



# **FORGOTTEN PIONEERS**

**Mary E. Weeks**

**1981**

## CONTENTS

1. CORA.....	7
I. The Eye of the Lord. ....	9
II. The Queen is Coming .....	10
III. Angel of God.....	11
IV. If He Couldn't See So Much.....	11
2. BACK IN THE HAARLEMMERMEER .....	13
I. The Good Ice .....	14
II. Uncle John and Aunt Sophie .....	14
III. Fishing .....	15
3. THE DECISION TO COME TO AMERICA.....	17
I. John and Gerrit Paint a Picture .....	18
II. Oowna, Ttwoe, Drey.....	18
III. Enrolled in the Scapular .....	19
4. VOYAGE TO AMERICA.....	21
I. First Stop, Ellis Island.....	26
II. The Flyer to Linton .....	27
5. THE UNCLE'S CASTLE .....	29
6. THE PUSTMUS HOUSE .....	30
I. Pigs and Dolls.....	31
7. THE RAMSHACKLE HOUSE .....	32
I. The 1909 Blizzard .....	32
8. THE HILL HOUSE-DYKEMA'S FARM.....	35
I. One Comes and Four Go .....	35
II. School in North Dakota .....	36
III. The Voice of the People .....	37
9. I FORGOT MY DOLL.....	38
I. 320 Acres.....	38
10. THE BENTON HOUSE .....	40
I. Montana Storms.....	40
11. SOME NEW FRIENDS .....	42
I. Building a Barn .....	42
II. Digging a Well.....	43
12. PORTRAIT OF A PIONEER.....	44

13. THE ROOT CELLAR .....	46
I. Fall, 1912 .....	47
II. Summer 1913-Milk Snakes.....	48
14. BUILDING A DUGOUT .....	49
I. Tin Cans ,and Syrup Pails.....	51
II. A Quickening of the Heart.....	54
15. CARANAGAS IN BLOOM. ....	55
I. September, 1914.....	57
II. Cowchips .....	58
III. Precious Pennies .....	59
IV. Working for Grandpa .....	59
16. TELL ME A STORY.....	61
I. Hold Back the Tears.....	62
II. Wanting to Learn.....	64
17. NOTHING MUCH TO DREAMERS .....	66
I. Louisa's Pancakes .....	67
18. GOD GIVETH AND GOD TAKETH.....	68
I. Cora's Confirmation.....	68
II. Neal and Joe .....	69
III. Oh Holy Angel.....	70
IV. Some Land of His Own .....	70
19. FOUR IN A BED .....	71
I. Not Like Her Father .....	71
II. Yellow Skies .....	73
III. An Order From Sears .....	73
20. THE PROPOSAL .....	74
I. The Sewing Machine .....	75
II. Planning a Wedding.....	76
III. A Big Imagination .....	78
IV. War in Europe .....	79
V. One Day to Go.....	79
I. Their Prayers Answered .....	83
II. I Must Be Drunk.....	84
III. A second dam.....	85

22. CARROT PIE AND KARO SYRUP.....	86
I. Part of Growing Up.....	87
II. Never Had Eaten Jello. ....	88
III. Too Much Bull .....	88
IV. The Indian Reservation .....	89
V. Chew Your Cloves.....	90
23. A HONEYMOON COTTAGE .....	92
I. A Farmer's Wife.....	93
24. CATECHISM OF LIFE.....	94
I. Called up for the Draft.....	94
II. Let's Take a Snapshot .....	96
III. Only a Volunteer .....	97
25. WHERE ARE MY BABIES? .....	98
26. LOVE LETTERS IN THE TRUNK.....	99
I. McCanns Ranch .....	99
II. Why Must it be so Cruel? .....	100
III. Another Forty. ....	101
IV. Pete, Jake and Mary.....	101
V. Summer 1919.....	101
27. SAINT NICKOLAS DAY. ....	103
28. WITHOUT A GOODBYE .....	104
I. A Sassy Brat .....	104
II. Stealing Sticks.....	105
III. Springtime in Montana .....	106
IV. Let us Celebrate .....	107
29. THE TOY DART .....	109
I. Someone Else to Midwife.....	109
30. A LETTER FROM AN OLD FRIEND.....	110
The 'Trouwboekje'.....	111
Certificates of registration. ....	113

## Author's Note

My decision to write this book was made a top a stepladder while wallpapering my Aunt Cora's living room. As measured, cut and pasted each strip the country lane scene, my Aunt, seated in her tan naughahyde tilt-back chair entertained me with stories of her girlhood in Hoofddorp, Netherlands; immigrating to America and growing up on the baked barren prairies of Montana.

This book is based on her stories in 1981.

While traveling through the west, I stopped in the town of Chino Montana, and asked directions to the former settlement of Hollandville. The filling station attendant, perhaps forty, looked puzzled. "I have lived here all of my life," he said, "And I have never heard of Hollandville." "Well, I understand it was a little settlement about twelve or fifteen miles north west of here," I persisted, "My Mother grew up there." "I am sorry lady, I never heard of it," he said, "Why don't you ask Marie Vander Weyst. She has lived in these parts most of life. I'll bet she can help you. She lives just on the outskirts of town."

With the help of Marie Vander Weyst we drove out to where Hollandville had been, only to find miles and miles of nothingness where only some sixty odd years before a struggling young community lay. Not a board nor brick could be found as a clue in our search in that brutal clime.

That they, the homesteaders, had once been there, is history.

This book then, is dedicated to my relatives, many of whom are still living forgotten pioneers of Hollandville.

My sincere thanks to all those who helped me in any way with this book, especially my Aunt Cora who spent many many hours telling and re-telling stories, reminding me on occasion that, "old memories hurt"; to my mother, Dena Zeestraten Killinger, who opened old wounds in order to supply me with the information used to tell her part in the struggle of life; to my aunts Mary Zeestraten Meyer, and Sister Elizabeth Zeestraten, and uncles Jake and Neal.

Also, thanks to Dr. Pat Murray, of the University of Michigan, Flint, Michigan, who encouraged me to finish my project, and to Jim Hemming, friend, and son-in-law of Joe Pruyt of the story, who convinced me that I could indeed accomplish this if only I would persevere.

Last but certainly not least, my heartfelt thanks to my family, who put up with my constant chatter about "my book", and supported me to its completion.

Mary E. Weeks

## 1. CORA

Eighty four year old Cornelia Zeestraten - de Boer lives in a cozy little two bedroom frame house, nestled on fifteen acres near Lake Orion, Michigan. She walks carefully indoors and still gets around outdoors with the help of her hoe handle, but the long, heavy handles of her shovel, rake and hoe, which she used when she was strong and upright, have been replaced with shorter handles and lighter tools. Cora's arthritic, stooped body can no longer manipulate the heavy duty equipment, though she still keeps up the fight for survival.

On the back of her fifteen acres a second house sits where her adopted son Anthony, his wife and their six children live. To many folks of the nineteen eighties, Cora may not appear "well off", but according to her she has everything that she needs. Her little white aluminum sided house, with light green trim, was built by her late husband Rouke and her, over fifty years ago. It is as warm as toast in winter, protected by a windbreak of caraganaa, and a good cross ventilation provides a refreshing breeze in the summer. She has an electric stove and refrigerator, deep freeze, automatic washer and dryer, telephone, color television and a late model automobile. Rouke's Social Security pension does her very well so she has no financial worries, and her strong Catholic faith sustains her spiritually.

Cora de Boer is truly a unique woman.

Says Cora, "I'm not very good at showing off. It doesn't mean enough to me. I just want to be satisfied with what I have and need.

I don't need what other folks need. Not too long ago I was still wearing feedbag petticoats. You know the kind I mean. You'd buy one hundred pounds of flour in cloth bags, wash out the bag and make bloomers and petticoats from the cloth. I still have a couple of bags which I can't wash the letters from. And I have some embroidered dish towels which I've never used. Someday when I get a nicer house, I'll use them."

Garden planting time is near and Cora is planning just which vegetables she will plant for herself. She has saved enough potato eyes to plant fifty hills, and although it will be a slow and painful procedure, she will do it, because that is what a survivor does in the spring. "I do think about it sometimes, though," she says, "When and if I can't plant a garden anymore, what will I do? If I can't go out to my little plot and get one or two carrots, an onion, a handful of snappy green beans and a few peas for a good, thick soup, what then? I will have to learn a different kind of living. Will I know how to buy vegetables from a market? I suppose I will learn. They tell me you can buy a whole bag of frozen mixed vegetables in the super market, and it makes good soup; sounds all right I guess."

And of course Cora will learn, just as she has always learned to survive in every circumstance she has ever lived in, for that challenge has been inborn. According to Cora, planting is the thing to do. Says she, "Life is like a seed: you plant it and it grows, replanting itself year after year."

As she leans back in her tan naughahyde tilt-back chair, she closes her eyes and lets her mind blissfully slip back to the days of her childhood in Hoofddorp (meaning HeadVillage) Holland, located in the Haarlemmermeer. She sees herself less than six years old, living with her parents in a tenement provided by her father's employer. The houses are small and set in a row, each attached to the neighboring building. She has a habit of slipping out of the house and sneaking over to visit the tenant who has a set of twins, for she loves babies. One day, when she was out on her visit, an old lady who lived in the end tenement and resented anyone who crossed her lawn, chased her home. The old woman ran shrieking after Cora, flailing her arms about, shaking her heavy brush, threatening to "get" her if she ever caught up with her. Cora's heart pounded in her chest as she dashed breathlessly across yards until she reached her own back door, fumbling frantically with the door knob, pushing against the door with all her might. "Thank God, it opened," she gasped, for just as she slammed it shut the old lady let loose of her scrub brush, hitting the door with a thud! Cora was safe, but she never again attempted to cross over the woman's yard to visit the twins.

Poverty was everywhere in Holland in the 1890's, and many children were dying of malnutrition. By the grace of God, Cornelius and Cornelia Zeestraten had finally found a new place to live and work, and were grateful to Him. They lived on a twenty bunder (about fifty acre) farm, and although they only worked it on shares, they were permitted to use some of the products raised and were paid a wage of approximately 87.00 per week. Perhaps the four older children, and now a new baby, would survive.

Cora and Jacobus, the two eldest children, were healthy enough, but Dingena was not at all well, suffering from a stomach ailment. Each day her mother fed her a concoction of liquid obtained by boiling chicken feet in water, combined with water which rusty nails had lain in. The food was nauseating, and at times so repulsive that they had to hold Dena's nose and pour it down her throat in order to make her drink the iron rich dose. Peter, their fourth child had suffered a sickness which may have retarded his growth and permanently bowed his legs. He had grown to be one year old, when he first became ill with what the town folk called the English sickness, (most likely the rickets). For weeks the family was not certain whether he would live or die. Then when he finally passed the critical point of the illness and was on his way to recovery, they realized that he could no longer walk nor talk. Once again the slow walking, talking process began all over. Cora could still remember how frightened Pete was to try to take a step. It seemed that there was still some pain in his legs and he was terrified to try to walk without holding on to someone or something. Then one day, someone put his hands up to the sturdy straps of his bib overalls and, grasping the straps firmly, seeming to think that he had hold of someone, began walking all over the house. What a relief it was to everyone, to see him walking again, but the illness did leave its mark in his bowed legs.

Mary was the newborn baby, and for the first time in their marriage Cornelius and Cornelia had hopes that this child might have the opportunity to survive.

Shortly after the family moved to the share farm, they received word from the owner that he wished to have a flock of sheep moved to another farm, much larger and specialized.

Cornelius was pleased with the news, for he was not fond of sheep, feeling that they spoiled the grazing land for cattle. Cora and Jake were permitted to accompany their father as he herded the flock over the dike some great distance before reaching the big farm. There the sheep were corralled in a barn the size of which Cora had never dreamed possible, for there was no floor to the hay loft, and she could look up to the very rafters of the huge building.

Hanging enticingly from the rafters was a thick rope swing, with a seat crudely fashioned of wood. Looking around she saw that no one was watching. Dare she take a ride on the pendulous temptation? "Why not?" she asked herself. So she climbed up on the seat, no easy task in itself, and began pumping her legs for all her might. Soon she was sailing through the air in a wide sweep, from one end of the towering loft to the other, feeling like a young bird who had just found its wings. Higher and higher she climbed until her tiptoes nearly touched the rafters, her lungs nearly bursting with the pressure of their added chore. When her father walked into the barn, he froze in his steps as he looked up and saw his seven year old daughter swinging so recklessly

At such heights. Cora, too, saw her father out of the corner of her eye and knew instantly that she was in for a severe scolding. "Should I keep on pumping and never stop?" she asked herself. "No, I would have to come down sometime", she decided, so she ceased her pumping and began the slow descent to the end of her fling, still wishing she would never have to come to a complete stop. "You could have been killed swinging so high", her father scolded, "don't ever do that again." Cora cried and cried, but deep down she felt that his scolding was well worth the wonderful roaring adventure.

## **I. The Eye of the Lord.**

The farmhouse was warm and the most adequate they had ever lived in, and the symbols of their Catholic faith were evident in each room. The Holy Bible occupied a distinguished place in the bedroom and each evening Cornelius brought it out, reading a passage aloud to the family. A Crucifix was always present on one wall and each individual's rosary and prayer book were important possessions. A litany to the saints was recited, the entire family participating. Also present was one ominous picture which hung on the living room wall: a picture of one large eye, meant to remind one of the Eye of the Lord, for it signified God, all knowing and seeing, and Cora had an intense fear of it. She shuddered a little even now as she squirmed in her tilt-back chair to find a more comfortable position.

Cora's mother had few worldly possessions, but she was an extremely modest, clean orderly mother. She believed in the old adage, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Even at their young ages, she taught her children to sweep and dust the floors, giving Dena the chore of polishing the brass door knobs. Cora too was taught the cleaning chores though she much preferred to be with her father in the garden and fields.

In the garden Cornelius raised vegetables, red berries, blackberries, strawberries, flax, barley and rows and rows of sugar beets. Cora loved the garden. "Let me help you in the sugar beets," she coaxed her father one day. "All right then," he said, "but be

careful not to stab the beets with the fork." And so as she carefully dug under each beet with a two tined fork and gently lifted it from the rich, black soil, her father walked along behind, whisking off the beet tops with a long, sharp knife. What a handsome pair they made there in the beet field, that father and daughter, toiling together, and how grown up and helpful Cora felt. She definitely preferred working with her father, that was quite evident.

When every round, plump beet was dug and topped, a large, flat topped boat, so wide it nearly touched the sides, came floating down the canal. An entire family operated the boat and bringing it through the narrow canal was a fascinating sight. With harness-like yokes over their shoulders attached to ropes, each boat family member walked along the edge of the canal, pulling the big vessel slowly along. Coming to a foot bridge, they scrambled down the bank, under the bridge and up the other bank, never losing their grip on the rope. Finally it stopped at the Zeestraten farm, where the beets were loaded onto its huge bed, make the pile look like an Egyptian pyramid. Then the boat with its precious cargo was off to the market, and Cora would have to wait until the sugar beets were processed before it returned with the pulp. In the meantime her attention was being directed elsewhere, for it would soon be time for school to begin.

## II. The Queen is Coming

Starting school was especially exciting this year because she had new wooden shoes. The shoemaker had carefully measured her foot, making the shoes to her exact measurements, her mother paying the cobbler thirty-five cents; well worth the money, she was certain. In her black ' stockings, starched hat and apron, with her little brother Jake hanging on in order to keep up, Cora looked much like a little Dutch mother that day, walking the three miles to school. She was in the fourth grade; Jake in the third. As each grade was located in a separate room, she had first to see to it that Jake was safely situated in the third grade room before she could look for her friends. Sarah VandenHoof was her best friend, who waited for her by the school gate each morning. How Cora's eyes lighted up each time she saw her chum waiting there, in her brightly painted wooden shoes, starched white apron, long blond braids dangling down her back.

Today, Sarah was anxious to see Cora, too, and she shaded her eyes against the sun to watch for her. Clenching her bright orange ribbon in her hand and crossing her fingers in hopes Cora would remember her ribbon too, she waited in anticipation, for today was the Queen Mother's birthday, and she would celebrate the day by visiting Hoofddorp. All of the school children looked forward to such special days, for then they could go outdoors, line the streets and wave to the Queen. As Cora Came into sight, Sarah danced for joy, as she could clearly see Cora's dazzling orange ribbon fluttering in the breeze.

At 10:00 A.M. the teacher dismissed the class to go out to the street. "Queen Mother Emma is coming," the teacher called out. The children made a cheerful colorful sight, each with their orange ribbon tied at an angle from shoulder to waist, as in their

wooden shoes they clumped out to the street, lining it on either side. Already they could hear the plunk, plunk, plunk, of the horses' hooves as the carriage came into view. Sounds of "oohs" and "aahs" could be heard from the children as they sighted the sparkling golden coach with its ornate design, pulled by exquisite white horses with golden plumes on their bridles and orange ribbons on their backs. Inside the coach Queen Wilhelmina and Queen Mother Emma could be seen, and as they passed by they waved to the children, throwing them kisses. The children, cheering, jumping and applauding were overjoyed to see their Queen, and threw kisses back to her. All too soon, though, the coach was out of sight and the parade past. As Cora, Sarah and the others clumped back into the schoolhouse, with the warm sun shining on their backs and thoughts and sounds of the parade still ringing in their ears, Cora thought to herself, "This is a day I shall always remember."

### **III. Angel of God**

Grandma and Grandpa Stassen, her maternal grandparents, lived half way between school and home. Grandma Stassen was not at all well and so Cora stopped by each day to see if she needed anything from the store. Grandma looked unusually tired and ill this day and Cora could not help but wonder, "Is Grandma going to die like my little brothers and sister died? What will Grandpa do if Grandma dies?" she wondered. But Grandma needed some sugar from the store, so Cora tripped off lightly, not worrying more about her Grandmother's illness.

At the store she watched carefully as the storekeeper took a square piece of brown paper, and by folding it into a cone shape, then folding up the end, made a teensy, weensy bag for the half cup or so of sugar she was buying. She cautiously carried the little bag back to her grandparents and went on her way home.

Up ahead were three bridges which she must cross over, though she dreaded the idea. One bridge, which seemed more like a mound of dirt covered with grass, went across the dike. Sometimes when the children walked to school they could see drunken men lying under the bridge, who frightened little girls and made lewd re-marks. As Cora approached the bridge she thought of her Guardian Angel and whispered half aloud, "Ever this day, be at my side." Her little legs pounded over the grassy bridge and carried her safely past, with no time to even glance below to see who might be lurking there. "To lighti and guard, to rule and guide. Amen," she sighed as she hurried on home.

### **IV. If He Couldn't See So Much**

Cora did not intentionally disobey her parents as she could quite easily visualize the Eye of the Lord on the living room wall, but today she felt quite carefree and wanted desperately to stop on her way home and visit the family who lived a few houses down from hers. She loved to play games with their little boy and it was great fun to play on their fountain, at least to Cora it seemed like a fountain. Located in the family's back kitchen, it stood in the middle of the floor in an elevated position, with two steps leading up to it, where it flattened off at the top. Water flowed freely in

and out and the children thought it great fun to sit on the top and splash in the water.

