

IN MEMORY OF HELENA ELIZABETH SOMSEN-MEIJER

6 November 1905 – 25 December 2000

by Gree van Daatselaar-Somsen [53]

At our worldwide Somsen Reunion Lenie Somsen – Meijer [141] was our oldest family member present. Therefore she received a special welcome. She was given a beautiful bunch of flowers.

Beaming and sprightly – she was 92 at the time – she came walking forward through the aisle of the hall. And her beautiful face, which I had known so well for a long time, had practically not changed.

Graciously she accepted the flowers.

After a short spell of sickness she passed away in hospital on Christmas Day 2000.

“I do hope so much that I may celebrate Christmas in heaven”.

In her birthplace Bolnes Lenie came to know her husband, Gerrit Jan Somsen [124]. Lenie was a close friend of the large Somsen teacher's family there. Gerrit used to come and stay with his relatives quite often. And so it all started...

They got married in 1930. Lenie's dedication in the drapery shop in Zelhem was great. Those were difficult years in the days of the depression, it was a real struggle for life.

During the war the shop had to be closed. There was nothing left to be sold. Gerrit got a job at the food office.

In 1944 he was taken hostage by the Germans together with other inhabitants of Zelhem. It was a diabolical means of coercion, because the occupying forces did not get enough volunteers from Zelhem for digging. The Germans delivered an ultimatum. Facing death Gerrit was at the place where the executions by firing squad took place in Zevenaer. The first victim fell! Suddenly there was a message that the number of volunteers was sufficient...

Lenie managed to obtain a license to visit Gerrit in Zevenaer twice a week. She went from Zelhem to Zevenaer by bike with homemade pancakes and clean clothes in her saddlebags. In 1944 Gerrit was released, but afterwards he never managed to become the same person he had been before. He died in July 1951.

After the war the shop in the Smidstraat, which had been bombed and burned down, was rebuilt again. Lenie gave a fresh stimulus to the drapery shop. She herself took care of the purchase, at that time by bike. Until her sons were grown up.

In 1974 she moved to a granny flat. Finally there were fewer concerns.

Her long and intense interest in the country and the people of Israel arose from her faith. It was the country and the people of Jesus after all.

She travelled to Israel several times where she stayed at a kibbutz. Back home in Zelhem she set up needlework groups. The revenues of the work went to kibbutzim in Israel.

To the last moments of her life she followed the news about the peace process in the Middle East with great attention.

In March 1992 Lenie needed more care and she moved to the old people's home 'De Zonnekamp'.

She was a woman with a very large field of interests, especially with regards to her children and grandchildren and all those who were close to her.

At the reunion in 1997 we had a very animated conversation. *“Oh, how you look like your mother”*, she said to me. It was very good to hear that.

She was a widow for almost half a century. When she talked about this she used to say: *‘Without faith I would never have managed’*.

A strong courageous woman with a warm heart. For her faith and a sense of humour went hand in hand. *‘This year I am not sending any Christmas cards. You will get another sort of card from me’*.

Helena Elizabeth Somsen – Meijer, your name is written in the palm of God's hand. ©