

Further Destinations

William Vanden Born

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After rereading the autobiography I completed in February 2011, I decided it was time to do some writing once again, and to review my life since that time. It seems especially appropriate now, when we are surrounded by and part of the coronavirus pandemic that is bringing anxiety and grief in many parts of the world, including our own community. We are not under lockdown, as some are in other countries, but we are definitely discouraged from leaving our house unless it is really necessary. The last three Sunday mornings, for example, Dixie and I watched and sort of participated in a virtual worship service, live-streamed from our church sanctuary. It was good to be part of it.

Many things have happened in the last nine years, not all of which need detailed description or enumeration, but all of them have had a reshaping influence on our lives in some way. In the first several pages I have recorded a number of significant events from the years 2011 to 2019, along with some context information. After that the story focuses more on Dixie's and my personal lives and experiences.

Three of our grandchildren got married: Abby Huyser-Wierenga married Lukas Millions in 2015, Lucas Huyser-Wierenga married Jill Wheat in 2016, and Zach Geisterfer married Renae Van Wyk in 2018. The youngest of my nieces, Melodie Vanden Born, married Scott Vander Wey in 2016. Dixie and I celebrated our 60th anniversary in 2018; my sister Bertha and her husband Bill hope to celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary in 2020. A great-grandson joined the family in 2018: Jacob, son of Abby and Lukas Millions.

Death claimed the lives of three of my brothers, all younger than I am: John in 2013, at 74; John J in 2014, at 76; and Wilco in 2015, at 67. John's wife Sophie died in 2015, at 75. Two cousins also died - Wilma Sandstra in Red Deer in 2013 and Bill Vandeborn in Ontario in 2016. Cousin Tineke's husband John Landman in Ontario died in 2018. On Dixie's side, her mother Harriet

Wierenga died in 2017, at 101, and her youngest brother Herman died in 2016, at 63. My generation's part of the family is shrinking, and the end of my life clearly is in sight also.

Another sign of the times is that our oldest daughter, Karen, turned 60 and retired from her 37-year teaching career in June 2019. Eight years earlier she had been diagnosed with a serious problem, uterine cancer. Dixie and I were able to spend some time at her home in Calgary to be near her during and after the needed surgery and, thankfully, she was able to recover completely after the removal of affected organs. Six of our other children and their spouses passed 50 during the last decade and now are approaching 60.

On Mom Wierenga's 85th birthday, in 2011, her youngest son Herman married Ria. Quite soon after, unfortunately, the family's relationship to Ria, and later to Herman, began to deteriorate, and it had broken off entirely by the time of Herman's sudden death in 2016.

Our last winter break trip to Arizona had been in early 2010, and the following winter we did not go away at all. In May 2011 we had our more-or-less annual visit with cousin Elaine and Chris Gort from Toronto. Those visits happened several more times, until Chris was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease in 2017, which claimed his life in 2019. A bit later, Dixie and I made a day trip to Camrose to see the sights there, and still later we spent a week in Canmore with Karen, Ann, and Elaine.

Elaine had been on medical leave for some time in 2009 but went back to work on a half-time basis in September 2010. She was forced to leave work completely the following year, however, and lived with us for a while, from January to June 2010. Early in 2012 her condition was identified as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a disease that plays havoc with her collagen and her connective tissues. It was a diagnosis Elaine had suspected for some time, and it was finally confirmed. In March of that year she moved in with us on a permanent basis. Her Havanese four-legged close friend Murphy came along, of course, and we have grown to like him. That arrangement has worked fine ever since. She was able to rent out her condo in *The Valleyview* to a few different tenants, some better than others, to supplement her 'on disability' income. In the years since then she has had to deal with serious and very expensive health concerns, including a couple of surgeries and many treatments by physicians based in the United States. In 2015, she had serious fusion surgery of some vertebrae in her neck which provided more stability for her

neck, even if recovery from the surgery took quite a while. At the time of writing, her health condition is reasonably stable, aided by a variety of medications, for which we are all grateful.

Dixie and I made our last long road trip in September 2012, perhaps to see if we could still do it. We drove to Randolph, Wisconsin, mainly to visit Aunt Jeanette, the last of Mom Wierenga's remaining siblings. We stayed with Larry and Marcia Dykstra and were able to visit with several other cousins as well. The trip went well and we were glad we were able to do it, but we had no great desire for more such long-drive trips. Sadly, Aunt Jeanette died three months after we saw her.

