

My Spiritual Journey

I like to begin with what I remember of my Parents teaching. Before every meal we prayed our little prayer after my Dad had asked a blessing on our food. "Lord, bless this food, for Jesus sake, Amen." After the meal we thanked the Lord by saying, "Lord, we thank you for this food" after Dad had said his prayer of thanksgiving. I learned very early that food was a gift of God.

And it was the same with our evening prayer before we went to bed. We prayed, "Lord, forgive me my sins and watch over me while I am asleep. I pray that I may wake up healthy and strong in the morning. In Jesus Name we ask this. Amen." We also thanked the Lord in the morning that He kept watch over us and we were not afraid when it was getting dark because God was in the dark as well.

It was indeed very dark on the farm at night when the moon was not shining. We lived on a lane one KM long and never had electricity until 1943 when I was eighteen years old. The main reason was that my Dad and our neighbor had to pay a part of the cost to bring the power to the farms. During these difficult years prior to the war, the so-called "dirty thirties" this was impossible. But during the first years of the war, our dream came true. In my memory this was a very happy occasion maybe because it was one of the few good memories of these five years. Up to then we lit a candle to go upstairs which did not give much light because our sleeping place was above several rooms. We were always very happy when the moon was shining again. It was our friend! Also when I came home by bike when it was full moon, it was a great help. I found it very difficult to stay in those small paths where the wheels of our buggy went. The light on our bikes was not the best either at that time. That lane was a long way in the dark evenings during the winter months. When I came home from school at 14 years old, to work for Mom, I was glad that all activities for me (Girl's Club and Bible study) were held in the afternoon every Tuesday. When it was mid winter it was dark already when the meetings were over and I did not like it. Of course many girls were in the same boat, so to speak. Some were lucky to live in town and one girl (my husband's sister, Nel) was living on the first farm out of town. To me that looked ideal but I did love our own farm very much and had to make the best of it.

Believe it or not, eventually these trips in the dark made a great change in my life! I was telling my stories about these trips to my friend Nel and her parents came to hear that I did not like to ride home in dark; especially during my sweet sixteen year, since I had a scary experience twice on the road. Nel asked me to come to her home soon there after and then I heard her Father say: "John, I want you to bring Corrie home now otherwise her parents will be worried. I will milk that last cow of yours." It was kind of an embarrassment to me but was very happy that I did not have to go home alone. John asked permission from my parents to bring me home every Tuesday during the dark months. And so it happened that he did and did not stop bringing me home when spring came! Then we started double dating with my friends Bertha and Pieter, walking on Sunday afternoons and sometimes canoeing on Saturday evening or going to birthdays. I know that God has used all these things to bring us together and tied us in an unbreakable bond of love for life.

These six years of Bible study with our Pastor, in the six winter months, had a great influence on my life. Especially the last four years when we had a young pastor instead of our elderly pastor who retired. He was very clear in answering questions and in every thing he said.

In 1945, we went with twelve girls to a preparation class during the winter and made public confession of our faith in Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. This was a very special winter for me. From then on it became a continued goal to always seek the Lord's approval in every decision John and I had to make. Of course we did this already but it was my dear husband to be who was the leader in these things. From the first time we met in our home, we prayed together before he went home (or else wherever for that matter) if it was not safe at home. Now I understood better then ever before, what it meant to take a stand for Jesus always, in every situation.

You might say that this was a result of the war and the uncertainty of our lives. This could well be a factor but we have continued this our whole life to our last day together. The day was not complete when we could not pray together. It was a gift, which I missed most when Dad went to his Heavenly Home.

Dad had a great influence on my spiritual life. From the beginning this bound me to him before I realized it! "Love is blind," I have heard that saying many times before but this kind was not harmful. John was so

different from the few other boys I had met. I was not able to respect them as I did Dad. I felt very secure in our relationship because with him I knew that we were building on the right foundation for a marriage.

