

The Saving of Jantje and Henkie

Riding my bike and turning into my street I suddenly heard children's screams coming from the direction of the park. The screams sounded urgent, something you just knew spelled trouble. During the last few days it had been very cold and the pond had frozen over with a thin layer of ice. Every winter when the ice was thick enough to hold us, we kids fastened our skates and practiced our skating on the pond. The pond was big enough for beginners, but far too small for the more experienced, who would run out of room to skate.

Our skates were made of wood with a steel blade along the bottom center, which had to be sharpened continually as the steel quickly became dull. You put your shoe on top of the skate, adjust the leather straps around the heels, toes and ankles, fastened them and away you went. I hated the cold, didn't like the slippery surface of the ice, and soon quit skating.

My brother, niece and I am on the right.



The park at the end of our street was enormous and had a pond in the center that produced beautiful water lilies in the summer. During the spring and early summer, we picked the dandelions that grew in the grass and brought them home to mom. I have always liked the little yellow flowers as they made the room look a little bit brighter.

Sitting in the grass, we used to weave the dandelions into necklaces with our little fingers, by making a slit into the stem and pulling the next dandelion through the slit. We would have a beautiful necklace made in minutes.

Now however, it was winter and a pretty cold day. It had snowed a little and I was looking forward to a warm bowl of soup. My mom loved to cook and soup was her specialty and always waiting when I came home from school. As I sped quickly towards where the screams were coming from, I could see a big hole in the ice and my neighbour boys, Henkie five and Jantje seven, were in the middle trying to stay above the water, going down frequently and screaming when they came back up. They had tried to see if the ice was strong enough, danced on it, and fallen through. Grownups were now gathering around and discussing the best way to approach the situation while one man ran home to get a ladder.



I threw my bike down in the snow and not considering my own safety, quickly crawled out onto the ice, sliding my way towards the hole. I managed to pull the boys out, one by one, the water being cold, and once they were onto the ice, I pushed them towards the wall. I could hear the noise of ice breaking off right next to me. I still don't know how I managed to save the boys, as I was only a fourteen-year old girl and their snowsuits and boots were very heavy and filled with

pond-water.

The water was dripping from their clothes and I knew they both were extremely cold as they were shivering. I quickly emptied the water out of their boots and send them running home. The people, who were saying how brave I had been, now were becoming concerned and they urged me run home and change my clothes very quickly, as it was so cold. When I came home, my parents noticed my wet pants and told me to change them for dry pants. I then noticed how my knees were red and swollen from the cold.



Unaware of what had happened, they scolded me for coming home late and that dinner now had been on the table for some time and they were waiting for me. Kids were not allowed to speak back in those days and I did not dare utter a word in my own defense, so after changing into warm, dry pants, I silently sat down to dinner. Afterwards, when the boys'

mother came to our door, and explained to my parents what a "hero" I had been, my parents were very proud of me. The boys' parents had insisted in giving me a beautiful present, but I suggested to them that to have a picture of the boys would be a much more permanent memory. It was just great to know that they were safe!

During a school play to which the parents were invited, the President of our school asked me to come up on the stage. Trying to remember what problem I had now gotten myself into that week, and not remembering anything unusual I had done, I shyly made my way up to the front. Instead of hearing I had been naughty, I was given a bouquet of flowers, a book, and a teaspoon with the date of my brave deed engraved on it. Someone had saved me from drowning when I was just three years old. I had now returned the good deed in two-fold.