

MARRIAGE

During these last five years we thought very little about marriage. It seemed to be too far away with all the dangers and uncertainties plaguing our minds. The few hours that we were together each week were used to come to know each other better. We seldom talked about the war itself and we were so glad that now the five years of occupation were over. Jan's life had been very stressful with skipping at least two nights of sleep every week during the last two years. We both felt at rest and relaxed and we turned over a new leaf. Now the topic of conversation for the next couple of years was about our future together. Jan was looking into many possibilities to find work and a place to live for us but all in vain. We were told that in France many farms were vacant. My parents were hoping that we could find a place to make a living in that country. But we wondered why so many farmers there did not take hold of the opportunity to farm; Did they find it impossible to earn a living? During the ten years I worked with mom I had often said that I would love to live close by, just as my two married sisters did after they married. It looked ideal to me. For the first few years they came home for a visit almost every week. In my heart I knew that this dream would most likely not come true and the thought of leaving our loved ones weighed heavy on me.

Finding housing after the war for newly married couples was next to impossible. So much was destroyed and much needed to be rebuilt. Yet so little was available and few young couples found a way to make a living and got married. The only way out was trying to make arrangements to live together with parents, in-laws, uncles, aunts, friends, neighbors or whoever. It just did not appeal to us to share one kitchen and washroom with two other families. Living in with others we wanted to avoid if at all possible. We had heard too many stories about those arrangements not working out. Besides housing, we needed work as well and that also was very difficult to find. For a long time none of our parents were in favor of possible immigration to Canada. I also struggled daily with it that last year before we married and shed tears often when Jan brought up the subject. But at last, after much searching and praying, our parents saw that we could not be engaged for ever. They agreed to have Jan write a letter to our cousin, Peter Lugtigheid, who had immigrated in 1929. I am sure that our parents had seen that Jan had done his very best to find a place for us. We explained to Peter our situation and inquired about farming situations in Canada. It was about two months later that we received a reply; This was in December

1947. We were very surprised to read that Peter had already found a farmer who would sponsor us and expected us to arrive preferably before May 1, 1948. The time of waiting was over and we took this answer as from the Lord because we asked Him many times to lead us on. I still saw our leaving as a mountain to be climbed but we both had peace and trusted God to show us the way, step by step.

The first thing we did was to set our wedding date for March 10, my mother and brother Piet's birthday. Next, we went to The Hague for our immigration papers and medical check up. Our papers were approved but we had to wait for the outcome of our health test. Jan had been ill when he was seven years old with pneumonia and they had seen a scar on his lung. They questioned him about it but found that we both were healthy. It did not take very long before everything that needed to be done was accomplished. Now we knew for sure that God was directing our way to Canada and we could have our wedding cards printed with our new address on it:

C/O Leonard Giffen
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We had written Peter for more information as to what to bring and the answer was to bring as much as we were able. The wages were not all that much so we were thankful for his good advice. Both of our moms had done their very best to find some furniture for us; a bed with bedding and a table with six oak chairs. A Singer sewing machine was given as a present for my 20th birthday in 1945 by Uncle Klaas and Aunt Stynje, who had lived with us during the war. Jan had given me, on the day we were officially engaged, a beautiful chair made by a friend. The rings were bought with wheat and butter (the stores were still empty). The following year Jan gave me a "thee-meubel" also made by his friend. This is a piece of furniture used for serving tea in the front room when visitors came. My brother Klaas and Annie, who had married 6 months before, gave us some coupons to buy essentials for the kitchen: one frying pan, two cooking pans, three plates and three sets of cutlery. On our wedding day our household was completed with 26 little presents during an A. B. C. game. I still use the bread knife and two wooden spoons which were given. If the stores would have been full of everything and no coupons were needed it would have been much easier. But the bright side was that we appreciated every little thing we

received. Our moms presented us with a few tea and bath towels and all kinds of things like thread, needles etc. when we were packing our crate. Again, none of this would have been possible had our parents not been farmers as they would not have been able to trade food for the items we needed. As you can imagine time went very fast with all these preparations.

February 25 was the date that we went to the Town Hall for our marriage license. We only had to sign one paper and make arrangements for our wedding day two weeks later. Several questions were asked about us going to Canada as this was something new at that time in Schipluiden. One couple had left for the States one year before. In the evening of that day, the Moerman family came over to our home, plus my four married brothers and sisters, to celebrate together our “ondertrouw” date or official publication of marriage. This had been the custom for generations. This publication was placed on a special board attached on the outside of the Town Hall for all to read. It must have been read by many because people were waiting at the Town Hall steps when we arrived to get married on March 10. I was surprised because they were not people I knew; they were in Church waiting for us.

This family evening was the beginning of two weeks of festivities which consisted of four receptions in our home as well as four evenings in Jan's home. Two evenings for the brothers and sisters of both of our parents, one evening for all of our cousins and friends and one more for our neighbors. It meant eight evenings of drinking coffee or tea and serving pastry and cookies. There was also two glasses of wine served or glasses with mixed fruit as a choice. The favorite of all were the so called “bruidsuikers” which were served only at weddings and anniversary celebrations. These delicacies consisted of almonds coated with vanilla flavored sugar or others had rum on the inside and chocolate on the outside.

The day before our wedding was a very busy day of preparation for the meals of our 40 guests. Our living room was converted into a very festive place. We had rented tables for the occasion and they were set in a U shape, which seated our guests comfortably. We decorated the tables with white paper and made squares of purple and pink streamers. In every other square we put a vase with yellow and white daffodils. We cooked a lot of soup with different flavors and many kinds of desserts. The next day the rest of our dinner was prepared by five cousins who also served on our big day.

