

Chapter 4

Early Childhood Memories

In was a very common thing for parents to tie their small children on a tree or pole near the house. When we were, we were tied to the big chestnut tree in front of our home, with all the ditches and creeks around every farm, even as open manure pits—there was no choice but to do something like this. Yet, I recall my parents at times talking about people who had lost children through drowning—among them a baby brother and sister of my own father, both at the same time.

Some of the earliest memories go back to pre-school years. I know exactly the spot where my father one day was standing in front of our house talking with someone. The reason for remembering this so well was that I went to stand with him. And while I stood there, he put his big hand on my head and just stroked my hair. My dad had big fingers and huge hands. They were very calloused because of all the hard work. He could pull nettles without apparent pain from the strings. His hands had deep grooves and sometime had cracks in them too. I recall some people referring to his hands as “coal shovels,” but to me, my father’s hands spoke of love, protection, and safety.

I also recall the time when it dawned on me that I did not cry as much as before. I concluded that I was becoming more like my older brother and sisters, whom I hardly ever saw crying.

In the evening, when the milking was done and after we had eaten, my two younger siblings were the first to be in bed. For a number of years, the others were spaced 15 minutes apart. Looking back, I can only say that life on the farm was very organized. During the 15 minutes before my bedtime, I often climbed on my dad’s knees. Sometimes he was reading *De Boerderij*. It was mainly a dairy magazine and contained a lot of pictures of cows with high milk production. But it also had pictures of work horses, sheep, and goats. Very often, before the 15 minutes were over, my dad would have trouble keeping his eyes open. I don’t remember my parents ever reading bedtime stories to us. The reason is no doubt simple: there was neither money nor time to do so.

In my later teen years, I had surgery for a rupture. I must have been born with it. I recall that at a very young age my mother, every few days or weeks, would put me in my parents’ bed in the living room. During the daytime, the “bed” folded up into something like a wide and deep clothes closet with doors on the front. We had two of them; the one in which my mother and father slept was in the living room. Toward the end of the bed was a large baby crib. My mother would tightly wrap a long cotton band around my groin and squeeze a small roll of cotton band into it. All of this was held in place by another band wrapped around my waist.

As small as we were, each of us had chores to do. During the winter, these included making sure that all of the cows had hay in front of them during milking time. If

the cows had to reach out to get their hay, it hindered those who were milking. A cow reaching too far for hay might slip off of the cement and into the gutter below. My father had cut two-pronged sticks from tree branches that functioned as hay forks for us.

Before I was old enough to go to school, my father allowed me, at times, to ride along with him on Thursdays to the market in Delft. There he would sell our cheese and butter. Afterwards we would walk over to the cattle, pig, and horse market. What a sight all this was to my young eyes. Throngs and throngs of people were milling around, and I couldn't understand how so many people knew my father or why they called him "Rinus." The old churches from the 13th century could be seen from our farm, but to walk past these massive buildings was awesome.

Several other things from the visits to Delft stand out in my memory. There was the occasion when my father did not make it in time to cross the railroad before the arm came down ahead of the horse and buggy. How it scared me. There had been times before when he had just made it. But to wait for the controlled railway to be clear again would sometimes take 15 minutes and he would be later for the unloading of his produce. After standing there for three seconds or so with bells ringing and the train on its way, they lifted the arm. At other times when the bells were ringing the arm was about to come down, they would just hold it until the vehicles or the farmer with a horse and wagon had passed. On this occasion, a police officer stopped us when we got through the barrier. I cannot remember whether or not he gave us a ticket, but I recall being very scared by the whole ordeal.

Then there was the time when I became separated from my father in the throngs of people. I do not know how long I wandered around, but I was frightened and in a panic when I was found. Every policeman I saw made me more scared.

Weighing the cheese and butter on the huge scales was very impressive. So was the bidding and the slapping of hands by my father and various buyers. A tenth or a quarter of a penny per pound could determine whether or not the sale would go through. Market days were the only time when I saw my father with a cigar, though he held it in his hand than in his mouth.

On one market day, we went to visit my uncle Jack, my mother's brother, who was in the hospital and very ill. I was five years old, and this was the first time I had been in a hospital. Walking in the hallways and seeing all the beds and sick people through the open doors made a big impression on me, even more so afterwards—my Uncle Jack died a few weeks later at the age of 33.

