the Japanese. When the Dutchmen were told that they had to move out to make way for women, they hurriedly made presents for the women and hid them all over the camp. One can imagine our delight when we found a bracelet made of bamboo on which flowers and other designs were carved. We also found bamboo rings with bright red berries (which are in

fact seeds) or a polished ordinary stone in place of the precious stone. In Java necklaces are made of these berries. We also found small bamboo bowls and combs. I myself found a bamboo clasp which was meant for a belt, which I still often use. I wonder who the maker of this clasp was and whether he is still alive.

Since we had only one pair of shoes each, we decided to walk barefoot to save our shoes for the great day of peace! Besides, the red sand would have ruined our shoes in no time in the hot weather. And when the rains came, the sand turned into clay which stuck on the shoes.

On waking one morning, however, we heard women everywhere shouting in disbelief:

"Where are my shoes?!"

Everyone had kept their shoes on the ground under their bamboo beds. During the night, an army of white ants had eaten all our shoes! Here and there a piece of a sole or part of a strap was left. Some of the women cried from disappointment, but it taught us how literally everything can be taken from us, if not by human agents, then by white ants or other catastrophes such as fire, earthquake, flood, etc. I was reminded of the plagues in the Old Testament, and had to think: "There is nothing new under the sun." History repeats itself in various forms. We all chatted about it and realized that none of us had really believed before that a whole harvest can be destroyed by locusts or that grasshoppers, for example, can do unheard-of damage. A white ant is such a tiny creature, but when millions of them arrive, their weakness as individuals is transformed into a tremendous force. In the tropics we knew of the danger of being bitten by scorpions, poisonous snakes, certain wasps and bees. One should never underestimate the danger presented by small creatures.

We used to sit for long periods under the coconut trees outside our barracks. One day we were sitting there with a small group when one of us happened to look up at the tree. Then she screamed and ran away. I looked up and saw a huge spider as big as a man's hand and legs as fat as the fingers of a man's hand. It was wrestling with a coconut. I fled with a yell and so did the others. "Bang!" - the coconut fell down onto the ground where we had been sitting. The weight of it coming from such a height could easily have killed one of us. Needless to say, most of us did not dare to sit under that tree again. I believe these coconut-spiders make holes in the coconuts and suck the milk out of them, but sometimes they just grab them with their hairy legs and loosen them until they drop. I detested them, and whenever I thought of them hidden in the trees I shivered with fear. To me they seemed to drop coconuts on us intentionally. Still worse was the idea of them falling on us themselves!

We had some women doctors and a dentist in the camp. They were wonderful people who tried to help the sick although there were no medicines of any kind. There was also a great shortage of bandages. The ones we had had to be used over and over again, being scrubbed with kitchen salt and then bleached in the burning sun. We all had wounds which refused to heal because of the shortage of vitamins in our bodies, and many people

had stinking, pussy wounds. There was a well-known actress in camp called Corry Wonk who volunteered to help the nuns with the washing of all the bloody, pussy bandages. It had to be done by hand, and there were no scrubbing brushes or aids of that kind. Stones and sticks had to be used for scraping or rubbing.

The Japanese would sometimes come into the camp and deposit loaves of mildewed bread and panfuls of soured vegetables in our dustbin. Some of the women and boys would pounce on them and run away to share their catch with their mothers or sisters. It never made anyone ill, so we came to the conclusion that mildewed bread and soured vegetables were in fact good for us.

The doctors told us that it was good to eat frogs, snakes and slugs as they were full of protein. The trouble was that we quickly finished them off, and every rat that we caught was handed over to the hospital. We had no more cats or dogs as they had been liquidated by the boys in our previous camp. As I was working at the fish-ponds, I was allowed to go outside the camp, and would pass banana-trees on my way to work. The women begged us to bring back the young shoots of bananas, from which they would roll cigarettes. The heavy smokers among the women were constantly complaining, which was a great burden on those who had to sleep next to them. They would be constantly talking about their craving for a cigarette, which on top of their hunger pains made life unbearable for them.

