

**EVERY SQUARE INCH—A MISSIONARY MEMOIR**

**THE LIFE AND MISSION OF**

**JAN & FRANCES BOER**

-----VOLUME 4-----

**Our Post-Nigeria Life**

**by**

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**Self-Published  
www.lulu.com**

**Vancouver, BC, Canada  
2014**

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**Every Square Inch—A Missionary Memoir  
The Life and Mission of Jan and Frances Boer  
1938-2014  
Volumes 1-5  
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***“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”***

**Quote from Kuyper's inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University, October 20, 1880.**

## DEDICATION

We dedicate this volume to

(1)

**All Members of the Prins and Boer Families  
Who so readily embraced us  
Upon our return to North America**

(2)

**The First Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids,  
who embraced us without reservation  
upon our return from Nigeria  
and did all they could to make us feel at home**

(3)

To all our Grandchildren:

**Anneke Amarya Hanneman Boer (Suisun City CA, Dec. 7, 2009)**

**Asia Asami Tanis (Japan, Sept. 13, 1999); Ezra Ishaya Tanis (Seattle, Dec. 21, 2001)**

**Jehan Crowther Boer (Grand Rapids, Feb. 18, 2003)**

**Stephan Ashoke Boer (Atlanta, Sept. 12, 2006)**

**Gerrit Tjalling Boer (Nairobi, Sept. 6, 2008)**

**Markus Willem Boer (Atlanta, May 7, 2014)**

**And all Future Generations....  
Who, we pray, will be inspired  
by these stories and recognize them  
as part of theirs.**

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## Part 8

### Introduction to Part 8<

As you probably know by now, our ministry in Nigeria ended suddenly, unexpectedly and ungraciously in 1996. This volume traces our post-Nigeria life in both Grand Rapids and Vancouver; that is to say, life lived in these cities, while Volume 5 tells you about our extensive travels during those same post-Nigeria years.

We hope you will enjoy reading about this third phase of our lives, our *earthly* twilight, if you like. We invite you especially to pay attention to how God has blessed us in amazing ways during this phase. We start every day with acknowledging His grace and goodness to us. Not all of our missionary colleagues have experienced such a rewarding retirement as we are currently enjoying—some have to scrape by; some suffer from restrictive frailties, though, by human standards, they may have deserved better than we.

You may be wondering why we refer to this phase of our life as “Post Nigeria.” Why emphasize the past? Why not emphasize our North American life? The reason is that this phase of our life is thoroughly influenced by the Nigeria phase; we are affected by that phase in almost everything we do; it colours all our thinking about and reactions to North American culture(s). This phase is for us indeed post-Nigeria, not merely North American. Besides, many of our journeys took us beyond North America.

## Chapter 39<

### Our Grand Rapids Life

May 1996-October 2001

#### *Return to “Civilian” Life*

We were back where we started together many years ago in a city we knew well, but facing a very uncertain future. According to CRC protocol, I was defrocked by the classis or district to which II Highland CRC belongs. Though there is also a reinstatement protocol, the initiative has to come from me. I never started that initiative, at least, not so far (2014). That’s not saying no one tried to convince me to do so, but that’s for Chapter 40.

Getting re-oriented to life in Grand Rapids and the USA in general took some doing, especially because of my loss of status in the church, which was more important to me than I had realized. Wherever I moved within CRC culture, which is all-pervasive in West Michigan, I just felt so lost because of my “diminished” status. I could not present myself to people in my usual confident way and did not know how to explain our current status and job without pushing back the firewall we had installed. We prayed a lot and read books that were recommended to us about situations similar to ours. We were surprised at the voluminous literature on the subject. We were also very grateful to the few people who knew about our situation not only, but also knew how to respond in a helpful way. Al Postma and Bill Blickley from First CRC in Grand Rapids, Francis Lieuwen, my co-groom at our wedding, and Keith Tanis, a pastor and Cynthia’s father-in-law at the time, stood head and shoulders above everyone else. The CRC’s Pastor-Church Relations Office, unfortunately, was on the bottom rung.

We received our severance packages, Fran from the Grand Rapids office and I from Burlington, and with that we were now on our own. Everything went as expected with Fran’s money, but mine went awry. There was a brand new employee in the Canadian office in Burlington, who treated my severance package as a normal monthly income amount and sent the “required” tax of around \$3,000 to Revenue Canada. When I objected, they responded that I should claim it back next time I filed. Problem was that I had not lived or filed in Canada for decades so that we were not sure of our standing. While Bill Termorshuizen, the former accountant at Burlington, assured us that Canadian missionaries did not have to file in Canada, his successor was afraid of stirring up a hornet’s nest by compromising the Mission’s status as a charitable organization with them. So, he washed his hands of the entire issue and would not go to bat for me. Preferring to let sleeping dogs lie and feeling unsure of ourselves, with considerable annoyance we decided not to request a refund.

We moved into rent-free temporary quarters on Alger SE that Cynthia found before we arrived. It belonged to a Calvin prof who traveled and wanted someone to care for his place. After a few months, we moved temporarily into a house on Burton SE, within a block from Calvin. The owners, related to Nelle Evenhouse, had also traveled. They had just done a

makeover of the house and installed brand new, mostly all white, furniture as well as carpets. We rented it at a very reasonable rate on condition we would care for the yard, that is grass and snow! We ended up with problems similar to the “Dutch house” on Blanchard. It was a good place to get our feet on the ground and it surely was handy being so near to Calvin, a place we frequented much.

Years earlier, we had bought a house at 2208 Godwin SE and rented it out, but when we had to move out of our temporary housing, we asked our renters to move out and we moved in. Soon after moving in, we held a prayer meeting attended by invited members of our new church, during which we sought the blessing, peace and presence of the Lord in the place. It was a pleasant home and neighbourhood for us for some four years, before we moved on to Vancouver. Renters had long ago paid for it and also helped us purchase a newer rental in Kentwood.

### *God's Provisions: Jobs and Business*

What would be our immediate future? How were we going to live? How would we raise sufficient income to pay expensive American insurance, groceries, etc.? We felt totally unsure, especially because of my status in the country: I was a visitor. Fran was a professional teacher with the proper degree and years of wide-ranging experience, but all that meant little in the US, since most of it had been done abroad and she had done no upgrading. I had no skills to offer, for in the areas where my skills might have been welcomed, I was a *persona non grata*; in short, not wanted. This was where we started to pray fervently for God to show us a way and provide us with a living. Would He help us pull through this mess of my own making? He did, but in the meantime, we went through the wringer of uncertainty.

### *Fran at Hope Network*

Now we were faced with the challenge of job hunting. Fran, being a citizen, was free to take any job and she soon did at Hope Network. Her first job was to fill in for people going on vacation at the administrative office on Division Avenue, less than two miles from our house. The very first one of mail sorter and distributor lasted for three weeks. Then someone went on a lengthy vacation and a job in the record-keeping area was available for several months. This meant a crash course for Fran in using both Excel and AS 400 computer programs. Fran was fairly well trained in computer use during her Hillcrest years and even taught it to her fifth grade students. But this temporary job was a stretch! She will never forget her helpful and kind boss, Phil Brouwer, who patiently taught her what she needed to know in order to keep up with the assigned work.

Then a permanent job opened up. It was listed as a “teaching” position at the old Pine Rest facility in Cutlerville, where Hope Network was renting some facilities. It meant she had a ten-mile daily commute one way during our first winter back in Michigan, a rather scary prospect for her. The “class” was made up of five severely developmentally-disabled clients.

The “teaching” part was filling in endless forms as to how they had performed that day. There had been no change in their ability for years, but in order for them to continue to qualify for government assistance, the forms had to be filled and filed regularly. Actually the main part of the job was feeding and doing personal care for the clients.

Though her salary was just minimum wage and the “teaching” not what she was used to, she stuck to it and brought home some income, including that bear of a problem in the USA, health insurance. I remember visiting her in her “classroom” and I wept at what I had done to her. It was horrible to behold; she was doing personal care for people with serious disabilities. It was an honourable job of mercy and compassion, but not her thing. Right after we were married, she worked night shift in a geriatric ward for mental patients at Pine Rest. That was a difficult job and not to her liking at all; after a few weeks she went back to work as receptionist at the downtown Grand Rapids office of Robinson Furniture. Now in 1996 she was back at the same location in Cutlerville, and once again doing this patient-care kind of work in her fifties. I have seldom felt so terrible and, yes, guilty at having put her in that position. Even as I write this paragraph in 2013, the tears and emotions come back. I so honour and admire her for sticking to this impossible job for five months. I was probably even happier than she was when the earlier temporary job at Hope Network was offered to her as a permanent position.

She now earned a bit more than minimum wage and was given the title of “Corporate Demographics Coordinator.” Often she also filled in as front desk receptionist during lunch breaks and did a variety of other jobs as well. Even though she still missed her Hillcrest teaching job, she worked at Hope quite happily for some four years till an unexpected inheritance allowed her to take early retirement in 2000.



Fran at her desk at Hope Network\*

### *John's Jobs*

For me, it was a different matter: I was a non-resident alien. There, that old problem from long ago was in my way again. I was a temporary visitor in the country and was not allowed to work. My first challenge, therefore, was to request a temporary work permit while I applied for a “green card,” that is, to become an immigrant and obtain resident status. The

work permit came surprisingly fast; the green card came several months later. It took several trips to Detroit to accomplish this and was even jeopardized because of my “deportation” for hitchhiking in northern Washington back in 1958. Remember that story? Please note the quotation marks. I use the word lightly and did not think of it as a real deportation at the time it happened nor now at the time of writing. The officer asked me about it but decided to let it go, since it had happened before he was born and I had been on good behaviour ever since! Once again, we recognized God’s hand of mercy in receiving the green card in a relatively short time. Now I could move around and live freely.

With a work permit in my pocket and, later, a green card, I began to scout around the CRC community for work. Some people sought to help me by either offering a job or connect me with employers. I am grateful, for example, to people like industrialist Pete Lanser at First CRC for the job he offered me in his company. I have not forgotten that Peter Borgdorff, a chief denominational administrative officer, offered to get me in touch with the owner of a long-distance trucking business. However, the jobs were all unsuitable for me: either my non-technical orientation and skills rendered me unsuitable or being on the road too much of the time did not suit our family situation. Though truck driving had always appealed to me, I did not want to be on the road away from Fran so much of the time. We needed to be together for mutual support and healing.

I tried various jobs, including even selling graves! Entirely unsuccessful. I also drove a van to deliver flowers to Detroit a couple of times a week. I enjoyed that. I tried my hand at learning to drive a bus for a local tour company. My license allowed me to drive a small bus, not a full-size one. The company told me to come back in the spring of 1997, when the business would pick up again. That left me with nothing guaranteed. One job that did pan out for us was to manage some 30 properties in Grand Rapids under the supervision of our old missionary colleague, friend and business partner, Lou Haveman, but I’ll tell you that story down below.

### *Christian Labour Association*

In the meantime, Cynthia was working in the group home industry and we heard different stories from her about conditions in those and other care institutions, including Christian senior homes such as Holland Home’s Raybrook and others. Always the activist, I began to realize that employees of such institutions needed to organize and defend themselves, not only for themselves, but even for the sake of the institutions themselves. Secular unions were organizing that sector all over the nation; none would escape their attention.

Then, one day I noticed the office of the Christian Labour Association (CLA) in Zeeland, MI, not far from Grand Rapids. I decided to offer my services to them as union organizer for nursing and group homes. I told them I knew nothing about those places, but I did know of their need. I was used to starting projects in Nigeria that I knew nothing about to begin with but learned on my feet and I was often successful. I described it as “jumping off the cliff.” They accepted my proposal and hired me part time, fifteen hours a week at fifteen dollars per hour. I told them I needed no perks. This was to make them feel comfortable. I signed a

contract and there I was, a union organizer! Who would have ever thought! From former missionary to labour organizer—an unlikely move, many will think, with opposite goals. Well, not really. I saw this adventure as right in line with my ministry with the Institute of Church & Society.

The CLA had been established in the 1930s by members of the CRC constituency. The CRC at that time had many blue collar workers who needed union protection but who did not like the raw methods of the secular unions. So they established the CLA with the blessing and support of the CRC. However, by the 1990s, the CRC constituency had turned into a white collar community of managers, CEOs and even owners. Now they saw their economic interest in being free from unions, including the CLA, their own child. Wherever I turned in the CRC, I ran into opposition. Where I turned to Christian senior and group homes, same result: strong resistance and resentment. Many members of our own CRC congregation disapproved of my job. Even a former CRC missionary-turned-CEO of a home wanted nothing to do with me. A Christian union would be much more suitable and responsible for these Christian homes. My offer to them was pre-emptive: it was to beat the seculars to the draw and save these Christian institutions a lot of pressures and unpleasanties. They did not see it that way. A union is a union is a union.

One humorous but telling incident took place in the halls of the Pentagon. I ran into an acquaintance who held a high administrative position. He knew of my situation and had consistently shown interest and sympathy. He asked what I was doing and I told him about my CLA campaign in nursing homes. He responded very encouragingly and thought I had a great plan. Then I told him that years earlier, some of us missionaries had discussed forming a missionary association to represent our interest vis a vis CRWM administration and asked him for advice as to how *now* to go about forming such an association among the troops in the Pentagon! He suddenly looked at me with a different, startled and none-too-pleased look. He put his hand in front of his mouth in total surprise, shook his head and walked away without a further word. Telling, wouldn't you say? Yea, great idea—for them, but not for us here, the very womb of the CLA!

Another story. I had my eye on a nursing home not far from First CRC, the church we had joined. I had entered the facility a few times, officially to visit a CRC resident there, but with the additional motive to make union contacts with the staff. I was soon found out and the manager threatened to take legal action if I ever set foot on the property again. He took me to the edge of the property and warned that if I ever crossed that line again, he would sue me. I was not sure whether he could prevent me from just visiting. I did actually a couple of times just to test the waters, but we did not see each other. The next time I met him we were sitting across a table from each other in the basement of our church. The church had invited seniors from the neighbourhood and staff from nearby senior institutions for a dialogue. That's how we met in the church. It was a bit awkward, especially for him, but we managed to break through it and had at least a civil conversation.

But how *does* a union organizer penetrate an institution in a thoroughly anti-union environment? I devised a sneaky plan. One of the major Christian senior homes in Grand Rapids was always recruiting volunteers. So, I offered to work for them a few hours a week

as a volunteer. The Home knew nothing about my CLA connection. During those hours, I tried to start up conversations with the junior staff about their working conditions and the help the CLA could render them, but I observed they were fearful. They all felt that showing interest in a union could lead to dismissal, something they could ill afford. I would sometimes leave a brochure or two in the elevators, trying all the while to remain incognito. The cover up did not work; before long, the management traced the brochures and signs of restlessness to me. They called me in and told me to lay off or they would dismiss me. They also hinted at taking legal action because of the brochures that, they claimed, were illegally distributed.

Actually, I could take *them* to court, for the law had it that if you allow one organization to distribute literature, you have to allow everyone. The Home was distributing Back to God Hour monthly meditations. Those were very good CRC publications I was quite familiar with, but that meant they could not legally prevent me. I did not challenge them on that one, because I did not want them to quit making those meditational booklets available to residents and staff. Besides, I do not believe in taking fellow Christians to court. It will only drive up the costs and, subsequently, the fees.

I still consider it advisable for the management of Christian senior and nursing homes to accept the CLA into their ranks, if only to prevent the intrusion of the much rougher secular unions with their entitlement cultures. Prevention is better than cure. Rejecting that adage is foolish and can only be considered as blind prejudice and failure to look into the future.

Another CRC institution I considered was the maintenance department of Calvin College, my *Alma Mater*. I had an acquaintance on that staff and I pumped him for information that led me to conclude that they would benefit greatly from a responsible union. So, I devised a brochure that I discretely distributed in places where maintenance folks were sure to find it. But, again, I was found out. That “offense,” together with an attempt to sell books at a campus event without proper authorization, almost earned me a *persona non grata* status on the campus, along with threats of calling in the police. Strange. Years ago, the College and/or Seminary had taught me that Christians do not deal with each other via legal institutions but they talk things over. What had happened to that? Whatever, I began to realize I should tread carefully, lest I really be exiled from the campus. Imagine: the father of stellar students well known and respected by the administration, an alumnus and former short-term ad hoc Calvin Seminary lecturer banned from the campus for misbehaviour! Things were getting comical and muddled, basically due to an unacknowledged change of mind and even of heart on the part of Calvin over the decades, which, in turn, was due to a change in the economic and social status of the Calvin community.

I should explain that my attempt at selling books was right alongside someone else who was also selling books without authorization. True, he was an invited guest on the campus, but the contract with him did not include selling books. They did not tell him to pack his books! Do you detect the smell of discrimination? Against a CRC member peddling Reformed materials versus an Indian gentleman scholar.

Sometime late winter I popped in at the tour bus company to report I was still available. They assured me that they would call me in due time. I chatted amiably for a while with the

manager and told him I had been working for the CLA. Bad mistake! The manager was also CRC. He never called me! I take it he was not about to bring an ex—or even failed union organizer into the company. You never know what kind of turmoil that might create.

Employment by the CLA also involved attending conferences. In fact, one of my first duties was to represent the CLA at a conference of the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) held in Calgary. Here I was, a Canadian representing an American organization in Canada. Since I knew a number of CLAC people, I enjoyed that conference very much and found it helpful, though I have forgotten by now in what way! I also attended two CLA annual conferences, one at the headquarters in Zeeland, and one in the Minnesota office, where CLA President Doug held sway. Doug and I held some mutually supportive discussions. I felt he was more on top of CLA and its challenges than anyone else I knew in the organization. I regretted he was not working in headquarters, where I was.

The trip to that Minnesota conference was by train. Lo and behold, I met Merle Den Bleyker, at this time the CRWM Director, on the train. You have previously met him in Jos in Volume 2. When I told him what I was involved in, he smiled appreciatively and commented, “John, you don’t ever miss a trick, do you?” I think he meant it as a compliment. Years later, when I reminded him of the occasion, he could not recall it. Well, it was after all no more than a chance meeting.

An interesting spy case I was involved in was a Chicago conference of a secular labour union that was making serious inroads into the senior and nursing home industry. Since they had the same target as I did, I convinced my CLA boss that I should attend that conference and hear them out. Just what were they planning to do and how? Since the secular unions had always opposed CLA, I could not attend openly as a CLA representative. So I registered myself as a graduate student in labour relations and they let me in without further questions. I found the conference very enlightening from every point of view, though I had to be careful not to blow my cover.

Some may object to this approach of trying to penetrate an organization with the use of untruths and compromised language. You will find parallel situations in the Old Testament where the Lord Himself suggested or blessed the use of untruths that served as cover for illegal acts! I refer you to I Samuel 16 as well as the story of the midwives in Exodus 2:15-21.

Ever the writer, I also wrote and distributed a few brochures. Unfortunately, the CLA being penny wise, they were just done on a printer on ordinary coloured stock, not something that would easily attract attention from the public. One pamphlet sported the title “Christian Labor Association; Union Representation with Integrity.” It featured the following headings: “What a union can do for you;” “Why a union?” “Because without a union your boss can do with you what he wants. Without a union you are helpless.” Without a union you are subject to “all the weakness of whimsical and arbitrary human beings,” something from which a union will protect you. The other brochure asked why a *Christian* labour union. While it does everything you expect from a union, “the CLA takes all interests into consideration. It fosters cooperation rather than hostility and class struggle.” The CLA “sees society as a community of common interests and wants to contribute to these common

interests,” not merely the one-sided interest of the secular unions. Unlike other unions, the CLA does not force people to join them—no union shops. And, very different from secular unions, workers are given a sense of responsibility for the entire enterprise; they are seen as partners, not as mere human resources, and certainly not as enemies.



Try as I may, I could not penetrate that CRC curtain of resistance—sorry, “wall” is a more accurate term; even better: “firewall.” When my contract expired, I was graciously dismissed. It had been an unsuccessful experiment. I thanked the CLA for having given me the opportunity. It had been an interesting adventure for me and it had provided us with some income.

**CLA Headquarters – Zeeland MI\***

When you put all these stories together—and there were more CRC-related institutions I attempted to penetrate—then you get the picture that I did not fit comfortably into the Grand Rapids CRC culture. But this had always been the case ever since my college days and throughout my mission years. That remains true even today. I have high respect for the underpinnings or basic official worldview of the CRC and recognize that these Kuyperian aspects are penetrating North American culture far beyond its own community. However, there is also that pop or folk CRC culture that exists parallel with that Kuyperian underpinning, even at the highest level. It is actually a case of officially and theoretically accepting and even advocating the Kuyperian aspect of its heritage, but in practice following American middle class and capitalist values. These two are uneasy bed partners. Another way of putting it is that the church harboured both Kuyperian wholism and a soft-secular dualism. That disjunction, I believe, is responsible for the CRC having lost its moorings right along with many of its members, who can no longer figure out what this church is all about. Even non-CRC missionaries in Nigeria had noticed it. The financial scandal in which Calvin College is currently involved (2012 and beyond) is an example of capitalist inspiration more than contemporary Kuyperian.

I had a legitimate mission that was aborted by the very community that spawned it. That community at one time had a worldview that called for a CLA, but it had climbed the social and economic ladder from blue collar and low middle class to that of managers and owners in the middle class and upwards. Unconsciously, it adjusted its worldview to its new status and now rejected the child it needed in its earlier days. That community had shaped me and provided me with a worldview that was comprehensive and called for social justice, but it rejected the natural outcome when I attempted to give it practical expression. If the church can be called mother, this was a mother who not merely abandoned her child but outright rejected it with threats.

### *Housing Business*

In the meantime, I began looking into the housing rental business. You may remember that we had been dabbling in rental housing for years, already way back in Abbotsford during

the 1970s. During the intervening years, we had bought some Grand Rapids houses and rented them out via property managers and sold them again. We held on to a couple of them long term, one of them being the Godwin house you heard about already, and the other a Kentwood place on Stanford Ave. SE. The latter was paid for mostly by rental income from both Godwin and itself.

We had different property managers to look after the properties in our absence. But it did not always go smoothly. One property was literally ruined by tenants and had become uninhabitable. We returned it to its former owner from whom we had bought it on land contract. That kind of sale allows the buyer to just walk away and return the property.



**We Own Part of this Building\***

In the case of Godwin, at one time we had some bad tenants. The neighbourhood came together and complained to the authorities. They were wondering who owned the place and where he was. Next time we were in town and heard about it, I introduced myself to the neighbours, apologized to them and promised to do better. We evicted the tenants. Subsequently, we spent a lot of money fixing up the place with new siding, roof, windows and driveway. It now looked respectable and fit into the neighbourhood to everyone's satisfaction.

In addition, we had several property partnerships with Lou Haveman. He was now a real estate broker in Lansing, MI, and we together bought, rented out and sold a few properties, with him serving as manager. Four of our housing ventures were successful. Two, we rented out for a while and then sold them at a profit. We are still (2014) receiving payments from a land contract or "agreement for sale" we started around the year 2000.

When we left Grand Rapids, we once again rented out the Godwin house, this time to Calvin students. We left it in the hands of our friend Rob to manage for us. When those students left, Rob moved in and paid us a reduced rate on condition that he would do the maintenance

without charging us for his time. In due time, we sold it also to Haveman. Recently, in 2012, Lou also bought the Stanford house on a land contract (USA) or agreement for sale (Canada). Apart from the two land contracts, we are now out of the housing business. It had been good for us. God had blessed the foresight we had to start these business ventures, even when conducted at a distance from Nigeria. The income from that little “empire” has been helpful to us even now during our retirement.

I referred to managing a group of rentals. A company had made a contract with Haveman to manage some 30 neglected properties for them in Grand Rapids. They did not even know their tenants or the shape of the properties. Haveman asked me to manage them for him.



This was an exceedingly interesting venture in which I met the best and the worst of tenants. I not only managed, but I also cleaned up after tenants left. We had bought a pickup that was used to bring excessive garbage and other junk to the dump. Sometimes, Fran would help clean up on Saturdays and get paid for the service. All in all, the job paid us well. We regretted the end of the contract, when the properties were taken over by another party.

### The Landlord\*

We were/are so grateful to both God and Haveman for providing us with this income at a time we badly needed it. With those properties out of my hands, I sort of slid into semi-retirement without actually deciding to do so. It just happened, for managing the three properties we still owned at this time, along with the two houses we were managing on behalf of a Nigeria missionary couple, was not a full time proposition.

Owning and renting out properties along with managing that other fleet brought me face to face with ethical challenges. Often I ran into poor people to whom no one wanted to rent because of their bad tenant histories. Several times I decided to give them a chance by renting to them, but every time I did so, my Christian compassion backfired on me. Others had refused them for good reasons. These tenants were members of the entitlement culture that had never apparently heard of responsibility. Getting the rent paid was a big job; I had to chase after them time and again. When they did pay, they acted as if they were doing me an undeserved favour. They might trash either the inside of the house or the outside, but more likely both. I would get letters from the city citing me for messy properties. I several times had to go through eviction procedures. There is nothing so harsh as evicting people in the middle of the winter, but I would have no choice. Sometimes they would not pay their gas bills, which meant the place was not heated adequately in the winter and the plumbing could and actually did freeze up in a number of cases. I was so grateful that the city would provide me with the protection of an armed sheriff when overseeing a tenant removing his/her

furniture or having to bring it to the curb myself with the help of hired hands, for occasionally I would be threatened and the sheriff had to step in.

This situation also led to my resignation from the Canadian social justice organization Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ). They were running an anti-poverty campaign in Canada and often featured articles and pictures in their monthly magazine, *The Catalyst*, about bad rental situations and greedy landlords who did not care for the welfare of their tenants. Invariably, the pictures were of apparently neglected or uncared for properties with junk lying all over the place. Actually, these could have been pictures of some of the properties I was managing! The mess was not from lack of concern on my part but from totally irresponsible tenants! I was offended at these pictures and wrote them that they needed to investigate each messy situation to be sure they had the right story. They failed to respond at first, but eventually they came out with a boilerplate type of response that only offended me more. Was that the best they could treat one of their long-time members and supporters? I challenged them to investigate *all* the causes of poverty, not just some, the *real* causes, including the contributions of such tenants to their own poverty. I received no satisfaction. I had already started to feel that they were basically jumping on ecumenical bandwagons that were usually one-sidedly against landlords and never referred to tenant responsibility. Where was the even-handedness so characteristic of Kuyparian thinking on basis of which CPJ had been founded? Some years later, I was informed in writing that CPJ had moved on and was no longer Kuyparian in orientation. That confirmed my suspicions. I resigned in disgust but also with deep regret. I had lost a great friend who occasionally would publish stories about my ministry and writings.

Eventually, we placed our three remaining properties in a trust, the purpose of which is to provide scholarship money for the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. The scholarship fund will kick in after we have both passed away, but in the meantime we live off the proceeds. It is called “The Jan and Frances Boer Nigeria Reformational Endowment Fund,” the income of which is to be used to promote Kuyparian scholarship in Nigeria. It is one of our ways to perpetuate the influence of our Nigeria ministry indefinitely, the other being the publication of our series. We may have left Nigeria physically, but we remain there with our missionary spirit until today through that writing project and now via these memoirs. Both of these projects compel us to think “Nigeria” almost every day and to pray for the country regularly.

You may be wondering why we went into personally-owned real estate. The reason was simple. You may remember that in my *Caught in the Middle* I emphasized the need to take responsibility for your investments. I also showed that it was very difficult to actually do so, but real estate owned by yourself made it possible. The owner can make his own decisions and take responsibility. Well, that’s what we did.

### *Boer Combo Services*

Actually, I had in mind expanding our business beyond housing. Developing a home-based business was in the air and offers of all kinds were featured on the internet. I spent a lot of

time researching this topic and seriously considered various enterprises. Sometimes I was tempted to give it a whirl, but Fran, with her down-to-earth common sense, frequently wisely restrained me. But in order to make space for other businesses, I decided we needed an umbrella name for everything we might be doing in the near future. I proposed the term “Boer’s ComboServe,” but was vetoed by Kevin and Wiebe, who both argued it was too similar to the then-prominent computer corporation CompuServe. Though I did not agree that it was too similar, I nevertheless consented not to use it and instead went to “Boer Combo Services” and even registered it with the city. I seriously looked into a delivery service, where I would have to buy my own van and deliver parts to certain factories in lower Michigan that would have to arrive at very specific times, no later, no earlier. Upon intense investigation, I found that those who had hired on could not make a living at it.

### *African Gospel Art*

Our first auxiliary was the distribution of African Gospel Art. This art consisted of absolutely beautifully coloured replicas of paintings of all the Gospel stories done in the setting of the Mafa people of Cameroons. The art was produced by the combined effort of the Mafa people themselves and artists brought in by some Catholic organization. They have ever since been published and distributed by a hole-in-the-wall office run by nuns in Versailles, France. They are published in many different formats and are outstanding in their beauty. We decided to distribute them via our website < SocialTheology.com >. We continue to love this artwork and displayed it prominently in both our Grand Rapids house and our Vancouver apartment.

Reactions to this Gospel Art were surprising. We were already promoting them in Nigeria. Some of our better educated Nigerian friends were offended by this art. Jesus was not Black and He did not live in an African culture. So what were we trying to prove? A Christian from Muslim background saw large vats in the picture portraying the coming to the Holy Spirit and immediately reacted rather violently. What was this, putting beer vats in a picture together with the Spirit of God? None of these people recognized anything beautiful in this art. Turning to the USA, when we had a Black lady try to sell this art at a downtown Black festival, she had no takers, not even one! We did have a Black family, friends of ours, buy a large poster and put it in an expensive frame to hang in their living room. Absolutely gorgeous! Nevertheless, over the years we have sold a fair amount via the internet and even now people find it on our website and a few put in an order. However, they are almost all Caucasian church workers and missionaries working in Africa.

### *Mystery Shopping*

I responded to an ad for “mystery shopping.” Various companies had contracts with other companies to check out their customer relations by sending out “spies.” Well, from my work with CLA you know that I was an experienced spy! They would assign me to banks, to various kinds of stores and shops, to post offices even. I was to present myself as a customer and ask certain specific questions and observe certain specific responses to their clients as well as the neatness of the premises. The assignments I liked the best were restaurants, for

the company would reimburse me for ordering and eating certain meals and then ask me all kinds of questions about the quality of the service and the food. I kind of enjoyed these assignments, but the pay was not enough to make it worthwhile. I quit. On their websites, these companies promise highly professional and skilled agents, but that's a laugh. I may have been a professional and highly skilled, but certainly not in this business! That was sheer false advertising.

### *The Community: Church, Friends, Family*

Here in this section we bring together a broad swath of our life in Grand Rapids. I try to somewhat distinguish between church, friends and family, but sometimes that is very difficult. Some of the stories under one heading could just as well go under another. Life just isn't composed of neat separate categories and boxes.

#### *Life on Godwin Street*

After we moved out of our two temporary locations, we experienced a first—living in our own house. Never done that before as adults. It felt great to live in our own house, but it had been somewhat neglected for many years and thus required a lot of attention—new roof, new windows, new siding, new driveway, etc. Over time, we got much of it done at great expense, more than we could really afford, but it was that or just let it deteriorate. That was not an option, not in the Godwin neighbourhood, where everyone took good care of their property.



**John at the Godwin House – Oh, the Joy of Home Ownership!\***

So, I found myself worrying about repairs I knew nothing about and was not interested in doing. I discovered that, if you're not an R&M person, living in your own house is not all it is cracked up to be. You're never free from worry, always wondering how to get this done or whom to get to do it at a reasonable price. I have pictures of myself doing stuff I had never done before, even standing on a high ladder at roof level!

In summer you have that interminable grass to mow and in the winter that unending Michigan snow. Pictures show that I knew how to delegate: Wiebe, Jude and Fran are all shown shoveling snow.



Wiebe, Jude & Fran fighting the snow!\*

### *Life in and with the Church*

We now lived in Grand Rapids, but our church membership was still at II Highland. We shopped around a while and then decided to throw our lot in with First CRC of Grand Rapids on Franklin Street SE, almost across the street from our first apartment during my seminary days. The pastor, Morris Greidanus, was from a strong Edmonton Kuyperian family. That was one attraction for us. Another strong motivation was the friendliness of the congregation. We were embraced immediately and invited for lunch our very first visit and on many subsequent Sundays. It was as if they had consciously decided to open their doors to each other. We enjoyed many Sunday dinners at the homes of the members and did our share to reciprocate. We also soon sensed that the congregation was unusually tolerant and non-judgmental, located as it was in the centre of the Grand Rapids ghetto to which it was haltingly reaching out. We joined the adult Sunday School and felt totally accepted, even after they learned about our recent history. So we requested II Highland to transfer our membership to this church. We had found a church home, at least for now.

But I was no longer ordained; I was “just” another member without special status, not only in this congregation but in the entire denomination. I had not realized how the status of

ordination puts a mark of high self-esteem on you. In addition, while in Nigeria I had become accustomed to thinking in terms of whole denominations, the entire nation and global ecumenical issues, now I was restricted to one congregation and was just one of the boys. That took me years to get accustomed to. It seemed like such a small world. Actually, I never got fully accustomed to this limited local role.

We were active participants. In addition to the services and adult Sunday School, I occasionally read Scripture during the service, we attended our small group meetings, hosted groups in our Godwin home, and participated in the Wednesday night community programme as well as in the occasional joint evening services we held with the neighbouring Black Baptist Church. All in all, membership in First CRC was a good and uplifting experience for us. We look back upon it with great satisfaction. They served as our bridge church back into the CRC in North America (CRCNA, as the official acronym has it).

I made a serious mistake. I was asked whether I would stand for elder. I declined, because we were already thinking about moving to Vancouver. However, I should have accepted it. For one thing, I would have enjoyed that ministry and I had the gift for it. In addition, it would have enhanced my standing in the denomination. I could have transferred to Vancouver CRC with “elder” included in my post-Nigeria ecclesiastical resume. The Vancouver church might have been less apprehensive about our status. I was grateful for the confidence the Grand Rapids church had in me.

We also had a fairly active social life with various members. It was just such an easy community to penetrate, so open and friendly. Two deserve special mention. I had a number of very helpful telephone counseling sessions with Elder Al Postma during the initial period when I felt particularly distressed about our situation. He was a brother to Gert, Fran’s brother Ray’s wife. Then there was the Blickley couple, Bill and Laverne. Like Postma, during his first few visits, Bill did much to encourage us in our distress, which was the beginning of a great friendship that remains in effect till today.

Bill really deserves an inset in these pages for all his wonderful and amazing housing business/ministry in the ghetto, not to talk of the bus he rebuilt for interracial and interdenominational youth work or of his neighbourhood computer ministry. He also had a snow removal business and had me plow for him one night. Thanks for the pay, but I did not feel cut out for this kind of thing. If I had stuck it out, who knows, I might have gotten used to it. We once camped with the Blickleys out on an isolated piece of land they owned somewhere, they with their bus and we with our camper. We also did some canoeing with them.

Our church was located in a former CRC area that had deteriorated into a ghetto. There were a few ghetto dwellers that frequented the church, some Black and some White. Among the latter were Lois Berry and her daughter Carla. As you may know from Volumes Two and Three, we’ve always had a weakness for the marginalized and so we were naturally drawn to Lois and her daughter. We did not know much about their history, but their reaction to life in general and to people was so unique that we could never quite know their next step. One thing we did know: When we had them over for occasional after-church

dinners, Lois would eat us out of house and home. Simply amazing. Her generous figure, reminiscent of the popular “traditionally built” first lady detective in Alexander McCall Smith’s humorous novel series, in no way inhibited her from enjoying literally *any* food within reach.

Lois loved driving and had a valid driver’s license without any restrictions but no car. She had pressed various church members to allow her to drive their car, but no one trusted her. Neither did we, but we decided to give her a chance, seeing she so desperately wanted to do so. After all, we had cars older than most church members. So we gave her the chance, but kept her away from busy traffic. She did alright. Others thought we were foolish, but it worked out fine and she was happier than a lark. Whenever she drove, she could have kept at it the entire day! We repeated this a few times.

Eventually, she was taken to a senior nursing home some 20 miles out of town, so that contact became less frequent. But when we would call her to arrange a visit, she would without fail *order*—and the word is carefully chosen!—a full bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and a carton of regular Coke, none of that diet stuff!

As to Carla, she stayed in the neighbourhood after her mother left. She attached herself to us firmly so that she would try to dominate us completely during the post-service coffee hour. More than once I had to almost rudely tell her to get lost so we would have a chance to socialize with others as well. We did visit Lois a couple of times during our visits to Grand Rapids from Vancouver. By 2012 she had passed away, but Carla was still the old Carla against whom we had to protect ourselves at church.

At the denominational level, there was Peter Vander Meulen of the Social Justice and Hunger Action Office in the Pentagon, better referred to as the CRC denominational service centre. That’s not the official name of the place. Some call it the CRC headquarters, but CRC does not have an official headquarter, for the real headquarter in a Reformed church is the local congregation. All other authority within the denomination is derived from the local congregations. So, perhaps the nickname “Pentagon” is the best; it is simple and humorous.

Especially during our initial dark days in Grand Rapids, I would often drop in on Peter. He was sympathetic with our situation and sought to encourage me every way he could. He tried to re-incorporate me back into the CRC by asking me to represent him at an international and interdenominational Justice in Africa Conference somewhere in Indiana—or was it Ohio? I was very happy to do so and drove down there in a denominational vehicle.

When I arrived at the campus, an Asian gentleman saw me searching. He introduced himself and, after discovering what I came for, he invited me to stay in his room with him. He also fed me a couple of times when there was no conference food available. I slowly heard him out about his background. He was a religious refugee from Burma or Myanmar, whose tribal people were severely persecuted by the Burmese government. He somehow found his way to this campus and was now preparing there for the ministry. However, he was very poor and dependent on handouts. Of course, I gave him from my pocket what I could, but that did not amount to much. This was still the time we had no idea what our finances would look like. I

was amazed at his hospitality and generosity. Later, I tried to keep in touch with him by email and other means, but somehow we lost track of each other. Too bad. I should have been more persistent, but being in our own personal distress, I did not have the necessary energy at the time. Another part of that conference I remember clearly because of the pictures I have, was my introduction to Ethiopian food by way of a meal a group of Ethiopians shared with me. I loved it so much that I take every opportunity I can to indulge in more.

I wrote a report on the conference for Peter. I am not sure it was a good report. I was not yet in a good psychological state to be able to absorb the proceedings of a conference and then write an adequate and meaningful report on it. At any rate, I submitted it to Peter and continued to visit his office, but he never invited me to represent him again. I understand and do not take it ill of him. He had his responsibilities and standards to maintain. I just thanked him for the assignment and for his faith in me.

### *Life with Friends*

Actually, the last section already introduced you to some of our new friends. It really was not difficult to develop a social community of family and friends. Keith and Marti Tanis opened their arms, door and telephone to us. Keith and I had many telephone sessions in which we discussed the way for us to move forward. He was a true advocate in that he also would occasionally go to various CRC offices on our behalf.

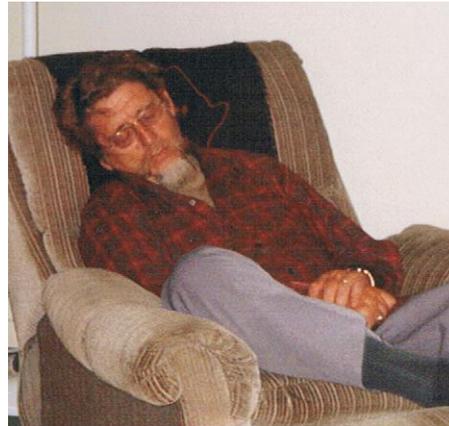
Then there was still a community from the past: former Calvin students, some of whom were now professionals, business people or Calvin profs. We had easy access to some of them, especially to my first friend at Calvin—Cor Barendrecht, now married to Mickey Rooks, the daughter of Dr. Rooks, the psychiatrist who examined us in preparation for becoming missionaries back in 1966. Mickey was head nurse in Blodgett Hospital until she was pushed out under suspicious circumstances. Cor had a hard time holding on to jobs for any length of time. He dabbled in professional photography and published some poetry of his own. Gerrit and Janet Sheeres were there as well. At the time we arrived, he was pastor at East Paris, the long-time Prins family church where we got married. The next year, he retired. Gerrit is the most optimistic and positive person I have ever met. Don't come to him to criticize any person, event or movement! I should have hung around with him more: perhaps his attitude would have rubbed off! There was always a smattering of current as well as ex-missionaries around as well. It should be said, though, that there were also some very fine old friends who were embarrassed about us and avoided us.

Cor had suffered an aneurism some time earlier and expected any day to die from it. And he did. Gerrit and I were the main speakers at his memorial service. In view of the tribal feelings between people from Haarlem and Groningen, I thought it interesting that, apart from the preacher, the two main speakers at his memorial, were the two Groningers among Cor's friends.

Mickey played both organ and piano and had both in their house. After Cor's passing, she wanted to get rid of the organ and concentrate on the piano. We took it over from her. Now we were the proud owners of a large two-tier organ that also had foot pedals. I hauled out my *Klavarscribo* books that I used during my teens and that I inherited back from my Mother who had carefully preserved them. For the rest of our Grand Rapids time I played my heart out. Occasionally we would haul out the keyboard as well and Fran would play on it so that we had a full concert going. Ah, what musicians we were! On Sunday mornings at 8 am, I would open the front windows of the house, crank up the organ to its loudest and treat the entire Godwin neighbourhood to a free concert of Genevan Psalms. No one ever bothered to thank me!



**John on the Organ\***



**John the Snoozer\***

**Music either way!**

As I peruse the photo album of that period, we are reminded of how rich we were when it came to friends.

There was Caleb Ahima, whom we knew from Wukari days and whose father was a friend of ours. Caleb graduated from Calvin Seminary with a master's degree in May 1998. We had him over to our house many times and also had him join our church. There he was embraced and respected. When we met him again in Jos during our first visit back, he was General Secretary of TEKAN. During the interim, he had been ordained by CRCN. Today, 2014, he is its President.



**Caleb Ahima\***

One of our pictures shows Dorothy Sytsma at Caleb's graduation reception. She was, you may remember, the lone missionary in Wukari when we arrived there in 1966. She now

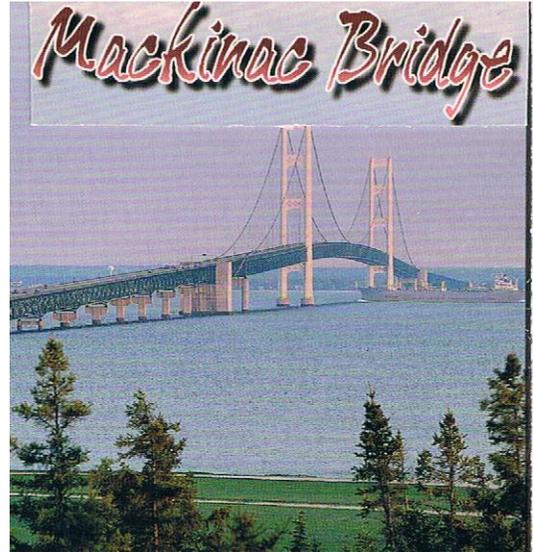
lived in her hometown of De Motte, IN. Other friends included Bennie Vander Walt from South Africa around our table together with strong Reformational friend Ron Roper. You've read about Bennie as the Kuyperian philosopher who wrote the book I used to teach Sociology at TCNN. We have a photo of the Havemans at our table, Lou with that eternal smile on his face and Jan holding up our famous guest book, checking up on her friends who might have graced our table over the past thirty years or so.

Some of our friends were getting older. Dr Harry Boer, that vigorous debater and challenger of CRC establishment who denied any common blood line with us, had long ago retired and now lived in a home in downtown Holland MI. We visited back and forth and went out for a few meals. He drove me around a few times, but his driving was losing its focus and I concluded he should no longer drive. My last visit with him was in Holland Home on Fulton SE in Grand Rapids. It was not a happy one. Not long afterwards, we attended his memorial. It was organized by the direct descendants of that earlier Prof. Geert Boer, which seemed to prove our blood connection that Dr. Harry had always denied.

Another friend from the past was Prof. Evan Runner, my former philosophy teacher, the single most influential person in my life with whom I had a personal relationship. That relationship developed during our missionary years, long after our graduation. During these Grand Rapids years, we sought to visit him a few times, but his wife "protected" him and kept us at bay. It was after she passed away that it became easier to visit him. He had left the CRC in favour of one of the spinoffs that occurred on the issue of women leadership in the church. However, he had become less of a fighter and was now a sweet, mild personality with whom you could hold pleasant ordinary chitchats. By now, he, too, was becoming feeble. It was at this feeble stage of his life that the ICS in Toronto, his brain child, established a chair in his honour with a ceremony at Calvin College, since he could no longer travel. I found it so striking that this honour was extended to him on the campus where he had been so strongly resisted. His daughter stood in for him to accept the honour, though he was present. Runner passed away after we moved to Vancouver. I would judge him to be the most influential person ever on the Calvin College faculty.

From our missionary past, we hosted our dear family friends, the Koops family, whose association with us went back all the way to MSU days. What a joy it was to have them over. Then Harold and Joanne De Jong popped by from their church post somewhere on the American prairie. We had so much to share. We were also happy hosts to Gary Maxey whom you met in Jos, a staff member of IICS and, at the time, the principal of a new international seminary he was founding—WATS: West Africa Theological Seminary, now located in Lagos. We frequently dropped in on Jerry and Mary Cremer, former Nigeria hostel house parents and Hillcrest teachers, now Logistics Manager for CRWM. They had become dear friends to us. Some years earlier, when Cynthia needed a place to stay for a summer, they invited her to stay with them. One day, we found ourselves at the table of Bert and Alice Witvoet in Ontario. Bert was a former long-time editor of *Christian Courier* and had published many of my articles. In 1998 we participated in the annual Labor Day Mackinac Bridge walk over the narrow strait between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, together with sister Henrietta and Luke Glashouwer. Within an hour's walk, we experienced almost every

weather condition possible at that time of the year, from friendly sunshine through dark clouds to severe winds with every shade in between.



**John, Fran, Luke & Henrietta at the Mackinac Bridge\***

After the bridge walk, we took a ferry to Mackinac Island, a charming historical and touristy place that played an important part in the struggles that eventually led to determining the border between Canada and the USA.

There were more islands in these Great Lakes where Michiganders would spend weekends or vacations. One Nigerian friend of ours was invited by a Grand Rapids family to join them for such a weekend. When they walked off the ferry on their way back home, this friend was amazed to see the Governor of Michigan walk off together with everyone else, carrying his own backpack, without security personnel or met by a convoy of cars with sirens. Just like an ordinary Joe! That day, he had a lesson in American democracy! Whether this still happens post 9/11, I do not know.

Somewhere along the line, Joseph and Emily Akpem, friends of ours from Nigeria, came to live in Grand Rapids. Joseph was a leading NKST clergyman with a doctorate from Fuller School of World Mission. Emily was a Caucasian and former CRC Mission nurse working with leprosy patients in Mkar. While living in Grand Rapids, they bought a rental home as investment and Emily spent much time fixing it up. Eventually, she put it on the market and got it rented out. I offered to manage the place for her *pro bono*. We were good friends and socialized a lot together, visiting back and forth Nigeria style, the style we enjoy till this day but have fewer chances to practice in inhospitable Vancouver. Unfortunately, her cancer reappeared and she passed away during one of our foreign trips. Joseph later returned to Nigeria, where he married a Nigerian lady and, I hope, they lived happily ever after. We don't hear much from him.

After our second honeymoon about which you will read later, Musa Gaya, a Nigerian scholar at Unijos and a good-natured acquaintance of ours, also with a constant wide smile on his face, entered our life again at this time. We found out about his visit to the US for a lecture he delivered at the McLaurin Institute in Minneapolis, a Kuyparian type organization. I invited Musa to stay with us, for he was interested in doing a few days of research in the Calvin Library. So he came, but we saw little of him, for he was determined to make the best use of his time at the Library. I have seldom seen such a disciplined scholar. As to that Institute, I also paid them a visit around that time and had some great discussions with the staff about Kuyparian perspectives on contemporary Islam.

### *Long-Term Guests*

For much of the time we had long-term guests in the Godwin house. First, there was Jude, the son of Lydia and Chris, whom Wiebe and Kevin had sponsored to enroll at Calvin. He "lived" with us for one year starting in August 1999. Our part of the arrangement was to provide him with board and room at our house and bus money to commute to Calvin. Unfortunately, Jude became a burden and caused us many sleepless nights. He was simply too immature to live and study abroad. We were prepared to help and guide him, but he avoided us like the pest. After some time, we hardly saw him anymore. He holed up in the Calvin dorms with his friends. He might occasionally come home unexpectedly at midnight so that we suddenly would see him in the morning. It was impossible to supervise or teach him anything. I will not write about some of the shenanigans he pulled off at our place and Calvin, but it was not a good picture. It was even dangerous, for when we were gone on various journeys during the winter, what did he know about heating and furnace? Before we moved to Vancouver, we went to the Calvin Financial Office and signed off on him. They were also ready to dismiss him because of his financial irresponsibility, but before we knew it, he was back in! But now somehow on his own. It was a totally bizarre and impossible situation.

As bad as the above all sounded, Jude was very popular with Calvin students. He was often seen "holding court" in the coffee shop, especially with girls. He was short but handsome with sparkling eyes, a great voice and, like his father, a boisterous laugh. He was member of

an African student musical group that sang Christian songs and performed in various churches. It took us long to realize that one of his problems was his artistic personality that resisted any restrictions on his freedom or tight college schedules. Another problem was that he wanted to hang out the big man, for his fellow African students were all monied people and showed it. And here was little Jude, very poor and proud, who desperately tried to pretend he was somebody. We suspect he “solved” his dilemma with credit cards with which irresponsible credit card companies entice students who have no idea about their proper use. Eventually, he was forced to leave Calvin without graduating. He owed them too much money.

Today, Jude is an international hip-hop star based in Lagos, with many CDs to his credit and countless fans. He markets himself as “Mr. Incredible”! Nothing particularly modest about Jude. When he is part of an event, it will be sold out. During our 2011 visit to W&J in Lagos, we were in a store together with Lydia. As we were looking at a rack with his CDs and the sales associates found out Lydia was Jude’s mother, you should have seen the admiration and respect they showed towards her. Mr. Incredible’s mother in *our* store? That was indeed incredible to them. We are grateful that he is now taking good care of his parents. We wish him God’s blessing. But it is hard to forget the sleepless nights and anxiety he caused us.

Then there were two divorced Christian men whom God put into our paths. One lived across the street from a duplex I owned. He had seen me work in the yard a few times and, both of us being friendly and outgoing, we started chatting and almost instantly became friends. He was a Canadian and a lapsed CRC-er, but not a lapsed Christian. Both of these men suffered from ADD. They knew each other and came into our lives almost simultaneously, but did not stay with us simultaneously. The first one was divorced by a Calvin professor who could no longer bear the results of ADD in their family. He was a Kuyperian theologian/philosopher with great plans and visions. He would write lengthy scholarly and complicated essays on various topics. He eventually took up residence in one of our upstairs bedrooms, which deprived us of our privacy. After some time, we had to ask him to leave. We remain friends and are in fairly regular email contact with each other. He was an enthusiastic participant in the Occupy Movement of 2011 in Grand Rapids. He felt that, given all the things I had written over the years, I should feel right at home with such a movement.

Unfortunately, though I was very sympathetic with the basic vision and social critique of the Occupy Movement, in Vancouver, their crowd not only included the genuinely poor and needy, but also riffraff members of BC’s entitlement culture. They were very destructive of public properties, so that when they tried to move into a neighbourhood park, the residents prevented them. The 99% they pretended to represent, rejected them. I avoided them, though I was sympathetic to their original complaints.

The Canadian semi-permanent guest had lived in Grand Rapids for 20 years or more. He was married and had a family of four great kids. He ran a profitable practice as dental technician. He was as smart as a whip and very handy, but not socially adept, what with his ADD. His wife had recently divorced him and he now needed a place to stay. So we took him in to live in the basement, where he set up his machinery, but his business had been

destroyed and he was unable to revive it. He now had lots of time on his hands and would often hold me hostage for longer than I wanted with his well-reasoned oratorical skills about issues of the church that mishandled his case, divorce, justice, the place of women and much more. I often just had to cut him off. Eventually, we had to ask him to leave as well. We also remain friends and call or email each other occasionally. We even stayed in his apartment for a few days after we had moved out of our house. He is now married again and lives in Ontario. We visited him there twice—once in his current home and once on the road in our RV somewhere.

So, we hardly had an empty nest in Grand Rapids. Even though it was not always easy for us to host these three unusual guests, we did become the richer for it—in a non-financial sort of way! Since then, however, we have been somewhat wary of inviting others in for longer than a weekend.

### *Life with the Boer Family*

Of course, the major social life was around the family, both nuclear and extended. In terms of the nuclear family, Wiebe, Cynthia and Andy (C&A), being near, were supportive of us from the beginning and we thank them for that. Probably their loving support was more crucial to us than they realized.

In May 1997, both Wiebe and Andy graduated from Calvin, Wiebe with a grade point average of nearly 4! Kevin decided to take a vacation from South Africa and attend the graduation. Now all of our kids, including in-laws, are graduates from Calvin! Some might consider it academic incest, but we surely did not turn out cookie-cutter facsimiles!

