

# The Hiding Place Study Guide

## Brief Biography of Corrie Ten Boom

As her memoir describes in detail, Corrie ten Boom was born into a large and religious Dutch family at the turn of the 20th century. After sheltering Jewish fugitives throughout World War II and surviving internment in the Vught and Ravensbrück concentration camps, ten Boom returned to Holland and opened rehabilitation centers both for Holocaust survivors and former Dutch Nazi collaborators. To raise money for these projects, ten Boom began speaking about her experiences to church audiences. She soon became well-known and traveled the world as an evangelical motivational speaker, speaking alongside famous preachers like Billy Graham. She emerged not just as a religious thinker but a social critic, protesting modern issues like the Vietnam War. Corrie wrote many books about her life and her relationship to Christian teachings, among which *The Hiding Place* is the most famous. Ten Boom was honored as one of the Righteous Among the Nations, an honor given by Israel to non-Jews who put themselves at risk to save Jewish lives during the war. In the last years of her life, ten Boom retired to California, where she died on her 91st birthday.

## The Hiding Place Summary

Corrie ten Boom begins her narrative by recalling a party she and her sister Betsie organize in honour of the hundredth anniversary of their Father's watch shop. Corrie helps Betsie make breakfast and do last-minute cleaning. Soon, her sister Nollie arrives with her several children. As the day progresses, the ten Boom house (nicknamed the Beje) fills up with colleagues and family friends, including Pickwick, a wealthy customer and one of Father's confidantes. All afternoon, Corrie keeps an eye out for her older brother Willem. When he arrives, he brings a Jewish man with him, announcing that he has just fled Germany after being attacked in the street. Willem operates a nursing home for elderly Jews, and lately he's been sheltering many people trying to escape the Nazis. Father and Corrie bring the man coffee and make him feel welcome, while the other guests conclude that Germany, a "civilized" country, will soon put an end to the activities of such "hoodlums."

Corrie then steps back to reminisce on her childhood and adolescence. She grew up in the Beje with her older siblings, Nollie, Betsie, and Willem. Also living in the house are Father and Mama, as well as Mama's sisters: Tante Jans, who writes "flaming Christian tracts," Tante Bep, a former governess, and Tante Anna, who takes care of most of the housework due to Mama's recurring bouts of illness. One morning, Corrie has to go to school for the first time; nervous and shy, she decides that she will simply refuse. However, over breakfast Father reads a long psalm describing God's ability to create a "hiding place" for the faithful. Father then walks Corrie to school himself.

Father often takes Corrie with him on business trips to Amsterdam. He sets his own watch, as well as all the clocks in the shop, by the precise naval clock in the capital. He also visits wholesalers who sell him parts, many of whom are Jews. After business discussions are concluded, the men bring out their Bibles and conduct lively discussions.

When Corrie graduates high school, she takes over the work of running the household. In particular, she cares for Tante Jans, who has developed diabetes. The disease makes the normally tough Tante Jans worried and nervous. Every week Corrie performs a complicated blood test on her aunt; one week the results are bad, and she knows that Jans has only a few weeks to live. The family gently delivers the news to the old woman, but she reacts with great calm and tranquillity. To Corrie, this is confidence that God always endows people with moral strength at the moment they need it most.

As a teenager, Corrie meets Willem's best friend at university, Karel, and falls in love. Corrie considers herself shy and plain, so she's flattered that Karel notices of her. When Willem is finally ordained as a minister and hired by his first church, family and friends gather to listen to his first sermon. In these weeks of celebration, Corrie and Karel become close, discussing a shared future even though Karel has not yet proposed. One morning, Willem warns Corrie that Karel will never actually marry her; his parents are insistent that he marry a wealthy woman, and he is resigned to fulfill their expectations. Corrie doesn't want to believe what Willem is saying, but after she returns home Karel writes her only sporadically. Months later, he arrives at the Beje bringing a woman he introduces as his fiancée. After they leave, Corrie runs upstairs sobbing. Trying to comfort her, Father says that she should ask God for help resolving the hurt and anger she now feels. Corrie prays that she will be able to love Karel selflessly, as God does.

