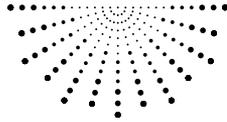


TINK POSITIVE
A MOTHER-DAUGHTER STORY



DIANA MAE SMITH

*In honour of my mother, Roelofje (Roef) Aronson, nee van Beek
To mark her 100th Birthday
July 2020*

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I have called this story “Tink Positive” in honour of one of Mom’s favourite sayings. This simple invocation embodies two of her key traits – her optimism and her determination.

Mom has always been an optimist, despite many challenging early life circumstances – the death of her mother at age 13, the deprivation and horror of the Second World War, up close in Holland, the move to Canada as a young woman where she embraced a new life, a new culture, and new love. Her positive outlook and determination coloured my entire childhood and indeed my whole attitude in life.

Her life continues with the characteristic acceptance of each day, facing realities and limitations with dignity and her steadfast resolve to do what needs to be done and do it as best she can.

“Tink Positive” is not just a saying that makes us smile and think of Roef – it also represents part of her legacy to us. A piece of hard-won life wisdom that in her ordinary, everyday humble way, she offers to us as a gift and an invitation.

This story of facts, narrative and my interpretations forms the threads of her life to date that I reflect on as her daughter. I share them with the intention of honoring her life, and inviting those who love her, know her in their own way, to share their stories of Roef. Together we create the woven tapestry of our interconnections – all of us.

Bless you Mom. We love and are loved. She is loved. May we always “Tink Positive”.

- Diana Smith, July 2020

INTRODUCTION

I began to write this as the story of my mother – Roelofje (Roef) Aronson, nee van Beek. I wanted to do right by her – and to get it right. She instilled that in me – getting it right. I wanted to honour her life and everything she has given to me. There was a story inside me demanding to be told. A story that is both grounded in our shared lived experience and continuing to emerge as we grow and mature in understanding and love.

This year, 2020, marks my mother's 100 birthday, on July 2. She is living in Laurier House, a long-term care home for people with complex care needs in Edmonton, Alberta. She is physically frail, somewhat withdrawn from life and in cognitive decline. She gets around by wheelchair and requires full care. The COVID- 19 pandemic prevented us from gathering with her in person as an extended family, as we had planned.

And so I engaged in a different kind of gathering. A gathering of stories, historical facts, memories, feelings, and reflections. I have reviewed family documents and photographs, as well as notes from conversations with my mom and other family members, my own journal writings, and spoken with family members. Piecing together the story, stopping along the way to reflect. I felt compelled to pull together the facts and events that formed the fabric of a long life. And I have moved beyond the factual narrative as such. To explore her expe-

riences and feelings – to try to understand what life was and is actually like for her.

I recognize that the latter in particular involves my own interpretations, my lived experience with my mother, how I have heard and received her stories over the years, and how being raised by her influenced the stories I carry about myself and my life. And so it has naturally become my story as well. I have come to understand that the fabric of her life is also part of the fabric of mine. That we share some key life patterns and parallels that have interwoven over our lifetimes.

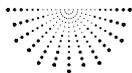
Fabric and patterns seem a helpful way to think of this weaving together of stories and meaning-making. They outlive us. What is the fabric of a life? What is left at the end of the day? Where does she end, and I begin? Whose story is this really? What happens to the fabric once she dies? Once I die? How do others who know and love her weave their memories and experiences together with mine?

Like any journey, this one I trust has reached some sort of destination – a place of acceptance and peace and insight. A stop along the way on the continuing journey of our lives. I offer it as a perspective on our two lives. As a way to help me better understand both of us, and as a gift to my family and descendants - born and unborn. ***We love and are loved. She is loved.***

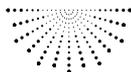


95th Birthday Celebration, July 2, 2015

PART ONE: ROEF'S LIFE STORY



THE GROWING UP YEARS IN
HOLLAND (1920-1933)



BEFORE THE BEGINNING

*M*y mother only remembers one grandmother - her father's mother, who lived to the ripe old age of 82. All her other grandparents had died. Her grandmother lived with her mother's aunt and had been married three times. The first husband died. Mom's father was born with his mother's second husband, who was probably a farmer, and who also died. Her father was the oldest child of that marriage. His mother then married her brother-in-law and had eight more kids - so Mom's father had many half-brothers and sisters. Mom remembers going to visit her grandmother on Sunday with her brother Gerrit. She always had a chocolate bar in a fancy cupboard made of wood.

Mom does not know anything about her mother's family - just that her mother had one brother who went to America and died when he was 23.

Her parents married in the Dutch Reformed Church in Ede, Holland on October 30, 1919. Her mother was 39 years old and her father nine years younger. The family story goes that there was snow on the ground. She has done the math and notes that she was born early the following July - about eight months later!



THE BEGINNING

My mother was born Roelofje van Beek on July 2, 1920 at home on a farm in rural Holland. The farm was named Mossel and was located in the municipality of Arnhem, between the towns of Otterlo and Ede. These towns were about 12 km apart. The farm was closer to Otterlo and Ede was more of the commercial centre.

She has always been known as Roef, pronounced “Roof” and often mistaken for “Ruth” in Canada. She was the eldest of three children born to her mother, Geeritje Schut, and her father, Jan Gerrit van Beek. Her sister Martha was four years younger and her brother Gerrit was six years younger. My brother is also called Gerrit, after my grandfather and uncle, as was the Dutch custom.

Mom’s dad was a baker, but he became allergic to the flour and had to change to farming. Before that he had been in the army in the First World War, halftime.



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Life for the young Roef was busy and active with lots of company. She remembers her mother as very patient, well-liked, and easy going, and that she loved to dress well. She was a good cook - she made cakes and many other things for her family. Dressing well and cooking for people became very important to my mother as she grew up – and she passed that expectation and pattern along to me.

Her father was very tall and friendly but had a short temper. Her sister Martha remembers a nice atmosphere in their home – that their dad was a disciplinarian, but that discipline wasn’t unkind. Mom remembers visiting with aunts and uncles on Sundays, often for tea. She particularly remembers her Aunt Martha.

They raised sheep on the farm and had a shepherd. Everyone had to help out. The girls churned butter, made buttermilk and tended to the animals – which meant pumping water by hand, as there was no elec-

tricity. The children sold eggs at the Ede market and to a co-op - big crates of eggs that were delivered with the horse and wagon.



MOVING FROM THE FARM TO THE PENSION

By 1927, when Mom was seven years old, economic conditions had worsened and the family had to leave the farm and move into a leased farm home. This was one of many times in Mom's life when historical events and conditions directly impacted her personally. She remembers vividly her father saying, about the crash of 1929, "those darn capitalists."

They rented/leased their new home from a local baron and ran a pension [bed and breakfast] there in the summers. They all had to help out with running the pension, as they had on the farm. It was still in the country and they kept chickens and grew their own vegetables and flowers. Mom learned to get on with what needed to be done at a young age. It cost guests 3.50 a day to stay at the pension and they came by train to Ede. Mom's dad would pick them up and bring them via horse and wagon for a couple of weeks or a month. It was usually whole families - all kinds of people including doctors and lawyers. Mom and her siblings played with the kids staying at the pension - ball, skipping, teeter totter, swings, playhouse. There was a pond. Mom remembers selling soft drinks and lemonade outside, also beer and buttermilk, and getting tips from the guests.

A fellow with intellectual disabilities named Pete, with a brother in Ede, helped out. Pete did most of the chores for the next day, hauled water, and ate with the family. He gave the horse turnips to eat. In the winter, Pete had a room. He stayed with them until they sold the pension and moved to Otterlo during the war, when he went to the Kramers to live.

Cream and milk were kept in a cellar at the back of the house, and vegetables were in a big barrel. They had salted sauerkraut, and Mom also remembers French beans and endive, and having to wash eggs every day.

Shopping was an important part of life in the country. A wagon came to the door. There was a butcher and a baker. Fruit came from

Otterlo. They went to Otterlo or Ede on Mondays for shopping and then to Arnhem on Fridays. Travel was always by bicycle. The countryside roads were good gravel, with lots of bicycles, and a few autocars, carriages, or horses with wagons.



GOING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL

School was in nearby Otterlo and Mom and her younger sister Martha rode their bicycles 5 km on a gravel bike path each way. Martha remembers once being exempted from an exam because there was a snowstorm, the path being treacherous and so far to ride. They parked their bikes at the principal's house so other kids would not ride them. Because of the distance, they were the only children to take their lunches to school, which they ate at the principal's house with a glass of freshly boiled milk. Mom says she hated it but was too shy to say no. She learned to do things right and not complain from a young age.