### *Wiebe*

During our Grand Rapids interim, Wiebe was in and out of town, but when he was around, he continued to create whirlwinds of social activities and kept us in touch with Nigeria. One day, Ken Sara Wiwa, son of the famous executed poet and social activist against Shell Oil, came to Calvin from Toronto as guest speaker about his father's campaign. Of course, Wiebe invited him for dinner at our place along with Michael Verheijen, that "Black Dutchman" who had so much fun confusing Hillcrest teachers. Michael's mother, Deborah Ajikayi, whom we knew well from Unijos, also showed up one day. She was now teaching at a university in Houston, TX. And then there was the Mbodwan girl, whose father had hired Lydia at Radio Voice of the Gospel in Jos, and Mr. Kapuria and his daughter from Nigeria but of Indian origin. Wiebe was a friend to several Gomwalks, a prominent Plateau family. Danlami, a nephew of the executed Military Governor, spent Christmas 1998 with us. Once in a while Wiebe would bring in a whole slew of Nigerians that we did not even know, but they were always welcome.

We have a picture of Wiebe, in his typical Nigerian clothing, performing on a Calvin stage under the umbrella of Rangeela, a group he helped organize. The group is even now still trying to promote the various art forms prevalent in the multicultural Calvin community.

His next step was Yale, where he pursued a Ph. D. in African History. I drove him there in September 1997 and we spent a couple of days in New Haven, a very interesting academic town. Fran and I were very proud of our bright son, but also of the fact that our immigrant-missionary family had been able to nurture him sufficiently to reach this height. After all, Yale is not for everyone. I am still happy that I always told our children not to impose restrictions and limitations on themselves by negative or even average thoughts. The sky is the limit. If you don't reach for it, you will only be average. You won't get there by accident. And if you reach for it on behalf of the Kingdom, then you have the wind of God on your back, pushing you forward. It is my testimony to you, reader, that later on, when you look back on how you got there, you will find the hand of God everywhere, even though there may have been some negative hiccups along the way, serious ones even.

Fran visited Wiebe twice during his first year at Yale. On one of these visits they took a side trip to the Big Apple where they did a lot of sightseeing together. Among others, they visited Ellis Island, the place where thousands of immigrants from all over the world used to arrive and be processed. Fran had at one time been under the impression that the Prins family was among them. But in actual fact, they landed in Hoboken, as Ellis Island had closed thirteen years prior to their arrival in the U.S. They also saw the Statue of Liberty and visited Grand Central Station.

After some time at Yale, in 2000, Wiebe taught a January "interim" course in African History at Calvin. He had become very popular, not to say the "darling," with the Calvin academic community, who expected him to become an academic rock star. He invited me to do a guest lecture in his course, which both of us as well as the students enjoyed.

It was during this time that I first saw a certain young lady by the name of Joanna-Marie. She was in Wiebe's class when I lectured. We actually met her at our house when Wiebe threw a class party to demonstrate Nigerian cuisine. She was one of seventeen who signed our Guest Book that evening. Her comment was "Thanks Boers!!" We had no inkling at that time that she would ever become more than an ex-student of Wiebe. Soon Wiebe would move to Nigeria for research, where we met him on our 2001 journey there.

There are three discussions Wiebe and I had that I particularly remember from his Yale days. One was the challenge he hurled at his mostly secular fellow students. They berated him as "conservative" because of his Christian faith. "Conservative," of course, was a pejorative term that no one wanted applied to himself. Wiebe deftly countered this by arguing that *they* were conservative in that they simply followed the regnant secular worldview. They were just sheep following the shepherds of academia. Right on, son. You got it well.

The second was his confrontation with the secular establishment of anthropology that berated Christian missions as mere tools of colonialism and the African Church as an

ephemeral phenomenon that would disappear along with the rest of Africa's colonial heritage. How could this foreign Western Christianity possibly survive in the newly emerging Africa? It was too superficial and unreal. Wiebe, doing his dissertation on sports in Nigeria, countered that prejudice—for that is all it was: academic anti-Christian secular prejudice—by pointing out that no one questions that the Western sport of soccer had captured the hearts of all Nigerians and that it had become a central feature of Nigerian culture. If that could happen to sports, why not to religion? *Touché!*

The third issue was the secular argument that traditional Africa was not religious, since it did not have separate and identifiable religious institutions. Wiebe seemed to have bought into that at one point. I tried to “set him straight” on this one. If you define religion in terms of religious institutions like church or mosque, well, then, okay, but that is at best a superficial definition. Kuypersians, along with many sociologists, philosophers and theologians, define religion as the underpinning of a society's worldview or as the basic assumptions on which people, individually or collectively, build their lives. These assumptions are usually undefined and unproven and, thus items of faith or belief, but very real and very powerful. That definition of religion is one of the foundations of my series. Defined thus, African societies along with all others, were squarely based on religion. Till this day, I don't know whether I was successful in my “campaign.” It was important to me, for accepting that secular argument would likely veer him away from the Kuypersian pathway I saw him embarking upon.

Between the two of us there was an awful lot of Nigeria-centred scholarship, probably more than almost any other family, with both of us having written doctoral dissertations on the country with foci on colonialism and mission on my part and sports development on his. Welcome to my perch, Dr. Boer Jr.!

### *Cynthia and Andy*

After Andy graduated from Calvin in 1997, he and Cynthia decided to take a break by going to Japan to teach English. The Japanese government was heavily recruiting native English speakers for this purpose. So C&A applied and were invited to an interview. They assumed that Andy would easily pass, since he had studied Japanese. They were not so confident about Cynthia. Lo and behold, Cynthia was accepted, not Andy. Apparently, the interviewers were not interested in anyone speaking Japanese; they seemed much more interested in Cynthia's international experience. So, they went, with Andy as “accompanying spouse.” While Cynthia went about her teaching job there, Andy studied all things computer, especially websites, and turned himself into quite an expert. When they eventually returned home, that self-training paid off handsomely with a website job in Kent, south of Seattle, that he has held on to ever since and has provided the family with a good living.

It was in Japan that their first child and our first grandchild was born on September 13, 1999—daughter Asia Asami. You can imagine everyone's delight with this beautiful child. Of course, the new grandparents soon started getting itchy feet. We wanted badly to see little Asia. For the trip we took there, I refer you to Chapter 41 in Volume 5.

*Sister Ellie's Passing (November 1998)*

Soon after leaving Nigeria, we learned that my sister Ellie had cancer. While on our Lutjegast pilgrimage (see Chapter 41), we siblings noticed that she had a habit of putting a pillow against her stomach and resting her hands on it, something that had not been noticed before. It looked strange, but apparently it had to do with pain control. As the cancer advanced, I began to phone her regularly, something we were never able to do from Nigeria. She always tried to keep up her spirits and sound brave. I had planned to visit her if things really got bad, but when that happened, everything went so quickly that she passed away before I had the chance. I've regretted that ever since. She died on November 16, 1998.

The lesson learned here is not to postpone visiting your sick loved ones. Go visit them when it is still possible to enjoy some prime-time fellowship with them; don't wait till they're gone. That's the policy we followed with our parents when we were in distant Nigeria. Why we did not follow that with Ellie, I do not understand, except perhaps that we thought it was just a hop, skip and jump by air. So it was, but we had not counted on the swift progress of the cancer that outwitted us.

Fran, Wiebe and I traveled to BC to attend her funeral. It was the first family funeral ever that Fran and I had the opportunity to attend. In the grand family tradition of singing, the siblings in attendance sang an old favourite Dutch hymn at the service. We did not sound like the Boers of years past, partially because Ellie's leading voice was missing. Brother Hendrik, also a good singer, took over from her, but we did not seem to be "in the Spirit" for singing. My own unstable voice was totally cracked that day.

Two memories from those days. One was from the viewing of her body in the surroundings of a very basic funeral home. When we arrived in the evening, Ellie's children were socializing in the back of the hall, while the little grandchildren were playing and running all over the place. They used the casket to hide behind in the course of their games and sometimes even shook it. With their grandma lying there in state, they were blissfully unaware of the situation and played and laughed their hearts out around the casket. Ah, the innocence of children!

The other memory is of the funeral itself. The funeral staff did a bad job of organizing the funeral procession to the gravesite, a customary funeral feature in those days. It was a cold, blustery day with icy rain and poor vision. Part of the procession followed the hearse, while another part, including us, was not aware of what was happening and were left behind. By the time we found our way to the cemetery and the actual gravesite, the committal ceremony was already over, but with half of the family missing. We just saw the abandoned casket standing out there by itself in the blustery cold. That's where and how we had to leave it, a funeral without closure. It was an awful feeling and stayed with me for a long time. In a way it was worse than not attending the funeral at all.

We had somewhat of a closure when some years later, together with sister Karen, we visited Ellie's grave. Later yet, husband Fred was also buried there and we, that is Fran and I along with nephew Martin, son of Tinus and Joanna, stayed till we saw the grave closed in. That gave us a much better sense of closure. But even today, many years later, I still sometimes see that lonely casket left there in the freezing rain, forsaken by all but God.

Ellie left behind husband Fred, but also six adult children with their numerous descendants. One son had perished in a car accident during his teens. She became grandmother at age 42 and the clan never stopped expanding. We have a picture of her huge clan from just before her death. We also have another picture from that period with Elly surrounded by her offspring with her hand once again clasping that pillow.

And the clan continues to expand. In 2012, Fran and I attended the baptism of a great granddaughter of hers, Vanessa Pel. In 2013, we attended the dedication of another great granddaughter, Ellie Bosma. What goes around comes around.

### *Kevin and Theresa (K&T)*

Kevin's first business in California was computer related, a consultant type of thing. We visited him there in 1999 to celebrate his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. But then he decided to join Wiebe at Yale to get an MBA degree. Now we had two sons there. Don't even *ask* me how proud we were of them! In distinction from Wiebe, who was fully funded by scholarships, Kevin had been out of academia too long to be considered for scholarships. He had to prove himself with his own money—spell that “debt.”

In May 2000, K&T married and so we made our second trip to California. This time our destination was the Hanneman family ranch in Suisun City, north-east of San Francisco, near Napa Valley, where Theresa grew up. It was a much bigger trip for Cynthia, who had to fly in all the way from Japan. The wedding ceremony took place on the highest hill on the ranch behind the Hanneman family house. The setting included a beautiful view over the valley below, but the scorching sun was excruciatingly hot that day on that hill, merciless, with no shade trees in sight. The wedding was conducted by a Presbyterian pastor who had befriended the couple in Santa Barbara, where Theresa was working as a school counsellor. Kevin, Wiebe and myself were all dressed in big and colourful Nigerian gowns called *babbar riga*, simply “big gown.” Wiebe and I wore the caps that go with it, but not so Kevin. Mother-in-law had resisted the Nigeria dress idea, but Kevin insisted on it except for the cap. The event was not only the wedding, but it also was a family re-union of sorts, without Andy, who stayed home in Japan to take care of Asia.



**The Happy Couple - 2000\***



**Incorporating Theresa into the Family\***

We have just told you the story of K&T's wedding in May 2000. Our next visit to K&T was during Christmas 2000, but now in New Haven CT, where Kevin had enrolled at Yale. From coast to coast. It was a pleasant and relaxed visit during which we did some touring on our own. We took the train to New York City and tried to do some sightseeing by foot. Alas, though New Haven was clear of it, New York was all snowed in since a couple of days; no one had bothered to clear the sidewalks. I already had leg trouble due to sciatic nerve issues, so that walking was extra difficult for me. We also wanted to go to Central Park, but it too was snowed in. That part of the visit was not a successful one. That big famous city not clear its snow? I found it hard to believe.

We did visit the United Nations premises on that trip and took a guided tour of the entire place. That was an impressive visit. It was then that we bought a multicultural poster of all the peoples of the world that ever since has been prominently displayed in our house. It is "The Golden Rule" by Norman Rockwell, a mural mosaic. There was also a gallery with a display of paintings of all former UN Secretary Generals.



Referring to a previously discussed announcement by Wiebe that he planned one day to take on that position, Fran placed a sticker under our photograph of that gallery with the question, "Will Wiebe be next?" Well, he was not the next one, but who knows...?

**The Gallery of UN Secretary Generals\***

We decided we would like to join the New Year's Eve festivities in Times Square, but discovered that you need to be there early in the day to buy tickets to enter the Square. We regretfully decided against trying to join the fun. It would have been difficult for me, given the pain in my leg. And it was bitterly cold. So, perhaps just as well.

During that same Christmas visit to K&T, we also paid a visit to Tim and Elisabeth Gyuse, Nigerian friends of ours who were teaching in the New York training centre of Campus Crusade. Tim was a graduate of the University of Alberta as a town planner and they had become Canadian citizens, a status that stood them in good stead during their many travels. Tim had also served as MC at one of our St. Piran's parties, you remember? Now in New York, we drove many miles along those extremely busy East Coast express ways. It was so good to see them there in their current situation. They lived in a good but isolated house without neighbours. They received us like good Nigerians and served a great meal. They have since returned to Nigeria.

#### *Hendrik & Barb (H&B)*

I must mention the frequency that my brother Hendrik and Barb (H&B) popped in and out of our lives during these Grand Rapids years. At the time of our return from Nigeria, they were in Honolulu, but in 1998 moved to Aurora IL. Since Barb's family lived in West Michigan, H&B would sometimes drop in unexpectedly during one of their West Michigan visits. Whenever we had a special occasion, we would include them. For example, we once hosted a cousins' reunion to which we invited H&B along with Jan & Grace Boer from Detroit and Warner & Betsy Boer from Ontario. Brother Tinus heard about it and joined us all the way from BC. When Karen and Jake Heikens visited us, we took them to H&B. And, of course, when H&B's daughter Elly died, we did all we could to support them in their grief, including attending the memorial service in Gary IN as well as the funeral itself in a cemetery close to Drenthe, MI, where other Van Haitsema's—Barb's maiden name—were also buried.

I still carry some regret in my heart about that funeral. Hendrik had invited me to officiate at the graveside. After some careful consideration, I declined, on the grounds that it would be too emotional for me. I would not be able to control myself. That was no mere excuse; that's just the way I am. Though a clergyman for many years, I had officiated at only two Nigerian funerals and thus had not learned to distantiate myself from the personal. So I expected Hendrik to invite another pastor friend of his. Instead, he did it himself. I felt terrible that I let him down at this sensitive hour and even worse when he did it himself, keeping his emotions in check admirably. True, he had done more funerals than you can shake a stick at, but still... doing your own daughter's is hardly the same.

You may remember this Elly niece of mine from seminary days. She was severely mentally challenged and even during her adult life she never mentally outgrew early childhood. H&B did all they could to care for her until it became physically impossible for them and they had

to institutionalize her. They left her there and they moved to Hawaii for some time. One day, we were in Elly's neighbourhood and decided to pay her a visit. When we arrived and she heard my voice, she became all excited, for she confused my voice with Hendrik's. She was so happy to see her "Daddy." It broke my heart for both her and her parents. It was not long after this incident that she died due to an accident from staff carelessness. By that time, H&B were back in the area.

We would also meet H&B at family occasions in BC, which they seldom failed to attend. They were at sister Elly's funeral and at most if not all anniversaries. All in all, we saw them more often than any other Boer sibling during the Grand Rapids years. It was always nice to keep in touch, but that was only during physical visits, hardly ever by phone or letter/email. That pattern pertains even today.

Originally, there had been three Ellies/Ellys in my life: my mother, my sister and my niece. Now all three were gone..... There were and remain one or two others with names derived from "Ellie." I'm glad to have them in the clan. One of them is Cynthia Jenelle, our daughter, whose middle name is a combination of Jennie and Ellie, her two grandmothers. I am grateful that the name "Ellie" has been revived by Richard and Emily Bosma, referred to earlier, and thus the memory of the historic immigrant mother of the clan.

### *A Boer Cousins Reunion*



You've already read about this reunion in April 2000 and know who attended. We took a picture with all the cousins around a photograph of Geert Boer, the first professor of Calvin College. That portrait was hanging in a hallway in Calvin Seminary.

**The Six Boers\***

Since Hendrik is a history buff, a tendency shared by Tinus and myself, he took us into the historical heartland of CRC in West Michigan, where Barb hailed from. He showed us churches and read historical markers to us. We found all of that very interesting. Hendrik also knew the cemetery on Leonard Street where Prof. Geert was supposed to have been buried. We went there in full force and scoured the entire cemetery but failed to locate his grave. His stone might have been illegible as so many were. It being Sunday, we could not check it out in the administrative office.

### *Life with the Prins Family*

And then there was that large Prins clan with most of the siblings and many of their children still in the Grand Rapids area, the exception being Francis and Trena Lieuwen in Cincinnati. Without mentioning individuals, some of them stood by us in our distress from the beginning, while others needed some time to accept me again in full. But eventually, we all made up and we enjoyed a vibrant family and clan life. The Prinses are a great people and the best in-laws you could ask for, solid as rocks, conservative to the core with hearts full of love—some of them smart and living memory banks.



**Worldly Prins Nephews and Nieces\***

The days of the 5-cent cigar

Of course, like our own kids, most nephews and nieces had grown up by now, while some were developing their own families and spreading all over the USA. We no longer saw as much of them as we did before. But we have a picture of Fran and myself smoking cigars along with a whole bunch of Prins-side nephews and nieces. None of us were smokers, but neither were any beyond an occasional fun cigar. Okay, I did once in a while enjoy a cigar or pipe, but hardly enough to be considered a smoker, except by insurance companies. I had to eventually give up that minor delight due to its negative effect on my vocal cords.



**The Four Prins Sisters\***

During the 1998 Christmas season, with all our kids home, we held an open house for the Prins clan with people from several branches honouring the invite. If I am not mistaken, that was the time we had more people in the Godwin house than at any other time, 40 or so! In fact, I was secretly worrying about just how much the floor was designed to hold! The myriad of pictures of the occasion is a clear witness to the fact that “a good time was had by all.”

### *Sister Jane's Passing (June 2000)*

With both parents gone, sister Jane inherited the family house. After all, she had given of herself for such a long time to care for both father and mother during their final years. We did a lot of things together with her. In fact, Jane and her house remained the central Prins family focus for us. We enjoyed many Christian celebrations at her house. Then, suddenly, all this changed.

One morning in June 2000, while Fran was already at work, brother Ray called to give me terrible and totally unexpected news. “Our sister Jane passed away,” he announced softly. When she did not answer the phone on Sunday, he went to her house on Monday and found her dead on her knees by her bed. We were all shocked. True, she was not well. Among other things, a form of Parkinson’s Disease had set in, but she died of a heart condition named “myxomatous mitral valve disease.” She had had this condition since birth but no one was aware of it. She was to go for tests to Ann Arbor and Fran had promised to come along. It was not to be. I immediately went to Hope Network to tell Fran. She took the rest of the week off. It was June 11, 2000.

The Prins family is close and tight knit. They together organized the funeral. It was an altogether traditional funeral, except for one feature I have never forgotten. Instead of the family leaving the cemetery with the casket standing above the ground, in the presence of the entire family, including little children, the casket was lowered into the grave. The family hovered around the open grave with the exposed casket. The children were encouraged to view the casket down below and throw flowers on it. They were given the opportunity to talk about Aunt Jane and ask questions. It was such an open funeral that I have never forgotten the way the family freely acknowledged death even in the presence of the children. This was so wise and so dignified. Whether it was actually planned that way or it just happened, I am not sure. She was buried right next to her parents in the Cascade community cemetery.



Children at Jane’s Graveside\*

Jane’s passing changed the family dynamics considerably. The parental home in which she had lived was sold and with it disappeared the central focus of the clan as well as a piece of family history and a set of relationships. Being single and not well, she had been of central concern to her siblings as well as the numerous nephews and nieces. They had assisted her in so many ways with house and yard maintenance. Now all that was gone. As far as the family was concerned, 6672 Cascade Road SE was now reduced to loving memories.

Possibly, Jane’s passing affected Fran and me more than anyone else. Apart from her considerable travels, including a visit to us in Nigeria and to Kevin in South Africa, she had

lived a rather sober and frugal life. This is not to say that she was an Aunt Scrooge, for she had been generous in supporting her missionary sister and family. But when her will was opened and read by brother Ray in the midst of the siblings and their spouses, we were all surprised at the considerable fortune she had amassed. Well, yes, good public school teacher's salary and perks most of her life without ever renting or buying a house. And she had made some lucrative investments at just the right time.

We had planned for Fran to work another four years and then to retire. Once Jane's estate was divided among siblings and quite a number of charities according to her instructions, we observed that Fran's share was almost equal to four years' salary at Hope Network. There and then, we decided she could and should retire. What a sense of freedom that gave us. We deeply mourned the loss of a dear sister, but we were grateful that Fran could now leave this low-income position which did include considerable administrative skill and a fairly high level of responsibility. There had been some personnel changes in her department and it was no longer as pleasant of a job as it had been earlier. As so often, the sour and sweet mixed up in one package. Understandably, our attitude towards Jane's death and its fallout for us has remained ambiguous. We continue to miss and mourn her. We thank God for His provisions during our retirement life, but we hesitate to thank Him for Jane's contribution to it, even though it was substantial.

### *Our General Life in Grand Rapids*

Getting re-oriented to life in Grand Rapids and the USA in general took some doing, especially because of my loss of status in the church, which, as I mentioned earlier, was more important to me than I had expected.

#### *Calvin College*

Despite all the ambiguous experiences I'd had with Calvin College over the years, the college was also an oasis of positive and solid Christian culture with its high level intellectual programmes open to the community—lectures representing a wide range of opinions; drama, musical and other art performances of the highest quality. And it was all within our grasp, often free of charge and, at first at least, within walking distance. It had markedly upgraded itself from our student days.

The same held true for its sport facilities. We gratefully used their race track, if not for running, then for stiff walking sessions. We also played tennis on their first-rate courts. When we would descend into moods of despair and hopelessness, vigorous tennis matches helped us overcome.

Occasionally, we would attend a sporting event. One day, we came upon an official college tennis match. There were probably some fifty spectators on the bleachers, all sitting there all tensed up, but as quiet as a mouse. We did not particularly notice the silence when we climbed the bleachers to watch the game. It was a great game and we, with all the Nigerian

exuberance in our blood, started making noise. Applause for a good hit, loud shout of support for a great landing—when suddenly we noticed everyone was no longer watching the game, but us instead! It was like: Who are these guys disturbing the silence and distracting the players? We got up and slunk away, thoroughly embarrassed for having been caught acting so buffoonish according to the local culture, but also with some sympathy for a people so trained to act in rational fashion that emotion and spontaneity seemed to have gone out of the window. Such a far cry from the boisterous atmosphere of Nigerian tennis matches, indeed of Nigerian culture as a whole that is so dominated by spontaneity and emotion.

### *RV Camping*

One day in 1997, we attended an RV exhibition in Grand Rapids. We had always had a latent interest in RVs, but found them beyond our restricted budget. However, at the exhibition we stumbled upon an older used truck camper that seemed in decent condition and was for sale at a reasonable price. Because of my housing work, I needed a pickup. So, we bought the camper with the promise we would buy a suitable pickup and then come collect the camper. We did within two weeks and soon started camping over weekends.

I did not realize how beautiful West Michigan's Lake Michigan coastline is for camping. Campgrounds everywhere along with unending miles of sandy beaches with their slopes sliding gently into the lake water. For a couple of summers, we camped out almost every second week end. On Fridays, I would load up the vehicle with food and clothes, pick up Fran from work and head straight for the campground we had selected for the weekend. This became a permanent feature of our summers and remained so even in BC, though not on weekends anymore. A few times we camped together with sister Henrietta and her husband Luke, who had been tenting for years.

The company from whom we bought the camper had completely restored the bathroom into a new condition and installed a new fridge as well as stove. However, no one taught us how to operate the bathroom and associated plumbing and tanks. So, we never used that system, except for storage. We did gratefully use the fridge and stove.

But, clumsy as I am, I could with some difficulty and trepidation lift up the camper on its wobbly legs and slowly inch the truck from underneath it, but I could not get the truck underneath it again. It needed a level of precision I simply did not have the confidence to try. Besides, it was parked in our Godwin driveway, just inches from our own house and only a couple of feet from our neighbour's. I had visions of having the whole thing collapse on me and fall against our house or, worse, against our neighbour's house. I remember asking friends like Bill Blickley and Keith Tanis to help me get the truck in place. The whole structure seemed terribly wobbly and unsafe. In the winter time I propped it up on skids.

Actually, both the truck and the camper were old and rickety, but with our Nigerian (in)sensitivity, we hardly noticed that. We were proud as peacocks of this facility and camped everywhere with it. Old and rickety as it was, on the many pictures we took while camping everywhere, as far as we were concerned, it all looked very handsome with truck and camper

perfectly colour matched by pure coincidence. Many proper CRC-ers might have been embarrassed by it!



One of the most ridiculous places we camped at one weekend was Silver Lake in summer 2000. Unknown to us, it was a place where dune buggies\* were the thing and our weekend was the highlight for dune “buggies”—if you allow me this neologism. We have never witnessed such a barbaric display of noisy macho as this weekend. Buggies, outfitted to be as noisy as possible, everywhere in every

direction. And the drinking and yelling that night—it was almost difficult to believe these were humans, so animal like it all seemed—with apologies to all animals! The following morning, after the camp staff collected all the bottles and cans, they had a veritable mountain of them. Never hope to witness again such macho stuff as we did that weekend.

### *Y2K Scare*

1999 should have been an exciting year for the entire world, including our own personal world. It was considered by most as the closing year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though strictly speaking that distinction belonged to the year 2000. It was also considered the last year of the millenium. There should have been all kinds of celebrations and historical events to mark this important end to the millennium. It should have been fun, educational, geared to both past and future, but little of any of that took place due to the “Y2K” scare. It was feared that all computers would go bonkers and not able to cope with the zeros of the new year. All kinds of fearful predictions were made about how the world of technology would throw the entire world into a dizzy downturn with every digital and electronic device coming to a sudden halt at midnight. In the USA especially, all kinds of organizations and individuals created storage places for food. Some were planning to distribute these foods among their neighbours who may not have prepared.

We did not know what to think of it all. However, we had two experts in the family in whom we had a lot of faith in this regard. Francis Lieuwen, the engineer, had worked with computers since their debut. His son Dan had a Ph. D. in computer studies and had worked many years for the big computer corporations. Both of these men were persuaded some disaster was sure to happen. *It had to happen*, they argued. It is all so deeply embedded in every structure that it is an absolute must. Francis built a wide verandah around his large farmhouse to make space for his local community. He also built an underground storage space in his barn that was completely sealed off from any atmospheric influence, and filled it with food for his local community. Really heroic, seriously. Few individual people readied themselves so well. Governments of many Western nations and their corporations spent

billions to prevent the disaster from happening. Fran and I were worried as well and made it a matter of frequent urgent prayer. Most southern countries were in no position to spend billions and so mostly ignored it. Good thing they did!

The feared moment of 12 midnight, December 31, 1999, came-- and everything kept going. No interruption anywhere! We remember the moment well. We were in a church service in downtown Grand Rapids, praying and singing our way towards that moment. The preacher did not even stop preaching, but simply continued as if he was confident nothing would happen. Well, the lights did not go out; the microphone still carried his voice. Fran and I snuck out as we had agreed and headed for an ATM to see if we could get any money out of it. We requested \$10 and \$10 was promptly spit out! We knew it was all over. We felt so relieved and sat in our car offering a prayer of thanksgiving to our merciful Father. We had placed too much confidence in our experts—and experts they truly were.

Francis and Dan had proved to be wrong. I have since challenged them a few times to explain why nothing happened when it should have. They never came forth with any meaningful answer. I suggested to them an answer: Technologically, something probably *should* have happened, it was unavoidable--except that our merciful Father in Heaven heard all the prayers of millions of His people and protected them. In his own mysterious power He protected His foolish technological children by providentially overriding all the things that *should* have happened. Why not? Can anyone think of a better explanation? After all, according to the story of the flood, He *did* promise that He would not destroy the world ever again. But it did spoil the closing year of the millennium for almost everybody. Many, including we ourselves, were wondering what kind of technological ogre we had unleashed that was now threatening to undo our proud civilization.

### *Writings*

#### *Christian-Muslim Series*

Except for the time I managed that fleet of 30 houses, my work in Grand Rapids was never full time. This meant I had time to continue writing my series on Christian-Muslim relations. I never tried to press CRWM to continue to own that project. After all, I had spent much Mission time on it already and was grateful for that. I continued to work on it on my own time and with our own money. It was not till 2003 that Volume 1 was published. By that time, we lived in Vancouver. However, it was during our Grand Rapids days that we decided to publish it piecemeal in volumes in order to make the earlier part of the project available as soon as possible. It was then that I started mapping it out, volume by volume. After I had done that, I knew where I was going with it as far as Volume 7, but I remained in doubt about Volume 8 for most of the years I worked on the project. That would be the stage at which I would have to come to some conclusions and proposals, but I had no clue what they would be except for three parameters:

- (1) I would build on what both Christians and Muslims were saying;

- (2) I would sort out the “viable aspects” of what they were saying, meaning that any conclusions or proposals would have to be practical and possible within the unique Nigerian context;
- (3) I would develop those “viable aspects” on basis of a Christian perspective or, more specifically, a Kuyperian worldview. That is to say, a wholistic framework that rejects the dualism between religion and the rest of life that Nigerian Christians had inherited.

But how all this would eventually turn out, I didn’t have a clue and for years was unable to satisfy my challengers along the way, especially my friend Timothy Palmer at TCNN. But that I had a tiger by the tail with my identification of dualism as a primary problem was affirmed by various African spokesmen. Professor Zamani Kafang, a Nigerian theologian, in his booklet *Christians’ Integrity and Politics in Nigeria*, wrote, “We must fight to overcome this dualism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 24). He devoted considerable space explaining this perspective in the Nigerian context.

During 2011, an international conference was held at the Free University in Amsterdam, my alma mater you may recall, where the Kuyperian wholistic perspective received much attention. Jan Hoogland, chief editor of *Sophie*, a Dutch Kuyperian philosophical magazine, reported on the response of two international participants, one from Brazil and one from Kenya. Hoogland noted the awe and respect these two had for this philosophical tradition. They told him they had nothing comparable in their countries and were jealous. They considered the Kuyperian tradition as a kind of antidote to the dualism that marks their own national Christian communities. The Kenyan Isaac Njaramba Mutua explained that it is difficult for many African Christians to establish a connection between the Christian faith and daily life and did indeed use the term “dualism” to describe it, “a strong separation between the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane.’” Though the discussion was held in English, it is recorded in the Dutch language from which I translate Mutua’s statement back into English: “What touched me was the heartfelt desire and the wholehearted determination to establish a relationship between faith with all sectors of life and society. This rich Dutch tradition in which people (Christians) everywhere are interested, as this conference clearly indicated, contains the challenge to develop and protect...” (August 2011, p. 2).

Mutua himself, in an essay about his spiritual development, wrote the following under the title “The Experience of an African Scholar: In Search of my True African Christian Identity--Journey from a Dualistic to Holistic View of Reality:”

...things around me, and particularly the Christian life as lived by Christians and as I was expected to live, did not seem to match what I seemed to get from Scriptures. A compartmentalization of life was a clear reality and I had to come to terms with what it meant to be a Christian. It was an accepted trend of Christianity whereby life in the church mattered more than life in the “world”—the realm outside the church. Literally I was supposed to view my life in the class as worldly—secular, while life in the chapel as godly—spiritual. I was reminded that I needed to work more on my private time of prayer, Bible study, fellowship among brethren and evangelism.

While Christian Union meetings in my high school made me grow in my personal Christian life, they did not achieve much in assisting me to relate my Christian life to the so called “worldly or secular” matters which mattered a lot to me, because a big chasm existed between them. If I was going to be a teacher, a lawyer or a professor, how was my Christian faith going to relate to them? What did it mean to serve God? If all other professionals except pastors were not serving God in their professions, how meaningful was Christianity? I struggled with when I was supposed to wear Christianity and when I was not supposed to.

The answer to the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular did not seem to feature throughout my training. Sometimes we would come close to attempting to resolve the problem but the world view orientation that compartmentalises reality which shaped the training and most of Africa’s Christianity let us down.

This has forced me into the...work of Herman Dooyeweerd and particularly his engagement with Immanuel Kant from whom mainly the Christian dualism (which has drastically influenced African Christianity) celebrates its origin. Others who have motivated me include Naugle, Plantinga, Goheen and Bartholomew, Wilkens and Sanford’s, Sunshine’s, Skillen, Kuiper, Newbigin,...Wolters and a host of important Western Scholars who offer a good critique of the Western thought. Fowler has continued to be an inspiration together with BJ van der Walt whom I am critically evaluating in my study. As I reflect on this during my study journey, I am strongly motivated by Abraham Kuiper’s confessions in *Lectures on Calvinism...* (<http://www.cpchea.org/>).

Sorry about this lengthy stream of quotations, but my point here is to indicate how relevant the wholistic Kuiperian tradition is to Africa and that my writings about the dualism Christian missionaries have inculcated, both as to its reality and its devastating negative effect, are right on the nose. Anyone familiar with the tradition will likely recognize most, if not all, the names in the last paragraph as true Kuiperian scholars, with Dooyeweerd as the post-Kuiper icon among them.

This Kuiperian Christian perspective would often contradict the Nigerian Christian outlook, based as the latter was on the dualism they have inherited. (If this language is a bit heavy for you, you can either skip it or you may need to go back to Volume 2, where all this is discussed at length.)

All the while, we were wondering how we were going to pay for this project. How much would each volume cost? Where would we get the money? How would we market them? We prayed about these issues regularly and just continued to plug away in the confidence that the answers, including the money, would come in some way in due time. Here, too, we were not disappointed. In fact, it became a pilgrimage of financial, energizing and intellectual miracles that took us deep into our retirement and absorbed much of our resources without ever depleting them. Something like the story of the oil that never ran out, though always almost (I Kings 17:13-16). Simply amazing! Just stay with this story as it unfolds.

So, the story of a journey into an unknown country. I felt a bit like Abraham. God had invited me to begin a journey without giving me a roadmap. Just go. Just write and see where it leads. He will be there to guide and protect. And He was in an amazing way. We will never lose our sense of amazement as to how this journey unfolded and how it ended. Actually it is still ongoing, since Nigerians are reading these books and students are using them for their theses and dissertations. They are still making the rounds and we continue to be involved in their distribution, especially in Nigeria. Even the archives of this project we deposited at Yale University are still reaching people. Only last year I was informed by a Yale archivist that a scholar from the UK was coming specifically to study my documents.

### *Miscellaneous Christian-Muslim Articles*

In addition to the above series, I also wrote articles on the same subject for various magazines and journals. For example, there was one entitled “The Nigerian Christian-Muslim Standoff: Some Underlying Issues; Parameters for a Solution” (*TCNN Research Bulletin*, March 2000, pp. 4-23). In a letter to me, my friend Tim Palmer, one of the editors, told me that the article “is very popular” with the *Bulletin*’s readers; Nigerians “are very happy with it.” He thanked me for raising the standard of the *Bulletin*. Even the Jos CRC Mission director, not always happy with my approach to things, was sufficiently impressed to order 20 copies for distribution among CRC missionaries. But Tim felt I needed to do a follow-up article, for, as good as the article was, I left the reader hanging in mid-air. In his “Editorial Remarks” he wrote:

At this moment, Nigeria is wrestling with the questions of Shari’a law and the concept of a secular state. February of this year has seen the tragic outbreak of fighting in Kaduna on this issue. In a bold article, Dr. John Boer asks whether Nigeria wants to continue as one country with two main religious blocks. He asks whether we want Nigeria to work. Dr. Boer challenges both Nigerian Christians and Muslims to re-evaluate their stance towards each other. Dr. Boer also re-examines the question of a secular state. He calls upon Christians to reflect upon whether a secular state is desirable and what we mean by this concept. This article is provocative, but it is written out of a love for Nigeria that Dr. Boer acquired from his thirty years of ministry in this country.

The Christian side of this standoff, I suggested, is based on three pillars:

- Pre-colonial Muslim slavery of the ancestors of Christians
- The *dhimmi* or second-class status of Christians in Muslim history
- The Christian “soft Secularism” versus the wholism of Islam

The Muslim side has its own pillars:

- Excessive infatuation of Muslims for and pride in their religion
- Total rejection of Secularism
- Superficial concept of sin in human life

- Vehement scorn for anything with a Trinitarian smell

Then I provide some parameters for both Christians and Muslims, *not solutions but parameters within which I suggest the solutions need to be developed, a framework*. That framework was not sufficient for some; they wanted solutions. Even throughout my series, I steadfastly refused to provide solutions; parameters were as far as I would and could go. If Nigeria's wisest could not find solutions, how could an expatriate missionary?

In early 2001, I had a two-part article published in *Christian Courier* with similar title: "The Christian-Muslim Standoff in Nigeria" (January 22 and February 5, 2001). Part 1 presented the Christian viewpoint, while Part 2, the Muslim. For those interested in Christian-Muslim history in Nigeria, these are wonderful articles full of interesting information as to background history, etc. Unfortunately, the best I can do here for a sampling is to just list the section headings of each article.

#### Part 1: The Christian Perspective:

- Two huge blocks
- Background
- Western interests in Africa
- Sultan bought Muslim loyalty
- Sharia courts discriminate against Christians
- Muslim focus on politics
- Christians want equality

I end this first part with the statement that "in a following article I plan to present the Muslim perspective with the full expectation that Reformed readers will find it intriguing because of its (superficial) parallel with Reformed thinking." I also need to emphasize that the "Christian" perspectives I present here are *Nigerian* Christian perspectives, hammered out in the context of the very unique Nigerian situation. Christians in other contexts may not share these; they are not to be considered *generally* valid Christian viewpoints to be applied in other countries. I hope to make the articles themselves available at an address yet to be determined. You can always check them out with *CC* itself or go to the Islamica page of my website ( [www.SocialTheology.com](http://www.SocialTheology.com)) where the location of the article will be given once it has been made available.

#### Part 2: The Muslim Viewpoint:

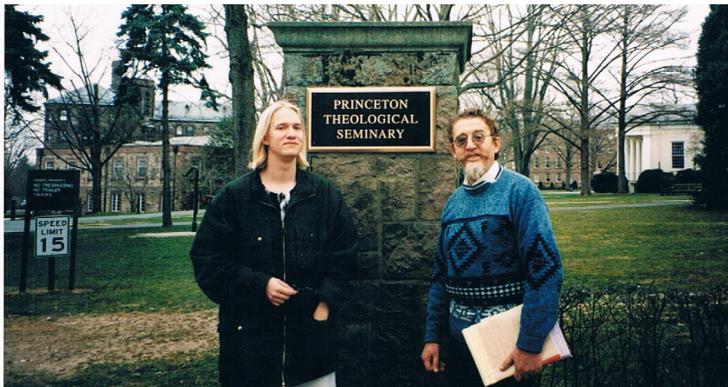
- Calling a spade (a spade)
- The dominant Muslim perspective
- Infatuation with the Muslim religion
- Islam vs the West: Crusade and  *Jihad*
- Colonialism
- Secularism
- Western moral bankruptcy
- Mission and church

- **Mainstream and fundamentalism**

*The Contemporary Kuyper (February, 1998)*

I attended a Kuyper conference: “Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper’s Legacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” It was sponsored by Princeton Theological Seminary, where it was held, by the *Vrije Universiteit* where I got my doctorate, by The Center for Public Justice and by Calvin College. It was held in February 1998. We could not really afford all the expenses incurred, but being a Kuyper fan, I could not resist this particular celebration, for that’s what it was, a centenary celebration of Kuyper’s famous Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton a century earlier.

So I went in spite of the fact that I had not been feeling well due to a prolonged cold. In addition, I had a problem with my sciatic nerve that made moving around uncomfortable and I was still struggling with the psychological and spiritual fall out from our recent trauma. It meant I was in poor mental shape as well and not on the ball as a conference of this nature requires. I had a ride with then President Byker of Calvin College from the local Princeton airport to the campus. It would have been a wonderful opportunity for some good discussion about Calvin, but I just was not with it and forewent a great opportunity. Furthermore, during the social times of the conference, I felt very insecure at my lack of standing—just an ex-someone with an embarrassing immediate past in the midst of so many Kuyperians that knew me and had respect for my missionary impact. I could not get myself to participate in the discussions and join the camaraderie. I marginalized myself. I was grateful for Wiebe’s “protection.”



Yes, Wiebe came from Yale to attend the conference as well. He noticed I was not myself and paid close attention to me, for which I was grateful. He commented to Kevin that it appeared I was getting old ahead of time. I am afraid I must have been a drag on him, for he needed to be free to move around in this circle of Kuyper scholars and make contacts for his future.

**Wiebe and John at Princeton\***

This international conference passed the following statement on Kuyper: “We... regard the legacy of Abraham Kuyper as a rich resource for Christian reflection and cultural engagement today.” They said more and not all of it was positive, for there is no way that a man with the philosophical, cultural and religious breadth of Kuyper would not have blind spots. These were left for his heirs to work upon on basis of the leading threads of this

heritage. I remember one South African “of colour” defending Kuyper against the charge of racism. He said that he stood on that podium before all these scholars, because the Kuyper tradition had released him from intellectual bondage and he was now free! There were some giants who addressed the conference, especially Nicholas Wolterstorff, the rock star of the event who delivered the Stone Lecture of that year. Then there were Bob Goudzwaard, a Kuyperian economist of note who could be found on any podium anywhere in the world where Christian economics was under discussion, and Elaine Botha from South Africa, who had taught for some years at Redeemer University College in Ontario.

That Princeton conference made stirs in Grand Rapids, where Kuyper had made quite some waves 100 years ago during his US Stone Lecture visit. James Bratt, a Calvin College Kuyper historian, stated that Kuyper’s speeches in West Michigan had a significant impact on Calvin, on the CRC and on West Michigan. Said Bratt:

A lot of people got a renewed sense of calling from that speech. Kuyper’s genius was his recovery and rearticulation of a lot of John Calvin’s ideas, many of which had largely been forgotten. He clearly reminded people of the notion that one’s whole life belongs to God. And that that includes such things as vocation – it’s not just soul matters or church matters, but also public matters, social justice, service.

According to Bratt,

...those influences are subtly felt still today in West Michigan with its high level of volunteerism and public service, its tremendous work ethic and its “squeaky clean politics.” West Michigan’s “Republicans with a conscience” are a direct result of Kuyper.

Bratt pointed to Kuyper’s notion of

...how to handle a plurality of religious convictions in public life. The traditional answer had been that you don’t recognize plurality in public life. There’s one accepted religion and everybody else either converts, dies or at least shuts up. The other answer is that religion is a private thing and the public sphere is neutral. He said no to both those options. He wanted people of all faiths to be vocal in public life, in the public sphere. He said a person is one whole person; whether Christian or Islam or Marxist that set of beliefs will affect your point of view and cannot be separated.

You look at North America today, you look at Africa today ... those are burning questions. How do societies deal with plurality of religious beliefs? Kuyper had some thoughts on such questions and I think we would do well to pay attention to him.

Bratt compared Kuyper to “such modern-day Americans as Martin Luther King, Jr., Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson, all of whom possess(ed) Kuyperian qualities such as intellect, persuasion, mass organization and political savvy.” (Thanks for this Bratt-Kuyper material

to Phil deHaan, a Calvin student, who wrote all this in *Calvin Connection* soon after the Princeton Conference.)

Bratt was also quoted by Charles Honey in a Grand Rapids Press article of March 7, 1998 about Kuyper's relevance today: "He was asking questions 100 years ago that Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants are asking today."

More important, Kuyper answered those questions in ways that could be useful to soldiers in today's culture wars. How to remain true to one's faith in a multi-faith society? How to blend faith and politics coherently? How to be Christian to the core and avoid either dropping out or giving in? He makes you think about the question more and come up with your own solution.... That's what makes him really valuable now.

If you feel that all of this is just an in-bred opinion in the predominantly Dutch-American enclave of Calvin College, here are a few opinions from other sources. John Bolt—yes, a Calvin Dutch—told the story of a visit to the campus by a well-known Ghanaian scholar, Dr. Kwama Bediako. During the course of his visit, he participated in a discussion that featured a heavy emphasis on Thomas Jefferson, a major father figure in the political formation of the USA. One Calvin scholar asked Bediako whether West Africa was not badly in need of their own Jefferson, to which he responded, "What Africa needs even more today is its own Abraham Kuyper." The person who had raised the question confessed to being "stunned, delighted and mildly embarrassed as the room broke out in applause."

I have in front of me a letter from an Indonesian brother, Iskander Saher, a social activist in his own (Islamic) country, who wrote, "I found that it is what we need in Indonesia," the "it" referring to the wholism of the Kuyperian tradition. Nigerians have also come to recognize the value of this perspective. One Nigerian student has written a masters thesis on my writings, because my approach intrigued him. Recently, I have been invited to assist another Nigerian student who wants to do a thesis about the relevance of Kuyper to his country.

All this reminded me of the prophecy of the late John Vriend, a professional translator of Dutch theology and philosophy into English, whose "office" consisted of a corner table in some nook in the Calvin Library. He was getting letters from all over the world in which people expressed interest in the Kuyperian tradition. He predicted that the Kuyperian century was not behind us but ahead of us; the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not the 20<sup>th</sup>; not restricted to his small homeland but spread out globally. I believe we are seeing that happening today.

Why do I write all this in these memoirs? First of all, to show you that my Kuyperian approach as described through the many chapters on ministry in Nigeria is not just my own dream, but is shared by a large group of people from all over the world, who think that even a century later, the thoughts of Abraham Kuyper are still very relevant for us today. This all gives me a feeling of affirmation, something for which I sometimes had to struggle in the context of our mission organization and in the CRC constituency. I also wish you to realize that this is not a Kuyper of past history but a dynamic figure for the immediate future.

*The Holy Spirit and Structural Revival*

I must have developed a reputation as a Kuyper enthusiast in West Michigan, or perhaps even an expert, which I definitely was not and am not. At any rate, I was invited by the Reformed Spirituality Network to deliver a Kuyper paper at a seminar during July 1999. I entitled the document “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Structural Transformation according to Abraham Kuyper.” The paper consisted of 28 independent propositions that were not always logically connected to each other. Let me treat you to six of them:

**Proposition 1**—A reading of Kuyper’s writing reveals a passionate concern for liberty, a throbbing affirmation of a religion that embraces life and culture in a comprehensive way and a vigorous engagement with that culture. This has all the hallmarks of a genuine, creative, Holy Spirit-driven revival in the best and deepest sense of the word, a very unusual movement of the Spirit.

**Proposition 4**—Kuyper reacted to various groupings of his age. One of these were the Evangelicals. After a brief and disastrous flirtation, he turned his back on them for their narrow dualistic view of the Christian religion and for their lack of a conscious worldview.

**Proposition 7**—“Spiritual warfare” is the contemporary Evangelical term for what Kuyperians call “antithesis.” The latter sounds old and musty to many Christian ears. It is considered part of that dull Reformed tradition that we have attempted to shake off in favour of the more contemporary “spiritual warfare,” a term that sounds so much more refreshing and vital. For a negative example, see Jeff Stam’s *Spiritual Warfare*.

**Proposition 12**—Spiritual warfare is not only a personal but also a structural struggle. New structures were established by Kuyper’s followers to counter the structures that embodied the secular spirit. Sin and rebellion against God had taken on structural forms that called for alternative counter structures. Awareness of the secular spirit embodied in these structures was too acute for Kuyperians to join them. Current expressions of that structural war are the Christian school system and the Christian Labour Associations of Canada and the USA.

**Proposition 18**-- Through common grace, the Spirit not only restrains the power of satan, but also generously distributes gifts and truth to mankind in general. Pagans and secularists alike create great beauty so that Kuyper, along with Calvin, had great admiration for classical culture and appreciated much of the Renaissance. He even approved of some of the results of the French Revolution, though he vehemently opposed its root worldview. In fact, in his battle against the secular spirit of his day, he freely borrowed from the very people and movements he opposed. Current students of Kuyperianism such as Bratt and Heslam emphasize how much he borrowed from them. However, common grace does not cancel either total depravity or the antithesis. The ambiguity of this scheme merely reflects the ambiguity of life itself. No single consistent formula can adequately account for the full range of reality.

**Proposition 28—Pentecost is more important than either Christmas or Easter. “Pentecost is the most noble of the three.” The coming of the Holy Spirit is the climax of God’s coming among us, first in Christ and then through the Holy Spirit.**

**And then a notion not included in the list of propositions: Christ came to one nation and culture, though His coming had a tremendous spillover effect on all. However, the Holy Spirit came everywhere without any restriction or limitation.**

**My concluding comments were not a proposition. I wrote, “I end this paper with a word of encouragement from Kuyper to his readers that was so typical of him and expressed his deeply pastoral heart for a tired, confused and oppressed people:**

**...have courage, you who are oppressed and tossed about by the storms! Your Saviour lives to pray for you, while in you lives and works God the Holy Spirit. Your God is in your midst and He will neither give you up nor forsake you! Whatever happens to you, “be strong and courageous” (Joshua 1:18)! Know and tell your children after you: It is precisely this that constitutes the work of God the Holy Spirit in you, namely that He lives in you in order to work through you. He causes you to do it and you do it in and through Him!**

**One vivid memory of mine about this conference is my nervousness at the presence of that scholarly translator, John Vriend. I felt so inadequate in contrast to his vast and intimate knowledge of original Kuyperian Reformational sources. Would he expose my “ignorance?” He was gracious. He contributed to the discussion without making my fears come true. A belated thank you!**

### *Other Writings and Lectures*

**Writing and lecturing have always been my passion with research an immediate second. That did not change when we left Nigeria.**

**During the waning years of the millennium there was much coverage in the media of the Hutu-Tutsi war in Southern Africa. Within the CRC there was a lot of concern about the violence between the members of three Nigerian churches among whom our Mission had been working. There were killings, looting, burnings and every kind of destruction possible between them. People were asking whether the Gospel had any effect on these ethnic groups. I addressed those issues in an article entitled, “Old Wine in New Skins: An Old African Worldview in a New Church” (CC, June 5, 1998, pp. 10-11). I first of all reminded the readers of the atrocities committed over the centuries by the “Christian” West. Many Western Christians would be offended by the question whether the Gospel had any effect on them, but that question would be as legitimate as it is about African Christians. The serious question was, I suggested, “Why has the Christian faith of the combatants not prevented them from such atrocities?” I explained that the old African worldview does not evaporate overnight upon conversion to Christ. It did not do so in the West. In fact, the West is still struggling with the residue of its pagan heritage, including especially that of the Greeks. It**

will not quickly evaporate in Africa either. The residue of that ancient worldview is still operative. It would take me too far to explain the contours of that worldview except to say that in African Traditional Religion, the point of religion is to persuade and manipulate the spiritual powers to do *our* will, while in Christianity, we are expected to serve God, to do *His* will. Therein lays the secret for that terrible contradiction.

During our ICS years, I cooperated with and received much help from the World Council of Churches (WCC), help in areas where my own CRC denomination was largely silent. During 2000, Marlin Van Elderen, a CRC editor of a WCC magazine, wrote an article in the CRC's *The Banner* in which he advocated that CRC join the WCC, a controversial topic. The article generated a rather heated debate in the pages of *Christian Courier* about the pros and cons of joining that I joined with an article entitled "World Council of Churches: Too Good or Not Good Enough?" My article was pro-WCC, precisely because I had benefitted so much from their programmes and literature just at points where the CRC tended to be silent. I ended the article as follows: "Perhaps the question is not so much whether the WCC is good enough for the CRC, but... is the CRC good enough for the WCC?"

### *Moving Amidst Turmoil*

During the last few days of a long trip in 2001, while we were in The Netherlands, Jos went up in flames due to Muslim riots. At the time Wiebe and K&T were still there. Wiebe stayed in the Gomwalk house in a fairly safe area, but K&T were staying in an upstairs apartment in downtown Jos. With shooting all around their premises, it was not a safe place to be. Their hosts, Lebanese Muslim friends, somehow smuggled them to another house hidden from the public view on an industrial property, where they stayed for several days till things calmed down. We were on the road and were not keeping up with the news. We did not hear about it till we landed in Grand Rapids and then, of course, worry set in. We were most relieved when Jos settled down and people could safely move about again. Thanks to Wiebe for his phone call assuring us that everyone was safe.

So we arrived "home" on September 5, 2001, and-- can you believe it?—we planned to drive our camper only nine days later to BC, the first step in moving from Grand Rapids to Vancouver as our permanent retirement abode. Well, we were still young and full of energy—only nine days after a busy five months' trip!

Why the "home" with quotation marks? Well, before we left for our five-months' journey, we had rented out our Godwin house to a group of Calvin students and had left our friend, Robert Eygenraam, in charge of the place. Our other properties had been entrusted to Bill Hart, a former colleague from Nigeria days. The students rented our house along with much of our used furniture. Some of the stuff which we wanted to keep, we temporarily placed in the basement and we ourselves moved in with Rob in his small apartment. So, the "home" we returned to was Rob's apartment.

But, of course, you know what happened during that time. Does 9/11 sound familiar to you? On TV, I actually saw the suicide mission fly into the New York Trade Center and the subsequent explosion that formed into tremendous dust clouds. We couldn't believe what we saw! What was this, who did it and who was behind this? These were the questions that cropped up immediately for most people.

