

JESUS...

THE ROCK THAT MAKES ME ROLL

Just a Farm Boy – One of God's Stories



WIEBE VAN DER HEIDE

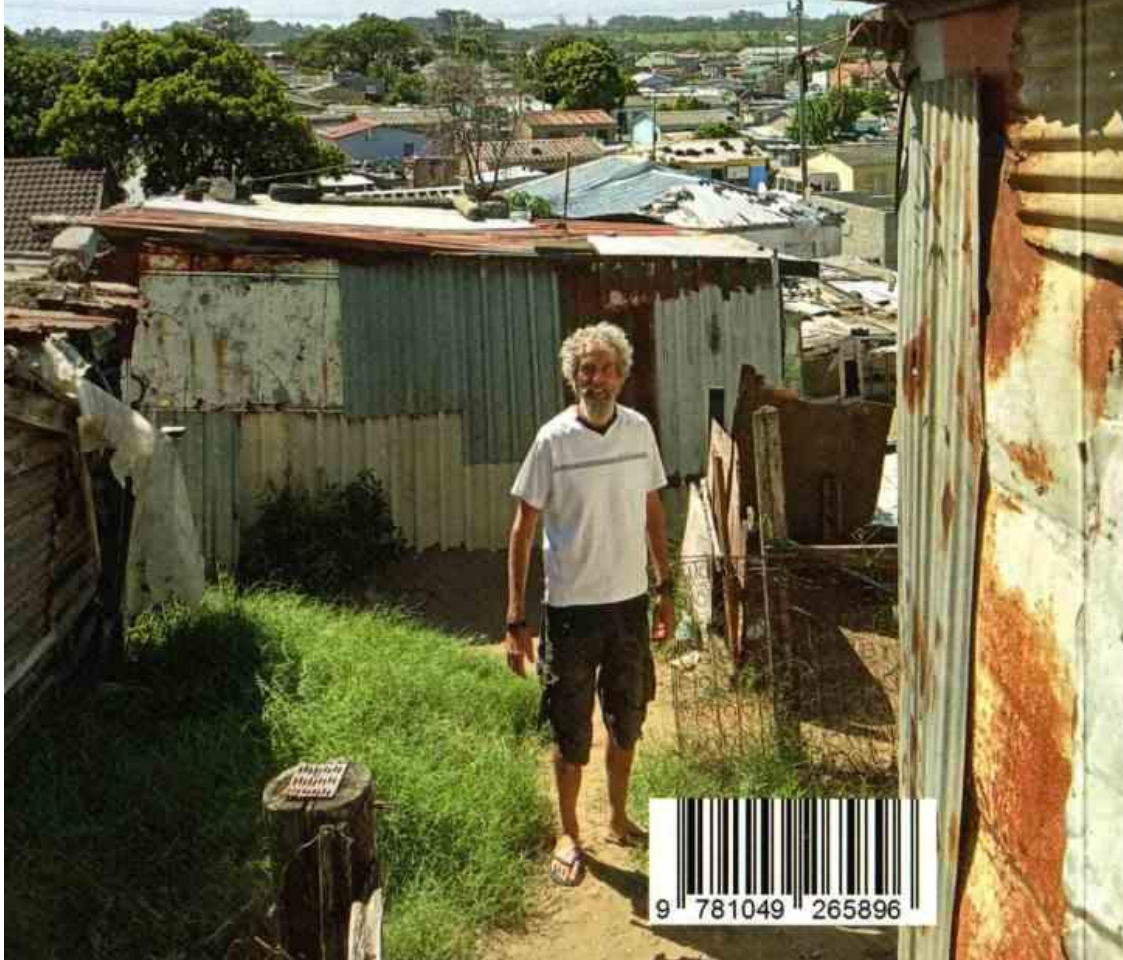
Wiebe van der Heide felt God's call to leave his country of birth, the Netherlands, to live in a shack in Mzamom'He township in Gonubie, Eastern Cape, South Africa. His mission was to minister to the children in the township and lead them to faith in Jesus. He lived simply among the Xhosa people, relying completely on God to supply his needs. Over the past thirty years Wiebe has become a much-needed father figure in a place where fathers are often absent.

During this time, he married Simone from the Netherlands, and they were blessed with a daughter, Lisa. Both Simone and Lisa joined Wiebe in his work among the children.

This is the story of their faith, perseverance, love, and commitment to doing God's will. All their work has been done without fundraising, relying fully on God's faithfulness and provision.

"This true story is inspiring and humbling. Jesus is the Rock, and ordinary people can achieve wonderful things with Jesus when they live their lives trusting in Him."

Caroline Selkirk – South Africa



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Published by the author
justafarmboy700@gmail.com

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FOREWORD

This is Wiebe's book, but actually it is not primarily about him. The book is about Jesus and everything He has done in Wiebe's life and how He reveals Himself through it. All honor to Him!

I had the privilege of knowing Wiebe for a number of years, during the period from 1993 to 1998 when I was a Reverend in Hooghalen. During that time he was partly in the Netherlands and partly abroad. It was a period in which much changed in his life, especially in the deepening of his faith. We had many conversations about this during that time, and afterwards we have been in contact by email, although sometimes more than at other times. What remains is the strong bond in our faith in God, our Father.

The path Wiebe has walked has not always been easy. God has blessed him. And blessing is ultimately everything that brings you closer to God. Sometimes these are the beautiful things, but sometimes also the difficult things that happen in your life. He writes about this openly and honestly, and I appreciate him greatly for that!

Even more, I appreciate and thank our Lord Jesus who has guided Wiebe and, together with Simone, makes him such a blessing to the people around them!

Wiebe, beloved brother in Jesus, thank you for your book! I hope and pray that both your book and your daily dedication to the people around you may be a blessing, and that through this God's Kingdom may come ever closer!

Your brother and friend,
Rev. Roel Meijer
The Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

Many times, people have suggested that I should write a book about the life I have lived and am still living. I always responded that I did not have the time. At the end of 2025, however, I realised that I might have the time during the December school holidays, as these are usually periods away from regular activities. Normally, I spend this time working on projects and maintenance around the farm where I am staying, but at the moment everything is in order. And so, I decided to write a book.

This is not a book about the life I have lived and am living, but about God's dealings in my life. In fact, it is God's story, following His question while I was reading Isaiah 6 in the Bible: "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?*" To which I responded, "Here am I, send me".

Did the story only begin then, or had God begun writing the story of my life much earlier?

God has been amazingly good to me and has given me many stories to tell. These stories should not be buried with me in the grave. I want them to be preserved – to help others find God and to encourage them in their daily walk with Him.

My intention is to make this book available online free of charge. I have two reasons for this. First, it is a book about God and His dealings with one of His servants. Second, since 1997 I have worked and lived without a salary; I have received freely, and I want to give freely. Should I manage to produce a printed copy, I would want it to be sold at cost price.

Adding the photographs was quite a mission. Most of the photographs from the years before South Africa were still stored in the Netherlands. Thankfully, one of my brothers

managed to find them and send them over to South Africa. However, the photographs from my time in Austria were not included in the shipment. I must have packed them in a different box. I may be able to add them at a later stage. In some cases, I simply did not have good photographs to include, such as from my time in the army.

I am very thankful to those who helped me bring this book to completion – Lisa van der Heide (South Africa), Tjeerd van der Heide (Netherlands), Rev. Roel Meijer (Netherlands), Caroline Selkirk (South Africa) and Mim Sinke (Canada). You have put so much effort into checking the flow of the story, and the grammar and sentence structure, and you did this entirely voluntarily. Thank you so much!

While working through the editing, I regularly came across interesting language differences. For example, the luggage compartment of a car is called the *trunk* in North America, while in South Africa we call it the *boot*. The same applies to *tyre* versus *tire*, and *soccer boots* versus *soccer cleats* or *soccer shoes*. I came across several more examples of different words used for the same object. In these instances, I have tried to use the most common international wording or have mentioned both terms.



PRELUDE

It is Friday morning, August 8, 1997. I have just arrived in East London and spent the entire night on a bus from Cape Town. There was little to see during the long journey, just small lights here and there and towns asleep. I slept most of the time too.

I need my morning coffee and find one. While enjoying it, I look around for a taxi – small, old, beaten-up cars.

Brent had given me a small scrap of paper with a Xhosa name I cannot pronounce written on it. It is the name of a taxi rank somewhere in East London, where I first need to go. From there, I need another taxi to reach my final destination: Mzamom’Hle, the Gonubie squatter camp.

After finishing my coffee, I walk over to the most decent-looking taxi. I show the driver the scrap of paper and point to the unpronounceable name. “That’s where I need to go”, I say. “No problem, I will help you”, the driver replies. My final destination is also written on the paper.

I am sure he wonders what a ‘white’ man is looking for in their world. We load my luggage into the boot (trunk) – a large backpack, a travel bag, and a guitar in its case – and drive off. After a short drive through East London, we arrive at the taxi rank. “Fifty rand, please.”

Eish, that’s a lot of money, I think, but of course, why wouldn’t he overcharge a helpless foreigner? Thankfully, he shows me the way to my next taxi, a beaten-up minibus, and helps me with my luggage.

Once the minibus is full of passengers, we drive off, through town and onto the highway for a short distance, then take the main road to Gonubie. Just before Gonubie, we turn right, and soon after, turn right again onto a gravel road. The gravel road leads straight into the Mzamom’Hle squatter camp.

The driver knows exactly where I need to go, probably because Brent used to live there. I climb out and collect my luggage from the back of the vehicle. The driver asks a young boy to lead me to Brent's shack. The boy kindly helps me carry my travel bag. For a moment I wonder if he might run away with it.

We walk between other shacks and up a dune. Brent's shack stands on top of the dune, built on poles, with six steps leading up to the door. The door is ajar.

"Mama Ganeko?" I call, but there is no response.

With my luggage, I push the door open further and step into the three-by-four-metre hut. Mama Ganeko is not inside.

I put my luggage down on the wooden floor, and a thought, one that does not seem to come from myself, flashes through my mind: *Now you're home.*



1. GROWING UP

Life on the Farm

My dear grandparents on my mother's side came to visit



One year old

when I was just one day old. I was lying in a beautiful cot, with soft white fabric around the inside. A pole with a horizontal metal ring on top was fastened to the far side of the cot. From the ring white fabric with beautiful edging hung, like a curtain surrounding the whole cot, which could be opened and closed.

My grandfather, who truly was a very kind and honourable man, looked at me and said, "What an ugly one".

It was February 5, 1971 when I was born, the third child in our family. I had an older sister and an older brother, and after me six more children were born. Dad came from a family of eight children and Mom from a family of seven. Large families were not unusual in our family line.

We lived on a farm near Hooghalen, a village in the province of Drenthe in the north of the Netherlands. Originally, my parents came from the province of Groningen, the northernmost province. My grandfather, the one who considered me to be "ugly", was originally from Friesland, the province in the northwest of the Netherlands. His name was Wiebe (pronounced as Vee-buh), and I was named after him.

Dad was a dairy farmer and had taken over the farm from his father. In his early farming years, he had only a few cows, perhaps twenty or so, and no tractor. Work on the land was done by horse, although, I do not remember that. I do remember Dad's first tractor, which he used throughout his farming life and which my youngest brother even used as his wedding vehicle in 2010.

By the end of Dad's farming life, he had more than fifty milking cows in the summer and no more than forty-four in the winter, as our stable could not house more than that. Dad farmed well. He worked hard, raised nine children, and had a whole row of certificates on the living room wall praising the quality of his milk.



My parent's farmhouse with my youngest brother on the foreground and my youngest sister on Dad's first tractor (1994)

The farmhouse was a typical Dutch farmhouse: people lived in the front section, and in winter the cows were housed in the back part, all under one roof. Our farm had the highest roof in the area, of which I was very proud. Dad, however, told us children not to be proud of it, as 'high roofs catch

much wind'. After storms, Dad could often be seen working on the roof, replacing tiles. The south side of the roof was beautifully red; the north side was dotted with blue and grey tiles where Dad had replaced those blown off. I suppose blue and grey tiles must have been cheaper than red ones.

We had wonderful times as a family on the farm. Neighbouring farms were less than one hundred metres apart, and people always helped one another. We did not have workers; all the work was done by the farmer and his children.

In summer, we made hay bales for winter feed, always watching the weather. The grass was cut, dried, baled by an agricultural contractor, loaded onto a wagon, and brought into the barn. Sitting on top of a fully loaded wagon on the way back to the farmhouse was an experience in itself. I felt grown-up and important to be part of all that work.

We had a cousin who was much older than us and spent most of his school holidays with us. He loved the farm and came to help Dad. Once a year, he even ran the farm by himself for one or two weeks so that Dad, Mom, and we children could go on holiday.

We had lots of fun when others visited. Dad liked to joke and always found funny ways to tease people.

With friends from the neighbourhood, we hunted rabbits in a nearby forest, without much success. We also built a hut in the forest by digging a deep hole in the ground. We covered it with cut-down trees and plastic, leaving a small opening as an entrance. The plastic was then covered with earth, leaves, and branches to hide the hut from unwanted visitors.

When everything was finished, we crawled inside and sat in pitch darkness. Sitting there without being able to see each other was not much fun, and the hut was soon abandoned. Making huts from hay bales in the barn was also great fun. One had to be careful, though, to not fall through the trapdoor and end up on the concrete floor below. This happened once to one of my younger brothers. As a result he spent several days in hospital.

In winter, we played in the snow and went ice skating on a small pond behind the neighbour's farm and on ditches in the area, always with neighbourhood friends. The older children taught the younger ones. When we grew older, we went to the local ice-skating rink, which was a paddock flooded for that purpose.

On hot summer days, once all the work was done, a water fight could be expected. Someone would start it and soon the whole family would be running around the farmhouse with cups and buckets filled with water.

On one such occasion, one of my aunts was visiting. She came after me with a bucket of water. I ran through an open sliding garden door and quickly slid it shut behind me. My aunt forcefully slid the door open, slamming her wrist into a wooden beam while holding the handle. She screamed in pain.

I stopped running and walked back, concerned to see if she was all right. Her wrist was very painful, and I checked to see how I could help. Suddenly, she picked up her bucket again and threw all the water over me. I wondered whether she had faked the pain.

Dad took her to the doctor. Her wrist was broken, and she always blamed me for it.

Dad was interested only in dairy cows, while one of our neighbours kept a wide variety of animals. I wanted variety too and got myself some chickens. I did not have much success. They roamed freely around the farm and died easily. When my first chicken died, I held a small funeral and invited my younger siblings.

I also tried slaughtering chickens, but was never good at it, and did not like the thought of eating my own animals.

I later kept goats, including a large grey female goat. In the winter she was kept in the barn, and I fed her morning and evening. One day she became sick, and as the days passed she grew weaker and weaker until Dad told me she was dying. I did not want her to die alone and sat with her for a while. Lacking patience, I soon became bored and told her I would return later. I checked on her several times until bedtime. By morning, she had died.

I had other goats as well and their young needed to be sold. The man who bought Dad's bull calves also bought goats. Dad wanted to teach me how to bargain with him. The man would offer too little, I would ask too much, and we would slap each other's hand during the negotiation. I did not like it. Eventually, I stopped the bargaining altogether. Dad told me I was foolish and continued himself. He succeeded in getting a better price.

I must have been around fourteen when I decided I wanted to become a farmer like Dad. The decision did not last long though. One Saturday morning in winter while working in the stable, one of my uncles spoke to me. He must have talked to Dad first, as he knew of my plans. He told me I should consider something else because farming was hard work with little free time. He himself was a postal worker, delivering the mail in Hooghalen by bicycle.

That same day, Dad also told me I could not become a farmer because he needed to continue farming for many

years to support the family. I was very disappointed and wondered whether I should become a postal worker like my uncle.

As my older brother Johnny (John) and I grew up, we helped Dad on Saturdays, after school, and during holidays. If we worked well during holidays, Dad would sometimes surprise us with some money as a sign of appreciation. Later, John and I even gave Dad Sundays off by taking turns milking the cows; a real luxury for him.

Milking cows in winter was not as easy as milking them in summer. During the summer, the cows were outside and milking was done in a large milking trailer. The trailer held six cows at a time, and they stood on a raised platform so that the cow's udder was at a comfortable working height.

During the winter months, however, the cows were chained in their stalls, where they ate, slept, and were milked. One had to crouch or kneel beside each cow to attach the milking cluster to the udder. When most of the milk had been collected, we would always apply gentle downward pressure to the cluster for a short while to extract the last bit of milk. This was strenuous work, as you remained crouched or on one knee for some time.

John, however, was very resourceful. He made himself a seat by tying an empty ten-litre drum to his backside with a piece of rope. When he lowered himself beside a cow, he would end up sitting squarely on the drum. As he moved from cow to cow, the drum dangled behind him.

One day, John was deep in thought, sitting on his drum beside a cow and pressing down on the milking cluster. He neither saw nor heard me approaching and I could not resist the temptation. A small kick to the bottom of the drum was all that was needed and John went sprawling between the cows.

On another occasion, Dad sent John and me into the paddocks to repair some fencing. We must have been about thirteen or fourteen years old. John took the tractor and we hooked the scoop onto the back. We loaded our fencing tools into the scoop, along with a roll of wire and a few poles in case any needed replacing.

There was a dirt road behind our farm, with paddocks lining the road. We had to work in a paddock about two hundred metres from the farmhouse. John decided to drive, as he was the older one. *Surely he would let me drive home*, I thought. Driving a tractor was no problem for us; we had grown up doing so.

John drove off, and I climbed into the scoop. Once we reached the paddock, we repaired the fence, taking turns driving the tractor along the inside of the fence line. After completing the circuit, it was time to head home. John made sure he did the last bit of driving inside the paddock.

“Please close the paddock after me, Wiebe,” John shouted from the tractor.

“Sure,” I replied, “but I’m driving home, you know”.

“That’s not necessary,” John called back. “I’m already behind the wheel. Just get back into the scoop.”

What? I thought. *He’s not going to let me drive home?*

“You drove on the way there; it’s my turn now,” I protested. But John did not move, and I was not strong enough to fight him out of the tractor.

Then, I had a plan: I would make his ride very boring.

I stepped in front of the tractor and began walking very, very slowly down the middle of the dirt road. John pressed the horn. I ignored it and kept walking at the same slow pace. Every now and then he nudged the tractor into me. *No problem*, I thought. *He won’t drive over me.*

Somehow, Dad appeared, walking down the dirt road toward us. Unfortunately, his arrival made things much worse.

As Dad approached, he thought I was walking far too close in front of the tractor. He grabbed me by the arm and pulled me aside. He should not have done that. I was perfectly safe in front of the tractor, there were no wheels there. When Dad pulled me to the side, one of my feet landed directly in front of one of the wheels, and John did not stop in time.

The wheel did not roll completely over my foot, but it crushed it badly enough that I could no longer walk. With tears running down my face from the pain, Dad realised it was serious enough to see a doctor.

Mom could not take me; she was busy making supper and caring for a house full of younger children; Dad had to take me himself. But it was milking time. So who would milk the cows? John.

At that age, John really disliked milking. Despite my pain and tears, I took a certain satisfaction in knowing that John was being punished for not letting me drive.

I ended up on crutches, with my foot in a cast for four weeks.

We children also had household chores that had to be done after supper. My chore was washing the dishes with Erica, my two year younger sister. Each evening we switched roles. One would wash and the other would dry.

We both became quite irritated with each other, especially when it was my turn to dry. According to my standards of cleanliness, many of the dishes were not clean enough and I would simply throw them back into the dishwater.

Years later, when Jannet, my older sister, left home to study and work, I was glad to take over her chore of vacuuming the living room. My dishwashing chore was then passed on to Frits, one of my younger brothers, who was then old enough to be given responsibilities. From that moment on, Erica and he irritated each other instead.

Vacuuming suited me well, as it could be done alone. The only problems were the schoolbags and shoes my younger brothers regularly left lying around in the living room. I would ask them kindly to remove their things and gave them a choice: *soft-handed* or *hard-handed*.

They soon figured out what that meant. *Soft-handed* meant they came and removed the item themselves. *Hard-handed* meant that I picked up the culprit by the back of his clothing, held him horizontally over the item so he could pick it up, and then carried him out of the living room into the hallway.

The *hard-handed* option was chosen only once by each of them.

Dad was the strict one and Mom was the kind one. When I did not feel like working on the farm, I tried to stay out of Dad's way. If we children needed something, wanted permission to go somewhere, or – after we had obtained our driving licences – wanted to use the car, we knew exactly whom to ask. Mom was almost guaranteed to say *yes*; Dad was almost guaranteed to say *no*.

Mom could, however, also give us a spanking when she felt it was necessary.

On one occasion, one of my younger brothers had done something wrong. He was not at home when Mom found out. He was probably playing at one of the neighbouring houses. Mom could not punish him immediately, but she intended to do so as soon as he returned. Her method of discipline was a spanking with a wooden clothes hanger on the backside.

Jannet, the older sister, felt very sorry for our little brother and kept watch for his return, determined to see him before Mom did. She succeeded. When she met him, she warned him that he was going to get a spanking, but told him not to worry, because she had a plan.

She took a newspaper, folded it to size, and tucked it into his trousers. “Now”, she said, “go and see Mom”.

Mom saw him, shouted at him, fetched the wooden clothes hanger, and gave him one, two, three, four smacks on the backside. But the expected screams and cries never came.

Much later, we told Mom about the newspaper. She said she had wondered at the time why the boy had not cried; she smiled about it.

Growing up on the farm was normal life for me. I accepted that I was a farm boy. I believed that working on the farm was what we were meant to do in our free time and during holidays. It never occurred to me that joining a sports club or learning to play a musical instrument might be an option for us. Not that I was particularly sporty or musical, but the possibility of exploring those activities simply did not cross my mind.

Those things were for children who lived in Hooghalen or in Assen, the town ten kilometres away. We were farmers and that was what we did.

I was clearly wrong in that thinking. Years later, when I was already a young adult, Frits joined a soccer club and my two youngest siblings, Alfred and Nienke, were taught to play musical instruments.

I must have been a generally quiet child and teenager, because my mother would occasionally say of me, ‘*Still waters run deep*’. Dad, on the other hand, would sometimes, rather annoyingly, advise me to, ‘*Go and live in a hut on the heath*’, as I seemed to enjoy being and working alone.

I was generally a shy person, trying to avoid attention. Not as shy as one of the younger brothers, who once hid behind the couch when Granddad and Grandma came to visit, but shy nonetheless, and wary of being noticed.

I also had a speech difficulty. Certain words would get stuck and refuse to come out. Mom took me to speech therapy where I learned that the issue was not physical. I was taught how to deal with it and how to train myself to overcome it. I learned that, in my case, it had more to do with a lack of confidence, nervousness, fear, tiredness, and even habit.

I suppose I was also quite relaxed, or perhaps too relaxed, because Dad would sometimes say, *'Even if the house were on fire, you still wouldn't run'*.



A Christian Upbringing

Christianity shaped our family life. Dad and Mom were believers, as were both sides of the family, and we all belonged to the *Gereformeerde Kerk (Vrijgemaakt)*, the Reformed Church (Liberated). In those days, it was a well-oiled organisation, with its own political party, workers' union, daily newspaper, old-age homes, primary schools, high schools, and colleges. All our contacts and associations were with people from this denomination. In our neighbourhood were others from the same church and we associated freely with them. We were taught that our denomination was the only true church; any other church was either false in some ways, or a sect.

Meal times at our home always began with prayer and after we were done eating, a chapter from the Bible was read, ending with another prayer. The Bible was read from the first page to the last and then we would begin again at the first page.

On Sundays we went to church twice in Hooghalen.

As the family grew, so did Dad and Mom's car. First, we had an orange Ford Escort sedan. After that came a yellow Opel Kadett station wagon. From then on, Dad remained loyal to Opel. When the whole family travelled together, the bigger children sat on the back seat, and the little ones in the luggage area.

Once after church, we were all relaxing in the living room, about to enjoy a cup of coffee, when one of our neighbours stopped their car in front of our house. They had also just driven home from church. We wondered why they had stopped. Then, to our great surprise, Henry, only about ten years old, got out of their car. He had been left behind at church. None of us had noticed he was missing.

When children reached High School they were required to attend catechism classes on Tuesday evenings. The minister taught from the church's doctrine for one hour. Each week we were given something to memorise. Catechism continued until we made our profession of faith.

At the start of high school, we also joined the Youth Society on Thursday evenings.

We sat around tables arranged in a large square in the hall. A person in their mid-twenties, appointed by the church's Youth Committee, acted as chairperson. One of the youth members was elected secretary and another treasurer.

Each youth member was given a turn to prepare an essay on a Bible passage selected by a national church committee and a discussion followed. When it was my turn, I was very nervous because of my difficulty with speaking, but I managed reasonably well. I still have one of those essays, on John 1.

After the discussion, there was a break during which we socialised, drank coffee, and the smokers went outside, a more relaxed and entertaining item followed and then we climbed back onto our bicycles to cycle home.

Youth camps were organised once every four years, giving every youngster the opportunity to attend at least one camp. The camp took place over a long weekend. I was fourteen years old when I attended one. About thirty young people gathered at the church, all on bicycles. My older sister and brother, Jannet and John, were there, as well as Dad and Mom since Dad was part of the overseeing Youth Committee.

We cycled about thirty kilometres to the campsite. The ride itself was already great fun. The camp was a real highlight and you really got to know one another. What stood out for me was that Dad and Mom were well liked by the young people and did not focus on me, which made me feel free. To my surprise, I was liked as well. While growing up, I must have developed the idea that I was not important.

Once a year we also had a youth exchange with a church from another town. This took place over a regular weekend, from Friday to Sunday. The youth groups took turns hosting. I am sure this was intended to help us meet like-minded young people from the same denomination, and therefore potential future marriage partners.

We grew up in a very safe and protected environment. We mostly associated with like-minded people. It was good and secure.

Every year, each family in the church received an official visit from the elders. They came to check on the family's spiritual well-being and families could share whatever they wished. Before one such visit, my brothers and I came up with a prank.

We had a large coffee table in the living room, surrounded by couches and chairs. There would be six of us present – Dad, Mom, and the older children. The younger ones were already in bed. Our prank was that each of us would place some form of Christian literature on the table in front of us.

Dad and Mom had no choice but to participate, because if they removed their books, one of us would put them right back.

When the elders arrived and greeted us, they commented, smiling knowingly on our seemingly perfect spiritual state, mentioning the abundance of Christian literature.

We received a great deal of Bible knowledge, for which I am very thankful to my parents and the church.

I was taught to read the Bible before going to sleep, but at some point I lost interest and stopped – though not for long. Fear of hell made me start reading again. I read from beginning to end and then started all over again. I still do so today and must have read the Bible all the way through many times by now.

When I was seventeen, Dad and Mom made a major change; they bought their first television. For years, we had been one of the few families without one. One of my aunts called it *'the devil's box'*. We did have a radio, though. At some point, we discovered that a book was read on the radio every Tuesday evening for thirty minutes.

Tuesday evenings were catechism evenings, but if I cycled home quickly enough, I was just in time for the broadcast. We would sit quietly and listen intently. Those thirty minutes always felt too short, and I looked forward to the next Tuesday.

Eventually we obtained a television, and that reminds me of an amusing story. Frits loved soccer. I did not care for the game: running after a ball, getting hold of it and kicking it away again held no attraction for me. That was how soccer appeared to me at the time. Frits, however, loved it and would watch matches on television whenever he could.

During one of those moments, I managed to get hold of the remote control without being noticed. Casually, I went

outside to the window behind the chair where Frits sat, completely absorbed in the game. I hid behind the potted plants on the windowsill.

To Frits' great surprise, the television suddenly changed channels, apparently all by itself. He searched for the remote control, couldn't find it. He quickly switched the TV to the correct channel manually before returning to his chair.

A moment later, the same thing happened again. "Something must be wrong with this TV," he muttered. Then, suddenly, the television switched off altogether.

Frit was now thoroughly puzzled and irritated and began frantically searching for the remote control. I had enjoyed my fun and revealed myself on the other side of the window, with a broad grin.

Going out on weekends was not something we did, or at least, that was how I understood it. That was for village and town boys, not for farm boys like us. I would hear stories of people going out and coming home late at night, but that was not our world.

There was even a bar of sorts in Groningen, a city thirty kilometres away, run by people from our church denomination. It was no different from any other bar, except that only people from our churches went there. It closed on Saturday nights at midnight because after twelve o'clock Sunday had officially begun.

I tried going there once or twice, after discovering that farm boys could go out after all, but I did not like the place.

Most of the time I stayed home and had friends over or we would visit others. That was where we learned to drink beer and other drinks.

Jannet had her own friends. Soon she had a boyfriend too, so she was not in my circle. John was not interested in my friends and would not touch alcohol. Erica, the younger sister usually joined in, and over time our groups overlapped

and eventually became one. I must have been about eighteen by then.

Dad and Mom did not mind us having friends over and everyone always enjoyed being at our place. If it was getting late in the evening Mom would occasionally come downstairs and tell our friends to go home and her own children to go to bed.

I am sure we sometimes cleaned up before going to bed, but more often, Mom quietly tidied up in the mornings.

I did get drunk at times, but not regularly, and never to the point of losing control, although sometimes I did do things I would not have done if I had been sober.

When I was almost eighteen, I decided I was old enough to go out on New Year's Eve, or so I thought.

The boys from our church would go from house to house throughout Hooghalen after midnight, offering New Year's wishes and collecting a beer at each stop. I was excited to join them. I went with a neighbour friend and we had a great time.

Apparently, Dad and Mom did not like me being out in the middle of the night, and neither did my friend's parents, so they sent John to find us. John had just obtained his driving licence.

Eventually, he found our group and told us to come home with him. *No way*, I thought. I made it very clear that I was not getting into the car. I was having too much fun.

John returned home, but was sent out again.

He found us once more, and I still did not want to come with him. *Leave me alone*, I thought. *I'm not causing trouble. I'm finally one of the village boys.*

My friend began to feel guilty about disobeying his parents. He decided to give in and got into the car. I was annoyed at his weakness and annoyed with John.

Grudgingly I got into the car as well since I could not stay behind on my own.



School Years



Eleven years old

We went to primary school in Assen, a school that belonged to our church's denomination, about ten kilometres from our farm. In Hooghalen, five kilometres away, there was also a school, but it was not Christian, so we could not go there. Two hundred metres from our farm was another small school with only two classrooms and three grades in each classroom. It was called '*School with the Bible*'. We could not attend that school either, as it was considered not Christian enough. And so, every morning a minibus came to collect us, along with other children who attended the same school.

The school building was a large double-storey structure: the lower grades were downstairs, and the upper grades upstairs. Throughout primary school, Dad and Mom never received bad reports about me, except that I would *see all the birds outside*, meaning that I tended to daydream and did not always concentrate on the lessons being taught. I do not remember much from my primary school years; only minor incidents.

For example, when I was about eight years old my friends challenged me to give a girl I liked a kiss. They said I would not dare to do it. I proved them wrong and the girl did not mind the kiss at all. I still remember her name.

During school breaks, a teacher would walk around the grounds to make sure everyone behaved. Once, a friend and I must have misbehaved, because the teacher called us and took us inside to reprimand us. We stood side by side, our heads drawn back into our necks, looking up at the angry teacher. “Get that smirk off your face,” the teacher said to me. “Sorry, sir, I can’t, I always smile”, I replied timidly. The teacher smiled too, told us to behave, and let us go.

In the last two years of my primary school career, I was considered old enough to cycle to school. Come rain, storms, snow, freezing cold, or sunshine, it made no difference. I cycled to school.

High school was also in Assen and also belonged to our church’s denomination. In the Netherlands, high school has three levels of education. I was too advanced for the lower level, which lasted four years, but not academic enough for the highest level, which lasted five or six years. Therefore, I attended the middle level, which was four years long, starting at age twelve and, if all went well, ending at sixteen.

I passed each year with average marks and did my homework faithfully. Dad sometimes thought I spent too much time studying, but I suppose I learned slowly.

I enjoyed high school very much and made new friends from other towns who attended the same school.

In the third year, we had a geography teacher who had just graduated from college. He was always friendly and it was a pleasure to be in his class. In his classroom there was a storage room and the door to it was always locked. Often, when we entered the classroom, the teacher would be inside that room fetching materials for the lesson. A bunch of keys would then dangle temptingly from the door. “Come on, let’s lock the teacher in,” we once whispered to each other. No one dared but I could not let the opportunity pass.

Quietly, I walked to the door, closed it, turned the key, and returned to my seat. Fortunately, the teacher appreciated the joke, but he never left the keys in the door again.

Our English teacher did not like me; the feeling was mutual. She did not teach me much either, because when I arrived in Canada at twenty years old, I could hardly speak a single intelligible English sentence. In class, she always chose me to check whether my homework was done, asked me to answer questions, or made me read aloud. If anyone misbehaved when she was not looking, it was often assumed to be me, even when I was innocent.

When a student was sent out of class, he had to report to the headmaster. It was something I had to do regularly. Sometimes it was because I had misbehaved, for which I received punishment, such as staying behind to clean something or writing a sentence one hundred times. But most of the time, when the headmaster asked what I had done, I had to answer, “Nothing, sir.”

Eventually, the headmaster grew tired of seeing me so often and called a meeting with the English teacher and me. He said to her, “If you have to send Wiebe out of your class one more time, he will not return to your class again.” After that meeting, she ignored me completely and never found another reason to send me out.

Seven years later, she must have received the shock of her life when it seemed that Wiebe was back in her classroom. *Oh no, thankfully not; it's his younger brother*, she realised, though she often still called him Wiebe instead of Henry.

Smoking was allowed on school grounds from the third year onward. My friends and I started in our second year, although for a long time I did not dare to smoke in front of my family. I was always concerned about what others might think of me. I did not want to stand out in any way –

whether by wearing other clothes or even having had a haircut. I found remarks hard to deal with. It felt safer to stay under the radar. My shyness certainly played a part in this.

I also had a strong sense of being unimportant which encouraged me to remain in the background. I think this probably originated with my Dad.

Dad was a good man. He loved to talk, make jokes, and always found a reason to visit someone for a chat. He was loved by many, which was evident at his funeral. He died in January 2000 at the age of sixty-three. More than five hundred people attended his funeral.

Yet somehow it seemed to me that he struggled to have conversations with his own sons.

I first noticed this when I was about fourteen. I would have a school friend over during the holidays, and Dad would engage with him as a 'real' person, having the conversations I felt he never had with me. Throughout my teenage years, I noticed Dad talking easily with friends who visited my siblings or me but never with me.

Another incident stands out clearly. One evening, an uncle and aunt were visiting, and a small discussion arose about the strength of our coffee. It was said to be quite strong. As I was sitting there as well, I remarked that I did not think our coffee was too strong. I still remember Dad turning to me with a look that, in my perception, said, *Who are you to comment or to know anything about coffee?* From that moment on, I made sure to say very little about anything. After all, who was I to think I knew anything anyway.

School holidays were mostly spent on the farm, helping Dad or working on my own small projects. Sometimes I spent a week with a cousin on his farm, or he would stay with us.

Occasionally, a school friend visited for a week and during the next holiday, I would visit him in return.

I also worked regularly on a nearby farm where large numbers of flowers had to be picked during summer. Like most youngsters, we looked for holiday jobs to earn some pocket money. I always had something to do and was never bored.

