

# Escape From The List: Courage, Sacrifice, Survival

by

Elliot L. Hearst

*"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"* — Fred Rogers

## Preface

Anne Frank has been described as Hitler's most famous victim. By virtue of her diary, which was in fact a heavily revised memoir that today might be considered to belong to the genre of creative non-fiction, Anne Frank has attained a kind of immortality that the art form of writing frequently provides. This should not, of course, trivialize her fate, nor the suffering of the multitudes of other victims of the Nazi regime, a group comprised of Jews, as well as non-Jews. Some of these stories have been told in great detail, while many others have not. What follows is the story of Elisabeth Rodrigues Lopes de la Peña, a Jewish girl whose family had fled the Spanish Inquisition to settle in the Netherlands. During the German occupation of Amsterdam during the Second World War, this family faced yet another existential threat, one that some of them did not survive. Elisabeth may well have ended up as yet one more entry in the long list of the Nazi's victims, if not for the intervention and courageous efforts of her non-Jewish neighbors—efforts that were based in large part on their own deeply held religious beliefs and sense of morals. Elisabeth's rescuers are known to Holocaust historians, and their names are enshrined in the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Museum in Israel, as well as in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Along with my Research Assistant Angelica Roman, I have conducted personal meetings and interviews with Elisabeth's daughter, Carolyn Stewart. Ms. Stewart has graciously shared many heretofore unknown details of her mother's story of rescue, as well as photographs and documents, including some that have been unseen by anyone in over sixty years. What follows is new insight into Elisabeth Rodrigues' escape from the list: a true story of courage, sacrifice, and survival.

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## Introduction

In the early 1940s, in the Dutch city of Amsterdam, there lived a young Sephardic Jewish girl by the name of Elisabeth Rodrigues Lopes de la Peña, more commonly known as Elly Rodrigues. Elly and her family were very religious Jews who originally hailed from Spain. When Queen Isabella had all of Spain's Jews expelled by issuing The Alhambra Decree in 1492, the family immigrated to the Netherlands, where they thrived for hundreds of years. Midway through the twentieth century, the occupation by Nazi Germany during World War II changed the family's lives forever. Tragically, Elly's parents, Abraham Rodrigues and Lea Coopman-Rodrigues, would perish in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Elly and her brother Henry, however, would both survive thanks to the courageous actions of three selfless individuals with a conscience: Lizebertus "Bert" Bochove, and two sisters, Aartje and Margriet Bogaards.

This paper explores a story that is not entirely unknown. There are mentions of Elly Rodrigues, Bert Bochove, and the Bogaards sisters in a number of books and on various websites. This writer has, however, enjoyed exclusive access to the story as told by Elly's daughter, Carolyn Stewart. Carolyn travels to different schools, speaking to young people about the inspiring story of her mother's rescue, and she agreed to meet with the research team for many hours, relating heretofore unknown details of this story. She has also made available to us photographs and documents that had been locked away by an uncle, unseen by anyone including the family, in sixty years. Our hope is that this additional first-hand

information will enhance appreciation for what is, as Carolyn puts it, a miraculous story of “love and faith.”

### Part I: Who Were Elly’s Rescuers?

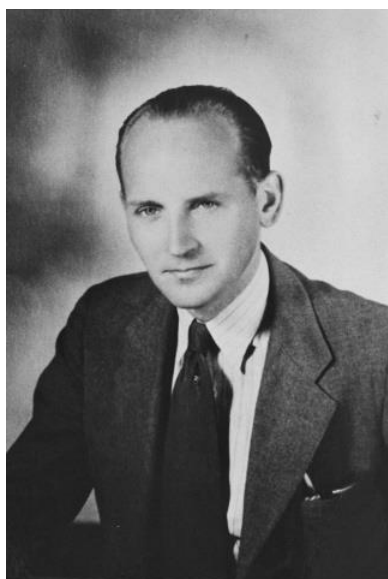
Only 11% of the European Jewish children who were alive in 1939 survived beyond the war years. It is a sad and sobering statistic that a total of 1.5 million European Jewish children were killed during World War II (Dwork xi). This astonishing number underscores how badly the odds were stacked against these children and helps explain why those who did survive, almost always with the help of non-Jewish citizens, felt that the gift of life they received was, indeed, miraculous. In Holland alone, “More than twenty thousand Dutch people helped to hide Jews and others in need of hiding during those years” (Gies 11). As a result of this altruism, there are many stories of heroism and survival that anyone examining this dark period of history can find. While some of the children who were hidden were rescued by people acting upon conscience alone, some were saved by individuals motivated by their Christian faith, as well, and, very often, this religious element had a large influence on the way the survivors led their lives after the crisis had passed. One example of the latter situation is the story of Elly Rodrigues.

Margriet Bogaards, who was Elly’s savior, was inspired to act primarily by her deeply held religious convictions. Religious belief was not, however, always a contributor to a moral imperative for many Christians—a great number of them chose to do nothing and often collaborated with the Nazis. Bert Bochove and his wife Annie, on the other hand, were

not motivated so much by their religion as a feeling that they would simply be doing the right thing:

‘If I was not Christian, I would still do it. You have it in you. The first woman to come to us was a good friend of Annie's, and likable, the last person you could say no to -- it was impossible. Then you see that your house is more or less the perfect place for giving help; you have the feeling that you can do a good thing.’

(qtd. in Land-Weber)



*Figure 1. Bert Bochove in 1946. ("Portrait of Dutch Rescuer Bert Bochove." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)*

While Bert Bochove was Elly's initial savior, Margriet Bogaards was her second, longer-term rescuer. Margriet was, in fact, motivated far more by her religious convictions than by any other consideration. Some rescuers were spurred to act by financial concerns, some by simple hatred for the Nazis; some, like the Bochoves, were guided by their conscience, and some were moved to act by virtue of their religion. Sometimes, these inspirations were combined, often conflating, and quite often the lines between these motivating factors became blurred.

