

The War Years (1) **May 10, 1940 – May 5, 1945**

When I was young I somehow never thought about marriage; our single neighbors must have something to do with it . But then in 1939 when I was 14 years old, my oldest sister was engaged to Jan Sniijders, who had been drafted in the Army like all men of a certain age. It was the year of the mobilization.

On May 10, 1940 we woke up around 4 o'clock from a terrible noise of planes flying very low over our farm. We were all down stairs in no time. My brother Kees said: "This is war." These three words changed many things in our lives. The first few days we were worried about my sister's boyfriend Jan, Dad's brother Andrew and of course, other men we knew so well who had left to serve. There was shooting and bombing and all kinds of terrible rumors going around. The weather was so beautiful it was hard to believe that so many terrible things were going on. We all stayed inside as much as possible until Holland capitulated after only 5 days of fighting. It was good news when we heard that Jan Sniijders was not injured during the battle and after six weeks Andrew came home after much suffering. What a relief to see him again. Jan and my sister Engel were married October, 1941. When my brother Kees had begun his studies at the University of Delft in 1939, he purchased a Harley Davis motorcycle. This was still possible during the first two years of the war but when the battle was no longer going well in Germany's favor, everything changed. Gasoline was rationed right away but for those years Kees received just enough gasoline coupons to commute to Delft. One evening when he heard us talking about going to Delft for some shopping he invited me to have a ride with him since he had only a few hours in school. I was apprehensive about the adventure at first but the idea that I would be there in 10 minutes rather than riding my bicycle 10 km made me decide to give it a try. The road to travel had many sharp bends following the canal but Kees told me to relax and to lean to the left and right as he did. I dressed well and enjoyed the ride to the fullest. It was too bad he didn't have more half school days, then I would have been his guest more often.

My dad bought a motor cycle some years before he retired from the farm but five years later when he retired at the age of 64 he moved to Schipluiden and traded his motor cycle for an Opal. It was necessary for his health too and

this way mother could come along to the birthdays in the large family; no more horse and buggy around !

In 1942 we were offered the opportunity to get electricity. The decision in favor depended on our neighbor next door and an Uncle half way down the lane. They both agreed. And so it happened that we could buy a washing machine and a vacuum cleaner! What time savers and what a blessing of less dust in our lungs! And to just think we could switch on the light! Our work was done so much easier and quicker. We were delighted ! This added blessing came just in time before we had an addition to our family of mom's brother with his wife and five children, ages 2-10. This is how it came about: It was my mom's birthday and Uncle Klaas and his wife came to visit like always. No sooner had they stepped inside and we heard the news that they were forced off the farm because of the German soldiers flooding all the land with in one week. They were next to being desperate saying, "where can we go?!" I still hear mother say, "Well, Klaas, then you just come here with all of you" and dad agreed whole heartedly. Their 40 cows were distributed among the neighbors whose land was outside of the to- be -flooded area. Dad (John) told me that it was a strategic move by the Germans because very wide and deep creeks ran through Uncle Klaas' land. They had in mind that when Allied tanks would try to cross there, they would not be able see these creeks and just drown in the rivers and mud. Beds, chairs, tables and dressers came the next day to our place and a small bedroom was built soon thereafter for the couple upstairs while the children were doubled up in the area where we slept. From here on, three tables were needed for the 19 who gathered for the meals each day. Often there were even more around these tables. Our teacher twice a week and a friend of Dad(John) came many times for breakfast. In Dad's(John's) family it was the same pattern. This way the rest of the family could have a little more to eat with the limited coupons. We also had an Inspector of Police from the city of Nijmegen in our home for two years. He was in hiding because the German police had discovered how he had been helping Jewish people escape from being transported, like cattle, in train cars to a concentration camp across the border. (Of the Jewish Dutch community with it's estimated 119,000 members, only approximately 8,500 survived the holocaust). For quite sometime he peeled the potatoes for the whole crowd . This lasted until he became very involved in underground activities around the area. We also had a new "hired man" to help on the farm; "Hein" we called him. He was a German soldier who had fled from his battalion in the army. In other words he was a deserter and was with us two years and four months. Also for six

weeks, we had an American pilot who had parachuted out of his plane when it was hit by canon fire. It was a very tense and stressful time. There is no question in my mind that God commanded His angels to guard our ways. One afternoon when everyone was in the living room for tea, all at once two German soldiers passed by the window. Opening the door was always my job. These visits meant Ausweis inspection. My two older brothers were okay, they had permission to work on our farm but the other brothers had no such permission. Hein had a falsified permit. All were gone in less than a minute. Like always during such times, I was slow to open the locked door, as Hein just happened to leave through the other door on the opposite side. He had picked up a gunny sack on which we wiped our feet and had it rolled up and put it under his arm. "Halt! where are you going?" they shouted. Hein answered very slowly as if he was not very bright. "I am going to pick brussel sprouts." "Ausweis!" they shouted. They carefully inspected the Ausweis permit and found everything in order. (Hein actually acted as if he was a bit retarded; but he wasn't.) I was working at the counter just to see what would happen. My heart was pounding in my throat. One would never know whether they were Gestapo men or just ordinary soldiers. But whoever they were, if they had discovered who "Hein" really was, not just he but dad as well, would have been in deep trouble. Their lives were at stake; it happened all the time. They looked all over in the place, inside and outside, then left without saying another word. It took a while before our nerves were more or less back to normal.

