

# When I think about the days of my Youth

By Herre Johans de Boer

Translated by: Johan (John) Willems de Boer

## Introduction

Grandma (Beppe) Trijntje en Grandpa (Pake) Johan had a family of eight children. Herre was the youngest, and is married to Aunt Holly; currently their residence is in Sneek, Friesland. His children used to say, “Why don’t you write about the days of your youth, before everything is forgotten”? In a nutshell, Herre has accomplished this and has written this in a very interesting story. Grandfather Johan and especially Grandma Trijntje have as far as I am concerned come back to life. The story as it is told gives us also a very clear picture of the crisis-years and the occupation of the Second World War in Sneek and outlining areas. The story was written in the winter of 1993 - 1994. Following you will find some pictures of the families who Herre makes reference to in his story. – *Johan de Boer*

*A note from John the translator:* When I met my Aunt Holly for the first time, Herre brought her home to meet the family, I must have been around thirteen years old and Holly about seventeen or so. One of my uncles, Omke Feike said to me, make sure that you call her Aunt Holly, which I did, much to the embarrassment of Holly, needless to say I never called her Aunt again although she is one of my favorite Aunts. This was when my grandparents lived at the Wijde Noorderhorne # 19 upstairs.



omke Herre

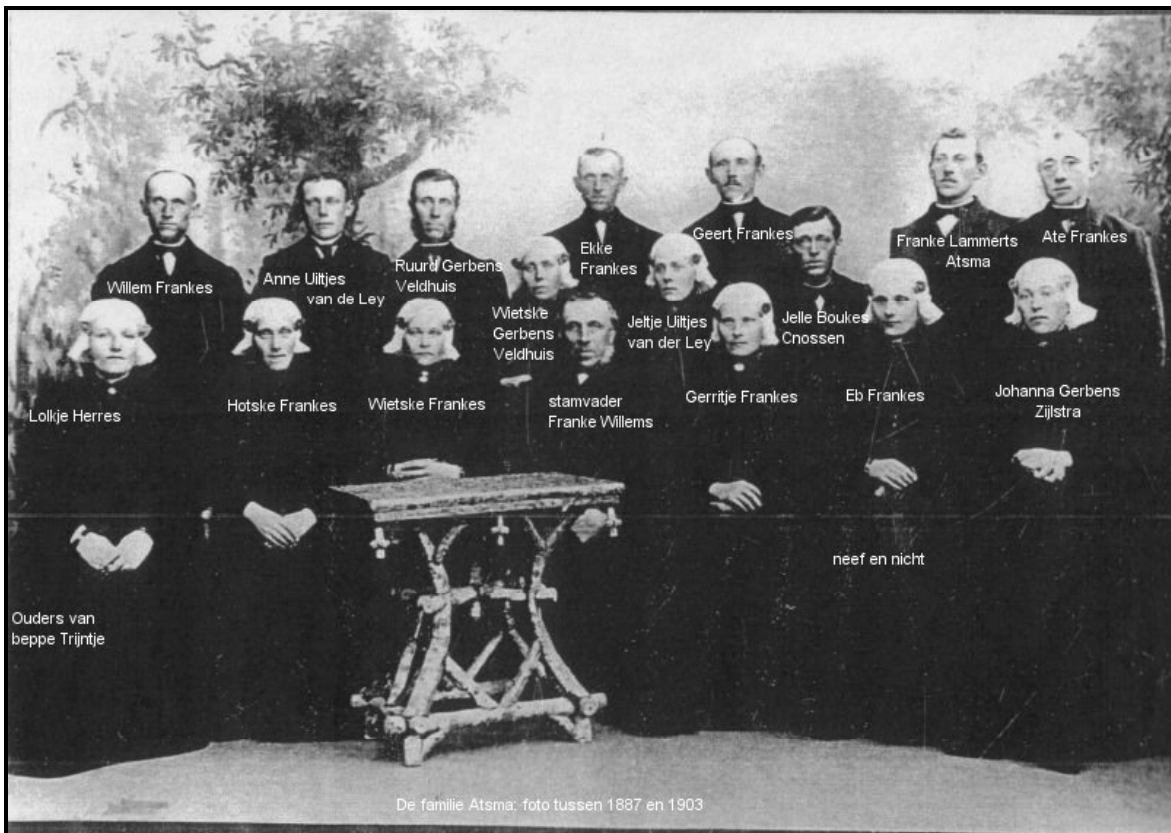


tante Holly





Johan and Trijntje de Boer and children



The Atsma Family 1887 - 1903



The de Boer Family

### Part 1 – The Early Years

*By Herre de Boer, winter 1993-94*

*"Why don't you record some of your memories of the past before you know, it is all forgotten"?*

The lady the man and the coffee tin  
 The monkey the sled with the preacher  
 The pickerel and the pike  
 The dirty boy with his hands in his pants.  
 While the full moon was shining  
 Using a ladder I climbed through a window  
 You don't have the nerve  
 You don't have the nerve  
 Here is a fish and there is a bird  
 Here goes the girl; you flirt.

A lot of memories came back in my mind when the question was asked: "What do you still remember from the past?" and I tried to answer that question. Just like the verse above, very chaotic. In order to make some sense out of it, well I will start with the early life of my parents.

That interesting song above was one of the many songs my mother knew, she often and with pleasure sang them for us. Also a lot of memories other of my mother, therefore I will try to start each chapter with a song like that.

The history of our great grand parents has been documented from before the year 1700, which was found in archives by both my brother Sjirk and nephew Johan (son of my oldest brother Ate). Pretty well immediately the surnames: de Boer and Atsma were found and also Christian names like Sjirk, Johan have been used in the family for centuries.

Most of our great grand ancestors lived in a small geographic area in the province of Friesland in The Netherlands. Workum, was in those days considered a far distance away from the town Sneek. Most of the occupations of our family were in the following categories, farmer, farmer's labourers, salesmen, domestic helpers, and merchants or bar men. It was noted alongside one of the person's that he was of the Christian Reformed religion. All the others were Reformed.

*“ When my father was still a bachelor and mother a young maiden”*

### **My Father.**

My father, Johan de Boer, was born and raised in Nijland, a small village North of Sneek in Friesland. His parents were Ate Feikes de Boer (July 27, 1850 – Feb. 3, 1929) and Hinke Cnossen (July 24, 1850 – Feb. 17, 1929).

Grandpa and grandma de Boer were married on the 11th of May 1872. They were blessed with nine children, named as follows:

Feike,  
Dieuwke, (she lived two years),  
Tjiske (she lived one year and died five days before Dieuwke),  
Dieuwke,  
Tjiskje (she lived one year),  
Sjirk,  
Tjiskje,  
Johan (April 12 1888 – April 18, 1974)  
Klaas.

My grandparents lived on a farm on the road between Nyland and Folsgare in Friesland. Beppe stayed home a lot and was not always too vocal. You could at times find her in a jovial mood, but mostly she maintained a low profile. Her greatest hobby was her flower garden. Grandpa was very active in politics and church matters. Once he was for a little while the deputy-mayor of the county where they lived. As mentioned he was active in the church, especially in the Reformed church in Nijland. There was a lot of animosity within the churches in those days and grandpa was one of the fore fathers for the church on the right.

Mr. S. ten Hoeve, director of the marine museum in Sneek, found some very interesting articles written by my grandfather. He was very impressed and said; "Even though this person had only basic elementary education, he was very clever in his field".

According to my father, my grandfather was always eyeing problems of a larger nature, rather than those in

the immediate area. Grandpa was therefore under the impression that no poor people lived in his village of Nijland, not realizing that some people living on the same road as his sometimes barely got by during the winter months. Grandma, when the opportunity arose would at times bring food to these people, but grandpa was not aware of this or so he let on.

Little Johan was raised in a very quiet area in Friesland, during weekdays there was school and that was usually the only excitement. It was quite a big deal in those days when a child at school received a new slate, (this is a small wooden box with a lid where the writing materials were stored, including a sponge etc.)

When a car came through the village, everyone came running to view this wonder. When an older person bought a bicycle, the salesman usually provided lessons for the buyer to learn how to use it, which was always very entertaining for the children.

