

Chapter 18. Retired Life Continues to Take Shape

We had accumulated enough Delta travel points for two tickets in North America and, at Dixie's suggestion, decided to go Savannah, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina for ten days in the end of March 2001. Dixie was able to get the airline to include a two-day stopover in Portland, Oregon to visit Howard and Margaret



With Howard and Margaret Spaan

Spaan, even though it was hardly on a direct route from Edmonton to Savannah. We had a nice visit with the Spaans and in the days that followed we learned a lot about southern US history. The amount of stuff related to the Civil War almost everywhere was quite overwhelming at times, including a camp where many northern prisoners of war died, mostly of disease under very poor hygiene

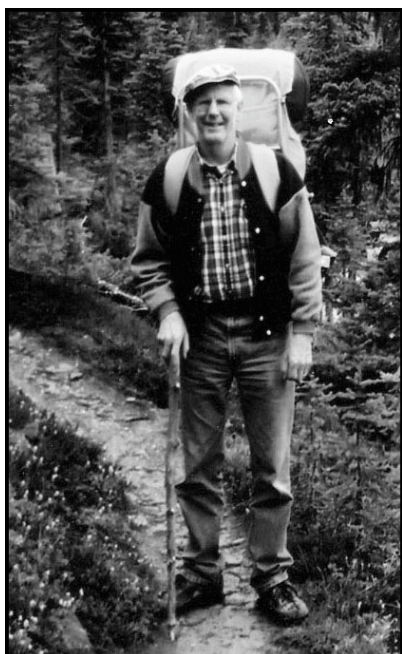
conditions. It was not the first time we had seen something of the terribly sad side of war but to see it all as a result of war among people of the same nation made it doubly sad.

Family celebrations included Grandma's 85th birthday and Matthew and Katie's wedding in Caledonia, Michigan, where the entire Wierenga-Weening clan gathered. Grandma almost did not make it to the wedding itself because of some intestinal problems, but in the end it all worked out well and a good time was had by all. It seemed appropriate for us to present the married couple with a Canadian flag, even though initially we were not sure how well that gesture would be received by the American family members present. Back home we had a Vanden Born family campout at a church camp west of Edmonton. There has been occasional talk about organizing another such event but no one has actually initiated anything yet. The closest we have come to it was a group picnic in Rundle Park one day in 2004.

Early in the summer I participated in a second photography workshop, this time with special emphasis on close-up or macrophotography, under the leadership of Maria Zorn, at a farm location near Hamilton. The timing was convenient because the workshop came right after I attended a BOT meeting in Grand Rapids and I was able to sleep at Gordon and Ann Pols' new house in Ancaster. It was great to learn some more photographic techniques and to be able to put them into practice at the same time.

Later in the summer I was brave enough (perhaps foolishly so) to join Karen, Elaine, and Herman, and go with Mark and Debbie and a bunch of others on a strenuous—for me—backpacking trip to the Alpine Hut at Outpost Lake. It was a tough hike, especially on the way up, on an often muddy and root-infested trail that

included a couple of stream crossings on skinny log bridges with nothing much to hold onto except a walking stick. For the last half-kilometer climb some of the early and younger arrivals came down to meet us and carry the packs for a couple of us the last distance. I gladly accepted their offer because I was very tired at the end of that day and it took several hours to get rested up again. The sleeping accommodation was such that we were all lying side by side in dormitory style on a foam-covered raised platform on the second floor of the cabin. There were a few snorers in the party, unfortunately, and a loud snorer right next to me did not make for very restful nights. A couple of people actually moved downstairs during the night and bedded down on the floor in the cooking and eating area, only to be disturbed there by mysterious animal sounds from below the floor.



