

Chapter 16

Seminaries' Home-Stretch

And, now, having mother's illness and Home-Going down on paper, we return to our further seminary training. It was again a time when study concentration was at a premium. But once again, God helped us cope with it and get through it. Our pilgrim's journey continued.

When we returned from our second summer at the church in Leamington, the last of the barracks had been demolished. We had rented a house now at 180 – 11th Street East. The house belonged to an uncle of Albert Klein.

It had been a hard and busy time at Hope College. Somehow, I had hoped (and more or less expected too) that seminary would be easier. Well, in one way it was - studying had definitely become easier. And my English had greatly improved too. I was far from being an expert in English, but compared with what it had been, it was improving. Corrie's English also. However, what I had not counted on in seminary was that the professors would pile on so much more work!

For a few months I felt somewhat deluged. But I was happy that I had taken this Greek immersion course at college. It came to stand me at good stead here at seminary. Slowly but surely, my grades continued to improve. I now had caught up to where some of the others were (and they had the benefit of high school!) With each meal throughout the day, we sought God's face in prayer for further help in relation to our studies. I want to emphasize "our studies", for Corrie was in it with me for 100%. In several areas we were learning together. I did a lot of sharing with her, wherever we saw our way clear.

During the autumn of 1955, Corrie became an expectant mother again. The first year of seminary we were not yet being sent out to preach. However, there were quite a few requests to have us come to churches to tell our immigration story. Also, the Dutch preaching at Kalamazoo continued. When there, we would occasionally visit Kees and Marie Vander Eyk who had left Schipluiden just before us. Kees was a friend of Andrew.

Our third summer charge (1956) was in Exeter. This congregation also was a rural congregation. These people were the most conservative worshippers we knew thus far. They still did everything in the same way as we did in Schipluiden, including the men standing for all the prayers. While there, I also had to lead some services at Strathroy where they had a lay preacher and teacher by the name of Breeuwsma. We lived in a stately brick home which they had purchased a parsonage.

It was here in Exeter that our fourth child was born. Corrie's sister, Rina, had come over from Holland for a visit a few weeks before our new baby was due. She stayed with us for three months and for a short while lived with us in Holland, Michigan.

On the evening of July 25th, I was just ready to leave for a visit, like I did practically every evening. However, just before I was about to drive away, Corrie informed me that I should not leave because initial labor pains had begun. It was great to have Rina with us. Whether it was arranged this way, I do not remember. But at least this time, Corrie and I were not hundreds of miles apart.

Just before midnight, we drove to the hospital in town, hoping and praying that it would not be too long before the baby would arrive. Well, it was morning before Corrie was able to deliver our new baby, whom Corrie had decided should be called John. Again, there was much, much prayer, but at last, here again we had another healthy child. The only other thing I remember was that Corrie said, "Little John has a big head!" (It's alright, John, many years ago we have forgiven you for this! All of us were grateful to God for your arrival.)

And by this time the other children were much bigger. I well remember walking down to the hospital with the three of them and how excitedly they waved at their mom, standing there at the window waving at us.

Again we made many friends, but all too soon we were on our way back once more to Holland, Michigan. John Drost and Henk Van Essen who had been living with us in the house the year before had promised to keep the grass short while we were away. Well, when we came back with our new baby, I had to take the scythe and could have started haying! These boarders were in Hope College and were, like us, Dutch immigrants studying for the ministry in Canada. We also had income from two other students, except they just rented a room upstairs in our big house. For a few years our house was like a bee hive.

And by now, Murray had gone to school as well. It was hard on him at first, mainly because all the other boys of his age were talking so often about their favorite TV program while we had no TV! The school was right across the road and during the school break Corrie could see him stand several times all by himself, either just leaning against a side of the school, or otherwise, against a tree. We talked with him about the reasons why we had no TV. We felt that he understood, but still it was hard on him to be a loner this way.