The Japanese

We soon learned about the ways of the Japanese. The simple Japanese soldier who had to guard us from a high sentry-post was a nice peasant. He could speak a little Malayan, and he told us wistfully that he was longing to return to his wife and family in a village where he worked as a fisherman. There were some papaya trees growing near the fish-ponds, and the only way to reach the fruit was by pushing against the long stem with a long pole in order to loosen the papaya. Of course, the papayas were for the Japanese, who counted the fruits and would send their cook to collect some of them. The Japanese peasant guard would sometimes look the other way while we poached the half-ripe fruit. As soon as he heard "plop", as the papaya fell into the water, he would look round at us with a grin. We in turn would point at the pond and ask him innocently whether we were allowed to go into the fish-pond to get the papaya out. We said that it had dropped into the water because it was "over-ripe". He would nod his permission from his exalted high seat, and we would wade into the water searching for the papaya in the mud. Of course, we had to eat the papaya there and then because the Japanese at the gate would never have allowed us to bring it into the camp. So we divided the papaya with a sharp stick and divided it amongst us. When the cook would appear and ask why there was one less fruit on the tree, the guard would come to our aid and admit that he had seen the papaya fall into the water. Of course, we had to be wise and not do this too often, so unfortunately we had to allow most of the papaya fruits to be collected by the cook for the Japanese.

It often happened during those years that we had to sign a card addressed to the Red Cross saying that we had received a parcel of food, which might include such delicious

things as bacon, chocolate, corned beef, etc. We had to sign the cards, but the parcels all found their way to the homes of the Japanese...

Some of the little children, especially little girls, were favoured by the Japanese at the gate. They would take them out of the camp to their homes and feed them with chocolate, bananas, etc. The mothers allowed it because it was a way of getting food for their children. One little girl with long fair hair was a great favourite with one of the Japanese officers. She was about nine years old. One day she fell seriously ill with bacillary dysentery, which is curable if you have the right medicine. Her mother rushed to the gate to tell the Japanese officer, who followed her into the barracks to have a look at the girl. But he refused to let her have any medicine, and she died. This mentality frightened us. It seemed to us that in the Japanese we were dealing, not with human beings, but with another species.

Before my mother and I were put in prison, some Japanese moved into the house opposite. They had eight or nine beautiful dogs which came from the houses of Dutch people. They used to stroke them, play with them and roll over the lawn with them, and they told their servants to give them plenty of good food. One day my mother and I heard anguished yelps coming from the garden opposite. We rushed to the front to see what was happening. The Japanese had tied all the dogs onto one flagpole on the lawn, and they were bayonetting them while laughing loudly. Blood poured out of them in fountains until they were all dead. My mother and I just cried and cried, but we could not help because we knew that if we tried to stop them they would bayonet us instead...

Moon-Madness

We discovered that a high proportion of the Japanese suffered from moon-madness. One of the officers suffered from it. For a few days, just before and after the full moon, he would go raving mad. For some reason the Japanese found it difficult to keep him confined in a room in the house which they occupied next to the camp. At night he would roam through the camp, and as long as he did not see you, you were safe. But he himself would hide in the shadows and wait for his victim.

One night, a young woman had a desperate need to go to the latrines. She slipped out of the barracks looking carefully to left and right to see if she could see him. When she thought the coast was clear, she ran swiftly towards the latrines. But on her way back he grabbed her from behind and kicked her repeatedly with his heavy boots. She screamed and fell unconscious. Women and guards came running, and the young woman was carried to the hospital. They operated on her and found that she had lost one kidney. She was about twenty-three years old, and engaged to be married. Of course, her injury meant that she could never have a child.

The next day the Japanese officer sent her a huge cake as a token of his regret. How can we understand this mentality?! To us it was a mockery. But he sent the cake with all sincerity.

There were various jobs to be done in the camp. When the trucks arrived carrying heavy bags of flour for the kitchen, the women had to unload them. It was very heavy work, and the Japanese made no effort to help. My sister, as well as looking after the pigs, was one of those who had to unload the trucks. One day she was in terrible pain, and we had to massage her back. For the rest of her life she has suffered from backache as a result of this work. She has to be treated regularly by an osteopath. Many prisoners of war have suffered either physically or spiritually from their experiences for the rest of their lives.

Every day, the Japanese would pick out some of the cleverest women in the camp, put them in a room together, and set them to solve some problem or other. At the end of the week they would have to tell the Japanese officer the solution they had arrived at. We called them the "think-tank". They had to deal with economic, political and religious problems.

