

Sunday, June 14, 1981

Our third visit in Holland

At noon we were ready to leave for our trip to Jack and Grace in Alberta. After church we were spoiled with a hot meal yet at Murray and Carol and then drove to Clearwater for a good rest. We arrived the next day, late afternoon, in Redwater, at Jack and Graces. We were again taken care of in every detail. The next day they brought us to the airport, Lisa from John and Ina, was with us and excited to go to her Grandma Annie for a visit. As we were eight hours in the plane, we were getting more excited about seeing our loved ones too. Up until this time we were traveling and visiting and did not have much time to think about it. But now we began to picture our brothers and sisters at the airport! It was eight years ago that we went home to celebrate our 25th anniversary.

We left one half hour late and arrived one half hour early, thanks to a strong tail wind. Our trip was beautiful with all the way sunshine, except for one hour. It was the shortest night we ever had.

We were welcomed by several brothers and sisters. As always it was very emotional for me to see them all, especially my Mom where we were staying overnight for three weeks. I have raised the question to Dad, "Will this always be like this, when we are going Home?" My dear, wise husband answered, "Don't worry about it Mom, that is the way you are"! That brought me the freedom to be myself, many tears or few, I could come as I was and felt. Dad was always so calm, even though he loved his family just as much as I did mine. I often thought and wished that I could be like him but there was no need for that. This reminds me of the question I asked Dad during our "Golden feast" celebrations. "Have I irritated or even aggravated you when I often laughed more then you did?" I did not need to ask that again but I am glad I did. I needed to hear these words of assurance once more, "Mom, I have loved you always the way you are."

We all went to Oma's apartment with all the Van Leeuwen brothers and sisters. It was a wonderful party, which lasted several hours. It was all organized in detail and we enjoyed every moment to the full. Dad has always been a great help to me, catching me in my weakness and also during times of sickness, he was always there to urge me on.

After lunch we needed a nap and so did Oma. After supper Dad's family came for the evening. They took care of the serving etc. as well and Oma loved it just as much as we did. This has become a custom since we had left for Canada. With our birthdays they come together to celebrate as well. After the first day when we had met everyone, we settled down for some quiet days.

June 18: John made a start on preparing a sermon for July 5 in Schipluiden and I made arrangements, by phone, to visit all our brothers and sisters in their homes. We have done this the four times we were home and found this personal contact of great value, even though it is very "gezellig" when we are together with the whole crowd! In the evening we visited with Nico and Jannie Van Leeuwen in Delft. It was a wonderful evening. They are so open as to what the Lord is doing in their lives.

June 19: We spent most of the day at the farm of my sister Teuns and her husband Frank. I have always loved that old farm with the "rieten dak" (thatched roof). Frank's parents were ready to retire when they got married and took over in 1943. They drove us around and showed us the four places of their sons who make a living from the farm, mainly growing vegetables. The other four sons make a living elsewhere. One son emigrated to Australia. My sister still lives in their newly built home, close to the old farm where one of her sons lives with his family. (86 years old)(??) We also visited Dad's cousin John van Vliet and family and afterwards my cousin who was our neighbor in Holland. They both lived on the same street. We could not pass her by when we heard that we were so close when I was a young teenager. I lost contact after we left. When you leave your homeland you feel like keeping in touch with all of them, but it does not take long before you find out that this is impossible. I have learned that you cannot let go of everything all at once, what had been dear to you in all those years. The answers for most of the immigration struggles were coming very slowly. It all boils down to faith in God, that this was His plan for you. There is no other way to make a new beginning in another land. It was a wonderful day with meals for a king so to speak. But most of all, full of love, reconnecting where we had left off.

Making a trip home gives you much joy to see all your loved ones again. You can compare it with picking a beautiful rose with thorns because the hurting comes when it is time to leave again. "When you love much, you also have to cry much, at times."

