CONTENTS

Press Release	2
Title Information Sheet	3
Author Biography	4
Author Q&A	5
Short Summary	8
Synopsis	9
Research Background	10
Historical Overview	12
Historical Timeline with spoilers	13
Endorsements	15
Cover	17
3-D Cover	18
Author Photos	19
Excerpt	21
Contact Information	24

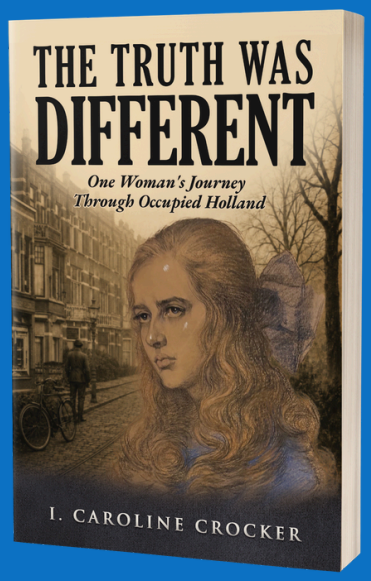
Many families pass stories from one generation to the next. But are they true? After extensive research, Dr. Caroline Crocker discovered that her family was totally unaware of some very important facts.

PRESS RELEASE

***The Truth Was Different* reveals the hidden story behind one half-Jewish Dutch woman's wartime choices. Based on years of historical research, it challenges our assumptions about courage, sacrifice, and survival during the German occupation of the Netherlands.**

(Fairfax, VA—November 16, 2026 by Rambling Ruminations)

About the Book



When Dr. Caroline Crocker began investigating her grandmother's life during the German occupation of the Netherlands, she expected to confirm the family stories she'd always heard. Her grandmother, Rita, was cold-hearted and cruel. Instead, she uncovered a far more complicated truth.

In *The Truth Was Different: One Woman's Journey Through Occupied Holland,* Rita speaks for herself. Drawing on Rita's out-of-print Dutch books, family documents, interviews, and archival records, this book reveals the reasons behind her decisions, even those on which others passed judgment, not omitting any of the surprising details.

Rich in historical detail and emotional insight, *The Truth Was Different* reveals how one ordinary person navigated extraordinary moral dilemmas and heartbreaking choices while living in an occupied country. The book will appeal to readers of narrative nonfiction, World War II history, and true stories that challenge simplistic judgments about right and wrong.

Praise

"Compulsively readable....A compelling and unapologetic portrayal of a flawed woman's life and choices." --*Kirkus Reviews*

"An immersive, gripping read." --Teresa Kosciuk Rowe, MD

https://ramblingruminations.com
caroline@ramblingruminations.com

The Author

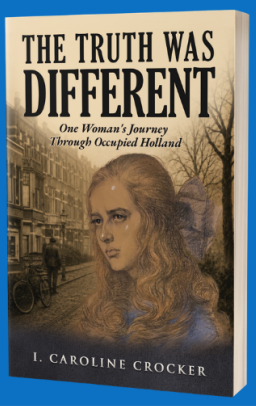


Dr. Caroline Crocker is the author of sixteen books across multiple genres, including her award-winning WWII series. Trained as a biologist, she worked as a professor, scientist, technology CEO, and nonprofit founder. She now applies those research and analytical skills to uncovering little-known stories from her family's wartime history. Caroline lives with her husband, Richard, and is mother to four and grandmother to nine.

The Truth Was Different

One Woman's Journey Through Occupied Holland

A meticulously researched true story that reveals how lives and choices are rarely as simple as they seem



About the Book

During the German occupation of the Netherlands, a half-Jewish Dutch woman made choices that shaped her family for generations. Those who read *Unforgivable*, her son's story, and some who knew her condemned those decisions. Few understood them. Decades after her death, her granddaughter began comparing family stories with Rita's own out-of-print Dutch books, archival research, and other historical sources. The result is a compelling narrative in which Rita tells her story. Rich in historical detail and emotional insight, *The Truth Was Different* invites readers to look beyond first impressions and consider the impossible choices that ordinary people face in extraordinary times.

Details

- Narrative nonfiction/historical biography
- Publication: November 16, 2026
- 440 pages; 6x9; B&W photos; glossary and appendix
- Hardback 9781957970332 $42.99; Paperback 9781957970349 $28.99
- Order through IngramSpark
- WWII history, narrative nonfiction, biography, women's studies, psychological studies, and Dutch history

Why It Matters

- Based on Rita's own published books, family records, interviews, Dutch archives, and historical research
- Reveals everyday life in the occupied Netherlands through one woman's experience
- Explores the difficult choices faced by civilians living under occupation
- Challenges simplistic assumptions about guilt, courage, and survival

https://ramblingruminations.com
caroline@ramblingruminations.com

Praise

"Compulsively readable...A compelling and unapologetic portrayal of a flawed woman's life and choices." –***Kirkus Reviews***

"The accessibly written story of the impossible situation in which a brave woman found herself in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands." **-Ad van Liempt, Dutch historian, journalist, and nonfiction author**

The Author



Dr. I. Caroline Crocker is a scientist, former professor, and award-winning author whose investigative writing draws on archival documents, family records, and historical research. *The Truth Was Different* is the third book in her WWII narrative nonfiction series, exploring her family's experiences in Nazi-occupied Holland.

