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## LIA'S STORY Part 1

### PREFACE

Lia's Story, Part 1, is an account of the impact of war on an ordinary life. It tells the experiences of a young Dutch girl who lived in the Netherlands during the Second World War. It is a Christian story about some of the events in her life before and during the war. Like countless other people, that war and its aftermath suddenly and dramatically changed her life.

In some ways, Lia's Story is similar to that of the Holy Family enduring conditions under Roman occupation over two thousand years ago. Throughout His life, Jesus Christ revealed the glory of God; and now this facet of World War 11 - as expressed in a simple rhyme:



*A Dutch girl's true record of war,  
Life lived in Holland in the raw;  
But may God have all the glory,  
In the words of Lia's Story.*

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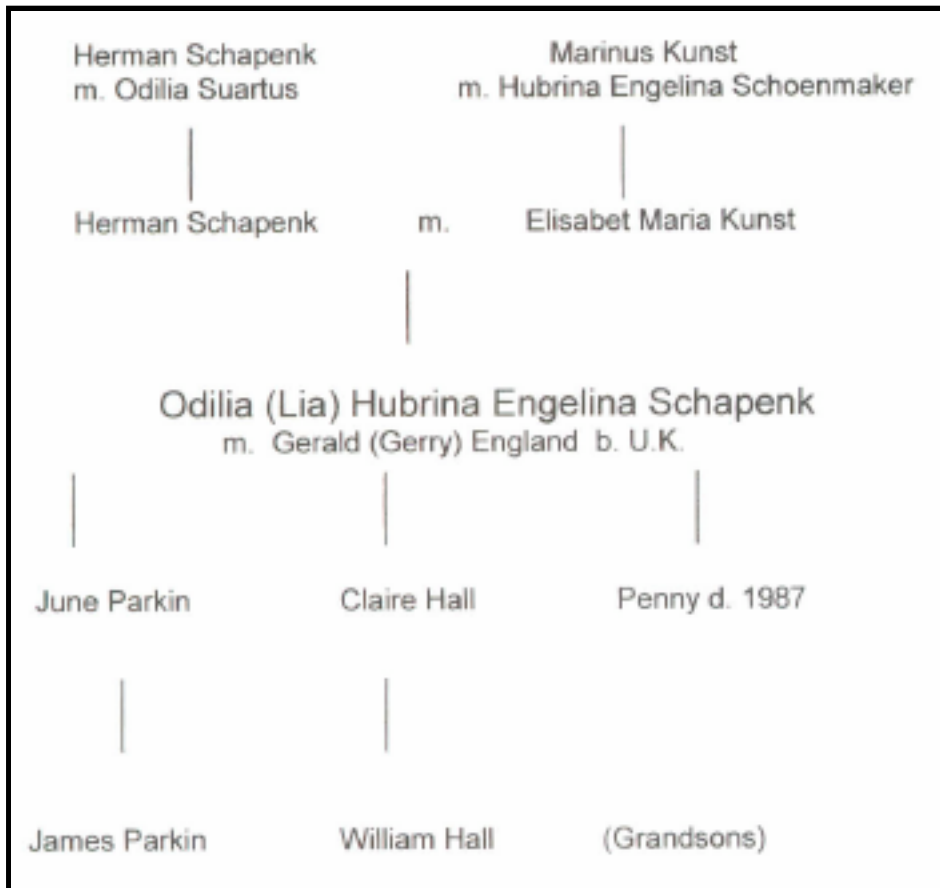
MAP OF THE NETHERLANDS



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Chapter 1

FAMILY TREE



LIA'S EARLY YEARS

Lia was born on 1st January 1928 in Breda.

The English Stuart King Charles11 lived in exile at Breda Castle.

Lia was an only child and felt lonely.

Her first little friend was called Annie. Lia loved visiting Annie and sometimes stayed overnight in Annie's home at the local grain mill. Unlike Lia's Protestant background, Annie's family belonged to the Roman Catholic Church.

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## "COME TO MY HOUSE"

Lia was named after her paternal grandmother and called Lia (short for Odilia). Lia had lots of aunts and uncles.