Children played skipping, tag and hide-and-seek at school.

Mom remembers that her first teacher was Mrs. Rhonda DeHaan, and that she was nice. There were two grades in one room. She taught everyone to knit, embroider and crochet. Mom started in Grade 1 and was a good knitter. She was an average student, not a top one. She remembers that she got to stay home when her baby brother was born. When she came back to school, the teacher asked her where she had been. She said she had had a baby, and everyone laughed. She was embarrassed.

Mom's sister Martha remembers taking a goose egg as a birthday gift to Mrs. DeHaan – and that her birthday was March 19th.



SMALL DETAILS OF CHILDHOOD

Our memory of childhood is often made up of small scattered details. That often reflect the things a child notices. Here are some I have gleaned from Mom's stories over the years:

- She had her tonsils out when she was 12 years old; she went to Arnhem to the hospital and stayed overnight. She had lots of earaches as a child, and they put cotton and warm face clothes on her ears to help ease the pain.
- She remembers having knee socks, not wanting long stockings, and having blue knees [perhaps from the cold?]. She knitted socks with her mother and sometimes they sold them. Martha also remembers their mother knitting with visitors in the winter.
- The house had lots of paintings and old furniture from the family.
- They always got money in the spring for a new dress. The vendor was in Ede and is still in business.
- They picked wildflowers in the forest.
- Mom was the first girl to have a bike, a special girl's bike. She always got the new bikes, which they bought in Ede, as she was the eldest.
- Her mother used to take Mom for walks before dinner on Sunday. She was interested in rocks.
- Mom remembers the first time she rode in a car. People who had a summer home near the pension had a car. She was scared. They went around the countryside, filled with sand dunes and birch trees.



HOLIDAYS, CELEBRATIONS AND SOCIAL LIFE

A special festive time for Mom growing up was December 6 – the day that St. Nicholas came and brought presents. The children put a wooden shoe by the fireplace or the stove with a carrot in it for St. Nicholas's horse. Black Peter was with him. And if you weren't good, you got put in Black Peter's sack. They had gingersnaps [speculaas], chocolate letters in the shapes of their initials, and almond paste treats. They gave presents to their friends, accompanied by a poem or a rhyme.

Christmas was quieter. There was a tree with clip-on candleholders

and real candles, cookies and chocolates. Roulade, a special beef roast, was the usual meal just for family. They also went to church.

The family celebrated other holidays. There was a parade with a band on the Queen's birthday in August, for which people dressed up - with an orange ribbon or in red, white and blue. Orange was for the House of Orange, and red/white/blue were the royal colours. At Easter, Mom remembers having bread shaped like a chicken with currants for eyes, and a parade with palm trees.

Candies were fruit drops that came in packages. Birthdays were important. They invited friends for coffee and fancy cakes with soft drinks. They also wore the colored ribbon on their birthdays, when everyone gave them a present and sang to them.

Sometimes for entertainment the family went to the open-air historical site in Arnhem or the amusement park in Ede. Roef went on the train once to Amsterdam or The Hague, she is not sure which. On Sundays, they went for long bike rides - miles and miles - with cousins or friends. They often stopped for an ice cream cone at a café and Mom always had vanilla.

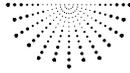
The family went to the Dutch Reformed Church regularly, sometimes twice on Sunday. Mom was baptized and then confirmed. She had to go to the minister's house to learn lots in preparation for confirmation, and then answer questions from the church board. She still has her confirmation book.

The family played cards. Mom's dad belonged to a weekly group with uncles playing cards in the living room. She remembers them having a drink... jenever, maybe advocaat and koffie.

Mom's parents were very hospitable. Teachers came to the house for dinner and the postman always stopped by for coffee, as did the police. There were lots of books. And she learned music at school. Her teacher played the violin - not very well apparently. At home they had a mouth organ. Her family also had one of the first radios, with big horns and batteries. People would come to visit to listen to it.

Mom's family always talked about politics and sports. Local football clubs were important, and they went to the local games. There was a little snow in winter, and they went skating on the pond. In Otterlo there was a bigger pond and they skated with friends. The skates were strapped onto boots with long blades with curved fronts.

HER MOTHER'S DEATH (1933)



Mom's childhood innocence came to an abrupt end in September 1933 with the death of her mother after a long battle with stomach cancer. She recalls being present for her mother's death, aged 13, as were her siblings, aged nine and six. She remembers her lying in bed and passing through, as she called it. Her mother had had bouts with rheumatoid arthritis that had had her resting in bed for months at a time. Until now she had always recovered. Not this time. Mom has talked about feeling totally alone. Her aunts came to see them, and they stayed overnight with their cousins, which helped.

Mom's sister Martha remembers it a bit differently. She recalls their mother being sick and that there was someone else in the household, perhaps a cousin. She recalls that in the last year, their mother went to the hospital. She tells about being in bed and their father crying and coming to tell them all that she had died.

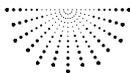
Martha also recalls that their mother wanted to be taken to her funeral in a car. The funeral home in Otterlo did not have one, so she was buried in Ede, where the funeral home did have a car. There's no longer a marker there. Martha remembers their mother's funeral and people saying what a nice woman she was.

Her mother's death was a significant rupture and loss in Mom's life and one that in some ways shaped her experience of life going forward.

She has talked about her life falling apart - at age 13 - which is already a time of great uncertainty and transition.



TEENAGE YEARS (1933 – 1939)



After their mother's death, her sister Martha remembers that, as the eldest, Mom became the 'boss', a good-natured one. She took over a lot of the cooking and liked to knit without patterns. Martha remembers wanting a pair of mitts with stars and bribing her sister to make her mitts in exchange for putting the sleeve in a dress. They apparently traded clothes and shared a bedroom.

To keep the pension going, their dad remarried a couple of years later. The woman who would become their stepmother was called Marie Schildcamp. She started out as a housekeeper before they got married. Martha reports that the children did not like her - they were not allowed access to wash clothes without a key and she expected to be called "Mother". They apparently called her "Sarge" and never got along with her. Martha felt that she was jealous of her husband, but she did look after his physical needs.

This was the 1930's - the country was in a great depression. Fortunately, the family was able to meet their basic needs with the chickens, eggs and vegetables they grew at the pension and they had skills such as making their own clothes. The experience taught them to never waste anything.

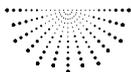
There was a big age difference between Mom and her younger siblings. She remembers at age 16 Martha tagging along. That wasn't really a bother - they had to look after each other and look out for each other.

As a teenager, Mom used to play basketball in Otterlo with her cousin Rhonda [who now lives in Alkemaar]. They played with other teams. She also belonged to a girls' club. Once a year they went on a bus trip, a day trip to the sea or to Amsterdam with a leader of the club. Mom talks of having many friends in Otterlo. She was not allowed to go out on dates until she was 18 years old. She does recall going with Martha to walk in the bush and meet boys, at perhaps 16 or 17 years old.

By then the political climate was changing and there were rumours of war coming. They were aware of the NSB – a Dutch fascist movement sympathetic to the Nazi party in Germany – being more and more in the news.

Mom went to college in Ede where she studied agriculture, religion and home economics, and graduated with a diploma in 1939. She went to the college three times every week, as she still had to help with the pension.

COMING OF AGE DURING THE WAR (1939-1945)



The Second World War started just as Mom turned 19 and completed her diploma. This transition point in her life matched with major world events which impacted her directly. The invasion and occupation of Holland by Germany lasted over five years and resulted in many shortages and much deprivation, hardship and trauma. Mom remembers ripping apart old sweaters to make new ones out of necessity, German soldiers in the family house, and the sights and sounds of tanks, parachutes, bombs, shelling and land mines. It was a defining time and had a direct and profound impact on the rest of her life. Memories of the sound of tanks and bombs lasted in her unconscious mind. Growing up in Alberta, I remember that when there was an overnight thunder and lightning storm, we had to get out of bed and be watchful...those noises signalled fear and danger for her. As they did for her sister her whole life. Now we would call it post-traumatic stress disorder.

There were all kinds of tensions around who was sympathetic to the Germans and who was not. Her family knew and helped members of the Resistance. She never considered that what they did was heroic – just that they were sympathetic to people being oppressed. It was just what everyone who was a decent human being did.

After graduating in 1939, Mom got a job in Arnhem taking care of an elderly family. She still lived at the pension and rode 16 km each day by bicycle. This lasted for most of the war years, until Arnhem was

evacuated in the fall of 1944. Having this job enabled her to avoid being conscripted to work for the Germans. Many women were forced to work [and more] for the Germans. At the end of the war, they were shamed by having their hair shaved off, and walking though the town.

