

Summary: Diet Eman

Diet Eman was born Berendina Roelfina Hendrika Eman on April 30, 1920, in The Hague, Netherlands. She grew up in The Hague with her parents and three siblings (Albert, Stephana, and Arjan). She was raised as a member of the Christian Reformed religion, an association that was to prove very important to her throughout the war. After the German occupation of the Netherlands, she became a member of a resistance group identified as HEIN (an acronym for “Help Elkander in Nood,” translated as “Help each other in need”). Her boyfriend and soon to be fiancé, Hein Seitsma, was one of the leaders of this group. All members of this group were Christian Reformed members.

While their first resistance activity was to inform people about the news (e.g. typing out BBC radio information and passing it out or doing small acts of resistance against the Nazis), their real work began in 1942, when it became clear that Jews were to be deported to Westerbork.. Although she did not know what this really meant, Diet and her group knew this could not be a good development. When Diet’s Jewish co-worker, Herman van Zuiden, asked for help, Diet and Hein discussed the problem and decided to hide Herman. Quickly, many more Jews became part of this plan. Indeed, within two weeks more than 60 people were on their list to be hidden. The HEIN group found hiding places, provided false ID’s, ration cards, and even delivered mail, since it was too dangerous to use the regular mail service. By 1943, the group needed about 800 ration cards per month for all those who were in hiding.

Diet became a fugitive in 1943 as did her fiancé, Hein, because their work became known to the Nazis. Separately, each moved around to various hiding places and used several aliases. In April 1944, Hein was arrested. He died in Dachau in January 1945. Diet was arrested on May 8, 1944, and was imprisoned in Scheveningen until June 6, 1944, when she was transferred to Vught. In Vught she acted as if she were a simple-minded maid—of course, using a false name—and the Germans never did figure out who she really was. She was released in August 1944.

Upon her release, Diet continued her resistance work. She was liberated on April 20, 1945. The Netherlands was liberated on May 5, 1945.

When she heard that her fiancé was dead, the loss was almost too much for her. She was able to get nurses’ training but felt she needed to get out of the Netherlands in order to heal. She did so in 1945 when she left for Venezuela to work for the Shell Company. In the 1950’s she came to the United States.