When we were at this beautiful phase of our life in 1943, restrictions for men of John's age became more tight and scary. Many joined the under ground forces which worked mostly at night

They were also forced to work elsewhere just like every one else. All those farmer's sons who had legal papers to work for their Dads, were called to do all kinds of jobs for "De weermacht" as well. Mostly they were told to ruin the fields of farmers by plowing them deep, so that it could be inundated with enough water that it was useless. Since we lived close to the coast of the North Sea, we were in much more trouble then the first years of the war. Now the aim was to keep England from landing in Holland. The sons of the farmers where forced to do all the plowing and John was told to ruin our farm. He refused to obey and since he was in the underground movement he could not sleep home anymore those last two years until the war was over. If they disobeyed and were caught they were in danger of being shot; or the father of that family.

For two years our love for each other was hampered by fear. We were always being alert and uncertain to mention a few things. I never knew if John was able to come on Saturday evening or any other time or if he was going on a mission for the underground. If I add that neither one of us had phone, I am sure that you get the picture that it was a difficult time of uncertainty.

Besides all the work of twenty-two people around our tables in our home, the last two and one half years, there was a lot more stress in every day life as well. I was the only girl who had the responsibility to be the doorkeeper, so to speak, keeping them locked all day and not opening too soon, when the soldiers were surrounding our farm. This happened often these last two years. We had to be alert day and night when some one knocked on our doors. Several persons had to be in their hiding places, between false walls or somewhere underground, before I could let the soldiers in to search the house. You might wonder how our love even survived under all the stress and strain but I think it was BECAUSE we had each other and by the grace of God of course, it did.

It not only survived but it grew and blossomed. It was a miracle, under the circumstances. We saw each other a few hours per week at best, plus a few minutes at night when John had to leave on a rescue mission. Once they rescued one of the leaders out of jail. (They were dressed in German soldier's uniforms.)

These minutes at night we used only for prayer. That was our lifeline. There I began to learn to trust God, whatever the out come of that night would be. Now I look back, I can see that this part of life was needed for the preparation of our emigration as well. We did not emigrate to enter in an adventure, but it was necessity. We both longed for a place where we could live and work and that was not available in Holland. When I left home after much struggle, I was able to trust God that it was in His plan for our lives to go to Canada. We came to the conclusion to try immigration because every effort had failed in Holland, even two years after the war was over. When these five years had ended we could hardly comprehend it. There was much time needed to work it all through for both of us. I had no clue that we had to learn to forget what had happened. There are things you never forget but many things fade away or go to the back burner and that time we needed to make room in our minds to start planning our future together. John had been under much more stress then I ever had been aware of. For years he woke up (or I woke him up) from the nightmares that bothered him. We had contact in our ten retirement years with many veterans who invited us every year on Nov.11 for their dinner after the Memorial Service. It was amazing how many men brought up painful memories of the war when they heard that John had done his part.

I was glad that John had no idea what homesickness was like, during the first years when we had left for Canada. I never knew that leaving your Dad and Mom, brothers and sisters, your friends, your home where I had lived 23 years, would make such an impact on my life.

I found out that I was hanging, with every vessel, onto my dear family. I was dreaming for years to marry and go home for a visit once in a while. This was a different stress then during the years of war. I thought that I would adjust sooner in our new land but this had little to do with adjusting. I did not long for things or ways as it was at home, only for those who were so close to me. At that time we could not call home by phone yet. We could only write letters. It would have made a great difference if I could have heard their voice and hear that all was well. I had a feeling that I was cut off

from every one but I never had any regret that I crossed the ocean with my dear husband. My life with him has been beautiful. He has been my all and God has blessed us abundantly in everything.

“All new beginnings are difficult,” says a Dutch saying and there is a lot of truth in that. As time went on we began to love our new country and when the five-year waiting period was over, we thankfully received our citizenship papers of Canada.

When we arrived in Canada, the Sundays became the highlight of the week. In the morning there was a service in our new language. It felt bad at first. I could understand so very little of what was said but the singing was a joy from the start. Soon we sang tunes I knew and I discovered that we sang the words I knew in the Dutch language as well.

This was an easy way of learning new words and at the same time we received spiritual food. It sounds insignificant but when you just sit there and long to hear some thing besides the name of God, Jesus and a few other words, it was pure joy that we could sing along. We were blessed with a Dutch service in the afternoon, and could listen without missing a word.

When we left for Canada, three weeks after our marriage, I found it difficult to accept that this was God’s plan for us. I knew that I had pleaded with the Lord to let me stay closer to home. I had so longed to be connected with my parents as much as that was possible when we where married. Yet after five years of engagement I was determined to follow John to whatever land was open to us.

