

Vale

Dora Suuring, Dutch Resistance fighter, chemist, lecturer, teacher, NZAS Council Member: b. 10 July 1914, Amsterdam; m. (1) Sal Breemer, 1939 (diss), (2) Henk Suuring (dec.) 1946; d. 31 March 2017, Waikanae, aged 102.

Dora Suuring once said she was only a small cog in the big machine that was the Dutch Resistance during World War II. But her work as a skilled forger helped save the lives of scores of fellow Jews. She lived under a false name in occupied Holland where she helped to get Jewish families into hiding and arranged for children to be taken care of under false identities, using her chemical knowledge to forge identity papers, food coupons and passports.

Born Dora Polenaar in Amsterdam's Verhulststraat, she was raised with her three sisters. She chose to study science rather than become a lawyer like her father, and graduated PhD in organic chemistry from the University of Amsterdam. Before war broke out, she was a teacher at a Montessori school in Amsterdam. Her first husband, Sal, taught at a Jewish secondary school nearby.

As the Germans swept into Holland in May 1940, Dora's parents and sisters went into hiding and she and her husband tried to leave for England, but their vessel never left. Later, she and Sal were persuaded to go to a special 'safe' camp for Jews in rural Holland. 'The Germans offered teachers, lawyers, those in the arts, to go to this camp to be saved. I didn't want to go because I didn't trust them, but my husband was very scared so we went', she revealed in a documentary, *Lest We Forget*. However, it soon became clear that the camp was a way-station for the deportation of thousands destined for slavery or death in Nazi concentration camps. So, when the Germans started transporting inmates, Dora and her husband escaped through a hole in the camp fence.

She began her resistance work in Deventer, in the east of Holland. Her husband had left her after their escape from the camp, and she later moved back to Amsterdam, where she continued her resistance work.

Blonde and blue-eyed, she was not readily identifiable as Jewish and was able to move about relatively freely with her false identity, although she was nearly discovered on several occasions. One of these was when German officers were carrying out an identity check on a train she was on. Realising she did not have her papers, she hid undetected in the lavatory. Altogether she lived under four different names.

Using her skills as a chemist, she took a job in a baking powder factory, which gave her access to the chemicals used to remove photos, fingerprints and stamps from ID cards so that new papers could be forged for herself and others associated with the Dutch underground. She and her fellow Resistance workers also made false coupons and bribed farmers for food in exchange for household items and clothing and later, gold and diamonds.

As the war drew to a close, she was commandeered as an interrogator to whittle out those who had collaborated with the Germans.

Around this time she met her second husband, Henk Suuring. The couple began their new life in New Zealand in 1948.

Though she held a doctorate, Dora had great difficulty in getting this recognised by the then Education Department, so she started teaching in private schools, firstly chemistry at Chilton Saint James in Lower Hutt and later at Queen Margaret College in Wellington. When she subsequently got a position at Onslow College the headmaster was disturbed to find her abilities unrecognised and demanded that the Education Department accept her qualifications. Dora eventually moved on to Tawa College, then to Wellington Teachers College, and lastly to Wellington Polytechnic.

Dora joined the Council of New Zealand Association of Scientists in 1979, at the invitation of her fellow Jew, John Offenberger, who was Vice-President of the Association at the time. She served on Council for 11 years, acting as Secretary for three of them. She was teaching science at Wellington Teachers' College and became involved with the Association's lobbying to improve the participation of women in science. She expressed particular interest in research in teaching and in social responsibility of scientists (particularly teachers) and helped the Association's initiative to promote tertiary courses in Science and Technology in Society.

Dora is survived by two sisters, two daughters, two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. She touched the lives of many here in New Zealand over her long lifetime.

Sources: Anja Snowsill, The Dominion Post (Hank Schouten), The Press (Rodney Laredo), Chemistry in New Zealand Journal, Lest We Forget (AC Productions), Boyd Klap, RNZ, Geoff Gregory (formerly NZAS Council)