

Tina Bootsma nee  
Zomeran  
Dutch Immigrant  
Johan Van Oldenbarneveldt  
July 7, 1954

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM  
**PIER 21**  
A WORLD OF STORIES



MY STORY AS A DUTCH  
IMMIGRANT GIRL - 1954-1957

Our family, father, mother, brother  
and I emigrated from Nieuwolda,

Groningen, the most Northern Province in The Netherlands, bordering



Germany. My sister was  
married in 1953 and she  
and her husband  
emigrated shortly  
afterwards and lived in the  
Edmonton area already.  
We followed in 1954 and  
arrived in July of that  
year. My parents and  
brother boarded with  
another Dutch family for  
the first while and I stayed  
with my sister and her  
husband in a two room

house on the Julius Seutter farm, located across from the present  
Colchester Elementary School and across the highway from the then  
Bremner store.

When our crates arrived, we moved to our sponsor, Horricks Dairy, a  
combined farming operation by two brothers on Highway 28, halfway  
Namao Airfield Base. There were two other Dutch families working there

already and a single farmhand who had  
been our neighbour in Nieuwolda. There  
was a Ukrainian couple with two little  
daughters who were in charge of the  
dairy operation. On their weekends off,  
one of the other couples was to do those  
duties. The other men worked the fields  
and at other farm chores. Dad was an  
expert at ploughing straight furrows, so



he did a lot of tractor work. We were assigned a three room house with a  
porch. Dad and Mom got the bedroom of course, my bother slept on a cot



in the corner of the kitchen and I slept on a wall bed in the living room. When upright, it had curtains covering the springs so that it looked like a piece of furniture during the day. At bedtime, I had to move all the living room furniture to one side and pull down the wall bed and in the morning reverse the operation.

Saturdays was housecleaning day and I was to help my mother, but not without having the radio on CFCW, a country and western station. We learned how to bake and this became one of my duties also. In the afternoons I would make my rounds to wash and curl the other ladies' hair. How this came about I just don't remember.

On Sundays our family was divided in half. Two of us would get a ride with the Eilander family who attended Third Christian Reformed Church and two of us would get a ride with the Witten family and attend Second Christian Reformed Church with them. These churches were all located in central Edmonton and the First Christian Reformed Church is still located in that area. This was the procedure until Dad bought our own car and we became members of Third C.R.C.



That first summer, Mrs. Horricks asked Mom if I could help her pick raspberries. I was excited about the opportunity to earn some money and practice my two years of English at Ulo in The Netherlands. The picking went well; afterwards we had to check the berries for worms on the kitchen table. Mrs. Horricks was a very kind lady and tried very hard to converse with me, but I had to disappoint her and myself especially, for it did not go well at all.

The second winter I had to attend catechism. This was an ordeal in itself, for it meant for me to walk that long lane, lined with very tall spruce trees on either side, to the highway. I have always been afraid in the dark and I would see all kinds of creatures ready to jump at me. Once at the



highway, I had to wait for the Greyhound bus and flag it down to take me to the Greyhound Bus Station. From there I would walk to Third C.R.C. which was only a few blocks. After catechism the procedure reversed and I had to make sure the bus driver would stop across from the correct lane, I would cross the highway

and run all the way home, thankful to be home safe and sound.

In the meantime my sister and her family moved to a pig farm not too far away from us. On Sundays I would often spend time with them and play with baby Cathy, who had arrived in the meantime. One Sunday afternoon I heard a lot of shouting and yelling on the other side of the huge hedge separating the two properties. I asked my sister what they were saying since it did

not sound like English. Oh no, she said, they are speaking Frisian. They have a girl your age and I shall introduce you two and thus I met my first girlfriend, Tina Admiraal, in Canada. There were seven children in that family and I just loved going there. Our own family, with a brother five years older than me,



nothing much was ever happening except go visiting with my parents to their friends. Tina's father was a fanatic Frisian (immigrants from Friesland, the province next to Groningen, speak their own language which no other Dutch person understands) and if you could not understand him it was just too bad. Her mother and sisters would speak Dutch to me, her brothers less so, but I slowly learned to understand it and even speak it a bit. Tina herself, liked it better at our house since there were a lot less dishes to do and no teasing by siblings.