In their home many games were played such as dominos or other board games. But listening to my father's stories I never got the impression that a lot of fun occurred at home. My father was never to eager to talk about his parental home compared to my mother who was always willing to share her stories. One thing was very disappointing for my father; he was not interested in becoming a farmer but took a big interest in becoming a teacher. When he mentioned this to his father, the answer he got was: " Well, your brother Sjik has tried it and he could not make it work".

It was after that that my father chose to become a painter and he was allowed to attend the trade school in the city of Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland. It was normal in those days that young people learned a trade working for an employer.

The years my father spent in Leeuwarden were for him the good times of his life. Life in the city of Leeuwarden was full of excitement compared to life in the village where he had lived. Some of his teachers actually taught a bit more than the required subjects for the trade. From one of them my father learned how to paint pictures.

When an opportunity arose my father visited a theatre at the local fair, which was not the place not to be associated with in his home village. As a child my father really thought that the devil lived in a "merry go round".

People who lived in Nijland would get very angry when an advertisement was written in the blue sky by an airplane, they would call that an insult to god. My father was really good in making fun in song about famous people. An older former mayor employed a young maid in his household; he was blamed for impregnating her.

A song about this went as follows:

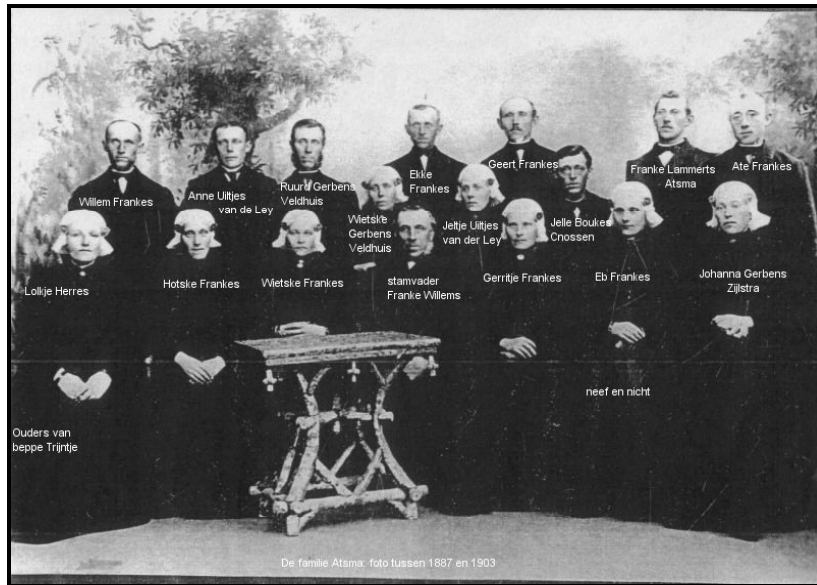
On this earth he has lived a good eighty years and can sing,  
His mind is still young; he has shown this with another off spring.

You did not want to show up in Nijland with ideas like that. I was never able to figure out how my father thought about the discipline expected from his father. At times he would unexpectedly vehemently express himself about a text like, "For those who expect the blessings from above, think that there is no water in the sea and that mountains are as flat as the prairies", he would then say out loud "A lot of bull shit that is". But he always remained a son of Ate Feikes, and that had a big influence on him.

## My Mother

Trijntje Atsma, born November 13, 1890 in Uitwellingerga, died March 24, 1973 in Sneek. Her parents were: Willem Frankes Atsma (July 23, 1861 Dec. 22, 1933) en Lolkje Herres Zijlstra (Sept.1, 1868 – may 8, 1939).

Grandma and grandpa were married May 17, 1890 and were blessed with eleven children.



Willem Frankes en Lolkje Zijlstra to the left  
Trijntje  
Neeltje  
Franke  
Herre  
Ekke  
Lammert  
Ate  
Jan  
Wietske  
Beeuwkje  
Geert.

Now in January 1994, only Geert is still alive.

The Atsma family lived in Uitwellingerga, a small village south of the town of Sneek and later in the village of Atzebuorren, just West of Sneek. After my mother's wedding the family lived in Heidenskip and Nijland for a while.

Uitwellingerga at the time was located what seemed to be at the end of the world. It was not far from the city of Sneek, but the roadway between the two places was in terrible condition. To the west, east, and south of "Top en Twel" were pastures, grass fields and lots of large ponds with ditches, canals and many lakes. Those who wished to travel from Sneek to Joure, (a small town) in the area had to take a big detour via Spannenburg to get there. The geographic location of Uitwellingerga made it a refuge for petty criminals who lived in that area.

The provincial police from Sneek were called in many times to keep the peace, but the disturbers found protection in the natural marshes which provided excellent hiding places where they were impossible to find. My mother told us with a little shame but lots of pride, that several of her uncles were more than once associated with the rebels. They were family members of the Zijlstra family

Being the oldest in the family, my mother was taken out of school when she was around ten years old. There was so much work to do at home, all the help available was needed.

Mother thought this was awful; she liked school a lot and was a very good student. Even the teacher came to visit the family but he could not persuade her parents to change their mind.

Especially in the spring and summer months there was always a lot of work on the farm. Mother did most of the work in the kitchen, as well as looking after her younger siblings and assisting with the laundry. Most of the men were busy working the fields and mother was busy bringing food and drinks to them.

When in the fall the cattle were housed in the barn, times were not that hectic. Needless to say there was always lots of work to be done around the farm at anytime, but once dusk started and it became dark, one's mind could think of other things. We sometimes had guests from the family stay with us or we were allowed to visit family ourselves.

There was always a lot of fun at the Atsmas when visitors came to stay with them for a while. You had to brace yourself for a lot of teasing. The visitors should not be surprised that it was impossible to crawl under the blankets at night. Beds sheets were made so that you could only crawl a little ways under the wool blankets. It was on such occasions that you did not let on anything was wrong even though you might have been upset sleeping in a ice cold bedroom. (Houses were not centrally heated in those days). The first obvious question in the morning would be something like "did you sleep well last night?"

Around the time of St. Nicolas, early December mother visited an uncle and aunt where they also celebrated this festivity. The presents consisted usually of a baked doll made from pastry or something similar, but first you had to go to the barn where it was almost dark. Above in the hayloft you heard strange noises and there were the sound of chains banging back and forth. Mother was usually not scared, as she always liked a bit of exhilaration.

This was a good thing, when stories were told, which happened quite often, you heard about the hair-raising situations you would never have dreamed of. Mother told us that after listening to these gruesome stories, the kids did not have the nerve to go to the outhouse. There was no inside toilet facility. The outhouse was located in the dark yard with no light and you were afraid of what might happen.

One of those stories was about several tough guys, who had just consumed several glasses of gin in the bar when they invented a new game: "the Lord's Supper". When they left the bar, late in the evening, some said that some strange crying noises were heard in the far distance close to the lake. None of the men ever returned home again.

Another story was about a farmer returning from a cattle sale in Leeuwarden pretty well intoxicated. Normally the farmer had to get off the carriage pulled by a horse to open several gates as he made progress going home. But this time he could stay in his seat and all of the gates opened automatically by themselves. Arriving at the farm, the horse stopped and waited. The farmer had died and that was where they found him.

A lot of stories were told about family members, for example about Atze Geert Atsma, a rough merchant mariner who was also a long track speed skater and nobody was ever able to beat him or so the story goes. Atze always wore a coat so dirty, when he took it off it would stand up straight on its own. Usually the first races were the easy ones so he did not remove his coat for them but as the competition became stronger he removed his coat and placed it somewhere on the racecourse. Everybody seeing the coat would skate around it with great respect. His secret: "I consume a very large piece of horse meat everyday". As the story goes on it is led to believe that he drowned in his yacht in the Zuidersea.

Willem Geerts Atsma (1791-1874) was another of our great grand parents. When he was a young lad, he was drafted by Napoleon's army and was expected to walk during the war to Russia. Somewhere in Poland, Willem and a friend deserted his army but found themselves on the wrong side of the front. A quick return was impossible. It was many years later that they were finally able to come back to their village of Uitwellingerga. Willem found his love, got married and lived a peaceful life. He never, so the story goes, shared his experiences of army ventures in far away lands with anyone.

