

Memories of Childhood

The memories of my pre-school years are not many but I do remember that I loved to sit on my dad's knees after supper, ready for bed. He often called me "Corsica" to tease me and I would say, "No dad, my name is Corrie!" Dad then said, "Oh your name is Korsie Kaas" which means a crust of home made bread and cheese. Of course I would tell dad again that my name was Corrie.

When all the kids had left for school with their lunches(four or five for many years), it was breakfast time for the rest of the family. I had the privilege to sit in front of the potbelly stove; dad was sitting to the right and our hired man, Alle DeVries, to the left. I often would sit on my knees for then I could reach the table and my sandwich better. Breakfast was always whole wheat bread with home made cheese and some times ham and one slice with sugar, all made ready in front of us. One morning the stove must have been very hot because my socks were close to burning. Alle pulled off my sock so fast that I did not know what the fuss was all about. Dad told me that this was the last time I could sit on my knees, since it brought my feet too close to the potbelly stove.

Behind our brick building, where we parked our horse-buggy , we had our fruit garden; I loved to be out there. Besides apple and pear trees, mom and dad had rows of raspberries and a dozen or more black and red currents shrubs and a few goose berry bushes. After we picked the currents, we took the black berries off with a fork and the red currents were eaten fresh as a dessert. The black currents were cooked and strained and put in one liter milk bottles with wide openings and a cork was used to close them air tight. This juice was later diluted and brought to a boil and thickened with potato flour and sugar added. This sauce was served over rice as a dessert on Sunday as well. During the week our desserts were barley or oat porridge, rice, or bread cubes in boiled milk with syrup or sugar. On Saturday, during the winter, kidney bean soup with syrup and fried bacon was our dinner and rice with melted butter and brown sugar, our dessert. It was our delicacy of the week .

I have always disliked thunderstorms. Our farm was surrounded by high trees and it must have been because of strong winds and lightening that we always had to come down stairs during heavy thunder storms. I thought it

was not so bad when there was a storm in the evening, for then the shutters were closed in the front room and I could not even see the lightning. Also then we did not have to go to bed early. But at midnight I found it very scary, especially when I woke up when the storm was very close already. There was no light to switch on because we had no electricity until I was 17 years old and the candle we used when we went to bed we were not allowed to touch. One night there was a bad storm again and when it was over, I asked dad if I could go with him to see if the storm was gone. I felt big as a five year old to go outside in the middle of the night. Dad opened the top part of the door followed by the lower part and just when we were stepping outside a big flash of lightening hit a tree very close by. It was a terrible noise and we quickly stepped back inside waiting for this storm to pass. I still hear mother call, "Man, kom in!" The next morning we saw that the tree was split in two length wise and pitch black. It looked awesome . I never asked dad again to go with him outside to look whether the storm had passed. This early scare affected me for years .

Before I went to school I found it fun when people came to our door to sell things. Wednesday afternoon we knew that our Uncle Teun, mom's brother from Vlaardingen was coming with his car filled with groceries. This Uncle visited all his eight brothers and sisters in one day to supply their needs. Mom would go to the car to pick out what she needed for the family and we received one candy which we were waiting for. After that mom went to the bedroom and opened the "secretaire." It had a big door that could be pulled down and used for writing. All the important papers were in there as well as money for groceries and our piggy banks. Sometimes mom would let me look in the small drawers and doors where mom's necklace and bracelet was kept and dad's golden watch and chain was kept. I found it fascinating to look in there. When Uncle Teun was paid and had his cup of tea he left and I could help mom to put all things where they belonged; I loved doing that.

On Friday a man came with fresh fish. He also sold oranges and bananas and always gave us a candy. He asked mom if she wanted "a zoete mond?" That meant, "do you want a candy too?" He rode a three wheeled carrier-cycle with the fish kept in the bottom and the fruit on top. Also once a month, another man came, selling things needed for the kitchen. He was handicapped and mom always bought something from him. Then there was a man coming to the farm with a huge pack of clothing in a carrier at the front of his bike. It was packed in canvas to keep everything dry during

rainstorms. They always came in our living room with it, enjoying coffee or tea while mom selected what she needed. For us preschoolers all these visitors coming to sell their wares were special. On Saturday noon a man came whom we called "the rain coat." He wore the same long coat spring, summer, fall and winter. He sold mending needles, elastic, shoe laces, shoe polish, matches and safety pins. From this man, too, mom always bought one item. He really was a beggar but he was our steady guest twice a month and he ate his dinner in our kitchen .

