

CHAPTER 2: ABOUT US

Who are Leen and Ria La Rivière? Knowing them better will help the reader to better understand what follows in this book.

LEEN LA RIVIÈRE

Born in 1946, son of a chief engineer of Philips. His parents were born in Rotterdam and his father had studied there. But just before the war his father could only get work at the laboratory of Philips in Eindhoven. A place where they could be in total safety during the war, while the whole inner city of Rotterdam was bombed to the ground. To be in Eindhoven at Philips may have saved their lives, but they took quite a few risks as they worked at night for the resistance-paper. After the war Leen's father was moved to Hilversum, where Philips was building a new factory. So they lived in a house in nearby Bussum, where Leen attended college, but failed as he was already, by that time, more interested in creative things than in mathematics and other academic studies. His parents were deeply concerned. But Leen decided to go his own way. His parents were of traditional reformed background (Leen's father was even an elder; and as this church was not narrow minded, Leen even went to a dance-class). His parents' contact with the evangelical/pentecostal movement was a great enrichment for their personal lives for a number of years. When Leen was the youngest participant of a youth-meeting of this movement he asked for prayer for the Holy Spirit upon his life. As he was so young the leadership did not know what to do (quite embarrassing if they step aside for discussion and you wait for prayer). Anyway finally they prayed for Leen and something did happen; the next day the Bible was not just an important book, but became something that speaks and so it has been since that moment. Since then Leen has read the Bible every day and every time when he opened the Book, it starts to speak..... and amazingly since that day of prayer there has always been a clear feeling of the presence of God. He is just there, walking the road with Leen..... As result of all this it made Leen think, it made him ask questions and it built his character at huge speed, and that has not been easy for his family and himself, especially when you are a teenager and you sin against the 11th Commandment: 'Thou shalt not ask questions' - especially not of leaders and pastors.

Unfortunately this movement turned out to become more and more manipulative. Leen refused to submit and stood up against this. Not that he was rebellious, he just did not agree and soon saw that the preaching, testimonies and theology and exegesis were not consistent. So at the age of 16 he decided to let go this circus of strange convictions and search for the truth.

THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

So as a creative young man Leen went on his search. As this foolishness of inconsistent convictions and weird theology was not the truth, what was the truth? As this movement had quite some negative opinions about persons who were thinking in other directions, it seemed to be a good idea to search in all those directions. So Leen went to read about other religions and studied them a lot. He found a lot of truths, but THE truth was something else. Next he studied psycho-analysis and found a lot of truths, but not THE truth. This pattern of analysis became very dangerous for himself. In time Leen moved to study literature, was there any wisdom there? And then came philosophy. Again many beautiful things and truths were found, but THE truth? In these years Leen must have read appr. 1500 books and studies, the last book was Nietzsche's 'Also sprach Zarathustra'. Nietzsche proved that God was dead. Having understood that so well, the 20 year old Leen asked himself the following questions: it is obvious that this God of the

theology of the 19th century is dead, there must be another God....and....it is Nietzsche who says this, so it must include the possibility that he is wrong.....At that very moment (Leen was sitting in the train late at night from his studies in Utrecht travelling home and he just had closed the last page of Nietzsche) it felt like two arms around Leen, like a tender hug and like a voice saying..... *'well done, son, you went for the truth and the truth shall make you free, I AM the truth'*.....an incredible encounter with God. It was the beginning of a rebirth and a year of mental repair.

But the outcome was, that it had turned Leen into a very strong character with a lot of perseverance. This became very useful later in the service of God.

In these years after failing college, all Leen could just get into was a 5 year study to become teacher. Here he studied pedagogy, didactics, culture, got all his religious exams, loved to win the debates with teachers. But school was boring. They discovered here how creative Leen was, so instead of going to the conservatory or the Academy of Arts 50% of his time was spent on creative studies, literature, musicals, exhibitions, art-work, performance, theatre, etc. as the school wanted to keep Leen there at any price.

Now and then Leen kept visiting the circus of that christian movement, where the leadership more and more got afraid of him (strange, Leen was just a teenager) and finally marked him as 'enemy of the state'! As his parents were big benefactors of that movement, they did not dare to throw him out, but they would have loved to do it. And when Leen felt in love with Ria, (who was the secretary of a famous evangelist of that movement), that meant war.....so they tried everything to prevent the marriage. But Leen had got stronger and had gained a wealth of wisdom and insight.

RIA LA RIVIÈRE

Born in 1946, she came from a farmers' background. Her father had a nice complex of greenhouses between the city Rotterdam and the suburb of Ommoord. Those many acres of glasshouses provided a good income. Ria could go to highschool but after a few years she dropped out as she had more interest in fashion. She got a job at the best fashion-house in Rotterdam and she will tell you how much she learned there about fashion, skills, clothes, the materials, styling, presentation, make-up, etc. Here she learned how to deal with the absolute secular, non-believing and gay-scene. Quite something when you are 16 and when you come from a very traditional, conservative baptist background (her father was elder). Her parents were wise and allowed her quite some space, but did not allow her to dance, as they believed that was wrong. Her brother in law, married to her elder sister was a baptist-minister and he caused her many, many problems as this man turned out to be a master-manipulator and extremely narrow-minded. Ria even worked a while for him, but broke loose, as she could not stand his terrible attitude and immorality (later it came out he had abused her best friend).....

To dare to stand up against him was a powerful act for such a young girl and showed her strong character and her sensitivity for what is right and just. Her brother did not want to conform to all this silly religious stuff. He studied to be architect and you can still see some of his buildings in Rotterdam. In his twenties he became a christian in a tent-crusade, where his brother in law was preaching.....Of course a great spiritual break-through, but it also brought this brother on to a path of manipulation.....