June 20: In the morning John and I went shopping for shoes. We did a lot of walking going out every day and I needed better support for my feet. This was the day of the Van Leeuwen reunion. It was to be held in the social hall next to the church in Schipluiden. Mom and all my brothers and sisters were present with most of their children, seventy in all. It was a beautiful feast. We talked with every one who was there and it was a game for both of us to guess with whose child we were speaking. Mom was sitting next to us and said to her grand children: "Don't tell who you are, they can still guess it." My brother Kees, was the MC of the family, since Klaas had passed away in 1977, announced that every one could talk with us for 3 minutes at the most, beginning with the younger generation. It was a pleasant experience to talk with most, if not all, who were between the age of ten and twenty five years. We guessed the wrong "tribe" with two of them but not bad for not seeing them grow up. It was beautiful hours together with lots of food and drink. And without realizing it we had entertained every one, we were told. In closing a picture of the "lovers lane" from "Huis ten Dorp" was presented to us by the children of my oldest sister. It was a very enjoyable reunion which we have always treasured.

Sunday, June 21: As we were at Oma van Leeuwen those three weeks, everything was arranged by my brothers and Mom for ten days. After that it was the Moermans who took care of us, even though we slept at Oma's, and had breakfast with her every day. We loved it. We went to our church in Schipluiden with all the memories of our youth. The Sunday services, the place where we were baptized, made our public Confession of Faith (John in 1943 just before he could not be home any more and me in 1945). This was the place where we were married too, three weeks before we left for Canada. It does not matter how you look at a visit home (four times in 55 years). It has always stirred our emotions, mine more than Dads. It was beautiful to hear my brother Teun play the pipe organ again, many of my favorite songs before and after the service. We spent the rest of the day on the farm where I was born, with my brother Adrian and family. Because of the cold weather we did not walk much outside which we would have loved to have done. It was the last time that we were at our home. In 1994 when we took our last trip together, the farm was sold and my brother had moved to the province of Zeeland. Gerard, the youngest of our family, lived for some years at our homestead as well when he married. The farm was big enough for two living quarters, and it was a pleasure for my Father to bike to the farm as often as he wanted. Both boys married one week after each other

in Sept. 1955 and Dad and Mom moved to their retirement home in Schipluiden. We stayed with Gerard and Ien the rest of the day. All in all it had been a beautiful Sunday.

June 22: We went to my brother Teun and his wife Annie in Maasland. We visited their store and had a wonderful time hearing all the news of their four married children. Their oldest daughter is married to Pastor Bob and we listened to a tape of a service for a quiet break and were spoiled with delicious meals. This visit was so special as he played his organ for a while and we sang our favorite songs. We had much contact in every respect and the day was too short (as usual!) The evening we spent with the Moerman family. There was a birthday celebration at Tante Pietje and Oom Jan. Besides Dad's brother and sisters two of their children and families were home. The room was full with friends as well. It was a wonderful evening but we were more than ready for a good night of rest when we came home in Delft again.

June 23: At 8 o'clock we were on our way to the province of Friesland, where Dad's youngest (and only brother) Jaap had bought a farm. In 1973 when we were home to celebrate our 25th anniversary, Dad's home was sold to the government to be demolished, very sad in deed. We drove via the Wieringer Dike, which closes off the North Sea from the polders with many new farms and those who are in the making yet. It looked very impressive to us to say the least. The farmhouse was big too, with lots of work for Tante Gre inside and for Jaap and their three sons outside. We just loved that day on the farm. Our farmer's heart was beating overtime! This brother of Dad had a lot of humor and Dad loved it and so did I. Dad was outside most of the time and I was with Gre, which I liked very much. I am often there with my mind lately, since she lost her husband just before Christmas 2003.