My mother was happily making fish-nets for the Japanese when she discovered that the nets were not meant for fish at all, but for the camouflage of Japanese soldiers. She promptly refused to continue the work, and told the camp's woman commandant that according to the Geneva Convention she did not have to help the army of those occupying her own country. The Japanese officer came storming into the room and burst out indignantly against my mother in a mixture of Japanese, English and Malayan words. My mother, who was very small and the same height as the Japanese (most of us towered over them), raised herself to her full stature and answered him in the same fiery tone. She reminded him that she was Russian. He gaped at her, not quite grasping the horrible significance of that fact. Russian! Then she said that it would be a shameful crime on her part to help the Japanese against her own people, and mentioned the Geneva Convention. Finally, she reminded him that her honour was at stake, leading him to think that in certain circumstances Russian women might commit hara-kiri.

He was so amazed that he let her go free, and gave her some needlework to do instead. My mother taught me never to show fear in the face of the enemy. By bluffing and shouting back at them indignantly one gained their respect. They despised cowering people and admired courage, even in their enemy.

We were surrounded by millions of flies, and the Japanese were getting worried that they might spread various diseases. So one day we were told that each of us had to catch fifteen flies a day, otherwise we would get no food. We all laughed. It was easy enough to catch fifteen flies on a piece of tin or the lid of a box. We used to stand in long queues for our meals and as each of us came forward we had to show our fifteen flies. They were counted by a Japanese standing next to the woman who was dishing out the food. But soon our laughter turned into anxiety; for, believe it or not, the flies were dying out under the ruthless hands of three thousand women and children. Thank goodness, the Japanese released us from our fly-catching duties when there were no more to be caught. It shows that there are simple ways of dealing with pests that do not need pesticides, etc.

Some teachers in the camp volunteered to give lessons in the evening. We were too tired to do a lot of learning or listen to lectures, but I tried to continue with lessons in

Maths. As we had no text-books or writing material, the teacher would draw with her finger or with a stick in the reddish sandy clay ground. She would draw geometrical figures and use the ground as her blackboard. Then she would explain the theorems to us. We could not make notes, so we had to sit and listen, concentrating very hard to try and remember everything she taught us. She also did algebra with us, which was much more tedious as it took a long time writing the equations out on the ground with a stick.

We noticed what difficulty we had memorizing our lessons. This was owing to vitamin shortage. After the war many of us had to recuperate physically for about two years before we could enter university. When one's body is depleted of vitamins and proteins, one cannot concentrate or think clearly or memorize material.

In spite of everything, we could still laugh sometimes. This released tensions, and relieved suffering. Sometimes we doubled up with laughter when something we had been dreading did not materialize. The children were always adorable and elicited smiles and protective behaviour. We also laughed at the Japanese in a mocking way, imitating their bow legs or ways of walking or shouting.

There were some artists in camp, and the Japanese gave permission for them to give us a performance. I vividly remember someone doing a solo dance fighting an invisible enemy with a sword. At the end she collapsed exhausted on the ground, and the sword in her hand turned into a cross shape. This made a deep impression on me, and influenced me in later years. We are constantly fighting against invisible enemies who sometimes manifest themselves in visible form. The cross is our weapon against the enemy; we take it up to fight evil and become worthy followers of Christ.

I learned in the camps that all the sufferings we endure there - hunger, fear, illness, death, etc. - we share with the rest of humanity because of our common loss of God. However, these "crosses" can be endured in three ways. Either we grumble and complain about them. Or we can endure them without grumbling, but without bringing Christ into our suffering, without thanking Him for them. Or we can accept them as from the hands of God, with thanksgiving. Only the last is truly "taking up one's cross and following Christ". Only the patient endurance of suffering for Christ's sake can be compared to the voluntary suffering of persecution for the sake of truth and righteousness. Only such suffering attracts the grace of God.

Appendicitis

One day, two boys fell ill with terrible stomach pains. The doctor told the respective mothers that they had appendicitis and advised them to allow them to be operated on in case they developed peritonitis, in which case they would die. The boys clung onto their mothers, beseeching them not to let them be operated on. One mother hugged her son, comforting him and reassuring him that he would not have to have the operation. He was so relieved. He hugged and kissed his mother, and told her how much he loved her for her decision. The other mother wrested herself away from the arms of her son, clenched her lips together and said to the women:

"Take him and operate on him."

They grabbed the boy, while the mother walked away with tears streaming down her face. The boy screamed abuse at his mother:

"I hate you! You don't love me! How can you let this happen to me! You are awful, terrible..."

The mother just walked on without looking back until she was out of earshot. Then she slumped down and with sobs prayed to God:

"Save him, save him!"

