

True Heroes

When I was a young Christian in the 1970s my faith was shaped by two classic biographies. One was God's Smuggler, the story of Brother Andrew and his daredevil attempts to deliver Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. The other was The Hiding Place, the account of Dutch spinster Corrie ten Boom, whose faith survived the hell of a Nazi prison camp.

I've read plenty of books since those days and interviewed many Christian leaders. But I've never met anyone who had the courage and character of these two humble Dutch saints.

That's why it was such a special treat for me to interview Brother Andrew in August during a trip to Holland. When I arrived at his home in Harderwijk, an hour from Amsterdam, he invited me and my two companions into his study and talked for two hours about his favorite subject: How to share the gospel of Jesus with terrorists.

As quick-witted and able-bodied as ever at 76, Brother Andrew spends his time these days traveling in dangerous areas of the Middle East. He has preached in 125 countries and has never yet met an obstacle he didn't laugh at. The same God who helped him smuggle Bibles past Soviet guards now gets him inside PLO training camps and Muslim prisons.

For 50 years Brother Andrew has risked his life for the suffering church. His typical ministry assignment is anything but glamorous. It usually involves slipping past border guards and surveillance cameras to find persecuted Christians, wherever they are meeting in secret.

In the 1960s he stuffed his Volkswagen with Bibles and sneaked into places such as Poland and Hungary. Today he meets with sheiks and Islamic imams in places we can't divulge.

"I am not an evangelical stuntman," Brother Andrew told us, downplaying his bravery. "I'm an ordinary guy. What I did, anyone can do."

I want to be that kind of "ordinary" guy when I grow up.

This man's courage is not just a case of bravado on steroids. After looking into his kind eyes I realized that it is God's love that prods him to put his life in danger every day. My realization was underscored when I left his house and drove to Haarlem to visit the clockmaker's shop where Corrie ten Boom hid Jews during the Nazi occupation.

God's love led Corrie to build a hiding place on the third floor of the home over that shop. Her act of defiance sent her to the Ravensbrück death camp, where she and her sister led many women to Jesus while enduring unspeakable misery in lice-infested barracks.

Six Jews avoided detection on February 28, 1944, while Corrie was being dragged away by the Nazis. During my visit 60 years later I crawled into that hiding place in Corrie's bedroom and asked Jesus to make me willing to endure hardship.

Please join me in praying for her kind of courageous character. It's not the norm in American churches today, where we preach a spineless gospel that makes no demands, requires no risks and expects no suffering. Maybe that's why we produce few heroes.

Corrie is dead, and some people today don't remember her story. Thankfully we still have Brother Andrew. I pray he lives long enough to see the Western church embrace the same selfless sacrifice he has modeled for us all.