Transcript of a series of videotaped interviews by Mark, conducted from December 2017 to early 2022

Compiled in May 2022

Mark: Dad, I want to ask you a bit about your Dutch years, in the Netherlands. I am going to divide that up into three parts. You lived in the Netherlands from the year you were born, 1932, to when you moved to Canada in 1949, when you were sixteen and a half. So, three parts: before the war, during the war, and after the war. Some years for which you may not have a very robust memory.
Bill: For the first period I have very little memory actually.
Mark: So you were born where?
Bill: In Achterberg, a small village about 20 km west of Arnhem (on the Rhine), right in the middle of the Netherlands.
Mark: Did the Rhine run right through Achterberg?
Bill: No, the name of the village actually translates into 'behind the mountain' or 'behind the hill'. That hill is between he Rhine and the village where we lived. On the Rhine side of the hill there is a town [city] called Rhenen, with a population of about 20,000. That is where I went to school. Achterberg was in the municipality Rhenen. It was to Rhenen something like Spruce Grove is to Edmonton. Achterberg was a little over 1 kilometer from Rhenen.
Mark: What was the population of Achterberg?
Bill: I don't know but I would say less than 1000. I could look that up, I suppose. To get from Achterberg to Rhenen we had to climb up and over the hill in between.
Mark: And that was in which Dutch province?
Bill: Utrecht.
Mark: You were the second-born in your family, about 16 months after your sister Bertha?
Bill: Her full name was Gijsbertha.
Elaine: I did not know that.
Bill: It was really the female version of Gijsbert, which was usually shortened to Gijs or Bert. She was named after my grandmother on my Dad's side. She was named Gijsje.
Mark: Let's talk about your parents and their families. Your mom was Nennetje Nijboer. Tell me about her family. Was she the only one who got married in her family?
Bill: No, she was one of two. Her older sister Eef, the oldest in the family, got married at the age of 40, to a widower who had 10 children. She got married first, and my mother got married second. There were four women and three men in the family. Only two of the women got married, and none of the men did.
Mark: So your mother was the only one who had children of her own.
Elaine: Was that not unusual for the time?
Bill: I think so, but I don't know how that all came about.
Mark: Your mom was born in?
Bill: 1904, on October 3.
Mark: She grew up in that area?
Bill: Yes, it was about 20 kilometers straight north of where I was born.
Mark: Both of your parents were born there. What was the name of that place?
Bill: It was a rural area. My mother went to church in Barneveld, about 2 km away. I am quite sure she went to school there also, but I don't recall any discussion about that.
Mark: Where did she fit into the lineup among the seven in the family?

Bill: There were actually nine in the family, and she was the seventh. I should have looked that up, I suppose. [As I got to know the family, she was the fifth, because two older brothers had died young, by drowning, in 1919 and 1920. One in the same area, and one in the US where he had emigrated (Iowa, I believe)].
Elaine: Don't you know your aunts and uncles that well?
Bill: You know, we did not see them that much. I don't recall ever going there during the pre-war period. During the war years we went there a few times, but we did not have a whole lot of good transportation to go there.
Elaine: And you did not have cousins to play with?
Bill: No, on my mother's side there were no cousins to play with.
Mark: Your grandparents, on your mother's side?
Bill: I barely knew them.
Mark: What were their names?
Bill: Willem and Willempje Nijboer. There were a few different spellings of that last name, historically, but it translates simply as 'new farmer.'
Mark: And what was your grandmother's maiden name?
Bill: Van Middendorp. ('from the middle of the village').
Mark: Do you know their years of birth?
Bill: No, I don't. [1860 and 1865, married in 1894]
Mark: Were they farmers?
Bill: Yes, they had a small farm. The had, maybe, a dozen milk cows, a couple of horses, and probably some pigs and chickens. They sold the fresh milk to local dairy, but also used the milk to make butter and cheese. My mother knew how to make butter and cheese. And they may have sold some of that butter and cheese also.
Mark: Do you know what kind of cheese they made?
Bill: Probably something like what we know as Gouda cheese. It probably never got very old.
Mark: When we were living in England, we went there a couple of times, and there were the four siblings living together on the family farm.
Bill: That is where we visited.
Mark: And that is where your mom was born and lived until she got married..
Bill: Yes. I think she had some kind of clerical job in a doctor's office in Barneveld for a while during her later years.
Mark: How long did she go to school?
Bill: You know, I really don't know.
Mark: And how old was she when she got married?
Bill: She was born in 1904, so in September 1930 she was 25.
Elaine: Was that common in those days?
Bill: My dad would have been 27.
Elaine: You said that you and mom were considered old when you got married.
Bill: In those days people didn't get married so young, I guess.
Mark: Let's talk a bit about your dad.
Bill: He was born in 1903, on February 27, in Terschuur.
Mark: And where was that?
Bill: About the same distance from Achterberg as where my mother was born. The places where my parents were born were at most a kilometer apart.
Elaine: What? Really?

Bill: The whole area we are talking about was rural, and probably smaller in area than the city of Edmonton. Neither of my parents was born in what you might call a village or a town, but in a rural area. For my dad, there were just some solitary houses among the farms, and that is where he grew up. My grandfather had a feed business, and there was a house with the business, which is where he lived. And that is where my father was born.
Mark: And his father and mother, what were their names? My grandfather's name was the same as mine, Willem Hendrik Hendrikus van den Born, and my grandmother's name was Gijsje Doppenberg. They were born in 1872 and 1874, and married in 1902. My dad was the oldest of six, four males and two females.
Mark: Did your grandparents grow up in that same area also?
Bill: They did. My grandfather moved around a bit because he worked as a hired hand on windmills in a couple of different places. With these wind-powered mills they would grind grain for farmers in the area.
Elaine: Was one of the millers sucked up into the system and killed?
Bill: No, he was not killed. It was my grandfather, at 22, and he broke both of his legs and arms in a couple of places. There was a chain hoist that would take a bag of wheat or rye from the bottom of the mill to the top where the wheat would be poured into a hopper to take it down to the millstones. They would tie the chain to a bag at the bottom, then quickly run up the stairs and catch he bag at the top. My grandfather got his hand caught between the rope and the bag, so he was hoisted up along with the bag and then hauled around a pulley at the top. Someone apparently noticed what was happening and was able to stop the mill, carefully get him down, and he survived [after four months in the hospital].
Mark: Were windmills pretty common in the area?
Bill: Probably not that common but there might be one every five to ten kilometers where farmers could bring their grain to be ground. In other areas of the country windmills could be more common, and often were used to pump water away from low areas.
Mark: Would those mills be operating all year?
Bill: Yes, whenever there was wind.
Mark: Did you have quite a bit of experience with a windmill?
Bill: I had none.
Mark: So your grandfather was a labourer in a windmill in a few different places.
Bill: He was. But when they bought the business in Terschuur, perhaps around 1905, there was no windmill there. Instead there was a big oil-burning engine that powered the millstones. They scraped together all the money they could get and then were in business.
It was a feed business, for cattle, pigs, and chickens. They would buy the grain and other components for the feed, do the grinding and mixing, and sell it to farmers in the area.
Mark: Did you see that big engine that powered the millstones?
Bill: Oh yes. It was a big machine, with a big flywheel perhaps a meter and a half in diameter. We would go to that place once or twice a year perhaps.
Elaine: There was a big building with the name 'van den Born' on it.
Bill: In later years my two uncles had taken over the business, and then still later two of my cousins. And then they sold everything, and the name on the building was replaced with a painting of a horse.
Mark: Where did your Dad go to school?
Bill: He went to he Christian elementary school in Zwartebroek, a 15-20 minute walk along a path that went cross-country along farm fields, and later to high school in Amersfoort and to a