Just before Dixie and I returned home, another serious situation had arisen. Elaine had a tumour on her pituitary gland that was causing all kinds of problems. For a variety of reasons the difficult surgery that was needed did not take place until May 2013, and even then it was not completely successful in that it was not possible to remove every bit of the tumour tissue without other serious consequences. Elaine came home 4 days after the surgery but had to go back to the hospital for another 11 days to manage her extreme pain. Thankfully, there is no evidence that the tumour has regrown since then.

Important events in 2014 include the name change of The King's University College to The King's University. The institution continues to have a big place in our hearts and we support it gladly. The establishment of an archive at King's that is dedicated to the history of Dutch emigration to Canada allowed us to deposit a box of documents related to the Vanden Born family migration of 1949.

During the summer Dixie and I flew to Victoria with Karen, Ann, and Elaine for a week's stay and exploration of the city and its surroundings. On a sadder note, it was also the year that my youngest brother Wilco had surgery for colorectal cancer, a serious problem that claimed his life the following year.

The next year also brought important events. In April 2015 we celebrated Mom Wierenga's 99th birthday with what had become a traditional Saturday brunch at the University of Alberta Faculty Club. The same month, Dixie and Karen and I flew to San Antonio, Texas for a week of exploration of the sights in and around that historic city, our last 'big' vacation trip. We saw many things and learned a bit of local history at the same time. Later in the summer we

celebrated Bill and Bertha Groot's 60th wedding anniversary with them and their family, and Dixie and I spent a few days with Clarence and Jean and Peter and Anne in Kelowna.

With gratitude and joy we celebrated Mom Wierenga's 100th birthday in 2016 at an elaborate catered dinner in the basement area of Emmanuel Home. We saw a slideshow of many family history photos, nicely annotated with a running commentary by Jean, and heard words and stories from others. We used the occasion to have a series of family photos made by Dixie's cousin Curtis Wierenga, part-time professional photographer.

Another happy event was the first wedding of one of our grandchildren. Mark and Debbie's daughter Abby married Lukas Millions at an outdoor ceremony where some of us were happy to find a bit of shade from the hot sun. Three years later, in June 2018, they welcomed a son, Jacob, our first great-grandchild.

Dixie's brother Herman's sudden death in Indonesia in 2016 and his subsequent burial there, not long after Mom Wierenga's centennial celebration, were a shock to the family system, and none of us quite knew what to make of it. His children Phil and Alena helped organize a memorial service later in the summer that brought people from many walks of life with whom he had had contact over the years. We heard many words of memory and appreciation for the contributions he had made. Needless to say, it was a difficult time, especially for Mom Wierenga, another loss added to the list of those she already had suffered in her life.

Shortly after the memorial service Dixie and I, accompanied by Karen and Elaine, flew to Vancouver Island for a week's stay at a large house on the shore of Nanoose Bay, close to Nanaimo. It was a nice time to walk the beach or sit in the hot tub, and to explore the surrounding area. We saw many beautiful mural paintings of historical events in Nanaimo and a number of spectacular sand sculptures in a beach park area nearby.

The year 2017 had much more in store for us. In mid-August we flew to Victoria to help celebrate the wedding of Dixie's nephew Phil (Herman's son) to Jenn Logan. On the way back to our home from the airport we received word that Mom Wierenga's condition had suddenly taken a turn for the worse that day. Dixie and Karen went to see her right away, but came back home after their visit. Next morning, however, we received the news that Mom had died early that day.

She was 101, and her life during the last year was often difficult. Many arrangements had to be made, of course, for burial and a memorial service, not to mention the emptying out of her suite in Emmanuel Home so someone else could move in. With many helpers, all that needed to be done got done, and three months later we had a family day of remembrance for Mom at the Weening home in Calgary. Photographs of several of the events and copies of tributes by members of the family are accessible on my website, on a special page dedicated to Harriet Wierenga's memory. The following spring we had a second time of reminiscence, along with an opportunity to distribute some of Mom's weavings and paintings, this time at Andy and Joan's house in Edmonton.

In November our children organized a surprise celebration in honour of my 85th birthday, at the large new home to which Andy and Joan had moved some time earlier. Anticipating a dinner to which we had been invited, I was totally surprised to be greeted by all the members of our immediate family. It was a wonderful celebration, particularly when we listened to amusing or interesting stories and words of appreciation from our children and grandchildren.

In August 2018 Dixie and I had a family celebration in honour of our 60th wedding anniversary. The real date actually had been in June, but our grandson Zach and his fiancé Renae had chosen that month to get married so, of course, we went to celebrate their wedding with them. We had our own celebration a few months later, a joyful time of talk and laughter, food and drink, and a time to express our gratitude to God for his love and care through all those years.

