

was able to get somehow. No one liked the soup very much but at least it was nutritious and it was clearly better than nothing. Dad would collect all their identity papers overnight, lock up their bicycles and food supplies in another building, and in the morning they would retrieve their papers and their belongings and move on again.

Dad spoke German sufficiently well that he could carry on conversations with German army officers and soldiers that came by. Earlier, in Achterberg, his knowledge of English made it possible for him to serve as translator for allied fighter or bomber crew members who had bailed out of planes or survived plane crashes and were being helped on their way back to England by local members of the Dutch resistance. As children, of course, we were told nothing about any of those activities. Similarly, we knew nothing about the radios hidden in the small brick 'transformer' building on the business premises in Terschuur while we lived there and where Dad and others went at night to listen to the latest news from the BBC. When the Canadian tanks and jeeps finally rolled in it was time to celebrate the end of the war. I don't remember much from the celebrations, but I do remember the oranges, the chocolate bars, and the loaves of white bread, things we had not seen for a long time.

In early June 1945 we were able to return to our home in Achterberg, such as it was. Dad and some others had gone there first to check things out, and soon we all went. The place was a terrible mess. The house had been lived in by soldiers who had stuck stovepipes through the window, dug trenches in the front yard, and generally messed up everything. At Dad's place of business, the windmill had been blown up and part of the warehouse was totally destroyed. Dutch Nazis were brought in to clean up the rubble, under the supervision of resistance members with orange armbands and sten guns (mini-machineguns) in their hands.

Most of the wood from the destroyed buildings, especially from the mill, was salvaged, cut up for firewood, and dumped in our back yard. George and I had the joyous task of splitting the wood and stacking it inside one of the chicken coops in our large back yard, for later use in the kitchen stove.

At home in those early years in the Netherlands, we did not see much of Dad, even on Saturdays or Sundays. We did occasionally sing together by the organ in the living room, likely only on Sundays. Dad could play the organ a bit, but I don't remember if he was the one accompanying us or if Bertha did it. My parents were not very socially inclined, and they did not do much visiting. It is undoubtedly true also that their church and community connections were much more in Rhenen than in Achterberg. Mother probably would like to have had more opportunity to do that kind of visiting, but much of her time was taken up with being pregnant and raising her children while Dad was going about his business activities and getting his social fixes with the farmer customers and their wives at the same time. Comments included in the general letters Dad wrote to his customers during the first five years after our emigration to Canada attest to his enjoyment of those contacts. Similar contacts no doubt contributed to Dad's enjoyment of peddling eggs to many private customers in St. Albert during the 1960s and 70s.

I did not really get to know my dad until after we emigrated in 1949 because then, of course, both he and I were around almost all the time. The three years and a bit that I worked for my parents on the farm in Busby were an important time, therefore, in terms of my relationship with my parents. I know that Dad had taught me to play checkers and chess and that he made me memorize the Heidelberg Catechism, but I have no memories of playing other games with him when I was young, or of sitting on his lap or walking with him other than to and from church. In other words, I have no memories of intimate moments other than occasional spankings, mostly after fights with George. As a result I do not recall from those years any kind of a close and loving relationship with him. Often he would not be home at supper time, so even memories of mealtimes are dominated by images of my mother. During my high school years, she would be up early Monday morning to make me breakfast and see me off. I probably gave her a goodbye kiss. I do remember that I would kiss her on the cheek when I returned on Saturday afternoon from my week at school. I have no memories of hugging her until many years later. One such time, an important one, was when we went to the farm at Busby after we heard that Dad had died, in the fall of 1980.

I never did witness any physical expressions of affection or love between my parents. From some things Dad said, it seems that he believed those expressions should not happen outside the bedroom. In retrospect, it is unfortunate that he took that position. Perhaps it also accounts for what I remember as an almost complete absence of expressions of love or affection by my dad to his children. He was not an insensitive person, as witnessed by letters he wrote to people in Holland, but he seemed unable to give verbal or physical expression to the feelings he had, at least to his children.