An uncle of my mother was an enthusiastic hunter and loved to hunt for geese during the winter months. For that he used a gun mounted on a small boat. To aim the gun he would have to manoeuvre the boat in the direction of his target. Once he got injured during a trip and could not get home. Many days later he was found frozen but still alive in some ponds between two of the surrounding villages.

Mother also had a very famous uncle, his name was Wijbe Zijlstra. Once I brought home a book from the library about the history of long track speed skating, mother looked a bit through the book and said: "Here 's Wijbe in his underwear". This man took part in many international competitions; this picture was taken at such an event. Mother had seen him in training and told me that a lot of training took place on some of the frozen smaller water filled ditches so he could get stronger leaning forward into the wind. During times when ice was not available he would train by doing some of the heavy work required on a farm.

The sister of uncle Wijbe, my grandmother Lolkje was also a very good ice skater, she seemed to float over the ice, that's how beautifully she skated my mother said. Once when grandma Lolkje was too old to skate, she had one wish to visit family in a small village called Terhorne on the other side of the Sneekermeer during the winter when there was ice. A trip like that would normally take a good part of a day but a fast skater could do this in less than an hour.

They placed grandma Lolkje on a chair, which was mounted on a large sled with a small charcoal lit fire on the sled to keep her feet warm. Note: (ladies in those days, wore long skirts). While two of her sons pushed the sled over the lake, one of them "smelled something burning" What could be wrong? Well you guessed it; grandma's skirt had started to smoulder creating the smell. There was no open water in the immediate area; the lake was frozen solid, how do you now extinguish a fire? Yes, "Piss it out"

One of mother's brothers, Herre Atsma compared himself to uncle Wijbe. During one winter he registered for a short distance (500 m) speed skating competition. Having so much self-confidence of winning the first prize he took a taxi to the event in Bozum. Herre was eliminated during the first round. He was teased about this incident for the rest of his life, like they would say, "Have you ever been in Bozum? It is supposed to be so beautiful there, did you order a taxi, Ekke?" and the story went on and on.

One of the best things to occur would be a cold winter with lots of ice. Most of the time it was difficult to travel from Uitwellingerga, but with ice you could travel almost anywhere and that's what they did. "When the hormones of the young start to move, the older ones are not to be held back either" how true this is. A cold winter also had other advantages, kissing amongst distance family was not unknown in some villages. Lovers from other cities or villages were not always welcome and many times one could receive a good beating if he or she did not leave quick enough. On the ice one could skate to someone of his or her liking and many relationships were established. There were some good things about ice huts built on the ice.

My mother never told us very much about her life when she was a young woman. I think that it must have been very difficult.

A big trip would be attending the catechism classes which were held once weekly during the winter months. How she ever went from Atzebuorren to Oosthem (two small villages) in the dark I will never know. She enjoyed the fact that during these get together she was able to use her intellect again at which she was very good. Most of the catechism classes were to study and answers and questions of the "Heidelberg Catechism" which had to be memorized. It was also a great opportunity to meet other girls her age from the area and then you were able to hear and catch up with the latest gossip.



When I think about all of this and with how much feeling she sang, it gives me the impression how much my mother enjoyed her life in the Atsma family, especially when she would sing the song:

“When I remember the days of my youth,  
and think about the fun we had playing,  
World what are your riches?  
What is gold with its glister?  
When in springtime the flowers grow all over the meadow,  
O, how happy the children were,  
O, Old Church tower, I always remember you”.



## **Part 2**

### ***“AT THE ANNUAL FAIR IN BOLSWARD I NOTICED A NICE YOUNG LADY”***

There was no way I can find out how our parents met. It is known however according to mother that when Johan, (my father) met his future in-laws for the first time during a visit, the following happened. It was during the winter and we had lots of robust ice, which made skating from town to town very easy. So Johan arrived on skates right at the house because the Atsmas lived on a side-canal between Oosthem and the Geew of the “Ald Rien”, a canal that runs from Sneek to IJlst. Scared a little, mother said that a clumsy skater was coming around the corner but everything worked out fine.

With a step like a figure skater Johan (father) came skating up to the house. After removing his skates he greeted with a very nice little curtsy, in the kitchen Mr. and Mrs. Atsma as follows: “Dag, Atsma, dag frou

Atsma” (meaning Hello, Mr. Atsma, Hello Mrs. Atsma). The following days after milking the cows, the Atsma brothers came in the kitchen and said “Dag, Atsma, Dag frou Atsma”! Setting the tone for future meetings.

Mother was flattered with the fact that a “Son of Ate Feikes de Boer from Nijland” came to court her. That special feeling stayed with her for the rest of her life.

My father and mother were united in marital matrimony, May 9th, 1914. They made their home in Nyesijl a small village southwest of the town of Sneek. There seven of their eight children were born. I am the only one who was born in Sneek and am therefore a Snitser. There is also another difference. It is a custom that birth announcements are placed in local newspapers with a Biblical tone. The de Boers being religious people placed the following in the local newspaper for the first seven children: “ Through the love of our Lord, today we were blessed with the birth of a healthy...” In my case the “Through the love of our Lord” was omitted.

The average time difference in time of birth between Ate, Willem (translator’s dad), Lolkje, Hinke, Feike, Franke and Sjirk was about two years. Then after four years and ten months, what a surprise – a son. Mother at one time thought, “well I am becoming an old lady” but my god what a pleasant surprise it was.

Being a painter in the country was not always an easy task. During the winter months, there was practically no work to be found, it was necessary to earn enough through the summer so budgeting through the whole year was “job one” in order to survive through the winter.

My father always wished to maintain a standard of living for his family similar to that of his parents. Even during the winter months he employed two painters and also in the household there were two maids. According to Hinke my sister, mother was never too interested in raising a large family. Obviously she knew like nobody else that work is never but than never done. She was quoted as saying after her fourth child: “We now have four children, a perfect family two boys and two girls; a nice family, don’t you think Johan?” not realizing she was only half way.

Father was an excellent craftsman in his trade. Many of his friends and colleagues have told me this over the years. In business administration affairs, he was not so gifted. In this instance he was a perfect replica of Karel Gildemacher’s father, a gardener in Sneek. This is not really a compliment. Karel represented his father in something like this:

Either one or another capitalist  
living in the Lake of the Woods  
needed thirty sheets of wallpaper.  
My father ordered them and they should bring  
at least a Guilder each. (About a dollar)  
But I remembered that they also grew,  
in the ditches for nothing,  
around the highway towards IJsbrechtum.  
So I took my bike  
and as soon I got there I pulled thirty  
of the weeds out of the ditch.  
Very nice I said to my father,  
never were thirty guilders made any faster.  
We can’t do this dear boy, my father replied,  
we got them for nothing so it would not be fair,  
to charge this much.  
If we charge a knaak (two fifty),  
just for the bike ride,  
that’s just perfect.

My father was very particular. Before a project could be started a lot of preparation was required in the workshop. Paint mixing, making sure colours would match, etc. As a general rule this would take many hours of work as it was done without computers or the like. My father had a hand driven cart, which he would load with all the supplies before he went on his way. For instance, a trip to Abbega a little ways away, was in those days a long trip with the handcart.

When sometime later, all of the do-it-yourself products arrived on the market, my father had a difficult time accepting it. "A painter is not appreciated by the people anymore" he would say.

The basic materials my father used were mostly delivered when he lived in Nijeziyl, by means of a cart, pulled by a horse. By these means also some of the household supplies were delivered to the house.

Invoices when they arrived were sometimes difficult to understand. When the name of a product was not recognized, he would mark it as ("Een dinkje, 10 cts.") - "One thing, 10 cts". Once my father was charged for three cans of green paint, although he did not order any green paint. " But you did order three shirts the delivery boy would say", to which my father replied, yes there were three shirts with the order.

My father's painting skills allowed him to use all kinds of techniques you do not hear about too much anymore. As an example he was able to make an exact replica of marble or any shade of wood with paint or varnishes.

The paint business in Nijeziyl did not fair very well and was not able to support the large de Boer family. It was then when my father made the decision to start the business in Sneek, a town much larger and not far away from the homestead. It was on the Oosterdijk where the initial start was made and I was born on that street. Times were very difficult in the late "twenties, and for a lot of the citizens times were very depressing to say the least. A lot of business people had to declare bankruptcy; my fathers business also fell because of the hard times.