It's all history and it has been recorded and analyzed in a million places. I won't go there, except to state that, once it all became somewhat clear, my reaction was very different from that of the politically-correct interpretation. Remember, I had spent years studying colonialism for my doctoral dissertation. I had written and/or edited books about the neo-colonial behaviour of the West and about the role of multinationals as well as the foreign debt of nations. Furthermore, I had started research into Islam and its opinion about the West. So, way before 9/11, I predicted in my own heart that one day the Muslim world, or some radical group within it, would take revenge. They themselves had been predicting it for years and I knew someone was only waiting for the proper time. I was as sad as anyone when it happened and so many people killed, but I did feel that this was finally our Western oppressive behaviour come home to roost. It was an opinion I had to be careful with as long as I was in the US, for it sounded like betrayal to most people. I could be more free with that opinion once we were in Canada.

If I am allowed to jump ahead a bit to after we had moved to Canada, I participated in a discussion on the subject in a letter to the *Vancouver Sun* on December 14, 2001.

The sad event did little to make anyone aware of the large plank in Western, including American, eyes. All everybody saw was the huge plank in *Muslim* eyes. Does anyone actually *read* the Bible verse in which Jesus warns us, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eyes, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5). In my view, that verse is a major key for interpreting 9/11.

We set off on the road with our old camper to BC on September 14, three days after the New York disaster. The whole country, in fact, the entire world, was all tensed up. Who would respond to this awful violence and how? As we traveled, we wondered how we would cross the border into BC, for things had become very tight. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, we arrived at C&A's place in Seattle and moved on to the border on the 21<sup>st</sup>. We were very happy we had no hassle at all. Actually, that did not surprise us too much, since we had to deal only with Canadian officials.

We found a camping place in Richmond, right on the Fraser River, across from where we could see the City of Vancouver, our destination. Within two days we found the apartment in which we still live today, twelve years later. We had decided we would try living in downtown Vancouver, since we had always been drawn to downtowns in all our travels, especially Vancouver's. Whenever we were in BC on furlough, we would spend at least one day in Vancouver's downtown. We thought it such an interesting place that we wanted to try to live there. We wandered around in a very popular folksy section of downtown called "West End," a very crowded place, a mixture of low and high rises, with lots of people on the

sidewalks and the main streets lined with restaurants and coffee shops from all over the world. We found one single two-bedroom apartment for rent, one, just one, on the entire peninsula. We contacted the manager, a Romanian lady, who showed us the place on the ninth floor and we took it right there and then. Since it was only on a monthly basis, we figured that if we did not like it, we could move out any month we wanted. We're still there! We paid her the first month's rent and returned to C&A's place in Seattle, experiencing no hassle at all on entering the USA. In view of 9/11, that made us very happy. We parked the camper on a Seattle side street near their apartment and took a plane back to Grand Rapids.

We moved back in with Rob for a few days, while we prepared to move our goods in a small Penske rental truck. We got a tremendous deal. They needed that truck on the West Coast and charged us only \$800 for a one-way journey. We filled it with our big organ and humungous "emperor" sized bed, my library, desk and some other furniture and "stuff" and off we went, another drive across the continent. After four days, we arrived back in Seattle.



Crossing the border into Canada was different this time, for we were moving into the country with an American rental full of our household goods. We had to declare all of our stuff and apply for Fran to immigrate. Seeing we already had an address, she was able to finish all the paper work right away. When asked to give our postal code, V6E 1Z9, she correctly pronounced "Z" as the Canadian "zed" instead of the American "zee." The Canadian border official was impressed and pleased and said, "Welcome to Canada!"

#### **Bute Manor\***

We were not traveling alone this time. Wiebe happened to be visiting in Seattle. So Wiebe, Cynthia and an acquaintance of ours offered to follow us to Vancouver in their car to help us move our goods into the apartment. That was so thoughtful and helpful to us, for we could not have carried all that heavy stuff by ourselves and had no one to call on for help in Vancouver. Cynthia, being heavily pregnant with Ezra at the time, helped by holding the right doors open at the right time! They all returned to Seattle that same day. Thanks, guys. That was great. We kept the Penske for a couple of days and then returned it to a dealer in Seattle as per our original contract and returned ourselves to Vancouver in the camper that had patiently waited for us on a side street.

We were starting a new life that was more different from Michigan than we had anticipated.

*Our Testimony: God Has Provided*

When we found ourselves back in Grand Rapids so unexpectedly in 1996, we had no idea what lay before us. Were we going to stay there or would we return to Nigeria? When it was decided we would not return, the question came up about where to stay. In Grand Rapids? But I was merely a visitor, a non-resident alien. I would have to immigrate. Should we go to Vancouver? I was told by some siblings that there were few, if any, employment opportunities. Besides, if we went there, *Fran* would be the non-resident alien and she would have to immigrate. We decided to stay in Grand Rapids for the time being and apply for a work permit and then a “green card” for me. God was good: He provided a work permit very quickly and the “green card” was not long in coming either. So, I was free to work. He provided the opportunity to stay and work.

Yes, that green card was quick in coming, but part of my history caught up with me in this context. After officials had researched my files and history, I was invited to an interview in Detroit. I emphasized my relationship to Americans: my children were all American citizen. The official brusquely pushed this aside as immaterial. My American wife did seem to make a difference. What was of more weight was that little incident at Blaine years back in 1958. That needed further explanation: why was I deported? I was grateful the official dismissed it as irrelevant and I thought I would never hear of it again. Alas, my innocent little deportation would come back to haunt me even in 2012, but that’s for later.

As to housing, the very first couple of months we had free furnished housing and after that a nice place near Calvin for reasonable rent. Years ago, we had bought a house for rental purposes. Now all we had to do was ask our tenants to move so we could move in a few months later. We had a permanent home waiting for us, all paid for. We bought it as an investment; God knew we would need it as our main residence. We were successful on both counts. He provided.

Fran got a job fairly soon with Hope Network, a large local Christian ministry to the handicapped. It was not the kind of job she was hoping for, but it brought us at least the basics for now. Salary wise, it was minimal, but it included the usual benefits, including insurance. God provided. After some months, Fran was transferred to an administrative job within the Hope organization. Much more to her liking and totally befitting her gifts. Also a much shorter commute. God provided.

Money wise, we had some investments, but were not getting much income from it. They were tied up in long-term deposits, since we had not expected to need them any time soon. We truly did not know how things would turn out for us, though we did know that eventually, after a few years, we would be alright. But, in the meantime, would we have enough to go around? I was more worried than I should have been.

Then we both received our severance pay, which gave us temporary relief. Not much later, our long-time friend Lou Haveman totally unexpectedly offered me a temporary property manager job. You’ve read about that job. It was not the prettiest, but it did provide a fair income. Its legality was somewhat shady, but we decided to proceed. And then, of course, that CLA job materialized. It was only temporary and experimental, but the income from those three jobs now provided more than we had expected. God continued to provide.

We slowly got used to a limited income and lived accordingly. When my temporary jobs disappeared, I managed to get some “income” from other various little jobs I found, just enough to keep our heads above water, with Fran supplying the basics. Actually we got used to our “near-poverty-line” existence and did quite well. We managed to buy that truck and camper.

We did so well, in fact, that we started doing a lot of travel, as you will read in the next volume. We didn’t really plan most of it but were kind of “forced” by family situations created by our kids who moved around a lot. So, we went with the flow, paid our tickets and traveled. At the end of the year, we would stand amazed at how we had done financially. We had not made any gains, but neither had we gone backward! As we studied our financial comings and goings, we could figure it all out alright, but we still considered our finance miraculous. Remember my theses about miracles: They do not have to go against or ignore all known scientific rules or “natural” laws; they can sometimes be traced by ordinary measurements, but because of timing issues and God blessing one’s efforts over and above the normal, they can still be described as genuinely miraculous. Both finances and health could have failed us, but God protected us on both counts.

And then my 62<sup>nd</sup> came around and I could begin drawing from both my CRC Ministers’ Pension Fund and Social Security. Neither one was fully funded. I began drawing prematurely and thus received comparatively small amounts, but it put us over the top. Things were easing up still more. The time for our investments to mature was also drawing closer. We continued to praise God for His mercies—and we continued to travel both within and beyond the continent.

Why do I tell you all this? Aren’t finances personal? Not so sure about that, especially if we use that as an excuse to escape accountability. I am telling you all this to testify to the mercy of God as He saw us through our crisis of location, job and income. Of course, there was also that personal crisis, but that we treat as confidential, except to say that His mercy extended to that as well so that forgiveness could take place. When we told Danny McCain, a dear friend of ours and currently professor at Unijos, about our intentions to write these memoirs, he urged us to be clear and open about God’s guidance and protection in our lives as well as His forgiving grace. In addition, the years of ministry He gave us were amazing Kingdom adventures for us and continue to be that. We so testify. Amen and amen.

## Chapter 40<

### The Vancouver Years

#### October 2001--Present

*NOTE: I remind you that, like most chapters, this chapter is divided into sections that often describe developments and events that happen concurrently. A section may take you into a certain time period that gets covered all over again in the next section, but then from a different angle.*

#### *A Harried Start*

On October 2, 2001, we crossed the border into BC. I, at least, had come home—in some sense. I had left BC, Canada, in 1958, 43 years ago after having been in Canada a mere seven years and a Canadian citizen for just one. For Fran it was an official and full emigration, her second, the first being from The Netherlands to the USA. For me it was not a legal immigration but a cultural one, for the city, the nation and the culture had changed almost beyond recognition. The downtown where we lived had changed from a collection of mostly low, two-to-four storied buildings to one celebrated for its forest of high rises. The society had changed on the surface but even more in its underlying worldview that now proudly, not to say “haughtily,” embraces Secularism. The transition to a secular worldview has advanced far and continues to shape—or should I use the word “distort”?-- the mentality of the people and the structures of society to such an extent that I hardly recognized it as the Canada I left. I almost felt like a foreign citizen.

Ours was a rather harried beginning that immediately saw us celebrating a church anniversary in Port Alberni. So, we hadn’t even spent a weekend in our new home when we did what we seemed to do best—travel, this time to Port Alberni, my teenage home in the centre of Vancouver Island. An hour and a half by ferry Vancouver-Nanaimo and then another hour by the now modern road to the Alberni Valley. It was a great dinner event in some hotel. My contribution was to do a bit of reminiscing about my custodial job at the church as well as about my time as President of the Young People’s Society. Then I gave them a small book on the history of the Valley written by Trevor Goodall, my friend Vincent’s uncle, who lived at Sproat Lake. It was out of print and a valued little book for Valley history. Usually, when we go to Port Alberni, we stay for a few days to visit friends, but, with guests waiting at “home,” we had to hurry back.

It was a BC fall, which in this case meant a week of heavy torrential rains. It probably was not a record-breaking week, but it must have come close. Just rain and hard rain one day after another. And that had to be the weekend that Ray and Gert visited us! They were on their way to visit their daughter Rachel in California and decided to accept our invitation to

stop in Vancouver before heading south. Of course, we had not expected them our very first weekend, when we were still sitting on crates!

They had hardly ever seen such rains and were not impressed with our climate. Why did we boast about BC? Despite the bad timing of Ray and Gert's visit, I felt forced to attend that Port Alberni anniversary. So we left Ray and Gert in an unfurnished apartment in a strange city bombarded by monsoon rains. What a terrible combination. They made the best of it by visiting cousin Auke Prins in Abbotsford for one day. What a beginning for us!

We spent the next couple of days "showing off" the city to Ray and Gert, all the while ducking the rains. It simply was not a good experience for anyone. Ray and Gert never returned to Vancouver and neither did any other Prins, except Trena, whose husband Francis was also from BC and thus had many relatives here that drew him.

Apart from Ray and Gert, our first visitors were C&A and Asia. Asia was a toddler at the time, our first grandchild. We were so fond and proud of her and took many pictures of that first visit. Compared to Grand Rapids, it was so nice to have them so "near" in Seattle—only some 200+ kms and an international border separating us.

The next month was spent trying to settle in, including shopping for new furniture, most of it from Ikea, that I had to assemble, not exactly my forte. Fran is always smart enough to keep out of my way when I assemble stuff, for it tends to trigger my darker side, what with two left hands, a "slight" temper mixed with a sense of frustration complicating the experience.

We also visited some of my siblings and other relatives as well as some friends, with the emphasis on "some," since they are legion in number and spread out all over the province. It was a delightful re-acquainting process that was so different from merely visiting them as we had done over the decades. This time it was for keeps. When the Wolferts received our first phone call, Si exclaimed, "Amazing!" For some reason, he had not expected us to come back to BC, I guess.

However, if you thought we would now settle down, guess again. The next month, December 21, 2001, baby Ezra was born in Seattle to C&A. That meant a trip there, of course, and sleeping in their crowded apartment in Greenwood. It was a virtual invasion for C&A, for the entire clan came, K&T as well as W&J. In fact, that was the time Joanna was introduced to the family. Some of us slept in the apartment of a neighbor who was traveling. Those were a rough few days for Cynthia, just having given birth to her second and then having all of us around in a crowded apartment.

Other relatives also came to visit us in Vancouver, curious how we could live in this highrise downtown culture with all that traffic. They were all suburb and mostly small-town people. This, some of them lectured us, is for young people, not for the retired. Strange, for there are hordes of retired who have lived here for years, who would not live anywhere else. As time went on and our relatives visited us more often, many of them came to concede the advantages of living in downtown, where all your facilities are within easy walking distance and we were within three blocks of the famous Seawall and fifteen minutes walking from

Stanley Park. Yes, but still, “not for me.” Or, “I would like it, but my spouse wouldn’t think of it.” You know what? Go ahead and stay in your suburban car culture. When our milk runs out while cooking, we just cross the road and pick up a new jug. When our bread or eggs are finished....

To put it mildly, this was a harried introduction to life in Vancouver. We could have made it less so by not visiting siblings and other relatives that first month, but I was so eager to touch base with them that I could not wait.

This section has introduced you to our new phase of life. From here on, I describe our involvement in the life of both church and city. After that, I move over to family life. The first two parts form the context or environment in which we live our family life.

### *Church Life*

If you have read the earlier volumes, you will know that, from our childhood on, church always formed a central part of our lives. This continued to be the case in Vancouver. Thus, true to ourselves, we begin our Vancouver story with our church life.

#### *Liberal Downtown Churches*

Vancouver does not have a reputation as a “Christian” city. In fact, along with the rest of Canada, it prides itself on being secular and “tolerant,” but Vancouver even more so than most of the country and downtown even more so than most of the city. Though believers are in the minority, one could argue that the city as a whole displays strong Christian influence, especially in its great compassion for the poor and marginalized

The downtown has its normal mix of churches. They, of course, include Roman Catholic and Anglican cathedrals. Actually, two Anglican churches. Though we had an Anglican history in Nigeria, we did not feel drawn to these, since their diocese was embroiled in an ugly battle about gay marriage that led to a court case and secession of some parishes, including the largest Anglican Evangelical parish in the country. Apart from a few special events, we have little to do with these churches.

We soon sensed that the smaller of the two and very close to us, St. Paul’s Church, was not only gay friendly, something we might have been able to live with, but it seemed *dominated* by gay culture. As the gays in the West End prefer to separate themselves by having their own special restaurants and other establishments, so we would not have felt at home in a church where they dominate. Which is not to say that we cannot live with gays anymore than they cannot eat with us. There is an easy-going amicable relationship between the two communities in the West End. It is one of the few places in the country, if not the world, where gays can feel comfortable and at home. Though, according to my reading of the Bible, homosexuality was not part of the scheme or intention of creation, the gays are with us in this

broken world and need to be accorded a place. The West End is one of very few of such places. I am glad for them; they need it. It is one place where they can feel at ease.

We once attended an interesting service at St. Paul's. The gay-friendly Bishop preached a sermon about the Biblical call for social justice. If you had not known better, you might have thought him to be a Bible-totin' Evangelical, Reformed even, judging from the way he quoted and approached the Bible. From his bullish behaviour towards the seceding churches, including taking them to court, it was plain he was far from Evangelical or Reformed. But, it *was* a good sermon.

Then there were two United Churches as well, including St. Andrews-Wesley United Church. The latter shares an intersection with First Baptist Church (FBC), but from what you hear on either pulpit, you'd never know from the one that the other exists. Like the Anglican churches, in these United churches gay culture is very prominent, with at one time both pastors openly practicing and freely talking about it from their pulpits.

These two denominations, Anglican and United, together represent the gay and liberal spirit of downtown. They live into, participate in and put their stamp in many practical ways on that culture. They are *part* of it. For example, the Cathedral runs prayer and blessing meetings for the Sun Run, the largest mass running event in the city. St. Andrews-Wesley has held prayer and blessing services for the pet animals of the West End, where pets are everywhere. Just imagine a stately cathedral-like church with its fancy carpets down the isles full of dogs, cats, and some other pets, a horse or two even! But as humorous as it may sound, the services are solemn, dignified and meaningful. After all, these pets play an important role in the lives of people who often live alone in their apartments. People who might be totally secular in their worldview and who would hardly ever darken the door of a church, entered to have their pets blessed! There was a hidden seed there that cracked open just a little. Such a service makes sense to a community where the traditional family has lost its respect and where pets are often valued more than children.

In addition, this church runs jazz sessions every Sunday afternoon, year in, year out. The event is a mixture of music and "soft" meditation, slight hints and reminders of the neglected spiritual side of life, again, for a people who might otherwise not be seen in a church, and for musicians who might even feel scorned by the church for their "secular" jazz. I believe these churches have some significant things going that speak to their secular neighbours. They enter into their lives.

Pastor Gary of the United Church annually preaches a series on the current award-winning Oscar films. He spends serious time on this project. He watches them at least twice and takes notes. It is a highly popular series that draws large audiences. Again, a way to enter and engage the culture of the people. However, judging from the few series sermons I heard, there is a tendency to miss the central relevant Gospel perspectives on them. I always leave with a feeling of incompleteness. They might be great reviews in some other contexts, but as sermons they leave something serious to be desired. Last night (February 25, 2013), as we walked past the church, we noticed that the series is on again. This coming Sunday he is going to deal with a movie that is the next one we plan to watch, the one about Abraham

**Lincoln. I am not all that eager to spend an evening on American history, but Lincoln is a fascinating historical figure.**

**Sometimes there is a degree of hypocrisy, even among white liberals, or perhaps especially there? Well, what would you expect? Liberals are humans also! The attitude of “not in my backyard” or “nimby” is very strong in Vancouver. Yes to all kinds of social services for the poor, but not in my backyard. There was a push to open a home for wayward youths in the middle of downtown, not far from St. Andrews. There were powerful forces opposing its location. Dr. Gordon, the pastor at that time, thundered from his pulpit, “Yes, in *our* backyard!” But whose backyard is it? Most of the members live in other sections of town. Gordon himself lived comfortably in a seaside community north of West Vancouver, one of the most comfortable communities in the nation. His private property would not lose its value; only that of his church that would never be sold and thus was not affected. I was both humoured and annoyed.**

**We did worship in that United Church quite often for a while, but it became apparent that though the United Church has great orators, poets and singers among their clergy, to my mind too many are totally liberal and deny the essential historical fact of Christ’s resurrection. When I took one of them for a lunch to discuss this, he said to me, “Come on, John, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century!”**

**The first few years, we would attend especially this church’s Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve services. The place is packed with people from all over the Lower Mainland. They sing mostly the traditional favourites accompanied by a choir composed of professionals and an organ that even out-thunders that of FBC across the street. Absolutely soul-thrilling singing, but I once heard one great preacher introduce a singing session by describing those traditional songs as “songs we used to believe in”!**

**At the same time, another one once attended the biennial Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College and was exceedingly impressed with the level of scholarship and art. He should have been, for it is one of America’s largest literary conferences with 50 publishers and journals participating along with over 1500 literature enthusiasts and several Pulitzer Prize winners as main speakers (CC, May 20, 2002, p. 12). When he learnt that Calvin was our family’s Alma Mater, his jaws dropped in amazement. “Wow,” was his response. “You graduated from *that* place?!” Yep. He was properly impressed and I thoroughly flattered.**

**One Easter Sunday morning this church was the scene for the national Easter service over CBC, Canada’s national broadcast service. A long lineup of people snaked around the church already by 5 am. We were amazed at the huge crowd so early. Anyhow, as we approached the lineup and knowing that this was a mainly theologically liberal if not ignorant crowd, I shouted at them, “Christ has risen!” Most of them looked at me as if I were some drug addict off the street, of which Vancouver has more than its share. Apparently, it made an impression on at least one of the church’s elders. A couple of years later, I visited the church’s council meeting in connection with our Christian-Muslim books. One elder popped up, “Ah, you were the one who greeted us with “Christ has risen!?” It marked me as**

an interesting eccentric to whom they were sympathetic. They lent me their ear—about the books.

When we arrived in Vancouver, this church would draw only a small congregation on Sundays. The main preacher was formal as were his sermons. However, after he retired, his replacement soon became very popular and the church began to blossom and is now pretty well filled most Sundays. This is partly due to his great personality and presentation, but also to the fact that the church feeds into the local gay culture. The church emphasizes its all-inclusive attitude, where almost anything goes. It has even featured the Qur'an on its bulletin. Gay-wise, the pastor has another man for his partner, the man being a city counselor. Both are divorcees with children and grandchildren. He speaks freely from the pulpit of all of his relationships. So, an unusual set of circumstances for a Christian church, but it fits right into the West End culture that surrounds us.

The congregation's senior pastor has recently (2012) been appointed denominational Moderator, while his partner, a well-known politician, was sent by the Vancouver City Council to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia precisely to confront them there about their opposition to homosexuality. It appears he failed to get the ears of any official, whether Russian or Olympic. No one was apparently impressed or saw the need to pay attention. Notice I did not use the term "homophobia," for it has nothing to do with fear.

There was also a smaller United Church congregation just down the street from us. We attended there a few times. We even were allowed to hold an exhibition of our Mafa African Gospel art in the foyer. The preacher, also gay, was another very good speaker with a great personality. I learned at least that the United Church produces some great preachers—if you can concentrate on delivery and personality while ignoring Gospel content.

However, during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that smaller church lost so many members that it was closed down. The building was demolished and is being replaced by a controversial high rise. I wrote a letter to a local paper discussing the controversy in which I commented that the building's demise that they so bitterly opposed was the direct result of their own decision not to attend and support the church. Choices have consequences. They are opposing the consequences of their own choices. The letter was not published.

While I decry the Liberal/liberal orientation of these churches, I must remember that when I started my research years ago for my book on multinationals, *Caught in the Middle*, and I looked to my own church, the CRC, for supporting documents, I found none. I found the first denominational documents on the subject in the United Church. They had been focusing on my topic for decades, while the CRC had hardly thought of it. I was so moved about those United Church materials that I wept for joy. Where was *my* church when I needed it, the church that proclaims that there is not a square inch of creation that does not belong to Christ? Why is it that the constituents of Evangelical and Reformed churches are frequently so secular in their economic choices, while Liberals are often very aware of and opposed to the negative consequences of secular capitalist economics—the clergy and leaders at least?

Our own denomination, the CRC, meets and cooperates with the United Church in the context of the Council of Canadian Churches, of which both are members.

### *First Baptist Church (FBC)*

Again, remember: these various sections run mostly concurrently, all at the same time. Though the section above took us all the way into the present, I am going to take you back to our initial arrival in Vancouver.

The first Sunday in Vancouver, we decided to try the downtown First Baptist Church (FBC), a large church only a few blocks from us, sharing an intersection with St. Andrews-Wesley United Church. We did not want to repeat the Grand Rapids situation where we passed several churches on our way to First CRC; we would look for a suitable church within our own neighbourhood. The Vancouver CRC, to which we belonged during our first year in Canada (1951), was too far away to serve as our neighbourhood church. FBC's pulpit was vacant. They invited a number of very good preachers to fill the pulpit, especially Darrell Johnson from Regent College.

That first evening, we attended a prayer meeting at that church. It was badly organized and might have turned us away, had it not been for the fact that we were asked to introduce ourselves. When they discovered that we were former missionaries who had just moved into the West End, they immediately jumped on us and asked us if we would be willing to host a Bible study group in our apartment. We agreed, not realizing that they also meant us to *lead* the group. We were surprised. They knew nothing about us apart from what we told them!

It did not take long for two of the pastoral staff to follow up by visiting us within the next few days. Apparently, they came away with positive feelings and the church let us loose with a weekly Bible study group. If nothing else, it was a great way to get to know some people immediately.

### *Bible Study Group*

And so, there we were, barely in the city and already responsible for a group. The group was an interesting mix. A few had just gone through the Alpha course that was very popular in many denominations to acquaint people with Christ. A few were newly baptized adults. There was a young Korean lady who attended every session without fail, but who never opened her mouth. But over time, she learned her English, became a nurse, and is now a vivacious charming lady with fluent English, all of that in just a few years. There was a Romanian refugee couple with both of them still learning English. There was an elderly Canadian lady who had walked out on her abusive pastor husband. There was a schizophrenic who was a former stock broker as well as a failed hijacker, prisoner and prison rioter, a huge fellow who came to Christ through FBC. He was a very gentle fellow normally, but he could also lose his temper, at which time I would hurriedly get out of his way, though I never saw him violent. There was a fellow with fetal alcohol syndrome,

adopted by a Jehovah Witness couple, during his childhood taught to shoplift by his “mother” and sometimes tied up in their dark basement. What are the chances for you to escape such a past? He came to Christ and successfully struggled to overcome it. He has now been employed by a church group as a maintenance person for some years and recently got married to a fine gal. There was a converted Muslim from Iran who escaped being deported from Canada by the skin of his teeth and who was forced to “waste his time” making a living, but whose thoughts and interest were focused exclusively on converting other Muslims. The group later came to include Adam, a refugee from East Africa, whom we got to know through the CRC and who became our friend. His story is so convoluted that it would take a book to tell it and so impossible that he caused us many sleepless nights, something like Jude in Grand Rapids. Except for that Jude, no one has ever stressed us out like Adam. And then there was this “ordinary” Canadian senior couple, the woman I could hardly understand due to her very rapid speech and my deteriorating hearing. People being people, everyone had their own unique personalities and histories, with the resultant mix creating a most unusual dynamic. I am not sure a more variegated group of people has ever been gathered for Bible study. A couple of these folk have left and disappeared out of our life. A few drop back in occasionally, while the rest are among our continued circle of friends. There is nothing like a small Bible group if you wish to create a social life for yourself. Ten years later, we joined another one, but this one of a decidedly limited duration and objective—and I am not the leader this time! It has already run its course.

One problem I had leading the group was that we were seriously engaged in research for and the writing of our Christian-Muslim project. This put pressure on me and prevented me from spending sufficient time on preparing for each session. I often felt ill prepared. The second problem was that my hearing was beginning to deteriorate, so that I had trouble hearing what was being said. One Canadian sister was very active in the discussions, which I appreciated, but she spoke so fast that half the time I had to guess my way through her contributions. The heavily accented or even broken English of some participants also was difficult for me to make out. Thirdly, we traveled a lot; every trip meant an interruption, sometimes for several weeks. The group ran for about three years, after which Fran and I decided to wrap it up. It had been a rewarding experience; we had gained some friends and a wider group of acquaintances.

The group also generated parties occasionally. I remember a small “post-baptism” party we gave in the Three Roses coffee shop next door for our two Romanian refugees Ionella and Ian Pop as well as Daniel, a tall handsome hunk of a guy. The group also participated in my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday party in Hobbit House of FBC.

Our lasting gain from this project was acquaintance with an interesting variety of people, some of whom became our friends. It also gave us a good reputation with the church’s pastors; they trusted us almost immediately. In the long run, the church did not gain many members from this group, for over time most dispersed to other churches. Though we were not Baptist, I did my best to speak as a representative of that tradition. Since some of its preachers clearly have logged into the Reformed tradition, usually without saying so, I felt free to draw from that tradition as well, provided it did not go against that of the Baptists in so far as I knew.

However, we were baptized as infants and merely sprinkled instead of immersed. This meant that we were accepted only as “adherents,” but did not qualify for full membership. To achieve that status we would have to be re-baptized according to Baptist tradition. We were not about to renounce our infant baptism and so were doomed to remain marginalized in the church, even though we did have considerable room for participation.

After each church service, there is the coffee social. It is supposed to be a time of bonding and getting acquainted with each other. We soon discovered that there were two distinct groups: the core group of long-term members and the more recent arrivals consisting of all kinds of people, nationalities, degrees of education, etc. The first group hardly bothers with the second; we belong to the second and soon realized that we were socially marginalized. We often invited people for a lunch after church, but few of them ever reciprocated. We concluded that this was neither part of Baptist or Canadian culture. In a restaurant, yes, but not in your home.

I just referred to a negative aspect of Baptist life, but the positive far outshines it. The singing and the music are superb and uplifting, a good blend of traditional and contemporary, with the latter being the more dominant. But when the organ plays, it stirs one’s soul with its powerful majestic notes reaching upwards to the very throne of God. Being a large urban church, it has a lot of talent in every way, not the least in the area of music—singing as well as every type of instrument. It continues to be a joyful feast of song and instrument Sunday after Sunday, not to forget the fine choir for its part. On top of all that, most of the guest preachers are also deeply spiritual, moving and Biblical, especially Darrell. The church extended a call to him, but at the time he was not prepared to leave Regent College. That would happen a few years later.

The church is also very good at celebrating Christian festivities like Christmas and Easter. Everything is carefully thought out and organized in meaningful ways. For some years, they were holding their Easter service in the cavernous beauty of the Orpheum, an impressive and traditionally designed theatre in downtown, to which they would invite the entire city. Enough people responded to fill the entire place. A regular feature at this service was to give special recognition to a person who had provided unusual service to the community of the homeless and addicts that were “living” in the poorest postal code district in all of Canada, just two kilometers down Hastings Street. As the supply of excellent guest preachers began to dry up and the church’s own pastoral staff had to pitch in, attendance began to drop, giving reduced and the church could no longer afford the luxury of the Orpheum. The service was moved to the church itself. Since Darrell Johnson became the senior pastor, the Christmas and Easter seasons are truly joyful blessings to us once again. We love them so much that we have decided not to travel during those seasons, but avail ourselves of the spiritual services of First Baptist, the CRC as well as of some other Vancouver churches.

### *ESL Programme*

It did not take long for Fran to get involved in the ESL programme—English as a Second Language. This programme was run by Barbara Forster, a former SIM missionary in the Jos area. Though not really well acquainted in Nigeria, we did recognize each other. Most of Fran’s students were Asians, some of whom had been attending this class for a long time already without having learned much English. It was more of a social event for them in which they could meet some of their compatriots with whom they could speak their own language.

There were other students who really benefitted from the programme and that made the time spent quite worthwhile. After a couple of years, there was someone who was interested in teaching Fran’s class on a permanent basis. He wanted to use it as a practical project for the academic thesis he was writing. So Fran handed it over to him and she continued serving as a substitute when necessary. She still serves in that capacity today. Like teaching at Hillcrest, a couple of times ESL students have taken the two of us out for some nice lunches as a means of showing appreciation. We have a couple of nice pictures of her classes.

### *The Shelter Programme*

A regular event that I soon joined was the so-called “Shelter” programme. Under this programme, the church fed a good dinner to around 50 poor people every Tuesday evening, almost all men. They had a license to have 25 stay overnight. The following morning they would again feed breakfast to around 50. These were mostly homeless and addicts, some of whom appreciated the service, while others thought of it in terms of entitlement, a typically BC disease. I would help with the breakfast time by setting up, serving food, cleaning up. Occasionally, a client would stay to help clean up, but most of them would just simply walk out after the meal, with or without a “Thank you.”

The volunteers in this programme included a lot of non-Baptists. It was mostly a fun group I enjoyed working with. Again, it helped me get acquainted with some new people. There was an Aboriginal with an artificial arm and hand, who was both very handy and very jovial, who would stay overnight to supervise the night guests. He was also somewhat of a computer expert whom we hired a few times to “discipline” our equipment and, once, to help us organize new machinery. We also had him over for some meals, once including his wife. I am thinking we need to further develop our friendship with this unusual (for us) couple.

For a while, there was also a Black man, a Caribbean I suspect. With our Nigeria background, I have a special feeling for Blacks and often try to befriend them, but it did not work with him. He spoke perfect English, but had a totally unique accent and speech pattern—always indirect and often kind of poetic. He was always poking fun of his fellow crew members in an unpleasant sort of way. I tried to make the best of it by reciprocating, but in a more friendly way. Sometimes, I would try to joke with him and lightly just touch him, as I often do with people, but he would blow up and yell, “Don’t touch me!” Wow. It was part of my style in relating to people that I would do spontaneously without thinking about it. It was

very hard for me to stop the gesture so that it created tension for me. In fact, the combination of his insolence and his exaggerated reaction to a personal touch made it increasingly unpleasant for me.

An additional problem was that my hearing was deteriorating, so that I could not always hear what the clients were saying. Some of them had no patience with that. In addition, I began to feel it was taking too much time away from our writing project—leave home at 5:30 am and return at 9:30. It included a time of fun fellowship with the crew around a light breakfast at a local coffee shop. All these things put together finally led me to withdraw from the programme after a couple of years. I made myself available as a standby they could call anytime, which I still do today.

In the meantime, my Black friend died in a tragic fire on a small boat in which he lived, anchored in False Creek, not far from us. Also I bought hearing aids so that, when I do take a turn, I can hear. Without his threatening presence and my new ability to hear, I enjoy the occasional turns I take now.

However, I do question the efficacy of this programme. Most Baptists regard it as an evangelistic effort. As such it is not very successful, though a few people have been rescued by the staff from their addiction and come to faith in Christ. I sometimes ask to what extent this and hundreds of similar “soup kitchens” in downtown enable the clients to continue their way of life. There is always free food available from the various churches and the abundance of social agencies. Does it feed into the entitlement attitude of many clients? If, on the other hand, you have no expectation beyond offering a cup of cold water to a poor man, well, then it is clearly successful and can be seen as a legitimate response to Jesus’ encouragement to give that cup. My own thinking, strongly influenced by Kuyperian structural thought, often makes me doubt its efficacy, except for that cup....

### *FBC-Muslim Relations*

Throughout the years at FBC, I have contributed in the line of relations with Muslims. After we had made considerable progress with our Muslim writing series, people became aware of our project and of knowledge of Islam. This led to a number of FBC engagements. I once was scheduled to speak on the subject three Sunday evenings in a row. That was my debut in this area of concern. My presentations were well received. My emphasis was on developing normal neighbourly relations, chat over the fence, take a Muslim out for coffee, invite them into your house and expose them as much as possible to your way of life and Christian attitudes without overtly evangelizing. Let God do His thing with them, as He has been doing all along via dreams. FBC published a summary of these presentations in their weekly “FirstNEWS” bulletin in which I briefly discussed: mission considerations; neighbour relations; dialogue; Post 9/11 factors (September 14, 2008).

At another time, I had developed a relationship with a Turkish group known as the “Damla Foundation,” that was showing interest in closer relationships with Christians. How that all began will be told in the section under “World Views Collaborative” below. I discussed their

interest with Pastor Jan Porcino, who was very excited. We ended up inviting the Damla people to a Thanksgiving dinner at the church.

The occasion was preceded by an introductory meeting of all FBC members who would participate in the dinner. I was the facilitator for the event, during which we discussed various issues that arise when interacting with Muslims. Again, I warned against attempts at direct evangelism, insisting that such an approach would offend most Muslims and turn them off. It was emphasized that every one who would attend, should come with the intention of making an arrangement with one of the Turks to meet somewhere, whether at their house, at a coffee shop, at a movie or wherever. They all promised to do their best.

In preparation, Pastor Jan and I discussed the issue of *halal* and *haram* food. *Halal* is like the Jewish *kosher*; it is acceptable. *Haram*, on the other hand, is forbidden food. Based on my understanding of Nigerian Islam, I assured Jan that any food that does not contain any pork product should be acceptable. Alas, Islam is not the same everywhere and Muslims are not the same everywhere. A couple of hours before the dinner, the Damla leader called Jan to tell her that his version of *halal* was more strict: The food would have to be prepared by *halal* cooks in a *halal* kitchen not contaminated by other foods. Jan could not get hold of me for consultation. The traditional turkey meal had already been prepared. What to do? Pastor Bob, her colleague, then bought a whole new complete table full of food from a *halal* establishment! Now we had two tables of luscious food, something for everyone!

The dinner started with some hiccups. It was scheduled to start at 7 pm at the church. I was appointed to be at the entrance to the parking lot to identify the guests and hook them up with someone to guide them through the church's labyrinth of hallways. No one showed up at 7, but there was a group of men congregated on the sidewalk whom I did not recognize and so just left them chatting with each other. It was not until the leader arrived almost 45 minutes late that we realized that group of men were Damla people. Well, eventually we were all there and the appropriate formalities and speeches were delivered from both sides. Since they came from a land with many churches a thousand years old, I welcomed them to our new church that was only 100 years old. That brought a good laugh. I also announced the Baptists' intention of everyone making an arrangement to meet with one of our guests as explained above. The Turks agreed that would be a great idea.

Time for the dinner itself. Someone from both groups led in prayer and the guests were invited to come and help themselves to the food. The difference between the two tables was explained clearly. Lo and behold, many, if not most, of the guests went to the turkey table and ignored the *halal* one! All that trouble, turmoil and expense! The explanation is that they may all have been Muslims, but *Turkish* Muslims, which meant *secular* Muslims who did not all follow the traditional Muslim prescriptions! Our guests were not all serious or practicing Muslims; many were "nominal" Muslims. They did not worry about these food distinctions, except for the leader and a few pious others. Unfortunately, I am not sure anyone left with an agreement to meet a counterpart in the near future except Fran and me with the Damla leader. In fact, we visited each other a couple of time in our homes, while I had several lunches with him in town.

Some months later, the Damla Foundation offered to celebrate a Turkish Muslim tradition known as *Ashure* or “Noah’s Pudding” with FBC in the church. According to Wikipedia, “It is claimed that when Noah’s Ark came to rest on Mount Ararat in northeastern Turkey, Noah’s family celebrated with a special dish. Since their supplies were nearly exhausted, what was left (primarily grains, dried fruits and the like) was cooked together to form a pudding, what is now called *Ashure*.” It “is distributed to friends, relatives, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, etc. without regard to the recipient’s religion or belief system as an offering of peace and love.” It was a fun occasion that did not take much effort or expense to organize, since we were guests in our own “house.” It was light hearted as an occasion like this should be and could be useful for further relationships and joint events—*could* be. I’m afraid it did not really work out that way.

Subsequently, the Turks invited FBC members to a couple of their weekly picnics during the following summer. Though these, too, were fun events and informal, not many Baptists responded. It seems that no one was really seriously committed to building lasting personal relationships, neither the Baptists nor the Turks. Fran and my arrangements worked for a while only because we were committed and were very interested in developing personal friendly relationships with the Muslim community around us and pushed hard. I write more about that under the Muslim section below. In the meantime, almost all the staff at FBC has been replaced, with the old ones either retired or moved on. The current crop have not indicated any interest. Perhaps we should tell them the history of it all and see if they would like to make a fresh start. I did send a circular to some FBC staff, but no one responded. The end of a story.

### *Miscellaneous Participation*

The preceding paragraphs describe the major forms of our participation in FBC. We are only “adherents,” not full members, a fact that keeps us from full participation. For example, one member recommended me for a seat on the mission committee, but the Council rejected this on basis of our incomplete membership. I let it be known that I was a good Bible reader and eventually I was “tested” and found acceptable. I am now a regular part of the group of readers and generally get very positive response. We participate in various meetings, social as well as business, including congregational business meetings, but we do not have a vote. The reason for attending such meetings is to be up to date with respect to developments in the church. We just about always participate in the coffee time after the service, while we often take lunch in Hobbit House, a satellite building with kitchen and dining facilities for church events. It is a great time and place for socializing. We usually also participate in events like senior Christmas dinners. In June 2003, we attended the annual church picnic on Keats Island, a place where they own some property and use for retreats. It takes an hour to get there by boat, a real fun ride.

Ever since the Winter Olympics of 2010, the church has had an “Open Sanctuary” programme, during which sandwich boards are put out on the sidewalk, inviting people to come in for a rest, a prayer, counsel or just a touristy visit to see the inside of the church--whatever they request. It is interesting to meet the people who enter and discover their

reasons. Quite a few are curious about what the inside of a church, especially a Protestant church, looks like. Sometimes the visit leads to discussions on a wide range of topics. Fran still participates in this programme. It is always two people spending their time chatting or reading or doing handwork, while they wait for visitors to enter. I have participated a few times and brought a laptop to work on these memoirs.

At the social front, we have had some of the clergy over for either a lunch or dinner. However, we have been in the home of only one of them, Jan Porcino, who apparently did a lot of entertaining in her home. We appreciate that very much. She has since retired from her position at FBC. I did not really expect the clergy to reciprocate, busy and involved as they are. Inviting them into our home was in order to know each other better and to express appreciation for their ministries. We enjoyed especially an afternoon spent with Darrell and Sharon Johnson, the current senior pastor couple. He was, you may remember, that occasional interim preacher during our first couple of years at the church.

However, we do not consider ourselves to be successful at the Baptist social front. While the CRC community often invites each other into their homes for coffee, lunch or even dinner, we do not experience such hospitality and friendship at FBC. That appears to be typical of Vancouver culture. People socialize mostly in coffee shops and restaurants, hardly ever in their homes. This holds not only for our relations at FBC, but also for most other friendships struck up in the neighbourhood. Apart from coffee shop socializing, there are many socializing events within the church--breakfasts, lunches, dinners--, but these are always organized by the church; they are not spontaneous expressions of fellowship and friendship and seem never to blossom into personal friendships and spontaneous social life. We continue to miss that spontaneity. So different from the Christian Reformed Church.

Recently, we have joined a newly established West End Connection Group, another word for "cell group" or simply "small group" at which we engage in Bible study, prayer and fellowship on a weekly basis for eight weeks, with pastor Judy Lang as our leader. After that, we may disband or re-organize for another limited period. Once we get going, membership will be closed to avoid interrupting the social and spiritual dynamics that we expect to develop. If we decide to do another eight weeks later, we may open up to new members again. The response of the eight members was very encouraging last night.

The first three sessions or so went very well. Judy is a good leader and participants all contributed. However, after that, attendance became more sporadic. One could no longer count on group loyalty and even Fran's enthusiasm began to wane. However, at the beginning I had opted for Tuesday evening meetings on a bi-weekly basis. Instead, it was decided to hold it weekly on Thursdays. After the third session I resigned, for Thursday is the day of so many other events that interest me that the sacrifice became too much for me. By now the programme has run its course and the group is no longer meeting. And those who did attend till the end of the season have moved on to other churches and even countries.

Pastor Judy told us a story about the first time she saw me. She was just new to the church and was in her first worship service with us. I happened to be the Reader that morning. I wore dark blue suit. When she saw me in those clothes, with my grey beard and with my

hearing aid remote control dangling in front, she thought, “What a delightfully diverse church. An Orthodox priest reading Scripture. How diverse is that!” She could not identify that remote control and thought it was some holy Orthodox clerical symbol.

You may ask just what it was that made us choose FBC over against those liberal churches. I like the way the liberals enter into the life of the community. Though the Baptists try as well, the others do so on a wider range of issues. However, for me the denial of the resurrection is a central issue that draws many other issues in its wake. It is a matter of a modern worldview that finds it hard to cope with the more open universe of the Bible with its stories and perspectives. The core Gospel is missing, even though they serve the community in admirable ways.

Our interaction with FBC continues on a weekly, if not daily, basis. A couple of weeks ago (July 2013) we became aware of an upcoming Aboriginal March for Reconciliation. It immediately occurred to me that I should encourage various organizations to which we belong, to participate. So I e-mailed Carson Pue, the new CEO of FBC, about it. He responded that both he and Darrell, the Senior Pastor, were already planning a lecture on the subject and then to forego the Sunday morning service so all members can participate in the March. I was happy they were already on it.

Our own denomination, the CRC, meets and cooperates with the Baptist Churches in the context of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, of which both are members. Our local CRC congregation often cooperates with Granview Baptist Church, while our pastor couple are both former students of Darryl Johnson, and greatly admire him for his preaching talents.



John's Lecture Advertised\*

### *Christian Reformed Church (CRC)*

It is indeed the First CRC in the city and, in fact, the mother church of many of the congregations now spread all over the Lower Mainland. However, it is located in a suburb,

while we were interested in churching in downtown. In fact, I was thinking we should just leave the CRC and join a downtown church. But when we checked it out one Sunday, we received such a hearty welcome during the coffee hour, so many people either knew us from our missionary years and so many knew various members of the Boer clan that we were almost the last ones to leave. Fran commented that perhaps I want to leave the CRC, but the CRC is so much part of my family history and so much part of me that I couldn't possibly leave it. Eventually, we decided to become part of both CRC and FBC, full member of CRC and adherent in FBC. The one would be our root church; the other, our neighbourhood church. It's not an ideal arrangement, but the best we can do under our circumstances. And so it has been till today.

At the time we arrived, the Vancouver CRC consisted of mostly older people, with hardly anyone below 40. We thought that perhaps we had come to turn off the lights! However, Pastor Henry Numan became mentor to some Regent students. They started attending this church and were given space to practice their new pastoral skills. Soon more Regent students followed and before you knew it, other youngish folk, many of them professionals, were drawn in and *voilà*: suddenly we had a church full of children and younger folk, most of them seriously committed to both Christ and His Church. They started to volunteer for many functions and ere long, they were running the church, with us seniors kind of looking on. This process was helped along by the fact that Numan retired and was replaced by the Vander Veens, a young couple themselves, both ordained and both graduates of Regent.

### *My Position in the CRCNA (CRC in North America)*

I am running ahead a bit. The Vancouver CRC pastor, Henry Numan, had known us for many years; we used to visit him and Aileen during furloughs when they were pastoring various CRC congregations in this area. He wanted to have me rehabilitated in the CRC and to preach. When we explained my situation to him, he worked hard with me to get me on the pulpit, but since I was defrocked, that was not allowed according to the denomination's protocol. Then he called some office in the CRC Pentagon in Grand Rapids and they told him in no uncertain terms that, unless I went through a number of well-defined hoops, I could not preach. In fact, as he told me, they said to him something like, "John Boer preach? No way!" This exchange with Grand Rapids made it plain to me that my file was accessed by people who were not supposed to have such access, according to the agreement by which I had resigned. Someone had broken the agreement by breaking the seal of the file and allowed wider access to it.

I was very upset and seriously considered taking the Grand Rapids administration to the Judicial Committee, the same one to whom the Evenhouses had appealed. We decided not to proceed in view of the amount of travel that might be involved to Classis Illiana, south of Chicago, that originally examined me for ordination and later defrocked me. I envisioned several trips and meetings. Besides, though I thoroughly regretted the behaviour that led to my defrocking, I had/have too much resentment in my heart to kowtow to Americans.

Nevertheless, even today (2014) I am still sometimes tempted to take up the issue. However, at 76, the time left me for restored ministry is too short to make it worthwhile. Of course, a restoration to honour itself might be worth the effort. But for now I will just wait for the Lord Himself to put on the white robe awaiting me for the next phase of my journey. Or do you think even He might also have succumbed to today's tasteless "t-shirt and blue jean" fashion? God forbid! Then I might have to do a rethink!

### *Our Participation in the Vancouver CRC*

Though prevented from preaching and certain leadership positions, I was/am free to participate in congregational life at every other level. I soon ran an adult Sunday School (SS) class about Islam and enjoyed the exchange with the participants. Tony and Agatha were among our first friends in the church and members of the class. Tony would pose the same question at every session: Is the God of the Bible and Allah of Islam the same God? I kept him at bay throughout the course till the last session and even then I did not give him a definitive answer. Rather, I presented the class with a couple of alternative approaches to the question. My main answer was the parable of my parental family—ten kids and each has her/his own picture and memory of as well as relationship to our parents. Same parents; different responses, relationships and memories. Where would this parable take you? Draw your own conclusion, but not too hastily, for the parable has room for nuance.

Some time later, I tried to run an adult SS class about the Christian in our secular society. I suggested various key concepts that should be kept in mind and then would try to link that to current events in the city. There were quite a few participants and the discussions were lively. However, again, I did not give enough time to preparation due to the pressure of my writing project. Secondly, we traveled too much so that it became an irregular event. Eventually, the very idea of Sunday pre-service classes grew increasingly unpopular and most such sessions were dropped by the church. Subsequently, it became almost impossible to organize any serial event, with great loss to the congregation. Only occasional Saturday morning events seemed to work, but they had to have a finishing date, nothing perpetual.

One of the things I decided to explore was the whole area of Christian involvement in the legal profession. This was not something that just happened to occur to me. I had long thought about some kind of crusade addressing Christians in the legal professions, particularly lawyers. As I observed evolving North American culture from my Nigerian perch, I noted that the legal profession was contributing strongly to distortions in society and, in fact, had created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. I also observed that with their exorbitant fees and methods, lawyers had taken justice beyond the reach of the common people. In addition, I noticed that they were not interested in justice per se, but, rather, in winning their cases regardless of the truth and in making as much money as possible. I was aware of national Christian associations of lawyers, but few if any of them did anything to transform or redeem the profession. At best, they champion causes with religious colouration without transforming the profession itself.

So I invited church members to a series of meetings to begin exploring the issue and a number of them attended. I soon realized that I needed to become more sensitive to the culture of both the nation and CRC. I was a cultural stranger and could not find a way to move the project forward. In addition, I became aware that I could not do both: Develop this lawyer programme *and* write that series on Christian-Muslim relations; it would be one or the other. I also concluded that I had started off with the wrong crowd. I should have been more patient to find a more suitable target group to work with, more ecumenical and with more passion for this specific issue. So, I wound up the series of meetings and abandoned the effort for now. However, I have been saving newspaper and other clippings that deal with lawyers and justice in the hope that perhaps I can do some writing on the topic after we have completed these memoirs. Many are the times I get enraged and my blood pressure rises when I read stories from that cultural segment, especially at the uncritical Christian participation in what I consider the totally unjust “justice” systems of North America.

Another issue in which I had been interested for a long time, way back to Nigeria days, was that of public Bible reading. This interest actually goes back to the college course I took in Interpretive Reading with Prof. Ann Jansen. I am often annoyed at the poor way in which the Bible is read during worship services, by pastors just as much as the members. Preachers spend much time preparing for their sermons; choirs and other singers don’t just get up and sing, but they practice. However, it seems that most Bible readers just get up and read with little or no forethought. In the process, they read so poorly that they hide the true meaning of the passage and it takes the preacher a full 20 minutes or more to unwrap it for the congregation. Without intending to boast, people notice the difference when I read the Bible and often comment that my reading opens up the meaning of the passage for them. Well, that’s the intention, right?

My offer to do a 3-4 hour workshop on the issue was accepted. Believe me, I spent a lot of time on preparation. Around fifteen members attended and showed great interest. At the end of the session they said such a workshop should be repeated every few years. I took that to heart and am waiting for the invitation to do a repeat. But after quite a few years have elapsed, I should probably raise the subject myself again. I think I will. Thanks, John, for reminding and encouraging yourself!

More recently, I have also started leading the children’s service and enjoy it tremendously. It is a challenge to address children with the Gospel in simple words, sentences and concepts. I find humour helps a lot. But sometimes I wonder whether I teach the children or entertain the adult congregation! After one presentation, an elder who himself has a public reputation for being a brilliant scholar, described it as “brilliant.” Coming from him, I confess to feeling flattered, but I wonder if the kids recognized that!

With so many youngish and active members, including the Vander Veens, the liturgy has changed considerably. There is often a Regent intern in charge of developing the liturgy in cooperation with the pastors. Various teams take leadership in the services. They create the liturgy and assign the reading and the musical parts. I am member of one of these teams and so sing or read about once a month. The team members are mostly of the younger generation, with whom I enjoy working, except that with my poor hearing, I have trouble

understanding the discussions at our practice sessions. This younger generation communicates differently from mine. It is typical that we practice the singing, but we still allow the Bible reader in the service to do her/his thing seemingly without having seriously studied and practiced the text. Some do well; others, not so well. The inconsistency continues to annoy me.

I did enjoy the singing. After about 50 years, I was back into the position of lead singer, something I have not done since leaving Alberni in 1958, though now not as a single individual but as member of a team. My voice went through a valley, as you may remember, but it came out stronger. Now I know something about breathing and about singing in the front of my mouth, not in the back and thereby straining my vocal cords. I tried to sing with an opera type voice that I admire so much, though with a continuing degree of frailty and uncertainty. Every now and then my voice broke down and would be silenced. Nevertheless, I delighted in this new singing role—while it lasted. In March, 2014, I resigned. The combination of poor hearing and an unreliable voice forced it on me. It was a hard decision to arrive at.

Somewhere along the line, I was invited to take on the role of congregational Mission Representative. My functions would include encouraging interest in the programme of CRC World Missions (CRWM) our former employer, but also interest in missions in general, *foreign* missions, that is. However, I soon discovered that I was still too resentful against CRWM to function properly, so I resigned. Unfortunately, the two young ladies who took over this work, after starting out with a bang, kind of petered out it seems. At least, we heard little if anything from them about missions. Hence, recently, in 2012, I offered to take up that mantle again, with the intention of making it a broader concern so as to cover missions in general, both at home *and* abroad, not merely to represent CRWM, though that would be included. The end result of the discussion was that I would represent Missions Fest but not resume the general mission mantle. I was already serving as MF representative in the CRC. We mutually agreed, but I believe Trevor feared I was going to spread my mission net too widely in the church and get it involved in projects too diversified for this rather small church to handle. Admittedly, that danger existed. Trevor seems to know me well!