Soon afterwards, Mama has a stroke. Now she's confined permanently to her bed, and can't speak or write. Still, she manages to correspond with family and friends by having Corrie write letters to them. Meanwhile, Nollie becomes engaged to Flip, another student at the teaching school she currently attends. On their wedding day, Corrie realizes that she will probably never get married or leave home. She recalls her previous hopes of a life with Karel, but finds that she's able to think of him "without the slightest trace of hurt." She knows that Jesus has helped her to forgive Karel and pray for him sincerely. Several weeks after the wedding, Mama dies.

Corrie has been running the house while Betsie acts as bookkeeper at the watch shop, but eventually the sisters switch roles, as Betsie proves a better housekeeper and Corrie has a sincere interest in the business. Learning more of Father's trade, she becomes the first certified female watchmaker in Holland. Between running the shop, visiting her siblings and their children, and caring for the foster children that Father takes in, Corrie has a busy and satisfying life by the time of the shop's hundredth anniversary.

The ten Booms have been hearing about Germany's ominous transformation on the radio, but they only realize how serious the situation is when Otto, a young watchmaking apprentice and avowed Nazi, comes to work at the shop. Otto makes a habit of taunting Christoffels, an elderly employee at the shop, even kicking and hitting him in the street. Willem explains that Nazi philosophy encourages disrespect for the elderly because they are "useless" to society. Trying and failing to remonstrate with the young man, Father eventually fires him.

Soon afterward, Germany declares war against Holland, overcoming its army in five short days. The ten Booms then must adjust to life in an occupied city: Germany soldiers and tanks are everywhere, a curfew is set, groceries are bought with ration coupons, and the newspapers only carry Germany propaganda. More frightening, Allied bombings are often audible at night, sometimes breaking the windows. However, the most sinister aspect of the occupation is the growing persecution of Jews. Many shops stop serving Jews, and eventually they are forced to wear yellow stars on their clothes. Some families are taken away without warning. Corrie is horrified to see that many Dutch people don't object to this injustice or even participate in it, joining the NSB (Dutch Nazi party), taking over the shops and residences of deported Jews.

One afternoon, German soldiers ransack a Jewish shop across from the Beje. Corrie and Betsie quickly bring the owner inside their house. After making contact with his wife, they arrange for him to be transported to Willem's house. Due to his previous connections to the Jewish community, Willem is already sheltering some Dutch Jews. Coming at night to pick up the couple, Willem's son Kik informs Corrie that she's part of the "underground" now. Corrie knows that a resistance has formed in Holland, but she always associates these movements with sinful things like stealing and lying. She finds it hard to think of herself as part of it.

As the weeks go by, the ten Booms begin to help Jewish neighbors in any way they can. Corrie picks up and delivers watches so Jewish customers don't have to brave the streets; a rabbi stores his books in the Beje; Father befriends a man he and Corrie have seen for years during their evening walks, Harry de Vries. Jews whose houses or shops have been targeted by the Gestapo begin sleeping at the Beje, fearing deportation. Corrie asks Willem to find these people safer and more permanent places in the countryside, but it's hard to place fugitives without ration cards, which are not issued to Jews. Corrie turns to Fred Koornstra, a family acquaintance who works in the Food Office, and they come up with a scheme to manufacture fake ration cards. This makes it possible for Corrie to shelter more people and to provide them with resources when they move on. Kik brings Corrie to a clandestine underground meeting; to her surprise, it's headed by Pickwick, an old family friend. Pickwick sends an architect to the Beje, who builds a secret room in which fugitives can hide, should the Gestapo raid the house.

Every day new problems occur, but with help Corrie always solves them. Pickwick introduces Corrie to a man who sets up a secret telephone in her house, she finds more sources of fake

ration cards, and a policeman named Rolf turns out to be sympathetic and provides her with information about Gestapo movements. However, not everything goes well. Once Corrie is struggling to find a hiding place for a mother and a young baby; she asks a pastor and family acquaintance to take them in, but he's too scared and refuses. Corrie has to place the pair in a less secure house, and they are later deported.