Before we started school dad gave each of us a small garden to take care of. He gave us some bean seeds, carrot seeds, a few flower seeds and he also planted one perennial in our little garden. When he was working in the big garden we worked in ours. Of course, dad told us everything that we had to do. We loved it and were proud when we could bring mom some flowers, carrots or beans.

When I was 6 years old I did something very selfish and mean. On December 5 "Saint Nicolas" had brought each of us a chocolate letter. It always was the first letter with which our name began. When I had eaten my chocolate letter "C" I broke a piece off my four year old brother's letter and ate it. Right away I felt so terrible I did not know what to do. Just before bed time it was discovered and I confessed my sin. What a relief I felt! It was a lesson for life.

When I was six years old I went to school. It was a big change in my life. We had to get up at 7 o'clock when mom had our lunches made and our breakfast ready. At 5 a.m. she started the stove in the living room in the winter and the cooking stove in the kitchen in the summer. At 8 o'clock we were on our way to school. With good weather we were allowed to walk across the fields of four neighbors. Dad took care of the planks or boards over the ditches. When there was a strong wind and/or too much rain had fallen on the fields, we walked our one km lane and three km on the main road which took us one hour. Otherwise, the shortcut was 45 minutes. My older brothers could do it in less time but not the smaller ones. We were told to always stay together, no matter what. When we came home from school our "hot meal" was ready as soon as we had changed into our "home-clothes." All the others had their hot meal at noon already when they were done milking and chores. Then they came in for supper. Homemade bread with homemade butter and cheese was served with home made jam. We had to be finished

with our after school chores as well for our devotion time together. My after school chores was peeling potatoes for the next day's noon meal. At 9 o'clock at night, there was porridge for all the adults who had to get up early (4 o'clock); to carry them over until breakfast time. The porridge was made with oats, rice or barley, cooked in buttermilk and served with syrup.

Once a year we had a parents and teachers evening for children grades 4-8. These four classes were all in one room and taught by one teacher. Mr. Klarenberg was also the principal of the school. Classes 1-3 were taught by one teacher as well. There was strict discipline and we were always kept busy. Sitting idle was not allowed but we learned a lot. On these evenings the older children entertained the parents with reciting poems and playing skits. We could choose our own poem, serious or humorous and also win a prize. I was very nervous during these events. My legs felt like rubber and my heart worked overtime. I remember only two poems from the five evenings. The one was called "Moriah." It was about Abraham and Isaac going in obedience to Mount Moriah to sacrifice. My heart was in it, my nerves left me and I could not believe that I won the first prize of my class. The other poem was funny but there was a truth to it during the "dirty thirties." It was about a man who made a visit to a home. A boy answered the door and he asked for his dad. The boy did not know what to say but after some stuttering he said, that his father was home but could not come to the door. "Honest Sir, my dad can not come to see you because my mom is fixing his pants and he can not get up until she is finished." I did not get a prize but it was fun to make them all laugh. During the intermission we went with our parents to the other room where our work was on display. All in all it was a highlight in my life.

My Dad has been for 25 years in the board of that school and he was not the only one who served that long. Since my first day in school (May 1, 1931) Bertha Klarenberg became my friend and still is. Sometimes she could come to the farm because on Saturday we had regular class till 11:30. Right there after, from grade 1 to 7, lessons in needlework for one hour; such as knitting, embroidering and crochet work. My brothers were allowed to go home at 11:30 and I dreaded the long walk home all by myself. I did not dare to take the shortcut because of a bull in the field and a barking dog at one of our neighbors. Bertha did not want to hear about the short cut either and it was a lot of fun to walk together.

Of course at home chores had to be done; peeling potatoes and helping with the dishes. Bertha, the oldest of 6, did her share and mom gave us enough time to play outside. Bertha loved to go in the field to catch frogs in the ditches. She took her socks off and walked in the ditch to feel the mud between her toes. I watched her catching frogs and took care that they did not jump out of the jar.

Once during supper time, I was sitting between my dad and Bertha. Dad was ready to read the Bible and I was still talking. It was then that I got the only slap on my ear from dad that I can remember. I was more ashamed than hurt by it but it was deserved and a lesson to pay attention and obey.

