

Chapter 23

Mayerthorpe Retirement Years

(1988 – 1994)

We were so blessed to have this Mayerthorpe old bush quarter (editor: “quarter” section = 160 acres or 65 hectares). By now of course it was no longer what it used to be. During the early 1960’s it was the posthole digger (Ph.D.) that created both toilet facilities as well as refrigerator space. A deep hole in the muskeg kept the milk and other perishable goods as cold as any new refrigerator. And prior to the making of an outhouse, a bench above a hole in the bush elsewhere served the purpose just as well for the time being. So as with drying clothes; a few lines between trees around the house functioned just as good as an expensive clothes dryer. In fact, Corrie always preferred fresh air on washed clothes above anything else. Fumes, chemicals and unnecessary medicine have always been a family enemy.

No doubt our roots had a lot to do with all of this. The stress on life style and health-food had been a priority in our lives for quite some time already. We had been fortified in these principles by Dr. Cornelius Moerman, M.D. from Vlaardingen; his findings and fight with the Dutch College of Physicians and Pharmaceutical Companies. They held, “For every ill there is a pill,” while his research had turned it around, “For every pill there is an ill.” (A few years before his death, at the age of 95, the Dutch “House of Commons” publicly honored him for his break-through research).

Also the work here was such a blessing to us: gardening, lawn upkeep, cutting trees for poles, keeping cows, fencing, building, etc. Already during the ministry I had been disciplining myself with a stiff daily walk. Concerning Alberta Premier Manning, it was said that when he wanted a rest he would just switch to a different kind of work. For sometime already we had been dreaming about a small tractor. We knew that it would be impossible to do all the heavy work without having one with four wheel drive and a front end loader. The old Massey of Chris Krabbe just did not fit the bill. What a joy it has been all these years to have this John Deere 950. Even driving to the back of the field on a beautiful day to work there with Corrie in the bucket was always sheer joy. We felt so richly blessed to be able to do this together.

One of the first things was to have some renovation done on the house and carpeting and linoleum replaced. Corrie had come up with the idea of enlarging our south porch. What a blessing this has been for a variety of purposes. I then began to reclaim garden space which had become a weedy wilderness during the ten years we had been away. The wooden fence around the yard had to be renewed if we were to have some cows. I rented a post pounder

and Joe Trudzik came with his tractor to help us put up the fence around the yard and part way on the road side.

Besides this I began to work on garden spaces elsewhere. One place was in the north-east corner of our quarter. We put our camper up in the bush for Corrie to take the rest she needed while still being able to enjoy the outside while I was working there. A couple years later the south part of our yard was made into a garden. Next was a cement floor for our garage and cement troughs for our cows and calves. We were so grateful to slowly see Corrie's health begin to improve. The fresh air, the quiet, the absence of pressure and stress all worked in her favor. We saw it all as part of God's blessing on us here. For a while we even made butter and cheese for the fun of it. We just wanted to find out whether after a good 50 years we still knew how to do it.

One of the best things of our new experience was to be the whole day together with just the two of us. It had been a joy and blessing to raise and care for all our eight children. If we would be asked whether we would want to do it over again with this many we would wholeheartedly say, "Yes, definitely" and when the 39 years of having children around us all day came to an end, we rejoiced in this too. Added to this was an actual relief; staying home practically every evening rather than visiting or going to meetings a minimum of five evenings a week. Many times we said, "Thank You, Lord, for being able to stay home again tonight." At the same time we thanked God for allowing us to be actively retired for these years. Sometimes we even found ourselves to be more "refired" rather than just retired. Ecclesiastes tells us, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." This tells us that all of life's "seasons" are special and that God has appointed them so each has its own purpose. The one "season" is not better than the others (a growing family of small children, school age, teens years, children marrying and having grandchildren, years of retirement); they are just different. Each "season" has its own challenges, difficulties and joys. We found it to be the same with our retirement. Though I continued to have the opportunity to preach here and there, mainly during summer months, at first it was hard to just sit there in the pew like all the others. ("Dad was plain bored or did not know what to do with himself at times the first months. I felt sorry for him and could do nothing but hold his hand!" – Mom.) It was like dropping from center stage to behind the scenes or as I have put it more often, "Going from hero to zero." Teaching for a while in the Pentecostal Church and later being on the Advisory Board all added to overall fulfillment. We also kept on attending our Emmanuel Church in Edmonton on an average of once per month.

Besides getting trees out of the bush for fence poles we also needed a lot of wood for our wood-burning stove in the living room. Sometimes during the spring, it almost looked like the back yard of a saw mill. But I loved going out in the bush and cutting down dead trees,

some of them up to 76 feet tall. I found out it was an art to fell trees. Careful consideration was to be given to the leaning angle of the tree, the number of arms on each side, steadiness of wind direction, length and the exact place where you want the tree to fall without hitting a fence line, small trees or falling on another big tree. One mistake I made along the way was not beginning to make use of ear mufflers sooner. If I had done so, perhaps I would not have had to say so often, "I did not hear you. What did you say?"

The first farm yard building was our multiple purpose pole barn. It was needed for storing hay, machinery and a place for our growing herd of beef cattle. The poles, 2 x 8's and 2 x 6's all had come from our bush. They were the ones we stored away in the barn prior to our ministry in Surrey.