What Dad did do from time to time was to give expression to his anger by administering bare-bum spankings when we had misbehaved or when George and I had been fighting again about our 'stuff'. I have no memory of Mother ever punishing us; that was left to Dad, and there certainly were times when we were not looking forward to his coming home. Once when Dad was sick in bed with pneumonia, I remember being called in to receive such punishment administered right from his bedside. They were painful lessons.

Of things sexual I was mostly unaware for a long time. Of sex education by my parents or teachers there was none. In conversations with classmates at school there were occasional references to verbs or nouns with sexual meanings but the real significance of those terms for myself or my friends escaped me. I did know in my head, of course, that babies were not delivered by storks, and I knew that my mother was pregnant a number of times, but I don't recall ever thinking about my father's role in helping to bring those pregnancies about. All of my siblings and I were born at home, with the help of an aunt (*tante* Teun) or midwife and probably with a physician present as well, but we always were sent off somewhere, at least out of the house, when a birth was about to take place.

Dad taught George and me how to play checkers on a European-style ten-by-ten board, with 20 stones each, and with rules that are a bit different from the Canadian-English rules. I still have the original board, with a checkers grid on one side and a

conventional eight-by-eight chess grid on the other side. He also taught George and me how to play chess—he later taught my younger brothers as well—and we became fairly good at it. I still have the chess set we used then, complete with the wooden box used to store the pieces. George and I went to a chess club in Rhenen for at least a year, during 1948-49, after I had finished high school and was home every night. We enjoyed those times in the chess club and were able to sharpen our chess skills considerably. At least we thought so at the time. On one occasion we participated in a small tournament that included having one master player take on at least twenty of us simultaneously. Somehow neither George nor I lasted very long in that setting. We had to be home from the club meetings by 10, which meant that we could never play more than one game. That annoyed us no end, of course. We may have stayed longer a few times but then Dad would be waiting up for us and we would not hear the end of it. I am no longer sure just what happened on those occasions. What did happen was that George and I learned to play well enough that we could beat Dad on a regular basis. The result of that was that he did not like to play chess with us anymore. I don't recall any other games he played with us but among ourselves as children, Monopoly stands out as one game we played quite often. The 'regular' kind of playing cards did not exist in our house, but we did have a small assortment of other 'approved' card games. One of the things that entertained at least George and me was a second-hand *Meccano* metal construction set. We had a great time building all sorts of things with that. I am quite sure that we had wooden blocks to play with also.

Favourite books for me were western stories about Winnetou and Old Shatterhand. Also, of course, the five-book series by Louis Penning about the Boer War, with heroes such as farmer-leader Louis Wessels and servant Blikoortje. These were the patriotic Dutch versions of that war, of course. Titles such as *De Leeuw van Modderspruit* (The Lion of Mud Spring) and *De Held van Spionkop* (The Hero of Spy Hill) come to mind. I am certain that I read through all of the volumes several times over the years, and that the stories in them did nothing to endear the English to me.

For a time George and I slept together in the same bed and that often was a good occasion for an argument or a fight. Later, I was allowed to sleep in the larger bed in the guest room, by myself, and somehow that worked much better. An exception was the time when during a heavy-duty thunderstorm at night lightning struck a power pole nearby. The sound of that woke me up and scared me so much that I crawled under the blankets and did not emerge for perhaps ten minutes. Rational thinking certainly was not part of my response. Actually, all of us older children were afraid of violent thunderstorms and I remember many a time when we would hide under a table in the back room during such storms.

I assume that Bertha was involved in helping with household chores, even though Mother did have one or more young women helping her in the house for a number of years. As the two oldest boys, George and I did not have any household duties that I can recall from our pre-teen and teenage years but we did have stuff to do outside during the summer, such as weeding in the garden, cutting the grass, raking the gravel on the 'driveway' that was not used as such, and trimming the hedges around the property. Neither of us particularly enjoyed those chores but they were

part of our lives just the same. Occasionally we would go and pick blackberries from bushes along the rural roads in Achterberg or we would dig a useless hole in the garden, just for the fun of it. A few times we also made our own peanut butter. Mother bought peanuts that we shelled laboriously, sitting on the back *stoep* (step), and then ground up in a meat grinder.