university-level business school in Utrecht. Amersfoort was 8 or 9 kilometers away and he would ride his bike there.
My Dad was a well-educated guy. He had to learn to speak and write in English, French, and German, something that stood him in good stead during the years of World War II.
Mark: What was his youth like? What was the impact of World War I on his family?
Bill: I don't know what impact there was. I do know that in my father's family they had a Hungarian refugee girl for a time. She is included in some family photographs of that period. Similar to the situation when I was growing up and we had a young Hungarian boy living with us for perhaps six months. I don't know how all that came about either.
Mark: What about the religious side of your parents' families?
Bill: They were all good Kuyperians. They were strongly committed to the *Gereformeerde Kerk* [sister church to the Christian Reformed Church in Canada and the US].
Mark: Was the whole area Reformed?
Bill: Probably mostly. There may have been a few Roman Catholics also here and there.
Mark: In other parts of the country there were Roman Catholics probably.
Bill: Oh yes, further south. South of the Rhine and further south is heavily catholic.
Elaine: What kind of Dutch people are South-Africans?
Bill: Most were of the Reformed kind.
Mark: Where does the Rhine river flow to the ocean?
Bill: To the North Sea via Rotterdam.
Mark: It has its origin in Germany?
Bill: Switzerland.
Mark: When did your parents get married?
Bill: In 1930, on September 5, in the church in Barneveld where my mother was a member. They had a house built in Achterberg during the time they were engaged, and moved there as soon as they were married.
Elaine: They had money to do that?
Bill: They must have. Of course, my dad had worked for his parents for a number of years.
It was a two- or two-and-a-half storey house, with a living room and a kitchen, one room behind the kitchen that was not used much, a toilet, all on the ground floor. Also on the ground floor a sort of back porch, for laundry and bike storage. On the second floor there were four bedrooms, one of which served as guest room, and there was an attic, where I slept for some time in my later years.
Mark: Is this the house you lived in until you immigrated to Canada?
Bill: Yes.
Mark: The house still stands today?
Bill: Yes.
Elaine: Was this the house where you fell out of the window?
Bill: Yes, that was the house. Well, I did not really fall out of the window, but I fell down when I was trying to climb up the wall to a window in the attic. I probably was about 12 then.
There were actually two window incidents. The first one happened when I was no more than 2 or so. There was a flower planter outside the window of my parents' bedroom on the second floor and, apparently, at one point I must have climbed out of the crib I was sleeping in, in their bedroom, and crawled out the window into the planter. A farmer who was working in the field across the road saw me and came to tell my mother that there was this little boy sitting in the

flower planter, and he might fall down. I have no memory of it and only know what I have been told.
Mark: Was there an address for the house?
Bill: Yes, Achterbergsestraat 171. It was on the main road between Achterberg and Rhenen.
Mark: Were you born in that house?
Bill: I think so.
Mark: Do you know anything about your birth?
Bill: Zero. I am quite sure that all of my siblings also were born in that house. My mother never went to the hospital for births. There would have been a midwife. And, actually, my aunt on my mother's side who had had some nursing training, perhaps as a nursing aide, or perhaps a full-fledged nurse, would come to the house. And the local family doctor also would come to the house.

WHVB interview 27 Dec 2017, Part 2, Img_0930.mov
27 Dec 2017 Part 2
Mark: You were just saying that that whole rural area was about 50 kilometers from Amsterdam.
Bill: Yes. The whole country is not much more than100 kilometers wide, and maybe 150 kilometers north to south.
Mark: At the time you were born, was your dad running his own business?
Bill: Yes, he was. When my parents got married, they moved to this town where my dad, with the help of his father, had bought this business. They had built a house, and the business got started. He also had a partner who, presumably, had put up some money as well.
Mark: Did that partner work in the business as well? Who was that person?
Bill: Yes, he did. His name was Eibert Wilgenburg. Do you remember us visiting the Wilgenburgs in southern California, after we left Davis, on our way to England? It was near San Diego. The man I am talking about was dead by that time, but his wife was still living there, with her sons.
Elaine: Did she remember you?
Bill: The name, for sure. Mr. Wilgenburg had left the partnership under a bit of a cloud, in the early thirties.
Elaine: Did he do some embezzling?
Bill: No. He and his wife lived in the house that was attached to the business by the mill. His wife had died, and he had a young woman as housekeeper. At some point he got into bed with that housekeeper, and she got pregnant, something that was not popular in that community. My dad then must have told him that the partnership was not going to work any longer, and he had better leave. He bought out the partner, who then went back to farming and some time later emigrated to California with his family.
Do you remember the Van Beeks in Oregon?
Mark: Yes, for sure.
Bill: Joanne Van Beek was a Wilgenburg, a daughter of those same Wilgenburgs. So, a daughter of my father's ex-partner.
Mark: She was a daughter of his first wife?
Bill: She could be, but could also be of his second wife.
Mark: Didn't the Van Beeks live in California first?
Bill: They may have, I don't know.
Mark: Did they go the CRC in Corvallis, The Church of the Savior?

Bill: Yes, they did.

WHVB interview 27Dec17, part 3, Img_1817.mov
Mark: What was your father's name?
Bill: J.J. van den Born [Johannes Jacobus]. The name of the business was J.J. van den Born & Co [for the partner]. That name stayed on even after the partnership was dissolved.
Mark: Where was the business located?
Bill: Probably about 0.5 kilometers from our house.
Mark: And you went to school where?
Bill: In Rhenen, about a 20-minute walk from our house.
Mark: Was there kindergarten?
Bill: No. I actually started in grade 2, and never attended grade 1.
Mark: Why grade 2?
Bill: There may have been a couple of reasons. I had learned to read in the meantime, and I was also a little older, with my birthday being in November. I was close to 7 when I actually started school.
Elaine: Wow! That is crazy. I didn't know that.
Mark: You started school in 1939, right about the time that the Germans invaded Poland.
Bill: Yes, I was almost finished grade 2 when the Germans invaded the Netherlands.
Elaine: So you were almost 7 when you started grade school.
Bill: I spent four years in grade school.
Elaine: And 8 years later you were ready to apply to university.
Bill: I was 15 then.
Elaine: And they said you were too young. That was crazy. I didn't know that!
Mark: Do you remember how that went, starting in grade 2?
Bill: I have no idea how it all worked. I remember the teacher I had, but I don't remember anything about that early part of school particularly.
Mark: And uncle George, he was how much younger than you?
Bill: About a year and five months, born 14 April 1934.
Mark: Who was next?
Bill: My brother Hans, born 19 June 1937. He was named after my dad, Johannes Jacobus, and was called Han. My dad also was called Han.
Elaine: Was the one who was named after your dad one of the two who got along with your dad the least well?
Bill: Uncle George and my dad did not get along that well.
Elaine: Was not uncle Hans the one who felt slighted when he did not go to university and worked on the farm for a time after high school?
Bill: Yes, there was a bit of that.
Mark: And then it was John on 7 September 1938, and then . . .
Bill: Jack, on 1 May 1943.
Mark: So there was a bit of a gap there.
Bill: Yes, And then Wilco on August 3, 1947.
Elaine: Think of Grandma. Six boys!
Mark: What drove the economy in the area? Primarily agricultural?

Bill: Yes. It was all farming in the area. They grew rye, turnip rape, barley, oats, most of which was fed to their own cattle, pigs, and chickens. There were no big farms. They were almost all small operators.
Mark: Did you ever go to Amsterdam or Rotterdam?
Bill: I was never in Rotterdam, but I was in Amsterdam once when I was in high school, on a school trip to the big zoo in Amsterdam. Perhaps to a museum also, but I don't remember. That was about a 40-kilometer trip, so it was an all-day affair. With my parents I never went to Amsterdam. We never really went anywhere with my parents, except to relatives.
Mark: Did you not go to Rotterdam to leave for Canada?
Bill: We did. I did also make a bike trip to a place close to Rotterdam with a couple of pals. I have no memory of where we stayed. Perhaps one of them had relatives in the area, but I don't remember. I would have been 14 or 15 at the time. Probably 2 or 3 days, but I have no memory of the details of the trip.
Mark: The world seems to have been small for you, because everything was so local and you did not travel very far.
Bill: Well, my dad did not have a car. In the early days of his travelling to farmers to sell his feed products he almost certainly did that on his bike. During the early postwar years he had a mid-size motorcycle, and still later, perhaps in 1947, he bought a jeep.
Mark: Where would your family fit socio-economically?
Bill: In that small area, they probably would be considered upper middle class, compared to most of the farmers.
Elaine: Tell us the story about the motorcycle.
Bill: I am not sure how old I was at the time, perhaps 14. My dad had this motorcycle, and one day, while he was in his office (at the business) and the motorcycle was parked outside his office, I was there, for whatever reason. I decided to get on the motorcycle, start it, and take it for a ride. I went down the road, perhaps 200 meters, and back again, shut it off and parked it. Never got out of first gear, I think.
Elaine: Didn't you think your dad would figure you were dead?
Bill: He didn't say a word when I came back, and never talked about it. And I never did it again.
Mark: Did your dad have other people working for him?
Bill: He had about five people working for him. One was a bookkeeper, and the others would grind and mix and deliver feed, and pick up stuff.
Mark: And what was your dad's focus?
Bill: He was the manager. He would choose and buy all the supplies that were needed and he would go to the farmers' homes and sell them what they needed. He would look at their pigs and chickens and offer advice about what to feed them. He was very well informed, especially about chickens, how they should be fed and looked after to get maximum egg production.

Interview 23 January 2018, MVI_5445 (Part 1) and MVI_5446 (Part 2)
Mark: Last time you told us that the house you were born in was the only house you lived in in the Netherlands.
Bill: That is true.
Mark: And what about the church you went to? Was that the same church during your whole childhood?
Bill: Yes, it was, except for a brief interlude during the war, when we were away.
Mark: How far was that church from your home?

