

## **Chapter 20**

### ***Monarch, Alberta: 1970 - 1976***

We moved to Monarch with our four youngest children. Murray had enrolled at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. On the day we moved, August 4, 1970, Jack traveled to Regina for RCMP training. Anne, John, Jim, and Andy exchanged city school for prairie school at Nobleford.

It was a special privilege to have Corrie's cousin, Dominee Piet Lugtighied, take part in the Installation Service. All around he was such a special person, having such a wide open relationship with His Lord as well as a wide open heart toward every human being. He had learned from Jesus to mingle with inner city "sinners" but he also could easily converse with prairie folks.

When mentally the flames had begun to burn low in Edmonton, due to "burning the candle" at both ends, I longed for a country setting and things smaller and more quiet. Well, Monarch and surroundings could not be any more country-like. On certain days the wind told us that the neighbor across the road raised hogs and further down the road other neighbors were in the dairy business. Just north of us was the irrigation canal, dug in 1922 when I was born, which supplied the farmers with the water they so desperately needed to grow their crops. We even used it on our own little calf pasture. But the blessings of irrigation sometimes became inconveniences in the parsonage basement. For weeks we had to pump and scoop out water that seeped in. And as for our drinking water and baths it had to be trucked in from Monarch.

Howling winds, prairie blizzards and chinooks were things we had to get used to. I recall people asking Corrie whether these winds did not "drive her up the wall?" She answered, "I take it to be prairie music". But the rapid temperature fluctuation brought us more cold sniffles than we'd ever had during winter months. And when a sudden blizzard arose it was wise to head straight for home or otherwise the nearest farm.

We very much enjoyed our gardens. Here in the country we could even have berries without neighborhood kids picking them before they were ripe as often was the case in Edmonton. The same with the rest of the vegetables. Also, we enjoyed our calves and the milking of our cow. But of course we had gone here to preach, teach and reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And all the other things were just outward differences. And so, no matter where a Gospel preacher goes there always is plenty of work to do.

The Reformed Church in Monarch, being the oldest RCA fellowship in all of Canada, had already a long history by the time we arrived. The oldest people were pioneers way back from the beginning of the Century. They had come through the Great Depression. In their anniversary

booklet “Down the TRAIL OF MEMORIES” we read that their first minister's annual salary was \$800.00.

A glance at the church cash book reveals other expenses like these:

Horse for pastor	\$37.00
Buggy shaft	8.50
Hay	3.00
Coal oil	.30
Halter	1.50

It was on August 28, 1971 that Jack and Grace were the first ones of our children to marry. As parents we even suggested that they would move up their marriage date by half a year. This was so that Oma van Leeuwen who was visiting us could be part of the celebration. Also, Corrie's oldest brother Klaas with his wife Annie were over to visit their son John in Onoway. Thus their marriage was special in more than one way.

When we had come here the congregation was involved in some mission work at the Indian Reserve near Cardston. It really was the work of one Elder. He was eager to pull out and have me take over. Here was a church with a long and prairie-strong tradition. As to mission work among the Blood Indians, I knew nothing about their centuries old culture. I did my best to learn about Dutch prairie traditions and Indian ways of doing things. I visited the old Chief, Jim Whitebull, quite a few times. I learned about drinking problems, forsaken children, extended families, idleness, suicide, pride, immorality, child abuse, Welfare and disorganized living, et cetera. But as to trying to bring about even the slightest change anywhere, the hardest thing for me to deal with was the, “We never did it this way before.” Some have called it, “The seven last words of the church.” The Indians never expressed it this way. They just ignored things by way of negative reactions. Mission work on the Blood Reserve and personal contact with some Indians led us to consider opening our home to troubled Indian children. The Welfare Department was eagerly looking for anyone willing to do so. They had many children in Group Homes who were in desperate need of another life style. This is what brought Jennifer Across the Mountain into our home. However, her shoplifting habits, running away and other vices made it impossible to give her a consistent different life style.