For a couple of years in the late 1940s, Dad grew a patch of tobacco, perhaps 10 by 10 meters, in a part of our garden that had served as chicken run before—yes, we had a number of chickens, and feeding them and gathering their eggs was part of our regular chores. Harvesting the tobacco leaves and stringing them up to dry also became part of our summer work, a messy job that none of us liked. When the leaves were dry, Dad would take them somewhere to be turned into cigars for his smoking enjoyment. I do not know what motivated the tobacco growing but it probably was the scarcity of tobacco during the immediate post-war years.

Sometimes some of us would go to Ouwehand's *Dierenpark* (Ouwehand Zoo), especially for the playground that was there. If we walked cross-country we could get there in 15 or 20 minutes. Other times we would go climbing around in Dad's windmill in Achterberg, with or without permission. It was a cool place, with brick walls around one meter thick (so I was told), and huge wooden gears and shafts in the top works.



Dad's mill and buildings in the mid-1930s

Every Sunday afternoon, Mother and Dad went to bed for a nap for an hour or two. Did they sleep? Or did other things happen also? I never asked myself that question until I was much older. What did I know at the time? Besides, most parents' lives are not known by their kids to have a sexual side to them.

Once on such a Sunday afternoon, probably while Mother and Dad were enjoying their nap, two of my brothers walked into a neighbouring farmer's field and proceeded to knock down a bunch of grain stooks. When Dad woke up and found out about it, and when he also saw that it looked like it was going to rain, he unhappily went out to set them all upright again. Beyond that I have no memory of other consequences.

Dad made some of us (Bertha, George, and me) memorize the entire Heidelberg Catechism, one Lord's Day at a time. Every Sunday afternoon we would be called into the living room one at a time to recite what we had learned, from Lord's Day 1 up to however far we had progressed. I know that I did get to Lord's Day 52. What determination on Dad's part! Bertha and I, and perhaps George as well, attended catechism classes in our church in Rhenen also but I do not remember much from those times.

Some time in 1946, Dad bought a red open jeep that he used to get around to his farmer customers. One time, probably in 1948, I was supposed to learn how to drive

it. It did not go real well. What I remember of it is that I scraped the brick wall in a tunnel under the railroad track with the outside-mounted spare tire because I had no idea I was that close to the side. That incident slowed down the driving practice quite a bit. Dad also got involved in custom spraying of crops and orchard trees, and during the two-month break from high school I went along with his crew a number of times to help, mostly driving the tractor, the Ferguson tractor that was later exported to Canada and saw a lot of use on the farm at Busby.

As a way to diversify, Dad's crew did some custom grass cutting for hay. They used a ground-driven mower that had been converted by replacing the long horse tongue with a short hitch for the Ferguson tractor. One Saturday afternoon, I was to help him finish some cutting for a farmer, and he was going to use the jeep to pull the mower. My job was to drive the jeep, with Dad sitting on the mower. I was not a particularly good driver, however, and managed to stall the engine several times. The lowest gear in the dual-range transmission was not quite low enough, especially for my inexperienced foot. Then Dad took over the driving; he hit the gas and took off, with me on the mower. The end of the cutter bar promptly caught in a high spot and the mower broke into two pieces. The cutting was done for that day. We abandoned the broken mower where it was and went home. Dad was not happy, of course, and I was glad I had not been driving when the mower fell apart.



Dad's jeep and Coen Pels, manager of the business

I must have learned something about driving, though, as witnessed by an incident some time later when George and I rode our bikes to Epe for a visit to *Oom Cees* and *Tante Aal* and their cousin daughters. On one of the days there, we went along with two of their workers to deliver feed to a farmer. While the men were in the farmyard, I decided to drive the army surplus truck into the field to be helpful in turning it around, and promptly got it stuck. Not seriously, fortunately, because the regular driver managed to get it out fairly easily.