Even though our parents where not against emigration, it was after much struggle and many tears, that all four gave their blessing. We were the first from our town to immigrate to Canada. It was no wonder that it was difficult for them to let us go at first but they saw no other way for us either and gave us their blessings and support wherever they could.

With our final good bye, after visiting all our married brothers and sisters in the last week, I whispered in my Dad and Mom’s ears, Psalm 18:29,30, where David said: “With Thee I can crush a troop (I added) and I can cross the ocean with a 2000 ton freight boat) and with my God I can leap over a wall. (“This our God, His way is perfect.”) We believed that it was Gods

will for us to go to Canada, and God has blessed us in every way. His way was and is perfect!

We were absolutely sure of His plan for our lives now and it was all God's doing. Even though I was very uneasy to cross the ocean with that small freight boat, on which John's friend was first mate. But my fear subsided soon (drunken sailor walk and all). And when a big storm hit us halfway our trip, the fear did not take over. I was carried on deck every day, not able to walk for ten days during that storm. (Captain's orders, who helped John carry me to deck.) Watching our boat climbing the enormous huge water waves was more than awesome. I have no words for it. I have never seen anything like that. After the climb, we plunged into a deep dark hole or opening as if it were. Talk about a roller coaster! That bad storm took three days, and then it took a week before the waves calmed down more or less. I was told that the sea is never without movement.

When we were getting close to Newfoundland, a thick mist came in and all at once there was a commotion on board. Every one was running on deck, except us twelve passengers. The boat went into reverse and came soon to a stand still. We were told that we were in for an "iceberg break." Soon the foghorn was blowing every couple of minutes and these two days and nights became a great blessing for my health. First I was totally unaware that we were in danger of being hit by another boat. I was able to go to all the meals after the storm had died down and we celebrated my twenty third birthday with the compliments of the cook, with lots of "boter koek." (butter cake) for all.

And of course we could sleep in peace without that roller coaster movement. John 15:5 came to my mind often, when we crossed the ocean in that small boat. It is so awesome what you see during such big storm that you feel small and helpless. Indeed, "without Jesus we cannot do anything", but with Him "all things are possible."

With such a new phase of life as we went through in a short time (marriage, leaving home for good, adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language) it was almost too much to comprehend. There was the pressure of making a living on very low wages as well. We were not allowed to take more than one hundred dollars each, from Holland. I was homesick at times, but when John came home it was a feast for both of us.

I can still picture myself, walking that first day to the corner store with ten dollars in hand. We lived on a gravel road four miles south of Blenheim, Ontario. I was just wondering how much I could find of what we needed, and how much the storekeeper could help me. But the Lord was in it all and I was surprised at how easy everything went. Many times those early days we were surprised in one-way or the other. Either we learned several words which were quite similar as in our mother tongue, or we discovered something, which was new to us.

It was very clear that we were not the first immigrants who went to this corner store. Just by pointing to what I wanted and showing how much money I had, did the trick. Everything was scooped into paper bags and the storekeeper kept saying “more yet,” until I had reached the ten dollars. I could not believe that I could take home so much. That shopping was plain fun. I was thankful that I could find the tea, sugar, salt, oatmeal, potatoes, vegetables, wieners and margarine. That was the beginning of our own little household, starting together in our new land. My husband was proud of me and I was glad that he did not have to go shopping with me after a long days work.

I know that during this new beginning in our lives, I prayed about every little thing and now as I stand on the “other side of our 50 years together,” I still talk everything over with the Lord!

April 3, 1952 marked a day of more intense prayer and many weeks there after, when we brought our baby Jack who was 18 months at the time, to the hospital with meningitis. For three weeks his life was in danger because of the chance that the virus would settle in his brains. It did settle in his knee, that was the first answer to our many prayers. Every day we drove to Chatham to see him, even though we were not allowed to show ourselves. It was too upsetting for him. When his little body was put in a cast after three weeks, we could take our treasure home. What a blessing to be able to care for him again. Every month we went to a specialist for a new cast and measurement of his legs. We were also told that this virus could stop the growth of his leg and this became our main prayer concern. After six months we heard the good news that his leg was growing. We were overjoyed and so was the Specialist and our Doctor. And so were many others, family and friends who were praying in Holland as well as here in our church.