Bill the hiker



Return from Outpost Lake hike 2001

Early the following summer (2002), Dixie and I flew to Europe for three weeks. We spent a week in Holland and then flew to Greece for a two-week bus and boat tour of places visited by the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. The tour was arranged by friends Bob and Mary VanderVennen from Toronto and included mostly people we knew. There were just 14 people in the group, with Amarylis, a Christian Greek woman, as tour guide. She was a wonderful person and full of more information about Greek history than I—and probably some others—were able to assimilate. We saw parts of Athens (Parthenon, Areopagus), Thessaloniki, Philippi, Berea, the oracle at Delphi, a monastery high up on a rocky peak at Meteora, Corinth, Olympia—we saw a lot of ruins. Especially meaningful were the places where Paul had preached or met with other Christians or where he had appeared in court. At one such place, Bob VanderVennen read from the relevant chapter of Acts; at another place our tour guide Amarylis read an impromptu English translation from her Greek Bible. After ten days on the bus—a big bus on which we

could move around to our heart's content—we boarded a cruise ship for four days for visits to the islands Crete, Patmos, Santorini, Mykonos, and Rhodes, and for a stop at Ephesus on the Turkey side. It turned out to be a marvelous and informative trip that made us look at many sections of the New Testament in a whole new light.

In mid-November we had our usual birthday dinner with Bill and Bertha and Audrey and Wilco, something that we had done nearly every year since we started it with Bill and Bertha in 1976. Bill Groot recently made a list of all the different places we had gone to for those celebrations. And, of course, we had a friends-and-family celebration of my 70th birthday. Another decade was behind me, and a new decade of life began.

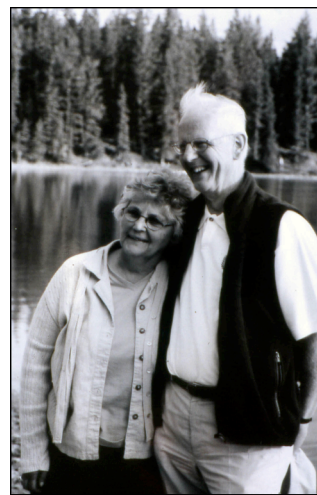
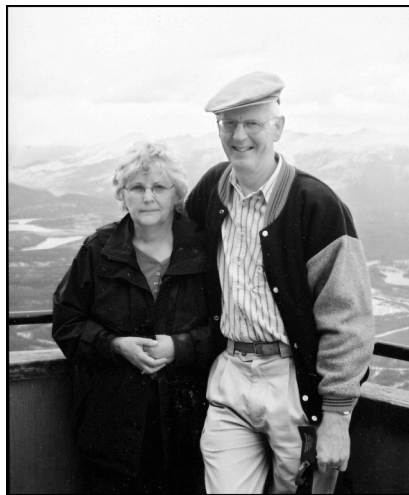
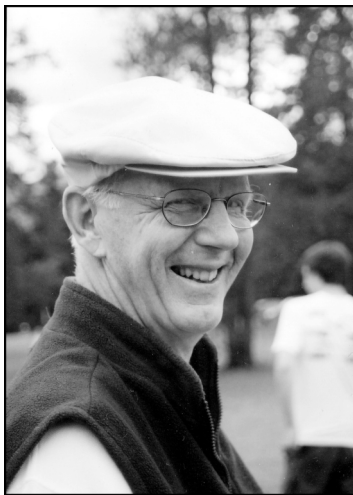
Some time before I retired, I had decided that I would try to do quite a bit more downhill skiing than the trips I had done once or twice a winter until then. I also had begun to take some of our grandchildren, one at a time, to Marmot Basin in Jasper for a one-day ski trip via the ski-bus that left Edmonton around 5 am on Saturday morning and returned around 9 pm. I got as far as taking Lucas, Zach, and Maria—I took Maria in 2003—but then the system ground to a halt. I took Abby and Sam together to Rabbit Hill once after that and then the plan ended, mostly because it seemed that my skiing days were nearly over. By that time their own parents also were taking them and they could out-ski me any time. The last time I skied downhill was in 2005, when Dixie and I took Bert and Hendrica Schouten to Jasper, and Bert and I skied two days. Bert's knee was giving him trouble, though, and we never went back.

In May 2003, Dixie and I drove to Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa for our one and only Elderhostel experience. The main point of attraction was a series of presentations by author and professor James Schaap on the history and literature of important writers from northwest Iowa, including the controversial Fred Manfred (Feike Feikema). When the conference was over, we drove further east to Wisconsin and visited relatives on the Westra side of the family around Randolph and East Friesland.