During my final year of high school, around the age of fifteen and sixteen, I had to decide what school I would attend next, what occupation or trade I wanted to pursue. This was a major decision at such an age.

I could not become a farmer, as Dad's farm could not support two families, so I could not join him. Dad observed that I enjoyed working in the garden around the house and suggested I attend horticultural school. I could not think of anything else. I was a farm boy with limited options, or so I believed. I applied and was accepted.

I passed my final high school exams after studying hard for long hours. After each exam, my classmates gathered outside to discuss the questions and compare answers. I was not very interested in these discussions; I could not change anything once the exam had been written. I knew I had done my best and the outcome was in God's hands.

I truly enjoyed my high school years, and it was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to my friends and cycled away from the school for the last time. Some friends I would never see again, as we lived far apart. No one else was going to the horticultural school I had chosen. That school was in a distant town in the opposite direction from where many of my friends were headed. It was also not affiliated with our church's denomination. For the first time, I would have to associate with people who were not like-minded.

Horticultural school entailed a three-year programme. To get there, I first cycled five kilometres to Hooghalen, where I parked my bicycle at my grandmother's house. She was Dad's mother; Dad's father had died long before, when I was still very young. From her house, I walked two hundred metres to the bus stop and then travelled forty-five minutes by bus to school.

I managed well at the school. I associated easily with my classmates, sixteen boys and two girls, but I did not form close friendships. They knew I was a Christian and some others were as well, but we rarely talked about matters of faith.



Once, a very awkward incident occurred.

I sat down to eat my lunch, and as I began, one of my classmates asked, "Hey, don't you need to pray before you eat?" I did not know what to answer. My whole being froze. I continued eating without answering or even looking at him. After a while, he left me alone. I felt very embarrassed and small.

Seventeen years old

As always, I did my best at school. I completed my homework, studied hard, and passed my final exams with average results.

I was nineteen when I finished school and earlier had decided that I wanted to go to Canada to work. The cousin who used to help Dad on the farm during his school holidays had married a Canadian woman and was living there. I wanted to go to Canada too. But first, my duty to my country awaited me.

At that time, the Netherlands still had mandatory military service for the two oldest sons in a family. As the second son, I had to report for service. Military duty lasted one year. Before being called up, I had a few weeks free and spent them working as a foreman on a nearby farm.

As foreman I supervised young people who worked there during their school holidays. In a large barn, rows of tables were filled with straw-like flower heads freshly harvested from the fields. These flower heads arrived in bags which I collected by car, and distributed among the youngsters. They inserted thin, twenty-five-centimetre wires into the underside of each flower head, bundled them in bunches of ten, and placed them neatly into crates. The flower heads were then sent for drying and exportation. My task was to ensure the youngsters had the materials they needed and that the final product was of good quality.

Some people also did this work from home for extra income. I delivered materials to them, inspected their work, and collected the finished products.

Neatness was part of who I was. In my bedroom, everything had its own place. Mom would regularly dust my room and try to put everything back exactly as she had found it. She never succeeded and was always surprised that I noticed she had been there. I did not mind. Mom was always kind, worked very hard, and tried to please everyone.

Being a foreman suited me well. It was seasonal work that perfectly filled the time between finishing school and beginning military service.

I was paid well and soon bought my first car – a Zastava Yugo.



Military Duty

In November 1990, when I was nineteen, I was called up for military service. I had to report to the barracks in a town in the south of the Netherlands. I was to receive two months of training as a Land Rover driver. To get there, I travelled by train; a journey of three and a half hours.

Upon arrival, I was welcomed, introduced to my platoon, and met our

officers. After that, we were sent to the uniform hall, where we had to undress, be measured, and receive our fitted uniforms. I was now a real soldier, unsure whether I liked it or not.

One fellow really did not like it at all. He faked headaches every day, knowing they could neither be proven nor disproven. He had long hair and used marijuana; he once showed us how he carried it with him. At the time, I had no idea what marijuana was, only that it was some kind of drug. His headaches worked and he was soon declared unfit for service.

He forgot to take some of his belongings home, though not his marijuana, and contacted me, asking if I would take them with me as he lived in Assen, the town where I went to primary and high school. He said he would come by later to collect them. I agreed and he did come by. Dad was home, and as always, he liked to talk. He joined the conversation between me and the young man. I noticed how Dad spoke to him as an equal. I felt sidelined and wondered why Dad would not speak to me in the same way. The young man had long hair, used marijuana, and looked wild; yet Dad accepted



him. I could not help but ask myself, *why does Dad still not see me as an equal?*

Every Friday we were allowed to go home, and return early Monday morning. Often, I did not take the time to change into civilian clothes in case I missed the earliest train. I felt quite important, sitting on the train as a real soldier.

Once, we were offered the Friday off on condition that we donate a pint of blood. I was not interested, but all my mates were. I did not want to be the only one left behind at the barracks on that specific Friday, so I decided to donate as well. After they had taken the blood, I carefully stood up and felt fine. I walked toward the table where coffee and meatballs were provided to help us recover but I didn't make it. Fortunately, someone caught me before I hit the floor. I never donated blood again.

Once, when I was about twelve years old, I fainted in church. It was a day after I had been badly sunburned. During the service, we sat the entire time except for the final minute, during which the minister pronounced the blessing. When everyone stood up, I did too, but soon I grabbed Dad's arm and whispered, "I can't see anything." Dad kept me standing until the minister said *Amen* and left the pulpit. He then guided me to a side room at the front of the church, moving against the flow of people leaving. I was later told that my eyes had rolled back into my head. That afternoon, I was allowed to stay at home and miss the second service, which I did not mind at all.

The two months of Land Rover Driver Training went smoothly, and I obtained my military driving licence.

We also learned to use firearms. As drivers, we were issued Uzis. An Uzi has a folding stock, making it compact and ideal for use in vehicles. The Uzi assigned to me must have

had an invisible bend in the barrel, or so I explained it to myself and my mates, because even though I aimed perfectly through the sights during shooting practice, I mostly missed the target.

A military Land Rover was equipped with a multiband radio, which required separate training. For this, we were sent to another location for one month. Again, we were allowed to go home on weekends. Before the end of this training, we were able to indicate our preferred barracks for final placement. I chose Assen. That way, I could report in the morning and return home each evening, except during multi-day exercises in the field. My preference was granted.

For the remaining nine months of service, I no longer needed a bed at the barracks, only a locker. This applied to those of us who lived nearby. Each day began with roll call, after which my fellow drivers and I strolled to another building. All my mates were drivers, some for Land Rovers, others for motorcycles or trucks. We drivers had our own coffee and lunch room located in the same building as several officers' offices.

Each Land Rover driver was assigned a specific officer to drive during exercises. I drove a Major. Our day usually began with several cups of coffee, as there was often very little to do when we were stationed at the barracks.

Each driver had his own vehicle. I had 'my' Land Rover, which I had to keep in top condition and spotlessly clean. After coffee, we eventually wandered to the far end of the compound where the vehicles were parked. There we also had a garage containing two motorcycles for those who drove them. We killed some more time hanging around, after which everyone pretended to work on their vehicle. Keeping my Land Rover freshly painted was no problem and I didn't mind painting over some forgotten dried mud.

We often pestered the motorcycle riders to let us ride their bikes up and down the parking lot. When they were away, we could not ride them as we had no keys. That was until we discovered that a screwdriver placed in the ignition could be used to start the bikes.

Days at the compound were often long and dull with little to do. Nine months passed extremely slowly and became nine very long months. Toward the end of my service, I sometimes went home early, as there was often no roll call at the end of the day. My excuse was that I could help my father on the farm instead of doing nothing.



Me on the right, and my mates, relaxing at a restaurant with a beer

This worked well until one afternoon when an unexpected roll call was held. The next morning, during roll call, the officer announced that I was to report to his office immediately afterward.

When asked where I had been the previous afternoon, I answered honestly that since I had nothing to do at the barracks, I thought it better to help my father on the farm. My punishment was a stern warning not to leave early again and a fine of fifty guilders. I regretted losing the money, but agreeing not to do it again was easy; by that time I had only a few more weeks of service left.

I did enjoy exercises in the field. During one of the first months, we were sent on a night hike. We were divided into groups of ten. Each man carried his own weapon and each group carried five full sets of military gear, divided among us.

The Netherlands is mostly flat, but the south has hills, and that is where we were dropped off. We did not know how long the hike would be, only that reaching the trucks would mean we had arrived at the end of the hike. The route may have been marked with signs, or perhaps we used a map, but I no longer remember how it was indicated.

We began full of energy and chatter. But soon the night grew darker, the talking faded, and we walked on in silence, not knowing how far we would have to go or how long it would take us. Some guys struggled under the weight of their gear and passed items to others. Eventually, I carried a full set of gear. I must have been fit from years of farm work.

Climbing hills was hard; going downhill was worse as you constantly had to brace yourself. Some guys became completely exhausted. They had already handed over all their gear and could no longer carry their weapons. I later wondered whether they were genuinely exhausted or pretended that they were. By then, I was carrying two weapons and full gear.

At some point, even my thoughts faded away. I simply kept putting one foot in front of the other, hoping a truck would emerge from the darkness.

When we finally reached it, I did not even realise we had arrived; the others had to tell me. I lifted my head and could just make out the outline of the truck before my knees buckled beneath me and I collapsed onto the ground. There, beside the road in the pitch dark, I lay utterly exhausted.

Everyone else climbed into the truck, but I could not move. When my mates realised I needed help, they came back for me. They lifted the luggage from my back and threw it into

the truck, then hauled me to my feet and carried me inside, where I collapsed once again on top of the bags. Looking back on that night hike, I was grateful to have been given both a body and a mind capable of endurance.

On another occasion, we were preparing for a two-week exercise in the forests. Our entire platoon would be involved, along with Land Rovers, trucks, motorbikes, and platoons from other barracks. It promised to be a great experience, and I was very much looking forward to it.

In the days leading up to the exercise, we prepared ourselves and our vehicles. On the appointed day, we set off in convoy. I was driving my Land Rover with the Major as my passenger. During the exercise, I was to drive him around and likely other officers as well. The journey to our destination was about one hundred kilometres, mostly along highways before turning off into the forests.

The drive itself was straightforward; just follow the vehicle in front of you. Everything went perfectly well until we left the highway near our destination.

As we exited the highway, I shifted gears from fourth to third. The gear engaged smoothly, but to my great surprise I suddenly found myself holding a disconnected gear stick. While still driving, I showed it to the Major. He was clearly astonished. I set the gear stick aside, and we continued on our way with the vehicle permanently stuck in third gear.

Once the convoy arrived at the barracks near the forest, we parked to make final preparations before heading in. I was quite disappointed, assuming that my adventure had come to an end and that I would have to take the vehicle back to my own barracks. But that was not the case. I was told that someone else would return the Land Rover and that another task would be found for me.

We stood around for a while as I wondered what they might assign me to do. My wondering soon came to an end; I was

told to assist in the kitchen at the barracks, where meals were being prepared for those out in the forest.

No way, I thought. *All my mates are heading into the forest, and I'm supposed to stay behind in a kitchen with people I don't even know?* I did not like the idea at all. My mind began racing and then came up with a beautiful plan.

One of my mates, Edo, was driving a truck with a trailer. The trailer had a metal frame about one and a half metres high, covered with canvas. It was loaded with supplies for the exercise, but I was sure there was room for a person.

I told Edo that I was not staying behind to work in the kitchen. Instead, I would ride with him into the forest in the trailer. All he had to do was close the canvas once I was inside and let me out when reaching the final destination.

All my mates agreed it was a great plan.

Just before the convoy set off again, I climbed into the trailer. Edo closed the canvas, and off we went. It was dark inside, and before long I was being bounced around, realising that we had entered the forest.

After a short while, the truck stopped. I was surprised; we seemed to have arrived already. Edo came to the back and opened the canvas, telling me to get out and join him in the cab. The officer who had been with him on the highway had not joined him for the final stretch into the forest, so Edo decided I might as well ride with him as his passenger.

When we reached our final location, everyone made themselves busy setting up camp. All the officers were present, giving instructions and I made myself as useful as possible, while quietly wondering when someone might ask why I was there instead of in the kitchen.

No one did.

I had a great time camping and taking part in the exercise. My plan had worked.

Two or three days into the exercise, another Land Rover driver fell ill, seriously enough that he had to leave the forest

to receive medical attention. Fortunately for the officers, they had a spare driver on hand. And just like that, I became genuinely useful.

I cared less about being clean-shaven than the officers did. I did not mind skipping a day or two. Often, I would shave in my car, the Zastava Yugo, while driving from my parents' farm to the barracks. I kept a small battery-powered shaver in the car for that purpose.

When the weather was pleasant, I sometimes took my bicycle instead, to save on petrol.

On one of those fine days, I was running late in the morning and did not give myself time to shave. Shaving while cycling would have been rather tricky; I arrived at the barracks unshaven.

The officer conducting roll call was unusually alert that morning and noticed my appearance. He ordered me to report to his office within half an hour; clean-shaven. No reply was expected.

I had no shaving equipment in my locker, which left me with a problem.

Half an hour later, I reported to explain this. The officer was unimpressed and insisted, giving me one hour to return, clean-shaven. My mind raced. *One hour was not enough time to cycle home, shave, and cycle back.* I told him one hour would not be enough time. He still insisted that one hour was sufficient and suggested I borrow shaving equipment from one of my mates, a suggestion that was disgusting to me.

I spent the hour drinking coffee and waiting. At the appointed time, I reported back again.

"You still haven't shaved", the officer exclaimed.

I calmly replied that I had already explained that one hour would not be enough.

Clearly exasperated, the officer then gave me two hours. "Thank you, Sir. I can do that," I replied.

I walked quickly to where my bicycle was parked and raced the ten kilometres home; something one was not supposed to do during service hours, but who would know?

Mom was very surprised to see me arrive and shook her head in disbelief when I explained the reason.

At the appointed time, I reported to the officer for a third time. He was pleased to see that I had managed to arrive clean-shaven and I was equally pleased to tell him that I had said that two hours would work for me.

Throughout my military service, I was the opposite of my brother John. John served for fourteen months and was first promoted to Soldier First Class. A few weeks before completing his service, he was promoted to Corporal.

Most Fridays during roll call, promotions were announced. As I neared the end of my service, I truly expected to be promoted to Soldier First Class, and so did Edo, the truck driver. Every Friday, the two of us waited intently and expectantly, hoping to hear our names read out. Each time, however, we left very disappointed.

By the end of our military service, Edo and I realised that we would have to accept permanent disappointment when it came to promotions within the military.

During my time in the military, I completed a management course, a ten-month programme, so that I would have additional qualifications alongside my horticultural training. I passed the course with an excellent average.

Although I was often bored in the army and did not particularly enjoy military life at the time, once it was over I remembered the good moments and looked back on it as an experience I would not have wanted to miss.

I was twenty years old when I completed my service to my Fatherland.

Next, a new land was waiting – Canada.



2. LAUNCHING INTO THE WORLD – 1

Canada

I did not know much about Canada, except that it was a very large country. In my mind, I imagined long, dusty gravel roads with a farm or some other building here and there. I had watched such a scene once in a Second World War movie and it had stayed with me.

I even wondered whether they would have toothpaste.

My brother John had visited our cousin in Canada for a few weeks, but from the few stories he had told, I could not picture life there.

During my last weeks in the Army, I had been busy preparing for my stay in Canada. Through an article in an agricultural magazine, I learned about the IAEA (International Agricultural Exchange Association). I signed up with them and was given the option to find employment myself or to let them do so. I wanted to play it safe and first try to find something myself.

I contacted my cousin who suggested placing an advertisement in their church magazine. This magazine was distributed throughout Canada to members of the Canadian Reformed Church. The Canadian Reformed Church had been founded in 1950 by immigrants from the same church my family and I belonged. Finding employment with a member of that church felt very safe, as I would be among like-minded people.

I wrote the advertisement which my cousin placed in the church magazine, and soon I received a letter from Mr. Jan VanZanten. He was a Dutch man who had emigrated four years earlier with his family from the Netherlands to Ontario, Canada. He was growing freesias in greenhouses. Freesias are cut flowers used in flower arrangements.

Jan's offer of employment was accepted by the IAEA and I received a one-year work permit, with the option of a six-month extension.

On November 29, 1991, Dad and Mom drove me to Schiphol Airport. Our farewell at the airport consisted of a handshake; no tears.

Mom later said that she missed my presence at home, even though she still had seven other children there. Jannet, my oldest sister was already married, and her second child was born while I was high up in the sky.

My first flying experience was quite something. From Schiphol, we were supposed to land in Paris, but due to mist we could not do so and flew on to London Heathrow. From London we returned to Paris, where we waited for a long time. Six hours behind schedule, we finally flew to Montreal for a planned stop and then on to Toronto, our destination. The flight from Montreal to Toronto was only one hour. It was night time and I fell asleep.

As we were landing, I woke up and, to my surprise, I noticed that the one-hour flight had somehow become more than two hours. From the flight attendants I learned that we were back in Montreal. Due to much wind, we had not been able to land in Toronto. By then it was past midnight. All passengers were given hotel rooms for what little remained of the night, but first we had to collect our luggage.

I had checked in two suitcases, but only one appeared on the baggage belt. I reported this but struggled to make myself

understood, as my English was very poor. Before going to the hotel, I also had to phone my parents. I had told them what time I would arrive in Toronto and had promised to call immediately upon arrival. They must have been very worried when I did not phone upon time. This was the first and last travel promise I ever made. Never again would I promise to call at a specific time while travelling.

Jan had been waiting for me in Toronto for five hours, as my flight was still expected. Eventually he was told that it would only arrive the next day.

After a very short sleep in a pleasantly comfortable bed, I was woken by the telephone; breakfast was on the house. Air Canada flew all affected passengers to Toronto.

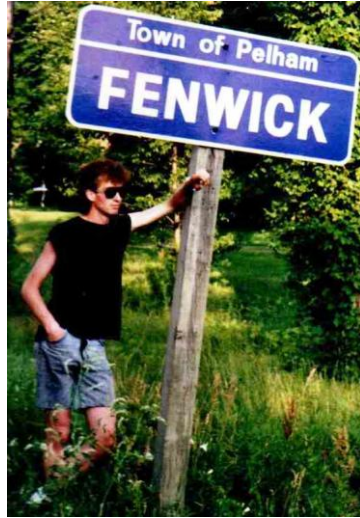
By then, I had taken off and landed several times, but this landing in Toronto was beautiful. I had a window seat and looked outside. There were scattered clouds and we flew above them. From above, the clouds looked like pure white wool or fresh snow. In between them, I could see houses and roads far below, all so small and beautiful. I had never seen anything like it.

It was still windy, the plane moved left and right, up and down, but I was not worried. I was completely fascinated by the view below. The man sitting next to me, however, was clearly terrified. His face was pale, beads of sweat shone on his forehead, and he clutched the seat in front of him.

When we had landed, everyone applauded the pilot for bringing us safely to the ground. The man next to me relaxed and made the sign of the cross on his forehead and chest.

Jan was waiting for me with his two young sons, aged four and ten. After introductions, we left the airport and walked to his car. A warm, strong wind was blowing, even though it was the end of November.

After a drive of just over an hour drive, we arrived in Fenwick, a small town near the well-known Niagara Falls. Jan's farm was just outside Fenwick. The house and greenhouses were hidden from the road by an apple orchard. On the other side of the road stood a deep red mobile home with a permanent parking spot and an added entrance. This was to be my home during my stay in Canada. I rented it from Jan's neighbours who lived about twenty metres away.



Jan's wife had done some basic grocery shopping for me and that very first evening

I cooked my first meal as an independent adult. Later that evening, Jan's wife picked me up and took me to the grocery store. I was amazed by the sheer number of products; far more than I had ever seen in a Dutch store. And yes, they even had toothpaste.

Jan had bought a car for me, an old cream-coloured Ford Fairmont, purchased for 1,500 Canadian dollars. I paid it off at fifty cents per working hour. The car had a bench seat in the front and was an automatic, with the gear lever next to the steering wheel. I was told to keep my left foot as close to

the seat as possible, so I would not be tempted to use it for braking. The car gave me some starting problems during the first few days, but these were soon fixed.

The first time I went to the fuel station, the attendant asked, “How are you?” However, his accent was so unfamiliar to me that I had no idea what he was saying. I replied slowly: “I am from Holland and do not speak English very well.”

Very patiently, and speaking clearly, he explained that if someone asks me, “How are you?” I should reply, “I am fine, and how are you?”

Oh, I thought to myself, if you had spoken clearly in the first place, I would have understood what you said and how to reply.

Three weeks after my arrival, I celebrated my first Christmas in Canada by visiting my cousin in Ottawa, a six-hour drive. Work in the greenhouse was slow during those first weeks, so Jan thought it would be good for me to go away for a few days.

The weather had turned cold, and the first snow had fallen, although the roads were clear. A few hours into the trip, a cold, moist wind picked up, and my car began to struggle when climbing hills. On flat stretches and downhill it was fine. Each time a hill approached, I wondered whether I would make it to the top.

Eventually, the car started struggling even on flat roads.

As I came upon a village, I pulled into a small fuel station that had a little shop as well. Inside the shop a man was standing behind the counter. With my broken English, I explained that I had car trouble and needed a mechanic. Ten minutes later, the mechanic arrived. He looked under the bonnet (*hood*), started the engine, revved it up, and concluded that cold, moist air had entered the air intake and had frozen in the air intake, causing the engine to lose power. While I had waited, the ice had melted. He advised me to keep

driving and, whenever the engine lost power, to pull over and let the engine's heat melt the ice. Eventually, I arrived safely at my cousin's place.



I enjoyed working with Jan in the greenhouses. We always spoke Dutch, which suited me well, and even his children understood Dutch.

I learned more English over time but was never comfortable speaking it. If I knew someone understood Dutch, not a single English word would come out of my mouth. It was as if something inside me locked up completely. This greatly hampered my social life in Canada. I felt most comfortable at work and avoided interacting with people who did not speak Dutch.

At church it was much the same. Every Sunday morning and afternoon, I attended church. Many of the older people still spoke Dutch, as the church had been founded by Dutch immigrants. One elderly man had even grown up on my father's farm; his father had sold it to my grandfather shortly after the Second World War.

The youth at church reached out to me, but my shyness and the language barrier kept me from feeling comfortable.

Once, after the late afternoon service, it was already getting dark. The young people were having a social gathering at someone's home and I had been invited. Getting there was supposed to be easy as I simply had to follow someone who was driving in his own car. Unfortunately, he drove so fast that I lost him and missed the gathering.

On another occasion, I was invited by the church youth to go skiing. I gladly accepted. At the ski slopes, I rented all the necessary equipment: overalls, gloves, eye protection, boots, and skis. Then we took the chairlift up the mountain.

I had never skied before. My companions told me what to do; lean a little left, then right, then left again, and so on.

The slope they had chosen was straight and steep, with a forest of pine trees on both sides.

I set off downhill but soon fell, with one ski coming off. I put the ski back on and tried again. This time my legs drifted wide apart, and I could not bring them back together. I fell again.

Fortunately, someone took pity on me and explained how to stay upright on my skis. Off I went once more, straight down the slope, picking up speed; too much speed. I threw myself to the ground and rolled head over heels.

Once again, a Good Samaritan came to my rescue, explaining that I should take the slope more diagonally. I should go to the right first, make a gentle turn and then go left. That was good advice.

I went off, initially moving horizontally to the right. I gained a comfortable speed but soon noticed the trees approaching. I had no idea how to make a gentle turn and the trees were getting closer. I wondered whether I should I throw myself to the ground again. Then I decided that I would choose a tree.

I steered carefully just toward the side of one particular tree and when I reached it, I wrapped both arms around it as tightly as I could. It worked. My skis lifted off the ground, my body swung halfway around the trunk, and I gently dropped to the snow.

Eventually, I did make it down that straight, steep slope.

My companions then pointed out another slope, which began at the same spot at the top of the mountain. This one was beautiful, winding gently down the mountainside.

I spent the rest of the day there and truly enjoyed my day skiing.

Water skiing suited me better, though.

During busy periods in the greenhouses, Jan employed several women to help with picking the freesias. One of them was a young woman whose fiancé owned a boat. Both of them spoke Dutch, as their parents had immigrated to Canada some years earlier. The fiancé was called AJ and on a hot summer day he invited me to join them for some water skiing.

I had never water-skied either, but I was willing to learn.

In the end, it was fairly simple. You wear a life jacket which keeps you afloat. Once in the water, you put on the skis and sit comfortably with the tips of the skis sticking out of the water while holding a handlebar attached to a long rope connected to a boat. The boat starts moving slowly, and as the rope tightens you stand up, leaning back and keeping your elbows bent to maintain leverage. As the boat picks up speed, you set off, skimming over the water.

AJ gave me one important rule; if you fall, let go of the handlebar. Otherwise, your body will be dragged through the water with great force, especially punishing to your head.

Of course, I did fall – and instinctively held on with all my strength to the handle bar in my hands. Even now, I can still imagine the force of the water pounding against my head.

Eventually, I remembered the rule and let go of the handlebar, convinced that I would drown.

I did not drown. I found myself sitting in the water, floating calmly, supported by the life jacket.

By the end of the day, I had become quite good at water skiing. AJ tried all sorts of wild manoeuvres to make me fall but he failed.

Having worked for Jan for more than half a year already, he asked me to consider extending my one year work permit by six more months. I was very pleased with his request.

My English was still very poor. I tried improving it by reading English books and watching some TV. There was a little TV in my mobile home. The few channels available were unclear and looked as though I was watching a snowstorm. Before I could watch a programme, I had to move the antenna all over the place. Once the picture became reasonably clear, I would leave the antenna carefully where it was, move away to my chair, and, to my frustration, the TV started snowing again.

Every now and then I managed to obtain reasonable reception and was rewarded with a picture of the screen.

My landlord was Dutch. He and his wife had immigrated to Canada many years earlier and were now well into their old age.

Once in a while they would cook a typical Dutch meal, and very proudly, invited me to those meals. I dreaded those invites. They had made a split pea soup which was delicious, but the chunks of pork in it were awful as they were mostly soft fat. The pig's skin was still on some of those chunks and occasionally there was a little hair that hadn't come off. The landlord thought that those chunks were the most delicious ones.

I had to help myself to seconds and of course tried to miss the chunks of pork. "Don't be shy," the landlord would say, followed by adding some of those chunks to my plate.

No, I dreaded those invites.

For some time, I had wanted to have an earring. It had become acceptable for boys to have one. One of my friends living near to my parents' farm had one.

I would never have dared to do so while living at home with my family. I could just imagine all the remarks I would receive. But now I was on my own and so I went for it, just a small golden ring. I was happy with it and liked the feeling of doing something daring.

I told my family about it in one of my letters. In the next letter I received from home, some family members felt the need to express their disapproval. But I was far away and doing my own thing so I didn't let that affect me too much.

Ten months into my stay in Canada, I began reflecting on the life I was living and came to the conclusion that it felt rather empty. I worked in the greenhouses, did my housekeeping, attended church twice every Sunday, and went to the church's Young People's Get-Togethers on Sunday evenings, where I always felt out of place.

I wanted more. I wanted to enjoy life, to be young, to feel young, and to have fun; but in a Christian way.

At one point, I was introduced to another young man from the Netherlands who was also in Canada on a student exchange permit. He and a Canadian friend invited me to go with them to a Monster Truck Show in Toronto. It was great fun and an unforgettable spectacle. Afterwards, over some drinks, they talked about things I was not used to; vulgar talk and the like. I realised then that our worlds were quite different, and I never went out with them again.

Wanting to do something more meaningful, I decided to learn to play the guitar. I found a music shop and to my delight, the shopkeeper also gave guitar lessons. I bought a second-hand guitar from him and showed up for lessons once a week.

The first thing I had to learn was reading and playing simple melodies, which went reasonably well. Then came the

chords. I practised and practised but never mastered them. Even today, I can only play simple melodies and sing along. I did not tell Jan and his family about my new adventure. I was too shy to show change.

I was twenty-one years old and occasionally thought about marriage. I had never had a girlfriend and had never actively looked for one. This was different from one of my neighbourhood friends back home, who was always searching and regularly entered relationships that ended in pain and disappointment.

I once told him, while cycling to a girl's birthday party, that I believed I would one day meet the woman God had appointed to be my wife.

At high school we knew two girls who were friends with each other; I was interested in one, and my friend was interested in the other. Nothing ever came of it for either of us.

Sometimes I noticed that a girl seemed interested in me, but I had no idea how to respond. Bringing a girl home was unthinkable anyway; I could already imagine the remarks from my family. So I waited patiently, evaluating every girl I came to know to see whether love might grow and whether she could be a potential wife.

I did the same in Canada. I considered that I would have been content to marry a Canadian girl and remain there.

That year, my parents were celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Jan gave me two weeks off and I flew to the Netherlands. My siblings did not know I was coming. When I arrived at the farm, my brothers and sisters were greatly surprised and excited to see me.

Nienke, my then four year old sister was playing at the neighbours when I arrived. When she came home and saw me sitting in a chair, she stopped in her tracks, stared at me

for a few seconds, then exclaimed, “Wiebe!” She ran toward me and threw herself into my arms.

My parents held a large celebration for their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. All my uncles, aunts, cousins, and my parents’ friends were invited. It was a large crowd.

Entertainment was provided by various guests performing poems, skits, and other acts. I had learned a skit in Canada from someone who occasionally worked with me in the greenhouses. In preparation, I privately took three uncles aside and gave them old ties to wear instead of their own. In those days, men always wore ties when going out.

I explained that I would teach the audience a very simple children’s song. I would then pretend to be unhappy with their singing and, with the help of my brother Frits and a pair of scissors, move through the crowd cutting someone’s tie. Of course, that someone would be one of those I had given the old tie. They were to protest and resist, but ultimately let me and Frits win.

The uncles performed excellently. After the first tie was cut, the crowd tried hard to sing better. My grandfather even removed his tie so I could not choose him, and my mother genuinely thought I was angry about the poor singing. After the third and final tie was cut, accompanied by exaggerated resistance that pushed chairs around, the crowd sang with all their might and I acted being fully satisfied with their performance.

After two wonderful weeks with my family, I flew back to Canada. On my first day back, I felt terribly lonely and imagined that if an airplane were to land in my yard offering me a ride back to the Netherlands, I would immediately jump on.

For my second Christmas in Canada, I was invited to dinner with a family who originally came from the Netherlands. I did not feel like going, as I expected to feel very awkward among people I did not know well. Not all of them would feel comfortable speaking Dutch with me. I even tried to talk myself into being sick; it did not work, and I went to the dinner anyway.

In the period around New Year's Day, I spent time with my cousin and his family in Ottawa. The car had the same problem as the previous year; every now and then I had to pull over to the side of the road to let ice melt away from the air intake.

After the festive season, I felt homesick. I had received a letter from Mom in which she wrote about their celebrations back home. I longed to be back in the Netherlands. I imagined New Year's Eve in Hooghalen – walking through the streets with a group of youngsters, going from house to house, my stomach full of beer.

The Netherlands may have snow during the winter months but Canada certainly does. It was commonly said that one should never accelerate suddenly when driving on snowy roads, as that would almost guarantee a skid.

One early morning, at three a.m., it was my turn to deliver the freesias to the auction in Toronto.

The freesias were neatly bunched in tens, sleeved in plastic, and placed in buckets with their stems standing in water. The interior of the minibus was designed so that two layers of buckets could be stacked one above the other. I had carefully loaded the buckets of flowers into the minibus.

During the night fresh snow had fallen and the roads were covered with a thin, fine layer of it. I was the first vehicle that morning to drive over the beautiful white roads. About five kilometres from the farm, I remembered the warning

about never accelerating suddenly on snowy roads. Foolishly, I thought, *let's see if that is really true.*

I accelerated carefully, just a little, and sure enough, the vehicle began to slip and slide. After a short while, it came to a standstill. I found myself with both feet pressed down hard on the brake pedal, the vehicle facing in the direction I had come from and leaning sideways into a small ditch along the road.

There were no mobile phones in those days, so I walked toward a light in the distance, woke the people in the house, and asked them to call a tow truck for me.

Jan was not pleased when I arrived back at the farm with the flowers, not neatly packed and mostly damaged, still in the vehicle.

One Sunday between church services, I received uninvited visitors – Jehovah's Witnesses. They used to knock on the door at my parents' farm as well, but they were never entertained. We had been taught that they belonged to a sect and that we should stay away from them. Now I was my own boss and invited the two visitors into my house.

They soon realized that I was a Christian and challenged me on the concept of the Trinity – the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I remembered being taught in primary school that the Trinity was like a clover leaf. A clover leaf has three distinct parts, yet it is one leaf as a whole; in the same way, God, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During the conversation, I realized that I needed to study the Trinity more thoroughly so that I could defend the concept properly. I asked my visitors to return in a few weeks.

In our denomination, we used a number of doctrinal books that explain the church's teachings in depth. Some of these

address the doctrine of the Trinity, including references to many Bible passages.

In the weeks following the visit, I studied the Trinity using these books and carefully examined every Scripture reference.

To my great surprise, I did not find the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the Bible. What I did find was that the Father is God, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both. They are perfectly one in purpose, will, and love. Their oneness, as I understood it, seemed similar to the oneness believers are called to have with one another and with the Father and the Son.

When the visitors returned, our conversation was brief. They left me a booklet entitled *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* I did not like the booklet, as I felt it diminished Jesus.

A few weeks later, the minister of the church I attended came to visit. We also talked about the doctrine of the Trinity. At the end of our conversation, he said, “If you begin to doubt, please come to me, because I would not want to let you go into darkness.” His words shocked me.

Some weeks later, the minister preached a sermon on the Trinity. He concluded by saying, “Everyone, inside and outside the church, who does not believe this, is in deep trouble.”

That same Sunday, the Lord’s Supper, also called Communion, was celebrated. I wrestled with whether I could participate. I wanted to believe in God as He reveals Himself in the Bible.

During the preparation of the Lord’s Supper table, we sang Psalm 43:1, “*O save Thou me and set me free, that I may honour Thee.*” At that moment, I felt a quiet assurance and knew I could participate.

My time in Canada was drawing to a close. I still wanted to have a proper holiday, to travel through Canada or the United States. I had asked a friend from the Netherlands if he would be interested but his reply was, “Money doesn’t grow on my back.”

My sister Erica, however, was willing to come. She was the same sister with whom I used to wash dishes back on the farm, when we irritated each other endlessly. Money didn’t grow on her back either; our parents must have paid her way.

I knew my time in Canada had come to an end, and I looked forward to a new beginning in the Netherlands. I imagined a new life ahead of me: new work, leaving my parents’ farm for good, new friends, playing guitar – a bright, successful future.

But first, I would enjoy a holiday with Erica. She arrived three weeks before my final departure from Canada.

I picked her up at Toronto airport and tried to trick her by making myself unrecognisable. I wore sunglasses, a hat, cowboy boots, and clothes she would not associate with me, and hid partially behind a pillar. I waited and waited, scanning the crowd, but saw no sign of Erica. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, she stood right in front of me, checking carefully to see whether I was really Wiebe.

She had been walking up and down, trying to find me. To this day, I have no idea why I didn’t see her.

