

**EVERY SQUARE INCH—A MISSIONARY MEMOIR**

**THE LIFE AND MISSION OF**

**JAN & FRANCES BOER**

**Volumes 1-5**

*by*

**Jan H. Boer & Frances A. Boer-Prins**

-----VOLUME 1-----

***OUR EARLY STORY***

***1938-1966***

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**Every Square Inch—A Missionary Memoir  
The Life and Mission of Jan and Frances Boer  
1938-2014**

**Volumes 1-5**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT AUTHORS AT:**

**E-mail: Boerjf @ hotmail.com  
Website: www. SocialTheology.com  
Tel. (604) 646-8016**

**or**

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*“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”*

Quote from Kuyper's inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University, October 20, 1880.



## DEDICATION

### We dedicate this Memoir

*To our Parents:*

*Wiebe Boer and Ellie Boer-Veninga*

*Tjalling Prins and Jantje Prins-Boersma*

*For having brought us up in the Faith of Old*

*For their sweat and tears to bring up our large families*

*For their courage to move their large families*

*to an unknown continent*

*without having the requisite language, education, wanted skills or money*

*at their advanced age*

*To ourselves for having*

*stood by each other, supported and inspired each other,*

*and both lived and wrote this history together*

*from beginning to end*

*To Prof. Dr. H. Evan Runner*

*For providing us with the perspectives*

*underlying all of it:*

*our lives, our ministry, our memoir*

*To Dr. Eugene Rubingh*

*Who had forgotten that he was the one*

*who urged us to embark on this Mission*

*that defines our lives*

*To II Highland Christian Reformed Church,*  
*who took the risk of sending complete strangers*

*and who faithfully supported us for 30 years.*

*Thank you!*

*To God, Who made it all possible by inspiring us*

*To live this life and ministry*

*And to write its story.*

*To Him be all the praise and glory!*

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## *Preface and Introduction*

A poster in my office shows a cat looking in a mirror and seeing a lion. The caption underneath reads, “What matters most is how you see yourself.” It’s been on that wall for over a decade, for I love its sentiment—except for one thing. Yes, it matters how you see yourself, for it will largely influence your thoughts, actions and, really, your entire life; it’s very important. But the *most* important thing is how *God* sees you. So, I scratched out the word “most” on the poster, so that it now reads, “What matters is how you see yourself.” Yes, that matters very much.

Fran and I, when *we* look in *our* mirror, we see missionaries. Hopefully, God sees us that way as well. We may be a lot of other things, but to us, viewing ourselves as missionaries is central to our lives and to the story about to unfold.

It could be argued that we are among the people described by the Dutch writer Agnes Amelink, who wrote *De Gereformeerden Overzee*, a book about members of the Gereformeerde Kerken, the church in which both of us were born and baptized, who emigrated to North America. Amelink writes about who they were, what motivated them and how did they fare in the new world. What were their ideals? What was the result? Well, our parents and we, along with our siblings, were amongst them. In these memoirs, you will find all these questions answered in our lives.

The beginning of our story, Part I, includes two short chapters about our ancestors down to our parents. If you are among our descendants, our “downline” as I like to refer to you, these two individual stories are *your* stories. That’s where you came from. Those people carried the genes that impact your life.

Addressing our children and further descendants, Fran and I remember and know our parents well, the ones who brought our clans to North America, but our parents shared very little with us, a common situation in the culture of their generation. Neither we nor most of our siblings asked them many questions. After our parents passed away, the questions surfaced, but too late. All we could do was compare notes with each other. As to our grandparents, I remember three of them very well, but I do not remember that they *ever* chatted with us, read, laughed, walked, played or even prayed. Their generation just didn’t do such things, especially when their grandchildren were next to legion. The result is a vacuum in our lives. We offer you, our children, grandchildren and succeeding generations, this memoir to prevent a similar vacuum in *your* hearts and lives and thus enrich you. By knowing more about your ancestors, you know more about yourself. Woven into this story is also how our Heavenly Father/Mother dealt with us, guided us, and inspired us throughout our lives. To be sure, it is a story with hiccups; some, very serious, they were beyond hiccups; no one has a perfect story.

Part I also contains two chapters about our debut to the world in our respective birth villages. Even though we don’t talk about our missionary status during those chapters, we

ourselves regard that part of our lives as preparatory for our unknown and unsuspected future. God was preparing and shaping us right from the start.

From there this initial volume continues with our immigration stories and moves on to our academic ventures, at the end of which we unexpectedly discover at least our tentative future. By that time our two separate stories had already merged into one by marriage. In this volume our stories begin in our birth villages and end(s) up preparing for ministry in Nigeria, a long journey. We chose to give the title *Our Early Story* to this first volume.

But there are two additional audiences we have in mind with this book and series. Volumes II and III play themselves out in Nigeria. As it has been for decades, if any African scholar wishes to do research about any of the missionary organizations his country has hosted, he usually has to go to the European or North American headquarters of these missions, for that's where most of the archives are lodged. Just imagine: You want to read about history that took place in your own country, but you have to go to your former colonial "masters" to access the information. It is an insult that few missions so far have sought to rectify. By making our story available, we hope to spare Nigerians the trouble of having to come to Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, to do research into our missionary contribution, though if they want to do research into the reaction of Grand Rapids to our manner of mission, they will still have to go there. Well, we are doing what we can by offering our own story. Besides, herewith we offer this to any African, scholar or not, who is curious about missionaries. And we offer this to the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN), within whose bosom so much of this story has taken place, with special love and many thanks.

There is a third target group for this series. We are not only missionaries, but, I at least, am also a missiologist, one who academically studies the world of missionaries, their mandate, their history, their successes and failures, their theories. In pursuing my doctorate in this discipline, I spent much time studying missionary archives in the UK and discovered how much valuable information is hidden in these archives, exciting for students of missions. Such studies bring into the open all kinds of foibles, personal, theological and cultural, but more than anything else, they force you to gain respect for a remarkable subculture and its members.

Perhaps you think of Missiology as an arcane discipline, but actually there is an entire academic subculture pursuing studies in this area, writing books and publishing academic journals and magazines. It's a whole world that is found on both public university campuses as well as in specialized private tertiary institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Since we have had a rather unusual mission career and sought to develop an unusual wholistic approach, we offer this story to my fellow missiologists, especially those of future generations when there may no longer be such a critter as a foreign western missionary going to a so-called Third World country to bring the Gospel. It is beginning to turn around: Missionaries from the South are now coming to the West.

We have a particular take on missions that some people will recognize immediately from the series title: *Every Square Inch....* That is a famous term from Dr. Abraham Kuyper,

who insisted that the Lord Jesus Christ has dominion over the entire world, over every square inch. Our mission was geared to make that the overall vision for the Nigerian Christian community where we served. While Volume II follows that story in great detail, this current volume can help missiologists understand the background of our missionary journey and thus take into account the context within which we developed our approach. If you wish to satisfy your curiosity about Kuyper immediately, you can turn to the Kuyperiana page on our website < [www. SocialTheology.com](http://www.SocialTheology.com)> for a brief introduction.

While Volume II traces our mission history, Volume III traces the development of our family and our social life. Again, you, our “downline,” may enjoy reading about how our children--your parents, your grandparents, your cousins, uncles, aunts, etc.—grew up in a culture as foreign as that of Nigeria. You will read about their interesting and confusing multiple language experiences as well as how they related to both peers and adults in the host culture. Nigerians may similarly find it interesting to read how our family experienced living amongst them. And again, sociologists of missions, a sub-division of Missiology, will find a lot to study on this topic.

And now a few housekeeping items. First of all, you may have noticed the title of this introduction to the series and to this volume. We have conflated the preface and the introduction into one document. We simply see no value in the conventional division between those two, at least, not for this series.

Secondly, for a memoir that basically spans only 75 years, this one is pretty hefty. We kind of apologize for that, but advise you that you don’t need to read the entire series. You can read just one of the volumes or even just one chapter that appeals the most to you and leave the rest. A curious descendant will be interested in different stories than a missiologist. A member of the Prins downline may not be interested in the Boer story or vice versa. Pick and choose your way.

Thirdly, a note about who is who in this volume. In most of the chapters, the first person singular pronoun, the “I,” is me, Jan or John. In a few chapters where Fran is the subject, as in chapters 3-7 and 11, the “I” refers to her. In all the others, chapters 13-42, except where noted otherwise, Fran is referred to in the third personal pronoun as “she,” while “I” refers to Jan. Before we made that clear-cut distinction, things were becoming clumsy and murky. This decision was made on Fran’s clear insistence that I, Jan, am the main writer in the family, not she. The result is that, except where she is explicitly quoted as in paragraphs lifted out of the letters she wrote—and they are many—first person singular personal pronouns refer to Jan/John, not usually to her.

Fourthly, the external sources of this memoir are generally indicated, especially if someone else contributed. However, the *main* sources for *this* volume are our personal memories and those of Fran’s siblings, all of whom she interviewed on their 70<sup>th</sup> birthdays. For Volumes 2 and 3, the main source was the letters we wrote to our parents and which we asked them to save for just this purpose, which they faithfully did. Fran wrote more than her share. Since one of us wrote almost every week, except during home service periods and study leaves, we ended up reading through around 1300 letters, thank you! These letters were

supplemented by our memories, photo albums and a variety of other saved documents, including my own writings. Volumes 4 and 5 depend on memory, Fran’s travel journals, photo albums and, again, my own writings.

Fifthly, as to the organization of this series, Volumes 2 and 3 cover our Nigeria years. They run concurrently, with Volume 2 telling the story of ministry and Volume 3, the story of our family and our social life. When you turn to the Table of Contents for these volumes, you will see a column “Parallel Chapters.” In Volume 2, the numbers in that column refer to the concurrent chapters in Volume 3 telling the family and social stories of the same period. For example, while Chapter 15 in Volume 2 tells the story of our initial period of ministry among the CRCN, the number in the parallel column tells you that in Chapter 27 of Volume 3 you will find family and social stories of the same period. The reverse holds also for Chapter 27 in Volume 3.

A major problem we faced was the division into chapters. How could we delimit each chapter and not make any of them too long? For Volumes 2 and 3, we decided to employ the framework of the home service periods as book ends for each chapter. It is kind of an arbitrary framework, but it was the best we could do. The problem does not exist for Volumes 4 and 5, where the chapters have been divided on basis of whether we lived in Grand Rapids or Vancouver.

*A fine but important detail of convenience for the digital version is the significance of two devices throughout the this series. The asterisk (\*) helps you find the photographs of which there are several hundred. Each photograph can be found by using the “Find” function (Control F). Using “Find” in succession enables you to see them all in succession. Secondly, each chapter title is accompanied by the “greater than” symbol “<.” Wherever you find yourself in the text, you can get to the next chapter(s) by finding “<” using the “Find” function.*

### *Words of Appreciation*

Before closing this Preface-Introduction, we want to express our sincere thanks to the entire Christian Reformed Church in North America for their wide view of global missions. I have often felt at cross purposes with her because she often does not live up to her own theology and worldview, because she too often is guided by Evangelical rather than Reformed inspiration and too often sells out to the prevalent dualistic worldview of the West. As CRC member Prof. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a Reformed philosopher emeritus at Yale Divinity School, has publicly lamented, the CRC has been much too conservative for her revolutionary roots, the very source of my conflict with its world mission establishment. Nevertheless, in spite of these frictions, she did often support me in surprising ways.

Sometimes I may not have expressed that clearly enough. Today, I acknowledge it and regret some of my expressions of annoyance and impatience. Among others, we have dedicated this series to Dr. Eugene Rubingh, a former Director of Christian Reformed

**World Missions, who may have born the brunt of some of my exasperations, even though he probably had greater appreciation for our wholistic approach than any of his successors during our days. He, too, was hemmed in by the politics that resulted from the same CRC conservative dualistic framework. If you are now becoming curious, well, read on, especially Volume 2.**

**Our thanks also goes to II Highland CRC in Highland, IN. They dared to call, ordain and support a missionary couple they did not know from Adam. Well, they knew some important things about us. We both graduated from Calvin; I graduated also from Calvin Seminary and was declared fit for CRC ministry by both the faculty and the Seminary Board of Trustees as well as by Classis—CRC term for “district”—Illiana. That said a lot about us, but it did not reveal the differences in orientation between us until much later. They became suspicious of my Kuyperian approach to mission, but they never failed to live up to their promises and more than once went beyond them. That, too, you can read about in Volume 2. We remain grateful for their support over three decades.**

**Over the years, as II Highland began to diversify its support of missionaries to include sons and daughters of their own congregation, a number of Western Canadian churches came aboard, especially the three Edmonton congregations, First CRC, West End CRC and Covenant CRC. Towards the end, a few others joined us as well, including Lethbridge and Medicine Hat in Alberta and Surrey CRC in BC. We thank all of them for the faith they showed in us and enabled us to continue.**

**Much thanks must surely be directed to the Nigerian Church for embracing us and for giving us space to operate, but especially to the CRCN within whose bosom we learned to navigate the culture and the country’s Church and make the mistakes all young missionaries inevitably make. When I think of some of these early mistakes, I still cringe, but the CRCN graciously overlooked them and enabled us to move on and grow.**

**Of course, our greatest and deepest thanks goes to our heavenly Father/Mother, a spirit that pervades this memoir from beginning to end.**

**And with that, we invite you to take the plunge, beginning with a skimpy description of our ancestral history. Enjoy the read.**

**PART I****In the Land of our Ancestors<***Comments from Readers:*

**I just can't believe it. This is so amazing ! You guys write so well and remember so much of your childhood! You must continue, for it has so much history. How can you remember all this! I am very impressed !**

*Ineke Lodewyk, missionary colleague*

**I thoroughly enjoyed getting acquainted with your genealogy, it is always interesting to read where people hail from historically -- and then your chapters about Little Jan in Lutjegast, your immigration experiences, your years in Port Alberni prior to coming to Calvin. I found it fascinating reading, perhaps also because I knew the Boers personally.**

**You could have been writing my story because of the many similarities in growing up. I loved how you wrote about the games we played. It had not occurred to me this might be of interest to later generations and I will add a similar account to my notes. I am sure that kids growing up today, let alone a century from now, will find the non-electronic nature of the games that kept us happy hard to imagine. How simple life was. Not only were the games and various celebrations the same when I grew up, what I found so interesting as well was how the Reformed Kuyperian customs seemed to have been ingrained in our segment of the population so that we all seemed to have the same "religious" customs. In one word, John, I relived my own childhood as I read about your experiences as a child growing up in Lutjegast.**

*Gerrit Sheeres, fellow immigrant from Lutjegast*

## Chapter 1<

### Boer Roots and Family

#### *Family Roots*

These are the memoirs of myself, Jan/John Harm Boer (1938) of Lutjegast, Groningen, and of Foekje/Frances Ann Prins (1942) of Hantumhuizen, Friesland, both in The Netherlands (NL). Before we get into our own stories, you will want to know a little about our background. This chapter introduces you to my ancestry, while Chapter 3 tells you about Fran's, her preferred name.

There are two things about this chapter, a good and a bad one. The good part is that, along with Chapter 4, it is one of the shortest of chapters in these memoirs. The bad part is that it may also be the duller for you. If you just want to read about our story but you're not into genealogy or history, just skip over it. You won't be the worse for it. However, if you are family and you want to know about your ancestors, where and when they were born or who married who, then this may be of intense interest to you. If you visit the "Old Country" and want to visit the graves of some of your ancestors, this is the chapter to read.

The Boer clan, it appears, has for most of its history been a peasant clan. Many members of the generation of my parents, i.e. Wiebe Boer and siblings, managed to work their way up into the middle class of small business people. One, Oom/Uncle Harm, the oldest of the siblings, became a teacher and worked in the colony that became Indonesia. Benefiting from the general prosperity of the Western world from the 1960s onward, many of my generation, including myself, became university-trained professionals. Many of us and our children have distinguished themselves in many areas of life. I gained a doctorate from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and our two sons, Kevin and Wiebe, obtained degrees from Yale, MBA and PhD respectively, while Cynthia, our daughter, became an active civic leader in the Seattle area. There are architects, medical doctors, nurses, computer folk at every level, accountants, theologians, a minister/chaplain and an author in the crowd. We have scattered over several countries and continents.

My main source of information about my ancestral family is brother Harry Hendrik with his unpublished and unfinished genealogical documents. Two subsidiary sources are the genealogical CD prepared by brother Tinus and an autobiography with the title *De Mens Wikt; God Beschikt* by cousin Jan Boer, son of my Oom/Uncle Harm, living in South Africa. His story is written in Afrikaans; I translated and somewhat reworked the material I used.

But, back to where Harry Hendrik starts us off.

#### *Paternal Ancestors* :

I begin the story with a Boer ancestor born in 1757. In all of this I depend exclusively on the 1994 draft of Hendrik's genealogy, for which I thank him profusely. I cannot imagine the persistence it took to come up with all this information.

That genealogy starts with *Great-great-great Grandfather Geert Egbert Boer*, born in 1757, a farmer in Roden, Drenthe, NL. He died in 1846 at the ripe age of 89. He was the grandfather of Prof. Geert Boer, of whom you will read below. Geert Egbert was married to *Altien Karst*, who died "before 1824."

*Great-great Grandfather Jan Geert Boer*, son of Geert Egbert and Altien, was born "around 1799." He married *Bouchien Harms Kramer*, who was born "around 1790."

*Great Grandfather Harm Boer*, son to the above Jan Geert and Bouchien, was also born in Roden, in 1830, and died somewhere between 1910-1913. His wife, *Willemtien Koops*, was born in Witte, Drenthe. They are the parents to my grandfather, Opa Jan Boer. He and his wife lived along Leeksterweg somewhere between Leek and Roden. Unfortunately, we have no specific address.

According to Harry Hendrik, the above Harm was very tall and at one time found himself a member of the Queen's Guard during the reign of Regent Emma, the mother of Queen Wilhelmina, who was seven at the time. Height appears to have run in the Boer family. My father, Wiebe, was called "*Lange Kapper*" (Tall Barber). He was about 184 centimeters tall. I know of several tall cousins while several of my brothers are well at the 184 centimeter mark or above. I, however, stopped just shy of 180 centimeters, while during my senior years I lost about five centimetres.

My paternal *Great Grandfather Hendrik Uringa* was born in Zevenhuizen, Leek, province of Groningen in 1854, and died in December, 1929, at age 83. He married *Angenietje Sietsema* of Roden and Zevenhuizen, who was born in 1854 and died in 1894, apparently due to tuberculosis. This couple gave birth to Jacobje Uringa, my paternal grandmother about whom you will read more below.

*An aside:* Though the Boer clan belonged to the peasantry, they did spawn one very prominent leader who became one of the first pastors in the Christian Reformed Church in the USA and the first professor of what became Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. He was President of Calvin College from 1876-1902. The name of this august Boer was Geert Egbert Boer, born on March 1, 1832, in Roderwolde, Drenthe. He was a cousin to Harm Jan, my great grandfather. I could also put it this way: the prof's grandfather was my great-great-great grandfather. Close enough to be proud of him for his role in the Alma Mater of both Fran and myself as well as of all three of our kids and their spouses and Fran's sisters Jane and Trena and husband Francis along with many of Fran's nephews and nieces. I entered Calvin College 54 years after his death.

Geert studied at the Gereformeerde Theological Seminary in Kampen, NL, graduated and was ordained. He pastored two churches in NL, Sappemeer and Niezijl, both in Groningen. In 1873, he was called by the Commerce Street Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Grand Rapids, MI, USA, the church that later moved to Bates and Henry in SE Grand Rapids and eventually took on the name of First CRC of Grand Rapids. Two years later, the CRC appointed him to the first full time teaching position in what became the first CRC seminary. He also became editor of *De Wachter*, the denomination's Dutch-language magazine. Prof. Geert retired in 1902 and died suddenly in 1904. He lies buried in Valley City Cemetery on Leonard Street in Grand Rapids. (See *Geert's biography, Een Man des Volks*, Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, 1904). If you google "Geert Boer Grand Rapids," or the title of his book, you will get a number of websites about him.

*Paternal grandparents: Opa/Grandpa Jan Boer* was born on October 14, 1869 at Nietap, Roden, Drenthe and died on December 25, 1931, also in Roden. I never knew him, since this Opa died seven years before my arrival in 1938. *Opoe/Grandma Jacobje Uringa-Boer* was born on May 20, 1877, in the Uringa family referred to above at Foxwolde, Roden, and died at Enschede, province of Overijssel, on August 17, 1960. During my pre-immigration years, Opoe Boer was a widow and lived with her daughter Martha in a second-floor flat in the city of Groningen. Later in life, while her son Wiebe and family, including myself, were en route to Canada on the *SS Volendam* in March, 1951, her name changed to Buter because she married the widowed father-in-law of her oldest son, Harm, and moved to Enschede, where she lies buried in Coster Cemetery.

There is a bit of discrepancy about the number of Opa and Opoe Boer's children. I have always heard—and an early photograph of their family seems to confirm it—that the couple had twelve children. However, cousin Jan Boer from South Africa states there were fourteen.

I remember Opoe Boer well, especially from the times I had to undergo eye tests in Groningen city, a story that will be told in Chapter 2. She was a sober person who might at best show a faint smile. I do not remember talking with her or doing anything else with her. Like others of her generation, she was always dressed in black from neck to toe. Opoes were to be revered, not loved. Certainly not to go for walks with or have other kinds of fun.

Her husband, Opa Jan Boer, was a peasant farmer in the Roden area of the province of Drente, with a total of three or four cows and four or five pigs on a five-acre farm that was his economic mainstay. He also rented an additional acre and a half for 30 guilders per year. With that he had to raise his family of twelve children! Twice a year he sold his pigs for cash. He had no horse and had to do all his work manually, even mowing. One of his "conveniences" was a "*platte kruiwagen*" (flatbed wheelbarrow) used to carry the milk in milk drums. After his death, Opoe sold the farm for 2300 guilders, only 300 guilders more than they paid for it 20 years earlier. According to Harry Hendrik, the life of Opoe Boer improved considerably after Opa's demise, though he does not explain how or why.

I translate from Afrikaans and rework the following from cousin Jan Boer's autobiography about Opa Boer, his farm and environment. It does not altogether square with brother Hendrik's story.

He began farming on a farm owned by his father, Harm Jans Boer, at 225 Roderweg, Nietap, a small agricultural village near Leek in the province of Drente. The history of Nietap goes back over 1,000 years to a time when authorities built a lone monastery there to which they exiled monks to do penance for grave sins. They would engage in forced labour by digging peat in the area—shades of my Father Wiebe during his first year in Canada, though his was not a matter of penance! Having fathered ten children, neither was he a monk!

Opa Jan Boer soon obtained his own farm not far from the first, near Foxwolde, close to Leekstermeer/ Leek, at De Groeve 8. It was located on an elevated sandy ridge and comprised two hectares or nearly five acres. This, I believe, is the place where my Father Wiebe was born.



**Where Opa Wiebe Was Born\***  
De Groeve 8, Foxwolde, Drente

It was a mixed type of farm that, in view of its infertile soil, required hard labour. The crops included rye, barley, oats, potatoes, beans and peas. There was also a meadow in which he kept a “couple” of Frisian cows and “one or two” robust horses

for pulling his wagons, plough and other implements. He supplemented his income by working for other farmers in the area and in the construction industry.

Thus far, cousin Jan.

Son Wiebe (my father) reported that his brothers found it difficult to get along with their father, my Opa Jan. Wiebe apparently was the only one to get along.

Wiebe told my brother Harry Hendrik about Opa Boer's spirituality. Here's his report:

Opa Boer was a seeking soul, and unable to talk about his faith. His dying words to my Dad were, "Wiebe, I never could pray at the table. Now I can do it, but now I can't come to the table." He had said to his daughter Annie, "It's OK with me." He had not been going to church, because one Sunday he had bought some bread and had many church visitors as a result, not to eat the bread but to criticize. After that he went for a while to an evangelical church in Tolbert.

But for most of his life, he and his family attended the Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church) that was founded by Abraham Kuyper. That church baptized all the twelve babies. I am quite sure they prayed formal set prayers before and after each meal and read the Bible at every meal, since that was the culture of that church. I remember no expressions of personal religion or spirituality from Opa Boer. Such expressions would have been highly unusual from such stoic Christians in that culture.

*My Father: Wiebe Boer* was born in Roden on December 23, 1907, the sixth child of Opa Jan and Opa Jakobje in their family of twelve children on their farm near Foxwolde. I will often refer to him simply as Wiebe, since he was the only one by that name, apart from the one he was named after, namely Wiebe Uringa, who drowned at age two. Later, of course, Fran and I named our youngest after him—Wiebe III. There may have been Wiebes before him.



Jacobje Uringa-Boer, Mother of Opa Wiebe \*  
May 20, 1877—August 17, 1960



**The Boer Family, 1922 \***

**Top row, left to right: Hendrik, Opa Jan, Harm, Willem  
 Middle row: Martha, Oma Jacobje , Berend, Ge, Janna, Bouk  
 Bottom row: Willy, Annie, Wiebe  
 Missing: Nieta**

*Note:* Janna is not part of the family. No one seems to know who she is.

**When it comes to Wiebe's early working career, once again, Brother Hendrik to the rescue. The following is my edited version of his stories. When young Wiebe left school in 1919 at age 12, he first worked for his Dad. Then he hired himself out to other farmers at 80 cents a day. Subsequently, he worked for one farmer 24/7 at fl. 17 a month. He worked for one more farmer but finally concluded this was no way to make a living.**



Then he turned to business and became a *lapjes koopman*, a traveling cloth salesman, moving about on a bike with his wares in a basket at the front. He was so eager to sell that he often sold on credit but seldom got his money! It did not add up for him.

**Opa Wiebe the Cloth Peddler, 1925 \***

Then someone advised him to try barbering, since it did not take much start-up capital. Wiebe actually listened! He served as an apprentice for several years and then started looking for a place of his own. He tried it for three months in Zweeloo, Drenthe, after which he hired on for six months in Groningen city. There he soon became dissatisfied with the atmosphere in the barbershop that included much swearing and coarse language. He placed an advertisement in a provincial newspaper for a Christian town or village in the area that needed a barber. He promised a reward to whoever gave him information about the place he would eventually settle in and open a barbering practice. The winning town was Lutjegast, in the province of Groningen, district Westerkwartier, three kilometres east of the Friesian border and twenty-five kilometers west of the city of Groningen. The winning informer was one Bron, owner of a duplex in the centre of the village at *DeWieren* 2 and one of the few non-church goers in the village. He rented the new Kapper Boer one side of his duplex, where the new and flourishing practice of twenty years was begun. Just before he made that move, on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1929, Wiebe married Elsiëna Veninga, my mother.

Within two years Wiebe was able to build a new red-brick house in 1929 for 3,000 guilders in the midst of that infamous depression. How he managed that, none of my siblings know. The address was and remains De Wieren 7. The house included space for the barbershop and, later, for Mother Ellie's hair salon. Today, in 2014, that house still stands as a testimony to the skills of the building industry of Lutjegast, a perfectly maintained house, easily good for another 70 years. Here he and Mother Ellie spent their next twenty years and brought up their first nine children.



**De Wieren 7 \***  
**The House that Opa Wiebe Built in 1929**  
**The Boer Family Home in Lutjegast**

*An aside:* Harry Hendrik draws our attention to some interesting age coincidences. Father Wiebe was 30 years older than me, but he was 30 years younger than his mother, who in turn was 30 years younger than her father. Which means I was born 90 years after my paternal great grandfather, Harm Boer, the Queen's Guard. Fran and I tried to keep the tradition going but missed by one year. Our oldest son Kevin Samu'ila was born when I was 31. So, Kevin was born 121 years after the birth of his paternal great-great grandfather of the Queen's Guard fame. Once we missed the boat, the tradition totally fell flat. In 2009, Kevin and wife Theresa had their first when both of them were 40. Their daughter Anneke was born 161 years after her paternal great-great-great grandfather of the Queen's Guard fame.

### Maternal Ancestors

For this section I am indebted totally to brother Tinus who produced a CD with all this material. I thank him as profusely as I thanked Hendrik for the paternal information.

I begin with *Great-great grandfather Jan Lukas Veninga (1825-1891)*. He married *Great-great grandmother Jantien Attema Ottens (1820-1901)*. They had six children, of whom Lukas was the oldest.

*Great grandfather Lukas Veninga (1849-1925)* married *Elsiena Jans Postema (1851-1935)*. They also had six children, of whom Jannes was the second oldest.



**Lukas and Elsiena Veninga \***  
**Parents of Jannes Veninga, father of Oma Ellie Boer**  
**Maternal Great Grandparents of Author Jan**

**Grandfather *Opa Jannes Veninga* (March 31, 1883 - December 20, 1973) married my *Opoe Bontje Vander Vinne* (September 22, 1880 - February 10, 1958). These grandparents had ten children, of which Elsiena, my mother, was number five. Opa Jannes died at age 91 in Zuidhorn, in the home of Riek Hamstra, his eldest daughter and sister to my Mother. The couple lies buried next to each other in the cemetery of the Hervormde Kerk in Midwolde, Groningen.**



***Jannes and Bontje Veninga \****  
***Parents of Oma Ellie Boer***  
***Maternal Grandparents of Author Jan***

Opa Jannes was for many years in the butcher trade. I remember him also as a kind of sober personality with a friendly smile. Opoë Bontje was much friendlier in appearance with an eternal smile and twinkling eyes. True to contemporary fashion, I remember them only dressed predominantly in black, though Opa might have had a light-coloured and often striped shirt. They lived in Leek, Groningen province, in a line of simple row houses on one side of a brick street. The other side of the street was a brick wall plunging straight down into the water of a fairly wide and deep canal. Pedestrians, bikes and an occasional car would move along this narrow brick street without any protection on the canal side. This is, of course, not uncommon in Dutch towns. We were allowed to play freely on the street without anyone guarding us from the canal. It was the time before hyper-parenting had taken over.

Opa Veninga reached the ripe old age of 90. We visited him at Tante Riek's place several times during our travels and during our stay in Amsterdam. I attended his funeral, but that story will be told in Chapter 29.

There is a kind of mystery in my mind about my mother's brothers. While she and her sisters looked like average northerners of blond complexion and blue eyes, her brothers had darker skin, brown eyes and dark hair, strikingly different from the rest of the clan that I knew. My siblings and I occasionally discuss this strange phenomenon. Mother Ellie never explained it. So we sometimes surmised that somewhere there must have been a Frenchman or Spaniard among the ancestors or, perhaps, an Indonesian from the colonies. The family genealogists have found no evidence for this. Since our family emigrated to Canada and thus became separated from the clan, I do not know whether these features were carried over into succeeding generations. So, the puzzle remains.

*Parents: Elsiëna Meets Wiebe*

The Veningas gave birth to Elsiëna or Ellie, as she was called most of her life, on June 26, 1911. She was one of nine children. I don't know much about her youth. On pictures she looks quite stylish. She apparently worked for some time as a maid in a Jewish home. Somewhere along the line, she bumped into Wiebe Boer and they got married December 21, 1929, in Leek, her birthplace.

We know nothing about Wiebe and Ellie's courtship, except that they married in 1929. As to their marriage, probably the most outstanding feature was their full quiver of an eventual ten children. Here they are with all their glorious names, at least the girls, with their birth years in parentheses: Jakoba Angenita (1930), Bouwina Henderika (1931), Martha Wilhelmina (1932) and then as far as girls went, finally, simply Ellie (1935), the youngest with the shortest name but with the most flamboyant and expansive personality of them all. She was the first to pass away at age 62 due to cancer. Jakoba became "Koos(je)" which was turned into "Karen" in Canada. Bouwina became "Ina" but later changed to "Bo." Martha and Ellie never changed their names.



**Oma Ellie Veninga-Boer \***  
**Mother of Author Jan**  
**1927**



**Opa Wiebe Boer \***  
**Father of Author Jan**  
**1929**

Wiebe and Ellie took a little break, but continued in full force a good two years later, but now with boys and only boys—six of us. My arrival closed the door to further girls. The boys' names were more prosaic, not classy like those of the girls. My (1938) full name was Jan Harm. Jannes (1939) was the one to follow me. No middle name. He became Jim in Canada. Harry Hendrik (1940) was next. Due to circumstances too long to tell here, he eventually chose to use "Hendrik" as his common name. He never anglicized it. Then there was Wim (1942), who in Canada toyed for many years with the name "Bill," but eventually returned to the original. Wim was the first of the brothers to pass away, like Ellie, also at age 62. Tinus (1945) was Dennis for a while but also came back to his original name. And then, after a bit of a hiatus, there came the only born Canadian the family can boast of, Dick (1953). Yep, that's all there is to his entire name. He was born in Port Alberni, Vancouver Island, where he lives till this day. Welcome to Uncle Dick: he was born *after* his three oldest nieces and nephew. Every one of the siblings was named either after a grandparent or aunt/uncle, many with middle names to make sure all the parental siblings were covered. They did not make the rounds completely! Not even with a family of ten kids and doubling up of names! The ancestral families are simply too huge.

Both Wiebe and Ellie experienced World War I as children. I never heard them talk about it and we, their children, apparently never asked. That is one of the strange things in the family. The parents never volunteered telling their children about their past; we, the children, never asked much, Harry Hendrik being an exception. He found Dad hesitant to share. His trick was to tell Dad that he had heard this or that about the family, but he would consciously distort it. Dad would then interrupt to straighten out the record. How clever. I must hand it to Hendrik!

Living abroad as a missionary and as good as out of communication range, I never asked much either. It was not till my return to North America that I began to ask questions, but by then it was too late—there was no one to answer them, except the siblings. So, there is this vacuum in my life of parental and ancestral history that we experience as an unpleasant emptiness.

*An aside:* One of the reasons I agreed so readily to our children's request—demand?—for memoirs was to enrich their lives and that of subsequent generations with a family memory and to avoid that vacuum. With this tool at hand, they will be equipped to pursue that history beyond where this book will take them. They can go to the cemeteries and find the burial places of their closest ancestors. They can go to Lutjegast and Hantumhuizen, the birthplaces of Jan and Foekje, to see for themselves. They can check out the family genealogies. These memoirs can serve as a tool to enrich their sense of family history and thus, their own lives.

## Chapter 2<

### Little Jan in Lutjegast

(1938-1951)

#### *The Debut of Jan Harm*

On February 18, 1938, the “*Rooie Kapper*”—the “Red Barber,” a nickname due to his reddish complexion-- the one and only full time barber in Lutjegast, strutted through the village, proud as a peacock.

“Unto us a son is born!” he shouted to anyone willing to listen.

It being a village, everyone knew everybody else. They all knew *Vrouw* Boer was pregnant and they all wondered whether it was to be yet another girl, the fifth, or, this time around, a boy. It was several decades before ultrasound.

If you know the language of the Bible, you will recognize the messianic reference here. What better reception could I ask for? The only missing links were the angels, the shepherds and the wise men—with apologies to the men of Lutjegast! Well, I have to admit to a few more differences. After having four daughters and now a son, Mother Ellie was hardly a virgin. And, yes, I did have an earthly father, the *Rooie Kapper*, also known as the “*Lange Kapper*,” due to his unusual height for his day of around one metre eighty-two.

Though this messianic announcement was a bit over the top, my arrival was really quite an event, particularly in our family. The first son after four lovely daughters; the first brother to four lively sisters with those impressive names I told you about in Chapter 1. And eventually the oldest brother to all those boys. Yes, mother Ellie was kept busy! You do the math and figure out how many we eventually became!

And so the village was properly notified. You can be sure my birth was the topic of discussion around many supper tables in Lutjegast that evening. No, not earth shaking, but Lutjegast shaking it surely was. “*Vrouw Boer, een zoon!*” “Mrs. Boer, a son!” Yes, after four daughters.

There is a story going around that there was something unusual about this birth. My head, including my face, was said to be covered by a *vlies* or membrane that had to be removed immediately lest I suffocate. There was a very special meaning attributed to such a birth. It could bring good luck, according to ancient traditions. Sister Martha wrote that the story was hushed up for many years on the advice of the family doctor. “Jan would have been looked upon as a person with special gifts, maybe with futuristic or healing qualities. He would have been labeled for life in Lutjegast.” I remember being told this story several times so that it is firmly etched in my memory. The question is where that story came from.

Mother would not have told me; she was far too embarrassed to talk of such things. I am sure my sisters told me, but who told *them*? Again, not mother Ellie, in no way. In her seventies, Sister Bo does not remember the story at all and advised me, also now in my seventies, that it probably is an “old wives’ tale.” The phenomenon is called “veil” or “caul” and the person so born is sometimes called “caulbearer. It is not all that unusual. We will just leave it at that, except to note that one of our children was also a caulbearer.

A bit about my name, Jan or “John” in English. I was named after my paternal grandfather, Jan Boer, a man I never met, since he died years before my arrival. My middle name is “Harm.” English speakers should not feel threatened! “Harm” was the name of my father’s oldest brother. If you check the genealogies produced by my brothers, Hendrik and Tinus, you will find that a variety of these names have abounded in the Boer clan for generations, not to say centuries. Even today there are quite a number with names like “Jan,” “Harm,” “Jan Harm” or “Harm Jan.” Then there are hybrid versions in other languages, depending on the country they were born in, like Johan of South Africa but now in Ontario, Canada. There is Yohanna, the latter being the Hausa-language Christian name of our youngest, Wiebe. And then there is Jehan, that special gift to me on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. “Jehan,” his parents explained, is an old French form of “Jean” or “Jan.” But we’re running ahead of ourselves.



Jan Harm Boer, 1942



Jan and brother Jim



Jan and his four sisters, 1941

### *My Earliest Memories*

There are three outstanding memories I have of my earliest childhood, even though I cannot remember their exact sequence. I began to speak rather late, like during my third year. The front yard of the house on De Wieren in which I was born bordered on a fairly deep ditch full of water. One day I threw an object into that water, but then I wanted it retrieved. As I saw the water close in on the object, I pointed to it and shouted, “Unk, unk!

That may have been my first public oration. That's the best I could do at the time to alarm people to my problem. Whether or not the object was retrieved, this memory means I remember something from the time I could not yet talk.

The other two major early memories are of two parallel events: Twice I fell down the stairs that led from the “*zolder*” (the upstairs) down to the kitchen. I do not remember the first fall, but I do remember that I was in bed for what seemed an eternity. During that time I was in a coma for some time. I spent my recovery days in my parents' “*bedstee*.”

I remember the second fall more clearly. While coming down the same stairs, I was trying to balance a bunch of empty boxes with which I was playing. I lost my balance and again fell down the stairs onto the same hard cement floor below. The result was similar to the first one. So, I had serious brain concussions twice in my early life, the effects of which remained with me for years. When riding a bike even up to age twenty, I would occasionally get a hot forehead and then a headache. My forehead sported a scar for many years until it was overtaken by worry lines. I often blame these two concussions for my poor memory for details. However, writing these memoirs has triggered so many memories that Fran, my wife, is astounded at all the details I do remember. Could *forcing* my memory end up rehabbing it, something like forcing a lazy eye or long underutilized muscles?

### *Life in Lutjegast*

Dad and Mom were very busy putting food on the table. Dad worked Tuesday to Saturday from 7 am till close to 10 pm. Sundays were off as were Monday afternoons. He might make a quick appearance at mealtimes, gobble up whatever food was served and back to the barbershop it was for him. Mom had her children as well as her salon—also too busy to pay close attention to the children. Though the girls insist they were kept on a short and tight leash, I was free to go wherever I wished throughout the day.

At first, of course, this would be close to home, but as I got older I went further and further afield. After I got a bike, an event I remember vividly, and had learned to ride it, I would go off to surrounding villages as far as fifteen kilometres away without even telling my parents. As long as I was home in time for meals. The Ijbersburen bridge, Stroobos divided into two by the Groningen/Frisian border, Visvliet along the railway, Grijpskerk on the northern “highway,” Gaarkeuken with its sluices, Sebaldeburen, Grootegast and Doezum were all within my range. Great freedom! It may well explain my adult resistance to restrictions placed on me.

I had my friends in the village, of course. One major one was Henk Rozema, son of Anne Rozema, who lived only three houses south of us. Though friends, we did not attend the same schools. Henk, being of the Hervormde Church, naturally attended the “*neutrale*” school, while I, being of the Kuyperian Gereformeerde tradition, attended the Christian school. Both were public schools in the sense that both were equally supported by the Government and both had equal standing in every way.

The other major friend was Piet Alserda. He lived a bit further away, like two city blocks, which Lutjegast did not have. His father was a house painter. Our parents were friends who socialized together. Piet and I attended the same school, with Piet being one grade behind me. One day at school, Piet and I had a fight and Piet had me flat on my back on the ground with him sitting on top of me and pinning my elbows to the ground with his knees. I remember the humiliation I suffered from being beaten by someone from the grade below me, while many of the children stood around us watching. As he held me pinned down, our anger somewhat subsided and I sought to cover up the humiliation with a joke, a practice that has stayed with me all my life. Piet's older brother, Geert, became Dad's apprentice in barbering and eventually ventured out on his own in another town.

In addition to Henk and Piet, I had other friends but on a more casual and occasional basis. There was Jan Van Til, my competitor at school of whom you will hear more and the son of a wealthy farmer. There was Luit Hoeksema, a farmer's son who inherited his father's farm and never moved away. He lived on that farm until recently, though now largely retired. I visit him when I am in Lutjegast. And then there are still more but further afield with some of their names even forgotten.

What were the things I would do with my friends? If the weather was favourable, we would be outside. We might go biking. We might wander off into the meadows and farmland around the village. Across from Henk's school there was a large field usually planted full of grain. It belonged to the Douma's of Oom Berend Douma fame. When the grain was tall, we would create trails everywhere, trampling upon much of the grain. Play hide and seek. Whenever we were caught, we made a run for it. No one ever pursued us hard enough to punish us.

There was an exhausted peat bog nearby called *de Petten*, that always held our fascination and beckoned us with all of its small animals. Among other things, a lot of birds built their nests there. So my friends and I would go search for eggs. There was nothing in the ethos of that day to make us feel we were doing something wrong. A war-time specialty was for my siblings, friends and me to search the fields for exhausted shells from overhead military planes that would have contained bullets and other war paraphernalia they would drop overnight. They were never dangerous, since they had already been used. They were considered precious possessions with which we would play and trade.

We would go fishing in *het Hoendiep*, a large canal one kilometre north of the village. Someone had a rowboat moored close by and we would often enter it to find eels. One time we found a full bucket of these slippery but delicious snake-like creatures. That same canal also had a swimming hole, where all village swimmers would congregate. It was the only place for swimming. Our entire area was as flat as a dime, no hills, except an artificial one leading up to the bridge over the canal. It was a drawbridge that allowed inland freighters to pass. The area was very popular with the older youths for romantic purposes, since it had been planted full of bushes. As younger pre-romantic children, on weekends when the older boys and girls would play their romantic games in these bushes, we would hunt them down and embarrass them, call their names out loud or whatever. This was not always

appreciated. Yes, all those things and more at the canal. You see how valuable a canal can be for children in a village that offers no recreation except what you make of it yourself! Unfortunately, that bridge has recently been replaced by a more modern one. Next time I visit, it will hardly seem like home, what with all the nooks and crannies with memories gone—along with the romanticism I associate with the place.

A favourite fall morning activity would be for my siblings and me to go to all the chestnut trees in the neighbourhood to collect the fallen chestnuts. We would come home with pockets full of them, yeah pails! Somehow we attributed value to them. They were precious, for they could be hollowed out and turned into pipes that we pretended to smoke.

Yes, pretending to smoke was to copy the adult culture. Though the village was largely Christian, Reformed of various stripes, almost every man smoked. This was considered normal and no one ever challenged the custom. Even the church elders would smoke pipes and cigars during their meetings. It was so common that I remember well the ditty, “*Het is geen man die niet roken kan*”—“He is not a man who does not smoke.” When I first met evangelicals in Canada who frowned upon all smoking, I was very puzzled. What kind of Christians were these? I have since come to realize that these Reformed Christians did smoke far too much, including my father, a chain smoker for many years. No smoking during church services, but right afterwards the village would immediately turn into a virtual smoke stack.

Another favourite activity would be *polkje springen* or pole jumping. We would jump across the many wide and deep ditches, crisscrossing the land with the help of poles designed for that purpose. They were long, sturdy and had a ball at the tip to prevent them from sinking too deep into the mud. Occasionally a boy would jump short and land in the water.

My friends and I would also enjoy *bokje springen* or leapfrog and various forms of hide and seek. And there was *hoepelen*—running with a metal hoop, steering it with a stick, sometimes a stick with a loop that would be soldered around the hoop and thus inseparable. Various marble games were also popular. Sometimes with small clay marbles called *knikkers*; at other times with glass marbles in combination with heavy steel ball-bearing-like balls that would be aimed at the marbles at great distances at high speed.

There were no organized sports in the village, but the boys did like to kick a ball around. During the war, balls were scarce and thus improvisation was the order of the day. Though keeping pigs was illegal during the war, my dad and some others managed to keep some secretly to butcher them. The boys always eagerly took the bladder, which they would inflate with a bicycle pump and then use as a football. Great fun, at least for a few days!

One trick game Henk and I liked to play would be to lay a wallet or something else of interest on the road, tied to a thin thread not immediately visible to the unaware. We would hide behind a bush. When someone would duck down to pick it up, we would jerk it away. A few moments later, after the victim would look around with a puzzled look, we would stand up and reveal the hoax to the “victim.” Harmless and fun.

A few times Henk and I would sneak into the belfry of the Hervormde Kerk. It had a huge bell at its top that would be rung daily at 6 pm sharp. However, we would confuse the town by ringing it at some other time. People would wonder if there might be some emergency. We would quickly slip away before being caught.

During the winter, children always looked forward to snow and ice. The Boers had a large wooden sleigh with metal strips at the bottom that ensured easy traction on snow and ice. It was a very popular snow time tool for the entire neighbourhood. Not having any hills, except for the berms of the many ditches, tobogganing was not a well-developed art. If the ice was strong enough, we would do some of it down these berms onto the ice below. And, of course, *sneeuwpoppen* [snowmen] almost outnumbered the hard-bodied citizenry and snow buildings and caves the village houses. Snowballing was the game supreme with everyone outside a legitimate target.

Every winter favoured us with ice for sledding, sliding and, especially skating. Skates had a narrow platform at the top on which the feet with either shoes or boots would be tied firmly. The skates themselves did not have shoes attached to them. Like many others, I learned to skate on a wide ditch across the street by pushing a chair on the ice. After I felt secure, I would skate through the country side on the ditches that bordered every meadow, field and farm. Some of these were not kept up and were not skate friendly, but others were fairly wide and open. Great fun. And then, when the thaw set in and the ice began to crack and could no longer support skaters or sliders, we would run as fast as we could across the cracking ice that soon became a temporary collection of ice floes. It would take speed and courage—and a degree of boyish foolishness—to skip across the ice floes without getting our feet wet—or more! Great fun! Probably the most fun of all, apart from the rinks described below, were the coldest mornings when the roads would be covered with enough ice to skate on. We would be up and at it as early as we woke up and felt the cold, skating as fast as we could down the village streets. Look for a funny incident in the context of my school adventures below.

Brother Jim, then known as Jannes, recently wrote the following to me: “I was especially proud of you when, during a particularly heavy snow fall in Lutjegast and you were, maybe, about ten years old, all the neighbourhood kids were looking for things to use as a toboggan. You remembered that an old outdoor wall sign of ours (propably a Douwe Egberts tobacco sign) had ended up in a merchant’s back yard, a few houses down the street from us. Anyway, you marched right up there and demanded the return of it so we could go sliding.” I have no memory of this heroic deed, but will accept the credit, late as it came in life. Thanks, Jim, for boosting my self esteem. I needed it.

There would often be a farmer’s field that would be flooded to become an outside community skating rink. This was possible because a large part of the country has a water management system of pumps and dykes that can be used to flood as well as to dry. In Dutch history this has been used as a device to flood out invading enemies. These rinks were very popular with hundreds of people, children and adults, skating around the perimeters, all in the same direction. Speed skating was the thing; figure skating was unknown. Someone would operate a concession stand where you could buy simple pastries

and delicious hot chocolate to warm up your insides. I have the most delightful memories of these skating rinks. This was an experience I sorely missed after emigrating to Canada's south-west "tropical" British Columbia, where the winters did not produce natural ice and inside skating rinks were still rare and largely dedicated to organized winter sports rather than public skating. If I have devoted an extraordinary amount of space to the snow-and-ice scene, it is only because it occupies such an extraordinary pleasure space in my memory.

Lutjegast is farming country. There was a family called Pereboom who had a horse-and-wagon hauling business. They would haul whatever goods ships brought to the local two-ship canal harbour next to the Ijbersburen bridge. They also had the contract to collect the milk from the farms and deliver it to the dairy processing centre in Doezum, a village beyond Grootegast. I loved riding along on these trips, whether to the harbour or to Doezum. It inspired my imagination. I would sometime look for tree branches with a shape that in my imagination I turned into a wagon with my being the horse. I would then pull the branch to the harbour, pretending to load the "wagon" with pulp or whatever product, and pull it fully loaded to the town. This pretence was very real to me. I experienced the game as a full replica of the real thing on the real wagon. I still mentally refer to this imaginary situation as my "*takken wagen* ["branch wagon"]

*An aside:* Throughout my adulthood I often think of that play whenever I watch children pretending they are doing something in their imagination. I remember how really real the experience was to me and thus I appreciate how the child is experiencing its imaginative game as fully real. That itself then becomes a delightful memory and experience to me all over again. The imagination of children—how real, rich and delightful.

I also liked to play postman. I would find used paper—new paper was scarce and expensive-- and cut it into small pieces. I would then go down the street and deliver my snippets to each house through their mail slot. This game, too, was as real to me as seeing the actual postman. We were not yet "developed" to the point where we had a dictatorial postal service that forbade use of *private* mail slots for purposes other than the nation's Postal Service.

The above game may have been partly inspired by my monthly trips to the local post office. It consisted of an ordinary house in which the postmistress lived and in which one room was dedicated to postal activities. The postmistress also operated the postal bank in that facility. Every month I would make a pilgrimage to this office to deposit a quarter into my account. This deposit would yield me not only interest on my account but also a large postage stamp-like picture that was part of a series I would paste in a special album provided by the post office. It was, of course, a ploy by the post office to teach children about banking in a fun way. To me, this was a prominent item on my monthly agenda I would not readily forget. In case you wonder how I could amass a fortune of a full quarter every month, you will have to turn further down to my work situation.

I have never been inclined towards political correctness, not even in my childhood, when the NL was occupied by the hated German Nazis. Occasionally, when I felt slighted at home, I would get angry and threaten to run away. I would pack a bag with a shirt and stuff and march off. On one occasion Mother supported me in my plan by packing me a small lunch for along the way. I would go north to *de hoek*, the three-way junction at the centre of town, and turn east on de Abel Tasman Weg. East was the direction to Germany. When someone would ask me where I was going, I would say with great determination, “Ik goa naar Duutslan!”—“I’m going to Germany.” That was definitely politically incorrect. That’s where the Nazi occupiers came from. People who went to Germany did so either as forced labourers or as prisoners many of whom would never return. Fortunately, I never made it to Germany until 1973. By then it was safe. I reacted this way quite a number of times, enough for it to become part of my own as well as of general family memory.

It was not the only way I expressed annoyance. When I was seriously angry, I could actually become dangerous. I was thought of as a *drifkop*, a hothead with a serious temper issue. I would lose my temper and actually throw a knife at the target of my wrath. When Dad brought me to school on my first day and handed me over to my first teacher, *Juffrouw* Baukamp, Dad advised her to be careful with this hothead and to make sure he did not have a knife in his pocket. Over the years, I totally forgot this teacher, her face or name, until I met her again more than 50 years later in the late 1990’s at the centenary celebration of the school. There I met this teacher whom I had forgotten and she told me this story after so many years! I had never heard of it before. Actually, I never threw a knife, never had a temper in class and was, in general, a well-behaved student.

From the previous chapter, you may remember Tante Dienie, my mother’s youngest sister. After she married Berend Douma, she moved into the Douma farmhouse. I liked her. She was friendly and warm. I would often visit her and wished she would invite me to stay over for a night. I hinted a few times, but it did not happen. People just did not do such things. So I thought of a little lie. I told her that Mother Ellie wanted to do her a favour by offering to have me spend a night at her place! Tante Dienie, of course, was pleased as punch to have such an august guest stay overnight. So I had my wish fulfilled and slept at Tante Dienie’s house. No one ever learnt of this little trick till years later when I felt free to tell the story. Well, being the first son after four girls *did* make me a little august! Not sure Tante Dienie had a more august visitor ever!

Not all of my life was on the road or in the fields. I also had a home life. I played all kinds of games either solitary or with other members of the family. Especially during the long dark winter evenings I would play games with siblings, sometimes including Mother Ellie. These games included checkers, Chinese checkers, Sorry and others. There were also wooden toys like cars, animals and building blocks. I would also play with empty cardboard boxes. I don’t remember where I got them from, since most food was bought in its original state. It is likely that groceries would be put in a cardboard box by the grocer and so we ended up with some boxes. It was while manipulating these boxes at the top of the stairs that I fell down the stairs twice and had my concussions.

One toy I really enjoyed and spent much time with was an erector set. I loved constructing all kinds of machinery and buildings. Looking back upon my joyful preoccupation with this creative toy, I am surprised that this has had no effect in my later life, when I instinctively avoid fixing everything mechanical or electric. Oh, yes, I use them gratefully, including computers, but I have little insight into that entire world, am usually slow in developing any skills and often resort to consultants, some free, some for pay. Son Kevin and son-in-law Andy have frequently helped me out with my website. At the time of this writing, I am trying to publish books already published in hard copy as e-books, but I get stuck at every step. I have just found someone at First Baptist Church to consult and help me with it. I am grateful to Sabrina Chen for her expertise.

I always enjoyed the *Provinciale Courant*, the provincial newspaper, especially the Saturday edition. It featured a column for children my age. It would offer riddles and various games, including crossword puzzles. Since children were invited to send in games and puzzles, I spent considerable time producing my own crossword puzzles that I would send in. Some of them were actually published under my name. You can see that my career as a published writer started early!

I was in regular correspondence with the author of this column and occasionally received a response either through the mail or by a printed message to me in the column itself. Perhaps I overdid it. When I was not getting any answers for a while, I was wondering if perhaps my letters were not getting through. So I decided to test the system. A feature of the column was for kids to tell the whole world when they had a new baby in the family. So, I wrote that my mother had just had a new baby daughter. It was promptly published in the column with the result that the entire village of Lutjegast were wagging their tongues about Ellie Boer having a new baby, while no one even knew she was pregnant, a fact that generally would be public knowledge. You can imagine that Mother Boer was more than a little embarrassed, but at least my experiment worked. I knew my letters arrived! I don't remember any punishment for creating this embarrassing village uproar. These crossword puzzles were my first publications. No one could have predicted that many more were to follow—books, not puzzles. Unfortunately, for some readers even my books are puzzles!

But I always had a love for books and reading. There was a relatively rich library in the school and also one in the church hall. I would borrow and read several books every week. I became, in fact, a very avid and fast reader. After emigration to Canada I had to switch to English. That, of course, was a difficult period about which I will tell more in Chapters 8 and 9. But the switching process turned me into a very slow reader, because I paid so much attention to individual words. Later, that turned into my dwelling too long either on dubious grammar or on fascinating ideas. To my great annoyance, I am a slow reader till this day, always stopping to think about this idea or that word.

### *Holidays and Celebrations*

There were a few annual highlights in the village that I always looked forward to:

### *Sint Martinus Dag*

St. Martin's Day was always held on November 11, in the fall, when it was dark early. At sunset the children would go out into the streets with either paper lanterns that they bought or with lanterns they carved out of large sugar beets. They would be lit with a candle inside and hung on a stick. Armed with that and a bag, they would go from door to door, often in small groups, singing a prescribed song, the end of which asked for a small gift—a candy, an apple, a dime. That last sentence: “*As je wat geev'm dan wor je bedankt*”—[“I/We will thank you if you give me/us something.”] The similarity to North America's Halloween trick or treat is obvious, but it had a totally different focus: It was not a replay of paganism but a celebration of the life of a saint. The following morning the children would excitedly compare their haul with each other at school. The village was civilized and safe; danger did not enter anyone's mind as the children wandered around the village without being stymied by hyper-parenting or fear. No thoughts of razors in apples. Wonderfully carefree.

### *Sinterklaas Dag*

December 5 was *Sinterklaas Dag*—Saint Nickolas Day. Many European countries celebrate this event in a variety of ways. In Lutjegast, it was an exciting time for children. For some years, it was preceded by *winkelweek*—“shop week.” Every shop or store in the village would decorate their display window in special imaginative ways, often including games like guessing the number of beans in a jar with the week's winner awarded a prize. Throughout the week, the children would excitedly run from one shop to another after school to see what was new, for the displays and games could change during the week.

In the meantime, at home the excitement for *Sinterklaas* would be built up by the parents. In our house, for example, during this *winkelweek*, Mother Ellie would suddenly throw a handful of *pepernoten* [small ginger cookies] around in the living room or a handful of candies. We were mystified: Where did these come from? We would scramble all over each other to grab what we could. Each child would have his stocking—just ordinary socks they wore—hanging on the chimney mantle into which Mother would stuff candies or chocolate or a fruit for the children to pick out in the morning. Mom and Dad would secretly amass small gifts and hide them somewhere in a basket. We children would whisper to each other or ask Mother in whispering tone whether we would pass the scrutiny of *Zwarte Piet* [Black Pete] or perhaps be carried away in his sack because we had been too naughty. One could never know. Then, on the evening of the fifth, the family would gather in the living room, hushed and in great expectation mixed with some anxiety. The great wait had begun. No lights anywhere in the house, except dim light in the living room. Now and then mother would begin to sing one of the many special *Sinterklaas* songs with the children joining in. She would throw more goodies around the room with the usual resulting scramble. Who or what will come first? *Sinterklaas* or the basket of gifts? Usually the latter. Dad would be in his barbershop even that night, but he would sneak out for a moment and then suddenly open the door to the living room and, making sure no one

could see him in the dark, toss the large basket full of gifts into the room. And now the fun began. The children would take turns taking a package out of the basket and give it to the person whose name was on it. Great excitement and squeals of delight. Unwrapped gifts were handed around for everyone to admire, compare—and guess.

But throughout it all everyone was still anxiously waiting for Sinterklaas and his companion Zwarte Piet. The saint himself would be dressed like an ancient bishop, complete with beard, mitre and staff. Zwarte Piet, also dressed up in centuries-old fashion, would carry a sack. All gift activities were suspended when the children heard the much-awaited knock on the door and the deep mysterious call of Sinterklaas whether there were any children in the house. Each child would be called to come near him. He would ask whether you had been good or bad. The children would tremble, fearing they could end up in Piet's sack. Timidly they would promise to do better next year. It was the only time of the year that Lutjegast children would ever see a “black” man. It was kind of racist and negative as he was cast in the role of a servant who did the dirty work like carting off naughty and anxious children. Later his role changed to that of a jolly assistant and less a strange man to be feared.

*An aside:* The Dutch community in Metropolitan Vancouver had developed the tradition that Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet would come into New Westminster by special boat down the Fraser River and enact a variety of Sinterklaas traditions at the riverside market. They had already upgraded the role of Zwarte Piet to take out the alleged offense. However, in 2011, that was not good enough for some local Black academic who raised the alarm “Racism!” He got enough media coverage to cow the organizers into canceling the event the day before. He even had them on their figurative knees confessing their sin of racism. The Dutch folk got up in arms about this cancellation and had several letters of protest published in the Vancouver Sun, including yours truly.

In my opinion, those who raise the cry of racism the most readily, often think in racist terms themselves. It is often a case of “*De pot verwijdt de ketel dat hij zwart ziet.*” They naturally attribute their own way of thinking or doing to other people simply because that comes natural to them. If you are racist, you naturally think others are as well. In 2012, the celebration was privatized and held on private property away from the public eye.

This is a long story to tell you that gift-giving was not a Christmas thing. It was a separate event altogether. Among Gereformeerden, the custom of gift giving on Christmas was seen as a worldly diversion from the Christ child whose birth was to be the focus at Christmas. Since then, Americanization and business pressures are encouraging the people either to practice both or replace the Sinterklaas of December 5 with the Santa Claus of Christmas. When we lived in Amsterdam during the early 1970s, we noticed that the traditional Sinterklaas songs, sung so lustily during our childhood, had lost some of their popularity. Well, healthy culture is never static, but always changing and moving.

### *New Year's Day*

The third annual event was New Year's Day, including New Year's Eve. There would be a moving New Year's Eve evening service. However, afterwards the young people of the town would go about doing various pranks. Large movable objects would be moved to unexpected but clearly visible places in other parts of town. Sometimes this would end up with a large object on top of a barn roof—possibly a full-sized wagon. Along with my younger sibling, I would get up early in the morning, eager to discover the annual “legitimate” pranks.

On New Year's Day itself, there would be a morning church service, but in the afternoon my friends and I would play with carbide, a light explosive, which we placed in a tin can along with just a little water, sometimes just spit. The can had a small hole in the bottom. The lid would be closed and a match held near the hole. The carbide then exploded with a bang and the lid would be hurled off into the distance. The procedure would be repeated many times till the children got tired of it. Since the amounts were small, I do not remember a single accident. It was a form of home-made firecrackers. I'm sure the practice has been discontinued and, like all kid fun stuff, is probably banned. Spoil sports!

This was the village environment in which I, *Kleine Jan*, made my debut in 1938, in the shadow of WW II.

### *My Working Situations*

But life in Lutjegast was not all play for this first of six sons. Mother Ellie assigned me a variety of regular chores. There were the Saturday shoe polishing routine and the potato peeling regiment. During the week we wore *klompen* (wooden shoes, clogs), but we had our “Sunday shoes” for church, actual leather shoes. Though we wore them only a couple of hours per week, they had to be polished every Saturday. It was one of my early regular chores that I shared with siblings.

One of my most vivid Saturday memories is that of peeling potatoes—and, yes, by the bucket. For that very Saturday, but also for Sunday dinner. There were no special potato peelers; we would just use an ordinary sharp knife. Mother would watch us like a hawk to make sure we cut the peeling very thin. After all, we were poor and had many mouths to feed. On Sundays we would often have friends over and so needed the bucket filled to the top. I remember doing it with sister Ellie especially. Ellie and I both loved to sing together, so potato peeling was a song fest for us. I would also tell Ellie stories around that bucket, stories I would just concoct on the spur of the moment. Good or poor, Ellie loved listening to them. Of course, with so many people around, I also did my share of “doing the dishes.”

Dad would also assign me chores in his department—the chickens and the garden.

I was responsible for feeding the chickens, cleaning the coop, and collecting, cleaning and bringing the eggs to Eije Faber's grocery store on the village square. We sold them at 20

cents each. We had an extensive vegetable and potato garden behind the house that I helped tend: dig it up in preparation for planting, plant, pull weeds, harvest potatoes.

I am not suggesting that I was the only one to have chores or that I found my responsibilities a burden. I do not remember ever seriously resenting this work regime, though, like all children, I must have been unhappy when work interfered with my own agenda. We were a normal family where responsibilities were shared fairly by everyone, most of the time.

I also took a job outside the family. Kitty corner from the Boer house was a bakery. The owner provided a limited delivery service. When I turned about ten or eleven, I hired myself out part time after school to deliver bread to far-flung isolated houses over a wide area that would take me close to Stroobos on the Groningen-Frisian border. I remember especially that part of the route, for it led along the flats of *Hoendiep* and up the hill to the Ijbersburen bridge. The winds would sometimes be so fierce that biking almost became impossible. I would have to peddle hard to get *down* the hill from the bridge, while going *up* the hill was a breeze—with pun intended. This was my first paid job outside the house. I have forgotten the pay.

### *Jan the Barber*

My major job, however, was in Dad's barbershop. You may remember from the last chapter that Dad had an assistant by the name of Geert Alserda. When he left, Dad could not afford another full time assistant. That's when I was recruited for *inzepen* on Saturdays—to apply the lather--, while Dad would do the shave. On Saturdays it was so busy that I worked from 7 am till 10 pm without any break. This was my Saturday routine from my tenth to thirteenth year (1948-1951), when the Boers left for Canada. I would just sneak out for a minute to grab a bite to eat and back to the shop. Today, such a rigorous routine for a child would be illegal. It was too much, but I realized Dad needed the help, so I did not complain—externally! Sometimes, when there was a long row of shaving customers awaiting their turns, I would inwardly despair from tiredness and come close to cursing these customers in my heart.

One beautiful summer evening when there was a most unusual gap between clients, I snuck out and went for a short bike ride. I soon returned and noticed a backlog of clients waiting for service. When I re-entered the barbershop I was sharply chided by Dad. I never again made that mistake, but neither did I ever forget that inconsiderate behaviour. It was clear that Dad had no idea about how hard he was working me and I never thought to tell him! Afraid? Perhaps. But Dad did not treat me harshly in other ways. It may have been more an example of how little the Boers shared their feelings with each other. I sometimes wondered why brother Jannes was not called on to do his share when he became ten, but that issue was never raised. Much later in life, Jannes explained that he was never told and, at that age, had no urge to volunteer! Can't say I blame him. I probably would not have volunteered either.

I could be mean to some customers. I knew all of them and liked most of them, but not all. Sometimes, when I was in one of my moments of tired despair and serving a client I did not particularly like, I might on purpose brush his mouth shut by streaking soap all over it. That was a no-no I had been trained to avoid. I did that several times to Meester Vander Zee, my teacher in grades four and five. If “Meester,” as children would call their teachers, had done something in school during the week that had displeased me, I would give him the treatment. When it happened by accident, I was to wipe it off immediately and apologize. When I did it on purpose, I would leave it in place for thirty seconds or longer and thus prevent him from participating in the ever on-going chitchat between barber and clients. Yes, I would wipe but not apologize.

I was taking considerable risk with this nasty treatment. Many customers would leave me a tip of either a nickel or a dime. In view of the price of a shave of twenty-five cents, that was very generous—you figure out the percentage! At the end of the day, I collected over three guilders. It was from that money that I was able to make my monthly deposit at the postal bank. However, on the whole I did not personally benefit much from that money. It would be saved up in a tin can that was stored in a drawer somewhere in the shop. It would be used to buy clothes for me as well as for my siblings. Remember, these were the harsh post-war years where poverty was the order of the day and every penny counted. I knew exactly which client would tip and how much. I don’t remember whether anyone ever skipped a tip or even quit tipping altogether because of my mouth soaping!

However, I lived by the myth that this was my personal money. So my parents played a little game with me. I would keep a running account of the money in the can. Every week I would diligently add the day’s profit. When my parents dipped into it, they would conscientiously inform me how much they had “borrowed” from the fund and I would keep careful tab of that as well. So, I always knew how wealthy I was. Sometimes that exceeded a hundred guilders, but the recorded amount never quite tallied with the actual. I was happy in the assurance that in due time Dad would repay me!

I developed a curious habit. For probably six months or more, around six in the evening, I would get the hiccups. Vigorous hiccups. While it was taking its course, it would become the focus of the conversation. People would talk about what causes hiccups and how to overcome it. One theory was to shock the victim in some unexpected way. One day, Visser, the neighbour living on the farm directly across from us, snuck up to me and gave me a firm slap in the face! It worked. I was cured for the day. But for some time it came promptly every Saturday without fail. I came to expect it. Though it appeared to come willy nilly, it appears I unconsciously wanted it to happen and was somehow able to trigger it without realizing it myself. Why did this happen? Perhaps I enjoyed the attention it brought me? If so, I was eminently successful!

### *Other Family Situations and Stories*

First, one more story about myself. I had long noticed that I could see only one side of my nose. So I asked my parents why that should be. Could they see only one side or two?

They took me to an optometrist in Groningen who diagnosed the problem as a “lazy eye.” Actually nothing wrong with the eye, but the problem is in the part of the brain that processes the eye’s message. That part is not working well. The optometrist declared that nothing could be done about it. The man had put drops in my eyes that dilated the pupils, with the result that for the next hour everything I saw was blurred. After each visit to the optometrist, we would visit Opoe, who lived in a second-floor flat in the city. I remember walking around her flat with that hazy vision. Well, that was in NL during and after WW II, when nothing worked properly. The problem came back to haunt me later in Canada, but then it was too late for rectification.

Mother Ellie was very busy with her growing family and, being pregnant much of the time, needed and enlisted help from her four oldest, the daughters. Till this day, in their 70s and 80s, these poor overworked sisters still complain about their workload! One of their assignments would have been both changing the diapers of the family’s battalion of boys and baby sitting them, though I have not heard them talk much about that, except for sister Martha. She remembers the following story with respect to *Kleine Jan*: “Ettie [a friend] and I had to take you with us one day. We went into a meadow to pick flowers but not knowing what to do with you, we tied you to a tree. We were kids ourselves and didn’t make the knot very sturdy. So you soon wiggled yourself out of it, leaving us in a panic for a bit until we found you.”

One of the most famous family incidents took place when Koosje and Ina were moving into their teens and boys became interested in them. One Sunday evening, Ina and Koosje were in their upstairs front bedroom. A group of boys were on the street and Ina made her presence in her bedroom known to them through the window. One or two of them promptly began to climb up the wall, holding on to the drain pipe and walking in the sturdy gutters at roof level towards that window. Dad Boer heard a noise and became suspicious. He came out of the house with cane in hand and beat the boys so badly on their backs that he broke his cane. When you hear about my temper, you do not have to wonder from whom I inherited that trait, though I cannot say that he would normally flare up easily.