Cora stopped to play. The little boy climbed up on the fountain to play too, but he, being accustomed to playing on it, soon grew tired of the game. Cora tried to pacify him, for she was not yet ready to quit playing, but the child became violent, kicking and biting, biting her finger so hard that she thought he had bitten it off. Screaming, she ran home to her mother, showing her the bleeding finger. At home her mother gave her no consolation, in fact scolded her severely for stopping after school without permission. "That is your punishment," her mother told her, "Now do you believe that the Eye of the Lord is upon you?" "I wish He couldn't see so much," Cora sniffed to herself as she held her injured finger and pondered her predicament.

## 2. BACK IN THE HAARLEMMERMEER

Cora stirred in her tan tilt-back chair and opened her eyes. The little cuckoo clock ticking on the wall behind her said 2: P.M. "Time for a coffee," she decided, for she and Rouke had paused for a coffee often in a day, and now seemed like a good time to do just that. As she pushed her stiffened body from the chair she silently wondered how many of these little rests she had become accustomed to in one day. "And why not rest?" she spoke to the empty house. "My labors are nearly over, aren't they?" She drank her coffee and then settled back in her chair for just a few minutes more, smiling to herself to think she really did not have to try to fool anyone about her frequent naps. Soon her eyes closed and she was once more back in time, in the Haarlemmermeer.

It seemed like all of Hoofddorp was lined up along the canal like soldiers on guard, watching the big boat come in. Slowly it inched its way down the canal until it reached the Zeestraten farm. The sugar beets had been processed and now the pulp was being returned in the form of cattle fodder. Cornelius had painstakingly planned for the pulp, digging a large hole in the ground near the canal. Very carefully now the men unloaded the fodder into the hole, Cornelius covering it when filled to the top. Each day thereafter he would take out a few pitchforks full and feed it to the livestock. This was the day the olie koekin (oil cakes) were also delivered. They too, were food for cattle, but they were considered a special treat. The olie koekin was pressed fodder made into a cake about 9x13x2 inches. Cornelius had a large pile of them stacked neatly by the barn and he often allowed Cora to break the cakes into pieces, feeding them to the animals. They had not had any special food in a long while, so this was a holiday, so to speak, for the animals as well.

With all of the excitement of the big boat, the smaller children were left temporarily to play by themselves. Pete had mastered the art of walking and was now learning to run. He and Dena wandered a short distance away to a small foot-bridge which covered the slough. As the two scampered back and forth across the footbridge, Peter lost his balance and fell into the muddy backwaters. Laying face down in the water, his little white blouse puffed out like a huge white balloon. Dena ran crying to her mother, babbling, "Pete is in the slough making bubbles!" Cornelia was terrified. She ran to the little bridge, leaped into the murky water and grabbed the bubble of the toddler's blouse, pulling the drowning child out. "Please, God, not after all he's been through," she prayed, turning him upside down, crying and beating on Pete's back, "Please God." Suddenly Peter began sputtering and coughing and she knew he would be all right. "Thank you, Lord." she whispered with a sigh of relief. Once more the challenge for survival had been met.

In the meantime, Grandma Stassen had grown gravely ill and so she was brought to her daughter's home, where Cornelia could care for her and still look after her own family. Grandma slept in Cora's and Dena's bed for the time being, and they felt quite proud to have given up their bed for their sick grandmother.

## I. The Good Ice

A ringing, ringing, ringing sound disturbed Cora, and she stretched in her chair. "Could it be the telephone ringing?" she asked herself. She picked up the phone which was located within reach and spoke, "Hello," but no answer. "Hello hello, hello hello," she repeated, but the phone only buzzed. "I must have been imagining the ringing," she thought, "or maybe I was just a teensy bit uncomfortable." She laboriously rearranged her position in the chair and settled back to some more dreaming. As she drifted off to a semi-slumber she could hear the ringing once more. "Why, it is the whole neighborhood ringing bells to alert everyone that the ice is good," she dreamed. When the ice was just right, everyone, young and old, dropped whatever they were doing and all went out to skate. Even the smallest child had skates, and those who were not yet proficient on them could use a backless, four-legged stool to push on ahead for support. Cora at nine years old was already an excellent skater, as were her parents. Her skates were beautiful and sharp as a razor.

A string of people, like a lengthy snake, was already forming, each holding on tightly to the next person's hand. As the line came by their house, Cora, Jake, Dena, Cornelia and Cornelius all clasped on and joined the snake. In the canals the water is running constantly, being pulled by huge windmills, so the water in the very center of the canal never freezes solid. That part of the canal in winter was called wat ice (wet ice). It was great fun to skim across the cane from the good ice, over the wat ice and back onto the good ice. As the snake line twisted and turned from one side of the canal to the other, Cora squealed with excitement, as her mitten clad, white clenched fingers clung tightly to the person on either side, for she knew she dare not let go the other's hand for fear someone would surely fall into the wat ice. It seemed the snake traveled for miles that day and Cora was certain it would be another one of her very special memories.

The air was feeling much colder now as she squirmed in her chair to pull the hand knit afghan, with its blue and brown ripple design around her shoulders. Was it the cold of the air while she made her imaginary ice skating trip or was it time for the thermostat in her little bungalow to kick on? She was not certain which world she was in at that particular moment, however the afghan felt warm and cozy, so she decided to just settle down in the chair a little deeper and continue her journey back into her childhood.

## II. Uncle John and Aunt Sophie

Cora could see herself in her bed in the farmhouse near Hoofddorp. The recently replaced straw in the pillow ticking made it full and fluffy, and the rustling sound as she moved was like music to her ears, for fresh straw in a mattress was most conducive to sleeping. Her bed, which was built into the wall, had a wooden railing in front to prevent her rolling out. Cora had no intention of rolling out, but her mother had called her to get up. With one big leap she jumped out of bed and onto the cold, clammy floor. "Brrr, it's cold in here," she complained. On mornings like this, it did not take Cora long to get into her long, coarsely woven dress and black woolen stockings, which felt particularly warm this day, and she did not even mind the itchy feeling they usually

gave her. She immediately went to see if her father had built a fire in the stoof; a little wooden box which held an urn. Charcoal brickets were placed in the urn, lighted and covered. The girls and ladies sat on the stoof with their long skirts draped over, thus trapping the heat and warming their bodies. Yes, her father had warmed the stoof, so she sat down and warmed her feet. The hot coals made her feel warm and cozy and ready to go to visit Aunt Sophie and Uncle John Brock.

Aunt Sophie (her father's sister) and Uncle John were Cora's Godparents. She had not been to visit them in a long time and was anxious to see them and their seven children. When they arrived at the Brock house, they found a very solemn household, for Uncle John was very ill and Aunt Sophie and the children were deeply concerned. Walking over to the bed where her uncle lay, Cora was shocked to see his hand which hung limply over the bed-board for although he was a rather dark skinned man, his hand was as blue as slate. Little did she know that he would die from tuberculosis less than a year later, and her Aunt Sophie would die three years later, leaving the seven children orphans.

### III. Fishing

The afghan draped over her shoulders had gradually warmed her until Cora felt as though sunshine was penetrating her very bones. Or was it sunshine she was actually feeling? Whichever it was she was not certain, nor did she concern herself too much about it, as this dreaming was proving to be a wonderful way to pass idle time away.

She dreamed she was sitting on the bank of the canal with her mother and father, sun beaming down on her shoulders, feeling quite comfortable and protected. Her mother and father each held a fishing pole and eagerly awaited a bite.

Suddenly Cornelia got a bite, and with one hard jerk flipped her catch up over the bank and into the middle of the road. She was delighted as she scrambled up to the road and spied her catch; an eel about twenty-four inches long hooked firmly on her line. She picked it up and brushed off the gravelly road dirt, taking it home to clean, for in Holland, eel is a delicacy. Though much like rattlesnake meat, it does have a generous amount of fat and to a family not accustomed to an abundance of food, an eel was a grand treat. When Cornelia placed it in the pan, the eel jumped and danced in the hot grease. What a fine meal the family had that night. To Cora at least, the eel dinner was the most delicious she had ever eaten, and she went to bed that night with her belly full and satisfied.

In the early morning hours the Zeestratens were awakened by a hoarse sound coming from grandma Stassen's bedroom. Both Cornelia and Cornelius ran to her, fear she might be dying, and Cora was sent to town to tell her Grandfather and Uncle Billie. "And bring the Priest." Cora was instructed. They rushed to her side, the Priest administered the Last Rites of the church, and Grandma Stassen died that day. Cora felt very sad, for she loved her grandmother, enjoyed their after school visits and knew that she would miss her very much. Sometime after the funeral, it was decided that Grandpa and Billie would come to live with the Zeestratens and their five children. So here it was that the combined families lived. Poverty was still everywhere and so it is

understandable that talk of America, the land of golden opportunity, fell on very fertile ears. The fight for survival was being bravely fought but had not as yet been won.

### 3. THE DECISION TO COME TO AMERICA

Thinking back much further, Cora wondered about that decision to come to America. She knew that the people in Holland were starving, because that is why her little baby brothers and sister had died, but why were the people so destitute and why did her family choose America?

She thought about that for a very long while and then remembered the story her father had told her of his ancestry and Holland's history.

In the early 1800's, the Haarlemmermeer was only a big lake, but the Dutch government undertook the task of draining it. Thousands of workers from Spain, France, Portugal, Prussia and other countries came to Holland to work on the drainage operation, completing it in about 1852<sup>1</sup>. Then the slow process of reclaiming the land began and is in fact still going on today. During those years of the 1800's, many lives were lost in the attempt to dry out the lake, with disease and pestilence running rampant.

This was the situation Cornelius Zeestraten found, when he came down from Prussia<sup>2</sup> with his father, mother, six brothers and three sisters. They were farm oriented folk with the never ending dream of owning some land. The father found employment as a bridge watcher, which included wages and a tenant house. When Cornelius, the oldest, was only sixteen, his father was killed in a bridge accident<sup>3</sup>, thus the mother lost her livelihood and a place to live. She did the very best she could by boarding her children out to farmers and Uncles who would feed them and give them a temporary home, but the dream to own land was uppermost in her mind; a dream which she instilled in her sons as well.

The family lived in five or six different places, always trying to better themselves. Shortly thereafter one son died. Mrs. Zeestraten eventually did take title to a little one acre farm, where she supported herself by raising flowers and strawberries. At times she had nothing to eat but the tiny throw-away potatoes, and Cornelius could remember his mother Peeling thirteen little potatoes, so small they could be held in the palm of her hand. This was his mother's food for the day.

His sister Anna entered the convent and became a Roman Catholic nun, while his brother Hendrick, a deaf mute, entered a shoemakers trade school. After Cornelius married Cornelia Stassen they lived in several places before settling on the share farm three miles out of Hoofddorp. Four of their babies, Petrus Martinus, Joseph Maria, Maria Catharina and Petrus Paulus, had died of malnutrition but because they had lived in poverty for so many years they did not even have hopes that all of their babies might grow up much past infancy. They were confident that all of their deceased children were now in Heaven, in the arms of The Father.

---

<sup>1</sup> The reclaiming of the land was completed on the 1st of July 1852.

<sup>2</sup> Of course Cornelius didn't come from Prussia (part of the present Germany). He came from the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> Petrus Martinus Zeestraten died in Bennebroek the 20st of August 1888.

Two of Cornelius' brothers, John and Gerrit, had seen an article in a publication which intrigued them. It told of America, this land of golden opportunity, where you could own acres and acres of land, get rich and be your own boss. Writing to the publishers in America, an even more glorious picture came back. And so, the decision to go to America was made, and excitement ran high.

Gerrit, a blustery, boisterous type fellow, boasted one evening, "This is the way they live in America; you put sugar on your potatoes and pepper in your coffee!" And, not to be doubted, he did it, and he ate it. As a child, Cora sat wide eyes, listening to the exhilarating dreams of her elders.

## I. John and Gerrit Paint a Picture

On borrowed money, in the year 1907, John and Gerrit Zeestraten, both unmarried, sailed for the U.S.A.<sup>4</sup> They found work in a stone quarry near Linton, North Dakota and soon bought a small piece of land and a team of horses. They constructed a one room shanty on the property and called it home. Soon they began writing letters back to their other unmarried brothers, Bill and Henry, and to Cornelius and his family as well, painting a beautiful picture, impossible to resist. They said that they had a home which they could all share temporarily, and that they had transportation as well.

Cornelius wanted desperately to better himself and to own some land where he could raise his growing family and work for himself. Said Cornelius, "I would rather eat dry bread and work for myself, than eat bread and butter and work for someone else."

Cornelia had little choice in the matter. She would go wherever her husband went.

The three brothers began talking to merchants and anyone else who might loan them the necessary money to go to America. A merchant in Hoofddorp by the name of Manus Von Schoten urged them to go and loaned them the money, 300 Guilders or about \$100.00, for passage. They would sail on an immigrant ship, or perhaps the T.S.S. Volendam, but only as first class Passengers. Immigrants who did not have the funds to pay their fare had to travel steerage and Cornelius did not wish to subject his family to such degradation.

## II. Owna, Twoe, Drey

Plans for the trip to America were now the subject of every conversation. Grandfather Stassen would come along with his daughter and her family, while his son Billie stayed behind to try and arrange passage at a later date.

Cornelia began sewing clothes for her five children to wear on the voyage. They might be traveling on borrowed money, but they would be well dressed just the same. To make new bloomers and petty-coats for Cora and Dena, she bought unbleached musli cutting patterns from the old worn out clothing. How the young Zeestraten bachelor brothers-in-law teased her when she put a pair of bloomers together upside down.

---

<sup>4</sup> In any case, it is plausible that Gerrit was in the US in 1907, probably earlier.

According to the ship's manifest of the SS Statendam (departing Rotterdam on 2 Febr. 1907), Henry M. Zeestraten (26 yrs.) arrives in New York on Feb 13. 1907, with a ticket to his final destination Rock Valley, Iowa, to visit his brother G. Zeestraten there. He also has \$ 20 - pocket money.

John is not mentioned in this ship's manifest.

His name is on the ship's manifest on March 15. 1908 of the S.S. Iverna, when he goes to the U.S. with the rest of the family (See 4. VOYAGE TO AMERICA).

"Oh, you are disgusting," she told the young Dutchmen, as they teased and tormented her.

Cora, like her Uncle Gerrit, now wanted, to impress her school chums. She was going to America and she could count in English, at least she thought she could! Reading in the English brochure she would say, "owna, twoe, drey, fower, fever, sex, self, eickt, nina, and ten." Her friends thought it very humorous, laughing and making fun of her. "That is what the boo says, doesn't it?" Cora fumed.

With March 1908 quickly approaching, final arrangements for the trip to America were made. The entire family received smallpox immunizations, with everyone worrying about poor old Grandfather Stassen. Would he survive the long ocean voyage? After all, he was seventy years old. Would little Mary, only four months, be able to withstand the rough trip over stormy seas, and would Uncles John and Gerrit be there to meet them as they had promised, and would Cora ever see her dear friend Sarah again, or her Grandmother Zeestraten and Aunt Mary? Would anyone in America be able to understand their Dutch language? So many worries intermingled with so many dreams, at times Cora thought it almost too much to bear.

Trunks were purchased and all of the clothing carefully packed away. The straw ticks were emptied and washed so as to be ready for clean stuffing in their new home. Of course there would not be nearly enough space to take along every possession, but the Holy Bible, Crucifix and Trouwboekje (the wedding book with all the births and deaths registered) were packed; Cora secretly hoping there would be no room for the picture of the Eye of the Lord.

As Cora and Jake walked the three miles to school for the last time, Jake did not have to hang on to her apron to keep up, for on that day she only dawdled along the way. The weather was still cold and, it seemed to chill her to the bone.

Sarah stood at the school gate waiting as usual, and the girls clasped hands tightly, not uttering a word, fearing that if she did they would both start crying. The school day went by slowly, and even the announcement that Cora would be leaving as top of her class in Arithmetic did not bring her out of the doldrums. And then the day was over and Cora was hurrying away from the school gate. Snatching one more quick glance backward, she saw Sarah still waving, waving, waving. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she ran toward home, not waiting for Jake or anyone else, knowing deep down in her heart that she would never see her dear friend again.

### **III. Enrolled in the Scapular**

With just one day left in their homeland, Cornelius and Cornelia took their children to church, asking the parish Priest to enroll them in the scapular, for they believed the promise the Blessed Virgin had made to Saint Simon Stock, "Who so ever dies clothed in this scapular, shall not suffer eternal hell." On Dena they placed a medal of Saint Alphonsus, the saint to protect her health on her sea voyage, for her body was particularly frail.

The next morning the family rose early. Uncle Bill Stassen was there with his cart pulled by his faithful dog, Griet, as was the merchant who usually delivered the rice

pop (rice soup). They would transport the heavy trunks to Hoofddorp by dog cart, while the family walked and carried what luggage they could.

At the trem line in Hoofddorp they were met by Uncles Bill and Henry Zeestraten, hauling their trunks. What a picture they made, this conglomeration of people; two young single men, one old grandfather, a husband and wife, and five small children, ranging in age from ten years to four months. Grandmother Zeestraten was there to bid them goodbye, as was her young daughter Mary, who would now have to be the sole support of her mother until the time came when they could join the others in America. Little did they know, that day would never come.

The little group on the trem, filled with sorrow and anticipation, kept their eyes fixed on their loved ones who had be left behind, until they could see them no longer. This trip to Rotterdam would be the first short leg of a very long journey.

Jake immediately became interested in the trem, as he had never ridden on one before. From the outside, it resembled a small street car on steel rails, but inside near the front, was a horse which pulled the rig. The trem fascinated him to no end and he entertained himself the entire time cogitating on the idea of motorizing it.

## 4. VOYAGE TO AMERICA

In Rotterdam they boarded a small ship for the crossing to London, which would take them the better part of the night. They sailed the North Sea in a ship which was nearly round like a giant-sized hot tub, with everyone but Mary, Grandpa and Jake becoming dreadfully seasick, the latter two having the time of their lives roaming around exploring the ship.

Reaching the London Harbor by morning, they were relieved to set foot on solid earth and not have to contend with the pitch and roll of the ship. Everyone soon felt refreshed and eager to catch the narrow track: train to Liverpool, where they would have a twenty-five hour wait before the T.S.S. Volendam<sup>5</sup> would sail for America.

Form 200-A  
Department of Commerce and Labor  
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

3000  
JK

ALLOON, CABIN, AND STEERAGE ALIENS MUST BE COMPLETELY MANIFESTED.

### LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered

S. S. Ivernia sailing from Lpool on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1908

1 No. on List.	2 NAME IN FULL.		3 Age.	4 Sex.	5 Height or Build.	6 *Calling or Occupation.	7 Able to— Read. Write.	8 Nationality. (Country of which citizen or subject).	9 Race or People.	10 Last Permanent Residence.		11 The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came.	12 Final Destination.
	Family Name.	Given Name.								Country.	City or Town.		
1	William	Fredrick	30	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
2	William	Iron	18	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	Wales	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
3	Word	James	24	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
4	worderck	Ernest	24	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
5		Mary	18	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
6		Albert	21	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
7	Watson	John	31	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
8	Geestration	Willie	24	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
9		Cornelia	34	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
10		Cornelia	10	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
11		Dina	7	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
12		Cornelius	36	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
13		Peter	4	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
14		Mary	18	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
15		James	8	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
16		Agnes	18	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
17	Jackson	Nary	25	F	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
18	Kay	Arthur	25	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
19	Arnold	Robert	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
20	McCall	John	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
21	Ellis	Richard	14	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
22	Lee	Alfred	14	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
23		Henry	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
24		Henry	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
25		Henry	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
26		Henry	19	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley
27	Watson	John	31	M	5' 10"	Wagoner		British	English	England	Widley	Widley, W. Sussex	Widley

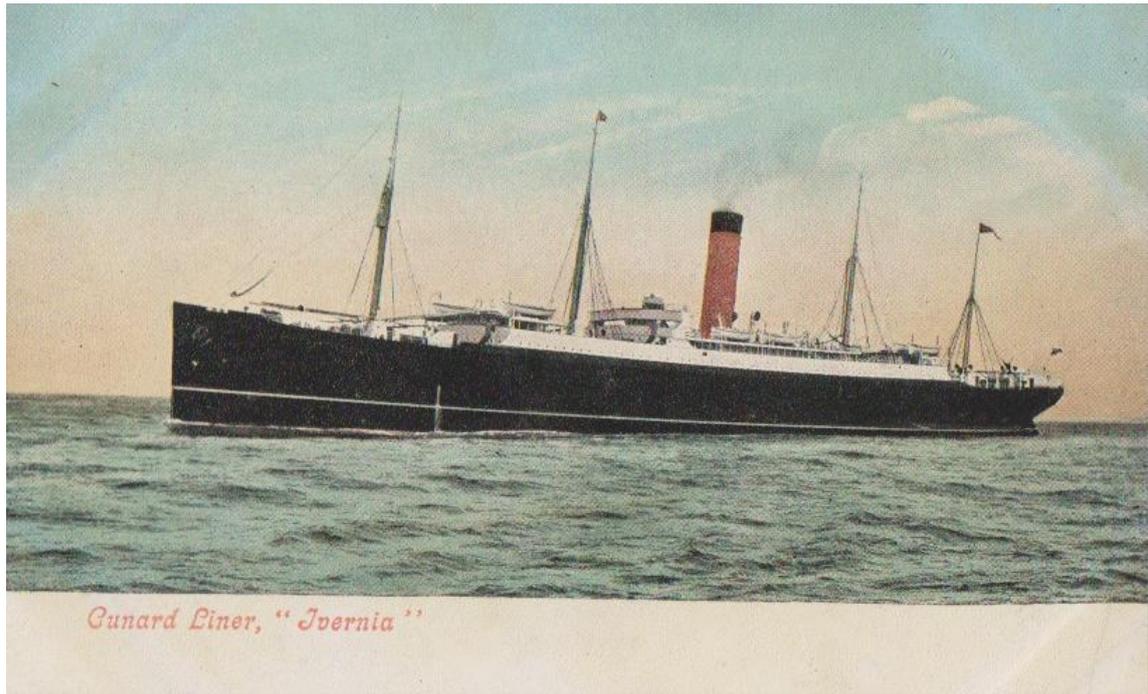
\*In case of showing occupation of tourists and aliens in transit, state in column 6 whether they are "tourists" or "in transit."  
†"Race or People" is to be determined by the stock from which aliens sprang and the language they speak. List of races will be found on back of this sheet.

Figuur 1 Ship's manifest of the S.S. Ivernia of the 15th of March 1908, sailing from Liverpool<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The name of the ship was the S.S. Ivernia.

<sup>6</sup> On the passenger list of the Ivernia we find successively (all with the surname Zeestraten, age indicated in brackets):

John (31), Willie (24), Cornelia (34), Cornelia (10), Dina (7), Cornelius (36), Peter (4), Mary (age not specified) and James (8).



Figuur 2 The S.S. Ivernia.

The Volendam was a much larger ship than the one which brought them from Rotterdam. Surely they would not become as seasick as they did on the overnight trip across the channel. Or would they? Cora dreaded the thought of being that ill for two weeks; the length of time her parents had said it would take to make the ocean crossing. For now though, she was on the train rumbling along to Liverpool, where her mother had promised she would take the children shopping. Cornelia was not accustomed to having time to waste as her days were usually too full of home and children to ever wonder about free time, but today she had the entire day with nothing to do but shop and see the sights.

While walking down the street in Liverpool, they met a barefoot boy with a little rag tied around his toe. Feeling sorry for him because he had no shoes on, Dena asked, "Mama, why doesn't that boy have any shoes?" but Cornelia only shushed her daughter, saying, "It's not nice to gape at people." Often in the lean years to come,

---

John Zeestraten is 31. He is born around 1877. Willie Zeestraten is 24 and thus was born about 1884. So these are two brothers of Cornelius: John (born July 16, 1876) and Willibrord (born August 14, 1883). The others are all children of Cornelius and Cornelia. The age of Mary is not specified. Probably because she's only newborn (20 October 1907).

Grandfather Jacobus Stassen is listed (together with a number of other people with surname Stassen) on another page of this ship's manifest. A summary of this list can be found on

[http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?new=1&gsln=stassen&gl=40&rank=1&gss=sfs21\\_cms\\_landing\\_imm&\\_83004003-n\\_xcl=f&\\_83004002=dutch&msady=1908&msapn\\_ftp=boston&sbo=1](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?new=1&gsln=stassen&gl=40&rank=1&gss=sfs21_cms_landing_imm&_83004003-n_xcl=f&_83004002=dutch&msady=1908&msapn_ftp=boston&sbo=1)

Dena would remember the little boy in Liverpool and realize that poverty was the reason the child had no shoes.

Even though they shopped mostly in the store windows, it was a thrill to the children, for they saw beautiful gowns on the window models, shops with glistening gold watches and sparkling diamond rings, sweet shops with red and white checked tablecloths and shops which displayed pipes, intricately carved and polished.

As they approached one shop, Cora and Dena stopped dead!

There in the window were two of the most elegant dolls they had ever seen, with china faces painted to perfection. Their eyes were like deep blue pools of water, and their lips were full and red as new salvia blooms. The girls gazed longingly at the two masterpieces. Which little girl has never dreamed of owning something so lovely? Cornelia watched her daughters as they stared at the dolls, very much aware of the loss they were feeling on leaving their homeland and friends, for she was feeling an almost overpowering loss herself.

Dare she spend some of the precious borrowed money for dolls?

The desire to take away some of the hurt the children were feeling was more than she could bear. She made a determined entry into the shop and plunked down the money. "A doll for each girl, please," she told the merchant. The girls danced for joy, for never in their wildest dreams did they ever dream they would receive such a precious gift. Imagine, a beautiful baby of their very own. Cora's doll had blonde hair like the flax in Holland; Dena's shining brown. The girls clutched their dolls close to their breast as they headed back toward the harbor, certain that nothing could ever cause them to give up these wonderful new possessions.

Though they had shopped for what seemed like hours, there were still many hours remaining before the Volendam would set sail. Cornelia busied herself with Mary, making certain that she was clean and dry to start out the long journey. Jake tagged along behind the menfolk, inspecting everything he could see in the unfamiliar surroundings, and Cora and Dena played with their dolls while keeping one eye on Peter.

At last the time came for them to board the gigantic boat. Still they all worried over Grandpa and Mary; he such an old man and she such a tiny baby. Surely on this leg of the journey they would become miserably seasick.

The Zeestratens in their newly purchased suits and dresses, though immigrants, looked more like royalty as they strode up the steep gangplank onto the ship.

They were assigned two cabins; one for Cornelius, Cornelia and the five children, the other for the Uncles and Grandpa. Their cabins contained four bunk-beds, thus Cornelia assigned one to Cora and Dena, the other to Jake and Pete. Each bed had a clean, shiny bucket beside it, and Cora wondered why they needed so many buckets. She was soon to learn.

The ship was well at sea when Grandpa Stassen was roused from his sleep, for although he had fallen asleep easily, his two young cabin mates had not, for they were both horribly seasick. With every pitch and roll of the huge boat they reached for their own shiny bucket, violently spewing out the entire contents of their stomachs,

moaning with pain, wondering if this would continue for the entire voyage. Grandpa got up and dressed, for he felt he must investigate to see if the rest of the family were ill. He made his way to his daughter's cabin and knocks lightly. At first he was not certain whether they had heard him or not, for it sounded like the whole family were crying and moaning in unison. Again he rapped on the cabin door and this time Cornelius called weakly, "Come in." The stench of the room as Grandpa opened the door took him aback, and the sight of the mass of humanity sprawled around was a shock to see. Cora, Dena, Jake and Pete, all hung limply over buckets, too exhausted from vomiting to even lift their heads. They only cried and retched as the ship rolled in the rough sea. Cornelius lay in his bunk trying desperately, to no avail, to give the appearance of a protector, but the stormy seas had been his undoing too. The young mother dragged herself about, trying to comfort the children, while at the same time being terribly ill herself. Mary only whimpered and whined to be cradled and rocked, not understanding what the commotion was all about. Grandpa was beside himself with worry, wondering what to do. "Should I go for help?" he asked himself, "Or is everyone on the ship in the same dilemma?" He looked at the pathetic group and decided to carry Mary out on deck where she might breathe some clean fresh air, for that might benefit both the child and her mother. The fresh air had a marvelously rejuvenating effect, and soon Mary was cooing and smiling. Sea travel was not going to bother her in the least.

For three days Grandpa did his best to entertain Mary, returning her to her mother only when necessary for milk and dry diapers. Each day he tried to bring a little nourishment to the seasick groups, and it seemed to him that some of the family were improving slightly. At last, on the fifth day out to sea, Jake felt strong enough to venture out of the cabin and onto the deck. As the cool sea air filled his lungs he could feel the reeling leave his head and nausea disappearing. He knew then that the worst of it was over for him. That afternoon he accompanied Grandpa on a most interesting tour of the ship; like a child in a Christmas toy shop, dashing around, examining it from starboard to bow. Grandpa was happy to have a companion, and pleased that at least one of the ailing group was back on his feet. By the sixth day Will and Henry seemed to recover so they too left their cabin to wander about the ship; happily surprised to find that at 10:30 every morning, bouillon and crackers were served on deck. It seemed a relief to keep even the slightest bit of nourishment on their stomachs.

Young Pete and his father were the next to risk leaving their cabin, soon realizing that they were famished after such a long while with very little food. They made their way to the ship's dining room where, after drinking a pot of strong coffee, Cornelius seemed to come back to life, so to speak. Peter was served a bowl of oatmeal, but his attention was riveted to the oranges which were in a bowl there in the dining room. Oranges were a luxury in Holland, but here on the boat they were plentiful. When Jake came into the dining room, they gathered up several of the coveted fruit and hurried back to their cabin, certain that this would be the thing to coax Cora and Dena out into the fresh air. They spread the fruit out in front of them and the girls sat up in bed wide eyed. Surely oranges were a big temptation for the poor immigrant children. Still feeling very woozy, Cora and Dena could not resist the bait. Rising slowly from their bunk, they straightened their rumpled clothing and brushed back their tangled

hair, carefully standing up on their wobbly legs. More than a week had , passed since they had actually walked and they wobbled about like a pair of newborn colts. Withstanding the initial steps, they tried one, then two and three more, leaving their cabin and gingerly making their way to the deck. A whole new world greeted them out there. The other first class passengers strolled about, their children playing, the atmosphere one of enjoyment.

The ship steward served the little girls bouillon and crackers, and their uncles brought them more oranges. Still clinging to their dolls, which had not left their sides since departing London, the girls began to forget, at least for the moment, the terrible nausea which had held them in its grip for so long.

Cora's eye caught sight of some children playing with a rubber ball. Each time they threw the ball up high, into the air it came straight back down. She watched until she became nearly hypnotized with the sight of it and dared herself to go and join in the ball game, for she had to find out for herself how it could possibly be that, while traveling on a moving vehicle, you could throw a ball up and have it come back down in the same spot. Time and again she tossed the ball up, and each time it came back down to her. What was the answer? She surely did not know, and in desperation gave up the test, deciding to leave the solution to someone more learned and mature than she.

During the next few days, all of the Zeestratens, with the exception of Cornelia, made the most of their time aboard ship. But Cornelia still did not feel well enough to leave her cabin, so the children timidly followed the menfolk around, wishing this part of their journey was over.

One day while they were all on deck, Cora spied the most beautiful lady she had ever seen. The lady carried a baby, and as she moved closer, Cora realized that the baby was black. She had never seen a black person before, much less a black baby with a white mother. Cora ran to their cabin and told her mother of the lovely lady with the black baby, for she did not understand how such a thing could be, but Cornelia ignored her, as such things were never discussed in front of children. Cora wondered about it just the same.

The next day was nearly the end of the trip, with Cornelia finally emerging from her room. Neatly dressed and well groomed, she was pale and gaunt from the grueling two weeks. A weaker woman could never have withstood the ordeal, but the seemingly young mother managed a faint smile as she and her husband strolled the deck in the sunlight, their little brood of children trailing along behind.

On the starboard side, some passengers were playing a game by tossing rope rings over a peg. As the Zeestratens strolled by, one of the rope rings rolled away where the players could not see it. Cornelia had, seen it however, and called out in her Holland language, revealing the location of the ring. A dead silence fell over the players and Cornelia could not understand their reaction. What had she said? Surely she did not know, and not until later, when a Hollander who spoke English explained it to her, did she grasp the meaning of the whole affair, for the word she had used in Dutch was a sexual insult in English! What an embarrassment it was for Cornelia who was such a modest individual.

That night, all of the first class passengers gathered in the dining room for their last meal together. It had been a long and arduous trip, and everyone was happy to see it finally coming to an end. Cora saw the beautiful lady again and nudged her mother to take notice. "It is impolite to stare," Cornelia reminded, only slightly glancing at the woman, but Cora could not take her eyes off the lady and knew that her face would be imprinted on her mind forever.

## I. First Stop, Ellis Island

At last the day arrived to reach America. March was nearing an end and the April air was bitter cold. The first stop was Ellis Island in upper New York Bay, where many passengers disembarked. Cora watched as the beautiful lady left the Volendam carrying her baby. On the dock was a handsome young black man who met her, putting his arms around the woman and her child. As Cornelia watched the young couple embrace, she glanced at her daughter and said, "Now we know where the baby came from." Cora frowned, still not certain she understood, but knowing that the subject was now closed.

Ellis Island was also the port where the immigrants who had been in the hold, or cargo deck of the ship, disembarked. Cora was horrified to see the passengers who emerged. Dirty and disheveled, with the rank smell of vomitus and human excrement rising up from their bodies, they looked like the lowliness and forgotten of God's creatures. "How horrible it must have been for them," she cried in disbelief, "How horrible."

Boston, Massachusetts was the last leg of their journey and the port where they would finally put their feet on dry land. Cornelia, still not completely over her nausea, was definitely looking forward to leaving the ship, and so the Zeestraten, along with the other remaining passengers disembarked. What a curious feeling it was to walk once again on solid earth. Their legs felt much like rubber and their bodies seemed to be fighting to gain their balance, as they walked along the busy sidewalks. Trailing along behind their parents, the children were in awe of the tall buildings reaching what seemed, way up to the sky. Cora and Jake had to push Dena along as she walked with her head flung back trying to see the building tops.

From there they were to go to a railroad station, present their passport papers and go on to North Dakota by train. Such was not the case however, for in the Boston port, Grandpa Stassen's steamer trunk had gotten lost, and in it his passport. The port officials searched frantically for the trunk and in the meantime the entire family was held up at the station. The authorities would not allow any one of them to leave if even one member was missing a passport, and the port officials insisted that they needed more time to locate the missing luggage. There was nothing to do but wait in the railroad station.

The huge station was cold the first of April with its wide flung doors, and long, wooden benches, and at the ticket window, an unfriendly looking gentleman with icy cold eyes glared at them over horn-rimmed glasses. Not realizing the dilemma, the four youngsters scampered around the station chasing a rubber ball. The menfolk,

however, were most concerned, especially in view of the fact that not a word of English was spoken nor understood by one of them.

Cornelia kept very busy washing baby diapers in the station lavatories, knowing it would most, likely be a long while before she would find an opportunity to do any laundry.

Cornelius, who was ordinarily a patient man, began to feel hungry. When hungry he was ornery and irritable, and soon was involved in an argument with the station master. Looking out the big open doors, he could see shops with bright lights and baked goods in the windows. He wanted to leave the station just long enough to go to the shop and buy some food for his family. The children now hid behind their mother's skirt as the argument grew louder, for so many hand motions and so many shouted words terrified them.

At last the station attendant agreed to let Cornelius go as far as the bakery shop, and he soon returned with two large bags filled with something. "Panekoeks!" he told the hungry family, "Panekoeks!" Inside the bags were a dozen pies, and although he called them panekoeks (the Dutch word for pancakes) they were like no other pancakes they had ever seen, for they were filled with sweet juicy fruit. Cora was certain that her father had made an excellent choice, devouring one pie all by herself.

Finally, after more than thirty-five miserable hours of waiting in the icy cold station, Grandfather's steamer trunk was located and his passport produced, thus satisfying the port officials.

The Zeestraten and Stassen family were permitted to board the "flyer" bound for Linton, North Dakota.



**Figuur 3 North Dakota.**

## **II. The Flyer to Linton<sup>7</sup>**

To the children, after having been a-board ship for two weeks, the train did seem to fly. By dinner time the little group, tired and hungry, entered the train's dining room. Having seated his wife and children, Cornelius looked down at his plate and sputtered, "Who put this rag on my plate?!" Cornelia was mortified and tried to explain to her husband that it was a dinner napkin, not a "rag" on his plate.

---

<sup>7</sup> More about (the history of) Linton, North Dakota on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linton,\\_North\\_Dakota](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linton,_North_Dakota)

Blushing, she cast down her eyes and prayed that no one had understood her husband's uncouth, boorish remark. This had not been the first time on the train that Cornelius had embarrassed his wife, for he had been asked earlier to move away from a mirror where a passenger wish to powder her nose, causing quite a little commotion. Not understanding the language was proving to be a slight problem. The train was soon in Linton, and as planned, Uncle Gerrit was there to meet them. In the shivering April cold of North Dakota, the trunks and boxes were loaded atop a large lumber wagon. Cora, Dena, Jake and Pete were very excited ahoy riding atop the pile of luggage, and even though the temperatures were menacingly low, they mattered little, for the children were now in America, and that was all that mattered.

## 5. THE UNCLE'S CASTLE

After a long, rough, freezing ride, the wagonload of immigrants arrived at Uncles John and Gerrit's castle! Cornelia, still not completely recovered from her nausea aboard ship, grew deathly pale, for the wagon had come to rest in front of a single construction shack, built on four foot posts, on the low side of a hill. The building looked barely large enough for one man, much less twelve people.