We moved from the Oosterdijk to a house on the Looxmagracht, not too far away, and my father tried again to build a business from scratch. It happened because of necessity when my mother would check her husbands pant pockets for a nickel or a dime. My father fell sick quite a bit in those days but he was running a business again although it was operated out of his home, nevertheless it was OK.

Obviously there were bills to be paid and the children had to be schooled. There was a large family to support, but my parents succeeded to get through this difficult time, which was very commendable.

These hard times also took a toll for my older brothers and sisters; they were all very good students and would have enjoyed continued education, this unfortunately depended on the family's financial situation. As an example, Feike was taken from the school for secondary education to earn some additional funds and placed in an office to work as a clerk for \$ 1.50 a week. Hinke got a job as a domestic worker in a clergy's family. It was required of her that she consumed her meals in the kitchen, but when the time came to read a chapter from the bible and praying time she was allowed to join the family. Later she got employment in a more liberal type of a family where she really got the feeling being part of the family.

The only one of the children, who joined my father in the business, was my brother Willem. After the Second World War, my father become more reluctant to climb the long extension ladders, so additional help had to be hired to assist in larger projects.

I did get an opportunity to help once when the farm of my uncle Sije required a new paint job. This uncle was married to my mother's youngest sister, she first worked for him as a household assistant and he was quite a bit older than her. My job was to paint the "Uleboerd", this a plaque normally mounted at the front of the main building identifying the geographic area where the farm is located.

At one of the occasions when I was there with my father, we had to find cover in the barn because a torrential rain shower hit us, uncle Sije came walking through with a bull behind him on a rope. The bull breathed very

loud, much louder than uncle Sije when Willem quietly asked: “Can you tell which one of the two is uncle Sije?” we did not dare to break out laughing, because we did not know our new uncle too well yet.

I don't remember anything about our life on the Oosterdijk. Even the time on the Looxmagracht brings back only a few memories. For example, I was allowed to attend church with the family for the first time and after the service Hinke would ask, “how did you find it”, to which I replied just like my father would answer: “ It was a nice sermon.” Which made me mad because everybody busted out laughing.

During my younger days growing up, it was not as busy any more like it used to be. My brother Ate was a teacher in Sondel a small village in the southwest part of the province and Hinke also worked outside the home through the day.

If I remember correctly we moved to our house in the Wijde Noorderhorne, in around 1935, and that's where most of my memories are collected. My parents lived there till the 1950's when they moved to the Korte Vreugde, a house they were familiar with because Rein and Hinke lived there with their children Tineke and Harry.

Later in the twilight years of their lives, they lived in Tabor, a home for senior citizens where both of them lived out their lives.



This picture of the Wijde Noorderhorne shows the street around the turn of the century.

Our house was the third one from the right, Faber a blacksmith lived on the corner, next to him was the butcher Groenland and next to our house the one with the higher roof was the veterinarian Hofstra. The building at the end of the street is Hotel Hanenburg an easy orientation point. The butcher's storefront has been changed over the years .

### ***“HOME, HOME, SWEET HOME”***

Our home on the Wijde Noorderhorne is for me my parental home. Can you imagine, there were two house numbers; one for the store, # 17 and our living quarters that were upstairs had # 19. The family always used the door to the store, because you could get to the stairway taking you upstairs. A noisy bell would ring when the door opened; we would than yell out loud, “Stay there!”

This home upstairs was somewhat uncomfortable and difficult to maintain for my mother as I detected, but for a child it was very adventuresome. The stairway from downstairs ended in a small hall, at the front on the

street-side was the living room. Further back we had a kitchen and a smaller kitchen off the hall where the laundry was done; our toilet consisting of a barrel was also in this area. This barrel got emptied weekly or more often as required by the city and while I sit here writing my story it seems that I can still smell it. Additionally there was another hall with two steps going up to a bedroom and a back living room that had a balcony looking over a yard where my father maintained a workshop and stored his supplies. This yard was also accessible by going around the corner where Faber, the Blacksmith lived over what was called "Het Bolwerk".

In the smaller kitchen was the stairway to the attic. On the street side of the attic was a bedroom and the rest of the attic was one large area portioned off with old materials such as blankets and left over remnants. There were a few beds in the bedroom. After you went to bed, the first thing you would do, crawl under the blankets. It was ice cold in this room but you were never alone, a lot of mice made their home behind the walls. When lying under the blankets you could hear the little rascals, running back and forward. Sometimes there were even stranger noises; just outside there was a wire connected to the house and when a bird landed on it would make an amazing sound, like: "toingngngngngng!" very, very scary.

Most of the mice came from an adjoining storage room used for grains by another storekeeper just behind our store. Mice had no problem finding their way, especially behind wallpaper where they were masters. Wallpaper in those days was never directly glued to a wall; first the wall was strapped with a small wood frame, which was covered with burlap and old newspaper and eventually with wallpaper. When you were reading at night you could hear the little rascals behind the wallpaper.

Very few people knew the trade of wallpapering, so not too many succeeded in performing the job to a satisfactory result. My dad was an expert at this and he was always happy when someone came and purchased a few rolls of paper knowing very well that they would come back. Most of the time the customer would create a mess in his home, names were called, dishes were flying until someone yelled: "Go get de Boer!"

There were times when we had rats, then the only solution to get rid of them was to poison them. Mother did not like the animals and was scared of them. When she had to go from the living room to the kitchen in the dark via the hall she would first make lot of noise and yelled at them before she had enough nerve built up to proceed.

Most of the stuff in our house was what today would be called old fashioned. In the living room we had a stained glass lamp hanging from the ceiling. Below the lamp there was a table surrounded with chairs. On the floor we had vinyl and in the middle a rug. In front of the three windows mother had curtains close to the glass and than heavier curtains that would close at night. In the cold winter days those heavy curtains were ideal to keep the cold drafts out, but sometimes blankets were used at floor level to keep the extreme cold outside. The front of our house faced East from where the cold winds came from in the winter. My dad when necessary would use old newspapers to fill any cracks there might be.

The whole house was heated with only one coal stove that was in the front living room. When we had a very cold winter, we sometimes moved to the smaller room at the back since that one was easier to heat. The only problem than would be, the kitchen was farther away. Behind the store downstairs we stored our coal for the stove so we took turns to get a supply from downstairs every now and then that lasted a couple of hours. There was also a need to cut kindling wood to get the stove going quickly in case the fire would go out.

When I think back about the days of the past, it is amazing how different life was then compared to the way we live today. For instance; the day when the laundry was done was a special day; the housekeeper (mother) would stand for hours in the back kitchen slaving over a tub with water and manually wash, rinse and wring the laundry before it was finally hung on a clothesline to dry. The meal on a day like that was very simple and usually consisted of a type of porridge we called "potstro", which is cream of wheat cooked in buttermilk. Tasted quit good, only heating up the buttermilk was accompanied with a rare sour smell. You eat this stuff from a plate with a spoon, in the middle of it you made a small hole which you filled with melted suet, mixed with a brown sweet syrup and, then enjoy.

There was not too much of a choice of menus during those days. Especially during the winter months it consisted mainly of potatoes with canned vegetables such as sauerkraut, salted French beans, etc. For desert there was normally (“supengroatenbry”) a delicious cooked mixture of barley with berry juice and raisins with sugar on top it was eaten while it was still warm.

One of the daily routines in those days was that there was home delivery of baked goods and milk products by the baker and milkman. Deliveries were made all over the city, none of them really had a specific area, and they used either a bike cart or a horse driven cart and moved from customer to customer.

Milk products and milk were placed on the cart in large milk cans and customers would walk up with their own containers requesting from the supplier whatever they needed. The procedure would go something like this: could I have a “mingle” or a “half mingle” meaning a litre or half litre please? The milkman would happily oblige. When time of settling; the bill came; there were still half cents, two and a half cents and nickel coins used. The milkman was never surprised when someone would ask for a “in snies aeijen”. That was than twenty eggs.