Bill: Probably about a 20-minute walk.
Mark: Is that how you would get there?
Bill: Yes, every Sunday.
Mark: And you would walk there for catechism as well?
Bill: Yes, though I may have ridden a bike there some of the time.
Mark: Did that start when you were 12?
Bill: No, probably not until I was 14.
Mark: Would you all walk together, with your Mom and Dad?
Bill: Yes, we would all walk together.
Mark: Now let's talk about school. You started school when you were 7?
Bill: Close to 7, in the fall of 1939.
Mark: Kind of a bad time, the fall of '39.
Bill: I have no recollection of it being a bad time. Somehow, we as kids were not really aware of what was happening, such as the invasion of Poland.
Mark: The world was a larger place, and Poland was far away.
Bill: My parents would undoubtedly have been aware of that, but as kids we were blissfully unaware.
Mark: Where was that school you went to?
Bill: Rhenen.
Mark: How far was it from your home?
Bill: About the same distance as the church.
Mark: Did you tell me how big Rhenen was?-
Bill: I am not sure but I would guess that it was between seven and ten thousand.
Mark: How big was that school?
Bill: Six classrooms, six grades. It was not a big school. A one-storey building, with one classroom for each grade.
Dixie: Were there that many children? I thought it was just like a little country school.
Bill: No, no. It was bigger than that.
Mark: What was the name of the school?
Bill: It was called the Dutch version of the School with the Bible, *School met de Bijbel.*
Mark: There were other schools without the Bible?
Bill: There was a public school, probably only one. There may have been a Roman Catholic school as well, for all I know.
Mark: Was that school supported by the government?
Bill: Yes, every school was supported by the government.
Mark: Did you go to grade 1, or grade 2?
Bill: I started in grade 2.
Mark: Was that determined before you showed up at school?
Bill: I suspect that my parents had sorted that out with the school beforehand. I did know how to read, apparently.
Mark: Do you remember reading before you started school?
Bill: No.
Mark: What do you remember about the early years of your childhood?
Bill: Really, almost nothing.
Mark: And then grade 3, 4, 5.

Bill: Halfway through grade 4 they put me in grade 5. That's when I joined aunt Bertha in school.
Mark: That would have been your third year in school? During 1941-42.
Bill: I started high school in the fall of 1943. So by that time I had finished grade 6. I had to do some make-up stuff in math. I remember riding my bike to the home of this teacher on Saturdays, where I spent maybe an hour. I had to do some homework also, to catch up on what I was missing in math.
Elaine: Were you excited or were you scared about these changes?
Bill: None of the above. It was just the way it was.
Elaine: You must have been a bit scared - these kids would be three times your size.
Mark: What high school did you go to?
Bill: It was called the *Christelijk Lyceum* in Arnhem. [latinized name for what really was considered an intermediary school because the name 'high school' in the Netherlands was reserved for universities.]
Mark: Is that the time you were boarding with someone?
Bill: My parents made arrangements with a schoolteacher and his wife in Oosterbeek, a small town that was to Arnhem something like Sherwood Park is to Edmonton.
Bill: I would ride my bike to Rhenen on Monday morning, park my bike by someone's house there, and ride the bus to Arnhem, probably straight to school. After lunch on Saturday I would come back home again, since we had school on Saturday morning also.
Mark: What were the names of the people you boarded with?
Bill: The last name was van den Berg. I don't remember his first name, but hers was Toos, and I was asked to call her *tante* Toos.
Mark: How big was the high school?
Bill: I don't really know. There were double grades and even some triple grades after the war.
Mark: So you went there grades 7, 8, and . . .
Bill: It was called first, second, up to fifth year. [not as a continuation from grade school, as in Canada]
Elaine: Did these people have kids?
Bill: No.
Elaine: So you were living with a couple.
Bill: No, there were three more people, a Jewish couple, probably in their twenties, and a tall young man, all hiding from the Germans.
Elaine: Oh yeah, they were going to ask you how old you thought they were. And how old were you then?
Bill: I was ten.
Mark: Who were these people?
Bill: I don't know their names, though I may have known then.
Mark: Why was the third young man hiding?
Bill: He was probably of an age where the Germans might pick him up.
Mark: How was the secrecy kept? Did they never go out of the house?
Bill: Nothing was ever said about keeping it secret, or not telling anybody, that I recall. They were just there. I think they may have gone out, because we were on the edge of the town, away from the town centre.
Elaine: You must have been lonely.

B*i*ll: Probably. There was a kid from the school who lived close by, and occasionally he and I would hang out together. And I was getting piano lessons at the time, from the neighbour lady.
Mark: How long did you have those lessons?
Bill: About six months, just that first school year. Those were all the piano lessons I ever had.
Mark: So you graduated from the fifth year of high school?
Bill: Yes, that was in June 1948.
Mark: Let's talk abut the war years a bit then. What do you remember about the German occupation?
Bill: The German occupation did not really interfere with our life all that much [at least not in the early war years]. But I do remember particularly the time in the fall of 1944, when the paratroop landings took place at Arnhem. One day before those landings I was still at my boarding place in Oosterbeek, when my father came to get me. He rode a heavy-duty bicycle, with a sort of basket at the front (*transportfiets),* to Oosterbeek and took me home. He must have known somehow that this landing was imminent.
Mark: That was 15 or 20 kilometers?
Bill: Probably around 15 each way. One bit I remember was going up a long hill near Wageningen, not terribly steep, where I had to get off the bike and walk. I think my dad must have been pretty tired by the time we got home. He was not used to doing that kind of stuff either.
Mark: Were the allied forces Americans?
Bill: I think they were British and Polish divisions, but I really did not know anything about it at the time. I just remember standing in our front yard the next day (Sunday) and watching waves of fighter planes coming directly over our house, followed by transports pulling gliders loaded with soldiers and equipment such as machine guns and jeeps, and lots of parachutists dropping out of the sky. The landing place was probably no more than 8 or 10 kilometers from where we lived, and we could see all the goings on quite clearly. The gliders would be released and glide to a landing where they could be unloaded.
Mark: What happened after that? That did not work too well?
Bill: No, that did not go well at all, because the allies apparently did not know that a German tank division had moved close to the landing area fairly recently.
The Americans were supposed to be coming up from the south, across the Rhine to Arnhem, and they had trouble getting there because it had rained a lot, and they got bogged down on muddy roads.
Mark: And "the bridge was too far."
Bill: It was a disaster.
Mark: You said that the war did not impact you too much. Was that true for your parents also? Or was it because you knew it from your perspective as a child?
Bill: It was my perspective as a child. My dad's business certainly was affected. They could not get any gasoline to run the truck to deliver feed so they had to resort to horses again or to running the truck on some kind of wood-burning gas generator.
My parents would butcher a pig in the fall, and my dad kept rabbits, which we ate also. And we had chickens in the back yard. So we were not short of food particularly.
Mark: Was that a change?
Bill: I have no recollection of how that went before the war.
Mark: You said you were relocated for a time, you and your family.

Bill: In October 1944 there was an order from the German army that everyone had to leave on 48 hours notice. People may have been given earlier notice, but I am not certain of that.
Mark: Was that after the allied invasion? [the paratroop landings]
Bill: Yes, a couple of weeks or a month later. In the meantime we had been sleeping in the cellar at night because the allies were across the Rhine, only 3 or 4 kilometers away, and they were firing guns across the Rhine at some targets in our area.
Elaine: Would you not go out of the house then?
Bill: This would be at night, and you could hear the shells coming. First a gentle whine, and then an explosion.
Elaine: Why would they shoot at night and not during the day?
Bill: Maybe they shot during the day also and I just don't remember that.
Mark: Where were you relocated to then?
Bill: We moved to the area where my parents grew up. A couple of my uncles, on my dad's side, lived in houses next to a main road and close to a railroad track. The allied planes were shooting at trains and at trucks on that road, so these uncles and their families had moved out out their houses and moved in with some farmers some distance from that main road. Their houses were empty, therefore, and we moved in. Our family, and at least two of the people who worked for my dad, and also a retired policeman couple, so there was a whole troop of people who moved there, all in October 1944.
Mark: How long were you there?
Bill: About 8 months.
Mark: Until the liberation.
Bill: Yes.
Mark: What do you remember about the liberation in 1945?
Bill: There are some people who have very clear memories of a lot of celebration but I don't remember a whole lot. I remember seeing the Canadian tanks go by on the road where we lived. And we probably got some loaves of white bread or some chocolate bars or oranges from the Canadian soldiers. We were not in the middle of a village, or even on the edge of a village, and there was not a whole big fancy celebration that took place, not like the pictures you see of what happened in many towns. So I don't have vivid memories of that. Bertha's memories would be different from mine.
Mark: Do you have any memories of the events at all, such as a sense of relief?
Bill: There must have been some sense of relief, although I don't recall that. The bigger emotional impact came from all the Dutch people who had come through there during the winter, looking for food. People from the big cities would make their way to the east part of the country to see if they could scrounge up some food, or trade whatever valuables they had for food. Since there was empty warehouse space [at my uncle's business, next to the houses where we were staying], many would stay overnight, at my dad's invitation, I guess. He would collect all their ID information and lock up their bicycles with food in another building. In the morning they could not get at their food supplies to go home again until they were all there at the same time, and no one could steal their stuff. There may have been anywhere up to twenty people staying there overnight.
Mark: Your family yourselves were not short of food at all, that you can remember?
Bill: No, not really. We did eat some food that I did not like particularly. At earlier times my dad had all these rabbits, and my mother had canned a lot of that rabbit meat. The canned meat was not all that great. It was put in those tall canning sealers, and those had been brought along. We