Some people also begin to stay permanently at the Beje. The ten Booms take in one man, Meyer, because his features are so stereotypically Semitic that other safe houses consider him too risky. Meyer is very religious and knowledgeable about scriptures, and he and Father become close friends. Corrie also takes in two young men, Henk and Leendert, as well as some Jewish women. They run drills on a regular basis in which the fugitives gather their belongings and hide in the secret room as fast as possible. Corrie's nephews prepare her for possible interrogation by waking her up at night and questioning her. This part is especially hard for Corrie, as she's not used to lying.

One night, an unknown man arrives at the Beje, asking Corrie how he can help his wife, who has been imprisoned for helping Jews. Corrie gives him instructions and some money; she has the flu, and is too sick and tired to think much about it. That night, the Gestapo raid the house. For hours they interrogate Corrie and the other members of the family, but they refuse to admit that Jews are hidden there, and the Germans don't uncover the secret room. In the end, they arrest the entire family, including Peter, Willem, Nollie, and her husband.

The family is taken to a prison in the Hague. Corrie is separated from her sisters and placed in a cell with many other women, where she's sick, worried, and bored. Because of her illness, she's eventually placed in an individual cell where she languishes until her health improves. She spends four months in the cell. Eventually, a letter arrives from Nollie informing her that Father died in a hospital ten days after their arrest.

Corrie is interrogated several times by Lieutenant Rahms, a German army officer. Instead of giving him any information, Corrie speaks to him about the Bible, which seems to strike a chord in the officer. He tells her that he hates the work he does at the prison and only wants to go home to his family. At the same time, he feels that there's no way to change conditions in the prison or alter the circumstances of his job. After some time, Lieutenant Rahms allows the whole family to convene at the prison, on the pretext of reading Father's will. It's the first time Corrie sees her family in months; by now, everyone has been released except her and Betsie. Willem tells her that all the Jews hiding in the Beje managed to escape, though police watched the house for several days.

Some time later, the women in the prison are transported to Vught, a concentration camp in Holland. Corrie is grateful to be reunited with Betsie, even though they are housed in dismal barracks. Corrie is assigned to work in a factory assembling German radios. The atmosphere is congenial, as the prisoner-foreman encourages people to work slowly. In the evenings, Corrie talks with Betsie, who's been assigned to knitting socks. Betsie learns that the spy

who exposed them, Jan Vogel, is a collaborator notorious throughout Holland. Corrie feels furious every time she thinks about him, but Betsie says that he must be “suffering dreadfully” and encourages Corrie to pray for him.

As rumours circulate that Germany is losing the war and the Allies are approaching Holland, the female prisoners are transported to Ravensbruck, a concentration camp in Germany. Waiting to be processed, they have to sleep outside in the rain for several days, after which Betsie contracts a chronic cough. Still, Corrie manages to smuggle a sweater for her sister and a small Bible through inspection. She’s horrified to find that the barracks are crawling with fleas, and that several women have to share each bed. Still, Betsie reminds her that the Bible instructs people to thank God in “all circumstances.” There’s a lot of complaining and fighting in the barracks, but Betsie improves the circumstances and creates cohesion by praying and eventually leading prayer services for women of all Christian denominations. Eventually, they realize that the guards haven’t discovered their illicit activities because they are too scared of fleas to inspect the barracks. Corrie realizes that even the fleas are part of God’s plan.

Betsie gets sicker and has to spend days at a time in the hospital; otherwise, she knits socks with other women too weak for outdoor labor. Eventually, Corrie joins this group as well, and the women spend the day praying and envisioning their lives after the war. Betsie says that she and Corrie will open a house for people who need to recover from concentration-camp life. However, one day Betsie is too ill to get out of bed for the morning roll call. She’s taken to the hospital, and by the time Corrie escapes from work to go see her, she’s already died.