Partway through the war - different accounts say 1941 or 1943 - the family moved to Otterlo. Family accounts of the reason for this move differ. Although the house in the country where they ran the pension was itself leased, the family owned the pension business. Perhaps they sold the business because the German military had taken over the property. Perhaps the German military bought the lease. Either way, they were able to build the house in Otterlo with the proceeds. They needed a permit to build the new house in town. It was brick on the inside [against what the permit allowed], covered with frame on the outside [which was allowed]. Windows were brought from another house.

Mom remembers that because Arnhem was so badly bombed, many people had to leave and find refuge somewhere else. Mr. and Mrs. Daniels came to stay with the family in Otterlo. Mr. Daniels had to be hidden as he would have been forced to do some kind of work for the Germans if they found him. Accounts differ; however, it seems likely that he was Jewish. The family had to lie about how many people were in the house when the Germans came to the door asking questions. Mrs. Daniels was pregnant and the only way to get her to the hospital in Ede was on a little wagon that Mom tied behind her bicycle for the 13 km journey. She had twin girls. Mom went with her bicycle and wagon to pick them up from the hospital and bring them back to Otterlo. Enroute, English spitfires came along the road, and attacked German troops and vehicles. They had to take quick refuge in a ditch to escape the barrage. All ended well.

During this period, her younger sister Martha was working in Otterlo as a nanny for the police chief, who was a family friend, and his wife. Her stories and Mom's stories sometimes differ on the details, however it seems clear that the chief was a member of the Dutch Resistance and that Martha, like many others, took risks to support the Resistance.

Martha remembers one time when a railroad was blown up nearby. Germans thought the Resistance had done it. The police chief and his wife and family had to go into hiding. Martha stayed at their family

house in Otterlo. There was a signal that a pot of flowers would go in the front of the window when the chief needed something. One time he needed his service revolver delivered to another person who was waiting in the woods nearby. Martha took the baby carriage to him, with the revolver under a blanket, topped with a doll, and pretended that she was just out for a walk with her baby carriage.

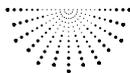
Martha remembers that the Germans took over the house any time they wanted to. She remembers cooking horsemeat and the Germans taking all of it. It happened many times. When they killed a cow, they had to also kill one for the Germans. Martha was involved in getting meat and other provisions to members of the Resistance. People often hid animals when it was time for slaughter.

Martha also remembers one young German soldier singing English songs...and knowing that he didn't want to be in the war. She and Mom shared the impression that young Germans didn't want to fight. The brutality of the SS people invoked harsh memories for Martha her whole life.

As the occupation went on, people were starving in Amsterdam and they would walk from Amsterdam to get food. They picked grain from the fields. Martha remembers a woman and child coming to the door asking to have food in the dog dish. Instead the family invited them in for a meal. People were so grateful.

The film *A Bridge Too Far* is about the battle of Arnhem in September 1944 and shows some of the difficulty and destruction of the times. Mom witnessed one actual scene depicted in the film, of thousands of allied troops parachuting into a big field between Otterlo and Arnhem.

THE WAR ENDS (1945)



*H*istory books tell us that on April 16, 1945, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division liberated the village of Otterlo before continuing on to Wekerom. They left the divisional headquarters and an infantry battalion behind in the village. Some 300 German soldiers who were trying to head to the west to escape the Canadians tried to retake Otterlo later that day. The shelling went on for hours. By the next day the battle of Otterlo was over and the Canadians had defeated the Germans.

What the history books make no mention of is that this warfare was on the street where the van Beeks lived. Nor does it mention that the family joined a neighbour in the basement of his house that day and overnight to avoid the shelling. The accounts given by Mom and her sister Martha differ on some details, however they agree that the neighbour's house was destroyed, and the neighbour's four-year old son was killed in the basement by shrapnel. The Red Cross rescued them when it was safe.

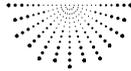
For Mom, this was a defining moment of the war. She remembers that little boy being on her lap when he was killed. She was impacted by not just the horror of it, but also by the suddenness and seeming randomness with which simple people's lives can be upended by war. She experienced it as her own tragedy – not just her neighbours'.

Now 100 years of age, and with so much else slipping away in her memory and mind, Mom still remembers clearly that she was there for

the war and the liberation ...we spoke about it in May 2020 on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Holland by Canadian troops. In the 1980's, my husband Forrest, my brother Gerrit, and his wife Vivian, and I went on a trip to the places she grew up. I remember specifically a bicycle tour with her of the area and learning first-hand about her experiences. She witnessed much that the rest of us just read in history books. And really cannot imagine.

RALPH COMES ON THE SCENE

(1945-46)



Once again, a key turning point in Mom's personal life aligned with historical events. She met the man she would marry and follow to Canada just as the war had ended and reconstruction was beginning in Holland. Everything was in transition, her life included.

It was the Queen's birthday - August 31, 1945. They met at the village celebration. Rudolph William Aronson was with the Canadian Army, 4th Light Anti-Aircraft, 3rd Division. Always known as Ralph, he had served since 1942 and seen action in Germany and Holland. He was in Holland helping with reconstruction, while awaiting transport back to Canada. The contractor Ralph worked with lived in the garage at the family house and so Mom and Dad had seen each other. The two of them dated after that meeting in August 1945. They went to dances at the military base on bicycles built for two.

Mom remembers that Ralph went to the hospital in Ede with tonsillitis. When he got out of the hospital, there was a notice posted saying he was scheduled to go back home. He said he couldn't, as he was getting married. So he went to northern Germany as part of the occupation force, working as a military policeman [or carpenter?]. At one point, the story goes that Ralph hitchhiked from Germany to Holland to see Mom. In from the main road it was 17 km and he used an old bike with wooden wheels instead of rubber tires to ride into town, and the bike was kept in the bush for the next time he came.

Ralph remembered and told the story of New Year's 1946 - it was

his first and only time in Holland with Mom's family. They went to church where pews were auctioned off. Where you sat depended on how much you paid. There was an open house where friends and family came. The day before, the men cooked the Oliebollen, in a deep fat fryer, and the women made the dough. Oliebollen is a traditional Dutch new year's treat.

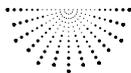
Roef and Ralph married on March 16, 1946 in Ede. Ralph went to The Hague afterwards for a few days to deal with immigration, and then he had to go back to Germany. He had to go AWOL to take the time to go to The Hague and got put in jail for a day when he got back.

Ralph left to go home to Canada in May 1946. In August 1946, by herself, speaking very little English, Mom took the train from Otterlo to the Hook of Holland, and then the ferry to Tilbury Port in England, then the train to Liverpool, where she boarded the *Mauretania* on August 18. They docked at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia on August 24, 1946 [There is a good photo of the route and ship in her early years photo book]. Then began a long train journey on the main CN line to Stony Plain, Alberta, 30 miles west of Edmonton, where she was met by Ralph. Then on to the family farm in the rural community of Holborn to meet the family.

So began her life in Canada. She never saw her father again. This move halfway across the world was another rupture in her life – this time one she chose for herself.

Mom's sister Martha was also a war bride – she too married a Canadian soldier, Harold Grigsby, and moved to Canada never to see her father again. She sailed in October 1946, already pregnant with her first child, and also docked at Pier 21 in Halifax.

MOVING TO CANADA (1946)



Mom's decision to come to Canada as a war bride, to a strange land where she barely spoke the language, with a man she had only known for six months before marrying, and join a Swedish-Canadian family with very different customs and cultural habits, was a brave one. It was literally a leap into the unknown.

I have reflected for decades on her reasons and what it was like for her. The horrors of the war and the dim prospects of the immediate post-war period in Holland seemed to have been key factors. She did not know where she was going. But she did know what she was leaving, and it was not a hopeful or safe or prosperous place at the time. Her mother was dead, her father was rigid, she did not get along with her stepmother, there was a scarcity of potential husbands due to so many young men being killed in the war. I'm sure, like all of us, she longed for a loving future. Without a doubt, the promise of that was freely present in Ralph's kindness, and captivating charm. She was tenderly [and perhaps, passionately] "courted" and wooed.

I can only imagine the poignancy of the goodbyes in Otterlo... and am present to the courage it took to embark on that journey. This was only her second train trip, the only other one being a trip to Amsterdam in the 1930's. There were no doubt many other women on the train on a similar journey.