In case you wonder why he would have a cane so near at hand, it is my theoretical guess that it was a leftover from the time when rulers would have scepters in their hand as affirmations of their authority. This eventually was democratized so that ordinary mortals—men only, actually—would strut around with canes in their hand. Dad Boer, for example, would stroll through the village swinging his cane as a symbol of his social standing in the village’s *midden stand* [middle-class small businessman]. As he walked, he would swagger his cane *met lef* [jauntily if not a little haughtily], telling the world he was somebody. Well, he *was* a Boer, even if of peasant origin! In the NL the tradition has gone the way of all customs, but in parts of Nigeria some form of it still exists. Now a senior, I am sometimes tempted to resuscitate the custom! After all, I am Wiebe’s first son. Which means, I am *somebody!*

I grew up in a war situation that seemed perfectly normal to me. I knew no other environment and did not experience any fears. Seeing Germans around, curfews, having no electricity and other inconveniences were simply part of my life and I did not question them. Some of my war time memories include the following:

- The frequent passing of German soldiers.
- Curfew—no one on the street after 6 or 7 pm.
- No electricity—the house was lit with kerosene lamps hanging from the ceiling.
- Completely darkened windows at night so that planes overhead would not detect the village.
- Keeping a pig in the shed behind the house we were not to talk about.
- The secret slaughtering of the pig and the meat we would occasionally enjoy, some of it hanging in the chimney to smoke and preserve it.
- Turning the pig’s bladder into a football.
- Having clandestine goats or sheep in a Douma meadow for milk.
- *Fietsen vordering*—Germans would demand everyone bring their bikes to a central location for use by the Germans. When the villagers heard they were coming, many would hide their bikes out in the fields.
- After the war, the rounding up of collaborators, many of whom were shamed by having their heads shaven completely. Some of the worst went into prison eventually, but none of them were from Lutjegast. Most local collaborators were apparently not hard core. People from Lutjegast are too good-natured and laid back for hard-core positions.

Hendrik treats us to a number of precious war stories that he must have pressed out of our parents. I simply reproduce his stories, usually without quotation marks or other technicalities, while I take the liberty to insert editorial changes or even change facts if I see the need for it, based on my own memories. I have not checked on their historical accuracy. So, Hendrik’s stories interspersed with my own memories without always clearly separating them.

Wiebe and Ellie had a growing and expensive family to support during those stressful years. They had to be creative at times. It was illegal to have electricity at the time, but Dad needed it for his barber shop to run his clippers. As Hendrik tells the story, Dad rigged his clippers “to look like he had a battery in the attic.... Even after the war he had to keep up the fiction or he could have been accused of stealing.”

Mother Ellie made her own contribution to the family economy. She transformed our *pronk kamer*, the front room used for entertaining visitors, next to the barbershop filled with the fancier furniture where visitors were entertained, into a hair salon for providing the village ladies with permanents and other hair services. She worked by appointments. How she learned this trade, I do not know. Ditto with what she did with her equipment, but I do remember the expensive-looking shiny equipment. Just imagine, having eight children with more on the way all the time and then running this business.

She did have household help. For some years her younger sister, Tante Dienie, came to Lutjegast and served as a live-in maid. Here she met her husband, Berend Douma, and settled in the village for the rest of her life, except that for the last few years she moved into a senior complex in Grootegast, the county seat three kilometers south of Lutjegast. During the war, Dienie moved out and refugees came to the village from the southern part of the country. They worked for people in the village, cleaning houses and other household chores, also at our house. They did not live with us and sister Bo is not sure they were even paid beyond getting a meal.

For fear of NSB-ers, members of the *Nationale Socialistische Beweging*, an organization of Dutch collaborators with the Germans, some of the men in Lutjegast did not sleep at home at night. After one particular threat, Dad went to the *burgemeester* in Grootegast, the mayor appointed by the central government, in other words, by the Germans, and reminded him that Dad had a large family and that Mother Ellie had heart problems. So, if they were going to arrest Dad, it should be in the daytime! The mayor told Dad not to worry and go home. Another day, an NSB-er, probably Pier Nobach, the most infamous and dangerous among them, chased the customers out of the barbershop, held a gun under Dad's chin and threatened to shoot him if he saw him again. Dad went underground for six weeks and spun wool at his mother's flat in Groningen. We children did not know where he was.

One of the collaborators of whom Dad had to be careful was Folkert Visser, a middle-aged single man living next door together with his aging parents. Folkert delivered kerosene throughout the village. He was in cahoots with Van Dellen, another NSB-er and barkeeper in the middle of the village. I was blissfully unaware of all these tensions. I hung around neighbour Folkert a great deal as he was working around his yard, cared for his few animals and organized his kerosene business. It is quite possible that he tried to pump me for family information that would be useful to him as a collaborator, but, to the credit of my parents, they never poisoned my mind against him or told me to be careful what I told Folkert, nor prevented me from going there. But I did sense there was something different about Folkert. He did not attend church nor did he ever marry, two highly unusual characteristics in the village. In my later years, I wondered whether he might have been gay, a taboo subject those years of which children would not be aware.

My most vivid memories were of the end of the war, when the Canadian soldiers came through the town pursuing fleeing German soldiers. I remember the long procession of army vehicles, tanks and trucks, full of Canadian soldiers, moving slowly along the streets and throwing chocolate bars, cigarettes and other goodies at the villagers that lined the streets in jubilant celebration. As my memory has it, the village celebrated for some two weeks straight, with especially the young people dancing late into the night. For me it seemed life was one great big party!

There were also a number of experiences that ranged from sad to horrendous. The sad one—sad in my memory but horrendous in the memory of the Jongsma family—was the death of a small Jongsma child, just two doors south of us. I remember the somber days when the curtains of the normally open and pleasant house were drawn and deathly quiet

surrounded the house with the little corpse awaiting burial. Then there was the shocking suicide of Bolhuis, kitty-corner from our house. That house and family always had something mysterious about it for me, for Riemer, a son, was a strange, esoteric bird from whom young children kept their distance. He was thought to sometimes eat grass and dandelions.

The worst of all my experiences that I remember very clearly was an accident I witnessed with my own eyes. I had just left school to come home for lunch. On the way, I would pass a trucking business run by a member of the Douma family, a brother to my Uncle Berend. This particular day, just at the time I was passing their place, Douma was backing up his truck in the driveway without seeing that his little son was behind it. He rode over the boy, with the tires squashing his head! I saw the boy's brains strewn all around! I have never forgotten that awful scene, nor the horrendous cries of despair of the driver/father as he picked up his child's mutilated body. It remains so firmly etched in my memory that it still brings tears—as it does right now.

### *School Experiences*

Lutjegast had two primary schools, both equally supported by the Government. The one is secular; the other, the larger of the two, Christian. Like all Gereformeerde families, the Boer children attended the latter. So did all my friends, except Henk, since his family attended the Hervormde Kerk, whose members supported the secular school.

Grade One was in a room by itself, but the other grades were all bundled two to a room. The pupils would sit in double benches, two each. At first, they would write with pencils, but later with ink pens that would constantly have to be dipped in the inkwell that was built into the bench.

You've already been told about how I was introduced to *Juffrouw* Bauwkamp, my grade one teacher, as a hothead who could not be trusted with a knife. With such an introduction, she must have been expecting a difficult child. Actually, I was an easy pupil who never got into trouble with her. I was also a good pupil. For example, I remember that my arithmetic exercise book had nothing but correct checks in it. Never any mistake. Only problem was that I misinterpreted those checks and thought everything was wrong! Throughout the entire first grade I thought I had it all wrong, when in fact I was doing great! It brought me agony, but I never talked about it to either my teacher or parents—much like my exhaustion in the barbershop. I would suffer in silence. Reason? Perhaps I was fearful of authority? Or perhaps I naturally closed in on myself? I do know that there was not a lot of intimate communication within the family. Both parents were too busy to pay much attention as long as we brought good report cards home. Perhaps that carried over into school and other relationships.

Some who know/knew me as an adult may be surprised to learn that I was shy at school during the earlier grades. A couple of boys emerged as leaders on the playground. Unless I was specifically invited by one of the two, I did not join them during playtime. I would just

watch from the sidelines. It was the time I started my life-long habit of chewing nails, a nasty habit from which neither my mother nor, later, my wife were ever able to free me, whether by coaxing, shaming or nagging. But I did enjoy school.

Grades two and three were in one room together. My main teacher during those years was Juffrouw Scheltens. I remember nothing specific from grade two. Things just sailed along smoothly. Grade three with the same teacher was more exciting. She had come to realize that I was a good student who would often be finished ahead of everyone else and needed additional challenges. So she allowed me to proceed at my own speed, independent from the rest of the class.

One day I came across a crucial word in my reading that I needed to understand. When I asked the teacher, she gave me a primary-school dictionary and told me to look it up. Never having seen a dictionary before, I began looking at the top of the first page and started going down the long list of words, page after page. I soon noticed that I was looking for a needle in a haystack and was about to give up. In time, the teacher noticed what I was doing and then introduced me to the ways of dictionaries. I have been a grateful user ever since!

I had a friendly rival in my class, also named Jan—Jan van Til, son of a wealthy farmer. In every exercise or test the two of us always came out on top, now the one, then the other. One day, the other Jan brought a harmonica to class and played it to everyone's admiration. I felt challenged. If rival Jan could do it, so could I. It so happened that my mother often played the same instrument in the company of her children. So I went home and asked her to teach me to play the instrument. It being a fairly simple instrument and my being musical by nature, within a day or two I had mastered the skill enough to take the harmonica to school and also play it in class. OK, the playing field had once again become level for the two. Now the class boasted *two* musicians and my honour was restored!

*An aside:* Recently (2013) Jan Van Til and I started corresponding with each other and reminiscing about our class experiences. He has a parallel harmonica story, but his took place in grade 6 with *Meester De Vries*. One day, I was playing my instrument during recess and De Vries heard me. Then the latter brought out his violin and the two of us gave a spontaneous concert together. Jan remembers that the next day he heard me practice in my upstairs bedroom.

It does not matter whose memory of the details was the most correct. The point is that his playing stimulated me to learn to play also. I was not to be outdone by my (friendly) competitor. It seems that the harmonica was a popular instrument in Lutjegast. I have in my archives a short childhood autobiography of Gerrit Lok, son of the “brugwachter” of the Ijbersburen bridge outside of the village. He wrote about his two brothers who were both accomplished harmonica musicians.

One day, the teacher invited the children to sing their favourite song solo in front of the class. A couple of children volunteered, but I did not. Instead, I whispered the lines of a

song to my neighbour, a song about a subject that was kind of below the belt in a humorous sort of way. *Juffrouw* noticed it and asked me about it. When I tried to deny it, she forced me to the front to sing my song. Here it is in all its “gory.” I won’t translate it, for it sounds too coarse in English and the humour would be lost.

*De oude WC was jarig  
De keutels vieren feest  
De pispot mag niet mee doen  
Want hij is pas ziek geweest.*

No idea where I picked up that song. Or was it my own creation? I got off with a reprimand for a song I was forced to sing! Till this day, I have not figured out why I did not quickly think of a more acceptable song and sing it! I guess I was not “street smart” enough. *Juffrouw* would never have known the difference—and I would not have the story to tell!

I was used to getting good marks for my work. But one day a disaster occurred. I handed in an assignment and was awarded a grade of a mere 5 out of 10 for my handwriting. It should be understood that grades were expressed numerically from ten down to one, not by letters. I was not used to such a low grade. It devastated me and permanently made me lose my confidence in my handwriting ability. Till this day, I am embarrassed about my handwriting and am hardly capable of manually filling out forms decently. I am so glad that throughout my adult life I’ve been blessed with a wife who excels in filling out forms neatly.

*An aside:* In his letter, Jan Van Til wrote that he did not get along with *Juffrouw Scheltens* and found her way too strict. She did not approve of his handwriting either and gave him a 5 as well. Thus both of us, her best students, faced the same challenge. She told Jan that he could do much better. One day he received a hefty beating on his buttocks in front of the entire class to encourage him to write better. The next day, he received a 7 for his effort. Jan commented, “*Dus het hielp toch!*” That is to say, “It did help!”

On to Meester vander Zee, whom you have already met in the barbership. I had him for grades four and five. I was wondering whether Meester knew about my advanced status in grade three and whether I would be allowed to continue along that line. Meester said nothing about it. It may be that *Juffrouw Scheltens* had not discussed it with him. So I just joined my classmates in their routine without complaining.

This Meester was highly respected in the village. He was an elder in the Gereformeerde Kerk, the director of considerable skill of the village brass band and a fine flower gardener. He had one of the village’s nicest flower gardens in front of his house. He really was a kind man—but he was also a hothead. He always had a ruler close at hand that he used to apply to the buttocks of unruly pupils or use as a strap on their hands. One day, he told the Bible story about the beheading of John the Baptist. Afterwards, he left the room for a few moments. During his absence, I stood up and, mimicking the daughter of King Herod, I

shouted, “*Geef mij op een schotel het hoofd van Johannes de Doper!*” (Give me on a plate the head of John the Baptist.) I had barely said it when Meester re-entered the classroom. Out with the ruler. I had to bow with my buttock facing Meester. The latter let me have it at his full power—which, fortunately, was not all that impressive. In fact, the children often secretly laughed at his lame floggings. They preferred the ruler to writing *straf regels* or lines over and over again.

From Meester vander Zee to Meester de Vries, the headmaster who taught grades six and seven. That was the teacher I loved and respected the most. During playtime, he would often play with the children, including games involving running. He would roughhouse with us.

He organized a school choir in which I participated since its beginning. It is here that I picked up my love for singing and music in general. The children learned to sing do-re-mi by a scheme of numerical notes. It became such a natural system for me that even today I use it mentally when I play my harmonica, recorder or even organ. It was here also that I learned to sing in parts, something I still do in church. Among the boys in my class I was the lead singer. When I graduated from primary grade six and transferred to the *MULO* or junior high in Grootegast, I continued singing in this choir at the request of Meester. Once a week, as soon as the *MULO* let out, I would jump on my bike and race the four kilometers to my former school to join the choir. Till this day, I have exceedingly fond memories of this choir experience.

*An aside:* Jan Van Til wrote on the same subject in his letter and I translate:  
I thoroughly enjoyed our weekly singing practice, singing as we did in harmony and learning the music with the do-re-mi scheme. You don’t ever forget that scheme. I have for years been a member of a major male choir and still use it to learn my part.

In class de Vries challenged me as a writer. The class would spend the first half of every Friday morning on either writing or art, with each pupil making his own choice. I chose to write throughout the year. I wrote one single long story from beginning of the year to the end. Though I do not remember the content of the story, I do remember the opening sentence: “*Door de duistere straten van Rotterdam sloop een donker figuur*”— (A sinister figure slunk his way through the dark streets of Rotterdam.). Never mind that I had never been to Rotterdam or any other city, except Groningen. It was a lengthy story written well enough to merit being displayed at a teacher’s convention. I never saw the manuscript again. It was, of course, handwritten with that pen constantly dipped into the inkwell.

*An aside:* In his recent letter, Jan Van Til wrote the following and I translate:  
I sat next to you in grade 6 when we had to write a story every week about any subject of our choice. For me, this was disaster, especially because you began to write immediately and continued writing without any hesitation so that after fifteen minutes or so, you had written a robust and coherent story. It was even a series that continued the following week and each time you would end your story with “*wordt vervolgd,*” that is “to be continued.” I remember how jealous I was of you.

Even this popular headmaster could occasionally be pushed into a temper tantrum, especially if he was pushed to the wall. It was one of these winter mornings with thick ice on the streets that so thrilled us school children. All of us were on the road skating. As friends met friends, I found myself in a group that included some of my classmates. We decided to go meet some of our friends living further out in the country. When we finally arrived at school, we were late. Meester de Vries knew of course what was going on, but he demanded an explanation and apology from his late pupils. Most of them did, but for some reason, once I had submersed myself into spinning a story that was obviously false, Meester began to press me more and more to simply tell the obvious truth. When I continued to deny it, de Vries became angrier and angrier. Finally he told me to lie down on the floor on my back. I obeyed. Then Meester put his foot on my throat, though he did not put any weight on it. So there stood this popular headmaster with his foot on my throat. It would have made quite a photograph that a few years later might have led to his dismissal. I do not remember whether I recanted, but I emerged from the ordeal unscathed in my affection and respect for the man fully in tact. I realized I had asked for it.

From grade six I moved over to the *MULO* or junior high in Grootegast in 1950, just three kilometers from home. I would always bike there together with other students from Lutjegast. Here I was suddenly bombarded with three foreign languages at the same time! English, German and French. I do not remember any special incidents or story about this school, except that I mysteriously had a very hard time with *handels rekenen* (business math). I had done well in numbers since grade one—remember the check marks? Suddenly I received low grades on the subject. Try as I did, I could not overcome it. I remain puzzled by this development even today. It was so out of character.

I did not attend this school very long. The family prepared for immigration to Canada. A month prior to leaving on March 15, 1951, every one had to have a smallpox inoculation. I knew that this made some people sick. So I pretended to be sick so I did not have to attend school any more. Though I generally loved school, I had lost interest in courses I would not complete. There was a free world out there beckoning me and here was this excuse. Who would not go for that? After hanging around the house for a few days pretending to be sick, I wandered about for some weeks, just enjoying my last few weeks in the village without anything in particular at hand.

### *Religion*

The Christian religion overshadowed my life. Apart from going to church twice a Sunday, there was the Christian school and the Christian ethos pervading the village. The Boer home shared this ethos and was deeply affected by it.

Starting at home, the most obvious effect of religion were the prayers before and after each meal, as well as the Bible reading that went along with every meal. If Dad was around, he would say one of his set formula prayers. If he was not, Mom would take over, often just leading us in the Lord's Prayer. The children also had a set prayer they each recited one after the other. Before every meal it was "Here, zegen deze spijs om Jezus wil. Amen"

(Lord, bless this food for Jesus sake. Amen). After the meal there would be an appropriate post-meal formula we would all also rattle off after each other. Reaching age twelve was an important rite of passage, for then we no longer had to orally recite the prayer. As to Bible reading, if Dad was around, he would read the next chapter in the Bible without ever skipping a chapter, generational and tribal statistics, sordid stories and all. At the end, he might ask one of the children to repeat the last word, as a way of “ensuring” a listening audience. Without Dad, Mother Ellie might read a story from a children’s Bible story book written by Anne de Vries. No free prayers ever, nor spontaneous spirituality. Later on in his life, my Dad would become more free in his prayers and more expressive of his faith.

Mother Ellie was always a closed kind of person. We never knew what she was thinking. She was especially closed when it came to spiritual matters. Her failure to express herself did not mean Mother Ellie was not a believer. She did gather the children around her to read Bible stories and to sing Christian as well as folk songs, often with her playing the harmonica. She did have a good singing voice. It is to the story Bible with the pictures of Bible patriarchs and prophets with beards that I trace my love of beards. I have for years told people that my beard was to copy the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. By wearing a beard, I would often joke, I was preparing myself to meet all these Biblical heroes in heaven.

Another prayer occasion was bedtime, when each child would kneel down and sing the following prayer:

<i>Ik ga slapen, ik ben moe.</i>	I’m going to sleep now; I am tired.
<i>’k sluit mijn beide oogjes toe.</i>	I’m going to close both of my eyes.
<i>Here, houd ook deze nacht</i>	Lord, watch over me faithfully
<i>Over mij getrouw de wacht.</i>	this night.
<i>Amen</i>	Amen.

It really was the Dutch equivalent to “Now I lay me down to sleep....” Sometimes, when I finished my prayer, I might take a quick peek under the bed to make sure there was no boogey man hiding there! So, a fixed religious regime without much spontaneity, but it was real. The Bible readings, the singing, it all was real and made a deep impression for life on most of us.

Then there was the religious routine at school. Prayer at opening of the day by the teacher. Sometimes a Psalm would be sung. Every day a Bible story that might be reviewed the next day. Alternatively, we may have been assigned to memorize the Heidelberg Catechism Sunday by Sunday as it is divided. Around Christmas the children would often have to memorize Messianic texts from the Old Testament or parts of Jesus’ birth stories.

The library, of which I made extensive use, contained mostly Christian books, even though some were Boer stories from South Africa and really racist. That incongruity was not recognized at the time. Sometimes the Christian message would be wrapped up in nationalism, especially in stories relating to the Boer War in which the Dutch kind of

automatically favoured the Boer side of things, their kith and kin. Though most English-language accounts of these two wars favour the British cause, it should not be forgotten that it was during those two wars that the British invented the concentration camps for which the Germans and Japanese were so infamous during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, hey, who is the Boer clan to complain about all that? Which other family has two wars named after them?! A wonderful jocular club to hold over the head of someone you want to impress!

Church was of course a major part of the religious regime. The Boer family belonged to the Gereformeerde Kerk and faithfully attended twice a Sunday. If December 25 happened to fall on a Friday, it meant a busy church schedule and a horrendous one for the pastor. Twice on Christmas day itself; once on the *Tweede Kerstdag* (“Second Christmas Day”--Boxing Day); twice again on Sunday. Same type of thing when it fell on Monday. The two-day Easter celebration brought the same constellation, what with Good Friday introducing the weekend.

Though for me the sermons of *Dominee* (Reverend) Scheeres were a bit long and hardly meaningful, I always enjoyed the singing immensely, which consisted either of Psalms or of one of the 29 hymns the denomination had approved, mostly Bible hymns solid in content and music both, hardly like the chorus cult of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I remember especially, still with a reverent fondness, the New Year’s Eve service in which all the names of those who had died during the year would be read with the congregation totally hushed. And then a hymn that still brings tears to my eyes, “*k Wil U, O God, mijn dank betalen*”(I want to express my gratitude to You, oh God). Another regular song during that service and equally moving to me even now was the Dutch version of “Hours and days and years and ages, swift as moving shadows flee.” At a very early age I taught myself the tenor of most of these songs and belched them out at my loudest! The term “robust” would not do justice to my enthusiastic singing. The singing made the entire service worth it for me.

*An aside:* Recently (2013) my old classmate Luud Hoeksema reminded me in a letter that in grade 6, *Meester De Vries* had us sing “*k Wil U, O God...*,” every Friday at the end of the school day. I do not remember, but it helps explain why that particular song retains such deep meaning and evokes such emotion within me till today, the time of my final edit. Once a year might not achieve that, but every week might well.

There was a strict pattern to these services. Every year the pews would be allotted anew among the families. Thus everyone knew exactly where every family sat. For visitors without connections, a red light was turned on a couple of minutes before the services. That meant the empty seats were now free for the taking. On the minute, the preacher and elders would come marching in, with the “serving” elder of the month shaking hands with the preacher before he would ascend the high pulpit. I assume he wished him God’s guidance during the service. Then all the elders would slide into the front bench reserved for them. After the service, the same elder would again shake the pastor’s hand, as a sign or declaration that his sermon had been faithful to the Bible.

In between those two handshakes there was a fixed liturgy. Items of special interest were the reading of the Ten Commandments in the morning service and of the Apostles' Creed in the afternoon service, both by the serving elder. This reading was done from a lectern located in front of the pulpit at floor level. These readings were usually done in dour ways that were not very uplifting. It may well be that the dour expression of the faith in these communities was partly due to this emphasis on a law so dourly read without positive reminders of grace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Normally only Psalms were sung, no man-made hymns, except a small bundle of 29 *Gezangen* approved for use on special occasions. They would be sung sitting down, all of them. During the usually long congregational prayer, many of the men would stand up, presumably to keep from falling asleep. Remember, many of them were dairy farmers who had gotten up early in the morning to milk their cattle. Wanting to act grownup, in the course of time I would also stand up. When the service was over, the congregation exited and went their way. No social hour. As soon as they were outside, the men lit their cigarettes, pipes and cigars and merrily smoked their way home. I would run home to organize the living room for "my" mini-service. By the time the others arrived, I was ready to preach to them! No surprise, I guess, that I became a preacher.

The Boers observed all the Sunday restrictions the culture imposed on all, including turning the Sunday afternoons into fun social events. The parents might have invited some friends over and sit in the more festive visitors' parlour, until it was turned into a hair salon. The ladies would chat and drink tea. The men would often play chess over a glass of wine and a cigar. It might also take the shape of a family walk in the village. It was all very *gezellig* or cozy. Though there was a degree of legalism involved, that was not the dominant spirit of the day. That interpretation was imposed on the situation after both country and church adopted more worldly attitudes that have culminated in a modern NL one can justifiably describe as pagan—worship of creature(s) rather than the Creator.

Of course, Lutjegast celebrated the usual Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. All three of them were celebrated in couplets of two days as national holidays. I have already told you about the many services around Christmas. The same held true for the others—and the Boers never skipped a single one of them! Another thing these feast days had in common, apart from their focus on special spiritual events, is that the Boer children would each be given an orange, rare and expensive, and, especially on Easter, a boiled egg. Though the family kept chickens and thus had eggs, poverty forced the sale of eggs to Faber's grocery store, where I would deliver them several times a week. For health reasons, only Mother Ellie would eat an egg daily, but she would try to do it stealthily so that the children would not notice. She would just crack an egg open and devour it raw straight out of the shell. I did often notice. How special these treats were. 60 years or more later, I still remember the occasions.

Boxing Day, simply called *Tweede Kerstdag* (Second Christmas Day) was the most ecumenical day of the year. In the afternoon, the Hervormde Kerk would hold their Christmas party for their own children around a Christmas tree, but the Gereformeerden would be invited as well. We did not have Christmas trees, for it was considered an

overture to modernism. So, it was a real treat for me to see the candles and other tree decorations. But note that this constituted yet an additional service on top of all the others, the difference being that attendance was voluntary. Yet I never missed the event. I was indeed a church junkie! It was such fun. And, after all, there were no alternative recreational options available for many, many kilometers! Not much choice, really. Though the schism that led to the separation over a century earlier was not a pretty scene, by my day they had learned to tolerate each other, be good neighbours—and invite the schismatics to their Christmas party. Around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the two denominations re-united under the banner of “*Protestantse Kerk van Nederland*”—(Protestant Church of NL).

While Christmas, being winter time, was spent at home and church, the other two holidays were different on their second day. Dad and Mom would take the children for a visit, usually to Opa and Opoe Veninga in Leek. The trip was always by bike. Mom would have a child on the back of the bike. Dad would sometimes carry three children—on the back, on the bar and on a special seat hung on the front of the handlebars. But before reaching Leek, they would often divert to Norg, a place with a permanent children’s *speeltuín* (amusement park). We children would play to our hearts’ content. The really special part was that we would be treated to an orange drink and an ice cream cone. It was little short of heaven! What a day that always was. And then, finally off to Opa and Opoe. That could be a bit of an anticlimax since that was basically an adult event. In this way, religious holidays were also fun days for the children.

The Kuyperian tradition had laid its stamp on most of Lutjegast. That meant a pervasive sense of religion in all of life, not just in a religious slice of life. It also meant that especially the men would love to discuss theology and politics. This spilled over into the barbershop discussions that I overheard every Saturday. I picked up something there without realizing it that would have profound effect on my religious and professional life in later years.

#### *Ambitions of a Filosoof in de Dop (Budding Philosopher)*

As I moved on to around age 10, I began to think in terms of politics, the universe and other issues beyond myself. This was undoubtedly further stimulated by the Saturdays in the barbershop where serious discussions took place among these rather heavy Calvinists, of whom it was often said that every one of them was a theologian in his own right. There were three major issues that sometimes occupied me, but that I did not share with anyone else.

One concerned the ecological question. I would occasionally accompany my parents to visit Uncle Hendrik Boer in Hoogkerk on the way to Groningen. This uncle worked in and lived next to a tar factory whose tall smoke stack bellowed out terrific black clouds day in and day out 24/7, without letup. I would often wonder, “Doesn’t the sky ever get full with this smoke?” The question would occupy me even at home in Lutjegast. It seems I was “green” far ahead of my time!

The second issue was the war with Indonesia. The Dutch had hardly been liberated from the Nazis, when their Indonesian colony began to demand and fight for their independence. It was in the air throughout the entire colonized world. The Dutch sought to forestall independence by sending troops and waging an actual war, even in the face of American support for independence. When a soldier would come home from the front, the village's Christian brass band would welcome the returned hero with an open-air concert at his house. Relatively large crowds would attend the festivity and they would all sing the Dutch national anthem. I was dubious about such nationalistic demonstrations. I asked myself why the Dutch should prevent Indonesians their freedom when they had just fought for their own! Since it seemed the whole village was in support of the effort, I kept this reservation to myself. Perhaps someone will one day find a connection between my feelings at that time and my writing a doctoral dissertation on colonialism 25 years later at the Vrije Universiteit. It is also interesting that I chose as my professor Johannes Verkuyl, who was a missionary in the Indonesian colony, supported the rebel cause and ended up in a Dutch prison as a traitor to the fatherland. As I handed him chapter after chapter, Verkuyl would always comment, "*Mijn hart klopt er van*" (My heart beats with excitement). Two of a kind.

The third issue was that of competition between the mostly Christian businesses in the village. I noticed that my parents did their shopping in the village very carefully. There were three bakers. So, they rotated buying bread from each one. Same for other products and services. I learned that it had to do with business and competition. If my parents wanted these people to patronize the two Boer businesses, they had to treat them all equally. This made me think about the relationship between Christians in business. How could it be that Christians would compete with each other and take advantage of each other instead of supporting each other as I heard from the Bible and in church? Later, as an adult, I continued these thoughts and concluded that it was the result of the uncompleted Kuyperian revival in the NL. Business was not always brought under the banner of Christ, as Kuyper would have prescribed; capitalistic norms were still reigning and had not been reformed.

### *Three Dreams for the Future*

I not only had big ideas but also had big ambitions. There were three things I wanted to do when I grew up. I wanted to become a *dominee*. That was not so strange, given my positive church orientation and experience. I also wanted to become a writer. Though I had never met one, I had read plenty of their products. So, not so strange either. But I was also determined to get a doctor's degree! Now where would I have gotten *that* from? No one in my village, family or other aspects of my life were Ph.D's! I have long been puzzled about this one! As I moved into my teens, these dreams were submerged into my subconsciousness, if I may use a bit of pop psychology. But they remained active beneath the surface and eventually all ambitions were met. I became a missionary pastor and served for thirty years. I wrote quite a number of books. And I did get a doctorate from the Vrije Universiteit. It was some years after all three had been fulfilled that those earlier ambitions surfaced again and I recognized all my dreams had come to fruition! A

fortunate and blessed man. In view of my early poor environment, I achieved more than anyone would have predicted. The details of those achievements are recorded in subsequent chapters. I am not boasting so much as recognizing what God has done in and with my life, even though it was not without blemish. Praise be to God.

### *Emigration, 1951*

All the foregoing came to an end on March 15, 1951, when, in the dark of the early morning, the Boer family boarded a bus that someone—Government?—had chartered to take a number of families from the region to Rotterdam for onward emigration to Halifax, Canada. Quite a few neighbours and friends had gathered to see us off. Dad and Mom and some of their friends were weeping, something I could not understand. Why weep when there was this new adventure awaiting us? I was eager to get moving. This was fun! I was thirteen years old.

Emigration was in the air during the 1950s. People despaired of the future in the NL. Thousands upon thousands left, mostly to Canada but also to other countries. The entire social structure of some villages was disrupted due to so many leaving. They could not envision a NL that would rise from the ruins of WW II—with the help of most successful foreign aid programme by the USA in history, known as the Marshall Plan. When I returned to the country in 1966 on my way to Nigeria, I could not believe the standard of living the country had achieved. Today, at the time of this writing, the Dutch at home, in so far as they can remember this population bloodletting at all, kind of contemptuously refer to those emigrants of the 1950s as “*weggelopen Nederlanders*” (run-away Dutchmen).



**The Boer Family Immigration Photograph - 1951 \***  
**Front left to right: Hendrik, Tinus, Dad, Wim, Jannes, Mom**  
**Back row: Jan, Ina/Bo, Ellie, Koos/Karen, Martha**

And so our family, together with 1500 others, sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to Halifax in nine days aboard the *SS. Volendam*. Today, that is the name of one of the cruise ships of the Holland-America Line that we occasionally see in the Vancouver harbour. I do not have good memories of this crossing. Within a day I became sick and was diagnosed with diphtheria, a sickness that was feared and called for isolation. I was immediately placed in the ship's hospital ward and kept there in isolation for the entire trip. I had none of the fun that I had anticipated. I was fed almost exclusively bananas, a fruit I began to loathe and could not tolerate again till three decades later. I am not sure that diagnosis was ever confirmed.

### *An Appendix – My Colourful Uncle Berend*

Berend Douma, though marginal to the Boer story, deserves a write up as a cultural icon in Lutjegast. Though born there, thus in Groningen, he was one of the many Frisians in the village. He was the first Frisian to marry into the Veninga clan, my Tante Dienie. That relationship constitutes my excuse for including his story here. He was the son of a Gereformeerde church elder whom I remember as such a dour reader. He was also a well-to-do local farmer who operated that wheat field we would turn into our playground.

Oom Berend cut a colourful village figure. Not being the oldest son, he was not eligible to take over the farm and had to fend for himself. He served many functions. He went around the farms in the area on his bike as an official milk controller to ensure high quality. He also went around selling kerosene with his three-wheel automobile. The reason for the three-wheeler was that it did not require a driver's licence. It was difficult in NL to obtain a license and he failed more than ten times! Though normally a very pious, soft-spoken, polite and friendly person, at one failed attempt he is reputed to have yelled out: “*Verdom jullie allemaal!*” [Damn all of you!] For a Gereformeerde in Lutjegast, this was gross heresy; for a Berend Douma, this was simply unheard of and completely out of character. That's of course, why the story is remembered—and celebrated!



He was also the town crier. He would walk through the village to announce special events. When a death occurred, he would don a special black uniform, high hat and all, and knock on all doors to announce the death. I believe he was also responsible for some of the funeral arrangements. The dead would be buried either around the Hervormde Kerk, or in the Gereformeerde cemetery behind the Christian primary school. The corpse would be kept at home for a few days, while the curtains would be drawn to indicate mourning. A small black patch of diamond-shaped cloth would be sewn on the sleeves of the people in mourning. The body would be conveyed to the cemetery in its coffin by a very stately horse-drawn hearse with the mourners walking in a silent procession behind it. Berend, if I recall correctly, would walk at the head of the procession in his uniform.

*Oom Berend, the town crier \**

Though just about everybody would be given a Christian burial, these stout Calvinists continued an age-old tradition of circling around the cemetery three times before heading for the grave. Unbeknown to them, this apparently was a remnant of ancient Paganism that sought to confuse the evil spirits about the location of the corpse by encircling the place. Had they realized the probably source of this custom, they would have been horrified by their own behaviour and, again probably, would discontinue it forthwith. To mix their Calvinism with Paganism would be unthinkable for them; the antithesis would be too great; it would amount to syncretism, something that they would vehemently reject as impure.

One of Berend's hobbies was raising rabbits. He would experiment with breeding new types with special shapes and colours. He always had a wonderful collection of them that he would take to special rabbit exhibitions. He won many prizes and was justly proud of them.

Berend was also a musician and the village poet. He proudly "played" organ as well as accordion—but note the quotation marks! According to the newspaper article mentioned below, his children did not want him to play in their presence! But, Berend insisted, "Ik heb er plezier in" [I enjoy it]. He sang in the Gereformeerde choir.

He wrote poetry and published a new poem in every edition of the village paper *Tasman Koerier*. Upon his death, a local newspaper, *Het Westerkwartier*, featured an article about him under the title "*Berend Douma (83), de dorpsdichter van Lutjegast*," ["Berend Douma (83), the village poet of Lutjegast]. The largest part of the article is a large picture of Berend happily playing his accordion in his living room with his usual big serene smile on his face (January 12, 2000). He was a most gentle and friendly person with an eternal smile. Always—except that one time!—soft spoken. When he died, Lutjegast lost part of its soul.

## Chapter 3<

### Prins Roots and Family

#### *In the Beginning*

*Note to Reader: There are some important differences between Chapters 1-2 and 3-7. In Chapters 1-2, the author is Jan/John. The first person pronoun, the "I," refers to him. In Chapters 3-7, the author is Foekje/Fran. Here the first person pronoun, the "I," refers to her. Different authors, of course, means different styles. We have edited each others' chapters but retained their original flavours.*

**I was born on what used to be the bottom of the sea, in the far north of Friesland, a province in The Netherlands bordering on the shallow Wadden Zee, an arm of the North Sea. I was the seventh and last child of Tjalling (Charles) Prins and Jantje Boersma (Jennie), daughter number four.**

**This took place on Wednesday, March 11, 1942, in the family farmhouse in Hantumhuizen, during the harsh winter time in the middle of World War II (WW II). In spite of those difficult beginning circumstances, I always felt loved and wanted. I consider this a great tribute to my parents and my siblings.**

#### *Naming Traditions*

**Why was my last name "Prins?" One obvious answer: my father's last name was Prins! But where did that name come from? For many generations people simply used their father's first name as their last name. My father would then have been named "Tjalling Reinders" and his first son would have been "Reinder Tjallings."**

**But in 1811, Napoleon, the French emperor who occupied our country, mandated the taking of official last names. Some people chose their trade or their geographical location or even humorous names, but my ancestors made a political statement. They chose royalty, the Dutch House of Orange, the *Prins!* It was a belligerent and, probably, risky anti-French statement. It was my great-great-great-grandfather Pier Doekes (1750-1818) who, in 1811, made this decision for all his descendants.**

**I was born into a very large extended family: my grandparents had many brothers and sisters. My parents had eight siblings each. That gave me sixteen uncles and aunts, not counting their spouses, and at least 75 first cousins. Most, but not all, of these ancestors were farmers. The records include references to bakers, cattle and sheep traders, even street vendors in meat and buttermilk.**

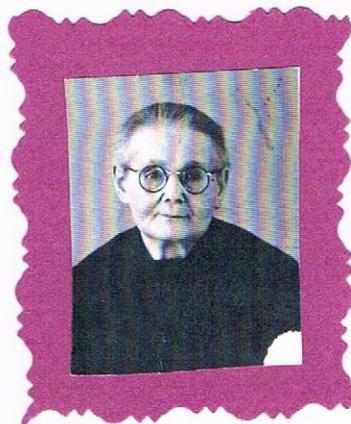
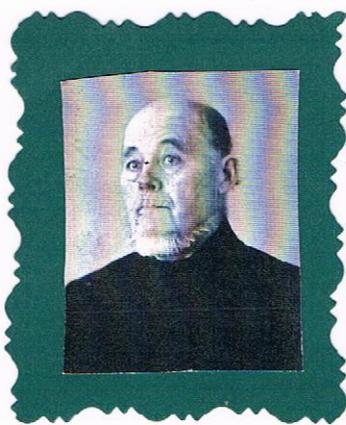


*Doeke Piers Prins\**  
1832-1904

*Foekje Posthuma-Prins\**  
1832-1921

*Fran's Paternal Great Grandparents*

Even though my paternal grandmother was born in Groningen, the province just east of Friesland, the names of most of my close relatives reveal that my heritage on both the Prins and Boersma side is basically Frisian. Here's the list: Reinder, Henderika, Doeke, Thijs, Pier, Geert, Trijntje, Tjalling, Foekje, Klazina, Hedzer, Janna, Jan, Antje, Detje, Jantje, Frederika, Frederik, Tjiske and Harmen. You can't get more Frisian than that!



*Reinder Prins\**  
1868-1949

*Henderika Bolhuis-Prins\**  
1870-1954

*Fran's Paternal Grandparents*



Back row: Beppe Henderika, Pier, Doeke, Geert, Pake Reinder  
 Front row: Thijs, Klasina, Trijntje, Foekje, Tjalling/Charles

*Family of Reinder & Henderika Prins - 1907\**

My parents followed the standard naming tradition with their children: Reinder, Hedzer, Doeke, Janna, Henderika, Trijntje and Foekje. The custom was to name the first son after the paternal grandfather, the first daughter after the maternal grandmother; then the other grandfather and grandmother; and then down the line of aunts and uncles on both sides of the family.

However, with Doeke there was a bit of a problem. My mother felt that there were already enough boys named "Doeke Prins." For some reason she preferred the name "Geert" even though that name was not next in the lineup. Between Mom and Dad they had agreed to break with tradition and that their third son would be registered as "Geert." Somehow Grandpa Reinder Prins heard about this and he met Dad on the way to the birth registration office. The result was that the third son was properly registered as "Doeke." I wonder what story he told Mom when he returned home!

According to tradition, I should have been "Trijntje," after my father's oldest sister. However, my mother's oldest sister was also named "Trijntje," after whom my sister was named. Rather than have two "Trijntjes" in the family, as some chose to do, my parents picked the next name down the list, and I became "Foekje."

My Aunt Foekje was born with a lame arm. When she was very little, the local doctor did surgery on her on a table at their house. He made a mistake when he cut a nerve and made the situation worse instead of better. On his deathbed, that doctor sent for Grandpa and he confessed his mistake.



*Hedzer & Janna Sliep-Boersma \**  
 1865-1937      1869-1950

*Fran's Maternal Grandparents*



**Back row: Jan, Trijntje, Antje/Anna, Jantje/Jennie**

**Front row: Frederika, Beppe Janna, Harmen, Tjiske, Pake Hedzer, Frederik, Detje**

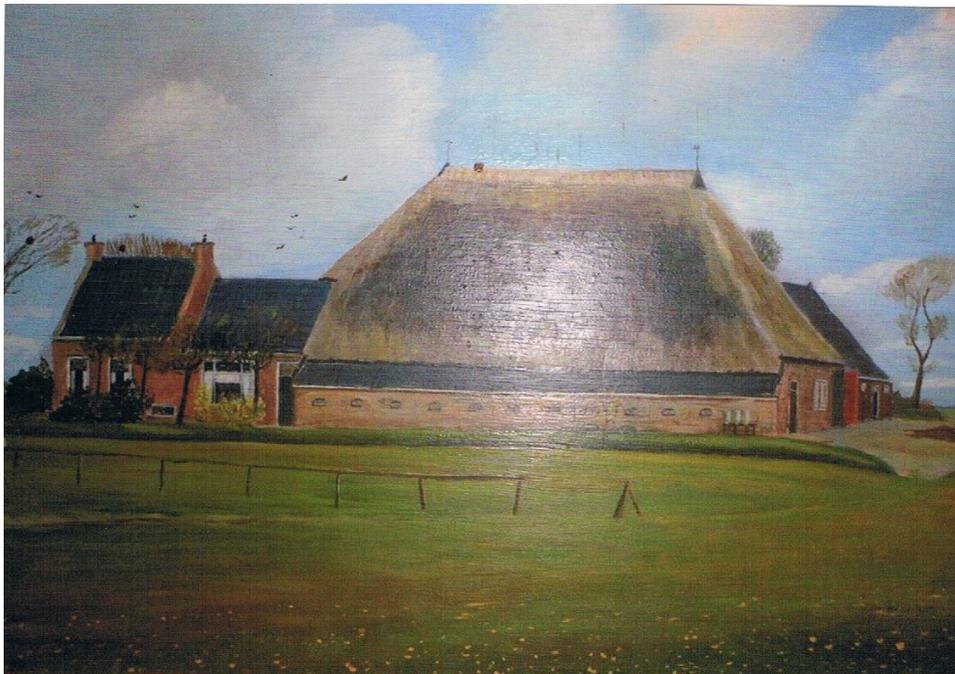
*Family of Hedzer & Janna Boersma - 1916 \**

### *The Family Farm*

And why was I born at Hantumhuizen? Again, the obvious answer is that my parents lived there! But why? What brought them there? Get ready for a bit of Prins family history.

This is the story of the farm. It came into the Prins family in the 1880s through my Great Grandfather Doeke Prins, who bought it for 1200 guilders as a “gamble.” He was a land speculator as well as a trader in cattle and horses. He would speculate by bidding on farmland and entire farms.

According to the custom of the day, a person who made the highest *initial* bid had bought the place, but then you didn’t really know who had made that bid until the afternoon when there was the second sale of the same property. If somebody raised the bid by as little as 5 guilders, it would be his. The previous bidder would get a premium. It was somewhat of an art to know how much to bid. The real reason these speculators put in their bid was to obtain that premium.



*The Prins Farm – Fran’s Birthplace \**

Great Grandfather Doeke was normally very successful in his bidding. He had expected to make a quick profit by offloading it that same afternoon. But in the 1880s, as a result of the French-German War of 1870, there was a depression all over Europe, including the Netherlands. Land prices were uncertain. Since his

remained the highest bid, he was stuck with the place. He did not go to live there right away but had somebody else take care of it. There wasn't even a road to the place, just a bad "mud path" (*modder reed*).

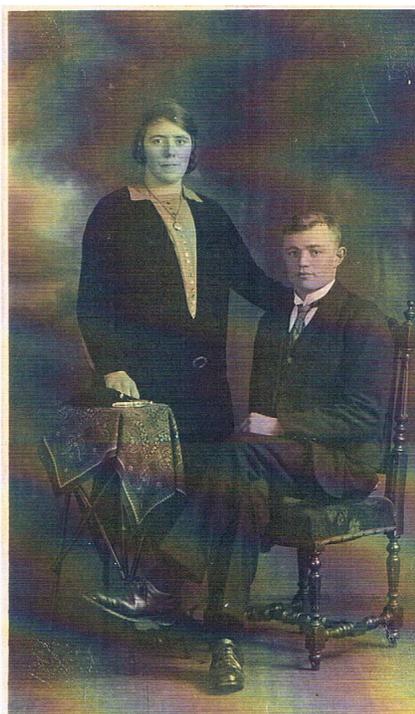
My Great Grandparents, Doeke and Foekje Prins, lived in a rented house for many years. Some of their sons were very interested in the teachings of Abraham Kuyper, the founder of the Gereformeerde Kerk, the nearest Dutch version of the Christian Reformed Church and one of its ancestors. Kuyper founded many other pillar institutions in the country as well that still exist today. Their interest in Kuyper upset their landlord, the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church) in Hantum, enough to evict their tenants. After all, Kuyper was the leader of a denomination that broke away from their beloved church, the former state church. This eviction forced them to move to the remote farm in Hantumhuizen. Their rented quarters had been very convenient and up to date. Thus they had become used to comfortable living conditions and were not happy with this downward move. Also the Hantumhuizen farm proved to have bad soil and was hard to work on. My Great Grandparents lived there for only a few years. Great Grandfather Doeke died as a result of a stroke in 1905 and, a little while later, Great Grandmother Foekje, along with Uncle Tjalling, her bachelor son, moved to the city of Dokkum. Several of the relatives lived in Dokkum along streets with the word "*Bolwerk*" in their name. A *bolwerk* is a fortress, thus referring to the ancient defence system around the city.

My Grandparents, Reinder and Henderika Prins, lived on the Hantumhuizen farm from 1892–1896 and again from 1913–1928. Grandpa refused on principle to have a bicycle because he felt it was much too modern. Once he even refused to interview a much-needed farm hand, because he had arrived on a bike! He was, however, forced by circumstances to learn how to ride a bike at age 50. My Dad said that he would give Grandpa a gentle push on the slope in our farmyard right by the manure pile to get him started on his return trip to Dokkum. He hoped Grandpa would remember how to use the brake when he arrived home!

Apparently my Grandpa was quite a stubborn man. In addition to being hesitant about learning to ride a bike, he was very suspicious about margarine when it first appeared. Once, when he was travelling with his brother Theunis, he insisted on taking real Frisian butter along and used it in restaurants. Nothing could compare with the original stuff that came from his home province! Theunis, who was studying in Amsterdam at the time, had been trying to impress my Grandpa Reinder with the beauty of other parts of The Netherlands. My Grandfather was not impressed and felt it couldn't compare at all with Friesland. Interestingly enough, when many years later Theunis traveled to the USA to visit his children, he complained about the potatoes there being of poor quality in comparison to those grown in Friesland! Just a comment from Jan: Us immigrants to Canada during the 1950s similarly complained about Canadian potatoes.

Grandpa Reinder made some improvements on the farm, especially on the road to the farm. He bought cobblestones left over from repairs of the Dokkum Square and

then laid them in the road. To this day the name of that road is “Cobblestone Way” (*Bolsteinreed*). In 1928, Grandpa Prins turned 60. By now he owned the farm but was tired of farming it. Because Dad & Mom had just gotten married and Dad was having a little difficulty finding a farm to rent, it was decided that he would rent the Hantumhuizen farm from his dad. My parents lived on this farm from 1928-1948 and all their seven children were born there—all home made, fully organic!



*Tjalling (Charles) and Jantje-Boersma (Jennie) Prins - 1928 \**

*Fran's Parents*

Dad kept very neat and clear records of all transactions concerning the farm. I suspect there are record books floating about in the family of all the years he farmed at Hantumhuizen, but the one I have is for only two years-- May 12, 1931-May 12, 1932 and from May 12, 1932 – May 12, 1933. In addition to extensive farm inventory lists, he kept track of all income and expenses. He recorded sales of cattle in great detail, even distinguishing between bulls, cows, heifers and calves. He also listed sales of pigs, sheep, wool, potatoes, beets, beans, wheat, and barley.

On the 1931-1932 summary page of receipts, it shows fl 2292.89 for the sale of potatoes and fl 3321.07 for the sale of milk, a grand total of fl 9245.12 as income for the year. On the expense side it shows wages of fl 2441.84 and rent at fl 3300.00. Grand total of expenses was fl 888.91, leaving a positive balance of fl 356.21. Then

he added “living free” (*vrijwonen*) valued at fl 175, so that the actual annual profit was fl 531.21, less than a guilder and a half per day!

As I continued the study of Dad’s Bookkeeping Notebook for 1932-1933, I noticed that everything went downhill. Sale of potatoes down to fl 1324.63 and milk down to fl 2977.78. Wages paid to his labourers down to fl 1971.40 and his rent for the farm was down to fl 2650.00. Total income for the year was fl 7436.94 and expense was fl 8453.10, meaning a net loss of fl 1016.16 over the year or fl 2.78 a day.

### *Dad’s Helpers*

Dad had people working for him. They usually lived in the *Teebus* right on the farm property. This was a very small house and did not have any modern conveniences. It was poorly insulated as it was built with wood considerably inferior to that used for farmers’ houses. Jintje Hoekstra worked for Dad for quite a few years; then a few men who didn’t stay very long. Then someone named Aune Dijkstra, a name that I remember, came to work. He left after a rather unfortunate tug-of-(principal)-war. Let me describe the situation:

Right after WW II, the Christian Labour Association (CLA), representing farm workers, decided that it would be a nice thing for farm labourers to have Saturday afternoons off. This CLA was one of Abraham Kuiper’s “pillar institutions” referred to earlier. The workers would still have to come back to do milking chores at 4 P.M. and finish around 6 P.M. But at least they could then have 4 hours of free time on Saturday afternoons. However, the Christian farmers thought that this was wrong in principle. Didn’t the Bible say “Six days you shall labour and do all your work”? And now this CLA was saying that you didn’t have to work six days? That five and a half was enough?

Aune Dijkstra wanted Saturday afternoons off. He was a good man and a good worker. Dad should have relented and kept him, but he didn’t. It’s true that Aune and his family had already talked about moving to a place where there was a paved road close by. They were getting tired of walking through the mud for more than a quarter mile to reach a real road. So Aune left, and Dad lost a good worker.

When there was the major work of harvesting potatoes, beets or hay, men would come by bike from quite the distance to help out for a few days. At these special times, Christian Reformed farmers would often treat their workers to a *borreltje*, some alcoholic drink. In contrast, the liberal farmers would give them bonus pay instead!

When the first textile factories were opened in the Netherlands, many farm labourers flocked to the city because of better wages. This turned out to be a disappointment for many farmers, since it became more difficult for them to get good labourers.

Dad and my brothers all worked really hard on the farm. It was the natural thing to do – work hard! They were up early – at 4 A.M. - to do a quick inspection in the barn. The

horses were then fed some hay and oats to prepare them for their day's work. Next it was time to milk the cows. The milk was deposited in cans and set outside for the milk hauler who would come a bit later with his team of horses to pick up the fresh milk. By 6 A.M. Mom would have a big breakfast ready and by 7 A.M. the men returned to their farm routine.

On very rainy days when the farm fields were terribly messy, Dad said that he felt sorry for the horses that they had to be out in such bad weather. But it seemed natural to him for his workers and his sons to be out in it doing their work! When Ray was at Agricultural (*Landbouw*) School, which met just once a week, he would have to get up extra early that day and hurry home after school to do his part of the farm *work*. School wasn't really considered "work." Was it even really necessary?

Even though Dad was "tough" on his sons, he meted out fairly mild punishments for misbehavior. When they got into trouble, especially for teasing their sisters or Douwina, his usual punishment was to either to go and pull weeds out of the cobblestone walk or to go to a nearby field and cut down thistles with a garden hoe.

### *Mom's Helpers*

Douwina came to work for Mom as a skinny little thirteen-year old. She was too weak to lift a milk can and could even fit inside a milk can herself! So initially, Mom cleaned the milk cans and Douwina cleaned only the covers. She did not live in with us but with her parents less than one kilometer from our farm. During World War II she would often take milk and farm produce back to her own home to share with her family. Her beginning wage was fl 7.50 per week, which was later raised to fl 10. By the time we left Friesland in 1948 she was earning fl 12.50 a week. At one time she considered leaving us to work in different houses as she could have earned more money that way. But, apparently, she was too attached to our family to seriously consider other possibilities.

Mom and Douwina got along very well together and worked as a team. It was very common for farm families to have workers in the house as well as on the farm outside. Families were large, so there was lots of time spent on food preparations. Almost everything was done by hand; there was always work to be done. The two of them would sit at the dining room table drinking a cup of tea, while doing the knitting and sock darning for the family. Another job of Douwina's was to check on all the children's cleanliness before we were allowed to leave the house. She said that she especially remembered checking our ears before we went to church.

It seems that Douwina "sided" with us children when there was any controversy. The boys especially liked to gently tease her and sometimes would even playfully throw things at her. One time this got out of hand; they actually threw a stone which hit her on the side of her head and it bled quite a bit. She covered it the best she could with her hair and hoped that Mother wouldn't notice. Apparently in the evening the boys confessed to Mom and the next day she forced Douwina to tell her the whole story.



Trena, Douwina, Fran – 1947 \*

When, years later, I asked my siblings if they had any memories of “babysitting” me, they said they’d never had that responsibility, because of Douwina. She was officially Mom’s maid, but, in my memory, she was also part of the family. She was the one who took care of me and helped me with everything that I wanted or needed. I was six years old when we emigrated, and I begged Douwina to let me stay with her. She had to force me to let go of her hand when it was time to leave for the boat. She was definitely the “Mary Poppins” of my childhood memory. What a disappointment, when I saw her again eighteen years later, to find she was a typical middle-aged woman with a problematic teenage daughter!

In addition to Douwina, Mom had someone come weekly to help with laundry. Her name was Renske Brouwer, the younger sister of Abe Brouwer, a rather well-known author. When Renske got married, Mom felt it would be impossible to find a good replacement worker for her. So my parents bought a washing machine, quite a modern thing for those days. Instead of putting hot water in it, you would actually stoke a fire underneath it and heat the water right in the machine. Many mornings it was Reinder’s job to light the fire underneath the machine, a job he described as “fun.”

Mom also had the convenience of groceries and bread delivered to the door. A certain Mr. Tolsma would collect grocery lists from his customers in the village. He would then go with his horse and wagon to Dokkum to buy the needed items and deliver them the next day. He charged a small fee for this delivery service. The baker came twice a week to deliver fresh bread. If Mom ran out of something essential, she would send one of my brothers by bike to the small grocery store in the village.

Hedzer was of great help to Mom. He loved working with wood and often made blocks and storage boxes that his little sisters used for toys. He also made wall racks and letter holders for our parents. These were often used as gifts for relatives. He enjoyed finding ways to make necessary jobs easier. For years our family used a little manual machine for slicing beans. As an 11-year old he hooked the motor from the washing machine to this little bean cutter. That certainly made a necessary chore much easier. And that’s the way he’s been his entire life!

### *Grandfather Hedzer Boersma*

Even though I never met my maternal grandfather, I have a copy of a precious letter written in Dutch, dated July, 1937, from my Grandfather Hedzer Boersma to his “Beloved Children” (“*Geliefde Kinderen*”). He had just been notified by his doctor that he would have to undergo cancer surgery. If he could have spoken these words, they would have been in Frisian. But in writing, only Dutch seemed possible for such serious matters. He wrote, “I would prefer to live longer and be with my family, but if it turns out otherwise, the Lord’s will be done. Greetings from all but especially from your loving father, H.J. Boersma.” (*Ik zou gaarne nog wat bij de familie blijven maar wanneer ‘t anders besloten is, de wil God’s geschiede. Zijt verder gegroet van ons allen en inzonderheid van Uw liefhebbende Vader.*)

### *Uncle Tjisse Boersma*

I don’t have any actual childhood memories of any of my relatives. However, in 1987, during my heritage trip with Ray & Gert Prins, we stayed at the house of Uncle Tjisse and Aunt Ans. He told many family stories, including about himself. Here is one of them:

Either Uncle Tjisse was quite well off or he liked to pretend that he was. In his letter written in 1943 about which you will hear very soon, he confessed that he liked to make jokes about everything. So maybe the story isn’t quite true, but this is what he said. He told me about a time when he went on a holiday to Bussum in the province of North Holland. Because the waiter had seen him driving an old car, he demanded immediate payment for his cup of tea. Uncle casually took a 1000 guilder note from his pocket and noticed the surprised look on the waiter’s face. He asked if perhaps that wasn’t enough to pay for the tea and said that he had more money in his wallet. The startled waiter returned the money promptly and jumped to attention every time after that when he saw him during the rest of his stay at the hotel.

He also told us about a Frisian poem often recited at weddings at the point where the groom is presented with a specially decorated pipe. He had memorized this poem for the wedding of his sister Antje (Anna) and recited it for his new brother-in-law, Dirk de Jong, on May 17, 1923:

*Dizze pyp mei grien en blomkes siere  
Untfan dy bregeman fan my  
Omdat jo hjoed jo brulloft fiere*

*Smook swiet derut en tink derby  
Sa’n pyp brekt somtiden gau  
Mar jimme leafd’ en trou  
Moat bliuwe lyk as no  
Ja, nimme earger ta dan of*

This pipe decorated with green and flowers  
The bridegroom receives from me,  
Because today you are celebrating your  
marriage.

Smoke sweet from it and think while doing it.  
This pipe sometimes breaks easily,  
But your love and troth  
Must remain as now.  
Yes, it should increase, not decrease.

He must have learned it very well since he was still able to recite it entirely from memory in 1987. In 2009, I read that poem at the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our Frisian friends, Nick and Renny Hoekstra. I am happy to report that they told me my Frisian was still very good!

In the summer of 2012 I found two letters, written in 1943 and 1944, from Uncle Tjisse. I have no idea why my mother saved those letters for all those years. They were in a suitcase that contained many official papers about the 48<sup>th</sup> Street farmhouse. In one letter he writes about his own and his father's spiritual state. Here is my translation of part of that Dutch letter:

You probably think that I seldom bother myself with serious things, that I often make jokes about everything. But that is often a cover up for my spiritual difficulties. I believe that our Dad often had difficulties as well with respect to belief. He could sometimes turn inward for a long time and then you could really notice that he was contemplating deeper things. But then at other times, one noticed that Dad had found assurance again. Then while Dad was in the barn with us, he would quote from the Psalms. Then I was so happy because I was crazy about my Dad. If we continue in prayer, then everything will be alright. According to God's Word, we can depend on that.

In the second letter dated December 1944, Uncle Tjisse writes about his hopes to visit us in Hantumhuizen "next summer, after the war is over." It seems that it was well known and expected that the war would soon be over. And it was, in May 1945. I wish I had known about these letters when I was growing up on 48<sup>th</sup> Street in the 1950s. There are so many questions I could have asked my mother. And that is, of course, an important reason for writing these memoirs!

#### *Great Uncle Ds. Theunis Doekes Prins*

My Grandfather Reinder Prins had several brothers who were farmers, but one brother just didn't fit the mold. My great uncle, Theunis Doekes, born in 1862, spent his early years as a typical farmer's son, but he soon discovered that he didn't really relish a future as a farmer for himself. He loved studying and was well known in the community for his sharp mind, especially for his ability to play chess. He was, by all accounts, a very impressive man – six feet and six inches tall with shoulder-length hair. Apparently his long hair was the "talk of the town." Once he overheard some people on the street saying "Let's give him a quarter so he can afford to cut his hair." He replied, "If my mother needs a wig and would like to use my hair for that purpose, *then* I will have it cut!"

After elementary school, he worked for a time in a notary's office, a job he didn't like either! So it was decided that he would go live with his grandmother in Dokkum and study the Classics at a "*Latijnse*" school in preparation for university. Sometime later he was ready for his oral exams which he did in Latin! One of his examiners was Dr. Abraham Kuyper, about whom you've heard before.

In 1881, at age 19, he was one of the first class of five students to be admitted to study theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper. During his first years at university he lived in the Kuyper home. The total cost for his university education was 10,000 guilders, basically paid for by his father.

In 1887 he was ordained into the ministry at Wons, Friesland, and he had earned the title “Ds.,” short for “*Dominee*” or “Reverend.” In the same year he married Aaltje Botma. Even though she was quite sickly most of her life, very likely with tuberculosis, they had a large family of eleven children. They spent most of their ministry years at his second charge in Bolsward, Friesland. It was quite common at that time for a pastor to stay a long time with one congregation. During a party celebrating 25 years of ministry, his Council asked that Psalm 118:9 be sung. In English this reads as follows: “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.” The humour is more obvious in the Dutch language where “prince” is written as “prins.”

Three of the Prins children emigrated to the United States at quite an early age. The first one was Doeke, my second cousin, who, as an 18 year old, left home in mid 1910. It seems that as of April 2, 1911 nothing had yet been heard from him. At least that’s what my grandparents, Doeke’s uncle and aunt, wrote in a letter with that date. They asked him whether he was enjoying life in America, whether he was disappointed in anything there and whether things were going as expected. My copy of the letter is written in two different handwritings, which seems to show that both my grandparents took the time to write to their nephew.

Another second cousin, Roelof, had emigrated shortly after his brother but had to return to The Netherlands for military duty. He was not involved in active fighting but was given opportunity to pursue his passion of sports. He was a recognized champion in The Netherlands in both high and long distance jumping. Rumour has it that he received at least one Olympic medal. When his father, the Rev. Theunis Prins, showed off some of his medals to his colleagues, it was discovered that one of the events had occurred on a Sunday. That was a bit of an embarrassment for the proud father!

On February 21, 1921, Uncle Theunis asked his consistory for a three months leave of absence in order to visit his children in the USA. That was granted and, in fact, extended to almost 5 months. He visited many CRC churches, including some in Chicago and Grand Rapids. (All of this information about him comes from *Een Dienend Leven - A Life of Service* -, a biography written by his granddaughter Alie van der Wel-Prins.)

### *Church and Related Traditions in the Family*

Some interesting information about how we traveled to church. The normal thing had been for our family to go by bicycle. But during WW II, bicycles were very expensive, if even available at all. Since we had horses on the farm, our parents decided to buy an old buggy from our neighbour, Dad’s second cousin, Johannes Brunia. For a few years, we

were one of four families who traveled to church that way. The horses were stabled behind the church during the service. After the war was over, we quit using the buggy and went back to individual bicycles.

*An aside:* In 2012, my husband John added the following: It seems the Prinses do things backwards. In the province of Groningen, at least, if a farmer would arrive at church in a buggy, usually an enclosed coach, the farmer would be considered wealthy and high class: a “*heerenboer*.” But no, the Prinses went by buggy out of poverty! Poor Prinses? They are rare in history! But, then, so are Prins farmers.

In any Christian community, Christmas is a prominent celebration and our area of Friesland was no exception. I write more about it in the next chapter from the point of view of my own experience, but here I describe a major part of the celebration that was important to children a bit older than I was at the time, including my older siblings.

The Hervormde Kerk or Reformed Church, had some Christmas traditions that differed from ours. They had a Sunday School type program in their churches on Second Christmas Day: singing, reading the Christmas story from the Bible and then listening to a good storyteller, rather than to a serious sermon. Part of the attraction was a Christmas tree with burning candles inside the church, something totally foreign to us. One time brother Doeke went with Douwina, who was a member there, and he received a goody bag with an orange and lots of other stuff. Oranges, you must realize, were often an *annual* treat. Sister Janna also reported that she went to that event once; however, she didn’t receive a small gift like the other children did because it was not her own church. Maybe Douwina wasn’t with her, so there was no one to plead her case? This was probably the only ecumenical event in the village for the entire year. Of course, it must not be forgotten that our church had seceded from the Hervormde Kerk under very bitter circumstances. Even such small bits of ecumenicity could thus be considered quite a miracle. In Chapter Two you read about similar Christmas arrangements in Lutjegast, Jan’s village.

It seems hard to believe today, but in our Gereformeerde part of Friesland, cigarette smoking pervaded the entire culture. It seemed that *everyone* smoked, even right after church services. Even young teenagers smoked and thought it totally normal and acceptable. My brothers raised their own tobacco plants. They hung the leaves in the barn to dry and then cut them into fine tobacco. They bought a small manual rolling machine and thin paper with which they rolled their own cigarettes.

### *The Frisian Language and Customs*

Even though Dad used Dutch rather than Frisian for family prayer and devotions as well as his farm records, the Frisian language was a very important part of my family history. It was the language of heart and home.

Here follow some typical Frisian sayings, idioms and proverbs. I remember hearing many of these sayings from my childhood and still use some quite regularly myself. I have even tried to teach some to my husband and children.

*As't net kin sa't moat, dan moat 't mar sa't kin.*

If you can't do it the way it ought to be done, then just do it the best you can. You make the best of it.

*It is ek nooit goed.*

It is never good enough; i.e. it's impossible to please you.

*Moarns let, de hiele dy let.*

Get a late start in the morning and you will be behind schedule the whole day.

*Ik wit net wat jim wolle, mar ik gon op bed.*

I don't know what you want to do, but I'm tired and ready for bed.  
(i.e. You are letting your guests know it's time to leave).

*Read rikke riere leare.*

Red smoked heifer ham (a tongue twister in Frisian).

*Buter, brea en griene tsiis, wa't dot net sizze kin is gjin oprjochte Frys.*

Butter, bread and green cheese; whoever can't say this is not a true Frisian. (Actually used in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to distinguish the Frisians from other groups in the Netherlands.)

*En hut rinner sjucht er net ny, en en starig rinner tinkt er net om.*

A fast runner won't look at it and a slow runner won't think about it.  
(i.e. Don't be so fussy; no one will notice the mistake.)

*It is de boer gelike folle of de kou skyt of de bolle.*

It's all the same to the farmer whether the cow defecates or the bull.  
(i.e. It's the same to the investor whether his income comes from Vancouver or Beijing)

*Mei de Heare dy segenje en behoedzje. Mei de Heare dy mei it ljocht fan syn antlit beskine en dy genedich weze. Mei de Heare syn antlit nei dy takeare en dy freede jaan.*

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace (Numbers 6: 24-26).

All the above Frisian expressions are familiar to me, except the Bible passage which I learned to read with some difficulty only recently. Even though Frisian was the language of heart and home, it seemed that our "earthy" Frisian language was not good enough for serious "heavenly" matters. Bible reading, prayer and church services were all in Dutch. Dad always read the Bible and prayed in Dutch.

Only the Dutch language was used in school, often causing confusion for the Frisian students, especially at the elementary level. A cousin of ours came home from school and reported that the Bible story had been about Jesus and the twelve onions. She confused the Dutch word for "disciple" (*discipel*) with the Frisian word for "onion" (*sipel*)! Our parents wanted their children to be educated in Dutch and to learn it well. They themselves could

read, write and understand Dutch, but they felt that they were at a disadvantage because they could not really speak it very well.

There was a real resurgence of interest in the Frisian language after WW II. That began when a local person was hauled into court for some offence and he answered the judge in Frisian. The judge was angry and declared the offender in contempt of court. This caused people to start agitating for more Frisian, because they felt this judge wasn't being fair to those who could not speak anything but Frisian.

Frisian farm children were not allowed to go anywhere near a phone, probably because they were thought incompetent, illiterate and destructive. The veterinarian lived in Dokkum and occasionally had to be contacted by phone. Our Dad would write down the message in Dutch for the vet; then Reinder or Hedzer would bring this to Jantje Steensma, one of the five people in our village who had a telephone. She would make the call in Dutch to the vet and the following day the vet would come to our farm. (Ray himself never used a phone until he turned twenty and was already living in the U.S.)

My grandmother was a typical Frisian farmer's wife. A special custom for these women was that they often wore gold helmets underneath their pleated white cap head coverings, especially when they reached the ripe old age of 50! It was a sign of wealth and also of respect, signaling that one had reached old age. Some of these helmets were made of all gold, others half gold, or silver or half silver. Grandma Janna Boersma's was the very best - all gold. Earlier in this chapter there are pictures of my Great grandmother, Foekje Posthuma-Prins and my Grandmother, Janna Sliep-Boersma. They are both wearing their special head coverings.