It was then that Corrie began to think about a much younger child or even a baby. She mentioned this to a Welfare worker and it was shortly thereafter that she received a call from her whether we would be willing to consider taking in a family of five small children. We took several evenings to discuss it also with our growing children still home. It looked like an exciting thing to do but obviously it would not be right to overload “mother” with all the extra work and stress. And so,

prayerfully and compassionately the decision was made to have our home and heart opened to help out. And further I would like to refer you to what Corrie wrote about it.

Other work I became involved in for a couple of years was being Chairman of the Advisory School Board in Nobleford. I sought to bring Christian teaching into the Public School system there. I did not succeed. There was very strong opposition from United Church members who hardly ever attended church. And since all Christian Reformed families had their children attending Christian Schools, a hand full of Reformed people were unsuccessful.

One other issue that took much time and brought a lot of stress was to have the 75 families of Hope Reformed Church of Lethbridge amalgamate with the local Presbyterians. I fought this hard everywhere. Basically, it was a "Mainline Ecumenical" move. Neither of the two churches were deeply spiritual or strongly evangelical. I feared, and expressed it as well, that the amalgamation would make the two small churches one big lukewarm one. But I lost here as well, although a few of their members joined the Monarch congregation.

The Elder who succeeded with the amalgamation was a formidable opponent. I am happy to say we remained friends throughout the years. A few years after leaving the Reformed Church there was something of a shake up in the Presbyterian Church and he left. Thereafter he had a "new birth" experience and joined a large charismatic church. Presently, there are very few former Reformed members left in the Presbyterian Church. And further, at our last Classis meeting in Monarch, this leader asked permission to meet with the Church Planning and Development Committee to see if the Reformed Church had any plans to establish a new Reformed witness in Lethbridge.

After a few years it was possible to discuss certain new initiatives. The Adult Bible class began to flourish and so did the children's Sunday School. Young people made Profession of Faith and some visitors began to join as well. We also were able to arrange an outreach campaign with the Nobleford Christian Reformed Church, with Calvin Rays of Kentucky as speaker. We had a very good relationship and periodic pulpit exchanges with both Christian Reformed Churches in the area. The Ladies Aid was a flourishing fellowship as well. The VBS during the summer time was a good instrument of outreach as well. We had some very talented ladies in our congregation.

In 1973 we made another trip to Holland. It was 15 years ago since our first visit. Jack and Grace helped out by spending two weeks of their vacation in our parsonage. The other weeks our two youngest children were cared for by members of the congregation. Our visit was to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary with our loved ones in Holland. The celebration in the church hall at Schipluiden was an unforgettable event. After arriving back home we even found out that son John found it to be so lonely that he felt he should have his first date with Jeanne.

August 1, 1973, the day after our Mayerthorpe vacation, was a very disappointing day. Corrie came down with “herpes zoster”, or shingles. The day we drove home she already had been telling the children in the back of the car to “put the window up”, because she had a stiff neck. Early in the morning she woke up with pain and a itch on her neck. She thought it must have been mosquito bites since the day before we had made a path through the bush for a fence. But when the pain became sores and a few small blisters that day, we knew it was something else. On the weekend in the hospital emergency ward she was given cortisone, which turned out to be the wrong thing.

The following Monday our Doctor discovered what it really was and showed deep concern. The blisters had spread all the way down the right side of her face and also covered her right breast. For a while Dr. MacTavish stood there and walked around without saying anything. When she pressed him to say what he was thinking, he answered, “You will be paralyzed”. She asked, “Where, I want to know?” His answer was “That, I can’t tell you. I don’t know.” Afterwards he told me privately that she would be having severe pains and that the only thing that could be done for it was to take her outside for a walk and let her cry. The next day the right side of her mouth began to droop and later during the hospitalization her right eye had to be bandaged closed since there was no more moisture to protect her vision. This surely was time of beseeching God to bring healing. We had to make major decisions several times. One was to have a Specialist in Calgary “unravel” certain nerve endings. This would require a lot of cutting. We decided to pray for healing instead. Later Dr. MacTavish said that the situation had corrected itself. Hallelujah! It took 3 months before sufficient moisture returned to her eye.

Other happenings and events were Anne graduating from High School and starting work in Lethbridge and John finding himself a part time trucking job at the Konyenbelt business in Nobleford.