A combination house and barn, with a partial partition made of sod separating the animals from the humans, it was a sight to behold.

The family, to say the least, was shocked at what they saw. Cornelius, though easily satisfied, knew immediately that this would never do for so many people. For the time being however, they would have to make do, as night was nearly upon them.

The men carried the luggage into the shanty, trying desperately to keep from falling over each other. A crude, rough table set with blue enamel dinnerware sat in one corner, with a heavy wooden bench beside it. The wood burning stove with stovepipe poked out through the roof, took up one wall, while two single bunk beds occupied another. This would be the Zeestraten home until something larger could be found. With no blankets nor beds, they lay on the floor like logs in a log jam and fell asleep.

Cornelius woke early, discovering that John and Gerrit were already outdoors, as were Henry and Will. The five men were aware that something must be done to provide for Cornelia and the children. John and Gerrit were certain that their brothers could find work in the stone quarry, so Henry and Will agreed to go there, but Cornelius felt that he would have to find better employment to support his family. His brothers told him of a Dutchman named Kleevenga, who lived in Strasburg, 24 miles away, who might give him a job. He was encouraged, as he was a very hard worker and not afraid of any job, nor too proud to do menial labor. So, early the next morning he took off on foot, following the railroad tracks, arriving in Strasburg near dark, where he located Mr. Kleevenga.

Back at the shack, Cornelia looked for something to feed the children. There was fresh milk from the mornings milking and a pot full of rhutabagas. She carefully peeled the rhutabaga, slicing it into perfect slices, then cutting the slices into teensy, weensy strips like shoestring potatoes, she placed them in a pot to boil. Though she hated rhutabagas as a rule, today Cora was so hungry that she was grateful for anything. That night Cornelia again cooked rhutabaga strips, this time mixing them in with potatoes. Though she was weak and nauseated, she realized that she must keep up her strength, as her husband was out searching for work and she must do her part by staying strong and looking after the children. Later that night, in her weakened condition, she sat weeping quietly, her rosary beads in her hand, softly counting off the "Hail Marys".

## 6. THE PUSTMUS HOUSE

The following day Cornelius returned with a borrowed team of horses and a sprig wagon. Mr. Kleevinga had given him a job in the grain elevator in Strasburg and told him of a little house ten miles from town, formerly owned by another Dutchman Rupe Palpor, now owned by a Mr. Pustmus, where he and his family could live. They moved their belongings to the little house standing empty and invited on the prairie, also bringing with them the two young cows purchased for them by the young Zeestraten brothers. Though it was not much larger than the Uncle's place, it was a beginning, they hoped.

Cora watched carefully as they unpacked the trunks, and with a sigh of relief, dashed out of the house to play, for the picture of the Eye of the Lord was not among the goods brought from Holland.

Behind the house was an enormous flat stone, the likes of which Cora had never seen. She and Dena, Jake and Pete, played on the stone all afternoon, calling it a trem, ship, train, and most anything that their imaginations could concoct. The stone was a wonderful spot to play and it was a relief to Cornelia to have them out from under foot.

With the exception of Grandpa Stassen, the men, after helping their brother move his meager belongings to the Pustmus house, prepared to leave for work: Cornelius to the elevator and the others to the stone quarry. They assumed that Grandpa would milk the cows. Grandpa, however, had never milked a cow in his life, and Cornelia too was terrified of them. Who would milk the cows? Cora, of course, for she was the oldest. So, feeling very important about it all, Cora was taught right then and there how to milk a cow, never dreaming that she would continue to milk cows for more than sixty years.

The Pustmus house of course, had no furniture except what the Zeestraten boys had cobbled up, but the clean feather ticks brought along from Holland could be filled, not with feathers, mind you, but with clean corn husks, serving as their beds. To the four children was given the task of gathering corn husks from a nearby field, so, following a wagon, they picked up the husks, taking off the stem, and by bedtime had stuffed the ticks until they were fat and bulging. They would all sleep well in the puffy, rustling ticks; at least until the husks began to break and settle, for when that happened there would be very little padding left. For the time being, though, they would be comfortable.

The brothers shared their limited supply of potatoes and rutabagas, and occasionally brought some apples, while Cornelius bought food in Strasburg with the money earned at the grain elevator. The meals were scant, and many a night they went to bed with very little, still they were not starving. Cornelia, feeling ill most of the time, wept softly to herself. After just losing her mother, she had left her homeland to come to this so called wonderful country, and now her family seemed in no better straits than when they left Holland. To add to her worries, she found that she was again with child.

The family did receive a few eggs from a neighboring farmer, and as the summer wore on they also shared some of their vegetables. One vegetable which they received occasionally was kale, a food much like broccoli and even stronger in flavor. Cornelia mixed it in with potatoes to give them some variety and to make the potato stretch farther. Cora hated the kale mixed with potatoes. One thing she did enjoy though, was apples mixed with mashed potatoes, for the hot apples kept the potatoes hot forever.

## I. Pigs and Dolls

Figuring that he would have a pork for butchering by Christmas, Cornelius brought home a pig. They would feed it scraps, and corn from the elevator, and in the fall they would have a butchering.

It was a warm and sunny day, when Cora and Dena decided to play house on the big stone, pretending that their china faced dolls were their children. Cora, the father, and Dena, the mother, pretended that they were living on a farm, where the father left to go out to work. Cora lay down her doll and went out to the imaginary fields to do her plowing, while Dena busied herself in her imaginary kitchen with the cooking. The pig, looking for something to eat, came upon Cora's doll. In one big crunch he bit off the head, and was just devouring the last bit of the body when Cora came screaming toward him. She slapped and beat at the pig, crying and calling for her mother, but it was too late. He had eaten her precious baby, her treasured china faced doll. She cried and sobbed for her doll, hating the pig, this new country and the whole world, until finally exhausted, she fell asleep, knowing that she would never own such a beautiful toy again.

Though they were many miles from town, the Zeestraten family, at least the father, Cora and Jake, managed to go to church on Sunday. The long walk to church made Cora and Jake very hungry, so they often stopped in farmer's fields and picked corn and sun-flower seeds off the ground, for seeds scrounged off the ground were better than no food at all. Cora also walked to catechism classes in Linton, where the language spoken was Russian! She of course did not understand a word of Russian, but that made little difference to her parents. She must still attend the classes in religion.

## 7. THE RAMSHACKLE HOUSE

The family lived in the Pustmus house for most of the summer. Autumn was coming and time for the children to start school, but ten miles was too far for them to walk. Having repaid Manus Von Seloten every penny of the passage money, Cornelius wanted to buy some livestock, and he would need a good barn for them, so he rented a farmstead owned by Mr. Albert Hurn. It was closer to town and had a very good barn, and a windmill which pumped water into the cattle troughs. The house, however, was a tall ramshackle frame building, colder than an icebox.

They moved to the Albert Hurn place in fall, where Cora, ten, Jake, eight and Dena, six, started school. Though they had attended school in Holland, they of course could not speak English, so all had to enter the first grade, Cora being most unhappy with her sudden demotion. Coming home from school the first day, Jake was already doing a little bragging, telling his mother that he had learned to say needle and thread. "If needle is needle, then thread is threedle," he boasted, everyone laughing at his childish effort to speak English. He did have an easy time with his numbers however, and Cora and Dena did learn to read a few words in English those first few weeks of school.

Then, on December 31st, when Cora came home from school, she was told that she had a new baby sister. She was furious, refusing to even look at the baby. Taking care of Mary was enough without having to help with another, but there was work to do and she being the oldest had to help her grandfather with the housework until her mother could be up on her feet again.

They named the baby Elizabeth and called her Bessie. To Cora, Bessie was a problem from the very beginning, as she cried too much, demanding too much attention. Her crying was most likely due to a belly ache from living in the cold, drafty house, but cry she did, day and night. And because her mother had not been well for such a long time, Cora had not as yet attended a complete week of school and now with the new baby her attendance ended. She felt greatly deprived.

Winter weather forcing the school to close early also bent Jake and Dena home, ending their education for that year.

The Zeestratens kept a team of horses, two cows and a few chickens in the barn that winter. That the uncles had come to stay with them was a consolation to Cora, for then she had less work to do in the barn, though she still had to knit wool socks and mittens, and help with the babies.

### I. The 1909 Blizzard

North Dakota was noted for its horrible blizzards and the year 1909 was no exception. One night about dark, the snow began falling, whistling winds coming right on its tail. It blew all night, daybreak bringing no relief. Nevertheless, the livestock must be fed, and so John set out for the barn, groping his way over the mountainous snow banks. Inside the ramshackle house the family huddled around a pot-bellied stove, waiting for him to return, winds screeching and howling through the old house like a host of goblins on

Halloween. An hour went by but no sounds of John could be heard. Two hours went by and then they heard a banging on the back door. Hurrying to the door, they opened it to a snow covered figure, barely able to move, whiskers frozen white, hands as stiff as boards.

In the whirling blizzard, with nothing to guide him, John had gotten lost, never finding the barn and only by accident finding his way back to the house. So the men devised a plan. They would all go out together, holding on to one another all the way, unrolling a ball of binder twine as they went. When reaching the barn door, they would attach the twine to the door handle, and by following it back, make their way to the house. The children watched wide-eyed as the men prepared to make the short trip to the barn, bundling up with all the warm clothing available. With heads bent down like a herd of buffalo, they stepped out the door into a blinding blast of snow that nearly sucked the door off its hinges, pushing their way in the direction of the barn. Suddenly the lead man stopped with a thud, having run heads first into the snow blocked door. He took hold of the door and pulled, not budging it an inch. "I can't get the door open," he called back to the others, "I'll just tie the twine to the door handle." The twine now secured, they made their way back to the house, guided by their rope pathway. Back inside, the men warmed themselves, had a bite to eat and set out again, this time with shovels. After several hours of shoveling a semi-tunnel to the barn, they managed to force open the door, went in and fed the hungry livestock.

By the time they emerged, the tunnel path had blown shut but the heavy string guide in their half frozen fingers guided them home.

For one whole week, the snow kept blowing, keeping the family prisoners in the house and barn, while the men folk made their way daily by tunnel to the stranded cattle. At the end of the week, the winds quieted and the snow stopped. The storm of 1909 was over and Mother Nature had piled the snow up so high that they had to crawl out the upstairs window in order to leave the house. It was but the first of many North Dakota blizzards experienced by the Zeestratens.

That winter in the ramshackle Albert Hurn house was long and boring. The men spent hour after hour playing their favorite Dutch card game, Pondoer, sometimes enlisting the company of Cora and Jake, though Jake objected bitterly. Cornelius often spent nights at the elevator, unable to make it back home in the blustering weather. The children stayed indoors for days at a time, occupying themselves as best they could, but if they ran out of games to play there were always stockings to knit, butter to churn and of course a cradle to rock. Though Cornelia did have some eggs, milk and butter, keeping food on the table was no easy task, relying heavily on rice soup and rhutabagas.

Dena was constantly bothered by her stomach complaint, the bitter cold weather doing nothing to improve her condition, nor did her diffidence to her father. Deep down, Dena was afraid of her father and his occasional loud yelling at the children, frightened her, making her belly hurt all the more. Cornelius expected work from his children, not play, and because' Dena suffered from stomach pains most of the time,

her mother often excused her from household chores, causing a point of contention between the two oldest girls.

Henry, Dena's Godfather, often felt sorry for her, holding her close, when her belly ached, rocking her, singing little songs, asking, "Doesn't it feel better now?" Dena did feel better when her uncle held her close, for the warmth of his body helped ease the pain, and she loved him for understanding and trying to console her.

The single Zeestraten men were becoming restless, and talked of moving on to a state where they might have more chance for survival, so each night as the family gathered around for evening prayers, they offered prayers of petition and a litany to the Blessed Mother, asking her to "pray for us, pray for us, pray for us." In the meantime, they struggled through the winter the best that they could.

## 8. THE HILL HOUSE-DYKEMA'S FARM

Nearby was a farm owned by a Mr. Dykema, which Cornelius could rent on shares. The house was said to be a much warmer building, and so before spring came, the Zeestratens moved to the farm which the children immediately dubbed "the hill house." The barn at the hill house had a shed addition with a long slanted roof, so climbing from the still high snow banks onto the barn roof, Cora and Jake, on their seats, slid all the way down the slanted roof, across the frozen garden and onto the road. To Cora, it was the most playing she had done since leaving the Netherlands, and the most fun.

### I. One Comes and Four Go

In the spring, John, Gerrit, Henry and Will loaded up their few worldly possessions on lumber wagons and bid their brother Cornelius and his family goodbye. They were off to South Dakota in hopes of finding a better fortune than what they had found in the north.

Meanwhile, Billie Stassen had come to America, pledging himself for one year to a farmer in Iowa, in exchange for his passage. Upon completing his Iowa pledge, he came to North Dakota to live with the Zeestratens.

One day the entire family decided to go into Linton to attend Mass in the big Saint Anthony Cathedral, piling on to the farm wagon, making one big wagon load. As they pulled up to the church they heard the congregation praying in German, "Bita fe'r ons, bita fe'r one, bita fe'r ons" (pray for us, pray for us, pray for us). To Dutchmen who did not understand German or English it was rather confusing; to some Dutchmen at least, but not to Cornelia. "Listen," she said, "They are praying the litany to the Blessed Virgin. They pray the same prayers wherever you go in the world." Hearing the litany was indeed comforting to the little group of foreigners in this new and different country.

Billie Stassen was now a great help to his brother-in-law, pitching in to help with the livestock and planting. To protect the new plants from disease, the seed potatoes needed treating before planting, and the chicken coop need delousing. Billie and Cornelius, being very ingenious, placed the seed potatoes in wash tubs filled with formaldehyde, setting the tubs in the chicken coop overnight. Though the chickens spent a cold night out of doors, their house was louse-free when they returned, and the potatoes were ready for planting.

That spring they planted a field of corn, potatoes and a nice vegetable garden, while here and there in the corn rows, they planted watermelons. As the watermelon plants grew, their vines climbed up the corn stalks, making it difficult for Billie to cultivate the corn, but the plump, ripe melons would be well worth their trouble in the fall.

In the fall, Pete and Dena, being good buddies, would occasionally slip into the kitchen, snitch a little sharp knife, and head out to the corn field. Hiding between the rows, they would find a nice ripe melon, and being very careful not to cut themselves, would

slice it in half, having themselves a feast, topping it off with some raw corn on the cob. They enjoyed several tasty meals that late summer and luckily never got caught!

At harvest time, a crew of men came to help with the corn, walking along beside a wagon with side boards. As the team of horses walked ahead slowly, the men pulled the corn ears off the stalks, throwing them into the wagon. Dena and Pete watched as the men worked. Their work seemed almost like a song, as they kept a steady rhythm of, "Pull it off, throw it in, pull it off throw it in." Corn picking time was indeed a fascination for the children. The wagon heaping full, the men drove it back to the barn, loading the corn into outdoor bins; lath constructed.

## II. School in North Dakota

Harvest time was also time to return to school and this year should prove to be better than last, for the teacher, Mr. Martin Van Dyke, was also Dutch. Though he would not allow the Zeestraten children to speak Dutch in school, he could understand them thus communicating more freely.

Martin Van Dyke was not a well man, suffering terribly from asthma. He carried around with him a little pot containing some sort of medication which he inhaled occasionally, causing him to cough violently, until he had coughed up all the phlegm from his respiratory passages. He was rather repulsive, coughing all the time, but he was a good teacher, never even taking time off for lunch, it seemed.

Cornelia was once more heavy with child, so again Cora was needed at home and could not attend school as often as the others. When she did attend however, Mr. Van Dyke sometimes worked privately with her, explaining word construction and what the letters sounded like, promising that if she could just learn that, she could learn English. Cora did learn word construction and enjoyed reading, though she never did learn verbs, nouns, pronouns, etc. and arithmetic seemed almost impossible.

On December 23, 1909, during a blinding snowstorm, a son, Joseph, was born to the Zeestratens. With a one year old baby, and another barely two, Cornelia had her hands full, and needed all the help she could get from her father and older children.

Although she again left school, this time to help with Joe, Cora did not appear to resent this new baby as much as she had Bessie, but the mystery of where babies came from still haunted her. Her mother never talked about such things, still new babies seemed to be born to her parents each year.

Then one night she had a dream. She dreamed there was a very large house, with a cobblestone wall, too high to jump from, on which she stood. Below was a flat paved road where an insignificant man stood. Also on the road was a little blonde haired boy of about four years, who had been hurt. Frantically scrambling down the cobblestone wall she reached the injured child and somehow carried him in to the house, which opened up to a large high ceilinged light and sunny room. In the room was a beautiful red plush sofa where she carefully laid the unconscious child.

Then she awoke, and began to sob uncontrollably, for she feared she would never have a little boy like the child in her dream, because she still did not know where babies came from.

### III. The Voice of the People

Cornelius continued to operate the Dykema farm on shares, his dream of being his own boss and owning land never fading from his mind.

One day he drove the team into Strasburg for supplies, taking some of the older children with him, stopping at the home of the grain elevator owners, Mr. and Mrs. Kleevenga, who had befriended him when first he arrived in North Dakota.

Mrs. Kleevenga invited the children in to warm themselves. Inside, Dena suddenly spied a beautiful doll sitting on the sofa, like a queen on a throne, and seeing that she was taken by the lovely thing, Mrs. Kleevenga invited her to hold it. Dena's eyes closed as she clutched the doll close to her breast, enjoying its softness, for she dearly loved dolls; knowing that this would be a moment she would treasure forever.

Meanwhile, in town, Cornelius bought a Volkstem, a Dutch Catholic newspaper, the title meaning People's Voice, which was printed in De Pere, Wisconsin. The Volkstem would be his reading material for a large part of the winter. Little did he realize that an article in that very newspaper would influence his life for years to come, for a Catholic Priest in Chinook, Montana, Reverend Father Vermaat, had written an article for the Volkstem, telling of hundreds of acres of Government land in Montana, free to an American citizen, or a person who declared intention to become one, who would cultivate, fence and live on the land, at least part of each year, for five years.

Both Cornelius and his brother-in-law, Billie, were impressed with the idea of land, free for the taking. They immediately took action to apply for American citizenship, paying the \$2.50 fee and studying the required materials. Next, they wrote to Father Vermaat, seeking his advise on the possibility of their becoming Homesteaders. Father wrote back urging them to come on ahead to Montana, as scores of other immigrants were also planning on coming.

## 9. I FORGOT MY DOLL

Early in October, 1910, the Zeestratens, along with Billie and Grandpa Stassen, prepared to leave North Dakota, never to return. Cornelia gathered up what little household goods she had acquired, along with a small winter food supply, while Dena, wanting to make preparations the same as her mother, dressed and wrapped her precious doll for the long journey to Montana.