One cousin had worked for years for my mom and dad when I was very young and this lady took all the responsibility for the whole day.

One big problem was solved only three weeks before our wedding day. That was that there were no wedding dresses in the stores yet; not even fabric. Mom had once been able to get some dress material. It was "heaven" blue as I called it but when my brother Piet married one year after the war, his bride was in need of it and we were glad to help her out. Now it was my turn to be in need of a dress. This was a concern until my brother Klaas' wife, Annie, suggested that I fit on her dress. (She had an Aunt that was a top seamstress who had been able to obtain material). It fit perfectly; even the length was right. What a relief and what a blessing! Tante Annie asked us not to tell anyone that it was her dress I was wearing. Later a few people asked, "Where on earth did you find that nice dress?" Then I had to tell them and they in turn wondered whether I felt bad that I did not have my own wedding dress. I told them that I was very happy to look beautiful for my bridegroom and that was most important to me. I was excited and thankful to be a "white bride," as I had always dreamed of and God had made my dream come true.

On Wednesday morning, March 10, mom called me at 7:30 for breakfast. I realized it was my last day at home. At nine o'clock a hairdresser came who also helped me with dressing and with my veil. At twelve o'clock my bridegroom came by taxi. He was dressed in a new suit made by his deaf and dumb brother-in-law (a tailor) and he looked beautiful! First we went to Delft for two official pictures, then returned to Schipluiden and transferred to a rented buggy with two horses. Our parents were honored to ride in such a special buggy as well, which was called a marriage coach. All the others used their own horses and buggies. The sun was shining all day but there was lots of wind, so much so that my sister Cathy who was fourteen, had a hard time to hang on to my veil when we walked from our buggy into the Town Hall. All the official signing was done there and the custom was that parents were the witnesses. Next was the Mayor speaking and gave us his congratulations and best wishes in our new land. Soon we were on our way to Church where many people had gathered. Our Pastor, Cor Verbaas, brought us to our places which was a long walk through the whole church. Wedding rehearsals was an unknown thing at that time. To my consternation, I felt all at once that my veil had hooked on the cocus runner (a rough industrial style carpet) on which we walked. Our Pastor had not noticed that he had "lost" us until he went around the corner. There

he was smiling and waiting until Cathy had unhooked my veil. At least we were all smiling about the interruption! The text for our lives together were the words from John 1:38 which says “Wat zoekt gij?” (What are you seeking?) It was a beautiful message which I plan to translate, DV. About 250 people attended our wedding service. The Church’s Girls Club sang Psalm 134 as a blessing and a farewell. (tune “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”)

1. O Bless our God with one accord,
Ye faithful servants of the Lord,
Who in His house do stand by night
And praise Him there with all our might.
2. Lift up your hands in prayer draw nigh,
Unto His sanctuary high;
Bless ye the Lord, kneel at His feet,
And worship Him with reverence meet.
3. Jehovah bless thee from above,
From Zion in His boundless love,
Our God, who heaven and earth did frame,
Blest be His great and holy Name.

Also we sang: Ps. 146:1 and 8; Gez. 135:3, Psalm 121 and Psalm 139:3 and Gez. 186:1.

After the wedding ceremony and Church service both of our families went to my parent’s home called “Het Huis Ten Dorp.” (The name came from the “Van Dorp” family who owned this place during the earlier part of 1800 when it was a castle. It was very visible to see, in the field, the dip where the moat had been. Once when digging, during the war, two urns were found. They were sent to a lab to determine what was in them. It turned out that one contained the ashes of a person and the other urn contained the ashes of a horse and rider. Then the farm was sold to Opa Piet van Leeuwen). It was quite a line of horses and buggies going to the farm to celebrate. Besides both of our families there were a few special guests: my grand mother who was the only grandparent between the two of us, my Aunt whom I was named after and the Aunt and Uncle who lived with us for two years. And of course our two very close friends Bertha Klarenberg, her fiancé Piet Vande Burgh and our Pastor and his wife.

When we arrived tea and coffee was served with cookies and “bruidsuikers.” We then all went outside while the girls set the tables for dinner. Our dinner took two hours as the menu was elaborate and delicious! The girls served in intervals and stayed until the very end which was two o'clock a.m. They did a beautiful job! There was also an enjoyable program. My brothers took care of the entertainment, consisting of skits, poems, singing, speeches and rhymes. My oldest brother Klaas was the evening's M.C. We also were presented with the picture of the homestead where Jan had lived all of his life. I received a painting as well of my “dierbaar plekje grond, waar eens mijn wieg op stond.” (my sweet spot of soil, where once my cradle stood). Dad and mom Moerman surprised us with our wedding text, painted on black velvet with a vase of yellow and white daffodils. The two paintings were made by Simon Paul, who was converted like St. Paul, except through a terrible accident. It was at the age of 50-55 years that he accepted Christ and became the greatest Christian witness in our town, also serving for years as Elder. Because of his disability he began painting pictures while before he had been a painter by trade. These three presents have been of great value to us and have been on our wall until today; A reminder of the many blessings we received before immigrating to Canada. Toward the end of the evening my dad read Psalm 121 and spoke to us in a very personal way. It was very touching. The thought that this was the last family gathering was hard on us and we were not the only ones. At the same time we knew that God was directing us to go and we trusted Him for our future. I was sure Jan was the man God had given me and I trusted his judgment in every event we undertook. We were longing to begin our lives together, settling down in our own home in the land God had given us to go. I never regretted the step I took to leave home, in spite of much home sickness and adjustments in many ways. Our wedding day with all its emotions has always been a precious memory for us as we were sent off with God's blessings. After the wedding we went to the Moerman farm where we lived until we left for Canada.