

Rut Matthijsen

by Rachel Biddlecombe, Skutt Catholic High School

According to The Tribute to the Rescuers moral courage is the ability to take a strong stance on a specific issue and to defend it based on one's personal beliefs or convictions regardless of danger or threats to personal safety. Having moral courage means accepting people who are different from you and holding the conviction that one person can make a difference. (Rescuers) Each moral courage story is different, but Rut Matthijsen's story fascinated me beyond measure and has made a big impact on my life. He was an ordinary person who became an extraordinary person because he acted in accordance with his own belief system while living in an immoral society. (Rescuers)

It all started in 1942 (during World War II), while Rut attended the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. He was busy taking a few summer classes when he was asked if his dorm room could be used for housing young Jewish children. These children were escaping the terror in Amsterdam and needed a place to rest. Rut agreed and joined the Utrecht Kindercomite, a small group of college students who saved hundreds of Jewish children during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. (Klempner) His role in this committee was to transport children to safe foster homes. Because the summer was coming to a close and the fall semester was starting up, the members of the Utrecht Kindercomite greatly decreased. However, Rut stayed committed to helping the children.

Meanwhile, the Nazis were trying to take over the universities of the Netherlands just as they had made over the government. (Klempner) All the Jews were being banned from attending these colleges. When the time came for the Jews at the University of Utrecht to be suspended, Rut willingly dropped out. Caring for these endangered children was Rut's top priority.

The foster families taking in the Jewish children were, of course, taking on a big responsibility, but besides the danger of it, many of them had very limited resources. (Klempner) To help raise money for these families, Rut, along with a fellow member of the Kindercomite, Geert Lubberhuizen, began a printing press called *The Busy Bee*. They raised over seventy-five thousand guilders within the first six months of selling

things such as posters and books. Geert eventually moved the printing press to Amsterdam, but Rut stayed in Utrecht. After the war, the total wartime revenues of *The Busy Bee* were totaled, and the figure was close to eight hundred thousand guilders. (Klempner) Eventually, Rut went back to school and studied to become a chemist. He is only one of the many inspiring Holocaust rescuers who showed a huge amount of moral courage.

Rut Matthijsen's acts not only influenced our world during World War II, but also our world today. His courage influenced many people of his community to also help the Jewish children. Today, we can look back on his brave acts and try to help the suffering parts of our world. There are several people who remember what the rescuers of the Holocaust did and also tried to make a difference in our society. Having people in our world like Rut has encouraged several people today to go over to Africa and help the children who are greatly endangered. He has shown us how to stand up for what you believe in, strive for excellence, and make a difference.

When I first came to my high school I heard about an organization called Angel For a Day. This is an opportunity for high school students to take part in helping out the less fortunate kids of Omaha, Nebraska. I joined this club excited to help out the young kids. We get together with these children once a month and do fun activities to help them grow in their faith with God. Learning about what Rut did with the young Jewish children inspires me tremendously to continue making a difference in these kids' lives. The looks on their innocent faces when we work with them is one of the greatest feelings I can encounter. I could only imagine the faces of the Jewish children after Rut saved hundreds of their lives. The things Rut did for these kids only increases my determination to help out other kids in the world. I hope someday I can change lives of hundreds just like Rut Matthijsen did.

The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become. -Charles Dubois