

## Chapter 15

### *In the Midst of Death . . . Life Is To Go On*

I have mentioned before that when Father and Mother Moerman left after visiting us in Ontario, she did not look well at all. Early in 1954 we already began to read in between the lines that she indeed *wasn't* well. Her visits to her special doctor in Delft were increasing too. Mother was very apprehensive about hospitals. During the Spanish flu of 1918-1919, she had suffered much; she been near death almost ten days at that time.

My sister Pietje had received in 1990 or so a letter from one of my cousins (Gre Moerman, daughter of my uncle Chris and his wife, Jaantje) which she had found in a closet when cleaning up after the death of her mother. My sister asked whether I was interested in this letter and what it said. When I wrote that I was very interested, she sent it to us. The translation of this letter tells us what we had never been told before. Such things my mother never talked about. The only thing we knew was by way of my father, who just had mentioned at one time that mother been very ill during "the great Spanish flu". We also knew that this severe illness of my mother during that time had something to do with the deafness of my sister Mina. But this was the extent of our knowledge.

This letter was written by my Aunt Jaantje to my Uncle Chris about my mother's illness prior to their marriage.

Hof Van Delft,  
December 18, 1918

Yesterday morning I received your letter in which you wrote that Antje was pretty sick. Because you wrote me this, I went over to the farm to see her. The fields were very wet. Also, we had more rain storms, but I thought in case her condition gets worse, I will feel sorry that I have not been there. *(I should mention here that in order to save herself six miles by bike on a muddy road, she did what we often did when visiting there - we took our bike and first rode two kilometers on the road, then turned off on a one kilometer lane way, and from there rode right through this farmer's field until we came to a ditch that separated this farm from my uncle's. He had a plank across this ditch from where we could further bike through his field to the house where they lived on the other road leading to Delft and Kethel. When my Uncle Chris married Aunt Jaantje, he brought the farm from her parents).*

Well, I was glad I went because she was worse. Her one lung was already affected. The doctor checked her again in the afternoon. She said that she had no fever but I do not have much hope.

Rinus (*my father*) asked whether I would see you this week in order to tell you. But I told him I would write you. This way, maybe mother could go there yet this week. (*My Uncle Chris still lived with his mother on "The Vergulde Hand"*). They will expect her to come.

Rinus himself was still up and around, but he had a bad cold and was very hoarse. The children were somewhat better. (*These children were Andrew and my oldest sister, Ma. In other words, this flu had reached them all. It was therefore very brave of my aunt to go there, seeing that the flu was so contagious and had killed already so many thousands in Europe.*)

I do not know whether I will be able to go there this week again, or whether the fields will be too wet, but otherwise, I will go there on Sunday morning when I go to church (*with her parents by horse and buggy*). But then again, it takes a long time before it is Sunday and by then she could be a lot worse. In case she will deteriorate much more (*and you have been there with mother in the meantime*), let me know.

I do not know any further news. We hope for the best and pray that she will be healed. It would be such a big loss for Rinus if he would have to miss her.

Piet is going to Delft and will mail this letter.

Jaantja (Van Eendenburg)  
(OF THE DUCK SANCTUARY)

Maasland  
January 14, 1918

Now let me write back how it is in Schipluiden. Mother (*my father's mother*) has spent the whole Monday there, and that day wasn't too bad for Antje. But, then, before we ate yesterday Arie Van Vliet (*my mother's brother*) came to tell us (*at De Vergulde Hand*) that her condition overnight had worsened. Therefore, in the afternoon I drove mother and Neels (*my father's oldest sister*) from Vlaardingeng down there. And, yes, she was in poor condition. Now both her lungs are affected. To me she does not look good at all. Some other people came to see her as well. I

saw Aart Vander Lely and his wife, Neels (*my mother's sister*), Teun Van Vliet, and the three maids of Jan Van Vliet (*my mother's three youngest sisters still at home: Jaantke, Maartje and Pleuntje*), and Janus Vande Sar and his wife Pietje (*my mother's oldest sister*).

Mother stayed overnight. There also is a midwife from Vlaardingen. Cornelis (*my father's oldest brother*) went there this morning to bring mother home. Overnight her condition did not get any worse. Her breathing was not as belabored as the day before. But this does not mean that the danger is passed.