One day, Corrie is released for seemingly no reason. She and several other prisoners are dropped at a train station, to make their own way home. Once she reaches Holland, she limps to a hospital where kindly nurses take care of her for several days and then arrange for her transport to Willem’s home. Her siblings are overjoyed to see her, though devastated to hear of Betsie’s death. In turn, Corrie is shocked to hear that Kik has been deported to Germany, and no one knows where he is.

After some days, Corrie returns to the Beje, which she now inhabits alone. The house feels empty and haunted by the memory of its former occupants. In order to fill her time and give herself a sense of purpose, she turns the house into a school and meeting place for mentally disabled children, who can’t go outside due to constant harassment from Nazi soldiers.

Even before the end of the war, Corrie meets a wealthy widow who agrees to let Corrie turn her country house into the recovery center Betsie dreamed of in Ravensbruck. Almost as soon as the Allies take Holland, droves of people start arriving at the house, coming from concentration camps or hiding places within Holland. At the home, they relearn all the tasks of normal life, and try to overcome their resentment of both the Germans and the Dutch

collaborators. Corrie always encourages her residents to forgive those who have harmed them, though she knows it's difficult to do so.

As time goes on, Corrie becomes well-known as a public speaker, relating Betsie's teachings about the importance of forgiveness to large audiences. She even starts to speak in Germany. At one church service, she recognizes a former S.S. guard from Ravensbruck. When the man comes up to shake her hand, she remembers all the suffering Betsie experienced there and feels that she's unable to forgive him. Still, as she prays for help, she feels her arm become warm and lift, seemingly of its own accord. She knows that God has assisted her in her own personal task of forgiveness. Eventually, in cooperation with a German relief organization inspired by her work, Corrie helps transform a former concentration camp into a shelter for displaced Germans, the very people who once imprisoned her.

## **Themes**

### **Faith and Action**

The Hiding Place tells the story of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who, alongside her family, sheltered and saved the lives of dozens of Jews during the Holocaust. Born into an extremely religious Christian family, Corrie is taught that God is active in everyday life and that all worldly events are the result of a divine plan. This belief gives Corrie the strength to withstand the misfortunes that befall her.

The constant presence of the Bible in family routine shows the extent to which the ten Booms' lives are centered around Christianity. To them, the Bible is not a set of abstract principles but an immediate and relevant guide to all life's problems.

### **Tolerance**

In The Hiding Place, Corrie ten Boom and her family help dozens of Jews escape the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Holland. An extremely religious family, the ten Booms are defined by their religious beliefs. However, rather than seeing religion as something that sets them apart or makes them better than others, the ten Booms feel that tolerance and inclusivity are among Christianity's strongest imperatives. Corrie portrays tolerance—of religious minorities and other marginalized groups.

### **Forgiveness**

In The Hiding Place, Corrie ten Boom and her family witness and experience great injustice as they shelter Jews in their house during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Although Corrie is often angered by the behaviour of those around her, she tries to resist these feelings,

believing that as a Christian she should not hold grudges but instead forgive those who have harmed her, even when it seems impossible to do so.

### **Family**

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells the story of her family's participation in an underground movement to shelter Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland in World War II. Although the memoir is centred around Corrie's experiences, it also emphasizes the extent to which she is grounded in a strong family network. As she comes of age, Corrie's family provides a firm moral and Biblical framework.

Corrie had a close relationship with her family, but it also with no one left to care for except Father, she's facing a moment of uncertainty and purposelessness in her life. Her work during the war isn't just invaluable to the people she helps, it's something that brings out Corrie's latent leadership abilities and gives her a sense of fulfillment in her own life.

### **Moral Choices**

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom relates her family's mission to save Jews during the World War II Nazi occupation of Holland. In order to procure safe houses and facilitate these people's escape from the country, Corrie develops a wide network of sympathetic and trustworthy people who provide resources, information, and even money. Her experience as a member of the underground shows her the capacity of ordinary people to be brave and selfless.

## **The Hiding Place Characters**

### **Corrie ten Boom**

The novel's protagonist and narrator, a middle-aged Dutch woman who turns her home into a hiding place for Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Raised in an extremely religious family, Corrie remains a devout Christian.