Also, we received a very special letter from Murray informing us about his experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Sitting around the kitchen table reading this letter made us cry for joy. This was a very first in our family. We also said to one another, “If this can happen to him we want it too”. When one of our elderly neighbor ladies a few days later was working around the church on the flowers, in my excitement I shared the news with her. I must have made a fool of myself for she looked at me, as we say in Dutch, “Als of zij water zag branden”. i.e. “As if she saw water on fire”.

Funeral services in Monarch were different from those in Edmonton. Though the congregation was much smaller than in Edmonton, in the first 3 years we had more funerals here than up north in 9 1/2 years. Here we had funeral services of genuine prairie pioneers. In the country where

everyone knows everyone people literally flock to funerals. Not only was our auditorium upstairs packed but most of the time so was the consistory room and basement. We could always count on 250-300 mourners to attend.

The tradition was that after the funeral service the immediate family and Pastor would stay behind while all others filed out. This was in order to open the casket one last time. We looked upon it as a needless and heart breaking experience. I do not want to describe the pitiful and heart rending scenes but many times at last I gently tried to take them away from it. Biblically too, we found it anti-climactic, for after setting out the eternal comfort of salvation and the glories of Heaven in the presence of our great Redeemer, it was like going back to the moment the dear one breathed his/her last. But the uniqueness of a grave-side service on a wide open prairie cemetery is indeed very special. There we always ended with words of comfort from Scripture and a prayer of thanksgiving.

In 1979 my health was not good. And once more, since most of us are better at looking back than controlling tasks ahead, I now can state that much of it was the result of years of undue stress and strain. Already in late 1974 I was being plagued much with intestinal troubles. I am sure that most of the children remember the Metamucil bottles around. I also had constant pain on my right side. A Lethbridge physician thought it was my appendix. He always would say, "If it becomes severe we will have to operate you". It never became severe. It only was a dull steady pain. But many nights I would wake up shaking all over and fright would grip me. During the day time my heart often beat wildly. Many times on Sundays I feared I would collapse in the pulpit. And here I recall one funeral service especially (Mrs. Hofman) when I had to hold on to the pulpit and silently called on God to help me finish. One Sunday morning I did have to abruptly end the service. During the early months of 1979 my whole abdomen became more and more painful while I became more and more tense. (Or may be the other way around. I don't know).

During the first week of March 1975 I was hospitalized with excruciating pain. Surgery followed immediately. A few days later I was informed that the intestines were blocked off by a certain growth and that it would take a week before they could let me know if it was benign. The Surgeon also said that I had been plagued by appendicitis and had to take away a shriveled up appendix. This made sense to me. It became a long and trying week of much prayer. Thank God that it was benign! Rightly or wrongly so but I have concluded that anesthetic affects me mentally for months to come. The whole summer I was not myself. And again looking back I resumed my work way too early.

Anne and Henry married in Monarch on May 31,1975. I was thankful Murray helped out with the Wedding Service. Present from Holland were Corrie's sister, Tante Teuntje and husband, Frank and

also her oldest brother, Klaas and his wife, Tante Annie. Even though we both were tired, we still look back upon a meaningful and beautiful day.

When Fall came around after evening meals at times I was getting severe shoulder and abdominal pains. Ordinarily it would last an hour or so. Again I began to see the Doctor. At first he was not sure what it was. But after numerous visits three months in succession he concluded I had gall bladder problems. I was informed that with the next attack I should immediately go to the Emergency for surgery. And so during the last week of November 1975 I again had anesthetic and surgery. I recall that Loris said, "Dad, don't again go; it is boring when you are not home." Well, even though that was kind of her to say, I had no choice.

Then came December 20, 1975 and Murray and Carol's marriage in Holland, Michigan. We took the train: Corrie and I, John and Jeanne, Jim and Andy, Francine, Loris, Adele, Stacy, and Russ. But then we ran into the clean-up of a derailment and a wait of over 5 hours. We finally arrived at Chicago on Saturday evening at 11 o'clock. It must have been Murray's nightmare, for then he had to drive us to Holland in a big snowstorm. It was very slow going and dangerous. Finally, at 2:30 A.M. he dropped us off in an empty house where there were all kinds of sleeping bags. His friends were away and we could stay there for the weekend. Physically Corrie and I were present at the Wedding that day but mentally I was a wreck. It all was too short following this last surgery. The next night I did not sleep one wink either. I did not know whether I was coming or going. And it was in this state that I arrived back home.