More importantly, 2003 marked our 45th wedding anniversary, another significant occasion to celebrate. Our entire immediate family headed to Jasper over a weekend in June, to a series of motel rooms that could accommodate us all for a long weekend of celebrating and reminiscing. We were able to include a return visit to Honeymoon Lake nearby, complete with a group photo shoot and a repeat of the photo taken of Dixie and me from a tripod at the same lake on our brief honeymoon trip in 1958. A few weeks later Dixie and I travelled to Marble Canyon near Fairmont, BC, this time with Clarence and Jean, Herman and Mom, and with Peter and Anne who had arrived for a visit. When the other men in the group went off golfing, Dixie and I and Mom drove south to Kimberley and spent some time looking around there.



In Jasper for our 45th anniversary, at Honeymoon Lake

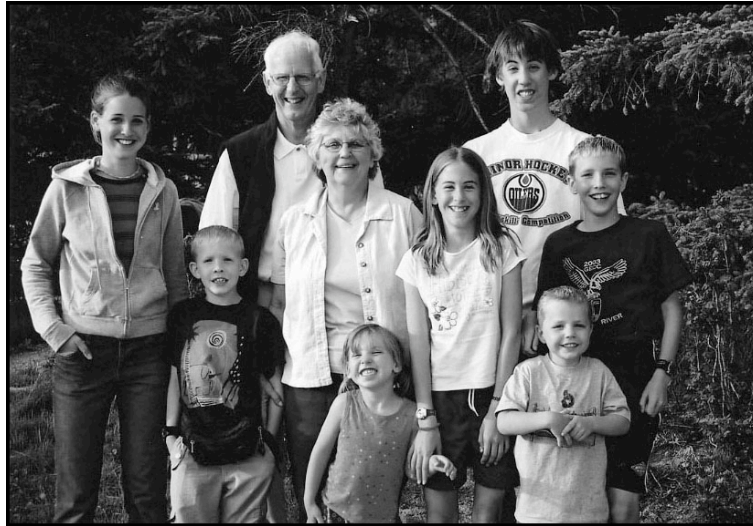


At family celebration in Jasper in 2003

Honeymoon Lake reprise



With our children and their spouses



With our grandchildren

Later in the summer, on 11 August, many of us gathered at the Westlawn cemetery to commemorate the deaths of Andrew, Carolyn, and Gladys 40 years earlier, and also the death of Dad Wierenga 49 years earlier. It was a very emotional time for all of us, especially when Mark spoke briefly about the biological parents of whom he has no direct memories.

Still later, the Vanden Born siblings and their extended families gathered at a cabin and trailer camp west of Edmonton for a weekend family reunion. The clan clearly has increased in size over the years.



Vanden Born reunion 2003



Riding on Duncan's quad

Todd had liked it so well in Canada that he also was back for a visit that same summer. He accompanied Dixie and me on a trip to Grande Prairie where one of the things we did was ride around on bumpy trails and across a small stream in a couple of Duncan's company quads. It was the first and only time I drove one of those vehicles and it was very enjoyable, if not a bit of hard work on a stump-infested trail. Todd thought it was the greatest. Dixie was less sure about it all but she did

actually ride on the backseat with me for a short trip and Ann preserved the event for posterity in a photograph.

With encouragement from Dixie—again!—I joined the Images Alberta Camera Club in January 2004, to help in my pursuit of photography as a hobby. I was favourably impressed with the group, men and women of all ages and with a wide range of photographic interest and ability. I have participated actively in competitions, outings, and workshops organized by the group ever since. In the fall of 2004, Dixie joined as well. Even if she was not involved in actually making photographs, she enjoyed the presentations and competitions and got to know a number of the club members; until the fall of 2010 she came along to all the meetings. I started entering slides and some prints in the monthly competitions on a



Dixie as new Canadian

regular basis, and since digital images came in and replaced slides in recent years I have entered some of those as well. It is satisfying and rewarding to come home from the competitions with ribbons from time to time and to see my winning images published in the club's monthly newsletter. It is equally rewarding to see the results of the very creative and wide-ranging artistic imagination of many of the other club members.

It had been some time coming and in 2004 it finally happened. Dixie became a Canadian citizen—in addition to her continuing her US citizenship, even though at the time of writing in 2010 her US passport has expired and has not been renewed. Most of the time she is more politically attuned than I am, and now she can actually participate in the political process by

voting. She could—and did, of course—always freely express her political views regardless of her formal citizenship.

