

**EVERY SQUARE INCH—A MISSIONARY MEMOIR**

**THE LIFE AND MISSION OF**

**JAN & FRANCES BOER**

**Volumes 1-5**

*by*

**Jan H. Boer & Frances A. Boer-Prins**

-----VOLUME 3-----

***FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE IN NIGERIA***

**1966-1996**

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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 our children**

*Kevin Richard Samu'ila*  
*Cynthia Jenelle Kristiana*  
*Wiebe Karl Yohanna*

*They gained the most from*  
**a wonderful climate**  
**a carefree childhood**  
**a multicultural environment**  
**an international life**  
**a world-wide group of friends**  
**an infinitely wise and patient mother**  
**a wide-orbed Christian upbringing**

*They sacrificed the most by*  
**Giving up their beds for our trillion guests**  
**without ever grumbling,**  
**but through which they learned**  
**the virtue of hospitality**  
**and for**  
**Having a father who was all too often**  
**absent in mind, body or both**

*They learned the most from*  
**family dinner discussions**  
**about taking it to the Board of Governors**

*Go for it, guys!*

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**Map of Nigeria - 2014**

*Please note that Wukari, Baissa and Jos, three major centres of our life, are encircled for your easy identification.*

**Part 6<**  
**The CRCN Decade**  
**(1966-1976)**

*Introduction*

Welcome to this Volume 3 of the Boer memoirs. For the benefit of those who have not read the earlier volumes, let me repeat the goal and subject of this one. While Volume 2 tells the story of our *ministry* in Nigeria from 1966-1996, this one tells the story of our *family and social life* over the same years. Though we have separated these stories into two volumes, in real life, of course, they intersect time and again and are not really separate stories. But at what stage does the size of a volume scare you off? Most people are discouraged when they see a large tome of, say, 700 pages. To avoid discouragement on your part, we have turned this one story into two volumes.

This volume may have wider appeal than does Volume 2. Most readers are more interested in people than they are in missions and missionary theories. This probably holds true for you especially if you are a descendant of immigrant families of Charles and Jennie Prins, who immigrated to Michigan, USA, in 1948, or of Wiebe and Elly Boer, who immigrated to British Columbia, Canada, in 1951. Those people were the parents of Fran and John respectively; we immigrated with them as part of their families.

This is the fascinating story of our family that has grown up in the midst of a culture that was originally foreign and exotic to us but to which we gradually became accustomed and learned to appreciate and enjoy. This is a story of children learning to speak local languages in a context where it is normal for people to speak four or more languages, from which they switch in and out through much of their day. It is a story of how our family would frequently run into cultural surprises that sometimes would annoy us, stump us, but just as often stretch our understanding and appreciation for other ways of thinking and doing. It is also the story of extremes in hospitality that continues to be part of our lives even seventeen years after our return to inhospitable North America.

This is not about missionary theory or practice, but about the people involved in all of this. Of course, the theory and practice are never far away, for even personal and family life is affected by the missionary context. Well, relax and join us on this journey. We have every reason to think you will enjoy the trip, for we'll take you into a world of fascinating thought patterns and assumptions that, in turn, lead to equally fascinating action, but all of which, given those assumptions, are as rational as their equivalents in the West, only not as rationalistic—and that's a gain.

## Chapter 27<

### CRCN I - Family and Social Life

(1966-1968)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 15, Volume 2)

#### *A Few Beginning Odds and Ends*

We lived in Wukari from 1966-1974. Wukari is located in Nigeria's Taraba State that borders with Cameroon, but we never lived in Taraba State! To make it even stranger, we lived in the Northern Region of Nigeria, in Benue-Plateau State, and in Gongola State, but all the while lived in Wukari. Perhaps you've guessed the reason for this anomaly. You've read about Nigerian restlessness in Volume 2. That restlessness translated into the proliferation and redrawing of states. Wukari did not move, but the configuration of states changed several times with the result that Wukari found itself within the different states mentioned above over the space of just a few decades. Before it finally became known as Taraba State, we had moved on to Plateau State. So, we never lived in Wukari, Taraba State, though we did live in Wukari. The same compound; different states. There's no country like Nigeria.

A related oddity: Though we lived in three different communities, Wukari, Baissa and Jos, with Jos several hundred kilometers from the other two, our postal address remained the same throughout—P. O. Box 261, Jos. The reason was poor postal services in Wukari and Baissa. Hence, the Mission had a post box in Jos through which all the mail for all the missionaries was routed. From there, the Mission's pilots would carry the mail to the various stations and drop off the mail. They did not have special mail flights, but as they landed at the various missionary stations for other reasons, they would also drop off the mail.

When we lived in Baissa that service was not regular enough to suit us. If the plane did not touch down for two weeks, we would hire a messenger to ride his bicycle for 140 kms one way to Takum, where the planes were based, and pick up our mail.

That Jos post box became a very popular address for hundreds of Nigerians who had close connection with missionaries. They would have their mail from abroad channeled via their missionary friend. In fact, that one tiny box was the address of choice for people over an area of several thousand square kms. It became a problem to the Post Office so that they finally ruled that only staff of our Mission could use that box. That was reasonable enough, but it was difficult for missionaries to explain this to their friends. Many of them took it as lack of cooperation on our part; they felt we did not want to help the people.

### *The Story Begins*

While all the ministry in the companion Chapter 15 in Volume 2 was going on, so were our family and social lives. They often intersected with each other to the point that separating them sometimes ran into problems. But, here it is. You're getting a break: a short chapter!

#### *Setting*

Most information about our compound and environment are found in the companion chapter. Below follow just a couple of supplementary items.

Our Wukari house was well built in terms of strength, but poorly designed in terms of ventilation. We called it our "matchbox." Though we had a dining room, we mostly ate on the back porch. During the muggy season, when it could be interminably hot inside at night due to lack of ventilation, we might also sleep on that porch. Later, when we had a raised water cistern built behind the house, we would often sleep there on camp cots to catch the cool breezes. At the front of our house there stood a two-room outbuilding that housed a kitchen with a wood stove and a store room for supplies.

We had a lot of fruit trees on the compound. In the back was a grapefruit orchard that also contained some orange and guava trees. I am not sure why earlier missionaries planted so many grapefruit trees, since Nigerians do not care of them. Perhaps that was the point: People would not so readily help themselves! There were also huge mango trees scattered all over the compound with their magnificent shade areas. Next to our own house was a special type of mangoes called "julies," less stringy, much bigger and a thousand times sweeter than the ordinary ones. All that fruit made us feel like millionaires! The students were allotted their share of it, of course, but under controlled conditions to avoid having it gone before the fruit even ripened.

#### *Social Life*

We have already written about our personal relations with some churches and individuals. You already know about our neighbour Dorothy Sytsma on our station. We had active social lives together, especially sharing meals. Dorothy was a superb cook and Miss Hospitality personified. Not only did we share many meals with each other, but she also had Nigerians over regularly. We held prayer meetings together as well.

Both Fran and I were very conscious of Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo's warning about concentrating too many missionaries in one place. With Dorothy as our initial role model, we worked hard at developing strong local social ties. Not only did the various pastors frequently visit and join us for meals, but we also made other friends in the church with whom we would visit back and forth. Sometimes we would eat at each other's homes or participate in private celebrations. Fran wrote, "We've had a lot of company this last week.

**I just counted and found we served 24 extra plates in six days! We do enjoy practicing hospitality, but it seems our guests always all come at once!”**

**You may remember that Dorothy and we lived at opposite ends of the compound, we at the entrance and she at the very back. Fulani women carrying gourds with milk on their heads would stop at our house a few times a week to deliver milk from their cows. One day they asked why I had put my first wife, referring to Dorothy, far away in the back of the compound and stayed only with my new wife. That, they chided, was not fair on my part: I had to treat them equally. Well, that *is* a standard rule in Muslim polygamy: no two or more wives unless you can treat them all equally. I had to explain myself!**

**I am going to tell a few more humorous stories about our interaction with Nigerians, but not in order to give negative impressions of anyone. Like the Fulani story above, these stories are about the confusion and humour cultural differences can create between friends. As Pastor Ezekiel and we once laughingly discussed with each other, Nigerians laugh at our cultural ignorance and funny customs, while missionaries sometimes laugh at the Nigerian way of doing things. Nigerian social life is delightfully open with open doors to your friends. You just drop in. They would poke fun of us by saying that we needed to make an appointment two weeks ahead of time just to see our grandmother! I protested and thought this over the top, but when we returned to North America, I noticed that it was not that far off the mark! It’s just that we had never experienced this, both of us having left our grandparents behind in Europe.**

**Funny things and misunderstandings often happen between different cultures over food. When the Prinses first immigrated to the US and their neighbour gave them a bushel basket of sweet corn, Mother Jennie was highly insulted. Corn was for cattle or chickens, not for humans. During my first worship service at the Nyankwala CRCN, after the service I was invited to relax in a comfortable chair in the shade of a mighty mango tree in anticipation of a meal. After a while, they brought me a sizable bowl full of fish heads, just heads without the rest of their bodies, eyes all open and staring at me. I was not prepared for this and was shocked. However, I realized that failing to eat their food the very first visit would surely give the wrong signal. So I closed my eyes and started picking away at the first head. Then a second, a third, etc. After I got over my first shock, it did not taste that bad; in fact, pretty good. They had been fried by an expert. I began to realize that our tastes are culturally influenced to develop likes and dislikes.**

**I assumed that this menu was an expression of poverty. That’s all they could afford. And that did not surprise me, for I had learned that they had just emerged from a tribal war with their Tiv neighbours, who had burned down their village. The village they now lived in was brand new; they had spent all their wealth on rebuilding from scratch. So, fish heads was all they could afford at this time.**

**As we talked about this incident some years later with our Nyankwala “daughter” Lydia, she explained that, to the contrary, it was not an expression of poverty but of showing the highest respect for their guest! Well, I must have lost everyone’s respect, for no one ever has offered me fish heads again!**

Two beer stories. Please remember that CRC is not a teetotaler church. Many drink alcohol in moderation. However, in the CRCN setting, local brew was so closely tied in with the local religion that the early Christians decided they should not drink alcohol, period. We were aware of that and generally adhered to the prohibition in order to offend no one. Once we were invited for dinner at the home of a friend and prominent leader in the church. He invited another mutual friend, also an elder, to join us. Of all things, without any comments they served Guinness! What was going on here, we wondered. Were they trying to test us? But they themselves drank it. So we did as well, even though both of us detest the taste of Guinness. We've been wondering about this for the rest of our lives.

One Yoruba nurse working at the Wukari Government Hospital, James by name, was a very active member of the local church and recognized as such by the leadership. He got married and threw a party at which he had piles of beer cases stacked up. In view of the earlier experience and of his status in the church, I had a bottle. I thought this must somehow be acceptable. It was at least a month later that Pastor Habila called me and told me I had embarrassed the church greatly. How had I done this? I asked. Then he referred to this party. I had to apologize and was warned that if I wanted to be respected and accepted, I would have to avoid all alcohol. Years later, Lydia's future husband, Chris Garba Abaga, warned me similarly when he "caught" me once in a relaxed mood with one of my occasional cigars.

Here's a more humorous and more spicy story. A senior elder who had served the Mission as a driver for many years, invited us for dinner to his house. He was truly a dear and kind hearted old man whom we highly respected. Having associated with missionaries for so many years, he thought he understood their eating habits. So he served a customary rice dish along with chicken stew, but mixed the latter with an entire can of Tomapep, a Nigerian product that was very, very hot and spicy. Well, it was in a tin can, was it not? That meant it was white man's food. So, pour it on! One small bite and our tongues, lips and mouths burned so ferociously that we all spit it out! That was, of course, highly impolite, but we simply could not control our reaction; we were so taken aback by shock and surprise and by this impossibly strong spicing. We tried to explain the problem to our host, but I am not sure he fully recognized his mistake. The "dinner" ended in a social stalemate. He never invited us again, though we did him. He and his friend, Pastor Habila, accepted the invitation but did not take revenge; they ate our food. I told you he was a kind hearted man! Or was their polite and quiet eating our food a case of heaping coals of fire on our heads?

One lady with whose family we had become quite close once joined us for a breakfast of bacon and eggs. We had imported the bacon ourselves and thought of it as very special. The eggs were local but very hard to obtain. Bread is very popular among Nigerians and so is tea. So, we thought we had the perfect breakfast for her. Alas. She nibbled on the egg a bit and took a small bite of bacon. She promptly laid down her fork and declared with a straight face, "*Yana da dadi, amma na koshi!*"—"This tastes very good but I am full!" She would have no part of our food and "graciously" declined. I say "graciously," for her

reaction was too transparent for us to misunderstand. It was a reaction Nigerians did not shy away from if they disliked foreign food, but if we were to react similarly, they would be highly offended—or so we were told by Nigerian friends.

One day we were having lunch and a gentleman from Takum whom we knew very well, arrived. We invited him to join us at the table and share the food with us. The menu included pasta and Fran's own banana bread. We had a bottle of ketchup on the table and each of us poured a bit on the pasta. He promptly took the almost full bottle and shook it entirely empty on his slice of banana bread! Our eyes opened further and further with amazement as we watched him shaking the bottle till it was empty. The reason we remember is that we had imported it, since it was very scarce in the country at the time. It was precious to us! He did manage to clean his plate. We did not comment. But Corny Korhorn, also at the table, remembered some 30 years later how our eyes almost popped out of their sockets!

Perhaps the above stories make Nigerian look silly. That is not the intention. We are merely describing the delightful and humorous situations that arise in missionary multi-cultural social life. Nigerians laugh at themselves as in books like *How to Be a Nigerian*. Remember our discussion with Pastor Ezekiel about expats and nationals laughing at each others' ways of doing things. If Nigerians were to write stories about missionary behavior, including our eating habits, they would probably have us roll over with howls of laughter. I am waiting with anticipation and am already licking my humour chops.

Okay, enough stories about food, guests and jokes for now and on to something more serious—money. Money is very much of an influence in social life. I already talked about money a bit in the companion chapter. This is what I wrote in a May 1967 letter:

Just now I had to interrupt writing this letter because a CLTC student came to ask for school fees for his brother. These fees are not low—about \$60 a year, very expensive for people here. So they ask anyone they know or do not know, as long as they might have some money. Missionaries are constantly barraged by such requests. You want to help them, especially if you know them, but there is simply an end to what you can do. Presently we are supporting two men in pre-seminary, one girl in secondary and two girls in primary school. If you do anymore, then you have a hard time helping the churches that need help badly. Some churches are too poor to pay their evangelist or pastor. Just a week or so ago one of the larger churches had its entire roof blown off by a storm. They have no extra money at all, since they have been in a building programme for four years and have no insurance. And so it goes. Everywhere you go, there is an open hand, but so often you have to turn it down, which is an extremely painful thing to do. Having a little money in this country brings many challenging problems and means great stewardship responsibility.

The above says it pretty well.

### *Wukari Tennis Club*

Though we did not mention it, during our Seminary years, we started to play tennis and loved it a great deal. So, when we packed for Nigeria, we included our tennis rackets, cheap wooden versions as they were, with at best a very faint hope that we would be able to use them in Nigeria. As it turns out, tennis is very popular among Nigerians, i.e. those who can afford the equipment, as well as among missionaries. There was no court in Baissa, but there was a double court in Wukari operated by the Wukari Tennis Club and its patron Ibrahim Usman Sangari, whom you have already met several times in Volume 2, a prominent Christian, businessman and avid tennis player of high quality. All members were men, except after Fran joined and, later, Nelle Evenhouse.

The members welcomed us with open arms and let us play on the same terms as everyone else. We came regularly, at least, when I was home. We did not do very well with our poor quality rackets, though Fran did considerably better than I did. When we changed to better rackets, we both improved, but I remained at the bottom of the ladder. I enjoyed it much but could never get a good grip on the game. Fran would occasionally win a game, something that would deeply embarrass her Nigerian male opponent!

Once Ibrahim organized a tennis meet with a team from Lagos, the capital city far to the south. The Lagos players had apparently never been far beyond their city and were utterly amazed at the culture of their own country. They acted more foreign than we ever did and felt more at home with us than with their own countrymen. They were astounded that we spoke Hausa, a language they associated with what they considered backward Northern Hausa Muslims. *Their* reaction, in turn, surprised and amused us. I suspect that the Jukuns were somewhat insulted. I do not remember who emerged the champion that weekend.

Like other community involvements, membership in this Club paid us many dividends. Some members were Muslims who would never have come close to us if not for this Club. When we needed to visit a government office and there was a member there, we would always get proper attention and service that every citizen should be getting but seldom does. It created personal relationships that at times allowed us to have more personal discussions as well.

### *Family Life*

Though our decision to join the Mission in Nigeria surprised us more than anyone else, it was not a particularly difficult decision. We had nothing to keep us back—SallyAnn furniture, an old car, no house and no children. No complications; no obstacles. Why not make use of the opportunity? We were young and expected it to be for a few years only.

Once there, things were not quite that easy, what with kerosene cooking, strange foods, increasing political violence—and no child! That started to become increasingly problematic for us. We had started doctoring before we left the States without any result,



including an analysis of what was blocking things. During the first two years of marriage we successfully avoided pregnancy and thought we had things under control. But when a couple of years later we still had “nothing to show for,” we began to realize that we were not in control. Muslims in Wukari town were aware of our childless state and offered me their daughters for a second wife, assuring me of “success.”

We began to seriously doctor with our medical officers at Takum. Being missionaries, terms of service for Nigeria missionaries were for three year periods—two and a half years on the “field” and then six months in North America. During our Wukari ministry, we had two such breaks, with the second an extended study leave. In preparation for our first break we began working on a possible adoption. Fran wrote,

The doctors always say there isn’t anything wrong and all possibilities have been investigated, but still, nothing. So now we hope very much to adopt a baby during our furlough next year. Then maybe each furlough we can adopt another one! However, in the meantime, we have “adopted” a little Nigerian girl. (See below.)

The adoption idea was not just a fly-by-night kind of thing. We corresponded with agencies in Chicago, Seattle and Vancouver. Especially Fran’s letters referred to it often and got more serious and detailed as the time for furlough drew closer. “If we’re lucky,” she wrote in June 1968, “we hope to get two children while we’re home, but we won’t count on it. An older child or two through an agency and a newborn through a private doctor. It’s all in the planning stage, of course, but we would surely be happy if it worked out that way.” I guess we knew little about the world of adoption. In that world, even a rain is never more than a mere trickle. Probably some readers of these letters might have mumbled, “Dream on, you guys, dream on!”

### *The Lydia Story*

You’ve already heard of Lydia, daughter of Iliya and Naomi, in Volume 2. After some discussion with Naomi in October 1967, we told her to pack Lydia’s suitcase and get ready to come with us. There was no suitcase, only the clothes she was wearing. She just climbed into the back seat of the car and was ready to go! We consented, thinking that she would return home the next month. Within a few days of her arrival Fran wrote,

She’s seven years old, but has always been a sickly child. So her parents were very eager to have her live with us in Wukari, not an unusual arrangement in this culture. She is so brave and happy and loveable. We agreed to have her live with us for one month and then we would see again. At that time, we *all* voted in favour of her staying with us—she herself, her parents and both of us.



Lydia, 1967\*

Shortly afterwards, Fran wrote,

We think she's so cute. She speaks no English, a little Hausa, but mostly Jukun, which *we* don't understand. However, we get along fine and "understand" each other well. In January we will put her in primary school. In the meantime, I hope to teach her a little English in readiness for school. What I have taught her already she has caught onto very quickly.

One of the first Hausa phrases she would frequently use with reference to the two of us was "Wannan" and "Matar wannan," meaning "This one" and "Wife of this one!" In her limited Hausa, this was the best she could do at first. Soon she started calling us "Mama" and "Baba," almost universal terms.

One of the very first things we did when she joined us was to buy cloth at the market and have a tailor make new clothes for her. That tailor was Dan Azumi, who with his wife became our friends with whom we had an active social life of visiting back and forth. Lydia expressed her fears of the sounds of certain birds around our compound, especially owls. The sounds of the wind in our trees around the house also caused her apprehension. These were fears that originated from ancient Nigerian traditions. The story of how Lydia became part of our family and why has been recorded in a chapter called "Lydia" in *Hands across Africa* by Joanne De Jonge and Marjo Rouw (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), though with some "artistic license," if you know what that means.

Lydia became like a dear daughter to us. In a letter of April 1968, Fran wrote to my parents,

Yes, she is still with us. We took her with us originally because she wanted to visit the white man so badly, though when we asked her the reason, she could not really explain. Then we got attached to her very soon and hated to part with her. Her parents preferred her being with us and so did Lydia. It was all sort of by informal mutual agreement. They had not intended to put her in school, but, seeing we

insisted that they should, she would have to stay in Wukari anyway for that purpose.

Then Fran added, “Last week her little three-year old sister, Phoebe, suddenly died of dysentery and whooping cough. They had brought her to the Wukari General Hospital and hence buried her in the local Christian cemetery.” We remember the funeral. By Jukun tradition, only the men were allowed to enter the cemetery; the women, including Naomi, the mother, had to watch from outside the gate! Though a woman, Fran did attend the grave-side service. As a White woman, she was allowed to play it on both sides of the cultural divide.

But such a relationship inevitably creates some humorous situations as well as more uplifting ones. Our toilet habits puzzled her. She reportedly told someone that we save almost everything, even our feces! It might have looked like that, for, because of water shortage, we flushed only when “necessary.”

Nigerians born at home often do not know their exact birthday simply because of lack of records. However, Lydia was baptized as an infant and that record included her birth date, September 24, 1960. Birthdays are not big things for most people, though that is changing with record keeping on the increase. So, about two weeks before her birthday, we explained our birthday customs to her and reminded her every day. When the day arrived, we sang “Happy Birthday” and gave her some small gifts. Her response? “But I’m born already!”

Lydia had beautiful large shining eyes along with a wonderful singing voice. Sometimes I would sing along with her. We first introduced her as a singer in the English service at Wukari. She stood on the bench while I stood next to her and we sang “Ga tsuntsu can a dutse; Ya yi ta wakarsa....” The song is about a bird that praises God. Its melody is similar to that of a Dutch song about an owl and a cuckoo singing to each other: “*Een uil zat in de olmen....*” Sorry, I don’t know any English song with that melody. When she was an adult, she published CDs of her singing.

We enrolled Lydia in the Wukari’s Ebenezer Christian Primary School, but since that was quite a distance, we had our Ibrahim—remember him from Baissa?—bring her there on the bicycle. The other pupils began calling her “Matar Ibrahim,” “the wife of Ibrahim.” They also tried to scare her by telling her that once she was fattened up, these white people would cook and mash her and put her in a can. That’s what they have in the cans of food at their houses!

One of our goals for Lydia was to prevent estrangement from her own family and community, including language and culture. So, during school breaks we would send her home. Her parents, especially Iliya, her Dad, would tell us to keep her with us and learn our ways, including English. We tried to argue that this was not a good idea, but he did not buy our argument till we reminded him that, once she was married, her husband would not demand that she write a letter or speak English to him, but to bring him a bowl of well-cooked pounded guinea corn, the main traditional food in Wukari. *That* he understood! As

it turned out, this was not an either-or issue. Her eventual husband did expect her to cook but also expected her to speak fluent English. She met both expectations with flying colours!

We had to make provisions for Lydia during our furlough. The first furlough she was still in primary school. She was given into the custody of a relative in Wukari for that time. We left them with all the necessary clothing, money for school fees, food, etc. We heard very little from or about her while away, but that's Nigeria for you.

Here's a sneak peak into our future relationship with her, with the details following in subsequent chapters. After primary school, Lydia enrolled in WCSS, a boarding school. So, we did not see as much of her from there on. However, she remained our "daughter" and we continued taking responsibility for her. We would always try to visit her when we'd come to the Takum area. By the time Lydia graduated from WCSS we were living in Jos. She came to live with us once again, while she worked at *Muryar Bishara*, a Lutheran radio station, The Voice of the Gospel.

Eventually, Lydia married Chris Abaga, who served for some years as pastor in ECWA's English congregation in Jos. ECWA stands for Evangelical Churches of West Africa. It is a large Nigerian Evangelical denomination. Some years later Chris left ECWA to become a freelance evangelist. Lydia went on to achieve an MA in special education and has long served as secondary school counselor. They have three sons, all of them in their 20s now.

*An aside:* Jude, the oldest of the three sons, came to Calvin College, financially sponsored mostly by Wiebe, while Kevin helped out and we took on the responsibility of room and board, since we were at the time living a bus ride away from Calvin. Jude, it turned out, had the typical artist's problems with discipline and schedules, so that we did not see much of him. He spent more time developing his considerable singing talents than studying, but we were not aware of that, since he did not share anything with us. Our relationship with him became bumpy and eventually we separated. He did not complete Calvin and we have no idea how he found his way back to Nigeria. However, once there, he and his brother Jesse began to work on his music and are now hip-hop stars of international repute, especially Jude, who advertises himself as "Mr. Incredible." Obviously, his Calvin programme of studies did not suit him. Had we been made aware of that, perhaps things would have taken a different turn for both him and us. But we recently met him again in Lagos and are on friendly terms. We wish him all the success in the world, provided he does not let it run away with him and forget the ways of his Creator and Saviour.

Today, Lydia is a Nigerian lady of professional distinction. We are very proud of her and her family. We visited her in 2001 and in 2005, while she paid us a visit in 2011, when we were staying with Wiebe and Joanna in Lagos. We tried twice to get her a visa to visit us in Canada but failed both times. We are trying again this year, 2014. Our ties of love remain strong. This section summarizes the entire story of Lydia and her relationship to us, while the bits and pieces of that story are followed in succeeding chapters.

### *Entrepreneurial Life*

**My Dad had an entrepreneurial spirit about him that expressed itself especially in the way he conducted his barbershop business in The Netherlands and in the way he wheeled and dealt in real estate in BC. I inherited that spirit from him, I believe. So, after we had paid off our student debts we found ourselves with some extra cash on hand. We decided to invest it in a mutual fund and see what would happen, a first for us. As such investments go, Shell was one of its beneficiaries.**

**Shell was active in oil-rich Nigeria during the Civil War and, according to the media, it was playing an ethically dubious game. Newspapers contained article after article about Shell's behaviour. We began to realize that we were in Nigeria in two ways: as missionaries and as dubious investors. Whether the stories were true, we had no way of knowing. If true, we could do nothing about it. We were ashamed of our investment and learned that you need to take responsibility for it. We sold our shares. The *next* phase of that story will be found *back* in Chapter 17.**

## Chapter 28<

### CRCN II - Family and Social Life

(1968-1972)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 16, Volume 2)

#### *Travel Interlude*

**One of the perks of being a missionary to places like Nigeria is that on the way to or from you can afford to do some inexpensive traveling, since the main and most expensive part of the flight is already paid for by the Mission. So, for our first furlough we decided to visit Israel, Greece and the “Old Country,” and from there on to Grand Rapids. In terms of flights, this additional travel cost us all of \$100!**

**We took Middle East Airlines (MEA) from Kano, but, due to “Near East” politics, it was not allowed to land in Israel. They flew us to Beirut, where we spent the night in a hotel on the Mediterranean beach. We remember walking along the beach with its cool breezes, the likes we had not felt for two and a half years. It was a delightful experience. Then the MEA flew us to Cyprus, from where we transferred to an El Al plane for Tel Aviv, Israel. In the midst of transferring, an announcement was made that Tel Aviv was closed down due to arson. There was a fire. There was going to be a delay of undetermined duration, but certainly of several hours. It turned out to be a mere 30 minutes. When we landed in Tel Aviv, the fire engines were still working at extinguishing the fire, while a maintenance crew was already painting the walls blackened by soot and smoke. They were good to go!**

**We are not going to into great detail about our visit to Israel, except some of the more striking memories. Being freelancers by nature, we did not organize our trip before hand and just went by the seat of our pants. Whether that was a good decision is a moot question, but that’s us. The very first evening we went for a random walk in Jerusalem. It had gotten dark and we were wondering why the streets were abandoned. Just no one around. We found our way back only to be told there was a curfew and being out was very dangerous!**

**We traveled around quite a bit with local tour buses. We floated in the salty Dead Sea. We sipped beer on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. When we took a picture of our idyllic setting there, we carefully “hid” the beer bottle underneath the table, where it clearly showed up on the picture! We spent time in Nazareth and saw the high cliff from which the Jews had tried to cast Jesus to His death. We drank coffee in a restaurant there and met Arab Christians who complained about Jewish discrimination against Christians. We visited Bethlehem and saw the stable where Jesus was allegedly born. We also entered the church**

built around the grave of Abraham, but the place swarmed with Israeli soldiers with cocked guns. We wanted to visit the Jordan River, but it was out of bounds to tourists because of danger. We were inside the Dome of the Rock, the first time we were ever inside a mosque, since Nigerian Muslims do not allow Christians in the mosque. We also watched the kissing and wailing at the Wailing Wall. We were in the Garden of Gethsemane while we also visited various sepulchers, in all of which Jesus was said to have been buried.

The one that seemed the most authentic had a Catholic cathedral built around it. To gain entry into the sepulcher itself, we had to walk backwards while bent forward through a low tunnel. Inside the sepulcher it was all light and splendour with a priest guarding a large gilded coffer into which worshippers were invited to deposit their donations. We were seldom so disappointed, if not enraged, by such outright monification of such a holy place—if, indeed, it was that. Actually, we experienced such emotions several times due to excessive commercialization of alleged holy places. In the end, though interesting, we did not find our visit to Israel edifying. Too much obvious fake and too much outright commercialization. If we ever go again, we should probably do so as part of a guided pilgrimage group, but then we will probably be treated to pious traditions and spiritual folklore that ignores the realities of gross commercialization. That would have its own advantages and drawbacks.

One point of special interest to us was the *tomb of Rachel*, one of the wives of Jacob, who was one of the three ancestral patriarchs of the Jews. Tradition has it that infertile women who come here to pray for a baby are guaranteed to have their desire fulfilled. Not sure whether this guarantee also extends to infertile men. At any rate, since we were in that boat and prayer is valid at any time and place, we did utter a brief prayer together.

We were impressed by something else. Wherever the Israelis had put their stamp on the country, everything was lush and green, reminding us of the Biblical description of “the land of milk and honey.” Wherever the Arabs lived, everything was left in its natural desert state—wild, undeveloped, brown. Absolutely striking, that difference.

From Israel we traveled on to *Athens, Greece*. We stayed in a great but inexpensive hotel. We visited the Acropolis, a great historical experience. However, Fran was feeling quite nauseated and not up to all this running around. So she spent most of her time in or near our hotel, while I did some exploring on my own. Except for the great inexpensive restaurant meals, I don’t really remember much detail, for I was worried about Fran.

After just a few days there, we continued our journey to *Amsterdam*, from where we did another (kind of crazy) *blitzkrieg* visit to our respective birthplaces and a few relatives. We were offered many cups of tea and coffee by Fran’s relatives in Friesland. For some reason she kept feeling nauseous and didn’t enjoy all the *gezelligheid* as she had before. Also visited my Opa Veninga, Mother Ellie’s father. He was in the high eighties by then and living with *Tante* (Aunt) Riek in Zuidhorn, sitting in the same corner and same chair we had met him two years earlier and where we would meet him again in 1972. He would just be sitting there quietly, smoking an occasional pipe and enjoying his daily *cognac* (brandy).

From there on to Grand Rapids, where a mission house was awaiting us on Prince Street, all set up for us to live in for the duration of the furlough period—or so we thought. The end of our first missionary journey, back to where we set out from two and a half years earlier, in a mission house, but it would all be very different from what we had planned and expected.

### *Pregnancy Story and Kevin's Arrival*

Towards the end of the term in Wukari in 1968, Fran began to experience unusual “stuff” inside her and the absence of something else. Tests at Takum Hospital were inconclusive; remember this was years before “morning after” pregnancy tests became available. In fact, the doctor said she was definitely not pregnant and reminded her that stress can cause a temporary cessation of the menses. Since this was close to our first furlough, we were told we should check it all out in Grand Rapids.

Apart from time with Fran's family in Grand Rapids, every furlough began with a debriefing in the “Pentagon,” the popular missionary designation for CRWM headquarters. However, the thing that was uppermost in our minds was Fran's condition and the need to see a medical doctor prepared to give us an immediate appointment. So on November 11, 1968, Fran went to Dr. Ed Postma, our former family doctor. She described it this way:

After spending some time discussing our adoption plans, he proceeded with a physical exam. Then he casually said, “And what do you plan to do with the child you are carrying?” I thought it was a cruel “joke” and started crying. He said, “Fran, I'm totally serious. It looks to me as if you are about 3 months pregnant!”

I remember driving Fran to the doctor's office and waiting in the parking lot. It seemed to take forever, but finally she came running out of the building. There she was, in the cold Grand Rapids winter, shoes untied, coat and pantyhose in her hands, swinging her arms wildly and yelling, “*I'm pregnant! I'm pregnant!*” So that was the “start” of the “six-month pregnancy.” Yes, Kevin was born exactly 6 months later.

Wow! I cannot tell you how happy, relieved and grateful we were. After all, we had been told she was *not* pregnant. Our many prayers had been answered. What about Rachel's tomb? The Lord must have been smiling there as He was listening to our prayers that had already been answered! And later Fran's Frisian aunties told us they knew it all along!

Now our carefully developed furlough plans were all up for grabs again. The order of things was reversed. We were supposed to go to BC a bit later and start the adoption process, but now it was decided we should go there right away so that we could be kind of settled in Grand Rapids during the latter part of the pregnancy and joyfully drop the adoption plans.



We socialized quite a bit with my family in BC and spent time deputizing in the churches as we told you in the companion Chapter 16. Then in February 1969, we drove back to Grand Rapids along a more southern route in the States. This also gave us the opportunity to visit brother Hendrik and Barb who were at this time pastoring in Grangeville, Idaho, a town high up in the mountains. When we arrived in Grand Rapids, we were assigned a house at 1058 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, in the middle of the ghetto, a place we lived in many times subsequently.

While I was busy with research at Calvin Seminary and doing various deputation trips, Fran was free to spend her time visiting her family. Sister Henrietta and family lived only a few blocks away. Lots of chatting happened at their house.

Everything proceeded normally in the pregnancy and the doctor visits became quite routine. Having experienced difficulties and delays in reaching this stage, everyone, including CRWM, agreed we should wait out the birth and recovery period in Grand Rapids, even though Kevin's birth delayed our return to Nigeria by some six weeks.

On May 8, the official due date, Professor and Mrs. Runner—remember him from Groen Club at Calvin—took us out for dinner. This was the first time they ever socialized with us and I was happy with our new status with him. When we told him that this was the due date, he almost choked on his food and was nervous the rest of the evening.

Six months to the day of that doctor's visit, on Mother's Day, May 11, 1969, Kevin made his appearance. Fran was brought to the labour and delivery room at Butterworth Hospital, while I was unceremoniously ushered into the Fathers' Waiting room to bite my nails. Kevin was already an hour old before I was even informed and allowed to see him and Fran.

Kevin's name is explained more fully in a section below, but one remark needs recording here. Fran's mother was not impressed with her new grandson's name. In Dutch a "v" is pronounced as an "f". To her the name Kevin sounded like "*Keffen*"; and that means the "bark of a dog!" It took us some explanation before she agreed that it really was a beautiful name.

### *Buying Supplies*

While in Grand Rapids and shepherding Fran's pregnancy along, we also engaged in buying supplies for Nigeria, always a time, energy and money consuming part of any furlough. Our favourite source for groceries, clothing and almost everything else was Meyers on 28<sup>th</sup> Street and Kalamazoo, right across from the Pentagon. Now we had the complication of buying baby and toddler clothes to take us through the next two or three years, including shoes. Try it! We would also buy some canned foods that we particularly liked. One of them would be canned bacon that we could only find at K-Mart and was always imported from Europe. This became our Nigeria Sunday morning staple for years.

Unfortunately, the product disappeared from the market. That was the bacon rejected by that one breakfast guest of ours in the previous chapter.

### *Back in Wukari*

We arrived back in Kano on June 28, 1969, to begin our second term. The story of our re-entry and return to Wukari is told in Chapter 16. We settled in quickly again and continued as if we had never been away, except that now we had baby Kevin with us.

Here's a two-paragraph report from a Fran letter about the mixture of work and social life that characterized our situation. It gives you an idea of the whirlwind we lived in:

John has gone to Taraba for a week. He came back quite tired and worn out. We had a nice weekend. We celebrated our ninth anniversary. But yesterday John had to go away again, this time to Mkar for a meeting and to have the car serviced there. (John: all Mkar trips include a barge that so often created delays and near-accidents when getting on/off the barge. It was eventually replaced by a bridge.) He hopes to come home this afternoon. Tomorrow morning early, Kevin and I are going to Ibi, some 40 kms away, until Friday. This will be the first time this term that we have gone away and left John at home. There is a Women's Annual Meeting where John is not really welcome! I'm taking Bulus, our part time housekeeper, along to take care of Kevin so that I can attend the meetings.

Sunday morning John and I went to the English service at 7 AM while Lydia watched Kevin. We had a quick breakfast together and then all went to a Tiv-language service at nine o'clock. We didn't understand a word of it, but we had promised we would visit them sometime. Afterwards, we decided to call on the Sikh Indian District Engineer, who asked us to stay for dinner. Even Lydia and Kevin enjoyed the Indian cuisine. The men all wear their turbans, don't cut their hair and are extremely friendly, interesting and very talkative. Even John doesn't get much of a chance there! We left at around 2:30 PM. But the day was not done. We had previously been invited out for supper at one of the "big men" in town. So we went out to eat twice that day. Seeing we didn't go there till 8 PM, we had a baby sitter for Kevin. We had a very nice meal there as well, even though we were not very hungry after that Indian meal. So, we had a busy, enjoyable and opulent Sunday.

A few weeks later that Engineer and his wife came to our house for dinner. This presented a bit of a problem. They will not eat beef. Our Muslim butcher will not supply pork. We did not have any rabbits ready at the time. So, we located a couple of goat legs for the meal. Yep, that's a multi-cultural cook out for you!

*The Children and Their World*

*Lydia—A Growing Girl*



Of course, Lydia was still in the family, attending primary school in Wukari. In December, 1969, we sent her to her parents for the Christmas holidays, according to our earlier explanation. Fran would have loved to keep her with us to help out with Kevin. During the school year when she was with us, Fran wrote, “What a difference she makes with all her constant chatter. And she is such a good baby sitter!”

**Our Family in 1971\***

In another letter, Fran wrote that she is giving Lydia extra lessons to help her along a bit. Tests showed she ranked ninth in her class of 43. Five months later she was fourth out of 57, a considerable jump ahead. In June, 1971, Fran wrote that “she goes to school every day without complaining. She seems to be one of the better students in her class. Just yesterday she said she was reading-group leader of seven kids and takes them outside to read with them.”

We always signed all our letters with the names of all *four* family members, including Lydia. In that way we encouraged people to think of her as part of the family. Oma Ellie even urged us to bring Lydia on our next home service time, but visa problems being what they are from Nigeria, that would be very difficult to arrange, if possible at all.

Once when Lydia had gone to her village for her school holidays, Fran wrote that it was so quiet with her gone:

I miss her chatter and, of course, if she’s here, so are many of her friends. She is good company for Kevin also. He likes to have other kids around. While she’s gone, a young boy living in the compound has sort of taken over her baby sitting responsibilities. He comes every afternoon to see if he may push Kevin in his stroller.

When Kevin got older and able to move around, he enjoyed the sociability that Lydia’s presence created. He enjoyed the noises her friends made but did not play with them: just sat and watched them contentedly. They were, of course, much older than him.

We celebrated Lydia's tenth birthday with a bang. She was now in grade 3. We had the Evenhouses over for dinner on birthday eve. On the actual birthday she came home from school with an entourage of twelve children, many of whom were curious about white man's ways. She was joined by another 20 or more children from the compound. Two women from the compound cooked every one's favourite: rice and beef. For a whole \$10 we fed that entire crowd of hungry kids and could even have them take some home with them. We gave her two dresses, a raincoat and earrings. Someone else gave her a coin purse, while the Evenhouses chipped in a belt. We also told her about the Western tradition of the "X" on your back for every 10 years and that she now had such an "X" on her back. She spent a long time with a mirror, trying to figure out just where this "X" could be!

In 1970 Lydia traveled with us to Jos for the first time. Because we knew basically everyone in the expatriate community in Wukari and Takum, she assumed the same was true for Jos. She was fascinated with all the *Turawa* there and would ask Fran questions such as "What is her name? How many children does she have? Why is she walking in such a strange way? Why is she wearing pants?" She was thoroughly confused when Fran was unable to answer most of her questions.

Lydia preferred playing games to reading or doing school work, which, Fran surmised, is quite normal for someone her age, something she kept repeating in her letters. Quite a bit later, Fran reported again that she preferred playing *and* taking care of Kevin, whom she would often carry on her back in true Nigerian style. She truly was his big sister. She also loved to cook and spent a lot of time in the students' kitchen, helping the women with various chores. Sometimes she even turned out "complete meals" and called her little friends to share the food. A few months ago, her mother had twin babies. Now Lydia was more eager than ever to go home for the holidays to see them.

In January, 1972, Fran treated her readers with a more detailed report on Lydia. She had just returned from a three-week stay with her parents.

Everyone is commenting on how much weight she has lost. I guess she is healthy when with us but not when she is in the village. She's having such a hard time with arithmetic at school. She is doing well in English and reading, but arithmetic seems to be impossible. It means nothing to her; she just wants to go outside to play. She'll have to get more serious about school. She is in grade 5 now and weighs 75 pounds, a 40-pound gain from when she came five years ago. In two years she'll hopefully be ready for secondary school, where competition is very stiff these days. She is such a pretty and helpful little girl. I must begin to give her more responsibilities.

### *Kevin—A Growing Boy*

When we started our second term in Wukari, we realized it would not be a simple continuation from before what with Kevin around. He made all the difference, the main difference being the joy he brought us, but also problems. We had him baptized by Pastor Habila in Wukari. He was, of course, born in the States and II Highland had expected to

baptize him before we left. However, we explained to them that Kevin would be brought up in the Nigerian community and that therefore we preferred a Nigerian baptism. Besides, it would amount to the gesture of recognizing their full status as church. We were grateful II Highland understood and accepted. We could have opted for two baptisms, one in each place, but we take baptism too seriously to play around with it.

Before his birth, we referred to the child by the Hausa name of “Umaru,” but we had him baptized as “*Samu’ila Kevin Richard*.” The first name is the Hausa version of “Samuel” of the Old Testament, which means “I have asked him of the Lord,” a most appropriate name for him. “Kevin” was just a name we picked out of the sky. To my later regret, we abandoned the tradition of naming him after one of his grandfathers. “Richard” was after my youngest and only Canadian-born brother Dick. Dick, being born some years after Tinus, his immediate predecessor, almost grew up like an only child in a family of ten siblings! We thought thus to honour him and help him recognize his membership in the family. Not sure he ever accepted or believed us on this one. While living in the CRCN area, people called him “Samu’ila,” but when we moved to Jos and into the world of Hillcrest School, “Kevin” became the more common one.

A few days after Samu’ila’s baptism, we held a naming ceremony and its attending party. We invited the entire church! That could theoretically mean six to eight hundred! Well, we took a chance when we were told we should expect around two hundred. The Women’s Fellowship would do the catering, while the MC would recruit some traditional drummers. It being rainy season, we prayed for no rain, for it would be an outside event on our compound. *All* we would have to do is pay for it all. Yes, we took a chance, a *big* chance. Actually, about 150 people showed up. We had a typical Nigerian menu of rice, chicken, beef and minerals (soft drinks). Not every missionary would take this route, but for us it was a way to demonstrate a spirit of unity with the local community by following their tradition.

A lot of children always swarm to such events in the hopes of getting some morsels. We did not disappoint them. One young boy, whom we did not know from Adam, was Nathan Elawa. When Kevin was a couple of years old, he got a ball that he would play with outside. When Nigerian boys see a ball, soccer fever takes hold and there’s no stopping them. So boys much older than Kevin from both the compound and the town would come and “play with Kevin.” Someone would be appointed to protect the fragile little white boy, while the rest would just take over the game—and the ball. Nathan was one of these.

*An aside:* When he grew up, Nathan joined Great Commission, the Nigerian chapter of Campus Crusade and married Ann, a Great Commission colleague from Canada’s Maritimes. Shortly after we moved to Vancouver, Nathan and Ann came for him to study at Vancouver’s Regent College for a master’s degree. Though of different generations, we became friends and socialized actively. After graduation, they returned to Nigeria for a few years, but in 2012 they came back to live in Langley BC, where Ann works for Campus Crusade under their new name “Power to Change,” while Nathan is pursuing his doctorate.

Kevin was not an easy child at night. He cried easily, frequently and for prolonged periods. Early August, 1969, Fran filled almost an entire letter about a bout of fever Kevin struggled with for almost a week—and we right along with him. As is normal in Nigeria, we treated it as malaria, probably the most common sickness in the country. At the end of it, Fran wrote, “It was all quite an experience, and we are surely grateful that it ended well. Fevers are dangerous and yet they flare up so quickly, especially when it is malaria.” During January, 1970, she wrote of another six-week period of infirmities and listed them: “teething, colds, flu, malaria and ear infection.” He was getting “longer and skinnier.” He’d be better for a few days and then would be down again. It was not to be the last.

Nigerian custom had it that you do not allow a child to cry for any length of time. You pick him up, cuddle and feed him. We would sometimes allow him to cry for a while, but almost every time one or two women from the nearby student compound would come and “inform” us, “*Yaro yana kuka*,” “The child is crying,” as if we did not know! It was their way of reprimanding us for cruelty and to urge us to feed him forthwith, i.e., stick a *real* nipple in his mouth.

For some time I would do the night shift for Kevin, feeling that Fran had him for nine months full time and now she still had a fulltime day job, that I should now take a turn at “it.” And then that generator we told you about in Chapter 27 came and all nocturnal hell broke loose for us. No kidding!

You remember how that story began a year earlier. We went on home service with most of the ditches dug for the wires having naturally filled up again. The next dry season they were opened up again and the generator finally installed. It worked, but oh, the noise in the student compound and in our house! The generator did not look new. So we asked the engineer about both items. He refused to address the noise problem and admitted that he had given Highland’s new generator to a “more needy” station and gave us a used one. He assured us we would be happy with its performance.

Everyone was unhappy with the noise and complained, Kevin more than anyone else. He slept in a bed that looked like a cage, designed by us and locally made with even the top closed in with a hinged “door” and wholly surrounded by permanent mosquito screening supported by wide-gauged chicken wire, ugly but effective. The very first night the generator operated, the noise so scared him that he got up and tried to force the top of his bed open in panic. He would never sleep with his bed closed again. He was permanently haunted by that terrible noise. A few weeks later, he still refused to sleep in his “cage.” We put his mattress on the floor next to Lydia’s bed and “now he sleeps peacefully.” Fran wrote that she hoped we would soon have someone else to sleep in that cage!

The issues were never rectified, but at least we had electricity. Two weeks after we first got it, Fran wrote, “We’re enjoying our electricity in the evenings. What an improvement over kerosene lamps.” It made our evenings a lot more pleasant and productive, even if noisy. It was like living along a high-traffic road: you get used to it and sleep through it. But it definitely was a project laced with deceit on the part of that Mission engineer.

Kevin's presence affected almost everything, including Fran's participation in ministry. In January 1970, she wrote that she hoped to start teaching in the CLTC again, "but with Kevin demanding quite a bit of time lately, I don't know if it will work out."

We tried to keep our parents up to speed with Kevin by sending them occasional pictures, but that was no easy task from this end. Neither we nor the photographer were able to make him smile. More often he looked "*bedenklijk*," (grave or serious), as Fran put it. One of Fran's sisters said that when Kevin was only two weeks old, he looked so much in deep thought that she figures he'll be a professor someday! Actually, he turned out more of an entrepreneur than an academic, though smart enough for either. In November, his six-months statistics were 18 lbs and 28.5" tall. Fran wrote,

He now rolls over constantly and is getting good at sitting up. A few days ago he started sitting up 'Buddha style.' Every day there is a bit of improvement. How they change day by day. We love him so much. He is such a joy to us. He certainly provides the 'missing link' in our home! And to think that last year at this time we just found out that he was on the way!! What surprises the Lord had in store for us.



Kevin – March, 1970\*

When Kevin reached ten months, he loved to stand up by holding on to things, including us. He wanted us to walk with him. According to Fran, "He lifts his whole foot without bending the knee, but he acts as if he knows what he's doing!" Isn't that just like a Prins?—or was that Boer?

He still did not crawl in March, but in April he started, finally. In early May, while in Jos, he really picked up on that skill and so enjoyed it that, according to Fran, "he has temporarily lost interest in trying to walk, because this method works for the time being." At the end of May, he had become expert at crawling and went all over the place, but he was now becoming impatient to walk. He just could not pull himself up to a standing position. He would try so hard and scream with frustration. Fran added, "Kevin really has quite a temper. John's parents said that he also did when he was little. Kevin certainly embarrasses us sometimes with his piercing loud yells and demands! Then, the next moment, he's all smiles again. The blessed joys of parenthood!"

So you see that Kevin was not always the gentleman one would expect from a Boer-Prins. Once we took a vacation in Jos and flew in the CRC plane with Gordon Buys, our second pilot. The last ten minutes of the flight were turbulent and Kevin vomited. Gordon tried to

put us at ease by telling us that his children had done similar things with other pilots. That was nice of Gord.

We stayed a few days in the guest house of the SUM British in downtown, eating at a communal table and surrounded mostly by British missionaries. Kevin did not act very British. Fran wrote, “I was rather embarrassed at the way he threw things on and at the table. Britishers are so polite and quiet. They even provided a complete table setting for little Kevin! He promptly took care of that nicety by knocking the glasses over, chewing on the placemat and other unforgivable acts.”

Again, being British, none of the guests commented on this behaviour. Perhaps they did not even notice, but *we* surely did! Some years later, when our kids were a bit older, one of these Britishers had a meal at our house in Jos. All three kids were lively in their conversation. This time this Britisher did comment, but put the best possible face to it. “Your children are certainly vivacious,” he observed. Yes, indeed!

While Fran was writing a letter, Kevin was “pulling at me, trying to get up and touch the typewriter. When he hears the sound of typing, he figures he needs a turn too.” She referred to this habit of Kevin in several letters. One time she was tired of having to fend him off that she wrote a letter in long hand, something she loathed to do.

In September, 1970, Fran wrote, “Our big news is that Kevin now stands alone and takes one step or maybe I should say ‘one slide on his shoe.’” He was by now quite happily playing by himself. Things were finally moving or, better said, Kevin was finally moving.

On October 2, 1970, Fran wrote a quick hand-written note dedicated to the “big news:” *Kevin is walking!* “Wednesday afternoon he started all over the living room and looking very proud!” However, after the original thrill of walking had worn off, he became lazy. He could easily walk to the end of the compound where the other missionaries lived, but insisted on being picked up instead.

Then she started worrying about his language development. Fran wrote,

I’m sure that Kevin is slow in everything. He responds to a “bye-bye” with the wave of a hand and doesn’t know the meaning of “Dada” or “Mama. He makes the sounds along with others, but they don’t mean anything to him, at least I don’t think so. For several days now after we all say “Amen,” he says “Aa.” Maybe that will be his first real word—after all, he’s a PK, a preacher’s kid. But each child develops at his own speed and we just need to be patient.

Actually his first word that he repeated time and again was ‘ada’,” exactly the same as small children of the Nigerian families on our compound. So that would appear to be a first word universally. “It so happens that Pastor Habila’s last name is ‘Adda.’ So whenever he hears Kevin, he really laughs.”



Before long he seemed to be making good progress. Wrote Fran, "He jabbars and calls a lot, but nothing makes any sense to us yet." In her first letter of 1971, Fran wrote that Kevin was beginning to actually talk now. Most of his words were Hausa with a little Jukun thrown in. The point is that he seemed to know what they meant. He was not just making sounds he was hearing around him. Some five months later, we read, "He is really beginning to talk now, but mostly Hausa. He seems to realize there are two words for one thing, because he often says the English and Hausa word together." When he would come to report on a pending bowel movement, he might say, "Coming, *kashi* coming," "*kashi*" being Hausa for "bowel movement." Sometimes it was a false alarm he used to get his Mommy to jump up and run! By June that year, Fran wrote about his "real hodgepodge of languages. Sometimes we have to ask Lydia what he means! But mostly it is still English and Hausa." By October 1971, Kevin was talking a blue streak, mostly in Hausa. Nigerians were really getting a kick out of seeing this little white kid speak the language so fluently.

Also in October, 1971, the Baas family joined us to build and operate the Youth Centre. They had five children, three of them being pre-schoolers. Would Kevin continue to play with his Nigerian friends or would he be attracted to the white kids with their boys and toys. Would he even notice the difference?

Not sure whether Kevin noticed any colour differences, but he *was* attracted to their house with its toys. He still played with his Nigerian friends, but ah, those toys...! How could he resist them? Over at our house, the rabbits were a major attraction also for the Baas kids, especially since we allowed them to play with them under our watchful eyes. But we had our share of toys as well. For Christmas 1971, both sets of grandparents had sent him a supply of small toys, mostly cars, while they sent jewelry to Lydia. Both children were happy with their gifts and all of them got plenty of use. "Kevin is rather rough on toys, especially since he shares them with lots of friends. He is telling everyone that these and these cars are from his grandma in Canada and those from his grandma in America. Not sure he understood that difference, but it seemed important to him anyway."

He did eventually become aware of some sort of difference. The Evenhouses had brought in an above-ground swimming pool. Of course, people needed to be clean if they were to use the pool. Unfortunately, most of the Nigerian children of CLTC parents were village type that did not meet the standards for the pool. However, Lydia did. So, Kevin got confused about who was in or out. He came home with the question, "Am I Black or White?!" It made an important difference, for "white" meant you could swim in the pool!

While Lydia had gone home for Christmas to see the new twins, Kevin missed her but soon found Briskilla to replace her. She was seven-year old daughter of a CLTC student, small in stature and thus not imposing to Kevin. He loved to play in his sandbox, where many compound children would join him. But Fran had to restrict the number of playmates coming into the house, for they were getting too wild. In a letter from this period, she apologized for the rambling nature of her letter. It was due to three of Kevin's friends in the room, all making as much noise as possible. He was getting "so much more independent," playing outside with his friends quite a bit. He needed Fran only in emergencies as defined by him.

In another letter, Fran described Kevin as

standing next to my table here, singing up a storm and taking collection with his friend! He is always playing church and preaching, etc. He says his name is “the pastor who prays.” John says he used to play church also as a kid (see Chapter 2). Kevin and his friend Manoah often walk together with arms around each other, totally oblivious of racial, cultural and language differences that adults make so much of.

Under the influence of the other missionary kids, Kevin began to pick up more English, though he still spoke mostly Hausa. People told us he understood some Jukun also, though he would reply in Hausa. Fran spoke and read mostly English to him, for she wanted to make sure he learned standard English. I, however, since pretty well all my communication with people around me was in Hausa, just naturally spoke Hausa to Kevin as well. He concluded that sometimes Fran and I did not understand each other. So, occasionally he would translate for us. He might say to Fran, “Daddy says,....” And then he would translate my Hausa to English. Or vice versa.

Since we were thinking about going to Amsterdam in 1972 for study purposes, Fran hoped that he would also learn some Dutch while there. She sadly expected that in due time, he would forget all these so easily acquired languages. Well, today in 2014, he still speaks Hausa and a fair bit of English, his major languages from that period. In the meantime, Dutch has come and gone, replaced by Setswana and some French.

As we did for Lydia, so we organized birthday parties for Kevin and his friends. His third birthday party was attended by 20 compound children, both Nigerian and missionary children. We played games, sang and had a big birthday cake. I am always amazed at how good Fran is at organizing such parties and keeping them fairly orderly without spoiling anyone’s fun. The cake part was also attended by the missionary parents.

There were now four of us, but we were not satisfied. In September, 1970, Fran wrote that we were thinking about once again initiating adoption procedure with that Vancouver office. “Maybe that trick will succeed again,” she hoped.

### *Miscellaneous Experiences and Culture*

With the extremely hot weather of the *bazara*, the muggy season before the rains start, and a toddler around, Fran often had the laundry piling up quickly and needed to do it often. She had this old fashioned but not old wringer washer run by a gasoline engine Maytag was still manufacturing for the developing world. She would do the laundry together with Istifanus, a part time CLTC student and part time worker. He would bring in the buckets of water and carry the wet laundry to the outside clothes lines, while Fran would operate the machine. We had learned the hard way that village Nigerians tend to be rough on such machinery and pull and pull at it with all their strength when the wringer gets stuck.

In early March, 1970, we had a collision between our mission car and a truck. There were four of us in the car. Fran sat in the passenger's seat with Kevin on her lap, strange as that sounds today. This was before seat belts and baby seats. Ifraimu Nyajo sat in the back, the seat of honour in Nigerian culture. It was dry season, which means that every vehicle on these dirt roads leaves a cloud of dust in its wake that makes it impossible to see him. Where there's smoke, there's fire. Where there's a dust cloud, there is a vehicle. The vehicle ahead of us stopped suddenly on the middle of the road. Before I could see, I hit him full force. There was blood all over both Fran and Kevin. We panicked and without checking things out, we "commandeered" the truck driver to drive us the 50 kilometers to Takum Hospital, where both were treated. Ifraimu was not hurt and stayed with the vehicle to arrange having it moved to the side of the road. It turns out that Fran had protected Kevin by bending over him and taking the brunt of the collision herself. The windshield had jumped out without shattering; the wiper hit Fran's nose and split it in half. Hence all the blood. We were so relieved Kevin was alright, while Fran had her nose sewed up. There is still a slight scar running along the bridge of her nose. She also had to be stitched up at various other places on her face. But today she's as beautiful as ever! Our vehicle was a total loss. Fortunately, it was an old one slated to be discarded soon. In spite of my doubts and questions about the Mission's medical programme, we did appreciate the immediate and professional attention they gave us. They *were* very good at that.

Accidents involving personal injuries and insurance issues have to be reported. So the truck driver and I went to the Takum Police Office together. You see, we were amicable with each other. After we both gave them our written statements, they began to light into the driver something fierce, but told us to go. Still not street smart Nigeria style, I did not understand the dynamics until later. I was member of a privileged and popular community that was known to resist bribes. So, why waste their time on me? But, strictly speaking, I was the main guilty party since I hit a parked vehicle from behind. He, of course, was guilty of parking dangerously on the middle of the road in a cloud of dust. They went after the driver and, I suspect, milked him for all he was worth to avoid being put in jail indefinitely. I had expected the driver to contact us again, but he never did. Communications being what they were, finding him would have been almost impossible. I have ever since felt bad for him and ashamed that I left him alone in that den of lion robbers.

Ifraimu later told us that he had preached on God protecting His children and used Fran as an example: the mother who bent over her child to protect him from an accident.

In May, 1970, we started occasionally using the latest in letter-writing technology—the carbon copy method that enabled us to write once but end up with two or even three copies. This meant we could keep in touch with both sets of parents with one letter! The main side of these airforms did not include personal issues that related to one set, but the backside would be written individually. We often started them with the generic "Dear Mom, Dad, etc.," that covered both situations. It did mean that Dick no longer featured in the salutations of the copy that went to the Boers. It also meant that the one receiving the

copy might feel kind of cheated, for carbon copies of personal letters often made people feel second in rank. But it saved us considerable time and effort, important considerations in busy lives.

I mentioned earlier that we tried to keep our parents up to speed. We did this not only by telling them about what was happening with us, but sometimes also by serving them with family advice. The Boers found themselves in a situation of two simultaneous divorce cases in the family. It was clear from the letters Dad and Mom Boer sent us that they were deeply concerned with these developments. Fran advised them not to allow this to worry them into an early grave. God knows what's happening. They had done their share and must now leave it up to Him and them. They, the parents, have their own lives to live with *their* friends. Pray, by all means, but don't let it ruin your life or rob you of sleep. She buttressed her advice with a true illustration of another mother facing a similar situation who became ill because of it and lost out on having a life. I share this with you readers, because till this day I am impressed with the wisdom that Fran displayed. Actually, this summary does not really do justice to what she wrote.

Things were not always going smooth with us either. Most of August, 1970, Fran had been sickly and in bed. She had a stubborn case of malaria that just would not let up along with ear infection. She lost weight and went down to 99 lbs! CLTC women were sure she was pregnant again. When Fran denied she was pregnant, they replied that they had been fooled once with Kevin and would not allow that again! Since she had lost appetite, the doctor *ordered* Fran to eat her way back to health. She picked up again after we attended the Mission's annual Spiritual Conference. I thought that Fran might have been too isolated, while I was often absent or, alternatively, that it might have been my *presence* that had caused the problem. I do believe that the fellowship and prayers at that conference helped turn things around.

However, her prolonged sickness caused me to go "out of my mind," according to her. She wrote it was because of

his (John) trying to take care of me, Kevin and Lydia, and do some of his own work too. At such times you realize, he said, how much work a woman does behind the scenes to keep the home running smoothly. The last week we finally found a gal to baby sit all day, so that I could rest and John go about his other things.

One day late October 1970 we experienced the "full cycle" of life. There was a wedding at church and a woman died in childbirth. We attended the funeral in the darkness of 9 pm that very evening. Then in the following morning at 5 am we were all woken up because a baby was about to be born on the compound. Here's Fran's version:

The men say they want their wives to deliver at the hospital in town, but the women usually refuse. They try not to let their husbands know they are in labour and secretly call their women friends. By the time the husband knows what is going on, the baby is already delivered! I was going to be helpful and quickly came with a razor for cutting the cord, but by the time I got there, the new mother was already

outside of her room and washing up! These women are in such good shape physically and so strong that they don't seem to have nearly the trouble in childbirth that we are accustomed to. As long as everything goes alright, we, CLTC staff, don't mind if they deliver at home here, but we are always worried that some day there will be complications and then it is often too late, which would be a shame when the hospital is so close. It's understandable that the women would rather deliver at home with their friends to help them, because at the hospital they are often made to feel like fools because they don't know the proper protocols. The young midwives laugh at the ways of these "bush" women.

Farming was the major occupation in our area. Fran, having been raised on the farm and having married a Boer, tried her hand at raising vegetables, for they were hard to get even in the larger town of Wukari. She wrote,

Even this farmer is trying her hand again. The beans are up nicely and so are the cucumbers. Two days ago I planted radishes, lettuce and cabbages and we already see little signs of life. I have tomatoes in a seed box to be transplanted later. I don't usually have much luck with gardening in the end, but it's always fun to try. The soil is bad, not enough rain and too much heat. Yet, some people manage to have wonderful gardens, so that's why I keep trying. This year we are going to spray more. Maybe that will help.

Apart from tomatoes, these were all vegetables we enjoyed but could not buy locally. Sometimes missionaries coming from Jos might bring some of them, for Jos is on a high plateau, much cooler, so that those vegetables will grow there. Those successful growers Fran referred to were not living in Wukari with its arid climate.

Sometimes life could deliver us moments of inconvenience with objects we purchased to create some convenience for us in our sparse life. In May, 1971, while I was gone on an evangelistic trip to Taraba, Fran wanted to do some sewing, but her machine "refused to work." As she recorded it,

I checked everything and loosened and tightened things, etc. A Nigerian friend came by as I was monkeying with it. He said he'd come again some other time. Only an hour or so later, there he was in the company of a very good local tailor whom I knew. I had been too embarrassed to send for him myself, because I've asked him for help so often, but there he was! He discovered a safety lock on the machine that had locked the teeth into position and therefore would not allow the material to pass through. How simple, but I did not know about this lock.

During that same Taraba trip of mine, Fran also ran into trouble with our propane fridge. The propane tank was empty. Of all the timing, with me gone, but somehow she managed.

On April 6, 1972, Fran devoted a paragraph to a "big day in the history of Nigeria." This event called for the mandatory involvement of every citizen and resident in the country,

and *was* an unforgettable and quite amazing experience. Let me just give you her entire paragraph:

**In addition to it being Easter, we changed to right hand driving. One has to really think about where to be! The steering wheels are of course still on the right side. That means the driver is now on the edge of the road instead of towards the middle. That's confusing. Eventually all cars will have steering on the left, but that will take some time. In the meantime, there are many policeman, soldiers, and boy scouts directing the traffic and trying to keep everybody going the new way. They have built many roundabouts. So far, there have been no serious accidents here in Wukari and we have not yet heard of any anywhere in the country that is caused by this change. However, medical doctors have been alerted to be on 24-hour emergency stand by.**

**Weeks before the deadline, new road and traffic signs were installed everywhere in the country. They were all covered up. Then a national curfew was announced the night before from 6 PM till 6 AM. During this time, all the signs were uncovered and any old misleading signs were either covered or removed. By 6 AM all the traffic personnel mentioned above were in place, ready for the light Easter Sunday morning traffic. Nigeria eased its way into a new driving culture.**

**It truly was an amazingly successful exercise that would not have gone that smoothly had it taken place a decade later. Nigeria was still fairly orderly and stable at the time. The exercise was part of a general decimalization or metrification of the country that involved change-over from miles to kilometers, from inches to centimeters, from "lb pounds" to kilogrammes and from the British pound to the decimal-based Nigerian Naira. Before these changes, Nigeria was a British measurement island in the midst of a metric West Africa. This step made it easier to effect the integration of West Africa into ECOWAS, the West African common market.**

### *Relations with Other Missionaries*

**You have already read a lot about how missionaries host each other, feed each other and work on a lot of committees together. That was a major way in which we related to other missionaries. It usually was sweet fellowship, even though we may have had serious differences of opinion.**

**There were very few missionaries with whom relations were difficult for us, and then the fault would sometimes at least partially be due to my bluntness and strong opinion. At other times it might be due to their failure to think through their underlying subconscious and compromised worldview, a situation all too common among missionaries, but for which there is no excuse, since it is of such crucial importance in missionary work. The difference between me and some of them was not that mine was perfect, but that I was aware of the issue and seriously working all the time on this crucial missionary issue.**

Missionaries were entitled to a total of four weeks annual holidays while on the “field.” We would often spend the major part of these breaks in Jos, because of its cooler climate. It just felt such a relief to relax in the coolness of the Plateau. We also enjoyed staying at various mission guest houses in Jos, because we would meet missionaries from other missions there. This gave us a chance to compare notes, especially about the common problems we all faced and the excitement of common challenges. We also enjoyed staying at our own CRC compound, called Mountain View, where we would meet our own colleagues whom we seldom saw. With them we could profitably discuss in-house issues and challenges that were just as interesting. From Kevin’s point of view, Mountain View was a great place, for there was much more space for him and we ate in our own units, a little more private and thus shielded from the embarrassment of “uncouth” behaviour.

The last few days of one of these vacations was spent with new friends at Obudu Ranch, a resort about 300 km south of Jos in Ibo country, at about 1800 meters elevation. These new friends were Lou and Jan Haveman, the CRWRC agricultural couple based in Baissa at the time. Obudu offered all kinds of recreational facilities—horseback riding, tennis court, swimming grotto with ice-cold water, miniature and real golf, hiking trails and indoor games. First time in my life for me to even touch a golf club and, until now at least, the last time. Fran grew eloquent in a letter describing all the delights of this place, including the food and the way it was served. The place “made us feel like kings and queens,” she commented. “How blessed we are that we have the means for such vacations.”

The Havemans have remained good friends of ours ever since. When we moved back to Baissa and they to Mararraba not far away, we would occasionally together butcher a pig, a development that will in due time receive the attention it deserves. Still later, when Lou became a realtor in Michigan, we owned some investment properties together. You will hear more about our real estate adventures later. Even today, 2013, whenever we both find ourselves in Grand Rapids, which happens once every eighteen months or so, we always make sure we meet to chew the cud. Lou always listens with sympathy and understanding to my complaints about the lack of vision in our Mission. He always laughs and often comments that I am forever ahead of the times. That may be so, but that is due not to any genius or “gift of prophecy” on my part so much as to the insights I derive from a revolutionary Kuyperian perspective that, in the hands of Kuyper himself at least, was indeed prophetic. I should have more friends like Lou. This was by no means the only time someone considered me ahead of the times.

## **Amsterdam - Family and Social Life**

**(1972-1974)**

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 17, Volume 2)

### *Absentee Landlords*

From Chapter 17, you may remember that the time covered by these two chapters began with a visit to my family in BC. The big thing for us in BC was that we began our adventures in real estate. Father Wiebe had over the years dabbled in a few real estate deals, something that began to appeal to me. When we visited sister Bo and her then husband Ernie, the latter encouraged us to invest in a rental in the Abbotsford area, since property there was relatively low priced. Together we began the hunt and we bought a small, old house just outside the Abbotsford downtown between the road to Mission and a railroad. We left the province as landlords, proud as peacocks!

There was a very particular reason we decided to go into real estate instead of investing in some other business. Our very first investment effort ever was in a mutual fund that included Shell. I told you that story in Chapter 27. That experience taught me that you cannot exercise your Christian responsibility in the average mutual fund; in fact, you hardly know where your money is invested, where it is used and whether it is a blessing or a curse to the people among whom it is working. So we decided that real estate was a better way to go, for we could keep control and practice responsibility, at least if it involves property owned by yourself alone. This thread of our lives will continue to wind itself through the rest of our lives. Watch for it in coming chapters.

### *Family and Social Life*

During her time in Grand Rapids while I was already in Amsterdam, Fran spent a lot of time with her parents and siblings. She also spent a couple of weeks with sister Trena in Cincinnati. But her big project, even in the course of her visits, was to retype the manuscripts of my three Hausa-language commentaries. These had been mucked up by staff of the Literature Dept of the Mission in Nigeria and needed a lot of “uncorrections.”

I had arranged with my Oom (Uncle) Harm to pick me up at Schiphol and take me to his house in Wassenaar, near The Hague, for an overnight. Oom Harm was my father’s oldest brother, the only sibling who had gone beyond elementary school. He was a teacher and had spent many years in Indonesia, where his family grew up. They all went through the Japanese concentration camp system. After their return to The Netherlands, several of his children soon decided to leave again and ended up in various countries, including South Africa and Canada. I have inherited my middle name from Oom Harm.



Our family was now in three countries, with Lydia in Wukari, Fran and Kevin in Grand Rapids and I in Amsterdam. Soon Fran and Kevin would join me, but what would they do here? What preparation should I make for them to be happy here? I soon noticed that my immediate neighbours were very unfriendly. We passed each other regularly in the stairwell, but even just a curt greeting was too much for most of them. There were two exceptions to that rule and they happened to be Christians, members of the same church I attended three blocks down the street. How could I break through this wall of silence? Well, I often work early in the morning even today, like three or four o'clock. Those days it was on a noisy typewriter. So, one day I knocked on the doors of my immediate neighbours to ask them if my typing early in the morning bothered them. My hope was that this would afford us an occasion to meet and break the ice. No way! Their answers all were pretty much the same. *“Nee, meneer. Helemaal geen last van.”* And the door would be slammed shut! *“Not at all, sir. Doesn't bother us a bit.”* Experiment failed.

Okay, now what? A new plan emerged. I distributed a photocopied invitation to everyone in our entire block to participate in a Bible study in our apartment. This could turn into a sociable event, I hoped. No response, not even one, not even from the Christians in our stair well.

Then, after consulting Pastor Van Geest, the members of the church were invited to our apartment for the same reason. This time it succeeded. Our two Christian neighbours responded as well as Nannie, the pastor's wife, and two other couples. This became a well-defined group and turned into friendships for us and generated considerable social life. Here I was with my neglected Dutch, leading a group of highly educated Dutchmen in a Bible study, but it worked. We had good discussions, sang songs and prayed together. But I did all the leading and praying. When I suggested others should also pray, they told me in no uncertain terms that if I forced that on them, the group would dissolve! Dutch Christians, at least at that time, did not feel free enough to engage in spontaneous prayer, not even among friends. But I understood, since I had spent my childhood in that culture and remembered. That hesitancy had carried over into CRC culture in Canada as well.

We began to visit each other. We sometimes babysat for one couple, the Zijps. They lent me a bike for the duration of our stay so that I could bike to the VU, all the way across the city. Well, that's the Dutch way to go, even if there is a car. He obtained his doctorate in either physics or chemistry, but could not immediately find employment. So he was “entitled” to “unemployment insurance” to which he had never contributed a cent. His entitlement was not merely a basic living allowance, but the equivalent of the salary he would earn if employed as a scientist with a PhD! If you ever wonder why the EU is having financial troubles, here's one of the reasons. Zijp eventually found a position in Indonesia and spent some professional years there.

Afterwards we lost contact with most of them. One exception was Pastor Dick and Nannie Van Geest, whose children became friends to Kevin. Years later, we arranged for them to visit us in Nigeria. However, Dick became ill and died on the day they were scheduled to land in Kano. We remain in occasional touch with Nannie even today and have visited her a few times since.

Another couple with whom we have kept fairly close contact till today are Ellie and Frans Linger, who now live in Purmerend, north of Amsterdam. They were both teachers, of charismatic frame of spirit. He was/is a musician, while she became a poet and writer. We shared reading the Christian daily called *Trouw*, established by the *Gereformeerde* or Kuyperian underground during World War II and still going strong even today in 2013. After we left, the Lingers saved page two, the one about religion, and would forward them in quarterly packages to us for years. Such faithful friends! I always enjoyed reading those pages. Later, we have visited and spent the night with them a couple of times during our subsequent visits to The Netherlands. Around 2008, they were going to visit someone in Boston and thought they could just drop by and see us as well. We had made tentative arrangements for the visit, only for them to discover that it's not only "a long long way to Tipperary"—and cancelled our visit. We regretted that cancellation deeply, but understood. It is almost impossible for a Dutchman to comprehend the vast expanse of North America. They sometimes joke that they are the country with the largest *buitenland* (exterior, land beyond their borders)!

For the time we lived in Amsterdam, this group became our community. Christians offered the friendship that others indifferently withheld. That Bible study initiative was the smartest thing I ever cooked up. You will see references to its members throughout the rest of our Amsterdam story and beyond.

Of course, we had our own internal family life as well. Both of us liked to play games, but did not always like the same ones. I tried to teach Fran chess several times, but she saw "absolutely no point to the game." Both of us liked card games, but we did not know the rules very well and so made up our own as we went. Fran preferred word games, but I did not like them. According to Fran, I "hated them," probably because she always beat me.

Actually we had a very active social life, what with Dutch friends and relatives as well as North American friends coming through Amsterdam. When I arrived, my mother was visiting her ailing dad. Shortly after Mother Ellie returned to Canada, Tante Dienie, called to invite us to spend Christmas 1972 with them in Lutjegast, my birth place. We were thrilled with that invitation and planned to spend three days with them. Several friends from Alberni days dropped by. Some Dutch cousins visited us as well as my childhood friend, Henk Rozema. We were invited to the home of Oom Job and Tante Suzi. They lived in the very folksy Amsterdam neighbourhood of the Jordaan. He was my Mother's brother who had completely "Amsterdamized" in language and culture, a totally different person from our northern relatives. So we found socializing with them very interesting.

Sometimes we could get overwhelmed a bit. We learnt that sister Bo and her son David were coming for a visit. That sounded great to us. At the same time a Nigerian family with three kids was coming through as well, and stayed for two days. We borrowed sleeping stuff like mattress, blankets, etc. from those same Dutch friends. We arranged for Fran and me to sleep in Lingers' apartment two floors down, since they would be gone for three weeks and had already given us their keys. I also started studying there to escape all the household commotion.

One evening, when I was working in the VU library, someone called Fran and introduced himself with a strange English accent as “Jan Boer!” Go tell that to the Marines! Another Jan Boer? Fran did not believe him at first, but he turned out to be my cousin and son of Oom Berend in Australia, my Father’s brother. Cousin Jan and a friend were traveling the world. They stayed at our house for a few days and moved on. This was Jan Boer IV I had ever met, though there are several more, in fact, many more if you count variations like “John,” Johan(nes)” or “Jehan.” I once introduced myself in a Vancouver meeting where we had to explain our names as “Jan Boer LIV” or “Jan Boer the 54<sup>th</sup>!”

One aspect of social life that we had been missing through all our missionary and furlough years was correspondence with my siblings. Fran especially kept encouraging them to write us, particularly Dick, but little came of it. Important events like weddings would pass us by without anyone notifying us. They were all friendly and hospitable when we visited, but write us letters? Not on your life! Of course, there were occasional exceptions.

Remember my childhood trick about writing the newspaper that my Mother had a new baby? Well, I did something similar with Bo and Ernie. I wrote them that we had sold our Abbotsford house for a high price at 100% profit. That goaded them into action alright. I now believe Ernie was hoping for a cut, but that did not occur to me at the time. They actually wrote us a letter. My devious little trick worked! I confessed my “white lie” to them and admitted it was kind of a corny joke, “*flauw*” as the Dutch put it.

My complaint was about *my* siblings; Fran’s siblings were quite faithful with writing. In addition, we could not really complain about lack of correspondence *in general*, for Fran wrote in July, 1973, that on one day we received letters from Canada, US, Australia, Africa, England and The Netherlands! That was quite a haul. You see, we were part of an international community.

The stories about Kevin both in this and the previous chapter are a lot about his language development, but Fran underwent her own language turmoil. Though she had hardly ever in her entire life spoken Dutch—Frisian, yes, fluently--, the Dutch complimented her frequently for the way she handled the language. Yep, that’s my mermaid! By February, Fran was volunteering in Kevin’s class. She wrote that her “Dutch may not be all that great, but the kids seem to understand me. But I’m always happier when I can speak Frisian or English.”

Her chance to speak a whole lot of Frisian came when her Mother and sister Jane came for a visit in May, 1973. Frisian by the basket full! Day in, day out. I drove Fran and them to Friesland to spend time with relatives. They would return by train. We also did some sightseeing in the west of the country, like at the Keukenhof, the famous tulip gardens, and Artis, the Amsterdam zoo. Some relatives came from Friesland to visit her at our place. She also discovered she had a relative in Amsterdam, namely her Frisian cousin Delia, who came for a visit one day together with her mother, Muoike Jaantje. After Cynthia’s arrival, Muoike Detje and Omke Siebren also came in from Friesland to visit us for a day.

Being seniors, they were entitled to a free train ticket to anywhere in the country, four times a year.

The flow of sociability and visitors continued unabated after baby Cynthia had arrived. Gerben Groenewoud was a VU student whom we knew from our Edson summer back in 1964. His parents visited us. Mae Mast, a nurse at Takum Christian Hospital, and Evy Vredevoogd the director of CRCN's KYK youth work, came through in transit to Nigeria and stayed for a few days. Fran's cousins, Bram & Alice Prins and large family, came for a day on their way to visit their family in Friesland.

Then Kefa Sempangi and his family needed a place for a few days. He was an Ugandan artist and political refugee from Idi Amin. They had a girl of two in whom Kevin was very interested, but she wasn't in him. Well, you may as well get used to such disappointments early in life. A few days later he had better luck. Nienke Wolters-Van Dyke with two girls came for a day. Kevin was delighted and had a great day with the girls.

*An aside 1:* A little extra info about the last two guests may be of interest. Nienke was the daughter of philosopher-barber Siert Wolters from Victoria, BC, a friend of Opa Wiebe Boer. He ran a weekly column in *Calvinist Contact*, now known as *Christian Courier*, in which I also occasionally write. Wolters had his barber shop in the prestigious Empress Hotel in Victoria, across the street from the BC Parliament Buildings. He had many of the leading politicians among his clients, including the occasional Premier. He was also the barber who told me I could never have a perm. My hair simply would not allow it. A few years later, I tried and succeeded. I walked around with a perm for some five years or more. Yes, Fran always was a good sport.

*An aside 2:* Kefa Sepangi was also a pastor and much under the influence of the famous Kuyperian Dutch art philosopher Professor Hans Rookmaker, a collaborator of Francis Schaeffer and his L'Abri, a popular Christian philosophy outreach to students. Kefa later founded an AIDS orphanage in his country and invited me to come and see and do some teaching in the country. However, a coup was brewing in Nigeria and I did not want to leave Fran and the children by themselves and regrettably cancelled the arrangement. Another reason for the cancellation was that on the Ugandan side, organizers kept postponing the event. Sepangi appears on several websites and, until recently, was a Member of the Ugandan Parliament. He has now left politics in favour of evangelism.

During this period, Fran was very productive in needlework projects. In September she wrote to sister Jane that she was "starting on building no. 6 on the *schellekoord*. We might have to extend our stay here so that I can finish it, have it washed and stretched before returning to Nigeria!" This was a *schellekoord* of Friesland's eleven cities. She explained to my parents that I had chosen this particular one but that they should not fear that John was becoming a Frisian. On December 27, Fran announced the completion of this project. Phew, we didn't have to extend our stay! Ever since, it has occupied pride of place in the living room of every house we lived in.

Shortly after Cynthia's birth, the time had come to put our Opel on the boat for Nigeria. We were still driving with a German plate but would have to import it into The Netherlands and pay a hefty customs bill if we held on to it longer than one year. We decided to forward it and get a used vehicle for the time left in Amsterdam. We bought a Citroen, a "lelijke eend," as the Dutch called it, "an ugly duck." It was a tiny car and cost us fl 250. Since the insurance cost more, I told people we bought insurance and got a car to go with it. It had only 110,000 km on it, but it seemed like an old rattletrap.

We hoped it would last us for the required months. It did not. It stopped on us several times. Twice the brakes failed. So we gave it away to a student acquaintance, Allen Manekofski, who, like any true American, was somewhat mechanically savvy and thought he could nurse it along. Alas, that was not quite the case. Allen later told me he would never accept a gift from a missionary again!

Allen was an American Jewish Christian convert from New York who had come to study Christian philosophy at the VU to get a handle on his new faith. We became friends and socialized, but I had a hard time figuring him out and sometimes thought there was something artificial about him, until I began to realize that his Jewish background gave a unique colouration to his Christian faith. Then I started developing more genuine interest in him and we would have many discussions of theological and philosophical nature. We shared an interest in the Kuyper tradition and the philosophical school that emerged from it. He felt attracted to that school of thought precisely for its wholism, the same reason it attracted me.

Again, after we were without a car, the Van Geests offered us the use of their car when we would need it. You see the benefit of Christian fellowship that provided us with so much support throughout our stay in Amsterdam. Actually, the public transit system was so well developed in our part of the country that we could get around fairly easily. Commuting to the VU was usually by bicycle. Of course, once we had two children in tow, things became a little more complicated.

### *Lydia*

During our Amsterdam time she stayed with some Jukun friends in Wukari. We had asked them to treat her in the normal Jukun way and help her stay close to the culture. They accepted this responsibility with a vengeance so that it became oppressive for her. During the school break she ran away and somehow made it to Nyankwala, where her parents lived!

For a long time we had heard nothing from or about Lydia, but in June 1973, we received a letter from her. She was doing well and, judging from the letter, her English had improved considerably. She had taken the entrance exam for WCSS, but had not yet received the result. We were so happy with this "*levens teken*," "sign of life" from her. A month or so

later, we received news that she had passed both entrance exam and the interview. In fact, she was already in school. We felt greatly relieved to have that issue settled.

Once Lydia started secondary school, she began to write more often. Iliya, her father, even wrote us once. Since that school was about 80 kilometers from Wukari, even after we returned there, we would only be seeing her occasionally. Commented Fran, “We certainly are sorry that she won’t be staying with us full time anymore .... Last week she turned thirteen already.”

### *Kevin*

When I left Grand Rapids for Amsterdam in September 1972, Kevin was fine with it for that particular day. In fact, according to Fran, he was happy to see me go for he thought that now

*he* would be the daddy and drive the car. But when he woke up the next morning and found that Daddy was still gone, he was upset and said “Daddy didn’t come yet.” He’s used to having John go away from home, but this is the first time he left by plane. That was a bit different.

Question to Fran: Was he not used to seeing me fly away in the Mission plane? Answer from Fran: Yes, but not in such a huge plane and leaving with people he did not recognize!

Daddy did not come back even the next day, but some weeks later Kevin and his mother would meet up with him in Botterstraat of Amsterdam Noord. Daddy was still the old Daddy and Kevin, the old Kevin. Fran was once again writing a letter and, as in former days, Kevin once again wanted to take over the typewriter. Fran wrote,

Now Kevin wants to “say” a few words too: “666666666jjjj06666.” Actually, his 6’s, j’s and 0’s occupied a full three lines in the letter. He was really garrulous! He says he wrote that he has a “backwards Honda,” meaning that he turns the handlebars on his tricycle around and rides that way!

Soon after Fran and Kevin joined me in Amsterdam, we put Kevin in the neighbourhood *peuter* school (pre-school) and the next year in the *kleuter* school (kindergarten). This gave him a break from our confined apartment but would also help him learn Dutch as well as make friends.

In our 1972 Christmas circular, I wrote:

It is quite amazing that less than a year ago Kevin spoke Hausa more fluently than English, but now he understands only English and wonders what we’re about when we speak Hausa to him. “That’s a funny language,” he would reply.

Even though he appears to have forgotten his Hausa, he has not forgotten his Nigerian friends. In fact, last night he fell asleep crying for these friends. Sometimes we wonder whether we're not cruel to him by dragging him everywhere. In the meantime, he attends nursery school semi-weekly and appears to like it, even though that is again in a different language.

I predicted that he would nurse a life-long grudge against the people of Babel in Genesis 11! Actually, Kevin developed a positive attitude towards language learning and even learned Setswana very well, the language of Botswana, during his Peace Corps years.

In February, 1973, Kevin still did not speak much Dutch, but he seemed to understand quite well by that time. He still loved his nursery school twice a week. He played much with local kids, both in and out of school, in the playground, in our own apartment and even in theirs. Our neighbours directly below us were among those who had slammed the door in my face, but once their children and Kevin started playing together, the ice between us melted and we became fairly friendly with each other. At least, now we were on a greeting basis.

Once the language hesitation disappeared, it was amazing how quickly Dutch came to Kevin—another language experience for the young boy as if the Nigerian situation was not enough! Fran would read him a Bible story every day in English and would talk about it with him. After some months of that, he began to cry without any provocation that we recognized. The reason? He wanted Fran to read and talk in Dutch! Amazing. His memory of Hausa was totally fading. His English had been “de-Africanized” or “normalized” in Grand Rapids, and now he was adding this new element. Children and language!

But then things began to change rapidly for him. While both his Dutch and English were now fluent and flourishing, by early June, 1973, his Hausa had become nil, zero! “Except for a word or two, he understands nothing of it,” I wrote and added sadly, “He no longer even talks about his Nigerian friends.”

The entire neighbourhood seemed to know him after a while and referred to him as “that English boy.” One day he was supposed to be in the playground, but Fran did not see him. She went outside looking for him. When people noticed her searching, several came out and told her that he had gone to a friend's house. They were looking out for him! He, wrote Fran, “wasn't scared of anybody or anything.”

He made a name for himself one Sunday in church. Pastor Dick was preaching from the Old Testament and referred to the wars Israel had been waging against a number of neighbouring nations he listed. But his list was not complete. Kevin noticed that one was missing in the lineup and he suddenly piped up loud and clear in Dutch, “Egypte ook!”—“Egypt also!” Getting a Dutch congregation in stitches is no small feat, but Kevin managed it with his correction. Pastor Dick assured Kevin he was right, but that at this particular time, according to the text, those two were not fighting. During 1973, there was a lot of turmoil between Israel and Egypt that Kevin followed with great interest. “That's

what my Bible stories are all about too,” he explained. That afternoon “he had his play soldiers (thanks to his cousin Danny Lieuwen) all lined up for action against the Fisher Price people (thanks to his cousin Melanie Lieuwen).”

Though I was busy in the daytime with my studies, I made sure I slotted in evening time for Kevin. We would visit the ducks and feed them, something we all enjoyed tremendously. Not sure the ducks started to recognize us after a while. We bought him a tricycle and taught him to ride it. Once he caught on, he and I would take short evening rides around the block. I slowly weaned him from the training wheel. When the weather was bad, we would play on the bench by the front window with his little cars. His favourite game was “*botsing maken*,” making the cars bump into each other.



**The Global Kid  
Kevin Participating in a National Holiday\***

Father’s Day 1973 was not my first celebration, but it was the first time I got my first authentic Father’s Day present from Kevin. He had made an ashtray from clay at school. I found it very precious simply because it was the first ever. Can you imagine that?-- a preacher treasuring something as worldly as an ashtray! Of course, smoking was the expected thing to do in those days. It was still a time when “*Het is geen man die niet roken kan*,” “He is not a man, who not smoking can”—there, I even made it rhyme; just pardon the English!

Remember Kevin’s misbehaviour in that British mission guest house in Jos? Well, during our second research trip to the UK, we again stayed in a mission guesthouse, but, wrote Fran, he is behaving well in the dining room. He had a Finnish adult lady friend there, a first-year college student who wanted to learn English from Kevin and found him easy to understand. So, progress in all directions! Anytime Kevin saw her, he would be all



excited. He even found her room and visited her. Fran commented that it was a good thing that he made friends so easily, especially if people respond to him. He had come a long way from a Hausa-speaking “bush boy” to a teacher of English in its very world centre, London!

As delivery time came closer, Kevin became increasingly excited and full of expectations. He would like a brother and two sisters and, wrote Fran, “wouldn’t mind having them all at once!” He no longer enjoyed being alone and so Fran would invite other children over to play with him. He would also visit with other children, most often with Erik and Renie Van Geest. Especially at meal times, “Kevin figures the more the merrier. I don’t blame him any, for both of us grew up in big families and that is always *gezellig*” or cozy. In December, 1975, while in Baissa, we received a letter from Nannie in which she wrote that Renie wanted to know where she and Kevin would live after they married, in Nigeria or The Netherlands? Apparently, for her it was an extended romance! Unfortunately, by then Kevin had moved on and had forgotten most of his Amsterdam experiences and people, particularly the language.

When his new sister, Cynthia, was born, but had to stay in the hospital, Kevin was “thoroughly disappointed” at not being allowed even to see her in the hospital. He seemed to feel kind of deceived, wrote Fran. “All this talk of a baby coming and then Mommy’s tummy gone but still no baby! We let him stay at the Van Geests for almost a week to get his mind off the subject and help him relax.”

Some weeks after Cynthia’s birth, Fran wrote,

Kevin is learning so many poems and songs at school and he is sending them to the grandparents. He really enjoys school and doesn’t like Wednesday afternoons, because then there is no school and he stays home. He makes lots of cute things at school too. He will really miss all that activity when we go back to Nigeria.

By now Dutch had become native to him and nothing further is said about language development until we return to Nigeria.

Toward the end of September Kevin was very excited because his class was going on a “*school reisje*,” a school trip, to the Artis Zoo in the city. They would take the bus, an exciting part of the adventure. A couple of days before the event, he said, “*Nog twee nachtjes slapen!*”—“Only two more nights...!”

Late October featured very nice weather so that many neighbourhood children were playing in their playground: “loads of kids playing and riding bikes, etc. Kevin had a few sticks out and a box and was drumming and singing—“*voor de koning*,” he explained—“for the king.” Fran wrote,

He is now starting to take the initiative and others follow him. Previously, he’d watch the kids from the window and if he saw someone doing something interesting, he wanted to try it too. He really is pretty good at making up his own games and

playing alone. *Kleuter* school makes them much more group conscious and he wants to do *spelletjes* (games) with others more than by himself. He is getting more friends in the neighbourhood now. He still bites nails a bit, but says it's to save me the time of cutting them! John says to leave him (John) alone with his nails; he could do worse things like hitting his wife when he's frustrated! Men have their own strange type of reasoning.

By November, Kevin "wrote" in a pretend letter to Auntie Jane—I have a strong suspicion as to the real author of that letter--, "I don't remember any English." Yes, you read that right! He also explained that we called Cynthia "Cindy," "because it is too hard for the Dutch to say 'Cynthia'." But "Daddy calls her '*wichtje*,' Lutjegasters for 'little girl,' while Mommy calls her '*famke*,' Frisian for the same." Now, of course, you may be wondering how one can write English when he has just told you he has forgotten the language! Strange things happen in this land!

He fully entered into the world of Sinterklaas 1973. We arranged for an appointment for Kevin to meet the old man in a nearby shopping mall. In spite of his earlier brave language, as the time came closer, he became "quite afraid and in awe of the old man. Also had his picture taken with him. A friend offered to play Zwarte Piet and bring Kevin a sack full of gifts." The Zwarte Piet of the past had morphed into a more kind personality and had even diversified, but we won't go into those details now.

During our last month in Amsterdam, January, 1974, Fran wrote:

Kevin continues to amaze us with his wise statements which are all stored in his "*bolletje*." Last week he leaned against my stomach and was all excited and said, "*Mama, daar zit weer een baby in je buik en deze keer wordt het een broertje!*" "Mommie, there's another baby in your belly and this time it will be a little brother!" He asked us if it was true and I said "Yes." Then he said he knew it would happen, because "*toen ik nog in je buik was, heeft de Here God het mij verteld dat je krijgt nog zo veel babies, je kan nooit weer stoppen!*" "When I was inside you, God told me that you would have so many babies that you can never put a stop to it." Later, though, he seemed to doubt the truth of his discovery. Yesterday he told me very wisely that my belly was big because Cynthia had just been in there and then it takes a while before that goes away again. Isn't he the limit?

The above story is meant to alert you about yet another totally surprising pregnancy, Fran's third. Hold your horses; you will soon hear all about it.

### *Second Pregnancy*

On December 29, 1972, Fran wrote a quick note to the parents with an announcement of far-flung implications for our family. We had found a real but unofficial family doctor in our church who lived in a houseboat not far from us. We knew him from church. He had just confirmed that Fran was pregnant again! She could expect to deliver the new baby

around mid-August, 1973. She closed her note with “Praise the Lord.” She continued going to him in his houseboat, not his office, for he did not want us to waste money by coming to his office. Kevin was not really surprised when he heard about the coming baby. He had been talking about wanting one and praying for it for a long time already. He assumed it would happen sooner or later. Nevertheless, he was glad about it.

Now that she was pregnant, a group called “Moeders voor Moeders Actie” got in touch with Fran to get her to donate her urine for research purposes. Apparently the urine of pregnant women contains a hormone used in fertility drugs. Three times a week they would come by to collect her urine stored in big jugs. She felt it kind of a nuisance, but when she remembered the purpose she would feel more positive about it. They were paying her fl 2.50 a week and at the end would leave some baby soap and a toy.

Half a year after the announcement, Fran explained the routine the maternity folks had outlined for her. She would have the baby at the *Polikliniek* of the VU’s *Academisch Ziekenhuis* (Hospital). Provided all would go well, she would return home that same day by ambulance. A doctor would drop by daily and a nurse twice a day to check things out and help with bathing both her and the baby. Fran added that we preferred a hospital delivery, but found this an acceptable compromise. I had promised to stay home for the first week to be around, cook and whatever else might be needed. Kevin would be at his *Kleuter* school during the day but would stay at the home of Pastor Dick and Nannie for a few days. As to having a baby born at the VU, the university founded by Abraham Kuyper, my hero, I joked that if this baby did not grow up a full-fledged Kuyperian, it would not be for lack of trying on our part! We tried our best. Cynthia, do you hear?

While we were in the UK for research, Fran wrote,

I get quite a few stares on the street these days, with Kevin holding my hand and my tummy protruding. They probably think, “Poor thing.” Monday I asked for directions to our guest house which, I knew, could be no more than three blocks away. Someone advised me to take the bus.

### *Introducing Cynthia Jenelle*

Cynthia made her debut at 2:30 AM on Sunday, August 12, 1973, at the VU hospital as planned. On the same day I wrote,

The whole thing went so quickly and so perfectly that the medical team were greatly surprised. “*Ontstellend vlug*,” was their reaction, or “amazingly fast.” I was told to take Fran for a walk in the hallway and return every fifteen minutes for a check up. The moment Fran stood up, the water broke there and then. No more walks! She promptly had the baby.

We had been told we would take Fran and Cynthia home around 3 pm that very day. However, complications set in. Cynthia had trouble breathing from having “stuff” in her

lungs that had to be siphoned out. Fran later wrote, “After one of the most enjoyable and easy pregnancies and deliveries in medical history, you can well imagine my sudden shock that Cynthia needed to go in intensive care.” She was put in an incubator, but we were told there was no danger. I was glad sister Bo and David were around to help us through all of this, while Kevin was at the Van Geests as planned.

A bit of humour was part of the picture. During the last phase of labour, Fran was told to “*zuchten*.” She thought it meant to “breathe in,” but I explained that they wanted her to hold her breath. Actually, they wanted her to pant, but they could not think of the English term for it. All of us, except Fran, could see the humour in it.

Just as in the case of Kevin, “Cynthia” was simply a name we picked out of the air. We thought it sounded nice and planned to call her “Cindy,” something she in due time rejected vehemently and insisted on “Cynthia.” Jenelle was a combination of “Jennie,” Fran’s mother, and “Ellie,” my mother. And again as in the case of Kevin, Cynthia also was a triple citizen of The Netherlands, Canada and the USA. Fran and I reported her to US and Canada respectively as a citizen born abroad. Even now in 2014, I find “Cynthia” a nice name, but do regret that we did not follow tradition more closely by giving her names that reflected the names of her two grandmothers more clearly. The two grandmothers, likewise, were somewhat disappointed; neither one acknowledged the conflation “Jenelle” as an acceptable substitute.

Fran came home the next day, but Cynthia had to stay, though no longer in the incubator. Further testing had shown that she had swallowed womb water into her lungs and that there was some infection in the blood. When I visited her, she looked bluish and breathed irregularly. She stayed in the hospital for ten days, a surprisingly long time. The main nurse in the delivery room was a Ridderbos, daughter to the famous theologian.

Fran wrote a letter on August 18 to Mothers Jennie and Ellie in which she traced the entire birth process intimately, blow by blow, including timing, as only mothers will appreciate. She let both of them know that “they still believe only in natural childbirth, just like when you had your babies!”

Fran wrote another blow-by-blow letter about Cynthia’s struggle and slow recovery. She also described Cynthia’s appearance in detail. I went to see her every day and Fran started coming along after four days or so. Again our local Christian friends came through with various kinds of help. They brought baby clothes and lent us a crib and a baby buggy. They were simply marvelous in their generous support. Couldn’t ask for more.

In some parts of the world having a baby can cost you an arm and a leg. Not so in The Netherlands. The bill for Cynthia was fl 2050. The insurance paid it 100% within a week! There were some other expenses we had to pay—a mere fl 223.

Sister Bo went away for a few days but came back during the week and stayed for a couple more days. Fran’s cousin Anneke called and asked to come for a few days as well. So, lots of relatives around to help out with all the chores. I was happy, for this allowed me more time for research and writing. After all, I did have the pressure of deadlines. Kevin was

happy, simply because he loves having people around. Above all, Fran was happy with all this help and support during these critical days. Fran described the month of August as a “commune” that everyone enjoyed, including herself.

Before long, she was back to typing research papers for me. She wrote on September 3, “I started typing the final draft of a paper for John. It will be some 50 pages long.” Ten days later she had cut 43 stencils and commented, “I really don’t feel like typing anymore....” Tough. She still had 15 pages of bibliography and appendices to go! And this, she wrote, was only a minor paper. “The big one is still coming!” I was soon to take the oral exam on those 30 books.

By September 14, both Fran and Cynthia had recovered “very well.” At the clinic they suggested that Cynthia was growing too fast and should slow down a bit. I wrote,

Last night she let us sleep straight through. Ever since she has been home, we have never fed her at night. We only change her diaper. This is in sharp contrast to Kevin whom we used to feed at night and had to keep it up for more than a year. Two years, I often say, but Fran says it was only a year. How could she know better than I do, for I was the one to get up and it surely seemed like two years to me!

Subsequent letters remind us that Cynthia was indeed an easy baby. She tended to sleep through the night, possibly with the need to be turned over and be laid on her tummy and then she would sleep till 7 AM sometimes. But she could have her angry moments. At only three weeks, she could already work her way from one end of the crib to the other. She did this for several days during a heat spell. “She seemed angry about something,” Fran commented. She had not been doing it since, simply because she was wrapped in a blanket in the colder weather. Fran reported further progress:

She is awake so much of the day already. Often she is lying in her crib with her eyes open and she also sits in her two chairs already quite a bit of the day. As long as she sleeps such long nights, it’s alright with me! She eats well and drinks greedily! She drinks so fast, she chokes on it sometimes, gets all red around the eyes, coughs or sneezes a bit, and then she starts drinking furiously all over again!

The months of August and September had been chaotic and wild for both of us, what with Cynthia’s birth and the numerous visitors, both day and overnight, both individuals and families. Nevertheless, Fran wrote that she thought that August had been rougher on me than on her, even though she was the one who had the baby! In September, she was “the loser,” as she put it, but once into October both had recovered and were ready to go at it again. In the meantime, I had fallen behind on my study schedule.

By end October, Fran guesstimated Cynthia’s weight at ten and a half pounds.

She (still) really eats and drinks well. Her sleeping is unpredictable. Yesterday she woke up at 5:30 and this morning at 4:45 AM. Previously she had been sleeping till

six or even seven. She doesn't seem terribly hungry. I don't think that's why she wakes up early. Just bored with her bed maybe?

In November, doctors thought to detect something wrong with Cynthia's hips. In Fran's words, "her two sides didn't quite look even and she seemed extra loose in the hip 'hinges'." "One leg is a half centimeter longer than the other. This could be caused by 'immature' muscles, which would probably be naturally outgrown." They planned to take x-rays and wondered if it could be something inherited.

This made us ask Father Wiebe about two of his sisters who were crippled. If a defect showed up on the x-rays and it were taken care of immediately, it would not be serious, we were assured. However, if it were left for later, it could cause problems. We were happy to receive the news that it was all a false alarm and that Cynthia was fine. However, her one leg *is* indeed shorter by half a centimeter than the other, but she is expected to outgrow it over time. The doctor gave us a copy of her medical records to take with us to Nigeria just in case they would be needed. Eventually we handed them over to Cynthia.

During January 1974, our last month in Amsterdam, Fran wrote,

Cynthia rolls over now! From tummy to back, that is; from back she rolls to side, but not yet over that 'bump' with arm in the way. Cute to watch her try. She has been very easy to care for lately. Eats, drinks and sleeps well and smiles at us at the appropriate time. A real joy to all of us.

Around this time, OPEC had imposed an oil embargo on The Netherlands. It was an interesting time to see the entire country scrambling and finding ways to economize oil usage. For some weeks the citizens of Amsterdam—and probably other cities as well—were not allowed to drive their cars in the city on Sundays. Those special days were called "*autoloze zondag*" or "car-free Sunday." People enjoyed their empty streets that now only had buses and trams. Many came out with their bicycles, including us. Remembering how my Dad used to convey us as kids on his bike years ago? I biked into the city centre, one hand on the handlebar and pulling Cynthia's stroller next to me with the other hand. Alas, the newer generation had forgotten these traditional biking skills and were aghast at my exposing our baby to such great "danger." Several people scolded me for such recklessness; a few yelled, "Idiot!" Our reaction was, "Where's the danger? No cars!" And, "Go talk to your Opa!" We enjoyed the scene and felt perfectly justified.

### *Sibling Interaction*

A few weeks after her birth, Kevin asked "whether it wasn't about time to begin praying for another baby by now. We suggested he take it easy on such prayers for the time being. That's like playing (or praying?) with fire!"

Cynthia soon sprouted hair, much sooner than Kevin, who was "totally bald until one year." She had reddish hair, something that is not surprising, given the ruddish

complexion of both Opa (Wiebe) Boer and sister Jane. The hue stayed with her so that Fran predicted in December that “certainly she won’t be as snow white as Kevin.”

Kevin liked Cynthia a lot, but he tended to get rough with her, according to Fran:

I guess they all survive big brothers and sisters, but sometimes it does scare you. He often pretends that he’s a baby again. After his bath, he wants to be wrapped in the towel and carried like Cynthia. I don’t have as much time for him as before and so I suppose that is his way of drawing attention.

Reading to him lately doesn’t work out well with the schedules. He is so sleepy already at 6 PM that he often falls asleep at the supper table, while mornings before school are too busy and at noon Cynthia is always up.

In response to Mother Jennie’s questions, Fran wrote that he seemed disappointed originally because she was so small and wanted to sleep most of the time.

But now she smiles nicely for him and that really makes him proud. This week she started smiling at hearing Kevin’s voice and so that is beginning to play as far as Kevin is concerned. He wants to carry her a little ways, but feels she is too heavy for him now. I figure it’s better to let him carry her while I’m standing right there than to tell him “no!” for then he just might sneak her right out of the crib!

### *Third Pregnancy*

We were in for a surprise. Kevin must have secretly prayed! Late November it was determined that Fran was pregnant again! Here is the announcement in her letter to my parents:

I must tell you some more surprising news! Surprise for us too! D.V. we hope to make you grandparents for the 30<sup>th</sup> time early July ’74!! After waiting so long for our first two we are very surprised to find a third so close behind! John says now he knows why all Dutch families were always so big; here you just look at each other and BANG! It did take us a few days to get used to the idea, but we really are very happy about it and do see it as another blessing from the Lord. At least these two won’t have to complain about sleeping or playing alone as Kevin sometimes did.

It did not occur to us that we of all people should begin to practice birth control after all these years. While we were discussing this question, Fran was already pregnant. When she told our surprising news to our neighbours, the Lingers, who were expecting their first child, Fran said that if you figure three children over a space of having been married for twelve years, that means good planning: a child every four years!

Our family doctor, some secular bloke—not the one that helped us with Cynthia-- assumed we wanted no part of this pregnancy. Without consulting us, he casually said, “Don’t

worry. Just come on over. We can easily take care of it"! Just like that. Life had become that cheap! He could not understand that we regarded this pregnancy as a blessing from the Lord, even though it was neither prayed for—unless it be Kevin!-- nor planned. The doctor described it as a "*blind opgezette zwangerschap*," a "blindly arranged pregnancy." So it was, but a welcome one.

### *Opa Veninga's Death*

Mother Ellie was receiving letters from her sisters in The Netherlands that her Dad, my Opa, was failing. He was almost 90 years of age. She decided to come and visit him during my initial Amsterdam bachelor days. I picked her up from Schiphol and, after a day or so under my roof, I drove her in the Opel to Zuidhorn, a town in the northern province of Groningen, where Opa lived in the home of daughter Tante Riek. I left her there and returned home to continue my studies. I have no recollection of how she came back to Amsterdam, but she did and I brought her back to Schiphol. Opa had improved and was in surprisingly good shape by the time Mom flew back to BC.

About a year later, in December, 1973, Opa passed away unexpectedly. He had reached the ripe old age of 90. I remember visiting him on our travels to and from Nigeria while he was still living in the home of his daughter Riek. He would always just sit in a chair in the same corner, year after year, hardly uttering a word, but he always had been one of few words. Every day he would drink a glass of brandy, a diet that allegedly accounted for his health and longevity. He was chipper right up to the end. He was buried next to Opoe (Gronings for Grandma), as we used to call her, in the cemetery of the Hervormde Kerk in Midwolde, Groningen.

I rode with Oom Job and Tante Suzan to the funeral. He was a very flippant person, but on the way home he was rather quiet. His father's death must have set him thinking, something he tended to avoid, a lack he covered up with his typically folksy Amsterdam flippancy.

My actual memory of the funeral is that it was a somber affair with no one saying much. I was looking forward to seeing so many of the Veninga clan, most of whom I had not seen since our family emigrated to Canada in 1951. 22 years had passed. I was very disappointed. Yes, a good many Veningas attended the event. But the service in the church was a somber event and the entire congregation, mostly relatives and some friends, breathed a spirit of indifference both to their dead Opa and to each other. It was a very chilling and deeply disappointing experience. The singing was little more than mumbling; the preacher was as dull as they come.

I remember standing up during the reception on behalf of my parents to publicly thank Tante Riek and Oom Renze for taking him in and caring for him for so many years. My parents were grateful to them, but there was jealousy and suspicion among the others that they were doing this to get their hands on whatever inheritance there might be. Probably not much, if any at all.



To my great surprise, the letter I wrote on December 27, 1973 about the funeral gives the very opposite picture! I have no explanation for the contrast. I wrote,

I must admit that I almost enjoyed the funeral, for it gave me a chance to meet many relatives, especially cousins I did not know. Actually, the atmosphere was not very sad. Everyone realized that they should be grateful the way things had gone with Opa. Only one person wept and that was Aunt Willy who had not long before stood at her husband's graveside, Uncle Dick, Mother Ellie's youngest brother.

Opa's passing triggered a rather fundamentalistic discussion among some of my siblings and Mom about whether you could be saved if you were an introvert who would or could not openly talk about faith. My Mom expressed hesitation about Opa's standing before God. I counseled her that we simply must commit him to God and trust in His mercy. Doing that is no small thing. There is often faith where we do not expect it. Besides, God's mercy is always wider than we think. Hence, we should not mourn as those without hope.

I was surprised that Mom would bring up these questions, for she herself was exactly that same way. She did, would or could not talk openly about *her* faith. Perhaps in triggering this discussion she really wanted to hear us out about her own "chances." In fact, I remember "defending" her over against my sister Ellie, who was always ready to give an account of her faith, probably overly so at the frequent embarrassment of her children. Ellie tried to "scare" Mom into heaven by attempting to force her to speak out! When Mom was approaching her own end, by letter I reassured her of God's love for her, no matter one's personality, introvert or extrovert. Personality was, I assured her, irrelevant when it comes to God's mercy.

### *Citizenship Issues*

You recall from Chapter 17 that I had discovered I still had my Dutch citizenship. Ever since, this issue has remained an important point of discussion in our family. This development meant first of all that Kevin was also a Dutch citizen, since he was born to a Dutch father. He now had three citizenships: Dutch, Canadian and American. The last, because he was born in America; Canadian, because I, a Canadian, reported him as a Canadian born abroad. Many Americans especially have disputed this triple citizenship, saying the US does not allow it. Well, it did, provided you were born into that situation and did not actively take on a foreign citizenship. The only caveat was and still is that if you have multiple citizenships including American, when you cross the border into or out of the US, you have to do so as an American citizen. Failure to do so will call for a fine of \$100 or more. We know, for Cynthia, the daughter with whom Fran was pregnant at this stage of the story, did this some 17 years later and it cost us that much.

Fran was kind of jealous, for she would be the only non-Dutch citizen in the family. After Cynthia was born, Fran wrote,

*Ik wil het heel graag worden.* Seeing John, Kevin and Cynthia are all Dutch citizens, I would also like that honour. I love this country and, seeing I was born here, feel that I have a *right* to be its citizen also. With most of the world not too favourably impressed with the US these days, it is often advantageous to be a citizen of another, more neutral, country.

Fran was wrong about her right, of course. Both The Netherlands and the US governments have the right to determine conditions for citizenship. Under US laws, her naturalization as an American during her childhood was done by her parents who had the legal right to choose on her behalf. That, at least, was my understanding, but perhaps I was wrong, for Fran wrote months later that “it is international immigration policy that a person who immigrated can become a citizen of her new country before 21 and can be a legal citizen of both countries.” Don’t know where she got this from. At any rate, she did not succeed in regaining her Dutch citizenship.

Apparently, Mother Jennie misunderstood Fran’s intention. She had become quite a proud American and got the impression that Fran took it ill of her parents that they had naturalized her. She wrote tongue-in-cheek, “*Wat toch echt jammer dat we je toen American citizen hebben laten maken.*”—“It’s too bad that we had you become American citizen.” Fran reassured her, “Mom, I’m not sorry you made me an American.” It just might make things easier if Fran had both, she thought. But Mother made it difficult: She refused to copy a document Fran needed from her to pursue the citizenship question. Her mother was under the impression that it was illegal to make a copy of an official document. Fran was frustrated. “If you don’t want to copy it,” she wrote, please just type it over so I can show it to an immigration officer here in The Netherlands.” It appeared that Mother misunderstood that request. Not sure it ever came.

When it was time for Fran to apply for a visa back to Nigeria, their embassy officials in The Hague made it difficult for her and dragged their feet. She felt it was their way of showing a tough attitude towards the US and its citizens. “The whole world is watching the US these days what with all their political irregularities.” These were the days of Watergate turmoil. Fran ruefully exclaimed, “If only I had proof of Dutch citizenship, I’d probably have no trouble.” By the time we were about to leave, she reported that she gave up for now. Forty-five years later she tried and failed again, but this time because other prohibitive factors intervened when Fran took on Canadian citizenship as an adult.

### *Our Departure Time*

With the advent of Fran’s third pregnancy, we were also approaching the time for our departure back to Nigeria. If it were not for the members of our church we might not have made it. They extended help in so many ways. Three retired men spent the larger part of a day to run off the stencils of the thesis Fran had typed and to bind it in folders. Van Geests lent us their car to visit the Nigerian Embassy in The Hague. Everyone pitched in for us. Amazing. We have seldom seen so much practical Christian fellowship in action, let alone

be on the receiving end of it all. It could best be described as a “moving experience” in the double sense of the word.

Socializing also became hectic with so many of our friends either coming to say farewell or for a meal or inviting us for meals to their homes. We even managed to visit relatives and some friends in Groningen and Friesland. We saw hordes of them. Fran was impressed with the strong interest these relatives showed in us and the rest of the Prins family in the US. They also told us about some “scandalous” stories about Fran’s parents during their youth. Fran commented in a letter to her mother, “If any of the nephews and nieces are interested in hearing these stories, I’ll gladly furnish details!” Wonder how eager Mother Jennie would have been to have those stories circulated! Unfortunately, Fran has forgotten what the “scandals” were. Too bad!

Van Geests were going to care for the kids during the above trip. So, in true African style, I carried the crib to their house on my head, quite a sight for Amsterdammers! When we returned after nearly a week, Cynthia was a bit afraid of us and preferred Nannie to Franny.

