

## *Mayerthorpe Interval*

*(September 1976 - September 1978)*

When we moved to Mayerthorpe it meant settling in. Somehow, in the back of our mind was the thought that it might also be the end of our full-time ministry. In that way it was sad and disappointing. However, we knew that God was in charge and always would be. Jim, Andy, Stacy and Russ were to enroll in school in Mayerthorpe.

After unloading our belongings there was little space to move around upstairs. We lived in cramped living quarters. There was no room for our piano. For the time being it was to stay outside under a tarp. The thinking was that sometime later hopefully we be able to come up with something better. We were keeping our eyes open for a small old barn to be moved onto the property. This would come in handy for some animals as well.

We missed Kris Krabbe who had passed away unexpectedly on October 1, 1975. Life would have been quite different for us had he still been around. He would have surely been over every day for a little visit like he always did when we were on vacation. We had bought his old Massey tractor from Gwen Hall for \$60.

One of our problems was that during a wet season quite a bit of water would seep into the old basement. We made a small hole in the cement floor in the northwest corner to scoop the water out. It worked for a four-day rain but anything longer made the situation worse. After consulting several people it became clear that we should lay weeping tile around the foundation.

It took me a good week to do the digging in the hard clay in-between the downpours that made a heavy muddy mess. However, it had to be done. A trench also had to be dug to drain the water away to the northwest. One day while standing deep in the mud and digging hard, Herman Scholten and his wife arrived on the scene. He helped me the rest of the day for which I was so grateful. All the hard work has surely paid off. We never again have had one drop of water in the old basement. Not even during long weeks of rain did the floor become damp.

The last renter who lived here prior to our arrival was the Willy and Loraine Dwyer family. He was an Indian who had lots of kidney problems. Although a very hard worker, it was next to impossible for him to have a steady job. They had their milk cow on a rope and pin in the ground, removing her to a fresh "pasture" whenever the area was eaten bare. We at first were thinking about this too mainly because he had an old shack on the yard where he could milk and

keep her in the winter. They told us it would cost too much to move so we could have the shack. However, the month before we arrived, it went up in flames. How it came about we never found out. But since it stood on our property and was legally ours, we filed a claim with the fire insurance company. They came and measured the dimensions and a little later we received to our big surprise \$900. Without doing anything, all at once we were rich!

One day Pastor Art Zeilstra of the Emmanuel Community Church in Edmonton called whether he could come over for a visit. When he came the next day, we talked about all kinds of things and he asked all kinds of questions about future plans. We told him that we were grateful that God gave us this place in 1962 so we would have a place to live today, but that otherwise we lived one day at the time and would see how God would further direct us. Before leaving he prayed with us and for us, wished us the very best, and left. It was good to have him come, but quietly we wondered what the real purpose of his visit was.

Only a few weeks later while I was walking around on the yard thinking, praying, and praising God, I saw a large truck coming from the Mayerthorpe direction and slowing down as it approached our place. The driver stopped at our driveway and came walking toward our house. As I walked up to meet him, I saw he had some papers in his hand. He asked, "Is this where John Moerman lives?" When I told him that I was John Moerman, he said, "I have a load of lumber for you." I answered, "Well, that is nice, but you must have it wrong. I have not bought any lumber." I looked at the big truck and saw lots of lumber on it. The driver showed me the bill and said, "This here says John Moerman, doesn't it?" I could not deny that, but then I also saw it said, "Paid by Emmanuel Community Church of Edmonton." And then all at once while my eyes filled up with tears, I remembered all the questions that were asked during Art's visit here. When the truck driver walked away, I went in the house because my emotions were hard to be controlled. I did not know what to say or do. (Editor: Art Zielstra wrote of the effort to provide support in this crisis in the *Pioneer* [here](#).)

Within a few minutes a car with six men from the church arrived to explain and help unload. Also, they wanted us to tell them how and where they should build the barn, and how and where they should build the addition on the house. With the house it was quickly decided: it was to be built right on top of the old basement. But for the barn it meant a bulldozer had to come and push clay from the hill to the north where we had our garden and some berry bushes. This would level things out for the new barn to be built. What a day this was: nothing new and exciting when we arose in the morning and by the evening an addition to the house was up! I was instructed to have a bulldozer come and have the work done before the next Saturday.

At the end of the day I called Pastor Art relating to him our feelings. He had shared with consistory about his visit with us. Thereupon it was decided that the following Sunday an

announcement would be made telling the congregation that the members were being given an opportunity to help out and show their appreciation for our years of service in Edmonton. Pastor Art also said that for a number of Saturdays tradesmen and regular workmen would be coming to build an addition on the house even as build a new barn for us. The goal they had set was \$1700. However, when all was counted it was \$2300.