Many times mother would ask me to get some groceries for her and this was usually done on a daily basis. The grocer only lived two houses away so that was lucky. With a grocery list I would read what my mother had ordered, the grocer believe it or not had to weigh each item individually, and it went like this: “one pound sugar, a pound and a half of syrup, one kilo of brown beans, .....”. What was fascinating about it was that when it came to the syrup he had a long wooden spoon that he dipped in a large container with the syrup, twisted it around a few times making sure a certain amount would stick to the spoon and moved it over the scale in a container I had brought to the store making sure I received the right amount. There was a vegetable store just down the street, in the Nauwe Noorderhorne, the owner always made it difficult when it came to paying for the goods. When the bill came to \$ 1.30, he would not ask for a guilder thirty, no, he would demand: “twenty six nickels”.

In the morning we would normally refresh ourselves in the kitchen with ice-cold water from the tap. There would be a piece of sunlight soap, and the toothbrushes were there as well. Just your face and hands that was most of the time all you washed. It would not cross your mind to remove your undershirt, as it was just too cold. At the end of the week on Saturday we all got the opportunity to wash all of you, in a small tub or pail with some warm water, also in the kitchen. This was a general trend in all families. A change of clothes also took place only once a week, it did not matter how sweaty you could be in the summer months when you came home there was only one change a week and than only on Saturday.

We, my friends and I had no clue what was going on at the time in the world. As a rule there was no radio in the house and most of the adults did not think of talking to their kids about politics. Sometimes we saw an adult talking seriously to the milkman and when we would ask what is going on? The usual answer would be that: “ there is a war where St. Nicolaas lives” Not knowing what war meant, you might as well just guess. If our neighbours to the east of us were a threat, it did not occur to us.

There were times though when you could figure something out about the situation. One of my sisters, Lolkje was a qualified and registered seamstress that was recorded on a little board placed on the outside of the front door. Most of the work she did was done at home with the occasional job at the residence of one of her customers. All of a sudden she got through to some Jewish contacts in Sneek, customers from Germany. When she came home she would talk about these people, apparently they were refugees from their own country and the conversation would always end with the good times of the past “when they were still rich”.

Those were just minor impressions. I found stories about well-known families in Sneek more interesting. Within those families there was a bit of a “show off” type of atmosphere, they wanted to show the “ordinary seamstress” how life was lived by the rich.

For instance at the home of the principle of the school of agriculture, they not only have more than a three course meal, also the dinner plates were replaced with new ones even when they were not used. At the end of the meal, the youngest daughter would ask: “are we getting clean plates again, mother?”

Never did I get the impression that as children we were short-changed in any way, not having youth journals or town hall meetings at school. There was lots of opportunity for us to enjoy life to its fullest: playing soccer, right in front of our house; playing marbles in the middle of the road around the church property called "het Oud Kerkhof" translated meaning "The Old Cemetery"; playing during the evening hours of the day making it completely dark by extinguishing the gas lanterns which lit up the street by climbing in the pole and moving the control to its off position, and just to show your friends how much nerve you had by climbing up a drawbridge by means of the supports and then slide downwards by the chains.

Around the city close by, there were a lot of small ditches. Subdivisions did not exist and one sport was to try leaping over the ditches without falling in them with a very long wooden pole; during the winter when we had ice we skated on the canals in the area. Your parents would take you there and tie on your skates but after that you were on your own, playing with a "top" whipping it around on the Prins Hendrikkade where the trolley went a few times everyday. There hardly was any traffic to speak of. What we did have were "Horse Drawn Carts" used for delivering goods to local merchants from the train station, being boys we often jumped on them for a free ride till the driver notice us and scared us away with his whip, that was always a challenge.

And of course we attended school. My kindergarten years were at a school in the Kerkstraat. Most of the time we would be braiding coloured pieces of paper together. The elementary school I attended was the Jan van Nassau School on het Oud Kerkhof. Secondary education (ULO) was given at the school attached so I walked for ten years from the Wijde Noorderhorne to het Oud Kerkhof, about a half city block away.

### **Part 3**



There was a railroad track in front of our house, used for a trolley, connecting three cities – Bolsward, Sneek, and Joure. We did not live far away from the church we attended, as a matter of fact most of the people attending services on Sunday had to walk by our house to get there. One Sunday morning my brother Franke was getting dressed in the living room when Rein and some other relatives dared him to run in his underwear to a little transformer building across the street and back. His answer was: "how much is it worth?" When quite a few guilders were put on the table for the bet, he ran outside, around the little building and back to collect his money.

Frisian version:

Sliep sêft, myn berntsje, ei, slomje sa swiet;  
Heit is dêr bûten op 't skolprige wiet.  
Swalkjend yn rein en wyn dreau er fier wei;  
Sliep sêft, myn berntsje, mem is dij nei.

No hast gjin soargen, mar gau komme ja;  
Ien kear moast ek nei de wetterkolk ta.  
Dan moast yn rein en wyn fier fan my wei;  
No hast gjin soargen, mem is dy nei.

Loosely translated:

Sleep soft, my child, you look at peace;  
Your father is on rough water but far away;  
Drifting in rain and wind he will go far;  
Sleep softly my child your mother will stay;

You have no worries, but sometime soon;  
There will come a time when you will go to the lagoon;  
You than have to face winds and rain far away from me;  
Now you have no worries, mother is near thee.

***“YOU HAVE NO WORRIES NOW, BUT YOU BETTER COME SOON”***

I was sick for a few days in the beginning of May 1940. While lying in my bed in the attic I could tell something was going on outside. More and more older people were seriously talking about an invasion of the enemy and we could hear the occasional airplane flying over in the sky. After some time when I was feeling better, army soldiers marched through our streets, singing very nice marching songs. We never saw real soldiers before. What we did see were our local police force in uniform, but they were young people only a bit older than us and we knew them by name. This was completely different. When we overheard older citizens talking about the soldiers, they would say: “March perfect” and “Present yourselves Correctly”. My brother Willem, (Johns Wz. Father) who was in the Dutch army when the invasion took place in 1940, told us about the rule which existed, like “treat your prisoners according to the rules” when he and his comrades were taken prisoners of war.

Basically on the surface not too many changes were noticeable. Even the newspapers reported the usual stories like: market updates, the occasional theft of a bicycle, and sports news. Later on we would read something like: “Arrested, so and so related to not abiding with a curfew period”.

My father went to work on his normal times, mother looked after the household and I went to school. Every Sunday we attended church and I went to the gym classes off ADVENDO (a gymnastic club) once a week. Once for a short period I was a member of one of our soccer clubs in the city. There were five clubs in the city. Oranje Nassau, the Christian club only played Saturdays. I scored two goals while I played for them as a striker, one in our favour and one in our own goal. When I grew out of my shoes, there was no money to buy new ones so I retired.

The city of Sneek was fortunate to have one of the largest weekly livestock market, only second to Leeuwarden. Our family being mostly farmers attended this sale every Tuesday and while the men attend the sale, the ladies came to visit us at de Wijde Noorderhorne. It was also a very good reason for them to make



good use of the toilet. Because of this as well as the fact that most Sundays my older brothers and sisters would visit, our toilet (barrel) filled up quickly which made it sometimes difficult because of its weight to take down the stairway by the city workers. The man who came to pick this up had place the barrel on his shoulders and take it down the stairway which was quite an accomplishment as the barrel had to weigh well over 75 pounds. This job was quite an accomplishment. We were fortunate that our stairway was a straight one, so not too bad.

It was a different story at my brother Willem's place on the Parkbuurt (now Meerkoetlaan). The barrel was also upstairs but there was a difficult turn, halfway up. In large families lady luck was not always with them and many times some of the "golden smelly stuff" would end up in the neck of the carrier. All the barrels filled with "you know what", were neatly placed on a horse drawn cart and taken to the public dump for disposal. Sometimes as children we would jump on the back of the cart getting a free ride and the smell did not really concern us much.

As times went on, some of life's essentials became in short supply and the city council decided that rations for basic supplies needed implementation in the form of distribution coupons. All citizens received a determined amount of coupons to live on, for example for sugar, butter, etc.... etc.... etc. Going grocery shopping required a lot more time because the grocer had to account for every coupon he had to collect. My brother Frank was employed for a short time at the coupon distribution office when all this was going on. The consumption of petrol, which was used for cooking and other needs also required to be rationed and if you used more than your allotment you faced being cut off the supply for several days.