Part II: Early Life in Amsterdam



*Figures 2 and 3. The Rodrigues family apartment in Amsterdam. (Courtesy of Bonnie Price)*

In 1930s, the Rodrigues family was leading a happy life in Amsterdam, where “a small class of very prosperous Jews, mostly of Sephardic background, whose ancestors had immigrated from Spain and Portugal as early as the sixteenth century, held leading positions in the country’s economic and cultural life and stood apart from the great majority of Dutch Jews” (Müller 95). Abraham Rodrigues was a successful textile merchant, married to Lea-Coopman Rodrigues. Carolyn Stewart states, “I wish there was more about my grandparents I could tell you. I know that they were born in 1900 and 1901 respectively. They didn't have Henry until 1930 and Elly came eleven months later in 1931. The Rodrigues family lived on Kromme Mijdrecht Street in Amsterdam. I've been there and it's in a very nice section of the city.” Living in what was a Jewish area in south Amsterdam, the family, including Elly and her brother Henry, would regularly worship in a Portuguese synagogue; in fact, one of Elly’s grandfathers was a rabbi. The stories and experiences of Elly Rodrigues and Anne Frank have many intriguing parallels, as well as crucial differences that will be examined later. The Rodrigues residence was a ten-minute walk from where the Frank family lived prior to going into hiding. Elly spoke to Carolyn Stewart about being acquainted with Anne, and this is supported in an autobiography written by Barry Spanjaard, an American boy living in the same neighborhood, who was a friend of both girls. In describing the area he writes, “There were several Dutch girls, and we used to play together. It wasn’t until a few years later that I found out that one of these girls had been Anne Frank” (Spanjaard “The Emerging American”). Elly studied at the Jewish Lyceum, the school that the sisters Anne and Margot Frank also attended. However, with the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent Nazi occupation of Holland, life became increasingly difficult for Amsterdam’s Jewish population, and as Deborah Dwork points out, the “siege of the Jews began with a legal

definition” (8). The Nazi regime was extremely specific in determining who would be identified as Jewish, and the First Ordinance to the Reich Citizenship Law, dated November 14, 1935, consisted of a number of rather complex statutes:

#### ARTICLE 2

2. Partly Jewish is anyone who is descended from one or two grandparents who are fully Jewish by race, in so far as he is not to be considered as Jewish under Article 5 Section 2. A grandparent is to be considered as fully Jewish if he belonged to the Jewish religious community.

#### ARTICLE 5

1. Jew is he who is descended from at least three grandparents who are fully Jewish by race.

Article 2, paragraph 2, sentence 2 applies.

2. Also to be considered a Jew is a partly Jewish national who is descended from two fully Jewish grandparents and a) who belonged to the Jewish religious community, upon adoption of the [Reich Citizenship] Law, or is received into the community thereafter, or b) who was married to a Jewish person upon adoption of the law, or marries one thereafter, or c) who is the offspring of a marriage concluded by a Jew (as defined in paragraph 1) after entry into the force of the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor of September 15, 1935, or d) who is the offspring of an extramarital relationship involving a Jew (as defined in paragraph 1) and who is born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936. (qtd. in Dwork 8-9)

These specific prescriptions for identifying Jews within the population led to ever-tightening restrictions on the everyday lives of the Jewish residents of Amsterdam. As Miep Gies, one of the helpers of the Frank family, later recalled, “Some of the anti-Jewish orders were laughable. Jews were no longer allowed to keep pigeons. Others were devastating—Jewish bank deposits and valuables were suddenly frozen from transfer or use” (79-80). Jews

had already been “prohibited from staying in hotels, or going to cafés, movie theaters, restaurants, libraries, even public parks” (72). In addition, Gies points out that “Now Jewish doctors and dentists could not treat non-Jews,” and “Jews were not permitted to bathe in public swimming pools” (73). Despite these degrading edicts, up until June of 1941, “Jewish children had pretty much been unmolested. Now they were forbidden to mix with their non-Jewish schoolmates. Now Jewish children had to go to all-Jewish schools and be taught only by Jewish teachers” (80). Elly Rodrigues had been receiving a religious education at the Portuguese synagogue, but once Jews were no longer permitted to attend public school with non-Jewish children, she found herself at the Jewish Lyceum, which closed in 1943.

It is interesting to note the lengths that some immigrant Jewish families went to in order to assimilate into the culture of Holland, such as trying to avoid giving offense by not speaking German in a country that was now so gravely threatened by their neighbor. In her biography of Anne Frank, Melissa Müller notes, “When Otto [Frank’s] cousin Milly Stansfield came to visit in 1938, the family never spoke a word of German on the street even though they spoke a mixture of Dutch and German at home. Milly concluded that Otto had instructed his children to speak Dutch in public so as not to cause offense in the country that they had made their home” (97-98). At the Jewish Lyceum, Anne always spoke fluent Dutch.



Klasse: 3

SCHOOL JAAR 1941/42

VAKKEN	Dec. 1941	Jan. 1942	Febr. 1942	OPMERKINGEN
Hebreeuwisch Lezen . . . . .	4	4	4	
Berachot . . . . .	3½	3	3½	
Joodische Kalender . . . . .	3½	3½	3	
Bijbelsche Geschiedenis . . . . .	4	3½	3½	
Hebr. Taalkunde . . . . .	4	4	3½	
Gebeden vertalen . . . . .	3½	4	4	
Pentateuch vertalen . . . . .				
Vijft . . . . .	4½	3½	4	
Gedrag . . . . .	4½	3½	4½	
Geoorloofd verzuim . . . . .	1			
Ongeoorloofd . . . . .				
Handteekening der Ouders	Rodrigues	Carbony		

Onderwijzer(es) *J. M. van der Pijl*

Betekenis der Cijfers:  
 1. = slecht  
 2. = matig  
 3. = vrij goed  
 4. = goed  
 5. = zeer goed

*goed voor naar de 4e klas*

Figure 3. Elly's report card from the Portuguese-Israeli Religious School in Amsterdam, 1941/42. The teacher's handwritten notation in the lower right corner indicates approval of Elly's promotion to the 4th grade. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)



Figure 4. Elly Rodrigues at school in Amsterdam. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)



Figure 5. Close-up of Elly Rodrigues as a student, center. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)



*Figure 6. Anne Frank in June, 1942. ("Anne Frank Stichting." Used by permission)*



*Figure 7. The Merwedeplein during the time the Frank family lived there. Elly Rodrigues and her family lived just a few blocks away. ("Anne Frank Stichting." Used by permission)*

### Part III: The Noose Tightens

In June of 1942, conditions became increasingly difficult for Amsterdam's Jewish population. The Nazis began to implement with ever more ferocity their plans for ridding the entirety of Europe of all its Jews. Tighter and tighter restrictions were put into effect. Jews were forced to surrender all their bicycles (an order which Margot Frank did *not* comply with), they were not permitted to attend the cinema, they were barred from public parks, and

they were required to wear a yellow star so they could easily be distinguished from the rest of the population. The Dutch version of the yellow star was a slight variation on the German one: in Germany, the star had the word *Jude* emblazoned on it, written in a poorly executed approximation of Hebrew lettering in order to be as degrading as possible. The Dutch stars were imprinted with the Dutch translation: *Jood*.



