Pass It On®…

The Man who Printed Hope on Packing Paper.

In the depths of World War II, a quiet Dutch printer named Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman proved that the greatest weapon against darkness is simple human kindness.

The craftsmanship of creating art and literature is often lost in our digital age. During the darkest days of Nazi occupation in the Netherlands, it was a skill that reminded the community that humanity still existed, and that poetry and art could inspire to a higher spiritual plane, even in the midst of war.

When the occupiers banned free speech and rationed paper, they thought they had silenced the Dutch spirit. They didn't suspect humble printer Hendrik Werkman could be capable of inspiring a nation with his simple printing press. Alongside a few close friends, he started an underground publishing circle and began secretly distributing beautifully crafted booklets, poetry and stories. All of it was printed on whatever paper he could scrounge.

Werkman used his art to lift the spirits of his neighbors suffering under the privations of war and the oppression of tyranny. He pioneered a technique called "druksels," picking up large wooden letters, turning them sideways, and rolling vibrant inks across the page to create beautiful landscapes of hope. When people secretly opened these unexpected gifts printed on rough packing paper, they escaped into an imaginative world of beauty and remembered something vital: Their dignity and their freedom could never be taken away.

But Werkman's kindness went far beyond the page. As his Jewish neighbors faced unimaginable persecution, he refused to turn a blind eye. He used his art to openly celebrate their heritage, printing a breathtaking series of illustrations based on Hasidic legends. Even more courageously, Werkman and his partner, Greet van Leeuwen, opened the doors of their own home and workshop, providing a secret hiding place for Jewish people hiding from the Nazi occupiers. In a time when distrust was everywhere, his shop became a sanctuary of safety.

Tragically, just six days before his city was liberated by Canadian forces in 1945, Werkman's brave journey was cut short by his captors. Yet, the light of kindness he kindled in the hearts of his neighbors could never be put out.

Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman showed us that you don't need an army to change the world. Sometimes, the most heroic thing you can do is create something beautiful, something that lifts the human spirit above the contention and conflict in the world.

Courage…PassItOn.com

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

The Foundation for a Better Life® promotes positive values to live by and pass along to others.

Copyright © 2026 | The Foundation for a Better Life®
All rights reserved. | www.passiton.com

Available under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License (international):
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/