My Old Testament prof at Calvin Seminary, Prof. John Stek, was also studying in the country, working towards his doctorate. We arranged for him and his wife to move into our apartment. So they came for a dinner to be introduced to the Van Geests and the Lingers. Ellie Linger being pregnant, Mrs. Stek immediately offered to help her in any way she could.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> I had my final exam on the thesis. On the 24<sup>th</sup> we planned a farewell with the Bible study group and on the 28<sup>th</sup> we would board a Sabena plane to arrive in Kano on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The three days in between the last two dates would be spent in Madrid. We had been able to secure a stopover in Madrid along with hotel for free! We could not resist that temptation.

### *Closing Comments*

Looking back to our stay in The Netherlands, we disagreed with my mother who had described the country as “*bekrompen*,” i.e., narrow minded and cramped. We found it anything but that. In answer to questions people put to me on the subject, I often replied that the most pleasant part of it was this liberation from long distances. To Mother I responded,

I find short distances convenient. And I find the people themselves more broadminded than most Americans and Canadians. They are more internationally aware here at grassroots level. We find it a very pleasant place to live. I, for one, would not consider it a punishment to have to live here the rest of my life. The place has surprised me very much.

In my 1973 Christmas circular, I wrote,

**I appreciate the chance to sit back and reflect on what we are doing in Nigeria and upon possible additional challenges. It is a treat to be able to profit from the experience of those who have spent a lifetime in missions, are familiar with all the movements and literature, and have a defined Kingdom vision.**

**But for now, it was thank you and good bye to Amsterdam; hello to Nigeria. The thank you was directed especially at our Heavenly Father who had seen us through this amazing and eventful period of our lives. We could not have asked for anything more or better. Writing this chapter has once again made us aware of how well He treated and led us. Praise be to God! Or as we say it in Arabized Hausa, “*Alhamdu Lillahi!*” But the “thank you” was also directed to our friends in Amsterdam who came through so many times with all kinds of help. We truly experienced the fellowship of Christ in a very practical way. Our thanks was also to Prof. Verkuyl and his assistant, Jerry Gort. Jerry and Donna had become our friends, no less helpful than those in Amsterdam. And then, of course, there was the help from II Highland orchestrated by Rubingh. All in all it was an amazing experience we have always looked back upon with the greatest of heart-felt gratitude. Some of the people have remained our friends ever since. Only a couple of weeks ago we received a Christmas 2013 card from Nannie. Over the past few years we have received copies of Elly Lingers’ poetry books and I read them with genuine admiration.**

## Chapter 30<

### CRCN III - Family and Social Life

(1974-1976)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 18, Volume 2)

#### *Re-entry into Nigeria*

Upon our re-entry into the country, we stayed in the SIM guesthouse in Jos for a few days to have discussions with our administration there as well as do local shopping. Yes, more shopping. It was harmattan season, an unhealthy time during which many people get colds and even pneumonia. Sure enough, it hit Cynthia immediately. She developed a cold bad enough that we took her to the doctor twice in one day. Fearing pneumonia, they gave her a penicillin injection. For two nights she fussed and cried, but then slept better and got over it all. Needless to say, we were relieved and thankful. Though our children tended to be reasonably healthy, we had a future before us with frequent health challenges, what with three young children in a climate without the annual winter detox.

Kevin was not affected. He found a four-year old missionary kid from Chad to play with at the guest house. Fran wrote, "It's cute to hear the two talk to each other in their secondary language—English!" Kevin enjoyed the Jos weather and liked to wear shorts, even though this was the coldest time of the year in these parts and Nigerians were shivering from the cold, especially in Jos.

From Jos we drove down to Wukari along a brand new paved road that did not exist when we left. It cut the distance between the two places in half. But there was still a river to be crossed by barge this time the Benue River at Ibi. That is always a primitive, dangerous and iffy kind of operation in Nigeria. But since the old route also included a river and barge, we were happy with this new development, the result of the oil boom that had taken over the country. Kevin sang most of the way, all Dutch songs, including Christmas songs. Much of our conversation with him was in Dutch as well.

#### *Life in Wukari*

##### *Family and Social Life*

We had left back in 1972 assuming that upon our return we would again live in our original house, the match box, in Wukari. However, without anyone consulting us, it was arranged that we would live in the Baas house, since they had moved to Jos during our absence. We were not happy about the change, for we preferred to live at the front of the

compound, but it was a done deal. It really was a more pleasant place, for it was built to allow plenty of natural ventilation. In other words, it was designed with the climate in mind. The house was built on top of a 30,000 water cistern! A considerable advantage was that it was far from the generator with its annoying noise. So, we soon were reconciled to the move, especially also because our former house would be needed for the Nigerian principal of the CLTC.

You've already been alerted in Chapter 17 to Fran's third pregnancy and will be told more down below. In the meantime, being pregnant and having two children already, she could hardly be expected to do much in the way of ministry beyond the family or house. However, she wrote about using her "spare time" typing my manuscript for my commentary on I and II Samuel. She also did a lot of letter writing. Early March, she reported she had written and mailed out 130 form letters; some to North America, some to The Netherlands. She also had answered questions from various CRC Cadet groups. "Always a lot of work," she commented, "but it has to be done too!" You will read more of her dogged pursuit of these typing projects.

February was not only our personal transition month but also our seasonal transition. It is the month when we change from the dry and cool harmatan season to the muggy season. It is the preparation time for the rains to return and is characterized by steadily mounting temperatures with humidity in the 90s. An unpleasant time for everyone, including Nigerians. We were fortunate, for at night there would be a breeze on our hill station. In contrast to Jos a few weeks ago, Kevin now started to complain about the heat, while Cynthia was once again restless.

Fran found the heat of the muggy season simply too much. She complained, "Some days I just don't think I'll make it to the end." 50°C (110°F) in the daytime and at 10 pm still 33°C (90°F) along with high humidity! We were once again sleeping outside on cots, but that was not comfortable for Fran. Here's her own description of her daily life at this time of caring for two small children and being pregnant in the heat and humidity of the muggy season:

I'm busy taking care of the children and preparing meals, etc. Doing or getting things takes longer in this country and you just naturally work slower in this heat. I have two people helping around the house for a total of 65 hours a week. Someone cooks the evening meal twice a week in her own compound (within our larger compound) and brings it to us. Just today we hired a young girl to give Cynthia a stroller ride in the late afternoon. This all sounds like I'm a real lady of leisure, but I still find myself with plenty to do!

She was bigger with this pregnancy than she had been for the previous two. Nigerians did not know what to think. After all, you're not supposed to be pregnant within two years from the previous one. Remember those stories in the CRCN chapters? We had broken an ancient taboo and had become a hot button item for gossip! But it could also be argued that we demonstrated freedom from a taboo that was no longer necessary now that the alternative of supplemental milk was available. Whatever the case, this was not done on

purpose. Remember the Dutch doctor who said this was a “*blindopgezette zwangerschap?*” Our history being what it was, we did not think we had to worry about family planning. We were wrong, happily so.

Even Lydia was confused. Remember, she was at school in Nigeria, when she heard that Mama was pregnant again. She explained to her friends that Mama was having twins, but one is coming later!

By mid-April Fran felt a bit depressed, but, she wrote,

John keeps reminding me that as long as I manage to get through each day, I shouldn't worry about all those extra projects I want to do. It's a full time job caring for our family at this point. He wants me to get more help, but somehow having people around you all the time isn't always helpful either.

Fran does not give up easily. Early June she wrote that she was hoping to finish the typing on the final edition of my Hausa commentary on Samuel. It appeared she was nearing the end of that project. Alas... it would be some *years* before she was done with it. Keep your eyes on this story that was to drag on and on. She was also still hosting quite a few guests.

Here are some of Fran's letters about her Wiebe pregnancy:

May 13 — My doctor is a Dutch doctor who is doing a term of service for the Nigerian-Dutch govt as a sort of “peace corps” deal. His name is Gerald Lips. He has just finished his M.D. training and will go for his specialty in gynecology after his tour here is finished. I'm so happy that this works out; otherwise it would mean frequent trips to our own doctors in Takum fifty miles away. I went for an appointment this morning. Everything is fine but I'm a bit anemic again so he doubled my iron intake for a while and also I am losing weight but he said not to worry about that as I look and feel happy and healthy enough.

May 21 — I am very tired at the end of the day but I try not to let that worry me. I'm getting a bit of trouble with my legs, a combination of “growing pains,” and strange rashes. I try to do as much of my work sitting down as is possible. Only five more weeks and then D.V. we will go to Jos for a month.

May 22 — I stay quite busy with the kids and the house and seem to need a lot of rest these hot days. I have about seven weeks yet to wait for D Day and, as you well know, those last weeks are never the most comfortable especially when it is so warm. But I shouldn't really complain because I do have sufficient help and can get more if I feel I need it.

June 19 — It seems that I wasn't drinking enough milk and then I don't have enough calcium in my bones and that gives me trouble. Actually I have no reason to complain as I feel well and have plenty help. I'm still losing weight, but the doctor says that doesn't matter. That means I won't have so much to lose after delivery!

Fran continued her hostessing, what with many guests coming and going. The *monthly* guest plates averaged around 30, but just this one *week* she served 52 guests! She wrote, “Seeing I get plenty of help and food from both the guests and our own household help, it really isn’t all that hard, but it still is a lot of extra people around. I was a bit exhausted yesterday.” Anyone wonder why? This is a pregnant woman with two little children! But still she kept going. Another time with pregnancy advanced even further, she wrote that she kept busy typing for me to keep her from thinking too much about her pregnancy and its discomforts. A babysitter would come from 8 am-12 noon. During that time, Fran would hide in another room to type. A few days and more guests. One day she had to host, including catering, a committee of 15!

And then, to top it all off, that same day I came home at midnight with the totally unexpected news that we were to be transferred to Baissa! Fran was okay with that. She wrote it would not make much difference to her, since her job with the children was basically cut out no matter where. However, she would miss the Wukari friends and the tennis crowd.

Around the beginning of July we went to Jos for a month maternity stay at our own Mountain View Guest House. I already described my own activities for most of this time there. Here’s the story of Wiebe’s arrival.

*Wiebe Karl Yohanna’s Arrival (July 10, 1974)*

When we went to the hospital for the delivery on July 10 at around 8:30 PM, Kevin hollered out of his bed, “Have a good time having the baby, Mommy!” We left thirteen-year old Lydia in charge of Kevin and Cynthia.

The delivery went so fast, the nurse was caught totally unprepared. It was her first delivery after some years of being off the job. She began yelling at me to help her in an English I did not understand. Something like “Old! Old!” I believe she meant either for Fran to hold the baby in or for me to hold or catch it! Fortunately, the doctor came just at that point and saved the situation. That doctor was our friend Glen Verbrugge, the one who had played the organ at our wedding and now he delivered our child. He had come to Nigeria only about a month earlier.

This is what I wrote to our parents regarding his birth:

Announcing the arrival of Sir Wiebe Karl Boer  
Time: July 10, 1974, 9:45 pm (Nigeria time)

In another letter, I wrote:

About supper time Fran felt something like labour *kriebeltjes*, by 8:30 she was in the hospital and at 9:45 it was all over. Like with Cynthia, Fran did not waste time!



And again like with Cynthia, it was a completely natural childbirth. Both mother and child were fine when I left them last night. By the way, “Sir” is not part of his name!

Later on, Fran wrote:

This one was a still speedier delivery than with Cynthia and the nurse again insisted it was impossible and told me to quit pushing til the doctor got there! John had warned the nurse how fast the delivery went with Cynthia but the nurse wouldn't listen. In fact Glen Verbrugge just peeked in the door to see how the labour was coming and suddenly realized it was his turn to do some work.

I do miss my relatives at such a time, but I'm very grateful that John could be here this much too and that Lydia is here. The whole family came to visit yesterday afternoon. People were surprised to see “big sister” Cynthia crawl down the hallway to see her little brother.

I wrote the following to our parents, “From everything I can see about him, I see that Wiebe is strong, handsome, intelligent, able, great genius—but well, what else would you expect from such a fine set of parents?!” Aaahem. I signed that letter as “John the Patriarch.” I guess I must have really been feeling my oats with three children to our credit! For the record, this was grandchild number 25 for the Prinses and number 30 for the Boers.

It was also the first time that Father Wiebe had a child named after him using his actual name, not some far-fetched English “equivalent.” The middle name “Karl” was *primarily* after Fran's father, but changed from the Frisian “Tjalling” to the German “Karl.” The *second* reference was to Karl Kumm, the founder of the SUM about whom I had written so much. It really should have been “Charles,” as Fran's father was known by his English name, but that would have made Wiebe's initials “W. C.,” something he would not hear the end of when he grew up! We didn't want to subject him to that.

Naming Wiebe after our fathers was a departure from our previous children, whose names we picked out of the air simply because we liked their sound. Our living in The Netherlands made us realize that in the global world in which we now live, a Dutch name is as good as any English name. We had become more appreciative of our Dutch heritage, including their naming traditions, I wrote. “They have a strength of character that I admire in them; they do not let others push them around as do Canadians.” Except for the humorous generalization in that sentence, I am not sure it should stand.

Mother Ellie had written that Grandpa Wiebe never liked having someone inherit his exact name, but, she assured us, he was pleased. Fran wrote, “We are happy to have named him after his two grandfathers. Since we've been in The Netherlands, both of us feel more of a sense of history and want to carry on the family names.”

Here is the first letter Wiebe “wrote” to his Opa on July 15, 1974.

Dear Opa Wiebe,

Because I am named after you I thought I would write you my first letter. My mommy will help me because I can't write too well yet. In fact about the only thing I can do well is sleep and then I wake up terribly hungry and then someone comes along and sticks something in my mouth and then soon I feel better and fall asleep again. What a life!

I surely didn't give my mommy much trouble when I came into this world. But my daddy was a bit worried because he could tell I was in a hurry to see him and the nurse didn't want to believe him. Daddy even had to help the nurse find the scissors and tie on her mask and also the mask and gown for the doctor! But it's good for daddies to do part of the work too, isn't it?

Even though you are my Opa, I'm afraid I won't get to see you until I'm 2 years old unless, of course, you come here to see me. If you do come, please take Oma along with you!

Now I'm tired and I want to sleep.

Love,  
Your grandson Wiebe

Mother Jennie apparently did not like Wiebe's Dutch name. Fran responded,

I was surprised what mother said about it. Why are people sensitive about a Dutch name? Kevin is an Irish name; Cynthia, Greek. We have neither Irish nor Greek blood in our veins, but 100% Dutch. We feel a Dutch name to be meaningful. If he does not like the name when he grows up, he can always change it.

It turned out that Wiebe became very proud of his name, especially during his college years and worked it for all its unique worth.

During this stay in Jos, our missionary colleagues there were very kind and helpful to us. We received many invitations for meals at their homes. At other times we would have meals catered from the kitchen in the student hostel located on our compound. This gave Fran a great chance to rest, especially with Lydia picking up most of the slack. The same thing when we arrived back in Wukari on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July—Fran and Wiebe flew; I drove the rest—, Lydia did some cooking and our regular cook did as well. After only a few days, Fran felt up to preparing *stamppot boerenkool* and sausage. She was eager to get cooking again in her own spacious kitchen.

Fran had dreamed

of relaxing in the hospital for at least a week after delivery and then enjoy lots of reading when we got back to Wukari. I figured I'd have someone cook African food every evening and with Lydia here to help with the kids, I'd really rest out. But somehow, by the third day I was so bored in the hospital that I felt I really didn't need it at all. Now back at Wukari we've had African food only a few times, because I feel so strong and enjoy cooking in my own kitchen after the crowded quarters in our Jos guest house.

**Fran's first report about Wiebe—September 4, 1974—read:**

Wiebe is, unfortunately, not a very good sleeper during the day. Some have complimented us on having such an alert baby. He likes to lie on his back and look around and also sit in his comfy chair, but he also "likes" to spend a fair amount of time crying. He's probably just adjusting to the big world. He sleeps quite well during the night, so I should not really complain.

**End September, Fran described Wiebe as**

lying in the playpen in the afternoon sun and starting to make little noises. He smiles easily for all of us. He's being a bit stubborn about his night time sleeping. Practically from the beginning we couldn't get anything down him at 10 PM and so he still insists on waking us sometimes between 3 and 5 AM. But then he's good and ready for a drink and it doesn't take long for us all to sleep again.

Lydia had been with us in Jos and had been very helpful with the children, but now, before she had to return to school, she went to spend a week with her birth family in Nyankwala. So we arranged for our former baby sitter to take care of Cynthia four hours in the late afternoon and all day Saturdays. That was a big help for Fran.

**Mother Jennie asked about nursing. Fran explained,**

No, Mom, I'm not nursing Wiebe Karl. I gave it a half hearted attempt for two weeks but gave up because of other demands on my time. Kevin and I survived together for 6 weeks on nursing but with many supplementary bottles. With Cynthia I never tried because she was hospitalized for 10 days. And Wiebe just the two weeks. So my performance in that department is nothing to be proud of!

### *Family and Social Life Continued*

In September, 1974, shortly after Wiebe's birth, we had family company for the first time in Nigeria: Fran's cousin Anneke and her friend Marten. With her being Frisian and Marten Groninger, my type, a lot of Frisian and Gronings could be heard on our compound! They were very active. They followed me around during trips to Ibi, Nyankwala and Takum. They followed our Dutch doctors around on their walks through the Wukari Government Hospital, something I was not sure was ethical but probably a

breach of privacy; however, no one complained. They also ventured out on bikes, at one time as far as 17 kms on dirt roads and bush trails. Anneke spoke to the people in Dutch and somehow they understood each other. Being young and venturesome, they somehow found their way to Jos, then by bus to Kano and finally by bus to Lagos, all the way from the Sahara in the far North to the Atlantic in the far south, everywhere spending a few days sightseeing. We thoroughly enjoyed their visit.

During the past few months, our drums from the US and our crates from The Netherlands had dribbled in via Mkar. Soon after Wiebe's arrival the last one arrived. We had feared the worst, for it had gotten separated from the others, while it contained very important items like

Kevin's bike and then there were Mommy's jello, pudding, spices, etc. So, now we are all happy! Not to forget, of course, my horseshoe game. We are happy we took so many toys along. At the time of packing, we were buying for Kevin, but in these subsequent two years, many things have happened—like two more babies!

Those loads included quite a few items we meant to use as gifts. Among them were several sets of melmac dinnerware from Amway. Towards the end of September, 1974, we had already given three sets away. We kept a double set of 16 for hosting our many guests. It came in so handy to have such gifts around, along with rabbits, for special occasions. Though cheap for us, they were precious to the recipients.

Fran was also eager to start playing tennis again, but her doctor had told her to wait six weeks—and he was member of the tennis club! She decided she'd better listen to the expert. How nice it was to have these good medical people right in Wukari; no need to make maternity trips of 80 kms to Takum Hospital. So, yes, she'd better listen to him.

She was enjoying her

homemaking role tremendously. It's almost embarrassing to admit these days with all the feminist talk, but I do so enjoy these little kids and I often tiptoe from Cynthia's crib to Wiebe's basket and watch them sleep. I try to hold Wiebe as much as I can, realizing they grow up so fast and then they'll hardly sit on your lap anymore.

When Cynthia's birthday came around a month later, Fran was wondering whether she would have the energy to stage a party, but she wrote, "I feel so great, I can't believe it!" However, a month later, she wrote,

I have a fairly good excuse for not writing: I've been sick. John had been worried for a long time what he would do if I should get sick, because caring for three little ones looks like a hopeless task to him. I've had my first attack of real malaria again. A course of the normal anti-malarial didn't seem to cure it so now I'm on a round of penicillin yet too. It's a bad time to be sick, as John had an extra load already with classes to teach, meetings etc and always lots of company and there is

fruit (guava) rotting on the trees while I could nicely can it. But when you're sick, survival is the main thing. The malaria caused my ear pain again too, so tomorrow I have to have my ears cleaned professionally; fortunately that can also be done at Wukari hospital now.

### *Lydia*

One of our first thoughts upon our arrival in Wukari from Amsterdam was about Lydia, who was in boarding school at WCSS only 80 kilometers away. We arranged for her to visit us over the first weekend. Though students in boarding schools are usually not allowed off the compound, we had written a letter to the principal and he made an exception. She had a rough time of coming to our place. Waited two and a half hours before a taxi became available in Takum. She had to walk half a mile in total darkness after the taxi dropped her off at the Wukari "lorry park." Then she stopped at the house she knew, but we were no longer living there. So she wondered what had happened—and all this in the dark. She did eventually reach our house, but completely exhausted and upset. Such are the travails of traveling in Nigeria. One never knows....

We were so happy to see her again and to notice that she was still the same happy girl she had always been. Fran wrote, "What a darling girl she still is. She really hasn't changed much and looks very healthy and happy. She isn't doing too well academically at school, but we hope that will improve." Lydia was disappointed that Cynthia was afraid of her, but Kevin certainly got along well with her this weekend. He didn't want her to go away again. Since she had such difficulties getting here, we decided to drive her back early Monday morning.

Lydia wrote us quite regularly during her time at WCSS. Here are some samples:

The teachers have decided that throughout the week they will be checking to see the cleanest classroom and that class will be excused from compound work which we do every Wednesday. Fortunately last week we were the cleanest and we were excused. We hope to have it the coming week again.

Mama, please send me some cookies.

Mama, you see? My hand writing is improving! I need to buy some more underclothes. Please (the magic word) will you mind buying some for me? I am very well and at the same time enjoying my school work. I love you all as usual.

On Saturday morning we had to run all the way to the town. We started at 5:30 and I am having sore feet now. This coming Saturday we have to run again. The principal told us it was cross country, but we don't know the meaning. Mama, I can't see my French exercise book. Please check at Kevin's table or on the shelf where I put my books and clothes. Thank you very much for the clothes you fixed

for me. Mama, please give Kevin, Cynthia and Wiebe a kiss for each of them. Greet Bulus, Bathsheba, Briskila, Cisilia, etc.

As you have already read, Lydia was such a great help during our time in Jos while we were waiting for Fran to deliver “Humpty,” Wiebe’s prenatal name. Again, while Lydia was watching the children there, Fran was typing! What was this? Dedication or addiction? Ach, my Famke! When Lydia returned to Takum for her second year of WCSS Fran wrote,

She is trying hard, but not doing very well. In tests, she is usually around number 25 out of 36, but the teachers all say she is a nice girl, very conscientious and honest. We are happy to hear that. More than likely she will end up as a teacher, because in the next few years they will need 76,000 new teachers just in our state. In 1976, Nigeria is going to have mandatory primary education. That means many new schools and teachers.

### *Kevin*

The change from a wintry Amsterdam to an exceedingly hot and humid climate along with changes in food and water took its toll on Kevin. He would wake up at night for a drink. Though we left a glass of water next to his bed, he preferred to call me to help him. He never called Fran, for he knew I had night duty. Fran wrote, “John says that seeing I care for the two kids all day while I am pregnant with the third, he will do his part at night.”

In a circular to our friends at the end of February, 1974, we wrote the following about Kevin’s linguistic journey:

He left Nigeria in 1972 a master of Hausa and with a Nigerian English accent. He has since forgotten Hausa, “normalized” his English, learned Dutch to the point where he would correct that of his parents, while his English was taking a beating again. Now back in Nigeria for three weeks, he is beginning to use more English again and less Dutch. He no longer understands Hausa and has his former Nigerian friends wondering what happened to him. Hopefully he will pick that up again soon. What all this does to such a young mind, we have no idea.

The Nigerian children on the compound remembered Kevin, but were puzzled that he could not talk to them as before. Nevertheless they followed him around everywhere. By mid-October, he could still speak and understand quite a bit of Dutch. Quoting from a letter, “We are trying to help him keep it up by reading and talking to him in Dutch at times. Right now we have those two Dutch doctors around. That helps too. He has also begun to understand quite a bit of Hausa again, but tends to be too shy to speak it.”

As to his social life, Fran had to guard the door, for every time Kevin came in, ten kids or more would come in tow. That was a few too many! Among them was his old friend Manoah. They had resumed their special relationship but without the fighting that used to

mark it. Kevin fought much more with Krister Evenhouse than with Manoah. He enjoyed the freedom of a less structured school day and playing all day long, though in the afternoon Fran did some school work with him.

A month or so later Fran wrote the following:

Kevin's room is full of kids and noise and toys. He enjoys playing all the time much better than going to *kleuter* school in Amsterdam, because they kept telling him what to do. I guess he likes being his own boss. Both he and Krister are the bossy type, which often leads to real confrontation, though generally they get along quite well.

I'm having a minor court case on my hands lately. Kevin had been "losing" many of his little cars. It turns out he had been "giving" them to other kids who, in turn, were selling them at school. The kid who got most of them from Kevin was fourteen years old. I tried to explain to him that it was not fair for a boy of his age to beg a four-year old to give his things away. Kevin says he meant he could have them for a few days and then bring them back. It's so hard to know what to do, for our kids have so many toys, while they have so little. Yet, we have so many kids playing here with all the stuff that I don't want just everyone taking them either.

Sometimes Fran found Kevin motivated to do some schoolwork, but it usually would not last longer than ten minutes. We ordered BC Government kindergarten materials for him to begin in September. We ordered courses for two individuals, so that Fran could teach Kevin and a friend. Fran found Kevin an eager beaver as far as learning went. He loved stories. By October,

he recognized all the letters in the alphabet and could even write some words with the magnetic letters. He was able to count further than we cared to listen to as well as do "many 'easy' calculations." He was ready for going off to boarding school at Hillcrest in Jos, but his parents were not! He talked about school so much. The other day he said he would go to school in the morning by airplane and then come back in the afternoon. I tried to explain that when he goes it will be at least six weeks before he sees us again. I really don't even want to think about it, but I do know that it will be the best for him. He needs social as well as mental competition.

He found himself "on a tracing binge" and wanted to send some of his pictures to the grandparents. "He is really too lazy to colour a picture or to make his own. Tracing goes much more quickly and easily."

A bit early at age four perhaps, Fran wrote that Kevin "thinks it is taking him way too long to grow up. The other day he started crying and said, 'It's taking such a long time before I can be a daddy!'" At around the same time, he was already talking about whom he would marry when he grew up! Someone advised him to marry Lydia, since he loved her so much. He rejected that one. "Oh no, I'm going to marry someone I don't even know yet, but she has to believe in God." Why was that? "Otherwise I might start saying also that there is no

God.” Fran suggested that someone might accuse us of “indoctrination,” one horrible crime! But then, what of those who have been told there is no God? Not indoctrinated? Or what of those who simply ignore Him? Not indoctrinated? The last three lines are mine, not Fran’s and, even less, Kevin’s!

Kevin’s fifth birthday was celebrated much in the style of previous ones. 26 kids showed up, mostly from our own compound. We played games with them, but what they really came for was the good food they had come to expect at such occasions. They delighted in the feast of rice and beef. Fran described the party as “wild,” but the kids had a great time.

In contrast to Cynthia, Kevin was much more high strung and might get angry if things did not go his way. But we were happy with his ability to adjust to so many different situations. In fact, we considered him mature in that respect. “Linguistically,” Fran wrote, “he is very bright. We are hoping he will retain enough of the Dutch that he can use it again in due time.”

In September, Kevin had reasons to feel lonely. All the Nigerian children were now going to school in the morning, so that he had no one to play with. Fran tried to switch the Kindergarten schedule over to the morning. Kevin found it difficult to await his turn for attention when she was feeding his siblings. He was alone for so long and thus was not used to having to compete for Fran’s attention.

Since the bike arrived, Kevin made great use of it by riding it all over the compound. He had learned to get on and off easily. We were glad we had not put the training wheels on at all. First, he wanted them badly, but he had been doing well without them already in Amsterdam, so that we did not wish to backtrack. We kind of forced him to get on with it without the extras. It was an adjustable bike, which meant he would not outgrow it very quickly.

Fran worried that Kevin would have a rough time when we moved to Baissa, for he had so many playmates in Wukari. As she was writing a letter mid-September, 1974, there were “around fifteen of them playing games on our back porch, everybody singing and screaming with Cynthia enjoying it all, too, of course.” He would have to “work his way in again at Baissa, for each group of children play in a different way.”

Two weeks before we were to move to Baissa, a local school teacher invited Kevin to visit his classroom. Kevin did and enjoyed it so much that he went regularly for the last two weeks we lived in Wukari. Fran wrote,

I admire Kevin’s adaptability. There he sits in a class with 45 Nigerian children and doesn’t think anything of it. His best friend is also in that class and that helps. School starts at 7:45 and ends at 12:45. I am giving him and his friend each two pennies to buy a little food at the market during their break time. He carries his drinking water with him.



## *Cynthia*

Cynthia had a bit of a hard time adjusting to the new climate. She suffered from terrible heat rashes. She was drinking a lot more, which was natural in the heat, and was not sleeping as well as in Amsterdam. But she slowly adjusted to the new climate and routine.

Before the end of February she began to sit up and had developed strong legs, so strong, in fact, that she wanted to stand on our laps, not sit. Fran wrote that she laughed a lot and was very friendly and happy. “She smiles more for me than for anyone else,” but, Fran surmised, that is normal for little girls. Her eyes “are so bright and clear and she has such a wise look about her.”

Two compound girls started coming every late afternoon to give Cynthia a stroller ride. When they returned, they would play with her a while on the floor. Fran wrote,

It’s good for her to get used to others, so that she doesn’t get too ‘*eenkennig*’ (shy of others). She still prefers us three to anyone else, but she enjoys sitting on a blanket and watching others play. She really has a great big smile for everybody, as long as they stay at a bit of a distance. She hasn’t agreed yet to allow “strangers” to hold her.

On Easter morning, 1974, Cynthia was baptized by Pastor Habila and, as per Nigerian Christian tradition, was given an additional name, “Kristiana.” However, we were already used to calling her “Cynthia”—“Cindy” actually with due apologies to her the first time she reads this—that we doubted the new name would be used much. That turned out to be true, but it is there as part of her name.

As we did for Kevin, so we had a naming party for her in Nigerian fashion. We had invited many people and had our compound cook prepare rice and chicken, a traditional meal. Quite a number of people attended along with hordes of kids from the compound as well as from town. As always, the kids hung around till the end of the party and expected to be given the leftovers. At such parties, people often give little speeches, blessing the child and wishing it success in the world, etc. Ibrahim Usman Sangari, the local Christian leader, was there as well and “spoke” for Cynthia: She was to become the wife of his son Joshua. Such occasions were always fun and we enjoyed them as members of the local community.

She remained fretful on hot nights and would occasionally let out a piercing yell, only to go back to sleep soon after. Sometimes I would comfort her with a bottle of milk. Fran was alright with that, since it did not affect her—except when I was away and she would have to follow the patterns I had established. Being a mother ain’t ever easy.

On April 24, 1974, Fran wrote, “Cynthia just learned to get up in a sitting position today, but does not yet know how to get down. Shortly after being put to bed, she cried. When I checked, she was sitting up in a corner but did not know how to get out of that position.”

She was also beginning to move, “creep, not crawl,” according to Fran. She gets to where she wants in her own way. In general, she was a very happy baby, but she did not like the heat, especially at night; it would make her restless and sleepless. She enjoyed the crowds of kids that played with Kevin in the house, but Kevin found her a bit of a nuisance, since she tended to grab things from them.

Three weeks later, she had begun to crawl, slowly and not far. She started pulling herself up on chairs and people. She was a very happy baby and by now very friendly to strangers, which, of course, always made them feel welcome. They would pick her up from her playpen and cuddle her with all parties happy. In the meantime she now weighed in at 19 lbs, but no teeth as yet.

Another few weeks later, she was now crawling all over the house and enjoying discovering the world around her, for now, mostly the house. Progress for her, but for us it meant shutting the doors properly and putting things higher up. She was starting to make the usual sounds of “mamamam,” “daddadda” and “byebye,” while she waved, all at the appropriate times. Fran wrote that Cynthia was developing “that strange affection for Daddy that when she sees him she insists that he hold her at least for a while. John now has to be careful she does not see him if he is in a hurry to go somewhere!”

In August, in other words, after Wiebe’s arrival, Cynthia had begun to “walk” outside, crawl in the grass and sand really. So it was a big relief for Fran to have this afternoon babysitter watch her. Her first birthday was just around the corner on the 12<sup>th</sup> and Kevin had “big plans” for a party. In view of Fran’s recent delivery, we had smaller plans this year and invited only six kids over along with a girlfriend of Lydia. We also invited the two Dutch medical couples for dinner that evening.

Cynthia was becoming really independent. Fran wrote:

She wants to feed herself, but that makes her menu a bit of a problem. She feels she can handle mashed potatoes and ice cream with her fingers, but mother won’t allow that. She likes bananas as long as we give her the whole thing. If we cut it up, she won’t eat it! She had her smallpox vaccination ten days ago and has a really red arm now, but it hasn’t bothered her temperament much. She’s also getting her fifth tooth.

By September, she was able to stand up alone. In Fran’s words,

You *expect* them to go through all these learning stages, but somehow it is still so thrilling to see their “firsts,” especially from your own children. We are all trying to get her to try a few steps on her own, but that she won’t do yet. She crawls so fast now that it’s not worth the effort, I guess. But while she stands alone, she claps her hands for joy, as if she’s really proud of herself!

A month later, she was walking all over the place. How different from Kevin. We had thought he would never start!

### *The Children Together*

The two kids have always loved Lydia and vice versa, the exception being the first few days after Cynthia met Lydia. Cynthia was not so sure. After that, it was always mutual love. Lydia has always been that way. At this time of writing (2011), she is in Lagos, children sitting for Wiebe and Joanna, while Wiebe is in Kenya and Joanna in Atlanta, GA. Between her and the children it is still the same mutual love. She is telling the children stories about Wiebe during his childhood; they hang on her lips to hear these Daddy stories.

In May, 1974, we wrote that Kevin was really proud of his sister and liked to crawl on the floor with her. He claimed that he was the only one who could understand her language! But after Wiebe also appeared on the scene, sometimes Kevin sang a different tune. During mid-October, Fran described him as

A bit jealous of all the attention the babies get. When he wants a story and I'm busy bathing or feeding them, he finds it hard to wait. Yesterday he said, "I guess I shouldn't have prayed for them!" But in general, he's very pleased with both of them and enjoys playing with Cynthia and talking to Wiebe.

### *Life's Miscellanea*

You may remember our rabbitry during our previous term. The cages were still there to remind us of this hobby. So, in mid-March, when Bill Evenhouse and I had to go to Mkar for a meeting, I planned to return with rabbits, one for each cage. Some missionary there had a rabbitry as part of a rural development project. One cage was populated already, since someone had donated a rabbit as a welcome back gift. Someone else had come with a chicken. Thus we were already back into animal husbandry. Fran wrote that she was eager to release the farmer lodged in her heart. In addition, a rabbitry would provide a couple of kids on the compound with a little job and income as they would collect the grass we needed.

Unfortunately, the rabbitry was not going as expected. The females would give false signals by making nests, but nothing came of it. We were not used to such unproductive animals. We bought three additional females, but had to wait three months for them to mature.

That farmer in her did come out again as it had the previous term, or, at least, the gardener. Once the rainy season was safely on its way, she started planting various vegetables that are not traditionally grown in Wukari. It was an interesting experiment to see whether they would flourish in this climate. So, she wrote, we'll see what happens to the venture. She also planned to do some flower work. A couple of weeks later, she jubilantly reported that the cucumbers and beans had lots of blossom. That sounded hopeful.

Alas, things did not go as well as we had hoped. “Until early today, the cucumbers and bean blossoms looked great, but by this evening they looked shriveled.” Our yard man told us it was because of the heat and everything would revive overnight. Well, we will see. We did see and finally could enjoy some harvest results. She canned some cucumbers and cherry jam, while she froze some beans. So, it *is* possible in Wukari! That was good to know.

You may also remember that we had bought a small house in Abbotsford, BC, for business purposes. The place started to become troublesome. Father Wiebe, who had retired and now lived in Abbotsford, kept an eye on the place and noticed it was vacant and shabby. That made him nervous and gave him sleepless nights. We were getting nervous letters from home. We had not really wanted him to get involved in this project, but he did anyhow. So we then made him the go-between with Brown Agency in order to sell it. I am not going to bore you with too many details. Let it suffice to say we did sell it, though it took ages for everything to be settled and squared away—and many anxious moments for Dad and anxious letters from him to me.

By the end of September, 1974, we were still sending letters and forms back and forth about the house. Dad had done a good job representing us and even spent his personal money to facilitate things. At the end of it all, we promised to repay him as soon as we could but that we had all kinds of debtors “pursuing” us—CRWM (car loan), a sister-in-law, Prof. Verkuyl at the VU, the Dutch Government (interest-free scholarship loan, Canadian Government (Revenue Canada for capital gains tax) and now Dad! Quite a debt empire! We never had so many debts distributed over so many parties. Though we had all these financial breaks during our Amsterdam days, at the end of it we found ourselves in the red. Imagine what things would have been like without those breaks! Thanks, Lord.

We regarded this housing episode a successful venture and hoped to do more of that. In fact, we asked Father Wiebe to enquire from Brown Agency whether they could recommend any other smaller place for us to buy. They never came through. We did get into further real estate, but in Grand Rapids, not in BC.

The profits of the sale were to be set aside for one of two potential future projects. One was to help pay for the publishing of my dissertation some five years down the pike. The other was to pay for building a small office if I should start working in modern Nigeria. Giving at home was decreasing and CRWM had given missionaries notice that there would be no further building expansion.

## *Life in Baissa*

### *Family and Social Life*

Remember that this is the companion chapter to Chapter 18, where I describe the Baissa ministry and related issues. That's also where I describe our move from Wukari, to the new environment, neighbourhood and neighbours. Here, without further ado, I plunge into the subject of our new life there.

In that chapter I mentioned something about "first things first." Well, there was an even more urgent "first things first" upon our arrival in Baissa. The first thing Fran did was to look around for a good baby sitter. We found Damaris, an elementary school pupil and daughter of Mallam Joel, the Principal of the Baissa Bible School, who lived right behind us. She was hired as a part time nanny and stayed with us till we left Baissa. Throughout, Fran was very pleased with her.

As to the compound, it was full of kids, Fran wrote,

There are so many kids here under ten living within 1,000 feet of us that you wouldn't believe it! They all stand at the windows and call for Kevin. I'm trying to "screen" them carefully, because we've been warned about the kids on this compound. I only allow two others in the house with him at a time, so that I can sort of size them up. Just hope Kevin will find a good friend like he did in Wukari with Manaoh.

As Fran had written earlier, for her at this stage of life, it did not make much difference where she lived, since she would be totally busy with the children anyway. Now she wrote, "I'm enjoying it here and find each one of the three kids a challenge in their own way."

Late in the year, Fran had written "home" about having malaria, a sickness that sounds terrible at home, but is as common as the "common" cold or flu, though not the same. It is life threatening to people not in basically good health, but to "normal" people it is usually not dangerous, though far from pleasant, what with the high fever it can bring. Early into the new year she wrote to Mother Jennie that she was well. "I really feel very well, stronger perhaps than before I had the children. I love my work, my life, my family, etc. It's just that when I get malaria it really knocks me low." She was advised to change preventive medicine if it should attack her again.

In that same January 1975 letter, she summarized her own work and that of her helpers:

Yes, I have plenty of help around the house. Basically, I do most of the meals, table setting and clearing as well as taking care of the children, teach Kevin, entertain guests and some secretarial work. *Bulus* does the sweeping, dusting, dishes, washing, ironing and fruit cutting. *Elam* hauls water, rakes leaves, and gets grass for the

rabbits. *Damaris* takes care of the babies for a few hours in the afternoon. She is the best babysitter we've ever had.

With the exception of Lydia, I would add. But then Lydia was not a "babysitter;" she was more like a daughter to us. In a subsequent letter, Fran explained that *Damaris* is typical of Nigerian babysitters. She is highly trustworthy. They all grow up in extended families and grow up with responsibility for younger children from an early stage on.

In February we set up the small plastic swimming pool (8 ft diameter; 20 inches deep) that was in our drums. The hot muggy season had started with its uncomfortably high temperatures. We put it up in our screened porch. We allowed four compound kids at a time in it, while *Damaris* sometimes sat in it to hold *Wiebe*. He did not enjoy it, but Kevin and Cynthia were having a great time. The infatuation lasted less than two months. By early April, the kids were hardly playing in it. Besides, the water got dirty so fast while it was very hard work to carry up the hill. When we dismantled it, Kevin did not even ask about it.

Fran often wrote about meal times and schedules. In May, 1975, she commented that "in general things are going better and easier than I had expected." The scheduling does not bear repeating all the time, but the following was a pretty typical situation:

John prefers only 2 meals a day (partly for weight reasons; partly for waste-of-time reasons), so he leaves the house at 6:30 after a cup of tea and heads for his office. Depending on what the work of the day is, he usually comes back around 10:30 and fixes his own breakfast and then I have my coffee break at that time. In the afternoon he comes for a snack of some sort and then our supper is around 7:15. The kids and I have breakfast at 7 and lunch at 1. Even *Wiebe* is beginning to fit into that schedule.

It was weekends, especially Sundays, that she found the toughest and loneliest. "Weekends are usually extra lonely for me," she wrote. But she realized that she did after all marry a preacher. Part of the problem was that we were not able to make local friends the way we did in Wukari, who might drop in and offer help.

Fran once had a weekend off from isolation and loneliness in December, 1975. Missionaries in Takum held annual Christmas parties at which, among other things, they would always listen to a recording of Handel's *Messiah*. We had never attended the event, but in 1975, Fran and Anita drove there for the occasion, while I stayed at home with the kids. Anita stayed for the entire weekend, but the mission plane made a special trip to return Fran the next morning. Around that time, we also began a weekly Tuesday arrangement where Fran would work in my office to catch up on various typing projects for me. It was jokingly called her "day off," during which I would stay at home and watch the kids. Bulus' wife would do the cooking that day, so that I had to only look after the children with the help of *Damaris*. I actually managed to do some of my "own" things as well. One day, though, Fran cheated. She spent part of the time writing letters to her family. That was not part of

the deal! That was *her* work, not *mine*. She wrote that she probably enjoyed these breaks more than I did.

### *Lydia*

Lydia, of course, was still at WCSS in Takum. We were not seeing much of her. She came for a short visit during her December Christmas break, but then went to Nyankwala at the request of her father. Lydia loved both of her homes and dividing her time was the best way of coping with the situation. Fran wrote that

Kevin is so happy to have her home and doesn't like it that she's staying such a short time. Cynthia remembered her from her last visit and immediately went to her. Lydia is so good with children that I'm sometimes tempted to have her stay with us full time again, but that would be an unreasonable demand. She's trying hard at school, but some of the subjects are a bit beyond her. Her best subjects are always Bible and English. All the teachers speak highly of her honesty, personality, effort, etc., something that is really worth more than all the A's in the world, right?

The sentiment of the last sentence was repeated time and again in Fran's letters. Though Lydia never became an academic star at WCSS—in January, 1975 she was number 22 out of 36—we were always happy with those testimonies regarding her character.

In March 1975, Fran wrote about how pretty Lydia was becoming and how boys noticed her.

But she isn't interested. I'm amused about the hard time she gives them. She writes us about some of the love letters the boys at school send her! A boy in Form 3 was trying to make her befriend him. He said that she must marry him. When she refused, he said that she was acting like a bush girl. So she told him to go ahead and look for another girl. At least, communication is still very open with our teenager!

Here is one of the "love letters" which Lydia enclosed. Just to show us how her own English had improved, she underlined all the spelling and grammar mistakes!

Dear Darling. It gives me a great pleasure since it save my personal free chance. I hope nothing is unhappy with you. I am writing you this letter because I would like you to be my girlfriend or lover, but I don't know weather you love me or not. If you love me reply my letter soon, so that I may know weather you love me or not. Please Lydia make up your mind so that you enjoy me and how life will go. I wish you a succesful life throughout your form five and may the Lord God guard you. Amen. Your's loving boy, Rabi Tanko.

She also wrote us about a fake teacher:

Last term I wrote you that we had a Math teacher who doesn't teach. Whenever he comes to the class, if we ask him to teach, his answer is "Don't worry, we will finish this book in one day if I like." He borrowed about N90 from a boy in this school. Last week he was trying to run away but the principal told the students to catch him. He borrowed much money from people in the town and from the principal. He now told us that he received a letter saying that the man is not a person from the National Youth Service course. He pilfered the degree from someone else.

And even a bit about a small student rebellion:

This morning we were supposed to have bread and tea. But they did not give us bread, so some of the students became angry and poured their tea on the tables. The principal put our whole class on fatigue today. Each student had to carry many blocks.

And there were some of the normal requests for money and other necessities and also thanks for the stuff we sent her:

When Baba comes next week, please have him bring me some groundnuts, cookies and oranges.

Thank you very much for the watch that Baba brought me last term. I like it very much and use it all the time.

When Baba comes, please give me some money. I don't have enough for transport fare (N2) to Baissa. If you don't mind, when it is getting near to the time of school holidays, you can send me the transport fare.

Thank you very much for the tin of milk which Baba brought to me last time; also for the loaf of banana bread which I enjoyed very much.

Mama, I don't have even a kobo (penny). I had N1 left last week, but it was pilfered.

And then about the other things she was involved in:

I am one of the FCS executive members and I am the Prayer Secretary. At first I was shy, but before everything was over, I felt alright. Maybe this coming Sunday I will lead the first part of the service. I also conduct group Bible studies every Sunday night.

I am now working in the library, putting books in alphabetical order. I also read the newspapers every day.

Every time Fran or I went to Takum we would visit Lydia at her school. However, one time maybe Fran tried to skip out:



**Mama, is it true that you came to Takum? Some of the girls went to the hospital and when they came back, they told me that they saw you in the hospital. I said maybe it was another white woman that they saw, but they insisted that you were the one. Please remember that if you are coming to Takum, you should try and bring something to me if possible.**

**In August, 1975, Lydia's parents came to Baissa for a visit. Unfortunately, I was away in Jos, working on the Hausa translations for the Ife Conference. Fran wrote, "They were nice guests. Lydia's mother is willing to try all new foods, but father Iliya is a bit more hesitant. He feels safer with bread and jam. I had Bulus' wife cook the evening meal each time, because I knew they preferred Nigerian food and it was easier for me, of course." Iliya may not have braved our food much, but he enthusiastically joined the kids in some of their games. He had never seen the "shape ball" with different shaped holes and found it a challenge to beat the kids at it.**



**Fran, Cynthia, Kevin, John, Wiebe and Lydia (home from WCSS)\*  
Baissa 1974**

**In September, Lydia entered the equivalent of grade 9 and turned 15. Fran wrote, "She can be very mature and also very childish, which, I'm sure, is quite normal at that age." Fran saw her for a few moments during a visit to Takum and was told that she was getting used to her 70 new dorm mates again.**

**They have two bunks to a small room. In addition to their bedding, they are allowed one large trunk and one box in the room. All studying etc. is done at school. Just this last vacation she told us she would like to go into radio work after graduation. She**

has a good singing voice and is already part of a group of students who go out preaching on weekends. So, that looks like a good start.

### *Kevin*

Kevin was adjusting well to his new surroundings. He scouted out the compound on his own and soon had quite a few friends. I commented that he really was quite an amazing little fellow with his ability to adjust to any situation. Though Fran was busy as a homemaker with three kids, she still found time to have regular teaching sessions with him. She played Monopoly a lot with him. The educational value of that game is amazing, especially for learning the basic processes in arithmetic. He could read the dice quickly and could read from the cards what he had to pay and could even make the right payments including the change issue.

According to Fran's letters, Kevin "believes everything he hears and has a thousand questions. I'm glad I have time to work with him and answer his questions. We read together quite a lot and today we started discovering this part of the land on bicycle. He really does quite well on it."

A few weeks later, in answer to a question from Mother Jennie about birthday celebrations, Fran wrote that

Kevin is so conscious of hours, days, weeks, months, years, birthdates and numbers, that we are paying more attention to birthdays. How many days in a month? How many minutes in an hour? How many seconds in twelve minutes? How many days has Wiebe been in the world? I have to be correct and specific in my answers, because he has the memory I used to have and I can't fool him by just saying something! When I say that I don't know, he brings me pen and paper and "orders" me to figure it out.

Shortly after, Fran wrote,

Kevin talks most of the day—almost always it's questions, questions, questions. He is fascinated with airplanes. He's had many rides in our little mission plane already. Once he got to "help" the pilot and another time he had a 20-minute ride with just himself and the pilot. He builds airplanes out of everything: blocks, wood, string, paper, etc. From Sinterklaas on December 5, he got a big set of Tinker Toys. Those are great with wheels and wings for making "real" airplanes. He really enjoys being read to and can pick out several words already. He's also doing very well with numbers. He is certainly ready for "real" school.

But there were health concerns. During the course of February, 1975, he was crying too much and often complained of tiredness. The medics at Takum Hospital discovered he had "malaria parasites" in his blood, i.e. chronic malaria, something that is very debilitating. This kind of malaria causes anemia, which, in turn, made him less resistant to malaria

again. It also causes stomach pains due to “spleen damage.” After he was put on a different anti-malaria regime and some other pills, he soon puckered up, quit his crying and complaints. He was once again his old self, full of “endless ideas for games and things to do.”

Kevin had his sixth birthday while I was on my first ICS-Ibadan trip, but he wanted his party regardless. It was so nice to have all these little toys we had in our drums just for such occasions. Fran issued a general invitation to Kevin’s friends, which under such circumstances included all far and near who heard about it. She wrapped little presents for 30 kids and then had balloons for those beyond that number. She also baked a cake and 24 cupcakes—a typical Fran-organized party that kids always loved.

The party was a rip roaring success—“fun and wild,” as Fran put it:

Everyone enjoyed the games while the cake and cupcakes were devoured in short order. Since they were not brought up with this tradition, they don’t understand our idea of cake and candles and singing “Happy Birthday,” but they are happy to join in on the fun and goodies! Now we’ll have to start thinking about our July and August birthdays.

Indeed, family life had become more complicated. And also more conscious. Kevin was now 43 lbs. and 4 feet tall, very conscious of the fact that he was skinny. He said, “I’m going to eat a lot so that I’ll get fat.” He was afraid that Cynthia would catch up with his weight! Some months later, he began to despair that he would ever gain weight. One evening he “ordered” an extra bowl of yogurt so that he would soon reach 50 lbs.

All the time there was a steady flow of packages from Grand Rapids, often for Kevin. By September, 1975, “he can’t figure out who these mysterious people are that keep sending him things. He loves you all, but doesn’t remember anything about our stay in Grand Rapids in 1972 or even really of Mom and Jane visiting us in Amsterdam. He has so many experiences that he forgets quickly.”

As far as language development went, Fran wrote,

He’s to the point again where Hausa is easier than English. He talks Hausa to us most of the time, but I always speak English to him and, of course, also read to him and teach him in English. He does seem to have a knack for languages and enjoys speaking whatever is the local thing. He knows a fair number of words in Ndoro (local Baissa language) too, of which John and I know nothing. Other missionary kids these days understand some Hausa but refuse to speak it in front of their parents, so that everyone is amazed at Kevin’s speech.

Kids’ interest can move quickly from one thing to another. End October, 1975, Kevin became interested in handwork. We had a little loom on which he made potholders, then he would take them apart and do it again and again. He also embroidered with yarn and even crocheted a bit. He was self-conscious about drawing and painting, but felt comfortable

with handwork. It appears to have been short-lived, this interest, for nothing is ever said of it again in the correspondence.

Kevin developed a real interest in the mission plane and, later, in aviation in general. The pilots were aware of his fascination. So, when the plane brought people to our station one day and planned to pick them up again in the late afternoon, Gord Buys, our second pilot, invited Kevin to come for the ride to Lupwe, play with the children there for a while and then fly back. This invitation did not need to be repeated! Those small planes were really nice, for, because of the short distance between these two places, the pilot usually flew low so that one got a good view of the country side. Kevin went, played with Lupwe children, had lunch at Buys' place, and came home again. What a day for him! Both pilots, Browneye and Buys, liked to give children a chance to "operate" the plane or, at least, "steer" it, something right up Kevin's alley.

In July 1976, just before leaving Baissa, Kevin reached another milestone: He lost his first tooth. It had been loose for some days and we wanted to pull it. No way; he would not allow it. Then it fell out unnoticed. When he discovered that, he recruited his friends to look for it in the grass all over the compound to no avail—a needle in a haystack. He was disappointed, for this would mean the tooth fairy might not come his way. Somehow, the following morning it *had* come and left a dime under his pillow.



Occasionally he would accompany me on day trips. Sometimes these would entail interesting adventures for him as, for example, this picture shows.

**Kevin Crossing a Vine Bridge\***

*Kevin's Schooling: A Wavering Posture*

About a year before Kevin reached school age, we already began thinking about a very difficult decision we would have to make sooner or later. All missionary children attended boarding school at Hillcrest in Jos; it was the natural thing to do that no one questioned or

hesitated about, even though it was painful to all parents to send their children away. Local schools were of very low level and their English poor, often pidgin. All our colleagues advised us against sending him to the local school. We were struggling. He seemed to be too young and small to send so far away. If he were to get sick, he would want our care. We had no qualms about the low local *academic* level, since Fran was a teacher and would supplement what he would get in school. She knew that Kevin was already a bright student and an eager learner.

We worried more about the *social* aspect. His couple of weeks in that Wukari school had gone well, but the problem was that as the only white child, he got far too much attention, something missionary children don't need. At Hillcrest, he would be with children like himself as well as with a rich variety of others. Fran wrote, "Our heads know it's best to send him, but our hearts don't agree." If he were to go, that would be our first big "sacrifice" in Nigeria. "If it must be done, I'm sure the Lord will give us the ability to make the break, but our parent hearts can't bring ourselves yet to make the decision." We realized that most children did well at Hillcrest; it was the parents who suffered the most from the separation.

However, a month later, we filled in an admission form for Hillcrest, having decided that it was the best option. "Other children and parents survive, so we presume that we will too. But it's a sacrifice that we are not willing to make for long. Children are too precious to be boarded out to others." By mid-December, Fran wrote,

Although we are not looking forward to the separation, we do feel it will be the best all around for him to attend the missionary school in Jos. He already knows several of the missionary children who will be in first grade with him and he's looking forward to the plane ride to Jos as well as to living in a dormitory with 30 other children.

She repeated that the arrangement is "often harder on the parents than on the children." Mother Jennie entered the discussion by referring to a missionary family from Hillcrest whose adult children were misbehaving and thought this could be caused by having been farmed out for twelve years. We responded that we were still uncertain about it: "I know that we wrote earlier that we'd made up our minds about sending him off to boarding school, but now Kevin seems a bit more insecure about things, seems a bit afraid, etc. So, now we are once again thinking of having him attend the local primary school, low caliber though it is."

Then she went on to list all his accomplishments and concluded, "So I really think he'll be alright by staying in Baissa. I know he's capable of doing Kindergarten work."

Around that time we took a holiday in Jos and spoke with the Hillcrest Principal, a CRC Canadian missionary from Alberta, Norm Brouwer by name, who, upon retirement, settled in Chilliwack and became good friends to my brother Jim. We told him that we had finally decided to keep Kevin at home. He would attend the local school and we would supplement him at home. Norm did not try to talk us out of it and wished us success, but he did warn us

not to “dump” Kevin on Hillcrest in the middle of the school year and expect Hillcrest to help him catch up! He gave us the names of the textbooks for Kevin’s class and advised us to order them. Fran wrote, “We do hope we are doing the best for all concerned, and feel that for our situation and after much prayer and thought, this is what the Lord is telling us to do.”

Shortly before starting school in Baissa, Kevin wrote an *actual* letter to Grandpa and Grandma on our manual typewriter. Here it is, warts and all:

DearGrandpa Gra ndma This is Kevin  
 We have acat .  
 We went to m marraba.  
 I pla yed with jeff  
 Daddy went to Zing. On Feb. 12 mommy and I will go to the  
 dentist with the airplane.

He had come a long way from his original “xxxxxx-es!” And he didn’t even mention anything about schooling!

January 26, 1975, was a really important day in Kevin’s life. He started school in Baissa.

We wanted to try it, but thought we’d wait till he felt settled and confident. A few weeks ago *he* asked us if we wouldn’t ask the teacher if he could go to school as he had in Wukari. So this morning off he went with all the others, dressed just like them in his school uniform. How long this will last and how it will go and how satisfied we’ll be all remains to be seen, but we are happy that he is brave enough to attempt this adventure. He cries easily and gets tired quickly. So we feel this group experience may be very good for him.

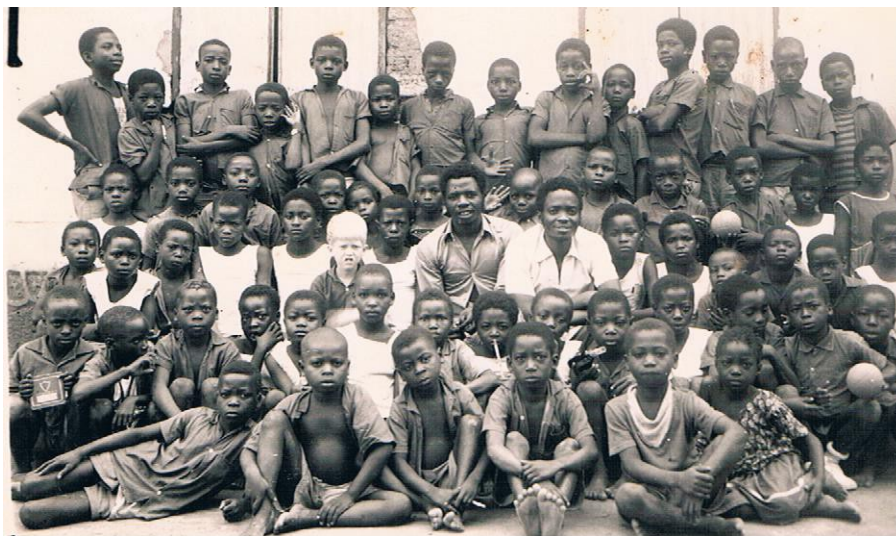
The Headmaster, Mallam Yohanna Garba had agreed to the arrangement and promised to keep in touch with us about how Kevin was doing. A few weeks later, we wrote we were happy with the situation, but we did have to make allowances for the Nigerian style. One day a teacher was sick. So, they joined two classes and ended up with almost 100 children, most of them sitting on mats. Kevin was one of the few lucky ones to be assigned a bench.

In spite of his being under the weather occasionally, here’s a long paragraph about this adventure from February, 1975—

Kevin really enjoys school. For roll call, he understood the kids to say, “Praise him, sir” instead of “Present, sir.” However, on the whole he understands Nigerian English quite well. The Bible story and questions are all in Hausa and he can follow that alright. I think because he knows most of the Bible stories that helps too, but he said yesterday he had even answered some of the questions. So, he doesn’t hesitate to speak Hausa anymore now either. Today he came home with a new song sung to the tune of “London bridge is falling down”: “Off to Egypt you must go, you must go, you must go, Off to Egypt you must go, to buy food.”

But it was not always positive for him. He began to complain that some kids teased and bothered him. Today, that would be considered bullying. However, Fran wrote, “He’s a bit of a cry baby at times, something the kids may take advantage of. I’m afraid that the teacher treats him a bit too special and tends to ‘protect’ him, with Kevin taking advantage of that.” We, however, learned the reason for his crying from the Takum medics as reported earlier.

We received good reports from Mallam Yohanna Garba. One day, after they had played some classroom games, Kevin reported to us that he “ate them all.” He knew it was not correct English, he told us later, but he couldn’t think of the right English. The expression is a translation of the Hausa “*Na ci duka*,” literally meaning “I ate everything,” actually meaning, “I got everything right.” Some months later, Dr. and Mrs. Harvey Bratt visited us and told us how impressed they were with our “Nigerianized” children, especially Kevin with his fluent Hausa.



Kevin Next to his Teacher in Baissa School, 1975\*

One day Fran went to visit Kevin at the local school during recess. She wrote, “He was doing fine and playing well and had already spent his four pennies with his friends. He said he knows about ten kids now out of the 50 in his class.” Just a week or so ago, at the end of a brief school holiday period, the Headmaster, Mallam Garba, came to us for a visit. Kevin told him at that time that he was ready for school again. It did not seem he was suffering from attending this school. In fact, he was enjoying himself to the hilt at school. Even after school, “he is eager to have Fran teach him more stuff!” He simply could not get enough of school. After school, he would often play school with his friends! He would be teaching them from the very book that Fran was teaching him. I made him a couple of blackboards and he used them in his play-school to teach the other children. I can’t believe I actually managed that! Too long ago to remember the details, but I wonder how crude they were.

A little while later, Fran visited his classroom again along with Carolyn Baas, who was visiting. All the kids would stand up when a visitor entered and were taught to say together, “Good morning, sir” and when she left, “Bye-bye, sir.” When Fran and Carolyn left, Kevin’s voice came out loud and clear, “Bye-bye, Mommy.” He now sat in the back row between other kids, which shows us he was getting adjusted. First, he felt more secure sitting on the side right next to the teacher’s desk.

Some days later, he came home from school smiling from ear to ear. He had been declared “No. 1” in his class, meaning he had done the best in his class on all the year-end tests. Fran then told him to invite some of his friends for a party the next day. Just leave it to her to touch the right tone!

He never got tired of either schooling. When Fran thought it was enough and wanted to quit, he wanted to keep going: “Let’s read some more yet,” would be his response. She decided that as long as he wanted to continue, she may as well also. Fran was keeping him up with his class at Hillcrest.

At one stage, however, he was not taking Fran’s role as teacher seriously. Sometimes he said he didn’t have to follow her instructions “because I wasn’t *really* his teacher. But now that I have the teacher’s manual in front of me, he takes me more seriously. He sometimes asks me ‘Is that what your book says or are you just making it up?’” Fran wrote to Jane that the pictures in the book she had sent were not really appropriate for Kevin. He did not recognize the road signs or the types of trees, since he was used to others in Baissa.

Mid-September, 1975, the Baissa school opened again after their rainy season break of some weeks, but Kevin was disappointed with the first week. It was mostly cleaning up the buildings, the furniture and the grounds. This included dusting and washing, cutting grass and raking, carrying cement blocks, etc. That was not his cup of tea. He was eager to know who would be his new teacher in grade 2, but had to wait almost the entire week to find this out. He also wanted to know what books they would be using. In the meantime, Fran continued with his home schooling. A few days later, regular classes started and Kevin once again was enjoying himself.

We are more than happy that we have decided not to send him off to Hillcrest. The local school is not as good, but with Fran teaching him on the side, he can read very well and seems particularly on the ball in arithmetic. He has seen a small type of “computer” that people are playing around with these days and hopes ardently to get one when we get back home. We have more or less promised him one.

This was the beginning of the intrusion of computer culture in our family. I suspect it must have been an early form of a calculator.

The opening routine of the school after each holiday period was similar to the one described above and Kevin never liked that part of it. Early January, 1976, Fran wrote,



Kevin starts school again tomorrow. The first two days are always general cleanup and that really frustrates him. He's a bit lazy, I'm sure, and doesn't understand just what he's supposed to do. If they'd assign each group to a certain task, I think he'd be alright, but they just tell the whole school to clean the whole grounds, buildings etc. He's always happy when real school starts.

Fran was also teaching Kevin from books that sister Jane would send. Some of these were substantial books of up to 200 pages with stories of 20 pages. But Kevin was handling the materials well. The math books, in fact, were too easy for him. They went through them "just for fun!" His school teacher told his class to learn the multiplication table and Kevin was doing quite well with them. It was a challenge to him, since it was something new to him. Fran wrote that "they teach math most of the time. If only they would spend that kind of time on reading." She added, "The school system here is really hopeless and I see no way out without a major overhaul." She was not impressed when the teacher made Kevin nervous by threatening to beat them if they did not learn those tables! With the benefit of hindsight, I wonder if we should not have discussed this incident with the teacher.

Kevin was beginning to read on his own by end October, 1975. On weekends, he would put a book under his pillow so that, when he woke, he would read a story to himself before getting up. He was reading the same books he would have been reading at Hillcrest and understood them well. At school, he continued to do well. End November, his teacher assigned him to teach reading to a group in his class. He said the kids listened quite well. He found it a great experience. He and his friends continued to play school with each other. So, Fran bought them a supply of pencils to give it a more real feeling.

By mid-February 1976, Kevin had finished reading a whole raft of books, including some of over 200 pages. He could read books like *Leading Little Ones to God* (M. Schooland), *Tell Me Why* (D. Korfker), *Devotions for the Children's Hour* (Taylor). He was getting bored with the programmed reading textbooks he was in. So Fran offered that he could skip one volume, but he refused because "Auntie Jane had sent them and said he should read through book seven before furlough and he didn't want to cheat!"

As we have already seen in this saga of Kevin's schooling, education can take many forms, much of it outside the realm of school. Late February, 1976, he was learning all sorts of stuff. Playing soccer would be the most familiar to you, but he also learned "what grasses and leaves will make brooms and ropes and how to set traps for different birds and wild animals." Fran tried hard to keep him somewhat "updated" with Western culture with the use of pictures and stories.

During an April 1976 holiday in Jos, we took Kevin to Hillcrest to check how he was doing compared to the kids there. The teacher said that he was doing very well after she tested him somewhat. We were, of course, very happy to hear this. It showed that we had not cheated him academically by keeping him at home.

Fran started teaching him map reading. "He could soon find cities on the Nigeria map by locating it in the index and then following with his fingers to B7 or J2 etc." He also learnt

to read the distance columns, which fit right into his continuing aviation interest. “He is so exact about numbers and has quite a memory for details,” a typical Prins quality that Daddy sadly lacked/lacks. The Mission aviation people have a chart which shows the distance between various airports and strips, the time it takes between them and the fare for each ride. Kevin soon had that entire chart memorized! He became jealous of all the rides I got and was full of aviation talk. He declared he wanted to become a pilot when he grew up. “We gave him a battery operated airplane for his birthday and he’s always building planes with his Lego. Every room is a runway for a different Nigerian city. It’s all so real to him.”

His next step was world geography; he studied the globe eagerly. He could tell both BC and Michigan time, because his globe indicated all the time zones. He knew the names of all the continents and of many African countries. He would take imaginary trips to other parts of the world and count the countries where he’s actually been. He counted Cameroon, because we once crossed the river dividing Cameroon from Nigeria. He counted Niger, because we once landed at the Niamey Airport. He would ask us so many “ethical” questions about current world events that he actually kept us on our toes. He had always lived in a Christian environment, but he was beginning to learn that not everyone in the world thinks Christianly. Fran wrote, “It’s amazing how he thinks these things through.”

### *Cynthia*

Cynthia was continuing to do well in her new surroundings: still always her happy self and kept everybody laughing most of the time. She was quite jealous of Wiebe, but, Fran wrote, we work that out the best we can.

A month later, Fran wrote, “Cynthia is almost always happy and playing. John says he didn’t know real babies could have such nice personalities and be so cute! He thought that was just in baby ads. She jabbars a lot and already says a few words that mean something to us.” Another month later I said something similar, according to Fran: “John enjoys the children very much and can’t believe they can be so ‘intelligent,’ cute, etc. Of course, he’s prejudiced, but he thinks Cynthia is so beautiful and she loves to flirt with her daddy. So, that really sets them on good terms together.” Fran continued,

She is always happy and trying something new to make people laugh. This morning she was pulling at clothes on the line and sucking the water out of them. Later, she took her favourite spoon to the sand box and started eating sand with it. She still has a very limited vocabulary but can manage to get herself understood. She’s on the verge of speaking and can imitate words very well.

Cynthia had also Africanized just like Kevin at her age!

First thing in the morning she’s out the door to her baby sitter’s compound! This morning she was trying her hand at the mortar and pestle and chasing chickens away etc. She comes back with palm oil around her mouth indicating she’s had

food with someone again! Then she pulls “Babee,” her little friend, along with her and comes back to the screen door calling “Ga-ga” (“*Gafara*” is Hausa for “excuse me.”) and then she points and jabbars so that I can tell she’d like more food and then the two of them sit down on the kitchen floor with their plate and eat whatever there is. She’s just following exactly the way of Kevin and Manoah in Wukari.

Towards the end of the month, Cynthia was still just jabbering a lot with only a few words intelligible. She talked to everyone and was so friendly. She wandered through the compound behind our house. One Sunday morning I found her somewhere inside a student roundhouse listening to the radio along with the others.

At this time, Fran described her as being “in a hauling and climbing state.” She would bring the potty chair into the living room, the towels outside, etc. “Last night, I thought I had everything fairly well under control, had set the table early for dinner, new tablecloth and all, and where did I find Cynthia? Yes, *walking* on the plates on the table and sprinkling Maggi sauce on the new cloth!”

By April, Fran wrote that she was happy with Cynthia’s progress in every way. She was getting interested in books and would climb on Fran’s lap and “demand” a story. She would slap the pictures as if they were naughty. Cloth books were her favourites at the time. Not long afterwards, she

was starting to say quite a few words, mostly repeating what she hears or understands us to be saying. Which language will be dominant is hard to tell, because she uses both Hausa and English words. She has an amazing appetite for snacks and her waistline shows it! Everything that tastes good is a “cookie,” even baby aspirins. At the market she always manages to find some goodies and promptly fills her hand and mouth with them.

During June, 1975, the seven-member Baas family stayed with us for some days. With Anita also joining us for some meals, we had thirteen people around the table. Of course, both of us grew up around a crowded table, but for our children that was a new experience. Wiebe sat in his feeding table, while Cynthia was in her high chair. She was not getting the attention she wanted and felt neglected. As soon as she was finished eating she wanted to get out and sit on Fran’s lap to be cuddled. “She’s so obvious about her jealousies and problems that it’s easy to know what to do about it. She is always so happy and friendly to everyone.”

Unless she was not well, Fran couldn’t get her dressed quickly enough to let her go outside. One day, Damaris was bathing her and then let her run outside naked in heavy rain. When Fran asked her about that, she explained Cynthia wanted to go outside. Fran commented, “I have to keep reminding her that, she, Damaris is the boss, and not Cynthia or Wiebe. But that falls on deaf ears.” Yes, that seems to be the way of this culture: You let a child have his way. Or was it because they were *our* children that she did not dare to restrain them? We saw this happen over and over again with her and other babysitters. A few days

later, Fran wrote, “She lets the little ones do and touch whatever they want and explains, ‘They reached for it, so I gave it to them.’”

Towards the end of October, 1975, Fran reported on an issue of great importance to parents but that I have been advised not to write about in detail: potty training. OK, I’ll spare you! Cynthia had graduated, “with hardly any effort on my part,” wrote Fran. Then she began training her dolly! She brought it to Fran, pulled a face and said “Ba.” She went through the motions of cleaning her up. Fran commented, “It won’t be long before she starts training Wiebe, I suppose.”

After she started talking, Cynthia never quit! This was a common refrain in the letters of early 1976. She understood English, but preferred Hausa. She also learnt to speak fairly well in Panso, Damaris’ language, though we never heard her speak it. In my 1976 January circular I wrote that “Cynthia is becoming a proper lady and a good conversationalist, not to say blabbermouth, and preferably in Hausa. She is a real little Nigerian and prefers African food. She frequently pushes aside her plate scornfully with the remark, ‘*Abincin Bature,*’ i.e., ‘white man’s slop!’” Again, according to Fran, “Whether she has anything to say or not, doesn’t matter. She just keeps talking. If you don’t understand her in one language, she tries another. She is beginning to speak more English lately, maybe because she realizes that we are going on furlough in six months!”

When Cynthia was two and a half, Fran started a little class for her and a few friends with picture books and blocks for counting. This was going to be a challenge for Cynthia, for she found it hard to sit still for five minutes, since she was used to talking all day. Fran commented, “We’ll see if we can discipline her enough to keep quiet for a few minutes.” I could not understand she did not lose her cool with Cynthia’s endless jabbering. She was always sharing news with Fran, always asking for food, for permission to change clothes or take yet another bath. She was not, at that time, interested in listening to stories.

Hausa-English is getting in her way. She sees a picture of a cat but insists that it’s a *kulle*; she sees a picture of a fish and says “*Kamar kifi fa,*” “Why, that’s like a fish.” Hausa is definitely stronger with her right now than English. If she wants something badly, like food or drink, she first says it in Hausa and then, if she thinks I might not have understood her, she repeats in English.

A few months later, she began to show more interest in reading and stories. If she and Fran were looking at and talking about pictures without reading, Cynthia would demand, “*Ki yi magana fa,*” “Hey, read what it says.” One day she brought a book to me and expressed surprise that I could also read. I often played with her in the evening but seldom read books. So she said in surprise, “*Ashe, ka iya!*” or “What do you know, you know how to read too!”

Disciplining her to be quiet would be a challenge of its own for Fran, since, in contrast to Wiebe (see below), if she ever raised her voice at Cynthia, “even if just slightly, her heart is broken!” A few days later, I wrote, “She’s extremely sensitive to any sign of parental

disapproval.” She was learning to repeat her prayer before meals and if we’d forget, she would feel hurt.

Mid-April, 1976, Cynthia was changing into a “terrible two,” something we were not accustomed to from her. “Everything is immediately ‘No’ and she whines easily. Fran took it in stride: “This stage will pass I presume.” But first it became worse during the rest of the month. For one thing, she was jealous at all the attention Wiebe had been getting recently due to his walking. In addition, she had a pinworm condition which, together with the medicine for it, all made for difficult behaviour on her part. In mid-July Fran still described her that way.

### *Wiebe*

In *my* first Baissa letter, I indicated some impatience on my part about Wiebe’s progress. He was still a baby, but I wanted him to start doing things prematurely. I used the excuse, “That’s the Boer in me, I guess.” In *her* first Baissa letter, Fran wrote that he was settling down a bit, but he was not an easy baby like Cynthia was. He had his crying spells, but they were getting shorter and fewer. He began to sleep from his 6 pm feeding till 4 am, but “Daddy always takes care of that.”

A month later, he was already “enjoying his baby swing, ‘sits up’ a little, can roll over and makes lots of noise and noises.” He decided to greet in the new year of 1975 with two teeth almost simultaneously without anyone noticing. Fran felt something with the spoon in his mouth, she looked and, *voila*, two teeth! She reported that Kevin was a bit jealous “that Wiebe is the winner with getting teeth first.”

However, at six months he still did not sit up. He got on all fours and started rocking his whole body, looking like he was trying to crawl. Maybe he would crawl before sitting up? He was “fine featured and long like Kevin. He was starting to sleep better so that I was happy my night duty was becoming easier.”

By February, 1975,

Wiebe seems to be determined to be fast at everything. Two teeth at five months and now at six months he is creeping. He’s long and tiny and there he is on all fours, rocking away and trying to move. He is so aware of his accomplishments that he grins from ear to ear. He can move quite a distance, but it doesn’t yet qualify for crawling. Sitting doesn’t interest him in the least. He sleeps till 7 am, when “we sit *gezellig* with him and Cynthia both.”

Then, at the end of the month, all of a sudden he sat up, alone even. By the end of April, he had become an expert at crawling. However, at this time, Fran was having a tough time finding the right foods for him, since we had shut down our fridge due to a lack of bottled gas. Wiebe had a great appetite for bread and milk, but was not growing much. She boiled peanuts with carrots and mixed it with a banana and cereal—and he liked it! Peanuts

were, of course, the “perfect food” and readily available. Also we had oranges growing in our backyard.

Wiebe had been quite sick for some time, but by mid-May, he was well again, had begun eating again and was near his old weight of 18 lbs. His sleeping habits had improved as well, but sometimes he would wake up several times in quick succession and would “just holler in anger.” One midnight he kept at it for over an hour, but we were sleeping through it all and heard nothing till our neighbour Anita, on her way from the maternity ward, “heard him screaming way down there. She came to see if we were having trouble. She called us at the window, but we heard neither the screaming nor her calling us! Well, we must have eventually.” Fran added, “He definitely has red hair like his Opa Boer, so I guess we named him right.” By late October, white hair was overcoming the red —“unfortunately,” according to Fran. There was some left in January and Fran promised to send a red lock home for them to see how really red it was.

Then Wiebe got sick again. We tried all manner of medicine to no avail. In June, 1975, he was losing weight again and becoming skinny. It turned out to be some kind of worm you pick up when eating dirt or sand contaminated with stools! Ugh! Fran wrote that at his age it’s hard to keep things from his mouth. I guess this was the price we and he were paying for allowing so much freedom for our children to wander around. But Cynthia also ate everything in sight and was healthy and happy. We knew some missionaries who kept their children isolated in the house away from Nigerian children for that very reason. That, to our thinking, was even more disastrous. Freedom always exacts its price, but lack of it even more.

Towards the end of the month we took Wiebe back to Takum hospital for another check up. The medicine he was taking left him looking yellow as if he had hepatitis and he felt nauseated much of the time, listless, tired and unhappy. We suspected he was also anemic. We hoped they would find the problems, “for we were getting a bit worn out with the bad nights and much crying in the day. Our helpers began to describe him as a “*mai rikice*” or “troublesome kid.” Damaris, the baby sitter, often would bring him back to Fran with the report, “He’s crying, Madam,” as if we had not heard!

Another hospital visit early July did not help much. They found that he had a slightly low blood count and a light case of anemia. He was also underweight. His behaviour did not change. We remembered that Kevin was often sickly during his first year and a half but was doing fine by this time. Hopefully the same would come true for Wiebe. At the same time, Cynthia was perfectly healthy, even though “she eats everything and everywhere, probably including unboiled water.” A few weeks later we began to breathe a sigh of relief at the signs of improvement. Still not there, but much better. It was a long haul for him, but by his first birthday, he started regaining his weight and was once again happy, playing with toys and with other children, crawling all over the place and screaming for attention. Fran planned one of her typical parties for him that would include a host of compound kids. Kevin bought a rattle for him from his weekly allowance. We gave him a Tonka truck and a Fisher Price bus.

Finally by the third week in July Wiebe seemed to really be on the mend. “He is eating so much now, you can see him grow by the day. His cheeks have fattened up again. He is crawling vigorously, getting into everything again like cupboards, waste baskets and bookshelves. In spite of these inconveniences, you can imagine how happy we are with his progress again.”

Two months later, some of the symptoms had re-appeared, but they did not get him down as before. He still was pulling things off the shelves and out of the cupboards and had started to climb onto the furniture. To put a stop to it all, Fran took the books off the shelves and tied the cupboard doors. A few days later she returned the books and untied the doors. Wiebe had lost interest in them, at least for the moment. But sure enough, he started it again. This time we tried to teach him that this was a no-no, but he did not heed us. Fran wrote that “even a strong reprimand (and slight slap) from Daddy did not discourage his efforts. When we say ‘No!’ he just looks at us and raises his hand as if to say ‘Why not?’” Once I wagged my finger at him and he promptly wagged back!

He loved Damaris and enjoyed being carried on her back. Damaris would pull both children in the wagon. She’s very nice to them but a bit careless at times, so that Fran had to keep a constant eye on the situation. He started walking with the help of either his potty chair or highchair, but still very weak in his legs. Kevin said he hoped that Wiebe would be slower with walking than he was. Kevin was a good sixteen and a half months and Wiebe was almost fifteen months. So, we were watching who would “win” in being the slowest! By mid-October Wiebe was making some progress. If we held him by the hand he would try to move. When we let him go, he would stand for a few seconds and promptly get down on his knees. The jury was still out.

He had become quite set in his routines. End November Fran wrote,

Wiebe is a little rascal now. He climbs on everything, pushes things out of his way, hauls everything out of the cupboards and bookshelves and then crawls in there himself. He doesn’t respond to “No.” He just looks at us and grins. Even gentle spankings from Dad don’t impress him. He has that “*ondeugende*” (naughty) look in his eyes. Didn’t John throw his wooden shoes in water when he was little? Well, Wiebe feels that’s where all shoes belong. He often throws shoes in a pail of water we usually have in the bathroom.

For the record from John: There is only *one* known incident of my throwing something in a ditch and it would *not* have been a wooden shoe or any other! Besides, had he not noticed the *ondeugende* look in Fran’s eyes when he first met her? Fran continued,

He still refuses to walk. He stood alone for the first time on his sixteenth month birthday. We all clapped for him and he thought that was cute, so he did it a few more times, but since then he’s lost interest. He just gets on his knees, grins and claps for himself. I think he knows we are watching him and want him to try, but he has his mind made up!

Fran added, “Can you imagine how I spend my days, trying to hold the whole business together! This is certainly a different term for me than our first two terms in Nigeria. I’m enjoying it though, and find homemaking a very fulfilling fulltime job.” A month later, still no change in the Wiebe walking department. Early January, 1976, Wiebe started “walking” on all fours. He stretches out his knees and half standing goes on both hands and feet” with still no interest in either standing or walking at 18 months. Even my patient Fran professed impatience with his lack of progress. She ended a letter with a word to herself, “Patience, Mommy!” In our 1976 annual January circular, I wrote that “in his more forgetful moments we notice attempts at standing up independently.” A month later, still walking mainly by holding on to Fran’s finger. She wondered who would give up first, she or he.

*Wiebe Karl started to walk on February 8, 1976!* Two centuries after the American Revolution! Wow, what a struggle that had been. Kevin was relieved that Wiebe was actually slower at walking than he was! A couple of days later Wiebe was already trying to run. “He goes all day now and says ‘Big boy, big boy.’” He was obviously pleased with himself. “He’s getting many enthusiastic cheers from his siblings, Damaris and friends. He’s decided he wants to grow up fast now, as he also wants to use the potty chair.” We planned a party to celebrate his walking. “Good excuse to butcher some rabbits,” wrote Fran.

As to discipline, he was very different from Cynthia, who was overly sensitive to it. In that same 1976 circular, I wrote,

In addition to refusing to walk, he refuses to learn the meaning of “No!” “When we say “No,” he only wags his warning finger at us and merely lets out a disapproving grunt—only to repeat the offence. All his mother’s considerable teaching skills have so far run amuck, not to speak of his father’s clumsier attempts.

Similarly, Fran wrote, “Dad can say ‘No’ to him and slap his hand lightly ten times for getting at the books, and it doesn’t seem to affect him at all. He just looks back at Dad and wags his finger back or jabbers.” After he started walking on his own, he became much happier, but, wrote Fran late April, 1976, “He’s a little rascal with a gleam in his eyes. He just sparks with naughtiness.” In the next letter, he “is getting to be more and more of a rascal every day with that look in his eyes the other two never had.” Fran repeated this terminology in quite a number of letters of the time. He would wag his finger “as if to tell us that he’ll get back to us someday.”

Wiebe’s been a fussy one, wrote Fran, just like Kevin during his first two years.

Kevin was often restless at night and then crabby the next day. Now he’s very cooperative, easy to work with and sleeps very well. We are just assuming that Wiebe will grow out of it too. But it does make for frustrating days and nights in the meantime. Good thing that Cynthia is usually cheerful and easy to manage.



In February, 1976, Wiebe began to respond to Hausa talk. Two months later: “He’s saying more words all the time now; some Hausa, some English.” Fran remembers one humorous incident of Wiebe’s early Hausa. We all needed a cholera shot to be administered by Gremar, the new nurse on the compound. Cynthia cried a little, but Wiebe “just laughed and said, ‘Auntie, *allura, haka,*’ ‘That’s how Auntie gives a needle.’”

Fran had written to Mother Jennie about Wiebe’s pranks, but Mother did not believe her. So, towards the end of our Baissa stay, Fran gave her a few examples:

So you don’t believe that Wiebe is naughty? Well, you’ll see when we come. His tricks: Wherever there is water, he either climbs in himself or throws all the shoes in; He hauls all the diapers out of the cupboard, crawls in himself and shuts the door; He licks the peanut butter off the bread and throws the bread away; He drinks as much juice as he wants and pours the rest on the floor, etc. etc. etc. And then he has the cutest and most winsome grin, so Mommy can forgive him anything!

### *The Interacting Family*

While the former section talks about individual members of the family and our parental relationships with and reactions to our kids, here the topic is life and social interaction *within* the family, especially between the children. We had planned a family holiday in Jos for March, 1975 and intended to drive up there. However, we could not get on the ferry to cross the Donga River. The approach to the ferry was too sandy for the car. We decided to turn around and go via Takum. While there, we were told an empty mission plane was going to Jos. So, the family was put aboard and flew, while I drove the six-to-eight-hour road by myself. Such flights, by the way, are quite costly, but with three little children, we considered the extra cost well worth it for Fran.

I am relating this bit only to demonstrate once again, the unexpected twists travel can take in this country. One never knows what’s up ahead and can take nothing for granted. Actually, that is good for the soul, for it makes you more conscious of the need to depend on God and to pray. It also makes you more grateful when you arrive safely without any “interesting” adventures along the way. This particular time, we were “lucky” with that empty plane; usually things don’t work out so conveniently.

During the Jos holiday, Cynthia pushed Wiebe down three steps in his stroller. He tipped over and landed under the stroller. His lips and nose were bruised and bleeding, while he had a little bump on his forehead. “It’s amazing how tough kids can be,” commented Fran. Being in Jos, we asked Verbrugge to take a look at him for internal injuries, but, thank God, all was fine. We were reminded how alert we had to be constantly with three children around. Cynthia did many of such things in “pure playfulness,” without realizing that she was hurting him. She cried this time simply because Wiebe cried. Kevin thought that Cynthia deserved a real spanking, but Fran said that Mommy and Daddy should be spanked for letting it happen!

Back in Baissa again by April, Wiebe had started crawling properly and moved really fast. Kevin would get disgusted at both of them, because all his building projects were now really in danger. We did not allow him to shut all the doors to keep them out of his way. Again he would mutter in despair, “I shouldn’t have prayed for them!”

Back in Baissa, Fran frequently went for a bike ride, but she usually took the same route up and down the airstrip several times, for it was level, unlike much of the area. Sometimes Kevin would ride along on his small bike while she would carry the other two on the child’s seat on her bike. Early 1976, Kevin graduated to a medium-sized bike and the two continued their airstrip tours.

Cynthia would sometimes try to be Fran’s little helper by trying to get Wiebe to stand up and “walk” with him just as she would see Fran do. Sometimes Fran “would lay them in bed together in the morning and they would actually play and jabber to each other without being mean for a few minutes. They all go to bed willingly and easily for naps and evening, but they now get up *so early* in the morning. Can’t have everything, I guess.”

By July, 1975, it was becoming so interesting for us to compare the progress of each child. While Kevin was playing school with his blackboards and friends, Cynthia, almost a two year old then, had started enjoying little books. She would bring a handful of them and we’d sit down and together look at the pictures. Wiebe was still in the “ripping” stage when it came to books, as Fran called it. But he had his own that he was allowed to rip to his heart’s content. Everyone seemed satisfied.

During my involvement in the Ife Conference (see Chapter 18), Fran, Lydia and the children flew to Miango, near Jos, for the Mission’s Annual Spiritual Conference. But it was going to be a hassle for Fran to get things organized before flying out. She wrote, “Good thing the airstrip is close by. I will have to bring the kids and luggage to the strip and leave them there, while I bring the car home and walk back to the field.” That walk would have been some ten minutes. Of course, she would leave the children in the hands of Lydia during that time.

But while at Miango, Cynthia was looking for Daddy. She had seen me leave with the plane just as she herself would a couple of days later and she expected fully to see me at Miango. When she did not see me there, she declared, “Daddy *ya gudu*,” “Daddy ran away.”

We met up with each other in Jos after both conferences. Things had not been easy for Fran at the Mission conference, though Lydia did her very best to care for the children. No problems with Kevin, but Cynthia got malaria with all its attendant difficulties. Wiebe was unhappy with his hard bed and hardly slept at night throughout the conference, a mode that continued during our days together in Jos. This, of course, put him in a difficult mood during the daytime. Fran wrote,

I was really exhausted after all those meetings and bad nights that I clunked out. Having the responsibility for the children all alone for that long just wore me out. By Saturday I could tell something was wrong. Sunday morning I woke up with my

famous trilogy: fever, headache and sore ears. Yes, I had the siege again—malaria! I was so worn out that I had no resistance left and that did me in.

Fortunately, this time it did not take long. By Wednesday and at home in Baissa, she was sort of on top of it again, but still worn out from it all. Wiebe was happy to be in his own bed again and slept soundly for the first time since we left home. Fran commented, “As we’ve often decided, we’ll *never* take him away again, until....”

As I write this history in 2013, I belatedly felt like a heel at how I left my wife and family in such difficult circumstances. At the same time, that Ife Conference led us to a turning point in our ministry that brought me into contemporary Nigeria, though in a way different from what I originally had foreseen. It was so crucial that I could not afford to miss it. Still....

Right after the above two conferences—and I *mean right* after!—there came Jerry Gort from my Seminary and VU years, not quite without notice, but almost, since we had not heard from him for months. He was to have come together with Donna, his wife, but their house-and-kid sitting arrangements fell through the last minute, too late to make alternative arrangements. Fran wrote, “I’m so sorry, because I do enjoy ‘my kind’ of company sometimes too. It’s always men, men, men, but I enjoy a woman’s fellowship too!” Jerry and I went on an overnight trek to a village to give him a taste. During the course of his visit, we had many stimulating discussions, while I was updated a bit on recent missiological developments at the VU. “Bush work” tends to isolate you from professional and academic developments.

One day Fran took Jerry to Takum to show him around the Mission there, while I took care of the children at home. Fran expected that she would be more tired from that trip than if she had stayed home, but at least it was a change for her. When he left, he forgot his travel documents with us. So, the plane had to make an extra return trip Jos-Baissa to pick them up in time for Jerry’s onward journey. That cost him a pretty penny, for non-staff paid full fare.

By October, Cynthia and Wiebe’s mutual jealousy was well developed. Cynthia’s had been there somewhat all along, but now both of them! When I was gone, Fran could not take both of them to church, for they were far too jealous and then became difficult to manage. I would play a simple game with Wiebe with both of us sitting at opposite ends of the table. I would call out “Wiebe” and he would respond as quick as he could with “Baba” or “Daddy.” Cynthia would right away interfere with her “*Ni fa?*” “What of me?” Then I would have to do the same routine with her. As Fran kept commenting, her jealousy was so obvious that it was easy to handle. Kevin was really starting to enjoy playing with the both of them, even rough playing together on the rug. He was quite impressed with how much older he was than “the little ones.” Perhaps this was the origin of the distinction that Fran and I made for years between Kevin and “the kids,” much to annoyance of “the kids.

As 1975 drew to a close, Kevin and Cynthia were learning to play with each other, though not without tension. He was really quite nice to her, but you know how brothers and sisters can act after a while. Fran had to keep reminding him that she was allowed in the

playroom just as much as he was. If there were precious things, he did not want her to touch, he should place them on a shelf out of her reach. “But,” Fran wrote, “he’d rather just shut the door when he gets tired of her.”

In another January 1976 letter I summarized our situation as follows:

As a family, we are all doing well. Kevin is enjoying himself to the hilt at the local school. These kids are growing up in the most carefree surroundings here with all the space in the world to play. They are becoming increasingly Nigerian in their interests, lingo and thought world. From that point of view, any move we make away from here will be for the worse. We’ll never get a better place for them.

Nevertheless, as you know from the companion chapter, I was determined to move from Baissa village into the city.

### *Community*

And then there was the social life with the wider community, both Nigerian and expatriates. It was not as rich and varied as it was in Wukari. There people would drop in more readily and we had the tennis gang. Besides, it was on the way to Jos, while Baissa was on a dead end; it served only as destination, while Wukari was a through-way to Jos and beyond. Fran found that there was really nothing to do there for diversion, especially during my absences. That was one reason for her frequent bike rides.

The above paragraph described the daytime situation. The evenings were something else! The Bible School teachers would come as a group almost every evening, supposedly to greet us, but in reality to enjoy our comparatively comfortable furniture, the light and the tea or coffee. This became a burden to us, for it deprived us from any privacy or family activities. For a while I would just leave them sit there and go to my desk in the bedroom to work on my dissertation, but then Fran would be stuck with them. They did not take the hint. So, after some time, I let them know that they were stretching our hospitality. Once a week was fine, but *every* evening?

Of course there was the usual Monday market traffic, including the evangelists. As you may know from Chapter 18, that turned into a Bible study event. But on the whole, Fran was right: socialization in the Baissa area was slim. One occasional exception was the Headmaster, Mallam Yohanna Garba, but he was not your typical native. He had a Hausa background from Sokoto. How he ended up in Baissa, I have forgotten, if ever I knew. As a Hausa person, he would naturally feel superior to the locals and be drawn more to the white missionaries with whom he shared alleged superiority. This, I should explain, is my interpretation; it is not something he ever spelled out for us.

One memorable visit was that of Mr. Samu’ila Gani, a Wukari person high up in the Federal Government as a Permanent Secretary. He was a brother-in-law to Addi Byewi and son-in-law to the elder who fed us that Tomapep meal in Wukari. He was a fine

Christian and needed a place to get away from it all. So he requested a few days at our place. We were more than happy to accommodate him, but much of the time I was away. He did achieve his purpose of getting away from it all. He expressed amazement that with Fran's college degree, she was content to be a homemaker and home school her son.

During the course of 1975, we also socialized with the British and Dutch managers of the local saw mill I referred to in the companion chapter. Given the climate of corruption these people had to work under, they were totally discouraged. In the middle of their contract they just up and left completely dispirited. Later, when we moved to Jos we saw more of such situations of people just throwing up their hands in despair and quit. Nigeria was/is its own biggest enemy.

Christmas 1975 was a mixture of all three, family, missionaries and community. We spent the major part of Christmas Day itself with Lou and Jan Haveman at Mararraba, some 50 kilometers towards Takum. Half way there, we attended a church service at Tati Ngoro, the home village of our first domestic helper Ibrahim Amman. On Boxing Day, we drove some 35 kilometers to Bakin Kogi of Bakundi congregation, a place where we spent our entire Christmas celebrations in 1967. By midday we would drive another 35 kilometers the other way to pick up Bulus, our current helper, together with his wife and Damaris, who was also from the place, and then return home together. The children were so happy to see them again. A very mobile Christmas, but we could count on some good food all along the way. The next day, Saturday, would mean lots of cleaning, since we expected the Graham Weeks family for a couple of days over New Year's.

### *With Missionaries*

Though Baissa, located along a road that dead ended at the border with Cameroon, was more isolated than Wukari, we did not lack missionary and other visitors. Already in December, a month after the move, we could count: the Bijlevelds, Wukari government doctor—two adults and two children; the Lodewyks, previous Baissa missionaries—two adults and three children; the Ubels, Mountain View Hostel houseparents—two adults and two kids; the Verbrugges—two adults and three kids. Over Christmas, with the Ubels and Verbrugges, we had fourteen around the table.

All the kids stayed up late at night and oh, what fun! Kevin enjoyed it so much that by the end of the week he was so exhausted, he could hardly sleep. His bedroom was an indescribable mess, but each evening we had to clear it up to make enough room for Lydia to sleep on a cot. Otherwise, we pretty well left all their building projects, games, etc. as they were. If you've ever had kids, you can imagine it all!

Only a few weeks later, Dr. Harry Boer from TCNN came to teach a ten-day course and for some meetings. Fran described him as a "nice and interesting man; quite set in his ways, but that's typical for a bachelor." I wondered how she knew that! I confess not to ever have detected that. One thing we both remember him for was his surprising ability to entertain little children, who loved him and hung on his lips as he told them off-the-cuff

stories about wild and spooky creatures like “push me-pull you’s.” By the time they went to bed, they would feel uneasy and fearful, wondering if they might encounter any of these creatures in the dark. Fascinating stories, but not exactly bed time stuff! It probably was more than a coincidence that at the time he was writing a commentary on the New Testament book “Revelations,” a book full of apocalyptic scenes.

Boer did more than entertain the children with his stories. He also would ask if anything needed fixing around the house. He knew that I was not an R&M person. I would get thoroughly frustrated trying to fix things. I would attempt only the most urgent tasks and usually found someone around town who could do it better than me. Knowing all that, Dr. Harry offered his services. I don’t know who was more grateful, Fran or me. We also tended to cash in when other missionaries with R&M skills would visit. They were always glad to reciprocate our considerable hospitality.

Whenever things got really hectic around the house, Fran would tease me and ask if I did not wish that I were Harry instead of John! Well, no, for the single life never appealed to me; it always seemed a lonely life to me, though it may have its conveniences.

This R&M thing even entered the negotiations about our move to Baissa. The Mission agreed to my condition that when our car broke down, they would send a mechanic to repair it and not expect me to do it. Actually, I never needed to call anyone in. We had that fairly new Opel we used in The Netherlands and used it sparingly and carefully, since it was not built for Baissa roads. I often used a motorcycle that we had bought from the Evenhouses, for it also could be used along the jungle trails. Local mechanics could often do needed repairs, at least, if we could provide the parts, which could also be a challenge at times.

Christmas 1975 was not quite so loaded with missionaries. You can find the details above under “Community.” We did have Graham and Katy Weeks over for the New Year weekend. Graham, you may remember, was the British fan and look-alike of Charles Spurgeon I met at the Ife Conference. Katy was a quiet person and a great pianist—and also an aggressive driver, as we noticed when she rushed us along the narrow rural roads of Scotland many years later. Graham, on the other hand, was an avid blunder buster of a conversationalist with a host of strong conservative and off-the-wall opinions on both politics and theology. He rightfully considered himself a Kuyperian, though more conservative than the average contemporary Kuyperian. They gave us a huge guest book that we have used ever since through 2013 and is likely to last us for the rest of our days. As our kids learned to write, they would write their names and dates on blank pages throughout the book that we keep coming across as the pages fill one after another. They thought of themselves as really naughty. We never disappointed them by denying it! The first signature in the book was that of the Weeks, who thanked us for “a memorable weekend in Baissa.” Other signatures on that first page were by Kefa, a blind Baissa evangelist, and by the three-man crew of that airplane that crash landed on our airstrip just a couple of days later and about which you should have read in the aviation section in the companion chapter.

## *The Animals in our Life*

### *Rabbitry*

We transported all our rabbit cages from Wukari to Baissa along with the rabbits themselves so that we did not have to start from scratch. By end March, 1975, we were doing well—eighteen at six weeks old; eight, two weeks old; six, a couple of days old. These statistics did not include the older generation of does and one buck. But it was not always success. A few months later in May, all the females fooled us. They all went through the usual process of building nests with both their own hair and grass, but on the due date there was nothing. Meanwhile, the entire family would daily watch the process unfold with excitement and eager anticipation. They did this for several cycles in a row. Then we got ourselves a new male and suddenly, in July, the drought changed into a downpour—within just a few days, 32 babies from six does. We had a real Patriarch Jacob in our buck! We had to build an additional cage to make room for them all. By October, 1975, we had a regular rabbit farm: 30 ready to butcher, 13 young ones, 22 newborns and two pregnant does! We used the meat for Nigerian stews, for sandwiches, meat pie, curry sauce, soups and for any menu that called for chicken. This came in very handy, for, due to inflation, the price of meat at the market had suddenly skyrocketed and we would have had to seriously cut back on our meat consumption if it were not for our rabbits. From the perspective of 2013, that might not have been a bad idea!

We even developed a stylized “rabbit conversation” in Hausa between ourselves, the two first lines of which we still use even in 2013. It’s a traditional stylized Hausa formulation for bringing good news.

|                |                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Albishirinki!  | I’ve got good news for you! |
| Goro.          | Okay, tell me.              |
| Zomo ta haifu. | A rabbit has babies.        |

Though I occasionally did it, I was not good at butchering rabbits, let alone happy doing it. So, when we needed one, we would assign Bulus, our domestic assistant, to pick out a big one and butcher it. He would bring us the meat he knew we would eat and gratefully take the rest home. We used ten as presents during Christmas 1975. People loved them. That same week we had nineteen more young! It really went crazy. We loved them too.

### *Snakes*

You may remember the snake in our house during language study back in 1966. Since the beginning of our ministry in Baissa, we had several snakes in the house, for they were omnipresent in both grass and bush, but never poisonous ones to the best of our knowledge, which admittedly, was definitely not the most authoritative on this score. In July 1975, we had another visit, this time a poisonous one. I was gone and, blessed be God, all three children were napping and thus safely out of the way. But Fran was only three feet away

from it. Close as she was, Fran did not see it, but the two Nigerians who happened to be there spied it immediately and promptly clubbed it to death with their stick. Fran thought Nigerians must have an eye for this kind of thing, always being on guard for such threats.

She was so grateful that the children were not around, for one of them, probably Wiebe, might have approached it with his natural curiosity to touch it. We shuddered thinking about it and were reminded of the need for God's protection over the children during their outside playing and wandering around. We could not bear the thought of having to lock them up in the house, though that would have been so much safer. Some missionaries might have considered us reckless. However, previous missionaries in Baissa had always left their children free to wander and play. Exactly a year later, we had another one killed in the house. This time the children were around. Wiebe noticed it first. He pointed at it and cried out, "*Tsoro, tsoro!*"—"Afraid, afraid!" He had imbibed the deep-seated fear Nigerians have for snakes and instinctively responded accordingly.

Fran did not pay attention immediately, for she knew that he was fearful of a lot of things like flies, ants or even black spots on the floor. She told Kevin to look at what was bothering him. When he recognized the snake, he knew what to do: He ran off to get Bulus, who came immediately and killed it with a stick. "Nobody fools around with snakes here and no kids ever make a false snake alarm," commented Fran. It is considered too dangerous for games. Reminds me a bit of the enmity between snakes and humans as in Genesis 3. They are definitely seen as enemies. It was a small snake, though its poison was no less dangerous. So it was probably thrown away.

However, large snakes, even poisonous ones, after the poison was evicted, might be cooked and eaten. Once I drove over a large snake with the car. I stopped and went back and forth over it several times till I was confident of its death. I then used a stick to put it in the trunk and brought it home. It was identified as highly poisonous by Nigerians. Bulus' wife cooked it for me and I had a delicious snake sauce over my rice that evening. Fran insists in 2013 that she would not have eaten it! Okay.

### *Other Food and Drink Issues*

You may have noticed that we do not write much about food issues. Those who know me well may be amazed at my silence at this front. Actually, food issues were very interesting; I could wax eloquent about them and long winded. There were the tropical fruits growing in our backyard. There was the gardening and canning Fran did, sometimes with the help of Damaris. There was the food often flown in from Jos. Then the many issues surrounding Nigerian cooking and food. So much to tell, but we have chosen to skip most of it.

However, I do wish to tell you about our pork adventures. It all began when meat became more expensive and we needed to find alternatives. In addition to the rabbits, we started buying an occasional pig and had it slaughtered crudely by Bulus and whoever he chose to help him. They loved doing it, for they would take home the parts we did not want,



including the head, a substantial hunk of meat. It ended up costing us half the price of beef and was much tastier, local beef being very tough and leathery. Soon word got out about us and pigs. People starting coming to our house, offering to sell their pigs. Well, we did not need that many. One pig would yield us around 40 lbs. and last us many moons, especially because we also had rabbits. We became almost self-sufficient at the meat front.

During our Christmas 1975 visit to the Havemans, the topic of slaughtering pigs came up again. Lou suggested we should do the butchering ourselves in order to produce “proper” cuts. I was not that interested, for however cut, it would all taste the same anyhow. Maybe I had become too Nigerian? For the sake of friendship, I agreed to share in buying a larger pig and butcher it “properly.” This first time, we followed an instruction book, but were confused by the diagrams. Problem was solved when we turned the book right side up!

Then a Swiss CRC development staff from Niger, the country north of Nigeria, visited us on a day we were doing another pig. He introduced me to making head cheese. I remembered its taste from my childhood and was all ears. So he taught me to make it to the chagrin of Bulus, since from now on he would no longer take the head home. Ever since then, I have made head cheese during our Nigeria years. Though the making of it grossed our kids out once they were in their teens and would embarrass them if their friends happened to come around while one was acookin’, we all loved its taste, including our guests—as long as we did not tell them what it was!

For the genuine pork lovers among our readers, I herewith reproduce the recipe for head cheese, a true European delicacy.

Scrape the skin of all hair and wash thoroughly—the skin, not the hair!  
 Place the *entire* head in a large Dutch oven or pail and cover it with water.  
 Cook it until everything falls off the bones—8 hours or so.  
 Mix the spices in at early stage—black pepper, seasoned salt, half a dozen bay leaves, sausage spicing (ask your butcher).  
 Separate the bones manually and discard.  
 Separate the water from all the meat. Reserve the water.  
 Grind *everything* in a meat grinder or blender.  
 Mix the ground meat with enough water to make a thick stew.  
 Pour the stew into containers like bread tins.  
 Place in the fridge overnight.  
 Following morning cut it into the size blocks you want to use.  
 Freeze them.

Head cheese is good for sandwiches, soups, gravies, and stews.

You could now be the proud owner of head cheese. The recipe emphasizes using *everything*, literally—eyes, brains, snout, everything. There is no reason to take any of that out, unless, of course, you are squeamish! But why should you? If you eat butt called “ham,” everything from there on is up! Herewith I leave my mark upon the world! *Guten Appetit!*

During 2010, I contributed the above recipe to a Baptist cookbook. The editor of the book has been bugging me ever since to show her how to make it! I excused myself for not knowing where to get a pig head, but she, being Chinese, knew of a meatshop where it would be available. So, no more of that excuse. I guess that one of these days I will have to succumb. While we liked it in Nigeria, in Vancouver there is such a variety of meats available that we don't need to go through all that work and fill up our freezer.

Back in our Wukari years, I learned to appreciate drinking *kunu*. Whenever we were visiting anywhere, Nigerians always served us soft drinks, either Coke or Orange, often warm. Usually missionaries would not like it, but still preferred it to *kunu*, because of the unboiled water added to it. Simply not safe. You've read how I began to drink it hesitatingly and eventually drank it quite freely, often with a prayer in my heart. It was one of these things that brought us closer to each other. You could be just one of the boys when it was served. I was especially appreciative of Lydia's mother, Naomi, since she took special care when making it for me.

In Baissa I continued drinking it. A normal scene would be for me to visit a church or village somewhere. During the course of the visit, the leaders would gather with their missionary guest for a social drink, *kunu*. Now that they knew I drank it, they were spared the trouble of locating a "mineral," as they called soft drinks. It would be served in a large bowl, which would travel around the circle, each participant taking a few sips in turn, including me. Not altogether hygienic, I realized, but it brought me closer to them. I never fooled myself into thinking that I would ever be accepted as Nigerian, but I always felt it is good for missionaries to participate in the ways of their hosts as much as possible.

I became sick or, rather, not well. I lost energy, strength, zest and, in general, just started feeling down physically. I continued working, but it became more difficult. Since this did not let up, I consulted a doctor in Takum. He checked out my diet and when he found out I was drinking *kunu* regularly, he kind of croaked and told me in no uncertain terms to quit drinking it altogether. I recognized the wisdom of his advice and followed his instruction. However, it was very difficult for me to have to explain to my hosts that I could no longer drink it, because the *bakin ruwa* or unboiled water was making me sick. And sure enough, after I quit drinking it, I slowly recovered my strength. Over the years, I made an exception with Naomi's *kunu*. We would meet only sporadically, but when she knew we would meet, she would be prepared. It never had any adverse effect on me.

And with this, we started our next home service-study period in Grand Rapids. This was the end of our Baissa time not only but of our CRCN years. A huge change was afoot and a big dream struggling to become reality.

## Part 7

### Family and Social Life in Jos

(1976-1996)

#### Chapter 31<

### Jos I - Family and Social Life

(1976-1979)

This is the companion to Chapter 19 that deals with the first period of our Jos ministry. It begins with the extended home service (1976-1977) in Grand Rapids, which was a preparatory time for the upcoming ministry with the ICS. Do realize that this chapter covers the same years as its companion.

#### *North America*

##### *Family Stuff*

##### *Our Core Family*

I repeat one of the opening paragraphs from the companion Chapter 19 to remind you where we began in Grand Rapids:

We found ourselves once again in that same old house at 1058 Kalamazoo Ave. It was on an old, curvy, narrow, neglected, bumpy and busy thoroughfare that possibly followed an ancient Aboriginal trail, in the middle of Grand Rapids' ghetto where few "self-respecting" mission supporters would want to live.

Our letters from Nigeria just about always started with a paragraph about letters written, sent, arrived and not arrived. Furlough letters were different and fewer. My first letter from Grand Rapids to my folks started with Kevin, who was now seven years old: "Kevin is standing by my side here and he will tell me what he wants you to know." So, the core section was dictated by Kevin himself as follows:

I have a calculator. I bought it with my own money for \$9.95. I like to do problems on it. Mommy took all of us children to the Public Library yesterday and we came

back with eight books. On Cynthia's birthday the other day (August 12), we celebrated by going to McDonalds for some hamburgers and French fries. Boy, did that taste good! We don't have such places in Nigeria at all. We had pot pies for lunch today. We can just buy them in the store. In Nigeria, Mommy has to make them herself and then she makes them with rabbit.

In that same letter I wrote,

We have to keep a strict eye on the children when they go outside, for they are not used to having to look out for cars. We probably did not do them a favour by leaving Baissa, for they will never have such a good playground as they had there. But they are doing well under the circumstances. For a few days they were somewhat difficult; the change of climate and everything else is hard on adults, let alone small children.

Three weeks later they had already become used to not being able to run around freely as they did in Baissa. Not getting out as much did not really seem to bother them. For one thing, they had that exciting TV thing to captivate their attention.

The house was only two blocks from Oakdale Christian School, our school of choice for Kevin, a very handy arrangement. The location of the school meant that in the past many CRC folk had lived in the area, but they had all fled to the suburbs and left the place for the Blacks. Many still used Oakdale for their children because of its excellent reputation, but they now had to be bused or driven in.

So, the CRC schools and churches stayed; the CRC people moved away. They were prepared to go through the expense of selling their *personal* properties cheaply, build elsewhere and take the loss, but they were *not* willing to do the same with their *communal* properties. They ended up with isolated islands of CRC institutions in the midst of the Black ghetto, with everyone busing or driving in from the suburbs. After their members had moved away and made it clear they did not want or could not live among the Blacks, their churches tried to reach out to the people among whom they did not want to or could not live among. That was too artificial and contradictory an arrangement to succeed. Few Blacks have joined these CRC congregations, though quite a number have received financial and other support from them. To the best of my knowledge, only two congregations disbanded and cut their losses—Burton and Franklin CRCs; the others are still there and relatively flourishing. Oakdale School reached out more successfully by encouraging the residents to enroll, even at the expense of subsidizing their tuition, often through a CRC congregation.

On September 7, 1976, Kevin went to Oakdale School the first time. He came home that day completely amazed. They did not spend their first day cleaning the school compound or carrying cement blocks! That was a part of the Baissa school routine he never liked. They started regular classes that very day, something he had never experienced before in his Baissa school. Three days later he said he enjoyed it very much. He was now in grade

two. He had become quite a bookworm, but now he allowed TV to crowd out his reading adventures. We had to restrict his TV time.

Kevin thought of the Black neighbourhood kids as Nigerians, but he could not figure out why they were so unfriendly to him. At one time he came home crying, because some kids had been harassing him. He never became integrated in this neighbourhood the way he had in Nigeria. Black, yes, but something totally different.

At first, we used to leave his bike on the front porch, but one day it was gone. Later that day, a boy came with part of the bike and offered to find the rest for us—for money, of course. That was something we could relate to later in Jos.

Language wise, in our December 1976 annual circular I wrote,

Though all three found Hausa easier than English in Nigeria, by now English has taken precedence and they are beginning to forget Hausa, at least, the two little ones. Paternal attempts to the contrary appear futile. If you find us writing too much about language in these (other) letters, take it as an indication of parental fascination with that aspect of child development.

My “paternal attempts” consisted of speaking Hausa with them. It did not prevent them from slowly edging away from the language. There just was not enough support for it. It would have required that the family as a whole adopt Hausa as the home language, something we were not prepared to do, for as much as we liked the language, it was not our heart language.

On October 5, Dad and Mom Boer arrived for a visit. Since our smallish house was kind of crowded with three kids, we had brought in the camping trailer of brother Henry and parked it on the driveway, as far back from the street as we could. Kevin immediately asked if he could sleep in it some time. We planned for my parents to sleep in there. They hardly made it through the first night and told us they wanted to sleep in the house, come what may. So, we re-arranged things and turned a small room on the main floor into their bedroom. It meant they had to put up with all the noise we wanted to shield them from. Oh, well. Can’t win them all. Fran and I could have slept in the trailer, but then we could not monitor the kids. We all survived and enjoyed their visit.

The end of their visit coincided with a trip on our part to Highland, one that had been arranged a half year ago. We had told them about this problem long before they came when they were still working on their itinerary. They were aware of the problem but had no solution. How were we to bring them to the Grand Rapids Airport? Sister Henrietta brought them. She lived only a few blocks from us.

In the spring, as the children began to play outside again, we had Kevin take indoor swimming lessons as well as softball lessons. Together with his school work, those activities kept him busy and out of trouble.

Wiebe had been called “Uhbie” for a long time, a version of his name he himself concocted. However, now he began to object to this name and insisted on the name “Wiebe.” “He gets very angry when someone calls him Uhbie by mistake and says ‘My name is Wiebe Karl Yohanna.’” Fran commented in a letter to my parents, “So, Dad, it looks as if you do *really* have a namesake now!”

I want to share one humorous discipline incident that is part of the family’s joke lore. The early Wiebe is remembered in the family as a challenger to parental authority. It shows up in various chapters in these memoirs. We had oatmeal for breakfast this particular morning and Wiebe had decided to resist it in a particularly rebellious spirit. The principle of parental authority became the emerging issue that, in view of other altercations we had, needed to be asserted. During the fracas, Wiebe ended up in a box next to my desk, while I pretended to be working. He was to remain there till he agreed to take at least a few spoonfuls of oatmeal. I readily admit this was not a shining gem of discipline on my part, but neither was it a gem of obedience and respect on his. We were both showing slips of our “undersides.” Did he or did he not? I conveniently forgot the end of the story, but it remains part of the family “joke lore.”

### *The Prins Family*

Home service always brought relief from the weekly pressures of letter writing. Now the telephone was the natural way, at least for the Prins side. This was the year during which we revitalized our relationship with the Prins family. Ever since, our children have felt part of the clan and interested in their lives. Our 1976 diary shows many visits back and forth that we all enjoyed. We “did” our 1976 US Thanksgiving at the folks’ place. Another special event was the Prins-wide Christmas party in the gym of Ada Christian school.