Tears still come to my eyes when I try to describe the feelings during and after this telephone call. Let me say it was a time of learning how difficult it is to be on the receiving end of the words "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Before God had always favored us with the blessing of helping and giving to others, but now it was being turned around on us.

For about five Saturdays it was beehive of activity at our place. It all was so unbelievable. This was compassion, helpfulness, warmth, and genuine love in action. And whenever someone talked about appreciation for our good service and hard work in Edmonton, I said something like "Then I like to pile appreciation upon appreciation." Talk about gratitude to God and a congregation! It flowed here freely on this little hill being converted into a bigger house and farm. And for the rest of our life we have been grateful to Emmanuel and the men who made this "non-dream" into a reality. For several Saturdays thereafter two electricians of the church came to bless our hearts further with light and power. This was "Bless the Lord, O my soul" in a new and unexpected way.

Soon I began to make a stall in the west part of our barn so I could safely milk Scholten's milk cow he had promised. For very little or nothing we had gotten some beams from Mr. Heinen in Picture Butte (where Jim and Andy worked on Saturdays cleaning bricks). With the picture in mind of how we had our cows tied up for milking in Holland, I went to work.

When everything was built I used one of the other long beams to push and hold the cow alongside of the north wall. Having the beam securely fastened just high enough so I could reach over to milk her and just low enough that when she kicked she would hit the beam rather than me, I milked her. After hitting the beam for a few days, half a dozen kicks became less and slowly her kicking stopped and I was able to put on a kicking chain. Within a few weeks I was able to milk her normally.

For a while the cow helped us buy groceries each week by selling milk to a few customers in town. For \$25 we could buy all we needed. We grew our own vegetables which have been such a great help throughout all the years. Also, we got ourselves a few chickens. It actually cost us next to nothing to keep them. They were running loose and found enough to eat. (Andy might remember when he was out on the yard with the gun and a coyote was chasing the chickens in the bush!)

Having a barn now meant we could break down the dilapidated screen house. Since this was the only place where scraps of wood could be stored to keep somewhat dry, it was full to the roof. Now the good stuff could go in the barn and the rest was for the stove. Originally it was for our vacation to keep mosquitos away when we wanted to read outside. But since there was always plenty of work to do, it was hardly ever used for this purpose. And we also had found out that physical work during the vacation was better for our mental health than reading and studying.

Our problem to receive long term disability finances was twofold: the Monarch church had taken out no such insurance. And it was not Classis policy at the time. The other problem was that I could not produce a doctor's report to say I was on medication. It had to be an answer to prayer that at last the New York RCA office came across the bridge with some financial support. However every three months I had to have a doctor's affidavit that I was unable to do my work. This began to pose a problem of conscience or integrity for me. There was never any problem for me to do a lot of hard work here on the farm. So, what about going back into the work of the ministry?

An additional benefit was that during this time the Canadian dollar was about 12 cents *higher* than the US dollar. Prior to this RCA support, some of our children helped here and there. The pastor of the Reformed Church of London, Ontario (Cliff Turkstra) sent us a sizable gift two or three times too.

In the fall of 1976 we bought a 1963 Ford one ton truck from the Mayerthorpe Co-op Lumber Yard for \$400. This truck served us very well for all kinds of purposes, not the least to haul trees from the back of the field early on spring mornings when the ground was still frozen. Andy and I made many such trips, one of us with the truck and the other with the old Massey tractor.

The greenhouse was built during the latter part of 1976. It was a multi-purpose building. The renters had been having problems with their washing machine drainage during the winter. We knew that it would be the same with us. Therefore, we laid the drainage deeper and made a pit where the greenhouse would be to collect heavier waste. And growing our own tomatoes in the greenhouse was Corrie's dream. She grew a lot of large tomatoes there.

What we experienced every time whenever making or hauling something was that we always had just enough, or one to spare, whether it came to a board, a 2 x 4, a 2 x 6, big nails, small nails, poles, staples, barb wire, siding, roofing, tiles, bricks, cement blocks, or whatever. Talk about the goodness of God and providing for His children for all that was needed!

Frances George, an elder friend in the United Church of Canada was a real "jack of all trades". He made us a better kitchen counter and sometime later John Van Leeuwen built us new cupboards.