Also the wood needed for our porch stairway came from the bush. A year later Andy, with the help of some of our other sons, brought power to that far end of our yard. It was an extra bonus for my July 1st birthday celebration. The pump house had been built just prior to our arrival here and the same with the cement steps. We also were happy with the bell system Andy installed just below the top of the roof on the north side of the house. It gave us some peace of mind as to Corrie being able to call me while working outside. No problem to hear either bell or siren while working way out in the bush. Also, the bell came in handy when there were long distance calls coming in. Then there was the heat lamp being installed down in the hole where the water tank and pump is. How handy this has been during extreme winter weather.

For several years we spent much time and money on improvement of our bush path to the back of the property. We found out it is was not conducive to have neighbor Joe haul heavy loads of hay to our yard for our cattle. Neither was it a good idea to have the cows walk back and forth along the side, trying to be more comfortable there than with the rocks on top of the path. Anyone farming the 100 acres in the back will have to either wait bringing the hay to the yard until freeze up time, or, when grazing cattle, build a barbwire fence line along the gravel road to the north and then along the north to the east. This will not be much of a job since there are tamarack trees all along in the bush. The bush path is good as long as it is being used wisely. It has been carefully rebuilt with large rocks on each side where there were no trees growing. In 1995 I have planted many small poplar shoots along the side and before this also some spruce trees. This should mean as much strengthening of the path as the boulders themselves. Cleaning up windrow piles was another thing that greatly improved our 100 acres of farm land in the back.

The barb wire fence built behind the bush from west to east, south to north, and east to west was done in the summer of 1991. We rented a postpounder for 2/3 of the way while the rest

was done manually by way of our motorized Ph.D. or the old fashioned one by hand. On the north side where we had to go through the bush the fence line came to be known as our "Glory-Hallelujah Fence." It was because it was so difficult to drill a hole into the ground because of the root system. The other problem was to still go as straight as possible. It was hot and the mosquitoes were having a feast. Moving the hole back and forth and using axe and shovel until at long last there was another hole for a new pole. So each time I finally succeeded, I shouted "Glory-Hallelujah." Most likely it is the only fence by that name around in all of County Lac Ste Anne No. 28. It is a fence of open gratitude to God who helped me build it.

In 1990 we had our woodbarn built to the west of our existing barn. This was to have a better place for calving time. Also it would have better access for our cows and calves to go into the stalls for milking and feeding as well as loading and unloading. Then too, we wanted to have our stove wood nearby. Having our new woodstove burning all winter saved us \$650.00 on our gas bill. Finally, this new woodbarn gave us a lot of protection from the cold north-west wind during the winter months.

December, 1992 the south garden was created by first removing black top soil on the west and thereupon bulldozing the clay from the old basement on it. When this was done the black soil went on top of it again. We also needed to slope it on each side for the water to drain away. During this early freeze up time we also had the dug out made in our field at the back of our bush.

In the summer of 1993 we made a cement floor in the barn and a cement pad around the drinking bowl. I will not lightly forget the heat while doing this. We wanted to have a heated place for our tractor. Andy had replaced his old furnace with a new one and wanted to donate the old one for use in the barn. He had arranged with John to have it shipped free of charge to Mayerthorpe; what a spoiling. Also, with the potatoes and carrots from the garden we needed more storage room during the winter months than just the basement. The summer prior we had dug around 2,000 pounds of spuds. And this year it would be about the same. It was such a joy to take our utility trailer filled with potatoes to B.C. when visiting our children and families. It was also a joy to make a long work bench in the barn with ample racks to stack away things. All of this came in handy to do some work there in the winter time.

Whereas someday it could be very useful to know where gas and water lines are, as well as drainage pipes, here now is my homemade ground plan indicating where they can be found when called for.

Ever since we bought our water softener we developed problems with our spruce trees in front. We did what we could to have the salt water drain away as fast as possible. However, some of the trees began to look more sickly all the time and we lost about ten trees to the salt. It became clear that this water and other waste products needed to go east rather than west. This project finally was accomplished in 1994. All the rocks of the ditch and cesspool were dug up and used to strengthen our bush path some more.

It was wonderful to have some of our brothers and sisters visit us here during our retirement. My brother and sister together with those still as husband and wife came to spend some time with us here. Pietje and Jan, (Murray Rodenburg's parents) and also my brother Jaap and Gre when they came back from their children in Texas. Annie Van Leeuwen -Westerman (John Van Leeuwen's mother) have been repeat visitors. From Corrie's side, also three brothers, Piet, Jaap, and Nico and wives spent several weeks each here as well. And since I cannot begin to stand in the shadow of Corrie's expertise of dates and years, I will leave the chronology of the year 1993 with the many weddings in the family to her.

In the fall of 1994 we decided to no longer keep cows for calving during the winter. Getting up at night during calving time was not what we enjoyed anymore. I was beginning to spend far more time on research and writing memoirs, articles, letters and doing work for Classis. It brought me in conflict with the principle of trying to "serve two masters." We regretted to see our very tame cows go but with our rising age, it was a move we had to make. Also, along with the climbing of our years, we had to drop some of the work. How could we have our prayer and devotional time together squeezed into a worldly pressure mold? That simply would never do. How could God be asked now to take second place? Never! Never!