Very often the farmers would meet the buyers at a pre-arranged time in the coffee shops to receive their money for the products. These places were thick with cigar smoke. On one occasion, something must have gone wrong because my father walked many blocks to the man's office. Soon the buyer raised his voice and started arguing. His face

became red, and he became very angry. My father never raised his voice and most of the time did not even answer him. I don't know what had happened.

When my father received two or three pennies per pound more than he had expected, he would buy a big bag of peanuts for the family. What a feast that was. Most of the time he would arrive back at home just when we were finishing our noon meal. The big bag of peanuts did not last long. I can still see the pile of shells that was in front of my oldest brother by the time we left the table.

There were always plenty of chores to do. The pigs were never fed dry feed; it was always made into slop, and we often helped to stir the pails of slop. We had a yoke that neatly fitted on my father's shoulders. With this he would carry the big buckets to wherever they needed to go. Then there were our rabbits to be taken care of. We ordinarily had about 40 or so. During most of the year, we had to find our own feed for them. It was only during a few winter months that we were allowed to give them some of what the chickens, pigs, and cows were fed. It was very special when a salesman from the Hague came around twice a month with old bread, which the rabbits loved. Some of it was stale and moldy, but at times there were loafs of raisin bread and cakes, which were okay for us to eat ourselves.

Every Saturday we cleaned the pens. In each farmer's community, there were a few salesmen who came around to buy and sell rabbits, chickens, ducks, marmots, mole hides, and goats. I learned how to catch and skin moles and to dry skins at an early age.

Every penny went into our piggy bank. There were times, though, when we found that our piggy bank money was no longer in there. We only discovered this when we went into the *opkamer*, a special room in which all the things that children were not supposed to put their hands on were kept. This was forbidden territory for us. Later we found out that mother at times had to borrow our money to pay the homeopathic doctor who showed up unexpectedly.

My mother was sold on homeopathic and herbal medicine. With these, plus cod liver oil and her own homemade remedies, she fought all colds, sores, boils, rashes, headaches, tummy aches, and whatever else at times plagued the family.

There had to be something seriously wrong before a doctor was called, such as when I had developed pneumonia. It was spring and I had been sitting on the ground watching our sheep being sheered. I don't know if I already had a cold or fever, but I became very sick. The doctor came over every day and so did the minister. The teacher who taught my deaf sister for a few hours each day also came. I recall them praying for me. I also remember aunts and uncles stopping by to see how I was. I heard my mother whisper something to them about "the crisis being within one or two days." At that time, I had no idea what she meant. I do know that my bed sheets were wet from sweat, and later on I was told that I came close to death. I was out of school for four months, as a seven-year-old.

My parents had to take my sister out of the special school called *Effatha*, which was located 25 kilometres away in Voorburg. She had been there for several years, but with the Great Depression hanging on, my parents could no longer afford to have her attend. She later returned to the school, but by then she had lost much precious time. She could speak certain words, but she could not formulate any sentences.

We had very few toys to play with. The only toy that I recall is a teddy bear, which was passed on to whoever was the youngest. When my brother Jaap carried it along to bed, it was pretty well worn out. I have never seen a doll at home. My mother let me use her scissors to cut out animals from my father's farm magazine, *De Boerderij*. When I was bigger, my parents gave me a small circular saw and a piece of thin plywood. My mother would make a pastry glue with which I could stick my animals on the plywood then cut them out with my saw.

During spring, summer, and fall, we would play in the sand pile, making various things with a cup or dish that our mother would allow us to have for the day. We also played with chestnuts. I loved planting chestnuts all over the place. By the time I was 10 years old, I had to dig up a lot of the small trees and give them away. I later found out that one tree still stood there many years later.

On one occasion I came up with the idea to bend low and try to walk under a row of 15 cows that were tied up on one side of our barn. When our parents found out what I had been up to, it quickly ended. We had not considered the danger of being kicked if we had scared one of the cows. My ideas and pranks sometimes ended with a scolding. I received a serious scolding on another occasion when I hid at the top of the stairway leading to where the five of us slept to scare my sister Pietje. When she arrived, I jumped out from behind some boxes with a scream. When I saw how this effected her for several days, I felt very bad about it.