Available for author talks, historical presentations, book club discussions, and interviews, in person or virtually.

AUTHOR BIOS (short and longer)

Dr. I. Caroline Crocker is the author or coauthor of sixteen books, including her award-winning World War II series. Trained as a biologist, she worked as a professor, research scientist, technology CEO, and nonprofit founder before using those skills to investigate and write about her family's wartime history. Caroline lives with her husband, Richard, and is the mother of four and grandmother of nine. She is also Rita's eldest granddaughter.

~~~~~~~~

Dr. I. Caroline Crocker is the author or coauthor of sixteen books spanning several genres. They cover a variety of subjects, but share a common thread: they are true, even though some read like fiction. Her award-winning World War II books include *Unforgivable: Through a Child's Eyes* and *Brave Face: The Inspiring WWII Memoir of a Dutch/German Child*. She is also the author of *The Truth Was Different: One Woman's Journey Through Occupied Holland*.

Trained as a biologist, Caroline has worked as a research scientist, university professor, scientific writer, entrepreneur, and communications specialist. During her diverse career, she conducted research in asthma and cancer, tutored medical students, served as the chief executive officer of a technology startup, and led a nonprofit organization advocating for integrity in science.

She is married to Richard and has four grown children and nine grandchildren. More importantly for this book, however, Caroline is Rita's eldest granddaughter. Over many years, she drew upon Rita's own writings, family records, interviews, and extensive historical research to tell this remarkable story as faithfully and accurately as possible.
~~~~~~~~

AUTHOR Q&A

What inspired you to write *The Truth Was Different*?

The *Truth Was Different* is the third in a series of true stories set in the occupied Netherlands during WWII. The second of those, *Unforgivable*, is about my father and details how an abandoned, abused, and bereaved child ended up having to choose between bitterness and forgiveness and tells what happened afterward. People always say that they loved the book, but all too often, they ask me what was wrong with his mother. By the way, the first, *Brave Face,* is about my mother.

The more I heard them ask, the more intrigued I became. I didn't really know my grandmother, but what I'd heard wasn't good. Still, I rationalized, every person has to live with themselves, and most believe they are rational and their actions are justified; I figured there must be more to her story. Thus began *The Truth Was Different*.

Why did you choose the title *The Truth Was Different*?

In investigating my grandmother's story, I started with the long-out-of-print Dutch books she wrote. One of them was classified as nonfiction and autobiographical. She called it *De Werkelijkheid Was Anders*, which translates to "The Reality Was Different." So, my title is, more or less, her idea. That said, *The Truth Was Different* drew on many more sources than that.

As I read, I realized that my grandmother had changed the names in her book—presumably to keep those who might be offended from realizing she'd written about them. She even said that her brother was not her brother, but a foster child! Yeah, she wasn't too fond of the guy. It took much research to find out what she changed and restore it to what actually happened.

Also, as I read her other books, I realized that they all contained autobiographical elements. This isn't unusual—most authors draw from life to construct their stories. I surmised that the events she described with particular clarity, and those that recurred, probably represented real incidents in her life.

To fill in the details, I worked with a genealogist who visited the Dutch archives and uncovered so much that my mind was blown again and again. Next, Dutch relatives whom I'd never even met came out of the woodwork and gave me family photos and documents. Then, I visited museums and the homes where I knew various incidents had occurred, and was even invited into some of them. And online historical research and the ever-helpful Myheritage.com—a plethora of information! All of it combined to provide me with an amazingly detailed and accurate picture of my grandmother's experiences.

Did your research change what you thought of your grandmother?

Absolutely. Up until I did the research, what various relatives said about her had me scratching my head and worrying whether I might have inherited her very evident character flaws. Now, I understand that she was a brutally honest, courageous, and resilient woman who was just doing the best she could.

My grandmother experienced more trauma than most of us could cope with. She chose to deal with it in one way; we might not. Her life circumstances forced her to make impossible decisions. Did she always choose rightly? Originally, I doubted it. Now, I wonder. After all, how can we judge if we don't know the circumstances in which her choices were made? But there's no doubt in my mind that the truth really was different.

Why did you tell the story in first person, from your grandmother's perspective?

