



The Parrots of Moshe

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Prologue

The man's hands are folded. His head bowed, as if in prayer. What answer will he give later? What does he want to say, but also: what should he say? What weighs the most? Protecting his own children, not endangering himself and his family, or is there another option imaginable?

He looked at his wife while the stranger with the small child suddenly stood at the door and asked her: "What would you do, woman? You tell me."
She looked deep into his eyes, was quiet, and said, "No, that's up to you."

He walked out to the stable, took a respite for a moment, in search for solitude, and now he is in the barn among the animals. In the semi-darkness he sees the shiny cow eyes, he hears the pigs grunting, smells the earth in which the softly cackling hens scratch. Furthermore, he is alone with this difficult dilemma.
He kneels down and prays.

Then he walks back to the house. He looks around at the raised faces of those present waiting for him.
He speaks briefly, "Let the child come."

The two-year-old child arrived in 1943 and survived the war.
That man and that woman were my grandparents.

All real life is encounter.
Martin Buber

1. Huizen

Would he still be alive, that Jewish boy? His name was Jopie. That was his cover name. When we were little my father told us a lot about him and about the time in the war. He pasted the few photos taken of Jopie into the family album. That one photo of him, on the arm of his previous foster father, especially appealed to our imagination. That's how he became part of our family.

Now that I am older, I look at him again for a very long time, and browsing through the album the stories come back automatically. I remember how my father put us to bed at night and we begged him for another bedtime story: "A story, Daddy, but it must truly have happened, a real story."

"All right, go to bed, I'll be right there," he said.

As little children, how my brother and I, lying on either side of him, listened in awe to the most exciting war stories. Father told us he and his brother had to go into hiding in order to escape from employment in Germany, told about the raids and the Germans checking an empty bed for heat so that they knew if that bed had been slept in recently. He talked about the fears in the last years of the war. He explained about escaping the curfew in wintertime - when the world was white with snow- by carefully sneaking from one house to another under a white sheet. And about the V-1 and V-2 missiles that were fired from Nijverdal and north of Hellendoorn. Sometimes they continued to spin in circles after a failed launch. People anxiously looked up and knew that they would come down somewhere, but where?

Usually, after those stories, we woke up screaming from a nightmare an hour or so later. Then my mother forbade my father to tell such exciting war stories any longer. He gave in and switched from the war to an endless series of adventures of Pierewietje and Langstaartje, two brave mice who managed to survive in all kinds of precarious situations.

I put the photobook away, and notice that I sigh. What to do with these strong memories?

Could I write a story about that time and about Jopie? But I just finished the book about my mother and her family. Do I want to embark on another writing adventure?

However, I cannot put my thoughts and questions to rest. Would he still be alive? What is the story behind this photo of the timid, gloomy-looking little child, looking away in the far distance, as he leans on the arm of that cheerful-looking man. Who is that man anyway?

"Jopie's previous foster father from Enschede," is what my father wrote under that photo in the album.



Jopie in Nijverdal, 1943, on the arm of his previous foster father from Enschede

My family lost contact with Jopie. There is still an old letter in which he thanks Grandma. It is from 1963, just after Grandpa died. In it, he says that he has little time to write because of his busy daily life, but he is aware that he is only alive because of what they did for him during the war: *'... please know that I have in no way forgotten the days of distress, of terror, of great injustice where you gave me a helping hand without worrying about what could happen. That is why I am here now, there would not have been a here, nor there for me were it not for your helping hand...'* 11/18/1963.

A few more letters go back and forth. Also one in which he mentions that after grandmother's death in 1968, he planted a tree in memory of her, his foster mother. My grandparents are no longer alive and yet the story about Jopie did not die, it remained active. It became part of the family stories of my father and of us, the next generation.

When it comes to remembering World War II, asking who was right or wrong, who was a hero or a coward (and when will we have done talking about that?), Jopie always comes up. We were absolved, thanks to my grandparents.