One day Uncle Klaas, my mother's oldest brother, who lived in The Hague, left a radio with us for a few weeks. I was fascinated with it. I remember standing in front of it and looking it over, front and back and sides, and listening to the man inside of it talking to us. I felt that since I could hear him, there should be a way to see him. Yet, I had a problem understanding how a big man could be inside such a small box with two knobs on it. Though I was dumbfounded, I sat there for the longest time trying to figure out how and where I might find him. I did not leave before my mother turned it off. It took about another 10 years before I had a radio of my own.

At the age of six or seven, I started to learn how to ride a bike. There were only adult bikes, and I had to wait until Andrew had time to help me. We didn't have a lady's bike; my mother never rode a bike in her life. At that time, my oldest sister did not have a bike yet. To manage riding a big bike, I put one leg through the frame to reach the peddle on the right and placed my other foot on the peddle on the left. This was a double

balancing act. It was much easier when my sister got her bike for a young boy to ride, and for a number of years, the two bikes were very much common property.

For as long as I can remember, Andrew cleaned the chimney each spring. This required the construction of a unique cleaning tool. A brick was tied to the end of a rope with two bundles of straw just above it. The brick was lowered to the very end and pulled up and down several times.

Frequently, beggars would come around the farms; they were shabbily dressed and, at times, hungry. Some of them would offer items for sale: shoe strings, safety pins, sowing needles, elastic, shoe polish, and other small items. Most of them were honest people. Some would bow their heads and thank God for the meals we gave them. My parents always had a big heart for them and gave them a good meal. The beggars, in return, expressed their gratefulness. I remember one of them doing an odd thing as he left. He had a long stick with him, and at the end of it was a mole trap. He stopped at a certain place on our lane and, for about five minutes, hit one of the hollow knotted willows with his contraption. My parents figured that he believed demons were hiding in the tree. I refer to this incident in my printed sermon "The Empty House."

Something about the beggars scared me. Sometimes between fall to early spring, they would come back to the farm when it was dark to find a sleeping place in the hay; they would leave early in the morning. One morning when it was still dark, my father went to the barn to throw down some more hay for the cows. Reaching in the dark, he grabbed the arm of a beggar who was still asleep under the hay. He often said that he was thankful to not have been using a fork to throw his hay down that morning.

Gypsies who came around the farms could not be trusted. Large families of gypsies lived in horse drawn caravans. They arrived in groups, each visiting a different farm, requesting food for themselves and hay and oats for their horses. They would have the horses graze every patch of grass along the laneway and on the side of the road. There were places where they would congregate their caravans, and one of these places was where Corrie and her brothers and sister had to pass while going to school. The children were frightened to pass that place. The gypsies seemed to live lives of crookedness, lying, and stealing. When they came to our farm, one came to the door while the others wandered around the farm. My father and Andrew and my oldest sister would always watch where they were going.

Releasing the cows and calves from their winter confinement, where they had been tied up for close to six months, was a big event for the whole family. For my father and my oldest brother and sister, it meant an end to the extra chores of feeding, brushing, and cleaning. For us smaller children, there was the sight of my father and Andrew running from the barn with another cow or calf and letting it go through the gate. It was a sight to behold. The animals were wildly jubilant to be loose. My mother and my older sisters came to watch them run up and down the field with their tails held high. My father always waited until the last moment before letting the cattle out, not only until there was

enough grass for them to eat, but also until the land was dry—otherwise they would trample too much of the ground in their excitement.

We had roofing tiles under which starlings and sparrows could nest, and every spring there were numerous birds that hatched there. As small children (always in bed by 7:00), we would listen for the parent bird crawling through the small opening above our heads, followed by a lot of noise from the young birds. My parents were not too fond of the hundreds of birds that hatched there. It was my oldest brother's job to take out the nests with eggs and young ones, a few times each year. On these occasions, we could stay up one hour longer.

It was customary when a baby was born among neighbours and friends that small children were invited sometime thereafter to be treated to biscuits with coloured sugary kernels. If the baby was a girl, the kernels were pink; for a boy, they were white.