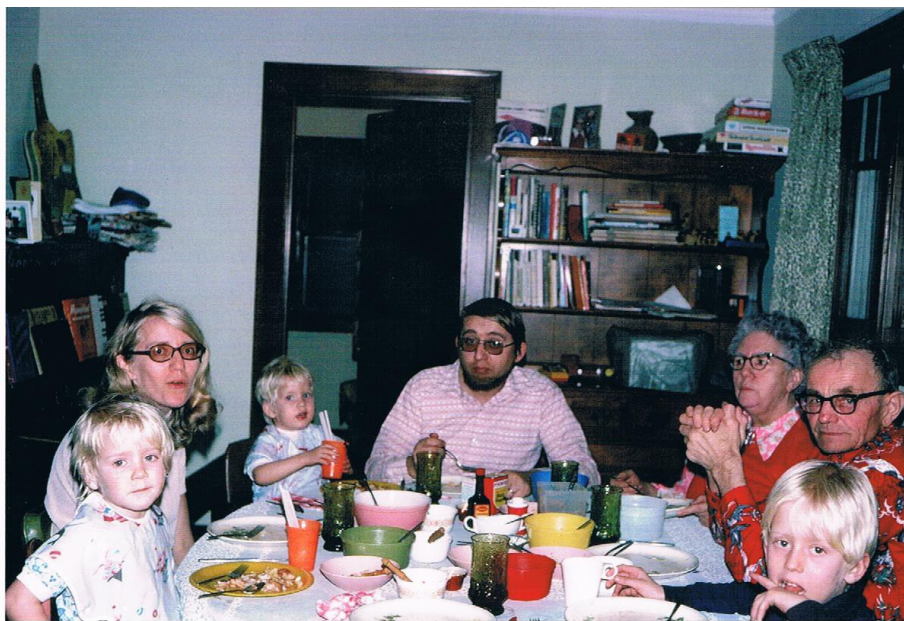


Jane, Henrietta, Trena, Fran, Dewey, Henry, Ray  
Grandpa, Grandma  
The Prins Family - 1976 \*

On Christmas itself, we hosted Ray, Gert and family, another very special occasion for us. Shortly prior to that, within one week we separately took Henry & Idamae and then Ray & Gert to Sveden House, a famous buffet on 28<sup>th</sup> Street.

This place holds many memories for us, for we used to hold Prins family dinners there during various furloughs. I was the idol of some of the teenagers, who admired my ability to polish off three full plates in one sitting, a skill they have not forgotten till this day, even though the skill itself has sadly been lost! Also sadly, the place has been closed long since, though branches survive in some other localities, one of which in Detroit we have occasionally patronized together with cousin Jan Boer there.

Sister Henrietta & Luke Glashouwer spent New Year's Eve with us. Though religiously they were as conservative as the rest of the clan, they were more liberal in other ways. We could enjoy a wine and a cigar with them in those years, something I really appreciated. Since then, we have both dropped the cigar part of it, but the wine remains an option. The only barrier to that part of it is that neither Fran nor I enjoy the taste of most wines, but an occasional glass of some harder drink mixed appropriately with a "softener" can still entice me. They lived only a few blocks from us on Adams Street, also in the ghetto. We socialized with their family a great deal. Especially in the summer did we frequently join them in their yard. Our kids liked each other and bonded well.



**Cynthia, Fran, Wiebe, John, Grandma, Grandpa, Kevin  
Family Dinner in the 1058 Kalamazoo House\*  
(Note all the matching Mission House dishes)**

We also always enjoyed our visits to sister Trena and Francis Lieuwen in Cincinnati, where Francis was working as engineer for various companies, but mostly Ford.

*An aside:* They had bought themselves a kind of hobby farm on the edge of the city. A huge old house with a dilapidated old barn and very hilly acreage. There was also a smaller building that Francis converted into some kind of hothouse. They had a huge garden that more than kept them busy. Of all the Prins siblings, they came closest to Dad Prins' ideal of land ownership as the gateway to security. The entire Lieuwen clan was brought up on this "farmette." Today, Trena & Francis still live there in their retirement and grow and can veggies as energetically as ever. I understand that urban pressures on them to vacate and sell are increasing. I find it very interesting that their son Tim, a professor of engineering, has bought into a similar kind of acreage in the middle of an Atlanta suburb, though his is a wooded valley rather than a hilly meadow. As the Dutch proverb has it, "*Een appel valt niet ver van de boom.*" "An apple does not fall far from its tree."

Throughout all of our social and ministry whirlwind, Jane was there constantly for us as she was even while we were in Nigeria, always ready to serve as our gofer. During this furlough she frequently babysat while we were going about our business.

### *The Boer Clan*

Communication with our relatives during home service periods is always different. For my folks it was a mixture of phone calls and letters, but letters were now few and far between. The letters were also different. Letters from Nigeria just about always started with discussions about letters written, sent, arrived and not arrived. Not so during home service periods.

Though there is a Boer clan native to Michigan that arrived there in the person of Prof Geert Boer of Calvin College & Seminary fame, they are by now so far removed from our clan that they do not acknowledge any relationship. Even our friend and colleague, Dr. Harry Boer, always denied any relationship, though I know it is there.

However, there is another Jan Boer, a first cousin of mine and a son to my Uncle Willem of Hoogkerk, Groningen. He and his wife Grace lived in the greater Detroit area at this time. They have always been very interested in family, so that we did some visiting back and forth, especially since they came to Grand Rapids frequently. It was during our visits to them that they would take us to their local Sveden House. Thus the Sveden tradition moved over from Prins to Boer and from Grand Rapids to Detroit. We continued to enjoy their laden counters. Jan maintained a very active relationship with the Boers in the Old Country, so that during every visit he would update me on developments at that front. That tradition has continued right up till today, something I appreciate tremendously. A few years ago, this cousin Jan Boer gave me, another Jan Boer, a book written about Groninger Dutch by a third Jan Boer! I plan to donate it to the Calvin College Heritage centre.



I find it very interesting that, in distinction from us, Jan & Grace taught their only child Wim to speak fluent Dutch. I regret that our children do not speak it, but in our Nigerian context I do not see how this would have been possible, especially since Fran and I were in an English-speaking relationship from the start. We had grown too far away from Dutch to have that as a viable option, especially also because Fran's first language was Frisian, not Dutch. Jan & Grace's language policy did not turn their Wim into a provincial ethnic, for he married a beautiful and highly successful professional wife from India.

In the spring we organized a Boer cousin re-union in Detroit. This was held in the home of Jan and Grace. Warner and Betsy Boer from Ontario also came as did my brother Hendrik and Barb. Warner is a son of Oom Harm and an Ontario Provincial Policeman. It was a fun event and a great way to refresh our relationships.

Part of June and July 1977, at the end of our stay in Grand Rapids, we spent in BC. We drove there in our leased car and at the end, sold it to a Washington State resident. It was a US-based vehicle and could not be sold in Canada without first importing it. We spent a lot of time with my parents, who had moved to Abbotsford after Dad's retirement. They drove us around all over the place so that by the time we left, Fran commented that now the children knew Opa and Oma Boer as well as Grandpa and Grandma Prins. We had also met several of my siblings and their families, while we spent time visiting old friends in Port Alberni as well. All in all, a great visit to the Canadian West for all of us, very similar to previous visits, but a bit more relaxed.

### *Grand Rapids Social Life*

The first time we attended a "regular" Grand Rapids CRC church after our arrival, I described it as rather boring and dull—so quiet and mostly just one fellow up in front doing the whole show. It surprised me that these things just continued going on the same way year after year, while everything else was changing so rapidly. That evening we planned to attend another CRC church, but one with a more informal style about it.

It did not take long for social life to kick off. We had barely arrived when we received dinner invitations to the homes of Bill van Tol and Prof. Gordon Spykman. Van Tol used to be a colleague in Nigeria but became Nigeria Field Leader and then Africa Secretary in Grand Rapids. Later, he became CRWM Director. Spykman was Prof. of Bible at Calvin College and a strong Kuyperian who had for years been sympathetic to my wholistic mission efforts. I found such dinner invitations delightful, even though with three children in tow, discussions did not always go that smoothly. Right on the heels of these two, more social events were scheduled. Chris and Gretta Overvoorde came to our house for an evening. He was a budding Calvin artist who eventually dominated the arts scene there with his skills. Prof. Monsma, a political science prof at Calvin, invited us as well. We would later meet him in Jos a few times and socialize with him there. The next day we had my old friend, Cor B., over for a Sunday evening. Many of these visits would in due time be reciprocated.

An important visit for us was that of Prof. Runner and his wife to our house. I had been heavily influenced by him, but we did not have close relations with each other. I had been neither outstanding as a student of his nor as a Groen Club member. His influence on me grew during our ministry in Nigeria, when I began to recognize the radical thrust of his teaching and the fatal result of the mostly Evangelical emphasis by missionaries there and in most other countries. While he was disappointed by some of the students that had been close to him, he had heard of my Kuypertian struggles and was grateful for the effects of his teachings there through me. So, we grew closer to each other during our home service periods. You may remember our restaurant date with him and his wife on Fran's due date with Kevin, but this was the first time he visited our home. We felt highly honoured at having this courageous and prophetic philosopher and wife at our table.

By February 1977 it began to look as if we were again caught up in a rat race, a social rat race with other elements thrown in. Fran wrote,

Last week John spent several days at CRWM because of the Annual Board meetings. We were also invited to the annual Board dinner. It was a nice meal and a nice programme. Over the weekend it was Calvin Homecoming, a programme that included a performance of a Gilbert & Sullivan play by the Calvin Alumni Players and on Saturday night the Homecoming Smorgasbord. That was nice but expensive. Over the weekend John and David Angye, who is right now a student at Reformed Bible College, will fly to Wisconsin for a deputation assignment.

Yes, our friend David was in town. Both of us were busy, but we did manage to do things together, like the above deputation visit to Wisconsin. David also spent a weekend at II Highland with us, where we shared speaking and preaching engagements. The people there highly appreciated him. We would also have him over to our house occasionally and visit members of the Prins clan. I was also happy to have him meet my parents during their visit to Grand Rapids.

All of this meant time off from the dissertation. A lot of fun and interesting stuff, uplifting and all that, but it definitely impeded progress.

### *Back to Nigeria*

#### *A Stopover in The Netherlands*

From BC we flew Vancouver-Toronto. During that flight, the children did very well, since there were other children for them to play with. In Toronto Fran called her mother. Cynthia also talked to her. When Mother said "Good bye" to Cynthia, Cynthia asked her where she was going. She did not realize that *she* was the one traveling! On the Amsterdam leg of the journey, Wiebe slept all the way, Kevin part of the way, but Cynthia talked a blue streak most of the way.

We spent a few days in The Netherlands, visiting relatives and friends, including a day with Prof. Verkuyl. My greatest experience there was once again to attend a Sunday morning service in “my” church in Lutjegast. Fran’s was visiting several of her Frisian relatives, among them Mouike Foekje after whom she was named. We met Havemans there on their way to the US, Lingers in their apartment, Gorts in their house. Just so many friends and relatives. What a life!

The most dramatic of meetings was that between Kevin and Renie Van Geest, who were pals during our Amsterdam days. Both of them had looked forward to seeing each other again. However, they just stood staring at each other. With no common language, they had nothing to say to each other, a strange experience between two “old” friends. Eric, the older brother, tried hard to communicate with Kevin by games, riding bikes and motioning, but Renie was too shy to do anything with Kevin.

### *Life at Mountain View*

We traveled on to Kano, where we ran headlong into the devious customs and immigration officials for which Nigeria is known and feared. It took us some hours—yes, *hours*-- to get through it and arrive at our hotel. The following morning Ray Browneye met us with his plane and flew us to Jos. By 9 am we arrived and were welcomed by a few of our colleagues there. By this time, Kevin was complaining of a stomach ache and Wiebe already had some 30 mosquito bites. We were duly informed that we would be living in three different locations in Jos over the next few months.

The first of our three locations was the Mountain View (MV) Guesthouse behind the Hostel for CRC Mission children at Hillcrest School. It was a good place for the children, what with a wide and long porch for them to run around in as well as a sandbox outside and swings. Kevin borrowed Hardy Boy books from the Evenhouses, who now lived in one of the houses at MV. Fran used these first three weeks to embroider a perpetual calendar which was used for years in Nigeria and now decorates the wall in our Vancouver apartment.

The first Sunday back in Jos, Kevin and Wiebe went with me to a Hausa service. We were both curious how Kevin would react. He seemed to understand a bit but did not dare to speak Hausa to anyone yet. We assumed that he would probably start again when we were not listening.

Kevin soon began to look forward to his new school, Hillcrest, just down the road. He had already met a few third graders, including Rusty, son of our Dr. Verbrugge. Since we would eventually be living near them, we hoped that the boys would be good friends from the start. Alas, it did not always work out that way.

Our kids had always been scared of dogs, but quite a few of our missionaries had dogs. Hence, the children were afraid and tended to stay close to the Guest House. One day Fran sent Cynthia and Wiebe on an errand to deliver a letter to a missionary on the compound.

They discussed together whether there would be a dog there. They held each other by the hand and kept reassuring each other that it would be alright. If a dog should come out, they would not jump or run. They came back shortly with an answer to Fran's letter and told her they hadn't even seen the dog.

We had sold our Opel through the aid of Lee Baas before our extended study leave and now had to purchase another vehicle. We ended up with a 12-seater Toyota commuter bus that would help us shuttle people around in the context of our upcoming ICS ministry. Before we actually took ownership, the price had suddenly jumped upward by 500 naira (\$750) without explanation.

Our next temporary move was to the house of Ralph and Coby Kok. They lived along the long Mountain View driveway, popularly called "Lower Mountain View." They were meticulous both as house keepers and gardeners, what with a great flower and vegetable garden. We were worried, for neither one of us had a green thumb. The dry season would present an ethical problem to us, for they would want their grounds watered at a time the entire city suffered from scarcity of water.

At the same time, governments at all levels were encouraging people to grow their own foods. While during Baissa days there was the Green Revolution, now there was "Operation Feed the Nation," basically a similar programme with neither yielding the promised results due to corruption and inefficiencies. So this emphasis would demand we use up the scarce water. This would give us an excuse? The programme also encouraged the keeping of rabbits and chickens. It was supposed to make rabbit cages and chicken coops available at subsidized prices. That sounded hopeful for my animal husbandry hobby.

Early August I flew to Baissa to pack our belongings with local help before the Mission truck would come to move it all to Jos. The truck—"lorry" we call it in Nigeria—could not take the last rabbit cage we still owned. We had sold the other ones when we left Baissa a year earlier and now we had to sell this one. Whether we would keep rabbits again in Jos remained to be seen at that time. I returned to Jos on that lorry.

The next issue was to find a place to store it all, since we would not need most of it while living in someone else's house. That was somehow solved with the goodwill of Les Van Essen, our Nigeria Director, by storing it in an empty room on the other Mission compound.

We were now going to live in a city of ease: with running water and electricity. At least, so we thought. We had decided to sell our gas stove in favour of an electric one, but had to supplement it with a kerosene two-burner in case electricity would be off! We also exchanged our propane fridge with an electric one. Whether these were wise exchanges remained to be seen.

We were ready for a new life in Jos and beyond, but still without having completed my dissertation. That beast was still staring me in the face.

### *Family and Social Life*

For the sake of convenience and, hopefully, clarity, I am once again dividing this part of the chapter into individual sections, each devoted to a member of the family. Again, this is family and social life separate from ministry, which is recorded in Chapter 19 of Volume 2. In reality these are often intertwined, constantly intersecting with each other. Well, I'll just do the best I can. A little confusion here and there won't necessarily hurt you!

It took the kids a while to agree they were back in Nigeria. They were in denial, for the place was so different from Baissa. They were right of course: It was very different. Just the (occasional and theoretical) fact of 24/7 electricity and running water made such a difference for everyone. However, before too many weeks the power interruptions started to increase and we had to use our kerosene burner. We had not yet sold our gas stove and decided to hold on to it, since rumours had it that power interruptions would happen more and more. The house into which we would soon move was in a section particularly hard hit. In our section of the city, water was running regularly, but not so in some other parts.

Soon the water problems started. Without going into details, we again found ourselves using the drum system. Now that was more annoying than it was in Wukari or Baissa, for there we had our own system that was labour intensive but worked without fail. In Jos, we ended up with two systems: the public and private one. Even the latter did not work as well as it should, since a major tank used for the entire compound was built too high. We were back to a bucket and drum routine. Occasionally a tanker from the Local Government would come to fill up our large compound tank. They owed it to us, since we were paying for water supplies from them. These tankers would hold two to three thousand gallons and, if judiciously used, would last on our compound for some days. Remember, our tank served 5 homes, a hostel and a guest house with 6 units. It meant we could actually take a hot shower instead of the sponge baths to which we often had to resort. Actually, a sponge bath is not really that serious; that's how I grew up in Lutjegast and it never hurt any of us!

Food wise, things had become very expensive since our Baissa time. Fran was experimenting with Nigerian cooking and Kevin said it was as good as that cooked by Nigerians. I also approved, but missed the smoke flavour from the open fire on which Nigerians cook. Fran wondered whether she should start cooking outside on the three stones with wood! Meat was readily available but also expensive. It might be cheaper to buy whole pigs again, but with constant power interruptions we did not want to keep much meat in the freezer. So we missed our rabbits. However, keeping them now would probably make their meat as expensive as any other, since those expenses had also gone up. "But," wrote Fran, "they were such fun to keep."

As the price of food increased, so did our complaints. It made us turn to head cheese again. Apart from Kevin perhaps, the "kids" were still too young to be embarrassed about such "gross" cooking! It remained a staple throughout our Jos years. The cost of living increased so much and so rapidly that by April 1978 our cost-of-living bonus overtook our

beginning salary when we joined the Mission in 1966. By May 1978 we had started going to the meat market and buying our meat directly from the butchers, but our stomachs did have to get used to all the blood, gore, flies—and vultures.

I referred to head cheese just now. In Jos we did not need to buy an entire pig and slaughter it. Pork, including the head, was available in the meat market or abattoir, but only on Saturdays. The reason for the restriction is that abattoirs in much of Nigeria are controlled by Muslims, to whom pork is *haram*, forbidden, unclean. In Jos at least, probably under pressure of the majority Christian and Animist population, they “allowed” pork on Saturdays. Why Christians and Animists in Jos put up with that abattoir and meat monopoly is beyond me. At any rate, that’s where we could go for our pork and head. It made it much easier. In October 1978, the week before Oma and Opa Boer were scheduled to arrive for a visit, we did a head cheese.

You will hear about Fran’s 36th birthday further down, but that was one of these times of electrical failure—and this time I was home. Let me review with you how that would typically go here, following Fran’s report:

The electricity was off most of the day. Usually that doesn’t bother me, but when you are planning a party, you want electricity, lights, etc. I asked the Baases to bring plenty of ice cubes. It being hot season, cold water goes nicely with a spicy meal. It affected only two houses: ours and one neighbour. We reported the fault at 8 am, 2 pm and 4 pm, each time actually going to the office. At 5:30 pm they came with a crew of four and found out that a fuse had blown in the transformer across the street from us. That took all of 30 seconds to repair!

Actually, we feared that it was an administrative problem about unpaid bills and that they had cut us off. We always pay promptly, but their records are often confused or not up to date and then they will cut you off. The onus is on you, not on them or their records. Evenhouse had this happen some time earlier and they were without for nearly two days. Some people even longer for this reason; some, much longer.

As we neared the time of moving to our permanent location on Zaria Road, we hired a new house helper, a Muslim by the name of Hamza, an elderly married gentleman with lots of experience of working with Whites. However, he had never worked for missionaries before, a different breed from foreign government workers or business men. We were pleased with him, at least at first. He was clean, pleasant, proficient, quiet. However, it did not take long for some cultural issues to arise. See further down.

Social life soon picked up with all kinds of visitors gracing our table. At times it could be hectic. An early November Sunday we hosted the Hunse family with their three children. He was from Ontario and came as a volunteer to help out in the NKST agricultural project for three months. He became a regular fixture in the Mission, who would come and go frequently for either agricultural or water projects. That Tuesday we had two delegates over from the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) to invite me to speak at a conference the following week. That did not give me much time for preparation! We invited them to

stay for supper. That Thursday Fred Feikema had supper with us along with his own daughter and two Baas kids, who were his nephews. He was a builder finishing a new house for Van Essens to move into from the Zaria house that we were waiting to move into. We had great vested interest in making him comfortable and get that house finished! On Friday we had the Van Zees over for lunch. He was a mechanic in the Mkar garage, keeping our vehicles and other gadgets going. They were in town to see their children at Hillcrest. Saturday night we entertained Theodore Kay, a Taiwanese Canadian teaching chemistry at Unijos, and the Wilmots, a British business couple known best for their attempts to restore the accounting practices of Nigerian Christian organizations and for their spiritual leadership amongst Christian leaders. Sunday we had the Verbrugges over after church. He was the doctor who delivered Wiebe and who played organ at our wedding. On Monday, the Ladipos came over. He was Nigerian; she, British. He was the founder of Great Commission, the Nigerian chapter of Campus Crusade, whom I helped get settled when they arrived in Jos. He subsequently became our pastor at the St. Piran's Anglican Church. Phew! That was a week of guests, if ever there was one. Fran commented, "We can't do that much visiting in one week all the time, because then we won't have time for anything else!" In spite of the fun of socializing, that comment called for a loud "Amen!"

During a mid-January 1978 Sunday, Fran was again writing her regular weekly letter. At the end she wrote, "This house is like a market place today with so many people coming and going. I'd better get back there and see what is happening." Well, that was our life. Feel free to count the guests and the lines it took to summarize it all in one paragraph! And all that in only one week! Though this week it was excessive, visits one after another became the routine for years to come. Often pre-arranged; at other times just unexpected drop ins at any time of any day. Well, it was the Nigerian way.

If you think the above week was crazy, you ought to read Fran's latter of July 10, 1978—Wiebe's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. You can't believe the people, individuals and groups, that darkened our doors, table and bedrooms that week. Simply insane! Notable among them were Drs. Charles and Margaret Kraft, our teachers from Michigan State University, and Dr. Adegbola, my ICS Director, who came with a delegation of five. In addition to the numerous adults, Kevin had a sleep-over party and Wiebe a birthday party of fifteen. I was simply amazed when I read that letter in the course of these memoirs. Unbelievable. Don't know how we, especially Fran, did it. Day as well as night. And it was not all just sociability; the Adegbola part included major ministry time. At the end of it all, Fran concluded that it was "a busy weekend, but everything went well and it was fun"! Fun after all that? My *Famke* is simply amazing.

One time we even hosted someone else's birthday party. Remember Graham Weeks from Chapter 30? They lived in Daffo village, some 115 kilometers to the south east and had a couple of kids in boarding for Hillcrest School. They asked if they could hold a birthday party at our house. Fran, being the ultimate in birthday party organizing, agreed. Mother Katy baked a cake in our kitchen in the morning. In the afternoon a dozen kids came. The biggest event was a game of twelve squares, one of which had to be identified as "it." It involved a little trick by the two people leading the game and always led to amazement on

the part of the others as to how the “guesser” could always “guess” correctly. Kevin, being the “host,” was doing the honours and properly impressed all. It seemed like magic to them.

During this time, we bought our first TV, a thirteen-inch screen, which, Fran commented, “was big enough for us.” Programming most days would start at 5 pm and end at 11. This became a big neighbourhood attraction for the kids. Our motive was to encourage our kids to want to be at home. That gave us more control over them without force, since few of their friends had TV at home at that time. They immediately enjoyed the TV immensely, regardless of the limited choices.

The first steps in the move to our permanent location on Zaria Road began in late November. The very first step was the creation of a sandbox. Builder Feikema had some extra blocks and sand left from the new Van Essen house and allowed us to use it for that purpose. So Kevin and I loaded the stuff on a Mission pickup—two loads, actually—and brought it to our future home to create that sandbox. This was the first time Kevin and I did a project like that together. The facility was gratefully used both by our own kids as well as neighbourhood kids that soon came streaming in. Unfortunately, the actual move had to be postponed until January 1978, due to the Van Essen house not being ready.

Our first Christmas in Jos was enjoyable but not without its problems. The kids had been extra wild and unruly. The excitement of presents and of the presence of the school children living on the compound throughout the day just made life so exciting for them. Fran wrote that I, having just returned from that Ibadan trip in December described below and having spent that entire time only with adults, could hardly take all that noise!

We had promised the kids they could open their presents on Christmas eve. During the preceding week Santa came every night with some presents through our large chimney. So we had a blanket in the fireplace to catch them. There would also be some goodies in their stockings. Kevin being a few years older, had great fun playing along with all this. Fran commented that we were still trying to find the middle way between the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas and the North American Santa. We preferred the Sinterklaas version, since it left us free to celebrate a spiritual Christmas.

In the section on Evangelism and Preaching in the companion Chapter 19, I summarize my Christmas season preaching schedule. It was all mixed up with the social. On Boxing Day we went to visit the Weeks family in Daffo. Here we participated in village Christmas dancing, something we were used to from our CRCN time, but which did not happen much in Jos. In fact, Jos was empty during the season, for few people called it their home. It was a colonial city full of “strangers,” people from other parts of the country. They would scatter across the country to celebrate with their families. Every Christmas it became a dead town. Nevertheless, enough of our Nigerian friends stayed put, so that there was plenty of Christmas socializing to be enjoyed. There were plenty of local people as well, but they were normally so outnumbered that one hardly noticed them. So, we enjoyed the Daffo dancing time.



During our visit to the Weeks, a group of young Caucasian women dropped by. They had come for a volunteer project under the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). One of them introduced herself as from Alberni, my hometown in BC. Of course, I followed that up for more specifics and discovered she was a Van Viet and I had taught her in Sunday School!

Christmas also meant that we would soon be moving to our new Zaria Road house. Fran was not looking forward to the hullabaloo of moving while they were still painting the inside. The house was old style colonial with roughly-hewn stones as all-around façade. Quite impressive really. It was built at a time people had a full complement of workers that we would not have, but the place, including the yard, was still just as big and would need just as much maintenance. The yard had been neglected with unkempt tall bushes everywhere and a lawn with more weeds than grass. But we realized that an empty place always looks bad. Once we had moved in, everything would look better. Nothing like a bit of optimism to buoy you up.

### *Life on Zaria Road*

Our new house was along Zaria Road, a major artery through Jos with a lot of traffic. With an ICS sign at the road, we were easy to locate for people and easily accessible by Nigeria's private public transport system. Behind us was the large luxurious compound of the Roman Catholic Bishop Ganaka, a very graceful and learned clergyman of great oratorical skills in English and of impressive stature. In a corner, between our two compounds was a small house owned by the Catholic diocese that was rented out to a Catholic gentleman called Hubert Sheldas, owner of a dry cleaning business and a contractor, who was heir to the throne of the chieftaincy of Shendam, in the southern part of Plateau State. Some years later, we attended his enthronement. He always had his door open and our children soon became his regular visitors. He was very kind to them. Once he left, he was replaced by Father Emmanuel, an Ibo priest, equally friendly to our children.



Can you find ours?\*

Next to us lived a Plateau State Commissioner, that is, a member of the State Cabinet. One of his young boys became a regular visitor at our house. Whenever the family had birthday parties, they always invited all three of our children.

Zaria Road Children –

The house on the other side was inhabited by an elderly British couple. When they moved, it was vacant for a long time. The exterior of all three houses consisted of rough stone. Originally they must have belonged to one owner.

Across the road from us was a Catholic girls' secondary school called St. Louis College. The school was run by nuns, who lived on that compound. Also across the road was the only ten-story building in Jos that housed the local newspaper *Nigeria Standard*. Of more practical relevance to our family, there was also a small food market there, where the wife of Hamza, our steward, sold freshly fried yams and other goodies we all loved. We were among her regular customers.

And then there was the village Tudun Wada close behind us with tons of children, many of whom started coming to our compound to play with our children. Expressed more accurately, to play with our children's soccer ball and other toys. Among them was a little boy called James, who years later became our driver, with whom we are still friends and who serves as my book agent up till this day of writing, 2013. He is now in his mid-fourties.

### *Getting the House Ready*

The house was still not ready when we actually moved in during the second week of January. The painting wasn't finished while the contractor and the subcontractor were both out of town. Hey, it was Christmas, right? And this was Jos! People go home, away from Jos. Here's Fran report:

No one knew the fellows who were doing the actual painting. When we complained about something not being right, they would just say that this is how they were told to do it. They were going to paint all the cement floors because they had spilled so much paint on it that it had become an eyesore. They also spilled on the furniture, but promised they could clean that off again. The house being partially furnished by the owner, they used the furniture for scaffolding! When they started painting the outside trim a brilliant white, we "chased" them away and told them to come back with their boss. If you knew how unlike us it was to treat workers in that way, you can imagine the mess they had made.

I told you that the yard at our new house was messy and needed sprucing up. We had a load of dirt cum manure brought in to create a fertile garden. That required physical work. There was a lot of other labour-intensive work to be done. Until now, our workers had always worked both in the house and in the yard, though sometimes we hired extra help when the work became too much and then tasks might be divided. In Jos, wages were too high for us to have more than one worker, shades of Baissa days. So, as before, we planned on having Hamza work both in- and outside. However, he was not used to that. His previous employers had been more prosperous business people and civil servants who

usually had several workers, with Hamza doing only domestic work. It was a matter of rank: yard work was considered lower than domestic. He resisted at first but eventually gave in and cooperated grudgingly, something we initially did not notice. Though, like Christianity, Islam insists on the value of labour and rejects the gradation of one type of work over another, human nature being what it is, for both religions that was/is easier said than done. Hamza was not happy with this “demotion.” This was the cultural problem I referred to earlier. There is more to come.

### *Vignettes on Zaria Road*

January 1978 was also the time we switched from sending Christmas circulars to our family, friends and supporters at home to writing January Annuals—on stencil, of course. This enabled us to respond to the many Christmas greetings, whether cards or letters, we had received. Of course, they kept coming well into April due to the irregular postal services. We have kept up that annual tradition ever since. We try to keep up with the times by having switched somewhere along the line from stenciled hard copy to emails, but by now even that is becoming obsolete.

When we were living in the rural CRCN area, we had difficulty getting a variety of foods, especially vegetables. We depended on colleagues in Jos to buy them for us and put them on the Mission plane to deliver it whenever they were scheduled to land in Wukari or Baissa. Jos was something else with its plateau Mediterranean cooler climate. All kinds of vegetables were available here. One day a vendor came to our door offering to supply us weekly with vegetables. Fran agreed. Within a couple of days, the man came with a bushel of tomatoes and three burlap sacks full of cabbages, carrots and fruit. Fran told him ours was not a hotel but a family with three small children. He was thoroughly disappointed, for he had expected us to buy the entire shipment! When it rains, Fran wrote, it pours.

February 18, 1978 marked my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Leave it up to Fran to organize a big party. We had invited the Weeks family to spend the weekend with us. Fran made her famous “snow on the mountain” curry dinner for 20 people. We ate outside on the cement patio behind the house. It was such a nice and *gezellige* party in the moonshine. For the first time for a long time, a store in town sold ice cream. Fran bought and we splurged that evening. All in all, a great party and a great entrance into my forties.

The end of my birthday did not mean the end of the birthday season, for Fran’s comes only three weeks later on March 11. Her 36<sup>th</sup> in 1978 was an exciting day for the kids, for they had two birthday parties to attend. First, one for Thor Evenhouse, who was born on Fran’s 30<sup>th</sup>. They went to a zoo and later had cake and ice cream at the Evenhouses. Then home for Mommy’s party. The Lee Baas family, our former Wukari neighbours, joined us for the occasion. Fran had Mrs. Hamza do the best pounded yam and chicken stew she had ever made for us. Lee took instant pictures with the most modern camera ever seen, the famous Kodak Poloroid. Our gift drum was still full of little presents. Thus all the kids, including the Baases, received a present. Even I did: Fran had wrapped up my thesis with “page 600” on the label! The kids and I had gotten her a long Nigerian dress, “all

embroidered in front. It's very comfortable and pretty." It was a typical all-out Fran party.

Throughout this chapter you will constantly read plenty about Fran's work with the children, with me, with all the hosting. While she was involved in all that with little chance for relaxation, she was still nursing hopes of returning to her first love, teaching. Her thoughts were focused on Hillcrest. However, after our trip to Lupwe in February, she wrote, "When I see how busy I stay with the children and with working for John, I have sort of changed my mind about going back to teaching for the next few years. First it looked good to me, but I don't really think it would work out right now."

We had an interesting visitor from Wukari, namely Pastor Luka Agbu. He graduated under us from Wukari CLTC. While a student there, he worked part time for us. From there he went to the Junior Seminary at Lupwe and eventually graduated from TCNN. He was soon appointed Principal of Wukari CLTC and moved into the house we first lived in. He also worked with the Evenhouses in their Jukun linguistic programme. He came to visit us during a linguistic workshop in Jos. Some years later, he was appointed a Commissioner in the State Government and thus became member of the State Cabinet. Sadly, like my star student at CLTC, Yakubu Masoyi, Pastor Luka perished in a car accident a few years later.

Like all Easters, Easter 1978 was again a busy time. Both Good Friday and Easter Monday are national holidays. It was a time for family picnics and weddings. In fact, in the CRCN area, weddings were so many that the church instructed pastors to preach that Easter is about the resurrection of Christ, not about weddings. No weddings should be scheduled over the weekend. This provision did not go over well and was ignored. Had pastors refused to conduct the ceremony, the couples probably would have contacted pastors from other denominations that were beginning to proliferate.

In fact, we attended the wedding of a prominent Christian businessman, Jonathan Onigbende, member of a family that belonged to that United Faith Gospel Tabernacle Church that had befriended me. He had a degree in administration from Wheaton College, a leading Christian college in the US. We had become friends of the family and could hardly refuse to attend. Being well-to-do Yoruba, they went all out to make it colourful and impressive. Dozens of people with their brand new Polaroids so crowded in on the couple that the pastor could hardly get them to exchange rings and vows. That part of it was definitely not impressive. The family operated a major supermarket in downtown Jos as well as in Bukuru, a town nearby where they lived. Jonathan established various businesses, including an ice cream factory that we patronized gratefully.

Early April 1978, I was involved in a Bible School workshop in Jos. People came from all over. However, there were a few people who wanted to attend but who could not afford lodging expense. So we offered them to stay at our place. Three of them did.

We gradually moved away from the simple life style of our rural CRCN past. We had already bought a TV and a piano. In May 1978 we purchased a used stereo from a

missionary colleague. It was an old fashioned model but produced beautiful sound. Kevin thought the sound was great. True to everything technological in Nigeria, it only took a couple of weeks for the stereo to go on the blink. It would play but not record. Fran “nagged” –her own word-- me for weeks to get it repaired. Not sure I ever did!

Our neighbours, the Sheldas family, threw a big naming party in honour of their new-born son. He asked our permission to have his guests park their cars on our yard. We agreed, provided they would not park on the flower and vegetable garden. The yard was totally filled with cars. The party must have cost him a fortune. The drumming and dancing went on till after midnight. The stereo was blaring; the TV was on. Various generations engaged in their own thing. Kevin did not attend, since he was at a Hillcrest movie, but Cynthia and Wiebe sat on the floor in the middle of it all, watching TV. Everyone seemed to know Cynthia. She was a real ice breaker. The quality of the food was extraordinary and spiced just right for our palates.

You probably do not remember my shoe shine bag that I received when I was a porter on the Canadian Pacific Railway during the summer of 1959. I have kept it all these years right up till now. However, I was not aware that Fran had a similar souvenir from her 1959 student working days at Robinson Furniture. It was a little shoe shine bag that some lady made for Fran from leather scraps at the factory. She had been using it for twenty years. During the Sheldas party, when many people were moving around on our yard, we had a break in on our front porch where that bag was hanging and from where it was stolen along with a couple of folding chairs. That memory and all these years of use had given it sentimental value for her as mine still has for me. Never recovered the stolen items.

Christmas season 1978, our second in Jos, was--what else?-- hectic and marked by various performances. A local choir, comprising both Nigerians and expatriates, directed by our own Corny Korhorn, performed their annual rendition of The Messiah. Hillcrest choir and band did an evening concert. COCIN organized a special Choir Festival with twelve choirs from different congregations. It was a delight to listen to their creative songs, many of which were original in both lyric and melody. Hillcrest Elementary was not to be outdone; they gave a programme entitled “Hands of Christmas.” All three of our children had various parts to play, especially in the St. Piran’s Christmas service. Please go to the section “The Children Together” below.

All those programmes, together with a lot of the kind of socializing during the season you’ve come to expect from us by now, made it a delightful time for us. A fair amount of the socializing was with new missionaries that were arriving and with others who were returning from home service. The former included the Tim Nelson family who were going to work in Wukari, where you will meet them again during Lydia’s wedding.

Without planning, our Christmas dinner became a global affair. Let’s listen to Fran’s story:

We had invited the Koops family and Theodore Kay, our Taiwanese friend. Koops asked if they could bring another family along and Theodore also brought a friend.

Everyone contributed food so that we had a good variety. We had sixteen people around the table. When we were nearly finished with the dinner, three strangers stopped by to ask for accommodation. They knew the guest house at ICS Ibadan and assumed we would have similar facilities. We told them we did not, but we did have food on the table and invited them to join us. Now we were nineteen. When we got to talking about nationalities, we discovered we had the following around our table: Canadian (4), American (9), Dutch (4), Taiwanese (2), Chinese, British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian! A miniature United Nations!

This put us far over nineteen. Here's a trivia question for you. Can you guess how this could be? The secret is to be found in several cases of multiple nationalities, triple in the case of our children. And all of this while our steward had gone home for a five-day Christmas break!

We had planned another party for New Year's Eve and had invited a couple of families. However, the children all developed the chicken pox. So, those families did not come and we had an unplanned quiet evening of conversation, games, food and watching the fire in the fireplace. A wonderful quiet family time.

Throughout these chapters you've read about the difficulties of traveling in Nigeria. Even local travel was difficult at times, often mainly due to shortage of gasoline. Especially in Jos, this became a major obstacle for us, both for family as well as ministry life. Nigeria was/is an OPEC country and thus a leading oil exporter, especially to the US. Fran wrote early June 1978,

When you stand in line for an hour and actually get your tank full of gas, you feel you've accomplished something big. Yesterday I was lucky and got the car and the extra jerry can I carried filled after a mere ten minute wait. That does not happen every day! When I got home, John was so happy about it.

The above paragraph talks about an hour, but it gradually got worse to mean spending an entire day in the lineup. Often there was no point in lining up, for there would be no supplies for days on end. Many years later, we finally smartened up and hired our own private driver who might spend a whole day in the lineup and come home with mission unfulfilled, that is, without any gasoline. That was one of the smartest things we ever did.

For years we have scorned Nigeria for importing gasoline for local consumption when it is an OPEC exporter. We always considered it a function of inefficiency and corruption. However, it occurred to us later that oil-rich Canada also imports oil. Western Canada consumes mostly its own Western Canadian gasoline and exports its surplus mostly to the US. In the meantime, Canada imports oil from the Middle East for its eastern consumers. Is that inefficiency, corruption or just smart business?

*Church Life*

By March 1978 we had been in Jos for seven months, but we still had made no decision about which church to make our permanent home. We had started with COCIN Gigiring, a Hausa-speaking church near us, hoping that the children would pick up Hausa again. It was a church of *talakawa* or ordinary grass roots people with whom we liked to associate. Unfortunately, Cynthia and Wiebe now knew only the Hausa greetings, while Kevin did quite well and was interested in keeping it up. I preached in quite a few local churches and the family would usually go along, but in the long run this was not satisfactory.

Most missionaries worshipped at the Hillcrest chapel, but we had decided not to associate too closely with that strange missionary “apartheid” hour. It made no sense to us that missionaries living in Jos should separate themselves from Nigerian churches. They lived next to each other in their missionary compounds; they socialized mainly with each other; they worked together at Hillcrest or other missionary settings. For many of them their contact with Nigerians was marginal, mostly restricted to mission situations, somewhat like the situations I complained about with reference to Takum and Lupwe. In short, too much confined to their comfort zone.

One Sunday evening we did attend a Hillcrest service. A colleague who was sitting behind me and who was aware of our objections to these services, tapped me on the shoulders and with a grin on his face, asked whether I would be willing to preach at Hillcrest services. He thought he had caught me in an uncomfortable position. I replied that, since I preach to Pagans, why not to missionaries?! This attitude of ours did not stop me from applying for a grant for ICS literature work from the Hillcrest congregation. A little pragmatism can get you a long way!

I hasten to add that this attitude of ours towards Hillcrest services did not represent our attitude towards Hillcrest as a school community. We were happy it was there, even though we often cringed because of the fundamentalistic tendencies of some SIM teachers. We were happy Kevin could attend there without being sent off to boarding school. We participated in its functions as all active parents would. We often countered the “fundy” influence on Kevin by lively discussions around the supper table, a practice that would continue for many years as all three children made their way through the system.

We finally settled on St. Piran’s Anglican Church. It was a cosmopolitan Nigerian English-speaking low Anglican church of mostly professional, business and civil service people. The church had a colonial background in that it was started by and for expatriate miners a few decades earlier. St. Piran is regarded by Anglicans as the patron saint of miners. The name made sense, since the Plateau had long been a world centre for tin mining. Though it was part of the Anglican diocese, the far-away bishops in Kaduna had always kept their hands off and allowed it to follow its own path. However, during our time with them, a local diocese was established with bishops from the south of the country. A decade later, Benjamin Kwashi, a local Plateau clergyman who graduated from TCNN, was appointed bishop. He took strong control over St. Piran’s and forced it to comply with his policies. He milked the church with its many well-to-do members in order to build up the diocese. It became both more Anglican and more Charismatic. By the time we left Nigeria in 1996, while the number of expatriates had dwindled down to just a few, the congregation had

grown numerically and replaced the old building with a much larger one with the worst of acoustics that made it almost impossible to hear. As a result, by the time of our visit there in 2001, the services had become quite chaotic.

Yemi Ladipo, the one who had started Campus Crusade or Great Commission Movement in Nigeria, was the pastor when we joined. He was a good preacher and spoke clear English, something that could not be said for all. Kevin said he could understand him clearly. Kevin joined the children's choir, Sunday School and the Boys Brigade, the Anglican version of Boy Scouts. Cynthia enrolled in the Sunday School class for four year olds. It met during the service. There was also a play group for three year olds, but Wiebe announced that "in my whole life I will never go to a Sunday School." Hence, for the time being we let him stay with us during the service.

Fran soon started to teach Sunday School and actually enjoyed it. She was sharing a class with Esther Koops, each doing a Sunday. "But the kids are such rascals, or try to be!" One November Sunday, the lesson was about the crippled lady who had been ill for eighteen years and then was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath (Luke 13). The teacher's handbook suggested the teacher ask the children if they knew anyone old and crippled. Two boys answered, "Yes, you!" Fran had a quick retort, "Yes, I know I'm old (36 in fact), but I'm not crippled!" That got a laugh and they settled down. However, after a couple of years, she got tired of the chaos and bowed out.

I also played an active part. Occasionally, I would be asked to read the Scriptures, something I have always enjoyed doing, since interpretive reading is one of my passions. After one such reading, Yakubu Gowon, the first Military Head of State and son of an Anglican evangelist, attended and complimented me on my "expressive reading." Of course, it did not take much to make an impression as a reader, since most people read Scripture like drones. One year, I led a Bible discussion group on Revelations. I also participated in my capacity as clergyman. Now and then I would preach and sometimes even give communion. I was also part of the church's Council for a term but was not re-elected since we were away on home service at the time.

We joined this church for various reasons. Being Reformed and CRC, we should have joined the NKST congregation in town. After all, they were CRC partners. However, they were a marginal church as far as the community went, since they had their roots in Benue State, not in Plateau, and were mostly of the Tiv tribe. I did not want to be part of a marginal church. I wanted a church that was recognized as a local church and whose members were prominent in the local community. Secondly, most of their work was done in the Tiv language.

Positively, the first reason for joining St. Piran's was the children. The services under Ladipo were dignified, simple and short, while he spoke clear English. Secondly, as churches go, this one also served the functions of a club, much like the Wukari Tennis Club did: It provided us with useful contacts in the community. On the one hand, I regretted losing contact with the grass roots we had at Gigiring. On the other hand, my ICS ministry was often helped considerably by the relations St. Piran's helped us develop in the upper



echelons of society. We tended to always have good personal relationships with the vicars that came and went at the whim of the bishop. Thirdly, at St. Piran's we were ordinary members; our status as Whites did not mean special status, respect or privilege. We enjoyed just being part of the crowd.

One of the things I especially appreciated at St. Piran's was its leadership development. Many of its vicars came out of the ranks. They were professionals or academics in their own fields who gave leadership in the church and then were sponsored to take part time theological training. Over time, they would be appointed part time vicar and eventually move into full time. After that, they were often snatched by the bishops and transferred to other congregations, often continuing especially their academic careers part time. This way they always had experienced people in leadership positions, not just young men who had graduated from some theological institution and then be appointed pastor without real previous leadership experience. The vicars also would have income from their other work so that they did not depend solely on the church's meager stipend. I considered it a great leadership development model that I advocated in CRCN—without success.

As a family we also experienced other denominations. On Good Friday 1979, we went to a "Stations of the Cross" service at the Catholic Church across the road. Fran thought it a shocker! There has been so much written about changes in the Catholic Church that we didn't think such a "service" was possible anymore. The priest could as well have been addressing the animals on a farm. It was an Irish priest speaking English, but he could as well have spoken Latin. I don't think he meant anyone to understand the words! He paid no attention to the people, just rattled off the whole form. He walked in at noon right according to schedule and then just mechanically followed the words in his book, which included 14 times saying the Lord's Prayer and 14 Hail Marys. We were all shocked because we had hoped for something very liturgical and meaningful on the "stations" of the cross.

Except for some individuals such as the Verbrugges, CRC-ers in SIM clothes, at this stage I had little to do with SIM missionaries, for most of them were suspicious of anything and anyone related to the ecumenical world, which the ICS definitely was. However, I had affable relations with quite a few Nigerians in ECWA, the church nurtured by SIM. Here's how we spent a lovely sociable Sunday afternoon with Iliya Majam, one of the executives of ECWA's business empire, including Challenge, their chain of bookshops.

In typical Nigerian style, we just dropped in on Iliya and his wife and chatted amicably about all sorts of subjects. He explained the organization of the ECWA businesses. The bookshop makes a good profit and subsidizes many ministries. They are also able to pay decent salaries to all. He is thinking about eventually also selling toys in the bookstores as he sees that as a useful ministry.

We then attended the 5 pm service at ECWA's Good News church in downtown. Iliya was in charge of the service that day. It was a singing service in which those who chose a number had to explain what the song meant to them. Iliya asked me unexpectedly to pray at the end of the service, a sign he considered me part of the comrades! Afterwards I told

him about the availability of a Johnny Cash film. He hoped to show it coming Sunday and asked me to contact the fellow who has it. All in all an enjoyable time of genuine fellowship. Unfortunately, Iliya went abroad and I lost track of him.

### *Steward Issues*

I have already referred to Hamza not being too happy with his work situation. Soon after Lydia came back living with us, he figured here was a fellow Black who would naturally side with him vis a vis these White people. He started complaining to her and grumbling about his work situation, especially the outside part of it. "He was getting more and more disgruntled and saying lots of things about us." Lydia reported his complaints to us. So we had a good talk with him and advised him he should find another job more to his liking. A day or so later, he announced he had found one and would be moving out the next day.

Now a new problem cropped up for him: His new job and living quarters were far away from his wife's market food stall across the road from us. When you're poor, you just can't seem to win. We were not angry with him; we were sorry that we seemed incompatible, but we had no way to solve his problem. We lost sight of him and his wife eventually moved her stall elsewhere.

Hamza's unhappiness with us and his sudden leaving was not a pleasant experience for us. We had never had our relations with stewards and other workers so badly soured. We were so grateful to Lydia that she had the sense and the love to alert us to Hamza's attitude. We had noticed for quite some time that something was amiss, but could not lay our finger on it. We did realize we had made a mistake in hiring him in the first place, given his professional experience with more wealthy people working for corporations and governments, who did not have the constant pressure to support all kinds of Christian causes, churches and individuals. They poured much of their "charity" into Hamza and his wife.

Besides, with Christian-Muslim relations beginning to worsen at the time, it was not a good idea to have a Muslim overhearing our conversations. It was very likely that they would be pumped by Muslim leaders for information and they would have little reason to resist such pressures. Over time, I began to warn my CRC colleagues about hiring Muslim stewards for that reason. Some of them agreed, while others had developed such close bonds with their stewards that they took it ill of me. They simply could not believe that their faithful steward would become informer to Muslim leaders. They could not understand the strength of the bond that tied their worker and the Muslim *ummah* together.

It was not a good time for us to have to find and train a new worker, since my parents were coming the week after, but we had no choice. I went to the pastor of the Gigiring church to see if he could think of anyone in his congregation who might be suitable. The idea of going through that church was that they would recommend someone they really knew and trusted, for if things did not go right, it would reflect on them. Furthermore, if problems arose, they might call in the person and have a talk with him. In the meantime, Fran found

herself peeling potatoes and commented, “See how I suffer now that I don’t have a steward? John is eager to get me a new worker, because he wants me for *his* worker! He’s worried about the progress of his dissertation and his filing!” I don’t believe that was quite fair, though that *was* an issue.

It was only a few days later that the pastor brought us a young couple named Kiliyobas and Lydia. He had never done housework or worked for White people before. So, it was training from scratch. However, he was willing to learn and was cooperative. After a few days we decided to train him for permanent employment. Our relationship with him and his family lasted several years. The couple had one little child with whom Cynthia and Wiebe soon started to play. Our Lydia also got along very well with the couple, while we were happy with his performance. All in all, it seemed like a positive change.

### *Our Exercise Regime*

You may remember the Wukari Tennis Club of which we were active members. We were blessed with abundant tennis facilities in Jos. The Mountain View compound, where we lived first, had a court up by the guest house where Fran and I often played.



**Playing Tennis at Mountain View\***

Hillcrest School had several courts. Plateau Club had courts where we never played, but where we would come just to watch the very fast Nigerian players whose ability I always admired, especially their quick reactions at the net. Tennis was our favourite way of exercise. I was never good at it and Fran would usually beat me, until we got better rackets and I improved considerably. Nevertheless I remained a loser, but a loser who loved the

game. Bishop Ganaka, our neighbour, also had a court and once invited me to a game. He was a strong player far out of my league. He never invited me again. If I had been a good player, I could have leveraged that ability for cementing important relationships among the city's elite. A skill of that nature can play an important role in a missionary's work. I missed out on that one.

Later, when we moved back to Mountain View, Fran and I would often drive our car to the court on our own compound, for it was several minutes walking, perhaps two and a half blocks. Unbeknown to us until a decade later, our colleagues used to laugh about this strange habit of ours. Why not walk it for the exercise? For the record, let me explain. Often that court would already be occupied. Then we would have to walk home, jump in the car to play at Hillcrest. By that time, those courts were often occupied as well. However, if we were early enough, we could play. So, driving the car to our compound court, ensured us a court. I understand the laughter, fair enough, but there *was* a reason.

Another way in which we exercised for some time was jogging. At first, up and down the Mountain View driveway of two and a half blocks; later, along the race track at either St. Louis College or at Hillcrest. One Saturday in January 1979, Fran surprised herself she could do six laps or over two kilometers. She had caught up with me. She felt she wasn't doing it often enough, basically because she found it hard to get up early enough before preparing the family's breakfast and get the kids ready for school by 7:45.

We forced ourselves for several years but eventually gave up on it. Fran did not enjoy it; I just plain hated it. Sometimes Kevin would run along with us, especially during our time on Zaria Road. He thought it funny he could outrun us, not by speed but with staying the course longer. More about his jogging under his own name.

### *The Children*

#### *Lydia*

We all were delighted when Lydia visited us in Jos while we were still living in our temporary quarters on the Mountain View Compound. Cynthia and Wiebe were especially happy when she would carry them on her back or when she showed Cynthia again how to wear Nigerian clothes and carry things on her head. We bought Nigerian food to celebrate her coming and the children all dived right in as if they had never been away. Lydia stayed for two weeks. Then she went to her parents in Nyankwala for a few days and after that back to WCSS.

A week later, Fran wrote how we all enjoyed her visit.

She is prettier than last year, because she lost some weight. She was putting on too much weight at that time. We've also already had it that she seemed a bit moody and unhappy, but so far things are really fine. Perhaps a bit of teen stuff creeping in? She's been a big help watching the kids and doing a bit of housework, while I'm

still trying to get the house organized. Since our washing machine isn't working at all, it is good that Lydia can do it well by hand. She's talking mostly Hausa with the kids, which is giving them a good exposure to the language again.

Lydia continued to write letters from school. Here are a few excerpts:

We were supposed to be back from our school holidays on September 5, but then because of "salla" it was changed to 16th September. I had received notice of the change so I stayed home. But some students did not get the news in time, so they had to stay at the school compound and wait for the rest of us to come.

We are not using our personal clothes now. We have uniforms for class, for compound duties, for sports and for town leave. Most of the uniforms hardly fit now because we have all grown fatter during the holidays!

We are busy practicing our running and other things seriously, because some of us girls might be going to Yola next week for sports. Our boys came back last week from Ganye with a very good result. So you know what it means if girls go to Yola and don't do well!

Early 1978, Lydia's parents came to bring Ibrahim, a younger brother, for cleft palate surgery at the hands of Glen Verbrugge. They stayed at our house during Ibrahim's entire hospitalization. The surgery was successful and Naomi and Iliya took Ibrahim back home to Nyankwala for further recuperation.

During our February trip to Lupwe, Fran went to see Lydia at WCSS. She was in her last year and hoping to go to university. Fran wrote,

Her principal said that, judging from her grades, she wasn't really university material, but he advised her to try anyhow. Her test results showed she was number 22 out of the 34 in her class. Some comments on her latest report said she should be more serious, especially about Math. But it also said, "She has not caused any trouble in the school." So that's good news! She is really becoming interested now in broadcasting children's programmes.

Lydia came again for her 1978 Easter vacation. As always, the children were so happy to see her. The first thing they said was, "Carry me on your back!" She did not mind at all. The children were also eager to show her our new house on Zaria Road, room by room. Fran did all kinds of things with her, social things but also work around the house. They shopped together. They varnished our ten-year old furniture we bought during Baissa language study days. They did yard work. Lydia even dusted off my library, book for book, covered as they were by the heavy penetrating harmatan dust.

I took Lydia job hunting and had almost immediate success. Both Jos-based Christian broadcasters were interested in her. One was ELWA, a rather fundamentalistic outfit

connected to SIM and ECWA with its broadcasting facility in Monrovia, Liberia. The other, Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG), was connected to the World Lutheran Federation and had a recording studio in Jos but a broadcasting station in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Both advised her to learn typing. They made it seem very likely they would employ her to make radio or TV programmes and that if she did well, they would sponsor her for further training. No firm promises, but bright prospects. We were both very happy with our good day's work. It had helped that the people in charge knew me. I was especially on good terms with Sam Mbodwan, the director of RVOG.

Fran started Lydia immediately on typing lessons. It can be discouraging when you start by slowly pecking away, one letter at a time and you see others type like Jehu. Lydia soon did get discouraged. Fran had started typing at age fifteen and was very fast at it. Lydia thought that at seventeen, she might be too old! Fran decided, "I'll keep pushing her the rest of her Easter vacation. Then, when she starts in earnest in July or so, she will know a few basics already."

Shortly after spending the school holiday with us in Jos, she realized she'd forgotten something important:

I forgot to give you my fee assessment form along with the grade report. The principal says we must pay our school fees before the middle of the month or we will have to stop attending our lessons. My own fees are now N9.75. The principal is very serious and promised us last Wednesday that he will send us home if he has to in order to collect our fees. So please, kindly send me the school fees.

Mid-July I met Dick Mbodwan again. He told me he wanted Lydia to start working for them as soon as possible. We were so excited about this opportunity and wrote her a letter immediately. A month later, Lydia arrived and started with them.

Around two weeks into her job, Lydia was enjoying it. It seemed almost like school to her what with reading assignments and typing practice on the job. Fran wrote that she was doing quite well in her typing but that she needed to be reminded daily to keep at it. She already knew half the keyboard.

She continued to be happy at her work. Before long, she had the confidence to lead in staff prayers. In September she was assigned to prepare a drama script, work it out on a cassette—this was before CD days—and then present it to the Director. She was continuing with her typing lessons both at the office and at home and was making good progress. Fran wrote, "She's determined to learn well and I never catch her peeking at the keyboard." A month later, she was still into typing and reading. Other assignments included labeling cassettes.

Then the door opened for her to a scholarship for a course at Daystar in Nairobi, Kenya. Daystar was the communications centre of the All Africa Conference of Churches. She would need this training to continue her work at RVOG. The course would last six months.

She was somewhat apprehensive about going so far from home, but we encouraged her strongly.

She was entering a new phase of life, what with boys showing increasing interest in this very pretty and fun-filled young lady. One boy had come to see her several times at our house. One day she got nine letters, one from “that” boy and from eight others, all old school mates who had not forgotten her. There is no dating system here where young people are free to move around together and get to know each other. Everything is more circumscribed, because in this culture people are more realistic about what free dating can and often does lead to. That’s of course a major reason church youth organizations were very popular with Christian young people, for they give them an opportunity to socialize together in groups. That was probably a major reason for Lydia to join, for a time, the large COCIN church where I preached occasionally, for they had a good choir there and an active youth group.

In fact, Lydia became very active in all kinds of youthful activities. I am in no way suggesting it was only to find boys! She took a course with Great Commission Movement for evangelism. They would practice by visiting patients at the hospital or visit compounds. Afterwards, they would meet to discuss their experiences. She also attended a Bible study group every Friday evening at her church. She became one busy young lady, being involved in a whole raft of constructive Christian activity.

Whether or not the search for romance was part of the motivation, it did work. During January 1979, there was this young man who would walk her home from church and from Bible studies, quite a distance that Lydia normally would not walk. Then he would often stay a while for a visit. Actually, several fellows were visiting her. Then, one day she pointed out the one whom she described as her boyfriend. His name was Chris Garba Abaga, who hailed from the Takum area and was at one time baptized as an infant by the CRCN, something he later rejected in favour of believer’s baptism by ECWA. He was an evangelist with Campus Crusade. He was a handsome young man with an infectious boisterous laugh. With Lydia possibly going for that six-month course in Kenya, we thought it would be interesting to see how strong the tie was.

She worked hard to meet RVOG’s requirements for her scholarship for the Kenyan course. She continued improving her typing, also at home. She had to write three sample manuscripts that Fran typed up for her, while she was cooking for the family. Fran found it handy to have her around as an extra cook, especially on TCNN women’s day. She enjoyed cooking new foods for us.

A week before Christmas 1978, Lydia received notice that she had been accepted for that course in Nairobi. Fran wrote,

She sounds apprehensive about it and will be telling her parents at Christmas time. It will be real news to them, since she had not told them before. Naomi, her mother, had not really wanted her to go so far away when she came to Jos, some 480 kilometers from Nyankwala, so I don’t know what she’ll say about this.

When she left for Nairobi end February 1979, things were still going strong between her and Chris. Fran wrote, “He is a very nice fellow and we certainly have no objections to the match.” She had also been getting more friends and is much happier than when she first came to Jos. Fran commented how beautiful Lydia looked on a new picture she gave us. “She has really grown up in the last six months and, I’m sure, during the next six months in that course, she will grow even more.” Even today in 2013 that beautiful picture is hanging on our living room wall in Vancouver.

Lydia received her permanent employment contract from RVOG in February. Because of the training they were giving her, she had to sign a bond for two years. After that, she would be free to leave. Fair enough.

Towards the end of the month, she, together with another student named Yohanna, was scheduled to fly out to Nairobi via Lagos. The Director had decided to accompany them to Lagos to ensure a smooth transfer there. By now she had lost her hesitation and was looking forward to the adventure. We were surprised to receive the first letter from her from Nairobi very soon after she left. Everything had gone well on the trip and classes had started. Chris started coming daily to get news from her and was hoping to receive his own soon. Of course!

### *Kevin*

Here’s an introductory paragraph about his Jos life from Fran:

He is very happy in grade 3 at Hillcrest. His class list reads like a United Nations’ roll call. Out of 23 kids, only five are mission kids; the others are with firms and other agencies with mostly Lebanese, Indian or Pakistani names. His teacher’s name happens to be Miss Bohrer, pronounced like “Bohr,” much like “Boer,” a funny coincidence. He is doing very well. He is in advanced reading and math groups. He is also in a play that practices three times a week after school. So, he is kept very busy.

There were a couple of kids he knew from before, like Rusty Verbrugge and Karen Baas, but they were in the other grade 3 section. He played well with the children on our Mountain View compound. I think he soon felt quite at home again. He got along well with the Evenhouse boys, our former neighbours in Wukari, at Mountain View, but *we* would soon move away to our more permanent house on Zaria Road.

At school, his first friend was Nabeel, but he was having trouble keeping other friends, for too often people moved away so that no relationship was steady. He was constantly losing friends that way and then looking for new ones. His good friend Nabeel went to Pakistan, but fortunately came back again. He brought a shirt for Kevin that he liked very much. He wanted to give Nabeel something typically North American. I do not remember what he gave.



One Saturday Kevin had Nabeel over and Fran served a breakfast of pancakes and bacon. Oops! Nabeel was a Muslim and could not have pork. So Fran prepared some other meat for him. Kevin found it hard to understand how your religion could prevent you from eating pork, for he loved it in any form, especially head cheese.

One day, Nabeel told Kevin that his Dad had said that if they didn't read the Qur'an at least once a year, they might become Christians. Fran thought he meant that if you are not faithful enough to read the Qur'an regularly, you might as well be a Christian. Kevin asked Nabeel, "Well, don't you want to be a Christian?" Nabeel was shocked at the question and replied with a firm "No!" Fran commented, "Kevin has his theories as to what Muslims are like and Nabeel his about Christians. They are both beginning to realize that both groups are human and can be good friends."

I have written about our Wukari friend Ibrahim Usman Sangari in earlier chapters. He had moved from Wukari to Jos and held a birthday party for his son Joshua, the one for whom he had jokingly claimed Cynthia at her naming ceremony party. Kevin was invited to the party but felt uncomfortable at first for being the only white kid, something that would not have dawned on him in Baissa or Wukari. But remember, that was a long time ago for him. Being at Hillcrest, he was now used to mixed groups, but not being the only one. But he soon "rearranged" himself and enjoyed the party after all, especially speaking Hausa to them, even though the Sangaris felt perfectly at home with English.

He was happy at school, and, wrote Fran, "has even adjusted (sort of) to his music teacher!" He had just started piano lessons. Fran was curious "how this would go, because he would always let me teach him other things, but with piano he rejected my opinion and advice!" A month or so later, we bought a used piano on which Kevin practiced. He was "very enthused" about his lessons. We told him that, now that he had started and we had bought this piano, we would not allow him to quit for at least three years.

The three kids were sleeping, very temporarily, in one room, but Kevin was not happy with that arrangement, for he liked to read in bed early in the morning, but the kids would be noisy and thus bother "His Majesty." I was not too sympathetic with him on that one. I was brought up in a family of ten in a small house, with up to four children sleeping in one small bedroom and had never considered it a problem. I considered the emphasis on each kid needing his/her own room ridiculous and was annoyed with the missionary community's false standard that our kids took over as the ideal.

He was also into saving money with a vengeance. Since our return to Nigeria, he had spent only 10 cents for gum. Don't know where that came from! Parents, perhaps? Couldn't be, for we had spent more than 10 cents!

In September he was into reading several books about Helen Keller. This led to his interest in learning Braille and the finger alphabet used for talking to the deaf. He had already written the entire Braille alphabet on cardboard. It so happened that we had a Britisher over for supper who was a specialist in training teachers how to teach the blind. Kevin was

fascinated. The man promised he would come back and show Kevin a Braille typewriter and also teach him some enhancements for Braille writing.

By end October, Kevin was still in that play, but he was getting nervous about it and started to chew his nails as he had done before. “He’s aware of the problem,” wrote Fran, “and is trying hard to quit. He says he doesn’t want nails and fingers like his Dad!” Yes, I embarrassingly admit it: I am a long-time chewer and biter since grade one!

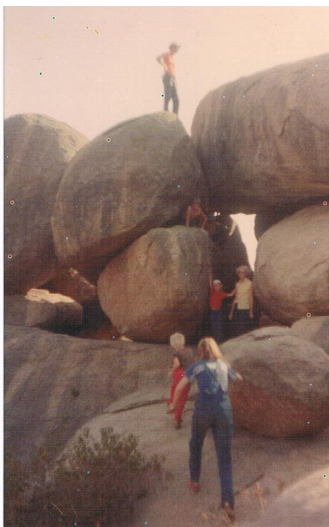
Kevin just had so many interests as time moved on. He loved to play “Stockmarket,” a contemporary capitalistic competitor of Monopoly. A medical couple from Takum Hospital, the Peerbolts, had introduced us to the game while we were still in Baissa, after which we played it regularly. Kevin became a pro. This one day he played it by himself the entire afternoon until he had all the money and broke the bank! If you like Monopoly, you will probably like Stockmarket. My explanation for the popularity of these games is that it allows one to vent his natural selfish aggressiveness without really hurting anyone.

Slowly his re-integration into Nigerian life took effect. By December he started having Nigerian friends over to the house for playing. One was his close neighbour; the other was from Wukari, Joshua, the son of Ibrahim Usman Sangari. He enjoyed playing with them enough that he also wanted to go to their house to play there. That Saturday lunch, in addition to these boys, there was a girl at the table whom Fran was tutoring and two missionaries who dropped by. Always full tables, it seems.

Kevin was enjoying Hillcrest school and consistently came home with good reports. If the challenge in most classes was not great for him, he faced a real one in his piano lessons.

Our new location on Zaria Road was some four kilometers from Hillcrest. We arranged with an Indian family who drove past our house with their kids, to pick Kevin up right at our driveway. That was handy. However, at the end of the day he would be dropped off across the busy road. Fran told him she would keep her eye out for him and help him cross, but he considered that an insult. In the meantime, he had changed best friend. His latest was Rusty Verbrugge.

Sunday afternoons would often be bonding time for Kevin and myself, at least when I was home and free. Occasionally we would have “driving practice” out on the flats of Liberty Dam, an artificial lake just out of town, from where we got our water.



More often we would take hikes in the hills around Jos. The Jos landscape was a very interesting one with the strangest rock formations, with some balanced on top of each other, seemingly ready to topple at the slightest wind or tremour. We never saw it happen. We would climb or jump from rock to rock, though not quite with the expertise local goats demonstrated.

Rock Climbing in Jos \*

One time we got stuck. We had jumped down from a higher to a lower level rock between which there was no bridging connection. When we tried to make our way back, we could not find a way to get back on the higher rock. Since there were Nigerians nearby who were accustomed to this environment, I did not really worry. However, Kevin was very upset and cried. I prayed with Kevin that God would send us someone to get us out of this predicament. Before long, He did. This made such a deep impression on Kevin that he decided to share this experience in class next day. These Sunday escapades were fun for us and exercises in good father-son bonding. Fran wrote, “Kevin loves these Sunday afternoon special times with his Daddy, and I’m sure that it’s good for both of them.” The other kids were left out, for they were too young for this. Besides, Fran wrote, it was their nap time.

Early March, Kevin brought a glowing report card home: all As and Bs, with a couple of A+s. Fran wrote he’s a good kid at school and tries very hard. So, he deserves these grades. “His teacher and boyfriend are coming over this evening. So Kevin is very excited about that. He told her where we lived at least ten times to be sure she didn’t forget!”

He was becoming quite mature and responsible. Elsewhere in this chapter you will read about Dr. Harry Boer’s retirement party. We had left the kids at home in Hamza’s care with instructions to Kevin to help watch over his siblings. The event took longer than anticipated and the time for the children to eat came around. When we came home after 7 pm, Kevin had already fed the kids and had started the customary evening devotions with them! They were worried about us and even prayed for us. Fran wrote that “we were touched by their behaviour and how grown-up Kevin had acted.”

Several weeks before his ninth birthday—May 11, 1978—Kevin started planning his party. We agreed on inviting ten boys, no girls. He really wanted to invite girls as well, but was afraid of what the boys would say! We had the games figured out as well as a menu of Nigerian food—rice with chicken sauce. He really wanted a slumber party, but then he would have to reduce the number of boys, according to Fran. Not sure why. Besides, Nabeel did not want to stay overnight. The plan worked out well. The kids watched a popular TV programme that they would not have liked to miss. Then, after cake and ice cream, I brought them all home. Few things are as delightful as children’s birthday parties, except ferrying them all home all over the city!

During the same May, there was a special Boys Brigade sports competition like high jumping, racing, etc. Here’s Fran’s report:

Kevin doesn’t do too well in that type of thing, a least not against some of these super athletic Nigerian kids. There were only five white kids there and about 50 Nigerians. The white kids were last in every competition! Kevin cried when he missed the second high jump attempt. So, it’s a good thing I was there to comfort him. It’s actually good for him to lose sometimes, because he does so well at school and is always way ahead. Even his piano lessons are getting easy now.

Early July 1978 Kevin did something new: he stayed overnight at the Maxwells, our Nigerian neighbours, whose son was his friend. They invited him for supper and they

watched TV till 11 pm. He had a great time. Fran wrote, "We are so happy that he's well integrated into this community now." He seemed to feel equally at home in every culture: Nigerian, Indian, Caucasian. What a preparation for a cosmopolitan life.

Fran would spend time reading with him two chapters a day from Hardy Boy books during his vacation time. She expected him to soon go back to the Narnia series as well. The little kids were not used to seeing Fran read to Kevin during the daytime. They were kind of jealous, for this was usually their time, not Kevin's. Fran was now allowed to help with his piano lessons. He was making good progress.

During that most insane week of social activity at our house I described earlier, Kevin invited some friends for an overnighter. One was named Olaf, an MK and proud owner of a pet turtle he brought along. The other was Mike, his Nigerian neighbour friend. They wanted to stay up late to watch TV. So we brought the TV to Kevin's room and we went to sleep. The report had it that one of the boys fell asleep at 2 am, one at 4 am and one even bragged that he never slept the whole night!

So far in this chapter you have not heard about Kevin's long-standing interest in aviation, but it had not waned. When he heard in July 1978 that his older cousin Mike, only son of my sister Karen, wanted to be a pilot, Kevin was all excited. According to Fran, "He still just loves planes." That old interest of his would remain active at least into his forties, at the time of this writing.

I mentioned Kevin's running with us on the track at St. Louis College across the street from us. He stuck with it for quite some time. Early September he did five rounds with me in the morning and then did another ten in the afternoon while Fran walked five rounds. He jogged six and a half kilometers that day. This may not be that much, but for a boy his age, Fran thought, it showed persistence. He said he was practicing for grade 6, when they could win awards for running the most kilometers in a semester.

During August 1978, the new school year introduced him to homework, something he enjoyed. We hoped he would soon start up his piano lessons again. He had slacked off during the vacation, because "it was only Mommy who listens to his lessons." Kevin had outstripped Fran's limited expertise, except when it came to hymns; she was better at them than he was. It was a matter of being used to a different genre. He now had an older, more experienced teacher. We expected him to continue making progress, even as his lessons were getting more difficult.

He had to start practicing for his recital at the end of the school term. The piece he was assigned sounded very nice when Nelle Evenhouse played it for us, but he had a lot of work to do on it. She encouraged him to practice measure by measure. Fran was confident he would stick to it. She commented, "Challenges are good for him. Things in general are coming too easily for him." So easy, in fact, that when he got a "C" for handwriting in his October report, he was very disappointed, even with everything else being "As" and "Bs." He was determined, he said, to write better and not spoil his report card again. He had a different teacher this term and each one has different expectations. Indeed. Two parallels

to my own life. Remember my low mark for handwriting in grade 3 that I never got over? And those two opposing teachers in my Speech course at Calvin?

Kevin also reminded me of my story writing in grade 6. He was writing a story during the visit of Grandma Jennie and Aunt Jane. By October 24 he had some eighteen pages and was reading it to his class at school. Grandma had asked him for a copy when the story was finished. Since he had seen us make stencils, he asked that Mommy stencil his story so that he could share it with others just like we do! “That,” wrote Fran, “was our special project last Friday on his day off from school.”

He was also getting into swimming. Ken Baker, an MK high schooler, was giving him lessons in November. By that time, the water is pretty cold, so that there were only two other people in the pool, but he stuck it out. He was working on his diving but ended up more often with a belly flop. One more lesson the following week and then it would be too cold to continue till February.

Kevin picked up one interest after another, often dropping them again along the way. Around his tenth year, he began to show an entrepreneurial spirit that was to characterize him during much of his adult life as well. Once, when a large shipment of books had arrived from Paideia, a Canadian publisher of Reformed literature, Kevin would take them to school and to other missionaries to sell. He was getting several orders. Since he received the same commission we paid others, he was really proud of his success. When the next shipment arrived late March 1979, he was eager to help unpack and count them and then sell again. He sold N25 worth of children’s books to his fellow pupils at Hillcrest, for which he received 20% commission. Selling was getting into his blood, it seemed.

All of a sudden Fran reported that Kevin’s main thing at school had become baseball, something he never talked about before. When he came home, he would now tell us how many hits and home runs he had made.

The three R’s seemed incidental to him. In order to stay in piano lessons, the kids have to practice five times a week for 30 minutes or they get kicked out of lessons, because the demand is so high. They have to fill in forms each practice time and the piano teacher has to sign. So far, he has been very conscientious about it.

On Fran’s 1979 birthday Kevin had to do his first public piano recital together with Krister Evenhouse and four girls. It was a short event, but it gave them a goal to work towards. They had to walk on the stage, announce their own number and then play. Kevin said he was nervous, but he was already planning on learning a piece for the next recital two months later. Unfortunately, I could not attend the event. Originally they had scheduled it for another day that I had protected and dedicated for this event, but then they moved it and I was scheduled for something else.

The language situation of the kids was quite different from that of the CRCN era. In March 1979, Kevin became Kiliyobas’ English teacher. Fran thought it was “cute” to hear Kevin trying to explain some English construction to Kiliyobas in Hausa. They were

working with a book that contains questions and answers. Kiliyobas wrote things down and Kevin would check his sentence structure! Fran felt that the exercise was good for Kevin. She had been teaching him and now he was helping someone else.

### *Cynthia*

It was the time of Cynthia's birthday, but, in view of our move to the Cok house on that day, we postponed her party for a few days. Fran commented that it was "too bad we can't go to McDonalds like we did for Wiebe!" A couple of months later, Fran reported that "Cynthia is so sociable and plays with others most of the day." Still the old Cynthia!

Cynthia could often be generous. One time, a St. Piran's friend of ours and an elderly judge, Haruna Dandaura, came to our house. Cynthia happened to have some M&Ms at hand and gave him a few. He was so touched by this gesture of a little girl that he never forgot. He would often talk about it with great delight and appreciation, especially when he saw Cynthia, even decades later.

Another time in January 1979, when we were flooded with free grapefruit I had brought home from "our" trees on our former Wukari compound, Cynthia overheard us saying that we had plenty. We intended to share them with some missionaries who had no access to such fruit. In Fran's words,

So our little sociable lady who knows everybody, went and distributed them while we were away in town. Lydia told her to quit, but she said that Mommy allowed it since we had too many. The next morning I discovered only twenty were left! What do you do? You want your children to learn to share. I guess she was practicing what we preach! I told her not to pass anything out again until I have seen it. That same week she had also given away or "loaned out" her doll bed, her dolls and the clothes! She said that little girl didn't have any, while she herself had more. So, why not? How could we object?

Not only was Cynthia generous, she was also observant. We had a friend called Jeremy Hinds, a missionary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) from the UK, living in Zaria. Like me, he wore Nigerian gowns, but unlike me, he wore the same gown all the time. He would visit us occasionally, often to stay overnight. Cynthia observed that he always wore the same robe. She asked him one day why! In spite of that childlike gaffe, a few years later she felt a special attraction to one of the Hinds boys for a while. As you may have observed, her married name is not Hinds!

Early January, 1979, Cynthia started kindergarten at Plateau Private School, kind of an unofficial feeder school for Hillcrest that especially non-missionary people used to get their kids through the Hillcrest entry competition. Missionary children did not have to go through Hillcrest testing, for they were guaranteed a place. Cynthia liked kindergarten very much, but it did make her very tired. Good training for Hillcrest in August, according to Fran, when it will be full time.

Cynthia had made some good friends and would often come home with all kinds of stories. Early February 1979, she was very excited they would be doing a TV programme late March. That day came after a lot of practice. All the children were dressed very colourfully. During the part of “Skip to My Lou” the camera followed Cynthia around while dancing with her Pakistani partner. Fran had gone to watch it on the colour TV of our neighbours, the Maxwells, but I saw only a small part of it, since it overlapped with a catechism class I was teaching. That was that same eventful day when Kevin participated in a Hillcrest performance and Wiebe had an accident.

### *Wiebe*

Little 3-year old Wiebe had a rough introduction to the wet monsoon on the high Jos plateau. Here’s the story from Fran:

Today we had one of those sudden unexpected downpours. Wiebe cried and did not have enough sense to run for shelter, any shelter. Fortunately, his big sister stayed with him until she could persuade him to run back to the house with her. He just stood there and was mad; he expected the rain to go away, same way as he wanted the snow to go away when he first experienced it in Grand Rapids a short while ago!

He and Cynthia were both having a lot of fun riding their trikes, but Wiebe discovered he could also manage the bigger tricycle with its training wheels. So, we wondered for how long he would be satisfied with the smaller one. And to think that it had been only a year since Cynthia was afraid on the *little* trike!

“The little ones,” Fran wrote, “but especially Wiebe, are very interested in pre-school activities. He’s bugging me from early morning on to read to him and cut, paste or colour! The favourite books right now are *The Big Pancake* and *The Wolf and Seven Little Kids*. After you’ve read them a 1000 times, one is tempted to make them disappear!” A month or so later she remarked, “Wiebe feels safer when he’s close to home! He’s just like Kevin at that age in that he loves to look at books and hear stories. He’s always following me around with a book and ‘Please Mommy, one more story.’ How can you say ‘No?’ He already recognizes many numbers and several letters.”

One time Wiebe earned a whole 10 cents for finding a saltshaker that had disappeared. Fran had offered 10 cents for finding it. He found it behind a bookshelf. How it got there is anyone’s guess. Fran surmised someone had hidden it there as a joke when clearing the table and then forgot about it.

At age three plus, Wiebe was turning to theology for explanations. Early November he and Kevin were struggling with the flu. Wiebe could not decide whether it was God or Satan that had made him sick. After he had fallen a couple of times, he said, “God pushed me. God wanted me to fall.” Fran wondered whether this was a case of hyper-predestination. He was aware that we would move into our permanent house soon after Christmas. Ever

the theologian, he said, “After God’s birthday, we will move into our new house.” When he saw presents under the Christmas tree in the hostel, he asked, “Is Jesus coming down to open them?”

During early April 1978, we had the strangest experience at our Zaria Road house: We were getting shocks from all water facilities like faucets, sink, bathtub, etc. A colleague advised us to disconnect the water heater and sure enough, it was over. Wiebe had blamed Lydia for the shock he felt when she was bathing him. He refused to come near her for the rest of that evening!

Wiebe had his fourth birthday during what may well have been the busiest and most chaotic week our family ever went through. I have already summarized the social chaos of that week. In the midst of that chaos we invited fifteen kids for the party. And, you know, it had to rain! As Fran told it:

The rain forced a change of plans to inside the house. Fortunately, John was there for crowd control and to keep them out of the living room. Katie Weeks came to play kid-friendly music on the piano while they played “follow the leader.” We had lots of fun. At the end, we piled them all into our van to take them home. It looked so cute, each one with a hat and balloon.

They were barely gone, and the expected delegation from ICS Ibadan showed up together with my Director Dr. Adegbola. You’ve read about that in Chapter 19.

When Cynthia entered Plateau School in January 1979, Wiebe first was very lonely. He soon got over it. According to Fran,

He likes to colour and to look at books. On Wednesdays he plays at someone’s house while I’m teaching at TCNN. He has three good choices right now. Sometimes he has a hard time deciding which one to go to. Yesterday morning, Ruthie Koops came here to play with him again. For a few weeks he had learned from Kevin to be anti-girl and then he didn’t want to play with Ruthie, but he seems to have forgotten all about that again, because they had such a nice time yesterday.

Late February 1979, Wiebe banged his chin while climbing a tree and got a nasty gash in it. We took him to a nearby private clinic, where they applied bandages. Fran had to take him back several times over a period of nearly two weeks for checkups and antibiotics. When it was all finished, it had cost us a whole \$1.60! Only a month later, on a day when the other children participated in performances, Kevin at Hillcrest and Cynthia on TV, Wiebe had another freak accident: our dog Hankali attacked him and bit him just underneath an eye. We could not figure out the reason for the dog’s attack, but became kind of suspicious of him as unpredictable, something we had not observed before. This time we quickly took him—Wiebe, that is-- to the out-patient clinic at Evangel Hospital where he was born. They soon had him sewed up. As Fran reported the scene,



He was so brave about it; he hardly cried and laid very still when the two stitches were put in. John almost fainted and walked out of the room, because the doctor did it with what looked like a fish hook. Wiebe thought it was funny that Daddy couldn't take it! Then he had to have a tetanus shot and he smiled to the nurse who gave it.

Fran noted that this was the seventh scar on Wiebe's face. She summarized them all, but I won't bore you with all these details, except to help you realize that he was a pretty battle-scarred little boy.

### *Children Together*

Some years ago, sister Jane recorded herself reading children's stories specifically for Kevin. Every once in a while, she would interrupt herself by making a comment to Kevin and using his name, like, "Kevin, turn the page." He had enjoyed those readings many times over and over again, but by now he was beyond that stage. Now the two younger children became interested in listening to the same tapes but they would be irritated when they heard these instructions to Kevin. They would ask questions like, "Doesn't she know it's us?" Or, "Can't Auntie Jane see us?"

Soon after our move to Jos, Jane sent new tapes, this time addressing Cynthia and Wiebe. They were really pleased and said, "Now she knows our name!" Jane had herewith redeemed her reputation! Fran wrote to Jane, "I guess they thought you were dumb that you kept calling them 'Kevin.' Wiebe thought it funny that Jane kept calling him 'Wiebe' instead of 'Wiebe'." How could he know about the confusion between the Dutch and English "w?" After all, his name was Dutch.

While Jane was producing tapes for them, Grandma Jennie sewed pajamas, all of the same pattern and colour. The kids loved them, but poor old Hamza, our steward, was only confused by them and found it hard to tell one from the other—the pajamas, that is, not the kids! In the meantime, Fran wrote that every time she handled those pajamas she had to think of all the work Mother had put into them.

Fran had been teaching Cynthia and Wiebe pre-school stuff every morning. She enjoyed making up number and word games for them, things they were both good at. She was using Lego blocks to teach them colours. We were discussing whether or not to send them to "K-class," but Fran felt that since teaching Kevin herself had gone well, she would just as soon teach the other two as well at K-level. It is expensive putting them in school and would require us to bring them and pick them up every day, a commitment we were not ready to take on. In the end, though, both of them did spend some time in pre-school at Plateau Private.

Language wise, things had "deteriorated" considerably since Baissa days. Earlier in this chapter I told you they initially enjoyed their nursery group at TCNN, when Fran went there to teach. But already then they were hesitant and sort of stuck together without

playing much with the others. Don't forget, they had just spent almost a year in Grand Rapids and this was a very different world from Baissa. It was like starting all over again for them. Only a few months later at end November, Fran wrote,

The little ones aren't so happy in the TCNN nursery. I think a big part is language. Last week a little girl came running to Cynthia, holding a pair of plastic sunglasses. She was just greeting Cynthia, but Cynthia assumed she was going to fight and push her over. And that's the way it goes. It's sad to think that a bit over a year ago, they were more comfortable speaking Hausa than English. What happens to that all in their minds? When we move to the other house, they will have more contact with Hausa speakers. So, hopefully they'll relearn it then. Even with Hamza, our steward, they can't make him understand them now. Someone came from Baissa some weeks ago, and he couldn't believe they were the same children!

Our children now found themselves in a cosmopolitan world of many nationalities. Whereas previously, their linguistic experiences and developments formed the centre of our attention, that aspect of their lives stabilized in the new English environment with an occasional nod to Hausa. We did kind of regret that development, for their linguistic world had been very interesting. It was an inevitable price to pay.

As if she didn't have enough to do, early December Fran started teaching the little kids stitchery, but she found they were a bit young for this, even though they enjoyed trying it. Thor Evenhouse was part of the project but was more ready for it, being at the advanced age of six.

Around this time, Fran began to refer to Cynthia and Wiebe as "twins." They were, of course, very close in age, 10 months and 28 days to be exact! I sometimes would refer to them as "hesitant twins." Around our first Jos Christmas, they began to act that way as well. They wanted to dress alike. Fran suspected they just enjoyed confusing people as to who was who. In our December annual I wrote that Cynthia and Wiebe "continue to act like unequal twins, with Cynthia preferring to roughhouse it with her friends outside, while Wiebe is turning increasingly to literary pursuits."

Towards the end of August 1978, the school and church programmes were in full swing again. Cynthia and Wiebe went to St. Piran's Sunday School in spite of Wiebe's earlier declaration. In fact, Wiebe decided he liked it and planned to continue with it. Cynthia felt the urge to "take care" of Wiebe during the session, but that would not last long, for in October classes would be reorganized and the two would be separated.

After Grandma Jennie and Jane's visit, Fran started teaching Cynthia and Wiebe again, something she had eased off on. Mid-September they surprised her by counting up to 100 with hardly any help. Cynthia was starting to recognize many letters and could tell whether words were "the same" or "different." She loved to work in her workbooks. As to Wiebe, she wrote,

He has his days when he “refuses” and throws the books, pencils and crayons away, but he soon comes back again for more! I always tell him he doesn’t have to listen to Cynthia when she is reading, but he doesn’t want to be left out either. The best time for him always is story time, and they never fail to bring me plenty of books to read to them.

The week before Opa and Oma Boer arrived for their visit, we “did” head cheese and also had a “kid exchange” day. Cynthia slept over at Bierlings with her friend Sarah. Her Dad, Al, was the math teacher at Hillcrest High School. Wiebe slept at the Evenhouses. Both of them thought the arrangement “super special.” In exchange, we had Krister Evenhouse at our house. He and Kevin used to play and fight in Wukari; now they were playing in Jos, but, Fran wrote, they became kind of wild.

Our second Christmas in Jos (1978), was one full of excitement and activity for the children. A week before the big day, Fran and the children together baked and decorated Christmas cookies, something “the children won’t let me forget,” she wrote. “They have to try out all the cookie shapes we have, of course. Cynthia treated the frosting like finger paints, with lots of licking fingers in between. Thus anyone eating our cookies does so at her own risk!” Mrs. Maxwell, our neighbour lady and mother of Michael, took Cynthia and Wiebe to see “Father Christmas” at the Kingsway Department Store. They came back with a little book. She had promised to do so a week earlier and the kids would not allow her to forget either.

They had many parts to play in the St. Piran’s Christmas service. The Sunday School presented a programme in which Cynthia and Wiebe together with 50 other kids, sang “Who Came Down?” Fran wrote, “It was cute to see and hear them perform. You can excuse a lot of mistakes when it’s your own kids, right?” Kevin had a lot of responsibilities during this service. He took collection, he had a small part in the Christmas play, he sang with his Bible class group and he read one of the Scripture passages. Fran wrote, “They hadn’t taken into consideration that some of the children were small. Kevin’s head didn’t make it over the lectern, but he still read very clearly and it did not seem to upset him that he couldn’t see!” Though I do not recall, I am sure that we coached him in reading his passage properly, so that he was well prepared and confident.

During February and March 1979, we had a couple of Dutch children stay at our house for ten days, children of Dutch missionaries who had to travel to The Netherlands. The children understood no English, only Dutch. During the same periods, we also had a few other toddlers over from parents who needed to be relieved of them for a day here or there. Wiebe decided there were too many “babies” around. So he stayed at Michaels’ house next door most of the time. Fran wrote, “It’s hard having two extra kids over who speak another language. Cynthia tried hard to babysit them, but Wiebe felt quite threatened. Kevin thought they were a nuisance, because they got into his model kits, bookshelves, etc. Everybody was happy to see them leave in due time.

**One Saturday afternoon in April 1979, Fran, Cynthia and I attended a wedding and left the two boys in Kiliyobas' hands. We came home to a bad surprise. Here's Fran's version of the story:**

**Kevin and his friend Rusty Verbrugge were throwing stones and pretending they were aiming at Wiebe. In fact, one stone landed on Wiebe's head! A true doctor's son, Rusty made an icepack and applied it to the wound to stop the bleeding. Kevin ran over to the Verbrugges, who came over immediately by car and brought Wiebe to the hospital to stitch him. Wiebe never cried at all. When we came home, Wiebe was still bloody, but the boys had cleaned the floor and his clothes as well as they could. Kevin is normally so sensible that it shocked us he could be so foolish as to throw stones at his brother. But it all ended well. The stitches were removed after a few days.**

**This was Wiebe's eighth accident! As to the boys pretending to aim at Wiebe, I could relate, for I had done something similar during my boyhood in Lutjegast. You may check Chapter 2.**

### *Canine Adventures*

**In January, 1978, we bought ourselves a puppy, a playful little thing we called "Maigadi," Hausa for "guard," for that is what we planned for him. Reactions in the family were mixed. Fran was not that fond of dogs to begin with and found it an expensive hobby. Neither was she aware of the canine calls-of-nature regime, which was much more than she had expected, but, being the good sport she was, she was willing to go along with the project. She wrote,**

**Kevin likes him, but is disappointed that he doesn't run out to meet him when he comes home from school. Cynthia loves him and drags him around all the time, but Wiebe is scared to death and heads for the highest chair or table when he sees the pup. He won't go anywhere inside or outside until he first checks on the location of Maigadi. We hope he will soon get over that.**

**I thought it was a good idea in order to teach the kids some animal appreciation and positive interaction with them. To alleviate Wiebe's fears, we ended up chaining Maigadi to the clothes line, which gave him plenty of leeway, while ensuring Wiebe of his safety. Three months later, Wiebe's reaction had not changed much, except that, as long as Maigadi was tied up, Wiebe enjoyed bringing him food and water. In the long run, Kevin did not maintain his interest, for he was basically a bookworm.**

**One Sunday morning in early April 1978, I accidentally ran over Maigadi with our van and killed him. Fran wrote,**

**We still can't figure out just what happened. We were leaving for church and Cynthia had just been playing with Maigadi, telling him we would not be long—ten**

seconds later, he was dead. Even though Cynthia had been playing with him more than the others, she said she really didn't want another dog, because it was more fun to play with children than with dogs! Kevin had hardly paid any attention to Maigadi and was, in fact, still a bit afraid of him, but he cried most of the day. The next day we started looking for another puppy. Kevin wanted one that looked like Maigadi.

Apparently, Wiebe did not respond. Fran commented, "It's hard to figure out children." Within a couple of days we found a female puppy and called her "Princess." This time all three kids were playing with it and no one seemed afraid. Having Maigadi did thus help to make them more comfortable with dogs. Wiebe, in fact, related very positively to the new puppy. Fran wrote, "He's quite determined not to be afraid of her. We put the collar on her yesterday and today the kids put the chain on and tried walking with her. She's already too strong for Wiebe to hold on. As long as Wiebe is wearing his boots, he feels quite well protected." Unfortunately, Princess also met her "untimely" end by someone else's car as she tried to cross busy Zaria Road, possibly to follow me. The children felt very bad. Even Wiebe had become playful with it. We hoped to get a new puppy soon from the Verbrugges, whose dog had just given birth to a litter.

Early July we picked up that puppy and called her "Hankali," "Be Careful." The kids were really protective of it. She slept in our bedroom. Fran wrote, "She's getting a bit trained already, but somehow this is the third doggie training I've been working on this year. I surely hope we end up with a grown-up dog this time." You detect any tiredness on her part? Hankali did last longer.

Early February 1979, someone brought us a little kitten. "Just what we need," exclaimed Fran. Hankali was afraid of it when it hissed at her. Wiebe named the kitten "Paul;" Kevin called it "Hitler;" but as a family we called it simply "Puss." The cat was supposed to hunt mice and the dog was supposed to guard the house, but at first they were hunting each other and guarding their food from each other. However, after a few weeks we were noticing that the mice were gone. According to Fran, "Our mice are properly scared now! They heard about the traps and they've seen the cat and dog. We haven't had any trouble lately. So, we are grateful."

### *Visit from Mother Jennie and Jane*

For quite some time Fran wrote a lot of letters to both sets of parents encouraging them to visit us. It was often advice about necessary documents, vaccinations and medicines, clothes to take. They were often advised to consult with the CRWM administration about procedures, and, not to forget, what to bring along for us. Quite a few of her letters ended up with a long wish list of miscellanea we all wanted. They also contained preventive advice and words of encouragement to prevent fear from setting in. After all, Mother Jennie was well into her seventies and she had never before been in any tropical climate or southern culture. Unfortunately, Father Charlie did not want to come along, largely due to his fear of flying.

Cynthia and Wiebe were very disappointed one day in May 1978. We visited the Bierlings, Hillcrest colleagues of ours also living at Mountain View, to greet their grandmother who had come for a visit. Why had *their* grandmother not yet arrived? They were consoled when Fran assured them that they would come before long and that they would stay longer than the Bierling grandmother.

In July it was finally time for the anticipated visit from Mother Jennie and sister Jane. They arrived in Kano on July 26, 1978. Jane said she was so happy when she could already see Fran in the distance while they were still on the bus riding to the customs area. Jane commented that "going through customs was quite an experience. There was a big crowd of people, but I saw no recognizable lines anywhere. It was strange, scary, crazy and funny all at the same time."

Jane continued,

Driving from Kano to Jos was like seeing a live travelogue. People and more people on the sides of the roads, particularly in the villages and towns we passed. People walking, people riding bikes and motorcycles. People carrying things on their heads, people selling things on the side of the road. I have never before seen so many people outside!

After a few days in Jos we took our visitors "down bush." We were worried about 74-year old Mom's health, so we brought enough boiled drinking water with us to ensure we knew what she was drinking.

We stopped at different church compounds, some COCIN and some CRCN. After crossing the Benue River by ferry, we visited Ruth Vander Meulen and Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo in Ibi. Even though we had crossed there many times, it was quite a fearful experience for our children who no longer remembered these journeys, and also for Mom and Jane, for whom it obviously was a first. We stopped in Wukari for just a little while and showed them the two houses where we used to live. Then we drove on to Takum and Lupwe where we spent the night. Mom & Jane were very pleased with how hospitable every one was to them, both Nigerians and missionaries. We were surprised how well they both slept in new places. Jet lag was not an issue, because they had already spent a week in our time zone in The Netherlands, on their way to Nigeria.

We stopped in Mararraba to see the Havemans and then traveled on to Baissa where we spent several days. Again Mom & Jane were amazed how many Nigerians invited us over for meals or brought food to us. Both of them were good sports about trying new foods. We continued to keep careful track of their drinking water. After leaving Baissa we stopped in Rafin Kada to greet Ifraimu Nyajo and his wife and then went back to Wukari to stay for the weekend. Many Nigerians came to the Mission Compound to bring food or just to greet.



**Pastor David serving food to Grandma and Jane \***

**A highlight there for Mom & Jane was meeting Pastor David's family and having a meal with them. They knew him well as he had visited them several times during his study time at Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids.**

**Then finally to Nyankwala to meet Lydia and family about whom they had heard so much for so many years. Lydia was in her home village for just a short holiday and was getting ready to start working and to come to live with us again in Jos. It was a delightful visit for both families.**

**After a week of showing Mom & Jane around the CRCN area where we had lived and worked for a decade, it was time to drive back to Jos. We again crossed the Benue River by ferry, which was not quite as scary as the first time the week before!**

**Once back in Jos we spent time in many places. We looked around Hillcrest School, Evangel Hospital, all kinds of open markets and shopped at various supermarkets. We visited and walked around the campus of TCNN. Mom had a real "African" experience there! She complimented a Nigerian staff on her lovely wall decoration of calabashes. The lady promptly took several down and gave them to Mom as a gift. Mom was a bit embarrassed at first, but she took the gift home with her. They hung on her wall for many years and she would share the story of how she got them. We then drove just a little way from TCNN to Johanna Veenstra's grave at Vom. It looked so familiar to them because *The Banner* often displayed a picture of that whenever there was an article about Nigeria. Veenstra was the first CRC missionary in Nigeria and died in 1933. She is a missionary icon in the denomination.**

**We spent a day at Miango Guest House while John was attending a conference. We visited lots of missionaries at their homes and they came to our house in order to chat with our visitors. Jane was impressed with all the visits and with the frequent cuts in electricity. She acknowledged that I had not exaggerated such things in my letters.**

**John preached in many different churches during Mom & Jane's visit. So that meant they had quite an ecumenical experience, had communion served in new ways and also heard many different languages and translations. We did attend St Piran's with them as well and they were happy that it was all in English and that all the people could speak English.**



**Cynthia's birthday – 1978 \***

**On August 12 we had a party for Cynthia's 5th birthday. Lots of kids were at the party, but the thing that was the most special for her was that her own grandmother and aunt were there! In the evening Lydia arrived, unfortunately not quite in time for the birthday party.**

**After a four week visit, John drove them back to Kano. Since Kevin was in school and had already missed a week when we traveled to CRCN area, Fran decided to stay home with the children. Jane reported that she was very happy that I was able to stay with them the whole time during luggage inspection, passport control etc.**

**It was a great, enjoyable and successful visit. Even though Mom was a bit sick for one day, Jane felt very well the whole time. I felt that our extra care with regards to drinking water had really paid off!**

### *Visit from the Boer Parents*

**My parents decided to visit us as well and not that long after the Prins visit. We wanted them to spend the entire month of October with us and were unhappy that they seemed to prepare for only two weeks. Why such a short time? We assured them that we were seriously eager for their visit and that we would make time for us to travel together. I would take two weeks of holiday and then we would spend the other two weeks just being together in our house and enjoying each other's company. Our letters to them were also full of info, advice, instructions and, yes, of course, more wish lists!**

**We were to pick them up from the Kano airport early October. However, we took a few days to get there. We first drove to Kaduna, quite the other direction, where I had to address a Baptist conference, while Fran and the kids swam in an Olympic-sized hotel swimming pool. The next day we stopped in Zaria to visit the Anglican Archdeacon there. Such visits were important in getting leaders interested in the ICS to support us and to give us space for ministry. By the time we arrived at the airport in Kano, the plane had already landed. Kevin with his Hausa talked officials into allowing him to look in the customs hall to see if his Opa and Oma had arrived. They had. They were not hassled very much as some people are, probably because people here have respect for age, but it still took them a while to get through, enough to make Dad nervous when he thought of going through that line again when leaving.**



As we did not travel to the airport directly, so we did not return home directly. We made it a bit of a sight seeing tour for them, especially the ancient Muslim town of Kano City with its mosques everywhere and the impressive main mosque near the equally impressive palace of the Emir. One of the more interesting sights was that of Muslim pilgrims waiting for their planes to Mecca. There were thousands of them camping around the airport, all waiting for their particular planes and causing the typical Nigerian delightful chaos that makes life in this country so interesting and vibrant. The Federal Government strictly controls their numbers, for they constitute a tremendous drain on the country's economy. In 1977, they numbered 100,000; in 1978, half of that by Government decree. When they return, the men can claim the Hausa title of "*Alhaji*;" the women, "*Hajiya*." There is prestige attached to that title. During the oil boom years, so many went that whenever a list of Muslims was published for whatever purpose, they would just about all sport that title. This proliferation tended to cheapen the title. At their return, the Nigerian press would often have titles like, "The Smugglers Have Returned." Those titles spoke for themselves and need no further comment.

When we arrived home in Jos with my parents, they unpacked all the goodies they had brought, much like Grandma Jennie and Jane had done not long before. Just imagine the excitement of the children, all that stuff they had asked for, a veritable Sinterklaas Day for them. As for Fran and me, they brought a box with 100 tubes of Dutch salmiac powder that one consumed by pouring out a bit on your hand and then relish it by slowly licking it up. It was strong and pithy. We loved it and it lasted for a couple of years, long enough to lose some of its pungency. What surprised us was that Customs did not confiscate it, for it had all the marks of drugs.

That Sunday in Jos, my parents and the family followed me around as I preached in the Presbyterian Church in the morning and the big COCIN one in the afternoon, all in English. Their first Sunday to see their son in ministry action. It was an impressive day for them.

The next day we celebrated Canadian Thanksgiving along with our CRC colleagues by means of a picnic. Since we had both Canadians and Americans in our Mission, we celebrated both. Personally, I was not that much in favour of observing home country celebrations, for Nigeria had enough celebrations of her own, including her own style of thanksgiving celebrations. I didn't always want to make issues out of such things, for missionaries were just too tied to their home cultures and not enough to the local. They would neither listen to nor appreciate my thoughts on such issues. Perhaps I hung more loose with respect to my "home" culture, because I had already lived in three of them prior to Nigeria, but this was true of most of our other Canadian colleagues as well. Of course, having married into a Frisian family was the ultimate cultural experience!



**Back row: Oma, Adisa, Habila, Opa, Wiebe  
Front: Cynthia, Kevin at CRCN Wukari – 1978 \***

**A few days later, we set out for a five-day trip to Wukari and surroundings. We stayed in the old guesthouse on our compound there. We really enjoyed our time in the Wukari area. We visited CRCN Wukari and took a picture of Pastor Habila and his wife together with Opa & Oma and our children, all sitting on the steps of the church.**

**We also visited many of the area pastors and other leaders there, including the two Nyajos--Ifraimu and Pastor Ezekiel. We had a meal with Dan Azumi and his wife. He was a tailor and contractor. He was also the person to whom we entrusted Lydia during a home service period and from whom she ran away. He said that if he had been given advance notice of my parents' visit, he would have slaughtered a cow for them!—a typical Nigerian exaggeration. Deep down he was grateful he had this excuse as I would have been.**



**Opa, Oma, Iliya, Naomi \***

**We spent a Sunday in Lydia's village, Nyankwala, and introduced my parents to Iliya and Naomi and their family. They were fed a royal Nigerian meal cooked by Naomi. It was an unusual experience for Dad to get on the pulpit to greet the people, a common custom here for august visitors—and august he was, being the elderly father of a former pastor of theirs and a White man to boot. If I remember correctly, I translated for him into Hausa. Probably others would have had difficulty understanding his "Dutch-English" brogue.**

**When we left CRCN area to return to Jos, something had gone wrong with the Ibi barge across the Benue River. We had crossed it on our way coming and Dad was not impressed with its primitive and admittedly dangerous operation. When we noticed that our wait might be indefinite, Dad became very impatient and wanted us to take another route that would be 600 kilometers instead of 300! It would still take us across the Benue but now via**

a fairly new bridge. So we did. On the way, we stopped at our Mission station at Zaki Biam, where there was a Canadian missionary, Andy Horlings from Smithers, BC. Fran wrote, "The detour took us a good (bad, actually) eleven hours. The road was terrible. We don't ever plan to take it again until it is improved. We could much better have stayed an extra night in Wukari and tried again the next morning. Hindsight is always better than foresight."

The following week we had a hectic social schedule. We visited TCNN and met some of the teachers there, including the CRC members on staff, Harvey and Thelma Kiekoover. They also visited Fran's women's class. We went to Vom to visit Johanna Veenstra's grave. We visited the Koops, the Evenhouses and the Verbrugges. It was kind of a repeat of Mother Jennie and Jane's visit.

Everywhere they were fed, both African and Western. They enjoyed a church dinner that was already scheduled at St. Piran's, though not in their honour! Lydia cooked all kinds of dishes for them, while Fran did her famous "snow on the mountain." But they did not like all the food Fran served them. They especially disliked the southern US dish of biscuits and gravy, something that we loved, and the potpies that were the children's delight.

In the meantime, so many of our Jos friends dropped by to greet my parents. Mom would sit there, regally dressed in her big mumu gowns and looking like a queen. People could not believe she had given birth to ten children with all of them still alive. She just did not look worn enough for such heavy work and all ten children living was unheard of in Nigeria with its high infant mortality. Nigerian English was difficult for them to understand, as was their Dutch-English for Nigerians, but with goodwill they all communicated.

A few times I had to rein Dad in somewhat. Due to changes at Unijos, I was busier with teaching there than I had expected. In fact, Fran wrote that I worked almost every day, while she took them all over the place. This left Dad on his own occasionally. Being restless by nature, he needed an outlet and asked for the car. I refused but he insisted. Then I gave him a firm "No!" It was one of the few times in my life I stood up to him and he did not like it, that is, not to have the car. I guess he forgot that he had *never* given me his car during our visits! The difference was that I had noticed his hesitation and hence never asked. My reason for refusing was that, though the official driving rules in Nigeria are similar to those in Canada, in fact, Nigerians have an unofficial driving style that is much different and very dangerous. It would have been reckless to have given him the car, given his age and his clumsy driving style. Having learned driving late in life, like in his mid-forties, he never developed safe habits.

The second incident arose when Dad got nervous about the return trip through Kano customs. One day he declared he wanted to leave right there and then, without consulting Mom or anyone else. Of course that was impossible, if only for his dated tickets. Besides, we all had our schedules that we could not just set aside and follow his. I had a class to teach at Unijos. It took quite a bit to calm him down and see the good reason for having to stay out his visit. Well, that was one side of Wiebe Boer Sr.

He reminded me of an important truth I was aware of but, I'm afraid, did not always adhere to. He had noticed that I had become a respected and prominent person in the community. For this reason, he advised me to be slow to speak up in meetings. Let others say their thing, let them discuss, but I should wait with mine till close to the end. I found it gratifying that he had recognized my social position and I appreciated his insight. It led me to be more careful and not to speak up too quickly. Thanks, Dad.

### *Repair and Maintenance*

There were many frustrations, the water and electricity situations being the major ones. However, others kept cropping up. Back in the CRCN years, we had bought an old-fashioned gasoline-driven wringer washing machine, but the wringer broke down along the way. So, once again back to manual laundry done mostly by our steward. However, manual wringing leaves a lot of soap in the clothes. I had ordered a new wringer from the US which arrived end December. Fran wrote,

John put the wringer in place—[John's insert: I am surprised at this achievement of mine. Me fix a washing machine? Who would have ever thought! But now comes the clincher--], but the wringer just kept wringing and wouldn't stop. The Mission mechanic, Harry Faber, explained that, since it hadn't worked for three years, it was probably rusty inside. It would need some heavy work to snap it back into neutral gear. It kept rolling for about 30 minutes and then it quit completely again. That joy was short lived. Hopefully Faber can look at it again soon.

Such inconveniences were part of the routine of living in Jos. We would obtain modern equipment, though hardly the latest version, to make life more convenient, only to find it break down and having difficulty getting it fixed. Early January, 1978, Fran's oven would not work. We were now in our new house on Zaria Road. It had happened before and she would shove it, push it, bang it and everything else and it would somehow start up again. This time, no way. A Polish engineering couple was due to visit us and Fran hoped he would be able to fix it. Again, no success. So she took the baking she was doing to the Evenhouses, who lived four kilometers away at the CRC compound, to put it in their oven. Evenhouses' neighbours on either side had the same problem!

Where was I during this "crisis?" I had traveled to Donga, a town in CRCN area. Besides, would I with my two left hands have been able to fix it if Fran's cajoling and the engineer's expertise did not do it? Not infrequently we remarked to each other that in some way living in the rural area of CRCN without all these "conveniences" was easier on the psyche. We soon learned an important lesson in Jos. If you don't have a modern gadget or convenient arrangement, you simply do without and make alternative arrangements that don't break down on you so easily. The same thoughts occurred whenever we ran short of water or out of electricity. Primitive but dependable arrangements are better than modern but undependable arrangements "of convenience." They cause less frustration. You can count on them to work even if kind of primitive.

One weekend in June 1978 was one gigantic chaos for us. On Friday, a storm brought a large branch down on our clothes line, knocking one of its poles right out of the ground. Four days earlier, I had taken the washing machine apart and was still trying to reassemble it on Friday. With both facilities out of commission, poor Hamza had to do the laundry without the machine and the lines. But he managed with a tub and temporary lines strung between trees.

Then we had so much rain that the roof started leaking worse than ever, while the gutters on the ground overflowed and backed up. On Saturday, I brought in some fellows to clear out the gutters and to dig some drainage ditches to the main ditch along Zaria Road and also to repair the clotheslines. Someone else came with a can of pitch to repair the asbestos roof. Guess what: It started raining again, cats and dogs no less. While the man on the roof was trying to quickly repair one more hole, he slipped and his heavy can of pitch fell through the roof, creating a bigger hole than ever! The roofer felt so bad about what happened that he offered to help me finish with the washing machine. While we were both lying there in our dirties underneath the machine, the Head of the Department of Economics of Unijos dropped by! Fran offered this piece of wisdom: "It helps to maintain a sense of humour about life out here!" Indeed, as stretched as that humour might be at times.

As far as the washing machine was concerned, we sort of "fixed" it, but, again the wringer could not be turned off and kept going except when the electricity was turned off. Well, Hamza could manage to work with that, but now the tub started leaking! It was still useable, but we could not soak laundry over night, for the water would leak out. We felt defeated and decided we would bring out a new machine next time from home. Difficult maintenance was a continual characteristic of life here, again and again and again. The fact that I had two left hands did not help it any. Being enslaved to machinery is not all it is cracked up to be! I suspect that any Nigerian reading this section will just shrug his shoulders with a "You're bringing this on yourselves!"

I would not argue the same way about water and electricity, especially in the city. Irregular supply of these amenities can become very time consuming and even prevent crucial things from happening. Today, February 18, 2012, my 74<sup>th</sup>, I received an email from Tim Palmer, a CRC lecturer at TCNN, in which he describes the irregular electricity supply to the school. The problem was still ongoing. That's more than 30 years later! In our digital world, colleges simply cannot tolerate it, for it cuts them off from the global internet, an absolute necessity for an academic institution.

So far throughout these memoirs I have written very little about climate and weather, but I should not cheat you out of a vicarious experience of harmatan, the Saharan dust clouds that cover Africa south of the Sahara roughly from November till February. They are not just clouds of dust up there in the sky but they penetrate every building and cover everything in your house with a heavy layer of dust. You breathe it in. Your eyes get watery. Temperatures drop, especially on the high Jos Plateau, into the F40\*s or C10\*. Literally everything is affected. Like Jos amenities, the harmatan comes and goes, but in its season, it is mostly there all of the time. There may be no maintenance associated with the

harmatan itself, but it surely calls for maintenance of your environment and health. Here's a write up from Fran of March 1979:

Seeing the dry season is almost finished (I thought) and everything was smelling so terribly dusty, I went through all the rooms the last few weeks, washing blankets, nets, and curtains. Alas! Last Thursday, the harmatan returned for one day in fuller force than the whole season. I don't know how, but it comes through closed doors and windows. It was so thick everywhere, that you couldn't even blow the dust off furniture; it was just clinging on! And the mosquito nets etc. are as grey and smell as dusty again as ever. It's almost like a big snowstorm after you've cleaned off all the sidewalks for the "last" time! But this is *inside* the house, books, clothes, etc. My eyes were really sore by Friday and my cold/allergy/sinus problem was back again right away. It is unhealthy and seems to blow germs. Fortunately, it only lasted a day and a half. Now the skies are clear and sunny again. Thanks a lot!

### *Entrepreneurial Life Continued*

Hopefully you will remember the investment stories I have told you in earlier chapters. The story includes ethically dubious investments in Shell mentioned in Chapters 17 and 27. That experience taught us an important lesson about stewardship responsibility. I left the story with the purchase of that Abbotsford house.

During the period of this chapter, we sold the place. The original price I forgot, but the original investment was \$3,000. The final sales price I also forgot, but it amounted to a \$10,000 profit on a \$3,000 investment. The venture was successful. It was the first of several more to come. We now had some cash in preparation for the upcoming publication of my dissertation. Yes, the VU requires publication, not simply the duplication of a few copies. It is a huge expense. This venture helped towards that. We were once again grateful for God's provisions towards my academic progress.

### *End of Jos First Term*

And that was our life during our first term in Jos. Lots of changes for everyone in the family. We were all looking forward to spending two months in North America but were also eager to continue in our new life in a new place in Nigeria.

## Chapter 32<

### Jos II - Family and Social Life

(1979-1981)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 20, Volume 2)

#### *Short Summer Furlough*

We had a short furlough in summer 1979; a month in Grand Rapids and another in BC.

The two months in North America were family months almost exclusively with a visit to II Highland thrown in as well as the routine debriefing at CRWM in Grand Rapids.

During our time in BC, our extended family celebrated Opa and Oma's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Since we wrote few letters during Home Service periods, we have no written records of the event, only a faint memory. It was celebrated in some church in North Vancouver. The one outstanding factor was that *this was absolutely the very first time in the entire history of Opa and Oma's family that they were together with all ten children!* You will find an explanation for this curious fact in Chapter 35, where we write of their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



Back row: Bill, Bo, Jim, Dick, Tinus  
 Front: Martha, Opa, Oma, Ellie, Hendrik, Karen, John  
 Opa and Oma and Their Ten Children - 1979 \*

It's not altogether true that there is no written record of the event. In fact, there are several. A BC-based Dutch magazine, *the Windmill Herald*, published an article under the title, "Gezin van 'Kapper Boer' viert reunie." That is to say, "The family of Barber Boer

celebrates a re-union.” The article includes a photograph of the couple and all of us ten children together with our spouses. However, the content of the article dwells more on family history than on the anniversary celebration (July 16, 1979). The *Abbotsford, Sumas & Matsqui News* of January 3, 1980, featured an article about a smaller family celebration held closer to the actual date, this time with a picture of only the couple. *Christian Courier* had an announcement under the rubric “Anniversaries.” The reason for the wide time spread was that the main celebration in July was early to accommodate our family’s presence, but it was half a year before the actual date. So, the event did not go unnoticed, even if we did not write about it. Lesson: not indispensable? Hmmm.