So far, this section has been mostly about me. Well, yes, Fran participates in all the events described and supports me in all my efforts, but she does not play an active *leadership* role in the church. In fact, she keeps herself kind of marginalized. She's a self-described support person, something you may not have noticed from her work in Nigeria! The Council invited her to stand for Elder, but she declined, basically because it would involve a lot of running around to visit the members assigned to her and who live all over the Metro and beyond. We have no suitable vehicle for that kind of activity and the transit system is not only time-consuming but also does not give adequate coverage, especially at night. She is an enthusiastic participant in the post-service koffee kletz. It is there that she makes many acquaintances and friends who may later be invited to our house or we to theirs. We are often among the last ones to leave. Both of us take our assigned turns to serve at coffee time and clean up. Fran is much more active at FBC, and, as you will learn below, also at St. Paul's Hospital. Both of these places are within easy walking distance and that makes all the

difference for us, in our immediate community rather than the distant root church. That makes a lot of sense.

Throughout all of the above CRC activities, we found and still find it difficult to juggle membership in both churches. Too many crucial events or decisions would simply pass us by as we were occupied in the other church. It was/is not an ideal situation, especially also since there are many other interruptions due either to travel or to local events we want to attend so that we frequently end up attending neither church, sometimes for weeks on end. For example, during the two months leading up to Christmas 2012, we were involved in all kinds of other activities. We visited sister Martha twice in Victoria, one to celebrate her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. We spent one Sunday morning attending the annual Memorial Day ceremony to remember fallen Canadian soldiers. I remember too vividly how the Canadian Army flushed out the Germans from our area in The Netherlands to ignore this event, even if it falls on Sunday morning. Then there was the West End Senior Christmas Dinner organized by the Rotary for the seniors in our part of town. On Boxing Day, we started a trip that took about a month to visit all three children and their families.

But whenever Fran and I discuss how to solve this tension, every solution that occurs to us will only make things even less satisfactory. We do not want to give up our participation in FBC, for we enjoy the ambience of a downtown church over against a suburban church, of a large church with many people involved professionally and as leaders in every part of the city. But neither can we make a radical break with the CRC: It is too much in our blood. And even though I am dissatisfied with the effect of CRC in our province, I am too aware of the philosophers and other key national Christian figures that the denomination produces that have radical influence as leaders, especially in American culture. This holds particularly true for leading philosophers. Though that may sound irrelevant and “merely” academic, the philosophy that is created on the campuses of today will become the “common sense” of the next generation, even when that generation may not know the source of its thought patterns. The CRC produces pioneers in the development of the Christian worldview, an exceedingly crucial cultural function that we need to support, even if at other fronts the denomination in BC seems to have little practical effect.

Having said that, I rush to acknowledge the crucial role the CRC’s educational pioneers have played in the development of the private school system in this province. They did so together with Catholics, other Christians and even secularists, but it was the CRC worldview that provided the framework on basis of which the battle was fought and won. I highly recommend reading the history of this struggle as recorded in Victoria Cunningham’s *Justice Achieved: The Political Struggle of Independent Schools in British Columbia*, published by The Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia (FISA).

That struggle took place during our Nigeria years and we did not become aware of it until later, but here the members of the CRC of BC played a most amazing role with lasting effect in the province. Whether the CRC community would have the balls to fight such a battle now is a very good question. I had nothing to do with this struggle, but I am proud of their achievement, for it showed how powerfully the Kuyperian perspective can overcome the argumentation of the so-called “neutrality” of the secular community. Other Canadian

Kuyperian organizations like CLAC, CPJ and ICS have similarly reasoned their way to victory through the courts with exactly the same kind of logic. As one contemporary TV commercial promotes a certain cleaning product, “It works!” What better recommendation do you need? But it took a lot of effort to overcome the irrational prejudices of the secular mind to recognize the superior logic of Kuyperian thought, especially its emphasis on pluralism. It has introduced freedom of education or educational choice to our province, a precious gift to all its citizens, even those who may dislike the source!

### *CRC-Canada vs CRC-USA*

Probably you remember the struggles I’ve had over the years in my relations with CRC-USA as well as with the setup of the church. It was an issue that kept annoying me, especially because no one seemed to do anything about it. Canadian leaders told me to mind my own business and they would take care of this problem. Yea, sure.

It is by no means just a personal hang-up that I should get over. Probably I should at least get over the personal part of it, but what of the organizational aspect? I last referred to it in Chapter 21. The issue kept staring me in the face. The 2013 annual January Series of Calvin College lectures, true to its tradition, gave no indication there was a Canadian part to the church and to the ownership of Calvin College. The brochure for the 2014 series lists Canada as one of the two *foreign* countries where there will be a “remote webcast” for people to listen in. In 2012, Kathy Vandergrift, President of the Canadian side of the CRC Board of Trustees, still complained about the “negative implications” of the Canadian side of things (*The Banner*, March 2012, p. 15) and she is just one in a continuous long line of complainants. Bruce Adema resigned as director of Canadian Ministries for the CRC end August, 2012. He said that his greatest challenge was

the eternal questions of a bi-national denomination, where the one part is larger than the other, with different histories and inclinations. How does the Canadian part of the CRC maintain an effective national witness while being part of a united denomination? How can national distinctiveness be celebrated without being perceived as a threat of division? (G. Postma, *The Banner*, October 2012, p. 10).

He is not the first to resign with this kind of question in mind. It’s been an ongoing problem that people in the national Canadian CRC structures have been battling for a long time without anyone apparently doing anything serious about it. During the summer of 2004 there was also a spurt of writing on the issue in *CC*.

Finally, in 2013 it looked like something is brewing. In January, a “Canadian Forum 2013” grew out of a conversation held by Ontario CRCs that raised the issue. Richard Bodini, a spokesperson for the Forum, said, “We want to give space for Canadians to speak with one voice into the denominational processes that will impact the Canadian portion of the denomination.” The question is what “God is calling us to do in our Canadian context, and what are the leadership, structure, and strategies required to do this?” (G. Postma, *The Banner*, January 2013, p. 13). We are now early April 2014, and still no sign of anything

happening at that front. In June of 2013, Harry Houtman wrote a letter praising the CRC-USA for the way they have nurtured CRC-Canada, but also demanding that time had come to recognize Canada's maturity. Hands off! Let go! I believe I can predict....

So I called one of the organizers of that Ontario conference and was told that they prevented the conference from making too much of this particular problem, for they did not want to upset the denominational leaders in Grand Rapids. Exactly—and that's why nothing ever happens. The necessary corrections cannot be made without upsetting people who have vested interest in the status quo. It is time for CRC-Canada to stand up and *declare, announce* where it wants to go, hopefully in association with CRC-USA but a looser form of it. Seeking permission and negotiating has not gotten us anywhere and will not in the future. The discussion continues without apparently going anywhere. *The Banner* inaugurated 2014 with two articles on the subject in January by editor Bob de Moor and grass root CRC-er, Adrien de Jong. So, another year of spinning wheels? Ach, we Canadians, we are so damn polite. "Sorry" seems to be the mantra deeply embedded in our national psyche. We CRC-Canada have indeed indigenized!

But wait! An online *Banner* article of March, 2014, indicates that changes *are* brewing with the Canadian members of the denominational Board of Trustees forming a Canadian corporation known as "Canada Corp." I won't go into the details of this new arrangement, but it opens the door to hope for a better future. Gayla Postma, the author of the article wrote,

The new approach "includes regular gatherings of Canadians to focus on the future of the CRC in Canada specifically, a voice in setting priorities for all ministries in Canada, and input into the budget from Canadian perspective," said Kathy Vandergrift, president of Canada Corp. and vice president of the full BOT.

Vandergrift said that the changes parallel an expanded role for the Canadian Ministries Director. "That helps to make this a 'new day' for CRC ministry in Canada," she said.

Vandergrift having been at the forefront of these developments, has her eyes wide open and is not to be fooled very easily. So, I register a hesitant turn from cynicism to a careful hope. Perhaps....—but there have been perhapses before!

Why do I spend so much time on church organization in these personal memoirs? Because this aspect of the CRC has always personally bothered me. I am both a missionary and missiologist. I love this church. I know that a church under colonialist bonds of an imperialist nation will have difficulty appealing to the colonized peoples. It must be free to respond to its own culture without colonial interference. I want us Canadian CRCers to relate to our US brothers and sisters in a positive way, appreciate each other, cooperate with each other, but this can only be accomplished in a context of total equality without either side chafing at the bits. So much for an "apology."

### *Missions Fest Vancouver*

Missions Fest (MF) is an annual event held in downtown Vancouver. Well, it's more than that, but this annual conference is its major face. Considering the raw secular atmosphere of the city, this Fest is an amazing phenomenon. There it is, since 1983, in the Convention Centre, right in the centre of the city. Hundreds of booths of all kinds of Christian outreaches to every part of the world and to many different cultural sectors. A hundred or so seminars with speakers on all sorts of mission-related topics. Besides all these seminar speakers, there are always a half dozen or so plenary speakers chosen from among a core of activist Evangelical world leaders that deliver major challenges to audiences which often stretch the large halls in which these events are held.

Probably the most significant is the youth programme with its great music and premiered films that draws tons of youth from all over the Lower Mainland. It is the place where we often meet our BC grand nephews and nieces, people that I hardly ever meet anywhere else. So, here you have this amazing crowd of youths come together to participate in all these wholesome activities, the largest crowd of young people in the city centre apart from sports and music events, doing neither drugs nor alcohol nor rioting, but intent on finding meaning and purpose for their lives. How wholesome is that?

You would think it would attract the media, but no, the media won't touch it—silence, absolute silence! There can hardly be a more obvious example of anti-Christian prejudice in the media. I once asked the writer of a religious column in a local newspaper about this. He explained that he had tried but that his editors refuse to cover the subject.

As to our own participation, the first few years Fran and I just attended the event. We did develop some criticisms and noticed some serious problems, but basically we rejoiced especially for its impact on all these thousands of young people. Who could match that in this secular province? After a few years, we had seen most of the booths, but then turned to the seminars and found a lot of challenging stuff there. In 2008 I actually gave a seminar myself on the subject of "WWW: Wholistic World Witness." Well, what else would you expect from John Boer? I described the dualistic worldview of Christians that I had always battled in Nigeria and indicated that Evangelical world leaders had come to confess the reality and tragedy of that dualism and rejected it wholesale. I also asserted that this dualism prevents us from a viable approach to Islam that is more wholistic. The lecture is published on CD and is available from MF. I continued participation in the seminar programme of MF, but now in the form of hosting seminars and introducing the speakers. For the last few years Fran has been helping at the seminar table by preparing packets for the speakers and hosts and by answering general questions.

Every year I think about doing a lecture again, but the pressures of other writing projects always keep me from the final decision. In the meantime, I have come to find out that the number of applications from seminar speakers is *double* the space and time available! There is a huge pool of available speakers. The hard part of it is the need to reject 50% of the

applications! So, they don't miss my submission, but still, next year.... Heh, I'm John Boer. I've got things to say!

We got ourselves on MF's electronic mailing list and slowly became more active in it, especially after Pastor Numan from CRC asked me to represent the church at MF. I began attending some meetings and picked up materials for distribution. Slowly, Dwayne Buhler, the Director, began to notice me. During 2010, he nominated me for membership on the Board of Directors. Membership is for three years and renewable.

When I was interviewed for the above position by an MF committee, I was asked what I would bring to the MF table and responded with three challenges: Bring MF home; make it more wholistic; get the CRC more involved. By bringing it home, I meant that it should pay more attention to our secular local Canadian and BC culture, that the home front needs attention more now than the other continents. The interviewers agreed heartily with those suggestions. I also told them I would try to get the CRC to support MF more enthusiastically. I was appointed.

Fran and I are working hard to get the members of First CRC Vancouver more interested in MF, to become volunteers, to give more generously and to attend the annual conference. I believe we are making some impact. We've seen more members on the conference floor than previously. We are doing this by means of inserts in the bulletin and the pastors' electronic "First Glance" as well as by placing notices on the bulletin board and distributing MF brochures.

I'm also trying to encourage our CRC Classis or district churches to take more of an interest in MF. I successfully requested a 5-minute slot for an MF promotion speech on the Classis floor a few months ago. I gave a speech that was well received and I distributed brochures, some from MF and some created by myself. I followed that up with a visit to the pastor of the Burnaby CRC that was already a member but under a name I did not recognize. The pastor was very open to MF and will do what he can to support it, I believe. I asked that they appoint an MF point person with whom I can work.

After my Classis speech, another pastor presented a mission speech that was very wholistic in its thrust and in which he made several positive references to my presentation. I was very pleased, of course and made an appointment with him. We met over a Tim's tea in Maple Ridge and had a great time exploring each other's opinions about the church and making it more wholistic. He also promised to take my message about MF to his council. We'll see where this takes us. My long-range goal is to visit every CRC pastor in Metro Vancouver. Only yesterday did I have a short visit with the pastor of Fleetwood CRC in Surrey. His reaction seemed positive and he will refer the matter to the church's Missions Committee.

Earlier that same day, I had an appointment with the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) with their BC regional office in Langley. The local chief hauncho, Jim, comes from an Evangelical background and was recruited from the ranks of organizers because of his good work. It so happened that Dick Heinen, the national chief whom I have known for years, was in town and he joined us for the discussion. He explained that the arm

of the CLAC that would be the appropriate agency to work with MF is the new CLAC Foundation, a separate arms-length organization that deals with the religious aspects of the union and constitutes kind of a “labour mission” by supporting unions in other continents. It gives its members, mostly non-CLAC folk, an opportunity to participate in such a labour mission. Since then I have established contact with the Foundation. I am hopeful that the Foundation will come through, if not for the coming 2014 MF conference, then in 2015.

All of the above are part of my triple agenda to turn MF into a more wholistic direction and to get the CRC and its spinoffs more involved. These are really two sides of the wholistic coin. The third side of that coin—Yes, I know, most coins have only two sides, but this is an unusual one—is to explore ways to get MF to pay more attention to the Canadian and provincial scene, that is, turn into a more local direction beyond the Downtown Eastside. For this purpose, I hope to have a discussion with an influential Board member who is knowledgeable of and sympathetic to Kuypertian thought, one of the founders of Regent College. I was also hoping to get a Richmond-based CRC Chinese pastor on the MF Board, since MF is looking for greater people diversification, but the brother cannot consider it right now due to pending academic pursuits. I have since learned that the MF Board does not accept two members from one denomination.

I am also looking for a person or a way to build a bridge between the two CRC classes or districts in BC in order to get more CRC involvement in MF.

*Inset:* The original single BC classis was divided into two using the Fraser River as the boundary. Now each classis consists of a string of churches some of which are practically neighbours, as the Maple Ridge and Langley churches are, right across the river from each other, but they have little contact and do not strategize together for the region or province. It effectively cuts their ability to create a province-wide outreach or even just Metro outreach. When I discussed this with one pastor, he smiled and said that effective provincial or Metro outreach was not part of the concern when it was divided. Imagine, a large swath of the CRC re-organizing itself without considering its effect on outreach! What does that tell us about this church?

Finally, I have been trying to get an MF support group started at Elim Village, a large Christian senior establishment in Surrey that was started with CRC inspiration and has a lot of CRC senior residents, including my sister Karen, Inneke Lodewyk, the Wolferts and a whole lot more as well as Bruce Robertson, one of the founders of MF and a former President. So far, none of those participating with me on this project were too hopeful, but at least they were willing to explore it with me. The idea would be to raise a group for prayer and financial support at a time when MF is having serious financial troubles. This could be the first such group in existence. However, the two people working with me on this project, both Elim residents, though cooperative, gave me little hope for success. Two other Elimites with whom I discussed MF similarly were not encouraging. I gave up on this effort.

So, lots of plans, challenges and MF activities ahead of me. I just hope I am not taking on too much, but I find these issues challenging and worthwhile. I need to follow up on the pastors I mentioned above.

One other concern that I developed since joining the Board is that the Director Dwayne Buhler and his small staff spread themselves too thin. I admire Dwayne as a leader from many points of view, but I recognize a tendency in him similar to mine when I was with the Institute of Church & Society in Jos: trying to cover the entire Christian waterfront and being involved in too many inter-church activities. He gets overworked and there is not enough time for getting or keeping the member churches on board. Dwayne is training a new CEO to soon replace him and I will push for a policy that keeps the annual MF Conference front, line and centre with all of *its* aspects, especially the role of youths and of the churches.

### *Volunteering at St. Paul's Hospital*

I have referred to Fran's volunteering activities at St. Paul's Hospital (SPH), just a ten minute walk from our house. It is a large hospital owned by some shadowy Catholic nun organization that has become a world-class medical pioneer and is rightly a famous place. This is where Fran has been volunteering for most of our years so far in Vancouver. A hospital is not a church, but for lack of a better place, I insert this part of the story here, since the hospital does belong to a Catholic organization. It is not part of the secular society I describe later, though it is very involved in it through its medical outreach.

Here's her story with the "I" referring to her, not to me, John:

I started volunteering at the Gift Shop of SPH soon after we arrived in Vancouver. My initial assignment was to visit all the floors with goods from the Gift Shop prominently displayed on a cart. Most of the sales were to the staff on duty, but I also showed items in many of the rooms and wards. This service was discontinued after a few months, because it was too hard to keep an accurate inventory, as every day a different volunteer was in charge of the cart.

The job I stayed with for almost seven years was that of an actual sales clerk in the Gift Shop. I always wanted to handle credit cards and a cash register, so here was my chance! With the other volunteers quickly discovering that I was good at record keeping, the bookkeeping part of the Gift Shop was soon added to my responsibilities. I did all the sales data entry and produced monthly financial reports. After some time I also handled the weekly magazine and candy orders. And all of us worked at rearranging the shelves and putting out new stock as necessary.

I write "all of us." There were probably thirty volunteers whose main job was in the Gift Shop. For many of them it was a big part of their lives, including social life, and they often worked several shifts a week. The record holder worked in the Gift Shop for thirty years, but quite a few had more than ten years under their belt. It proved to be a great way to make friends in the West End, as many of them lived in this area. Even today I still chat with many of these people when we meet on the street.

But then, disaster struck! The hospital's Vice President of Mission, Ethics & Spirituality displayed the typical corporate mentality, in spite of his "pious" sounding title. He saw the

Gift Shop premises at the hospital's main entrance on Burrard Street as "prime real estate space" and wanted to squeeze more profit from it.

The Gift Shop's average annual gross sales were around \$200,000. Since everyone worked as volunteers and all the actual profits went back to patient care needs at the hospital, it seemed to us that this was the best possible use of the space. But the VP saw it differently and wanted to hire a professional manager who, he felt, would be able to make more money for the hospital than the volunteers ever could. Most of us felt that we were not interested in volunteering in order to pay some stranger's salary.

I, Fran, was asked to write a letter to the CEO, the last paragraph of which said,

**This is a complaint about the VP's disdainful treatment of the volunteers, his lack of obvious, visible spirituality and of planning. As volunteers who have sacrificed countless hours and, in some cases, even years or decades, we are now experiencing needless heartache at seeing this ministry handed over without due process, without a proper replacement plan and with such disrespect.**

The CEO's response:

**Please be assured that we are aware and truly appreciate the numerous volunteer contributions the Auxiliary has made to SPH. Our desire has been to find solutions together that are workable and offer a way forward. I am satisfied and have complete confidence that the process the VP has engaged in with the Auxiliary has been comprehensive and inclusive. As we can all appreciate, change to long-standing processes and relationships can be hard on all parties. However, new processes are often required to continue to meet changing public and patient needs.**

The result was that on February 27, 2009, most of us signed a letter which said, "We regretfully and with some heartache, resign from being volunteers in the Gift Shop." The SPH Auxiliary was in charge of the Gift Shop and the proceeds were their main avenue for fund raising. The official letter from the Auxiliary said, "After one hundred fifteen years of dedicated volunteer services and of very successful fund raising efforts, on November 16, 2009 the Auxiliary to SPH will cease to exist. We wish to make it clear that this is not our choice but we recognize our services ... are no longer required."

The end of the story: I still see many of the volunteers at various social occasions and in our neighbourhood. Since then there has been a lot of turnover in the professional management of the SPH Gift Shop. The VP in question has been let go for "undisclosed" reasons. It's hard to get exact figures, but I doubt that the Gift Shop is earning more than it did during "our time."

After a break of several years, I am now once again volunteering at SPH. Someone from the SPH Foundation office phoned and asked if I'd work for them. She was aware of the events that had led to many volunteers quitting at the Gift Shop but felt that I might be ready to

help in another area. So now I've been helping with large mailings, sending out tax receipts and invitations to specific events at the hospital.

And that's the end of Fran's story at SPH. I, John, also tried to start volunteering at St. Paul's, but my interest was in the palliative care unit. I was interviewed for this work and assigned to take a full week's training along with another fifteen people. It was a wonderful course in which I learned a lot. The trainer's report to the administration was that I would make an "excellent" palliative care person.

My assumption all along had been that the palliative volunteers would operate like Fran's Gift Shop volunteers. If someone could not do her shift, she would trade with someone else. However, when I informed the administrator that I traveled frequently and that I expected to trade shifts with colleagues, she adamantly rejected that approach. I must either sign up for a minimum of six months and take my shifts without interruption or I would not be accepted into the programme. I could not take that rigid kind of schedule and did not enroll myself. Until now, at least, that, regretfully, has been the end.

### *Life in the Broader Community*

We have placed our involvement in St. Paul's in the church section, because it is a church-owned hospital, but now we are moving on to our participation in the broader community. I am not suggesting that the beyond-the-church community is more broad minded. It is broader only in the sense that it includes everyone in the community.

### *The Rose Coffee Shop Gang*

So, here we were in the middle of a city we did not really know. Yes, we knew some of the streets from years back, but how to live in it or how to relate to its people was another thing. How or where would we make friends outside of church? Even more important, how could we let our Christian presence be felt? We were intensely aware of the fact that we were strange birds in this very secular city. We had already sensed a spirit of animosity to the church and Christ.

The third door north of our apartment building was a coffee shop named something like "Three Roses." We noticed that a certain group of people spent a lot of time socializing on the shop's sidewalk patio. So, we began by simply greeting them as we passed by. Then, once or twice, we would briefly stop to chat a bit and move on again, until we felt comfortable enough to invite ourselves to sit down and have a coffee. We were a bit apprehensive about how they would receive us.

We played it "cool." We slowly started to join the conversation and laugh at their jokes, even if sometimes a bit off colour. With the strong ethos of privacy in BC, people were slow to ask us where we were from and who we were, but they soon sensed that we were a different kettle of fish. Slowly, as the ice of estrangement gradually melted, we meted out

information bit by bit until we informed them that we were Christian missionaries. That created deathly silence. Christian was bad enough, but *missionaries*? What could they expect from us? Would we begin to preach this Christian garbage to them? After all, if they had any connection with the Christian faith at all, it was in most cases either bad childhood experiences with their “Christian” parents or they might have heard some of these ridiculous TV preachers with their never-ceasing spiritualizing sermons that totally trivialize the Christian religion. But we did not start preaching to them. Slowly they grew used to us as none of their fears materialized.



I was for some time dubbed “the missionary man,” at first kind of mockingly, but later that almost became a term of endearment! They started to like us. We were kind and helpful whenever the occasion arose. And whenever *they* brought up anything to do with church or religion, we would do our best to shine the best light on it without preaching.

A Few Gang Members Celebrating A Birthday\*

One exception to the above attitude was Vincent, a sincere and devout Catholic who was forever talking about his church, but often in a critical way. We have since bonded firmly with him and enjoy conversations about our faith together. Note that I said “faith,” not “faiths.” He is the man in the picture above.

Slowly we developed a kind of social relations with a few individuals. They would sometimes refer to our acts and attitude of kindness with appreciation, but any time we would try to explain the source of that attitude, the conversation would end right there. Kindness and helpfulness, fine, but none of that religious stuff. They did not wish to hear it. Religion is not supposed to be mentioned openly in Canada. If you want to screw around with religion, that’s your business, but don’t talk about or mention it; keep it private, to yourself.

We found our “membership” in the gang very helpful in learning how to relate to the local people. Eventually it fell apart. Some moved away; some passed away; some developed quarrels with each other and just quit. New smoking laws made it illegal to sit there and smoke. The “mother” of it all is still with us. She has multiple sclerosis and has a wheelchair, but she is a tough lady who insists on walking ever so slowly with a walker. Except for the roughest winter days, she spends much of her time sitting on her walker on the sidewalk just down the street. Everybody knows her and confides in her. If you want to know about anything that might have happened, you can pump her for information. Though she does not live in our building, she often knows about happenings in our building before we do. I often

call her the “Lady of Davie Village,” the name by which our intersection is known. We get along with her fine and often stop to chat. She has even rented our apartment a few times during our travels and we have treated her very well. She has experienced our kindness, but refer to its Source, and the conversation is finished. Her smile disappears. In the picture she is seated on Vincent’s right.

Another example was Jim, a gang member with whom I often chatted. One day, I told him I was off to a meeting. Well, what kind of meeting? We were working on re-introducing some kind of religious teaching in the public schools, a project I will tell you about below. Now, we had many chats during our chance meetings on the street or around the gang’s coffee table. He was always friendly and gentle with me. However, as soon as he heard the reference to religion, he blew up and began yelling at me as “you religious people!” Jim had cancer and died soon after. I only learned about it from the Lady of Davie Village. The West End is such an individualistic place full of people without any real connections, so that people just pass away without anyone knowing about it. It happens all the time. Thank God for our Lady, our chief information officer!

The gang always knew when we traveled, where and how and they came to the conclusion that we were wealthy. How else afford an RV and constantly travel all over the place by bus, RV, plane or even cruise ship? Well, yes, good question. Compared to them, I guess we *are* rich. The difference between many of them and us was that they made more money than we did during our working years, but, according to their own stories told without shame or embarrassment, quite a few of them wasted most of theirs or went broke during the disintegration of their dysfunctional families. We, on the other hand, had inherited the traditional Dutch money management culture described as “thrifty” that would make it stretch. They enjoyed themselves with no thought of the future, while we deferred gratification, that is, restrained our common human instinct for wasteful fun. Living on government dole does not embarrass them, for they have imbibed Canada’s entitlement culture that knows no shame. Some of them live in apartments that we and most other taxpayers cannot afford! Just think: Living it up by spending all your money and then qualifying for subsidized housing responsible tax payers cannot afford! Can you blame me for a little cynicism when it comes to our “progressive safety network?” Compassion for the weak and vulnerable? Absolutely. Generosity is the word. But subsidizing the result of irresponsible life styles and entitlement mentality? That’s not within my Christian sense of either charity or justice.

Of course, I realize that some have become poor due to no fault of their own and I fully support policies of compassion for them. But too many.... On the dole and you take annual Amtrak trips traversing the continent? Getting \$50 annual transit passes when you spend most of your time traversing the nooks and crannies of the world? Owning a three-quarter million dollar home but you are on the dole because you are considered living below the official poverty level? Sorry, but that’s hard to take for a responsible taxpayer. It’s often referred to as “entitlement culture,” an attitude that is very common around here.

*West End Neighbours in Action (WENA)*

WENA has been in existence since the early 1990s and for long it was the only community forum of its kind in the West End. It was popular and engaged in a number of relevant projects. However, by the time we arrived, it had shriveled down to a fairly small group. It had lost members due to financial misbehaviour by its treasurer, though not with WENA funds. We accidentally ran into them soon after our arrival, when they tried to recruit new members at a community fair in the neighbourhood.

It was an ominous beginning. As we walked towards their table, I stumbled on the curb and fell flat on the ground right at the feet of the President! We thus introduced ourselves in a spirit of humility, if not humiliation. At our first meeting, it became obvious to us that the organization was in bad shape and needed revving up. Besides us, only four others were in attendance, and all four were challenged in one way or another. The President did not know how to chair; the Secretary did not know how to write minutes; there was no Treasurer due to the event to which I referred. Neither was there much money to work with. The programmes had all run their course, with the exception of two.

One of these was “The Nest,” a government sponsored weekend evening drop-in for the down and out. Participants would socialize with each other, play games and enjoy light suppers. It was held three nights of every weekend and had two paid staff. The programme was going fairly well, since it was a partnership with a community house and a provincial government health institution through whom the annual grant of some \$21,000 was channeled. We had a joint committee that met regularly. The staff also kept the programme going at a reasonable level. WENA members would often drop in. When Fran and I did so, we would usually bring fruit for the participants.

The other project still going was the annual city-sponsored “Keep Vancouver Spectacular” campaign. Once a year, the city would supply us with the tools to clean up the neighbourhood, especially the lanes. We would try to recruit members of the public to work with us and enticed them with light food, a party atmosphere and prizes. Sometimes our Federal Member of Parliament (MP) or our Provincial Member of Legislature (MLA) would participate, but it was always either/or, never both/and, for they were of opposite parties. We have a photo of our MLA posing with Nigel, one of the founding WENA members, and Sharon and Frank, organizers of the event, posing with the son of our MP, but the MLA and MP made sure they would not cross paths! The project took much of our time and, though the party and food were fun, the results were too meager for the amount of effort it took. The next day all the dirt and trash were back! What especially galled us was that one city department would rip off our city-sponsored ads on the utility poles! One city department vs another. Not just once, but regularly. Those utility poles were the accepted place to advertise community events, but once a week the ads would be torn down to prevent them from clogging up the poles. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back. We just walked away from that programme without any announcement.

One cute little story about Hedy Fry, our Liberal MP. She is from Trinidad and a medical doctor who has represented the West End for years. At one WENA event she appeared in a t-

shirt that said on the front, “Women belong in the house.” Then she would turn around and you would read on her back, “And in the Senate.” Great pun and fine humour. However, the Senate is held in low esteem in much of Canada as just a bunch of privileged beneficiaries of political patronage. Its continued existence is due mainly to its constitutional status. One time I wrote Fry a letter in which I asked her why she entertained such low and useless ambition. No answer so far. The answer is not far away. Senatorial salaries and perks are such that its honourable members will put up with the public contempt just for the money!



Sharon, Hedy's son & Frank  
Keep Vancouver Spectacular Annual Campaign\*

Hedy Fry, MP

The basic problem of WENA was that we were not able to recruit new members, younger and more on the ball. We did have three energetic and capable women join us at different times, but they all dropped out again. I think they were discouraged by the type of people we had. It was also clear that the officers had to be changed. So, one of these three women, Fran and myself kind of pulled a coup and took over all the leadership positions. I became president; Fran, treasurer; that one lady, secretary. To keep the old president happy, we appointed him vice-president as well as one of two signatories to our bank account. Eventually the secretary quit but we found a professional volunteer accountant. So Fran happily handed over her treasurer's duties and became secretary instead.

Though WENA was no longer the active force she once was, we were still on the mailing list of many agencies, including city agencies, and often were invited to participate in various forums where community affairs would be discussed. A major issue in the city was that of the homeless and addicts in the city's Downtown Eastside, the poorest postal code area in the country, where the homeless, addicts, prostitutes and pimps lived. The meetings and consultations called by the city were endless and WENA was usually invited. As president I frequently attended and found them very interesting and informative. Gradually the realization dawned on me that the basic problem and the reason the number of homeless etc. was constantly increasing was the pervasive Secularism in the country. The slide from Christianity to Secularism had left a void in many lives and families who had lost all sense of standards as well as their faith in the family structure and left many people adrift, away and isolated from their families. They had lost all sense of meaning and purpose.

The politically correct opinion was that the solution for these social problems was to go to their root. And what was that root? Addiction. Homelessness. Prostitution. Uh? Were they not the symptoms rather than the root? No one wanted to dig deeper than that. One day I ventured to air my opinion that they were confusing symptoms with roots. The basic root, I said, was Secularism. Everyone at my table suddenly went silent. No response. I had challenged their deepest conviction about life. Then, after some moments, someone picked up the discussion as if no one had made this outrageously rude remark.

WENA struggled on for a number of years, but eventually Fran and I proposed that we disband, for we were all seniors and needed fresh and younger blood. That younger blood channeled itself into new community organizations that worked along ways more amenable to their generation. Our volunteer accountant passed away due to cancer and we had no one capable of the proper accounting needed for Government funds. It took us a year to convince the other members we should disband. The former president agreed only after it was decided that the remaining money would be divided among two of his favourite charities, both organizations that worked with the mentally handicapped. The Nest continued under the supervision of the two remaining partners, but closed down two years later because of government cutbacks. We had seen that coming.

WENA's very last action was to spend our last few dollars on a "closure lunch" with the Board members, a mere five of us, at Nando's, a popular South African neighbourhood chicken restaurant.

#### *West End Citizens Action Network (WECAN)*



Around the time we were disbanding WENA, another group organized - WECAN. The initial members were mostly youngish, energetic people who wanted to improve the West End environment. We joined them, as we did still want to be involved in some local community organization, both to be part of the action and to let our Christian light shine. Not much action; mostly talk—on the part of the leader, an exceedingly knowledgeable woman named Sheryl. One thing we did occasionally do was "Night Patrol Watch,"\* during which we would look out for drug dealers and either chase them away or stare them down.

After some months of meetings and talking, the group dwindled down to a dozen or so members, mostly seniors, with Sheryl as the only officer: chairperson. We basically served as a sounding board for her. She had some political ambitions and was exceedingly knowledgeable about West End developments, especially about police affairs. Meetings consisted mostly of Sheryl telling us about developments and hearing us out. We were not

really taking any action, except that Sheryl would forward our collective opinions to whatever city project we were discussing. Fran and I realized that it was basically a one-woman show, but we found it very educational and learned a lot about local politics and other developments. In fact, that was the very reason we continued to attend.

Sheryl gradually reduced the number of meetings. She ran for a position on the Parks Board. We campaigned for her and one morning found ourselves campaigning right along side Mayor Sam Sullivan to whose party Sheryl belonged. She was not elected. However, she was appointed to the Board of Vancouver Police Force. Finally, she announced there would be no more meetings unless a need arose. So that has not happened.

#### On the Campaign



She  
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Trail\*

We have enjoyed our association with Sheryl, including a degree of social life. We've had her over to our house, but have more often been to hers, for she organizes rather lavish Christmas open house parties that are fun not only because of the food and drinks served, but even more so for the interesting people we meet. Lately she is away much of the time to sunny and exotic locations. Apparently her insurance business is supporting her very well. Recently, she has moved from our immediate neighbourhood and is now retired from her business.

So, like WENA, WECAN also petered out, but for a different reason.

#### *West End Seniors Network*

I do not know this network's history, but it is a very vibrant community organization that provides a lot of services to West End (WE) seniors. Its vibrancy is at least partially due to the support it receives from various government levels. It is an important institution for a community in which many seniors live alone without any family support. There is a lot of loneliness that it seeks to address through a variety of programmes.

We have been members of it for some years, but not very active. I am afraid we have been consumers of its services rather than contributors. We occasionally attend their lectures which are of vital interest to senior well being. They have various social gatherings, including games and movies. Once a month there is a senior men's breakfast in local restaurants that I enjoy, since it helps meet other people in a relaxed atmosphere. Probably their biggest event is the annual Christmas dinner in a local luxury hotel, free of charge to members and sponsored by the Rotary. Several hundred people, including the Boers, avail themselves. Unfortunately,

it always is scheduled during church time on Sundays. And, of course, it is invariably marked by the superficiality of the Santa Claus culture.

Once I get done with the pressures of my writing projects, I would like to do some volunteering for them, like weekly visits to lonely seniors, for example. Problem is: will that time ever come before we need such visits ourselves? That loneliness, of course, is often not due to uncontrollable circumstances; it is often the result of bad decisions years earlier or of family breakdowns—in short, a byproduct of the nation's Secularism that does not have the resources to protect and nourish family ties. Since most West Enders are so hostile to church, this network fills some of the secular vacuum they have created for themselves.

Recently, WESN advertised their need for new Board members. I applied and was called in for an interview. That interview went very badly. A woman took the lead and right from the beginning I could detect hostility on her part and suspected it had to do with my missionary background. The other person was a man who said nothing but who was obviously embarrassed about the way his partner handled the interview. In the middle of the interview, I suddenly stood up and announced I was withdrawing my application and walked off. The man apparently headed straight for the office and informed the Director of what had happened. The latter invited me to his office, where we had an honest discussion. He clearly disapproved of her behaviour and apologized on behalf of WESN. A few days later, the President himself called me also to apologize and hoped I would still be open to a board position. A few more days later, the interviewer wrote me an apology in which she openly explained that she suspected me of having missionary intentions. There you go; that's the West End for you. I am quite sure her letter was the result of Board pressure, but I also suspect that the Board did not read it.

I am not sure yet whether I will officially request a new interview. One factor that makes me hesitant to make that request is the emphasis I have noticed on the Board being highly proactive with many meetings. If it is true that they meet on a weekly basis, as someone intimated, and they expect members to be available most of the time, then I'm afraid I'm out of the running. We are gone too much for such a tight schedule. I had another discussion with Eric, the Director, during which I indicated no hostility but that I did not intend to seek a seat on the board anymore. Some time later, the interviewer and I sat facing each other at a meeting. I got up, shook hands with her and proposed we should be friends. She gladly accepted. An organization cannot function well when members walk around with grudges and grievances.

In the meantime, I took over the function of hosting that monthly Senior Men's Breakfast. The previous host had health issues and could not keep it going anymore. The staff recognize my position and channel every issue about the club through me. Fran encouraged me to take this step by herself taking responsibility for calling all members the day before a scheduled breakfast. The Programme Director gratefully accepted my offer and the conditions that go with it. We'll see whether we can put some life into the organization.

And even though I am not on the board, I do have some ideas for the organization. One was to have WESN join the Aboriginal March of Reconciliation a couple of months down the pike. I

talked to Eric about this and he was immediately very interested. A few days later, he called to inform me that the Board had agreed to organize a WESN team for the event. I was surprised it took me to goad them into this important community event.

The other idea I am contemplating is for FBC to offer them chaplaincy services. I mentioned this briefly to Carson Pue, the church's CEO, and to Pastor Judy. Both seemed open to the idea immediately, at least enough to consider it. Whether WESN will be interested is, of course, another question. I do think it would be an open door for FBC to minister to this community of so many lonely people.

I have one problem with WESN. Its members tend to act like a lobby for their own interest at the expense of the larger city community. There is a controversy about a certain bus route that goes through the WE and making Robson Square a strictly pedestrian zone. I attended a meeting on the topic that included city and transit officers and members of the public, mostly seniors from the WE. These seniors spoke and acted as if their concerns were the only ones to be taken seriously, even though that Square is only marginally within the WE. Never mind the interests of the rest of the city! I hasten to add that those seniors did not officially represent WESN, but they let it be known they were members of this rather influential organization. I aired my disagreement on the floor and also warned the WESN Director that the organization or its members should not act or appear to act as a lobby that disregards the interests of the rest of the community. He appeared sympathetic to the concern.

### *The Dutch Community*

It could be argued that the section under CRC belongs here because of its Dutch background. Dutch as it is, it does not identify itself as Dutch and is struggling hard to outgrow its Dutch character by inviting others to join its ranks. It participates in the East Vancouver church community, but does not participate in the overtly Dutch community and its associations, though a few of its members do, including us. Besides, the CRC is not part of the secular city. So, I describe the CRC under Vancouver churches, while the Dutch community described below is largely secular with a smattering of Christians mixed in.

The dearth of Christians in the Dutch organizations I am about to describe has its reasons. These Christians belong to churches, many of them to the CRC; some to the Reformed Church of America, the oldest denomination in the USA, from which the CRC seceded in the 1830s; some to smaller denominations with Dutch backgrounds; and then thousands more are scattered through other denominations in the country. You find them everywhere. Some of these churches also support various types of Christian schools all the way from K to high school. Well, membership in these churches and supporting those schools is very time and money consuming. If you're active in them, you have little time for other organizations, except perhaps one that engages in a hobby you share with them, particularly sports clubs. Beyond that, you will hardly have time or money for other organizations, including these Dutch cultural organizations. In most cases, these people are hardly aware of them, as was our case for more than six years after our arrival in Vancouver. The result is that you find few Christians in these Dutch cultural organizations.

But how then did *we* get involved in CAANS—Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies? It began with my immigration story in the *Vancouver Sun* in April 2008, reproduced as Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter. The Dutch Consul-General in Vancouver was so impressed with it that he invited me for a consultation at the Consulate. There we discussed the issue further and he invited me to speak on the subject of Dutch integration in Canadian society at the annual Dutch *Koninginnedag* (Queen’s Day) which was only two weeks after my article appeared in the paper. It was at that celebration that I became aware of these Dutch cultural organizations, for each had a table there.

Before proceeding further with these Dutch organizations, I need to report on the result of the meeting at the Dutch Consulate. I did deliver that speech and have included it in this chapter as Appendix 2. I detected that it went over very well, but, unlike other events where I either spoke or merely attended, I noticed that no one stopped to chat with me on the subject afterwards. That I found very strange and kind of unsettling, even though the Consul-General gave me a thumbs up afterwards, but even he did not stop for a chat. It was our introduction to Vancouver’s Dutch community. We observed that most of the participants were more recent arrivals; very few hailed from the immigration of the 50s. Most were professionals and business people, a very different breed from the earlier immigrants. And while the latter tended to come mostly from the northern and central parts of NL, these people were more from the Randstad. It was the breed that we met in Nigeria and whom we befriended there. It was also the breed with the attitude I have described earlier.

Ever since that speech, we have been on the invitation list every year for the annual celebration of *Koninginnedag*. It is a real feast with almost unlimited Dutch delicacies hard to find that draws hundreds of people, most of them Dutch citizens or of Dutch descent. This event for 2013 was a very special one, for we celebrated not only the Queen’s birthday, but also her abdication and her son’s accession to the throne. I had planned to fast for a week before the event! I confess that I did not do the fast, but we did enjoy the event, which was held in De Dutch, a restaurant at the Coal Harbour waterfront. That speech of 2008 has more than handsomely paid for itself! Unfortunately, due to economic cutbacks these events will no longer be open to us, only to the officers of different Dutch organizations.

It was at that 2008 *Konginginnedag* that we decided to try CAANS. I was attracted to its academic character. It is an *international* organization in that it also includes Flemish—thus, Belgian—interests, even though we have so far not met any Belgians among its members. It is a *national* organization in that it has branches throughout Canada as well as belongs to a national umbrella organization of the Social and Human Sciences that holds national conferences where people of all these groups and sciences deliver papers, hold seminars and mingle with each other for a number of days. CAANS also publishes a semi-annual national journal.

We attend some of CAANS’ monthly meetings, not all. Sometimes we have other engagements; sometimes, the subject does not interest us. The ones we do attend, have been interesting and worth our time. However, the membership can hardly be qualified as exclusively “academic.” There are some academics, including myself, some highly qualified,

but many, whom you would hardly meet at a non-Dutch academic event, come merely for the *gezelligheid* of a Dutch get-together.

I have some tentative plans for CAANS. I am thinking about doing a re-run of part of my lecture at *Koninginnedag* in order to stimulate a discussion about getting younger people like nephew Fred Bosma interested and involved in CAANS, for it is literally bleeding to death with few younger people in attendance. I also hope to do a paper on Kuyper in Canada to be delivered at a CAANS meeting as well as at that umbrella organization and, possibly, at yet another event organized by CAIS, the Canadian Association of Independent Scholars, to which I belong but have never yet had an opportunity to attend, due to conflicts with CAANS and other organizations. So, lots of plans, but I first need to finish these memoirs! Here I am, writing memoirs about our past but in the process shifting gears to the future!

Membership in CAANS means we receive monthly digital newsletters published by another Dutch social organization *Je Maintiendrai*. This organization alerts us to all kinds of Dutch activities in BC not only but also in NL and elsewhere. It serves as a contact organ for Dutch people looking for others, informs us about Dutch books and about the Dutch in general.

Through that Newsletter I became aware of the annual December 5 Sinterklaas parade on the Fraser River in New Westminster. In 2012, Fran and I decided to attend that event, but then it ran into accusations of racism about *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pieter) who traditionally accompanies Sinterklaas as a jolly servant. The accusation was aired in *The Vancouver Sun* by a Black South African faculty member of the local Kwantlen College. It threatened to become a human rights issue that the organizers wanted to prevent. From the Newsletter, I accepted an invitation to a meeting where and how the future of this event could hold without such threats. We attended that first meeting and participated in the discussion, but decided not to continue, for the meetings would hold in remote suburbs in the evenings during the winter when it was often cold and wet, while transit services would often not reach.

Eventually, the actual celebration was held in a large building on a large private property within Metro Vancouver with *Sinterklaas*\* and a half dozen *Zwarte Pieten*\* in attendance. It was a fun event at which I\* volunteered to serve the traditional Dutch pea soup. Since it contained ham, I served it with what became my standard joke: “When you serve pea soup, you’ve got to ham it up.” Some people had to think for a moment, but then would break out into a laugh.



The Newsletter also got us to participate in a few other activities as well. For example, a couple of Dutch bike tours that were really fun, especially during Olympic days. During that period, the Dutch Government had hired the brand new Olympic Oval in Richmond, where it organized a huge Dutch party with traditional foods, Heineken beer, and Dutch music. They had imported a very popular Dutch singer, who was a nephew to our friend Agatha.



They had also brought in a large number of Dutch bikes for a kind of “bikathon” in which we participated, everyone competing with how much orange-coloured clothes or other objects they could muster. The tour was along the Richmond dykes. Where else would the Dutch organize such an event! They had intended to eventually sell all the bikes, but many of them somehow got stolen!

Olympic Dutch Bikathon\*

### *World Views Collaborative (WVC)*

Around 2004 or so, a gentleman by the name of Ernest Poser called us to arrange for a discussion about religion in the public schools, a subject always of deep interest to me. We met in our apartment. He was an Atheist Jew and a retired professor of psychology from both McGill University and UBC. He had come across my website and thought I might be interested in a project he was trying to launch. The project was to introduce the teaching of religions in the public schools. The problem he saw was that religion is an important part of people’s identity, but in the public schools it is hushed up, so that students who spend years in school together are kept ignorant of what motivates their peers. As adults they live in their communities next to each other and spend their days in the workplace together without ever really understanding each other. The solution, Poser explained, was to teach about religions, all religions in BC, in the public schools to promote understanding and appreciation of and respect for each other. Members of the project would hopefully adhere to different religions and worldviews, including Humanists and Atheists. Poser’s original inspiration for this project came from a lecture by a Christian at Trinity Western University (TWU). I was invited as a Christian.

It was, of course, a highly unusual situation: an Atheist proposing the teaching of religions! I *believed* Poser had an ulterior motive in addition to the one he stated. He wanted Humanism

and Atheism taught in the schools and thought that this proposal would help promote that, but he never admitted it.

I responded affirmatively since I thought it a fascinating project and one badly needed. However, I promised limited participation. I would attend meetings but not accept any assignments from the group, since I was deeply involved in the writing of my series. In addition, we traveled frequently and hence would not attend regularly. Poser agreed to these conditions.

We began our meetings with three Atheists, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a couple of adherents to Indian religions and three Christians—an elderly but very socially engaged Catholic nun, a Protestant TWU lecturer and myself. Over time, the Indians quit coming without explanation, while Ali, the Muslim, succumbed to cancer. Occasionally, individuals of other religions would show up, but they never stayed. The long-term core group were the single Buddhist, three Atheists and three Christians. However, the Atheists, particularly Poser, were the founders. The Humanist Association to which they belonged, hesitatingly and without any real enthusiasm, agreed to fund the startup, but their support soon dwindled, for most of its members could not fathom their organization supporting the teaching of religion.

The group elected Poser as President/Chairperson. He and his fellow Atheists turned out to be very charming, friendly and tolerant—as were the rest of us. We took some time to get used to, trust and respect each other. We agreed to openly acknowledge our fundamental differences, freely discuss them and ask questions of each other, but not to criticize each other.

Except for hearing difficulties I had till I obtained hearing aids—“hearings,” as some of our grandchildren referred to them--, I enjoyed the meetings very much. I learned to appreciate the secular Atheists and the Buddhist and they, in turn, us Christians. We kind of became friends with each other. Poser and I especially hit it off with each other. Both being retired, we had the time to hold occasional “souperamas,” as we called them, soup lunches, during which we would discuss our respective perspectives in an open way. I came to love the man. As couples we would visit each other occasionally and enjoy home-made dinners. Since Ernest enjoyed soup so much, every time we/I would visit them/him, we would bring a container of home-made soup, in which they always expressed delight. When Ernest became ill and could no longer receive visitors, I would occasionally just go and deliver a couple of containers of different soups I had made for him.

Somehow WVC got in touch with that Turkish group DAMLA I wrote about in connection with FBC. The leader of the group began attending our meetings and then invited us to an annual dinner of DAMLA. It was a wonderful event organized very tastefully—with pun intended. When they invited WVC to address the crowd, I took the opportunity to tell them about our Christian-Muslim series that seemed to interest them. It was from there that I developed a relationship with their leader and helped move them into the orbit of FBC.

Unfortunately, the leader of DAMLA did not continue to attend our meetings, without ever giving a clear explanation. It was more excuses, especially about his many travels within Canada but also, frequently, to Turkey, where he would spend a month or more. Though the travels were fact, reading between the lines, we felt it was more lack of interest in our project

as well as his lack of English. After some time, he moved and was replaced by another. This one also attended our meetings once or twice and that was it. We never did find a Muslim to replace faithful Ali.

Somewhere along the line, Ernest invited Fran and me to his house to watch a TV series dealing with militancy in various religions. We missed the first one, but we watched the second one at his house and the third at ours. The group included the four of us as well as another Jewish Atheist couple we had never met. Ernest's purpose was to discuss religious militancy on basis of the TV programme. We did indeed have interesting discussions. After the programme on Christian "militancy," which was equated especially with American Christian fundamentalism, Fran and I occupied central stage due to the many questions directed at us. We did our best to penetrate the protective shield of our secular friends. They found our Kuyperian-type explanations very interesting, for, except in the context of WVC, these had been unheard of for them. They appreciated the pluralism the tradition promotes, but found it difficult to comprehend the faith-reason alignment. They were too steeped in *their* traditional formulation. Philosophically—and that was the level of their interest—*that* is where the central difference lies between the two traditions.

We were not in the business of changing each other's perspectives and beliefs. The Humanist members surprisingly agreed that everyone lives with beliefs that play a large role in our lives and colour our perspectives. However, that did not seem to affect the role of reason; the latter was still the basic and dominant agency or device through which we arrive at objective knowledge. They adhered to the classic secular idea of rational neutrality and neutral rationality that Christians, at least, Kuyperian Christians, reject.

I tried to signal the contradiction in their perspective. They wanted Humanism, Secularism and Atheism taught as a course along with other beliefs or worldviews, but they did not seem to recognize that, in fact, the basic curriculum of the public schools *is* Humanistic, Secularist and, basically, Atheist. Oh, not overtly, but *de facto* as the underlying perspective of it all and at the exclusion of references to God. They already had more than they were asking for! I warned them that the direction we were pursuing could lead to more people realizing that the schools were run on basis of only *one* of the worldviews to be taught in the courses we were proposing. Why should that be, when there are other equally valid worldviews? In other words, the project could eventually end the Humanist domination of the school system. Smart as they were, my Humanist friends never understood my warning.

In my Christian-Muslim series, I have written some scathing critiques of Secularism. However, while I was writing Volume 8, I toned down these critiques due to my new secular acquaintances. Now the critiques seemed more personal and directed to my friends. The critique is still there but in a more gentle way. I had become more aware that Secularists and Humanists can also do genuine and lasting good.

As to WVC's project itself, we struggled and struggled, but we failed to attract wider participation. Furthermore, we searched in vain for openings or indications of interest within the educational establishments. Several times the question of disbanding arose, but the issue was put off till our first and final meeting in January, 2013, only a few weeks before this

writing, when all of us individually had reached the conclusion that we *should* disband. It was decided right there and then to proceed with it and that it was our last meeting.

We all agreed but with deep regret. We still favoured the teaching about religion in public schools. But even more, we almost felt as if we were disloyal to each other, as if we were denying or betraying the strong bond of appreciation, respect and even fondness for each other. It seemed such a personal decision. We decided in a vague way to somehow keep in touch and perhaps have an occasional reunion. Since then, I have forwarded a few articles relevant to our interest to the members as a way of keeping in touch and sharing. I noticed yesterday that another member has also done so.

The disbandment decision coincided with the passing away of our founder Ernest in May of 2012. He was 91 and had been struggling for over a year with cancer and other ailments. Somehow, his passing was a symbol of the struggles of WVC and *its* passing. His death made it easier for us to make that decision. I believe that deep down in our hearts we were all waiting for that moment, so that we did not have to disappoint Ernest.

I experienced the death of both Ernest and of WVC with considerable sadness. I had come to really enjoy the meetings of this varied group; there was so much tolerance for, appreciation of and genuine curiosity for our different worldviews within the conscious awareness of deep-seated differences. We learned much from each other and about each other. We were able to work together towards our goal.

My most precious memory of WVC and Ernest was from our first annual Christmas party, where he gave a short speech about what WVC had meant to him that first year. Among other things, he said that something totally unexpected and unheard of had happened to him. He, a convinced Atheist, had become close friend to a Christian missionary! I was deeply moved and sometimes still get emotional when recalling that moment. I have loved him ever since.

You may have noticed that I have classified this WVC story as a “neutral” organization, not under either the church or secular sections. It was neutral not only in that it included people from different religions but that it honoured the differences between us without giving any perspective pride of place; every perspective was given equal respect and place. That is different from “secular,” for where Secularism is dominant, it generally seeks to impose its own worldview and privatizes the others.