In May 2019 we traveled to Calgary to witness the baptism of Sean, the long-awaited son of niece Rachel and her husband Travis. It had been a difficult road for Rachel, especially biologically but also emotionally, and the entire family rejoiced over Sean's safe emergence from the womb and his reception of the sign and seal of God's covenant faithfulness.

Joan had volunteered to drive our van (to keep the older folks out of driving trouble), and she did it again six weeks later when we returned to Calgary to help celebrate Karen's retirement after 37 years of teaching. Karen had done all of her teaching at the Calgary Christian School except for a year's exchange with a teacher in Sydney, Australia. We heard songs and speeches lauding the many contributions Karen had made during her teaching career, especially in helping shape the lives of a large number of young students, and also expressions of sadness from her younger

colleagues about now having to get along without her. Even with our parental biases, we know we are justifiably proud of what Karen has accomplished during her life to date, with the emphasis on this occasion on her 'working' years.

In September we participated in the 40th anniversary celebration of the opening of The King's University, an institution with which we have a long-time association, including the time of its history before opening day in 1979. It was a wonderful occasion to celebrate God's goodness.

From time to time we have considered the possibility of moving from our house to a condo or into a seniors' residence somewhere, but each time we have concluded that we want to stay where we are. As one backup plan there is the possibility of renting Elaine's condo in *The Valleyview* and moving there. Another possibility, of course, would be to sell our house and rent another condo somewhere. Also, back in 2011 we asked to have our name put on the list at Canterbury Manor, a seniors' residence nearby that is owned by the Anglican Church. A couple of times we have been invited to look at a vacant unit there, but each time we have declined, and our name remains on their list, near or at the top. We have been told that we need to be able to walk to be accepted as residents! An advantage of such a move would be that the place also has accommodation for people who need more care.

For now, therefore, we continue to live in our own house because, for better or worse, that it is still more attractive to us than the alternative possibilities we have considered. We did, however, put our name on the list for a place in a Christian Seniors Home planned for a location in west Edmonton, even though a first phase probably will not be completed until 2023. It may well be, therefore, that we will not be able to make use of that possibility.

During the summer of 2018 our children encouraged us to try a food delivery program, 'Hello Fresh'. It provides weekly delivery of an icepack-cooled box with three bags that each contain the makings of a meal intended for two people, and invariably enough for three or more. After a trial run we decided to sign up and, except for the occasional skipped week (we have to let them know by the previous Wednesday) we have made use of the service happily. With a couple of minor exceptions we have enjoyed all the meals, a number of which have taken us well away from our more customary expectations of what constitutes a supper meal. There is always a meat component, but the rest varies. Each bag includes all the necessary ingredients such as spices and

dressings, as well as detailed instructions on how to prepare the meal. Sometimes the instructions even tell us in what order to put the food on our plates. The preparation part of the meal can be a bit finicky, but Dixie has been able to cope with that fairly well once she got used to it. I mostly watch it happen but sometimes help out when several things seem to need doing at exactly the same time. And so we plan to continue with it. The new system seems to have only a minimal effect on our total food expenses, though that may be helped also by the fact that we eat out even less often than we did for a while (and that already happened only infrequently).

Six years ago, in 2013, we decided it was time to get someone else to take care of the routine grass cutting and snow clearing at our house. After one false start with someone who did not want to travel across the river on a regular basis during the winter, we signed on with a small, mostly one- or two-man, operation called Grassbusters. They cut the grass once a week, do a major clean-up in the spring and again in the fall, and clear the snow from our front sidewalk and driveway within 24 hours after it quits snowing. They may not always meet the same expectations we might have if we were doing it ourselves, but the system has worked quite well. The flower bed planting and maintenance I can still manage, at least for now. Sooner or later we may have to find someone else for that also.

Several years ago, probably some time in 2016 or 2017, I stopped my fairly regular walking in the river valley near our house during the winter months, mostly to minimize the risk of falling on icy sidewalks or trails. I also had noticed that the hills had become steeper than I remembered from earlier times. My summer walking routines in the ravine and valley now also have been reduced to an occasional walk there, and I get most of my routine exercise by walking on a treadmill we have in our basement. My doctor thinks it is a good idea to keep walking! Some 15 years ago, our children put up some money towards renting the machine, on a rent-to-buy basis, and after trying it out for a while we bought it. Initially I did quite a bit of running on it, but that has given way to walking, which I try to do most days. All of these changes have taken place in the last five years or so. I recall speaking to someone who is five years older than I am, probably at least fifteen years ago, and saying that he was only five years older. His response was that they were five important years, and I now understand that much better than I did at the time.