### *Post-Promotie Travel*

The story about obtaining my doctorate in Amsterdam is told in companion Chapter 20. Here I tell you about what happened after that goal was achieved.

Our plan was to take a break with a trip to Germany. We rented a car and off we were. We planned to go to Berlin, inside the East German sector. To get there, we had to cross the border between the two Germanies. The East German border control demanded I open the hood of the rental. However, European cars have a different feel about them and I could not find the opening mechanism. They did not believe me and suspected something was afool. They got very annoyed with me, but finally one of them found the switch and *voila*, it opened. After due examination, we could proceed, but we were sternly ordered in German not to leave the *Autobahn* and wander off into the country. Ours was a special transit visa for Berlin, not for East Germany. We proceeded but with some trepidation into hostile country. Quite an experience with police everywhere and the high towers overlooking the entire length of the *Autobahn*.

Once in West Berlin, we felt more relaxed and were impressed with the hustle and bustle of the city. There was no hint we were in the middle of Communist country, but there *were* more than hints of World War II, what with several major buildings still in ruins, possibly meant as permanent monuments to a horrible past.

There were plenty of hints of the divided nature of the city once we approached the infamous Berlin Wall. All kinds of emotions and feelings went through us as we approached the Wall at the Brandenburg Gate. There was something mysterious about it, since it was such a clear barricade to another world we had read much about, mostly, it must be admitted, prejudicial. Of course, we could not see anything on the other side until we climbed the viewing platform somewhere along the Wall and thus gained a view of the other side. What we saw was a large swath of empty space between the Wall and East Berlin. Beyond that, at some distance there was a somber looking city in which we detected little life. Here and there were watch towers from which, we imagined, we were being closely watched.

On Sunday morning Fran and I passed through the gate and the East Berlin Customs without any hassle. If I recall correctly, we had to come with a certain amount of cash that



had to be spent in the city. If we returned with it, it would be confiscated at the East German side. We walked across the empty swath, meeting some guards along the way. We felt kind of queasy, but they did not bother us. It was a shock to walk into the city itself. Much of it was grey and dusty. Few people on the streets, possibly because it was Sunday? We saw a church with the name "St. Sophia Church" and decided to join the service that was about to begin. No one spoke to us either before or after the service. We did introduce ourselves to the pastor, but he merely said "Yes" and walked away. We did not get the feeling of being among brothers and sisters in the faith. We suspected that Communism had instilled xenophobia (fear of strangers) in their hearts.

The display windows of the small shops advertised mostly poverty, especially the fruit sellers. The fruit was old and spotty and looked unappetizing. There was also a more dynamic part to the city with broad avenues, modern buildings and a fair amount of traffic, mostly consisting of cars of unfamiliar brand and style. There was one very large department store that catered to tourists like us and, probably, local elite, where you had to pay in US dollars, plenty of them. We saw no reason to buy, since there was nothing we could not buy elsewhere and at better prices. We had a lunch in some restaurant and there spent most of the little cash on us. On the way back, we gave our remaining cash to incoming tourists walking into the city. We re-entered the Western sector with no problems. It had been a most interesting experience. All the while we had not been out of sight of uniformed security people even for one moment. They were everywhere, keeping their eyes on us.

Monday we spent more time sightseeing in West Berlin, taking in especially some palaces and museums. We enjoyed the place with all of its colour, busyness and energy, such a contrast to across the Wall. On Tuesday we drove back to West Germany. Among other things, we looked up some friends of sister Jane as per her request. They were not home, but we talked to their neighbours who invited us in for a meal. We had a wonderful time with them, using a mixture of Dutch, English and a smattering of German. The kind of hospitality we did not expect from Germans. In addition, the drive took us through lovely countryside we thoroughly enjoyed as well.

From there, we drove to Maastricht, the southernmost point of The Netherlands, where we stayed overnight at the home of Henk and Klarie Boer. Henk was son of my Oom Harm and thus a cousin. He was a retired medical doctor who had served in New Guinea and South Africa. Maastricht is totally different from any city I have ever seen in The Netherlands, totally Catholic in culture and full of ancient churches. Fascinating. It is a part of The Netherlands we really should explore more sometime. Henk and Klarie were very hospitable to us and, having foreign service in common, we had much to talk about. He served for many years as an industrial medical officer. When I told him about my hearing problems, without having heard its history, he checked my ears and immediately diagnosed them as suffering from industrial damage. Little did he know about the intense noise level I was exposed to in the APD mill in Port Alberni 25 years earlier and to which I traced it already then.

Klarie showed us all around the city's ancient Catholic churches on, of all days, Reformation Day! The first bishop there was appointed in 300 AD. Yes, you read that correctly! Of the *original* St. Servatus church built in 600 AD, one small archway remains standing. Later, they just kept building and building and adding on to it till it became what Fran described as a "monstrous cathedral." I observed that Nigerians get discouraged when their church building takes ten years to complete, but those people took 700 years to build theirs!

From there we drove to Apeldoorn, where the Van Geests lived by that time. Stayed over night. Then on to the Gorts in Uitgeest to pick up some stuff and then on to Schiphol to fly back to Nigeria. That's when our world collapsed, or so it seemed at the time. Our flight was canceled due to a very short-lived air controller strike in Nigeria. At first, KLM did not want to tell us what was wrong. We were afraid it might be another coup. We were really angry at them for acting so secretly.

Suddenly our children *felt* far away. They had been far away all that time, of course, but it had not bothered us, since we had left them in good hands. We tried to phone Jos, send telegrams—nothing worked. We went back to Gorts to wait for a call from the KLM. Three days later they had found seats for us on British Airways and flew us to London. The rest of the journey to Jos was uneventful. When we arrived home several days late, we immediately went to see the kids at school. They had been worried, of course. They had done special cleaning in the house and Lydia had cooked our favourite meal, while we were stranded in The Netherlands. We were so thankful that the Failings could stay for those extra days. Lydia was happy, for we brought her a guitar. She soon started lessons with our friend Rob Koops.

The kids had been on their best behaviour, everyone told us. But we had agreed before we left that upon our return they could "let it all come out." They did, all their suppressed feelings, but we loved their noise, while we tried to control the most vicious of their fights! "They all seemed so happy to have us back," wrote Fran. Especially Cynthia just kept hugging us and wanted to sit near us all the time. We promised each other we would never both leave our children again ever, at least not for such a long time.

Towards the end of November, Nelle Evenhouse organized a reception by our CRC colleagues to congratulate us on our success. I was quite pleased for this unexpected recognition. Nelle also organized a private dinner for us and invited some of our special friends. We did appreciate Nelle's support and "forcing" recognition on the part of our missionaries. That would hardly have come spontaneously. Thank you, Nelle.

### *Family and Social Life: Vignettes*

To avoid confusion, keep in mind that the events in this chapter and its companion Chapter 20 happened concurrently. The same is true for the various sections within this chapter.

We continue as we did in previous chapters in this volume, with vignettes to give a glimpse into our lives together as a family as well as our social life with others. However, we will not continue with as many details of social life as before. Chapter 31 gave you a pretty good picture of how it all went. Here we will pass on only the more unusual, but be assured that life was no less hectic and that no fewer people darkened our doors. We *will* continue with the details of our children's lives, since they were always getting into new situations as they were growing up.

I have occasionally stressed that in Nigeria it is important to have good relations with people in high positions. Somehow during our time away both of our drivers' licenses disappeared. We reported it to the police and followed all the legalities required, but then we were instructed to go to Makurdi where we originally got our licenses. Remember how that went during our Baissa days? Makurdi was nearly 500 kilometers south of Jos along a terrible road. Due to our kids' mingling with those of our neighbour Maxwell, who was a Commissioner in the State Government, we got to know that family quickly. So we went to see him about this problem. He promptly wrote a letter to a friend who was the Vehicle Inspection Officer. That worked magic. Within a few days we had new licenses! Thank you, Mr. Maxwell. My lost license was found much later in the bushes along the road to Hill Station Hotel and returned to us by the police; Fran's never showed up again.

You've read about the difficulties of communications with our parents. Letters came very irregularly and sometimes not at all. Almost every letter Fran wrote to our parents began with a summary of outgoing and incoming mails as well as those on the way. In September, we received a parcel from my brother Jim and Wilma with a lot of comics for Kevin. Though it looked none the worse for wear, the parcel had been on the way for over two years! Would have been interesting to know where it was all this time—traveling around the world, perhaps? At least we did not have insurance to repay as we did for the crate that was found in the Congo a year after we arrived in Nigeria. It did not always go that slow with parcels, for later in the month we received a shipment of books sent by surface mail from Ontario that took only three weeks.

An early September Sunday afternoon we took the kids out to Liberty Dam, where they enjoyed playing in the overflow water. We would often spend Sunday afternoons in that area. While there, we met a very interesting Iraqi engineer with his British wife. He was a committed Christian; she, nominal. We took them to St. Piran's the next Sunday and went to their house that evening. I relate their story because they were "typical" of the "untypical" kinds of people that entered our lives. We also tell their story to show you that the Iraq of 1979 was not much more comfortable than the Iraq of 2013. As Fran told it:

Though he met his British wife while pursuing a PhD in engineering at the University of Sheffield, they were married in an Iraqi village. They showed us their wedding slides. It was really fascinating to see how many customs there are similar to Nigerian customs. He went to the UK on an Iraqi government scholarship; they paid his tuition, room and board plus 250 pounds a month as pocket money. He said he was better off financially than most of his instructors! On his return to Iraq, he entered into a contract with the government but broke it within a year, for they gave

him a useless job and he felt they were spying on him, probably because he was a Christian. With his Ph.D, he was eager to work as a real engineer. He fled the country and now could never return home, for they would imprison him immediately. He does correspond with his family and thus hears from them. He was now teaching at Unijos.

We had our daily newspaper delivered at the door as well as *Time* Magazine. The carrier often asked about our parents, since he had met them. He was not well in September due to the strains of his new marriage. His new bride ran out on him, a sad story. His thoughts were not on his job. He would buy our *Time* and we would immediately repay him, but it just wasn't coming anymore. Same for some other customers of his. He was in danger of getting fired if he did not pick up again soon. That would be too bad, for the job paid fairly well. In the meantime, like everything else, the price of papers increased by 50%.

The 1979 Christmas-New Year season was another typical one of traveling to the CRCN area to greet and meet scads of old friends, mostly Nigerians. They included Ifraimu Nyajo of Rafin Kada, Filemon Tsojo of Wukari and Iliya and Naomi, Lydia's parents of Nyankwala. We went with the kids. We were so well treated that one day we had no less than five full Nigerian meals. We were more than stuffed; we were time bombs!

At the other end of the season we found ourselves at Yankari, a game reserve in Bauchi State. Among others, we met two travel groups traversing Africa from end to end in specially equipped army vehicles. One group started in The Netherlands; the other, in South Africa. Both planned to take four months for their journeys. Such safaris are organized by experienced travel companies. We also met many baboons that were hilarious to watch as they scampered around for food from the tourists, jumping from tree to tree and, not infrequently from tree to car.

As far as Yankari went, a few details about our experiences there over time. It was a popular place with its hot springs great for playful swimming. Missionaries often would go there for a break. One time, Cynthia had a run in with a baboon that tried to grab her lunch bag right out of her hand. Though Cynthia was afraid, she was not about to give it to him without resistance. The baboon won and Cynthia was kind of angry at us for not jumping to her rescue more quickly. Rightly so! But it *was* a hilarious sight.

For a few years we went there quite frequently. Sometimes groups of Muslim men would come down to the springs, fully dressed in their robes, simply to gawk at the women in their swimming suits, including some bikinis. Knowing how "deprived" they are from such scenery in their own culture, we did not have to guess long about their reasons for being there! Though they were not particularly interested in me, I felt like we were in a zoo and would quickly get out of the water to cover myself. Some of the bathing beauties seemed to be blissfully ignorant of these men and their interest. It was, quite frankly, a disgusting scene, disgusting with these alhajis' open lust and with these white women's ignorant oblivion of the dynamic at work.

Soon after a short holiday at Yankari, Fran was hostess again during a hectic week of many CRC missionary families coming and going. The following week, Fran taught a quickie Hausa course for Hillcrest teachers. She was impressed how quickly they caught on, much faster than the average language learner. Fran commented she was willing to teach this course in appreciation of all the extra curricular activities of the teachers helping our children. Oh, yes, then the Assistant General Secretary of COCIN sought to recruit her to type out his dissertation, for he had seen mine and liked it. She was not ready to do so any time soon. Try keeping up with that lady, week after week! And even though it seemed we had returned from home service only a few months ago, early January saw us begin work on our next home service!

If you read the last few paragraphs in one sitting, you should sense how compact life was for us and how hectic and varied, one thing on top of the other or back to back, personal as well as ministry contacts. It is amazing that after this continual trapeze of visitors day and night with the kids frequently having to cede their beds to guests, that near the end of this term, Fran could still write that the kids enjoyed having visitors over! Thanks, guys. You were great!

We were still worshipping at St. Piran's Anglican. Of course I was often preaching in other churches, but as much as possible the family would attend there with the children in Sunday School and Fran teaching in it. Early January 1980, the Anglican church in Plateau State became an independent diocese and thus needed its own cathedral and bishop. The big Yoruba church in town was appointed Cathedral, while a senior Yoruba clergy there became bishop. It was a highly formal event that Fran described as follows:

What a lot of pomp and pageantry they go through! The service lasted from 10 am till 12:30. It was all very orderly, well done and interesting to watch. But there was so much talk of obedience to, power and rights of the bishop. It sounded like 17<sup>th</sup> century England when the church was *the* power! There was little talk of evangelism or the general Good News of Christ. Then there was an elaborate luncheon. We did not get home till 3 pm. It was a good thing we had brought the kids to the Evenhouses.

During February 1979, Fran wrote about a feature of our life never mentioned before but that was particularly striking when living in Jos, where you would meet all our colleagues in their comings and goings, not only between Jos and North America but also within the country in the course of their work and holiday travels. Evenhouses were leaving Nigeria. They had become good friends of ours and we hated to see them leave. Others leaving permanently included Marge Kooiman, Dorothy Sytsma, Peerbolts and Ruth Vander Meulen. The Vreekes were going on a year's furlough with no assurance of their return. That was just the way things went, year after year. Of course, they would often be replaced, but it was an unsettling part of our life, with pun intended. It was always hard to see so many of your colleagues you've known so well and for so long leave so often. Fran commented, "I guess we are all pilgrims here on earth, but that seems especially true in missionary life." This unsettled feature of our life also affected me organizationally,

especially with our friends of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), but for details on that you'll have to do a "find" search for "Mennonite" in Chapter 20.

I have paid little attention in the memoirs so far to family health issues. Over the decades there were enough health and sickness issues to fill a lengthy chapter, especially since there were children involved. It was a choice we made; one has to put limits somewhere. However, when a health issue is combined with humour, it becomes more difficult for me to ignore. Here's one of these stories that has the humour but also gives a glimpse into our health situation. As Fran told it:

It always makes me mad that, when I've had malaria, it takes me so long to get over it. I conducted Hausa class last Friday and it really wore me out again. I relaxed as much as possible over the weekend and think I'll skip out on my next turn for the class, because I'll never make it on top again! I get jealous of John's strength, because he always gets over his flu or fever in two or three days! I guess I should be glad that we aren't both "weak." Ironically enough though, last month John offered to donate blood to a kidney patient and they wouldn't take his blood, because his count was too low. They told him it was as "bad as that of a woman!" So, now he has an appointment to find out why his count is too low.

Well, of course I would have it examined. My chauvinistic self could not let *that* judgement stand unchallenged! Weaker than a woman? Me?

When we did have health problems during our CRCN era, we usually had recourse to government medical officers attached to the Wukari hospital. Then there was also the Takum Christian Hospital operated by our own medical colleagues, but it was 80 kilometers away by rough roads. In Jos, we were close to Evangel Hospital of the SIM/ECWA. They usually had some excellent doctors and nurses there that made us missionaries feel comfortable in Jos. However, the SIM folk working there always had to scrounge around for their financial support; the SIM did not raise it for them. One time, the medical doctor there on whom we all depended was seriously short of support and there was even a question about his return after his furlough. His wife was also a major support in that she ran the lab at the hospital. With her in charge, we could depend on it. These faithful people were constantly writing letters to raise support and were always wondering where next month's pay would come from or whether it would even come at all.

Fran was disturbed by this situation and wrote letters to all our CRC missionaries, asking them to pledge support to this family. She reminded them that we would all feel insecure if they should leave. She also wrote to the Prins family in Grand Rapids. Then she commented,

When I hear of such problems, I'm so thankful to be working for a denominational mission that does not expect their missionaries to raise their own support. We have enough troubles and problems living in a foreign situation without also having to worry about financial support. We feel that is the business of the home office and

the CRC constituency. After all, we are here in *their* name; they recruited and sent us. We are not private entrepreneurs.

On a totally different note, in March, something exciting happened: our dog Hankali had pups, four males and two females. A month later, they were doing well, already eating and drinking from their mom's plate and bowl. We immediately got an amazing number of requests for them. Though most people sell their puppies, we distributed them among people who had done us favours, like our former neighbours, the Sheldases—they wanted and got two—and the driver who brought Wiebe home from school. Fran wrote that the next two batches were already spoken for! After they had all been given away, the children were very sad, for they had enjoyed playing with them so much. However, they realized we could not keep seven dogs! They were happy that the puppies were given to people we knew so they could “visit” them if they wanted.

Occasionally I refer to boxes we packed during home service periods and then get sent off as surface mail parcels. We sent 26 parcels end July 1979, of which half arrived late October, but by mid-March the rest had still not arrived. The children would not let us forget, for the promised toys were among the goodies still on the way. Fran was considering next time to send them all air freight or even take them with us as “unaccompanied baggage” to have them arrive safely, quickly and all together. I was not so eager for that, probably because of the very high cost. In the meantime, we would have to wait it out.

One very practical problem was that we always imported a lot of lemon Kool Aid. Though Fran and I drank little of it because of the high sugar content, it was such a popular cold drink with children and with Nigerian guests that we served a lot of it. However, we were running out, with the rest of them in the boxes still on the way. Since Grandma and Jane regularly sent us packages, we asked them to include ten Kool Aid envelopes in each. That would keep us somewhat supplied for the time being. When our friends the Havemans left Nigeria mid 1980, they sold us their left-over Kool Aid. The “crisis” was over. Jane no longer needed to send any.

The “crisis” was *completely* over in September 1980, when twelve of the thirteen missing boxes arrived finally after fourteen months! One box had been attacked by rats, but the others were in fairly good shape, considering the long passage they went through. Now we had lemon Kool Aid to last us for a long time. We discovered it is better to wrap shampoo and toothpaste in separate plastic bags! The one missing box contained family games. Oh, well, we were happy with the twelve and would not worry about that last one.

We had some furniture issues. We hired a local firm to sandpaper everything and re-varnish it all. It looked like new. This was the furniture we had bought during our first year in Nigeria (1966). Though it looked almost extravagant in Baissa, it looked pretty “bush” in our Jos environment, since we lived in an elite area and in a house one would expect to be furnished well, if not lavishly. I felt kind of embarrassed about it, but also realized that it was not good to try to keep up with the current Joneses. Our witness should include simplicity of life style in a society where poverty was the rule. Besides, keeping up would have meant highly puffed up couches and chairs that were too soft, uncomfortable,

and would soon start to smell musty. But they would look impressive and that was the name of the game. The living rooms or, as they are called, parlours, of most elite homes smell musty.

Fran's citizenship issue also remained active. You may recall that she struggled to regain her Dutch citizenship but failed. She never really got reconciled to having "only" one citizenship. "I get teased much in my family about having only one citizenship, while the others have two (John) or three (the children)." She finally resolved that issue when she became Canadian citizen in November 2005. Now she, too, had the proud status of dual nationality, since she had retained her American citizenship. She had at least reached my level, if not that of her kids.

During our time in Amsterdam, there had been some testy disagreement between Fran and Mother Jennie about Dutch citizenship. In April 1980, Fran found the behaviour of the US in Iran "incredible and hardly possible for my adopted country, or should I say 'my assigned country?'" That kind of disagreement again showed up in political feelings at the time of President Reagan. Let me quote a Fran paragraph from a letter to my *Canadian* parents:

You ask for my comments on Reagan. I'm afraid that on this score I'm in complete disagreement with my family, so it's probably safer to just be quiet! But, I must say that one of the children said that "at least Grandma is happy now" and another said that according to World Book a president elected in a year that ends in a "0" has always either died in office, or been assassinated and then asked me, "Shall I pray for that, Mom?" I worry about the future when a US president says that "he admires the spunk of the Afrikaaner in South Africa" and makes not one comment about the rest of the continent of Africa in all his campaign speeches; does he realize there is more to the world than the US? See, I told you I shouldn't get started on US politics!

In July 1980, we took another vacation trip in the Toyota bus. It took us to many places in the north-east of the country like Maiduguri, Numan and Yola. We saw many things and met many people. We also visited some of the church and mission institutions as well as leaders. We stayed with Lydia's Chris in Yola. Apart from this summary, I won't bore you with many details except for a couple of humorous little incidents.

Somewhere along the road there was a young Muslim advertising some kind of berry. Curious, I stopped to ask him about them, including their name. He answered they were called "*jinin arna!*"— "blood of pagans!" When squashed they did indeed look like blood. We burst out laughing at that funny if not ridiculous name. Actually, it wasn't funny, for it was a clear expression of the contempt northern Muslims held/hold for Nigeria's Animists or adherents of Traditional religion. They are hardly considered human and, if most Nigerian Muslims had their way, human rights would not be applied to them.

The other incident was an indication how successful I had been in spreading my net. Somewhere along the journey, fairly close to Maiduguri, we stopped in a small town. I was



barely out of the vehicle when a man came up greeting me profusely, “*Barka da zuwa Likita John Buwa!*” “Welcome, Dr. John Boer!” The children were amazed that someone knew me on the street so far from home! They were properly impressed. I did not remember the man, but he had attended a conference in Jos where I had lectured. Of course, all along the route we met leaders who knew me. That was impressive enough for them, but just like that on a random street in a random town? Did *everybody* know Daddy? Well, no, not everybody. The man with the berries didn’t.

Another somewhat similar incident happened but on another journey. We were driving along the road from Langtang to Jos, when I noticed our tank was dangerously low. We probably would not make it home without buying gas. We stopped in a random town along the way, but there was no gas at the pumps, something that happened frequently in Nigeria. Then you need to ask around for black market sources and buy out of drums or kerosene tins. One man saw us and recognized me. He immediately helped us find gas not only but even at a reasonable price, not at the “normal” black market price. Though the children were often annoyed at how I tended to know people and “wasted” their time wherever we traveled, this time they were ever so grateful for the connection. They would sleep in their own bed that night!

Snack wise, Fran often devoted a major part of her Saturday mornings making snacks for the kids’ lunches as well as after school home-coming. This would often include potato chips. She had a tiny little manual potato slicer that produced the perfect chip, provided she used the right oil and dropped the slices in the oil according to a very exact procedure. The chips were delicious and always gave the kids an edge with school lunches. They could trade them for anything the other kids had to offer! The other snack she might make was doughnuts. One 1980 October Saturday she “decided to do two recipes, which made almost 80! I make them smaller than the directions say, but that way they stretch out farther. I shape them with a cup and the hole is made with the top of an old fashioned ‘manual’ coffee perculator!”

Early December 1980, NEPA, the national provider of electricity, went on strike for 50 hours. Now power interruptions were part of daily life, but 50 hours is a bit long for which we were not prepared. After 46 hours, our little freezer started leaking water. So, time for decisive action. Fran wrote, “The kids thought it would be nice to play Sinterklaas and bring meat to the neighbours. That’s what they did, but when they returned from the neighbours the power was back on again—for a while. The rest of the meat was thus saved. But what a mess it was.”

While on the subject of electricity or lack thereof, here’s a paragraph from Fran that pretty well described a typical situation that changed only in that things kept getting increasingly sporadic.

Our electricity has been terrible the last few weeks. They call it “load shedding.” There’s not enough power for the whole country, so they send partial supplies to different areas, each of which then rations as they see fit. No published schedules. They turn it off at any time for any length of time. Ours was off for 26 hours, then

on for 22 hours, then off for 8 hours. Then this morning it was on for seven hours, but now it's off again till who knows when. You can't plan anything.

Of course, preparing meals became something else. You might be right in the middle of cooking, but then would have to change in "midflight." A lot of people started having two stoves, electric and gas. But gas stoves were very expensive as well as gas itself, if it were even available. If you still had money left after all that, you might buy a small generator as second backup. By then you had established yourself as a rich person. We had long ago settled on a two-burner kerosene stove as backup. Having described the situation, Fran described herself as "angry" and "frustrated."

When it finally settled down somewhat, the same pattern began to emerge with the water system! I won't bore you with those details either, but it meant that we would store water in drums and even in the bath tub, which made Wiebe happy, "because he says now Mommy won't make him take baths for a whole week or longer!" For me, that did not sound too horrible, for that's how I grew up in Lutjegast. Of course, differences in climate did play a role here. Guess what. Two weeks later we had more water and more water pressure than ever. Go figure! But don't count on it!

Christmas 1980 was typical of previous Jos Christmases—very enjoyable, but not much to report that was different except two things. One was that Kevin began to show signs of growing up. At the Mission Christmas party, the kids were all asked to say or sing something. Cynthia and Wiebe each did their thing without hesitation, but Kevin was very hesitant. He was going to play a piece on the piano, but he was not sure he could do it faultlessly and therefore hesitated. He was no longer the spontaneous child. The other incident was that I was to have preached in the early morning Hausa service at the Anglican Cathedral, but I thought it was at the evening English service! So I left the Hausa worshippers stranded! Fran commented, "He keeps an accurate diary, but then he forgets to consult it." I never got over that bad habit. In 2013 she still catches me not checking the calendar for scheduled activities.

As to Christmas cards, every year many of them would come late. So, we kept last year's cards and displayed them during Christmas 1980. The 1980 cards would be used for Christmas 1981. Nigerians were also beginning to adopt the card custom. Though we appreciated the idea behind it, we would much prefer a visit to a card, especially because they tended to buy very large, expensive and ostentatious, sometimes *huge* cards. If someone insisted on sending or giving us a card, we much preferred a smaller and simpler one. We were happy to have gotten away from the custom and did not really feel like getting back into it, especially not into the Nigerian scene, where they were extremely expensive. In terms of relatives and friends in North America and elsewhere, we would send them an annual newsletter in response.

I don't have many descriptions of Fran's birthdays, but she was generous with info about that of 1981, her 39<sup>th</sup>. The two of us spent the afternoon touring some new museum buildings. The children bought her cookies, lunch meat and candy bars. We had three family invitations over the weekend from the Koops, the Kiekovers and from Lydia and

Chris. She wrote, “I got properly spoiled for my birthday.” Well, sweetheart, after all the parties you organize for the rest of us, you deserved it!

### *Visitors*

The policy in this chapter is not to record all our visitors except special ones. Below follows a sampling of such special visitors that graced our doors from end 1979 throughout 1980. Ivan Eikenberry, a senior missionary of the Church of the Brethren and an activist in the world of Christian education in Northern Nigeria under the umbrella of NEAC, noted the constant traffic flow in our yard, office and house and suggested that we set up a control tower! He was not far off. Commenting on one October Sunday, Fran wrote, “The rest of the day after the morning service was people, people, people, all unplanned.”

Shortly before Christmas 1979, Pastor Iliya Abowa from Baissa CRCN came to stay with us while getting treatment at Evangel Hospital, the one near us. You may remember him as the pastor called by CRCN Baissa, a saint of a man but not a strong leader. It was fun to see him playing games with the kids. “It’s cute to hear the conversation, because Cynthia and Wiebe each know about ten Hausa words and Pastor knows about ten English words!” Just think, a couple of years earlier they would have chatted with him like natives. We had an early version of a computer soccer and tennis game. It was so much fun to watch Pastor relax, play and compete either with the kids or with the computer. Kevin had gotten really good at these games and could return all the balls.

About that same time, Charles and Margaret Kraft paid us a visit. You may remember them as our Hausa teacher and “mission advisor” at MSU back in 1965. By this time they had moved to California, where he taught at Fuller School of World Missions and she at Biola University. We saw them seldom, but when we did it was always a joyous reunion. He was still the same blunder buster he always was, though a scholar at the same time. Margaret was equally radical but expressed herself much more carefully. He entertained the kids by drawing two weevils, one small and one large. He asked them what the small one was, but they could not find an answer. It was: the lesser of two weevils! The kids howled with laughter. A year later, during July 1980, the Krafts were back again and spent an evening with us. They tended to come almost annually. They were working in their spare time on a Hausa translation of *The Living Bible*. We neither heard of nor ever saw the finished product. Probably it never came to that.

In March we had two of our special CRCN friends visit us, with both of them staying overnight. Lydia’s Dad, Iliya Lena, came for some discussions with Lydia about her upcoming wedding later in the year. The other was Pastor David Angye. When we left Wukari, he was pastor of the Bege congregation at Sondi. Now he was a principal of a Government school for Christian Religious Knowledge teachers, far away in the north east of the country. He was very busy teaching Bible in the school and preaching in the local churches. I told you long ago that he was a popular preacher everywhere he went.

We were so grateful for his visit, because, as I also told you, during our Wukari days, due to tension between CRCN and the Mission, CRCN pastors, including Pastor David, for a while avoided contact with us. It was a painful gesture, but I fully understood and appreciated their attitude. Therefore, we were very happy with his visit. After all, we had done a lot of things together both in the CRCN area as well as in the US.

His reason for working in a Government institution was better salary. A pastor's salary was simply inadequate, which was the reason that we personally subsidized some pastors during our CRCN days. However, he could not deny his deep pastoral heart and so taught Bible and preached with his usual enthusiasm. I had learned a lot about preaching from listening to him.

It was not easy for him to keep up his Christian standards as a civil servant. The civil service at all levels was hopelessly corrupt and anyone bucking it would be treated as a fool and enemy who was working against everybody's interest. It meant his normal routine requests to the Education Department would be ignored, sidelined, "lost" in the shuffle of files, etc. etc. In fact, the very existence of his school was often threatened by Muslim officials who wanted to close it down. Basically, David had a constant war on his hands. I admired him for his courage and insistence and could well appreciate the bitterness towards life that he sometimes betrayed. He felt cheated by all the parties important to him, church, mission and government, for the way he was treated.

Another interesting visitor early April was the American Consul from Kaduna. He was looking for Bishop Ganaka's place and stopped to ask us for directions. He was close: right behind us! His request for directions turned into a visit in which we held wide-ranging discussions. We discussed the nature of our work. He was fascinated by both the work and my dissertation. He borrowed it for that evening and announced his intention to buy a copy as soon as it was available again. However, I slowly got the uncomfortable feeling that the man was not interested so much in our missionary work as in gaining unusual information to which, in my position, I had access. He was after all the American Consul, always looking for information of interest to the US. In other words, an American spy! I began to clam up. I was not interested in being sucked for information a western imperialist nation might find useful.

Remember: I did write a dissertation on colonialism, a project that had a lasting effect on my views of the West. I had become so radicalized that I came to advise my close Nigerian elite friends that Nigeria should deal more with other Third World countries and downgrade her economic relations with the West. Of course, many of these elite friends stood to personally gain from Nigeria's connections to the West and would not likely sever them. It was part of my anti-imperialist witness that I later continued in other publications and conferences. I sought to promote Christian freedom at every level and in every sphere. My anti-imperialism was part of that. That attitude remains with me till this day without apologies.

Another April diplomatic visitor was Garrit Polman, the First Secretary to the Canadian High Commissioner in Lagos. I felt more at ease with him because he represented Canada,

a comparatively non-imperialist country that I proudly called my home. I also felt more at home with him for two other reasons. First, he did not pry like his US counterpart. Secondly, we had a bit of common history. He was the son of Rev. Polman under whom we served as a seminary intern in Prince George in the summer of 1963. Garrit was a teenager at that time. We met him again in 2011 in Vancouver where he now lives.

For some months we were planning for a visit by Dick and Nannie Van Geest, friends from our Amsterdam days, and were really looking forward to that. The visit was scheduled for July 1980, but in March he was hospitalized for six weeks, ending up with major surgery. They had to call off the visit and hoped it would be possible the next year. We were all disappointed. We heard nothing further from them until suddenly in mid-July we received a *rouwbrief* from the Van Geest family, that is, a traditional Dutch obituary in the form of a card containing the usual information with black lining around the edges. Dick had passed away on July 5 at age 53. We were supposed to have picked them up at Kano on July 3. Dick had looked forward to this trip more than did Nannie and had described it as “*de reis van mijn leven*,” “the trip of my life.” The children, Eric and Renie, were 13 and 11 respectively. We were very sad.

You have heard a lot about Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo in Chapter 15, including the tragedy of his becoming a Muslim due to a desperate financial situation and some other factors. He was still pastor in September 1980, when he dropped by and stayed overnight. I had always had high respect for him and I learned a great deal from him. So I was very happy to see him. We spent many hours talking about church and mission affairs, including his own attitude towards his Nigerian colleagues. He did not have a lot of respect for them and they, in turn, kind of resented him for his admittedly haughty attitude towards everyone, including missionaries.

One Sunday in October 1980, an Egyptian doctor working in the north of the country, dropped by. He was a Christian and had written to the Back to God Hour (BTGH), the international radio programme of the CRC based in Chicago, who had referred him to us. Since we were about to have dinner, Fran was reluctant to invite him to join us, for she had really hoped for a private family dinner for once, but did anyhow. During the course of the dinner, he said to Fran, “You are just like my wife, who also believes in practical Christianity—always welcoming strangers to meals.” Fran wrote, “I didn’t feel I deserved that ‘compliment,’ because I hadn’t really wanted to invite him, but the Lord overruled and taught me a lesson once again.” Did she really need such a reminder? As if she had neglected the practice of hospitality!

Two Muslim evangelists who had seen our ICS signboard dropped by that same afternoon. They asked if we would be interested in talking about the prophet Muhammad. I made an appointment with them for the next week, since I had to prepare to travel to Ibadan early next morning. I sent them off with some BTGH booklets in Arabic. Never saw them again.

The Islam in Africa Project (IAP) had a conference in town on Christian-Muslim relations in which I participated. Remember, that was the group that organized that Ibadan course we attended back in 1967. Our host and one of our teachers there was Dr. Hans Haafkens,

who was now the General Secretary of IAP and living in Nairobi. He came for that conference along with a couple of Kenyan men. Haafkens also brought his Cameroonian wife, whom Fran had never met. Often the Haafkens would invite me whenever I was in Ibadan. So, now was the time to reciprocate. Hans and I were busy with the conference, but Fran spent a lot of time with his wife, showing her around town and meeting various missionary ladies. Among other things, I remember she taught us a delicious way of serving avocado.

### *Children Together*

Another one of the first things needing attention at the beginning of our new term was getting the kids shuttled back and forth between our Zaria Road house and Hillcrest. We were fortunate that Plateau School was across from Hillcrest, so that one ride each way would do the trick, provided the timing was right. Since we had this large Toyota van, we started carrying ten children, our own and neighbourhood kids. An Indian neighbour from St. Louis College would bring our kids home in the afternoon. The only problem was the time for Wiebe to come home. For a while he was riding with Maxwell's driver, but when the Maxwells moved, that no longer worked.

It had become a custom for us to start giving the kids a small allowance of 20 kobo/cents when they turned six. If they had a good report card from school, they would also receive some money for good effort. I don't believe any of them ever lost out on that one. It was a way for them to *earn* some money.

A major change since our previous term was the huge increase in the price of electricity—100%! So, in order to teach the kids to use power sparingly, we made a game out of it, a weekly contest. If we used less than 150 units, the kids would each get a bottle of pop on Saturday mornings. They would remind each other to turn off unnecessary lights. It worked. A bottle of pop may not sound like a big thing, but in an environment where they drank mostly lemon Kool Aid, pop was something special. Do you see Fran's hand in this arrangement?

Wiebe did not yet qualify for an allowance in March 1980, but Fran predicted that he would be "wiser" with his money than Cynthia was. Cynthia "was overly generous and wants to spend what she has." Fran's prediction was based on the above "pop game." Kevin had managed to save up to seven bottles by this time; Wiebe five, but Cynthia only two.

In October 1979, the Hillcrest Junior class organized their annual "Carnival," a fund raiser for them and a lot of fun for the kids. Our kids went wild, according to Fran. They would buy a ticket for N1 (one naira) and then have it punched for every event in which they participated. They soon learned the ropes. We decided that next year we would just bring them down there and pick them up again at 10 pm!

Earlier in the year Cynthia and Wiebe finally got to set up the business they had long talked about: a lemonade stand in our driveway near the road. There they sat, the two of them at their little table with some pictures of Kool Aid and a pitcher of iced lemonade made from the tons we always imported. Quite a few pedestrians traditionally passed our place and a number of them stopped out of curiosity to chat and, sometimes, buy. It was so cute to watch them. This lemonade was a favourite of our Nigerian guests. It was the cold drink of choice for us to serve them. The kids made 87 cents “profit.” Now they wanted to go into business seriously and do it again the next day, Sunday, but we settled on doing it once a week on Saturdays. Another condition was that from here on they would have to pay for the sugar and the lemonade. They would find their profits diminish considerably. That did not dampen their interest, at least not for that day! Actually, they operated their stand three times, but then we made them quit. It was the same people who walked past and bought. We did not wish them to start feeling obligated. As to their new riches, when the stand was finished, so were their profits!

In an earlier section, I wrote how missionaries often lose friends and colleagues who return to their home countries permanently. This was not only true for adults, but our children were also deeply affected, with their friends constantly moving away to other countries, not only their MK (“missionary kid”) friends, but also their friends in the corporate and technical world from many countries, especially Asia and “Near East.” No relationship seemed permanent. Cynthia particularly was sensitive toward this feature of our life and never lost it. It could make her cry at times. Both Cynthia and Wiebe were particularly sad when neighbour Hubert Sheldas moved away to a larger house more suitable for a growing family. They felt a bit lost, Fran wrote. Using our driveway and coming and going at all times, they would always wave and greet the kids. Our driveway became quiet, comparatively. Of course, what with our own many visitors, we still generated a lot of traffic ourselves as well.

The Sheldas house was not vacant for long. An Ibo Catholic priest named Emmanuel moved in. He was a friend of the Sheldases and a frequent guest of theirs. Hence he and the kids already knew each other. The kids welcomed him with some small gifts and he reciprocated with a bottle of pop for each of them.

The arrival of Emmanuel led to a discussion around our supper table. As Fran told it,

Wiebe told John, “Daddy, I obey the Bible more than you do. The Bible says to love your neighbour as ourselves. I always go to the neighbours with things and I visit them, but you are always too busy to sit and visit with the neighbour man!” Kevin told him that Daddy obeys in a different way, because Daddy sees the whole world as his neighbour, whereas the little kids mean just one specific person!

Thank you, Kevin, for defending your Daddy! If I may add another point to my defense, Fran and I were so busy entertaining neighbours from all over the world in our own house, that we did not always have the time to go to theirs! And sometimes we “used” the kids to represent us by visiting neighbours, as when they visited the Sheldases in their new home.

Early March 1980 Kevin and Cynthia came home with very good report cards. At Cynthia's stage, they got only comments, not grades. Kevin had 6 A's, 2 A-'s and 1 B+. We kept reminding him to thank the Lord for his ability. Wiebe was a bit jealous, because he would not get a report till the end of the school year at Plateau Private.

As you read earlier, the Evenhouses left Nigeria and sold us their tent. We purchased additional equipment to round off our camping gear. The kids were very happy with these purchases and we used it often. We used it at the Yankari Game Reserve, but we used it more often in our own backyard during the dry season. During the Hillcrest 1980 Easter break, for example, the children slept in the tent several times along with some of their friends. With our yard being along a major thoroughfare, not surrounded by fence or wall and not protected by night guards even, this arrangement was a clear indication of how safe Jos was at that time. This changed radically during the 1990s, but that's for later, while today, 2013, that kind of arrangement would sound utterly irresponsible, what with suicide bombers and armed robbers combing the city.

Fran had just started reading Narnia stories to Cynthia and Wiebe. Kevin had enjoyed them so much at that age so Fran decided to try it with them as well. She wrote, "Sometimes it's all a bit too real and makes them a bit scared, which, of course, is not the point of these allegories. Cynthia hangs on tightly to me when I'm reading and then says she likes it!"

The end of the school year involved all kinds of activities. Wiebe's class appeared on a children's programme on TV. Kevin and Cynthia started sorting through a year's worth of papers they had produced to save some and discard others. We bought an additional bookcase for the living room to place the children's books as well as ours. Especially Cynthia and Wiebe were proud of their reading ability and wanted to give their books the same prominence as our adult books.

When the summer holiday was over in August 1980, the children were all ready for school again. At the end of day one, they all came home with glowing reports about their new class and teachers. However, after only two days of school, they had two days off due to the end of the Muslim fasting month (Ramadan). All three were disappointed at having another holiday period so soon, even Wiebe. See their stories under their individual names below.

The report card story was the same every term. Mid December they again came home with "excellent report cards." The reports for Cynthia and Wiebe consisted of comments instead of letters, but they were excellent. Kevin's letter grades were all A's except a B in art. Fortunately for him, they didn't give grades for penmanship anymore in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

A couple of days later, with the kids home on vacation, while I was running around helter skelter for that conference on science and religion, Fran organized a party for the kids by having their friends over. I probably would not have referred to this party, for it was a typical one for our family, except for one unusual fact. One of the friends who had come was another Indian friend of Kevin's, who was born in Nigeria and had lived here all his



life. He had never tasted Nigerian food and was not about to begin! Not even a fried yam or plantain! Fran could not believe it. She fixed him a peanut butter sandwich.

Beginning February 1981, we welcomed a part time guest into our family. A Canadian friend of ours, Derek Fawcett, taught at a Christian secondary school 50 kms away, where I had been the main speaker at its opening some time earlier, belonging as it did to the United Gospel Tabernacle Church that had taken a liking to me. He had a son of Kevin's age and in his class, named Timothy. To save his father that long daily commute along bad roads, we agreed to have him three nights a week. Timothy was a likeable chap who fit in easily. He had come to visit his dad for only a few months. Normally, he was living with his mother in Canada.

Fran continued her weekly schedule for writing letters to our parents. After the kids were all in school and Wiebe was able to write somewhat, she tried to coax them to write regularly as well. It wasn't always easy to get them settled down to write, especially the boys what with so many neighbourhood kids on the yard wanting to play soccer. February 1981, she warned them that if they didn't get their monthly letter written, next summer, when they would be at Grandma's, the relatives would ask, "Let's see. Whose kids are you again?" That made an impression! "Next week," they promised. Yea, sure. Bribes come in different ways and when you live in Nigeria, you can't help but become creative about them. Sometimes Fran would "bribe" the kids into letter writing by giving them a choice between writing letters or doing dishes. Guess what they would choose!

Children can be so different from one another, as illustrated by the 1981 annual teachers' dinner at our house. In March we had the kids' teachers over for supper, including the school nurse and one spouse. As Fran described it: "It was a nice sociable evening. Especially Cynthia had to show her teacher 'everything!' Wiebe is more shy in that way. Kevin was pleased enough to entertain his teacher and behave in a very mature way in his discussion with him and his wife."

The kids usually got along well, but one late April 1981 day, Cynthia and Wiebe got into a fight. They had planned to surprise Fran by cleaning out their clothing drawers, but somehow things did not turn out that way. After they hauled everything out, they started fighting and throwing clothes. When Fran came to check out the noise, she "saw their intended surprise." She settled the matter by reading to them for a while.

### *Children Individually*

#### *Lydia*

Early September 1979, Lydia returned from her course in Kenya. It was not so simple to meet anyone at the airport anymore since the new airport was now some 30 kilometers south of town, while the old one would take only five minutes. Chris Abaga, her boyfriend, came with us along with another friend. We enjoyed a nice welcome-home dinner at our place and were joined by three pastors from the Hausa course I was teaching at TCNN at

the time. Lydia reported in glowing terms the wonderful time she had had in Nairobi, though she did not forget the negative parts she had also written about.

We have often reported on our children's birthdays, but by now Lydia was a young adult of nineteen. She had requested Fran to make her famous "snow on the mountain" curry dinner along with a cake and candles. Chris came to join us along with mutual friends Manasseh and Victoria. As we were about to eat, a cousin of Lydia dropped by as well along with her husband and baby. And then Rev. Adamu of NKST came along. Though he did not know Lydia or the visitors, he also stayed to celebrate. That's just the open way of Nigerian social life that we have always enjoyed so much. Drop in and join, whatever is going on.

The following Sunday, Lydia and Chris sang a duet at ECWA Good News Church. It is a downtown church that attracted a lot of young people, whose pastor's name was, believe it or not, "Bluff!" We attended their evening services occasionally. Lydia has a wonderful voice, strong and clear. Fran commented in a letter that she hoped Lydia would pursue her gift of singing. She did, at least enough to publish a few CDs that we still love to listen to even in 2014.

Chris was now an evangelist working for Great Commission and was soon transferred to Yola, a six-hour drive from Jos, a very hot and humid place. We thought him a very nice young man and hoped that the relationship between them would mature. He was very much a modern Nigerian who preferred English to Nigerian languages and Western fashion to Nigerian dress. He was also a very good preacher with a most contagious, boisterous and hearty laugh.

As far as her work was concerned, Lydia was now a full-fledged producer of radio



programmes at Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG). They would receive requests from other radio stations for programmes on all kinds of subjects and Lydia would have to prepare them. She gave talks on various subjects as well as conduct interviews. One station requested a Hausa programme from her "Talk to Women" every day. She had to prepare the content and then deliver it in front of her colleagues, who would help her improve the content as well as correct her Hausa. She also told Bible stories and folk tales. All in all, a highly responsible position with a wide reach. RVOG itself did not

**broadcast but prepared programmes for other stations through much of Black Africa.**

### **Lydia at RVOG – 1980\***

**Somewhere along the line, Lydia quit attending COCIN and began worshipping regularly at ECWA Good News church. I do not know why she switched. Perhaps it was because they involved young people in so many responsibilities or because Chris was ECWA. While Chris was working in distant Yola, Lydia became involved in a singing group with both her voice and guitar. They were practicing to do a recording. She continued to get new friends and frequently was invited out. She did Bible lessons and attended prayer meetings. No time to get bored. But Fran regretted that she didn't do any serious reading. That was far from her interest.**

**And then the inevitable came: wedding bells started ringing! We do not remember all the details of this episode, but I remember that Chris sought our approval as Lydia's "parents." We readily gave it. We felt we could not ask for a better choice. The couple were in a bit of a quandary, what with Lydia's two sets of parents, the natural and adopted, Nigerian and Western. A young man wooing a girl traditionally had a whole raft of social obligations to her family, including the extended family. There were gifts involved and, most important, a bride price to be negotiated. The latter could be so high that it became prohibitive.**

**One day Chris asked me if we were willing to serve the role of his in-laws so that all the traditions would be conducted with us. We could understand his reasons, for he knew enough about Westerners to know that we would not exact the potentially demanding gifts Lydia's relatives might try to get. It would also save him the trouble of having to travel and visit all these relatives. We declined and insisted that he follow the traditions of Lydia's family and tribe. We had several reasons for that. For one thing, we had every confidence that her parents would go easy in their demands. They were just that kind of people and would react as one would expect from serious Christians. The second reason was that Chris might not be regarded as a true son-in-law by many of Lydia's relatives if he did not fulfill his obligations towards them. After all, we were missionaries and would probably one day return to our home country (-ies), while he would always have Lydia's family around and could never "escape" them.**

**We also resisted Chris's request for another reason. Chris represented a new generation of Middle Belt Christians who preferred English to Nigerian languages, whether Hausa or their own local tongue. Chris in fact knew English much better than most secondary school graduates. He wore only Western clothes and was quite Westernized in general. We were not used to this new trend, for, apart from southern Nigerians, we dealt with most Nigerians in Hausa and were accustomed to more traditional behaviour and tastes. There was nothing wrong with Chris' choices in this respect, but we simply were not used to his style and tended to resist it. We needed to get used to that side of him. And so we did not think it a good idea to help wean him away from traditional culture by accepting the role of (foreign) in-laws.**

Of course, we were working on the same issue with Lydia, namely to make sure living with us would not turn her away from Nigerian culture, customs and languages. The result is that Lydia is a very culturally balanced lady who appreciates both sides of her upbringing. As Chris matured, from what we have observed in more recent years, he regained some appreciation for more traditional culture. We have even seen him wear Nigerian clothes occasionally! In the intervening years, we have gained in appreciation and understanding of Nigerians who have chosen a more Western life style. It is their choice on their terms.

I should point out, though, that our resistance to westernization was in keeping with the attitude of the early SUM and SIM missionaries. Early colonial officers were wary of westernized Nigerian Christians; they found them uppity and difficult to work with. That being the case, and missionaries seeking to encourage new Christians to serve in the civil service, the latter thought it wise to resist such westernization. In fact, in the very early years, westernized Christians stood the risk of being disciplined by the church, for their life style was offensive to the average Nigerian. In that context, they were considered not reflecting the image of Christ to their neighbours. That said, I hasten to make clear that *our* resistance was not for that reason. We simply had to get used to this “new breed” of young people. Chris was our first and he was close.

Really, we felt we could not have asked for a better husband for Lydia. We were happy for her, but would certainly miss her when she would join Chris in Yola. Chris was hoping some day to enter seminary. However, as long as he was working for GCM, after the wedding, Lydia would have to join him, for their policy was that both spouses work for them. Lydia liked her RVOG radio programming position and would like to go for further training as well. So, their future was full of plans and hopes, but also unclear. They would get married in December 1980 in Wukari. More about that later.

Lydia took her first vacation of two weeks from her job in June. It wasn't at the time she wanted it, but she was given no choice. She was going to Nyankwala, but she feared she would be bored there, since her two secondary school siblings and none of her friends would be home but at boarding school. Her folks figured she would be useless for helping on the farm and so they did not press her. Had we failed to keep her a Nigerian after all? Not really. Few graduates of secondary schools, let alone those who had gone further like Lydia, would be expected to help out on the farm. They had gone to school to escape from that hard physical work and create a better world for themselves with benefits accruing also to their families.

Even when she was at home, that is, at our place, she tried to keep in touch with her birth family, something that made us very happy. You know that her parents visited occasionally. So did her siblings show up now and then. Late August 1980, for example, Rhoda, her sister visited for a whole week. That was timed just right, for Fran was under the weather that week. Lydia and Rhoda took charge of the kitchen and did all the cooking and cleaning. What a blessing Lydia continued to be in the family.

She developed an interest in crocheting a shawl. It kept her quite busy. At first she could not read the pattern so that Fran would read it with her and then they worked it out together. She ended up doing a fine job, mostly on her own.

As the time for their wedding approached, excitement mounted steadily and all kinds of arrangements were in progress. By August, Lydia bought the material for her bridesmaids' dresses and for the flower girls, of which Cynthia would be one. She was so excited to be chosen for this honour. Lydia planned to borrow her own dress from a friend, while she would make her own veil. Mid October, Fran took Lydia to Vom, a few miles south of Jos, to meet the girl who offered to lend her a wedding gown. It was a bit long, but otherwise it was a good fit.



When Cynthia tried her new dress on a couple of weeks later, Fran said that she looked so cute. But sibling jealousy intruded. Wiebe's function was to pass out candy from a tray, but he would not get a new outfit. Fran wrote, "First he acted really tough and said he would throw mud and candy at the people, but Lydia didn't pay any attention. When he saw Cynthia's beautiful dress, I think he was even a bit jealous that he didn't get a new 'pretty' thing to wear."

Cynthia at Lydia's Wedding\*

We celebrated Lydia's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday with some friends over, including Chris, who was in town at the time. Her request for a birthday menu: mashed potatoes, hamburg, corn, bacon hot dish and ice cream for dessert. We were moving away from Nigerian dishes, but no one objected, for we all loved her choice. Funny: when we had a party, we would usually choose Nigerian food, but when Lydia had one, she would choose Western cuisine! Well, you know that bit about the grass on the other side.

End November 1980, Lydia worked her last day at RVOG and started packing her goods in preparation for moving out. She was getting ready for her big day, but first had to fulfill some traditional duties towards her birth family as well as to the Nyankwala CRCN. She still needed formal permission from the church to get married. She also had to greet her relatives and do further preparations for the wedding itself. She went home with a suitcase and three heavy boxes, all presents she'd already gotten in Jos as well as things she had bought. She needed to show them to the relatives. She also left some stuff for us to cart along when we came for the wedding. They planned to go to Miango for a short honeymoon and then stay around Jos till after Christmas, when they would move to Yola, where Chris was living. They planned to be back in Jos from February to May for Lydia to attend a

training course in preparation for working with Campus Crusade. Then in June, it would be Yola more permanently. Our little girl was grown up and leaving us! Fran wrote, “We are very happy with Lydia’s choice of Chris and the way things have worked out over the years, but the parting is still hard!”

As far as further customs went, Lydia would not be “given away,” for that custom had not been established in Nigeria. For months ahead, Chris had been “bargaining” for approval from all Lydia’s relatives to marry her. When that was all over and done with, then they as an extended family had agreed to “give her away.” They had been a bit merciful to Chris financially, but we felt they still exacted quite a lot. However, it was not really a “bride price” as you often hear of it. The custom is rather an insurance that Chris was serious and that he could support a family. Most of the money is used for buying gifts for the new couple. Perhaps it could be considered a Nigerian version of a bridal shower. In the end, they receive a lot more back from everyone than what he had to “advance.” The system is good when it’s not abused, but unfortunately, many families see it as a way to get “rich,” especially if the girl has an education. The “price” can become so prohibitive that many young men postpone getting married. The CRCN had long ago advised people to keep the price reasonable, but they had no mechanism to enforce the “rule.” It was culture and greed driven, not church or religion.

The day after school let out in December, we headed to Wukari for the big wedding. When we arrived at the Benue River, there was such a long lineup for the barge that we decided to leave the car in Sarkin Kudu, a village just a couple of miles from the river. There was a CRCN church that knew us. So we parked the car there after we unloaded our goods at the river. We then crossed by private canoe. The loading and unloading was, of course, quite a hassle, but preferable to a wait of uncertain duration. The kids loved the half hour it took to cross the river. We then took a taxi to our old Wukari compound, some 40 kms, where the Nelsons now lived. We spent the rest of the day there making cakes. Yes, plural. There was the wedding cake itself and then a number of smaller ones. A number of missionaries had contributed to this enterprise, especially Margaret Seinen, whose husband Dick had been Lydia’s teacher. She donated two cakes.



Here’s Fran’s story of the wedding itself:

The wedding went off quite nicely, even though no one had practiced the ceremony part. It was a total surprise to everyone! Then the pastor, Rev. Philip Aboki, a native of Nyankwala, surprised them by doing the entire service in Hausa, even though his English was good. He explained that this is Hausa-speaking country. So, anyone who hadn’t taken the trouble to learn Hausa should just be patient if he could not understand the service—and he should try to learn soon! We got a kick out of that, because Chris was not very fluent in Hausa and preferred English, but he said his vows acceptably in Hausa, though a

little haltingly. After all, they had not counted on this. Apparently, the language issue had not been discussed previously.

Chris & Lydia\*

I suspect the pastor was trying to humiliate the normally proud Chris.

After the service, the entire crowd took to the street and slowly danced their way to the reception venue. Father Iliya was present but did not join in the church service. According to tradition, church weddings were part of youth culture in which elders did not participate. I was a bit embarrassed at my sudden recruitment to walk Lydia part way down the aisle, for I was not dressed for that eventuality. I was accustomed to wearing robes at any public function, while all I had with me was a pair of dress pants and a blazer. I felt badly underdressed.

We attended the reception for a while, but such receptions are for the youth, not for more senior people. So after we had shown our faces and had taken some food, we left for the same reason Iliya did not participate in the ceremony. Being expats, we had some leeway to straddle both sides.

The next day, Sunday, our wedding party completely took over the Nelson residence, what with untold number of greeters for the new couple as well as for our family. This was not really planned by anyone, though it should have been expected. We apologized to the Nelsons, who were not accustomed to such crowds or such an overwhelming explosion of Nigerian culture in their house. We promised to make it up to them when they came for their next visit to Jos.

The harmatan was so thick on their wedding day that the mission plane was not able to fly. That meant some of the expected Campus Crusade guests were stranded in Jos. However, two days later Lydia and Chris were able to fly to Miango for their honeymoon. The Nelsons brought us along with all the “wedding loot” to the river. The new couple never actually opened their presents till after Christmas. We crossed as before and in due time found ourselves back home in Jos. The next day I would be busy with that WCC science conference mentioned in the companion Chapter 20.

During the post-honeymoon week, we saw quite a bit of Lydia and Chris. They were staying in a guest house somewhere, but spent a lot of time at our house packing her stuff for the move to Yola. She also agreed to treat us to one more of her absolutely delicious pounded-yam-and-chicken-stew meals. Food just doesn’t get better than that! After all her years in our care, she was still the Nigerian we had hoped her to be. We were going to sorely miss her!

However, she didn’t get out of our life that easily. After a month in Yola, the two of them returned to Jos for her to take a Great Commission training course. We had frequent contact with her. They began to clear their boxes out of the house. We delivered a fridge, our wedding gift, to them. She came to us to get a yogurt-starter culture. Then she sent a message to say she was coming to cook chicken for my birthday. Wow, was I pleased! We

kept seeing each other during the course in which he taught. In response to a question from one of our mothers, Fran wrote, “Yes, we feel that Lydia is our daughter and that we now have a son-in-law. That’s a nice feeling, especially since she married such a sound Christian fellow. So many of her friends have done otherwise. We are grateful that God has brought them together.”

On the Boer side of things, becoming parents and grandparents early was a pattern, but then you can’t take seven years for your first as we did. Nevertheless, mid-April Fran wrote, “If all goes well, it looks like I’ll be grandmother before 40. Lydia and Chris came to tell us they are expecting in October 1981. The children are really excited. In fact, Wiebe thought they already had the baby. He said, ‘So, I’ll be an uncle when I’m seven!’” In the Boer clan that was nothing new, what with my brother Dick *born* a triple uncle. New or not, for all of us this was exciting news. We waited eagerly for the baby-in-process and prayed continually for mother and child.

In the last chapter I told you about Lydia’s little brother undergoing cleft palate surgery at the hands of Glenn Verbrugge. There was follow-up work to be done. Shortly before we left for home service, May 1981, Naomi, Lydia’s mother, and little Ibrahim stayed with us for two weeks after the next phase of surgery. After the procedure, he couldn’t eat anything, only drink milk. He cried a lot which meant that Naomi could only sleep when he was asleep. They had to come back in August for the third phase of the procedure. We had no idea that harelip problems were so complicated and took so much time and so many procedures to heal. During those two weeks another sibling also stayed with us. He could have stayed with Lydia, but we lived a few minutes walking from the hospital, while Lydia lived on the other side of town.

### *Kevin*

Life went on for the other children. Late September 1979, Kevin got a new soccer ball. As was predictable, Nigerian children from the village behind us came trouping in after school to play football/soccer. James, who became our driver a decade later, was among them. There is nothing like football in Nigeria. It is the one thing that unites the nation and overcomes all divisions, according to Wiebe in his Yale dissertation years later. We surely experienced that in a small way. Apart from food, you cannot make Nigerian boys happier than by providing them with a ball to kick. And Kevin in all this? Busy as he was with school, running and piano, he relished having 20 or more boys meet him after school for a round of ball.

On Independence Day 1979, Hillcrest was expected by the authorities to have Kevin’s Grade 5 participate in the Independence Parade at the Polo Grounds, very near our house. Sixty schools participated! It was, of course, televised. All in all an exciting event for Kevin especially. We were able to see him clearly on TV that evening.

Around that same time, Kevin, along with a car load of other boys, was invited to join an Evenhouse swimming party at Bagauda. It was a three-hour drive one way towards Kano.



They had an Olympic sized pool, a special place for Nigeria. When Kevin returned home around 8:30 pm, “his eyes were really red from the chlorine and his hair green from the algae. But they had a ‘wonderful’ time.” Fran wrote that Chris, at the time still Lydia’s boyfriend—“couldn’t believe it that people would actually drive seven hours in one day just to take a long ‘bath!’” Apart from children in a local village pond, Nigerians are not accustomed to such elaborate plans for swimming. They think of swimming more in terms of taking a bath. One pastor friend told me that as children they would swim in a local stream. As an adult he sometimes yearned for the coolness of the water, but it would simply be unthinkable and totally humiliating for a man of his stature to be seen swimming even if adequately dressed. That was strictly child’s play.

I have already made mention of the kids’ economy. Kevin made some money in addition to that already mentioned by selling books, a business he started during the previous term. It had awakened the entrepreneur in him. Unfortunately some of his money had to go towards a new rear window in our Toyota bus. He had been throwing stones again and this time he broke a car window. The expense was bad enough, but getting a replacement was something else. Parts like that usually were not held in stock and needed to be ordered, something that was time consuming. I had to chase all over town to find one. We needed it replaced within a few days when we would travel to Wase for an SUM anniversary celebration referred to in Chapter 20.

Kevin’s piano practice required discipline, but he was applying himself. He knew we

insisted; so he kept at it. He was now actually spending time playing a variety of music that was not part of his lessons He was practicing hard for another recital at Hillcrest. He did two pieces and also accompanied his friend Happy who played the violin. Next year he would again be doing recitals. He said he wanted to get as good as some of the present high schoolers. Some of those kids were really excellent. So, Kevin was setting high goals for himself.



Kevin at the piano—Happy on the violin - 1980\*  
Teacher Esther Koops looking on

He told us he was glad we hadn’t let him quit earlier in the year when he was so disgusted with lessons. I emphasize he was glad, for eventually he refused to play piano and claimed

he had *always* hated it all along. Sounds a bit like me in the barbershop in Lutjegast: I really *did* hate it but never let on or complained. Well, you know about that falling apple!

One area in which he wasn't so good was his handwriting. In fact, Fran found it downright bad. Another fallen apple? Also his art teacher said he did not try very hard in his class. Fran guessed he simply wasn't "finely coordinated." He loved sports like soccer and baseball and was learning roller skating on the Hillcrest tennis courts.

Kevin and his friend Krister Evenhouse started a building project at Mountain View in Evenhouse's yard. As Fran described it: "They are building a hut of mud bricks. The big plans include having electricity come in from Evenhouse' house so they can listen to tape recordings. Also plans for setting up a water system. They want it big enough for two box beds." I don't remember how far they came with it, but I do know that when we moved into the Evenhouse place a couple of years later, there was no trace of their project left. Well, it probably was a good learning exercise for them and fun play.

You may remember Kevin's interest in jogging. He maintained that interest for quite some time. Early February he was part of a Hillcrest jogging club and had signed up for 300 kms for the semester. So, he would jog home from school. That would add close to a daily five kilometers to his total. End March he was doing ten kilometers a day without any trouble around the Hillcrest track during recess and lunch hour with his friends. He had almost completed the 300 when he decided to set his sights on 500 for the semester to get a medal. By April 13, he had clocked 430 and was confident he would finish within a week.

He did not *always* jog to school. In May, some days he took his bike, but one day he fell. That was dangerous, for traffic on Zaria Road is heavy and the road itself does not have much of a shoulder. He was both shook up and "banged up," in Fran's words. His knees and elbows were all bruised, but the worst was on his chin. The school nurse bandaged him up somewhat, but he really needed stitches, which he got at the hospital. In contrast to Wiebe, who had become a pro as a stitch consumer, this was first time ever for Kevin. A week later, the stitches were removed. Perhaps riding a bike along Zaria Road was not recommended. Needless to say, he barely completed his 500.

You've read a lot about the children's birthdays. May was Kevin's turn. At age eleven, birthday parties begin to look different. It was a happy coincidence that his French teacher had organized a great French dinner at her house for the best group in his French class that included him. He had (only) two friends over for the night and Fran prepared his favourite meal: chicken, French fries, cole slaw and cheesecake dessert. It was a far cry from Baissa parties with crowds of kids eating rice with peppery chicken sauce and bottles of pop.

The Hillcrest school year ended in late May. At the closing assembly, Kevin received three awards: one for running his 500, one for general Physical Education and one for participating in a marching band. Two were in the physical aspect of school; none in the academic. I would not have been surprised if he had won academic prizes; in fact, I had expected that. But for physical education? How unlike his father; more like his mother.

Fran had been good in various sports during her youth and at this time was fairly adept at tennis, though hardly as a jogger. He wanted us to attend this assembly to witness him receiving his awards. We did our utmost to be there.

But he was *disappointed* as well. As Fran told the story:

Kevin was quite proud of himself and so were we. About ten boys in Grade 5 had run the 500 and they all talked about bronze, silver and gold medals. They had visions of real gold and were really disappointed with just a blue ribbon, but they soon got over that. The two athletic awards were badges that I sewed onto his spring jacket. So, now he looks like a real sportsman.

When there are things to be done at whatever front or level, I am quick to delegate to the appropriate person(s). Sometimes too quick, at which point delegation deteriorates into abdication. I did it to Kevin. It was Saturday morning. I was to travel some 200 kilometers to Garkawa on the new road to Wukari to deliver a speech that morning. I was already late in getting ready when I realized the car radiator needed topping up. I called Kevin, told him to bring a container of water and showed him the radiator opening to pour it into. I went into the house to get myself ready. After a few minutes, Kevin came and said he had poured in two containers and it still wasn't full. We went to the car and I asked him where he had poured it. Into the oil shoot! What to do in a case like that? We let the water/oil drain out of the engine and left the vehicle parked there. I borrowed a Mission car for the trip. Upon my return the following morning, Kevin and I poured new oil as well as water into the car, both in their appropriate shoots. Kevin learned something about cars (I hoped); I learned the difference between delegation and abdication. I should not have had Kevin pour the water without my supervision.

Throughout the "summer" vacation, Kevin would work at a number of things. Occasionally he would do rug hooking. He also kept up his piano practice, while doing a lot of reading as well. Michael Maxwell was home from boarding school, but he and Kevin had grown apart and no longer saw much of each other. Kevin was eager for school to resume.

Once back in school, Kevin was especially pleased to have two men teachers, for so far he had only females. He expected that male teachers would all be perfect. Unfortunately, he soon found one of them boring. Mmm, was male chauvinism somehow in the air? There are more signs of it in this chapter. That expectation needed some downgrading.

Kevin was happy in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, but found homework a bit exasperating. There were so many other things to do! We encouraged him to get his homework done right after school so that he could play, but he had trouble concentrating. He had signed up for the running club again, but found it hard to keep up because of school work. In addition, piano lessons were about to start and he really wanted to continue with that as well. "Wow," wrote Fran, "these little kids really have a full schedule." Note that *he* wanted to keep up his piano along with sports, running club. We did not *force* him.

Kevin was becoming very helpful in the bookshop with unpacking, checking, etc. He especially liked earning the money, for he was quite disgusted that at this time both Cynthia and Wiebe had more money in their accounts in Jos and in the US than he did. So, he needed to earn and save! How he, Mr. Thrifty himself, not to say “Uncle Scrooge,” could have fallen behind at this front, is hard to imagine.

Towards end November 1980, Kevin participated in a Hillcrest track meet, the school’s first ever. He did two events and got first place in both. I never ever participated in school sports; never really had the opportunity. So I was doubly proud of Kevin. The same week, he had a piano recital scheduled. He accompanied his Indian Sikh friend Happy with his violin, but had not been able to get his own piece in order. So, he skipped his and planned to do it at the next recital. Fran wrote, “He was under such pressure from school and his running club, that we advised him to postpone the recital piece and take a few weeks off from running as well. He still has 80 kilometers to reach his goal. We are glad that he can still share his problems with us and listen to our advice.”

Backtracking a bit, in the new January semester, he was one of seven out of 25 boys in Grade 6 to be chosen for a basketball team. He was very pleased to be chosen and so were we. They were to play against a team from that other missionary school at Miango. We were looking forward to the game, for we expected it to be funny, since they were not really familiar with the game, having learned the basic rules only a few days earlier. It went reasonably well, given their primitive level.

I reported earlier that Kevin was disappointed with a “B” in art, but it got worse. In April 1981, he got a “C.” He felt bad about his low grade, because he really did care, but being clumsy and messy with manual things, his art all turned out “smudgy and sideways.” He felt doubly bad because that “C” kept him off the honour roll.

In her last letter before our 1981 summer home service, Fran wrote a lengthy account of a birthday weekend in Kevin’s life that gave a good picture of his varied activities and friends. Here goes:

Kevin really had a day yesterday. From 8-12 they had a catechism party. The teacher had the kids over for breakfast and then took them for a swim and a hike. At 1:30-3:00 he had a birthday party for his soccer friends. He planned most of the party himself. All he needed from Mom was a cake and Kool Aid. Then from 3:00 to 6:00 he went to a soccer game with his friends at the Stadium in town. He came home just in time for supper and then to a 6<sup>th</sup> Grade roller skating party at the Hillcrest tennis courts. Home around 9:30 pm. So, that was a full day!

Today he has another piano recital. It’s good practice and it no longer makes him nervous anymore at all. Tomorrow after school, his two best friends, Happy Bagga and Tunde Hughes, of Nigerian-English parentage, are staying overnight. Because of Happy’s Sikh scruples, the only meat to serve is chicken, which, of course, Tunde doesn’t mind. Happy is a very sincere, conscientious, polite boy. It bothers Kevin that he has no interest in being a Christian. Tunde has been confirmed in the

Catholic church and is quite active. So, these kids get quite an exposure to different views early in life.

### *Cynthia*

While Kevin was in his soccer phase, Cynthia was into biking. However, the road past our house was busy and dangerous. Thus she could only ride on our driveway, which was basically a round-about. So around and around and around she would go.

She had recently turned six and was really proud of it, especially because she would now be getting a small weekly allowance of 20 kobo (cents) just like Kevin. Fran did not expect her to be frugal as Kevin was, for she was already making plans for all the things she could buy.

School wise, Cynthia was now having a harder time of it. She really had to concentrate and it took a lot for her to sit still for any length of time. If she were in one of the Hillcrest boarding places as so many of her fellow students were, she probably would have had an even harder time, Fran surmised. At any rate, as we observed boarding children, we were happy ours were not among them. Boarding kids were always waiting to see their parents and were happy when they got an opportunity to get off the Mountain View compound, as good a place as it was. For this reason, we would occasionally invite some of them to our house for a break.

Things got worse for Cynthia. She started saying she hated school. It was too hard for her and her teacher, Miss Rose, was said to be “mean.” A bit later she described school as “slavery.” Fran wrote,

Miss Rose is a very experienced teacher (25 years) and is a firm disciplinarian, but she also loves children. She is really just the “right” type of teacher for Cynthia, but Cynthia doesn’t realize that at this point. We try to encourage her as much as we can, but it does look as if she just might have to work harder for her grades than Kevin ever did.

Though there was no doubt that Cynthia needed a firm teacher to instill discipline in her, we realized some years later that Miss Rose had been too tough, if not at times too cruel. Cynthia had some valid reasons for disliking her, while Miss Rose had some valid reasons to “sit on her.” Fran wrote,

Several times Cynthia lied to Miss Rose about her work being finished and then Miss Rose would find uncompleted pages in her workbook. She would be “punished properly” for that. But things do seem to be improving with her. We all try to encourage her as much as we can and I try to have her read to me as much as possible just for extra practice.

Fran had a little notebook in which she recorded reminders of things to write home about. Though she had already started a list, Cynthia wrote *above* the list “Cynthia’s tooth.” Fran wrote,

Yes, she wanted me to tell you that her first tooth came out and she is so pleased. The tooth fairy brought her twenty kobo. Now Cynthia is trying to pull out the next wiggly one already, even though it’s a bit too early. She didn’t want the money credited to her account—we have an extensive bookkeeping service here!—, but wanted the cash in her own billfold, so she could spend it easier, she said.

By February, Cynthia seemed much happier at school. Things were getting a bit easier for her. It seemed she was becoming more confident. Miss Rose said that she was doing fine and that she was now in the average reading group. Cynthia even offered to read to Fran occasionally, a sharp contrast to the time we had to beg or even force her. Miss Rose assigned them to write stories, which she then would correct for them, after which they would copy them into their writing books. Her early March report card clearly showed great improvement. We were relieved.

At the end of the 1980 “summer” vacation, Cynthia still primarily just wanted to play all day long. When Michael’s mother had a baby, Cynthia kept going there to “help” with the baby. One day Fran and Cynthia were making some doll clothes for Cynthia’s dolls. As the two were working together, Cynthia said to Fran, “If Daddy saw you monkeying around like this, he’d really get mad, wouldn’t he?” Fran wrote, “I guess she feels I work for Daddy and I may not do things like making doll clothes with her. I tried to explain that Mommy works for and with everybody in the family. John says he feels I’m always doing things with the kids, so I didn’t see why Cynthia interpreted it in that way.” Thanks, Fran, for defending my reputation with her, but I guess that her comments were an indication of a subconscious attitude of mine she had picked up on and it was not flattering.

Fran organized the typical Fran-style party for Cynthia’s seventh birthday in August. She had kids over from her class and she brought treats to school. All very nice for everyone, except that I, her Daddy, had to drive nearly two hours to get them all home again, since they lived on opposite sides of the city! Not sure it did anything to improve Cynthia’s picture of me!

She was very happy with her second grade teacher and was now performing well in her class. She was also eager “to show her work to both of us, and really enjoys the art projects, games and sharing time. She likes to suggest songs and lead in prayer. She’s such an outgoing, sociable little girl.”

### *Wiebe*

While Kevin was into soccer, Cynthia into biking, Wiebe was into “triking.” He loved to ride his tricycle, but, as Fran put it, “he was too lazy to make the effort to peddle. So, he started bossing the Nigerian neighbourhood kids around to push him!” This was

reminiscent of how Fran made a young son of a farm worker push her in a wagon back in her Hantumhuizen days. These were poor kids from the village behind us. Their reward was that Wiebe allowed them to play with his toys. It was kind of a repeat of Baissa days, something that most missionary kids that age experienced when playing with Nigerian children. We did not like this attitude on his part, but Kevin went through such a stage and eventually got over it. So we would not worry.

On November 12, 1979, Wiebe actually wrote his first letter on record:

Dear Grandma and Grandpa and Auntie Jane,  
Hello. Are you all fine? I love all three of you.  
(Signed)Wiebe Karl

He was initially very happy in kindergarten at Plateau School. When he heard that Christmas vacation was near, he was disappointed and said, "I'll be so bored, staying home all day!" Fran visited his room several times and concluded that he was a very good boy at school. He was doing all kinds of arithmetic and, unlike Kevin, wrote neatly. However, mid January he was worried, because the teacher told his class they would have to take a test. He really did not dare to go to school, for he was sure he would flunk the test, an attitude reminiscent of mine in grade 1. As a matter of fact, he did very well. We were sure he was ready to attend primary school full time.

February 1980 saw Wiebe engrossed in playing Monopoly. Fran wrote, "It's really cute to see him give correct change and read the cards." Numfa, Michael's younger brother, often came to play with him. They were developing their own rules about getting interest by keeping some money in the bank. He figured out things very quickly just in his head, including the change he might have coming in the game. It was through playing such games that Wiebe became familiar with arithmetical processes very early and without any serious effort.

One day early May, Wiebe came home from Plateau School and was "demanding attention!" He announced he was getting very bored with this "baby school" and was eager to start Hillcrest in August. His kindergarten would continue through June, but we decided to let him quit at end of May, the same time Kevin and Cynthia were finishing their school year.

From that same time, we have Wiebe's second letter to his grandparents:

We are all doing very fine. One of Hankali's puppies was stolen and one got sick. Yesterday Kevin was riding his bicycle coming home from school. He fell off his bike and hurt himself. He needed four stitches in his chin.

During the 1980 summer vacation, the two younger Maxwell boys were over a lot to play games with Wiebe and to read our books. Wiebe was getting a bit bored and was ready for the end of the vacation. He didn't like playing outside very much, while the neighbour kids

did not always relish playing Monopoly with him. Then sometimes Wiebe would just sit there, not knowing what to do with himself.

We had been concerned about his attitude towards Grade 1, for he had acted totally disinterested and “tough.” If that sounds contradictory to a couple of paragraphs earlier, so be it: that’s the reasoning of a child. However, he came home the first day saying, “It was so nice!” And that was Miss Rose, that tough teacher Cynthia had disliked so much. During the Ramadan holiday, we met Miss Rose somewhere and Wiebe told her he wished he could go to school tomorrow. “You can imagine,” Fran wrote, “how pleased we were to hear him say that.”

Before the end of the month he finished his first reading book, while arithmetic was too easy for him. Fran wrote, “I’m sure Miss Rose has noticed already that academically he’s far ahead of Cynthia. However, he needs Cynthia’s help to find friends, tie his shoes and tuck his shirt!” In stores, Wiebe immediately knew how much change we had coming, while Cynthia hated to even do her sums up to ten! Recollecting her own primary school experience, Fran wrote, “There is such a difference between these two. Good thing they aren’t in a one-room school where everyone would be together!”—as was the case with Fran and Trena in their East Paris primary school.

Early September, Fran wrote to Opa Boer:

Opa Wiebe, you can be proud of your namesake. His teacher said he was doing so well in both reading and math, she could easily push him ahead into much harder work, but she felt he needed to stay with his own group for the social experience. He is happy at school and isn’t “tough” and aggressive like he is sometimes at home.

A month later, she wrote, “Wiebe still often likes to act ‘tough’ at home, but, judging from his report card, he’s very cooperative, helpful, kind, willing, alert, etc. at school.” We were happy.

Though I minimize family health issues in these memoirs, here’s one for the record that might be good for Wiebe to know in the future, namely that he had a root canal in his “front top teeth” in October 1980. For a couple of weeks he had been complaining of tooth ache. When he was two, he fell and his two top front teeth turned somewhat black. Since they returned to their normal white before long, nothing was done. Four years later, a dentist in Miango found “the nerve in those teeth was completely dead.” So he put in an artificial nerve. Wiebe said that “everything feels fine now when he eats.” We were wondering whether this could mean trouble in the future.

Early February 1981, Wiebe again needed stitches in his head! Fran wrote that “a door got in his way and he crashed his head with his forehead split open a bit.” While getting the stitches in the emergency room, “he just laid very quietly and let the nurse sew him up.”

One evening about the same time, we had the Machungas and some other friends over for dinner. Rev. Machunga, you may remember, was Chairman of my Board as well as



General Secretary to TEKAN. Since some of the guests did not speak Hausa, our conversation was mostly in English, which Mrs. Machunga did not understand. She ended up playing games with Wiebe, even though they could not understand each other either. They played a Nigerian marble or bean game called “*dara*” that Wiebe always won, but this time he met his match. He was surprised that this elderly Nigerian lady beat him! She was a sweetheart of a lady whom our children loved to visit. Shortly after, he played the same game with a 30-year old Nigerian librarian and beat her. He always thought it funny that he often beat Nigerians at their own game.

### *Closing Comments*

And with that, we have completed another chapter in our Jos family and social life—and in these memoirs. It had been an exciting time of ministry and a blessed time of family development with a rich social life straddling both. But it had been an extremely busy time with hundreds of guests around our table, many dozens staying overnight, many conferences and seminars, many sermons, many classes taught, many papers written, typed and duplicated, many books ordered and distributed. As to children, it was delightful to watch their development as they moved from class to class, picked up different skills and bonded with a variety of friends. We always and especially appreciated their easy relationships with Nigerians and how Nigerians reciprocated. And, of course, we could put paid to the almost decade-long quest for my “*promotie*” at the Vrije Universiteit.

Above all, we thanked God for the wonderful opportunities He gave us for this life and ministry in a wonderful city and in a country where religion was recognized as a legitimate and influential force. As a missionary I had the opportunity to address the major issues of the day, not a marginalized and churchified segment of culture.

## Chapter 33<

### Jos III - Family and Social Life

(June 1981-January 1984)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 21, Volume 2)

#### *Transition Travails*

In June-July 1981 we had two months of home service, with August tacked on as our annual vacation. It was a normal summer of some church deputation and a lot of family stuff both in Michigan and in BC.

Well, not everything was “normal.” One important difference was the way we shipped our supplies this time. A few boxes were mailed from the US directly to Nigeria by surface mail, but most of our boxes we checked in. Baggage allowance at the time had become very generous, two “checks-ins” per person and one carry-on, each one up to 70 pounds! For a family of five that meant ten check-ins and five carry-ons without extra charge! A total of 1050 pounds! Simply amazing. Those were the days of the “traveler’s market.” We were very fortunate and glad that we were charged no customs. European missionaries in Nigeria were very jealous of these generous arrangements. None of this applied to them.

We packed everything in banana boxes! They looked kind of crude but they were strong and exactly the maximum size allowed by airlines. There was no hassle at the Grand Rapids Airport, for they were accustomed to all these unusual missionary shipments. From there we flew to Vancouver to continue our visiting. We planned to store the boxes in my parents’ basement. However, when Vancouver Customs saw all these boxes, they got all upset. What were we going to do with all this? Where were we going? Why such crazy packaging? Expecting this scenario, I calmly explained who we were and where we were going. They understood, but that did not mean they could let all this through. I gave them permission to rummage through every box. That was too much. Then they told me to open two random boxes that they selected. When they noted I was prepared to follow their instructions, they stopped me and reluctantly allowed us through. Dad was there with a pickup on which it was all loaded and driven to Abbotsford.

A month later, we reappeared at the airport with the same boxes. Ten to be checked in as accompanying luggage and five units as carry-ons in the bins above the passengers. The flight attendants sternly demanded that we take them out and check them in with the others. I argued that these boxes were within the allowable limits in terms of both size and number and that they had no right to make such demands. They threatened that the plane would not take off unless we met their demand. I calmly stated that then it would be a long time to take off. Eventually they relented and off we flew.

Though I had “won” those two Vancouver battles, I did not relish going through it all again in Toronto, where we had to transfer along with these five boxes. So I took them to the ticket counter and explained the issue to them, pleading with them to just check them in with the others and save me from further battle with their colleagues. They agreed and we were now at peace with fifteen crude banana boxes checked in free of charge! Those were the years!

In Kano we were met by our friend Graham Weeks with a large enough vehicle to carry all the luggage and boxes to our guest house. We gave him half a wheel of Dutch cheese, something considered very precious by most missionaries and probably overly generous, but, hey, he was a friend.

The next morning we knew we were back in Nigeria. Fran’s first letter home described the situation as follows:

The back window of our car had been stolen while parked in Kano, so John spent some time right away to get that replaced. We were stopped by policemen so often on the way to Jos that we didn’t get there till 4 p.m. Several of the stops were by customs officials who were suspicious because we had so many boxes in the car. Most of them were quite friendly, though, when it was obvious we had just come from leave and let us through. There has been so much smuggling going on, that these roadblocks have become quite common.

One of the checks was a “particulars” check; everything was expired: our drivers’ licenses, car registration, car insurance, and road worthiness test! The policeman was very friendly, and laughed that he had “caught” a white man with that many “offences.” We assured him that we would get everything taken care of as soon as we got to Jos. I spent a lot of time the first few days back in Jos getting all those things up to date again.

It may strike you that it was irresponsible to drive Nigerian roads with expired insurance; in other words, *no* insurance. Under “normal” circumstances that would indeed be the case and we wouldn’t. However, we were privately insured by our own in-house Mission plan. Though the policy expired annually, we knew the Mission would not treat us as un-insured should we get into trouble.

Our house had been broken into as well, but fortunately, not too much of value was gone. I wrote,

We haven’t finished unpacking all the boxes in which we had stored our things yet, but so far, it seems we are missing: a very old typewriter, all our kerosene lamps, one florescent lamp, an electric toothbrush, coffee mugs, old Dutch souvenir cups, a garbage pail, and an assortment of tools. That was the stuff within easy reach of the door, so that’s what the thief took.

### *Our New Neighbourhood*

From Chapter 21, you may remember that we were scheduled to move from Zaria Road back to the Mountain View compound, this time permanently. With Fran and the children immediately starting school, it was left up to Kiliyobas and me to set up the new house on the Mountain View compound. If you've ever moved from one house to another, you know it's a hard job. Getting things somewhat in place is one thing; getting everything exactly as you or your wife want it is another. As Eugene Rubingh once advised us, it will take an entire term.

There was a row of three missionary residences along the driveway to the Hostel and the Guest House with a duplex added later. We moved into the Evenhouse house, the first one nearest the gate. We were happy with that location, for it allowed us to develop our yard in our own way without sticking out like a sore thumb if we lived more in the middle of people who tried to keep up their yards as if living in North American suburbs. We did not want to water lawns and flowers when water was so scarce, especially not when we had a huge yard and were often offended by those who watered their lawns with water the Mission had trucked in at considerable expense. We were not sure what to do with the yard at first, but did keep the grass cut at a reasonable length from the house to give the children room for play and to discourage snakes from coming too close. But watering? Very minimally. We recycled used water on the few flowers around the house. As to the tall grasses, that soon became a play asset for the children. See under the children section and find "grass." After a while Nigerians used to say that the line between Nigeria and America on our compound was between us and the next house; we were living in Nigeria. I took that as a compliment.

In our annual January newsletter covering 1981 I described our situation thus: "Whereas we have always lived amongst Nigerians, we now live in exclusively missionary surroundings. Though we have very good neighbours, we are unhappy at being cut off from the Nigerian community residentially." However, our residential isolation from Nigerians was paradoxically in a very busy place. We were now living on the main artery into Jos from the south with a constant flow of heavy traffic, including trucks grinding their way on the long incline, day and night.

Since we were living near the gate and understood Hausa, I was appointed to supervise the guards. This meant among other things that I would occasionally get up at any time at night to check on them to ensure they were not sleeping. I got along well with them and often sat and chatted with them, but when I found them sleeping, I would wake them up with a gruff voice and then walk away without another word, a reaction that terrified them, for it was such a contrast to my normal relations with them. It was De Gaulle, I believe, who said that silence is the most terrible of weapons.

For a long time we would also serve food to whoever was on night duty, usually rice mixed with a vegetable and, often, some head cheese. Now, I admit that this head cheese thing was a bit sneaky. It really spruced up the flavour and it was by far the cheapest form of meat. We would use it in rice ourselves. However, it being pork, it was *haram* to our

Muslim guards, that is, forbidden. Since it was mixed with various spices and then mixed into rice, I did not think they would recognize the pork angle. Well, they did but did not comment. One day I discovered they would either throw it away or give it to passersby known to them. I immediately quit giving them food. That was not “nice” of me, since I had tricked them. Of course, they had fooled me for a long time as well. But, hey, I was the boss with the power! An argument could be made for abuse of power?

Mid December I had an accident involving a young fellow on a borrowed motorcycle without license, insurance and lights and, would you believe it, without knowing how to brake! He ran broadside into our car. He was badly hurt on his face, so I took him straight to the hospital where they worked for two hours to stitch it up. His face was sure to keep some ugly scars. I stayed with him throughout, though I had people waiting for me at a couple of places, including home. He stayed at the hospital overnight, stayed at a brother’s home for a day and then went back to his village. We planned to see him a couple of days later, since we would pass by his village.

As to the car, slivers of glass everywhere. If there had been passengers, they might have gotten seriously hurt. It took a week for the vehicle to be repaired, but it would never look the same. You could really tell it had been bashed, but, wrote Fran, “at least the door slides open again and the window has been replaced.” Would our insurance with the Mission cover this? We would find out soon. In the meantime, we would try to have his family take some responsibility, but that might be a long shot.

It so happened that the boy’s brother was a mechanic. He went all over the place to find the best place to repair at the best deal. I reminded him that the boy was completely at fault and that I could take the case to the police. The final price was 100 Naira, part of which was covered by our insurance.

### *Missionary Family Life*

Just in case you have forgotten our busy social life, let me begin this section by telling you about Sunday, December 13, 1981, when we once again had our house full of guests from lunch time right up to 9 pm. In fact that entire week was another one of these whirlwind of activities for Fran especially. She was involved in various seasonal committees at school. It was our turn to host our monthly Mission prayer meeting, while she was also responsible to update the Mission’s Jos hosting list. On top of that, Kevin had an extensive report to hand in, but he was under the weather. Fran then volunteered to type it out for him.

Christmas this year looked a bit different in our new house: We had brought an artificial collapsible Christmas tree, while we bought lights from some missionaries leaving the country. Now all we needed was occasional electricity! We dug around in our gift drum to find items suitable for putting under the tree. There were some clothes there that the children had forgotten as well as some toys. Often we gave the kids some money. Cynthia would spend hers no time flat, but the boys took a bit more time. We had also received some monetary gifts from family and used that to have a collapsible tennis table made. It

was kind of a clumsy design done by TCNN carpenters, but it worked. We set it up in the garage and enjoyed playing it. As in most games, Fran would beat me! We had a crowd of 20 over on New Year's Eve and Kevin organized a table tennis tournament. Somehow, he emerged the champion of the evening.

Whether the Christmas tree was a good thing in a missionary setting, I was not so sure, but we did have to cater to our kids a bit more along that line now that we had surrounded them by or immersed them in missionary culture. It's one thing to have your ideology, but you have to be careful in imposing it on children when you have immersed them in an environment with competing ideologies. We had some missionary friends who shared our ideology when it came to missionary life style, but they would impose it with a vengeance on their children who attended Hillcrest, where they were immersed in more western ways. We observed the struggles these children had with this clash in ideologies.

This was the case with only a few missionaries, but much more so with non-Christians who sent their children to Hillcrest. There was this one Sikh family we knew, the finest and gentlest of people. However, they said that if their son at Hillcrest ever adopted another life style, drink, smoke or cut his hair, he would not be allowed to ever come home again! They approved of the friendship between their son and Kevin, because they recognized Kevin as a serious and religious boy. Fran commented, "Imagine the tensions those children must experience attending a Christian school, when they are pressured at home to excel in school, show respect to the teachers and yet not believe a word of the truths taught at the school." It was also true of the many Muslims at Hillcrest.

On January 2, 1982, our family was invited to spend the day with Kevin's Sikh friend, Happy Bagga, and his family. Happy's dad was the chief engineer at NESCO, a local electricity supplier. They took us to their artificial lake and showed us some of their dams as well as gave us a boat ride to an island where we had a picnic. It was a very interesting and most enjoyable day. We would also visit back and forth, sharing meals at our homes. They were a wonderful couple and very peaceful.

Fran had for some time wanted to join a St. Piran's Ladies Prayer Group late Wednesday afternoons, but it was difficult to arrange, for she felt she could not leave the children alone at home even for an hour. Two children alone was fine, but three always created problems. It got worse with so many friends coming and going all the time. I promised to come home early on Wednesdays so that she could attend, while I watched the kids and cooked supper. We kept up this arrangement for quite some time.

I was no complete stranger to cooking, for I had been the main cook during our honeymoon years in Grand Rapids, while I was also the customary Sunday morning cook for many years. However, the two little kids sometimes feared my concoctions and would often complain about the onions, tomatoes, okra and cabbage that were standard components in many of my recipes, no matter what meal. Fran and Kevin loved my cooking—at least, so they said--, so we let the others off with bread and cheese. Too bad for them we were not in Mac&Cheese country!

Fran had arranged with a lady by the name of Miryam to cook Nigerian style for us every Tuesday. Her husband was the cook at the hostel, while she spent her days at the gate selling miscellaneous supplies like bread, canned milk, matches, etc., including food she cooked right there. The food she cooked for us did not come from her own supplies. We provided that and paid her for her work. She was not the greatest cook we ever had, but she would do, since we all loved Nigerian cuisine.

Fran had a great 1982 birthday, her 40<sup>th</sup>. With mail being so slow, it was on that day that *my* birthday card from the folks arrived, three weeks late. The rest of the day was hers. Though it also came late, Grandma sent Fran a birthday card. It was such a beautiful one that Cynthia “couldn’t believe it that they would send such a nice one to her Mommy.” Fran responded that “even though I’m 40 years old, I’m still their baby!” I took her out to a Chinese restaurant with good food but horrendous prices. In the evening, the Koops treated her to cake and coffee at their house.

The next day Lydia and Chris visited and Lydia outdid herself in cooking a chicken-and-rice dinner for all of us, including the Baas family, once again our next door neighbours. Everybody praised her for her cooking! Of course, they brought little Jude, who was really growing— “the picture of good health with a great crop of jet black and curly hair.” Everybody, including Kevin, competed holding him. It was a good two-day celebration of Fran’s 40 years. I write this paragraph while we are visiting Kevin and Theresa in Mountain View, California, for Fran’s 70<sup>th</sup>! 30 years later from MV to MV!

That 40<sup>th</sup> birthday took place in the midst of a rough few weeks as far as utilities went. The power people struck for one week. When they came back to work, the electricity was on only for a few hours from midnight till sometime early morning. Shortly after that, the water people had their strike. We kept our battery charger on without interruption and were able to keep our battery lamps going much of the time. Also used a propane gas lamp. Finally, after much coaxing from me, Fran decided she was tired of not having a reliable stove for cooking and agreed we should purchase a small gas stove for backup. And then there was a gasoline shortage again. “You just can’t win,” she sighed. Around the same time, her sister Henrietta and Luke were out of power in Grand Rapids for a whole fourteen hours. It made the news big time. Fran commented, “Here it would be big news if it were *on* for that long!”

This electrical yoyo also endangered our frozen food supplies, of course. Some missionaries coped with that by purchasing a full-sized freezer that could be kept closed longer and thus retain the cold longer. But it also often led to the next purchase, a generator, for now there was the danger of losing a whole freezer full of food. We decided to keep things simple and cope with the “top-of-the-fridge” kind of freezer. That was in line with our general attitude to keep things simple. Eventually, when we got back into rabbits big time, we sometimes had too much rabbit meat on hand and we succumbed by buying a “small” full-sized freezer, an oxymoron like the term “superette.” I was grateful at that time we had not discussed our feelings about freezers with those who bought earlier, for then we would have had to eat our words.

We had a similar attitude towards electric typewriters. The Mission office had changed over from manual to electric typewriters, a move I opposed because of the yoyo electrical supply. I expressed my opinion loud and clear to our General Secretary at the time, for I had noticed how often they were stuck. We kept going with the manual and at least at that front were not hampered.

Later in the term, when our family moved over to computers, then I had to kind of eat my words, for we were among its early users in the Mission. Fran more than once reminded me of that conversation when the computer was down due to lack of power. I argued that it was a different issue. The difference between the two types of typewriters was minimal compared to the difference between the typewriter and the computer. The latter allowed us to do things, especially, in our case, writing, editing, filing, etc. that was such a great advance that it would take a Luddite to reject the computer, even in the Nigerian context. How much time and frustration Fran and I might have saved if we had done my dissertation a decade later in the computer era!

Without going into details, Fran devoted almost half a letter in August 1982 to the subject of electricity. She said her work at home, whether cleaning, cooking or baking, was always “a race against the unknown,” for it would go off anytime and for any length of time. Though we missionaries at first balked at it as an unnecessary luxury, the Mission decided to supply both Jos compounds with large generators. As things became worse, we came around and accepted it as almost a necessity, certainly more urgent than a luxury!

Nigerians were also getting into generators more and more, but they were not always considerate about how the noise or exhaust would affect their neighbours. So, Colonel Walbe, our next-door neighbour, installed a huge one with the noise and exhaust aimed directly—and purposefully?—at our bedroom! I’ve written about him before. He was a millionaire who imported all his furniture from the US, while ours was made by local carpenters. As in our Zaria Road neighbourhood, so here at Mountain View, missionaries were definitely the “poor man on the block.”

Poor or not, that same month we joined the two-car family crowd by buying a used 1978 VW with brand new tires that was declared in perfect shape by our knowledgeable colleague Jerry Cremer, the housefather at our hostel. It made things so much easier for the both of us, since we no longer had to try to accommodate our very different and irregular schedules. As such things go, we soon wondered how we could have done without two cars for so long! Fran was happy she no longer had to walk to school, especially after she was given a split-shift schedule in September.

The other Lydia in our life, Kiliyobas’ wife and our part time house worker, was not available for work during the first week and a half of April 1982. Her little girl had measles. Fran wrote:

Nigerians will not treat any sickness without getting injections and medicines as much as possible. The “book” says that measles requires quiet bed rest, plenty of liquids, and avoid bright lights. But she has taken the baby to the clinic for *five*



*daily injections.* They also bought all kinds of pills and are rubbing all kinds of salve over her body.

This being Fran's Hillcrest spring break, she had planned for Lydia to do all kinds of cleaning after all that harmattan dust, but she would now have to do it herself. That would not be easy, since just the routine household affairs kept her going. Of course, the children were there to help, but.... For their reaction go to the next section.

You've heard nothing about our dog Hankali for a long time. The reason is that she was gone when we returned from home service. Kiliyobas was to take care of her but said she "disappeared." Could be, of course, but we suspected he had eaten it. People do eat dogs here, even though they pretend they don't. There seems to be a stigma attached to it. So we got a new one we simply called "Arfus," after his favourite vocabulary.

We celebrated our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on Saturday June 5 by going with others to a nice restaurant. Unfortunately, the next morning I was sick. It seemed like food poisoning, but no one else had that problem. I was supposed to preach at Unijos and got Lee Baas to pitch in for me. I asked Fran to find a doctor. So she went to St. Piran's and found one on the parking lot. *She bargained with him to come to our house for a gallon of gasoline!* It being a scarce item once again, he agreed and came. Whatever it was he gave me, by late afternoon I was all chipper again. In the meantime, Fran had called off her Sunday School to attend to me. The rumour went around that I was seriously ill and, true Nigerians as they were, quite a number of church members came by to greet in the afternoon, only to be welcomed by a healthy me! It's a part of Nigerian social life that I have always loved, even though it gets to be a bit much occasionally. I guess it once again proved Fran's point that "He's hardly ever sick and when he is, it's over in one or two days." Fran often complained about how long it would take her to get over "routine" sicknesses like colds, flu and malaria, while I always snapped out of mine within a day or so, usually without any help.

The end of the school year was always time for many farewells, some just for the summer break, some for "good," the more accurate term being "for worse." It seemed to hit Fran unusually hard in 1982. One reason was that the Weeks returned to the UK. We had shared so many special occasions with them, like birthdays and anniversaries as well as child sitting for each other, but also he would drop in at times for an occasional beer or a cigar, something that was strictly taboo in his Mission but that ours sort of unofficially tolerated; at least, would not send us home for! Another difference between Evangelicals and Reformed. Wise, responsible, occasional use without prohibition.

About these farewells, Fran wrote,

We just have to keep making new friends and remember to make newcomers feel at home. One tends not to get deeply involved in friendship because we always know people will "soon" leave again. Wiebe cried the other day, because he realized how many of his school friends would not be coming back to Hillcrest. I'm wondering how this will affect their ability to ever establish permanent relationships. At least,

they have a strong and permanent attachment to their own family and don't have to be in boarding.

Late November 1982, Fran developed severe and sustained headaches that definitely belong in these memoirs. She wrote,

I'm still having quite a bit of trouble with headaches. Some days I wake up with a headache and then it stays all day; other days are pretty good. I'm seeing a new doctor about it, a Dr. Pelleboer, who is from the Netherlands. He's prescribed stuff, but so far no improvement. He's also had me see his wife, a physiotherapist, for head massages; they feel nice when she does it, but don't give lasting relief either. Sometimes I get dizzy from the headaches and I feel as if there isn't enough blood circulation there or something, but my blood pressure is excellent every time I see the doctor. He says he still has other possible solutions, but if they don't work, then I'll have to see Glenn Verbrugge again. Glenn is way too busy, so we hesitate to see him unless it's really serious.

I've still been able to cope with my work at school and home and I'm not discouraged or depressed about it, so we keep hoping and praying for total healing. The family has been very understanding, so that's a big help!

By the time we returned home from a Cameroon Christmas campout described in the next section, Fran's headaches were considerably reduced. She concluded that the doctor's surmise of stress may have been correct and that a relaxing campout was all it took. She thought that perhaps she should learn to relax more. The challenge for her was that "I enjoy working so much, I sometimes find it hard to relax and sleep in!" Some might call this a "workaholic" complex. I reject that description of it. A workaholic is an unreflecting addict to work, whether meaningful or not. In her and my case it was a matter of serving the Lord joyfully. That is not an addiction; it's a calling. But if you're a secular person, you probably won't understand or appreciate that distinction, let alone its importance.

### *A Cameroon Adventure*

Our last family activity for 1982 was getting ready for and traveling to Cameroon for a Christmas camping vacation together with our Dutch-New Zealand friends, Willem and Henny Berends. We planned to travel in our Toyota bus, while the Berends had a home-made camper. Like us, they also had three children.

It was an eventful fun-filled vacation. There were three different Cameroonian customs/immigration stations, two at the border, the third some 80 kilometers inland along a narrow road the likes of which I had never seen. Many trucks travel along this road and in the rainy season they push the mud up higher than the height of the trucks themselves. This process is aided by villagers who make a living digging out trucks. During the dry season, the ruts turn into hard mud walls also higher than the trucks. Here and there it was possible to get off the road to either park or enable us and oncoming traffic to pass each

other. Fortunately, there really was little day traffic, only night traffic, so that we could proceed without serious hindrance, though ever so slowly. It took us some three hours to negotiate our way through the ruts.



**In the Ruts\***

Upon arrival at the inland customs office, it was already closed for the day. Willem knew a Catholic priest he had met in Nigeria and who had invited him to stay at his place if he ever came through the area. After making some enquiries, we found the place, but the priest was nowhere to be found. So, we got the reluctant permission of his steward to set up camp in the priest's meadow. When the priest came home and saw us, he was angry at the liberty we had taken and hardly acknowledged his earlier invitation. He came very close to evicting us, but Willem's calm but persistent negotiations saved the night.

The very first morning of our trip we became aware of differences in our family cultures. While we were up and at it around 6 am and eager to get going to take advantage of the coolness of the morning, the Berends stayed in bed till around ten o'clock! That difference prevailed throughout the trip, early and late risers. It made it difficult for us, since we were not exactly a subdued bunch! We tried to make the best of it. After a late joint breakfast, we headed for the third Customs office and soon got our clearance to proceed. So far the journey had been quite different from what we had understood from the Berends, who had done it before. We were wondering what else we were getting into!

As we traveled on, we soon found two delightful Cameroon treats: French bread and the juiciest of pineapples. These became major staples for us throughout the journey. After the worst of soft white bread available in Nigeria, this bread was simply scrumptious. Eventually we arrived at our destination at 6 pm, a great beach in a bay on the shores of

the Atlantic Ocean, near the city of Victoria. The kids immediately headed for the water and, except for an excursion during the week, hardly left the water. During the week it was sparsely populated, but over the weekend it filled up with people and tents, mostly Caucasians. Though in the northern “winter,” the tropical weather was warm along with the water.

We spent an awesome week at this place, though not without some incidents. Every night we had guests in our tent—crabs, dozens of them. We could not keep them out no matter how hard we tried. They would even get into our shoes. We hung our clothes on the tent poles. They seemed to be harmless, but it was not a nice experience, and that night after night. The Berends were free from this invasion since they were off the ground in their camper. We also had another guest—a thief. While we were sitting in front of our tent one evening, having communal devotions and singing heartily, a thief cut into the back of our tent and stole our camera.

One day we decided to take a trip to Douala for some sightseeing. We all crowded into our bus and made our way. Once in the city, we parked to find our bearings. As it goes in Africa, soon people crowded around us offering their wares and their services as guides. When they noticed we were not interested in their services, one of them took out a sharp knife, slit two of the car tires and ran off. Willem and I tried to chase him, all the while yelling, “Thief! Thief!” People saw what had happened, but no one gave us a hand—or is it “foot?”—in the chase. They just stood there gaping. I believe they actually enjoyed the scene. It did not give us a safe feeling, so we soon got out of there, since the gash in the tires was only superficial and did not prevent us from getting away. We stopped at some shops at a distance from this attack and found it an interesting city, very French with everything available in the stores but at very high prices, but Cameroonians filled up their grocery carts like North Americans. We did stock up on Cameroonian chocolate, for it was of very good quality and inexpensive.

Our campout covered Christmas and New Year. That was an aspect of our trip Fran and I did not like, namely to totally ignore the community Christmas celebrations. It seemed so empty and spirit-depressing. To the Berends it was a “home” Christmas, since “down under,” Christmas is celebrated in the summer and, for outdoors people like them, outdoors, not in church or concerts. We did not ignore Christmas celebrations altogether. There were a few other missionaries from Jos at the campsite as well and one evening we enjoyed a Christmas hymn sing all together.

The experience led us to reflect on the influence of culture and climate on Christian celebrations. Christmas originated in the northern hemisphere and was meant to replace a pagan winter solstice celebration. People down under were too legalistic when they took the northern Christmas with them. They might have moved it to *their* mid-winter, but then, people nominated by UK judges were not likely to give much thought to such issues! Besides, come to think of it, what’s wrong with a summer Christmas celebration? Nothing, except that summer is usually full enough with diversions. It’s the long winter that calls for serious celebration more than summer.

The return trip was fortunately uneventful except for one amazing experience. By the time we neared the Nigerian border, night had fallen and the border station was “closed”—officially. So we parked a kilometer or so before the border and spent the night. The road was heavy with trucks loaded with every kind of goods you can imagine going into Nigeria. Border closed? This was the real business time. Every one of these trucks paid a hefty bribe to Nigerian officials who would then open for them. We tried to count the trucks, but soon lost count. It was almost like a parade and all of it one way into Nigeria. We began to understand the many Nigerian media reports of widespread smuggling. This was beyond all reasonable bounds. Total corruption and total betrayal of the country’s trust in them.

We were happy to get back into Nigeria the next morning without further incidents. The children even more so than the adults. The reason? They were so glad to see that awful Nigerian white bread, “normal” bread to them, and eagerly devoured it to their hearts’ content! To us parents that seemed almost sacrilegious. We arrived home late that evening tired from the day’s journey but refreshed from the week’s campout.

### *Jos Life Continued*

Early February 1983, we enjoyed a lengthy visit by Dr. Gerald Anderson, a Methodist theologian in charge of the Overseas Ministries Study Centre, at that time located in New Jersey, but today in New Haven, CT. He was also editor of the prominent missiological journal *International Bulletin of Mission Studies*. He had already printed a notice of my dissertation in his journal and planned to publish a full scholarly review later in the year. A lot of reviews had appeared in European journals and magazines, but so far few in North America, Eugene Rubingh’s being an exception. One evening during this visit I invited Dr. Yusufu Turaki, the JETS Principal and graduate from Boston University, who, like me, had written a dissertation about colonialism, his concentrating on its history among his own people in Kaduna State. Mrs. Turaki came along as well. She was a trained veterinarian, a highly unusual career for a woman in Nigeria.

During that same week, a camper drove into our yard with a Dutch license plate. We recognized the couple from our Cameroon adventure. We had invited them to drop in on us in Jos and so they did. They had been on the road for four and a half months and were so pleased to have a few home-cooked meals and to interact with children. She spent a morning in the kitchen with Fran baking bread. They stayed a few days, including the weekend and witnessed all the traffic and visitors we attracted. It was one of these non-stop weekends. They sat around our table together with Anderson, an American, and all kinds of others—Nigerians, a Britisher, another Dutchman, a couple of Indians, a Chinese, some adult friends of ours; some friends of our children. The Dutch campers said they assumed that missionaries and their families lived very narrow and isolated lives. They could not believe what they saw! Another anti-missionary prejudice down the drain! Aw, you poor missionary despisers!

Of course, if you have been reading our Nigeria chapters so far, you will know that that weekend was nothing unusual. It seems like we seldom had a day without some visitors

around our table. And you'd think that sometimes we might get tired of so many people around us, but not my dear Fran; she was the ultimate in incorrigible hosting. However, one fine April 1983 day, she took the kids to a swimming pool, for the kids to swim and for her to "relax"—an exact quotation. She wrote, "There are always so many people there to talk to, so it's a nice way to spend an hour relaxing."

We spent most of our 1983 Easter holidays on the road. We started in Wukari and then, via various mission centres, ended up in the Yankari Game Reserve you've heard about before, from where we returned home. We decided we would never again do an Easter holiday in Wukari, for it is usually in the middle of the muggy season and so hot in Wukari, you hardly know where to crawl. The same was true for Yankari. We felt greatly relieved at being back in the cooler climate of Jos.

The most enjoyable part of that whole Wukari-Yankari trip was visiting old friends and students in the Wukari area. Fran's report went as follows:

Lots of the church workers out that way were our students or house helpers during our first years in Nigeria. It's very encouraging to see some of them and the work they are now involved in and to realize we might have had some small influence in their lives. Others have really disappointed us; one student who was at the top of his class now has a dreadful drinking problem and another one has left his wife, etc. etc. Same as all over the world. But it still hurts when you know how great their potential was for the Lord's service.

Just before the next school year in July 1983, we spent a few days at Yankari again, this time staying in a chalet instead of a tent. We had another one of these baboon experiences. As Fran told the story,

The baboons are getting more aggressive all the time. One walked straight into our chalet and took a sniff at our soap powder and silverware bag. I guess he figured that wasn't worth it. I was cooking food and held the pan above my head, while John chased him out. I had called John, but he first thought I was kidding and was calling one of the children a "baboon." Just before he left, the baboon grabbed a whole bag full of bread right out of my hands! We watched him bite through the plastic to try to get to the bread inside.

You've not read much about Arfus, the dog we got almost a year ago. We all liked Arfus, but the kids were so busy with their own affairs that they had little time left for him. Fran had planted geraniums and carefully nurtured them with recycled water. They looked beautiful and she was proud of them. Then one day April 1983 she found them broken and flattened out. She reacted angrily and thought it was all the kids on our compound with their soccer ball or our own kids carelessly dropping their bikes on them. It turned out to be Arfus cavorting with neighbourhood dogs. Fran intended to really beat them next time she'd see them near the flowers again and planned to replant in the approaching rainy season. I remember those geraniums, so absolutely gorgeous with their red against the

background of white walls with everything else dry-season brown and dreary. They were up and blooming again the next dry season.

Speaking of plants, you remember our extensive yard with a large unkempt area of tall grasses in which the kids used to play and hide and “build.” A close friend of mine in charge of COCIN’s rural development programme, Joseph Jibi, introduced me to a remarkable tree popularly called the “miracle tree.” It would grow quickly and almost anywhere. Even in the dry season it would need little water except the first year. Its leaves and branches were nutritious food for various animals, including rabbits. And they would re-grow very quickly after being stripped. So I planted a row of them for experimentation with the thought that perhaps one day we would get back into rabbits. The only thing that had kept us from it so far was our open compound, only some skimpy wires separating us from a very busy road with cars, bikes, motorcycles and pedestrians. A similar situation had obtained on Zaria Road. It would have been too easy for people to steal them at night.

Perhaps it’s time once again for a Fran Saturday description. This time it’s about November 5, 1983:

I had a busy day. We went to the meat market and bought another pig head, for we were out of lunch meat and still have some weeks before home service. It’s always a big job, but nice to have the meat packaged in the freezer. We can be generous with it this time in order to use it up before we leave. I also did some liver and made a batch of quark and some guava sauce. I don’t spend much time in the kitchen every day, but Saturdays I have to make up for it, I guess. I always do potato chips, something that takes more than an hour. And doughnuts frequently as well. It takes time to keep the tins filled with baked goods and snacks. They get emptied quickly in the children’s lunches!

### *The Beginning of Family Technology*

In October 1982, I joined an elementary computer class at Hillcrest taught by Corny Korhorn of whom you’ve heard before. Imagine a 44-year old Ph.D. of reasonable intelligence sitting in a Middle School desk taking an elementary computer course. Well, I wanted to get some sort of feeling what computers were all about if they were going to be part of our future.

Prior to taking this step, Fran and I had been discussing the issue. I am not a Luddite philosophically but I *am* a technophobe in practice: Few things I try my hand at work. So, should we get involved in computers, knowing that learning it would cause me endless pain and frustration? On the other hand, as a writer should I consign myself to the technical level of the middle ages? We decided to go for it, come what may, and to bite the apple, an expression that unknowingly turned out to be a pun. I knew nothing about the “Apple” or any other brand. When during the next furlough we saw large billboards featuring a big apple with a bite taken out, it took us some time before we learned this was promoting the Apple computer. Learning about computing was indeed a genuine and bitter pain for me,

but I persisted and am glad I did. It changed my life totally in that the later life of almost full time writing became so much easier, efficient and more pleasant for me. Today, I cannot imagine what life would have been for us, had we surrendered to the technophobe in me.

Through the help of a British engineer, Mr. Nowson, we ordered a computer from the UK, an Osborne with a 6-inch screen, the first portable computer in the industry weighing some 22 lbs. We eagerly awaited its arrival. Our order included a “side screen,” whatever that was, and a printer for the total grand price of \$3,000! It was supposed to have arrived in November, but that became January. Kevin was very excited and had already many plans to use it for his homework. We expected it to take us much time to learn how to operate it. Kevin and I both spent every spare moment we had to figure it all out. The irregular delivery of power was not helpful in this respect. I would sometimes get up in the middle of the night, work on the computer for a few hours and go back to bed. That may sound outlandish, but that was already my style for writing purposes, partially due, I suspect, to latent sleep apnea that later got a full hold of me.

The computer gave us constant troubles. We first assumed it was us rather than the computer. By mid-March we concluded it was the computer, not us. That was little comfort, for *we* could be corrected in Jos, but a broken computer had to be taken back to the UK from where we got it. Nowson, who had purchased it for us in the UK, offered to take it back there for repairs. Fran wrote, “We’ve always been hesitant with respect to complicated technology. I feel that the computer is way beyond us, but seeing it definitely is the wave of the future, John felt its time had come. Maybe in a few more years they’ll be able to simplify them and have the bugs sorted out.”