Two trips with Dad in his jeep were memorable. On one occasion I went along on what was supposed to be a short business trip to Drenthe, 40 or 50 kilometers east. Unfortunately, that trip was aborted when we were less than halfway there and the engine quit. Distributor problems. By the time that was repaired it was too late to go on and we simply went back home. Not very exciting, of course. The other occasion was a vacation day trip in which Dad took Bertha, George, and me to Staphorst and Giethoorn (a sort of Dutch Venice, full of canals). We saw a lot of people with interesting local clothing in those two places, and we actually ate lunch out at some café. Along the way, Dad did a little speeding and showed us what it was like to travel 100 kilometers per hour, probably top speed for the jeep. It was both exciting and very windy in the wide open vehicle. Later the same day we spent some time on a North Sea beach and had an opportunity to run in the water, something we had

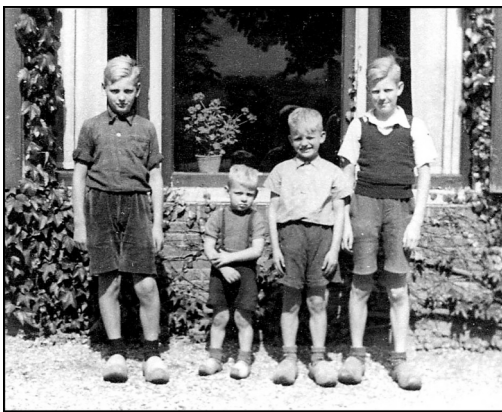
never experienced before. Unfortunately, the seawater had a very painful after-effect because George and I had been running around barefoot in a farmer's stubble field across the road from our house the previous day. Our legs were quite scratched up as a result, and when the sea water on our skin dried up our legs were terribly sore from the salt. When we got home an hour or so later we spent time splashing water over our legs to get rid of the salt but it did not work well. By the next morning, however, the pain was gone and things were back to normal.

During the summer some of us children often spent a week or two with our Nijboer relatives on the *Dronkelaar* farm where Mother had grown up. Those were nice times. We would walk to church in Barneveld, we would go for walks with *Oom* Heimen, or we would jump from the hay storage area high up in the barn (attached to the house) into a pile of hay on the barn floor. The smells of the barn part are still part of my memory somehow, as is the taste of the drinking water from their well, a peculiar taste that we were not used to. We slept in the attic above the living room part of the house-barn combination, a place where apples from the fall crop were stored, just like in our house in Achterberg. *Oma* Nijboer was not living anymore during the visits I remember, so it was just the three uncles (Jan, Willem, and Heimen) and two aunts (Teun and Gijs).



*Dronkelaar* farm in 2009

George and I made the occasional bike trips, once to Epe to visit our van't Land relatives, and another time to Lekkerkerk, to revisit the place where part of our family spent a week or more in the spring of 1940. Arie Hovestad, a classmate of George, went with us to Lekkerkerk. The most memorable event on that trip was the time Arie tried to walk on water that happened to be covered with a layer of green duckweed and, therefore, did not look like water.



George, Jack, John J, Bill in wooden shoes, around 1947

I don't remember the source of the 'wooden shoe' photograph, but I am quite sure it was not taken by an official photographer. Probably by a relative or by some acquaintance of my parents. On formal family photographs we usually appear reasonably dressed up, but for this one we even wore our *klompen* (wooden shoes). We never wore them to school, but in the yard outside our house we often did.

During the summer months of 1946 to 1948, I sometimes went along with Jurrie Rijksen, one of Dad's crew, to deliver

feed to farmer customers, both in or near Achterberg and in the Betuwe, across the Rhine. That was fun, in the ‘big’ 1946 Dodge truck imported from Canada. The loaded truck crawled and whined up the hill to Rhenen in the lowest of its four gears (a straight-six engine, and no six- or eight-speed transmission). One of those times I was riding on the back of the empty truck on the way home and fell off when Jurrie turned a corner. I was not hurt, fortunately, and I simply walked home, about 2 kilometers. What driver Jurrie thought or did when I was not on the truck when he got home, remains a mystery. Apart from the initial scare it did not seem such a big deal to me, though, and it was never talked about at home.

