

Christina Van Maren
Dutch Immigrant
Groote Beer



FAMILY TALK
The Van Maren Family
Newsletter

May 1999

In August, 1948, Arie Jan and I starting going out. After going out for 3 ½ years, we married on February 21, 1952.

Arie Jan decided to buy a small houseboat that was moored in Geldermalsen.

Arie Jan could not get used to living on the houseboat. He could see no future for himself at his place of work and longed to start his own business. He didn't think that he could do this in Holland.

Bernie was born on November 16, 1952, and he was a "schat" – pink cheeks, gorgeous blue eyes, and oh, so friendly.

Arie Jan's plans to emigrate continued. Our parents found this very difficult. Arie Jan's mother found it extremely difficult. She did not like the idea at all. When Arie Jan asked his mother the second time if she was still so against us going to Canada, she said "No, Arie Jan, I may not hold you back."

This answer was like music in Arie Jan's ears. Mother Van Maren was a converted woman, and well respected. Arie Jan would never have dared to leave Holland if his Mother would still have been so against it. She must have received grace whereby she was inclined and made willing to let Arie Jan go.

Saying goodbye wasn't easy. In those days, families didn't expect to see each other again – they expected their partings to be final.

So we arrived in Rotterdam. The Groote Beer was laying ready to take us to Canada. Pa and Moe (Christine's parents) and several others were there to see us off. It was also difficult for my parents to see us leave.

July 1999

Then we took the train across Canada. This was not a nice way to travel – we sat on wooden folding benches. We collapsed them at night to sleep on. Bernie's travel cot had a layer of dust and soot in it.

On July 1, the train stopped in Lethbridge. This was the last stop before the Rocky Mountains.

There were families at the train station picking up children or parents. Watching these emotional meetings was too much for me – my tears started to flow. I felt further and further removed from everything I held dear.

Because we didn't have enough milk and bread to get us to Summerland, Arie Jan got off the train to shop for me. A large heavy man came into the train, "Are there still some emigrants on this train?" He continued "Oh yes, I see", because the tears were still running freely down my face. He introduced himself as Mr. Nieboer, he was a fieldman who helped new emigrants. He asked where my husband was. I told him that he was getting some groceries. "Oh" he said, "That will be difficult, because it is a holiday, and everything is closed." He got off the train, and told the conductor not to leave because there was an emigrant who needed some groceries. He tapped Arie Jan on the shoulder, and helped him with these purchases. There wasn't enough milk in this store, so he took Arie Jan to another store. After filling Arie Jan's arms with groceries, he came into the train. He asked us which church we went to, and when we answered, the "Ger Gem" (NRC), he answered, "Then you are not travelling to the right place." Arie Jan explained that the labour exchange had sent him to Summerland, where we would be working for Tony Holler, the boss of a large business.

Mr. Nieboer said, "Here is my address. If you have any problems, write me. I hope to always be able to help you." Arie Jan wanted to pay him for the groceries, but he wouldn't take one cent. He wished us the best, and got off the train. The train left the station immediately. That a train would wait for a few people sounds unbelievable, but it really happened! That was Canada!

Then we both quietly cried. We never forgot that man. I can still see him clearly in my mind.

August 1999

It was "bloed warm" (very hot) there between the mountains. Our neighbours were a great support to us. As we had nothing to eat in the house, Mr. Jim Holler took me grocery shopping that same afternoon. This was quite an experience. I couldn't read English, and didn't

recognize the packaging, but he took a grocery cart and started to load it full of groceries. He took large packages of everything, and I thought: "Man, I won't have enough money!" We only had 45 dollars left of our "landings money", and Arie Jan had to wait a month for his first paycheque. I just stood and watched. He called me over to the cash register. I laid the 45 dollars on the counter, and the neighbour man began to laugh. When the cashier joined in, I thought "See, I don't have half enough money!" They're just laughing at me." But no, I got a lot of money back. I didn't understand it at all, because I had 2 big boxes of groceries. I compared the receipt with the change, and it worked out to the penny. We were very impressed by this. Arie Jan couldn't believe his eyes either. That food fed us for a month.