It was the custom in Holland to call out,

"Come to my house,"

as a little child ran into the arms of a loving aunt or uncle, to be picked up and hugged. As a young child, Lia remembers visiting her father in a Roman Catholic hospital at Breda for the emergency removal of a kidney stone. This was the first time Lia had seen a crucifix and Jesus hanging on the Cross with outstretched arms.

"Look at that man, Mama, playing –

Come to my house."



This childhood memory was the first call of the Lord Jesus on her life to follow Him, to be with Him in His home in Heaven – a meaningful experience to both Lia and her mother.

*Come to Me - - Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,  
for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*

Matthew 11: 28, 29

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in  
the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalm 23: 6 A.V.

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When Lia was 6 years old the family moved to Sas-van-Gent in the province of Zeeland on the Belgian border.

On Saturdays they sometimes visited Bruges and Ghent in Belgium.

Lia started school at Sas-van-Gent. When Lia was 7 1/2 the family moved to Chaam near Breda. At Chaam Lia went to a small Protestant School where the education was biblically based.

It was described as the -

**School with the Bible.**



The next move was to Sittard in the province of Limburg. Here, her father was Customs and Excise Officer in control of the Dutch - German border checkpoint. Their home was in the same building as the Customs Office. The Schapenk family lived at the back of the Office building. Their house and the garden were nice but the road Lia biked to school was lonely and rather scary even before the Germans came and invaded the Netherlands.

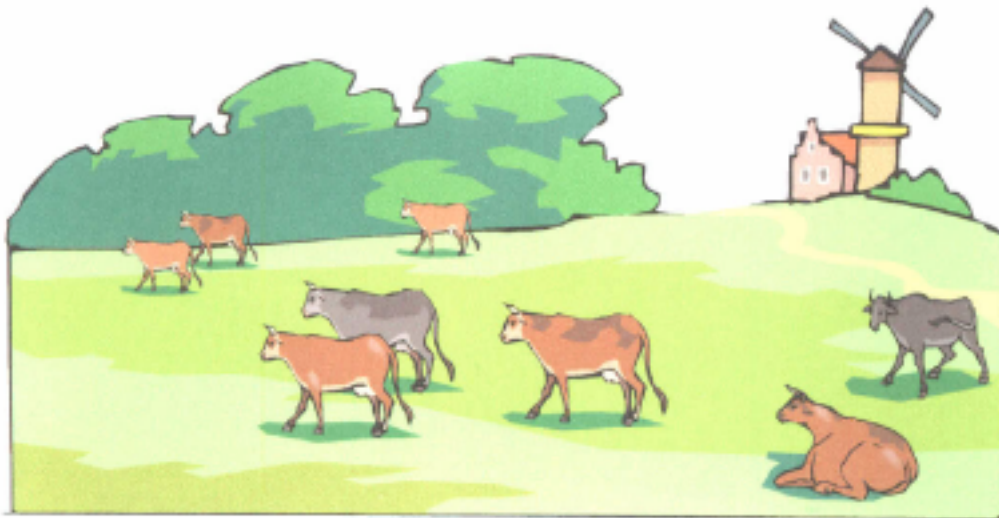
LIA WITH DUTCH SOLDIERS AT CHECKPOINT IN THE SNOW - 1940



## CUSTOMS AND EXCISE HOUSE AT SITTARD - 1940



By this time Lia was eleven years old and went to a technical school at Galeen, a journey of over 10 k m. across the hilly Province of Limburg.



Unbelievably Lia's old home, after sixty years, is still standing!

It is no longer a Customs and Exise Office checkpoint but a private dwelling, the house and garden largely unchanged.



Lia Schapenk had a happy childhood and was dearly loved by her family of many aunts and uncles. Lia's maternal grandmother (Oma) had ten children - six boys and four girls. They were hardy and tough fisher folk of the North Sea and belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church being strict Protestants. The Bible was always read at table after the main meal in the middle of the day.

### CHRISTMAS TIME

St. Nicholas Day is celebrated on 6th December, when St. Nicholas comes riding his grey horse and children receive many presents. They eat lovely marzipan sweets, German marzipan being the best. Black Peter, St. Nicholas' companion, comes down the chimneys on St. Nicholas Eve to leave presents by the fireplace for the children - if they've been well-behaved.