When I was in grade one and just able to read and write a few words, I wrote “oom eet een peer” (uncle eat a pear) on the inside wall of our buggy and wagon barn. I had found a pail of tar, which my father had put there when it had started to rain. It was a very thick tar, which my father had been using on poles below the ground's surface. I made a mess of the floor and cement wall, but I managed to get a few words on it before Andrew stepped in and, in no uncertain way, made me end my writing. What was on the wall in 1929, however, stayed there until the building was demolished in 1985.

When I was eight years old, my father's mother passed away. She was the only grandparent I ever saw. His father had died when he was 13 years old. My mother's father passed away when I was three months old, and her mother was only 56 when God called her home. So this grandma was special to us. Every new year's day the whole family would go by horse and buggy to Vlaardingen to wish Oma Moerman a Happy New Year. It was also the time we had the opportunity to show her our small booklet that we had received from Sunday school during our annual Christmas program. I do not recall ever seeing her at any other time of the year, but I can well remember my father and mother making themselves ready on March 13, 1931, to go to her funeral. I can still see the exact location where my father tied the bands in his long underwear to hold up his socks. I could not believe that people would bury her and that I would never see her again.

Collecting eggs was a hobby I had at a very young age. In the spring, I was always roaming around in the two-acre bush we had, in the orchards and fields, and in the ditches where so many knotted willows dotted the landscape. I knew the shape of every tree, the kinds of weeds and grasses that grew in certain areas, what trees were hollow, and how the sides of the ditches were shaped. I had learned the tricks, or instincts, of the birds—how they acted to get people away from where the nests were. Sometimes wild ducks would also nest in the knotted willow trees. At one time, my collection of different bird eggs numbered around 30.

During spring, summer, and fall, farmers needed to bring their cows in from the fields for milking. In the evening there was no problem locating them, but in the morning it was often quite difficult—especially when there was no moon or when it was overcast. As soon as Andrew became a teenager, father let him do it. One time I asked my parents if I could go with him at 3:30 in the morning. It was pitch dark, and we had to adjust our eyes to it. Flashlights were an unheard of commodity. When we crossed the old bridge over the creek (referred to as the Keen earlier), I was frightened when a wild duck loudly splashed away from under it.

One afternoon when my youngest brother and I were roaming around, I turned over a few half-rotten planks, which were laying at the edge of our bush. To our great excitement, we found a nest with five little hedgehogs under it. We did not know what they were, but when I carefully tried to grab one, it rolled up in a ball of little pricks. We ran over to where my father and Andrew and my sister Ma were milking and told them what we had found. When my father had finished milking, he came over and told us what they were. He had never seen them on the farm before, and he told us to put the planks back over the nest again. The next day, they were all gone.

One day, as I was kicking against a hollow knotted willow while hunting for eggs, I heard something strange. Kicking again, I could hear that whatever was in there was climbing toward the top. Before kicking again, I called our dog, who was very good at chasing rats, and moles, and mice. To my surprise it wasn't a rat; it was a fitchew or polecat, which is a bad smelling weasel-like carnivore with a beautiful fur. They only live in Europe. They are the size of a skunk, but instead of black and white, they are brown with a little white under the neck and belly. The fur is expensive. When the animal saw the dog, it stayed in the branches of the tree. I hollered for Andrew to come with his gun. The bullet made the animal fall in the creek, and the dog jumped right on him. I wish I could say that I received a good price for the fur, but I did not. I was told that the bullet hole made it nearly worthless. We found it hard to believe.

I loved catching frogs, and there were plenty of them around, everywhere. To keep small children away from the ditches, it was common to tell them of the “danger” of bullfrogs. We were told that they hid on the sides of the ditches and creeks and that they would suddenly jump out and pull us into the water. I soon found out that this simply was not so, though I later understood the rationale behind the scare tactic. Once, I persuaded my parents to allow me to have a big old wooden tub that had been used for making cheese in the early days but was then used for cow rationing. I wanted to use it to keep all the frogs in. This way they could not jump out while I was catching others. One time I had around 150 frogs in there. It was quite a sight when I had to let them all go because my father needed the tub back. Sometimes the big frogs did not get off so lucky. I do not know how or where we learned the wrong, but we would take a straw and blow up the poor frog to double its size. Looking back, I thank God for the scolding we received when my parents found out.