**Figuur 4 Montana**

She laid her doll outdoors on the straw which banked up the house, and watched as the wagon was packed and loaded. When all the livestock were secured and the children settled in the wagon, Cornelius started out. "Oh, my doll," Dena cried as the wagon pulled away. "I forgot my doll. Stop! I forgot my doll!" "We don't need a doll," Cornelius said as they continued on their way. "Stop the wagon and let her get her doll," Cornelia demanded, knowing how much Dena loved the doll, but there was no stopping her husband. Horror and disbelief rose up in Dena, for she could not believe that her father would leave her most precious possession behind. She had no choice but to believe it for Cornelius did not stop the horses. Sobbing her heart out, she kept her eyes on her darling baby until she was out of sight, for she knew she would never see her again. Her stomach ached and she longed for her Uncle Henry to hold and comfort her. The incident left an ache in her heart that no amount of time could ever erase.

In Strasburg, the family, household goods, livestock and wagon were loaded on a train for Montana. Once again they were off on a journey to a new and sacrificing life.

### I. 320 Acres

The trip from North Dakota was an experience the children enjoyed, and it was over much too soon, but the autumn weather was beautiful when they reached Chinook, Montana, and they looked to the future with enthusiasm. Both Cornelius and Bill filed on a 320 acre Homestead, promising: to meet all government requirements within five years.

The land was about fifteen miles northwest of Chinook, a great distance from town for some, but for Cornelius Zeestraten the distance was nothing compared to how far he had already come, and the proud feeling he would have when he could finally hold the deed to his property in his hand was worth the hardship. After all, he had come all the

way across the sea just to find this opportunity, and nothing was going to stop him now.

Although the animals and farm machinery had arrived on the same train as the family, the household goods had not, so they had nothing to do but drive out and locate their land. The fifteen mile ride out to survey their land seemed endless, for not a tree or bush could be seen, nor any real vegetation; only mile upon lonely mile of open prairie, with prickly cactus, buffalo grass and prairie dog holes everywhere. At last they came to section 21 of which theirs was a part, hopping off the wagon to at last get the feel of their new property. Cornelius picked up a handful of the rich loam, squeezing it tightly in his fist. Though it felt extremely dry, he knew it was good soil, and with a little rain, he told himself, and the help of the Lord, he would make a success of this new life.

## 10. THE BENTON HOUSE

In those early 1900's herds of wild horses ran free in the northern mountains of Montana, and sheep grazed not far below. Mr. Arthur Benton, a rancher in the valley, had built a two room shack up in the sheep country where his ranch hands could spend the night whenever they went up to rope wild horses. The place was fenced, had a well, though no pump, with water that contained alkali, which if consumed in any great quantity, could cause one to become gravely ill and even be fatal, still Benton agreed to let the Zeestratens and Stassens move into the shack until they could build a shelter of their own.

The first night in the Benton house was an experience, for the family had no furniture nor bedding. Once more, as in North Dakota, they all stretched out on the floor with only coats for blankets. "Whoever falls asleep first, say so!" Uncle Billie teased. The children thought sleeping on the floor great fun, and felt that Billie told a good joke, but to Cornelia this was no joke. She knew that she was expecting another baby, with no idea where the food would come from to feed the seven children they now had. What would life on this vast nothingness have to offer them? She shuddered at the thought of what might be ahead for her and her family in this desolate prairie as she lay on the cold bare floor, straining her ears to hear some kind of consoling sound, something to take the fear from her aching heart. Clutching her rosary, she counted off the "Hail Marys" until sleep mercifully overtook her.

Cora soon learned to get water from a well which had no pump. First she tied a rope to a pail handle, easing the pail down slowly until it touched the water.

Then, if she was lucky, she would tip the pail, fill it with it water, carefully pulling it back up. As time went by and the weather grew much colder, she would nearly freeze her legs off as she hauled up the eighty pails full needed to water the cattle.

Arthur Benton, being a kind and compassionate man, looked at the meager food supply of the Zeestratens, the eleven mouths to feed, and thought of the days when he himself first came to Montana. Although he knew that he did not really need an extra hand at this time, he offered Cornelius occasional work at his ranch, the Milk River Valley, Cornelius gratefully accepting.

### I. Montana Storms

No sooner had they settled in Benton's house than they experienced their first Montana storm. Like goblins darting in and out with the wind, the tumbleweeds rolled past their window, as the winds screeched and howled unmercifully, chilling everyone to the bone. In the morning their only two milk cows, Red and Blackie were missing, having run away in the store Searching first in the east and then in the direction of the badlands, they could find no trace of the animals. The following day they searched again, frantically running as far north and south as possible, but still no sign of the unbranded cows was seen. The loss of Red and Blackie was tragic, for without them there would be no milk for the babies that winter. But, Mr. Benton, hearing of their dilemma, came to the rescue, selling them a cow named Mamie, who had just freshened; bring her new calf along.

Mamie's first day at the Zeestratens was most traumatic, for she would not let a man come near to milk her. By this time Grandpa had learned to milk a cow, so he tried his luck, but Mamie kicked and stomped, nearly killing him. Cornelia too had mastered the art of milking, so tried her hand with Mamie. The old cow stood still and was gentle as a lamb. It was said that Mamie was so cantankerous toward men because at one time a man had tied her up by her horns. At any rate, the chore of milking Mamie became Cornelia's from that time until Dena learned milking, for to ask someone else to do it was useless, Mamie just held her milk until Cornelia or Dena came to milk her.

Every night when the family gathered for their evening prayers, they now added this Novena to Saint Anthony, the Patron Saint of! lost things: "Dear Saint Anthony, please help us find Red and Blackie." The family prayed the Novena for nine months, until one day when the "big ranchers" had completed their roundup, they found two unbranded cows in their herd. The ranchers remembered the story of the homesteader with the large family who had lost their milk cows. He sent word to Cornelius to come and see if the animals belonged to him. Seeing the two milk cows, he could indeed identify them, and gladly took them home, though they were now "dry." That very night a humble prayer of thanksgiving replaced their prayers of petition: "Dear Saint Anthony, thank you for finding Red and Blackie, Amen."

## 11. SOME NEW FRIENDS

Dominick and Louisa Schiettecatte, from Belgium, along with their three children, Mary, Ramie, and Emil, and Louisa's two unmarried brothers, Ramie and Emil Goessen, were the only other homesteaders on the prairie when the Zeestratens arrived. It was not known which woman was the happier to meet the other.

Louisa, much like Cornelia, had come there with her husband, children and brothers, and found desolation; still she had hopes. Cornelia had spent more than three years, with just her husband, brother, father, four brothers-in-law and her children, and was overjoyed to now find another woman to share her womanly thoughts. Louisa immediately nicknamed Cornelia, Kay, and promised to be midwife when her child was born, giving Cornelia a refreshing surge of hope.

Cora looked at Louisa and said to herself, "She is an old lady. She only has three children, but she is an old lady. I never want to get old like Louisa," for to Cora, anyone over twenty-five seemed old at the time. She was however happy to see the Schiettecatte children, for she always liked children, especially babies. Though the Schiettecattes were somewhat younger than the Zeestratens, the two couples had much in common, and became the best of friends, especially the women. The first winter would admittedly be a struggle, but the two families had tremendous faith in God and were not afraid of hard work. Mr. Schiettecatte, like Cornelius, had found work in the valley for a farmer named Mr. Herman Stirieb, and in the spring they and the other pioneers who came to the prairie. would all begin anew.

### I. Building a Barn

The Benton house, although small, was a blessing to the family, for with winter quickly approaching, there would be no time to build a house; a barn for the animals was much more important.

With no money for lumber, nor trees on the prairie from which to cut logs, the settlers had to depend on their own resourcefulness for building materials. They decided to build a barn out of sod, approximately 100x25 feet. Using picks and shovels in the rock-like soil, the men began the laborious task of digging a hole in the side of a slight hill, which would be used as the foundation for the barn. With huge blocks of sod, cut right at the site from the thick buffalo grass, and stacked one on top the other, they built walls which extended out onto the flat ground. Then from the badlands, twenty or so miles south, they hauled small brushwood, which was used as rafters for the roof, and over the flimsy rafters was attached rolled tar paper. A second layer of small branches was then piled on, with the final layer being more sod. Three center posts were sole support of the three foot thick, nearly flat, and somewhat water proof roof. For a door, they fashioned a heavy frame, then laced narrow poles to it with baling wire. Though crudely built, the sod barn would be a warm shelter for livestock for many years to come.

## II. Digging a Well

The alkali water from the well at the Benton place was being used carefully, still the family must have purer water, so Cornelius, Billie and even Grandpa set out to dig a well. Day after day they picked the hard baked earth loose and shoveled it out. As the hole grew deeper they hauled the dirt out with pails, until they had reached a depth of about 18 feet, where they finally struck water.

Cornelius was jubilant, for now he would have fresh water for his family and livestock. The jubilation was short lived however, for they soon found out that the water contained more alkali than did the Benton well. Cornelius was discouraged but not defeated.

In the spring, on May 14, 1911, Louisa stood by her friend Kay, in the delivery of a son, Cornelius. At age 37, this was Cornelia's twelfth child, (her eighth surviving child), and her last. The Zeestraten children spent the day at the Schiettecatte dugout during the birth of the new baby. "Didn't you see that buggy going across the prairie?" Louisa asked the wide-eyed youngsters when she returned home. "That was the doctor and he brought you a new baby brother," she teased. They all kept a careful watch on the ground as they walked home, but could not see any buggy tracks. "No doctor brought the baby," Cora thought to herself, although even at thirteen she was not too certain just how the baby did get there. Back at home, the children gathered round the new baby, excited to see him for the first time. "Let call him Neal," Cora said, and so the baby was nicknamed Neal.

That same time, one old chicken came up missing, not having been seen for two or , more weeks. Then they discovered her in a nest she had made in the sod roof of the chicken barn, having laid a dozen or more eggs, settling down to setting on them. When the baby chicks hatched, she walked around the yard with them for a few days, going right back to the nest to lay more eggs. Cora took care of the baby chicks and the old hen, digging worms out of the earth floor of the hen house, for there might be worms in there when there were none elsewhere. The second batch of chickens hatched, Cora certain that the mother hen would raise them. Nothing doing! No sooner could they get around by themselves than she again headed for the nest, laying a third nest full of eggs. That spring, the old hen laid and hatched three batches of chicks, and with the help of Cora, every last one lived. It was a blessing from God, and the beginning of a very nice flock of Plymouth Rock, chickens.

## 12. PORTRAIT OF A PIONEER.

Perhaps this was the spring Cornelius had waited for all of his life, for with the bitter winter behind him, and now a new namesake, he felt alive and renewed in spirit. The frost had finally given up its grip on the wind—battered ground and the smell of damp loam was in the air. He hitched his team to the plow, stood with the reins draped loosely over his shoulders, made the sign of the cross and said, "In the Name of the Father, and of The Son, and of Thy Holy Ghost. Giddap." He was off to open the earth for the crop he hoped would be the beginning of his fortune, the perfect picture of a pioneer.

Families who arrived and filed on a 320 acre tract tried to settle as near together as possible. Those who had read Father Vermaat's article in the Volkstem, joined them in early summer, settling on either sides of the road, already creating a class distinction. The Schiettecates, Zeestratens, Goessens, Stassens, John De Haan and the Wolneiviezs all lived on one side of the road, while a group from Little Chute, Wisconsin,(although everyone said it was Little Shit!) set claim to land on the opposite side. Theodore and Martin Vande Ven, from Wisconsin, were originally from somewhere near Limburg, Netherland. They were the jovial partying type, unlike the Zeestratens, and were called the North Bra Bunders. Henry and Elizabeth Vander Weyst and their daughter Marie, Henry and Ella Vande Ven and their children, plus John and Anna Wigman and their children, were some of the others who settled on homesteads in the beginning.

On July 22, of that year, two months after Kay gave birth, a son Henry was born to Louisa, and Kay was there assisting her new found friend.

The scorching hot sun and winds like breath from a melting furnace burned and lashed the spindly crops in the fields that summer, until there was little left, yielding a pitiful crop, but Cornelius was not disheartened. "This was a dry year," he assured everyone, "And the ground was just newly broken. Next year will be better."

One summer day in 1912 when Neal was just learning to walk, his mother was mixing bread dough in a pan which sat on the bench. As she finished mixing, a crust of floury dough formed around the inside of the pan. She was scraping the crust off along the edge with a butcher knife, when Neal came toddling toward her. Reaching the bench where the bowl was sitting, he lost his balance, grabbing for the edge of the bread pan just as Cornelia made a wide swipe around with the knife. The knife sliced deep into his little finger, spurting blood every which way, nearly severing it. Cornelia knew well that there was no way to take the baby fifteen miles to town to a doctor, so she tore long cotton strips and wrapped the finger, pressing it together as she wrapped. "Oh my Jesus, please don't let him lose his finger," she prayed, rocking the crying child until he finally fell asleep. Neal's finger did heal, but the sickening scar it left, he would carry forever.

Today was Dena and Mary's turn to get the cows. They were not too far away, just down by the big coulee near Wolneiviers, so the girls were in no particular hurry. It was a typical hot Montana day, and as they sauntered along they jabbed a long stick into each gopher hole they came upon, hoping to scare out a gopher or two. Suddenly,

without warning, a big, thick-bodied snake with a stubby tail, making sharp clattering sounds, slithered out of a hole and toward the girls. Screaming in unison, the two ran for home, certain that the snake was tight behind them, not looking back until they were sure they had outrun the rattler. It was certainly not the only rattlesnake seen by the family in Montana, but the incident did cure Dena and Mary from poking into gopher holes!

### 13. THE ROOT CELLAR

Despite the fact that Cora had been furious when her sister Bessie was born, a great deal of her care rested on Cora's shoulders. And Bessie was literally a thorn in Cora's side, in fact, it seemed at times as though she was a thorn in everyone's side. She was the most obstinate child Cora had ever seen, still, whenever anyone gave Bessie trouble, Cora defended her. If the truth be known, Bessie was no doubt trying to establish an identity for herself in this large family who had little time for tending to the wants of children who were no longer babies.

One hot day when Bessie was not yet four, Cornelia stood over a laundry tub, washing what seemed like mountains of dirty overalls on a scrub board. Joe, near three, and Neal, one year, were hanging on to her skirts, one on each side, whining and complaining, while Bessie tugged on her arm, repeating, "Mama, Mama, Mama," demanding some attention of her own.

Sapped of her patience, Cornelia slapped the child and said, "If you don't be quiet, I'll lock you in the root cellar": The root cellar was just a small cave dug into the side of a knoll, with two or three earth hewn steps and a wooden door. Pitch-dark, and filled with spider webs, it was not a pleasant spot for an adult to enter, much less a small child. One might think that Bessie would have been quiet out of fear if for no other reason; not so, however. "Mama, Mama, Mama," she continued, badgering her until Cornelia could endure it no longer. Grabbing Bessie, she marched her over to the root cellar, opened the door, pushed her in, locking the door behind her. Bessie screamed in terror, her cries bringing the older children around to see what the commotion was. Realizing it what was happening, they cringed in fear, for not one of them would care to be in Bessie's place just then.

After a few minutes, Cornelia opened the door and let Bessie out of the cellar, saying as she did, "Now do you think you can be quiet?" Bessie only screamed all the louder. Again Cornelia shoved her into the fearsome hole, while the other children stood speechless, not daring to cross their mother. Once more, Cornelia unlocked the door and released the frantic child, posing the same question to her, "Do you think you can be quiet now?" Bessie screeched like an animal, kicking and fighting. Taking hold of her shoulder, Cornelia again started toward the cellar door, when suddenly Cora stepped in front of her. "That is enough," Cora said, "You'll not put her in there again!" Startled, Cornelia pulled back her hand, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, weeping and at her wits end, handed Bessie over, saying, "Take her out of my sight then!", and Cora led her little sister away. Although she felt ashamed for having defied her mother, she felt justified, for she could see that her mother was to the point of sheer exhaustion.

Yes, Bessie was obstinate, and punished regularly, more than the others, while Mary was rarely punished. Cora, though contrary in her mother's eyes, was her father's All.

## I. Fall, 1912

Since food was scarce, it had been over a year since either the Schiettecattes or Zeestratens had eaten any red meat, so when a yearling colt on the Benton place fell broke its leg and had to be shot, Louisa and Kay teamed up to preserve the meat. They cooked much of it, salting more of it down. Not an ounce was wasted, learning how to prepare it so it tasted very much like beef, their families loving the tasty nourishing meals they served. Today neither family would eat horse meat intentionally, but when you are as hungry as they were that year, you would eat it gladly. It was agreed that had the two families not eaten the meat from the colt, they probably would not have survived that winter.

Though things were not going as well as had been expected in the area, more and more Homesteaders came with their families, worldly possessions and golden dreams. Arriving that year was a group of Dutch bachelors with high aspirations and plenty of youthful vigor, but with little knowledge of farming. John, Rhyne and Rouke De Boer came after having worked for a year as farm hands for the man who had paid their passage, much as Billie Stassen had done. Coming from Freesland, the Zyder Zee section of Holland, John was a cobbler, Rouke a sailor, and Rhyne a laborer. Homesteading would be an entirely different experience for them. John, an amiable sort, set up a shoemaker shop in Chinook as soon as possible, but lived in a tent on his homestead, while Rouke built a dugout on his place.

George Eldring, another bachelor who came that year, was an "Umbsum", or carpenter craftsman, while Henry Schick was a city boy. Joe Pruyt, too, had been raised in the city in the clothing business, but was eager to discover what life was like in this new land. Though there were now ten or more eligible young men in the community, there were few eligible girls, Ann Williams, Dora Oudenhoven and Cora being the only young women, and they were still very young.

One winter day, Rouke De Boer came to visit the Zeestratens and stayed to play Pondoer, as Cornelius liked Rouke and enjoyed having someone to play the Dutch card game. The game over, Rouke prepared to leave. "Here," Cornelia said, "Take these potatoes home with you and cook them for your dinner tomorrow, but don't let them freeze." Rouke thanked her, putting the potatoes in his pocket as he walked out the door. Back at home, not wanting them to freeze, he took them to bed with him, poking them down deep under the covers by his feet. Imagine his surprise when in the morning, despite the fact that they had been in his bed all night, the potatoes were frozen solid! Such were the temperatures, in Montana that winter, even in the dugouts.

Because the article about free land had first appeared in a Catholic newspaper, many of the families who homesteaded in this section of Montana were Catholic, furthermore, most of them were Dutch, although they were immigrants from different parts of Holland, and did not all speak the same dialect. And even though Chinook was a great distance to travel to attend church, the Zeestratens made the trip when possible. Ofttimes, however, Father Vermaat would travel out to the prairie and celebrate Mass at the Zeestratens, there in Bentons house, with the kitchen table serving as an altar.

The Zeestratens, Schiettecattes, Joe Pruyt (who would never miss Mass, even if he had to crawl to it), and other early settlers, knelt in the humble quarters and worshipped

together. Though the house literally bulged at the seams, a state of camaraderie was formed between the families, that would endure a lifetime.