Mom had never been on a ship before. She boarded with some 1300 other women, almost all war brides. The *Mauretania* had been built in

1938 as a luxury passenger liner. The ship was apparently very nice, and Mom recollects having her own cabin and good food. She got to know many of the women, and one, Marie Bailey, came to Devon, Alberta, living close enough for she and Mom to become friends. I was the flower girl at Marie's wedding, and remember visits to their home. She and my mom would chat about other women who had been on the ship with them, where they went, and some who had not fared as well as they had. Not all war brides were warmly welcomed and well-treated in their new homes in Canada.

I don't know how long the train trip to Stony Plain was - probably almost a week. When she arrived at the little train station by the tracks, Dad was waiting for her. I think he was there alone, with love and deep compassion. It was 13 miles to the farm in Holborn. This was a long distance for Mom, because she had only lived places where distances were shorter, and they biked everywhere. I don't know how they travelled to the farm that first day...maybe it was the Model T Ford I remember being parked in the yard as a young child.

Grandpa, Ralph's father, was waiting, I assume, on the porch of the small log house that was to be her home. The Allens, who lived a mile away, were all outside on the hill to welcome her. Helen, Art, Lorna, Chrissy, Troy, Gloria, and probably Ralph's brother Harold were there, I know. I can only imagine her thoughts and feelings in those early days...not speaking much English, literally miles away from any services, having to learn new rituals and tasks and cultural ways, with everyone and everything around her being new to her. I recollect Mom telling us about the community picnic/shower to welcome her. She was embarrassed about not speaking English, and shocked that people were eating corn on the cob, considered only suitable for animals in Holland.

Dad had made her no promises - she knew that he had nothing in a material sense. His father, Melker, had homesteaded in the early 1900s and had several quarter sections. In 1933, his mother became mentally ill and was institutionalized. Ralph's father had to pay for her care by selling land. By the end of World War II, he had no money and was about to sell off the last bit. Ralph took out a loan, available to returning soldiers, to pay expenses and keep that farm.

They lived in small log house with no running water or electricity. It was very rudimentary, and definitely a loss of material standard of

living for Mom. Not to mention a loss of a sense of cultural continuity and support around her. She was expected to be a homesteading farm wife with little preparation. In Holland she had not baked – there was a bakery for deliveries. Quickly she learned to bake bread, pies and cakes, haul water, manage a wood stove and a wringer washer. It must have been challenging. In her quintessential Dutch way, she got on with it without complaint.

She was astute [or lucky?] in her choice of husband. Ralph was a loving, gentle and caring man. He was sympathetic and understanding to the changes she was adjusting to. She was wholeheartedly embraced and welcomed by his extended family, with two generations of roots in Holborn, as well as by neighbours, and the community.

Sisters-in-law, Helen and Chrissy, were loving, welcoming and became confidantes. They helped her with her English and taught her practical skills and how to look after babies when they came along. Older, already married, and each with a young daughter, they embraced Mom in every way.

Florence Allen, her neighbour, who was about ten years older, became a mentor, friend, and confidante – somewhat of a maternal figure to a young woman who had lost her own mom at age 13. The Allens, throughout the generations, were ‘chosen’ family for her and us throughout her/our lives. All these friends and family members, women particularly, were a great support. The extended family was close then and remains so today.

Mom was adaptable and willing to learn new things. She apparently never thought of going back. Her capacity for friendship and willingness to accept help and love from her new family and community expanded. This was an important antidote to the sense of dislocation and loss she must have been feeling.

That first winter in Canada, 1946-47, Mom and Dad packed to go to the Propps’ logging camp, where the women cooked and cleaned, and the men cut logs for nearby sawmills. Mom found that experience daunting, and I can only imagine the feelings of being so far away from a familiar life, her family, her friends, learning a new language, in a new marriage. And experiencing her first Alberta winter...

Later in 1947 Dad began full time work as a carpenter and he worked away every day. This left Mom and her new father-in-law at home together, with Mom responsible for all the daily work of a mixed

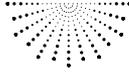
farm - gardening, feeding chickens and animals - in addition to her domestic duties. Her father-in-law was Swedish and 68 years old at the time Mom arrived. Neither of them spoke good English, and what little they spoke was heavily accented. They communicated in English. Learning a new language was another form of rupture for Roef. Language is the carrier of culture and social ways and assumptions, and all of that was changing for her. She was escaping the rupture of war and its aftermath in Europe and encountering other kinds in her new life.

She embraced these changes with great resolve – a sense not just of getting on with what needed to be done, but also of adapting and forging a new life – not trying to recreate her old life in her new circumstances. For example, I very rarely heard her speak Dutch growing up, only with her one Dutch friend, Marie, and she did not teach us Dutch. I never saw her ride a bicycle, even though that was what she always used back in Holland, and we children had bicycles. The only time I saw her on a bike was on our trip to Holland with her in the 1980s. She learned to cook and bake, offer hospitality often, and organize Christmas celebrations, all in the Swedish tradition.

It was as if she resolved to maintain the high standards and expectations she had been raised with – just in a completely different set of circumstances. She was determined to be a good wife and mother and embraced Ralph's family and heritage in order to do that. As an immigrant, adopting the ways and patterns of the dominant community would have been expected.

She did retain some traces of her Dutch cultural ways – for example she organized St Nicholas' Day and baked Dutch treats for us as children - such as the chocolate letters at Christmas that she had had as a child. And her Dutch-ness was always there in her accent and her stoic character. I do sense and wonder whether witnessing and learning the new ways might have made her more aware of her own Dutch ways, that they were different. Until then, they would have just seemed normal to her – the only ways she had known.

RAISING A FAMILY (1947-1966)



I was born in December 1947, in the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, loved and special from birth, carried on a pillow for several months, the family stories suggest, because of Mom's fear of dropping me. Helen and Chrissy helped so much. Two years later, my brother Gerrit arrived. Mom and Dad were a loving couple – a real pair – and they modelled a strong marriage and home for us growing up. Ours was a loving, not a violent household - I only remember her physical anger once...how startled I was when she hit me with a wooden spoon.

Growing up, I recognize now that we were poor, but I never felt that. We lived in a small log house, with a living space, two small bedrooms, and a lean-to kitchen. I slept on the pullout couch. We later built a new and bigger house.

I remember Mom as a competent and fulfilled farm wife and mother – I have memories of her plucking chickens with the neighbours, killing one with an axe for dinner, and saving a cow from death. We picked wild strawberries, blueberries and saskatoon berries. We were expected to take on chores and responsibilities in the family. I remember threshing time, a cream separator and a smoke house. We had a large garden and many animals to feed – chickens, turkeys, pigs, milking and beef cows – and many farm chores. Mom cooked, cleaned, sewed, knitted, canned, froze and preserved produce, pickled, and made jams and jellies, always striving for the best and the most

beautiful.

Dad worked away every day. He was a carpenter and participated in building many houses and farm buildings in the area, often for friends and neighbours, as well as working on the Holborn Community Hall. He served on the boards of our church and of the Stony Plain Rural Electrification Association, which was instrumental in bringing electrical power to the Holborn district. Starting in 1955, he worked for the Stony Plain School Division, building new schools, and then in 1963, moved to a local firm called Shaul Construction.

My grandpa, Mom's father-in-law, Olaf Melker Aronson, lived with us when I was growing up. I remember him as a quiet strong presence in our lives – the patriarch – who created a sense of permanence in connection across the generations and extended family. He was a blacksmith, a municipal worker and a community leader. He had a gentle manner, and accepted Mom gratefully and completely. They loved and respected each other throughout his life. There were a few moments, recorded in family story, that revealed a different approach to raising children than Mom. My Uncle Troy, Chrissy's husband, was the gentle giant of the family – full of laughter and generosity.

I remember there always being people around at home. Music. Many family and friends. Uncles, aunts and cousins. We celebrated birthdays and holidays all together, with lots of good food, stories and laughter. Mom always offered hospitality, coffee most often, with wonderful meals, cookies, squares and pies, and enjoyed a good visit. Visits to BC and from family there were memorable.

Christmas was particularly special for me growing up. We always hosted the extended family for Christmas Eve. We began cooking days in advance – Mom and I. Shortbread cookies, sugar donuts, Jan Hagels, pickled herring [both a Dutch and a Swedish tradition], salads, vegetables and of course the turkey – grown on our farm. The laden table took up the entire room in the old farmhouse. Cousins, aunts, uncles and of course Grandpa. Fun and laughter. And so much food. All so nourishing. The oft-repeated ritual of gathering, making, sharing and enjoying good food was central to my family growing up, and ever since. Mom was a wonderful cook and lovingly choosing, preparing and serving food gave her much pleasure and recognition.