Hygiene on the farm was far from what we know it to be today. This was due no doubt to a variety of circumstances, such as poverty, old fashioned toilet facilities, inadequate drainage, drinking rainwater that was stored in large basins, crowded sleeping quarters, etc. Bedbugs were not uncommon; nor were head lice. Some of the poorer children in school were notorious for these things, and we at times brought them home from school. Each Saturday, my mother would comb our hair with a special comb to catch any lice that might be there.

Mother was also our dentist for a long time. My father, visiting us at one time, brought the old tooth puller along and gave it to us. As a child I hated it, though I must also say that going to the dentist during my teen years gave me just as many frightening times. Fixing cavities without freezing was one thing, but root canals was something else.

In other ways, I was a frightened boy, especially in the winter when darkness came early and the nights were long. I believe it had something to do with overhearing my father and uncles refer to “De Moord Woning” (Farm of the Murderers). This farm was located between the farms where both my mother and father were born. Perhaps at one time I heard the story of “De Vergulde hand” itself. Anyway, during the winter, I was always checking whether the doors in the cow barn were locked—everything was under one roof. Yet it didn’t make any difference because a strong wind would open them, even if they were locked. The high humidity had caused them to rot at the top and bottom. My father simply didn’t have the money to fix or replace them. I could not understand how my father could go out each night to check the cows just before going to bed.

Often at night, I would lay awake listening for strange sounds. I often heard them because of the howling winds and the big beams that squeaked on the roof and the cows tied with chains to poles of iron and wood. There was always noises. I often called from upstairs to my parents, “Dad, Mom, I hear something.”

During the Great Depression, a number of farmers had decided to hire a night watchman who would go around checking farms. Sometimes, when the ground was frozen, I could hear him making his rounds at our place. It was a relief to know that someone was out there checking and watching. I had a lot of respect for our night watchman, Jan Van Dien. He was the son of our neighbour, a widow with six bachelor children. I could not imagine how he had the courage to do his job.

I was also afraid of one of the big girls at our school. At times she would call me “stijf boertje” (stiff little farmer). And no doubt I was. I was short and, as a small child, worked quite a bit every day. Sometimes this girl would come running past and grab me by the tail of my coat and swing me around and make fun of me. It didn’t help that I couldn’t keep a tune in a bucket, so to speak. The teacher would make me stand at the front of the class and sing a song all by myself just like the others. I was petrified when I had to do this. It did not happen often, and something must have been decided about it because it soon ended, to my great relief.

When my youngest brother was old enough to go to school, we had to walk through our bush behind the orchards. He was afraid to go to school. Walking hand in hand, I tried to quiet him about being away from home. No doubt some of the things I had shared at home had something to do with his fear.

Then there was the time when my father told me to go by bike to check our cows on a farm about two kilometres away, where he had rented some land. When I got to the field, the farmer's dog took after me, chasing me around the haystack. I don't know if the dog was vicious or not, but I was so frightened that every time I went there, it was with fear and trembling. For years I had nightmares about dogs chasing me and trying to bite me.

Since Christmas has no connection with St. Nicholas, December 5 is the exclusive celebration of the latter. On the evening prior to this date, we would put our wooden shoes behind the wood stove, and the next morning we would be up bright and early to see what was there. Ordinarily there were a few sugar candies and a chocolate letter for each of us, the first letter of our names. Other goodies related to Santa Claus and Black Pete included ginger nuts.

On Christmas day, we had two church services. On the following day, there was a church service in the morning; the evening was for a Christmas celebration with all the Sunday school children and their parents.

This was very important to us. Since evergreen trees do not grow anywhere in the western part of Holland, the large evergreen that was standing in the church was a special attraction. The tree was decorated, and the many candles added to the fascination on that special evening. We, and the other Sunday school children said our memorized scripture text. Some of the older children recited several verses. We also received two cups of chocolate milk. Just before closing, we received a booklet and a mandarin.