Figure 8. Photo of an actual yellow star used in Holland. ("Anne Frank Stichting." Used by permission)

These stars were provided to the Jewish Council on April 29, 1942, by SS *Hauptsturmführer* Ferdinand aus der Fünfen. Precisely 569,355 of them were distributed, and he ordered that "all

Jews over six years of age ... be identified with the Jewish star” (Müller 171). The Jewish Council was given all of three days in which to accomplish this complicated task, and the procedure they were to follow was very specifically spelled out for them:

The star was to be firmly stitched to outer garments, such as overcoats, suit coats, and dresses, and not just anywhere but breast-high on the left side and fully visible. Any Jew caught in public without a star—and ‘public’ meant not only on streets and squares but also in front yards, in courtyards, or on balconies—would be subject to a heavy fine. (171)

Those who possessed a previously provided identity card emblazoned with a “J” were to receive one of these stars, but they were not provided free of charge. As an added indignity, these stars had to be purchased for 4 cents each, plus the surrender of one coupon from a ration card, “without which clothing could not be purchased” (172). Many non-Jewish Dutch citizens reacted to this edict with utter disgust, and some also took to wearing these stars themselves, as a show of solidarity and in order to confound the Germans and negate the intended effect. Miep Gies recalled that “many Dutch Christians, deeply rankled by this humiliation of our Jews, also wore yellow stars on their coats. Many wore yellow flowers, as emblems of solidarity, in their lapels or their hair” (87). Resistance often begins as internal seething that burns for a long time, building up and eventually exploding into direct action. Gies articulates this herself, explaining that the yellow stars were felt to be particularly offensive: “This edict, somehow so much more enraging than all the others, was bringing our fierce Dutch anger to a boil” (87). The fact that large numbers of Dutch citizens collaborated with the Nazis should not be forgotten, but these small acts of defiance were early indications of what would become for many personally risky acts of overt resistance to the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Holland. This sense of decency and

concern for what was happening to their neighbors in their own country would directly lead to the rescue and survival of large numbers of men, women, and children who would most likely have perished in the mass deportations and executions that followed. In fact, less than one in twenty of the Dutch Jews who were deported returned to the Netherlands (238). Christians wearing a yellow star as a show of solidarity was evidence of the first stirrings of conscience that so many Dutch citizens were experiencing at the time, which, for many, would be manifested in direct action and defiance of the Nazis. Many of these citizens were arrested for their action and were sent to a concentration camp for a term of six weeks as punishment (172).

#### Part IV: “Well, I’ll See What I Can Do.”

Bert Bochove was a Dutch pharmacist who hid an amazing total of thirty-seven Jews in his own home, above his drugstore in the heart of Amsterdam, right under the noses of the Nazis (“Lizebertus Bochove”). Sensing the increasing danger, the Rodrigues family realized in 1943 that life could not go on for them as usual. Elisabeth confided in her friend Barry and told him about the decision that had been made:

One day as I was walking Ellie home, she told me she was going to tell me a big secret. She said, ‘Barry, what I am about to tell you, you must NEVER repeat to anyone, not even your father and mother, because my life would be in danger.’ I reassured her. She went on, ‘Tonight, around one in the morning, my parents, my brother Henri and I, are going away; we are going into hiding’ . . . It was a very sad goodbye, even for a couple of twelve year-olds, as deep down inside, we both had the feeling we would probably never see each other again. I never stopped

thinking about Ellie and would search for her wherever I went. (Spanjaard “The ‘Moffen’ Get Rolling”)

Like many before them, the Rodrigues family became beneficiaries of Bert’s protection:

The first refugee to come and stay at his house was Henny Juliard; she had been one of his wife’s best friends and came to her in this time of utter despair.

Without any sort of argument Bochove saw it as his duty to provide for this woman and took her in. What followed was an influx of peoples and the whole town became flooded with Jewish families seeking a hiding place. This very quickly led to the depletion of food stores and Bochove was forced to roam far to the neighboring farms and beg for any small donations of potatoes or wheat.

(“Bert Bochove’s Story”).

Bert hid the Rodrigues family in the attic above his store, which they shared with another family.

With Bert’s drugstore open for business during the day, they all had to lie perfectly still and not move at all for eight hours—the family members even had to slip bedpans underneath them when it became necessary to answer nature’s call. The families hid here like this for eleven straight months (Stewart). These conditions were, in some ways, more difficult than those experienced by Anne Frank and the other residents of the Secret Annex, which was over Otto Frank’s warehouse. The small attic over Bert Bochove’s drugstore was extremely confining.

With so many people breathing in the tight space over the drugstore, and the oxygen not being recycled for long periods of time, the air became oppressively stale. One can get a sense of the living conditions Elly had to endure by consulting Miep Gies’ description of the Secret Annex:

“When the summer heat became extreme, it was not very nice up in the hiding place” (114). She

continues to state that “even under the best of circumstances the place was always a little stuffy” (114). On a few occasions, helpers Miep Gies and Bep Voskuijl stayed overnight in the Secret Annex and recalled later that only during these visits were they able to fully appreciate the fear and confinement experienced on a daily basis by their beneficiaries.

Anne Frank actually had a little more space, though certainly not luxurious accommodations, than Elly and her roommates had in Bert’s tiny attic. In the early period of her hiding, Anne even recorded favorable impressions of the living arrangements. “The Annex is an ideal place to hide in,” she wrote. “It may be damp and lopsided, but there’s probably not a more comfortable hiding place in all of Amsterdam. No, in all of Holland” (236).