The choice of whether or not to take in a Jewish boy during the war was a major dilemma. It becomes evident when we question our conscience and ask each other: "Would we, would I, have done that?" Then there is a moment of silence, the appearance of a half-hidden smile, raised eyebrows, a hand covering the mouth.

Well... I honestly wouldn't know. I'd want to, but would I have the courage?

Telling about Jopie was some belated form of basking in reflected glory brought on by the heroism of our ancestors. You could use it to show off, because after all in World War II, you were in great danger if it was discovered that you had taken in a Jewish child. You could have been shot dead for minor offenses. In the safe environment of a birthday party in the living room, it was more like telling about a good movie you had recently seen. A movie with heroes and villains.

Now I wonder, what heroism were we talking about? That of grandpa and grandma? They were very modest. They didn't tell us, their grandchildren, anything about it. Their heroism is mainly claimed by later generations. We, their descendants, belong to the good ones with such a story and not everyone can say that about their (grand)parents.

Who was the hero? Isn't there another side to it? After all, how do you pick up your life if you survived the war as a Jewish four-year-old, after having been someone's foster child for two years? And how courageous is it to give your child to strangers, because your situation has become life-threatening?

Soon it will be 75 years since World War II ended. It will be extensively commemorated, often with a lot of self-reflection about what happened then. The big and the small stories keep coming out. Who and what was right and who and what was wrong? And who missed the opportunity, because looking away was a choice as well. Is that an old sore spot, a hidden feeling of guilt?

How do we prevent something like this from ever happening again? Are there still lessons to be learned that are relevant to our decisions today and tomorrow? This automatically raises the question whether you, me, would do the same in that situation when all of a sudden a child needs a hiding place, a home. Do you take him in or do you refuse?

I make a decision. I want to tell the story if only to pass it on to my grandsons, now only nine and six years old.

In this book, I will seek answers to these questions on the basis of old documents, memories, interviews and whatever comes my way from day to day. I want to tell the story that started in World War II in Nijverdal with my grandparents and 'Jopie'. Two families, who did not know each other at all but were so closely linked by the political situation of the time.

I start with the search.

What became of Jopie? He would be almost eighty years old if he was still alive. What is his real name? Where did he come from? Who were his parents? Did he have brothers and sisters? What has become of them? If he is alive, does he have a family, relatives? Which traces are still visible in both families? What does or did this time with my grandparents mean to him, to his possible children and grandchildren? How do they look back? How do they look ahead?

Then there are so many questions about his Nijverdal period.

What can we say about the family where he ended up? How did he get there? Who is the man in the photo who, according to stories, brought him? What is his part in the story? When was that photo taken? What preceded it? Why did my grandparents say "yes"? How was their family situation at the time? How does Jopie fit into the larger story of children who were saved? Which organization took care of the placement of Jewish children in Nijverdal? Did or maybe does that period also have meaning for us, for me and my cousins? What is the role of grandparents in relation to their grandchildren?

Finally, the question of whether this story has a broader meaning for now, for this time. From the small family story to the big world. How do we deal with small and large dilemmas? How is the geopolitical situation now? Are there any comparisons to make? Do we know unexpected dilemmas that demand an answer, just like when suddenly a man or woman with a child on the arm turns up at our door? Situations that leave you breathless, that scare you? Situations that test your conscience, when are you 'good', when are you 'wrong'? But are that entirely opposite viewpoints?

Those who do not believe in miracles are not realists.
David Ben-Gurion

2. Jerusalem

When I was young, I did not know any Jewish families.

However, I did know Catholic families. I was allowed to play with them, something that was not common in the religiously segregated Netherlands of that time.

