

## A Humorous Anniversary Tale:

### Nick & Rinnie's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration May 2009

This speech is different from any other piece on this Boeriana page. It is a humorous speech given at the 50th wedding anniversary celebration of a friend. It is included here simply to make you think I am not *always* busy with serious things; sometimes I enjoy attempts at humour. Whether I succeeded or not, is for you, the reader, to judge. However, I do want you to know that the audience did occasionally respond with a guffaw and, sometimes, even with genuine laughter.

It's an anniversary today. That's what we're here to celebrate. Well, some of us anyway. Probably most of us are here because we get a free meal on the house. Come on, let's be honest about this. For Dutchmen, there's few things that draw us more easily than a free meal. But, welcome anyway, to all of you, whether you come to celebrate an anniversary or a free meal—or perhaps even both! I guess they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

#### *Nick and Rinnie and Their Friends*

There's a reason I suspect some of you have come for the free meal. I simply do not believe that Nick and Rinnie have this many friends who would come only to celebrate their anniversary without any ulterior motives like this free meal. There's no way that all of us are their friends. Why do I say that? Well, I have a perfectly good reason. The family asked *me* to "say something" about Nick. Me. John Boer.

But how can that be? I knew Nick for only a few short years during my teens in the 50s. From around 1952-1960. Then I vamoosed. I got out of here and after that I only visited Port Alberni, incl. Nick & Rinnie, a couple of days every two or three years. That's it. Now I am in Vancouver and we see each other a little more frequently. But for 43 years I was far away. Mostly in Nigeria, some 15 years in MI and a couple of years in Europe. Now, that being the case, there should be many people here in PA who know a lot more about Nick and Rinnie than I do. There *should be*—but apparently there are not.

So, the family turned to me, probably because the rest of you don't know them. You are not their friends. You're not close to them. You don't know any of their stories. I may know only a little, but you know even less.

That's one possible scenario and that's why I guess that most of you are here just for the freeby, not because you're friends of the Hoekstras. How can you be friends to people you don't know!

But there could be another reason, an *opposite* reason. Probably, I have said to myself for some weeks, the family asked me, precisely because I know little or nothing about the kind of things this couple pulled off over the years. I am sure you could tell all kinds of spicy stories. So, the family wants to protect this elderly dude and dudess from embarrassment. Remembering especially what Nick was like during my Port Alberni days, I can well imagine that this could be at least partly the reason for inviting me to stand before you. It's an attempted cover up. To leave sleeping dogs lie.

So, there you have it—two opposite reasons, two opposite possibilities why I should be standing here in front of you.

Actually, I am not sure this last expression “let sleeping dogs lie,” fits the occasion. Sleeping dog? You must not have heard Nick growl! Sleeping dog—that expression hardly does it for Nick! Just ask his boys.

***My Assignment: Pile on the Dirt***

And that brings me to the last part of this game I am involving you in of surmising and guessing why I am picked to deliver this oration. It was only a little over two weeks ago that Frank Jr. here called me to discuss this part of the programme. He firmly commanded me, “And pile on the dirt!” Yes, that's what he said. “Pile on the dirt!”

Now, can you imagine an adult son, who was brought up in our fine Christian tradition, to expect, no, *command* a senior like me to pile the dirt on his very own father? Can you imagine *that*? His old Father. The man was never caught drinking or drunk driving or doing drugs. Never caught stealing. Never set a foot in jail. Always paid his bills. What kind of dirt is there to pile up on him? I've been scratching my head ever since. But it does go to show that my theory of cover up was dead wrong. I am expected

to pile on the dirt, not cover it up, not sweep it under the carpet nor leave sleeping dogs lie. But to *pile* it on. To expose!

Well, Frank, if you want to have the dirt piled up, you're going to have to do it yourself. Go ahead. This is the one public occasion you can get away with it and people laugh it off. The *one and only* time. Any other time, you will be called in by the Church Council for disrespecting your father. It's also the *only* time you can safely disregard the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment without fearing that the Dept. of Internal Affairs will exile you from Canada.

So can I not think of anything that might be considered dirt? Well, Nick did have his rough edges. Provoke him enough and this would quite readily show up. But what do you expect from a hot-blooded Frisian young man?

While this was definitely true during the 1950s, I have a feeling this has worn off somewhat, though it could be that the next generation would have something to say about that. Hey, with a woman like Rinnie at the helm, what would you expect?

You heard what I just said: at the *helm!* She has her own female tools, sometimes called "wiles," with which she would sandpaper the roughness away till it smoothed over a bit. During our occasional visits, whenever the old free rumbunctious Nick would pop up, I saw her looking at him with that female wile called smile and with a certain expression in her eyes that Nick would immediately pull back and with a guffaw or growl tone down. The growl would be to convince himself and me he was in charge. Well, of course he was. Which Frisian worthy of the name would admit to being managed by a woman, even if she is Frisian herself?

### ***Two Travel Stories***

But there were a few incidents that I want you to know about Nick. Now, it's true that I have a bad memory as far as concrete facts and specific incidents are concerned. You see, as a small child, I had a serious brain concussion twice. I was in a coma and out in other ways for quite some time. I use that as an excuse for every lapse in memory and for every slight mistake or exaggeration that pop up in my stories. But as I remember them... here goes and without taking responsibility for the accuracy of all the facts. We're dealing with an emancipated view of the facts here.