would get some milk from a farmer across the road. There was also a local dairy [creamery] where we could get a tin can of milk from time to time.
Mark: What were the next four years like, such as school?
Bill: During the time we were evacuated, we had no school at all. But I did have organ lessons for about four months from some guy who came from Amersfoort [about 8 kilometers away]. He gave aunt Bertha organ lessons and gave me some lessons also. Half a year of piano lessons and half a year of organ lessons, that was my music education.
Elaine: Did she play organ in church?
Bill: Not then. She had a lot more organ lessons than I did, after that time.
Mark: Was that the organ Joan has now?
Bill: I am not sure if it was that organ or if it was an organ that was in my uncle's house.
Mark: What about church when you were there?
Bill: We went to church in Zwartebroek, a village about a 20-minute walk from where we were living, well away from the railroad tracks and the main highway.
Mark: Same denomination, different location?
Bill: Right.
Elaine: How many years, in total, did you go to school in Holland?
Bill: Eight, four years of grade school and four years of high school.
Elaine: You had eight years of school, and then you came here in 1949, and then you ended up at university.
Bill: Yes, three years later.
Elaine: That is a bit crazy.
Mark: What about aunt Bertha? Did she go all the way through high school?
Bill: She did not go to a regular high school, but she did have a couple of years equivalent to our junior high. She went to a home economics school, on the south side of the Rhine, where she boarded with some people, probably not more than five or six kilometers away. She would come home on weekends also, I think, at that time.
Mark: When would that have been?
Bill: That probably was the same year as my first year in high school.
Mark: She did not go to the same school you did.
Bill: Grade school yes, but not later on. She was a female.
Mark: Were there only males at your school?
Bill: Predominantly. There were three girls in my class, out of about twenty total.
Elaine: Aunt Bertha went to a 'domestic' school?
Bill: Yes.
Mark: And what about uncle George?
Bill: He was two years behind me in school, and went to the same grade school I went to.
Mark: Did he go to the same high school also?
Bill: No, because by the time he reached high school age, there was a new Christian high school in a town closer by, only about five kilometers away. He went there for three years, until our family emigrated.
Mark: You graduated from high school in what year?
Bill: June 1948.
Mark: Was the school year similar to here, ten months of school?
Bill: No, it probably was eleven months. [grade school was eleven months, high school ten months]

Part 2
Mark: You were talking about your graduation from high school.
Bill: It was on a Saturday in June. Every Saturday my dad would go to Utrecht, to the *Graanbeurs*, to meet with dealers from whom he would purchase grain or other feed ingredients for his business. He must have come home from there in the early afternoon and driven me to Arnhem in his jeep. By the time we got to the ceremony, however, everything was finished already. All I remember is that we walked in there, walked past a desk where the principal of the school handed me a diploma, and we walked out again. The party was over.
Mark: How about all the awards?
Bill: What awards? They did not give awards.
Mark: You would have cleaned up, I bet.
Bill: I have no recollection of receiving any awards or recognition.
Mark: What did you do then the following year, 1948-49?
Bill: There was an agricultural school in Utrecht, something like here in Olds or Vermilion, and my dad decided to enrol me there, to learn something about agriculture. He had gone to the Agricultural University with me, in Wageningen, about 5 or 6 kilometers away, but they concluded that I was too young. That was probably correct.
Elaine: You were what?
Bill: I was 15 then. I have no recollection of the conversation there at all. It was my dad's idea and I figured I should do that.
Anyway, he then enrolled me in this school in Utrecht, and I went there that year. I learned something about digging with a spade, I learned something about animals, and some chemistry that I already knew.
Elaine: Wasn't that kind of boring?
Bill: Yes, it was boring. I would ride my bike to Rhenen every morning, park it, and take the bus to Utrecht, perhaps 25 kilometers away, then take the bus back at the end of the school day, ride my bike home again, and do whatever homework I had to do. I remember that, probably within the first week, I got so car-sick on that bus. I don't know if they had puke bags on the bus but, in any case, I was able to open the window, and I puked out the window.
Elaine: You were sick on he boat trip to Canada also.
Bill: Yes, I felt uncomfortable during that trip but never actually threw up.
Mark: What was aunt Bertha doing during that time?
Bill: I don't know. She may have been working at home, helping my parents.
During the summer of 1948, my dad enrolled me in shorthand course, so I rode my bike to this place a couple of times a week, perhaps six kilometers away, and had a class in shorthand for five or six weeks.
Mark: That was supposed to help you take notes?
Bill: I assume so. I actually became quite good at it.
Elaine: Were you quite miffed that your dad made all those decisions for you in Holland?
Bill: He and my mother probably made the decisions together.
Elaine: And when you came here, they decided that you should go into agriculture.
Bill: Yes.
Elaine: And his idea would be that you would help on the farm afterwards?
Bill: I think so, but he never said so [to me].

Elaine: Your parents were making all kinds of decisions about your life. Were you ever miffed about that?
Bill: I don't think so. One time he was really mad. That was during the summer after my first year university. He wanted me to come home and help with haying, and I said I couldn't because I had a summer job.
Elaine: And you needed to earn some money.
Bill: He was not happy about that.
Elaine: How did he react to that?
Bill: "Well, I guess I have to do that myself with my old bones." [Dad was 48 then].
Mark: The first years in Canada, did you speak Dutch most of the time?
Bill: All the time.
Mark: Until you became proficient in English?
Bill: I have no sense of how or when that transition took place in our household. I think that most of the conversation in the house was in Dutch, probably until I left to go to university.
Mark: And later, when your parents would come to Edmonton, would you speak Dutch?
Bill: I don't think so, because Mom was there. And my parents were both sufficiently proficient in English that they could manage that quite fine.
Mark: What was your folks' reason for leaving Holland?
Bill: The way I see it, it probably was a three-fold reason. First, there were six boys in the family, and the future looked pretty bleak in Holland after World War II. They decided that there was not really such a good future in Holland. They also contemplated South Africa at one point. Another factor that played a role was that if conditions remained bleak, some of the kids might well leave the country. So they would rather go as an intact family. And, my dad was getting disillusioned with the Dutch government. Perhaps their socialist leanings, but they were more and more telling him how to run his business, and he did not like that. Not surprising, of course. More regulations, more this and more that, and he was not happy about it. Also, his personal life was not that great. He was busy with his business, he was in church council, he was on the town council for some time, and so much of the time we never saw him at supper time. He would come home late and leave early, and we would not see much of him. He did not have a real full personal life that way, and he thought that perhaps that would be better in Canada. I think he was just a bit disillusioned.
And then, what triggered the events that followed was a visit from some relatives of the Van Doesburgs in 1948, when that whole discussion was perhaps beginning to perk.
Mark: Those relatives were the Kannegieters, who came to visit.
Bill: The women were sisters. Mrs. Kannegieter was a sister to Mr. Van Doesburg.
Mark: They came from Canada.
Bill: Yes. They had emigrated 40 or so years earlier and had farmed in Neerlandia. They had retired from farming and now lived in Edmonton. They had no children of their own.
They had a bit of money, and came to visit. The Van Doesburgs were close friends of my parents. From the little I know they seem to be the only couple with whom my parents visited on a regular basis. They went to the same church, and he was the chief of police in the town.
Mark: What was his first name?
Bill: Probably Jan, but I am not sure. I did not know him by his first name.
Mark: Related to the Van Doesburgs here?
Bill: Jason's grandparents.

