

BERTHA AND ADRIANUS VANAS



Adrianus and Bertha Vanas spent the war years in Westerbork transit camp, where they helped save numerous Jewish lives. Officially, Adrianus was the food distribution officer and later, Camp Commander. Unofficially, both he and Bertha were members of the underground and made every effort to sabotage the transportation of Jews.

This photograph shows Adrianus and his daughters in front of their barrack housing at Westerbork. Here, Adrianus and Bertha lived through the most difficult and disturbing years of their lives. Adrianus was the only Dutch, or German, official to actually live within the walls of the camp, amongst its Jewish inhabitants. His neighbours and his friends were Jews. The photograph was taken by the famous German Jewish photographer, Rudolph Breslauer. He was appointed the official photographer at Westerbork and made a film of camp life. The

photograph forms part of an album, filled with photographs of the Vanas family. It was beautifully illustrated with animals, children and stars by the well-known Dutch artist, Leo Kok. Sadly, neither man was to survive the war.

Following are copies and translations of 2 postcards written to Adrianus by Heino, which were dropped from the train en-route to Theresienstadt in February 1944. The originals are held in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. The cards were found by friendly people and posted. Adrianus encouraged people to write down what was happening and send notes back so that he and his underground colleagues would know what was going on. Many mentioned high chimney stacks and thought they were entering an industrial town. They soon would have discovered that these were, in fact, the crematoria used to burn the bodies of thousands of victims. Heino's postcards poignantly show how strong was the bond between the 2 men. Nevertheless, Adrianus wasn't to hear from Heino again. He discovered later that within 1 week, Heino was transported to Auschwitz and selected for the gas chambers upon arrival. His childhood friend Felix, mentioned in the postcards, was transported to Bergen Belsen, where he died a few days after liberation.

Dear fam. van As.

I write you this card in the hope that you will receive it. Since I am accustomed to the idea that I am leaving now, I submit to it. You and your wife will always be an example to me in the perhaps difficult coming days. Now I am sure of your lasting friendship for me, a lot of things have become easier.

Furthermore I wish to congratulate you Mrs. van As with your birthday. I could add a lot more to it, but that is not necessary, we do understand each other also without that.

*Greet the people known to us. I wish you and your family the best of all. I am strong. Regards from Felix.
Till we meet again. Signed Heino.*

My dear fam van As.

There goes the second card. Again I hope you will receive it. We just passed Sappermeer. I have send Felix off to bed. He is O.K. I reserved the rear cabin of the wagon for the two of us. It is not warm but we can bear it. Writing is difficult because the carriage is jolting a lot. We are approaching the border. Give everybody our greetings especially Mr. Cohen and Felix's brother and wife.

For the last time my very best wishes. Till we meet again.

Signed Heino

This photograph shows a 17-year-old boy, Heino Zijttenfeld. When Heino and his family were to be sent to Auschwitz in November 1942, Adrianus organised to have the young Heino removed from the train. For 2 years, he fostered him and kept him safe at Westerbork, giving him work as a message boy. But, Heino missed his family and wanted to be reunited with them. He begged to be sent to join them. The most Adrianus could do was ensure that he was not sent to Auschwitz. To this day, Adrianus cannot believe that Heino went of his own free will – but they had no idea what awaited. Heino couldn't have known that his parents were transported to Auschwitz and killed just 3 days after leaving Westerbork.



This thank you letter was written by Mrs B Dwinger, who worked with Adrianus in his office. He was able to keep her and her husband in Westerbork camp until 1943, when sabotage became more difficult. The Germans were interested in numbers and, as long as the quotas for transportation were being met, they were satisfied. By 1943, Germany ordered there be no more exempt lists. Adrianus continued to barter for individuals to remain, but it was much harder. The Dwingers were transported and only Mrs Dwinger survived. Nevertheless, she remains eternally grateful for the noble act committed by Adrianus in keeping them from the death camps for as long as he could. A copy of the letter and its translation follow.

Amsterdam, 17 nov. 1994.

Dear Mr van As,

From Mrs Gudema of Winschoten I got your address via Westerbork.

It is - a bit late but for me not too late - to thank you for what you did on 6 october 1942 for my sadly not returned husband (Sal Dwinger).

Because of that we stayed in Westerbork till 14 september 1943, the date we were transported. My husband had the dubious 'luck' in Auschwitz to become a member of the orchestra and I came in the medical experimental block of Prof. Glauberg.

On 18 january 1945 we experienced the walk and train transport - in open wagons, which caused the death of my husband in febr. 1945.

I had to work hard after the war as a secretary of the now late notary Spier (you perhaps have known) I live together with a friend whom I know from Auschwitz in a nice unit of Beth Shalom, very nice.

In the meantime I am now 86 years old and my eyesight is very bad, that's why I take this opportunity to thank you once again and to wish you many healthy and happy years together with your loved ones.

Sincerely

B. Dwinger

ik u met
 van de felicitaten
 met uw vrijheid
 Ik kan er noch veel aan
 toevoegen, maar dat heeft
 niet mij begripen elkaar
 ook zo. Blijft u de be-
 henden? Ik wens u en uw
 gezin het allerbeste. Ik
 ben sterk. Groeten van
 Felix. Tot ziens.
 RZL
 M. H. H.

NEDERLAND NEDERLAND
 BILLET
 ZE GEREED ZIJN!
 10 1944
 Aan den Heer
 van As
 Breda
 Pagen Westerbek
 Hooghevelerlaan

Beste Jan v. As
 Ik schrijf u dit toetje in de hoop
 dat 't goed kericht komt. Nu ik aan
 't idee genend ben dat ik wegga, berouwt
 ik er in. U en uw vrouw zullen mij de
 roosbreeds dienen in de missebie moeijke
 komende dagen. Nu ik bewust ben van
 uw vriendschap voor mij, zijn vele dingen
 lieker voor mij geworden. Het zal niet

Amsterdam, 17 nov.1994.

Zeer geachte heer van As,

Van mevrouw Gudema uit Winschoten kreeg ik via Westerbork uw adres.

Het is - wel wat laat ~~maar~~ voor mij nog niet te ~~laat~~ laat - om u langs deze weg te bedanken voor wat U op 6 oktober 1942 voor mijn helaas niet teruggekeerde echtgenoot (Sal Dwinger) hebt gedaan. Daardoor bleven wij tot 14 september 1943 in Westerbork maar gingen toen op transport. Mijn man had het twijfelachtige "geluk" in Auschwitz in een orkest te komen en ik in een experimentenblok van Prof. Glauberg.

Op 18 januari 1945 begon voor ons het bekende loop- en open wagon transport, waardoor mijn man in febr. 1945 is overleden ~~hetgeen ik van iemand die bij hem was en die ik later gesproken heb, heb vernomen.~~

Ik heb na de oorlog hard moeten werken als secretaresse van de inmiddels overleden notaris Spier (U waarschijnlijk ook wel bekend) maar ik ben al sinds 1973 gepensioneerd en woon samen met een vriendin uit Auschwitz in een aanleunflat van Beth Shalom, heel mooi.

Ik ben inmiddels 86 jaar en zie heel slecht, reden waarom ik deze gelegenheid te baat neem om U nogmaals te bedanken en U nog vele gezonde en gelukkige jaren met degenen die U lief zijn toe te wensen.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Hoogachyend,

S. Dwinger