The children finally had a dog for which they been asking for a while. It was a light brown Labrador, all around a nice dog. However, one morning when she had gone to bring Andy, Stacy and Russ to the school bus, she was run over by the carpenter who built our garage in 1968. What a traumatic morning this was for them. She was so badly cut and broken that I had to shoot her. And since he had not stopped, I called him the same day sharing the family's feelings with him. From there on he did not drive as wildly past our place as he used to.

Having a cow meant fencing off the yard and building some fences elsewhere too. To do so meant we needed more tamarack poles. One day while Corrie and I were sawing down trees on our north hill, we heard Stacy and Russ call us from way up high in one of the big spruce trees. It reminded me of how I had scared my parents once when doing the same at home. Just one things – I was a teen then, while they were just 6 and 7 years old. It frightened us at first.

In order to get our trees home, we were able to borrow a Clydesdale horse from the Herb Ziemer Family, whom we had come to know during our summer vacations. What a help this was. Also, one day we found a place where they wanted to get rid of used 2 x 6 lumber. We used this to build a fence around our yard. This way while watching our cow we could let her graze on our yard as well.

Then Andy came up with the idea of keeping a few pigs. He has a brother who was in the pig business, and after his school hours he was working at Champion Feeds where at clean up times he sometimes was "blessed" with some feed for pigs. And so, to the east and north right across the ditch we began to build a pig fence and loading shoot. Something of electrical know-how must have been a part of him already then, for he was good at putting up shock wire all around it.

Since to us Andy was "an electrical expert", we undertook to insulate and wire the garage. We needed a larger furnace to heat our now larger house. We decided to put the old furnace in the garage.

I believe it was the boys' idea to place some memorabilia to the southwest corner of the house, just underneath the bottom part of the roof. And the same as to the newly built living room. Only there it is on the top inside of the southeast corner. Andy also built the variety rack in the garage.

Our neighbor Joe Trudzik farmed our land alternating between grain and alfalfa. We had Joe make square bales for us which thereafter were piled to the rafters in the barn. It was a hot job under the tin roof on summer days. But what fun it was for Stacy and Russ to play up there.

After one year, Jim graduated from high school in 1977. But he graduated without his parents present. As he told us later, he didn't realize that it was for parents. He was the only one there without his parents. When the formal ceremony came around the only girl he remotely knew was a sister of John's wife, Rosalind Scholten. She came here to be his escort. He also recalls that since none of the high school families knew us that "the only ones who seemed to applaud when he received his diploma were Mom and Dad and Rosalind Scholten." In the fall of that year Jim enrolled at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

In September 1977, at the age of 84, mother Van Leeuwen came to Canada once more to visit her children and grandchildren. She stayed with us for three weeks and thereafter flew to Ontario to be with Cathy and her family. Corrie's oldest brother Klaas and his wife Annie were with her. While mother was with us, they visited their son John and family in Onoway. We knew that for Klaas it was a real effort to be here. When we said good-bye it looked like we would not see him anymore on this earth. He was grateful to be with his "naamgenoot" for a few days (Andy, who was named after him). Within one month after arriving back home in Holland, he was called away to be at Home with his Lord.

We attended the United Church in town. We helped out with the Kids Club. The children of the Cook Family who often came to play here with our children drove along with us. But as to being fed spiritually, it wasn't there. The spiritual feeding was to be done by ourselves. We came into contact with a few families who were eager to attend a Bible study. Most of the time we held our studies in the Sangudo school, although some of them were held in the home of the United church minister. It was a blessing and we kept it up until we left. In 1988 when we retired we found some of them back in the Pentecostal Church. They had left the UCC.

We sensed that to keep the bitter cold winds away during the winter months a wind break was needed for the northwest corner of our place. It was decided that the row of spruce trees growing under the electrical wires along the road should be transplanted for this purpose. And what a blessing this was 11 years later when we retired here. It is too bad that because of our water distiller and the salt water draining there that ten of these spruce trees later died.

In 1977 we built a barb wire fence just east of our bush from south to north. It was done with our "Ph.D". (post hole digger). At a certain depth we would make mud and pound them in the rest of the way with our mallet. Here though we did not use our own tamarack poles. The

ground was too hard to pound them in. It was because of this heavy work that later I had to enter Surrey Memorial Hospital for a hernia repair.

During all of 1977 it looked like we were to stay here and eventually seek to make a living with farming or something else. However, during the early part of 1978 a few requests began to arrive whether we would be ready to consider serving in the church again. Now even though things began to look up farm-wise and the three children were settling in well, I had begun to feel more and more like taking up full time ministry again. I do recall sharing this here and there as well. I felt the requests were affirmations that I should. We also recalled how already back in October of 1976, less than three months after coming to Mayerthorpe, I could accept Murray's request to give the "Charge to the Minister" at his Installation Service in Burnaby, B.C. So we replied that we were ready.