Christmas also included concerts, carols, plays and music. We played games and cards and sang together. The religious significance of

Christmas was there but more as a backdrop rather than as the reason for all the celebrations. I could always count on Mom to make a costume or help with props for the concert, and for help choosing gifts and cards for friends. We shared family stories: apparently at one of his childhood concerts, Ralph could not hit the high notes, so Willis Propp crouched behind him and chimed in at just the right moment!

I have many other food memories of growing up. Birthday cakes. The smell of freshly baked cinnamon buns when we burst through the door after school. Homemade ice cream made with ice and lots of turning and love. Chocolate fudge. The food served to the threshing crew at harvest time – lots of it – breakfast, coffee, lunch and dinner, homemade bread, roast beef, fried chicken, cakes, cookies and pies.

Coffee was also special. Farm work stopped mid-morning and mid-afternoon and sometimes in the evening – for coffee time, a visit, conversation and a few stories. The coffee pot was always perking on the stove, ready for anyone who arrived, and offered as a symbol of friendship and caring. The smell of it permeated our household and the ritual of drinking it is a key childhood memory for me.

The coffee cups themselves stand out in my memories. They offer a sense of the standards of the 1950s that Mom embodied – needing to do things right. There were mugs for everyday, and sometimes cups with saucers for the ladies. But what I really remember are the bone china cups which were brought out [and still are at my mother's place!] for guests. There were many different designs and shapes. My favorite was a deep red with gold leaf design, always touted as a very special one, as it was a gift from Aunt Anna. And then there was the collection of cups, each with the provincial flower from one of the Canadian provinces. Many of them were lovingly presented with stories about whoever had given them as a gift. Sometimes I looked under the cup to read the name of the usually English company that had made the cup – Royal Doulton - and the name which had been given to it...English Rose. And I had to be very careful washing them, and of course it was v-e-r-y important to match the cup and the saucer each time! I still do this! The favorite cups [and saucers] are retained to this day in the china cabinet.

I recognize now that my Mom facilitated ALL of that high standard of homemaking, as well as getting all the domestic and farm work done. She created so many tables, during my growing up years and for

so many years afterwards – at Christmas, birthdays, summer picnics, cottages, parks, home, restaurants. She was a homemaker in every sense of the word. She knew and demonstrated for us what home is, the value of it and the work involved – the rituals and farm-life routines and hospitality, the baking of special Dutch and Swedish treats, countless family gatherings, the celebration of Christmas every year.

She had several very good friends – Florence Allen, Olive Allen and Ruth Barth I remember especially. She came to know the community well – Bessie Meisner at the Holborn store for example. Ralph's family were always there, always. She kept up contact with her sister in Ontario and her brother back in Holland through mail and photos. We had a phone with a party line.

As a married woman, wife and mother in the fifties, Mom adopted the dominant patterns and norms for female behaviour. Always looking good and behaving in certain ways. She always wore dresses. She embraced this role and was very good at it – setting a standard that I recognize in myself to this day. There were the birthday club, the Ladies Aid, community dances, card parties, and quilting bees. She participated in the 4-H garden club, called the Holborn Lassies, where she served as assistant leader and leader; the Holborn Community league; and the Holborn United Church Women, where the annual bazaar and chicken supper was an important annual community event. She was involved with the community hall and our schools. The Witherspoons were the principal and teacher at our local school and my parents were both involved in parent-teacher activities such as organizing the annual concert. They were also family friends so I felt that we could not get away with anything at school!

She made do with what she had, sewing our clothes, first on a Singer pedal machine and later on an Elna machine, knitting, embroidering, mending and making rugs out of rags, for example. It was a pleasure for her and her friends, who exchanged ideas, recipes and stories, accounts of triumphs and disappointments, while doing this domestic work together. I remember her learning to drive at some point while I was growing up and going into the ditch on one trip. She drove a car because she had to in order to transport kids, get places on her own...I don't think she ever liked it.

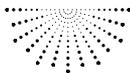
I don't remember Mom reading many books, or us talking about

books, literature or politics in the house. She subscribed to and shared homemaker magazines of the time, including *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Living*. I reflect on this as I am a voracious reader and a keen follower and participant in politics and activist causes.

Mom embraced being a mother, and we have always felt her unconditional love and giving spirit. She was a champion of high standards, expecting excellence, and hard work to survive and thrive. She valued education and instilled curiosity, a love of learning, and by example, a persistent commitment to serving others. I learned to be a “good” girl, many habitual patterns which I carry to this day. As part of an extended family, I learned to both celebrate and share in love and loss. Mom and Dad were active in contributing to the Holborn school, church and community life. They both encouraged us to learn, to explore, to inquire, to be the best we could be.

Habits and attitudes learned in her upbringing in Holland during the Depression and the war stood her in good stead in her life in Canada raising a family – frugality, not wasting anything, helping others, valuing friends, and just getting on with what needed to be done. Her life philosophy was well known in our family. Two of her favourite sayings are “Tink positive” and “You can’t change the weather”. She has instilled in us to make do with what you have and always do your best. I grew up feeling I needed to excel. I got money for getting good grades in school. I felt a healthy mix of being supported and being allowed to flourish. And I and my brother did indeed excel – I finished high school early and headed to Edmonton for university at age 16. I remember staying out overnight for my high school graduation in 1964 and then leaving home to attend university in Edmonton two months later. I never lived at home again.

MOVING TO THE CITY (1966)



*I*n 1966, Mom and Dad moved to Edmonton, selling the farm and leaving behind that way of life. It was an opportunity to reconstruct their lives and who they were in the world. Another rupture in Mom's life – this time very much a choice, and with lots of support from her husband and friends and family around her. This decision mirrored a larger societal trend at the time – of rural folks moving to cities and the burgeoning growth and economic prosperity of the suburbs.

Dad continued to work in construction after the move to Edmonton. Mom had not had paid work since the war, and she decided to get a job. She applied to the fabric department of a department store in Edmonton called Johnstone Walker, known for its high-quality merchandise. She felt uncertain and afraid about operating the cash register and was fired after only a few days. She never tried again to extend herself into a paid job.

Mom's life in Edmonton marked a new beginning for her, at age 46, with much less farm and domestic work and more time for friends, activities and pursuing her own interests. Both my brother and I were gone, launched. Again, Mom seems to have resolved to make a new life. She pursued her creative interests, and briefly became a silversmith, from which I benefitted...I still love my silver bangles, and choker necklace.

I have a lingering image of Mom and me in the sixties – me discovering a wider world at university and beyond. And her moving to a city for the first time and trying to figure out who she was as her own person. As if the warp and weft of the fabrics of our lives were separating as I grew up and yet some key threads remained entwined – and continued to provide support to each of us over time, even though we lived far apart.

Mom and Dad lived at 16002-110A Ave in West Edmonton for nearly forty years. It was a three-bedroom bungalow, with a finished basement, large backyard, deck and double garage. Even though I had been at university for two years by the time they moved there, one of the bedrooms was always “Diana’s room” with my white childhood furniture and a few mementos - I remember the white doily on the dresser top.

In a suburban neighbourhood, part of the post-war baby-boom, and oil and gas-based prosperity in Alberta, it was close to public transit and a half hour drive away from Stony Plain, where family and friends lived. Their extended and chosen family remained constants - shared lives, joys and sorrows, celebrations and heartaches. Gerrit lived with them for a few years, before leaving Edmonton, that time together providing a vital link to the next generation and to his friends. I never lived in that house.

Ebenezer United Church became a focal point for their social and spiritual life, and both Mom and Dad were very involved. Mom was an active United Church Women member, knitted and crafted for the bazaar, and baked and helped in the kitchen for weddings, funerals, and social occasions like card parties. She had good friends - Olive, Wilma, Verna, Isabel, and Val among her closest, and, with their husbands, they all shared active lives.

Mom’s friends were important to her life – they shared phone calls, visits, volunteering and everything that contributed to being superlative homemakers and confidantes. I know that they went ‘downtown’ on the bus for lunch and shopping every Thursday for many years. And together they met to knit, crochet, sew and do other crafts. Many activities were fundraisers for social issues, for example making sandwiches for the Bissell Centre regularly.

Family and friends’ birthdays were special...Mom’s tall chiffon

cakes, or other special treats, were welcomed and her handmade gifts remembered by everyone. Mom and Dad continued to always host Christmas Eve, with extended family, up to 20-25 people, as children grew and had families. Mom's trifle still evokes distinct memories with my cousins. Niece Lorna, her husband Ron, and family were in Stony Plain and hosted many family celebrations. When Aunt Chrissy and Uncle Troy moved to Innisfail, there were frequent visits there. Weddings, funerals, summer picnics, visits to the lake, and outdoor barbecues.

