

Hi Dick.

I am going to try to describe our immigrant experience.

In November 1948 Gerrit (Gerrit Jonker Kzn.) left by himself. Traveled with Holland American Line. Kept a journal where he described his experiences on the ship.

Was greeted upon arrival in Holland, Michigan by friends from Halfweg who had arrived a year earlier. He stayed with them a few weeks. They helped him buy winter clothes, find work and rent a flat.

Sponsors and friends helped buy second hand furniture etc. Waited for wife Jannetje and two sons, now Nick and Pete.

My sisters and I traveled with them by train to Antwerp where they boarded an American troop transport ship. The Ernie Pyl.

It was not a luxurious trip across the ocean. Eventually were reunited with Gerrit and settled down in the Holland flat. Happy to know the sponsors Nicholas and Kate Yonker, and see old friends.

Mom was so excited to find all the beautiful things in the grocery store. She loved to cook. Nick got a little job at a hardware store and Pete went to school.

Then it became waiting for the daughters. The three of us made the crossing in February of 1949. Freight ship with accommodations for 50 guests. The Dalerdijk.

Met in Hoboken New Jersey by a representative of the Christian Seamen Mission. We're put on the train direction Buffalo. A heavy snowstorm caused delay so we missed the connection to Detroit. Spent the night at the railroad station in Buffalo.

Next morning train to Detroit and then train to Grand Rapids.

Happy reunion.

We were asked if we had been afraid in Buffalo. Why? Because of all the black people. We had never seen black people before so we did not know we were supposed to be afraid!

Introduction to racism!

We daughters arrived in the middle of the week, but by Monday morning we had jobs at a small souvenir factory. 60 cents per hour. 40 hour week. That meant three checks of 24 dollars added to the family resources we had promised that we all would contribute to help parents. They had sold everything they had and borrowed money to finance the trips to U.S. for seven people.

After 22 years of marriage they started over with absolutely nothing!

Thanks Mom and Dad for having that courage.

We lived in the upstairs flat during a very hot summer. Following year opportunity to rent house with option to buy.

Done!

It was there that Lijntje Jonker Troost came to visit for several months. Her trip was a gift from members of her Troost family. They had admired her fortitude in life. Widowed after 6 year marriage (Klaas Jonker, she had managed to run a farm and raise three sons. It was a wonderful gift.

After moving to 17th Street Gerrit rented a piece of land to grow something to earn extra money.

There is a Heinz pickle factory in Holland. The factory furnished seed and collected the harvest. After our regular work we picked pickles! The following years he grew chrysanthemum in various color. Dug up in fall, dried and stored. Sent to customers in other states in early spring. So he now had a home business in addition to his factory work.

A big event was the purchase of a car. A brand new Chevrolet. End of walking everywhere. People looked at us differently because we had joined the American way! Without a car you were nothing.

In 1953 came the opportunity to buy a farm. It was a house with 40 acres of land situated a few miles south of the city of Holland.

Linda and Jane were married that year. Nick was in the U.S. army and Marge had become a nurse.

Gerrit and Pete were doing farm work. The first year they did baby chicks that were raised until big enough for the butcher. That meant building a chicken coop. After that it became egg laying chickens. They acquired egg washers. Bought a truck to deliver eggs to cooperative. On the land they grew corn and wheat.

In 1964 they got a bonus. The State of Michigan was constructing a new highway including bridge close to their farm. State bought loads of sand for construction. Found money!

They were able to buy a trip back to the Netherlands. How they enjoyed that time seeing their dear ones. No one could have predicted that when they left.

When it came time to return to Michigan Gerrit exchanged his ship tickets for airline tickets and returned home the same day. Yes , America had become his home.

I wish he could have lived longer. He died in 1969 . He was 67 years old. He left my mother a house and a third share of the farming business. She continued living there for a number of years.

Eventually Pete's youngest son bought the farm house and raised his family there .

The solution for mother was a double wide house trailer placed on the same property. She was very much a part of family lives. Lived until age 96!

This is a condensed version of our immigrant experience.

A lot of hard work and opportunities. My children love the history.

They loved their grandparents and have happy memories spending time on "the farm".

This is Linda's version.(March 16th 2021)