The doctor said yesterday that if the labor would start now, she would not make it. The suffering then will be grievously intense. It is terrible to think about it.

Siom (*my father's youngest brother*) is there today the whole day to help Rinus. Rinus is taking it all with patience. If Simon will come home today, maybe I will go there tomorrow. Yesterday I thought perhaps my Jaantje will be there. But then you were there Tuesday already.

I now have to end my writing. It is already pretty late to bring the letter to Vlaardingen.

Chris  
(A letter from him to Jaantje)

Maasland  
January 14, 1919

Mother and Antie (*my father's mother and his younger sister*) went this afternoon by train to Delft (*where my mother now was in the hospital following the birth of my sister Mina*). It is going better now with the sick one. She was glad that mother came. Mother said that she looked better than before.

Rinus walked down to the train when it stopped in Schipluiden. (*This was the railway station where I hid for a few minutes on my way to take the German transport bike parked at my neighbor*). Rinus came to bring a bottle of milk for the sick one. He had figured someone might be on the train to visit her in the hospital. And on the way back, Jaantje Van Vliet went to the station to find out how she was.

Antje now has heard from Rinus that the child is not well. (*Mina was born on Dec. 29, 1918. I do not know whether at home or in the hospital*). She is not able to use her one arm and one leg. But the doctor, who has looked at her said she may be all right yet. But mother was not allowed to talk to Antje about this (*the baby being deaf*). How pitiful for the child.

Chris  
(letter to Jaantje)

I thank God for the above letters that have come in our possession. They give me good insight into my mother's condition while she had the Spanish flu. We must conclude that at last she was brought to the hospital in Delft. I presume that the baby was born there. These letters even tell us something about the life and death of our ancestors, especially when we remember how several of the Moerman tribe lost life partners. The letters are also precious to read how my father coped with it by the grace of God and the help of family members.

As we have mentioned before, all we knew was that during the Spanish flu mother had been very ill and that she was in the hospital. I did not even know that Mina was born deaf. To the best of my prior knowledge she became deaf at the age of two years because of an ear infection. By way of one of our oldest cousins, we later became aware that she was born deaf, having a severe ear infection.

And now continuing where I left off, with regard to mother's frequent visits to her doctor in Delft immediately following father and mother's visit to us in Ontario. Her letters began to indicate that her health was going down. We knew enough about mother in relation to hospitals that, humanly speaking, no one would be able to get her into a hospital again. When her time would come to die, she would die at home. Period. She had never related to any of us why she felt this way and what actually made her take this stand. This was typical for her. She always kept things to herself. However, this began to change when she knew that she would not live much longer. And especially during the last months of her life, she really began to open up.

During the last half year of her life when the suffering began because of stomach and intestinal cancer, my youngest sister Nel spent most of her time with mother, caring for her to the utmost. Mina walked over each day as well to help wherever she could. My sister lived in Friesland and had a baby herself. The baby was with her there, being just five months old. My youngest brother lived right on the farm but was yet unmarried. At one time when father and mother were visiting in Friesland, mother had said knowing that Nel was expecting a baby, "Now there will be no one to take care for me anymore when I will be sick." The two older sisters had their own families already. Mina was deaf and could not help the way others could. And the two of us had

emigrated to Canada. It was then that Nel, sensing mother's plight of apprehension, desperation and fear of hospitals, promised mother that she would be there to help her when needed. Which she did, in spite of moving away from her home and the baby born since then. She and her husband had decided to make this sacrifice. Corrie and I have often written Nel and her husband how much we appreciated everything they did for mother and father during these months.

Here now follow some excerpts of letters we received during our second summer charge while living in Ruthven, Ontario.

June 12, 1955

Dear Jan and Corrie and the three children:

First of all, we are doing well and hope the same of all of you, especially now in your new place. *(Then mother tells us how much she appreciated the pictures we sent, their trip and visit to Friesland, the weather, how happy our children must have been when seeing the children of Andrew and Nel again. But the last few sentences written with a different pen were altogether different. Mother must have written the major part early in the morning and waited for the last and closing part until she had been at her doctor, letting us know the outcome of this visit.)*

And now, Jan and Corrie, what I now must write will be unexpected to you, as it was for all of us and myself. When I was this morning at the doctor, things were wrong. He looked in my eyes and said, "You must first go to the nurse." *(This meant undress)*. And, yes, the blood was too thin. Then he checked me all out in my tummy. Well, I had never felt any pain there, but when he pressed down, it was very painful. He said right away "You have a lump on the bottom part of your stomach. We have to take a picture of this." This will be done Thursday, June 16 and what it will bring I will tell you next time I write. You can draw enough conclusions even as we do. Greetings to all of you. Bye everyone.