Another highlight in our childhood was when one of our parents had a birthday. This was a day on which either all of my father's or mother's brother and sisters, with their spouses, came for the celebration. The whole yard was full of buggies, and horses were tied inside and out; some of the tamest horses were loose in the pasture. When we came from school at noon, the ceremony of going around the circle and shaking hands began. I always found it very impressive. My father would make the round of the farm and fields with all the uncles, looking over the cows; my mother and my aunts would be out looking over the gardens and orchards.

An annual boat trip to the North Sea at Scheveningen with all the school children, teachers, and some parents was also special. By way of the canals, we travelled through country side, towns, and cities almost to the sea. We only needed to walk through the sand dunes. There was a strict discipline. I don't know if anyone knew how to swim, and no one had a bathing suit or swimming trunks. We waded in the sea without shoes and socks and with our men pants rolled up.

Insert picture of boat trip here.

One day I received an embarrassing scolding from our new veterinary. His father, a good man but very much a self-made veterinary, had been coming around for years. My father liked him very much, and my mother called him “cousin.”

The father often talked about his son who was about to graduate from the veterinary college. He recommended him as the new veterinary who knew all about new medicine. He always talked about his son as “Bram,” a very familiar name and short for Abraham.

So one day when the son came to our farm on a new motor cycle, I very innocently greeted him with, “Hello, Bram.” I was shocked when he immediately told me that I should be ashamed of myself. He lectured me on being so impolite to call him by his first name, rather than by saying, “Hello, Mr. Qualm.” He emphasized very strongly that I should address him as “mijnheer” (sir).

I was red faced when I walked into the house. Since he had also told me that my parents had taught me differently, I did not say anything at home. I could not remember my mother or father ever telling me to greet him in this way. It was a number of years before I dared approach him again. Sadly, by that time he had been in a serious motor cycle accident in another country. He never walked normally again. It was heartbreaking to watch him slowly become completely crippled.

Class distinction was a fact of life during the time we were growing up. Those in the upper class were addressed as *Weledele*, *Weleerwaarde*, and *Weledelgestreng Heer*. Among these were government leaders, judges, and mayors. Loosely translated, it came down to Sir, Lord, Your Honour, etc. Those in the middle class were addressed as *Mijnheer*, *Den Heer*, and *Dominee*. Among these were company directors, professors, teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers, and everyone with a university degree, including our recently graduated veterinary. The same stood as far as the wives of these people. Farmers were looked down on by city people, and those who worked for farmers were somewhere at the bottom rung of culture and society. For quite some time, I felt inferior when I came into contact with city people. Slowly but surely all that began to change, especially following the war.

My father became very angry with any of us. When necessary, it was my mother who spanked or disciplined us. When her eyes grew big, we knew what was coming. One day, my father really became angry, and my youngest brother was in for it.

Marketing our home-made cheese brought in the little money my parents made, and the day before it was marketed, it was inspected. If there were cracks in any of the cheese blocks, they had to be sealed. To seal a crack, hot water was slowly poured over it,

and a knife was used to close and smooth the cheese. If it was winter, the cheese blocks were laid out to dry behind the stove in the living room.

On this occasion, my brother had taken a bite out of a couple of the cheese sections. He was only four or five years old. My father, who had come in for something during the milking time, saw it and got so upset that he lost his temper. It was not necessary for my mother to intervene with the spanking. We did not know at the time that the price of the cheese would be cut in half on the following day. During the Great Depression, every penny counted.

Cats were always needed on the farm to keep the mice population to a reasonable level. Most cats were not too good at catching rats or moles, of which there were plenty. We always had dogs, therefore, which were good rat and mole catchers. The pig barn was a favorite place for the rodents, but they also had burrows along the ditches and at other locations around the farm. When the dog signaled where the rats' burrow was, we would pour water into it until the last rat came out. We also had a wire box as a trap.

I loved to catch rats whenever there was a chance. What I hated was my father drowning newborn kittens that appeared on the farm at regular intervals. Sometimes we would try to hide the kittens, but this only lasted a few days. We did not understand that a farmer could not possibly keep all the litters that were born. Trying to give them away did not work because everyone had more than enough cats.