The day I write this paragraph is Labour Day 2013, always on a Monday. It is inserted here many months after the rest of this section is written and then edited several times. As I was reading a fine article this weekend on Islam by Jos Strengholt, a Dutch Anglican priest in Cairo, it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps I should accord Secularism the same respect I do Islam and other religions. I don't need to agree with them but can and should still respect them. My writings about Islam are full of that, but why is my attitude towards Secularism so different, not to say hostile? I think the reason is that, unlike the other worldviews, in the West, Secularism threatens the very foundation of Christianity. Buddhism and Hinduism have the reputation of being tolerant of others. However, when Christianity or Islam challenges or threatens them, they become intolerant as we see in India and Sri Lanka. Of

course, my experience with WVC has already somewhat softened my attitude and now this Strengholt article!

I am not sure where this newly budding awarenesss will take me. One reason for the difference is that Secularism is so much more dangerous to the Christian mind and spirit. Islam and other official religions wear *klompen* (wooden shoes), which means they are noisy and you can hear or see them coming; they do not hide themselves. Secularism is more insidious; it comes in socks, quietly. This is so especially for the Western Christian, who lives in a secularized atmosphere where secular standards represent the common sense. It just creeps up on you and into your heart and mind without your realizing it. You can protect yourself only if you have a keenly Christian mind that has trained itself to recognize the difference.

Secularism represents a serious attack on every official religion, including Christianity, in that it wants us to reduce our religion to the private and personal spheres and ban it from the public square. That is a serious attack we Christians are fighting at every front, on the personal level not only but throughout our culture, including the legal system. It is as difficult for a keen Christian to accord respect for such an attacker as it is/was for Dutchmen to respect the Nazis. The Nazis merely attacked our bodies; Secularism, our very souls. My recent interview with West End Seniors Network is just the most recent example, though I acknowledge that the leaders, mostly secular folk, immediately sought to undo that gross secular gaffe. It was recognized as an attack on the organization's neutrality.

For now, I have decided that, though the deep antithesis between my faith and Secularism remains and it continues to attack my community, I will try to develop more respect for its adherents and recognize its positive contributions as well. This revised attitude will most likely come to expression in the blog I hope to begin when this memoir is completed. A year from now, check out my blog "Boer's My World—My Neighbour" to see whether I have succeeded.

### *Racial Reconciliation Movements*



Bill Chu is a naturalized Canadian citizen from China. He is one of the most socially active Christians in Metro Vancouver. He is acquainted with the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto and is inspired by the Kuyperian worldview. Among other causes, he promotes racial reconciliation between the Chinese population in BC and the Caucasian community as well as between the Chinese and Aboriginals in the province. He organizes overnight bus tours that take participants to various places of historical significance to the Chinese as well as to Aboriginals. The Chinese places are basically related to mining and railroad building history, mostly places reclaimed by wilderness and thus hard to find or recognize.

Bill Chu holding a railroad spike\*

As to Aboriginals, he took us to a fishing site on the Fraser River, where they astounded us with the hundreds of fish they had just netted in the river and now piled up on the ground and in large bins. At the same place, a group of Aboriginals served us a delicious traditional fish dinner on the river bank.



**Aboriginal Fishermen on the Fraser\***

At one of our stops we were served tea in the house of a leader who had pleaded the Aboriginal cause all way to the United Nations. Among other things, he was demanding that all Aboriginal children be given the opportunity for complete schooling in their native languages! Now that struck me as highly impractical and would probably place them at a serious disadvantage as they seek to find their place in society at large, even though (somewhat) on their own terms.



Somewhere in the wilderness we were addressed by a man I can only describe as an Aboriginal nobleman, what with his dress, bearing and demeanour. He gave us extensive information about the rocks, bushes, creeks and trees in the area. He seemed to know every person who had ever lived there and what kind of building they had constructed. I was very impressed with his obvious brilliance, but, unfortunately, I forgot most of the details of his talk.

**Aboriginal Nobleman Addressing the Group\***

Another, more massive and national, reconciliation movement was known as “Reconciliation Canada.” Established in 2012, its goal was to rebuild relationships between Canada’s Aboriginals and the rest of the population, “following a difficult colonial period that included the tragic legacy of Indian residential schools.” Actually, I understood it to *concentrate* on the residential schools debacle, not on the entire colonial history. One concise article describing the experience of children at these schools is that of Chief Robert Joseph, the official and national Ambassador of Reconciliation Canada—“Walking Together Will Help Rebuild Relationships” (*Vancouver Sun*, sometime during July, 2013). The movement actually moved from city to city throughout the country, including Vancouver. See < [www.reconciliationcanada.ca](http://www.reconciliationcanada.ca) >.

For Vancouver, the week of September 15-22 was marked by a full programme that included mass meetings at the PNE grounds, where speeches were delivered and testimonies about the schools were offered, all in the context of much emotion and many tears. There was also a large exhibition of all associated movements and organizations, including pictures and written records of the various schools in BC, the buildings, classes, individual students and teachers. Aboriginals, including residential school victims, and other Canadians of every race and colour freely mixed in the crowd and easily engaged each other in conversation about this terrible history. *The one thing that struck and amazed me is the forgiving attitude of the Aboriginals.*

The climax of the week was the Walk for Reconciliation on Sunday, September 22, through part of the downtown, that was expected to attract 50,000 people. Unfortunately, it was a day of drenching rain that kept some people away and caused others, including us, to drop out along the way. It was preceded by a mass outdoor rally, also in downtown during the drench, at which the daughter of Martin Luther King spoke. Unfortunately, her harsh tone was one of aggressively challenging racists and perceived racists without any display of the spirit of reconciliation.

All kinds of social grouping and organizations signaled their participation. WESN was there as well as First Baptist Church, with its senior pastor, Darrell Johnson, leading the pack arm in arm with an Aboriginal member of the church dressed in full traditional regalia. The CRC was generously represented as well, not only the local congregation, but also by delegates from the denomination’s Canadian Centre for Public Dialogue (CPD), housed in Ottawa. Apparently CPD has established close and meaningful relations with the Aboriginal community and participated in the Reconciliation Canada programme as it moved across the country.

On the picture below you will note the banner, a local CRC creation that was hastily designed due to my urging. I confess to being disappointed by it for its lack of CRC identification. All the other church groups identified themselves in some way. The CRC keeps itself invisible enough in BC as it is, but here we had a chance to participate *visibly* and we blew it. No one was motivated to ask what the CRC is or what it stands for.



### **The Walk for Reconciliation\***

**I am on the far left in proper rain gear.**

**Opposite me with the green stole is Darrell Johnson with his wife and his Aboriginal companion. Between us is a group of members of the local CRC.**

**At the end of the programme, CPD together with Vancouver CRC held their own reconciliation event attended by three leading Aboriginal representatives, including Mark McDonald, Aboriginal National Anglican Bishop, as well as CRC members. CPD recorded this event on a video under the title “We Drink Downstream, and described the event as “a gathering of CRC members from a number of congregations who attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event in Vancouver. They gathered afterwards to talk about the experience and what it means for the Church.” Various participants in this meeting are featured on this video, including yours truly. Danielle Rowaan, a CRCN staff member, wrote,**

**The video is being provided free of charge through [this link](#), so feel free to promote and share it wherever you like. We'll be sharing it on the [Centre for Public Dialogue](#) Facebook page tonight. Hopefully this video will be used in the CRC and beyond to get people who might not otherwise get involved thinking about the need for reconciliation with indigenous peoples. It was designed with offerings, adult education classes, small groups, and youth groups in mind.**

**If there's one single area of Canadian life where Shalom and right relationships are most needed, the relationship between indigenous peoples and other Canadians is certainly in the running. And where there are broken relationships, the followers of Jesus Christ are called to be. This video,**

developed by several CRC agencies, shows a gathering of CRC members from a number of churches who attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event in Vancouver. They gathered afterwards to talk about the experience and what it means for the Church. The TRC is a chance for indigenous people to tell other Canadians about their experiences of the residential schools that operated for more than 100 years in Canada.

For more coverage you can go to < [www.crcna.org/trc](http://www.crcna.org/trc) >.

If you have watched the video till the end, you will have noticed that I repeated the major response of mine to this campaign, namely amazement at the readiness of Aboriginals to forgive. I said something like—and you *may* correct me if you've watched the entire video--, “I find it unbelievable that, after 100 years of these shenanigans, the Aboriginal community stands up and tells us they are ready to forgive. That, to me, is incredible.” *And we Christians want to evangelize them? Is it not rather we who need to be evangelized?!*

After such a serious event in the local CRC, you would think that we would have started some action. During the event, I proposed that, among other things, we explore a way in which all interested individuals are helped to establish a special friendship relationship with at least one Aboriginal. People nodded their approval and Persenaire, the leader of CPD, wrote a note about it, but now, six months later, nothing has happened! Was it, after all, merely a catharsis exercise without intentions to follow through? I plan to bring it up again to push for some practical and enduring reconciling action.

I also wonder what effect this TRC campaign will or should have on the ongoing negotiations between the Aboriginals and the BC Government. If it truly were only about the residential school situation, it might not have any effect. However, you can hardly pack reconciliation in a separate box without it overflowing into other relationships. Reconciliation in one relationship and then hard ball it in others? That's not the nature of reconciliation. It wants to spill over and cleanse *all* relationships; its very nature is all-encompassing.

### *Vancouver Culture*

I do not intend to give you an overview of Vancouver culture in general. That would be impossible in this context. Instead, I describe here some aspects and events which we simply enjoyed or in which we participated or by which we were influenced. Quite a few of such stories have already appeared throughout this chapter so far, especially the over-the-top secular character of the population. Let me begin with the most beautiful flower-and-tree culture of the city. There are so many parks everywhere that are well maintained by the city. Our West End along with neighbouring Stanley Park are those that we enjoy the most simply because of proximity. April is cherry blossom time all over the city.



**Cherry Blossoms just down the Street\***



**Robson Square in the Summer\***

### *The Queer Community*

**Our own Davie Village in the West End of Vancouver is famous world-wide for its gay culture, something we did not realize or noticed when we moved in. Its gay culture dates back a full century! There is a central gay office right across the street from us, while there are quite a few businesses catering specifically to them. You ought to see the crowded gay bars and restaurants. At the time of the annual parade, gays come from all over the world, many of them strutting semi naked along the street, something that does not enhance their reputation among the “straights.” They refer to themselves as “queer,” a term that seems derogatory to me. They even have that term on the signboard of their centre just down the street from us.**

**We were wondering whether we would feel at home in such an environment. Well, after twelve years we’re still on the same corner and haven’t moved away. In fact, we’ve enjoyed living here, partially because of the friendly atmosphere of Davie Village. Apart from one gay nephew living in the area, we do not have many personal relationships with gays, though we do not purposefully avoid them. In fact, as with Muslims, we would like to have closer relationships with gays. They tend to be friendly and sensitive people and we would like to know more about them and their experiences of life. However, they tend to socialize in their own dedicated coffee shops and pubs and seem to feel more at home amongst themselves. We are glad that they have a place like Davie Village where they can feel at home and relax in a world that is generally hostile to their lifestyle but, in most cases at least, have not freely chosen for themselves. I am, of course, hardly competent to explain the causes that drive people into the queer life, though I have some hunches.**

**Where I draw the line is when homosexuality is paraded or promoted as of equal standing with its hetero counterpart, taught in public schools as an equally viable lifestyle and advocated throughout our culture so that slowly the implications penetrate our entire legal system, and traditional institutions are discounted, undermined and even berated. In short, the “gay agenda,” advanced not so much by the average queer as the extremists amongst them, but that’s my attitude towards extremism in every aspect of culture, no different from my opposition to militant Islam. It ends up pushing an aspect of culture, in this case gender**

and sex issues, beyond their creational boundaries and blows them out of all proportion. Of course, some of that is called forth by centuries of prejudice against and suppression of homosexuality by almost every culture and religion.

*Inset:* The book I have found very helpful on the subject is Jeffrey Satinover's *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. This is a Jewish psychiatrist who has dedicated many professional years to studying the gay culture and who practiced and lectured on gay issues at both Yale and Harvard. My own church, the CRC, has published the result of a study committee on the subject that is also very helpful, but probably needs updating by now.



Vancouver loves parades. One huge annual event is the Gay Pride Parade.\* That parade is an exceedingly colourful and imaginative event, but it is often so overshadowed by extreme sex and nudity that anyone with any sense of cultural pride will turn away from it in disgust. What we saw years ago in Berlin was nothing compared to this one. To top it all off—pun intended—, the liberal churches I have described earlier participate enthusiastically, with some of the clergy proudly marching in the shadow of live porno. Though I am no advocate of homosexuality, I do not object to their having a parade; it is their right like anyone else. However,

why does it have to be marked by such gross sexuality and nudity? It is “paraded” as a “family friendly” event, but that’s a far stretch.

I am by no means the only one to object to this gross display of sexuality. Three members of the Toronto School Board oppose it as well, though they describe the parade itself as “a wonderful event that’s also part of our board’s social justice piece. But I cannot sign off to participating and promoting an event where the laws against public nudity are being flouted.” The source of this info includes the statement, “Despite being billed as ‘family friendly,’ photo documentation of past parades show full frontal male nudity and simulated sex acts, bondage and sadomasochism.” Guess what happened? You probably already did: They were accused of insulting and hating gays and were labeled “homophobic.” Of course! That’s a common way to squelch free democratic speech in this country. Gay activists even defend this nudity and promote it, but I won’t go there (CC March 24, 2014, p. 7). We’ve come a long way from a century ago when the West stood aghast at the “primitive naked barbarians” of Africa! Up or down?

In preparation for the 2013 pride parade in Vancouver, they pulled a “coup” with the connivance of the city. They reserved a half block of Bute Street, the part that connects us with Davie, as a socializing centre by blocking it to car traffic and filling it with ten picnic

tables. It is actually a wonderful socializing centre that is gratefully used, especially on sunny days. We ourselves have made use of it and discovered it to be a pleasant socializing place. As soon as the weather is dry and sunny, even in the winter, people gather there, relax and chat. “Bute Plaza” is the name that is bubbling up. The only part of it we dislike is that the tables are all in gay colouration. Not only the tables, but even the crosswalks at Davie and Bute have been painted gay. It is not that the majority of the residents of the area are gay, but their institutions have dug their way into City Hall and have attained much sympathy and, thus, political power there. They are well organized to exert their political and cultural power, while the straights just allow it to happen in the name of tolerance and for fear of political incorrectness. Our MLA is gay and the sole city counselor in the West End is gay, while our MP is a single woman sympathetic to and supporter of gay rights and culture.



The Crosswalk\*



The Picnic Tables\*

### “Gayification” of Our Intersection

Without diverting into a full discussion of gay issues and my approach to the subject, I am glad that they have a place where they can feel at ease and relax. Almost everywhere else, they are under pressure and afraid to identify themselves. Here is one place they can feel at home. I appreciate that. They are not hard to live with, though I sometimes shut my eyes at openly gay behaviour on the street. However, I do object to the forced “gayification” of my neighbourhood by means of these new symbols; it gives the impression we are all gay. It amounts to a coup and an orientation that does not represent the majority. The rainbow has traditionally been a Christian symbol of God’s faithfulness and protection of the regularity of creation. See Genesis 9:12-17 in the Bible. So, when I see those colours in our block, I am reminded of God’s covenant.

In the meantime, we are kind of blocked in with our RV. We are now hemmed in by Bute Plaza to the north and by a long-time cul-de-sac to the south. We can only get out through the laneway or back alley, which makes it complicated for visitors who drive in to reach us. I have requested the city to open up the cul-de-sac if the Plaza becomes permanent, for it will no longer serve the purpose for which it was installed originally. We’ll see what happens.

*Movies, Music, Plays, Art, Events*

Living in Vancouver downtown means we are living in the centre of BC's "high" culture, some of the major aspects of which are listed in the above heading. Many of these events are within walking distance, provided it does not rain too hard. Transit is always there, ready to help out in case of rain, tiredness or laziness. I cannot tell you about all events we attend, but the menu available at any time is always rich and enticing. One important restraint for us is the high cost of tickets for plays and concerts. We always keep in mind our retirement financial plan and usually skip expensive events, though with regret.

One of our favourite theatres is the small unique Pacific Theatre in an Anglican Church, where the stage is a cramped little pit with the audience peering down from tiered seating above on either side. The stage furniture is always very minimal with the audience expected to create its own mental stage setting. The cast is always minimal, with actors often playing multiple roles identified by minimal changes in appearance—a shawl, a hat, a cane or whatever—again with the audience participating in the drama with their own imagination. The plays are always of deep meaning, though good humour is not lacking. Even the secular press accords the place respect for the quality of the plays and their performance.

Among our most favourite events over the decade have been a couple of Gilbert & Sullivan operettas—not in the Anglican theatre. Ever since my participation in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, I am spellbound by those delightful comedies for their bombastic music and absolutely hilarious texts applied to sharp social critique of elitist privilege. Fortunately, Fran shares this love with me. When one of these is performed, we often throw away our financial restraint and go for a delightful evening.

Over the decades, a few songs from the *Pinafore* operetta stayed with me. I would sometimes unexpectedly break into singing one. This caught the attention of nephew Fred, son to Martha and Albert. He became so interested that he learned to sing them with his unique take on British accent better and with greater humour than I ever can. He, in turn, taught his sons so that singing them has become kind of a family tradition for them. When we get together, we *must* ham it up together by singing them and delighting ourselves if not others. I did something similar with our own grandchildren, Asia and Ezra, as late as the year 2013. You can read that story down below.

We are members of the Vancouver Art Gallery in downtown. This gives us free access at any time. Not infrequently, when we go downtown for our Saturday afternoon check up on Robson Square, we will enter the Gallery, in front and behind which all the demonstrations take place, and look at one of the exhibits for an hour, then go for a tea in the Gallery coffee shop and sit where we can overlook the milling crowds on the square below. Some exhibits we enjoy to the hilt, while others we wonder what they are doing there. One exhibit was a display of the junk and tidbits that we gather up in our homes. Was that art? In a discussion with nephew Fred, he argued that everything is art, while I, with a little of Prof. Dooyeweerd in my Kuyperian soul, countered that everything has an artistic side or aspect to it. He accepted

that. I guess that would mean even junk has an art side to it, at least if it is arranged artistically, an insight that is growing today, I believe. I had to struggle for a while with that particular exhibit.



Vancouver has a public art programme called Vancouver Biennale, under which various art projects are scattered all over the city in public places, often parks. My current favourite is the one by the Chinese Yue Minjun called “A-maze-ing Laughter,”\* a collection of eight larger-than-life bronze male figures with bared chests, laughing exuberantly in

various postures. The sculptures clearly are of one man, probably of the sculptor himself. The collection is located in a triangular garden at the foot of Davie and Denman streets near English Bay. I love to go and explore the collection—as do thousands of others. Though the Biennale exhibits are normally on display for only two years before they get sold or find a permanent home, we were happy to hear that this display will stay for 20 years.

A few writers have observed that where religion has been eclipsed in modern times, art tends to flourish. Of course, others have said the same about sports. I believe there is something to that. The eclipse of religion leaves a vacuum of meaning and relevance that we are hardwired to fill. Art is a major way in which people find or create other expressions of meaning to fill that vacuum, with sports being yet another. That does not mean that art and sports properly conceived in their place, are competitors to religion or necessarily hostile to it, but they take on greater prominence when the meaning and relevance of religion is eclipsed. I believe Vancouver’s artsy atmosphere is an example of this development.

One feature that has attracted me for years are the chess players in front of the Art Gallery. I love the game and would often stop to watch a game to its end. It was fun, what with bystanders making comments or giving advice. However, I never played, for the players always used clocks, a feature I do not tolerate, for any type of time pressure makes me inefficient and, in the case of chess, spoils it for me. Unfortunately, they were pushed out by the Olympics and have not returned so far. I miss them and still hope....

I have already written about the downtown campus of Simon Fraser University which sponsors various lecture series that we enjoy and often attend. In fact, I plan to attend one on *sharia* (Muslim law) this very evening (March 6, 2013). The Public Library is another venue for lectures galore, often of local historical interest that answer many questions that arise as we wander through the city.

There is the annual Remembrance Day ceremony at Victory Square on West Hastings, right across the street from Amsterdam Café, Vancouver's pot centre, the owner of which currently languishes in a US jail. It is an event we attend annually in order to honour the efforts of Canadians to restore freedom to NL by routing the Germans. I have never forgotten the events surrounding our liberation itself and, therefore, never forget to attend this ceremony. In fact, in 2003, I laid a wreath on behalf of Lutjegast and the Boer family. Fran, Karen and Martha accompanied me at the laying. Since we were the only individuals, in distinction of organizations, to lay a wreath, the media interviewed us.



Martha, John & Karen  
at the Cenotaph\*

The Lutjegast Wreath in Place\*

John Paying Homage\*

One huge recurring event in our West End is the annual Celebration of Lights, a series of three evenings during which various nations compete with each other displaying their fireworks. It is an amazing display of colour in the night sky over the waters of English Bay, just fifteen minutes walking from our house. Up to 300-400,000 people attend the event each evening. All roads are closed to traffic as the crowds stream in for hours on end—and then, of course, out. It is such an interesting experience to live in the middle of such seething crowds. Unfortunately, we do not live high enough to see the show from our own balcony. A few times we went down to English Bay where the actual event takes place, but it is just as easy to just go down Bute Street and watch it from there. At other times, we go to watch it from the Burrard Bridge, just a few blocks the other way. The last few years I watch it less, for regardless of how beautiful and impressive, after so many years, the thrill subsides. But when we have company, as will be the case this year, watching the fireworks is a must, at least once or twice. Final report: Fran saw it with the Lieuwens; I didn't. And another night she went with Julie Lieuwen. Again, I didn't; I was assigned to babysit Julie's little Loudoun. You may remember niece Julie as a Calvin student during our Grand Rapids days.

Another annual West End event is Davie Day, when the street is closed to traffic and is filled with booths, buskers of all types and pedestrians enjoying the foods and drinks. Something similar is also held annually on Denman Street, the other shopping area in the WE. The United Church always has a presence at Davie Day, but never FBC. A few years ago we encouraged the appropriate staff at FBC to have the church represented, but he never even responded. We were glad when FBC had a float in the 2012 Santa Claus parade, due, I believe, to the new CEO, Carson Pue, whom you've met before. He appears to be a go-getter. It was also at Davie Day that I met the chiropractor whom I subsequently patronized, with the result being the end of my back pain. As with so many other things, we are living in the midst of all the activity.

Then there is the PNE—Pacific National Exhibition, an annual event that the people love and attend by the thousands. Foods of every culture and kind; all sorts of performances and exhibitions for sale. The Peking Acrobats and the Super Dog shows have been among our favourites. Even the RCMP equestrian unit always has its famous musical show. Also plant and animal displays. If you want to know the stats about the mushroom industry in BC or all the basic facts about cows and milk, including human consumption, Safeway had them all displayed in such an interesting way that we took pictures that ended up in our photo album. I am resisting the urge to reproduce the whole lot in these pages.

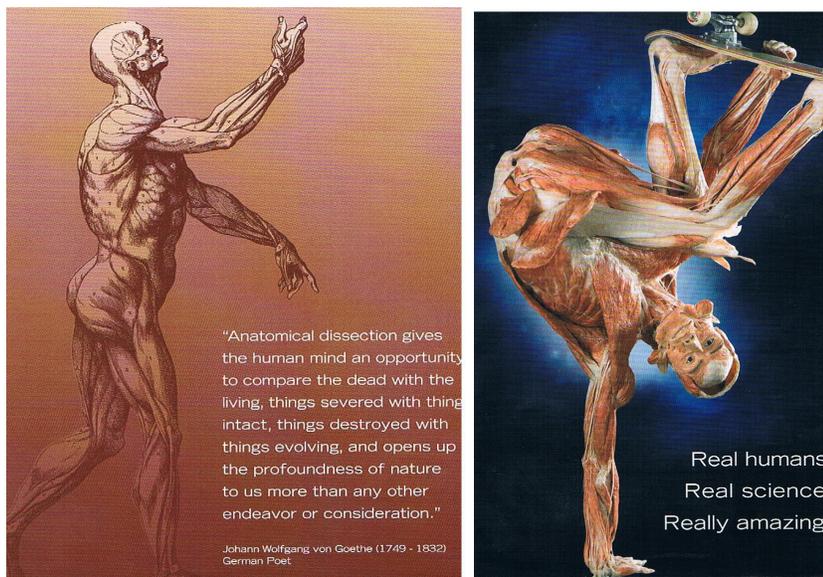
St. Patrick's Day parade is another annual event, but it has been turned from a Gospel celebration to a raw drinking party. Christmas parade has changed to a secular Santa Claus event, though churches are free to participate and some do. I have urged the Baptists to get in on this and finally, in 2012 they did so. I have never felt so good in a Vancouver parade or even in our downtown in general as the time I danced and sang behind the Baptist float. It gave me such a feeling of freedom and exhilaration. We've had a Shriners' Parade as well that was really fun. And, of course, there is the Chinese New Year's parade as well every year and a host of others.

Metro Vancouver is home to the largest Sikh population outside of their homeland, Punjab, India. So, throughout the decade plus that we have been here, there have been various Sikh occasions in which we participated. One was a Sikh wedding in April 2003. I forgot just how we got involved in the event, but we found ourselves sitting on the floor in a Sikh temple among crowds of Sikhs in their colourful clothes, including their turbans. At the front, three Sikh male musicians were sitting at a low table playing very haunting music on their traditional instruments. The food that was distributed was out of this world. Who ever tried to tell us that Asians are culturally inferior people? Ordinary Western cuisine *looks* pretty pathetic compared to those Sikh dishes, let alone *taste*. I do realize that comparing the ordinary of one with the exquisite of the other is not a genuine comparison. It is one of these rich multi-cultural events that makes Vancouver such an intriguing place.

Almost any culture from anywhere in the world will have its day in this city. Or any demonstration from anywhere in the world. The Chinese, the Taiwanese, the Italians, the Germans, etc., they all have their events that involve street closures to traffic and thus create pleasant car-free neighbourhoods for a day, far more entertaining and relaxing than the car-

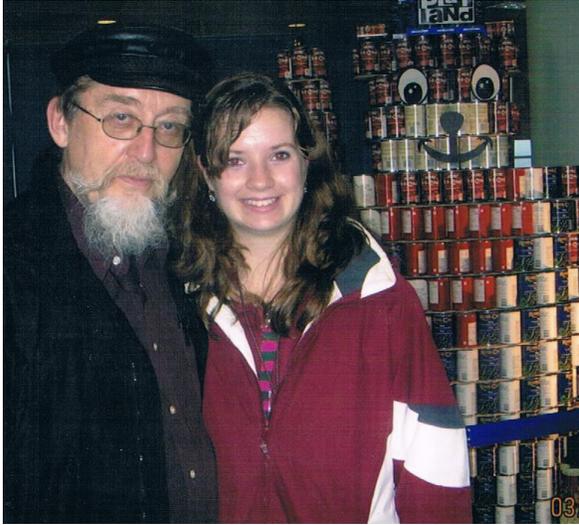
free Sundays in Amsterdam during the oil embargo of 1973, which were fun in their own right, but the reasons behind it were stressful.

Telus Science World, a constantly changing science exposition designed especially for school children, had a “BodyWorlds Exhibit” in 2006 that was nothing short of amazing. Somewhat creepy as well, as it involved “Real humans; Real science.” The “real humans” part of it was actual bodies and body parts that the people on display themselves had donated for this purpose. The bodies and parts had been treated—mummified?—so as to be preserved indefinitely and exposed, both exterior and interior, in such a way that one could see the total body in and out. It was a traveling and controversial exhibition that not everyone could accept or enjoy. We decided to visit the exposition and were totally amazed, even if it kind of creeped us out. Educational for sure; absolutely interesting; enjoyable—that’s another issue.

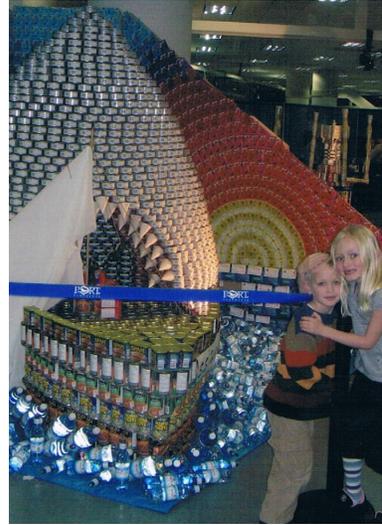


### BodyWorlds – The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies\*

The local Food Bank and their supporters hold annual food collection events. For many years now, teams of architects, engineering designers and elementary school students have banded together for an annual “Canstruction” competition in various downtown locations. It is a contest of who could construct the most beautiful and most complicated exhibits with unopened food cans. The cans themselves, of course, eventually get donated to the Food Bank. Some people construct some amazing exhibits, each involving thousands upon thousands of cans of different colours and formats. In 2007, it coincided with Fran’s 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and the visits of a Dutch aunt’s great granddaughter, Angelina, and of C&A and family. We all went to admire the competition together and were properly amazed. The 2013 version is on as I write, March 29, Good Friday. Since 2002, Canstruction Vancouver has donated over 1,056,000 cans to the Food Bank. The movement started in New York City in 1992 and takes place in 180 cities worldwide. If something is global, then Vancouver will not be kept out.



John & Angelina\*  
Canstruction



Ezra & Asia\*

### *Various Characters*

I have told you about members of the Baptist Church as well as the Rose gang, though I may not always have indicated that some of them were real characters. Our Ethiopian friend Adam was one whose full story would be worth an entire book. Can't go there. Being a fully trained chef in the Vancouver hospitality industry that is dominated by Asians, he ran into all kinds of racism and moved from job to job and from crisis to crisis. Not infrequently he *imagined* racism. He is a man who cannot live with injustice, fraud, dishonesty, etc. He takes action wherever he sees it—and gets into additional troubles time and again from people who feel threatened by him. One Christmas he was totally broke and started selling cigarettes illegally on the street. It took only a couple of days for the police to detect him and confiscate his holdings. He was extremely angry, since another man had been doing this openly for years without being accosted by the authorities. It was, I believe, another of the many racist incidents in his life, of which I have seen others as well.

Adam became so much part of our family that we hung his picture that included his Japanese wife and son under our “family” plaque and so much part of our emotions that I had countless sleepless nights of worry about him. He was scrupulously honest and would always pay his debts to us, even though it might take a couple of years. The stories are more than we have space for. Since he has moved out east, we have regretfully lost contact with him, basically because his wife demands this break in relations. We regret losing him, but life has become much easier for us, less stressful; we were too much involved in his affairs. For privacy reasons we neither reveal his real name nor show his picture.

Then there is the “hoarding lady” whom Fran befriended soon after arriving in Vancouver. Also for reasons of privacy, no name and no picture. She is heavy set and always walks with a heavy load of safety and health equipment on her back. “Just in case,” she explains. Her

apartment is totally occupied with useless hoarded materials such as outdated foods and tons of newspapers and telephone directories. And always talking about gruesome and bloody physical conditions she is suffering. Fran tried to help her overcome her hoarding habits; both of us offered to help her clean up the place, but when we started, she objected vociferously. Dump telephone directories of five years ago? Why, there could be a name and address she will need! After a while we woke up to the situation and gave up. She also complained of poverty, but when an accountant friend of ours agreed to her request to help her with taxes, without betraying privacy issues, he assured us she was “alright” with no financial worries.

Another character is Tom, the sidewalk sweeper.\* He is a trim, good looking, slightly built 80



something, a retired small businessman who got bored living by himself and began cleaning Davie Village sidewalks in front of the businesses. He has become an authority figure on the street who is able to chase the many street people from their sleeping places in the entry alcoves of these businesses. He also serves as the eyes of the city sanitation department. Though he started off *pro bono*, he ended up getting paid from some business owners. He is part of the “street furniture” known to everyone. We are good friends with him, frequently chatting together on the street. As Chairman of WENA, I awarded him a WENA certificate at one of our annual

events of which he is proud till this day. At one time, he sang in the FBC choir, but currently wants nothing to do with the Christian faith and wards off all nudges in that direction.

Then there was Abbas, the Iranian owner of our neighbouring hardware store in which he kept a typical third-world collection of thousands of mostly small items, but he knew the price and location of each one. He was a very proud but sociable person who also served as the neighbourhood handyman. Many neighbours, including myself, came to him for advice and small repair jobs. He would even make house calls. He often travels back to Iran and stays for a month or more. When he’s away, his wife minds the store and she knows prices as well as he does. Unfortunately, he moved his store some three long blocks away to free himself from the street people. That has made him less accessible to us. For West Enders, a store as far as three blocks away is beyond our horizon.

I should not forget that other Iranian, who is the one selling illegal cigarettes on the street and drugs from his apartment for over a decade without the police bothering him. I firmly believe he must be an informer, for why would they not arrest him as they did our friend Adam? He is bent over badly due to severe back pains. I have taken him to my chiropractor when I had just started my treatment and thus too early to point to any success. A year later, now that my back is much better, I am working on him again to go. He seems more interested now that I can affirm the effectiveness of the treatment. He is a sweet man, but suffering too much from his pain. I have considered challenging the police about his illegal work, and, in view of

Adam's experience, accuse them of racism. However, I do not wish to jeopardize his income; he has enough pain as it is.

Actually, I could go on and on and on with different characters, but I believe I have given you enough to sample. Of course, there are "normal" people among our friends as well, but who wants to spend time on the "normal?" Besides, some of them you've already met in other sections of this chapter. Among them are a number of psychologically challenged friends, who, in the spirit of the West End, feel free to talk about their illness and the experiences it brings them. You don't find the hesitation in the West End to talk about such illnesses that you customarily find elsewhere. As a result, I have gained considerable respect for such victims and learned a lot from and about them.

### *Vancouver's Underbelly*

A big issue in Vancouver is its underbelly, concentrated in the Downtown Eastside, but also spilling over into our WE. The Downtown Eastside is the poorest postal district in the country, what with its legions of mentally-challenged folk, addicts, pill pushers, pimps, johns and their prostitutes as well as poor housing and the homeless, etc. In the middle of it all stood the neglected and dilapidated former Woodward Department Store, famous still for its long-gone "\$1.49 day" sales every first Monday of the month. Someone finally took the bull by the horns to renovate the place after it had stood vacant for over a decade, but the neighbourhood derelicts decided in November 2002 to prevent it from happening by camping all around the building. They did not wish to lose "their" building that was home to hundreds of squatters. The watchword was "gentrification" and it was rejected by a vocal group of locals. Eventually, after much dilly-dallying, the Vancouver Police and the city bulldozers cleaned up the place and order was restored. The ingeniously comfortable living and sleeping quarters these folks had erected on the sidewalks surrounding the property were truly remarkable!



**Woodward Squatters Resisting Revitalization\***

However, it was claimed that many of these make-shift facilities were vacant at night, for their owners would go back to their comfortable beds in their comfortable neighbourhoods, while in the day time they would pretend to be the poor that were suffering from discrimination and deprived of their human rights and dignity. There was more than a hint of outhouse activities in the area. The end of that story was a complete gentrified renovation of the building in the midst of shameful poverty and chaos that authorities allowed to develop over the years without the guts to intervene and prevent.

At the same time, the promoters of the Woodward development tried to market the renewed place in terms of downtown versus suburbs, a spirit quite in tune with the attitude of us city dwellers. Far above the protestors and out of their reach they strung a banner with this challenge: “Be Bold or Move to the Suburbs.” Thousands of commuters from the suburbs were taunted with this banner on a daily basis. It must have grated their souls.

Recently, at the time of writing in February 2013, an upscale restaurant has opened its doors in the same neighbourhood and is being harassed by the same locals, again in opposition to gentrification. A *Vancouver Sun* editorial condemned the harassment, stating that it is wrong to defend a slum when efforts are made to improve it. As reported earlier in this chapter, I supported that editorial with a letter to the editor that they published. Though the place caters to well-to-do clients in the very centre of the slums, it is employing and training neighbourhood residents. The protests have not intimidated them and the harassment has abated somewhat, but it is now targeting another new establishment.

Actually, we enjoy visiting the area occasionally, especially to eat in one of the many inexpensive restaurants. The meals are usually simple but surprisingly tasty, but what attracts us more is the camaraderie of the clients. You often sit along long counters right along the “natives” of the area and they are the friendliest people you can find anywhere, just about always ready for a chat. Occasionally we buy a lunch in the Carnegie building, the popular social centre for this crowd. We enjoy that tremendously and it fits the reputation of the neighbourhood as a bonding community where people are always ready to jump in and help each other. It contrasts sharply to the more distant clients in the middle-class restaurants of downtown where you are usually expected to keep to yourself.

That reputation seems contrary to the resistance the people show to gentrification. How can they simultaneously be friendly to outsiders? Well, as long as you come in with clear friendliness and respect for them, they respond accordingly. But as soon as you are seen as attacking or despising their culture, they rise up in arms. The “gentrifiers,” I must hasten to add, are not necessarily among those despisers; quite the opposite. Businesses are sprouting up with the conscious intention of training the locals for useful occupations. Sometimes it seems attractive to me to go live there, but I have noticed that most of the staff members of both Christian and secular service organizations working in the area live elsewhere. There must be a good reason for that.

This part of town is also home to many “binners,” people who make their living scouring downtown’s garbage bins for items that can be recycled. You see them, mostly walking, but

sometimes on bikes ingeniously outfitted to ply their trade, which is to collect recyclable items and sell them to “United We Can,” a now very successful business founded by a former homeless person. It is located in the heart of the area. Anytime of the day you come past the place, you will see a long lineup of people with their bags and shopping carts full of recyclables. They perform a most useful function in keeping tons of stuff out of the landfills. Only a few of them are a nuisance when they scrounge through the bins and leave a lot of junk carelessly scattered outside of the bin.

The binner culture is not confined to Downtown Eastside; you find it throughout downtown, including our neighbourhood. When we ourselves have recyclables, we will often drop them off next to garbage containers on the sidewalks, from where “binners” will pick them up. In fact, these sidewalk containers are now designed to place recyclables in an outside frame attached to them to avoid the need to scrounge through the garbage inside, for that has now become more difficult to access to avoid a mess. There is a love-hate relationship between the binners and the city; they constantly seek to outwit each other. At other times, residents in our own building will dump boxes of recyclables in our garbage area. When that happens, we seek to alert binners and open the gate for them to pick them up. They are usually very grateful for this sort of cooperation.

Occasionally, when I run into a binner pushing a shopping cart full of recyclables who is going the same direction, I have walked with them and even helped push the cart while chatting. Again, they are often very friendly people who are eager for some respectful conversation. One time I helped push a cart all the way into downtown. When we parted, the binner thanked me for humiliating myself in public. I told him that the idea of humiliation had not occurred to me. Besides, I was merely following the example of Jesus, who humiliated Himself far deeper on my/his behalf.

Sometimes Fran calls the city to complain about messy situations in the back alley next to our building but nine floors below, clearly visible from our windows. Usually it is not caused by “binners,” but by neighbouring businesses or by residents. If it is from a neighbouring business, the city will call them on it. Sometimes residents need to get rid of furniture, including bedding, and just dump it near a bin in the area. Since it is impossible to trace such mischief, the city will come and clean up the mess.

### *Demonstrations and Violence*

Vancouver not only loves parades, but it is also a demonstrators’ paradise, partially because the authorities are weak and hesitant to step in at the appropriate time, largely due to the leftist liberal orientation of the city. They tend to let things run their course, until the damage becomes unacceptable even to our leftist citizenry—or until the next election is over!

Some Vancouverites participated in an International Protest Day against the war in Iraq. The demonstration quickly expanded to include every cause imaginable. As such things go, the crowds carried all kinds of banners and placards for one cause or another. “Stop the War on Iraq; “Big Oil Is Bound to Make a Killing in Iraq.” A duo sporting Chretien and Bush masks

wanted “No Foreign Armies in Canada,” while supporters of “Atheists.Net” sported a sign saying “Jesus Is a False God Too. Religion Kills.” Hundreds of people participated in this demonstration.



#### The Ultimate Protest\*

Ours is a hockey-crazed city that produces traffic gridlock at every game. But the city and province are fully behind it, for these games generate a lot of business and taxes—as well as more riots. Some years before we arrived, there was a riot when the local team lost Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals. It was a severely damaging riot. During our time, there was a similar riot for the same reason that led to cars burned, store windows smashed and much looting. Many of the participants were the useless kids of respectable citizens who were bereft of any resistance to the chaotic impulses due to alcohol and lack of positive values in the secular dysfunctional homes of the Metro. After all the damage, the city was flooded with tears from those stupid kids, some of whose life-long ambitions were cut short. The police promised a thorough investigation and court cases that are still snaking their way through the system. Well, you know the saying: Justice delayed.... Only last week, a participating beauty queen got away with a mere slap on her wrist. After all, she is a nice girl!

The most bizarre, persistent and damaging demonstration was that 2012 (in)famous international Occupy movement that was instigated by a Vancouver writer, who apparently had no idea it would take off as it did. That writer’s challenge was taken up by New York demonstrators who pretended they represented 99% of the people in their opposition to establishment politics and economics. I was basically sympathetic to their cause. It spread quickly everywhere with Vancouver taking it on enthusiastically, once again proving that what goes around comes around.

As almost any such event in Vancouver, it was soon hijacked by addicts and their ilk, who gathered at the Art Gallery by the hundreds and, claiming human rights, destroyed the

beautiful grounds so carefully maintained for the enjoyment of the public. They put up makeshift shelters and started lighting fires at will. The public no longer had access to enjoying the premise. The Fire Dept. had a constant presence along with police, but no one dared touch them till after a local election was held. Then the authorities moved in and chased them out. They moved around to a couple of other venues, but were chased out of a neighbourhood park by the locals, the very people they pretended to represent. A year and a half later, March 2014, those grounds still look dismal with bare black soil reminding the citizens of the debacle. So far the city spent well over \$1 million with more to come.

My Grand Rapids friend, Ron Roper, was positively involved in the movement in that city and was using some of my publications to stimulate Christian participation in it. I was happy with that, for in Grand Rapids it was not hijacked as it was in Vancouver. I might have joined it over there with him! Indeed, they had a legitimate cause similar to that of the 1960 hippies that even enjoyed the sympathy of my mentor Prof. Evan Runner.

Demonstration after demonstration at Robson Square. We don't always take pictures of them, but we did take a picture of a pro-foreign doctors rally that rightly complained about the extreme hurdles the medical establishment has placed on foreign doctors joining their establishment. Now I am aware of different levels of medical training in many countries that we cannot tolerate in Canada, but the almost absolutely locked gate is unjust and unreasonable. Why allow such people in with false promises? It is ridiculous that our taxis are driven by highly qualified professionals, a waste of talent and resource. And then we have a picture of a pro-marriage rally, sporting a Canadian flag and a banner, "God Keep Our Land."

At the time of writing, March 2013, we ran into a demonstration demanding an end to discrimination against women the world over, but it was closely tied up with global condemnation of all religion. I engaged a couple of the participants in discussion, ensuring them I am a deeply religious man who abhors every form of discrimination. Why do they join these two opposites, since Christianity, in spite of all its historical blunders, has been at the forefront in the battle against discrimination. One man readily saw my point. Another started delivering a fiery sermon on the evil of religion and the virtues of reason. After his five-minute non-stop harangue, Fran and I stopped him in his tracks and declared him the most fundamentalist militant Atheist we had ever met and the most religious, given his deep faith and commitment to reason. We needed to leave, but we hardly budged him.

Actually, if we printed all our photos of protest movements in the city, this volume would become a photo album. Well, pictures *are* worth a thousand words...!

### *Sports*

You may have noticed that so far I have mentioned little about sporting events. We do enjoy watching various games on TV—tennis, baseball and soccer especially, winter sports at Whistler and, sometimes, hockey for a few minutes--, but do not attend many. Too expensive. Besides, you get a better view of the details on TV. We did attend a couple of baseball games,

and were humoured by the fans' sporting culture at least as much as we enjoyed the game itself.

We attended one live hockey event together with a group from the United Church soon after our arrival in Vancouver. It was a minor league game between Vancouver and some other team from the BC interior. The Vancouver team was aware they did not stand a chance. So, they decided to turn the game into a fist fight and thus make it difficult for the other team. It was shameful and downright stupid. I decided never to attend a hockey game again and so far have stuck to that decision. It helps, of course, that Major League games are very expensive indeed.

A significant annual April event in which we don't participate but eagerly watch is the *Vancouver Sun Run*. *The Sun* works hard at creating a climate of excitement during the days prior to the event. And well it should, for they gather no fewer than 50,000 runners on that day! Yes, 50,000—no exaggeration! That comes close to a world record. Not just once, but every year. Even for bystanders like us, it is an exciting event that we eagerly await in anticipation and then watch at the end line to see which Africans come in first. They gather at the starting line, 100 or 200 in a group at a time, each participant with a chip in her/his shoes that makes it irrelevant which group he is placed in, for it is the chip that records the timing. This makes looks deceiving. It is possible that the first to cross the finish lines are not the fastest. However, I understand the organizers put those expected to be the fastest on basis of their records, in the first group so as to mitigate the possibility of deceiving looks. The first to cross the finish line *usually* ends up being the fastest according to the chip. The chip also helps the organizers to identify runners by name as they cross the finish line. When a prominent sports or other public figure—and there are many of them-- crosses that line, their names are announced immediately, a practice that adds to the excitement. The next day we eagerly scour the numerous pages of *The Sun* for the names of our friends who ran to see what place they took in the race. Just great fun and excitement and a lot of money raised for various charities.

The various governments do all they can to support sports. Not only does it generate much economic activity, but it also diverts people from boredom, from bad politics and from the meaninglessness inherent in the secular culture. Many people are so engrossed in sports that it has become a religion to them, an observation aired by many sociologists and that I share. It fills their lives every vacant moment of the day.

Vancouver reached a sports climax, not to say frenzy, during the 2010 Winter Olympics. The media did all they could to build up the appropriate excitement for the event for most of the entire preceding decade. It was a controversial issue. The city held a referendum to gauge the popular opinion, but this was only because they had promised a referendum before the choice of Vancouver as the venue was confirmed. They could not really back out after that confirmation, but held the referendum to fulfill their promise with the provision that its result would not be binding! The majority voted in favour, of course. What would you expect from an unthinking secular city? I voted against it, not because I did not like the fun and atmosphere that comes with it, but because I was convinced that it was based on many false economic predictions and budgetary assurances. It would be much more expensive than the

authorities predicted—and that became true with a vengeance. I won't go into the gory details of the economics of Olympic Village that allegedly left the citizens on the hook for over a billion! Complete ineptitude on the part of a City Council that had no idea about real estate. Not to speak of the costs of the Sea to Sky Highway to Whistler, the major skiing venue or of the need to truck in snow from a distance of several hundreds of kilometres!

But the Olympics *were* fun, even for us! We were living pretty well in the very centre of it all, with thousands upon thousands of visitors from every country. We only watched some of the sporting events on TV, but it was accompanied by a rich celebration of international culture with so many participating nations having special venues displaying their cultures. I already told you about the Dutch participation.



By Day



By Night

### The Olympic Flame\*

We loved the ambience of the city at the time. It helped that the weather was exceptionally mild, but that's what required the trucking in of snow. We are tempted once again to insert many pictures of the events in these pages. Alas, the pictures of the Olympic flame will have to represent the rest. We could show you pictures of the many long, winding lineups of people patiently (?) shuffling their way into events. For days, lineups wrapped themselves around The Bay with its large Olympic department.

One day during those two weeks, I was called by the Dutch radio broadcasting group NCRV—*Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging* (Netherlands Christian Radio Association)—that emerged from the Kuiperian movement. They invited me to an interview about the role of the Vancouver churches in the Olympics. I hesitated because my Dutch had not kept up with the living dynamic language at home. So, they arranged a mock interview that I passed with flying colours. As per agreement, that Sunday morning at 6 am they called and did the actual interview. I had practiced and written down some items to ensure proper Dutch and it all worked out well. I even threw in a Dutch pun about the mobile toilet services provided by some churches on their parking lots that made the interviewer break out into a hearty laugh. It worked! I was proud to be heard all over my fatherland in my mother tongue. It was a fun

adventure for me. I received a fountain pen with “NCRV” inscribed on it as my reward. You know what a fountain pen is, right?

The Open Sanctuary project at FBC described earlier was started during the Olympic weeks and has continued ever since. You already know about our involvement in it, especially Fran’s, which is ongoing even now some years later. Another form of participation on my part was the serving of hot chocolate to the public at Skytrain stations during cold evenings. It was my chance to ham it up with ridiculous and, hopefully, somewhat funny calls. One of my partners was Near Easterner. Once he found out that I held a doctorate, he was amazed that I would so humiliate myself in such a serving function. To be honest, it did feel a bit humiliating, but to him this was an impressive practical example of a serving Christian leader.

There were some outside religious groups at the event as well, such as the Action Ministries International Sports Chaplains that participate in every Olympic.



Sports Chaplains\*

Vancouver Stats\*

### *Getting Around*

You know that we have this RV, but you have not been told that we have no ordinary car. Our RV is parked on the outside parking lot straight below our ninth-floor balcony. That vehicle is hardly suitable for moving about in the city. Well, no problem, for we wanted to live where we did not need a car for daily use, remember? And we got it. We can get to most places we want simply by walking. This morning I walked to the chiropractor, a walk of some 20 minutes. Did some shopping on the way back using a combination of leg and bus with a monthly transit pass that gives us access to all the transit facilities in Metro Vancouver. This evening I will be walking to the downtown satellite campus of SFU to attend a lecture on sharia after the Arab Spring. Afterwards, I either walk home or take the bus, depending on weather conditions and my residual energy for the day. When we go to the suburbs, it

depends on our destination(s) whether we take transit, including Skytrain and the Canada Line. If a single destination, it will usually be transit; if more than one, it will usually be RV.

We end up walking a lot, not to save money so much as to get exercise. Besides, it is enjoyable to walk in Vancouver; it is a walking downtown with crowds everywhere. And always something unusual and surprising to see. A morning routine of mine is to walk down the very steep Bute Street hill that begins just past our place and then tumbles down to False Creek, an ocean inlet four blocks down. The purpose of this routine is to climb back up for the exercise. It's a steep challenge. Through it all, we get the exercise we need at our age. In fact, for our age, we do an excessive amount of walking; it keeps us feeling fit. Fran, being a natural statistician, wears a pedometer so that she knows the exact number of steps she takes per day!

Transit is relatively cheap, especially for seniors. A basic ride is \$1.75 for an hour and a half within one zone. Crossing into other zones brings extra charges. But we can travel Vancouver-Victoria for approximately \$10 on certain days. No one can complain about that! Just don't take your car, for then you get a different story. If we take the Greyhound to Seattle, as seniors we are out a mere \$75 for a return for the two of us! We are blessed.

We have given you little more than a skimpy sketch of Vancouver. It was a hard struggle to resist turning this part of the memoirs into a photo album, for we have so many beautiful pictures of a city often dubbed the best in the world by those who know.

### *Interaction with Muslims and Islam*

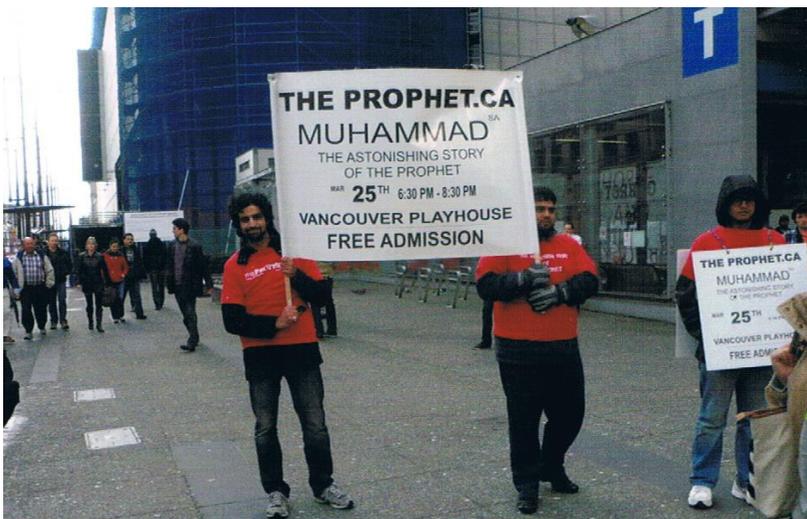
Though Metro Vancouver does not count many Muslims among its residents, we tried hard to build relationships with that community, but that is not an easy task. You have already read about our involvement in the Baptist outreach. For one thing, the number of mature Muslim men or couples is low in our West End, though there do seem to be quite a few young people. I somehow managed to get myself on various local Muslim electronic newsletters by means of which we would find out about Muslim events that we could attend, especially lectures. We tried that route. We would attend an event and both prior to and after the event would try to strike up conversations with Muslims. They were always friendly and polite, but indicated no interest in further socialization. Since most of them were Asians, they had no interest whatsoever in our Nigerian background or the series about Nigerian Islam. Without saying it, they expressed obvious disinterest and racism when it came to African Islam. Asians in general, of course, have a reputation of racism amongst each other and even more so when it comes to Blacks. Asian Muslims seem no different in this respect in spite of Muslim denial: Islam is not racist; Muslims cannot be racist.

This approach seemed to be a dead end. The last couple of years we have not attended many lectures because of the pressure of these memoirs. We don't want this to be another interminable project. Probably age plays a role as well, for these Muslim events seldom take place in Vancouver proper. You usually have to take long trips in the evenings to distant suburbs.