During the first week she was there, I showed her around the area where I lived. She was very impressed, and I thoroughly enjoyed being the big brother, proudly showing her my world.

My Ford Fairmont, however, was getting very old. Parts of the exhaust were held together with wire, and during a trip

to the historic St. Jacobs Farmers' Market in Kitchener, some of those wires came loose. Part of the exhaust began dragging along the road behind the car. At a convenient spot, I pulled over and tossed the loose piece into the boot (*trunk*). During my final days in Canada, I drove around making an impressive amount of noise.

I had planned a two-week trip through the United States and rented a Ford Taurus for the occasion. It was luxurious. I borrowed a tent, and we headed south to the Great Smoky Mountains, then to Myrtle Beach in South Carolina, and from there travelled north to Washington, New York, and finally back into Canada.

Erica and I enjoyed the trip immensely and, remarkably, we didn't argue once. We usually ate two meals a day, late breakfast and early supper, mostly at small restaurants. We did have a little gas cooker and tried cooking canned food one evening. It was not a success as we managed to burn it.



Erica handled the map reading while I did the driving. She did an excellent job, except for one small mistake. According to my travel notes, Stafford was meant to be a town full of interesting things to do. When Erica announced that we had arrived, we found a campsite and set up camp. Afterwards, we went into Stafford to explore the town. To my great surprise, there was absolutely nothing to do there, completely contrary to my research.

Soon we found out that Erica had misread my handwriting and taken us to Stratford instead. The two towns were about forty minutes apart.

During our trip we laughed a lot, saw many wonderful places, and impressed others by how well a brother and sister could travel together and enjoy each other's company.

Back in Canada, I had to clean up, pack my belongings, and say a few farewells. Jan was sad to see me go.

Erica was flying back to the Netherlands on a Sunday. I preferred not to fly on a Sunday and had booked my return flight for the following day.

Erica transported some of the clothes I had bought back to the Netherlands as she had less luggage of her own than I did.

I left my Ford Fairmont with Jan. He was free to sell whatever remained of it and donate the proceeds to the church.

“Farewell – farewell,” my dear Canada.



Back in the Netherlands – 1

“Don’t! Don’t do it!”

I was driving my Zastava Yugo from Hooghalen on my way home to the farm. The road was lined with big, old oak trees on both sides. I felt a strong temptation to steer just a little to the right. That was all it would take, just a little to the right, and I would hit one of those beautiful trees, and it would all be over. A few months after I returned from Canada, I felt desperately hopeless and disillusioned. I had no sense of purpose and wished I was no longer alive. *‘Born,*

meant to die young'; that was a thought I had about myself from time to time throughout my younger years.



I flew back from Canada in August 1993. I had a window seat, and as we flew over the Netherlands, I looked down at the Dutch landscape. Farmhouses were scattered everywhere, with perfectly straight paddocks and countless small water streams. Little towns dotted the land, linked by winding roads, with cars moving slowly like insects.

After one year and nine months in Canada, I was back in the Netherlands. At customs I was asked where I had come from, how long I had been there, and whether I had bought anything new. Yes, I said, I had bought clothing. They wanted to see it. I opened my two suitcases, but everything inside was clearly used. Then I remembered and explained that all the new clothing had been taken by my sister the day before. Fortunately, the customs officials had not checked her luggage.

My parents were on holiday with my younger siblings at a campsite, where they owned a caravan. John was probably running the farm. Our reunion was pleasant. Nienke, the youngest sister, who ten months earlier had been so excited to see me during my visit from Canada, was now so shy that she did not dare come close or even look at me. Alfred, the youngest brother, who was eight by then, behaved the same way.

I stayed with my family during their holiday. At that time, I also gathered all my courage to start smoking in front of them. Two of my other siblings were already smoking, as was Dad, who had always smoked cigars. To my surprise, no one commented. I was now the big brother who had been away for a long time and had lived in a faraway country.

After the holiday, everyone returned to their daily lives. Before Mom had gone on holiday, she had tidied my bedroom, and I moved back in. All my souvenirs from Canada were given their own places. One of them was a black bandana with skulls on it.

I had no daily routine to return to and began searching every newspaper and magazine for suitable employment.

I filled my days with various tasks; there was always something to do on Dad's farm. However, I felt as though I was lacking in purpose. I discovered that when one has little to do, one can become too lazy to do anything at all.

The church was doing maintenance work on the parsonage and needed volunteers. I was available and did my part, painting window and door frames. The Rev. Meijer even asked me at times to babysit his children while I was working. He disliked cutting grass, so the backyard also needed attention. Most of it was then paved with small flower beds here and there. When everything was finished, the Reverend wanted to give me a present in appreciation for my hard work. He asked what I would like. I told him that I did not need anything at that time and that, if something came to mind later, I would let him know.

After three months of job searching and signing up with an employment agency, I found work not far from home. It was in greenhouses where tulips were grown. The job was temporary, but at least it was a start. The work ended after four months. The employment agency found me short-term jobs here and there, while I continued searching newspapers and magazines for something permanent.

Since returning from Canada, I had become increasingly agitated, restless, and purposeless, and was easily angered.

One afternoon, during our usual teatime just before Dad went out to milk the cows, only a few of us were at home,

gathered in the living room. We drank tea from thick glass cups. My brother Frits, four years younger than I, was also present. He was more strongly built than I was and I would never have dared to pick a fight with him. I knew that if I did, I would surely lose.

I said something that angered him. In response, he took his empty glass teacup and threw it at me with great force. It hit me and I became very angry, angrier than ever. What followed was a strength no one expected; not me, not Frits, and not Dad and Mom, who were also present.

I went for Frits, threw him into one corner of the living room, picked him up, then threw him into another corner, and so on into all four corners of the room.

Dad, Mom, and Frits were stunned, and so was I. Completely out of breath, I went to the barn, put on my boots, grabbed my jacket, and walked down the dirt road behind the farmhouse.

The incident was never spoken of again. Only years later did it occasionally come up in family conversations and then recalled almost humorously, with Frits smiling sheepishly.

My Zastava Yugo was always parked next to the barn, just off the driveway leading to the back of the farm and the dirt road behind the house. Frits's blue Opel was usually parked in front of my car. He generally left earlier than I did in the mornings, first driving forward onto the driveway and then reversing onto the road.

One morning he must have been late and still half asleep. He forgot that my car was parked behind his and reversed straight into it. Frits went back inside and told Mom what had happened. She told him to go on his way and said she would tell me once I was up.

Mom was very nervous about telling me. She feared I might explode in another rage. At first, the damage did not look too serious and I took it calmly enough. Later that morning,

however, I discovered that the radiator had been damaged and was leaking. I had the repairs covered by Frits' insurance which caused his premium to increase the following year.

I put myself on a waiting list for an apartment in Assen. Surely the odd jobs I was doing would cover the rent. I wanted to leave my parents' home, live alone, and be independent.

I didn't get the apartment. When it finally became available, I was no longer in the Netherlands. John took it instead.

From the outside, I appeared to be doing well but my restlessness and lack of purpose drove me to think of other countries once again. I wanted to get away; from my family, from the people who knew me, and from the Netherlands itself.

Once more, I contacted the IAEA and chose New Zealand, about as far away as possible. I knew no one there and had no contacts; I let the IAEA find employment.

The employment they found was on the farm of Mrs. H., who farmed sheep and also grew some flowers. I accepted the offer. Through the program, one could choose either six or eight months. Naturally, I chose eight.

My family and friends organised a farewell party on the farm. I reminded Rev. Meijer of his offer of a present and asked for an English Bible. On the front page, he wrote:

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
and He will make straight your paths.”*
(Proverbs 3:5,6 RSV)

A new adventure lay ahead of me. It might only be for a short time, perhaps, but maybe I could find a way to stay

longer than eight months. Maybe I would even be able to stay there forever.



New Zealand (1994)

The airplane took off from Schiphol Airport. I looked out the window and watched the Netherlands grow smaller and smaller. I was flying away from the place where I had felt so hopelessly desperate.

During the last few days in the Netherlands I had been very nervous, but now my whole being began to relax. I started to feel like a man again; a man with a purpose. A new world was opening up before me. But most importantly, I was succeeding in leaving behind the place where I could no longer be and the people I did not want to be with. I was twenty-three years old.

The IAEA had organised everything in detail. My flight tickets had been handed to me at the airport by a real farmer, wearing wooden shoes called clogs. The flight went via Singapore, where I was to meet other internationals who were also on their way to New Zealand. A taxi fetched me from the airport in Singapore. I was surprised to see the steering wheel and everything else on the ‘wrong’ side of the car. I asked the driver whether he accelerated and braked with his right foot and used the clutch with his left, as we did in the Netherlands.

We arrived at a large hotel. The air was very sticky and hot, even though the sun had already set.

The group internationals spent three days in Singapore, where we got to know each other and did some sightseeing.

Afterwards, some of the group flew to Auckland to work on farms on the North Island of New Zealand. Others, including me, flew to Christchurch; we would be working on the South Island.

Mrs. H. was waiting at the airport to collect me and some of the others. Her farm was a few kilometres outside Winton, a small town in the south of the South Island, and about a seven-hour drive from Christchurch.

Along the way, the other internationals travelling with us were dropped off and collected by their respective employers.

Mrs. H. had a hands-free telephone in her car. That kind of technology amazed me. The telephone used a very long antenna mounted on the outside of the car.

Mrs. H. was a very busy person and quite authoritative. She talked a lot and seemed to be everywhere at once. Originally, she was from the USA. She was in her fifties and, as far as I knew, had no children. Her husband had died in a car accident many years earlier. Her sweet, elderly mother-in-law lived in Winton and I visited her from time to time.

Mrs. H. was rarely at home; one never knew when she was coming or going. In her busyness, she would give people instructions in her authoritative manner and then leave them to it. There was always space for other people in the house.

After I had been with Mrs. H. for a few weeks, two girls from Sweden arrived. They would stay for six months. Later, a woman from the USA also came and stayed for a few weeks.

The farmhouse was set back from the road, with a small forest lining the driveway on both sides.

In the fields around the house, Mrs. H. grew all kinds of flowers but mainly peony roses. Across the road, directly opposite the driveway to the farmhouse, stood a smaller wooden house where an elderly couple lived, Mr. Dale and Mrs. Thelma. Mr. Dale was employed to run the sheep farm.

Mrs. H.'s farm was large, with sheep paddocks on both sides of the road.

I arrived in New Zealand at the end of July 1994, summer in the Northern Hemisphere, but winter in the Southern Hemisphere. In the south of the South Island, it could become very cold.

Mrs. H. did not like my winter clothing so she bought me 'long johns', including a top, as well as a pure wool jacket made from New Zealand sheep's wool. I still have both items and wear them with fond memories, on very cold South African days.

Mrs. H. also did not approve of my body. She thought I was too skinny and was determined that I would leave her house nicely fattened up. She failed in that.

A chap from the USA also came to work for a few months. According to Mrs. H., he was too fat and she intended to make him lose weight. She failed at that as well.

During the first weeks, not much could be done in the flower beds or with the perennial peony roses. Work with the peony roses was mostly done by the girls from Sweden anyway. Once Mrs. H. realised that I could do woodworking, she asked me to make a parcel box to be placed at the roadside so couriers would not have to come all the way to the house.

I made her a beautiful parcel box in the shape of a house, complete with a pointed roof. It was mounted on a brand-new square pole, and on the other side of the pole I relocated the regular mailbox. Mrs. H. was delighted with my handiwork, although parcels rarely arrived to be placed in my beautiful box. I always enjoyed seeing that pole with the two boxes whenever I passed by.

I was told that New Zealand sheep farmers tried to have their sheep give birth as early as possible so they would be

the first to bring fattened lambs to market and fetch the best prices. However, there was always the risk of late snowfall.

Mrs. H.'s sheep also began lambing quite early that season. And late snow did come and sheep were giving birth in the snow. Some lambs were strong enough to get up after birth and follow their mothers, who would later find them again after they had rested. Other lambs were too weak and too cold to stand. Eventually, their mothers would walk away, leaving the lambs behind to die.

There were also predator birds, vicious creatures that could begin eating a lamb while it was still alive.

One early morning, Mr. Dale called me to help him collect sheep with their lambs so we could bring them into the barn. The barn was not large, space was limited.

We each rode a quad bike with a trailer into the fields. Sheep that had just given birth were marked, as were their lambs; each mother and lamb with its own marking. If lambs did not get up soon enough, we could return later to fetch them and identify their mother by the markings. Some lambs were lying alone and we had to guess which sheep was their mother. Lambs without a known mother were bottle-fed in the barn.

We loaded many sheep and lambs into the trailers and brought them to the barn. Some lambs we found were already dead from the cold, and some of them had their eyes pecked out, or were otherwise damaged by predator birds.

One lamb in particular I will never forget. It was lying flat in the snow, still alive, while a bird had already begun tearing open its skin along the length of its small body. I gently picked it up; the little thing screamed like a baby. Carefully, I placed it on some hay in the trailer and slowly rode it to the barn where I tried to get it to drink warm milk. The next day, I found the little creature had died.

As spring approached, the sheep needed to be shorn. A team of shearers would come to do the work and I was tasked with cleaning the shearing shed.

I knew how to clean a shed. On my father's farm, the stables were always thoroughly cleaned after the cows had been inside for the winter. Dad's results were always spotless and he had taught me well.

Mrs. H. thought cleaning the shed was taking me too long, as it took me more than one day to finish.

When I was done, she came to inspect my work and clapped her hands with delight. "Ooh, my shed has never been so clean!" she exclaimed. "You gave it a proper Dutch clean; truly a proper Dutch clean!" She told many people about her Dutch-clean shed.

Mrs. H. decided to grow sweet peas. I had to prepare the beds and place vertical netting on poles for the plants to climb. There were eight beds, each twenty metres long. I advised her to buy a small rotary tiller so the beds would not need to be prepared by hand. She took my advice. Throughout my stay in New Zealand, she would occasionally remind me that I had made her buy a rotary tiller, but it worked and made the work much easier and more pleasant.

Mrs H. knew that I was a Christian and accustomed to attending church on Sundays. She told me I did not need to worry about finding a church; she would find just the right one for me. After doing her research in Winton, she came



Loading sheep

home with three options. Firstly, the Roman Catholic Church, but as I was not Roman Catholic she ruled that one out. Second, there was the Anglican Church her mother-in-law attended, but it consisted mostly of older people, so she scrapped that one too. The third option was a small church with some young people. That was the one she chose for me. I had no say in the matter. Mrs. H. enjoyed making decisions for others and if you did not accept her choices, you were considered foolish.

My Reformed Church back in the Netherlands had given me only one option; the Reformed Church in Dunedin, which had a sister relationship with our churches in the Netherlands. But Dunedin was nearly a three-hour drive from Winton, where I stayed. This had also been a concern for my parents, some uncles and aunts, and church elders when I left for New Zealand.

I did not worry about it at all; I believed God must be present in other churches too.

I decided to accept Mrs. H.'s choice of church.

Had she known then what her chosen church would mean for me, she might never have sent me there; she might have chosen the Anglican Church instead.



The church was indeed small – just a few families and several individuals. A full house consisted of perhaps thirty individuals in all.

Naturally, I sat at the back trying to hide a little, but there was not much hiding to be done in such a small gathering. Two young men were already seated there. They welcomed me warmly and introduced themselves as Grant and Paul.

A couple in their late fifties also came to introduce themselves, the pastor and his wife, Mr. and Mrs.

Barraclough. Grant was their youngest son, four years younger than me. Paul was a single dairy farmer, two years older than I was.

Announcements were made, and then Grant went to the front and sat behind a drum set. A drum set in church! I had never seen that before. Songs were sung from words projected onto the wall. I had been accustomed to singing psalms and hymns from a book so this was very new to me. Everyone stood, some raised their hands, and others swayed to the rhythm. Spontaneous prayers were spoken between songs. To me, it was all very strange.

Eventually, the singing stopped, and the pastor spoke about God and Jesus, reading from Bible passages along the way. After a few more songs, the meeting ended with prayer. Instead of leaving immediately, people stayed, chatting happily. Several came over to introduce themselves to me. I did not know what to make of it all.

After the church meeting, Mrs Barraclough invited me to their home for lunch. They had several children, but only the two youngest were still living at home; Grant, whom I had already met at church, and Jane, who had also been at church.

We had coffee and I was asked what had brought me to New Zealand, what I had been doing previously, and how I had come to attend their church.

What puzzled me was the way they spoke about God among themselves, very naturally, as if He were a present and personal part of their daily lives.

After lunch it was time for me to go home, my mind full of all that I had heard and seen.

Over the next few Sundays, I returned to church and was often invited by the Barraclough family for coffee and lunch. What I observed in them was that God was a personal being

to them, present in their day-to-day lives, as though they could almost touch Him and feel Him.

Never once did they challenge my Reformed upbringing or my Reformed beliefs. Instead, they asked who God was in my life, and I could tell them that I knew God was real and that I read the Bible daily.

I had always known that God was real, but I did not know what to do with Him in my everyday life. God was a mystery to me. He felt far away, somewhere in heaven, while I was here on earth, struggling and struggling, all on my own, and often feeling utterly alone.

I will never forget September, 1994. God came to me. I did not go to Him; He came to me. When I later looked back on that month, it was as though God had taken me by the neck and said, “Now you come to Me”, while Satan was still gripping my ankles, trying to keep me down where I was.

Sunday, September 4

After the morning church service that day, the Barraclough family invited me to their home. A young man who had also been at church was invited as well; the Barraclough’s knew him well. He had been listening to music that glorified Satan but he wanted to return to God.

That afternoon, the Barraclough’s prayed for him and helped him destroy his music CDs, which he had fetched from his home.

At the evening service, the young man was present again. This time, he had brought some of his books and videotapes, which were also focused on Satan’s works. More prayer was offered and the books and tapes were destroyed. All of this was very strange to me and I simply observed.

That night at home, I lay in bed thinking about myself. I had been struggling inwardly with various issues, always assuming that these were simply part of my character, my personality, given to me by God. Then, all of a sudden, a thought came into my mind: *No, these struggles do not come from God; they come from Satan.* I realised then that I could fight these issues by resisting Satan. I became very quiet within myself and thanked God.

Sunday, September 11

During the week leading up to this Sunday, I became very, very afraid whenever I thought about having to return to the Netherlands once my eight months in New Zealand were over. I truly did not want to go back. A tremendous fear would grip me whenever I thought of it.

That Sunday, I prayed and asked God to lead me where He wanted me to be, and, if possible, to let me stay in New Zealand. I asked that, if it was His will for me to remain in New Zealand, He would provide me with work after my eight months with Mrs. H. had ended.

Two days later, I met someone who offered me employment once the eight months were completed. I was amazed and deeply thankful to realise that God had answered my prayer.

Tuesday, September, 13

I decided to stop smoking. It was not easy but I smiled and said to myself that I did not need God's help for this. Soon I realised that I could not hold back any longer the desire to smoke. I jumped into the car, went to the nearest shop, and was smoking again.

I then remembered what I had said; that I did not need God. I finished the packet over the following days and then asked God to forgive me for thinking that I did not need His help. I asked God to help me and on my second attempt I felt no desire to smoke again.

Sunday, September 18

A visiting pastor was speaking at church. It was a good service.

At the end of the service, the visiting pastor decided to pray for Mr. and Mrs. Barraclough. He asked everyone to stand and lift their hands to God while he prayed.

I was not used to lifting my hands. I would feel very self-conscious standing there with my hands raised above my head. *No*, I thought to myself, *I am not going to do it*. Everyone else did.

Dark thoughts began to flood my mind: *I don't belong here. I should leave now and never come back; just disappear. I have no purpose in life. I wish I wasn't alive; I wish I were dead.*

The prayer ended and the service was over. I was still inside the building, despondent, lost, weak, tired, and very lonely. Grant came over and saw that I was not doing well. I briefly told him how I felt. I grew a little calmer inside, then I got up and went home.

No one else was at home. I made myself something to eat and went into my small bedroom. I sat on my bed and began to pray for purpose in my life and for God to lead me. For the first time, I went down on my knees before God.

As I prayed and spoke to Him, my eyes filled with tears, and soon they were flowing freely down my face. I had not cried for years but that afternoon it went on and on. It was just God and me.

Between the tears, I kept talking to God until my being quieted and the tears stopped. Then I picked up my Bible and continued reading where I had left off the day before; Isaiah chapter 6 (NKJV).

I came to verse 8: *"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I; send me.'"*

After reading that verse, the tears came all over again but this time they were tears of amazement and gratitude.

It was the very first time a Bible verse spoke directly into my heart. I knew then that God was looking for people to send into His world and that it was up to me whether I would respond.

Through my tears, I asked God to give me a day or two to consider it. I realised that if I said “Yes” to God, I would be giving my life away.

The following day, I went down on my knees before this great and Almighty God and said, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”

Friday, September 23

I attended a special meeting that the church held that evening with the Holy Spirit as topic.

During the meeting, I felt that our church back in the Netherlands was missing the Holy Spirit in daily life. Here, it felt very different.

Once again, I felt like an outsider, like I did not belong, and again wished that death would come for me.

That evening on my way home, I deliberately did not fasten my seatbelt. I did not care if I were to crash and die.

Saturday, September 24

I had brought my guitar with me to New Zealand, the one I had bought in Canada. That day, I spent two and a half hours singing spiritual songs, reading the Bible, praying, and asking God for His Holy Spirit.

Sunday, September 25

I went to church as usual. After the service, Grant needed to go to Invercargill, a 30-minute drive. He did not have a car so I offered to take him.

Since arriving in New Zealand, I had not written to my parents. I had only phoned once to let them know I had arrived safely. During those first weeks, I did not know what to write. I had a strained relationship with my parents, at least from my side, actually a strained relationship with everything in the Netherlands.

Now, however, I wanted to write to them. I wanted to share how I had felt during my last months at home, ask for forgiveness for my often inconsiderate behaviour, tell them about the church here, and what God had done in my life during the past month. But I found it extremely difficult to open myself up and be so vulnerable to my parents and siblings.

During the drive to Invercargill, I told Grant about my church in the Netherlands, about my family, and how difficult it was for me to write to them. I said I would need God's help.

Before Grant got out of the car, he asked if he could pray. He prayed for my parents, our church, and for me. It was the first time someone had prayed with me, apart from my mother, who would sometimes pray with me when I was little, when I thought my problems were very big.

Monday, September 26

During some weekdays, there was a young woman working in Mrs. H.'s house. I felt the urge to tell her about God and the church, but I did not.

Afterwards, I struggled to pray. As I tried, I had a mental picture of God on His throne, looking at me and shaking His head. It felt as though there was a wall between God and me. I kept trying and even asked Jesus to pray for me. I needed God to tell me what was wrong.

I replayed the entire day in my mind, again and again, trying to figure out what I had done wrong, but I could not see it.

Later, as I was about to go to bed, I noticed a church pamphlet about prayer lying next to me on the couch. I picked it up and read: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Suddenly, my understanding opened.

I had not listened to God by failing to tell the woman about Him so why should God listen to me? I asked God to forgive me and immediately I sensed that the wall between us was gone. I could pray again.

The next day, I told the young woman about God and the church.

Wednesday, September 28

I wrote a long letter to my parents and siblings. I asked them for forgiveness and told them everything God had done in my life over the past weeks.

Saturday, October 1

I phoned Grant to tell him that I had written the letter and that I had much more to share, this time something good. To my surprise, Grant offered to come and visit me immediately.

I told him everything that had taken place between God and me during the previous month.

When Grant returned home, he told his parents that I had received the Holy Spirit. The next day, which was Sunday, I also told the whole story to Paul, the dairy farmer from church. I was grateful to have friends.



I realised that all the knowledge I had received about God through my Christian upbringing, something for which I remain very grateful to my family and the Reformed Church, had largely been head knowledge. Now it had reached my heart.

My life was no longer my own. I had given it to God and it was His to do with as He pleased.

Once, before I came to New Zealand, two young men approached me in Assen and asked whether I was saved. I answered, “I don’t know. I hope so.” Now I could say, “Yes, I am.”



I began to live with a smile on my face and a dance in my step. God had become real to me. It felt as though He walked with me in daily life and I with Him. A deep thankfulness, peace, and joy filled my heart. I could not fully express it in words, but it was there.

When I was a small child, my mother took me to one of our church bazaars and allowed me to buy something. I chose a small, silver-painted wooden board with seashells glued to the corners. In the centre was a picture of a small sailboat, with a text beside it: “*God heeft ons geen kalme reis beloofd, maar wel een behouden aankomst*” – “God has not promised us a calm journey, but a safe arrival indeed.”

That little sign always stood in the window of my bedroom. I read it often but never understood its meaning. Now I did.

In the church in Winton there was a family who owned a very large dairy farm and had distant Dutch ancestry. I visited them from time to time. I was curious to know what denomination the church in Winton belonged to and what it would be called in the Netherlands. This family thought they could contact people in the Netherlands and find out for me. It took several weeks, but eventually they came back with an answer: *Pinkstergemeente* – Pentecostal Church. I nearly fell off my chair in shock and was completely confused.

The *Pinkstergemeente* was regarded as a sect, unchristian and dangerous; something one should stay far away from, or so I had always been taught among the believers I knew.

Was I in a Pinkstergemeente now? I wondered. *Am I completely lost?*

But something did not make sense. God was real among these people and they lived normal, everyday lives and God had become real in my own life. I decided to remain quiet, keep praying, keep reading the Bible, and simply observe.

Grant offered to lend me a book, *'He Came to Set the Captives Free'* by Rebecca Brown. He told me that the author had come out of Satanism. I asked him to give me something lighter first and his choice was *'Good Morning, Holy Spirit'* by Benny Hinn. I read both books and learned a great deal.

I still had an earring, the small gold ring that I had bought in Canada. I went to a shop and bought myself one with a small cross.



Mrs. H. had a small car for her foreign visitors, a Morris Minor 1000. I was used to old cars, but this one was almost antique.



When I was the only foreign visitor, I was quite happy with it. However, after two months the two Swedish girls arrived and we had to share the car.

Mrs. H. expected us to go out together on weekends to the local pubs, but I wanted to go to church and spend time with my church friends. This irritated Mrs. H. tremendously, though she tried to appear nonchalant about it.

I had some money, so I asked Grant and Paul to take me to Invercargill to help me find a used car. Before long, I drove home in my own Mazda 323 station wagon, a deep red colour. While buying it, I had been talking to God and truly believed this was the car He wanted me to have.

I parked the car at home and when I walked past it a few hours later, noticed some wetness underneath the front bumper; it was water. I could not believe it. I opened the bonnet (*hood*), put my hands on the radiator, and said, "God, I can't believe this. I really believed this was the car You wanted me to buy. It can't be leaking water; it just can't".

I closed the bonnet (*hood*) and from that day on, I never noticed moisture under the car again, though I always kept a bottle of water with me, just in case.

The car served me well throughout my stay in New Zealand and even once took me to Dunedin and back. It did end up with one white door, though.

One Saturday evening I went to visit Paul. Grant and Jane were there too; they had borrowed their parents' car. We spent a pleasant evening together, probably playing card games. When it was time to go home, Grant and I somehow got into a challenge to see who would be first onto the road. Grant and Jane jumped into their car and I into mine. In my haste, I forgot to close my door and quickly reversed to turn onto the road. The open door struck a wooden porch pillar of the farmhouse. *Oh no*, I thought, and pulled forward to close the door; but it would not close.

Paul found some rope, and we tied the door shut; I had to enter the car through the passenger side.

Meanwhile, Grant and Jane, who were already long gone, wondered why they could not see my headlights behind them, but they continued home.

The next day was Sunday and my birthday.

When I arrived at church, only one parking spot was left. If I parked there normally, everyone entering and leaving the building would see my damaged door. I did not like that idea, so I parked the car backwards, hiding the door from view.

Grant was already inside. He greeted me and wished me a happy birthday, then asked where I had been the night before, as he had not seen my car behind him. I was too embarrassed to explain my reverse-driving mishap and simply said something had come up and I had not left in time.

Then Paul arrived. With a broad smile, he wished me a happy birthday and added, “I like the way you parked your car”.

Grant immediately knew something was going on and ran outside to investigate. From the church entrance, everything looked fine, but when he walked around to the other side of the car, he saw the damage.



Grant investigating the damage



We all had a good laugh about it.

I could only find a white door to replace the damaged one, but it did the job.

On a Saturday afternoon, Grant and I went to visit Paul. He had an off-road motorbike that he used on the farm. Paul took it out of the shed and we each had a turn riding it around the fields.

There was also a river nearby, though it did not have much water in it. In a small pool was a large fish. We wanted to catch it and eat it for supper, but the fish was too quick and too slippery. Paul went home and returned with his hunting rifle and shot the fish. There was not much left of it afterwards and I had no interest in eating it anymore. Paul ate it anyway after Grant and I had gone home.

The three of us also went surfing. The nearest ocean was the Southern Ocean, also called the Antarctic Ocean, about a 50-kilometre drive from Winton. Paul had an extra wetsuit which I borrowed.

I had never tried surfing before. The day was hot, but the ocean was extremely cold. Grant and I did not get any further than wetting our feet. Paul did try to go into the water, but he did not get far before turning back. The water was simply too cold.

From time to time, the internationals from the IAEA organised outings. I was not always interested, as I had developed a social life through the church.

However, I did join the internationals on the Milford Track, a five-day hike in the mountains. I had to pack food for those five days, and thankfully Mrs. H. was happy to help and told me exactly what I needed. She also gave good advice regarding clothing.

I enjoyed the hike very much. Walking in shorts on top of a snowy mountain impressed me greatly and it did not even feel cold. At the end of each day, we reached a hiking hut with only the most basic facilities, where we made sure everyone was present. I always walked together with others in the group, as it is not wise to hike alone.

On one stretch of the hike, however, I found myself to be walking alone through a forested area. I passed a small trail sign indicating that the next hut was a 30-minute walk away.

After about 15 minutes, I came across another sign indicating a hut to the left.

Surely this can't be the hut where we are staying tonight, I thought. I've only walked 15 minutes since the last sign, and it's far too early in the afternoon to have reached the hut already. So I continued walking.

A light rain began to fall. The forest ended and the path climbed up a rocky mountain. I could see no one ahead of me, no one behind me, and the rain limited my visibility. I should have turned around to try to find the others, but I did not want to waste walking time. I hesitated, unsure what to do. The 30 minutes had definitely passed. *Perhaps the hut is just around the corner,* I thought.

I continued climbing as the rain kept falling. Around every bend, I expected the hut to appear, but it never did.

At the top of the mountain, I met a man hiking down. I asked him how far it was to the night hut. He told me it was still quite a distance. When I explained the route I had taken, he realised immediately that I had gone too far and told me to turn back and go to the hut in the forest that I had passed earlier.

He walked ahead of me, but I could not keep up with him, and soon he disappeared from view. I made my way back down the rocky mountain and into the forest. Evening was approaching.

Eventually I reached the hut, the very one I had thought could not possibly be it. Everyone else was already there of course, and greatly relieved to see me arrive. They had been very worried about my well-being and had been searching for me, backtracking parts of the route, and looking down mountain slopes. Along the way, they had met the same man I had met, who told them he had encountered a lost hiker who should arrive shortly.

That evening, I was able to give my fellow hikers some useful information about the next day's route.

On another occasion, we internationals went on a day trip to Stewart Island. Stewart Island lies about 30 kilometres south of the South Island, not far from Winton. A ferry took us there. I sat at the front of the ferry next to a window. The waves were enormous. The ferry climbed a wave, and suddenly I could see the ocean far below me; then the ferry plunged down into the water again. This went on repeatedly.



I also caught a fish

Many people became quite seasick that day. I did not feel too bad, though I felt a little miserable once we were on land on Stewart Island.

Part of the visit involved fishing from a boat. We caught many fish. The smaller ones were thrown back into the ocean while the larger ones were cleaned, bagged, and shared among us to take home.

Mrs. Thelma, the wife of Mr. Dale, the sheep manager on the farm, was involved in a group that cared for penguins. The group went to the coast to plant trees and I was invited along. It was bitterly cold right by the sea. We planted many small trees and placed shade cloth around each one. Hundreds of penguins were walking nearby as we worked.

I spent my first summer Christmas in New Zealand, not knowing that many more summer Christmases would follow. On Christmas Eve, Mrs. H. organised an elaborate dinner on the farm for all her international visitors. She and the other women in the house had been busy cooking.

On Christmas Day, I went to church and then joined the Barraclough family for lunch. The main dish, placed in the centre of the table, was a roasted pig's head with salads

around it. An apple had been placed in its mouth, and cherries sat where the eyes had been. I found the sight very unappealing. Grant cut a piece from the pig's cheek, but I could not bring myself to eat any of it.

Over New Year's, Grant, Jane, and I attended a Christian youth camp in the Wellington area, at the southern end of the North Island. With my Mazda we drove to Dunedin, where I parked the car in a churchyard. That church was the meeting place for many others attending the camp. From there, we travelled by bus for the 13-hour journey north. During the bus trip, Grant met his future wife. I, too, looked for a possible future wife, but did not find the right one.



In the months following that remarkable September of 1994, I spent much time talking with God about what He wanted from me once my initial eight months in New Zealand had ended.

In my heart, I knew that if I wished to stay in New Zealand and accepted the job offer I received in September, God would make it possible and would be good to me. But if I wished to be sent by God, He would want me to return to the Netherlands; the place I had run from, the place I had feared so much to return to during those first months in New Zealand.

I had once felt that I had no purpose in life, so much so that I had not wanted to carry on living. God now wanted to give me purpose by sending me wherever He chose. In truth, I had nothing to lose. And so I was willing to return to the Netherlands, though still nervous about it.

My English had improved tremendously during my time in New Zealand. Unlike Canada, no one spoke Dutch. I had nowhere to hide and was forced to speak English all the

time. Of course, I still made mistakes. Once during a card game, the cards needed to be shuffled and I said, “I’m not good at shaking cards”, much to everyone else’s amusement.

All the new things I had learned about God, I had learned in English. Now I would have to translate them into Dutch and wondered whether I would find the right words once I returned home.

My last Sunday in New Zealand had arrived; my final church service in Winton. The church and its people had come to mean so much to me; it was full of people I had come to appreciate deeply. It was the church God had used to draw me to Himself, even while Satan had still been trying to hold me down.

At the end of that final service, I was called to the front. Everyone present gathered around me and prayed, asking God to give me strength and courage to face the challenges ahead, and to give me the right words to speak.

During the prayer, someone spoke words from Psalm 1:3 (NKJV):

*“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.”*

An emotional farewell followed.

Grant drove with me to Mrs. H.’s farm. At the driveway, we got out of the deep red Mazda 323 station wagon, with its one white door.

A last handshake, a final farewell. I handed Grant the car keys and watched him drive off, back to his home in Winton.

Slowly, I walked up the driveway. My heart was heavy, but I was not alone. God was there, right by my side.



Back in the Netherlands – 2

In Singapore, I had to change airplanes again, this time without a three-day layover. The aircraft bound for Schiphol was very large but nearly empty, with only a few passengers scattered throughout the cabin. I had five centre seats all to myself and slept most of the way.

The final moments with Mrs. H. were not pleasant. She was very upset when she learned that I had given the car to someone from the church and accused them of taking all my money.