June 24: We moved to Dad's sister Nel and her husband Anne in Sneek. They lived in a house built on a warehouse in the city, a big contrast with the farm we were at the day before. Their two daughters came home for lunch but their two married sons we did not meet. Dad went with Anne to his garden on the bike. It was a beauty and supplied vegetables for most of the year. Late in the afternoon we went with Tante Ma to her son Marien and family. After a cup of coffee we went on again, this time to her daughter who was with us in 1967 (in Edmonton). She married Gert Jan van Tilburg and lives in one of those most productive polders. Their whole farm, the yard, the crops and where ever you looked, was beautiful with shrubs, roses

and many other flowers plus a very nice windbreak. I had never seen a farm in “the Polder” before. They enjoy life to the full, living close to the Lord. It was a joy to see their four children as well. They all have their tasks but it is paradise growing up in such beauty. After a two-hour trip, we arrived safely at Oma van Leeuwen again, after two wonderful days.

June 25: We stayed home all day. What a treat. In the morning one of my favorite Aunts came to visit us. When I was ten years old I went for a couple of weeks during our vacation in the month of August, to their farm to help her with spring cleaning their house. I did this for several years and I loved it. Somehow she became my second Mother over the years (so to speak.) In the evening we walked to my brother Nico and Jannie, who had several times surgery for cancer. Their strong faith stood out and it was a wonderful evening. For years now she has been healthy and they are enjoying their children and grandchildren.

June 26: At 10 o'clock my sister Teuns came to visit Oma. She did that every Wednesday morning, since Mom is alone. At 4 o'clock she was picked up by her husband and they took us to my oldest sister Engel and her husband Jan. This was the brother in law who had many questions about the Holy Spirit after John had led the service. He had never heard such a sermon, he said. John talked for hours with him and I had a wonderful time with my sister. They live in a beautiful Senior's apartment. Jan had lived for 65 years in his parent's home. When his Mom died he married Engel and together they took care of his Dad, who died soon there after. It was so good that we had contact with all our brothers and sisters. We were told that they do not talk with each other about their faith in Jesus Christ. We were both well aware of that. We were not taught at home to speak about these things. Our parents read God's Word twice a day and at breakfast we all listened to a short message from a calendar with a story for the children. And there was a prayer of blessing before the meals and a prayer of thanksgiving after the meals. I remember that our new pastor who came when I was 19 years old, preached to us personally. He did not say “we” but “you,” and when we came in Canada in 1948, we heard that same preaching in the Christian Reformed Church in Chatham Ontario, the home church of my cousin Peter Lugtigheid. Another wonderful day came to the end when it was past our bedtime, (which was 11 o'clock at home.)

June 27: On this Saturday we stayed home with Oma. Corine, daughter of brother Jaap did every thing for Oma and us to make it a pleasant day. She

shopped, cooked and cleaned up so that it was a complete holiday. In the evening one of Dad's cousins and his wife came to visit us. All in all a very pleasant day again!

Sunday, June 28: We went to the home church of Nico and Jannie, in Delft. Their pastor is a son of my cousin, Pastor Pieter Lugtigheid, who had visited twice all the Reformed churches in Canada. (in 1962 & 1970.) It was very different from the traditional services in our home church and very liturgical. The emphasis was on the third world and all the terrible things that are happening. Joy, peace or comfort that I was longing to hear for the people was not there. I came to the conclusion that I was somewhat critical in my spirit. We talked with the pastor after the service. He told us that he shivers from the words charismatic and experience. Between the services we went to Tante Annie (from Oom Klaas) and Lisa. She is enjoying her visit very much and Tante Annie is very happy with her granddaughter. Tante Annie brought us home and Oma had a good time at Nico's place as well.

June 29: Tante Maartje and my brother Piet came for us the next morning to spend the day with them on the farm in Waddingsveen. Oma was going to her sister in Berkel. This was the same family where I went every summer. Much had changed in those 35 years. The youngest son was farming and the farm was large enough to be renovated into two comfortable homes for the parents and the son's family. We had a special day on the farm of my brother and the family. It all looked so beautiful but the sad story was that the price for the pigs was very low and they were losing money daily. Their youngest daughter, Ina, was an invalid and could hardly walk, even after several operations. She is a language teacher and needs special furniture for her apartment. Four children are married and the youngest son is still in high school. They were very open to hear how our churches in Canada were doing. Ina goes to a charismatic Bible study group. When we went home after supper we picked Oma up again and Piet, Maartje and Ina stayed with us the rest of the evening. It had been a very good day. We learned with all our personal visits that they all have strong faith in Jesus and that we were really connected again with all our siblings. (Ina passed away on Christmas Eve, 1998, and her father in January, 1999. A double loss in one month, I cannot fathom how hard that must be. Maartje has moved to a senior's apartment in the same place they lived.)