I felt that it was very important to give my grandmother a voice; to get into her head. Telling the story in the first person seemed the best way to achieve this goal. I was forced to consider why she did what she did, how she would have felt, and what the consequences of her decisions were. As I read and imagined her thoughts, I became aware of something surprising: I'm a lot like her, and I don't mind that at all.

What does her story tell us about the choices ordinary people faced under occupation?

Those of us who live in countries that are neither occupied nor war-torn cannot even begin to imagine the difficulties that those who are not similarly privileged face. Is it better to allow one's children to starve or to take a job working for the enemy? Is it more important to identify with one's people or to do one's utmost to survive? Is it wrong to eat food meant for others if it means you will have the strength needed to continue helping them? She had to make many decisions where there isn't any answer everyone would agree on!

Was there anything you discovered that you wished you hadn't?

Much. Frankly, this book wasn't easy to write. The horrendous betrayals by those a person trusted. The stomach-turning medical descriptions. The small decisions with big consequences. The relatives that, as a result of a cover-up, I didn't even know existed until now!

One discovery that won't be too much of a spoiler to mention is that my great-grandmother chose to become an NSBer—someone who sided with the Nazis, despite having been married to a Jew—and spent time in jail because of it. Until now, nobody mentioned it. Perhaps no one even knew. Now, they will.

How did trauma affect your grandmother and the generations that followed her?

The way a person deals with trauma depends on so much: personality, strength of character, upbringing, innate resilience, faith, and more. My grandmother had a rotten, if financially privileged, upbringing with narcissistic parents and little to no ethical instruction. Her eventual response to repeated trauma was to shut down emotionally and reject anyone who might penetrate the "bubble." Forgiveness was not part of her vocabulary.

As a result, my father was not allowed to live at home, and the only love he experienced in his early years came from his father and the Congolese houseboys who were tasked with

caring for him, and in his older years from his younger brother. My mother was the first source of consistent love that he encountered, and he gave her a very hard time! Having said that, Dad did decide early on that he would forgive, and I believe this enabled him to give love to his children—and he did.

But were we affected by the unhealed parts of his personality? Of course. We all knew that you never come near Dad when he's sleeping—he may hit you! Have we passed that trauma on to our children? Possibly.

What do you hope readers will take away from The Truth Was Different?

Be gentle with others, even those who you consider to be unpleasant. There is the poem by Mary Lathrop that says, "Just walk a mile in someone else's moccasins before you abuse, criticize, and accuse." We really cannot judge another person without having lived their life.

SHORT SUMMARY

What if everything you believed about someone was wrong?

For most of her life, Caroline assumed that her grandmother, Rita, was a cold-hearted woman whose self-centered choices had wounded her family. Then she began investigating.

Drawing on archives, interviews, family documents, and Rita's own books, Caroline uncovered a very different story: a half-Jewish mother navigating extreme trauma and impossible choices while living under German occupation.

The Truth Was Different is both a compelling true story and an exploration of family, memory, and the uncomfortable distance between **what we're told and what really happened.**

SYNOPSIS

When Rita was born in Amsterdam in 1908, no one could have predicted the events that would shape her life—or the decisions she would later be judged for.

Rita's narcissistic and quarrelsome parents, not to mention the strange circumstances under which she married, left their mark on her long before the Netherlands surrendered to Germany in May 1940. By then, Rita, a highly intelligent, analytical, and resilient woman, was the wife of a terminally ill man and a mother responsible for the lives of her two sons.

The occupation affected every facet of her existence. Food and fuel first grew scarce, then disappeared. Jewish friends and relatives faced harsh restrictions and, eventually, Rita made decisions that might even put her own life at risk. As she experienced almost every kind of traumatic event, Rita found that the difference between right and wrong wasn't always obvious.

She made choices: Some courageous, some desperate, some illegal, and some very difficult for even her loved ones to understand. After the war, Rita was judged to be cold, selfish, and even cruel. The unanswered question was, "Why?"

Long after Rita's death, her granddaughter, Dr. Caroline Crocker, set out to discover the truth. Drawing on Rita's out-of-print books, family documents, archival records, historical sources, interviews, and extensive research, Dr. Crocker began investigating how much truth the rather unpleasant family stories held. Simple explanations became complex. Events and actions placed in their original context looked very different, sometimes even reasonable.

The Truth Was Different was written in Rita's own voice. In her own writings, she never claimed to be a heroine, nor did she conceal the painful, embarrassing, and sometimes illegal parts of her life. In *The Truth Was Different*, the reader is ushered into the experience of an ordinary woman trying to survive extraordinary circumstances.

Part family history, part historical investigation, and part intimate portrait of a complicated woman, *The Truth Was Different* asks whether it is fair or even possible to judge a person's actions when the circumstances surrounding their choices have been forgotten.

A story of war and survival, but also trauma, resilience, love, loss, moral compromise, and unimaginable pain, this book asks a question that reaches far beyond occupied Holland:
How well can we understand another person if we don't know the whole story?