At that time dad had a counter made in our kitchen with a sink and drainage. Up till then all dishes, pots and pans were washed on the floor where we washed the milk pails and strainers. Even though we still had to heat all the water it was great improvement. The water for washing dishes was heated on the kitchen stove in the so-called "boenhoek," translated "cleaning area," between the front room and cow stable. The potbelly stove in the front room was always decorated with a tea kettle where Mom made all the coffee and tea. Afterwards she washed the cups on the table in a dishpan, draining them on a cookie sheet. During the week plates were not used for either breakfast or supper time; only with the hot meal. At the time of the war that changed. I think that my Aunt had lots of dishes and of course we had "deep" plates as they it were called for soup or porridge. Sandwiches were ready made and placed where each one was to sit. Mom was the chief cook. I was the potato peeler and vegetable cleaner but I had a one year break because of our new guest. Every morning I brought Jan Bommel (not his real name) his breakfast and at 9 o'clock a 5 gallon pail with potatoes, water and a knife. At coffee

time I brought him coffee and took the peeled potatoes back . He loved to be busy and the more he could help, the better he liked it. For us it was great too. Many times he cleaned a 5 gallon pail of brussel sprouts as well which we grew ourselves. Each year we grew 2 acres of brussel sprouts which we sold. He also helped out when there was an abundance of vegetables in the garden during summertime. At winter time when all the doors were locked, he could have lunch and supper with us most of the time. Jan and his girlfriend were strong Christian people. She visited him maybe six times in those years and there was always danger involved.

You might wonder how we preserved beans. It was normally done with salt in a big wooden vat and when it was full, a round board was placed on top with a good size rock to press it all down. In the winter we ate salted beans once a week. We kids were not fond of them but we had to eat some whether we liked them or not. The beans were rinsed first, then soaked all night. Thinking about it now I have come to the conclusion that there was little nutritional value left. I had learned to like them, more or less, but my brother Kees just hated the sight of them, I could not blame him. Once on a Wednesday afternoon Kees was sitting with his beans for over an hour. At last mom said: "Kees, soon dad is coming for tea. Why don't you eat them before he is here?" He did. Rules were rules and we had to eat what mom prepared, except onions and tomatoes, because dad did not like them!

On Sunday morning we always went to Church with horse and buggy. First graders were expected to sit still in Church. All under the age of six, stayed home with our maid or later with our older sister. They cooked the hot meal during Church time and set the tables so that every thing was ready when the family came home from church. Church started at 9:30am and afterwards they went for coffee to one of our relatives in town. At 12:30 dinner was served and in the afternoon dad and the one who stayed home and some of the older ones went to the 2 o'clock Service by bike. When my two older sisters were married, it was my turn to stay home and cook the meal. By that time I was 16 and everyone was old enough to go to Church. This was the first time that I was home all by myself and I found it strange. I could hear the cows rattle their chains in the cow stable which I had never heard before. It was good that I was very busy with all the work. I was rather proud that the meal came out very good that first time. The next time I was more confident that I was able to do it again.

Saturday was always a very busy day as well. We began the day just

as early as on a Monday. First the big copper kettle was to be filled; this time with water from the creek which was pumped by hand into the kitchen. Next I made a fire to heat the water. The cellar floor, the whole kitchen floor was to be scrubbed, plus toilet and doors and all the windows outside were washed. On that day mom made butter as well for the whole week and dad made a cheese from the skimmed milk. This meant a lot of cleaning of utensils afterwards, such as milk coolers, tubs, churn, vats, etc. Just outside next to our work area was a large place paved with bricks. This is where we dried all the utensils. This area was scrubbed and washed as well. After these jobs were done the big water kettle was filled again, this time to heat water for the bathing ritual. Everyone under ten years old was to be in night gowns or pajamas before the evening meal. Heads and hair were washed separately in the kitchen. The bathing took place in the living room in a large tub close to the stove. Pre-schoolers went in two at the time. There was some privacy by hanging some sheets over chairs around the tub. All the grown ups had the privilege to wash in the bedrooms upstairs, winter and summer. In the summer this was no problem but in wintertime it was a very cold experience. Maybe my big brothers were wise to go in the cow stable to wash where it was warm, I often washed the milk pails there when it was bitter cold. Mom also cooked a big pot of soup on Saturdays and the meat was fried and dessert was made for Sunday. The dessert consisted often of a chocolate and vanilla pudding or custard, poured in large bowls at the same time. This way we all had a choice and it was every body's favorite. We thought the world of it. Saturday evenings were special in that everyone was home and the boyfriends of my two oldest sisters came (and later my own, how special!) We also sang lots during winter time. The organ was played by my brother Klaas and later by my brother Teun, who always played by heart. It felt a little bit like Sunday already.