The numbness symptoms in my legs that started on the bottom of my feet in 2000 and gradually increased thereafter seem to have stayed the same for some time now, and my sense of balance

continues to be manageable. In August 2014 I had another visit with the neurologist who earlier had diagnosed the condition as peripheral neuropathy, to check on its progress. It was quite clear from the measurements he made that nerves in the lower parts of my legs transmit touch or pain messages poorly or not at all, apparently a fairly common age-related phenomenon. In my case, thankfully, it is not accompanied by leg pain. The only suggestion the neurologist could offer was to try monthly injections of vitamin B12, something that is needed for nerves to regenerate. Consequently, I have been getting those injections ever since, and I also eat a vitamin B12 pill every morning. In any case, there has been little change in the condition the last several years and it is manageable, for which I am grateful.

Several years ago Karen bought me a very nice lightweight walking cane for my birthday, and I frequently use that cane now, particularly in icy conditions or on other precarious surfaces. She expressed concern about insulting me with such a gift, but I accepted it gratefully. It probably is part of some kind of reality check on my age and gradually changing physical ability.

Some of the after-effects of my shingles attack in 2010 are still with me, in the form of mild nerve pain just below my rib cage, both front and back. The pain occasionally flares up into discomfort for a day or so but much of the time I tend to forget that it is there.

Just after Christmas 2018, I had the unsettling experience of standing by the sink in the bathroom soon after getting up, and suddenly finding myself sitting on the floor, glass still in my hand. With a bit of a struggle I was able to get up and make my way to the bed, where I spent the next four or five hours. When I went to see the doctor later that day, all he could tell me is that our bodies do mysterious things sometimes, and to go get some tests done. Predictably almost, no abnormalities showed up in the results, and it became another experience, one that has not happened since.

Recently, Hendrica Schouten, one of our friends and a serious practitioner of Tai Chi, offered to come to our house and teach Dixie and Elaine and me the moves she and her husband Bert go through first thing in the morning five days a week. We were able to have about five sessions with her before she and Bert left on an extended road trip. During that time we got as far as doing the first dozen or so of over a hundred sequential moves in the program but since then, to our shame, we have not practiced much of what we learned. The brief one-leg positions are the

ones that give me trouble, of course, in terms of balance. Apart from that, the stringently-controlled movements of arms, hands, feet, and legs seem to be an excellent form of exercise.

Along the way, I have had regular eye checkups, and also a couple of hearing tests. Indeed, there has been some hearing loss, mostly for higher-frequency sounds (apparently to be expected in people my age), but the losses have not been serious enough so far to make hearing aids a necessity. My eye doctor three years ago (2017) thought I should have my eyes checked for possible cataract surgery. In due course I saw a specialist but he did not think anything needed to be done at the time. My most recent eye checkup was in May 2019, and no further action seemed warranted.

Dixie had hip replacement surgery in June 2010 and was still in recovery mode when we decided to rent a beach house for a week two months later, on Half Moon Bay on BC's Sunshine Coast. Karen and Elaine and I drove our van, and Dixie and Joan flew to Vancouver, where we met them at the airport and drove together the rest of the way. Dixie was able to get around quite well by that time with the aid of a cane and, with some help, was able to make her way up and down the stairs to the second floor bedrooms. We had a very nice time there, including climbing around on the rocky shore, making photos of some of the plants and critters there, and exploring one of the neighbouring towns.

More recently, Dixie also has experienced changes in her mobility, mostly with ankle weakness and other leg-related concerns. For several years she would walk with her friend Alyce Oosterhuis on a regular basis, outside during the summer and in a local mall during the winter, and that no longer happens now. Our activity program clearly is shrinking. Nevertheless, in February 2020, we signed up for a six-week exercise program sponsored by Alberta Health. We passed the initial assessment test, which was encouraging at least, but the coronavirus concern now has put the whole program on hold.