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This extensively researched, deeply personal historical biography draws on years of meticulous research. First, Rita wrote five now-out-of-print books in which she detailed and explained some of her actions. More of her true story was pieced together through interviews with her Jewish-heritage relatives, reading what her brother wrote, help from an awesome genealogist, a trip to the places where Rita lived and worked, much time spent on MyHeritage.com, and enough poring over newspaper articles, court records, and other primary sources to make me cross-eyed!

I tend to write and research simultaneously. For this book, as additional stunning information kept coming to my attention, I had to rewrite again and again—for years. Totally engrossed doesn't even begin to describe how I felt while on this journey of discovery! How in the world could this person have betrayed that one? Did this other individual really ally themselves with Nazis? Seriously? Why was that person spared? Who went to jail and why? That revelation blew my mind!

Because historical truth matters to me, and so does understanding the 'why,' I kept going until I was satisfied this story was as accurate as I could make it. Along the way, I came to appreciate that the reasons for decisions and actions that change lives may not be obvious and can be very complex. Perhaps that is one of history's enduring lessons. Especially in today's deeply divided world, we would be wise to seek the facts and understand the context before passing judgment.

Archives
Professional genealogist and distant cousin Rosita Olivier searched the various archives in The Hague for information about Rita and her relatives. There, she discovered where they lived and what jobs they had; who was arrested for being an NSB member; who adopted Rita's half-sister, Sophia; who betrayed Rita's brother but wasn't arrested, and much more.

Family Papers
My first cousin once removed, Irma O'Connor Wallig, spearheaded the efforts to provide me with copies of stories, poems, and other documents that her sisters and nieces have in their possession. My favorite was a letter from the famous Willy Corsari to Irma, in which she writes about some very pertinent gossip. My parents, Frits and Meta Evenbly, also had several important documents.

Interviews
Both of Rita's daughters-in-law, Hetti Evenblij and Meta Evenbly, provided me with valuable information. Natascha and Irma, Hans Wallig's daughters, gave me more insight into who Rita and Hans were. Some of the revelations were mind-blowing.

Photographs
The photographs in the book came from albums owned by Irma O'Connor Wallig, my uncle Jan Evenblij, Frits Evenbly, and Rosita Olivier. Others came from MyHeritage and other websites. Finally, because Henri was famous and Rita's half-sister was adopted by a prominent Amsterdam photographer, some of the photos are in the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam and the Rijksmuseum.

Historians
As part of the placement of the Stolpersteine in Bussum and Driebergen, historians researched what happened at the children's home in Driebergen and the arrest of Hans and Esther. In addition, I conducted much online research to understand wartime events during Rita's lifetime, including but not limited to Dolle Dinsdag, the Hunger Winter, and the bombing of the Bezuidenhout.

Newspapers
Through perusal of various archives and searching for documents referenced at MyHeritage.com, it was possible to find the article that spoke about why Frederik's father lost his job, advertisements and posters regarding Henri's various shows, engagement, marriage, and death announcements, and even a photograph of Henri's second wife, Liddy.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (spoiler-free)

1908	Rita is born in Amsterdam
1931	Rita marries Frederik
1933-6	Her two sons are born
1938	Rita places her sons in a children's home
1940	Germany invades/occupation begins
1942	Rita is widowed
1945	The Netherlands is liberated
1946	Rita remarries
1962	Rita turns to writing
1992	Rita dies

HISTORICAL TIMELINE (contains major plot revelations)

This chronology is provided for journalists, reviewers, historians, and interviewers who need a comprehensive overview of the events described in the book. It contains significant spoilers. Readers who prefer to discover Rita's story as it unfolds may wish to consult the brief historical overview instead.

1908	Rita is born in Amsterdam
1914	Rita's father, Henri Hartog Wallig, the eldest son in a Jewish diamond family, gets his big break in show business
1925	Henri gets a job in the East Indies; Maximilian Alandt does a portrait of Rita
1926	Rita and her mother, Aleida, unsuccessfully attempt to convince Henri to come home; The married Frederik seduces Rita
1931	Frederik's wife and baby die; he and Rita marry and move to the Belgian Congo
1933	Frederik and Rita's eldest son is born, followed by the second in 1936
1937	Frederik becomes ill, and the family moves back to Holland; He has myasthenia gravis, which will ultimately be fatal
1938	Rita realizes that she needs to get a job and leaves her sons in a children's home in Driebergen
1939	Rita moves into a boarding house and begins work for a Jewish sports club; Henri dies in Antwerp
1940	The war begins; the Netherlands surrender and are occupied
1941	Anti-Jewish measures become worse; Frederik becomes more abusive
1942	Aleida becomes an NSBer; Frederik asks for a divorce Hans and his wife, Esther, get fake ID cards; they hide their children in Driebergen Frederik dies under suspicious circumstances; Hans asks Rita to hide him and Esther; she does
1943	Rita gets a job in Zeist; she meets and falls in love with 'Ernst,' the leader of an LO Resistance cell Hans and Esther take risks and start a new business; Rita suspects that Ernst is married, but he denies it Rita is accused of being anti-German and loses her job; she appeals and is transferred; Aleida sells Rita's portrait to Hans
1944	The Jewish children in Driebergen are taken to Westerbork; Hans and Esther become even more reckless about hiding Rita's eldest has a heart problem and needs a bike; Hans refuses to help; Hans, Esther, and their things disappear Rita visits Ernst's family in Amsterdam; A railway strike prevents her from leaving Rita and many others both freeze and starve during the Hunger Winter