Corrie's ability to admire others' good qualities, rather than feeling jealous, reflects the deep humility that is inspired by her faith. For Corrie, Christianity isn't restricted to the church but permeates every aspect of daily life.

Both Corrie's personal life and her future resistance work is centred around her house. This reflects her deep devotion to and reliance on her family. It also emphasizes the extent to which Corrie's fight against injustice takes place on an individual level. Her resistance work is the fruit of personal principles, not government or group action.

### **Betsie ten Boom**

Corrie's older sister. Born with pernicious anaemia, Betsie is unable to marry or have children, so she spends her adult life in the family home, alongside Corrie. At first, she works as the watch... read analysis of Betsie ten Boom

### **Father / Casper ten Boom**

Corrie's father, the benevolent patriarch of the ten Boom family. Father is a highly skilled watchmaker whose shop is one of the oldest institutions in Haarlem.

Father's insistence on valuing each person, regardless of their flaws, will inspire his children's lifesaving work during World War II.

### **Mama**

Corrie's mother. Often bedridden by an unnamed chronic illness, Mama accepts her lot in life without complaint and selflessly devotes herself to aiding the city's poor people. Even after she suffers a stroke.

### **Willem**

Corrie's older brother. The only one of her siblings to receive a university education, he attends seminary and becomes a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church. He marries Tine, a family acquaintance.

Willem is the family's intellectual voice, and his astute grasp of events means that the family is ready to mobilize almost as soon as the Nazi threat to Dutch Jews becomes apparent. It's also important that at this point Corrie is largely deferential to her brother as the man of the family and her sole college-educated sibling. Her work will lead her to develop independence and decision-making skills, allowing her to interact with Willem as an equal regardless of her gender or educational opportunities.

It's important that Willem's principles of tolerance, which he has been practicing before the war, enable him to do important work during the Nazi occupation. For the ten Booms, tolerance is not an abstract idea that comes to the fore in times of trouble, but a principle that affects the direction of their entire lives.

### **Nollie ten Boom/von Woerden**

Corrie's older sister. As a child, Corrie frequently contrasts Nollie's composure and physical poise to her own shy nature and plain looks; however, she admires her sister's attributes rather than resenting them.

**Pickwick**

A wealthy Haarlem merchant, frequent customer at the ten Booms' shop, and genial family friend. As Corrie starts to shelter Jews in her house, she discovers that Pickwick is at the centre of the Dutch resistance network.

**Tante Jans**

Mama's sister and Corrie's aunt, who lives in the Beje for most of Corrie's childhood. One of the most devout members of the family, Tante Jans is a well-known writer of Christian tracts

**Tante Anna**

Mama's sister and Corrie's aunt, who lives in the Beje for most of Corrie's childhood. Due to Mama's frequent bouts of illness, Tante Anna is usually responsible for running the entire household.

**Tante Bep**

Mama's sister and Corrie's aunt, who lives in the Beje for most of Corrie's childhood. Prior to living with the family, Tante Bep was a governess.

**Toos**

A saleslady and bookkeeper at the watch shop. Toos is so unfriendly and bad-natured that most people don't want to employ her, but Father has not only kept her on but softened her with his kind heart.

**Karel**

A friend of Willem's at seminary. Meeting Karel as a teenager, Corrie immediately falls in love with him. Several years later, during celebrations for Willem's wedding, Corrie and Karel share a brief courtship.

**Christoffels**

An elderly employee of the watch shop. Once an itinerant clock mender, Christoffels settles down in Father's employ now that his trade is out of fashion and becomes a beloved member of the family.

**Peter von Woerden**

Nollie's son, one of Corrie's oldest nephews, and her personal favorite. Peter is an exceptionally gifted musician as well as an impetuous idealist: the organist at his church, Peter breaks the law by playing the Dutch national anthem after it's been outlawed by the Nazis. As a result, he's briefly imprisoned by the Gestapo. Upon his release, he becomes an important member of Corrie's operation, working as a "runner" to ferry supplies and news between different safe houses. Arrested at the same time as Corrie and his parents, he is eventually released and spends the rest of the war in Haarlem.