Muslims hold an annual “Canadian Islamic Cultural Expo” on the grounds at the Art Gallery in downtown. We often attend it and enjoy meeting various Muslims there. We have a couple of interesting pictures of the 2005 version. One shows a sizable group of Muslim men kneeling for prayer with their faces to the ground and their buttocks “facing” heaven. Both a humorous and impressive sight. The next picture shows the women praying—you guessed it!—*behind* the men. Fran’s written comment: “Women in the back—in Vancouver!” That scene would tempt most Vancouverites to scorn the entire Muslim culture.

One spring, I took a course on Islam designed for seniors at the downtown campus of Simon Fraser University (SFU). My goal was to discover how Islam would be explained on a secular Canadian university campus and how secular Canadians would react to it. The part time lecturer was the imam of a Richmond mosque who presented Islam in a positive light, but was hardly academically objective, frequently defending Islam over against the West. He was also often critical of the stance, attitudes and activities of Muslims. As Muslims tend to do, he treated the West as a monolithic whole and failed to make the necessary distinctions between Secularism and Christianity. The class listened to and discussed with him with proper respect. I am not sure they would have accorded the same respect if the subject or the lecturer had been Christian.

I once had a coffee with the lecturer and gave him some advice, gave him a free copy of my entire series and expressed interest in developing a permanent relationship with him. He sounded interested in the idea, but never responded to my subsequent invitations. He had told me he was having trouble with his congregation, who felt he was too open to Canadian society and were trying to dislodge him from his position. I believe he was dislodged and then disappeared from my radar, something I deeply regretted. He was a gentle person and would have made a good friend.



In March, 2013, we attended an unusual event. It was advertised by young people walking around on Granville Street carrying banners. This was a campaign conducted by the local Ahmadiyya Muslim community in the Vancouver Playhouse, an expensive venue in downtown. Along with many others, we accepted their invitation to this free event.

Muslim Street Evangelism\*

The Ahmadiyya are a Muslim sect that has an uneasy relationship with the rest of the Muslim community, something akin to the relationship between the churches and Jehovah Witnesses. In some countries they are “excommunicated,” that is, declared non-Muslim. Sometimes they are discriminated against in different ways by the larger Muslim community.

The event was magnificently organized with great free snacks and coffee as well as books, some free, some for sale. The main focus was a film called “Muhammad: The Astonishing Story of the Prophet.” The film was interrupted many times by a main speaker, Qur’anic chanters, and a beautifully dressed group of children, boys and girls, singing. The entire programme was superbly and artistically done in a very irenic spirit. They downplayed the differences they have with the larger Muslim community. They stressed commonalities with Christianity. They praised Canada as the world’s home for freedom of religion, etc. The dominant tone was that Islam is a religion of peace and that the Prophet stood for peace and justice in the chaotic pagan environment of pre-Islamic ignorance in Saudi Arabia.

The speaker devoted a whole two sentences to the fact that Muslims don’t always follow Islam properly. These two sentences were meant to address the many questions we and, no doubt, many in the audience, had about Muslim wars, violence and terrorism. That was sliding over a burning issue too easily and gave it a hypocritical atmosphere. More honest and explicit statements were necessary to make the rest of the presentation believable.

After the event, we talked to some of the organizers and they promised to get in touch after I gave them my card. I also talked to one of them about Afghan hats, which I would like to add to my hat collection—and wear. He promised to follow up on it for me. As usual, no one followed up on anything. What is this with BC Muslims? So friendly when you meet them but then they drop you.

For those curious about Ahmadiyya Islam, here are a couple of websites:

[www.alislam.org](http://www.alislam.org) [www.ahmadiyya.ca](http://www.ahmadiyya.ca) [www.TheProphet.ca](http://www.TheProphet.ca)

I have already told you of my lectures on the subject in both Vancouver’s First CRC and FBC. For a while, I opened myself up to giving lectures outside of Vancouver on Muslim subjects, an activity I enjoyed greatly. Once I was invited to speak to a small non-traditional “upstart” CRC congregation in Abbotsford. I was actually the preacher for the morning. A larger opportunity came from a CRC congregation in Lynden WA that invited me to do a series of three presentations to their adult Sunday School. But these opportunities were minor compared to the ones described later.

### *The Turkish Damla Community*

Another attempt at building relations with Muslims came through WVC. Our group somehow had forged kind of a friendship with a Turkish organization known as the Damla Foundation that had as its official aim to create just such friendships with Canadians. They have an annual dinner to which they invited us WVC members. We honoured the invitation and had a

wonderful evening with them, great Turkish food and an equally great programme. At the event, they asked me to give a brief introduction to my series, which I was happy to oblige, of course. Unfortunately, like Asian Muslims—or are Turks Asians themselves?—they do not show interest in Africans or books about them, even if about African Muslims, their brothers and sisters.

This relationship, as you have already read, spilled over to FBC, from where my relationship with the Damla leader began to develop further than any other so far. We would go for “coffees,” which always morphed into full-blown lunches for which he insisted on picking up the tab. This was always in Turkish restaurants; he refused to go to any other. I soon began to realize that the issue was that of *halal* food, food approved by Islam. But he would not even go to other *Muslim* restaurants, only Turkish. That was not religion so much as culture, provincial culture.

We also began to socialize by visiting, with our wives, in each others’ homes. We would dine together as couples; none of the separation of genders for which Islam is widely known, nor any special Muslim dress for the wife, apart from the obviously modest style and the moderate head scarf, just enough to cover the hair. There were often a couple of other guests as well, probably to help keep the conversation flowing. English was difficult. Of course, these were Turkish Muslims who had been subjected to a secular regime since the 1920s. They were not like most other Muslims.

We also had them over for dinner at our house a couple of times, but then things became more awkward, for the husband, without saying anything, would simply not touch the meat we served on their plates. The perplexing thing was that the wife *would* eat it. We hesitated to bring up the subject, but eventually I did during a restaurant event just between the two of us. Then he explained that he happened to be particularly strict on this issue, more so than many other Muslims. He insisted, as he did at the Baptist Thanksgiving dinner—remember?—not only that there be no trace of pork anywhere in the meal, but also that it be butchered by a Muslim butcher and killed the Muslim way. When I asked other Muslims about this, they were rather scornful of this man’s puritanism. This went too far even for them. How did Damla expect to reach its socialization goals with Canadians with such an attitude?

Then he disappeared from the radar. It was months later that he called to tell me he had suddenly moved to Calgary and that a new man had replaced him in Vancouver. I got in touch with him, but basically the scenario repeated itself. By now I had concluded that it may be easier to befriend ordinary Muslims instead of leaders. When we had a couple of other Damla members over for a meal, things were much more relaxed and informal. I believe that’s the direction we need to take it, but if we want to continue with the Damla organization, then we do need to keep the connection to its leaders alive.

#### *An Academic Muslim Conference--Vancouver*

During the last week of November 2013, I attended a full-day seminar at Simon Fraser University (SFU) on multiculturalism and pluralism in Canada and Indonesia. It was a very

interesting event, what with North American and Indonesian speakers. Some of the North Americans were Muslim scholars, but most of them were run-of-the-mill secularists. One may have been a Christian, but like so many Canadian Christians, they hardly identify as Christians, for they have bought into a dualistic secularism that allows them to leave their Christian shoes at the portals of academia. The Indonesians were a mixed group of Christians and Muslims, with Christians openly identifying themselves. I was hoping that this mixed group would deal with the increase in Muslim intolerance in their country and persecution of Christians. I was disappointed. As in every other gathering that includes Muslims, this one followed the tradition of bypassing the subject. And, also as per tradition, the other participants in the conference always fail to bring it up as well during the discussion period.

I decided to take the bull by the horns this time and raised the issue. Not surprising, it did not spark a discussion for everyone to participate in. One of the Christian lecturers belittled the issue by ensuring us that it is a minor problem in a few isolated places. I felt he betrayed his people, though I was not surprised, for he was sponsored by the Egyptian Ministry of Religion, a high official of which was among the audience. He did not have the courage to bite the hands that fed him. I should not criticize him until I myself face such a situation, for it would probably have spelled the end of his career. That official himself also addressed my challenge by explaining that it was a matter of some extremists and foreigners, but it was not in keeping with official government policy. His response was typical of officials in governments that are struggling with Christian-Muslim relations. They will hide every embarrassing truth and fact to avoid offending either or both religions. Part of the problem was the format of the conference: No provisions for discussion or debate, only question and answer. During the break, a number of people thanked me for bringing up this politically incorrect topic, even though it did not go very far.

The department sponsoring this conference holds on-going series of public events dealing with Islam and we attend quite a number of them. They are always interesting, but never bring up this topic or leave room for open discussion. Next time I attend one I will ask that provision be made for more open discussion. In fact, one was held later this month of February, 2014, when a Muslim scholar, Ebrahim Moosa, spoke on “Retrieving the ‘Ethical’ in Islamic Law: A Worthy Pursuit or a Fool’s Errand?” Unfortunately, I was not able to attend that event.

### *Lecturing Abroad*

#### *Overseas Ministries Study Center Seminar—New Haven, CT, USA*

So far, I have discussed *local* interaction with the Muslim community, but, I also had wider connections, if not with Muslims, then with Islam in general. Spring, 2011 turned out to be a busy period for us. I was invited to two significant lecture occasions, the first one in April at the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC) in New Haven CT, located right across the street from Yale Seminary, while the other one was scheduled for May in Ibadan, Nigeria.

The OMSC event was a seminar for an international group of students, some of whom flew from abroad just for purposes of this seminar. When I discovered that, I felt a special

obligation to make it worthwhile, especially since some had advanced degrees as well. The dozen participants were mission leaders in one way or another. The seminar ran from Monday afternoon through Friday morning. The subject was “Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria” as a case study that was based on my series.



**John Lecturing at OMSC\***

No one told us, but we read from a brochure that this seminar was financially supported by CRWM. Remember them? Our employers in Nigeria. I was surprised that they would support a seminar run by us, but also grateful. We learnt from the Center’s administration that the current CRWM Director is an ardent supporter of their programme and often participates. I was happy for this support and experienced it a bit as a palm branch of peace between us. I sent them a letter of appreciation.

The Center is a charming and comfortable place designed for such events. It holds courses and seminars throughout the year and hosts international scholars who are doing research while also participating in the Center’s scholarly events. The only thing lacking was a kitchen and dining facility. We were expected to take our meals on a campus almost a kilometer down the road. We truly enjoyed staying at this place and were not ready to leave when it was time.

As to format, we would hold one long morning session with a coffee break at mid-time and another long one in the pm, also with a break. My lectures would follow the contours of my series and included quite a few readings from it. I would do the lecturing, but Fran would do the readings. The readings were all marked to make it easy for her to locate. The advantages of this method were that it gave my voice a rest and, secondly, it created variety for the participants. My voice, remember, has a history of troubles. The participants told us they liked this format very much and thought it very creative.

As to content, in the introductory presentation I introduced two men who had been very influential in the formation of the culture, religion and politics of their people, both of whom

were key figures in this seminar. The first was Shehu Danfodio (1754-1817), the man who revived Northern Nigerian Islam and established the Sokoto Sultanate. His shadow continues to hover over the place. The other was the Dutchman, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), whose shadow hovers over my series and over myself as well as over his country. The mature work of both of them were a century apart. I think of Kuyper as the Danfodio of The Netherlands and of the latter as the Kuyper of Nigeria.

Besides that introduction, here are the main topics of the seminar:

**Background Factors to the Nigerian Christian-Muslim Struggle**  
**Colonial Developments**  
**The Muslim Perspective on the Contemporary Nigerian Struggle**  
**Call for Sharia**  
**The Christian Reaction to Sharia**  
**Re-Focusing Objections to Sharia**

There was heavy personal shadow hovering over us that week. Ray, Fran's oldest brother, had been seriously ill for some weeks, but seemed to be recovering. Suddenly, during the middle of our course on Wednesday morning, he took an unexpected turn for the worse, and on the Sunday after our seminar, peacefully passed away. During the course, we tried our best to book a plane to Grand Rapids for Fran to pay him a last visit, but aviationally speaking, New Haven is too isolated. We did find a possible way she could travel via a very circuitous route, taking much time with no guarantee she would make it on time, while costing a fortune. It was her decision to stay and complete the seminar with us. The students greatly appreciated her painful gesture as did I. Presenting the rest of the lectures without her doing the readings would have made it very difficult for me, more specifically, for my voice. Thank you, Fran.

When it was time for us to fly out of New Haven, there was too much fog for planes to land and alight. We had to take a taxi to Hartford, CT, and flew from there. That taxi ride cost us a cool \$100. Though we had not really been eager to leave OMSC, we were happy to arrive at home again. Now it was time to prepare for our next adventure.

*Adeolu Adegbola Memorial Lecture—Ibadan, Nigeria*

The next adventure. During the course of 2010, I was invited to deliver the sixth annual lecture in the Adeolu Adegbola Memorial Foundation Series in 2011 organized by the Institute of Church & Society, Ibadan. You may recall from the Jos chapters that Adegbola was the Director of ICS Ibadan who appointed me to establish ICS Jos. He had passed away, but his sons and friends wanted to keep his legacy alive by means of an annual lecture series.

Our arrangement was to spend a month with Wiebe and Joanna, who were by now living in Lagos, only some 150 kilometres from Ibadan. From there we would be driven to Ibadan by our old friend Modupe Oduyoye, who sat on the Foundation's Board and was among those who chose me to present the 2011 lecture. It turned out that he also featured prominently in

the lecture itself, since he had published a book in which he wrote positively about sharia, Muslim law. That took some courage for a Christian!

My title was “Retooling Our Approach to Sharia: A Wholistic and Pluralistic Perspective.” The lecture headings were:

1. *Introduction*
2. *Requisite Attitudinal Pillars (towards sharia peace)*
3. *A Wholistic Approach to Religion*
4. *Law and Culture*
5. *A Pluralistic Approach*

It being 30 pages, you will realize that I had to summarize certain parts or, as they say, “speak to” the lecture rather than deliver it in its entirety. And, in case you are wondering, the event would hold in English, the official language of the country.

Modupe had brought us to Ibadan the day before, where they put us up in a good guesthouse. Just to remind us of our earlier days in Jos, the electricity was disrupted at least once per hour throughout our stay there. At that front, nothing seemed to have changed in Nigeria. During that evening Modupe took us around a few establishments, including the Dominican monastery right next to the ICS. There we met a well-known American Muslim scholar Joseph Kennie, who had lived in Nigeria for decades and whom I had wanted to meet for a long time. He was not even interested/polite enough to invite us in but had a brief chat with us standing in the yard and then dismissed us. I had the distinct feeling that he was afflicted with a Catholic superiority complex who regarded me as just another unknown wild Protestant. I did not feel good during our short conversation with him. Before we left him, Modupe gave him a copy of the published lecture. The following morning, he came up to me in the lecture hall and shook my hand profusely with an enthusiastic “Well done!” He was obviously impressed after all. This was not just a “wild Protestant;” I was now a scholar of substance in his eyes. I regretted not meeting him again; I should have insisted afterwards, except that I had serious voice trouble by then. He passed away in 2013..

Yes, voice trouble indeed. The delivery was bracketed by sudden, unexpected and extreme voice fluctuations that I have never experienced before. You know I had voice problems for many years, but this was something else. The morning of the lecture I got up without noticing anything unusual. Fran and I took a walk and engaged in our normal chatting. An hour before the lecture, my voice started to crack and within 30 minutes I could only whisper! What was this? I was shocked! Why should this happen just before I was to present a lecture for which we had traveled all the way to Nigeria! We did a desperate and hurried prayer and were driven to the venue, where we met our hosts and organizers again. In a whisper, I told them what was happening. They laughed boisterously and dismissed the problem. “Don’t worry. God will see you through.” Then they turned to a driver and instructed him to fetch me some cough drops from a local pharmacy. Upon his return, I started sucking these, while they escorted me to the podium in a huge assembly hall at Emmanuel College, near the ICS.

They set the two of us down at the “high table” and went off to make further arrangements. There were other guests already sitting there and more were on the way, obviously all prominent people with clerical and academic robes as well as some in flowing colourful Yoruba robes called “*agbada*”—one of the two Yoruba words I know, the other being “*oga*.” We were indeed among august company, the cream of society. Adegbola had been a highly-placed person who had enjoyed the respect of the community leaders. I felt very honoured to have been invited to address such a crowd.

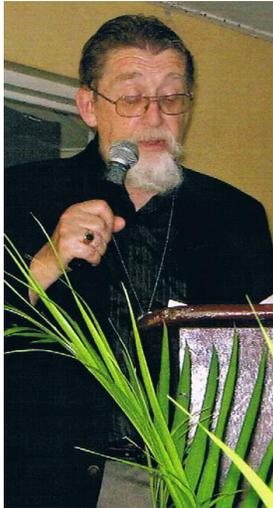
But what was I to do? What could I expect from my voice? I could not even speak to the other guests, for I needed to protect whatever voice I had. Fran and I had already agreed that, if I did not have a voice, she would read the lecture on my behalf, following the highlights and other marks I had inserted for my own delivery. We continued praying in our hearts that my voice be released.

In the meantime, it was getting hot in the place. This was May, towards the end of the dry season, the hottest part of the year in an already oppressively humid tropical climate at the best of times. The many windows were all open and there were fans all over keeping the air moving, but it was still hot and getting hotter as the sun itself rose higher and higher. And here I was, wearing a Western suit and sweating it out something terrible. The heat was made worse by my apprehension about my voice. Would I be able to pull it off? “Come on, Lord, you can’t spoil this event, please. Work a miracle.”

The programme started with all sorts of prolegomena and introductions, but all of it leading up to the climax, namely the Adegbola lecture. In the meantime, I was sitting there wondering what would happen. Would the Lord return my voice to me in time? When my time had come, I did not know whether I had a voice or not. When I stood up, I did not know. When I opened my mouth, I did not know. This was the strangest and oddest experience I ever had. When I shaped my mouth and tongue to utter the first word... what would happen? I had my voice! Yes, it was there, but it hardly seemed to be my voice, for it was low and gravelly, nothing like my normal voice. I sounded like a stranger to myself, but there was a voice and I gratefully determined to make the best of it. I warned my audience—which, by the way, was huge and filled the entire cavernous space—that my voice might fail me and that Fran would then arise and read the rest of it.

Here I was, uncertain of my voice, in stifling heat, wearing a “proper” suit and perspiring like ever. With the fans blowing all around me, I had to hold down my lecture with one hand while I needed the other hand for the mike. That meant my hands were virtually tied up and it was impossible for me to move and gesture the way I usually do when speaking in public. As soon as I was finished with a page, all I could do was just throw it in Fran’s direction—she sat close to me— and quickly get my hands back on the pile of remaining pages lest they blow away. Never have I spoken in public in as impossible a situation as this one. Never. In a way, it was a hell of an experience, but difficult as it was and as hard as I had to concentrate on the delivery, slowly I felt God relaxing me and assuring me that it would all end well—and so it did. My low gravelly voice held up till the end and I even had enough of a voice to respond to questions and comments. And then, when it was all done and the audience duly applauded their “brilliant” guest speaker, my voice promptly returned to that earlier whisper. I was

done and could not even hold informal chats with people on the floor. As the day progressed, my voice slowly returned to near normal. What a day! Thanks for this opportunity to lecture, but please, no more days like this. Amen.



John Lecturing\*



The Audience\*

The next day, Modupe took us to the ICS and I nearly broke into tears. The place was in such disrepair and neglect that it would take a fortune to restore it to its former glory. Likewise, he took us to Daystar Press, which was in similar shape. He had retired from it years ago. There were still books, including my own, on some shelves in an old dilapidated building, but they were all covered by dust. The proprietor of these institutions, the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), had died an unofficial death, but “forgot to lie down,” as a popular saying from my teens had it. I believe I already told you in Volume 2 that the last General Secretary had sold CCN secretariat building in Lagos and pocketed the money for himself. Nigeria is shell-shocked by corruption: nothing amazes or angers people any more. No one took any action. The man is *safe* now: he died. But whether he is *saved*, is another story. He left this world and the church with much on his conscience. Glad *I* don’t have to make that decision.

Recently—March 2013--the Director of the ICS informed me on Facebook that he had taken on an appointment elsewhere. Given the chaos into which the buildings had fallen, I wonder whether anyone would apply to replace him, unless it be a brave soul with a clear vision for renewal. He would have to be bathed in prayer.

### *The Writings*

#### *Writing to the Community at Large*

I always enjoy participating in the life of the community, especially by writing. Over the years, I wrote quite a few letters to the editors of various local newspapers on all kinds of issues, but most of them were ignored. Some did make it. Let me give you a few samples.

In 2005, *The Vancouver Courier* featured an article about Hendrik Buene, a fellow Dutchman in Vancouver whom I did not know. I felt so offended and irritated by Hendrik and his story that I submitted a rather scathing letter to the editor that they actually published (September 18, 2005, p. 11). I don't know what you think of it, but here it is, the product of a less charitable moment in my mind:

Allow me to give a different spin--without knowing Hendrik.

So, here's this hero, my fellow Dutchman, living in this East Side below-par hotel, in a room you can hardly turn around in. Surrounded by mental illness, alcohol, drugs and nicotine. But, hey, Hendrik is helping the people living there.

Helping these people has been his life. Admirable. Noble, undoubtedly. From the story I get the impression that it cost him both his family and business. Hendrik was going to help the East Side poor.

So, now he does this noble mission, living a sparse life in sparse surroundings. He squeezed out of his wife and children what he could. Ditto his business. Then he turned to the benighted Santa Clauses operating our welfare system and talked them into supporting him.

*Och, arme* Hendrik. Aw, poor Hendrik. That cheap Liberal government gives him only \$607.92 a month. Out of that, they have the nerve to deduct \$20 to recover his forfeited damage deposit. What kind of cheap, unfeeling government is that? Come on, folks, let's call the NDP back so we can have some justice.

You know what my problem is? Which Santa Claus agreed to pay my \$600-plus to Hendrik who has freely chosen this way of life? "I enjoy my freedom," he admits. "I don't want to give that up too easily for a regular job."

I wouldn't either if I had no more conscience, ambition or pride. If you can squeeze it out of Santa Claus, why not? So what if all these taxpayers have to get up at 6 a.m. to make their way to the daily boxing ring? As long as Hendrik can live out his mission!

You know, I'm not sure whom I first want to kick in the ass with a solid wooden shoe—that Santa Claus or Hendrik, or perhaps Cheryl Rossi for twisting this guy into a "hero"—or the whole works! On second thought, a wooden shoe just wouldn't deliver the payload that Hendrik deserves—not sharp enough.

To understand this torrent of sarcasm you must realize that we live in a downtown section of Vancouver where the culture of entitlement reigns, where people pride themselves on ripping off the government social services and where these government services act like a collective Santa Claus. I know there are people who need these services and deserve them, but a high percentage.... Well, just don't let me go there. My letter evoked the wrath of at least one reader who submitted a letter of counter indignation. I don't believe the writer took the time to read my letter carefully. He sounded like just another entitlement bloke.

And here are a couple of examples that did not make it. The first one was sent to *24 Hours* on April 11, 2007, and deals with a court case known popularly as “The DePatie Case” that had many people disgusted.

A lot of stuff has been written about this case by letter writers and columnists in your as well as other local papers. There is, of course, nothing unique about the story. This is the stuff that we read about day after day. Citizens are getting more and more outraged as they watch our “wise men”—judges and lawyers-- play their games in the courts, make their big money and have fun undermining the whole idea of justice, all the while giving the finger to the “ignorant” masses.

One of the common complaints is that our “honourables” with their skewed sense of “justice” are far removed from the people. They are as haughty as the Liberals who appointed many of them. Only yesterday, Paul Williamson of the BC Supreme Court at length tried to convince high school students how close he is to the people. Next question: “What do you think about *Law and Order*? According to Ian Mulgrew of the *Vancouver Sun*, Williamson responded: “What’s that?”—completely “without a whiff of irony”! Comments Mulgrew, “You could see the look of puzzlement sweep across the eager faces.”

If imprisonment often fails to express the justice society demands, is it not about time our professional “honourables” begin to think out of their box that must be well over a century old. Give some leadership in new directions that satisfy the people’s demands for justice? (I know, it’s not for everyone to upset the machine or bite the hand that feeds you so well.) How about boot camps to teach civil values like respect, work, honesty, community? Six months or more of strenuous training in such an environment is something worth considering. *I so propose.*

I have been watching these trends for some years and have collected a hefty file of the juicy stories that appear almost daily. The range of thoughts and emotions I regularly experience include those of a deep sense of insult, almost vicious resentment and something akin to total contempt of.... Oops, I’m close to a crime that deeply offends our “*honourables.*” It’s called “contempt of .....” Sorry, forgot that last word. Now *that’s* one offense they might not tolerate!

The second one: “Olympic-sized Distortions.” It was sent to *The Province* during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver (February 12, 2010).

I love a good party, but I voted against the Olympics and am increasingly proud I did. Too much money spent that we said we did not have when the poor from all over the province came knocking at our door. Too many lies. Too many dubious promises. Too much dubious use of taxes with explanations even more dubious, including those about the California buses. Cheating whole cities out of a promised skytrain while destroying businesses during Canada Line construction. Not to speak of the outrageous inflation of sports the Olympics represents. I came close to joining the

protests. However, the bunch that is leading the protests with their irrational claims and accusations became too embarrassing for me. Your Editorial is right on. Remember especially the empty beds of the Salvation Army waiting for the needy to show up.

I know, you need to be familiar with the atmosphere during our Olympic days and the outrageous government promises and denials, etc. to appreciate such outbursts. I could go on to entertain you for quite a while....

So, even though these gems of wisdom did not make it, herewith they are accessible to the public after all. Not a total waste of time after all!

Not all of my submissions were biting. I could actually be quite friendly and supportive, like one I submitted to *The Georgia Straight* on February 19, 2004. It was about the concept of “the warm heart” that the Dalai Lama was peddling in Vancouver as a new approach to education. The local writer describing the “new” approach suggested it could help improve the public education system that was failing our young people. I discussed the Dalai’s approach very sympathetically and then related it to the Christian concept of the “new heart” and reminded readers that local Christian schools had been teaching such concepts all along right here in our back yard. Why do we listen to a foreigner of another culture and close our ears to the similar message of our immediate neighbours and their institutions? My article itself was an expression of a “warm heart.” It was published.

My major—and most friendly-- contribution to the community in this regard was my story of our family immigration in 1951. As part of BC’s celebration of the province’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the *Vancouver Sun* invited immigrants in the province to submit their immigrant stories. I submitted mine under the title “An Immigrant Journey.” It included a 1951 photo of our large family and was published on April 16, 2008. The article was very popular in the Dutch immigrant community. I received many favourable comments on it. One Canadian acquaintance asked me whether I knew there was a second Jan Boer in town. Well, yes, actually I did, for I had seen a real estate billboard to that effect. However, this friend was talking about the author of this immigrant story. He did not know my history and assumed it was someone else. When I told him I was the one, he was amazed.

I did not limit myself to the local Vancouver or BC scene but also tried a few times to reach out to the national Canadian scene, but only one national submission was published in the *Macleans Magazine* in May, 2010. Someone had written an article about the damage Atheists were doing to the church and considered this “bad news.” I challenged that interpretation in these words:

*RE: Churches and Atheists (May 3, 2010)*

*Bad news? What bad news? The "substantial declines in Sunday attendance" among Canadian churches is good news. I claim this not as an enemy of the church but as a clergy and missionary. Ever since the beginning of Christianity in the West, it has been foisted upon a people largely spiritually indifferent with the use of sword and pressure. Most members attached themselves to the church for all kinds of cultural, economic*

and social reasons without a heart commitment to its core, namely Christ. The church ended up an oppressor and that's why she is now despised. So now these spiritual fossils have left the church and the church is free to live and work out the Gospel without that heavy foreign baggage. I hope you enjoy the cold, rational, secular atmosphere of social disintegration and entitlement you have created for yourself. We will embrace you anytime you want to make a comeback and will enjoy honest dialogue with you for the benefit of all.

As to Atheists now competing in doing good, welcome! There are few things more useful to the poor than to have communities compete in doing good—especially if it's the kind we call *justice* rather than the *charity* that currently seems to be the rage. On second thought, a little cooperation rather than competition would be even better for the poor--cooperation not just on your secular terms, but on terms acceptable to all, meaning reason *and* faith. Let's try it out and see where it gets us. What do you think would happen?

End February 2013 I wrote another gem to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun*. I congratulated the paper on their courage to publish three politically incorrect or “offensive” articles in one issue:

Seldom has the *Sun* served a bowl of intellectual oatmeal that sticks to our intellectual ribs as does the issue of February 22, 2013. First, there's Fralic's column about “enabling addiction, poverty and anti-social behaviour” in the Eastside that no one dares to mention but is a “much-documented reality.” Equally blunt but true, she writes of “the crackheads” etc. who have “far more access to tax... funded health care, emotional support and financial assistance than the average single working mother of an autistic grade-schooler.”

Secondly, there's the Guest Editorial that chides our secular missionizing elite for resisting the resurgence of religion. That resurgence does “not sit well with the secularist mandarins.”

Thirdly, the *Sun*'s own editorial about the new Pidgin restaurant. We cannot “protect slum housing.” Neither should we attempt “to maintain the character of the Downtown Eastside....” It is no solution “to protect a slum as a haven for the poor.” We must instead work towards creating “mixed neighbourhoods” and support institutions that create wealth, not treat them as “unwanted intruders.”

For years we've been fed the one-sided and *much-needed* pap of compassion. Now you're finally balancing the equation a bit. Thanks for your courage and keep it up.

Creating “mixed neighbourhoods?” Mix the poor with the rich and risk reducing the value of the latter's precious properties? The bastards will resist that at any length as they resisted routing the Canada Line along a railway bed through their neighbourhoods that was ready and waiting to be used. Instead, they had it routed through a neighbourhood of “mom and pop” shops, many of which were destroyed

during the construction period. This was the *Sun* at its most daring, even going contrary to its own class interest.

My letter did get published but only in a heavily edited version that deleted all the heavy stuff and left the reader only with the “praise the Sun” section.

This paragraph was written during the first week of December 2013. Recently, the issue of senior discounts in the market place had come up for debate and was seriously attacked as no longer necessary. I had strong opinions on the subject—what else would you expect?— and wrote a letter to the *Vancouver Sun*, who published an edited version. Since I know you’re dying to read it, here it is:

*Re: Discounts for Seniors--*

My, my, my! Where has the spirit of Canada’s parents and grandparents gone? Are we no longer (grand) parents and have instead turned into an egoistic lobby group to squeeze the most out of our system for ourselves? Amazing! Shameful!

At a time:

When wages are on a downward spiral and workers supporting families—  
our children —are having a tough time of it;  
When young secondary and tertiary graduates—our grand-children—  
cannot find jobs suitable for their skills;  
When single mothers—our granddaughters-- are squeezed to death;  
When school children—our grand- and great grandchildren-- come to  
school hungry;  
When the pool of wage earners supporting seniors is dwindling due to  
seniors having refused the responsibility of raising families,

we seniors are demanding continued privileges for ourselves instead of our needy families! And that not because we are necessarily poor—many of us are not—, but because we are seniors.

If there were any love and charity in our hearts, we seniors would lobby for our children and grandchildren as well as for the poor among us. CARP ought to be ashamed of itself. A bunch of well heeled and well organized egoists! This is the reason I have never joined them.

### *Christian-Muslim Writings*

While the above section deals with *ad hoc* issues in our local and national environment, the most ambitious, expensive and time consuming writing project during our first decade in Vancouver was the 8-volume series of *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, far from the concerns of our compatriots, but very close to our hearts. Actually, it is the most ambitious

research and writing project I have ever undertaken, even more than all the work that went into my doctoral dissertation.

*Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*

You will remember from earlier volumes that I had started work on this series already during our Nigeria years. But after we got settled on Bute Street in Vancouver's West End, this project pre-occupied me without let up for years, while Fran was often involved in logistics, organization of data files, typing, copying, editing and mailing. We ended up with eight volumes, a total of some 2700+ pages.

I would be hard put to tell you *when* I actually started this project. I guess it's a matter of definition. Though I was not sure what I would do with it, but since the early Nigeria years I began collecting every scrap of information on the subject I could lay my hands on and filed it away for future reference. I scoured newspapers and magazines, collected many Nigerian books and articles on the subject. I subscribed to *New Nigerian*, a daily newspaper with the mission to represent northern interests, including Islam, as well as *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, a Hausa semi-weekly that was to the Muslim community what *The Banner* was to the CRC, the glue that held the community together. While we were living in the rural areas of CRCN, we had someone in Jos buy these papers and forward them to us whenever the situation arose, which was totally irregular. Most often the papers would be two weeks old or more, but I read them with great interest nevertheless—and filed all relevant articles on Islam, Muslims and all things pertaining to religion in Nigeria, including Christianity. The body of information was voluminous, for religion in Nigeria has for decades been at the very vortex of national concerns, problems and activity. Islam will not allow itself to be marginalized as do so many semi-secular Christian communities.

Once we moved to Jos, we had more immediate access to even more information, for newspapers and magazines proliferated and continued to give extensive coverage to religious developments. It could be argued that they not only *covered* those developments but *contributed* to them, if not actually *created* them with their often incendiary articles. Sometimes the publications piled up on me and I would ask Fran to cut out the articles I had earmarked. After I hired my first staff, Anthony Ochumana, I would mark each article with a number. He would cut it out, mark its source and date and then place them in the file with the corresponding number. I kept a list of these files so that I ended up with a very systematic and extensive filing system on every religious subject I had come across, Nigerian, but also foreign in so far as I considered it potentially relevant to my interests. This process continued throughout all my years, so that when I actually started organizing the series, I had a treasure of Nigerian "religiana" with many unusual and rare documents, references to which you will find scattered throughout the series.

The series developed along with the internet. Once I began to concentrate on it, the internet was also developing so that, even though by now I was in North America and thus far from the scene, the internet allowed me daily access to various Nigerian newspapers. In fact, I had easier access to the materials in North America than I would have in Nigeria, since till today

the computer culture there is bedeviled by frequent power interruptions. What I read on the internet early in the morning, would often be in the manuscript before breakfast—news as it happened. The information thus gained was supplemented by the materials I would collect during our visits to Nigeria, for not every paper or magazine was available electronically.

I did not start out with the notion of a series. I never thought of anything but one single book. However, I soon began to realize that this was a long-term project and that the events as they happened while I wrote about them would be old hat by the time I would be ready to publish them. I also began to sense that the book would be huge. So, the idea of a series cropped up to keep the project manageable, to publish the stories while they were still somewhat fresh in the minds of the public and to keep the price down. Smaller volumes would make it easier for people to buy them as they rolled off the press.

Here are the volume titles along with short content descriptions:

**Vol. 1—*Nigeria's Decades of Blood, 1980-2002* (2003)**

Describes a dozen religious riots in gory details and thus sets the stage for later volumes. Without these details, readers may find subsequent volumes difficult to appreciate.

**Vol. 2—*Muslims: Why the Violence* (2004)**

Nigerian Muslim explanations go back to colonial days.

**Vol. 3—*Christians: Why This Muslim Violence* (2004)**

Nigerian Christian explanations go back to pre-colonial days.

**Vol. 4—*Muslims: Why We Reject Secularism* (2005)**

Title is self-explanatory.

**Vol. 5—*Christians: Secularism—Yes and No* (2006)**

Having inherited a dualistic Gospel from missionaries, Nigerian Christians have an ambivalence about Secularism that causes confusion among them and contradictions. Part 2 contains an introduction to Kuyperian thought relevant to the situation.

**Vol. 6—*Muslims: Why Muslim Sharia Law* (2007)**

Title is self-explanatory. Again, goes back to colonialism.

**Vol. 7—*Christians: Why We Reject Muslim Law* (2008)**

Title is self-explanatory. Again, Christians go back to pre-colonial times.

**Vol. 8—*Christians and Muslims: Parameters for Living Together* (2009)**

On basis of what Christians and Muslims have said in previous volumes and siphoned through a Kuyperian worldview, I suggest a framework within which a solution to Nigeria's religious crisis might be found.

For a fuller description of the series, I refer you once again to [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com), where the books can be found under author < jan h boer >. You can also go to the Islamica page of my website <[www.SocialTheology.com](http://www.SocialTheology.com) > for additional summary statements and explanations.

Original publisher is Essence Publishing, Belleville, ON, Canada. Then the volumes have been republished in Jos, Nigeria, for Western publications become too expensive for the Nigerian market. Republishing, of course, was really too expensive for *us*, but it was a matter of “do or die.”

I chose Essence, because I read an ad of theirs in *Faith Today*, the monthly magazine of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Essence was familiar with the Christian market and they were a “print on demand” outfit that I needed. It turned out to be a bad choice, for they apparently had a difficult owner-manager according to a later article in *Faith Today*. This led to bankruptcy proceedings, during which their affairs were conducted in a *barkatai* manner, a Hausa term for total chaos. The manuscripts they printed and then returned for approval had an unbelievable number of mistakes *they* inserted! I thought I was back in Nigeria! The next round might even see *new* mistakes! Problem was that once they had done the first volume, I had to stay with them to make sure the volumes looked similar and thus related to each other—or so I thought. I have subsequently discovered that when they are displayed next to each other, most people think it is one and the same book; the similarity of the covers seems to trump the difference in titles. Essence caused me so much extra work, you wouldn’t believe it. In the end it was a lady called Sherill who saved the situation for me. I am extremely grateful to her.

We did try once to change to another publisher in Victoria. We went down there to check them out and possibly make arrangements. We came to an agreement and paid them several thousand dollars and went home with confidence. However, nothing happened after that. We emailed and called, all in vain: no responses. We finally paid them another visit in Victoria, only to discover that they were in a double whammy: both in bankruptcy and take-over proceedings! An American firm took them over and rescued them from bankruptcy. It took us half a year or so to retrieve our money without having accomplished anything! We decided we better stick to Essence—the devil you know somewhat is apparently better than the devil you don’t know at all!

From the titles, note that there are three couplets, each containing a Muslim and a Christian volume. In the Muslim volumes, I give Muslims the floor by quoting from them liberally and then interpreting them as sympathetically as I could. I sound so much like a Muslim that Nigerian Christians sometimes take offence.

When Volume One appeared, I had a hard time finding a Nigerian publisher, for they were afraid it could spark riots. The publisher told me he feared to handle the project and went into deep and prolonged prayer to discern the Lord’s will. After they were published in Nigeria, book retailers, including a number of friends of mine who had handled my previous books with enthusiasm, now hesitated and used various excuses. After more volumes appeared and they saw that this was a highly responsible project, they agreed to stock them. They sparked no riots.

**This series is now highly popular among Christians. We receive many appreciative comments from Nigeria. They are used extensively for academic theses and dissertations, quoted frequently and appear in many bibliographies. Our friend, Prof. Danny McCain of Unijos, tells me that he comes across references to this series more and more in his students' writings.**

**The problem is with Muslims. Nigerian Muslims generally do not expect Christians to have anything of significance to say about Islam. Furthermore, there is a broad chasm between the two communities, so that it is difficult for these books to cross the divide into the Muslim community. Try as I may by email to various parties I am dealing with in Nigeria, that hurdle has not been overcome, though I suspect that a few Muslims must have bought a copy or two from Modern Bookshop in Jos, one of the few places where both Christians and Muslims shop.**

**What did I hope to accomplish with this gigantic project? Several goals:**

**With respect to Christians:**

**To free them from a dualistic missionary heritage for a more wholistic understanding of the Scripture and a more wholistic approach to life and to Islam.**

**To help them listen to and understand Islam and Muslims in order to work with them on the development of a viable multi-religious nation.**

**With respect to Muslims:**

**To make them understand that what they see in the anemic and trivial version of Christianity, which Nigeria has inherited, is not the full thing. Like Islam, Christianity is a wholistic way of life that includes all cultural sectors.**

**To help them listen to and understand Christianity and Christians in order to work with them on the development of a viable multi-religious nation.**

**To confront them with a more wholistic understanding and appreciation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**With respect to students:**

**To achieve all the goals listed above under Christians and Muslims.**

**To make available to them responsible research sources for their academic projects. Such sources are difficult to locate in Nigeria. These books represent for them, especially if they also have access to the Companion CD, an unimaginable treasury of facts and events they would be hard put to collect anywhere else.**

**As they use these tools, to confront them with the seriously wholistic Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**Finally, a set of additional comments about the project as found on my website:**

**This series of studies deals with Christian-Muslim relations. Though I concentrate on Nigeria, it is Nigeria as a case study with global implications.**

**What dynamics develop when you have two large blocks of these religions living together? These large blocks are some 70 million each!**

**What happens when you have these two aggressive missionary religions competing for a place in the sun?**

**What happens when a once almost supreme Muslim community is confronted with an emerging Christian community that has woken up to a growing sense of political awareness and power?**

**What happens when you have a confrontation between a Muslim community that vehemently rejects Secularism in favour of sharia and a Christian community that flirts with a soft version of Secularism?**

**What happens when both communities are fearful, mistrusting of and angry with each other so that they can no longer hear each other out?**

**The flow of events in Nigeria is a powerful example of how things are *not* to be done from either side. I expect that Nigerians who read these monographs will feel deeply ashamed of the violence they unleash on each other in the name of their respective religions. They should! Especially now that their violence is perpetrated before the face of the entire world. They defile not only the name of their people, but also of their two major religions.**

**But these studies are not written primarily to embarrass Nigerians, though I hope that shame will play a constructive role here. The main purpose is to arrive at some parameters within which they can develop more positive relations with each other, relations of respect and tolerance that will allow both religions to flourish within the one nation.**

**These relations have been bedeviled by untold bloodshed and destruction ever since the 1970s. The series describes and explains the riots themselves and the issues of confrontation. Most of the study concentrates on the opinions of Nigerian Muslims and Christians themselves by providing extensive quotations and appendices, especially from the media. Each volume deals with a separate aspect of the relationship.**

These studies do away with political correctness and religious wishful thinking. We are encouraged to get real. The fatal influence and role of Secularism in these relationships in Nigeria come across very pointedly. The weak inheritance of a dualistic Gospel transmitted by Christian missions also is explained and constitutes a major reason for confusion in Nigeria. Muslim aggressiveness is another major reason.

Another set of goals is:

*To contribute* to the search for a solution to Nigeria's religious violence by establishing some necessary parameters.

*To demonstrate* the horrors and dangers that arise when religious institutions are distorted into power blocks and parties or into weapons of manipulation instead of vehicles for service.

*To illustrate* that Secularism leads to anger and resentment among Muslims, derails Christian thought, prevents rapprochement between the two religions, and is not a suitable solution in Nigeria due to Secularism's anemic view of religion, its arrogance, self-delusion and partiality.

*To help* Christians develop a more Biblical and wholistic view of their religion.

*To demonstrate* to Muslims that the picture of dualistic Christianity which they have been given is an impoverished version and that a healthier, more wholistic version exists.

*To urge* Muslims to adjust and update their traditional sense of pluralism and tolerance to the current situation in Nigeria.

*To convince* the secular West that it must take religion seriously, respect it – not merely tolerate it – and incorporate it into their political equations.

(Some of these goals will be implied, not argued.)

The nature of this series should be well understood. It is based on many years of experience with and exposure to a living Muslim community, influenced by Shehu Danfodio, the founder of the Sokoto Sultanate, who, in turn, was affected by Wahabism, an intolerant type of Islam. It is also based on years of research into that same community's interaction with Nigeria's Christian community. Finally, it is heavily influenced by my doctoral dissertation on missions and colonialism and similar subsequent studies and publications of mine. There is thus a solid foundation undergirding the scholarship of this series that can legitimately be used for academic purposes even though it sometimes breaches academic niceties.

At the same time, the deepest purpose of this series is of a missionary nature, not academic. I have within me a spirit of freedom and resistance to unnecessary restrictions that does not

allow me to stay within narrow academic protocols. I throw in non-academic and personal comments, sometimes humorous ones, that are not allowed in an academic project. I insert prayers and make faith statements for which I do not apologize. And unlike most secular writers, I am deeply *aware* of my assumptions and worldview not only but also do not hide them. To the contrary, I let it all hang out for all to see, consider and be challenged in *their* faith and worldview.

Throughout the years of the project, friends and others interested in this series would repeatedly ask me somewhat impatiently where I was going with it and where I would come out. My friend Timothy Palmer of TCNN, Jos, was especially pushy here for a long time. He just could not wait for the outcome. In his response to an article of mine in the *TCNN Research Bulletin* (see below), he wrote, “We now need some constructive proposals as to how to put your idea of a multi-religious state into practice.” And then follows a whole raft of questions that I was not able to answer at that point. Since no one else knew what to do about the Christian-Muslim situation in Nigeria, what would John Boer come up with? I had to constantly confess I did not know, but told them that I expected my conclusions and proposals to form gradually as I continued with the research and writing and, secondly, that I expected God to inspire me towards that end. It sounded like a cop out to some, but to me that was the only responsible answer at the time. God did not disappoint me; you can read the result in Volume 8. But Tim should know that I was as eager and impatient as he was for some sort of answer throughout the writing years. Sometimes, waiting on God can bring embarrassment or seem like a cop out.

### *Other Writings on Islam*

In addition to the series, I wrote other occasional articles on Christian-Muslim affairs for various papers and magazines. Two weeks after 9/11, I wrote “The Voice of Islam” along with a sidebar in *Christian Courier* (November 26, 2001, pp. 13-14), in which I do exactly what I cautioned against in Chapter 39, namely to suggest a rationale for 9/11 that made sense, even if I was as devastated as anyone else by the attack. I declared myself open to the accusations that my article was likely to evoke. I proposed that after all is said and done,

there are some legitimate concerns that place these horrible events into a context with some sort of meaning. That rationale is the West’s attempt to impose Secularism on the world, including the world of Islam. By “Secularism” I mean that perspective that confines religion to the spiritual and the private and renders it largely irrelevant for actual life.

For over a century the West has exported Secularism everywhere. It has done so through its colonial programs, through its educational efforts abroad, through its corporations, through its “development” and “foreign aid” programs, through its political missions abroad. One of the most cutting ways in which Secularism is spread today is through Western mass communication devices, especially videos and TV programs exported to these countries. In short, its entire style in Muslim countries has

been secular and its message that of Secularism. *That is the Western assault against which Muslims are waging war.*

Not all Muslims in the world will share this perspective, but it certainly is the mainstream Nigerian Muslim perspective.

The sidebar is a powerful article by one Muhammad Tawafiq Ladan, a Nigerian Muslim, who warned that it is not Islam that is blind and ignorant, but the secular West, that forever fails to comprehend Islam and its depth. This article was written twelve years earlier; it was not a hindsight warning so much as foresight. Ladan did not know what type of explosion would take place, but he was sure something would happen somewhere along the line. The pressure among Muslims had been building up for a long time, especially since the Iranian revolution. I wrote, “Amazing that it has not been heard or taken seriously,” but that was all the result of Western pride that blinded our eyes and minds and fed our egos. Ladan’s was representative of Muslim warnings since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 9/11 was the exasperated explosion of the buildup of a century by a handful of extremists.

The editor of *CC* dared to publish Ladan’s totally politically incorrect article to be read by a rather conservative constituency. I am still surprised that it did not unleash a rash of protests. Perhaps that constituency was more open than I gave it credit for. Harry Antonides, a frequent anti-Muslim writer in *CC*, was one writer who critiqued the above article so severely that I felt led to respond under the title “Western-Christian-Muslim Relations in the Current Crisis” (*CC*, May 20, 2002, pp. 10-11). In it I basically defend—read “repeat”—ideas and facts I had written before.

Suddenly my old friend Simon Wolfert entered the discussion. In an unpublished paper on “Interfaith Dialogue” (January 2002), Wolfert referred to my various articles in *CC* on Islam, especially the November 26 article, as particularly “challenging” in helping make the CRC constituency understand that Muslim opposition to Secularism is parallel to that of the CRC. While Antonides seemed to support Secularism in his opposition to (militant) Islam, Wolfert emphasized the commonality between the two faiths on this score and wanted us to recognize that Islam shares certain major Reformed tenets, something that we should build on in our relationship with them. Antonides emphasized the antithesis, while Wolfert seemed to prefer the “common grace” aspects of the relation between the two religions. It is my opinion that a one-sided emphasis on one causes distortion for both sides. In developing our relationship with Muslims, secularists and all others, we need to build on *both* pillars, antithesis *and* common grace, differences *and* commonalities. Well, at least I provoked discussion!

I continued writing articles of this sort, often repeating the same ideas but with different foci and for different readers. In December 2001, Paul Gessell wrote a selective summary of a book by John Ralston Paul, the husband of the then Governor-General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, entitled *On Equilibrium*. Paul held the West in general partly responsible for 9/11 because of “its long-standing ‘aggressivity’ to Arabs.” In addition, he asserted that “Christian militancy has wreaked far greater destruction than anything managed by Islam” (*Vancouver Sun*, December 13, 2001). I responded with a short letter to the editor:

I affirm that Mr. Paul is right: The West has co-responsibility for the current climate. He is also right that Christians share in that responsibility.

However, the *primary* Western culprit is Secularism. Islam can and has tolerated Christianity, but mainstream and fundamentalist Islam both regard Secularism as their main enemy. The relationship between them is antithetical; in the long run, they cannot co-exist. Generally, Muslims regard Christians as part of the problem only to the extent that they are seen as part of the secular package.

The sad part is that Muslims have warned of a coming explosion against Secularism for more than a decade, but it has always fallen on deaf ears. Secularism is haughty and deaf with respect to other worldviews. We are now paying the bill (December 14, 2001).

I had an article in *Perspectives* under the title “Islam and the West in the Current Crisis: A Challenge to Christians” (Aug/Sept 2002, pp. 14-18). I just want to pick up one strand of that article, namely the Muslim view of Christian missions. We Christians have been sending missionaries to Muslim lands for centuries. I wrote,

From the Christian point of view, that is a benign intention: It is our deepest desire to bring them to Christ and to salvation; it is our Great Commission. Yet Muslims regard our missionary efforts as a hostile attack that undermines the very foundation of their religion and cultures. From their perspective, they are correct. They *are* under attack by us. We may not regard it as an attack, let alone a hostile attack; we see our missionary approach as a benign way to spread the blessings of Abraham. But we can hardly deny Muslims their perspective on our endeavour.

I wrote another article in the South African magazine *Woord & Daad* entitled “Nigerian Islam vs Secularism: The Concept of Secularism” (Autumn 2002, pp. 20-24). In the introduction I wrote, “Secularism is the major issue that divides Nigerian Christians and Muslims. Muslims reject Secularism with a passion and regard it as the product of satan himself, while Christians uphold it with equal passion as the solution to Nigeria’s inter-religious struggles.”

This Nigerian Christian stance, I explained, was in direct contradiction to some leading South African scholars who regard Secularism as “their most dangerous enemy,” a position which is, by the way, the official CRC position in North America. “Over against the objections of Christians who argue that the sharia is intolerant of other religions, Muslims brush Secularism with the same tar”—and they are both right. “Muslims regard Secularism as promoting an exclusive concentration on the material at the expense of the spiritual. A religion that gives in to this attitude is doomed to trivialization, as has happened to Christianity, according to Muslims—and to me. Much of the article is challenging Nigerian Christians to liberate themselves from their “soft Secularism” as I call it. Keep remembering: I am just about always writing about *Nigerian* Islam, not Islam in general.

In the next issue of *Woord & Daad* (Winter 2002), I submitted an article under the title “Western-Christian-Muslim Relations in the Current Crisis: A Christian Challenge.” This

time it was not just about Nigerian Islam. I summarized the American political and military responses to 9/11 and suggested that there are some Christian considerations that we should ponder. For one thing, we need to ask what the precise motivations were of the perpetrators of 9/11. In discussing the issue, the difference in the Western and Muslim attitudes towards Secularism surfaced. For Westerners, Secularism is a home-grown product. We may reject it, but it is not a foreign product imposed on us by foreign oppressors. For Muslims, it is foreign and imposed and *therefore* for many, a hated imposition. Then I describe how Muslims view that foreign imposition through colonialism and other capitalist forms. I went on to indicate that they tend to view the missionary enterprise as part of that foreign imposition and have some good reasons for that view. The current Muslim revival, I suggested, is partly a response to all that Western imposition. I then ask whether we have any *Christian* justification for our incursions into Muslim lands? Finally, I suggest that the plank of Jesus' parable is first of all in our own eye and we should recognize that. We must always "exercise the obligation to be critical of *both* sides in a conflict." It was, I must stress, a radical and hard-hitting article that remains good reading till this day.

In 2002, a most peculiar development took place in Nigeria that centered on the Miss World pageant. It was Nigeria's turn to host it. However, it turned into Muslim rioting and was quickly transferred to the UK. I wrote three similar but not identical articles on the event. In *CC*, it was "The Anatomy of Miss World" (March 3, 2003, pp. 12-13). In the *TCNN Research Bulletin*, it was "Nigerian Muslims and the Miss World Pageant" (March, 2003, pp. 36-43). And then there was the original one on the Nigerian website < Gamji.com > with a similar title. I began the *CC* article as follows:

It isn't every day a theologian gets a chance at such a catchy title as this one. The anatomy under discussion is...that of the Miss World *pageant*, not that of Miss World herself! I could be the first CRC theologian to write seriously about a Miss World contest.