It took Grandma Janna a lot of time every weekend to get the lace and linen headdress starched and woven properly. Just after WW II started, she sent Uncle Tjisse to Dokkum on his motorbike to pick it up from the shop, in order to be sure the Germans wouldn't get it. He had no way of carrying the newly-starched headdress so he sat on it on his way home. It took poor Grandma three weeks to get it back in shape!

### *The Prins Family at school*

The school my siblings attended was in Hantumerhoek, three kilometers from our house. They would walk there, rain, shine or wind. It was a "*School met de Bijbel*," "School with the Bible," in other words, a Christian school, fully supported by the Government but operated by members of the Gereformeerde Kerk to which we belonged. Grades 1-3 were in one room and Grades 4-7 in the other. The total school population was usually around 50. Teachers were paid by the government and earned three times as much as preachers who were paid out of the church coffers. For a while there was a special teacher just for Grade 1, but usually one teacher was expected to manage three or even four grades. The extra teacher was probably a "freebie," someone who was just trying to get some experience and get into the system. Most teachers were men; very occasionally it was a woman. (Ray had his first female teacher as a Private in the U.S. army at age 23.)

The school year started on April 1. In order to start first grade, your birthday had to be March 31 or earlier. Doeke's birthday was April 1, so he was 7 when he started. It could have been different. Friends and relatives advised Dad to register his birth as March 31 in order to start school earlier. Dad did not want to be a deceiver, so he reported Doeke's true birth date, April 1, at the registrar's office.

Doeke was left-handed. When he used his left hand for writing and drawing at school, he was immediately corrected with a sharp tap on his left hand from the teacher's yardstick. He was told in no uncertain terms to use his right hand only! For the rest of his life he wrote with his right hand, but he would do everything else with his left hand. He was never "cured" from this "malignant" condition.

Henderika was very happy during her early years at school. She soon had lots of friends, even though she had been quite shy as a pre-schooler. Her favourite teacher was the woman who taught the handcraft or needlework class. From her she learned more about sewing and knitting than what Mom and Douwina taught her. At age ten she already could make and finish a proper buttonhole. She used these skills well throughout her life.

Basic education was finished at age thirteen. Reinder went on to a *Landbouw (Agricultural)* School for four years in Metslawier, twelve kilometers from home, but that was just once a week. Hedzer was not really fond of farm chores. Because of the war situation, he stayed home for a year after finishing primary school, but at age fourteen he was happy for the opportunity to enroll in a two-year course at the *Ambacht* School (Skill Centre) in Dokkum. That was about eight kilometers from home, a distance that took him at least an hour one way by bike. He insists till today that the wind was always against him, for it regularly switched direction during the day! That's not as crazy as it may sound. During our Vancouver years we often camp along Howe Sound, where that does indeed happen frequently. When the weather was *really* bad, he would stay in Dokkum with Grandpa and Grandma Prins and come home just for the weekend.

### *The Years of WW II*

Though both of my parents lived through WW I as teenagers, they never told us about it and I never asked them. It simply never was a point of discussion in the family as a whole. Thus I have no family history to share for that period.

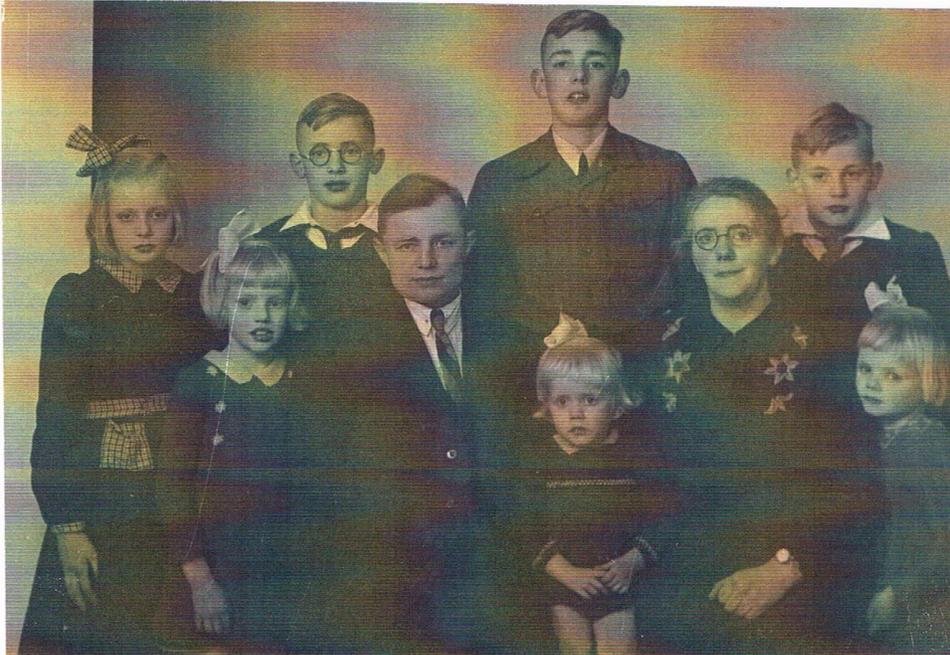
The event that had the greatest impact on The Netherlands at the time of my birth was, of course, WW II. Compared to people in other parts of the country, WW II had minimal economic effect on the Prins family for two reasons: First, we lived on a farm and therefore always had access to plenty of food; secondly, my brothers were too young to be drafted into the military or recruited for forced labour in Germany.

However, my brothers could sense fear about the war from our parents' conversations. There was no radio in the house, something the Germans had rendered illegal, but they

overheard discussions with friends and neighbours about the terrible situation. For a year or so during the war, we had no electricity on the farm. This was, of course, very inconvenient for our parents, but the children enjoyed the cozy evenings, everyone sitting together, with kerosene lamps all around the room.

The war certainly affected Mom in other very immediate ways. Quite a few people stayed with us during the war. These were refugees from the large cities in the west and south of The Netherlands who were assigned to us by the Dutch occupation Government because of the living space that we had. One of the families assigned to us from Nijmegen lived in our front room. By the winter of 1944, the southern part of the Netherlands had already been freed from German control, but then the tide turned. As an act of revenge, the Germans forced the whole town of Nijmegen to evacuate. The woman helped mother a bit with housework and cooking, but it must have been quite stressful for Mom, who already had a family of nine, to have these extra four strangers stay with us.

For a while a young fellow from Amsterdam in his early 20s, was assigned to stay with us. He and some friends collected money from different people at a time when salt was very scarce. They were going to try to get a boat load of salt from Drenthe, the province to the south-east of Friesland. We never heard from him again and never saw any salt. He might have been a scammer, but it's also possible that he got caught by the Germans.



Back row: Janna, Hedzer, Reinder, Doeke  
 Front row: Henderika, Heit/Dad, Foekje, Mem/Mom, Trijntje

*The Prins Family -1946 \**  
*First Photo of Fran in Existence*

## *Emigration*

WW II ended in The Netherlands on May 5, 1945. Talk of emigration resumed immediately. I write “resumed” because our parents had already talked about leaving the country in the mid 1930s. Then there were plans of going to Argentina as part of a colony of settlers. The mastermind behind this scheme was someone named Udo de Jager, one of the editors of *Friesch Dagblad*, the major provincial newspaper. Udo died very unexpectedly on June 19, 1935, the day sister Janna was born. With his death the entire scheme collapsed. Only a few years later, WW II started, and that definitely put all talk of emigration on hold.

Talk about emigration revived everywhere, especially in the northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen. It seemed to be on everyone’s mind. Most of my siblings were excited about the possibility of emigration; it seemed like an adventure with endless possibilities. Only Janna was somewhat hesitant: “It did not make me at all excited; in fact I was somewhat afraid of the unknown future.”

And why did our parents want to leave The Netherlands? None of us seem to know for sure. Did they want a chance at owning a farm, something that seemed impossible in Friesland? Dad certainly felt that owning *and* farming land was of the utmost importance, certainly more important than getting an advanced education. Or were they afraid of Germany and Russia, two large war-mongering countries that were so close by? Were they afraid that the boys would soon be drafted into the Dutch army? Was it simply to get far away from the in-laws? There were lots of stories in books, newspapers and advertising brochures about how people could better themselves by immigrating to the United States. These stories were often embellished, with the harsh realities left out. But at the time, it seemed the streets in the U.S. must be paved with gold!

Mom’s sister, Aunt Anna and her husband, Uncle Dick, had immigrated to the U.S. in the 1920s. They came to visit us in 1946 and gave glowing reports about life in America. They “forgot” to tell us about all their horrible experiences during the Depression and other difficulties they encountered. During that visit they agreed to be our sponsors. We were an ideal family for immigration, just the type the U.S. was looking for: three strong sons, ready to work on a farm.

In preparation for the move, there were lots of questionnaires and other forms to fill out. Our parents filled them out with great diligence and mailed them to an office in The Hague. In time they would get a response with still another questionnaire and be told what to do next. One time they mailed a questionnaire from Ljouert, the capital city of Friesland, but usually they would put it in a mailbox in Dokkum. After it had been entrusted to that Ljouert mailbox, they had some misgivings. Was that really a mailbox or was it something else? So the next time they went to Ljouert they mailed a postcard to themselves in Hantumhuizen from that mailbox. Sure enough, three days later they got their own postcard. That relieved them of their anxiety of having possibly put an

**important document in a dead letter file! A comment from John: This reminds me of the time I made a similar test with my announcement of a new sibling.**

**Aunt Anna and Uncle Dick, our sponsors, also needed to fill in lots of forms. They had to send in income tax papers to prove that they could handle being sponsors for such a large family. Apparently they filled in the papers but left the income line blank because they felt that was nobody else's business. But then the papers were sent back to them again and they still had to complete that part, whether they wanted to or not!**

**A lot of time was spent during the winter of 1947-1948 on cleaning wagons and machinery so they would look better when it was time to sell everything. At the time of our emigration, the Dutch Government allowed each family to take only 1000 guilders in cash out of the country. So our parents spent much of their money on buying stuff to bring with them to the States. They also used it to commission paintings of the farmhouse and the school and church which our family attended. Some of those purchases turned out to be quite useless in the new country, but seeing these paintings on our dining room wall kept the memory of The Netherlands very much alive for me. The farmhouse painting is today (2014) hanging on our living room wall in our apartment in Vancouver. I also was very glad that Dad packed a bag of Dutch skates!**

**Having shared with you various family scenarios and wider situations, my next step is to zero in on some stories in which I feature more directly, but that's for the next chapter.**

## Chapter 4<

### Lietse Foekje of Hantumhuizen

(1942-1948)

#### *Home, Church and School*

Just to remind you from the last chapter, I was born on the Prins farmhouse in Hantumhuizen on Wednesday, March 11, 1942.

Everything about my birth seemed normal, no complications. The following day, Dad registered my birth at City Hall. Mine was report number 27 for the year 1942. My Dad's signature, "Tj. Prins," and that of the registrar of the civic registry of the county of Westdongeradeel, D. Westra, are on the bottom of the certificate. Dad's age (40) and occupation (farmer) are also recorded on the form as well as Mom's maiden name followed by the remark: "*Zonder beroep, bij hem inwonende,*" "No occupation; living in with him." "No occupation" indeed; only seven children to take care of!

Apparently, my sister Trientje, almost two years old, felt she also needed some attention. Shortly after hearing of my birth, she choked on a potato and started to turn blue. Dad must have applied something like the Heimlich maneuver and quickly rescued her.

The Sunday after my birth, when I was only four days old, I was baptized in the Christian Reformed Church of Hantum. My mother was ill at home and would soon be going to the hospital. Hence it is most likely my Dad alone presented me for baptism. I was told that most of my siblings were there, but not my grandparents. Douwina was probably home caring for Mom and Trientje. These immediate baptisms were not done as a way of putting women down. The mother wanted the baby baptized right way just as much as the father did. There may have been somewhat of a superstition that if the baby died before baptism, its salvation might be in jeopardy. But a major reason was simply that the mother wasn't feeling well enough and was usually under prescribed bed rest.

The pastor who baptized me was Rev. Maurik. He worked in Friesland for 30 years but always claimed that he could not speak Frisian. He was the only person in the congregation who regularly had vacation time. He said it was probably more of a "holiday" for his congregation than for him!

Mom developed a fever within a couple of days of my birth. Dr. Elzinga, the local doctor, diagnosed a lump in her breast and ordered ice packs to be applied to the affected area. As this was before the days of refrigerators or freezers, Dad took ice out of the nearby drainage canal (*sleat*) and crushed it to make it usable. Apparently Mom's problem was more serious than the doctor first realized. The following week Mom went to the regional hospital by taxi. It seems that the young children in the family were not told about where

their mother was going. Henderika, a little four year old, panicked at seeing her mother taken away like that. There in the capital city of Friesland, Leeuwarden (*Ljouwert*), a surgeon named Dr. Bloeme removed the growth and that took care of the problem.

A story that has often been told to me is that when I was still taking naps, probably around two years of age, brother Hedzer was always assigned to help me out of the crib when it was time to get up. Apparently I would order everyone around. "Turn the light off." "Mom give me a kiss." "Henry get me up." (*Lampe ut, Mem tut, Hedzer helje*). I must not have known the difference between off and on! Apparently I remained a bossy child. A bit older, I used to say, "*Ik en heit en mem ben de baas*," "I and Dad and Mom are the boss." Aune Dykstra, the son of one of Dad's farm labourers, pulled me around in a little wagon because I used to boss him around and probably ordered him to do so!

Trientje would often volunteer to get me up, but Mom wouldn't allow it. Trientje had the habit of crawling in the crib with me and falling fast asleep, while Mom was trying to break her of the habit of afternoon naps. She was hardly two years older, but she liked to "mother" me and really doted on her little sister. One day, things must have gotten out of hand. She stamped her foot and declared, "*Foekje, ik wol die net bedown meitsje*," "Foekje, I don't want to spoil you." She and I got along very well from early childhood on.

As a child, I was quite tiny and had very blond hair. One nice summer day, when I was perhaps three years old, I was playing with Trientje, pretending to be birds and trying to build a nest on top of a high tripod contraption (*ruterstokken*). Normally these timber and wire tripods were used for drying clover hay. They lifted the hay up from the soil, so as not to make a dead spot in the clover field. That particular summer, in anticipation of a good clover crop, the "*ruterstokken*" were piled on the land right next to the drainage canal. As it turned out, even a "tiny bird" could upset the equilibrium of this collection of timbers. I landed in the water in the canal and soon went under. Dad, who was spreading fertilizer nearby, heard Trientje's cry for help. Even though he wasn't a swimmer, he jumped in the water, managed to rescue me and then carried me home. That day Dad was wearing a brand new blue denim shirt. In those days a new shirt let off quite a lot of color during the first few washings. It turned out that I was not very impressed with having been saved from certain drowning. Instead, I complained about the blue streaks in my hair! It seems I was ahead of the times against my will!

In spite of my small stature, I must have been quite on the ball. When Dad and Mom discussed emigration plans, I was in the room with them sometimes. They assumed that a four-year old would not comprehend the conversation. Sometime later, when I was visiting an aunt and uncle, they raised the question how much a boat trip to the United States would cost. Apparently I informed them how much, right down to the last dime! When Mom and Dad heard about this, they told me there were some things you just did not tell other people. From then on when asked concerning the progress of the emigration plans, I refused to give any more information.

All of my siblings had their primary schooling in Hantumerhoek, about three kilometers from the farm. They all walked the distance every day, rain, shine or windstorm. I have

no memories of going to school in the Netherlands and my siblings don't remember either whether or not I ever accompanied them. The school year started April 1 and we were scheduled to leave for the US on May 12. So I used to think that my parents never bothered putting me in school and that, instead, they just let me stay home for those few extra weeks. However, some weeks after writing the foregoing in 2011, I came across my *Poezie Album*, or Autograph Book. In it is a page with the heading "*Hantum, 4 Mei, 1948.*" It has stickers including one of a little Dutch girl wearing wooden shoes and pushing a wheelbarrow with flowers. It has a beautiful poem and is signed "*Ter herinnering aan Meester Jousma,*" (In order to remember Teacher Jousma). That would be an indication that I did go to school, even though it was only for a few weeks!

### *Fun Stuff and Christian Celebrations*

In addition to school and farm work, the family also had time for fun and games, some of which I participated in. One big memory for all seven of us is the ice skating we did in Hantumhuizen. Our farm had water on three sides, thus an ideal place to learn ice skating. Naturally we used Dutch skates. We wore heavy warm socks to keep our feet warm. We would then put on our shoes and place them on the flat area on top of the blades. Then we would tie them on tightly with the leather straps. With our skates on, either Dad or one of the brothers carried us and an old chair down to the frozen canal. We would push the chair in front of us, and, presto, we were "skating!"

Reinder quite often skated rather long distances. At age twelve he participated in an organized skating event, named the *Oostergo Tocht*, which was 60 km in total. Obviously not the 200 km of the famous *Elf Steden Tocht* (Eleven Cities Tour), but still quite an accomplishment for a twelve year old. His family still has the little medal that was issued to all those who completed the event. I assure you it was not a Sunday event!

There's another school game my siblings have described to me. They called it *potje roven* (stealing from the pot). Twelve large stones was the only equipment needed and these were gathered from wherever you could find them. You had to make a line in the gravel with the toe of your wooden shoe. Then you divided into two groups and each group took possession of six stones. The object of the game was to protect your own stones which were on your side of the center line, and to steal the stones that were on the other side. In the very centre you were safe, but if you got tagged when you were in the other side's territory, you were a prisoner. You wouldn't be freed until someone from your own side tagged you. The winner was the side who had the most stones at the end of the game. It was quite wild but great fun! Actually it sounds a lot like "kick the can" doesn't it?

And, of course, there were the special celebrations in December: *Sinterklaas* (Saint Nicholas) Day celebrated on December 5 and Christmas on December 25 and 26. Two totally separate and distinct holidays. *Sinterklaas* was a very impressive looking old man, dressed in a long robe and wearing a mitre on his head. He came annually by ship from Spain and was the bearer of gifts, at least to the children who were well behaved. But only those who traveled to Dokkum or other larger cities would be able to see him in person. We stayed at home but were told all about him. During the early evening the lights would

mysteriously turn off and small spicy cookies would be thrown around the room. Then we would look around the room until we found the small gifts that *Sinterklaas* had left for us. The cookies were called *pepernoten* and were spiced with nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, anise and ginger. The gifts were things like candy, fruit, a small coloring book or toy.

However, if you weren't well behaved, then *Zwarte Piet* (Black Peter), *Sinterklaas*' helper, would put you in his burlap bag, take you back to Spain with him and probably make *zoute drop* (salty black licorice) out of you. This *drop* thing probably wasn't part of the authentic story, but, as good as my big brothers were to me, they made up this part to scare me.

Imagine my surprise when I lived in the Netherlands for a year in 1973 as an adult and noticed how the story had changed! *Zwarte Piet* now didn't really take naughty children back to Spain. He had become the jolly helper who had all kinds of candy in his burlap bag and threw it to the children. Another change reflecting the changed economic situation: *Sinterklaas* now brought *huge* gifts, not the small stuff of my childhood memory!

Christmas, December 25-26 was a totally religious holiday. It meant church services and more church services. If the 25<sup>th</sup> was on a Friday, there would be morning and evening services; then on the 26<sup>th</sup>, which was called Second Christmas Day, there would be a morning service. And then on Sunday, the 27<sup>th</sup>, there would be the normal two church services. Lots of singing, organ music and sermons. But no exchange of gifts, nor a Christmas tree. That was reserved for modern people and members of the former state church, the Hervormde Kerk. But I already told you all about that in the previous chapter.

### *The Poezie Tradition*

Immigration to the US was a hectic time, but in the middle of it all my parents remembered my sixth birthday, March 11, 1948. They gave me a special gift of a *Poezie*, (Poetry) Album. It is something like an Autograph Book in which relatives and friends would copy popular poems and decorate the page with beautiful stickers. Mom wrote in Dutch on the opening page:

*Deze album behoort aan mij  
Zoolang ik hoop te leven  
Foekje is mijn naam  
Mij bij mijn komst gegeven  
Prins is mijn fan  
Al van mijn vader's stam  
Hantumhuizen is de plaats  
Waar ik ter wereld kwam.*

This album belongs to me.  
As long as I hope to live  
Foekje is my name  
Given to me on my arrival.  
Prins is my last name  
From my father's tribe.  
Hantumhuizen is the place  
Where I entered the world.

Dad wrote on the next page on March 19, 1948:

*Aan mijn dochtertje Foekje.  
Toon met woorden en met daden  
Dat gij zijt een Christen kind  
Dat gedoopt is in God's Namen,  
Boven alles Hem beminnend.  
Buig voor Hem vaak uw knieen,  
Hij die altijd op u let  
Geeft verhooring aan de woorden  
Van het kinderlijk gebed.*

To my little daughter, Foekje.  
Show with words and with deeds  
That you are a Christian child,  
That you were baptized in God's Names,  
Above all loving Him.  
Often bend your knees for Him,  
He who always watches over you  
(And) listens to the words  
Of your childlike prayer.

Then follows another page from Mom and then from each of my six siblings. Five of them were written on the same date, March 19, 1948. I don't know why Ray's was written on March 1, 1989 and Henry's on August 7, 1992. Everyone else wrote in the album in Dutch, but Henry and Jane wrote in Frisian. Trientje was almost 8 years old and it looks as if she was just learning to write in cursive:

*Ik ben nog klein,  
Toch wil ik in uw album zijn.  
De tijd gaat snel;  
Gebruikt haar wel.*

I'm still little,  
But I do want to be in your album.  
Time goes fast;  
Use it wisely.

Then there are fifteen more entries from my Grandma, many aunts and cousins, and even from Douwina. They are dated right up to the day before we left The Netherlands. Mom must have really been organized – even remembering, at such a hectic time, to have so many people write in my own special Autograph Book!

### *Emigration*

In order to be admitted to the U.S. we had to have smallpox vaccinations. Dr. Elzinga, our family doctor, didn't think those vaccinations were safe. He saw to it that we got official proof of having been vaccinated, even though we didn't actually get it. The date stamped in the booklet was March 20, 1948. Many years later in Jos, Nigeria, we had a similar experience and called it "corruption!"

Shortly after that the whole family was summoned to The Hague for the *keuring*, medical examinations by a doctor who was on the "approved" list for emigration to the U.S. Dad chartered a large taxi from Dokkum for the first "world trip" I ever was part of—a whole two hundred kilometers. That trip cost him 120 guilders.

We left the farm at Hantumhuizen on May 12, 1948. It was an old tradition that all new contracts started on that day. (54 years later Wiebe & Joanna made a contract on that day!) That meant that labourers would go to their new places to work and farmers would

take over their newly-rented farms. That is also the date on which Dad started every new year in his Accounting Notebook for the farm. So, a perfect date for the big transition.

Because the *Veendam* wasn't scheduled to leave until May 25, and because our furniture was all packed and ready for shipment to Michigan, we all stayed at different relatives' houses for those last two weeks. Prior to this immigration time, we also went "*ut van hus*," "away from home," quite regularly to our cousins and our cousins would spend some time with us. Thus staying with relatives was nothing new for us.

I have memories of staying some days with one of my aunts during this time of transition. I didn't really like it there very much because they were quite strict and ate "strange" food! I was happy that Trientje was with me and was a protective big sister. She allowed me to take these strange things from my plate and quietly put them on hers. This saved me from the threat of unfamiliar foods. I remember feeling more comfortable for the next few days when the two of us stayed with Grandma Janna Boersma.



Back row: Doeke, Hedzer, Reinder, Janna, Henderika  
Front row: Trijntje, Heit/Dad. Mem/Mom, Foekje

*The Prins Family Immigration Photo \**  
1948

On May 25, our parents chartered a bus for the nine from our family and for Douwina and the uncles, aunts and cousins who wanted to see us off in Rotterdam. I certainly have memories of the good-byes and tears as we boarded our ship, *S.S. Veendam*.

All our names are on the "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers" of the *Veendam*. There are, however, several mistakes on it. Reinder is listed as "Reinden" and Hedzer as "Heibren" even though the names were probably copied from a form filled in with the beautifully clear handwriting of one of my parents. In the line under "Occupation," Dad

and the three boys are listed as “farmers,” Mom as a “housewife” and us four girls as “none.” Trientje had turned eight the month before we left, but her age is given as “seven” on the manifest. It also says that she was “under age” and not able to read or write Dutch. So much for our excellent school system in The Netherlands, at least according to the U.S. immigration officials!

On the boat we were served our meals in the dining room by a waiter. Lots of the food was unfamiliar to us but there was certainly plenty of everything. We noticed that the dinner rolls were removed from the table at a certain stage of the meal. So we put them in our pockets at the beginning of the meal and then took them back to our room for snacks at a later time. Mom was very seasick and wasn't able to enjoy much of anything during the boat trip. The rest of us were sick part of the time but also remember the good food and playing shuffleboard, table tennis and other games.

We met a Dutch Christian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Roeters, on the boat. They were returning from a trip to the Netherlands and were now living in Grand Rapids, Michigan. We girls were fascinated with the gift they were bringing back to their daughter: a beautiful walking doll! At the time we had no idea where Grand Rapids was, but this couple remained family friends for many years.

We thought we would be landing in New York. That place was known by all of us as a famous city in the United States – and that's where Ellis Island is, the place where most immigrant ships docked. However, we docked at Hoboken, New Jersey, on Friday, June 4, 1948.

Apparently the *Veendam* was not in great shape; it was a discarded troop ship. The sailors complained about its general poor condition, even the cables for tying up the ship. It was definitely an old ship being used only for immigrants who were not expected to complain. It was retired shortly after our trip. The names of several immigrant ships like ours have been revived by the Holland America line for their luxury cruise ships. We saw the new *Veendam* at the cruise ship terminal in Vancouver in 2010 as well as the new *Volendam*, the ship on which husband John came across.

My green card, officially named an Alien Registration Receipt Card, comes from the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the United States Department of Justice. The card says that “Foekje Prins is a quota immigrant for permanent residence” and “has been registered under the Alien Registration Act, 1940.” One interesting vital statistic: when I entered the U.S. I was 3' 7" tall!

So, ready or not, U.S.A., here I come!

## Part 2

### Immigrant Life

#### Chapter 5<

#### The Wandering Prinses

(1948-1950)

##### *US Train Trip and Arrival*

Welcome to the shortest chapter in these memoirs.

Aunt Anna & Uncle Dick had done their homework by contacting Rev. Grasmeyer who was running a Seamen's Home in Hoboken. An intern named Dick Van Halsema, who eventually became the President of Reformed Bible Institute in Grand Rapids, was also working there for the summer. Our relatives had asked them to meet our family to bring us to the Home for an overnight stay. As it turned out, another ship had just landed so there was no room for us at the Seamen's Home. "No room for us at the..."—hmm, does that sound familiar?

They thought about a hotel for the night but then came up with another option. If they were really quick, they could still get us on a train for Michigan that same day. So Grasmeyer loaded our family plus all our personal baggage into a 1945 Plymouth. He took us on a wild ride through the streets and puddles of Hoboken toward the train station. The tickets must have been purchased ahead of time because we could board immediately. Reinder was the last one to board the train and it was already moving by that time! Grasmeyer had told us to keep on moving toward the front of the train because the car on which we boarded was not the right one for us. We did a lot of walking through about fifteen cars before we got to the right one. That was quite an adventure because the train was definitely picking up speed by that time. What a welcome to the New World after spending ten days on a boat crossing the Atlantic Ocean!

After 22 hours on the train, on June 5, 1948, we arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan. (A total coincidence – 14 years later to the day and in G.R., was my wedding date!) Dad's cousin, Ralph Prins, was at the station to meet us with two vehicles. Some of us rode in the car, while the three brothers rode on the back of Ralph's pickup.

Cousin Ralph took us to his house which was in the Franklin-Eastern neighbourhood, a short distance from the train station. His wife, Margaret, had lunch ready for us. Her soft white bread was a big hit with us as we were used to heavier breads. She also served us

bananas which were totally new to us girls, though the boys remembered them from before WW II.

Uncle Dick and Aunt Anna lived on a beautiful farm in Moline some sixteen miles south of Grand Rapids. They and their two sons, our cousins Bram and Hez, came soon after lunch to drive us to a house also in Moline which they had furnished and rented for us from a member of the Moline CRC, the church of which our relatives were members. This large house was rented to us for only \$30 a month, a real bargain, even though our parents didn't think so at the time. The house was on Division Ave. or the old M131, a very busy truck highway, at least that's what we thought. Remember we had come from a farm, totally at the end of the road! There was this long, steep hill right in front of our house, so all the trucks had to shift gears, grinding their way going up or down. Imagine the noise, especially at night. None of us slept very well that first week, partially due to the truck noise and also because of the intense Michigan summer heat. It was only early June, but it was already hot and a bit humid; certainly much warmer than what we were used to. Both Mom & Dad were really bothered by the heat; the rest of us got used to it quite quickly.

### *Moline CRC—Welcome and Help*

We must have made quite an impression when all nine of us marched into church on that first Sunday, June 6, 1948. Carol Meyer, a friend I met eight years later at South Christian High, remembered the day a new immigrant family named Prins had been introduced at the church service! To be sure that we remembered our heritage, Dad would read Dutch sermons to us on Sunday afternoons on the large porch in front of the house.

The landlord was also a Frisian. He thought it was delightfully cute to hear all of us speak it! As a welcome-to-America-gift, he gave us a bushel basket full of fresh sweet corn. Being a Frisian himself, the landlord should have expected our negative reaction to this gift and explained it. Seeing Mom was only familiar with field corn which was used to feed cattle in The Netherlands, she felt rather insulted. She soon learned that it was truly a delicacy to have sweet corn fresh from the farm. We all learned to enjoy it eventually.

Other people from the church also pitched in to help this new family. A lady came several times a week during the summer to give us girls some English lessons. She also taught us some English children's songs like "Jesus Loves Me." An older neighbour across the street took the boys to watch Moline CRC's softball team. He was an immigrant himself and could still speak quite a lot of Dutch, so he tried to teach them the rules and strategies of the game.

### *Anglicizing our Names*

Aunt Anna took it on herself to give us all new English names. Tjalling became Charles, Jantje changed to Jennie, Reinder to Raymond, Hedzer to Henry, Doeke to Duke, Janna to Jane, Henderika to Rika, Trijntje to Trena, and Foekje to Frances. Later Duke on his own

changed his name to Dewey and Rika wanted Henrietta instead. I never did understand why Hedzer's name was changed to Henry, because Aunt Anna's own son was named after the same grandfather, and his name remained Hedzer. Maybe she didn't want two cousins with the same name?

At the time, I didn't appreciate the fuss about my name. I didn't understand what could possibly be wrong with my beautiful name, Foekje. But eventually I became very grateful that she changed my name the very week we arrived! Perhaps to confirm my new name, Aunt Anna wrote in my *Poezie* book to "*Lieve Frances*" and signed it "*je tante Anna*."

### *Work and House Hopping*

The brothers found jobs almost immediately. It was just seasonal work on the Wustman farm in Byron Center for which they each earned only around 50 cents an hour, but it was a start. This was a large truck farm where they raised onions, radishes, lettuce, etc. in excellent muck soil. Most of the other seasonal workers were "street urchins," all of whom were eager to teach them "contemporary" or street English. Before long our cousins were quite shocked at their budding vocabulary and told them it was best to forget most of the words they had learned! You see, the CRC was a cultured community that upheld standards of decency.

Dad and the boys found all sort of odd jobs to keep the money flowing. In mid August of 1948, Dad found a position of running a dairy and crop farm in Shelbyville. The farm was owned by Rolf Bonnema, who had a dairy in Kalamazoo; it was just a hobby farm for him. I don't know what Dad's wages were, but the contract included the use of a large farm house and lots of free milk. The boys helped Dad with chores and other small things around the farm. They also worked occasionally on the muck farms owned by the Klamers and Medendorp families. Then they spent some time cutting trees for a paper mill and tried selling firewood. They also worked at nailing onion crates together -according to brother Henry, about 150 nails to a crate - for which they were paid between ten and fifteen cents per crate. All three of the boys remember being unemployed a lot in our first few years, especially during the winters. I'm sure they often thought about the advertising posters they had seen in Friesland, promising great riches and lots of gold in America, and wondered where to find it!

In September, 1949, twenty-year-old Ray was sent off to California. Henry said that Ray himself wanted to go there because he didn't want to be unemployed for another winter. Ray said that he went at Mom's request. Ray knew a lot about cows and farming in general because of his studies in the Netherlands. So it made good sense that he went there to check out the possibilities for our family.

Ray came back less than a year later with a negative report. He felt it would basically mean a second immigration, because it was almost as far from Michigan to California as it had been from the Netherlands to Michigan. He had not enjoyed his experience of working

on dairy farms in Artesia, Bellflower and Cyprus, all in the greater Los Angeles area. It had not been easy finding even monotonous entry-level milking jobs.



While Ray was off in California, Dad found a better-paying prospect in Comstock Park. Dad and Dewey worked for Mr. Oscar Pitsch on his fruit and dairy farm. Dad earned \$150 a month and had free house rent, milk, meat and fruit in season. Dewey's earnings of \$100 a month helped with the total family income. While working six and a half days a week, they learned a lot about American style farming, driving tractors, operating farm machinery and making apple cider. Henry had landed a factory job at Keeler Brass.

Trena, Ray, Fran – Comstock Park House \*  
1950

### *School Experiences*

In September, 1948, the four girls started school at East Martin Christian School, a short distance by school bus from our farm home. Dewey was only fifteen and should have gone to school as well, but it seems that our parents conveniently “forgot” about this and allowed him to continue working and contributing to the family income instead.

Jane was put in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The teacher, Mr. Johnson, knew no Dutch but he was quite helpful in getting Jane adjusted to school. He assigned her English readers starting at Grade 1 level and she worked her way up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade level quite quickly. But other adjustments were more difficult. Jane wrote, “It was hard to get in with other pupils socially, having only a partial command of the language and not being familiar with the games which were being played by my classmates.” That sounded very much like John's school experiences in Alberni.

Henrietta started in Grade 5. Spelling and Language were a challenge for her, but Math was quite easy. She also felt that the teacher was very helpful to her. He used a Sears catalogue and pointed at different items and would tell her the English name. She learned a lot of vocabulary this way by simply repeating after him. Amazingly, in contrast to Jane, she remembers really “liking recess time!” She learned the rules for softball and other games very easily and felt that “hitting the ball and running came naturally” for her.

When everyone yelled “You’re out!” she soon realized what that meant. She also learned about the American way of cutting bread to make sandwiches and that one uses lettuce rather than cabbage for enhancement!

Trena, because of her April birthday, had only been in school in The Netherlands for a year and a few weeks. East Martin was a small two room school with the lower grades taught by Mrs. Johnson. She described her teacher as being a “lovely person.” Initially Trena was put in Grade 2, but after a few months, it was decided that, because she was doing extremely well in all her subjects, especially Math, she should be moved up to Grade 3. Since it was such a small school, this move was done with little fanfare; after all she stayed in the same room with the same teacher!

Having been in school only a few weeks in The Netherlands, I was of course put in Grade 1. I have no recollection of not being able to speak or understand English by the time I started school, so the “teacher” who helped us during the few weeks in Moline, must have done a good job! I know that Dad bragged about his youngest daughter who could speak “perfect” English so soon.

However, maybe I didn’t understand so well after all! I have a memory of trying to draw on the onion skin paper that used to be inserted between the regular pages in a drawing notebook and then erase it. I must have misunderstood the directions and started drawing on the wrong sheet.

At the end of the 1948-1949 school year, I was told that I had done very well. The recommendation to my parents was that I should skip Grade 2 and go straight to Grade 3. They accepted that as a great compliment and without hesitation approved the teacher’s recommendation. They were probably also thinking of the tuition savings it would represent! That meant that I was now just one grade behind Trena, even though we were two years apart in age. It also meant that I was always the youngest in my class.

We moved to Comstock Park in March of 1950. That meant it was in the middle of a semester with two months remaining in the school year. Our parents very much wanted us four girls to go to West Side Christian School, which was seven miles away. However there was no bus transportation from our farm house on Seven Mile Road. The problem was solved in two stages.

Henry had a job at Keeler Brass and he had to be there at 7 AM. So we were woken up *very* early. After a bit of a breakfast, he would bring us to the house of Rev. Vanden Heuvel at 6:30 AM, the pastor of West Leonard CRC, the church we were now attending. He and his wife were very gracious. They welcomed us, let us sleep a bit more, and then gave us a second breakfast. After that we walked to school together. After school, we stayed with another family till Henry picked us up after his work day. Later on, a schedule was set up so that different people drove all that distance to pick us up for school in the morning and brought us home in the afternoon. The Christian community certainly treated us with great hospitality and helpfulness. What a commitment from all these people just so we could go to a Christian school!

West Side was a large school with up to 40 children in a class in the elementary section. Trena was finishing Grade 4 and I was completing Grade 3 by the time we arrived at West Side Christian. Both of us have recollections of having teachers who were quite the disciplinarians, not particularly gentle or loving. When they called out “SUS” we knew that meant “Sit Up Straight” and “FFOF” meant “Feet Flat on Floor!”

Jane & Henrietta were in the Junior High, so they had different teachers for different subjects and went from one classroom to another during the day. Quite the change from the small two room school of East Martin! Both of them found this new school situation quite challenging, with Henrietta again coping better than Jane.

A highlight of the summer vacation of both 1949 and 1950 for Trena & me was spending several weeks with Aunt Anna & Uncle Dick on their farm in Moline. They had neighbour children close to our ages with whom we had wonderful fun. These children eventually became our classmates at South Christian High in Cutlerville.

### *Settling Down on 48<sup>th</sup> Street*

Even though Dad was earning more money now than in his first real job in America, he soon became restless. He really wanted to *own* and work on his own farm. He still had the feeling that land ownership was very important and necessary for making any kind of progress. In the fall of 1950 our parents started serious discussions about buying their own farm. Amazing that after being in the U.S. for only two years, they had the financial wherewithal for a down payment on a property!

They looked at different farms and decided to buy a 120-acre place on 48<sup>th</sup> Street, southeast of Grand Rapids on a land contract from the Vander Laans for \$18,750. They felt comfortable making such a huge decision and purchase, because they knew the older children would all soon get jobs paying enough to help with the mortgage. Many immigrant families operated on this principle. The tenacious, hard-working Prins family never missed a payment, much to the surprise and disappointment of the Vander Laans! They had expected that our family would not be able to keep up the payments and the farm would return to them.



*The Prins Family Home and Farm on 48<sup>th</sup> Street \**

**This frequent moving during the first few years was typical of immigrants. When hearing about the impending move, Cousin Hedzer De Jong said he hoped we had truly found what we wanted now. He had helped to furnish the house in Moline, helped with the move to Shelbyville and then to Comstock Park. Now this was the fourth time in two and a half years, and he was not interested in helping us move *again!***

## Chapter 6<

### The Settled Prinses

(1951-1956)

*This chapter is a year-by-year account of my life on the 48<sup>th</sup> Street farm and East Paris Christian School, but my life interwoven with that of the rest of the family. In distinction from previous chapters, these materials were mined mostly from my own personal memories and experiences. Another distinction from most other chapters in these memoirs is that it is arranged historically rather than topically. For readers from dysfunctional families or subcultures, you will learn what a happy childhood in a stable Christian family can feel like, even if it has its blemishes. The period of wandering, so typical of immigrants in their early years, is past; the family now settles down for good.*

1951

We made the move to 48<sup>th</sup> St. during Christmas vacation 1950. Dad had high hopes of becoming a full-time farmer again, together with his sons, this time on his *own* farm. But that never really worked out.

Dad was always in a hurry to get his barn chores done and never took time to enjoy his morning coffee break. He would try to hurry things up by cooling his coffee the traditional Frisian way. He'd pour the hot coffee from the cup into a deep saucer and back again a few times until it was cool enough to drink. He would then gulp it down and rush back to the barn. He had only a few cows and they didn't produce enough milk or meat to keep the family supplied. It was a lot of work for him and ended up being just a break-even operation. Before long, he realized that he would have to find additional work to supplement his farm income. That other work turned out to be bricklayer assistant, together with Henry. Ray soon found work in cement and Dewey as helper with a tile setter.

One thing that Dad really enjoyed about our new farm was building fires outside in the gully. If we wondered where Dad was, especially on a Saturday morning, all we had to do was check for smoke and we knew he must be there. It is one of my big regrets that I never joined him in those days to enjoy outdoor fires and to spend some time with my Dad.

One of my first recollections of the 48<sup>th</sup> St farmhouse is how cold it was upstairs! Up to this time Trena & I had always shared a bedroom and the same for Jane & Henrietta. But the first change we made was for us four girls to move our beds to the attic. Remember we had arrived in the middle of the winter! The open stovepipes leading to the chimney made that a much warmer room than the regular bedrooms. It was also much more cozy (*gezellig*) there with all four of us in one large room. One time when Trena & Henrietta went to

**babysit at a neighbour's house, I was horrified and shocked that I would have to go to bed by myself that night, because they wouldn't be home till 1AM!**

**After the long Michigan winter, the snow finally melted and the early springtime revealed what a lovely yard we had. There were lots of spirea and lilac bushes all around the yard. Even now, whenever I see and smell lilacs, I remember the farmhouse yard. There were also some fruit trees on the property and before long Mom had a nice vegetable garden growing as well.**

**In January of 1951 we four girls all continued with school. Jane started her last semester of 9<sup>th</sup> grade at East Paris Christian School. It was a small three-room school with just a few students in each grade. Most of the others in her classroom had been in this school for years, so she felt like an "outsider" and wasn't very happy. Upon graduation in May of 1951, she decided that she wasn't going on to Grand Rapids Christian High, the school where pretty well all CRC kids would go. Instead, she found a job at Hekman's Cookies on 28<sup>th</sup> Street, while she took correspondence courses to get her high school diploma. She obtained her diploma in 1956.**

**Henrietta was half way through Grade 7 when we made the move. After her exhilarating experience at West Side Junior High, she felt it a real let down to come to this tiny school. There were only two other students in her grade. She didn't feel challenged anymore and was eager to get school "over with." In May of 1953 she graduated from East Paris Christian and soon started working at Hekman's Cookies together with Jane. Decades later, she finished high school by taking courses through a community education program. Maybe Henrietta didn't feel challenged at East Paris School, but she did write an interesting essay in the school paper, *East Paris Echo*. The three students in her class must have been assigned to write on the topic of "Gossip." Here is her contribution:**

**Gossip means idle talk, talk which is half true or not even true at all. Gossip means to chat. This is an example of gossip: Janice is in 10<sup>th</sup> grade in high school and all the pupils hate her. Hardly anyone will speak to her. This is because someone told the other kids that her father is drunk all the time. Things got so bad that Janice planned to quit school. But then they had a program and she was asked to sing. When the other pupils heard her beautiful voice, they applauded. After school that day, she was invited to a party and everyone treated her nicely from then on.**

**In Colonial times, gossipers were punished severely. They were put in dunking stools or stocks. Maybe these punishments were rather harsh, but we as Christians should remember not to gossip. We ourselves should first of all stop gossiping, and then we should tell our neighbors to stop gossiping.**

**The essays written by her two classmates are also included in the paper. They must have all done quite a thorough reflection on the subject, because each student's contribution is quite different from the others.**

Trena and I both were in the “middle” room – Trena in Grade 5 and I in Grade 4. We each had twelve classmates, making a full room of twenty-six children. A class picture was taken the very month we started at East Paris. Unfortunately, I can’t remember the name of our teacher!

I had the same teacher in Grade 5. She was quite an average teacher, nothing very spectacular. I do remember that she assigned us lots of Bible memory verses. One time I was selected to do a recitation at a school program. I was good at memorization and was able to rattle off the whole of Psalm 103 in 53.5 seconds! She had forgotten to teach me to speak clearly and with meaning. But Mom was very impressed anyhow and praised me for my effort!

Every spring we all participated in lots of fund-raising activities to raise money for items that were not included in the budget of a small Christian school. There were regular paper drives which, in those days, were good money makers. Our brothers would drive us quite a distance to collect newspapers which people had saved up for us and then deliver them to the truck parked on the school yard. Good thing the brothers didn’t charge us mileage – that would have been the end of the profit!

We also went around the neighbourhood taking orders for magazines, soaps, perfumes and even for vanilla flavouring. Trena & I would go together and knock on many doors; no one was concerned about the dangers of going to unknown houses. We were trying to raise money for our school and felt totally safe. It was only later, when people became richer, more educated and less religious that security became an issue. These school projects taught us all about planning, reporting, accounting and making the deliveries at the promised time, all very useful life skills.

One of my classmates at East Paris Christian School was Mary Ann Oosterhouse, who was also my neighbour. She would come quite regularly to play at our house. She had only brothers in her family and was quite happy to have new girls in the neighbourhood. She couldn’t understand Mom’s English and didn’t have much patience either. Mom meant to ask “How are you?” but would instead say “Who are you?” She would answer in rapid English, “You know my name. So why do you keep asking who I am?” But Mom liked her anyway and encouraged our friendship.

Trena and I loved playing all kinds of things on our farmyard and in the barn. We especially enjoyed climbing up high in the storage areas and on the piles of baled hay. Then we discovered how much fun it was to jump from the hay into the pile of wheat stored on the barn floor. We invited Mary Ann to join in the fun. Apparently she reported at home on how much fun we all had. Her dad then told our dad that this wasn’t very safe or hygienic, so we were forced to stop!

Besides attending East Paris Christian School, I also attended East Paris Christian Reformed Church. Both of these buildings were on the same property on East Paris Avenue. Our whole family attended both the morning and the evening worship services at this church for many years. Mom became a member of Ladies’ Society and Dad of the

**Men's Society there. We children regularly went to Sunday School and Catechism classes. In the late 1950s the old wooden church building was sold to a Baptist group who moved it to somewhere on Cascade Road. The CRC then relocated about a half mile down the road and built a beautiful new structure. Henrietta and Luke were the first couple to get married in this new facility as we did a few years later.**

**A big part of my growing-up years was family meal times. The menu was fairly stable for each meal: oatmeal for breakfast; soup for lunch; meat, boiled potatoes and green beans for supper. Good food, well cooked, enough for everyone, but not a lot of variety. Prayer before the meal was also regular and stable. Dad prayed aloud a fairly ritualized prayer in Dutch, not a lot of originality or personal stuff. Those of us under age twelve, only Trena and me by this time, individually and serially responded with the Dutch version of the children's prayer, "Lord bless this food and drink, for Jesus' sake. Amen."**

**Bible reading after the meal was also a regular routine. My memory has it that this was always done in Dutch as well. The fact that I don't remember confirms for me that I was equally comfortable in both Dutch and English at this stage of my life. To check up on whether we were listening or not, Dad had the regular custom of asking us what the last word was that he had just read. We never knew when it would be our turn to answer the question. I do remember always wanting to sit close to one of my big brothers, especially Dewey, in case I needed "help" in remembering what the last word was! All of this was so parallel to John's family and represented classic Gereformeerd piety.**

**During the summertime Trena and I spent lots of time exploring our neighbourhood on bikes. There were lots of hills, but we were young, undaunted, enthusiastic and found the up-hill bike rides exhilarating. We tried our luck at fishing down at the 48<sup>th</sup> St Bridge at the Thornapple River. Mom would pack a lunch for us and we would be away for much of the day.**

**Because our brothers were all old enough to drive and there was a car available, they would often take us swimming after they came home from work. The closest lake was Campau Lake, but they also sometimes took us to Gun Lake, Green Lake, and even to Lake Michigan.**

**The first few winters in our new location were cold and very snowy. We often went sledding on the hill at Mary Ann's house at the corner of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and Thornapple River Ave. They had better and longer hills than on our farm and we were always welcome to join their family for some fun. Several times that winter our farm land and the streets were totally frozen over so that we could skate everywhere. On those days the school buses could not get through so school would be cancelled and then some of the other neighbouring farm kids would join us in skating. I remember skating on 48<sup>th</sup> Street and seeing the totally frozen electric and telephone wires above our heads.**

**Being part of a large family and living in a somewhat isolated place had its own charms, especially during the cold time of the year. We enjoyed playing long games of Monopoly. I have no memories of anyone in our family playing Chess, but Checkers was certainly a**

favourite. I remember playing “backwards” checkers with Dad – we called it *eerst kwiet* (first to get rid of or “Give Away”). The one who was able to dispose of all the pieces first was the winner instead of the real rule of trying to hold on to as many pieces for as long as possible. Maybe Dad played this with me so that I could win? Or maybe I was such a poor player and Dad got bored with my attempts at learning the real rules?

It was not always or only play, fun or games. We often had to work in the garden. Mom planted a lot of vegetables, especially green beans, every spring and we always helped with the harvesting and canning. Sometimes we also picked strawberries at a farm a few miles away. We must have been good workers, because someone from that farm came by car to pick us up and bring us home at the end of the day. We earned five cents per quart for picking the berries and then a bonus of 1 cent per quart was added at the end of the season as a reward for picking every day when they needed us. I remember that Henrietta was an excellent and fast worker and that I tried my best to keep up with her.

We also had our assigned jobs from both Mom & Dad in the house, in the chicken coop and the barn. Because I was the youngest, I often got away with doing very little while looking busy! A regular Saturday job done under close supervision was polishing everyone’s shoes. We usually listened to “The Children’s Bible Hour” during this time so that it was still a fun activity. Then Mother would send Trena & me upstairs to do the weekly cleaning. We would keep the vacuum cleaner running for much longer than necessary to make it sound as if we were busy, but sometimes we would both be reading some favourite book instead. I don’t remember Mom trying to teach me how to cook or bake. I suspect that was because Jane was already learning and doing a good job. One job that was assigned to me for quite some years was ironing and I became quite good at it. Many clothes and all linens had to be ironed, or so we were taught!

1952



Back row: Henry, Ray, Dewey  
Middle row: Henrietta, Dad, Mom, Jane  
Front row: Frances, Trena

*The Michigan Prins Family 1952 \**

A major event for our family was Henry getting drafted into the U.S. Army in 1952. One reason for our immigration had been to avoid war. Now we had been in the U.S. for a mere three and a half years and Henry was drafted. This was a point of contention between Mom and her sister, my Aunt Anna. Her two sons were the same age as our brothers, but for some mysterious reason, they were never drafted while our three brothers all were.

In January of 1952 Henry went initially to the reception center at Fort Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan. The whole family went there for a quick visit the first weekend. Then he was in Fort Knox in Breckenridge, Kentucky, for fourteen weeks of basic training. He was sent to Korea in April, 1952, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment in Company M. He was there on active duty for nine months and also spent a few weeks in Japan for Rest & Recreation.

I remember that we were all assigned to write him regularly; he remembers getting letters from home regularly. Mom said she wanted to be sure that for every day there was a mail call at his army post, there would be at least one letter for him. Of us four girls, Trena was definitely the most faithful writer. It was obvious from his letters that he still didn't have complete command of English. He wrote using Frisian, Dutch and English words in the same sentence: "Thanks for the letters, because *dat makket de tiid wat hudder gone by*," "that makes the time go faster."

In June of 1952 Ray was also drafted into the U.S. Army. Four years after our immigration and two sons in the army during the time of the Korean War. Not an easy time for our family, certainly not for our parents.

Maybe partly to get our minds off the fact that two of our brothers were now in the army, we planted several acres of pickles on the land between our house and Thornapple River Ave. So that became our main job for the summer of 1952. It was important to have something major to fill our time during school summer vacations, because the long vacations were really long then: from mid May until early September.

It was a huge job to pick pickles daily. You needed to check the whole field carefully every day, because the larger the pickles, the less per pound that we were paid for them. Dewey drove our harvest to the pickle mill in Alto every afternoon where they were graded by size. Most of the time we girls cooperated with each other, but sometimes things ended in a grand pickle fight with us throwing them at each other or just checking what great distances we could throw them! I know that at the end of the summer all of us felt we never wanted to see or eat another pickle for the rest of our lives!

This was also the time we were introduced to Vacation Bible School. The Christian Reformed churches did not then have Bible Schools in the summer time, but Alaska Baptist Church did. Trena and I went together with the Oosterhouse children. Since that was about ten miles away, I suspect our parents and siblings must have taken turns driving us there. One of the big things I remember from that experience is participating in a contest of being the first to find Bible references. The leader would announce the reference and then there would be a mad scramble from the whole class to find the correct place. You

then had to stand up quickly and read the first word of that verse in order to be declared the winner! The contest went on for the whole week and the winner for the week was announced at the program on the last day. Another big thing was Bible memory work. Some children were able to recite whole books of the Bible.

I had my share of all the regular illnesses during my childhood: measles, mumps and chicken pox. It wasn't fun being sick, of course, but Mom did her best to make it tolerable. I was allowed to sleep downstairs on my parents' big bed in a warm room. Mom would regularly check up on me and bring me things to eat and drink. I wasn't supposed to do any reading while I was sick, because common wisdom had it that too much reading during such times would cause nearsightedness. I tried my best to sneak books under the bedcovers and would try to read even though my eyes were tired and swollen and there was very little lighting in the room. I should have listened to Mother, because I have been very nearsighted for most of my life!

September of 1952 began a very wonderful time of my life – Grade 6 and finally in the upper grades classroom at East Paris Christian. Henrietta had complained about how small her class was and didn't particularly like the teacher, Mr. Van Houten. Maybe Henrietta was also a bit unhappy because now she had two little sisters in the same school room with her! But for me, I felt that I had arrived in school “heaven!” We, in Grade 6, were the youngest in the room but we felt big, because now we were in the same classroom with Grades 7-9. There were about 35 students in total in the room.

Mr. Van Houten taught *all* the subjects to *all four* classes, while he also served as principal of the school! I don't know how he did it. He taught Bible, Math, English, Social Studies, Science, etc. to all four grades. I was a good student and was still always very challenged by his lessons, so he must have been well prepared. He and the other teachers were always on the playground at recess time participating in our games. He also was in charge of the annual Christmas program, the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Class Trip and the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation program.

Sometimes all four grades had the same assignment, so that would have made things a bit easier for Mr. Van Houten. At Thanksgiving time in 1952 he must have assigned everyone to write about the Pilgrims. According to the *East Paris Echo*, this was my contribution:

The Pilgrims settled at Plymouth in 1620 and started a colony. They had little food, were cold, and had poor shelters. They only had crude little huts to live in. They chose a governor from their group. They had very strict laws. On Sunday they were not to play but had to worship God all day. They had left England because they wanted freedom to worship God as they pleased. In the fall, when the crops were harvested and carefully stored away, the Pilgrims gathered together and offered thanks to God.

If the Pilgrims thanked God for the little they had, I think we surely should thank God for all we have. The Pilgrims were satisfied with the little that they had. We

sometimes grumble because we don't have whatever we want. Instead, we should always be thankful that God has blessed us so richly.

There are eight essays on the same topic from others in our classroom, including one from Trena. They are all quite similar, so I suspect we all "copied" from the same encyclopedia and used the notes Mr. Van Houten had given us during Social Studies class. A poem of mine is also included in the same school newspaper. It is titled

*Thanksgiving Day*

The church bells are ringing on this happy day.  
Even the birds are singing—"Come to church!" they seem to say.  
And as the people are walking, they are talking  
About what God has done for everyone.

Was that really my own work or was it also sort of "copied?" Mr. Van Houten must have regarded it as original and included it in the school paper.

Another assignment that was regularly given to all the students was Monday morning sermon reports. We all had to be ready to report, even though Mr. Van Houten selected only a few each week. Many of the students went to East Paris Christian Reformed Church; so we'd obviously heard the same sermon. Woe to anyone who tried to get away with giving a report that wasn't very accurate! We often envied those who went to other churches, because no one could challenge them on what they reported.

At the end of 1952 I was selected to give the "Sixth Grade Report" in the school newspaper:

First we sing in the morning. After singing we study Bible. We are studying about Joshua when he conquered the heathen cities in Canaan. In arithmetic we have been studying about fractions, long division and decimals. In history we are studying about the Roman Empire. They surely had many emperors. I would much rather have Eisenhower for my leader than one of those bad emperors. In English we have been studying about subjects and predicates, nouns and verbs. We are having a little trouble with linking and helping verbs. In geography we are studying about the British Lands in Asia. They surely live differently than we do.

*1953*

The year 1953 started with not very happy news for our family. Ray, who had been in the army for six months but stationed within the U.S., was sent to Korea in January. Now we had two brothers in Korea. We still continued with the tradition of writing daily letters to Henry. Ray, who was serving with the 733 Supply Point Company, wasn't in quite as dangerous a situation as Henry. We siblings were "assigned" to write him every other day. Sometime after Ray arrived in Korea, he and Henry were able to visit each other for a few days. That was such wonderful news for all of us. On May 7, we received a letter that was

written jointly by Ray & Henry, a genuine proof that they were really in the same place. It was always such a treat to get letters from our brothers and Ray also sent pictures quite regularly.

We also continued to receive letters from our relatives in The Netherlands. One day we received three such letters: one each from Beppe (Grandma) Prins, Omke (Uncle) Pier Prins and Omke Jan Boersma.

We never had official P.E. classes during my elementary school days. There really was no need for it, because we were all very active during break times. In the winter the big activity was ice skating on the frozen creek about a block from the school. We would race down there as quickly as we could during recess time and immediately after eating our lunch. When we heard the school bell ring, it was time to return to class. There were always a few of the older and naughtier kids who pretended they hadn't heard the bell. But Mr. Van Houten knew how to deal with them too!



In the springtime the big physical activity was softball. Everyone was invited to play and there were often several games going on at the same time on the huge playground. We were taught the rules and to try our best with a sense of healthy competition. Every spring there was also a Field Day involving the other small Christian Schools in our area. We had running and ball throwing competitions and often even a spelldown. But the main event was the Softball Game between the two best schools, selected via playoffs. Henrietta was a good sports person, also at these events, and was often on the winning team. I, on the other hand, was often a winner in the spelldown.

*Franny the "champion" hitter \**  
1953

*Comment from John: Fran's winning these spelldowns was an indication how quickly she had learned English: she beat the natives after only five years in the US. And she found her winning so normal that she made no point of it apart from this short mention. English obviously had become native to her.*

In Jane's diary for 1953 she wrote often about going to the *Fryske Kriete*, the Frisian Club. Jane went with Dewey and Henrietta and mentions different young people who were also there. I suspect it was fun for them to get together socially with other immigrant young people. I don't think either Trena or I ever went to the *Fryske Kriete*; after all we two were "the kids" and that was probably more of an adult gathering. I do remember, however,

that we attended Dutch-language church services, probably once a month, during our first few years in the U.S.

Trena got a diary for her thirteenth birthday on April 19, 1953. At first she guarded it very carefully. On April 27 she wrote, "I'm not going to have anybody snoop in my diary." But by August she was letting me write entries as well. Possibly she was getting bored with the chore of writing something every day and I probably begged for the privilege!

I had totally forgotten about that diary until Trena brought it to Vancouver on a visit in 2011. Several things were a bit "shocking" when I read through it: My memory had it that Trena & I always got along well and that we were basically honest kids. Also I remembered that I always liked school and my teachers, especially Mr. Van Houten. However, there is some evidence to the contrary!

Trena wrote, "Frances is such a nice girl, but I fight with her so much and then we make up again." "I lose my temper on her too much, the poor little kid." "I am so mean to Frances. She asked me to go to bed with her but I would not do it. She always goes with me to places when it is dark and I'm scared; ain't I mean though?" Maybe we were quite normal sisters after all?

Trena *was* a wonderful big sister for me most of the time. Listen to the diary again: "Frances went to bed before me. She looks so cute now sleeping – she always is cute anyway." "Frances is our little darling and Henrietta and I kiss her lots. She is so tiny and nice and skinny that when I carry her, I can hardly feel it."

After a lovely summer evening spent at Campau Lake, Trena made this entry: "Did we ever get a lady mad because we did not pay fifteen cents like you are supposed to. She caught us and made us pay. We'll have to try something different to get out of paying." Maybe we weren't such saints after all?

And about school, I wrote, "Four more days of freedom and then back to jail." "I don't like school very well. There's so dome (*sic*) many rules. We mayn't even go to the store without a note. I think that's silly." "We're going to have a geography test on Friday. I know I'll get a D or lower. I just don't understand that stuff." "Van Houten got really mad at two boys for talking too much. He shook them and threw them in a seat. They probably deserved it but it still was mean of him, I think." Isn't it wonderful how only the good memories about a teacher remain with us?

During the summer of 1953 Trena & I once again were able to earn some money with strawberry picking. In the late afternoon, after the others came home from their work, we helped out with some farm work. Trena & I took turns driving the tractor while Dad, Dewey, Jane and Henrietta would pick up bales. All we had to do was steer the tractor straight down the row. When we got close to the end of a row, Dewey would jump on and make the turn and then we were allowed to continue. It seemed like such a great responsibility to an eleven year old!

We also had other work assigned to us during the whole year, but especially in the summer time. We helped with gathering and selling eggs, cleaning the chicken coop, painting the barn, mowing the lawn, weeding the raspberry patch, harvesting and canning vegetables from the garden and planting flowers.

Trena and I continued the tradition of spending time visiting the few relatives we had in the U.S. The record has it that we stayed at cousin Bram & Alice Prins for a few days during the school vacation. By that time they already had several children; hopefully we were a bit of help to Alice who was recovering from polio.

The big news in July 1953, for our family was that Henry was safely back in the U.S. He phoned from Chicago and said he had found a ride to Zeeland and that we should pick him up from there. Unfortunately, Mom understood him to say "Wayland." So both cars waited for hours and didn't connect. Remember this occurred before the arrival of cell phones! Eventually the person who gave him the ride brought him all the way home. What rejoicing when he said he would be staying home for thirty days. After that he was sent to Fort Lewis in Seattle, Washington, for a few months to finish out his U.S. army career.

The even-better big news in July 1953 was that the Korean War had ended and the armistice was signed on the 27th. Ray was still in Korea, but now we all breathed a sigh of relief, because it seemed not to be as dangerous as before.

For me it was back to school in September, now in Grade 7, but, alas, once again the lowest class in the room! Because of increasing enrollment, Mr. Van Houten was now assigned to teach *only* three grades: 7, 8 and 9! Grade 6 was assigned to someone else. But I was still very happy and continued to thoroughly enjoy school.

This was also the time we bought a used piano. I had often tried to make music by putting wax paper over a comb or tapping on a kitchen window, so my parents wanted to give me a chance to make "real" music! I started weekly piano lessons with Miss Johnson for \$1 per lesson! For a while both Trena and I took lessons, so that she earned a grand total of \$2 when stopping at our house. She was not a particularly inspiring teacher and we were probably not particularly inspiring students either. I do remember that she would sometimes fall asleep while listening to our lessons! Once I was able to play a few songs that were recognizable, I was asked to play piano at school and at church for Sunday School. I used my piano skills somewhat in my school teacher days, but never really worked hard at improving my skills. Years later, husband John regrets that I didn't.

October 17, 1953, was a historic day, certainly for my parents: they became U.S. citizens. Jane's diary entry says that she, Mom and Dad "went downtown for our citizenship papers." My brothers and Jane were "of age" and thus had to apply on their own. The next step for my parents was applying for "derivative naturalization" for us three younger children.

On October 30, 1953, the record says, "Henry came home today. He came with the airplane. He phoned home and then he walked from the old airport on 36<sup>th</sup> Street to

Hekman's on 28<sup>th</sup> Street, where we were waiting for Dad." That's how Jane describes the big event of Henry's real homecoming from the army. The very next morning he went downtown with Mom and in the afternoon went hunting on our farm property with Dewey! Back to "normal" life in our family.

Then just a few days later on Sunday, November 8, Dad, Mom, Trena and I were in a car accident on our way to visit cousins Bram and Ida De Jong. Dad was not an experienced driver, having learned it in his mid-forties, and was not very comfortable behind the wheel. Apparently it took him so long to cross a major road that we got hit by oncoming traffic. Mom especially was bruised quite badly and Trena remembers staying home from school for a few days to help her out. I think Dad's confidence was now completely shattered and he never did a lot of driving again, certainly not with passengers in the car.

### *1954*

Living on a farm and having cattle meant that we could occasionally butcher a cow. Our home refrigerator freezer was not large enough to hold this much meat, so we rented freezer space at a Caledonia food locker. I remember going there often on Saturdays with Mom and Henry to pick up the meat for the next week's dinners. Also we would sometimes visit the community library there and check out some books.

Our family doctor also practiced in Caledonia. I had trouble with warts for quite some time and Mom tried all the "home cures" like scraping, taping, freezing, burning, pasting, rubbing a raw potato and even gel patches with some acid ointment. Even though warts usually disappear on their own, especially with children, Mom brought my problem to the attention of this doctor. Believe it or not, he literally took a kitchen knife and cut it off! It bled furiously and left a huge scar which remains to this day. But the wart never reappeared!

In the spring of 1954 Ray also came home from the army. Shortly after that Dewey was drafted! Since the Korean War was over, he never went overseas but spent his entire time at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

It is an interesting fact that two of my brothers served in the U.S. Army *before* they became U.S. citizens. Legally they were permanent residents or "green card" holders in the U.S., but still citizens of The Netherlands. According to the Geneva Convention, was this allowed? With his dry sense of humour, Ray recently commented that they were probably "undocumented mercenaries!"



**Ray, Henry, Dewey - 1954**  
*The Undocumented Prins Mercenaries \**

One regular feature of spring in Grand Rapids was attending the Easter Sunrise service at the Civic Auditorium in downtown Grand Rapids. It was with a mixture of sleepiness and excitement that we made the twelve-mile drive each year. No matter how cold it still was, we always wore our new spring outfits. Those were still the days of hats and gloves, even for young girls.

According to my Certificate of Citizenship, I became a U.S. citizen on June 18, 1954. I didn't have to fill in any forms or take any tests, as our parents did this for themselves and the minors in the family. I acquired American citizenship through "derivation," i.e. my parents became naturalized citizens when I was still under eighteen years of age. For some reason the actual certificate was not issued to me until two years later.

September 1954 was the start of another school year. Now I was in Grade 8, and, would you believe it, once again the lowest class in the room! The enrollment continued to improve, an average of ten in a grade, and I suspect the tuition rates went up, so that it was possible to hire another teacher for Grades 6 & 7.

I continued to be very happy at school. The school bus ride was great, learning was fun, Mr. Van Houten was still challenging our class to work hard, most classmates were friendly, recess time activities were invigorating, etc. Life was good!

*1955*

Something new was added to our lives: television. We didn't have our own (religious objections?), but we were allowed to go to a neighbour to watch. Two of the programs we watched were "I Love Lucy" and "Break the Bank." We also did some babysitting for another neighbour and watched *their* TV.

Spring of that year brought major changes to our family. Dewey came home with his girlfriend, Dorothy Perkins from Indiana, and announced that they had wedding plans.

Then in September some more big changes! Trena left me behind and went off to South Christian High in Cutlerville. But the sweet part was that now my class, Grade 9, was finally the highest class in the room. Same teacher but a new status! We had a total of nineteen students in the room, nine of whom were in my class. The exciting thing in arithmetic was that now we were doing Algebra. In Social Studies we had a whole section on Civics, all about city, state and federal government. Mr. Van Houten now had more time for each subject and he continued to be the excellent teacher he had been all along.



*Fran's Grade 8-9 Classroom at East Paris Christian, 1955-1956 \**  
*Fran is the bespectacled young lady 3rd before Mr. Van Houten*

**1956**

The 1956 New Year once again brought changes to our family. The first grandchild for my parents and my first nephew, Charles (Chucky) Edward Prins, was born on January 19. We didn't get to see him right away, because Dewey was still in the army and they were living in Kentucky. But it made me feel so grown up to be an aunt at age 13!

In March, my oldest brother, Ray, got married to Gertrude Postma. The nuclear family was getting smaller, but the extended family was certainly growing!

My memory has it that ever since a very young age, when I would line up my dolls and talk to them, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher. The exemplary teaching of Mr. Van Houten from Grade 6 – Grade 9 certainly played a great part in forming that goal. He sensed my gift in that area. He wrote in my Autograph Book on February 6, 1956: “To a future teacher – Thank you for the good job of “practice teaching” you have done for us. I hope your future will be filled with real success, and I’m sure it will if you continue to apply yourself as willingly and conscientiously as you have in East Paris Junior High.”

The “practice teaching” he referred to was that he allowed some of us 9<sup>th</sup> graders to help the teachers in the lower grades by marking papers, explaining math problems to the children or doing recess duty for them. One of the teachers I “helped” in this way was the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Idamae Knott, who became my sister-in-law several years later when she married Henry.

Judging from my 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Report Card, I guess I was a “conscientious” student. All the average marks were either “A” or “A-”. My parents expected me to do well and they acknowledged it as well. Dad’s clear signature of “Charles Prins” appears on the first three “Signature of Parent” lines; then Mom’s “forged” signature also says “Charles Prins.” Most likely she wasn’t confident enough to just sign her own name.

In May of 1956 Mr. Van Houten and one other adult took the 9<sup>th</sup> graders for a three day class trip to Detroit. Can you imagine chaperoning nine teenagers on the train and in a hotel? The most memorable part of the trip was seeing a live Detroit Tigers baseball game. Then came graduation! A very formal picture was taken of the graduates – two girls and seven boys. The diploma is dated 25<sup>th</sup> of May, 1956 and is signed by Marvin Van Houten, Principal, and by Collins Oosterhouse, President of the School Board.