Once when I was playing in the yard behind our house I was sure that I was hearing voices above my father's workshop. Being nosy I went up to look and to my surprise I found my father listening to a radio. This on its own should not be seen as abnormal except for the fact that we never owned a radio and those that had one were requested to turn them in to the German occupation forces. My father was crying, "That was our Queen he said", right away after that he told me not to talk about what I just heard with anyone. That had a big influence on me when he said, "not to talk about this with anyone" not realizing my life would change a lot.

Our large attic was a nice place for playing with friends on a rainy day. Toys were not really needed. Some rope, a large board, from that we made a jumping horse, a ship on rough seas, and our imagination just got carried away when we tied all that to the rafters. Bandits were hidden a little farther down the attic behind some old curtains that were there to cover an area to be concealed. Hide and seek was one of our favourite games as well as teasing people who would walk down the street in front of our house by being yelled at, and not knowing where the voices came from.

Once very unexpectedly my father and mother asked me to join them in the back living room. To my surprise there was another boy in the room, his name was Louis I believe. I was told that this boy was going to live with us for a while but I could not talk to anyone about it, which would be dangerous for both him and us. "Don't tell anyone". It rained a lot and sure enough the next day we had rain, my friends, Sjoerd, and Brugt would like to play at our place. "That's impossible I told them my mother has a headache", I still don't know where I found that excuse so quickly. It must have surprised my friends, and they probably wondered how it was possible for my mother to always have a headache and that my sisters were often sick as well as us having cousins over for visits.

Even at other homes things were going on. When we played hide and seek at Sjoerd's place, his mom would tell us "Don't go near your fathers hiding place".

Our friend Louis did not stay very long with us but many Jewish people hiding from the Germans took his place. There were several occasions that my father would take these people to work with him as long as they wouldn't give themselves away as being Jewish. My father was very impressed when one of them could read the Ten Commandments in the original language. There was no way that this boy would go with my father. He had to entertain himself at the house, which he did by studying a very old Bible. Once he looked at one of the pictures for a long time and my father asked what he found so interesting about the picture of Jude throwing thirty silver coins in the temple. His reply was "I only count twenty nine".

My father did a lot of work for the resistance. His main function was to find a place for people who were hiding from the German occupying forces. He also took an active part in trying to get food coupons for the guests. He did not wish to get too involved in confrontations where weapons were needed although he did take an active part in situations where food coupons were to be obtained by force.

A short while ago on New Year's Day, we invited neighbours who live in the same building as us here in the Leeuwarderweg, for a celebration drink. The lady, Mrs. Van Foeken started to talk and told us that my father once placed her sister and herself in a safe home during the war. German soldiers had come into the store they owned to arrest their father. With some luck he was not at home at the time, Mrs. Van Foeken who was a young girl at the time, was able to escape out of the house through a window and balcony. She then managed to get a message out to her father not to come home. Unnoticed she returned back inside. The Germans became impatient and took both of the Groninger girls (that was their last name) to the police station and arrested them. The two young hostages were lucky as the resistance organization freed all of the arrested people in the police station the next night.

After their escape, they were first placed in hiding in a school basement not too far away. Later the members of the resistance took all of them to different places in the city. My father always worked in his painter's coveralls with his handcart when the circumstance arose to perform these jobs. That is the way he was known in Sneek, and also the Germans recognized him that way. There were times when my father had a little job to do in the district's office of the German occupiers, which also made him less suspicious. So this job also went without a hitch. Many of the citizens knew of course what had taken place at the Groninger store, and some must have seen my father with the girls but nobody said anything about it. But talking about activities in a small city did take place and not just in private. When something was leaked to the wrong party quick decisions had to be made.

Once late in an afternoon a lady from Sneek came to see my father, very upset; "you have to take that little boy from my house she said, he has been seen by the wrong people and I am scared". We did not find a quick new location for him so my father brought him home to our place for the night. Along the way he asked the boy what his name was and where he lived, "my name is Loeki and I am from Amsterdam," he said. "From de Karel de Jarden Street my father said? Surprised the boy looked up and said; how do you know that.

At the time we were host to a Jewish couple from Amsterdam, their names were Mozes and Sarah Locher, they owned a fish store in the Karel de Jarden street in Amsterdam. We had heard about their daughter and two sons. The girl's complexion was somewhat fair and she had registered after the first request for volunteers for "duty". They never heard of her again. The rest of the family quickly went underground after that transpired and Mozes and Sarah did not know particularly what happened to their boys.

When my father arrived at home he told Loeki to wait in the store for a minute. He went upstairs and went to the back living room where the Lochers lived, and said "I am not sure but there maybe a there is surprise for you". Then he brought Loeki into the room. Loeki could not stay with us long, just a few days. His parents also only stayed for a while longer before they moved to a new location. Both the Lochers and their sons survived the war. With my brother Feike, I visited them once in Amsterdam. Later on they had another child, a daughter and eventually they immigrated to the US. We never heard again of them since.

About a year ago I ran into a girl I grew up with from the Wijde Noorderhorne, she told me that during the war days her mother was awfully scared because of the people that were hiding in our home and especially when men showed up with weapons. We were always under the impression that nobody ever noticed anything. What we did know was that even in our street there were people who collaborated with the Germans and many others who sympathized with them. Lady Luck was with us most of the time.

Those men with weapons were members of "the Dutch Resistance Movement"; they possessed weapons that were dropped at night by the allied forces. They still had to learn how to use them and for that purpose instructors were sent over from England. Meetings for the instructors and resistance personnel were organized and carried out. In our front living room we had some of those meetings. One of the instructors had a very loud commanding voice that could hear above the noise of the weapons they were demonstrating. Luckily no real shooting ever occurred.

My friends and I had a unique relationship with the German soldiers. Of course they were our enemies but in real life they were just ordinary young boys going about their business with their exercises with dummy ammunition. When they marched in formation they sang their hearts out. The kitchen for the soldiers was pretty closed to our house, right in the garage of a local restaurant “van Leeuwen”.

The chief cook was a friendly heavy-set person who liked to joke around with us. The soldiers lived in “barracks”; our school was one of them, which was not hard to accept for us. Most of our educational lessons were given at private places like somebody’s home, but there was no systematic approach and it only applied to some of the students. Often there was a day when we could not attend. Even if the soldiers did not live in our school, we probably would have been out of school during the winter. There was no coal to heat the school. What was funny was when German soldiers were in the swimming pool one of my friends was not allowed to go there? We found it strange, because in their swimsuits everybody looked the same.

We did know whom you could trust and whom you couldn’t. There was the SS, the secret police, a rough bunch of guys, the Field Police and the Local Ordinance who were local men who had joined the with occupiers and wore their uniform, called “landwacht”. They performed all kinds of different duties for the Germans. They sometimes marched down the street and behaved as their German friends did. The commander would yell, “three four, sing!” But the feedback from the troops made him to command “Shut up god damn”. Most of us could speak Frisian, which the Germans could not understand, but amongst the landwacht there were also some Frisian speaking boys and I would discover this quickly.

Everyday of the week my job was to pick up a few litre of milk from a farmer just in the country. It was a very lonely walk. No houses were built there and I was all by myself, it was very quiet. During the winter months many of the fields would be covered with water or ice since because of the low laying areas. The farm where I was directed to go was also a central meeting place for the underground resistance organization. I normally received the usually two bottles of milk and a large box for my father.

On the way back I was stopped by two of the “local ordinance” (landwacht), they had their shotguns ready. “Control!” They said, I showed the two bottles of milk and that was no problem, you were allowed two bottles of milk. But then in Frisian they asked: (“Wat hest in dy doaze”) what is in the box? “ My sister is a seamstress and works at the farmers house, she asked me to take the clothes home for her; ”I said”; “OK go on”, they told me.

When I came home, it turned out that there was a police uniform and a handgun in the box. They were a worst bunch than the devil, what a close call. And can you imagine all the problems I avoided with that quick little lie. The Gestapo (German police) was very good in getting people that were arrested to talk through “interrogations”. What could I have told them: names of some assistants of an attack on the police station in Sneek, addresses of some of the freed people that were now in hiding, names of many of the local couriers, the coveralls and weapons hidden in our workshop, locations where letters had been delivered hidden in bank deposit envelopes, the truth about the farm where I got the milk which was a central location of the underground resistance organization, etc, etc, etc.