*Figure 9. A model of the second of the three floors used as the Secret Annex. The room that Anne Frank shared with the dentist Fritz Pfeffer is on the upper left. ("Anne Frank Stichting." Used by permission)*

Many years later, Bert Bochove spoke about hiding the Rodrigues family:

‘One day in '42, my brothers called asking me to help a business acquaintance of theirs who was in trouble. Abraham Rodrigues was a salesman for women's

apparel. His family were Portuguese Jews, known as Sephardic. They had been living in Holland for maybe 250 years, but still proudly maintained their Portuguese heritage. Abraham and my father had met by chance on a street car, around 1915, and a business relationship developed between them that continued on with my brothers after our father died. I had never met him.

‘Can you take Rodrigues and his wife and two kids?’ they asked me.

‘Well, I’ll see what I can do.’

I went to the Rodrigues house in Amsterdam to talk it over, and found out that they were ready to go. It was high time too; they really were in danger. There were parents and others in that family that were already caught. Back in Huizen, I arranged with a skipper who had a delivery business, to go the next day and load up all their possessions onto his boat. Meanwhile the Rodrigues family came to my house by train. Two days later the Gestapo came to pick them up, but their house was empty.

Across the street from us was a little grocery store with a big long attic above; you couldn't see it from the outside. We told those people that we all had to help the Jews. And since they had extra room, and we were happy to pay for it, could they please store the Rodrigues family stuff. They said yes, fine, only the piano they couldn't have; it was too big to get up the stairs. Well, I had a commercial building with a wide staircase, and a big hallway. It took four strong fellows to



get it up, but we were glad to have it. Annie liked to play the piano, and the guests too.

After the Juliards and the Rodrigues family, it was all unknown people coming into my house. There was a network in the underground that brought people to us: I didn't understand how it worked, and was never interested either. After all, with so many strangers coming into my house, the less I knew the better. Sometimes it wasn't until years later that I knew their real names; with some, I never learned them.' (qtd. in Land-Weber)

The choices that Bert and Annie Bochove made, putting themselves in danger in order to help so many strangers whose lives were in jeopardy—many whose names they did not know at the time, and some whose names they would never learn—are truly inspiring. One can search the soul, asking what actions would be taken under similar circumstances. The truth is, this cannot be predicted with certainty until such a situation itself arises. This action was taken by the Bochoves based purely on its being the right thing to do. Despite all her suffering while in hiding, Anne Frank wrote “that people are basically good at heart,” and the heroic deeds performed by Bert and Annie Bochove underscore Anne’s oft-quoted belief in the goodness of humanity (Frank 716). It saddens one to imagine how Anne’s feelings about this might have changed after her eventual arrest and deportation.

## Part V: Turning Points

One great fear of those in hiding was the fact that so few people could be trusted. The Nazis offered bounties for information about those in hiding, and the difficult wartime economy made these rewards extremely enticing for many Dutch citizens. Thus, there were informers everywhere. Some of the Franks' acquaintances were hiding other Jews themselves, and one of these, a grocery store owner named Mr. van Hove, was betrayed by an unknown informant. As his wife related later on, "'Being tight-lipped didn't help. Someone ratted on us'" (qtd. in Müller 284). In late May 1944, four officers arrested van Hove and "the two Jews he was hiding" (284). As Anne Frank noted in the first version of her diary, "We're going to be hungry, but nothing is worse than being discovered" (Frank 681). With Bochove incredibly busy hiding so many Jews, keeping these efforts a secret for a sustained period of time was bound to be difficult, as they would soon find out.

Elly Rodrigues later stated that "'the address got hot'" (qtd. in Stewart). Neighbors were turning on one another with greater and greater frequency, often deliberately giving each other away. There was an increasing amount of chatter in the neighborhood about Jews hiding in Bochove's attic. Elly's father Abe, the textile merchant, checked his customer list in a desperate search for names of people who might be willing to take his family in. It was at this point that Abe Rodrigues made a momentous decision which proved to be a crucially important move that, despite the many parallels between Elly's experience and that of Anne Frank, radically distinguishes Elly's story from Anne's.

Those in hiding had to make choices and consider their options quite carefully. One of the most common decisions that had to be made was whether to try to keep the family together or

to split up. Very often, splitting up was considered to be the wiser course of action to take, as it increased the chances for survival of at least some of the family members. Melissa Müller notes, “Most families separated, with the parents entrusting their children to the care of organized resistance groups. They drummed new family names into the children’s heads, names that didn’t sound Jewish, and arranged for them to live with people who—at least to the children—were utter strangers” (214). Otto Frank felt that it was very important that his family remain together, despite the added danger: “Anne [realized] how lucky she was. Her parents were always there for her, spoiling her and cheering her up when she was sad. No matter what happened, [Otto] had assured her repeatedly, the family would always stay together” (Müller 187). This decision no doubt made Anne’s two years spent in hiding more comfortable than they otherwise might have been, but it also could have had unintended consequences. When the eight residents of the Secret Annex were eventually betrayed, all of them, including Otto and Edith Frank, and the sisters Anne and Margot, were arrested at the same time. Tragically, Otto Frank would be the only one of the eight to survive beyond 1945.

According to Hedda Kopf, “Parents had to choose between keeping their child with them and being deported together, [and] giving the child to strangers with the knowledge that they might never be reunited” (113). Kopf quotes one Dutch resistance worker as stating, ““The parents cried tremendously most of the time, which was very depressing. But I think the people who did it had a lot of courage. It took very much courage”” (113). Like so many other Jewish parents, Abraham Rodrigues made the decision to split his family up, although employing this strategy certainly never guaranteed the survival of one’s children. Upon checking his client list, he discovered the name of Margriet Bogaards, an unmarried home economics schoolteacher who lived a great distance away, in the countryside. Abraham telephoned Margriet, explaining to her,

““We have to flee”” (qtd. in Stewart). Margriet immediately agreed to help without a moment’s hesitation, saying, ““Give me Elly, I’ll take her. I will make a phone call to my sister, who will take your son”” (qtd. in Stewart). Not yet a teenager, Elly Rodrigues now had to leave her parents and her brother Henry to go live alone, with a complete stranger. The plan was for Elly to leave Bert’s attic in an ambulance, as such a vehicle was less likely to be searched. When she stepped outdoors for the first time in nearly a year, Elly took in deep breaths of the intoxicating fresh night air. As she departed for Margriet’s modest thatched roof home in Hazerswoude, a rural area of South Holland, Abe’s parting words to his daughter were, ““Do what you can to survive”” (qtd. in Stewart). Abraham had always provided financial support to his children’s rescuers, but, in December 1943, Abraham and his wife Lea were apprehended. Both of them would soon perish in the gas chambers at the Auschwitz death camp, leaving Henry and Elisabeth penniless orphans.