I got married to Forrest in 1969, a military wedding in Oromocto, New Brunswick. Mom and Dad flew to the wedding, meeting Forrest for first time when they arrived in Fredericton – this might have been their first plane trip. She was very gracious about letting me/us do our own thing but did feel it important that she bake the wedding cake. Three tiers of fruit cake arrived by mail a month before the wedding, to be decorated. I passed them on to the chef in the Officer's Mess, with little direction. To Mom's horror, the cake, which she saw for the first time at the reception, was yellow, pink and blue, not AT ALL what she expected!

My brother Gerrit married Vivian a couple of years later in 1971 in Edmonton - their wedding was memorable for its Ukrainian roots. And marked the beginning of Mom and Dad's lifelong friendship with Vivian's parents – especially her mom Vicki.

In 1971, Mom and Dad went to Holland, the first time back since they left in 1946. 25 years had passed, her father had died, and her brother was now married with four children. They visited lots of aunts and uncles and extended family - the trip was memorable for them. In the ensuing years, they travelled many places - Hawaii, Arizona, an Alaskan cruise - often with friends. Family from Holland came for visits. And Mom and Dad visited us – their children - in Fredericton, Halifax, Nashville, London, Ottawa, England and Vancouver. And went to “the coast” as we called the Vancouver area, to visit Dad's brother Harold, his wife Jeanne and family.

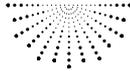
From my vantage point, living far away, those were happy years for Mom. I know there were some disappointments...not keeping the job she got in the fabric department, both children leaving Edmonton, the long-distance relationships with grandchildren. Menopause also

seemed to mark the beginning of anxiety and mild depression for her... visiting at our home in London, Ontario in 1978, she was very stoic and told us about being on medication. She has been treated for it in some form ever since then.



Family 2019, 99th Birthday

BEGINNINGS OF PHYSICAL HEALTH
CHALLENGES (1985)



Mom's 65th birthday in 1985 coincided with an Aronson family reunion at Jasper...a happy time. Later that year, I remember a phone call from Dad saying that Mom had had a mild heart attack. I flew from Montreal to Edmonton, and recollect a tender time, just the two of us, at her bedside after the angioplasty.

Looking back, I sense that her heart attack reinforced physical and emotional changes. It seemed to mark the start of a pattern of gradually closing herself down and retreating from life. I began to notice more of what we now call anxiety, especially about her health. She seemed to me to accept limitations and that her life was on the decline. She made less effort to learn or initiate. She no longer went for long walks or pushed herself.

This retreat was gradual and subtle at first. She continued with the activities of her life – church, freezing garden produce, making pickles and jam, and organizing family celebrations and friends' birthdays. She made and kept good friends and nurtured relationships with their strong extended family. Her time with friends and family has always mattered. At the same time, and over time, she became very dependent on Dad, seemed to sit back and let life pass her by. Ralph did more and more - gardening, laundry, dishes, with love and without complaint.

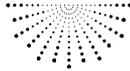
My father retired from construction in the eighties, which began a time of them being together more. They travelled, offered hospitality, and visited family and both of us, her children who were living

afar. Dad was most often the initiator of trips and other activities. Mom participated but seemed to have lost initiative and sometimes to be going through the motions.

There were many small pleasures. The connection to her Dutch roots was a continuing source of grounding and joy. She got reconnected with her sister Martha, and nieces and nephews visited. A memorable trip in 1995, to mark the 50th anniversary of WWII Dutch liberation, included visits with her brother, nieces and nephews, and elderly aunts still alive.

This retreat from life has proven to be lasting, though she continues to appreciate people visiting or a chance to see family and friends and is always kind and interested in what others are doing.

GETTING OLD AND LEAVING THE
EDMONTON HOUSE (2002)



Gradually, it became more and more of a challenge to maintain a house and garden. Health issues began to be a bigger factor for Mom...arthritis, anxiety, heart disease...changes became a necessity. Changes that hastened the process of withdrawing, taking care of herself, becoming more reliant on Dad, and ones which she was sometimes reluctant to face, and yet at another level accepted as inevitable.

We were together with Mom and Dad on Galiano Island, B.C, for Christmas and New Year's 1999. Mom, Dad, me, Forrest, his mother Jean, his brother Mark, our children [then young adults] Jason and Greg...it was a family gathering to mark the turn of a century. Mom was nearly 80 and had already lived a long and full life that in so many ways reflected the history of her times.

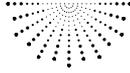
I remember that she was worried about medical support on the Island, and I had to ensure that there would be easy access to a medical airlift if needed. Looking back, it was indicative of worry and concern about her health that I remember beginning during menopause, some 30 years earlier and increasing after her heart attack some 15 years earlier. She had gradually retreated from taking initiative and trying new things and tended to be anxious.

I noticed that in the decision to sell the Edmonton family home, in 2002, it was hard for her to leave it and it became Dad who "forced" the time and place, recognizing his own vulnerabilities, needing to slow

down and face his own health challenges. This marked another stage of his “taking care of Roef”, with love and devotion...and the practical realities of making tea, doing the laundry, and taking care of business of all kinds.

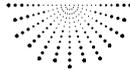
Together they moved to Terra Losa, an independent living centre in West Edmonton. They had a two-bedroom apartment on the 5th floor and appreciated the in-house amenities and relationships. One of Mom’s [and Dad’s] best friends, Wilma Schmidt, moved to the 4th floor. Harold and Olive Allen also lived there for some years. Mom withdrew a bit more, did not do very much, though she did enjoy visits from friends and family, daily coffee with a group of women, as well as special entertainment. Ebenezer United Church continued to be an important part of their lives. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2006 with a lovely party at Terra Losa. We were all there to celebrate with them.

LOSING RALPH (2007)



Dad died quite suddenly in October 2007. She was now 'alone', so very hard for her, as she had become very physically and emotionally dependent on Dad. She felt alone and lonely. Wilma dropped in every night. Lorna and Ron, other family members in Edmonton and area, were there for regular visits, phone calls, birthdays and anniversaries. She managed the change with grace and determination but the strain of it began to be more apparent to all of us. She needed more home care, a walker, help with daily needs, and had several falls. Ralph's death was yet another rupture in her life and I often feel she has never been happy since then. Maybe she was not before, I wonder. She has been very dignified and accepting of her reality - just not very jovial about it.

GETTING REALLY OLD AND MOVING
TO LAURIER HOUSE (2011)



*I*t was time for more care, something that she resisted for much of her life. A fall, subsequent time in a rehab hospital, and a geriatric diagnosis led her to Laurier House in November 2011, at the age of 91. She could no longer walk and used a wheelchair. As a long-term care facility, designed for physical disabilities, it is an ideal place for her, with a central dining room, recreational programs, and a dedicated, committed staff. She has now lived there for nearly nine years. Even as she has continued to withdraw, she has maintained friendships and been unfailingly kind to everyone around her. She seems resilient and resolved, even mostly content, but not necessarily happy.

For the first few years at Laurier House, Mom maintained her connection to Ebenezer United Church, to which she had belonged for over 40 years, since moving to Edmonton in 1966. She received pastoral visits and kept up to some extent on church news. This stopped about five years ago, with the closing of the church. Her church had been a life-long source of support for her, spiritually and socially...yet another loss.

It is amazing to me that she is 100 years old. No one imagined she would outlive Ralph by over ten years and counting, given how dependent she had become on him. And she has survived many other people in her life – her sister Martha, her brother, and virtually all her friends.

I reflected on her resolve when my brother and I discussed whether

or not to tell her that her sister Martha had died. By then Mom was 99. She had stopped speaking with Martha by phone several years before, as they both retreated further into their interior worlds of dementia. Should we protect her from the possible impact of telling her the truth or not? What anxiety would it cause her? What would be kind? The Laurier House folks told us this is one of the hardest decisions for families to make. We ended up waiting until there was an obituary and death notice about a memorial service, and we told her at that point. She accepted the news stoically. It was the right thing to do.

Her last remaining friend is Wilma Schmidt, aged 98. I called Wilma recently to say hello. Also Dutch, Wilma grew up in Amsterdam, where the war years were very hard, and came to Canada in the fifties. She and Mom became friends after the move to Edmonton in 1966. Her husband died young and her son committed suicide when Wilma was about 70. She lives in Terra Rosa and is alone much of the time now due to the COVID-19 restrictions. She still calls Mom. In this recent conversation, I was struck by her grace and her acceptance of living one day at a time. It gave me another window into the character of these women, forged by war, deprivation, loss, and life difficulties and yet still full of grace, dignity and kindness.