It was around this time that I had to eat my words about the Mission’s electric typewriter mentioned earlier in this chapter. It took Fran to remind me of it! However, I insist that the profound difference between a typewriter and computer warranted our decision!

At the beginning of the 1983 school year, Kevin had become desperate for the computer to return. He had really hoped to work on it a lot during the holidays, but it was not to be. A friend offered that Kevin could come to his house to use his computer. That was very kind, but it was not quite the same.

The computer was finally returned to us end August. Nowson checked it out for a whole week to make sure it was in good shape. He delivered it to us and showed me everything I needed to know to begin with and it worked as it should. Nowson went home and Kevin booted up the machine, only to find that one of the two hard drives was not working! Nowson promised to check it out again. We were all disappointed but not ready to give up—yet. Kevin was able to “do quite a few things” with the one working drive. Our initiation into the new world of computers was a bumpy one, to say the least. It was more than nine months since we first ordered it and paid for it and we still were not able to use it to the full. Early September the computer was up and working. We considered ourselves very fortunate to have such a computer expert as a friend.



### *The Children Together*

The children all started school again on September 9, 1981. Cynthia and Wiebe were very happy with their new teachers. Kevin was trying to adjust to the Middle School system that involved many teachers. He had a hard time initially even figuring out who his home room teacher was!

Our three months absence and our move led to Kiliyobas starting to work as a gardener at the State Secretariat, while he worked for us only on Saturdays. His wife, Lydia, worked for us several hours a week. The rest of the work was shared by the family. The children all made their own beds and cleaned their own room while also responsible for doing dishes. The arrangement was working out fine. A week later, the children were all pretty busy; Kevin with his school work, sports, piano and jobs around the house; Cynthia and Wiebe were doing better in their share of the work, not always willingly, but they were improving. We kept adjusting Kiliyobas' and Lydia's schedules as well as that of the kids to suit our changing circumstances so that by early November Fran felt that "help wise we were quite fortunate. We didn't want anyone full time anymore and now the children are getting much better with daily jobs." Fran wrote, "We keep reminding them that when they are grown up, they will be so grateful that they learned to work when they were little. They don't understand or appreciate that line of reasoning at this point."

The kids were enjoying life at Mountain View; it wasn't all work for them. There was a hostel with nineteen kids to play with, many of them in Grades 1-3. Sometimes a hostel kid would stay overnight at our house in the hope that one of ours would be invited overnight in the hostel. They still had some Nigerian friends from "the outside" as well.

A couple of times their soccer friends from Zaria Road came *en masse* to play ball. They walked six kilometers one way! Our kids took them to the large grass triangle just in front of the hostel. It was hostel area, not residential. Uncle Jerry, the housefather, a good friend and a very kind and sympathetic man, allowed it to happen the first time without comments. When they came a second time, he allowed them to finish, but then made it clear to us that this could not continue, for it interfered too much with the play of the hostel kids. It was very hard for him to say this to us, for we might have taken this as a form of racism. After all, there were no rules in the hostel book that prevented residential kids to bring their friends to play or to restrict their number! We recognized the awkwardness of the situation and promised it would not happen again, though we regretted this development. It meant their relationship with a more spontaneous and indigenous part of Nigerian society was largely broken, as were friendships. But, yes, a hostel is not a public place. For better or for worse, we were now living in a more cocooned world.

Remember the unkempt part of our own large yard? It did not take long for us to recognize its value to children. They started playing in the large plot of tall grass. It was so much fun that we abandoned all thoughts of either cutting or burning it down. They were building forts with sticks, tall grasses, stones and mud and were having the greatest time. So, we left well enough alone for the time being.

Hillcrest organized a 1981 Halloween Costume parade in which Cynthia posed as a Dutch girl and Wiebe a fireman. Kevin, of course, was too big for such “nonsense.” The children were also taken out for trick and treating. Fran wrote, “Now that we live more in a missionary community, our children are much more part of that, for good or for ill.”

Cynthia was chosen to play the role of an angel in the St. Piran’s Christmas play. Whenever she had to practice her role, the boys poked fun of her that she had to *practice* being an angel! At school she was also given a lead role in a Christmas play: She was the Raggedy Anne doll in a play called “Super Gift from Heaven.” Wiebe felt kind of jealous that Cynthia was chosen for such roles more often than he was. But then Cynthia volunteered for everything and was so expressive and therefore was chosen for such roles. Wiebe was still a bit more shy and not noticed quite as easily by others.

Our Sunday afternoon activities varied, at least, when I was not traveling. Sometimes we would do “driver’s training” on a large vacant field near Liberty Dam, when everybody would get a turn at the wheel at age-appropriate levels. They always thought this was great. At other times we might go hiking or climbing in the hills around Jos, another favourite. On Opa Wiebe’s December 1981 birthday we found a very interesting place that looked like a cave among all the strange rock formations for which Jos is justly famous. “Kevin is like a mountain goat; he jumps up and down anywhere and then asks if ‘granny’ needs his help!” Remember how he and I got stuck a couple of years ago on these rocks? By now he did not easily get stuck anymore.

During the 1982 summer break we worked hard on keeping the children occupied. Kevin had some outside jobs you can read about in his own section below. At home, he had to keep up the lawn—or is “keep down” more appropriate?—, keep the car clean and hang laundry. He also spent about 30 minutes a day on typing and piano playing. So, plenty of things for him to do. Within a few weeks he was up to 33 words per minute. He and we were very satisfied with his progress. On Wiebe’s eighth birthday we gave him and Cynthia each a rug-hooking kit featuring some Sesame Street characters. They soon finished six rows each. It looked like this project would keep them creatively occupied for a while. We also gave them a baking set, so that this one day found Fran and Wiebe baking brownies together. Results were a delicious treat!

There had been considerable correspondence between Fran and sister Jane for various items the kids wanted. One of these items was stickers. End September a new supply arrived, which made the children very happy indeed. They spent most of their allowance buying albums in which to paste the stickers and show them off to their friends. It was one of these fads that work their way through elementary school kid culture.

Then Ruud Dekker, a Dutch friend of ours working for CHAN, came back from a trip to The Netherlands with a Dutch *poesie* album, the type that Fran received when she left The Netherlands as a child. Now the children had a *real* album for their stickers. We bought special stickers for the page reserved for parents and Fran wrote a poem for it. Now they were really happy with Jane’s stickers and proudly showed their new album off to their

friends. Perhaps a fad, but early into 1983 it was still going full force. The kids were extremely happy with another batch from Auntie Jane, for now they had loads to trade again, since Jane had sent quite a few duplicates.

In February 1983, I wrote our annual “New Year” circular in which I summarized our situation both family and work wise. Here’s the family paragraph:

The children continue to do well in school, very well. Kevin is sitting two feet away from me exploring the Osborne computer we just acquired, enjoying it very much, while Fran experienced for the first time last night the lot of a “computer widow.” That computer will help us a great deal in our research/writing projects – at least, so we hope! Cynthia wants you to know she’s in Grade 4 and enjoying it. She also is interested in our new gadget, she says. Wiebe is still our bookworm. He tells you that he has read about 50 novels! He also likes to draw and is good at it. Lydia is happily married to Chris, an evangelist for Campus Crusade and seminary student. Their son Jude is now walking and we, his “grandparents,” are very proud of him.

Toward the end of March, the children came home with their grades again. Doesn’t it seem like that was a weekly occurrence? Actually, it was only every six weeks. Kevin had mostly As with three Bs; Wiebe had all As; Cynthia pulled up her math grades from D & C to C & C+. She had hoped for a B- this time. We knew she had worked hard and was improving, so we were satisfied. The rest of her grades were As & Bs with an A+ for Oral Expression. That A+ did not surprise anyone.

Award celebrations became part of our parenting style. We had tried several times to take the children out to eat, but they often acted so competitively and noisily that even for us it sometimes became embarrassing. So we decided on a special treat, namely to take them out individually. I took Kevin to the Chinese restaurant at Hill Station, where we both had a good time just with the two of us. It was now Wiebe’s turn to choose when and where, but Cynthia still had some work to do before her turn. For details go to the Cynthia section below.

Shortly after, in April of 1983, a girl named Shirya came to stay with us. We knew her when she was a little girl at Wukari. Her parents were then our students at the CLTC. She was a friend of Lydia and we even have a picture of her at Kevin’s third birthday party. Shirya’s father was killed in a motorbike accident two years ago. In a letter,

She is half way through a secretarial course here in Jos and, for some reason, couldn’t stay any longer with the family where she had been living. When we were in Wukari together at Easter time, we heard of her problem and discussed it together. The overwhelming majority (I was the only one not 100% sure!) was in favor of taking her in till our home service time. Cynthia just loves having a big sister to share a room with again. Wiebe has now moved in the room with Kevin.

Shirya is a very nice girl and is adjusting very well. She is really alert and extremely helpful around the house. I am going to give her some extra typing instructions and

hope to work at her English too. So far she speaks only Hausa to John and me, but the kids joke with her in English.

In October, we came to the sad conclusion that Shirya was a “lost cause” academically speaking. In her *third* year of commercial school, she still could not type up to 15 words per minute. That was half of my speed after nearly *one* year of typing class in High School, and I was almost the slowest in the class! In addition, her English reading was “extremely poor.” Fran wrote, “I don’t see how she can understand anything she’s reading. We thought we were helping her widowed mother to get her oldest daughter a good job somewhere, but we really can’t recommend her now.” Too bad. We gave her so much opportunity, but she wasted it.

All three children kept up their musical involvement. In May, Kevin was preparing two pieces very conscientiously for a recital. Cynthia was continuing her guitar practice and was hoping to get some lessons from my siblings when she would be in Vancouver later in the year. After only two months of lessons, Wiebe did not enjoy his piano lessons with Carolyn Baas. Fran thought it was “because he didn’t realize it would take effort and so far everything has come to him without effort.”

Beginning of the new school year in August 1983, all three children walked home from school, since we lived so close. This left them free to stay at school for various activities. Fran wrote, “I’m afraid of their crossing the busy road, but John keeps reminding me that we have to let them go and grow. I know they are very careful, but I still worry. I tell them they have to stay together, so that if something happens, one of them can report.”

When Fran and I attended the Ishaya ordination in Wukari in September (see Chapter 21), we left Kevin at home. Cynthia was staying with a Lebanese friend, but she got homesick and returned home on Sunday before we returned. Wiebe stayed at the Yisas again, but was also eager to see us back. The next two days were national Muslim holidays. So, Brenton Seinen invited Wiebe to stay with him at the hostel, but Wiebe declined because he wanted to be with his parents after a two-day separation. “So,” wrote Fran, “I guess the kids do still miss us a bit.” It indicated, I believe, that we were doing something right!

In October, Fran reported that

things are going well at school for me and all three kids. Kevin did well on his first report card in high school but he got a C in PE, which he thinks is unfair. Their grade depends on how fast they can run, how well they can shoot baskets, etc. It seems that quite a few kids who get all A’s otherwise, have gotten C’s and D’s in PE. Cynthia had all A’s and B’s and just one C in Social Studies. She’s not very happy in school this year, so we’re glad she still had a good report card. Wiebe gets A’s in everything without even trying. His handwriting is beautiful too, something that is always Kevin’s low mark.

You know by now that much of our story is taken from our letters to our parents, whom we asked to save the letters for future use such as these memoirs. It is better to say “Fran’s

letters,” for she wrote by far the bulk of them, something like 95% at certain times. Often the children forced her to choose between writing letters to parents or playing games with them. Sometimes she’d choose the one and then the other, depending on the situation. She wrote, “Maybe I’ll pass on some discipline to them with regard to writing us when they are grown up and out of the house!”

Looking at this issue from the perspective of 2013, the times are different and communication has changed dramatically. Lengthy letters by mail are definitely out. All kinds of other means have been devised for much quicker communication, but has the volume and quality of communication between the children and parents improved? The full answer would be both “yes” and “no.” They definitely will not have a large collection of letters they wrote to us from which they can recall their stories. The age for that is past. They may well come to regret that.

### *The Children Individually*

#### *Lydia and Chris*

Lydia and Chris had their baby on October 4, 1981. Time: 9 pm; name: Jude. We were now grandparents “by proxy” and before age 40 as Fran had predicted earlier. Lydia went home after only twelve hours in the hospital. We visited them several times and everything seemed to be fine. But then we met Chris at a grocery store looking for medicine for Jude’s stomach ache. Fran warned him not to give such a tiny baby too much medicine, for she had long ago observed that Nigerians seemed to feel that, if a little is good, a lot ought to be better! Remember her comments about our worker Lydia. Cynthia and Wiebe were so proud of little Jude and enjoyed holding him. Even Kevin enjoyed talking to Jude and cuddling him. So we kept in regular touch with each other by visits back and forth.

Just before Christmas 1981, they stopped by on their way for a three-week visit to both Nyankwala and Chris’ village near Takum. Baby Jude was growing nicely by this time. Fran wrote, “This will be Lydia’s first visit to Chris’ village; most of his relatives she had never yet met. Even if they didn’t like her, they would accept her because she has borne them a son. Not that she was worried they wouldn’t accept her.”

We spent an April afternoon at Lydia’s house. Fran wrote:

Little Jude is really growing nicely; he’s beginning to enjoy picture books and calls everything a “ball.” He is still happy most of the time; so Lydia is lucky to have an easy son! We were just reminding each other that when Wiebe was born, Lydia was almost 14, same age as Kevin is now. When I was in the hospital for five days, Lydia took care of Kevin (5) and Cynthia (11 months). She changed diapers, bathed Cynthia, kept the guest house room clean and cooked food. John was around, but he said Lydia was grown up enough to manage very well. Kevin said he wouldn’t like to have to do any such thing! When it comes to academic things, Kevin is much

more grown up than Lydia ever was during her school days. Each one has his/her own strengths, eh!

It was such a nice experience for us to have Lydia, Chris and Jude living close by, to visit in their home or host them in ours. Cynthia would occasionally stay with them for a day or so. In general, we enjoyed fellowship with each other as any healthy family would. A half year later, Fran wrote we were seeing quite a lot of each other and that Jude was such a “healthy and happy little guy, really different from Kevin at that stage as Lydia and we all remember so well.”

Lydia’s sister, Rhoda, wrote that she would like to spend part of her school holidays with us. Cynthia looked forward to having another “sister” around for a while. The kids assumed she was a good cook like Lydia. Regardless, she was welcome. Well, she came, but she wasn’t anything like Lydia. She hardly talked, not even when Lydia was around. She said she wanted to learn English. So Fran told her that she should respond to conversations with more than a “yes” or a “no.” At her school she was recognized as a leader, but at our house she showed no signs of that. Perhaps extra shy around us?

By 1983, Chris had entered JETS, the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, and was getting excellent grades. Lydia was working at getting her full high school accreditation. Though she had completed secondary school, the system required students to pass an additional national examination for the General Certificate of Education. This was required for university admission. It was a slow process with little Jude around.

Jude had become such a healthy and delightful little fellow. He was walking for some time and getting into everything. Lydia’s cousin was helping her with Jude in the afternoon. Fran wrote that Cynthia could have had the honour, but we weren’t ready to let her go. Besides, it would be too far from Hillcrest. It would have been a nice reciprocal arrangement, since Lydia had frequently taken care of Cynthia and even carried her on her back.

In July 1983 Lydia got her driver’s license. It was a natural step, since they had gotten themselves a Volkswagen while Chris was a seminary student. That was quite an achievement. For a while she was a bit hesitant and picked her driving time carefully. We were happy about it, for it enabled her to visit us more freely.

### *Kevin*

Remember, we are back to the time we returned from our last home service in September, 1981. Back at Hillcrest, Kevin soon started feeling quite sorry for himself because of the volume of homework. He had had it too easy during the three months of home service and now needed to get used to hard discipline again.

He continued his piano studies with Katy Weeks as his teacher. We let him choose between piano and choir and he felt choir was the worst of two evils. When he put his mind to it, he

played well. He was starting to pick out melodies on the piano that he learned elsewhere, but it was really too much effort to practice seriously. But he was very conscientious in general, so that we were pleased with his over-all progress. At the end of the first report period, Kevin once again got all As and one B and then...a C for his industrial arts work, not for handwriting this time. “That sort of hurt his pride, but that may well be good for him once in a while,” according to Fran’s professional wisdom. I remember my own struggles in that subject and am not sure whether I had even that good a grade.

He was now in grade 7. By early February he started to worry about his first ever set of exams. He and Happy Bagga would study together an hour after school every day. He was also facing another recital, one piece of his own and one together with Happy on his violin. These events no longer made him nervous; he had gotten used to them. Fran wrote she was probably more nervous than Kevin was.

Things started to improve for Kevin. His report card for the first semester in Grade 7 showed an A- for his practical work in Industrial Arts and a straight A for the written part. He was overjoyed and could hardly believe it. Fran wrote that those two As meant more to him than all others combined! We marked the occasion with a small celebration.

He was still involved in after-school sports and thus could not ride home with the other kids in the hostel bus. So he rode his bike. We shuddered at the thought of him on his bike in the chaotic traffic between school and home, but we had decided we needed to give him his freedom. We had rejected the hyper-parenting model, but when I think of that chaos *today*, then I do wonder whether ours was the right decision. To walk it was dangerous enough, but on a bike?! I had the same question, you may remember, when we lived on Zaria Road.

He became a bit unhappy at school during 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s a lengthy story involving a fundamentalist dispensationalist teacher from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)—be alert and distinguish it carefully from our own SUM or the Sudan *United* Mission. She had surrounded the entire class room wall with dispensationalist time charts. Here’s how Fran told the story

He has one teacher for two hours every day who really “preaches” more than teaches. She is 67 years old and this job is really too much for her to handle. She has told people that she sees every subject as an “excuse” for evangelizing the children. Instead of a five minute devotional in the morning, the kids say that she preaches for 30 and then they have no time for their work. Also she’s very “hellfire” when it comes to other beliefs, including Catholics; many of the children are being really turned off. Kevin tries in his own way to witness to his Moslem, Hindu and Sikh friends, but now he’s at a loss, because he can’t stand the approach of this lady. We are concerned because he is normally a good kid, but he is really misbehaving in her class now and many of the children are really mocking Christianity. Pray with us for a solution to this delicate situation. We’ve tried by talking to the principal and the teacher and have told Kevin to relax because she will only be here this year. But to a child “only this school year” is a long time!

As Reformed missionaries, we found this heavy emphasis on fundamentalism unacceptable, but so did some Roman Catholics. The situation made such a long-lasting impression on some students that in 2012, when Tunde Hughes, a classmate and friend of Kevin, visited us in Vancouver, that was one of the memories he shared with us. Tunde was brought up a Catholic and this lady constantly engaged in Catholic bashing.

During the spring break 1982, Kevin and Tunde planned a lot of biking adventures. As Fran described it, we all worried about them, “but have to let them grow up, right?” They took the Liberty Dam route, kind of a circular route around the city, a trip of nineteen kilometers between our houses. Both of them had good bikes and enjoyed the ride. They could shorten the trip to twelve kilometers by going through downtown, but that would be very busy, while they enjoyed the calmer but longer ride. We would agree on a time of arrival, but if they did not make it on time, we would go looking for them. Remember, no cell phones yet.

Early May, Kevin did another recital and did it well as usual. Fran wrote, “Sometimes he tries to talk us into letting him quit lessons, but I think he really doesn’t mind too much. There are some good male pianists in this community, which is an encouragement to the boys.”

It was hard for missionary kids to find paying jobs during their summer holidays in Jos, but in 1982 Kevin landed himself a couple. Someone asked him to feed their cat for a month and someone else their dog for a week. Since they were located outside of Mountain View, he was grateful for his bike. A Chinese restaurant owner hired him to tutor his daughter an hour every morning at our house. She was ten years old but was reading at only second grade level. When Kevin and Fran went to make arrangements with the man, he invited them to stay for dinner at his restaurant. At \$15 for the cheapest lunch, it was an expensive place, where we seldom went. Fran wrote, “Kevin has some reading and workbooks to use with her and he’s now trying to think of some questions to ask her about the stories she’ll read later this week.” He was taking his responsibilities seriously by preparing well. Of course, he had a perfect role model in one of his Middle School teachers!

Around this time, Kevin and I began to develop some common interests. As I wrote in the companion chapter, I was preparing to write a small book on investments and found that Kevin was very good at “systematizing and organizing” data cards for me. Both of us also developed interest in computers that were being introduced into Nigeria, especially in relation to that organizing of data. You’ve already read about the entry of computers into our lives.

Kevin was growing up and we recognized it. So, when he did not want to attend the Mission’s annual conference in Miango, we allowed him to stay at home by himself, to “batch” it for the weekend. He did enjoy this first batching experience, except that he burnt his food when he forgot to put oil in the pan. He had planned to clean house before our return, but we returned early. Things looked good. He had passed his first batching



test! So when Fran and I were in Wukari for the weekend of June 4, Kevin was allowed to stay home alone. He had gained our confidence.

Another sign of his growing up was that he was losing his attitude of innocence and spontaneity towards life: He referred to going back to school in September as “going back to bondage.” He was even slacking off with his running, no longer enjoying it. However, he was not ready to give up, for he had never given up on anything. It was beneath his dignity to quit! He therefore signed up for the lowest limit to qualify, namely 400 kilometers. He had big plans for doing 50k one weekend in October, but decided to sleep in instead.

Mid-March Fran wrote about him:

Kevin said this morning he wished for two or three more hours per day. He has a fair amount of homework. Sometimes he’s a bit disorganized, while he’s also a perfectionist, so it takes him longer to finish his homework than it really should. He’s been staying after school almost every day for some sports. He’s into both basketball and softball right now. He also likes to play tennis and he’s still taking piano lessons. So, he has lots of things to keep him busy!

He was on the softball team and really enjoying it. Though doing better than the previous year, Fran commented that he was no Glashouwer, referring to his Glashouwer cousins nor, if I may add my own, was he like the kids of Henry and Idamae Prins, another set of cousins who were still on church softball teams even into their forties.

You may remember that Kevin was enjoying woodworking in Industrial Arts and getting good grades for it recently. He had made us a key house in the shape of a birdhouse with hooks for keys. We used it for many years. “He was beginning to make such nice things,” Fran wrote. Unfortunately, it was for only one semester, after which he would have to do Art, a course he never enjoyed as much. He hoped to take more woodworking courses in high school. We were glad he was interested in this kind of skill in addition to the more academic subjects. That was the Prins in him, for he certainly did not pick that up from me!

I believe I’ve told you about our precious canned bacon that we would import and reserve for special Sunday breakfasts—bacon and eggs. We all loved it and considered it special, very special. One 1983 April weekend, when Kevin was staying over at the Hughes, he rode his bike the full nineteen kilometers to our house, just so he would not miss out on that breakfast!

As said before, summer breaks in Jos for kids Kevin’s age can be kind of boring. It is often difficult to find ways to occupy them constructively, let alone earn a little money. During the 1983 summer holiday, Kevin was offered an “apprenticeship” with Barry Unema, a young man who had come to volunteer for R&M work on our Jos buildings. Since Kevin had done well in woodworking at school, we all thought he might do well in this job. Fran also expressed a slight hope that perhaps Kevin could become our own R&M person, since

I never did anything along that line. He said he enjoyed the work, but one day he needed a day off to have some fun. However, when we talked about this “apprenticeship” in 2012, he said he had botched it badly by putting in doors wrongly and by never cutting any wood straight. I don’t know which is more reliable here: a mother’s report on the spot or a personal memory almost 30 years later. At the end of the holiday, Fran wrote that Kevin had enough jobs to keep him occupied and that he was pleased with the money he had earned. He was excited about starting high school in August, but said he would miss the income. He actually suggested that we pay him for going to school! Well, he did eventually get an MBA, but at his own expense. He had had this entrepreneurial spirit in his soul all along!

Kevin enjoyed his first semester of high school very much, partially because he had little or no homework. He had a daily study hall during which he was able to do most of it. He was also still taking piano lessons. Long-range plans for the next year included his teaching a second year piano student and taking organ. According to Fran, he was looking forward to that challenge. He joined the newspaper staff and was soon working on his first article. He was taking Mechanical Drawing and Career Guidance, neither of which were academic in nature and which did not require much homework. He would stay after school for either sports or shop.

He was also into earning money and saving up for the coming home service. He sometimes would go along with me to a meeting, where he would sell books and earn a commission. He was also tutoring two boys for pay and then he had paying jobs from us. “He’s been able to save a fair amount for a 14-year old. He thinks it through before he spends so he will have some cash on hand for furlough right away.”

The issue of driving came up for Kevin when he was only 14 (1983). The parents of some of his Hillcrest friends from other countries allowed them to drive on the road when they were that age and Kevin did not understand why we didn’t allow him. Some missionary kids were allowed to drive at 16, but we had told Kevin he would have to wait till 18! The reason was simple: that was and still is the law in Nigeria. The parents of those 14-year drivers came from countries where people have little respect for the law. The parents of the 16-year old drivers were mostly Americans in whose home country kids may drive at 16, so why not in Nigeria? Again, the answer is still the same. Driving before 18 in Nigeria is illegal and means you drive without insurance, something that is dangerous for everyone else on the road. Both groups were disrespecting Nigerian law, something no missionary should do and certainly not teach their kids. We did allow him to drive on the long Mountain View driveway with one of us sitting next to him. He was really getting pretty good at various maneuvers and he wanted more. Understandable, but that law...! Personally, I favour that law. Kids may be physically capable of driving at 16, but there’s that teenage emotional thing that too often throws a wrench in it; besides, there is that general teen feeling of invincibility! Just give me the Nigerian law in this case.

*Cynthia*

The following was Cynthia's contribution to Fran's first letter of this term to the folks: "I love you. Thank you for the good time we had. I have a problem of putting my words too close together. So I will put a mark behind each word." My (John's) editorial contribution was to delete the marks and separate the words, but I did not change the letter itself.

Now in Grade 3, she was initially not too happy with her Australian teacher; she found her too strict and her math class too difficult, but she was coping well and had lots of friends. Most of the teachers knew her because of her outgoing nature. Our former neighbours, the Sheldases, had a baby girl they named after Cynthia. She was so thrilled! Their oldest child, Miepo, still called all white people "Cynthia," for she was the only white person he knew.

She also started piano lessons in October, 1981.

End October the kids brought their report cards home and all showed good grades. Cynthia especially was doing much better than we had expected.

You've already read about her role of Raggedy Anne. She had to use a southern accent and did it well, naturally very expressive with her eyes and hands. Everybody really laughed at her funny sayings. She got a lot of compliments and was really hyper about it all for a couple of days.

She attended the annual performance of the *Messiah* with Fran. I was not interested, for the talent for a good performance simply wasn't there. They only stayed for the first half, for Cynthia got bored with those "high screeching" voices! Fran wrote, "She liked the choral parts but the solos she considered 'quite awful.'" That was precisely my reason for not going.

Cynthia may have been cute on stage, but she had her quirks off stage at home. During the Christmas break Fran had some work to do for the children, but Cynthia objected that she felt "fluish" and needed to stay in bed. Fran wrote it was hard to tell with her when there was work on the horizon. We would see the truth as soon as the work was done! More than a bit suspicious, based on Fran's experience with her. She not only tried to get out of work at home, but also disliked reading outside of school. Fran wrote she would get "really mad" when her friends on the compound wanted to read instead of play. Wiebe tried to encourage her to read but had little success. Nevertheless, she had a good Christmas report card: all As and Bs. Wiebe tried again a few months later with similar lack of success.

So she needed encouragement to read just for the fun of it. She just could not fathom how anyone could do that for fun! As we had a little celebration for Kevin for his Industrial Arts achievement, so we promised Cynthia a celebration if she could finish a whole Nancy Drew book, a series for girls her age. We did not notice any eagerness on her part and a week later she had not yet read a single page! But somewhere in April she actually managed to finish a 120-page book. She even acknowledged enjoying it! We had her "celebration" and intended to keep after her to continue reading.

She started to display another streak of stubbornness early February 1982, according to Fran:

Cynthia refused to let me correct her fingering or her notes during piano practice. The next day she showed me multiplication problems on the board in her room and claimed that her teacher said that  $32 \times 3 = 36$ . She says that you multiply  $3 \times 2$  and then you just insert the 3 before the 6! I'll have to find her teacher to see where the confusion lies, because Cynthia will not accept my word that hers is not the correct way to multiply!

She kept having problems with doing her work. Grade 3 can be demanding and piano practice surely is hard work; she needed constantly to be reminded. She was never quite ready to start practicing. It was kind of a running battle for her—and for us. Mary Cremer, the housemother at the hostel was Cynthia's piano teacher. While she did that, Fran sorted laundry for her.

Mid-March 1982 Cynthia's class embarked on a fund raising project for the Gindiri Blind School. Their teacher supplied them with an official notice asking people to give them small jobs at 10 kobo a job. Her first customer paid her 40 kobo for cleaning a car. It was a contest to see who could bring in the most. And, yes, Cynthia was actually working voluntarily!

On June 17, she wrote the following letter to Grandma and Grandpa. The letter itself was encircled with the word "love" repeated many times over. The letter, her own spelling, punctuation and all:

Hi! This is Cynthia. Hope your doing fine. I am! Mom said that Uncle Willem babysat us. Well we aren't babys. Well I forgive her. My teacher is still nice! We are all happy because it is almost the end of the school year! Only one or two more weeks! I cant type to well yet. Sorry it isn't a very long letter. Its been quiet cold latly! We have had many rains in the past months. (HARD ONES!) One more thing I STILL LOVE SCHOOL!!!! And I STILL LOVE YOU. YOURS: ONLY: CYNTHIA;;;;;

Mid-September 1982, now in Grade 4, Cynthia came home with two checks (not cheques!) for an art project she did and was happy. She now was getting a bit of homework every day, which she did not enjoy. But she would have to get used to it, wrote Fran.

Fran wrote the following early in 1983: "Cynthia just came home with an A+ on a project on Stephen the Martyr. Her attitude towards math isn't good and we keep struggling. John is amazed at my patience with her in this respect, but it's one will against the other!"

Mid-March Fran wrote, "Cynthia is taking guitar lessons now. She certainly has the outgoing personality to sing and play guitar, but we are encouraging her to also develop the persistence to stick with *practice* on the guitar. You can't always just strum on the guitar;

there has to be music too.” After she had learned a few chords, she wanted everyone to listen to her play.

Again,

She still needs lots of help with her math. She just doesn’t comprehend it very well, while it makes her angry that Wiebe does it so easily. It’s hard for her to take the time to work on drills on multiplication tables and other such “boring” stuff when she could be out playing with dolls, house, makeup, etc. It’s hard for me to be firm with her, because math is so easy for the two boys. But I realize that she will really get behind if she doesn’t concentrate hard now. So, for the time being, Mommy is the mean one who makes her come in from play and do math! Maybe someday she’ll thank me?

Earlier, I wrote about awarding or “bribing” the children for various accomplishments. For Cynthia, another major issue continued to be reading. As the earlier story above,

We are again “bribing” her to read more. She won’t get a reward until she’s read another full book of 100 pages. We have to bribe the boys to quit reading so much and go out to play, but with Cynthia it’s the other way around! We’ve also told her she can *earn* a watch for her tenth birthday, which is four months down the road, by doing a certain amount of reading every month. Whatever book she reads, I also read so that the two of us can discuss it together. We just can’t believe it that we have a child who doesn’t like to read.

Improvement at the reading front was in sight. Early August 1983, magazines arrived that sister Jane had sent in November. They included some women’s magazines that Cynthia was beginning to enjoy reading. Fran wrote, “The boys really tease her, but at least she’s reading something! Her attitude towards reading has improved a bit during the summer holidays, but she still regards reading as something you do when you have nothing else to do.”

Math was still a different story:

Her interest in math and willingness to put forth an effort hasn’t changed much. Being a teacher, I should not give up, but it is much more exasperating when it’s your own child than when it’s just your student! She acts completely unconcerned about the most basic everyday math situations (reading thermometers, clocks, figuring prices and measurements in recipes) and just wants to be told the answers and can’t be bothered to try to figure it out. Patience! Patience! I guess it’s hard to accept for me, because the two boys are such whizzes at math.

Whenever Wiebe has his birthday, he and Cynthia are of the same age for about a month. In 1983, they were both nine for a month. She always found this hard to take and was glad when her birthday came around and she was a year “older” again. It was also confusing to her because of the order of birthdays in our family. Her dad, the oldest, in February; her

mom, in March; Kevin's in May. So it seemed "unfair" to her that, even though Wiebe was younger than her, his birthday came before hers! At this particularly birthday, it also did not help that Wiebe was catching up with her height wise, now only half an inch shorter than her.

The irritation never lasted more than a month. Birthday no. 10 ended the irritation again, especially because Cynthia got her promised watch. She had been curious all the time where and when we were going to buy it, or whether we were even serious about it. Someone had actually bought it in The Netherlands for us and brought it, but it was kept a secret. "Now," wrote Fran, "she is happy and proud." The rest of her birthday celebration included baking cupcakes together with Fran as well as a swimming party with her friends. On the way home, we stopped for an ice cream cone. Things had certainly become easier; we did not have to make everything from scratch.

She began Grade 5 with, once again, a dislike for her teacher. Fran reminded her that this had been the case with almost every teacher. This time, Cynthia replied, it was "really true" that she was "awful." We suspected that part of the problem was that she made them work harder and did not turn everything into a game anymore in Grade 5. She generally loved to stay after school and help her teachers with some odd jobs in the room, but not this year.

But then things took an unexpected turn for the better: She was invited to take on the role of Helen Keller in the senior high school play "*The Miracle Worker*." Since Keller was deaf, dumb and blind, Cynthia had to say only one word throughout the play, "Wah, Wah." However, she had acting parts in every scene and thus had to come to every play practice. "She's enjoying the attention from the senior class kids and they are really nice to her and want to help her with her parts." However, play practice made her too busy, so that we were giving her some extra help with her homework.

With only one week to go, Cynthia started getting quite nervous about the play. She had lots of acting in each scene and a very fussy director, who was the one who invited her for the part in the first place. When Cynthia saw the costumes for the first time, she was quite worried about how hot they would be, what with their many layers of cloth which was typical a century ago but in a more moderate climate.

Monday night was the last practice session; they didn't get home till 10:30. Wednesday night was dress rehearsal with a full audience of school children. Then the real performances were on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. She did a fine job of it on stage, acting like a blind spoiled child. There were scenes of temper tantrums, boredom and learning situations. She had many compliments afterwards. Since I was about finished with my TEE workbook on Biblical Social Ethics, Fran thought we should have a double celebration after the play was finally over.

There were a lot of late nights in one week for a ten-year old. She had permission to miss one morning of school, so she came at recess time on Friday. We all enjoyed it very much, but were also glad when it was over. Practice three times a week for ten weeks was

certainly disrupting to our normal supper schedule. Cynthia was also relieved when it was all over. Being forced for hours during this entire episode to say nothing but “Wah, Wah,” there has been no period in her life before or after that she talked less!

We went out for a shish kabob and pop celebration a few days later. Maybe that was the *double* celebration thing Fran wanted! Otherwise, I am still waiting for it!

### *Wiebe*

Wiebe was still finding school very easy and was helping Cynthia with her math. Recently he had become interested in copying pictures with pencil and shadings in distinction from tracing; he was really doing a good job. He sent pictures to Grandma and Jane that he had copied from his books. Fran wrote,

The art teacher has given him a drawing book to copy and encouraged him to draw items just as he sees them to get practice at all types of objects. His classroom teacher lets him have special pencils and markers to use during his free time. It's good to see him develop that talent, because he so often likes to act “tough” and “violent.” This is a better way to express himself.

Wiebe, as well as Cynthia, was struggling with loose teeth; they both wished they were at Oma's, who was so good at pulling teeth. But they managed on their own to extract theirs. The teeth were placed underneath their pillows awaiting the fairies. Wiebe still had two more that had been wired in place by a Grand Rapids dentist in order to keep them in place a while longer, but the time to pull them out had arrived as well. The dentist had actually encouraged him to wiggle them till they came out without any professional help. We promised him a special reward if he could extract them himself before his next dental visit. That gave him two months.

He managed. One he wiggled out himself; the other came out when he and Kevin collided with each other on their bikes. He was all upset, “but in the end he was glad because it had to come out anyway. He was worried because he couldn't find the tooth to put under his pillow. The tooth fairy brought the money anyway!” Kind of a replay of Kevin's tooth that got lost in the Baissa grass.

Fran wrote in the same letter that “he's finally learned to ride his big bike and enjoys it very much. It just took him one day when he really put his mind to it and *wanted* to learn. Now we have to work on his roller skating skills!”

Kevin and Wiebe would often play money games like Monopoly and Stock Market. Wiebe loved these games and easily competed with Kevin and his friends. He also continued with his interest in reading during the 1981 Christmas break. He had finished his second Hardy Boys book, a popular series for boys his age. That took some discipline with each having some 150 pages. For his second-grade report he got good check marks. Fran commented, “It certainly is a blessing that they all do well in school.”

A month later, Wiebe was really making progress. He was growing into a bookworm just like Kevin. By now he had finished reading *eight* Hardy Boy books. Fran wrote that “It’s a good thing he likes to read, because he can be very wild at times, while reading is a calming activity.” He continued to enjoy drawing and painting. Fran kept feeling that things were too easy for him at school.

But while he did great at school, at home things could be a bit difficult. Fran wrote, “He’s having a bit of trouble with his temper, bad language, and refusal to eat certain foods. I guess they are all very normal kids with everyday adjustment problems.”

By early March Wiebe had read his *thirteenth* Hardy Boy book! Since we were in the celebration mode with the children, we promised him a celebration if he did not complain about his food for a whole week. Fran commented, “He’s trying hard, but hasn’t quite managed yet for a whole week. This morning we had oatmeal for breakfast, something he detests, but he ate it and didn’t complain. He didn’t ask for a second helping though!” Maybe he had learned something from the “oatmeal episode” when he was a three year old! All these “little celebrations” had all the marks of Fran, who had/has endless ways of motivating kids. My role with these schemes was usually one of consenting to her plans—and admiring her ingenuity!

Fran wrote that she tried to cook to everyone’s liking, but that was not always possible. Her policy was that everyone had to take at least a little bite. “Wiebe has more dislikes than the other two, but he’s working at it. I’m not about to cook a separate dish for each person!”

Kevin felt it was time for Wiebe to graduate to the *Journey through the Night* series that deals with a family during WW II in The Netherlands. Wiebe was finding it a bit difficult, but he kept at it and asked questions when he did not quite understand. Some time later, when he was almost through the entire series, Wiebe also tried unsuccessfully to interest Cynthia in the story, but at least, as you already read, she did finish one book during that year.

In April, Wiebe received a personal letter from Grandpa. He was so happy with it and also amazed that at his age, 81 at the time, Grandpa could still shovel snow in Michigan, so amazed in fact that he told his class about it in their “show and tell time.”

For his 1982 birthday dinner he wanted baked chicken, baked potatoes and brownies for dessert. He chose to invite only a few friends. Everybody had a good time. We watched a world cup semi-finals between Poland and France, while the next evening we had a great time cheering for each goal of the finals together with Lydia and Chris, no matter whose goal it was. Since it was such a historic occasion as far as Kevin was concerned, he took notes on the entire game. Cynthia, on the other hand, went home with Kevin’s student and had a Chinese meal at their house. The only thing she did not like was that they spoke Chinese all the time!



I had spent most of that day at a seminar sponsored by the Ford Foundation. I came home for supper and saved my Hill Station meal ticket for the next day so we could go out together at a price reduced by that ticket. We agreed that I would take the following Thursday off to all go fishing together with the Koops. The kids looked forward to that adventure.

Wiebe had gained a Bulgarian friend by the name of Emil Volkov, who had not travelled during the summer break. Together with six other children, they were invited to demonstrate some crafts on a TV programme called “Children’s Club.” They were filmed for four installments, together taking up two complete Saturday afternoons. Wiebe felt that was as much time as he was willing to devote to it. We were not able to watch some of the installments due to power interruptions. The fact that the station was our next-door neighbour did not even help us!

Mid-September 1982 Wiebe came home from school smiling from ear to ear. He was now in Grade 3, where they gave letter grades instead of checks and smiley faces. He had just gotten his first letter grade and it was an.... A! Fran commented that since he was such a good student, she was sure he would bring home many more of the same.

Early 1983, Fran described his school situation in these words:

Wiebe continues to draw pictures and gets lots of advice from Mrs. Tinklenberg, his CRC art teacher and neighbour of ours. He asked for a whole pack of duplicating paper, because that is just the right thickness for drawing. Another teacher asked him to bring his whole rock collection to school to display for a science project. He’s trying to figure out the names of the kinds he’s found around here.

You have never read about his interest in rocks before. It was one of these ephemeral interests kids pick up with enthusiasm, only for it to wane as fast as it came.

For his tenth birthday we did a couple of things. Wiebe chose not to have the traditional cake and ice cream party. Instead he asked for a shish kabob and roast corn picnic. Fran commented, “I do like to let them sort of plan their special day.”

Then he wanted to have the Yisas over for a family dinner. Pastor Yisa and Rhoda were the current vicar family of St. Piran’s. Fran and I had become good friends of theirs, while Wiebe and their son John had become close buddies.



Ruda, Mother Yisa and Nathaniel\*

The next time we had the Yisas over only a month or so later, it did not go so well for accident-prone Wiebe. With friends in his bedroom, Wiebe had climbed on a high luggage-storage area and fell headfirst on the cement floor. He was unconscious for a short while and incoherent when he came to. He did not seem to know what had happened. Verbrugge saw him in the emergency room and judged it to be a brain concussion. He prescribed ways in which to treat this condition. It took Wiebe quite a while to get over it completely. Even playing table games would leave him with a headache for some time. I know all about those headaches from my own concussions years earlier. Fran wrote that Dr. Spock, the famous father of pediatrics of the day, wrote that “if your child never falls or bangs himself, it means you are protecting him too much. But I guess we should protect Wiebe a bit more!”

He was quite happy in his 4<sup>th</sup> Grade and soon found that his new teacher was not as bad as he first thought. He was eager for his first month to be over so he could “play wild” again, referring to his concussion. He had quit complaining about headaches, but Dr. Verbrugge said he should remain calm for yet another month. On September 1, Wiebe’s “quiet and peaceful” month was over. He had asked us to wake him early so he could start yelling and running! He was also eager to go swimming that very day.

Wiebe’s math interests continued to diversify. At the beginning of the 1983 school year, he developed interest in statistics. As Kevin years ago was interested in statistics related to aviation, so Wiebe was memorizing encyclopedia charts on size and population of countries. I find that interesting in 2013, for during my senior years I developed a similar interest. I constantly compare and contrast countries with respect to both size and population over against both Canada and The Netherlands, the huge and the tiny, the under-populated and over-populated. I have a world atlas at my fingertips. A tree-apple situation in reverse?

### *End of Term*

It had been an eventful and busy term both in terms of family and ministry. It had involved amazing adventures in hospitality, what with the untold number of guests. You’ve already read about Fran’s attitude towards it all. It had also been a time of long days and much travel on my part. Fran’s attitude? “I don’t really mind how many hours John puts in or how much he travels, as long as he is feeling satisfaction in his work and contentment with doing the Lord’s will.” Thank you, Fran. I owe you much more than one!

## Chapter 34<

### Jos IV - Family and Social Life

(January 1984—June 1987)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 22, Volume 2)

Fran and the children left for Grand Rapids right after New Year 1984, while I stayed behind till January 27. For one thing, the Evenhouses were returning to Nigeria and would live in our house, their former house, during our absence. So I had to prepare the place for their moving in. In addition, I had a lot of ICS affairs to finish off. Fran and the children left earlier to have some extra time with the Prinses, since we would soon have to move on to Vancouver to put the children in school there.

Fran and the children stayed at Grandpa and Grandma's house for a few days. Then on to spend time with some of her siblings, and then more than a week with Trena and family in Cincinnati. Actually they were snowbound there for several days. Imagine that: snowbound and forced to stay home with nine children around! Kevin & Dan played all kinds of games together non-stop, especially computer stuff. Ruthy tried to get everyone to play school with her being the teacher. Occasionally she was somewhat successful.

#### *The Nigeria for Which We Had to Prepare*

Politically speaking, the previous term had started while Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria was the civilian President. He was re-elected in 1983, but by the end of 1983, his government was overthrown by a bloodless military coup led by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari. We were back in the hands of the military. That coup took place just before Fran and the children left for the USA. Buhari was a strong man of law and order and soon had the situation under firm control with the exception of "minor" issues like bribery, corruption and oppression. By the time Fran left, the situation in the country was quiet with everyone happy and full of expectation for a new day. In mid-January 1984, I wrote in one of my rare letters, "We can only pray that the soldiers can withstand the temptation to fall into the same trap again this time. The last military regime eventually did fall into it. After all, the temptations are the same. The heart, even when covered with khaki, is very much the same as well."

I don't write much about the economy in these family chapters, but just before our 1984 home service period and simultaneously with the coup, it had become chaotic. As Fran described it:

I really don't know what's happening to the economy here. Many people have not been paid for several months and prices have quadrupled on some items in the last three

months. Soap disappeared completely for some months but is now back at a new price! 1 kg of powdered milk is now \$22.50; 1 lb of margarine is \$10. It's amazing how you learn to substitute or manage with less, but there doesn't seem to be any reason for such things. The shelves in many grocery shops are empty. Only those shopkeepers who hoarded and now have quadrupled the prices have full shops. In principle we refuse to go to those shops, except in desperation.

Those were the political and economic scenarios for which we had to prepare ourselves during this home service period, both psychologically and practically in terms of family purchases for the next term.

### *1984 Home Service*

#### *In Vancouver*

As to our Vancouver location, enquiries had been sent to Metro Vancouver CRC congregations about housing and furnishings. Henry Numan, pastor of First CRC Vancouver, promised they would help us find a place. Sure enough, the Slot family, members of that church, had a brand new duplex at 6010 Southwest Marine Drive that we could use. Mrs. Hilda Slot and her adult daughter, Kathy, lived in the one side and we in the other. The place sat on the front of a gardening business with greenhouses and a farm behind us. Besides family members, many of the workers were Chinese. From our duplex, we could watch them crawling their way among the crops, covered by typical Chinese cone hats, almost as if we were in China. In fact, the Slot children had learned to speak Chinese from their workers. We were grateful to Numan for finding the place and to the Slots for making it available. Never in our lives had we lived in a brand new place—nor ever since.

My parents and siblings had banded together to supply us with furniture and everything else we needed. I was grateful for their help, but kind of annoyed that this was treated as a family responsibility instead of church. The Grand Rapids-level rent allowance was insufficient for Vancouver, but the Slots accepted it. Our family had a pleasant few months in BC. We spent a lot of time with my siblings around the Lower Mainland and elsewhere. Of course, a visit to Port Alberni was a must.

The big thing was schooling for the kids. We had previously informed the Christian elementary and high schools in Vancouver and had a special appointment with both principals on Saturday. Monday they went and were given their respective places in Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 9. Though the kids were strangers, the Boer family was not, since a number of my nephews and nieces had attended there, though under different surnames like Heikens and Bosma.

Transportation wise, we first took them to school with the car we had rented from "Rent-a-Wreck." The car was better than you might expect from the name! We also explored the bus routes together and taught the children to take the bus to school. It was fortunate that Kevin had

to take the same bus beyond the elementary school so that he could help Cynthia and Wiebe. It was also convenient that there was a bus stop quite close to our duplex.

Probably the most important school event for the entire family was Wiebe's introduction into the world of runners. The PE teacher observed that he had the perfect build of a runner. So, when an area-wide race was organized, she urged Wiebe to participate without having practiced even once. He did not win first place, but he did knock out one contestant who had a history of winning. From then on, Wiebe devoted himself to the life of a runner with practice, practice and more practice that would also affect our family routine.

Cynthia became just another pupil in the school. No one knew about her and her talents. She wasn't there long enough to bubble up to the surface as she usually did. Whether she had any problems with a totally white school as she did at college many years later, we do not recall. It seems this period was one of anonymous relaxation for her.

We have more detailed memories about Kevin. At fourteen, he was old enough to take a small job in the Slot greenhouse business right behind our house. So, he was introduced to the world of part time jobs and employment in Canada. That was a positive experience for him.

One Saturday morning he asked permission to take the bus to downtown Vancouver. We explored the bus route together and allowed him to go. Vancouver downtown then as now is/was a very interesting and exciting place for young people. We understood his desire and let him go. A few hours later, he called us from a payphone in downtown in a tone that indicated he was all shook up. He was sitting on a public sidewalk bench when someone offered him a drug of some kind. He had heard enough about that not to accept and to get upset. When he called, we judged it would be faster for him to take the bus back home than for me to pick him up either by bus or car. So we instructed him to hop on the bus and come home. This was more exposure to the rough world of downtown than he was prepared to handle. We praised him for calling us instead of taking the drug.

From Chapter 33 you know that Kevin and I shared interest in computers. We had come to Vancouver with our faithful Osborne "sewing machine," as it was sometimes dubbed humorously. Through his contacts at school, we got to know the Chattaway family who were far advanced in computers and introduced us to the Osborne Computer Club that met bi-weekly near the PE grounds on Hastings Street. Together we attended their meetings and got many of our questions answered from members who were eager to share their expertise. Since it was held next door to a McDonald's outlet, we would stop there for a milkshake afterwards. Great bonding stuff.

A highlight of our time in Vancouver was a visit from sister Jane. She was spending her summer vacation doing extra work caring for Grandpa & Grandma. Fran's siblings thought it was a great idea for Jane to visit us for a few weeks to give her a much-needed break. They agreed to pick up the slack during her absence. Fran and Jane did lots of touristy things during the day while the children were at school. Queen Elizabeth Gardens, Downtown Vancouver, the Quay at both North Vancouver and New Westminster. They even took BC Ferries to Victoria and visited my sister Martha at her workplace downtown. Jane had quite a green thumb, so a visit to Buchart Gardens there was also a must. It was a delightful two weeks for all of us.

In the companion Chapter 22, I mention visiting pastors as part of home service routine. However, there was also a personal or family angle to these visits. At this time, the CRC was challenged by the Charismatic movement. Two of my sisters were involved in it, but both found it difficult due to CRC resistance. Ellie was at the point of leaving the CRC, while Karen was uncomfortable. Since I was visiting the local pastors anyway, I chided them for making it so uncomfortable for their Charismatic members. While they sent me abroad with the Gospel, I argued with some of them, they were rejecting my own Christian kith and kin. Would they prefer that I return to Canada and work towards a broader CRC? Chris Spoor, the pastor of the New Westminster CRC, decided to make room for them and Ellie stayed. Chris was the same person whose chapel speech at Calvin Seminary is the only one I remember. That one was about openness and I did not really appreciate it at the time. He was still showing that same kind of openness and this time I did appreciate it. Thanks Chris and sorry for my earlier rejection. Some people grow up faster than others!

### *In Grand Rapids*

The Nigerian situation described at the beginning of this chapter set the stage for our home service purchases, but more about that later. Our five-week stay in Grand Rapids was basically holiday time. We lived in a Mission house and did the obligatory routine at the CRWM office and at II Highland. But most of the time was spent shopping and visiting Fran's relatives.

### *Fran's Dad's Dying Days*

Grandpa Charlie had grown old after he quit working for "the boys." He really had little purpose for living anymore. He said that his father had died at 82 as did his brother. He was now 82.... Draw your own conclusion.

Fran and I were at his house one afternoon late July, when breathing suddenly became difficult for him. I felt he should be taken to the hospital forthwith and we put him in the car and whisked him off. He was immediately admitted; we left him there after calming him down somewhat.

We visited him there a couple of times. The last time we visited, we saw him lying in fetal position, a tiny little shriveled up old man. He assured us in his own way he was at peace with God and thus ready to go. We bade him farewell and he whispered, "See you next furlough." After leaving his room, I told Fran we would not see him again. Fran was not so convinced of that.

He returned home from the hospital the day after we left for Nigeria. He spent twelve days at home, but then he went back to the hospital. During his days at home he was in and out of consciousness. He kept calling for his brother Thijs, who had died 65 years earlier! He ate little, but did take in some liquids. Two days before his death, Sister Henrietta wrote that he appreciated company and would be calm if you just held his hand and talked a little. He did not speak clearly, and it was mostly Frisian. Gert wrote that on Sunday Ray read to him from the Frisian Bible and it again quieted him down.

On “the day” the hospital called for the family to gather. They arrived just in time to see him depart. This was about three weeks after we had returned to Nigeria. He died at age 82 on August 28, 1984. The Grand Rapids office phoned our Jos office to inform us. My initial response was, “I expected this.” That did not mean, of course, that we did not mourn his passing. It’s at times like this that we keenly felt the separation from family, for that’s when you want to be home to experience your mourning together with the family. We had earlier decided that when this would happen, we would not try to go home for the funeral. He was buried on August 31 in the Cascade cemetery behind Henry and Idamae’s house.

Henrietta told us a little story we have always treasured. But we need a small digression to understand the story, both its subtle humour and its tragedy. One feature of the Prins family that always struck me was the dominance of Mother Jennie. By the time I joined the family, Father Charles hardly counted and, when he tried to participate in anything, was quickly brushed aside. Somewhere along the line, he had abdicated his position in the family and allowed this situation to develop. The vacuum was taken over by Mother.

And now the story itself: In his later years, Father Charlie needed lab tests done on Saturdays. Sister Henrietta would take him and then take him for a brunch. One time she offered him oatmeal, but with a decisive stroke we were not accustomed to see from him, he said, “*Dat kin’k thus wel krije*,” “That I can get at home.” End of discussion. Bacon and eggs it would be.

It is no wonder that he continued working, climbing ladders and roofs, right up to his 80s as mud-mixer and supply carrier to his sons Ray and Henk, who co-owned Prins Bros. Construction, a small brick-laying company of high reputation. Fran and I felt that he had lost his purpose in life along with his place of honour in this Frisian family and expected that he would not survive long if he retired. I am quite unhappy to say we were right when he passed away.

### *Back in Nigeria*

It wasn’t long after our return to Nigeria that Grandpa passed away. On the day of his funeral, Hillcrest held a memorial service for Duanne Hendrickson, a Lutheran teacher who had died from cerebral malaria while on furlough in the U.S. Fran wrote to Mother, “During that service I could very well picture all of you at the funeral service for Dad.”

Three weeks after his death, Fran wrote in a letter to my parents that had she known he would go so soon, she “probably would have stayed behind in order to be with my family.” However, she “thought Dad still looked good. My Dad has always been so strong and a fighter, that I can’t quite believe that he really just gave up.”

### *Of Telephones and Goodies*

Soon after our return to Jos a new international telephone service was introduced right across the road from us. Theoretically, that was an amazing improvement from having to drive to Kaduna for a call abroad, some 280 kilometers from Jos! We never made use of that one, but we did try this new arrangement end August 1984. The place had booths in which telephones had been placed, a half dozen or so in a row. But it was pathetic, for all the booths were always occupied, with every occupant yelling at the top of his lungs, each in his own language. If you were successful in establishing contact, the voice from abroad would be so badly distorted and then overpowered by your yelling neighbours. It hardly ever resulted in even a half-way satisfactory call. Yet, we always hoped and occasionally succeeded. Our first attempt was to call Grandma after Grandpa passed away. Fran wrote, "I could hear very little of Mom and Jane when I phoned."

The first ever phone call we received *from* North America on our home phone after 20 years was in April 1986 from nephew Rob Prins, son of brother Ray. That call was a complete surprise. Fran picked up the phone and heard, "Hi, this is Rob, your brother's son," as if he called regularly! The connection was as clear as a bell. Thanks, Rob. You made history!

In the meantime, the political and economic situations kept changing. I wrote "There is a real scarcity of basic foodstuffs and other items, like soap." We could not understand how the average Nigerian could possibly make it. Though the people had welcomed the coup at end 1983, they were not so sure anymore—exactly the same reaction as with all previous and subsequent coups. The new regime inherited a real mess and then added their own mistakes to make it even more difficult for the people. "This country needs a lot of prayer to survive."

You will remember from earlier chapters that it always took a long time for the supplies we bought during home service periods to arrive in Nigeria. Having been warned by our Jos Mission administration that the markets had basically collapsed so that even the most basic items were hard to find, we bought more supplies than ever. Instead of sending them as freight directly to Nigeria, this time we sent them as freight through International Development Agency (IDA) in Amsterdam, who then bundled it with their own supplies and air freighted them to Jos. They arrived in Kano on September 10, only six weeks after our return. Unbelievable! I had to go to Kano to get them released from Customs.

Fran wrote: "It was really fun to unpack everything and we are still happy that we took as much along as we did. We just can't get over how much storage space there is throughout this house. When these houses were built, we thought they were really extravagant, but now we are happy with it."

Most of the stuff came through quite well. However, six jars of "non-coffee" Caf Lib were pulverized; three jars of beef bouillon also; three tins of lunch meat were smashed and the liquid had leaked out; one container of popcorn had opened and spilled all over a box; one bottle of calcium supplement pills had opened and one container of small cake decoration sugar had spilled through everything. The "coffee" is the greatest loss, as "uncoffee coffee" is not available here and instant coffee sells for \$35 a jar.



Fran asked Henrietta, who worked at Boston Foods, to tell them that our cupboards looked just like their shelves and many thanks for their help with all these purchases from them. They had given us a generous discount.

The box in which the bicycles came was badly damaged, but the bicycles themselves were in good shape. One bike was given to us by Ray and Gert, a Schwinn that Fran really liked to ride. Cynthia and Wiebe did not like it: too old and not “cool.” Fran predicted they would soon enjoy their own bikes once they used them on the rough roads on our compound—and so they did.

### *The Family*

We were not back very long, when Fran started a new daily exercise regime of walking for half an hour with Mary Cremer. Though she loved tennis and hoped to get back to it in due time, for the time being this routine worked better for her work schedule and she was content with it.

Fran taught five mornings a week at Hillcrest. The afternoons were her own or the family’s. She had help three afternoons a week for cleaning and laundry. Everything was going well for her.

By October, our traditionally “mad” hosting regime was in full swing again. I won’t go into all the details as to who and why, but it was once again a list of “who’s who” in our world. Sunday October 14, 1984, saw five guests at the lunch table and another five at supper. One was Sue Porter, who was going to teach at the Wukari CLTC to do the same thing Dorothy Sytsma used to do in the 60s! Of course, she would not be the Principal; that position had long been Nigerianized.

Sometimes Fran did show cracks in her hosting energies. The two Berends boys would occasionally spend a weekend with us away from their hostel at Kent Academy, the SIM school for missionary children. They were nice and appreciative boys, but, she wrote, “I don’t know how long we’ll be able to keep it up, because it does make it busier. I find it hard to say ‘No’ to people.” Right after that weekend, Kevin’s Indian friend, Samit Choudhuri, came to stay for three weeks, for his mother had to receive medical treatment in London.

It was during that time that Fran went “on strike” permanently about preparing the children’s school lunches. She had been preparing five sandwiches for the kids’ lunches, but now that would mean doing at least eight sandwiches every morning. She felt it was time that each one prepared his/her own lunch. To make things easier and quicker they decided to stop buttering their bread, and Cynthia has, to this day in 2014, never used butter on her bread again! *Never?* Well, hardly ever!—with thanks to Gilbert & Sullivan.

Towards end 1984, Fran also began to “complain” that taking time for letter writing was becoming more difficult, for the children needed more help for their homework. Cynthia was also becoming interested in cooking and baking. Though that might save Fran time later, for now it took more time. She also was helping Cynthia and Wiebe in their making little Christmas presents for family and a few others.

**You will remember that much of our Nigeria story is taken from or triggered by our letters to our parents, whom we asked to save the letters for future use such as these memoirs. Fran was still writing the bulk of them, but in due time the proportion was considerably adjusted as I was also writing many**

**When you're on the subject of writing, that of mail cannot not be far behind. Mail was particularly unreliable come Christmas 1984. Everyone was complaining, for the expected Christmas care packages were not coming through. Fran commented that it was a good thing that we always saved last year's Christmas cards, because they seldom came on time. So, in 1984 we once again gratefully strung last year's across the living room.**

**Christmas 1984 was our second Christmas holidays spent with the Berends family, but this time in the more harsh environment of Niger State, where the Mission was opening up a new outreach that was largely designed by Willem. The visit was a troubled one. We had serious car troubles as well as shortage of gasoline. Then there was such a water problem at their house so that we spent a couple of days helping the Berends haul water. As Fran described it, "We spent one day bringing drums to a reservoir and hauling them back. Then we would transfer the water pail by pail into other drums and into the bathtub inside the house. The next day the town water returned, but it was too dirty to drink." In spite of all this, the visit was enjoyable and invigorating. They were awaiting a signal from the Grand Rapids office, to proceed fully with their mission plans for the area. That was the beginning. Today, in 2012, less than 30 years later, there is a full-fledged new church in that area that has chosen to join CRCN. Willem and family have long since moved back to "down under."**

**Upon our return home, the kids and I set up the tent in our yard. It was occupied for the rest of the vacation. One night Wiebe complained because he could not keep our cat out of his sleeping bag. He came back in the house. Fran wrote, "They sort of use it for a playhouse during the day and bedroom at night. For a couple of days, Cynthia and neighbour Allison Seinen gave a few little plays inside, with the audience sitting on pillows in the tent."**

**Technology was penetrating our family more and more. Now that we were (somewhat) comfortable with the computer and wrote many of our letters on it, we moved on to embrace a video machine so that we could rent videos from local outlets and see many of the latest movies, mostly pirated copies! We also bought a colour TV. Our house became a popular attraction for the kids' friends, the very purpose of these purchases. Better to have them home voluntarily with friends than have them do whatever wherever.**

**You've read about the snail's pace of our mail through all these years. Hillcrest devised a plan whereby members of the Hillcrest community could deliver letters to the Business Office, where they would be weighed and packaged for delivery to the US by courier. From there someone would post them to their addresses. It would be double the price, but, we hoped, much faster. By end February we still could not tell whether the new mailing method was any faster. In fact, it was not till April that we saw a definite improvement in the speed of mail to North America. It must have taken that long to work out the kinks in the new system. We were happy that it was finally paying off.**

Not everything went at a snail's pace in Nigeria. Cars could not only drive fast but also wear out fast. By early 1985, our Toyota minibus clocked over 100,000 kilometers. That's not that much, but the engine had to be replaced. At first Fran disliked driving that bus, but eventually fell in love with it because of its room, but now she had to let go for we decided to replace it with a French Peugeot station wagon, the most popular car in the country that was assembled in Kaduna. Actually, Fran used our little VW more than the bus for driving around town. With 60,000 kilometers, it still had lots of the zip that she liked, though she was a turtle kind of driver who would never use that zip.

The Peugeot took till October 1985 to arrive! It was a repeat of the pickup story. Between the order and its arrival it was a long unending row of promises of "tomorrow." It cost us around \$8,000. I immediately drove it down to CRCN area and enjoyed it tremendously. It handled so well on our rough roads, while the AC just made it a delight in our hot climate. How could I have done without it for so long? Fran commented, "We are getting spoiled in our old age!"

Fran and I both loved restaurants and since there were quite a few inexpensive ones around, we would often go out for lunch, just the two of us. Mid-February she was tempted to start full time teaching, but, she wrote, "Then I'll have to give up those lunches. So, maybe I'll have to reconsider!" O'oh. What's this? A little hedonism creepin' up on her? That's hardly the Fran I know!

Fran and I had been planning a ten-day trip down south in the new Peugeot. The trip kept being postponed. In the meantime, we had made provisions for the children. Cynthia and Wiebe would stay in the hostel, while Kevin was to batch it at home. All were excited about this arrangement and could hardly wait for us to go. Kevin's list of "necessities" to be left in fridge and freezer for him kept growing. Finally in mid-April we were off.

The week before we embarked on the trip was a busy one. Kevin's class was involved in a carnival (see below), while we had two evenings in a row of dorm relief: one at Mountain View for CRC kids and the other at Pineview for a dorm with kids from everywhere. The next evening we had dinner at the home of some Indian friends. That, Fran commented, meant three nights of no cooking. "That's always a nice treat! Maybe after our trip next week, I'll be tired of eating out and be glad to get back into my own kitchen."

However, only a few weeks later she decided she needed a part-time cook because she had been told she would be teaching more hours the next school year. We had let it be known and before long someone applied. There's never a shortage of people looking for a job in missionary homes. They usually get treated well while they are paid decently and *on time*, an important feature not so common in most Nigerian work situations. Fran would give her the ingredients for a Nigerian type meal and let her fly/fry. If it worked out, Fran would teach her how to make chips, how to bake and how to make "American" dishes—not sure where Canadian or Dutch cuisine fit in. She would come three afternoons a week. She would also be doing the marketing, since some basic items were becoming increasingly difficult to find. Her name was Asabe, who eventually became our full time housekeeper when Fran went to full time teaching at Hillcrest. She became a family friend and even named a daughter after Cynthia. She was a leader in a local Baptist Church. We remain in

contact with her till today in 2014 and are the channel through which a Seattle CRC funnels money to her to support her in her sickness.

Around that same time, Fran commented on sister Jane's Master's degree and pondered whether she herself should also take such courses in education. Great thought, but I want everyone to realize that Fran refused to take any courses at all, though I encouraged her to do so time and again. It wasn't that I used her to get my degree and then let her get stuck at her level. She simply refused; didn't want to. She was always good at studying and got superior grades, but she was never academically inclined. Some months later, she wrote that, though she had much teaching experience at different levels in both elementary and high school and had a B. Ed., for lack of additional certificates and training she would probably have a hard time landing a teaching position in the US. Well, each to his own. I just needed to clear this.

It may seem that Fran's life was a constant treadmill of teaching, hosting and committees, but there were also many merciful breaks. You read about some of these here and there. In August 1985, she, along with Cynthia and Wiebe, attended a Hillcrest Staff Retreat and all had a great time, relaxing for Fran. She also spent a day flying to Kaduna to renew her US passport. This was the first to be valid for ten years instead of the customary five. The flight was uneventful, something that is always cause for thanks, while the procedure for getting the document went so unusually smoothly that they arrived in Jos according to schedule. That is pretty good when it comes to aviation and government services in Nigeria, whether Nigerian or foreign. Kevin had wanted to drive her, but, wrote Fran, "He's still learning; it's a long distance of four hours one way along busy roads with many potholes. Besides the American consulate is a hard place to find." This took place at the same time that she had to take care of hosting during that month that was even excessive for us, and get ready for a new year of teaching, while I was running a week-long seminar for Christian writers, which is documented in Chapter 22.

During the 1985 fall and winter months, Asabe continued cooking for us three times a week. Fran used that time for visits but also for playing tennis. She did not have a good tennis week late October, for both Kevin and I beat her, something that seldom happened. She and Kevin played twelve rounds; so, it was tough competition, but in the end Kevin ran with it. Her constant back and forth method—"post office tennis" as she called it, "return to sender"--just about always outdid us with our attempt at tricky maneuvers.

This is how the 1985 Thanksgiving scenario turned out. Nigeria has no special day, but each Christian congregation celebrates on the Sunday of their choice. Fran wrote:

On Saturday our church is having its Harvest dinner and I have to bring just cupcakes – I'll probably bring about 6 dozen. That's an easy thing for me to bring. We had a lovely Harvest Sunday last week when everyone brought produce and money as they were able. Last year we collected about N4000, and we're hoping it's more this year. We had a lot of special music this year; our Ladies' Fellowship Choir had to sing at both the morning services. Seeing the services lasted almost two hours instead of the usual one, we were at church from 8:45 til 1 pm! John preached, so he had to be there too. Cynthia played guitar; she also had a long morning. In the evening at Hillcrest chapel, her youth group

was in charge, and she had to be there early again for that. Always a lot of activity around here!

Both Mothers Jenny and Elly felt once again that Fran was too busy, but she felt that she was a lot better off than they were at her age. She wrote:

Actually I have a much easier life than either of you did at my age! I'm teaching 21 hours per week, a job which I was trained for and which I love very much. I spend *some* time each week on cooking, cleaning, laundering, hosting visitors, but I often arrange it for evenings when I have my cook and I never have to do the dishes afterwards. So don't feel sorry for me. I feel that I have the best of both worlds! In addition when you were my age (43), you must have had "money worries," having just uprooted big families and you had to start all over in a new land and language. We've never had these worries since we started with CRWM, though we, too, had to start afresh in a new country and new language.

However, some time after our Togo vacation, Wiebe's accident and my being away to various places, all of which items you will find scattered through this and the companion chapter, Fran did feel once again that things could get too hectic. With my being gone and Wiebe needing extra help with washing, dressing, fixing his lunches, etc., etc., she wrote, "Things have been very busy for me, too busy really. I don't see how single parents can cope."

Fran also made the following comments, first about Father Wiebe and then about myself, kind of contradictory but probably true: "Too bad Dad doesn't enjoy reading, researching and writing as John does; that would keep him occupied! I often wish that John had fewer projects on his mind and would get out and play more, but I guess everyone is different."

### *Christmas Vacation 1985*

We began planning for our Christmas 1985 schedule so early that by beginning November it was all in place. We planned to spend Christmas itself in Jos; thus, a "staycation," stay at home. Right after, we would visit the Berends in their new home in the village of Momo, where they were going to begin their new ministry. Then we would travel to Togo, a small sliver of a nation two countries to the west of Nigeria. After that, we would have twelve days of rest at home before school was to start. Didn't that sound like a perfect Christmas holiday? That is pretty well how it all worked out as well.

I keep telling you that I don't touch this or that subject much, but then I go ahead and treat it. Same for weather: I don't write much about it, but here's Fran's description of the Jos December 1985 weather:

Our winter has come! Monday the weather turned cold and it was 60 degrees in the living room this morning. I got out all the extra blankets and we are happy that we have plenty of firewood left from last year. Our windows and doors don't really close well, so we have a real draft in some places in the house. The harmatan dust has covered everything and is hiding the sun. It happens every year, but it is always hard to take! We shouldn't

complain because we have warm clothing, but this is a very difficult time for the poor. Many of them build fires in the middle of their village roundhouses with thatch roofs, just to try to keep warm; that causes lots of accidents.

### *Kambari People*

Mid-January 1986, Kevin wrote a lengthy letter about the vacation we had planned as per above. At sixteen he had become a good writer. He quoted me saying that the Kambari people, among whom the Berends were starting to work, were the most primitive I had ever seen. Actually, I had seen people *as* primitive in the mountains and jungles behind Baissa, but never *more* primitive.

Kevin wrote:

They have very few comforts or conveniences. The only things in their huts are usually just grass mats. For carrying water, the women carry calabashes on their heads. One of their main forms of transportation is by camel. Their newer forms of entertainment revolve around beer drinking. A common practice and one on which much money is spent is wife stealing. Wives are often stolen from the husbands they have been promised right on the night of their marriage!

A major difference between those Baissa tribes and the Kambari is that the former had been free to live their own lives as well as they could. They seemed content with their way of life and were not clamouring for major changes. The Kambari people on the other hand, were also Traditionalists, but they were oppressed by the Muslims who surrounded them. They *were* ready for change, but they did not trust other Nigerians who approached them. The only experience they had with non-Kambari people was the Muslims and they assumed that other Nigerians visiting them would be similarly oppressive. That was the reason our Mission sent White missionaries to them to break that spirit of mistrust towards others. They were open to Whites and soon began to respond to the Gospel. Once there were a few small congregations, our missionaries introduced them to the CRCN as our friends and partners. That did the “trick.” Eventually, the Kambari Church joined the CRCN as a separate classis or district.

The Kambari people were good at building very circuitous roads or, rather, trails, according to Kevin. They would often take you into the opposite direction from where you thought you were heading. It would take a “good hour” to get from Berends’ home by car to that of the Van Zee’s, another missionary in the area, while it would take only 45 minutes to walk it, provided you could decipher the myriad of bush trails traversing the area.

Though Willem was a degreed theologian, he also had an engineering background. Kevin was impressed with the way he harnessed technology to make his home a comfortable place. He had rigged up solar panels as well as a generator to charge up batteries. By these means the entire house had electricity. Here they were, in the middle of nowhere, far into the “bush,” but fully equipped with blenders, televisions, videos, computers and more. Kevin was fascinated by all this. They were actually better equipped that we were in the city.

The Berends house was of typical Western design with galvanized roof that would clatter and thunder when it rained so as to drown out every other sound. But the Van Zees had a Nigerian-type home in order to demonstrate to the people that even modern people can live in them quite comfortably. They had seven round huts built with ordinary local mud blocks. Every hut had its own function: master bedroom, children's bedroom; guest room, office, bathroom, kitchen, living room and some smaller outbuildings, including a garage and an outhouse. The difference between their compound and that of their neighbours is that these huts were arranged in a circle around a huge shade tree and were connected by above-ground tunnels. You did not have to go outside to move from one room to another, an interesting blend of Nigerian and Western housing.

### *Lome, Togo*

From Momo we traveled via the ICS at Ibadan, where we spent a night, to the Lagos Airport to fly on to Togo, a KLM flight of only 25 minutes. It took off only two hours late.

Togo is a former French colony and so French was the official language. Kevin was quite surprised at how much French he could speak and understand. English being hardly understood, Kevin was our mouth piece. Though it had been a half year since his last French course, he could handle himself quite well. There is a little story, however, that has become part of family lore. We needed an extra mattress in our hotel room. So Kevin requested one. The attendant came with a bucket of water. We never did figure out whose French was at fault here!

Lome, the capital city, looked very much like European cities with tall buildings, beautiful lawns, clean and orderly streets, etc. The people in the city were very courteous and respectful, very different from noisy and chaotic Nigeria. They had impressive buildings, including Roman Catholic churches. There was a ramp that had been used for a papal visit some years earlier. A canoe was on public display that Mother Mary had allegedly used one time. There were sculptures of all kinds. We have a picture of a statue of two old village men sitting on their stools chatting with each other. Very beautifully sculptured. We also have a picture of a *juju* statue in the middle of the city. Our grand hotel organized regular picturesque dancing groups for their guests.

Our hotel was on an Atlantic Ocean beach. However we could not really enjoy that facility unless we took a taxi some distance away. There was a strong undertow near the hotel. Besides, at night the local people would use the beach for their calls of nature and turned it into a repugnant place in sharp contrast to the clean streets of the city. At another point, though, the beach was a very interesting place. We watched groups of fishermen pull in their boats with nets full of fish.

We came with US dollars and needed to exchange them for Francophone francs. While this was all strictly controlled in Nigeria, it was a free-for-all in Togo, where you could freely exchange on the street at much better than bank rates. As a result, prices for us were very low. We could enjoy some top notch restaurants for very low prices. Dutch cheese was cheaper in Togo than in The Netherlands! Most of their food stuffs were imported from France. Political colonialism may have been done away with, but economic or post-colonialism was still going strong.

We made an arrangement with a taxi driver to serve as our driver for the length of our stay in the country whenever we needed him. One of the first days, he took us deep into the interior. We had agreed on the official price, but we knew there would be a sizable tip in addition. It had been our understanding that we would pay for each trip and then, at the end of our stay, pay him the tip. We misunderstood each other and at the end of that day trip, when we paid him only the official rate, he drove off in great anger. We could not get him to stop and explain. So, we never did see him again or pay what we owed him. Till this day, I feel bad about how we left this man. We even tried to contact him by mail from Nigeria and make good, but all to no avail.

Again in contrast to the city, the airport was very primitive and unkempt, much like Kano in Nigeria. We waited four to five hours for the plane on our return, only to be told it was cancelled for the day. Sorry, folks. No explanation given. We took a taxi to a mission guest house for one more overnight, since we had run out of local funds to pay a hotel. The next day we flew out without delay and spent the following night at the SIM Guesthouse in Lagos, where we had parked our car. From there, we drove back to Jos the next day, a drive of some twelve hours. Apart from some untoward behaviour on the part of Wiebe that distressed everyone, we had a very good and unforgettable holiday in Togo.

We knew about the low prices in Togo and had made plans to carry enough inexpensive goods back to Nigeria to pay for most of the trip. One major item was several 5-gallon tins of palm oil for cooking. Our plan worked: the trip ended up costing us very little. It was something we had learned from some other missionaries who had taken a similar vacation there. Our cheapest international vacation trip ever, though our Cameroon camping trip had also been relatively inexpensive as well.

### *Family Back Home Again*

Early March we spent a weekend under the stars at a family campout a few miles from Jos. Fran wrote, "It was fun sleeping under the stars; the sky was so clear and bright; the moon, as bright as a car light! The kids each brought a friend. We all had a great time together."

Mid-May Kevin had his Junior-Senior Banquet. Fran was involved head over heels as a parent. She was drafted to make her famous potato chips. Thirty pounds of potatoes were delivered to our door. Asabe, our housekeeper, peeled them; Kevin sliced them with our little slicing gadget; Fran fried them in five pans a shot. Quite a production. In the afternoon, two girls came and helped her bake 200 cookies as part of the dessert. Fran commented,

These banquets have become real productions here! Their theme was Tropical Paradise and they had an actual pig roasting all day at one of the hostels and then some men carved it at the banquet. They had girls in Hawaiian skirts meeting everyone at the door with leis to hang around their necks. It seems that each class (or maybe the mothers?) tries to outdo the previous year. Good thing a class has to prepare for a banquet only once; the next year they are the guests!



*European Vacation 1986*

From May 30 to July 11, 1986, we wrote no letters to our parents, for we were on a vacation trip in Western Europe. “We” here means the entire family minus Kevin. We had been thinking of making such a trip, but with five people everything would have been difficult and expensive. We would have to rent a bigger car and more hotel space. However, after Kevin decided to travel to the US—see under “Kevin” below for details—and we were down to four people, it became more possible. So we arranged for our tickets. The rest of the arrangements were made by the seat of our pants en route.

Kevin felt somewhat cheated and left out. However, had we been five, we probably would not have taken the trip. I believe he still has not completely come to terms with that situation. I do not see how we could have done otherwise, except for us all to stay in Jos while Kevin was enjoying himself in the US. If *that* were the reason for canceling our trip, how would the rest of us have felt? Cheated? Left out? It was a bit of a conundrum. Just one of these cards life deals occasionally. The trip itself was a mixture of pleasure and business, but the basic initiative was family vacation. Fran wrote an extensive travel journal which I gratefully used for the following section.

On June 10 we arrived in Amsterdam about 7 am and rented a car. I went for an eye check up close to Uitgeest, a place referred by Jerry Gort. Then we went on to cousin Henk and Klarie Boer in Maastricht. They were medical missionaries in South Africa for about 10 years, but he ended his career as an industrial medical officer in this city. We borrowed their bikes and went for a bike ride in the hills around Maastricht, right to the Belgium border.

On June 12 we drove to Switzerland via Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Germany, a real international trip but, it seemed, almost without borders. Unlike Canada and the USA, the EU countries have largely done away with border control within the Union. We stayed on expressways all the way to Basel, Switzerland. That’s when we switched to local roads and slowly wandered through some of the mountain roads to Bulach, where niece Joanne (Prins) and Han De Bruyn lived. Together with our hosts and the kids we shopped and did sightseeing, after which we enjoyed excellent food at a cafeteria. The next day we went to Rheinfall, right on the German border. As the German name indicates, we saw a majestic fall on the Rhine River more accessible than the Niagara Falls. On Sunday we attended a German church service in Bulach. We could understand some of the things going on. It reminded us of stuffy Dutch church services where no one greets anyone else. In the afternoon we went for a lovely ride through the mountains and returned via Liechtenstein and the tip of Austria. The mountain pass Han drove through is only open certain months of the year, so they hadn’t seen it before either.

On Monday, we left Cynthia and Wiebe at the De Bruyns, while Fran & I went to Bern, capital of Switzerland, to get visas for Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The one for Czechoslovakia took only a few minutes, but the East German embassy wasn’t open that day. Then we went on to Geneva and visited lots of people at the WCC. We met Mrs. Tevi, the lady from the South Pacific Islands who had earlier visited us in Jos. She found a hotel room for us, which is no small job in Geneva.

From here on, we had a few days during which we mixed mission and vacation. The mission part of it is described in Chapter 22 under the heading “Trip to Europe.” One Tuesday with a particularly heavy mission agenda in the morning, we spent the afternoon on a city tour to take in some of the many historical sights. We were especially impressed with the Reformation Wall, with the house where John Calvin lived and with the chapel where John Knox preached. But there were also many other significant organizations and buildings we went to see: the birthplace and headquarters of the Red Cross, the offices of the UN, the WHO and ILO. At the end of the day, Mrs. Tevi invited us over for a Polynesian meal at her house. It had been a very full day for us. The next day it was back to Bulach and our family.

We not only had “mission business” but also personal business, especially in Zurich, where we visited on June 19. The business part was with a Danish bank in Zurich with which we had some investments at the time that somehow were related to our Godwin house in Grand Rapids. Some complicated and ugly ownership struggles arose between the Danish bank and its Swiss affiliate that affected our accounts very favourably. Suddenly, we found they had paid off our mortgage! They charged our account, but considerably less than they put into that mortgage. We never were able to figure out just what happened, but since it was clearly in our favour, we accepted the turn of events happily: Our house was paid for! We did not press them with too many questions!

Yes, we had over the years become involved in various international investments. We had also invested in a British company that operated an international fleet of containers. However, they sold out to a Zurich-based business that did *not* do so well for us. So, they also deserved a visit from us, but that visit was less lucrative: The business had basically collapsed and we should not expect any further payments from it. We had gotten involved in this company because they advertised in *Time* magazine and we assumed that *Time* would not accept ads from just any company, but that they would protect their reputation by featuring only good companies. Alas, that assumption proved wrong. Well, you win some; you lose some. Among others, we had lost our faith in *Time*. Again back to Bulach and the kids.

From Bulach we drove to Reutlingen, West Germany, where we had some former missionary friends, the Quack family. Jurgen Quack took us to Tübingen which is one of the oldest university towns in Western Europe. Also spent time at the Wholistic Health Institute in Tübingen and had some very interesting WHC discussions.

The next day on to Stuttgart, Germany to visit the Hermann family, also former Nigerian missionaries. Spent time at a Youth Farm in the afternoon where their daughter participated in a horse show. Mrs. Hermann’s mother showed Cynthia & Wiebe how to do basic weaving.

That Sunday we attended a German church service in Stuttgart. They were a bit more open and even asked for prayer items. The people even talked to each other a bit! Had a picnic in the Hermann’s backyard and in the evening strolled around the inner city. The next day I spent time visiting some donor organizations and tried to make them interested in ICS projects. We also visited the headquarters of United Bible Society. In the afternoon some of us went strawberry picking.

Then on June 24 we crossed the border into Czechoslovakia. It was quite an experience. The border and the Czech Customs and Immigration were located in the middle of a forest that separates the two countries. The road bent, so that you could not see those offices from the German side. They checked our car thoroughly, even underneath with mirrors on long handles. They were especially interested in books and magazines, of which we had a supply. Yes, but their interest was not just in *any* publication: They were personally interested in pornographic literature. Well, sorry, we didn't have any. They released us and we traveled on into Pilsen, the nearby border town.

It was a shock. Germany was so lively, colourful and active; this town was dilapidated, grey, dirty and sleepy. Nothing going on. A maximum of two blocks between them but worlds apart, just like our experience in West and East Berlin. We could find no hotel that would/could take us and thus drove on to Prague, where we finally found one at 10 pm. We were looking for food and saw a number of street carts, but all they had for sale was stale buns with sausages without condiments. Well, better than nothing. The sausages tasted fine, but those buns! Ach!

From the moment we entered the elevator to our floor—yes, it worked!—we were beleaguered by Czechs who wanted to exchange their money for our dollars at very good rates. However, we could not tell whether they were genuine or whether they might be government agents out to get us. Same on the streets in broad daylight. But we had been warned of its danger and so did not succumb.

Prague is, of course, a historic city and so we tried to visit some of its historic buildings, but everything was grey and dusty. We walked around to see the sights, but the kids did not feel at ease. They had heard enough of the Iron Curtain and the eastern Communist regimes that they just could not relax. In fact, they were afraid. And everywhere, those stale buns!

One fairly impressive building was a large kind of modern department store with a lot of stainless steel and glass. It was advertising all kinds of modern gadgets that displayed their prices in US\$ in their show windows. Apparently this store was meant for tourists to spend their dollars and for local elites who somehow had access to dollars. It did not seem a busy place and we wondered which tourists would buy here instead of at home. Possibly those from other Iron Curtain countries?

Time to move on. So we drove through the Czech countryside towards the East German border. It was kind of eerie. Very wide swaths of farms and open fields without any houses, except in villages and towns. We've had it explained that the Communist regime wanted people to watch and spy on each other. Thus, they discouraged people from living far away from each other. Hence few if any houses far from each other.

Crossing into East Germany was easy. Again, they seemed to pay special attention to whatever literature we had aboard. Perhaps afraid of poisoning the minds of their citizens? They gave us a day pass to ride straight through to West Berlin. We were warned not to stop; certainly not to get off the *Autobahn* into the towns and cities. Straight through, nothing and nowhere else. We did stop off at a rest stop to have lunch, but even then we were ill at ease. Would they come and chase us away?

We spent the night in West Berlin, but the day wandering through East Berlin, again on a day pass. We experienced a humane side. As we stood in line for a day pass through Checkpoint Charlie, the officials saw our children, beckoned us to the front of the line, processed us and sent us on our way. Same money regulations as during our previous trip in 1979. Between the wall and the city there was still that open field we had seen before, but the first experience of the city itself was a small park. It being a beautiful summer day, a lot of people were hanging around and there was a band playing sprightly music that the kids liked. I did too, but something that attracted me even more were those empty benches. I was sleepy and so, in the middle of this East German crowd I stretched out on a bench and took a quick cat nap. Fran told me the kids were beyond embarrassment at their Dad! But I felt better for the rest of the day.

The next day we spent sightseeing in West Berlin city, wandered around the Wall area, saw Checkpoint Charlie House, where information about attempts at crossing the wall was gathered and displayed. We also visited the *Reichstag*, from which Hitler ordered his affairs. After almost a week in the dreary world behind the Iron Curtain, West Berlin was like heaven, what with all its dynamism and colour.

Checkpoint Charlie was protected with barricades and warnings from the West that we were about to leave their zone. We saw an individual approaching the wall with a ladder and wondered what he was about. He turned out to be an American from Seattle who would regularly lean his ladder against the Wall, climb to the top and from that perch urinate into East Berlin. He called it his "International Pee In!" Occasionally, we were told, he would jump down into East Berlin. Guards would be quick to arrest and promptly return him to their Western counterparts through the Checkpoint.

But this city, too, had its negatives. In the midst of its splendour there stood the non-rehabbed ruins of an ancient church destroyed during World War II. In juxtaposition next to it stood its modern replacement. Not sure whether it meant much to the kids, but for me who remembered the war, this hit me hard. I stood there for some time, contemplating the meaning of this scene and what it would mean to the different generations of Germans.

One event that thoroughly both shocked and surprised us was the first gay parade we had ever witnessed. We were appalled at the prevalence of scant clothes and nudity that brazenly faced us. To be gay, we felt, was one thing, but did it have to deteriorate into such a barbaric primitive display of raw sex and nudity? I was reminded of the research for my dissertation of missionary descriptions of near-naked Nigerian village Animists of 75 years earlier and of how shocked missionaries were at such "primitive barbarism." Since then, Nigerians dressed themselves, impeccably so that even the Western suit looks poor by comparison. Those missionaries would have had a field day describing the unashamed and brazen nakedness and barbarism in broad daylight on the streets of Berlin, one of the *avant garde* centres of Western culture.

On June 29 we re-entered The Netherlands and drove to Apeldoorn to spend a little time with Nanny Van Geest. Both her kids were gone on holiday, but we had a nice visit and watched the World Cup Finals together. From there we drove on to the Gort home in Uitgeest. We knew they

would not be home, but got the keys from their neighbours. The rest of the week we were on our own, shopping, resting, watching TV, and at the beach, some sixteen kilometers from their house.

Sister Henrietta and husband Luke were in The Netherlands as well. We had arranged for them to come by train from Amsterdam and spend the day with us in Uitgeest. We had a lovely day together.

That Sunday we attended a local church service in Uitgeest. Quite a nice service; friendly people; the sermon and the liturgy were fine. However, from certain unusual remarks the preacher made during the service, we began to realize that the preacher was gay. The congregation seemed fine with it, but somehow we weren't quite ready for that! Of course, we knew nothing of the history of this arrangement and so decided we should not judge.

At the end of the trip, Fran wrote, "We really had a lovely time and are glad we made the trip. Sometimes there were tensions between generations, such as whether we should see this ancient building or go to that MacDonald's restaurant, but in general there was good cooperation," not as on our Togo trip. We did a total of four weeks: one in Switzerland and West Germany each; one and a half weeks in The Netherlands; a few days each in Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

### *Back Home Again*

During the final part of our European trip, Cynthia bought herself a bike and Wiebe a stereo. Once back home, they were both happy with their purchases and enjoyed them much. Cynthia loved to use it on the compound for short errands Fran would send her on. She attended a Hillcrest staff conference in far-away Miango with Fran and Wiebe and rode her bicycle back the entire 30 kilometers, while Wiebe ran the last ten.

When we returned home, Kevin would still be away for another month. Fran commented, "It does seem strange with Kevin gone. I guess that's the way things go: the kids usually come one at a time and leave that way! This is good practice time for us. Now it's only another month before he comes back; next year he'll leave permanently."

During February 1987 the kids tried again to get Fran and me to embark on a physical fitness regime. They got both of us doing a bit of "running," our starting goal being a mile in ten minutes. Fran started out with a run/walk a mile in fifteen minutes, while I managed to run three-quarters of a mile non-stop without timing myself. Not sure how close that came to any world record! Fran wanted to get in shape for a possible bike ride in Friesland later in the year, when she was hoping to visit that province in the company of family historian Ray.

Our efforts, strenuous as they were, were minute when contrasted to that of the boys. They did non-stop runs of ten kilometers or more along all kinds of bush trails, would come home and then still go rock climbing, trampolining or play ball! Did our puny efforts make any sense at all? The boys convinced us that they did. Well, with their experience they should know. Fran reminded me

that at one time we had their kind of energy too. That, of course, was correct. Just think of my non-stop running around the high school gym for a full class hour in Port Alberni or of my biking up the Port Alberni hills or of hiking up Mt. Arrowsmith non-stop.

You may remember that we had a TV and video equipment. We would occasionally use this for a family evening “in” instead of “out.” We would watch some excellent movies together as a family. Fran commented, “It was almost like reading a book together when the kids were younger. What’s nice about it is that you can stop and re-watch a part you didn’t get or wanted to discuss.” These were wonderful family evenings, though it was hard to protect our privacy for an entire evening without friends or strangers knocking on the door.

One late Monday afternoon and evening in early March 1987 was one of those days we all had different agendas. Fran had a Junior High curriculum committee first, followed by a practice session at church for a children’s group Bible reading on the Women’s World Day of Prayer. It also happened to be our turn to do dorm relief at Pineview, which I took by myself, while “dragging” Cynthia and Wiebe along for the occasion. They did not mind, for they had friends there. Besides, eating in the Pineview dining room was fun—different environment, different cuisine. Kevin stayed home, for he had his own senior class party at home. He had invited ten kids over for Nigerian food, which most of them loved. That Nigerian food, of course, was cooked by Asabe. Fran commented, “It surely is nice to have a good cook. She often comes and goes before I’m home. I just leave the food out along with cooking directions and pay her at the end of the week.”

I have skipped writing about many birthdays of the past couple of years, but Fran’s on March 11, 1987, generated a lot of love and appreciation. In her own words,

I had a nice (and long) birthday yesterday. Cynthia fixed breakfast and insisted that we eat it in bed. At Hillcrest staff coffee time, someone always bakes a cake in honour of the birthday person. Then one of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sections “surprised” me with a cake and later in the day the other section had a cake to share. In Ladies’ Fellowship meeting at church I got sung to, and because it was CRC prayer meeting, I had another song and cake there. Good thing I don’t gain weight easily!

However, the family birthday dinner took place in a restaurant several days later, since I was gone to Ogbomoso for a few days. Fran commented, “That is so much more enjoyable now that the kids are older and there is such a variety of nice restaurants in town.”

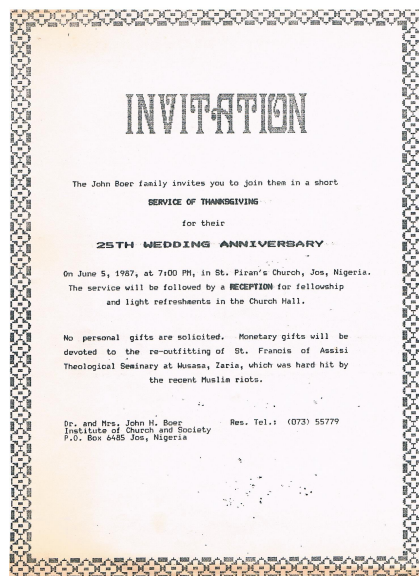
June 5, 1987, would mark our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and we wanted to celebrate it properly. We planned an anniversary service at St. Piran’s with a reception to follow in the church hall. Fran was a bit nervous about it. For our wedding we knew exactly who was coming, but we had no idea for this one, since people here never RSVP. She commented, “I guess we’ll just have to be sure there’s plenty of food!” She also wrote, “We didn’t know till the evening itself how things would go. We really had no idea how many people would come, because it was both a specific and ‘open’ invitation. There were about 120 people who came for the service and reception. The CRC missionaries in Jos came and many of our St. Piran’s friends and other Nigerians from different contacts.”

Our pastor, Nathaniel Yisa, conducted a very meaningful service for the occasion and a friend, Tim Gyuse, was the MC at the reception. He did a good job at pulling together the different cultures represented. We had well-worked out programs for both parts. Cynthia sang during the service the same song that Francis Lieuwen and I sang together at our wedding: “O, Perfect Love.” At the reception we had New Life Singers, a Christian group that included two of my staff, Peter Magaji and Matthew Adams. They played and sang in a way that really added life and colour to the party! Lydia and Chris also sang a duet, while Cynthia sang a second solo.

All in all, the whole family were very happy with the day’s events and look back on the day with happy memories. You might be interested in the menu: we had bottled soft drinks, fried chicken and beef, spring rolls, Indian meat pies, roasted peanuts, Nigerian chinchin, and potato chips. Then for the tea time at the end, we had doughnuts and cookies. Different people helped with making things, but Fran made all the chips and doughnuts herself. Yesterday morning the CRC missionaries honoured us with a special coffee for our anniversary.

There was a funny moment when Tim, the MC, arrived. He had been to some missionary parties and had observed that, compared to Nigerians, missionary parties were often sparse in what they served. This was a St. Piran’s party; no place for “sparsity.” So, upon arrival, he peeked in the kitchen and observed the plenty of food awaiting the guests. He nodded his approval to us. He would not have to be embarrassed to MC this party! This was not just any old missionary party!

On the invitation it was stated that we did not solicit any personal gifts, but that any monetary gifts would be “devoted to the re-outfitting of St. Francis of Assisi Theological Seminary at Wusasa, which was hard hit by recent Muslim riots.” N600 was collected. Yes, Muslim riots way back then in 1987. And that had been going on already since 1977-1978 during the first Constituent Assembly!



25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – June 5, 1987\*

### *Lydia and Chris*

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. While August ended with Grandpa's death, it began with Lydia and Chris having a new baby boy named Jesse Galeya. Fran wrote,

He is a really nice looking baby and they are all doing well. Jude will be three in October and seems quite happy with his baby brother. At the end of the month Cynthia plans to spend the weekend with them so she can play with her nephews. Because we've been away for some months, Jude hardly remembers us and is even a bit afraid of us.

As time went on, their boys were both doing well. Jude had become an active and talkative three-year old, while little Jesse was sleeping through the night and "growing nicely." Chris was enjoying the challenges of his third year in seminary. The report from which I draw this, is silent about Lydia. Sorry, but let's assume that no news is good news.

Lydia had her 26<sup>th</sup> birthday in September 1986. Here we have the latest news on that part of the family:

We gave her the usual box of jellos, puddings and Kool Aid which is a real treat for her family. They have recently moved. Garba graduated from Seminary in June and he was called by Plateau Church here in Jos. The church rented an almost-new house for them. They've just moved in but still have to get curtains, more furniture etc. to fill the house. They have a lot of guest room space and over this first weekend they already had a family with three kids use the extra rooms!

### *The Children Together*

Our three "natural" children had all kinds of plans for their 1985 "summer" break. Kevin got himself a job in the clean-up crew at Hillcrest. In addition, he wanted to finish his electricity course (see below), teach himself shorthand and teach Fran word processing on the Osborne computer. Cynthia wanted Fran to teach her typing, but Fran was not sure her fingers were already long enough. Wiebe wanted to get more animals to take care of—remember his rabbit job--and work at his running. His best Nigerian friend, John Yisa, was going to transfer to another school. So the two planned to play with each other as much as possible during the break. Both Kevin and Wiebe were also deep into computers, especially playing games. We had to restrict them to one hour a day on games and the rest of their computer time on learning other skills, Wiebe in the daytime and Kevin in the evening.

Early July during the same break, according to Fran,

Cynthia and Wiebe had great fun rearranging their bedroom; that was "fun cleaning," they said. Usually when I make them haul everything from their shelves and under their beds etc. to straighten things up, they hate it, but this time it was their own decision! They managed to squeeze in two beds, two desks and several small cabinets and even an easy



chair. They put blankets in front of some open shelving now so it won't get so dusty and also that mom won't see the mess so easily!

Last time we read of such a cleaning endeavour it ended up in a brawl. Well, kids do grow up eventually!

If you do a “find” on “August 1985” in this chapter and its companion Chapter 22, you will find it was about as busy as things can get. In the middle of all that there were those unrelenting annual birthdays. We had a party and dinner for little Jesse, Lydia's one-year old, as well as for Cynthia, who wanted a family over to help us celebrate. Sorry, don't remember which family, but it meant still another meal to cook.

And to top it all off, Pastor David Angye came by and stayed for a few days. He was always a pleasure to have around; it was our opportunity to encourage him in his difficult job as Principal of a Government Teachers College, where he was surrounded and confronted with corruption at every turn. Neither one of us could spend as much time with him as we would have liked. Just too much going on at the same time.

And, oh, yes, school started up again as well with its typical flurry of official and unofficial stuff needing to be done all at once. It surely was good that we still had the stamina of youth. After all, we were only 47 and 43 respectively.

As you will have noticed by now, music of one form or the other played a significant role in our family as it did in Fran's and my youth as well. When Nigeria was in the midst of Babangida's coup—see Chapter 22—we had our piano tuned. The tuner was going to teach Kevin, but Kevin found it too complicated. Nevertheless, Kevin kept it up for a while. Some weeks later he came along to help the tuner man re-assemble a piano that had been dropped and fell apart.

Wiebe's goal was to be a drummer, but we wanted him to understand some music basics first and thus mandated piano lessons for him a minimum of one year. It could hardly be said that he was enthusiastic about it. Cynthia was to continue her guitar lessons and Kevin his organ. Cynthia and Wiebe were both in the Junior High Choir.

One evening a few weeks later, Fran was writing a letter during a full family concert. “I'm listening to a guitar concert from Cynthia; Wiebe plays (bangs?) his drums and Kevin plays his stereo, not piano this time.” That was a typical musical scenario. Fran herself occasionally played piano, “but not as often as I should.”

All three kids were very active in student leadership. Fran wrote,

Wiebe has been elected president of his class; Cynthia, secretary of hers. Kevin was running for Student Council membership and tried to “bribe” the voters with my potato chips and candy bars to vote for him. Then he found out the election wasn't till a day later. He's not sure they'll remember who gave them those goodies! Cynthia is also member of the Steering Committee for Junior Youth Fellowship; so, they all stay quite busy.

Kevin had apparently caught on to the Nigerian way of doing things with that potato chip bribe. He also had a pretty good eye for the fickleness of voters who often are too stupid to remember such important things from one day to the next. Others, of course, accept such bribes without intending to fall for them. But he made it! After his first meeting, he told us that the two staff advisors “weren’t too sympathetic to the students’ feelings!”

The kids were again involved in various sports at school, which meant we were pressed frequently to watch their games. One October Saturday Fran wrote about Wiebe’s soccer game and Cynthia’s volleyball competition, both against Kent Academy, the SIM missionary children school in Miango. Hillcrest won.

If you still haven’t caught on to the family routine, here’s a summary of it from Fran:

Cynthia and Wiebe have catechism after school on Thursdays and Kevin has Student Council meetings then. Actually, they come home after 5 pm most days now, because they are involved in intramural sports and other activities after school. They are all busy enough to stay out of trouble. Schoolwork and music practice takes most of their evening. It’s nice we live so close to school, because we spend little time commuting.

Here’s a glimpse of the kids’ lives in February 1986 by Fran:

Kevin continues to be very busy at school and, even though he wouldn’t want to admit it, seems to enjoy it alright. Cynthia and Wiebe are both involved in the production of *Oklahoma* and have play practice several evenings a week. They both love it, but are very busy with school, homework and the play. Good thing it will all be over just before Easter break, because it’s hard to live with all that time pressure.

A little while later,

They are supposed to know all their lines and songs now for *Oklahoma*. Practice will be from 7 – 9:30pm every evening this week, so I hope their teachers will be easy with the homework. It’s a good experience for them but really too much time pressure at such a young age. Wiebe says he’s enjoying it so much that he wants to try out for every play that he can!

During the second half of March, it was time for the actual performance of *Oklahoma*. It was really a very ambitious project for a school the size of Hillcrest to take on. They could have used more strong singers and a few more weeks of practice. But everything went “reasonably ok.”

As I wrote earlier, running was also part of family culture. In October 1986 all three kids were involved in running events. Here’s the story:

All three of the kids did well at some running events this week. Cynthia’s class had to run laps for time in P.E. She tied with another girl for first place in 8th grade with 11 minutes 43 seconds for 6 laps. Wiebe came first in 7th grade with 5 minutes 53 seconds for 4 laps (1 mile). Yesterday Hillcrest hosted a cross country race between them and Baptist High

School. There were 16 kids who ran the 3.5 mile race. The first 4 finishers were Hillcresters, and I'm proud to say the first of the Hillcresters was Kevin! He beat the next one by 13 seconds. Kevin originally started running because he was embarrassed that Wiebe could and he couldn't. Everybody started asking him, "Is that your *little* brother?" Once he started running, he said he really enjoyed it, especially the long distance stuff.

October was a busy running month. Another race was a half marathon, thirteen miles in which both boys participated. Out of the 72 participants of all ages and every skill level, Kevin came in eighth at 1 hour 31 minutes; Wiebe, tenth at 1 hour 35 minutes. Later there was a high school cross country competition against several other schools. Out of 22 kids, Kevin came in ninth in a five kilometer race at 18:03. Fran wrote, "Kevin says he's done better time than that before, but I thought he ran fast. This kind of race goes over small hills, across bridges, rocks, etc. Kevin started long distance running to show Wiebe he could do it too, but he says he really loves the feel of running now and hopes to continue in college too."

For quite a while both Kevin and Cynthia made regular trips to Kaduna to see an Egyptian orthodontist. We thought he did good work and had good results, while the kids really wanted to get it all done as soon as possible. He did some pulling and both of them needed retainers which required regular checking and tightening. The orthodontist had enough Jos clients that he hoped to make occasional visits there to meet them, but it never seemed to work out. Later in her 30s, Cynthia needed more rectification, including retainers. Her Seattle orthodontist apparently was horrified at some things his Egyptian colleague had done twenty years earlier.

### *The Children Individually*

#### *Kevin*

Kevin started his Tenth Grade school year with a bang. He joined the high school choir and was taking both piano and organ lessons. That plus some intramural sports, a little tutoring, homework, and jobs around the house all kept him very busy. A few weeks later, Fran thought that he might be a bit too conscientious about all his work, but "it's important to him to do well, so that's a good attitude." He was doing well in his organ lessons, but was planning to quit piano lessons, for he could not keep up both. In November he played organ for ten minutes before the Hillcrest Chapel Service. "He did a nice job and did not seem nervous."

In November, Kevin got another tutoring client, a twelve-year old Turkish girl whose parents were desperate to get her into Hillcrest. Her English was minimal, but her father expected positive results from her tutor. Kevin stressed that there was nothing guaranteed, though he would do his utmost with her. Fran commented, "Quite the pressure put on kids these days!"

Remember the drivers' license issue between Kevin and me? I was still taking him out for driving sessions. Though we knew the law about the actual license—not before eighteen!—we were not certain about the learner's permit—sixteen or eighteen? And it seemed impossible to get the precise answer anywhere. Fran wrote, "He is so ready and eager to get out on the busy roads. It

really would be nice if he could get it at sixteen. I can still remember how eager I was.” But *this I*, the writer, did not bother till I was seventeen. I had not considered it a big thing.

In due time, Kevin got his learner’s permit, but this had to be renewed every three months until he turned eighteen. At least, he could now legitimately drive on the road with a fully licensed person next to him. That was a great step forward.

The kids all wrote occasional letters to the grandparents, but hardly any of these letters survived. However, here we have one from Kevin dated November 18, 1984, from which I quote a bit. He had become used to the computer and disliked writing on a manual typewriter. At the end, he wrote “I give up on the manual!” “School,” he wrote,

is tough and getting worse every day. More homework, more essays, less study periods. I’m taking organ lessons and am enjoying them a lot. I’ve decided to quit piano next semester, because it’s taking too much of my time. I’ve got several tutoring jobs this semester; all told I’m earning about \$25 a week. I’ve decided to stop those as well next semester. Instead, I’ll try for the cross country team and I’ll join the play.

He was growing up and making decisions, even some hard ones. Giving up on \$25 a week would not have been easy for him. But let it be noted that he enjoyed taking organ, especially once he started learning about the pedals with their powerful sounds, and that he did not indicate any negative attitude towards piano. He also had started to enjoy the choir, especially after he moved over from tenor to bass, but due to overwork, he dropped it for the time being. Same thing for piano.

Kevin really was thrilled when he was invited to spend two weeks of a Christmas vacation “helping out” at the Mission hangar in Takum. I wrote somewhere that this was his way of finding out whether or not he would like to become a pilot in the future. After all, he was in his last term in Nigeria; next term he should be in college somewhere in North America—Canada, I hoped. The time for major decisions was not far away. He had the time of his life there in Takum. Fran wrote, “He was getting in on lots of flights and Al Rumph, the pilot, was even giving him training at the ‘wheel.’” This was holiday at its best. He said that he loved every minute of his experience “down bush. He says he’s definitely going to be a missionary pilot!” He was also very pleased with his ability in Hausa and its usefulness in that work.

Early in the next semester, Kevin was really challenged with his Computer II course. Fran reported,

It’s really a bit beyond him, but the challenge is good for him. He spent five and a half hours on the school computer yesterday, but in the end he figured out his problem. He stayed after school and came home at 6 pm with a big smile on his face. Not only did he get the one that stumped him, but he even completed an assignment not due till later.

At the end of March 1985, Hillcrest was putting on the play “The Music Man.” Kevin had only two lines in it and decided to try for a bigger part in next year’s play. He could have gotten more

even in this play, but he didn't think the story was worth the effort. At that point the school asked him and many other boys to just cooperate and all take little parts.

Kevin suddenly seemed to pick up an interest in electricity. This might have come from his summer in repair of Mission buildings in Jos or from his few weeks at the hangar. At any rate, he took a course in Basic Electricity from the BC Government Correspondence Course, the same outfit from which I took my high school. He said he was enjoying it. He completed it during the 1985 "summer" break. I have never seen him take any practical interest in things electrical since, nor have I ever detected him tinkering or repairing electrical stuff. I guess it was just one of these temporary things kids pick up and then drop just as quickly.

Mid-April 1985, Kevin's class put on a "carnival of food, games, guessing contests, videos, sports, etc." to make money for their class. They cleared over N1500, which was very good for a class of 40 kids. They as well as their parents worked hard. Kevin was the class Treasurer. Thus he had to get the final figures worked out.

Kevin's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party included having three boys over for a "doughnut bash." Fran made four dozen glazed doughnuts and the four boys polished off two dozen right out of the frying pan—six each! They did, of course, taste the best right at that moment. She gave another dozen to a friend who had a birthday on the same day, while the fourth dozen went to Cynthia and Wiebe for them and their friends. I always wondered afterwards why our kids were not obese!

Another part of the celebration was a card Fran made with a poem written specifically for a sixteen-year old, lined with baby pictures and more current photographs. She commented, "He didn't rip it up, so I guess he was pleased."

At 16, there was the 1985 "summer" break to organize. Even before it started, he had already several offers for part time jobs, including looking after the hostel chickens for the entire break. It was to be on a straight 10% commission on egg sales. A month into the break, Fran wrote the following about Kevin's jobs:

Kevin stays busy by working a few hours every morning at Hillcrest; right now they are digging out weeds from the track. He finds it very hot working in the sun, and doesn't want to do manual labour all his life. He is in charge of selling eggs for Mt. View Hostel. Those chickens are really laying eggs now; he's getting 5 to 6 dozen a day. So far he's managed to sell them all, but with still more people leaving he might run into trouble. Someone is willing to buy them at wholesale prices when he has way too many, so he might end up doing that when he gets really swamped. It's better to sell them for a bit less but still sell them. I'd hate to have the Cremers come back to the hostel and find 200 dozen eggs on the counter!

The business flourished till the end. By early July he was collecting about seven dozen eggs a day and he managed to sell them all at full price. He kept thinking he would have to place a sign at the gate, but people kept coming. In fact, he sometimes could not keep up with the orders. He was enjoying this business a lot more than he had expected. He had set a goal of sales up to N1,000 and by end July he had reached N850—close.

At work, Kevin and his friend, Samit, were now painting the rocks around the track. The supervisor got wise and found he would get more work out of them if he placed them at opposite ends of the track. Duh! Kevin was eager for the money he was making and even put in some overtime. He wanted to earn as much as possible before school opened again.

He was also continuing to train Fran on the computer. At this time the lesson was about “cut and paste,” so she could copy her letters more easily and send a nice copy to both parents. She thought she was making good progress.

In October 1985, Kevin and four other boys in his 11<sup>th</sup> grade class unexpectedly cut their longish hair and surprised both parents and class mates. Their new style looked like the brush cuts of the 50s. The girls in their class denounced it as “awful,” but Kevin said it felt cool, especially when running.

During that fall semester, Kevin was pre-occupied with a fruit fly experiment for Advanced Biology. He had bottles, solutions, test tubes, etc. everywhere in the house, in the garage and fridge for different stages of the project. Sometimes he kept flies in the oven, so that Fran had to remember to check before she’d turn it on. He expected to have about 5,000 flies before the project was over. It just might go over into the next semester, thank you! Somewhere in the midst of it all, he went with his teacher, Al Persenaire, to the school lab to x-ray the flies. During the next semester he was involved in a fish experiment in an aquarium.

A month later he was deeply involved in flight simulation on the computer. He claimed it was really useful for his future. Fran was tempted to restrict his computer time but refrained, since he kept getting good grades in all his courses.

In February 1986 Fran wrote,

Kevin is extra busy with school work these weeks. He’s taking seven solids and all the term projects seem to be needing attention. He always has this good student reputation to live up to, so that puts pressure on him. He scored in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on the PSAT. We are really proud of him and hope he does equally well on the SAT. He is Business Manager of the *Crest*, the Hillcrest yearbook. With 550 students in the school, that demands a lot of accounting and receipt printing etc. He has put it all on the computer now, so the future Business Managers won’t have as much work. This evening he’s off to a Chinese Restaurant at the invitation of the Rotary Club. Apparently they sent invitations to lots of secondary schools to select 3 students each for a Rotary evening. As soon as he heard the word “food” he raised his hand, before he even knew what the requirements were! He wasn’t sure that his “social skills” were well enough developed to survive the evening, but he was looking forward to a good meal!

For the 1986 summer break he planned to travel to the UK and the US. I’ve written about that earlier in this chapter. Fran surmised that it was to begin the “weaning process” and to lessen the culture shock awaiting him the following year. He wanted to try something on his own. We were thinking about going to Switzerland with the rest of the family, but he was planning to visit the

Graham Weeks family in London and then on to the US. The Weeks had sent him an encouraging welcome; so he was looking forward to that.

As to the US, he worked for some weeks on the Zandstra farm in Highland, IN. The Zandstras were big time truck farmers and stalwart members of the II Highland CRC. While working for them, he stayed with brother Hendrik and Barb, who lived nearby in Gary, IN. Later, he moved to Grand Rapids and stayed with his cousin Ray Prins Jr., who had a house in Wyoming, a Grand Rapids suburb.

His plan was to pay for his trip by importing “floppies” and other electronic goodies. “Floppies” were an early type of computer disk that derived their name from the fact that they were, well, floppy. He could pick them up cheaply in the US and sell them for a mint in Nigeria. However, an economic recession had set in so that the people had less money than he had counted on.

He would come to me for advice occasionally about a prospective sale. I wrote the following about one of these occasions:

Someone had come to buy a portable stereo and Kevin needed advice about a bargaining point. Bargaining is a big feature in Nigerian culture and Nigerians tend to be a lot better at it than we are. Well, we'll see how he comes out of it. They had come to within \$15 of each other and that is not bad when Kevin's last offer was \$400. In the end Kevin settled for \$390. Fair enough.

Kevin sold most of his imports very quickly. Fran wrote, “He should soon have a nice bank account to show for his efforts. He is very happy that he went to the US. A big thanks to everyone who helped him out. It was a good experience for him to be with relatives on his own.”

In 12<sup>th</sup> grade Kevin was involved in another Hillcrest play, but it put him under intense pressure, what with his other school activities as well. The play went well. Fran felt it was “amazing when you think that a class of 35 kids have to do all that work: acting, sets, programmes, advertising, etc. In a small high school, I think everyone feels his/her responsibility more than in a larger school.”