Every farmer had a little bit of bush around the farm, a source of poles to which milking cows could be tied during the winter months. In the bush were the hard and long lasting ash trees that grew like knotted willows, though not as fast. It took about eight years to grow a good pole. When cut, the top part with its thinner branches was stuck into the ground in a sunny place near the house, and the ladies could use it to dry socks for a big family. This was a common sight around every farm in our area.

The only running water we had was what ran down from heaven onto the roofs of our building, into the gutters, through the spouts, and into the "regenput," as they were called. They were cement rings, eight feet wide, three on top of each other, with a cement bottom. The top of the cistern had a three- or four-foot square opening with a wooden lid and a heavy rock on top of it. We had three of these cisterns. One was for washing clothes and dairy equipment, one was for personal use, and one was for animals and general purposes. When they were not freshly filled with new water from heaven, mosquito larva would form in the stale water. The water intended for drinking had to be screened.

Every year, the gutters were cleared of any leaves and dirt that had blown in. In addition, one of the cisterns was emptied and thoroughly cleaned out each year—especially the one used for drinking and washing water. When little rain had fallen, we would use only water from that cistern. The water left would be scooped into one of the other cisterns and the last of it thrown out. When no more could be scooped out, a ladder was lowered and one of the smaller members of the family had to climb down into the

cistern. An adult could not squeeze through the opening on a ladder. Since this was a boy's job and Andrew was already too big, the lot fell on me for several years.

I can remember one day when my father was very busy. It looked like it might rain so he and my oldest brother worked on the cistern between other jobs. Then it was time for me to go down the ladder and fill the buckets with the water and mud that was left. The ladder had to be lifted out to make space for the bucket. I had to scrub the sides clean, which required lowering clean water down and later scooping it up the dirty water and lifting it out. It took several hours to complete the job. My father suggested that he and my brother would start eating while I finished up. Staying in that dark, deep hole did not sound too inviting, but I knew they were very busy.

For the first 10 minutes it went all right. But then I began to think of the worst possible scenarios. I was worried that it would start raining, perhaps a sudden big thunder storm and a heavy rain. I did not know how to swim (my mother had the unwritten rule that we were not to get into the water until we knew how to swim). The more I thought about my predicament, the more scared I became. Soon I began to call out for my father. The echo of my cries made me panic. I do not know how long I had been in there, sometimes screaming at the top of my voice, "Dad, Dad, come help me!" It was very frightening. When my father came back at last, I was in tears and could hardly talk. He tried very hard to quiet me down and comfort me by saying that he had not been away all that long, but his soothing was not immediately successful. When the job was finally done and the ladder lowered for me to climb out, it seemed that I had never seen a more bright and beautiful sky than I did that afternoon.

When I was around 11 years old, I came up with the idea of hitching a ride with the delivery truck that was parked in a garage in our farm yard. It was built by a man who paid a small fee annually for its use. He always left at about the same time my younger sister, brother, and I left for school. When he had backed it out and turned it around, he always came back to close the garage doors. This was our opportunity to climb onto the low tailgate of the truck and hang on. The man always stopped at his parent's grocery store in the middle of town, where we could jump off. On this particular morning, however, he went straight on. When this happened, we all panicked. Had we been able to think rationally, we could have let go and landed safely when he came to a near stop at the bridge. The trick was to run as fast as we could on landing. My younger siblings failed to do this and fell hard on the road. They were bruised, but they still went to school. My sister must have had a near concussion for she began to vomit. Not only was it dangerous, but it was a dumb thing to do for another reason. I had overlooked the fact that the people in town would see what we had done and through them my parents would hear about it. Actually, the truck went past my teacher's home and his wife saw us hanging on the tailgate. When we came home for lunch, my mother was waiting for us. She knew it all, and the bruises told the rest of the story. Rightly so, I bore the brunt of the discipline that was applied.

The overview of all these childhood memories may not be of the greatest interest to all. However, the memories must have meant something to me; otherwise they would not have stayed with me for all these years. I never wrote any of them down until I reached the age of 70. Then when I started to write down a few of them, many other episodes came to mind. The reason I continued writing so many was that such experiences helped to form and shape me. I trust that these stories and episodes will enable our children and grandchildren to get a fuller overview of where we came from and, by God's grace, what made us the persons we have become.