The next day in a letter to Andrew and Nel (which they brought over the following Sunday and we forgot to return), she wrote:

Yes, I would like to write you that we are all doing fine, but alas, I can't. I already had trouble with eating and the last few weeks I had seen that my bowel movements were very dark. My blood is too thin and the red blood cells make it dark. Without Dr. Kok saying so, I understand there is more to come.

It is so good to know we do not have to ask you to pray for me. Nel, your mother often said, "Head up high and heart up high. Down below you will not find it".  
(*This is a line or two from a Dutch poem or song.*)

Hearty greetings to all of you,  
From your mother and Oma,  
Bye, bye.

June 22, 1955

Dear Jan and Corrie:

I now want to let you know, Jan and Corrie, about the results of the picture taken in Bethel (the hospital in Delft). The specialist said there is a shrinking of the inner stomach membrane. This is why my digestion is not working anymore and I am losing so much weight.

And now today it is Friday and I have been again at the doctor. Aunt Jaantje again went with me all the way by car from Maasland to pick me up here and on to Rijswijk. This morning again I have asked the Lord to point out which medicine to use and for His blessing on it. Oh Jan and Corrie, after our visit we even dropped by at Aunt Pietje and Uncle Janus. Oh, there I was so calm. I talked with Aunt Pietje and said, "Let us give ourselves to Him (surrender), who will do away with our sin, in order to meet one another with Him in heaven." I can't say it all so well.

But, oh, how hard it was last week. Rev. Slik came over for a while to talk with me. It helped me a lot. I know that God will never let us cry in vain.

Yesterday we received such a nice letter from Andrew and Nel, and now today such a good one from you. My sincere thanks for all that you have written. And above all, your good wishes and prayers.

And now, Jan, receive my hearty congratulations with your birthday. May God spare your life for many years. May He keep you in good health for yourself, Corrie, and the children. May God richly bless the task which you have placed before yourself.

Greetings to all of you.  
Mother and Oma

We also have a letter she wrote around her birthday (July 9<sup>th</sup>) and all who came to see her for the occasion. Also, she tells how it proved to be too much for her and that she was unable to sleep thereafter.

For the first time we had to use the bell to call Jaap (for help). It was 2:00 a.m. I had to vomit so much. He was there in a moment. He has the key to our house. Feel who slept there was right away here too. She cleaned everything up.

I still do not know anything about my weight, but ? Well, Jan and Corrie, I want to greet you and also the three children.

Your Mother.

Undated letter

Dear Jan and Corrie and the three children:

Yes, Jan and Corrie, humanly speaking, this letter could well be the last one you will receive from me because my health keeps going down. I cannot write much anymore because I am sitting in bed. And yet, I wanted so much to do it. It is now Sunday afternoon. On Friday I wrote a letter to Andrew and Nel. The letters are not all alike, but just read them from each another. Right now I am not suffering much pain, but I do not know what it is going to be. Oh, I so much hope that our loving Lord will hear everyone's prayer and that my soul may be saved. And yet, I do not fear it, for God will not allow my cries to go unanswered. Oh, Jan and Corrie, and Andrew and Nel, how we have sang Sunday evening with Nel. But then, there is Satan again.

Oh, I cannot write everything anymore. I am getting so tired.

I will see you again. Receive a stiff (strong) handshake and stiff (strong) kiss. ("stijvell" in Dutch).

Bye Jan, bye Corrie, bye children.

You all three too, een stijve zoen.

Bye everyone.

From your mother and Oma.

Bye."

A few months prior to mother's Home-going, she lapsed into unconsciousness. My father, sisters, and brother were all called to her bedside to further surround her with their love. The attending physician believed she would not come out of it anymore. Yet, to everyone's surprise, she did. Later she related to Rev. Slik the local minister, that during this time she had an amazing dream.