My parents were understandably nervous about having their wayward son return home. They did not know what to expect. After the initial greetings and welcomes, we had coffee and I shared some general news. Dad then went to milk the cows and Mom busied herself in the house. I went upstairs to my bedroom.

Mom had kept it perfectly clean, dusted, and fresh. I put my luggage on the bed to unpack and an overwhelming sense of loss filled my being. There was no chair to sit on; I sat down on a small metal rubbish bin. Tears welled up in my eyes, and once again they began to flow.

I needed employment and signed up with an employment agency, just as I had done after returning from Canada. Within two weeks, the agency contacted me and offered temporary work at WMD; *Waterleiding Maatschappij Drenthe*, the Water Supply Company of Drenthe. The position was to last only a few weeks, as I was replacing someone who had fallen ill.

WMD supplied water to the region. I was assigned to assist Jeff who was responsible for maintaining the grounds at various water pump stations scattered within a radius of about twenty kilometres. Each morning, I reported to a pump station in Beilen, a small town twelve kilometres from my parents' farm.

My Zastava Yugo had been borrowed by my sister Erica while I was in Canada, and during my time in New Zealand it had stood unused in the wagon shed on the farm. One of my younger brothers had driven it once in awhile around the paddocks behind the farmhouse while I was away. By then, it had been well used and not roadworthy. I sold it to a local Zastava dealer who might have been able to use it for parts.

Dad advised me to buy another vehicle from one of my cousins who was my age and had just started a second-hand car business. However, my lifestyle had changed. I now wanted first to talk to God and ask for His guidance before making such decisions.

I also did not want to upset Dad, so I followed his advice and bought a car from my cousin, hoping it would be the one God had in mind for me. It was a red Ford Fiesta.

I learned an important lesson from this: always seek God's guidance in every matter and do not simply follow others, even when doing so seems polite or considerate. God must always come first.

Many years later, I would make a similar mistake.

I began work at WMD shortly after buying the car. From the very first day, the car caused problems. Moisture seemed to enter the fuel system, causing the engine to lose power or refuse to start altogether. No one could identify the fault and I soon grew tired of the unreliable vehicle.

I decided to try cycling instead. My old bicycle was still at the house. I cycled to work, to church, and to visit people. It worked well and I enjoyed it.

I parked the car in front of the house with a “For Sale” sign. When it sold, I went to a bicycle shop in Hooghalen and bought a used racing-style bicycle with an extra-high frame, mudguards, a luggage carrier, and lights. I also purchased waterproof cycling clothing and a set of side-bags for the carrier. I had found my new mode of transport.

Over the next three years, I would cycle many kilometres on that bicycle.

In hindsight, the troublesome Ford Fiesta had been the right one; because without it, I might never have started cycling. *“God works all things together for good for those who love Him.”*

Work at WMD suited me well. Each morning at the pump station, we started with a cup of coffee, Jeff, three technicians, a supervisor, and me. Very little was said in the supervisor’s presence. I never understood why. Once everyone went outside to begin their tasks, some small talk followed.

Jeff and I would load tools into the pickup truck and head to whichever pump station required yard maintenance that day. Once all stations were completed, the cycle would begin again.

It was peaceful work, and I slowly adjusted again to life in the Netherlands. With Jeff, I spoke quietly about the reality of God and what God meant to me, never in a way that might irritate him. At one point, Jeff developed a badly infected finger caused by a splinter and was off work for

several weeks. During that time, I worked alone and managed well.

I carried a pocket Bible with me wherever I went. During lunch breaks, I read it thoroughly and marked many verses. Eventually, I stopped using it. Years later, my youngest brother Alfred found it and enjoyed reading it with its marked passages. At some point, he accidentally left it behind on a train.

One pump station in particular was quite secluded, located at the end of a dead-end road, about two hundred metres from a main road. During the weeks I worked alone, I also maintained that site.

In the quietness of that place, I felt God's goodness flowing through me. Right there in the yard, I knelt, lifted my hands and head, and praised God silently from the depths of my heart. After a short while, I stood up, and noticed a woman and a child standing about twenty metres away.

I felt slightly embarrassed, but shook it off and approached them. The woman's car had broken down on the main road and the pump station was the nearest building in sight. She asked if she could use the telephone. Of course she could. I helped her make the call and she thanked me before returning with the child to the car. She never mentioned the unusual scene she had witnessed.

One of the technicians later told me that the grounds had never been so well maintained as during the period I had worked alone. In my heart, I thanked God.

What was meant to be a few weeks of work eventually became nine months. When Jeff returned and winter set in, there was little work to be done at the pump stations and I was no longer needed.



God had sent me back to the places I had once feared; the Netherlands, my family, and the church, the Reformed Church. When around my family, I lived peacefully, helped where I could, and occasionally spoke about who God had become in my daily life.

Mom once commented on my calmness. I remember replying, “The good in me comes from God; the bad in me is still me”.

Years later, Mom told me that when I first returned home, she would sometimes tense up, expecting an outburst of anger from me when one of my brothers did something that used to provoke me. She was surprised each time that I stayed calm and let things pass.

Dad reacted differently. He was irritated that I spoke differently, behaved differently, no longer drank beer, and liked to talk about God. In his view, I should be like everyone else.

He once overheard me singing “*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*” while I was busying myself around the farmhouse. Dad told me it was a bad song; Jesus was not a friend, he said, and singing like that was disrespectful to God.

On another occasion, an evangelical concert was held in a large tent in Assen, attended by hundreds, if not thousands, of young people. I went and enjoyed it immensely. It was wonderful to praise and worship God with so many others. Afterwards, the local newspaper published an article about the event with a sarcastic undertone. Dad read it and told me he found it disgraceful that his son had attended something so embarrassing.

We also once found ourselves in an argument about baptism. In the Reformed Church, the belief is to baptise infants by sprinkling water on the baby’s head. Before the baptism, the *Form for the Administration of Baptism* is read and the ceremony is marked by a sense of serenity.

The *Form* includes footnotes with references to Bible passages meant to show that the doctrine is based on Scripture. As I had done earlier with the doctrine of the Trinity during my time in Canada, I checked all of these Scripture references and came to the personal conclusion that there was something wrong with the doctrine of infant baptism.

I challenged Dad about this and during the discussion, asked whether he had personally examined the Scriptures cited in support of infant baptism. His response was that we must trust that the church and its ministers had already done this work for us, and that our role was to accept, obey, and follow the church.

The discussion became heated and afterwards I felt very unsettled. I decided then that I would never argue again with anyone. I would share my thoughts and convictions when appropriate, but I would no longer argue, whatever the subject might be.

During my time at WMD, Dad was involved in a serious car accident. He was rushing to Assen for supplies before milking time when a car from a side road failed to stop. Dad's car flipped through the air and landed on its wheels in the yard of a corner house. He was taken to hospital though discharged the same day.

Afterwards, Dad was not strong enough to resume full farm work. I wondered whether I should leave my job and help him, perhaps that was why God had sent me home, to assist and maybe eventually take over the farm.

Dad told me not to worry. A worker from an agricultural association would manage the farm, paid for by insurance. Eventually, Dad sold the milking cows and became more like a hobby farmer.



Upon my return to the Netherlands, I attended the Reformed Church in Hooghalen, the same church I had belonged to since birth. God had not put it into my heart to leave the church; in fact, He had sent me back to it.

I attended services twice every Sunday, as before.

One day I searched the telephone directory, wondering whether there might be a Pentecostal (*Pinkstergemeente*) church nearby. To my surprise, there appeared to be one in Assen. The following Saturday morning, I got on my bicycle and went to check the address.

There it was, a large building among other buildings, partly in front of it stood a smaller building, a Christian bookshop. I stood there for a few minutes, simply looking, taking in the realisation that I was truly standing in front of a Pentecostal church.

Then I decided to go inside the bookshop. An elderly woman was working there and began talking with me. What a relief it was to speak with someone who understood exactly what I meant when I spoke about God.

After discovering the Pentecostal church, I continued attending the Reformed Church on Sundays, morning and afternoon, and in the evenings I cycled the ten kilometres to Assen to sit quietly in God's presence at the Pentecostal church.

Dad and Mom worried that I might influence my siblings. I was not concerned; in my view, it could only be good for them.

I spoke with many people, sharing my newfound faith in a God who was present in daily life and interested in every aspect of it.

One Sunday as I cycled home from church, I passed the farm belonging to people I knew well; members of our church. I felt that I should stop and visit, but I did not feel

well. My ears were blocked, something I had already spoken to God about.

Because I did not feel well, I decided to cycle on, even though I knew I should visit.

Soon afterward, I felt convicted that I should turn back, and I did. They were pleased to see me, and over coffee we spoke about their farm, my work at WMD, my time in New Zealand, and about God. During the visit, my ears became unblocked.

Later, on my way home, it was as if God said to me that if I did not want to visit people, I did not need ears.

I also had many conversations with Rev. Meijer, who had given me the English Bible. He appreciated my renewed faith but was concerned about what he considered my dangerous doctrinal path.

He warned me about the Pentecostal church and urged me to stop attending. I asked whether he had ever visited one. He had not so I invited him to come with me.

Rev. Meijer was a sincere, humble, and kind man. He presented the matter to the church elders and later visited the Pentecostal church together with one of the elders. I can still picture the two of them sitting there.

He did not change his views, which was understandable; doing so would have placed him in a difficult position as a Reformed minister.

Sadly, twenty-five years later, the Reformed Church in Hooghalen closed its doors. There were too few members to continue. The village itself had grown, but many Reformed believers had either lost their faith or moved toward more Evangelical or Pentecostal expressions.



People sometimes asked whether I would go to another country again, since I seemed to be a world traveller. I would reply, “I could, but not to a country where German is spoken”.

I do not know why I answered that way, although I suppose I did have something against Germans. As a boy, I had read many books about the Second World War, where Germans were always portrayed as the villains. Moreover, when Germans visited the Netherlands, the Dutch were expected to speak German and the same applied when Dutch people were visiting Germany. Germans rarely tried to speak Dutch. No, I had decided that I did not like Germans or their language.

A hobby farmer, who lived three farms away, grew perennial plants and trees alongside his regular work. He and his wife were not Christians. I visited them occasionally to talk and admire his plants. Naturally, I shared my faith.

He wanted to hear more, so I offered to visit one evening a week to study the life of Jesus together. We worked through a study book, read the Bible, and prayed. I shared the gospel; what God would do with it was up to Him.

When my work at WMD ended, I began searching for employment again. Then, during one visit, the neighbour mentioned an advertisement he had seen; a large garden centre was looking for Dutch employees, in Austria.

No way, I immediately thought, *Austria? German-speaking people? Absolutely not!*

I did not want to offend the neighbour and wrote down the details anyway. On my way home, I talked with God. “I don’t want to go to Austria. German-speaking people; please, not that.”

Yet I knew I had to respond and leave the outcome in God’s hands.

I sang a song:

*Make me a servant, humble and meek;
Lord, let me lift up those who are weak,
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant, make me a servant,
Make me a servant, today.
(Kelly Willard)*

March 1996. I was twenty-five years old.

Once again, I packed my bags.

And once again, I launched into the world.



3. LAUNCHING INTO THE WORLD – 2

Austria – 1

Vincent was also going to work for Starkl in Tulln, a town about 45 kilometres from Vienna, Austria. His father was a co-partner in a large tree and shrub growing business in the south-west of the Netherlands. From time to time Starkl ordered truckloads of trees and shrubs from them. A week before our departure to Austria a truck had left for Tulln and my bicycle was transported on top of the load of trees and shrubs.

The day before the departure I travelled by train and bus to Vincent's house. Vincent owned a car and early the next morning we began the twelve-hour drive to Tulln, or more precisely to Frauenhofen, a very small village about four kilometres outside Tulln.

Vincent and I got along well. He was not a Christian but I had learned how to be around people who were not like-minded. I had learned to speak about God while trying not to irritate the person with whom I was talking. In general, I was still a shy and quiet person.

We lived on the grounds of the garden centre in what could be described as a small castle. In the cellar, all employees stamped their time cards upon arrival and again when leaving at the end of the day. The handyman also had his workshop there. Above the cellar was the floor where the offices were located, staffed by several young women. On

the top floor, above the offices, were seven rooms: three older ones, each with its own bathroom, which were already occupied, four newer rooms with two shared bathrooms, and a communal kitchen area. Two of the rooms also had small private kitchens.

Vincent and I initially had to share a room because the handyman was still finishing the room directly opposite the kitchen. That room was the nicest, and once it was completed, Vincent decided he wanted to remain in our original room. I was happy with that, so I moved into the newly finished room.

My bicycle arrived before I did. The people unloading the truck realised that a tall Dutchman would soon follow, as it was quite a large bicycle.

We worked mainly in the outdoor section of the garden centre where customers browsed for plants they wished to purchase. March was still cold and wintry, so there were not many customers and this gave us time to practise our German, which went surprisingly well. Once customers did arrive, we managed to assist them. Vincent, however, had dark hair and dark eyes, and with his accent, some customers assumed he was from Eastern Europe. Austrians, generally being strong nationalists, would sometimes walk away from him, much to his annoyance. I, on the other hand, had light brown hair and blue eyes. Customers did not walk away from me. Instead, conversations often started naturally.

I enjoyed working at the garden centre and working alongside the other employees. It was a pleasant place to be. One colleague once asked me how I could always be so cheerful. The reality of God was the only answer I had.

I began searching for churches in Tulln. Austria is mainly Roman Catholic, and nearly every town has its own large Roman Catholic Church building, but I was not looking for a Roman Catholic Church. While cycling through Tulln, I studied buildings and road signs and eventually found a New Apostolic Church. I had no idea what it was, but I decided to check it out.

It was a church that preached Jesus, and in my situation, that was good enough. Most of the people there were elderly. Reverend Joseph and his wife were kind and pleasant people. They lived in another town and I visited them from time to time when cycling in their area on my days off.

I also found a Seventh-day Adventist Church, and on Saturdays, if I was off work, I could often be found there. I was a visitor at both churches and I respected and accepted them.

Vincent and I did our cooking together. Saturdays were pancake days. At the end of the meal, one of us did the dishes and the other dried them. One evening it was my turn to dry the dishes. Vincent had already gone to his room. I was in a hurry because I wanted to finish quickly and go to my room to read, sing some songs with my guitar, and talk with God. While drying a plate, it slipped from my hand and shattered against my wrist, causing a deep cut. Blood immediately gushed from the wound and sprayed across the kitchen. Fortunately, I had a towel in my hand and pressed it against the cut while raising my arm.

The sound of the breaking plate brought Vincent out of his room. When he saw all the blood, he panicked. Two young women who lived in the older part of the building passed by and wondered whether Vincent and I had been fighting. They were shocked by the blood splattered throughout the kitchen and called Bertina. She was a young woman who

lived downstairs and owned a car. Bertina remained calm and drove me to a doctor, who stitched up my wrist.

When I returned, the kitchen had been perfectly cleaned by Vincent and the two young women.

The next morning, I showed Starkl my arm to explain that I would not be able to do heavy work that day and told him what had happened. He did not seem to believe my story; the look on his face suggested he thought I had attempted to commit suicide.

In my spare time I went on long cycling trips, exploring the surrounding area and visiting people I had come to know.

When my colleagues decided to go out for pizza, I joined them. When they went out drinking, I did my own thing. I was very happy.

Once, the colleagues decided to go tandem skydiving. I was not particularly interested, as I wondered whether it was the right thing to do to put my life in danger by jumping out of an airplane. Still, I did not want to be the one who often said no, so I went along.

We received our instructions, boarded a small aircraft, and took off. The plane rattled and shook like an old car driving on a rough gravel road. Before we could jump, we needed clearance from air traffic control. We circled again and again and waited. The clearance was not given due to heavy air traffic, and eventually we had to land. I was quite relieved that I did not have to jump out of that airplane.

As the end of the first three months approached, Starkl informed Vincent and me that there would be no work for us during the summer months. Vincent was very upset by this and began looking for other work. He soon found a job in a nearby town and left Starkl.

My parents came to visit me for a long weekend and my sister Erica joined them. They travelled by train. I rented one of Starkl's vehicles and showed them around Tulln and Vienna. On Sunday, we attended a special service at the New Apostolic Church in Vienna. My parents were very impressed when they were given headsets through which the sermon was translated into Dutch.



Dad and me at Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna, Austria

Despite the pleasant visit, my relationship with my parents remained somewhat strained. I could not speak freely about the things on my heart, the things of God. Erica, on the other hand, listened openly and did not mind talking about God.

Soon after my parents and Erica left, it was time for me to leave Starkl as well, at least for the summer months. I was welcome to return at the end of August for another three-month period until December, and then again from the following year March onward. I had peace about these arrangements. My life was in God's hands, for Him to do with as He pleased.



A Bicycle Journey

I had nine weeks to fill and was in no hurry to return to Hooghalen. I enjoyed cycling and had discovered that I could travel back to the Netherlands by following rivers. Many of them had cycling paths alongside them. I bought a map and a youth hostel guide.

After packing my bags and loading my bicycle, I locked the door to my room and stepped out very early in the morning into pouring rain. Bertina heard me leaving and, before I headed out into the rain, she greeted me from her doorway and wished me well.

For the first three hours, the rain poured down relentlessly, but I was fine. I had proper rain gear and my luggage was well protected by a rain cover. My heart overflowed with thankfulness to my great God; He was so close.

During the first three days, I cycled around 150 kilometres per day. On the second day, another cyclist caught up with me and we rode together for a while. We had good conversations and I shared the Gospel with him. At one point, he got a flat tyre. I waited while he repaired it, but he insisted that I continue, not wanting to delay my plans.

After 150 kilometres on that second day, one of my knees became extremely painful and I could barely continue cycling. The next town with a youth hostel was still 10 kilometres away. I managed those 10 kilometres despite the pain in my knee. Once I arrived in the town, I asked someone where I could find the youth hostel.

“Up there, on top of that mountain,” he replied.

I cycled as far as I could up the mountain while my knee pained me greatly, but soon the slope became so steep that I had to get off and walk, pushing my fully loaded bicycle.

The third day was a Saturday. After nearly 160 kilometres, I approached the town where I planned to spend the night. As I cycled, I talked with God and said to Him that a McDonald's and a church for the next day would be very welcome. Upon entering the town, I saw a McDonald's, and after finding the youth hostel, I went out to look for a church. I found a Baptist church. There was no morning service that Sunday, so I rested and attended the afternoon service instead. That evening, to my delight, they held a Gospel live concert. I was so grateful to be a servant of King Jesus.

In the following days, I cycled about 100 kilometres per day. My knee continued to trouble me, especially toward the end of each day. I met many people along the way and always looked for opportunities to speak about the reality of God. On the second Saturday, I crossed into the Netherlands, found a place to sleep, and once again found both a McDonald's and a church. The church was called 'Assembly of Believers'.

On Sunday morning, I attended the service wearing my cycling clothes underneath my regular clothes. After the service, I quickly changed next to my bicycle, packed my clothes, and cycled to Zwolle, hoping to stay the night with Erica. When I arrived, she was not home, nor were her housemates. I cycled around for a while and rang the doorbell again, but there was still no response. I began looking for a bush where I might sleep, as I did not know of any youth hostels in Zwolle and chose not to pay for more expensive accommodation.

Let me try the doorbell one more time, I thought. To my surprise, the door opened. One of Erica's housemates stood there. Erica was not home and her room was locked, but the housemate invited me to sleep in the hallway.

The final day lay ahead, with another seventy kilometres to go before I would reach my parents' farm. In Beilen, the town twelve kilometres from the farm, I met my uncle, the postman, delivering mail by bicycle. We exchanged a few words, and he was impressed by what I had accomplished. I cycled on and came through Hooghalen and finally arrived at the farm.

Dad was not home. Mom was sitting on the couch, reading a book. She did not get up to welcome me. Surely it was not done with bad intentions, but it hurt. I learned something that day. Now, when my daughter returns home after being away for weeks or months, I stand outside the house, waiting to welcome her back.

I had made it; 1,400 kilometres in twelve days, with one day of rest. God had been so good to me. I had travelled through rain, wind, and sunshine, often with a painful knee, and not once did I have a flat tyre. I met many kind people along the way. Most of the journey was through Germany, and I learned that German people are just like anyone else and can be very pleasant. All the resentment I had previously held toward the German people and their language had disappeared.



I had high expectations for the few weeks I would spend in Hooghalen. I hoped that the people of the Reformed Church would understand me and share in my excitement for God, but that was not the case. I also had further conversations with Reverend Meijer, yet I felt misunderstood. It was as though I was no longer accepted. I realised that the door to the Reformed Church of Hooghalen had closed for me.

I was still officially a member and asked God how to bring this chapter to a proper close. I believed God spoke into my heart, assuring me that He would take care of it and that I did not need to worry.

After seven weeks in Hooghalen, I felt drained and spiritually exhausted.

In a magazine, I read about a Christian music festival that would take place just before I was due to return to Austria. I made plans to attend this festival. Henry, one of the younger brothers, wanted to come along as well, but my parents would not allow it. One wayward son was enough.

Little did I know that this festival would bring about two major changes in the life I was living.



Flevo Total Festival 1996

I did not want to attend the festival merely as a visitor, but wanted to make myself useful. I applied to be a volunteer with the counselling team. Members of the counselling team were free to walk around the festival grounds, but at assigned times they were required to be present in the prayer tent to talk with and pray for people who came in seeking conversation or support.

In my team there were two young women who had become friends during the festival. The three of us would talk together from time to time. I invited them to visit me in Austria one day, never truly expecting them to do so. Their names were Simone and Nicoline.

A particular area of the festival grounds was lined with rows of stands where Christian organisations promoted their work. I would not approach a stand if no one else was standing on the public side. If I were the only one there, the people behind the stand would certainly start talking to me and I did not want that kind of attention.

At one point, I was walking along the rows of stands, keeping a safe distance. I was simply observing what organisations existed.

The next moment, I found myself standing at the Mercy Ships' stand, not knowing how I had ended up there. Even more surprising, I was the only person there; no one stood to my left or my right. I was exactly where I did not want to be.

And then what I did not want to happen did happen. A young woman behind the stand started talking to me. "Mercy Ships are always in need of volunteers," she said. "Wouldn't you like to volunteer?"

"Well," I replied, "I have three months from December to February when I'm not working."

"Oh, that's great," she said. "Mercy Ships has a three-month volunteer program."

After a bit more conversation, I walked away from the stand holding several Mercy Ships pamphlets and deep in thought, wondering what had just happened.



Austria – 2

Only one couple in the church in Hooghalen truly appreciated the way I spoke about God. We knew each other well because, as teenagers, my friends and I had often visited them. They did not mind driving me back to Austria in their

car and even decided to turn the journey into a short holiday for themselves. We loaded our luggage into the boot (*trunk*) of their station wagon, placed my bicycle on top, and set off for Austria.

When I arrived in Frauenhofen, I immediately felt at home again. Returning to work also felt like coming home. On the door of my room, I taped a sticker I had bought at the Flevo Festival. It had just one line of text – **JESUS...The Rock That Makes Me Roll.**

At the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a baptism service was being held. I had been baptised as an infant, but also wanted to be baptised as an adult, as the meaning of the two is entirely different. Until then, I had never felt the urge to be baptised. The people in New Zealand had never pressured me either. But now things had changed. I had done what I could in Hooghalen, and the door to the Reformed Church there had closed for me.

I was reminded of Jesus' words in Luke 4:24 and Mark 6:4, where He says that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown or country. I felt free now, standing on my own. Perhaps this was the right time to be baptised.

I shared my desire with the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. There was a complication: anyone baptised in their church automatically became a member, and that was not what I wanted. I respected their beliefs and was grateful to attend their services, but I could not become a member. In response, the leaders mentioned an Evangelical Church in Tulln. I was completely surprised. Despite all my cycling, I had never come across such a church.

Around the same time, I realised that it was time to leave the New Apostolic Church. It had been good to get to know the church and its people, but I sensed it was time to move on. I continued, however, visiting Joseph, the Reverend, and his wife from time to time and maintained a good relationship with them. Many years later, when visiting Austria with my family, I rang their doorbell again. Reverend Joseph opened the door. His wife had passed away by then, and he himself was quite ill. We shared coffee, and Joseph gave my daughter a vintage doll that had belonged to his wife.

The Evangelical Church in Tulln became my home church in Austria. Before being baptised, however, we first had to get to know each other.



The two young women, Simone and Nicoline, whom I had met at the Flevo Festival, accepted my invitation to visit me and came for a long weekend. I arranged with Starkl for them to stay in the room Vincent had previously occupied. When I asked Starkl for the room, he looked at me questioningly and asked whether one girl was not enough and why I would need two at the same time.

The next day, I gave him a piece of paper on which I had written 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5,

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.” (NKJV)

Simone and Nicoline felt somewhat sorry for me, as they were two lively, laughing, and extremely cheerful girls visiting a quiet man. However, I was perfectly comfortable

and enjoyed their company. I showed them around in Tulln and Vienna.

One evening we had supper at a restaurant and invited Vincent and his girlfriend to join us. Vincent's girlfriend had come to work in Austria from the Netherlands as well.

Before the main course arrived, Simone ordered something from the menu that I did not recognise. When the waiter returned, he placed a single plate on the table. In the centre was a white sauce, surrounded by eight black objects spaced evenly around it. For a few seconds, the table fell silent as we all stared at the plate, wondering whether this was truly something Simone enjoyed eating. The black objects were snails.

As it turned out, Simone did not like snails at all. She had thought to have ordered bread with garlic butter, but the German language had confused her. In the end, we all tried a snail – except Simone. She simply could not bring herself to eat one.

Later that evening, we sat in my room – Simone and Nicoline on the couch and I opposite them in a chair. Simone began to share her life story, one of fear and hardship. I listened and felt her pain. Before me I saw a broken flower; a flower, one scarred deeply. A thought ran through my mind: *I am the only one who could ever marry her.* Was that an arrogant thought? No, it was not. Perhaps it was a seed that God planted.

Simone lived in Groningen, and over the following four years I visited her whenever I was in the Netherlands.



I made contact with the *Freie Christliche Jugendgemeinschaft* (FCJG), the Free Christian Youth Community in Vienna. FCJG was an organisation whose members went out into the streets to bring God's goodness to people struggling with drug addiction. If someone was willing to leave their situation, the organisation offered a structured program to help them do so. Before joining them on the streets, we needed to get to know one another. Therefore, once a week in the evenings, I attended their worship gatherings.

Shortly after returning to Austria, I applied to work as a volunteer with Mercy Ships on the *Anastasis*, a medical hospital ship. God willing, I would serve on the ship from December until February; exactly the three months during which Starkl had no work for me.

The following are extracts from my writings dated November 3, 1996, written just before the outcome of my application to Mercy Ships was known:

In this too, I must learn to trust God, to rest and lean back in the Father's arms. I have seen God work in small matters; He can do the same in big matters. Life is like a puzzle. Each time a piece is placed, you think, 'Okay, it's going to be this way'. But then you discover it is taking a completely different turn. "Almighty God, put it in my heart to say, whatever You choose." No security – only Jesus.



Mercy Ships – “Father Them”

The airplane began its descent toward Durban Airport in South Africa. Looking out of the window, I saw a modern city with large houses, many of them had a blue spot in their yards. I wondered what those blue shapes were until I

realised they were swimming pools. *What is the Anastasis doing here?* I wondered quietly.

Bill met me at the airport. Bill and his wife, Tina, were originally from the Netherlands but had lived in Canada for many years. They were retired and served on the *Anastasis* as long-term volunteers. Bill was the head of the carpentry department and would be my supervisor for the next three months.

I was assigned a bed in a small three-person cabin. The two other young men in the cabin also worked in carpentry. Breakfast was served in the mornings, after which everyone went to their assigned duties. Although the work was voluntary, we were expected to work as in a regular job – five days a week from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon.

The ship was large, with many decks. My main task was painting vacant cabins deep in the belly of the ship. Pipes ran everywhere and they also needed to be painted. Everything had to be white; just white. Whenever I finished one cabin, relieved that the task was complete, Bill would show me another cabin that also needed fresh white paint. The work was humbling.

Durban was extremely hot in December, and deep inside the ship I became hot and sweaty. The men in the engine room had it even worse though, working near the engines that produced constant heat.

Tina worked in housekeeping and was responsible for the ship's interior furnishings. When chairs broke, she asked Bill to send someone to help repair them, and Bill didn't mind sending me. What a relief it was not to be painting pipes overhead. Over the course of the three months, whenever Tina needed help, she asked for me to assist her.

I had expected to enter a close-knit Christian community and was surprised when it was not quite what I had imagined. What troubled me most was that some people had much, while others had almost nothing. This stirred an inner conflict within me. Eventually, I worked through it and decided simply to live my faith – to love and praise the Lord.

The Dutch group on the ship decided to celebrate *Sinterklaas* on December 5, the Dutch equivalent of Santa Claus. I felt completely out of place among the exclusively Dutch group. I no longer felt Dutch myself.

On New Year's Eve, we held another Dutch gathering. Again, I felt somewhat out of place, but after everyone shared about their walk with God, I realised that each person – myself included – was on his or her own journey with God.

In a Christian bookstore in Durban, I bought a small devotional booklet titled '*Walking with the Saviour*' by Max Lucado. I still read daily from it with my family.

I was free to follow my own interests in the evenings and on weekends. Together with a small group of other crew members I joined a man who ministered among people living on the streets. I was not used to seeing homelessness; after all, I was just a farm boy. Some of the people from the streets stayed overnight in a shelter where they were given a meal. In the evenings, the shelter held times of praise and worship. Seeing the broken and outcast worship God stirred something deep within me.

I found myself asking, "Could I live among these people in the streets to show them God's goodness?" My honest answer was, "Yes, I could; if God were to ask me to do so".

I also met a man named David in Durban. David owned a small farm outside the city where he tried to provide refuge

for homeless adults and children. I visited him there for a weekend. On Christmas Day, David took the children to the beach, where I and others from the ship joined them.

There were so many people, and so many children. And so many thoughts filled my mind.



On January 2, 1997, the *Anastasis* sailed to East London, about 500 kilometres south. An evening church service was held on board. Because the ship was moving, I began to feel unwell, but attended the service anyway, bringing a plastic bag with me just in case. Halfway through the service, I felt worse and decided to leave and go to bed.

During the night, I woke up several times, feeling my stomach roll from side to side. I wished I could hold it still with my hands. Later during the night I felt so ill that I even didn't mind to die. Eventually, I fell asleep again. When I woke up later, the first thing I noticed was that my stomach was no longer moving. Then I noticed that the ship had also stopped moving.

Still lying in bed, I looked out through the porthole and saw rocks and greenery. The ship had docked in East London harbour.

A storm raged inside me. I loved Durban and its people. I shared this inner turmoil with some fellow volunteers, and they invited me to join their prayer group. Once again, peace filled my heart.

In my free time, I joined an outreach group that visited the squatter camp of Duncan Village. We did what was called a prayer walk, during which we prayed, sang songs, and spoke with the people. I truly enjoyed it. Yet I kept wondering,

How could someone leave his or her comfortable home, come here to speak about God's goodness, and then simply return to that comfortable life? I felt strongly that one should live among the people. After all, Jesus once came down from Heaven and lived among people.

I began asking myself whether I was willing to leave my Western world and live among the people of Duncan Village. I approached a man who lived there and asked him, "What if I were to buy or build a shack here and come to live among you?" He stared at me, then burst out laughing, turned around, and walked away without answering. Still, the thought had entered my heart.

Brent served as a translator during the outreach visits to the squatter camps. He himself lived in a squatter camp called Mzamom'Hle on the outskirts of Gonubie, a small town near East London. Brent was originally from Cape Town and shared God's goodness among the people of Mzamom'Hle. Because I had been speaking openly about my thoughts of living in a squatter camp, I was introduced to him.

Brent invited me to visit him and stay the night in his humble dwelling. We left together after work on a Friday and travelled by taxi, an old minibus. Mama Ganeko also lived in the shack. She was an elderly woman who believed God had called her to be with Brent, whom she knew from rural areas.

We ate together, had coffee, and shared stories. Mama Ganeko slept on a bed, while Brent and I slept on the floor on simple mats.

The next day, Brent had a plan. Since I was visiting, he suggested that I help him paint his shack. He had a large can of white paint waiting. And there I was, on my day off, painting again, and what's more, painting with white paint!

In the afternoon, we walked through the squatter camp and visited several people.

The following day, back on the ship, I wrote a prayer:

*Oh Lord, how beautiful You are.
May I look into Your presence?
I see Your mighty works;
The landscapes, the rocks, the waters, the hills.
Oh Lord, how beautiful You are.
My heart is full of praise.
In silence, Lord, I wait for You.
I see the people;
Oh Lord, let me love them with Your inexpressible love.
Lord, to rest in You is what I desire.*

Carefully, I allowed thoughts to enter my heart and prayed:
“Father, I thank You that You are the One who leads me onward.

Let me know, Lord, that I am complete just as I am – only because Jesus is perfect and He lives in me.”

I sang a song: *“Don’t let my vision die, I’m calling out, light the fire again.”*

While praying, I saw myself living in a hut in a squatter camp, where God had built His church. I was inviting people to come and serve our God. Children were coming to my hut, finding joy and meaning in the midst of a desperate life.



Bill allowed me to leave work early on a Wednesday afternoon so I could join the outreach team in Duncan

Village. We went on another prayer walk and visited a crèche. At the crèche, a little boy of about four years old kept seeking my attention.

Back on the ship, I went into a small cabin set aside for prayer. Alone there, I thought about all the people and children we had met that afternoon and I prayed for them, especially the children. A song title came into my mind: *Father Me*. And immediately, the words were changed to *Father Them!*.

I wondered whether God was asking me to “father” these children; to be like a father to them. I did not want to assume this on my own, so I asked God for confirmation. I prayed that if these words, “Father them”, truly came from Him, I would meet that same little boy again during our Saturday prayer walk, the very little boy who had been seeking my attention that afternoon.

Saturday arrived, and the outreach team boarded the bus to Duncan Village. I was full of expectation. *Would God confirm the words “Father them”?* When we arrived and stepped out of the bus, I immediately looked around to see whether the little boy was anywhere nearby. He was not. I said to God, “I am not going to look for him. If You want to confirm this, You must do it”.

We began our prayer walk and eventually returned to the bus.

I had not seen the boy. God had not answered my request of confirmation. The bus doors were locked, and some team members were still talking. I was not much of a talker, so I stood quietly near the bus, waiting for the doors to be unlocked.

Suddenly, I felt two small fists knocking against my leg. I looked down, and immediately the words *“Father them!”*

flooded through my entire being. It was the little boy, knocking on my leg.

A few days later, I found myself in an African minibus taxi, travelling to visit Brent in Mzamom'Hle. The bus rattled along the road, but the people were kind and attentive, helping me get off at the right stop and making sure I was all right. It felt as though they were leading me by the hand.

I arrived safely at Brent's hut. Mama Ganeko was there, and Brent arrived shortly afterward. I told them both everything that had happened between God and me over the past weeks.

We went for a walk through the streets of Mzamom'Hle. Two men were fighting, and Brent, who knew them well, intervened and managed to stop the fight.

Children were playing in the streets.

Back at Brent's hut, I asked him what he thought about the idea of my returning to join him in his work among the people. Brent responded positively.

As I prepared to leave, I said to him, "If God wills, I will be back. God's will be done".