Fran wrote about a 12 hour relay in early December, 1986, in which Kevin and nine others participated:

They each ran a mile and then waited till their next turn, about an hour later. By the time they did their warm up and warm down exercises, there wasn't much time between runs. It looked like an army camp down by the track! They had some foam mattresses, blankets, sleeping bags, radios, food, drinks, etc. there. I went down several times during the day to bring little goodies and to cheer them on. It was a charity race and they collected almost 4,000 naira for two hospitals.

Kevin was thinking of different options for a future career, but he did know that teaching wasn't for him, even though he proved good at it. He had taught a nine-week computer course twice a

week to Grade 8 and had done a good job from all we heard. He had also tutored Cynthia in math throughout a whole academic year and she appreciated his help. But no, that was not for him.

May 11 being his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Kevin went for his driver's license test late April, since it would take some time for them to process it. They refused to test him till he was actually 18. Four days after his birthday he returned to them with his birth certificate in hand. He took his test and was told to return the next day to pick up the license. Fran wrote,

We really hope that everything is ok because he is *so* eager for his real license and he's ready for the responsibility too. It'll be handy to be able to give him errands to run for us. If he gets the license tomorrow, then he wants to go with some friends on an overnight campout and take the car. A whole new set of worries but I guess we'll survive those too!

He got it!!! Now you may think that was no big deal, but for a young kid to get a license without bribery and other shenanigans here is little short of a miracle. I remember accompanying Kevin to the office to pick up the license. A few days later, Fran wrote,

Kevin finally got his license on Tuesday, and he is still celebrating! He's put an awful lot of miles on the Volkswagon since then and he's even had a flat tire. He's out right now visiting friends and really enjoying his new freedom. He's really feeling it that he'll soon leave here and by the end of next week most of his school friends will have scattered to the four ends of the earth. Some of these kids have been schoolmates since first grade and they'll probably never see each other again.

### *Graduation!*

The big occasion had come for Kevin! We're going to stick closely to Fran's report on the proceedings:

Sunday, May 30 was the Hillcrest baccalaureate service. The graduates as well as their parents were to be honoured at the evening service. We had reserved seating and presented a special number as parents. It was fun to introduce ourselves as "Kevin's mom and dad." Many of the parents we hadn't met before, because they work so far away: Chad, Cameroon, Sierra Leone or other parts of Nigeria.

Three days that week were exam time for both Fran and all three kids. "Exam time is always a bit tense for the kids and teachers with all the preparations and corrections that need to be done. We all made it to Wednesday afternoon! We also had our Awards Assembly and all three kids got some awards: either academic or sports."

Then the big day itself, June 3 1987:

Wednesday at 7 pm was the long-awaited graduation program. The caps and gowns and all the traditional music typical of an American graduation were all part of it here at Hillcrest. It was a lovely program with lots of light-hearted humorous things told about each of the



37 graduates. After the program, lots of hugs from everyone in the receiving line. Most of those kids had been in my class in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so they were “special” to me too. Many tears were shed as many of the kids were ready to “scatter to the four corners of the earth” as soon as the evening program was over. There was a nice graduation tea for the grads, families and staff members till about 11 pm. Then everyone was invited to a Lebanese restaurant for a buffet “supper.” Most of us “old” people left shortly after midnight, but the grads stayed there till 5 am and then they went to a mission hostel for a group breakfast. Kevin came home at 6:30 am quite emotionally drained from all the farewells.

Our Kevin had graduated! Congratulations! During that week, our missionary colleagues organized a “coffee” in honour of the two CRC grads: Kevin and Lisa Dykgraaf.

### *Kevin’s College Hunt*

This section constitutes a flash back to Kevin’s struggles about which college to attend. At 16, he started to think university, but had no idea where he’d like to go. He would love to go somewhere in BC like UBC or Trinity Western, for he liked the climate there, not cold and hot like Grand Rapids. But, wrote Fran, his interests were in aviation, computers—nothing new there—and linguistics—now where did that come from all of a sudden? He would want a school that was known for those fields. Of course, tuition and other expenses would also influence the final decision.

I also had some thoughts about his further education. With his interest in aviation I sometimes feared he might turn to the US Airforce. That was something I wanted to forestall even though he had not yet mentioned it. I would not mind his getting trained in an airforce, for it meant solid training and good general education while getting paid. Not a bad deal. But not US Airforce, for that nation was/is too imperialistic and too much of a war monger, interfering all over the world where it has no business. I would be so embarrassed to have a son in the US forces. So, during our Vancouver months we did look into the Canadian Airforce, but that did not go anywhere for Kevin.

When he was approaching his seventeenth birthday, he was beginning to think more seriously about college and was becoming aware it would cost him a bundle. As ten years earlier in Baissa we agonized about which school to send him to, so now *he* was agonizing about which college to choose. Some colleges and scholarship boards in the US were sending him unsolicited circulars because of his high Scholastic Achievement test scores. Calvin offered first year tuition free for MKs, something hard to beat. He was thinking of majoring in computer science for his Bachelor’s degree, but hoped to pursue Aviation after his BA. He would go back and forth before settling on Calvin; there were so many intriguing choices out there. Besides, so many Hillcrest grads, not just CRC kids, tended to choose Calvin. So, a different track looked attractive; he didn’t really want to follow the beaten path!

September 1986 found him busy filling in forms for scholarships. He received notice that he qualified as a National Merit Semi Finalist and needed to fill in some special forms. Since he was the only one at Hillcrest that year, he felt quite honoured. He had sort of settled on going to

Calvin at least for the first year, but now he saw a whole new world of possibilities opened for him. The school counselor gave him a list of 15 schools with degrees in Aeronautic Engineering programs, and he intended to apply to the “best” schools.

He was really having a hard time. In October he received a brochure from Le Tourneau, a small college in Texas that offered a bachelor’s degree in Aviation. He could do his liberal arts and learn flying at the same time! It was becoming a big and important decision for him to make. Most of the mail from the US was from colleges for Kevin. He was getting wooed all over the place. Fran felt he was faced with “over choice.”

By February 1987, the most likely scenario for Kevin was to attend Calvin for the first year to benefit from their first year free tuition for MKs, after which he would transfer to Le Tourneau as per above. In the meantime, he was enjoying the “bachelor’s survival course” to which Fran was subjecting him.

By April 1987 Kevin was still struggling. Various offers continued to drift in from different institutions. He had just received a package from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo MI. Fran wrote,

He doesn’t yet know where he’s going. He’s still getting some scholarship offers. Calvin awarded him the “Presidential Award” worth \$1600 in addition to his 1<sup>st</sup> year tuition waiver as an MK. Le Tourneau in Texas has offered him about \$4000 (some grant, some loan) per year if he comes as a freshman. He’s having a hard time deciding – also about an exact career.

By end April he was coming closer to a decision. In spite of the large annual scholarship promised by Le Tourneau, he was now 90 percent sure of going to Calvin for one or two years and then see again. And that’s where he ended up for all four years!

### *Cynthia*

Starting January 1985, Cynthia was trying to pay a bit more attention in school. Some of her teachers complained that she was so busy talking that she didn’t know what was being taught. She had a few F’s on her last 1984 report card, something that seriously shook her up. She was determined to do better for her report at the end of the school year, for exams counted for 20% of the final grade. If it wasn’t music, she simply wasn’t disciplined with her studies; we had to keep reminding her to get going. Fran wrote, “She has so many other fun things that ‘need’ to be done first.”

Cynthia, of course, had her summer break as well. Fran wrote:

Cynthia is still quite serious about her typing. She is working on lessons 11 and 12 this morning and she finds that it’s getting complicated, but she is sticking with it. She’s also continuing with her guitar and is trying to make her own songs now; she really doesn’t have anyone who can give her lessons during the school holiday.

In another letter: “Cynthia is really enjoying all her freedom. She is doing some baby sitting which she really enjoys and is also spending lots of time drawing and making cards.” But as the holiday wore on, she was getting bored and listless. She didn’t want to work at anything too hard and needed constant pushing and reminding.

That seemed to be the story of her life at the time. When the next report time came around, Kevin and Wiebe both had an A- average, but Cynthia a C+. Fran wrote,

It’s a little hard for her when teachers assume she’ll get excellent grades because they know her brothers. Cynthia isn’t nearly so serious about her school work as the boys are; she’s always ‘forgetting’ her books at school and then suddenly remembers an hour before a test that she has forgotten to study. We’ve had to set some more regular study time for her, because she isn’t self-disciplined. When it comes to personality and out-going ways, she outshines them, but somehow those aren’t things you get graded for.

She wasn’t always getting grades mediocre or below. While Kevin was engrossed in his fruit fly experiment, Cynthia wrote a paper for Social Studies on the African Hippo and got a B+ for her efforts. She was quite pleased, for she had worked hard at it. She showed she could do it if she applied herself.

Actually it was a seesaw with her, up and down constantly. Mid-November 1985 she was having trouble with several subjects; she failed tests in Bible, Social Studies and Math, especially those that had “trick” questions. Then suddenly, she came home with a 100% for a science test. “We try to help her, but so often she ‘forgets’ what the test will be on. That’s hard for us to get used to, because we’ve never had to check up on Kevin’s homework. Oh, well, each child is different and that’s what makes parenting such a challenge.” Only a few weeks later, “Cynthia is studying a bit more lately, but she never does very well on tests and exams. Some kids seem to be luckier than others with that kind of stuff. Her attitude is still good and that’s important.”

You’ve heard about all of us involved in tennis at one time or another, but not Cynthia. That changed temporarily. During the 1985 fall she took tennis lessons from a Nigerian trainer, while Fran also taught her some rules and how to keep score. Soon she was participating in a tennis competition with another school. The entire team consisted of beginners, but they won this event and, in fact, won a few other games as well. Good for her; a new outlet, but it never became a really big thing for her.

Somewhere during May, Cynthia’s Home Economics class invited their mothers for a Mother-Daughter Tea. Fran reported that it was nicely done. The girls all wore the aprons they had sewed and served the goodies they had recently baked and then frozen for this occasion. Their next activity was going to be making breakfasts. Fran told them they should then invite their dads for a Father-Daughter Breakfast! Don’t believe that ever materialized. At least, I never received an invitation to such an event!

In September 1986, Fran wrote the following about the next school year for Cynthia:

Cynthia stays busy with her school work, sports, and guitar practice. She's managing to keep ahead so far, but 8<sup>th</sup> grade is often a difficult year. Kevin is checking her math every day, so we hope that will help. Last year we waited till she had trouble, but she never seemed to sense when she had trouble and didn't understand. Now it's part of Kevin's "job" to help on that.

Towards end October, report cards came out again. Fran reported, "Cynthia has a bit above a B-average this time, so we are really proud of her. She got an A- in Math which is really a record for her. Kevin has been checking her homework every day and explaining things to her, so that seems to have helped. We'll go out to eat in a restaurant to celebrate with her!"

### *The Musician*

Cynthia was into music a big way. Fran wrote she was making good progress with the guitar. She had a nice singing voice and enough confidence to play for others. She had also joined the Hillcrest choir and thus occasionally sang at the Sunday morning Chapel service. When this was the case, we would skip St. Piran's and attend the Chapel service. By Christmas 1984 Fran reported that she "is quite creative, but she never wants to practice too long for anything! She's continuing to improve on the guitar, but needs the discipline of regular lessons to keep her moving. She has learned a few songs on her own during the holidays."

A while later Fran wrote, "She loves her guitar lessons and is working on some nice songs. Each week she plays in Sunday School at St. Piran's, which requires discipline on her part to train." Late March she was to sing and play a number in church itself. This was her first attempt and it made her nervous. Fran felt that the earlier she started performing, the less nervous she would be later.

End April 1986, the Evenhouse family organized a concert and invited a few "outside" musicians, including Cynthia. Cynthia was asked to sing and play guitar at the occasion. She performed three solos and also sang and played together with the others. "We were really proud of her; her voice is so lovely and clear. Wiebe gets a bit jealous of the attention she gets, but he does so much better academically that we are really glad that she shines at this." Some months later, she started taking lessons on the electric guitar. A student who was soon graduating wanted to pass on his electric guitar to Cynthia. She was really enjoying the instrument, according to Fran.

In September 1986,

Cynthia is doing a bit better in school so far this term. I'm glad that her attitude has always been positive in spite of the fact that her grades aren't usually the best. The boys always outshine her and that is sometimes a bit hard to take. She continues to make progress with her guitar and often has to play at Youth Fellowship meetings. She says she's willing to try for Junior High chapels now too. She's really building up confidence about her singing and playing, so we are very pleased with that.

Early March 1987, the Evenhouses conducted another concert, this time outside, and again invited Cynthia to participate. She did “Red River Valley” as a solo. In the chorus there is a line “Come and sit by my side if you love me.” So, of course, one of her friends had arranged for someone to come and “sit by her side” and then hugged her afterwards. It was “Uncle Case,” housefather at Mt. View Hostel. Cynthia said she was so embarrassed, but we knew she really enjoyed the attention. During the “request” phase of the concert someone asked her to sing “You Are My Sunshine” as a solo. The Evenhouses had given her a chance to shine and she did not let them down.

### *Wiebe*

Wiebe led a very busy and involved life during this term of service. His two main concerns were school and running. For his running, see “The Runner” down below.

School wise, he did an interesting project on the Wukari Jukun people for Social Studies. He included a picture of our old neighbour there, Ayuba, whom we used to call “Old McDonald” and who sang a song to both sets of our parents with his home-made “guitar.” Wiebe didn’t really know Ayuba, but had heard plenty about this unique old man from us that he was interested in him.

He was also getting into singing with Cynthia. We were happy that he dared to sing in public with her and hoped they would continue to sing together as they got older. Fran wrote, “I think he notices that Cynthia gets attention for her singing; so maybe he feels that he wants some too! People praise him enough for his running, so he really doesn’t need more of it.”

Wiebe’s 1985 birthday – his 11<sup>th</sup> - was largely celebrated outside. If he had waited one day, that would not have been possible, for the entire day was one huge tropical deluge. Rhoda Yisa, the mother of John, Wiebe’s best friend, made him a cake and came to our place with their entire family to have cake, ice cream and drinks at the picnic table in our yard. It was great. The kids now were making their own birthday party plans. Fran found that to be fun, for everyone was different. For his supper he “ordered” rabbit, chicken and fried potatoes.

As to work, he was kept busy with his rabbits and gardens. He sometimes got tired of working with the rabbits, “but chores are good for any kid.” He did love to see them grow—and then eat them!

He had a special adventure when he was invited by Pastor Yisa and son John to visit their village near Bida in Niger State. He had a wonderful week, he told us. He also made history in that he was the first White person ever to visit that village. Fran wrote, “He saw lots of interesting things, kept a diary and took pictures. I’m sure he will write about it in his next letter (to his grandparents).”

In the fall of 1985, Wiebe was still taking piano lessons, but against his will. He had just fulfilled a dream by getting a drum set. He tolerated the piano, while he beat his drum with enthusiasm. We had to keep reminding him to shut the door to his room when practicing. However, his drumming

did not stop me from taking a late afternoon nap in the next room! He may as well have played with the door open!

### *The Patient*

Soon after our return from Togo in January 1986, Wiebe fell out of a big tree in our yard and badly damaged his right wrist and elbow. We spent a lot of time with Wiebe at the hospital. He had severe pain for a week. After three weeks it was still swollen and he still needed more x-rays taken. The doctor told us to figure on six months before he could stretch his arm and straighten it out. In late January he had to start the next semester of school without the use of his right hand. We all know how inconvenient and clumsy that can be. A week into February, he was getting discouraged. The beginning of the hot season mid-February made his arm feel very uncomfortable.

Another week later, Fran wrote,

I just had a phone call from Wiebe's doctor. He said he was still concerned enough about Wiebe's elbow that he made a phone call to the States a few days ago to consult with a pediatric bone specialist from his university to discuss Wiebe's progress and x-rays. He again said that he had never seen such a "crushed" elbow – everything inside is mangled up. He is very concerned that there is still some swelling. The pain is minimal now which is helpful, but he wants Wiebe exercising enough each day until he actually feels pain. He has to force his sore arm gradually down by using his muscles. He said in six months he should be able to get it back in a straight position, but there is a possibility it won't quite ever straighten out again. Please continue to pray for patience for all of us and for complete healing of the elbow.

Two weeks later, this was his situation:

At Wiebe's checkup, the doctor gave a very encouraging report. He said he's made "fantastic" progress in the last seven days. Now he has to really push hard for the last stretch. The goal of course is to get his elbow even or in a 180 degree position. Right now it's probably at 150 degrees. I'm sure those last degrees will be the hardest to achieve. At least the swelling is completely gone.

Ten days later, though making some progress, he still couldn't straighten out his elbow, but towards the end of March, Fran wrote,

Wiebe's elbow is almost completely healed up. It seemed to take so long with no obvious progress and then suddenly two weeks ago, he made remarkable progress. He can bend it almost straight now, but it still looks "out of joint" right at the elbow. The bones on his wounded elbow look to be in a different position from the other elbow. He announced on Saturday that he was going to start climbing trees again! So I guess he feels he's all better! I told him he should only climb trees when his daddy is home. I don't want to be the one to pick him off the ground and rush him to emergency again!

Towards end April, things were almost normal again for him.

And then disaster struck again for him! Just before Christmas 1986 Wiebe came down with appendicitis. We did not recognize the problem right away, but he had so much pain during the night that we took him to the hospital's Emergency Room. They immediately put him to bed and three hours later he was on Dr. Carter's surgery table. The appendix had already ruptured a few hours earlier. As Fran told the story,

The surgery took about an hour and all went well, but the poor kid was really sick and sore and desperate for something to drink. That isn't allowed until 24 hours after surgery, so we had to talk him out of it. Here the family stays in the hospital with the patient, so John and I took turns being there. Even a nice cot is provided for sleeping next to his bed at night. It is inconvenient to have to be there the whole time, but certainly nice too, especially for the patient. Wiebe said it was so good that every time he opened his eyes a little, he saw we were right there. He came home on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> and still had trouble keeping his food down and had to be brought back in every morning for the wound to be checked. He'll be going in again this morning and before long the stitches should come out.

Originally our plans had been to go to Baissa area on the 27<sup>th</sup> and then go up to a very isolated area via a dry-season-only road where none of us had been before. So the timing was providential. If his appendix had ruptured there, there would have been no medical help available within a two days' drive. Please praise the Lord with us for healing.

The weekend before the holidays are over we still hope to go to Yankari, a natural hot springs area. The warm water would be good for him right now, but the climb down to the pool and back up again would be too much exertion, so we've decided to go then if still possible. He still walks like an old man and has trouble standing very long. Otherwise he's doing very well. His appetite is back and we're all working on fattening him up because his weight is down to 62 pounds. He never was heavy and he runs off any excess fat with all his long distance running but he did lose at least eight pounds in this experience.

### *The Runner*

You know that Wiebe had entered a new world of running during his 4<sup>th</sup> grade semester in Vancouver. Though only ten years old, once back at Hillcrest, he was allowed to join the junior and senior high track team. The coach had seen him run just for fun and asked if he'd like that challenge. Fran wrote:

They practice four times a week and do some ten kilometers non-stop runs. So far, he's run 300 kilometers this semester; his goal is 1,000 before Christmas. Yesterday was a practice run for anyone interested. He joined the 1500 meter run. The other contestants were teachers, high school kids and post-high schoolers. So there came that skinny little White kid behind the others, but he kept going. One Nigerian from the Sports Council decided to

run along side him to encourage him. He probably was afraid this kid would collapse half way.

By mid-October, Wiebe was practicing for the 5000 meter, which was twelve and a half laps around the track. He was keeping up with lots of the high schoolers, who seemed to enjoy the challenge of this little kid competing with them. He ran his 1,000 by mid-December. We all went to watch him finish and run his final lap together with him. Then we celebrated by going out for a *suya* bash. He even got Kevin to get back into running. He closed the year with his eye seriously on the Olympics!

Running was really Wiebe's main life. Anything preventing him from running was bad news for all of us. For example, March 1985 he fell at school and hurt his right wrist enough for it to need a bandage for a few days. Fran wrote, "It did not prevent him from running. Good thing, too, for that would have been a disaster for all of us." We were all relieved when we learned he would be allowed to continue running in spite of this latest injury.

In October he showed how much he had improved in his running. He did 12.5 laps around the track for the 5000 meter and came in second at just below 20 minutes, beating all but one high school student. His coach predicted that in Grade 8 he might be able to shatter the Hillcrest record.

Running had wormed its way into our family culture as a whole, not just Wiebe's. Even Cynthia was into it. In December 1985 she came in second in the 800 meter race, just two seconds behind the first runner. That was good for her, since she wasn't into it all that much. However, Wiebe came first in his 3,000 meter race. Fran wrote:

I love to watch him run. It seems to be absolutely no effort for him at all. It was a high school track meet, so he, a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, was competing against 9<sup>th</sup> graders. I asked him what he would do if he should get beat since he's so used to always being first these last two years. He said he never really thinks about that, because running is fun and easy and he's just going at a natural pace, not trying to win a race or anything.

In November 1986, Wiebe received a plaque for being the "Youngest Finisher" in the half marathon I wrote above under the "Children Together" section above. However, the doctor told him to quit running for a month and then build up again gradually, since that half marathon had damaged one of his feet. He hurt his foot because he was not wearing his proper running shoes. Apparently he had decided on the spur of the moment to join the race. Fran wrote, "He's having a hard time, because his body seems to need the running now. He says he feels 'guilty' when he doesn't run."

Given the seriousness of his ruptured appendix and surgery, his recovery was comparatively fast, just as Dr. Carter had predicted. By January 20, 1987, he was back to long-distance running. Because he really wanted to concentrate on regaining his weight, he decided to go for 500 km this semester, rather than 1,000.



### *Family Social Life*

Fran wrote a letter dated February 28, 1985. It could just as well have been written during 1977, the year we moved to Jos. It was the same kind of hectic weekend social life at our house, mixed with the same hectic work schedule for me. Here's a short section of that letter:

We had a busy weekend. The Berend boys came over for their three days away from Kent Academy. We had a family with two little ones over for Saturday lunch and a family with three children for Sunday lunch. John preached at the 9 and 11 am services at St. Piran's and we had a congregational meeting after the evening service. So, we were ready for a week of "work" after a weekend "off." On Monday John went with Peter, an ICS staff member, to a village some 200 kilometers away to arrange for a course to be taught later in March. They came back on Tuesday afternoon. A week later, John was gone for a whole week to teach a course again.

It all sounds very familiar, right? So much of it has all been said or done before, just different dates, names and distances.

Sometimes people would react to our hospitality in disappointing ways. One missionary colleague who had sat at our table numerous times, took \$5 from Mother Jennie for carrying a few letters to us from Grand Rapids! That was pretty shameful! We did not call her on it.

November, being American Thanksgiving month, always triggered a lot of social activity. Fran wrote,

In the last few weeks we've had several Thanksgiving events and welcome potlucks as well as dorm relief evenings. Last night we were invited to a buffet supper. The hostess had invited some fifteen people from many different denominations and all serving in a wide range of missionary capacities. She told us that such an evening always felt like a foretaste of heaven with different people but one common bond.

Around February 1985, Fran entered a Hillcrest tennis tournament and, at the time she wrote about it, had reached the semi-finals. Our kids were so proud to see their Mom's name on the school bulletin board. Describing her style, she wrote, "I don't play tricky, but I'm steady and can often outplay better players that way." Tell me about it. I'm never much good at any sport, but even at my low level at tennis, I could not resist tricks—and always ended up in the net or across the line. Guess who would win! A week later the tournament wound up, but Fran wrote, "I didn't do too well. It just wasn't my day, I guess. I lost 6-2 and 6-3. My opponent had too many tricky shots in the back corners of the court. She said I did still give her a good workout though."

I had a great sociable 1985 birthday, my 47th. We had Mrs. Tevi over for a few days. She was from Fiji Islands and came on behalf of WCC. When she learned about my February birthday, she treated Fran and me to a meal at an expensive restaurant where we would never darken the door on our own. Well, thank you, Mrs. Tevi. Great food and highly appreciated. We would meet her again during our visit to Geneva, when she took us out to another fantastic restaurant. See Chapter 22. Come again, sister Tevi. You are a joy to host!

That birthday triggered some fun parties. The first one at home together with the Evenhouses, including their two younger sons who could polish off a dish or two in a wink. The Dekkers, Dutch friends, and Koops also took us out on two different evenings. With all this partying at 47, I could hardly wait for my 50<sup>th</sup>. What would *that* be like? As Fran put it, “That’s a lot of celebratin’.” Sure was.

You remember the story about the catechism party muddle in Chapter 22? Well, we had another kind of muddle party at St. Piran’s, though it ended much more positively. Towards the end of June, the church choir had invited other choirs for a festival. As Fran told it,

It got a bit out of hand. First they had invited just five choirs and none of them accepted the invitation. Then they invited more, and in the end, those who had declined at first, accepted, and in fact invited others too! So at the last minute we realized that thirteen choirs were coming! The Ladies Fellowship were told to arrange for food for all, so Saturday afternoon we got together and fried 40 chickens in the parsonage yard. Everyone was assigned to cook or bake something at home too. The service turned out to be four hours long. That’s not that unusual for most Nigerian churches, but for St. Piran’s that is almost unheard of; anything over 1 hour 15 minutes and people really complain!

End June 1985 we tried to phone both sets of parents. We had often talked about it but just never did it simply because we doubted it would work. We phoned Grand Rapids on Jane’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and, according to Fran, “We had a beautifully clear connection.” The one to BC was on Mother Elly’s 74th birthday, but it did not work out so well. Couldn’t hear each other.

You may remember that our house in Wukari used to be called “*Gidan Dekka*,” after Peter Dekker, the first long-time CRC missionary in Wukari. Well, he came to visit late 1985. He had a wonderful trip back to his stomping ground and saw the tremendous progress the Gospel had made during the intervening 20 years. He also met the former Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo and was thoroughly disappointed with his conversion to Islam. He emphasized to Dekker the deep inroads he had made into Islam. He and his first wife had gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca, while he had done Islamic studies in Kano. But they were friendly to the Dekkers. After all, Dekker had taught him in the Wukari CLTC; that’s where he got his start. But they took every opportunity to rub in their new reality.

A few months later, Ezekiel and his wife dropped by unexpectedly. We still could not call him *Alhaji* Muhammadu, his new identity. “*Alhaji*” of course means he had gone to Mecca on this pilgrimage. Fran wrote,

He is still so bitter about everything and he retold their story once again. There certainly are many strange things and lack of love and forgiveness on the part of many. At the end of a long evening, they said, “But, don’t worry; we still have Jesus in our hearts.” Right now he has big plans to attend university and get a degree in Arabic and Islamic studies. We are of course praying that God will frustrate these plans and bring him back to the Christian church. Please pray for that whole family.

In another letter, she wrote,

**It's hard to figure him out. He's still very bitter and self-righteous but keeps up contact with some of his Christian friends, especially missionaries. He knows so much about both Christian and Muslim cultures and religions. He could be used as a mediator. The Saudi government has given him a two-year scholarship to live in Mecca and study Arabic. They know a prime "catch" when they see one!**

Personally, I don't think he's that hard to figure out and have explained his "conversion" to Islam in previous chapters. One factor I have not yet explained is that with his schooling restricted to the Hausa language, he was forever unofficially but *de facto* disqualified from becoming a leader in the CRCN, where a TCNN English education was increasingly required for leadership positions. He would be restrained from ever occupying such a position. He foresaw younger pastors passing him by and leaving him in the dust; they would be the ones to be selected to attend conferences abroad, not him. Even before his conversion he would talk about wanting to go to America or the UK. For a man with such leadership qualities and with such pride, his position would simply be unacceptable; he would not be able to live with such life-long marginalization and humiliation. The Muslim community recognized this in him and thus made him this promise to give him education in the language of prestige in that community and have him live for a while in the holiest of all places. Among pious Muslims this would surely provide him with all the leadership and prestige that he craved.

Another guest of interest was a young man who had traveled the opposite route: he was a convert *from* Islam. His name was Ahmed. The two missed each other by a hair. It would have been an interesting dynamic to have them at the same time. Because of his conversion, his family had allegedly kicked him out and now he needed a place to stay temporarily. He was shy and ill at ease at our place, which was not surprising, given our different backgrounds and cultures. He was also quiet and did not understand much Hausa or English, both of which were surprising, given his background. One evening he really came alive while he and Kevin watched a soccer game together. We started looking for a family with whom he could more easily associate and identify himself, as well as a suitable secondary school to attend for one who was in his third year of a Qur'anic secondary school.

He stayed with us for a few days and then left very unexpectedly. Some "cousin" came with a letter to us from the family informing us Ahmed had stolen something and they had been looking for him everywhere. The story could be true, of course. It could also be that they tried to make us disbelieve his story, no longer trust him and therefore kick him out. When he left, I encouraged him to stay in touch with us. We will probably never know the truth of the matter. We heard from him again a couple of months later, when he wrote us a letter and promised he would be coming during his next vacation. It took a while but we did eventually see him again as you read in Chapter 23.

### *The Bulgarians*

As I have occasionally repeated, social and missionary life often intersected and could not always be separated. We had met a Mr. Valkov, an amiable Bulgarian engineer married to a Vietnamese medical doctor. He was a convinced Marxist atheist, but not averse to developing relationships with missionaries. I believe he was fascinated by people like us with our strange beliefs. His son, Emil, attended Hillcrest and became a friend to Wiebe. One November 1984 evening he invited us to a viewing of a video about Jesus of Nazareth that a Russian friend had lent him. Volkoff insisted that he was curious about our reaction to it and was at pains to convince us he had no "spiritual" interest in it. Afterwards we engaged in an interesting and challenging conversation, a feature that marked just about all of our get-togethers over the years we were in Jos together. His views of Christianity were totally negative. He saw it only as an oppressive and exploitative tool of Capitalism.

The Bulgarian Communist regime had done a good snow job on him! His knowledge of Christianity was zero, but he had imbibed enough negative propaganda on basis of which he argued very effectively. He spurned the Old Testament as a nationalistic Jewish book. I told him he was totally ignorant of it. In fact, it is probably the most anti-Jewish book in existence. Almost every page accuses the Jews of unfaithfulness and oppression. Volkoff would just shrug his shoulders.

I would often give him copies of my books, papers and lectures as samples of a Christian approach to social issues, my own, that of WCC and of any other I wrote about. He would appreciate them but always insisted that this all constituted exceptions to the normal Christian stance, in fact, contradictions. It is pretty hard to penetrate such a shell of bias, ignorance and willful blindness. But we remain friends. We visited him in Paris years later and stayed with him for a week or so. We also hosted him in Vancouver for some days. I have always appreciated his friendship, especially his amiable good-natured smile.

Around October 1986 a new Bulgarian family came to teach at Unijos. Fran told their story:

Recently a new Bulgarian family moved to Jos. He's teaching at the university and his wife hardly speaks a word of English. They seem to need friends and have dropped in on us several times already. They have finally been able to move out of their university guest house into their own place. To celebrate they invited us over for supper tomorrow night. We'll see what real Bulgarian food is like! We invited the couple to church with us last Sunday. They are Greek Orthodox from a communist country; they were amazed at the freedom and relaxed atmosphere at St. Pirans. We always have a special welcome and handshake for visitors. Good thing we had told them of this custom, because they seemed to be a bit suspicious and wondered why anyone would ask them to introduce themselves. He whispered to me, "Is everything ok?" It must be awful to live under such fear and suspicion. We'll see if they are interested in attending church with us again.

A few remarks about the actual dinner. One was their relaxed eating style. The food was great, but it took them a couple of hours to finish their plate. At first, we did not notice their slow style of eating and, being hurried and busy people, we started out eating at our regular pace. By the time

we were halfway through our main course--which did not take long, especially for me--we began to notice their pace and slowed down. It was so hard to adjust our hurried pace to their slow one. Try spending two hours on one plate of food! Too bad we cannot remember the name of this fine couple.

The second thing was that, after they found out we had other Bulgarian friends, they told us they did not want to meet them and asked us not to discuss them with the Valkovs. Such was life as it developed under Communist regimes. Strong distrust of other people. It struck us as an awful way to live, especially since Communist regimes seemed to prefer to have people live on top of each other rather than in isolated places. That meant reduced privacy in an atmosphere of distrust. See also our comments on Czechoslovakia above.

In March 1987, this Unijos couple invited us for a “Liberation Day” celebration. All the other guests were Bulgarians. Now I began to realize that they did have relationships with each other but needed to control *our outsider* influence on these relationships. The celebration was about their liberation from the Turks in 1878, an event they were still celebrating annually. They served special food and our hostess read poetry about the liberation. It was obviously a meaningful emotional experience for them all. We were especially honoured to be invited when we realized it meant the burden of translating everything for us.

### *Rabbitry*

During this same Christmas 1984, without planning to do so, we got back into the rabbit routine. Some friends remembered how we loved rabbits and had given us a doe. She was mated on December 15 and delivered her first young on January 16—perfect timing. Fran wrote, “It’s good for the kids to have animals around to take care of, while it’s also a good supply of meat. When chickens cost about \$5 a pound, it’s nice to have four-legged ones around!”

A major reason we had not picked up rabbitry in Jos was insecurity: in open and easily accessible compounds too near major roads with hordes of pedestrians. However, during our home service, a wall had been built between our compound and the road so that we were now shielded from view and access became more difficult. So, it did not take much for us to use the gift of that rabbit as an excuse to get back into it. The colony soon flourished and became once again a scene of great attraction to all our visitors, especially Nigerians.

At the end of March the doe delivered again and it looked like a full nest. The nest should not be disturbed for the first few days; otherwise the mother could reject or kill her young. They turned out to be nine—a good haul, though by no means maximal. Wiebe had taken responsibility for the rabbits. He was very excited when he discovered the doe had another litter. Fran wrote that “He’s quite good about taking care of them, but does get a bit tired of finding greens for them during the dry season. Now that the rains have returned, that should become easier for him. I’ve been getting scraps from our vegetable dealer twice a week, which is also a big help.” By the time these nine were three weeks old they looked very cute of course and playful. Sometimes the kids would bring all into the house and play with them in the hallway.

Wiebe was very pleased when in early July one of the does—by now we had two-- delivered another six young. It just kept going. “We have two breeders right now,” Fran wrote in November 1985, “and have four different batches, with some new ones born again yesterday. Several are almost big enough for the frying pan. Wiebe gets tired of feeding them sometimes, but when we have a good meal from them, he appreciates the praise and encouragement he gets.”

We all grew tired of having to fetch grass for the rabbits. So Kevin tried to build a portable cage so that we could bring them to the grass. He did not really enjoy carpentry, but he did find the project a challenge. He usually figured that if something could not be done on the computer, it wasn't worth doing! It was time for something new, since the old cages were getting dirty and dilapidated.

Alas, the new cages did not work either. As Fran told it,

The rabbit coop that Kevin made didn't work out quite the way we had planned. The wire at the bottom was still too fine for grass to grow freely through the bottom, so we had to cut some away again. Then the box wasn't really strong enough anymore and the rabbits dug themselves out! We fixed that and then one night a dog dug a hole next to the cage and killed one rabbit and all the others ran off. We had all our neighbours help us catch them again! It's quite well fixed right now, but it has suffered from all those mishaps, so we've ordered a new all-wire cage and will see what that does.

### *Concluding Remarks*

How do you like that! 40 pages of stories about a missionary family and their social life, and you end up with a bunch of rabbits. Somehow that does not seem very pious does it? Should this chapter not end with a word about God?

Take heart. There is this very pious *and* political book in the Bible called “Esther,” but, pious as the story is, God is never mentioned even once! And that's in the Bible. But, believe me, through and underneath all these stories, experiences, opinions and reflections, we were very conscious of God's leading in our lives and we were motivated daily by the conviction of calling and service instilled in our heart by no one but Him.

I've taken you through another term of service, a long one this time. Please remember that the stories in this chapter occurred simultaneously with the ministry stories in Chapter 22.

## Chapter 35<

### Jos V - Family and Social Life

(June 1987-June 1989)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 23, Volume 2)

#### *In Nomadic Mode 1987*

After all those celebrations in Jos—graduation and anniversary—the family flew to Amsterdam together, but from there we split up three ways. Fran flew to Grand Rapids; Cynthia and Wiebe to Vancouver; Kevin and I rented a car and toured parts of Germany and The Netherlands.

When our original travel plans were made, Fran was supposed to meet up with Ray & Gert in Amsterdam and then tour Friesland together. However, their daughter Joanne & husband Han were expecting their second child any day and they asked to have that visit postponed by a few weeks. So Fran's trip with Ray & Gert was postponed to September. Unfortunately this entailed an extra trans-Atlantic ticket for Fran.

Fran flying to Grand Rapids was not so unusual. After all, that's where the Prins clan was anchored and the Mission Board. She stayed with Mother and Jane in Cascade, a Grand Rapids suburb. Cynthia and Wiebe were met in Vancouver by sister Karen and Jake Heikens, where they were going to stay for a few weeks. Since they were very excited to be "on their own" for a few weeks in B.C., we decided to let them enjoy themselves there, while Fran spent some extra time in Grand Rapids with family.

Cynthia and Wiebe did have a wonderful time at the Heikens in their forested rural environment, that even had bears. They had a delightful time riding bikes, crossing the Fraser River on the Albion ferry to Fort Langley, shopping and, in general, being entertained by their Auntie Karen. Karen later on told us she had really enjoyed their visit and it was great to get to know this niece and nephew in some depth. She regretted it when the two weeks were over and we took over the parenting role again! Since then, in case you look for it on the map, that Albion ferry has been replaced by the tolled Golden Ears Bridge between Langley and Maple Ridge.

#### *Father-and-Son Journey*

Our graduation gift to Kevin was a father-son heritage trip in and around The Netherlands and Germany. I showed him the places in Lutjegast that he had heard me talk about over the years, the school, the church, the bridge, the "hoek" or the central square of the village, and, of course, the house where I was born and brought up till we emigrated to Canada and where Opa Wiebe had his barbershop.

We visited various Boer and Veninga relatives throughout the country. In addition to Lutjegast, of course, we could not miss Fran's birthplace, Hantumhuizen with the farm where she was born.



Kevin visiting the birthplaces of his parents\*

We stayed a couple of days at my childhood friend, Henk Rozema, now a retired engineer and inventor still living in Grootegast, just four kilometers from his birth home in Lutjegast. It happened to be an exciting time in Lutjegast, for they were celebrating the third centennial of the village's hero's "discovery" of Tasmania. His name was Abel Tasman.

It included a plan to have a ship, outriggered like Tasman's, travel from Delfzijl, the main harbour in the province of Groningen, all the way to Tasmania. It was partially to be "manned" by selected young people from the county in which Lutjegast was situated. Henk drove us there to see the ship leave. It was quite a celebration. Lutjegast has one of its major arteries named after him, while it also has a plaque of him in a wall of the local Christian school. The Tasmanian Government sent a delegation to Lutjegast to participate in the launching of the ship's journey.

We also took a ferry to one of the Wadden islands to the north of the country and rented bikes to traverse the place. It was a tourist place where I had never been before. Interesting with its little settlements, cottages of mainlanders and the bike paths winding their way through the sandy dunes. It was an ancient fishing centre of which there was little left except historical plaques, statues and the like.

In a bid to visit a sister of Opa Wiebe in Middelburg, Zeeland, diagonally across the country from Groningen, we took the opportunity to check out the amazing network of dykes and locks the Dutch had built to protect that island province from a recurrence of the 1953 flood. It was amazing and impressive indeed. We oohed and aahed without stopping. However, we failed to find this aunt, the reason being, we found out later, that they had moved to another city. That was a pity, but it was fun, especially for me, to see those ancient and quaint Zeeland villages, so different from ours in Groningen.

While the villages were "ancient and quaint," I rush to prevent a misunderstanding. Those are the kinds of terms our compatriots from the *Randstad*, the country's contiguous cities



in the west, use for Lutjegast and the rest of the northern provinces of Groningen, Friesland and Drente. However, they also apply these terms to the *people* living in these provinces. I do not so regard the *people* of Zeeland. Ancient villages, indeed, but “with-it” people no more quaint than those of *Randstad* villages.

Probably the most impressionable part of the trip for Kevin was a visit to a major military cemetery near Arnhem in the centre of the country. There they lay, the fallen soldiers, Canadians many of them, long row after long row. As we took a good look at the individual crosses, I was moved by the memory that these soldiers had fallen for my freedom. Kevin was moved because so many of them were his age when they were mowed down.

A disappointing part of the journey was that the bonding I had hoped for did not happen. Kevin had always been a model child, even during his teen years, though he pulled off more pranks and other things than we were aware of at the time. However, the personal bonding was missing and the trip did little to create it. My own busy life had put kind of a barrier between us, not of open rebellion but of a below-the-surface kind of resentment that constituted a barrier to open and easy chatting. Nevertheless, we both enjoyed the trip and, I believe, it represented a significant graduation present.

#### *Kevin at Narramore and Calvin*

After that ten-day trip we proceeded on to Grand Rapids and met up with Fran. But we were not to stay together for long. The Mission sponsored Kevin to attend a seminar at some Evangelical institution in California run by a fellow called Clyde Narramore. His youthful clients called him “Uncle Clyde.” The purpose of this institute was to help returning missionary children settle “back” into the US.

Soon after Kevin left for California, we moved on to BC. One night at around 3 AM he called us there and shouted over the phone, “I have found Jesus!” We were still very groggy and failed to respond with the enthusiasm Kevin had expected from us. Why? What was this? Were we not happy?

Once we got our minds organized, of course we were happy, for this was quite a turn around from a year or so earlier when he was not prepared to do his profession of faith along with his age mates. We never pressured him on that. However, his new spirituality was so evangelical and narrow that he could find no space in it for our Reformed mentality. In fact, over the next few months he asked us a number of times whether we were actually Christian! We assured him we were. In fact, for a while he was stand-offish with respect to us, being suspicious of our Christian status. If there had been a kind of standoff earlier due to my overwork, now it was because of his kind of spirituality. Why CRWM sent CRC kids to such an Evangelical place was beyond me, but we were happy Kevin had made peace with Christ.

After that seminar, Kevin returned to Grand Rapids, where he moved in with Ray Jr., while he worked for Ray Sr. and Henry in their bricklaying business. When we finally met up with him there, wrote Fran, “He was well and had enjoyed his time with his cousins and uncles at work, but was ready for the challenge of college.” He worked hard and saved his money for college. In fact, he amassed enough for the first two years!

Two weeks after Kevin enrolled, Fran wrote,

Kevin is adjusting well to the dorm, but he still phones us every day. He finds he has a lot of homework and needs to get back into good study habits. During his last year of high school he had wasted a lot of time and sort of coasted along on his past record, but that won't do at college! If he gets good grades, he'll qualify for more scholarships.

### *Fran's Pilgrimage to Friesland*

You've already been alerted to Fran's plan to visit Friesland. In a letter she wrote,

I'm planning to go to Friesland tomorrow with my brother Ray and his wife, Gert. We talked about such a trip for a long time but this was the first time it worked out for them. Ray has a good sense of history and an excellent memory, so I'm really looking forward to his explanation of my “roots.”

Fran's report on their roots pilgrimage:

The trip was truly a delightful experience and all that I had hoped for. We spent much of our time visiting relatives. Gert, Ray's wife, was a great sport about it all, even though she understood very little of the conversations. Whenever possible, I tried to fill her in on what was being said. I was pleased with my ability to understand and speak Frisian so well. The relatives complimented me on my efforts. We stayed at the home of Uncle Tjisse for a week and he delighted us with family history and stories. We spent time at our farm in Hantumhuizen and it was wonderful to see it all through Ray's eyes.

A bit of sightseeing as well, of course, especially the famous *Afsluitdijk*, an engineering marvel completed in 1933, a *werkverschaffings* (an employment-generating) project during the depression. It's a 32-kilometer span which dammed off the salt water inlet of the North Sea and turned it into the fresh water lake of *Ijsselmeer*, connecting the provinces of North Holland and Friesland. Another unforgettable experience was wandering through all the little streets of Dokkum, many of them cobblestoned and lined by totally unprotected canals, a place where Ray often went on errands when he was a young boy and where our Prins grandparents lived in their retirement.

### *A Family Furlough*

Once Fran and I arrived in BC, we lived as a family of four for some of the time in the home of Pastor Tuininga of the New Westminster CRC, while they were away on holidays. It was while we were there that Kevin made his dramatic phone call.

In due time, we settled back in Grand Rapids in the Edna Street mission house just off Eastern Ave. SE. We had ahead of us months of the regular furlough stuff—debriefing, deputation, socializing, shopping and packing.

As to Fran's Home Service life, she wrote to my parents:

I'm enjoying my time as homemaker. I talk to my mom on the phone everyday and have visited her quite often too. I'm still enjoying all the big stores! We've gone to several programs at Calvin College and Seminary and have visited lots of missionaries (past and present) so our days are still quite full.

In the fall, Cynthia and Wiebe enrolled in Millbrook Christian School. A few days afterwards, Fran wrote that "they had been afraid and nervous," because they had heard how snobbish the junior high kids were in the Grand Rapids Christian schools. However, to their surprise, they both made friends at school and in the neighbourhood quite easily. Of course, if *our* kids couldn't make friends there, no one could!

### *Back in Nigeria*

#### *The Family*

I've given a brief report on our settling back into our house in the companion Chapter 23. Within a day or so, Asabe, our cook, showed up and told us that we all looked quite fat! To Nigerians, being fat is good, for it shows you are doing well and it reflects especially well on the husband, for it is proof he is successful and taking good care of his family. So, coming from her, this was a compliment—and she was not the only one. At another time she tried to "compliment" me by comparing me to a Japanese sumo wrestler! I sure had come a long way from that teenager embarrassed about being so skinny. I told her to be careful in her cooking, otherwise we might not want her to cook for us anymore. She was quick to respond that this fat was put on in America and thus was not the result of her cooking. *Touche!* Fran wrote, "She has been outdoing herself again in cooking her lovely Nigerian dishes for us. We are going to have her come just twice a week, because Nigerian food tends to be very fattening. We should not have it too often. We all have to help John get rid of his 'excess baggage'."

We were welcomed back properly also by our Pastor Nathaniel Yisa and his wife Rhoda, both at home and in church. They had become such precious friends to us. We *felt* welcomed.

As before, we were running a pretty tight ship in the mornings. I was usually up at four or five o'clock to do research and writing in my home office. At six I would wake up Fran. As she described the regime:

Wiebe goes running at 6:15 and Cynthia takes her bath at 6:35. We try to have lunches made and breakfast done by 7:30 and then we are at school a bit before 8. They like staff to be to school by 7:45 for staff devotions, but those with families are excused so that we can have family devotions instead.

By now you are aware that we like celebrations and parties. February 18, 1988, was my 50<sup>th</sup> and we made a big deal out of it. Around 100 people joined us that evening. We had bought mountains of beef and had it fried up in a delicious Nigerian way. Lydia made a Nigerian snack and also roasted peanuts. There were six cakes in total, two of them decked with 50 candles! But it was a birthday celebration with a difference. We combined it with the official opening of the new ICS facilities described in Chapter 23.

### *Health Issues*

Every once in a while I write that I don't deal much with health problems and then promptly proceed to do so. Well, I *don't* deal much with them—but here we go! In April of 1988 Fran started having trouble with fluctuating eyesight, had blood in her stools, as well as side and back pains, all quite unusual for her. End May she was still having different tests done. Her side pains still came occasionally but not as severe or often as before.

In spite of it all, in the midst of year-end exam and reporting duties and “so much to do for teachers and students alike,” she wrote she “enjoyed it all.” A week later, her pain was “off and on;” she was learning to cope. The doctor said to keep drinking plenty of water and to be patient. “I'm trying to do both,” she wrote. Doctor Truxton ordered more tests to try to figure it all out.

After months of testing and trying different options, it seems that most of the problems were the result of wrong medications. The new anti-malarial drugs were affecting her eyesight, an excess of iron tablets was causing the bloody stools, and the wrong kind of calcium supplements were building up as “stones” in her system. They were causing the side and back pains. A reduction and change in various medications was advised and by the end of the summer she was really feeling quite on top of it again.

There also was an additional reason given for Fran's fluctuating eyesight problems. We were fortunate to have Dr. Oji, a first-rate Nigerian ophthalmologist, for a close friend. After many tests, he concluded that it was probably simply a matter of aging and a buildup of cataracts. “In the meantime,” wrote Fran, “I can't see faces clearly and I can't tell whether the traffic director is holding his hand up for me to stop or to wave me on! I definitely do not drive at night right now.” Good thing that we had made friends with a lot

of these traffic directors over the years, so that they would not jump on us at the first excuse they had! Fran was told to wait it out with her eyes, especially the cataract situation. “I’ve often prided myself on my level of patience (in contrast with other members of my family!) and now I’m being tested on it.”

As for me myself, somewhere towards the end of 1987 I picked up viral pneumonia that took months for the doctors to discover. It had become a complicated case, for it combined with malaria, so that I had symptoms that fit both and neither. For months I was tired and weak; I just dragged myself through the day, until the problems were finally recognized by Dr. Truxton of Evangel Hospital. The Verbrugges had returned to the U.S. some years earlier, so that Truxton was now our doctor of choice. She was good, very good. I was prescribed a lot of rest and was told to “listen to my body.” I won’t bore you with all the details as recorded in Fran’s letters, except to say that I became the major subject in her letters.

In May 1988, Truxton instructed me to go to the Miango Guest House for a week and take a total rest away from work. So I did and traipsed off with a few books, my electronic keyboard and chess game. Fran wrote that I was getting discouraged:

He’s hardly ever been sick before and this pneumonia seems to have really gotten him down. Please pray that he’ll be able to accept the limitations of his strength. He always had boundless energy and could go from 5 am till 9 pm and didn’t understand why others couldn’t keep up with him.

Halfway through my week at Miango, Fran planned to come see how I was doing. She also planned to spend time on accounting at the ICS, for she knew I was very concerned about that. “I’ll see what I can do to change that.” She had been exceptionally busy in her own work, while she was also recuperating from her own dragged-out health problems. Always thinking of someone else—even her husband!

As to my sickness, it kept dragging on even after Miango, though there were signs of slow recovery. At least, I managed a few hours a day at the ICS, but I was still on a high medical regime and needed more x-rays. I measured my progress by my (in)ability to sing. I could really feel it in my lungs if I sang. Fran wrote, “It’s hard for him to keep quiet in church.” Well, yeah, ever since Lutjegast I’ve been bellowing it out. No wonder my lungs were objecting! By end May, Fran reported that I had been doing fairly well the last couple of weeks. Early June, Fran reported I had had no fevers for four weeks. That surely was moving in the right direction. A few weeks later, Fran declared me healed and described me as “so grateful for good health.” She commented, “It was probably good for him to be sick for some months to realize that lots of people are ‘tired’ lots of the time. Now he can identify a bit more with those who don’t always have his endless energy!”

Finally, near the end of September, both of us were feeling great. Fran wrote that she was “feeling on top of it again” and “John is feeling well.” We could play tennis for 45 minutes without a break. That was a long haul for both of us. Phew! But it wasn’t the end of health issues. In the section below you will read about sleep apnea that was creeping up on me.

### *Miscellaneous Vignettes*

In a June 30 letter Fran began her last but very lengthy paragraph about all the company we had that week, names and all with which I won't bore you, but it included Kathy Vanderkloet, my furlough replacement, and her mother and sister. After completing my replacement duties, she stayed on as a volunteer Mission Business Manager for another half year. In 2014, she is still there in that same capacity, but since long as a fulltime staff.

It also included Elly and Henk Plomp, a Dutch couple who had just arrived in the country and needed help finding a house. They became good friends of ours. Then there were the Wurasinghes, a Sri Lankan family with two cute girls around Kevin's age, one of whom had been in his class at Hillcrest and was now his classmate at Calvin. It was that evening apparently that my habit of falling asleep at any time showed up again: I fell asleep during the post-dinner conversation, a trend that continued for many years till I started treatment for sleep apnea in 2010. There were other visitors I will pass over. I include this paragraph just to remind you that our social life remained on the same fast track as you read about in earlier chapters. At the end of it all, Fran still had her old spirit of hospitality: "We've had a nice and busy week."

Another visitor was a library staff member from Calvin. He unexpectedly dropped in at 10 pm one evening, expecting us to host him, and stayed for a few days. When on our next furlough I met him on the steps outside the Calvin Library, he greeted me and mumbled something about taking me out for a lunch sometime and went his way! The last we saw of him. What a way to show appreciation! A disclaimer: This was no reflection on Calvin itself!

Sometimes we did relish a break from all that unceasing hosting. During a long July 1988 weekend due to the Muslim pilgrimage holiday, the whole family took a break in a guest house in Bauchi city, an hour north of Jos. We swam in their pool and played a lot of tennis. Fran wrote, "We wanted to go with just our family, because we have so many people over all the time. It's good to be with just the four of us sometimes too!"

Not all of the sociability was hosting on our part. That same week we spent an evening with Lydia and Chris' family at their house. Fran wrote, "She's still such a good cook that we all love to go there."

Lydia and Asabe were not the only good cooks around. While we loved their Nigerian dishes, Nigerians also loved some of Fran's. Her doughnuts and *koek* never failed to bring smiles of delight. Once Fran was invited to do a cooking demonstration in our kitchen for the St. Piran's Women's Fellowship: how to make potato chips. It was a bit crowded with 20 ladies in the kitchen. Fran's chips were indeed popular, even with the kids' crowd. They could bargain for anything with these chips during school lunch hour. Problem was that her success depended on one tiny little manual potato slicer, a gadget that eventually broke down and which she was never able to replace. Without that gadget, not even Fran could do it. When it broke down, her chip career was finished. Once back in North America, of

course, there was no further need for such skill, what with every kind of delicious calorie-laden chip available everywhere.

Early August 1988 a very clever thief stole our video recorder. He was a trader who had heard we had an old stove for sale. He came to our house a number of times in connection with that stove and eventually bought it and packed it away. During these visits, he surveyed the place, while the gate guards and our house keeper Lydia had become used to him and allowed him through the gate and into the house. One day he had told Lydia that he had been to my office and was told to wait for me at the house. He sat down and then ordered a cup of tea from her. While she went into the kitchen, he took the video recorder and put it in the bag he had come with. He drank the tea and left, but not until he told both Lydia and the guards that he would return after a while. We did not discover the theft until later in the day. After we pieced the puzzle together, we were obviously quite upset, but also thought it very clever and could not help but recognize the humour in the situation. Fran wrote, “You read about such things in fiction and newspapers but don’t think it will happen to us.” Well, it did! We were happy that it had happened at the *end* of the children’s school vacation, not at the beginning.

In the companion chapter you’ve read about the havoc of devaluation as well as the temporary personal upside. While I was in Ibadan for five days end September, Fran and the children went with the Koops to Bauchi for a relaxing weekend. “We stayed in a nice hotel, went swimming, played tennis and ate in nice restaurants. With the strong dollar, we can now do that for less than \$10 per person a day.” That was a real deal, albeit a temporary one till the local prices caught up with the new economy.

Early November 1988 in a letter to her family, Fran commented about the US elections bringing Bush Sr. and Quayle into the White House. “I suppose that most of my family is quite happy with Bush/Quayle, but I would have preferred Dukakis/Jackson. I’d like to see a little colour in the White House. This campaign didn’t generate much interest in the foreign press. There really weren’t any issues debated, were there?” It wasn’t like Fran to bait her family, but this had all the makings of it, with especially Mother Jennie a die-hard Republican. This was like a bull in a China shop. Fortunately, both the bull and the China shop stayed in one piece. I thought this baiting was exceedingly funny! Even today in 2013 I laughed as I re-read this story—as did Fran herself.

Fran wrote a three-page letter on November 10, 1988, from which I glean most of the next six stories as well as one found in the “Lydia and Chris” section.

Fran was very health and exercise conscious during this period. Here’s a report on her typical regime:

After school today I went walking with Esther Koops. We walked laps on the track, and even when we walk fast, it’s still taking us 4 minutes per lap. I know my sons think that’s terribly slow, but we are trying hard! We walked steadily for 30 minutes and I can really feel my legs. When I finish teaching a few special Hausa & orientation classes after 2 weeks, then I’ll try to walk on Tuesdays also. I’ve been

playing tennis most every weekend. To get benefit from exercise, the experts say you should do something every day, but how many people have time for it every day?

Mother Ellie had apparently commented once again that Fran was too busy. So Fran again explained the household routine of the day:

Yes, mom, I stay busy, but then so does everyone else. I have lots of good help in the house. I usually have to cook only one big meal per week. We all get turns: Asabe, John, me, Cynthia & Wiebe. Weekends we often have leftovers or a pot of soup. So I have it a lot easier than you did at this age! I enjoy teaching a lot more than doing housework, so I'm happy that it can work out this way. I always do a little cleaning and baking on Saturday morning. In the afternoon I do the grocery shopping, and that is the extent of those duties for the week.

Twelve days later, Fran continued the conversation:

Lately I cook just once a week and that is fine by me! I like to cook but it always takes time. Last night it was John's turn and he did *stamppot boerenkool* with *worst*. It tasted *best!* Tonight, Cynthia did baked chicken and French fries. Tomorrow night Asabe will cook. Thursday we go out; Friday I'll probably do spaghetti. Saturday it's Wiebe's turn. What a life, eh!

In terms of house helpers, Asabe was still our part time cook; she had a full time job in a sock factory. Then there was that other Lydia; she was our part time housekeeper. This was the situation with respect to her and her family at the time:

Lydia is pregnant again and we are all hoping for a boy. If this turns out to be another girl, she'll have no support from her husband whatsoever. Her husband, Kilyobas, has been such a disappointment and we've warned her about going back to live with him. He drinks a lot and doesn't take care of the family. He was such a nice young man when he first came to Jos, but drink and wrong friends have totally ruined him.

Not much later we finally had to let Lydia go. She just could not do the basics of housekeeping. She had domestic problems that were becoming increasingly difficult to manage. So, we gave her several months' severance pay and offered to pay her tuition for learning to sew with the sewing machine we bought her.

During early November 1988 we received a letter from Fran's niece, Kristy, who wrote that Mother Jennie was doing poorly. Fran was grateful for Kristy's letter, especially because she was a nurse, but she was exasperated that none of her siblings wrote regularly, except Jane, of course. However, Jane was both teaching and serving as caregiver to Mother. She did not have much time left to write us. Fran wrote,

I figured something was wrong because we haven't had any letters from mom for several weeks. But no one else is writing (except Jane), so we hear nothing. Where



are my sisters and brothers? Have they all forgotten their little sister? If you don't feel like writing, how about a phone call? Just call Kevin and ask him how easy it is now. The connections lately have been so wonderfully clear.

She ended that long letter with a pastoral comment to Mother: "Mom, please be assured of our daily prayers for you. We ask that God will give you peace and help you accept His will."

Well, correspondence may have been lacking, but a week later, Fran thanked sister "Riekie" for a parcel of requested goodies she sent.

In response to Kristy's letter, Fran decided to pay Mother a visit. This was in keeping with an agreement we had made between the two of us that when our parents seemed to be reaching their end, we would pay them a visit while still alive, but not come for the funeral. So she ordered tickets for a trip from December 27 to January 12. However, getting tickets at that time of the year so late was normally next to impossible. Fran wrote, "I asked the Lord to make it plain to me whether I should go and the answer came in the form of a prompt delivery of the tickets within a week." That was pretty special. She took it as a double confirmation: the airline's and the Lord's.

My apnea-like condition I refer to earlier in this chapter was probably a pre-apnea condition that slowly undermined sound sleeping habits on my part, but I did not recognize the reason. This one particular night I woke up at 3 am and couldn't sleep any more. So I went out to check on the night guard. I stayed and chatted with him for half an hour or more. By that time I was totally awake and decided to work on my current writing project instead of going back to bed. I took an afternoon nap but was totally bushed at 9 pm and went to bed early.

This sort of thing became a pattern. For a long time I kind of prided myself on my "ability" to wake up in the wee hours of the morning and write my books. That "ability" turned out to be a disability that could only be alleviated by using a so-called "C-pap" sleeping mask at night during my retirement. Wiebe had it right when I overheard him tell a friend that "My Dad can't sleep at night." That's not how I thought of it at the time: He interpreted what I thought of as a "strength" as a weakness.

Fran wrote about the 1988 Hillcrest Christmas party and our family's part in it:

We were asked to do something on Dutch Christmas customs. I told about my memories of *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet*. Cynthia threw pepernoten, while I was telling my story. Then we sang *Ere Zij God*. People seemed to appreciate it. Cynthia loves doing things like that, but I'm the one who gets nervous. Wiebe and two friends had prepared a Christmas rap. They called it *An Eight Hour Rap* because that's how long it took them to write the lyrics and practice it. It went well and it was his group's second public performance, so they are getting more confident now.

The next day, Fran and I went to Shendam in the southern part of Plateau State to attend the official installation of their new chief. That new chief was Herbert Sheldas, our former Zaria Road neighbour and friend of our kids. He sent us a personal invitation, a high honour indeed for such an intensely native cultural institution. Though Cynthia and Wiebe fondly remembered that family, they did not want to go. So we left them home together to fend for themselves—another first. Here’s a paragraph Fran wrote about it:

Those of you who have visited us will remember Mr. Sheldas. We knew he was the oldest son of the chief and realized that someday he might take that position of chief of Shendam. These are really historic traditional occasions to witness. We remember when the Wukari chief was installed, but we didn’t know him personally, so this will be very different.

Sometime later, Helen, Herbert’s wife, dropped by with a friend. She said that her husband was really like a “prisoner” in his position. I am not sure she was happy about their new situation. She was a modern woman who could hardly be expected to fulfill the role traditionally assigned to a chief’s first wife. She continued living in Jos to run their dry cleaning business.

Fran left for Grand Rapids on December 27. She rode with the Van Gerpens who took her to the Kano airport and saw to it that she got on the plane. Her flights were fortunately uneventful, even though they were at a busy time and in the winter.

Fran’s Mom was definitely not doing well. She was somewhat depressed and never really liked the winter darkness. She probably had Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), but that was not a diagnosis at the time. Her pains and limited mobility meant she spent her time either in her special chair at the living room window or in bed. That window gave her a view of a busy road not only but, beyond that, of the Cascade CRC on the hill, surrounded by lush lawns and weeping willow trees, a scene so beautiful and peaceful that it must have blessed her even in her distress.

Unfortunately she was also a poor sleeper and even the slightest noise anywhere in the house would wake her up. That made it difficult for Fran to phone us in Jos because of the time difference. Every evening before going to bed, Mom would say that she hoped she would die during the night. She was tired of living and ready to meet her Lord. Fran was happy to hear that testimony, but also assured her that she was glad to have this short visit with her. Mom was thankful that Fran had made the effort to come all that way. Sister Jane was encouraged by the visit and they had some good times together.

After Kevin returned to Grand Rapids from his Christmas visit to B.C., Fran was able to spend some time with him as well. That was certainly a bonus! Kevin enjoyed Fran’s cooking. Even a rice and curry meal with some friends at his dorm. And we all continued to be so grateful that he faithfully dropped in to see Grandma and Aunt Jane.

We actually had made plans for the family to spend Christmas 1988 at Baissa, since our visit there in 1986 was postponed due to Wiebe’s appendectomy. This time, it did not

materialize either, because of Fran's trip to Grand Rapids. She really did not want her trip to prevent ours, but we decided to cancel it once more. We decided to spend a quiet "Momless" Christmas at home.

I remember vividly the joy we spread among our compound guards and our ICS staff with Christmas presents which we gave them. I wrote to my folks:

Do you remember those very heavy sweaters I picked up from that Mennonite place just before I left you in December, 1987? Well, I gave one each to the four guards we have on our compound. And were they ever grateful for them, for it is relatively cold here at this time of the year. So you see that you did not waste your time helping me get them to GR. We also had a box full of sweaters from Hendrik's Thrift Shop and we distributed them among our ICS staff for Christmas. In addition to that, we gave them each a chicken and two yams for their Christmas dinner. With these items having become too expensive for most people to afford, they deeply appreciated these gifts. So we helped them enjoy their Christmas in a way they had not expected.

Towards the end of 1988, I wrote a very brief summary about each member of the family. Instead of distributing the items under different headings, I give them to you here on one plate:

Fran still enjoys teaching in junior high, but she is looking forward to the day she goes back to elementary school—as a teacher, be it understood!

Kevin is at Calvin College (2<sup>nd</sup> year). During his latest telephone call he intimated that he was close to deciding his major: a combination of computer science and economics. It is nice to be able to keep contact by telephone with him.

Cynthia (Grade 10) is getting deeper into music all the time. She is both a guitar student as well as teacher. She is taking voice lessons and is member of two school choirs. And, according to some of her teachers, she's also good at talking. What with a Prins-and-Boer background, what else is new?

Wiebe (Grade 9) continues his running tradition. He is now training for the 12-hour relay charity marathon! His other main interest is in drumming. He has a good drum set at home and is also in the school band as a drummer. If anyone should ever ask me why I am going deaf, I would have some answers. Two doctors have analyzed it as industrial damage, but does that term include drumming in the room next to our bedroom when we take our afternoon nap?

As to New Year's Eve, the kids spent it at a friend's house, watching videos. I spent part of the evening with the Wally Rasch family, Lutheran friends at ELM House. Cynthia gave a sigh of relief when she learnt of that invitation, for she and Wiebe had been afraid of having to babysit me that evening!

Wally Rash and I had something special going between us. We both loved humour, jokes and laughter. We also loved to play an occasional game of chess, but with the proper trappings, which traditionally for both of us had to include either a glass of wine or beer and a cigar. Sssshhhhh; don't tell my Evangelical friends! He was one of the few people in all of Jos with whom I could enjoy that kind of fellowship. We did it very seldom, neither one of us being smokers or drinkers, which made it all the more special. Of course, Lutheran and Reformed: What would you expect? It had to be!

*An aside:* As an example of Wally's off-the-wall humour, I take you to a St. Louis hospice, where he was living—"dying" would be the better word—because of terminal cancer. A few days prior to his death, he decided he wanted to die at home, the place they had moved into for the occasion. He conspired with a number of people, probably including some hospice staff, to have his family push him on a hospital bed out of the hospice into the streets and to their house, where he died peacefully in the bosom of his family without all the technological gizmos that often surround dying patients. Well, after all, the point of a hospice is to feel comfortable and at home! RIP.

I did not stay long at their party but left in order to attend the St. Piran's midnight service. I wrote,

I always enjoy spending that time in church, for it helps me to reflect. I got home about 12:30 am and then spent an hour playing our new organ—an electronic keyboard that can sound like a pipe organ. I enjoy it very much. I played some Psalms from my *Klaverscribo* and also from the *Psalter Hymnal*. With no one around, I could play as loud as I wanted to – and I did!

New Year's Morning saw me at St. Piran's once again, partially because it was our tradition, but even more because I find spending time in Church with fellow Christians at such times particularly meaningful. It is a time for looking ahead and reflecting on the Christian hope for the return of Christ and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness shall dwell. But the afternoon was reserved for a pig roast at a friend's place. The return of Christ and pigs—unlikely celebration partners, some might think, especially Muslims. Not so for those who recognize the earthiness of the Christian hope.

Upon my return home from the annual January TEKAN meeting, Cynthia, Wiebe and I stayed a few days in the guest house of the Austrian Steyr Company in Bauchi, distributors of imported tractors. They made their guest house available to missionaries. Nice enough. But I remember thinking at the time that they were *not* nice to Nigeria. Nigeria was littered all over with broken down tractors and other heavy equipment. Government officials prevented their repair, for they received kickbacks from ordering new ones from manufacturers. Steyr fed into that corruption with its new machinery. They should have worked on providing parts and teaching people to repair the old ones. They could have made good money with that. In spite of that plaguing sentiment and Fran's absence, we managed to have a good time.

Fran's return trip was pleasant. She was met at the airport by Case Vander Leest, the hostel housefather, who came with the hostel bus to pick her and others up. As to her welcome in her own words:

The family was very happy to see me back again. They did *very well* without me but I do notice there are some things for which I am still needed! Cynthia and Wiebe had baked cookies, brownies and cupcakes and put them in the freezer so that was a nice surprise. They told me to get my laundry in the basket by Monday morning because *they* planned to do the washing. They all said they didn't really know what they ate because no one cooked much. They ate leftovers but I don't know where they came from if they didn't cook! They were all gone a fair amount and, thus, had few complete meals together.

Kevin had been phoning us quite regularly from Grand Rapids and his calls usually came through crisp and clear as if from next door. The other way around was another matter. So, Fran frequently urged the Prinses to try it as well, but without much success. However, late February Jane tried by dialing again and again and finally got through. Fran thanked her for her persistence.

She also urged my parents to try. They finally did in February, but, unlike Kevin's calls, it wasn't clear at all. We kept hearing buzzes and dial tones during the conversation. It was enough to discourage them from trying again any time soon. Too bad.

It was great that Kevin's calls were working out so well, but, wrote Fran a few months later, "Kevin, thanks for your phone calls, but we do appreciate a letter *more*. You seem to have forgotten our address; it's still the same as the eighteen years during which you lived with us." That comment kind of surprised me, for I thought a mix of the two would be preferable. Fran's reasoning: A letter could be read over and over again and thus savoured; once the phone call was over, it was over. But you could mull over and savour the memory of a call as well, was my reaction. No big deal; we were happy both to read and hear from him.

Early February 1989, the former Military Head of State who guided Nigeria through her civil war, General Yakubu Gowon, attended our church. He visited this church occasionally and tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. However, Pastor Nathaniel spotted him and acknowledged his presence. Afterwards, Fran asked him if he could be eligible for office in the future. "He said, 'No,' because he had his turn and all former military rulers were excluded. It's too bad, because he is very popular, at least in this part of the country, his home turf. He really kept the country united as best as he could during the civil war." I do agree with Fran as to his popularity. He kept the country together and prevented genocide. Those were huge accomplishments. However, during his post-war years, his reign was marked by indecisiveness and some policies that are difficult to explain, except that he allowed himself to be fooled by Muslims. At the same time, by replacing the regional system with the state system, he effectively undercut the power of the Muslim North over the country.

During Holy Week 1989, Fran wrote,

We are once again in the middle of what used to be an annual occurrence: no petrol. It hadn't happened for the last few years, so no one took the warnings seriously. But now this is the worst we've ever had. Apparently it's a bad combination: tanker drivers' strike along with breakdowns at several refineries. The Akpems came up to get their children for Easter holidays and were stranded all day yesterday since they didn't have enough fuel to get back home. So we had some unexpected guests for supper and breakfast. We had already invited 4 others for supper, so that made a total of 12 people last night. Good thing some foods "stretch," isn't it?

My parents were preparing to celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in December. However, they decided to hold the celebration during the summer of 1989 in order to accommodate our furlough schedule, since we were slated to be in BC part of that summer. We appreciated that very much. It would be held on June 24. I was requested to serve as Master of Ceremonies at the occasion. There may have been several reasons for this request. Since Karen, the oldest sister, would not have been inclined to serve in that capacity, the next choice would be the oldest son, yours truly. Perhaps the fact that I was a minister and had the gift of the gab in public might have played a role. But I was kind of hesitant, since I had been in another culture for so long and no longer felt secure in my "native" culture. Would I have the right sensitivity to pull it all off to the enjoyment of the entire large Boer family and without offending anyone with my sometimes off-the-wall humour? I ended up accepting the task.

### *All Our Children*

#### *Lydia and Chris*

During this term, we did not see all that much of Lydia and her new family. Everyone was busy in their own ministries and social lives, not to speak of travels and studies. But early November 1988, Lydia and family joined us for supper. As with grass, so also food is always greener on the other side. When we visited them, we relished Lydia's Nigerian dishes; when they came to us, they preferred our type of cuisine. So Fran fixed a pork roast and mashed potatoes, a common enough meal, but to everyone's delight.

In the meantime, Lydia was pregnant for the third time. They were suspecting twins, since both families had twins in their histories. Ultrasound tests blew that one: a single child it would be.

Lydia had been thinking about going to university and by this time had already been accepted by Unijos to start in December, even though she was expecting her baby in January. Here's Fran's wisdom:

I advised her against trying to go to school while she has three kids to take care of, but she says she's getting bored with staying at home. Now she wishes that she had finished her degree before getting married, but when she was 20 there was no talking her out of it! These people who get married at the young age of 20 should have their heads examined!!!

Well, yes, Fran ought to know. I was 24 when we married and she was four years younger!

In her next letter Fran continued the chat and wrote,

Lydia definitely wishes now that she'd followed our advice to finish school before marrying, but no one listens to that advice when young and in love, right? Garba is now pastor at Plateau Church, an English speaking elite type congregation. He seems very happy in his work and we are glad that Lydia married such a fine Christian man. When we see what has happened to our *worker* Lydia and Kilyobas, we are so grateful that *our* Lydia has married well.

One of the first things we did after Fran's return to Jos was to visit Lydia and Chris and their new baby, a third son, born on January 10, 1989. They had been so sure it would be a girl that they had never even considered a boy's name! They named him Jason. They had now become a "triple J" family: Jude, Jesse, Jason. The two older boys at first were a bit angry and even shed tears about not getting a sister, but they soon reconciled themselves and became quite pleased with another brother. Jude was now in boarding school at SIM's Kent Academy in Miango, nearly 30 kms away.

During the latter half of 1988, in cooperation with CRWM, Baker Book House published a book entitled *Hands Across Africa*. Fran described it:

It's a collection of stories about children, both missionary and African. There's a chapter in it about our Lydia, entitled "Lydia." Much of it is quite accurate, but I wish they would have sent us a copy to check before printing it. Do you remember in 1984 when Mariam Schooland interviewed me? I didn't think that anything had ever come of it after she got sick and died. But the preface to the book acknowledges her contribution and then they asked Joanne De Young and Marjo Rouw to complete the project.

Fran suggested to the family in North America everyone should order a copy.

*Kevin*

With Kevin gone, things were different in the family. I wrote,

We did have a nice and gradual separation during the course of our furlough. Though he did not live at home the past 6 months, we did have frequent contact. At any rate, it would have been more difficult if he were with us here in Jos, for there

would basically be nothing for him to do. Nevertheless we look forward to seeing him, DV, in June. In the meantime, pray for him as well, for he is planning to join a profession class at Madison Square CRC and we are extremely happy about that, as you can imagine.

At first we called him regularly, since the telephone service in Nigeria had improved considerably. However, at the end of February they raised their prices by 600%! We quit calling him, but asked him to call us instead, which, of course, he had been doing already. It was only half price to call from the US to us. And sure enough, early in the morning of February 28, he dialed us directly from his dorm room. But even calling from the US had its ups and downs according to the fluctuating state of the Nigerian system. It had gone well for some time, but now he often had to try “several dozen times to make it through.” It was very clear. Apparently 6 am was a good time, since others had a similar experience. It was good we were able to talk, for he had received no letters from us, not one. Apparently, they had gotten stuck somewhere. A few days later, he received a batch of seven all at once!

He was already making plans for the spring break to spend it with a Cambodian friend in California! Wow, our son was spreading out. He told us he continued to feel more at ease with foreign students than with Americans. If you have read about my social life at Calvin, you will recognize the parallel. Once again, a case of tree and apple?

Mid-May 1989, Fran wrote about Kevin coming home:

We are so happy that Kevin finally got his visa and hope all his travel arrangements and holiday plans will work out well. We are all very eager to see him. I’m sure the five weeks will go too fast for all of us. He has lots of friends who will also be here, so there might be some competition for his time. Cynthia says he has to help her with exam study first of all.

No, we were not swimming in the money that we could buy tickets left and right. CRWM had started a policy of paying for college students to visit their missionary parents twice during their college years. It was an attempt to keep missionaries on the field, for in the past many missionary families would return home when their first child entered college. The ploy worked: most stayed on, including us.

End-May he arrived following an uneventful trip. Fran wrote:

The kids are keeping Kevin busy so far with all their needs: “please bring me here or there!” He has become their personal driver as we’ve had an unexpected two days off from school already since he came home. Lots of his school friends are here now too, so he certainly won’t get bored the first while.

He came home at a critical technological moment. You guessed it: the computer. I apparently had unknowingly given a wrong command which seemed to have wiped out our Word Star programme, a predecessor of today’s “MS Word.” Kevin was trying to get it working again, but so far no luck. Early June, it was working again, but somehow, Fran



wrote, “We need all new commands to make it perform.” No idea as to who actually “fixed” it or what this “new commands” stuff meant anymore.

A few days into his visit, he invited former classmates who were also visiting their families for a Nigerian meal to be cooked by Asabe. Seven came. “They always appreciate Asabe’s food and she did a super job for them. She really likes Kevin and is pleased that he appreciates her cooking. So, she tries her very hardest.”

He stayed very busy. He started his running again, something he hadn’t done much of at Calvin. He seemed to enjoy doing it again though. He was occupied “visiting people, going out to eat, taking C&W driving, sorting out lots of computer bugs for John, running errands for us all, etc., etc.”

Fran wrote,

We all enjoy having Kevin around. In fact, it seems as if he has never been gone! But soon, he’ll be on his way again. He’s raised quite a bit of his support for Operation Mobilization (OM), an overseas mission outfit for young people that he wants to join for part of the summer. He has not yet decided on his major at Calvin.

As to his leaving again soon, Fran wrote that saying “goodbye” is a part of missionary life “you never quite get used to.” A firm “Amen” to that!

But occasionally the reverse would be true when former colleagues returned either for temporary or permanent assignments. Our former neighbour Lee Baas, for example, returned for a while in July 1988 on behalf of his new ministry Outreach Inc. The Koops family had been away for two years of graduate study but now returned to Jos for work. Such returns were always joyful occasions during which “old times” would be thoroughly rehashed, often with gales of laughter, for missionary life is full of funny experiences, at least in hindsight.

After five weeks at home, Kevin’s next letter to us was from OM headquarters in Belgium. They assigned him to work in Sicily, where his group would mostly be working in French with North African Muslims living there. They also taught him a smattering of Arabic basic terms like greetings. He was challenged properly language-wise by his very international OM team in Sicily. He thought he was pretty good with his three languages, but some of his mates could handle more languages than he did. I commented in a letter, “Few things are so good for the soul as to be put in one’s place once in a while.”

We did not receive any mail from Kevin during his Sicilian sojourn, except a few postcards. He returned to the US on September 4 and resumed classes on the 12<sup>th</sup>. He could look back on an interesting, rich and challenging summer, but I can tell you nothing about it. Sorry. You’ll have to ask him!

Kevin decided to spend Christmas 1988 at my parents’ place in Abbotsford. I wrote to them afterwards:

I hope you've enjoyed having Kevin around for a few days. We are glad that he wanted to visit you, for we do not want him to lose contact with the Boer clan. Even though he is far away from us, we do enjoy keeping contact by telephone on a somewhat regular basis. Our relationship with him is an enjoyable one. We have always appreciated him, but since he committed himself to Christ, our relationship has become closer.

### *The Children at Home*

Cynthia and Wiebe were both happy to be back in Jos, but they also missed the new friends they had met at Millbrook Christian as well as their relatives in Grand Rapids. Both kids wanted to resume their musical training, but both had difficulty finding teachers for their particular instruments.

The next report about the "kids" is about their 1988 summer break. Fran wrote, "The kids are doing typing lessons for 30 minutes per day." Their practice was beginning to pay off. By the end of June, Cynthia knew the whole keyboard and was now working on speed. Wiebe had started later and thus still had a lot of work ahead of him. Fran hoped that by the end of the break they would be somewhat accomplished typists, for "then they can use the computer so much easier. Learning to type on a manual and then switching to keyboarding is like learning to drive in a stick shift and then switching to automatic. Everything else is a cinch once you've learned that."

They were both also doing well at tennis lessons. Their coach was really giving them a workout. He was a Nigerian free lancer who was teaching quite a number of missionary kids in Jos. Probably a good job, I would suspect. Early July they had really become pretty good. Fran used to beat them easily, but now that became a challenge. Wiebe and I played a game and quit after a tough competition with the score tied at 6-6. Without insulting either one of us, I must confess that it usually did not take that long to beat me!

Towards the end of the school break, their Nigerian tennis teacher organized a tennis tournament for his six students. He charged the same for a 30-minute training session or an hour and a half. He was a member of the Plateau State Tennis Team and had just gotten a scholarship from some US university. Fran supposed "he figures the more practice he gets at teaching and playing, the better for him."

C&W had jobs to do in the house as well like helping with some housework, and doing "lots of cooking." However, they hadn't found any paying jobs outside the house yet. "That's tough for teenagers living here, because they really would like to earn some more money."

Socializing wise, they were no slouches. One evening in mid-July they had 25 kids over for a tennis competition. Everyone brought some snacks to the event. The following evening they had ten kids over to watch a video. "And so it goes," commented Fran.

Early November, Fran commented on their musical involvement at school: “It’s amazing what these choir directors can get the kids to do. I’ve always enjoyed the music programmes at Hillcrest, but especially so when one of our own children is in it. Kevin kind of dropped out of music in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but I hope that Cynthia and Wiebe will keep it up.”

The 1988 fall term was pretty well the same as before for the kids in terms of their participation in choir and band concerts, both of them performing in their own way with instrument or voice. Cynthia often was given solo parts, which she enjoyed doing. During a February 1989 Talent Night, Wiebe’s musical group presented one of their original numbers. Fran wrote, “It was crazy, but we were pleased with their efforts. The music and lyrics are their own and they certainly practice, usually at our house, even when one of us is having an afternoon nap.” I may have been afflicted with sleep apnea, but these raw and loud voices and drums could not keep me from sleeping, not when it’s nap time!

Same with drama. Fran wrote:

Cynthia has the part of the daughter in a family comedy. She says she has to yak non stop, and she feels that won’t be hard to act out at all! The very opposite of her role as Helen Keller. Wiebe has just a few lines to do as a radio announcer, but he said he was happy with that much. He still gets to help out behind stage and go to the cast party afterwards. He isn’t as easy about performing in front of an audience as Cynthia is, but we are glad that he wants to try.

Early March, the kids went to Kaduna for a weekend on a choir/band tour. Their schedule did not look all that crowded, but once there, more performances were added on the spur of the moment. Saturday was British Consulate day, when they used their pool in the afternoon and did a “Broadway performance” for them in the evening. They performed at two churches. Fran wrote, “The choir/band director is a single fellow in his late 20s. He had never undertaken such a tour before. We told him we admired him for his courage for taking a large group of teenagers on a trip, but he said it was probably foolhardiness as much as courage!”

Fran and I took her 1989 birthday weekend off by holing up in a Bauchi hotel, where we swam, tennised and ate, all at very reasonable dollar prices. When we returned home, we were welcomed by a birthday cake baked by Cynthia and some almond bars by Wiebe. “The kids are really getting good at cooking and baking. They are even beginning to give me (Fran) competition for my reputation of making the best potato chips in town!” They were also once again doing well scholastically: Cynthia made the honour roll with B- as her lowest grade; Wiebe made it to the “high honour” roll.

### *Cynthia*

At the beginning of the 1988 fall term Cynthia was having a harder time than usual, for she really missed her friends at Millbrook Christian. In addition, some of her best Hillcrest

friends had left as well, while “she is trying to find her way in a new high school situation.” She had come back with an acoustic guitar and immediately started giving lessons as before and would soon start *taking* lessons again as well. Fran also wrote: “She just started voice lessons this week and she said it went well. She tried out for the Swing Choir and made it. That choir has always been a fun choir to listen to, so we’re really proud of her that she made it.” She felt “a bit fearful of her Algebra class, because she is a bit behind in that. She’s always had a hard time in math and that keeps getting worse as it becomes more complicated.”

Socially this was a good time for Cynthia. Fran wrote:

Cynthia is now in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and really enjoying life these days. She has so many friends at school and gets invited to lots of parties. She really enjoys choir, swing choir, voice lessons, and giving guitar lessons. She’s also getting a bit more serious about her school work, even doing extra credit reports sometimes! She really finds that school work is basically useless. However she still wants to become an elementary teacher, so she has many years of school ahead of her yet!

Both kids participated in the Hillcrest October concert. Cynthia’s Swing Choir did two songs with movements. With only twelve kids in the group, each voice really counted. She was nervous, because it was her first time performing with this group, but they all did well. As Fran explained later, “A swing group is a group in which the kids sing and move in rhythm. It’s hard work, but really looks nice.”

Early November, Hillcrest held a “crazy dress” day for Middle School. Cynthia wanted Fran to dress like her! Fran wrote, “I’m wearing her jams, T-shirt, high tops, big earrings and jean jacket. We’ll see if I survive the day!” Was this a Fran or Cynthia story? I put it here under Cynthia.

Two months after their previous performance the kids were involved in another High School concert. Here’s Fran’s report:

The main part of the program was a long number of all Broadway selections done by the main choir. Cynthia had one solo part in that and she sang to and with Daniel Ligon. It was a sweet love song: “If ever I would leave you, it wouldn’t be in springtime” and then ended, “No, I would never leave you at all.” I suggested to the Ligans we should discuss bride price soon!

It seems that the concepts of “letting up” or “relaxing” did not exist in the Hillcrest culture, what with all the concerts, exams and parties. Three weeks later, Fran wrote:

Cynthia has really been feeling under a lot of pressure lately. She’s still in both choirs and they have a program on Saturday. She’s also starting to worry about exams. She’s doing a bit better academically this term, but her exam grades normally pull her down. Hopefully that won’t happen this time. It seems to me she

does more talking than studying, especially when someone comes over to “help” her study, but she says she’s working to capacity!

Cynthia and some friends were planning an all-high school party for Valentine’s Day 1989. Our new friends, Henk & Elly Plomp, had offered them the use of their lovely patio and the high schoolers gratefully accepted. The group spent lots of time decorating with streamers, lights and valentines. At the last minute the official chaperones couldn’t come because of illness, so they begged the two of us to chaperone. “You can imagine that mom and dad are at the bottom of their favourite chaperone list” but we agreed and even passed the test! We walked around the house every 30 minutes to be sure everything was going alright, but most of the time we spent visiting with our friends. Seeing the Plomps lived out in Rayfield with no neighbours close by, the music could be turned up as loud as the kids wanted it. And it was loud! Afterwards the 70 partiers all said they’d had a great time.

Late March found Cynthia busy preparing for her class carnival. Fran wrote that she was a good organizer and liked to participate in community life.

Every year the kids try to think of something original as well as continuing things that were popular the previous years. Their new ideas this year are an adults-only café with quiet (!) music. Also they are adding baby sitting services. I surely hope things go well for them and that they make lots of money. They’ve had very bad luck with finances so far and both of their class sponsors are new, so they don’t always give them the wisest advice.

Cynthia was very happy when it was all over, for she had put a lot of work, time and worry into it. Wrote Fran, “Things went quite well, but there are always complaints about the food or games. It’s hard to please everyone. They seem to have made a lot of money, but there always seem to be more bills to pay than first expected.”

### *Wiebe*

Wiebe started the 1988 fall term with several disappointments. He was somewhat displeased about having his mother as teacher again, but he soon got over it and settled down at school. He had really looked forward to finally having his very own bedroom, now that Kevin was away at college. But, alas, he had to share his room with Ahmed for the first few weeks. Those boys were from such different cultures that it was probably unreasonable for us to expect them to share a room, but we really had no alternative. For Ahmed, go to companion Chapter 23.

Wiebe continued with his drumming. He was again taking lessons and had joined the Junior Hi Band. He participated in a variety of sports and also enjoyed watching sports on TV:

Wiebe is excited about the Olympics. Last night he set his alarm for 11 pm, so he could watch some soccer games. Unfortunately, Nigeria is not doing very well, but he enjoys watching others too. He’s really looking forward to the track events,

especially the race between American Carl Lewis, Canadian Ben Johnson, and some Nigerian contender for third place. Both of those first guys have bragged so much about their abilities, I'd laugh if someone else took first place! We'll see what happens. (Now that it's 2014, do you remember what happened?) Wiebe continues to get up before 6, makes his school lunch and then is out running at the crack of dawn. Just recently he ran the fastest time for six laps (1.5 miles) so far this year. He did it in 8:31.

Like Cynthia, Wiebe also found himself on the honour roll after the first nine-week grading period, but for him that was routine and thus expected. He is, after all, an all around "A" student. He got a "B" for French this time, because he skipped first-year French and just started second-year. Fran wrote, "He has a tutor twice a week and is therefore able to keep up, but at least it's a challenge for him finally. He needs a few academic challenges."

He was still the runner-musician and enjoying both. He had done 600 km by end October, 1988. He was hoping to participate in the half marathon as before, but the group organizing it quit. So he talked Fran into joining the Fun Run which was only 5 km. Fran expected him to win that one.

Music wise, he participated in the same concert Cynthia did, *his* first also. With four percussionists, he played the lead drum in one song and did well. He and his friends had organized themselves into a musical group they called "Acoustics," shades of my "Lumber Jacks" of years ago! The difference was that they composed their own lyrics and music and had the "proper" instruments to screw up the sound waves big time. We Lumber Jacks with our singing and at best a guitar or accordion were pretty mild and—dare I say it?—a little more civilized and definitely more funny! Fran wrote that Wiebe c.s. sounded "really good." I wonder if she meant that. Sounding good to the young generation no doubt, but to us older folks? But I guess as long as I could sleep during their practice in the next room, I had no reason for complaints. I did not; we encouraged them and were even proud of their creativity.

Early December 1988 he successfully participated in the 12 hour relay:

His average time was 5:30 per mile. Of the ten runners he ended up in fourth place for speed, even though he was the youngest. The fastest average was 5:26, so we feel that he really did well. It was a charity run for which they collected a total of N10,000. He was really worn out at the end of the day, but they had a class party that evening and he went.

On Easter Monday 1989, Wiebe continued with his accident tradition: he fell and hurt his left wrist. The x-ray didn't show any break, but the doctor said that sometimes it takes two weeks to show up. In the meantime, he had to wear a splint and an ace bandage. It hurt him a bit, but he was allowed to go running, but only with his splint on. He was determined to run 1992 km that academic year, for 1992 was to be his graduation year. A week after the accident, things were healing up, but when he rode his bicycle, he had to quit because of the pain.

The last two Wiebe stories for this term were fitting for him.

Friday night Wiebe and two friends had an all high school party. These kids are really getting into it: they invite everyone. About 60 kids showed up; fortunately, it was not at our house! We only had to chaperone it together with two other couples. The electricity went off, so most of the evening they had to play their music on battery-operated stereos. Once the power came back on, they put full volume on: amplifiers, loud speakers, etc. The party was out on a veranda so the noise didn't bother too many other people!

The next one, almost two weeks later was something similar, a party, but organized quite differently. Here's Fran:

Today some of Wiebe's classmates gave a farewell lunch for two of their number who are soon leaving Nigeria. They asked if they could cook the meal here. I told the group of ten that they should just all cook at their own homes and then they could eat it here. I'm glad I said that because this way I got a lot of baking done for our family. I still had to help them with the last details, like heating up the oven chicken, making gravy, and cooking the rice, but they had done most of their homework! They actually cleaned everything up quite well too. They knew their reputation was at stake; if they left it a mess, I'd never agree to such a request again. So now they can ask again sometime!

### *Animal Husbandry*

You remember our love affair with rabbits, beginning way back in Wukari? Well, I've been quiet about the animals in these pages, largely because we did not write about them in our correspondence.

But ever since Christmas 1984 (Chapter 22), rabbits had once again been a prominent part of our lives and cuisine. At any time we would have between 80 to 90



rabbits: one buck, five or six does and scads of young, all candidates for the frying pan. The rabbits were all cooped up in cages high off the ground to protect them from predators, after our earlier experiment to have them in cages on the ground. The cages were largely self-cleaning, what with tight-meshed chicken wire on the bottom. We often used rabbits as gifts at birthday or anniversary occasions.

Two Rabbits for John Orkar's Birthday\*

Then we moved into chickens and ducks as well. Now we needed to fence off our yard from that of our compound neighbours as well. Since we had a huge back yard, a fact we did not appreciate at first, we had a huge area for the chickens and ducks to wander around in. In due time, we planted a small forest of so-called “miracle trees” that could be stripped of their leaves and branches but recovered in no time to be stripped once again. Those leaves and branches were very nutritious for the animals. They paid no attention to the seasons, rain or shine; they just grew. We gave branches to many people for them to plant in their own yards or farms. So, it was kind of a development demonstration project as well.

We even were into goats again for a short time, counting on them to keep the grass in the back yard short. We had also tried that when we lived on Zaria Road. The goats were tied to stakes that were moved around regularly. That experiment was once again not successful; they did not seem to like our grasses. I must admit they did indeed not look very appetizing. Before long they succumbed to the knife.

We became part of a chicken co-op along with a few other missionaries. One day in April 1989 we received a shipment of a 100 day-old chicks. Since we were the only members with an attached closed-in facility, a garage we did not use for cars, they were housed for some days there. It did not take long for some smells to penetrate the house. When they matured somewhat, they were transferred to another member’s chicken coop. Eventually, our share ended up on our plates. It was the first of a successful series of such co-ops.

### *End of Term*

While all the stuff in this chapter was going on as well as ministry in the companion Chapter 23, we were again also working on furlough plans. It was going to be a short one to accommodate the kids’ Hillcrest schedules. It was to start with a visit to the Weeks family in London. From there, fly to BC, where we would celebrate my folks’ 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. And then on to Grand Rapids. Some of the details will be told in the companion Chapters 24 and 36. See you there.



## Chapter 36<

### Jos VI - Family and Social Life

(June 1989—August 1991)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 24, Volume 2)

#### *Home Service*

Our furlough was very typical of previous furloughs so that we do not write many details about it. As to the time with the Weeks in London, it took the usual form of socializing, with Graham and myself competing for talk time. Both Graham and Katie working in the day time left the four of us free to wander around London, which is always a great experience.

A couple of things that stand out from this visit. It coincided with our 27<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We decided to celebrate it together with the Weeks and asked him to choose an appropriate restaurant. Did he ever! We ended up with our most expensive restaurant celebration ever till that time, apart from our 25<sup>th</sup> in Jos. Graham must have forgotten his own penurious COCIN days and that he was dealing with a *Dutch* and a *missionary* family, neither of which was given to extravagances!

We rented a car and visited Bath and Brighton. The Brighton trip was especially memorable. The day we drove there, it was raining cats and dogs without letup. We decided on taking a London ring road part of the way, but the heavy rain reduced driving vision to near zero. To make it worse, I had long lost my skill of driving on the left side of the road, as we used to do in Nigeria until they changed years before. I was nervous as all get out under these conditions. I never saw the Brighton exit and went around the entire city, an interminable distance! Somewhere along the line, I also scraped a car that was parked in some unusual location but I just kept going, not daring to stop in the midst of all this traffic chaos. How, I don't know, but I did eventually find Brighton and remember even enjoying the visit.

From London, we flew to BC and did the usual deputation in the two supporting churches of Port Alberni and Surrey. Of course, we socialized a lot with siblings and others of the clan, while we all stayed at Dad and Mom's place in Abbotsford most of the time. It never occurred to us that having our family over for a few weeks might be a strain and drain on them. I guess I thought we were God's gift to them. Actually, of course, I, at least, was! Remember? First son after four girls?! Always proud of my place in the lineup, though I can hardly boast of it as my own achievement.

The big event was another anniversary, my parents' 60<sup>th</sup>, already referred to earlier. *This was only the second time ever that all the ten siblings and parents were in one place, the first one being their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Only the second and last time! It never happened again.* Isn't that incredible? The reason for this unusual situation was that the oldest sisters were already married when Dick, the youngest of all, was born. After a while, Hendrik and I left for Grand Rapids and went our separate ways from there. Apart from those two anniversaries, it never happened before or after. I was often the culprit. I was not present at the funerals of either of them, nor did I attend the wedding of Dad with Lady Ann, all occasions where everyone else was present.



**Our Crowd with Opa and Oma Boer\***  
**June 24, 1989**

But the anniversary was a fun event. I believe I did a good job emceeding the reception. Pictures were taken of the parents with the different generations of their descendants who by now were considerable in number. Not all the grandchildren made it, but we were glad our three children did. Most of the siblings gave short speeches of appreciation and some precious memories, while a few in-laws and grandchildren did as well. Fran spoke of her joy in being part of the Boer family, even though she was twice a foreigner, being a Frisian and a Yankee! We remember Kevin telling the group that during this visit he had played pool with both Opa and Oma and they beat him soundly. He advised them to be careful. After all, they were old and should act their age!

Hendrik and Barb had also come for the occasion from Gary IN. Since our family was staying with the folks, they had to find other lodging nearby. So Fran and I offered to pay for them to stay in a motel. After all, they had to spend their own money to attend, while our tickets were paid by the Mission Board. We would soon see them again at the wedding of their son Rob and Julia on our way from Grand Rapids back to Nigeria early August.

At the end of our BC tour, we moved on to Edmonton, where we carried out deputation assignments in our three sponsoring churches. As you know from the companion chapter, I also lectured there at King's College. We were there for about two weeks and stayed in the home of Lee Hollaar, who offered his house free of charge, while he and his family were on

holiday. We never met the Hollaars at that time, but we did after we moved to Vancouver in our retirement. They live in Cloverdale BC, part of or near Langley. Also Kevin met their daughter when they were both living in South Africa. She's the one who told him she "knew" his family, even though he was not with us during that Edmonton stay.

While in Edmonton we spent some time at the famous Edmonton Mall, allegedly the largest in the world at the time. We were all amazed by the place, but Cynthia and Wiebe were absolutely fascinated by it. After they had experienced enough of the Mall, they flew off to Grand Rapids by themselves and moved in with Kevin in the Edna Street mission house. We stayed in Edmonton to complete our assignment.

The Grand Rapids leg of the home service was too hectic. We had many doctor appointments, board activities, shopping, packing, a trip to Highland and in between we tried to see the relatives as well. Of course, we wanted to spend as much time as possible with Kevin also. It certainly was a pleasure to have him around. He was enjoyable company and had learned to work with his hands as a summer house painter, something we had a hard time convincing him of when he was still with us. He now described himself as a workaholic and was worried about it a bit. We were dead tired by the end and were glad to be home again in Jos in a more sane routine. "Sane" did I say? In Jos?!

### *Back in Jos*

#### *The Family*

The day after our return Fran had to hightail it to Hillcrest and get going. That left me to getting things going at home again. I wrote,

So I shopped and had to get various people like carpenters, electricians and mechanics to repair various problems around the house and with our cars. I am not finished yet, but enough to sit at the computer for a few minutes in order to take advantage of the people who are willing to carry our letters abroad. However, Monday I will go to the office and be "serious" once again.

When we left, the freezer was half full; when we came back, it was nearly full. As Fran put it, "Our 'range manager' had butchered some rabbits and our housekeeper had frozen lots of mangoes." That was a nice welcome.

I do not repeat all the details of our socializing in every "Family and Social Life" chapter, but I do like to insert one paragraph in each chapter to remind you of our continuing hectic family and social life to ensure you that, interspersed with all the social and ministry activities described in this and its companion Chapter 24, it kept going all the time. So, here's a paragraph from Fran's letter of October 1, 1989:

Happy Nigerian Independence Day! We are enjoying a long weekend. This is our first school break since August 9, so we were all ready for it. Friday, Nancy Bosma

and I did our weekly shopping to get ahead of the weekend schedule. In the afternoon we went to Rayfield Lake for a while. We had De Jongs over for supper and had a nice evening with them. Saturday we had a brunch cookout at Rayfield with five families. In the evening we were invited to Lydia & Garba's for a Thanksgiving service of his three years at Plateau Church. Also he gave thanks for a good trip to Israel. He went with about fifty other Nigerians under the sponsorship of the Pilgrims' Board. This evening we are invited to a Groninger's house. The name is Vander Heuvel; he lives about 15 miles from here and is the chairman of Roads Nigeria. Tomorrow evening the big event is Wiebe's Akustix performance at Yelwa Club.

I have mentioned my voice problem in earlier chapters. This was the result of years of abuse of my vocal cords that went back all the way to my childhood years. You know I did a lot of singing and always sang my heart out not only, but also my vocal cords. I sang the best way I knew how and, later, I spoke to large Nigerian audiences, often without loudspeakers, the best I knew how. No one ever drew my attention to proper breathing techniques when singing or speaking, not in the choirs I sang, not in the college public speaking classes and not even in the seminary preaching sessions—*nobody, nowhere, ever!* Hard to believe, I know.

My faulty "technique"—if that's what you'd call it—slowly began to wreak havoc on my vocal cords with the result that I had to scrape my throat often while my voice lowered from tenor to bass. As still more time went on, public speaking became increasingly difficult until it eventually affected even my ordinary conversations. Talking became difficult, interspersed with scraping and coughing. Singing became basically impossible. 40 years into all of this, at age 51, I finally decided I needed help. Here's the first paragraph about it in our correspondence:

John has now finally found a voice therapist named Mrs. Andrews. She specializes in helping to retrain adults who have voice problems. They've had two sessions and she really seems to know what she is doing. John is now beginning to see some hope because she is confident that he can be helped. He's using honey in his tea and also a special lemon/honey drink. These are both very old-fashioned remedies, but she recommends them and he finds them very useful in soothing his throat. He also has to have throat lozenges on hand so that whenever possible during the day he can suck on them. Also he's supposed to drink lots of water to keep the vocal cords moist all the time. Even a bottle of water beside his bed, so whenever he wakes up, he can take a sip. Also he's doing a lot of proper breathing exercises. Please pray for his complete (and quick) recovery, because he really misses out on group singing now. This morning at church he tried singing softly and his voice didn't seem to break as quickly as it has been lately.

As you know by now, birthday and other parties were almost routine. In one letter, Fran made reference to six parties—four birthday parties, one Akustix affair and a Canadian

**Thanksgiving. One of those birthdays was for a Nigerian friend and was characterized by one of these comical collisions of time cultures.**

**Last night John and I were invited to another 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party for a Nigerian friend from church. John couldn't come so I decided to go alone. The previous Saturday we had been invited somewhere and we decided to come a bit late. When we got there, things were in full swing already. So yesterday I decided to be on time. You guessed it! I was way too early and no one quite knew what to do with me! I was thirty minutes ahead of the next *early* arrivers. The invitation said 7:30, but we didn't really get started till after 9. The food was delicious and, once people started coming, the fellowship was nice too.**

**We passed by the actual date of my parents' 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, December 21, 1989, since we had celebrated it in the summer. But now that the actual date had arrived and we told our Nigerian friends about it, they could hardly believe it, for life expectancy in Nigeria was so much shorter. If you reach 50 years of your own, you've done well, let alone being married for 60. In addition to congratulating them, I also thanked my parents "for the many siblings they had given me. Even though we are far away most of the time, we love being members of such a large family," something that I have said over and over again even during our retirement years in Vancouver's West End, where most people seem to exist as bare individuals and are amazed when we tell them of the two huge clans to which we belong—a total of something like 75 nephews and nieces between the two of us.**

**During my absence in BC to visit my ailing mother, Fran wasn't feeling too well during a very hectic week both at work and at home—"cough, headache, tired, etc." Since home and school were often too intertwined to discuss them separately for our Hillcrest family, here's how her first intertwined February week went:**

**I went to school but tried to take it a bit easy after school. However, that is often hard to do! Tuesday was our turn for Mt. View dorm relief, so I didn't get home till after 9. Wednesday we had a mission committee meeting from which I excused myself at 9. Thursday another planning committee meeting for our annual conference was held at our house. Friday evening I was invited out for supper with seven other adults. All of us have teenage kids who were either out on a campout or were at a high school Young Life meeting till 11. So we celebrated by going out! We went to a very nice restaurant, but it took them over an hour to prepare our food. It was 10:30 before we got home and then the others stayed at our house since it was almost time to pick up the kids again. I was invited to a barbecue last evening but I really didn't feel like going out "alone" again, so I decided to stay home and read a book.**

**Though Christmas 1989 was already history for over two months, money for Christmas gifts from Mother Jennie and Jane arrived early March or, more correctly put, the information about it. We all had different ideas as to how to use it: Fran—The family go out for four Sunday lunches; Myself—Give to a new convert from Islam who has many Muslims coming to challenge his new faith; Cynthia—"Her note is enclosed," but it**

wasn't; Wiebe—Pay towards his Christian Music Conference costs when he went to Benin City. Fran wrote, "That's how each one used his/her part." Wow! I don't recall the exact amount, but it must have been substantial. Thank you, Mother and Jane. Much appreciated and all put to good use.

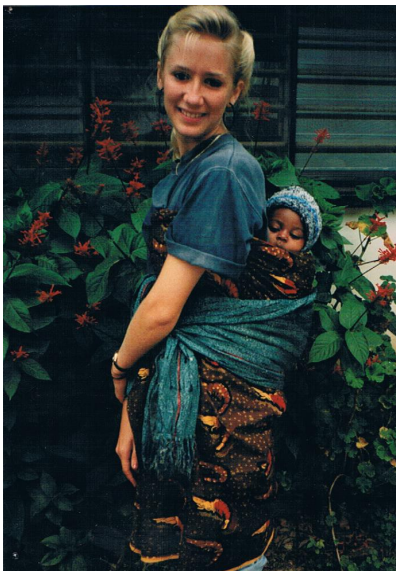
Fran's 49<sup>th</sup> birthday in March was celebrated with a delightful Nigerian dinner cooked by "our" Lydia and enjoyed at our house with our family, Lydia and family and the Evenhouses. Then we spent a few days in a Bauchi hotel, where we first met up with CNN. Here's what I wrote: "Fran and I spent the weekend at Zaranda Hotel in Bauchi. I needed badly to get away from things and people for a couple of days. It is amazing what two days of holing up can do in terms of restoration. Apart from meals and two games of tennis, we just stayed in our room, reading, chatting and sleeping."

Oh, yes, the hotel now provided access to CNN. This was our first contact with it. We watched it with some fascination, but also got bored with it quickly. "The images and symbols flit across the screen so quickly that one gets tired." Also too much repetition. We felt offended at its gross intrusion of privacy during the homecoming scenes of the soldiers and family reunions. We did enjoy the in-depth interviews with a reporter from Bagdad and with the Iron Lady.

On March 17, 1991, I sat down and wrote a letter to my parents before Fran even got up. This was part of a change of pattern.

When Fran gets up she will be surprised that I have already finished this weekly task of writing. We still kind of think of this letter writing as her task, since she has done it so faithfully for so many years. However, that perception is slowly changing as I pitch in more and more. But even when I write, she still prepares the envelopes and whatever else is involved in getting these missives on their way. Anyhow it is possible that she will add her own two bits. She did: "next time, D.V.!"

And here's the latest on Asabe, our housekeeper:



"She had a baby girl. They've named her Naomi Cynthia! Cynthia got to hold baby Cynthia at the naming ceremony last week. Asabe came back to work this morning with the little baby. We went to pick her up and will bring her home when she wants to. She said she was getting bored at home and was ready to come back to work. Her substitute had no complaints about that! You may guess who that substitute might be!"

Two Cynthias\*

We were reaching an important phase in our missionary lives. Kevin had already left four years earlier; Cynthia was about to leave for Calvin; Wiebe had only one year to go at Hillcrest. It was time for a family picture.



Cynthia, Wiebe, Kevin, John, Fran-1991\*

This is the stage when many missionary families return home to keep the family intact. I commented:

But we have no such plans. We are enjoying the challenges the Lord places before us. Furthermore, leaving here would mean that much of our experience would become useless. So, unless the Lord clearly shows that He wants us to go elsewhere, we plan to stay. Even if we were to return to Canada, where would our kids be? Kevin is planning on Peace Corps. Where will he end up later? The others do not sound like they plan to stay in North America either. So, it may well be that we are as close to our kids in Nigeria as anywhere else in the world.

During the 1991 summer we had this empty nest, with the kids travelling all over North America, as you can read in the various sections about the children below. Our reaction? Here is what I wrote:

Here at home in Jos, our house is very quiet. To be honest, though we love our kids, I, at least, looked forward to a break from the pressure of very active, noisy and aggressive kids who are in the center of their student community and who therefore brought in loads of others, who always forced us to eat at very specific times because of their school activities, etc. etc. For right now, I am enjoying the quietness. We can eat at our own time and own speed. We can eat what we want without being restricted to the narrow range of foods teenagers tolerate. I enjoy the break. Perhaps after a while I would like to have some more activity around us, but for now....

To our kids: Don't be offended at the above paragraph. One day you will understand.

*Fred & Nancy Bosma in Jos*

We were so happy in mid 1989 when we learned that nephew Fred and Nancy Bosma were coming to Jos to serve as a one-year voluntary accountant in the capacity of Business

**Manager for the Mission. They were going to live on our compound and thus be our neighbours. I wrote, “It will be different to have relatives so close by. We look forward to having them around.” They arrived as arranged and soon settled in just down the compound driveway from us. We were excited to have them around, especially their little kids and Nancy’s contagious laughter.**

**It was a real joy to have the Bosmas living so close to us. Fran wrote to my parents,**

**We are so happy to have real family here and everyone seems happy. Their house has only a shower and here we have a bathtub and shower, so last night Nancy came over with the three kids to let them each have a nice bath. She also comes over regularly to use our washing machine.**

**Nancy has been subbing a lot at Hillcrest. She could get a fulltime teaching job today if she wanted it!**

**A month later from Fran to her family,**

**It’s so much fun to have *real* relatives around; we are thoroughly enjoying the Bosmas here. It’s great fun to have the little kids pop in for all kinds of things. Joleen even sat on my lap during the High School Christmas program. She fell asleep at the end, so I told Nancy that I still have the makings of a good mother!**

**We had them over for both Christmas dinner and New Year’s Eve. Nancy hosted a delightful 48<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Fran. They also spent time with Lydia and Chris, even joining Plateau Church for the year they were in Jos. The Bosmas were very happy at Chris’ church. That in turn made us happy for two reasons. We were glad that they did not submerge themselves in the Hillcrest expatriate Chapel but branched out into the community. Secondly, their being happy at that church was an indication of the good job that Chris was doing as their pastor.**

**We really appreciated their help with checking up on Cynthia & Wiebe during the times Fran & I were away from Jos together. Also when Fran had surgery.**

**We wrote, “Everyone appreciates them and is trying to keep them here. I hope it works.” It didn’t. That was too bad.**

### ***Our Liberia Adventure***

**In October 1989 we went to Liberia for ministry as described in Chapter 24. It was not all work, especially not the first week.**

**Here’s the arrangements we had made for the kids during this safari. Fran wrote,**



Cynthia (16) and Wiebe (15) managed very well while we were gone. They stayed with Bierling/Bosma/Kiesselhorst/Papadopoulos/Ritter families and part of the time they stayed home together or alone. They had encouraged me to go with John and leave them home “alone.” I’m glad I went to Liberia and I’m glad they are becoming so independent. They are certainly more independent than I was at their age!

Fran also wrote about the “hardships” we suffered there:

It was terribly hot in Monrovia, but the ELWA compound is right on the beach. You can see the ocean from every window. It’s about a thirty second walk to the water, a ten minute walk to a safe swimming area and a fifteen minute walk to where there were many fishermen. One day we bought fresh fish (huge ones; you know John!) and paid someone to scale and gut them. Some kids carried the “catch” straight to the guest house and then John started to fry fish for everyone there!

As I was frying that fish, someone knocked, opened the door and who walked in but Bill Kiesselhorst, a friend of ours from Jos and a missionary of the Four Square Gospel Church, with whom we had a very active social life. Were we ever surprised! For him it wasn’t all that unusual a meeting, for he traveled all over West Africa almost full time and could be seen anywhere at anytime. Well, for us it *was* a surprise, albeit a pleasant one. Of course, we invited him to our fish feast.

He came with some bad news about misbehaviour by Wiebe and his friends. Apparently in protest about something that happened between them and some administrators at Hillcrest, they decided to take all the pop bottles from the student café they were operating and smash them against the school walls. Mr. Bierling, high school principal at the time, dealt with them in quick order and applied some of his “creative” punishment. Unfortunately I don’t remember what it was, but he was in charge and they had to obey!

### *St. Piran’s Church*

We remained members at this church, even though things were changing drastically. But first a bit about the church’s annual Harvest Sunday celebrations. The fall is, of course, Thanksgiving season. Canada’s in October; the US’ in November and then, often St. Piran’s Harvest Sunday following right on the heel of the US’. In 1989 there were only several days between the last two. In Nigeria, every congregation chooses its own day; there is no set national thanksgiving day.

In November 1989, Fran wrote,

Today was Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday at our church. Normally there are some 300 people at the 9 am service, but there were at least 600 today. We got out a bit late and the 11 am people started coming early, so there were real traffic jams!

There was lots of extra singing and people brought all kinds of produce to distribute to the needy in the neighbourhood. We won't know till next week how much money was collected in the special offering, but it usually is a good sum.

About the next year's celebration in November 1990, she wrote:

Today we will celebrate it by bringing our gifts either in cash or kind. There will be a table outside on the parking lot where the "kind" can be deposited. We have chosen to give in kind this year, 100 yams which we purchased for the occasion. During the collection of the cash, people will walk towards the front of the church and deposit it. It is usually a festive occasion.

The second part of the celebration will be a harvest dinner this coming Saturday evening. Everyone will bring a specimen of their local food, whether of some other nation or another tribe. It is usually very good food. John is going to make *stamppot* with sausages. Instead of kale, he uses local spinach. We can't buy kale here and the spinach does a better job anyhow.

As far as the changes I just mentioned went, we had a new Bishop installed—or is it "enthroned"? Anglicans like to use royal terminology-- Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kwashi, the first Plateau indigene to take that position. While the southern bishops we had till now were content to leave St. Piran's continue with its own established Evangelical low-church tradition, the new Bishop was eager to place his own stamp on the place. He was going to turn this church into an archdeaconry centre with its own archdeacon. For Anglicans those were important changes and would enhance the prestige and influence of the church. As to Curate Emmanuel, he would soon be replaced and become the Bishop's Chaplain. It was plain for all to see that the new Bishop intended to milk this rich congregation for all he could to build up the diocese, including maintaining an expensive bishop's court. Though I had great appreciation for Kwashi, for his energy and for his vigorous approach to society and, in fact, occasionally would pay him a social visit, I had my misgivings about these pending changes. But then, I was not an Anglican at heart and had joined St. Piran's precisely because of its low-Anglican services of simplicity and dignity as well as the social influence I would gain from it.