When arriving home, it was Christmas time, Old and New Year Eve services too which meant extra preaching services. Besides this we stepped into situation we had not been prepared for. Prior to our leaving I had done a lot of counseling with a young lady and her parents about a proposed marriage which I was sure would become a failure. The parents and Consistory were of the same conviction. Therefore, it was unanimously decided to not support this marriage which now was to take place in some other church. Yet, shortly after the New Year some Church ladies decided to give a bridal shower just the same. When this was discussed at a special Consistory Meeting all members sided with the ladies and their decision. This was the last straw that broke this "camel's mental and emotional back" and I plunged into a state of depression. I was advised to hand in my resignation, which I did on January 11, 1976. In the same week the Treasurer of the church dropped in and told Corrie that he was bringing us the last cheque.

At that time there was no Classis rule for churches to have a long term disability insurance. Therefore, until government unemployment insurance kicked in we were on our own. But right away we also found out that we were **not** on our own. God was still "Emmanuel". One of the charismatic church families who had never officially joined our fellowship, in every way helped us

through these early times. Even around this New Year (1996) Mrs. Brouwer called to express gratitude for our Christmas Letter. This, however, is a mutual gratitude.

The depression was so severe that for at least 4 weeks it was impossible for me to even see the people come to church on Sunday. I closed the curtains. The physician put me on Valium. I knew nothing about Valium but soon found out that it was addictive. I began to call it “junk” and within a month stopped taking it. We found that prayer did much, much more for our overall good. After a week or so one Elder, Gerrit Groeneweg, came by. He prayed with me and I was led to pray with him. After our “Amen” he said, “Oh good, Reverend Moerman still knows how to pray.” Basically, it was all I did. The other was where God led me to memorize scripture verses that were of a strictly positive nature, such as Psalm 23, Isaiah 26:3, Jeremiah 32:17; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 11:9; John 15:7; Matthew 6:33; Philippians 2:1-11 and 4:8-9 and 13.

The emotional break down or burn out went through 3 distinct stages. The first was a depression where I felt myself in a deep, dark hole of mental and emotional turmoil. Yet, faith in Christ was still there for I found myself often saying: Though He would slay me, i.e., Though I would go crazy, yet I will hope in Him (Job 13:15a). This lasted about one month. The next stage was that of Scripture memorization I mentioned above. And the last stage we entered upon when moving to Mayerthorpe. It consisted of singing praises to God with all our heart, thanking Him for giving us this beautiful place already in 1962 because He knew that we needed it in 1976! “God works in all things for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

During our time here we must have said scores of times while working on the house, around the house and in the bush, “Thank You, Lord.” Our hearts were overflowing with praise and thanksgiving. This was more therapeutic than the whole medical and psychological professions could provide us with. Here we also learned that medical advice we had received in Edmonton to combat Diverticulitis was not a bland diet but the opposite: fiber meals! Slowly the Metamucil bottles began to disappear! Another big “Hallelujah” to the Lord.

But even during my time of depression I held no grudge against anyone. We thank God for this. And so when the time came to move away to Mayerthorpe, we wanted the whole congregation to enter into this Gospel experience. I requested Consistory to give me the privilege to preach a reconciliation-farewell message and celebrate Holy Communion with them. It was eagerly accepted. By telephone I invited everyone to be present for this Sunday of confession of sin, forgiveness and reconciliation. Everyone was present except two Deacons. It was a wonderful time together. The father of the young lady who had still received a bridal shower from our church ladies offered to give us a milk cow he wanted to get rid because of her kicking habits. He said, “Maybe you can do something with her. We have given up on her. If you want the cow, I will

bring her to your place.” Besides this, the couple also surprised us with a sizable cheque. In Mayerthorpe, we learned how much easier it had been “to give” than the opposite and be on the receiving end.