We were Protestant. Mother was from an orthodox reformed family while my father was from a more liberal reformed background. Their marriage was literally a leap of faith because they experienced a lot of resistance from the orthodox reformed church. "With two beliefs on a pillow, the devil will intervene," was a saying at that time. My mother's childhood pastor admonished her to marry an orthodox reformed man, with this phrase that echoed over a lifetime: "I'd rather bury my daughter than agree for her to marry a liberal reformed man." I knew the people of Israel, but only from the Bible stories at home and school. I especially liked the miracles; blind people who could see again, deaf people who could hear again, and the paralyzed man who could walk again. As a child, I learned the meaning of Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. These were beautiful stories that made me happy. The unconditional love of God was central in my childhood. I effortlessly got excellent grades in religion classes at school. I moved happily through life, even when we moved from Steenwijk to Amsterdam.

When I was ten years old we moved again, now from Amsterdam to Huizen. There, with difficulty, I got mediocre grades in religion classes. Different stories were presented from the Bible. On Saturday mornings we also had school. Almost thirty thick Bibles came out. We had to pair up and two of us had to share a Bible. The class had fifty-six students, all who had to take a turn reading aloud, especially from the Old Testament. Suddenly there was talk of a God of vengeance.

The little boy next to me kept a finger on where we were and with his other finger, he quickly looked for spicy passages, David and Bathsheba, Rahab the whore, Lot and his daughters. "Read it," he chuckled. "I'll keep an eye on where the master is." I felt a deep embarrassment. Then came an examination. Did I know who the patriarchs were? I had never heard of the word, patriarchs. They turned out to be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I knew them, but not as patriarchs.

And did I know the Old Testament books by heart? No, I did not.

It was as if I was suddenly a Gentile. But after six months, like any other child in the class, I memorized the thirty-nine Old Testament Bible books. I still know them all by heart, from Genesis to Malachi.

I first met a Jewish family when I was married and had two small children. We lived next door to a family with three lovely daughters. My father, who lived nearby, liked to visit us when the Jewish neighbors were at our house. They exchanged war stories. Of course, Jopie's story came up, with which my father qualified and in one fell swoop was a reliable partner, because of the bravery of his father and mother.

What kind of man was my grandfather?

Of course, I remember him and I knew him from my father's stories, but I did not know him well. I was grandchild number eleven and seventeen more grandchildren came after me. Also, Grandpa was sixty-six years old when I was born. He had a whole life behind him.

Now I wonder, what was it about my grandfather to be able to say yes to this difficult request, to take this little Jewish boy into his family? Did he hesitate? How did he know he should make this choice? Didn't he have nine children and three grandchildren in 1943? My father was not so fond of his father, who he considered strict but fair. They had a distant, not very warm relationship. I knew from my mother that my father reluctantly went to visit his parents, and that was mainly because of his father. My father longed for his acknowledgment or encouraging words. In vain.

My memory is that Grandpa Broeze was a quiet, distant man with a mumbling mouth depending on whether or not he had his dentures. Did he have humor? He had a friendly face, almost always a smile on his lips. But humor? He was serious, ambitious in his early years. I don't remember hearing him laugh, let alone roar with laughter. Grandma was able to throw her head back and laugh and wipe tears from her eyes with a small handkerchief, always ready in the sleeve of her cardigan.

My father did have humor. He was able to put things into perspective and view himself with self-deprecation. He got that from his mother. But my grandfather?

A memory of a conversation with an aunt, his second youngest daughter, comes to my mind. She said, more honestly than she wanted, "When I got home, I always checked to see if he was there. If I saw his Solex (moped), I thought: 'Hey, o no, father is at home', because then it was uncomfortable in the house. Then we had to do what he wanted. And if he was not there, was away for other responsibilities, then we, his children had a great time with our mother. She could laugh and was always singing."

I received documents from my father. Old notary documents, letters, a diary, notebooks, often with 'keep' written on it in his beautiful handwriting. That's how I became a kind of archivist of the family, even before I had time to read everything and think about it. I was still working and had no time to write, even though I sometimes corresponded with cousins from America who knew a lot of stories through their mother, my father's sister. In foreign places, old family stories are often better preserved.

