

# Because We Care SPRING INTO ACTION!

Join us  
Sunday May 21st  
1-3pm

Help older adults in our  
community get their yards  
looking great for the  
spring and summer.

Open to bar/bat mitzvah students and  
their family and friends!

Register online at  
[jfsdetroit.org/becausewecare](http://jfsdetroit.org/becausewecare)

or contact the  
Youth Initiative Coordinator  
248.592.2264



Jewish  
Family  
Service  
OF METRO DETROIT



## jews in the d essay

continued from page 26

strangers, was heart-wrenching. I can only imagine what it must have been like for my grandparents to give away their precious children to strangers at a time of war in the hopes that they might survive. They told their skinny little 15-year-old girl to count on it being six months, an eternity for my mother.

In the middle of the night of Oct. 3, 1942, after she put on nine layers of clothing and ripped off her yellow star, Gerard van Angelen put her on the back of his bicycle, peddled her to the Waal, and took her in a row boat across the river near Haaften, where Krijn de Kock placed her on the back of his bicycle and took her to "Pella," their farm. There she would spend the next two years and seven months. For the rest of her life, she observed Oct. 3 as a somber day of fasting and mourning.

With great fortune, however, the de Kock family was warm, welcoming, empathetic, kind and loving. They made my mother feel like one of their family. They called her "sus [sister]." The mayor of Haaften, Johan, prepared a false identity card, giving her the name Johanna de Kock. She was the youngest of the six de Kock children and they all doted on her.

Though she could never leave the house by day and could only go outside late at night amongst the trees to get some fresh air, she was, nonetheless, fully integrated in family life. If anyone came to the house, she would be sure to be in the attic, and one of the six children would be there with her. She was never alone. They purchased for her a spinning wheel on which she made lots of yarn, then knitted or crocheted it into gloves, mittens, socks, scarfs, sweaters and hats. This was how she filled her time.

As was common, when the Germans needed housing, they would expel families from their homes. One day they came to evict the de Kock family. But, after a conversation, it was agreed that the Nazis would have complete use of the main floor while the family moved to the upstairs, with my mother hiding in the attic. Those three weeks were full of anxiety for everyone. Had my mother been discovered, the whole family would have been murdered. These consequences were well known to the de Kocks before they took in my mother. But their deep faith in God compelled them to take the risk. They felt commanded by God to "welcome the stranger," to "provide for the less fortunate," "to shelter the homeless," to "protect the innocent," "to keep faith with those in need." They took their

religion seriously and acted as they believed God expected them to act.

After the war, a few days after May 4, 1945, my mother was reunited with her family. Miraculously, all five had survived, along with her Tante Hete, but her grandmother and all of her aunts and uncles and cousins were murdered.

As I grew up, her story came out in small snippets. We would ask something, she would respond until breaking down in tears and that was it until next time. Over the years, we were able to learn more and more, and ultimately she was able to share her story on videotape.

She spoke of her grandmother, and how her father's inability to convince his mother to join them in hiding haunted him the rest of his life. She spoke of her cousins, her best friends, who were "taken away." Whenever we traveled, wherever we traveled, she would look in the phonebook for the names of her cousins in the vain hope that any had survived. She lived with survivor's remorse, asking, "Why did I live when they all died?"

The silver lining was the de Kock family. They and my mother and family have remained close over the years. Thirty-four years ago, the de Kock family and Gerard van Angelen were inducted into the Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles on the mountain of memory in Jerusalem at Yad Vashem for their heroic bravery. Twenty-nine years ago, members of the de Kock and van Angelen families attended my ordination in New York. Six years ago, Edith was witness for the wedding of the de Kock's granddaughter, Krijna, to Bas Haghoort, and I had the honor of co-officiating the ceremony. Four years ago, Krijna spoke at my mother's funeral.

Fortunately, Edith died an old woman, warm, in her own bed ... unlike most of her family who died naked, screaming, on cold concrete floors in poisonous gas chambers.

Mom shared that since age 14 she felt she had been living on borrowed time, and she was determined to make the most and best of that borrowed time.

The truth is, all of us are living on borrowed time, and the more conscious we become of that, the richer and more beautiful and more precious that time becomes.

Near the end of her life, after cancer had spread to her lungs and brain, she said to me, "I've had a great life. You've had me a long time. There is nothing to feel bad about. You go and live your life; find happiness. I love you." 🍷