Placed beside wooden Dutch clogs there's a big, juicy carrot for St. Nicholas' horse.



CHRISTMAS DAY On the day remembering Christ's birth no games were allowed in Lia's maternal Oma's home; but there was a big Christmas tree with real candles.

BOXING DAY was a day of lighter relief with visits by family and lots of cousins.



EASTER was a solemn celebration remembering the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday; and again this was especially true in Lia's maternal Oma's home.

EASTER DAY of Christ's resurrection was a festive time. Lia remembers eating painted Easter eggs for breakfast. Homes were nicely decorated with flowers, especially tulips and other Spring flowers and little fluffy chicks.

Often in Easter week the family visited Lia's aunt and uncle in Rotterdam.



## Chapter 4

## THE INVASION

Disaster struck the quiet Schapenk household when war broke out on 10th May in 1940.

Lia, now 12 years old, remembers the German invasion very well.



Her father heard the Germans cutting through the barbed wire defences in the early morning. The German soldiers soon entered Meneer Schapenk's office and Lia clearly remembers a gun being held against Father's head so he couldn't move to use a phone to summon help.

The Dutch people did not really expect the Germans to invade Holland. There were few Dutch soldiers defending the border.

The Germans also came into the house just as breakfast was being prepared. Lia's mother was furious seeing enemy soldiers coming in and ordering the family about in their own living room. The first shots were fired at the nearby café where a German soldier was shot and killed by the few Dutch soldiers defending the border post.

Lia remembers that soldier, badly wounded, been given a cigarette before he died.

War is sad and cruel but there is kindness.

One caring German soldier, probably a family man, had an especially kind word for Lia, so very frightened,

*'My Child, be not afraid.'*

*As it is written in the Scriptures, 'Do not fear Daughter of Zion.'*

John 12: 15

*Jesus said,*

*'Fear not little flock, it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom.'*

Luke 12: 32

There are about 365 *'Fear nots'* in the Bible; and that's one for every day of the year.

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## Chapter 5

### GERMAN OCCUPATION

Life for the Dutch people was not easy during 1940. Day after day under Nazi occupation there was no remission. The centre of the city of Rotterdam was destroyed in May 1940 by the German bombardment. The Dutch government was allowed to continue but under German supervision. There was a real problem of loyalty for the Dutch royal family. Queen Wilhemina had a German father and also had married Prince Hendrik from Mecklenberg. A German soldier was now in charge of Customs and Excise but Lia's father was able to continue his job in the office. German soldiers and Gestapo policed the streets. Pro-German Blackshirts carrying guns were also often to be seen. Lia remembers seeing many German soldiers on duty. At Sittard she even saw Herr Himmler in an open limousine with his entourage in convoy. Lia's family and other Dutch people were even called out to wave! Lia's next door neighbours were two Dutch brothers married to German wives. The family was not really pro-German but it was unwise to trust anyone in those uncertain days of foreign occupation. Herr Schapenk's sister-in-law was in fact German and her family were indeed blind to the truth about the German war machine. War often divides families. Lia's vividly recalls seeing lines of Dutch, Belgian and French prisoners of war. There were columns 2 to 3 miles long of wounded men with bandaged heads and / or limbs, some on crutches, en route to prisoner of war camps in Germany. The German guards, usually on horseback, were cruel and used whips to move the many injured and hungry prisoners along faster. As the prisoners wended their way eastwards some were asking for water. Lia's mother brought out a bucket of water to quench their thirst but it was roughly knocked out of her hand. One French soldier begged for a piece of bread –

*'Le Pain, le pain,'* but it was not allowed.

Later that year life returned to a kind of normality. Things got easier for a few months after the invasion. There were no soldiers in the Customs office as the German army had moved westward across Belgium and on into France.

However, life for the Dutch people became stricter in 1941. Mevrouw Schapenk was very worried about her husband's health and eventually he was transferred from the border to near Eindhoven, 40 miles away. As a civil servant he was employed in the Income Tax office doing valuation work.

The family now lived at Asten just a few miles from Eindhoven. Some Dutch people were pro-German. There was the National Socialist Party of pro-German Blackshirts. Some Dutch girls joined the Hitler Youth Movement.