What journey am I embarking on this time? Where do I start? When do I start?

When I finally had the time to write, Jopie's story was not my first priority. After a sad period in my life, my mother's story took precedence. My mother and sister died ten days apart.

Suddenly I was the only woman left in our family. I had always thought my mother was one of six, but it turned out that she was one of twelve children. What grief, hidden grief, because no one talked about six brothers and sisters dying, three at birth and three at a young age with serious brain damage. Hidden grief does not go away. Hidden grief grows.

How could that happen?

Through all the research I did, I found out that the family first lived in a small rural village, Lemele, where the first three healthy children were born. Then they moved to another village, Hellendoorn, when my grandmother was more than three months pregnant with my mother. That new place was toxic, with the most likely major culprits being the environmental pollution from the river near where they lived and from a tannery next to their house. The drinking water from the well in their yard was contaminated with heavy metals. If something is harmful to a small embryo, it is mercury and lead.

So the fetuses were deformed and died because of external factors. It happened before water pipes were laid in 1937. They had no clue why all this happened. It was only in 1941 that environmental influences were mentioned as causes of birth defects.

As I wrote the book about my mother and her family, I became aware of children's loyalty to their parents. I realized that my mother concealed her grief, out of loyalty to her parents. After all, talking about it would hurt her parents. I unwittingly took care of my mother, in a way that reversed our roles. I took her place. I became, as it were, the mother of my mother. I tried to take care of her by not being troublesome, by swallowing my emotions, by bursting out in anger when it got too much for me, by keeping my distance, by limiting contact, becoming pedantic, and when I couldn't handle it further: powerlessness and tears because I meant so well. It took a lot of effort for me to understand my own needs and not always have to think about hers and others. I became a parentified child. Writing about my mother has taught me a lot. I was able to become her daughter again.

That first book was written and now I wondered what I would do with all those documents I have from my father. How well did I know my paternal grandparents? Would it also give me more insight if I understood my father's life better? What was his influence on my upbringing?

A child needs safety and protection from both their mother and their father. I wondered what would I discover when I wrote about my father and his family? What would I learn from this relatively uncomplicated family? A family where nine children were born, all of whom were healthy and lived to old age. A family who made room for a small Jewish boy during the war.

How did all of this affect Jopie? What is it like for a four-year-old to leave a family, after living with them since he was two years old? I am also curious about what this does to the need for attachment, so important in the first few years of a child's life. A myriad of questions race through my mind. Jopie was picked up after the war, but by whom and where did he live afterward? What happened to his mother and father? Did he have brothers and sisters? Was his family discussing all the suffering of the Second World War, all those relatives who didn't come back? Or like with my mother, with her six dead brothers and sisters and like many Jewish families, the pain and sorrow of six million 'dead brothers and sisters', was simply hidden away?

As a result, hidden grief could grow and the subsequent generations would also be damaged. But was it even questioned? The reception of the Jews returning from the war was poor and shameful. The Netherlands were recovering from the war. The historian Chris van der Heijden explains in his dissertation *That Never Again*, the lukewarm to almost no interest in the returned Jews for two reasons:

- *They had heard enough individual stories: 'if you heard one then you know them all'.*
- *And second, the suffering was suffered collectively. The individual experience did not count. Community goes before the individual. So, there was a generalization about how it went. 'You' means 'one', means 'them'. Publications about that time were about 'public health', not about individual health.*

If Jopie is still alive, he is now almost eighty years old. I would like to get to know him, but all those questions that I would like answered, also make me wonder: 'What are you getting into? Hasn't that history been told a thousand times? What would an extra book add? " Then the lines of a verse of Leo Vroman come to my mind: *Come tonight with stories / how the war has disappeared / and repeat them a hundred times / I will cry every time.*

I decide to speak to my cousins. My primary sources, my father and his brothers and sisters, my eight uncles and aunts, have all died.