For the last fifteen or twenty years I have kept a record of books I have read, mostly just by author and title, but occasionally with a few lines or paragraphs that struck me in some way. The list is long and varied, probably a bit heavier on fiction than on non-fiction. When I look at the list, as I do from time to time, I find that many of the titles and most of the authors' names continue to look familiar, but I am hard pressed to come up with anything related to the actual content of the books. I am not unhappy about that, and simply make the observation here. After

all, reading a book is a largely experiential enjoyment, not all the details of which need to be remembered (as opposed to working with a textbook from which things must be learned and remembered for future use). I read magazine articles in *The Atlantic*, *National Geographic*, *Maclean's*, *Christian Courier*, *The Banner*, and *Photo Life* (all of which come to our house on a regular basis) and put their content somewhere in between books and daily newspapers (of which we receive two every week day). The line between non-fiction and fiction in some of those articles sometimes is, unfortunately, ill-defined, but they still are an important source of information from outside our home, and we read the material with a measure of discretion. Dixie and I don't always read the same articles but when we do they can be good material for conversation.

Dixie joined a ladies book club several years ago and meets with about a dozen other women once a month to discuss a particular book and to enjoy some social time together. She very much enjoys the opportunities and the times together, even though reading a book chosen by someone else does not always work well, and finding enough book copies for each club member also poses a challenge sometimes.

As early as 1976, Dixie and I started going out for an annual dinner with Bertha and Bill Groot in honour of Bill's and my birthdays that are just one day apart. The foursome tradition continued for many years, until we invited Wilco and Audrey to join us, since Audrey's birthday is just a few weeks later. Eventually the dinner dates turned into lunch dates and began to include all of my siblings and their spouses. The lunch dates happened two or three times a year, frequently in a restaurant, but sometimes also in one of our homes. One such special event was an outdoor barbecue lunch at John and Audrey's home in August 2013, triggered in part by a visit from cousin Hans Van 't Land and his wife Rita from Lethbridge, and enriched by their presence.

A month later we were part of a Vanden Born family reunion afternoon and evening in the McQueen Community League, organized mainly by niece Jacquelyn. It was a great time to reconnect, especially with nieces and nephews, and to reminisce a bit. It was also the first time that one of the regulars was missing. Brother John had died at the end of June, and we missed him.

Five years later, in September 2018, a large number of the extended Vanden Born clan met again in the same place, this time for a potluck supper, and again organized mostly by niece Jacquelyn. The occasion was clouded by the absence of two more of the Vanden Born brothers and of John's widow Sophie. John J had died in March 2014, Wilco in April 2015, and Sophie in October 2015. They had been important and much loved members of the family and we missed all of them.

In spite of the sadness about the losses there was a good deal of laughing, a lot of conversation, and a fine presentation of Vanden Born family history by brother Jack. His presentation was especially meaningful for and much appreciated by the now mostly middle-aged grandchildren of my parents and by their children, the next-down generation. Those great-grandchildren are now getting married and having children, and the family's branches are growing farther apart.

In recent years Jack and Avlyn have hosted a Vanden Born sibling and spouse lunch-time get-together several times. At one such event, in honour of couple of November birthdays in 2016, I had a potentially very serious accident, when I stepped back at the top of the stairs while taking a picture, lost my balance, bounced off the wall behind me, and slid down the stairs on my back, head first, and with camera in hand. Thankfully, nothing broke, and I survived, albeit with some major bruises down one side of my back, all of which healed relatively soon. A medical checkup the next day did not reveal any special problems. One result was that I became much more careful on stairs everywhere.

In the summer of 2017 I had a surprise contact with Anton de Ridder in the Netherlands. I had not heard of him before. He is the chairman of the local historical society in Achterberg, the village in which I grew up. Our family actually lived some 200 meters outside the village, in a cluster of four houses surrounded by farm land. Anton had become interested in the '*familie van den Born*' and in its fate after leaving the Netherlands for Canada in 1949. My father had been the owner of a local feed mill and supplied poultry and cattle feed to many farmers in the area. As such he had become well known in the community. Anton somehow found my brother Jack's name and contacted him for information about our family. At that point I also became involved because Anton did not know much English, and I could still speak Dutch, albeit haltingly at times. In any case, I spoke with Anton by telephone once and sent him copies of whatever

documentation I had about our family. He in turn sent us many historical photographs he had been able to collect. We discovered that his home is on the southern edge of the village, directly across a farm field from the house in which I grew up, and about 200 meters away. Until the current coronavirus crisis developed, it had been Anton's plan to make a public presentation of his findings about our family in Achterberg in June 2020. It is probably safe to assume that the plan is now on hold until further notice.

In October 2018, during an out-of-season snowstorm, we had a visit from Dan and Julie Van Beilen from Brampton. Dan and his first wife Leida (who died in 2008) were our age and we had become close friends during our time in Toronto in 1958 to 1960; every time we met in later years we could simply pick up where we had left off the time before. We had worked in completely different disciplines, with me as an agriculture- and biology-type academic and he a municipal-administration civil engineer. There was no significant overlap in our work details, therefore, but in the important issues of family and life experience we shared the same faith and enough of the same views on many things to make repeated personal contact and conversation meaningful and important.