The Kannegieters offered to set my parents up on a farm. They were trying to help, and my parents accepted their offer, probably during the summer of 1948. We were not told anything about it, of course, until much later, probably a few months ahead of the actual emigration date. My dad also did not want it spread around in the community. He wanted to keep it to himself until the last minute. I am not sure what prompted that. Maybe he just did not like the idea of saying goodbye to everything he had there. That was a possibility, at least.
Bill: We were the first family to emigrate out of that area. Nobody else had emigrated from there.
Mark: Was there a farewell?
Bill: My dad organized a farewell evening in the newly built warehouse that was part of his business. He also wrote a letter, perhaps just prior to that, and had copies distributed to all his customers and acquaintances, explaining what was happening.
Mark: Do you have a copy of that letter?
Bill: Yes, I do. I don't remember what all it said but I can probably find a copy. I think it is on my website also.
Elaine: Did your cousins go into the business then?
Bill: No. My dad had a guy who served as general manager and who was going to manage the business in the interim, because he could not sell the business and take the money to Canada at the time.
Mark: What were the policy reasons behind that rule?
Bill: The government was short on foreign exchange and did not want to have it used up by having emigrants taking it out of the country. Part of it may have been after-effects of he war and the need to do a lot of rebuilding in the country.
Mark: The Van't Lands, they are your relatives?
Bill: Yes, aunt and uncle, on my father's side. The aunt was a sister to my dad, *tante* Aal and *oom* Cees.
Mark: I heard about them on a recording a few years ago, from some celebration. Was that at Gull Lake? What anniversary was that?
Bill: My parents' fiftieth.
Mark: And I thought we heard some things that *oom* Cees was saying, some negative things about leaving the Netherlands.
Bill: I would have to listen to the speech again because I don't remember that.
Elaine: I remember that anniversary. They seemed so old, Grandma and Grandpa. Your dad had had a stroke.
Bill: He died three months later.
Elaine: He was not in the greatest shape, and looked like an old man.
Bill: He did.
Elaine: And I was nine.
Mark: When did the Van't Lands come to Canada?
Bill: In November 1950.
Mark: Was that as a result of the Vanden Born emigration?
Bill: No, there is a long history behind that. My uncle Cees spent four years in Canada when he was a young man, in his twenties. He and Frits Schuld, the father of Fred Schuld in our church, and my dad were good friends. Frits Schuld wanted to go to Canada, and my dad did not. My uncle Cees and one other guy went with Frits Schuld to Canada. Uncle Cees came back four years later. They had worked in Ontario and BC, also in California for a while, and in southern Alberta [where Frits Schuld stayed].

My uncle was then courting my aunt, and my grandfather said, "In no way are you marrying our daughter and taking her to Canada as long as we are alive." So they promised, got married, and stayed in Holland. And then, after my grandfather died in 1942 and my grandmother in 1944, they could begin to think about making their way to Canada, which is what they did.
Elaine: Why did he want to go to Canada so badly?
Bill: I guess he liked what he had seen there, but beyond that I really don't know. I'll have to re-read the history that his daughter Betty has written.
Mark: They were married in the early thirties?
Bill: He was roughly the same age as my dad.
Mark: Your dad was born in 1903.
Bill: And he was born in the fall of 1903.
Mark: He was in Canada in his early twenties then.
Bill: He was married, I think, in 1932.
Elaine: Recording time is about up.
Mark: So we'll have to draw this to a close. It's been nice.

Dixie: interview 3 July 2020, ImgP_1355 (pp 3-7?)
Mark: In 1949, Dad, when Mom comes to Edmonton, that is a significant year for you too. Why don't you tell us something about that, the whole notion about coming to Canada, why your parents were making that decision, how you remember that, the journey across the ocean, the long train trip.
Bill: That 's going to take the rest of the night.
As kids, we were not consulted about the decision to move to Canada. We were not told about until perhaps six months before we actually moved, perhaps even closer to the time, because I have no recollection about being informed about it. To us, speaking for myself, it was an adventure, and I was not really concerned about it.
Mark: You were sixteen and a half.
Bill: Yes, and my future was kind of uncertain. I had graduated from high school the year before and had gone to an agricultural school for a year after that. My father had sent me there, mostly to fill time, but perhaps also in anticipation of our move to Canada.
When the time came for our move, in May 1949, we watched all our stuff being packed up, and I don't even know where or how we slept that last night, because all our stuff was in this huge crate. On the morning of that day, Friday 6 May, one or two of my uncles drove us to Rotterdam, where we got on a train that took us to Paris where we stayed in a hotel overnight. First time in Paris, first time out of the country.
Mark: Did you see the Eiffel Tower?
Bill: No, at least I have no recollection of that. I think we probably arrived in the late afternoon, and then next morning we were on the train again, to Le Havre, where we were to catch our ship. We must have gone out to eat at some restaurant – I don't know how that worked, but the next morning my dad went and bought a whole pile of bananas, 17 kilos according to my diary, that we ate on the train on our way to Le Havre.
We got on board the ship, the *Scythia*, an English ship of the Cunard Line, and we spent the next eight days or so on board. Males and females were in separate quarters, and except for my youngest brother Wilco who stayed with my sister Bertha and my mother, we were all housed in double bunks in the male section.

There was a place where we could play some ping-pong, until we wrecked all the balls, and then that party was over.
Mark: Is that something you were acquainted with before?
Bill: No, I did not know anything about ping-pong.
Mark: Do you remember the dates of the sailing?
Bill: We boarded the ship on Saturday May 8. [I did not remember the exact date, and since then looked it up on page 43 of my autobiography, where I had inserted a translated version of the brief diary entries I wrote during the trip across].
Mark: And then across the ocean, to Halifax?
Bill: No, we landed at Quebec City, got off the ship there, and made our way to the train station. I remember going to a grocery store not far from the station, but I don't have any idea of what we bought there. We had another four days to go on the train.
Mark: What else do you remember about the boat or train trip?
Bill: Oh, a number of us wandered around the boat, some were kind of seasick, I felt uncomfortable and nauseous a good part of the time, though not quite enough to throw up. We ate our meals, which were OK, even if they were very different from what we were used to. I have no memory of what they actually were. So I don't have a lot of detailed memory of that boat trip, other than what I wrote down in a diary I kept for the duration of the trip. I think we saw another ship just once during the trip. I also have no memory of the protocol involved in entering Canada.
Elaine: Weren't bored during the trip?
Bill: I don't recall being bored, but perhaps I was. My brother George and I horsed around. Bill Van Doesburg was on that ship also, of course, so we were a threesome, and he probably was more adventuresome than I was.
Mark: Was he someone you knew from the Netherlands?
Bill: He was about the same age as my brother George, so a bit younger than I was. His father and my father were good friends. His father was the chief of police where we lived, and we went to the same church. Bill had to be formally adopted by our family to be able to emigrate as a fifteen-year-old. He was a bit of a wild character at home, I think, and his parents may have been quite happy to see him go.
Elaine: He had an older brother here already.
Bill: Yes, Joe Van Doesburg, Jason's father.
Mark: Where is Bill Van Doesburg now?
Bill: He died about five or so years ago [actually in 2009].
Mark: What did he do in Canada?
Bill: He worked on the farm for my parents the first five or six months, and then went off on his own to a job on a dairy farm just outside Edmonton. Eventually he and his brother Joe bought their own dairy farm, near Leduc. After some years they split to separate dairy farms, presumably because the two families did not always get along that well, living so close together. I don't know the details of that. As far as I know, one or two of Joe and Emma's sons still run a farm there.
Mark: What about Bill? Did he have a family?
Bill: [He married Jenny Bootsma, who worked with aunt Bertha for a time as housekeepers in the Delta Upsilon frat house on the university campus.] I don't know any of their children.
Mark: The house you lived in in the Netherlands, did our parents own that?