An African taxi dropped me off near the ship.

"Father, I need Your Holy Spirit to lead me", I prayed, "and I thank You that I know that Your Holy Spirit will lead me".



My time on the *Anastasis* was drawing to a close. I still wanted to visit David in Durban for a few days, so I presented my request to leave earlier than planned to Bill. He granted it.

I said my farewells to the people on board. With some of them, I would remain in contact for many years to come. One of them was a Dutch radiographer who, even twenty-

eight years later, continues to support the work in Mzamom'Hle with a monthly contribution.

I also stayed in touch with Bill and Tina for many years through letters. In the last letter I received from Tina, she wrote that she and Bill were growing old and had returned to Canada a while ago. Her handwriting had become difficult to read.

David had a contract to build a school in a rural area. With his pickup truck and a trailer loaded with materials, we set off toward the construction site. The road was rough, and eventually the truck could no longer carry the weight. We unloaded several cement bags, leaving a man behind to guard them, and continued on our way.

When we arrived, we found an old mud building being used as a school. It had no door, parts of the mud walls had collapsed, and the roof was full of holes. The metal frame for the new school building had already been delivered earlier.

David sent a driver back to collect the cement bags we had left behind. The rest of the day, we worked digging holes for the metal frame. That night, David and I slept in the back of his pickup truck with our feet sticking out, while the other men slept inside the mud building.

During the night, it began to rain, and my sleeping bag became wet. In the morning, we made breakfast and coffee and continued working.

My flight was scheduled for later that day, and throughout the morning I reminded David that we should not leave too late for the airport. David remained relaxed and told me not to worry. Eventually, he decided it was time to go.

On the way, the pickup truck got stuck. Using shovels and branches, we managed to free it and continued on our way.

Now David realised it was getting late. I felt nervous but trusted God that I would not miss my flight.

We stopped briefly so David could collect something. I noticed an outdoor tap, quickly washed myself, and changed my clothes. Then we raced to the airport. At the airport, I ran through passport control, rushed to the departure gate, and stepped straight onto the waiting airplane.



Austria – 3

March 1997; home again. Yes, truly home. It felt as though I had never been away, as if my time on the *Anastasis* was suspended above my life, almost like a vision of things yet to come.

I felt dirty and took a shower. While washing, I noticed a small grey knob on the side of my waist. I removed it, dropped it onto the shower floor and watched it disappear down the drain with the water.

During the first nights back, I woke up several times drenched in sweat. I assumed this was because I had come from a hot South African summer into a cold, snowy Austrian winter.

I enjoyed being back at work, reflecting on everything that had happened during the past months and shared my experiences with my colleagues. I told them about my plans to return to South Africa to share God's goodness with people living in squatter camps. They admired me for it and respected my walk with God. I was thankful that God was also at work in their lives.

At the first opportunity, I took the train to Vienna and visited the South African Consulate. I explained my intentions and need for a visa to the women behind the counter. They found my request somewhat unusual but informed me that I would first need a letter of invitation from Brent before any further steps could be taken. When I returned home, I sent Brent a letter by mail and wondered how long it would take before it reached his mailbox in Mzamom'Hle.

One day, very soon after my return, I began to experience a tingling sensation in both legs, from my knees down to my ankles. The next day, I found I could not stand still without pain and had to keep moving. By the end of the day, red spots had appeared on my legs.

The following day, the red spots had spread, covering both legs from knees to ankles. I considered seeing a doctor but hesitated, deciding to wait. My long-held motto was: *'what comes by itself, goes by itself'*.

The next day, the redness turned black. At lunchtime, I made up my mind and asked Starkl if I could start work later that afternoon because I needed to see a doctor. He looked at me sceptically, so I showed him one of my legs. His eyes nearly popped out of his head, and he immediately agreed that I should see a doctor.

The doctor's practice was closed and would not reopen until the following afternoon. I cycled back and returned to work. The next day, I went back to the doctor. He examined my legs and asked whether I had been feeling feverish. I remembered the night sweats. He then asked whether I had been out of the country recently, and I told him about my time in South Africa.

The doctor wrote a note and instructed me to go immediately to the hospital in St. Pölten and hand the note

to the doctors there. By then it was already late in the afternoon. There was no way for me to go home, prepare myself, travel by train to St. Pölten – a forty-minute journey – and return again the same day. I decided to go early the next morning.

By morning, the blackness in my legs had faded slightly. I told Starkl that I needed to go to the hospital and left. I cycled to Tulln and took the train to St. Pölten. At the hospital, I handed the note to a doctor, who examined my legs. He disappeared briefly and returned with several other doctors. All of them studied my legs with great interest and concluded that I had *Süüd Afrikanisch Zeckenbißfieber*, South African Tick Bite Fever.

I then remembered the small grey knob I had removed in the shower and realised it must have been a tick. I had never heard of ticks biting people; I only remembered my father occasionally finding and removing them from cows.

The doctor explained that the tick bite had caused internal bleedings in my legs. These internal bleedings could have occurred anywhere in my body, and I was fortunate that they had not occurred in my head.

He asked if he could take photographs of my legs for the hospital magazine. I agreed. He then wanted me to stay in the hospital for observation to ensure that everything would go well. I refused. My legs already looked better than the day before, and I did not want to lie in a hospital bed. I insisted on going home.

Disappointed, the doctor wrote a letter for my doctor in Tulln, which I was to deliver personally. With some medication, I returned to Tulln and handed over the letter immediately. The doctor read it, shook his head, and said, “You didn’t want to stay in the hospital?” I assured him I was fine and went back to work.

For the Easter weekend, I flew to the Netherlands to visit my parents, and brothers and sisters so that I could tell them in person about my plans to return to South Africa. I explained to them my desire to live in a squatter camp and help Brent with his work, bringing God's goodness to the people.

Mom listened quietly and was probably very worried. Dad, however, was outspoken, and told me that he believed that I was out of my mind. He asked on what I would survive financially, how I would pay for my groceries and other expenses, how I would manage medical insurance and what I would actually do in a squatter camp. He asked who I imagined myself to be and when I would finally stop what he called my nonsense.

I had no answers to most of his questions. My only response was, "If God wants me to live in the squatter camp, to be there for the people and for the children, then He will take care of me."

Indeed, on what was I going to survive? It was a reasonable question. During my time on the *Anastasis*, I had heard about 'fundraising'. I did not know what it meant. In the Reformed Church, fundraising was never done. I asked someone on the ship to explain it to me. He said that fundraising meant approaching people, especially in churches, to ask for money for a particular cause.

This felt very strange to me. I asked him, "Shouldn't we just trust God for everything we need? Shouldn't we only ask God?"

"Yes", he replied, "we ask God, and then we ask people."
"That is how God answers our prayers".

To me, this did not sound right. It felt as though there was not full trust in God. I remembered the scriptures in the Bible where Jesus told us to ask the Father. He will provide. I also remembered that He told us not to worry about what

we will eat or wear, because the Father cares for the birds and will care for us as well.

No, I could not agree with fundraising. It did not make sense to me. If God was my Father and I was His child, then my responsibility was to remain in the centre of His will. He would provide everything I needed. I could not believe that God would make beggars of His children whom He had called to serve Him.

If God placed me in a position without a salary, He would surely provide, just as Jesus promised. Psalm 37:25 also came to mind: *“I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.”* (NKJV)

Fundraising? No – I chose to trust God alone. How could I tell people to trust God if I did not trust Him myself?

I knew that my God is so great! He owns the whole world, and He allows me to work with Him. He is my Father and I am His son. My heart overflowed with praise and thankfulness. Surely, He would take care of me. I would ask Him alone and leave it up to Him to speak into people’s hearts to give.

On the *Anastasis*, all volunteers had to pay a monthly contribution to keep the work of the Mission Ship going and to cover the costs. I had paid my contribution from my savings.

God had provided me with funds, and I used those funds for His Kingdom when needed.



Pastor Mark of the Evangelical Church in Tulln, and the people of the church, had come to know me well. The weather had become pleasant, and the waters had warmed after the cold winter. A date was set for my baptism.

In the meantime, I sent a letter to Reverend Meijer of the Reformed Church in Hooghalen to inform him that I was

going to be baptised. He presented the letter to the church elders, and it was decided that they would respond by requesting that I cancel my membership in the Reformed Churches. Otherwise, they would have to place me under church discipline. I responded by sending a letter cancelling my membership, as requested.

The Sunday after my letter was received, a special announcement was made before the service: “Deeply saddened, we announce that Wiebe van der Heide has withdrawn himself from the Church’s discipline.”

My father and mother, as well as my brothers and sisters, were present during the service.

Reverend Meijer was a good man. I had many meaningful conversations with him and I understood that he had to act within the church system.

It was a beautiful summer Sunday in Tulln. After the church service, we all went to *Das Aubad*, on the edge of Tulln next to the river *Donau* (Danube). This was where I was baptised. People from the FCJG, those who worked with the drug



users, were present as well. They were considered a bit too Pentecostal by Pastor Mark, and he had asked me to inform them not to interact with the members of the Evangelical Church.

I had also invited my colleagues from work. One of them came and watched from a distance.

Another Pastor, Richard, was going to do the baptism. Pastor Richard and I entered the water. The pastor then

spoke the words, “I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” I let myself fall backwards into the water, supported by the pastor. Once fully submerged, he helped me up again.

I had died with Christ, been buried with Christ, and been raised with Christ.

“Lebt mehr und mehr aus der gnade unseres Herrn und Retters Jesus Christus und lernt Ihn immer tiefer erkennen. Ihm komme alle ehre zu jetzt und in ewigkeit!”

(Live more and more from the grace of our Lord and Saviour and learn to know Him deeper always. To Him belongs all honour now and forever.) (2 Peter 3:18, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*, Good News Bible)

This was the text I received from the church for my baptism.



After returning from the Anastasis, I also resumed my involvement with the FCJG. I arranged with Starkl to have Thursday afternoons off and work Saturday mornings instead. This arrangement worked well.

Every Thursday afternoon, I took the train to Vienna and joined a team that went out on the streets and in the subways. We approached the drug users. Many of them knew the team members. On cold days we offered coffee, and on warm days cool drinks, along with sandwiches. We tried to have conversations with them and pray with them.

There was a young man with the FCJG who was in rehabilitation. He had previously lived on the streets and in the subways, using drugs. After being clean for several weeks, he played guitar during worship evenings. One morning he packed his belongings and said he was leaving. Later, he was seen again in the subways using drugs. Still, the FCJG members continued to show God’s goodness and

offer people the opportunity to leave darkness and enter God's light.

At the end of April 1997, I received the letter from Brent explaining his work in the squatter camp and inviting me to join him. He also mentioned his involvement with the Vineyard Church of East London, South Africa. With this letter, I returned to the South African Consulate. The staff again found my request unusual and they were unsure how to proceed. Eventually they gave me forms to fill out. A week later, I returned with the completed forms and the documents which were required. They were all sent to South Africa for processing.

During a long weekend, my brother Frits visited me by motorcycle. We had a very good time together.



During these months, God taught me many things through reading the Bible, praying, fasting, and through other people. I spoke with God continually in my thoughts wherever I was. I had asked Him to make my thinking a form of prayer; a continuous conversation with Him.

In my deepest being, I gained understanding of what it meant to be a follower of God and His Son, Jesus. At times I felt extremely close to God, as if I could almost feel His presence. At other times, my own brokenness stood clearly before me. I needed God's forgiveness again and again.

I read about Solomon's wisdom and riches and prayed that God would make me rich like Solomon, not in material wealth, but in love, compassion, and wisdom to go into the world.

At a worship evening with the FCJG, I felt prompted to pray for a certain person, but I was too shy and feared what others might think. I asked God to wait, even though I knew it was the right moment. I did not act on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the opportunity passed.

At the end of the evening, the leader read from 1 Samuel 15, where King Saul obeyed God only partially and lost his calling. I felt like Saul. I saw how disobedience could cause me to lose what God intended for me. I felt surrounded by darkness, empty and alone. Rudy, one of the group, came to me and I shared how I felt. God's forgiveness came, and I felt restored. I learned that obedience is essential and that one's calling can be lost.

I saw where people without God are – they are in a cage trapped in darkness, without purpose, walking toward an endless pit. God's light is outside the cage; it is bright, there is freedom, there is a smile, and there is love, without end.

“Thank You, Father, for showing me where people are without You, and where I could be if I let go of You. Hold me, Lord. I want to love You even when I do not understand You.”

“I stand before God, before the mercy seat of Jesus. Only through His mercy can I live. I am nothing in myself, yet chosen by grace to receive His mercy. God wants to pour out His mercy on those who are nobodies, and I am one of them, chosen by grace. What else can I do but pray that God will choose many more people on whom to pour out His mercy? What else can I do but tell everyone about God's mercy? Yes, I want to humble myself before the great God; to pray and to go! I want to go into this world and show mercy to people!”

At work, I was planting summer flowers in a park next to the garden centre. Before I started on a section of the park, it

was as if I could see the lines and circles showing where to plant what, as though God was showing me what to do.

One night, I woke up and saw in my mind a bright, shining star in a certain place of the park. The next day I planted bright yellow flowers in the shape of a star on the place I had seen during the night. And I planted the shape of a sun on the one side of the star and the shape of a moon on the other side.

I considered that my prayers at night were before God like bright, shining stars; like gifts to Him, as wonderful as shining stars. I prayed, "Father, I want to give You many more stars".

Despite all these experiences over those months, I sometimes felt down or lonely, and at other times like a failure. There were moments when God felt far away, and I struggled as if on my own. It was as though I was moving up and down spiritually.

I came to understand that also these experiences, of God feeling far away, were helping me grow deeper in Jesus. It is like a tree: if a tree is planted where it has everything it needs, it does not need to send its roots deep into the ground. However, if it is planted where it must search for what it needs, it will send its roots deeper. In doing so, it becomes firmly grounded in the earth and able to withstand the storms to come.

So it was with me. If I could always feel God's presence, and if everything I needed were immediately available, I would not have been able to stand the storms of life. But by seeking God again and again, it enabled me to be planted strongly and firmly upon my Rock, Jesus. When the storms of life inevitably come, I knew that I would be able to stand firm and endure.

“But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29, NKJV).

I regularly attended prayer meetings at the FCJG. At one of these meetings we prayed for the salvation of people and for God to touch hearts. During one of these prayers, I saw clearly that if we wanted to see the salvation of other people, we had to be willing to lay down our lives completely, and on God’s terms. We could not say, “We have done this or that, therefore we have laid down our lives.” No, we needed to go further, laying down our lives more and more.

This understanding was confirmed on my way home by train. I was reading Matthew 20:28 from *The Message*, which says: *“That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served – and then to give away His life in exchange for the many who are held hostage.”*

These words spoke deep into my heart. We are called to be like Jesus, to give our lives in exchange for those who are held captive.

The following evening, I invited Michael for coffee. He was a 17-year-old young man who also lived in the castle at Starkl. In my opinion, we did not talk about anything meaningful, and at one point I wished he would leave. I thought to myself, *What a waste of time this is*. Eventually, Michael did leave.

Instead of feeling relieved, I felt convicted that I had failed to take the opportunity that God had offered me. I asked God for forgiveness. The teaching from the previous days came back to my mind. I had given some of my time, but not my life, and that was why we had not spoken about the Gospel.

“O Lord, I need Your forgiveness”, I prayed. “Give me another opportunity to make it right. Father, make me a

useful tool in Your hands for the salvation of many people. You turn my sins into good out-comes after repentance. You teach me. Thank You, Father.”

Jesus’ words in the Garden of Gethsemane had gone through my mind often that day: *“Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from Me.”*

Was I willing to lay down my life in such a way that I, too, might cry as Jesus did? My thoughts went very deep. Jesus’ love had opened the way for me. I asked myself, *How deep is my love for the lost?*

“Father, only You can show me the way”, I prayed. “You will never leave me. With my hands lifted in praise, I want to be able to say victoriously: Not what I want, but what You want!”



During one particular week in this period, I had several dreams. Normally, when I dreamt and woke up, I would turn over and go back to sleep. This time, however, I got up to pray through the dreams, and through prayer their meanings were revealed.

Dream 1

Someone struck me in the face with a stick. My teeth became loose and one tooth even fell out.

Through prayer, I understood that the loose teeth represented believers who were wavering in their faith, and the tooth that fell out represented those who had lost their faith. The blow with the stick symbolised the actions of others that caused believers to stumble or fall away. I was called to pray for fellow believers.

Dream 2

Neighbours from my childhood, people I knew well, were chasing me with guns, trying to catch me, possibly to kill me. Through prayer, I understood that people, with whom one has good relationship, but who are not friends, will come to oppose and discourage you, trying to stop you from doing what you are doing for the Kingdom of God.

Dream 3

I was sitting on the ground with others. A leader in the group allowed someone else to urinate all over me. I did not really care, and it continued for quite some time. Afterwards, I immediately took a shower. While showering, I wondered whether I should have waited, but realised I needed to wash right away. The others who had been sitting with me also wanted to shower, but they could not.

Through prayer, I learned that this meant other people's dirt; their negative behaviour, attitudes, and character – would come onto me. I needed to allow this, because I could go to Jesus to be cleaned. I must go to Him immediately in prayer, without delay. The others could not come to Jesus because they had not come to faith.

Dream 4

I was walking when a dog joined me. The dog was very excited, jumping upon me, licking my face, and showing great affection.

Through prayer, I understood that those considered 'the dogs of the world' would come to me and love me. Who are 'the dogs of the world?' I was reminded of the following words: "*Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs*". (Mark 7:28 NKJV). And of the words which speaks of how God chooses what is foolish, weak, lowly, and despised in the world. (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)

Psalm 16:7–9 (NKJV) became very meaningful to me:

*“I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel;
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.
I have set the Lord always before me;
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope”.*



On Friday, June 20, 1997, I received a letter from the South African Consulate. My application had been approved, subject to two conditions. Firstly, I was required to pay a deposit for a return flight from South Africa in case I needed to be deported because my permit had expired and I did not have the funds to leave the country. The second condition was that I had to prove that I had 1,000 rand (the South African currency) per month to support myself, or that I would receive those funds, for the full duration of the permit, which was one year.

I was able to comply with these conditions because I had been saving from my salary since returning from New Zealand, with the idea that if God wanted me to attend a Bible college, I could pay my own way. Not going to a Bible college was also acceptable to me, because a few weeks earlier I had read 1 John 2:27 (NKJV), which says, “...and you do not need that anyone teach you...”. I was therefore open to the possibility of not attending a Bible college.

Work at Starkl slowed down as summer arrived. I had told Starkl that I was making plans to return to South Africa, but when I asked him to let me go, he was quite upset and did not speak to me for a few days.

In my final days at work, I said farewell to my colleagues. I had shared many good moments with them and knew this was a period of my life I would not forget. I handed out forty copies of the Gospel of John, along with a booklet titled '*Getting to Know God Personally*'. My prayer was that God would continue to work in the hearts of those special people.

I collected my permit on June 30. That same day I also wrote a letter to Brent in South Africa, telling him that I would soon be on my way and, God willing, would see him in the Mzamom'Hle squatter camp. In the letter I also included my parents' address and telephone number in case he would need to contact me.

My plan was to hitchhike to the Netherlands and from there leave for South Africa.

During the first week of July, I stayed with the FCJG, where we organised barbecue days for the drug users. After that came my final Sunday church service with the Evangelical Church. They had organised a farewell lunch barbecue. They were such special people.

I walked through the streets of Tulln and realised that I now had only one boss – Jesus. *Has my missionary life begun now?* I wondered. *Would I ever return to a regular job?*

On my last day with the FCJG, I was given a text referring to
Isaiah 49:2;

*ER hat mich zum einem spitzen Pfeil gemacht
Der Pfeil, vom Baum abgeschnitten...
Im Köcher verborgen...
Der Bogen wird gespannt...
Der Pfeil wird abgeschossen...
Ins Ziel getroffen... → Südafrika*



*He has made me a sharp arrow
The arrow, cut from the tree...
Hidden in the quiver...
The bow is drawn...
The arrow is released...
Hitting its mark... → South Africa*



4. MY WORLD FALLS APART

Hitchhiking

I had packed up my room in Starkl's castle. Most of my kitchen items I had given to FCJG that also runs a charity shop. My few personal belongings were packed into boxes and would be taken to my parents' farm by people who travelled between Vienna and a town near my parents, from time to time. I was left with my guitar, a large backpack, and a travel bag.

I passed on my bicycle, the one I had cycled so many kilometres on, to the leader at FCJG, who was about as tall as I am.

I slept in my now-empty room for one last night.

Early in the morning I woke up and removed the sticker from the door, the one that said: *JESUS...The Rock That Makes Me Roll*, and carefully packed it with my papers. With my backpack on my back, the travel bag in one hand, and the guitar in the other, I left the castle and looked one last time at the sun, the star, and the moon, there in the corner of the park.

I had planned to walk the four kilometres to Tulln but a passer-by stopped and gave me a lift. In Tulln I stood beside the main road going in the direction I needed to go. The doctor passed by, recognised me, and greeted with a friendly smile.

Soon enough I got another lift, but it was only for a short distance and I found myself standing beside the road again. I did not worry; God knew what He was doing. After five

different lifts, I had covered only 180 kilometres of the 1,200 to the Netherlands, and it was already three o'clock in the afternoon. I wondered if this was going to be a long journey. By now, I had realised that hitchhiking is humbling: standing on the side of the road and sticking out your thumb each time a car passes by. Most drivers either looked at you blankly or did not look at all. Others seemed to slow down but drove on anyway, probably because they saw all my luggage.

I thought about the people who had given me lifts and the conversations I had with them. Each time, I carefully tried to speak to them about the reality of God.

A Ford Ka stopped and the young man asked where I was going. His route was the same as mine for a long distance. We loaded my luggage, it barely fitted into his car, as he had a lot of his own belongings, and a Ford Ka is a very small vehicle.

Once on the road, I tried to make conversation but he was not interested, and I fell asleep. After four hours of driving, he needed to go in a different direction from mine. However, he decided to make a 30-kilometre detour to drop me off in front of the youth hostel in Erlangen, Germany. I thanked the young man from the bottom of my heart, and I thanked my God for taking me halfway on the first day.

Early the next morning, I found a lift that took me the short distance to the highway. Once there, a young fellow stopped and gave me a long lift in the right direction. We had good conversations along the way. Before leaving his car, I handed him a Bible which he gratefully accepted.

The next lift was with a man who once owned a business but had gone bankrupt. Because of the bankruptcy, he had lost his wife and now lived in a cellar. From time to time, the bank checked on him to see if he had any money for them.

At five o'clock, I arrived at a truck stop near Köln and planned to sleep there, as they also had accommodation. To my surprise, it was fully booked. There was nothing else for me to do but return to the roadside. I noticed a truck arriving with Dutch number plates and walked over to ask the driver whether he was heading to the Netherlands and if he might give me a lift. He told me he would be driving on shortly but did not take hitchhikers.

I returned to the roadside, but no vehicle stopped. After some time, I heard a voice calling me from behind, it was the Dutch truck driver. He called me over and invited me into his truck. He told me he never takes hitchhikers and is not supposed to but he had decided to make an exception that time. He shared his story: 34 years of marriage followed by a painful divorce. I told him about God's goodness.

Two and a half hours later we arrived at a petrol station right on the border between Germany and the Netherlands. The truck driver was going to sleep there in his truck, and once again I stood by the roadside. I thought, *if I can get to Arnhem, I can take the train to Assen, and from there one of my brothers can easily fetch me and take me to the farm.* But no one stopped, and it was getting late.

I looked around, checking the bushes to see which one might be best to sleep under for the night. Then my eyes fell on a minibus refuelling at the station. It had Dutch number plates, the people were foreigners from somewhere in the Middle East. I approached them and asked whether they were going to Arnhem. When they said they were, I asked if they would mind giving me a lift and drop me off at the train station. At first, they hesitated, but eventually agreed.

On the second day of hitchhiking, I had reached my destination.

I stood in amazement at God's faithfulness, and my heart was full of praise. I had left behind a chapter of the life I

lived, and a people and a language I had come to appreciate very much.

I would now step out in faith and walk by faith, not by sight. Rudy, from the FCJG, had given me a T-shirt with the words *'Marsch für Jesus'*. I would march for Jesus.



The Phone Call

It was quiet on the farm. My parents had gone to the campground with my youngest siblings. My brothers who were still living at home were at work during the day.

I took a bicycle from the barn and cycled to Assen where I booked a flight to East London, South Africa. The best flight available included a one-day layover in Tel Aviv.

At the end of the day I hitchhiked to Noordbroek, a small town near Groningen, where Jannet, my oldest sister and her family lived. I wanted to say my goodbyes.

From there, I hitchhiked to the campground where my parents were staying to spend time with them and with my youngest brother and sister. Those few days were not easy, as I could not share my stories with them. It felt as though there was a gap between my parents and me. Only God could close that gap, and I prayed for Him to do so.

One of my brothers, who was on the farm, left a message for me at the campground office: *"Brent has phoned and needs to speak with you. You should phone him back as soon as possible."* I was given a number to call. It took some time before I could reach Brent. Phoning South Africa from a telephone booth was far from ideal, and the phone was not answered

immediately. I tried again, and then again. During that time, I prayed constantly, feeling very nervous and wondering why Brent needed to speak with me.

Finally, a woman answered the phone. I asked to speak to Brent. When he came on the line, he told me that things had changed: he was no longer in the squatter camp Mzamom'Hle but was in Cape Town at his mother's place, and I should come to Cape Town.

Bewildered and devastated, I left the telephone booth, and my world came tumbling down. Everything seemed to fall apart around me. I wondered what I was going to do now. I had given up my work, given up my room at the castle, given away my belongings, and no longer had my bicycle. I stood there asking myself: *what now?*

There was no one I could talk to, and I felt unable even to talk to God, though I tried.

I had become like a dead man walking.

I returned to my parents' farm as they were staying another week at the campground. In the quietness of being alone, I was able to pray again. One word kept resounding in my heart: "Go!" I knew then that I had to go to South Africa anyway and go by faith.

Every time I spoke to God, the same word came back: "Go!" I thought of Abraham, who was called to go to a country he did not know, to a people he did not know. I would go. I would go to a country I did not know and to a people I did not know.

I realised that if I did not go now, I would be taking back the reins of my life into my own hands. If I did go, I would be leaving those reins in God's hands.

One thing Brent had said kept returning to my mind: "*Come to Cape Town.*"

I phoned the travel agency where I had booked my flight and explained my predicament. I asked the agent to cancel

the flight from Johannesburg to East London. Once in Johannesburg, I would book a flight to Cape Town instead.

I was alone on the farm during the day. The farmhouse was a bit of a mess because of some building work that had been done. I cleaned it up so that Mom would return from her holiday to a clean house. I also arranged to meet with several people before leaving for South Africa. Some of them had been with me on the *Anastasis* and had since returned home. The ship was now docked in Rotterdam, and I wanted to visit it as well. I also travelled to Groningen to meet with Simone.

It was very good to see all these people again and they encouraged me not to give up.

During that time, I did most of my travelling by hitchhiking and spoke to those who gave me lifts about God's goodness. With some of them I had interesting conversations.

Once, as I stood by the roadside, I said to God, "It's always men who give me lifts – how about a woman this time?" A few minutes later, a station wagon stopped. It was a woman. I got in, she drove off, and we started talking. She was a veterinarian. I asked her why she had stopped. She replied, "I don't know. I never give hitchhikers lifts."

Then there was a young man with whom, as usual, I steered the conversation toward God and His reality. He told me that he knew the spiritual world was real. He explained that he could be at home, lying on his bed, and yet, could travel to his girlfriend, who lived in a town much further away.

This did not surprise me. I had read the book *'He Came to Set the Captives Free'* by Rebecca Brown, in which she speaks about such things and how people do them through the use of demons. I explained to the young man what he was doing and told him that he could, and should, let go of the demons and find true life with Jesus.

Many of my visits during those few weeks were a real pleasure. However, the visit to my grandmother on my father's side was very difficult. I had visited her often when I attended horticultural school as I used to park my bicycle at her house during those years.

My grandmother was very angry with me because of the way I spoke about God and said that the name of the Lord was a curse in my mouth.

On my way home, I felt sad, and alone, and felt sorry for my grandmother. I prayed for my grandmother: "Father, forgive her, for she does not know what she is saying."

When I returned to the farm, there was mail for me from one of my friends from the *Anastasis*. It was a small booklet about Jerusalem, which I might be able to visit during my layover on the way to South Africa. Included with the booklet was a card containing the lyrics of a song by Elly & Rikkert.

The words encouraged me not to give up, even though several people around me thought I was doing something foolish.

The text on the card read:

*Heer, wat kan ik doen?
Ik zie een zee van tranen
Van kinderen zonder namen
Door niemand meer genoemd*

*Wees een levend brood
Een zegening voor velen
En ik zal jou verdelen
Voor anderen in nood
Zoals ik ook geleefd heb
Voor anderen in nood*



*Lord, what can I do?
I see a sea of tears
Of children without names
No longer mentioned by anyone*

*Be a living bread
A blessing to many
And I will divide you
For others in need
As I have lived
For others in need*



5. SOUTH AFRICA – 1 (1997)

The Arrival

The couple from the Reformed Church in Hooghalen, who had taken me back to Austria after my bicycle trip, offered to take me to the airport. I was very grateful for our friendship. The last day with my family was good. We all went to a subtropical swimming pool to spend the day together before my departure.

My parents were probably still worrying about their son, but they had to let go. I was sure my mother would be praying for me. My brothers and sisters were used to me coming and going; they had their own lives. We had all become accustomed to saying goodbye, and therefore there was no fuss when I left again.



During the flight, I was often very nervous, but each time I found peace in God. *I am not doing my own thing; I am following God's call*, I kept thinking. "And if I am mistaken and it doesn't work out, I have money to fly back to the Netherlands," I told myself.

At that stage, I was taking a step of faith, and I had to do it. I could not go back; I did not want to go back.

I was on my way to a country I did not know, and I did not know what I was going to do. Still, one word kept flashing through my mind: "Go!"

The words *'Father them'* kept going through my mind, and I thought of the song text I had been given a few days earlier.

The airplane made a stopover in Tel Aviv. I had most of the day there and took a bus to Jerusalem.

I walked through the narrow, busy streets of the Old City and went to the Western Wall, also called the Wailing Wall. I placed my hand on the wall and noticed all the small pieces of paper wedged into its crevices.

Then I went to the Garden Tomb and looked carefully inside the tomb. There was such stillness in that small garden compared to the busy streets of Jerusalem. On the other side of the garden, opposite the tomb, was a bench. I sat down and imagined Jesus walking out of the tomb, with angels standing on either side of its entrance.

A friend had asked me to deliver a booklet to one of her friends who lived in Jerusalem. I found the address, walked up the stone stairway to the door, and knocked, but received no response. I slid the booklet through the letterbox and left.

The bus took me back to Tel Aviv.



I arrived in Johannesburg and booked a flight to Cape Town. Brent was waiting for me at the airport. He should have been at work but had taken the morning off to fetch me. We drove the thirty minutes to his mother's home in Hout Bay, a beautiful coastal town just outside Cape Town.

On the way, Brent told me that he could no longer stay in the Mzamom'Hle squatter camp. He felt spiritually and physically drained and needed rest and new direction in his life. Once we reached his house, Brent introduced me to his mother and then returned to work.

That evening we had time to talk again and Brent suggested three options for me:

1. Go to a Bible college in South Africa;
2. Find any kind of work and consider my situation during that time;
3. Go to Mzamom'Hle and live with Mama Ganeko in Brent's hut.

I considered these options over the next few days, though in truth I had already made up my mind.

I had not come to South Africa to attend Bible college. Finding a job was not possible, as my permit was for voluntary work only. One option remained – and it was exactly why I had left everything behind and come to South Africa. I was going to live in a squatter camp to share God's goodness and to be a father to the many children there. I would go to Mzamom'Hle and hope that Mama Ganeko was still living there. She was the only person I knew in that area. I also needed to trust that Brent's hut was not occupied by someone else.

I spent a week in Hout Bay. Brent was working most of the time, but his mother was very hospitable.

I went for walks, did some reading, worked a little on Brent's weaving project, and spent time talking with his mother. On Brent's day off, we went on a five-hour hike up a mountain.

On Sunday evening, I went with Brent's mother to the Anglican Church where they held a meditation evening. This was not meditation with an empty mind, but meditation on Jesus healing the paralysed man who lay day after day beside the pool, waiting for the water to be stirred but never able to enter first. Jesus healed the man that day.

While meditating I saw my own brokenness and weakness, and I sensed Jesus saying, "You are healed." And in meditation, I worshipped Jesus and went on my way, to see others touched by His love.

Brent's mother was worried about me. I was such a quiet person, and she wondered how I would cope in a squatter camp among only African people. She was certain I would not last very long there.



It was Friday morning, August 8, 1997, I had just arrived in East London after spending the entire night on a bus from Cape Town. There had been little to see during the long journey – only small lights here and there and towns fast asleep. I slept most of the time as well.

I needed my morning coffee and managed to find a place where I could get one. While enjoying it, I looked around for a taxi – small, old, beaten-up cars.

Brent had given me a small scrap of paper with a Xhosa name I could not pronounce written on it. It was the name of a taxi rank somewhere in East London where I needed to go first. From there, I would need another taxi to reach my final destination: Mzamom'Hle, the Gonubie squatter camp. After finishing my coffee, I walked over to the most decent-looking taxi I could see. I showed the driver the scrap of paper and pointed to the unpronounceable name. "That's where I need to go," I said. "No problem, I will help you," the driver replied. My final destination was also written on the paper.

I was sure he was wondering what a 'white' man was doing in their world. We loaded my luggage into the boot (*trunk*), a large backpack, a travel bag, and a guitar in its case, and drove off. After a short drive through East London, we arrived at the taxi rank. "Fifty rand please," the driver said. *Eish, that's a lot of money*, I thought, but of course, why wouldn't he overcharge a helpless foreigner? Thankfully, he showed me the way to my next taxi – a beaten-up minibus, and helped me with my luggage.

Once the minibus was full of passengers, we drove off, through town and onto the highway for a short distance, then took the main road to Gonubie. Just before Gonubie, we turned right, and soon after, turned right again onto a gravel road. The gravel road led directly into the Mzamom'Hle squatter camp.

The driver knew exactly where I needed to go, probably because Brent used to live there. I climbed out and collected my luggage from the back of the vehicle. The driver asked a young boy to lead me to Brent's shack. The boy kindly helped me carry my travel bag. For a moment I wondered whether he might run away with it.

We walked between other shacks and up a dune. Brent's shack stood on top of the dune, built on poles, with six steps leading up to the door. The door was ajar. "Mama Ganeko?" I called, but there was no response. With my luggage I pushed the door open further and stepped into the three-by-four-metre hut. Mama Ganeko was not inside.

I put my luggage down on the wooden floor, and a thought, one that did not seem to come from myself, flashed through my mind: *Now you're home.*

For the previous five weeks, I had travelled constantly. *Lord,* I thought, *are You telling me that I have come home now?*

I walked halfway down the steps and looked out over the squatter camp. I was alone; yet not alone at all. God was right there with me. I had stepped out in faith. I thought of Peter, who stepped out of the boat and walked on water. As long as Peter kept his eyes fixed on Jesus, he was safe. I decided to fix my eyes on Jesus too, and I would be all right. Then Mama Ganeko appeared, walking between the shacks below. She clapped her hands with delight and welcomed me into her home as though she had been expecting me.