It is disappointing how little my Dutch family knows. One says: 'I thought I could always inquire about things like this, but now I'm too late.' Another says: 'My father never said anything, he was silent and retired to his study in the evening. Although, when it came to the war, he got tears in his eyes.'

How do I find out if Jopie is still alive and if he is, where he lives now? Chance plays a role. I notice that almost every time I am struggling with something, it seems as if I suddenly get the solution thrown into my lap. This time it came in the form of Joanne, the Jewish girl who lived next door to me many years ago.

Joanne is with the hairdresser, in her kibbutz Beth Haemek, when I send her a WhatsApp. 'Do you want to do something for me? Can you check the phone book in Tel Aviv? I'm looking for Jopie, that was his name during the war. He went into hiding in my grandparents' home and now I would like to know if he is still alive. At some point, he emigrated to Israel. The last correspondence from him was a letter, from Tel Aviv, years ago. Maybe, if he's still alive, I can interview him. His surname is Van Leeuwen, M. Van Leeuwen. I don't know more.'

Joanne recently came back into my life via Facebook, after almost forty-five years. She is a journalist, makes beautiful travel guides full of photos, and writes columns and articles. She regularly comes to the Netherlands, but she lives in Israel.

I was twenty-five, she was sixteen when we became neighbors. She already lived there when we moved in. We were a young family which to her and her sisters was interesting because we had two small children, a one-year-old and an eight-week baby. We lived alone, on the edge of the moor, and it was nice when Joanne occasionally stopped by for a chat. And maybe she also wanted to be our babysitter? Yes, she wanted to.

She attended the Maimonides Lyceum in Amsterdam, drove to school with her father and sister every morning, and came back by bus. I had just graduated as a sociologist from the Free University in Amsterdam and had experienced the turbulent sixties and seventies of the twentieth century. Because of our small children, I decided to wait a while before working. But soon I got a part-time job teaching Social Studies at a secondary school, a fifteen-minute bicycle ride from our house. It was the end of August 1973. The geopolitical situation of the time immediately provided teaching materials. The subject on television and radio was the coup in Chile. I dedicated one of my classes to it, of course. A democratically elected government was overthrown. Salvador Allende, the socialist president, was found dead in his palace. Suicide? Murder? In the later reports, eyewitnesses stated that it had been suicide on September 11, 1973. He declined the offer to flee and stood for his principles. Better to die than escape. The army under Pinochet instituted a junta and suppressed and killed each opponent until it was overthrown seventeen years later.

It reminded me of a sociology seminar on the subject: 'Revolution or Evolution?' I also remember the conclusion: evolution is a gradual change, revolution is a sudden change, which itself provokes so much resistance that the ruling power is replaced by a new ruling power that is also replaced by another new ruling power. Evolution has public support, revolution creates chaos in society.

How relevant is that even now?

Joanne stopped by. Had she heard about Chili at school? I had discussed it with my class. Food for discussion. The Netherlands thought Allende was a good president and detested the coup, supported by the American CIA. As a 16-year-old Jewish girl, she had been hit by yet another war. How does peace come into the world? Her history from the time she was born

was marked by World War II, although we didn't realize at the time that the protective concealment of all that war misery would pose a second generation of problems. Something was hanging, but you couldn't touch it. We know now that whenever there is 'something' in a family, a small child thinks it is because of them that there are tensions. By nature, a little child wants to move forward, like a little perfect professor, to discover the world. When there are tensions, the child becomes anxious and always looks back, to their father or mother. The world is not safe enough to go exploring.

Joanne and I often philosophized about the big questions in life and we were curious about each other's faith. What were the similarities and differences? Is faith a support in difficult times? Or is faith a support for every day? We have the same book, for her, the Hebrew Bible, named the Tanah, for me the Old Testament. 'Old' because with Christians it is followed by the New Testament. Both religions have an expectation of salvation. With the Jews, the Messiah is still coming, with Protestants Jesus is the Messiah. Joanne, the sixteen-year-old, looks at me with her big brown eyes and says thoughtfully, 'Do you know what I believe? He comes when all people in the world pray at the same time. Then it will be peace on earth.'