During the last several years in Holland, Dad had a motorcycle that he would use to travel to his various farmer customers, especially when the jeep was in use by Coen Pels who had become the day-to-day manager of the business. The motorcycle was parked inside, along with a bike or two, in the *bijkeuken*. If I was home alone on a Sunday evening, or babysitting while the rest of the family was off to church, I would sometimes get on the bike and kick-start it for the thrill of hearing the engine roar for a few seconds.

The one time I actually rode the mid-size motor bike (a 250 or 350 cc DKW) was an experience in itself. It was parked outside the office by Dad’s business and Dad presumably was inside. I must have been 15 or 16 at the time, and I don’t really know what I was thinking, but I got on the bike, started it, and rode it down the road a few hundred meters and back again, all of it in first gear. When I got back, I shut it off and parked it where it had been before, and wondered what might happen next. Surprising enough, nothing happened! There was no reaming out, no punishment, and Dad simply never mentioned it. Perhaps he was so happy that both the son and the motorcycle survived the stunt without injury or damage and decided to just let it go.

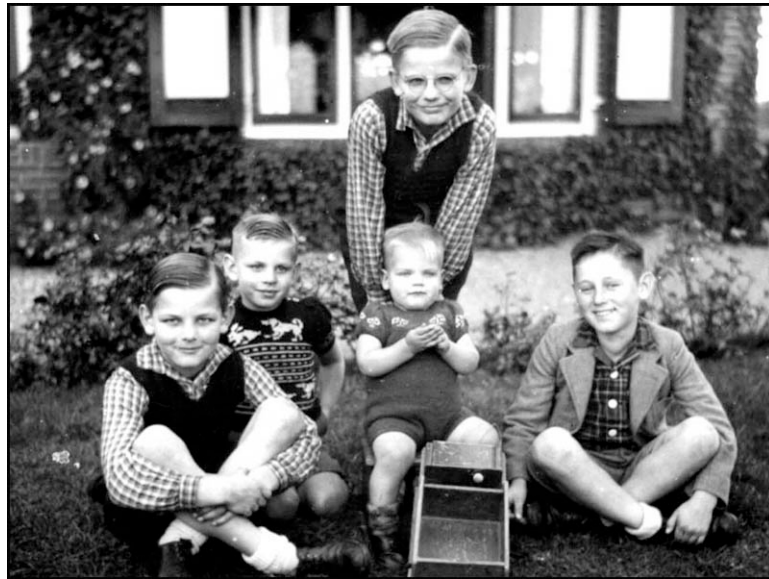
A potentially much more serious event was our encounter with a rusty-looking but half-alive allied-forces ‘eggshell’ hand grenade plowed up in the farm field next to our house a couple of years after the war. Three or four of us were standing around when John picked it up and pulled the pin. The grenade started to make a hissing noise, and we ran off. John was still close enough when it exploded that a piece of metal got embedded in his arm and had to be dug out by the doctor. The grenade must have been well past its ‘best-before’ date, otherwise who knows what the outcome might have been.

An important test of my ability to carry a bit of responsibility occurred when Dad asked me to ride my bike to Wageningen, about 8 kilometers away, to deliver 1,000 guilders in cash to a wholesale supplier there. I think I had my hand in or near my inside pocket most of the trip to make absolutely sure that the envelope with money was still there; the trip back home was the relaxed part.

In Dad’s younger days, he had spent a good deal of time with homing pigeons, and in 1947 or 1948 he bought a couple for his sons. They were wonderful to have and it was a joy to watch them fly around. It did not seem difficult at all to have them become so tame that they would come and sit on our shoulders or eat out of our hands. Then one sad day they suddenly were gone, and all we could find was a few

feathers behind the hedge around our backyard. We could conclude only that a neighbourhood cat was too fast for them and had turned them into lunch.

In 1948, a number of young children from Hungary were brought to the Netherlands, probably through the efforts of churches, and one such boy, Joseph, came to stay with our family for about six months. He was probably around 10 or 11. At first, of course, he knew no Dutch at all but it did not take very long for him to learn to communicate with us. Other than his presence on a family photograph from 1948, I remember little about him. He seemed to fit right in, well enough to make his own way to the bakery in the village and buy himself some candy at least once.



John, Jack, John J, Wilco, and Joseph in 1948

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