Jack had just learned to walk and enjoyed moving as fast as his little legs could carry him, before this virus hit him. He was promoted to bringing the Bible to Dad at suppertime, taking turns with Murray. The evening before he got ill, it was his turn to carry the Bible. He was trying to walk on one leg and on his knee with the other. We both thought that he was showing off and were even teasing him. Not knowing of course, that a few hours later we were walking at night with a crying little boy who did not know how to stop any more.

I have found that such times of stress are of great value for our spiritual lives. It was the most difficult times, but I have always seen it as a warning to stay close to the Lord. Besides the birth of our babies, we went to the hospital twelve times for surgeries, between the two of us. We had each six over the fifty years, (and one each in Holland during our five years engagement). I did not know that we were going to keep up with each other in these things too, but I do know that they are part of life. And I also know (and Dad would agree with me) that stress and pain keep you close together and to the Lord.

And these seven months were very stressful as well for both of us. Nights were restless with not much sleep. Jack was heavy with being in cast up to under his little arms. Lifting him in and out of bed and in his high chair was a chore for me, from morning till night. The evenings and Sundays were so much easier when Dad was home. You can well imagine that it was one of our happiest days in those early years when Jack was healthy again. I must say that it took several months before the overly tiredness feelings left me and I was my normal self again.

During that time we were also praying for wisdom for Dad's future. He could not go on doing all the work with visiting new immigrants and leading church services. We did receive a pastor for our church that fall but the emigrants came in great numbers as well and many asked for advice from us so called "old timers."

Several times we went to the pastor for advice but being retired, he had his own hands more then full too. We were driven to prayer for wisdom because Dad's health was failing and we were told to leave the dairy farm as soon as we were able. Answers came in different forms, times and ways.

First, we found a small house we could rent on a farm in Merlin so that Dad could get away from the lime that was used and making him sick. The second answer was that Dad found work the same week as we left the farm. Later Dad found a house for sale in Charing Cross, only six miles from where he was working. From Merlin, where we were living at that time, it was twenty miles. Another answer came by way of our pastor who was willing to take Dad to College and Seminary in Holland Michigan, just to find out if there was a place for Dad to study without a high school education. Hope College accepted that it would take Dad two years to get ready for three years study in Seminary. Besides that good news, six congregations, which our pastor had served before, were willing to pay the rent for our living quarters during these five years. We were speechless when everything fell in place in such a short time and Dad was given the opportunity to study, to make his dream come through. We promised that we would go back to the farm, if it were too difficult for him. We were well aware that we needed more miracles since Dad had only seven years of elementary schooling in Holland. The first two years were very hard on him but in Seminary it all came easier.

We have always seen this as a sure sign from God, that Dad would be able to do this work as a pastor in the new immigrant churches in Canada, since He opened all the doors.

Now I look back on my life, I noticed that I went with every detail of our lives to the Lord. It is the only sure way that you can know that you have His approval. There was no other way that we ever could come to a conclusion about anything.

Many times fear drove me to the Lord as well and I am not talking here about the war. That was often a fear of losing loved ones. I was fearful of going to Canada in that small boat across the ocean but I was at peace to go with John and trusted him in every thing, loving him with my whole heart.

I had to learn so much (all at once) leaving everything behind, adjusting to each other, which was not difficult at all, thanks to the five years of preparation. I did feel insecure when I was surrounded by people I could not understand, yet it urged me on to do my very best to learn our new language. During Dads study I felt almost proud, that I could do my part in washing floors three afternoons every week, to put food on the table every day. Dad came home these afternoons with a lot of homework and took care of our

three children. Murray went to play school and Jack went for a long nap. That left baby Anne to take care of, to change her diaper and give her a bottle with water. Anne was six weeks old when I left her with Dad. I was coming home after more than four hours, very uncomfortable with an abundance of food for our baby. It was a great joy to Dad to see his daughter grow up. He only saw our two boys when they were in their first few years, when he came home in the evening from the farm and on Sunday.