The First Few Weeks

East London is a city on the Indian Ocean and is known for its beaches. One of its main factories is Mercedes-Benz. Gonubie is more like a village than a town and is also located on the ocean, at the mouth of the Gonubie River, about 15 kilometres northeast of East London. In 1997, its residents were mainly Caucasian people. (I do not like using the terms *'black'* and *'white'*. A Caucasian person is far from white, and most African people are far from black.)



Mzamom'Hle in 1997 viewed from Brent's shack

Mzamom'Hle began as an illegal settlement near Gonubie's small industrial area. Xhosa people seeking employment built their shacks there. As the settlement grew, residents were moved to an area at the foot of the dunes on the southwest side of Gonubie. At this new location, the government laid gravel roads and installed a sewage system, electricity, and water supply, and allocated numbered sites for people to build their own dwellings.

Each site had a concrete toilet structure with a tap on the outside.

A community hall, a school, a clinic, and a sports field were also built.

The squatter camp had effectively become a township.

Once people had built their dwellings, the municipality connected them to electricity by installing a small switchboard with a few power outlets inside the home. Most dwellings were constructed from whatever materials people could find such as wood, zinc, and plastic. Therefore the dwellings were called *shacks*. Often, more than one shack stood on a single site. A few residents had built houses from brick or concrete blocks. The original layout also included open spaces intended for recreation, but these were soon filled with shacks, with narrow footpaths winding between them. People also built shacks outside the official sites. The settlement grew rapidly. Newcomers arrived from rural areas in search of work, and children, who had grown up there started needing places of their own.

Brent had built his shack on top of a dune, about thirty metres from an official site below. Other shacks surrounded his, except at the back. Standing behind Brent's shack, the dune sloped downward and was covered with thick vegetation. Beyond that were more vegetated dunes, and further still, glimpses of the Indian Ocean could be seen between them. Small footpaths had formed where people walked through the vegetation toward the sea.



In the year 2000, the government built concrete-block houses on the official sites. In the years that followed, more land was purchased to extend the township. New roads were laid and more houses were constructed, though many shacks remained between the houses and on the outskirts because of continual population growth.

Brent's shack had now become Mama Ganeko's home. She was a woman in her fifties who had met Brent while he was living in the Transkei. During the *apartheid* years, the Transkei was designated as Xhosa territory and was roughly the size of Denmark.



Mama Ganeko

Mama Ganeko believed that God had called her to go to Brent to take care of him. Brent was gone and I had arrived, and she could now take care of me and help me settle into life in Mzamom'Hle; which she truly did.

The shack consisted of a single open space measuring three by four metres. The door opened inward. On the right, stood a small, low table with a few kitchen utensils; this was the kitchen area. At the far left end was Mama Ganeko's bed. The frame was made from pallet planks and the mattress was a thick piece of foam. Cooking and heating water for coffee and tea were done on a paraffin stove. For light in the evenings we used a paraffin lamp or candles. I always liked the smell of burning paraffin.

During the first nights, I slept on the floor on a thin mat. A woman who lived down the dune worked for a business that sometimes discarded wooden pallets. She arranged for some pallets for me, and in my first week I built a bed frame from them, as well as a small table. My bed was placed on the right side of the shack, with the table between my bed and Mama Ganeko's.

Water for drinking and washing was fetched from a tap in a yard below. We used the toilet belonging to the family of the woman who had arranged the pallets. We washed ourselves

using a basin filled with water. On cold days, we added hot water that had been heated on the paraffin stove. When Mama Ganeko washed, I went outside; when I washed, she went outside.

I soon noticed that there was very little food in the shack and decided to take Mama Ganeko grocery shopping. I had no idea how she survived financially, as she had no income. Yet before I arrived, she always managed to have something to eat and even shared her food with two children who had previously been connected to Brent.

We travelled by taxi to the Spar supermarket in Gonubie. There were small shops in the township, but their prices were higher.

I did not know what was needed for daily life, so I let Mama Ganeko do the shopping and I would pay with my Dutch money. I was surprised by how many items she placed in the trolley and wondered whether she thought a rich 'white' man had arrived, meaning she could now buy whatever she wanted. I worried that my money would not last long. After that, I did the shopping alone.

Breakfast usually consisted of cornmeal porridge, lunch was brown bread with margarine and occasionally jam, and supper was rice or noodles with a soup-based sauce containing some vegetables. Occasionally, I allowed myself a piece of 'cake' with my coffee, a slice of brown bread with margarine and sugar.

On the fourth day of my stay in the township, I began to worry that I might struggle to fill my days and would become bored. Yet I sensed God speaking to my heart, assuring me that in time there would be plenty of work for me to do. Still, during those first days, there were moments when life felt like an open prison. I had come to live there,

yet there were long stretches of time when I did not know what to do with myself.

Children began visiting us and I made wooden blocks for them to play with. They asked me to teach them a song and I taught them *'Blessed Be the Name of the Lord'*. I wrote the lyrics on the cardboard that was nailed to the wall to keep the wind and sand out of the shack. When there were not too many children, I shared some of our bread with them.

Once, two little boys sat on the steps by the door and said to each other that they were not afraid sitting there because they were now Jesus' children.

Mama Ganeko helped me with the language. She had been a teacher and spoke fluent English. From her, I learned my first Xhosa, the language spoken by the residents. Many adults could speak English, but the children generally could not.

Mama Ganeko started a prayer group in the shack during the evenings. A small group of men and women would gather to read the Bible and pray together.

I began thinking and praying about starting a kind of coffee bar; a place where people could come for free coffee, conversation, and prayer if they wished. A children's church on Sundays was also on my mind.

I walked through the township praying silently for the people, greeting everyone I passed with 'Molo', the Xhosa word for *'Hello'*. Occasionally I had short conversations, and when people asked what I was doing there, I told them that God had sent me to live among them. I was the only Caucasian person living in the township.

People observed me closely, curious about my presence and intentions. Because they were used to Brent living among them, my presence was easier to accept. I knew not to criticise their way of life. God had called me to live with them, to show His goodness, and to be like a father to the children. I had to accept them as they were, with their own culture and ways. They had not asked me to come; it had been my choice to live with them, and that is what I did. I simply lived among the people of Mzamom'Hle.

During the first week, I met a young Caucasian woman who assisted teachers at a crèche near the community hall. She was an ordained Methodist minister living in Gonubie and was about to end her involvement with the crèche due to health reasons. She invited me to attend a fraternal meeting of ministers and pastors from the Gonubie churches, which was taking place the following week.

There were eight ministers and pastors from seven different churches. They were pleased to meet me and asked about my plans. I told them simply that I had no plans. God had not given me a strategy. Only the calling to live among the people, speak about Him to those who were willing to listen, and be a father to the children.

The pastors were eager to become involved, as they desired reconciliation with the African community. *Apartheid* had ended only three years earlier.

During coffee time, the Roman Catholic priest approached me and asked whether visiting clergy from Rome could visit me in the township the following week.

The Roman clergy came with a large entourage, including reporters from the local newspaper. I shared my story of how God had led me to the township.

As they were leaving, the reporters asked whether they could return to interview me. I agreed.

The reporters did return, and an honest article appeared in the newspaper. What I appreciated most was the caption beneath the photograph: *'God's work'*. Yes, God's work indeed.

Dutch missionary spreads Gospel in EC squatter camp

By Matt Ramsden

EAST LONDON — Residents of the Mzamo'mhle squatter camp in Gonubie have a new neighbour in the form of a missionary from Holland.

Mr Wiebe van der Heide, 26, set up home in the camp after he claims to have been told by God that he must go and teach the Bible to the people there.

He arrived three weeks ago and quickly set about organising a place for children to come and play and "have peace".

He was in this area last year when he was serving on board the mercy ship *Anastasis* which was moored in the harbour for several months.

He visited Duncan Village and met a fellow Christian who stays in different camps teaching the Bible to residents.

He felt that this was what he wanted to do, so he returned to his home in the northern part of Holland and applied for a visa.

He arrived in Gonubie just under a month ago and has been busy making friends and con-

tact with the people there.

He is trying to learn Xhosa so he can communicate more with people, especially the children.

He has constructed some wooden building blocks for them to play with and has around 20 young visitors a day.

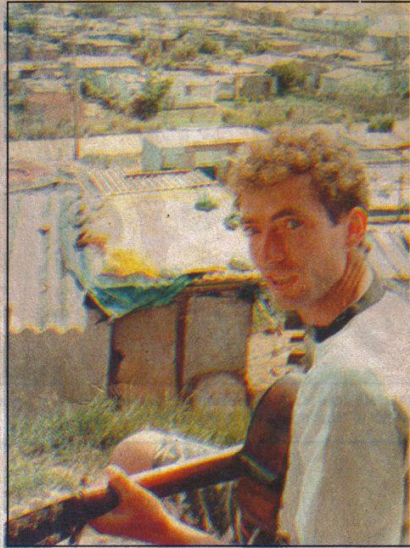
His parents, Jan and Gre, and eight brothers and sisters, all think he is doing a worthy job but are not sure whether he should live in a squatter camp.

He is staying in a shack with Mrs Koleka Ganeko and, despite the lack of electricity and running water, is comfortable.

"There is nothing that I miss about home. I am at the centre of God's will and that makes me very happy," he said.

Mrs Ganeko said: "He is doing a wonderful job for God here."

He does not know how long he will remain at the camp, saying that God will tell him when to go, although he is interested in maybe travelling to Mexico to work in shanty town communities there.



GOD'S WORK: Mr Wiebe van der Heide from Holland at the Gonubie squatter camp where he ministers.

Picture by PATRICK KUKARD

Daily Dispatch, East London, September 1997

The article led a Dutch man living in East London to visit me. Over the years, I met others who remembered the article but had assumed it was not true, unable to believe that a young Caucasian Dutch man would choose to live in a squatter camp.

For the first three Sunday mornings, I attended the Vineyard Church in East London because my permit listed my involvement with them. Soon, however, I realised it made more sense to remain connected with the Gonubie churches,

which were closer and more involved with Mzamom'Hle. The Vineyard pastor agreed this was a wise decision.

I chose to attend the Gonubie Baptist Church. The congregation was very welcoming and the pastor introduced me to them. I also wanted to get to know the other Gonubie churches and therefore rotated between them for Sunday morning services, while attending the Baptist Church in the evenings. The Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Church usually had a short service, and afterward I would cycle quickly to the Pentecostal church about three kilometres away, where the service was still ongoing.

There were also churches in the township. Besides Sunday services, they held evening services during the week, which I attended occasionally. Church life in African culture was very different from my own. One of the challenges was the blending of biblical faith with ancestral worship.

In many ways I was moving between two worlds, Gonubie and Mzamom'Hle. Two communities that were geographically close, yet worlds apart.

During the first few weeks, I walked from the township to Gonubie to buy groceries or attend church. On one of those first Sundays, I went to the Baptist Church, a fifty-minute walk from the township. I left in the late afternoon, with perfect daylight. The shortest route from the township was via a narrow footpath through a forested area with a dry stream; the footpath ended on the outskirts of Gonubie.

The Baptist Church was at the other end of Gonubie. During that service, the pastor had introduced me to the congregation. Afterward, I slowly made my way to the exit, giving people the opportunity to offer me a ride back to the township, but no one did. And so there I was, walking the fifty minutes back to the township.

By then it had grown dark. There was no moon and no clouds to reflect any light. Walking through Gonubie was fine, and the first half of the footpath was manageable too, but once I entered the forested area it was pitch dark. I held my hand in front of my eyes and could not even see it. I do not know how I managed to walk that stretch through the forest and across the dry stream in such darkness, but once I emerged from the forested area, I had reached the first shacks.

Mama Ganeko was very relieved to see me enter her shack, as she had been extremely worried.

On the fourth Sunday of my stay, I thought about how much walking I was doing and remembered the bicycle I had owned in the Netherlands and Austria. I asked God for a bicycle, simply and honestly, like a child asking his father. Later that afternoon, I asked God how much money I should give to the church offering. R50 came to mind. *No way*, I thought. *That's far too much.*

When getting ready for my walk to church, I put R50 in one pocket and R5 in the other. In my opinion, R5 was enough for me to give to the church. *But*, I said to myself, *I have plenty of time to talk to God about whether it should be R50 or R5 while I'm walking to church.*

After passing through the forested area and entering the open space, I asked God what to do; R50 or R5. Immediately, the following thought came to mind: *With the R50, you are going to pay for your bicycle.*

Wow, I thought, *that makes it easy then, it will be the R50.*

When the collection bag came around in church, I dropped the R50 note into it and said within myself, "Now, Lord, I am very curious to see what You are going to do."

As usual, after the service I made my way to the exit. I was still not much of a talker and did not approach people for

conversation, just a quiet hello here and there. As I was leaving the building, someone tapped me on the shoulder. I stopped, turned around, and saw a middle-aged man. He said, “While I was sitting in church, I was thinking about my bicycle. Would you like to have it?”

On my way home, I could only praise God.

I wondered, *what would have happened if I had chosen to put the R5 in the bag? Did God put the bicycle on the man’s mind only after the R50 was in the bag?*

Once, I wrote the following: *“If we don’t obey You, we don’t accept Your grace. If we accept Your grace, we will obey You.”*

I received the bicycle the following week and was very happy with it. It served me for many years. Yet I must admit that I even acted like a spoiled child. The bicycle was old and had a standard frame height, not what I had been used to, and in my heart I began to complain. It took me a few days before I saw the parallel: Jesus came from glory to a stable; I went from a wonderful bicycle to an older, smaller one.

All glory and praise to God. Soon, I became perfectly accustomed to the size of the bicycle and was extremely thankful for my means of transport.

In the fifth week, Brent arrived unannounced. Mama Ganeko and I welcomed him warmly. He stayed for three days to see how I was doing. Together, we built a small prayer hut beside the shack using six pallets. It was only about one square metre, and I had to stoop low to enter, but it gave me a place to be alone with God. Some people in the township thought it was a toilet.

One of the Gonubie pastors invited me to a meeting with him. During the meeting, he shared his ideas for the people of the township. He wanted to draw people to his church through various programs. Since I did not yet know what I was meant to do in the township – only that I had been told

to, “*go!*” – he thought it would be a great idea for me to run those programs.

He explained that he was looking for a program that worked in his community so that it could also be implemented in other communities nationwide. This kind of language was unfamiliar to me. I found myself wondering whether God was a program. At the end of the meeting, the pastor said he would contact me later so that I could think about it.

That evening, I had a dream. It resembled a *Star Trek* setting in which a group of ‘friends’, who were not really friends, placed one of their ‘friends’ into a tank-like structure. The tank was lowered, and as it descended, it became hotter and hotter. After a while, they stopped lowering it. The man inside the tank was swollen and exhausted and could not get out on his own.

I prayed about the dream, and it was as though God was showing me that the group of ‘friends’ represented the Gonubie churches, who might be trying to involve me in their activities in a way that would eventually lead to my total exhaustion.

I also prayed about the pastor’s ideas and sensed that they were something *from* and *for* the church. I could help them for as long as was reasonable, but my place was inside Mzamom’Hle. I had moved *into* the township, not to move *out* of it. God would lead me; He would show me what to do. I wanted to follow Jesus.

The pastor never contacted me again about his ideas. I suppose he may have noticed my puzzled expression during the meeting.

The Reverend from the NG Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) asked me to speak at their church, simply to introduce myself and explain what had brought me to Mzamom’Hle. In the days leading up to it, I was very

nervous. I had never spoken in front of a crowd and was afraid that words would get stuck in my mouth.

The evening before, God taught me to keep my eyes fixed on Him and on Jesus, to see Mzamom'Hle before me, and to have faith.

I spoke for about ten minutes, and everything went well. From that moment on, I was asked to speak more often, and God was always faithful. For many years, I still felt nervous beforehand, but I learned that in my weakness, God showed His strength.

Churches tended to place me on a 'pedestal' so to speak, because of what I was doing, living in a township to share God's goodness. I did not like this, because I knew it had nothing to do with me. I always felt insignificant compared to others. I knew that I had nothing in myself that enabled me to do what I did; it was only Jesus within me who made me do what I could not do on my own.

People in Gonubie often wondered whether I was afraid to live in the township, but I was not. I did not have a background shaped by apartheid and its violence. I simply saw African people as belonging to a different culture, in need of Jesus in their daily lives, just like anyone else.

There was, however, one particular sandy footpath I regularly took between Mzamom'Hle and Gonubie, different from the one through the forest. This route was more manageable by bicycle. It was about 150 metres long, with one end beginning at the first houses of Gonubie and the other at the first shacks of Mzamom'Hle. A fence ran along one side of the path, while a vegetation-covered slope bordered the other. Before entering it, I would always ask God to place an angel in front of me, one behind me, one on my left, and one on my right. Once I reached the first

shacks in the township, or the first houses of Gonubie, I felt safe again.

A certain woman from Gonubie believed that anyone living in a township could never really be clean. She changed her mind because whenever she saw me, I was always clean.

The one unpleasant aspect, however, was the dune sand that blew into the house on windy days. On windy nights, I could feel the sand in my eyes while lying in bed. Even though I had closed all the small cracks and openings with newspaper, the sand always found a way into the house.

I was also regularly asked by Gonubie residents whether I missed the comforts of Western living, like running water, electricity, a shower, a toilet in the house, or certain foods. I had to answer, “No, I have never missed those things”.

At times, it felt like being in a campground, everyone close to one another, with voices always to be heard.

I adjusted remarkably well and immediately to the living conditions of the township. It had nothing to do with me, rather, stand in awe of God. *“He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24, NKJV). This applied here as well.



Moving Forward

Every day, children came to our small shack and I spent time with them. There was a constant coming and going of children throughout the day. Eventually, Mama Ganeko could no longer handle it. At the same time, we began to irritate each other.

The only solution was for me to move out.

To the left of Mama Ganeko's shack stood another shack, and beside that was a bushy area followed by more shacks. I went to the community leader and asked whether I could build a shack in that bushy area. He came to look at the site and told me to build a nice house there and plant a tree.

Two days later, I began clearing the site. Once it was cleared, I realised that the area was quite large. I could build a large shack and even have a backyard where children could play. Because the site was so spacious, I believed God wanted me to build a large shack. At the same time, I struggled with the costs. Eventually, that struggle turned into faith: I would build a large shack, trusting God and using the money I had in my Dutch bank account.

When the Gonubie churches realized that I was planning to build my own place, many offered to help with materials. Around the same time, the NG Kerk informed me that they would support me with a monthly financial donation.

Materials came from many sources. The Baptist Church purchased six large pallets – three by two



metres – from Mercedes-Benz, along with poles. The Methodist Church promised roofing beams. A building contractor from the Baptist Church provided used zinc roofing sheets that were still in good condition. A man from the Pentecostal Church brought four steel window frames and a front door. Someone from the NG Kerk supplied used floor planks and kitchen cupboards.

The materials did not arrive all at once at the start of construction. I simply indicated when I was ready for each delivery.



I began building during the beginning of November, three months after I had moved to the township, and by the end of January I moved into my own shack, which was in fact, God's shack. I made a sign with the name *Zion* on it and hung it on the outside wall. On the front door, I hung a cloth cut from an old T-shirt with the words: *"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord."*

During this building period, several events occurred that are worth mentioning.

On Wednesday evenings, I attended a Bible study group in Gonubie, close to the township. It was intended to be an interracial group, and I brought along two brothers from the township. One of them was Mawethu Msebi, who was becoming a real friend.

At the end of one Bible study evening, people were invited to request prayer. I asked for prayer for protection, thinking about what had happened the previous evening.

The previous evening, I had been visiting people in Gonubie. On my way back to the township, I was unable to enter a street because several large dogs were blocking my path, barking aggressively. Their noise brought a man out of his house. When he saw me on my bicycle, he shouted that I should not worry and that he would chase the dogs away. Moments later, he returned with a *sjambok* whip and cracked it loudly, sending the dogs running and clearing the way for me to continue home.

With that incident in mind, I requested prayer for protection. Three days later, around ten o'clock in the evening, while I was still reading, I heard a commotion on the steps outside the door and a man shouting. Mama Ganeko was already in bed. As I got up to see what was happening, the door swung open. In the darkness, a man stood on the steps, hacking around with a machete. He struck the floor repeatedly while attempting to climb the steps to get inside.

The distance between me and the door was only about two metres. Since the door opened inward, I was able to push it closed, keeping the man outside. I called out, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," while leaning my full weight against the door with both hands. The man struck the door a few more times, then left and smashed the windows of the neighbouring shacks.

That night, I did not sleep well.

The next day, Mama Ganeko told me what the man had been shouting. He had accused me of taking their wives away from them.

In the nights that followed, I sat upright in bed at the slightest sound. The township could be a rough place, with alcohol abuse often leading to fights and crime.

Sometime later, Mama Ganeko went away to visit her family for a number of days. While she was gone, I continued building. At the end of a day's hard work, I walked back to our shack to wash myself and to prepare supper. I was hot and dirty from working in the sun. Before I even began washing, fifteen visitors arrived. They were from a church in the Transkei and had come to visit Mama Ganeko. Since she was not there, I became the host, dirty as I was.

I made coffee and tea and brought out some bread, which became supper for the evening.

Several women sat down on the edge of my bed, the bed I had built from pallet wood. Soon they were sliding closer to each other toward the centre of the bed's side, as a length of plank broke under their combined weight.

After supper, a prayer meeting followed and lasted quite some time. By the time it ended, it was midnight. The women decided to sleep in the shack, my shack; I was banned from my own place. The men, including me, were rescued by the family whose toilet we used. Dirty and unwashed, I wrapped myself in a blanket and tried to sleep on a double bed with two other men, all of us rolled up like parcels.

The next morning, everyone took turns washing. I declined, I was clean enough. We held a time of prayer, after which the woman whose home we had slept in served cornmeal porridge. Goodbyes were said, and the visitors left. I returned home, cleaned the shack, added a fifth leg to the bed, washed myself, and was relieved that this adventure had come to an end.

Halfway through the building process, I was invited to dinner by a kind couple in East London. The husband fetched me by car from the township. Excitedly, he told me that he had also invited a Dutch couple who were

temporarily involved in a development project in the Transkei.

After introductions and coffee, our host led us through the Christmas story, with each person reading a Bible passage. It was still three weeks before Christmas, but in South Africa celebrations often take place throughout December. The Dutch couple were not Christians, but they were willing to participate.

A three-course dinner followed, with plenty of time for conversation. The Dutch couple asked many questions about what I was doing and what my future plans were. They were surprised that I was not working with an organisation. I explained that I had come to the township in obedience to God's call.

The Dutch man reacted strongly. He openly called me stupid and, halfway through the evening, began to ignore me completely. Even when it was time to leave, he acted as though I did not exist. His wife, however, wished me well and advised me to join an organisation, organise projects, and 'get real things done'.

On the way home, not much was said. My host apologised for the man's behaviour. Later, I received a letter from him and his wife in which they apologised profusely and expressed their full support for me.

Being rejected so openly was painful. It forced me to realise that I was for God, and for God alone.

I struggled with these things however. I was not a project manager, not a planner, and not a clergyman in a suit and tie. Sometimes I said to Mama Ganeko, "I'm not a holy roller."

I was simply a man who had given his life to God; just a farm boy, who got his hands dirty, trying to follow God's leading while wrestling with his own human weakness. I was not perfect; I was a sinner living by grace. I did not need to

perform to please people. I only needed to be myself and allow God to fill me with His Holy Spirit.

The words from Proverbs 4:10-12 helped me continue:

“My child, listen and accept what I say. I am guiding you in the way of wisdom, and I am leading you on the right path. Nothing will hold you back; you will not be overwhelmed.” (NCV)

Before I went to the *Anastasis*, I had removed my earring because I felt I needed to perform. Once I realised I could simply be myself, while avoiding sin, I put it back in.

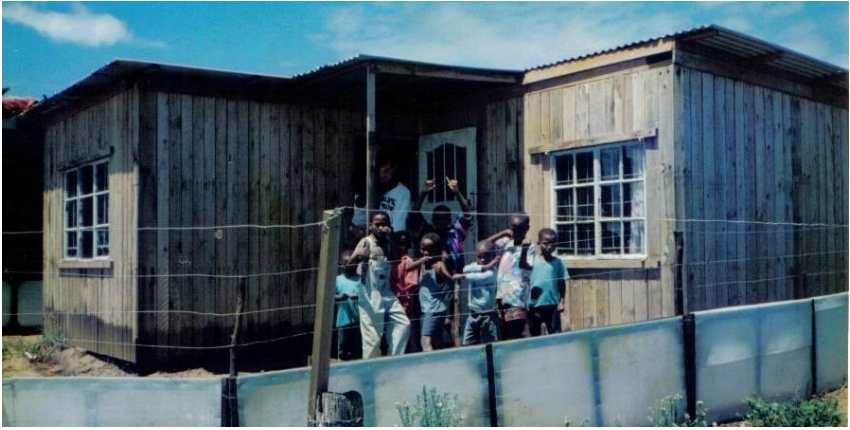
On New Year’s Eve, I attended the Pentecostal Church and learned a new song: *‘What a faithful God I have, faithful in every way’*. After midnight, I cycled home, and could not stop singing. People in the township later told me they thought I was drunk that night.



A New Beginning

At the end of January 1998, I moved into *Zion*. Most of the things I needed for the house were spontaneously given by people from the Gonubie churches.

A couple invited me for supper and wanted to give me some pots and pans. Most of the other kitchen items had already been given to me by others. During the afternoon before that supper, I stood in my beautiful new home and said to God, “I still need some tea towels.” Later that afternoon, I walked to Gonubie for supper at the couple’s house. I did not take my bicycle because I would not be able to cycle home with a box full of items; they planned to drive me home.



'Zion', my home for three years. I painted it white sometime later.

After supper, the woman showed me the cardboard box she had packed for me. Then she walked to a cupboard and said, "And here are some tea towels," adding them to the box. My heart overflowed with praise to God. He is my Father, and I am His son.

For a long time, I had wished for a Bible in the New King James Version but never felt peace about buying one. I used a Revised Standard Version, the one that had been given to me by Rev. Meijer of the church in the Netherlands just before I left for New Zealand. I appreciated that Bible and was content with it, but a New King James Bible would be extra special.

Once again, I was invited to supper by another couple. They had a 25-litre bucket with lid for me to collect water from the tap at the bottom of the dune near the road, as well as a blanket. After a pleasant evening, I returned home with the bucket, with the blanket placed inside it. When I opened the bucket, I found a medium-sized Bible lying on top. I carefully took it out and checked the translation; it was the New King James Version. Once again, my heart filled with praise to my great God and Father. I still use that Bible daily as my main translation.



In the kitchen cooking a meal

Over time, the people of the township came to accept me as one of their own. They saw that my desire was to live among them as a man of God, not to disrupt their families or take advantage of anyone. Trust grew slowly. Parents felt at ease allowing their children to spend time with me, knowing that otherwise many of them would

wander the streets, where trouble was never far away. On weekends especially, when some parents drank too much to properly care for their children, the children found safety, attention, and a sense of peace simply by being in my home.

I had set aside part of my shack as a play area for children, while my private living space was separated by a length of wood mounted on legs. In the mornings, children who did not attend school came to visit, and in the afternoons it became busy with school-going children as well. If I needed to go out, I sent them all home. The children soon discovered that from a certain spot down the road they could see whether my door was open, if it was, they knew I was home and they could come.

Most of the time, I let the children entertain themselves with toys and drawing materials. Many Xhosa children are very artistic and can create beautiful drawings. In the backyard, I had a steel jungle gym, donated by someone who wanted to support what was happening. My place was almost always busy. When I needed time alone, I kept the front door closed so the children would think I was not home.

I had been looking for a gospel tract to give to people in the township, but all I could find were tracts focused on issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, or partial explanations of the gospel written in Christian language.

I could not find a tract that explained the gospel in simple words; explaining that God is God because He created the world and that the world therefore belongs to Him; that people rejected God even though He wanted to be a good Father to them; and that God made a plan to save us from destruction by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so that we could have new life with Him in this world and ultimately in the new world to come.

I wrote my own gospel tract. Mawethu translated it into Xhosa. One of the Gonubie churches had a printer that could produce large volumes, they offered to print a whole box of tracts for me.

Once the tracts were ready, I walked through the township for days, delivering the gospel to every house and every shack. Even today, more than twenty-seven years later, I still keep copies in my car and hand them out whenever the opportunity arises.

One of the Gonubie churches asked to start a Bible group in my home, consisting of a mixture of people from Gonubie and from the township with whom they were in contact.

I was also involved with other Gonubie churches and assisted them in reaching out to township residents. I was

excited about this and felt encouraged that these things were happening.

For months, I was constantly on the move, keeping myself very busy. Then I fell, so to speak, into a black hole – everything felt heavy, and I became extremely tired.

The constant presence of children in the house became too much, and I had to limit their visits. I also found myself unable to go into Gonubie to meet with people or attend church services. I could not interact with Caucasian people at all.

This lasted for two weeks. Then, slowly, I began to re-emerge.

I had also given up being part of the Ministers' Fraternal. I had noticed something that troubled me. Ministers often asked one another how many members they had in their churches. Those with large congregations seemed proud to share their numbers, while those with smaller congregations appeared hesitant. Perhaps this was only my perception.

The fraternal meetings were held at the ministers' homes on a rotating basis. At some point, the meetings changed from coffee gatherings to lunch meetings. The first month, lunch consisted only of sandwiches. The second month, the meal became more elaborate. By the third month, it resembled a full dinner. It felt as though a competition was taking place; though again, this may simply have been my perception.

During these meetings, I also thought that churches were each doing their own thing, keeping themselves very busy while missing the heart of simply being like Jesus in a broken world.

I wrote a letter to the ministers that I would no longer attend the fraternal meetings. I added that they were welcome to visit me if they wished to discuss my reasons.

The two NG Kerk ministers came to visit and understood exactly what I meant. Two pastors from the Pentecostal Church also visited. I explained my struggles with what I had experienced in the churches. The younger pastor remained very quiet. The older one said, “Of course I will defend this, because the church is my livelihood; they pay me a salary.” I was completely taken aback by such a statement coming from a pastor and thought to myself, *If this is how you think, then you have nothing more to say to me.*

I did not meet with the pastor for the next twenty years.

Then, after those twenty years, one of his church members left a parcel with him for me to collect. When he was told that someone named *Wiebe* would collect it, he said to himself that there could only be one *Wiebe* in Gonubie. He had not realised that I was still around and looked forward to meeting me. When I arrived at his house, one of the first things he said was, “I have come to understand what you were talking about the last time we met, all those years ago.”

After I stopped attending the fraternal I attended the NG Kerk on Sunday mornings and in the evenings I went to the Baptist Church. I had learned that every church is more or less the same; they simply express and practise their faith in different ways.

Through my church visits, I had come to know many people and appreciated them much. We all walk our own journeys with God, each in our own place.

At the end of 1998, I had another dream.

In the dream, I was enjoying myself within my family. I felt relaxed, protected from sin, and active. Then someone from a neighbouring family asked for my help.

My father owned beautiful cornfields. Fields with young plants, fields with half-grown plants, and fields with fully

grown crops. Something, however, was wrong with the neighbour's fields.

I then saw many people working frantically, like slaves. They were using heavy machinery to dig up my father's young plants and transplant them into the neighbour's fields. They wanted my help, but I did not want to give up my freedom. In my heart, I said that I was not a soccer ball to be kicked around, pushed in one direction and then another.

As I prayed through this dream, the meaning became clear. The neighbouring family represented the churches. What they could not grow themselves, they took from God's kingdom. They were working frantically, like slaves, trying to build their own little kingdoms and imitate the Father's kingdom. God allowed them to do this, but why not simply come and join the Father's kingdom?

I am not a soccer ball. I cannot allow myself to be used by others to do whatever they want.



At times, many negative thoughts passed through my mind: *What am I doing all this for? Why live in a township? Why bother painting the window frames? Why am I doing what I'm doing?*

Then I read a devotion by Max Lucado: *"If God has been with you this far, He's not going to leave you when you're in troubled times. If your faith has brought you this far, don't throw your faith away when the going gets tough."*

And God seemed to say, "If you were not here, who would pray for the little criminal? Who would bring joy to these boys who love to be around you? Who would pick up these small children whose mothers are drinking? Who would pray for all these people?"

And I answered, "Yes, Lord. Thank You that I can be in the place of Your choice and not the place of my own choice."

“For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”
(Psalm 84:11, NKJV)



1999

Every three months, I wrote a letter to my family, uncles, aunts, and friends, as well as to friends in Canada, New Zealand, and Austria. My mother made copies of these letters and posted them to the people in the Netherlands. I sent the international letters directly from South Africa. Many people wrote back to me, and I soon had a whole shoebox full of letters. At first, I had a post office box in the township, but later changed to one in Gonubie, which was more reliable.

After eighteen months in South Africa, I felt it was time to visit my family. What better time could there be than my father's birthday in February? Little did anyone know that this would be his last birthday.

We had a good time together, and everyone could see that I was doing well and was healthy. I shared stories of God's faithfulness, His provision, and what occupied my days. My family had grown quiet and seemed to have made peace with what I was doing.

I also wanted to visit my grandmother; the one who had said that the name of God was a curse in my mouth. I asked my father to come with me because I was afraid she might become angry again and possibly even have a heart attack. My father said I did not need to worry and that I could go alone.

My grandmother was glad to see me and was very peaceful. Some family members even deposited money into my Dutch bank account. I saw that relationships between my family and me were beginning to be restored.



February 1999, the last family photo including Dad



Back in the township, I returned to my daily life, hosting small groups of children, sharing my meals with them, taking them to the beach, or simply letting them entertain themselves in my house.

One boy often knocked on my door in the evenings. He had no father and his mother drank frequently. When he came knocking, he wanted to sleep at my place, just to have a peaceful night without drunk people around him. He slept on a carpet on the floor, rolled up in a blanket.

I continued visiting people in the township and in Gonubie, sharing God's goodness with them, and they shared their lives with me. I was often invited for supper by various people, regardless of denomination.

I met a man who had previously been a missionary in the Transkei. He had stopped his work there and was busy building a house for himself and his family. I had time available and offered to help him two days a week, free of charge. God gives freely, and so would I. I helped wherever I could, particularly with building the concrete stairways, a built-in wardrobe, the roofs above two bay windows, and assisting with the main roof. It was a two-storey house, and sitting on top of the roof structure, without medical insurance, required a great deal of trust in God.

One morning, I arrived full of energy for another day's work, but as soon as I got there, a wave of darkness came over me and I suddenly felt utterly exhausted.

Once again, I realised that I had overcommitted myself to things that should not have taken so much of my time. I stopped helping immediately, though I was grateful for the building skills I had learned. Many times, when I did not know how to do something, it was as though I suddenly saw how it should be done – and it always worked out.

I also realised that by keeping myself busy outside the township, I was walking away from what I was truly meant to do: to live among the people of the township, to be with them, and to do whatever work I found before me.