During the same summer, the Aussie niece and cousin, Lauren, came to stay in Alberta for a few months as part of her pharmacist practicum. Part of the time she stayed at our house and so was able to share the privilege of the worst hail and rain storm we had ever seen here. It was a Sunday afternoon, and Karen and Lauren and Elaine had walked down the ravine and across the river before the storm hit. They had to work their way back up the ravine against a steady stream of ice-cold water, only to find more water around our house and in the basement. Our downspouts and those of our neighbours were plugged with hailstones, and very soon we had a sizable lake beside the house that was high enough to have water flowing into our basement through openings in the window casings. Mopping up the water in the basement looked like a hopeless cause but Dixie saved the day by finding someone in Spruce Grove who was willing to come along with a big vacuum truck and suck up the water in our yard. Once he arrived and pumped away all the water we were able to clean up inside. There was some damage to walls and carpet but nothing compared to what happened in a number of other houses in the area. The adjuster for our insurance company initially was not going to cover any of the repair costs but when I quoted the relevant section from our policy and he checked with his office, he changed his mind and wrote us a cheque on the spot. Lauren has not forgotten her experience and neither have we.

A major event a few months later was the installation of hardwood flooring in our house, in every room on the main floor except the kitchen, the laundry room, and the two bathrooms. It meant that we had to empty out all the furniture, take down all the wall pictures, disconnect and take out the stereo system and the computer, and empty most of the closets. That part of it became a big undertaking. Most of the stuff went into the garage, some into the basement, and the piano went into the kitchen. Dixie and I moved into the basement bedroom. One night, when smelly stuff was put on the floor, we slept at someone else's house. It took ten days to get all the hardwood installed and then it took quite a while to get all our stuff back in place. Pieces of felt had to be put under all the furniture, a chore in itself, but eventually it all got done. We were happy with the results, even if it took a while to get used to a hard floor after living on carpeted floors for something like forty years.

During 2004, I decided to put a number of Vanden Born family photographs that I had scanned, into a DVD and to give each of my siblings a copy that they could play on their DVD player or computer. The collection of images includes photographs of people in four successive generations, starting with my grandfather and some of his ancestors.

A very significant event the same year was the 25th anniversary of the opening of The King's University College back in 1979. I had a continuing strong interest in the college and had spent a good deal of time in helping to plan and develop the institution that now has an enrolment of some 640 students in a number of degree programs. Some years earlier, in 1997, I had approached Hank Verhoeff in Calgary with a proposal to write a small booklet on the history of the movement that led to the opening of the college. Hank and I worked at it for a few years but then he decided to withdraw from the project and I asked Harry Cook to take his place. Harry had recently retired from his position as professor of biology at King's and was willing to work with me. Hank Verhoeff proposed the title, *Torchbearers for*

the King. Harry and I shared the writing, most of it based on the collective files and memories that Hank and I had, and I did the formatting and organizing. In addition to describing the historical development, we had asked for and received written reflections from a number of others who had been involved in those early years. All of these were included in the booklet, as was the inspiring talk presented by Richard Mouw at the opening convocation in 1979. Copies of the 137-page book arrived at King's at noon on the day of the anniversary celebration banquet, just in time to distribute copies to all who attended the dinner. It was a joyful occasion.

Earlier in the year we had put a deposit on a two-bedroom condo unit in *The Valleyview*, a 24-unit building that was to be constructed on the southwest corner of 142nd street and 96th avenue, just a few blocks from where we used to live in Crestwood. Dixie always had her ear to the ground for real estate developments that might be of interest to us and this was one of them. Elaine's marriage to Darren had broken up, sadly, and she had moved back to Edmonton, into our house with us. The plan was that she would purchase and move into the condo unit, with the possibility that, should she move out again later, Dixie and I might sell our house and take over the condo. During the winter we spent a lot of time making decisions about kitchen cabinets and appliances, flooring types, and wall colours, and traipsing through the building under construction to keep an eye on things. There were lots of challenges to be met and much of it was a new experience for us, especially for me. In the end it all came together nicely, the completed building was very attractive, both inside and out, and Elaine moved in during the summer of 2005. We had enjoyed having her stay with us but it was time for Dixie and me to have the house to ourselves again!