I have seen more of Mom in the last ten years, as I have visited her at Laurier House many times. Even in an “institutional setting”, she has maintained her sense of “home”. She has important personal things carefully arranged around her. Her cognitive decline has deepened in the last number of months, perhaps exacerbated by the isolation and loss of social contact and family visits imposed by the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and her anxieties that seemed to begin in mid-life persist.

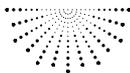
On a typical visit [at least until January 2020, which was my last visit before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions], I push her wheelchair daily down the hallway to the dining room at Laurier House. Every time she says, “It’s a long hall.” And I answer each time, “Yes, it is.” In recent years, I was often aware of my inner voice screaming...” A long HAUL – yes, it is! Oh, what a life! She has lived so many years, in a wheelchair, with declining independence, which is so important to me. A long haul indeed.”

For many years now, I have spoken with her on the phone every day. “How are you today Mom?” “I’m okay.” “What are you doing?”

“Nothing.” She replies with what I perceive as resignation and acceptance. Then often comes her anxious voice, “Please help me.” Or “Do I have enough money to stay here?” I know that she does all she can each day, and each day seems like a long haul to me. We end our calls with a familiar pattern, “I love you Mom.” And her response, “Thank you for calling. Please say hi to Forrest”.

With each passing year, each visit, each phone call, I honour more deeply her resilience, and presence the grace with which she has faced adversities. I keep learning from her. And love her.

OUR RELATIONSHIP – A 2020 VIEW



*H*er words, her love and her anxieties. I hear them over and over again. I ponder what lies beneath the words. This woman who survived the Second World War in Holland, who remembers the little boy killed on her lap during an air raid, a war bride, a farmer's wife making bread and pie, herding cows, canning and freezing fruit and vegetables from the big farm garden. A loving mother, friend, partner and neighbour. And now I, the elder child, who left home at 16, feel responsible for her, as she was for me so many years ago. This "long haul" has gone on for far longer than either of us imagined. And continues to bring precious moments of connection, love and insight.

I notice the paradox of love and acceptance co-existing with deep-seated feelings of regret and grief. I don't want her to be alone and she IS alone. She often expresses that she is lonely. Not angry, just lonely. I am sad for her suffering. I am grateful for the excellent care she gets at Laurier House and I am sorry she does not live closer. And I sometimes despair that she is so dependent, for example when I see the reality of the hydraulic lift that takes her from her chair to her bed.

Even now, as she struggles to pick up the phone and put it to her ear, I can hear and sense her resolve to do things as best she can, that pattern of her whole life. And I see it balanced and tempered now by a certain grace. Grace in the full meaning of "*an elegance or beauty of form, manner, motion, or action*". She seems to have matured in extreme old

age into acceptance of who she is in herself, in a deeper place. She does not use words to express this, but I observe and feel it. I resonate with the words of Stephen Jenkinson, from his book *Coming of Age*:

“Wisdom {and grace} emerge from the lived experience of being willing to deal with life’s hardships, challenges and suffering...ae we age...we have far less range, but much more depth.”

I feel whole and complete in my relationship with Mom. Perhaps she has let go of most of her regrets, shames and blames in her own way. I have expressed my regrets, shames and blames to her. She has listened, taken it in, accepted it quietly. We have rarely had those kinds of intimate conversations – it runs against the grain of her Dutch-ness and her generation. Which does not take away from her total acceptance of me being able to say what I needed to say, or of her listening to that. I feel I have largely let go of those regrets and been able to just be together when and how we can.

This is my story of my mother, my way of sharing with those who love her [and me] what I have learned from her, what her presence in my life has gifted me, and where I’m at in the evolving journey of the dance of life. I speak with her everyday, as does my brother, Gerrit. We love and are loved. She is loved. In the words of William Stafford:

The Way It Is

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn’t change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can’t get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.
You don’t ever let go of the thread.



Friends Matter, with Wilma Schmidt



Harold and Olive Allen with Niece Lorna and Ron, 2002, at Terra Losa



Christmas together in Edmonton, 1978



65th Birthday, Jasper Family Reunion, 1985

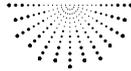


Great Grandchildren Forrest and Gwendolyn



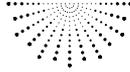
95 years, with Great Granddaughter Emma

PART TWO: A DAUGHTER'S REFLECTIONS



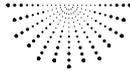
I recognize that my reflections, beyond the facts and the narrative, are just my stories. They are made up and yet are the warp and weft of our shared relationships. They are full of my own biases and interpretations, whether I am aware of them or not. They are what is present for me in 2020 when I think about my mother's example of what makes a life. Here is what has distilled for me through this process of writing about her life. I invite each of you to share your stories, your interpretations, as that is how we will weave together the fabric of our interconnection.

MY PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP



*M*y parents shared a lifetime of unconditional love for each other through all stages of their lives. Mom loved Dad, respected and depended on him to be an anchor, a protector, and confidante. In turn, she served his needs without fail. There was never any shouting or aggression with my parents...they loved each other deeply. My Dad was a caregiver - generous, forgiving, and empathetic. So is mom in her own way. Anniversaries were special... I remember the celebrations marking 45, 50 and 60 years particularly. Their marriage was a model for me.

HER LIFE MIRRORED TWENTIETH CENTURY HISTORY



There were a number of turning points or transitions in the my mother's life that coincided with and were dramatically impacted by key historical events and forces – leaving the farm as a child due to economic conditions, coming to adulthood as WWII began, and coming to Canada as a war bride. Being raised in the Depression and being a young adult in the war forged a particular character that was somehow well-prepared to make the choice of a new life in Canada and adapt to it. After coming to Canada, she lived and embodied many of the larger social and cultural trends and patterns of the second half of the century:

- The expansion of European immigration to Canada in the post-war years
- The traditional role and expectations of married women in the fifties
- The population shift from rural areas to the burgeoning suburbs of cities in the sixties
- The social mobility resulting from post-war prosperity and educational opportunities – resulting in her children and grandchildren all living far away from her
- Lengthening life expectancy and increased chances of living to be very elderly

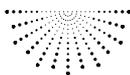
- The trend away from multi-generational households and attendant expansion of care facilities for the elderly

While her life as an immigrant farm wife and mother in the fifties looks constricting to me now, it was a place of safety and fulfillment for her. And it afforded me a nurturing, loving and safe childhood. Mom's choice to leave the farm during the turbulent sixties showed a level of bravery and willingness to adapt again – also mirroring a larger social shift – this time to suburbanization. This pattern of personal adaptation within larger sociological trends has continued, as she maintained her life in Edmonton knowing her children [and grandchildren] had no intentions of living there, and has grown very old and is now living in a care facility.



Backyard Family Time

LIFE VALUES



I don't remember talking to my Mom about her personal, spiritual or political beliefs – I don't know whether she believes in a personal god or life after death, what she thought of feminism or anything about her relationship with my father, other than what I observed through my own lens. It is her lived experience, all of it, that I take guidance from.

I now understand that she lived a series of values that have been indelibly printed on the fabric of MY life. Her actions and attitudes have told a story of what she believes was and is important. She rarely spoke of such things, but they were there in a kind, sometimes strong word, a special gift or a beautiful birthday cake. Here are some of those beliefs and values:

- The ability to accept what is happening and ***adapt through life's challenges***. “You can't change the weather” was/is a favourite saying of hers. She embodies a Dutch stoicism and dignity that means getting on with life, making your choices, without complaining or indulging in expressions or discussion of feelings. Though the feelings are deep and clear.
- ***Kindness and respect*** for everyone, tolerance of others, including those who were/are different...examples from my

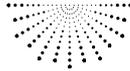
early childhood were her accommodating attitudes towards the Germans in our childhood community, and Jackie Lynch, who had a disability.