June 30: We were home that day until 4 o'clock, when brother Jaap and Maartje from Delft were ready to take us home. They have seven children, 3

married and 4 to go. The four were all home for the occasion. The youngest girl (Corine, named after me) writes us twice a year. Their family is very musical and are in worship in several churches. Cor has a choir he directs and plays also in churches, with his girlfriend's family and his own sisters included. They asked many questions about the church and so on and Dad answered them all. They were hanging onto his lips, so to speak. I think that this was the most interesting evening. They were so eager to hear and to find out how things were done on the other side of the ocean. Of course most of my brothers have an empty nest, this was a surprise. Two of my girl friends (since I was 14 years) came to visit too. It was a full but very pleasant evening.

Wednesday, July 1:

We celebrated Dad's 59th Birthday at Tante Maartje Van Der Ende's home. We went with Oma and my sister Teuns and her husband in the morning to Tante Ma. We heard that this was the custom with our birthdays, since we had left for Canada in 1948. This was the only quiet hours and they stayed to the noon hour. Oma just loved this visit and so did Tante Ma. They always came together until Oma died. I don't know if some are keeping this up. I do know that on Sunday our letters were exchanged for years. Mother Moerman was sitting in the next pew to my Mom's, so that was easily done. 35 of our cousins and friends came in the afternoon and also 8 uncle and aunts and 31 in the evening plus all our brothers and sisters! We hopped from one chair to the other to talk with every one for a few moments, and showed (off ?) the picture of our family. We were spoiled with presents as well but we were mostly overwhelmed with the friendship of so many who came to see us. That day we have never forgotten. Tante Ma did a tremendous job with Dad's sisters to serve 90 guests or more with an abundance of boterkoek, (butter cake with almond spice) all kinds of cakes, cookies, chocolates, cheese and crackers as well as coffee, tea, orange and apple juices. Of course we enjoyed supper as well even though we had little time to eat!

July 2: We both were tired after this celebration, yet we were not too tired to remember the birthday of little Chris from Murray and Carol. We had slept at Tante Ma and had a quiet morning with her which was wonderful! In the afternoon Tante Pietje came for a quiet cup of tea and of course we talked about John's birthday. They were thrilled that we had chosen to celebrate Dad's birthday in Holland. We knew that a birthday had always meant much but we noticed that it was more appreciated then we could imagine. We

stayed a couple more days with the Moerman family. In the evening we went to the principal of our school in Schipluiden. Their daughter Bertha, who is my friend since our first grade in 1931, was home with her husband, Pieter, as well. First we talked for two hours with our eighty five year old teacher and his wife. When they were ready to call it a day, we talked for a couple of hours with Pieter and Bertha yet. It was 33 years since we had left. We had seen them on our two previous visits too but every contact is always too short. I think that my homesickness had a chance to stick up its ugly head, for that reason after every trip. The visits were too short or our family and friends circle was too big! Whatever the cause, I never had one day of regret that I had followed my dear husband to Canada. Three things stand out, now I have finished most of my "race." First, we were convinced that God led us to Canada. Second, Dad's dream (since he was 14 years old) to become a pastor, did happen, even though it took much strength, prayer, patience and perseverance! And in conclusion, we have been blessed by the Lord, in abundance and our whole family shares in those many blessings.

