



Letter from Anny van der Sluys to the Schnell family, July 9, 1945

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Translated by Jocelyn R. McDaniel

English Translation

Image 1

ANNY VAN DER SLUYS
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THE HAGUE
TELEPHONE: 770.817

THE HAUGUE, July 9, 1945

Dear Mr. Schnell,

So that you know who is writing to you, I must first tell you that I was friends with Alfred and Eva before they married in 1938. A very close friendship developed after September 1940, when they had to evacuate from The Hague to Amersfoort. I then packed the belongings of your mother, Alfred, and Eva because they didn't have any more time. I continued to support them until the last minute. I often visited your mother in Amsterdam, of whom I was very fond, and did whatever I could do for her. She was very ill and I was so sorry that no one

could help her. She later died in Westerbork and was buried in Assen, where my friend Cilia Loots from Amersfoort stood in for Alfred and Eva, who had already gone into hiding. You have no idea what has happened here in recent years. Moreover, if I describe this to you in too much detail, it is only to give you a clear picture of the conditions in which we lived and in which Alfred and Eva were victimized.

It must have been in early 1942 when I arrived in Amersfoort for a visit that Alfred and Eva had already packed to be transported to Westerbork and Poland respectively. I was so shocked that I couldn't say a word at first. In the evening, I earnestly spoke to Alfred and persuaded him to defend himself against forces that ultimately wanted to end their lives. Yet he and Eva believed that they had no right to consider themselves better than others and that they also had to bear their lot and go where so many went. I can't tell you how I felt about that. I knew the Germans and German conditions inside out and I couldn't believe that they wouldn't see the future as clearly as I did. I also suspected that something else was influencing their attitude. Their financial situation was bad, and I knew it because I had helped them out a few times back in 1940-1942. I also knew how reluctant they were to be helped by friends. However, when I made it clear to them that their lives were at risk here and that they shouldn't be ashamed of accepting help from a good friend, we finally accomplished something, and I promised to help them until the end of the war. A place to stay in Amersfoort was quickly found, because the people were all very helpful. Hence, we obsessively packed for the second time within a few days. They could only stay there with the family temporarily because these people

Image 2

(page 2)

had five children, which could become too dangerous in the long run. Yet the man was very clever and after a few months, he found a new home for them on a farm in Olderbroek. He was later arrested for illegal work and was sent to Dachau, from where he recently returned home very ill. The farmer's wife, Mrs. Blaaw, and her unmarried son Jan, were very good to Alfred and Eva. The woman really cared for them like a mother. Of course, they had to help out at the farm so as not to arouse suspicion. That wasn't always easy, especially for Eva. This transition is very difficult for us. On the other hand, they had many advantages during this time, which many of their fellow sufferers lacked. They were able to be together all the time when many were live separately. They had fresh air and could move about freely, because it was so remote. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Liebenthal lived in a small attic room for three years and practically could not move. Last but not least, they always had very good food while we were nearly starving in western Holland. In the area where they were, not far

from Zwolle, many young people, who did not want to be dragged to Germany as part of the work assignment, went into hiding. Among them, Alfred and Eva made many good friends. I gave one of them, a theology student, your address upon request. He will certainly tell you about this time. During the time in Olderbroek, I visited Alfred and Eva and often brought them what they needed. These visits from the normal world were a celebration for the three of us. In the times that we experienced, you become much closer than in normal times. I was last in Olderbroek in September 1944. On September 17th, the landings were at Arnhem. The train workers also went on strike, so I could no longer go there. At the end of September, they sent me another packet of butter (because we couldn't get anything.) Alfred wrote on the packet, "See you again soon." We were really looking forward to the end of the war, which seemed to be near. I then heard nothing more until the beginning of November because the postal service had stopped running. Afterwards, someone from Amersfoort brought me a letter from my friend Mc. Loots with the awful news of Alfred and Eva's arrest. I immediately alerted all my connections. I even asked a friend who worked illegally German agency to call Westerbork to see if they were there. Telephoning was only possible through the Germans because everything else was closed down. However, they didn't even want to give the office any information. A well-known Dutch lawyer, who usually had a lot of success with such matters and could've helped us, also went into hiding like everyone else.

Image 3

(page 3)

Since I had also hidden a Jewish family of 4 people in The Hague, who were completely dependent on me and were also doing other types of illegal work, I could no longer risk anything and could only pray and wait. This terrible time lasted until May 5, 1945 when the Fortress of Holland finally capitulated. My first task when the postal service was running was to write to Westerbork and Zwolle. According to people from Olderbroek, they were taken there together with three non-Jews. The farmer's son was also imprisoned for a few weeks. (They didn't burn down the farm as originally intended, but they took everything the woman owned). After a few weeks, on June 10th of all days, Alfred's birthday, the dreadful news arrived that a mass grave had been found near Westerbork with 6 people in it, in which my friends could have been. I didn't want to believe it and decided to travel there to see for myself. A few days later (I first had to get a travel certificate based on a letter from the prison director in Zwolle, because you are still not allowed to travel from here to eastern Holland without permission), an officer from the P.O.D (Political Investigation Service) came to me for information. None of the six people had papers. Only one of the young people had a picture of his bride with her name on it. Through an appeal in the newspapers (this all happened in

eastern Holland, because we didn't even have newspapers yet), the lady was found and she told the police at what time her husband had left. By asking in Oldbroek, Mrs. Blaaw and I were found. On behalf of the P.O.D., I then traveled to Zwolle and Westerbork, always "getting a ride", because trains aren't running yet. After a week of searching and asking, I discovered the following information:

1. They were not registered at the prison in Zwolle, i.e. they were not there as prisoners.
2. According to a statement from an S.D. man, who is in prison at the S.D in Zwolle, and whom I asked, they hadn't been there.
3. They were still wearing the clothes they had on when they were arrested.
4. Their belongings were distributed by the Nazis shortly after their arrest (they took everything with them when they were arrested, except for one suitcase, which is in my possession).

They must have been murdered right after their arrest near Zwolle and probably by the squad that organized the raids. It was not determined how. All six of them were buried in a small forest on the Ijssel River. On February 6th, they were found there by O.T. workers who were supposed to build reinforcements. Dr. Bos, a doctor from Zwolle, whom I also visited, was summoned by the people but could no longer determine their cause of death. Once the Nazi security service found out what had happened, the bodies were confiscated and taken away and no one knew where. The grave was found for the second time on May 15, 1945. They are now buried in the Westerbork Cemetery. I was there and felt indescribably forlorn.

I also share your great sorrow, dear Mr. Schnell. I lost my best friends, your brother and Eva. How must you feel about never seeing them again?

Image 4

(page 4)

Our only consolation can only be that they stayed together until the very end and were not tormented like millions of others for months or years. Alfred said to Ms. Blaaw as they were leaving: "Pray for us, Ms. Blaaw, that when we meet our tragic fate, it will come quickly."

I don't know what else I could write to comfort you after this deeply sorrowful news. Their life, especially the way they always cared for each other, was an example for all the friends they made here.

I also want to write to Eva's parents. Your brother already telegraphed and knows of the news.

I hope to hear from you soon. If there is anything I can do for you, please write to me and I will take care of it.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish you much strength to bear this great loss.

Yours,

Anny van der Sluys

Some of their clothes were stored at Westerbork. When I saw them, I was no longer confounded.