

Daniel Johannes Huygens

Title: *Opposite the Lion's Den: A Story of Hiding Dutch Jews*

Author: Daniel Johannes Huygens

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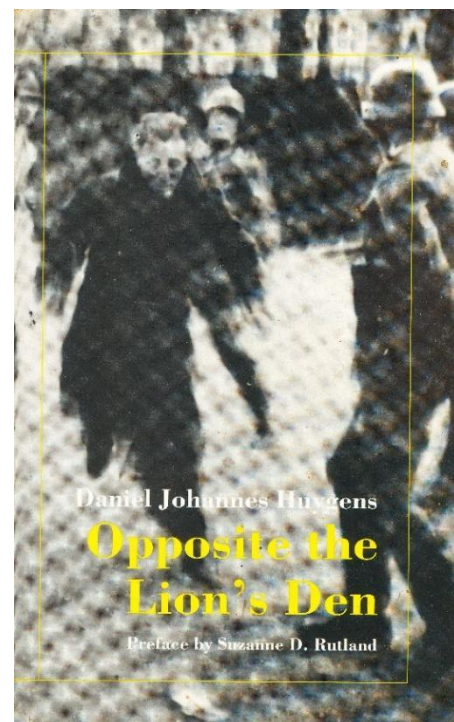
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: The Netherlands: Amsterdam, Utrecht; Australia:

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: ghetto; concentration camp; child survivor.



Opposite the Lion's Den is the 186-page memoir of Dutch rescuer, Daniel Johannes Huygens, who together with his wife Lydia hid their five Jewish friends in their home, directly opposite police headquarters.

The frontmatter includes a 52-page preface by historian Suzanne Rutland outlining the history of the Holocaust in the Netherlands and Jewish emigration to Australia. Pages 1-27 briefly recount the author's pre-war life and career before describing the Nazi invasion and occupation of Holland. Pages 28-73 describe antisemitic measures, the Degen and Dresden families going into hiding in July 1942, as well as their first six months in concealment. Pages 74-117 cover the years 1943-44, detailing the Huygens' black-market activities, resistance efforts, and police raids on the home. Pages 118-150 describe the destruction of the Huygens' house during an Allied air raid, in October 1944, and the final months of the war. Pages 151-186 recount liberation, the immediate post-war period, and the Huygens family's migration to Australia, along with their continued relationships with the Degen and Dresden families.

Daniel Johannes Huygens was born 28 June 1908 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. His father was a housepainter and decorator. Initially, Daniel studied to be a painter before undertaking an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. At age twenty he met his future wife, Lydia Lankhout, and in 1933 he opened his first hairdressing salon. In the 1930s, he became increasingly troubled by developments in Nazi Germany and founded a political discussion group with a small circle of trusted friends.

In 1935 he befriended a Jewish family, the Degens, Hyman, Miep, and their daughter Lenie, who had recently moved from Amsterdam to Utrecht. They became regular clients of the salon and active participants in the discussion group.

When the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, antisemitic measures were enforced. By June 1942 the situation for Dutch Jews had greatly worsened and Daniel began seeking a hiding place for the Degens. To prevent German officers from being billeted in their spare room, Daniel and Lydia rented it to a university student, Hans Brenkman, who – unknown to them at first – was a member of the resistance. In April 1942 the Huygens' daughter, Lydia Beatrix, was born.

After a failed attempt to place Hyman and Miep into hiding, Hyman and several Jewish acquaintances were arrested and deported to the Vledderveen labour camp. Daniel attempted to smuggle food parcels into the camp but was intercepted by the commandant, who confiscated the supplies.

Disheartened, Daniel returned to Utrecht and continued searching for a hiding place for Miep and eleven-year-old Lenie, but without success. When both were ordered to report for deportation a few weeks later, Daniel and Lydia decided to hide them in their own home. Daniel converted the upper floor into a secret refuge while continuing to operate the salon below – a business frequented by ordinary locals as well as Nazi sympathisers.

Afraid for Hyman, Daniel collaborated with Miep's former housekeeper, Marie, and her husband Jack, to organise his escape, utilising the proximity of Marie's parents' farm to the labour camp. A couple of weeks after Miep and Lenie went into hiding, Hyman succeeded in escaping Vledderveen and returned to Utrecht where he was taken in by the Huygens.

In the following weeks, Miep's sister Beppie and her husband Barend Dresden joined them in hiding. As deportations intensified, Daniel travelled frequently to Amsterdam to liaise with the extended Dresden and Degen families to seek hiding places for them, without success. A short time later, he smuggled Beppie out of Amsterdam and later arranged for Barend, who was interned in a labour camp, to escape and join the others at the Huygens' home. Although Daniel desperately sought hiding arrangements for the extended Degen and Dresden families, by 1943 almost all their relatives had been rounded up and deported to the camps where they were murdered.

As feeding five hidden people placed a heavy financial strain on the household, Daniel resorted to black-market dealings – placing him at even greater risk. On one occasion Daniel was arrested for illegally selling fabric from Miep's former textile shop but was released.

Through their black-market and resistance efforts, the Huygens formed connections with the Dutch underground and in 1943 began using the room rented by Brenkman as a temporary safehouse for Jews in transit to long-term hiding places.

In July 1943, Dutch police raided the Huygens' home following accusations of black-market activity. Throughout 1943 and 1944, several of the Huygens' resistance contacts were arrested and tortured by the Gestapo, including Brenkman, although none betrayed the family.

In October 1944, Allied aircraft targeted the nearby police station, causing severe damage to their home and salon. With the help of the underground, the Jewish families were swiftly relocated to a new hiding place while the Huygen's sheltered with their in-laws.

With the destruction of the shop Daniel lost his income and the final months of the war became a struggle for survival. Desperate, Daniel frequently travelled long distances to beg for food from farmers and relied on occasional black-market dealings.

After the war, Daniel reopened his salon, but business was difficult. In 1946 the Huygens' second daughter, Danielle, was born. Hoping to secure a more stable future, the family emigrated to Sydney in 1950. Daniel initially struggled financially as a hairdresser and was forced to work insecure labouring jobs before eventually turning to painting.

The Huygens family maintained close contact with the Degen and Dresden families throughout their lives, visiting Beppie and Barend regularly after their emigration to New Zealand. In 1988, Daniel and Lydia were recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations for their efforts in sheltering Jewish families during the Holocaust.

Opposite the Lion's Den is a detailed account of the author's wartime experiences and the daily realities of concealing a Jewish family in Nazi-occupied Utrecht. It offers valuable insight into life in hiding, illuminating the practical difficulties and moral pressures faced by both those in concealment and those who protected them. The memoir also sheds light on the varied Dutch responses to occupation – from active resistance to indifference and collaboration. As a well-established hairdresser with a diverse clientele, the author observed a wide cross-section of Dutch society and its varied reactions to antisemitic measures and Nazi rule. The memoir also contributes an important account of the Dutch resistance. It was published in 1996 by Brandl & Schlesinger, a commercial publisher in Sydney.