Back at Seminary, our professors just kept on piling more work on us with each succeeding year. The seniors informed us that this would keep on going until the end. They "comforted" us that the third and final year would see even more work, all in preparation for the heavy load waiting us in

the ministry, we were told. I kept on studying at the library. I had all good professors and liked them all. They were Menninga, Osterhaven, Ouderslyus, Eertingenburg, Piet, and Bast. In some ways, they were all different, yet in many ways, they were all the same: very dedicated and committed men.

As all the children know, I have a habit of underlining things when they really speak to me while reading. I already had this habit in Hope College and Western Seminary. At one time, one of my professors, Dr. Eenigenburg, asked the class whether they had all read the assigned chapters of a certain book. Then, he made this remark: "I know John did; he just keeps on underlining whether the book belongs to him or to the Library." Ouch!

One day when it was pouring rain, I had taken our car to Seminary after our noon meal. I always left immediately after we had eaten. When it was 5:30 p.m., I walked home in the pouring rain. Upon my arrival at home, I threw off my wet clothes. Corrie asked me, "Why are you so wet?" I thought it was funny for her to ask me this since it had been pouring rain all afternoon. I even started to say something like this to her, until it all at once struck me that I had totally forgotten to take our car back home. It was a reminder to me how much I always buried myself in the studies.

The second year, us middlers were sent out on a regular basis to preach at churches who requested this service of the Seminary. Several times there were requests from churches to have the "Dutch Student" lead their service and speak either before or after the worship service to the congregation or Adult Bible class. One such Sunday, a request had come in for me to lead a service which was broadcast by radio. It was in Grand Rapids. Murray had come along with me. I had left plenty early, but got altogether lost in Grand Rapids. I was beginning to panic for it was very close to the time for the broadcast to begin. We had the radio on and the announcer already had mentioned who would be preaching. We arrived there 10 minutes late. What a sweating experience this was!

Rina had left again. She really enjoyed it with us in Holland, Michigan, and also with our boarders. They had become part of our family by now. John Drost especially loved all the children. He even took time out to play with them every now and then. Anne began to speak her own home made "language". Little Johnny was growing well. But then, when the month of December '56 began to close in on us, something else started to close in us as well. Anne broke her arm ... the boys developed pneumonia ... and Corrie had a miscarriage - all within a few weeks! Besides all the disappointments and concerns for physical wellbeing, all at once medical bills began piling up and we had no money to pay them.

Again, God stepped in. This is the only way I can put it. I was scheduled to preach at DeMott, Indiana and I was told to bring the whole family along. But because of all the illness, I showed up at the church alone. They immediately began to ask me where the family was and how we were

making out with the bills. The elders said no more. But they were clearly moved, even as I. That same week, we received a letter from the consistory with a check of their entire evening offering. And this amount was exactly the same as our combined medical bills! In the Netherlands, we were not brought up with personal testimonies, but now, because of all these works of God in our lives, we could not be silent. Giving testimonies here and there had become part of our lives.

Thus, in certain ways, seminary life was no different than all our other life experiences both in Holland and on this side of the ocean. God's "maturing of the soul" (Charles Colson) had been going on for a long time already. The only difference was that here at Western Seminary the emphasis was on the academic instead of the manual labors we were so used to. The "maturing of the soul" not only takes time, it also has many sides to it. It opens our eyes wider, brings us more patience, helps us sense the unconditional love of God, enables us to be better and wiser witnesses, helps us understand other peoples' pain more fully, and readies us to genuinely comfort others.

With the above in mind, I should mention that it was during our sojourn in Holland, Michigan that we were led to start tithing. It should not have been this way, but tithing in the Netherlands was - to the best of our knowledge and inquiry - neither taught nor preached. The church in Holland was a State Church. And when this support slowed down, there were wealthy barons who took care of church finances. They also had donated land to the churches, and from the rent of the land, the church paid its bills. And to obtain extra money, farmers were asked to keep a few lambs each spring which were sold in the fall. For these reasons, Dutch evangelicals coined the phrase, "*De doden hebben zo lang for the levenden gezorgd, dat the levenden nu ook dood zijn.*" (The dead have cared for the living for so long, that now the living are spiritually dead).