After Dad's graduation, which was a wonderful celebration for both of us, I got burdened again with the role I had to play in the manse. Having no education, except eight years in Holland, just bothered me. How could I help John in his work from now on? In the first five years on the farm I saw no problems, I had grown up on a farm, and doing housework for other families was great. I learned our new language much faster, when I went I to work every Saturday for a Canadian family and Dad loved to take care for Murray and Jack.

But now as a new part of our life was standing in front of us living in the manse, I lost my emotional bearings and burst out in tears. It was not a surprise for my husband. We had talked about this before and he did not ask what was wrong. He knew where I was hurting. As I have written before, in one sentence, he put me at ease and at peace and we enjoyed the rest of that special evening together.

When we moved soon after to our first church in Cambridge, Ont. I was asked in September to be the leader of their women's group. I never had done this before and I never had been at one, except to a seminary wives teaching course. I was wondering how to go about this. I heard from different ladies what they were used to at home, which confused me more than it was helpful. To make a long story short, I did cry to the Lord again and He showed me the way. I must say that I never have enjoyed being a leader, but later when I was asked to lead a bible study group, I began to enjoy these things more and more. I never lay awake about these things anymore. Even though our first decade in Canada was not easy at times I must say that between all the struggles we had, I still sang a lot as well, which is one of the best ways to go through rough spots in life. At home I had never known of my parents ups and downs. They never talked about these things to us children. All my brothers and sisters tell me the same thing, that we were raised with singing, laughter and a lot of work.

I have learned a lot from Dad from day one I met him. He was always calm and encouraging and I needed that desperately at times. This was especially true the first year when I was homesick. To get on top of these longings for home there is no medicine, only prayer and Dad's love for me pulled me through.

Life is one long chain of happenings and joy and difficulties are all part of it. We cannot do anything on our own. Without Gods leading and direction we do not survive. There is no other way then walking with Him and asking for His ways, in whatever comes on our path. Knowing Gods Word is the most important thing in our lives. His Word has rescued me many times. Especially when Dad died which was the biggest storm in my life, Gods Word pulled me through on my darkest days. Never forget to ask to hear His Word. We have to be tuned in, "we receive not because we do not ask." I have remembered John 15:5 many times, where Jesus said: "Without Me you cannot do anything."

It seems to me that our last ten years together were years of peace and quiet. Everyday was a feast we have often said. We had so much time to walk and to talk. Always being together, in the field or going to church functions or making trips to our children as often as we felt like. No pressure, no responsibilities. We enjoyed doing nothing, believe it or not, at least or at last? We were learning!

Our golden anniversary was a wonderful time of celebration, yet we talked about death five times. I brought up the subject which I could not understand. Neither, why I woke up that month, many times with the same words from Psalm 46:10. But God was in this too, all in preparation of Dads Home going. I am still thankful that I asked Dad about the meaning of the words I was reminded of so many times: "Be still and know that I am God". He answered: "Mom, whatever happens to us, we always have to be still and know that He is God."

I pray that our whole family will be aware of this and will always remember that God is faithful to His Word in all circumstances. Even though it is more then five years that Dad left us suddenly, it is all as clear in my mind, as if it has happened a few months ago. My mind goes many times over all the years I have known him so well. It is beautiful that memories are stored for future comfort. First it brings many tears but after some years it becomes a longing for what was and that might stay for the rest of our lives. I never

knew of course that I was to go through these lonely years and I am very thankful for that. Dad's prayers and our sharing together, I miss most and I will miss it for the rest of my life.

I still love the memories of my home, Mom and Dad and my brothers and sisters very clearly. Yet, I do notice that certain things have slipped my mind or I was never told of some events, which others of my family bring to my attention. This could be due to my early leaving (in 1948,) three weeks after we were married. I find that since I have never been at a funeral when close family died, that the pain of losing a loved one wears off sooner than when you see every thing.

But the memories of the 55 years with Dad and our own family will never be fading or erased, as long as my mind stays healthy. I had a very happy and fulfilling life with Dad all these years. He was calm and steadfast. He was a man of few words but we could read each other's mind, so to speak. I always felt at ease and at peace with him. First I thought that on the farm I could be of more help to him, than in the ministry, since I had been raised on a farm. But Dad had me quickly convinced, that I could be of help in his ministry in the church as well. I still hear Dad say, "Just love the people as you always did, Mom. You can do it and will love it." (and I did love it, more than I can express!)