- High value on **relationships, love** and commitment, especially **friendships** with women. Friendship is important to her, and always has been. She is loyal and steadfast.
- **Importance of family, friends and hospitality** – taking time for friends and family, marking birthdays and holidays together. In the Laurier House years, her family, we children, our spouses, grandchildren are the centre of her life in many ways, even though we have only seen each other a few times a year. She sent cards, knitted, sewed, and gave lovely gifts until quite recently.
- The idea of and importance of “**making a home**”. The sense of continuity and belonging and familiarity and safety she fostered. My understanding and sense of home, and my capacity to build and rebuild my own homes in various places, come directly from her example and teachings. Not everyone has the capacity to create a home. Mom did and does. Her mother did. I do. It matters!
- She has a **strong moral compass**. She has always spoken her mind, stood up for what was right, and expected that in others. I remember when I was 12, I accidentally spilled hot water on a man’s back while pouring coffee at a church supper – I ran to the kitchen to find Mom, horrified and embarrassed. She immediately made me go back to apologize to the man. I learned that it was the right thing to do.
- Love of **learning and creative expression**. She taught me to love crafts, artistry as a means of self expression, of seeing and creating beauty.
- Hard work and **high standards for self and others** – cleanliness, neatness and looking good, expecting the best and making it possible.
- Optimism and **positivity** - “Tink positive”, regardless of the circumstances, failures, difficulties or realities to be faced.
- **Honouring of cultural and social rituals**, traditions and heritage – both Dutch and Swedish - through stories, stories, special ornaments etc.

- **Community-mindedness** – service, offering what is needed and making a contribution.



A Life of Love

UNDERNEATH HER PERSONA –
SEEING WITH MY EYES...

I have felt for a long time that I was/am my mother's cheerleader, the meaning of which I have thought about and explored throughout my life. Contained within and hidden underneath Mom's persona of excellent homemaker, loving mother, aunt, grandmother and hospitable friend, I have been and am more and more aware of her vulnerabilities. I often wondered whether she believed she was good enough, pretty enough, slim enough, well-enough dressed. I am aware of an unconscious early pattern of feeling I needed to boost her confidence, ensure she thought well of herself. Maybe I sensed that she did not believe that she was enough in herself.

I also never saw her ride a bike, drive a tractor, play baseball or board games [except cribbage with Dad for several years]. I wonder why? When she came to Canada, did she choose to adopt a certain way of being that mirrored those around her? Leave behind the painful past? Or did she let go so she could embrace new realities? Did she live with the feeling of not being good enough? For example, why do I remember so vividly her driving into the ditch? Did I interpret her response as being humiliated and the beginning of a lifelong fear of it happening again? What's true? Will we ever know?

Mom read magazines and watched TV but rarely read books or shared in any kind of intellectual conversation. She didn't like to dance or sing, which Dad did. She was very creative with crafting and artistic

pursuits that stopped in her later years. She has always been a good listener and enjoys visits and people.

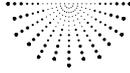
There are many parts of me, my interests, beliefs, roles and commitments that I have never shared with Mom. And yet, I have always known that she loves me, supports me, and is proud of all that her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren contribute. She is a much-loved auntie.

I have rarely seen her cry, though I've been with her through some of the difficult moments. I know that she cares deeply, experiences love and loss, joy and sadness. She often seems downhearted and resigned. Is this an underlying grief that reaches into her childhood and maybe before? Has it become somehow my grief on her behalf? In her later years, especially after Dad's death, I notice that she has accepted more often the reality of her physical and emotional vulnerabilities, with grace and fortitude.



The Family Together

THE SHAPING OF ME



*B*eing raised with those values and vulnerabilities, here is some of what I observed and felt and remember as most impactful for me, from a very young age:

- The feeling of being unconditionally loved and supported
- Being treated with kindness
- Needing to live up to being special, to a standard of behaviour, to being good and doing things right
- Striving for excellence, serving as motivation to achieve and improve, be engaged, sometimes showing up as unrealistic expectations of myself
- Attending to looking good - dressing well, being coordinated, keeping things neat and tidy, and watching my weight
- Expectation of making contribution to community
- Being a woman...and the dominant patterns and expectations in the fifties in particular
- Importance of friends and family
- The expectation to “just do it” - what needed doing - picking raspberries when they were ripe, washing the dishes after meals, doing my homework, tending to my responsibilities
- The sense of tending to life’s passages – menstruation, sex, leaving for university, births, marriages, death, moving

- Importance of celebrating and honoring joys and losses – being together
- Feeling enriched by my Dutch and Swedish heritages
- A certainty that my parents had my back – that I had the freedom to pursue my life

When Mom and Dad moved, to Edmonton in 1966, I was 18 and finishing a degree in Household Economics at the University of Alberta, living in Edmonton with roommates. My choice of subject was influenced by the role models of the District Home Economists [DHEs] I had met growing up. The DHEs were attached to the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture, as a corollary to the staff who helped men develop better farming practices. They supported rural women, and I remember them visiting Mom. Mrs. Atkinson is one I remember. I was also clearly influenced by Mom's love of cooking, sewing, and crafting. I had learned those basics through her, and it seemed logical and natural for me to get a degree that combined science with the family orientation and life skills that home economics provided. And it was the 1960s, so feminism, social justice, and equity issues swept me up in their wake...the time in history shaped my life choices and activism.

Like Mom, I embraced the possibilities of my time – like her I was a young educated woman with a mind of my own who made a choice to set off for new horizons and never looked back. I left Alberta in 1967, oblivious to my mother's experience of middle age, menopause and empty-nestedness. I never returned, except for three years in Edmonton when Forrest and I lived there, when I did an Education degree, and briefly taught elementary school. Like Mom, I have had a very independent adult life from my birth family. That will be the focus of another story one day...my own life.

As an adult, I have embraced and highly valued much of this legacy of my upbringing by Mom, and consciously built upon it in my life – for example the importance of friendship, community, unconditional love and family. There are aspects of what I perceive as my mother's persona and values that I am aware I carry with me, such as the habitual pattern to do things right, look good and speak my mind.

Other aspects I have consciously transcended given the external influences of my youth and adult life – for example the limitations of a 1950s traditional female role, and everything represented by the

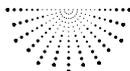
symbolism of the women in the kitchen and the men in the living room that I grew up with. It fuelled my commitment to equity, feminism and human rights – a conscious rejection of gender imbalances and my own rebellion against the dominant social patterns.

I am grateful for ALL of it. The harder bits have offered and continue to offer some of my greatest learning. The steadfast conviction to be the best I can be, to adapt, to accept, to “be” with what is. Thank you, Mom.



With good friends and family

THE FABRICS OF OUR LIVES



I am not unaware of the parallels in our lives and life choices. We are both first-born children and elder daughters. Both born and raised on a mixed farm in what we might call working-class households with lots of extended family around. Both married military men and moved far away and stayed far away the rest of our lives – creating brand new lives for ourselves as adult women separated from our birth families. Both have had long happy marriages to kind, loving non-violent men. Both completed post-secondary qualifications in Home Economics. Both positive, optimistic, hospitable and generous women who are good at female friendship and value family gatherings and good food.

I am the eldest child in the family and was taught to set an example. What does it mean to be an eldest daughter? I recognize a number of patterns in me that are consistent with those revealed in the book called *The Eldest Daughter Effect*, in which Lisette Schuitemaker and Wies Enthoven suggest:

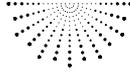
“There are “five big qualities” that characterize all eldest daughters to some degree. Eldest daughters are responsible, dutiful, thoughtful, hands-on and caring. Firstborns are more intelligent than their siblings, more proficient verbally and more motivated to perform. Yet at the same time they seriously doubt they are good enough.”

I am also present to the non-parallels - the great differences between our lives. I did not lose my mother at a young age - in fact I have been blessed to have her my whole life so far. I have not lived through war. And the transitions and turning points in my life have, so far, always been by choice. Those choices have not been constricted by the impacts of the sweep of history on my own life. I am present to my privilege.



With grandchildren

SOURCES AND THANKS



In writing this, I have pulled from a number of sources, and built upon earlier starts I have made on Mom's story. This piece pulls the threads together into a stand-alone piece, but it does not include all the content of all these various sources:

- 2010 Photo book of early life in Holland. Done by my Mom and brother Gerrit
- 1998-99 notebook of personal interviews with all aunts and uncles – many of whom have very varying childhood recollections from Mom
- *Along the Fifth, a History of Stony Plain and District, 1982*, published by the Stony Plain and District Historical Society
- Eulogy written for Celebration of Life for Martha Dirkje van Beek [Roef's sister] 2019
- 1998 interview notes – from conversations with Mom and Dad
- *The Eldest Daughter Effect, 2015/16*, Lise Schuitemaker & Wies Enthoven, published by Findhorn Press
- *Come of Age, The Case for Elderhood in a Time of Trouble, 2018*, Stephen Jenkinson, published by North Atlantic Books



THANK YOU TO KATE IRVING, OF VICTORIA, B.C., WHO OFFERS A SERVICE called *Life Scribing*, for being my partner in having this story come to life. And to each person who has contributed to my life, to bringing me to this place of privilege. And the journey continues.



Christmas - 1970