1945	Rita discovers that she is pregnant; Ernst and family are arrested; Ernst is executed Rita has an illegal abortion and moves in with her cousin; She finds out that Hans and Esther were betrayed Rita returns to Driebergen; The war ends; She hears that Aleida has been arrested and does nothing
1946	Rita moves to the Hague and marries her boss, Jacobus Ouwerkerk
1947	Rita is forced to pick her children up from Driebergen, but her eldest is 'difficult.' She houses them elsewhere
1953	Rita sees her portrait in a room with other Jewish artwork; Cobus acquires it for her
1962	Rita's sons are married and have children, but she is depressed. She turns to writing; the publisher expects 'payment'
1977	Rita has a heart-to-heart with Caroline, her eldest granddaughter, and learns what gives her hope
1991	Hearing that Caroline is moving to the USA, Rita contemplates her life and wonders if the truth is different
1992	Rita dies

ENDORSEMENTS

"*The Truth Was Different* is the accessibly written story of the impossible situation in which a brave woman found herself in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands."
--Ad van Liempt, journalist, TV producer, historian, and author of dozens of nonfiction books, 10-15 of them on WWII

"The complexity of Rita's character and her relatable humanity render the story compulsively readable… A compelling and unapologetic portrayal of a flawed woman's life and choices."
–Kirkus Reviews

"…I was enraptured in reading her tale…Rita's story explores what shapes the truth and who determines it. It is a human story. It is a desperate cry for help with a faith as small as a mustard seed."
--Clarion Magazine

"…the story [is] quite compelling as it chronicles the emotional reaction of one woman to the unthinkable. …a good number of readers will find much to interest them in this story of a woman who survived war and occupation completely on her own terms."
--Midwest Book Review

*"*The book evokes sadness, compassion, frustration, and hope as readers struggle with Rita's choices while gradually understanding the experiences that shaped them. It avoids easy judgments and invites readers to hold personal responsibility and human compassion together. Trauma does not merely produce symptoms. It can become woven into identity, changing how people understand themselves, relate to others, and give or receive love."
--Jonathan Hartiens, Ph.D., M.B.A., Clinical Psychologist, Dept. of Veterans Affairs

"Caroline's amazingly detailed research allows her many characters, and there are lots of them, to live and challenge us with the cruel battles that they each encountered…She gives all of us a powerful glimpse of the human spirit that will not be quenched by cruelty and conflict. The book is a masterpiece and deserves wide attention."
–The Rt. Revd. Martyn Minns, Missionary Bishop of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America (retired)

"This book will transform you to a place where, like Jacob, we wrestle with the angel, and who we are may never be the same."
--Rabbi Bruce Aft, Rabbi Emeritus at Congregation Adat Reyim and Chaplain and Adjunct Professor at George Mason University