She dreamed that she was on her way to heaven. She knocked on the door of heaven to be let in. An angel opened the door just a little bit because he saw that she was carrying something with her. He asked her what was in this small suitcase. She answered that all her good works were in there.

He told her that this way he could never open the door wide enough to let her in. She was told to go back to the earth and leave this suitcase (kleine kistje) with the good works in it, down there. *He could only let her in with empty hands.*

Following this "her-spirit-leaving-her body-experience", she lived for another 6-8 weeks. Thereupon, after some more suffering and weighing only 80 pounds, she did enter heaven with "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."

On November 5, 1955, just after having started first year seminary, we received the following telegram:

**MOEDER OVERLEDEN (Mother died)  
MAANDAG BEGRAVEN. (Monday burial)**

Mother was called Home on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1955. The same day we sent this telegram back to Holland:

**Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of His saints.  
(Psalm 116:15)  
Onze Innice Deelnemng.  
(Our Heartfelt Sympathy)**

Mother had so much longed to go Home while singing God's praise and glory. Several times she had expressed this to Nel. But though she was unable to do so in anyone's hearing, we believe that her spirit sang praises to her Redeemer as she entered into Jesus' Presence.

Dr. John R. Mulder, the President of Western Theological Seminary, sent the following letter to my father in Schipluiden:

Nov. 4, 1955

Dear Mr. Moerman:

Your son, John, is enrolled at Western Theological Seminary. From his lips we heard the sad news of the death of your dear wife, John's mother. When he told me about his mother's death, I said to him, "John, this is one of the times when immigration means much more than it usually does." In times of family loss one becomes terribly aware of the length of the miles that lie between home and one's place of residence. How we wish that Holland, Michigan, could be closer to your home, so that your son could come home to share this family grief with you, and some of the rest of us could give better expression to our Christian sympathy.

We all love your son, and we feel that he will make a fine minister of the Gospel. He has taken fine leadership in the churches in Canada, and there he has been honored with positions of leadership in the church. We are happy he felt himself called into the Christian ministry. He will make a good minister. I hope you may have the privilege of hearing him preach some time.

The whole faculty joins together to commend you to the grace of God. May you and yours know the arms of divine love to be around you all, and may you discover that for mother "Death is swallowed up in the victory of faith."

On behalf of the Faculty  
Sincerely yours,  
J.P. Mulder

The Holy Scriptures say much about trials, tests, and suffering in various ways. Sometimes we think that suffering will only come because of sin or neglect, or for the sake of witnessing for Christ. And certainly, the land and world is full of these kinds of suffering. But Peter calls our attention to the fact that hardship or suffering is not limited to these two reasons or aspects. We can expect to be exposed to tests, trials, and sufferings from various sides or directions (I Peter 1:3-7). As we grow older, we are beginning to become more aware of this. Also, that God uses these disappointments, tests, trials, hardships, or whatever and that we may see them fulfill a glorious purpose: that our faith in Christ may prove to be more and more genuine and, thereby result in "praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

The "rouwkaart" which was sent to us following mother's Home-Going reads thus:

Today God took to Himself into His Heavenly Glory,  
after a patiently carried suffering,  
our tenderly beloved wife and caring Mother and Grandmother

ANTJE MOEIRMAN - VAN VLIET  
at the age of 69 years.

Vaste rots van miin behoud (Gez. 174)

TRANSLATION OF SONG:  
Solid rock of my salvation  
When sin closes in on me  
Let me lean on Your faithfulness  
Let me rest in Your shadow  
There, where You have shed Your blood  
May this be my Fountain of Life.

Schipluiden, M. Moerman.  
Canada, Andries and Neeltje.  
Vlaardingen, Maartje and Dirk.  
Schipluiden, Mina and Hilbert.  
Kethel, Pietje and Jan.  
U.S.A. Jan and Corrie.  
Sneek, Nel and Anne.  
Schipluiden, Jaap and Gre.

Schipluiden, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1955, Veenweg 11.

The burial will take place, Deo Volente, on  
Monday, November 7, 1955  
in the General Burial Grounds at Schipluiden.  
Leaving the funeral home at 2:00 p.m.