After her years in fashion Ria worked for a few years at the office of a known evangelist of a free-evangelical/pentecostal movement. At one of his youth-meetings she met Leen. She saw in the

midst of the multitude a young man, that was totally himself, one who did not use the normal christian 'slang', had his own opinion and when she started to know him, she found out that the leadership feared him as they could not manipulate him, so they warned Ria not to marry him.....even a few days before their marriage she got visit from a leader warning her not to marry Leen, as he would make her life miserable.....Ria and Leen married and even just before the wedding in the church the boss of Ria (who was the well known evangelist) did not want to perform the service as Leen and Ria had wanted and had agreed uponWith great difficulty a compromise was reached just a minute before the wedding would take place.....What a drama. In spite of all these painful situations Leen and Ria took courage and stepped into marriage. Two STRONG characters in a box. How long would that last? But great joy, soon Ria discovered she was pregnant and the first son Magiel was born 9 months later.

TWO ROADS

Well what is it like to put two strong characters in one box? Yes, impossible. Ria and Leen had fallen in love, because they were so different and they both had minds of their own. So this marriage was designed to clash and clashes were happening and increasing.....Just think about the stress-levels: a ministry starting up in your house (the first desk was in the bedroom).....,during the day teaching at school.....,next at home this other job for the Conti's....., volunteers every day to help....., Ria every day in the kitchen to cook for all those people...,The first baby born, soon another on its way.....The stress levels went through the roof. It was WAR. Conflicts were arising and increasing as nobody wanted to submit. After 3 years of marriage they were ready for divorce, as they were both longing for peace. But how to square that with God's calling? And why did prayer not help? And how to understand this as both were true christians? And what about the kids? But the worst had yet to come.....All was gearing up for the 'mother of all fights'....After a week of Leen working hard for school and ministry with no time for the family, through a little incident hell broke lose....After an evening of yelling and screaming and bitter arguments, Leen and Ria decided to quit and they both broke down together in deep weeping ending in a bitter prayer of regret that 'I' was not possible for true love and commitment to exist....'I' was the origin of the problem as 'I' wanted it all MY way....no longer 'I' wanted to manipulate the other or to make the other submit or blaming the other for every crisis.... This astonishing insight we both got in almost the same moment. We both prayed that and still today we believe that the finger of God did touch us with a ray of light - insight. That night was the moment of change. It took several months for repair, but we no longer blamed the other. After a while we were equally in love as years before, as we were so different and loved the differences. And our relationship developed into true companionship. Ria is not there to keep Leen busy or 'entertain' him, nor is Leen there to 'entertain' Ria: living together but as mature persons, one in diversity. Marriage became a two-track railroad, 2 strong individuals, each with their own unique gifts, each contributing in his/her own way to leadership, a true complementary form of unity and diversity. And the ministry has benefitted from that enormously.

UPHELD TRUE VALUES

There is another episode in our personal life that became of importance for the ministry. As you have read, Ria's family was quite manipulative. Her brother became a Christian and also became preacher and also turned gradually into having a manipulative attitude. Ria had a problem seeing her family in the real light. She worshipped them. Several fights during dating,

engagement and early marriage were rooted in her dependency on her family. Did she make the choice for Leen or for her family? Did she choose to worship the real God or her family? To see all in the real light has been a long and painful journey. Leen was convinced that unless she could discover the truth herself, nothing would help. So on his side there was also suffering, as he saw that Ria could not arise to her real greatness, as she was bound and blinded. It took 13 years.....In the meantime as a by-product of their ministry Leen and Ria started a home church as neighbours became Christians. That homechurch outgrew their house and they asked Ria's brother to become pastor, while Leen's first call was the creative ministry, but serving as co-pastor. Slowly Ria's brother showed his true manipulative nature, till it got so far that he asked in a private talk with Ria to put pressure on Leen so that Leen should abandon his ministry and submit all to him. At the same time it came to the light that her brother-in-law had abused her best friend. Total crisis: finally she saw the family in their real light, and she made a choice for herself, to have her own opinion and to stop manipulation. This became the beginning for the unfolding of many of her talents: writing, speaking, styling, insight, wisdom (she is the best scanner of people's motives). She got her column in our magazine, and that is the best read part of every issue. And after many years she wrote a unique book about this episode: 'Stolen Innocence'. It also came to light that her former boss (the well-known evangelist) who was always so against Leen and against all the creative projects had committed adultery over a number of years. The man and his theology were a total fraud.....We decided to leave that church as they got so extreme and fanatical. Besides that such manipulation is like poison. It broke up the whole family. Very sad too was the fact that Ria's brother and his religious manipulation had greatly damaged our eldest son. So much so that he protested against religion and its institutions by moving into drugs and crime. 7 terrible years in our own family were the result, the battle for his safety and life. Thank God a deal went wrong and that became the turning point for our son to start a new life. This was another interesting learning point for Ria and Leen. The clue is NOT we go to church (as that does not prove anything). The clue is that we are called to love each other, unconditional love. That love brought our son back. He is now a great fashion-designer, a great father of 2 dear children and he still believes in God, but going to a church, was not possible as too much damage had been done. Through all these situations we learned to uphold true values and to stand for what is right.

p.s. Now, in 2012, you may wonder what happened to this pastor, Ria's brother? In 2011 contact came again, we can meet now again in a normal way. And he rejects his fanatical statements and opinions of the past.... This too learns so much about having patience