I recall that one Saturday when I was on my way home alone, a car stopped and a man asked me if I wanted to have a ride home. It really scared me. But then I saw that it was someone whom I had seen before. He looked like our Doctor. Though I recognized him more by the kind of coat with the fur collar he wore than anything else; he was the only one in town who did so. Very shyly I asked him "bent u Dokter Reynders?" When he assured me he was, I had a ride with our house-doctor to the beginning of our lane way. It was the first time I drove in a car.

I have mentioned my dad several times before and now I would like to describe him further; what he was like. I don't know how to give the right picture of him because there was seldom any private talking with each other. This was rather common everywhere but I will give it a try. The inside of him was demonstrated by his life-style and character. He was a faithful church goer and I heard discussions about sermons often but never in the negative. No "roasted preacher for dinner." He had been a consistory member for as long as I can remember and was often the spokesman when there was a need to speak to the Pastor or to other leaders for that matter. In our home he was most of the time a man of few words. He had a limited education but knew his Bible very well and had a good dose of common sense. He was a deep believer and a serious man yet there were days that he expressed lots of humor which we all loved. I remember that our cat needed to go outside. Dad opened the door and held the cat by the tail. The cat started to protest and we pre-schoolers said, "Dad, you are holding the cat by the tail. He can't get out!" Dad replied, "Oh, is that what the cat is saying, then I better let her go."

When we had breakfast, dad always read a meditation from our calendar based on a text from the Bible and on the back of each page was often a continuing story. At noon and supper time dad read a chapter from the Bible but the longer chapters took two days to read. When there was a birthday in the family, he would read a psalm, the number of which matched our age. We later heard that for his own last birthday, he read Psalm 73 and then talked about it for a while. One month later he went to his Eternal Home and his funeral message was based on that Psalm .

The morning before he had his heart attack he referred to the words of the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" He answered the question by saying, "That I belong - body and soul in life and death, not to my self but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of His own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil, that He protects me so well, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head, indeed, that everything must fit His purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of Eternal life and makes me whole heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him."

When I was in grade 5 something terrible happened to my dad's herd of cows. It was discovered that 21 cows out of the 40 had open tuberculosis. They were destroyed and dad did not receive one penny for them. But that was not the end of the tragedy. My oldest brother Klaas was very ill with tuberculosis for several years because of this. He went to a sanatorium in Delft which was 10 km away from us. We were not allowed to touch him for the illness was very contagious. Those below the age of 12 could not visit him at all during the two years. Mom visited him twice a week, walking the long lane to catch the bus to Delft and then from the bus stop to the sanatorium which was also 1 km. She never missed one visit in those two years. When Klaas came home, he needed one more year of complete rest to further recuperate in a separate room. This room was called the upper room because it was built on our cellar where the milk from the evening was cooled etc. The milk truck came only in the morning at 6 o'clock .

When Klaas was strong enough to start working it was difficult to find work with no education beyond grade school and farm work being too heavy for him. Dad's only brother, who was a bank manager in Schipluiden and getting on in years, made room for Klaas to learn the banking business. He caught

on fast and in 1952 he became the bank's manager when Uncle Cornelis retired. In 1947 he had received Doctor's permission to marry Tante Annie Westerman. We were so happy when we heard the good news. But in 1950 one lung was removed and for one week he hovered between life and death in an "iron lung." Actually, Doctors gave no hope for recuperation. Annie stayed with him day and night for 8 days and God brought healing again. It was a miracle but it took a long time before he could work again. He was bank manager for 25 years, until spring 1977. In November of that year, at the age of 60, he was called to his Eternal home. We are thankful that he and his wife were able to visit us just before his death.

We all went for tests for tuberculosis several times during those years. My baby sister Cathy also had contracted it. She was all summer in bed in a portable room outside which was provided by the hospital for such patients. My brother Jaap had a scar on one lung. All of this was the result of drinking contaminated milk from our sick cows. From then on all milk for our own use was boiled even though all cows were tested regularly and found to be healthy.

The financial loss was terrible, not only as far as dead cows were concerned but also the cost of sanatorium and testing, etc. No insurances were there to cover anything at that time. I have never understood how my parents got through those years. They never talked about it till years later. My oldest sisters had to start working outside the home at relatives and I had to quit school at grade 8. Most of my friends went to school three more years. I am sure that during these difficult times dad and mom often poured out their hearts and minds before the Lord and went on the wings of their faith in Him, especially during the years of the "Great Depression." These burdens were never shared with us; instead what I heard many times was dad singing, also while milking cows. One of the songs he often sang was:

"Waarheen pelgrim, waarheen gaat gij, hoofd omhoog en hand in hand,
Wij gaan op des Konings roepstem, Naar Gods Huis in't Vaderland
Over bergen en door dalen, gaan wij naar die blijde zalen,
Van Gods huis in't Vaderland."

freely translated it says:

“Pilgrim, where are you going, hold your head high and go hand in hand. We are obeying the King's voice we are going to God's House, in our Fatherland. Over mountains and through valley's, traveling to our Home above, To God's House in our Fatherland.”