A week earlier Robert and Roswita Norris had driven up from Davis, California to visit her brother in Edmonton, and we had a nice visit with them as well. Robert had been a graduate student in the department where I worked soon after I joined the faculty, and we had frequent contact with him and his wife over the years, especially during my study-leave time in Davis in 1969.

At least three times during the last decade, we have participated in reunions of my 1956 university graduating class. The most recent one took place in 2016, the 60th anniversary of that momentous event. The group was not large to begin with and has shrunk in recent years as a result of deaths or decreasing physical ability. The main event organizers are among those who have died, and the future of such reunions is, therefore, quite uncertain.

About ten years ago we started going out to dinner with a group of retired University of Alberta academics and their spouses, five or six times a year, and always at a different restaurant chosen by the main organizer. We got to know a number of couples that way whose 'academic half' had worked in a totally different discipline than the one I was familiar with, and there were many things we could talk about. Some members of the group were more congenial than others, of

course, and sometimes the noise of others in the restaurant restricted conversation to the one or two people nearest to us, but on the whole the dinners were positive experiences. For the last two years our participation in the dinners has mostly stopped, however, because the dinner dates were changed from Fridays to Thursdays and then conflicted with my camera club meetings or Dixie's book club sessions. One of the members of the group with whom I had a lot of good conversations died very suddenly just after Christmas 2019, and I attended a memorial service for him at a funeral home. Sadly, faith or trust in God did not play a part in anything that was said during the service except in the prayer by the officiating minister.

Last summer, 2019, we decided not to renew our long-time subscription to the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's six-concert series, partly in response to a sudden increase in the cost of the aisle seats we had ever since we started (we liked those seats!), but also partly because the travel to and from and the walking around had become more difficult over time. We had started going on a regular basis in 1996, shortly before my retirement and, needless to say perhaps, it had been a good run. Music can sound great from speakers in our living room but it is never the same as live in a concert hall, where the (forced) concentration and the visual context contribute much to the enjoyment. For most of those years we went together with our friends Bert and Hendrica Schouten. Bert would pick us up and drive, we would pay for parking, and on most occasions we would visit for a while afterwards at our house while enjoying a glass of wine and some snacks.

Similarly, 2018-2019 was our last full season of attendance at Citadel Theatre productions, after being regulars there since 2001. For 2019-2020 we bought tickets to four of the six main productions, and at the time of writing we have been to three of them. The fourth production has been postponed in light of the coronavirus concerns and may not take place at all. We enjoyed most of the productions over the years, some more than others, and we have particularly good memories of a few special ones. With some of the musical productions we had more difficulty, perhaps related to our hearing (how could that be?) but just as likely because the lyrics came from a time or place that was unfamiliar, which made them difficult to understand and appreciate.

A few more of our travel experiences since 2010 are worth including here. In early 2012, Dixie and I flew to Palm Springs, spent a week travelling around in the area, visited Dixie's cousin Sy

Westra and his wife Jan in Chino, and then tried out a week in a 'park model' in Caliente, a trailer park in the desert not far from Palm Springs. It was an enjoyable week, but it did nothing to entice us to buy into something there, or even to make a return trip. Several couples we knew were staying in the same park, including our Edmonton friends Bert and Hendrica Schouten with whom we went on a windmill farm tour on a very windy day.

A few months later Jack and Avlyn took us to Frog Lake in eastern Alberta, a provincial park on the site of the infamous Frog Lake Massacre in 1885, during the Cree uprising that was part of the North-West Rebellion. A bit of early Alberta history, therefore.

The following summer Dixie and I drove to Kelowna for a week as guests in the condo owned there by Clarence and Jean. The week was great, even if the weather was unusually rainy part of the time. Because of serious flood problems in and around Calgary at the time we made the return trip home via Jasper instead.

We have not done any extensive travelling the last two years. There was, of course, the flight to Abbotsford for Zach and Renae's wedding, two road trips to Calgary (with Joan driving our van), and a trip to Rosebud for a play featuring Martin Luther King, as guests of Mark and Debbie. Predictably, Debbie did the driving. Karen joined us for the occasion and drove up from Calgary. Driving through the Alberta countryside on a sunny summer evening is always an enjoyable experience, especially as the long shadows take shape, and this trip was no exception. Without his eyesight, Mark, unfortunately, had to miss out on the visual part of the experience.

