

## JOURNEY OF THANKSGIVING

### Writing Excerpt One – “Values Taught and Learned”



Travel restrictions to Holland ended in 1945 after World War II ended. In 1946 many Dutch people in Hollandale, who longed to return to Holland one more time before their death, began to make travel plans. I was ten years old and curious. When I did not hear such travel plans from my Grandpa Kuiters, I asked him pointedly, “When are you going to your homeland?”

He replied in rather a gruff voice, “America is now my home! This is where you can work hard and get ahead.” Then, looking straight into my eye, he softened his tone and added this value statement: “This is where you can go to good schools, study hard, and make something of yourself. What you put into your mind can never be taken away.” He planted more than onions and potatoes on that day.

During my youth, three values were sown deeply in my mind and heart: 1) America is a land of opportunity; 2) good stewardship includes mind, body, and spirit; and 3) education is priceless.

## Writing Excerpt Two – JOURNEY OF THANKSGIVING



During the summer months when I was old enough, I played softball, the pitcher position, with friends at the ball diamond located in a small village of Maple Island. After the game, we often went to the old gravel pit for a cool swim. Later we ballplayers went to the newly constructed swimming pool. Dad let me use his car or truck without question and never told me what time I had to be home. However, he expected me to get up in the morning at the *very same time that he arose*, which was always early. No exceptions were allowed.

That worked well until one hot, mid-summer day. My assignment was to cultivate onions with the small International Harvester farmall tractor that was called a *Cub*. The tractor engine droned on and on. My close attention wavered. My head would sag momentarily while the tractor continued to move ahead. Just like that I had cut out six rows of onions for a distance of five or six feet. That never happened in front of the field near the farm house; it occurred in the back half of the field where my dad did not see the blank spaces *until* an enterprising airplane pilot took air photos of area farmsteads and sold the pictures door-to-door. That is when my father saw the checker-board look in the back of the field and he lit into me with an angry, verbal barrage that I shall never forget.

He fairly shouted, “Raising onions is our livelihood! How dare you be careless with the means of our family’s existence? We treat you like an adult and expect you to give back in kind. Where is your sense of stewardship?” On and on he went until I was reduced to tears. He walked away before I could ask for forgiveness. The fact that sins will find you out was strongly reinforced that day!

### **Writing Excerpt Three – “An Earthquake: New Vision for Leadership”**



Mary Anne and I were attending a Saturday morning staff development seminar in Japan in the spring of 1962. We sat in a large luncheon room on the first floor of a tall office building. Without warning, pictures hanging on the walls began to swing back and forth. An underground seismic force pushed the floor on one side of the room upward about two inches. Like a ripple wave on water, the upward thrust moved across the entire floor, lifting and lowering tables, chairs, and people as it rolled along. A thick support pillar close to me began to vibrate and then shake for a few seconds. It was all over in about a minute.

During those tense moments I did not fear death, for I had long known my eternal destination was secure. However, this probing question did press into my thoughts, “If I live, how should my remaining years be spent?” In quick succession this Spirit-prompted answer followed: A) develop and use talents to the full in the service of the Master and B) be open to higher order professional challenges as they may arise. It was an epiphany. My first words to Mary Anne following the earthquake centered on the possibility of enrolling in a doctoral program.

## Writing Excerpt Four – “Parting Wisdom”



My own generation was born in the worst of economic times (1929-1939 depression) and lived through World War II and horrendous human sacrifices to topple despots and hopefully end tyranny. Then, we worried about our economic and political freedom during the long, Cold War with Soviet Russia, only to find a new source of terror, that being, religious zealots flying airplanes into our tallest towers and shredding our sense of security.

Currently, in 2009, the powers that threatened America from without our borders have been revealed to equal or exceed threats from within our borders. Dishonesty, hubris, and greed have tempted too many of us and have caused critical financial institutions to overreach. I feel desperation to *fix* the world's brokenness, but my time on center stage is over. I am now on stage left and am increasingly sitting in the audience. My ultimate peace of mind during my full-retirement years comes from knowing the One who has already triumphed over evil.

Again and again throughout history every one of us must re-learn life imperatives, which include, for me, that God is sovereign and supreme, work is good, health is a gift, and family and friendship are precious. Also my own confession and forgiveness through Christ frees the Spirit within me to live abundantly. Closed-mindedness to this big picture undermines and destroys human compassion, understanding, and personal growth that are so sorely needed in the world.

Brooding over the past is foolishness. Each day, live with a thankful heart for what we do have. Hope should not be directed to personal hoarding but for the well-being of the many. The greatest happiness comes when we willingly empty self of self and take on the role of servant who addresses the needs of others. True abundance is found not in gathering things but in loving, enjoying, and being a good steward of *ALL* that God has created.