Except for cleaning the living room, the Wednesday was used to mend clothes. There was always much mending to do. In the evening we mended socks or if there was time we were knitting socks. For years on Saturday afternoon we polished about 20 pair of shoes. During the war there were many more. All the wooden shoes were scrubbed on Monday after the laundry was finished. After they were cleaned they were white washed and hung out to dry against the wall on a rack especially made for this purpose. Before we had electricity (in 1943) on Fridays the copper oil lamps were polished and the glass cleaned. The lamps from our buggy were also included as we used candles in those glass lanterns when we were driving in dark.

Once a year a big hog was butchered at home. This was done at the same place where all the other farm activities took place; where we did the laundry, made butter and cheese, etc. A lot of boiling water was needed to scrape the hair off the hog's hide. Dad and the boys did not do the butchering. They always made use of the town and country butcher who made this his living. We were in school when they killed the 500 pound sow. Only the men helped and I was glad about that. When the pig was butchered and cleaned out it was laid on a special rack and tied on with ropes. Then every adult helped to set the whole works against the wall. The hog's head was placed on the top between the hind legs with an apple in it's mouth till the next day. I always found it a scary affair. The following day was a very busy time for the women because then the butcher came back to cut up that big animal. Of course there was a lot of fat on such a large animal and all the fat was to be carefully melted after it had been cut in half inch cubes. We had dozens of crocks which we filled with lightly salted pork chops and slices from the shoulder. Then the melted fat was poured on the meat until it was covered with one inch. All this pouring of the fat was done in the cellar where the crocks were kept. The left-over of the melted pieces were called “kaantjes” i.e. or cracklings. They were delicacies for breakfast on home made bread. Whether they were good or bad for high blood pressure and cholesterol - that is another story. But about this neither farmers, butchers, nor Doctors knew much. Mom also made head-cheese.

This was made from parts of the head and scraps of pork chops. It was cooked in soup pans, spiced with pepper, salt and vinegar and thickened with corn starch or flour. Then it was poured into small bowls to cool, sliced and used on bread. The hams and sides were hung in the smoke closet. We had two in different locations upstairs, where the two chimneys went through. During these weeks no coal was used anywhere in the stoves, only wood. They then were hung in a separate place to be further smoke cured.

I stayed home from school when I finished grade 8. For two years I had followed sewing lessons in a private home in Schipluiden. This was after school until 6 pm during the wintertime. When it was too dark to go home alone I stayed with my Uncle and Aunt just outside of town. He was the miller of the area and they had no children of their own. These months I learned to patch blue jeans and sew night gowns, aprons and dresses. Making patterns was not my best but my sister Teuns was very good at it. In 1938 the school doors closed behind me for good and I was well aware that this would bring a great change in my life. When I was working with mom full time I had to learn a lot; first of all to get up early.

On Monday morning dad called me when he was ready to start milking, just after four o'clock. I found it hard to be wide awake that early at the age of 13 but as soon as I had a big fire going under the big copper water "kettle" I was awake. It was built in a corner of the "boenhoek" (a large area between the cow stable and our living room which was our kitchen) where butter and cheese was made and laundry done. This kettle was built to the left of our cooking stove so the smoke from it went in the same chimney. On the other side of the stove was a built-in oven which was 3 X 7 foot long (underneath it wood could be stored). It was heated with wood until it was very hot, then the hot ashes were scooped out and the last was scraped away with an iron hook on a long handle. When this was done it was quickly cleaned with wet rags that looked like a mop. The already risen loaves were one by one laid on a long handled board and shoved into the oven. Mom checked the bread after 40 minutes but sometimes it took a full hour to get ready. This baking was done always on Saturdays and in the evening we enjoyed fresh baked bread just from the oven. I can still taste it !