Back row: Mr. Van Houten, Richard Mulder, Henry Vander Loon, Dan Westfield, Bob Bolt  
Front row: Jack Kamhuis, Frances Prins, Mary Ann Oosterhouse, Dale De Young

*East Paris Christian – Class of 1956\**

**That summer we found a new way to earn some money. We were tired of berry picking and were ready to try something different! Trena & I shared a babysitting job for a family who lived on 36<sup>th</sup> Street, quite close to East Paris Christian School. Since Trena was older, she worked there three days a week and I only two. I remember watching hours of television with the children and making them lots of peanut butter and jam sandwiches.**

**And that ended my primary and junior high school days. Now it was time for the next step – secondary or high school!**

## Chapter 7<

### Fran at South Christian High

(1956-1959)

*1956*

Just before starting on a new phase of life, i.e. High School, I received my own Certificate of Citizenship. On September 5, 1956, I went to the court house in downtown Grand Rapids and there and then made a sudden decision: I was going to give myself a middle name! So my legal name became Frances Ann Prins. Glad to meet you.

And now my vital statistics, according to this certificate: 5'3" at 95 pounds. So during the first eight years in the U.S., I grew 20 inches! However, I did not reach my weight goal of 100 pounds before starting high school.

Trena was the first one in our family to go to high school. The older ones, for reasons explained in Chapter 5, started working. By the time Trena and I were that age, it was assumed that we would go to high school and even beyond. So what had changed?

Dad definitely felt that education was a "waste of time and money." According to him, to get ahead, the important thing was owning and working the land. Mother was, however, taking advice from Aunt Anna and some friends who saw the importance of education. Because both Trena and I were good students and wanted to become teachers, we were encouraged to continue at school. Also, our parents' financial situation had definitely eased by this time because of all the help from the older siblings. So they did not need our earnings.

Starting high school was a shock for me. I was used to being in a class of nine students and had been in the same classroom for four years with just one teacher. Now suddenly there were 111 of us in the class and every subject was taught by a different teacher and in a different room.

I was prepared for the academic subjects, but was totally unprepared for the social life. I was an unsophisticated and naive fourteen year old. Most of the other girls were fifteen or even sixteen, quite developed and into the dating scene. It was obvious that Mary Ann, who had been my only female classmate for years, was really much older and more socially mature than I was. Having skipped Grade 2 many years ago now suddenly seemed to not have been such a good idea after all!

The fact that we lived over ten miles from school didn't help either. For years I had ridden on the East Paris Christian School bus and knew everyone. Now we drove to school with a few neighbours but had to come home right after school. So there was little chance to get involved in after-school activities such as clubs or sports.

I did find a good friend during the first semester, Carol Meyer, and we are still friends. She came from a small town and a small school in Moline so we had lots in common. She actually remembered when our family came to Moline Christian Reformed Church back in 1948! What so impressed me about Carol and her family was all the relatives they had who lived close by! I only had one aunt, one uncle and a total of six cousins who lived somewhere in North America. All the others, and there were many, lived in the Netherlands. But Carol's extended family regularly got together for celebrations and she often invited me to participate. Carol was the oldest in her family and I, of course, was the youngest. During our high school years, I got several nephews and nieces already, and she, obviously, had none. So that quite impressed her about me!

During the first semester of 10<sup>th</sup> Grade my classes were: Biology, English, Geometry, Latin and Music. My report card shows two "A's" and three "A-'s." Interestingly enough, the accompanying "Citizenship Report" regarding classroom behavior shows mostly "satisfactory," not many "excellent." The card was signed "Mr. and Mrs. Prins" in Mom's writing.

In December of 1956, my first niece, Joanne Rae Prins, was born. Exciting stuff - now I was an aunt twice over! Ray & Gert lived in a new house built on acreage right on our farm. Trena and I often stopped there on our way home from school for a quick visit. Before long Dewey & Dotty built a new house on our farm property as well. And then the nephews and nieces kept on coming! It was great fun to have them live so close to us and it gave me a good chance to baby sit!

I'll go ahead of my story and list the rest of my nephews and nieces:

1957 – Dewey Jr	1958 – Linda, Ray Jr
1959 – Dale, Patty	1960 – Jeanne
1962 – Mike, Dick, David	1963 – Sherry
1964 – Kristy	1965 – Steve, Dan
1966 – Ruth	1967 – Paul, Rob, Melanie
1971 – Eric	1972 – Tim, Rachel
1974 – David	1975 – Rob
1979 – Julie	2000 – Dynitta

*1957*

I continued with mostly the same subjects for the second semester of 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, but now had Bible and no more Music. The topic in that Bible class is one I still remember: Old Testament Minor Prophets. Mr. Gerrit De Vries, the school principal, taught the class and he knew his subject well. It was a pleasant experience for me as it was the first time I studied that section of the Bible in such depth. This semester I ended up with three "A's" and two "A-'s" and again got mostly "satisfactory" in the behavior section! This semester's report card is again in Mom's handwriting but signed "Mr. Charles Prins."

Trena and I shared ownership of the 1957 *The Anchor*, the annual yearbook of South Christian. Looking at all those who wrote something personal in the book, I notice that a few people wrote to both of us, some wrote to just Trena, but most of the notes are to me. The notes come from both my male and female classmates. And many of them say things like “Remember how much fun we had” and “Take it easy on the boys.” Maybe I wasn’t quite as shy and socially awkward as I remember!

Richard Mulder, who had been my classmate at East Paris as well, wrote, “It looks like we jumped from the frying pan and into the fire. First Rocky and now we have De Vries and his crew.” “Rocky” was a nickname given to Mr. Van Houten by those who didn’t like him and “De Vries” was the name of our high school principal. So apparently not everyone had the same great memories of my favourite junior high school teacher!

The records show that I was quite helpful to my fellow students. One classmate wrote, “I don’t know what I would have done without your help.” Another, “Thanks for the help you gave me with English.” And from my real friend, Carol, “Thanks for helping me with Latin and Geometry.” It’s also true that I was a good student – at least I could memorize well! The Science teacher wrote, “Wow! What a lot goes on in this mind! This includes subject matter where she really shines!” Or was this comment meant for Trena? Remember we shared the yearbook.

I had a wonderful summer job in 1957. In the spring I replied to an ad in the *Grand Rapids Press* asking for a daily baby sitter all summer long for a three month old child. The only requirement was that the applicant should be “at least sixteen years old.” One small problem: I had just turned fifteen, but I phoned the parents anyway. Mr. and Mrs. Otte drove out to “interview” me and, I’m sure, to see what kind of family I came from. Either they were desperate or were very impressed with what they saw and heard. At any rate they hired me on the spot!

The first two days, Mrs. Otte was at their home in Burton Heights to introduce me to little David and to show me what she expected me to do. After that she left home at 6:30 AM with David sleeping in his crib. Jane and Henrietta dropped me off on their way to work at Hekman’s, so I was able to get there around 6:45 AM. Can you believe it – entrusting your infant to an almost total stranger and leaving him home alone, even if only for a few minutes? How the world has changed! I spent my days feeding little David, taking him for rides in his stroller, changing his diaper and watching TV while he was napping. I earned the princely sum of \$15 every week and thought I was super rich!

Then back to South Christian in September of 1957 for my Junior year or 11<sup>th</sup> Grade. My daily schedule now followed this order: American Literature, Algebra, Latin, Church History, U.S. History and Typing. Church History was taught by a local pastor, Rev. Leestma. This was the case with most Bible classes. My recollection is that we weren’t very merciful to these “teachers” who we knew weren’t real teachers!

Trena and I were in the same Typing class and even then she was already intimidated by “technology.” She needed me to help her get the sheet of paper in the typewriter correctly

before we took speed tests! My grades this semester: one “A”, four “A-‘s” and - shockingly – one “B+.” No comments from any teacher, but we did have new report cards, with a separate card for each subject. The back said “Parent’s Signature and Comments.” Mom continued faithfully signing “Mr. and Mrs. Prins” but never left any comments.

### *1958*

The big event at the beginning of 1958 was being allowed to take Drivers’ Education. One of the regular teachers, Mr. Selles, taught this class as an optional after-school activity. On the day I turned 16, March 11, 1958, I took the Michigan State driving test and got my first driver’s license. The very next day, even though it was wintry and snowy, Mom allowed me to drive her to an appointment somewhere on Grandville Ave. in southwest Grand Rapids. The car stalled several times as I was trying to shift my way and go up a certain long hill, but we made it and I was very proud of myself.

Second semester schedule was: U.S. History, Business Law, Trigonometry, Physical Education, and Latin. Results: two “A-‘s” a “B+” in Latin with the teacher’s comment being, “Far too much talking, also in study hall,” a “B” in P.E. and a “B-“ in Trigonometry. The exam grade in Trigonometry was a “C” – the only “C” I ever got in high school! I didn’t like P.E. very much and thought it was a waste of time. It seems that it was a required subject every semester, but I managed to hold on to only this one P.E. report card; all the others got lost. Maybe I didn’t get very good grades and therefore threw the cards away?

Finally, this year Mom decided to sign her own name: “Mrs. Jennie Prins.” I wonder whether I may have figured out the difference between “parent’s signature” and “parents’ signature” and made a point of it with Mom? I make this comment since the use of apostrophes with “s” has always intrigued me.

*The Anchor* 1958 was much like the one of the previous year. But this time it was mine alone. I didn’t have to share with Trena. After all, this was her senior year at high school and she wanted her own yearbook. And once again, part of the busyness of exam week was writing messages in everyone else’s copy.

I also have a copy of the school newspaper, *South Winds*, dated May 22, 1958. It has the usual news about sports events, upcoming graduation and chapel talk summaries. Also has a column on news of alumni of 1956, the first class to graduate from South Christian High. Amazing how many of them were already married and had a child!

And then the last page of the paper had a few good jokes:

*Teacher:* Name the outstanding accomplishment of the Romans.

*Student:* They understood Latin.

*Advice to a Lonely Maiden:*

**Eeny, meeny, money mo. Catch a bachelor by the toe.  
If he hollers, let him!**

**In the summer of 1958 Henry married Idamae Knott. She was one of the teachers at East Paris Christian that I “helped” and I think I had a small part in those two getting together. I remember “highly recommending” her! Idamae pointed out to us that when she initially came to visit our family, all of us were talking something different from English. Whether it was Dutch or Frisian, she didn’t know, but it was not English, *that* she did know. And we all thought we were talking English all the time by now, ten years after immigration! Both Idamae and Gert did have Dutch “roots” and thus had some knowledge of our background. Poor Dotty, who had a totally different heritage; try to imagine her frustration!**

**My summer job was not as much fun as the previous one, but I did earn a bit more money. I took care of two young children and did some light housework for the Ward family, wealthy people in East Grand Rapids. I rode to work with Mary Ann Oosterhouse who had a similar job for a family nearby. I earned 75 cents per hour while I was actually doing housework and 50 cents per hour if I was just sitting around while the children were sleeping. I continued doing that job on Saturdays during the school year. It certainly was fun getting a check written out to me each week.**

**For much of the time during my high school years my social life was with my siblings and with groups of friends. I spent lots of time doing needlework, especially crocheting. A big rage at that time was “Paint by Number” paintings, and I really got into it. They were huge projects to complete and were very time consuming. I also regularly taught Sunday School at East Paris Christian Reformed Church and was a soprano member of the choir. Once again Trena “left me behind” when she went off to Calvin College and I started my senior year of high school. My school day went as follows: Government, English Literature, Bookkeeping, Shorthand and Reformed Doctrine. The English class was taught by a student teacher and he had a rough time with our class; we were, however, nice enough to know that he needed a good grade for his efforts, so when his supervisors from Calvin came, we behaved well. And I remember him thanking us for that kind of cooperation!**

**Reformed Doctrine was taught by Rev. William Kok, a name well known in the CRC. Reports had it that he was an excellent preacher, but he was already quite old, somewhat hard of hearing and totally out of touch with teenagers. He didn’t take kindly to any challenges or questions. The best way to stay in his good graces was to memorize well and reproduce his exact words on the tests.**

**Report card results for the semester: two “A’s,” two “A-‘s” and one “B+.” And, oops, the parent’s signature was once again “Mr. and Mrs. Prins.”**

**1959**

I began the year with a brand new diary, probably a Christmas gift. An entry on January 6 was about a tobogganing party for the Senior Class at Echo Valley in Newago about 60 miles away. I reported that "It's not too scary after you've been down a few times." Quite different, though, from the small hills in my own neighbourhood.

The next day "I went to court today with our Government Class. It was a case in which the police were charging a man with drunk driving. He sure seemed drunk, but I don't know who will win because I only saw half of the case." And then we went, as a class, to Kresge's for lunch. We had "scaloped potatoes and ham." Apparently I was not impressed – "Ugh! Mother can surely cook better food."

In February I started writing in my diary about a Marv Mulder, who became a somewhat serious boyfriend for me! On February 18 (the birthday of my husband, John!) he phoned. I wrote, "I guess that Marv is a nice kid, but I don't know him very well." He was the older brother of Trudy, one of Trena's good friends. Our first date was on February 20. We went to a travelogue at Calvin about Sicily. We went together with Trudy and Francis Lieuwen, who later became my brother-in-law via Trena! And afterwards went to Howard Johnson's for coffee where we met Henrietta and Luke, my soon-to-be brother-in-law.

Previously I had gone out with groups of young people, but now Marv invited me out on real dates. He was very musical and took me to some hymn sings and concerts at Calvin College and even to symphonies at the Civic Auditorium in downtown Grand Rapids. I was still only sixteen and he was almost four years older and quite serious in every sense of the word. That sort of scared me off. I felt much too young to make any kind of commitment. Just before graduation, I broke it off.

I knew I was doing well academically but had really not paid close attention to my overall high school averages. To my great surprise I was called into the principal's office on March 10 and he told me that I had the highest Grade Point Average in the class and was, therefore, the Valedictorian.

That was a very short-lived honour! One of my classmates, Beverly, had been keeping careful track of her averages. At a school skating party that very evening she asked me what the principal had told me my average was. Then she told me that her average was higher than that. She went to the principal the next morning and showed him that her grades were slightly higher than mine. Out of a possible 12, hers came to 11.34 and mine "only" came to 11.04. And the principal found out that Shar, at 10.98 was not far behind! So Bev was declared to be the Valedictorian and Shar & I were co-Salutatorians. That was an unusual way to spend a birthday, my 17<sup>th</sup>!

I still have a letter from our Congressman Gerald Ford, future 38th and only non-elected President ever, in which he congratulates me on the "distinct honor" and "outstanding accomplishment" of being named co-Salutarian of our class. He continued, "You have

proven your ability and success in academic achievements and extracurricular activities at an early age, and they are an indication of a wonderful future in store for you.”

In addition to school activities, I was also involved in a Girls’ Society group at East Paris CRC. I entered a Young Calvinist speech contest and, since I was the only one from our church interested in it, I went to the next level competition in Grand Rapids. I don’t think there were any others in my age group there either, so again I “won.” Then it was off to II Highland CRC (which a few years later became our calling church for going to Nigeria as missionaries!) in the Chicago area for the regional contest. There I met lots of competition, got serious stage fright, and that was the end of that! I did note, however, that “I’d like to try more and different speech contests.”

My speech was titled “The Christian Witness” and I quoted from a book written by Dr. Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled*. (Some years later I became his namesake and his missionary colleague in Nigeria!) In my speech I encouraged young people to join a “Mission Group that goes regularly to visit various places and then get into a conversation with residents.” And that is how I spent many Sunday afternoons since we were invited to join such a group from Calvin College even though we were still in high school.

I attended church and catechism (doctrinal instruction) classes at East Paris CRC ever since we moved to 48<sup>th</sup> Street in 1950. Now that I was a senior in high school, I decided that it was time to “officially” become a member of the church. Together with five others from my class, we went to the consistory to tell them our intentions. We were briefly “examined,” were all accepted and the date was then set for the service. In those days it was sort of the natural thing to do: become a professing member of church at the time of high school graduation. Today in the CRC there is much more of an age range for taking this step.

Today profession services are held in the main service, the morning one, and it is quite a big thing. In 1959 it was much more like a “routine” and just a minor part of a service. So it was during the evening church service that we made our “Public Profession of Faith.” Afterwards I wrote in my diary, “It was really wonderful and I sure hope that I can live up to my profession for always.” The first time I participated in a Communion service, I was happy “to take part instead of just sitting and watching.”

As I reflect on my life now (2014), I can not recall a time when I didn’t believe, when I felt that I didn’t belong to the Christian community. Lately when I’m asked for my “conversion” story, I say that I feel I was born “born again.” That’s probably not good theology, but it’s the best I can do! And remember Jesus’ words to Thomas in John 20:29 – “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Yes, I am truly blessed.

A popular high school tradition in the late 1950s was the annual Senior Class trip. The top choice for that trip was always to Washington D.C. We all had to figure out a way to pay the \$40.35 for the trip. That definitely was a problem for some and only 67 out of a class of 102 actually went. We left school at 1 PM on a Wednesday afternoon for a bus ride to

**Detroit. There we boarded a train and arrived in Washington D.C. at 8 AM on Thursday. That day we visited many of the famous places, the Capitol Building, Library of Congress, Supreme Court, Archives, F.B.I and the Smithsonian Institute, all without having gotten much sleep on the train the night before. That night we stayed at the Lee House Hotel. As evidence that we were still young kids who didn't need a lot of sleep, my diary says that "We jumped around in our shorty pajamas until 2 AM."**

**On Friday we visited Mount Vernon, Arlington National Cemetery, the White House, Washington Monument and the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. One highlight was having a class picture taken with our Representative Gerald R. Ford. I still have the photo of that occasion in my album. After spending a busy day touring all these buildings, we left at 6:00 PM and after 18 hours on the train and bus arrived back in Grand Rapids at noon on Saturday.**



**Representative Gerald R. Ford is at the center in the front row**

*South Christian High Senior Class Trip to Washington DC – 1959 \**

**Even though I was taking the College Preparatory courses, I was allowed to take Commercial subjects as electives as well. First semester I had taken Bookkeeping and Shorthand. Second semester I continued with those and added Typing II as well. I benefited greatly from those commercial subjects for the rest of my life! And in 2012, John added the comment: "And so did I!"**

**In addition to the three Commercial subjects, I also took Psychology and English Literature. The grade results for the second semester were exactly the same as for the first. And this time my Dad actually signed the report card and used his own name!**

**A lot of my classmates wrote messages in *The Anchor* of 1959. Many of them made comments about my "boyfriend." About half of my class was planning to go to college and**

many wrote, "See you at Calvin in the fall." Carol wrote a two page letter and reminisced about our three year friendship and pointed out all the highlights of our time at South Christian High.



Frances the High School Grad \*

On Graduation Day, May 28, 1959, because I was the co-salutatorian of my class, I gave the "Welcome Address." My words of wisdom included, "For some, tonight is the end of schooling ...; for others, tonight is a stepping stone to new and higher learning. ... It is for all of us a beginning to a new and different life." By the time I got to the middle of my speech and was thanking everyone for coming, Ray & Gert & two-year old Joanne stood up and left. That made me really worried as I thought I had said something seriously offensive. But the real issue: Joanne had to use the bathroom urgently! Thanks, Joanne, for the memory!

My Typing and Shorthand teacher, Miss Telgen, helped me get an interesting job for the summer. I worked as a Kelly Girl, an agency that provided temporary office help. I was placed as a receptionist/typist as summer relief in an air-conditioned office at Converta Sofa in downtown Grand Rapids. They paid the agency \$1.60 an hour for my services and the agency paid me \$1 an hour! After taxes and other deductions, my first real paycheck from them was for \$34.14.

That's how I spent the summer before starting college: serving as receptionist for people coming in the door, learning how to operate a small switchboard and doing general office work. Just before the summer ended, the woman I was replacing "stopped in at work and told me she would like to have next summer off again. I sure hope that will work out because then I won't have to look for another job next summer." And surprisingly, I actually did return there before "next summer."

I really "enjoyed being a receptionist." It was great fun, a real challenge and an insight into other ways of earning a living, but I was still determined to become a teacher. And the only way to become a teacher was to go to college. So off to college I went

## **Chapter 8<**

### **Jan's Pitt Meadows Year**

#### **(1951-1952)**

**My teenage years coincided with my first Canada life, 1951-1958. My second Canada life began with our move to Vancouver in 2001.**

**It did not start off too well. I arrived in Halifax in an isolation ward aboard *SS Volendam*. Remember from Chapter 2: nine days of bananas! I noticed nothing of the arrival in the port. Somewhere along the line, I was transferred to an isolation ward at the docks, but I remember nothing of that move. Neither was I told that the Boer family had been instructed by the Canadian authorities to move on to their BC destination. There were no provisions for keeping such a large family at the place. Koos/Karen, the oldest of the children, and her fiance, Jaap/Jake Heikens, stayed behind to wait for my recuperation.**

**A day or so later, I was discharged from the hospital. I was simply accompanied to an exit that led into a huge hall used for immigrants in transit and told that I should go look for my family! A mere boy of thirteen! Just pushed out without any further concern or responsibility! I was lucky that the hall was sparsely populated. I began to wander around, wondering where to look for my parents. Whether I was frightened or not, I really do not recall. Then some adult, an acquaintance of the Boer family, recognized me and told me that my parents and siblings had traveled on but that Karen and Jake had stayed behind to wait for me. However, they had not been informed about my discharge and had apparently gone into the city. So I stayed with this acquaintance till Karen and Jake returned. You can imagine my relief upon seeing them some time later.**

**To make a five-day story short, Karen, Jake and I boarded the train for the long ride to BC. I remember only a few things about what was really an amazing ride in a dirty old train. One, it was sooooo long; no end to it. And then those endless boring prairies and, finally, those huge rugged snow-capped Rocky Mountains out West. The one break came in Montreal, where we had a layover. I remember vaguely that Jake hired a horse-drawn coach and driver with whom we did a city tour.**

**Finally, after some five days, the train stopped in the middle of the night in what seemed the middle of nowhere. We had arrived in Pitt Meadows, a rural farmers' community along the Lougheed Highway about 40 kilometres east of Vancouver. There was no station, but the train stopped just to drop off us three on Harris Road and went on its way. Pitt Meadows was where the Floris family lived on their farm, the people who had sponsored our family. The place was named after the watershed produced by the large Pitt Lake to the north and the Pitt River that flows into the Fraser River just west of the town.**

**Simon Floris and his family used to live in Visvliet, a village some three kilometers north of Lutjegast. They had immigrated two or three years earlier to Pitt Meadows. Just like the**

Prins family in Michigan, this family with two grown sons pooled their resources so that within a short time they were able to buy a farm along Ford Road. Land ownership qualified them to sponsor immigrants, a responsibility that included the requirement to guarantee such immigrants a job or income for one year. Floris had neither. He offered to sponsor our family with a secret gentlemen's agreement that included the illegal condition that he could not offer employment or income of any kind. If Dad were to accept, he must promise never to come to Floris for any help whatsoever, since they were spending all their resources on a mortgage for the farm. Dad, foolishly or wisely but certainly adventurously, accepted the condition. Imagine that! Middle aged, no English, only sixth-grade education, no wanted skills to offer, no job offer or prospect, large family and no money. Decades later, our son Kevin asked us whether this made us illegal immigrants, to which we responded that Floris probably was an illegal sponsor! We thank him for his faith in Dad and our family and we are glad we never had to disappoint him.

### *The House and Yard*

When the family arrived, we settled into an old house on stilts right next to the Community Hall on Harris Road—in the centre of “town.” Floris had rented this from the MacDermott family, very friendly and helpful English people and themselves immigrants. He was a florist and operated a greenhouse on the property. She was a teacher into whose hands I was fortunate to fall in Grade 6 in the elementary school at the southern end of Harris Road. It was to this house, less than a block from where we were dropped off, that the three of us were brought that night.



The House on Stilts in Pitt Meadows, 1951 \*

When I started exploring my new surroundings the following morning, I was fascinated by it all. So different from Lutjegast. To begin with, the rented house was a ramshackle of a place that was built on stilts above the ground. It was made of lumber siding painted black,

instead of red brick like our house in Lutjegast, with all of it decidedly shabby looking. The strangest thing was that it was not even level. The northern end of the house was higher than its south.

It was a two-bedroom house plus a sleeping space the size of a hospital ward upstairs. It also looked like a ward, what with two rows of four beds. That's where all of us boys slept and possibly the two youngest girls, Martha and Ellie, when they were home. At midnight freight trains would thunder down the railway just up the street. The entire house would shake and tremble on its unsteady posts and all the beds upstairs would slowly slide southward. We would all wake up in the morning a few centimeters down from where we began the night. Hilarious!

As to other facilities, in the kitchen we had a stove that burnt sawdust. There was a large mill in Hammond, just down the road, where you could buy sawdust really cheap. It would be brought in by truck and burnt in a large tank attached to the side of the stove. Besides cooking, it served as the central furnace. It would smoulder all night to keep the entire house warm during the cold season.

We had only an outside toilet in the form of an old shack kept from collapsing by clotheslines attached to the house, standing on top of a deep hole. It was a two-seater, something us kids found most amusing. Using the two-seater simultaneously was a fun thing to do—at least, for the boys. When someone occupied the place, the boys would sometimes rock it by pulling the clotheslines back and forth to scare the occupant. It did not take much imagination to picture it collapsing on you!

The property was basically a commercial gardening and greenhouse business. There was a cavernous greenhouse operated by landlord, Mr. McDermott.

### *Town and Country*

The house bordered on the Pitt Meadows Community Hall. It housed the town's administration on the ground floor, while the second floor was the town's main dance hall. Every Saturday night there was dancing and drinking and other stuff that goes along with it. So, every Sunday, early in the morning, we boys would scamper out to collect discarded beer bottles that we could sell for pocket money.

Behind the hall were large recreational grounds, including a baseball field, a sport we had never seen or heard of before. I remember being totally puzzled at this strange sport. There was also a swimming pool in the far corner of the property. Though it was kind of dirty and without any maintenance facility, boys from Lutjegast are not that easily intimidated. We'd seen it all before. So, plenty to do for everyone.

The family lived on Harris Road, the main road in the centre of the community. Harris Road ran north-south from the Pitt River in the north to the Fraser River in the south. There was also the Alouette River, a smaller tributary to the Pitt River along the road. We

lived a kilometre from the Fraser River, a major river in BC, and some five from the Pitt River. My Canadian friend Chum Richardson and I used to play on the log booms lining the shore, rolling them with our feet, trying to see who could stay on longest. We would go to the Alouette River to swim “BB.” Miles, a Dutch farmer living near the Pitt River, had a son my age with whom I also became friends. That friendship made it possible for me to take their horse for rides. Sometimes I would take it all the way home.

*An aside:* Chum knew many of the Dutch immigrants in the area, including those of his and my own age. Even though not many in the Dutch community know him, through the years he kept track of their movements. When I returned to BC in 2001, through sister Karen Chum found out I was back in town. He took up contact and we have kept in touch ever since. If I want to know what happened to any of these Dutch people, all I have to do is consult Chum.

Another area where I liked to look around was a dirt road that wandered through the countryside from the Crossroads near the Pitt River bridge, all the way to Ford Road. It was a fun area. It was close to the confluence of the Fraser and Pitt Rivers with old boats moored along their banks and, again, those log booms. There was a railway near by and many farms along the road, some of them owned or rented by Dutch immigrants. Also houses, many of them in a dilapidated state with messy grounds around them with old cars and other discarded machinery. It was Pitt Meadows’ answer to Lutjegast’s *De Mieden*.

One of the farms along that road was owned by a Dutch family named De Vries. Since the family included children of my age, I would sometimes play around that farm, at times even driving the tractor in the field, a highlight for me. Occasionally I tried to be useful by helping with the haying or with trampling down the animal fodder or silage blown high up into the very hot and steamy silo towering above the old barn. But it was fun!

All in all, Pitt Meadows was a wonderful environment for a young teenager to wander around.

### *Family Life*

Not all family members lived at home. The three oldest sisters worked in Vancouver and would often come home over the weekends, including Jake Heikens. That, along with two boarders, made for crowded conditions at home. That never bothered me as throughout my life I have thrived in crowds. Sunday dinners after church were for me events to look forward to.

During the week things would be a little more relaxed, at least, for the children. Dad, of course, would go off to work. I vividly remember how Dad would leave in the morning with a cheerful, “Hello!” and come home at the end of the day with a tired “Goodbye!” Sometimes things were topsy-turvy!

Somewhere during that first year, Dad bought his first car, a step every Dutch immigrant longed for, as it was something they could never attain back home. It was a 1928 Ford Model A—23 years old. He was as proud as a peacock. He was coming up in his new world. How or when he learned driving, I do not know, but he never really learned it well. Throughout his driving years, right up to his final days, he would give his passengers conniptions for his strange and dangerous driving practices. He never got into an accident, but the entire family wonders how many he caused in his wake without realizing it! I remember being a terrified passenger on the Trans-Canada Highway more than once, even during my adult years. For some reason, Dad never encouraged Mom to learn how to drive. No one knows why for sure, but it may be connected with his need for control or simply lack of confidence in her ability. It was something parallel to a later incident when our aged Mother needed a wheelchair but Dad refused to get her one.



The 1928 Ford Model A—Enjoying a Chat \*

One of the things that all siblings seem to remember is that there was no openness between parents and children and not much either among the siblings. All remain very conscious, painfully so, especially of the closed nature of Mother. We never really knew what she thought. She never shared much, spiritually or otherwise. This led to estrangement of some kind. Whenever I would visit her during her final years, I could never really have intimate discussions with her. An additional obstacle to intimacy was an ever-present shadow of a loquacious husband/Dad, who loved her too much to leave her alone for any length of time even during my last visit to her.

The same was true for the other brothers who tended to go their own way and create their own social lives. We got along as well as you can expect from a group of young brothers, but no particular intimacy. So I for many years did not know how to relate to people beyond a superficial level. I had to go through years of life before I learned to open myself more. For years it has prevented me from engaging in personal conversation with people. I did not dare ask questions for fear I was invading their privacy, not minding my own business or that I would meet resistance. It also led to a kind of shyness with girls that was re-enforced by language problems. It was not only a matter of Mother Ellie or of the Boer family as a whole; it was also the result of the rather stoic culture of the northern Netherlands, where people clammed up about their emotions, spirituality or any other form of intimacy.

### *Making a Living*

Dad's first priority, of course, was to find a job to support the large family. The \$100 he came with would not stretch far! He rode around everywhere on a bicycle in his hunt. He had his eye especially on the Hammond sawmill, but no luck there. He soon got a job digging peat by hand. You should have seen the poor man's hands—sores and wounds all over. It was piece work. Thus he worked his butt off. He also got a part time job stripping cows in the morning and late afternoon. To strip a cow was to manually press the remaining milk out of the udder after the milking machine was finished. This was at a time milking machines were still in the development stage. You can imagine that with hands already terribly wounded, this was not easy for him, but he persisted and kept bread on the table. I do not remember ever being hungry, even though the food was very basic, something we had all grown accustomed to during World War II and its aftermath.

During the summer, the peat work changed in character. Now the drying sods had to be turned over and lean on each other two by two. The third stage was to pile up the semi-dry sods into hollow pyramids to complete the drying process. Again, piecework. With the sods having already dried considerably, it was not hard work like digging, so Jim and I helped out a few Saturdays.

A few months later, a Dutch company bought a large area of wetland near Pitt Lake. They hired a group of Dutch immigrants from Pitt Meadows, including Dad, to build a dyke. They would be transported early Monday morning by a boat from the Pitt River bridge and would live in a houseboat during the week on the job site far from the town at the southern end of Pitt Lake, the source of the river. Friday evenings they would be returned to the bridge and go home from there. The main job was to build a dam separating the lake from the wetland and turn the latter into a viable agricultural area that came to be known as the Pitt Polder. The land was sold as farms. Quite a number of Dutchmen moved in. A few decades later, Asians took over to grow various kinds of berries, especially blueberries and cranberries. The area has also become a recreational area for all kinds of outdoor activities, especially boating, fishing and hunting. The dam itself is now part of a park; it serves as a wide trail for bird watching and recreational walking and biking as well

as for a limited amount of industrial vehicles for some kind of extractive activity on the other end. On the one side you see Pitt Lake nestled between the Coastal Mountains. On the other side is a large preserved wetland with bird watching opportunities. Thanks, Dad, for your contribution to a delightful strolling and biking facility. During our retirement we occasionally go there with our RV and stay over night.

Dad was not the only breadwinner; Mom also contributed. Not only did she run the household, but she also had boarders that used one of the downstairs bedrooms. The boarders were Dutch bachelors—Hemke Vander Zwaag, who has remained a friend of the family ever since, and one other young man who later disappeared from our horizon. As boarders, they supplemented the family income. In addition, in season Mom picked berries—blueberries and strawberries mainly. Again, it being piecework, we boys often worked along with her. Later on, I understood that she was doing this not only for the income, but also to overcome her loneliness. One of my sisters claims she enjoyed this work immensely.

The three oldest daughters were shipped off to Vancouver and worked as live-in housemaids for the rich. Karen and Jake got married a few months later and were on their own. Bo and Martha contributed \$25 each a month to the family income. When Bo changed employment some months later, her job was taken over by Ellie, the youngest of the four girls.

Jim, Hendrik and I became businessmen in our own right. We were busy collecting beer and pop bottles from the dancehall next door as well as other places in the community. You would often find us along Lougheed Highway both east and west, scouring the grass for collectibles. We would store the bottles in a shed behind the house, everyone on his own shelf. Occasionally a dealer would come and buy them. This was disposable income for us. Much of it was spent on ice cream and pop from a store just on the other side of the tracks. I also soon got myself an afternoon paper route.

### *School*

Though I had almost completed the first year of Junior High or *MULO* (Grade 7) in Grootegast, due to language problems, in Pitt Meadows I was placed in Grade 6. It so happened there were several Dutch pupils in my class who already understood English, among them Kay Floris, the daughter of our sponsor and Trina De Vries, daughter of that farmer. Their presence was very helpful for me.

I remember with great fondness our family's landlady, Mrs. McDermott, who was also my teacher. She gave me much individual attention with great patience to help with learning English. She gave me lists of words to pronounce. Never mind the meaning: Pronunciation came first in her scheme. I would take these lists home and recite them repeatedly, also paying attention to spelling. The next day she would sit with me and listen to my pronunciation and then she'd have me write them out in response to her pronunciation. She went far beyond the call of duty.

Yes, there was this language stuff. I had taken almost one year of English, French and German in the first year *MULO*. Since the emphasis had been on reading and writing rather than hearing or speaking, the little I had learned did not help me much. I'd mix up the three languages. Couldn't remember which word belonged to what language, but that was a matter of time. After school or during breaks, some boys would take me into a corner and teach me "shady" English in exchange for "shady" Dutch. We communicated with each other by using quite graphic sign language at the beginning.

I remember struggling hard to master certain sounds in Canadian English. The "th" sound is difficult for any Dutchman, who is likely to pronounce it either as a "t" or a soft "s." I practiced it by myself by repeating words containing the sound over and over again. Another sound I found difficult to master was the "t" that changes into a soft "d" within many words. For example, in "water" the "t" sounds like a soft "d." And then there was the "bossy 'r.'" What an ugly sound! I disliked it intensely and wondered for many years where this sound came from. I eventually concluded it was inherited from the Irish, but became much more pronounced over time in Canada. Though I did not like the sound, I took great pains to master it.

I remember buying my first English book from a store just down the road, next to Route 7, the Lougheed Highway. It was not a happy choice: *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. Reading English was difficult enough, but this colloquial stuff? I persisted and waded through it page after page without realizing I was reading off-beat English. I was so proud of myself when I had finished it. Then I purchased a second book: *Huckleberry Finn*! Same author; same problem! Till this day, I remember my struggles with these books more than their content. I really should try them again now to check on whether my English improved any!

One of the things that astounded me at first was the Canadian sandwich. During lunch hour at school, the kids ate sandwiches that were cut diagonally instead of in straight halves. Who on earth ever thought of such a strange sandwich? To make it even stranger, some of them put jam *and* peanut butter on the same sandwich! Jam and peanut butter together? On top of each other? What a crazy world I had landed in!

The next academic year, I went to Maple Ridge High School in the centre of Haney, now mostly called Maple Ridge, comprising both junior and senior high. I was now placed properly in Grade 8. I did well there and enjoyed the school. It was soon recognized that I was ahead of the class in math and so the teacher appointed me to help the stragglers. However, I could not help them much because of my struggling English.

During lunch break, I would chum around with two or three classmates whose names I don't remember. One of them was a Norwegian immigrant also struggling with English. I tried to overcome my language handicap by gaining their admiration by serving as shoplifter-in-chief. We would go into a nearby grocery store and spread out. The others would all make some noise to divert the attention of the store staff. In the meantime, I would pilfer a package of cigarettes, which we would then share and smoke together. There's more than one way to become a hero! It should be understood that, unlike today,

cigarettes were within easy reach of everyone. It wasn't that I was becoming a bad boy. I was just desperate for friends. Not sure how often we did this—two or three times?

The school was some six kilometres from home. I would sometimes take a school bus; sometimes I would bike; sometimes hitchhike and sometimes just walk. Hitchhiking was a common and easy way for young people to get around. If I walked, I always looked for bottles and cans along the way! Never missed an opportunity.

### *The Church Situation*

There were quite a number of Dutch immigrants in the Pitt Meadows area that affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC).

*An aside:* That church had been in the US for well over a century, but had a scanty presence in Canada. The First CRC of Vancouver, established in 1926, was the only one in BC for some 25 years. With the mass Dutch immigration in the early 1950s, many CRC congregations were established in quick succession throughout the province. This was accomplished by CRC Home Missions department that sent out “fieldmen,” to organize these churches and to help the immigrants get settled. They did a marvelous job.

As an adult, I reflected on the CRC in Canada and concluded that being a Canadian satellite to a much bigger American church was not a good thing. I have long regretted that the Presbyterian Church of Canada, another Calvinistic denomination, had not worked harder to welcome these new Reformed Christians and incorporate them into what would have become a significant Canadian church of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition. Apparently, these Presbyterians were still too tied to their Scottish background and had no vision for these newcomers. As it turned out, they harvested mostly members rebelling against the CRC, including some clergy. There has been talk of the “Dutch mafia” within the Presbyterian Church.

There was and still is a cute little community “church in the valley” in Pitt Meadows on the corner of Harris and Ford Road. It was (is?) the only church building in the community and used by various denominations. Arrangements were made for a slot for the Dutch immigrants in this church. Under the auspices of the Vancouver CRC, we would worship here every second Sunday. The other Sunday, we would be bused to the mother church in Vancouver. It was an old school bus with chicken wire enmeshed in the windows. All the children used to enjoy that ride tremendously. We referred to it as our “chicken coop.”

I remember the first time our family attended the Vancouver church soon after our arrival. The church building was bulging at the seams, due to the wave of new immigrants. We were ushered up to the balcony. While climbing the stairs, all the children squealed with great delight at this new adventure, but we were soon squelched. Didn't we know this was a church?! Oh, yes, of course!

Another thing the children enjoyed was that the people would not just walk or drive away after the service. They stayed to socialize. *That* was different from Lutjegast! And fun. This gave the children a chance to play around the church in this big city and get to meet some of the other children. While the children played, the front yard of the property was crowded with smoking worshippers, who came from far and wide in southern BC.

*An aside:* Yes, smoking. Remember the smoking culture in Lutjegast? That was general throughout the Netherlands and the immigrants carried on the tradition with great enthusiasm. It gave the CRC a bad reputation among Canadian churches for some years. The immigrants did not understand. What on earth is wrong with smoking? Eventually, the tradition was largely overcome as the health issue became a greater concern and anti-smoking legislation was expanded, though even today you will notice a few smokers hanging around the outside of some Canadian CRC churches.

I loved the services in Vancouver better than those in Pitt Meadows. There was a good preacher by the name of Schooland, an American. Though I understood as good as nothing because of language, I liked the preacher's demeanour. Another thing I enjoyed was the singing of hymns from the Psalter Hymnal. Their lively tunes appealed to me more than the Dutch Psalms, even though I used to sing them with gusto as well and had taught myself to sing many of them in the tenor voice. Now that I am a bit more mature, I enjoy both! In the meantime, the CRC has largely moved over to a more diversified culture of singing and instruments. The hymns that were so new and exciting during the 1950s are today regarded as old and mostly outdated. I enjoy them all, the old old, the old and the new. Well, most of them, at least.

The Pitt Meadows services were very different. No preacher. The service was conducted by an elder appointed by the Vancouver CRC. Only the Dutch Psalms were sung and the sermon would be read by the elder in charge. The CRC denomination had a committee that published sermons meant to be read in such situations. The reading was usually very dull and could not attract the attention of the young. As in Vancouver, after the service, the congregation would socialize outside, also puffing up a storm. Sister Karen and Jake Heikens were married in this little church during our first year there, that is, in July, 1951.

Members of the congregation soon decided to organize themselves into a local congregation independent from but with the blessing of the Vancouver elders. A first step was to find our own place of worship. Dad was involved in this effort. Soon they located a dilapidated Hindu or Sikh temple on Dewdney Trunk Road in Haney. I remember accompanying a group of adults to clean out the place to renovate it into a proper church. My job was to help clean out the old wood debris, especially piles of cedar shingles, which was strewn throughout the facility.

*An aside:* Eventually, it became the CRC of Maple Ridge, the neighbouring town much larger than rural Pitt Meadows, also known as Haney. There is a large lively CRC congregation in that town today with a few of the original members still there. Its worship form is very contemporary, more so than some members appreciate.

**Some wonder what is left of the Reformed thrust. Indeed, a good question. The current facility is on a different location along the same road and very modern. Our family never worshipped in that former temple, for we moved to Vancouver Island before the congregation moved in.**

**Things are never static. The above paragraph was written a couple of years ago. By now (2013), the “offending” pastor has moved on and replaced by an altogether different type, who has more appreciation for the Reformed nature of the church. The bloodletting has stopped.**

**After little more than a year in Pitt Meadows, Dad decided to look for greener pastures. He had heard that the lumber mills of Port Alberni on Vancouver Island were paying well and hiring. So, off he went by himself to check out the situation. He moved into a boarding house in the town and soon found himself working on the APD mill, one of the MacMillan & Bloedel plants. Six weeks later, he arranged for the entire family to move to Alberni, where he had already found a house in the heart of the town at the junction of Johnson Road, River Road and Victoria Quay, where Kitsucksus Creek joined Somas River and just half a kilometer from where that river flowed into the Canal.**

**So, the Pitt Meadows story was very short in my life, though for a young boy, a year is a long time. It still holds many memories for me. In the summer of 1952 the family moved to Alberni, where we began a very different sort of life. That is where the story continues and the next chapter begins.**

## Chapter 9<

### John in the Alberni Valley

(1952-1958)

#### *The Move*

Only about a year after immigrating to BC, and another huge move to cope with! This time from Pitt Meadows to Alberni, a frontier lumbering town in the heart of Vancouver Island. I was now fourteen years of age.

To avoid confusion further down the line, be it understood from the onset that there were two towns in the Alberni Valley. There was the “Old Town,” called “Alberni,” named after a Spanish explorer Captain Don Pedro de Alberni, a Spanish officer, who commanded Fort San Miguel at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island’s west coast from 1790 to 1792, according to a Wikipedia article. With only one kilometer between them, there was also the “New Town” or “Port Alberni,” the larger of the two by the time the Boers arrived. The two towns were separately incorporated and had their own city governments. Actually, the “New Town” was the older of the two in terms of incorporation. Eventually the two towns were amalgamated under the name “Port Alberni;” “Alberni” disappeared from the map. It was nothing like the humungous move from Lutjegast. No crowd to see us off on the bus in the early morning. It only took one day. But for a kid who enjoyed the adventure of new places, it was an exciting move to a mysterious kind of place. Like the original emigration, it included a boat ride as well as a long car ride through unfamiliar territory. The family had to take a large ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo on the Island. So, off we went in the old 1928 Model A, rattletapping our way along Lougheed Highway and Hastings Street into downtown Vancouver, to the bottom of Granville Street on the shores of Burrard Inlet, right in the city’s central harbour. It was a mere 45 kilometers from Pitt Meadows.

The location of the ferry terminal was at the Canadian Pacific Railway station. Boarding the ferry was a drawn-out procedure. The cars stood in a long lineup for some hours, awaiting their turn for an elevator to take them below into the belly of the ferry, one car at a time. The ferry was large enough to accommodate some 200 plus cars. So you can imagine the time loading took! It seems like an unlikely arrangement, but that’s my memory. Once on the ferry, we had over two hours to explore the multi-deck vessel. For me especially it was exciting, since I had missed the fun on the *SS. Volendam* a year earlier. I remember especially a few things about that ferry ride. One was going underneath Lion’s Gate Bridge. It was so high and so long! The second thing was the large flock of seagulls that accompanied the ship all the way across. It was so much fun as we boys threw small bits of our sandwiches into the air for them to catch in-flight or, when they missed, dive for it in the water far below us. The competition was fierce. It was also exciting to see the mountains of the BC mainland slowly recede in the east and, when they were almost out of

sight, to see the Island mountains appearing on the horizon in the west. Vancouver Island! Nanaimo! Wow, what excitement lay ahead.

The Nanaimo ferry terminal, like its Vancouver counterpart of the time, was also in the centre of the town. Unloading took as much time as loading, but once we reached solid ground again, Dad immediately hit the road in the direction of Alberni, some 80 kilometers from Nanaimo. First 30 kilometres along the Island Highway, north along the east coast to Parksville and from there 50 kilometres inland to Alberni. The first part was along the Georgia Strait, as the strait between the mainland and the Island is called. The second part was through the mountains. The road at that time was paved, but barely so, many potholes, very narrow and many very sharp curves. It took us through Cathedral Grove, a famous stand of original old-growth forest that till this day draws thousands of visitors every year.

Finally, after an exciting ride of what seemed many hours, we found ourselves rolling down the hill at the end of the Nanaimo Highway straight into the heart of Alberni. The house Dad had already rented for us was right smack at the T-junction at the end of the highway, the town part of it called “Johnson Road,” across from City Hall on the one side, across from the Canadian Legion Hall at the other side on Victoria Quay, a popular beer drinking joint, and behind the town’s largest supermarket, Overwaitea. It was also at the confluence of Kitsuksis Creek and Somass River, the river that flows into the Alberni Canal just a kilometer down the road, one of the world’s most famous centres for salmon fishing. The confluence was spanned by an old wobbly wooden bridge that has since been replaced by a modern one. Once again we Boers found ourselves in the centre of town—as we had been in both Lutjegast and Pitt Meadows. Not the centre of the world, to be sure, but being in the centre of town was enough excitement for me, the teenager.

### *The Alberni Valley*

I liked what I saw in Alberni. What a big place! Well, nothing like Vancouver or even Nanaimo, of course, but compared to the earlier places I had lived in, it was big and gave me the feeling of a city. It had so many and well maintained paved streets and blocks all neatly arranged in squares. It had a wide downtown street with ample space for angle parking. There were several churches and a couple of schools. I felt I had arrived. Alberni had a population of a whole 5000 or so.

The Somas River, flowing right past our house, turned into “the Canal,” another term for the Alberni Inlet, a fjord that connects the Alberni Valley with the Pacific Ocean. International freighters from all over the world plied this inlet to pick up processed lumber, including plywood, and newsprint from the pulp-and-paper mill in the Port Alberni harbour.

The Alberni Valley is or, at least, was a very interesting place, splendid in its isolation from the rest of the world, situated as it was at the end of everything motorable. The “Old Town,” along with the First Nation Reservation along the Somas River, constitutes the

valley floor, the town's core being a totally flat area of some fifty square blocks. From there, no matter which direction you go, you go uphill. And every direction you look from that floor, you're looking at forest-covered mountains, some reaching up beyond the tree line.

The total Valley population was around twenty thousand at the time. The people were concentrated, of course, in the two towns, "Twin Cities" as they were called. But there was also the rural population spread throughout the Valley. For all practical purposes, Alberni was the end of the road for most people, including tourists who drove in especially for fishing and hunting. The Twin Cities were their final destinations. During the summers, the town would swarm with California plates.

I keep talking about Alberni, but if you checked your map as I asked you, you wouldn't even have found the place, because, as I explained at the beginning of this chapter, somewhere along the line it was absorbed into the larger Port Alberni; Alberni was no more.

In distinction from the flat Old Town, the New Town—in spite of amalgamation, the distinction is adhered to—is located on a very hilly area, even if there is only one kilometer between the two. Hardly any level territory anywhere. And not just little hills—huge, steep, long, not bike-friendly at all. Nevertheless, as a teenager, I rode my bike and negotiated most of the hills without much pain. If you guys ever go there, try the 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. hill or 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. downtown! Nothing down about it, I tell you. Straight up, all the way! I did not see it that way during my teens, but when I look at those hills now, I shudder to think I used to scale them by bike and marvel that I did it with relative "ease."

Port Alberni was and still is an industrial town with all of the raw culture that tends to characterize such places. The common language is rough, not to say uncouth, the "F-word" being the most popular. Drinking is the most popular social activity, with the Canadian Legion across from our first house playing its customary role. In Pitt Meadows our family lived next to the main local drinking place; in Alberni, across from a similar place, the Legion Hall. It was another place to keep your eye on for empty bottles and cans. At the Monday morning coffee break at the plywood plant, workers competed with each other to convey the excitement of the weekend and their accomplishments. Their communal boasting had a "trinitarian" focus: drinking, speeding and sex—they could hardly speak of the one without the other. It definitely did not provide a spiritually uplifting atmosphere.

Another characteristic of the town, years before anyone heard of Trudeau, was its multicultural immigrant nature. Every race, nation and language under the sun were out on the street and on the job sites, with the exception of Blacks. Members of the First Nations were well represented, what with their Reservation along River Road and a now infamous Residential School, the very one where all the abuse scandals in the country started. With the exception of the First Nation on their Reservation, they all worked, shopped and lived amicably next to each other—no ghetto--, but mostly socialized separately.

### *The Boers in the Valley*

So, there we were, in the Alberni Valley; in Alberni, to be more exact, right in its centre. But not the entire family. Karen, the oldest, and husband Jake Heikens had already established their own home in Burnaby, a Vancouver suburb. Bo, sister number two, also married and stayed behind on the mainland. The rest of us all went to Alberni.

### *Working Situations*

You already know what brought the family to Alberni. Dad had heard of unlimited job opportunities at the mills with high pay. He knew of other Dutch immigrants who had successfully moved there. Since his first year in Pitt Meadows had not gone all that smoothly, he decided to give it a try. He went on ahead by himself to find a job and, if successful, get a place for the family to live. He succeeded on both counts in quick order. Such a move within a year after immigration was very common for immigrants. The first year was usually one of muddling along, but it allowed them to keep their eyes and ears open for better opportunities elsewhere.

The job he landed was on the so-called “green chain” at the APD, as it was popularly known—the Alberni Pacific Division of “Mac & Blo,” the local designation for MacMillan & Bloedel. The job consisted of pulling selected pieces of lumber from a long conveyor chain table that moved all kinds of green lumber. He was one of a crew of about 20 men, each pulling off pieces according to designated chalk marks written by a worker designated as “grader.” They would slide them on piles that, when high enough, would be hauled away by carriers designed for such loads. Dad stayed at that chain for about twenty years till he retired. The last few years he was promoted to “grader,” at the head of the green chain. He now had to mark the lumber according to certain grades and qualities, while the crew along the chain had to pull it off according to Dad’s grading. It was a better job than pulling, not as physically strenuous and better pay, but he had long ago lost his enthusiasm for the green chain. By age sixty he began to count the working days left before retirement. At sixty-four he quit counting, for he began to realize that retirement meant old age, something he was not looking forward to with any degree of enthusiasm. Though he disliked his job, he stuck with it.

In the early years he toyed with the idea of going back into barbering, but it would require getting a license that was difficult to get if one was not proficient in English, which he was not. The complaint of professionals who come to Canada during the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not a new one. They are lured to Canada without realizing their qualifications are not recognized. They either have to repeat much of their training or take lower level jobs like security or driver. And so Canada is “blest” with a crowd of medical doctors and PhDs doing “menial” jobs. It is, I understand, a matter of professional associations blocking the way and of wimpy governments not having the guts to buck the professional establishment by cutting the crap. As I am told it, in the 1950s the BC barbering association had already sewed it up for themselves by prescribing a test that covered the physiology of the entire

head. Few immigrants would have the English required to pass the test. That probably held for most Canadians as well, who felt threatened by the inflow of European immigrants and were jealous, for they saw immigrants make fast progress.

This did not mean Dad gave up on barbering altogether. Many Dutch immigrants would come to our house for a haircut, especially on Saturday mornings. It provided a bit of extra income. Mom was not all that eager for this scenario, for she was expected to provide customers-cum-friends with coffee and, perhaps, a piece of *koek*, a popular Dutch sweet bread. If you have never had it, someone in your ancestral “upline” has not done his job! Not that Dad needed the income all that badly, for as member of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), the reigning labour union in town, he was making good money. I believe he started off at \$1.50 per hour. If that does not seem much to you, well you should have been there way back then and you, too, would have been jealous. It was a steady job with set forty hours per week, set annual paid holidays, good insurance and, later, good pension. Though the IWA provided stability, it also was a major source of instability. The annual labour contract always ended on June 15. The possibility of a strike always loomed large over the entire community, for the entire industry, including logging, would shut down. And it did happen every few years. The town would virtually shut down and everyone disperse.

The IWA mills all ran 24/5 with three shifts a day. The day and night swing shifts shared seventeen and a half hours between them. They swung every four weeks a shot. But all these years, Dad worked in the non-swinging so-called “graveyard shift,” from 1 AM till 8 AM, working for seven hours but getting paid for eight. At the time, it yielded five cents an hour more than the same job in swing shift. Possibly the biggest advantage of this shift for those who could get used to it, was that it spared them the social instability inherent in swing shifting.

Within the first year in Alberni, Mom started working outside the house part time. She did some house cleaning. She took on the job of cleaning at Jowsey’s, a variety store just around the corner. I am not sure of the reason for her doing so, what with her still having a large family to care for. Did she need money? Did she need to get out of the house? One rumour has it that Dad controlled the purse strings too tightly and she wanted some discretionary cash of her own.

With Karen and Bo in Vancouver, Martha and Ellie were the two oldest. Both of them looked for work and landed various jobs as waitressing, dishwashing, hospital kitchen. The waitressing and dishwashing were at Red Bird restaurant on Third Avenue for both of them. Even I worked there a few Saturdays washing dishes during my time at Alberni District High School (ADHS). Always having had a healthy appetite, I found it pretty awful to smell all that delicious oily cooking around me and the deep frying without being allowed to touch or taste it, except for lunch.

Also during my time at ADHS, I again succeeded in getting a paper route. I delivered the *Vancouver Sun* that I had to pick up behind the “Co-op,” up the Johnson Street hill. The Alberni Valley being one of the wettest spots in the BC rain forests, this work was not

always pleasant or easy. But rain or shine.... I got myself some good raingear and a state-of-the-art three-gear bicycle, hanging my newspapers in a special bag on the front of the handlebars. At the end of the month I had to collect the subscription price from each customer--\$1.25 per month, of which 35 cents was mine to keep. Sometimes I would have to go to the same party several times to collect. At other times, subscribers would move away without informing me. Tough. That was at my expense; I was expected to pay attention. But December was a sweet month, for then I would get Christmas tips. I don't remember how much I might take in.

Eventually all three of us, Martha, Elly and myself, got a job at the plywood. I will tell you a little more about my work there in due time, but, yes, both girls got jobs at the plywood plant, pulling dried sheets out of the dryer onto piles on top of "dollies," flat carts that "floor boys" would supply and replace when full—the plywood equivalent to Dad's green chain. For quite some time I was such a "floor boy," and was responsible for rolling away the loads the girls had piled up. With all of us contributing most of our pay to the family coffers, the money was rolling in. Four IWA mill wages in one family. Imagine that! Father Wiebe had never seen so much money rolling in. Times were good. The immigrant family had arrived and the mortgage for 643 Gertrude Street paid up fast.

### *The Family and Home Situation*

As in Pitt Meadows, Mom continued to run the family ship from our first Alberni home on Victoria Quay. It was a time of family expansion. Karen, Bo and Martha had their first children—Karen had Dorothy; Bo had Johnny; Martha had Helen. The first two were in Vancouver, but Martha had come to Alberni. Mother Ellie, not to be outdone, was the fourth in row; she gave us brother Dick, her tenth. Dick was the fourth in the series of new births and thus born an uncle, the only born Canadian among the ten siblings. Born in Alberni and now just touching 60, he is the only one still living there.

As I remember it, none of us ever asked Dad about the family financial lay of the land and Dad never volunteered the information. You can be sure he never had it so good! But that was not the way Martha remembers it. She recalls fierce arguments between her and Ellie on the one hand and Dad on the other. Ellie wanted to marry Fred Bosma, but Dad would not release her, for, he argued, he needed the money. Martha remembers backing her up to no avail. Dad insisted on the money. Being a few years younger and never prone to observe situations closely, I noticed none of this. I gladly donated my money to the family pot without complaints.

A healthy home is the centre of life. So it was for the Boers in Alberni. Dad's graveyard schedule did demand some adjustments from a more traditional regime. But once the family had adjusted to it, it became the new routine, since it involved no swing shift. Eventually, of course, with three of us working swing shifts at the mills, the routine had to become still more fluid. Nevertheless, we managed to retain family life at home as central and important.

In so far as swing shifts allowed, we ate our meals together. As had been our Kuyperian tradition, we continued to pray before and after each meal. They would be led by Dad and after he had finished his, the pre-twelve boys would quickly ramble through their ritual prayer. The Bible would also be read, chapter after chapter from beginning to end—not, I hasten to add, all in one sitting! If this seems like a quaint custom to you, it was an example of the pervasive religious nature of the Kuyperian family culture. It was a recognition that food is a very special gift that requires blessing and thanks, that should never be taken for granted. It was an expression of a deep and rich religious culture that gave meaning to life in general. It did not require alcohol and drugs to create excitement or to fill empty hearts and minds with useless stimulation.

Sunday was always a special day that centred around church, something you will read more about under the heading of “Church Life.” Usually church would be followed first by a coffee hour at home that would include either cookies or *koek* baked by Mom. Then the big Sunday dinner, also cooked by Mom. All this was not just for the family, but also for friends or other guests who would be invited from church. Since there were many bachelors in church and two beautiful Boer sisters—Martha and Ellie-- at home, the Boer home was a natural attraction for some of these bachelors. There were especially two Bosma brothers among the frequent guests, Albert and Fred, who eventually married the two sisters.

A frequent feature of these social events was music. Albert would come with his guitar. Both he and Fred had good voices, especially Fred with his wonderfully untrained powerful booming opera-type voice that I have admired all my life. There was also the family pump organ, actually a converted piano. One of the frequent after-church guests was Hemke. He was a family friend from the Pitt Meadows days, when he boarded with our family, who had also moved to Alberni. He was one of the few not after the sisters, since he had Grietje, his fiancé in The Netherlands whom he eventually married. He played the organ, mostly Dutch hymns from the popular collection of Johannes de Heer. Since all the Boers were good singers, the house would reverberate with a choir in which all the parts were sung—bass, tenor, alto, soprano. Without prejudice, it was beautiful to hear—except for the elderly couple next door only six feet away from our house. They were friendly folk, but not used to such musical extravagance. Occasionally they would request us to turn down the volume.

I learned to play organ by taking the self-teaching course known as *Klavarscribo*, a Dutch invention. This self-study was in keeping with my taking high school by correspondence course, also at home, about which you will hear more later. This is a vertical musical script that depicts the keyboard, with lines representing the black keys and the spaces in between, the white keys. It allows one to play a totally full organ or any other keyboard and is a script much easier to read and play than the traditional horizontal notation. I have shocked many traditional players over the years by claiming its superiority over the traditional notation and even sometimes offended them by describing the hallowed traditional as “barbaric” compared to this new one. That they could only understand as pure nonsense. Who can possibly improve upon the venerable classical notation? I played

this music until recently when we disposed of our electric multi-tiered home organ. Those interested further in *Klavarscribo* can check their website [www.klavarskribo.nl](http://www.klavarskribo.nl).

So, now I “played” three instruments: the harmonica, the recorder (see under the section on education below) and the organ, but I never became an accomplished player on any of the three. The same holds true for two other instruments I later tried my hands on, the guitar and the accordion. It all remained at mickey mouse level. I also have learned to play the traditional script at easy hymn level.

The problem over the years has been that, as much as I loved music, I never devoted enough time to practice. Other things always prevented me from taking the necessary time. Usually my writing instinct would not release me and insisted on its priority. During our Nigeria days, my ministry was just too demanding. And after Nigeria, the series on Christian-Muslim relations that was time sensitive pre-occupied me. Now that all of those things are behind me in 2012, who knows what budding musician may yet emerge....? Problem is these memoirs, the current writing project.

I have perhaps painted too positive a picture of family life. Slowly the picture changed as the older children flew the coop and the younger ones with little or no Dutch experience, growing up in the secular Canadian jungle of a rough frontier industrial multicultural town, were left to their own devices. A cultural rift developed between parents and the younger ones until they lived in totally different worlds. Even I had no idea what my younger siblings got into. As in Lutjegast and Pitt Meadows, everyone carved out his own life and circle of friends. Over time, drugs and alcohol became part of some of my younger brothers’ lives, while the steady Reformed routine receded into the distance for them. All of this, no doubt, was encouraged by the shameful infighting that marked the Alberni CRC for some years. By the time Dick, the only born Canadian, started reaching out for outside friends and develop his own world, he was far removed from his parents. By this time they were too tired to be serious about their responsibility towards him and let him grow up on his own. Dick lived in a world totally different from theirs. But he and wife Dianne remain dear parts of the family. He sounds tough, but has a heart full of love and compassion. He has traded in his wild ways for a more settled life and is a solid contributor to his community. Fran and I keep in touch with him and Dianne and enjoy visiting them occasionally. Gratefully, the addiction part has largely been overcome over the decades, but it felled brother Wim/Bill, who died at 62.

### *High School Life*

#### *The Academic Aspect*

Due to their age, Martha and Elly were not legally required to attend school, but all the boys attended various schools in the Valley. The Alberni Valley made up a single school district. I enrolled in ADHS—Alberni District High School, located in Port. The other brothers eventually all ended up there as well. It cannot be said that the Boer boys as a

group emerged as stellar stars at ADHS. I alert you to the fact that my time at ADHS preceded my mill years. In other words, I am retrogressing a bit.

One of the first important changes for me at this school was the deterioration of my eyes. You may remember that I already had seen an optometrist in The Netherlands. My eyes were now getting worse, so bad, in fact, that even from the front seat I could not read the blackboard. I went to the optometrist at Woodward's at the top of Third Avenue in Port Alberni. He said that it was too late. If I had come a few years earlier, he would have covered the good eye to activate the defective part of the brain by force. This apparently was not a known technique in war-time Groningen. So, I have gone through my entire life with one eye and a quarter. I have worn glasses ever since that Woodward's visit, except when I read or work on the computer.

Generally I have always been a good student and throughout my life enjoyed school. Academically my time at ADHS was no exception. I was recognized as a good student by most teachers and the administration. I had enrolled in the commercial track, since it was less demanding on my still developing skills in English. However, the administration noticed my performance and soon transferred me to the more academically challenging "university entrance" programme. Recently (2013) someone explained to me the economics of that transfer: Schools were getting more money from the provincial government for students in the university track than in the commercial. So, perhaps it had little to do with my performance, though it did have to be up to the university-track standard.

Teachers at ADHS were not particularly skilled in handling students not proficient in English. I was completely lost in the Industrial Arts course of Drafting. I had no idea what it was about or what I was supposed to draft and the teacher either did not notice or did not know how to teach. The fact that I always have been clumsy with two left hands, of course, did not help. It also showed up in woodworking class, where I just could not get the pieces of wood cut or shaved straight or planed even. In the metal-work part of the course I did manage to produce a reasonably nice copper ashtray that I used for many years. As I was writing this paragraph, it suddenly dawned on me that another reason I was transferred to the more academic track might be not that I was too good for the commercial-occupational track so much as not good enough! Good thing that did not occur to me at the time, for it might have put a serious dent in my self-image!

My ninth-grade science teacher had little patience for an immigrant boy with language issues. Nevertheless, he thought to recognize my native academic ability. He gave me a passing grade on condition that I would take no further courses in his department! I was grateful enough for this conditional pass, for I had been fearful of this unfriendly and intimidating teacher. But later in college, my weakness in science re-appeared. So, perhaps that teacher was actually generous with his pass and I should have been grateful instead of resentful.

I am still puzzled by some of the teaching methods of some teachers. My Grade 9 music teacher distributed a stenciled bundle of songs [I bet many of you readers do not even know what "stencil" is. Google it!] at the beginning of each class session with quite a

number of traditional English, Scottish and American folksongs. I do not recall whether the collection included any Canadian folk songs. Without any sort of introduction to the material, he immediately started us off singing these songs, one after another, without any pause for a breather. Class after class was conducted that way throughout the entire semester. Nothing about their background or history. No other kinds of music. Just that one bundle with the same songs every class! The good thing was that at least I learned many traditional popular folk songs in English that has stood me in good stead all my life. If I don't remember their words during my senior years, at least I recognize them and can hum along. Maybe it was not such a bad method after all?

The above was not my only musical experience at ADHS. I had a *blokfluit* that I brought with me from Lutjegast. When I heard of an ADHS band that had room for flutes, I assumed that was the English for *blokfluit*. So I contacted the teacher in charge of the band and asked him whether I could join the band. The teacher agreed and told me to bring the instrument. I was a bit hesitant and came to the band the first time without my instrument, just to check it all out. During that session I learned how wrong I was. The words “*fluit*” and “*flute*” may look and sound similar, but the *instruments* sound very differently. The English for “*blokfluit*” is “*recorder*.” I was embarrassed that I had misunderstood a situation once again. Instead of just telling the teacher what had happened, I sought to worm my way out of my embarrassment by telling the teacher that I had lost the *fluit* on the way to school. To my great disappointment, that was the end of my band connection. I loved and still love music and would have enjoyed being a band member. It was not to be. The family was not yet in a financial shape that would allow us to buy “luxuries” like musical instruments. At the time of writing in 2012, I still have the “*blokfluit*” and sometimes play it a bit.

A third part of my musical experience at ADHS was to *participate* in the school's operetta choir. It was the year of Gilbert & Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*. I was awarded the part of Boatswain's Mate, the most minor of the major parts. It involved a duet and it was one step above just being part of the chorus. I enjoyed the practice sessions immensely and was proud to finally be recognized for something. Unfortunately, only a couple of weeks before the public performance, I got a job and had to quit school. Though I was grateful for the job, since it took me out of my dreadful marginalized situation, I once again deeply regretted missing out on yet another musical experience that I craved.

There is a disagreement as to whether or not I participated in the actual performance. Sister Martha insists that she, Dad and Mom attended the performance in order to hear me sing on stage. I sang, Martha insists till this day. In addition, brother Jim, in a 2013 (!) email, after reading this story, insists that he and sister *Karen* attended the event and heard me sing—no word about Martha. That's confusing enough, but it gets more convoluted. My Famke Fran insists I did *not* sing! But how does she know, since she had never met me or any other Boer at the time and lived in far-away Michigan? During our early years together, she remembers me talking frequently about my regret at not having participated. For the sake of domestic peace, I will side with my dear wife! Sorry, Martha and Jim! But I'm glad you enjoyed my singing!

*An aside:* This was not the end of *H.M.S. Pinafore* in my life. I had come to love both its music and its lyrics and was intrigued with the social criticism wrapped in the hilarious humour that marks the operetta. So I would continue to sing certain parts of the piece at home and wherever it was appropriate or otherwise. One of the beneficiaries of my singing these songs some years later include Martha's son, one of my two Fred Bosma nephews, who similarly loved and learned parts of it. For decades it has been a fixed tradition between Fred and me that when we get together, the event is not complete without us singing at least a short section of the operetta. Even Fred's children still sing parts of it 50 years later! Every time I have the opportunity to attend a Gilbert & Sullivan event, I seize it and always emerge from it with great glee at the experience. I attended about five years ago, when some society played selected passages from the Gilbert & Sullivan operettas in the Orpheum in downtown Vancouver. It was attended by busloads of seniors from outlying senior homes. During 2011 Fran and I attended a performance in Mountain View, California, the town where Kevin and family live. We splurged big time for this one, but we could not resist it. Apparently it does not appeal to the current younger generation, but I predict it will revive, for such a humorous and artful body of music cannot remain suppressed forever. I surely hope so for the sake of future generations.

Closure to this weighty *HMS Pinafore* saga did not come till 2013, when we visited Port Alberni and pursued the matter. The ADHS facility that I knew had been closed down and replaced by a splendid new building on Roger Street in or near the old army camp. When we asked the librarian there for a copy of the 1954 edition of the school's annual, they did not have any and referred us to the Alberni Valley Museum. There they had editions prior and later but not the one of 1954! What was this? Jinxed? They promised us they would research the matter and send us a report. And sure enough, a week later a package of documents on *HMS Pinafore* arrived in the mail. It contained a lot of detailed information—and made it clear that I was *not* amongst the performers. That was the end of the matter. The good news was that I had been right all along; the bad, that I really did miss out on a great experience. The saga is closed. The world can now move on after being kept in suspense for so many decades!