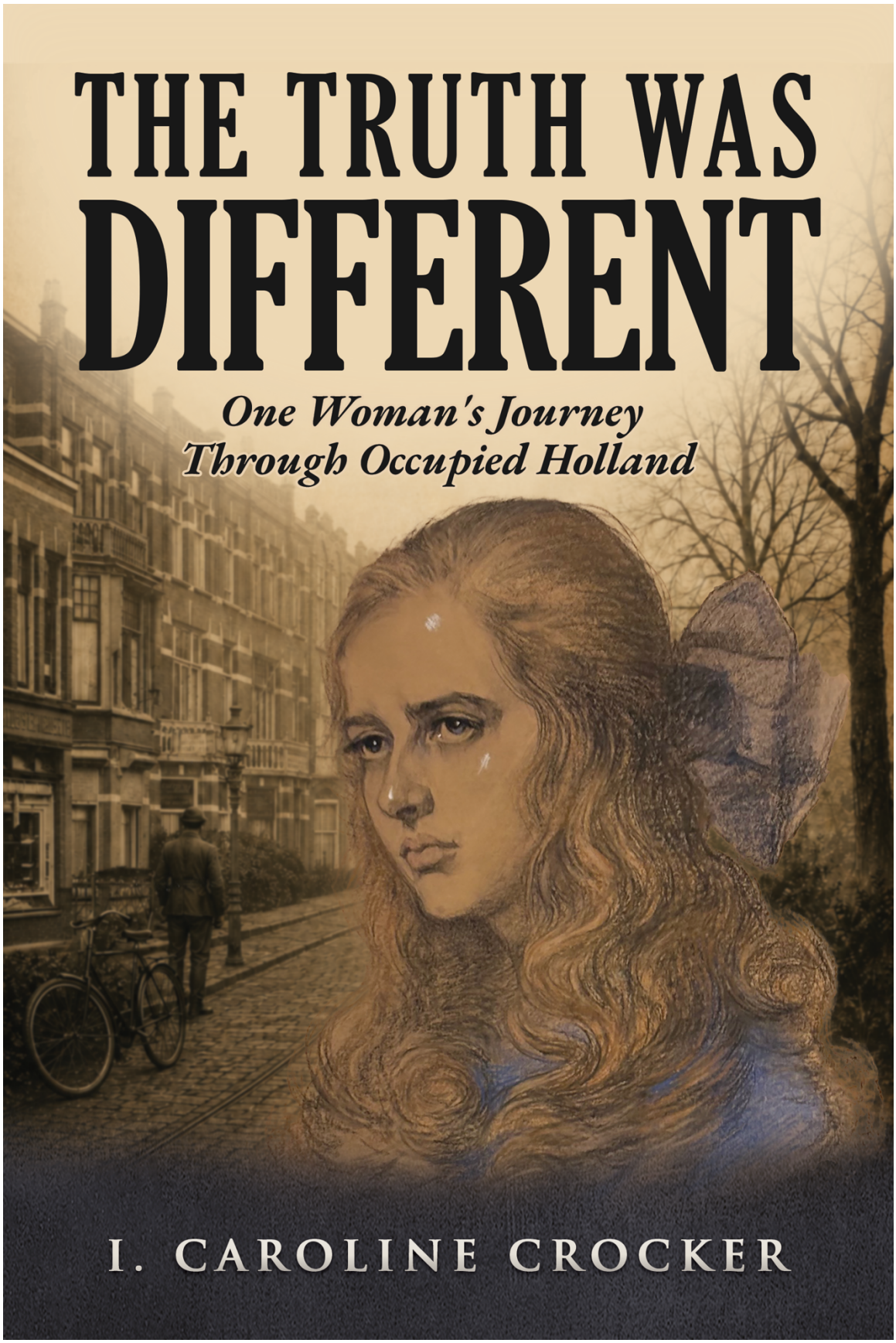
Dr. I. Caroline Crocker's *The Truth Was Different: One Woman's Journey Through Occupied Holland* is a deeply moving and meticulously researched narrative that gives voice to a story both harrowing and profoundly human…What sets this work apart is its balance of scholarly care and narrative power."

