

Matthaios-Michail Damigos
ERASMUS Student (Greece, Ionian University)
HKU Conservatory, 2020

Dear Truus,

Over the course of these two months I learned a lot about you. Most of those things were facts.

Collected, investigated, connected to Utrecht, the rest of the world, and to WWII history. This is the best that can be done so that we, living in this city so many years after your time, can get to know you and your life - as well as the impact it had in the world.

A lot of things can be answered by these facts. When you were born, who were your relatives, what did you study. Whom of your loved ones were killed in the war, what did you do for the Resistance, how did it affect the course of local history.

But I am writing here for the one thing that these facts can't answer, and you could only do if you were alive. And it's the following question.

How did you feel?

I believe it is something that we don't approach a lot when we are being taught history. Feeling.

We learn facts and numbers, dates and names, but we don't dive in to the actual feelings. In a way, it is hard - words can't help a lot, and the further we get it time from WWII, the less people are alive to speak to us about it. But we are humans, and human feel. This is what moves us, and ultimately what makes us learn. That's why we like stories, because they make us feel.

And I was wondering... what stories would you tell about what you did, and how you felt? How did you feel when you had to hide, when you had to fight, when you had to risk your life, when you had to spy. How did you feel to see your city and your country being occupied by Nazis? How did it feel when you had to actually kill somebody? How did it feel when you were caught and transported to the concentration camps?

And I'm also wondering... how would you feel now. If you were here today, in the same city, so many years after your time. What you would have to say to all of us. How would you spend your time. How would Utrecht look like to you, without war on the streets, and fear inside the hearts of citizens.

These are things that history can never speak about. But they are so valuable. I can only imagine what was going on inside you, and how would you feel now - and this is valuable too. Coming close to your story and imagining your feelings is one of the few ways I have to actually coexist with you. To not simply be a spectator, but get inside your shoes, have a conversation with you.

But it would be so much better if you were here. If I could actually get to know you, and speak to you. If we could talk, I'm sure you could teach us a lot. We would see our world in a different light.

Time and history puts us very far apart. But I get to walk in the same streets as you did. Only now they are peaceful. And you are one of the many reasons.

*I'm glad I got to know you,
Manthos*