### *The Social Aspect*

Socially, my time at ADHS was most difficult and unpleasant. I came as a fourteen-year old and thus was entering my full-blown teen years with its own peculiar challenges. The boys in my class were already becoming conscious of “proper” dress and appearance. My fashion consciousness was undeveloped and had not yet indigenized. In other words, I looked and dressed differently—“awkwardly” might be the better word. The hair of my peers was cut by local barbers who knew the nuances of the day, but mine was cut by Dad, whose awareness or sensitivity of local teenage hair culture was nil. My peers also had already become quite proficient at their favourite sport, baseball, while I felt totally helpless with ball and bat. I was no sportsman to begin with and felt seriously marginalized

for not being able to participate. The fact that no one encouraged or invited me to join did not help any.

I was embarrassed about my English which led to being shy with the girls. I remember one random incident of no real significance in itself that really set me back. A couple of girls asked me a question and I answered, “I guess so.” It was the wrong answer to a misunderstood question and the girls just howled with laughter. I was thoroughly embarrassed and decided to keep a distance from Canadian girls. I might try again when my English had improved. It did, but the shyness remained for a long time afterwards. These factors led me to withdraw from the main crowd in several ways. During the winter period, physical education classes were held in the gym. One winter the teacher allowed the boys to do whatever they preferred during the hour, as long as it was physically uplifting. While most of the boys chose to play basketball most of the time, I chose running around the outer rim of the gym. For a full class hour I would run without ever pausing. Obviously I was in good shape physically, but it was an indication of how I coped with my social marginalization. I could do this running on my own, needed no one’s invitation to join, and do it as well as anyone else.

A second way I coped with this marginalization was to befriend another marginalized student, an Aboriginal. For years I remembered his name as Tom Watts. This was a common name among local Aboriginals and I remembered him by both name and face quite clearly even 50 years later—or so I thought. During lunch break, we two might wander off to a forested area with a rocky creek running through it. If we ate in the lunchroom, we would sit together, somewhat apart from the others.

*An aside:* Many years later, around 2008, when I was 70 years old, I had written up my story for inclusion in a series of immigrant stories in the *Vancouver Sun*. The article constitutes an appendix to Chapter 40 in Volume 4. A man called Daniel Watts, a member of Port Alberni’s First Nation band, read it and emailed me saying he was that friend. I do not know why my memory keeps insisting on the name “Tom,” for it was obviously Daniel. Some weeks later Daniel and I met in a Port Alberni parking lot in the Boer RV where the two of us had a very pleasant reunion, both summarizing our life journeys. We mutually pledged to stay in touch, which at the point of writing has not yet happened, except for an occasional email.

The third way in which I responded to my social situation at school was to chew gum in class. Yes, you read that correctly: chewing gum. Some teachers were very strict when it came to chewing gum and assigned the culprits to noon-time detention. It meant the student would have to spend his entire break sitting in the school’s detention room, quietly, doing nothing, just sitting there. As boring as it was, I preferred it to taking the break that was so stressful to me. So, I often would chew gum without hiding it with the expected result. The strange thing is that no one ever bothered to find out why an otherwise exemplary student would be so stubborn about gum chewing and time and again end up in detention! I think the reason is that the counseling industry was still in its infancy. No one was paying attention. There probably were no parent-teacher meetings in those days

where such behavior might be discussed. If there were, I never heard my parents talk about it.

### *Town Socialization*

I really had three circles of social life. My difficult social life at school has already been treated. There was significant social life connected with my church community that will be discussed further down below. But then there was also a town life outside of these two circles that I will tell you about here.

I tried to develop some social life with Canadians in the community apart from school, since that was hardly successful. I ended up with a fellow named Vincent. He was of solid British stock living in the Old Town. Since the story of this friendship is not all that positive, I will not mention his family name, for he came from a highly respected family whose reputation I do not want to sully.

I do not remember just how I met Vincent. He was a chunky fellow with a bit of a limp he never wanted to talk about. Since his parents' divorce, Vincent lived with his British grandmother up the hill of Johnson Street, past the "Co-op," almost next door to where my brother Dick and Dianne lived for a couple of years until recently. Being quite old, Grandma did not exercise any supervision. Vincent was totally on his own.

We two boys did a lot of fun things, sometimes naughty things. We would often just wander around town, in both the Old and New Town, or around the harbour at the bottom of Argyle to watch the boats and fishermen. We loved to wander in the forests around the Old Town, with its creeks and rocks and a railway with its trestles. We would jump from rock to rock in the creeks. We might spend time on a railway trestle, now and then pressing our ears on the rail to listen whether any train was in the neighbourhood. Sometimes we would steal a chicken from yards bordering on the forest and roast them on an open fire. That was fun!

Other things we used to do included the old Pitt Meadows game of jumping around on and rolling the logs in the log booms in local waters, trying to get each other to fall into the water. We would hitchhike our way to Sproat Lake, either to swim or to visit Vincent's Uncle Trevor, kind of a recluse living on the lake shore, but also a poet and visual artist. Once a stranger picked us up when we tried to hitchhike to Uncle Trevor. The man had no idea which direction he had to go. So we directed him to take the road to Trevor's house. When we arrived, we instructed him to keep on going till the next village. Well, there was no next village and the direction was opposite from where he wanted to go. Not a nice thing for us boys to do, but it got us to where *we* wanted to go!

*An aside:* Many years later in Nigeria, someone pulled a similar trick on me. I was on my way to Ibadan in the south of the country, but found myself on an unfamiliar road. I picked up a hitchhiker in the hope he could guide me in the right direction. He took me in the *wrong* direction and got off when he reached his destination. He instructed me to just keep going along that particular road till I reached a certain junction.... It took me some time to realize I had been had! Then, remembering my

own trick years earlier, I laughed and laughed at the humour of the situation. God has a good sense of humour!

Probably the funnest thing we boys did together was to camp in his Grandma's backyard an entire summer. My parents were totally fine with that and never asked any questions!

But Vincent also drew me into a circle of ruffians slightly older than us two boys. They had a car. We would sometimes join them riding around town. Though we never got into any serious trouble, this gang represented the run-of-the-mill uncouth ruffians of which so many plied the streets of the city. They would "soup up" their cars to make them very noisy. The noisier, the prouder they would be of their jalopies. Speeding, cutting off other travelers and yelling at them. Screaming obscenities as they passed women and girls and sometimes getting hold of alcohol. I never drank with them and felt terribly uncomfortable in their presence, but I was desperate for friendship. Vincent appeared to enjoy their shenanigans to the hilt. It was a bad fit and did not last long. I deliberately dropped out.

I grew away from Vincent once I started working on the mill and began my correspondence course. Vincent never got a job. He was too lazy for that and eventually seems to have turned into a kind of bum, living an unproductive life. When I would later visit the Valley I would try to find Vincent. I found him a couple of times hanging around at the bottom of Argyle, the seamy side of the New Town. No visible means of support. He eventually just dropped out of sight. No one had any further information about him.

I developed a more positive relationship with a Dutch immigrant boy by the name of Henry Petersen. The Petersen family lived in an old rental built on stilts on the bank of the Somas River, partially over the water just before it flowed into the Canal. They were a nice family. In distinction from most Dutch immigrants, they associated themselves with the Anglican Church. Probably the reason was that they were from the western part of The Netherlands, while most CRCers in the Valley were from the north. Sometimes these two do not easily make friends with each other. The family represented an interesting contradiction. While they shied away from the local Dutch community, the parents insisted that the children speak only Dutch at home, no English. There was even a monetary penalty for lapses.

This friendship developed after I started working at the mill. Henry was working there as well and even had a car with a rumble seat in the back. We two would occasionally spend time at each other's houses or we might go for a ride here and there in the Valley, all the while chatting with each other. It was a healthy relationship that slowly dissipated as I came closer to leaving for Calvin College. I have good memories of Henry and, living as he does with wife Bev in Courtney on the east coast of Vancouver Island, was grateful to meet up with him a couple of years ago. He reminded me of an accident I caused with his car when he allowed me to drive it one day. No one was hurt, but the car was apparently quite badly damaged. I conveniently forgot!

### *My Mill Years (1954-1958)*

Dad found himself in kind of a quandary. On the one hand, he wanted his sons to study and make something of themselves. On the other hand, he also needed, or thought he needed, more income to help him get settled in his new country. For this reason, he and I made an agreement that right after my sixteenth birthday, Dad would try to secure a job for me at the APD mill, where he worked. I was cool with that. Though I liked studying, I detested ADHS for reasons described earlier. However, this would not mean the end of study for me, for I would complete high school by correspondence courses offered by the BC government and eventually I thought I would enroll at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver in order to study accountancy. In time, the first step was accomplished, but I never made it to UBC and, fortunately for myself and the rest of the world, never became an accountant!

The way opened up earlier than expected. I was only fifteen, but I managed to get a job at a smaller mill called Tahsis, that belonged to another company. Since the law prohibited fifteen year olds from working in factories, I was encouraged to fib about my age and claim to be sixteen. The job lasted only during the summer. Thus, at fifteen I started to bring big union wages home. In the fall I regretfully returned to school.

The following year, once I had reached sixteen, one midnight Dad came home from his graveyard shift, to wake me up and announce I had a job at the APD to start right there and then that very night. I got up and away I went into a new world of work. I was put on what I remember as the "A chain," a broad bed of conveyor chains that moved huge timbers. I, being only sixteen and not accustomed to such work, did not do very well and within a few nights I hurt myself. I was off work for a few days and then re-assigned to the planer department, where smaller and lighter lumber was handled. I remained there for close to a year. Most of the time I worked at the end of a conveyor chain, where I had to tie up bundles of planed lumber of various lengths put together by workers along the conveyor. I, along with a colleague on the other side of the conveyor, had to tie the bundles together very quickly and then pile them up in a certain way. Fast-moving mobile cranes called "carriers" would come and take the full piles away and then we would start afresh. The bundles would be tied with a special kind of string that I would cut with a small hooked knife attached to a ring around my little pinky. It was go-go-go with hardly any letup throughout the shift, except for the 30-minute lunch break and the ten-minute "smoke break."

This all took place in a very drafty place that had a roof and walls on the side, but open on both ends. It was located right on the Alberni Canal with its fierce and cold winds that wafted in along the Inlet from the Pacific Ocean. Though the local climate was mild by Canadian standards, in the winter this location would be very drafty and downright cold.

Occasionally I would be assigned to the dry kiln section. Two of us would have to climb on very high carefully constructed piles of lumber that had been kiln dried. We would then push the lumber off onto a conveyor belt below that would carry it to a set of saws. The noise at the top was horrendous. I am sure that is where my ears suffered industrial damage as it was diagnosed years later. At that time, no one thought of ear muffs for noise

reduction. Over the years, my hearing got worse and worse till I eventually had to get hearing aids.

The mill hands were mostly immigrants from Europe, but there were also quite a few Chinese and (East) Indians. Unlike the American scene, there were no Hispanics and no Blacks at the mill. In those years, people in the Valley did not talk much about racism, at least, not the Caucasians. In view of their experiences, it is likely that the Aborigines and Asians did. If we did not think or talk *about* it, we would often think racially or racist. I remember looking at the Chinese with their “squinting” eyes, as we thought of them those days, and the Indians with their beards and turbans and wondered what burden it must be to go through life like that. I imagined that each one of them would love to change into a Caucasian! Racism? Oh, no, of course not! Not me! No one ever expressed such notions and, in my circles at least, no one advocated them, but they were there, floating like viruses in the air that you would just pick up without being aware of it.

Among this motley crowd of mill hands, there was the usual percentage of “characters.” One man I remember with special fondness was little Joe, a tiny little Chinese man. Affable, sociable, funny. One day he came to work even happier than usual. “Joe, what’s up? What are you celebrating?” He explained with a happy smile, “Oh, my wife just had a son.” “Joe, that’s great. Congratulations. When was the last time you saw her?” “About 25 years ago. She’s in China!” Happy as a lark. My colleagues and I all loved old Joe.

Less than a year later, changes in world markets forced changes in local industry. The APD lumber mill where Dad and I were working had to reduce its workforce. Thanks to the IWA, instead of laying off workers, the company transferred some to their plywood plant just down the Canal. I was among them. My first job there was loading the dryers. I had to spread green, thin sheets of freshly cut logs out on rollers that would take them through the dryers. They were huge machines totally enclosed and some thirty metres long. It was a very hot place, especially in the summer time. My sisters, depending on their shift, would be at the receiving end of these dryers, where they would pull the same sheets, now totally dried, off the rollers onto piles on top of “dollies,” flat cars that were moved by pushing them. Later, I became “floor man.” I had to manage those dried piles and dollies. Make sure the piles would be removed when complete and keep supplying empty dollies. Push and pull all day long. The result was a strong set of leg and arm muscles. Still later, I was put in charge of ten “patchers,” that would cut out knots and other ugly places on the plywood and replace them with the oval patches you often see on plywood even today. I supervised the operators and had to keep them supplied with the raw materials and replace the full dollies with empty ones. It was a more interesting job.

While I was a friend to Henry Petersen, I was a colleague to his father, since both of us worked at the plywood plant. I remember a competition organized by the management in which both Petersen Sr. and I participated. They had organized a writing competition among the workers. We, the workers, were invited to write a *composition* about work safety in an effort to instill greater safety consciousness among the workers. There was to be a prize for the winner, just one prize. At the time, I was taking an English composition class in my correspondence course you will hear more about later and I was very proud of my ability to write good compositions. In fact, I felt absolutely sure I would win! Who else in the entire mill of rough uneducated mill hands could possibly do better than me? Well,

Petersen was a worker of a different stripe and culture and he submitted a *poem*, definitely a good one in the context and he won the prize! I was extremely disappointed. Petersen had not followed the rules: He wrote a poem, not a composition! Didn't the management know the difference? And had they not specified a composition? Disappointed as I was, I did not hold it against Petersen so much as against management. I made no attempt to reverse the decision. It was one of the few times in my life that, in the words of the famous prayer by Francis of Assisi, I had the wisdom to recognize what could not be changed. I worked in this lumber environment about four and a half years. From there I left the place to go to Calvin College.

### *Highschool by Correspondence*

My working years included many other aspects of life, of course, most of which will be described below under their respective headings. One aspect that I want to discuss here is my continuation with high school studies. Remember the agreement between Dad and myself. After I started working at APD, I reported my plans to Mr. Ramsey, the Principal of ADHS. Ramsey was not impressed. He scornfully warned me that many dropouts had told him of similar plans, but he knew of no one who actually succeeded. This negative attitude fired my determination to show this negative principal that I meant business. I enrolled in the correspondence courses run by the Education Department of the BC government, who ran these courses mostly for the benefit of BC students living in isolated places with no access to schools. I intended to take all of grades ten through twelve in my spare time while working at the mill. But my work was swing shift. One month, dayshift; the next month, afternoon shift from 4:30 till 1 am. During dayshift, I would study in the evening; during afternoon shift, in the late morning and early afternoon. The ultimate aim was to graduate and then take accountancy at UBC.

Not all ADHS teachers were negative towards my project. I needed a sponsor who would receive the test materials and supervise tests and exams. Mr. Lawson, a school counselor, was sympathetic and encouraging. He agreed to accept this responsibility. So, while I studied at home, I had to come to ADHS to take my tests under Lawson's supervision. After I graduated and left the Valley, I never met Lawson again. However, around 2005, I did telephone Lawson at his Sproat Lake home. The man was old by this time, but said to remember this Dutch boy called Jan. I summarized my achievements over the years and thanked Lawson deeply for his help so many years ago. I hoped that Lawson would be open to a meeting, but the man was apparently too old for such arrangements. He died in 2010. Though I have reasons to believe we would often be at odds with each other on social and political issues, I remember him fondly and with appreciation.

Dad was very encouraging to me and wanted me to succeed in the worst way. Though the family house, by this time at 643 Gertrude Street, still in the Old Town, was none too large for the sizable Boer family, Dad set apart an entire study-bedroom for me and that on the main floor even! That was a privilege none of the children had ever enjoyed, but it did make it possible for me to concentrate on my studies without being interrupted by the younger siblings all the time. But then, none of them were ever asked to work and contribute to the family income either. It took concentration and persistence on my part,

but I never objected to the arrangement. It provided excellent training for my future endeavours and it gave me a lasting appreciation for the dullness of factory work that I never forgot even when I moved into more elite and higher education circles. I remained sympathetic with members of the working class without falling into the union-type one-sided critique of employers who take the risks in creating the jobs.

### *Church and Spiritual Life*

Church continued to play an important role in the Boer family. The local CRC was organized in 1951, shortly before we arrived. The members were all recent Dutch immigrants from various parts of The Netherlands. Though the services at first were exclusively in Dutch, within a few years English was introduced and before long took over. The process was enhanced by our mostly American CRC preachers, but it did not happen without some friction, a normal element in the history of any immigrant church.

The congregation met in a small church building built and owned by an elderly Baptist couple who lived next door in a house they also built. It was located at the junction of River Road and Beaver Creek Road. The church had no foundation and was built on posts. The CRC rented the facility.

At fifteen, I was appointed custodian. That involved mostly a weekly cleaning and getting the place setup for Sunday services. In the winter I had to cut wood to warm the place. All of that for a grand \$2 a week. Even in those days that was minimal, but I had always loved church and its culture. So I was happy to so serve. And, of course, it gave me a sense of belonging and provided me with a sense of stature. For some people, that does not take much, apparently!

Eventually, a property was bought along Rogers Street, the street that kind of unofficially served as the dividing line between the two towns. There was an abandoned army camp of WW II vintage up the road that was being shut down and the barracks sold. It had served as a military base against the threat of a Japanese invasion. The CRC bought one barrack and moved it down the road to the property. There it was turned into a proper church edifice. A smaller barrack became the church hall. All the remodeling was done by voluntary labour on the part of the members. It was a simple edifice, but it served the congregation well for a couple of decades. I continued my custodial services in the new edifice for a couple of years and was awarded a hundred per cent raise—now I received \$4 per week! Eventually I resigned due to the demands of my study programme.

*An aside:* As to the old Baptist church building, it was ripped off its posts by the tsunami that came rolling through the Inlet into the town in 1964 as a result of the Alaska tidal wave. Google < Port Alberni tsunami > for more information. The flood carried the church to the edge of Kitsuksis Creek and there neatly deposited it. It was turned into a scout hall. This event did not affect the CRC, since it had already moved on.

Music, especially singing, was a large part in my teenage life. You've already read about it during my pre-teen years in both church and school in Lutjegast. You've heard about it during my high school days in Alberni as well as in my social life there. And now it appears in my church life there as well. As in Lutjegast, I loved congregational singing, especially the new English hymns in the CRC's new blue *Psalter Hymnal*. I sang my heart out and, again as in Lutjegast, I soon learned to sing the bass and tenor as well, though I preferred the latter. You could hear me throughout the church!

Then I was appointed *voorzanger* or song leader. That position was given to me because I had a good voice—strong and clear, an obvious candidate for leadership that was further supported by my being the oldest in the church to have mastered enough English for this position. Besides, many of the hymns in the *Psalter Hymnal* of the CRC were not known to this church of immigrants. I knew enough organ to learn them on my own and then lead the congregation. So, every Sunday morning, before the official service would begin, I would lead the congregation in singing three hymns. Yes, *before* the official service. Such singing was popular with the people, for they loved these hymns, but the regnant concept of a service liturgy was too rigid to allow for such singing. So it had to be done before the official liturgy kicked in. That, of course, has loosened up considerably since. I continued as *voorzanger* right up till I left for Calvin College. Al Hoekstra took over from me and he did it for a full seventeen years! By that time singing came to be led by musical *groups* that would both sing and play more popular instruments. The organ was toppled from its monopoly, the end of a centuries-old tradition.

One time, two of the organists got married. Though there was an excellent player in the church by the name of Corry Colijn, for some reason she was not recruited to play at the occasion. I was invited to try it. I agreed, but shouldn't have. I practiced and practiced and practiced some more. A Dutch preacher from Vancouver Bethel CRC came to officiate. He was known to be an unfriendly person. When I made my first mistake on the organ, the preacher frowned at me. I became nervous and made more mistakes. Now the preacher began to show open disgust at me publicly for all to see. I was devastated. I somehow managed to fumble my way through the service, but have never again played in public since, not even in front of my adult children whose silence about my musical abilities speaks volumes. Something like Oom Berend? Or was it a generational issue?

I also sang in an ecumenical choir with members from the CRC and from the Baptist church, with a Baptist, Mr. Auterhoff, as our director. Though, like many members of the choir, Auterhoff worked at the plywood plant, he was a professional musician with a good voice and good directing capabilities. He was also a piano tuner. It was a good choir and a fun choir in which members of both churches participated with enthusiasm. The Boer family was well represented with Mom, Ellie, Jim, Hendrik and me all members at one and the same time. Sometimes we would sing in the Baptist Church and sometimes in the CRC. Sometimes even at other venues and events. However, except for special occasions, there was no room for choirs or any other "special music" in the Canadian CRC liturgy. That was a prohibition they brought with them from The Netherlands, even though CRC USA did have choirs sing regularly during the liturgy.

It was still the old era of rigidity. Though the Council of the CRC—“Consistory” as it has been called for centuries—occasionally allowed the choir to sing during a service, that ecumenicity had its limits. One Sunday evening the choir sang in the Baptist Church service. Towards the end of the regular service, the pastor invited all those who loved the Lord and were in good standing with their church to participate in the Lord’s Supper. This was, of course, an invitation to CRC singers to stay and join. All but two of the CRCers left. The idea of open communion was foreign to them. Only Jan Jansma and I stayed and participated. Some weeks later, we were called in by the CRC Council and were reprimanded for playing so fast and loose with the holy sacrament. The elder appointed to reprimand us did so in all seriousness. A good decade later, that same elder had become quite charismatic and would have been embarrassed if we had reminded him of his reprimand.

I was also heavily involved in the church’s youth work. At the time there used to be the Young People Society. It was patterned after the model we were familiar with in The Netherlands. A member would be assigned to write an essay on a Bible story or doctrine, read it at the meeting and then the President would lead a discussion. It was quite an educational experience, actually. At sixteen, I was allowed to join and, though I was the youngest of the entire bunch, often some fifteen in number, I was soon elected President. Well, I had leadership qualities. I could lead in singing. But the main reason probably was that I could speak the best English and the group did want to conduct the meetings in English, even if everyone spoke Dutch more fluently. So, I was busy, at one time being *voorzanger*, custodian and President of the Young People Society, all at the same time.

The local Young People Society was a member of the denominational Young Calvinists. This denominational organization organized various annual events, including an oratorical contest. Local participants in the event would compete with each other in delivering a speech on a topic of their own choosing. I surfaced as the local winner, though I do not remember my subject. I consciously copied the style of Billy Graham and it was recognized by my audience. The next step was at the district level, which included all the societies on the Island. Again, I won. Now I was to proceed to the regional level in Everett, WA.

I went with a carefully crafted speech fully written out that I had practiced till it ran out of my ears. I was fully conscious of the imperfect English and Dutch accent with which I would address people who knew only English as their first language. I also knew that American CRCers tended to look down on their immigrant cousins north of the border and I did not want to confirm them in their attitude. So, I went as well prepared as possible. Nothing left to chance.

About three minutes before the event was to start I was alerted to a terrible misunderstanding. I thought I was to deliver a speech with or without notes. Instead, it was interpreted as a memorized speech delivered without any notes at hand. I was crushed. I had not prepared for that situation and I knew I could not pull it off without some hitches. A sympathetic pastor who would occasionally come to preach in Alborni and who knew me, noticed my distress and promised to help me out. He asked me to give him my manuscripts and told me he would prompt me when necessary. I thought this meant he would hide behind a curtain close to me on the stage and whisper to me. Instead, he sat in the audience and prompted me by loudly reading the beginning of the next sentence. Now I

was totally crushed and embarrassed beyond limits. I had let myself down, but, worse, my people in front of all these English-speaking Americans. I had confirmed these people's prejudice. I have seldom felt so humiliated! At the time of writing in 2010, I checked the dictionary and there is nothing to indicate that an oratory is a *memorized* speech. Perhaps those organizing the contest had decided on that rule, but it may have slipped past the immigrants of BC. Perhaps memorization was part of an *assumed* definition? Over the years, I have frequently thought about this incident. I have noted recently that Wikipedia insists on memorization! Even now, every time I pass Everett along I-5, I remember my humiliation. It was an event somewhat similar to the Plywood composition, but much more humiliating.

During my Alberni years, several pastors served the church. During the initial period, various pastors from Washington State came to conduct two services on one Sunday and then return home. They were assigned to do so by the Classis Pacific Northwest to which the Alberni church belonged. A classis was a district or region of the denomination. The young CRC in BC belonged to that American classis or district. Classis officials would assign pastors to visit vacant churches on a monthly basis. That's how I knew the pastor who "prompted" me in Everett. Then the denomination called Rev. Gerrit Rientjes to the Island. He would visit the Valley one weekend a month. He was a warm and emotional preacher whom everyone loved, both him and his wife. When after some years he delivered his farewell sermon, I remember the entire church weeping, including myself.

One day, unbeknown to me, Pastor Rientjes came to see Dad and asked him whether I had ever talked about becoming a pastor. He asked because I was so active in church. Dad said he had never heard me talk about it.

Unbeknown to Dad, I had actually been struggling with that very issue for some time. My plans had been to become an accountant, but the idea of pastor started intruding. I pushed it away, but it would come back every time. I began to pray about it. I could no longer concentrate on my studies, since I was confused as to what I would do with them. Then, one day, like a thunderbolt from the sky, I heard this voice telling me in no uncertain terms that I was going to be a preacher. I surrendered, for I recognized this voice as God's, speaking to me. The matter was settled; no more talk of accountancy.

The following Saturday, just three or four days after Rientjes had talked to Dad, I went for a drive with Dad and told him what had happened. Dad in turn told me about the question Rientjes had asked! That was obviously more than an accidental coincidence. The new direction soon became public knowledge in the church.

Another pastor who came to serve the early Alberni church was from The Netherlands. He had let it be known he was ready to come to Canada. It soon became clear that his English was not the best. So, he asked me to sit with him every Saturday morning to go over his English sermon and improve the language. Unfortunately, the man soon proved to be unfit for this church. When he had to appear before Classis for admission into the CRC clergy, he did not pass their scrutiny. He left.

The last pastor before I left for Calvin College was Rev. John Holwerda, an American who came to us from New Jersey. He had a slight limp. He and his wife were a very kindly couple with a great sense of humour. I often visited them.

The above section gives the impression that, apart from my involvement in the nondenominational choir, I attended only the CRC, but that was not exactly the case. Especially during my early pre-custodial period, I would occasionally attend other churches as well, especially in the evenings. I enjoyed the looser liturgies and the peppy singing in some. For a while the Foursquare Church and Plymouth Brethren were among my favourites. Sometimes I wondered whether I preferred these Evangelical churches to my Reformed roots.

In 1956, I took a major spiritual step. I did my Profession of Faith at the age of eighteen. For the uninitiated, this is what in some churches is called “confirmation,” though that is often around the age of twelve. It means that I now publicly declared that I had appropriated the promises of God at my baptism back in 1938. At that time, my parents had said “Yes.” Now I said “Yes” for myself. It meant I was now a full member of the church in that I could participate in the Lord’s Supper. I could now also vote in church matters. But the deeper meaning was my “Yes” to God that I had accepted His promises and intended to live the Christian life. Even though I took this step, there was still some nagging doubt deep in my heart as to whether all these promises applied really to me personally. Yes, I believed God had made these promises, but somehow I could not muster the joy and liberation this should have brought to me. When I told the elders about this during the profession interview with them, the same elder who reprimanded me for taking Communion at the Baptist Church, assured me that mine was a common experience and that it would grow on me. It took me quite some years to reach that point. I do not remember the exact year or date, but I do recall the exact moment and occasion, but now I am running ahead of the story.

### *Social Life within the CRC Community*

I have written earlier in this chapter about my social life in school and in town. I had considerably more social life within the CRC community. I was very active among the youth of the church as you have already learnt. The youth often went on hikes into the mountains in groups, especially Mt. Arrowsmith, the highest mountain around that was within easy reach by car. At the time, I was pushing heavy loads in the plywood mill and was in excellent physical shape. I could not understand or have patience for some who could not keep up. Why, this was easy!

The Boers are not known for prowess in any sport but some of us did *attend* sporting events. I remember riding with Nick Hoekstra to Nanaimo to watch occasional curling, lacrosse or hockey matches. Brother Jim reminded me recently that sometimes the two sets of brothers, Nick and Al Hoekstra and Jim and I would travel in Nick’s car to Victoria for a game. Baseball was popular, but I still knew little about it, while my local peers had already achieved a fair level of expertise. *The game in the Valley was basketball.* In fact, one year the Valley team became Canadian champions in their league. This brought a lot

of excitement to the town, what with various teams visiting that would otherwise not have bothered with this small isolated town. One time even the Harlem Globe Trotters showed up. Oh boy, did they ever pulverize our team, but it was all in good fun and great humour. That year was a highlight for the entire town and one I never forgot.

At other times we would go fishing in the Georgia Strait at either Parksville or Qualicum. We would rent boats with outboard motors and gear and off we went. It was a time of laissez faire fishing with hardly any regulations. Some of the group would occasionally succeed with a significant catch. I do not remember ever being lucky. I still have a photograph of Fred Bosma, later to become sister Elly's husband, proudly displaying a sizable fish he had caught.

Not infrequently the group would go to the beach at Sproat Lake Park, a wonderful place to swim and picnic. Sometimes some of us would rent a rowboat and go far onto the lake, perhaps having a picnic on some lonely island. This lake was then, as now sixty years later (2012), the home of the world's famous largest fire bomber planes that were used all over to fight forest fires, even today, reaching all the way into the US as far as California.

During the winter months, after the Saturday evening Young People's meeting, some of the members, including me, would sometimes go bowling. This was Canada. So, it was the five-pin variety. After the game, we would sometimes go to Nick Hoekstra's house to watch either boxing or wrestling on TV. This being the mid-fifties, not every family had a TV; it was still kind of a novelty.

Here are some items and stories about some of the major CRC characters in my life during this period. As I have already indicated, most of the young people were older than me, some into their twenties, but they allowed me to tag along.

There was Ben Wisselink, a young Dutch immigrant who boarded with the Tabak family on Second Avenue. Ben was the Dutch equivalent of a high school graduate and thus better educated than the rest of us. He would even quote poetry, something that seriously impressed me. After I went to Calvin College, Ben attended the University of BC, but became seriously ill and died there. I still have *Roget's Thesaurus* that Ben gave me as a present. It sits on my desk and I have been using it regularly all these years. The Tabak family also welcomed the church's youth into their home.

There was Jan Jansma along with his parents and siblings on Beaver Creek Road. I would often chum around with Jan. His father and mine knew each other from their youth in the province of Drente. Jan has spent his entire working life as a millwright, that is, a mill mechanic. He can repair and build anything. He has built a couple of houses as a hobby. Jan has over the years been very helpful in bringing me to the ferry in Nanaimo. Jan was also a sincere and serious Christian who wouldn't hurt a fly. We have retained contact throughout the years and do visit each other even during our retirement years. Jan became a widower just a few years ago.

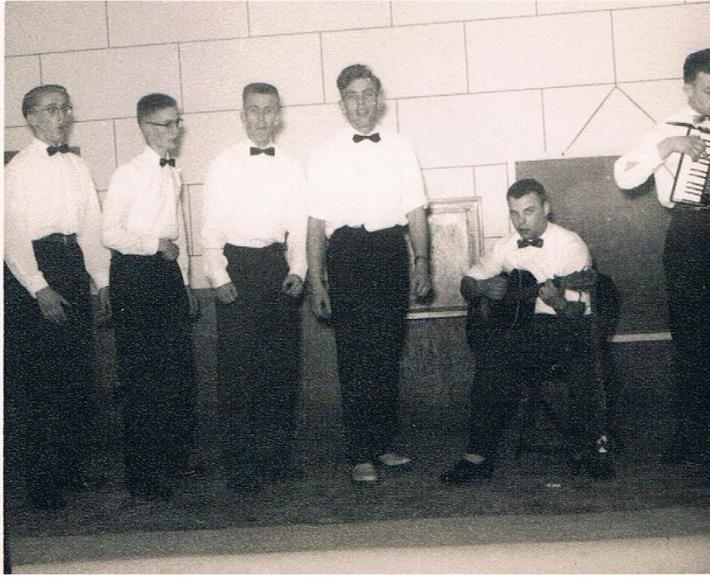
In addition to Jan Jansma, I also had a special friendship with Nick Hoekstra. Again, Nick was a few years older than me. He was working in the plywood plant and remained working there till 55, when he was given a golden handshake and retired. More than anything else, Nick was a sportsman, though he and Rennie are also passionate about the Gospel and Church. You will hear more about him during the Nigeria years.

Like all mill workers, I took my annual two-week holidays or vacation from the mill. The venture would be financed by the “holiday pay,” a payment made in addition to the regular wage, the equivalent of two weeks’ pay. Though I gave most of my wages to Dad, I kept my holiday pay. One time I went with some members of the Young People to the Okanagan Valley. We stayed in motels and in the daytime either would go to the beach or explore some of the Okanagan towns.

The most expensive and extensive trip I ever took together with Nick, Al, and Jim was in Nick’s car to Yellowstone Park in the USA. We camped in a tent at random places along the way. One pitch-dark night, we had stopped at such a random place and pitched our tent in the bush. As we settled in with the four of us, we heard a suspicious rustling sound outside the tent. What could that be? We were in the middle of nowhere so that anything could happen. Our imaginations went wild. Could it be a cougar or mountain lion? A bear? Who should go out to check? Whether ordered or voluntarily—I don’t remember—I stuck my head out of the tent but saw nothing. I slowly and carefully crawled out onto the grass, looking every which way. Nothing. I stood up to look over the bushes around the tent. Still nothing. Then a minor wind gust arose and I saw the culprit: a roll of loose toilet paper one of us had carelessly left outside! The wind had picked it up and made it rustle! All four breathed a sigh of relief. Phew! That was close! I felt a little less sheepish than the others. After all, I had dared to go outside and take the risk. I was really quite pleased with myself.

Nick was a natural sportsman. He specialized in football or soccer and coached for many years. He even took a team to Europe. One game he never played was tennis, the one and *only* game that I ever played, usually together with my wife, Fran. So, during one of our visits from Nigeria, we told Nick about tennis. He insisted we try him, the two of us against him. We went to the court, showed him the basic rules and way of handling the racket and ball. And, would you believe it? The impossible happened: Nick beat us! The very first time! Nothing further said. This was too much. Talk about feeling sheepish!

Again, my love for singing showed up. The two Hoekstras and Boers formed a singing quartet called “The Lumberjacks.” This being the Alberni Valley, the name was self-explanatory. Though we did not sing religious but current popular songs, we performed within the CRC community, at church events, weddings and other fun occasions. Sometimes Jake Bosma, brother of Fred and Albert, accompanied us with an accordion and a fellow called Guy with a guitar. We were all good singers, harmonized well, and had a healthy sense of fun and humour so that people always enjoyed our performances. I remember Pastor Rientjes and his wife doubling up with laughter at one of our performances. We also sang at CRC occasions in other places on the Island. It *was* fun for all of us.



**The Lumber Jacks \***

**From left to right: John, Jim, Al, Nick, Guy, Jake**

I must tell you a little bit of my attitude towards CRC-America at the time. The few Americans I had known well were our American pastors, especially Gerrit and Gretta Rientjes and John Holwerda. We liked each other. Being active in church life from early youth on, I visited them and worked with them frequently. They were always very friendly and encouraging to me.

Rientjes once organized a trip for a few of us young people to go to Lynden and environs, a place just south of the border, to meet some of the CRC young people on the American side. The trip was preceded by a short penpal relationship between some of us and a few girls around Lynden to break the ice a bit before meeting each other. I participated in the programme, had a girl penpal briefly and did the visit. That visit was the end of the matter for all of us. It was never attempted again. Probably we were all too young to cope with the cultural differences between us. Of course, I was still struggling with that earlier bashfulness that did not help matters much either. But nice try, Rientjes.

Pastor Holwerda was concerned to notice an anti-CRC-America streak in CRC-Canada and sought to prevent it from developing in me. As the time I would leave for Calvin approached, he would warn me against this prejudice and encouraged me to make friends with American students and get to know them. So, I had every reason to go with the best of intentions and expectations in that regard.



*Sir*

**Holwerda also taught me another skill in preparation for going to Calvin: to make a proper necktie knot! I wanted to look like a gentleman, not a bush boy.**

*Jan Strutting along Hastings Street, Vancouver – 1958 \**

### *My Farewell to the Valley*

Ever since I quit ADHS to start working, the plan had always been for me to go for further studies, whether that should lead to accountancy or the ministry. I plodded away at my correspondence courses while the above sections of this story unfolded until I completed the last one about mid-1958. Since I graduated on my own time there was no graduation ceremony to mark the occasion.

My Alberni days were coming to a close. In September, I planned to leave for Grand Rapids, MI, to enroll at Calvin College, the place where CRC ministers would start their training. The last half year of my plywood mill period I was allowed to keep my money to save for college. By the time I left, I had saved \$1500, a sizable amount those days.

There were all kinds of preparations to be made before leaving, of course. You already know about the necktie. There was also the issue of eating with fork and knife, the “proper” way. During my Lutjegast years, I had learned that people of higher social status than we were, would eat with fork and knife. I assumed that the same would be true at Calvin College. So, I taught myself to get used to eating that way, though never in the

presence of my friends, who would have wondered what had gotten into me! By the time I arrived on the campus, I was well prepared to eat “properly.”

The CRC had a scholarship system for ministry students that was operated by the individual classes, geographically defined groups or districts of churches. I applied and had to be interviewed by a classis meeting in Lynden, WA. I went there together with the Alberni delegates. After my interview, I went back by myself via the trusted hitchhiking route. I hitchhiked along a road parallel to but just south of the border. In other words, on the US side. Soon I was picked up by a couple of uniformed gentlemen. I thought nothing of their uniform while they questioned me about my trip and its purpose. Suddenly it dawned on me that these were immigration officials and that they were suspicious about my hitchhiking so close to the border. I was under arrest for the “crime” of hitchhiking, but I did not think of it as an “arrest,” for I never heard them use the word. I wondered what lay ahead for me, but I was not afraid, since the two men were polite and friendly. They took me into their office at the Blaine border crossing where they filled in various forms and took my fingerprints. Then they handed me over to Canadian authorities who promptly released me to continue on my way—hitchhiking! I had just been arrested and deported! Wow. Though it seemed like an innocent enough “crime,” it showed up much later in Detroit in 1996, when I was applying for a US Green Card and I had almost forgotten the incident. It came close to preventing my immigration to the US in 1996 and other issues in 2012. But that’s for later chapters. However, I never thought of this incident in terms of arrest, criminality or deportation, for I had not heard those terms used. Besides, the incident did not seem serious enough to merit such heavy terminology. Hitchhiking a crime? Against the law? Why, it was the means of travel of choice for young men who did not have their own car.

And so, on Labour Day, 1958, I joined the Alberni CRC for the last time in their annual picnic at Rathrevor Beach in Parksville. At this picnic, standing on a tree stump, I led the congregation once more in singing. Then I took my leave from the congregation and from Mom and my siblings. Dad drove me to the ferry in Nanaimo. It was a very emotional moment for me that brought tears to my eyes.



From left to right: Wim, Jim, John, Tinus, Dick, Hendrik

*John and his Brothers at Church Picnic (September, 1958)\**

Even though I continued visiting the old town over the decades and the members of the Boer family that remained there for a number of years, my ties to the place slowly weakened. After some years, the town was amalgamated with the neighbouring bigger City of Port Alberni and adopted its name. There is no Alberni on the Canadian map today. My parents remained at the 643 Gertrude Street address for some years, but, while the house remains, the addresses in the Old Town have all been renumbered. After some years, while only our Canadian-born Dick remained at home, they moved to 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the New Town. From there, they eventually moved to Abbotsford to retire, but that's for a later chapter.

The end of the Alberni story. Alberni had been good to me. Very busy, yes, but also very meaningful. A place of great personal development. I look back upon those years with joy and gratitude. I still enjoy visiting the church in the Valley and meeting its people in so far as they have not either moved or passed away. At the time of the final edit of this chapter—2013—my closest friends there remain Jan Jansma, the retired millwright, Nick and Rennie Hoekstra, and, not to forget, my own brother Dick and his Dianne.

## Part 3

### Academic Life:

### Singles in; couple out

## Chapter 10<

### John at Calvin College

(1958-1962)

#### *The CRC College Scenario*

Here begins the adventure I had been preparing for the last four years, my story at Calvin College.

Calvin College & Seminary is the only tertiary educational institution owned by the CRC. There are other such schools that belong to various sections of the CRC constituency, but they do not belong to the denomination. Calvin is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. The seminary was the original institution; the college, its offshoot. However, in terms of numbers and size, the college now far outstrips the seminary, which is quite common in the history of such institutions in the USA. During the period I was there, they were on the same campus, they shared facilities and had one board over all. Eventually, the college and seminary were separated from each other with their own boards, but till this day, through their boards, both remain responsible to the CRC Synod.

As indicated in Chapter 1, there is a special historical tie between the Boer family and Calvin that needs no repetition here, except to remind you that the original professor and president of the mother institution, the Seminary, was a member of the Boer clan, whose relationship to my generation, though somewhat distant, can still be outlined. Being someone with a deep sense of historical ties, that connection gives me a sense of belonging, ownership and pride.

In 1958, when I entered Calvin College, it was on its fourth location at Franklin & Giddings SE, Grand Rapids. While there, it began another move, this time to the Knollcrest Farm at the East Beltline and Burton SE, from the city to the suburb, a typical middle class move in America those years. It is currently referred to as the “Knollcrest Campus.”

In terms of college, I attended the Franklin campus only, but some students during my years were shuttled back and forth between the two campuses. During the same period the

Seminary was also moved from Franklin to its own corner on the Knollcrest Campus. So, for me, it was college at Franklin, seminary at Knollcrest.

You may well wonder why a young Dutch immigrant to Canada, a 20-year old mill hand from Vancouver Island, would attend an American college all the way in Grand Rapids, MI. I had other educational ambitions for some years as you may remember, the original plan being the more natural one of enrolling at the University of BC (UBC) in Vancouver, so much closer to home. However, ever since it was decided I should enter the CRC ministry, it was an almost automatic decision to go to distant Calvin. At that time, pretty well all CRC pastors were trained there. It was assumed you would. Any other route would evoke questions and procedures before eventual ordination. It was a no-brainer like “of course!”

But “foreign?” As far as Canadian governments and universities go, yes, they regard Calvin a foreign college. They often look askance at its Canadian graduates. However, Calvin is not foreign in the sense that it also belongs to Canadians via CRC-Canada. Canadians sit on its Board of Trustees. Canadians support it financially through contributions channeled through their church. They even get tax credit for such contributions. Canadians study there, many of them. You find its grads everywhere in Canada, throughout Canadian church organizations, social organizations, businesses, governments and universities. It is meant to cater to the people of both countries, though it often fails to live up to that expectation. You’ll hear more about that issue as we go. Its standing as a Canadian as well as American institution cannot be denied.

### *The Journey to Grand Rapids*

So how did I get to Grand Rapids? I closed the last chapter with my leaving Vancouver Island by ferry to Vancouver. The day was Labour Day, 1958. I stayed overnight at Karen’s place in Burnaby. The following morning I caught the Greyhound bus to Seattle and from there on to Chicago and, finally, to Grand Rapids, 240 kms to the north. Yes, Greyhound bus. That was the transportation of choice for the poor, apart from hitchhiking. But in view of my earlier *rendez-vous* with American border officials, I was not about to start my American adventure on the adverse side of the law.

I had all my papers in order, including the most important ones: my Canadian Citizenship Certificate and the famous I-20. Things were more relaxed in those days; the US did not place so much emphasis on passports. Till this day the I-20 is the form every foreign student coming to a US educational institution must have on him when entering the country. Also I had to prove to them that I had enough money to carry me through the first year—\$1500. Though I had all my ducks in place, American officials grilled me extensively so that the bus had to wait for me quite some time.

I often wondered why they grilled me so and have come up with two possible reasons. One was that hitchhiking episode I told you about in the previous chapter. It was, of course, in their files, even though all of this took place in pre-computer days. So, here’s this guy

again. What's he up to this time? Another reason might have been my appearance. I was a Dutch immigrant with a serious brogue and looked my part: a dressed-up labourer with caloused hands, not like a student. I just did not look like a US student, something that would soon haunt me at Calvin as well.

\$1500? That does not sound like much these days, but I felt like a millionaire! That was the money I had saved over the past six months, when I no longer handed my mill income to Dad. I do not remember the cost for room and board at Calvin at the time, but my tuition was all of \$90 a semester or \$180 per annum! And I did not have to pay that first tuition bill, since I had received a tuition scholarship for one semester from the North West chapter of Calvin Alumni. Secondly, remember that trip to Lynden in the previous chapter? Well, that was to establish my status as a pre-seminary student at Calvin with Classis Pacific North West, who guaranteed me a \$500 p. a. scholarship for all my projected seven years at Calvin—four at the College and three at the Seminary—as long as I did not change course. Adding those assets to my bank account brought me up to \$2090 for the year, a princely sum for this immigrant boy! Never had seen that much money in my life, let alone own it!

Border officials did eventually allow me to proceed. I have not forgotten the annoyed looks of my fellow passengers for holding them up for so long. I can fully sympathize with their annoyance now, since we have become frequent Greyhound cross-border travelers after our retirement in Vancouver. We are always unhappy when some passenger is held up by officials and all of us have to wait while some have a tight schedule to meet the next bus in Seattle or a plane at Seatac. I have to try hard to remember that I once held up the bus when my papers were in perfect order!

The trip to Seattle and beyond went without incident. Though people consider the Greyhound an uncomfortable way to travel, especially long distance, I was young, adventurous and in good physical shape. Nothing much daunted me. I felt perfectly at ease all the way, eating sandwiches or snacks purchased at stations along the way, and sleeping without any problem in somewhat reclining chairs.

The major break in the journey was a layover in the Chicago station. It was bigger than any station I had ever seen, what with pay toilets (!) and shoe shiners—and so many Blacks. Alberni had no Blacks at all; Port Alberni had one or two token ones. Even Vancouver had very few. Of course there were more in the Seattle station than I had ever seen, but nothing compared to the Chicago station. It was definitely a new experience that I have not forgotten. I do not recall any negative feeling so much as a feeling of culture shock. I heard them speak in strange English accents; some I could not understand at all. I was really curious about them and wondered about their lives, personal habits and customs. I enjoyed this layover of some hours and was by no means anxious to move on. Only 240 kms to Grand Rapids, MI.

After a total of four days and four nights, I eventually arrived in an old dilapidated Grand Rapids Greyhound station in an equally dilapidated part of town. There I was, all by myself, expected and met by no one, with one large suitcase. The rest of my belongings had

been sent in a large trunk by freight train and would follow me in due time. I caught a taxi and proudly announced my Calvin destination to the Black driver. Yes, I was beginning to feel my oats. I was about to enter the world of students at this “world famous” place called Calvin College. I expected the taxi driver to know the place without further direction and was not disappointed. He tried to engage me in a bit of friendly and curious conversation, but I was hard put to understand. Some twenty minutes later he drove me into the heart of the one-square block campus and dropped me off right next to the only dormitory on the campus, the one I was to stay in.

### *Arrival at Calvin College*

*Note to Canadian and other non-American readers. In American academia your year is indicated not by the number of your class but by the following terms: “freshman”—1<sup>st</sup> year; “sophomore”—2<sup>nd</sup> year; “junior”—3<sup>rd</sup> year; “senior”—4<sup>th</sup> year. Please take note, since these terms will be used below.*

As we drove into the campus, my heart was beating with excitement. Hordes of students arriving and moving about helter-skelter every which way, mostly in groups laughing with each other, shaking hands and hugging. They seemed to know each other. Obviously, this was a great experience for most of them.

Suddenly it dawned upon me that I knew none of them, not even one, though John Holwerda, the son of our Rev. Holwerda, our pastor in Alberni, was supposed to be among them somewhere. Never saw much of him. Later into the school year, I discovered that Gerrit Scheeres, the son of our pastor in Lutjegast who had baptized us all, was also a student at Calvin.

### *Day 1 at Calvin Campus*

Apart from the feeling of being alone, the first time since I left home, I remember a couple shocking—and, thus, not expected-- experiences that are still very fresh in my mind. As I disembarked from the taxi I suddenly found myself among a race of blond giants! The blond part of it did not surprise me. After all, they were all Dutch. But their height! Incredibly tall! I had never seen such a race of giants before. And they were “my people?” Grown up in the CRC, almost 100 % of them! I was astounded. I was not prepared for this, for no one had told me to expect this. I was a hair short of six feet and considered tall in Alberni. I *thought* of myself as tall. But this? I was astounded—no other word for it. For the first time in my adult life, I felt small, diminutive, not an altogether pleasant experience. These kids must have lived pampered and easy lives, was my immediate conclusion, an attitude that was confirmed by subsequent experience with them and that remained a significant component of my attitude towards and my relationship with many of them.

Before I tell you of the second shock, I must remind you how our American pastors in Albemarle had encouraged me to develop a positive attitude towards Americans. I thus had every reason to go with the best of intentions and the highest expectations in that regard.

So, though aware of being alone and kind of embarrassed at my comparatively “small” stature, there I stood among these giants, as straight and tall as I could muster. These were the young CRC-ers I had been told about and from whom I had every reason to expect an outstretched hand of welcome. After all, I had decided I would befriend American students and not restrict myself to whatever Dutch or Canadians I might meet. Alas, no such outstretched hand. Instead, everyone was so busy with their own group, slapping last year’s friends on the back or sort of apprehensively in small groups of new arrivals wondering where to go, that no one paid any attention to this just one more new arrival. The others came together with some of their Christian High classmates. They had a ready-made group of friends from day one.

Uncomprehendingly looking straight at the old red-brick building that was to be my home for the year, I hesitatingly asked a giant who also seemed alone, where the dormitory was. He took one quick condescending peek at me, shrugged his shoulders and went his way. He probably did not know either. That did not feel very welcoming.

I tried another and he, again without a word, pointed with his thumb over the shoulder to the building I was facing and he, too, went his way. Again, not very welcoming, but, at least, I now had an idea where to go. Dragging my big, heavy Dutch immigrant suitcase—of course, as they went in those days, without casters—behind me, I proceeded to what I now knew to be my home for the year. Excitedly I entered its dark doors, wondering what I would see or whom I would meet. Just inside, three students were sitting at a registration table and asked me for my name and other info. They ascertained that I was indeed allotted a room in the place, a single room, as I had requested, in the far corner on the fourth floor. One of them invited me to follow him as he led me up the stairs without introducing himself, let alone offer me some help with my obviously heavy suitcase. When we arrived at the proper door, he opened it, handed me the keys and informed me that soon someone would come to introduce me to the place. In the meantime, I should just check out the room and get myself settled as well as I could. Again, nothing warm, nothing welcoming. Just proper reception without the warmth I had expected from my fellow CRC-ers. I noticed all of this keenly and with sharp disappointment. What was missing? I asked myself. Something’s not right. It was not what I expected, though I could not lay my hands on it.

I did check out the room. It was a single room, not very big, with a window facing east, though for some odd reason it took me a year before I realized it was not facing west! How did I finally know? Well, that’s where the rising sun used to greet me! Duuh! In the meantime, for almost the entire year I thought it faced the west. As a result I ran into real confusion whenever people talked about directions in Grand Rapids, for I had the entire city completely turned around in my mind! Once that pattern was set in my mind, it took me years to get my bearings and find places in the city. I might know how to find places, but if people talked to me in terms of east-west, they would confuddle me. It was plain rote

memory, each location. In fact, that did not correct itself till I worked as landlord and property manager years later in the closing years of the twentieth century and was transversing the width and breadth of the city regularly. And that after spending a full fifteen years off and on in Grand Rapids!

Back to September, 1958, to that dark single corner room. While awaiting the promised person to come and orient me, I began to arrange my room. Put the bed where I at least temporarily wanted it along with the small desk and chair. I placed most of the contents of the suitcase in their normal places: in dresser drawers and in the small, dark closet. Not much beyond clothes, since the rest was coming in my trunk by train.

A knock on the open door and there was one Don Coray. Don was a junior student who had been appointed dorm counselor for the year and lived right across the hall from me. Don turned out to be a very friendly and amiable fellow whom I immediately liked and trusted. He, more than any of the others, put me at ease. He explained his own function and then outlined the things to know about the dorm, including the dining hall routine, which was in the Commons building, not the dormitory. He assured me his door was open to me at any time, if I needed anything at all or felt lost. Obviously, Don was a good choice for counselor. I did reflect on the difference between him and the few others I had met, but could not decipher any reason at the time. That came somewhat later.

After Don left, with a temporary meal ticket he had given me at hand, I decided to check out the dining room in the Commons according to his directions, with the firm resolve to meet some people either in line or at the table. My problem with directions had not yet begun. Besides, the campus was so small, directions in terms of left-right-straight sufficed. I looked forward to using my newly developed skills of eating “properly” with fork and knife!

So, I located the dining hall and saw a long line of students snaking its way down the stairs. I joined them and jovially greeted the students just ahead of me in the line. They looked at me, murmured a short “Hi” and continued the bantering so common among students, ignoring me for the rest of the time as we slowly made our way in the line. Same thing with students behind me. They all had their own friends either from their Christian High from which they had just graduated or fellow students from last year. Of course, there were also these beautiful blond Dutch-American girls interspersed with the guys, but I was too shy to start chatting with them. For now, I concentrated on the male students, but none too successfully. If I could not succeed with them, how would I with the girls? I did remember the perceived snubs girls had given me in ADHS in Port Alberni and was eager to avoid such experiences in this new place.

OK, we reached the food counter and I was amazed at the wide variety of it all, food as well as drink. After going past the ticket checker, I piled it on as if it was my last and, upon finishing the first plate, went for seconds. Two things about that first meal that I remember. First, hardly anyone ate with fork and knife, the skill I had so intentionally taught myself in preparation for just this occasion! As I looked around the dining room, I did see a few individuals and a couple of small groups using fork and knife, but they were a

small minority. I surmised that they might be Dutch immigrants, for their hair and clothes also looked different. I reminded myself to concentrate for now on Americans, not on immigrants like myself. But I was beginning to realize that making friends with Americans might not be as easy as Pastor Holwerda had led me to expect. At the table the situation in line repeated itself. A short “Hi,” and then back to their own friends. I was beginning to notice the pattern. I dropped off my dirty plates and walked away, again wondering what was going on.

The schedule of events that I was given upon arrival told me that at 7 pm all the freshmen had to report in the chapel and find the seat allotted to them by the administration. All “A’s” sat together as did the rest according to the letter at the beginning of their last name. To the “B” section I went and found myself sitting next to a slightly older fellow by the name of Cor B. Everything about him—hair, clothes, accent—betrayed him as a Dutch immigrant, as indeed he was. He came to Calvin from Toronto. So, a Canadian as well.

We immediately hit it off so well that I’m afraid I might have totally ignored my other neighbour—just like the Americans ignored me! Afterwards we found our way to the campus coffee shop, where we chatted for quite some time, very naturally as if we had known each other for long. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted till Cor died due to an aneurism in his sixties. He had come to Calvin also as a pre-seminary student or “pre-sem” as we were known. He was a few years older than me, while I, at twenty, was a couple of years older than most freshmen, due to the delay in my high school career.

That evening’s meeting of freshmen represented a new tradition for Calvin. All new students were put in small groups with an upper classman as student leader, while each group also had a faculty member assigned to it. These were known as “orientation groups” that were meant to advise students, to keep a constructive eye on them and to help them socialize in the campus setting. My student leader was Henk Hart, also a Dutch Canadian from Ontario, who devoted his entire career to that of Professor of Philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto and to the writing of numerous books. Now retired, he is struggling with cancer.

We were very lucky with our faculty advisor, Lewis Smedes, also author of many popular books and set to become a nationally known popular speaker and writer as well as a famous professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Though his wife was chronically ill, he took the time and trouble to occasionally invite our group into his home, where I took a liking to him and developed a respect for him that increased right along with his career.

That first day was not a success in terms of my social intentions. On the one hand, I had met only two friendly Americans at the college, while the rest either ignored or snubbed me. I have not been the only non-American to have experienced this at Calvin. Many years later, 54 years later, to be exact, in 2012, Anne Zaki, an Egyptian student at Calvin, was featured in an interview in *The Calvin Spark*, the magazine of the Calvin Alumni Association, in which she said, “ I wasn’t very happy initially. I didn’t find it to be a friendly place as a freshman, since I didn’t come in with my own community as a lot of

students did coming from Christian schools here—probably students from public schools have felt the same way as me.” The Christian schools which are supposed to *open* the minds of their students, ended up *closing* them, in my case, even to fellow CRC-ers! Instead of world citizens, they had been turned into provincial cliques. It was shockingly painful to me back in 1958 and equally painful to Anne from Egypt in 2012. Though the world had changed radically during that time period, in this respect this CRC student community have remained the same. If you don’t come as part of a pre-formed community, you don’t belong.

I ended up socializing that evening deep into the night with a Dutch Canadian like myself, the type of person I had decided to avoid for the time being. On the other hand, I met two people who stayed with me for most of my life either in terms of influence or as a friend, two very important relationships. And one was actually an American, a Dutch American.

At other fronts, of course, it was an exciting day. I had arrived in Grand Rapids, the mecca of CRC of which I had heard so much and that had taken on mythical proportions to this young man from far-away. I had set foot on the campus of Calvin College after several years of preparation, the place where all my questions would be answered, especially questions of faith. I was starting my seven-year journey towards ordination into the CRC ministry, in my mind at the time a highly prized position. So, mixed success but surely exciting. The new life of a student! How different that would be from that of a part time correspondence student and full time mill hand surrounded by ancient rainforests! No more of that spirit-killing mill work—and no more of that lucrative IWA union contract with its big money! Foreign, for sure. I sensed that almost immediately. Sitting in school benches instead of working the floor at the Alberni Plywood Division of MacMillan & Bloedel! And listening to actual teachers? Participating in student life instead of sitting in an isolated study room alone to do correspondence. A totally different adventure. What would American college life be like? How would it all turn out? In spite of the disappointments of the day, I was ready to go!

I had made my bed earlier with sheets and a blanket from my suitcase. I laid down, well worn for the day, and, as was my custom, promptly disappeared into never-never land. It had been a full day.

### *Day 2--Registration Day*

No, don’t worry, I won’t subject you to a day-by-day account of my four years at Calvin College.

Got up fairly early that morning with the sun shining through the window in my face from the “West!” I checked my agenda for the day and gratefully noted that breakfast was the first item! Yea! That’s my thing. But first I checked out the common shower room on the floor and refreshed myself, something I should have done last night. Ran into a couple of naked fellows there, something I had to get used to. But everything a man needed for his morning toiletry session was there and I gratefully made regular use of these facilities. I

got used to seeing naked students around and soon joined them in their fashion. Only in the shower room, of course.

And then off to the dining hall for breakfast. On my way, I wondered whether the students would be any friendlier than yesterday. Alas, my experience in both the line and at the table were similar. I began to draw some tentative conclusions and decided I should be more socially aggressive by taking the initiative without giving up too quickly.

The comfort factor was the food. Good American bacon and eggs and a lot of other foods that made my mouth water. I went for the bacon and eggs and literally stuffed myself. Not accustomed to such unlimited culinary luxury. And again, no, don't worry that I will bore you with my daily food regimen till graduation. Throughout my four years, I loved the food. So much variety and so tastily prepared. Throughout the year I overheard students around me complain about this dish not being done right and that not spiced appropriately. In fact, it was a routine for students to complain, something I could not understand, let alone appreciate. What was their problem? Too spoiled at home? Or was it a collegiate tradition to complain about the food? Tasty and good as it was, for a full year I had to endure this nonsense. Eventually, those who got to know me slowed down with their complaints, for occasionally I would call them on it by asking what they would eat at home or whether their mother taught them to complain about college food out of envy for her own home cooking? Anyway, I got up from the breakfast table without having had any meaningful exchange with those around me, who were all chatting in groups of two and three and clearly knew each other well. I did find just listening to them interesting, for it told me a lot about where they came from and what they expected from Calvin. It did not take me long to realize they were from a culture very different from that of a multicultural immigrant millhand from Alborni and had very different expectations from mine. I also began to suspect that Calvin had a real clique problem of exclusivity.

With high hopes that this social thing would soon dissolve, I once again took yesterday's seat in the chapel. Again we were seated by orientation groups, this time for registration purposes. Registration? I had read about it in Calvin's catalogue and knew its purpose but had no idea how to go about it. Well, that was the very purpose of this gathering. Administration officials explained the process to us. Anything we still did not understand, we could ask our orientation leaders; in my case, Henk Hart. Of course, I sat next to Cor again and we continued yesterday's chat as if there had not been a night's break in between. Then we sauntered down to the Science Building where registration for freshmen was taking place. That is to say, that's when and where we had to sign up for specific classes and courses.

Being pre-sem, most of my courses were prescribed so that I had little choice in the matter. We had to take a lot of general introductory courses to become familiar with the basics of the world of the liberal arts, including the humanities and the social sciences. Very little in the way of the natural sciences, except one course called "physical science," but that was for later. The entire four-year curriculum was heavy on languages, history, philosophy and the classics. My pre-registration card identified me as "pre-sem" and listed all the required courses for the freshman year. It left me room for only two electives. I have

largely forgotten which were which, but I recall the courses I ended up taking. I will get back to them later in the chapter. The main choice I had was about which professor within each department, but I was not familiar with any of them. So, that was not much of a choice, except that the choice between a good and bad professor was pretty significant, of course.

One funny little incident during the registration process had to do with the letter “z.” While Canadians pronounce it as “zed,” Americans say “zee.” No big deal, but I was not aware of this bit of trivia. Since every freshman had to take English 101, they had classes all the way to English 101-z. Here no one had a choice of professor; everyone was assigned one. I happened to be assigned to 101-“zee.” That confused me. It did not sound like “C” to me, but I did not know any other letter with that sound. My card indicated 101-“zed.” So what was all this about 101-“zee?” The upper classmen working at the registration tables were not aware of this trivia either. They displayed a lack of awareness that seemed innocent enough at the time, but that later I recognized as a symptom of a general problem on the campus of largely ignoring the Canadian component of the student body and the Canadian component of the CRC that owned Calvin. It was treated as an American college all the way across the board, pure and simple. More about that later also. We did, of course, manage to uncover the confusion so that I walked out of the Science Building as a fully registered college student. I was proud as a peacock. Who would have ever thought it would come to this for a boy from Lutjegast? Or for this mill hand from Vancouver Island? An almost impossible dream in the process of becoming true.

The next step was to go to Calvin’s Finance Office to establish an account there. Remember, this was 1958—way before the birth of the computer and the ATM. There was need for a local account, a service Calvin rendered to its students. I deposited a check there with almost all the money I owned. Some weeks later I also opened an account with Union Bank, for they offered interest-bearing accounts for students, while Calvin’s yielded no interest. I retained the latter as a convenience account into which I would make small transfers from the bank. That saved me the trouble of walking the half mile to Union Bank on Wealthy Street. Among other things, the Calvin bank offered a sort of credit card good only on the campus that would allow one to purchase books and other items from the campus book store without paying in cash. I gratefully availed myself of this service.

Now properly equipped, I headed for the Bookstore in the same Administration Building that also housed both the Finance Office and the Chapel. During the course of registration, I received a list of books required for each course I was going to take and they were all available in the Bookstore. That was a whole other experience, what with the piles and piles of textbooks all over the place in the crowded space with other piles and piles of students rummaging through them, looking for their required books. I seem to remember that the Bookstore gave some sort of discount to Calvin students only, but discount or no discount, we really had no choice but to buy there. Without computers, there were no Amazons to order from online. It was a *de facto* monopoly. I spent a virtual fortune on expensive textbooks, all new. It was a few weeks later that I learned of the availability of used texts that would have been much cheaper, but by then the grace period for returning

new books had lapsed and I was stuck with them. But I did remember that service next time I needed books. It saved me tons.

Being a lover of books, I eagerly carried my new treasure to my room in the dorm. It was a heavy pile of beautiful books that I could not wait to dig into. How exciting it was for me to page through them, to peruse their tables of contents and glance at all the impressive charts and columns. This was going to be the life for me! Something for which I had waited and prepared for some years, ever since I “lost” the battle about accountancy vs ministry. This is why I had been working in the mills and why I had sweat my way through high school in my spare time. It had all paid off for me. I had reached an important milestone in my life and was determined to make the most of it. I was now all set to go on this new adventure. And now I was going to find answers to my vague questions and discomforts about Christian life, social obligations and other verities. This was the place for that!

It was around 4 pm. I had accomplished a great deal so far that day, including taking a delicious lunch in the Commons with largely the same kind of experiences. I decided to go for a walk through the campus and explore the place. The dorm, the Commons, the Science Building, the Administrative block with its chapel, the Library and the Seminary—I went through them all, one entire square city block. Found it a very interesting place, but met no one I knew and no one who showed any interest in me. From there I retreated to my room. The rest of the day is blurry in my memory and we will leave it there. Of course, it would have included a supper in the Commons. That I would never forego, for I have always enjoyed good food! *Don't believe I ever skipped even a single meal that year!* Simply too good to skip. Besides, I had already paid good money for it, something a Dutchman traditionally cannot forget.

### *My Academic Life*

Both social life and personal development, including the spiritual, are important aspects of college life. However, since the primary purpose is academic in the context of which these others take place, I begin by covering my academic life. I can already foresee that, though these different aspects of college life can be distinguished, they can be separated only so far and then you find them fusing. But let's give it a whirl and see what develops.

For a long time already I longed for the college classroom experience. I looked forward to soaking in the excellent lectures I had come to expect and wondered with excitement about the wisdom that would accrue over those four years and then, later, in the Seminary as well. I fully expected that some of the vague and unspecified questions I had about the Christian faith and life would all be fully answered, all its mysteries would be resolved and I would emerge as a grown man full of wisdom, stature—and knowing it all! Wow, what a future and what a hope!

Four years of full-time college courses and lectures cannot all be remembered in detail. (Aren't you happy for that?!) I am simply going to recall some reactions and experiences I had in various courses. I start with the English department, a mill everyone had to go

through. After all, Calvin is a liberal arts college that aims to bequeath students with a general understanding of all of life, something that should surely include a generous dose of literature.

### *1. The English Department*

I had always enjoyed my high school English courses, even during the correspondence part of it. In fact, English was one of my three high school majors, the others being history and math. So I looked forward to my first introductory English course. English 101—a course in grammar and research. The instructor was Ann Jansen, later to become Jansen-Noteboom. She was a no-nonsense capable teacher who knew how to communicate and teach. The first part of the course was “parsing,” i.e., disassembling sentences grammatically by locating each word on a kind of word tree. When finished you could tell exactly the relationship of each word in the sentence to each other. It was an exercise that I felt was beneath a college student. They should have learnt their grammar in high school, but it soon became clear to me that many students did not know this stuff very well. Though I found the parsing itself interesting, I was annoyed to have to waste my time on grammar. I had learned it pretty well in high school and wanted to move on.

Another part of that course was training in research, data gathering, and writing. It being a pre-computer age, this was a laborious and tedious process involving hundreds of index cards with notes, all carefully systematized. It also involved getting acquainted with the standard library catalogue, also all on index cards. Unlike most students, being a budding writer, I loved that course and have used the methods learned all my life, making allowance for the greater efficiency and availability of data research and storage. For me, it probably was the most practical of all college courses.

There’s one humorous incident I want to share with you that took place during the very last session of the course. We had written a number of short compositions and were graded on our spelling. A Canadian, I used Canadian/British spelling. Since there were a number of Canadians in the class, it was strange that she never discussed the subject in class. She simply ignored it. I do not know what my fellow Canadians did: use Canadian or American spelling. I do not remember ever discussing it amongst ourselves either, also a bit strange. Jansen did not reject my Canadian spelling except in one case: the word “judgement.” She judged it a misspelling. It was the only “mistake” I had made throughout the semester. She told all those who had made no spelling mistakes throughout the course, that they could leave. I considered it a rather juvenile action, constituting a kind of insult to college students. I stood up to leave also. But she had a sharp memory and “reminded” me of my “mistake.” When I explained it to her, she would not accept it. So, I burst out, “I did not come here to become an American but a Canadian minister in the CRC”—and I stomped out. Nothing further was ever heard about the incident, though I did have her in two more courses. Judging from the way she treated me in those courses, she held no grudges.

Humorous as the incident was, later I recognized it as yet another indication of how Calvin paid little attention to its Canadian component. As I became more conscious of this issue, I recognized it increasingly in all kinds of situations and continue to recognize it till this day

of writing, though steps have been taken over the years to ameliorate the situation somewhat. It was noticeable not only at Calvin, but throughout the entire denomination. I will return to the subject in later chapters.