Nobody dared to come near her. The women just watched her, and many wept with her. I was only a teenager at the time, and did not know what motherhood was. But I thought of the Lord weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was as if her sorrowful, sobbing body was pleading with God:

"Please let this cup pass from me... But not my will, but Thine be done!"

The boy was brought to the bamboo hospital, where he was held down by twelve women. There was no anaesthetic, so the surgeon had to start operating on him with primitive tools. Screams pierced the air, but his mother did not hear. The boy recovered.

Some months later, the other boy started to scream. He had peritonitis, and the doctor was unable to help him. So he died in excruciating pain.

Which of the two mothers had true love for her son? Was it not the one who accepted that her son had to suffer since this was the only way he was to be saved? The other woman by her permissiveness, by her trying to avoid her son's suffering, landed him in a far worse condition which killed him. We see this so often in the world today. People are permissive, they condone evil for the sake of a false peace and a false unity. The result is death.

Increasing numbers of people died either from malnutrition or from illnesses which we did not have the medicines to treat. In Bantjeuj prison we had been given only three spoonfuls of rice with salt each day. In the camps we received rice with a spoonful of cabbage and a teaspoonful of sugar each day. Some of the cooks were clever and made a kind of broth to go with the rice made of herbs and pig tripe which the Japanese used to throw out each day.

One day I got a toothache and had to go to the dentist. She could either put a clove in the cavity or pull out the tooth without an anaesthetic. The last few months before peace came I kept putting a clove in the cavity, praying that the tooth would not have to be pulled out. For the screams coming from the dentist's hut were chilling. I used to watch

some of the patients coming out of the hut with swollen eyes and tear-stained faces. But I also noticed how quickly they recovered, saying what a relief it was to be rid of the abscess, which made their whole body feel ill. I often used to think how "one has to get worse to get better". This is the pattern of much suffering.

The Men's Camp

Towards the end of our time in the camps, an incredible thing happened. The nice Japanese soldier in his high exalted watch-tower told us that a men's camp had been moved close to ours! The excitement rippled through the whole barracks. The women could not sleep, wondering whether their husbands or sons or fathers would be among those men. Most of us knew in which camps our husbands, sons or fathers were. In our case, I knew that my father could not be among the men close to us, and my sister knew the same about her husband. There were some women, however, whose loved ones were in the men's camp. Now we were all faced with a new situation, a crisis of a different kind from those we had faced up to then.

The women started planning how to get under the first, barbed wire fence and then the second, barbed wire and bamboo fence. This plan involved some women being on the look-out for the three guards who patrolled the area between the two fences. But other women objected, fearing that if they were caught there would be reprisals from the Japanese. The whole operation was very risky. First, the women had to crawl under the fences at night, when there was no full moon. Secondly, they had to arrange for their husband or son or father to do the same at the same time, so that they could meet for an hour or two in the space between the two camps. And thirdly, both had to crawl back to their camps.

Every morning at 6 a.m. there was a roll-call, and each of us had to call out our number. If someone did not respond, the Japanese would check why she was missing. Now each barrack had one woman in charge who was responsible before the Japanese for each missing person in her barrack. These women did not want to be beaten up by the Japanese because one of the women for whom they had been made responsible was caught.

We had already suffered various punishments at the hands of the Japanese for the "transgressions" of one person or group of people. Sometimes only the "culprit" was punished. Thus she might have to stand in the burning tropical sun with her arms stretched upwards. Whenever I saw a woman being punished in this way, I would feel sick in my stomach and tears would begin to prick behind my eyes. A Japanese soldier would stand guard nearby, and as soon as the woman would begin to lower her arms he would start yelling and shouting at her and wave his bayonet very close to her stomach. Of course, many fainted and got sun-stroke.

Now I read that the communist submit their victims to the same kind of tortures in Siberia, except there it is torture by cold rather than by heat. The same spirit of the evil one is at work in both situations. Satan and his angels try to break a man's spirit until he desponds and begins to doubt in the goodness of God. Is God really almighty? he wonders. Or is the devil in command? But while the devil is mighty, God is almighty, and when He

wills it He can completely turn a situation around. I experienced that in Bantjeuj when I felt an invisible wall around me when being taken for interrogation, and many other people in the camps experienced it.

Another reprisal the Japanese used was rationing our food even more. This particularly affected the little children. The mothers of these children argued that the lives of their children were being jeopardized by the acts of the women who wanted to see their menfolk. Those women, on the other hand, said that they had the right to see their loved ones for just a few hours. After all, they might never see them again. I did not take part in these arguments. I only thanked God that I had no children to worry about, and no husband who was within reach and whom "I would never see again".