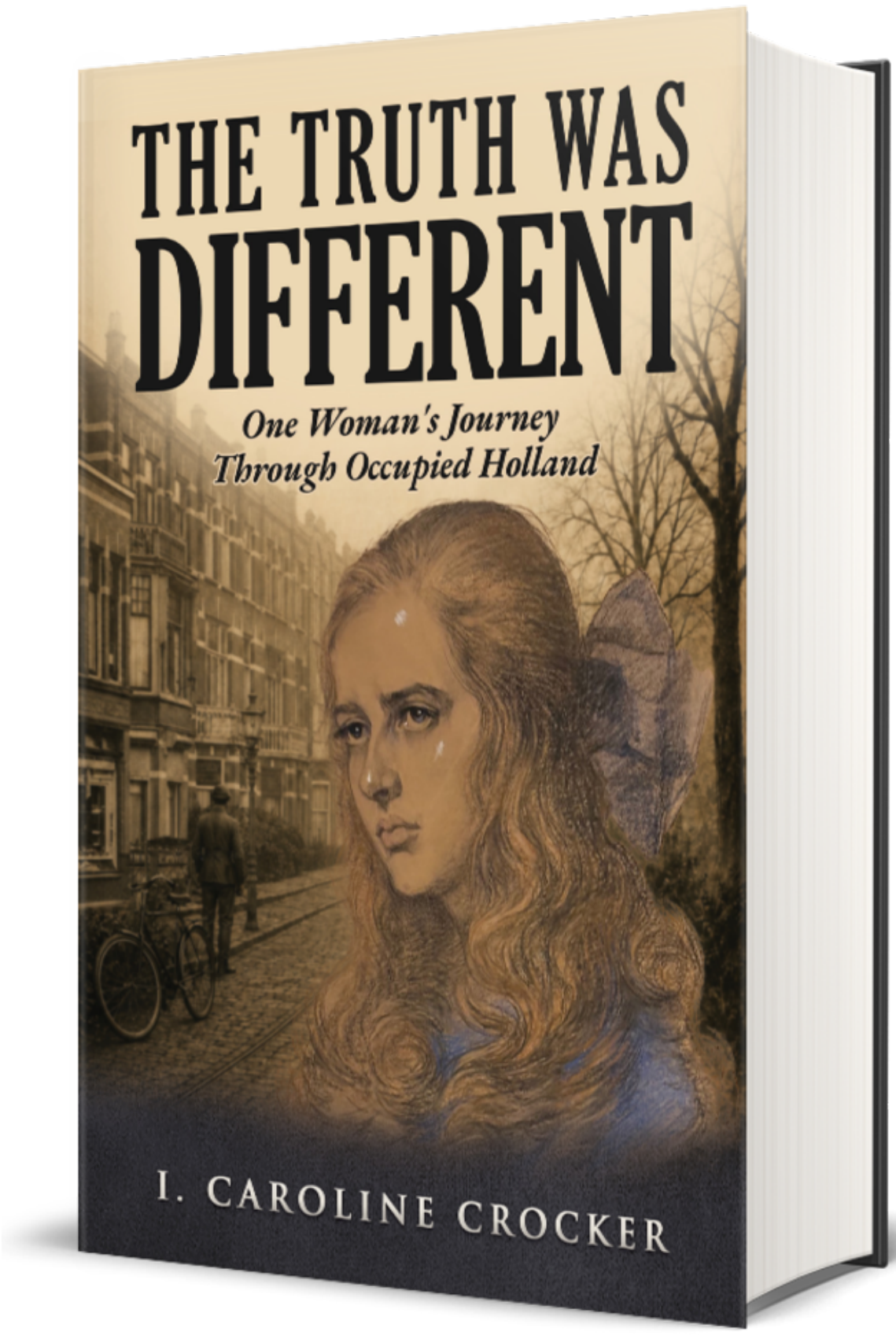
--The Revd. Dr. Johannes Vander Bijl, Missionary SAMS, Heiloo, NL

“Caroline Crocker tells her grandmother’s story with honesty and compassion, neither minimizing her failures nor ignoring the extraordinary circumstances that shaped her. In doing so, she reminds us that we rarely know the whole story of another person’s life, and that we should therefore be slow to judge and quick to extend mercy.”
--The Rt. Revd. Chris Warner, Bishop in the A.C.N.A.

“In an era when women's opportunities and options were limited, she makes fateful choices that perpetuate a legacy of both trauma and endurance for her two young sons. This is one woman's story of survival and impossible choices. The truth really is different, complex, and beyond our imagination, and the book is an immersive, gripping read.”
–Teresa Kosciuk Rowe, M.D., Pediatrician, Virginia Hospital Center

“Having read Rita’s story, I feel like I have walked alongside her, watching her rebellious, irreverent, and wild nature blend with a wondrous hope, a desire for light to shine in the darkness…Caroline has retold her grandmother’s story in a truly amazing and challenging way. A crafty blend of tension, despair, and hope. Rita’s story is her story and the way Caroline tells it makes it our story, too.
--The Revd. Aaron Eime, General Director, The Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People


THE TRUTH WAS
DIFFERENT
One Woman's Journey
Through Occupied Holland
I. CAROLINE CROCKER


THE TRUTH WAS
DIFFERENT
One Woman's Journey
Through Occupied Holland
I. CAROLINE CROCKER




THE TRUTH WAS DIFFERENT
I. CAROLINE CROCKER
THE TRUTH WAS DIFFERENT
I. CAROLINE CROCKER

EXCERPT

It happened on May 10, 1940, well before dawn. I awoke to the sun shining through my curtains after a restless night full of distant shots and what I thought were dreams of military exercises. Leaning on the windowsill, I looked out, hoping that the sight of fluffy white clouds against a blue sky would push away the lingering shadows. What I saw were dark airplanes flying over an empty street.

Aaltje walked into my room without knocking. "You're awake. What do you think they're doing? Drills?"

"What else?" I shrugged, opened the door to the balcony outside my bedroom, and walked out in my pajamas.

Shading her eyes, Aaltje peered upward. "Those planes look so strange—almost menacing."

A neighbor who was also on her balcony spotted us. "War! Germans!" she shouted.

Aaltje pulled me back. "Put your dressing gown on."

I obeyed, but sluggishly, as my mind returned to my vague memories of the Great War. Marijke told us that millions upon millions of people died, but not much had happened here in Holland. I expected this war to be the same. So, why would covering my pajamas be important?

We went to the balcony outside the kitchen, where we saw our neighbors flooding the street, many gesticulating as they conversed. "Could it be true? Are we really under attack?" A projectile shrieked down from the sky and landed with a thunderous crash. Too late, I covered my ears.