The above represents my freshmen adventures with the English Department. It was a good and fruitful English year for me. During my sophomore year, I took English literature courses. The first was *British* English literature. I had high expectations, for my professor was one of the most experienced, knowledgeable and interesting profs on the campus. His reputation must have had a good reason and I have no desire to detract from it. I wondered if my disappointment might be due to a short circuit within me rather than in him. As we moved through the course, I felt increasingly disappointed with the content of this literature as presented by the prof. Was that all there was to it? I found little profundity and thought much of it rather common. I was also disappointed that the prof had so little Christian insights or critique. Was that not what Calvin was all about? To give a Christian interpretation of culture and the world around us? I found its lack disturbing and disappointing. This experience, I may as well state up front, became a common one for me throughout my years at Calvin as I moved from course to course and department to department. It became increasingly problematic for me and over time led to resentment, not to say anger.

During the second semester of my sophomore year I took a course in *American* literature. It was a different prof, but this one, together with the previous one, had the reputation of being the doyen in the department. I felt the same disappointment with the content of the literature but was grateful that this prof did try to present some Christian interpretation, though I observed that he did not seem to have a unified perspective from which he approached the material. It was all kind of ad hoc. But from the perspectival point of view, it definitely was an upgrade from that first course.

As I moved through these English courses, I began to wonder about Canadian literature. There we go again! After all, Calvin was both Canadian and American, but we were not required to take Canadian literature, not even as part of a course that could have expanded from American to North American. We were offered nothing, as if there were no Canadian English literature, not a single hint. I wondered about that quite a bit. Was there any? Of course there was. I studied some of it in high school. Why was it ignored? These kinds of questions kept cropping up as my Calvin years proceeded. I believe that by now you are beginning to see some kind of pattern?

The end of the sophomore year also spelled the end of my sojourn in the English department. I took the required courses but not electives. As pre-sems, we had very little room for electives and I wanted to take courses I expected to enjoy more than these.

Actually, I learned more from these courses that I realized at the time. At the very least, I became acquainted with the names of authors, with some of their publications and even with some of their content. Though I have forgotten most of the details, the generalities remain and have served me well, though I have always felt inadequately equipped in the literature area. I occasionally try to make up by reading a novel, but often find myself too

impatient to reach the end. Other pressures always take over, mostly the pressure of writing instead of reading. Of course, during my working years, the pressures of a busy ministry in Nigeria also took their toll.

## 2. *The Speech Department*

I'm going to tell you about three courses. The first was a two-semester course in public speaking. It was a required course for pre-sems.

The first-semester part of the course was, again, at the hands of the same Ann Jansen-Noteboom. Don't know just why, but the class had an unusual number of Dutch-Canadians in it, including my friend Cor B. All these Dutch-Canadians were recent immigrants still sporting Dutch accents. They were mostly a few years older than me, some of them having immigrated to Canada on their own as young adults. Though a couple of years older than other freshmen, I was probably the youngest among the Dutch-Canadians in this course and spoke English with a less pronounced accent than the others. As a result, Jansen praised me without fail for every speech I delivered throughout the course. I could do no wrong for her. See what I mean about her not holding grudges?

I do not remember anything about my own speeches, but I do remember a speech delivered by an American co-ed with red hair. This was a speech of the how-to-make-something type. She taught us how to make pizza. Her speech was based on the assumption that everyone knew what pizza was. At the end of it, it was clear the product would be delicious, but what actually was pizza? She did not explain. Why should she, given her assumption. Ah, but here was this student from the sticks—literally, from the rain forests of Vancouver Island. I had never heard of pizza. It was still a relatively new food in North America and had not yet crossed the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Island, at least not the mountain pass to the Alberni Valley. So my critique of her speech was that at the end I still did not have a clear idea what a pizza actually was! In other words, I criticized her unspoken assumption. Many of the students were humoured by my ignorance and critique, since most of them came from larger and less isolated places and were well acquainted with pizza.

*An aside:* As we continue to go over these memoirs for editing purposes, I stumbled across relevant pizza history in the *Vancouver Sun* of August 23, 2013. The crowds at Vancouver's annual Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) in 1955 "were greeted by the newest food trend: pizza pies." It was brought to Vancouver by its own chef, Tevie Smith, who believed "he brought the first pizza ovens in Canada to the PNE." It was well known in the city's Italian community, but "it was just beginning to catch on in the mainstream." That was only three years before my speech at Calvin. It had not yet reached the isolated island mountain town of Alberni.

This incident stayed with me for the rest of my life as a vivid lesson not to assume too much in speech or in writing. Examine your utterances for unspoken assumptions that can make a difference in your delivery or in your audience's understanding. It so happens that the

issue of hidden assumptions also plays a large role in the Reformational philosophy associated with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd of whom you will learn later. Becoming aware of the role of assumptions through this pizza speech could be regarded as my “accidental” pre-threshold introduction to that school of thought. It even has played and continues to play a role in conversations between myself and my Famke Fran. I recommend this lesson to all who read these memoirs. It’s not an easy one to remember all the time. My wife still catches me red handed occasionally—as I do her!

The second speech course took place during the second semester of the same year. This time the teacher was a Mrs. Boeve. My experience here was the very opposite to that in Jansen’s class. Whereas in Jansen’s class I could do no wrong, in this follow-up I could do no right! Everything I did was wrong. She especially picked up on my Dutch accent with almost a vengeance. So much for “objective” scholarship! It was a hopeless situation for me throughout the course. However, I did pass and feel I learned a lot.

Years later, around 2007 at my 69th or so, we met Mrs. Boeve at LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids. She did not remember me. Imagine that! I jocularly told her that her total scolding of my speeches turned me into an excellent public speaker, for she strengthened my determination to do it well. She thought it funny. If only she knew the anguish she evoked in me! She recently went to receive her reward.

Ann Jansen was again my teacher in a third course, this time an elective, namely interpretive reading. I am not sure why I took this course, for I do not recollect any prior interest on my part in the subject. I was probably made aware of the importance of good Bible reading on the pulpit. At any rate, it was a three-hour one-semester course. I do not remember any incidents worth telling about it, except to say that I enjoyed practicing interpretative reading in my room and enjoyed listening to others doing it either in person or on what used to be called “LP’s,” the flat long-playing records played on phonographs in the library basement.

The course did evoke a serious interest within me in responsible public reading that would not put people to sleep or hide the Gospel under a mantle of boredom. That interest slowly grew in intensity so that now at my senior stage I represent myself as an interpretative or professional reader of the Bible not only but also of poetry. I take every opportunity to read Scripture in church or to do readings at other occasions. I even ran a workshop in our Vancouver CRC on Bible reading. Often the worst moment for me in church services is the time of Bible reading, for too many people totally spoil the exciting nature of the message by their inadequate preparation. It annoys me to no end. I think I’ll do the Bible reading at my memorial myself!

### *3. A Mishmash of Courses*

Of course, I took many courses at Calvin. Most of them involved a lot of reading and the writing of term papers, using the protocols taught by Jansen. There were courses in the classics, involving Greek and Latin languages as well as Greek history. The Greek was to

enable us to read the New Testament in the original in Seminary. Together, that history and language constituted our required pre-sem major. I found the history fascinating, while the languages represented mostly very hard work on my part, for I have a poor memory when it comes to ad hoc facts—and what is more ad hoc than vocabulary? I never had occasion to use the Latin afterwards, except that it better enables me to understand English words based on it. The Greek I used heavily during my Seminary years, but it has since largely faded away. I know how to use it when needed to study the meaning of some New Testament passage, but only with the help of tools created for that purpose. But one can hardly use Greek meaningfully for difficult or obscure passages, for there even the experts disagree with each other and there is no way I could possibly referee between them.

As pre-sems we also had to take courses in the Dutch language. Given the Dutch background of the CRC and her close interaction with theological developments in The Netherlands, it was thought an effective CRC preacher should have access to his Dutch roots. I say “his,” for it was many years before the notion of women preachers would be placed on the table. However, since I already knew Dutch, I was allowed to choose another modern language and chose German.

The German course I found rather strange. It was very different in method from other language courses I had taken, but the prof never explained his method to us. So I found it somewhat confusing. However, I did enjoy the course and it stood me in good stead at the VU later in the 1970s. I was able to muddle my way through. Later, when I took courses in the Hausa language at Michigan State University in 1966, I was subjected to the same method, but it was clearly explained to us and thus made me aware of a newer method of language learning that was, in fact, a great improvement over the traditional approach to which I was accustomed.

Other courses included introductions of psychology and sociology. I did not find them all that interesting, especially since the mostly young lecturers did not display a lot of depth. Most of them made no attempts at developing some Christian perspectives for us. They had learned their stuff at various secular American universities and that’s what they peddled in the Calvin classrooms. In the meantime, I was hoping to develop a Christian perspective on life in general and so was disappointed that, again, I received little help at that front. You’ve heard this complaint from me before.

Another required course for pre-sems was called Physical Science. Just one semester of it! It was the only required science course. A shame, actually; totally inadequate. I enjoyed it very much, but did not do very well in it. I ended up with a “D,” if I remember correctly. I guess this confirmed my calling to the pulpit instead of laboratory!

Physical Education (PE), including sports, was another area in which I did not excel. There was no gym on the Franklin campus. Most of the sports were taught on adjacent properties such as Franklin Park, a city facility, as well as on the outside parking lot of Calvin CRC, a congregation one block east of the campus. I was not really acquainted with any of the sports and usually managed to look like a klutz. Like the earlier pizza story, when I told our instructor I had never seen anything like American football, he was beyond

surprised. When I did not know how to handle a bat, he was much annoyed. In short, I was just clumsy and klutzy all over. Another confirmation of my calling: not to the locker room! Though I would not have been good at it either, soccer was a little more part of my heritage, but at that time Americans had hardly heard of it. So, that was not part of the curriculum at all, though Canadians and other non-Americans on the campus did play unofficial games. Because of Calvin's restricted athletic facilities, not much emphasis was placed on PE. Pre-sems were required to take PE only during our freshman year. I was glad when it was over; it was just not my thing.

Louis Smedes was Professor of Bible. I met him the first evening on the campus as the faculty advisor to our initiation group, something already explained. As a pre-sem, I was not really supposed to take Bible or theology courses while at college, for we would get our share of those in seminary. However, I was so enamoured with Smedes that I did take a course from him about modern western theologians. While in the Seminary these theologians were mostly treated with disdain and as modern traitors to the truth, Smedes searched for their motives and explained the problems they were trying to address without condemning them outright, much in the style of Professor Gerrit Berkouwer from the Vrije Universiteit (VU-Free Reformed University) in Amsterdam. That Smedes taught in the spirit of Berkouwer was no surprise, since he studied under that professor and translated a volume or two in his series *Dogmatische Studien*.

*An aside:* Smedes did visit us once in Wukari, Nigeria, when he came to see his friend, Dr. Harry Boer, a senior missionary-theologian colleague of ours. We presented him with the gift of a Nigerian drum. I subsequently met him again at two conferences in the U.S. Smedes died in his retirement due to a fall from a ladder in his house, I have always been grateful for the dual influence of Smedes and Berkouwer in my life.

That course has contributed much to shaping my attitude towards those who think differently. Without betraying my own convictions, I learnt to become more tolerant of and sympathetic towards more liberal thinkers. However, later on as I experienced further theological development, I drew the line where they capitulated to the secular dualistic worldview that has shaped the West with its narrow tunnel vision. But that's stuff that will come later in my story.

#### *4. Philosophical Developments*

The prescribed pre-sem programme was quite heavy on philosophy. No surprise, given the Traditional Reformed emphasis on scholarship and foundational matters. We were required to take courses in Ancient, Medieval and Modern Philosophy as well as a year of logic. In addition, I took a two-semester course in Political Science, not offered in the Dept of Philosophy, but which I will nevertheless include under this rubric.

I found the Political Science course very interesting throughout and have through the years referred to the textbook by one Sabine. The prof was professional, knew his stuff and was

interesting. However, like so many courses and profs at Calvin, there was little Christian depth or perspective to it all. Hence the traditional disappointment I experienced once again. But all in all, it was a good course. Glad I took it. I believe it was in my junior year.

The run in official philosophy courses started in my sophomore year when I took Modern Philosophy from a young unknown philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff. He eventually grew into a formidable Reformed philosopher and leader amongst American philosophers. After many years at Calvin, he shifted to Yale University. He wrote many books in which he developed serious Reformed philosophy. Now retired, he is a very popular international speaker throughout the Reformed world. However, I had him during either his first or second year of teaching and was very eager to get my feet wet in philosophy. This was, I expected, where the rubber would hit the road and where the basics would become clear. Wolterstorff was clear, crisp and practical in his approach to his subject. I enjoyed him immensely, but his depth and Reformed perspective were still for the future. I have heard the mature Wolterstorff speak at a couple of conferences and have read some of his books, all with deep respect and appreciation. In fact, I need to read more of him. Thanks for the reminder!

*An aside:* At one time, Wolterstorff reputedly was in the running for the post of President of Calvin College. He was rumoured to be the front runner except for one thing: his involvement in the charismatic underground movement within the CRC. He would have provided fresh and dynamic leadership not only to the college but to the entire denomination. He later lamented that, in spite of its dynamic foundation, the CRC was so conservative in its social thinking and wondered why. Had he been given a chance, I believe he would have steered the college and the church into a more dynamic and non-conservative Kuyperian direction, a term that will be fleshed out more as we proceed with these memoirs.

My next course was Ancient Philosophy taught by possibly the most controversial prof ever on the Calvin campus, Evan Runner. He was another brilliant scholar with the dynamism of a fiery evangelist. He was *the* representative and proponent of the school of Reformed thought known by various names like Kuyperianism, Neo-Kuyperianism, Neo-Calvinism, and others. Sometimes the school self-identifies as “Reformational” philosophy.

However, Runner did not start out in that tradition. As a young man he was an Evangelical who had plans to become a missionary. His studies somehow took him to the VU or Free Reformed University in Amsterdam, where he learned fluent Dutch and became an ardent adherent to the above school of thought. Runner had surrounded himself mostly with Dutch-Canadian students on the campus. He found that most American students were not interested in his approach and neither were the college administration or faculty, not even his colleagues in the Philosophy Department, though I am not sure where Wolterstorff stood at that point. Various reasons for his unpopularity. One was his somewhat abrasive personality. The other surely was the anti-Dutch atmosphere dominating the campus at the time. The Calvin community was trying to free itself from its Dutch heritage in order to become fully recognized as an American institution, never mind the Canadian angle. Almost anything that reminded the campus

population of their Dutch background was resented, including us Dutch immigrants. Runner's philosophy originated in The Netherlands and thus was part of that "scourge." Thirdly—and here I'm getting a little philosophical—the emphasis at Calvin was on "common grace," while Runner stressed "antithesis," two terms that only theologians and some philosophers understand. If you don't, just move on. Canadian students, including myself, recognized in Runner things they missed at Calvin and joined him in what was known as the "Groen Club." Groen was the philosophical "father" of Abraham Kuyper in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

So, Runner was responsible for Ancient Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy and Logic. I took these three courses from him during the junior and senior years. There was a general complaint that he was using these courses basically to teach his own Kuyperian philosophy and that he was not paying enough attention to the philosophers themselves. That complaint was fair enough. All three courses I took from him covered basically the same Kuyperian ground with an occasional nod towards the official subject matter. But he taught in such a spirited and enthusiastic manner, that I became enamoured with his materials, though I found it difficult to understand at first. However, the repetition during the next two courses made it more clear to me. In the meantime, I do not remember much of the philosophers we were supposed to study or of Logic. Whatever I know about these subjects now is the result of personal reading later on.

The Groen Club started prior to my coming to Calvin. I did not join it and, in fact, without knowing what it was about, I was kind of hostile to it. I did not like Canadians congregating together among themselves. After all, I had come with the intention of making friends among Americans. I was eventually "forced" by my sophomore-year roommates to start attending Groen Club. By that time, I had made many more Canadian than American friends and so found myself among friends in Groen Club. It surprisingly felt like home, even though I initially had a hard time understanding the papers more advanced students presented at the meetings. Same with the discussions. They were all quite technical philosophical ideas that had been developed within the Kuyperian school, especially by their major philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd. By the time I had been in the Groen Club for half a year or so, I began to recognize that here they were dealing with issues I long had questions about and about which I had expected Calvin to enlighten me. So, friends and the beginning of the sought-for enlightenment. A win-win situation. Somewhere along the line, I was assigned to present a paper. I was hardly ready for it and remember presenting a very superficial paper that thoroughly embarrassed me.

Runner finally provided me with a deeper understanding of the Reformed tradition as developed within the Kuyperian school of thought. The insights I gained from him gave me deeper roots and opened my spiritual and philosophical horizons widely. I had the same experience so many Christians have when they first become acquainted with the Kuyperian tradition. They feel liberated. They feel that the whole world opens up for them. They feel they have a place to plant their feet firmly on God's good earth. I experienced the same thrilling experience when the seeds of this new vision were planted in my mind and heart. Though they did not mature until later in Nigeria where I saw the negative impact of Evangelical missions, they did force a turn-about in my religious and intellectual life. Now

the vague questions I had come to Calvin with were being addressed. If they were not immediately answered, at least I discovered the direction I should go with them. If the answers were not yet in full bloom, I knew where I would find fulfillment. My experience was similar to that of many other Groen Club members.

It is too bad that it led to haughtiness on our part over against the rest of the student body and even with respect to the faculty and administration. We suffered from the negative reaction so typical of new converts. This was, of course, egged on by the equally negative responses from those “others.” As to myself, this new way of thinking not only broadened my latent, undeveloped theological and philosophical views, but it gave new direction to my spiritual life with a much broader appreciation of the Kingdom of God and the Christian religion. I felt I was learning to face the secular worldview dominating the Western world head on by understanding both its underpinnings and its Achilles’ heel.

By the time I was well into my third year, like so many “Groeners,” I began to develop a degree of belligerence towards Calvin. It led towards rudeness and haughtiness on our part at times. For example, during the final exam in a sociology course, I asked the prof about which answer he wanted from us—the opinion of the authors we had studied, his own opinion or the right opinion! Fran, my girlfriend at the time, was taking the same course and, sitting beside me, she cringed with embarrassment and annoyance. It was, of course, way out of the ball park. I should not have said that, but it was an indication of the depth of our frustration with the Christian character of Calvin—or lack thereof. After all, Calvin touted an integrated approach to faith and learning. That was supposedly its very hallmark! So, we had some reasons for our frustration and anger, though our expressions of it were not always taken kindly or expressed within acceptable parameters.

The aim of it all was to equip Canadian students for an aggressive approach to social Christianity in Canada, to face Canadian secularism head on, especially by creating Christian counter-cultural organizations. The organizations in Canada that came out of this movement are today (2012) well established, professionally-run organizations that include especially the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), now a flourishing Canada-wide labour union. There is also the Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) in Ottawa, whose founder, Gerald Vandezande, recently passed away, but not before he was appointed member of the Order of Canada, a prestigious Canadian decoration. It has an independent counterpart in Washington, DC. There is the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, an exclusively post-graduate institution with a heavy emphasis on philosophy and worldview issues. It now grants doctorates and has close affiliation with the University of Toronto and its theological seminary as well as with the Free University of Amsterdam.

The Canadian organizations had to go through some hard legal slugging in the courts, challenged as they were by their hard-core Canadian secular counterparts, but they stood their ground and won recognition in each case by exposing the falsehood of the secular claim to neutrality. Today, there is a Kuyper Center at the Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, while the Catholic Acton Institute is cooperating with Kuyper College, both in Grand Rapids, in translating one of Kuyper’s major three-volume works.

The development of these organizations was bitterly opposed by the American CRC establishment in Grand Rapids, especially by both Calvin and the Seminary. They had some philosophical reasons for their opposition, but especially sociological. Runner c. s. were accused of transferring Dutch culture and religion that would not fit in North America. They were deeply offended when Runner countered them with the accusation of secularism. The battle was fought especially in the pages of two magazines, *Torch and Trumpet* and *The Reformed Journal*, with the former favouring the “Runner side” and the latter the “Calvin side.” At the end of the day, both magazines disappeared, but the Runner-inspired organizations are vibrant today, while their opponents have nothing to show for beyond their legacy of sophisticated excuses that posed as philosophical treatises. Most of them are dead, gone and forgotten. I declare Runner the most influential person in all of CRC history, for he triggered the liberation of the Kuyperian movement from the limitations of Dutch language, culture and religion. The result of his work is that there is now an international pro-active school of Kuyperian thought and action that eventually led to the rehabilitation of his reputation at Calvin by the latter awarding him special recognition. That award should have been accompanied with an apology on the part of Calvin. The Institute for Christian Studies established a chair named after him.



**Prof. Evan Runner \***  
**Visiting us in Grand Rapids, 1969**

Runner may have been the leading pioneer of Kuyperianism at Calvin, but he was not the only one. Two profs in Calvin’s Bible department shared his vision. One was Henry Van Til, nephew of the American Reformational philosopher at Westminster Seminary Cornelius Van Til. He authored *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. Unfortunately, humanly speaking, he died prematurely during my college days.

Then there was Gordon Spykman, a German-American, who wrote a book on systematic theology, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*. He sought to develop a new approach from the point of view of Herman Dooyeweerd, the main

Kuyperian philosopher and said to be the most original Dutch philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I often enjoy reading a chapter now and then for the fresh spirit that pervades the book and have gratefully used it as a source in my own 8-volume series on Christians and Islam. We became friends and would usually visit him and his wife during our furloughs from Nigeria. He, too, passed on to his reward. His reach went far beyond Calvin and me. Recently, Fred Herfst, for many years the leader of the independent school movement in BC, who was one of the pioneers in gaining BC Government recognition of and support for the movement, explained that he was inspired by Spykman's 'big ideas'." So, Spykman's shadow continues to play a role in BC's educational establishment, even though few in the province have ever heard of him.

Eventually Nicholas Wolterstorff also became sympathetic to Kuyperian thought, enough to identify himself publicly as a Kuyperian. Though his main career is associated with Yale, he has also been much involved in the Institute for Christian Studies, the Free University of Amsterdam and in the international Association of Reformational Philosophy based in The Netherlands. The past few decades have spawned more Kuyperian profs at Calvin. The differences may still be there between the dominant attitude at Calvin and ICS' Kuyperian philosophy, but they are now expressed in more amicable ways. Some Calvin profs have recently written some excellent Kuyperian books.

You may wonder why I am spending so much time and space to these developments. The reason is that this history is part of my history or, perhaps said better, I am part of this history. It influenced me during my years at college and seminary, but much more later in Nigeria, when I began to recognize more deeply the fatal truth of Runner's exposure of Christian flirtation with secularism and the dualism it leaves in its wake along with the terrible damage this caused in Nigeria. There these issues became the major focus of my ministry, including all of my writings.

I will tease you with just a few key ideas that Runner and the entire school promote for both a healthier church and society. I say "entire school" advisedly, for there is indeed quite an international crowd of Christian social activists, preachers, teachers, labour leaders, academicians, authors, etc. who all advocate this perspective and spread it over all the world. It is not a small group of introverts hiding in some small corner of the world. The library that the movement has produced is ever growing, especially in English. At the time of writing, only a few are listed on the Kuyperiana page of my website < [SocialTheology.com](http://SocialTheology.com) >.

So, here then six basic key ideas of Kuyperian thought, the combination of which has world-changing potential. I present them in bare bones and without defense. If you want more details, see part 2 in both vols. 5 and 8 of my series.

- The dominant worldview of the Western world is a secular dualism between the spiritual on the one hand and the material or the worldly on the other. These two are separated from each other in Western thought as a natural and common sense separation that few people question, let alone examine. In reality that dualism or dichotomy does not exist and is a myth.

- **The true situation is that everyone is a believer, even atheists. Everyone bases her life on a set of beliefs or assumptions that most people are not aware of, do not analyze and cannot even prove to be true. They are simply believed.**
- **The above means that no person, philosophy or school of thought is ever neutral, since all are guided by and based upon these unproven assumptions or beliefs. This holds true even for entities like public schools, labour unions, etc. It is discriminatory for governments to support schools run on secular beliefs but not others.**
- **Since every person, philosophy and organization is driven by its own belief system, secular or otherwise, society is to allow a thoroughgoing pluralism that gives equal space to every school of thought without discrimination, provided the school has sufficient adherents.**
- **The Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, supported by the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, means that working in the world is a religious enterprise through which we serve God. Pastor and ploughman are both God's servants; both of their work is holy and pleasing to God. There is no spiritual hierarchy of occupations. In our work everyone either serves God or something else like ambition, money, power, self, etc.**
- **There is both a basic antithesis between those who serve God or something else as well as a "common grace." Their loyalties ultimately drive them in different directions, though common grace often allows them to share certain limited goals.**

**This difference of opinion divided the student body into schools as well. Most American and Canadian students were divided along ethnic lines, most Canadians, eventually including me, taking the "Runner side." This brought a certain tension, not to say hostility, between the two that occasionally carried over into the classroom with Canadians challenging the assumptions of their American lecturers. Remember my snotty question to that Sociology prof! It was typical of our behaviour. We developed a superiority complex vis a vis our American counterparts. As I admitted earlier, some of our reactions were inappropriate, typical of the zealous new convert.**

### *Spiritual and Church Life*

**Religion wise, Sundays were rich days for me, at least, after I made some friends. Two services, of course. During my freshman year, I followed someone named Aubrey to Neland CRC, a 15-minutes walk from the campus. He liked Schuurman, the preacher there, for he had been a missionary to Sri Lanka and preached in an English heavily tainted by Sri Lankan accent, which, along with his black robe, lent him a special kind of dignity. My sophomore year saw me move to Fuller Ave CRC, since that is where most of my fellow Lords attended (I'll explain that Lord thing in a bit) and stayed there all the way**

through Seminary. In the evening we would visit a variety of churches, not always CRC. Sometimes we attended at Granville Avenue CRC where there was a fire-eater of a Kuyperian preacher who called a spade a spade. No beating around anyone's bush. Grand Rapids actually had quite a few good preachers, though I did not always recognize or acknowledge that at the time due to my Groen Club rebellious attitude. Some good theologians, some good preachers, some good orators along with services meaningful to us. Usually along with it came great singing that has always been a delight to me. Burton Heights CRC used to have monthly hymn sings after the evening service that were such a delight that I attended almost all of them, whether on a date or with friends.

The dress code at these services was strict and traditional; for men, suit and tie, no matter the temperature in Grand Rapids' torturous summers. So, one Sunday evening a group of six of us decided to stage a serious coup. We went to Calvin CRC, the closest CRC to the campus, high class and formal, only in white shirts, no tie or coat. And so we marched in with the six of us right up to the front pew and parked ourselves. Boy, were we proud of our bravery! Heroes. Nothing less. Just think: no coat or tie. Where did we pick up the courage? Actually, not sure anyone took note at all, but we did our thing!

Sunday afternoons during my freshman year, a sizable group of students, 15-20 or so, would gather around a Commons piano and sing our hearts out, as much as possible in harmony. Again, to my soul's delight. Afterwards some of the group would meet up with members of the Mission Club to go to one of our "projects" I describe below.

1961 was an important year for me spiritually. I always loved the Lord, but, as you may remember from Chapter 9, there was always kind of a restlessness in my heart. Something was missing. I felt unable to appropriate God's promises for myself so as to have peace with Him and myself. One day, as I was working on a lawn (see under the work section) and contemplating my spiritual condition, suddenly something within me snapped and it all came together. The obstacle to a relaxed faith, whatever it was, was taken away and I felt totally accepted by the Lord. What a relief that was to me, what an experience. It was something similar to my call to the ministry, one of these spiritual climaxes you never forget. It changed my spiritual life—and thus my entire life—forever. *Alhamdu lillahi*. Praise the Lord!

### *My Social Life*

From the above, you will have gathered that my goal of making friends with my American colleagues did not begin very smoothly. My immediate neighbours in the dorm were all Americans. On the one side, there was Don Coray, my counselor, friendly and helpful, but an upper classman who had friends at his own level. On the other side was a room with four students who all came from the same Christian high school in the interior. They showed no interest whatsoever in the Canadians living on both sides of them. I overheard some of their conversations and concluded they were a spoiled bunch of teenagers who had never confronted any serious challenges. Everything given to them on a silver platter--tuition, books, board and room, clothes, pocket money and, several of them, even cars. My

dislike turned to contempt when I heard them complain that they were given *used* cars instead of new! They became the symbol for me of most American students—unfairly so, I readily admit now.

So, I naturally began to gravitate to two Canadians two doors down, who became and remained friends throughout my college years, both of them from Ontario. We socialized much throughout our college years and, for Bill R., Seminary years as well. The other was called “Al,” but I forgot his last name. Hey, that *was* fifty years ago! An education student, he gradually disappeared from my life after graduation.

Bill R., a fellow Groninger and pre-sem student was very quiet and kind of boring.. During my second Christmas at Calvin, he invited me to spend Christmas with his family in Ontario. Yes, fellow Groningers, but they spoke the “other” Groninger dialect that we West Groningers call “Overdaips.” I was surprised I could not understand them very well when they were conversing among each other. Throughout our college years, we did many things together. Eventually, he married a girl I had been dating. Years after our ordination, Fran and I visited them in their parsonage a few miles north of Grand Rapids. When the CRC lost many members due to a dispute about women in leadership, Bill joined the secession to serve a break-away church. When I met him again at the funeral of his father-in-law, he refused to talk to me! The sad end of a long relationship. But at Calvin he belonged to my group of friends.

As my freshman year wore on, I did develop a social life in spite of the original hiccups. It included Americans, but as I took stock at the end of the year, I noticed that most of the fellows in my social circle were Canadians, something I had tried to avoid. As to the Americans, there were very few born Dutch-Americans among them. I do remember Marty Hamstra from Seattle. He was from a jeweler’s family and continued his trade among students. I bought our engagement ring from him, while Fran and I both bought our wedding rings from him as well. Somewhere along the line I also bought an old Plymouth from him. Most of the others were either Dutch immigrants to the US or they were of non-Dutch origin. Probably the most prominent among them was Simon Wolfert, who remains a friend till today and lives close to us.

Then there was Don Larson of Scandinavian ancestry from a small town some 30 miles north of Grand Rapids. He invited me to his family home several times. Once we took a trip to Niagara Falls in Ontario. The one thing that I remember from that trip was his reaction to seeing a McDonald across the border in Canada. He was amazed that Canada was that developed! Truth be told, there are any number of Canadians who wish it were not! But it made Don feel right at home. He started his career working at Old Kent Bank. Don disappeared from my life after graduation.

*An aside:* Old Kent was a local Grand Rapids bank. At the time, unlike Canada’s national chartered banks, most US banks were local. Don’s branch was on the corner of Franklin and Eastern SE, the same one we banked at during our Seminary and Nigeria years. Al Scholten was the branch manager who took personal interest in our affairs and even kept a literal shoe box near his desk with

our documents! Remember, pre-computer days! When our kids went to Calvin, Al also eased them into banking. We will never forget him. He eventually quit the bank in protest to modernization that rendered the bank highly impersonal. We will always remember him with great fondness. “OK,” as the bank was fondly called, outgrew its britches throughout lower Michigan, even into Chicago land. Then it was taken over by a larger rival. It is history. It went the way of all local Grand Rapids banks.

There was also a senior pre-sem Sri Lankan, Aubrey V., with whom I hung around. His specialty was to berate the CRC for its lack of evangelistic and missionary fervour, in spite of the fact that he was the beneficiary of the ministry of CRC missionaries in his home country who brokered his coming to Calvin. He married a Canadian student and became a CRC minister in Canada. I met him once years later, when he was serving Trinity CRC in Abbotsford, BC, but did not notice that he had turned into either an advocate or practitioner of missions or evangelism. He was a run-of-the-mill CRC pastor in a Dutch immigrant church. Marrying into the “family” properly domesticated him!

An important source of American-born friends was Mission Club, of which Aubrey was President during my freshman year. This club consisted of students interested in missions in general and in student outreach into the Grand Rapids community. Club members bonded with each other and ignored the cultural distinctions and prejudices so common among the rest of the student body. We all became friends to varying degrees with each other.

We had four projects, one for each Sunday. One Sunday we would go knocking on doors in the name and neighbourhood of Buckley Chapel, now Grace CRC. Just imagine, white kids trying to bring the Gospel to a Black community that had been so discriminated against. I was new in America and did not know the dynamics at first. Later I began to doubt this programme and thought it hypocritical. Then there were the Blind Home, the Juvenile Home and Maple Grove, a senior care home for the poor. We would visit, preach and sing. It was the place where we pre-sems could practice our chosen profession. I often sang in duo, trio or quartet formation, sometimes together with brother Hendrik, who came to Calvin one year later.

Another important source of friends was the Groen Club, but this was all Canadian. As mentioned earlier, I was originally opposed to it, but was dragged into it by my sophomore roommates. It became a great social bonding experience for me. Now I was becoming “one of the boys” as far as the Canadians were concerned. I was always welcome at any Commons coffee table where Groen members congregated to spend hours discussing Kuyperian ideas and complaining endlessly about the lack of interest among American students and faculty. Lecturers would be quoted and ripped apart. Articles in *Torch and Trumpet* along with those in *Reformed Journal* were analyzed thoroughly. The Christian organizations that were being organized in Canada under the encouragement of Prof. Runner had to be defended to the core against the American onslaught. There was a strong sense of “us vs them” among us. We had the truth; they were semi-secularized. We were definitely not popular among American students and the Club was disliked by faculty

and administration. But, hey, I now had friends and soul mates. Now I had a full social life with more friends and acquaintances than I could reasonably handle, even though not the kind I had *intended* to befriend.

It was striking that my two crowds, Groen Club and Mission Club, were very different. Groen Clubbers had contempt for the Mission Club. After all, Runner had several times berated missions. He characterized missions as bringing someone to Christ, turn him/her into a missionary, who would then bring someone else to Christ, who would then turn him/her into a missionary—and on and on and on. Purely individualistic and cyclical. Nothing to do with culture, society or, more important, the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. Accepting the status quo. So, there was a built-in prejudice against missions in the Groen Club that extended to Mission Club. I was one of the few who belonged to both. Groen Clubbers tended to regard such dual membership as strangely inconsistent and unbecoming, but they “generously” allowed me.

For their part, Mission Club members had no idea about Groen Club issues and were not the least interested. So I was getting involved in two very different groups of friends. The one very much focused, intellectual and strongly partial; the other, more relaxed and concerned to relate to various marginalized groups in the city, especially to their eternal future. I felt at home in both circles, but was quite aware of their respective shortcomings.

There were two other activities in which I got involved, but neither of them were as important to my life as the ones already described. One was the Communism Study Club, of which I was the initiator and the first and last President. Our faculty sponsor was a history prof whose name I have forgotten. What motivated me was my fear that Communism was going to take over the West, including North America. Something like some people today fearing that Islam will defeat us. I was pessimistic about North America's future and thought there was a need for people to understand Communism if they were going to resist it effectively. For a brief while this issue consumed me. I remember that some dates were dominated by discussions on the topic. It did not last long. My interest and leadership waned and the Club disintegrated.

The other was a college Chess Club. I was no more than an average player but did enjoy the game tremendously. Once Prof. Byker of the Psychology Department challenged as many students as were interested to play him all at once: one player vs many. A dozen or so students took him on, including myself. He defeated us all. I was one of the last and ascribed that to the fact that I played an irregular game, bypassing normal, classic moves, not because I was so smart, but because I felt too intimidated by this master of the game and could not think straight, let alone play straight!

There was another very important source of social life for me, namely the Harkema family. The Harkemas were Dutch immigrants living in Wyoming, a Grand Rapids suburb. Mr. Harkema had a commercial painting business. He was a strong Kuyperian who stood solidly behind Runner's efforts. The family included one son and four daughters, three of whom were single and lived at home while attending Calvin. The Harkemas were very hospitable to Canadian Calvin students and organized many parties at their house as well

as outside. I already knew most of the students in this circle since they were members of the Groen Club. So, no new friends, really, but certainly an intense social circle. At one time I dated one of the girls. The joke made the rounds that the Senior Harkemas' goal was to line up their daughters with future CRC preachers, a "goal" that was only partially reached. Not sure the joke was fair or on target.

### *The Romantic Life*

You may have observed that, with the exception of the Harkema girl above, I refer so far mainly to male friends. What of girls? Well, I did tell you in Chapter 9 that I had developed a shyness towards girls during my early immigrant days of language struggle. My immediate closest Canadian friends did not engage in dating. Cor had just been dropped by his fiancé; Simon had a fiancé in The Netherlands as did Al in Ontario; Bill, the only marketable one, did not date much at the time. So I was left on my own in this respect. It took me a while to start hunting around. My hunting ground consisted of the three sources I have already mentioned. Some from the Groen-Harkema constituency and some from Mission Club; some Canadians and some Americans, but again, without planning, none were born Dutch-Americans. That pattern for me just continued naturally.

You may be wondering what we did on dates or during group outings. Movies, of course, were a natural setting. However, the CRC was just beginning to reorient herself with respect to certain "worldly amusements," which included movies. Calvin, to discourage students from going to local movie theatres and to put distant parents at ease, often showed movies of her own choosing on Friday evenings. I personally did not object to movie attendance, but some of the girls I dated did or their parents did. So, those Calvin movies were one alternative for Friday evenings. This would often be followed by a coffee and dessert in the Commons that would remain open late on Friday evenings. And then...home. That was no problem if my date lived in one of the coops (see below) or in a rented room in the neighbourhood. But when she lived farther away, it became a problem and often meant I had to arrange a double date with a car owner. This was one of the reasons I decided to buy a car of my own. It was an old Chevy, possibly the oldest on the entire campus, but it served me well for a couple of years.

Other activities we engaged in were, well, Harkema parties like roller skating, wiener roasts, swimming and picnicking. Some wintry things we did were ice skating, either on a pond outside or in a rink and toboggan parties at Newaygo, going down very steep and long hills specially equipped for this activity, all the while squealing with delight.

Another popular activity was attending classical concerts in the Civic Auditorium in downtown. For some years I bought season tickets. This was not because I liked classical music so much as this being a respectable place to take a date, an occasion that would usually be topped up with a visit to a café or restaurant and, depending on the relationship.... But never beyond the pale. Of course, Calvin also had musical and drama events which we attended. And then there were similar events in downtown theatres we also made use of. Basketball was a big thing at Calvin and we would take in most home

games, especially the special annual Calvin-Hope game. Occasionally there might be a speaker either on the campus, in some church or in downtown somewhere who would attract us.

Girl stuff was also an additional attraction of Mission Club ministries. It was at these occasions that I began to notice a gal called Fran. Boy stuff was equally important for her and sister Trena! She and sister Trena were kept on a pretty tight leash by Mother Jennie. Living far out in the boondocks of 48<sup>th</sup> Street, they did not often get to go out. But Mother could not possibly forbid her girls from doing mission work! So the two girls attended these Sunday afternoon events faithfully. They sang and...looked around.... Often older sister Jane would also come along. That's where and when it all began. This was genuine Calvinist integration: religion and romance. It does not get better than that!

### *Enter Famke Fran*

Apart from the Harkema gal, I began to notice a really blond gal with bright sparkling blue eyes that signaled she enjoyed life, one of those Prins gals from Mission Club. She also seemed to have a bit of a mischievous streak that appealed to me. Even her facial acne added to her attractiveness. Since she was active in the activities of the Mission Club, I had a regular chance to check her out. For some time I observed her even while dating the Harkema gal. Then a minor disagreement with the latter led to what I thought would be a temporary fall out. As it happened, the Harkemas organized a roller skating party to which both I and this sprightly Prins blonde were invited. I decided to try to make my current favourite jealous by skating with this blond, about whom I knew little at that point, except her name—Fran(ces) Prins. She was a freshman and lived on a farm at what is now the Grand Rapids airport. I skated with Fran almost the entire evening, while constantly keeping one eye on the other to see her reaction. Not sure whether she was jealous in any way, but the end of her story is that I did not try to reconcile and decided to make a go for Fran. This was in the spring of 1960. She did not want me to take her home, since she had come together with Trena in the family car.

The next step in our relationship was that Fran invited me to the Freshman Girls' Banquet in May, 1960. This was the one occasion when it was proper for a girl to invite a boy. To her surprise, I didn't hesitate for a moment; I accepted! We participated in that banquet, all decked up formally, with Fran looking just great with her gleaming eyes and acne. We had a wonderful evening along with Mary Ann, Fran's friend, and her date.

In between that invitation and the banquet itself, I invited Fran for a date on a Sunday evening. She asked me whether I knew where she lived. I bravely said she should just give me her address and I would find it. It sounded so simple: 6704-48<sup>th</sup> Street SE. She tried to explain the route to me, but, being a son of Wiebe Boer, I had perfect confidence I would find it without her wasting her breath. She shrugged her shoulder in skepticism and let it go. Alas, mine was over-confidence. Yes, it was easy to pinpoint on a map, but I did not check out the dead ends and one ways along the route that required an unlikely series of detours. Well, I did make it eventually, but a bit late. I had to eat humble pie. Fran has

never allowed me to forget the incident and by now recognizes that it was kind of typical behaviour on my part. A belated apology. I should have listened to you, my dear. Next time!

I took her to Burton Heights CRC service that evening, just a couple of blocks from Godwin Street, where we later owned and lived in a house. After the service, there was that monthly hymn sing with their mighty organ, soloists and, frequently, quartets or even choirs. From there, I drove her home, for we did not go to cafés or restaurants on Sundays in those days. I do remember sitting in the driveway with her for a while before releasing her. Talking, of course. Well, you know us!

Then the disruption of the 1960 summer intruded in our relationship. I went to BC and found work as a porter on the Canadian Pacific Railway. More about that job later. That summer I stayed with my sister Ina, now called “Bo,” in North Vancouver. She and her husband ran a landscaping business, including a nursery out of an old church and parsonage they had purchased. From there I corresponded passionately with Fran and vividly remember how I treasured her responses. Fran tells me she was thoroughly embarrassed about these letters, since correspondence in the Prins family might have been personal but hardly private while overt passion was crowded out by their Frisian stoicism! She will tell us more in her part of the story.

The summer of 1961 was a “together summer,” since I did not return to BC but worked, instead, at a local bakery in downtown Grand Rapids, not far from where Fran was working as a receptionist for a furniture factory near Wealthy and Division SE. That summer we spent a lot of time together. We would often have our lunch times together in the park in front of the Library. We would go on picnics, swimming, boating at Gun Lake. It was a great summer, though we had to sometimes work around our conflicting work schedules, since mine was once again shift work.

We continued to see a lot of each other and develop our relationship. There were many dates, the types described earlier. After some time I began to join the family for their morning service at East Paris CRC. Sunday dinners after church at the Prins home became part of my routine. At the time I was living with Simon Wolfert on Paris Street. I was doing the cooking; he, the cleaning—sometimes. So I eagerly looked forward to this weekly dinner routine—for more than one reason, of course! The menu tended to be the same, but I ate my way into Fran’s mother’s heart. I ate her out of house and home.

After all that, December 15, 1961 came around. I had planned it carefully. I secretly bought a ring from Marty Hamstra for \$125, a princely sum at that time for this student. It was a Sunday evening. After our regular Sunday evening activity, most likely a church service somewhere, I took her to my attic apartment on Paris Street and announced my intention for us to get engaged right there and then. I slipped the ring on her finger and it was done. Fran was taken by surprise but did not object. That, at least, is how I remember it.

Some time later, I knelt before Father Charley to ask for the hand of his youngest daughter. He approved without hesitation. Actually, in the Prins family it was Mother Jennie who wore the pants. It was her permission that counted more than Father Charley's. She also came through without a problem. Occasionally, I would eat my meal on the underside of a plate, since all the plates were dirty and piled up. That may sound unappetizing, but it helped me in getting permission to marry Fran. Mother Jennie once came to visit. When she saw the mess, she felt so sorry for me that when I asked for Fran's hand, she readily approved. She could have drawn the conclusion that I was a dirty pig and did not deserve her daughter. That would have been an understandable reaction. For some reason, her reaction was one of compassion and pity. I guess I had really eaten my way into her heart and she was not thinking logically. As they say, love is blind. That apparently can even hold for mother-in-law love! What I had hoped would happen at Calvin but feared never would, did! I was elated with my "catch." A Groninger and a Frisian. You can't get more multi-cultural than that!

Our relationship grew stronger and more intense. It was no longer mere dating; it was now a process of discovering each other at deeper levels. When we did date, it would sometimes be double dating, possibly involving Trena and Francis or, occasionally, brother Hendrik and his Barbara. We would also spend time together on the campus in the daytime--the library, the commons at mealtime or coffee. We took one course in Sociology together, the one in which I asked my infamous question that so embarrassed her!

Fran never really enjoyed academics even though she was very good at it. She took education at Calvin because that was one of the necessary hoops to become a teacher, not because she was eager for a professional or academic course in education. But enjoyed it or not, she is a smart cookie and routinely got A's for her courses. She graduated no. 19 out of 405! What was I getting into? Her grades were higher than mine and that made me jealous. So I told her that she got higher grades because she did not have to take the more difficult pre-sem courses I was taking. She should take philosophy and then we would see. Well, she did—and she beat me again! Hats off to my Famke, though I did not feel quite that way during my first shock of humiliation. I am sure I know more about philosophy in general than she does, even though she got the higher grade. If that sounds like sour grapes, so be it. I am glad she did not take Greek or Hebrew, for she would have beat me again hands down. That I know from our experience while studying the Hausa language at Michigan State University later on.

During this engagement period it was only natural for us to start talking about a wedding date. We were, of course, both students with little money. That was part of the equation. Should we wait till we both graduated in 1962 and 1963 respectively? Should we wait till I graduated from Seminary in 1965? That was too far to contemplate. Eventually, after discussions with the Prins family—the Boer parents, being so far away, really did not participate in the discussions—we picked June 5, 1962, a few days after my Calvin graduation.

In the meantime, Trena and Francis also started talking wedding. As the story has it, Ray, the oldest of the Prins sons, declared that the family did not want to "waste" time on two

separate weddings in one summer. It should be a double wedding. And so it was decided! June 5 it was. It was a good date, for most of our student friends—and we hardly had any other—would still be around since it was only a couple of days since graduation. Most of them would soon scatter over the length and breadth of the continent, since the Calvin catchment area was continental, from Florida to Vancouver Island.

As to the wedding preps, I will leave that story up to Fran, since she and Trena were more involved than I was. We did all agree on the church and pastor: East Paris CRC and its pastor William Van Rees. The choice was natural, since the Prins family had been churching there for years. Though I was not all that enamoured with Van Rees' leadership, I did not contest the choice. You don't begin a marriage relationship, including in-laws, by bucking in-law's natural decisions at the very outset! Looking back, I don't believe I ever bucked any in-law decisions. Just moved far away!

Though East Paris it was, I belonged to Fuller Ave. CRC with George Gritter as its pastor, and a fine pastor he was, at least, a fine preacher and person. It was considered *the* church for Groen Clubbers. Even Runner attended there. Fran had accompanied me there often by this time. So, we turned to Gritter for our pre-marital counseling—such as it was! At the time, premarital counseling was still in its incubator stage and could be considered primitive. Certainly ours was. The only thing Gritter brought up was birth control, which was, of course, a no-go area! As I look back upon that one single session with him, I am amazed that we did not challenge that notion, or, at least, explore it further with him. We “accepted” his advice politely, were prayed over and went our way, fully intending to carry out our family plan to hold off on offspring for two years. After all, both of us were students at least for the first year, Fran still having her senior year ahead of her and me all of Seminary.

A couple of things leading up to the wedding. First a car thing. You already know I had a car, but by this time I was on my third. About two weeks or so before the wedding it gave up on me. What to do? A wedding coming up and a honeymoon, but no money! So, I swallowed my pride and found Fran in the library. I whispered to her that the car had broken down and I needed money to buy another. Did she have \$250? Yes, she did and without any hesitation she promised to bring it the next day! We bought our first Desoto, an eight-cylinder orphan with an overdrive. A gas guzzler in town, but with overdrive not bad on the highway. It served us well for a couple of years, taking us twice on distant Seminary summer assignments in BC and Alberta.

Two evenings prior to the wedding, we were taking a ride along 48<sup>th</sup> Street, close to the Prins home. Fran suddenly got cold feet about the whole affair and started wondering whether we were doing the right thing. Should she drop it? Should we postpone? I remember discussing this together at some length that evening, with my trying to convince her to proceed. I won! Actually, we both won. But it was kind of scary!

Another issue that evening was about my work. I was working nights or graveyard shift at Pine Rest Christian Hospital, a mental institution in Cutlerville, a Grand Rapids suburb. I had intended to keep working right up to the wedding day. After all, we needed money

badly. Fran laid it down in no uncertain terms: Janneman would not work the day before. Among other things, there was the rehearsal the night before. No way would I be allowed to work! I didn't buck; I didn't work!

Apart from Hendrik, none of my family attended the event, for they all lived in BC, too far away. I did not press them, not even my parents. They had come the previous year, when Dad was appointed to attend the Synod of the CRC in Grand Rapids. My best man was brother Hendrik, my fellow pre-sem student. It being a double wedding, Francis Lieuwen, the other BC groom, and I sang a duet to our girls: "Oh, Perfect Love...." It went reasonably well. I pulled a bit of a blooper in an age more formal than today's. Instead of saying the customary "I do," I said, "Yes." Not on purpose, I insist, just nervousness, but Fran has not allowed me to forget this funny little slip either. It surfaces occasionally as a family joke.

I talked just now about bucking the Prins family. There was one feature of the family, including dear Franny herself, that continually annoyed me. The entire family was so tight-knit, especially with grandchildren, of which there were already quite a few, always at the very centre of attention. Now, they were nice kids, everyone of them, and the in-laws were great without exception, but being used to an even larger but more individualistic family, I sometimes found this closeness burdensome and the central attention given to the little kids downright annoying. I was not used to having little kids around anymore, not after four years of college living. The central domineering position of Mother Jennie turned the family into a matriarchy in which there was not a lot of room for individual decisions. Besides myself, there were two other in-laws who similarly found this a burdensome situation. The situation eventually relaxed with family cohesion largely in tact. We have often joked that I rescued Fran from compulsory daily 48<sup>th</sup> –Street afternoon tea parties!

The above paragraph is as much a commentary on myself and on my own birth family. We were probably too individualistic. The siblings pretty well did their own thing, but not with each other so much as each with their own friends, especially the boys. We were very free to do what we wanted, with our parents apparently trusting us without reserve. In addition, of course, I had been a single college student for the last four years and made my own decisions without much regard for family. With that as background, it should be no surprise that the Prins culture caused some annoyance for me.

But, in spite of the above, we managed fine together. I do not remember a single fight or even strong disagreement with respect to decisions they made that affected me. It is true, of course, that my forgetfulness may play a part here, but that I would consider a blessing in this context. Grudges are useless burdens. I have always basically appreciated them—the Prinses, that is-- for their rock-solid steadiness and decided not to highlight whatever differences there were between us. They have been and are among the finest of people. I could not wish better in-laws on anyone, not even on myself! The family always embraced *their* in-laws as full members of the family. With the exception of one from a completely different culture, we all felt totally welcome as part of the family.

### *Living Arrangements*

You already know that during my freshman year I lived in the Calvin dorm, the only one they had at the time. For reasons already explained, I never really felt part of its social life. It was strictly gender separated: only boys. The girls, you may remember, were living in those coops, houses across the street that Calvin had bought and converted into female dorms. But most students lived in rented private rooms and apartments scattered throughout the neighbourhood. They were allowed to live only in places approved by the Calvin Housing Dept. It was one of the many ways in which the presence of the college provided economic support for the area.

Towards the end of my freshman year I decided to move out of the dorm the next year. It would be cheaper to live outside and, provided I had a right room mate(s), more fun as well. I was invited by a couple of guys to join them in a house they were hoping to rent at 1340 Logan Street, about four blocks from Calvin. Eventually, seven of us moved into the place and named it “The House of Lords,” especially when we answered telephone calls. Of course, it triggered all kinds of humorous reactions from student callers. One responded with, “This is the Lord Chancellor calling.” It was a large house with four bedrooms and a bath and a half. We shared the \$150 rent between the seven of us—\$21.50 a person per month! That was cheaper than the dorm! Except for Si, we were all Dutch-Canadians, but, except for me at first, also all Groen Clubbers. They were the ones to “drag” me into the Club.

Life on Logan was good. We got along fine with each other and divvied up all the chores, originally doing each chore on a weekly rotation. However, soon that rotation pattern was broken, partially due to yours truly. Though I had peeled tons of potatoes for my large birth family, I had never cooked a single one. The first day it was my time to cook, I decided to prepare a potato dish with boiled potatoes left over from the day before. Potatoes were a major part of our Dutch cuisine in the House of Lords. I warmed them up by re-boiling them! Or, at least, trying to do so. That fiasco was enough to convince the group I would not make an acceptable cook. They took me off the cooking rotation and assigned me permanently to garbage detail. I did not mind. I cheerfully and faithfully took care of the garbage for the rest of the year. Apart from taking care of the room I shared with Si, that was my only chore. Not a bad deal, I figured. We paid for our food out of a kitty to which we all contributed equally. All in all, it was a very economical year for me, much cheaper than living and eating on the campus, and certainly more fun—if not too much! Food wise, it was a down grade.

A frequent feature of our life was the midnight snack. This usually consisted of either roasted chicken or grilled cheese sandwiches. The latter were new to all of us. We loved them and devoured them in great numbers. I still make them frequently for our evening meal.

Cor was our “problem” resident. Though he had a good sense of humour and smiled readily, his failed fiancée relationship drove him into a depression and dulled the usual brightness of his eyes. He began to skip classes and gradually ceased attending at all. He

would stay up until 4 AM or later and then go to sleep for most of the day. We all counseled, advised, encouraged him and what not, but it made no difference. He spent much of his few waking hours creating and organizing card files. Remember: pre-computer! He probably should have dropped out officially, but then he could not stay in the US and would have to go back to Canada, where he had no one, his birth family being back in The Netherlands. Twice we tried to shock him back to reality by lifting him out of bed at noon and dropping him naked into a cold-water bath. It did wake him up but failed to accomplish its purpose. He withdrew even more. That did not say much of the “pastoral” skills of us pre-sems! Cor eventually married a nurse from a prominent Grand Rapids medical family and they eventually lived in an apartment that we owned.

One final story about me as a “Lord.” Sometime during this year, Grandma Uringa-Boer passed away almost a decade after our emigration. I remembered her as a sober woman, often with a smile on her lips, but I do not remember ever having talked with her. After being a widow for some thirty years, she married a Buter, the father-in-law to her oldest son, my Oom Harm, and moved from Groningen to Enschede in Overijssel, where she passed away at the age of 83. When I received the notice of her death. I responded very strangely: I laughed and laughed and laughed. I could not stop! I was embarrassed in front of my fellow Lords, but could not explain my behavior, not even till this day. If any reader has any explanation, please share it with me. Perhaps it is very simple and not uncommon? I am still curious.

As the second semester of my sophomore year wore on, Simon and I started talking about finding an apartment just for the two of us in our next year. The House of Lords had been great fun and we still managed to do a reasonable amount of study, but both of us felt we could do better. So we looked around and found an apartment on Paris Street SE, not to be confused with East Paris Ave. or Paris township. This was in the middle of the city, just off Franklin SE, about a mile from the campus. It was the third floor attic of an old house. The attic had been turned into rooms, two sizable bedrooms, a small kitchen and pantry, and a small living room. The roof formed the exterior walls, which were thus slanted. We shared the bathroom on the second floor with two other tenant parties. The owners were an elderly CRC couple by the name of Keegstra, who lived on the ground floor. I am not sure when Si took possession of the place, but I went home in BC for that second summer (1960) and moved in upon my return early September.

Si and I lived there for our junior and senior years and enjoyed the arrangement. Though the Logan house was situated in a racially mixed neighbourhood, the Paris area was almost exclusively Black, our house being an exception. It was my first experience in such a neighbourhood and fully positive. There was more life on the street, especially children, something that I enjoyed more than the sanitized lonely streets of most white neighbourhoods.

Si and I did not always see much of each other. I am an early-to-bed and early-to-rise kind of guy, but Si was the very opposite. I would often go to bed early in the evening, sometimes as early as 6 PM! and then get up at 1 AM and study till noon, at which time I would go to lectures. Si, on the other hand, would study elsewhere, library or wherever,

and come home about the time I would get up and he would go to sleep till later in the morning. As awkward as this spontaneous arrangement sounds, it was good for Si, for when we did sleep at the same time, he would sometimes bang on the wall dividing our bedrooms because I would keep him awake with my snoring. If I did not always hear him, he would storm into my room and yell. And that says something about the volume of my snore, for Si was/is not one to easily resort to yelling. It was taken care of during the summer when I had a tonsillectomy in which the offending tonsils were removed. Thank you, Dr. Helmus. Si was grateful for the solution. I was to see Helmus again decades later when I had almost *lost* my voice, quite the opposite problem.

As in the House of Lords, we divided the chores, but now between just the two of us. My main task was to cook; Si's, to clean. Since the Keegstras were elderly, Si and I also did much of the outside seasonal lawn and snow work, though that was not part of our lease. As far as our in-house chores went, neither one was overly faithful, but we scraped by. Due to our different schedules, we seldom ate together.

It was in this apartment that I slipped the ring on Fran's finger and it was here that I lived when we were working on our new future together. One of the things that needed sorting out was where to live after we were married. We soon found a large upstairs apartment on Franklin Street, where it forms a T-junction with Paris Ave., less than a block from my previous apartment. The rent was \$45 a month, including utilities. We were to move in at the end of the summer 1962, at the beginning of my seminary career.

### *My Working Life*

#### *During the Academic Years*

You may recall that I felt pretty rich when I started Calvin. I was worth a full \$2000+, a princely sum. The first semester I did not do any work for money, but towards the end I decided that the next semester I would get a part time job, for the money *was* running out. Besides, I felt the need for doing something beyond student routine. In those days it was relatively easy for a foreign student to get a work permit from the US government.

I could not tell you all the jobs I had along the way. Some of them were not suitable for me, for example assembling tiny electrical parts in quick order. Just not my thing. Since I could not produce in quick order, I got canned in short order. I felt relieved. I became a valet parker for Wurzburg Dept Store in downtown GR. Its parking facility consisted of a circular building right in downtown with seven levels or so connected by very narrow circular passage ways. The demand for service was incessant and speed was of the essence. Again, not my thing; it made me nervous. I quit and again felt relieved. For a short time I also stocked shelves in a grocery store at night. I was okay with that, but it did not last long, though not sure why. Tried to sell Watkins door to door, but was not convinced enough of the product and so was not convincing. After many doors, I made one small sale, but forgot to charge sales tax. There went my profit! Si and I also tried to sell pots and pans door to door and by referrals, but both of us were singularly unsuccessful. Off and on

I also worked the yards of a few wealthy East Grand Rapids families throughout the academic years, including the GR summers and the Seminary period. I was reasonably good at that and enjoyed it. Such jobs were advertised by the Calvin Employment Office.

I did better at a few other jobs. One was at the “Fruitbasket” on 28<sup>th</sup> Street SW. My job was mainly in plant sales. Though I did reasonably well, I was too conscious of the fact that I really did not know much about plants and had often to defer to full timers. But with Christian owners and many part time “Runner-type” Calvin students working there, it was a friendly working environment that I enjoyed. Harkema’s son Sid worked there and eventually took over the place.

Another job I had was in the Calvin dining hall, where I served beverages such as milk, chocolate and juice out of large containers as the students went through the food line. I was scheduled mostly for lunch time, when the lineup was the longest, since off-campus students would also eat there. The advantage of this job was that it was right on campus and required no commuting.

Then there was the cashier-and-filing position I shared with Cor B. at Blodgett hospital, now part of Spectrum Health. It was an evening shift and not far from Calvin in East Grand Rapids. It was the perfect shift for Cor! Our duties were to receive payment for hospital services. When there were no clients at the counter, we had to place files that had been used back into their proper place. Again remember the pre-computer situation!

It was not a pleasant job. All too often the bills being paid off were horrendously high for patients who had long since “expired,” the term the hospital used for “died.” I began to feel increasingly uncomfortable for receiving what I began to regard as “blood money.” The accounts being paid off were mostly those of under-insured poor folk who came in month after month, year after year, slowly paying bills they could not afford for patients long gone. I began to resent the system that created this situation and started to contrast it to the BC system then in place, where patients paid \$1 a day for their hospital care, with the rest of the bill paid out of the sales tax that funded the system. At least the hospital had the grace to allow people to pay off their bills slowly over time. Not sure that grace is still practiced.

Towards the end of my senior year I began working at Pine Rest Hospital, mentioned earlier in this chapter. I was assigned to the boys’ section of the children’s ward and worked the graveyard shift, at first only a couple of nights a week. I was the only staffer on duty in my ward, but if there was a problem, I could call on the night nurse on the girls’ side. The work was minimal: mostly just watching over a ward of sleeping kids. Though I would try to use the time for study, I would often fall asleep myself in my chair. Not sure whether that is where I picked up the skill for which I am justly (in)famous till this very day, namely to sleep under all circumstances, in all postures and at all times.

All children usually slept throughout the night without needing any attention, except for one boy who, without fail, would need to urinate around 2 am—in the middle of *my* sleep! But it would often take him 30-45 minutes, during which time I would become extremely

impatient. Once or twice would not be so bad, but every single night? Interrupting *my* routine of study and sleep? That was highly unreasonable, I figured. I guess I forgot that that was precisely the reason he was there in the first place and the reason I got paid to care for him. I'm afraid that in that circumstance *I* was more unreasonable with my impatience than he was. I hope he has forgiven me for yelling at him! The most pleasant part of this nocturnal routine was the full-course dinner I was served every night. That was an enjoyable break in the otherwise dull environment. Those of you who know me well will not need to be told that I ate every single morsel every single night!

### *Summer Jobs—1959*

In addition to these part time jobs during the academic years, there were also my summer jobs. I returned to Alberni after my freshman year. The trip was somewhat adventurous. An Alberta student called "Henk" and I agreed we would go west hitchhiking together, he to Calgary and I to Vancouver. I guess the lesson of that original hitchhiking incident in Washington State had not stuck! I was going to try it again and, you know what?—it ended on a similar note! We traveled north up the lower Michigan peninsula towards Route 2, an older US highway that runs west all the way to Seattle. Rides came fairly easily, though not without incident. One huge man picked us up and took us a long way. During the course of the conversation he revealed that he was a gay Catholic priest and quite aggressively invited us to spend the night with him. At that point I was happy that my companion was also tall and husky. With him at my side I felt safe to decline the invitation. We asked him to drop us off there and then. I get along well with gay people, but a huge aggressive gay priest wanting us to spend the night with him is another story.

We reached Grand Forks, North Dakota late evening, but decided to try our luck and continue. That's where we ran into trouble. The police picked us up! Oh, oh! A re-run? We were taken to the station where he thoroughly grilled us as to identity and purpose. We were not told that hitchhiking was illegal and for some reason we did not ask. It is significant that this was the local state police, not some federal border entity. In that pre-computer age, these agencies did not share information as they do today, so that they had no record of my Blaine arrest the year before.

Eventually they gave us the choice between spending the night in the local jail or being placed on the next bus to the Canadian border at our own expense. We chose the latter and found ourselves at the border sometime around midnight and promptly de-boarded. Canadian officials had no problem with us and we continued hitchhiking north towards the Trans Canada Highway, the nation's No. 1. That's when we had more serious trouble. We stood there for over 12 hours without any success. By now we had been awake most of 36 hours and were getting tired. We decided to take the next bus, a Greyhound going west. We slept a good deal along the way, something we wanted more than anything else. The bus took us all the way to Calgary, where we parted ways and I transferred to a Vancouver-bound bus. No further incidents.

Since my intended mode of travel was to be hitchhiking all the way to Vancouver, I had not provided my parents a date of arrival. I crossed over to the Island by the usual ferry and then hitchhiked the 80 km. to Alberni. Got off at the Alberni Post Office and walked the 5 blocks to 643 Gertrude Street. I walked in cold but was welcomed warmly by my parents and by Dick and Bill, two of my younger brothers. It was great to be home after such a long absence.

My intention was to work at either the APD lumber mill where I had worked for almost a year back in 1954 or in the Plywood, where I had worked some four years. Both of them belonged to MacMillan & Bloedel and both of them had the policy of hiring students, especially former employees, in the summer to replace holidaying employees. One of them—I forgot which of the two—took me on. The job lasted less than a week, for it was the middle of June, contract signing time for the IWA, but nothing was signed. True to BC unions, they struck and left me without an income. I spent some days painting our house with Bill giving me a hand occasionally. Dick was too young to be of much help.

When that was done, I went to Vancouver to find a job there. I succeeded in obtaining a peat-drying contract job, exactly what I had done with my Dad in Pitt Meadows. It was back-breaking work in the scorching sun. Sweat like I had never done before out in the open. So, off with the shirt and trousers; only shorts and gloves. I came out of that ordeal darker than I had ever been. Worked myself to the bone and made a fair amount of money. I stayed with sister Karen in Burnaby.

### *Summer Jobs—1960*

I again returned home for the summer of 1960, but this time did not trust the mill situation, since a strike always seemed to be looming around June 15. So, I went home for a few days and then returned to Vancouver to find a job once again. I was prepared to do another peat stint but preferred something else. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) hired me as a summer porter on their passenger trains between Vancouver and Winnipeg. They gave a group of us students a week's course at the hands of Mr. Ramsey, Vancouver's "token Black," as he jokingly referred to himself. Though by now I had been in touch with American Blacks, this was my first more intimate contact. He was a fine man and a good teacher. I remember him with fondness and respect. The tasks we were taught were basically elementary that all of us had done many times, but now they had to be done the CPR way—shining shoes, carrying luggage, helping people aboard, making beds and, something that most of us may not have had much experience with, clean the cars including the washrooms. I "discovered" or, perhaps said better, came to the conclusion that when (some?) women's reputations are not tied to a bathroom and its cleanliness or otherwise, they can become careless and leave the place in disarray, to put it gently. I have never spent so much time in women's bathrooms! Of course, we were also everybody's gofers. We were given a fine shoe shine kit that I still have, though seldom use now. Who still regularly shines shoes these days? 50 years old, it is probably the oldest in-service shoe shine kit intact! Unfortunately, we had to hand our uniforms back to the CPR. I looked downright sharp in mine.

The job involved leaving Vancouver around 8 pm one evening and travel for some 36 hours to Winnipeg. There we would stay in their porters' barracks from around 8 am of one day till around 8 pm the next day. That gave us time to recover and also explore Winnipeg. Food wise we had to fend for ourselves while in Winnipeg, but we were fed at half price in the CPR dining car while en route. I remember being introduced to cream of wheat and strawberries. Never had heard of it before, but loved it, though today I find it bland and much prefer oatmeal. Though the trip took us through the Rockies, I did not see much of them, since most of that segment was during the night.

At one time I almost got canned prematurely. The constant weaving of these old trains made me motion sick on my third trip. It was so bad that I had to throw in the towel for the rest of the trip and the CPR had to find an emergency replacement en route. They were not pleased and threatened to fire me, but I managed to pacify them and continued with the job. Looking back, I feel that I had been too wimpy and should have slugged it out.

The layover in Winnipeg covered a number of Sundays. I spent them attending one of the Winnipeg CRC churches. When they found out I was a Calvin pre-sem student, the Buis family in particular became very hospitable to me. Pre-sems were future dominees (clergy), a group held in very high regard in the CRC at the time. Since I knew their son George from Calvin, they had me over for Sunday dinner a few times.

This time I stayed with sister Bo and family in North Vancouver, where they lived in that church and parsonage I have already mentioned. This was the time that I was corresponding with Fran as I also already told you. It was fun writing my passionate letters! It was the last summer I went home for work, a fact directly related to this new factor in my life, my famke in GR. I did not want another summer of letter writing, as much fun as it was. Of course, I explained to my parents that it was easier to get a job in GR even if for less pay, an equally true fact.

### *Summer Jobs—1961*

The summer after my junior year was a great one. Fran worked as a receptionist for a company right in downtown. My Paris Ave. apartment was not far from there. During our frequent lunchtimes together, we dreamt and chatted about our future together. It was a wonderful time.

I, too, worked in downtown at a bakery, but usually in the afternoon or evening shift. It was a fast moving and unrelenting kind of job that demanded I keep up with the speed of the conveyor that brought the loaves to me. I had to transfer them manually onto racks, after which they would be wheeled to the loading dock to be pushed into delivery trucks. GR is a hot place in the summer, but this bakery atmosphere, what with hot ovens dominating the place, made it almost unbearable, worse even than the Port Alberni Plywood. It was a union shop and thus we made good wages, even as temporary workers. That situation sweetened the arrangement. I came out of that summer with more money than ever.

There were a number of Calvin students working there and we all wondered how long it would be before the union would force us to join them. Fortunately, they did not catch up with us till the end of the summer, when we planned to quit anyhow or gear down to part time. The union would not allow the part time unless we joined them, something none of us wanted to do. There was strong antipathy to unions in the CRC because of their extremism and their hostile class warfare attitude. Fair enough, but, as in Port Alberni, we were happy to receive the high wages the union bargained for us. There was something unhealthy, cheap and unfair about this attitude that I have since become ashamed of. During the 1930s, the CRC-US constituency realized the need for unions of a different kind and so organized the Christian Labour Union (CLA), but today they even reject their own child! But more about that in Volume 4, Chapter 39.