Of course, some of the women did manage to get out and back and meet up with their loved ones. The next day their radiant faces gave away the secret. They were filled with such joy and gratitude, and just could not contain it. This went on for a few weeks at night when the barracks were fast asleep. But one day three of them were caught when they tried to slip back into the camp. The Japanese made them walk through the camp with a placard on their chest and back on which their crime was written in bold letters. All their hair was cut off, and they were put on very meagre rations. The Japanese punished the head of their barracks, and all the other women in the barracks (about two hundred people) were also punished by having their hair shaven off. This was a warning for the rest of us.

Benny and Freedom

I became so weak physically that the Japanese gave me permission to stop working for them. I was allowed to lie down all day in the barracks. This enabled me to nurse a little boy called Benny whose mother was seriously ill in hospital. She was a war-widow whose husband had been a pilot killed near Singapore. Benny was very weak from malnutrition, and the two of us would just sleep for most of the time.

Benny got worse and worse. At night I used to cradle him to try and keep him warm. It was like holding a little leather bag full of bones. How I prayed for him to stay alive for the sake of his mother!

Then I had a vivid dream. I saw all of us standing on a huge field. We were handed white cards, and on each card was a date, and a time (e.g. 11 a.m. or 2 p.m.) and the word "car" or "train" or "truck". When I told the dream to my mother, neither she nor I could understand it. The white cards might have meant freedom, but what was the meaning of the different dates, times and modes of transport?

We all imagined that peace would come like a kind of firework. We would all shout with joy and run out of the camps together. But it was quite different in fact. One evening, about a week after the dream, the Japanese summoned us to come out together onto a huge field. We wondered whether we were going to be told about a move to another camp. We had heard the terrible rumour that the Japanese were planning to put us on

ships and transport us across the sea to Borneo. I think that if that had happened, hardly any of us would have survived. While we were trooping together towards the field, I suddenly recognized that my dream was coming true. I grabbed my mother's arm and shouted:

"It's my dream! We're going to be given white cards now!"

When we had all assembled, a Japanese officer climbed onto a platform and started a long, tedious talk about life. We wondered what on earth he was leading up to. Then he started to talk about different religions, and that the faith of a Christian is in Christ, Who has given us a shining example of forgiveness and Who has taught us to pray for our enemies. Then he ended simply:

"I want to remind all of you to act like Christ in Whom you believe. The war is over, and we Japanese have lost the war."

Then he descended from the platform.

There was a stunned silence. No one could believe his words. The war was over?! How did it happen? Nobody cheered, nobody felt joy, it was all so unreal. A few women started to sing the national anthem in faltering voices. Here and there women started to cry, and within a few minutes of the announcement everyone was crying. We suddenly realized that now we would hear which of our loved ones had survived. Until then, everyone had lived in hope. But now fear fell over us. What did the future hold in store for us? How were we going to cope with our freedom?

Instead of rushing out of the gates towards freedom, we quietly walked back to the barracks, having been told that we had to stay in the camp until the British came.

The days and weeks that followed were like a dream. Suddenly the women did not have to carry heavy bags of flour anymore. The Japanese soldiers did it instead. We did not have to do any more work. Huge quantities of rice and sugar arrived. But we remained prisoners.

Then the first British arrived. We had told the children that they would soon be seeing their daddies again, white men! But then, to our surprise, when the English officers walked into the camp, the children suddenly shouted:

"They've got legs, Mummy! They've got legs!"

Apparently they had seen snapshots of their fathers taken from the waist upwards, and they presumed that their daddies were legless!

A plane flew over the camp in order to drop crates of food by parachute. We were told to make a white cross on the field next to our camp. The first parachute did not open, and accidentally crashed through the hospital roof instead of onto the field. Several people

were killed, and the tragedy affected us deeply. Of course, our bodies could not cope with all the different foods we were given. Sugar was a particular problem. We all developed sugar-heads, and had big, swollen faces. As our bodies were so thin, we looked like frogs, and the doctors forbade us to eat any more sugar.

We heard that peace had come as a result of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. If that bomb had not fallen, thousands and thousands of people in Java and elsewhere would have perished. I don't want to say that for that reason it was justified. Why should we live and others die? I think God allowed it as a warning for the whole world. Unless we change and turn towards Him for help, we are heading for a world catastrophe.