## Part 4

### *“VERY STRANGE NOISES WERE HEARD AROUND THE BARN”*

The last years of World War Two, were very scary. It was really noticeable through the means of communications the Germans used. “General Notices” and “Strict Rules” were placed on large information bulletin boards. Often you would find names of fellow Dutchmen that were executed.

Hunger we did not really experience in Friesland as people did in the western part of the country, like Amsterdam and other cities. People in the cities usually received a little more than what they were supposed to get by means of the coupons we had. Just outside the city a lot of the people were cultivating a small garden made available to them. We planted many vegetables like turnip, red and regular cabbage, beans etc. What could not be consumed was canned or put on brine to keep it till the winter months.

In Sneek there also was a central kitchen and it was located on “het Kleinzand” in the factory of Tonnema that normally produced the “King Peppermint” and other candies. It was my responsibility to go there on a regular basis with a large pot. (John’s note: I went there once a week to get whatever they offered for the family). Most of the time the daily menu consisted of: potatoes with turnip, or turnip with potatoes. Funny, but after all these years I think that I can still smell that food.

Many products used by the general population were not readily available anymore for instance: coffee, tea, tobacco, sugar, soap, clothing, and footwear, heating materials, etc.

The average citizen had no access or was not able to afford black-market products, so they had to be satisfied with all kinds of imitation supplies. We at one time tried to make sugar from sugar beets, with the paltry result of only a kind of white syrup. Those that smoked cigarettes seem to be the hardest hit and there were many. It resulted in some of them growing their “own tobacco plants” not only the smokers but also the folks around them were not happy with the smelly results. For the ones that had real cigarettes, there was a very exciting market for their product.

Mother still had many remnants of materials left in one of the drawers. The remnants came in very handy at the time as fabricating of “textile product inventions” reached an all time high.

Those who were able to get sheep wool, washed the wool and made some very useful thread from it. Many items were knitted from this stuff, like: socks, undershirts, underwear, sweaters, etc. You were aware of wearing it because it “itched like hell” and you wore it because there was no other choice. One of the jokes of the times was: “Mother were did I leave my socks standing?”

The veterinarian next door, Dr. Hofstra, had a car that used (benzene) gas, but it was not available anymore. The solution to get his “Opel” going was to build a gadget at the rear of the automobile and feed it with small blocks of wood to generate a fuel to feed the engine, believe it or not. Other than that there was very little traffic on the streets. All children used wooden shoes for their feet. Wherever possible to stop the wear, old rubber from car tires was nailed under them. For those of us who liked to play soccer, they sometimes did not last long; the solution was to take them to the blacksmith who would fix them with some “stove wire”.

There was a special place in the school to place your wooden shoes, just like at home they were taken off when you went inside and everybody had their own little spot. The clothes we wore were very old fashioned I thought. Boys for instance wore shorts in summer and winter with the exception that in the winter you wore knitted stockings. To protect the stockings from wear, we used knee protectors.

Of course it is impossible to skate on wooden shoes, so we had to improvise, maybe you could find an old pair of gym shoes and if not you would tie your skates under your socks.

During the winter we lived mostly in the back living room and when it was cold we had a very small furnace where we could only use small pieces of wood for fuel. You had no choice but to locate your own wood for fuel. We were fortunate that my father had a handcart so when there was a need for more wood we went with the cart and a hand saw to the roadway that runs from Sneek to Ijsbrechtum. There were lots of trees on both sides of the road.

The actual road was much smaller then. It took a long time to take a tree down and cut it in manageable pieces, we took everything that was burnable, from small branches to large trunks to the backyard our house. We were glad to have the cart as many people had no other option but to take home as much as they could get on their bike. None of the bikes were equipped with air filled tires. It was mainly just a piece of heavy rope tied around the wheel. In our backyard the next job started, with cutting everything into smaller pieces and splitting the trunk.

There were a lot of soldiers in the city now, some much older and others very young and not much older than sixteen or so. But boy could they sing their hearts out; for instance a song called "Horst Wessellied" was very popular. All of a sudden they were gone again, most likely to be shot to death while fighting for Hitler.

Nobody was allowed to be outside during the evening or at night as there was a curfew for those hours. There were continuous control by German patrols and you better not be playing around with them. Across the street from us lived a barber; he was a collaborator with the Germans. One night during a curfew, a patrol drove around and noticed him standing behind the window with a big smile on his face. All of a sudden a German drew his pistol and shot a hole through the window just above his head. The hole left by the bullet was there for along time. My dad also replaced windows, but very conveniently had no windows in stock at that time.

On a regular basis, many squadrons of allied aircraft would fly over the city, "Bomb everything you can find" some people would say, but mother took pity and said: "The poor children and woman in the far away places".

The odd time one of the airplanes of the allied forces would come back by itself, alone. Most of the time it was damaged or had been attacked. It did not take very long when a German attacker would chase it and bring it down in our area. Many planes found the end of their flight that way. When something like this happened during the evening, searchlights would light up the sky and would be directed at the plane.

Other than that, there was not much going on in the city that would indicate that a war was going on. By means of illegal publications and "Radio Orange" one could learn about some of the events of what was going on. Most people were under the impression that the end of the war was forthcoming.

The number of people trying to hide from the Germans was forever increasing, especially when the railroad employees went on strike. Many more safe houses were needed, and that created a lot more work for my father.

Most of my older brothers were also placed in houses away from home at local farms. It is beyond my comprehension how some of the farmers were able to cope with it all. There were so many of them, they all had to eat and their laundry had to be done, etc.

Two of my brothers-in-law, Wietze and Rein who were brothers from Bolsward a city just north west of Sneek had to learn quickly how to adjust to farm life and some funny incidents happened. On one occasion a farmer asked them: "The tails of the cows need washing, can you do that?" Both thought that the farmer was joking so they replied by saying "You better do that yourself!" Another task that was not too pleasant either, like moving a wheelbarrow filled with liquid manure. You would not dare emptying it with the two handlebars between your knees.

Those that were hiding from the Germans were well protected by the farmer, most of them prepared proper places for them to hide in. In the barn the farmer had a lot of bails of straw, neatly stacked, but one of them could be removed easily and behind it was the place to hide, once they were in there the last one got the “port-a-pot” and the farmer replaced the last bale to cover the hole.

It was April 1945 and the war was coming close to an end. All of a sudden most of the German soldiers started to disappear from Sneek. The scales, which were situated in the middle of town, were put on fire. Everyone thought that there was some shooting going on but in reality the Germans had used the building called “the Scales” for ammunition storage. I was not allowed to go outside, so I sat in front of the living room window watching the happenings in front of our house.

All of a sudden there were a few men in blue coveralls with automatic weapons, the first one I saw was Mr. Andela, one of our teachers! How was that possible? “Everybody inside” he yelled to a group of nosey people and shot a couple off rounds in the air with his gun. “What a man!”

A bit later there were several strange looking army vehicles rolling through town and the soldiers wore different uniforms than what we were used too. “Canadians!” We yelled and everybody ran outside. It was over.

### ***“HOW BEAUTIFUL, IS THE NEW SUMMER MORNING”***

Sparks of joy went through the population. There was no end in sight; singing and dancing went non-stop. The only discouragement was about family members who had not returned home yet and it was not known where they were. But that was sorted out soon and when they did return. Young and old they could show their faces in public and talk about anything they liked. There was an enormous admiration for the Canadian soldiers from the boys but it is without saying that some of the older girls were also very popular with the Canadians.

The military were housed in a school in het Sperskem, one of the areas in the city. Every now and then spontaneously a group of people would walk over there and sing “O Canada”. The soldiers sometimes were generous with their rations and shared some of it with us, like “Chocolate or a slice of white bread”, a real treat! Sundays after church nobody went home right away but we stayed around the area of city hall. The Canadians had their service after ours and marched from there to the church, lead by a “pipe band”. We had never seen or heard a wonder like that, especially the drum major was unreal. Look at him we would say, he hits that piskin on both sides without missing a beat “it’s a miracle”. There had been no music in the town for years.