Conditions in 1941 - 42 got worse. During this time, the Schapenk household cared for Hubrina Engelina, their aged maternal Grandmother. She had been evacuated when the dykes were bombed by either Allied or German planes; causing flooding to the many islands of low lying land around her home.



1943 was an especially bad year in the Netherlands.

As a Customs and Excise officer, Meneer Schapenk's work included valuation for the local farmers. Although there was food rationing, the situation for the family was not too bad. Father was sometimes given a ham for his valuation work.

Lia's mother made her own bread, butter and cheese, being supplied from the farms.

Both the Old Testament Scriptures and Jesus in the New Testament state,

*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God.*

Deuteronomy 8; 3, Luke 4: 4

Jesus said, *I am the Bread of Life.*

John 6: 35



## Chapter 6

## LIA'S UNCLE

Lia's Uncle Adrian owned a taxi and garage business in Middleburg. Like countless others, he was rounded up to be transported to work in German munitions factories.

Despite danger to life and limb, he managed somehow to jump the train at Eindhoven. It was a miracle he was uninjured and not spotted by the guards on the train and shot.

Adrian carefully made his way that night to his sister's home, turning up at the Schapenk's doorway to stay in hiding there until the war was over.

Although Lia's kind mother took her brother in, there were no food coupons for him. He could never go outside into the back garden except at night. The family could not trust anyone in those days. It was dangerous to keep someone in hiding. Anyone caught hiding prisoners, airmen or family members would be sent to a concentration camp. Prisoners suffered severe malnutrition and many died from cruelty and starvation.

On one occasion, a local priest was stopped by two Dutch collaborators and made to get off his bike. These men, who lived in the same street as the Schapenk's, were known to work for the Germans and often entertained German soldiers. Lia's father saw the whole incident and went out to give help to the priest. Meneer Schapenk was bashed on the head by a rifle butt and fell to the ground. Lia's mother immediately ran out of her kitchen to give first aid, the cut on her husband's head bleeding badly.

Young Lia saw everything from the window and was very frightened indeed thinking her Dad was going to be killed. The priest had been stopped being suspected of possessing coupons stolen from the Distribution Office to be given to members of the Dutch Underground. These men and women were not registered to receive food coupons, refusing to work for the Germans. Both the priest and Herr Schapenk were taken to Gestapo H.Q. for questioning. From there people often never came back and were never heard of again!

Lia's mother, now fearful for her husband's safety, went straight to their Doctor, a family friend who lived nearby. The kind Doctor pleaded for Herr Schapenk on health grounds, so he was mercifully released. No evidence was found of stolen coupons to incriminate the priest, so he also was released. Many others caught and detained for questioning suffered at the hands of the Gestapo and found themselves in a concentration camp.



Later, two eighteen year old boys, Joop Martens and Frans Strik were taken for questioning. They were friends of Lia and worked at the Distribution Office.

Found out for supplying coupons to the Dutch Underground, they were soon dispatched to a concentration camp.

On arrival there, they were shot the same day!

These young men will always be remembered and not just by their families. No sacrifice is ever wasted. Lia often thinks about them.

When the Schapenk family moved from Sittard, the border checkpoint, to Asten near Eindhoven, Lia's father joined the Dutch Underground. He was an active member in the Resistance Movement. At night, he helped pilots, whose planes had been shot down, to escape to neutral Switzerland and so enabled these needed airmen to return to Britain. Lia, now attending the High School at Helmond, did not see much of her father at this time and had no knowledge he was in the Dutch Resistance. During this time, Lia's aunts, her mother's sisters from Rotterdam with their husbands, came to stay for several weeks as respite from the Allied bombing.

During the war years 1943 to 1945 the Dutch people were not allowed to gather together. There were many curfews ordering the population to be indoors by 6 or 7p.m. Anyone caught on the streets could be shot.

Even so secret meetings did take place bringing light relief, especially into the lives of the teenagers. The young people used to meet illegally in the back room of a big café in the market place. A tall and elegant teacher from Helmond came regularly to the café to give dancing lessons. Lia, now in her early teens, had joined a hockey club and can remember these happier times meeting with her friends. It was a daring thing to do to meet together, but great fun for the young people giving them some kind of social life in those sad days of wartime restrictions. If they were alerted to danger, they dispersed very quickly indeed.