Aaltje's eyes grew round. "That was a bomb!" Above the fading rumble, I heard her continue speaking while wildly crossing herself, "God won't allow another war."

"I hope you're right. Meanwhile, it's 7:00. Time for a cup of tea." As I waited for the water to boil, we listened to the radio. Kettles in neighboring apartments were screaming. Yes, the broadcaster confirmed, Germany was attacking Nederland. They were bombing our entire coastline. And people were making tea.

I got ready for work, but Aaltje's teenage son stopped me just as I was leaving. "Don't bother. You won't be able to get through. Everything is blocked off."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but they're not letting anyone go to Den Haag."

"Good." I was afraid to leave the house anyway.

All day, Aaltje and I listened to the radio, drank tea, and stood on the kitchen balcony. A woman with a band on her arm, signifying she was affiliated with the Air Defense, passed by. She had an enamel colander tied to her head. I began laughing.

"Maybe she's smarter than us, Rita. After all, we're out here, totally without protection, while watching airplanes dropping bombs."

At eleven o'clock, I decided to join the group of people gathered at the end of the street. We didn't know each other, but spoke heatedly of how we hated Germans. Suddenly, someone pointed upward. "Look! That plane has been hit. It's burning!"

We watched the airplane lose altitude. Everyone around me cheered as it disappeared behind some houses, leaving a dark plume of smoke.

My stomach clenched. "Those people just died a horrible death!" I whispered.

"Who cares? They're Germans."

Now feeling very alone, I walked back to Aaltje's place.

That night, she and I stayed awake, dressed and ready, terrified by every air raid siren. "How do you think the government managed to respond so quickly?" Aaltje wrinkled her brow.

"They must have been expecting this. Otherwise, our troops wouldn't have been ready. And they clearly were."

"Do you think we'll win?"

I shrugged. The following day, I returned to work. Meneer Huisman met me at the door. "Why weren't you here yesterday?"

"I tried to come, but couldn't get through. The Scheveningseweg was closed off."

"Well, there's not much for you to do. Just type this letter and finish the filing."

The second night, Aaltje and I went to bed in our day clothes and got up for every siren. On the third night, we wore pajamas and slept through.

That morning, Elsa told me that the chairman of the board, Meneer van Leeuwen, had sent word. He wanted us to put the most important documents in the safe in the basement, then close for the day. Meneer Huisman went down and worked with us.

"Is this important?" I asked, holding up a file. An air raid siren howled.

He shook his head helplessly. "What's important now?"

I looked at the pile of papers. Even putting them in the safe seemed pointless. "Nothing," I whispered.

Meneer Huisman pulled me close and kissed me before scurrying up the stairs and leaving the office.

I didn't like him and was pretty sure the feeling was mutual. He was married to an adoring wife, so why did he kiss me? Maybe it was nothing more than fear. I had no idea. But I was very glad I wouldn't have to go to work for a while. Honestly, I felt safer at home.

As we listened to the news, logic fled. Instead, I was at the mercy of the power and strength, the comfort and terror, and the unimaginable tenacity of the RUMOR. At first, I believed everything. The English are coming. The English are not coming. Holland has been flooded. Nee, only the East. The Germans can never win, and the whole world will revolt against this. The Queen and royal household have fled because they're cowards. Nee, they're brave and will get help in England. The rumor stream never stopped, and we believed everything. Fear eliminated our capacity for rationality. My critical nature repeatedly tried to reassert itself, but time and again, common sense would fail, and I'd defend nonsensical assumptions as fervently as I had condemned them in others.

The rumors of fighting in Driebergen or Rotterdam made my blood run cold. Then we heard that Rotterdam had been bombed and was on fire. I tried to push down my terror with denial, insisting that the darkness we saw in the distance was just a storm cloud.

That night, my mind was my enemy. A healthy person has a chance in a bombing raid, but not Freddie. I saw him lying under beams and twisted pieces of steel, unable to move, unable to call out. And so, I prayed, "Oh God, please let him be dead!" The alternative seemed a thousand times worse.

Eventually, I received a short message from Driebergen.

Mevr. Evenblij,

Since we know parents worry, we want to let everyone know that we are fine. Your children are doing well. Zuster Dermout en Zuster Deenik

Next, I got a postcard from Freddie.

My Rita,

I'm alright. Our neighborhood was completely spared. Hope you haven't been worried. Come as soon as possible! Your Freddie

I felt nothing. No joy. No relief. Only vague wonder at the thought that thousands of healthy people died, and a man, for whom the future would only bring suffering, was spared.

Five days after the bombing began, Nederland capitulated. I listened to the radio in silence, unable to grasp the fact that we'd lost. It was a relief when the streetlights came on again, but I grew breathless at the thought that we were now occupied and a German territory. British bombardment was sure to follow. There was no escape.

CONTACT INFORMATION

caroline@ramblingruminations.com

https://ramblingruminations.com