Bill: They owned it, and continued to own it, along with the business my dad operated, for another five years after we emigrated. At the time we left, the maximum amount of foreign currency emigrants could take out of the country was one hundred dollars per person. Hat meant that for the ten of us, our immediate family of nine plus Bill Van Doesburg, they could take out one thousand dollars in Canadian cash. Not until five years later, after things changed, my dad was able to sell both the business and the house, probably at a substantial loss, and take the money across to Canada.
Mark: What happened to the house during the five years?
Bill: I don't know. It probably was rented out. The first time I was back in that house was in 1968. I had a brief look in the house then, but I don't even know who was living in it at the time. I knocked on the door and was able to have a quick look around.
Mark: What do you remember of the train trip [from Quebec City to Edmonton]?
Bill: It was boring. There are some things I remember. Not long after we left Quebec City, I saw a farmer at work in the field, pulling a set of harrows across the field with an old car, perhaps a Model A Ford or something of that vintage. I remember wondering what in the world that was all about. I had never seen that before, and it stuck in my memory. We saw a lot of forest, and passed by a lot of stuff we did not see because we slept on the train also.
Mark: Did you have to change trains?
Bill: No. We stopped in a few places, including Winnipeg. I tried to remember if someone came on board perhaps in Winnipeg, but I have no recollection of that.
Mark: Do you remember any of your parents' or your siblings' reaction during the journey across Canada?
Bill: No. My parents kept their cool and said little or nothing about it [to us, that is]. My mother may have cried after she saw the house on the farm for the first time, but I don't know that.
Elaine: I would think so.
Bill: They didn't talk about it [to us].
Bill: We stayed in Edmonton for about three days, in the Immigration Hall, just off 96th street, north of the tracks, very close to where the CN station was. My recollection is that it was a three-story building intended as a short-term stay place for new immigrants. We may have gone to First Church on Sunday, but I have no memory of that.
Mark: You knew some English, I guess. How good were you with tat?
Bill: Not particularly. I had had three years of English.
Mark: How well could you understand it?
Bill: I think I could understand most of what was being spoken. But speaking it was a different proposition.
Elaine: What was better, your French or your English?
Bill: Probably my German. I had had four years of German and French, but only three years of English. And the focus in those courses was mostly on understanding what you read, and not so much on oral stuff.
Mark: What do you remember of those first few days?
Bill: I went with my dad and Mr. Kannegieter to a machinery dealer, where we bought a tractor, a plow, and a double disc. Mr. Kannegieter had to put up the cash, because we did not have it/
Mark: Mr. Kannegieter, who was he?
Bill: Hendrik Kannegieter was an uncle to Joe Van Doesburg. He had farmed in Neerlandia and had retired from there to Edmonton. His wife was a sister to Joe's mother.
Mark: Was he from that same area in the Netherlands?

Bill: I don't think so, but I don't know where he came from. They had visited back in the Netherlands back in 1948, or maybe even back in 1947. My parents were then talking about emigration, at least to each other, and not to us.
Mark: Where did you go to purchase that farm machinery?
Bill: To a Case dealership somewhere. I don't know why they went to that particular dealership – I expect it was Kannegieter's idea, because my dad did not really have that kind of knowledge.
Elaine: Your mother was a very positive person but, like your mother, Mom, both were very positive, but they could think, 'We had it way better back home; maybe we made a mistake.'
Bill: I think my dad may have thought that also, because in one letter he wrote he made reference to that, as in "What did I do?'
Elaine: I don't blame him. But our mom was very good at 'Well, we are going to make this work. This is how it is and we are going to make the best of it.'
Mark: Do you know when that was that you dad had that kind of thought?
Bill: That was during the first year, I think. He wrote letters to the Netherlands over a period of about five years, to past customers of his feed business and perhaps some others. I have copies of all the letters, including translations into English, and I have posted them all on my *greywill.com* website. He wrote the letters on the portable typewriter he had brought along and then sent them to Holland, where the manager of the business would get them printed and sent to all his farmer customers. It was a sort of communal letter.
Elaine: Don't do it!
Bill: No, no. He would never do that.
Elaine: Is it not true that he never went back to Holland?
Bill: Yes, that is true.
Mark: Getting back to the tractor, was it that grey one?
Bill: No, it was an orange one. The grey one was imported from Holland several years later.
Mark: Do you remember anything else about those first few days in Edmonton?
Bill: No, not really.
Mark: And then, what about going from Edmonton to Busby?
Bill: That was a bit of an adventure. Joe Van Doesburg had driven the tractor out there, probably the day before, at a maximum speed of 10 miles per hour, so close to a five-hour trip to cover the 45 miles. I think his friend Jake Vanden Brink, who had a pickup truck, probably drove out to pick him up and bring him back. The following day we all piled into and on that same pickup truck, with whatever luggage we had. I have no idea anymore how that all worked with just the one vehicle.
Mark: Had Mr. Kannegieter bought the farm?
Bill: Yes, he had bought the farm. He had gone out with Joe Van Doesburg and bought the farm.
Mark: From whom did he buy the farm?
Bill: From a guy named Harry Badman [probably via a real estate agent]. The farm had been abandoned for three years, and no one had lived there during that time.
The Kannegieters had some money, and they had no children. He had enough money that he could lend my parents the $5,000 to buy the farm, plus perhaps another $2,000 to buy the tractor and equipment.
Elaine: In today's money that would have been about $200,000?
Bill: Not quite. The yearly salary for a university professor at that time probably was about $2000.
So at that point my parents owed Mr. Kannegieter about $7,000.

Mark: What do you remember about your arrival at the farm?
Bill: The date was May 24. After 30 miles of pavement, we got on the Busby road which was quite muddy because it had rained.

Interview with Mark 13 October 2020, Img_5624.mov (pp 1-5)
Mark: When was the last time we were doing this, June or May maybe?
Bill: A number of months ago.
Mark: I think it was after the Covid problems began.
Bill: I don't remember. Nor do I remember what we talked about then.
Mark: We talked about Mom going to high school, growing up a bit, moving to Canada. And then about your early days in the Netherlands, and then emigrating to Canada.
Bill: Could be.
Mark: That is about where we left off. So that would be . . . When did you graduate from high school, Mom?
Dixie: 1953.
Mark: And Dad landed in Canada in May 1949.
Mark: So maybe you can say a few things about your arrival in Busby. What stands out in your mind about that and the first number of years, before you picked up your studies again.
Bill: It looked like a pretty primitive operation. It rained, and the roads were muddy, and I think we slid into the ditch a couple of times. Well, maybe we did not quite slide off the road. We did arrive there. Our furniture did not arrive until several weeks later. The neighbours were very generous to us. They brought over some furniture, including a table and chairs. Later I discovered that the table was their only kitchen table.
You know, I was all of 16 years old and I really did not know anything about anything. My dad had bought a new tractor and a plow, and I am not sure what else, and I was charged with the responsibility of looking after that tractor, changing the oil and greasing and whatever else it might need, as I was the oldest of the guys, and I suppose I made the best of it.
After some time, when our furniture crate arrived, we had to unload all that. In the meantime, a neighbouring farmer put in the crop. My dad had arranged with him to do the seeding. I am not sure if we did the plowing ourselves . . . I think we did. The consequence was that the crop went in late, and then it froze early in the fall, so the crop was very poor. The first winter was very cold, the coldest winter on record for a long time. But we did not know any better. My brother George and I slept in the unheated old log house. In the morning my mother would get the stove going in the kitchen in the house, and we would get out of bed and make our way over there. By that time the kitchen was kind of warmed up.
Mark: How soon did you guys transition to speaking English in your home, and then, whose English was best when you first arrived in Canada?
Bill: My dad's. His English was actually quite good, because he had a much better grounding in English in high school than I did. I am sure he had at least five years of English, German, and French, and so he had no real trouble getting around in terms of the language. My English was not great. My oral English, I would say actually was quite poor at the time.
Mark: How quickly did your English improve, how quickly did you pick it up, if you remember?
Bill: I think it probably took at least a year, because in the house we would always speak Dutch. There was no English conversation. The very first fall I worked on a threshing crew and there I would have had to speak English to the other guys on the crew, all neighbours.
Mark: How many years did you stay on the farm, full-time?

Bill: Three years and a bit, four summers, until the fall of 1952 when I went to school.
Mark: Had there been talk before that about you going to university?
Bill: I think the conversation about that began about a year earlier, probably in 1951. In the course of that winter or spring I must have written to the university and made application. I was at the university once, perhaps in 1951. My brother George and I were members of the local grain club (4-H) in Busby. We sorted a bunch of grain samples and entered those into a competition. With members of that same club I went to what was called Varsity Guest Weekend at the University of Alberta, in a school bus. We drove the tractor to Busby and rode on the school bus the rest of the way. I saw part of the campus but I have no real recollection of what I had actually seen.
I still have a large brown envelope on which my dad had drafted a letter for me in English, a letter of application to the university's Faculty of Agriculture. I had copies of all my final high school exams and copies of my report cards and included those with my letter of application.
Mark: Those grades were probably pretty high. What were they, by the way?
Bill: I had a couple of tens in math, I think.
Mark: I assume that was 10 out of 10.
Bill: Yes. There was a guy in engineering who had emigrated from the Netherlands so I am quite sure that he would be someone who could look at my exams and evaluate my qualifications for admission to the Ag faculty.
Mark: Did you know that fellow?
Bill: No, but I am quite sure that that is what happened. The exams were all in Dutch, so that would mean nothing to the people in the Ag faculty at the time.
Mark: I had the sense that your dad thought that you should go into agriculture and that George should go into some kind of animal science, perhaps to become a veterinarian.
Bill: I think his dream probably was that after graduation we would come back and help him run the farm. Well, that never happened.
Mark: Can you remember how you felt about your dad wanting you to go into agriculture?
Bill: I felt fine about going into agriculture because that had been on my dad's mind already well before we left Holland. It was his idea the minute I graduated from high school.
Elaine: What did <u>you</u> want to do?
Bill: Nobody really asked my opinion about it. I was OK with it. I didn't really have a negative opinion about it.
Mark: And of course in the Netherlands you had already gone to an agricultural school for a year or so.
Bill: Yes, mostly to fill in time.
Mark: The last year before you left for Canada.
Bill: Yes, but that year was not particularly enjoyable.
Mark: And that was all Dutch then on the farm for you guys the whole time?
Bill: Yes. That did not really change for two or three years, after my younger brothers Hans and John and Jack started going to school and picking up English. Eventually the language began to change. Exactly when that changed I do not remember. [Almost certainly after I left home]
Dixie: Your mother started to listen to the radio a lot [*Bill*: but not during my time on the farm, because there was no electricity then; she also would start reading books that my brothers used for school].
Bill: I do not know that. She may have. I don't think she really started speaking English until several years later.