Anyhow, it was when we had times without food in the kitchen for tomorrow that tithing became a part of our life. Moreover, it was here that we received a few times a letter in the mail with a \$20.00 note in it. Later we found out that these gifts came from an elder of one of the Kalamazoo Christian Reformed Churches. (This elder and his wife "just happened" to be at the same home we were visiting one Sunday.)

During the Fall of 1956, Murray and Cornie with some of their friends had come up with the game of running across the street while the cars were coming. They must have thought it was nice that such big cars stopped for such little people. One of our neighbors called us about it. I must confess that my maturing was still incomplete and I proved that I had a long way to go. I lost my temper. I spanked and scolded them harder than was reasonable and tried to explain the danger of what they had been doing.

Our 1957 summer charge was a two-point charge in Guelph and Galt. We had come to know the pastor in Guelph pretty well. And since he and his wife were going to make a trip to the

Netherlands during the late Spring and early Summer of 1957, he had requested Western Seminary to have us come and take his place which also included the developing group of immigrants meeting in Galt (Cambridge). This group became an organized church in the same year. The first part of the summer we lived in Rev. and Mrs. Simon Ter Louw's parsonage, and the latter part on the Van Oostveen farm in Ayr. The two-point charge was really more than one minister was able to handle and especially for a student pastor and family.

While we were there, we received a call from our friends Joe and Coby Waardenburg that Joe's brother Cor who was visiting for a few days from Holland had drowned while swimming in Lake Erie. I had known Cor as a young boy. We were requested to come and conduct the funeral service. What a shock this was to the parents and sister in Holland, the Chatham congregation, Andrew and Nel, and to us as well. I still remember the extra stress and strain this brought on my ministry during that summer. It is extremely hard to bring comfort during times such as these.

When Rev. and Mrs. Ter Louw returned from their trip, the last four months were better ministering only to one congregation. We made good friends there too, especially with the large Van Oostveen family. Somehow, we already knew quite a bit about this family through their son John who was also studying at Western. John and his wife Ester had become good friends. Perhaps Murray and Jack remember their rafting experiences on the slough at the Van Oostveen farm. Living on the farm for these four weeks was great fun to the children. They loved going out seeing all the animals and farm equipment work. For us it wasn't so easy, for we had to eat with the family since there was only one kitchen. Our life was very organized and keeping strictly to appointments was something we always held in high regard. The saying, "nothing will give you more time than being punctual" had always served us well. We missed our privacy.

And now, this was our last summer change - the fifth one! And last year at Seminary! We were beginning to see the end of the dream, or better, the goal by the grace of God we had been allowed to set. Now the fulfillment of the goal was becoming visible on the horizon.

In the meantime, we began to feel much more at home in Holland and surroundings. We began to know quite a number of churches in the area. We began to be a bit "Americanized" in the Reformed Church. And, of course, Western Seminary had helped us a good deal here too. We also held the professors in high esteem. My grades now had come up on par with the other students. Yes, we look back to our years there with fondness and deep appreciation. And not the least do I look back on these years and see Corrie's self sacrifice standing with me in this Call for one hundred percent - and more!

We also look back at God's hand of safety with all the driving back and forth to Canada. Moreover, the many trips through Detroit was something we had to get used to. The over-loaded

car trips the oldest children will no doubt remember well. We recall how at one time, while driving somewhere around Grand Rapids, Corrie was sitting next to me with Johnny on her lap and the hood of the car flew open and hit the front windshield. I couldn't see outside, but I did see Corrie and the baby with glass showering on them. I had to stop quickly, but not too quickly for fear of being rear-ended. I had to stay straight not to hit an oncoming car on the left side or the ditch on the right. When we filled the tank with gas the station attendant checked the oil but neither he nor I had double-checked the latch of our old vehicle.

