

Cornelis and Aaltje van Meurs

Cornelis and Aaltje van Meurs were living in Amsterdam in the Netherlands during WWII. Once the Netherlands fell under the German occupation, harsh restrictions were brought into force against the Jewish population. Jews were no longer allowed into many public places, including theatres and parks. As an act of protest, Aaltje recalled that she and Cornelis ceased to attend those places as well, choosing to stand in solidarity with their Jewish friends. Before long, Jews were systematically removed from their homes and sent en masse to concentration camps.

As the situation darkened, Aaltje and Cornelis heard of the plight of Isaac and Lena Mouwes and their 18 month old son, Jochanan.

In an effort to protect the young family, Cornelis and Aaltje took in Jochanan and helped Isaac and Lena escape Amsterdam to go into hiding in the hope of surviving the Holocaust. The van Meurs' accompanied the Mouwes to Alkmaar in Noord-Holland where they could safely stay for about a fortnight.

The Mouwes then went into hiding in Scoorldam, where they remained until the end of the war. Little Jochanan, having blonde hair and blue eyes, was renamed Hans van Meurs. For the remaining years of the occupation, Cornelis and Aaltje lovingly fostered Hans as their own child, telling neighbours he was the nephew who had come to stay with them as their mother was unwell. Aaltje recalled, years later, that when the neighbours got too curious, she killed off the fictitious aunt to lend more legitimacy to the story of raising Hans.

Unfortunately, Hans' mother, Lena Mouwes, became very ill while in hiding. During this time, Aaltje would take Hans on her bicycle to visit his mother. The 50km journey was long and dangerous and Aaltje would use the trips to distribute illegal newsletters as part of her work within the Dutch Resistance Movement.

In May 1945, Isaac and Lena were finally able to come out of hiding and were reunited with their only son. Because of the courageous efforts of Cornelis and Aaltje, a young Jewish family survived the Holocaust. The van Meurs have never agreed to taking any form of compensation for their selfless acts of kindness towards the Mouwes family. Their only request was that the Mouwes continue to call their little one Hans.

The van Meurs family was committed to resisting the German occupation and helping anyone they could in their hour of need. They did this from a place of love, bravery and compassion.

In 2017, [Yad Vashem](#) recognized Cornelis and Aaltje van Meurs as Righteous Among the Nations.

Story by courtesy of [The Embassy of Israel in Canberra](#).