



## The Story Behind the Story

The show billing for *I Do! I Do!* on page 6 reads: Book by Tom Jones, Music by Harvey Schmidt, Lyrics by Tom Jones, Based on *The Fourposter* by Jan de Hartog. What does it mean when a musical is based on a play? In this case, it means that the characters and story of Michael and Agnes were born in the imagination of Dutch playwright Jan de Hartog.

People often ask playwrights how they “came up with the idea for the story.” De Hartog’s story behind the story is worth telling. The time was 1943, the Nazis were occupying Holland, and de Hartog had just published his novel, *Holland’s Glory*. The success of the novel led the Nazis to try to recruit de Hartog into their ranks, but de Hartog refused and instead joined the Dutch resistance.

When threatened with imprisonment, de Hartog went into hiding in a home for the aged, while he waited for word of his turn to be smuggled to England by the underground route, via Belgium, France, and Spain to Gibraltar. He lived alone for several months in a room he could never leave. His food was delivered on a tray. The room was bare except for a fourposter bed.

“I looked at that fourposter, [and] thought of taking it apart and putting it back together again,” he later explained. “Then I thought, I wonder what that fourposter has seen?”

De Hartog imagined Michael and Agnes, he said, because theirs was “a life I would have loved to have, and which I did not think I was going to have, because the mortality rate on the route that I was about to take was eighty percent.” He wrote of romance, marriage, raising a family, overcoming obstacles, and finding lifelong love because as a young man who thought he may never grow old, these were his dreams, and they helped him survive.

De Hartog finished the play, and two days later, departed for England, leaving the play in a linen cupboard. How fortunate that the manuscript survived, and more importantly, that de Hartog survived, and eventually married and moved to the United States, where he continued to write and dedicate himself to social causes until his death at the age of 88.

Where do stories come from? Necessity, dreams, hope, imagination. We tell stories to survive.