I improved my house by installing electricity. I ran a lawnmower cable from my house to a shack down the dune that had an official electrical switchboard. I mounted the cable along other shacks on the way and installed lights, switches, and plugs throughout my house. It worked perfectly, except that I could not use the electrical kettle

between five and eight in the evening, when many people were cooking and the safety switch would trip. At one point, I also received a microwave oven whose turntable did not work. I baked cakes in it by turning the cake pan by hand every now and then.

One day, it rained heavily, so heavily that an entire area on the edge of the township washed away. The damaged area was exactly where the road made a ninety-degree bend and where a footpath used to lead up between the shacks. I often used that path when walking to and from certain parts of the township, but it was now gone. The washed-away section was large, dropping straight down about three metres from the roadside.

That night, I needed to make a phone call at a telephone booth in the township. It was pitch dark, no streetlights, no moon, and no clouds. Because of the washed-away area, I took a different path down to the road. After making my call, I walked home slowly, deep in thought, and forgot about the dangerous washed-away area. Instinctively, I turned toward my usual footpath. Just as one foot hovered over the deep hole, I was stopped in my tracks by a hand against my chest, preventing me from moving forward. I suddenly remembered the washed-away area and pulled my foot back. I turned around and went home by the other route.

I realised that God had protected me by sending one of His messengers.

My next-door neighbour was a woman who drank too much. Her shack was less than two metres from mine, and thin wooden walls do little to block sound. Usually, she was considerate and kept the noise down, but one night the noise continued well past midnight. I could not sleep. I prayed that it would stop, but it did not.

I felt tempted to open my window and ask them to be quiet, but an inner voice told me not to. Eventually, I ignored that voice. I got out of bed, opened the window, and shouted, “Shut up! It’s past twelve!” Immediately, the noise stopped. With a mixture of satisfaction and guilt, I went back to bed and finally fell asleep.

Early the next morning, before I even got out of bed, the window I had shouted through was smashed. Later, I was told that three unknown youths had walked through the area and probably broke the window out of boredom. Some might think it was my neighbour or her friends, but I truly do not believe that. I think it was allowed to happen because I had not obeyed that inner voice.

Did you know that God had a mobile phone?

People in Gonubie often asked how they could get hold of me. I told them they would have to come to my house and hope I was home. “No,” they said, “you need a mobile phone.” At that time, mobile phones were becoming the latest must-have items.

I went to shops to look for one, but new phones were far too expensive. I then tried second-hand shops, but even those were beyond my means.

While cycling home, I said to God that if He wanted me to have a mobile phone, He would have to make my path cross one. Then I left it at that and forgot about mobile phones altogether. No one knew I had been looking.

A few days later, I was invited for supper by a couple in Gonubie. The man also asked how people could reach me. I explained I have been thinking about a mobile phone. He talked for a while about mobile phones, then excused himself. After a minute, he returned with a box, placed it in my hands, and said, “Here is your mobile phone.”

As I cycled home that evening, I exclaimed, “Wow, Lord – now I am cycling home with Your mobile phone!” That

night, I could hardly sleep. I was overwhelmed with joy and knew once again: God is good; not because I am good, but simply because He is good.

There was a young woman I enjoyed visiting. She lived in Gonubie with her parents, and we had many pleasant conversations. One Sunday afternoon, we planned a two-hour walk on the beach, and I intended to ask her whether she wanted to take our friendship further. Throughout the entire walk, I just could not find the right moment. Then just before leaving the beach, I gathered all my courage and asked. Her answer was, “no”; eish! that hurt.

In July, I started my first soccer team; an under-15 team. The boys had been asking for this for a long time. The coach, Alan, was a young Caucasian man who lived with his parents on a farm on the outskirts of the township. I knew nothing about soccer and had to learn as we went.

Some time earlier, someone had given me a soccer kit containing T-shirts and shorts, but we had no soccer boots (*soccer shoes*) and socks. Our first friendly match was scheduled to happen in a week's time.

People had often encouraged me to do fundraising to run big programmes, but I refused. I wanted to trust God alone and not even talk to people about my needs. This time, however, the need was not for me but for the boys. I wondered whether I should ask local shopkeepers for help. Each boy needed R133 for boots and socks.

The first shopkeeper I approached knew me well from church and shopping there. He immediately gave me R133. Encouraged, I went to the next shop, and the next, and the next. All the others refused. I became discouraged, but at the same time, my conviction not to fundraise and to trust God alone was strongly reaffirmed. I returned to the first

shopkeeper, gave the money back, and explained my reasoning.

Back at home, I felt so discouraged that I considered giving up the soccer project entirely. Then my eyes fell on a photograph on the wall showing a group of young boys, one cutting another's hair. That photo stirred me not to give up. I still had enough money in my Dutch bank account. The next day,



The hair cutting photograph

I went to East London and bought fifteen pairs of soccer boots and fifteen pairs of socks. I have never told anyone how they were paid for, until now, here in this book.

The following month, I started another team, an under-13 team. Soon after that, I met the man who had donated the jungle gym and he asked whether there was anything else he could give for the children. "Oh yes," I replied, "fifteen pairs of soccer boots and socks, for the under-13 team." And just like that, he provided the boots and socks for the second team.

Isn't God good?

He is not good because I am good; I am far from good. I know my weaknesses and shortcomings, and that is okay, because God's grace is greater. My weaknesses help me accept the weaknesses of others. God is so good.

A young man from the township, with whom I got along well, ended up in prison for a short time. He did not tell me

why and I did not ask. I visited him in prison. Afterward, when back at home, I prayed and saw in my mind the following picture:

I am in prison. Satan and his demons are in control.

I am sentenced for life;

I cannot pay the price for my release.

Then Jesus comes.

He pays the price for me.

The prison doors open.

Jesus takes me by the hand and leads me into His world of freedom.

In the last quarter of the year, I took both soccer teams on separate weekend camps. The under-13 boys were each allowed to bring a friend.

Both weekends were incredible. Everything was provided, the campsite, food, cooks, programme leaders, and helpers. We shared the gospel and the love of God. One boy asked me whether I had a gun. I replied, "It is better that someone shoots me to God than that I shoot someone to hell." The boy responded, "You don't need a gun; you have Jesus."

After the second camp, I went straight to a friend's holiday home in Morgan Bay, a small coastal town about 70 km from the township. The last 40 km was on a gravel road. I was driving a borrowed car belonging to the same friend who owned the holiday home. Near Morgan Bay, there is a turn-off to the town. I was very tired while driving along that long gravel road, and then, all of a sudden, I realised I was already in Morgan Bay. I could not remember making the turn-off. I wondered whether God had performed another miracle by bringing me safely to my destination.

After the camp weekends, I invited the older boys to come for Bible study one evening each week. Eight of them

attended regularly. Jesus tells us to preach the gospel and baptise people (Matthew 28). I shared the gospel with these youngsters and also explained baptism to them. Five of the boys expressed a desire to be baptised.

On December 21, 1999, they were baptised in the Gonubie River, with the two Reverends from the NG Kerk present.

Not long afterward, four of them became involved in criminal activities. Perhaps they had hoped that baptism itself would bring about a miraculous change in their lives, but that change did not come.

December is a difficult month in the township. The schools are closed for the summer holidays and businesses are closing. The festive season had arrived. Alcohol flows freely during that time; children as young as ten drink alcohol.

I was told that some of the soccer children were also drinking. Hearing this was like a knife in my heart.

One night, I saw a fourteen-year-old boy, one of the soccer players, and his father, each holding a knife and ready to attack each other. I managed to get them apart and let the boy sleep at my house that night.

I needed a break and went to visit Canada. A group of children waved me off at the airport.

My sister, Erica, who had worked in the USA, wanted to visit people there. She brought a friend with her, and we met in the USA, to visit her contacts first before travelling on together to see our cousin in Ottawa.



2000

After travelling from Ottawa to Toronto, Erica and her friend returned to the Netherlands. While in Toronto, I attended a four-day conference at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship. The final meeting focused on forgiveness. At the end of the meeting, I prayed and, during that prayer, forgave my father and mother for everything that came to mind that had hurt me.

I had rented a car and after the conference drove to Fenwick where I stayed with Jan and his family and helped him in the greenhouses, just as I had done a few years earlier. I arrived midweek, and it felt good and natural to meet again and to work alongside Jan.



The reunion with the vanZanten family

The following Monday night, as I lay in bed in the basement, just about to fall asleep, I suddenly sat straight up and exclaimed, “Dad, I love you!” Puzzled by what had happened, and not wanting to leave my mother out, I added, “Mom, I love you too!” Still puzzled, I lay back down and went to sleep.

The next day, Erica phoned me at Jan's house to tell me that Dad had suffered a heart attack and was in hospital. She did not know whether I should come home yet and said she would phone again the following day.

The next day, while I was working in the greenhouses, I felt restless as I waited for news. Jan offered me his telephone to call my family. I was surprised when Erica answered; she should not have been there, as she lived elsewhere and worked as a teacher. She told me I needed to come home; Dad was unconscious and very unwell. That same evening, I boarded an airplane to the Netherlands.

One of my brothers met me at the train station in Assen and took me to the hospital. There I met my mother. We embraced and cried together. I told her about what had happened two nights earlier and that I had forgiven them for everything that had hurt me.

Dad was lying in bed surrounded by life-support equipment. That evening, when the hospital was quiet, I sat beside his bed and read softly, but audibly, from the Bible, the book Dad had read from after every meal. I read Psalms, chapter after chapter, and then the final chapters of Revelation. Afterward, I went back to the farm.

A few days later, the doctors asked whether they could remove the life support, as Dad's brain showed hardly any activity. Before they did so, Mom and all my brothers and sisters stood around the bed and we sang a beautiful hymn, *Wat de toekomst brengen moge, mij geleidt des Heren hand* (Whatever the future may bring, the Lord's hand will guide me).

In the early hours of February 1, 2000, Dad passed away. In the days that followed, many people came to visit us at the farm.

On the morning of the funeral, I walked through the empty stables and said, "This is a horrible day". But the Spirit

replied, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”.

My five brothers and I carried the casket into the church. There was a new Reverend, as Rev. Meijer had moved on. I had come to know the new Reverend during the previous days. He had been with us often, both in the hospital and on the farm.

At the end of the service, my brothers and I carried the casket out of the church while the congregation sang the hymn we had sang around Dad’s bed.

After the burial, coffee was served, and I saw grown men with tears in their eyes.

My mother later told me that before Dad had the heart attack, he had been completely at peace with me and with what I was doing.

The day after the funeral was my birthday. Nienke, the youngest sister, only eleven years old, had organised a birthday cake.

The following week, I flew back to South Africa. At the airport in the Netherlands, my tickets were changed so that I did not have to return via Canada, and no additional charges were charged.

Tired and exhausted, I arrived home in the township. Two of the soccer players had looked after my house during the six weeks I was away and they had done a wonderful job.



I continued working with the two soccer teams. Alan, the coach, was still available. He owned a small pickup truck and collected me and the team four afternoons a week to go to the Gonubie Beach for soccer practice. A shop donated two loaves of bread twice a week for one team, and for the other

team I bought the bread. I also provided cool drinks for both teams.

Alan's parents had left their farmhouse, as the municipality had bought the farm to extend the township. Alan lived in an apartment attached to the main house. The main house stood empty, and Alan and I started a coffee bar there for the under-15 soccer team. It gave the boys a place to spend weekend evenings away from alcohol and the violence that often accompanied it.

Running the coffee bar was not easy. The boys liked to do their own thing and I had to learn how to handle many challenging situations.

In March, I began wondering whether I should ask God for a car. It would be wonderful to transport the children myself, but the cost concerned me, as the money in my Dutch bank account was steadily decreasing.

Nevertheless, I asked God for a car. Only Alan and the man who donated the bread knew about it and they prayed with me. I did not want to make my needs known to everyone; only God needed to know. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

I also had a clear picture of the kind of vehicle I hoped for: a pickup truck with a canopy and a vertical rear door.

Two weeks later, I received a phone call from a man from the NG Kerk. He had a pickup truck he no longer needed and asked whether I might be interested. That same evening, he fetched me and drove me to his house. On the way, he told me that he had seen me cycling home from church the previous day and wondered whether I could make use of his truck.

The vehicle he gave me was a blue Isuzu pickup with a canopy and a vertical rear door.



I built wooden benches in the loading area. On the right door, I had the words *God's Car* attached, and on the left door the same text in Xhosa: *Imoto ka Thixo*. Since then, every vehicle I use for the work in the township carries those same words on its doors.

But now I felt guilty owning two means of transport, both a bicycle and a car, therefore I lent my bicycle to one of the boys. A few weeks later, the other boys asked whether I knew what had happened to it. "No," I replied. "He sold it," they said. And that was the end of my cycling days.

Themba was the boy I had written about earlier, the one I once found facing his father, both holding knives. He and a friend had also looked after my house while I was in Canada. Themba was fifteen years old and lived below my house, near the road, in a shack behind his parents' home.

His parents drank heavily. When Themba was seven, he decided on his own to attend school; his parents did not care. Most days, he only had a meal in the evenings. His father beat him frequently.

At one point, his mother left for a long time, and his father stopped drinking. He bought a television and sometimes came home with a bottle of Coca-Cola. Life improved for Themba, and things looked hopeful.

Then his mother returned and with her came the alcohol and the beatings. When Themba was thirteen, he built his own shack to escape the situation, but his parents continued to cause trouble. Eventually, he wanted to get away completely. I offered him a place to live with me.

He stayed with me for the rest of that year and into the next. We had many difficulties, but I learned a great deal about caring for abused children.

One evening, he had been drinking and caused trouble with his father in front of my house. I managed to get him inside, but he continued causing trouble. Shortly afterward, he left

the house and got into another fight with his father. Unknown to me, he had a knife and ended up being stabbed three times in the back with his own knife. With two of his friends, I took him to the hospital; one of them cried part of the way.

Themba's behaviour continued to fluctuate. At one point, I involved an African pastor to help me.

After he had lived with me for three months, I extended the house so he could have his own room. At times, he was terrified at night because he saw things and beings that were not physically present.

Toward the end of the year, after months of struggle, I placed God's choice before him; the choice of life or death, blessing or curse, as described in Deuteronomy 30:19. Only then did he realise that I wanted him to follow Jesus, which surprised me. He tried to pray but could not. I prayed for him instead and afterward all he could say was, "God, I don't want to die. I want to live."

Two of the soccer boys were arrested for housebreaking and appeared before a magistrate. I sat on the public benches in the courtroom. Their parents were not present and the magistrate reprimanded the boys sharply. I stood up and asked whether I might speak. The magistrate asked who I was, and after I explained, he invited me forward and asked whether I would represent the boys, as they were minors. I agreed. He reprimanded the boys again and told them to listen to me in the future. I thanked the magistrate, shook his hand, and took the boys home.

Sadly, they did not listen for long. In the years that followed, both spent repeated periods in prison.

Alan eventually walked away and took the under-13 soccer team with him. As a result, the coffee bar also closed.

By then, I had learned enough about soccer to continue on my own. I worked with the older boys, aged fifteen to sixteen, and started a new under-13 team. Soccer was never the goal; it was simply a means to reach the children. Two camp weekends were organised again, with each under-13 boy allowed to bring a friend.

Once again, I saw God's provision in everything.

One boy's mother passed away while I had been away for two weeks. Her last words to me had been, "*You are like an angel to us here.*" Another mother once said, "*As long as you are here, we still have hope.*" I could only thank God for these words, though I often wondered what I was doing in a place like the township.

During those years living in the township, God taught me many things I don't think I would have learned anywhere else. I learned so much through daily life, through people, through my own failures, and through the work of the Holy Spirit – far more, I believe, than I could ever have learned at a Bible college. Some of the lessons He taught me were these:

- I cannot trust myself – so how can I trust others?
The answer: trust God to keep me; trust God to keep others.
- It hurts to see people do wrong. How much more must my Father in heaven hurt when He sees His children do wrong?
- It is exhausting, the fight in myself, to trust God to keep the children. What should I do? Come to know my Father more, so that I can trust Him more fully, to keep the children in the palm of His hand.
- The more I love, the more pain I experience.

- The Father's compassionate heart hurts deeply over children's pain.



Simone came to mind very strongly. Every time I visited the Netherlands, I visited her as well. During one of those visits, Simone took me to the cinema to watch the movie *Shakespeare in Love*. I was surprised that she wanted to go to the cinema as I had been taught that cinemas were not good places to go.

The cinema experience was not bad at all and later I wondered whether Simone might have been trying to tell me something by taking me to see *Shakespeare in Love*.

My youngest brother Alfred, always sensed that something was going on whenever Simone was mentioned in the house. I sent her a letter inviting her to come and visit me if she thought there might be something more between the two of us.



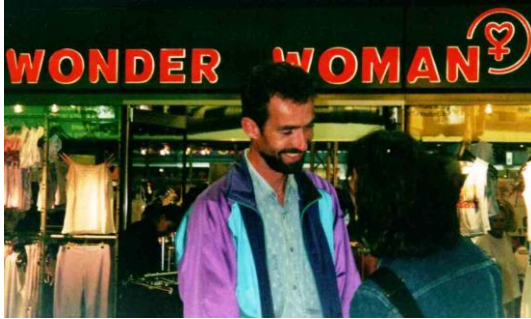
The Visit

My Dutch savings were nearly exhausted. Many expenses were coming up. I had enrolled Themba in a private school in Gonubie so that he would be less influenced by life in the township, and I had bought him a bicycle to get to school. The car also needed repairs, and Simone was coming to visit. I asked myself, "How am I going to pay for all of this?" There were so many more responsibilities than I had been used to over the past few years. "Am I where God wants me to be? Am I doing what God wants me to do? Or is God testing me to see whether I truly have faith in Him?" I asked

myself these questions repeatedly. And yet, every time, I was still able to pay for everything, day by day.

The car repairs became major repairs. Someone I knew well lent me his Volkswagen Golf, which he later gave to me to keep.

Simone arrived on January 26, 2001. We were happy to see each other again and cautiously explored each other's thoughts and feelings



because this visit was not just a visit. It was truly a time to see whether there was love between us and whether we were meant for each other, with God's blessing.

One of the first things Simone said, before we had even been to my house in the township, was that we did not necessarily need to do youth work in South Africa. We could also do youth work in the Netherlands where she was already involved with troubled youth in her city. I felt that this discussion came too soon.

Once we arrived in the township, however, Simone no longer needed the discussion. She immediately knew that her heart went out to the children she saw playing in the streets and to the young people she saw there.

Simone stayed with one of my friends in Gonubie. It would not have been appropriate for her to stay in the township, where there was no bathroom and shower. We spent a good time together and truly got to know each other well. I turned thirty while Simone was there, and she was thirty-four. The

four-year age difference had always been a small concern for me, but as I grew older, it seemed to matter less.

Before Simone returned to the Netherlands, we decided to get married as soon as possible. At the airport in East London, I introduced my future wife to my mother and Erica, who had come to visit and had arrived on the plane Simone was departing on.

It was wonderful to have my mother and Erica visiting so that I could show them everything I had been talking about. They also stayed with friends in Gonubie, and of course I brought them to my house in the township. My mother was not entirely sure whether her son should be living in a place like that. But one evening, as we drove away from my house, the voice of Phumlani, a young child, called my name out of the darkness as we passed by. In that moment, my mother knew: her son truly needed to be there.



Alan, the former coach, had left the farmhouse on the outskirts of the township at the end of 1999. As mentioned before, the house had belonged to his parents and had been bought by the municipality some time earlier. A neighbouring house had also been bought and was demolished by people from the township as soon as the former owners moved out. The materials were used to build shacks, and before long, only bare walls remained.

Because Alan had left, there was a real risk that the same would happen to this farmhouse.

I wrote a letter to the municipality offering to stay there to prevent it from being demolished. The municipality offered me a lease for only R90 per month.

I signed the lease during Simone's visit, and she was present at the signing. Before she returned to the Netherlands, I was

even able to show her the house. We decided then to name it *Beautiful Promises*.

I had lived in the township for three and a half years. It was okay for me to move out at this time. The people of the township agreed and at the same time were glad that the farmhouse would not be demolished. The nearest shacks were about twenty metres behind the house. In front, along the forty-metre driveway, were no shacks and I made sure that nothing was built there during the time I lived there.

The house was in good condition, except that there was no running water. Water used to be pumped by a windmill from a borehole into an elevated storage tank and then distributed throughout the house. The windmill needed repairs to function again. After some effort, I managed to get it working, but it leaned slightly, causing leaks so that only small amounts of water reached the storage tank. I tried everything to stop the leakage, but without success.

Eventually, I installed an electric borehole pump. Although we were close to the sea, where borehole water is often brackish, this borehole provided clear, fresh water.

Once the water problem was solved, I moved into the farmhouse and Themba moved there as well. I rented out Zion, my house in the township, to one of the residents and his family for R1 per month. The rent was never paid; it merely indicated that the house was still mine.

Now, twenty-five years later, the house is still standing, and the same family is still living there. It looks old though. Over the years it has been saved twice from shack fires. In 2010, a fire came from one side, burning shack after shack. By the time the fire-fighters arrived, the flames were about to reach Zion. A few years later, another fire came from the other side, again destroying shack after shack, and once more the fire-fighters arrived just in time to save Zion. The people in

the area believe that Zion truly must be God's house; the house that will not burn.

Simone and I were married in the Netherlands on July 2, 2001. I had no money to fly there and had to humbly accept Simone's insistence on paying for my ticket. Parts of the celebration were held on the farm where my mother still lived with some of my



younger siblings. Neighbours spontaneously offered to help in the kitchen, I appreciated their kindness so very much.

During a church service, our marriage was blessed by a Reverend who had meant a great deal to Simone during one of the darkest periods of her life. Many people from the Reformed Church of Hooghalen attended. The Reverend who had supported us during my father's passing was also present, as was Rev. Meijer, with whom I had shared many conversations after returning from New Zealand. I was later told that on that day, Rev. Meijer had admitted to the other Reverends that he and the Reformed Church of Hooghalen had made mistakes in the way they had handled my situation years earlier.

After the service, we went to a venue for a reception with coffee, cakes, drinks, and food. Some people performed skits and other contributions. It was a wonderful day of celebration, yet also a day of farewell, as Simone and I were leaving for South Africa the very next day.

Before the wedding, I had helped Simone pack up her house. It was difficult to watch her do away with so many of her belongings. Some items were stored with my family. She wanted to take her most precious possessions with her to South Africa. At the airport, her hand luggage turned out to be too heavy. Fortunately, she now had a clever husband who came up with a plan to take everything along anyway.

Upon arriving in East London, we left immediately for our disastrous honeymoon in Hogsback, a small town in the forested mountains. I had booked a small apartment at a hotel complex. Friends in Gonubie had assured me that it was the perfect honeymoon destination.

But Simone was a city girl, not a forest girl.

To make matters worse, when Simone opened her large backpack, it was full of tiny pieces of broken Christmas baubles. She had brought them as reminders of the Netherlands, but during the flight they had shattered into countless fragments.

Simone enjoyed being around people, but there were very few in Hogsback. We went on hikes in the forest, but the trees did not speak to us. "Let's go to a town," Simone said. I checked the map; the nearest town was Alice. Off we went, hoping to find people and life. But Alice was run-down, with dirty streets, grimy sidewalks, and foul-smelling shops. Simone became very discouraged and wondered whether this was the South Africa in which she was meant to live.

I have great respect for Simone for stepping out of a life of comfort and into a life of total dependence on God.

Over time, however, the 'broken flower' found healing and a full life in the presence of her family and her God.



Beautiful Promises



Themba and an older cousin of his had looked after the farmhouse, then called *Beautiful Promises*, while I was away for my wedding. They kept everything clean and in good condition.



The back yard with Mzamom'He on the background

Simone and I began our new life together there, and she was very relieved that her living environment was not like Alice. She was also very glad that there was a shower in the house, something she had been worried about.

Themba stayed with us for only a few days. Then he decided to leave school, return to the lifestyle of his people, and move back to the township, much to the disbelief of everyone who knew him. Soon after that, he moved out of

the township altogether, and I never saw him again. God will continue the work He has begun.

Simone and I were doing well, although we both had to adjust to a completely new life.

The only money we had came from our wedding gifts, for everyone knew not to give us material items but financial gifts instead. We lived very simply and, for a long time, survived on bread donated by a local shop that could no longer sell it because it was past its sell-by date. Toasted old bread was good enough for us.

We bought a few buckets of paint and painted the entire interior of the house, slowly turning it into our home. The apartment next to the main house we converted into a Youth Centre.

Youth groups were started for various age groups. We took the boys out for soccer, and Simone started a girls' group. From time to time, we took groups of children to the zoo, museums, or on other cultural outings.

Everything we did was centred on sharing God's goodness with the children and their parents.

The Isuzu pickup, which had been repaired, soon became too small for all the children who wanted to take part in our programmes. Simone and I began thinking about a minibus. A church in the Netherlands heard about this and decided to send out what they called a "begging letter" to people who might know us. I was not happy about this, but it had already been done before I fully realised what was happening. I had chosen to trust God alone and not make my needs or wishes known to others.

The money came and I was thankful. We bought a minibus, but I would not want such a letter sent on our behalf again.

The house had no boundary wall or fence, and from time to time we had to deal with break-ins. One of the bedrooms had a window with a broken glass pane. A piece was missing at the bottom, which I had taped close with plastic. The burglar bars in front of that window were also missing.

One night, just after we had gone to bed, I thought I heard the tape being pulled off the glass. I listened intently, and soon heard the squeak of the window handle being turned. I jumped out of bed, grabbed a stick I kept for self-defence, ran to the bedroom, and switched on the light.

The closed curtain was moving gently in the breeze coming through the open window. With my self-defence stick I pushed the curtain aside to see if anyone was there. No one was, but the window was wide open. The person busy breaking in could have easily stepped inside.

I closed the window and taped the plastic back in place. Because the outside also needed to be taped, Simone and I went outside together. While I taped the broken pane, Simone stood behind me, holding the stick, ready to strike if anyone emerged from the darkness. No one came, and we went back inside to return to bed. The next day, I reinstalled the burglar bars and replaced the broken glass.

On another occasion, some children entered the house while we were away and took a few kitchen items. People in the township knew who they were, and those children were severely punished by the township leaders, something I strongly disliked. In my view, a stern warning would have been enough.

On yet another occasion, Simone and I were given tickets to watch the Dutch cricket team play in East London. When we returned home, a large window had been broken, and Simone's wallet and jewellery were gone. After that, we decided to install an alarm system with armed response.

We called the armed response twice. Once, a drunken man was sleeping outside our back door. Earlier, he had tried to get inside but could not open the door.

Another time, in the middle of the night, the alarm went off in the Youth Centre. I did not want to investigate on my own and waited for the armed response to arrive. When the guard came, I told him where the alarm had been triggered. The door to the Youth Centre was closed, but there were other ways to break in.

Before entering, the guard attempted to load his firearm, but it jammed. It took him several minutes to get it working. He then opened the door, ready to shoot. There was no sound. I switched on the light – still nothing. When I checked the alarm sensor, I saw a large group of ants crawling all over it. They had triggered the alarm.

One Christmas morning, we woke up to find a dead cow in our driveway. All kinds of animals wandered through the township and this cow had somehow ended up dying there. I could not find the owner and contacted a lion park who came to collect it.

They also ran a restaurant and gave us a voucher for a meal. I imagined eating the dead cow and decided to give the voucher away.



On March 21, 2003, a beautiful baby girl was born to us. We named her Lisa.

Lisa was born in a private hospital, even though we had no medical insurance. Our original plan had been to deliver at a state hospital, which charges very little or nothing, depending on one's financial situation. We had already visited the hospital and were prepared. However, our doctor was unwilling to do the delivery there because of limited

resources. He put us in contact with a very young female doctor who was willing to assist at the state hospital; it would be her first delivery.

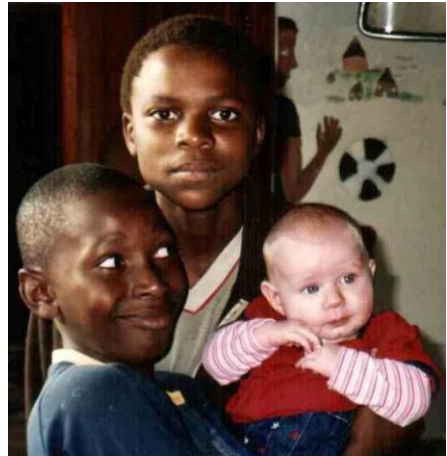
Then, one afternoon an acquaintance of ours, a plastic surgeon, came to visit. He told us that God had spoken to him that morning and instructed him to ensure that the birth took place in a private hospital. He arranged everything for us and even asked a paediatrician to be on standby.

Simone laboured from morning until late afternoon to give birth. A young midwife stayed with her all day until her shift ended. Then an older midwife arrived, nearing retirement. She was a no-nonsense woman and delivered the baby almost immediately.

The paediatrician was not needed, but medication that would not have been available at the state hospital was required.

The following day, I brought Simone and Lisa home.

After the birth, I took a few days off from our programmes, but soon we both were back with the children and Lisa went everywhere with us.



My mother and my oldest sister, Jannet, came to visit to meet the newborn. Together, we travelled to the Dutch Embassy in Cape Town to obtain Lisa's passport.

When Lisa was five months old, we travelled to the Netherlands to introduce her to our families and, as a surprise, to attend the wedding of my brother Tjeerd.

During that time, Simone wished to have Lisa baptised in the Reformed Church where she was still a member. I had

no objections, even though my own understanding of baptism was different. I held Lisa in my arms as the Reverend baptised her.

We expected that one day there would be another child. If it were a boy, we already had a name: Tom. I kept a pair of beautiful little shoes for him in my wardrobe.

But Tom never came. Simone suffered miscarriage after miscarriage.



6. GIVING UP

The Decision

In the second half of 2003, I was physically, spiritually, and emotionally exhausted, and Simone longed for the Netherlands. She wished to return to everything familiar to her. As a result, we began thinking about giving up the work in the township and returning to the Netherlands.

Everyone we spoke to questioned whether this was the right decision; whether it was truly God's plan or merely an emotional response. Even my mother was concerned about us stopping the work.

We were also thinking about Lisa. When it was just the two of us, Simone and me living in the farmhouse, we felt reasonably safe. But now, with a small child, Simone felt far more vulnerable.

We spoke to a friend who was a social worker. She felt that I was close to burnout and advised that I take a proper break before it was too late. Soon after that, Pastor Petrus from Gonubie came to visit and placed us on a two-month leave, until after Christmas. We accepted his 'demand' and stopped all activities with the children.

But work never truly stops when you live so close to the township. Children still came and we continued to attend to them.

On one occasion, four young men were walking on our property. I went outside and invited them for coffee in the Youth Centre. We talked for a while, and during the conversation they said they had not realised that it was

Simone and me living there. They promised not to come back again.

One rainy Saturday morning, a man was on his knees on our front lawn. We considered phoning the police to have him removed, but when he saw me through the window, he came closer and I recognised him. He was one of my first soccer boys, now seventeen years old. He was drunk.

We took him inside and gave him coffee. He told us that he was afraid of witchdoctors who were after him to kill him. Over the past years, his mother had died by suicide. His father, who had been a good man, had died of a heart attack. His father had built a proper brick house in the township while most people still lived in shacks. One of his sisters had also died.

In his drunken state, he made two statements:

1. "I have only one Bible, and that is you."
2. "You make me happy. I don't want that."

I realised the great responsibility Simone and I carried while bringing God's Word to the people.

Many years later, this young man died of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). I was often at his bedside, and in his hopelessness and brokenness, he would confess that he knew God is God and that Jesus was there for him.

I pray that God's grace is greater than his lifetime of struggles.

During this time, we were also at a crossroads regarding our permit to stay in South Africa. My one-year work permit had initially been extended by another year, then by two years, and after that by three years. According to the regulations at the time, no further extensions were possible.

Our only option was to apply for permanent residence, for which I was eligible because I had been on a work permit for more than five years. The other option was to leave South Africa.

In January 2004, we made the final decision to leave South Africa for good. In the months leading up to that decision, my mind had been going back and forth, never fully certain whether we should go or stay.

Now, however, I had made peace with it and knew that God was allowing us to return to the Netherlands.

We had no idea what we would do once we arrived there.

I began cleaning my tools and packing them into boxes. I had accumulated a number of woodworking tools because I enjoyed making our own furniture from pallet wood. I had built a large dining table with chairs, a table for the baby room, a baby cot, a baby playpen, and a large bookshelf.

When we had arrived in South Africa, we had nothing. I had come with only a guitar, a travel bag, and a backpack, and Simone had arrived with just her luggage. Now, we had so much more to take with us. We decided it was best to bring almost everything we owned back to the Netherlands, as we had nothing there.

Our dog, Rocky, had to come along too. I had bought him in 1999 from one of the children. As part of our family, he went everywhere with us.

In March, we held a large farewell party for all the children who had been part of our programmes; about 150 of them. At the end of the party, I told them that even though Simone and I were leaving, God would never leave them. I encouraged them to continue reading the Bible and praying. At the very end, we formed a large circle, held hands, and prayed together.

We then held a farewell gathering in the community hall in the township for everyone who wished to attend. The hall was packed, and there were various performances of song and dance.

I was leaving a place filled with trouble, often self-inflicted trouble. It was a place that would continue to grow and expand, with so many people and so many children, all in need of the God who cares.

The NG Kerk in Gonubie gave us the opportunity to say farewell during a church service, with coffee and refreshments afterwards.

We also said our farewells at the Baptist Church. One of our friends there looked intently at me while greeting me and said, “You will come back.” My heart leapt with joy, though at the time I did not believe we ever would.

The wife of the man who had once given me his bicycle was very distressed about us leaving, but her husband said to her, “Don’t worry; they will come back.” We only heard about this much later.

We closed a chapter. We closed a door. God allowed us to leave South Africa, and only He knew the reasons at that time.

On May 3, 2004, I sat on the airplane with my dear wife and our beautiful one-year-old daughter, filled with unspoken expectations for a bright future in the Netherlands.



Back in the Netherlands – 3

Upon arriving at the airport in the Netherlands, we had to wait a while before my brother arrived to pick us up. Rocky, our dog, had been on the same plane. Once my brother arrived, we collected him and then travelled to Hardenberg, a town about fifty kilometres from Hooghalen. My mother's caravan was on a campground near Hardenberg, and that was where we were going to stay until we found a proper home. My mother and three other family members were there to welcome us. It had only been a year since we had last seen them, but it was a pleasant reunion nonetheless.

Simone and I enjoyed the first few weeks, but we soon realised that we were no longer tourists in the Netherlands; we were residents again. We had to rebuild our lives. We managed to buy a car and a bicycle each.

The caravan was large enough for a holiday, but living there long-term, with little to do, was not easy. Lisa began sleeping restlessly, and I became irritated by the limited space. The doorways were so narrow that I had to turn sideways and bend my head to pass through. Lifting Lisa out of her cot was also difficult because there was a bed above the cot and a wall directly behind me.

We started looking for other accommodation. We found a place about twenty kilometres from Hardenberg; the back part of a barn that had been converted into holiday accommodation, near a town called Balkbrug. After viewing the place, Simone and I asked God whether this was where He wanted us to be. We both felt it was not. Simone then spoke with a person and he advised us to take the place. We listened to him instead of listening to God. This was the second time I had followed human advice instead of God's leading. The first time had been when I bought a car after

returning from New Zealand. There were probably other times as well, but these two stood out clearly to me.