Some of the citizens got their radio out of the hiding places and for the first time we heard some modern music. During the war the only occasional song a person would sing was an established Dutch song like: “On the beach quiet and all by yourself” or something similar and now all of a sudden you would hear Glenn Millers band playing “In the Mood” or “Trumpet Blues”.

My father had a hard time getting used to all of this. Of course he was very pleased that the war was over. But he was shocked when someone on the street would start to talk about people that were in hiding during the war. The saying: “Do not talk about it” had made a deep impression on his mind.

The school schedule became normal again. We had lost a lot of time but after a while further education became the norm again.

Several events left a serious impression with me. Mother told me once that the Nazis in charge of prisoners at times tortured some of them so badly that they cried out loud from the pain administered on them. Later on after the war on one of the first days of school, the principal asked us to sing our National Anthem. One of

the pupils “Rommert” did not sing. During the war he was a member of the Hitler Youth and there they were taught many different songs.

Our principal, Mr. Zuiderveld gave him a beating with his pointer so badly, Rommert cried out loud from the pain. A few days later Rommert’s father, who collaborated with the Germans, was driven through the City on a handcart on his way to jail. At least four men in blue coveralls followed the cart beating him up with sticks, and he also cried out loud from pain.

Maybe I have since that time been too eager to describe events related to their importance. Germany signed an agreement with the Allies to end the war a few weeks later. By this time most of the German army was in the province of Noord Holland, which was on the other side of the dike at Sneek more than a hundred kilometres away. All of them were made to march back all the ways to Germany and only at night were they allowed to stop.

The German cook who worked in a kitchen in our city during the war was allowed to sit on a cart because of his age, he would wave at the crowd when he went by and everyone waved back. It was a different story when the “SS Troops” went by and everybody went quiet.

When my father during the day worked with the resistance, he concluded that the differences of a Christian or non-Christian, and good or bad, were signs of the past. It was more important to know who could be trusted and who couldn’t be. After a while that sort of theory went by the wayside and the old differences and prejudices came back to the surface and everyone would fit again in its own category. What really displeased him was the fact that some of the folks received good positions and others did not. For instance, “why did the farmer who housed the head office of the central command of the underground” on the road to IJlst not become a prosperous farmer and somebody else all of a sudden became a Major of the city. My father was disappointed.

We did belong to Christian section of the population:

- The school,
- The newspaper,
- The painters union,
- The ladies organization for mother,
- The gym club,
- The boys club,

Even the volleyball club that was organized later also was predominately of Christian descent!

Being a Christian was not the final word either. Can you imagine a boy from the Reformed Church dating a young lady from the Christian Reformed Church? One of my best friends Sjoerd, came from a Christian Reformed family said once: “too bad that your family is Reformed, because Reformed people are not going to heaven when they die”. “You better not count on it!” “Roman Catholic” we said. Being a Catholic is much worse. If there were ever a mixed relationship between two young people the minister would come from one side and the priest from the other informing the parents about a possible disaster. Even in the sixties believe it or not an elder of the Christian Reformed Church came to visit and recommended that we should be reading a Christian newspaper.

Because of my upbringing, my employment was mostly in the Christian schools. In later life I was even an elder for four years in the Reformed Church. From one point of view that was somewhat weird. I did not exactly break a tradition. On the other hand I always wanted to try to make a difference in bringing society a little closer together. Was there any sign if I had or not, I don’t think so.

Over the years they always addressed each other as (yo) not “you or by name”.  
“Trijntje do yo know where my shoes are?” For instance;  
Smaller children were called “he” or “she”.  
“He first has to finish his plate”.  
“She now has to go to bed”.

Luck was with me. After finishing elementary school I was allowed to continue my education and went to a secondary school called ULO. This system received a lot of scrutiny from many newcomers who wished to change the system, but it had some positive aspects that were placed aside by the newcomers. That happened quite frequently. There was ULO-A and ULO-B, respectively with more trade or academic subjects. When it came to languages the candidate had a choice from three of them and when it came to the time for examinations, the more than one choice system was still deadly.

Things went a little better for my parents; the pressure of a large family diminished somewhat slowly. Supplies became more available and the workload got better. Most of the worries about financing were a thing of the past. The biggest worry now was preparing for old age and this issue was taken care of by the government a short time later.

There were still a lot of issues related to the war. Indonesia, a Dutch colony was still at war. My two brothers Feike and Franke volunteered to join the Dutch army and went overseas. That became another worry for my parents. All of us survived the Second World War and now new dangers lay ahead. They willingly put up with it, just as they did when half of their children immigrated later to Canada.

During weekends we had a lot of fun at home. We played a lot of games, like detective and murderer for which our house had a very nice layout. Everybody involved with the game drew a paper from a pot; one of the papers identified the detective and another one the murderer, the rest of the papers were blank. Once everyone was identified as to the role they had to play, we scattered through the house and tried to hide, only the detective stayed behind. The game was for the murderer to pinch someone near the throat and that person was to let out a yell a few minutes after to allow the murderer to escape. Everyone then had to freeze to his/hers location and the detective would come to observe the crime scene, all of us would then go back to the living room. The detective's job was then through interrogation to find out who the murderer was, only the murderer was allowed to lie.

My mother and sister in law Geeske, found the game a scary one. Once I remember I crawled through the dark hall and accidentally touched Geeske's legs, she let out a scream because it scared her so much. The game had to be restarted because of the false alarm.

Passing my exams of the ULO in 1949, I had to think about the future. My choice was the teacher's college. How mindful I was about that choice I cannot really say. At the time choices were limited and my education did not allow me to attend a university. Another fact was that higher education would be more costly and money was still very tight.

The economic situation at home pretty well determined your prospects for education. In grade six students were allocated to attend a College, a step higher than secondary education if the money was there to support it. If the economic situation at home was a little less prosperous, secondary education was considered and other than that, there was the trade school for boys or a school for home economics for the girls.

After my secondary education, teachers college was for me probably my best bet to achieve something in life. For those who were not fortunate enough to receive and complete a secondary education, evening courses were available at most institutions.

My brother Feike for instance, after the war and his time in Indonesia he was determined to be an achiever, and started serious study for several diplomas, which in the end created an excellent career for him.

Also my brother Sjirk started in an office in Sneek and after that he undertook a job in Utrecht, a city South from Sneek. Do not ask how many hours and evenings he had to sacrifice for studying, but the end result was a diploma from the evening teachers college that led him to a gratifying teaching carrier.

Teachers college prepared us for a unique method in becoming a teacher at an elementary level. We had to learn a lot about ourselves. Psychology and education were also taught, what we later found was that our textbooks were well out of date for those subjects.



Preparing for the practical application of teaching was much more comprehensive. On a Thursday, two or three of the student teachers took part in lets say a grade four teaching session for the day in a Christian Elementary School called Juliana. Their teacher would give us our home work of what we should teach the next week: "Harm would teach about a biblical story, Keimpe dealt with a geographic subject and discussed the map of Gelderland, a province in Holland, and Herre gave a lesson in arithmetic about percentages".

I compared myself many years later with students I taught at the Bogerman College and concluded that we as seventeen year olds were very immature.

But Harm made his story about the philistines very eventful. Keimpe and myself sat in the bench at the back of the classroom cramped in a small seat with our feet crossed, because Harm started to explain the method of circumcision in biblical times and even pointed out the foreskin. Harm had a lot of nerve!

"Not too many of you probably know what this is all about, he would ask the kids, well it went like this: a very sharp knife was the tool used by the father of the young boy. Yes I find the method very gruesome myself, but a small piece of skin was removed from the small boys foreskin! Where about is the foreskin you ask? "Here" and Harm pointed to his forehead! "This way the Jews right away knew who the philistines were because they were not circumcised. When my time came to teach arithmetic, Harm would continuously point to his fore head.

Bible education in a Christian school was a very important subject. When you applied for an opening in another school and asked to come to give a lesson, your best bet was to give an explicit story from the bible.

There was no end to bible stories in those days. You heard it at school, Sunday school, boys club, and later during catechism classes. There were times when the stories would end up in a joke, like, "And what do you think the mean men did? The poor fellow was thrown in a ditch!" Those people would place a wooden box on their heads and walked like that along the street. I have tried this at home but what do you think happened? All of the potatoes rolled over the floor!"