Things We Couldn't Say

A Readers Theater Presentation

by
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STORY OF THE PLAY

As the biographer of the story of Berendina (Diet) Eman begins a lecture about the Second World War and Nazi resistance in occupied Europe, he is interrupted by Diet herself. Diet explains that her efforts to hide Jewish people were not unique, but were undertaken by many ordinary people. To explain, she begins to tell the exciting stories of her Resistance work. As she does, her younger self appears and narrates stories in ways which occasionally vary from the descriptions offered by her older self.

In addition, her fiancé, Hein Sietsma, appears, and all three reminisce, telling each other much of what they couldn't say while separated by their work in the underground and their imprisonment in concentration camps. Sietsma, who died in the camp at Dachau, eventually asks Young Diet whether she would take up the cause of Resistance again, given the way they suffered for what they did. Diet's answer concludes the play by reaffirming her belief that, despite her almost overwhelming pain, she knows they did the right thing. Using letter and journal entries the courageous story of Diet and Hein comes to life in a touching and intriguing way.

About 90 minutes.

Cast of Characters

3 m, 3 w, 1 flexible

Biographer: *(Flexible role.)* Writer asked to speak about Diet Eman and the World War II Resistance movement in the Netherlands.

Diet Eman (Deet A'mon.): A Dutch-American woman in her mid-seventies, full of life, bright, energetic, forceful, who is, on the occasion of this play, telling her own story of suffering and survival via use of recently opened letters and diary entries, sources opened publicly for the first time in fifty years. Some of her story comes out easily, some comes with joy, some comes only with great reluctance; but on this occasion, for the very first time, it comes out in its entirety.

Young Diet: Early twenties--idealistic, gutsy, in love. As Diet's younger self, she appears as the story Diet tells begins to tumble out. Because she is being allowed to tell it for the first time, she is somewhat more guarded than her older self, conscious of both what it says about her and the presence of the man she's loved throughout the war, who is now beside her and hearing the things she could never tell him.

Hein Sietsma (Hyne Seet'sma.): Early twenties, handsome, somewhat protective, Diet's accomplice in the work of rescuing imperiled Dutch Jews. Because of his death at Dachau, he has never heard the whole story of his fiancée's wartime experience. Like Diet, he is committed to Resistance work for strong moral reasons. His death at Dachau came as a result of hunger and final physical collapse.

3 Nazi Guards: Two males and one female.

Scene

Unit set or found space.

Time

Current day, fifty years after the conclusion of WW II.

Setting

At the far left is a stool where Biographer sits. Three stools stand toward the center of the stage, and three more, more closely placed together, stand at far right, behind the three center stools. (Also, see map of the Netherlands at end of script.)

Pronunciation Guide

Aalt (Aahhlt): farmer friend
Ab (Ap): resistance fighter'
Alie (AH-Lee): Farmwife friend
Delftspoort (DELFTS-poort): station at which arrest is made
dieneke (DEEN-ik-ah): female term of endearment
dolblij (DOHL-blay): ecstatic
jonge (YOUNG-ah): male term of endearment
Klein Jantje (Klein YAHN-tschah): resistance fighter
mijn Famke (meen FAHM-ka): "my little woman"
moffin (MAF-in): derogatory Dutch term for Nazi occupiers
Nijkerk (NAY-kerk): town in Gelderland, Netherlands
onderdykkers (A WEnder-dye-kers): men and women in hiding
Piet (Pete): resistance fighter
Scheveningen (SKAY-fun-engen): Nazi prison
spelbrekker (SPEL-breaker): spoilsport
stommeschaap (sTOMma-skop): stupid sheep
toveren (TOE-ver-in): mix
Veluwe (FAY-loo-aah): wooded and rural portion of Gelderland, Netherlands
Vught (Foocht): A Nazi concentration camp
Zwijndrecht (TsVINE-drecht): city of arrest

THINGS WE COULDN'T SAY

(AT RISE: The occasion for the play is a lecture on the movement to hide Jewish people during World War II. BIOGRAPHER enters from the right and takes a position behind the podium. He is followed by HEIN, YOUNG DIET, and DIET, who take the middle stools, DIET closest to him, then YOUNG DIET, then HEIN. From stage right, the three GESTAPO appear and take the three stools at that edge of the stage.)

BIOGRAPHER: Few stories I've ever seen or read or heard--or written--are as fascinating, as dramatic, as enriching, as laden with the possibilities of the human spirit as the story of Diet Eman. And her story is not fiction. I believe the greatest story of the twentieth century is the story of the Second World War, pitting so visibly the forces of good against the forces of evil. It's an epic story, of course, five full years of undeniable courage and sacrificial selflessness, amid the horror. Every war has its Dresdens, its Guadalcanals, its Leningrads; but not every war has a Holocaust; and what remains of World War II, after all the carnage on the battlefields is the memory of a systematic genocide carried out in the name of racial purity. Within that epic lies another story of courageous men and women who found the laws of an occupying government so morally repugnant that they acted with little regard to their own fate or that of their families in order to help those specifically designated by Hitler himself for eradication--

DIET: Stop.

(BIOGRAPHER is not so much surprised as insistent that what he's just said about her character is the truth.)

DIET: You embarrass me.
BIOGRAPHER: Well, it's true, Diet.

DIET: Maybe it is true. Let God be the judge. What I know is this: what I did during the war was done by hundreds of people in the Netherlands alone, all of them, like me, such ordinary people doing what seemed at that time to be such small things--

BIOGRAPHER: Risking your lives--day after day, night after night?

DIET: When Hein and I got into the work, it was because of Herman, my friend from the bank. His family had received notice to report--to pack just one little suitcase and meet somewhere--I don't remember where. *(Begins to address audience, and as she does, BIOGRAPHER takes stool at far left.)* And Herman came to me--he was Jewish, of course--and he said to me, "Would you go?" That's what he said. "If you were told to report, would you go?" "No," I said. "Then what?" he asked. "What can I do?"

YOUNG DIET: *(Interrupts, standing, as if it is her turn to tell the story.)* So I went to Hein, my fiancé, and I asked him what could be done, and Hein said he could hide Herman out in the country, the Veluwe, where his father was the headmaster at a small Christian school, in Holk, Gelderland. There were all farmers around there, all Christian people, and they would certainly hide Herman--

YOUNG HEIN: *(Stands, continuing the story.)* We thought the war would last only a year or so, no more. We thought that certainly Roosevelt would come in and end all of this. After all, it was the twentieth century and this man Hitler, this little maniac, was a barbarian. (*Addresses YOUNG DIET specifically.)* Diet, this is not the dark ages--we live in the modern age.

YOUNG DIET: *(Energetically, but nervously. Directly at HEIN.)* Shall we then?

HEIN: I can find him a place--that's no problem.

YOUNG DIET: It's terribly risky, Hein--

HEIN: *(Pauses. This is the important question: will they do what their hearts tell them must be done? When HE speaks, he is hesitant, yet strongly committed.)* Diet, if we don't, when this is all over, you and I will not be able to look at each other in the face for what we didn't do.

End of Freeview

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