

Ronny:

“Based on my mother’s journal I wrote my first book. My agent sent the manuscript to several large publishers, who all thought it was a poignant story, but invariably commented that it needed more sex and more violence to make it saleable.”

Anneke, SBS Radio:

“In what year was this?”

Ronny:

“That was in 1990.”

Anneke:

“You would think that in that day and age people would know that that was not always the case.”

Ronny:

“My friends in California, where I lived at the time, knew nothing about the subject (of Japanese concentration camps for women and children). Then we moved to Hawai’i, and I had that manuscript and I thought, you know what? I am going to call Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema. I knew he lived on the same island. So I called Erik and invited him and his wife Karin to come to our house so I could ask him a favor, and they could meet my father (a pilot during the war, like Erik).

I said to Erik, I have this manuscript about the camps; would you please help me to add some more sex and violence please?”

Anneke:

“What did he think about that request? I bet he looked at you utterly astounded.”

Ronny:

“No,” he said, “I cannot do that, because it is an authentic, historical account. You have to leave it the way it is, with the original names and place names.”

“Anyway, Erik put me in contact with a publisher in Canada, A Dutch-Canadian, who was interested in my story and published it. The title: In the Shadow of the Sun.”

Anneke:

“How was it received?”

Ronny:

“Very well indeed. It had good reviews, all the libraries in Hawai’i, where I lived at the time, ordered copies, and it sold very well, even in the Netherlands. Many people there asked when I was going to translate it into Dutch. But that was not my intention. I had written it purposely in the English language because the subject of the camps was well known in the Netherlands, but not over here. My dearest wish was to have it published in Japan, but that met with insurmountable difficulties and it did not work, despite all my efforts. After twelve years in Hawaii we went back to the mainland and settled in Prescott, Arizona.”

Anneke:

“That’s where you live now, right?”

Ronny:

“Yes. And here, too, no one knew about the Japanese civilian camps in Indonesia. And every time I talked about it they said, “You don’t look Japanese at all!”

“And then I would say, no, you are confused with the Japanese detention camps here. Anyway, then I heard about the Japanese War Crimes Files, part of the NARA Files.”

Anneke:

“How could you get to those?”

Ronny:

“I contacted the owner of the largest POW website in the USA, and he sent me the CDs of two documents, Exhibit O and Exhibit J.

In Exhibit J in June of 1945, the Japanese camp leaders were advised to flee if they had misbehaved towards the prisoners and the other Exhibit specified that commencing in September 1945 all internees in all camps had to be annihilated without leaving a trace. As an example: they recommended putting poison in their food, or opening the gate so that the prisoners would flee and could be shot because of violation of the rules. This started in June

of 1945 already but the prisoners were so exhausted and weak that they remained where they were. On densely forested Borneo, the prisoners were to be herded into the jungles and shot when they dropped down and could go no further. That started in January 1945. But on (densely populated) Java that did not work. Weren't we not lucky that the bombs were dropped in August?"

Anneke:

"Yes, the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ronny told us about the role Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema had played in the publication of her first book. Erik was de "Soldier of Orange, War pilot and Adjutant of Queen Wilhelmina during WW II and one of the best friends of Prince Bernhard. The Soldier of Orange died at the age of 90 on Hawai'i.

Ronny later wrote a second book based on her mother's diary about the Japanese camps. We will hear about that next week."