And now Joanne and I are in contact again. One day she comes to visit with a friend. They stay for lunch and after reliving memories from our past, she urges me to come to Israel. She's on a mission to rectify reports about her country. She looks at us seriously. 'Too many prejudices. Only the tensions and outbursts are told over and over again,' she says vehemently, 'the papers are waiting for them. The good news is left out. I am a journalist and write columns about whatever happens. I live among the Arabs, they are my friends. We make it livable for everyone. Please come and see it with your own eyes. It isn't dangerous.'

I hesitate, I would like to, but I immediately think of the stories of a very nice Palestinian colleague of mine, who fled with his parents, and now lives in London. Stories that portray a youth in a torn country, the impossibility for his family to build a future there. Would I dare tell him if I suddenly traveled to Israel?

But I also think about Jopie.

'Okay,' I say, 'if you help me find Jopie, and that works out well, I'll come to Israel and you can show me around.'

And now I have asked Joanne for help. First, I tried to find an address on the internet. I have one last address from Tel Aviv, but that letter dates from 1964 and I can't even read his name properly. The writing is a bit scribbly where he signs his name. Mop, Mopie, Moosj? No Jopie. I can read Van Leeuwen. So that's his last name. I remembered my aunts talking about Jopie's Jewish Orthodox family, who had picked him up after the war. But how and what were the details? I send Joanne a copy of that letter. She immediately asks: 'Is it Moosje or Moshe?'

I have no idea.

From my American cousins who were involved in my first search, a few years ago, I had already received reports from a Jewish weekly magazine with the name Spiero. Jopie would have grown up with the Spiero family. I've kept that information all these years. This is helpful. I give her a list of names, from an announcement of couples who got married, 'Moshe van Leeuwen, our foster son, has married Judith Buchsbaum', signed by Family Spiero. 'Wonderful', she says. 'Did you know in that list of names there was also a cousin from my partner who was also married that year?'

'What a coincidence,' I say back.

'Nothing is accidental in life.'

Yes, that is an appealing thought to me. So, we are back into each other's lives at the right moment?

Joanne adds: 'Yes, which is special because I don't remember much from the old days, but I can remember that I liked being with you. When you told me that I was already philosophical at the time, it touched me. It warms me to know you are listening to me now, but you also listened to me when I was sixteen.'

'Would you please try to look in the Tel Aviv phone book or something similar to see if you can find a trace of Moshe van Leeuwen or his brother Alexander? From the letter I can conclude that he must have been born in 1941 because he writes:

'Dear Mrs. Broeze and family, How are you doing? Thank God I am doing well. I apologize I have not replied to your letter earlier but I am very busy with work [....] first of all wishing you a Happy New Year. Yes, time passes quickly, I am almost 23 years now. After I left the army, I worked as a civilian in the army.'

We text back and forth. Occasionally she will leave a voice message. 'What else do you know about him? I will use Facebook, which usually gets quick results. I'll forward it to the Van Leeuwen family I know on Facebook, and send it to my network of friends.'

She sends me an announcement. 'Could this be him? I got it from someone who replied to my email. I will continue to search with the name Spiero.'

Moments later she sends me a funeral announcement, from Delpher, the digital newspaper archive. It announces the death of Mrs. Spiero. Moshe and his wife are listed under the name of Marian Spiero-Stern. Would it be 'our' Moshe? Van Leeuwen is a common name. It could be someone else.

Then another text.

It states that one Moop 'holds his Bar Mitzvah in the large shul at Wagenstraat 103 in The Hague, on May 8, 1954. Reception from 3:30-5:30 pm in the Jewish community building, Nieuwe Molstraat 13. Also, on Sunday, May 9, from 3:00-5:00, at home. Signed April 30, 1954. S. Spiero and M. Spiero-Stern. The Hague.'