Let me mention one other incident, not an accident, when in spite of trouble we came home safely with grateful hearts. We were with the three of us - Corrie, Anne and I (Anne was two years old.) We were returning from a regular preaching assignment in Detroit. Two churches there were supporting us with \$100 per month for nine months each year we were studying. We knew that our car was old and not in the best shape, but it was all we had to get around. (And something else too - I was the worst mechanic around. In fact, I still hold this record in our family. My only excuse for this dismal record is that we were born with cows, horses, wagons, shovels, forks, brooms, wringers, two holers, saws and axes around us, while the following generations were surrounded by cars, trucks, tractors, motors, machinery, dishwashers, toilets, showers, microwave ovens, typewriters, phones, faxes, computers, etc.)

On our way back, the car began to sputter once in a while. It was late Sunday evening and most garages were closed, but in the next town we managed to find one open. The man checked out a few things and informed us that he had to take it into his garage to do a better job. We asked how much it would cost. When he informed us how much a good tune up would cost, we had to tell him that we could not afford it. We looked kind of funny and he was probably thinking, "and so well dressed?" With a prayer in our heart, we tried starting the car. Yes, it ran again! We kept on praying but after about 50 miles we heard the same noises, except now worse. But praise God, we also rolled into a town and were able to reach the first gas pump. The motor was dead now. Period. The garage man told us he would check the motor for free.

When he had done so, he informed us it would cost approximately \$350 to have it fixed, but not until the next day. We discussed our problem. It was too cold to sleep in the car; it was either January or February '56. Corrie was pregnant with John. We had "*onze kleine krummel*" with us. (Sorry, Anne, for calling you "our small crumb". But then, it's no worse than calling you "small fry"!) We did not think the car was worth this much money. Whether we did the wisest things or not, with our backs against the wall, we accepted his offer of \$25.00 for our dead car. He told us that a bus to Holland, Michigan would soon arrive and for \$20 we could get there. And this is what we did. How thankful we were to finally get home after midnight.

A few days later when we related our experience to our friend, Al Kleis, he told us that we should have called him for the car had been worth about \$100. It was his adult Sunday School Class that had bought the car for us! We felt bad that we had not called him, but now it was too late.

During the first week of December 1957, the Reformed Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba requested the Seminary to find out whether there was a Dutch speaking student who would be willing to come for three weeks taking the place of Rev. Franken who would be away during this time. Dr. John P. Mulder came approached me with the letter and asked me whether we would be willing to accept this assignment. There were pros and cons to consider. The advantage was to be pastoring for three weeks and earn some much needed money. The disadvantages were that this was a big trip with four small children, I needed the vacation time to catch up on term papers and it would not leave us much time with our family. In the end, the advantages won out. Basically, some extra money was very much needed.

It was our first experience with winter weather in the West. All commuting to church was by bus. We well remember the bitter and biting wind early in the morning while waiting for the bus to take our family to church. It also was my first experience with the 'sob-stories' of welfare people and taking advantage of the pastor. We also remember driving with an elder to Portage la Prairie where there was a "huis gemeente" (house church) at the large Bruinogen family. Following each preaching service in Winnipeg there was an afternoon worship service out there. Ordinarily the front windshield was frozen with just a small peep hole above the steering wheel to see where we were going. These were the kind of cars most early immigrants were able to buy.

After our first morning service as I was greeting the members, a young man grabbed my hand and asked whether I still remembered him. I took a good long look and told him that I didn't. Then he told me that I should. I asked him to wait until all the people had filed out. Then he said that he was from Schipluiden. I took another look at him but, no, I still had no idea who he was. Then he said that I had chased him in our orchard across the ditch when he was stealing apples and pears from us. When he said this, I suddenly had no problem remembering who he was! It was Jan Koole from the "vesting" (as the few poor houses there were called.)