July 3: With other friends we went to a museum in Rotterdam and took pictures of a letter of Dad's Forefather from 1573. After dinner we went to the only aunt Dad had not seen, Tante Magdalena, widow of Cornelius Moerman. What a beautiful example of how to grow old, ready to go Home any time, yet busy serving the Lord in many ways. After that visit we went to Dad's deaf and dumb sister, who lives with her husband, Hilbert, in a very comfortable home in Schipluiden. Hilbert is a retired tailor who still works a couple of days for the fun. After supper we went to the field of Dad's farm and he showed them where he lost two parts of his fingers. We also walked to other parts of the farm. I found it sad for Dad but Mina asked for it. She was so happy that we were there. We also went to a friend who was with Dad in the underground forces during the Second World War, in 1943-45. This friend has been an invalid since then and he just went through heart surgery again. Yet he is able to hold on to a part time job in bookkeeping. He is a hero in my book. A man of great faith who takes care of his family in a special way spiritually and his wife stands with him in everything. A wonderful family indeed, upheld and blessed by the Lord. It was a full day again with different experiences. We went to Oma to sleep and we slept like a baby but not before we had given to Oma a short rehearsal of the three days we spent with the Moerman family.

July 4: We needed a quiet day this Saturday as Dad was asked to give the message tomorrow. This takes a lot out of him even though he had three

weeks to brush up on his Dutch. But the family counts on it, it seems, when we come over. The other thing is that we are “behind the times” with our Dutch and that you don’t hear “pulpit language” when you visit people. I had all morning to talk with Oma because Corine was with us again to do the shopping and all the work again. It will be a family reunion tomorrow after the service again because it is our last Sunday. Oma has asked that coffee be served after the service in the social hall. She is counting on 80 family members, Uncles and Aunts and a few of our closest friends as well. In the afternoon my brother Cees and his wife Henny came from Enchede (on the German border.) This was the last one of our family we had not seen yet.

Sunday, July 5: A beautiful sunny day. The church was more than full with 70 extra relatives. It was a beautiful service. Dad spoke about the Holy Spirit. One brother in law said: “I have never heard a sermon about the Holy Spirit, I have been waiting for this.” I could not believe what I heard from others as well. I remember that we felt very blessed when we went to my cousin’s church in Canada. There was a difference in the preaching but you forget soon, what you were used to. The coffee afterwards was very much appreciated too but it became one big “good bye” party. Several friends of Dad came to church from other places too so it took a few hours before we were at my brother in “T’Huis ten Dorp” as was planned. A delicious meal and a long quiet walk brought rest for the body and the emotions. It was so beautiful to be at the home of my childhood for a few hours. Now we could walk and see all the places where we used to walk and where I lived and worked under Mom’s supervision. Of course the emotions were involved there as well but I felt that my roots had taken hold in Canada over the years and they were there to stay. In the evening we went to a combined service of the Christian Reformed and Reformed Church together. It was a beautiful evening with two choirs and a sermon on the topic of “The Peace that passes all understanding.”

July 6: This last day was spent on a trip to the province Zeeland. My sister Teuns and her husband organized every thing to show Oma and us where the dike was broken in Feb. 1953 and more than 2000 people had drowned. We saw the films and how this all was fixed. It was an enormously difficult task and very time consuming. When we heard of this terrible flood we were in Church and I think that we were all praying more for our loved ones than listening to the sermon. None had been able to reach Holland yet. Some had heard this on the news that morning. Uncertainty is a horrible thing. This day was a very good day for Oma too, a dream came true for her, even

though it was sad to hear so much about this tragedy. One day was not long enough to take everything in what we had seen and heard. We also had stopped at two cemeteries where all the people from one town had drowned at night and were buried together. The grieving of family and friends, I could not even begin to comprehend. It was so overwhelming.

July 7: This was the day to say “farewell” to our loved ones again. Our three weeks vacation had come to an end. It was the last time that we saw Mom on this earth and we were well aware of it. She was the main reason for this trip. Mom was 88 years old and was very healthy yet. She could enjoy it to the full and that made us all happy and thankful. She lived five more years yet and wrote us a letter twice a month. On Jim and Babette’s wedding day, she had a stroke and four weeks later she moved to her Heavenly Home.