In our congregation there is an unorganized group of seniors called 'West of 60', the members of which have gone on at least a dozen or so outings in the last six or more years, organized by a couple of energetic and enthusiastic women. One such outing in 2016 took some 35 people on a bus trip to Neerlandia and a couple of places around there. Dixie and I went along, of course. After all, she lived in Neerlandia for six years when she was young, and she is related to a number of people in that community. It was good to see the place again, on a bit of a guided tour, because other than attending one or two funeral services we had not really spent any time there since going to the hamlet's centennial celebrations in 2012.

In 2018, with the same group, we had a tour of the Rutherford House, a large historic house owned by the University of Alberta, and named after the first premier of Alberta. I invited my

sister Bertha and her husband Bill along, because she especially had some nostalgic connections to the house. In the early 1950's it was the Delta Upsilon fraternity house, where Bertha worked as a cook and housekeeper for a couple of years and lived in a tiny room in the basement, along with a friend who worked with her. That friend left town in January of 1953, which for me was midway during my freshman year as a university student who knew little of the world in the big city. After some discussion with Bertha, I left the house where I was boarding and moved in with her for the next four months, into the second tiny bedroom in the basement. In return for room and board I served as housekeeper's assistant, helping with cleanup after supper every night and with changing the beds in the upper-floor sleeping quarters on Saturdays. Among the dozen or so students who lived there at the time was Peter Lougheed, who years later played an important role for a time in Alberta's political history.

In the fall of 2009, I had sent a letter to our church council, suggesting that the church website, a newish communication invention that had been in place for a couple of years, was not doing a particularly good job of its intended purpose, and that something should perhaps be done to improve it. I might have known what the response would be, but had not thought that far ahead. In due course, the response came, asking me and three other named members to form a committee to do what I had suggested. A new challenge. Two of the members named were computer techies and website-savvy, the other two (of which I was one) not so much. In any case, the committee had been given a wide open mandate and had its first meeting in February of 2010, with me as its chairman. We dug in, learned what we needed to, and I worked with the committee for the next eight years.

We found someone who was able to help us with a template and some ideas, and before long we had a new website going. I was able to learn enough of what it takes to have a website and to keep it up to date, and our first one ran for about four years. Then it was time for another update, which was organized and set up by a professional website designer. I learned to do the necessary updating on the new site also and could even teach the church's administrative assistant to do the weekly routine things. Over the years there have been a few changes in committee membership and, after trading away my chairman role for a secretarial one some time in 2016, I decided it was time to resign from the committee in December 2017. It had been a satisfying and rewarding experience, and I learned much in the process.

The experience also motivated me to develop a website of my own, where I could post family history documents, family photos, and a collection of my own photographs. I no longer remember how I decided on the name “Greywill” for my blog website, but I soon got used to it after I started the site in 2011. I found books that helped me learn the necessary organizing and programming and did a fairly major overhaul several times. Of course, if I do not use a certain protocol for a while, I have to go back to the drawing board and relearn it or find a copy of a printed version somewhere in my filing cabinet. I found that I can store many of my photo files in the ‘cloud’ somewhere, with most of them on Google and Greywill (a few albums are still on Flickr), and then simply use links on Greywill to access the images. A rough estimate is that well over twenty thousand of my images are stored that way. I have the original files on my own computer and on a backup hard drive, so if either of the storage spaces fails, all is not lost.

The Vanden Born family history is an important component of the Greywill content, and much has been added to it over the years. Examples include the *Vanden Born and Nijboer Line*, prepared by my brother Jack, scanned versions of a small number of letters written by my father, scanned versions of the diaries he kept from 1949 to 1980 (in Dutch), English translations of relevant parts of those same diaries, ancestry timelines for both the Vanden Born and Wierenga families, ‘important dates’ for those same families, important events in the lives of these families (such as my parents’ fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1980), and sections dedicated to the memories of deceased parents and siblings. The entire content of the autobiography I completed in early 2011 is included, as is a section dedicated to the Van ’t Land family, in which the wife/mother *Tante Aal* was the only one of my father’s siblings to emigrate to Canada. Jack provided the content for a section on the history of Busby and surroundings.