We lived in the parsonage. There was a furnace in the basement where we had to shovel in coal to keep warm. We came away with some extra money, but it was too busy a time for both of us with no time left at this special time for doing things together with our children. And when we came back Seminary had started and besides all the studying I still had to do, several term papers were due. It was an extremely busy time.

During our last year, we came in contact with a couple who were Germans. The husband had begun his studies at Hope College. He had much more education than we did and I believe he

started off as a sophomore. But his family was just as lost at first as we were, so we befriended them. They were hesitant at first to give themselves. They just could not understand how we would want to be friends with them – Germans! We had a similar experience another time with a German professor who had been invited to be a guest lecturer at the Seminary. His name was Dr. Niesel. He was an expert on Calvinism and had written a few books on the subject. We invited him to have dinner with us and he accepted. But before we sat down for dinner, he asked us whether we had found it difficult to invite him over. We had a wonderful talk together on the wonderful grace of full forgiveness.

Exam time, of course, was always special. I know that during such weeks I failed the family as husband and father. But God so graciously took my place. This is the only way I can put it. One time on a Sunday evening when Corrie had stayed home with the children, I had gone to a Christian Reformed Church where a number of Seminary students would go occasionally because of the outstanding preacher. I returned home and had missed something very important: after the children had all gone to bed, Murray had been listening on the radio to someone preaching. He came out of the room and told his mother that he had done what the man said: he had invited Jesus into his heart. He was about seven or eight years old at the time. What joy filled out heart when Corrie shared this upon my return.

Our neighbors who lived next to us during the last two years of Seminary were Christian Reformed people. For a while, they kept a safe distance from us, but by time we left we had become good friends. They were retired people and had come to love our children.

When graduation time came near, the president called me into his office and informed me that since I had already three Calls and a number of students had none, I would henceforth no longer be sent out to preach. On the one hand, this was altogether fair, but on the other hand, we would miss the remuneration we would receive for preaching (which we desperately needed). I did not tell him this. I only told him that I could understand why he did it. And so, when I closed the door behind me, I thought the matter was over.

Imagine my surprise when only two weeks later I walked into Seminary and one of my classmates told me that the President had asked for me, and was upset with me. He did not know why. While talking about what this could be, the secretary came by and told me to go immediately to the office of the President. With fear and trembling I did so. I could see at once that there was something special. The first thing he asked me, with very stern voice, was “Why were you not preaching at Fifth Reformed Church yesterday?” I was flabbergasted. I asked him what he meant. He told me that I should have been there since a special request had come in for me to be there. He told me that one of the elders had made frantic efforts to reach our home yesterday and there was no answer. Where had we been? The congregation sang hymns for half an hour before at last they

had been able to find someone to take my place. He told me in no uncertain terms that I had failed him and failed the Seminary by not being present on the appointed Sunday at this prestigious church.

For quite some time I tried to explain to him that since he had told me I would not be sent out anymore, I had not bothered to look at the assignment sheet on the Bulletin Board. Every student usually did this as soon as the Secretary would put up the list. I am sorry to say that my reasoning did not help. “You should have looked anyway. I never told you to not look at the assignment list anymore...” I apologized to the President and assured him that it would not happen again.

When at last graduation time arrived, it was feast in the family. The children, though not comprehending what it was all about, were as jubilant as Mom and Dad. I shall never forget the excitement. I shall never forget the special kiss Corrie gave me. I am not saying that I was proud of myself, but I sure was proud of Corrie for having so faithfully stood with me during these five special years. I will not forget either the rose she gave me for the occasion. Above all and though everything, there was such thankfulness to God in our hearts. It is difficult, even now during the time of this writing, to adequately describe how great it felt.

Following the graduation, I found out that these years of study had taken more out of me than I had thought. I even had a few times where I nearly lapsed into unconsciousness. I thought I was dying. I even said it to Corrie at one time. She assured me that it was not so: I just needed a good rest. What had happened was that just before the graduation exercises, I also had my tonsils removed. So, yes, I knew she was right: we both needed a good rest. Glory to God, the years of study had come to an end.