In 1955 it was still customary to have the immediate family gather together at what was called, “het sterfhuis” i.e., the home of the deceased, and have the local minister bring a message to the bereaved. There would be prayer as well and ordinarily the singing of one song. This was also done with mother's passing. Up until 1955, there had never been a funeral service held in the church. This came some time later.

When the family left "het sterfhuis", the church bell would be rung. This would continue for a full hour. We always found it very impressive to hear this. We could hear it even if we were way back in the field. Usually it could be heard all the way at Huis ten Dorp.

Another old custom was that as soon as a person had passed away, all windows would be covered on the inside, either by way of the shutters which most homes had, or with bed sheets.

Sometimes, when we had not as yet heard of the passing away of someone, we would notice a house with covered windows and say, "Look, someone here has passed away." This kind of expression of grief would last until the day after the funeral.

Mother had been adamant to never enter a hospital again. She was not only firm, but adamant. She had made it known to my father that the surgery of 1918-19 was inhumane. She had heard them sawing away at her rib case. I would not wonder whether she had made my Dad promise to let her die at home, no matter what. And her stand here came to fulfillment: there was no hospital and no surgery. She died at home. She suffered much, but because of sedation, she didn't suffer anymore than she would have in a hospital.

Dr. John R. Mulder wrote about the distance from home during such times. We felt it, but we also knew it would be coming. Had telephone been in as much use then as it is now, it certainly would have eased the situation for us and the family back home. Reading excerpts of condolence letters of both of Corrie's parents indicate that this was true for everyone.

Saturday evening, Nov. 5, 1955

Dear children and grandchildren:

And now I must first write a letter to you our children, with whom we can only talk by way of a piece of paper. We just returned from a condolence visit at the Moerman family. A steady number of people came by. We were the first ones. After half an hour the people started coming. So, now, at last, the God-appointed hour has arrived, where her faith has turned into sight. The last days she was mostly unconscious. Last Saturday, I was with her for the last time. She did mention my name a few times, but all at once she was out again.

Too bad Jaap is not married yet. We expect it to be difficult for father to be present at the burial grounds. We believe it will be necessary to have a chair there for him.

You sure already are getting understanding boys, who already know that money is needed to carry the Gospel to the end of the world, and that for this they have freely emptied their piggy banks.

Schipluiden, 7 Nov. 1955

Dear Jan, Corrie and children:

It now is Monday evening and father has already written Saturday evening. (*They must have decided to wait with writing until after the funeral*). But now I will say something, even though it can't be any other way but on paper, but in mind, I will grab your hands, expressing my sympathy with the loss of your beloved mother. Even though you live far away, you will be missing all her letters. I believe she wrote often. It is such a great comfort to know that God had taken her up into His Heavenly Glory, even as this was expressed on the card of death notification (*rouwkaart*). She now is delivered from her distress and pain.

Her departure will of course be a great loss for father, and also for Mina who every day walked down to be there. Rev. Slik remembered Mina especially in his prayer when he prayed for all the sorrowing ones.

We, father and I, have gone this afternoon to the burial ground and were witnesses there of the interment of your mother. Rev. Slik read with a serene and clear voice the letter which you had sent him. The words moved us emotionally. It was as if I heard Jan speaking and saw him standing there. Thereafter, the minister said little else. He closed with the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. There were many people out and the letter made a big impression on all. We said to one another, "This way Jan and Corrie, Andries and Nel, have still been with us!" I cannot remember everything that was in the letter of the four of you, but I know it was a word full of comfort and faith.

At home Rev. Slik had a meditation on John 11, the resurrection of Lazarus.

Do the children talk much about Oma? They have known her. I wish you strength in these days of sorrow. I trust the Lord will comfort you. We wish you the very best and give you our hearty greetings.

From Oma and Opa Van Leeuwen and Rina

Mother also wrote that the people sang the hymn that was mentioned on the "rouwkaart". See translation above. They also sang verse 3:

See, I do not bring for my safety  
Any incense, myrrh or gold to You  
I come, tired, poor, and naked  
To my God who brings salvation  
Who clothes and feeds the needy  
And causes the sinner to Live!

This Hymn 174 definitely was one of my mother's favorite songs. In fact, it was almost everyone's favorite hymn. Corrie and I clearly recall how we too just loved singing all four stanzas.