Then a few more messages come that I hope are not about Jopie: one, a Van Leeuwen who only had brothers and has died and another one, a Van Leeuwen who lived in Utrecht and who also died.

It is encouraging and incredible that all those acquaintances of Joanne immediately answer and know so much. Someone else has another piece of information: Mr. Spiero was secretary of the Jewish congregation in The Hague, he and his wife and Moosje used to live on Molstraat.

We are getting closer and closer.

Jo gets a headache of all the puzzles around the research. For a change she sends a video of her daily walk. A village across the street from her kibbutz, a hippie-like area, then a herd of goats just crossing the road, all in the radiant spring sun. It looks peaceful.

Suddenly she reports again: 'This is him because it contains the name of your grandmother, he has planted a tree: Moop van Leeuwen-Israël, in the name of Mrs. Broeze-Mondeel in memory of my foster mother for my care during my time in hiding. It is a clipping from the New Israelite Weekly of December 13, 1968. And here's another newspaper clipping about his marriage stating that he married Judith Buchsbaum on June 22, 1965, in the kibbutz Chafets Chaim. Ah-ha, now we know for sure that we have the right Van Leeuwen, but now we need Moshe himself. I'm going to call the JNF, who knows.'

'What is the JNF?'

'The Jewish National Fund. They arranged everything for the trees that are planted.'

Unfortunately, Joanne finds a dead-end there; they no longer have a register with names, it has been too long ago.

Then another new message from an acquaintance of Joanne. A sister turns up. Rosie. This acquaintance writes that Jacob van Leeuwen and Bella Stern had three children, Alexander, Rosie, and Moshe. Mother Bella is the sister of that M. Spiro-Stern and she knows that a Jewish monument says that three of their children survived the war. But all in all, we still have not found him and we also don't know if he's still alive.

'Joanne', I write, 'Moop was in the army in 1963, is that a lead?'

'Hmm, I'll think about it. Do you know if he nominated your grandparents to Yad Vashem as an acknowledgment for hiding him?'

'No, as far as I know he did not do that. My American cousins would like to know about that.'

'Okay, I find it so strange that nobody knows him. This afternoon I called many Dutch people who live in Israel, people with large networks. I'm not giving up yet. I'm going to call those kibbutzes tomorrow.'

She ends with an emoji, sweat gushes from that little face.

What a puzzle!

A little later, a photo arrives of a clipping, all in Ivriet, of an acquaintance doing genealogy. He has Moshe in his database.

'This is him,' Jo writes. 'I just got it by e-mail from someone I don't know, but who was contacted via someone else, I think via FB. Here it is, Moshe van Leeuwen, born on May 1, 1941, moved to Israel in 1959, son of Jacob and Bella. This must be him! I found someone else who has phone numbers. I now have three numbers. I'll call tomorrow, then I will know more.'

Now we may have his phone number, if he's still alive.

* * *

'Are you coming to me, or should I come to you?'

I call a friend who lives near me in the village down the road and whom I haven't seen for a while. We agree to drink coffee, at her place, because it is freezing and she is not that mobile. I get on my bicycle. It is beautiful cold weather, blue sky, sun... you can smell spring coming. When I come out of the forest, I see the heather in front of me, and a flock of sheep grazes there, accompanied by a dog.

Instead of following the cycle path, which I usually do, I take a smaller path and ride straight through the herd. It is so nice to see and hear all those animals.

At the end of the herd, a sheep lies on the ground. I almost cycled past it when I see that the animal is lying still.

'Hey, what's the matter?' I say aloud to the sheep. 'Are you dead or still alive?'

I get off to see if she is still breathing. Yes, the coat moves up and down very slowly. Her eyes turn away, bloodshot.

What is going on here?

I take a closer look and see that she has twisted herself into blackberry vines. Not one, but thirty thick branches are tightly entwined around her neck. She cannot go anywhere.

This doesn't look good... what can I do?