In addition to the old saws about Secularism and colonialism that I have written so much about, I devote a couple of long sections to the practical and immediate reasons for the Muslim explosion in reaction to the event. You would find it very interesting, I believe, to read about all their reasons. I will just say that "everything about the contest smelled of anti-sharia. You will probably be hard pressed to even imagine how such a contest could turn into a religiously coloured riot, but this is Nigeria and these are Muslims who (correctly) relate everything to religion. Religion is at the very centre of all of life, even in places where the secular mind would never recognize or condone it.

In the closing section, I wrote,

It was a combination of religion and politics. Religion in Nigeria is a sensitive issue. Both Christians and Muslims are nervously watching each other and expecting the worst from each other. As soon as the religious issue reached its flashpoint, the political manipulators ensured that the spark would ignite and then started their machinations.

**In Nigeria, Christians and Muslims are at war with each other over the control and destiny of their nation. The Miss World fracas was just one flashpoint in a long series. Undoubtedly, there will be more to come. There are the additional issues of differing worldviews, of the Nigerian penchant to politicize everything, of extreme Muslim paranoia that detects an enemy behind every tree and more.**

**I find it interesting and significant that in 2013, as I write, Indonesian Muslims oppose the same pageant scheduled to be held in their country. You can see that Nigerian Muslims are not that unique when even the Muslims in traditionally more tolerant Indonesia oppose the event. They may have been inspired by the success of their Nigerian counterparts a decade earlier.**

**During 2010, my friend Bert Witvoet of CC invited me to write a six-part series on Christian-Muslim relations on basis of six questions from him. There would be two of us writing these articles, the other being Dr. Bert den Boggende from Alberta, a retired historian. The rule was for us to answer the same questions without consulting each other. They were published next to each other, half a page each. The restrictions forced us to stick to the bare fundamentals; there was no room for expansion or elucidation. The articles appeared monthly from September 13, 2010 till February 14, 2011. Herewith I reproduce the questions CC put to us. For our responses you are invited to turn to “Feature Articles” on < [www.christiancourier.ca](http://www.christiancourier.ca) > When you do, understand that the headings within the articles are inserted by the editor and do not really reflect the contents adequately. You need to read the articles, not just those headings.**

***Question 1:* What are the most striking similarities and differences between the two religions?**

***Question 2:* Is Islam a threat to Christianity and the West?**

***Question 3:* What are some of the frequent misconceptions about Islam and how do we counter them?**

***Question 4:* How does the Qur’an say women should be treated, and does this conform to or contradict what is practiced in many Muslim countries or cultures?**

***Question 5:* What can Christians learn from Islam?**

***Question 6:* How can Christians witness effectively to Muslims?**

### ***Our Memoirs***

**By October 2013, we had basically completed the text of our memoirs and are working on inserting many photos into the text. We have hired a young art student as consultant to teach us. After three intensive lessons, Fran began tackling that big technical job with many photos. I selected the pictures and the places they were to be inserted. Then Fran would take over,**

check out my selections and sometimes disapproved, where upon we would negotiate. After that, she scanned the pictures and inserted them in their agreed places.

We finally had Volume 1-3 completed and brought them to Staples for printing and binding in spiral form. They look beautiful and are easy to read. So, we are justly proud of them and show every visitor that enters our apartment. Just one copy per volume. That's the only hard copies we plan to produce; the rest will be digital, whether CD-Rom, ebook or, perhaps, both.

But if you think we were about finished and could take a rest, think again. Today is end March 2014 and we are still editing and re-organizing *this* volume you are now reading, with Volume 5 waiting in the wings for similar treatment. It ain't done till it's done! If you don't have the necessary stamina and patience to go over your materials time and again, just don't even start!

### *Translation of Abraham Kuyper Meditations*

Still another project is the translation of Abraham Kuyper's book on the Ascension of Christ and Pentecost. My choice here is due to the fact that Kuyper is famous especially for his writings on social issues, not on "more" spiritual ones. He has written quite a few meditational books but little of that has been translated. I would like people to get to know the "pious" Kuyper as well to show that deep Christian spirituality is a comfortable partner to Christian social concern. In so much Western thought, the two seem to follow different tracks and people follow the one or the other but not both. The result is that some people become pious in a one-sided way and then easily succumb to pietism, while others become social activists with little display of piety. After much agonizing, I chose the following title: *The Ascent of the Son —The Descent of the Spirit: 26 Meditations on Ascension and Pentecost.*

Never in my life have I encountered such difficult Dutch. For one thing, it is written in the language and style of 130 years ago. Synonym upon synonym that all require the same English word. String on sentences half pages long that usually need to be broken down into shorter more manageable ones. However, a couple of times I managed to retain a half-page sentence in English without any green indicator from the computer! Believe me, that took some doing, twisting and creativity. English is just not comfortable with such long sentences, but I did it once or twice. A few times I had to appeal for help to two of our friends in The Netherlands who are both specialists in the language and even *they* had a hard time!

Fran and I are doing this project completely on our own, with Fran called upon for editing and formatting purposes. However, there is a Dutch Reformed Translation Society based in Grand Rapids, MI, that is showing interest in this project, since they had already discussed translating this particular book as part of a series. I told them I am open to work with them, but will probably publish my version independently from them as an e-book and then allow them to treat my translation as they see fit. They might even pay us for our efforts. That would be a pleasant and surprising first! We'll see how things work out at this front. I expect that before long, this book will be available on < [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org) > as well as on a CD, long before that translation society will have its "butt in gear."

### *Other Publishing and Writing Projects*

Another project that has been awaiting the completion of the memoirs is the republication of some of my earlier books either by scanning, on CD or as e-books. To begin with, I had *Caught in the Middle* scanned and then wrote an article in *Christian Courier* (CC, Sept. 23, 2013, p. 5) about the history of and reason for that book along with an offer of a free digital copy to readers of the article. Half a dozen readers took me up on the offer. It is now for sale to the public as a CD-Rom from us.

In the meantime, Fran has keyboarded my *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ*, the summary of my dissertation. That has since been re-published as an e-book at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).

Other books and documents of mine are waiting in the wings. All of this, of course, depends on the availability of others to help us, for neither Fran nor I can handle such digital procedures. We are extremely grateful to Sabrina, whom we met at the Baptist Church, for being so helpful in this regard and for always offering her time for the next project. She has helped us with all the e-books we have published so far on Lulu and is already working on getting the Kuyper translation formatted for publication.

Probably the next one to be turned into an e-book is *Living in God's World*, a compilation of Bible passages with emphasis on justice, economics, fair dealing, etc. that we used in Nigeria for study in development groups. The aim of the publication is to change people's views of religion, of God, of the world, of themselves to free people for community development. The problem is that of copyright. Most Bible publishers have strict copyright conditions. To publish such a book in Nigeria without permission is not really a problem, though sort of illegal, but you don't do that in the stringent legal climate of North America. So, we'll see how this will work out.

The aim of much of this publication and re-publication work is to prolong the life and effect of our Nigeria ministry by making these out-of-print books available to Africa free of charge. I will probably also publish a CD and an e-book containing many of my lectures in Nigeria and earlier articles as well. So, the end is not yet in sight. Lord, please give us the time to accomplish all this in Your Name!

### *Blogs*

Ever since the blog culture opened up, I became interested in writing a blog or two to address especially the secular community that is the water in which we swim. I tried to do a couple of blogs during the time I was working on the Christian-Muslim series, but found it impossible to keep up. For a time I had blogs with the following titles: < Worldly Christianity >, <Christian-Muslim World >, and < Christian in the Secular City >, all under <Blogspot.com >. I enjoyed writing them, but found I could not keep up, what with the books I was writing. Currently I am writing another one, < My World—My Neighbour >, but, again, find it difficult to keep up the pace. We'll see what happens.

### *Continued Contact with Our Nigeria Background*

The most frequent way we related to Nigeria during the last decade was in connection with the series. I “visited” Nigeria every day on the internet for current events related to the project and believe you me, there was much almost every day, for this project dealt with history in the making.

In addition, we have active relations with *people* in connection with the series, some of whom are our personal friends as well. Probably the first among these is James Kpanto, our former driver and gofer and now our friend and representative for our series. He is one of the kingpins for our Nigerian distribution. The other kingpin is ACTS, an international Christian literature publisher and distributor with its Nigeria headquarters at TCNN. The two individuals in this context are my friend Tim Palmer and Luka Vande, the local ACTS manager. And then there is Numshi, an independent businessman who often has distributed our series. Currently, we are sending single boxes of free books to various Nigerian friends, who sell them. For them it is a generous gift to supplement their often-meager incomes. For us, it is a way to keep long-distance friendships active and our books circulating.

Another form of interaction is with students, especially post-graduate students who seek my help and advice, editing even, for their theses and dissertations. Fuller School of World Missions has requested me to serve as an outside reader occasionally. Recently a couple of CRCN students have sought my help along that line. Currently, I am negotiating with a CRCN student at TCNN who wants to do a thesis on Abraham Kuyper. I’m not quite sure yet as to what form my help should take. Unbeknown to me, the very idea of this subject was influenced by my work, especially my publications.

And then we have interaction with people for purely sociable reasons. The first among all is, of course, with our “daughter” Lydia. Both James and Tim are among them as well as Kathy Vanderkloet, the Mission Business Manager for many years. Remember how she straightened out my ICS finances way back in 1987? She is still as helpful as ever in facilitating our financial transactions, for we continue to send money to Nigeria. There are more friends with whom we have less frequent contact or even none at all until we come for a visit and then the conversations flow as if there had been no gap. We often kind of mourn the failure of many Nigerians to keep up correspondence. We have old friends dating from Wukari days who, for reasons of their own, simply do not respond to our letters, while we are very eager to hear from them and still are very fond of them. I find it interesting that the younger generation of pastors with whom I never worked, are more open to keeping correspondence flowing. Nathan Elawa is one Nigerian with whom we maintain fairly regular contact simply because he lives in Metro Vancouver (Langley). He is married to Ann, a Canadian on the staff of Campus Crusade now renamed “Power to Change.” His contact with us goes way back to the Wukari days, when he was one of the local kids who would frequent our station for whatever goodies they could find there. In fact, he and Ann visited us this past weekend. He is currently working on his Ph. D.

Altogether, our relations with Nigeria(ns) is of such a nature that, when I dream—and this happens often with sleep apnea folk—it is mostly about Nigeria(ns) even now, eighteen years

after we left the country. Some people might say that we have never yet come “home.” Well, that’s okay, for what or where is our home anyway? We would feel at home even now in several of the places we have lived in the past, especially Jos, but we have not yet reached our most permanent home. You guess where or what! Or is that a condition rather than a place? For many people, the jury is still out on that one.

In Grand Rapids, there were many former and current Nigeria missionaries who also helped keep us close to Nigeria. We do not have that kind of contact here on the West Coast. There are some across the border in Lynden WA, but we have little contact with them. There are a few in the Lower Mainland, but they all live “across the river,” a term familiar to CRC Nigeria missionaries. The closest to us are Ineke Lodewyk, the widow of Bob Lodewyk, in Surrey, and the Bandstras in Vancouver, now a trucking family. We have a few contacts in Chilliwack and we do occasionally visit Bea and Herm Gray, who live close to the I-5 in CA, when we drive to or from K&T, but they are hardly close to us in terms of distance. They also visited us once in Vancouver in 2003.

As the years go by, our Nigerian friends slowly go the way of all flesh. We keep getting reports about so-and-so passing away, some of them dear friends indeed. Some notable ones for us are Akila Machunga, Jabani Mambula, Haruna Dandaura and Ishaya Audu, all of whom played important roles in our lives and ministries and all of whom you’ve heard about. Only a couple of months ago we lost John Samci (February 2013), another dear brother whom we never failed to visit on our trips back to Nigeria. He was a former Secretary to the Plateau State Government and member of Transparency International, a body monitoring bribery and corruption on a global scale. A big loss to us was the passing of John Orkar, the Nigerian Director of the CRC’s development agency in the country, CRWRC, recently renamed “World Renew.” You will meet him alive further down in this chapter.

### *Our Life and Family*

#### *Our Children*

By the time we moved to Vancouver, both Kevin and Cynthia had already married and established their own homes; we still love them, of course, but the details of their lives are no longer included in these memoirs, though you will still meet them here and there.

#### *Wiebe & Joanna: Trinidad Wedding Bells and the Bachews*

Wiebe introduced Joanna to the family in Seattle during that rather hectic time of Ezra’s birth. We were all happy to meet her, even though much of everyone’s attention also went to the new baby. It was only a few months later that they announced their wedding plans. Though we had no objection to Joanna joining the family, we did feel it was a bit rushed and that they did not give themselves a chance to get to know each other sufficiently. This caused a few hiccups that were eventually overcome. Fran and I as well as K&T soon trooped to Trinidad, Joanna’s home country, in May 2002—another international trip. We were

wondering what customs, traditions and other arrangements we should be aware of, but Joanna assured us that these were no different from North American weddings. Thus we were put at ease and took on the responsibilities expected of us as parents of the groom just as we did as parents of the groom at K&T's wedding and as parents of the bride at C&A's wedding.

Joanna's father, Ashoke Bachew, came from a Hindu background, but became a Christian evangelist. He operated a church and a large guesthouse, where we were put up. It was a pleasant place to stay, for young people were also using it to hang out and to do their "liming," a Trinidad term for chatting and hanging out. They would sit outside in a circle and enjoy their soft drinks. They welcomed us into their midst and we had many interesting chats and discussions with them. We did have to listen carefully to their English, for, like every English-speaking country, Trinidad has its own brand. They, however, had little problem with ours, for the guesthouse was often used by American groups for mission trips. Thus, the locals were used to American English. Even at that time, there was an American pastor from Grand Rapids MI of all places, who had come to negotiate or renew their cooperation with this partner church of theirs.

Every once in a while, Joanna's father, Pastor Ashoke, dropped by and joined us. He would participate in the conversations and somewhere along the line often remarked to his young people with reference to us, "Wow, these are good people!" I was kind of puzzled by his repetition of such comments. He seemed surprised! Why would that be so? Years later, after we knew each other a bit better, I asked him about those comments, but he seemed not to recall.

One day Ashoke drove us around parts of the island for sightseeing purposes. It was an interesting mix of modern cities and traditional villages. He also treated us to a traditional fish bake from a small village *bukateria*, a popular Nigerian term for simple village "restaurants." We all enjoyed it to the hilt—and so did the young people who came along for the free ride and food. All in all, it was a good day of bantering and fellowship that *almost* made us forget the sweltering heat of the place. It was much like Wukari in May—hot and humid 24/7 with no respite except the occasional shadow of an old-growth oak.

We also participated a bit in the church's life. One day Ashoke rounded up his young people into the church and had me deliver an impromptu lecture. I did my traditional Genesis 1 spiel in which I emphasized how God loves this earth, this universe with all of its physicalities. He approves of the physical world and delights in it. However, we should remember that everything in this world is created by Him and nothing deserves to be worshipped or deified except He Himself. W&J were there. Wiebe was used to this kind of presentation from me, but it seemed to be new to Joanna. I saw her sitting there, nodding her head in enthusiastic approval. It is an interpretation not heard that often and that implies quite a different attitude towards the world than many Christians entertain.

We attended a Sunday morning service on Mother's Day with Ashoke preaching. I clearly remember his emphasis: No matter what you think your parents have done to you, you should honour, respect and obey them. There's no excuse to do otherwise. He is a vigorous preacher. Interestingly, as clear as the sermon was, it was interpreted differently within our little crowd.

As to the wedding itself, family and their friends were kept busy for quite some days. This was going to be a big one with several hundred guests expected. Fran wore the same dress she wore at the two previous family weddings. I wore the suit I had custom-made in Nigeria for Cynthia's wedding. In fact, unlike the K&T wedding where all the Boer men wore Nigerian gowns, this time we all wore suits. The service was conducted by Ashoke's preacher brother.



The Happy Couple and their Entourage\*



The Joining of Two Families\*

The reception was held in a large open kind of shelter set up for the event with hundreds of guests and tables laden with all the good things of Trinidad life. What struck me especially was that, apart from a couple of speeches, including my own, most people just walked away after they had eaten their fill. There was no official ending; it just petered out. Nothing wrong with that; it just surprised me.

As to my own speech, apparently the brothers were afraid I would engage in some politically incorrect stuff. I've been known to do that. So Kevin just jumped in to prevent a fiasco and took over. It was a "coup" in plain sight of all the guests. At this time of writing in 2013, I am still waiting for an apology! (Stop press: Please do detect the humorous undertone here!—but it *did* happen.)

Now all three of our kids were married and we were irretrievably in the empty nest phase of life. Yes, irretrievably, for marriage is for keeps. Part of this phase is expectation for the new crop to expand. C&A had already opened the sluice gates....

You know that Wiebe went to Yale to pursue a doctorate. His was in African history, for which he completed a solid dissertation in 2003, on the development of sports in Nigeria with an emphasis on soccer as well as a strong emphasis on the social aspect of sports. The title was *Nation Building Exercise: Sporting Culture and the Rise of Football in Colonial Nigeria*. He spent a lot of time in Nigeria for his research.

Unfortunately, we did not attend Wiebe's Yale graduation. We had hoped to attend the event, since we had so much appreciated those who attended mine in 1979 and had enjoyed that of Kevin in 2001, but Wiebe was very vague about the date and acted as if he did not care. We regret that we missed out on the occasion.

We all, Wiebe himself included, expected him to get a college teaching position, but it was not to be. After pursuing a number of offers, he reached the conclusion that he really was not an academic person. Instead, he joined World Vision and went into development work in Mauritania, West Africa. From there, he moved back to the US to work for the same McKinsey company that Kevin had worked for, but out of Atlanta GA, where they bought themselves a townhouse. After a couple of years, he moved over to Rockefeller Foundation and worked for them out of Nairobi, Kenya. His latest move has been to Lagos to serve as founding CEO of the Tony Elumelu Foundation there. All of these positions allowed him to experiment with different development models. During the course of their hopping around, he and Joanna gave birth to Jehan in Grand Rapids in 2003, to Stephan in Atlanta in September, 2006, and to Gerrit in Nairobi in September 2008. So, they gave us three most handsome grandsons. Thanks, guys, all of you. You are precious. And now, April 2014, we are awaiting their fourth boy!

Fran and I got to see W&J more often than we originally expected, given the distance. It took some time before Joanna met the Boer clan in BC. This was during 2007 in connection with our 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary cruise you can read more about further down the line. At the end of that cruise, W&J came to Vancouver, where we organized a party at the home of Margaret and Gary Vitt in White Rock. Margaret is the daughter of sister Karen and has a catering business. Per request, they did a pig roast along with all kinds of unusual and delicious snacks.

It was a most successful event in that quite a few relatives showed up and Joanna met a load of us. It was the first time our two Joannas met—W&J with Tinus and Joanna—both named Joanna-Marie! Six of the Boer siblings attended; only Hendrik and Dick were missing. Brother Jim and Wilma were there along with their two sons, Roger and Steve with wife Dawn. Can't mention everyone, but just two that are seldom seen at Boer events: Tammy, brother Bill's daughter; Susan, sister Elly's granddaughter from Cranbrook BC. Someone took a picture of me doing "*Op een dames paard*" (On a Ladies' Horse) with Danielle on my knees. It is a little dance I am famous for doing with little children. Danielle was now twelve years old and, judging from her enthusiastic laugh, enjoyed the flashback tremendously. I used to do this with her at the home of Fred and Nancy Bosma when she was small. Danielle is also Elly's granddaughter.

The next day, we took W&J on a heritage tour through Pitt Meadows, Pitt Lake and to the grave of my parents, Wiebe & Elly Boer, in Abbotsford. We also visited Tinus & Joanna in nearby Mission. After that, they left and that was the end of anything to do with or resulting from the anniversary. Life went on as normal.

Before that Alaska cruise, we had visited them in Grand Rapids shortly after the birth of Jehan in 2003 and in Atlanta shortly after the birth of Stephan in October 2006. For the Atlanta trip we invited Cynthia to come along too. Many pictures of Jehan and Stephan with their proud Opa and Oma as well as Aunty Cynthia. Since Atlanta is also a centre for the Lieuwen family with Tim and Julie both living there with their families, such visits always include a rendezvous or two with that crowd as well. During this particular visit, even Fran's

niece, Joanne and her husband, Han, were there. Wiebe also threw a party for Hillcrest alumni in the Atlanta area so that we met some of them again. That was a great visit. And we've visited them many times in Atlanta in subsequent years.

You have read above about my Adegbola lecture in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 2011. We made use of that occasion to spend nearly a month with Wiebe's family in Lagos, where they now lived. It was a great time of bonding with the three very lively kids. Lydia and Chris also came for a visit from Abuja, while we also met up with their sons Jude, Jesse and Jason, who are all currently living in Lagos. Jude has become a famous international hiphop musician. The entire visit was a great one, except for two shadows: the unrelenting heat of Lagos and W&J's unpredictable dog that kept us somewhat tense.



The Boers and the Abagas\*

### *Cynthia & Family*

Of course, C&A were sort of living nearby in Seattle. Upon our arrival in Vancouver, it did not take long before C&A made their way to our new pad. We have some wonderful pictures of toddler Asia interacting with us in the apartment, in the city and on the beach. A few pictures show her intensely teaching me how to play some of her games. And there she is bowling, sitting on the floor as she pushes the ball down the alley. Relax, this is the *real* game: five-pin bowling with smaller balls that she is strong enough to get rolling. This was on Fran's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, March 11, 2002. As I peruse these pictures once again, that old notion crops up time and again: Too bad kids grow up so fast! We have kept up a fairly regular social life with this family, traveling either by Greyhound or RV. The former was a lot cheaper!



A few months later, we again were at C&A's place, this time to witness Ezra's baptism. Andy, though professing not to be a Christian, was enough of a sport to stand up with Cynthia holding Asia, while Cynthia presented Ezra for baptism. She accepted God's covenant promise for him and pledged to teach him the Christian way.

**Ezra's Baptism at Emmaus Road CRC  
Seattle – July 14, 2002\***

Then the congregation arose and pledged also to take responsibility towards that end, a common but very meaningful and powerful part of the liturgy. Unfortunately, few congregations or their members take that responsibility seriously and fear "interfering" in another family. Actually, it would not be interference so much as acting out their responsibility for and towards each other. Individualism and so-called privatization have undermined this sacrament; it needs to be resuscitated for the health of families and the community.

### *Kevin & Family*

November-December 2002 we spent time in Palo Alto CA with K&T. That Palo Alto trip was not with the RV, for we still had the old camper that we no longer trusted for such long trips. We traveled in a rental. The details of that trip are found in Chapter 42.

At this time, Kevin was still working for McKinsey & Co., where they worked him to the bone 24/7. Gone much of the time to New York City and Germany. Yes, spoiling him with all kinds of elitist perks and paying him handsomely, but threatening the health of his family, while he was advising corporations to escape demise by becoming meaner and leaner. That may have been a good recipe for corporations, but it would hardly keep a family together! Ah, the life of a Yale MBA! Eventually, he quit and went on his own again, sort of.

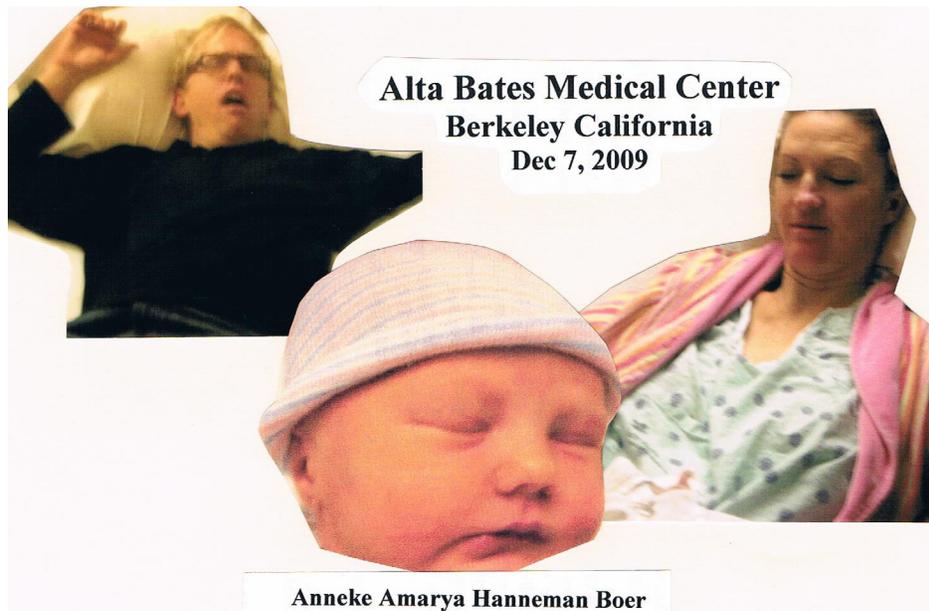
### *New Life: Anneke Amarya Hanneman Boer (December, 2009)*

A particularly joyful birth was that of Anneke to Kevin & Theresa in December 2009, their first. For a first, this was kind of late for this couple. They had been struggling and suffering with Theresa's lyme disease that led to advice not to have children. Finally, it did happen, but under strenuous circumstances in the aftermath of the economic tsunami of 2008 which hit Kevin particularly hard in California. His business collapsed due to it. Their house went into receivership. He needed a job, something difficult to find at the time. And then the anxiety of this special pregnancy. It threw Kevin into a depression. They were in deep distress.

Finally, with the help of a close friend, shortly before the scheduled birth, Kevin landed a job at Yahoo headquarters in Silicon Valley, but it involved a two-hour commute one way through the crowded California expressway system. Furthermore, though he is a computer geek, this particular department was not of particular interest to him. But it *was* a job! So he grit his teeth and set to work for an apparently good salary. But that *commute*! What a drag. And the worry over a successful delivery that was now planned as a C-section.

Fran and I were on our “four corner” RV trip through the USA, something you will read about in the next volume, and were scheduled to arrive a few days before the delivery. So we did. Early on the appointed day, K&T drove to the hospital in Berkeley and got ready for the big event. We came later that same morning. We had our cell phone all charged up, ready to receive the news as we left the expressway into town. Just as I drove along a very narrow road under an overpass and right next to a huge semi with no space to spare between it and our RV, there was the ring! What a circumstance to receive a call, especially such a nerve wracking one. Kevin gave us a very brief message that was so ambiguous that we did not know what to make of it, just when I was trying to negotiate that narrow passageway. It is an underpass and semi that I will *never* forget! The longest ever, it seemed, and the most harrowing.

Well, we made it through and found a happy family in the hospital. It was done and successfully so. A beautiful baby with a big name: Anneke Amarya Hanneman Boer!



**The Happy and Sleepy Family\***

She truly was the most beautiful baby I have ever seen. This was at least partially due to the C-section birth that spared her face from the contortions most newborns experience. A fully round-cheeked baby! We were all so happy. A few hours later, Theresa’s parents, the Hannemans, also arrived. They lived only a couple of hours drive from the scene.

Theresa had to stay in the hospital longer than is usually the case due to their peculiar circumstances. So, Fran and I decided to also stay around the hospital. We were parked on residential streets with free parking but with two-hour parking restrictions during the day. We had to keep moving the RV every couple of hours for the four days we were there. There simply was no paid parking facility that could accommodate an oversized vehicle like ours. So, back and forth, around the block, making sure we parked in another spot. It so happened that it was unusually cold in Berkeley that week, so that at night we were not too comfortable. We had not counted on that. This was California, right?

After some days, all came home. Kevin was once again busy working and commuting, working on a job he was not enamored with and nervous about. Theresa was busy with Anneke and we were getting ready to drive back to Vancouver. We had vague plans to return to CA later in January. We had been on the road for some seven weeks and were eager to be in Vancouver to enjoy the Christmas climate there. However, we soon got a call from K&T asking us to come back as early as possible in January, for things were just too difficult and stressful.

So we did but on one condition: Kevin should stay near his office overnight and not spend all his energies on four-hour commutes every day. He had a new but stressful job that stretched him very much and he was on probation. He should just relax at night and rest properly so as to attend to his new job situation without running the risk of not passing the initial three-months trial period. He should just come home over the weekend. We promised to assist Theresa in any way she needed in return. The bargain was agreed upon and we came. All of us stuck to our end of the bargain. I remember sleeping on the sofa with Anneke in my arms a couple of nights. Kevin was getting better equipped for his new job.

In the meantime, they looked for suitable housing near Yahoo and found their current cute two-bedroom rental in Mountain View in an equally cute neighbourhood with a lot of colourful Hispanic architecture. A nice little place with lots of windows and light—that Theresa constantly shuts out! They moved in after we had left and just abandoned their own house to the bank. Kevin had tried to negotiate and reason with them, but they would not budge. So he just left the place unattended. Now Kevin only has a ten-minute commute, so much better and more relaxed.

However, the outlook at Yahoo was unstable and unsure. Many employees began to leave, including Kevin's friend who had brought him aboard. This friend invited Kevin to come along and work for his new company, but K&T decided that for the time being they needed the stability and insurance provided by Yahoo, for insurance and medical bills for Lyme disease were horrendous. Nevertheless, Kevin frequently talked about the crisis in the company. I several times urged him to arise and use his training and experience at McKinsey to make a plan for Yahoo and offer it to them as a survival plan. He kept resisting my urgings without good explanation till eventually he told me that people with his training and experience were a dime a dozen in Silicon Valley. He was nothing special. Okay, but he could *become* special if he did what almost everybody *could* do but in fact didn't. I was reminded of Columbus' egg. Depression does ugly things to its victims.

He also indicated that if he were to move to some other state, his skills would be highly valued. My reaction was: Why then stay in California? Why not move to where the grass might be greener for him? Well, there's this CA sun. Yes, but the state has no monopoly on the sun. Then there was Theresa's family near by. OK, I give up. Stay where you're not needed or even appreciated, where you're just part of the gang and your skills and experience are devaluated. I know what I would do.

But we love K&T anyhow! We have deep appreciation for each other. We love to visit them and have visited them quite a few times, mostly by air or RV. Though they live some distance from us, via the digital culture we are able to keep in close touch, literally seeing Anneke grow up before our eyes via Skype and video clips. This is an amazing world we live in.

### *The Boer Side of Things*

While the single main activity in Vancouver for the first eight years was research about and writing the Christian-Muslim series, socializing with the Boer clan was/is a big thing for us. We had been separated from them for so many years that we really relished this part of our life. With Karen & Jake and Tinus & Joanna being the closest, we saw them the most, while we felt totally welcome as far as the others were concerned as well. It's just that the others lived farther away and thus not so easy to reach. We also felt close enough to some nephews and nieces, of whom we had scads, like Fred & Nancy Bosma, who had been our neighbours in Jos, as well as Helen & John Van Bergeyk, Helen being sister Martha's oldest daughter, to include them in our social circle. They all lived in Surrey, only an hour away.

People came to visit us partially out of curiosity. They were all wondering what our life would be like in a small downtown apartment. Most of them could hardly imagine.... We have all kinds of pictures about these visits. There's sister Martha and daughter Helen with us on the Seawall. There are Karen and Jake posing in front of the *inukchuk*, also on the Seawall.

*An aside: Inukchuk* has become a cultural icon in BC. Originally it was an Inuit (formerly known as Eskimos) stone device for giving directions to travelers. To Caucasians, it looks like a welcome sign and has become a souvenir item popularized especially by the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. There is a large one on display along the Seawall that is one of the most photographed items in all of Vancouver.

We gathered people at the slightest "provocation." Fran's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (March 11, 2002) was celebrated by having C&A and family over for the weekend. We have a great picture of Asia & Ezra in a double stroller enjoying Vancouver with us. The special treat was a few rounds of bowling in which even Asia was able to participate.

We threw a party at Kam's, a Malaysian restaurant right on Davie Street, to celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on June 5, 2002. Many of my siblings honoured us with their presence. The manager gave each one of them a small umbrella as a souvenir gift.

A very unusual and rare visit at our house around that time was of brother Wim/Bill and his daughter Tammy. That was rare because of an ugly history of alcoholism, dysfunctional family and divorce that had kept them separated from each other for so many years. We had good relations with both of them but not with both of them together.

In October 2002, we found ourselves with the old truck camper in Kelowna, BC, visiting sister Bo and husband Tom Wyatt. There is not much to tell about this and later visits to this couple, except that we invariably are made to feel welcome by Bo and always relish our conversations with Tom. Whenever we come, he is open to and capable of discussing an amazingly wide range of subjects that we enjoy so much. Especially Fran is always looking forward to her discussions with him. Tom does not usually attend Boer clan events, but when you visit him at home, he is all grace and conversation. In our latest visit in 2013, Tom at 88, may have lost some of his physical agility, but he is still as sharp a conversationalist as ever.

This particular visit of 2002 included a side trip to Adams Lake, a place rightly famous for salmon spawning, particularly early October. Bo had heard of the place, but did not know how far it was. She told us we should go for a drive, but was vague about the destination or distance. We ended up driving nearly two hours. The river leading into the lake was literally and totally full of red-bodied salmon who had come to spawn and die. You could almost walk across the river on the backs of the salmon.



Kelowna has a special sister-city relationship with the Dutch city of Veendam. That's the same name as the immigrant ship that carried the Prinses across the Atlantic in 1948.

Sisters Kelowna and Veendam\*

February 18, 2003, was a big one for me—my 65<sup>th</sup>. We again invited all my siblings together with three other groups in our life to a party in the FBC Hobbit House. This was a case of four completely separate groups in our lives intersecting with each other—family, the Bible study group, CRC friends and the WENA folk. Since the event included that Bible study group, FBC allowed us the use of Hobbit House, the church's social centre. I had jokingly boasted for some time that we would blow my entire first Old Age Pension check on this party. Not sure we managed entirely, but we came close!

The Bible study group composed the following ditty for the occasion:

**Song to Jon  
(Sung to “Jesus Bids Us Shine with a Pure Clear Light”)**

We are in Jon’s group every Thursday night  
He is our leader and he’s taught us right  
Right from the beginning clear up to Mark  
Talks are far from boring and many spark

We are such a mixed and a varied group  
Some of us eat rice and some love borscht soup  
Round the snack table after we have done  
We have yummie goodies and lots of fun.

Nigeria is where Jon and Fran came  
To our fair city loving our rain  
They gathered us together in their flat  
Sparse at the beginning but now we’re back to back

We’re glad you’re in the West End doing such good works  
When someone is needing that call, you never shirk  
You even check the street and the man who keeps them clean  
Buying him equipment when his is very lean

Now the big one’s on you, don’t you fear or fret  
You can travel more now as more money you will get  
It’s great to celebrate this auspicious time  
Cause the alternative would not be thine

**HIP HIP HOORAY!!!!**

(The guys will dress up like Jon for this little ditty)

My 65<sup>th</sup> was not the biggest event for us on that day. The bigger one was the birth of Jehan Crowther Boer, first son to W&J. We were told “Jehan” was an old French version of Jan or John. I could not be given a bigger or more meaningful present—our second grandson and third grandchild. W&J were living in Grand Rapids at the time. Joanna was still a Calvin student, while Wiebe was continuing his doctoral research. Our happiness knew no bounds! It was not long before we trekked to Grand Rapids to welcome little Jehan in person and to congratulate the parents.

Our visit happened to coincided with that of the Bachews. Remember that they had a church connection in Grand Rapids. They had come to visit that church, as part of a larger US tour

they were doing with their popular steelpan drum band for purposes of fund raising for their mission in Trinidad. That was our first post-nuptial meeting, one of several to come.

The visit to Grand Rapids, of course, included touching base with Fran's siblings living there. We remember wandering along the Lake Michigan beach with Henrietta and Luke on a terribly cold and stormy May day. K&T also showed up and we have a picture of them and Fran at the Prins cemetery plot where Mother Jennie, Father Charley and sister Jane were laid to rest.

### *Boer & Prins Family Deaths*

#### *Fred Bosma, May 2004*

The year 2004 was not a good year for the Boer family. In May 2004, Fred Bosma, sister Ellie's widower, suddenly passed away in Mission. After Ellie's death in 1998, he felt lost and did not take his medications regularly. One of his children found him dead in his apartment. His funeral can best be described as an "edified" Ellie-Fred type of chaos! Both of them had been church hoppers for some time and their children were not very familiar with Fred's latest pastor. They didn't realize he was wheelchair bound and that the church they had reserved for the occasion, which was not that pastor's, was not accessible. There was no way the pastor could get on the stage and there seemed to be no portable microphones available. So, two minutes before the ceremony, the family came to Uncle John with the request to take charge of the service! Fortunately, they had a print-out of the liturgy that I could work with. I had no choice but to agree, of course, but was not really "in the spirit" to provide the animated kind of leadership I prefer to give. I worked my way through the service. Lots of good eulogies were offered and we were all blessed by the vigorous congregational singing. It was the first and only memorial service I had ever done till then. It wasn't long before I had another one.

I have forgotten who led the graveside service, but it wasn't me. After the brief service there, everyone left the site except for Fran, myself and nephew Martin, son of Tinus and Joanna. I wanted to stay because of the way we left Ellie standing in the cold at her graveside six years earlier. It had given me such an unhappy feeling of lack of closure, that I wanted to see Fred's coffin actually lowered into the grave next to Ellie's. We watched the cemetery staff fill in the grave before we left. We then wandered through the grounds of the near-by Mission monastery together with Martin who had watched with us. We had a wonderful chat with him about family members and events. He has always held the Boer family in high esteem, especially his grandparents, Wiebe and Ellie.

#### *Brother Bill/Wim, December 2004*

In December of the same year brother Bill/Wim passed away in Qualicum on Vancouver Island, where he lived with a friend named Emily in her house. That morning, Emily called me to tell me Bill was sick, but she did not indicate the seriousness of the sickness. By mid-

afternoon she called again to tell me he had died. Just like that. Without any previous warning. Of course, we knew he had serious problems due to his alcoholism. There had been other serious problems some time earlier, when he spent at least a week in a Victoria hospital for heart surgery. I came to Victoria at that time to relieve Martha from the responsibility of taking care of him at the hospital. After all, she had a sick husband on her hands. So Bill and I spent a fair amount of time together and even did some singing together. Some time later, he paid us a visit in Vancouver. He sat on a dining room chair that had a tendency to tip backwards if you did not watch it. We failed to warn him and, sure enough, this heart patient fell over backwards. We were so grateful nothing serious emerged from that accident.

After Emily's announcement, I phoned Wim's daughter Tammy and together we immediately traveled to Qualicum. When we arrived, the body had already been taken to the funeral home. We went and arranged for cremation. Then we returned to Emily's house to determine our next step, especially with respect to his meager belongings in his one small room.

We found some financial records and money that belonged to the local Legion chapter of which Wim was the Treasurer. The Legion is officially an organization of veterans, which Wim was not. But due to lack of members, they allowed others to join them. It was the place where Wim found his niche and social life. He was popular there and trusted enough to become Treasurer. So we called their office and within a few minutes they arrived, obviously concerned for the financial records and the money we found. They trusted us and we accompanied them to their premises. There we arranged for a memorial service to be held a few days later. We returned home. It had been a hard day, but it was a good day for bonding with Tammy, a niece whom I never really knew. A very fine woman, I discovered, married to Randy and mother of two fine kids, all living in Burksville, a little village nestled between the north arm of the Fraser River and Richmond.

A few days later the memorial service was held with me in charge. Before the service, we took possession of the ashes and displayed the urn on a table at the memorial. Many people attended: all the siblings with most of the spouses, quite a few nephews and nieces and some folks from Port Alberni. Altogether we were a large crowd, so large that the Legion members were utterly amazed. Wim had not spoken much about his family and here we came in such large numbers.

On our part, we were amazed at Wim's obvious popularity and respect the Legion members had for him, for they also turned out en masse. The large drinking hall was totally filled with the two groups of people. We had a good memorial service together, with brother Hendrik delivering the sermon, and some of the siblings singing a Dutch hymn. Afterwards, the two groups socialized in obvious appreciation for each other. It turned out to be about as happy an occasion as one could expect. I believe we left them with a positive Gospel witness they felt good about.

The decision had to be made as to the disposition of the cremains. The central person here was Tammy, of course. But after some discussions and exploration, brother Dick, the one still living in Port Alberni, told us about a place by the Somas River that was precious to Wim. So, Tammy, Karen, Tinus & Joanna, Fran and myself, met Dick and Dianne in Port Alberni and

together poured the ashes into the river and watched them flow towards the Canal on their way to the Pacific Ocean.



**Tammy Pouring her Father's Cremains into his Favourite Spot in the Somas River  
Port Alberni\***

We had a picnic at the scene and then some of us went to the harbour at the foot of Argyle Street. While there, we witnessed and photographed a magnificent full-orbed rainbow that spanned the entire town and took two photographs to capture. It reminded us of God's promises about the earth. It took on a personal meaning that day, what with the disposal of Wim's cremains.

*An aside:* On that same day, we visited the town's oldest cemetery and came across the grave of William Henry Derby, who died on February 27, 1938, only nine days after I was born. He was the first beneficiary of Canada's Old Age Security scheme.

*Albert Bosma, December 2006*

Two years later, in December 2006, Martha's husband, Albert Bosma, passed away. He had been sick for some decades and had been at the edge of death many times. We suspected it would happen this time. So Fran and I went to Victoria to support Martha for a few days and to take leave of Albert. But he still hung on. So, we went back home. But a few days later he did pass away. We came for the funeral, again together with the siblings. It was at this event that Fred, Martha's oldest son, shone in his role as the family's leader. A postcard commemorating Albert's death shows Albert feeding a large flock of pigeons, an activity that gave him joy on his daily short walks and for which he was famous in the neighbourhood.

I read a poem from Milton at the memorial service and also pronounced Martha the hero of the family for the way she faithfully and lovingly cared for her husband for so many years. I promised that I would find a medal to decorate her into the Order of the Boers. I searched for an appropriate medal for some years, and Fran found one *six years later* in an army

surplus store in Mountain View, the home of K&T. I presented it to her on March 23, 2013, when Martha joined the Lower Mainland siblings and spouses for a brunch in Maple Ridge, where we had gone to attend the memorial service of Harry Scharft, a second cousin of ours through Dad Boer and with whom we shared our Boer grandfather.

*Jake Heikens, March 2011*

A little over four years later, we lost another brother-in-law, Jake Heikens, Karen's husband, the one who emigrated with us back in 1951. He suffered for some years of leukemia; we saw him deteriorate gradually over a few years. At one time he wryly commented that the main difference between him and us was that he knew what he would die of, while we had no idea about ourselves. Well, yes and no. He did not take into consideration possible unexpected turns of events, not even in his own ebbing life.

The Heikens were well off, Jake having been a partner in a successful insurance business. His greatest joy was to donate as much money as possible to his favourite charities. He had a special fund for that purpose, invested it and kept skimming from it for donations. He asked and trained Fran to administer that fund according to his priorities, for Fran has a reputation as a good money manager. He felt relieved and secure when Fran promised him she would administer that account according to his wishes. It was his way of controlling and safeguarding these funds even after his demise. However, shortly after his passing in March 2011, the family relieved Fran of this responsibility, promising that they would honour Jake's desires. Fran felt she had helped Jake die in peace. Now that it was all over, she readily handed over. Everyone assumed that the dead do not know what goes on. I've been in Africa long enough not to be so sure about that anymore.

At the well-attended memorial service at Elim, Cynthia did a short eulogy on behalf of the crowd of nieces and nephews, while I did an interpretive Bible reading. We were very happy to see the Heikens children rally around Karen so well. Her life has taken a very different direction from what she was accustomed to. Now well into her eighties, hers is a "successful" widowhood, pleasant even and blessed.

*Brother Ray, April 2011*

I have already written about the death of Fran's brother Ray during the week of our seminar in New Haven in April 2011. He had been quite ill for most of the previous winter but the doctors were not able to diagnose the problem. Fran had been phoning him quite regularly and by early spring it seemed that he was improving. But then in the first week of April it was discovered that he had advanced lymphoma. He and the family decided on home hospice care. Several of their children wrote and phoned Fran to let her know the seriousness of his situation. She had obviously not expected his death to come so quickly, but, fortunately all six of their children were at his side at the time of his passing. Fran was not able to pay him a final visit or even make it to the funeral.

Brother Ray was the one with all the stories about Friesland, the one who knew and loved the Frisian language, the one with the superb memory. Fran learned so much from him and, in many ways, he was like a father to her. She, of course, misses him still.

*Brother Dewey, October 2011*

In late August of 2011, Fran's brother Dewey informed us that he had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. He assured us that he was feeling fine and that he was getting ready for surgery. The cancer turned out to be much more aggressive than it seemed at first and the surgery was much less successful than they had hoped. His feeding tubes kept coming out and gave him endless problems, so much so that he was forced to stay at the hospital. When it became obvious that there was nothing more the medics could do for him, he decided that he wanted to go home to die. Home hospice care was arranged.

Fran had been in regular phone contact with Dewey and his family throughout the time of surgery and hospitalization. His children informed her of the seriousness of his condition and told her that if she wanted to see Dewey alive, she needed to come as soon as possible. It was totally unbelievable to her that, only six months after Ray's passing, another brother was now on his deathbed. She immediately bought tickets and arrived in Grand Rapids on Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October. What a blessing to get there in time to say her farewells and to see the love and care Dewey's family was giving him. Dewey was still alert, able to talk softly and give a firm hug and handshake. His children said he was just waiting for his little sister to come and that then he felt he was ready to die. He passed away on Sunday morning, October 16. Fran was able to be with the Prins family for the funeral, something so necessary for good closure.

*Joanna-Marie, October 2013*

In October 2013, Joanna-Marie, wife of brother Tinus, passed away rather unexpectedly. She had been sick and weak for many years, but there were no external signs she was about to go. Well, she did. The family was, of course, devastated, but daughter Sarah proved a real support for father Tinus. A "celebration of life" was held in a Mission funeral home where the body was cremated, the same home that did Elly and Fred's funerals. Many family members were present. Brother Jim was the master of ceremony, while I read two poems. We are now left with only one Joanna-Marie, Wiebe's wife.

While waiting for the ceremony to start, some of us, including their adult children, visited the graves of Elly and Fred on the same premises. The discussion indicated some feelings of indifference and nonchalance. They said they never visit the graves and saw no point in it, since "there is nothing there." Without showing it, I was somewhat offended and expressed my feelings in the second post of the new blog I have started, "My World—My Neighbour" and entitled the post "Honouring the Dead."

In terms of our own family, Cynthia and the children as well as Kevin and family attended. They all stayed in an Abbotsford hotel, while Fran and I RV-ed our way through the night on

the Walmart parking lot. Amazing: there were at least ten RVs staying overnight, more even than on summer nights. The following morning, Sunday, Fran and I invited our own and Tinus' crowd to a brunch in a very nice, cosy and crowded family restaurant in Matsqui. From there we all visited the grave of Opa Wiebe and Oma Elly Boer just outside Abbotsford to honour their memory and history.

### *Random Events with Family and Friends*

A September 2003 highlight was brother Dick's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. His was the twelfth 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in the family, including that of our parents, since he was the youngest of the whole bunch. So, it was not a new thing for us to have such a celebration. However, Dick tends to keep himself away from the family. Therefore, we decided to descend on him unexpectedly to show him how much we care for him. It was a fun celebration in Port Alberni. We had a neighbour entertaining us with his bagpipe. Even Hendrik & Barb from Illinois came for the event. That I really appreciated.



**Celebrating Dick's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday\***

In February 2006 we took the C&A family to Vancouver Island to visit relatives and show them a bit of both its beautiful environment as well as my history there. In Victoria, we visited sister Martha and her sick husband, Albert. We took a picture of him and Martha along with C&A, the last picture we have that includes Albert. He died later that year.

We spent a night with their son, Fred and Penny, in Cobblehill, near Duncan, where they live on a hobby farm. We have an unusual picture of Asia posing with Penny's horse and dog. Fred is housing manager for a First Nation reserve there. We have the most interesting discussions together, for his experience is so much like ours in Nigeria. The global similarities of traditional animistic cultures always astound me. Could that have been the global post-fall

religion before people spread out over the globe? How else explain those astounding similarities?

We hung around Cathedral Grove with its ancient growth trees along Highway 4 for a long time and then moved on to brother Dick and Dianne in Port Alberni. Cynthia has always had special ties with them and they with her. After all they drove their motor-bike all the way to Grand Rapids for her wedding!

Also paid a visit to Aafke Harkema, the widow of cousin Jan Luurt. It was my last visit to her; she passed away shortly after that. We heard about her death too late to attend the memorial service and, in fact, heard about it from Al Hoekstra, a Port Alberni friend, not from the Harkemas. Since then, we have regretfully had no contact with the Harkema clan. This very week (July 11, 2013) brother Tinus and Joanna are on Saltspring Island, where some of Jan Harm's offspring still live and he is scheduled to have a lunch with them. I sent him a message to greet them and to tell them that we would like to meet them as well. Tinus reported later that the offspring of Jan Harm are open to us and friendly. So, perhaps we should pay them a visit in the near future. Jan Luurt's crowd may be a different story. Jan Harm and Jan Luurt were brothers, sons of my Dad's oldest sister Angenita.

In June 2009, we attended a lakeside baptism of Danielle Bosma, daughter of Fred and Nancy, at Barnette Beach in Burnaby. It was conducted by the pastor of Burnaby CRC. Danielle keeps popping into our lives. We have that picture of my doing "*Op een dames paard*" with her on my knees when she was 12 years of age. This was in memory of the times we played this game during her early childhood. We've also run into her the last few years at the annual January Missions Fest. Recently we met at her church in March 2013, where she was helping in the kitchen as well as singing in the church's praise team for an event that we came to attend. She is a sweet young lady full of life and laughter, just like her mother and grandmother.

The next month, July 2009, saw us at Harrison Hot Springs with our entire clan, including the far-away W&J family, who came all the way from Nairobi. While Fran and I stayed in our RV, we had rented cabins for the kids and their families. What with the lake and beach, the indoor pool heated by the springs, the meals at which everyone took turns, we all had a great time and looked forward to a repeat.

As the years pass by, we do visit and receive visitors, both friends and relatives, from many different places. Apart from my siblings Karen and Tinus, we have paid the most visits to C&A, probably averaging once every two months. We often take the Greyhound, it being by far the cheapest. At other times, we take the RV. The bus is easier for getting there, but once there, it is nice for us to have the RV, parking as we do across the street from their house and plugging into the neighbour's electricity. Usually we sleep in it and can thus have our privacy. Occasionally we hold little parties for neighbourhood kids, who just love sitting inside the vehicle.

Visitors and visiting really never stops. We certainly do not want to write about all of them. But one visit I consider special was from Al and Marianne Bohr, missionary friends from

Nigeria with Marianne, now a widow, living in Abbotsford. A little background is needed here. They shared a German background, but Al was a born Canadian, while Marianne was born in what is now Poland. We had several good German friends in Nigeria, but every time I meet a German for the first time, unpleasant flashes of WW II go through my mind and I have to keep a mild anger in check. It soon passes. Well, shortly before their visit, I had read a novel about the Nazi occupation of Germany itself and the suffering they inflicted on Jews not only but even on their fellow Germans who had not joined the Nazis. It was not all that different for them as it was for the Dutch under the Nazi occupation. So I told the Bohrs about that book and then Marianne began to tell the WW II story of her family under the Nazis. That book had prepared me well for her story. After she finished her story, I became very emotional and confessed to her my Germanophobia. It ended up a kind of reconciliation session for me. I don't believe I've had similar moments of anger since. That, of course, does not undo the facts of cruelty and oppression the Germans inflicted on NL; that can never be undone or erased from history, but it is good to remember that it was not *all* Germans and that, in fact, many Germans were also Nazi victims.

### *Long Distance Visits From Family and Friends*

Though we had moved to the far western periphery of the continent, we were not forgotten by our far-flung community of relatives and friends. Apart from Ray and Gert at the time of the move, Vassil Valkov\* started a trend in August 2002 of long-distance visitors. You may remember him from our Jos years as the Bulgarian civil engineer. He now lived in Paris, but traveled frequently to California, where his two children live. Since his daughter worked for

an airline, he was entitled to a very generous free flying programme that he used to visit us.



Though he was an advanced senior, he was fit as a fiddle and eager to see the city and its surroundings. I drove him in our old truck camper up the Sea-to-Sky Highway all the way to Whistler, BC's famous ski centre. He spent one day exploring the city by himself by skytrain and bus. By 9 pm he was still not home. So we became worried and were

thinking of calling the police or transit authorities. When he finally appeared well after 10:30 pm, he was surprised that we had been worried! After all, he was accustomed to the much larger network of the Parisian subway. He still had energy to spare! We enjoyed his visit and had our usual Christian vs Marxist discussions that never come to any conclusion. Next time we'd meet him would be in Paris, a story for Chapter 42.

In June 2003, cousin Warner Boer and Betsy came over from Ontario to participate in the wedding of their son. Warner is the son of my Oom Harm and is a retired Ontario Provincial Policeman. They came with his sister Willy from NL, who stayed with us for a few days. She was a delightful guest.



The next month, our friends from Nigeria days, Graham and Katy Weeks\* “dropped by” from London, UK. We took them for an RV tour along route 99 and returned via the Fraser Canyon. At that time we had only a small axe to cut firewood at our campsite. I have never seen such an impatient man chipping away at a huge piece of wood with such a small axe with such infinite

patience! He literally spent a whole evening chipping away at a large piece of raw wood with an undersized axe. Well, it gave Katy a chance to tell *her* story!

In September of that same year we had Willem and Henny Berends, also Nigeria friends now living in Australia, over. We took them RV camping and followed the same route as with the Weeks. Again, spent lots of time reminiscing about Nigeria.