September came and so did school. I was still thirteen years of age, my birthday being October 11, and so I, along with Ronnie Horricks who was my age, and the two girls from the dairyman piled into the old half ton

truck with Mr. Horricks at the wheel. Mr. Horricks had been in a farm accident at one time which cost him his right hand and part of his forearm. The gear shift was on the floor of course so he had to use his stub for shifting in this crowded cab. Can't you just picture this scene?

Turnip Lake School (north of the old Griesbach Barracks) was about five miles from the farm taking the back roads. I was placed in grade 7 and not in grade 1 like most other immigrant children. It was a two room



schoolhouse with grade 1 to 4 being taught by Mrs. Rasmussen and grade 5 to 9 being taught by Mrs. Heacock. The latter was a very elegant looking lady with silver hair who always wore a black skirt, a crisp white blouse and sturdy black shoes. The first mistake I made was translating my last name. My maiden

name is Zwaantina Louwina Zomerman (going by the name of Tineke) and my last name translates into Summerman, so that's the name I registered under. But after looking at it on the blackboard for a few days I mustered up enough courage to tell Mrs. Heacock what I had done. She just took the eraser, changed it immediately without any comment. Tineke was changed to Tina, it being the last four letters of my official name, so now ready for class.

My education thus far had been six years of elementary and two years of High School (ULO) having just passed into the third grade of the four, before we left for Canada. During those high school years we had to take all four major languages besides all the usual subjects including algebra and geometry. Luckily, there were two other Dutch girls in grade 7; especially Ria Hobé was of great assistance by translating and such but especially when it came to math. Because, once I understood all the symbols, it was all old hat to me. My English came along slowly but once you are amongst English speaking students you have no choice. I completed grade 7 and 8 in one year and started grade 9 in September 1955. This class consisted of four boys and me. I told Mrs. Heacock I wanted to become a teacher and from then on was her pet pupil. One day we were given a very difficult algebra question and the student with the correct answer was to receive a bottle of pop. Well, those boys knew they

could wrap me around their little finger, so gave my answer away and no one was a winner. Another assignment was to write an essay on a partnership business. Once the essays were handed in and checked, Mrs. Heacock stood up and read my essay in front of all the grades. In literature we were to perform a play to which parents would be invited. The most popular boy was in charge of choosing the participants for the different parts and I was one of them. Oh, those jealous looks, I see them still. But the part was just right for me since two bachelors were to interview me as a housekeeper and needed to know my qualifications. I only had to say one sentence several times, “cabbage soup and wash dishes’, my Dutch accent being perfect for the part.

One day, Mrs. Heacock assigned the boys to take off the storm windows and wash the school windows. Looking out of the classroom window I saw them smear white stuff on them and wondered what on earth they were doing, not being familiar with Bon Amis at the time.



Towards the end of the school year, Mrs. Heacock gave us government departmental exams from previous years for us to study so we would have an idea as to what to expect when the mandatory Provincial Departmental Exams were to be taken. My final results were an H in math and the rest were A's and B's, this after two years in Canada.

The summer of 1956 we moved to the city in an area called Beverly, an annexation on the east side of the city of Edmonton. A lot of Dutch immigrants had settled there since the houses were cheaper there. They built the Maranatha C.R.C. with volunteer labour and I joined the Young People Society and Catechism there with my girlfriend and made friends with many more young people my age, even boys with cars. I got a job at Beverly Bakery that summer at \$15.00 per week and every third week had to work nightshift and then earned \$17.00. Mom, in the meantime, had contacted some other immigrant mothers without my knowledge, inquiring about possible further education for me. All my friends had jobs and spending money and my intention of becoming a teacher faded. I could not see myself going to High School for three years and University