This does not mean that the children felt the same way - quite the opposite. Talking with Andy about this just today (February 03, 1996), he reminded me that he had asked to live in Alberta with Jack and Grace and finish off his last year of high school in Alberta, but I had refused.

Corrie and I went by train to Vancouver to meet with the people of the Whalley (Surrey) congregation, while Andy stayed in Mayerthorpe with Stacy and Russ. Andy also had to take care of his pigs while we visited Whally. Since we had not seen Andrew and Nel and families, nor Cathy and her family for a long time, Corrie and I decided to go to Ontario prior to our return to Mayerthorpe.

Church life in Whalley was not the best. There were divisions and what goes with it. Spirituality seemed low and vision absent. Having been in such situations before, we found it no problem to go there. Perhaps God wanted us to use our experience there to serve Him in this weak congregation. Also, Murray and Carol and family and our longtime friend Pastor John Opmeer and family lived in the area. We were led to choose this church over one in Ontario.

Calling Andrew from there to inform him at what time we planned to arrive in Chatham brought a change in plans. He said, "you are not going to come by train." He said he would pay the difference of a plane trip instead. To save a week of travel appealed to me very much, but what about Corrie's problem with flying and her balance disorder? I did not dare to tell her that evening for fear of her not sleeping that night. It was the next morning just before taking the plane that I shared it with her. I felt bad about it but saw no other way of doing it. And so we were on our way to Ontario.

After arriving back home in Mayerthorpe we immediately began to make arrangements for leaving. The children had to be in Surrey by time school resumed. Pigs had to be sold.

Renters had to be found. Cows had to go. All our long tamarack poles intended for building a pole barn had to be stored away in the barn, and so had our 250 railway ties we had been able to haul home from the railway accident in Green Court, plus many other things. Farming all at once abruptly ended.

Since this was "boat people" time in the Christian Church, we gave our house rent free to the United Church on promise that they would sign up for a Vietnamese family. God had helped us and now it was time for us to help others. The proposal was gladly accepted. We asked the church to take responsibility for looking after the house as far as these people's care of house and property was concerned.

We found a small independent mover in Edmonton whose price was far below the bigger companies. This way we saved the church a lot of money, which was appreciated very much. Like with every move we've made over the years, Corrie did all the packing. After all our moves, she had become an expert. When it was just about loading time, the truck driver called that they had some mechanical troubles. Also, the weather report was that a low pressure system was on the way with lots of rain. We had our eye on the sky (and beyond it as well). We thought about the muddy roads we had to travel to get to Highway 16 west. So instead of loading early in the morning, it became late afternoon.

But one thing - God had heard our prayers - it had not started to rain yet. We brought everything to the truck and the workers did the packing and stacking. It was 10:00 p.m. by time we were loaded. An hour before the rain had started to fall. Thirty minutes later we were on the road with two cars: Jim and Andy in the one and the rest of us in the other. It was difficult driving through the mud, but on the wings of prayer we made it to Highway 16. Corrie reminded me that I had said, "I'll drive and you pray."

The plans were to drive to Edson and sleep there. Not so. All the motels were filled up at this time of the night. On we went praying that an hour later there might yet be one open in Hinton. It had to be God's doing, for at last we found one motel room still available. Thank You, Lord! With grateful hearts we laid our tired bodies down to sleep, with a prayer to God our souls to keep, and the next day to continue our journey.

He did. We were up bright and early the next morning. We had a long way to go and we needed to be there when the truck arrived. When we were three quarters of the way, Jim's car began to sputter when climbing hills. He waved us to stop. From what the boys told me, mechanically the car was in bad shape. Out in the middle of nowhere, the only thing we could do was pray. Whatever someone may think about it, we "laid hands" on the hood of the car, and fervently prayed that God would bring us to our destination. And, Hallelujah, God did it!

For without further big sputtering problems, they climbed every hill and arrived safely in Surrey. (The next day the motor was as dead as any old and defective motor can be. When towed to the garage Jim was told that it was impossible to have driven all these miles with a car in such shape. Well, what could Jim say? He told the mechanic the only thing he could tell him: "That may be so, but this is how we drove for several hundreds of miles.")

Because of our unfamiliarity with the roads around Surrey, we did not take the shortest route. And we were lost. But when waiting for a stop light right in the heart of Surrey, to our surprise there was our Furniture truck at the traffic light too! From there we just followed the driver and found our new home. Some folks of the church were waiting to help us carry everything inside and like other times, Corrie directed them where it was to go.