We stayed in this house for six months. It was a very difficult time, especially for Simone. The place was quite secluded, and there was very little happening in Balkbrug.

Lisa, however, was doing very well. She was happy and affectionate; our little light.

Simone had been a member of the Christian Reformed Church and wished to continue in that denomination. I was comfortable with this because I had learned that every Christian church that used the Bible as the Word of God is essentially the same. They may say and do certain things differently, but we are all people walking our own road with God.

We found a Christian Reformed Church in Dedemsvaart.

I searched newspapers and the internet for job opportunities. Twice I applied for advertised positions that would have suited me well, but both times I was unsuccessful, although I was invited for an interview on one occasion.

I also sent open applications to eight different mission organisations. All responses were negative.

We received social assistance from the government, but were never sure whether this was how we were meant to live, without working for our livelihood.

During the six months we lived in the barn accommodation, I worked for only four weeks through an employment agency.

Throughout these months, I often spoke with God about our situation and what He wanted from us. It felt as though God had placed us on standby. The world is so large; surely God could use us somewhere.

One day, I cycled past an empty farmhouse and stopped to take a look. From across the road, an elderly man called out to me. I walked over to him and learned that the empty house belonged to him – he was the only surviving member of his family and lived in another farmhouse just across the road. The grass on his lawn was long and untended; I offered to cut it for him. Reluctantly, he agreed. He was clearly distrustful of people.

He had one cow in a paddock and the stable still had dung from the previous winter. The old man no longer had the strength to clean it, so I did that as well. Two weeks later, I returned to cut the grass again. Slowly, he began to open up to me. The inside of his house was like a museum, filled with antique furniture and objects.

Over time, I visited regularly to mow his lawn, and Simone sometimes baked him pancakes, his favourite food. I also spoke with him about God but he told me that the church had let him down.

Simone desperately wanted to leave the place where we were living. We checked a local weekly newspaper and found an advertisement for a farmhouse to rent. We phoned but the house had already been taken. The following week we collected the newspaper as soon as it was printed. Once again, a farmhouse was advertised. We phoned immediately and were invited to view it.

It turned out to be the same house as the previous week. The earlier applicants had changed their minds. While speaking with the owner, he realised that we were the people someone had mentioned to him as potential tenants.

This time, we clearly saw God's hand leading us to this house. The landlord and his wife lived in a house next to the farmhouse. On the other side of the farmhouse were large pig stables housing thousands of pigs.

The town of Hardenberg was only six kilometres away. We made our home there and continued searching for work.

Lisa loved being around people. Sometimes she sat on her knees next to the landlord in the vegetable garden while the two of them dug for potatoes.

Occasionally, the landlord asked me to help load pigs onto a truck. The pigs were kept in smaller pens, about twenty per enclosure. The landlord marked the pigs I needed to guide into the central passage, from where they were herded into the truck. I wore long rubber boots while doing this work. At one point, I wondered why my one foot was becoming so warm; until I realised that a pig had urinated into my boot.

Simone found temporary work helping elderly people who still lived independently prepare for the night. These were night shifts, once a week.

Lisa had turned two and began attending preschool two mornings a week, where she could interact with other children and learn to be away from her parents for short periods.

After several hopeful applications and interviews, I found work at a high-security prison. I was accepted because the prison was required to employ someone who had been unemployed for a long time. The prisoners were referred to as patients because they suffered from mental disorders and had committed horrific crimes. I worked in a team providing therapy to them.

The position was initially temporary but could become permanent. The first three months was an employment probation period. I enjoyed working with the patients, but after the probation period I was let go. The reason given was that I did not fit in with the team of colleagues. In a sense, that was true; I felt that many of them were more interested

in socialising with one another than in the well-being of the patients. But perhaps that was just my perception.

By this time, we had been in the Netherlands for more than a year and my mind had finally let go of South Africa and the township.

Tjeerd, one of my brothers, made a video using the photos and video footage we had given him from the township. Later, he told us that while editing the video, he often had tears in his eyes and wondered why we had left South Africa and the people of the township.

In October 2005, Simone and I finally found the courage to face the real reasons why we had left the township.

Was it something God had wanted from us? Yes – it was something God had allowed at that time. But when we searched our hearts, we faced the truth. We no longer wanted to continue the work. We wanted to return to the Netherlands and live an easier life. We longed to choose our own activities, have steady employment and income, be close to our families, live an ordinary life like everyone else, while still serving God faithfully within the church.

For the first time, we spoke these thoughts out loud. They had always been there, buried deep in our hearts, but we had covered them with other explanations, trying to justify ourselves.

In the Bible, Jonah ran away from what God had asked him to do and spent three days in the belly of a fish. In the end, he still did what God had called him to do – even though he struggled with it and complained along the way.

I prayed: “Father, we are people full of sin yet forgiven by You. If You can use anything, Lord, You can use us”.

A song came to mind: *“Naked and poor, wretched and blind, I come; clothe me in white again.”*



A Renewed Surrender

Simone and I made a list of ten options or possibilities that might give our lives meaning. They ranged from moving to another town with better employment opportunities, to entering mission work through an organisation or church, continuing life as it was, or returning to South Africa, to the township Mzamom'Hle.

We set the list aside for two weeks. During that time, we did not discuss it with each other; we prayed individually and asked God for direction. Throughout those two weeks, one thought kept returning to me again and again; 'we should return to South Africa, to the township Mzamom'Hle'. I knew that if we chose not to obey and decided not to go back, then praying would lose its meaning for me altogether. Because what was the point of praying if I was unwilling to obey God?

After the two weeks, I asked Simone what she believed God wanted from us and waited intently for her response. She said, "We have to go back to South Africa".

When I told my mother that we were preparing to return to South Africa, she responded, "I thought you would." Our landlord, who had become a friend, said, "You were never really a Dutch person here anyway."

In a newspaper, I once read: "*When someone comes to faith in God, he says, 'I and Christ.' After some time, it becomes, 'Christ and I.' Later, it becomes, 'Christ alone.'*"

For me, it had indeed now become *Christ alone*.

We began making the first preparations for our return. The only permit we could apply for was a Voluntary Services Visa, which required an invitation letter. The Vineyard Church in East London had closed many years earlier, and my previous visa extensions during my first period in South

Africa had been made possible through invitation letters from the Vineyard Church in Port Elizabeth. I contacted the pastor there again, and he was very willing to help us in any way he could.

We also wanted an organisation behind us so that we would not carry the responsibilities on our own. We approached three people from our church in Dedemsvaart, and they agreed to serve as our board of directors. In March 2006, *Jesus the Rock Missions Foundation* was officially registered. I had already used that name for my activities while living in the township.

In the meantime, while preparing our return, Simone found employment at a retirement home for twenty-four hours per week. Two months later, I found employment for twenty hours per week with the municipality's city landscaping department. We planned our schedules carefully so that one of us would always be at home with Lisa.

We realised that once we had decided to return to South Africa, our lives in the Netherlands finally began to fall into place.

During the early stages of this decision, I sometimes felt afraid and wondered what would become of us as a family. Yet I also knew that God was humbling me so that I would not boast about myself, but only about Him – not finding peace in outward circumstances, but in God alone.

Whenever fear rose within me, I found peace again in God. I only needed to be still, to kneel, and to pray. He would do what He wanted to be done.

I had given my life to Him and I could not take it back. I could not leave Him; He would come after me to complete the good work He had begun.

Ten years earlier, I had told Rev. Meijer from Hooghalen that I could cycle away from his house and decide not to

follow God anymore. He had replied, “No, you cannot.” I knew then that he was right.

Many times during that period, I also felt unworthy of doing mission work. But I needed to understand that it was never about my worthiness. No one is worthy. It is about God doing His work in us and through us. All glory and praise belong to Him alone.

I wrote these words by John Burroughs down as a reminder:

*“Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind,
nor tide, nor sea;
I rave no more against time or fate,
For lo! My own shall come to me.”*

And God said (Isaiah 41:10, NKJV):

*“Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

And so I stopped trying to do things my own way and surrendered myself anew to God.

The first time I went to South Africa, I went alone. Later, Simone joined me in the work.

But this time, it would be Simone and me, together with our daughter Lisa, surrendering to God and the work, as a family, and stepping into the calling together.



The Return

During my first period in South Africa, and later when Simone and Lisa joined me, we had no health insurance. This time, however, health insurance was required by law. It was arranged through an organisation that supports Christian missionaries.

Our visa was approved as a three-year Voluntary Services Visa. The South African Consulate was concerned about our financial situation, but Simone managed to assure the lady of the Consulate that there was no need to worry.

We had opened a bank account in the Netherlands in the name of *Jesus the Rock Missions Foundation*, but very little money had been received. The board knew that we did not want to engage in fundraising because we wished to trust God alone. Nevertheless, they became concerned and attempted to start fundraising anyway. We managed to stop them just in time and once again explained that we wanted to trust God only. If it was God's work, He would provide everything we needed.

I asked God why our faith seemingly always needed to be stretched when it came to finances. I believe His answer was that it would keep us close to Him. It was for our own good.

Because this time we were going as a family and not just me alone, I felt it would be wise to go to South Africa by myself, for one week first, to prepare for our arrival and stay. From our salaries, we had saved some money, and I bought a flight ticket. During that week, I stayed in Pastor Petrus' house in Gonubie. He and his family were away.

I was warmly welcomed by the people of the township. They said, 'The father of our children has come back'. I was very thankful for those words. I had been exactly what God had asked me to be nine years earlier, in 1997, and now I was

returning to do so again. God would not stop what He had started.

During that week, I was offered a place at a preschool for Lisa, free of charge. Just before my departure back to the Netherlands, I also found a house for us. It was a backyard cottage on a farm very close to the township. The road from the cottage to the township was exactly as Simone had seen in a dream some time earlier.

The doors were opened for us to return; what amazing grace.

Once, we had run away from our calling, but God's grace was now leading us back.

Soon after I returned to the Netherlands, we booked our flights. Simone resigned from her work, and I continued working in city landscaping until one week before our departure. We packed the belongings we wanted to ship after us. Other items were sold, given away, or stored with one of my brothers. Rocky also had to come with us; he was booked on a different flight but scheduled to arrive on the same day. However, he somehow missed his flight and arrived a day later.

We didn't have much money, but could always pay for everything we needed.

We had farewell gatherings with friends, family, and the Church of Dedemsvaart. It was time to go. Jannet, my eldest sister said that she understood why we were returning to South Africa, but she felt sorry for Lisa. At the time, Lisa was three and a half years old. I understood her concern, as I had thought about Lisa often as well. But earlier, God had given me the words from Isaiah 54:13: "*And great shall be the peace of your children*" (NKJV). I did not need to worry. Lisa was in God's hands, and she would be okay.

October 5, 2006 – the plane was about to land in East London, I looked at Simone, took her hand, and said, “We have done it.”

All glory to God.



7. SOUTH AFRICA – 2 (2006)

A New Start

Upon our arrival, Pastor Petrus gave us a car, a Mercedes that had belonged to his late father-in-law. It was the third vehicle that had been given over the years. However, the car was not suitable for transporting children. In order to do activities with the children, we needed to take groups of them out of the township. If we stayed in the township, too many children would gather around or follow us, creating chaos and making it impossible to maintain a safe and peaceful atmosphere.

The first months were spent finding our place again and searching for a location from which to work. The farmhouse *Beautiful Promises* was no longer available because, before we had left, we had handed it over to a Xhosa family who continued renting it from the municipality. The farm would also have been too close to the township by then as shacks had been built all around it during our absence.

Still, I did what I could. I visited the township daily, walked around, and spoke with the people and the children. The children often asked when I would start playing soccer with them again.

After nine months, I received a substantial personal gift from my mother. She had sold some farmland and divided the proceeds among her children. With this money, I bought an Isuzu pick-up truck with a canopy and a vertical rear door. When I saw the vehicle for sale, it was as though it was looking at me.

In the back of the vehicle, I once again built wooden benches with storage space underneath. And so our soccer programmes started again; although I preferred not to call it soccer, but rather *children's meetings*. One of the fathers once said to me, "*I like your church*". That was exactly what I wanted the soccer to be, a place of safety where children could learn about the reality of God and His care, and in doing so learn to live respectful lives, not only as children, but later as fathers themselves.

We used the Isuzu pick-up for three years. It was a wonderful vehicle, but eventually we needed something larger. In 2010, we bought a Kia pick-up truck. I had benches installed, including seatbelts, and at the time of writing, I still use this vehicle; it remains in excellent condition.

Simone started a girls' group as soon as we had the Isuzu. She was offered the use of the Sunday school hall of the NG Kerk in Gonubie which was the closest church to the township. Simone did educational activities while always pointing the girls toward God.

Lisa came with us to most of the programmes which took place after school, except for one afternoon per week. On that day, she was looked after by a woman from the Baptist Church. Lisa enjoyed being with the children very much. Every year, we ended with a large celebration for all the children who had taken part in our programmes. At these parties, the children performed through song, dance, or other talents they had. Lisa always made sure she performed as well, sharing one of her own talents.

One morning, when Lisa was about six years old, she came into our bedroom and told Simone and me that she had seen God during the night. When we asked her what she had

seen, she said there had been a light in her room and that she knew it was God.



During the first six years after our return, we prayed for a farm where we could live and run a youth centre. The farm needed to be not too close to the township and not too far away. We did not want children to be able to walk to our home freely, as we also needed a private family life alongside our work in the township.

God gave us a Scripture, which we placed on the fridge door. And for six years, we read it often and held on to it. The verse came from Habakkuk 2:3 (NKJV):

*“For the vision is yet for an appointed time;
But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.”*

One day, Simone came home in tears. She had been speaking with a pastor’s wife who asked her whether she truly believed that God would give us a farm. Simone was much disappointed that the pastor’s wife seemed to doubt that it would ever happen.

But we did believe it. In our hearts we were convinced that we were not following our own plans but God’s calling. And we trusted that He would provide everything needed for us to continue the work He had placed on our hearts.



The Farm

As usual, I had been visiting one of the children's homes when returning the children to the township from our afternoon programme. I saw the desperation of the child's family and the child's need for a safe place.

When I arrived home, I walked across the lawn, and frustrated kicked a molehill, and said, "God, when are You going to give us a farm?"

Not long after that, someone we knew well phoned us. He owned a farm, although he did not live there himself. On the farm were three dwellings, a main house, a small cottage, and a second house set slightly apart from the other two. The tenants of the second house had moved out and we were asked whether we would like to move in. The farm was thirteen kilometres from the township – not too far and not too near.

Simone, Lisa, and I went to see the farm on a Sunday after church and immediately we saw that it had potential for our plans. The following day I returned alone, walked over the land, and prayed. I asked God whether this was the place He wanted for us, and in my heart I heard the words: "*Why do you ask when you already know the answer?*" Yes, I knew. This was the farm we had been praying for for six years.

I approached the owner and suggested a ninety-nine-year lease on a portion of the land that included the house. I told him that I envisioned living there for the rest of my life. I also made it a condition that we would be allowed to build a children's home or youth centre on the farm.

The owner agreed and a lease contract was drawn up by a lawyer.

In December 2012, right after our year-end party with the children, we moved to the farm, just over six years after we had arrived in South Africa as a family.

We spent 2013 cleaning up the farm on the days I was not running children's programmes. Thorn bushes were growing everywhere and the yard was littered with old fencing left

behind by previous owners. Simone helped wherever she could and likely developed quite a bit of muscle along the way.



While cutting grass with a brush cutter, a four-centimetre piece of fencing wire shot into my leg like a bullet. At the time, I did not realise that anything had entered my leg. All I noticed was a tear in my jeans and a bruise on my leg. The next day, the pain made it clear that I needed to see a doctor. X-rays revealed the piece of wire in the soft tissue of my leg just missing the bone. The doctor attempted to remove it but the pain was too intense. A specialist removed it under full anaesthesia. I have kept the piece of wire as a souvenir.

During that year, we also built a platform intended for a home for one hundred children. However, we soon realised that obtaining the necessary permits for such a large building would be extremely difficult. We therefore decided to start small and build a structure attached to the garage wall. I drew the plans. It would be a home for fourteen children, where we could provide weekend care.



By March 2014, the foundation and floor were completed. Once again, Simone played her part, moving countless wheelbarrows of soil.

All the materials for the exterior walls and roof were on site when four of my brothers, my mother, and my brother-in-law from Canada came to help us for two weeks. We worked very hard during that time. By the time they left, the outside walls were up and the roof was in place.



For the rest of the year, I continued building. A man from a church helped me on many Saturdays. I built the interior walls, fitted six doors, constructed two bathrooms, built a kitchen, and installed the plumbing and electrical systems. Simone helped with the ceiling boards.

The plastering was done by a man from the township. A group of young people from Lisa's school painted the first

coat onto the interior and exterior walls. Another group of young people later applied the final coat to the outside walls.

At the beginning of 2015, I began to feel exhausted and asked a contractor to build the front porch, while I continued working on the rainwater tank stands. When I had finished installing the tanks and connecting them to each other and to the house, I placed the final downpipe into a tank just as dark clouds gathered. Half an hour later, rain poured down, and the tanks began to fill.

Throughout the building process, I received guidance from a building engineer, and an electrician provided a list of all the electrical items I needed and explained what to do. The electrical work was inspected and we received a Certificate of Compliance.



We held our first camp weekend in June 2015. Our Vice-President from the board in the Netherlands and her husband were present, having come to witness the opening of the youth centre.

All glory belongs to God. Many times, when I did not know how to do certain things, I would see in my sleep how it should be done and it always worked.

At the end of the building project, the treasurer of our board at the time said, “Every month when large sums of money were spent, large sums also came in”.



The Camp Weekends

Every third weekend, except during school holidays, we run a camp weekend from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning. Fourteen children are invited with permission from their parents, including two young people aged sixteen to eighteen who serve as leaders.

Simone oversees the program which includes half an hour of farm activities, team-building, soccer games, playing in a small dam (pond) (weather permitting), and various other games.

Simone also does the cooking. At first, she worried whether she would be able to prepare meals the children would enjoy, but during the evaluations at the end of each camp, some children always mention that the food was their favourite part of the weekend.

The children also experience a true farm atmosphere, as we have geese, chickens, goats, and even a few cows.

Children who attend the camp weekends are selected from the weekday groups. Our aim is for each child to attend two or three times per year.

The farm gives them hope for their own lives. They see and experience that goodness is possible, even though they are surrounded daily by hardship. We cannot remove them from their circumstances, but we can teach them how to deal with the circumstances and, once they have grown up, how to choose a different way.

We have seen several of our young people become true followers of Jesus. One of them is even preaching in the streets of the township with his friends.

Our task is to be like parents to these children, to support their actual parents, and to show God's goodness to all – fulfilling the words of 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NKJV):

“[God] comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”



Our Visas

The three-year visa we received in 2006 was later extended by two years. Before this extension expired, I went to the Department of Home Affairs to discuss our options for remaining in the country. The officials I spoke to told me that we had no options and would have to leave South Africa.

I asked to speak to their supervisor. The supervisor told me the same thing; that we had reached the maximum allowable

stay as volunteers and would have to leave the country. I then asked to speak to her supervisor. She replied that she was the supervisor. I persisted and said that surely there must be someone above her. Eventually, she admitted that there was a senior official in another town and gave me his telephone number.

I phoned him immediately and he told me to come and see him.

The town was about seventy kilometres from East London and I drove there straight away. The man advised me to apply for a five-year work permit, including a request to waive certain requirements that we could not meet in our situation. He also told me that after the five years, we should apply for permanent residence.

I returned to the East London office and informed the officials for what I intended to apply. They responded that it would be impossible for such an application to be approved by the head office of Home Affairs in Pretoria. I asked them whether they believed in God. They said they did. "Then let us see what God is going to do," I replied.

I submitted the application and had to involve a lawyer to receive any response. In the end, just one day before our volunteer visa expired, the very same officials in East London who had spoken of the impossibility of my application, had to stamp our passports with a five-year work permit.

Toward the end of the five-year work permit, I applied for permanent residence. The application was denied, which was understandable, as we were not employed by a company and did not receive a salary. After a denial, one is given two opportunities to appeal.

We involved a lawyer and submitted the first appeal, which was also denied. One appeal remained. The lawyer and I worked diligently to ensure that everything was in order, and

with our second appeal, Simone and I were granted permanent residence.

The entire process took two years.

During those two years, we heard nothing about Lisa's application. Then, more than a year later, Lisa's permanent residence application was approved as well.



And Others

By the time the three of us had received our final permits to stay in South Africa, we had not been to the Netherlands for almost six years and it was time to go again. In the Netherlands, we spoke in two churches, sharing about God's faithfulness and about how it truly is possible to trust Him. We also visited the Evangelical Church in Tulln, Austria. That reunion was very special. The people there could hardly believe that I was the same shy person who had left for South Africa twenty-one years earlier. My shyness had disappeared, especially whenever I spoke about my great God.

In the churches where we spoke, we saw people wiping away tears as they were touched by the realisation of God's goodness.

Over the years, I had missed four of my siblings' weddings. When my youngest brother, Alfred, married in 2010, I flew to the Netherlands to attend and serve as one of his witnesses, just as he had been at my wedding.



Lisa has done very well growing up alongside our work in the township; she was truly part of it. She always enjoyed it when the children were on the farm for the weekend.

She also excelled at school, and Simone made sure she regularly had friends over.

The day after Lisa turned eighteen, she passed her driving licence test. When she came home, I had her car keys, along with the gate remote and house keys ready as a gift. The car was the fourth vehicle that had been given to us, a Nissan pick-up truck.

The first time Lisa went out alone to visit a friend, I followed her, without her knowing, just to make sure she was safe. When she arrived at her friend's house and saw me there, she was very surprised. I said to her, "I just wanted to be sure you were all right."

At the end of 2021, Lisa passed her Grade 12 final examinations and went to study in Port Elizabeth.

Finding accommodation for her was another remarkable act of God.

We wanted her to stay in one of two small towns just outside Port Elizabeth, close to the faculty. We found three rooms advertised online.

Early on a Friday morning, we drove the three-and-a-half-hour journey to view all three options. The first was unsuitable as it was very isolated. The second option was a converted garage. It required full furnishing and Lisa would be completely on her own. In the main house, the residents ran an aftercare centre for young children, which meant noisy afternoons.

The third option was advertised through a real estate agent. It was a fully furnished room with its own kitchen and entrance, located inside the home of an elderly woman whose husband had recently passed away.

We also went past local estate agents, but no other options were available.

That evening, we stayed in a holiday home about an hour's drive from Port Elizabeth. The place is specifically for pastors and missionaries, and we often go there for Christmas holidays.

We decided not to discuss our options with each another, but instead to pray separately and then share our thoughts the next morning. When we did, all three of us felt that the converted garage was the best option.

During the journey home, I heard messages coming in on my phone, but I rarely check my messages immediately and continued on our way. We discussed what Lisa would need for her apartment.

Simone was driving during the last hour and a half. I then remembered the messages. There were two – one from the real estate agent and one from the elderly lady. Both messages asked me to phone someone named Hilda, who had a room available.

By then, we were already more than halfway home and could not turn back.

It was late when we arrived home, and I decided to phone Hilda the following morning, which was a Sunday.

Before church, I told Simone and Lisa that I planned to call her. Lisa was surprised, as we had already decided on the converted garage. I explained that I simply wanted to confirm that Hilda's place was not suitable. I phoned and Hilda answered the call but asked me to call back later as she was on her way out to church.

During our own church service, we sang the hymn 'How Deep the Father's Love for Us'. Then came the line: *'how great the pain of searing loss, The Father turns His face away, As wounds which mar the Chosen One, bring many sons to glory'*.

While singing this it was as though God was asking me whether I was willing to let Lisa completely go by having her stay on her own in the apartment we had chosen, and whether I was willing to accept whatever might happen to her as though it had come from God Himself and if I was willing to forgive anyone who might harm her.

South Africa is a country with high levels of crime, where people are attacked, abducted, abused, or killed without reason.

Was God asking me whether I was willing to let Lisa go, and whether I would accept it, as coming from Him if anything were to happen to her? And then forgive the person responsible?

With tears in my eyes, I said to God, “I am willing. She is Yours, to do with as You please.” In the spirit I saw myself lying before the holy throne of God, completely broken, but forgiving.

I placed Lisa into the Father’s hand, for Him to with as He saw fit.

After the service, we phoned Hilda again. This time her son answered. He explained that he and his family also lived on the property. His mother lived in the main house where there was a room with a private bathroom available. The rent included evening meals shared with the family. Photos were sent to us, and we became very excited.

I suggested that each of us pray separately and then talk again after fifteen minutes. I went outside, sat in a garden chair and looked up to God. The first thing that came to my mind was that I had not been meant to see the messages on my phone from the previous day right away so that the Sunday morning conversation between me and God could take place. Then God spoke into my heart and said: “Because you were willing to give your daughter to Me, I am

giving her back to you by placing her in a family who will care for her.”

My heart was filled with a deep awareness of God’s amazing kindness and with gratitude.

God is so good, give it all to Him!

After the fifteen minutes had past, we met again in the living room. I asked Simone and Lisa what God had said to them but they wanted to hear from me. I shared what had happened during the church service that morning and what God had just spoken into my heart. I then said to Lisa, “Lisa, you can go and live with Aunty Hilda.”

Lisa still questioned whether God would give back what I had given to Him, but I was reminded of the story in the Bible in which God asked Abraham to give Him his son Isaac and how God gave Isaac back to Abraham after he had shown his willingness to do so.

Simone and Lisa felt we should first see the place. I said it was not necessary, but they insisted. The next day, my only available free day, we drove the three-and-a-half hours back to Port Elizabeth again.

At the time of writing, Lisa has now lived with Aunty Hilda for more than four years. The family has taken her in as one of their own.

Just after Lisa had moved in with Aunty Hilda, we heard that the elderly lady with the furnished room had realised soon after we left that Lisa was not meant to stay with her. That same afternoon, while she was taking a nap, her friend Hilda – who also had a room available – came to her mind. When she woke up, she phoned Hilda and told her she had just met someone who might be perfect for her room, as Hilda had been waiting on God to send the right person.

At first, whenever Lisa travelled to Port Elizabeth, Simone drove with her halfway to the home of friends. Lisa then continued alone, while Simone returned using a lift or a shuttle service.

The first time Lisa drove the entire journey on her own, I followed her until she reached the highway near our home. This time, she knew I was following. As I watched her car turn onto the highway and disappear from view, I saw, spiritually, that God was with her in the car. It was most likely not God Himself, but one of His messengers, an angel. Later, I told Lisa that she was never alone when driving to Port Elizabeth, but that God was with her in the car.

A few weeks afterward, Lisa phoned us excitedly. A woman in her church had prayed for her and said that wherever Lisa went, God was with her in the car, not only on the long journey to Port Elizabeth, but everywhere she went.

Once again, God is so good.

I often remember the words from Isaiah: *“Great shall be the peace of your children.”*



Twice I have been admitted to hospital – once in 2003 with symptoms of a heart attack; and again in 2016, with symptoms and blood-test results suggesting a possible pulmonary embolism. In both cases, further examinations showed no physical problems. It was likely the result of stress.

I tend to work too much and struggle to sit still. After the 2016 incident, I slept for a week and a half, too tired to do anything. Since then, I have followed a strict daily routine.

At the end of 2019, I developed severe pain in one knee. X-rays showed calcium phosphate crystals in the joint. The pain was so intense that I needed crutches and could not

drive. An orthopaedic specialist told me that surgery would not help; “*it would only empty my wallet and fill his*”. The pain would last seven to ten days, then slowly subside, only to return again later. Between episodes, my knee felt weak.

I struggled with this for more than two years. I prayed and spoke often with God about it, wondering how much longer I would be able to continue the work and manage life on the farm.

Then we had visitors, and one of them casually mentioned that sugar can cause inflammation in the body. I said nothing, but from that day on I stopped using sugar in my coffee and avoided sweet foods.

After two weeks, my knee felt stronger. And today, although I occasionally feel the crystals, there is no pain. My knees are strong, and I no longer use crutches.

No sugar, no crutches’, became another motto of mine.



The two years of COVID-19 and the so-called lockdowns were extremely difficult for many people. For us, however, they brought renewed passion for God and His work. I observed lockdown for only two weeks. At the end of the second week, I sat on the beach with my Bible, talking with God. There I felt that something about the COVID narrative did not make sense.

When I returned home, I told Simone, “We are going to take food parcels to families in the township who have lost their work, and we are going to meet with neighbours on Sundays to seek God and worship Him.”

Four young people from the township helped me distribute the food parcels. We entered homes where there was absolutely nothing. During the strictest lockdown period, we delivered more than a thousand parcels, each weighing between seven and ten kilograms. Many people donated

spontaneously, and a local businessman supplied us with three thousand kilograms of basic food items. The Sunday gatherings with neighbours were also unforgettable times.



Final Words

Here is just one of the many stories of children growing up in the township:

Many years ago, there was a little boy who often sat by the side of the road. I never noticed him standing or walking. Whenever I drove past he would call my name and wave.

One day I thought, *Let me find out who this boy is and why he always sits by the side of the road.* I parked my vehicle, got out, and crouched down next to him. I asked his name, “Alakhe,” he said.

“Where is your mother?” I asked. She was in the house just behind him. Alakhe then moved himself into the house using his two hands and one foot. I followed and asked his mother what her son’s problem was. She could not really explain but showed me his medical clinic records. From those, I understood that nothing more was being done regarding his condition.

I offered to take him to our doctor in Gonubie, and she agreed immediately. After making an appointment, I picked up Alakhe and his mother and took them to the doctor. The doctor examined him and reviewed his records, then called his partner in. Together, they concluded that the boy had MDR-TB of the spine (multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis).

The doctor wrote a referral letter for the doctors at the state hospital, and I took him and his mother there. He was admitted and stayed in hospital for six months. I visited him

regularly. Near the end of those six months, he proudly showed me his first steps without support.

Today, Alakhe is a young man and I often see him walking to school or very nicely dressed on his way to church. If we go in the same direction, I give him a lift; otherwise we greet each other enthusiastically.

When I was on the *Anastasis*, I marked Isaiah 60:1-5 in my Bible. In verse 4 it says, “*Your sons shall come from afar*”. I have no biological sons, but I often wonder how many sons God has given me anyway.



Anyone who thinks missionary work is thrilling and romantic has completely misunderstood it. And anyone who thinks he is going to do great things for the Lord has also misunderstood it.

Over the years, I have seen many people start projects in the township, only to pack up and leave after some time. I also know couples who sold all their belongings and went into full-time mission work, but after much disappointment, left the mission field disillusioned.

Simone and I have certainly had moments when we wanted to give up again. But every time, God reignites the fire and does not allow the vision to die.

When going into mission work, one needs to know, without doubt, that God has called you. One of God's greatest confirmations can be to go without fundraising and to trust Him and Him alone, just as the Bible teaches.

Simone and I have no idea how long we will continue our work in Mzamom'Hle.

Often, when I drive home after an afternoon program with the children or after visiting people in the township, I feel a

deep connection with them and sense the long history we share.

God will surely guide us. We only need to remain focused on Him and not act according to our own human emotions and feelings.



One day, when my work on earth is done, will I leave behind a legacy of human greatness – a large organisation running major projects and owning impressive buildings?

No, not at all.

I hope to leave behind the legacy of a people who knew someone who walked with them, laughed with them, cried with them, and lived alongside them.

People who remember someone who was like a father to them, and later became a father figure to their children – someone who did not reject them.

I hope to leave behind the legacy of people who were told about a great and Almighty God who wants to be their Father – a good Father.

The legacy of someone who told them about Jesus, the Son of the Father, who died for them and was raised to life by the Father, so that after they have died, they too may be raised to life.

And that all they need to do is talk to God, like a child talks to his father, and read that book called the Bible, so they may come to know this God more and more, and learn to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.



God is so real, more real than the things we can touch and see. What we touch and see will pass away, but God will remain forever.

I want to know Him more and more, so that I can trust Him more and more. He is so close; so very close.

Jesus came to pay the price for all my sins and to open the way to my God and my Father.

Jesus is the Anchor of my soul and the Rock that makes me roll!

He is coming back to reign as King over this world, and in the end, God will make all things new and dwell among us.

I am greatly looking forward to that day.

“Come, Lord Jesus – Come Quickly”



Words of Thanks

Many thanks to all the people who have meant so much in the life I live.

I am thinking of:

My father, who set the example of reading the Bible from page one to the end, and then starting again at page one; again and again.

My mother, who never stopped praying for me and for all her children, and who never speaks a bad word about any of us.

My brothers and sisters, all followers of our great God and always ready to assist each other.

All other family members, and all friends from my younger years.

The former Reformed Church in Hooghalen, who taught me so much from the Bible.

The people in Canada, who did their best to make me feel welcome.

The Barraclough family in New Zealand, together with the church community there at the time, who played a significant role in shaping my destiny.

The Evangelical Church in Tulln; Rev. Joseph and his wife from the New Apostolic Church in Tulln; and all the people of the FCJG in Vienna; and the colleagues at Starkl; who all became my friends and my community.

The people from the Anastasis.

The churches in Gonubie, and the many people from the wider East London area who have become our friends.

The Vineyard Church in Port Elizabeth, and its pastor, who were always willing to assist us with necessary documents.

The Christian Reformed Church of Dedemsvaart, who has supported us faithfully for nearly twenty years already.

All the people who have supported and continue to support the work of Jesus the Rock Missions and us personally.

All our board members, past and present.

All the people of Mzomom'Hle Township, who allow us to be part of their community.

And all those not listed above whom I may inadvertently have left out.

I will never forget you all, and I pray that God may return His blessings upon each one of you.

And many thanks to:

My dear wife, Simone, who loves me, stands faithfully by my side, and helps me to stay focused on God. Together we have walked a long road.

My dear daughter, Lisa, who is a light in our home and always ready to help wherever she can.

And above all my first and last thanks go to:

**my Almighty God and Father
and to my Master, my Friend, my Anchor, my Rock –
Jesus the Messiah.**

AFTERWORD

I wrote most of this story over a period of four weeks. Four weeks in which I lived in the past again, and felt many of the emotions all over again.

In this book, I have opened my inner life to you, the reader. I have allowed you to look inside my heart.

But my hope is that when you close this book, you will not see me but only the Father and Jesus.

Accept the place where God has placed you right now. And truly give everything to Him.

He will lead you and guide you in your daily life.

You will still make mistakes. And that is okay. Mistakes keep us humble. They remind us how much we need God.

And if the world inside you, or around you, feels dark... or if you feel so lonely... then reach out to Him. Reach out to Him for real. Go on your knees. Lift your hands toward heaven. He sees you. He is there. He will take your hands and help you through your darkest moments. He will help you!



One of my proofreaders asked me, “How do you keep going?”

Simone and I keep going by God’s grace – God who always lights the fire again.

We keep going because God has given us a beautiful farm to live on, beautiful friends to share life with, and much joy in daily life and with the children of the township.

We keep going because God has given us wonderful board members in the Netherlands who share the responsibility with us.

We keep going because God has never failed to provide for our needs, for us as a family, and for the work of Jesus the Rock Missions Foundation.

And above all, we keep going because God still wants us to keep going.

Blessed be His Holy Name!



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