With all the changes going on, it was no surprise that Pastor Yisa would leave us for his "home" diocese of Bida in Niger State. It was bound to come. Without them, our St. Piran's experience would surely change and not for the better, for our families had been close friends for quite a few years.

### *The Hoekstra Visit*

Early June 1990 I went to Kano to pick up Nick and Rennie Hoekstra, long-time friends of mine from Port Alberni, who came for a visit. With everyone else still busy with school, I decided to take a couple of days touring them around before bringing them home. We spent a day in Kano city and another in Zaria.

Nick was an avid footballer and coach even, having shepherded Canadian teams to Europe. So he and Fran organized a soccer match for her school children, with Nick teaching them the real rules. They were impressed that he knew the game so well. Some of the kids had told their parents about it, and a few even came to watch the game. The match ended 0-0, “a good way to end it,” according to Fran.

The Hoekstras spent two and a half weeks with us, but not all at home. With Useni as our driver, we took them to Mkar, the centre for NKST and location of various former Mission institutions. We took them to Wukari, our first place of ministry and then to Baissa. The resident missionary in Baissa was sick and needed a doctor’s attention. So, when we left, we made a bed for him in the third seat at the back of the station wagon and then carried him all the way to Mkar Hospital. Along the way, we were stopped at a road block manned by policemen. When they saw our patient, they wanted to know all about him, but we did not want him disturbed from his sleep. So, when they asked whether he was drunk, we affirmed their opinion with the comment, “Well, you know young people!” and they let us go. Later on we regretted the incident as a bad witness. But we got him to the hospital in time and left him in good hands, while we continued on our way home. A day or so later, someone else took the Hoekstras to Kano, for I had to take care of Fran who found herself in the operating theatre at the same hospital where Wiebe was born. In fact, she was under the knife the very moment the Hoekstras left. I took leave of them in the hospital lobby.

### *Life with Drivers*

I felt extremely fortunate to have Useni drive us all over with the Hoekstras. It made everything so much easier and more relaxed. He was a CHAN driver, whom I was allowed to use along with the CHAN car for private as well as official purposes. That was quite a perk I enjoyed for over a year or so. However, Useni was interested in another job and so we had to find a replacement. Cynthia put us on the trail that led us to James Kpanto, who was the driver for Dr. Sands, the father of Elliot, her boyfriend. They were going to return to California and thus no longer needed James. Cynthia had gotten to know James and liked him while she also knew that the Sands had been very happy with him. So we ended up hiring James as a driver, but now as a personal driver employed and paid by us. James remained with us till we left Nigeria.

Today I wonder why we waited so long to hire a driver. Well, yes, I do know. Having a personal driver seemed ostentatious in the missionary culture. Secondly, there was never a Mission budget for a driver so that it would have to come out of our own pocket. Neither did the ICS have a budget for it till we received support from ICCO and others. But as the naira began its devaluating slide downwards, hiring a personal driver became more affordable in terms of dollars, the currency in which we were paid. Having a driver saved us so much time that it would have been smart for the Mission to hire a driver just to stand in line at the gas pump with missionaries’ private vehicles to keep them from wasting their Mission time. Well, the Mission or missionaries just did not think that way. Hiring one made life and ministry so much more convenient and efficient, but no one followed our

example. It cost us money but saved the Mission and the ICS a bundle in terms of better use of our time and made life so much easier for our entire family as well, for James became much more than just our driver. He became the “range manager” of all the animals. He did much of our shopping and banking. He even became our repair and maintenance man for house and car. To top it all off, he was a great guy whom we could trust fully.

It turned out that our relationship to James actually went back more than a decade. He was one of the little neighbourhood kids who played ball with our little kids when we lived on Zaria Road. He was also one of those who came to play ball at Mountain View when we first moved there. Even today, 2014, he works for the Mission as an IT person and serves as our own private agent in Jos for our Christian-Muslim books. He and his wife, Mary, are friends to all of us.

### *Sickness in the Family*

#### *Fran’s Surgery and Convalescence*

Yes, Fran in the hospital in mid 1990. Here’s her story and its background:

On May 11 (Kevin’s birthday) I had gone to Dr. Truxton for my annual physical. She discovered my uterus was enlarged to the point of a three month pregnancy. She asked me to come back for another checkup on June 5 (our anniversary). It still looked the same so she sent me to the Teaching Hospital for an ultrasound. That test found out that there was a cyst on one ovary and a “cystic mass” behind my uterus. She said I would definitely need surgery, but that I “shouldn’t lose any sleep over it” and proceed with our planned trip with the Hoekstras.

The surgery was planned for June 15. Dr. Truxton said I could eat till midnight on the 14<sup>th</sup>. So we went out with the Hoekstras and the Bosmas for a nice Chinese meal, but I didn’t enjoy it as much as usual!

Arrived at Evangel Hospital at 7 am and was on the operating table by 10. Dr. Truxton was in the room assisting Dr. Iya, the surgeon, who had been trained by Dr. Verbrugge. The doctors prayed before beginning; then the anesthesiologist explained what he was doing and I was *out!* My next memory was someone shaking me and saying “We’re finished and bringing you to the ICU” where Esther Orkar was the head nurse.

The surgery ended up being a bit more complicated than anticipated. The ovary with the cyst was removed; the “cystic mass” was so entwined with the uterus that they had to take it all; and they decided to take the appendix as well “seeing they were in the neighbourhood.” The “mass” was the size of a softball, so the doctors couldn’t understand why it had never bothered me at all. It was sent to the US lab

of Dr. Verbrugge's medical practice for a biopsy and, thankfully, found to be benign.

The recovery went very well and I had little trouble with pain and none with infection. One uncomfortable moment occurred when a nurse dropped a whole IV bag right on the stitched-up incision. Her "sorry, sorry" helped but didn't quite take care of that discomfort! The stitches were mostly internal. The outside ones looked like "they'd sewed me up with a basting thread" and were removed a week later. The entire cost of the surgery and after-care was a whole \$100! Had it been done in the US, it would have cost \$10,000. We saved the Mission a bundle. We were so impressed with the hospital that we made a special donation to it.

A week later, Fran was home. The family and the Mission community did their best to help her. "We as a family are keeping close guard over her and we are all quick to say "No!" to anything she wants to do. The doctors and everyone else continue to warn us that she must not do anything for quite some time. We all take our turns at cooking. Also many missionary families, CRC and others, are providing us with cooked food."

A month later Fran wrote:

Yesterday I went to church for the first time again and that went okay but I was glad to get back home. We've been having many visitors and received many cards and flowers. One Nigerian family heard about my surgery and went to the hospital, only to be told that I had been discharged over a month ago! In the Nigerian context it is very important to come to greet a sick person, no matter how old the news is when you hear it. A few days ago, fifteen women from St. Piran's came for a visit. That did make my bedroom a bit crowded!

Fran learned that "some good can come out of illness." For one thing, during her long enforced rest, she had become more appreciative of the tiredness of which both of our mothers were complaining. "The first few weeks I was too tired to do anything; every little activity tired me out." I developed greater appreciation for Dad Wiebe for his never-ending care-giving duties of Oma, and the need for extra strength for all his extra responsibilities. She also wrote that *I* had learned a bit more about patience. "John has surprised even himself how patiently he sat next to my bed in the hospital and at home, just waiting for me to fall asleep or to chat quietly till I got tired again."

At the end of her convalescence, Fran and I took a weekend off in a Bauchi hotel. I used most of my time reading in preparation for writing a lecture. Fran commented, "He loved it that he wasn't constantly interrupted by others." "It's always fun to order tea for room service." However, getting to our room required climbing a fifteen-step stairway. That was proving too much for her still.

And then the Bosmas left Nigeria. Fran wrote, "We really miss them; it was like having grandchildren around with Joleen, Richard and Renee. They visited a lot, but when they got ornery, they could be sent back to Mom and Dad."

In August she slowly eased herself back into teaching, a few hours a day at first, then the full morning, while Linda Horlings would take the afternoons. At home, Cynthia was carrying more than her normal weight. Fran wrote,

Cynthia continues to be a great help in doing my shopping and hosting responsibilities. I was supposed to be CRC hostess for all of July and in charge of the guest house for July and August. Cynthia is doing a great job; even the guest house worker commented on how nice it was to work with her. She continues to be a people person!

Things were really improving when Fran and I were able to play tennis again. Perhaps she was rushing things with tennis, for a week later I wrote that, though she was teaching full time again, it was not easy for her and she was very tired by the end of the school day. Of course, that was sometimes true even before she got sick, for teaching is always strenuous. I wrote, “We try our best to keep her out of the kitchen as much as possible. For example, today, I made breakfast and lunch, but Fran made the salad. Whether we'll do much for supper is doubtful, but I did make some instant pistachio pudding for the event. I do actually enjoy cooking.”

During her period of convalescence, I played tennis with others and improved my skills. Early October, Fran wrote, “John has really improved during my absence from the courts, so he is a real challenge to me now!” I just wanted to make sure you knew! Even if the challenge was to a convalescing woman!

Actually, her convalescence became a bit of a yoyo. One week we thought she was on top of it all, but the next week tiredness would set in again. By end October, she really wanted to take me on for a game of tennis, but she felt too tired. Then, a sudden burst of energy and she took me on. You know what? The humiliation is still stuck in my throat: “She ate me,” the Hausa way of saying she beat me. I was so mad, I challenged her again the next day and had my honour somewhat restored by a solid revenge. I should just find myself another tennis partner, a beginner!

I wrote a short paragraph about Fran in a December 1990 circular which I reproduce here for your reading pleasure:

Teaching grade 3 and enjoying it as her first love—except for me! But you already knew that! She finds this class aggressive and not as academically capable as last year's. Her recuperation period turned the whole family into expert cooks so that now we all take turns at it—as if we were not doing so before! She continued to have serious eye troubles that do not want to disappear. In spite of these two handicaps, she still beats me at tennis most of the time. Gggrrr!

*Mother Ellie's Struggles*

Around New Year 1990, we received news about Oma Ellie's "mild" heart attack. It seemed mild to us, for within a few days she wrote us a letter from her hospital bed. But then more followed and things seemed pretty serious. I wrote her a number of pastoral letters, one of which read:

The time to face facts is here. The Lord seems to be giving us signals that we may soon have to give you up, Mom. Oh, we know this happens to others and they recover. This has happened to Fran's mother and it could happen to you as well. Though we pray for that kind of treatment from God, we cannot count on it.

You have not always found it easy to express yourself with respect to your relationship to God. Dad seems to find that much easier. However, God's treatment of us does not depend on our ability to express ourselves. He treats us because of Christ. I have every confidence that He considers you His child and is preparing to embrace you in His bosom. Though fear for the unknown can never quite let us go, I trust that this fear may be tempered by trust in His promises to us all and to you in particular. We all experience God in our own way and no one's experience may be held up as the standard that we must all attain. Your experience of God and His dealing with you is as real and legitimate as that of anyone else. So, rest assured of your status before Him.

The background to this letter was that one of my siblings seemed to be pressing Mom to be more free about expressing her faith, the implication being that as she was, she might not really be a Christian! That sibling was sowing seeds of doubt in Mom's heart, something that really disturbed me.

She hung on for two more years, but it was not much more than just hanging on; almost all of it in hospital and senior home beds and mostly in pain and weakness, hardly a life. From a letter we learned that she'd been in the hospital three times in two months with heart attacks and then with fluid in the lungs. She was on a lung machine for a while. So I decided to go see her. I was lucky to get the required new residence permit and the tickets in quick order and left almost immediately.

I was very happy to spend this time with the folks, especially since Mom was at home at Landeau Place instead of the hospital or in a home, places we would find her during our next visits. But she was not well and spent almost all her waking time just sitting in her comfortable chair far away from the windows, where there would be more light and where she could have seen things going on outside. She seemed listless and without purpose. She just sat there.

She had always been super at handwork. We still have a crocheted grape doily which she sent to Fran as a shower gift in 1962. Therefore, to give her something meaningful to do with all her spare time, I asked her to do a cross stitch embroidery of the Lord's Prayer for us, preferably in Hausa. I wrote it out clearly for her, but that was too much of a challenge.

So she did one in English. We framed it properly and have had it hanging prominently on our dining room wall ever since. She was still able to do her quality stuff; she just needed to be encouraged to take up the kind of project she had always loved. It was, I believe, her last major creative project.

Later I wrote, "It was so good to be with you two for these two weeks. It has been a long time since we spent that much time together. I thank you for all the things you did for me." They also showered me with useful gift items, though, to be honest, I do not remember what they were. In that follow-up letter I wrote,

You may be wondering why I was so ready to accept all the things you offered me. I did not hesitate or hem haw around. I just accepted them. The reason is that here in Nigeria we are always on the giving end and that is good. However, sometimes it is nice, very nice, to be on the receiving end. And that is what happened. So, I gratefully accepted the things you offered me. It was such a pleasant relief, especially also because I knew that you were doing fine financially. But, please, do send me the bill for all the telephone calls I made.

During my visit, I tried in various ways to improve her situation, but I suspect that Dad considered it interference. For one, I wanted to move her chair closer to the window, where she could see a bit of the world, but they refused to re-arrange things in the room. I knew how Mother Jenny enjoyed her "electric chair" that allowed her to put it in different positions and even help her stand up. Since Mom had a hard time getting out of her chair, I organized the siblings to buy such a chair for her, but she did not like it and the siblings returned it. Mom had indicated interest in going to the mall just across the street, but she could not walk it. So I rented a wheelchair for them to try. I even took her to the mall and wheeled her around. She really enjoyed that. After I left, Dad returned it. I believe it was a Wiebe control issue. Like, "Don't mess with my decisions." I know you can't win them all, but how about some? Come on! This was John the activist at work. Perhaps I did not know how to work with my own Dad.

Upon leaving, I ran into an unexpected delay. Siblings Karen and Bill brought me to the Vancouver Airport and, upon my urgings, just dropped me off and went their way. Bad mistake; the second. The first was absolutely stupid: I was 24 hours late for my plane! I had exactly one minute to decide whether or not to take a plane that would leave in fifteen minutes. No time to think it through. I bought another ticket that brought me to Amsterdam via London on Monday. Bless that credit card! I would see about reimbursement later.

Since there was no KLM flight to Kano till Friday, I had four days to kill. I stayed at the Gorts and spent the time visiting friends from our VU days, including the Lingers, our old neighbours on Botterstraat. I also contacted various relatives by phone, especially Mom's siblings, to tell them about her fragile health. Could not get hold of some, but her sister Riek was still a fast talker who could hardly stop to listen to news of Mom. Her sister Annie was in good spirits and sent her greetings.



One of Mom's brothers, you may recall, Oom Job by name, still lived in the same folksy Amsterdam neighbourhood where we found them years earlier. He had lived there so long that he had become a totally indigenous Amsterdammer, dialect, flippancy and the whole works. No longer a northerner. He and his wife were very friendly people. Though he was very small in stature, he still walked fast like a young man. We discussed why he had rejected the Christian faith.

He told me that he never believed in it from childhood onwards and quit going to church as soon as he could when he was small. He said that his father had mistreated him from the beginning and that was another reason he rejected the faith of his father. He said that it would be good if someone could rewrite the Bible in language that is understandable. So, I arranged to have a Dutch Bible sent to him, called *Groot Nieuws (Good News for Modern Man)*.

During my absence I had parked my car at the SIM Guesthouse in Kano. It had no peace: Thieves tried to steal it, but they made a mistake when they hotwired it. As a result, many of the wires burned, including the points. That saved the situation for us. We bought some extra parts and installed them. It so happened that I had a family ride with me, the husband of which was a good mechanic. We had to stop a couple of times along the way to put things in shape. I was glad I had this mechanic with me, for I would not have been able to manage it myself. We now had to buy some new locks that were also spoiled in the process.

Throughout my BC stay I was unsuccessful in phoning the family, but so did everyone else trying to call Nigeria. In The Netherlands, people *were* able to get through, but apparently I still couldn't. I wrote later, "It was just tough luck on our part." I was worried silly about not being able to inform Fran and the children about the delay. Fran wrote in a letter to the Prinses,

We tried to guess why he didn't come back when he said he would be back. We assumed it meant that Oma had taken a turn for the worse or that severe weather had delayed the plane. We never thought it was because he had forgotten to check the date on his ticket. He said he'd never be able to travel without me again, because we won't let him forget that mistake!

Recently, letters from my Mom had been less frequent. She had done all the writing, partially because Dad's handwriting was hard to decipher. But now it had gotten too difficult for her to write letters. In that follow-up letter to the visit, I encouraged her just to send us an occasional two-liner. We also urged Dad to do his part and promised we would do our best to figure it out.

Mom was able to write occasional full-length letters off and on for a while. This gave us the impression that her health had improved. However, Kevin wrote in March that she had had another heart attack. We were going to try to send them a letter by fax to Jake Heiken's office. That should arrive there in just minutes. *Ach jongens*, we lost his fax number! So, back to snail mail for the time being and the phone gamble.

We did try that phone route again. We would hear the ring of my parents' phone but no one picked it up. We tried also to phone the siblings, but either we reached their voicemail or their phones were out of order. Jake and Karen had the forethought of disconnecting their voicemail for our sake and so we were occasionally able to get the latest from them. That was deeply appreciated, for now we could keep updated.

In fact, things got worse rapidly. Mom was taken to St. Paul's Hospital in downtown Vancouver, only ten minutes walking from where we have lived in our retirement for the last twelve years but a four-hour daily return commute for Dad by car and sky train. He was incredibly faithful in visiting her every day there. They did a five-bypass surgery on her. In addition, her kidneys and bladder were troubling her. She was there for about 40 days, after which they transferred her back to the Abbotsford hospital.

I wrote her another pastoral paragraph:

Mom, it would seem that your time is near. I feel so helpless. Sometimes I wish I could take it over from you. But there is nothing one can do about it. One generation cannot take over the age of the previous one. So, we pray that God will make your physical discomforts bearable. But we do not stop there, of course. We pray that God will give the peace that only He can give. But that is real peace, a strengthening peace that can take you through the valley that lies ahead.

Everyone of us is different. It appears that you are struggling to prevent that final enemy from overcoming you. That is the way God has made us. We want to live. However, I trust that you also know that, though the valley is there, it is not the end. Remember that song that I always find so meaningful, namely "We have no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began." That is hard to believe or understand, but that's the promise God has given us. You have "no less days" before you; in fact, you have hardly begun your days, comparatively speaking. But, I know, the enemy, that valley. It is not easy to accept. Of course, we want you to get well.

End April 1990, she had another heart attack, now at that Abbotsford hospital.

No one expected her to pull through. The family spent the day with her and this time things were different. She was prepared to go and meet the Lord. Karen said that they had a beautiful day together. Afterwards, Oma told the family and the doctors that next time they should not hook her up to any machine but just let her go. I was overjoyed to hear that, for it meant she had found peace.

Over the next few months she went up and down. We heard from and about them occasionally through various channels, mainly letters. Mid-October, Fran wrote,

Last week we phoned Opa and Oma. No one is writing us from there and now Oma is no longer able to write. Opa says he can't write; we've encouraged him to just

dictate a letter to one of the sisters when they come, but that doesn't seem to work either. Karen tries to write but she seems to find it hard to do and also hard to find the time. We talked to Opa and he seems to be holding up well, but Oma is very tired and discouraged.

A few days later, we got hold of both of my parents by phone. Dad appeared to be of good courage, while Mom seemed depressed. That was so sad. Though Dad was doing everything he possibly could for her, she showed little appreciation for his efforts. Given all he did for her, that was amazing and disheartening, but it was kind of in line with her life-long attitude. It deprived her of much joy.

Early November, Kevin phoned to tell us that Oma was back in the hospital and was not expected to live much longer. Her lungs were filling with fluids again. I called Opa immediately and found him handling "the situation" well. In spite of all the traveling back and forth to hospitals for her, he was "still amazingly strong."

With Dad not being the writing kind and Mother not able to write anymore, some of the siblings finally stepped up to the plate and started to write. Sister Karen especially did her best to fill the void, but it was difficult for her. So I counseled her as follows:

Karen, we love receiving your letters, but we notice that it seems to be difficult for you to keep it up. That is no surprise, for you write very long letters and you do so in longhand. Under such conditions, I would not write many either. However, since we have this computer, it goes a lot faster. May I suggest that you try keeping your letters short—one page or so. That may help you. It will not seem like you have to climb a mountain or spend a day. One page does not take that long. Try it. We are interested in hearing about everyone, especially about Mom and Dad. And with them not writing anymore, we are kept guessing most of the time. Mom's short letter of a few weeks ago and Dad's phone call were great treats.

Some months later, I wrote the following:

Karen and Ellie try to keep us informed, but it has been some time ago since we heard from them. Martha writes an occasional letter as well. Karen does not like receiving edited computerized copies of the letters we send you. That makes it a bit more difficult for us to send her letters on a regular basis. But I know that she will read this letter and understand....

As in the case of Mother, so did I occasionally write pastorally to my siblings. I wrote the following to one of them that I believe even today to be good advice to any reader of these memoirs and so I reproduce it here for you to mull over:

Congrats on having reached your 60s some time ago. Nowadays older people are starting all kinds of new things and finding new purposes for which they had no time earlier. The last few years you have engaged in many new things you would not have dreamed of fifteen years ago. What makes you think such inspiration will stop

at age 60? If your primary reference for life is not God, but people or some other aspect of creation, I can see that people can develop such fears. However, with God as your primary focus, I do not think you will ever feel useless. He will faithfully inspire you to do things you can do within your limits. He can even stretch your limits beyond your own imagination. When you know you are obedient to Him and faithful, you have done your utmost and you will have a sense of accomplishment.

But what do you know, end January 1991 we received a letter written by Mother Ellie. We were surprised but, even more, pleased.

### *Mother Jennie's Struggles*

Mother Jennie, being eight years older than Mother Ellie, was having her serious health struggles, "all kinds of pain and tiredness. Every evening she prays that God will just take her and relieve her from her pains. She is ready to go not only, but *wants* to go."

Towards the end of 1990, she wasn't doing much better than Mother Ellie. She was now 87, very weak and could no longer speak easily, feed herself or get up. She was fortunate to have Jane by her side as well as daughters and daughters-in-law who lived nearby and who were ready to assist at any time. Fran and I felt bad that we were so far away from both of our mothers, but also happy that both of them were surrounded by our siblings. We were so grateful to all of them for their loving care. Kevin would occasionally visit her as well, but found it increasingly difficult, since she started to talk in Dutch much more. Fran remarked that it was too bad Kevin did not recall the Dutch he spoke when he was four years old!

Fran had gone to visit her mother in January of 1989 and thought it might be the last time of seeing her. However, she continued to struggle, but did not really have much quality to her life anymore. She spent much of her day sitting in her special "electric chair" looking out of the window to the busy Cascade Road and watching the activity on the driveway toward the Cascade CRC. All the children faithfully visited her and she continued to express joy at receiving regular letters from us.

This section is very short compared to that of Mother Ellie. It seems that the Boers saved most of our letters written during this time while the Prinses did not. Therefore we don't have much specific information to add here.

### *Christmas in Jos and South-East*

Much of the Christmas season 1990 was spent on a vacation at Abraka, but Christmas itself was spent at home in Jos. We had a Christmas party in the Mountain View Hostel along with a number of other missionaries.



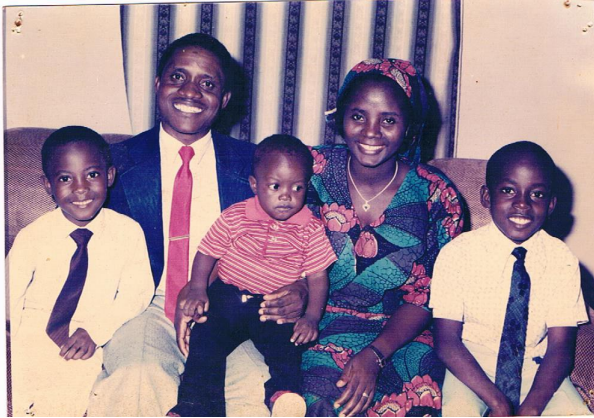
CRC World Relief. He had spent many years as a student in Canada and, being member of NKST, the church our mission helped develop, he joined the CRC in Canada. There he learnt that song and so loved it that he never allowed a CRC Christmas party or service to pass by without having it sung. So, there we were around the keyboard, me playing and John the Nigerian leading a mixture of Dutch, Canadian and American CRC missionaries in singing “*Ere zij God.*” Memorable indeed!

The most memorable moment of that party was singing that most popular of all Dutch Christmas songs, “*Ere zij God.*”<sup>\*</sup> It was one of the few times I actually played organ—call it “keyboard”—to lead a group, but the most interesting part of it was that it was led by John Orkar. John was the Nigeria Director for

But now about that wonderful family vacation trip we took together with Kevin, who was at home for Christmas, and James, our driver as well as friend to the kids. The vacation resort was on a river at a place called Abraka, in the south-east of the country some ten hours driving from Jos. Normally rivers in Nigeria are not safe for swimming but this river was free from all tropical diseases and a delight to swim in. We enjoyed swimming and tubing in its crystal clear water. The dining room served very expensive and tasteless food, but we found a nice village restaurant where the cost of food was 15% of the resort hotel prices! And the taste was superb. On New Year’s Eve we joined the guests at the hotel for a huge buffet on the beach. Quite a contrast from our Prins relatives who were struggling with snow and ice!

After a week at Abraka we headed for Obudu Cattle Ranch. That is where we spent some delightful days with the Havemans in 1970 when Kevin was still an only child. This time we only stayed one day. The children were bored because there was nothing to do. The prices had gone up steeply while the condition of the place had seriously declined. The drive up to the ranch was breathtaking and going down was also quite exhilarating. Kevin and Wiebe ran down the eleven km hill with its 20 switchbacks, while the rest of us rode down in the comforts of the car with James at the wheel.

A few years ago we would not have been able to afford such a family vacation, but with the sharp devaluation of Nigerian currency, it was now possible to splurge like this occasionally. “This trip was very good and most of it relaxing. It will surely go down in the family’s history and memory as one of our outstanding family outings.”

*All Our Children**Lydia and Chris*

Church in order to work for the ECWA denomination. Lydia was planning to enter university.

Jesse, Chris, Jason, Lydia, Jude Abaga – 1990\*

*Kevin*

We kept in touch with Kevin during his time at Calvin, but we did not write much about him in our letters. He kept in touch with his grandparents on his own. So, there is next to nothing in our sources that tell us anything about him or even just trigger our memories. However, during the 1990 summer, he once again joined OM. We received a postcard from Toronto and even a letter(!) from Montreal. We were “happy that Kevin is really enjoying his OM experience again. He is considering doing a longer term with them.” His upbeat attitude towards this ministry was confirmed in several of his letters.

Once he started Calvin again, he got deeply involved and had little time for anything else. However, he did find time to help Grandma and Jane with some chores around their house like lawn work and painting. He wrote that his classes were all very time consuming and that he had trouble setting priorities for himself.

Since we have so few details about Kevin, we’ll take any little morsel we find, right? So, in a December 1990 circular I wrote:

Final year econ student at Calvin College. Hopes to visit us for a month over Christmas and we are all looking forward to that. Does not know what’s ahead for him. Spent part of his summer evangelizing in Quebec, using French. In the meantime, he has also turned into a professional house painter.

Kevin phoned us December 15, 1990. That was not so unusual except for a very unpleasant reason. He had to get something off his chest: A friend of his had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head! What a shocking experience. It would take him some time to overcome that one. He was scheduled to write a major exam the same day, but he would try to postpone it. As you can imagine, he did not feel up to it. We had never met the boy, but we did get to meet his parents after we moved to Grand Rapids in 1996.

Shortly after, he came home for the 1990 Christmas break. As Fran told about his arrival:



As you know Kevin came three weeks ago. John and Wiebe went up to Kano to meet him and they didn't recognize him because of his glasses, beard, and long hair. He hadn't told us about the change in his appearance and neither had anyone written about it, so they were very surprised! Cynthia and I didn't recognize him either as he got out of the car when he got home.

Kevin in 1990\*

We all had a good laugh about it. I remembered him as he looked on the high school picture hanging in our living room; now that I'm used to it, I like his intellectual philosophy professor look. We've had so many wonderful discussions about everything with him. He has become so mature, and his heart is certainly in the right place. We are having a great time together.

Kevin's boxes did not come on the flight with him, so they waited around Kano for most of Monday, but, in the end, they drove down empty handed. His Christmas presents to us and some cards and letters were in those loads, so we got them all two days after Christmas.

I wrote to my parents:

It is real nice to have all of us together for these few weeks. There is a bit of tension occasionally caused by the fact that Kevin is no longer a teenager and thus no longer has teenage interests. In many ways he feels more at home with adults. The kids are a bit disappointed about that. Kevin does what he can to accommodate them and I think he does as good a job of it as can be expected. He thoroughly enjoyed the Abraka adventure described above with all of us.

Early January, with the kids back in school,

Wiebe & Cynthia are back in school and so is Fran, of course. Wiebe just broke a twelve-year old Hillcrest record for running 5 km yesterday. Both of them have just

been assigned their parts in the school play. Wiebe is more happy about his that Cynthia is about hers. In fact, she is going to talk to the teacher about hers.

Kevin featured prominently for a few days on the Hillcrest campus. I wrote, “At the opening assembly a few days ago, Kevin featured as main speaker and he did very well. Even high school kids thought he did well, including his teenage brother and sister. Fran and I were proud of him—or should I say ‘grateful?’ That is probably the better word.”

He also visited Fran’s third grade class a couple of times and even taught Calculus for two days in high school. He was toying with the idea of teaching high school math for a few years. His students said he did a great job those two days.

When it was time for Kevin to return to Grand Rapids, I drove him to Kano. He had a stopover in London, where he was going to spend a few days with friends from Hillcrest. We were told by other travelers that trans-Atlantic routes had hardly any passengers for fear of terrorism! Needless to say, we prayed for Kevin’s safe return to the U.S.

Only a month or so later we heard via the grapevine that Kevin had enrolled in the US Peace Corps. We were proud of the adventurous nature this portrayed but probably a bit annoyed that the news did not come from him. It did not surprise us. However, it meant he might not be around to help Cynthia settle in at Calvin or to welcome us to Grand Rapids in August. That we did regret. Oh, well....

Fair is fair. In May 1991, I reported that Kevin had begun to write us regularly. He wrote that he planned to spend most of his summer house painting together with Krister Evenhouse, just like 1990. And, of course, he had just graduated from Calvin! However, he still had to take some summer courses to get his full credits. A couple of months later, we complained we were not hearing much from him and commented, “That is unusual for him!” He had really changed in the letter writing department, but the question was whether this “unusual” of his would once again become the new usual?

### *The Children at Home*

Fran’s first letter in this mission term described Cynthia’s birthday party—20 kids for pizza and a video; nine girls to our house for fresh doughnuts at 10:30 pm; then all to the guest house for an all-night slumber party. And then there was Wiebe with his Acoustics group working on new arrangements. A typical Boer bang beginning!

During the 1989 fall semester, both kids were doing track workouts.

After the holidays they will have several track meets against other schools. Wiebe is training for the long distance events of 3000 and 5000m. He’s out running about 1 ½ hours each morning to build up his endurance. Cynthia is training for the 800 meter, but, unfortunately, she hurt her back on Monday. She’ll be seeing some people about it today. Her back has always been sensitive, but somehow it feels



worse and different than usual. We hope someone will be able to help her out; otherwise we'll try to get her a doctor's appointment for later this week.

Just an in-between notification about our kids' student leadership. At the end of the school year, Wiebe was elected class President for the next year, while Cynthia was Secretary to the Student Council. I commented, "It is nice to see our kids take active roles like that."

During the first 1990 semester both tried for the school play. Wiebe was happy with his part but at first "Cynthia was not terribly thrilled with hers." They were going to do "*The Pirates of Penzance*." Fran wrote,

Wiebe is one of the pirates, while Cynthia is one of the daughters and had some lovely solos to sing. We'll see how things work out for them. We just got a video copy of the 1983 play when she played Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*. It was great fun to see that and it certainly brought back memories. I hope she'll keep on with both music and drama when she goes off to college

One thing for sure: this meant a busy period of practice again, probably an irregular meal schedule and, possibly, for us a lot of ferrying them back and forth. Sure enough: play practice for two hours three evenings a week. End March, the play was performed four times in one week and went over very well, "except that the lead character was very weak and that spoiled it somewhat," I wrote.

Related to the above, Fran wrote, "We are all teasing John that he looks as if he has the part of the lead pirate in that play, because he is really getting a twirl in his mustache now! He puts mustache wax in it every morning!" The "twirl" refers to my new mustache sometimes called "handlebar." 23 years later, I still sport it, though the wax seldom gets used. There is no wax on earth that can keep my mustache twirled, not even after so many years. Fran says that this reflects my personality. I really have no clue as to what *that* means!

As if three weekly play practices were not enough, Wiebe had preparations for his class Carnival and was chairman of the Carnival. They did a wonderful job of it and made a profit of about N15,000, which they planned to use for a class trip or banquet. Cynthia also had a weekly work evening on Crest, the school yearbook. If you contrast that amount with money-raising projects of earlier years, you will get an idea of then galloping inflation in the country. N15,000 would have been unheard of a couple of years ago.

After both projects were finished, we gave a sigh of relief: "We hope that we can live at a little more relaxed pace for a few days. Like not having to take the kids to school for practice at 6:15 pm every night. Like being able to eat dinner together as a family and some such things."

We were creative about the kids' finding jobs for the 1990 "summer" break while Fran was recuperating from her surgery:

Cynthia and Wiebe are keeping out of trouble by working in the ICS, though we are paying them. They enjoy reading and answering letters from people in the Bible correspondence department. In the morning one takes his/her work home so that Mom has someone around and in the afternoon the other one works at home. It is proving to be a good arrangement.

During the spring 1991 semester, both kids were pretty busy. Fran wrote that they were

both involved in the *Sound of Music* which will be performed April 25-27, so they have been having extra practices during the school day and in the evenings. They were also both involved in the CRC service last night at Hillcrest. Wiebe wrote a skit which went over very well. He also played drums to accompany the other musicians for the group singing. Cynthia played her guitar and sang a solo during the offertory. On such occasions we are always so “proud” of our kids and realize how much we will soon miss all three of them. Cynthia sang another song titled “Lord, Lord.” It says “You call me Lord, Lord, but then you go your way; how can I be Lord if I’m not Lord of your today.” It’s actually an old 1975 Inter Varsity song, but many had never heard it before. One Nigerian girl came up to Cynthia afterwards and asked her to write the words down for her and to please sing it to her again!

As the time for the play approached, it got increasingly hectic for all of us. We would have to pick them up at around 11 pm for several nights. Unfortunately, the play itself coincided with our annual Mission Conference in Miango. Since we had to cooperate fully in the kids’ participation in the play, it became difficult to participate fully in the Conference. We just did the best we could.

The kids were growing up. Cynthia graduated in May 1991—see below. Both of them developed their own itineraries for their summer journeys to North America.

Wiebe plans to be in Vancouver for just a few days on his way to work with Kevin in Grand Rapids for the summer. He should be arriving on June 11 and has written details to Fred and Nancy. Cynthia will be in BC early July and has also written flight numbers etc. to Nancy. She’s going to travel a lot this summer and then next summer she’ll have to work hard because she’ll be all out of money!

And then guess on whose shoulders she will cry!

Fran commented that she would have to work hard that summer in order to “forget the empty nest.” That would hold for both of us. At the same time, we were looking forward to the beginning of a new phase in our lives. In other words, an ambiguous situation and attitude.

*Cynthia*

We had barely returned from furlough when Cynthia was planning her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party. She invited her friends for a video/slumber party in the guest house on our compound.

Now, being sixteen, she could legally obtain her learners license—and she did. She regretted that she was no longer in the U.S. There she could have legally gotten her real driver's license. The problem now was that our VW was not working.

Cynthia is known in her adult life as a community organizer, but she had trained herself early for this function. She was member of a Youth Fellowship group but got irritated with the Hillcrest Principal, who had imposed sponsors on them that the members did not want. He refused to reconsider. Fran wrote, "She is so ticked off that she is thinking about leaving in protest. She has tried to have the kids complain to the Principal all together, but you know how high schoolers can be: you can hardly organize them to do anything together when it comes to school authorities." I had always taught the kids not to take things lying down when things go wrong. We had a family saying, "Take it to the Board of Governors." Cynthia had taken it to heart and continues to practice it today. In fact, she *became* the board in her Kent WA neighbourhood, where she and Andy established their home.

Cynthia seemed to have learned a lesson from Wiebe: She fell while playing volleyball at school. Her foot was not broken, but it was more than sprained. She ended up walking on crutches for a few days. The pain soon subsided, but walking on crutches was one great inconvenience for her.

She was now also on the girls' volleyball team. When there was a game against Baptist High, she wanted us to come and support her team. We stayed till 9:30 pm. The Hillcrest team beat the Baptists. When it's your own kids, it is so much fun to watch a game. A few weeks later she participated in a tournament involving twelve schools. They started at 8:30 am and kept playing most of the time till after 10 pm! A long day by any standard!

After the Christmas break, Fran wrote,

Cynthia has been doing a fair amount of work in the house: baking, cooking, laundry, etc. She also has plenty of time to read and visit friends. She's not ready to get back to school after the break, at least not the academic side of school! She continues to be such a social extrovert.

Cynthia is very happy that she was able to drop both Chemistry and Advanced Algebra. She wasn't doing well in them and didn't enjoy the classes at all. Now she has taken up Computers and Speech which seem to be a little more to her liking. She represented Hillcrest in two track events last week at sub-zonal meets: the 800 and 1500m. She hadn't really practiced. So she wasn't surprised when she didn't place high enough to go on to the next level of competition.

Her story continued as the end of her 11<sup>th</sup> grade was approaching: “Cynthia is dreading the end of the school year, when her boyfriend, Elliot Sands, son of an American dentist and SIM missionary, will graduate and return to California.” After he left, she had a hard time of it, for it had been a “good and healthy friendship.” Fran wrote, “Both were wise enough not to tie themselves to each other in undying love. They are both free to pick other friends and go on with their lives.”

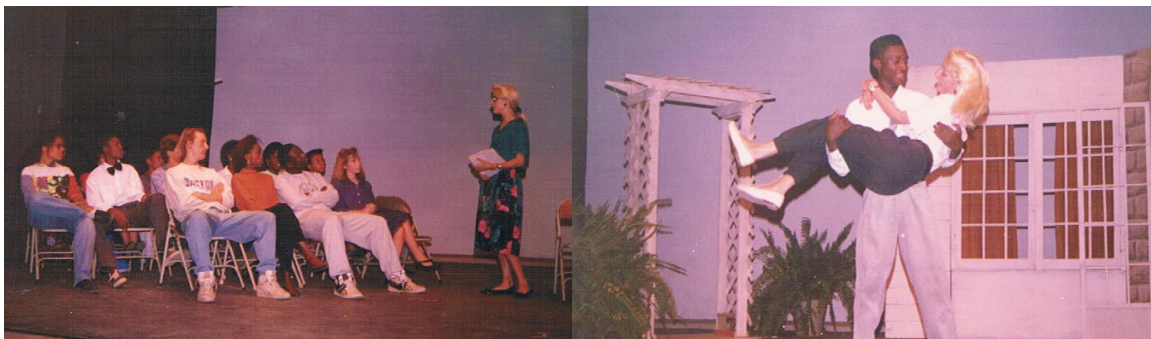
I wrote, “Cynthia was very happy for school to start again, her senior year or 12th grade. She found her holiday boring, what with her boyfriend and all the other friends having left town. I have never before known a teenager who was so eager for the summer holidays to be over.”

Once school started again, she dove right in:

Cynthia made the volley ball team again and got a lead roll in the senior play. She's still involved in choir and Swing Choir. She's in Student Council and active in her class activities also, so she'll have no time to get bored. She says she wants to be really busy so that she won't have time to think about how much she misses Elliot!

That senior play guaranteed us another rushed evening schedule of quick meals and commutes. Here's more information about her role in the play:

Cynthia has play practice three times a week now. She also has special voice lessons from a voice therapist to help her use her voice correctly. She's beginning to notice the same kind of problems that John has, so we are hoping she can correct her speaking patterns and use her voice and breathe in the right way. The play is scheduled for November 15-17 and is titled “*Curtain Going Up.*” She has the lead role and is working hard at memorizing her lines. We are trying to work with her by reading the other parts so she memorizes where she comes in.



Cynthia acting in her senior play – October, 1990\*

She received the best report card ever of her high school career, and we were really proud of her. She was also working on college admission. For her it was a given: Calvin it would be. No struggle like Kevin had. By November 1990 she had already been accepted and was

very excited about that. Money was a problem, since Calvin was a private college. Fran wrote,

MK's no longer get first year tuition free at Calvin, so she's busy applying for aid and scholarships. When we missionaries complained about this new policy, Calvin wrote that there was plenty of scholarship money lying around. So now we'll have to start digging for it! The reason for giving this aid hasn't really changed. They said they *used* to offer it because MK's had a hard time finding paying jobs and therefore couldn't start saving up for college. Well, nothing has changed there! If Cynthia and Wiebe were working for pay here, the most they could earn would be 50 cents an hour! We are "creating" jobs for them so that they can earn something and then paying them minimum wage. At least they have a start and we aren't just *giving* them the cash.

The play took place, three nights in a row. We did a joint celebration in the town's only Chinese restaurant at Hill Station. One was to celebrate Cynthia's success as the lead actor in the play during all these many weeks of practice and then three days the real thing. She had done so well! That was worthy of a celebration of its own, but there was God who was expecting something in terms of US Thanksgiving. So we tried to make both happy and believe we succeeded. God's care for our family through the year was nothing to be sneezed at, even if it included Fran's surgery and lengthy recovery, and the ill health on the part of both of our mothers. We all made it through the year. That was enough for celebration. As to the next, well, who knew?

In January 1991, Cynthia started her last Hillcrest semester.

She is a bit downcast this evening for her new schedule includes a course she does not want to take, while a course she does want to take had to be eliminated. However, at supper time the family did some creative thinking and Cynthia will now present a proposal to the relevant teachers that, if accepted, will allow her to take the wanted course and drop the hated one.

Even though she was not happy with this semester, she *was* happy that this was her last one. She soon settled down and accepted it. "Soon play practice will start and then she'll be too busy to think about things she doesn't like. They're going to do the *Sound of Music*." She was not happy about the part she was given and intended to discuss this with the teacher.

Early February 1991 she took the American College Test. She was at it for four hours. The English was very easy she said, but the Math and Science were very difficult. That test could also be taken during Orientation Week at college but she felt she wanted to get it out of the way early.

Lots of plans for the future:

**She is getting very excited about the next stage in her life: college. She'll graduate on June 7 and leave here on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Then she will stay in The Netherlands for a few days and then some time in BC, WA and CA. Around July 20, she'll attend the Narramore Re-entry Seminar for Mission Kids. From there she'll go to Grand Rapids and try to work for a few weeks before college starts.**

**You will have noticed that our kids participated in various Hillcrest school trips. Usually they would come home bristling with excitement and pumped with all the fun they had. In February Cynthia had a different experience, totally negative. Fran wrote,**

**They went to Lafia, some three hours driving south of Jos, with a group of Hillcresters for a state sports tournament. She came back this afternoon with the most horrible tales of horror, cheating, racism and other unpleasantries. She experienced a negative aspect of Nigerian culture in a graphic way she has not seen in all her seventeen years here.**

**However, in March, "Cynthia and some twenty others are supposed to go to the Nationals, where secondary schools compete in sports. It will take place in Port Harcourt, a full day's drive with a school bus. They are really excited about the week's trip."**

**When the day came, they left at 6 am, all excited. I wrote, "I only hope that the heat, the cheating and the racism they are bound to encounter will not turn them off with respect to Nigeria." The following day the group phoned to Jos to tell them they got stuck half way in Enugu due to bus trouble. Some church had allowed them to stay overnight. They hoped to arrive in Port Harcourt that same day. Their spirits remained high. The event itself was the national secondary school sport competition. They returned home tired and in good spirits, but "they were not the outstanding athletes of the country. Even Wiebe would not have won." See more about the Wiebe reaction under his section. Once again, the group experienced a great deal of corruption and cheating.**

**A few days later, Cynthia had a phone call from her friend, Elliot Sands from California. "He totally surprised Cynthia by telling her that he plans to come to Jos in May to dispose of the family's goods. We will probably end up buying their CD set. Needless to say, Cynthia is in cloud nine and beyond. Now she has two days to count towards: graduation and this one."**

**Another travel story about Cynthia:**

**She has gone to Lagos with two of her Nigerian friends. She'll be there for the whole Easter holiday. She never did much traveling within Nigeria before, but during the last four months she's been to Abraka, Lafia, Port Harcourt and now to Lagos. We hope she'll have a good time. Some of these rich kids brag a little too much about how great Lagos is! Wiebe was invited there a year ago during the Christmas holidays and was quite disillusioned.**

**And then one more trip for Cynthia before the end of the school year:**

Cynthia has gone to Yankari Game Reserve with three friends. It is a three hour drive from here and they have to go through Bauchi, the scene of a recent major riot. They have gone by taxi. Now that may sound like a most elitist way of traveling. Actually, that is the cheapest way of traveling in Nigeria. For the equivalent of ten cents you can be taken halfway across town. Of course, the taxi stops to pick up and drop off others along the way. It is a private enterprise, but it is called “public transport,” because it is the main way in which the public gets around. They will enjoy especially a safari into the wilds of the park to see all kinds of wild animals. There is also a warm water spring in which it is a delight to swim. However, you have to protect your belongings very carefully, for otherwise the baboons will take them. Some years ago, Cynthia had a physical tug of war with one of these baboons who snatched a jar of goodies from her. We did retrieve the jar, but not the goodies!

Finally the big day for Cynthia came: She graduated from high school! The Mission held a “graduation coffee” in her honour. She was the only CRC student to graduate. Of course, apart from that coffee event, she, her friends and her class organized all kinds of other events typically associated with graduations. She had a “graduation meal” at one of her friends. She was busy for a whole week saying “goodbyes” to her friends. She was also packing six boxes of her things to be sent to Grandma in Grand Rapids, where they were to be stored in the basement. Rev. Yisa of St. Piran’s had her stand outside with him to give everyone at church a chance to wish her farewell. That was a good experience for her.

June 2 was a big Hillcrest Sunday for our family:

Cynthia and Wiebe both have to sing during the morning service. This evening is the baccalaureate service at which I will be speaking under the title “On Being Cool,” based especially on I Cor 1:18ff. The title has been approved by those who count in this regard—C & W! Now they are only nervous about the goofs they are sure I am going to make and the embarrassment this will cause them. Actually, it is not quite that bad. Cynthia actually nominated me! So, now I have something to live up to. Of course, the most important issue is not whether C&W get embarrassed or whether I put on an acceptable show. It is whether this final Hillcrest challenge to those graduates who have not so far accepted Christ will have an impact on them. And for that I pray. The content of my message is a typical ICS subject, the Christian in society, but this time geared to unbelieving Hillcrest grads.

Another part of this Hillcrest Sunday is that the parents of the graduates have to form a choir for the occasion. So Fran is going to join them in practice this afternoon. I will not join, for I need to save my voice for the speech. I do feel kind of bad about that, for Cynthia’s class does not have many parents who participate in Hillcrest affairs. But, my vocal cords being what they are, I have little choice in the matter.

A little more about that Baccalaureate speech of mine is in order:

The speech was based on the notion of two kinds of wisdom as found in I Corinthians 1. I had a horrible time delivering it, for the lighting was so bad that I could not really read the Bible or glance at my manuscript. However, I have never had so much praise from people, even from C & W. As I reflect on that positive reaction, I once again come to the conclusion that these people are not accustomed to a Reformed approach to life that rejects all separation of life and religion. That approach enables one to identify relationships between the Christian faith and life concerns that other traditions simply cannot do because of the theological barriers (dualisms) they have created for themselves. I believe C&W were actually downright proud of their old man!

Fran was another locus of graduation activities. According to my letter:

She was the unofficial but real leader in the preparations for the graduation reception. She worked herself to the bone. After the reception, the two of us along with James and Mary worked until well after midnight cleaning dishes. The next day both of us were really tired and took several naps and went to bed extremely early at night. I guess we are getting too old for such late nights!

You've already read about Cynthia's travel plans in North America. By mid-summer, she was busily flitting about all over the place.

She'll be leaving Washington for California today. She'll spend ten days with the Sands family and then she'll be off to that Narramore Conference on Re-entry for Missionary Kids. She's looking forward to the psychological tests etc. that they do. She loves to analyze feelings and to be analyzed. She hopes to go into Counselling or some kind of Social Work.

That Narramore place, you may remember, was where Kevin also was "trained" to fit back into the American main stream.

### *Wiebe*

You remember Wiebe's Akustix group, I'm sure. They seemed to have changed their name or, at least, its spelling to something more contemporary. Earlier in the chapter, there was reference to a celebration of their first anniversary to be held on Independence Day weekend and financed by their parents: "We've been 'favoured' with lots of practice time already! The four boys have invited their own families and about 40 school friends to the celebration. We've ordered some snacks from Yelwa Club and the other families are all also bringing extra snacks." The guys did a great job. They did seven numbers and then "messed around" a bit by inviting their friends to come up and do some ad lib stuff. The snacks turned out to be "quite substantial and good," according to Fran.

Turning back to Wiebe's major hobby, in December 1989 Fran wrote,



Friday was Wiebe's big day with the twelve-hour relay. Seeing he hadn't been feeling well for several weeks, we really didn't think he'd be able to run it. But about ten days ago he suddenly improved and felt he could still handle it. He did very well. Our son's endurance is something to admire! Whereas most of the runners start out strong and then get slower as the day goes along, Wiebe starts out a bit on the slow side (5 min 40 seconds per mile), but then does his last three miles in record time of 5 min 20 seconds. The ten people ran a total of 127 miles. They set out to beat all records and make it impossible for another team to beat them, at least in the foreseeable future. Of the ten runners, only three of them will be here for next year's run, so it will be very difficult to find such a good team again. It was fun for all of us to watch. There was one member of our family down at the track for each one of Wiebe's miles. John and I brought him down at a quarter to six and watched him do his first mile when it was still a bit dark. Then I went home and woke Cynthia up so we could go together to see his second mile a bit after seven. Nancy took the kids down for quite a few hours to watch. Fred spent his lunch break there and came again after work. They raised around N15,000 for several different charities.

Mid-January 1990, Wiebe left to attend a Christian music conference way down south in Benin City and then on to Lagos to spend a few days with a friend.

He had a great time in Benin City. He went with the Kiesselhorst family. They knew some of the organizers and musicians at the conference, so that always makes a big difference. He personally met all the guitarists and drummers who are "big time" Christian musicians and was very impressed with their music and testimony. They had meals with the musicians at a hotel. His experience with his Lebanese Muslim friend in Lagos wasn't quite what he had expected. His friend has always given him the impression that he's very rich and has access to all the "good things" in life. But apparently they didn't treat their guests all that royally!

And here's the next Wiebe installment:

He continues to thrive in most of his courses. He's getting A's in Advanced Algebra; that's one reason Cynthia felt she had to drop that course! Kevin always did well academically at Hillcrest, but Wiebe is doing even better. He also ran in the sub zonals last week. He placed first in the 5000 meter at 17:30. Then he ran in the zonal competition and placed second at 17:08 seconds. Now he qualifies to go to the state meet next week. He is now only three seconds off the Hillcrest record which was set in 1975. He said if he had only known earlier that he was that close to beating the record, he would have sped up just one second per lap on the last mile. Well, he still has two and a half years to beat the record and now he has his heart set on it!

There was always the next opportunity. Early February,

He went to Gindiri last week to run in the State track meet. He came in tenth in the state at 17:40 which is 32 seconds slower than his personal record. He said he just wasn't able to run as well as usual. The track was new to him, of course, and it had gullies, ant hills, low hanging trees and even a chicken running across! The winner came in at 16:40. He gets another chance at Hillcrest toward the end of this month to run the event again to see if he can beat the school record this year on our own track. So he's training hard!

He bought a motorcycle in early 1990, when the Bosmas were still in Jos. Fran wrote:

We wanted to prevent it on basis of how dangerous it is. However, he reminded us that for years we have encouraged him to use a bike which is just as dangerous in Nigeria. We really had no good response to that. So he won! He is now the proud owner of a Suzuki 125. He is learning to ride on our long compound driveway-- about two city blocks long--and early in the morning on the road before the traffic becomes heavy.



Wiebe with Richard, Renee & Joleen Bosma\*

He had been using it throughout the break as well as into the new school year. Mid-September, Fran wrote,

He's really enjoying the freedom of having his own motorcycle, but he's also finding out how much time and money it takes to keep it running! We worry about the safety of driving on the roads, but he assures us that he is very careful. The problem often is that it's the motorist who is not careful about watching out for the motorcyclist. But I guess we have to let kids grow up!

A few other glimpses of his life:

Wiebe stays busy with all kinds of projects, including school work. He did some gardening on Saturday because we've finally had enough rains to start working on gardens. Now we've been having a good shower every day. He also baked a cake for a friend's birthday. That's what they do in their class: they take turns baking cakes for each one's birthdays. And Wiebe offers to take his turn too. He's becoming very good in the kitchen!

Like his sister, Wiebe immediately dove into his new school activities as well in August:

He is now in his junior year or 11th grade. He is class president and very actively involved in the school canteen. He and many others in his class are natural buyers and sellers, and they are doing a brisk business in selling food and drinks to the other students. He's also a member of National Honor Society this year. He's taking advanced level subjects in biology and math and seems to love the challenge of it all.

As expected, he was also again deep into the running life:

He is really working hard right now for the twelve-hour relay scheduled for late November. He is the only one on the team who has done this relay before; so he is in charge of everyone's training to be sure they build up speed and endurance. Otherwise we might have some people faint on the track especially in the hot afternoon sun! They are raising money for five different charities this year. At a CRC potluck today he "hit" all the missionaries and the Home Board delegates. He got a lot of signatures and promises.

This is how the 1990 relay went, according to my letter to my parents:

He and his cohorts did the 12-hour relay successfully. Towards the end, he almost collapsed psychologically because of some problems that developed and which he, in his capacity as the organizer, did not quite know how to deal with. However, he rallied around and the whole thing ended up a success. It will make you proud to know that Wiebe's slowest of his twelve runs for the day was faster than the fastest run of all the other participants!

The next event was a disappointing musical. Early December 1990,

Wiebe and his Akustix band were invited to participate in a concert given by a very famous Nigerian musical group. However, they did not make it further than the stage. They never got a chance to play. Wiebe had borrowed Cynthia's camera for the occasion. A friend kept it in his pocket, but another "friend" relieved him of the burden. Now Cynthia has no camera. And the boys were very disappointed, as you can imagine.

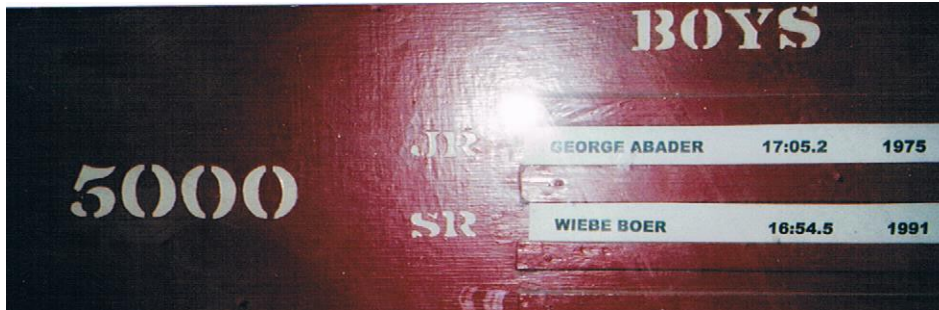
The following week Bill Evenhouse organized a Christmas concert in connection with his Music Ministry to which he invited the Akustix to participate.

Though Wiebe is the drummer of the group, this time he was the main singer. He has turned out to be a good singer. The all male group actually agreed to the participation of two female singers for the occasion: Cynthia and her friend, Annemarie. However, the instruments almost drowned out the voices of the ladies.

While Cynthia was kind of unhappy at the beginning of her final semester at Hillcrest, Wiebe was very positive. A major reason was that he was allowed to take a computer course on his own, set his own pace and figure it all out by himself. Just what he needed: a

good solid challenge. This arrangement freed his schedule so he could take Shop. “That is really good for him. It’s practical and he’ll be using tools he’d never otherwise handle.” Oh, yeah? I took some Shop and still don’t use those tools anymore than I have to!

Saturday, February 2 1991 was a big day for Wiebe! This is what we wrote:



He broke a school record for running five kilometers. The record of 17:05 was set in 1975 and Wiebe

ran it in 16:54. Ever since 5<sup>th</sup> grade he has had his eye on that Hillcrest Scoreboard\* and on that race track. He’s been working hard for it and we are all very proud of him. Now he has a chance to still improve on that at a few sub zonal meets. Then he’ll try at the zonal track meets. Hopefully he’ll make it to the Plateau State event, and, who knows, maybe even to the Nationals?

While Cynthia was away on her negative trip to Lafia as told under her section, that same weekend Wiebe went on a trip with his Advanced Biology class to Yankari. Their research was on a most unusual and—to some—a most interesting assignment: collect and study elephant turds! He came home proud as a peacock of his turds. His next step was to thoroughly dry them and then shellac them. “So now we have decorated elephant turd around the house. How artistic! Just to avoid misunderstanding: we do not have them in the living room. In fact, I do not know where he keeps them, probably in his room.”

Under the Cynthia section you have read about her sports trip to Port Harcourt. Upon their return, the discussion at home turned to how Wiebe would have done. This was the discussion:

Even Wiebe would not have won in the 5 km race, for his record is a minute slower than those who won at this occasion. However, Wiebe is quite confident that on the superb track there he would beat his own record. Furthermore, since he is used to running on a high plateau where the air is more rare, at sea level he would outdo himself, according to him. Well, maybe we’ll see later!

You’ve read about Wiebe’s motorcycle. It had its use and gave him fun, but such creatures are not always without trouble. Early April 1991, he was in charge of arranging the Hillcrest Grade 11 and 12 banquet. He spent a lot of time on the plans and wanted to make sure it was more awesome than any other banquet within memory. He had planned to go on his motorcycle but it did not work. He borrowed a second one and it did not work either. He borrowed a third one and had to leave it at Hillcrest at the time the crowd moved to the first scene. That was it for the motorcycle!

The following morning he had the post-banquet blues and talked it down as if it had been a flop. Cynthia and her friends, who were all guests of Wiebe's class, assured him that it had gone great.

At this time, Wiebe was thinking about getting a summer job in Port Alberni. He appealed to brother Dick and to Nick Hoekstra to help him find something that would pay well. After all, Port Alberni was a lumbering town with a strong union that had negotiated good wages ever since the Boer family moved there in 1952. Alas, things change. The plywood plant where I had worked 35 years earlier and where Nick had worked for forty plus years, was closing down and Nick received an early retirement at 55. Someone offered Wiebe a job of scrubbing the decks of fishing boats on the west coast of Vancouver Island. That would have been poor pay and expensive travel to a very isolated place. Wiebe did not exactly jump at this rare opportunity! But then another jewel was offered him. An acquaintance with the appropriate authority promised him a job planting trees in northern BC that was described as "a very rough and uncivilized job, but it pays well once you get the hang of it." Nothing came of any of these possibilities. He ended up house painting in Grand Rapids as an employee of Kevin and Krister.

He wasn't only thinking about summer jobs in Canada, but also about college in the US. He took

some sort of test yesterday for college entrance. I notice that he listed UBC and Simon Fraser University at the top and then two places in California. He wants to go to a place where snow and other weather conditions will not hamper his running programme. I hope he will eventually choose BC, for otherwise it becomes too difficult for us to see our children during our busy home service period. They will be scattered too much. Of course, that is going to happen anyhow—or, at least, most likely so.

That last sentence turned out to be true with a vengeance!

That same month we gave him a job of making plywood silhouettes of Africa for us to give to our supporting churches to hang in their foyers as prayer reminders. He used the Hillcrest carpentry shop and equipment. He would paint them black, but not till after we arrived in Grand Rapids to avoid having them scratched up during the journey. Thus he was still using the skills he learned in Shop.

Shortly after Cynthia's graduation, Wiebe was ready for his trip to BC and, later, Grand Rapids. I wrote, "He is all packed already and has just left for a half-marathon run with a friend. He is very excited about the summer ahead of him. That is good and I hope he will enjoy himself, while he also learns something about living on his own—though in the shadow of his big brother."

He sent us a postcard from Schiphol in which he clearly indicated he did not miss us. He called us from Grand Rapids and again made sure we knew he was not missing us.

Knowing the ways of youth, we did not expect anything else, “for he is enjoying life and his new freedom too much at this point to miss his parents. That’s youth for you.”

The next section deals with our animals. So, let me ease you into that subject to tell you about a rabbit experiment Wiebe was working on for school. I wrote:

He is doing an experiment on two rabbits for his advanced biology class. One is being fed a certain amount of alcohol twice a day and the other is treated in exactly the same way, except that it gets no alcohol. The aim is to discover the effects of alcohol on a rabbit. Even though I help him out by holding the rabbit while Wiebe pours the alcohol into the rabbit’s mouth, I am not sure I like this kind of experiment, since it does not appear that mankind or the world as a whole will gain anything from it. It appears to me as useless cruelty. But I do not want to go against his teacher.

### *Animal Husbandry*

We continued to keep the animals we wrote about in the preceding chapters: rabbits, chickens, ducks and goats. Before we left for furlough,

I had our gardener/night guard plant corn as well as peanuts. Our soil is very poor and so the corn did not do very well. It was meant for rabbit feed. The peanuts have done better and they will also be ground up for rabbit feed. After our return to Nigeria, we butchered the goat and decided to leave that adventure for a while and concentrate on learning how to raise ducks. The goat did not impress us as an effective lawn mower!

When I returned from my visit to my parents, I wrote:

When I left, two ducks were sitting on their eggs. I understand one of them ate all her eggs. I do not know why. I am just not having any success with the ducks and cannot understand what is wrong with them. Well, I do not give up easily. So I will continue trying till I have the kind of success I have had with the rabbits. With the end of rainy season in sight, I expect that things will go better.

End November 1990, we revived the chicken co-op from last year. We ordered another 100 broilers and divided the work as before. We cared for them the first three weeks in large boxes in our second bathroom, aka WC. When they get big enough, “they are to be transferred to the pen and another member of the co-op will take care of them. The third person does all the accounting for the project. By late December we expect to slaughter them.” At the time of writing—early 2013—I ask myself whether I have my facts straight: Do broilers mature that quickly?

As to the other residents in our yard, “our animals are doing reasonably well. The seven breeder rabbits are breeding as they should. I commented, “It is fun to have all these

animals around. And they are easier to care for than teenagers, for they do not talk back, etc.!” Then, in handwriting, I added this: “*Verdraaid*, I forgot to include the cat and mice!”

### *Nigerian Conditions*

As always, we were struggling with telephone communications to our families. With our mothers not well, we wanted to be able to call our parents in the worst way, but no dice. Occasionally Kevin got through to us after many attempts. We were quite sure that our telephone was sabotaged by some junior maintenance person at the telephone company. Several indications pointed to it. “Tomorrow,” I wrote, “I will begin a new campaign to get around the problem.” Only a couple of days later, it was repaired. How successful was that!

If the telephone itself was not sabotaged, the bill often would be! Early May 1990 it was cut off again. This time, “because we supposedly owe them a bill of some N600. That is mild. Many others have bills of N1,000 or more. It seems that the telephone company needs money and has no scruples about how to get it. I do not know whether I will have any success with reconnection without spending a lot of time.”

Early 1991 I started a diary in which I reported the daily telephone history.

I intend to use that one day to indicate to telephone authorities that they make Nigeria look utterly ridiculous in the eyes of the world by constantly having these breakdowns. Local telephone technicians probably do more to make Nigeria look ridiculous abroad than do all the Nigerian criminals across the world—and they are very many, indeed—for many individuals trying to phone Nigeria are frustrated time and again. This is a powerful argument in a culture that is shame based and very concerned with its image in the world.

Once in a while we would be blessed by an unexpected telephone miracle. Imagine my surprise the other day when I picked up the phone and had Dad on the line! It took me a few moments to realize what had happened. The phone had been out for over two weeks. I had sent a Nigerian mission staff to try to have it repaired and fully expected a call from the telephone company to check it out. I had just returned home from the ICS office when the phone rang. Of course, it would be the telephone company. Wrong. It was Dad. Dad was lucky, too, for I was not normally home at 10 AM.

Fair is fair. Sometimes utilities *did* work. In January 1991 the telephone worked! I called my parents and got through without any troubles or delays. Jane got through from Grand Rapids after only three tries. Same for Kevin. “So, except for times our phone is out of order as in February last year, it is not all that difficult to get through.” Ah, selective and short memories, what a blessing!

The telephone was not the only utility to let us down frequently, as you will remember from previous chapters. Here's the electrical drama for February 1990:

Our electricity supply has been just terrible the last ten days. The power was on from about 10:30 pm till 5:30 am each day, enough to keep the freezers cold. The Mountain View compound generator can run just so many hours and then it has to be turned off. So it was a real problem trying to get things done that take electricity. Our gas lamp works fine for lighting a room, but it isn't easy to study by. Now the generator is out completely and needs to be overhauled this coming week. So far our supply has been constant since yesterday afternoon; we are hoping for the best.

The above stories about utilities are already a good indication of the state of the society. Corruption slowly penetrated the entire Nigerian culture. We were banking by mail with our banks outside Nigeria, but some people had their cheques stolen. So we had to take precautions. We added sister Jane to the signatories of our checks not only but also of our letters to the banks. Every check or letter not having her signature was now invalid and not to be honoured or acted upon. All bank correspondence from either side as well as cheques would all be routed through her for her to sign and forward. She would cut off the signatures from the cancelled cheques before forwarding them to us. This way no one would see signatures. It was an awkward system and required a lot of correspondence with the banks before they could understand and agreed to this awkward roundabout way of doing business. But it worked; we were never attacked.

#### *End of Term Thoughts and Considerations*

In an October 1990 letter to Jake and Karen in connection with his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I wrote about my retirement thoughts, though I was only 52 years old. I had given early thought to retirement and now wrote to them,

By 62, I will do all I have in my limited power to retire. I do not know whether we can swing it, but we will surely try. Not that I am tired of working, but it would seem so good to be able to spend the last few years of my strength at what I am best at: bringing the Gospel by the printed page, the Gospel as it applies to social and economic life. Well, we'll see what God has in store for us. The idea of early retirement actually came from Dad when I was home in February. In fact, he advised me to try for retirement at 60. Who knows?

And with this I invite you to the next chapters of our family and social life. It's been nice to have you reading this chapter and thanks for hanging in there.



## Chapter 37<

### Jos VII - Family & Social Life

(Aug 1991 - June 1994)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 25, Volume 2)

#### A Divided Furlough –Part 1

August 1991-December 1991

#### *Euro-Trip*

August 1991 Fran and I visited the Dekkers, our Jos friends who had returned to The Netherlands. They always had been very helpful to us. This time, Aly drove us in their car to a place where we had reserved a Volkswagen (VW) camper, which we drove to Denmark for a week's stay. It was kind of funny. We thought of these European countries as tiny places where distance does not play a role. Well, just getting there from The Netherlands took a lot more driving than we had anticipated. And then those racing Germans on their *autobahns!* We could not keep up with them in our camper; they zoomed past us as if we were just crawling along, while we were traveling faster than the owner of the camper had firmly stipulated for us.

Most of our Danish trip consisted of just ordinary, but delightful, touristy sightseeing. A few memorable things stand out. We enjoyed the ferry that took us from the mainland to Copenhagen. It reminded me of the BC ferry to Victoria, the capital of BC on Vancouver Island. One time we camped on an open beach; another time, in a campground in the middle of Copenhagen. Of course, we visited the world famous Tivoli Gardens. We met the third mermaid in my life. Twice we were caught driving our VW camper with the tent on top wide open into the wind; twice we were warned by other drivers. We were lucky the tent did not collapse on us.

As to those three mermaids in my life, chronologically they are (1) the one at Stanley Park in Vancouver, where there is a statue of a mermaid sitting on a rock in the waters of Burrard Inlet; (2) my Famke Fran, who was actually born on the bottom of what used to be the Wadden Zee, part of the North Sea off the Frisian coast; (3) the one in Copenhagen. Of the three, Famke Fran has the greatest right to the title because of where she was born; the other two were mere copies of mermaids made by sculptors and placed there by human beings.

And, of course, we visited the Danish world headquarters of Legoland. I remember literally diving into their “Lego pool,” my own term for a huge box of legos full of kids delightfully “splashing around” in a sea of what were at that time, and in many cases still are, one of the most popular toys in the world. I dove in and joined them. I felt kind of related to the Lego headquarters, since their main Dutch affiliate was in Grootegast, the seat of the county in which I was born and where I went to the *MULO* school for one year before immigrating. There they had a similar “Lego pool” of smaller proportion but used similarly.

As to distance, we made the same mistake when we returned to The Netherlands. It was very early Sunday morning and we wanted to get to Lutjegast in time to attend the morning worship service in the church where I was baptized and where I learned to sing all the Psalms. When we finally arrived, the service had already started, but we discreetly walked in anyway. The service was modernized and the singing not quite the way I remembered, but enough to recognize and participate with joy and enthusiasm. Fran remembered enough of the songs to also participate meaningfully.

From The Netherlands we flew on to Grand Rapids. Cynthia had already been there for a few weeks and was living in a Mission house together with Kevin, who had graduated from Calvin in June and was now preparing to join Peace Corps in Botswana. He was very helpful to Cynthia in getting her ready for her transition to life at Calvin. Wiebe had spent the summer with Kevin but was now back in Jos to start his last year at Hillcrest.

### *Deputation in the Maritimes*

Right after Cynthia moved into her dorm at Calvin, we left for a three-week deputation trip to the Maritimes. In addition to work we also were given lots of opportunities for sightseeing.

Sightseeing wise, we visited Peggy Cove, one of the most photographed sights in all of Canada. *The* most photographed place is, of course, anywhere BC! On Prince Edward Island (PEI), we also visited the location of the fictional *Anne of Green Gables*, another all time favourite. My brother Hendrik had previously been pastor in the PEI CRC, so that there was an immediate kind of familiarity and sense of ties with the church.

A couple of special experiences will have to do. In PEI, Canada’s smallest province, we were treated to a local “delight,” the lobster. Our travel partners enjoyed them very much; at least, so they claimed. Fran and I were polite and oohed and aahed as expected by the locals, but truth be told, neither one of us cared for the taste, nor for the hard work it took to extricate a minimum of meat from the carcass. Above all, we were totally thrown off balance when we were told they were routinely thrown live into boiling water! It made us cringe. We did all we could to eat one and politely but firmly declined the offer of a second.

The second experience was a visit to a huge pig farm operated by a member of the CRC. The depth of the mud through which we had to wade to enter the barn was unbelievable. We were most grateful for the boots the owner provided! But, being an admirer of entrepreneurship, I was impressed with the skill and technology involved in bringing pork to the market, while the mud in no way dampened my life-long love of pork.

Evelyn Bouma, one of our travel partners, was an interesting lady. She was an enthusiastic “hatter.” She carried around with her a big box with all kinds of hats to be worn at different occasions. It was kind of a humorous oddity to me, especially since I have also taken to “hatting” of various kinds, as long as it is sort of unusual and has a humorous touch, but definitely excluding the ugly baseball cap.

In December 1991 our family really “scattered.” Kevin left for Botswana. Cynthia was settling in at Calvin in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And we returned to Nigeria for a joyful reunion with Wiebe who had been staying at Mountain View Hostel for the semester.

### A Divided Furlough – Part 2

August 1992 - January 1993

One of the most noteworthy family events during this period were Fran’s two cataract surgeries in October and November, both in Grand Rapids. Here is her story as she tells it:

I had been having trouble with my eyes for several years, especially unclear, cloudy vision. It was getting difficult to see the blackboard clearly from the back of the classroom and, when I was in the front in the classroom, to see the students who were sitting in the back rows. During each furlough I saw the same optometrist who noticed that cataracts were developing. However, they were not yet “ripe” enough for the needed surgery.

Finally in September 1992 the time seemed to be right. Then routine blood tests showed that I had signs of mild hepatitis that needed to be treated before I could have the cataract surgery. On October 8, 1992 Cynthia drove me to the outpatient surgery centre at Blodgett Hospital and I had the right eye done. They must have given me a generous dose of anesthesia, because I felt euphoric during the whole procedure. I could hear the discussion of the attending medical people and wanted to enter the conversation, but was unable to make my tongue speak.

The recovery was quick and they were ready to do the left eye just a few weeks later on November 5. Normally they wait a minimum of six weeks between surgeries, but because the first one had gone so smoothly and because I wanted to join John for our deputation assignment in Western Canada, they agreed to hasten things up. The left eye did not go as easily; there was some pain and it took longer to heal. In the end the results were fantastic and I once again had 20/20 vision with corrective

**lenses. No more cloudiness or super thick glasses to put up with. Now I could have totally clear lightweight lenses.**

**During these weeks of recovering from hepatitis and cataract surgery I lived in a Calvin dorm room which CRWM rented for me. This was a wonderful solution as it allowed me to be right on the campus with both Cynthia and Wiebe. They gratefully made use of my laundry and cleaning services during that time. And once Cynthia even “conned” me into going with her and cousin Tim and some friends to buy beer at midnight at Meijers. As they were all under 21, they needed a “responsible” adult along with them.**

**While Fran was in Grand Rapids during these six weeks, I was doing deputation for CRWM in BC and Alberta. Among other places in BC, I went to Vancouver Island, where I stayed a day or so with sister Martha and her sick husband Albert in Victoria. From there, I phoned a cousin by the name of “Jan Harm,” a widower who lived on Salt Spring Island and who had a brother in Port Alberni called “Jan Luurt.” Jan Harm Harkema was one of several cousins with the same names, including middle name, as me. This was the same Jan whom sister Karen had met on a random Vancouver street years ago. You may remember hearing about both of them before. Both brothers and their wives have passed on and for some reason their children seem not very interested in contact with the BC Boers. The two Jans were sons of Father Wiebe’s oldest sister, Angenieta.**

**At any rate, Jan Harm agreed to a visit on my part. So, the next day I took the ferry to that smaller island off the coast of Vancouver Island and knocked on his door. It took him a long time to respond, but when he did, he opened the door just a bit and snarled, “If you’ve come for money, I don’t have any.” He was going to close the door on me, but I said forcefully to him, “Jan, I am the other Jan Harm. We spoke with each other yesterday. You agreed for me to come and visit you.” He reluctantly opened the door further to let me in and led me to a room where I was to wait for him. I went in and met two elderly ladies there, who looked at me with some suspicion. Who was I? We hesitantly began the introductions. Lo and behold, they were two of Jan’s sisters, thus, also cousins of mine. They knew about our family and were so happy to see me, for Jan refused to speak Dutch to them, while they spoke little or no English. They were in BC for a family visit. So, this turned out to be a very pleasant visit for me in that both parties updated the other about family developments. Eventually, Jan joined us for a short while and growled that his island had become too crowded and that he planned to move somewhere into the BC interior where there were no other people. He never made it, for shortly after, he died. I later met those visiting cousins in Port Alberni at the home of Jan Luurt.**

**Between that Harkema story and meeting Dad again after our Alberta deputation tour, Fran met up with me in Calgary in mid-November. We drove across the mountains. Since much of the drive was through treacherous snow conditions, I had to drive very carefully and slowly. We were both tired by the time we got to Hope BC and decided to spend the night in a motel. There was some miscommunication as Dad and sister Ellie had assumed that we would arrive in Abbotsford that evening. Indeed, we had intended to do so, but the**

snow changed the schedule. They worriedly phoned the police and rescue people and were sure we had driven off the road somewhere. If only we had phoned!

Dad was now living independently in an apartment on the Ebenezer Home campus, doing his own cooking and housekeeping, though I understand he was getting some help with the latter. Having been a married man into his 80s, he was doing remarkably well as a widower, at least when it came to cooking. He had learned to cook a few traditional Dutch menus and was happy to serve us his boiled potatoes, vegetable and meat. We spent some good times with him and the siblings in the area. Eventually, we returned the car to its owners and flew back to Grand Rapids.

Sometime during our Grand Rapids stay, we decided to visit our old friends, Simon and Jean Wolfert. After they left Brazil, they ended up pastoring Grace CRC in Scarborough, Toronto. We spent a few unforgettable days with them when Toronto was totally paralyzed by a huge snow storm. The good thing was that neighbours began to act neighbourly by helping dig each other out, something that seems to happen in modern cities only when there is a common enemy.

Si and Jean had been at this church for eight years and needed a change. So Simon applied for the position of Minister to Seafarers in the Vancouver harbour. I was not so convinced that this would be a fitting ministry for them, but they insisted and did indeed receive the call. They served in that capacity for a full decade, when they retired. So, when we moved to Vancouver in 2001, they were there to welcome us. After so many years of being on the opposite sides of the world, the two old roommates were within reach of each other once again.

Christmas 1992 constituted a nuclear family reunion in Grand Rapids. Kevin arrived from Botswana and joined the rest of us. We offered to pay for Kevin's trip, but the charge *never* appeared on our credit card! We had a great Christmas together as a family. I don't believe we've ever had another one like it since. The main gift we gave to the "kids" was money. We had put a \$100 note inside an envelope for each of them, wrapped them up and put them under the tree. Somewhere along the line, Kevin misplaced his, and we spent some frantic time checking—pun not intended-- all the paper wrappings that had already been thrown into the garbage and, sure enough, it showed up!

In January 1993, we returned to Nigeria to begin the second phase of this term of service. The trip was fortunately uneventful, which is the way you want it when it comes to flying and Nigerian Customs and Immigration. James Kpanto had come to pick us up. That night in Kano we spent with the Van Gerpens, Dutch-American missionaries with the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. We had become close friends with them; our homes became each other's homes when we traveled. That Saturday morning James drove us to Jos. Was it ever nice to be home again after all the wandering we had done in North America!

## Back in Nigeria

### *The Family*

Early February 1992, Wiebe wrote the family letter. He began with his parents: “Dad is continuing to work hard in his task of making Nigeria better from the missionary point of view. Mom is teaching as usual and is once again thought of as Hillcrest elementary’s greatest teacher.” It was a very well-written letter. The rest of it was about him. You can read about it under the Wiebe section.

We were nearing Fran’s 50<sup>th</sup>, a big one we wanted to mark properly with an open house event. Almost a month earlier, Fran wrote,

Gerald Hogeterp from Ottawa is here for a year teaching at RTCN, the Reformed seminary in Mkar. He will turn 50 as well that day, so we have invited him to join our celebration. Isn’t that a coincidence? Their daughter is staying at Mt. View hostel. She and Wiebe talked about birthdays and found out their parents were both born on the same day in the same province. He is, however, a few hours younger than me!

We butchered a ton of rabbits from our own holdings and invited the entire St. Piran’s community as well as missionary colleagues from within and outside of our Mission and, of course, many friends. An open house in our own spacious front yard. We had invited Dr. John Orkar, the CRC’s Nigeria Director for CRWRC, to serve as MC.

Then it happened: Mother Ellie passed away that very week. You can read the story under the section on “Grandparents” below. Now the question was whether we should proceed with the party or postpone it in her honour. After considerable wavering, we decided to proceed in the conviction that she would have wanted it that way. Needless to say, it was an ambiguous experience for us, but under the circumstances, it was as great a party as could be managed. A check on the pictures taken confirms that fully. All the communities and individuals invited showed up in full strength, probably drawn by our generous rabbit meat reputation. Two Hillcrest students, Calvin Horlings and Nathan Nyabam, entertained us all with a trumpet duet. Jude, Jesse and Jason sang some birthday songs. Lydia was the main hostess and server for the occasion. Orkar did his usual great job as MC.

It was a tumultuous time for us—my Mother’s death; Fran’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Then, only some three month’s later, we had Wiebe’s graduation and our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

We had decided to give Wiebe’s graduation greater emphasis and celebrate our anniversary the following week instead with just a family dinner in a local restaurant. We had a big and expensive celebration with Fran’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and therefore decided to keep this event low key. But we were grateful to God for our marriage. He had been good to us.

July was another Anglican time for us. Early in the month we attended a five-hour service in the local cathedral. Two good friends were getting ordained and had invited us. This being Nigeria, one can walk out without giving the impression of being angry with the preacher (as in the CRC in the past). So after four hours we left and had a lunch in a restaurant. We returned just in time to participate in the socializing after the service.

People knew about how we took in Lydia and “adopted” her as our own. Every once in a while someone else would try to give us their child, but we always refused to take on such responsibility. We had our own children now and were very busy. We did not really want to be responsible for a little one at this stage of our lives. However, one day in July 1992, Exodus Adi from Wukari brought us his daughter. He was the lead CRCN evangelist for Muslims. He wanted to enroll his four-year old daughter in the Air Force School not far from our house and entrust her to us.

I strongly advised him that the girl was too young to be sent away like that. Who would give her the loving care a little girl like that needs? I also told him that we would not be able to take her in view of our present lifestyle. In addition to our upcoming furlough, we did not wish to be tied down with small children. We added, “Whether we will take in some young people in the future remains to be seen, but not a little child that would severely restrict our freedom of movement.”

That explanation would not easily sink in with Nigerians, who were accustomed to freely placing their children in other homes, either relatives or wealthy. We were among the latter. What would the little girl lack? It was just a different way of thinking, of culture. That was also the reason it was so easy for Lydia’s parents to hand her over to us, but that was at a different stage of our lives.

### *The Grandparents*

#### *The Boers*

It may occur to you that I have violated the nuclear family restriction by writing extensively about both Grandma Prins and even more about Oma Boer in Chapter 36. True, they were not part of our nuclear family. However, we want our downline to know about how these immediate ancestors lived or, at least, died. These were the people who transferred our roots to Canada and the US. These *are* our roots in North America. They took significant steps at great personal expense and inconvenience that determined the future of our families and clans.

In January of 1992, after returning from our home service, I wrote the following about our parents:

It was a difficult time in that Fran’s mother is having a hard time health wise. She has constant pain and can only sit in the same chair she has sat in for several years, except when she goes to bed. My mother was in the hospital during most of our time

in BC. Only yesterday were we told by telephone that now both of my parents are in the hospital. That comes as a surprise for my dad seemed very healthy for his 84 years. Such circumstances become even more difficult when you're far away and cannot share in family responsibilities to care for aging parents. We covet your prayers in this regard.

Mid-February I chatted with my folks about their situation. Mom was now in a place called Tabor Home, a Mennonite senior establishment. Dad felt it was time for him to leave his condo at Landeau Place and move into Ebenezer Home, a mainly CRC establishment in Abbotsford that he helped found years earlier while still in Port Alberni. Then I wrote a paragraph that seemed to contain a gentle chiding:

I often feel bad that we cannot do more to help you, since we are so far away. Even if we wanted to move closer, that would be very difficult for us to accomplish, given our circumstances and experiences. So, we are very grateful for faithful sisters and brothers who live closer to you and who are prepared to pitch in so readily. I hope that you appreciate their help and tell them that. There are many families where *all* the children live far away from their parents. There are also many families where the children are not much concerned about their parents. So, give thanks to God for His mercy and kindness and show some signs of appreciation to those who help.

In my next letter I made a pastoral promise to my parents:

From now on I want to give you what I will call the verse of the week. I do not know how much you read the Bible, especially Mom. It probably is not easy for you to read. So, this week my verse selection is Psalm 23. Read it over a few times this week, will you? Mom, if you cannot read it easily, get your visitors to do so for you. It is a Psalm meant to put joy in our hearts under all circumstances, a joy that is real, for it is from the Lord Himself. Even in the shadow of death, He provides comfort. His goodness and mercy will follow us every day of our lives, also in Tabor Home and at Landeau Place.

A few days later, brother Tinus phoned to tell us that Mom now needed family care around the clock. We were so grateful for nearby siblings who were willing and able to help out with our parents. We thanked God for them daily.

In the light of the above situation, my next verse for the week was Psalm 139.

That's a wonderful Psalm about God who knows us inside and out, about God who is with us wherever we go, whether standing up or lying down, whether in Heaven or in the depths of the earth, whether in the dark or light, in fact, even when a person is still in his mother's womb, God knows and sees her. And then the final prayer: lead me in the way everlasting. That is the God who is just biding His time to embrace you, Mom, with all of His love. And, Dad, let Him give you from His strength as well. Please have your visitors read this Psalm over a few times for you as the week passes.



Shortly after I signed that letter, brother Tinus called to inform us that Mom had passed away. The next day I wrote a letter of consolation to Dad that included the following:

That was hard to do: just write “Dear Dad” and not have “Mom” in there right next to you. My first reaction was a sense of calm and relief. I guess we all felt it was better for her to go. Better, first of all, for her. She was suffering too much. But better also for you, for things had become too much for you, even though you put on a brave front during our visit.

In that same letter, I quoted in full two stanzas of an ancient and deeply meaningful Dutch hymn popular in our denomination, “*Nooit kan ‘t geloof te veel verwachten....*” (“Faith can never expect too much....”) At this time of writing in 2013, I surprise myself that, as I read that entire hymn, my emotions overpower me and the tears well up. Well, yes, it is a powerful hymn that we sung during my childhood with me, in spite of the immaturity of my voice, singing it in tenor mode. I guess it’s part of aging that you reach back to the powerful moments of your childhood and that often will turn into an emotional experience. It is a rich experience I would not miss. It enriches the aging process to somehow re-experience the rich moments of your youth; it gives them renewed depth and revives the meaning of your youth.

We sent that letter by United Parcel Service (UPS), who promised us it would arrive in two days. Alas, it came a day later, after the funeral. The funeral, by the way, coincided with Fran’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, about which you have already read. I wrote, “The day of Mom’s funeral I was feeling pretty bad, especially because I could not be there. Esther Koops asked me to think about some of the good things I remembered about Mom. I have not forgotten that question. Her visit on that day was the most meaningful of all.”

Tinus and I had a successful extended telephone discussion that gave shape to my next letter to Dad on March 1992, sections of which read:

Now all is quiet at your house. I understand that Ina left for Kelowna this morning. I hope that you will give yourself the time and chance to work out your grief. After 62 years of marriage, doing without Mom is not going to be easy. However, when we were with you in December, you seemed prepared in a way for this to happen. But then, you never really can prepare for it. Death always stuns, especially when it involves someone very close. We pray for you every day that God may sustain you, especially during this initial period.

Tinus also tells us that you are considering visiting your brother Berend. That would be wonderful indeed and I really hope that can work out for you. However, we must be realistic and remember your age. I do not know whether it is wise for you to travel such a long distance alone. What about inviting your brother, who is younger than you, to visit you instead? Of course, visiting him would allow you to take a break from it all. We will pray that God will lead you to the right decision in this respect.

We have also been told already some time ago that you have applied for residence in Ebenezer. That would be a very good idea, it seems to me. Actually, I would prefer for one of the kids to take you in and you live with them, but people in Canada do not seem to arrange things that way anymore. It is easy for me to say it, since we are so far away, but if we were living closer, I would invite you to stay with us. Of course, even now you are very welcome to visit us. But I do remember that you were nervous about being in Nigeria. Still, consider yourself invited.

One suggestion: why not send us a cassette once in a while, one on which you talk. If letter writing is difficult, talking has never been a problem for you! We would like that. It would be a great way to keep in touch.

A month later, we received a condolence letter from our long-time friend Haruna Dandaura, an extremely fine and portly gentleman who had met my parents during their Jos visit. He was a former appeals court judge and currently the federal ombudsman. I forwarded it to Dad.

As to Dad visiting his Australian brother, Fran encouraged him, but also advised him to find someone to accompany him. Secretly we hoped he would pick our Wiebe, his true namesake. Then rumour had it he would visit both my brother Hendrik, who was ministering in Hawaii at the time, and his brother Berend in Australia, but he never made the trip.

After some months, Dad moved into Ebenezer Home, but he was not very happy there, basically because he did not find many people to socialize with. Socializing was his only hobby and he was good at it. Lack at that front would definitely bring him serious grief. I wrote to the Heikens,

I guess he does have the chance to visit Ellie & Fred at the apartment. That should give you/him a break. I am encouraging him to attend some church group. In a letter to him, I am also encouraging him to share his joy in the Spirit with others in Ebenezer who need more of that. I am glad he likes our invitation to join us in Grand Rapids for Christmas. I really hope he will come. That would be a real break for him, I should think.

A few days later, I picked up that “verse of the week” idea for him again and promised to be more faithful. I asked him to read Philippians 3:1 and 4:4 and then commented on them. These verses talk about rejoicing in the Lord. The next one was about the presence of Jesus in his life, based on Matthew 28:20—“I am with you always.” All of this was meant to give him a spiritual lift in the depressing atmosphere of Ebenezer Home. I had done some research on a couple of Christian senior homes and had come to the conclusion that, though Ebenezer may have been a pioneer when it opened, it did not keep up with developments and stagnated. That was what Dad was suffering from. My meditations were meant to help him break out of his despondency and to reach out to others at Ebenezer

with the joy in Christ he professed so readily to us, his children. Practice what you preach, Dad, and you will get over your despondency.

On the first anniversary of Mom's death, I wrote the following to Dad:

I am sure the first anniversary of Mom's passing did not go unnoticed by you. You probably did a mental review of all that happened at the time. You probably underwent some grief again. However, do remember that her last couple of years were much worse than her present situation in the arms of our Heavenly Father. I hope the gravestone is now in place?

That gravestone apparently constituted a problem for him. Rational Westerners that we are, it is cheaper to have a gravestone cut for the two of you together than separately. There still was no gravestone at our next visit. We kind of forced it upon him to proceed and even went along with him to the company, but he was dragging his feet and was very quiet. Understandably so. He was still grieving and could not quite face that final job. However, I got the strong feeling that he also hesitated to see his own name on the stone. He kept assuring us all of his joy for salvation, but he was still human and we are all created with a lust for life.

### *The Prinses*

During most of 1992, Fran's mother was having a hard time health wise. She had constant pain and spent most of her day time sitting in the recliner in front of the window in the living room. She didn't have much of an appetite for any food and, because of advanced diabetes, was on a very limited diet anyway. While Jane was at work during the day, there was always someone with her – often a daughter-in-law or niece, but sometimes a community nurse. Jane had the tremendous responsibility of caring for mother every night and weekend.



Kevin



Cynthia



Wiebe

The children visiting Grandma \*

Early September 1993, we received the disturbing news that Grandma Jennie had fallen from her chair and had to be put in a nursing home. The place was close to Calvin so that

Cynthia and Wiebe promised to visit her often. Grandma was not happy with the move and took it ill of the entire family, but it had to be, for Jane could no longer care for her. She did not have the time to be reconciled to her new environment, for within a month she passed away on October 4, 1993. Fran wrote to Jane that very day:

John had just finished the family letters when Cynthia and Wiebe phoned here with the news of Mom's death. Right after that they met you and other relatives in the home and we got to talk to many of you there. It's at such occasions where we really feel the physical distance from our loved ones. A time of grieving such as this should be shared with our families, but that now must be done "alone" here. We are grateful that Cynthia and Wiebe will be able to represent us at the funeral.

About six weeks ago we still talked to Mom on the phone but then her voice was very weak and especially John could hardly understand her. You called yet last Sunday and mentioned what you hoped to do for Mom's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. But the Lord had other plans and we must leave all in His hands.

We know that Mom yearned to be released from her pain already for some years and that she was ready to meet her Maker. In our regular prayers we always asked for Mom to experience His peace and joy and we know that has been answered in His own way.

Because I'm not there with you all at this time, I'm sure the finality of Mom's death will not really hit me until I see her empty chair in front of that living room window. It's from that position that she waved good-bye to us many times, also at the end of each furlough as we headed back to Nigeria.

In that same letter, she wrote a special condolence to sister Jane, who had spent so much time and energy caring for Mother. And she thanked her:

Jane, we certainly thank you for the years of care you gave to both Dad and Mom. May the Lord Himself reward you. We want you to know that our prayers are with you and we ask that you will receive the strength to cope with this new stage in your life, also as you have just started such a new and challenging teaching job.

We hope that even with both our parents gone now, you will continue to be a faithful letter writer. That means a lot to us the way you took over after Mom was no longer able to write.

I also wrote a letter to Jane:

Even though Mother wanted to go, it still came as a shock to us when Cynthia and Wiebe phoned us last night. Fran took the news fairly well, though with a few tears, of course. I do not know how she will be in the morning or the rest of the week. From my own experience with my mother last year, the time up through the funeral can be hard, especially because at such a time the separation from the rest of the

family is felt very acutely. Being separated from the family at such times constitutes an impoverishment. It is impoverishing not to experience these critical moments with brothers and sisters, to experience them more or less alone far away. It is enriching to experience such family events together with the others, even if they are of a sad nature.

And now you will be facing the question of your own future. We remember what you said some time ago about your retirement. Life will be very different for you without the constant responsibility of caring for Mother. We will remember you in our prayers that you may adjust well to your new situation.

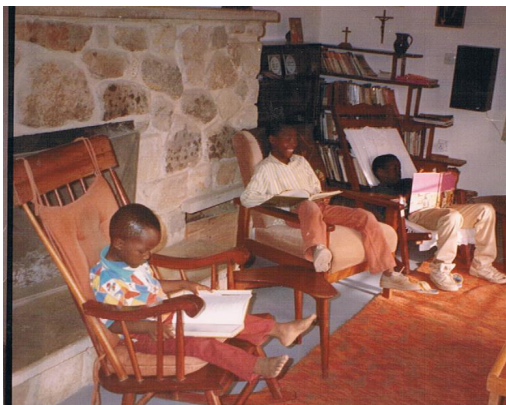
There was a strange similarity between the evening of Mother Ellie's funeral in 1992 and Mother Jennie's in 1993. In 1992, Ibrahim Lafe, the ICS evangelist, would not allow us to spend the evening grieving together, for he thought he had reasons to believe some people were going to come to kill him. This time around, an American member of Campus Crusade for Christ who was temporarily living next to us, insisted I come to his house because he was afraid of getting killed by Muslims. He recently left Zaria where his life was in danger, and now he thinks people are after him here in Jos. He had no sensitivity to our grieving situation. I asked him whether he could not understand and whether his mother had ever died! He said, "No." Anyhow, it was a very strange similarity indeed. In both cases I was upset that people could not leave us alone at such an important event in our lives.

Various missionaries dropped by to express their condolences to us, including the Vreekes, the Koops and the Lodewyks.

A few weeks later, Fran wrote to my dad that her mother's passing had not yet hit her.

It will probably seem more real when I see the house and empty chair. That's how it was nine years ago when my father died. Also it will seem more real and final when I see the pictures which Cynthia said she is sending. I have the pictures on our coffee table of my mom at her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday last year. Jane took pictures of each of my brothers and sisters with mother as they came to visit that day.

### *Lydia and Chris*



There is very little reference to Lydia in our letters during this term. We really did not have a lot of contact with her and her family. Of course, we would attend each other's celebrations. And the boys would occasionally spend a day at our house, usually all reading their books.

Jason, Jesse & Jude at our Mountain View House\*

We were all busy, but that was not the main problem. We did not have a fall out with each other, but I do think that Chris is the one to explain the distance that developed between us. I believe it had to do with our different types of spirituality, Pietism vs Reformed. There was a “spiritual” suspicion from the side of Chris, possibly even a sense of “spiritual” superiority. Fran and I deeply regretted that distance.

Lydia sent a very nice letter in October, 1993 to “Dear Aunty Jane” to console her on the death of Grandma. She wrote, “I am very sorry and pray that the Lord will comfort you and give you peace. We thank God for the hope we have in Jesus – that one day we shall meet again with our loved ones to part no more.” In that same letter she wrote about the city wide crusade that Chris was planning for Jos. She added “It is the very first that we are undertaking. Please pray that it will be a success.” She also gave an update on the family, mentioning where the three boys were schooling. About herself, she wrote,

I am taking a course in Special Education at Unijos. There was a problem between the government and the lecturers and so school had to close. We have missed one whole academic year. Next week we resume school and I know that will be a lot of work. We will be trying to cover a year’s work in as little time as possible.

### *Kevin*

Kevin had graduated from Calvin and was now an adult. From now on the sections devoted to him will no longer be lengthy either. He was assigned by Peace Corps to serve in Botswana. According to his letters to us, he was doing well and enjoying his teaching job. Wonder of wonders, we were able to phone him easily on a regular basis, so that we did keep in touch. However, all his Botswana colleagues were heavy drinkers; they spent their weekends getting drunk. That was not encouraging for him. Another discouraging factor for him, according to Fran’s letter, was that “so far he has not found much of a church home or any Christian friends, either from Peace Corps or from teaching colleagues. He asked us to pray about that matter.”

We kept in regular contact with him both by letter and phone. Letters took a while to get through to and from Botswana, but come they did. We phoned him every other Monday, an arrangement that had worked surprisingly well compared to the irregularity of calls to and from North America. Fran wrote,

That certainly is a bonus which we hadn’t expected. We thought we’d not hear his voice for two years, and now we get to hear it every other week! And he definitely has taken us up on our offer to buy him a ticket to Grand Rapids for Christmas 1992. The Lord blesses in unexpected ways.

A short while later, we made mention of a change in attitude we detected in Kevin. He continued to enjoy his work in Botswana, but the incessant drinking and constant carousing by his colleagues was getting to him spiritually; it was beginning to drag him

down. We began to feel the need to pray for him with greater intensity. Over time, things only got worse spiritually along this front for him. And with this comment I throw a veil of privacy over this development.

He paid us a visit in Jos during Christmas 1993, the same time that Cynthia was with us. He enjoyed himself tremendously. Cynthia left right after Christmas, but in January we went to Abuja together with Kevin. He had never yet seen Abuja, the new capital. In Abuja we had an august guide to show us around: Dandaura, a huge, fat, famous and jolly Nigerian about whom I've often written. At the time he was head of the Federal Bureau of Conduct, keeping a moral eye on government workers. The three of us stayed with him at his house. It proved to be a very interesting visit.

During his visit, Kevin also worked on some business prospects. I wrote,

He is busy developing some business contacts here. He has bought/ordered quite a few Nigerian clothes which he plans to sell for a good price in Botswana. It is possible that we will go into business together by us sending him Nigerian clothes. They are cheap here compared to Botswana and very popular there. The proceeds would first of all go towards our tickets to visit him in Botswana, though I am not sure just when we can do so, given our upcoming trip to North America next summer.

Expectation did not turn into reality. The Nigerian Government strengthened the naira, which meant Nigerian goods would be more expensive abroad. When it comes to Nigeria, you just can't win! However, the clothes he had already bought with the weaker naira sold like hotcakes in Botswana. He was also considering importing computers from the US and selling them.

In mid January 1994 Kevin was scheduled to fly out via Lagos. An Indian businessman, Mr. Benjamin, husband of Fran's colleague at Hillcrest, took him under his wings, since he was also traveling to Lagos. He said he noticed that Kevin was very uneasy about Lagos and the hotel. And no wonder, for Lagos is a dangerous jungle, especially for people who do not know their way around. The Bulgarian Airline plane with which he was to travel out on Sunday morning did not arrive until the evening. That meant Kevin had to spend two uncertain days in Lagos. Mr. Benjamin invited him to stay with him at a friend's house and then brought him to the airport. "We are so grateful for kind people. Kevin is an experienced traveler, but Lagos almost was too much for him."

A few days later, Mr. Benjamin came with his older son, Fran's student, who wanted to see our rabbits. So as a way of saying thanks for his helping Kevin, I gave him one to chop and told him that if he made a cage, I would give him a couple to start with. He seemed most pleased at the prospect. A good way to continue friendship with that family.

Though he was now involved in computers and other business in Botswana, Kevin really wanted to go to grad school, but he did not seem as motivated as such a direction requires.

He said he did not want me to be the only one with a doctorate! I would more than welcome the “competition!”

He was, however, not done with his business adventures. He wanted us to get some prices again on sending Nigerian shirts to Botswana. “Yesterday I ordered twenty five shirts and five dresses which I can pick up in three weeks. We’ll make up a ten kilogram courier package to send to Gaborone. He wants to see what the profit margin will be this way. He loves business ‘gambles’ it seems!”

### *Cynthia*

At the end of her first semester in 1991, it seemed that Cynthia had settled in quite well at Calvin. We felt fairly comfortable leaving her in the hands of responsible family and friends when we returned to Jos to meet Wiebe once again. She was, however, continuing to experience a degree of homesickness for Jos. That first semester had included a few significant firsts for her. During the summer she had tried her hands at waterskiing in California; in December, she was introduced to snow skiing in Washington State, the state which later was to become her home state.

She had a good Christmas with friends in Washington. She flew down there, but took the Greyhound back. I remembered my first trip to Michigan by Greyhound with considerable pleasure, but she “disliked Greyhound very much.”

She wrote and phoned us regularly. According to Fran,

She is generally quite positive about things and is enjoying her classes quite a lot this semester. She has just begun a part time job at Raybrook, a nursing home, which is about a ten minute walk from the Calvin campus. That is a true answer to prayer, because now she also has a job for this coming summer and will be able to save toward all her college expenses.

A little later, things were not quite as good with her.

She’s often having trouble with headaches lately and we advised her to have it checked out. All they can figure out is that it’s stress. It seems that everybody is under stress these days. She said they gave her medicine which is making her very sleepy. That’s kind of counter productive because then she’ll feel more stress about not getting her school work done. She’s also worried about her passport and visa not coming through in time for her visit to Jos. We are all hoping everything works out so that she can come home next month.

At the end of her freshman year, Cynthia was planning to visit us for a few weeks. Her visa came late, but it did finally come. We had asked Yakubu Gowon, a former Head of State who often attends our church, to get involved. He called the Nigerian Embassy in Washington on her behalf and the next day a visa was issued. It might



just be coincidence but it's a great story now! Cynthia should be in Jos next Thursday so she'll still be in time for Baccalaureate where all the former grads are always asked to stand up. She said she had looked forward to doing that ever since she was in first grade at Hillcrest!

It's good to have her around. She is her own bubbly self and embraces everyone she sees of her old acquaintances. Even our guards, who are Muslims and who practice strict gender separation in public, get a hug from her. She will be here for only three weeks. After that she will go back to Grand Rapids to work at Raybrook, a job that pays relatively well. Jerry and Mary Cremer, who now live very close to both Calvin and the nursing home have offered that Cynthia can stay with them. So, that makes it easy. She will buy a bike as her means of transportation.

Cynthia came with some special delights for Fran, among them being *roggebrood*, dark Dutch pumpernickel. I wrote,

So, this morning Fran and I will enjoy a boiled egg with *roggebrood*. For you perhaps nothing special, but for Fran a real delicacy, while I like it as well. She also brought some Dutch cheese to Fran's delight. I enjoy that as well, but since I enjoy the local Dutch cheese produced right here in Jos, imported cheese is not the treat for me as it is for Fran. Yes, Dutch cheese is made right here in Jos by *Friese Flag*. Every once in a while you see their cars go by with the Frisian flag painted all around it. It seems a little funny in this context. However, the Dutchmen working there are not Frisians, and, as Fran discovered, they do not speak it either!

Cynthia was, of course, not the only graduate from last year to return. Many students who graduated last year returned to witness the graduation of their friends and also for a psychological catharsis. These students often have a hard time adjusting wherever they have gone to. Coming back to Hillcrest a year after graduation often helps them come to terms with the fact that the world they knew during their Hillcrest years no longer exists. People have moved on, especially their fellow students and friends. It is a very important visit for them to make. We know that it will help Cynthia a great deal.

With Cynthia and many of her friends visiting Jos and with Wiebe and his class in the process of leaving, in addition to the happiness of graduation, there is also the turbulent trauma of kids having to take leave from each other, often never to meet again, since they will scatter all over the world. So, there is much emotion and turmoil.

Cynthia, as usual, drew a lot of people. If she did not have someone at our place, she would be gone to see them! No sitting still for active teenagers! We drove her to Kano this past week and stayed overnight with some Lebanese acquaintances. She phoned us yesterday to tell us she had arrived back in Grand Rapids safely. However, it was not an easy trip for her. I went through customs with her here in Kano and a good thing I did. She had two large boxes with her, with a lot of things that Wiebe wants to have back there. We had to

empty these two boxes completely and they searched everything. I could not accompany her through security, and she was pressured very hard to give a bribe. She did not have the money to give in, but the people who pressured her were angry. In New York they also gave her troubles. They do this to anyone coming from Nigeria, for Nigeria has become a real focus for the drug trade.

Upon her return to Grand Rapids, she worked at Raybrook Manor, but she also traveled. I wrote, "She certainly is doing her share of traveling around these days. Part of being an MK is knowing people everywhere and always having a place to go. She took a few days off from her summer job in order to travel to North Carolina (23 hours by Greyhound) to see a friend!" You may remember her dislike of Greyhound travel, but now she did it more regularly. As I wrote at the time, responsibility for your own expenses can do wonders to people and make them grow up really fast.

Sometimes she complained that my letters were dull and formal. In a letter to Dad, I asked him whether he found them so as well and then explained what I thought of Cynthia's complaint, "I think her problem is basically that she does not care to hear too much about my work—though I have reason to believe she admires it—but would rather talk about *koetjes and kalfjes*. That's how her own letters are. I guess we're all different and have to accept each other in that way."

Herewith a lengthy paragraph from August 1992 about Cynthia's economic life style and our response to it:

Cynthia is living life in high gear, but that's her and that's youth. She bought herself a car a month or so ago and I cannot really blame her, for Grand Rapids is a difficult place to get around in without a car. However, now she is complaining about being broke! She is probably figuring that if she cries hard enough, we will budge and support her. However, we will not, for the arrangements are that we support our kids fully during their first year at college, since they did not have a chance to save money as kids in North America do with part time work. But Cynthia has always spurned our financial and work advice. We have warned her time and again that she will get into financial difficulties if she keeps going her way or if she does not try harder to get work and scholarships. Our warnings are now catching up with her. It is hard to see her in such difficulties, but I guess for her to grow up in this respect, she will just have to manage. Take out a loan or work more or whatever. Do not get the impression that we are not getting along. We are getting along famously, but at this front we have had some disagreements.

Cynthia continued having somewhat of a rough time at Calvin. To be sure, there were many positive things in her life as well, but by early 1993

she continues to be somewhat depressed and cries easily. She is regularly going to a college counselor. Though he helped her at first, she now feels she needs more help. When I asked her whether she goes to church regularly, whether she reads the

Bible, prays personally as well as in groups, the answer is sort of “Well, yes, somewhat.”

I described her situation to my Dad. “Dad,” I wrote, “you have time on your hands. Use part of that time praying for your children and grandchildren. Pray for Cynthia especially.” Cynthia was not the only child of ours who needed such prayer.

After another phone conversation with Cynthia, we wrote,

She seems to be enjoying her classes a bit more this semester than previously. We certainly hope that will continue. Her part time job still agrees with her and she works an average of twenty hours a week. Unfortunately her car expenses seem to prevent her from saving any of her earnings. Sounds familiar, eh?

During her 1993 spring break, Cynthia went to visit another former Nigeria MK in Missouri. Since we had quite a few frequent flyer miles saved up, we transferred them to her so that she could fly free. She seemed to be quite happy with her job at Raybrook, but even her fairly good wages still could not keep up with car expenses.

Cynthia stayed in Grand Rapids for most of the 1993 summer, among other things to take a summer course and to work. Her summer class in human anatomy, “a course she hated thoroughly,” was hard and a lot of work. We were just hoping she would get at least a “C” in order to get the credit she needed. It seemed to us she was enjoying her work and social life more than her academic life. She might be growing up, but the old Cynthia was still alive and well. Towards the end of the summer break she announced new travel plans. She would go to Washington State using more of our saved-up air miles as a “free plane ticket” to get to Seattle, and then the Greyhound bus to the border, where she would get picked up by her cousins Fred and Nancy Bosma.

She really enjoyed visiting so many of the BC Boers. We wrote,

We are very happy that she wanted to make this trip. We are also very happy at the way everyone received her. It is important for our kids to keep interested in the Boer side of the family. So, thank you all for making her feel so welcome. I’m sure that especially Dick and Dianne were happy to see her make the effort during her short break to visit them. Maybe our children are the only ones ever to come to Port Alberni for the sole purpose of visiting them?

In a July 1993 phone call, Cynthia informed us of the death of Professor Gordon Spykman. He was a Kuyperian Bible teacher at the college, one of the few friends of Runner on the faculty. He had taught both Fran and Kevin. He was the author of a Reformational book on Systematic Theology that never became very popular but that I have always found refreshing for its unique insights. He was a senior friend of mine, whom we usually visited during our times in Grand Rapids, often together with Paul Schrottenboer, another Reformational scholar, the long-time founding General Secretary of the REC, whose mantle I had hoped to don upon his retirement. Schrottenboer has also passed away since.

Cynthia continued to have her ups and downs, but late July I reported that she “is more like the exuberant young lady we have always known but had gone into hiding recently. She received some counseling and got a new boyfriend. Between these two, things changed for her and she was more like her old self. We were grateful for that turn of events.

Financially, things were becoming a bit difficult for both of the kids at Calvin. Both Cynthia and Wiebe had long been worried about money. So we decided to give them a hand, especially because Kevin had recently emphasized that present conditions at Calvin are much harder than they were in his day.

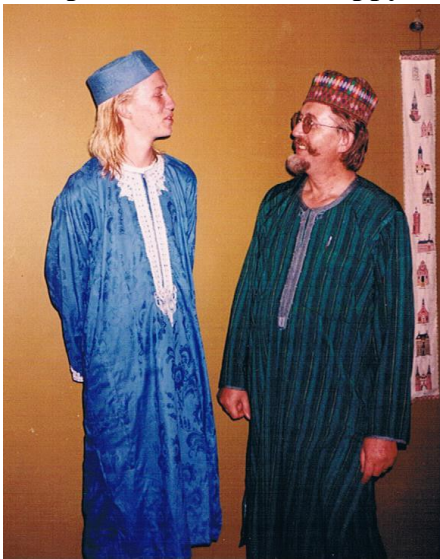
We decided to help them with \$3000. However, then Cynthia’s car started giving too much trouble while the scholarship/loan situation all of a sudden improved. So, now we would instead help them by buying a *family* car for about \$3000. It will belong to Fran and me, though Cynthia will sign for it. But whoever of the family happens to be in Grand Rapids will have equal access to it—except that we will monopolize it when we come there for about two weeks next summer, DV. The car will likely be financed by a student loan for which we will then take responsibility when the time for repayment comes.

At the end of the summer, Cynthia surprised us by saying she was eager for school to start up again! And all of us were eager for her upcoming visit to Jos for Christmas 1993. It was much too short but with school schedules, that was all the time she had.

By January 1994 things were looking better once again for Cynthia. “She works hard at the nursing home, and, true to her nature, not only enjoys working with the elderly but is appreciated by them. Another of her challenges is to keep Andy, her boyfriend, happy. Privileged information has it that she is successful at this front as well.” During our 1994 summer private trip to North America, we met Andy and his family for the first time.

### *Wiebe*

Wiebe, you may remember from the previous chapter, had chosen to do first semester of his Grade 12 at Hillcrest, rather than accompany us to the U.S. He, therefore, moved into the CRC hostel for Hillcrest children for the four months that we were away. At the end of that period, he seemed happy to have us return. We wrote:



Though it is a good hostel, he has gained in appreciation of his parental home. I believe he is enjoying the fact that we can focus most of our attention on him, though he also misses his siblings. His hostel experience has turned him into a much more appreciative family member. He apparently learned some life lessons there. He is a delight to have around.

### Wiebe & John\*

So, our family was now scattered, with our three children in three different countries: Botswana, U.S. and Nigeria. The chances for a complete family reunion seemed slim for the next few years.

He had another biology adventure in January. They took an eight-hour trip to the Cameroon border to spend a few days primarily “gorilla sighting.” He seemed happy with his schedule and courses, but, wrote Fran, “It seems that the last semester of a senior year, kids begin thinking more about the future than the past or present! Wiebe dreads the thought of leaving Nigeria and yet is ready to get on with the next stage of his life. That’s just how things went with Kevin and Cynthia as well.”

I referred earlier to a letter written by Wiebe. Herewith I reproduce the lengthy section he wrote about himself:



I don’t know what my parents have written about me in the past weeks, but here’s an account straight from the horse’s mouth. My running is continuing to go quite well. I’m training hard, but I still don’t like to have to compete in races. Next week we have the first track meet of the year, and if I can keep my confidence up, I should be able to improve on the record I set last year.

Wiebe, the Runner\*

Once again, I am in the school play, “*The Princess and the Pea.*” Compared to our senior play, it’s quite a waste of time, but I’m doing it anyway just for the experience. I have the part of the wizard, and so it’ll be quite fun with all my outrageous costumes.

Over the past years, there has continually been talk of starting a school newspaper, and finally yesterday one came out. Although it’s a school-sponsored newspaper, it is basically run by my friends and me. One of my good friends is the editor, one is the assistant editor, another the art director, and I am the chief reporter. So far, it’s been quite interesting.

I’m still working hard in my position of Student Council president. It gets really discouraging when anything you want to do is blocked by some staff member or

another. We have collected about a third of the money needed to build the new student lounge. This is our biggest project ever, and we're working really hard to get more donations. We are presently working on plans that will enable us to build the lounge in stages. That way, we can get started soon, even if we don't have all the money yet.

The letter is signed "Peace and love, Wiebe Boer for everyone." And sure enough, he beat his own record. A week later, Fran wrote:

Wiebe participated in a Track Meet yesterday and beat his own 1500m record. Not enough people showed up, so the 5000m event was cancelled; he then decided to just go for a short run! I always enjoy watching him run; he does it with such ease.