**Kik ten Boom**

Willem's son, and Corrie's nephew. Like his cousin Peter, Kik is an important member of Corrie's operation, working as a "runner" to ferry supplies and news between different safe houses.

**Harry de Vries / "The Bulldog"**

A Jewish resident of Haarlem. Prior to the war, Corrie and Father frequently encounter the man walking his beloved bulldogs. During the occupation, when they see that he has a yellow star sewn onto his coat, they befriend him. Harry has converted to Christianity but retains his Jewish cultural identity, and he and his wife Cato become regular visitors at the Beje. Eventually, fearing imminent deportation, they seek help with the ten Booms and Corrie places them in a safe house. However, eventually the house is raided by the Gestapo. Harry is deported and Corrie never discovers what happens to him.

**Rolf van Vliet**

A Dutch policeman and, prior to the war, a distant family acquaintance. During the occupation Corrie initially distrusts him because he works at the jail where Jews and other prisoners are held.

**Leendert**

A Jewish schoolteacher who takes refuge in the Beje. An amateur electrician, he installs a buzzer system through which someone downstairs can alert the whole house if a suspicious person is present.

**Meyer Mossel / Eusebius "Eusie" Smit**

A devout Jewish man who takes refuge in the Beje, having been turned away from several other hiding places because his stereotypically Semitic features make him an especially risky fugitive. Corrie rechristens him "Eusebius".

**Mary Itallie**

A Jewish woman who takes refuge in the Beje. Mary's presence is especially risky, as she has asthma and can be heard wheezing even inside the secret room.

**Jop**

An apprentice at the watch shop during the Nazi occupation. Eventually, he takes up residence at the Beje as well. Because German troops often seize young men in the streets and send them to work in German factories, the trip to and from work has become too dangerous. Jop begins to work with Corrie as a runner; one night, while delivering news of an imminent Gestapo raid to another safe house, Jop is caught and imprisoned.

### **Jan Vogel**

A Dutch collaborator with the Gestapo who helps expose several resistance organizations, including Corrie's. During her time in the concentration camps, Corrie often feels uncontrollable anger when thinking about Vogel, but when she admits this to Betsie, her sister says that she pities his moral suffering and regularly prays for him. The sisters' different reactions highlight Betsie's extraordinary ability to forgive people who have harmed her, and informs the message of forgiveness and reconciliation that Corrie preaches after the war's end.

### **The Snake**

A young S.S. guard at Ravensbruck. Corrie nicknames her "the Snake" due to the shiny dress she wears under her uniform. The Snake is often vicious towards prisoners, but she also intercedes to get Betsie medical care in the hospital. Her conflicting actions represent the struggle between good and bad impulses that exists within everyone.

### **The S.S. guard**

An unnamed man Corrie meets during a postwar speaking tour in Germany, whom she recognizes as a guard she and Betsie encountered at Ravensbruck. Remembering all the suffering Betsie endured there, Corrie feels as though she can't shake the man's hand and forgive him; but when she prays to Jesus for help, she feels a warm sensation and finds that her arm rises automatically. She interprets this episode as evidence that practicing forgiveness, even in difficult circumstances, brings one closer to the divine.

### **Otto**

A young German and proud Nazi who briefly serves as Father's apprentice, a few years before the war. During his time at the watch shop, Otto begins to abuse Christoffels with hatred.

### **Annaliese**

A young Jewish woman who hides at Nollie's house. When the Gestapo raid the house and ask if Annaliese is a Jew, Nollie, unable to tell a lie, admits that she is.

### **Lieutenant Rahms**

A German officer who questions Corrie about her alleged underground work during her imprisonment in Scheveningen. Corrie quickly establishes a rapport with the lieutenant, who is disillusioned with his work as a Nazi occupier.

### **Clergyman**

A priest who is a friend of Corrie's family. Corrie tries to get the priest to protect a Jewish mother and her baby by taking them into his home.