## II. Summer 1913-Milk Snakes

That summer the heat seemed endless and as Cora looked out over the prairie, unshaded for miles, she could see rainbows of iridescence radiating from the hot earth. In the distance she saw Dena and Mary ambling along, taking their time getting the cows. "Look out!" Dena suddenly shouted as she stopped short, grabbing Mary by a shoulder, jerking her back. "It's a milk snake," she screamed as the two children stood motionless. There, lying in a perfectly round coil, lay a greyish tan snake with black-bordered brown blotches and an arrow shaped spot at the back of its head. The snake, startled as much by the girls as they were of it, slithered off through the stubble, its four foot long body disappearing over the next knoll. Trembling in fear, the girls continued their trek, making their way more cautiously now. As they approached the grazing cattle, something looked amiss. Although the cows did not seem bothered or restless, the presence of an invisible intruder could be felt. And then they spied it, the grayish colored milk snake was hungrily licking the milk from the teat of a cow! Horrified, Dena picked up a short stick which lay nearby, swatting Wildly at the audacious poacher, sending it slithering away.

When back home with the herd, the girls dashed into the house, breathlessly relating their frightening experiences of the afternoon. "It was almost the color of milk," Mary told her mother, "And it was sucking milk from a cow." "Yes, and it was as long as a rake handle." Dena said, trying to add some authenticity to Mary's already vivid description. "And fat too," she added. "You probably saw a milk snake or king snake alright," their mother agreed, "They are perfectly harmless.", though she might have a difficult time convincing the girls of it. No doubt the girls did see a milk snake, and true they are perfectly harmless, but it is a good bet that the girls would remember the incident for a lifetime.

## 14. BUILDING A DUGOUT

The Zeestratens had lived in Mr. Benton's house long enough, and now it was time to build a house of their own, but if anything, they were poorer than when they first came to Montana. A frame house was out of the question, so the only thing to do was to build a dugout. Other families had built dugouts and survived in them, although it seemed unbearable, still there was no other way. The crops had been a failure those first years and the money needed for lumber was just not available.

Jake was growing to be a good sized boy, so he could help with the digging, and Cora, strong and willowy, could always handle the team, consequently she could help haul the brushwood and sandstone. Cornelius, Uncle Billie and Jake all set to the task of digging for the dugout right out on the flat prairie as there was no slight hill available like that used for the barn. Day after grueling day, they picked the baked, solid loam, until they had dug a hole four feet deep, and 28x28 foot square. Next, from eight or ten miles away, they hauled tons of sandstone to the site by stoneboat (a flat, heavy, sledlike vehicle approximately 4x8 foot, made from split logs and secured with cross arms). The sandstone, which was like cement blocks except flat and not as heavy, was in irregular shapes. Beginning at the bottom of the basement like hole, blocks of sandstone were fitted together as closely as possible until they were piled high as a house, leaving one 18x24 space for a window, and a 3x7 foot door opening.

The next morning at daybreak, Cora and her father left for the twenty mile drive to the badlands, as it would take them all day to gather enough small trees and brushwood for the rafters. Gathering wood wherever they could find it, they worked until noon, stopping to eat the lunch Cornelia had sent along. It was a warm, pleasant day and Cora cherished the time spent alone with her father, sitting there in the short shriveling grass. "If only I could spend all my time with him," she thought. "We could talk about so many things, and I could learn so much."

Then suddenly she spied some buffalo berries a short distance away. The first berries she had seen since coming to Montana, she knew that her mother would be happy to get them. For this reason, while Cornelius finished gathering brushwood, Cora picked a Karo syrup pail full of the plump, juicy berries, carefully cradling them in her lap all the way home. Thus for their supper, each family member feasted on a dish of wild buffalo berries, with milk, and thanked God for Cora's most welcome find.

The next morning, the challenge of putting rafters on the house began. Using the largest poles available, they laid them across the four sandstone walls, covering them with heavy black tar paper. Smaller branches were then layered over the tar paper, with a weighty cover of sod completing the roof. A hole was left in the slightly pitched roof for the stovepipe of their pot-bellied stove. The only door was , made of 1x12 inch boards with a diagonal strip nailed on for strength, and tar paper tacked over for water proofing. Not being a carpenter, Cornelius was certain that the dugout would be warm, dry and adequate. How little he knew.

Unless they found a way to divide it, a dugout consisted, of only one room. Somehow, Mr. and Mrs. Zeestraten acquired a piece of congoleum wide and high enough to divide their bed from the rest of the house. In the opposite corner of the dugout, three

beds stood in a row. Jake and Pete shared one, Uncle Billie and Grandpa were in the center one, and Cora and Dena occupied the end bed.

Having always been bed partners, Cora and Dena had a ritual about going to sleep. After praying their night prayers, the two would hop into bed and scratch each others' backs for one hundred strokes; at least Dena scratched the one hundred strokes, for she preferred to be the first "scratcher." When Cora did her scratching, Dena usually fell asleep long before the one hundred strokes were completed, nevertheless, Dena never complained, in fact, she chose the order in which they scratched. She merely snuggled down in the husk filled ticking with its red and white two by two inch squares, and slept soundly.

The four youngest children slept in the father and mother's "room". Blankets were hung on hay wire to create a semblance of privacy, though none were hung between the three beds in a row.

A two-burner, pot-bellied, or laundry stove occupied one corner of the room. Used for cooking and heating, it was a favorite spot most of the time, for when the benches used for chairs were not at the table, they were arranged around three sides of the stove. Each child was assigned a place on the bench and if anyone dare take anothers' spot, there was hell to pay. Bessie and Mary were assigned one bench, while Joe and Neal sat on the bench behind the stove. It was typical to see them, with plates on their laps, eating, toasting their knees until they were beet red. The table was a heavy wooden one somewhat like a picnic table. Although the rest of the dugout floor was bare, the section directly under the table had a piece of linoleum spread over the bare ground.

Since the family had now built their own dugout and moved from the Benton house, they were completely without water, as the well, though alkalized, belonged to Mr. Benton. Time and time again Cornelius tried to find water but each, time it was the same answer, alkali.

Nor did the other settlers have any better luck with water than did the Zeestratens. Rain water which lay in the draw or slough, as they called it, was the only available water, so Cornelius dammed it up and used it for drinking, watering cattle, bathing and laundry, though very little of the latter two were done. With sod and round stones the size of a man's head, he built up the sides of the draw so that when it rained, if it rained, they would be able to catch as much water as possible and keep it trapped there.

That the entire community did not contract hepatitis, malaria or a hundred other diseases is a miracle, for any semblance of sanitary conditions was impossible. For example a member of the family would go to the draw and fill a pail with the precious water, now more valuable than money, carefully carrying it back to the dugout. When inside it was strained through clean cloth, and placed in a covered crock for family use. The cattle, in turn, standing at the water's edge, drank their fill, then, typical of a cow, while still standing at the draw, emptied their bladders and bowels. Is it any wonder then that the strained water placed in the covered crock the night before was alive

with tiny polly-wogs in the morning? The people were drinking "cow pee"! Still, the homesteaders did drink it for there was nothing else.

## I. Tin Cans ,and Syrup Pails

The Zeestratens planted their garden below the dammed up water, for the ground, due to seepage, was somewhat moist there when dry elsewhere. Each spring they planted the garden with the hope that this would finally be a good season. Sometimes the plants came up looking very promising, so they hung tin cans and syrup pails throughout the rows to keep the birds away, hoeing and cultivating the plants, keeping every weed out, giving the garden every possible chance to survive; only God could do more. Joe for one despised working in the garden and complained constantly about weeding. One day when the children and Grandpa worked in the garden, Joe straightened up and announced, "I am never going to hoe in the garden again. My back is getting crooked, and if I stay it will never be straight again." He walked away from the garden and for as long as Cora could remember, Joe never hoed in the garden again.

Cornelius would sometimes have Cora pull the cultivator down each row as he guided her, for she was the only one who could walk a straight line, he claimed. She had learned to walk a straight line in Holland when she helped in the sugar beets, and could do a fine job of it. Although pulling the cultivator might have been demeaning to some, to Cora it was an opportunity to be with her father, whom she loved and admired. He was her Champion. She hoped that when she was grown up she would be just like him.

About 1913, but after moving out of Benton's house, Jake, Dena, and Pete had attended school in the United States for approximately six months all toll, but because Cora had been absent much of the time to help with each new baby at home, she had attended even less time. But, now that new settlers were coming to Montana every month, there was a need for schooling for the children. A teacher, agreeing to come only until cold weather set in, held classes in the now vacant Benton house, living in the back room. Jake learned more about his numbers, for although he was an awkward, clumsy child, reported to not even having learned to walk until he was three, his was a creative, mathematical mind. Cora and Dena practiced their reading, while Pete seemed to enjoy playing more than learning. The first session was short lived, for the snows came early that fall. Next year they' would begin earlier in their search for a qualified teacher, they vowed, for their community was indeed growing.

The Schiettecatte family was growing also. They had originally built a small dugout, but now abandoned it and built a second with more of the building protruding from the ground. Much higher than the Zeestratens', it also had more windows. Louisa hated the sandstone walls so papered them over with newspaper, and on the bare earth floor laid poorly made rag rugs, making it much warmer than the cold bare earth.

Discarded, the old dugout became a fine spot for the children to play. John Wigman was a much better cartepenter than Cornelius, for he built his dugout much tighter and put covering over the sandstone, still it was a dugout, and dugouts were cold.

In fact, Cora could remember that their dugout was so cold that the family could go to bed at night crawling down deep under the covers, only to find those same covers frozen stiff as a board in the morning.

One such morning, Cornelia called, "Come on everybody, get up!" Cora sat up, folded down the stiffly frozen covers, and jumped out of bed, for she knew that it was time to go out to the barn and help with the chores.

Dena pulled the board-like blankets back over her head, snuggling down even deeper, for she especially was scrawny and could not stand the cold, continually suffering from chilblain. Mary, in her bed, pushed back her quilt, and there in bed beside her was a snake with lengthwise stripes down its back, (most likely a garter snake). It seems that snakes were attracted to Mary, at any rate, she screamed and leapt out of bed, as the snake slithered across the floor and out a crack in the sandstone.

From that day on, Mary slept with her blankets up over her ears. "Why do you always pull your blankets up over your ears?" her brother Joe asked one morning. "Because snakes live in holes, and my ears have holes, so I am not going to take the chance of getting a snake in my ear," she answered.

During the bitter cold winter that followed there was nothing much for the men to do in the evenings but play Pondoer. Jake hated cards, so Cora played, though she didn't always want to, losing her temper more than one occasion; still she played. Cornelia too knew the game, and enjoyed it, but never had the time for such relaxation.

She usually made the hot chocolate, a treat they all enjoyed. She stretched many a pan of milk by mixing it with chocolate and a little of the strained water. Sometimes she served a slice of bread with the drink, telling everyone who complained about bread with no butter, "If you can't eat bread, you're not hungry!"

Often on the cold, dreary winter mornings that year, there was little to even get out of bed for, with no school for the children and no work for the men.

There were always socks to knit however, and both Cora and Dena must knit a certain amount of rounds each day. With little heat in the room they took turns sitting by the stove until they were warm, then traded places, knitting for a while until their fingers got so cold they were stiff and too numb to hold the knitting needles. And sometimes the men stayed in the barn even longer than necessary, as the barn filled with cattle was much warmer than the dugout.

\* \* \* \*

In 1914, Billie Stassen built a small house on his homestead, hence he and Grandpa moved out, giving the Zeestratens more room and privacy for their maturing young family.

Martin Vander Ven was more fortunate than the others, for on his 320 acres, he discovered coal, turning part of his homestead into a coal mine, enough to furnish all

those who had the money to pay. Zeestratens had no money to buy coal, getting by the best they could. Vander Ven also built a hall on his land, and brought in a pool table. There he sold 2% beer, thus the hall became the local pub, dance hall and meeting place. Once a month a dance was held, but Cora was still too much of a child to attend parties, furthermore her parents were not alcohol drinking people for the most part, nor were their neighbors George Eldring, Joe Pruyt or the De Boer brothers. Uncle Billie was known to take a drink now and then though, and more than once Cora could remember him coming home singing, "The moon is tooooooo high. The moon is tooooooo high."

Meanwhile, nearly fifty families had moved to the community and staked out their homestead. Whenever two or more settlers got together, they talked of the need to name their settlement, so a meeting was arranged at the Martin Vander Ven hall. The choice of a name was not difficult for with the exception of one or two German families, the Belgium Schiettecattea and Polish Wolneivizs, everyone was Dutch. It was unanimous. "We'll name our settlement Hollandville<sup>8</sup>," they decided, making Vander Yens a post office of sorts, although not an official one, and mail brought from Chinook could now be called for at the store.



**Figuur 5 Location of Montana**



**Figuur 6 Location of Blaine County in Montana**

---

<sup>8</sup> Hollandville doesn't exist anymore. It was a settlement in Blaine County, Montana.  
More about Hollandville on: <http://roadsidethoughts.com/mt/hollandville-xx-blaine-profile.htm>

## II. A Quickening of the Heart

Was it as far back as when Rouke De Boer roped the three wild horses up in the mountains, and came to the Zeestratens for instructions on how to hitch them to a three horse evener, that he first saw Cora? Oh, he had seen her before, just as one sees a child playing with other children, but that day his eyes seemed to be drawn to her more than once as Jake tried to demonstrate the art of hitching up the trio. For an uncomfortable moment, Rouke felt a touch of embarrassment at not being quite capable of keeping his mind on the instructions, thus exposing his inexperience as a farmer. And Cora, though somewhat of a child, did notice the rather quizzical glance he gave her and she felt a quickening of her heart as their eyes met, then quickly glanced away. "Rouke is a good man," Cora thought to herself, "and my family all think a great deal of him, but he is not a Catholic .....who I pray will someday be a Catholic," for in those days, Cora believed that everyone had to be a Catholic in order to go to heaven.

Once the name Hollandville became established things seemed to take on a more official meaning. The settlers now had contact with the government, who offered help in the form of seed, for lack of rain had caused the crops to fail the previous seasons. Each farmer was to sign a petition showing the government their need for aid.

Young, twenty-eight year old John De Boer, who always carried a gun in case he saw a rabbit or a little cotton-tail, strolled the three miles to Billie Stassen's where the men planned to meet and go from there to Hollandville to sign the petition. It was early spring, with snow still on the ground when John walked into the house, setting his gun down in front of him. The gun fired, the bullet going straight through his heart, killing him instantly. His death, the first in Hollandville, was a terrible shock to all, for he was known as the good natured, unselfish young man, especially nice to the children, who fixed their shoes whenever they needed and went out of his way to please them. Not yet having a cemetery in Hollandville, they buried him in Chinook. Shortly thereafter, Rhyne De-Boer, who was rather sweet on Dena, but much too old for her, left for Iowa to find himself a wife, leaving Rouke the only brother in Hollandville.

## 15. CARANAGAS IN BLOOM.

The government also gave assistance in the form of windbreaks. Free for the asking, they supplied hundreds of Caragana plants, a shrub used extensively in dry areas for hedges and shelter beds. Nearly every family planted a windbreak near their home and in the spring and early summer, their tiny flowers filled the air with their aromatic fragrance. Had they not already named their settlement Hollandville, they could easily have been known as Caraganaville, the shrubs were so numerous.

The Caragana were in full bloom in May, 1914, when another son Albert, was born to Schiettecatte, and he, along with his older brothers and sister Mary, became close friends of the Zeestraten children.

Going to visit the Schiettecatte was great fun for Louisa always had something different to eat than rhutabagas. Although she put them to work shaking rugs, weeding garden, or doing any odd job she could find, they enjoyed it. At her house work seemed like fun, and of course she quite often made "syrup candy."

The Zeestraten never had candy at home for they could not afford it. The Schiettecatte, though as destitute as the others, seemed able to set aside a small amount of Karo corn syrup, which had been purchased in gallon or half-gallon containers, just for candy making.

Cora remembered well how Louisa cooked the corn syrup until it stretched into strings when stirred, then pouring it on a greased plate, would leave it to cool. When cold it was broken into pieces and doled out to the children. It was a special treat to the hungry youngsters. Today, the same concoction mixed with peanuts would be labeled peanut brittle.

And sometimes, Mary Schiettecatte came to play at the Zeestraten dugout. One day when she came over, they played "House" outdoors. "What can we use for food?" Dena asked her mother. "Here, take two rhutabagas," Cornelia said, so the girls peeled the rhutabagas, carving them into shapes of potatoes, meat, vegetables and bread. What a grand make believe meal they had. At lunch time the Zeestraten children brought Mary in to eat lunch with them thinking they might have something special for company. Not so, however, for much as Cornelia would serve a treat, the only food she had in the dugout was more rhutabagas, rhutabagas, rhutabagas! It seemed as though they were the only food they ever ate, for they would grow in nothing but a few rocks and a mound of dust, and pulverized dust is what they had in the summer.

Pulverized dust meant dust storms most frequent in Montana, for the lack of rain dried the soil to a powder, leaving it to the mercy of the winds. One such storm occurred in July that year, frightening the cows away. Generally, when the cows ran away they ran eastward, but looking out over the vast prairie one could still pick out a cow or two, thus knowing in which direction to head out.

Not this time however, but today it was Jakes turn to find the cows, and being in no big hurry to do his chores, took off at a very slow stroll in an easterly direction. The storm had left the air hot and the sun scorched his head as he rambled along halfheartedly

searching for the cattle. The fact that it would soon be milking time and the cow's udders would be heavy with milk did not seem to bother Jake. He only had one speed, it seemed, and that was slow. Besides, it was too hot to hurry. After wandering around for nearly an hour in the vicinity of where he thought the cows should be, he decided to give up the search. "After all, I tried, didn't I?" he told himself, "The cows were just not here." And he knew that if he returned without them, Dad would send Cora after them, as she always seemed able to finish what he had started.

When Jake returned home, his father was very angry with him. "Can't you be depended on for anything?" he yelled at his son. "Oh well, never mind, I'll send Cora." he growled, and Cora was sent out in search of the runaway cattle. "And hurry up," her dad told her, "Those cows will be miserable and will lose a lot of milk.

Cora knew enough to set out in the opposite direction in which Jake had gone, for even though no one had much confidence in Jake's ability to carry out a chore, she was quite certain that had there been cows in the east, he would have seen them. She headed westward, running like the wind. Barefoot and brown as a berry, she looked like a young Indian girl flying across the prairie. The sun beat down on her young body and her throat parched from the intense heat. Dust filled her nostrils and her head felt as though it would burst, still she pushed deeper and deeper towards the badlands.

Then, just when she thought that her aching body would not go another step, she caught a glimpse of the cattle grazing in a low gully. She dropped down in the brown buffalo grass, too tired to run any further.