He's really into making *suya*, Nigerian fried meats, now. In fact, he plans to set up a stand at Hillcrest for their class fund raiser. He's getting lessons from the *suya* sellers at Hill Station, a fancy hotel.

Another week later, I wrote,

Wiebe keeps busy as President of the Student Council, with the school play and a host of other activities. He is also thinking a lot about college. Calvin? Likely, but not yet decided. We hope so. He would like to have a job in BC for the summer and has already written a number of people about it.

I wrote about the family flu that hit us all early March, including Wiebe. He had gotten considerably better a week later, but

he still has an ugly cough, the result of viral bronchitis. However, he is up and around again and just now left with a friend. Yesterday, as president of the Hillcrest Student Council, he had to introduce Bill Evenhouse who did a charity concert in support of the new student lounge the Student Council is working on.

Wiebe is happy, for he has been accepted at both Calvin and at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. That is a very prestigious university that has all the courses he is interested in, namely a full complement of African studies as well as a full ecological studies programme. However, we are encouraging him to try Calvin for a year or two first. Our family has a scattered future and it would be good for our unity to have some place where all of us have experience and can refer to as a common place in our lives. Calvin has awarded him a Presidential Scholarship, something like \$2,000 a year and renewable for all four years, provided he keeps up his high grades. He has decided to acquiesce by going to Calvin for a couple of years. That way he and Cynthia can support each other better. So, it looks like we will be a complete Calvin family—and that in spite of the fact that till today I feel betrayed by Calvin because of its lack of integration of faith and learning at many fronts.

At the end of March, he “finished organizing and participating in the annual 12-Hour Relay which raised money for handicapped children. It has been very hot these days, so it wasn’t easy to keep up from 6 am til 6 pm, but they managed. Wiebe’s average time was 5:19 per mile.” Why they changed the 12 Hour Relay from the cooler month of December to the hot month of March I don’t remember.

For his Easter break, Wiebe and Sam Ritter, a friend and son of a CRC missionary, “took a taxi to Kano and stayed with a Lebanese friend, Maan Hamzi. They bought some more Nigerian souvenirs and enjoyed the markets and speaking Hausa. They came back in an SIM vehicle on Wednesday.”

Do you remember Wiebe’s musical Acoustics Group? The spelling, as I recall, was always a bit fluid; their music was always challenging to the sound waves. Now, suddenly, I come across a new name, “Oedipus Wrecks.” Please don’t ask me for an explanation. As before, they still practiced in his bedroom, just a six-inch wall away from our bedroom. Imagine coming home from an exhausting four-hour church service with every right to a Sunday afternoon nap, to have that right ignored by Wiebe and his drums and friends on various loud instruments. I wrote, “We had a nap, but it was a restless nap.” Well, yes, of course. Whoever heard of being considerate of exhausted parents?

We were reaching the end of the school year again and went through all the usual hoops: Talent Night, Athletic Awards, Awards Assemblies, Baccalaureate Service, Graduation Teas, Senior Banquet, etc. He and a group of his friends once again approached their Junior-Senior Banquet in an unusual way.

He wore a dress jacket (made of burlap), shorts and sandals. About twelve of them got together and rented a lorry for the evening. They had couches on the back and got driven from place to place in style! Sounds great, doesn’t it? That little kid of ours has become a very creative rebel! As Student Council President he and some other students are going to meet with the Chairman of the Board of Governors to lodge some very specific complaints against the Hillcrest administration.

In a subsequent letter:

Wiebe has been a very active Student Council president this year, fighting against rather arbitrary and unfair administrative practices in the school. Some of his problems and assertions are supposed to be dealt with at the meeting of the Board of Governors this weekend. We are wondering what will be their response. Quite a few of the teachers praise him for challenging the administration, for he is doing what some of them would like to do but do not dare.

I was proud of his taking the bull by the horns. He was following our parental urgings “to go to the Board of Governors” literally and seriously. It’s too bad I do not remember the specific issues at stake.

Wiebe drummed his way through the year-end concert and did so in great style indeed. We were really proud of him.

Wiebe's graduation from Hillcrest on June 5, 1992 had finally arrived. Just like his mother, he had always achieved high scores all through his school years. I wrote to my Dad,

He had to make a speech at the occasion and did a wonderful job. People were impressed with the historical range of his speech and the awareness that he showed of political developments during his Hillcrest years as well as his fine and challenging sense of humour. Fran and I were really proud of him.

Did you notice that the last few paragraphs described us, his parents, as proud of his achievements? Indeed, we were, all the way.

To top it all off, Hillcrest was also celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Things could hardly be more muddled and busy, but it was all in a good spirit of joy and thanksgiving. Celebration upon celebration. The entire community in an extended celebration mode. As Hausa speakers might put it in their Arabized language, "*Alhamdu lillahi*," "Praise be to God." Now, how impressive is that! Too bad I can't impress you all the way by writing it in the *Ajemi* or Arabic script that I once taught in Wukari. As Kevin forgot his Dutch, so, due to neglect, I forgot my Hausa *Ajemi*.

We were about to leave home for the graduation ceremony, when Fran's sister Trena phoned from Cincinnati to wish us a happy 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She had forgotten about the graduation. Cannot blame her too much. It was not her graduation, but, in view of the double wedding we had, it *was* her anniversary! *This was her first phone call to us in Nigeria in all these 26 years!*

Wiebe's plans to leave included a garage sale. That brought many people to our house to buy things from him. Many also came to bid him farewell and he still had small parties with the few friends who had not yet left. And then Wiebe himself left. We brought him to Kano on a combined social-work trip that is described under the Muslim section in Chapter 25.

He went to BC to stay with Fred and Nancy Bosma, his cousins, who would help him look for a job. They found him one at minimum wage. I wrote to Dad:

We learned that some of the family were going to get together for Wiebe's birthday. I am not sure if you were also to take part. We are happy that he has a job. It took him a long time to get there and he earns only basic wage, but as he himself recognizes, it is a good learning experience for him.

Like his sister or maybe even more so, Wiebe engaged in a lot of travel. At the end of his stay in BC, Fran wrote,



We had to buy Wiebe a ticket to get from his official home address which is BC to Grand Rapids. He got a ticket which allows you to fly all you want for 30 days. That ticket actually was cheaper than a direct Vancouver-GR one! So he plans to make maximum use of it after he attends Narramore. In fact he plans to fly to Grand Rapids for Cynthia's birthday and stay just one day! Sounds like big stuff, eh? Wiebe loves to fly and he has many friends to visit, so he'll really enjoy this kind of a ticket.

In spite of his low wages, when he left BC he announced his intention of returning there the next summer. We wrote,

Wiebe renewed his ties with some of the relatives and that always makes us happy. Even though we live far away, we have always stressed the importance of keeping up ties with both sides of our large families. He liked staying with Carl and Elsie because it gave him a chance to get to know them and it was a lot closer to his work. He said he would try to come to BC to work every summer during his college years. We will see!

From BC he went to visit some friend in Oregon State and from there he went on to California to attend the Narramore Institute where they try to ease MK's back into North American life, but it seemed that Wiebe had already found his way.

And with this we came to the end of the first portion of this term. Remember that we were having an extra long term with a four month break in between? Well, the time for that break had come and we were off to Grand Rapids primarily in order to help Wiebe get settled in at Calvin as we had done with the other two, but also to engage in normal home service activities like deputation and family socializing. I have treated this second break along with the first as one furlough with a year's interruption. For details here you have to back up to the section, "A Divided Furlough - Part 2" earlier in this chapter.

Just after our return to Nigeria in January 1993, I wrote the following to my Dad,

I don't believe we told you how your namesake Wiebe is doing at Calvin. Just before we left Grand Rapids he got his report card and it was a straight 4 point average: the perfect score. You can be really proud of him. Academically, he even outshines Kevin. We should have named all of our kids after you!

A few months later, Wiebe told us in a phone call that he was doing well, interested in a lot of things, but he was beginning to lose his interest in running, something that greatly surprised us. He had been a runner for a decade or so. It was probably just a fleeting feeling for him, for he continued with the sport throughout his time at Calvin.

He was settling in well at Calvin and, in spite of his momentary flagging interest in cross-country, spent much of his spring break on the sport. We described his situation as follows:

He has always been a good student and seems to be enjoying the academic challenges. He's also on the Cross Country/Track Team, involved in student politics, has a two hour weekly show on the college radio station, and is the drummer in a band. He just returned from his Spring Break in Alabama where he went with the track team for some training and competition. He phoned us to say he had broken his 5000 meter record again. His time now was 15:34. His best time for that event in Nigeria had been 16:54, so that was a great improvement.

Late May 1993 we picked Wiebe up from Kano for an all too brief visit, his first time back home. But he was so busy that we saw little of him.

It is very nice to have him around. He has grown up so much. Not that we do not like children, but he was not exactly easy as a child! Now he is pleasant to have around and we are grateful for that. We were barely in Jos—no more than two minutes—when he put on his running clothes and off he went running to Hillcrest School to see some old friends.

We knew that leave taking again would be hard on all of us, but in the meantime, “we are ‘spoiling’ him. Next week a new reality will hit him when he has to be at his painting job by 7 am and has to fix his own food, do his own laundry, etc. He’ll do fine once he gets into it, but right now he’s enjoying his vacation very much.”

Wiebe did get work and lodging offers in BC, but too late. He had already found a job at Calvin and had arranged for an apartment together with others.

In his second year at Calvin, he “continues his ‘A’ work along with deep involvement in long-distance running. His team came 3<sup>rd</sup> in a national US college race. He also serves as Assistant Recruitment Officer in the International section of the Calvin Admissions Office.”

Early May 1994, Wiebe injured a foot bone and was thus prevented from running for the rest of this school year. It would not seem to be a biggy, since the academic year had only a few more weeks, but for him it was.

Somewhere along the line Wiebe had started calling himself “Wiebe-Wiebe.” This was after Boutros-Boutros Ghali, the Egyptian UN Secretary General. Wiebe was telling people he would be gunning for that position in the future. In the meantime, he would groom himself as member of the American diplomatic corps. He took the test for the latter and scored high.

Of course, most people would sneer at such ambition and consider it impossible to achieve. Both Wiebe and I would be annoyed at such small thinkers. Someone has to be there. Why not Wiebe-Wiebe? I was delighted with his ambition simply because I had always taught our kids that the sky is the limit. Any other limit you adopt is imposed by yourself. The “it-wont-happen-to-me” attitude is self-defeating. Wiebe found the same attitude at Hillcrest:

their counselor would only refer students to mediocre colleges, never to the Ivy League universities. Wiebe and Kevin, of course, eventually both ended up at one of them, Yale.

### *The Empty Nest*

Cynthia's summer 1992 visit lasted only three weeks, way too short for our liking. She had a way of cheering up whatever place she found herself, including our home. However, we hardly had time to enjoy her visit, since the entire time was a hectic one, what with Wiebe's graduation, anniversaries, terminations and Wiebe's garage sale and also leaving. But it was time for her to return to Grand Rapids for work. A week later, Wiebe would leave as well. Then, wrote Fran, "Our nest will be truly empty. It will be a whole new stage in our lives to which I'm sure we'll adjust eventually, but right now it doesn't look good to me!"

But we were scheduled to meet up with at least the two youngest quite soon, when the second part of our divided home service would kick in. That softened the blow of the empty nest syndrome we were expecting. In the meantime, Fran would spend time cleaning up her classroom for her replacement and then she would reorganize the Mission library as well as help me with some reorganization at the ICS. We would leave late August, for what could be described as the second part of the divided furlough of this term.

Early July we managed to have telephone contact with all three of the kids. We wrote,

A couple of days ago, Wiebe phoned us. It was good to know he had arrived safely. Cynthia also phoned to let us know how things are going with her. And yesterday, we called Kevin in Botswana. So, we were in touch with the whole crowd. We are surely glad for telephones. Years ago, when we lived in Wukari and Baissa, we had no telephones within hundreds of miles. It did not bother us then, but with the children now gone, that would be more difficult for us today.

We had an empty nest in more than one way. If you have read all the stories of our kids' travels and other things, you will appreciate that our nest egg was also getting empty! Mid July, I wrote, "It's a good thing we have always tried hard to save, because this year is disastrous as far as our wallet is concerned: our own trip to Grand Rapids, Kevin's trip to Grand Rapids, and Wiebe's first year of college."

Because of our four months furlough, it took a while for the empty nest to become real to us. We sort of weaved in and out with the kids during those months. But now, in January 1993, it was serious and real. I wrote, "And now we really do have an empty nest. However, we already can look forward to Wiebe's visit in May and Cynthia and Kevin will most likely come in December. In the meantime, I am ready for the empty nest, a nest without teenage pressure."

Fran continued to be thankful for her renewed vision:

I still am thankful for the miracle of good eyesight every day. I keep observing new things, but John tells me they were always there! Tennis is a whole new game again now that I actually see what I'm swinging at and can even see my opponent on the others side of the net! We've been playing tennis about three times a week lately.

You may remember that during our Amsterdam years there was an issue with citizenship and passports. Since passports expire, it continued to be a recurring issue every few years, especially my Dutch passport. During the first quarter of 1993 I applied for a new one and had it sent to Dad's place. I gave them precise instructions as to what to do with it and explained:

Now I am assured that my Dutch citizenship is still valid and it is now guaranteed for our kids as well. You may not think it important, but it opens up all of Western Europe for us. We can now live and work anywhere in the Common Market. We can retire there if we like or do anything else. I value that freedom, that possibility. Whether we or any of our kids will ever avail ourselves of it remains to be seen. At least, I have ensured them this possibility.

Well, yes, both Kevin and Wiebe made grateful use of it at their early career stages in that both worked and lived temporarily in the EU. Theresa was even treated medically there as if a resident. Some years later, Wiebe and Joanna studied French in Paris. Multiple passports and citizenship spell opportunities that can come to you at any unexpected moment; they are worth their weight in gold.

This section is about the initial period of our empty nest. Usually that refers to the house being emptied of the kids, but our *social* nest also became emptier with the passing away of two people in March 1993. One was Rose Ajaver, the wife of Pastor Joseph Ajaver of Takum, with whom I occasionally consulted about revving up a revival in the CRCN. The other affected us more personally—Kiliyobas, who had worked for us during our early Jos years. Fran wrote,

He was vomiting and had diarrhea, so they brought him to Evangel Hospital, but he died before he was even admitted. It certainly sounds like cholera. Lydia, his widow, worked for us for several years after her husband died. When we went to see her, she seemed almost in a trance. She said in Hausa, "His parents have come." I guess she still somehow regarded us as his "parents" even though we surely had not seen much of him in the last ten years. When we visited again the next day she seemed quite in control of herself and had made arrangements. They were getting ready to go to the morgue to get the body and then go down to his village for the burial this afternoon. We gave Asabe, our present worker, travel money so she could go along, because Asabe is a real leader and will be good support to Lydia.

Yes, okay, an "empty nest," but I bracket the term here with quotation marks with good reason. It may have been empty in terms of kids, but certainly not in terms of other people. The need for a control tower was as acute as ever. Let me summarize one week of traffic

that may have been somewhat extreme, but only somewhat. This is just to remind you of the social life that characterized our style, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the range of people. Fran wrote early August:

Let me introduce you to some of our guests. Tuesday, Aaron and Joanne Gana from Unijos were here for a meal. It was his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday so John wanted to welcome him to that club! Wednesday the Smart family returned from furlough. They are Canadians from Ontario who work at Hillcrest for the United Missionary Church of Africa. They are renting a house on our compound. The six of them joined us for supper on Thursday. Friday supper and Sunday breakfast we enjoyed the company of Jerry and Mary Cremer. Saturday evening we had a CRC welcome for the Cremers with a potluck. Today is Chris Roos' birthday. She's the business manager and we plan to take her out for a little lunch. This evening the Nafziger family and Dr. Easton will join us. Mrs. Nafziger is a Nigerian business woman who owns a large meat processing plant. That's where John always gets his pig head for making head cheese. Mr. Nafziger is an American psychologist with a practice here in Jos. Dr. Easton is a black American psychologist who has come to teach at Unijos for a year. This weekend Dr. Daining and family are coming as volunteers; they'll have a meal with us on Saturday. Next week we expect the Ellens family back from furlough, so they'll have a supper with us then. And so it goes. Besides all this, we try to do our assigned work!

During that same month Fran came down with malaria. Nothing unusual; as frequent as the common cold and not serious as long as you are generally healthy and take the medicine. But this time it turned into something worse, actually an anxiety attack. It really got her down and forced her to rest awhile from teaching. Here is an update I wrote to Father Wiebe:

She is doing fairly well, but gets tired very easily and sleeps several times during the day, while she has long nights—11 hours or more. Psychologically she seemed devastated only a week ago and could not even face the thought she might ever stand in front of the classroom again some day. She wanted to resign right there and then. Now she is taking an active interest in it again and is eager for Wiena Groenewold, her sub, to tell her how things are going. Friday I took her out for lunch to Plateau Club and we had hamburgers and chips. That may not sound like a real treat to you, but here in Jos hamburgers are not served in many restaurants. It's not a big deal, of course, but they did taste good and Fran enjoyed the outing.

A week later, Fran went back to work, but perhaps too soon. I intended to control her a bit to ensure she did not take on too much too early. She wanted also to return to guest house supervision, but that would have to wait a bit. Her collapse was due to a combination of physical and psychological issues due to the stresses within the mission, including our own future. I reassured Dad that she "is basically happy again now, even though for both of us we have resentment in our hearts and resentment can eat away at you, warp your judgements, etc. But do not worry. The Lord is good and is bringing healing."

A week later this is how Fran herself wrote about her condition:

**I guess my pent up anger with the way things have gone in CRWM led to a mild depression. Also menopause and hormone imbalance seem to have triggered something else. Dr. Truxton prescribed some estrogen and some anti-depressants for a few months.**

**I started teaching again late August and things have really gone quite well. 5<sup>th</sup> grade is a new assignment for me, but the kids are still young and unsophisticated acting, which I enjoy.**

**I'm still feeling tired very easily and am often in bed by 9 but am gradually assuming my other tasks as well. Several weeks ago John took over everything – including cooking and writing letters, so he's happy to get back to his "own work" again too.**

**When I returned from Takum, where I conducted a course on Worldviews, I found Fran in good spirits and reasonably strong. Still on medications but sleeping like a log, she was happy to be teaching again and glad that I did not act on her desire for me to write a letter of resignation from Hillcrest.**

**Both of us wrote about Fran's health in pretty well every letter; we just don't bother you with every detail of her going forward and backward. But early November, she described her situation as follows:**

**I'm doing quite well in my new teaching assignment, but I can't seem to take much of anything beyond those duties. We have been playing tennis again several times a week, so I guess things are improving! I'm on ½ the antidepressant medication now from what I started three months ago. Dr. Truxton actually feels that I "bounced back" quite quickly. I will see her again in five weeks and, hopefully, then she'll let me quit the meds. The medicine still makes me drowsy very early in the evening, so I don't do much besides necessary school work after supper.**

**Early October 1993, we received a letter from sister Karen. It had taken her more than a month to complete it. When it arrived, it was the first letter from the entire Boer clan in BC for a long time. If it were not for Cynthia and Wiebe's calls to BC and then to us, we would have been in total darkness by then. This did not mean they had all forgotten about us, for both Albert and Martha as well as the Heikens were sending money to the Mission for our support. At the end of that month a number of Boer clan letters arrived all in one day. This was the second time since the beginning of the year! It now became clear they had been writing faithfully, but the letters were delayed for some mysterious reason. We now advised them to send mail via the Mission's Canada office in Burlington ON. However, that did not work well either, for they would forward mail only once a month and thus also delay it. So, we were back to asking people to send mail via the Grand Rapids office. It seemed that no matter which avenue we tried, unexpected snags would develop.**

Another death. You may remember Mrs. Machunga as the lady who kept beating Wiebe in the *darra* game. Well, she died due to old age after she and her husband retired and moved back to their home town, Gindiri, some 80 kms from Jos. Her husband was the first Nigerian General Secretary of TEKAN as well as the founding Chairman of my ICS Board. They were such a lovely couple and gracious. We had great social life with them. We attended her funeral, but local custom dictated that we visit the surviving spouse occasionally. Though I found that custom too demanding in most cases, I did try to live up to it in the case of Machunga. The man had been so good to me in every way. His children had built him a house that would probably not last long, but surely would outlive him. After some years, as frailty set in, he was moved back to Jos into a new family house his children had purchased. Last time we visited him during a trip back to Nigeria in 2001, he was confined to the bed from which he never rose again. He ranks with me along with Elder Ifraimu, Pastor David and Alahji Muhammadu--the former Pastor Ezekiel-- as one of the four men to whom I am the most indebted for teaching me the “tricks of the trade,” the missionary “trade.”

I bring the Machungas up at this stage for the simple reason that it was at this stage in our correspondence with family that their name once again appeared. We were scheduled to pay Pa Machunga one of these visits on a January 1994 Sunday afternoon, but were prevented by an interesting St. Piran’s visitation programme scheduled for that particular day. It was declared “Visitation Sunday.” The evening service was cancelled. Members from one side of town were to visit members living in another side. This time we were among those *receiving* guests. Anyone could show up at any time in the pm. Hence, it would not do for us to be away. That pm several couples paid us a visit, some of whom had never been to our house before. It was an interesting way of getting to know each other.

I do not describe in this chapter every party we have ever held, especially not over the past few years, for it was getting to be old hat. But here’s our 1993 Christmas party:

We decided together with Rob & Esther Koops to have our own party to which we invited people who either had no place to go to or who could not afford a nice Christmas meal. We had some 25 people over, including Lydia, our former house worker, and her children. The group also included two lonely black Americans. Bitrus Sadiq, the Muslim convert about whom I write frequently, also joined us. He said that now he knows what people mean when they talk about *cin Kristmati* (Eating Christmas). We had rice and stew made of five chickens and rabbits, a big bowl of fruit and various items of baked goods. Everyone had a very fine time and appreciated being part of the festivities.

Neither do I continually write about computer developments. You were there at the beginning in earlier chapters. January 1994 we moved from the earlier Dos-based Wordstar word-processing programme over to Word Perfect, the newest star on the horizon. Our original foray into computer land, including learning Wordstar, was the most painful for non-techies like Fran and myself. We thought we knew all we needed to know until Word Perfect appeared on the block and forced us to learn this new method. Continuing with Wordstar would have isolated us from the local computer culture, where

Word Perfect was becoming king. We needed advice and help from others too often to stay with the “old.” We needed to be in sync with them. My annoyance at having to make this change knew no bounds. Having to start all over again! And how long before someone would force the next one on us? Can’t these computer “idiots” leave well enough alone? Who has the medicine to counteract this “change-itus” that has afflicted the entire world, whether computer culture or mission organization? Gggrrrrr!

Change-itus in the computer world was not the only sickness we had to cope with. In fact, that was mere small change. At the same time, we received news that sister Ellie, the youngest of the four, had breast cancer. Thankfully, some months later, it was found to be benign. Father Wiebe, now 86, was declared a “borderline” diabetic.

### *Ruminations about Future Ministry*

We had put in 26 years of service and all three of the kids were now out of the house. This was a natural time to consider our own future in Nigeria. On top of that, you will remember reading in Chapter 25 about missionaries being terminated and my own position with the ICS cut off. This made the question even more urgent. Here is Fran’s record of our ruminations in mid 1992:

It is ironic that we had been saying that maybe it was time for a change after Wiebe graduated. We had been in touch with an organization that is looking for people with ThD’s or PhD’s to teach Religious Studies at universities in the former USSR. Also there are requests for people to teach English to army officers and their children there. You might have seen mention of that in the *Banner*. Maybe we can work out something through CRWM. But we had never expected our career in Nigeria to come to this kind of an end. For some time we had also considered John retiring early and my continuing to teach at Hillcrest. I got a letter from the Board two weeks ago that two people had been terminated at Hillcrest, but I was asked to continue.

I wrote in the companion chapter that we missionaries were angry and upset about staff and ministry terminations, but there was also another side. In the above paragraph you read about various ministries abroad that we were thinking and praying about. In a late June letter I wrote,

It was only a few days before all this began that we had begun to enquire into ministry in Russia or some other former Communist country. Their governments are begging for people to help them with the Gospel, a most unusual development. So, we had begun to make enquiries about that *before* all this started and *before* we knew anything like this would happen. Perhaps this is the Lord’s prodding us to serve elsewhere? We will see what develops and seek His will in all of it.

We continued exploring the possibility of going to Russia. On my upcoming trip from Grand Rapids to BC I planned to stop over in Kansas for an interview at the International



**Institute for Christian Studies (IICS). In fact, the evening I wrote the letter containing this information, we were scheduled for a dinner at the home of Danny McCain, the President of IICS, who happens to be serving at Unijos. I did carry through on that plan and had that interview with the IICS.**

**It was an amiable interview, but it ended up negatively for two reasons. The first was a practical one. I was a Canadian and IICS had no Canadian office through which to recruit me and find Canadian support that donors could deduct from their taxes. At the time, I had no green card. He assured me they were working on a Canadian office, but it's time was not yet. True to promise, there is now an active Canadian IICS office that even has significant ties with CRC-Canada. It is called CSI—Christian Schools International. At the final stage of this editing in 2013, our friends the Hellemans are the main driving force for CSI. I am currently considering offering myself to serve on their Board, for which the Hellemans are encouraging me.**

**The second reason for that negative result was a theological disagreement about issues around Genesis and evolution. Though I had and still have not come to any permanent theories or conclusions of my own on those contentious issues, I did indicate I rejected the literalist interpretation and preferred that offered by Ridderbos, a Dutch Reformed theologian. The first month of my Moses meditations indicate the interpretation I prefer(ed). I was considered too liberal with Genesis and therefore was unacceptable.**

**The verdict both surprised and did not surprise me. It did not surprise me, because I knew that the denomination behind IICS, was a pietistic holiness church that tends towards fundamentalism. It did surprise me, because Danny McCain, the President of IICS, and some other IICS-sponsored pros were not the kind to adhere to such literal fundamentalism. In fact, ever since the Canadian office opened, it has been run by Kuyperians like myself! When Danny heard of my rejection, he shook his head and expressed his surprise. He promised that when I was ready to join, he would facilitate the process.**

**In March 1993, after we had settled back into our “normal Nigerian routine”—there really never was such a thing!—I wrote to Dad,**

**It is not the same for me. I have a lot of anger and bitterness in my heart against the people in the office that will not go away. As long as I am immersed in my work, there is no problem, but it takes only a tiny trigger to have the anger and bitterness start up again. On the one hand, I am not eager to leave here. On the other, I do not want to live with this anger and bitterness. So I am still opening myself up for a call. This week I wrote to two churches that are looking for the kind of minister I could be for them. One is in South Dakota (SD) and the other in GR. We will see what happens.**

**The one in SD was a small church in a university town. I had for years been saying that if I ever left Nigeria, it would be for a university chaplaincy.**

That “other church in GR” was LaGrave Ave. CRC, a church in downtown, very fancy, very rich, very high liturgically. It wanted a community missionary for their downtown area that was full of poor and other disadvantaged, while it was also surrounded by corporate glass towers, including banks and lawyers. That atmosphere attracted me at both ends. I would have tried to bring those two opposites together by challenging both. I had the experience and, important for all the Ph. Ds in the congregation, a doctorate. I was known in Nigeria for my ability to deal imaginatively and effectively with both levels and move easily from the one to the other.

Alas, I had been away from the West for too long and had lost touch. I had no idea about what they expected from an up-to-date resume; I was not even *aware* of my ignorance. My resume must have caused some shaking of heads and led to their ignoring me to the point of not even acknowledging receipt. *That* offended *me*. Was I not a CRC missionary who had offered himself to serve in a totally different culture? Should they not have made allowance for my situation and at least acknowledged receipt and explain why they could not consider someone with my qualifications or that kind of resume? That incident made me realize that the home churches had no real insight into the missionary situation and mind and were not ready to give us a chance. When they were done with us, they would just drop us. *Punkt!* We were throwaways, disposables. Whenever we visit Grand Rapids even now as we did in 2012, we always attend one service at that church, because it is impressive and has great preachers, but I never forget the way they ignored me and the bitter lesson that taught me.

Our ruminations continued as did the struggle. In late March 1993, I wrote: “A possibility down the line a couple of years from now, might be for Fran to continue teaching at Hillcrest, while I move over to Unijos to continue the programme started by the IICS. Well, we will see what develops.”

End November Russia once again entered these ruminations. I wrote:

CRWM is recruiting an administrator for all CRC ministries there and I have applied. But, knowing my standing with the hierarchy, I do not entertain too many illusions as to our chances. But prayer can lead to surprises. So, who knows what will happen. I am not telling anyone here that I applied. I probably should tell our mission director, for he would be the first to root for me! Guess why?

It is not that we are eager to leave Nigeria. Working for CRCN sounds OK. However, as things are, I am not sure there is room in this mission for both Boer and our director. Our views are too contradictory and he *is* the director with the backing of the bureaucrats in GR. I do not wish to spend the rest of my working life in a state of annoyance, resentment and disappointment. It may just be that the Lord is using this situation to shake us loose and prepare us for leaving Nigeria for a new pioneering situation.

*Animal Husbandry*

**You have not heard about our animal husbandry for a very long time, but it was still going full force. You should at least be aware of it, since it continued to be an important part of our diet not only, but also a hobby that I really enjoyed as a great point of human contact with our Nigerian friends as I explained in an earlier chapter. I wrote to Dad in May 1992,**

**I enjoy them as a hobby as well as a source of healthy meat. If I did not have someone to help me care for them, I probably would not enjoy it as much, for I would not have the time. However, we have James, who is our driver, gardener, messenger, shopper, repairman around the house and a thousand other things. He also does most of the work for the rabbits. So, I can enjoy them, feed them when I wish and eat them when cooked in a variety of ways.**

**A year and some months later I wrote another summary of our animal husbandry.**

**It is raining cats and dogs today. While so raining, Fran just told me that our young chicks were outside in the rain. So I had to go out into the rain to chase them back into their pen. Our animal farm is very active these days. Rabbits—some 60. This past week we butchered seven; the week before, eleven. The only male suddenly died of pneumonia, but I replaced him with a beautiful black and white son of his. Our ducklings are growing bigger. Another month or so and we can butcher them. But out of the fourteen originals, only seven are left. Our dog killed one a few weeks ago and another one yesterday. So as a future deterrent, we poured kerosene over the duck carcass and tied it around the dog's neck. We will leave it there at least until tomorrow night. Hopefully she will get a proper distaste for such creatures. If she does it again, we will have to take more drastic measures. In the meantime, the mother is sitting on the next bunch of eggs. The chicks that were out in the rain, four of them, were born only four days ago. Two more chickens are sitting on theirs. So, there's lots of life happening in this business. I am a real *Boer* (farmer), even though I have never lived on a *boerderij* (farm). These are all barn yard chicks—small and tough. They largely feed themselves by scratching around in the yard.**

**Then the unthinkable happened. After all the precautions we had taken, what with the animal part of the yard surrounded by solid chicken wire and the rabbits housed in very high cages with strong self-cleaning floors, a dog managed to get in and kill two rabbits. The how of it is beyond me, but he did not get to enjoy his prey, for the night guard heard the commotion and chased the dog away.**

**Remember our chicken co-op from Chapter 36? I wrote,**

**Late September 1993, we were enjoying the joyful sounds of some 120 chicks in our small half bathroom. After two weeks we will transfer them to the co-op coop at the other CRC compound here in Jos. From then on, other members of the group will take care of them.**

And since we are talking animal husbandry, allow me to report that all of our seventeen ducklings are doing fine. None have died. We are finally getting the knack of it after two years of struggle. I surely enjoy having these creatures around. The previous generation of fourteen is now down to six, thanks to the father duck, our former dog and rats. But they are getting big enough to chop one of these days. I think we will chop the males and give the females a chance to do their thing. Soon we will be overrun with ducks. Our next step is getting some turkeys.

One day in October I decided that in order to get people interested in keeping rabbits, I should know how many rabbits and cash flow one can reasonably expect from one doe and a buck over a period of three years. After some figuring, I concluded on an income of N17,200 if you sell right after weaning, but N28,800 if you sell at maturity. If you did not sell but breed them all, you would soon “have a veritable Australia on your hands” within five years, while “there would not be enough chaff, grasses and leaves in all of Plateau State to feed them.” Now how’s that for a recommendation?

Fran described a major disaster early December 1993:

John has been trying to get rid of all the rats in our yard and chicken coops by putting out poison at night when our own animals are locked up. He informed all our neighbors when he planned to start this campaign so that nothing would get killed accidentally. Well, our very rich Nigerian neighbor decided to ignore the warning and continued to leave his peacocks roam around freely. Friday night they obviously got at the poisoned food on our yard and three of them died. To say the least, the man is *furious!* John spent quite a bit of time yesterday seeking advice from good Nigerian friends how to deal with this problem.

I sought out one man in particular to mediate. He was Samuel Gofwen, a man you’ve heard of before in an earlier chapter. He was a one-time Secretary to the State Government, a member of St. Piran’s and a friend to both our neighbor and to us. He agreed to step in. A few days later he reported that Colonel Walbe, the neighbour, had agreed to forgive and forget and once again be a friendly neighbour. However, Gofwen emphasized that I had been very foolish in my approach. Nigerians don’t deal with issues in that way. They may discuss it, but not take the drastic action I did. After talking it over, they may let it slide without solving it, though it is possible that, without uttering any threat, the offended party will take radical action in a more furtive manner without ever admitting it. They might also resort to devices deep inside African Traditional Religion such as casually uttering an indefinite threat implying witchcraft that can slowly lead to terror and psychological disorientation on the part of the target. I knew all that, of course, but I was driven to the wall, while I did not wish to resort to *secretive* violence and certainly not to witchcraft!

Early January 1994 I was grateful to observe that Walbe had indeed resumed his friendly attitude towards us, his peacocks were no longer coming and the rats had been reduced to a manageable few. We were even invited to a big party he threw for the Catholic Women’s Association, a group he was apparently supporting, even though his wife and children lived in the US for years. You could be sure of great food aplenty at his parties as well as the free

flow of beer and other alcoholic goodies. We could not resist the invitation, not only because of the goodies, but also because it would help me in my contacts with Catholic leaders, a group that had always been difficult for me to penetrate. So, victory all around after all. A better outcome than anyone could have expected.

However, a similar problem cropped up towards the end of the year, when Walbe's army of pigeons started invading our yard and devoured the feed as well as made a hellish racket and other things on our roof and even in our attic. When I mentioned this to him, he became livid and asked if I was now going to kill his pigeons as well. Then he walked away in a huff. He had a terrific temper that did not allow for neighbourly discussions. I do not remember how we solved it this time.

I was usually the one to write about our animals, but end March 1994 saw Fran giving a detailed report of our weal and woes at this front:

Our female turkey really disappointed us. She sat on the eggs for six weeks but some of the eggs were rotten and others had dead turkeys inside. The vet had told us that five weeks was the limit; so, something must have gone wrong. Our duck that hatched twelve eggs only has five ducklings left. It seems that there is some infection that's bothering them. Another duck is sitting on a nest and should be hatching any day now. A third duck has just started laying eggs. There are also five chickens sitting on eggs now. And the rabbits keep producing like clockwork! So there's lots of activity in our barn yard.

Only a few weeks later she wrote an even longer report. As I indicated in Chapter 25, she had begun to make an educational project out of our animal husbandry with her Grade 5 kids who showed a lot of interest.

As much success as we had with rabbits, so little did we have with our chickens, ducks and turkeys. Their young either died or the eggs simply didn't hatch for all sorts of reasons. Then someone advised me to take the chicks away from the mother immediately and lock them up in a safe place. That was just a couple of days before the weekend when we had some 25 hatch. By now they would all be dead but, since we separated them, they were all living. The trick worked: Ten days later none had died. We planned to do the same with the ducks.

I had a hard time restraining myself when it came to our livestock. All these animals were just such fun to me as well as constant source of delightful conversation with all kinds of people, not to speak of table times. End October Fran wrote that "life in the barnyard is still going great guns." I won't bore you again with all the delightful details, but the ducks, chickens and rabbits were more active and prolific than ever.

We've written before about our dogs. The 1994 version was a Lhasa Apso, a tiny hairy dog that barked like a trooper at anyone approaching our door, but would never come near you. Dr. Truxton was our family doctor and a great one. When her family was going to be

abroad for several months, out of gratitude for her excellent service to us, we agreed to take care of their dog, the same kind as ours. Fran wrote:

At first the two dogs were really rough and wild with each other, but they've settled down a lot. In fact they are quite quiet and peaceful in the house most of the day and night now. They have found their favorite chairs and rugs, so that's that! They are both Lhasa Apsos, but we've had their hair cut. The tangles and snarls were just *too much*. They look more like cute little puppies now and this is also surely easier when it comes to taking care of ticks.

### *Early Steps towards These Memoirs*

Early July 1992, I concluded a letter to my Dad with the reminder, "Please remember to save our letters," written in capital letters for emphasis. It was a reminder, for we had asked them many years before. I repeated the request in February 1993, where I wrote, "If one day I want to write an autobiography, I can use these letters for the basic information." After Lady Ann came aboard, we wrote asking her to make sure our letters were saved. We had seen them lying around helter-skelter during our visits and were afraid of losing them. The next time we visited BC, we came across a whole box of them and stored them with Fred and Nancy Bosma. And here we are now in 2013, writing memoirs partially based on those letters; and here you are, reading them. Without these 1300+ letters we could never have done this. Yes, 1300+!

### *Nigerian Conditions: Vignettes*

In this section I am going to give you some random snapshots of life in Nigeria, good and bad.

There is something to be said for a seriously multi-religious country like Nigeria, especially if you enjoy holidays. During April-May 1992 we had three long weekends in a row. The first one was to celebrate the end of Muslim fasting; the second, the Christian Easter weekend; the third, May Day, the equivalent to North America's Labour Day. These were all regulars. In addition, the Government would occasionally declare a special holiday such as to celebrate a national sporting victory, especially international football (soccer) victories. These holidays were fun, but what they did to the economy was another question. I often spent such days either writing or in meetings. Hillcrest closed on such holidays, sometimes unexpectedly.

I have made reference to Nigeria becoming a dangerous country, what with armed robbery on the increase. It was not that robbery comes naturally to Nigerians, but the economic conditions were getting worse and worse right along with pauperization of the people and the outrageous enrichment of the elite. It was bound to happen. Though it has never happened to us, it did to many people we know, including our own Lydia when she went to

Lagos for a Canadian visa years later. We know people who got killed by these robbers, including some missionaries.

The following is not part of our own experiences, but it is so humorous as well as quintessentially Nigerian that I cannot refrain from inserting it here.

*An aside: "Christian Robbers"*

Nigerians are known to be intrinsically religious in the sense that almost all identify with one of Nigeria's three major religions. That includes robbers. People, men especially, mostly become robbers because of poverty. They see great wealth displayed around them, but the common folk have little or no access to it. So, some turn to robbery to feed their families.

There is this one group of robbers who consider themselves Christian. Among other things, this means they do not ply their trade on Sunday. They fear that if they rob people on Sunday, the wrath of God will descend on them and they will be caught. One time, things were so tough for them that they decided they had no choice but to rob on Sunday as well. Sure enough they got caught!

One day early May 1992, a policeman dressed in civvies came to tell me that the driver of one of the people staying in our guesthouse was in police custody on suspicion of car theft. So I went to the guesthouse and found the man, someone from The Netherlands, who was working on improving potato growing techniques here on the Plateau. He left our compound by taxi to get the driver released.

Now that driver could be in police custody for any length of time without anyone having a clue as to his location. No one would be informed by the police. However, individual policemen would then strike a bargain with such a prisoner to inform someone about his plight. That was a bit of private business to produce some extra income. Many ways to make a little extra for badly underpaid police!

Early July 1992, Nigeria was in the process of federal elections. The first one was for senators and members of the House of Assembly. It went well.

The election was peaceful and so far I have not heard about any fighting. That is progress for this country. The next election will be for president and that will be in December. Then, early January 1993, the new president will be installed and Nigeria will have a civilian government once again. The big political issue really is whether Muslims or Christians will be in power. That issue will not be settled until the presidential elections.

Upon our return from North America early 1993, we found that postal charges had increased sharply. Now that may not sound so ominous. How could postal rates possibly constitute anything serious? Just read the following from Fran's letter:

It used to cost us N1.50 to send you a letter. Now, if we mail it by Nigerian post, it is N30 or \$1.50 US. Now \$1.50 does not sound all that bad, but it is close to double the Canadian rate and close to triple the US rate. When you consider that is a two-day wage for many Nigerians and for many more it is a three-day wage, then you can see it is an impossible rate. Not only that, but they are now charging heavily for any incoming packages. We have sent close to fifty boxes of books by post from GR. If what we hear is true, then we will have to pay through the nose to collect those packages. That would be too bad, for we intended to make this literature available cheaply to Nigerians. Now that may not be possible and we may have to shoulder the heavy expense ourselves. We already have an investment of over \$1000 in these books.

Two weeks later, I wrote to Dad:

You may be wondering about the change in the type of paper we are using for these letters. The reason is that postage has gone up very much and we are trying to conserve. It went up from N1.50 to N30—2000%! Most Nigerians can no longer afford to send letters abroad now and the post office, that used to be crowded every day all day, is now largely empty. At the moment, commercial courier is cheaper than post office and that is unheard of. Ever heard of such an impact of a postal fee increase?

End March, I wrote,

Nigeria continues to have its own brand of excitement. I wrote some time ago that all the civil servants, state and federal, were on strike. That strike is now over with most governments having caved in to the demand of a 45% increase in salaries. However, food prices have gone up similarly so that no one stands to gain.

While the strike was ending, a gasoline shortage began and is still in full strength. No one seems to know the reason for it this time, but it happens almost yearly. Gas is heavily subsidized and costs around three cents a litre! There is talk of increasing the price, but there is also threat of violence if it is increased. Last year we bought a full drum and put it aside. It is on that supply that we are driving right now.

Here is Fran's report on a sad visit to Pastor David:

He took us to Fyayi, his birth village. That area was one of the hardest hit during the latest Tiv-Jukun disturbances. In fact his whole village was wiped out: farms and houses completely burned. The citrus orchard he was developing to help him in his retirement is completely ruined. His house and those of his brothers are burned and the walls smashed to bits.





## **David Among the Ruins\***

**A few old people were sitting amongst the ruins and still “living” there. They said they might as well die there because at least they had water available in a nearby stream. If they moved to Wukari, they would have no water as the whole new expensive system piped in from Ibi produces nothing. Even though this destruction happened over a year ago, nothing has been rebuilt because people are afraid and also they have no money. It was a real emotional experience for David to show us the ruins. I’ve never done this before, but seeing you have met Pastor David, I’ll do it. If you have any money to give for this cause or know of anyone who would be willing to help him rebuild, please deposit it in our account and let us know. Then we’ll give him the exchange here to help him out.**

**We solicited funds from family to come to David’s rescue. We were grateful to sister Jane for coming through and so was David. He planned to use the money to buy yam seedlings for his farm near Wukari, closer to his residence, so he could keep a better eye on it.**

**The gasoline shortage was also once again becoming serious. Fran wrote:**

**There’s been no regular supply for over three months. James is in line right now, but the tanker hasn’t even come to deliver the fuel yet, just the rumour that one is coming. Once it comes, it could still take him several hours because the line is already so long. He finally did get petrol at midnight, after being in line from 2 pm. Patience. Patience!**

**However, sometimes amazing gasoline miracles occurred. End July, 1993, I was in Takum and just by chance drove into a gas station and wonder of wonders, “it had petrol and no line up at all. That is something we have not seen since a year ago! We bought a whole drum (48 gallons) for 500 naira – some US \$12.50. Around Jos it is still the same as before in this respect.”**

**In August 1994 the fuel situation had become more desperate than ever—except for in Takum. When people did find some hidden source, it was too expensive so that people with a long commute by car found it cheaper just to stay home. I wrote,**

**People are hardly traveling anymore these days, except by foot and a few by bike. But a bike has always been considered a vehicle for a poor person. When you ride a bike, you admit publicly to being poor. Even though millions here are poor, they do not wish to advertise it. And so this country has never gone through the bike stage. And for those who might want to buy one now, it has become too expensive.**

**I am tempted to give you another lecture on the price of gasoline, including the politics of it, but I feel merciful today! Some of you, though, might have found it very interesting and**

intriguing. Apart from religion perhaps, that gasoline chaos adversely influenced all the country's politics, economics and, in fact, life in general. I commented that "this was a situation that absorbs everyone and is a major conversation item with everyone offering solutions to everyone else but with no one listening and applying any of these solutions."

I was scheduled to go to Takum during this time and left with four empty gas drums in our Toyota van to be filled up there. Could this be because it was the hometown of Theophilus Danjuma, one of the most powerful and richest generals in the country? The gas I bought there was meant to be shared with our Jos missionaries. This was the second time that petrol was available in Takum but nowhere else.

You may remember our neighbour, Colonel Walbe, a rich businessman and former aide-de-camp to Yakubu Gowon when he was Head of State. With electricity coming and going randomly and for any length of time, we had a large generator on our compound to supply all the residents. The Colonel was the only resident of his compound, for all his family were living permanently in the US. Though alone, he also had a huge and noisy generator that spewed all of its smoke and thunder towards our bedroom and home office. No one in Canada or the States would put up with it. In fact, there would be laws prohibiting such nuisance. I commented in a letter to Dad,

Fortunately, Nigeria is not that regulated. I say "fortunately," for we do find that though Western societies run smoothly in many ways, they are over regulated. Everything is governed by law. The spontaneity has been taken out of life. There are few surprises in everyday life. Everything is predictable. Here one often gets annoyed, but the unpredictable nature of things and the spontaneous nature of society make for a very interesting life.

Now that I have lived back in North America since 1996 and am considerably older, I am not sure I would still argue that way. There is something to be said, I have learned since, about regularity and dependability, but I had forgotten about that after so many years in Nigeria. Though furlough life should have reminded us, it is such an unsettled and harried life that, even though amenities and services are dependable, you hardly think about such issues.

June 12, 1993 was a very important day in the political development of Nigeria. There was a national curfew till 4 pm because of presidential elections. We wrote, "If all goes well, the military will step aside for a new civilian government. The new president will take over sometime in August. People are allowed on the road only to go to the voting booth, vote and return home. That makes for a wonderfully quiet street in front of our house."

The results of the presidential election were cancelled, even though it was said to be the cleanest election so far. The man elected was M. K. O. Abiola, a Muslim business tycoon. No one was sure of the reason, but it could have to do with the fact that the Federal Government owed him so much money that he might pay himself if in the saddle. Again, Muslims vs Muslims. Several newspapers supporting his election were closed down, including his own. Western nations were beginning to apply sanctions against the country.

Unrest in the country went from bad to worse. In July all the universities in the country shut down. In fact, all teaching staff were fired! Imagine: all of them throughout the entire country! Riots were taking place in various cities, though Jos remained quiet.

Then on August 22, I wrote:

This is *the* week in Nigeria about which everyone has been worried. No one feels comfortable. Everything is at a standstill in anticipation. The handover to civilians is to take place, but at this time no one knows to whom! Abiola still claims he expects to be installed! Anything can happen. Anything. Many southerners have left the north in anticipation of the worst. But by the time you read this, we should know what has happened.

Yes, we did. On August 29, 1993,

We are now two days past D-Day, the 27<sup>th</sup>, when IBB, our Military President, promised to step down and hand over to a civilian government. He did, though most people doubted he would. He kept the whole country in suspense by not announcing until the 27<sup>th</sup> who would take over. Well the person to head an Interim Government is Shonekan, the former chief of UTC, the largest company in Nigeria and affiliate of Unilever. The cabinet list has been published and seems fairly evenly divided over the country's main groupings. This government will have some six months or more to run the country, arrange for new presidential elections and then hand over to an elected government.

We are at this point breathing a sigh of relief. No civil war—at least, not yet. Nigeria pushed itself to the brink and is now trying to back away from it. However the Labour Congress announced a nation-wide strike in rejection of the election annulment. I hope they receive no backing. Neither do we know what Abiola will do. He fled to the U.K. and U.S.—to do what? And we made it through without breaking out into a civil war. So far, so good.

The new Interim Government seems to be getting a hold of the situation and various major groupings in the country are falling into line. The many strikes either threatened or actual have pretty well been called off. The universities are soon going to open up again. The major problem still at a serious stage is lack of various petroleum products used by many people-- petrol, cooking gas, diesel and kerosene.

In November we had another coup, a perfect one: bloodless. Nigeria was getting good at it! The military once again took over. The people were deeply divided over this development, of course, but a semblance of order set in again that was widely appreciated. Universities, unions and other organizations went back to work; gasoline became available again, though at a price three times as high at a whole 10 cents a litre. Still very cheap. Cheap gasoline was one of the few ways in which the people benefited from the nation's oil.

Various state governments established committees or task forces to investigate the reason for the constant gasoline shortage. However, before long, two of the chairmen were killed! Obviously, it was a very touchy matter and dangerous.

1993 had been quite the year. It was about as turbulent as you'd want it. Three governments. Various university strikes. Terrible gas shortage. Civil service strike. And then the straightest presidential election ever in the country—only to have it annulled. So much unrest that a lot of our work had to be postponed, especially our work on the External Debt and the Library aiming to aid students in integrating faith, learning and life.

The new order imposed by the new military government did not do much to make Nigeria any safer. You've read about armed robbers. Well, on January 2, 1994, Kevin drove Fran and me to Kano to pick up Cynthia, who was coming for a brief visit. However, I was nervous throughout the journey.

The day before we went, Rev. Habila, the ICS Acting Director, had gone to Kano to pick up Emmanuel Kumzhi, who was studying in England and who came home for the holidays. Emmanuel had let it be known at the airport that he had hard currency (pounds) on him. So, thieves somehow traced them to Habila's house the following night and demanded the pounds. They were interested only in money, whether naira or pounds, not in any of his electronic equipment. They got only 300 naira and no pounds, for they were in Emmanuel's hands. Fortunately, no one got seriously hurt, only bruised, though Habila had a gun pointed at his heart. So, we were nervous, wondering whether anyone was following us. Nothing happened. Thank God. Kevin was appalled that we had to constantly take such precautions and wondered how we could live this way.

The Government sought to stabilize the naira, Nigeria's "dollar," but it took a long time. In the meantime, chaos reigned supreme.

The government still insists on a rate of N22, but after a month and a half it seems they still do not have any procedures in place as to how this can all be done through Central Bank. In the meantime, the black or parallel market has been outlawed. 108 people in Kano have been rounded up, only to be released the same evening. The participants say there is no way the government can stop them, for it is their living. No hard currency is available to anyone except in the parallel market. And so the newspapers continue to publish parallel market exchange rates. It stands at some N45 to a dollar. In short, it is a mess, but people are very careful, for they are afraid of being arrested. At the moment we are living on money we have in Lion Bank that we exchanged a few months ago at a legal and favourable rate.

This monetary chaos even entered the church in a very open way. Towards end April 1994, during a special church service that included reps from various organizations, a rep from the Nigerian Bible Society let it be known that "they had millions of naira but needed dollars. Anyone having dollars should see them and they would exchange into naira at N45 to \$1—totally illegal and twice the official price. And all that in a church service! Oh, well, in Nigeria anything goes."

These days at the time of this writing, Jos is much in the international news due to it being the current epicenter of violence in Nigeria, both ethnic and religious. It is hardly a new phenomenon. We already had it back in April 1994 as Fran wrote:

We've had some serious political troubles in Jos the last few days: lots of rioting, looting and burning. The problem was over the appointment by the military of the mayor of Jos North. Then people use the occasion to recruit and rile up many others to join the fracas and so the riot and violence escalates till it is totally out of control. A dusk to dawn curfew has been imposed on the city. That really makes it quiet on our normally busy road.

A few days later, I presented more details:

The riot was about the appointment of a Muslim non-indigene as administrator for Jos Local Government. The local tribes, always at each others' throats about who owns Jos, are united in their opposition to this appointment. They staged peaceful protests. The appointment was withdrawn, whereupon the Muslim Hausa community started rioting. The market at Gada Biyu was burnt down and so is a large part of the main market. At least three people got killed in the fracas. Three mosques got burnt. The Muslims then tried to burn a church at Gada Biyu, but the women prevented it. The burning of that mosque was most likely the result of the general rioting and burning done by the Muslims themselves. The Thornburg family, CRC missionaries, got caught in a rioting crowd and some rioters threatened to attack them, but by the grace of God, no one touched them, though they climbed all over the car behind them. Now just last night, we heard that the local Catholic seminary was set ablaze. The TV news said it was an accident of some sort, but the coincidence is too great to just simply believe that. It is most like a continuation of the fracas. In the meantime, we have dusk-dawn curfew in effect, which makes our evenings very nice and quiet, since we live on the main road into town.

In a general newsletter, I wrote:

This continues to be a volatile country, though some of the most obvious unruliness has been reined in somewhat. It has been a year of terrible gasoline shortages, though towards the end that eased up and by now we can get it easily—most of the time. Right now we are battling water shortage due to repairs of the system. We make do with a well that is supplemented by a few tankers a week—a costly way to take a bath! Universities have been closed for six months, but they should start up in a week or so. I have never seen a more discouraged student generation. Inflation and devaluation continue hand in hand. Result: wages far short even for basic needs. How most Nigerians make it and still smile is beyond us.

*Closing Chapter Comments*

The social aspect of the period covered in this chapter was varied, probably too varied for some readers. It was an astounding array of “inters”: an international, intercultural and interreligious range of people that entered our lives and shared our table. A traffic controller would indeed hardly have been a luxury! We were challenged by all those people, inspired and encouraged. They contributed significantly to the expansion of our cultural horizon. Busy, busy, busy, but so delightful. We would not have wanted it any other way, except we did have an occasional struggle with exhaustion.

Family wise we mourned the loss of both of our mothers, but they were ready to go after long years of suffering connected with aging and diabetes. Our children were moving into independence and left us with an empty nest. Our oldest, Kevin, was carving a computer niche for himself in southern Africa. International travel for family and recreational purposes was more frequent.

And not to forget some other important parts of our lives: the headcheese and animal husbandry that brought us so much enjoyment, satisfied stomachs and fellowship with our Nigerian friends.

*Alhamdu lillahi!*—the Hausafied Arabic for “Praise be to God.”

## Chapter 38<

### Jos VIII—Family and Social Life

(June 1994-May 1996)

(NOTE: Parallel ministry chapter is Chapter 26, Volume 2)

#### *Time Away from Jos*

##### *A Private Break in North America- 1994*

It wasn't time yet for another home service leave, but we had decided to take a personal vacation for the 1994 Hillcrest "summer" break, better put: "rainy season break." This constituted our annual vacation, which meant travel at own expense. The major reason was to visit Father Wiebe as well as our Calvin kids. About three weeks each in BC and Grand Rapids. We had decided not to inform any of the sponsoring churches about it so that no one would call on us for any engagement.

We arrived in BC with great curiosity about the lady with whom Dad had recently started a relationship: "Lady Ann," as I called her. He had met her at Ebenezer, the senior home in which both of them lived. As I heard the story, after she scrambled a pool game Dad was playing with some friends, he was intrigued by her. Knocked on her door and introduced himself as "I am Wiebe Boer and I am a good man. Can I come in for a coffee?" He was courting her vigorously by the time we arrived. While on previous visits he would never give me his car but would drive us wherever we wanted to go, this time he offered me the keys the first morning and suggested we might wish to go somewhere! He would phone her early in the morning. I asked him whether it would not be better for him to wait till a bit later to give her a chance to wake up. He responded, "You don't understand. I want to make sure she is still alive!" Well, yes, at their age that made sense. She was around 80 years and had been a widow for 30 years. I could not blame Dad for this unique romance, for she was indeed a sweet lady as well as an accomplished organist.

The first letter we wrote to the two of them was headed by "Dear Dad and Lady Ann." In this letter we welcomed her into the Boer clan. By now, Dad had bought a new condo near Ebenezer and the happy couple lived there happily ever after. Well, happily, yes; but for ever? Ok, so a slight exaggeration, since the Lord gave them less than two years of married bliss, when Dad suddenly passed away at 88. More about that down below.

In Grand Rapids we had long ago arranged to spend a week with Fran's siblings at a cottage on Lake Michigan, something we always enjoyed as a time of great bonding. We also spent much time with our kids, of course, and we met Andy, Cynthia's boyfriend, for

the first time. In fact, we met the entire Tanis family. I wrote, “They are a very nice bunch of people.” Keith, Andy’s amiable father, was a CRC preacher supervising Calvin Seminary student field assignments.

We lived in with Jane for the other two weeks in Grand Rapids. She had inherited the parental home where she had taken care of both Mom and Dad Prins so faithfully. We were grateful for her gracious hospitality.

Our return to Nigeria early August 1994 went as well as could be expected. Our driver James and we were happy to see each other at the Kano Airport. We had left him with a lot of responsibility in June and he had been a truly good steward of everything. Such a swell person! We could not ask for anyone better. Thank you, James. We spent a lovely evening and night in Kano at our Presbyterian friends you’ve met before, the Van Gerpens.

When we returned to Jos, both of us commenced our respective jobs immediately. For Fran, that meant a new and more pleasant Grade 5; for me, it meant the beginning of-- or should I say “return to”?-- working for CRCN.

#### *A European Safari for John - 1994*

In September 1994, I attended a writers’ conference in the UK that I write about in the companion chapter. Due to airplane schedules and our habit of traveling by the cheapest fare possible, I was delayed a few days in both the UK and The Netherlands. I made the most of that extra time and enjoyed myself tremendously. In the UK, I stayed for two days with the Weeks in London. You’ve met them several times already. I had a wonderful time with them. If Fran and I sometimes had difficulties with our children, they were angels compared to one of the Weeks’. “However unwise and foolish I may have been occasionally with respect to our kids - and I am fully aware of that -, I was a paragon of wisdom, patience and love when compared to brother Graham! Katie played the same patient mediatorial role Fran sometimes did.” But she had to stretch herself even more than Fran!

During this visit, I fulfilled a promise given to Kevin. He had given me a colourful South African necktie on the condition that I would actually use it on at least one public occasion. Graham invited me to speak in his church and I have a picture of myself speaking while wearing that tie! I still have it today in 2013—the tie, that is, as well as the picture. It was by no means the only time that I wore that tie in public.

In the “Old Country” I first visited our old Jos friends, Ruud and Aly Dekker. Without my asking or even hinting, they spontaneously offered me their car so I could travel to Lutjegast, my birth village.





There I dropped in unexpectedly on Oom Berend and Tante Dienie at their dinner table.\* She had prepared a traditional peasant meal of cooked brown beans soaked in bacon fat—*spek en bonen*, as it was called. Terribly unhealthy, of course, but absolutely delicious for one who had grown up with that. They were embarrassed to serve such peasant food to *Dominee* Jan or Reverend John. I was only a nephew,

but I was also a *dominee*, someone with great social prestige to them in a class-conscious generation where few people were educated beyond primary school. I ate them out of house and home! That's how much I enjoyed this meal of my childhood. It took a while before I dared weigh myself again!

I stayed overnight at the home of Henk Rozema, my childhood friend and retired engineer. I also enjoyed a reunion with a number of Boer cousins, another delightful experience. Then, finally, I met Norm and Cyndi Viss, former Nigeria missionaries but now evangelists in Amsterdam.

One of the Boer relatives gave me a few copies of an old photograph of Dad's birth family that included my grandfather, who died when Dad was thirty. Dad was very happy with that picture, and I heard it said by some of my siblings that this was the first time he saw my Opa on a photograph. He knew his own father alright, but had never seen a photograph of him. That, I thought, seemed hard to believe, even though taking pictures was hardly a daily event in Dad's youth.

Upon returning home in Jos, I discovered that our little black address book was missing. We did not think we'd ever see it again and so began writing people to provide us with addresses of correspondents of ours whom they might know. As I've said before, miracles do still happen. Someone saw it in a phone booth near The Hague in The Netherlands, where I had carelessly left it. He saw the Hillcrest sticker in front so figured it was a Nigerian. He somehow turned to the "R" page and saw Henk Rozema from Grootegast and telephoned him. Henk said that yes, he knew whose book that probably was and asked the stranger to send it to him. Then Henk tried to phone us but never got through, so finally sent us a letter. That took almost a month to arrive. So we phoned Aly Dekker and asked her to call Henk to send the address book to them. They then gave the book to the Plomps who were on their way back to Jos. So much ado about such a little, but very important, object!

*A Wedding, Home Service and Time of Separation – 1995*

We arrived in Grand Rapids just one week before Cynthia and Andy's wedding. Just in time to get in on the last minute pre-parties and preparations. The rest of the story surrounding the wedding is told in the section under "Cynthia."

"Uncle" Jerry Cremer, the former Hillcrest teacher and Mountain View house parent and now the CRWM Logistics Manager, found a house for us on Blanchard Street in Wyoming, just off 28<sup>th</sup> Street SW. The owners had gone on an extended vacation. It was a full house, completely furnished, that stood us in good stead with all the extra wedding guests.

It was so nice that some of the Boers could make it to the wedding. Dick and Diane came all the way from Vancouver Island by motorcycle. Ellie and Fred came in their camper. Hendrik and Barb were ministering in Hawaii at the time, but had come back to Chicago for Barb's graduation. So, they were also able to attend. Wow! Four Boer siblings and their spouses in Grand Rapids all at the same time. Never before and, so far at least, never after. It was so nice to be able to host all of them for a change instead of their hosting us.

Mid July was the end of our vacation and home service activities started. It was back to work again, especially for me. In so far as we were not doing deputation, I would concentrate on the Christian-Muslim book.

As had long ago been arranged, Fran went back to Jos on her own to start the new academic year at Hillcrest early August. This meant that Wiebe and I lived in the Wyoming house together for a while. So I greeted Dad and Lady Ann in a letter, "Hello from the great bachelors' house of the two male Boers in Grand Rapids." I assured them "so far all is going well with Fran gone."

It was so nice having Wiebe stay with me. I wrote,

He is working as a painter at Calvin. Late August or so he will be going to Jos to keep Fran company, do some voluntary development work and perhaps take a few courses at the local university. He is developing into a nice, intelligent and responsible young man who seems to be appreciated by almost everyone. We are proud of him. The only thing is, we are both used to having a car available at almost any time. We now live in a part of town where we do not have any contacts. Anything we do, we have to travel quite far. This means we often compete for the single car and that can cause some friction at times.

It was a good experience for Wiebe and me to spend so much time together.

We talk about all sorts of things and understand each other better, I believe. He is especially relieved that I have been so easy with his use of the car in the evenings. Basically I have just let him have it while I stay at home either working or relaxing. I have hardly done any visiting; have put it off till he is gone.

We had a rash of car breakdowns that cost us a mint. “I could almost have bought a new one,” I wrote to Dad and Ann. Secondly, I had to have a bridge in my mouth replaced. In between I had a temporary one that came out on a Sunday as I was preaching. I wrote, “If you don’t think you worry too much about your appearance, take a few teeth out of the front and see how easily you get embarrassed!” Another mint!

The new bridge for my mouth soon arrived. I told Fran,

I am now the proud carrier of a new bridge at the slight price of a good \$1800! I arranged to pay it in one year and this morning I wrote out twelve checks for them. We will see how much the insurance will pay. The new bite splint is smaller than the earlier one and thus much more comfortable, for it does not fill my mouth like the other one did.

Note: I probably would not have recorded this kind of dental information, but this was the beginning of a long and arduous dental history that stretched way into our retirement and still often costs us oodles of money. The beginning of an expensive history and all because I have such a small mouth and even smaller teeth; so small, dentists can hardly move around in there. For reasons I don’t understand, some people can’t believe this thing about a small mouth!

You may recall my “illegal” presence in the US upon graduation from Calvin Seminary back in 1965 and 1966. That situation continued to haunt me. Here I was a visitor in the country who had no right to a US drivers license. However, I had long ago lost my BC license and felt that my Nigerian license probably would not have much credibility in this country. So, I renewed my Michigan license on basis of my old one. Officials had no reason to doubt its legitimacy and I could move around freely again.

Social and spare time activities went well with all kinds of activities. I wrote Fran,

Tuesday I picked up a new bike. Yesterday I took it for a 40 minute ride in the evening throughout the neighbourhood. It is such a nice way of exploring. I expect to do another 30 minutes or so this evening. I also played tennis on Tuesday night with Wiebe who borrowed Andy's racket. We quit at 7-7 and it was fun. Wednesday night we had a Nigeria party at Cynthia and Andy's house. Wiebe had to teach the Koops kids how to cook Nigerian. He did a very good job, and especially Andy liked it very much.

I also reported to Fran on my dietary behaviour:

Food wise, things have gone well. I have been quite disciplined in my eating habits, but I'm not losing any weight and that's discouraging. I have bought a new book on dieting that is very different in that it emphasizes the power and role of the mind and spirit in relation to eating habits. I have started reading and think I will find it

helpful. I have gone to a restaurant only once -- for a Burger King breakfast. That did not amount to much.

Then I confessed to a break in the routine due to the visit of some Nigeria missionary friends. I took them out to a Big Boy lunch. They were leaving the Mission and were quite emotional about it. A major reason for their leaving was over, as they saw it, the unfair way CRWM treated Canadian salaries. I had enough other issues with CRWM that I had chosen not to work on that one, but these friends were right. I decided to continue with my policy of not raising a ruckus about it, at least for now. I enjoyed their visit, but felt sad about their leaving. I record this incident just so you know I was not the only missionary to have strong disagreements with CRWM.

With the time of Wiebe's leaving for Jos at hand, I took "the gang" out for a good Indian buffet. The gang included Cynthia and Andy, of course, as well as a few of Wiebe's friends.

After he was gone, I wrote a letter to Fran in which I confided that "things around here are getting kind of boring, just me alone. I know you like to hear that. And it is true. Of course, it is made worse by lack of computer which is being repaired and therefore lack of any progress in my work."

She responded, "I'm surprised that things are getting kind of boring with just you alone! Just a few more weeks and you will be meeting all your brothers and sisters and Dad. Of that I'm jealous! All your other travels and assignments haven't made me envious at all, but a chance to go to BC always does!"

Actually, I had a pretty active social life as well. I met a lot of former and current Nigeria missionaries at Anita Vissia's funeral early September, 1995. Her only survivors were two nephews, who said their aunt could write the book on stubbornness. No kidding. Remember our Baissa life with her? Though she had made life somewhat unpleasant for us there, I decided to honour her at the mike. I said that even though she was never married and had neither children nor grandchildren, she might have more spiritual grandchildren than most missionaries, for Ezekiel Nyajo was converted under her leprosy programme and from there became a very effective pastor-evangelist who, in turn, led many to Christ. Even though Ezekiel eventually became Muslim, I stated, the fact of her numerous spiritual grandchildren remained true.

At that time, I was invited for dinner by brother Ray and Gert. Ray Jr. and his family were there as well. We had "heart-smart" hamburgers, if you know what I mean. A few days later, I joined a Prins get-together at Jane's house to welcome the Lieuwens who had come in from Cincinnati. This is what happened:

On the way I bought some donuts, but sort of forgot about the serious heart smart atmosphere in the clan. Jane as good as reprimanded me, though in a good spirit, for bringing such bad stuff. Only two were eaten, both by brother Henry! The rest I took home and Wiebe and Cynthia used them for a get together on Hall Street." Henry, it turned out, outlived some of the "heart-smarters."

When I got home from a deputation weekend in Cincinnati, I watered the lawn and cleaned the CRWM car before returning it. These were jobs I was not used to doing myself anymore; it seemed strange for me, and not James, to be doing them. In the process I had another “Amsterdam neighbour experience.” The watering and cleaning had wet the neighbour’s car. So I used this as an excuse to try to meet him by apologizing for spraying his car. The man opened the door; no greeting, no smile. Just: “What do you want?” No, he did not worry about water on the car. Thanks. Shut door! A sharp contrast to his wife, who was a friendly and chatty neighbour.

I continued to have an active social life with Cynthia and Andy. I wrote,

Dear thoughtful Cynthia is really doing her part. She phones me at least once a day to see how things are going or just to chat. She keeps inviting me, especially over the weekends. I appreciate that very much. She says she has been seeing more of me than of her in-laws who live just down the street from her.

Two-thirds into September, I had lunch at one of Cynthia’s tables in the restaurant where she was waitressing.

Soup and salad. They make excellent soup. I had two bowls! However, they inflate their terms, for their bowl is no larger than a cup in other places. I was the first to pay her a 100% tip and told her it was a new trend I was starting. Only thing is, I’m not sure how many of her clients heard it! Well, at least I did what she has been pressing me to do: come to her restaurant.

The next weekend I invited both Tanis families for a meal.

Pea soup is the announced menu, since the senior Tanises told me they like that. However the younger Tanises do not like pea soup, so I’ll import a pizza for them. All will be served a salad and some French bread. Sounds like a reasonable menu, don’t you think? I’m a bit annoyed with the younger generation’s open dislike of pea soup. Somewhere along the way one has to learn a bit of *hankuri*, right?

Early October was time for me to leave GR and do the necessary deputation in Western Canada. But first I had to clean the house on Blanchard Street, the “Dutch House” as the children referred to it. Neither Fran nor I had ever lived in a middle class American house before, let alone in the immaculate culture of Grand Rapids CRC. We grew up in immigrant homes. Neat enough, but no fancy carpets or furniture that were the family’s pride. The same was true during our student and Nigeria years. Neat, without being fussy or taking appearances too seriously. But now we were in a Grand Rapids home with..., well, “immaculate” is the only word for it. This was a typical hot Grand Rapids summer with sweat and grime everywhere. I would sit on the furniture with my naked sweaty upper torso and walk around with bare feet in and out of the basement. The carpets were showing the traffic patterns. And, of course, that fact that I lived there alone for a couple of months without Fran controlling the scene, did not make it any better. I confess: I did not leave the

house as we found it, though I tried by my own standard. After we left, the landlady sent CRWM a bill for cleaning the upholstery and carpets and vowed never to rent to missionaries again! I could not blame her and promptly paid that bill! We were just not part of that culture.

Quite unrelated to whoever happened to be living there, the neighbourhood was infested with moles that dug up the front lawns that summer, with our house at its centre. We did not know how to counter it, not even with the advice of neighbours, who did not know how to cope with it either. Now the landlady had this horror to work through as well as the problem of dirty carpets. For a people to whom the front lawn was their pride and joy, this was a horrible scene for which she also held me responsible....

When I arrived in BC it was wonderful to see Dad so happily married to Lady Ann and living in the new apartment they had purchased. We had a great time with the three of us. It was especially a delight to join them for their meals. Lady Ann had veered Dad away from his potato-meat-veggie routine to a more varied and more interesting menu.

From there, I moved on to Edmonton. While there, I got what I described in a letter to Fran as “a brilliant idea.” Here’s the idea and how it came about:

I am thoroughly embarrassed that I did not think of it before--send you a fax from Edmonton. How did that idea finally come to me? Well, you know that the Lodewyks are here. I told him I was going to send him a fax in Red Deer so that he could take it along to you in Nigeria. And all of a sudden it dawned on me that I could just send it directly to Jos! Brilliant, eh? Yes, but sort of belated. Anyhow, if it works, you should have this fax today. If it does not work, it will come with the Lodewyks.

From Edmonton, back to BC, especially Vancouver Island. At the end of my time there, I wrote to Fran, “I am sorry you felt lonely there for a while. Time is getting closer for our reunion and I look forward to that. Though I think we had good reasons for this arrangement, I am happy that we will soon be together again.” I ended the letter with “*Ik heb je lief.*” Truly I did. It was the last time I met Dad or Lady Ann. They were both gone before our next visit.

### *Back in Jos for Fran*

It may be good to remind you that the section above and this one are concurrent. The above deals with my batching days in North America; this one, with Fran’s batching days in Jos. Wiebe is with me in the above section and with Fran in this one.

Fran left the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1995 in time to start the new year at Hillcrest, while Wiebe would follow her a few weeks later. She had a remarkable trip in that she met so many people, some with whom she could even establish some indirect connection. On the plane to Chicago she sat next to a lady who was working for a former CRC missionary in Mkar,

Nigeria, and who knew all about the place. In Chicago she met a Calvin College German teacher who was married to a childhood friend of hers! During the flight Chicago-Amsterdam she was upgraded twice for reasons no one explained, but she did not object and slept much of the way in great comfort. At Schiphol it seemed there was a Jos missionary conference. Missionaries had descended there from many places, all to take the semi-weekly KLM flight to Nigeria in time for Hillcrest opening. Among them were Tim and Wilma Palmer from TCNN. Tim helped Fran through immigration, while she served as an Oma to their two children during the flight.

Cyril, the Mission driver who came to pick her up had a lot of business calls to make in Kano, so they didn't arrive in Jos till late afternoon. Asabe, our cook, was waiting for her at the gate. James had just returned for his early evening chore of feeding the rabbits. She had supper at the Hostel and, defying the jet lag factor, had a sound sleep in our own bed the very first night.

She knew she was back in Nigeria when quite a number of our Nigerian friends dropped by to greet. She wrote, "I've had lots of greeters—Lydia and her family, Hosea, Kilyobas, Filemon, Daniel, Ibrahim Lafe's friend Jerry, Hajaratu, and Joel Akpem." She also decided to join in the CRC routine this first Sunday morning by attending the Hillcrest service and then a coffee at the Vreekes who also invited her to stay for lunch.

Her first two days went as follows:

Thursday morning I straightened out the house a bit, and by afternoon I went to Hillcrest. So many new people and old ones to greet that I actually did very little in the classroom. Providentially, Bunmi Ogbeifun, my teacher's aide from last year, dropped by to greet so she helped me get some books down from the storage area and then together we arranged the desks. Bunmi will be teaching English at Baptist High this year. I told her I was happy for her that she found a "real" job, but I will definitely miss her help in the classroom. Friday morning we had an all staff meeting followed by an elementary staff meeting, so that I didn't get into my classroom till 1 pm.

The second Sunday back, Fran accompanied a couple of new young Hillcrest teachers to St. Piran's. She had intended to go to CRCN that morning, but because this young couple asked her, she agreed. Well, St. Piran's was totally out of sorts that morning but interesting enough to have Fran tell the story:

It rained terribly hard for about an hour but we stayed dry and could hear, so I guess the new building is ok. They did two things during the service which I have never seen before. First they drafted people into the choir. Ibrahim Haman, the director, said for a church this size they needed at least fifty in the choir, instead of the twenty they had. So they did some heavy-duty arm twisting and read off the names of known good singers. After about fifteen minutes they had as many people up front as they figured they needed, so the announcement was made that that was the new choir! We'll see how many actually will stick with it. Then, secondly, they

said they needed more money for the next stage of the building project. They asked those who were ready to give 10,000 naira to stand up and identify themselves. A few people stood up. Then they said the 5,000 naira group should stand up. Again a few stood up. Then the people's warden came to the front and whispered something to the speaker. He then said they would continue this exercise more in private and for people to please come to the church any afternoon to bring their donations. Finally at 12 noon, Rev. Bello got around to delivering a very short sermon.

**Her teacher guests were not impressed!**

About this same time the two Palmer kids, for whom Fran had served as Oma on the flight from Amsterdam, were over for a night. "They seemed to enjoy it because they didn't really want to go home again. They were 'bargaining' with their parents who said it was too quiet at their house without them. So the children said that maybe they could take turns coming here and staying home! I had a nice evening with their whole family."

Some people came over to hear about Cynthia's wedding and would often stay to watch the video. One evening the Plomps came; the next, Lydia and her family. A week or so later some other missionary friends came over for the same purpose. "It was," wrote Fran, "a *gezellige* time"—and for a Dutch person, that's as good as it gets.

That same day, though, Fran wrote that someone tried to "419 me for just N100." "419" refers to a certain Nigerian law and is a popular term for "fraud" and "rip offs." It is applied even today, for example, to all those famous Nigerian e-mail fraud letters that have been making the rounds all over the world the last decade or so. In fact, in 2012 Will Ferguson won Canada's prestigious literary Giller prize for his book titled "419" which "explores the Byzantine world of email scams, taking the reader from the streets of Calgary to the back alleys of Lagos." As Fran's letter recorded it:

He told me that he was a brother to the Hillcrest Middle School clerk, Habila Haggai. He said he'd had an accident and needed N100 in order to get home. According to the "brother" he said that Habila had traveled to Pankshin and therefore couldn't help him out. It was such a small request but it didn't sound right to me, so I said I'd have to check it out on Monday with Habila. Turned out Habila has no brothers and obviously didn't know anything about it and had not traveled to Pankshin. He was very grateful that I hadn't been duped!

After a couple of weeks of batching it in Jos, Fran felt quite good about her situation. The kids and I were phoning her quite regularly. Her jobs as teacher and as Guest House Supervisor kept her busy. In addition, social life was alive and well. Amongst others, Dan, our neighbour and manager of the government TV station next door came for a visit. As Fran wrote it,

He dropped in last week. I was just ready to serve coffee and a brownie to someone else so I set some out for him as well. Then he asked me to "bless" it before we ate and drank! He said some women would have just said, "Look, my husband isn't



home; thanks for coming; goodbye." He was happy that I invited him in and so he wanted the blessing to confirm it. He is a charismatic Catholic and a good neighbour.

Also "Kim Fynwever, the new CRC Art teacher at Hillcrest who just graduated from Calvin in Cynthia's class, is doing very well and is enjoying her work. She's come for quite a few meals already. She's coming in just a few minutes for supper. I have my homemade soup and even made crackers as well."

Thus, no time to feel lonely. However, she was looking forward to the time Wiebe would join her and even more to my coming home early November. Reading that did my old soul good! Wiebe arrived on September 6, 1995. He had a good trip, but not without the usual hassle at the hands of Kano Customs. They thought of him as a newcomer and, because of his long hair, a girl at that! He quickly set them straight on both counts by talking Hausa.

He had a similar welcome home in that Asabe, James and Mary and some others were waiting for him at the house. James had even put up a "welcome home" sign at both the gate and the front door. Wiebe spent most of the next day "hanging out" with James. When James came to work in the morning, he could tell at the gate already that Wiebe was up since Nigerian music was blaring out. He was playing one of his favourite songs, "Sweet Mother."



James & Mary & family\*



Asabe & family\*

These two families remain in our hearts right up till today in 2014. You will hear more about them in Volume 4.

Life without me in Jos continued to be lively and sociable for Fran. So many guests over and invitations from others. Three Mt. View Hostel relief times. And, of course, Wiebe created his own whirlwinds with his comings and goings everywhere in and beyond Jos,

while he was working on being admitted to Unijos. He thought that many courses available to him looked very interesting.

Fran commented on my meetings with CRWM with considerable annoyance. "Sorry to hear that the chairman is intimidated by your strong arguments and well-chosen words. I guess that means they can't take a challenge and would rather hear sloppy words and poor arguments?" In another later letter she expressed herself in even stronger terms:

I'm irritated about people accusing you of "intimidating" them. It seems to me that that is *their* problem. Esther Koops doesn't intimidate me with her beautiful violin playing, even though I know I could never do it. That is her talent and strength and I love to listen to her. You have a brilliant mind, clear thinking, able to express yourself well, etc. and then people get upset. They just have to realize that that is *your* gift, and that you are "out of their league" and should just enjoy listening to you or reading your books.

If nothing else, I felt pretty flattered. How often does a wife tell her husband he is brilliant and that he speaks so well? In fact, he is in a league beyond his colleagues. Wow! But can you believe it? I had forgotten all about that until now that I am writing these memoirs! Wonder if she would still say that? I won't ask her! And, of course, if I really was/were/am that smart, would I have boasted about it like this?!

But then she continued with regard to the terminations of 1992:

You say that IAT has "now admitted that it was not legitimate or, at least, that it was not done properly." Is that minuted somewhere? I would love to see it. Nelle Evenhouse wrote me that "we have the official letter in hand from the mission concerning our case which makes us very grateful because we can now put it behind us." Have you seen that letter? I asked her for a copy. Somehow until I see those things in "black and white" I still can't believe it's all over and can't quite put it behind me yet.

In September, Fran wrote that our Dutch friend Henk Plomp had a severe heart attack. She told the entire story, including his being taken to The Netherlands for further treatment. When wife Elly asked him what book she should bring for him, he said, "Bring Moses!" That was my book on Mosaic meditations. Fran said, "He's really enjoying those meditations and finds it is the message he heard in his youth" in the church that was established by Abraham Kuyper and that baptized all of us. Once again, I felt pleased like punch. When you write, you never know when you hit the nail on the head or whose nail you hit. When your book speaks to a Nigerian charismatic ex-Minister of External Affairs-professor-clergyman-medical doctor as well as to an inactive member of a Dutch church, then you know you are effectively communicating to a wide community. And then, just to bring it up to date and widen the circle even further, an elderly female relative read the separately-published first month edition in 2012 and asked me for the rest of the book, for she found it so interesting. With all due respect, I would describe her as a pious, conservative Grand Rapids Reformed Evangelical. So, a wide range of people indeed. A

couple of my friends have repeatedly observed that I appeal to a wide range of people in my writings not only, but also in other aspects of ministry. I can only thank God for what seems like one of my gifts—with a question to my friend Timothy Palmer whether he would classify that as a “natural” or “spiritual” gift.

Busy as Fran was socially and in her work at Hillcrest and the Guest House, on Sept 21, in letters to sister Jane and to me, she admitted that she felt “a bit down and lonely on Sunday.” No phone calls; no letters; no Wiebe; no John. But it all changed in a wink: Wiebe returned home from Kaduna, phone calls came through and seven letters in one day, including one from me! Life was sweet once again, but also a yoyo, for the next Sunday loneliness set in again. She watched a video about C. S. Lewis called “Shadowlands” and wrote,

That made me cry and miss you even more! Wiebe noticed yesterday that I have numbers written on the calendar. He finally figured it out that those numbers show how many days till my beloved returns. He said, "I didn't realize that you missed Dad that much!" At any rate my "exile" is more than half over now and I am really doing well in general, but I will be *very* happy to welcome you back home!

One woman’s sadness can be her husband’s joy. I was so happy to read of her deep affection for me and her desire to have me come home soon. The feeling was mutual.

In her last letter to Jane before my return to Jos in early November, Fran wrote about another whirlwind of a week. There was the annual Nigeria Mission meeting to approve plans and budgets and hear reports. That day her assistant took her class for her, but Fran ended up doing the assistant’s job of correcting, for assistants were not to be given work to take home. After that, the rest of the week was one great big circus. Several games of tennis. Wiebe in and out with friends. Cooking meals for guests; eating out with friends. It included watching the O. J. Simpson verdict with Wiebe and both of them predicting opposite conclusions. Guess who predicted what. Wiebe was right.

### *The Family*

#### *John & Fran Together*

I should once again remind you that often the stories in this section have no particular logical progression or connection with each other; they are just vignettes, one after another.

In our first letter to Jane after my return in 1995 we once again asked her to save our letters:

Did we ever ask you to keep our letters? If it is not too difficult to do so, we would appreciate it. All the others to whom we write weekly--all Boers--are forever moving around and can thus not be relied upon to save them. These letters sort of constitute

a weekly history of our lives and could come in handy when someone, possibly ourselves, would one day write a short history of our little family. Much appreciated if you can do it.

Of course our relationship with St. Piran's continued without a break. One Sunday the service was led by the young people as a climax to their youth week. They made us sing spiffy songs, dance, and march to the front to bring our offerings instead of just dumping them in the collection bag—and again dancing all the way. That's probably not the picture you have of the Anglican Church. The sermon was in the form of homemade drama in which the youth painted a picture in no uncertain terms of how parents often discourage their teens from following Christ and all of it in a very funny and typically Nigerian way. The whole thing was quite delightful, but with a pointed thrust.

And then, the regular Harvest Sunday at the church:

The congregation is divided into groups – choir, women, youth, men, guests, etc. Each group goes towards the front dancing and brings their special gift. It is a time of merriment and a very long service. In addition, the men are expected to cough up N700 each for the marble pulpit for the new church under construction. Now at the present rate of exchange that is only about US \$8, but it is more than a month's income for the lower-income workers—of which we do not have many in our elite church.

And another St. Piran's related story. Shortly before Cynthia and Andy's wedding we attended an engagement party at the home of one of the Gofwen brothers. It was such an interesting ceremony that I am going to share it with you lock, stock and barrel in Fran's words:

Their daughter married a Yoruba fellow from Akure. The traditional cola nut ceremony has been modernized. This used to be held between the two families at night; now it's done openly in front of all the guests in the daytime. The groom's family was forced to ask properly for the young girl by waiting at the gate, stating who they were asking for. They had to show all the proper respect, including lying flat down on a mat in front of the bride's people. Then they showed how "serious" they were by bringing many gifts including the engagement ring and a special bride's Bible. The bride's family expressed the proper hesitation by making them repeat the girl's name many times, telling them to ask in Hausa or English, not in Yoruba, pronouncing the girl's name correctly etc. Finally they allowed the ceremony to continue. It was, as usual, topped off with excellent food and music. I told Cynthia to ask the Tanis family what they think of such an arrangement!

Nigerians can be so delightfully innovative and imaginative when it comes to such affairs. Shortly after the Gofwen engagement party, Habila, the popular Hillcrest clerk, got married. According to Fran's letter,

It was such a joyful celebratory service. I really wished that Cynthia and Andy could have witnessed it. The bride walked down the aisle singing and dancing. The musicians, including drummers, played “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” and “I’ve Made the Choice to Rejoice in the Lord” as the bride danced to the front of the church. The bride and groom faced each other as they said their vows while the preacher stood between them. That is certainly nicer than when all the audience sees is the backs of the bride and groom.

Throughout the months and years, communication with both home front as well as with Kevin in Southern Africa continued to be problematic. Telephones often did not work; mail came through sporadically. It was always nip and tuck. But then things started looking hopeful. We received our first e-mail from Wiebe, though not on our own equipment. We could also reply through the same equipment. Before long, Cynthia and Wiebe began to email us regularly from Grand Rapids. Thus one day we read an email from Wiebe that he had typed out only twelve hours ago! We could hardly get over it. I commented, “Don’t ask me what e-mail exactly means, but it is very fast like fax and cheaper. It uses computer and telephone facilities.” But then we also wanted to send emails from our own computer, so in March 1996 we had a modem installed and arranged for someone to teach us how to generate and send e-mails.

It turned out that the “teacher” did not have much patience.

He can’t believe that we understood *nothing* about how such things work. He was trying to give us directions on the phone at 9 pm last night but I guess we all gave up! We told him to try again after Wiebe comes back from his trip. Maybe Wiebe will understand the process and then he can show us *slowly* and *carefully*. We realize that if we want easy, regular contact with our three kids, we’ll have to learn how to operate e-mail.

Sometime in 1995 we also invested in the technology to receive CNN, Sky News, two movie channels, a German sports channel and an Arabic station. The reception was perfectly clear. Wow! We felt that we had entered modernity—but our phone was still not working!

Lately I have been treating you to about one example of a busy home and table per annum, the type I described so many times in earlier chapters. To make sure you realize that failure to keep you updated all the time about our guests is not equivalent to lack of guests, herewith, according to Fran, a week at the end of March 1995:

We keep busy with all our meal guests as well. Last week Tuesday we had Kees & Ruth Krabbe (Calgary) over for supper. Then Tom & Hilary Cope (CMS missionaries from UK) on Friday. Monday we were at the Gyuses for “tea.” Last night Bob & Ineke Lodewyk (Surrey, BC) came for supper. Tonight the new Kambari linguist, Jan Canburn, dropped in and needed some food. Tomorrow night we have the official Mission Board delegates, Krabbes and Palsroks, for a meal. Friday evening the Garland family (TCNN teacher from Northern Ireland) are

coming for supper. And so it goes in missionary life in such an international community.

In one letter to my Dad and Lady Ann, Fran shared a sad news story:

Godiya, the six year old only son of widow Lydia Kilyobas died very suddenly yesterday at Plateau Hospital. He had a severe headache in the morning and by evening he was gone. They seldom do autopsies here but one possibility is that it was meningitis which is a sudden killer, especially in children. When John went to see Lydia this morning she was, of course, in shock and wailing, "My son, my only son." It's hard to understand why she has had to bear so much tragedy in her life. Kilyobas was working for us in 1978 when you and Mom visited us. Lydia worked for us after her husband found another job. The last five years she has worked as laundry lady for the hostel on our compound.

We've been very quiet about our tennis life, but it was still going good and strong; sometimes surprisingly strong. One April afternoon in 1995 Fran played with Victoria Vander Dyke, the Yoruba wife of Mike Vander Dyke. Fran wrote,

I've watched her play and realized I was foolish to challenge her to a game when she's half my age and has twice my strength and energy. But in the end I did my generation proud! I beat her 6-1, 6-1. She said she couldn't believe what had happened and thought she better not tell her husband. I told her that I would surely tell mine! Now John wants to challenge her to a game too.

Well, yes, of course. This sounded like a woman I could possibly beat for once! Even as I so boasted, I knew that her defeat by Fran was most unusual and that I would not stand a ghost of a chance against her.

Another short tennis story that may be of no significance to you, but to me it was huge. Two days in a row Fran and I played tennis. Nothing new there. Fran won the first day. Nothing new there either. We both fought hard. The next day we played another hard game and...I won! Now *that's* new, especially when Fran played hard. This is one for the history books or, at least, for memoirs. A week or so later, I had a particularly busy day that we topped off with a short tennis game. I wrote to Jane, "We will not discuss who beat who. I want you to continue to be proud of your brother-in-law!" Read between the lines!

Fran was very happy the first week in December due to two of her three staff returning from their maternity leaves. Asabe, our housekeeper, returned on Monday after seven weeks and Mary from the Guest House, on Friday. To be sure, Mary would work only half time for the next three weeks, but that would surely make things a lot easier for Fran. I suggested their families should do some family planning together so that such leaves don't overlap again!

During the 1995 Christmas week someone tried to pull a fast one on us in downtown, a classic “fuel pump” episode that was the rage among the “street smart crowd.” But in the end James and I got the better of him. Here’s the story from Fran:

**It went right by the book! Let me explain how it works: While your car is parked on the street, someone comes along and squeezes an external fuel line just enough so no fuel can get through. Then your car will go only about one block and stall. Suddenly a “good Samaritan” arrives and says he notices you are having trouble and he is a mechanic and would be pleased to help you! While I waited at the car with the helpful “mechanic,” John took a taxi home to get James, our worker. They came back and fooled the “mechanic” as to where they were going. They took him straight to the police. The “mechanic” had over 5000 naira in his pocket so he’d had a very successful day up to that point!**

We could not know that this story was written on my Dad’s last birthday, December 21, 1995.

The day before Christmas we went about distributing our Christmas gifts: yams, probably the most popular food in Nigeria, apart from meat.

**We went around to all the “yellow fevers,” popular local name for traffic directors, and to some special Hillcrest workers. This afternoon we went to the afternoon shift “yellow fevers” and to the police at the Charge Office. Tomorrow we’ll give them to our guards, Guest House and personal workers. So our pile of 120 yams will soon be gone.**

I must admit that in terms of the traffic officers, this gift could be regarded as kind of a pre-emptive “bribe.” Such an occasional gift together with giving them rides as they walked their way to their intersection made driving so much more relaxed within the city, for you were guaranteed hassle-free driving and support in case of altercations with other drivers. Every time we would cross their intersection they would wave us on with smiles from ear to ear. However, the deepest motive was one of sympathy and compassion for their plight: very difficult jobs and very little pay—often no pay at all or postponed indefinitely. There were certainly some reasons for the omnipresence of bribery.

In a late December 1995 letter, Fran wrote about all the Christmas parties and other events we were planning or to which we were invited. They were indeed impressive in their number and variety. Some Christmases none of the kids came home, but this year Wiebe was with us. Fran commented, “So you see, in spite of the fact that only one of our children will be here this Christmas, we are not just sitting around staring at each other. *Er zit leven in de brouwerij!* Our pot’s astirrin’ with lots of stuff brewing throughout the season.

Then a February 1996 birthday weekend for me that we celebrated at that Steyr place in Bauchi, swimming in an outdoor pool and playing tennis in the sunshine. What more could you ask for in February? The weekend was extended because of the Muslim end of Ramadan (fasting month) by two days. Obviously, my birth was well timed. Who said we

Reformed did not engage in family planning in those days? While my birthday was celebrated very privately, three weeks later, Fran's was celebrated in opposite fashion: communally with half a dozen friends over, including Lydia and Chris and Kathy Vanderkloet.

In fact, it was quite a rousing celebration, much of it not initiated by Fran herself. It started with phone calls from Grand Rapids, from Minna in Niger State by Bishop Nathaniel Yisa and his wife, Ruda, and from Kevin in South Africa. Great way to start, but there was more unexpected excitement ahead.

Then my 5<sup>th</sup> graders had a great "surprise" party. You always know that something is brewing but never know quite what will happen. They asked the school secretary to send me a note that there was a phone call at the office from my daughter and could I please come right away. When I got back to the classroom, they had the goodies all set out and had thrown paper confetti everywhere. They had no games planned for the party so things soon got rowdy and wild. Needless to say, I was happy when the afternoon was over!

Lest you think I had become civilized and gotten over my ancient obsession with headcheese, I want you to know that I still regularly bought pig head and turned it into headcheese. For eight hours I would boil the living daylights out of it in a pail, then grind it up and take out the bones—that's all. The rest all went into the delicacy along with sausage spices we always brought from the US. Then we let it set in bread tins overnight in the fridge. The following morning we cut it up into the appropriate portions, wrapped it in cellophane and put it in the freezer, ready for our enjoyment.

Apparently, Lady Ann felt under pressure to write us every week as we tried to do to them. So, I assured her,

Mom, you also write about a race that is hard for you to keep up. Don't even try, please. We do not expect a reply to every letter. We do enjoy receiving your letters, of course, but do not feel that you have to write as often as we do. Relax. We are happy to hear something from you once a month. Anything more than that is a great bonus.

Notice that I had come around to address her as "Mom" rather than as "Lady Ann." We were getting worried about Dad, for her last two letters talked about his not being well. He was still fairly vigorous at 88 and pulled out of it every time so far, but you never know.

Towards end April 1996, we received news from Karen that Dad was suffering from a weakened heart condition. He had been somewhat weak and sickly all winter, but we had all thought it was pneumonia. I wrote to him "At your age, that should not come as a surprise, but somehow it does. We do regularly pray for you." This was the beginning of the end. He never read that letter.



Though his health had been up and down, he was still driving. On Wednesday morning he was driving in the morning but ended the day in the Abbotsford hospital. The family was hastily called together. They spent some quality time with him, including singing some of the old familiar Dutch Johannes De Heer hymns our family grew up with. On Sunday morning, in the sole presence of sister Bo, he quietly slipped away to be with his Lord. We were represented by Wiebe, who happened to be visiting them right after his Nigeria sojourn.



There is this famous picture of Wiebe running as fast as he could from Opa's home to the hospital to bring his false teeth, his long blond hair waving in the wind like a horse's mane. I have often jokingly remarked that this was the only time ever that Wiebe ran for a specific errand other than running itself.

Wiebe\*

Both Wiebe and Cynthia attended the funeral. Now Fran and I both had lost our parents. We thanked God for what they had meant to us from childhood till now.

### *Lydia & Chris*

Again there is not a lot of information in the letters about Lydia and family. So just a few sentences will have to suffice. From the letters:

Garba (Chris) was supposed to have had the launching of three short books that he had recently written, but so far he had not yet found the necessary funds for printing, so that is all "on hold" for now.

Lydia just finished her third year exams in Special Education at Unijos. The constant strikes there have caused her to lose a whole year! But now she has only one year to go and she is optimistic she will finally make it.

Jude is waiting for the results of his Junior Secondary School leaving exam but will definitely be continuing in Senior Secondary at Baptist High. Jesse passed the test to Baptist High but not the interview, so he might repeat a year at his private elementary school, Kiddy Joy. Jason will be going to Grade 1 at Kent Academy. So now all three boys will be in boarding schools and that will give Lydia more time to concentrate on her own education.

One Saturday in August 1995, while I was still in Grand Rapids, Jesse and Jason came to our house in the morning to read and play with some of our games. Jude didn't come along because he was at Miango for a Youth Camp. In the evening Lydia and Garba came over and joined Fran for a spaghetti supper. They spent the rest of the evening watching the wedding video together.

In September of 1995, Fran wrote,

Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup>, our Lydia turned 35. I went to greet her but she had traveled with a friend and won't be back for a few days. Chris had gone to Miango to visit Jason at KA. Maybe Lydia forgot that it was her birthday? So there was no party. I just left my card and gift and went home.

I was reminded of her first birthday with us way back in Wukari, when she did not know what birthdays were all about.

### *Kevin*

Kevin had already arrived in Grand Rapids a few weeks before Cynthia and Andy's wedding in June 1995. That was his first time of meeting Andy. Kevin served as usher for the wedding. After the wedding, Kevin needed our help for a business proposition he was developing for Botswana. He left with eight boxes of computer and related stuff to sell. He didn't have the money available and neither did we, so we opened a line-of-credit to help him with this venture. You should have seen the chaos in the basement when he was packing his stuff. It was nothing serious or permanent: just a bunch of equipment along with boxes strewn all over the place. Easy for us to clean up after he left.

Kevin had moved to Botswana already in early 1992 for an assignment with the American Peace Corps. He was still there in 1995 but now he was working privately for Damelin, a computer company in the capital city, Gabarone. That's the city that features so prominently in the popular books by Alexander Mc Call-Smith, *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series.

In a letter of January 1996, Fran wrote,

Kevin phoned several times during his wandering around Southern Africa trip with Wiebe. They were usually very brief calls, because he was using phone cards with limited time left on them. These cards tend to be quite expensive. Tuesday he was using someone's home phone and talked to John for about 30 minutes. I was away at school at a meeting so I missed it. Today we got an e-mail so we do keep in touch. It sounds as if he's about ready to leave Botswana and either move to South Africa or head back to the US. He now has only one course left to qualify for his Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer. So he'll probably try to finish that before he moves.

In a way we were surprised that he was getting that degree, because, at one time he had described it as “about as useful as a tailoring degree in a nudist colony!”

Soon after that he informed us that he had some job offers from South Africa which sounded very attractive to him. So now it looked as if he would leave Botswana quite soon. We started making plans to visit him sometime that year. In mid February he phoned to tell us that he was definitely moving to Cape Town. In a letter he was “giving us different travel options for our planned visit to him. It looks as if we’ll rent a Camper Van for part of the time so we don’t have to worry about hotels.”

### *Cynthia*

#### *Wedding Bells: Cynthia and Andy*

I have written earlier in this chapter about our private trip to North America during the 1994 summer and that in Grand Rapids we first met Andy, Cynthia’s boyfriend, as well as his parents. Things moved fast after that. Early September she sent us “a rough sample of their wedding invitation; they have some great ideas.” Wow! No wasting of time there!

Though far away, we were involved in preparing for the event. Apart from praying and paying for the wedding, I had to order four Nigerian outfits to be sewed by our local tailor in Jos.

These are for the groom’s wedding gang. In naira they cost a fortune, close to N4000. However, when you convert it into dollars, it turns out to be cheaper for the whole package than it would be to rent one tuxedo in North America! How do you like that for a screwed-up economic system?

I was having a suit made for myself by my tailor. Double breasted. Pant cuffs. Real sniffy! Alas, it looked terrible and felt even worse. When I put it on I felt like I was a 4 x 4 x 4! A fat cube! I brought it back to the tailor. He was not there so I just left it. Then he got worried and had a sleepless night over it. He measured it once again and discovered that he had made some serious mistakes, so he undid them. By the time I came for checkup, it felt much better. But there were still some more small alterations to be done. He had always been a good tailor for me, so that I was surprised at his serious mistakes on this suit. “Well, Fran says it looks good now—double-breasted, cuffs and all.”

Early May 1995 Cynthia was getting all excited “with the wedding date coming closer and closer. All sorts of showers organized for her. In the meantime, we have taken delivery of the Nigerian robes Andy ordered.”

Only two weeks before the wedding, Cynthia had graduated from Calvin with a degree in Sociology and soon landed a job as “housemother” in a group home. Andy was not yet finished and would continue pursuing his degree in Business and Japanese.

Cynthia and Andy were already “considering buying a house under a government programme for first-time home buyers of low income. It seems like a good deal for them, but we cautioned them to take certain things into consideration before they jump in too fast.” The deal went so fast that before the wedding they were already proud owners of a fairly large older home on Hall Street SE in Grand Rapids, not far from the old Calvin campus. “The US government is encouraging low-income people to buy their own house at a very low interest mortgage. They borrowed \$3000 from us so they could make the down payment. Not many young couples can move into their own home right after marriage, especially not students.” Buying a house with the help of their missionary parents, who had also gotten married while they were still students, was quite an achievement.

I wrote in companion Chapter 26 that our family friend, David Angye, would be in Grand Rapids at the time of the wedding in order to attend CRC Synod. He agreed to attend not only but also to give a lighthearted speech about how things would have gone for Cynthia if she were a Nigerian girl getting married. We knew that would be a very interesting story.

Early June we flew to Grand Rapids with a large bundle of grooms’ wedding attire, while I traveled with my first ever custom-made suit for that occasion. Though Fran and I owned rental properties, Cynthia and Andy were the first in our nuclear family to buy their first residence. It was a period of many firsts.

In contrast to Fran and my wedding back in 1962 and to the subsequent weddings of Kevin & Wiebe, this one was “flooded” with Boer family. Hendrik & Barb were there from Hawai; Ellie and Fred came from BC in their camper; Dick and Dianne arrived all the way from Vancouver Island on their motorcycle!



Dianne, Cynthia & Dick\*

We arrived in Grand Rapids just a week before the wedding, but Fran was still in time to attend a shower. Both of us worked on last minute preparations for the big day. The wedding itself was beautiful. A highlight was that both Fran and I walked Cynthia down an

aisle. At the same time Keith and Marti walked Andy down another aisle. A true meeting of two families! I loved the symbolism; so much better than our vulgar individualism.



Andy & Cynthia\*



Joining the Two Families\*

The reception was held at the Grand Rapids Art Gallery. One of the conditions was that we pay for security guards. The meal was a hearty breakfast catered by our favourite family restaurant, Boston House. Yes, breakfast, like bacon, ham, sausages, eggs, hashbrowns, etc. Pastor David told some great stories at the occasion. And then a lovely time with close family for the rest of the afternoon at the spacious Tanis home on their front lawn. It was such a grand occasion for us that was made even grander by the presence of so many siblings and spouses for me. Elly and Fred sang a duet that was a bit too long for good taste, but that I remember especially because of Fred's tremendous but untrained opera voice that I always admired so much.

Cynthia was once again into singing at her church and enjoying it. She had also taken a real interest in sewing. She sewed an outfit for Fran and sent it to her when she was "alone" in Jos. Fran commented, "It fits perfectly – a sunflower patterned pants and a long black top with a sunflower pocket and collar. I'll certainly think of her every time I wear it since she just loves sunflowers herself."

By mid-March 1996 Cynthia was getting somewhat discouraged. "She had applied for another job that is more suitable for her social worker profession and would pay more than double. After the interview she was almost sure she would get it, but she didn't and was terribly disappointed. She was so hoping for a 'real' job." Fortunately, her discouragement did not last very long and by end March she informed us that her old job was going alright.

End March she phoned us at 3 am—Grand Rapids time. Fran couldn't figure out what was going on for her to call us at such an (for her) unearthly time. For us it was noon and thus no problem. She said it was the first time she had ever worked night shift and she was having a hard time staying awake. We were the only ones she knew who would definitely be

awake! Unfortunately John was already at his office and Wiebe had not yet returned from his trip to southern Nigeria. She also talked to both our workers, James and Asabe. At times when she normally phoned, our workers had already gone home for the day. So that was special for her; and both of them were thrilled to be able to hear Cynthia's voice once again.

### *Wiebe*

While in his third year at Calvin, November 1994, Wiebe's cross-country team qualified for a national meet in Pennsylvania. That was quite an achievement. He came sixth on his team, only two *seconds* behind number four and four *seconds* behind another one. Fran wrote, "For a kid who refused to even try *walking* until he was eighteen months, he's come a long way!" But the team as a whole ended up in sixth place; they had counted on being second. That was a real disappointment.

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, Wiebe went to Jos in 1995 to "mom sit" while I stayed to do deputation in North America. Wiebe was planning to audit some courses at Unijos. However, they still had not opened. In the meantime, he was enjoying himself with his Nigerian friends and also doing some coaching at Hillcrest.

After I returned to Jos, I added,

We both enjoy his stay here, but I must confess that I have become used to having an empty nest with the freedom that brings and the lack of hassles that come when you have young people around. I have sometimes thought we should take in some Hillcrest students who are in need of a place to stay. But this experience is telling me not to do so. He was planning to go to Kenya for a few months and enroll at Daystar University. Now he found out that they accept new students only in the fall, not in January. So now he will have to rethink what to do with the first few months of 1996.

Late November the three of us were invited for dinner to the Kapurias, an Indian family. Fran wrote,

I taught their daughter Lavanya in 8th grade quite a few years ago. She is now in her second year at Calvin. Her parents wanted to say "Thanks" to Wiebe for the help he gave her when she started at Calvin. So Fran and I were invited to come along and enjoy the meal. These people are definitely not vegetarian but rather "carnivorian!" A great variety of foods, especially meats, and everything spiced wonderfully as only Indians do it.

Wiebe was now the runner celebrity around Hillcrest. Early December 1995 he organized the annual twelve-hour relay. This was the 10th Annual Run and he wanted to have a really good team. He did all the training, organizing, advertising etc. It was a great day, lots of good participation, good sportsmanship and encouragement for the team. They ran their

120 miles and collected money for a local charity named Christian Care for the Widows and Aged (CCWA). Several people from that organization came down to the track and stayed some hours to watch the event.

Some more vignettes from mid-December 1995:

Wiebe is auditing some classes in Political Science at Unijos. However, the lecturers do not show up more than half of the time! How do you like that for responsibility? This evening Wiebe had three Nigerian student friends over for a meal. He did all the cooking himself. We had a very fine discussion together about the relationship of faith and economics. It was a nice evening.

Wiebe has been going to Unijos every day this week but has not really attended many classes. He hangs around waiting for a prof who still might show up and meets very interesting people while he's waiting. This afternoon we went with him to CCWA. He was able to present them with 60,000 naira (\$750). They were very impressed with his dedication and determination to help them out. It is fun to be part of giving like that.

Wiebe had also been doing a weekly programme of African music on Plateau Radio. You may remember he did something similar during his senior year at Hillcrest. He was very good at it what with his mastery of Nigerian Pidgin English.

In mid January Fran wrote,

Wiebe is still enjoying himself here. When the university students left for Christmas break, they were told they would resume classes on January 3. Then it was moved to January 15, but now it's the 18th and he still hasn't had an actual class. He often goes to the campus and waits, but so far no teacher has showed up. So this morning he decided to go to Taraba State with John for a few days, just for a change of scenery and to spend some extra time with his Dad.

Later in the month he actually attended quite a few classes at Unijos, but because he did not have a writing project like the other students, he had lots of free time. He managed to stay very busy with reading, writing and socializing. "Wiebe brings in a lot of life and activity. Sometimes perhaps too much--as when he brings in his friends during the day and we find the preparations for supper have disappeared! This weekend will be quiet for he is going to Kaduna with some friends."

He also started following me around to videotape me in my work. That was his Christmas present to me. He had the whole project carefully planned and knew how to edit videos, rearrange things, do the background music, put words on the tape, etc. Wondering what the finished product will look like!

He had only two more weeks of classes before he would start traveling around Nigeria again. He did travel and spent time with Bishop Yisa and family in Minna, the capital of

**Niger State. He also had a Lebanese Muslim friend dealing in precious stones living in that same city. You can imagine that these were two very different visits!**

**From there he ended up in the deep south-east of Port Hartcourt, where he had some interesting adventures. The people in that part of the country are more paranoiac than in our area. One time he entered some place where security was an issue and policemen grabbed him, demanding to know what he as a white person was doing there. This was a potential chance for them to squeeze some “white” money out of this young man. Wiebe got out of this situation unscathed because of his intimate knowledge of both Nigerian soccer and politics as well as his fluency in Pidgin. He somehow turned the conversation towards soccer and politics and so bowled the policemen over with laughter at his humour and language proficiency as well as amazement at his familiarity with famous Nigerian soccer heroes that they became instant “friends.” He was no longer “under arrest” and was now free to go. Typically, such stories would end with what would now be a friendly request for some money, since they had not received their salaries. Whether this story ended typically, I do not know.**

**The day before James and I brought Wiebe to Kano, we were invited to Lydia’s house for dinner. I guess it was as kind of a farewell party. “This was sort of unexpectedly arranged late this morning. Since we had already planned to have duck for dinner, we sent them the duck and added a rabbit to it. So we will still have our own home-raised meat at Lydia’s table! I am sure it will taste great as Lydia is still an excellent cook.”**

**The next morning I helped Wiebe pack. That was a specialty for which I was famous even among our children. What an honour!**

**I started a late April 1996 letter to Dad and Mom as follows:**

**It is possible that at this very time of writing Wiebe II is with you guys or at least in BC. He looked forward to being in BC with all the Boers and hope he was not disappointed. We also hope that you guys enjoyed having him around for a while. He usually brings a lot of fermentation in his wake, which I hope was not too hard for you to take.**

**Dad never read this letter. But we were so happy that Wiebe had arrived in BC in time for him to still visit his Opa.**

### ***The Animal Farm***

**Time to update you on our animal farm. Here’s an account from a Fran letter while I was still in GR:**

**James has recently butchered thirteen of the ducks. They were eating a lot and not growing much more. So he felt it was time. He's keeping two males and a few females for the next round. There are three sets of chicks now, two hens are setting and two are preparing to set. The rabbits are doing alright as well. I finally gave up**



on our dog, Grog, and her new “dog door”; she could not operate it. So I bought black car seat material, cut it into strips and nailed it at the hole in the screen door. Now she goes in and out freely, since the main door is usually open during the day. Walbe's pigeons have been coming in droves and ruining our ceiling. So we had a compound meeting (Dick Seinen and myself!) and decided to get Angus to put all wire between the roof and the ceiling. Now the pigeons are very frustrated and flying all around the house. I hope they'll soon get the message! Walbe's peacocks are still wandering around freely as well, but when Grog sees them in her territory, wow, does she ever chase after them!

And then here's my report written late March 1996:

Our rabbits are as prolific as ever and we continue to enjoy them at the table. We have some 70 in the cages right now, while only a few days ago we put a dozen in the freezer. Come Easter and we will give one to each of our junior staff on our compound to grace their Easter table. We have a lot of chickens running around, but not that many adults. Over the past year we've had many chicks die on us, but that now seems to be largely under control. These are native chickens and they are totally undisciplined when it comes to brooding. They sit on each other's eggs frequently and easily abandon their own nests. Sometimes they will sit for over six weeks and then nothing hatches—all are rotten. With four adult female ducks around also laying eggs, the situation is even more confusing since the ducks and chickens also sit on each other's eggs. So we keep hoping for a batch of *chucks*! The upshot is an inefficient system with many eggs never hatching. We are making plans to separate them in the hopes of greater efficiency. We really enjoy all this animal activity in our barnyard, but if it were not for James who does most of the work for us, we would not have the time to care for them.

### *End of Ministry in Nigeria*

We had told Abe Vreeke that we'd like to work two more terms in Nigeria, one as a regular term and one where I would be the “accompanying spouse.” We planned a trip in the summer to speak at a conference in the Philippines. We hoped to visit Kevin in Botswana during the Christmas break. And Jane was making plans to spend a semester in Nigeria during which time she would live with us.

But then a huge shock! Suddenly our Nigerian ministry and life came to their end. On May 6, 1996 it was revealed that I had gotten involved in a seriously compromised situation that did dishonour to my Lord and to Fran first of all, and then to my family, the Mission and the Nigerian church, not to speak of myself. It led to our termination with CRWM and our return to North America. It is hard to explain such a disastrous end to a joyous 30 years of ministry and life in Nigeria.

The rest of this section is written by Fran; i.e., the “I” here refers to her.

John's anger with the mission in recent years certainly played a part. Pent-up anger is a dangerous thing. Maybe even his latent feeling of anger and frustration when his family hadn't allowed him to take the REC position some years ago. A counselor said that a possible explanation for John's destructive behaviour was that it was his way of taking control over the actual decision as to when to leave Nigeria.

He probably had allowed himself to become too proud while hearing constant praise for his unusually successful ministry. The wisdom of Proverbs 16:18 is still so true: In the NIV, "Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before a fall." In *The Message*, "First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall."

He had allowed himself to feel invincible about handling temptations. Popular psychology tells us that people in positions of leadership or power tend to be risk takers and therefore are especially vulnerable. He should have made himself accountable to his Christian friends and his own family, but instead he felt he could handle everything on his own and tended to push them away.

And then of course, another popular explanation is that this was a typical middle-aged masculine attempt at trying to prove he wasn't really getting old. He still wanted to be popular and sought-after by the younger generation.

Whatever the reason or explanation, in all these areas he had allowed satan's evil spirit, rather than God's Holy Spirit, to take control over a *part* of his life. It must be stressed that John had been and continued to be equally serious about his ministry that went on simultaneously. His temporary unchristian behaviour in one area of his life did not nullify his lifelong ministry or make it worthless.

It was dreadfully humiliating to inform family, colleagues, friends, CRCN, CRWM, II Highland and other supporting churches of his moral failure.

Satan had meant to undermine John's entire ministry and to destroy his family in the process. Through the power of God, we are able instead to testify about mercy and grace. The children and I stood firm in our commitment to him as a father and husband, condemning his actions, but not his person. In 2012 we happily celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Several years ago we completed our eight-volume series on Christian-Muslim relations. The financial wherewithal to produce those books has been a miracle. The books are being well received and well used in Nigeria, our main target area.

I had to resign from my much-loved teaching job at Hillcrest. Mr. Arp, the principal, wrote a strong letter of recommendation for me, begging the Mission to allow me to return to Nigeria and continue. That was not to be.

And with that we draw the curtain of privacy over an intensely painful but private family episode.