### *College Closure*

College life get its closure from the graduation ceremony and other activities that come along with it. Though our class never had to attend lectures on the new campus, our ceremony was held there. I do remember the thrill of the moment I walked the stage and received my diploma. An important part of my long-range programme had been achieved. I now was the proud owner of a bachelor degree with a diploma to prove it. Though I was not the first Lutjegaster to do so—that distinction at Calvin probably fell to Gerrit Sheeres a couple of years earlier—, I was proud that I, a Lutjegaster from Abel Tasman's village, could have achieved this.

One humorous prank Simon Wolfert and I performed was to have our picture taken in a rowboat in the middle of the Seminary pond with our graduation gowns on. Years later, when our oldest son Kevin graduated from Calvin College on the adjacent campus, he did the same thing! So, a generational tradition has been established that one of our grandchildren will have to continue, preferably with a close friend at your side. Asia, Ezra, Jehan, Stephan, Gerrit and Anneke, that means one of you! And then one of *your* children and so on. If you graduate from a different college, find a pond and a boat in your area, have your picture taken there of you in your graduation gown and it will be accepted as the real thing.



*The graduates in the rowboat \**

It was a fun-filled few days of celebration and excitement with respect to everyone's future. One event that I remember particularly was the graduate breakfast held in the Commons dining hall where I had eaten so many great meals and served so many glasses of milk and juice to so many of my fellow students. It was a festive breakfast capped with an inspiring speech by President Spoelhof. We were all in the highest of moods. And then, just around the corner of the next week, there were so many weddings, including our own. Excitement indeed! There was also a tinge of sadness, since everyone's social circle of friends would be broken up with members strewn across the North American continent, the exception being us pre-sems, since we would continue together in the more intimate sphere of the Seminary.

### *1962--The Interregnum Summer*

I had reached a watershed period. Graduated from Calvin as a permanent bachelor only to marry within a few days to a Frisian *famke*. Two giant steps in anyone's life. From now on the larger picture would no longer primarily be "I this" and "me that," but it would be "we," "us" and "ours," while, of course, the "I" or "me" cannot be altogether obliterated. The unity of marriage does not delete the individual, but he/she is now an individual within a very special bond that usually takes priority; the "we" has priority over the "me." As a saying formerly on daughter Cynthia's wall said it much later, "We > You + Me." The "You + Me" are not obliterated; they still have legitimate functions and interests of their own. That is the idea. I believe we have both tried to live up to that--most of the time!

A wedding calls for a honeymoon, even when there is little or no money. We had purchased that old clunker of a Desoto and trusted it would take us to our destination. Actually, it outperformed our expectations by far and took us twice to Western Canada. Our honeymoon plans were simple and nearby.

Our first night was in a motel near Division and 28<sup>th</sup> Street. We did *not* fight. Wasn't that a good beginning? Our first breakfast as a couple was in a Grandville restaurant where we had pork chops, eggs, bread and hash browns. The pork chop put Fran on notice that I do not always go for traditional breakfasts, but she did not object. We occasionally still laugh about it, especially when we drive through the town once every two or three years.

From there we went to our destination cabin at Saugatuck, nestled deep in Lake Michigan dune country. We had a few very good days there, even taking in a few dune buggy rides. But it was not to be for long, for the harsh realities of life were pressing us with both of us going to school along with the attendant tuition bills. Our next honeymoon was our "retirement honeymoon," a few decades later!

After the three big events of *my* graduation and *our* wedding and honeymoon, we faced an interregnum kind of summer. Fran had one year of college left, while I was facing three years of seminary. That summer, Mother and Jane went to visit The Netherlands, while Dad stayed home. He did not want to fly and thus never returned to his Frisian homeland. We agreed to live in with him in the Prins home for the duration of their trip. We had both procured full time jobs at Pine Rest, working in different buildings but the same graveyard

shift. It meant we could ride together and, have the same schedule and we would be there when Dad needed us in the morning and evening: very convenient for everyone.

Unfortunately, the job was the pits for Fran. She was working with adult mental patients in a very old, dark and somber building that gave her the creeps, especially when some patient would begin screaming or yelling or wanted to get out. After trying hard for a few weeks, she was so out of sorts that we agreed she should quit. I called the Hospital and informed them of this decision and did not allow them to try to change her/our mind. Due to her conscientious work as receptionist at Robinson's furniture factory, they took her on fulltime for the rest of the summer. That was very nice of them, but it made it rather inconvenient for us, what with two separate long commutes and different schedules. But we had no choice in the matter and it was, after all, a temporary situation. So we made the best of it. The situation was not exactly recommended for a brand new married couple.

In due course, Mother and Jane came home and we were free to move into our "new" apartment. It was quite a switch for both of us as a married couple, of course, but even more so for Fran, who was not accustomed to living and sleeping on a busy road with heavy traffic coming and going at all times. But Fran is an adjuster and soon got used to the noise. This has stood us in good stead, for later we have lived on many busy, noisy arteries in various places, though also in extremely quiet spots.

As to how we furnished our apartment, we bought a complete bedroom set from some family in town that we later gave to Francis & Trena as payment for the debt of \$50 we owed them. That was when we were ready to leave for Nigeria some three years later. We ended up with decent but old furniture best described as "Sally Ann furniture." It included an old pedal organ that we used to accompany the singing we would often do with visiting friends.

Our landlord/lady was a pious elderly Roman Catholic couple well into their eighties. She was born in that house and never lived anywhere else until her daughter took her to New Jersey after the husband died. She was a sweet and pious old lady whom we loved and supported in every way we could. She would often initiate spiritual discussions; she was so happy in the Lord. Yet, I am ashamed to say, I was so narrow in my understanding of the Gospel that I had difficulty believing that this pious Catholic Christian could be "saved." The breadth that I mentioned with reference to Kuyperian thought was still under construction.

One of the decisions we had to face was that of family. We are both from large families and we never questioned the idea of having children. The question was when. Since both of us would be in school for the first year and we would probably be in debt the following year, we "decided" to hold off for two years and then we would start a family. Good thing Rev. Gritter did not overhear our discussion! We stayed firmly with that decision and it looked all along that we were successful and in control of things.

The summer went by fast. Fall was around the corner and we prepared ourselves for the new school year, Fran to complete her college and I to begin my Seminary career.

## Chapter 11<

### Fran at Calvin College

(1959-1962)

**1959**

*Note: The “I” in this chapter is Fran; Jan is relegated to the third person.*

I didn’t really “go off to college.” I lived at home and drove to Calvin every day. In that respect there really wasn’t much change from my high school years. After the first day of school I wrote, “I had English, Bible and German classes today. Much like high school.”

One big change, though, was that Calvin was much larger: Now I was in a Freshman class with 667 others. Orientation week consisted of lectures, picnics, a talent program, tests, filling in “millions” of registration cards and a social “Mixing Bowl.” Another big change for me was that now my 24 year old sister, Jane, was one of my classmates! Jane left school when she turned 16 and then went to work fulltime. In her spare time she took high school courses by correspondence through American School. She got restless and decided she was ready for a new challenge, Calvin College, and a new career, elementary teaching. Now we were three Prins girls at Calvin with all three wanting to become school teachers!

Just to summarize where the rest of the siblings were at this point in time. Ray and Dewey had already built houses on our family’s farm acreage. Henry had built a house on his own property in nearby Cascade. And now Henrietta married Luke Glashouwer on October 23, 1959, early in my freshman year.

My parents decided to offer an acre of land to *each* of their seven children! Or would we prefer \$500 in cash instead? I (un)wisely chose the cash; what did I want with an acre of land? My dad had always thought that *owning* land and *working* on the land was the essential thing for a good future. He did not see much point in education, especially advanced education. An interesting observation as I am writing these memoirs: Among Dad’s descendants, there is *no one* who is a farmer on his/her own land. In fact, there are really no farmers among us, although some might qualify as having hobby farms. There are, however, *many* with advanced degrees in different areas.

\$500 was a lot of money in 1959. I had received a \$250 scholarship from the National Union of Christian Schools to cover my first year’s tuition. In 1958 John had received a tuition scholarship also, but for only \$90, for tuition was based on geography and he lived that much farther away. This meant I was now financially all set for awhile at college. With this much money available, I should have lived on campus and had a true college experience. But Mom was quite strong-willed and was sure the “neighbours would talk” if

I left home, so I stayed living at home. Jane, Trena & I drove to school together every day and returned home together. Thus in many ways, college really was a continuation of high school for me. We lived about twelve miles from school and so once again, after-school sports or clubs were not much a part of my life.

My subjects the first semester were Bible, Biology, English, German, World History and Phys Ed. I didn't prepare very well for my first Bible quiz. Even though I had read the parables many times, I had never paid careful attention to the reasons Jesus gave for speaking in parables. Dr. Bandstra quizzed us on Luke 8:10 – "I speak in parables, so that though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand." I hadn't a clue what that meant and I failed the quiz. Imagine that, an almost straight "A" student! So maybe college was going to be a bit different from high school, after all!

In many ways I felt that I knew what I needed to know in order to become an elementary school teacher. These four years of college were just kind of a necessary "evil" that stood in my way to become old enough to handle a classroom. I definitely did not take advantage of a liberal arts education in order to broaden my horizon and deepen my world view. And, if the truth be told, I was also on the lookout for a mate in order to claim a "Mrs." degree!

A regular Sunday afternoon event for me was participating in the Calvin Mission Club outreaches as John outlined them in Chapter 10. Again, it was a continuation of what I had done during my last semester of high school. Our parents were quite strict about Sunday observance and the kind of activities were allowed, but they never had any objections to Mission Club. The pre-seminary students from Calvin did the preaching and we all helped with the singing and visiting. We always saw to it that we did lots of socializing with each other as well!

We also continued the tradition of having groups of friends over, especially on Sunday evenings after church. We had a noisy pump organ at our house and I tried my best to play the hymns while singing along with the others in the group. We knew we made a lot of noise and we thought it was actually quite joyful. Trena's steady boyfriend, Francis Lieuwen, who was coming to our house quite regularly at this point, had other memories! He says that when he opened the door, he was bombarded with lots of noise and could hardly tell what song we were trying to sing!

The Harkema girls also hosted lots of group events, both at their house and in other places such as beach picnics and skating parties. They invited us three Prins girls to a beach party at Lake Michigan in early fall 1959. It's possible that John, who later became my significant other, was there also. He has an old dark photo in which some girl with long blonde hair is being thrown in the air by several young men. Was that me? I do have a diary entry on October 4, 1959, which says "Talked to John Boer – a very nice kid." But John was not really part of the picture yet. I wrote about several dates with different boys, sometimes with boys who were going through somewhat of a "time out" with their regular girlfriends. As a typical seventeen year old, I thought I was falling in love all the

time. Mother would sometimes complain about my “night life” and act “perturbed” because I was staying out too late.

The diary entry for December 1 says, “Another day that I shall never forget.” This is what happened:

I was driving to school this morning and I must have been going a little too fast. I hit an ice spot and, you guessed it, I went in the ditch. The car landed on its side. It wouldn't have been so bad but we had 18 dozen eggs in the car that we were supposed to deliver to someone on the way to school. They all broke and what a mess. The car just plain stinks and it's at least \$150 damage.

But I finished that day's entry with “but now some better news – J.M. called and asked me out for Friday nite and I'm so happy.”

The Kelly Girl agency that I worked for during the summer of 1959 had a rule that the company they assigned me to could not hire me on their own until a three month gap had occurred. Well, Converta Sofa must have been happy with my work because the boss, Robert Miller, phoned me on December 2 and asked me to work part time again. They were very flexible about my hours and I was able to still attend all my Calvin classes. I worked full time for the two weeks of Christmas vacation and even received a “ham, Faberge cologne and an Avon Cream Sachet” as gifts at the office Christmas party.

## *1960*

The month of January was still first semester of the college year. Exams, spread out over a week, were given toward the end of the month. That meant that Christmas vacation was partially spoiled by having to finish class assignments. All the projects or papers that were still due in the New Year and the impending exams definitely put a damper on the feeling of true freedom during school vacations.

The second semester started in February and I continued with all the same subjects, again making it seem very similar to high school. I did, however, add one course and that was “Fundamentals of Speech.” This was the year when Kennedy was nominated as president for the Democratic Party. The big question was about his Roman Catholic allegiance. Would he be responsible to the people or to the pope? We were to debate on that topic in Speech class and I was assigned to be pro-Kennedy. My professor told me afterwards that I had a good voice and good logic; I should consider a career in radio broadcasting. However, my mind was made up that the Lord wanted me to be an elementary teacher. No one was able to divert me from those plans.

My friend Carol from high school days was also at Calvin. However her schedule was totally opposite from mine. She lived almost fifteen miles in one direction and I in the other direction. We, therefore, did not see much of each other either at school or in other places,

even though we did do some phoning. However, a girl from Iowa named Mary Ann Uken was in many of my classes and we became good friends.

During Spring Break the Harkema girls organized a skating party at Tarry Hall in Grandville. My diary entry of March 30 says “Skated with John Boer quite a bit. Lots of fun.” It was *years* later that I found out John had been dating one of the Harkema girls and he wanted to make her jealous; that’s why he kept asking me to skate with him!

Shortly after that, it was time to find dates for the Freshman Girls’ Banquet. That was an event where the girl was supposed to invite the boy. That was called a TWIRP (the woman is requested to pay) date. Mary Ann was planning to invite someone and she encouraged me to do the same so we could go together. On April 18 I got up the nerve to ask John to be my date for that banquet and he agreed. But before that banquet took place, he asked me for a hymn sing date with him on the following Sunday. He said he thought it was a good idea to get to know each other a bit better before going together to the Girls’ Banquet. Comment from John: “She fell for the excuse!” Therefore, May 1 was officially our first real date. We went to Burton Heights CRC for the monthly City Wide Hymn Sing. My comment: “He’s a nice kid but different from what I’m used to.”

Report on the Freshman Girls’ Banquet on May 6: “Had a nice time and John said he did too. He bought me a purple corsage. Went to Knollcrest Barn afterwards for a party. Got home at 2:30 AM.”

Then for May 14, I wrote:

Went with John Boer to Tulip Time in Holland. We saw the parade and *klompen* dance. Afterwards we went to the Mission Club outing at Prof. Swet’s cottage. Haven’t enjoyed myself so thoroughly for quite a long time. Sat in the car in our yard talking until 12:15 and then Mother hinted it was time to come in by turning the yard light on and off. I don’t know what time it would have been otherwise! John is so serious-minded, at least some of the time. I don’t know if I could ever fall for him or not.

I must have talked to Trena about kissing a boy. I wrote that John tried but I turned my head and refused. Trena gave me some wise advice: “He just wants to ‘cuddle’ with someone; he has no sisters around here, no mother, and therefore on a date, they want some affection.”

Another date on May 22 and again to evening church and a hymn sing, this time at Neland Ave CRC. John and his brother Harry had to sing there and the comment in the diary was “They sang very well.” Sitting in the car in our driveway, we kissed! (Theresa, take note!!) My excuse: “After all, he is going away for three and a half months.” “Sometimes he acts like he’s in love with me and then other times he acts as if he doesn’t give a hang. Boys are sure a problem.”

Now it was time for second semester exams. I had become fairly comfortable at taking exams and got quite good grades. All my grades for Freshman year at Calvin were A's and B's and my class ranking was 37 out of 668.

After taking exams, I rode with another Calvin student all the way to Kanawha, Iowa, to spend a week with Mary Ann and family. They lived on a very productive farm, one that I'm sure my father would have been jealous of! Mary Ann, her parents and her two brothers certainly showed me great hospitality during the visit.

When I got back to Grand Rapids, my summer job at Converta Sofa was waiting for me. So were a few letters from John who had left town on May 24 and gone to his home in Alberni, B.C. He had hoped to get a job at the local plywood factory where he had worked before coming to Calvin. However, they were not hiring at all and, therefore, he started applying at all kinds of places. In this first letter dated June 1 he wrote, "Just think: in Grand Rapids I had a chance for three jobs!" Did he already miss me and wish that he'd stayed in GR? Then he realized he'd forgotten something and asked, "Would you please send me a picture of yourself? I'd like to have one. Otherwise I may forget what you look like by the time we are together again."

Next letter was written on June 8. He still hadn't found any work even after trying in Victoria and "another smaller island." I'm not sure when I wrote my first letter to him, because he didn't save letters the way I did. However, John was "looking out for a letter" from me, "but so far nothing has come. I'm too eager and too impatient."

The letter of June 11 had exciting news, "I found a job - as a porter on the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) and will go back and forth between Vancouver and Winnipeg. I will work sixteen hours a day for five days and then I have five days off." He was going to have to work some Sundays which he didn't like, but also said he "didn't feel guilty about it." The pay would be \$265 a month plus free room and board ("free train") while on duty. He invited me to come to Winnipeg and said "It's only about 1200 miles from 48<sup>th</sup> Street." Then he added, "Presently I am doing three things at once. I am chewing nails (some things never change!), looking at your picture with the pretty smile for inspiration, and writing this letter." It seems that a letter from me had arrived!

In the next letter he described his new job of making beds and polishing shoes. "A Negro is our instructor, Mr. Ramsey by name. He is one of the very few Negroes in Vancouver and jokingly refers to himself as Vancouver's token Black. This man is really pleasant, well-mannered, and such a good instructor. People here are not prejudiced against them as they are south of the border." Then he congratulated me on my new niece, Jeanne, but added, "You'll have quite a way to go before you catch up with me. I already have fourteen and the fifteenth is a couple of days overdue." He had trouble remembering birthdays and wrote, "It seems to me you told me once that your birthday is sometime during the summer (it's actually in March!). Just when it is, I have forgotten; let me know, will you?" He also counseled me, "Don't get too discouraged. All Christians have their ups and downs. I have them as well as you. It is in such times that the faithfulness of God can

be so comforting. Even though you or I may doubt at times, God is still there, and He will keep His promises.”

I must have counseled him as well! He wrote, “Yes, boss, I will quit chewing my nails. Since I received your bawling out, I don’t think I have chewed more than one nail. That is a good start for one who has been at it for sixteen years. Keep on reminding me, ok?” Actually I did and still am some 50 years later!

He expressed concern about my having to get up so early. I rode to work in downtown Grand Rapids with a couple from Alto who worked in the factory and thus got to work by 7 AM. “Do you mean that you have to get up at 5:45 every day? That sort of thing is murder.” He seems to have changed his mind on that one because he has often gotten up *way before 5:45 AM.!*

We had some discussion about our age difference and that I thought I was much too young to make a serious commitment to anyone. He seemed to think otherwise, “It’s at our age (18 and 22) that courtship ought to be taken seriously.” “Quit thinking about yourself as immature and stupid. You are not at all.” And we certainly wrote about the faith issue. “Both of us are Christians and are eager to serve God in one fashion or another. I would not have any interest in a girl who is not fully dedicated to God. There must be first of all, I believe, a spiritual union. Only upon such a basis would I ever begin anything.”

And so the correspondence continued all summer. He felt I was having way too much fun and not working very hard in my air-conditioned office. After all I was often writing about going swimming with friends, going to Detroit to see a special travelogue and taking a few days off to visit relatives in Niagara Falls, ON. He, on the other hand, was slaving away as porter and having a hard time of it. He frequently got “train sick” and was almost fired once because of it, but then they decided to give him one more chance to prove himself.

John came back to Grand Rapids on September 7, in time to serve as group leader for Freshman Orientation Week. Because all the students in his group were from West Michigan, they didn’t feel they needed any help at orientation, certainly not from a Canadian!

And I, of course, registered at Calvin for my Sophomore year. Again I took mostly required courses such as Reformed Doctrine, American Literature, General Psychology, Elements of Music and I continued with German. One course finally had something to do with teaching, “History of American Education,” but, was I ever disappointed! It was much too theoretical for my liking and taught by a professor who had been teaching this course for “at least 100 years” and hadn’t done much to update his notes.

But my social life was definitely improving! The Saturday of that week, after John returned from B.C., we had a very special date by “row boating” on Gun Lake. I wrote in my diary about “several dates and coffees” so that things seemed to be progressing nicely. Many of these dates meant going to hymn sings or Mission Club activities together.

On September 29 I wrote about John: "I think about him a lot and I get jealous when he talks to others." "I know he's a true Christian and has very high goals in life. But is he God's choice for me? How is one to know?"

Next entry is on November 14 and I reported, "I've been so happy lately. He is so wonderfully sweet and I tried hard to be nice back to him too and then we really get along good!" "Now I just know that I'm in love." He had already declared the same in a letter of late June. So now we were happily on the same page!

### *1961*

First and only entry for the year: "Began the year with John this time and maybe every year from now on??? Tonight he asked me to go steady. I told him that I'd let him know in five years. He said we would surely be married by that time!?!??"

Second semester started and I continued with most of the same courses. But two interesting courses were added: Educational Psychology and Child Psychology. The Education course was still much too theoretical for me, but it was taught by a teacher who was extremely passionate about his subject. He often quoted Psalm 69:9 – "For zeal for your house consumes me" and said that unless we had that kind of "zeal" we would not become good teachers. Child Psychology I really enjoyed, because finally we were getting some classes about my passion: teaching children.

The summer of 1961 I again worked in downtown Grand Rapids at the same office. But the difference was that this summer John stayed in Grand Rapids as well and worked at a bakery very close to where I was working. I enjoyed the air-conditioned comfort from the hot, humid summer weather, but he had to slave it out in the heat of the bakery! Many times we would both bring our lunches to work and enjoy a picnic at a park in Campau Square. Spending time together was certainly more fun than just corresponding with each other!

This was also the summer in which I first met John's parents. His Dad was a delegate to CRC Synod in Grand Rapids and his Mom decided to come along. Because his Dad was very busy with meetings and committee work, I did not see much of him, but I did get to spend some time with his Mom. She was very impressed with my different hand work projects and my paint-by-number work. She bought some painting equipment while in Grand Rapids and worked on them later back home.

Then it was back to school for my Junior year. Courses were beginning to get a bit more interesting and varied: American Government, Principles of Sociology, Psychology of Abnormal People, Principles of Teaching in Elementary School and Speech for the Classroom Teacher. I started to pay a bit more attention to the lectures and, instead of feeling that I knew everything there was to know about becoming an elementary teacher, I felt I was learning something of practical value!

One weekend in September, Trena, John & I drove to Sault Ste Marie, ON, to visit Francis Lieuwen, who was working as an engineer on the International Bridge there. They were talking about getting married “soon” and then we also started talking about “maybe” getting married next summer. Soon after that we started shopping for a diamond engagement ring. John wanted to see what kind of ring I liked and then he actually ordered one from Marty Hamstra, a classmate who was also a jeweler.

It was a big day on December 15 when we got engaged. I no longer kept a diary but I wrote in a letter to him (it seems that sometimes I preferred writing to speaking to him directly), “It was funny how you surprised yourself as well as me!” We both decided that it was “the prettiest ring” we had ever seen. And I still like that ring now, even after 50 years! Jean Willems, who was engaged to Simon Wolfert, John’s roommate, expressed surprise at how one could be surprised about an engagement. They were both quite recent immigrants from The Netherlands and an engagement there is a very official event with an appropriate large party. It’s not something you can “surprise” each other with!

*1962*

Beginning of another semester and again time to sign up for new classes. John had been telling me, somewhat in jest and somewhat seriously, that my Elementary Education major was an easier one than his Pre-Seminary one. He said that’s why my grades were constantly better than his. So I accepted his challenge and took a course that he had taken the previous semester: History of Ancient Philosophy with Dr. Evan Runner. Dr. Runner had a reputation for being a very learned scholar who had some revolutionary Kuyperian ideas. His lectures were fascinating but hard to follow. By the end of a class session he had written *everywhere* on the blackboard, erased everything and written over top again! It was very hard to take notes from him, but I did understand the general ideas he was trying to get across. I got a B+ for the course; John doesn’t want his grade to be recorded!

In addition to that unusual Philosophy course, I also took German Literature and Canadian History. After all, I was going to marry a Canadian; so I thought I should take a course in the country’s history. For my Education courses that semester I had two interesting ones: Teaching Elementary School Arithmetic and Teaching Elementary School Reading. Finally, I was getting some practical courses that I definitely was able to use in my teaching years.

It was a great semester in more ways than just the class work. I was also preparing for our wedding. Trena & I had made the decision to have a double wedding! The announcement was in the *Grand Rapids Press* on March 13, 1962, and the date was set for June 5. Our pictures were side by side. We were trying to be practical – our immediate family was the same, our few relatives were the same ones and we had many of the same friends at Calvin. Why have them attend *two* weddings in one summer? And then brother Ray added, “Why should we waste two perfectly good summer evenings by going to two weddings?” It took me many years to figure out that his real motive was that he wanted to walk me down the

aisle! With two brides it would just make real practical sense to have Dad walk the oldest one and he, being the oldest brother, walk the other one.

I guess I have always been a record keeper. I wrote down and saved lots of slips of expenses of our wedding. Here is the list from the florist:

2 each bouquets for the brides and bridesmaids	
1 flower girl basket	
16 boutonnieres	
2 corsages for the mothers	
8 assorted corsages	
1 centerpiece for bridal table	
flowers for 13 tables, candelabra flowers,	
rental fee for 2 candelabras and 4 palms	Total - \$52.93

Some other interesting details:

Invitations @ J.C. Keena Printing	19.24
Stamps @ Post Office	6.64
Janitor's fee for use of church basement	20.00
Food – mostly homemade	41.08

Quite a good deal right? At least if you compare it to today's expenses! Mother sewed our dresses and we bought the following for them:

Material for 2 dresses @ Fabric House	38.37
Material for 2 veils @ Fabric House	2.71
Loops and sequins @ Steketees	.66
Covered buttons @ Fenstemackers	4.37
2 Hats @ Kingsland	1.04
Total = \$47.15.	

Mother's work = priceless! And the dresses were beautiful!



John

The wedding took place on the evening of June 5, 1962 at East Paris CRC, the church where Trena & I had been members for over eleven years. The article in the *Grand Rapids Press* said it all: "The brides chose identical floor-length lace gowns designed with scalloped necklines trimmed with sequins. Matching lace hats held their veils and they carried white carnations."

& Fran's Wedding Photo \*

The whole Prins family was involved: In addition to walking me down the aisle, Ray “presided at the church parlor reception,” Henry was an usher, Dewey was the toastmaster, Jane was Trena’s maid of honor, and Henrietta was in the gift room. Our oldest nephew, Chucky, was the ring bearer and our oldest niece, Joanne, was the flower girl. The only “outsider” was my friend, Mary Ann, who served as maid of honor for me. John’s brother Harry served as his best man. Unfortunately, no one else from the Boer family was able to come. The Lieuwens were well represented, but even though it was a double wedding, this is *my* memoir and they can tell their own story!



*The Prins Family – June 5, 1962 \**

A friend, Glenn Verbrugge, played organ for the occasion. The grooms, John & Francis, sang all three stanzas of *O Perfect Love*, the last verse of which says:

Grant us the joy which brightens earthly sorrow.  
Grant us the peace which calms all earthly strife.  
And to life’s day the glorious unknown morrow  
That dawns upon eternal love and life.

I am happy to report in 2013 that these words have been very true for both couples. Then John alone sang *The Lord’s Prayer*, and he did a wonderful job.

A few days after John received his Bachelor’s (B.A.) degree from Calvin, he married and was no longer a bachelor. I, on the other hand, received my Mrs. “degree” before I even qualified for my bachelors--B.A.! It’s a crazy world.

And now begins a whole new chapter (or should I say book?) of my life and, therefore, the rest of this writing project will be that of our joint memoirs.

## Chapter 12<

### The Seminary Couple

(1962-1965)

Since our fusion on June 5, this is now *our* story, our combined story, no longer two individual stories. We are now a couple with one main story that all along the way occasionally slides into the affairs of each individual and then brings us back together again into the greater unity, a pendulum swinging back and forth. This period is neither just about my seminary days nor just about Fran's senior year at Calvin and her two years of teaching in MI. It is our combined story. Nevertheless, it was the seminary that mainly determined the comings and goings of our lives, including our social lives, but definitely excluding our economic life: That came 95% from Fran during her two years of teaching. Nevertheless, except where indicated otherwise, the "I" in this and the following chapters refers to me, Jan/John, the main writer.

*Fran: From Student to Teacher*

#### *The Married Senior Student—1962*

First, then, Fran's side of the story. She would have happily skipped her senior year in order to dive right into the love and ambition of her life, that is, teaching primary school. She could not skip it, but even today she feels that Calvin's Education Department did not help her much to be a better teacher. And I believe that too. For one thing, the department was in a rut and not creative. Secondly, teaching and the skills and imagination that it requires have always come natural to her. She simply did not need the tired stuff the department was dishing out on a daily basis. Alas, the system required it and would not relent. So, off she went after the excitement of summer 1962, back to Calvin. She still attended classes at the old campus, even though the total move to Knollcrest was imminent. The Franklin campus was in the process of getting sold to the Grand Rapids School of Music.

And now here's Fran's own account of her senior academic year. *The "I" in this section refers to Fran, not John.*

A whole new chapter of my life, including a new name. At that time it was assumed that a married woman would take her husband's last name. And that I did – gladly! So now my name was legally changed to Frances Ann Boer – not a trace left of "Foekje Prins," my birth name. Actually the way the Dutch and some others do it makes more sense. In that system I would be Frances Ann Boer-Prins, i.e. the same last name as my husband, but the hyphenated part would show that I was married while still giving recognition to my original last name.

We had just celebrated our third “Monthiversary” with poems, letters and flowers and were happily settled in our upstairs apartment at the T-junction of Paris Avenue with Franklin Street SE, when it was time for me to start my senior year at Calvin. At last it was time to start my practice teaching or “Directed Teaching & Observation” as it was officially known. I was assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade at Oakdale Christian School, just a short distance away. I was able to walk to my assignment while other classmates had a daily commute of considerable distance.

But the unfortunate part for me was that Mrs. Nancy Vander Heiden, my supervising teacher, was not all that keen on having yet another student. She was an excellent teacher and loved being in the classroom, but she regularly had student teachers from Calvin assigned to her, and was therefore limited in the time she actually spent with her own class. It was, however, wonderful for me to spend time every day observing her methods and taking copious notes. She had been teaching for a long time and had great ideas for reading groups, art projects, math games, indoor recess activities etc. Somewhat reluctantly she allowed me to start doing a bit of “teaching,” first by doing the Bible lesson and then by working with one of the reading groups.

She definitely had a problem child in the group that year. In today’s climate (2013) he might have been labeled with some kind of mental disorder, but then he was simply regarded as a difficult child. He would act out, speak up at inappropriate times, and was extremely restless and stubborn. Her good normal discipline methods did not work with him. But I observed her efforts with him and learned a lot from that as well.

Over the course of the semester, our Calvin Education teacher, Miss Vander Ark, came several times to observe me in action as a student teacher. She would afterwards call me into her office for a discussion and give pointers on how to improve a lesson. It was all rather nerve racking but I made it. And ended up with a “B” for the course!

The student teaching took all morning, every morning and, of course, gave me lots of homework and preparation as well. In addition to that, I took classes in American History and Social Psychology in the afternoon at Calvin. So I had plenty of work to keep me occupied.

During the second semester I took one very useful Education course: Principles of Elementary School Art Education, taught by Prof. Edgar Boeve, who was a highly regarded artist, both on campus and in the wider community. He taught us many practical skills and techniques for the classroom. I certainly made grateful use of many of his ideas and suggestions during my teaching career.

I enjoyed a course called Principles of Speech Correction in which we learned how to help children with basic speech problems. An advanced level course titled English Language Development turned out to be a fascinating study of the changes in the English language throughout its long history. American History was again a good course which required lots of memorization. At one time I knew thousands of detailed facts about that history, but I’m afraid I’ve forgotten almost everything.

Without having taken first or second year Dutch, I really got brave and signed up for a third year course called “Dutch Classics.” Brother Ray was proud of me for making that decision and we had some interesting discussions on books and authors he was familiar with. And I was proud of myself that, in spite of the fact that I had never learned Dutch at school, I could understand it well enough to participate in this class. All of Dad’s Dutch Bible reading and prayers had paid off!

When I look over this list of courses taken in my senior year, I realize that I was beginning to enjoy a liberal arts education after all, just when the four years were about to end. It seems that I was finally growing up!

For all of us in the Education Department, March and April, 1963, were taken up with activity directly related to finding a teaching job. There was lots of competition for the schools in the immediate Grand Rapids area, especially for those of us who were married to Calvin College or Seminary students. I sent my application to eighteen schools within ten miles of our apartment on Franklin Street. Eight schools called me in for an interview. Mid April I accepted the job offer of teaching second grade at Godwin Christian in Wyoming, a suburb of Grand Rapids. Happily that issue was now settled and a job, starting in September, was guaranteed. Just a few more weeks of classes and exams and it was time for graduation.

My freshman class at Calvin in 1959 had 668 students. Only 405 graduated with me in 1963. I’m sure there were many reasons but that does seem like an extremely high drop-out rate. For reasons explained in John’s account in Chapter 12, I did not actually attend my college graduation, but was awarded my diploma *in absentia*. The diploma is even today hanging on our office wall.

### *Finally: Teaching and Ph.T*

September 1963. Finally everything I had been dreaming about, working toward and planning for most of my life now happened: I stepped into my very own classroom! The second grade class consisted of 24 lively children, 15 girls and only 9 boys. The room was large with plenty of space for my file cabinet, desk and the children’s desks. Lots of blackboards for me to use as well as lots of bulletin boards and window space for displaying the children’s work.

I was having fun with a capital F!—Famke’s Fun! It was a very busy life, but thoroughly enjoyable. We were expected to teach *all* subjects: Bible, Math, Reading, Social Studies, Science, Art & Music. Playground duty was also a regular chore and I would sometimes use that time for a bit of a P.E. lesson! Indoor recess activities and supervision were simply added to our assignment on days when that was necessary.

Making lesson plans for the week and long-range plans for the semester was now based on my own decisions with very little input from the principal, but all the teachers’ manuals

were certainly a big help. The other teachers were also helpful since I was new, but every teacher was basically independent. I mostly followed the plans and suggestions of my supervising teacher from last year when it came to Reading Groups. The idea was to divide the class into three groups based on ability: slow, medium and fast. No matter what kind of creative names one gave to the groups, the children had it figured out instantly and knew where they fit in. One of the highlights for all second graders was learning how to write in cursive or the way “big people” do. That would no longer be true today (2013) as cursive writing has recently been removed from the curriculum in some jurisdictions.

During the first week of teaching I learned that the first grade teacher, Janie Sikkema, lived in an apartment just down the street from us. That was great news for it meant I didn’t need to worry about transport. She loved driving and I loved riding and paying for the ride. I kept in touch with her for many years and she became a friend of my sister Jane as well. The other second grade teacher was Dorothy Wallinga who soon switched careers and became a secretary at Christian Reformed World Missions. In that way I kept in touch with her as well after we started working for CRWM. In fact, only a week ago in 2013, she and her husband had lunch with us in Vancouver, where she was in town running a Board meeting of CRWM.

I told you just now that in my last year at Calvin I took a course in Dutch classics. I guess that proves I was no longer embarrassed about my roots but wanted to learn more about my birth country. During early December I introduced the story of Sinterklaas (St. Nicholas) to the children, brought pepernoten, the spiced cookies, and taught them some of the Dutch songs for that season. Due to language confusion, Americans translated “Sinterklaas” as “Santa Claus,” but historically they were two quite different characters. At any rate, one of the parents got quite upset, because she felt that I was teaching about Santa Claus instead of sticking to the Christmas story from the Bible. No amount of discussion could change her mind and she threatened to tell “the School Board,” so I decided not to teach that story again. It was quite typical of Christian school constituents in the 1960s to be suspicious of “new” things when it came to teaching about different traditions.

Teaching is what I was meant to do, and believe it or not, I was getting paid to do it. My salary was \$3,600 for the year and without any deductions taken out, take-home pay was almost \$70 per week. Since John was a full time student in seminary, I now qualified for the Ph.T (putting husband through) degree. We thought we were *rich* with this kind of regular money coming in.

Actually I *should* have earned more. Another first year teacher, a male, was earning quite a bit more. The reasoning was this: men were considered the head of the household and thus supporting a couple or family; women were only working because they wanted to and thus didn’t need as much. My gentle explanation that I was the (financial) head of our household fell on amused but deaf ears.

One Friday when the principal came into my classroom and handed me my check, one of the little children was disappointed, not to say horrified. He thought I was teaching him

and his class because I wanted to, not because it was a *paying job* for me. He acted as if I had betrayed him; it was like seeing his mom getting paid to take care of him.

On April 1, 1964 I happily signed the contract for the next school year. We were all going to receive a *big* raise of almost 15% in September which meant the promised pay would be close to \$79 per week. Now we felt we could go out for hamburgers and fries a bit more often!

In September 1964 there were 22 children in my class, one of the smallest classes in the school. One of the boys was repeating second grade, one new boy joined the school and the others came directly from Godwin's first grade. Since everything was not as new as the first year, I became a little more daring and creative. I tried some ambitious clay projects, water paints and chalk drawing during art classes. Prof. Boeve would have been proud of my efforts. In a class report I wrote, "It was fun to make our balls of clay turn into kittens, dogs, snakes, turtles or even dinosaurs. We plan to paint the animals soon to make them look really alive. If you visit our room, we hope you will remember to look at our zoo!"



*What  
a*

One little girl, Marva Steensma, was exceptionally talented at art; she made a beautiful chalk drawing of me which I still have in my file folder today.

*Teacher Fran looked like, at least from  
child's perspective! \**

Bible lessons were quite familiar to most of the children because they heard the stories at home, at Sunday School and in their previous grade. It was therefore a challenge to make these lessons exciting and new. Sometimes I read interpretively straight from the Bible or a Bible Story Book. Memorizing and acting out the story was an excellent method, but, since it took a lot of preparation time, I didn't do that very often.

I also decided to try something new in the Reading Groups. Since in “real life” we meet people of all different abilities, I felt the same should be true in these groups. If slow readers hear only other slow readers, they assume everyone reads like that; if fast readers hear only fast readers, they assume everyone reads like that. I experimented and made groups with children of varying reading ability. That confused them and they could no longer tell which group was supposedly slow or fast! The experiment was successful and I used that same approach again and again many years later.

The Math lesson was often one of my favourite subjects. Using little markers, I figured out a way to keep their hands and minds busy all at the same time. The idea of numbers operating in “families” was a helpful concept which I frequently used. For basic addition and subtraction it meant that once a child understood that  $2 + 3 = 5$ , he should also realize that  $3 + 2 = 5$  and that  $5 - 3 = 2$  and  $5 - 2 = 3$ . If I asked them to show me the possibilities with the “family” of 2, 3 and 5, they moved their paper markers around on their desk to come up with the right answers. Toward the end of the school year, the same principle operated with multiplication and division. So the “family” of 2, 3 and 6 meant:  $2 \times 3 = 6$ ,  $3 \times 2 = 6$ ,  $6/3 = 2$  and  $6/2 = 3$ . Once children grasped that concept, memorizing multiplication tables was simple. Many years later I used this same math teaching method with adults in Nigeria and it worked there as well!

### *B. The Seminary Side of Things*

In this section, the “I” is John--mostly. Though we are going to move into the new world of Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS), it was not a totally new world to me. By now I was used to GR and to life on this campus, even though it had moved. I had grown accustomed to American academic life. I pretty well knew all the 40+ students in my Seminary freshman year, since most of them had gone through the same pre-sem college courses I had. Though still as exciting, the life of romance was now different with it being more settled and the chase a thing of the past.

But neither was it totally the same. We students were older and more mature after our college years. Some were professionals prior to coming to Seminary. We had a well-known local architect. We had a teacher or two and, I believe, a farmer. There were no immature college freshmen around, since the Seminary was located in a separate nook of the campus, nestled between the trees behind the Seminary pond you read about in Chapter 10. We would move about on the college campus to use the book store, the dining hall, or library, but the theological library has its own separate floor and staff. Only a few college students had cause to come near the Seminary, though they were free and welcome to do so. So, we had our own little kingdom of more mature students.

We also had more mature professors, all of whom had been engaged in their various theological disciplines much longer than the average college professor, often in a college setting. There were no young upstarts in the Seminary like Nicholas Wolterstorff in the College. There was one exception in Church History by the name of Henry Zwaanstra.

Apparently they could not find a more experienced prof for the subject who was also well versed in CRC history. He spent his entire career at the Seminary and did well but never taught our class. We were taught Church History, including that of CRC, by his predecessor President John Kromminga.

### *Theological Disciplines and Their Profs*

You may be wondering about the term “theological disciplines.” I won’t bore you with too many details I hope, but some of you will be curious. If you’re not interested, just skip this section. Theology is not everyone’s cup of tea. However, this will help you know something about the training of your pastor, though undoubtedly, like everything else, it has undergone pretty drastic changes.

Theology is divided into many separate disciplines, with most profs concentrating on one of them. Here’s a breakdown of most of the subjects:

**Old Testament and New Testament courses**—here you study how the Bible came to be, the similarities and differences between the two, special studies of each book in those testaments and their main themes, often at least partially in their original languages. Hence, Greek and Hebrew belong there. It also includes archeology and other ancient languages.

**Systematic Theology**—here you peruse all the Christian doctrines in great detail, including disagreements among denominations and theologians. Here the creeds are covered as well. These courses are often mixed with philosophical issues.

**Philosophical courses**—here you specialize in philosophy itself as well in ethics and morals.

**Church History**—this speaks for itself, but it is much more complicated and exciting than it sounds, for it often is influenced or paralleled by politics and other cultural sectors.

**Study of other religions** such as Islam, Hinduism, etc.

**Missiology** is the study of Biblical principles of and reasons for mission. Also covers the theory and history of missions along with missionary methods that deal with how to approach the people of this or that religion, worldview or culture. It studies urban missions, and various forms of chaplaincies. This specialty makes much use of anthropology and sociology.

**Practical Theology** is largely a how-to-do kind of course. Here you study how to make sermons; the theory and practice of preaching; how to pastor your church members; church administration; church education; liturgics, which means how to

organize a worship service, how to do the sacraments like baptism and communion, how to conduct wedding ceremonies, funerals, etc., etc.

There is so much to learn and study that three years, as it was in our day, was simply too short. Too much had to be crammed into this short period so that we were tremendously busy studying languages, research and write many, many papers and study for unceasing tests, not to speak of the final Bible contents test and the comprehensive exam, both of them oral events, something the Seminary did not practice at any other level.

The course that took most of my time during our first year was Hebrew. Man, did we spend time on mastering that one so that we could read the Old Testament (OT) in its original language. Actually it is not that difficult a language, but the speed at which we had to learn and use it was just too much. Every day hours of it at home. I was interested in it, for I considered it important to read the original OT just as much as I had studied Greek in the College in order to read the New Testament (NT) in the original. Well, I did learn to use both of them—while in Seminary. Once out in the field where I was on my own, I came to the conclusion that since others had already done all the work of ferreting out the meaning of the text and written them in commentaries, I should not try to re-invent the wheel all over again but use what they had already prepared. Besides, any passage where the original was difficult for me, it was so also for those experts. They would then reach opposite conclusions, sometimes on basis of scholarship and research for which I had no time, often on basis of their contradictory assumptions which guided them more than research. So, being extremely busy working among new Nigerian churches—yes, with this comment I am giving you a sneak preview of the future—, preparation for preaching and teaching required much more effort to make it relevant in that culture than to figure out every textual problem on my own, I gradually grew away from using those languages to the point where I could hardly use them anymore till, to my theological shame, I pretty well forgot them entirely. Too bad, all that hard work gone to the moon! I can safely say this now, for all those who taught me these languages have gone on to their reward. But it *is* kind of embarrassing for me sometimes when, having a doctorate in theology, I have to admit my linguistic status to fellow theologians. Oh, well....

The Seminary was a mixed bag of interesting and dull courses, basically due not to the subject matter so much as to the prof and/or to our own personal interest. I was interested in almost all the courses, but some profs made it dull for me. In Chapter 10 I told you that in the college I enjoyed Smedes' course because he did not condemn people with whom he disagreed or who disagreed with the Reformed position, but he engaged them in dialogue in *absentia*. Our two profs of Systematic Theology condemned, not dialogued. Sometimes I would skip class and stay home to read Gerrit Berkouwer's series on dogmatics for its fresh dialogical approach.

One of these Systematics profs had apparently become lazy. He used the same notes year after year. Our class caught on and duplicated the notes from last year's students. Many students did not even bother attending his lectures. As the prof lectured, everyone would turn their note pages at the same time. Of course, he soon detected it. After some investigation, he began to insert new materials in his lectures. One student once

complained about this prof to another prof right out in the open in the context of a class lecture and asked how we could get rid of this dull and uninspiring prof. With an amused grin, the prof answered that we could get rid of any prof on the basis of only two grounds: heresy or adultery. Then he added: That prof is capable of neither! You can imagine the howling laughter that this highly unprofessional and uncharitable remark brought! Even among men of the cloth.

As annoying and unimaginative as this poor prof was, upon his retirement he published several popular books on eschatological subjects, that is, about the end times and the return of Christ. Yes, *popular* books, books that could be read and understood by ordinary Christians. They were distributed all over the world with widespread appreciation and translated into a number of languages. That's more than could be said about that lippy prof who published very little and then only for a highly restricted group of readers. In fact, apart from these books, Seminary profs tended to write only professional materials and did not help the church's constituency to grasp what the Reformed faith was all about. No doubt, that is one of the reasons so many members of the CRC migrate to other denominations, with many of them turning into Evangelicals without appreciation for or even awareness of the deep roots of their own heritage which they find boring and uninspiring.

Many years later another retired Seminary prof was writing some advanced theological treatise. I asked him why he was not writing something for the people in the pew. He looked at me with surprise and disappointment, for, since I am a bit of a theologian myself, he had expected me to have high regard for his efforts to straighten out those theologians out there who had it all wrong. He kind of stuttered, "I can't do that. I was not trained for that!" Imagine! He had spent years training students for the pulpit where all that stuff has to be popularized. How could he have helped students do that? You answer it!

In spite of the fact that the Systematic Theology profs did not inspire me and I sometimes needed to take a break from them, I did entertain the thought that perhaps some day I would do post-graduate study in that discipline, for its logical organization and spirit appealed to me. Also I was still in a kind of intellectualistic mood that almost naturally feeds into that field, at least for me. That is, I believe the reason it is regarded with the most awe in the Seminary. And should that become reality, it would be at the Free University in Amsterdam, the place from where my theological and even spiritual roots came, founded as it was by my hero, Abraham Kuyper, and still a world centre for Reformational thought. I did get there eventually, but not to study Systematics. More about that later.

You remember the divisions we experienced at the College between Groen Clubbers or Kuyperians and "the others," a division that ran largely along the Canadian-American faultline. In the Seminary it was less harsh. It came out into the open especially in Henry Stob's classes, particularly in the discussions. Stob considered himself a Kuyperian and may even have been sympathetic towards Dooyeweerd, but his emphasis was more on common grace than the antithesis emphasized by Runner and us, his followers. Stob disliked the emphasis on separate Christian organizations in Canada. He and some other CRC scholars fought that approach tooth and nail as not fitting in the North American

culture. I have already commented on that in Chapter 10. Nevertheless, when he was old and lived in a crowded little room at Raybrook Manor across from the Seminary, I did visit him a few times and we had interesting and amicable discussions. He had become a very soft-spoken and gracious old man. We both had softened!

In our particular class another division arose between a small group of students who gravitated towards Stob and attended all his classes as well as the philosophy club he ran as an extra-curricular activity. Though some of them were originally fans of Runner and members of the Groen Club, they distanced themselves and began to conduct themselves in an elitist manner among us. Now we had three distinct groups in our class. The new group tended to be drawn to the theology of Karl Barth, a German theologian and probably the most famous one in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who wrote huge tome after theological tome. Members of the group would frequently instigate class discussions that were clearly based on Barth, but they never identified their position as such. That made for discussions that were kind up in the air without solid footings. So, one day I blared out in annoyance, “If you are Barthians, then identify yourself so we can move on!” Barth was no hero among us Groen Club members, for his theology helped undermine the Kuyperian spirit of his followers in The Netherlands. I don’t believe I endeared myself to that group of students. Though Simon was a “part time” member of this group, he never adopted their elitist attitude; he has always remained his natural humble self and never forsook his Kuyperian background.

Our class created a lot of tension within the seminary, not only amongst us as students but also between students and faculty. There was a lot of dissatisfaction among us with the way classes were conducted and lectures were delivered. Many meetings were held between groups of students and faculty.

Prof Praamsma was a church historian with a doctorate from The Netherlands and a Dutch immigrant to Canada where he served as a CRC pastor. Praamsma was caught up in the maelstrom of the unrest in our class and was clearly at a loss. One day I visited him in his office to explain the lay of the land to him and sought to encourage him. I also gently informed him about differences in teaching methods between this US seminary and his – and my—home country in order to have him adjust better. Not sure how he felt about my well-meant intervention. He did not return the next year and Henry Zwaanstra replaced him, an American who also received his doctorate in The Netherlands.

One of the core history courses was the history of the CRC, the church in which we were expected to serve. It was taught for years by President John Kromminga. He seemed to have little appreciation for his own denomination; he regularly displayed negative and unsympathetic attitudes. I sometimes wondered what he was doing in this Seminary. Later, after his retirement from the Seminary and his appointment as interim editor of *The Banner*, the denomination’s weekly, he was much more positive, constructive and even wise, a very different Kromminga we knew from that course.

There were two Krommingas in our day. Karl was the younger brother of President Kromminga and was in charge of the Dept of Practical Theology. This included

Homiletics, a fancy word for the art of preaching, as well as church education, pastoralia, field work, etc. For me the most vivid memory retained is that of practice preaching. Throughout the three years, we were involved in this subject. Every student would take turns preaching to his class in the chapel. The required format of these sermons has long been the butt of jokes throughout the CRC. The focus of the humour was the (in)famous “three point” sermon. Kromminga insisted on a clear statement of purpose and of theme on paper but not to be preached. Then an introduction that would reveal that information to be followed by the inevitable three points in parallel phrases that would be announced during the introduction. Example:

#### Introduction

Point 1--The context of the event

Point 2—The details of the event

Point 3—The results of the event

Application

The application might also constitute “Point 3.”

Kromminga also insisted that the sermon consist of an exegesis or explanation of a chosen text, usually a single verse or a so-called periscope, a paragraph. He condemned topical sermons, that is, sermons on some general topic on which the preacher would enlarge, appealing to various Bible texts to support his point. This would all too often degenerate into a general message with tenuous connection to the Bible. Tying yourself to a selected passage supposedly prevents the preacher from wandering all over the place and from emphasizing his own private opinion. The congregation needs to hear *God’s Word*, not the preacher’s pet peeve or preferred theory. We students used to poke fun of this rather stiff style, but we also realized there was something to be said for it—its solidity and discipline. In the meantime, that style has gone out of the window. One hardly hears it anymore.

And, of course, we were also taught to preach from the Heidelberg Catechism, a doctrinal teaching creed written during the post-reformation. The CRC required one catechism sermon each Sunday either in the morning or in the second service sometime during the PM to ensure the congregation would receive instruction in the entire range of Christian doctrine. This was the CRC equivalent to the Anglican lectionary.

Preaching in class was always a nerve-wracking experience, even though the students, all being in the same boat, would be sympathetic and measured in their critique. After all, they would soon be on the dock themselves. Of course, as “men of God” we would never think in terms of revenge! My own first-year sermon manuscript was a full 12-page double-spaced typewritten document, which I practiced and practiced and practiced some more at home. However, though I knew it cold, I was so nervous that I rattled it off like a machine gun in less than 20 minutes! It was also judged to be too academic instead of a sermon that would benefit the pew. That was clearly not a good start, but the students were gentle in expressing their critique, while the critique itself was biting enough. Ever since then, I place hand-written instructions in the margins of my written sermons like: “Slow down here;” “Reduce your voice gradually;” “Shout!;” “Whisper.” Or I might call for

certain gestures, postures or moves. That has helped me a great deal to discipline myself and not do simply what comes the most natural to me. It is a way of over-riding your personality and habits.

Another prof, a single man and a real scholar, was alleged to be a homosexual way before it had become a subject for open discussion. He was temporarily dismissed from the Seminary. Fran and I had taken a liking to this rather shy and humble man, who lived all by himself in a downtown apartment. He must have felt very lonely after his dismissal and, we guessed, many of his “ordinary” friends distantiated themselves from him. So, in the grand custom of the day, we invited him over for Sunday dinner and had a fine social event with him. He was a good story teller and had a good sense of humour. Then it was time for another grand custom we had grown up with: Scripture reading. We had just completed one book and the Letter to the Romans was the next one. So I started reading...and suddenly it dawned on me that this must have been experienced as a slap in his face. It is the chapter where Paul talks extremely negatively about homosexuals! Our guest must surely have thought that this was our reason for inviting him, to give him one more kick in the butt with the authority of the Bible itself! We felt horrible. I should have stopped reading immediately, but I was so overwrought with embarrassment that I automatically completed reading the chapter and, without any further discussion, closed the meal and the reading with prayer. Every time I ran into this gentleman since then, I remembered the episode with continuing embarrassment and never had the courage to discuss it with him. Remember, homosexuality was no topic for discussion, especially not when applied to a favourite prof. Eventually, he was re-instated and ended his career honourably. He died during one of our furloughs. We attended his funeral service at which no one made any mention of that alleged part of his life.

### *Dekker the Mission Radical*

And then there was Harold Dekker, the missions prof. While all other faculty members had their doctorates, Dekker had at most a masters. His qualifications were based more on mission experience in the eastern USA than on scholarship. I assume he was hired because at the time few people in the CRC had doctorates in what is now called missiology. Even today you cannot find the word in many dictionaries and it seems that all computer programmes mark it red, though by now it is common jargon among theologians. Though not much of a scholar either by study or inclination, we all enjoyed Dekker’s classes in missions simply because of his refreshing openness to consider all angles and opinions.

But Dekker was also a local social activist. He was engaged in the civil rights movements and encouraged his students, to march along with him. He was also a City Commissioner, where he was actively supportive of the Black community and other poor. That was all part of missions for him. No separation of evangelism and social concern; they belong together.

It was under Dekker’s auspices that we had two very interesting class trips, one to Chicago and another to the Big Apple. I have forgotten most of the details of those trips, but they were meant to open our eyes and minds to realities different from what we were seeing and

hearing in traditional CRC land. In Chicago we visited a number of missions among Black Americans. In other words, in the poor parts of town. What were these pioneer missionaries doing to drive away the blanket of poverty, racism and oppression that plagued these people? The most vivid part of that trip was the communion service we participated in where the elements were beer and pizza! Or was it potato chips? That lesson stayed with me when we went to Nigeria. We stayed overnight in the Lawndale Church, a CRC congregation in the middle of a Black area.

While the Chicago trip was by chartered bus, the New York trip was by a few individual cars. The main focus of our trip there was a CRC ministry in the middle of Harlem, again a Black enclave. I assume that “Harlem” was named after the Dutch city of Haarlem when New York was still New Amsterdam. I’ve been to Haarlem and let me tell you that nothing in Harlem reminded me of Haarlem! We stayed overnight in that mission complex, which no longer exists. The most vivid memory I have retained of that trip is that our group sauntered through Harlem in the middle of that Saturday night, something we were told *afterwards* was very dangerous and that we were lucky we “escaped” unscathed. Actually, we did not realize we had escaped from anything!

Dekker had this adventurous spirit about him that led him to take us on these trips, but that same spirit also got him into hot theological water of the CRC. The CRC was part of a centuries-old Calvinistic tradition that tended to analyze God and His work in a rationalistic (that is, worse than the merely rational) and logical manner. This led them to theological doctrines that created confusion about the extent of God’s love. Dekker courageously proclaimed that God loves all people, no matter who they are or what their religion. How can you engage in missions, he argued, or how can you invite people into God’s Kingdom if God does not love those invited? This did not quite square with the rationalistic framework the Seminary was assigned to uphold. This created furor in the church at various levels that eventually died down with greater appreciation for a wider sense of God’s love for the entire human race, though the rationalistic terminology was retained for reasons of church statesmanship. The only reason I bring up this controversy is that it had a direct effect on me after graduation, but that’s for Chapter 13.

Yes, I enjoyed Dekker more than most other profs, but not because I was interested in missions so much as in his open adventurous spirit. He was such a contrast to the others, a breath of fresh air to all of us. As to missions, he failed to instill mission interest in me. In fact, I had contempt for both mission studies and practitioners. For studies, because the scholarship seemed elementary compared to the other disciplines. For practitioners, that is, missionaries, because I had heard them preach in Grand Rapids on their furloughs and was not impressed. Later on I realized the reason: It was difficult for them to make the switch from their host country back to a Western culture. Furthermore, they were expected CRWM to preach propaganda to attract people to missions in order to become missionaries and/or to give to and pray for missions. As a result, their preaching often sounded unrealistic, for it was mainly success stories. Were there no problems or failures anywhere in missions? *The Banner* articles on missions were of the same stripe. So, I never saw, read or heard anything about missions or from missionaries that attracted me. And then, of course, there was this Runner legacy of contempt for missionary practice as

well, though I never bought into that too seriously. Did I not stay with Mission Club? In short, missions was still not for me; I was still gunning for a Canadian urban CRC pastorate. Little did I know what God had in store for me.

### *Sample Research Papers*

Some paragraphs earlier I referred to research papers we had to write throughout the three years in Seminary. Again, I made grateful use of Prof. Jansen's training and of the ten-year old typewriter I bought new in 1954 for purposes of my high school correspondence courses. As all the way along my journey, here again memory fails me. I remember only four of the papers I produced. This may not be of interest to many of my readers but it will be to some. Besides, they are part of my story and, being a researcher-writer by nature, I enjoyed working on them. Skip the following if not interested, but they do give you an idea what theological education and research can include.

One described the construction of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament and the meaning of the symbolism of these construction details. A major emphasis was that Old Testament religious institutions and practices were not new creations but were similar to those of the Pagan nations around Israel, at least, externally. However, their internal orientation and meaning were very different. The title of the paper was "Immanuel: God with Us; Structure, Meaning and History of the Tabernacle."

I wrote one with the title "The Development of the Doctrine of Reprobation with Special Emphasis on John Calvin." It dealt with the relationship of God to evil, suffering and man's eternal destiny and examined the opinions of two major theologians in church history, namely Augustine and Calvin, as well as the role of logic and Scripture in the issue. As I paged through it during the writing of this paragraph, I discovered it was interesting enough for me to re-read it 49 years later.

A third paper was more controversial, for it did not only go counter to my prof's opinion but also to mainline CRC opinion in the pew. In fact, if published, it would have generated heated debate in the magazines read by the constituency and seen as outright liberal, an always present boogeyman circulating throughout the constituency. I posited that the death Adam and Eve were threatened with if they ate from the wrong tree was a spiritual rather than a physical death, though it affected the latter due to the fear of it caused by spiritual death. I remain of this opinion till this day, but it does entail a reading of Genesis 1-3 that also goes counter to that same communal opinion. I believe there would be more room for it today than at that time.

A fourth paper dealt with the relationship between Jesus and Common Grace under the title, "A Christian Universe: Reflections on the Cross and Common Grace." I insisted that the Common Grace that enables non-Christians to produce good works and positive cultures is the result of the work of Jesus, a connection that was

generally denied in CRC theology. Another controversial study with which my prof did not agree, but, again, which today would be less controversial.

A fifth paper was not controversial at all, for my conclusion was totally in sync with the opinion of the prof, in so far as he knew anything about it, and that of the Canadian CRC constituency. It was a historical paper about the roots and development of the United Church of Canada. I concluded that it was indeed a liberal church, something I saw as negative. By “liberal” I meant in this context that they, especially their clergy, apart from belief in God, tended to reject anything that cannot be verified by science, e.g. resurrection and other miracles. My experience with the local United Church in downtown Vancouver years later confirmed that opinion.

If you read the above indented materials, I don't know how these subjects and conclusions strike you, but for me they were exciting projects on subjects of personal and/or theological interest. This activity also honed my research and writing skills that would stand me in good stead during all my post-seminary writing years right up to these memoirs.

### *The Proof of the Pudding*

At the end of the three years we had to pass a Bible knowledge test that proved we knew the content of every single chapter in the Bible. Believe me, that is a horrendous task. We could learn something from the Muslim tradition that treasures the memorization and recitation of the entire Qur'an and even runs world competitions along with valuable prizes. The lack of appreciation for memory skills in our Western culture made that Bible contents test very, very difficult, at least, for me.

The outcome of these tests brought some surprises. One average American student was scared silly of this test. He was sure he would fail. I spent time assuring him he would do alright, and he did. I would not have been surprised if he had flunked the test, for I did not really have a good reason to assure him as I did, but it worked; it put him at ease, the purpose of my effort. One Canadian student, a friend but kind of a “blunderbuster,” instead of preparing hard for the test during the week devoted to it, spent his time relaxing in Florida! He had never been a top student and hence I doubted he would make it. He made it with no problem! Nothing like blunderbusting, true, but I did not think it would work with these no-nonsense profs!

And then, guess what. *I failed the test!* Now it is true that I have always had bad memory for details and surely this entailed extremely detailed memorization. But I worked hard and long for this test and had no doubt about making it. However, one prof did not like the line I took during the oral test. He began to pursue me and make me nervous. It worked for him. At the end of the day I was told I failed it but would have a chance to do it over again. I was humiliated, but comforted myself in the knowledge that two others had also failed and both of them were members of that elitist group. So, now by failing I became associated with the elites I had kind of avoided! Almost a badge of honour! To be in the

company of the smartest! It does not get better than that. Now I could laugh it off, especially since there was to be a second chance. I was successful with the next round that was conducted by a committee of three other profs. It had been recognized that I had been treated unfairly and that nervousness had undone me.

Another huge event were the finals, or the so-called “Comprehensives,” an oral exam potentially covering everything we had dealt with in Seminary. If the Bible content exam was huge, this one was huge huge! Being weak on memory for detail, I was really nervous about this one. The general lines were no problem, but it could go down into very nitty-gritty stuff that I worried about, especially after flunking the other one. So, I worked hard, let me tell you, and long--and succeeded the first time around. Oh, passing that exam was such a relief for everyone. It had hung around our necks like a gigantic albatross throughout the Seminary years. We did not talk about it much, but it was always there in the background.

### *The Non-Academic Side of Seminary*

In terms of non-academics at the Seminary, there was the daily Seminary chapel. Unlike the College, attendance at these sessions was not officially compulsory, but it was expected that students training for ministry would naturally want to participate. The programme usually included the singing of a couple of hymns, guided by a great organ and an equally great organist, a student at the Seminary. For me that singing thrilled my soul, especially because there is a high proportion of great voices in a seminary community that all sang in harmony. There was often a Bible reading followed by a meditation, mostly by students, sometimes by faculty or other staff members, occasionally by an outsider. I remember the contents of none of them, not even my own, except that of Chris Spoor, a student from Chilliwack, BC, and thus a Canadian. Chris was one of the few Canadians not part of the Groen Club and I did not appreciate his speech at the time, but a rethinking later led me to belated appreciation. In face of the disunity in the Seminary, he emphasized the need for unity and tolerance. He was right on.

Though I do not remember the contents of my own chapel presentations during my student years, I do remember two very difficult circumstances in which I presented them. I was scheduled to deliver one the day after I had gotten a cheap partial in my mouth. Since I was not accustomed to such an obstruction, it came out during the presentation, a most embarrassing moment that produced more than a few pre-ministerial giggles but couched in understanding sympathy. Everybody realized that one day it would be them to be embarrassed on a pulpit somewhere.

The other incident was more serious. Hendrik and Barb had a baby by the name Ellie, after our mother Ellie. We all had realized for some time that there was something mentally wrong with her. Hendrik delivered the verdict to me while I was on my way to deliver a chapel speech. The verdict was not unexpected, but its confirmation shattered me and made the speech almost impossible to deliver in an acceptable way. This was not mere embarrassment, but a shattered heart and mind. It is one of these moments that has always remained vivid in my memory and played a part when Ellie died in 2000.

I belonged to the Seminary choir, an all-male ensemble, of course, since there was only one female in the entire student body. I enjoyed singing baritone, but felt myself overshadowed by some very excellent singers, an experience to which I was not accustomed. One year I was elected President of the choir for reasons I never understood, since I was basically a nondescript member with a singing voice that was average for this particular group. I found it an irksome position, since there was really no need for any presidential action. Furthermore, the director, a student one year below me, totally ignored the president. A useless president if ever there was one and an embarrassed one at that. But I did enjoy the singing with our fine harmony tremendously.

One annual event was *Dies Natalis*, the seminary's anniversary. It was in the context of one of these celebrations that I had my hardest and longest laugh throughout those three years. The organizers had invited Rev. Jacob Eppinga from La Grave Ave. CRC, an elitist church in downtown, but a popular preacher especially famous for his *Cabbages and Kings* column that ran for years in *The Banner*. He was invited to deliver a humorous speech, to entertain us, but he never uttered a word, not a single one! He placed himself before the piano on the stage and pretended he was going to play the piano without ever making a sound, not a single one! He would make the motions to prepare for a concert, to be playing a selection, to be transitioning to another selection, etc. But nary a word or a sound! He had us all doubled over with laughter for close to a half hour! Never saw such expert humour before or after. Simply amazing. A total Seminary highlight for me! Almost 50 years later, Fran and I still occasionally talk about it and smile with continuing delight at the experience.

I graduated, but I must confess that I remember as good as nothing of the ceremony, except that I was very proud of my diploma. Till today it is hanging in my office alongside my and Fran's college diplomas and the framed seal of my doctorate from the Free University that I obtained years later in 1979. I think the reason for forgetting most of it is not only my poor memory for details but even more the fact that it was tucked in between three even more momentous factors in my life at the time. One was the great relief after the completion of those long-feared, nerve-racking exams while simultaneously there was the uncertainty of getting a call from some church and the discomfort of another momentous doctrinal exam, not by the Seminary but by the Classis of the church that hopefully would call me into the ministry. This was an ecclesiastical exam, not an academic one. The Seminary had declared us ready for ministry before Synod 1965, but would the church accept us? Neither were givens. Then there was the added excitement regarding our immediate and surprising future of missions. It was going to be so different from how I had interpreted my call to the ministry back in my teens and so different from my purposes for entering both the College and the Seminary. In contrast to all of these factors, the graduation ceremony was kind of a miniscule event among those other mountain peaks and did not leave a memorable impression on me.

*An Unexpected Twist*

Missionaries occasionally showed up at the Seminary. Sometimes to speak in chapel, to lecture or sometimes just to socialize at their alma mater with the not-so hidden motive of increasing mission interest. They never succeeded with me, though I would freely socialize with them and engage them in discussion. Then, one day, a mere three months before Seminary graduation, a missionary came who piqued my interest more than the others. His name was Eugene Rubingh, son of a former American pastor in the Alberta CRC, and a long-time missionary to the NKST, the Church of Christ in Nigeria among the Tiv. He either spoke in chapel or lectured in a class, but he caught my attention. The upshot was the need for pastors in the newly emerging Nigerian churches in the country's Middle Belt. After further discussion with him, I told Fran about what I had heard. We prayed about it and sensed that we could not cavalierly shrug it off. We discussed and prayed for about two weeks and then decided to make ourselves available to CRWM for Nigeria. After all, what did we have to lose? No property of our own. An old car, thrift store furniture and no kids. Nothing to hold us back. We were thinking about doing one term of around two and a half years and then come home to return to my original love, namely the urban Canadian CRC. Regarding it as a short interlude before getting serious about Canada, we did not take it too seriously. It would be an interesting adventure, we thought. Nevertheless, it was a drastic change in outlook. An entire decade of "knowing" my future would be in the Canadian church, after almost seven years of hard study in order to reach that goal, it was put on the shelf for now and we turned to Nigeria. No one was more surprised than we.

One Sunday during my senior year in Seminary, Rev. Peter Dekker, missionary to Nigeria, preached the sermon at Fuller Ave. CRC. He preached about the need for missionaries in Nigeria and added that, since for reasons he did not explain, he was leaving his post in Nigeria, we should all pray that a successor might be found. Little did we know that we were the answer to that prayer, for we ended up as his replacement in Wukari, where he had spent fifteen years or so.

Our families, relatives and friends, after we had always told them that we would serve in Canada, were also very surprised. It was brother Hendrik and his Barb who wanted to do mission work in Nigeria as linguists, but me? Us? No way! Not so sure our parents were thrilled at the thought of our going abroad, especially my parents now thinking in terms of both of their pastor-sons going to Nigeria. Father Wiebe had been relishing the thought of visiting our churches occasionally and proudly introducing himself to the parishioners as the father of Rev. Boer, a very prestigious position at the time. Well, it did happen a few times, but with Hendrik, not with me, for Hendrik was prevented by Ellie's health condition and served CRC pastorates in both Canada and the US.

It turned out that I was part of an unusual wave in our class. All told, seven of us went into missions under CRWM, including Si and Jean, who went to Brazil, where they disappeared from our lives for some decades. Another couple was Harv and Thelma Kiekover from Barb's hometown, Drenthe. They also served many years in Nigeria, to have it cut short only because Thelma suffered multiple sclerosis and eventually died from it. Seven out of forty in one class was exceptional. Not sure anyone ever came up with an explanation, but Harold Dekker was understandably proud of what he claimed as his "boys," even though

his influence on them was far from demonstrable. Over the subsequent decades we became friends and would visit each other on our furlough time in Grand Rapids and during our post-Nigeria Grand Rapids years.