Even when peace had come, people went on dying daily in the camps. For them the peace had come too late. It seemed worse that they should die after the war had ended rather than during the war itself.

However, death is death whenever it strikes you. And when the moment of parting from the earth comes, it is the quality of our souls that matters. How much love for our Creator have we acquired during our sojourn on earth? Man is like grass, here today, gone tomorrow. Sometimes, through deep suffering, a soul can acquire a deep love and gratitude to God in a very short time, as in the case of the good thief on the right hand of Christ. When he was hanging on the instrument of shame, the cross, in just punishment of his crimes, he admitted that he was suffering justly, and appealed to the Mercy of God to forgive him. But we also have the case of the other criminal, who was hardened in heart and could neither repent nor appeal to God for mercy. Although he was suffering terribly, and death was staring him in the face, he was too proud to repent.

We left the camp on different days at different hours by different forms of transport, just as I had seen in my dream. It all depended on whether one had friends outside the camp who were willing to give you housing and food. We had friends, stateless White Russians, and so we were fetched by car and whisked out. Others were put in lorries and taken to hotels.

Benny and his mother just made it. If peace had come only a few days later, he would have died. The children in the camps had stopped growing. After the war they shot up; their bodies tried to catch up with the lost years. People would say: "Nature knows best", "Wise nature" put a stop to their growth while they were malnourished and needed to preserve their strength. But is it not God Who controls nature? Is it not He Whom we should thank?

In a short time the camps were emptied and we all tried to readjust to life in the world. We were short of clothes, and had lost houses, cars and all our property. It meant starting again from scratch. My father sent me to Holland, while he stayed behind for another year to work for the bank. On the way to Holland, we stopped in Suez and were brought to Attaka, where we were all given a pair of brown walking shoes, two pairs of thick stockings, and a shirt and jacket outfit. We all looked alike. We did not mind until we arrived in Holland, but then it became a nuisance to be identified by our clothing as

former POWs. In Holland everything was rationed, and we needed coupons to buy practical items like sheets, blankets and towels.

When the war was over on Java, and we were living in houses, the Indonesians attacked us. During the war the Japanese had educated the Javanese and Malays to hate us, to long for independence. So there were snipers in the trees, and we had to duck and hide from them in gutters in broad daylight until help came either from the English or the Dutch soldiers. As a result, when I went to Holland and was staying with my uncle and aunt and their five sons, I preferred to walk very close to the houses, would peer into the trees and look over my shoulder every few minutes. They treated me very kindly, but must have thought I was a mental case. Gradually, however, I adapted to normal life without snipers in trees.

However, life was never the same as it had been before the war. My eyes were opened to the fact that life is fleeting, that one cannot rely on men, but only on God. The Christian is a stranger in this world, a pilgrim journeying to a Kingdom that is not subject to time and change. There, and only there, is true stability and continuity. How true are the words of the Lord: "Without Me you can do nothing", and: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My word will abide forever."

In Holland I went to Amsterdam university, and then got married to an Englishman who had been an officer with the Gurkhas in Java. We moved to Amersham and had four children, two boys and two girls. Life in England was good, I was content as a wife and mother. How grateful I was that God had helped me out of the cesspool.

Slowly, however, my longing to feel as close to God as I had been in prison and the camps overtook me. What is the good of having a husband, children, a house, a garden, if you miss out on God? This feeling started me on my search for the True Church, the living Church of the living God. I discovered that 99% of the churches are corpses, and that as the angel said to the myrrh-bearing women: "You cannot find Him among the dead." I needed real spiritual food, I refused to be fed with the bunkil that kills the soul. There is a spiritual famine throughout the world and people in their despair feed themselves on poison instead of the Truth.

The clouds are gathering everywhere and we are heading for a mighty catastrophe as man becomes more godless every day. But a catastrophe is not the end of things, we often have to get worse to get better. A chastisement for the world which leads to the salvation of thousands is better than a false peace in which thousands are lost spiritually every day. People are clamouring for peace. But is the present situation really peace? In fact, there is a mighty war raging between good and evil, between God and Satan, and the battlefield is the souls of men. How much longer are we going to remain blind to this, burying our heads in the sand? Since a war is being waged, we must join the fight - on the side of the Truth. We must take up our cross and confess the Truth. For it is the Truth that gives life, even when it brings suffering, whereas illusions kill. As the Lord said: "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free..."