*Figure 10. Abraham and Lea Coopman-Rodrigues at an outdoor cafe in Amsterdam in happier times. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

2c Exemplaar acc BS 8-127		Overleden te op		2) Gezinso.	
1) Rodrigues--		Afke no. 25 juli 1900		2) Gezinso. koopman	
3) Abraham--		4) 25 juli 1900 geboortestad Amsterdam		5) Beroep (n-o)	
6) van Hijman--		7) 10 Dec 66		8) Essen D1	
9) van Gompes, Rosalie--		geb. no. 5 Nov 70		te Asd	
10) Coopman, Lea		geb. no. 10 Dec 66		te Essen D1	
11) 11-12 Geboren op 19 Jun 01		13) Huwelijk gesloten op 14 Sep 27		14-15-16) Huwelijk ontbonden op door	
17) Afgevoerd (dagt. en gem.) 16 Mei 44 D1		18) Asd		19) door	
20) Dagte aangeft 13 Nov 47		21) Gemeente en adres ASD Kr Midrechtstr 15		22) VOR	
23) EGEN EN STEERKINDEREN (alleen invullen op naam GEZINSHOOFD)		24) 25-31 Geboren		26) Verh. gezinsh.	
25) A.S.O. Dagekening A 18 Sep 45		26) Geachtsoom en Rodrigues, Henri		27) Verh. gezinsh. 11 Mrt 30	
28) A 18 Dec 45 Hazerswoude		29) Elisabeth		30) Verh. gezinsh. 23 Apr 31	
31) III		32) III		33) Verh. gezinsh. d	
34) IV		35) IV		36) Verh. gezinsh.	
37) V		38) V		39) Verh. gezinsh.	
39) VI		40) VI		41) Verh. gezinsh.	
42) VII		43) VII		44) Verh. gezinsh.	

*Figure 11. Civil Registry card for the Rodrigues family. The card includes Elly's location in Hazerswoude with an entry dated after the war ended. The notation "VOW" denotes Red Cross confirmation of the deaths of Abraham and Lea at Auschwitz. (Photo credit: Amsterdam City Archives. Used by permission.)*

## Part VI: When the Money Runs Out

Margriet Bogaards was a very religious woman in her mid-forties who had once been engaged, but the engagement had been broken off, and she lived alone. When Abraham Rodrigues called upon his customer to help his children survive, she responded, ““Jesus was a Jew. If he was walking the streets of Amsterdam the Nazis would be looking for him too. I might not be able to save my Jesus, but I will save your Elly”” (qtd. in Stewart). Although this was an incredibly dangerous endeavor, Margriet was happy to have the company and welcomed Elly into her home with open arms. At around the same time, Margriet’s sister Aartje Bogaards took Elly’s brother Henry into her home, as well. Through the extensive Dutch resistance network, Abe was able to funnel money to Margriet, who was earning a rather meager schoolteacher’s

salary, in order to help support his daughter. As the resistance network was a covert underground effort, the flow of funds was often sporadic and could frequently be interrupted. Using her resourcefulness, Margriet went to extraordinary and imaginative lengths to support her new charge, even taking her curtains down and sewing them into clothing for Elly until more funds arrived (Stewart).

When Abraham and Lea Rodrigues were arrested in Utrecht in December of 1943 and eventually deported, the support money stopped (“Bogaards Family”). After the arrest, Margriet moved Elly temporarily to another foster family, “but once the coast was clear, Elly came back, even though Margriet received no more money towards her upkeep” (“Bogaards Family”). Elly was terrified that Margriet would no longer be willing or able to continue to keep her in her home. Elly, barely 12 years old, had no idea what the future held for her, or how much longer she would survive. She was often fearful that Margriet, although always incredibly kind to her, would have no choice but to cast her out of her home and from under her protective care. For Margriet, however, money was *never* the issue; she “was driven solely by humanitarian and religious motives” (“Bogaards Family”). Margriet responded to the concerns of the clearly frightened and orphaned young girl in a manner that Elly would never forget: ““You are now mine,”” Margriet said to her. ““If all I have is half a sandwich, I will cut it into quarters and share it with you”” (qtd. in Stewart). This beautifully illustrates Margriet’s selflessness and devotion and reveals her deepening affection for the young Elly. Growing out of a favor to a friend that initially involved financial support, the bond between Elly and Margriet eventually blossomed into a mutually loving relationship that would run deep and last a lifetime.

## Part VII: Elly Rodrigues Becomes Elly van Tol

Upon returning to Margriet's home, Elly underwent a complete identity change. Elisabeth Rodrigues Lopez de la Peña, a girl who had come from a very observant Jewish family, who had gone to religious school, and whose grandfather was a rabbi, was now living as Elly van Tol, a Christian niece of Margriet's. She had to learn chapter and verse of the New Testament, as well as a large assortment of church hymns. In addition, Elly had to be particularly mindful of how she pronounced certain names found in the Bible, as well as many other words, which differed from the teachings of her extensive Hebrew education. She took what amounted to a "crash course" in Christianity, being awakened by Margriet at 5:00 AM every day (including weekends) in order to learn the New Testament (Stewart). Carolyn Stewart explained that Elly would later remember thinking, "All that Jesus business! I will forget that as soon as the war is over and I am back with my parents!" Elly began attending the small private school where Margriet taught home economics. All was proceeding smoothly until the day that Elly committed one slip of the tongue that could have easily proven fatal.

One day, while in class at school, Elly pronounced the name of one of the Hebrew prophets in a distinctly Jewish way because this was the pronunciation she had been taught and had always used with her family. Her teacher immediately realized that this girl had to be Jewish and went to the Dean, saying to him, "We have a problem. Go speak with Margriet and ask her what she is doing" (qtd. in Stewart). The Dean pulled Margriet into an office for a private conversation and confronted her, explaining what had happened. Margriet was petrified—her superiors at the school now clearly suspected Elly's true identity as a Jew in hiding. In that instant, everything important to her was placed in jeopardy, including her livelihood and her own and her young house guest's freedom and lives.