Occasionally Lia visited Rotterdam to stay for several weeks with her aunt and uncle together with a cousin. They lived in a big flat in the centre of the city. When there was an air raid, Lia remembers hiding under the stairs. This was the safest place for a frightened teenager who kept covering her ears and wondering all the time if her aunt's flat would get a direct hit!

At night Lia's father and mother tuned into Radio Orange, named after the princely House of Orange. It was William of Orange who came over from Holland in 1688 when U.K began to be ruled jointly by the sovereigns William and Mary after the reign of the Stuart kings ended.

Radio Hilversum was under the auspices of the German Radio propaganda machine.

The Schapenk's Radio was carefully hidden away for the sound had to be kept very low as they awaited coded instructions from the B.B.C. European Service. At night they listened out for the famous drum beats of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

DOT DOT DOT DASH (V for Victory in Morse Code)

to the words of – "THIS IS LONDON".



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## Chapter 10

## SCHOOLING

During the war years Lia, like other Dutch children, missed a lot of schooling. Her parents were always too busy to think much about her education. Their extended family needed accommodation and the home had no extra quiet room for Lia to study. Also, a cousin six years older than Lia shared her bedroom. After the family moved to Asten, Lia went to a private High School in Helmond. She remembers having a long 10 km walk or bike ride when the buses did not run. This happened regularly because the buses often broke down. There was no efficient transport system in Holland during the war years. In Summer when the bus did not come, Lia along with some school friends did not attempt the long walk to school. Instead they sometimes went on a rowing boat on the canal between the locks and had some fun in the sunshine.



From September 1944 till the Summer of 1945 the schools were all closed,

## Chapter 11

## ALLIED INVASION

Lia was now 16 years old. After the landings on the French beaches in June 1944, the Allies reached the borders of the Netherlands by September. As the Allies approached Asten, the Germans in retreat moved the local population eastwards.

Lia found herself in a huge barn with about 20 other people. Meneer Schapenk being in the Dutch Resistance remained to the west of Asten with the Allied troops. There was frequent shelling as the Allied tanks advanced towards the German lines. One large shell exploded at one end of the barn. Mevrouw Schapenk instinctively spread-eagled herself over Lia to give maximum protection against the blast. The Burgomaster's wife at the opposite side of the barn was seriously injured and died two days later. Their daughter received facial injuries but survived.

Meanwhile, Lia's mother was so worried about her husband's whereabouts, she told Lia to return on her bike to Asten to find Father. Lia set off with out delay but her journey was interrupted by Allied shelling right over head. Lia wisely dismounted and hid for about 1/4 hour in an open field.

Lia was very frightened and cried to God a simple prayer.

Please, God, let me live! God did!

*What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in You.*

Psalm 56: 3

When all went quiet, Lia returned to the barn on her bike – like the clappers! Her mother on hearing the shelling was worried sick and wished she had not sent her only child on that horrific errand. Mother and daughter still did not know the whereabouts of Father and were very relieved when they returned home to find he was safe and sound. Herr Schapenk was now wearing his orange arm band, so Lia for the first time knew her father was a member of the Dutch Resistance.

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## Chapter 12

## RECAPTURE

After two weeks, the Germans made a counter attack and recaptured land they had lost. Again, Lia's family were evacuated to a farm, but this time westward behind the safety of the Allied front line. As before they had to pack a few belongings and take enough food. Grandmother was with them and Uncle Adrian, but there was no need for secrecy being some distance from the German lines. Though their lives were disrupted again there was no shelling overhead. However, there was one frightening incident when a large bomb fell on a nearby cooperative farm making a deep hole just opposite the grain storage site destroying much of the building and blowing out all the windows. Whether or not it was an Allied or German bomb was never known.

## Chapter 13 ARNHEM

In October 1944 Lia especially remembers the sky black with planes and gliders, flying towards the R. Rhine, for the biggest ever parachute drop over Arnhem. It was a daring initiative to shorten the war and save many lives, but it was timed too soon for a successful advance into Germany in that phase of the war. Also, the weather was bad and more German troops had just been sent to the area.