Resting awhile, she thought to herself, "Oh, if only I could have a drink of water that would wash the sting from my dry, scratchy throat." But of course, there was no water to be had. Heading back home the cows plodded over the hard-baked prairie, their udders now full, swinging rhythmically from side to side. With each step a cow took, a fine stream of thick milk squirted from her teat. As Cora followed the tired, hot herd, clouds of dust kicked up from their hooves hit her in the face. Oh, how she longed for just a tiny sip of water. Then an idea began taking shape in her mind. "When calves are thirsty, they drink," she said half aloud, "Why couldn't I get a drink of milk?" She had been milking the cows for so long that none of them were afraid of her. So, slowly approaching one of the more gentle ones, walking beside her with her hand pressing lightly on the cow's back, she spoke softly, "Whoa, Bossie, whoa," and the old cow halted. Thoughts of a quenched thirst and refreshed body raced through her mind. "Why on earth hadn't I thought of this before?" she mused. "All that time I'd been so unbearably thirsty, there was a remedy right here beside me." She bent down and slid her hand ever so gently over the cow's belly until her fingers reached the udder, and with one slow, but firm squeeze, squirted a stream of rich milk into her mouth. "Ye Gads!", she gasped as the milk hit her mouth, "How horrible! This stuff is hot!"

Gagging with the thought of it, she spat the hot milk out onto the ground. Not until then had she realized that the milk would be the same temperature as the old cow. What a gross disappointment. "How could anything that tastes so sweet and satisfying when cold, taste so awful now?" she asked herself, making a mental note never to try such a crazy idea ever again.

By the time she reached home, it was dark, and the cows had lost much of their milk. Still, her father was proud of her for finding them, and praised her for a job well done. It was easy to see that Cornelius was as pleased with his daughter as she was eager to please.

## I. September, 1914

Although it was not on the official school section, the Hollandvillers did get together and build a school half-way between Cornelius Zeestraten and Rouke De-Boer's property, with Mr. Sam Heibert being the very first teacher. Enrollment was high, for the families were large, with six of the eight Zeestraten children now of school age. On the first day of school, Mr. Heibert held up a picture of a sheep, and then one of a train, explaining that a sheep made a "baa baa" sound, while a train made a "ch ch" sound. Mary ran home all excited, for she thought she now knew the names for the two. "One is a 'ch ch' and the other is a 'baa baa'," she said. The older children roared with delight at her attempt at English. Another time, Mary tried to discover why, in English, Our Lord's name was "hollow". No one could understand her silly question. "Yes," she said, "They pray, Our Father, who art in heaven, hollow be Thy name."

Even Father Petit, the new priest, in Chinook, thought it a funny joke. They didn't think Bessie nearly so cute, though when she repeated the new word she had learned. "You're a bastard!" she said to her brother, not having a ghost of an idea of what the word meant. "And you are a naughty girl." her father scolded.

By this time, Cora was approximately fifteen years old, could speak English fairly well and had attended seven months of school cumulatively in America. According to U.S. standards at that time, she was now in the third grade, though when she left the Netherlands she was nearly through the fourth. She was not the least bit happy about going to the little one-roomed school, being the oldest and largest child present, and expected to be in the third grade. Mr. Heibert called on Cora. "How many rungs are there on your chair?" he asked her. Bending down, she quickly counted the rungs. "Seven." she answered. "And how many steps are there in front of the school?" he questioned. Closing her eyes she mentally counted the steps. "Eleven." she said. "Then how much is eleven take away seven?" he pursued. Cora dropped her head, for "take aways" just did not seem to register in her mind. "I don't know," she muttered. "You don't know because you have been reading your Geography book instead of studying your numbers," he accused. "Well, how can I learn anything if I don't read?" she flared. "You want me to learn, don't you?" Then, fearing that Heibert was about to humiliate her even more, she jumped out of her chair, stomping out of school, not looking back until she reached Coal Creek.

It was a warm, lovely day, about Arithmetic time in school, when she lay down on the side of the sandy bank of the dry Coal Creek and drew marks in the sand. Perhaps she could not do "take aways", but she could surely add, and she figured that she had been in school for seven months, long enough, and she was never going back.

Cora never did go back to school. Although her mother thought that she should, her father gave her permission to stay at home. "There is always plenty of work to do at

home," he said, and seeing as though. Cora chose to be there, her parents saw to it that she kept busy.

One day when she was being kept busy, she was on her way outdoors to empty the "slop jar". Hatless and coatless, she stopped for just a minute to play and watch Jake and Pete busily building a wagon. "Children are supposed to work, not play," her father called out to her. "You have not been given permission to play," he scolded, and she continued on with her chores.

Then one night she was washing dishes. Their only light, a kerosene lamp, sat on the end of the table, where two dish pans, one for washing and one for rinsing, though for lack of water they drained, not rinsed the dishes set, so Cornelius moved his chair closer to the lamp in order to read his paper. As Cora washed the huge stack of dishes, the rinsing pan piled up higher and higher. "Dena, Ma says that you should wipe dishes." Cora informed. Dena, four years younger, and with a belly ache, sat under the kitchen table snipping pictures from an old Sears Roebuck catalog, and did not answer. "Dena," Cora persisted, "Come and help. Dena, come and help." Still Dena did not answer nor budge from the spot. "Dena,

Ma says that you are supposed to wipe dishes!" Cora shouted. Sitting by the lamp right next to the dish pan, Cornelius had had all that he could take. "Damn it, wipe your own dishes!" he blasted, slamming his fist down on the table. Cora was startled, and dropped her nagging abruptly, for her father's sharp words had cut her to the quick. She was her father's girl, and this yelling at by her father, was beginning to bother her. "Still, I was heckling awfully close to his ear," she said to herself, "It wasn't his fault. It was her fault," she decided as her mother came out and dried the dishes. "She should have made Dena wipe dishes and then Dad wouldn't have gotten mad." she rationalized. Yes, somehow, in Cora's eyes, her father's actions could always be justified.

## II. Cowchips

Oh yes, it was said that those who could pay the price had coal, but most could not, thus the children were sent out on the prairie to pick up cow chips. Because the ground was dry and the sun so hot, it was a simple task going into a pasture where the cows had recently grazed, picking up the partly dried droppings, stacking them up on their sides, three to a pile, like a miniature tee-pee, scouring the entire pasture. In a day or two, when the wagon or stone boat was not being used, most everyone in the household went out gathering up the dried chips, some being as wide across as a large dinner plate. It took hundreds of chips to make a load, and when placed in the cook stove, burned like paper, still it was heat if only for a few minutes. Cornelia despised having to use the cow chips for cooking and heating the oven to bake bread, but she had no other choice.

Then one day there was a great deal of excitement at the Zeestratens, for across the Coal Creek, in the hill on their property, Jake discovered coal. Oh, it was a very poor grade, nothing like Vander liens, nevertheless it was coal, and if the slack were thrown out it would burn, making at least a hotter fire than did cow chips. Cornelia was

delighted to finally be able to bake a good batch of bread. "Go and get another pail full," she excitedly urged Jake, and Jake was off to his coal find. An hour later, he had still not returned with the coal. And then she saw a strange looking sight coming, trudging up from the Coal Creek, carrying the bucket full of coal, black as midnight. "I got buried under the coal," Jake announced when at the house. "I dug in so deep that the coal fell on top of me and buried me. I was almost killed." he said. Cornelia was ashamed for having been so anxious about coal, sending Jake out alone for it. That night they added to their litany of prayers: "Thank you Lord, for finding us some coal, but especially for saving Jake's life. Amen."

### III. Precious Pennies

By pooling their money, the four youngest children had somehow accumulated the unheard of sum of sixty-five cents. What they would spend it on they had no idea, for they rarely went to Chinook, and then only to go to church. Still, they saved a penny here and a penny there whenever someone like Henry Schick or Rouke De Boer felt generous, and they were mighty proud of their nest egg. Then one day Cornelia needed some flour but she did not have one red cent in her purse. She told her youngsters of the problem. "Ma will pay us back if we give her the money," Mary promised, trying to convince the others of the good in it all. "Anyhow, she needs it worse than we do, because where would we spend it?" she questioned. The four thought it over carefully and after much deliberation, loaned her the money, although in their hearts they knew they would never see the sixty-five cents again. To Mary, this was no depravation, for she adored her mother and would give her anything she had, but to the others who were younger and not as aware of poverty, they did indeed feel cheated.

### IV. Working for Grandpa

For Grandpa Stassen, doing housework was becoming increasingly difficult, so Cornelia sent Cora to help him. One less person at the table could be a big help to their dwindling food supply. It was rather like playing house to sweep and clean, wash the separator and cook for Grandpa and Uncle Billie, though Cora was not nearly as fond of her grandfather as she was of her father. Nor did she like her Uncle Billie that much, for he made improper advances. When next at home, she told her mother that she did not like what her uncle did, but Cornelia seemed to pay little attention to Cora's statement. Once again Billie made advances toward her, and this time she ran all the way home and told her mother, "I do not want him to touch me that way anymore!" Cornelia finally realized the problem and kept Cora home from that time on.

Cora learned to sew by hand, mending shirts, overalls and dresses by what seemed to her, the carload. She became quite adept at turning a ragged shirt collar so it had months more of wear, and could darn a sock so perfectly that her work was a thing of beauty, though she still did not, as yet, sew on the Howe stitching machine. Dena could sew on the machine however, even though it was old and dilapidated, and helped to remake clothes given them by Mrs. Benton, and the Kremmer and Bremmer families in the valley. Although Cornelia was very particular as to how the garment to be made over was taken apart, wanting every seam carefully ripped and pressed open in order

to take advantage of every inch of material, Dena could do it to satisfy her mother. The girls were indeed learning a great deal about sewing and remodeling from their mother.

That Cora did very little playing has been mentioned, but the younger children did, and loved to make up their own games. One day they played a game where the older children swung the little ones around by their arms. Holding her by one arm Dena gave Mary a turn, swinging her high into the air. Mary let out a blood curdling scream, scaring Dena half out of her wits. When Mary came down, her arm hung limply at her side, having been pulled from its socket. Cornelius hitched up the team and took Mary to town, while she screamed over every rock and bump in the road. At his office, the Doctor tried to look at the arm, but could not see its upper portion because of Mary's long sleeve, so he picked up a surgical scissors to cut the sleeve. Fighting like a wild bull, Mary cried, "Please Papa, don't let him cut off my arm, please!" After some explanation and calming down, the Doctor did manage to examine the arm, only to find that through all the fighting, bumping and jerking, it had gone back into place all on its own!

## 16. TELL ME A STORY

When Grandpa and Uncle Billie visited the Zeestraten house, they told of the good food that they had to eat, and it sounded, at least to Dena, as if they had a great deal more than her parents, and they had cheese. Dena loved cheese for she could remember it from Holland. "Ma, please let me go over and live with Grandpa, and then I can cook for him." Dena coaxed her mother. Cornelia thought about the episode with her younger brother when Cora was afraid of him, but told herself that Dena was just a little girl of thirteen, and no temptation to Billie. Besides, her father did need help which she could not give herself, so sending Dena to his house would again be one less at the crowded Zeestraten table. With food even more scarce than the previous year, Cornelia agreed, and Dena went, staying with her Grandpa and Uncle for nearly one year. She straightened the beds, swept floors, washed dishes including milk pails bigger than she was, and skimmed the milk for butter. She loved living there if only for the larger portions of food. Her bed was a cot up in the attic, and she felt quite grownup having a little corner to call her own.

Grandpa loved to sit and tell Dena stories about Holland, and told her many fascinating stories about her mother as well. "Your mother has lived in poverty most of her life." Grandpa told her, as on a rainy day they sat by the wood stove and talked. "In fact, when she was only six weeks old she spent the night in jail, did you know that?" he questioned. "No, I have never heard that story before," she said, "Will you tell it to me?" "Yes," answered Grandpa, "Your Ma spent the night in jail at six weeks of age. You see, Grandma and I were very poor, and sometimes had absolutely nothing in the house to eat. When your mother was just a baby, I went north looking for work. Your Grandma had no food for the two older girls and herself, so she sent the children out begging. The two were caught begging (or stealing perhaps) and because they were only children, Grandma was arrested instead and put in jail overnight. Being a nursing baby, your mother had to go to jail with her mother. So that is how your Mama happened to spend some time in jail." "Oh, that is a sad story, Grandpa," Dena cried, "Tell me more." "All right," Grandpa said. "Poverty was also the reason that some of the Stassen children developed patience," Grandpa continued. "Grandma and I used to work for the flower growers, hand weeding the long rows. Because of the water situation, rows in Holland were much longer than anywhere else on earth, it seemed to us, Your Grandma would take the three children to the field, setting them at the end of a row, expecting them to stay there until she finished weeding the row. The children knew instinctively the reason not to wander away." Dena thought about her mother as a baby having to hold still for such a long time and cringed, for she remembered how difficult it was for she herself to keep from squirming for just one hour in church.

"And did you know that your mother also has spent time in the convent?" Grandpa inquired. "No, when did that happen?" Dena wheedled. "It happened when she was about sixteen years old," he answered. "She was a very religious girl, way back then already, and thought that she wanted to become a nun. Even in those days, it was most difficult to pass the rigorous tests of a Postulant, especially the tests of obedience. Your mother was given a basket, and told to go to the pump and fill the

basket with water, She politely told them that she could not do that, as the basket would not hold water. They repeated, 'Go to the pump and fill the basket!', but she refused to go, rejecting the whole idea, and because she did, she flunked the obedience test, and was not accepted into the convent." Dena knew that even though her mother may have flunked the obedience test as a young Postulant, as a wife and mother she lived up to the rules of marriage, giving of herself unceasingly, and she loved and admired her for it.

Then one day Dena was not feeling well, so stayed in her room in her cot. Her Uncle Billie came upstairs and stood over her bed, staring down at her with cold steel blue eyes. Terrified, Dena jumped out of bed and ran down to her Grandfather. "Uncle Billie is looking at me in a funny way," she told him, "And I am afraid." "Don't be afraid," Grandpa said, "Just get your clothes together, and right after breakfast I will take you back home." So after breakfast they went to the Zeestraten home, and when they arrived he told Dena to wait outside, as he wanted to talk to her mother alone. Coming back out he said, "I am sorry Dena, but you are not coming back with me." Giving no other explanation, he left. Dena did not quite understand, and she was heartbroken, for she loved living with her Grandpa, though she had to admit that she did not want to be around her uncle any longer.

## **I. Hold Back the Tears**

Jake and Dena did not go back to school the following year, as they, like Cora, felt awkward with the younger children. All three now had the equivalent of a third grade education. Peter continued to go to school, but mostly for fun, skip -ping regularly, and was rather disinterested in learning. Bessie too started school and sometimes when Mary was absent or had walked on ahead, had to walk alone. When that happened, she would cry because she was afraid to go through the coulee, where the Indians lived. One family of Indians did live near the coulee, but they were friendly and perfectly harmless, although Bessie would not be convinced of it.

On those days nonetheless, Neal, two years younger and not yet in school, would walk with Bessie so she wouldn't be afraid, then walk back home alone.

Bessie had a lovely voice and could carry a tune well for a child, so for that reason, the teacher chose her to sing a solo in the first Christmas program. Everyone in Hollandville came to the program, for most everyone had at least one child in school.

The white framed, one room school house with its tiny front vestibule was all aglow and decorated for the special event. Chairs were lined up in a row for the parents, and a pair of black curtains stretched across a line of heavy baling wire, created a stage. The children stood behind the curtain waiting breathlessly for the program to begin. Outside, the air was frosty and the squeaking of the snow under the wagon wheels as the settlers headed for the school could be heard for a mile. Al-though the crops had been a total fail-ure that year and the winter ahead looked terribly glum, they tried, as best they could to get into the spirit of the season.

When all had assembled, the curtains, pulled by Mary Zeestraten and Mary Schiettecatte slowly opened. There, in one group the entire student body gathered and softly sang, "Silent night, Holy night, all is calm, all is bright..." as a hush, almost

reverent, fell over the crowd. How very proud the immigrants were of their children blending their young voices together in song that Christmas. "...sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace." they sang. The curtain closed and the shuffling of feet and whispers of children could be heard from the rear stage.

The squeaking of wire on wire interrupted the hushed whispers as again the curtains parted, and there alone on the stage stood Bessie. Hesitantly at first, and then a little louder she sang:

"Oh what would you take for me, Papa,  
If someone who wanted to buy,  
Would offer you bright shiny dollars  
And pile them up high as the sky?"

Cornelius squirmed nervously in his chair and shot a questioning glance to his wife. Bessie's voice rose high and sweet as she continued with the chorus:

"What would you take,  
What would you take,  
Oh Papa now tell me  
Just what would you take for me?"

Cornelius felt a touch of fear as his little girl sang on:

"Sometimes when you say I am naughty,  
I don't s'pose you'd ask very much,  
But then when you hug me and kiss me,  
You call me your treasure and such.  
So now we'll just say Ma is willing,  
To find out my price, don't you see.  
If somebody wanted to buy me,  
Just what would you take for me?"

Tears welled up in her father's eyes as Bessie, unaware of the effect of her song, sang on:

"What would you take,  
What would you take,  
Oh Papa now tell me  
Just what would you take for me?"

As the curtains closed the audience stomped and applauded for the darling little girl singing so sweetly, but Cornelius was devastated. "How could anyone sell his children?" he questioned. How could they teach his child such a horrible song? Angry with the teacher and emotionally overwhelmed by the whole affair; he stumbled out of the warm crowded school house and into the night. Never before had he felt quite so near despair as on that night. He fumbled in his pocket for his rosary and prayed through his tears, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty. Please, Heavenly Father, help me to keep my children through this cold and freezing winter".

## II. Wanting to Learn

Having lived away from home for nearly a year with her own room and a generous portion of food at each meal, although Grandpa and Billie were also very poor, Dena was discontent at home. She remembered the stories her mother told of her own girlhood in the Netherlands, how she did housework for people, taking the money she earned straight to her parents. They in turn might buy her a good dress occasionally, and the experience she gained was irreplaceable. Cornelia learned, though out on the prairie there was little use for such knowledge, that some people used genuine sheets and pillow cases on their beds, had china rather than enameled dishes and sterling silverware. Dena too dreamed of learning such things, for she knew there was no future in only helping her parents on the farm.

Then Cornelia heard of a family in Zurich, Montana, the Highway Commissioner, a farmer, who needed a girl to help in the house. Dena, now fourteen, coaxed and begged her mother to let her work for the people. "I would get plenty to eat, so you wouldn't have to feed me, and I might learn a great deal, about keeping house." Dena reasoned. Cornelia acquiesced, for Lord only knew she could do with one less at her table, and it certainly was time for the girl to learn something about housekeeping besides living in a dugout. So Dena went to work for the Commissioner.

In the beginning, she worked for room and board only, helping in the kitchen, cooking for the farm hands. The lady of the house taught her how to bake a pie, something her mother had never learned, and how to talk and act like a lady; such as which words were not proper to say to men. Dena loved the experience and sense of independence it afforded her. The Commissioner's wife would sometimes give her a dress which she altered to look like the dresses of the other young girls who lived in Zurich. Soon she looked and acted like a proper young lady. She lived with the Commissioner and his wife for one year.

Cora, too, was beginning to care a little more about clothes. She had one dress which she loved, an autumn brown frock. One Sunday at church, when Cora was feeling rather dressed up in her all brown outfit of dress, coat, hat and shoes, Mrs. Kramer remarked, "My, but you look pretty today." "Thank you," Cora answered, blushing in embarrassment, knowing that the entire outfit had been handed down from Mrs. Kramer's daughter, and made over to fit. Still she felt quite proud to think that the German lady approved.