### *Preaching and Other Field Assignments*

An important part of a seminary student's training is to work in the "field," that is, in the churches. This took different forms. A few "lucky" ones were actually hired part time by a church during the school year to do youth work or some such task. They were "lucky," because they received a part time income as well. All of us were assigned during the duration of one academic/church year to serve in the education programme of various churches, often to teach Catechism classes, but without pay. I happened to be assigned to East Paris CRC, the church by and in which we were married.

### *Preaching in Churches*

After our first year in Seminary, we were invited to sign up for preaching in churches that had vacant pulpits and had opened them to students. This averaged out to about once a month. It could be in a local Grand Rapids church or one far away, sometimes hundreds of miles of either driving or flying. In general we stayed within the mid-west, but sometimes we even flew across Lake Michigan or to some far eastern states. Occasionally Canadians would find themselves far into Ontario, Canada. If it was far enough away, we would arrive late Saturday and stay overnight with some parishioner's family and enjoy meals with them. This helped us keep informed about popular opinion and kept our sermons somewhat relevant.

I enjoyed such assignments and found them interesting. Those were the days when there was only one man—yes, man!—on the pulpit who would do everything that's done on the pulpit. So, we had to make sure we knew the liturgy a week or so ahead of time so that we could select the appropriate hymns and send the info in time to be printed in the bulletin and for the organist to practice. Though these liturgies tended to be very similar and all singing was from the *Psalter Hymnal* accompanied by the mighty organ, there were just enough small variations that we needed to know. In some churches even a small deviation would be frowned upon, while others would just smile it away. As I have already indicated in Chapter 10, appropriate dress was expected. That is, either complete suit or a blazer with matching trousers and, of course, the ubiquitous tie. During these years, the biggest revolution in CRC pulpit fashion was to wear pastel coloured shirts instead of white. Though today white is making a comeback, I continue to prefer coloured.

Pay-wise, these Sunday assignments were not very lucrative. The standard honorarium was \$35 a service, an amount that hardly covered the travel expenses. Longer distance would attract greater re-imburement. Often we would have to report on the miles we drove or the charge for the ticket to a local church official and he would adjust the amount accordingly. No, we did not go on these weekend ventures for hard-needed cash!

### *Preaching in Alberni CRC*

The first time I preached outside of Seminary jurisdiction was by personal invitation from the Alberni CRC in June, 1963. I don't remember many of my sermons, but I do this one. It was nerve-wracking, even though I had a most appreciative audience of mostly personal and family friends.

Among my audience was Mr. Bosma, whom you may remember from Alberni in Chapter 9. He had returned to The Netherlands but had come back for a visit to his children, including two of his sons, Fred and Albert, who married two of my sisters, Ellie and Martha respectively. He could be very critical, so that I was glad he understood little or no English! That was good for me to realize, for in the course of preaching, I suddenly recognized a major and inappropriate twist in the thought pattern of the sermon that no one would have recognized except him!

During the course of the sermon I repeated a certain gesture that some of my friends remember till this day. I would poke a finger in my ear as if to clean it! I was not aware of the gesture, but remember the gentle teasing it has generated over the decades. Only during this service; it never stuck as an on-going habit.

I am not sure I would recommend a student do his first sermon in his home church. He may be too aware of some stupid or even wrong things he did during his youth and may fear that his audience will contrast his former youthful foolishness to this present "pious pretender." Had he become something else?

### *1963 Internship in Prince George*

In our day, Seminary students were routinely assigned to serve churches in various ministries during the summers as interns. This was part of our practical training. Our first assignment was in the summer of 1963 when we were sent as interns to the Prince George (PG) CRC in northern BC. The major task was to assist with the running of a Summer Workshop in Mission (SWIM), a denominational programme in which volunteer young people were given an opportunity for mission within North America.

Because the PG pastor urged us to come quickly, we left as soon as I could as far as the Seminary was concerned. Fran was about to graduate from the College, but with the urgency stressed by the pastor, we left a few days before her graduation. She graduated in *absentia*, something which, it turned out, had not been necessary. She did not experience much of the graduation excitement, prior, during and after. I have always felt kind of bad about her missing out on all that, for it represents a closure to an important part of your life. It is an experience every graduate deserves.

As it turned out, there was no need for Fran to skip her graduation. We had no specific assignment during our first week in Prince George that called for such urgency. That week there was a Billy Graham Crusade in the town with Leighton Ford, Graham's Canadian brother-in-law, as the main preacher. Our only role was to sing in the Crusade choir, a large one that would not have missed us. Fran should have been allowed to attend her graduation.

On our way to Prince George, we drove across the Canadian prairies, an experience all of its own. As we put Calgary behind us with the Desoto, we began to see the foothills of the Rockies. I enthusiastically pointed them out in the far distance. Fran was not all that impressed with what she had seen of the prairies so far. When she saw the foothills under my enthusiastic direction, she tried to hide her disappointment, but inside it was like, "Is that what all this hullabaloo is all about?" But when the mountains themselves came into full view, she began to understand my enthusiasm, but was much of this in BC or in Alberta? Why claim it for BC? As we traveled on, I kept pointing to this mountain peak, to that river and to those animals or trees, it slowly sank in that, yes, BC *was* worth all of John's boasting.

Though we felt cheated out of Fran's graduation, that week in Prince George was an interesting one. We both loved singing in that large inter-denominational choir. The Crusade itself was an interesting experience as well. During the course of it, the pastor arranged for a restaurant breakfast with Ford that both of us attended. I believe Ford sensed that the pastor did not have much of a dynamic vision for outreach in the community and probably gave up on him as just another pastor in what Graham had described as "the sleeping giant," the CRC. The "giant" referred not to its rather small size but to the power he recognized in the Reformed tradition that he rightly felt the CRC was only playing with.

But right after the Crusade we *did* take a week to visit Port Alberni. We drove through the amazing Fraser Canyon. Then wove our way through the beautiful farm belt of the Lower Mainland and the impressive skyline of Vancouver itself, laced as it is by northern Coastal Mountains and surrounded by beaches and the Pacific waters. On we went to take the beautiful ride on the BC Ferry to Nanaimo, crossing the Georgia Strait with mountains on both sides and seagulls by the dozens accompanying the vessel, diving for both fish and food thrown overboard by the passengers. Oh, my heart swelled with pride and boasting as we continued the journey. Then the Island Highway and those majestic trees in Cathedral Grove forest! All old-growth miracles that reaches high into the sky and that takes five or more people to surround. By now Fran's gasps and open admiration totally fulfilled my dreams of showing off all this beauty to this Michigan blondie as if I myself had created it all! As we passed wonder after wonder, I told Fran in glowing terms what I knew about all the different places and the things I and my friends had done at various places along the highway.

Finally over the hump, we made our descent into the Alberni Valley. As we proceeded downward, slowly the cabbage-like smell of the local pulp mill reached our nostrils. Fran was shocked; I had not prepared her for any such negatives. The point was, of course, that

I had grown accustomed to the smell not only, but even had come to like it, for I loved cabbage! Fran was not so sure about that.

Instead of the Old Town of Alberni, where my parents had lived on Gertrude Street, we took the road to the “New Town,” to Port Alberni, where they had moved into a house on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, near ADHS, my old high school. It was the first introduction to their current house for both of us. The folks welcomed us heartily and for a week wined and dined us, while they took us to many places in the Valley—more wonders of nature. Brother Dick was often part of it. We did not have much time for Alberni, for the pastor of PG had let it be known in no uncertain terms that we were needed urgently to meet up with our SWIM team there. We could barely squeeze in a week.

That was the summer Fran first met most of my family. She had met my parents, of course, during their visit to Grand Rapids two summers ago. One of her first recollections was of the dominant smoking culture. Nearly every one in the family and their friends, male & female, smoked! Not Mom, of course, but Dad was a chain smoker.

Fran insists that he was a bit suspicious of her, a Frisian and a Yankee, to begin with, but when she expressed annoyance with being enveloped with all that smoke, he showed it outright. When she choked on the stale smoky air in the house and asked to have some windows opened-- after all, it was the summer month of June!-- in order to get some fresh air, it was Dad’s turn to be annoyed. She felt he thought her unreasonable and looking for trouble. Happily they soon settled their differences and she left the place with very good overall memories of her father-in-law and all the other Boers.

I do reject her “charge” of Dad’s prejudice against Frisians and Yankees. That simply was not part of his makeup. Lutjegasters were friends of Frisians and Dad was eternally grateful for the contribution of the US to Dutch liberation and rebuilding during and after WW II.

She found it very easy to chat with Mom. They spent a lot of time cooking and doing dishes together and Mom told her many stories about her own siblings and their life in the Netherlands. She also told Fran stuff about me as a child and of how proud she was of my finishing high school by correspondence, my work at the church, etc. Fran thanked her for raising a fine young man and that she was proud to be my wife.

Of course, I had to introduce her to the Valley’s gem: Sproat Lake, the place where we as teenagers swam and boated and played on the booms. The road from town to the lake crosses several bridges, one across a creek just before it plunges into the lake.



There was a beautiful patch of wild flowers just

before that bridge. We stopped and I shot the most beautiful picture I have ever taken and ever seen of my Famke. I'm sure you'll all agree! You can't do otherwise! Here she is in 1963:

*My Most Beautiful Famke\**

*I*

It was on the Sunday of this week that I preached in the Alberni CRC as told above, the first outside of Seminary jurisdiction. Sorry folks: no picture of this one, not even of my picking my ears!

When we arrived back in Prince George the next week after a drive of 950 km, we immediately moved into our living quarters, the basement apartment in the parsonage, the same space that would also serve as our SWIM team gathering place. We were on our own as far as cooking was concerned and did have the place to ourselves in the evening and at night—sort of.

As my recollection has it, this “second first” week was mostly taken up with lectures and getting to know each other. Subsequent weeks were spent on Summer Bible School in a housing development for the poor just outside of town. This project became the seed out of which eventually a Christian elementary school developed. After a couple of weeks of that and graduation, the team spent time knocking on doors in an effort to engage people in gospel discussions and distribute tracts. Sometimes the pastor and I would do such calling together. Now the man had quite a pronounced Dutch accent while I had not yet overcome my own, so once in a while a resident would comment on our being the “Dutch church.” The pastor would vigorously deny that allegation in the thickest of Dutch accents you can imagine! It was both comical and embarrassing!

One assignment we enjoyed greatly was our weekend in Crescent Spur. This was a lumbering community east of Prince George with no road but only railway access. The place did not have a station, but the train would just stop if there were people waiting at the crossroad and similarly drop them off. It was an interesting town in its isolation. There was one unpaved double dead end road running through it that they plied with mostly old cars, many of which featured Alberta plates, even though in BC. Normal legalities were suspended. There was a company store that supplied their needs. On weekends, many of its bachelor lumberjacks would board the train for Prince George, live it up and return home stone drunk. We encountered some of them on the train whooping it up. Today, the place is served by a highway from Prince George to Edmonton and is easily located on the map.

There lived a small group of CRC families there that the Prince George pastor would visit regularly for a weekend. He assigned us to take a turn. I conducted two informal services and preached two sermons. Also spent other fellowship time with the group. They loved singing from the CRC *Psalter Hymnal*. Living as they did in a rough, kind of barbaric, frontier town, they were very hungry for more civilized and spiritual contact from the outside, especially from the church. We greatly enjoyed this visit.

Part of my assignment was to preach occasionally in the Prince George church, even though I was not allotted any time to prepare. Well, I did my best. My last sermon was a rather rebellious one in which I hinted obliquely at some of the problems that had developed between the pastor and us, at least, from our perspective. Frankly, I do not remember much of the details of the issues that developed, except that I was dissatisfied with the low level of responsibility I was given and with our awkward living situation.

We had slowly become aware that everything Fran and I said could be overheard by the family upstairs, which included four teenagers. Since that discovery, pressure built up within us till it reached the boiling point. Shortly after the sermon just alluded to and after the SWIM team packed up and left, Fran and I did the same—at midnight. We could no longer stand it in that house under those conditions and had to get out. Of course, in my report to the Seminary I tried to explain the reason for this unceremonious departure as favourably to ourselves as I could. It became one of the factors that eventually led to my reputation with the Seminary faculty as a troublesome person. I admit, there was/is some truth to that, but more of that later. It was a reputation that pursued me over the decades.

Perhaps the above report on our stay in Prince George gives a negative impression. In spite of these issues, Fran and I have always looked back on our stay there with positive memories of its people. Years later, we spent a weekend there on a furlough during our Nigeria days. Brother Jim lived there at the time and was the serving elder for the weekend. So we had a “Boer show,” with Jim introducing me and doing part of the liturgy, while I did the rest.

In terms of logistics, my weekly “salary” during this summer was \$50. We drove there and back in that old orphan Desoto with its wonderful overdrive. Rode like a Cadillac! Except that somewhere, while going down a steep hill in the Rockies, the brakes suddenly gave way! Believe me, that was scary. I quickly geared down to second, veered off to the shoulder, turned on the emergency lights and slowly crawled our way downhill and up and down and... till we reached a town with a garage. It was a tiny leak in a brake line that cost \$2 to replace. Cheap as that was, I would not like a repeat of the experience and wish it on no one else. Ever since, I’ve been deeply aware of the dangers of an old vehicle; something, somewhere can go kaput any moment.

#### *1964: Intern in Edson, Alberta*

In summer 1964, we were happy to be assigned once again to Western Canada, for it would enable us to visit the Alberni area once again. To be sure, Edson is not exactly anywhere near the Island, but it is a lot closer than, say, Florida, the place to which we went in 1965. Again we took the Desoto without mechanical incident of any kind.

Yes, but there was another incident. Canadian law forbids a Canadian resident from driving a US-based vehicle in Canada, especially if that Canadian is going to use it for

work, however temporary. In 1963, the Canadian Customs officials did not apply it to me, but in 1964 they did. After some hassle at the border, they allowed us to proceed with the car to Edson, but then had to store it and not use it for anything at all, except to drive it back. They warned us they would inform the local police. We were grateful enough for the concession. So, the Edson church had to scramble for a car and soon found a member willing to loan us one for the summer. The Desoto took a well deserved holiday!

The original assignment for Edson was similar to that of Prince George, a SWIM team. Whereas the previous team consisted mostly of Albertans, the 1964 team were mostly Michiganders. Though we never checked, we suspect that their activities were also illegal, since they entered Canada only on basis of drivers' licenses and worked without a work permit. Relations between Canadians and Americans were relaxed in those days.

From Grand Rapids we had corresponded with the pastor there and had every reason to expect a better experience than in Prince George. He was fairly young, enthusiastic, and a born English speaker. His letters made us feel really welcome and, thus, eager to go to another Canadian province. Alas, two weeks prior to our leaving, he suddenly wrote he had received a call and would be gone by the time we arrived! Holy smokes! We would be responsible now for the congregation *and* a SWIM team in a brand new town! That did not sound good. In fact, hopeless. How could this possibly work out? Thanks a lot!

True to his word, by the time we arrived, the pastor had already left. His departure was unusually fast. It was not because of bad relations with the congregation, for they were good. He had left a folder with plans he had made, but ensured us we were free to devise our own plan. After all, given our PG assignment a year earlier, we were experienced! Yeah, sure.

We were put up in the parsonage that had just been vacated and which we had to share with a great older couple from Iowa, the Vander Arks, retired teachers who had volunteered to run the church's summer elementary school course. Since there was no regular Christian day school in the town, the church was operating a Christian summer elementary school course in a local public school they rented for this purpose. They were a wonderful couple we enjoyed living with. We took turns cooking and often ate our meals together. The SWIM team slept at other houses but spent part of each day with us at the parsonage and we all ate together for the main meal.

So, here we were, responsible for two Sunday sermons, pastoral work in the congregation and a SWIM team who did not know the place any better than we did! I do remember we participated in the Dominion Day—now called “Canada Day”—celebration of July 1, by running along side the parade, distributing tracts to the crowds. I wore a western style cowboy hat and string tie along with proper jeans. It was kind of fun, though I was not so sure about the effectiveness of these mostly rather fundamentalistic tracts.

I do remember struggling with preparing sermons in time crumbs left over between SWIM activities. I preached a series on Zechariah from the Old Testament. The reason I picked

that book is that it had me curious and this would give me a chance to check it out. I did enjoy the series, though prepared under time pressure.

As to pastoral work, we tried to visit as many members of the congregation that summer as we could. Why? I guess we had seen other pastors do that in new charges. Again, why, when we were already overly committed and would be there for only a short time? During the course of these visits there was this elderly lady who was quite unhappy about the lingering controversy in the church about Dutch-language services. She preferred Dutch services for herself, she said, but she was old and knew the Gospel well. It was the youth who still needed to hear it. So why push Dutch on a generation that did not want it but that still needed to hear the Gospel? For their sake, we should do away with the Dutch. Now, that was the spirit!

I remember two incidents in neither of which I shone. The first was a single mother having a baby. I went to visit her in the hospital alone. Don't know why Fran did not come along. I sat on her bed, a no-no I would guess, and after some small talk prayed with her and then tried to "force" a confession of sin out of her! Imagine that! Still suffering from birth pangs, still in the hospital, fearful of the future and there I was squeezing her heart and soul instead of encouraging her to face the difficult days ahead. I walked out of there with the full realization that I had botched it big time and felt very bad for myself but even worse for her. I wondered why Seminary had not prepared me for such situations—or was this still ahead in the final year?

The second failed leadership incident was a youth campout together with the SWIM team. I prefer delegation to doing things myself. I expected the SWIMmers to take the lead and told them so, while I imagined myself serving as a presence in case of unforeseen circumstances. I did not simply delegate. I am afraid I abdicated and left it all up to the scantily-equipped team to carry the ball. They did fairly well, actually, but I soon realized that I should have done better preparation for my own part and turn it into a more wholesome experience for everyone. I felt I let them down as a leader. Delegation is one thing; abdication, another.

Another more positive case of counseling involved a young man, son of a big CRC business family in the town. He had been on the SWIM team in Prince George the previous summer. He was struggling with his future and was not so sure he saw meaning and purpose in his family business. Also he had qualms about some business practices. Should he become a pastor instead? We explored that option for a while, but my basic point was that you cannot escape temptation and sin by going to Seminary and working as a pastor. Wherever you go, whatever work you do, there will be temptation and sin. It is part of the human condition and cannot be escaped. Secondly, I emphasized that the pastorate is not more holy than business. In both situations one is expected to conduct himself personally and in his work as a servant of God, also in business. I did not give him a definite answer but asked him to consider his options within those parameters. I do not know where he ended up eventually, but it was not as a pastor.

Probably the most enduring—and humorous?—part of our Edson legacy was a recipe for making *koek*, a traditional Dutch sweet bread that includes anise seed and coffee among its ingredients, that a lady by the name of Fien De Jong passed on to Fran. She has been making it ever since and passed it along to many people along the way in various countries. Today, many Vancouverites delight in it as she bakes small loaves for Christmas and distributes them among our friends.

In distinction from the Prince George episode, we ended this assignment on a positive note, except.... We dusted off the well-rested Desoto and off once again to the highroad for Port Alberni before swinging back to Grand Rapids for our final year there. We toured around somewhat and visited the Columbia Ice Fields, astride the Continental Divide in the Rockies near a tourist centre. We noticed a trail across the road, winding its way upwards towards a nearby mountain. We decided we should follow the trail for a half hour or so. Since we did not plan to go far, we felt free to ignore the warning signs about following the marked trail, proper equipment, clothes and the need for a guide. When it was time to turn back according to our original plan, we felt enticed by a buttress a little further up the mountain. We decided to give in and hiked-climbed our way up to it, saw another and gave in, saw yet another and gave in.... By now we were much farther than planned and decided to turn around, when, suddenly, a pile of clouds just sort of swooped down from the sky upon us and blanketed the entire area around us with an impenetrable grey darkness. And then this sudden downpour of rain. The temperature must have dropped ten degrees right there and then. We could see no farther than ten feet.

Needless to say, we were scared, properly scared. What to do? Well, first pray, of course. We did and then, shivering, discussed on a course of action. The trail had somehow disappeared on us. So we decided that, since we had remained on the original side of the mountain, we would make a descent as best as we could down the same side in the hope we would reach---yea, reach what? We did not know. We just worked our way down the rocks, both terribly scared but pretending to be brave. Of course, we did not fool each other. We prayed and God heard. After probably an hour we started hearing what sounded like traffic noises and, still a little further down, human noises. We knew we were getting somewhere and felt terribly relieved. By that time, the darkness of the clouds started to lift to make way for light, while the rain went down to a drizzle. Sure enough, not far ahead we could see the outlines of the centre where we parked the car. We were safe! We embraced each other with joy and thankfulness and then made our final way down. Actually, we noticed that we had not turned far away from the trail. The sweater Fran had made for me was totally stretched far below my knees from the heavy weight of the water it had absorbed. We judged it beyond redemption.

Heh, Fran could always make me a new one, I thought. We have never forgotten the lesson to heed posted warning signs! Never! Nor the lesson of the entire experience. Whenever we are tempted to go off on our own somewhere, we look at each other and remember. All one of us needs to say is, "Columbia Ice Fields?" A rather precarious end to a great summer.

### *Final Seminary Introspection*

What was it I was looking for in Seminary? For one thing, if you have read the Albemarle chapter, you will know that I was called into the ministry of the CRC by God Himself and how that went. I say this without hesitation or embarrassment. Go back and read that story. In my time, Calvin College and, particularly, Calvin Theological Seminary were *the* way to reach that goal. There was no real alternative available for most of us. I did not share Fran's feeling that I could reach my goal on my own without further training. In fact, I felt a strong need for it.

If you have read Chapter 10, the Calvin College chapter, you also know that I came to Calvin with a number of vague questions about the Christian life that I hoped would be answered at both College and Seminary. It was especially through Runner and the Groen Club that I experienced considerable growth, development and excitement about the nature and scope of the Christian life in general and about ministry in particular. I gained more concrete ideas about ministry in a Canadian urban CR Church. However, it *seemed* all kind of intellectualistic without deep personal spirituality. In fact, in Groen circles there was little talk about spirituality. That, I think, was one of the reasons few Groeners had much use for Mission Club, for there spirituality was a priority. The other was that most Mission Club members tended to be more Evangelical than Reformed, at least the Kuyperian type, and unwittingly adhered to the dualistic perspective that Kuyperians, including myself, considered the bane of Western culture.

Nevertheless, the deep transformation of heart, soul and mind that began in the Runner context was more than intellectual; it slowly developed into a more *spiritual* experience and commitment that expressed itself then and now today in deep admiration and wonder at the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. The more scientists discover about the scope and amazing width of the universe, the deeper my wonder, respect, admiration and love for the God who once told us through the Prophet Isaiah that "my ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts."

The second major spiritual experience I underwent during college years, at first seemed to have no recognizable connection to the "Runner experience." I refer to the experience of personally appropriating the promise of baptism on that East Grand Rapids lawn. Later I was to become more familiar with the personal spirituality of Kuyper as displayed in his numerous meditational books and came to sense more deeply the wholistic connection between the social and the spiritual, something that often seemed missing in Kuyperian circles, though that was seldom admitted. I was in some vague way hoping that the Seminary would help me develop further in this more wholistic direction.

Unfortunately, in my day at least, the Seminary did not make this their priority. In fact, literature on the subject warns that seminaries on the whole are not good incubators for personal spiritual growth. It seems to me this showed something was missing and that skewed priorities were being pursued. A relentless pressure of time dominated the entire industry. The felt need to complete the curriculum was the dominant note. It was a constant complaint of a Nigerian student at the Seminary even many years later.

Another goal or, at least, hope, was very simply to learn more about the Bible and theology in general. That goal or hope was amply realized while, paradoxically, questions also increased, questions other than those at the beginning. Though that may sound negative, actually it is a positive factor that belongs to the essence of genuine education. Under the influence of Smedes and Berkouwer, I adopted a stance perhaps best described as an “either/or” and “both/and” attitude. Or, as our son Kevin, a collegiate major in economics, described his discipline as a matter of “on the one hand/on the other hand” kind of wavering. This attitude guarded and guards me from dismissing other opinions too easily and to recognize that in most arguments and issues there are multiple sides to be considered.

There is a negative side to this stance, for it can easily prevent the formation of a conclusion and taking a necessary stand as, for example, on a political issue that needs a solution and action. This very discussion is an example of the stance I am describing. It can drive you into an intellectualism that paralyzes you and keeps you from taking sides or, more positively, it can lead you to reject the popular alternatives in favour of a third alternative that has not been considered. That, in fact, is a classic characteristic of Kuyperian thought and action. We have come full circle.

And at the end of it all? First, a negative. For one thing, after these three years of exhausting post-graduate study all we received was a B.D., a Bachelor of Divinity. In any other discipline by now you would have your masters and be well on your way towards a doctorate, but for us it was only another bachelor degree. A friend of mine, also a Calvin graduate, received an M.A in linguistics from Mich. State University after only one year of post-graduate study! To be sure, ours was the most thorough and most solid bachelor degree in the world that we could rightly be proud of. No one had a more solid bachelor degree than we did. Still, we felt cheated. It did not help any to realize that this was common policy throughout the American seminary world. Later on at the Free University in Amsterdam, I had to take extra courses before they would admit me into their doctoral programme, even though my two bachelor degrees were fully equivalent to the Dutch *doctorandus* (Drs.), if not more.

Secondly, as solid as our training was, we all felt very poorly equipped to pastor a church! This also sounds negative, but is not. Is it not far better for fresh grads to realize they are not experts but have seen merely the tip of the iceberg? That there is much more to “it?” This recognition leads to the humility needed for an effective ministry.

Again, how did/do I feel about it all? You may remember that after the decision was made for me to enter Calvin College and Seminary, I was expecting to emerge from that educational journey with a lot of wisdom about life and spirituality and that all my own questions would be answered to my satisfaction, while I also would pick up enough knowledge, understanding and wisdom to answer everybody else’s questions. A laudable expectation perhaps, but totally unrealistic. What I actually ended up with was the realization that there was a lot more to learn and that I was only at the beginning of what might eventually turn into a faint shadow of knowledge and wisdom. In other words, more humility than certainty or, God forbid, false pride.

Nevertheless, a degree of pride at my accomplishment(s) was, I believe, legitimate and deserved. I *had* come a long way from my Dutch agricultural village childhood via the young immigrant teen in an isolated mountain community on Vancouver Island through an almost five-year stint as mill hand and high school correspondence to my current status. I had loved every one of my seven years of concentrated academic life and had reason for some pride, *grateful* pride.

Even now in our retirement, Fran and I often attend academic and other types of lectures at various Vancouver institutions, both Christian and secular. We thank God for such opportunities and delight in well-prepared lectures based on years of experience and research. After our own experiences and research over the years in association with the Free University of Amsterdam and the Institute of Church and Society in Jos, Nigeria, we know what it takes to craft and deliver solid lectures, realizing, again, there is *still* so much more out there and *still* so much farther to travel. We never seem to quite arrive....

### *Our Lives Together*

Now that we have shown the inside of the major determinants in our lives such as teaching for Fran and Seminary for me, it will be easier for you to understand the other aspects of our lives together. Throughout these teaching and seminary years we lived in that upstairs apartment where Paris Ave. runs dead into Franklin. It was an old but roomy and comfortable place, at least if you didn't mind the creaky floor at almost every step we took. Well, if you can get used to the heavy traffic on Franklin, why not when it comes to creaky floors? Besides, at \$45 a month including heat for a drafty apartment in a long, cold and bitter Michigan winter, you can't kick—and if you did, it would creak!

For the first period, Grandma Spoor, the landlady, lived below us. I already told you about her—a sweet old lady if ever there was one and a fine Catholic Christian. Though it was not part of our lease, we took care of the Michigan snow around the house, the sidewalk and the back alley, as well as the lawn in other seasons. Somewhere during our second year, her daughter took her to New Jersey and another Calvin couple, Ann and Bill Venema from Vancouver, moved in downstairs, an arrangement we brokered. Ann was my second cousin from the Scharft family that I knew well from our Lutjegast and Vancouver days. We were good neighbours and friends to each other. After graduation they moved back to BC, where they still live in Abbotsford. We occasionally visit them even now. He was a member of the Groen Club, a factor that often creates a special bond over the years, because it instills similar interests and concerns.

The neighbourhood had pretty well completed the transition from Whites to Blacks. Our house and the one next door were among the few exceptions in that the residents were white. I am happy to report that our Black neighbours were all pleasant people with whom we often chatted across the fence. A little further up the road it was a bit different. We did not feel safe walking the streets there at night, certainly not Fran.

Birthdays are always important, but they take on a special dimension during marriage and even more during the early part of a marriage. So how did we treat each other on our first birthdays? Fran treated me royally! You may remember how I would occasionally skip class and read Berkouwer's books? Well, Fran gave me the entire set of Berkouwer's dogmatics in so far as it was translated into English, all seven volumes at the time. That's what I consoled myself with during those days. For me at that time, few gifts would have been more precious than that. This very week of editing this chapter during May 2012, I have culled my library and sent off half of my books to the Philippines, but Berkouwer's are still there on the shelf. I cannot part with them.

Three weeks later, I pulled one of the ultimates of husbandly bloopers: I forgot Fran's birthday! Imagine, I forgot my wife's first birthday after we got married! I tried to make up for it by writing the following gem.

*To My Dearest Wife*

*Franny, Franny, you're my wife  
Ever since, we've had little strife  
Ever since, my life has been sweet  
I pray that with this you are agreed.*

*This morning, my memory seemed packed with starch,  
For I forgot that this is the 11<sup>th</sup> of March.  
I actually forgot about your birthday.  
For this I deserve a good-sized flay!*

*How this could be, I do not know,  
But you and I both know it's so.  
You have made my life one bountiful whole,  
So that nothing can be added to my bowl.*

*A bright and glorious future now we face,  
Supporting each other in life's race.  
This is the ideal to which we strive forward:  
Each for the other and both for the Lord.*

If you insist on reading more of my poetic gems, you'll have to ask! For the rest of you, I will just keep you in perpetual suspense. Enjoy life! But imagine: forgetting your wife's first birthday after your marriage! That's worse than a blooper!

*Our Life Style*

During the first year as a student couple, we were forced to live a spartan kind of life, but that was not new to either one of us recent immigrants. The monthly rent bill was low as

was our food bill. We shopped at Lindberg's, a local grocery store at Franklin & Eastern, with Fran keeping her eagle eyes out for specials and sales. Much of our meat consisted of chicken necks for ten cents a pound, while we bought smelt across the street for the same price. Our average monthly grocery bill was around \$30! And, we felt, we ate well.

Then as now, Fran kept meticulous financial records! In September, 1962, we spent \$45 for rent, \$2 for the *Grand Rapids Press*, \$7.10 for paint, lumber and bricks to make a student bookshelf. The total grocery bill was \$27.07, the largest expense being for \$6.29 at Lindbergs and the smallest item was for \$.10 at Hofstras. We bought eggs at 40 cents a dozen from Fran's parents. That very month we purchased six dozen! No wonder Fran eventually had trouble with high cholesterol.

During her growing-up years, Fran had learned a lot about housekeeping, ironing and basic record keeping, especially financial. However, she had had very little experience in cooking, probably because Mother Jennie considered that her domain. Fran doesn't think anyone else ever cooked at their house and she doesn't remember her Mom ever trying to teach any of the four sisters. She does remember her first attempt at preparing a meal as a student bride. We had invited her parents and sister Jane over for a Sunday dinner. I prepared a hot dish and Fran was going to make jello. She had no idea that it took close to 24 hours to have a jello "set" properly. So she waited till afternoon to open the package and read the directions. She doesn't remember what the rest of the menu was, but it definitely did not include jello!

During this first semester, Fran was busy with school work and wasn't able to supplement our family income at all. During the short Christmas break she worked a few hours a week again at Robinson Furniture, the new name for Converta Sofa. However, updated technology in the company made part time work impractical. She then found a very part time job at a real estate office in Breton Village Mall. The job was to manually file little cards with pictures and descriptions of current real estate listings. Obviously that was a very boring job, but we needed the money; so she persevered. Also she had to keep fresh coffee brewing during her short shift. One of the first times she forgot to actually put coffee in and thus ended up with just freshly brewed hot water. She commented, "I don't believe the realtor boys were amused!"

I was also very busy during my first semester at Calvin Seminary, especially with the Hebrew language course, but considered cooking a pleasant diversion. After my debacle with re-boiling potatoes in the House of Lords, I had improved considerably during my three years on Paris Ave.! Therefore, I was appointed main cook during our first months of marriage. One of my favourite dishes to cook was a casserole, consisting of macaroni noodles, cream of mushroom soup and tuna fish.

I did two or three graveyard shifts a week at the Pine Rest Children's Retreat, the same place I worked earlier. If I remember correctly, I earned \$1 per hour. I would try hard to do some assigned reading or work on a research paper, but usually sleep would soon overtake me and Johnny went a snoozin', sitting on an ordinary hard chair with my feet on a desk. That's probably where I picked up the sleeping skills for which I have long been

justly famous. I would be rudely woken by the buzzer announcing that the food was ready for pickup across the hall and by my never-failing nocturnal pee patient. The shift ended at 7 AM. Seminary lectures starting at 8 am, I would drive straight from work to the Seminary, eating a Children's Retreat sandwich on the way for breakfast. I was not always at my sharpest during these lectures, to say the least. But we made it through that first year on our own with minor debt and without any help from our respective families. Well, on our own? We gratefully acknowledge that God blessed our efforts to keep body and soul together and our two-some selves basically out of debt.

After Fran's graduation and starting a fulltime teaching job, we had a full time income! Wow! It was such a relief for both of us. Now we could give ourselves a little more *Lebensraum*, living space. She was ready, not to say "eager" to work on her "Ph. T." –"putting hubby through," a well-known "degree" among university students, females mostly.

A major change this more generous income meant that we would now shop at Lou De Young's grocery store in Wyoming. It was just a large glorified shed with wonderful prices. We started doing our major shopping there once or twice a month. Another major change is that now I could take advantage of the Seminary Bookstore discounts of 40% or more. Seminary students tend to love books and the Seminary years is the best time to build up a basic theological library, what with these discounts in place. Fran generously allowed me to use part of her income for this purpose, something for which I have always been grateful.

We started a tradition. She got paid every second Friday. When she'd come home with her cheque, we would go to the bank, deposit the larger part of it and drive off cash in hand to the nearest McDonald. At the time, there were not too many of them, but they actually were what they were supposed to be: fast food merchants. We would indulge in a hamburger, French fries and a soft drink each. What a treat that was after those collegiate years of famine and what luxury. We dared to *openly* love McDonald! Can you imagine? How the world has changed. The tradition took us into our Nigeria furlough years. And dare I confess it?: I still love the McDonald double cheeseburger and both of us swear there are no better French fries than theirs. Don't tell anyone else; it's our dirty little secret just between you and us. Even today, before I sneak into a McDonald outlet, I look all around me to make sure no one sees me. The shame of it all! I admit it: A fat juicy hamburger remains my all-time favourite American food with McDonald French fries a close second. Canada's poutine only spoils them.

Actually, we had a lot of variety in our lives. Within a very short compass, we attended a number of outside lectures, including the nationally infamous Dr. Carl McIntyre Sr. of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation Hour, who, according to a letter from Fran, spoke "against Calvin College, Peace Corps, Civil Rights, Government, etc." We participated in a 3000-person "Sympathy March" down Division Avenue against racism in Selma. We attended a worship service in an Eastern Orthodox Church. They did mass first in Arabic and then in English. Given the Greek background of that denomination, I expected the Arabic to be

Greek and was disappointed that I could not make out one single word! In a letter, Fran commented, “Those educated seminarians nowadays!”

### *Our Social Life*

#### *The Seminary Community*

Our social life outside of the Prins family was mainly with our classmates and their spouses, most of them being married. As for my side, we had already known each other from our college days and a camaraderie had formed between many of us. It also included some of Fran’s friends from before, especially John and Mary Ann Meyer, nee Mary Ann Uken. Most of our socializing was done in our homes; restaurants were out of the question for most of us.

#### *The Prins Family*

Most of our socializing took place within the Prins family. It was a close-knit family that did many things together, especially on Christian and national holidays. I appreciated that they hardly distinguished between the members of the birth family and their spouses. There was no “in-law” kind of feeling or distinction. Once you married into the family, you were one of them without reservation. If anyone refused or hesitated, that was his/her choice, not the family’s. This became especially clear after sister Jane’s death in 2000. Two of the sisters-in-law, Gert and Idamae participated fully in the disposition of her earthly goods.

Already earlier I expressed a kind of annoyance on my part at the way the grandchildren or nieces and nephews in the family were so much at the centre of attention. I was not used to that. In my birth family in The Netherlands, we grandchildren, nephews and nieces were seldom at the centre. Though I did have one nephew and two nieces in my birth clan by the time I left our home base in BC for Calvin, they did not live close together and thus were seldom in one place. By now, in my 70s, I delight in small children and may now be guilty of the same “over-indulgence!” My earlier annoyance was entirely misplaced. I apologize to that entire Prins down line—not that they ever noticed! Fran and I delight in that whole generation and *their* down lines and, I have good reason to believe, they likewise delight in us due mainly to Fran’s leadership role in the entire tribe.

One feature of the Prins family that particularly struck me was the dominance of Mother Jennie. By the time I joined the family, Father Charles hardly counted and, when he tried to participate in anything, was quickly brushed aside. It is no wonder that he continued working right up to his 80s as mud-mixer and supply carrier to his sons Ray and Henk, who co-owned Prins Bros. Construction, a small brick-laying company of high reputation, even climbing ladders and roofs. Fran and I felt that he had lost his purpose in life along with his place of honour in this Frisian family and expected that he would not survive long if he retired. I am quite unhappy to say we were right. He passed away at 82.

For a while, Father Charley needed lab tests done on Saturdays. Sister Henrietta would take him and then go for breakfast with him. One time she offered him oatmeal, but with a decisive stroke we were not accustomed to see from him, he said, “*Dat kin’k thus wel krije*” “That I can get at home.” End of discussion. Bacon and eggs it would be.

Nephew Steve, son of brother Henry, wrote, “We always knew if we could get him away from Grandma and Aunt Jane, then the rules were different! Once he showed up at our house with an entire weight lifting set he had bought at a garage sale. His only words were ‘Don’t tell your Grandma’.” My question is where he might have gotten the money for such excess.

Here’s a tale of two bridges, purses and pucks. Francis had been a pre-engineering student at Calvin and then went on to do engineering at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. And now you’re going to have to get out your Michigan-Ontario maps. When he graduated, he got his first engineering job with the company building the new international bridge between the two Sault Ste. Maries straddling the Canada-US border in Upper MI. On that job, he would walk the steel beams high above the waters of the strait connecting Lakes Huron and Superior. Brrr—enough to make me shudder even now. He lived on the Canadian side of the strait and that’s where he and Trena stayed after they married.

One weekend during my freshman year at the Seminary, Fran and I along with brother Ray and wife Gert went to visit Trena and Francis up there. A hundred miles south of the Mackinac Bridge, boasted to be the longest in the world, we had stopped for a coffee. Afterwards, as we approached the bridge, Fran realized she had left her purse, including money, passports and other valuables in the washroom of the restaurant. What should we do? We were on the bridge by now and could no longer turn around. We decided to explain to the toll gate keepers at the north end of the bridge that we had no money to pay toll, since we had left the purse at a restaurant. They allowed us to make a u-turn to go back and find that purse. So, we crossed that long bridge twice and made a u-turn without paying any toll. Candidates for Guinness Book of Records?

We returned to the restaurant, a hundred miles to the south of us. A hundred miles! It paid off; the purse was there in good hands, waiting for its owner. No one said a thing in recrimination or critique. Fran seldom felt so bad and would have preferred to be chastised for this time-and-gas-guzzling mistake.

Ever since then, I started working on her to abandon these useless purses when there was no reason for them. It took me years, decades in fact, but I finally succeeded. She no longer carries a purse and, worse even, between the two of us, pokes fun of women carrying purses, not to say she feels sorry for them! Even Queen Elisabeth remains the butt of our jokes for carrying a purse when she had to drop the ceremonial puck at a Vancouver hockey game! It became a matter of an editorial in the *Vancouver Sun*! What, the editor surmised, might she be carrying in it? Yes, a puck, a mere puck!

Years later, I confided to Fran that I long suspected that the only reason women lug purses around was to carry their monthly hygienic supplies! What other reason could they possibly have? No matter where or when or what, always that purse right up till today! Only, why then should older women carry them? I reasoned that it had become an inseparable habit for them they could no longer shake. Now I became the butt of Fran's jokes. She continues to assure me it was for money and other things, not monthly supplies! I still wonder .... One day I'll sneak a peak!

A few comments about our last names are in order. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a period France occupied The Netherlands. Napoleon ordered all Dutch families to choose a family name to create some semblance of order in civil administration. My ancestors, by adopting the name "Boer," acknowledged *and accepted* their lowly status in society. They were peasants and apparently had no ambitions to rise above their status. As the Frisian expression has it, "*In boer moat boer bliuwe,*" 'A peasant/farmer should remain a peasant/farmer,' an expression of a stagnant or static attitude towards one's social and economic status. In contrast, Fran's ancestors chose the name "Prins," thereby declaring themselves on the side of the royal House of Orange, a courageous choice, for it meant an explicit rejection of the French occupiers. So, now I find myself suddenly proud of having joined these revolutionary royals! Usually, support for a royal dynasty is an expression of conservatism; this time, it indicated opposition to the status quo. I would not say "liberal," for that word would hardly apply to the Republican Prins clan.

### *The Boer Side of Things*

The seminary years played themselves out mostly in Grand Rapids, far away from the BC Boers. Of course, brother Harry—now Hendrik—and Barb were also on the campus and we did occasionally visit each other or do things together, but on the whole, we led very separate lives. There really is not much to write about our interaction with each other, though we got along perfectly fine, just different interests and different crowds we hung out with.

One fine winter morning, there was a knock on our door and lo and behold there was brother Jim! Totally unannounced or unexpected! We were tickled pink for him to go through the trouble of this long journey. We enjoyed having him around and even played a joke on him that at the point of writing (2013) seems a bit lame. One night we spread rice between his sheets. Apparently that was a favourite trick young people played on each other at the time. It meant taking the bed apart and shaking it all out and then remaking it. A trick? Well, yes. But a joke? That's another story. Glad Jim did not take revenge, not that I remember at least, but then, I do not even remember the trick itself. Fran and Jim had to remind me.

### *Closing Comments*

**We have come to the end of a significant phase in our history during which we made many decisions with lasting consequences. We married. Both of us had done college. Fran had finally started the work for which she was so eager and eminently suited, namely teaching in elementary school. I made it through Seminary. We made ourselves available for mission work in Nigeria instead of ministry in some Canadian city. Life was a good adventure for us. We had a thousand reasons to thank God for His guidance, mercy and compassion in our lives.**

**But one thing we did not achieve during this period. Part of a humorous ditty that Fran wrote on her 1964 homemade Valentine's card said it:**

**We both tried our hand at reforming each other;  
You've done your best, but you've not made me mother.  
It seems you should try a little harder.  
Then maybe we would get a little farther!**

**It was with that determination that we entered the next phase of our lives.**

## Chapter 13<

### Ministry, Ordination, Preparation

(1965-1966)

The next year between Seminary and Nigeria (1965-1966) can best be described as an interim year, exciting and full of variety. We were facing a complete break from our previous work, study and socializing regimes. Everything would change. Fran had not signed a teaching contract and mourned the loss of a job she loved so much. She had completed her “Ph.T.” As for me, all the pressures and rigours of academic life were now behind me; no more tests or exams, no more research papers, no more lectures. Without all that pressure, life almost seemed like a holiday for me, even though there were plenty of things to attend to. The sad part was that my class of nearly 40 people with whom I had shared an intense seven years of academia and socializing was, along with our spouses, about to scatter across the entire continent and even across the oceans. In some way this was a repeat of our respective graduation from the College, but for me, at least, student relations in the Seminary were more intense than in the College. Some would continue with post-graduate study, while others would go into the church or mission.

#### *Preparation for Ordination*

The CRC protocol for Seminary graduates to enter the ordained ministry was first of all for the students to be introduced to the CRC Synod, which meets early June, and be declared eligible for a call. After that declaration, the way is open for interested churches to call the one of their choice. So, one fine day, early June, 1965, our class members were ushered onto the stage in the Synod chamber for due process and emerged from it full-fledged ministerial candidates for the CRC.

The next step was to be listed in *The Banner* as eligible for being called by churches to serve as their minister or missionary. In our case, we had already reported to CRWM that we were prepared to accept the challenge of Nigeria. Having successfully cleared the initial interviews with Rev. Henry Evenhouse, the General Secretary, we were listed with “(Nigeria)” behind my name. This would ensure no one would call us for domestic ministry.

Behind the scenes, Evenhouse had pre-arranged for II Highland CRC in Highland, IN, to call us as their missionaries to Nigeria. That congregation had offered to sponsor a missionary to Nigeria. So the two parties were hooked up with each other, II Highland called us and we “accepted.” This meant that, after a few more steps of due process, they would then take me to their local classis, a CRC district consisting of a dozen or more area churches, where I was to be examined once more, then ordination into the missionary ministry and we would be set to go. From then on, II Highland would pay our salary and

would tout us as their missionaries in both their own bulletin and in the CRC Yearbook, while we would be administratively responsible to CRWM. We would submit regular reports or “missionary prayer letters” to the church to ensure their prayers for and continued interest in “their missionaries.”

The “classical exam” as it was called, was scheduled to take place during an early fall meeting of Classis Illiana, a name that constituted a conflation of “Illinois” and “Indiana,” for this classis straddled the two states south of Chicago. This meant that I had an entire summer and part of the fall to prepare for this exam. In distinction from the various academic exams at Seminary, this was considered an ecclesiastical exam, where the classis would determine your suitability for ministry, including your doctrinal stance, personal faith and practical pastoral skills. Our salary would not kick in till we had passed this hurdle. Neither would CRWM process us any further till then.

### *A Florida Side Adventure*

Thus we faced a summer of preparation for this “classical” as well as the need for some income. The Seminary offered us a summer pastoral assignment in Lake Worth CRC, Florida. My task would consist exclusively of preaching twice a Sunday. I could use the rest of my time to prepare for the classical. The local CRC would pay us our traveling expenses, a low salary and provide housing.

Strictly speaking, the entire situation was illegal. I was a foreign student who was obligated to leave the country upon graduation. My student work permit automatically became invalid at that moment. However, the foreign student regime at the time was more relaxed than it is today. No one followed up on me. Fran, of course, was an American citizen and thus provided us with some kind of pseudo legal protection. We ignored the situation and were happy to accept the assignment.

So, off to Florida in our second huge Desoto orphan, another gas guzzler with overdrive. Neither one of us had ever been that far south, so that this truly represented a new adventure. We had a tent for overnight camping during the journey. The last night camp out on the trip we were already well into Florida. We pitched the tent in a campground and then drove off to explore the area. Then a tropical rain came upon us, the likes of which we had never experienced. Just buckets and torrents of never-ending rain! When we returned to our campsite, the tent, along with the bedding, was totally flooded and had become useless for the night. So we broke camp and moved into a local hotel. Our first experience of a tropical rain.

“Our” house in Lake Worth was a huge parsonage with an AC inside and palm trees in the yard. That seemed pretty exotic to us. We decided not to use the AC but to get used to tropical conditions we would meet in Nigeria. We adhered to that decision for a few weeks, but then succumbed to the comfort of AC temperatures. Well, what are temptations for!

We soon settled in with a new routine. The morning and early afternoon work for me was taken up with sermon preparation for two Sunday services and for my classical examination. We would often spend part of the afternoon on the beach, an experience we have never forgotten. The incessant rhythm of powerful waves of warm tropical water constantly washing over our bodies was an incomparably delightful experience for us day after day. We simply could not get enough of it.

I do not have much specific memory of my sermonizing and services. In distinction from today, it included doing the entire liturgy. Also in distinction from today, this was the church that ordered me to go home—next door-- and dress properly in suit and tie for evening services in the stifling tropical Florida heat. Well, not quite. They were gracious enough to allow me to shed the coat!

The congregation treated us royally. We were invited by some to their homes for meals. Not a bad way to start the missionary phase of our lives! One family treated us to a mango, a fruit we had never seen, let alone eaten. Such tropical fruits were not distributed as widely as they are today. Before we took a bite, our host warned us pointedly, “This is Black Man’s food!” Fran and I looked at each other and both wondered what the point of this “alarm” was. Why “warn” us for something as “dangerous” as this if we were preparing to be missionaries to the people of the Sudan, the old name of Sub-Saharan Africa meaning “Land of the Blacks?” He might better have introduced the fruit by saying he was giving us a foretaste of good things to come. We disregarded the “warning” and enjoyed the mango. Later, once in Wukari, Nigeria, we enjoyed a *real* mango, an improved variety called the “juli mango” that grew on huge trees around our house that were far more delicious than our first one in Florida. It is a huge mango and almost constitutes a complete meal. They simply don’t come better than the juli. Even now, many years later, when we think Wukari, apart from our friends there, the juli mango is one of the first things to come to mind.

Besides sermon preparation, which took considerable time for this rookie, I was working hard on my classical exam. Since doctrine tended to be held in high esteem, I concentrated on Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*. Berkhof was professor of dogmatics at Calvin Seminary, who retired before our time. His book was/is famous throughout the English-speaking world and has been translated into several languages. It was not popular with us students: as dry as dust, but it *was* complete with everything carefully defined, while all the distinctions one could possibly think of were found between its covers. It was the CRC standard. So, like it or not, that’s what I concentrated on daily for some hours throughout the summer.

Once again, the Lieuwens played a role in our routine by a return visit. Together we did quite a few touristy things. We took a leisurely drive to Miami, doing a lot of sightseeing along the way, especially the beautiful beaches all along the coast. We also joined a large recreational fishing boat together with many other tourists. We went way out into the ocean. The gentle breezes were delightful, but, true to myself, I became seasick and spent most of my time spread out on the deck. Some caught a fish or two, and everyone had great fun on this adventure.

We read an ad offering a free flight to Florida's west coast to view properties for sale. A free dinner at a hotel was included in the deal. We had no intention or money to buy properties, but we *were* interested in the free flight. So we arranged for a flight for all four of us. None of us had ever flown before. It was a small bush plane so that one of us sat next to the pilot. He overheard our conversation and soon realized that we were not really interested in properties. He did land us at the promised site and they did provide the free dinner they had offered, but they did not show us any properties. They muttered something about it being late and that a storm might be coming up. Back in the air for the return flight. The pilot had a sense of humour. Several times he would fly the plane upside down just to give us a memorable experience! Well, it did not do our stomachs any good, but it *was* an experience we never forgot. That was our introduction to the flying life, something that in due time became almost routine for us.

In the meantime, the list of ministerial candidates was published in *The Banner*. The list also included information about those already spoken for, like ourselves. One day we received a phone call from a CRC pastor from a church in Holland, MI. We did not know each other, but he had recently moved to Holland from the Illiana area, where he had also served as pastor. He wanted to alert me to a problem I would likely face during my classical examination. He described the classis as rather conservative and unhappy with the Harold Dekker thesis about the love of God. He assured me they had nothing against me personally, but I would be their guinea pig for getting back at Dekker and to the Seminary as a whole. They would try to trip me up and then blame the Seminary for doing a bad job! He then advised me to be as brief as possible in my answers, display a humble spirit throughout and, above all, not to argue under any circumstances.

I was very grateful for this alert, but it also made me very nervous. I had expected to be among friends who would seek the best for me. Instead, I was about to enter a den of lions ready to pounce on me. To make things worse, I discovered I would be the only candidate to be examined and that they could well spend the best part of a day on me. This all looked pretty ominous to me, but I had no choice except to face the music when it came. It led me to study all the harder or, rather, to memorize more.

At the end of the summer, Fran and I returned to Grand Rapids via Washington, D. C., where we spent a few days seeing the national sights. Fran had been there before with her high school class; for me, it was an interesting and worthwhile first visit to the nation's capital. In due time, we arrived back in Grand Rapids and moved back into our Franklin Street apartment that we had subleased to other students for the summer. We did not expect to stay long in Grand Rapids anymore. The wait was now for the classical exam, since neither II Highland nor CRWM would proceed with processing us for going to Nigeria. So I used that time for still more preparation for that scary event staring me in the face.

### *The Classical Exam*

The date for the exam was early September in some church near Highland IN. The exam consisted of my preaching a sermon on an assigned text after which a committee asked me questions or challenged me on the floor of the assembly. Various delegates had been assigned previously to test me on various doctrines and other issues. All the way through I carefully adhered to the advice I had been given, but then we ran into a snag on a question about the resurrection. I indicated some disagreement with the received orthodox wisdom on the subject that brought many questions from the floor. I told them that, though I had some hesitation over the established doctrine, I had not yet come to a ripe conclusion and was still struggling with the issue. This was unacceptable to these protectors of the faith. They wanted orthodox answers without any doubts attached. I could not satisfy them on this score. They ordered me out of the room so they could discuss the matter *in camera* and *in absentia*. After some brief nervous moments that seemed an eternity to me, they recalled me and, with a warning to be more theologically resolute, moved on to other issues. I was told later that Rev. Eldersveld, the original and very popular preacher of the Back to God Hour, had chided them for talking *about* me instead of *with* me. He carried the day and I was called back in. The next week Eldersveld died of a heart attack.

At the end of the day, I was officially accepted as a candidate. I had passed and they presented me with the classical diploma which officially rendered me acceptable as minister in the entire CRC denomination. Phew! What hard study had preceded this moment and what terrible tension! I was so grateful to God for having seen me through all of this. I have ever since retained an unpleasant taste in my mouth when it came to classis Illiana. This, I felt, was no way to usher a young candidate into Kingdom ministry.

Passing this exam was not an automatic given, especially not these years of the Dekker controversy. In fact, the next year the neighbouring classis also examined a member of my class, a close friend of mine, whom they actually failed! That was almost unheard of, but it was the same dynamic I had faced. The poor guy, also heading for missionary work abroad, could not proceed further. He got himself a job in construction while he waited and prepared for the next classis meeting. I gratefully record that he made it second time around.

### *Ordination and Further Preparation*

The way was now clear for both CRWM and the Highland church to process me further. The church set a date at which they would ordain me into the ministry and I would preach my inaugural sermon in the evening. It was in September. Various pastors participated in the ordination but the main one to officiate was the local pastor, Rev. Dr. Rutgers. He had at one time taught at Calvin Seminary, but during a theological fracas in the early 1950s, he was booted out along with our own Dr. Harry Boer you met earlier. I preached my inaugural in which I emphasized that though I was now ordained into the ministry and would soon go forth as a missionary, *every member* and *every Christian* had similar obligations to serve God and reflect Him in all they did and to witness to Christ in their

daily walk. Nothing special in the sermon that people would remember for long. After that service, there was a coffee and cake reception for us, during which all members of the church as well as some Prinses congratulated us and wished us God's blessings. My salary, fully paid by this church, kicked in on that day, while benefits came out of CRWM's pocket. These included housing, health insurance and pension.

Over the next few months, we would be in Michigan, but would frequently visit the congregation in order to get to know each other. We would visit various organizations within the congregation and open ourselves to questions. We would visit them at home for meals, all of it designed to cement our relationship with them. We found them conservative, yes, but so were we, though in a different way. It soon became clear to us that with our Kuypertian minds we were quite different from Highlanders. Our status as recent immigrants also made us different from this very settled and mature community. Nevertheless, we liked and appreciated them, a feeling that, I believe, was mutual at the time. All of them were Republicans, we were told, with the exception of one large clan, the Zandstras.

The Zandstras, especially the Arnold Zandstra clan with their several sons, were major truck farmers in the Highland area with extensive land holdings in Michigan as well as Indiana. They were the Democrats to spoil the Republican broth! They were energetic business people and progressive farmers. We stayed with several of them and loved our conversations with them! They were also generous and would load our trunk with fruits and vegetables every time we came. We came to love these people and never lost contact with the family. Today, most of their farm is gone due to forced urban "development." Arnold, or "Dick" as he was popularly called, retired long ago, but until recently still puttered around what was left of the farm. He reached the status of centenarian before he died in 2011—between the first draft of this chapter and its final edit. He was known far and wide for his active participation in and support of the Gideons, those inveterate distributors of Bibles in hotels around the world.

On one of these Grand Rapids-Highland trips, our second Desoto gave up the ghost on our return along the expressway. Both of us are a bit fuzzy about the details here, but we seem to remember that we took out our suitcases, hitchhiked our way back to Grand Rapids and simply abandoned that car at the side of the road, not having the money to have it hauled away. We bought another pre-owned vehicle, a Chevy Impala. It served us well for the rest of our time in the country.

With the classical exam and ordination out of the way, CRWM was now prepared to process us further. An important step was to have a psychological test taken as to a couple's suitability for missionary service. This was carried out by the very psychiatrist whose organ (musical, not bodily!) we inherited more than three decades later via his daughter Mickey, the widow of our old friend Cor B. Early into the interview, the psychiatrist started discussing an issue that was controversial at the time in the CRC. It took him very little time to decide that I am an argumentative person with strong opinions. Now, where he got that from is beyond me! For some reason, CRWM administrators over the years never argued against that judgement. When many years later I applied for a

teaching position at Calvin Seminary after I had obtained my doctorate, that judgement was dragged out of the closet and dangled before me as proof of my unsuitability. Ah, some things have a long tail. At any rate, though the Seminary rejected my application years later, CRWM did not. We were both accepted, though my alleged argumentative nature was duly noted.

### *Michigan State University Side Show*

CRWM followed some strange policies. In the CRC itself, pastors have traditionally been held in high regard. Hence, since I was now a full-fledged minister, Fran and I were offered the opportunity to go for further training at CRWM expense while already on full missionary salary, an opportunity not offered to non-ordained staff. After some investigation, we selected the African Studies Center (ASC) at Michigan State University (MSU) in Lansing MI. For one thing, along with five other African languages, they taught Hausa, the language we would be using in Nigeria. There were courses in African history, Nigerian literature and, of all things, First Aid! So Fran and I went there to check things out and pick up applications.

While introducing ourselves to the ASC folk, we were asked where we would be working in Nigeria. We were told by CRWM without further explanation, at “EKAS Benue.” So the entire staff got involved in locating this mysterious place that was not on any map. Eventually, CRWM explained that this was the name of the denomination, not of the town! As we were to discover more and more, information sharing was not a major CRWM strength! More about that name later.

Alas, things are seldom as they seem. The process required that MSU provide me, a foreign student, with that standard I-20 form. However, that form could only be supplied to full-time students who were pursuing a degree course, which we were not. The ASC was not a degree-granting department; it was *inter*-departmental, teaching courses administered and taught by various other departments. We spent a full day wandering from department to department, trying to find some departmental official who might take me under her wings. It really was an impossible venture; no ordinary official would take on such an irregular academic fugitive. The fact that it was for a disreputable purpose such as the missionary enterprise would make it even less likely.

As God would have it, an official in the Dept. of Sociology was willing to go out on a limb in a very humorously creative way. He decided to accept me as a master’s student in his department on the gentleman’s agreement that I would never use any courses I took at MSU towards a masters in Sociology! The likelihood of my ever nursing an ambition for such a degree was so remote that I jumped at the opening and signed up for his programme. Problem solved! I regret I forgot the gentleman’s name and never met him again. Just in the off chance that he should read these memoirs, “Thank you, Sir. Thank you. Sorry I did not ever visit you again.”

But I was still the foreign student, so that CRWM had to pay a hefty tuition bill. Luckily, Fran being a Michigan resident, her tuition bill was low. Yes, lucky for us, for we had to pay for her tuition ourselves; CRWM only paid for me. She was not an employee; she was “merely” accompanying her missionary husband. CRWM did not hire couples. They hired the husband and then expected the wife to volunteer, though that was never put in writing. Two for the price of one. The fact that she was expected to serve as a volunteer did not trigger any advance appreciation. She was not staff. Punkt! You’re on your own. The strange thing was that the Pentagon, the missionary designation for the CRC’s administrative centre in Grand Rapids, over the years did hire some husbands and wives for administrative functions at “home,” with both on the payroll. They did not expect volunteer service from their wives. This never sat well with some of us missionaries. Well, what do you expect? They were the administrators and we were their pawns.

CRWM also paid for our housing in Lansing, but being the stewardly scroungers that we were, we found a very old and dark, if not dank, apartment on Larch Street near downtown Lansing. From there we would commute to MSU, usually by transit. Living at some distance from the campus and being comparatively older and married students with limited tenure, we did not participate much in student or campus life.

There was one exception. We did belong to an unofficial small missionary group that was organized and sponsored by Dr. Charles and Mrs. Margaret Kraft. (Later, Margaret would also obtain a doctorate.) The couple had been missionaries in Northern Nigeria under the auspices of the Church of the Brethren. They were of independent mind and favoured baptizing polygamists. This created fury among the missionaries and eventually led to their being sent home. Years later, the Nigerian pastor-patriarch of that church, Rev. Maisule Biyu, confided to me that, left to Nigerian pastors, the Krafts would have been allowed to stay. The same rebellious spirit that led to their eviction from Nigeria, was also very obvious in their leadership of our missionary group. While they intended to encourage missionaries, they came close to discouraging us with their very sharp and negative criticism of missions and missionaries. Fran and I sometimes wondered about their motivation, especially Charles’.

If their contribution to the missionary group was of mixed nature, their contribution to our study of Hausa was singularly great. Charles had composed a hefty textbook on the Hausa language. We were glad that, given his negative spirit at the time, it was Margaret who taught the course. She did a marvelous job that we appreciate till this day. At first, we found the course very difficult because of the method used, details of which I will not bore you with except to say that conversation took priority to grammar, the very opposite to previous language courses we had taken with the exception of my German 101 at Calvin. Once we got used to this newer method we appreciated it. As in Calvin, I had a hard time keeping up with my Famke, who shared a sharp memory for details with her brother Ray. Since we took the course for only two terms, we did not speak a fluent Hausa by the time we arrived in Jos, Nigeria, but enough to impress the missionaries who welcomed us at the airport with Hausa greetings. We definitely had a considerable head start with the language.

We made a life-long friendship at MSU that started almost the very moment we first entered the classroom. There was this very blond-and-blue-eyed fellow sitting there who looked vaguely familiar. His name was Robert Koops, the linguist I referred to earlier. He was not only a Calvin College graduate, but he was also a missionary-in-training of CRWM! We had not been told about each other but here we were, taking the same course and going to the same country! That did make us wonder about CRWM administration, a comparatively small unit at the time within the larger setup of the Pentagon.

Being a linguist, Rob tended to catch on to the language faster than the rest of the class. We have never forgotten how he stunned us one day early in the course, when he uttered a complete sentence in as perfect Hausa as we had heard so far. The sentence? “*Ban san sunansa da Hausa ba*”—“I don’t know its Hausa name.” You see, we even remember the sentence itself after 55 years! It was a simple sentence, but he spoke it with the perfect tonal inflection that simply floored the rest of us. Rob later married Esther. They became best friends to us. We have always loved him for his exquisite humour, while we deeply admire Esther’s violin music, equally exquisite. Even our children became life-long friends. We mourned their move from Nigeria to The Gambia years later. Recently we visited them in their New Mexico home to which they “retired.” They have become internationally recognized linguists with a Ph. D. and Masters respectively.

We also took a course in African history. The outstanding memory from that course was a moment on January 15, 1966, when someone knocked on the door of the classroom. The lecturer was handed a note. He read it and put his hands around his head in obvious shock. “No, Nigeria! It can’t be!” The note informed him of Nigeria’s first coup. There had been a number of post-independence coups on the African continent, but throughout it all Nigeria was seen as a rock of stability. And here, suddenly, completely unexpected, Nigeria had a coup! It was unthinkable. Impossible. The man’s reaction called into question his knowledge and understanding of the continent. Later on, after we had been in Nigeria for some time, it became clear to us that this coup had been brewing for some time. That lecturer should have been on top of that. In his defence, his expertise was on East Africa, while Nigeria is in West Africa. That coup was the first of a long series over the decades. It almost became a way of life for the country till towards the end of the 1990s, when more stable elected governments were put into place. But even today, one never knows. Occasional rumours of potential coups still make the rounds.

Our MSU Christmas holidays were used to visit my parents in Port Alberni. We took a bus from Lansing to some place in Ontario, where we boarded a trans-Canada Canadian National Railway (CNR) train that would take us all the way across the country via Edmonton. Though I had crossed the country by train before in 1951, that was by CPR and along a more southern route and in a more primitive train. This time around, we traveled in a comfortable train with a little more money in our pockets and thus with access to a few more amenities. But, remember, it was Christmas. The wintry temperatures in northern Alberta were so low that between Edmonton and Edson the train froze up and had to stop in the middle of nowhere. The crew did what they could to keep us passengers “comfortable,” at least above freezing temperatures. We have no idea what they had to do to get the train moving again, but eventually it did and in due time we arrived safely in

Vancouver. From there that ferry again to Nanaimo, from where my parents drove us to Port Alberni. That winter delivered the most snow I had ever seen in the Alberni Valley: some five feet of it within a couple of days. The New Town part of Port Alberni, located as it is on the wall of the valley, is extremely hilly. The city was not equipped to keep all these hilly streets safe for traffic so that the snow created quite a mess. I seem to recall that, being young, we enjoyed the experience. We bade my parents farewell and returned to Lansing as we had come.

### *The Final Stretch*

We completed two out of three terms at MSU and returned to Grand Rapids for the final stretch before Nigeria. We lived in a “mission house” for the period. Various CRC members in the West Michigan area donated houses to CRWM that were used to house missionaries in need of temporary housing, such as missionaries in transition like us and missionaries on “furlough,” later re-baptized as “home service.” We have lived in many of them. They were all furnished, so that we could just move in with our suitcases and be set. Often the women’s group that had volunteered to maintain a particular house would also stock it with a few basic foods to last for a few days. All in all, a great arrangement, even though some were located in questionable neighbourhoods, the reason they were donated in the first place. You can’t sell for a reasonable price, so you donate the place to the church and get a hefty tax credit, while the church can put it to good use. Eventually, all those properties were sold and replaced by apartments just off 28<sup>th</sup> Street SE, not far from CRWM offices.

That final stretch did indeed become a stretch in our case. CRWM applied for missionary visas for us, but forgot that I was a Canadian. They applied as if I were American. They had to retrace their steps and apply to separate Nigerian offices: for Fran, the Nigerian embassy in DC; for me, the Nigerian High Commission in Ottawa. Commonwealth Ambassadors within the British Commonwealth are called High Commissioners. CRWM’s mistake delayed our departure by more than a month.

The interim time was taken up with medical appointments and various vaccinations required for international travel. These appointments included pregnancy issues. Our long-range family planning had been to start a family after the first two years into our marriage. In other words, start by 1965, my last year in Seminary. But by February, 1966, there was nothing to show for and we started doctoring. At the time, sister Trena was pregnant with a second child. Fran wrote to her from Lansing,

If you have twins, we *demand* one of them! So there. Unfair distribution isn’t allowed in Johnson’s Great Society. I have to go for a tube x-ray. My witch doctor is really keeping me hopping (also hoping!) lately. He wants to check all possibilities before we leave this fair land.

We were also advised about the availability of supplies in Nigeria and were then told it would depend on us whether we wanted to take supplies from the US or try to “make do”

with whatever was available in country. Specifically, it would depend on our attitude more than anything else. We checked with various experienced missionaries and got varied advice from them, not to say opposite. One couple, the Lemckes, whose spirit we appreciated more than that of others, advised us that with a bit of good will and patience, we would not need to take many supplies. We decided to go with their advice. It turned out later, when we had become friends, that they and we shared a “non-establishment” kind of spirit, something that others might call “rebellious.” No wonder their advice clicked with us.

Nevertheless, we did not go altogether empty handed. We purchased clothes to last us for three years and equipment like typewriter, a heavy, clumsy and technologically advanced Butoba tape recorder, but included very little food stuffs. We also sent my library-- my tools, in other words. Most of it was packed in a shipping crate, with the books going in drums, all of it to be shipped by freighters. CRWM paid us a shipping allowance that we could use as we saw fit.

Before leaving in April, 1966, we had one final obligation to fulfill. We still owed Francis and Trena Lieuwen a whole \$50 from Seminary days. It was payment in kind: our bedroom furniture. By that time, they lived in Cincinnati, where Francis was an engineer. So we transported that furniture on a U-Hall trailer behind our Impala. We left Michigan debt-free after a total of thirteen post-high school academic years between the two of us with a minimum of financial help. We had every reason to thank God for His grace and mercies.

On April 22, 1966, we boarded a plane at the old Kent Country Airport in Grand Rapids and flew to the Big Apple, where we boarded a KLM to take us to Kano, Nigeria, via Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. While climbing the stairs to board the KLM in New York, someone called us by name. We turned around to see who could possibly know our name so far from home. There was a photographer who was sent to take a picture of us. We never found out who mandated the picture, but an enlarged copy eventually reached us.

And this is the end of the brief interim between Seminary and Nigeria. A short time brim full of exciting events and preparation for an unknown future that we had never expected. A number of long-range plans had come to their fruition, but in that process preparations were unfolding for new and unexpected plans on a very different continent we had not expected ever to see. Nigeria, here we come!