Some of the Schapenk's relatives lived at Nijmegen about 10k.m. from Arnhem. There was also severe fighting at Nijmegen. At Arnhem many parachutists were shot and killed as they descended or got caught in the branches of trees.

Arnhem was one of the bravest events in the Second World War and the hard fighting there certainly did play a part in the future progress of the war. The Battle of Arnhem will never be forgotten. There are many war graves in large cemeteries at Arnhem. They are all still carefully tended by the local people and especially by school children as an on-going tribute to the *fallen*, the many who lost their young lives.



At Tilburg a Scottish regiment fought on the front line and began the liberation of that part of the Netherlands.



American troops, all young men, were in the locality in great numbers and helped to liberate the Province of Limburg. Many American soldiers had already been killed as they landed on European soil on the Omaha and Utah beachheads on the Normandy coast in France.

An American soldier called Gene was only 19 years old. When he was moved on to Germany, he wrote to Lia as a pen friend.

The Americans took over a large cooperative farm where they were stationed; with big transport lorries and countless numbers of vehicles parked there for weeks.



As the liberation of the Netherlands proceeded, Lia recalls the days when regiments of English infantry troops fought in the streets.

Back again in their home at Asten, Lia remembers a nice young soldier called Teddy from London. While he was busy digging trenches, her mother kindly gave him a cup and water to brew tea for his mates.

A week or so later, Lia was given a new dog to enjoy and she called him – Teddy. Their farm dog was called – Wally.

British Commandos with their green berets had already liberated Zeeland. Grandmother was then able to return there and Uncle Adrian moved back to Middleburg.



Lia recalls seeing lines of tanks. These tanks had earlier been in North Africa, the soldiers already known as the famous Desert Rats. Many of these men were billeted in the homes of the Dutch people, including the Schapenk's home.

Dances in the town halls were arranged by the British officers and very much enjoyed by many Dutch people.

There was much rejoicing but shame for those young women who had been too friendly with the enemy. Such women were brought to the town halls and had their hair shaved in public as punishment for fraternizing with German officers and soldiers.



All the events of the Allied progress were recorded on Radio. It was indeed a time of joyous celebration for those parts of the Netherlands already liberated. But Lia's family was still worried about their relatives in Rotterdam and other parts of Holland still awaiting the coming of the Allies and freedom. After the liberation, the war still went on in Germany in the winter of 1944 and into early 1945, the closing year of the Second World War. Lia recalls seeing different regiments of troops roll past ever eastward, beyond the Rhine, on to the R. Elbe and the Baltic. The war finally ended with the signing at Luneberg Heath of the German surrender on 5th May 1945 – Liberation Day. It was a great feeling in the Netherlands to be living in those victorious days.

## Chapter 15 LEST WE FORGET

At the end of the war, Lia's life began to change again. Some years after the war, Lia married a British soldier, becoming Mrs. Gerry England and went to live in Gloucestershire, U.K., as described in Part 2. Nevertheless, Lia has never forgotten her early life in the Netherlands and the events of the Second World War. It's only now Lia's Story has at long last been told. The impact of that war on her young life has been hidden for over sixty years. Kept like a secret, Lia's Story has been brought to remembrance with a clear and resounding message for all

### **Lest we forget!**



As from the lips of a child, it's a cry from the heart for every fallen soldier and for all who suffered during those war years - including the millions of Jews. Lia has a great concern for the Jewish people, her father's mother being descended from the Portuguese Jewish immigrants. It was too dangerous to talk about this Jewish connection during the war years.

Moreover, Lia is named after her paternal grandmother, Odilia.

### LEST WE FORGET - TODAY!

Moreover, 'Lest we forget' is also Lia's Christian witness for today of God's love and a reminder of all the suffering and loss of life during the Second World War as in all wars.

Lia's Story is the Christian message of Peace.

Through God's salvation in His love and justice, it is the only answer to war; a Jewish answer, expressed in the words of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

*I give you a new commandment; that you should love one another, just as I have loved you.*

John 13: 34

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