I have participated in a number of photo outings organized by the Images Alberta Camera Club where I have been a member since 2004, and also in a couple of special workshops. Outings in 2013 and 2014, for example, took a number of us to the University Botanic Garden at Devon, covered with a thick layer of fresh snow under a bright blue sky, to the Salisbury Greenhouse near Sherwood Park, the Edmonton Flying Club, the Arts Building on the University of Alberta campus, MacDougall United Church in downtown Edmonton, and, for the last time, to the Ukrainian Village east of Edmonton. Many photographs from those outings have been posted on

the Greywill website. Similarly, photos from a club-organized macrophotography workshop in 2015 are accessible there.

My interest in photography has continued unabated in the last nine years, but I no longer have the energy or the stamina to participate in club-organized outings or workshops. I also have not done as much 'new' photography at home or nearby in the last year as I used to, but I do continue to submit entries to the club's monthly competitions, and I attend most of the club meetings. It is always interesting to see what others do for a particular competition theme or what gets entered in the 'open' part. Everyone's imagination or style is different, and there is always something new to learn or to appreciate. All the images I have entered over the years are accessible via Greywill, which makes a convenient record for me.

In early 2013 I was asked to coordinate a series of 'small group' photography sessions for interested people in our church. Five or six people participated in these sessions in our home, during which I had the opportunity to show some of my photos, to talk about camera operation details, and to demonstrate some of the photo editing tools and techniques I use.

About five years ago, Ann put together a very nice two-volume photo book on Dixie's life, so in 2017 I decided to start work on some photo books as well. With the recent reappearance of photo albums in the form of such photo books, and with continuing technical changes in the digital world, it made sense to get many of the photos in my various collections in printed form. Another motivating factor was that upon my death the fate of all the digital images could be quite uncertain.

That project has taken up quite a bit of my time during the last year. I completed the first book in 2017, on a trial basis, and included many of my 'Lines and Shapes' and 'Light and Shadow' photographs. I was happy with the product, but not entirely with the production process. It meant uploading all the photos to a website (I used Costco Photo Centre) and then arranging them on the pages of the book within the various options available. Nevertheless, I used it for several books, including one about the life of Mom Wierenga. For her photos I had to do the book in two parts because I could have no more than sixty pages in one book. In any case, I had a 'proof' copy printed and, after making a few corrections, had copies printed for each of our children and for Dixie's siblings.

Next was a book that covered Dixie's and my lives, separately from the time of birth until we became acquainted, and together from then on. Each of our children, of course, received a copy of that book also.

I followed up with books covering the lives of each of our children. Back in 2005, I had collected and scanned all slides and printed photos I had for each of them and put them on DVDs, complete with music. Each of the children then received copies of all five discs, which they could play on a DVD player, seeing all four to five hundred photos of themselves, one at a time. For the photo books I used mostly the same images but added a number to bring the collections up to date as well as I could. I have now completed those five books, and each of our children has a copy of such a book, with between four and five hundred images, six to nine or ten to a page. I have taken 'screen shots' of each double page in the books, and have made those accessible via my website..

The possibility of losing access to my photo art files, particularly when I am longer around or am no longer able to keep up with it, prompted me to think seriously about producing printed versions of the most important photos in those collections as well. Accordingly, after the first book I mentioned earlier, I now have completed six more, with different collections of my photographs. After a bit of experimenting, I found that I can compose each page for a photo book on my computer. I can change the size and arrangement of the photos on each page at will, and then upload the files with the completed pages directly to the book program. It still is a finicky and time-consuming process, but rewarding in the end. Here also, I have taken screen shots of each double page in the books and made those accessible via my website.

Some closing reflections. Whether we like it or not, we are getting used to the idea that we now are more dependent on others to do things for us than we once were. If earlier in life we felt invincible perhaps, we do not feel that way anymore, especially in the global health crisis that has suddenly engulfed us. We are also at a stage in our lives when not only older (and younger) family members but also friends and acquaintances are dying and our social community has begun to shrink. It is especially disheartening when the losses involve people who are younger than we are.

Our church family and our friends within that family are more important than ever, and our participation in worship remains an essential part of our faith life. Even a few weeks' forced absence from communal worship services quickly reinforces the notion of that importance.

We are grateful to be blessed with responsible leadership from people in our church, our community, and our nation, even if we don't necessarily always agree with the decisions made by them. The current health crisis makes us even more concerned about those who have to make important and often difficult decisions about how to proceed. We are both content and relieved not to bear those responsibilities ourselves, and pray for wisdom for all those who need it.

Within our family circle, we are constantly reminded of the importance of prayer for our children and grandchildren and those dear to them. The current uncertainty and anxiety about jobs and related financial concerns plays a large role and no one is immune to it. We need to keep reminding ourselves that our God is faithful and trustworthy and that we can and must cast all our cares on Him.