Mark: I think the last time we talked, you mentioned that you saw Mom‘s dad Herman Wierenga a few times.
Bill: I remember only one occasion, when I stood not too far away. He was accompanied by a preacher from Calgary, Peter Hoekstra. He was trying to persuade my dad to move to some other location.
Mark: Out of that pagan country. Where was he trying to persuade your dad to move to?
Bill: I don’t know if that was said. We had only been there a few months and my dad, totally apart from not wanting to be told what to do, was not financially able to do anything. He was locked in.
Mark: Any assets he had in the Netherlands he was not able to take out of the country.
Bill: He had no options really. I don’t know if at that point we had been to church in Neerlandia yet. We went there at least once with the big truck, almost certainly during the first summer. Some time during the following winter, I don’t know exactly when, the church in Westlock was started.
Mark: That would have been quite a small church, perhaps eight families.
Bill: Not any more than that, Zeilmans, De Jong, Van Zalen were some of the families. Not more than 10 families, I think.
Mark: At some point last year I remember you told about your trip to Barrhead to deliver some cigars to someone there, in exchange for money.
Bill: That would have been during the first summer. My dad had brought along a lot of cigars from Holland. I am not sure whether he intended to smoke them himself or if he hoped to sell them after arrival. They were probably made from tobacco he grew in the garden by our house. Somehow he must have been in contact with someone in Barrhead, named Van Hemert, parents of some current members of West End. I was commissioned to deliver a box of cigars to this man who was going to buy them, so I drove the tractor to Barrhead. It took something like three hours.
Mark: The kid is 16 years old and fresh off the boat from the Netherlands, driving the tractor. How far is it from Busby to Barrhead?
Bill: About 25 miles.
Mark: Did you go about 10 miles an hour?
Bill: About 9 or 10 miles an hour, maximum speed, on a very bumpy road. About 2 1/2 hours, on a hard moulded metal seat. There may have been a slight spring in it but not much. And then back again. I think I came back with $60, which was a fair bit of money in those days. In any case, my body was still shaking 2 or 3 hours later, from the long bumpy ride.
Mark: Do you remember anything of the exchange or the conversation surrounding it
Bill: No.
Mark: Probably a fairly quick exchange.
Bill: I don’t think I stayed very long.
Karen: Hilarious.
Bill: And how I found my way around in Barrhead I have no idea.
Mark: Did your dad smoke cigars?
Bill: I think he smoked both cigars and a pipe.
Mark: Did he continue to smoke cigars later on?
Bill: He did not continue smoking cigars later on. He probably could not afford them. He did smoke a pipe for quite a long time. Then he started to roll his own cigarettes, which he had never smoked before. That was cheaper, of course.

Mark: Did he smoke until his 70s?
Bill: He probably smoked until he was about 70 and quit smoking after he had a blood clot in his lungs and the doctor told him that smoking was not good for that. He then quit cold turkey.
Mark: Was he hospitalized for that?
Bill: Yes, in Westlock, probably in 1973 or 1974.
Mark: And what about Bertha and her life in Canada?
Bill: She was only in Busby for the first four months or so.
Dixie: Didn't we cover that the last time?
Mark: Was she a domestic?
Bill: She got the job via Peter Elzinga whom dad got to know through buying feed from him. He found a place for Bertha to work as a maid in the household.
Mark: The father of the politician.
Bill: He had a feed mill in South East Edmonton near where the market is now, probably about 97th St. and 80th Ave. He also lived in the area.
Mark: Did aunt Bertha work for him?
Bill: No. She often spent weekends with them but she worked for Amby Lenon, or actually his wife. She was not really happy there because she was only the maid, and did not eat at the table with them but in the kitchen. During that time a relative of the Lenons came over. She took pity on aunt Bertha, took her to the library and got her some simple books and a library card. Aunt Bertha has nothing but good to say about that lady.
Karen: Did she get to keep the money she made?
Bill: She sent most of it home.
Karen: I wondered.
Mark: How often did you go home to Busby?
Bill: Not very often, because we had no car. There was a train to Busby, and we probably took that once or twice. I remember one time Bertha and I went together; I think we hitchhiked along the highway and then walked along the gravel or dirt roads. In any case, it took quite a long time to get to the farm. But we must have taken the train a few times also because at that time there was a train that went from Edmonton to Busby and Barrhead.
Mark: Was that a passenger train?
Bill: I have no recollection of that.
Mark: Perhaps we should let Mom talk for a little while now.
Bill: Good idea.

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Mark: Maybe I should ask Dad some questions now about his early university days. So Dad, three years on the farm?
Bill: Three years and four months.
Mark: Hard work on the farm.
Bill: Yes. You know, I was not used to any farm work, and really knew nothing about it when we started there.
Mark: So, talk a little bit about that time on the farm, about work on the farm, and the life in the Vanden Born household.
Bill: We had no money. My dad made arrangement with neighbours to put in a crop.
Elaine: Edwards?

Bill: No, another neighbour, Erickson. We already had a good relationship with the Edwards neighbours but they probably had their own crop to put in. I had nothing to do with making those arrangements and did not really know how they all came about. I had to learn to maintain the tractor and to drive the tractor and plow. I had to grease the tractor, with a grease gun my dad had bought and that was a real pain to use.
Elaine: How did you learn all that? There was no Youtube.
Bill: There probably was an instruction book with the tractor that we had to follow. My dad did not really know much about that kind of thing either.
He took on a few odd jobs, one of which was a real painful one, digging a basement for a bachelor a couple of miles from Busby. He took on a contract to move a small house out of the way and then to dig the basement, while having no idea that after the first three inches of surface soil the rest was all heavy and sticky clay and very difficult to work with. It took the four of us ten days to do it. There was a fairly new well on the place, and after drinking that water we all got the trots.
Mark: Who were the four?
Bill: My brother George, my dad and I, and Bill Van Doesburg. George and Bill were fifteen, and I was sixteen.
Mark: Your dad did not know what was underneath.
Bill: He was used to sandy soil where we lived in Holland, easy to dig.
Elaine: Do you think this bachelor was kind of jerk, that he knew it was going to be so difficult?
Bill: I don't think so. We just worked away at it until it was done. My dad was not used to such heavy physical work either.
Elaine: He did not think it was going to take ten days, though.
Bill: No.
Mark: You said your dad got some other jobs also.
Bill: There was a guy who had cleared brush on a piece of land about two miles east of us, so we spent a lot of time there picking up roots and brush, piling it up, and burning it. We did some work for the Edwards neighbours, and in the fall I worked on their threshing crew. They had a threshing machine and did contract threshing among the neighbours. I learned to pitch bundles. On the first Saturday night they were desperate to finish at this particular place, until 9 or 10 o'clock, and I remember being so tired I could not stand up anymore. I had to sit down.
Mark: That was the first summer, in August or September 1949?
Bill: Yes, late August into September.
Mark: You said that your family did not have any money. Was that something you were aware of at the time?
Bill: No, I was not really aware of it.
Mark: Looking back now at that period of three-plus years, did you have a fondness for that time? Was it hard?
Bill: It was hard, and I did not have a fondness for it. But I do know that, in hindsight, after I got a job teaching in the agriculture faculty, I decided that having that farm experience was very worthwhile. At the time I did not really think so.
Elaine: Were you miserable at first?
Bill: No, I wouldn't say that. It was the way it was, it was what we had to do.
Elaine: It was hard physical work.
Bill: It was. That first summer we also started clearing some brush on our own farm, on an area that my dad intended to get plow up for new land. We cut a whole pile of firewood also, because