The interrogation continued, and then, in amazing turn of events, the Dean said, “Margriet, we aren’t going to do anything. Continue to bring Elly to school. Your secret is safe with us” (qtd. in Stewart). Almost more shockingly, none of the other students in the school, nor any of the other teachers (including the one who had initially reported Elly to the Dean), ever said a word to anyone. Margriet was so shaken by what had transpired, however, that she decided to take a six-week leave of absence from the school and flee with Elly to hide more deeply in the countryside. By this time Elly was in possession of forged papers under the name Elly van Tol. When Elly and Margriet were on a train making their escape. It just so happened that a pair of German officers were on the same train, and they came face to face with Margriet and Elly. The officers, thinking it peculiar that this young, dark-haired (and, therefore, possibly Jewish) girl was traveling alone with a woman who appeared too old to be her mother, demanded to see their papers. Elly, frightened once again, held tightly onto Margriet’s hand for dear life and began to pray: “Jesus, if you are really who my auntie said you are, please spare us this one time not to get caught” (qtd. in Stewart). The officers looked at the identity papers, and, satisfied with the forgeries, continued on their way—as Elly’s daughter Carolyn now explains, this experience “was the seed that was planted for my mother’s acceptance of the person of Jesus.”

One problem with hiding out in the countryside, however, was that Margriet’s neighbors began wondering where she and Elly were. The pair became conspicuous by their absence, and some of Margriet’s close friends got word to her that she was raising more suspicion by being gone than she would have if she and Elly were at home. They let her know that everything was quiet, and that it was safe for them to return, which they did. From then on, Elly returned to the school and “continued to move freely around the village” (“Bogaards Family”). Thus, Margriet’s friends and neighbors who were in on the secret also played a significant role in Elly’s survival.



As if the recent months were not eventful enough, however, shortly after Margriet and Elly returned to Hazerswoude, there would be yet another close call.

As bad luck would have it, an American paratrooper had parachuted out of his airplane and just happened to land near Margriet's house. German occupation forces were scouring the countryside, trying to find him and, thinking he was nearby, knocked on Margriet's door. Elly opened the door and looked straight into the eyes of two German soldiers. She was speechless and paralyzed with panic and terror. Margriet then came to the door herself and, seeing who was there, quickly pushed Elly back into the house, saying harshly to her, "Get away!" (qtd. in Stewart). The Germans asked Margriet whether she knew or had seen anything concerning the American paratrooper, and she replied, "I don't know anything. I am a woman alone here with my niece. Get away, and don't bother me again" (qtd. in Stewart). The two German soldiers had not counted on running up against a middle-aged schoolteacher who had no problem standing up to armed Nazis, a woman who was fully capable of chasing them away from her door in order to protect a girl she had always treated as her own daughter. Whenever Elly was feeling insecure or expressed her fears of being captured or put out into the street, Margriet would always reassure her, stating with certitude, "No. That is not going to happen" (qtd. in Stewart). It was due in large part to Margriet's selfless actions, inner strength, and confidence that Elly survived the war years as a young child when so many others, so tragically, did not.

#### Part VIII: Post-War Years and a Spiritual Awakening

With the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945, World War II, one of the bloodiest chapters in the history of humanity, finally and mercifully came to an end. Millions of lives were changed forever. In addition to the countless deaths and physical casualties, families were torn apart, and

the emotional toll was high on survivors like Elly and her brother Henry, as well. Margriet felt that, as hostilities had ended, and the danger had passed, the right thing to do would be to return Elly to her family. Unfortunately, Elly's parents had both been murdered at Auschwitz, so the search for yet *another* new home for Elly had to begin among the extended members of the Rodrigues family. There was, however, a serious and unforeseen complication.

That complication was religion. Elisabeth Rodrigues, at around the age of twelve, had been through an incredible amount of trauma. Anyone who has read Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* is familiar with Anne's detailed account of what it was like to live in hiding for an extended period of time, unable to move around freely for many hours on a daily basis, incapable of enjoying the beauties of nature and fresh air, and to be denied any number of other small pleasures that are far too often taken for granted by those who live in freedom. Elly existed under similar, and at times even more gruesome circumstances, for eleven months. Unlike Anne Frank, Elly was separated from her family for much of the time she was in hiding—unbeknownst to her, once she left for Margriet's home, she would, in fact, never see her beloved parents again. She then had to take on an assumed identity and change her name, and above all, she had to always remember that she was supposed to be Margriet's niece. As if all of this were not enough, the 12 year-old girl who was raised in a very religious Jewish family, and whose grandfather was in fact a rabbi, had to convince everyone she interacted with on a daily basis that she was a Christian. Taking on a Christian identity was a fairly common strategy and was often a choice made by “the great majority of children who were ‘in hiding’” (Dwork 102). These children, by and large, “had false names and fictive histories” (102). Young people who were innocent of any real crime, but who were forced by an evil regime to live as fugitives, “had to be constantly vigilant to avoid disclosure. For years they lived a dual reality as internal Jews and external Christians”

(103). Although “the adoption of a Christian faith was not rare,” all of the subterfuge took its toll on young Elisabeth (105).

Another very important factor influencing these hidden children’s spirituality was the hiding place itself: “The circumstances of the hiding environment also played an important role in directing a child’s interest in Christianity,” and “young people who found refuge in ... pious Christian families had greater opportunities to become absorbed than children who hid in ... unobservant homes” (105). Also influential was “the duration of the hiding period [because] the longer a child lived as a gentile among gentiles, the easier it was to become incorporated into that way of life” (105). Sara Spier, a Jewish girl whose experience seems to have been quite similar to Elly’s, shared the following reflections about her own rescuers:

‘They were Christians and very good Christians. It was something natural. They told me they could never do work which was so dangerous if they didn’t have their belief. I was very impressed by this because I had the feeling that it as something true, something that’s no game ... [and] they also told me, ‘We always pray and that gives us lots of strength. We just want to tell you that.’ Every time I saw them (and this was also due to the fact that my parents were away) I thought of them as a kind of parents. I think I became Christian because I had the feeling, well, I’d like to be one of them. I’ve been a Christian I think nine years [1943-52], a long time. *Gereformeerd* [Calvinist]. Well, anyhow, I had quite a belief in the war and it gave me some rest. It also gave me the feeling, as most people I came to were *Gereformeerd*, it gave me a bit of feeling of assimilation, I think.’ (qtd. in Dwork 107)