Willem and Henny\*

An unexpected visitor in 2004 was Dr. John Orkar from Nigeria. He and his wife had studied many years in Canada and had, along with some of their children, become Canadian citizens. He was the Nigeria chief of CRWRC and a great friend of ours. He had been among the CRC crowd in both Canada and Nigeria for so many years, that he could sing that icon hymn “*Ere zij God.*” The purpose of this visit to Vancouver was to meet with one of his professors who had recently retired here. It was so nice to have John with us for a few days. We showed him around the city and had him address the CRC congregation on Sunday morning. I also arranged a lunch for him and Nathan Elawa. A Tiv and a Jukun meeting peacefully, while their people at home were at war with each other. He passed away unexpectedly in 2012.

My classmate and Nigeria colleague, Harv Kiekover, visited us in 2005. He is one we really appreciate for his deep pastoral heart as well as his intellectual acumen and his ability with respect to repair and maintenance, while still being a very humble man. Whenever we visit Grand Rapids, we make sure we arrange a visit with him.

That same year we enjoyed a visit from cousin Jan Boer, son of Oom Willem from Hoogkerk, and his wife Grace. They live in Michigan and are very family oriented. When in Michigan, we always visit them, often staying overnight. Jan always brings us up to date with respect to our Boer relatives in the NL.

End May 2006 another cousin Jan Boer and his wife Cecilia came for a visit. This Jan was the son of Oom Harm, my Dad’s oldest brother, whose name I carry as my middle name. They live in Pretoria, South Africa, where he was an architect. They had gone to Australia to visit our only remaining uncle there and were now on their way to his son Johan and his brother Warner, both living in Ontario. I was so happy to meet another one of my Jan Boer cousins. Though we seldom meet and some never, I feel a special bond with all of them, being named after the same peasant grandfather of ours. Cousin Jan has recently written his autobiography, which I am eager to read. In 2013 Jan was in and out of the hospital, hanging on for dear life at 86. He passed away in November, 2013.



Jan Boer & Jan Boer\*

That very same week in 2006, we had a veritable Lieuwen invasion. That word is no exaggeration: eleven of them all at once and for five days! They all came for a Lieuwen family reunion. Remember that the Lieuwens also have their roots in BC. Because there were so many Lieuwens visiting, Cynthia and kids decided to come also. That meant that a total of sixteen people were all sharing the facilities of a less than 800 square feet apartment! We, the four seniors slept in the RV in the parking lot, while we left the apartment to the younger generation. The whole bunch were all laid back and easily accommodated themselves in our little place. That was the biggest crowd we ever hosted in Vancouver! One of the Lieuwens, Prof. Tim, was an interesting study in contrasts. He spent a considerable part of his time on the phone consulting with post-graduate students whose research he was supervising. The next moment you might see him doing dangerous stunts on the street with our bike. He actually did a headstand in the skytrain! He ought to be ashamed of himself for so forgetting his professorial dignity!

In the summer of 2013 there was another Lieuwen reunion in Northern BC, but this time only six came, and not all at once, to spend time with us in Vancouver. In order to be sure we were at the airport at the right time, because they came and went at separate times, we printed out a schedule of arrivals and departures!

Does this remind you of our Jos routine?! It was busy for us, but lots of fun, for the Lieuwens continue to be a loose-hanging crowd. We just withdraw into our RV shell for the night and let them do their thing in the apartment. Good night!

In December of 2006 we received info that a certain Angelina Pikstra was an exchange student from The Netherlands (NL), currently living in Nanaimo. Angelina is a great grandchild of my aunt Angenieta, my Dad's oldest sister who brought the Harkemas into the Boer orbit. That means our grandchild Asia is a third cousin to Angelina, since Asia's great grandfather (Wiebe Boer) is a brother to Angelina's great grandmother (Angenieta Boer). Neither Angelina nor her parents had any idea that she was living in the midst of the largest Boer clan outside of the NL that descended from my grandfather Jan. We were told about her presence in BC by brother Hendrik, who had attended a cousins' reunion in NL and met Angelina's grandparents, who then told him about her. We contacted her and invited her to our house in Vancouver. She was such a pleasant young lady, an unusual teenager with a fresh, if not innocent view on life around her, without pretensions or self-inflicted peer pressures. She could discuss intelligently with adults and had firm goals for her life: she would study medicine.

We arranged a second visit so that we could introduce her to our local Boer clan. Her visit led to contact with her parents, who were interested in establishing contact with us. I hope that next time we visit the NL, we will also be able to meet them. She was used to the sea around her from the Old Country and had grown accustomed somewhat to mountains on the Island, but she was utterly astounded by the beauty of Vancouver, especially its highrises. Her second visit coincided with Fran's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, for which Cynthia and family also came. So, Asia & Ezra met a third cousin, a category not many people keep track of. That's the weekend we saw the "Canstruction" exhibition, which floored all of us for the imagination it

took to conceive of such an exhibition and of the engineering skills required for each individual entry.

During May-June, 2009, we hosted our Dutch friends Ruud and Aly Dekker. They stayed in the apartment of the Vander Vlisses, mutual friends of ours in Vancouver, who had traveled to The Netherlands. As with some of our previous visitors, we took them to Whistler and then on along Route 99 through the interior to places like Lytton and Lillooet, some of the hottest places in all of Canada. Along the way, they stayed in hotels, while we RV-ed our way as usual. However, once we got to Lytton, it was so hot that we also stayed in a motel.

On the way home, we spent one day at the Matsqui Regional Park under the Abbotsford-Mission bridge, a place we often visit during our “back-yard” RV trips. We had invited brother Tinus and Joanna along with daughter Sarah and family to meet our friends. Ruud had serious knee problems that plagued him all along the journey, but once we decided to do a barbeque at the park, he totally revived. He is a barbeque enthusiast and took the lead both in purchasing the food and doing the barbequing on the firepit. Actually, it was “fire season” with a ban on all fires. There was a sign to that effect off to the side of the grass field, but we did not see it with the exception of Aly, who *had* seen it but decided to keep quiet. So, we happily enjoyed this illegal event. Ruud did indeed prove himself an expert. This trip was a great experience for us in that we had the opportunity to “repay” the excessive hospitality they have extended to us several times during our trips to The Netherlands.

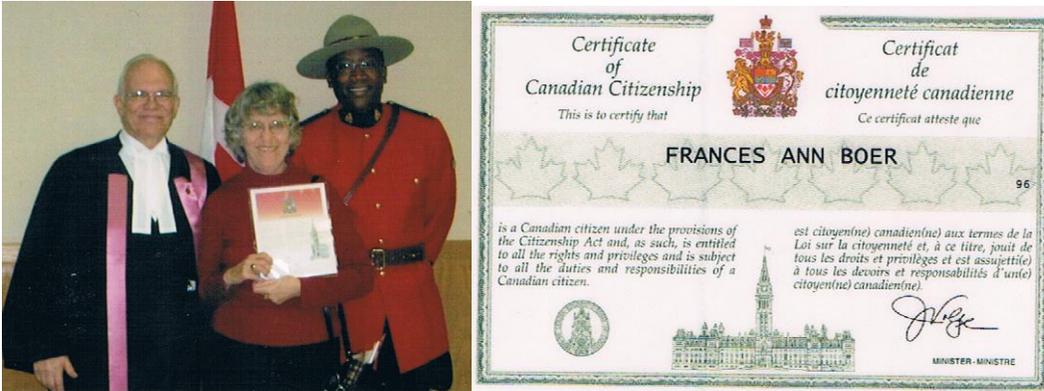
*“I Solemnly Swear....”*

On February 27, 2006, Fran finally achieved a long-time wish, namely to have dual citizenship. If you’ve read chapters of years long past, you may remember the issue she had on that. She was the only one in the family to have just one citizenship. She also mourned and resented the loss of her Dutch citizenship. But on this date, she appeared before the judge and was awarded Canadian citizenship without kissing goodbye to her American one. There were some 700 others alongside her.

In his speech, the judge said that there was to be no photography during the ceremony. In a very lame, almost pitiful, speech, he stated that the only thing Canadians have in common is that they obey the law! He didn’t seem to realize that he was speaking to a group that came from countries in which people have little respect for the law and see it as oppressive. The new citizens, true to their own traditions, promptly ignored the law and took pictures! Their first act as Canadian citizens was to disobey the law! Afterwards I asked the judge for a copy of his speech, but I believe he was embarrassed and said he spoke off the cuff. Well, it sure sounded like it! Judging from the media, that’s how most Canadian judges speak.

We have a picture of Fran posing with the judge and a Black RCMP in his bright uniform. He was one of the few RCMP’s not to have a potbelly! Fran could finally boast of dual citizenship and she now has the right to vote in Canada as well as the US. We were both

happy. She still was the only one not to have Dutch, while I remained the only without American. Mine was by personal, and, according to Fran, foolish choice; hers, by parental choice. Congratulations! May you respect and obey Canadian law.



**Fran with Judge and Mountie\***

**Fran's Citizenship Certificate\***

### *2007— Birthday and Anniversary*

The year 2007 was a biggy for us. For one thing, it was Fran's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 11. You already read that C&A came over and that Angelina was visiting us that weekend.



Cynthia had produced a very unusual birthday "cake." She had asked friends and relatives to send her a poem, remembrance or some kind of tribute to Fran. She then printed them all out, rolled them into candle-shaped scrolls, organized them on a plate to make it look like a huge birthday cake with lots of candles. It was Cynthia's usual creative side coming to the fore. Instead of eating it, the "cake" was read to all. An edible cake and other goodies were then enjoyed by the guests, who included Tony, Agatha, Tina Antonides, Sharon & Frank.

**Have the Cake and Eat it?\***

All of the written contributions were wonderful but a special one came from Lydia:

**Happy Birthday, Mama! When I call Mama, it is not the same as I did when younger. Guess I used to think that grownups have a way of coming up names to make them feel big. Now I better. I know that to be a Mama is a well deserved and you are my Mama! I you, value you, and respect you for my Mama. It was when I started doing things you did for me to my own children, being a wife to my husband the same time working at developing that I started understanding who is. Yet you did all that without me knowing that you were such a strong woman. On this your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, I salute you! Mama, you taught me to sing while working. You taught me that wisdom is better than strength. Today on your birthday, I want to thank you for being my Mama and for the privilege of being nurtured by you. As the years roll on and I grow, I want to be like you! Enjoy today and may the Lord bless you, keep you in good health and fill you with satisfaction. I love you. (Signed) Lydia\***



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and at  
myself  
Mama



The second celebration was our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June 2007. 2006 had been a year in which our investments did unusually well. We decided to use that extra bonus money in 2007 for a family cruise from Seattle to Alaska and back. All twelve of us participated in this cruise, that is, the three kids and their families. The account of the cruise itself can be found in Chapter 42. The picture above shows some of us enjoying a meal on the cruise.\*

While on the cruise, the children gave us a party in a room with private catering. I emotional all over again in as I write about this event. special poems written by Theresa and Wiebe were at the time, while a few later Cynthia presented us beautiful creative memories with photographs of the trip with the poetry. Precious memories for sure and for



special get 2013 Three Kevin, read weeks with a book along ever!

The Entire Clan on the Cruise\*

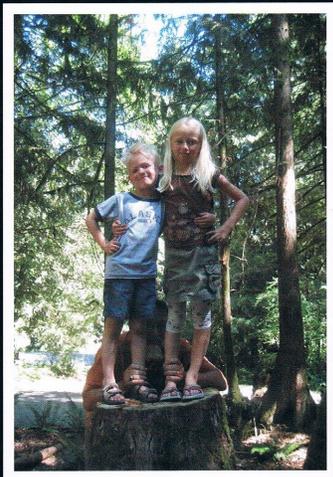
2008—John’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday

*A book by Asia and Ezra*

*Chapter 1*

There once was a man named Opa who had two grandchildren named Asia and Ezra.

They had lots of adventures together.



We did not make a big thing out of this one, though we did host a Chinese dinner in a Surrey restaurant for family and friends. What made it special for me was the book Asia and Ezra wrote under the title *The Adventures of Opa, Asia and Ezra.*\*

### *2012--50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary*

The year 2012 was one of profound contrasts: of great joy and equally great pain due to two contradictory family events. First, the good news of the joy. That joy was our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on June 5. We were so thankful that the Lord had been so faithful, merciful and gracious to us over the years that, in spite of that terrible failure on my part many years ago, He kept us together and saw us through. I have never ceased being grateful to Fran for sticking it out with me. And here we were, celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We began with serving cake at the CRC Coffee Kletz after the service. We had so much cake left that the next day we invited a number of our neighbourhood friends over for coffee and cake. There were still leftovers and we used it a third time. All in all, this took the entire week. Well, short periods *within* the week. Then we organized a party in a restaurant in Surrey for my siblings and a few other relatives and friends. Unfortunately brother Dick and Dianne were not able to join us but the The Hoekstras and Jan Jansma came all the way from Port Alberni for the occasion. This was the climax of our BC celebration.

However, the really big celebration took place in Michigan, on the shores of Lake Michigan, where we brought together the two clans that emerged from that double wedding back in 1962, the other clan being the Lieuwens as in sister Trena and Francis. Altogether 40 people spent the week together, living in four cabins we had rented. Our grandchildren were all there with their parents, except for Andy. The climax of that week was a dinner to which we invited all the Prins relatives as well as my brother Hendrik and Barbara from Aurora II. There were about 85 of us at a buffet restaurant, The Golden Corral, in Muskegon.



Our Crowd in 2012\*

After the dinner quite a few of the relatives joined us for a huge bonfire at the beach. Kevin, the MC, did a great job of combining both the celebratory nature of the occasion with a time of remembrance and tribute to the three Prins siblings who were no longer with us.

Towards the end of the week, we borrowed Francis Lieuwen's car to bring Cynthia and children to the airport in Grand Rapids. It became a quicky heritage tour for the kids in that we swung by various places in Cynthia's history: her house on Hall Street, places she worked, Calvin College including her dorm, etc.

Then the car developed brake problems; we could smell smoke. Being a member of the BC Automobile Association, we called them for a tow to a garage. Within 30 minutes or so a tow truck arrived and dropped us off at a garage and went his way. It was Friday evening. We wrote a note to the garage about why we left the car, but then discovered that the place would be closed for the rest of the weekend. That was unacceptable, since we all had to clear camp the next morning. So we called for a second tow truck, which delivered us to a larger establishment with a good reputation and left it there for repair the next morning. We had already dropped Cynthia and the kids off at a friend's house close to the airport where they planned to spend the night. We then rented a car to return to camp and Francis picked up the repaired Lieuwen car the next morning. Everything went fine as planned and BCAA paid for all the expenses, including our car rental. Bless them. Francis' car was repaired soon and that was basically covered by his insurance. We were certainly pleased with BCAA and once again learned that no matter where in North America, they will be there for you. You will meet them again in our travel stories in the next volume.

During our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration certain tensions appeared among our children that seriously marred the event for us. We decided we should think twice before doing another family reunion with everyone present. The same tensions occurred again during the 2012 celebration. It was made worse by additional tension due to the divorce you'll read about soon. After this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we definitely decided we would not have another one. It seems we need to deal with our children on an individual family basis. We felt very sad about this decision.

However, we will be having an unexpected reunion over Christmas 2013. W&J wrote they are coming to spend Christmas with us. We were very happy with that. When the others found out, they all decided to join the fun. What can we do? Of course, we are happy they all wanted to come, but to have this entire crowd with all the tensions in our small apartment? How will that go? Actually, though there was a degree of tension, things went reasonably well. Probably the most fun was the rather foolish and hurried trip we all made together in the RV to Victoria. Which kids wouldn't enjoy the fancy ferry to Victoria? We cannot forget the delightful roughhousing Kevin and the three W&J boys had together in the back of the RV.

### *Visit to Grand Rapids and Atlanta (July-August 2012)*

This was the end of the official double anniversary celebration, but not the end of our visit to Grand Rapids and, totally unexpected, to W&J's family in Atlanta. After everyone had

dispersed, we picked up a rental we had reserved in Grand Rapids for the next two weeks and moved into our favourite Extended Stay Hotel on 29<sup>th</sup> Street SE. From there we launched out to visit relatives and friends. We had a great two weeks doing that. Among the highlights was a buffet dinner we organized from Vancouver for our Nigeria missionary friends currently in Grand Rapids. Some fifteen former colleagues participated, a memorable occasion for every one. We went Dutch, of course.

Another highlight was that we finalized the sale of our Stanford rental to Lou Haveman on an “agreement for sale” basis. That had been hanging in the air for some years, while Haveman was managing it and paying us monthly interest. Actually, keeping it going would have been better for us financially than to finalize the sale, for we were getting more in just interest than we are getting now. But in the long run, we needed to clear all this up, since the sale price of the property has long been designated for our ICS Toronto scholarship fund. Had we left this till our demise, it might have been difficult to ferret out for our executor, what with this being an international transaction: ownership and beneficiaries, Canadian; the property itself, American.

Then a sudden twist. It was our final Saturday in Grand Rapids; the next day we were scheduled to fly back to Vancouver. We were enjoying a Thai lunch with the Palmers from Jos, when Wiebe phoned from Lagos asking us instead to help with caring for his boys in Atlanta, where they and Joanna were staying in their house. Joanna wanted to go to Trinidad to see a dying uncle, the one who had married them, and they wanted us to stay with the kids. We asked Wiebe how much time he could give us to consider this proposition. “Fifteen minutes,” he replied, with the promise that he would pay for the extra tickets. Actually, he gave us an hour. By that time we were in another restaurant with the Havemans to finalize that housing transaction. We agreed to the switch and Joanna worked on re-arranging our flights.

Unfortunately, her uncle passed away while she was enroute, but she continued her trip and attended the funeral. In the meantime, Fran and I enjoyed ourselves with the kids for a week, but did not go far afield, Atlanta being no better than Lagos when it comes to heat and humidity in the summer time. We did enjoy a couple of visits from the two Lieuwen “kids,” Julie and Tim, living in Atlanta with their families. We gratefully used the outside swimming pool in the housing development. In terms of our three grandsons, it was a great time of bonding. At the end of the week, we returned to Vancouver. Glad to be home once again.

### *The C&A Divorce, 2012*

You were told that 2012 brought us both joy and pain. You’ve just read all about the joy—but now, the pain: the sudden divorce of C&A, something that caught everyone by surprise. We’re not going into details here, but it cast a heavy shadow over the anniversary celebration; in fact, largely spoiled it for Fran and myself. Apart from the fact that the Bible teaches that God hates divorce, we felt bad for all the members of their family, especially the children, for it is all too well documented that children always suffer the most from a divorce. As we have done with earlier stories in these memoirs, we will leave a veil over the details. Currently,

C&A live separately, with the kids being shuttled back and forth between them on a weekly basis.

We are still trying to adjust to the new reality. During our second visit to Cynthia's post-divorce family in 2013, Fran and I had a most hilarious evening of fun with Asia and Ezra. We played various board and card games that they had not been interested in playing with us for a long time. Somehow, as I am wont to do, in the middle of the hilarity I broke out into one of my Gilbert & Sullivan songs I learned in high school way back in Port Alberni. This "performance" struck the kids so exceedingly funny that they had me repeat several songs from that operetta throughout the rest of the evening, invariably followed up with boisterous laughter of delightful fun from them. It was an evening Fran and I will not easily forget.

*A Jan & Fran Anecdote—Valentine or Halloween?*

Today is Valentine's Day 2013 and it began with a humorous but true anecdote what will surely become part of our family folklore. Fran insisted I should include it in our story. So, here goes, poking fun of myself.

Years ago I used to write Valentine poems for Fran but then became rusty. I convinced myself that my serious research and writings had taken the playful and imaginative out of my soul. This year I decided I would refresh that "gift" and write one. So, a few nights ago, I got up at around 2 am and sat down to write a gem for my *wichie*—a Dutch neologism I just coined, my own personal term of endearment. It flowed fairly well and was liberally sprinkled with poetic license. I printed the two-and-a-half-page document on fancy paper I reserve for special occasions and inserted it in a similar fancy envelope with the designation "A home-made card from the soul of your bard."

So, this morning, at 7:12 to be exact, my *wichie* got up and duly greeted me with our customary morning kiss. My literary gem was on my desk right in front of me and I could not wait to hand it to her. I was very proud of my poetic masterpiece so full of emotional romantic pictures, all duly rhyming with each other. That's where the poetic license came in. Without opening the envelope, she expressed her expected surprise, "Oh, my goodness!" and followed that up with a regretful, "But I did not write anything for you." Good, the tables had been turned for once.

Well, actually she did do something yesterday, but was not successful. We had talked about getting a new flowering plant for the living room but she had been unsuccessful in locating one in any of the flowershops in the neighbourhood, not even in the new one across the street from us which happened to open that very morning. So, she tried. It is the spirit that counts, not the flowers, though the latter would be nice, too!

I excitedly "ordered" her to sit down and read the poem to me. I wanted to get all the love kudos credits I could wring out of this situation. She opened the envelope, unfolded the papers and began reading and there it was: "Today is the day called Halloween."! She caught it immediately with another, "Oh, my goodness!" Uh? Halloween? Where did that come from?

And sure enough, wherever the term “Valentine” was supposed to be, it was “Halloween” throughout, consistently, even in the name of the file in which I stored the document. “Halloween” everywhere.

Here’s the “explanation.” An immigrant boy, I had not grown up with these celebrations; they were not part of me. For our first decade in Nigeria we lived in almost total isolation from our North American culture with its Valentine and Halloween celebrations. It was not till we moved to Jos with its American missionary sub-culture that we were nudged towards those festivities. Somehow, I began to mix up the terms, a fact that always produced mirth, especially for Fran. In this poem, I did the same thing. There was no way I could just delete “Halloween” and replace it with “Valentine,” for that would screw up the rhyme pattern. It would have to be largely rewritten. I had not noticed, but Fran, with her sharp editorial eyes, noticed it immediately and: “Oh, my goodness!”

Sorry, but there’s a trailer. On my way to the chiropractor this same morning, I did some shopping and wished the cashier a “happy Halloween!” No, not a joke. A genuinely-offered greeting until she looked puzzled, “Halloween?” For a moment the thought raced through my mind, “How out of it can you get? Don’t you know what day it is? Then, “Oh, yes, of course!” To save my reputation a little, I bought Fran a bunch of tulips from a street vendor. That should go a long way to brighten up our day and our room.

We are both in our 70s! Still young enough to do foolish things and laugh at and with each other. Fran wanted the story in and I enjoyed writing this gaffe about myself. Enjoy. Hope you’re smiling. As Fran put it, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” Amen to that. Have a good Halloween! Oh! Eh....

### *Penultimate: Culinary and Health Concerns*

Throughout this account of our post-Nigeria years up till April 2014, I have written nothing about two concerns that have actually occupied much of our time and discussions, namely our culinary life and our health. as if these were of no account or as if we do not appreciate the health God has given us, as if we take it for granted. None of that! Our pre-breakfast prayers just about always include thanksgiving to God for our health, while table talk often covers cooking and menus. We are extremely grateful, for we have seen and suffered with a number of our friends who were/are severely afflicted. I think especially of my friend Simon, who, while in Brazil, got a serious stroke and in a split second found himself at death’s door. He thankfully was given a new lease of life but in a wheelchair. His wife, Jean, is his very faithful fulltime caretaker. We are only too aware how blessed we are with our health as well as of the fact that, as Simon’s, our situation can change any moment without warning.

### *The Culinary Scene*

The unusual scene is that we both enjoy cooking and often vie with each other—in friendly spirit, to be sure—for space or our turn in the kitchen. There’s not really room for the both of

us in that hallowed precinct; it's a matter of butt to butt. We both have claimed certain types of cooking for ourselves. Baking is definitely Fran's territory and I have never challenged her there. On the other hand, if there's any cooking to be done for breakfast, that's mine without argument. Though we eat it together at the same table, our meals are sometimes totally different, so that I may end up cooking two totally different breakfasts. Nevertheless, the daily occasion is marked by the customary Dutch *gezelligheid*. We don't have lunch. Instead we have our dinner, our main meal, usually between 1-2 pm. That's the one that's always negotiated, not so much as to the what as about the who, though the former is debated as well. We both want to make sure we get equal time in that kitchen—and we pretty well do.

As to evenings, we don't sit together; we both do our own thing and at our own time. It's usually something light, a bowl of soup and a salad for me; a salad, other raw veggies and/or a sandwich for Fran. Even our salads are often different. This particular evening we shared an apple, both had their own salads and I took a small can of herring filet for a later snack. By this arrangement we go into the night without heavy stomachs and find the pronouncement of the scale the next morning more friendly.

Fran's well-deserved claim to fame is her "snow on the mountain" menu. A small bed of rice and then a veritable mountain of ingredients on top of that: first, a goodly amount of turkey sauce with a generous helping of curry; then a whole lot of meats, fruits, veggies and nuts, each in their own small dish ranging from 10-30 in number, all mixed on top of the rice. And then, on top of it all, a smattering of coconut flakes—the snow on the mountain. I am usually the only one to add some cayenne pepper to the mix. It's a great meal, delicious and nutritious, but a bit complicated when you have a crowd around the table.

In fact, to manage its complication, it's one meal that requires a lecture of instructions: how to pick and choose your dishes and then, instead of putting them back on the table, you pass them on clock-wise to your neighbour. If you don't choose that particular dish, you still accept it and pass it on. We had one guest once, a true-blood Frisian, who refused to cooperate and caused nothing but chaos, leaving his poor gentle wife totally embarrassed.

The cooks among the guests always leave with the firm resolve to try that meal themselves. Well, why not. It seems complicated but really is quite simple. One warning: start off with a *small* portion of rice! Otherwise, you will not be able to finish your plate, a cardinal sin in our tradition! So, beware! You have been warned.

One item that is prominent in *my* cooking is various soups. I am a true "soupoholic" and have a great reputation with the senior ladies of the CRC for my pea soup especially. I truly do a murderous job on that one with a very simple mantra: Let pea soup be pea soup. Apart from an onion, a smoked pork hock and some spices, nothing but peas and water. Recently I have discovered an out of this world "cream of potato with cheese" soup that is equally murderous. It comes with a variety of ingredients from which you can pick and choose. Whereas the pea soup begins its earthly journey in the crockpot and thus takes an entire night to mature, this potato-cheese soup can be ready in a good half hour.

The last month or so we have a challenging culinary situation. You will read below that I have started a radically different diet that excludes most of the major foods North Americans are used to. So, we need to get used to some new foods and tastes and new ways of cooking and baking. Almost everything has to change what with the preponderance of wheat, dairy and sugar in most prepared foods. You can read about the details of the new diet below and imagine for yourself the kind of explorations we are into. How do you make pancakes without wheat? How do you eat the new pancake without syrup? How can you make muffins with flour from coconut, green peas, or black beans? . And if caffeine is forbidden in every shape or form, what would become your hot drink of choice? In my case, caffeine-free herbal tea. Even decaf is out. This is all new territory for us that we will have to learn to live with for the foreseeable future. The designers of this diet tell me that after two months, I can “cheat on Sundays!” Ah, I will soon be able to have a hamburger after church! Great! Sundays will soon get even better than they always have been for me. I can live with that if it also means live without diabetes and all the havoc it plays with your body.

Why do I go into such culinary details? I want you, reader, especially if you are among the offspring of the original Wiebe and Ellie Boer, to accept these two recipes as our culinary legacy to you and, through you, to the entire world. You have just been given a most awesome global responsibility! But you’re Boers; You can handle it! We urge you to try them at least once. Until you have done so, you cannot really be counted among their true heirs! These constitute the mark of the beast—eh, sorry, of the clan! We so declare—unilaterally and without official authorization! But this is a free democracy, right?

### *Health Issues*

You will read in Volume 5 about how Fran was suddenly seized by polymyalgia rheumatica or PMR while barely started on our second honeymoon. It took a while to reach this diagnosis. PMR is an arthritic condition that affects *all* the muscles. Once we moved to Vancouver, she was fortunate to be accepted as a patient by an excellent specialist medical doctor pioneering in related research. This doctor took almost ten years to nurse Fran back to health, primarily through a regime of prednisone, a steroid. That steroid worked wonders in that it almost immediately relieved her of the pain and enabled her to live an active and normal life during this period. Active? Indeed. With a vengeance! Normal? Hardly. I now had to keep up with a wife on steroids! You can’t imagine how hard it is to keep up with that and you could not possibly count the number of times I begged her to slow down during our daily walks together! There was no way I could keep up with her. I would refer to her as “my steroid Famke.”

Regardless of the steroids, one vacation was cut short because of severe pain and swelling in her knees. There were also a few weeks along the way when she could hardly walk or get up out of a chair. One time I even had to push her in a wheelchair for a few days. She had developed a “Baker cyst” in the back of one of her legs and was told not to walk at all. Though painful, it did not take long for her to get over it. I must confess I experienced a perverse kind of satisfaction that my steroid Famke now depended on me to get around. At the same time, I was as relieved as she was when it was all over, for pushing your spouse around in a

wheelchair soon loses its luster. And still at the same time, I admire her for suppressing whatever useless pride she may have had against going to church in a wheelchair.

Now in her early seventies, I describe my Famke as “the paragon of good health.” She is taking no prescription medicine of any kind, something quite unusual for her age. We are amazed and more than grateful. Just don’t know the appropriate word for that. How about “*uberthankful*”?

Though my story is quite different, we have been living a great life together throughout our post-Nigeria years. A whole book—Volume 5-- just about our travels during this time! *That* says something about the quality of our life! And that despite my numerous physical defects. Some have a long history dating back to our Nigeria days, while others are of more recent vintage. Let me just give you a rundown of my body’s shortcomings and my struggles with it.

*Backpain*—During my early years in Wukari, you may remember, I suddenly got a shot of pain in my back without any obvious reason. It healed, but never left me completely. There was always a degree of discomfort, especially in bed. That got worse with advancing age till at 74 I decided to go to a chiropractor. I enrolled in a programme that started with three “adjustments” a week and now is down to once every two weeks. My back feels fine now, even in bed.

*Overweight*—As a young fellow, I was embarrassed about how skinny I was. Now, *if* I’m embarrassed, it’s about being overweight. I have come to look like a Jukun gentleman who needs a bra! (Chapter 15, volume 2). I have struggled with it, but my love for food too often trumps all other concerns. I tried the Atkins low-carb diet, but it helped only temporarily and the fad it produced dissipated, with many new specialty shops closing their businesses. Overweight, of course, has all kinds of negative health effects on the body. Currently, I am on a “push-the-diabetes-back” kind of diet that eliminates almost all the good things of life: No dairy, popular grains (not just wheat), rice, pasta, potatoes, caffeine. Approved foods are meat, alternative milks, eggs, buckwheat, quinoa and some other “ancient” grains, vegetables, limited fruit, caffeine-free tea. It sounds kind of scary, but with the aid of a menu and cook book provided by the sponsors of this approach along with imagination on the part of Fran and myself, you soon discover and create all kinds of delicious menus. I now appreciate foods and drinks I used to despise, like buckwheat and almond milk, for example. After five weeks on the program, I have lost ten pounds and my blood sugar numbers are also going down. My legs no longer protest standing or walking. I no longer reach for the nearest chair, bench or sofa and can take longer walks.

*Blood pressure*—Overweight is a major cause of high blood pressure. I have been monitoring mine regularly for a long time and am taking pills to control it. However, now that I am losing weight, I have reduced my daily pill but the pressure has not increased, though it has not yet started reducing significantly either.

*Diabetes*—A combination of overweight, genes—six out of the twelve in our birth family have/had diabetes—and the average Caucasian diet is almost guaranteed to lead to diabetes. A few years after moving to Vancouver, our current family doctor diagnosed me as “pre-

diabetic,” but he did not suggest any preventive and I continued as always. That now strikes me as idiotic and irresponsible on the part of both of us. I guess the doctor thought it is an unstoppable process without any known preventive measures. Eventually, some four years ago, I “graduated” to full diabetic status. He told me that there is no cure and that it will inevitably progress. His function would be to help me manage it by slowing down its advance, but not to fight it back. That did not occur to him. The same attitude prevails at the St. Paul’s Hospital Diabetic Clinic, where I am invited annually for monitoring.

A month ago, Fran and I attended a diabetic seminar where we were taught that, given the right diet, one can push back diabetes. I bought into the diet plan as described earlier and am now totally sold on it, for it works. Both my weight and sugar count have come down. I surprised my medical advisor (doctor) today—April 4, 2014—and was grateful for his enthusiastic and positive response. He was pleased as punch and commented, “It seems to work. Let’s hope it will keep working.” Amen to that. Even my blood pressure, managed with pills, was classic: 120/80.

*Hard of hearing*—You may recall that I worked in a very noisy place for a while in the saw mill in Port Alberni back in the 1950. At that time, no one thought of ear protection. Ever since then, my hearing has been below par and slowly deteriorating. Some 25 years ago, a cousin of mine, an industrial medic in the NL, checked out my ears and, without knowing any of the history, immediately recognized it as “industrial damage.” That, combined again with genes—at least five out of our twelve use hearing aids—was bound to lead me to use hearing aids as well. I had trouble especially in lecturing situations, where I could no longer hear the lecturer or preacher. I am now on my second pair and, though these aids are not perfect, I am very grateful for them. I do not use them much around the house except to watch TV or to entertain guests. But Fran is beginning to complain about my not hearing her around the house and she has to speak to me like she would in her elementary school classroom. I think the time has come for me to wear them in the house. Oh, well....

*Dental health*—From childhood on, I’ve had unusual teeth situations. First of all, my teeth remained very small. Some of my baby teeth never came out. At college I still had two of them dangling in the front till I just pulled them out and replaced them with a student partial, meaning.... Yes, you guessed it: cheap. But the very last one I pulled when I was in my 60s! It was more towards the back. Over the years I had bridges put in, but they were too strong for my bottom teeth and ground them down to make them even smaller. So, in comes the night guard.

My teeth needed a lot of attention once we were in Vancouver. We found a dentist near by. Fran had the first appointment. All he did was to examine her mouth, take a few xrays, and do two small fillings. That was appropriate enough for an initial visit. But then: \$500, if you please! Actually, there was no “please.” Just \$500. She came home with the story and I was livid at the charge. \$500?! Highway robbery, that’s what it was!

It was my turn an hour or so later. As I walked in, the dentist walked me to the treatment chair, but I said, “Wait a minute. We have to talk. How did you dare charge \$500 for such minimal service? That’s ridiculous.” He was not used to such confrontation and muttered

something about his charges being standard in the industry. I countered, “Well, that only means all of you are a pack of exploiters.” To assuage me and ensure he did not close off a potential gold mine, he offered to do my initial visit *pro bono*, as “generous” lawyers put it, free of charge, as long as I promised to donate the equivalent to some charity. I so promised, but throughout the visit I seethed with righteous indignation.

Twelve years later, we are still with the same dentist. He turned out to be an excellent and meticulous preventive dentist. Every time we came in for a cleaning on a quarterly basis, he would find something new that needed treatment to prevent more serious problems from developing. Over the years I needed extensive treatments to avoid ending up with a mashed potato and apple sauce diet. At one stage, I needed two root canals, two new bridges, five implants and what not. But no work could be done on my bottom teeth because they had ground down to a minimum. So, I first needed surgery to cut down the bottom gums to expose more tooth. Most of these services had to be carried out by specialists, while he kind of choreographed the lot by being in constant touch with them.

The end of the story is that, at the present time, both of us have a “beautiful” set of teeth in our mouths. But it cost us a total nearly equal to our annual income. “Thar’s lots of gold in them thar molars!” Every time I come in for treatment and he opens my mouth he admiringly and almost emotionally exclaims, “Beautiful! Absolutely beautiful.” After all the money he is making from us, I can understand that. I think that he does not see the teeth so much as our credit card! But, heh, he’s friendly and he’s meticulous. We have a healthy mouth. Like good Nigerians, we can eat chicken bones. What more could we possibly want? I force myself to be friendly to him, but when he says “Beautiful,” and sees a credit card, *I* see a bill. But why should I be so ungrateful? Just think of all the tax deductions I can claim! Though my appreciation of him is tempered, both Fran and I are very grateful to *God* for a healthy mouth full of healthy teeth. We are also grateful to one of our children who generously contributed towards all this.

Enough said! I could tell you about my sleep apnea and the mask I wear at night; about arthritis in my right foot, water retention, high blood pressure managed only with pills, the numb feeling in my left leg when going up even the slightest incline, that annoying damaged vocal chord or even my “lazy” right eye.... There is no end to my frailties. If you put it all together, you’d think I should be some decrepit old man. But here I am, enjoying a full life in a bustling city with a dynamic culture all around us. We have every reason to start every day with praise and thanksgiving—and so we do, both of us, taking nothing for granted.

### *Our Legacy*

A few pages earlier I wrote about our culinary legacy. That was meant to be humorous. We do count on more serious legacies. Yes, plural: One, specifically for Nigeria; the other, an altar call especially for my fellow secular Westerners, though Nigerians are, of course, included in that one as well. And yes, an altar call. At the closing of this volume I wish to emulate my role model, Abraham Kuyper, who closed some of his meditations in *The Ascent of the Son—The*

*Descent of the Spirit*, with virtual altar calls, for which he earned from me the distinction as the “most Evangelical of all Kuyparian writers.”

If you have read Volume 2, you can guess the legacy we leave for Nigeria: a comprehensive Gospel that covers all of life, one without the missionary heritage of dualism. I believe I detect a rejection of that dualism and an acceptance of and a preference for a more wholistic Christian worldview. I will in no way claim that I have been the sole force for this change, but I have no doubt that all of my efforts have definitely contributed to and encouraged that development. I believe I may have jump started this development. Through my Christian-Muslim series, that legacy continues to spread, especially through students who use this series for their research. Their theses and dissertations often include references to its volumes. At the very moment I am writing this paragraph, I get a telephone from Nathan Elawa, a Nigerian-Canadian you have met in earlier volumes, who confirms that in the dissertation he is currently writing, he has several references to this legacy of mine. That is our precious and main gift to Nigeria.

As to my secular neighbours in the West, the most serious legacy we want to leave you as our most precious gift is the offer of Jesus Himself, who invites all of us who are “burdened and heavy laden” to come to Him, for “My load is easy and My burden is light.” That invitation is woven in between the lines through all the chapters in these volumes. Accepting that legacy means a life of meaning and purpose, a life of forgiveness and love, acceptance and respect for everyone, the most complete form of social pluralism you can achieve and the most passionate push for equality, justice and freedom. Don’t get hung up on “those (American) fundamentalists.” They don’t represent the real thing; they are an embarrassment to the rest of us. As to the meaning of all these wide claims listed above, I don’t believe you are clamouring for an additional volume besides the existing five! So, I will try to elucidate them in further detail elsewhere, in my blog < Boer’s My World—My Neighbour > on < Blogspot.com >. You are invited to meet me there.

### *Closing Comments*

With this we have come to the end of our church, community and family involvements in Vancouver. So far, we have loved every day of it and every challenge. We are grateful the Lord made it possible for us to live here, something we had never expected because of Vancouver’s high rents.

Though we have lived in secular places before, as in Amsterdam, we have never felt that secular spirit as much as we do in Vancouver. Our Amsterdam stay was short and we were largely cocooned in the church and student worlds. In Vancouver, much of it is lived straight in the face of a secular people who have contempt, not to say hatred, for that which is dearest to us, our religion, our life of service to Christ, our values and worldview. It is a community that acts very tolerantly with respect to almost anything, but you mention Christ and you’re done for. Religion? Well, okay. Church? Somewhat tolerated because it feeds the poor on the street. Spirituality? Oh, that’s the in thing. But Christ? You meet icy silence or you get hateful blasts of prejudice and ignorance. After so many decades in a country marked by passionate

religion, the Vancouver spiritual climate is hard to take, let alone get used to. In fact, you don't get used to it. You may learn something about wise behaviour and speech in that context, but you never get used to it. It is simply too contrarian to your deepest feelings. We really are pilgrims in a foreign land.

Nevertheless, we are active in the community for several reasons. The Bible teaches us to bloom where you are planted, to seek the welfare of your pagan city. We do want its welfare, though our definition of that might be different from that of the majority. We do take its challenges seriously, but often find that their search for solutions follows the wrong secular track. And, of course, we never lose our missionary impulse: we always seek for natural ways to insert a Word.

The room for that Word sometimes crops up in unexpected contexts. The other day, in a store, I dropped a couple of coins without noticing it. A Sikh gentleman behind me picked them up and returned them to me. This generated small talk during which he asked me what makes me happy in life. I answered, "That God loves me." "Good for you," he responded. We exchanged cards and promised to contact each other, since both of us had appointments to keep at that time and both of us were going to travel for a while. I have not seen him again, though both of us have tried.

Another recent exchange on the street was with a fellow who used to belong to that Rose Gang. We were talking about getting older and the frailties that accompany the process. I then told him about my favourite line from *Amazing Grace*: "We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began." I told him that's what I live by and that's what I expect to die by. He said something like us Christians being lucky to have such a view of our future. I told him it could be his future as well. That was enough for him for one discussion and he moved on. I am sure that next time he sees me, he will think about that challenge. He's more than-the-average serious kind of guy.

Well, that's our Vancouver life so far. We continue to enjoy every day of it and are so grateful that God has made it possible for us to live in a city that is often rated as either the best or second-best city in the world. That's of course, from a secular point of view. It is a dry desert spiritually, but the Spirit of God has not forsaken the place. There is lots of compassion for the poor and downtrodden. There is room for lifestyles cruelly persecuted elsewhere. There is delight in the many culinary cultures that are represented in our restaurants. I love the respect for animal life and the abhorrence for the cruelty to animals such as chickens, pigs and others for gain. There is a strong push for a greener approach to life and to contain the negatives of modern developments, including the potential hazards of oil transportation. I am proud of a city that decades ago resisted the incursion of expressways through it and is now pushing for more pedestrian and bike lanes. Though these tendencies and developments sometimes go to extremes, those basic impulses I believe come from the Spirit of God, who in general is inspiring the people of this city to more sociable and responsible practices that make this a unique place. It's a city that can be described as intolerant of public expressions of Christianity, but unconsciously drawing from its deep roots.

We are waiting to see what God has in store for our remaining years in this city—or for the city itself.

Apart from the travel stories of Volume 5, this is the end of our story as *we* have recorded it, freckles, hiccups and all, but we know of another and much more important book in which our names are written with indelible ink and on indestructible paper, *The Book of Life*, written by our Heavenly Father/Mother. Today it is probably backed up by a divine version of CrashPlan!

As to our life story, we may not have that many days left for more adventures, but as the last stanza of the hymn *Amazing Grace* puts it,

We have no less days  
To sing God's praise  
Than when we first began!

That's what counts. That's our Christian hope.

*Laus Deo* (Latin)  
*Halleluja, lit my sjonge* (Frisian)  
*Pries de Heer met bliede galm'm* (Gronings)  
*Prijs de Heer met blijde galmen* (Dutch)  
*Alhamdu Lillahi* (Hausafied Arabic)  
*Praise be to God*  
(Take-offs from Psalm 146)

2014 AD

## Appendix I

### An Immigrant Journey

(Vancouver Sun--April 16, 2008)

**NOTE:** The following is our immigrant story submitted to the *Vancouver Sun* during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Province of British Columbia. The paper had invited immigrants to submit their stories. This was my contribution. Please see subsection “CAANS” above for how this article led to my introduction to the CAANS-Je Maintiendrai community.

My first Canadian experience was as a seven-year old in Lutjegast, my Dutch birth village, when Canadian tanks rumbled through the town, chasing after German soldiers. It was all chocolates, candies and oranges for us as they rode past. The otherwise sober town celebrated and danced for two weeks, with my two oldest sisters relishing the attention charming and heroic Canadian soldiers foisted on them. After two weeks of that, I thought life was one grand party!

The Netherlands was severely wounded and, thousands thought, destroyed for good. There was poverty. The Russians were in near-by Berlin. Dad foresaw his barber business of shaving becoming obsolete. He also wanted his sons—never mind the daughters—to have a chance at education. These kinds of situations created a general restlessness that led thousands of Dutch to immigrate to Canada in the early 50s.

Imagine the scene. A family of nine kids and an in-law, with one more son born two years later. Nine days aboard the troopship *Volendam*. Then, after five more days on the train from Halifax, it dropped us off at 1 AM in Pitt Meadows. Simon Floris, Dad’s friend and official sponsor, was there to meet us. He had found us a slanting rental on stilts on Harris Road, right next to the Community Hall and ballpark. No English. No money. No wanted skills to offer, since the BC barber establishment had virtually locked the door to foreigners, just like the medical establishment today. Just lots of hungry kids!

After some weeks of hunting for jobs by bicycle, Dad found a job digging peat with his bare hands. You ought to have seen them with their holes and festering sores! In the early morning and late afternoon he would strip the cows for a local farmer. We lived there for one year, after which Dad took us to Port Alberni, where work was aplenty in the lumber industry. He hated the work but stayed on for over 20 years to retire at 65. Now he received pension from the company and both he and Mom from the government—the *only* occasion they ever received money from the government. They settled into a comfortable retirement till they both passed away in their 80s.

I was 13 at immigration. My first teacher, who was also our landlady, paid much individual attention to me to teach me English. Since I was ahead of my Canadian classmates in Math, I was asked to help some struggling math students. I understood their problems but lacked the English to help them! In grade nine, I had enrolled in the commerce prep course, but the school soon transferred me to the more academic track of pre-university. Though I did fine in most courses, I did poorly in science due to poor English and an unsympathetic teacher. At the end of the course, he told me he would give me a pass, if I promised never to take an elective in his department! An easy promise. Didn't like him anyway!

Socially, it was rough. When a teenager looks and acts differently, his classmates can be very cruel. So I tried to avoid recess time by chewing gum. The routine penalty was lunchtime detention. Day after day. No teacher ever checked on why an almost model student would end up with so many detentions! In the meantime, at home we switched to using English within two years. We were that eager to blend in. The motto was: Leave your wooden shoes at home!

As per agreement made with Dad earlier, shortly after I turned 16, he came home from the mill at midnight to tell me I had a job! Bang. Just like that. So, up and at it, swing shift. One month, day; next month, afternoon. The intent was to help the folks pay their mortgage and get them settled so they could raise the younger kids in their new country. Most of my pay was handed over for this purpose. Till this day I am glad I was able to help them get over their initial difficulties. Two of my sisters also worked in the plywood plant with similar arrangements. Those days, Port Alberni enjoyed the highest per capita income in Canada. It was a good place for new immigrants. It was the multicultural capital of BC before Trudeau invented it.

I went to the Principal and told him I was going to work, but that I would do grades 10-12 in my spare time by correspondence courses from the BC High School Correspondence School. He laughed me to scorn, dismissing me with a sneer, "That's what everybody says and nobody ever does." I felt challenged by that and four and a half years later graduated. I thankfully remember, Mr. Lawson, a teacher who supported me throughout.

The last six months I no longer donated to the family but saved all my money in preparation for university. In 1958, at age 20, I bought a Greyhound ticket all the way to Grand Rapids, MI, to enter Calvin College, my denomination's college, with a full \$1500 in my pocket! While there, my mother insisted on writing me letters in English! Utterly amazing! 7 years earlier she scarcely knew "yes" from "no!"

At age 70, I can look back upon an exciting history of living, studying and working in the USA, Europe and Nigeria. I eventually obtained a Ph. D. from a Dutch university, published about 20 books, taught at three tertiary institutions and became Director of the Institute of Church and Society in Jos, Nigeria.

In the meantime, I found Frances, also from NL, in Michigan and have been married to her for nearly 46 years. She's been my co-adventurer for all these years. She has served as teacher in many situations, structured and unstructured, including literate and illiterate adults and

**even taught the Hausa language to Nigerians! Three children, two of whom graduated from Yale University.**

**Now retired in West End, Vancouver, Frances and I are about to complete a huge project: an 8-volume series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*. Website: [www.SocialTheology.com](http://www.SocialTheology.com). Come and visit us some time.**

## Appendix II

### Dutch Immigration

#### Integration and Loss of Identity

Speech Delivered at  
*Koninginnedag*, April 30, 2008  
 Vancouver, BC

It has been three decades or more since I last attended a meeting consisting *by design* of, for and by only Dutch people. So, I am no longer familiar with protocol in this cultural situation. Well, perhaps I never was! After all, I left the NL as an early teenager from the village where protocol is not that important. I am told we will have some very prominent BC Dutchmen among us, but, apart from the Consul-Generaal, and our former Premier Meneer vander Zalm, I do not know or recognize them. I only have read about some of them in the media. How do I properly address you? What, in Dutch culture, would be appropriate? You know, my name is Boer. So what chance do I have? It implies you cannot expect me to be an expert in such matters. My solution is provided by Nigeria, where I spent 30 years. There, protocol at meetings can be time consuming, since every person with any position at all has to be singled out and recognized. Lately they have solved this predicament by simply announcing, “All protocol observed”—no one is slighted and everyone is happy.

So, ladies and gentlemen, all protocol observed!

I have been invited by our Consul General to speak on the subject of Dutch immigrants to Canada—their strength and their weakness. In an exploratory conversation at the Consulate we observed the strong tendency of Dutch immigrants in Canada to be quickly integrated into Canadian society. If you have read my immigration story in the Sun, you will have noticed our *de facto* family motto: *Laat je klompen thuis!* And, in the case of this 13-year old boy, *Doe je pofbroek af/uit!* Within two years we had switched to English at home. My mother had nine children at the time and was in her early 40s. When she stepped off the Volendam on March 25, 1951, in Halifax, she hardly knew yes from no. But seven years later, when I went off to some far-off college in MI, she wrote me faithfully almost every week, but never once in Dutch. Always in English. She so pushed herself.

Well, that seems to be part of the Dutch way—to *integrate*. I have lived in Nigeria and traveled in several other African countries, where I would meet Dutchmen, but they almost always insist on speaking English. They would not give me a chance to practice my residual Dutch. Though I still speak a fair amount of Dutch—the Consul-General even generously praised me for my Dutch—I don’t feel comfortable enough in it to address a crowd of distinguished Dutchmen like you. You meet Dutch tourists in the Yukon, on the ferry, in Banff, on the plane, they almost always want to speak English. And while the Polish, the Czechs, the Germans, the Italians, etc. have their cultural organizations and identifiable halls and other buildings around the city, you will not see any such Dutch facility. We integrate. We become Canadian. We speak the language very quickly and well. We allow ourselves to be absorbed in the new home culture. There is no Dutch ghetto. There may be places where

they congregate, but no residential ghettos like other immigrants. There is no place in either Vancouver or Toronto that is described as the Dutch quarters. And even though we occasionally hear jokes about the Dutch mafia in BC, there is no identifiable place where they are located.

Here in Canada, we find ourselves everywhere. We are well represented in the BC govt at the highest level. Dutch names appear regularly in all the media. We contribute in every sector, especially agriculture and horticulture, labour relations, education and religion.

Not only do we integrate as *individuals*, but also in our *organizations*. We have done yeoman work in education. Here I hold a book before you that is a tribute to the contribution of the Dutch to freedom in education in BC—but it is written by Victoria Cunningham, not some Vandersma. We have built undergraduate and post-graduate institutions in Canada. We have pioneered and continue to do so with more responsible labour unions. We have established a national Citizens for Public Justice, whose main founder has been decorated with the Order of Canada. All of these efforts, started by Dutch, have thoroughly Canadianized. They have been integrated and are part of the local and national scenes. *We are integrators*. That's our strength.

Then the Consul-General and myself explored the other side of the coin. What happens to our Dutchness, to our own cultural awareness, especially with the second and subsequent generations. A few months ago Edie Bijdemast, whom I expect to be here, but whom I have never met, told her story of estrangement and lostness to the *Vancouver Sun*. She had lost touch with her roots and it made her feel empty and rootless. She had to go back to NL to search for her roots and understand herself.

In preparation for this talk, I explored this issue with a nephew of mine living in Cobble Hill near Duncan, who wrote something similar to Edie's. He began his letter: "I feel we are lost." He was born on VI. His parents (my sister and husband who met each other here) immigrated and, like good Dutchmen do, integrated—"and we lost our connection." "I am a Canadian with little understanding of my roots." Especially not being able to speak or read Dutch bothered him to such an extent that he has taken the trouble of learning a fair bit of it and also by going for an extended trip. He ended by suggesting that some exchange programme be established for Dutch Canadian youth to spend time in NL as students. Or some work exchange programme. Anything to help these youths get back to their roots and fill that cultural emptiness and loneliness.

The Consul-General and I had this discussion only 10 days ago. Since then, I have done a bit of research on the internet. Beginning with Edie's story, I found to my astonishment that there are actually quite a few Dutch cultural activities going on around our city. I returned here retired in 2001—a good 6 years ago, but never heard of them. I hope to explore these a bit in the near future. Perhaps they could become the vehicles, in cooperation with the Consulate, to initiate some kind of programme to this end. My nephew reminded me of the student exchange programme operated by the Rotary Club. In fact, they brought a distant young Dutch relative of mine to Nanaimo who was amazed to find herself surrounded by relatives of whom she had never heard!

**We are the opposite to most immigrants of the last few decades. Most of them are weak in integration and strong in retaining their traditions. We are the other way around.**

**Integration is great and necessary. It enables us to contribute to the country of our choice. We have reason to be proud of this part of our tradition, but we are weak in transmitting the good things of our heritage to our children—and leave many of them wondering who they really are and why. *That* is our weakness that we should do our best to overcome. We have the necessary structures to do it along with our Consulate.**

**Meneer de voorzitter: Ik heb gezegd! Goeie mensen, hartelijk bedankt.**