On Saturdays when everything was cleaned and every one had a "bath," I filled this copper kettle with rainwater which was caught from the roof in a big cement pit (which was cleaned every spring) with a pail on a long rope. I

pulled the water up from the pit to bring it inside. It was a cold job in the winter. The kettle held about 30 gallons at least and was heated with brush that dad cut from willow trees every year from a different section of our yard and along side the lane. Dad cut the brush the same length about 4 feet long, making bundles that were easy to carry. They were piled up in a large stacks to die and dry for a couple of years. When the water was boiling I made suds for the laundry in two large wooden tubs. In the one tub all the white clothes went and in the other, colored items. These clothes were soaked from Saturday late afternoon until Sunday night. Before I went to bed, these clothes were taken out of the tubs and hung over a board (dripping dry over the tubs) so that I did not have to wring them. Dad (John) would remember this well because for 5 years he went with me doing it on Sunday evening. Then all the coveralls and all work clothes were put in that suds to soak. Next morning, all the black home-knitted socks were washed twice in warm water by hand. We used a wooden “stamper” for all the clothes (except on the socks) to press out the dirt. We then turned the clothes around to “stamp” it on the other side for another ten minutes. After that, wringing by hand was next. This was when blisters on my hands bothered me most. Rinsing of white clothes was always done inside during summer time and the other clothes were rinsed in the creek. The white sheets, pillow cases, shirts, hankies, tea towels, etc. were bleached on the grass in the sun for 4 or 5 hours and then rinsed. During the winter time all these items went in bleach water until the afternoon then rinsed and hung upstairs in a special area above the “upper room” which was built above the cellar where all the milk was cooled and food stored. From that top room we had a beautiful view point to see the meadows, railway bridge, Uncle John's mill, Schipluiden, Delft and The Hague. I stood there not just when I was small but many times later as well, enjoying it all. During winter time all the dark clothes were dried in the living room. In the evening when all had gone to bed the big clothes lines were filled, which we hooked up and extra coal or wood put in the stove for the night. In the morning mom would take the dry clothes down before breakfast time.

On Tuesday I was allowed to sleep in until 6 o'clock. This was my ironing day. All the shirts, dresses, pillow cases, tea towels, hankies, etc. needed to be ironed. The Sunday shirts and aprons were lightly starched before they had gone on the line, then all the starched items were made damp again and rolled in bundles. They were done first for best results, We had four irons which were heated on the stove and rotated while doing the work. During the

winter time it was only on Thursday when everything was dry and folded. What a blessing when spring and summer came and everything was dry in one day; provided of course that there was no rain!

I should also mention that our home was very secluded, even from our nearest neighbor. Not only did we live on a long lane but there was also a wide creek between us and our only neighbor and their farm was shielded by many trees. They were single; 2 brothers and 1 sister. They were very well off and belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. When my youngest brother was born (this was my eighth brother) dad first went to tell the neighbors. Once they responded: "A boy again!? How will they all make a living?" My dad answered: "When God gives the child He will also provide for him." When the youngest was born, a daughter, they reacted, "she will get married anyway and be looked after by someone else." The only further contact was dad and mom's anniversary when many neighbors were invited and also with the weddings of all my brothers and sisters and ours as well. Our lives were very protected from the things going on in the world, except of course, when the war broke out with the five years of occupation.

I have always enjoyed that "safe" and protected feeling at home; also when I was a teenager. I remember the Saturday evenings we were sitting around the table having supper and everyone cleaned up for Sunday. All the shoes were polished and meals prepared for when we would come home from church. Saturday and Sunday evenings were always special to me with every one home. Hot chocolate milk was served and there was a lot of singing around the organ. This was right after supper so that the younger generation could first suggest their favorite Psalm to sing which they had learned and recited in school that week. Later we sang the hymns from our book of around 900 songs. A number of them are to the familiar tunes that we sing here as well. Later a friend of my oldest brother with whom he had been in the sanatorium, taught us a number of new songs as well. All these things that we did at home, the laughter often of mom, together with the few words of warning and rules laid down by dad on being home on time etc, were stepping stones of growth in my life. There was always stability in all the work we had to do, regular church going, Girls Club.etc. Also with the meals ready exactly the same time, there was routine in everything. I have found out that all this was necessary with such a crowd, yet nothing was ever boring to me. I felt it all as protection and security.

The older I became the more I thanked God for the wonderful youth He gave me. Even the three girlfriends He provided and I still have, after all these years, speak of it. This same protection and security I have felt all the years I have been married to my dear husband. Without that foundation of faith and security that I received at home, I would never have been able, humanly speaking, to leave home and immigrate to Canada.

It was God's mercy and my husband's love and encouragement that enabled me to leave my home, family and land behind.