Therefore, Margriet's own religious devotion influenced Elly to a large degree. Add to this the daily instruction in the New Testament that Elly received, without which she would not have been able to convincingly pass as a Christian (although another interesting aspect to consider is that some Jewish survivors who were rescued by Christians felt that it was divine intervention that had saved them, whereas others suffered from a religious identity crisis for years afterward) ("Between Two Religions"). All of these factors combined to shape Elly's spiritual consciousness, and, one day, she said to Margriet, "I want what you have" (qtd. in Stewart). Elly became what is known as a Messianic Jew, never relinquishing her Jewish roots, while accepting the teachings of the New Testament and becoming what she felt was a "completed Jew" (Stewart). Elisabeth's brother, Henry, who had been hidden by Margriet's sister Aartje Bogaards, did *not* experience a similar spiritual change, and, after the war, he was accepted back by the family with open arms. Elly's family, however, was not quite as accepting of Jesus Christ as she was. When Margriet began contacting Elly's surviving family members, including her aunts and uncles, none were willing to take her because of this profound change in her religious faith.

#### Part IX: Request Denied

Henry Rodrigues went into hiding with Aartje Bogaards at the age of 13 and, as a result, did not even have the opportunity of celebrating his Bar Mitzvah, which under normal circumstances, he would have done that same year. Henry's experiences hiding with Aartje and her children during the war affected him deeply, and in his later years, he would rarely consent to speak about this period at all, becoming a rather quiet and introspective adult. Unlike his sister Elly, Henry did *not* embrace Christianity, and, like some other survivors of the Holocaust, he

turned away from religion for a time, questioning the reasons for his suffering for many years before returning to more observant Judaism later in life. His niece, Carolyn Stewart, recalls that he finally did get to have a Bar Mitzvah, not at 13, but at the age of 56, in New York City.

During the war years, Henry became quite close with Aartje's sister Margriet and was like an actual nephew to her. When the war ended however, Aartje, a widow with six children of her own, was "all too happy to let Henry go" (Stewart). Henry went to live with an aunt and uncle, but Margriet was now faced with a problem: what would become of Elly?

The answer became more and more obvious. Margriet and Elly had become extremely close. Elly recognized that Margriet had most likely saved her life. Elly no longer had living parents, and her closest living family members had now disowned her. In addition, Margriet was responsible in many ways for Elly's current state of religious belief. There was really only one thing for Margriet to do: adopt the now 14 year-old girl. Margriet and Elly had developed a love for one another much like that of a mother and daughter. An application was made to the government of the Netherlands for a legal adoption, and shockingly, Margriet was immediately turned down. The Dutch government of the 1940s would not allow Margriet to adopt Elly because Margriet was unmarried, and "there was no nuclear family consisting of a mother and a father" (Stewart). Eventually, a compromise was reached, and in 1945, Margriet Bogaards was awarded fully legal Guardianship of Minor Child to Foster Mother by the Dutch government.

In his later years, Henry Rodrigues, who had been so profoundly affected by his wartime experiences and was always reluctant to discuss them, kept a photograph hidden away in a shoebox along with other artifacts from this period, never showing it to anyone. Upon his death, Elly's daughter Carolyn came into possession of an amazing photograph. This official Government of the Netherlands image, unseen by anyone in over 60 years, captures the

momentous occasion when Margriet Bogaards was given legal guardianship of Elly Rodrigues by the Government of the Netherlands. Carolyn Stewart points out how the strain of what Elly had been through is visible on the young girl's face. Elly certainly appears to be older than 15 years old in the photograph.



*Figure 12. Government of the Netherlands official photo capturing the moment when Margriet obtained legal guardianship of Elly. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

After the guardianship was legally formalized, Elly's Christianity played an increasingly important role in her life, although she always continued to hold on to her Jewish heritage, as well. Carolyn Stewart recalls that "Christianity simply made sense to her," and sharing in Margriet's Christian belief also deepened the familial bond that she formed with her legal guardian, convinced that she would not have survived without her.

While Elly was going through her own travails, elsewhere in Holland, there was another rescue story taking place, and these two lives would soon converge, leading to even more life-changing events. Ernest Cassutto was from a non-religious Jewish family who, at the time of his birth, lived in the Dutch East Indies. The family moved to Holland and, during the Nazi occupation, was also forced to go into hiding. Ernest and his fiancée, Hetty Winkel, were also hidden by Dutch Christians and members of the network that comprised the Dutch resistance movement, in a total of forty-four different hiding places during the war (Stewart). Hetty was eventually captured and died in a Polish camp in November of 1943 (Stewart).



*Figure 13. Hetty Winkel, date unknown. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

Ernest was also eventually captured and imprisoned in Rotterdam. One of the Dutch prison guards there was a very religious Christian, and, as a gesture of goodwill, he gave Ernest a Bible, saying, “The Bible will save you” (qtd. in Stewart). The guard began having regular conversations with Ernest about Christianity, and, then, an extraordinary thing happened.

Prisoners with a yellow star on their cell door identifying them as Jewish were slated for eventual execution, and Ernest's door had one of these stars affixed to it. Shortly before he was due to meet his fate, the yellow star mysteriously disappeared from the cell door. Someone unknown had removed it, and Ernest's life was spared. Ernest Cassutto always considered this to be the act of an angel, and these events led to Ernest's embrace of Christianity, as such experiences did for Elly and some others in similar situations. After his release from the Rotterdam jail, Ernest was given assistance by the Dutch underground in getting to England, where "he was rehabilitated back to good physical and emotional health by a couple named Mr. and Mrs. Newmark" (Stewart). In his later years, he wrote a book recounting his wartime experiences titled *The Last Jew of Rotterdam*.