we did not have a coal stove and had to burn wood. There was all kinds of old wood lying around on the farm. It was really a big mess on that farm.
Elaine: Fortuitous that there were so many boys in your family.
Bill: Yes. Bill Van Doesburg stayed the summer, but some time in October or so he left for a job on a dairy farm near Edmonton. His brother Joe lived in Edmonton, working as a mechanic. [He had emigrated in 1948]. There was really no future for Bill on the farm at Busby, so he had to go find his own way.
Elaine: Did Grandpa Wierenga help your family emigrate to Alberta?
Bill: No, he was not involved in that at all.
Elaine: Why did your dad pick Alberta?
Bill: The reason we came to Alberta was Mr. Kannegieter, a retired farmer from Neerlandia, then living in Edmonton. His wife's sister was married to the chief of police in the town where we lived. The Kannegieters visited Holland in 1947, and my parents met them. They had become interested in emigrating. Mr. Kannegieter told my dad that he would buy a farm for him in Canada. As kids, of course, we knew nothing about this at the time. For a long time my parents did not hear from him at all, so my dad wrote to him to see what was happening. My understanding is that after that, Mr. Kannegieter and Joe Van Doesburg went looking around to see war farms were for sale.
This farm was for sale. It had been abandoned for three years by its owner, and they bought this farm, in the winter time. So, when we came to Edmonton, that was where we were going to live.
Mark: You did not have a fondness for the farm in the three years and four months you lived there. It sounds kind of romantic in a way. Can you tell me more about that?
Bill: I was not a very social creature, you might say, so in a sense we did not really miss the social stuff. We were all pretty Dutch really.
Elaine: What do you mean by that?
Bill: We were the only Dutch family in the area, so we did not have much contact with the neighbours. None of us spoke English particularly well except my dad. We started going to church in Westlock a few times, to the church (CRC) that was organized there that summer. We did not really have much for entertainment other than reading or playing chess or dominoes. We had no radio, no TV.
Mark: Kind of isolated.
Bill: Yes, and we did not go anywhere.
Mark: What do you recall about the two siblings closest to you in age, aunt Bertha and uncle George?
Bill: In the fall of 1949, probably September, I was hired out to a dairy farmer about four miles away, where I worked for about four months.
Mark: Did you live at their place?
Bill: Yes, I did. I would go home a couple of times, on a horse I borrowed from them. My first experience on that horse was in the winter time. We were cruising along in the dark, bareback, no saddle.
Elaine: Did you know how to ride horses?
Bill: Not really. The horse got spooked by something, stopped dead, and I flew over the horse's head and landed in the ditch. Fortunately there was some snow to provide a fairly soft landing, so I got back on the horse and went on my way.

During that time, when I came home at one point, my sister was gone. Via Peter Elzinga [feed mill owner in Edmonton from whom my dad bought feed] my dad had found a job for her in Edmonton, to make some money and send it home. We needed money!
Mark: You earned some money too.
Bill: I think I was paid $40 per month while I was working for that dairy farmer.
Elaine: I guess you were kind of used to being sent off when you were going to school. Were you lonely then, in hindsight?
Bill: Probably a bit, though I have no recollection of feeling lonely.
Mark: Back to your siblings.
Bill: Uncle George was still home, but later he got jobs with a few different neighbouring farmers as well. During the first winter we would sharpen our axes and head out to the bush to cut down trees, three of us, George, my dad, and I.
Mark: The other kids would go to school?
Bill: Yes, three of them, Jack and the two Johns. Uncle Wilco was only two.
Elaine: I suppose after the first year or so their English speaking progressed quite well.
Bill: Probably. I have no recollection of that.
Mark: When uncle George was working for someone else, would he live at that place?
Bill: Yes, he did.
Mark: Was that a few miles away?
Bill: One place was about ten miles away, another about fifteen, a bit north of Westlock.
Mark: When you guys were not out there working, chopping trees down . . .
Bill: Before we would go out, we had to sharpen the axes dad had bought in Holland on this little hand-powered grindstone. They were heavy axes and when we were chopping down trees that were frozen solid, little nicks often would result and those would have to taken care of. Dad would hold the axe and one of us had to crank the grindstone, maybe an hour at a time.
Elaine: No hot water, no electricity. A bath maybe once a week?
Bill: Sort of a sponge bath. It was cold. My mother would bake bread, and with extra milk from the neighbours she would make cheese. The bread would be frozen solid in the cupboard in the morning.
Mark: Do you remember ever questioning or feeling resentful about the emigration, as in 'Why are we here?'
Bill: No, I have no recollection of that.
Elaine: Did you have electricity and running water in Holland?
Bill: Yes. No hot water, though, only cold.
Elaine: But you did not have to go to an outhouse.
Bill: No. There was a smelly pit toilet in the house. Not a flush toilet.
Elaine: So, an outhouse in the house.
Mark: So then a little more about working. Did you work elsewhere over the next couple of years?
Bill: We worked here and there. We did quite a bit of work for the Edwards neighbours. We helped build a new barn for them, and later a new house. Those neighbours were very good to us. We would borrow their equipment from time to time during the summer. And during that first winter - George was still home then - he and I joined the Busby Grain Club, for which you would take a batch of wheat or barley kernels, select the best and perfect kernels, and put them on display. We did that, though we never won any awards that I recall. In February 1951, we and

the other members of the club got on a school bus and went to the Varsity Guest Weekend at the University of Alberta.
Elaine: Was that quite an exciting event?
Bill: Yeah. I had never seen a university, had never seen the city, had never been on a school bus. Maybe a dozen or fifteen young farm kids. We toured the agriculture faculty at the university, probably saw some other things as well, all pretty impressive, and then went back home again. My first contact with a university.
Mark: The beginning of a long association.
Bill: The real association did not begin until later. Probably during the fall and winter of 1951-52 when we had been in Canada a little more than two years, and my dad thought I should apply for admission to the university.
Bill: I said 'Okay'. He drafted a letter on the back of an envelop, which I still have, that I then wrote to the university. [It may be that he typed it and I simply signed it]. I had all my report cards from my high school days, and even copies of all the final exams I wrote. We sent that all to the university, and in due course word came back that I was to be admitted.
Elaine: Those report cards would have been in Dutch, so who would they have gotten to look at them?
Bill: Yes, they were all in Dutch. I found out later that there was an engineering prof by the name of Verschuren. Someone by that name lived in The Valleyview, I think.
Elaine: She lived on the fourth floor.
Bill: She may have been a daughter. Who knows. That prof would have been able to assess my qualifications, and say 'Yes, this kid's OK.'
Elaine: Let's reel him in.
Mark: That was a couple of years after you arrived in Canada.
Bill: Yes, because I started at the university in September 1952, so the letter of approval must have come probably during early 1952, in January or February. [Actually in December 1951]
Mark: Did you have any social connection with the people at the church you attended?
Bill: We did a little bit, because most Sundays there were two services, one at 10 am and one at 1:30 or 2 pm. We would stay over at the house of one of the church families there, have lunch, and after church go home again. There was some social contact, therefore.
Mark: Do you remember any of those people?
Bill: Oh yes. There was the De Boer family and the Sierink family. The De Boer girls were a bit younger than I was, and I was not really much interested in girls at that point, at least not yet. They were quite happy to have us come there. The girls were quite nice.
Mark: You would do that every Sunday?
Bill: We would not take lunch along or go home for lunch. [On Sundays when we did not go to church, my dad would read a sermon from a Dutch sermon book]
Mark: How did you get to church?
Bill: My dad had bought a second-hand pickup truck in 1950. It was kind of a crappy old truck but it got us around.
Mark: How did the whole family . . .
Bill: Perhaps we did not all go every time.
Mark: Or did you travel in the box?
Bill: There was probably room for three in the front, probably my parents plus Jack and Wilco. I don't actually remember riding in the back.
Elaine: There might be you, uncle John, and uncle Hans in the back.

Mark: Did you spend any other time working elsewhere during that period?
Bill: Never more than a week or ten days at a time. I worked on a threshing crew for another farmer, probably the third fall. He would thresh for perhaps half a dozen farmers, and I worked on his crew. That was interesting. I was given a team of horses and a wagon [hayrack] to run on my own. We would sleep in the hayloft of his barn overnight, get up early to feed and harness the horses, have breakfast . . .
Elaine: That part of it sounds especially romantic. It was not freezing then?
Bill: It was not very warm but it was not freezing.
Dixie: Were the horses in the barn? They would give off heat.
Bill: Yes. I don't remember being cold at night in that barn.
Mark: What about your mom? Do you remember how she was doing during those three and a half years?
Bill: I don't really have a good sense of that. I think she . . .
Elaine: She was not a complainer.
Bill: Not at all. She had grown up on a farm, where the situation in her younger days would have been no different from what it was like on the Busby farm. No electricity, no running water, and an outhouse. [As I recall it, there was actually an indoor pit toilet in the barn part of their farmhouse]. The farmhouse consisted of half barn and half house.
Elaine: Was that so the animal heat would heat the house?
Bill: I don't know what the rationale for it was, if there was any.
Mark: I think we should stop recording.
Elaine: Next, the romance!

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