### *A Bear Tale*

Twice Nick had a chance to demonstrate the brave Frisian that he should have been, but twice he let me down. I must have been around 19 and, like Nick for all these years, working at the Plywood plant. We had our annual 2-week vacation. Nick had a car. A beautiful 55 Pontiac with the new fashioned wrap around windshield. So the four of us—Al, Jim, Nick and I—decided to go to Yellowstone Park. A world trip for us in those days. In Nick's Pontiac and tenting along the way—one small tent for the 4 of us.

One night we stopped in Washington or Idaho in the middle of nowhere along a two-lane highway and set up our tent just a short distance off the road. We tried to sleep when suddenly we heard a rustling sound outside. An irregular rush we could not explain. Yes, there were the wind and the trees, the grass and all that, but somehow they could not account for this sound, even though the wind was quite strong. We whispered to each other in apprehension that quickly turned to fear. What could that be? Since we had seen signs along the road that warned of bears, we came to the frightful hypothesis that there could be a bear outside our tent and we could just picture this bear getting ready for a sudden attack on the tent. This was getting dangerous. Someone should go outside and check it out. But do you think our big Nick, the oldest and biggest, would take it upon him? No sirreeh. Not this Frisian. Let the Groningers take care of it. And I being the oldest of the two Groningers, was appointed to the job. I fearfully opened the tent flap slightly and peeked out. I saw no bear. I opened it further and stuck my head outside. Still no bear. Now I got a little braver and on hand and knees crawled through the tent opening to the outside—still no bear. Then, continuing but now in a crouch, I slowly made my way around the tent—No bear!

But then who or what made this suspicious noise? This rustling? Ah, I saw the culprit. One of us—and I am sure it was our brave Nick—had left the toilet paper outside and the wind was playing with it, slowly unraveling it in the grass. So much for the bear and so much for a brave Frisian.

### *A Dog Event*

Another brave story, also in a traveling context. We, Fran and I, were in Grand Rapids, MI, for a missionary furlough or home service period. We lived in a house provided by the mission. The house had a small backyard surrounded by a fence. Nick and Rinnie were visiting us there. It was a dark Sunday evening when we heard the yelping of a dog. We ignored it at first, but as it got louder, we were forced to take action. The sound came from the fenced in backyard. So Nick and I went to check out the situation. And sure enough, there was a good-sized dog very agitated. He wanted to get out but could find no way. So we opened the narrow gate and encouraged him to leave. No way. He refused to budge from his corner opposite to the open gate.

Since the noise was ever increasing, we felt the need to get him out. But every time we took a step towards him, his yelp would turn into a fierce and threatening growl. He was in fact telling us to keep away. He wanted no help from us. But we could not leave him there either.

We should have just walked away with the gate left open. The dog would probably have found its own way out. But Nick, being the older and thus the wiser, suggested we use a stick to prod him out of his corner towards the gate. As soon as the dog saw the stick, his hair stood up and he looked ready to make a plunge at us. Nick chickened out. He threw the stick at me and retreated into the house, once again leaving me with the dirty and dangerous task of getting the dog out. At this point the facts become a bit cloudy, but the end of the story is that the dog did finally leave through the gate. And once again I emerged the hero Groningers are by nature. And the Frisian? Well, you can draw your own conclusion. But as I said the facts are not altogether clear anymore! Remember my concussions. Do take that disclaimer seriously.

### ***Nick the Sportman***

But not everything about Nick is that shady. There are also some good things about him that I want to share. You all know Nick is great at sports. I am quite the opposite. Though I enjoy watching some games, I am really quite clumsy at playing *any* sport. Always have been. But ever since our student days and throughout our 30 years in Nigeria, Fran and I played a lot of tennis. Fran usually beat me. It was one game Nick had never played.

So, during one of our visits, we thought we would teach him and then humiliate him by beating him in his first game. He just asked a few questions about the game. Watched us do it for a few minutes. Then he took the racket and decided to take on the both of us—one against two. Of course, we were happy to take up this challenge and of course, we would beat him.

But you know what? He beat us the very first game! Unbelievable! I never got over it. I won't even get near him with a racket or any other piece of sports equipment. Nick is the true master.

### ***Our Friendship and Differences***

And another thing we both appreciate about Nick and Rinnie. They have been good friends—good enough to spend a lot of money and time to see us. Not only do they visit us occasionally in Vancouver now that we are close, but they also visited us in Grand Rapids, MI, and then they even took the effort to visit us in Jos, Nigeria. So we have always appreciated these clear signs of solid friendship.

We don't always see eye to eye on things. We have very different interests. I am a writer and have published close to 20 books, but Nick has never read even one of them. In fact, Nick simply does not read anything, not even the papers, I believe. I at least *pretend* to be interested in his sports, but he does not even pretend to be interested in my books. But we're friends! Our friendship supercedes these differences and we are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Very different, but close friends.

### ***Closing Comments***

If you quickly review all I have said about Nick and Rinnie, you will conclude that I really did not fulfill my assignment very well. There really was no dirt to report, let alone, pile on. A lapse in bravery, perhaps, but no lapse in virtue. You could conclude that the cover up is complete. The non-stated purpose for my assignment has been accomplished. It remains for Frank and his siblings to pile it on—and I challenge them seriously!

And with that, Nick and Rinnie—**happy anniversary to you.** We are here to celebrate—and to eat. God bless you two for many years to come. I pray that I can stand here for your 60<sup>th</sup>. Thank you all for your patience.