#### Part X: Aunt Grie

During the late 1940s in Holland, a group of young people had formed who had all gone through similar experiences in hiding during the war. Elly heard about a conference that was to be sponsored by this group and wanted to attend, but, because Elly was only a sixteen-year-old at the time, Margriet forbade it, saying, "'You will go over my dead body. You are only sixteen!'" (qtd. in Stewart). In a rare show of defiance to her guardian, Elly insisted, and Margriet very "reluctantly let her go." This conference was where Elly Rodrigues would meet her future husband Ernest Cassutto for the first time, and when he saw Elly, "his eyes locked on her." Ernest was roughly ten years older than Elly, and their courtship lasted a full year "under the watchful eyes of Margriet" (Stewart). They were engaged in 1948, married on April 22, 1949, and lived during the early part of their marriage in the small Dutch town of Hurwenen. At the wedding of this young lady, who was now not only orphaned, but who, in her time of need, had



been disowned by her entire surviving adult family, Margriet Bogaards was called upon to sign not just as a witness, but now as a legal guardian, substitute mother, confidante, and friend, and also to experience the joy of being present at this event in what was her most important role: as Elly's lifesaver.



*Figure 14. Margriet Bogaards signs as witness and legal guardian at the wedding of Elisabeth and Ernest at The Hague, April 22, 1949. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

The couple's first child was born a short time later, and, in a very gracious act, Elly consented to name their new daughter Hetty, after Ernest's first fiancée. This is confirmed by Ernest and Elly's younger daughter Carolyn, who explains, "My sister is named after Hetty Winkel. To this day I don't know how my mother was OK with naming her first daughter after her husband's fiancée. I believe my mother wanted to pay tribute to a young Jewish woman who [lost] her life for no reason." This is quite an extraordinary gesture on Elly's part and illustrates the values of selflessness, compassion, and perhaps even sacrifice that seem to have been ingrained into Elly's personality by the acts of those who saved her from a fate similar to Hetty's—a fate that so many other innocent souls needlessly suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Together, Ernest and Elly later moved to the United States, eventually settling in Maryland. They raised a large and loving family, which included more than one pair of twins, and Ernest became a Minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. When Elisabeth's old friend Barry Spanjaard, who always had a crush on her, learned in 1946 of her survival he was astonished, as he "had assumed [her] to be dead" (Spanjaard "Epilogue"). Barry added, "I visited her a few years later in Holland. She is now married, has five children, grandchildren, and lives on the East Coast of the U.S. No, she did not marry me" (Spanjaard "Epilogue"). Margriet, who remained a lifelong resident of Holland, often travelled to the Cassutto family home in the United States for frequent visits. Elly's children always viewed her as a close family member, usually referring to her as *Tante Grietje*, or Aunt Grie. The gift of love that Margriet had given Elly was returned to her many times over and is reflected in the revered position that Margriet Bogaards holds in the Cassutto family to this day.

In her seminal 1991 study of the effects of the Shoah on the Jewish children of Europe, *Children with a Star*, Deborah Dwork raises some difficult questions:

The treatment of the innocent and protection of the powerless are, after all, key issues through which we can understand and judge a society. The central conundrum is not why did the *Jews* allow this to happen, but where were the *gentiles*? It is the collusion of the gentile world, their responsibility in the oppression of children, and their failure to defend their young neighbors, which emerges as the principal dilemma. (256)

While it is indisputable that many in Europe either willingly participated in the persecution of the Jews or simply looked the other way, this troubling fact makes the stories of those non-Jews who

acted on their conscience even more inspiring. Anne Frank was able to survive in hiding for two years and to give the world the literary gift of her diary, thanks to the efforts of Miep Gies and the other Christian helpers of the Secret Annex. The story of Elly and Henry Rodrigues, of Bert and Annie Bochove, and of the Bogaards sisters is yet another of many examples of non-Jews voluntarily putting their own lives on the line in order to save some Jewish children, despite the consequences that might have arisen from the dangerous situations these helpers placed themselves in. Sometimes their actions were motivated by religious faith, and in other instances, these risks were taken because the rescuers believed their efforts to be the right choice. Regardless of the origins of these selfless deeds, this paper's goal has been to shine a few more rays of light on what was, during a very dark period of history, some evidence of the brighter side of humanity.



*Figure 15. Margriet Bogaards hard at work cooking one of her specialty dishes during a visit to the Cassutto family home in the United States in 1955. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

## Epilogue

Elly Rodrigues, as Elly van Tol, was given the gift of life thanks to the heroic actions taken by Margriet Bogaards. Elly and Ernest both lived full and happy lives into the mid-1980s. They basked in the warmth and love of their family, often returning to Holland and always looking forward to Margriet's visits to the United States. Many of their sons and daughters speak today to young people about the risks taken and the courage displayed by their parents' rescuers, including Carolyn Stewart, who resides in Maryland and who passionately shares her mother's story with students at area schools.



*Figure 16. Elly (back, second from the left) and Ernest Cassutto (center) enjoying the warmth of a family celebration at a bon voyage party prior to one of their frequent visits back to Amsterdam. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)*

Bert Bochove was honored as one of The Righteous of The Nations at the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center with a tree planted in his name during a ceremony at which he was present, on January 28, 1980. He died on August 13, 1991, at the age of 81 ("Lizebertus Bochove").



*Figure 17. Bert Bochove at the tree planting ceremony in his and his wife's honor on January 28, 1980. ("Bochove Lizebertus 1910-1991." Yad Vashem)*



*Figure 18. The tree's plaque as it appears today. ("Bochove Lizebertus 1910-1991." Yad Vashem)*





*Figure 2. The tree planted on January 28, 1980, at Yad Vashem in the Bochoves' honor, as it appears today. ("Bochove Lizebertus 1910-1991." Yad Vashem)*

Elly Rodrigues' rescuer, Margriet Bogaards, passed away on June 17, 1964, at the age of 65 (Yad Vashem). In 1987, she was honored by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center as one of The Righteous of The Nations with an inscription on their Wall of Honor.



Figure 20. A portion of The Wall of Honor at Yad Vashem. ("Bogaards Family." Yad Vashem)



Figure 21. Detail illustrating Margriet's entry on the Wall of Honor at Yad Vashem. ("Bogaards Family." Yad Vashem)

Henry Rodrigues' rescuer, Aartje Ketel-Bogaards, passed away at the age of 77 on June 22, 1970 (*Groeneveld's Geneological Database*). In 1987, she too was honored by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center as one of The Righteous of The Nations with an inscription on their Wall of Honor.



Figure 22. Aartje Ketel-Bogaard's inscription on the Wall of Honor at Yad Vashem. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)



Figure 23. Elly's granddaughter Tina (bearing a striking resemblance to her grandmother) plays Anne Frank in a school production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in the 1990s. (Courtesy of Carolyn Stewart)



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