

Men - Monday 28 September is the date for the next forum where you can express your view on topical world events. Refugees are still in the news. Read the true story below and formulate an answer to some of the questions raised. Monday 28 September 7.00 pm -9 .00pm at 20 Elmsdale Close, Richmond. Visitors welcome. - Jacob Klootwyk



Refugees

This is a true story about a 12 year-old refugee at the end of the Second World War.

The time was February 1945. Europe experienced one of its coldest winters for years and February is normally the coldest month of the year.

The boy's father and his elder brother had been picked up by the Germans some months earlier to work as forced labour in Germany. By the end of February there was no food nor firewood to keep warm. Clothing was threadbare after 5 years of war. Shoes were worn out. There was no electricity, no gas, and often no water. There was a curfew from 8.00pm till 6.00am.

This 12-year-old boy set off to find greener pastures early one Sunday morning, to walk 250 km to a place called Zuid Laren in the North of Holland.

During the first day he and others on the road had to run for cover twice because allied planes were shooting at anything that moved. By 4.00 pm it was starting to get dark and the boy was very tired. He went to a farmhouse to ask to sleep in the barn, this was granted. Up to 40 people overnighted in the barn. The farmer couldn't feed them but he gave them shelter.

The next day the boy arrived at a city called Utrecht late afternoon. 70km from his home. There he saw a truck powered by a gas generator being loaded with women and children going north. He asked if he could get a ride but this was refused by one of the woman but another woman gave him permission to clamber on board. In all perhaps 25 or 30 people - women and children - were cramped on the open deck truck. - He realized much later that these women were German sympathizers and were being evacuated to a friendlier environment.

Some years back the boy had spent a holiday some 80km north of Utrecht on a small farm in a place called Wesep. When the truck came through Wesep he left the truck and walked with his backpack and a small suitcase two or three km to the farm arriving about 9 pm. well after curfew. These people already had two or three people staying the night but he was not refused a place to bed down for the night. He spent the next day resting and eating...

On the Wednesday he departed because a bridge over the river IJssel was about to be closed to all traffic and was subsequently blown up by the Germans. The next three days were hell. The weather had turned cold and overcast. At the end of the day a friendly farmer gave him shelter

and a plate of porridge before retiring. Another plate of porridge was offered and greatly appreciated before he continued his journey the following morning. During the following day he got a short ride on a boat but didn't feel comfortable with the questions being asked. At night he knocked on a number of houses to ask for shelter but was refused a number of times.

About a kilometre up the road there were 3 houses spaced about 100 metres apart. The first house refused shelter as did the second. Going to the third house he passed a bobby calf crate on the side of the road and he decided that if the third house wouldn't let him in, he would return to the bobby calf crate and bed down in it for the night. Luckily, the two old ladies in the third cottage took pity on him and gave him food and a warm bed to sleep in. The following day was bitterly cold and passing some houses where kids were playing in the front room with a good fire going, he rang the doorbell and asked if he could warm himself. The dialect of the country people was so different it was hard to understand them.

On the road again he teamed up with the driver of a horse drawn wagon full of bricks. He asked for a ride but was told he had better walk because he would get too cold sitting on the wagon. The sky was overcast and there was ice on the puddles on the road. This driver gave him a piece of bread and some cheese which was very welcome.

Finally, on the sixth day he arrived at his destination to find that the mental hospital where his two sisters were nurses, that all the staff patients had been evacuated to make way for a German war casualty hospital. After some enquiries he was united with one of the sisters while his other sister was in quarantine with scarlet fever.

The sisters were great. They arranged for accommodation for the boy at a farm where he stayed for 6 months until after the war ended. The farmer and his wife didn't have children and they treated him with love and affection.

The boy knew he was OK but his poor mother didn't know for days that he had arrived safely due to the lack of communication facilities. She must have gone through hell.

- What would have become of the boy if a lot of people had not shown kindness?
Perhaps we need to think of this story when we discuss the millions of refugees who are being displaced by civil war in their own country.
- Would you be proactive in helping refugees?
- Would you offer a room in your house to a refugee family?
- Would you do so if they were of the Islamic faith?
- Would you do so if they were black?
- Would you do so if they were Indian and exuding curry from every pore?
- Should we allow global warming to be criteria for becoming a refugee?