after that so I told Mom I had changed my mind. She, being a strong advocate for education, and wanting to give me the same chance as my sister and brother, who had completed their education in the old country, she approached me one day and gave me the option of becoming a hairdresser or go to Business College. Well, I did some quick thinking; hairdressing was okay as a hobby but college appealed to me more. Thus I chose the latter and Mom, on her own, enrolled me at McTavish Business College located downtown Edmonton. The Dean of the college did not think my English would be adequate enough to take shorthand so I took the general subjects which were typing, bookkeeping, English, spelling, handwriting, comptometer, etc. This was a seven month course and came with the promise of a job upon completion. My brother had a job in the city and paid \$40.00 board and room which covered the tuition for my college education. Till this day I am still thankful to both of them for giving me this opportunity for it sure has stood me in good stead in later years. While attending Business College I cleaned house on Saturdays for the John Vandenbrink family. The Mr. had been in a farm accident and Janet had just given birth to another baby and needed help. They lived down the hill in a log house where the Equestrian Centre is located at present along Fox Drive. When my work was done though, Janet would start up the car and drive me up the hill to the nearest bus stop. I earned \$5.00 a day and even bought my first watch at People's Credit Jewellers with a down payment of \$5.00 and made monthly payments until it was paid for.



On April 1, 1957, I started working for the Provincial Government in their Motor Vehicle Branch and was placed in a typing pool. This consisted of typing up cards on cars with liens on them which then had to be filed. Auto dealers from all over the province would phone our department, give us vehicle serial numbers to check for liens on trade-

ins. We also had customers come to the counter when planning to buy a second hand car to search for liens. The fee for a search was 25 cents. I was quite happy with my job, but doing the same thing day in day out became a bit boring at times. I like variety. So when a staff member was absent for a day or longer, I would take over their jobs, either opening mail, cash office, reception, etc.; with permission of course. At noon we would play cards and I got along well with all of the staff except one, for she would laugh hysterically at me when phrasing a sentence wrong,

which did not do much for my ego. In general though, all were very kind and would correct me to help improve my English. Then the time came when I was due for a promotion, which meant you would work for the Director in his office with a limited amount of staff. But one of the girls in the typing pool all of a sudden suffered from migraines, so the Assistant Director asked me if I would give up my promotion to her. I agreed as long as I would get the increase in salary due to me. This never happened and I did not dare speak up in those days.

In June, 1957, my girlfriend and I went to a Christian Youth Band concert. We got all dressed up for the occasion and took the bus downtown together. During intermission we got up to buy some refreshments when someone shouted at me to buy him a chocolate bar. My quick reply was, "Go buy your own." After the concert he and his friends stood outside and offered us a ride home. This was more appealing than taking the bus home late at night, so we accepted. And as it turned out, he was my husband to be. He was from Frisian descent yet too, so when I was introduced to his family they were pleasantly surprised that I could understand them. He had sisters and brothers still living at home and I again enjoyed the company of a larger family.

P.S. We celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary on August 14, 2009, raised four sons and are the proud grandparents of eight lovely grandchildren.

Tina Bootsma, nee Zomerman  
Author of 'Our Leaps of Faith'

This is the front of a card presented to our family before embarking.

Translation of the words are:

In memory of the voyage per "Johan van Oldenbarneveldt" June 29 to July 7, 1954 to Canada.

Signed by:       Rev. G.P. Klijn  
Organization:    The Open Door  
City:             Driebergen, The Netherlands

Note: This card added a d in front of the t at the end of the ship's name. The back of the postcard leaves the d out of the ship's name.

**T**er herinnering aan de bootreis  
per „Johan van Oldenbarneveldt“ 29  
Juni tot 7 Juli 1954 naar Canada.

*G. P. Klijn*

(Ds. G. P. Klijn)

„De Open Deur“  
Driebergen

**O**nze **V**ader  
die in de hemelen zijt,  
**A**w naam worde geheiligd;  
**A**w koninkrijk come;  
**A**w wil geschiede,  
gelijk in de hemel, also ook op de aarde  
geef ons heden ons dagelijks brood;  
en vergeef ons onze schulden,  
gelijk ook wij vergeven onze schuldenaren;  
en leid ons niet in verzoeking,  
maar verlos ons van de boze  
want **A**wer is het koninkrijk  
en de kracht  
en de heerlijkheid  
in der eeuwigheid  
**A**men