Then, wanting to earn some money for clothes, Odra got a job with the Montana Hotel, in Chinook, helping in the kitchen. On the first day the cook dumped a huge batch of bread dough on the table center, and quick as lightning, pinched off one bubble-sized piece after the other, tossing them into a kettle of boiling oil. "Now you try it," the cook invited. So Cora slowly pinched off a small piece of dough, rolling and rolling it in her hands until it was perfectly round, then carefully dropped it into the hot oil.

"Faster!" the cook said, "You'll have to do it much faster than that!" "This is the fastest I can do it!" Cora snapped.

"Well, that is not fast enough," the cook repeated, "why don't we try you in the chambermaid service?" So, Cora was transferred and soon became a chambermaid. Now the hotels did not have inside plumbing, so each room contained its own "chamber" which was to be emptied each morning by the chambermaids. Three days of emptying other peoples' chambers was enough for Cora, so she quit the job, going back home again to the homestead.

## 17. NOTHING MUCH TO DREAMERS

Communications between the four Zeestraten brothers who had left to find a better life in South Dakota, Cornelius, and his mother and sister Mary left behind in Holland, were infrequent, still they did keep in touch. Their dream had been to eventually bring their aging mother and sister to America, this land of golden opportunity, but by this time their dreams had all blown away. Cornelius and his family though he hated to admit it, were practically starving, and the brothers in South-Dakota were no better off. The parched summers and bitter cold winters left nothing much to dreamers.

Gerrit Zeestraten had married an Indian maiden who bore him two sons, Edwin and Tommie. Shortly thereafter Gerrit contracted malaria and died, his brother Henry marrying the widow, who bore him a daughter, Elsie.

John Zeestraten, who was a quiet, introverted sort, could no longer bear life in America, and committed suicide, and so the letters from South Dakota, even from Will, became less frequent, very guarded and secretive.

Cornelius thought about his brothers in South Dakota and wished they could have things easier, but he was in no better position than they. He had to leave their fate to God. He sat down at his table, picked up a knife and a loaf of bread, and with the point of the knife, made the sign of the cross on the loaf. "Bless us oh Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty..." he prayed.

\* \* \* \*

By now, Mary had become quite proficient, she thought, at riding bareback, and took one of the horses for a run on the open prairie. The hot winds as they raced over the dusty, flat land, felt good on her young, freckled face. Suddenly, the horse stopped dead in its tracks, scared by a rattlesnake, catapulting her out over its head like a discus in a field event. A sharp, piercing pain went up Mary's leg as she landed with a thud, twisting her ankle grotesquely. She lay there for a moment, not daring to move a muscle, certain that every bone in her body must surely be broken. Trying first one arm and the other, she was pleasantly surprised to find they still moved, and ventured a try at her legs. "Oh Mother Mary," she cried, as she tried to move an ankle. The pain in it came back worse than before, almost unbearable, still she knew she must get up and get back to the house. With tears streaming down her cheeks, making muddy streaks down her face, she crawled on her hands and one knee back to the dugout. There, Cornelia examined the youngster's ankle and determined to best of her ability that it was not broken, although Mary could not be convinced of it. She sat with her foot up on a chair for days and days, not daring to even sleep with anyone for fear they would accidentally kick her foot. The ankle eventually healed but it left an aching in her leg, that would forever flare up when the air got damp, about ready to rain, a reminder to Mary of the last time she ever rode bareback.

## I. Louisa's Pancakes

Mrs. Schiettecatte was Neal's Godmother, and he loved to go to her house to play. Sometimes Cornelia would let one or two of the younger children spend the night with the Schiettecatte boys, sleeping in their upstairs attic. One night when Neal spent the night, being an early riser, he came downstairs leaving the "younger kids" upstairs. He was pleased to see that Louisa was already up and mixing pancakes. Her head like a discus in a field event. As she stirred away at the pancakes, a stream of water (or something) came trickling down through the floor boards from the attic, and into her bowl of pancake mixture. Without batting an eye, she moved the bowl over, kept on stirring and chuckled, "What they don't know won't hurt them." That morning, Neal just could not bring himself to eat any pancakes, for he was quite certain he knew what kind of a stream of water it had been, and he was sure that Louisa knew too.

## 18. GOD GIVETH AND GOD TAKETH

When Emil Goesens donated a corner of his land to build the Catholic Church, all Hollandville turned out; even Rouke De Boer a Lutheran. While the men did the sawing and hammering, the young folks did the fetching and carrying. As Jake and Cora helped haul the heavy bundles of shingles up to the roof, Cora sensed rather than saw Rouke's admiring glance as her strong, willowy body climbed up and down the ladder. With so many hands helping, the church was completed in record time.

From that time on, perhaps once a month the available Priest from Chinook came out to say Mass in the Hollandville church. It seemed progress was being made at last. Monthly Mass became the time when all the news, good or bad, was exchanged. One day when the Hollandvillers gathered for church, the news spread that the little Vander Heuvel girl, about four years old, was very ill. While playing with an old alarm clock, she removed one of its tiny, copper legs, and swallowed it. After a day or two they took her to the Doctor, but it was already too late. She died of copper poisoning. It is said that laid out in her casket, she looked like a little china doll. The entire community turned out for her funeral, for it was the first such childhood tragedy, and they buried her in the newly fenced cemetery behind the church, a small wooden cross marking her grave.

Not long after, another tragedy occurred when Katie Vande Ven, wife of Theodore, died of impacted bowel, leaving two sons, and she, like the Vander Heuvel child, was buried in the new cemetery, her grave being marked with a stone marker. As one dies, another is born, for that year another son, Bernard, was born to Louisa and Dominick Schiettecatte.

### I. Cora's Confirmation

Confirmation Day was a big event in Hollandville for the Bishop rarely came to churches located such a great distance from the Chancery. For this reason, the group being confirmed ranged in age from fourteen through adult.

Bentons had sent over a box of hand-me-downs so Mary received her first pair of girls shoes in many years, perfect for her Confirmation outfit. In the box also was a dress made from soft, misty grey material, which Cornelia carefully ripped apart, making Cora a new dress for the occasion. Cora hated the dress and every stitch in it, for on the skirt Cornelia sewed squares of stiff lace, going all the way down to the tops of her ankle-high boots. Whether it was the lace or the dress itself, Cora could not be certain, but she despised it.

Perhaps that is why she felt so mulish when the Bishop told everyone to raise their hand and swear they would never again take a drink of an alcoholic beverage. Cora thought about it for a moment, remembering the fun she had had at the Schiettecattes when Nellie Vande Ven dared her to drink some 2% beer, and before she was finished she had drunk fourteen glasses from the barrel. "Raise your hand, Cora," the person next to her prodded. "I can raise my hand, but I don't have to promise." Cora told herself as she stuck her hand in the air. "Repeat after me," the Bishop said, "I promise to avoid all alcohol." All those being confirmed repeated the words of the Bishop, all

those that is, except Cora. "Cora, you're supposed to promise." her fellow student whispered. "Never!" Cora whispered back. "They can't make me promise." And promise she never did, although she never forgot her Confirmation Day, nor the grey dress. In fact, the dress became her Sunday church dress, wearing it until it was outgrown.

## II. Neal and Joe

Neal was the daredevil of the family and afraid of nothing, priding himself in the fact that Joe was two years older and afraid of the dark. Jake and Pete loved to tease Joe, being the smaller of the four boys, and one time when he was about seven they promised him a penny if he would go out to the barn in the dark without a lantern. Of course, they no doubt had planned to pull a trick out there to scare him, at any rate, Joe would not go. "We'll give you a dime if you go." they coaxed, but still no dice. They upped the bribe to a quarter, still Joe could not be persuaded. "All right then, we'll give you a dollar." they said, which of course was not true, for they did not have a dollar between the two of them. "No, I will not go." Joe insisted. "I'll go for a penny," Neal piped up, "I'll go for a penny." "Oh, you're too willing," the older boys chimed in, "It's no fun sending you out there." So nobody went to the barn and nobody got a penny, but it was an indication of the kind of pestering Joe took from his older

Some say that Joe suffered from the same stomach complaint that Dena had as a youngster, for he often complained of belly ache, vomiting up green bile. He was small and fragile like Dena, and thought by some to be picked on by Neal, for by the time Neal was two, he was game to scrap with Joe, egged on by the others. Cora felt that it was unfair, for Joe had no control over his health, but adults and teenagers sometimes have less common sense than children. At any rate, as a youngster Joe was not the go-getter that Neal was. For that reason, Joe did not get to do some of the things that he would have liked to do, like go to town with his mother, for instance. Cornelia did not go to town often, and when she did, the youngsters did not get to go, so it was a special treat when, at seven, Joe got to go along. Getting about half-way of the fifteen miles, Joe looked around, in amazement saying, "Oh Mama, how big this world is!" It was the first time he had been away from the homestead since coming to Montana.

Mary had a little devil-may-care in her nature, too, especially if challenged by her peers. One raw, spring day, one of the Wigman boys said to her, "I dare you to walk through that water with your shoes and socks on." "How much will you give me if I do?" Mary asked. "I'll give you three cents if you do it," he promised. So Mary plunged into the icy water, splashing across to the other side. "All, right, give me my three cents." she demanded. The Wigman boy just laughed, for of course he did not have the three cents. Undaunted, Mary marched over to Wigman's house, teeth chattering, the cold water squishing out the side of her shoes and collected her three cents. It was a mighty frigid hike, but it taught the Wigmans never to dare Mary unless they were prepared to pay up.

### III. Oh Holy Angel

With Holy Mass being offered only monthly or even less often, the Catholic people of Hollandville practiced their faith in numerous ways either physical or mental. The nightly family rosary with litany to the Blessed Mother was a ritual at the Zeestraten home, as were beautiful morning and before and after meal prayers.

One beautiful prayer learned by Cora as a youngster and still prayed in her old age is this one:

Oh Holy Angel at my side,  
Go to the church for me.  
Kneel in the place at Holy Mass  
Where I desire to be.  
At Offertory in my stead,  
Take all I am and own,  
And place it as a sacrifice,  
Upon the altar throne.

At Holy Consecration bell,  
Adore with seraphs love,  
My Jesus hidden in the host,  
Come down from heaven above.  
Then pray for those I dearly love,  
And those who cause me grief,  
That Jesus' love may cleanse all hearts  
And suffering souls relieve.

And when the Priest Communion takes,  
Then bring my Lord to me,  
That his sweet heart may rest on mine,  
And I His temple be.  
Pray that this sacrifice Divine,  
May mankind's sin efface,  
Then bring me Jesus' blessing home,  
The pledge of every grace.

### IV. Some Land of His Own

Miraculously, the Zeestratens had survived five years on their homestead, thus proving their claim. The Land Office at Havre sent Cornelius a certificate of registration, signed by President Woodrow Wilson. How very proud Cornelius was of that document. He and his family had somehow survived this long, could they possibly stay and make a success of his dream?

## 19. FOUR IN A BED

Deep down Cornelius knew that if they were ever going to get out of the dugout and into a frame house, this was the year to do it. Bogey Mercantile Co. of Chinook, agreed to sell on credit the necessary lumber and supplies, based on the year's perspective crops, and many of the men who had already built frame homes offered to help with the construction. Rouke took advantage of the opportunity to lend a hand, thus being in the company of Cora as much as possible.

The house was, a single construction, with narrow, horizontal wood siding, and no insulation. Its floor plan consisted of two large bedrooms on one end, a living or eating room in the center, with the main bedroom and kitchen at the opposite end. Though they no longer lived like rats in their burrows, the house was extremely cold. That winter the frost on the windows was so thick that Mary entertained herself by the hour, pretending to be an artist, drawing beautiful scenes in the frost; her works of art remaining until spring.

The bedrooms were designated Ma and Dad's, Cora and Dena's and the kids, meaning Neal, Joe, Bessie, Mary, Pete and Jake. Because there were only two double beds in the kid's room, Neal, Joe, Bessie and Mary shared one bed, with the girls on one end and the boys on the other. As they well knew, brothers and sisters this was the closest thing to not sleeping together.

Many a fight was fought over whose feet were kicking whom, with Mary being the oldest, usually managing to be the boss.

### I. Not Like Her Father

Louisa Schiettecatte was troubled with rheumatism and seemed old for her age. At times she would be in such pain that she had to stay in bed and have someone come and care for the children.

Mary was a tremendous help to her mother, but still only a little girl.

Cora remembered one such time when she went to help Louisa, Ann Williams, another young girl a little older than Cora, had been there to help, but had evidently interfered with Mr. Schiettecatte too often, and was told to "get the hell out of there, and stay!" Ann, like most everyone else, was afraid of Dominick Schiettecatte, but Cora was not. She also did not feel that Dominick had much sympathy for his sick wife and told him so'. While his wife lay up in the attic in bed with hot irons on her swollen joints, Mr. Schiettecatte went to town to see a Doctor. What good the Doctor could do without seeing the patient, Cora could not understand, and when he returned from Chinook, she asked him, "What did the Doctor say?" "Keep right on doing what you're doing. Nothing else can be done about it." he answered. Cora was furious. "How could you ask the Doctor about it when you didn't even ask her how or where it hurts?" Cora snapped, "You aren't the one who is sick, she is." Dominick muttered a string of Belgium cuss words at Cora and stomped out of the house.

His children were sometimes afraid of him too, and to Cora that kind of behavior was difficult to understand. Her father did have a temper and might come into the house looking for this or that and say, "I put it here somewhere, now where is it?" but they could usually appease him and say something like, "Yes, you're always looking at the ceiling. You didn't put it on the ceiling you know." It is said that Cornelius even looked for his cap on the ceiling, but he never became violent about it, at least not in Cora's eyes. Mr. Schiettecatte on the other hand, could shout and blame the family for some things which they were unaware of, like the time he came into the house yelling about his hammer. "Where is my hammer?" he shouted, as the entire family rushed around looking for his hammer. A cyclone could not have hit the house any harder. While the family, scared to death, scurried around desperately searching for the hammer, Dominick walked into the bed-room for a plug of tobacco, and there on the night stand lay his hammer where he had left it the last time he came in. Cora could not get over the fear and reaction of his family, and never forgot the episode.

But Louisa was loved by all, as she was a very sociable person, and the connection between the Zeestratens and Vander vents or vander Weysts, was through her. Though they all attended the same church and school, only Louisa socialized with the neighboring homesteaders, She seemed to maintain a friendly relationship with everyone.

Wigmans and Vander Vens socialized a great deal with each other, for both families liked their parties, so had a common interest where as the Zeestratens rarely allowed themselves the luxury of parties.

Spring seemed a long time coming that year and the younger Zeestraten children were happy when it finally did. Joe came running into the house hollering, "Bessie, Neal, Mary, come quick, the gophers are coming out of the snowbanks!" The four hurriedly put on their coats and ran out to the snowbanks. Sure enough, right before their eyes, a little heaped up tunnel was being formed in the snow, and at the spot where he figured the gopher would pop out, Joe had placed a piece of binder twine tied in a loop, half buried by a small amount of loose snow. The four sat quietly, half frozen, waiting for the gopher to appear. "I got him, I got him!" Joe yelled as the squirrel-like animal squirmed and tugged at the twine. "Let's catch another one and have a team," he said, so another slip knot was placed over the next tunnel opening and soon a second gopher was added to their catch. "Let's take the team out to the field and do the plowing," Joe suggested to Neal, "while the women fix our dinner." "All right," Neal said as he took the reins of the gopher team. Bessie and Mary pretended to fix dinner, making man-sized mud pancakes for their "men folk" as Joe and Neal pretended to drive the team to the field. "Keep him running," Joe cautioned, "or he'll chew the twine and run away."

"Come on, horse, keep going," Neal said as the two gophers tugged and struggled with the rope, "We have a lot of plowing left to do." Stopping to untangle the rope, a big mistake by the boys, gave the gophers enough time to chew through and scurry away. "Oh, we've lost the team," Joe moaned, "Let's go home and eat dinner, then maybe we can catch another pair this afternoon." "Good idea," Neal answered, "I could use a nice plate of pancakes."

And so the youngsters entertained themselves with the objects available, unaware of the fact that they were destitute.

## II. Yellow Skies

There was something about the quiet, still air, though, that made everyone more than a little uneasy, and the sky to the east had a yellowish, eerie appearance. Storms in Montana were not uncommon, still Bessie instinctively felt terrified when one approached. "Is it going to come here?" she asked Mary, who never seemed afraid of the every expected acts of nature. "No, it's way off in another county," Mary reassured her younger sister, "We won't even see the rain from it." But suddenly Bessie looked up and shouted, "Look, there's a funnel up in the sky." Mary looked up and saw the dreaded black funnel of a tornado coming toward her, as Bessie dashed into the house, hollering over her shoulder as she ran, "Come on, Mary!" Mary stood transfixed as the funnel continued to head toward her. Fear was not the reason for her mesmerism, but rather fascination, for inside the black funnel sat a farm grate perfectly intact as if it were being special delivered to points beyond. "Come on!" Bessie shouted again from the safety of the house, but Mary stood her ground. Suddenly, without warning, almost miraculously, the funnel cloud switched directions, roaring off over the prairie, never touching a dry blade of grass nor handful of dust. Mary watched in awe as the cloud grew smaller until she could see it no longer. "What a wonderful thing nature is " she thought to herself as she stood all alone looking out over the miles of nothingness. "What a wonderful thing is nature."

## III. An Order From Sears

Working now and then at the Milk River Valley Ranch, Cornelius managed to bring home ten dollars. By sending an order to Sears Roebuck and Co., they could purchase more for their money than if they spent it in Chinook, so once or twice a year the Zeestratens received a grocery order by mail. The food was dried, such as peaches, apples, prunes, navy beans, peas, rice, oatmeal and potato flour. They baked their own bread, and it was usually eaten dry or spread with salted, home rendered lard, for butter was a rare treat, used more for bartering than eating.

Once when a grocery order arrived, the family eagerly opened the package, only to find that the hand soap had not been packaged separate from the oatmeal. The oatmeal had a strong, soapy odor and taste, and they all complained, but they were compelled to eat it, as food was food, and they were too poor to throw it out.

And on occasion, Billie Stassen would shoot a jack rabbit or sage hen which he shared with the family, but red meat was practically unheard of. It was said that deer and antelope were sometimes seen on the other side of the valley, but the Zeestratens never got that far from home, so never bagged one. The deer, like the berries, were all out of reach.

## 20. THE PROPOSAL

The Schiettecattes sent word to the Zeestraten that they were having threshers and asked that Cora come and help with the cooking. Rouke DeBoer was coming also, they said, to help the men, and could pick her up on his way out. Early the next morning, Rouke arrived with his team and wagon. Cora, already anxiously waiting, jumped up on the wagon and they were off to the Schiettecattes.

As the wagon bumped and lumbered along over the rough prairie, they chatted about this and that, nothing of any importance, when suddenly out of a clear blue sky, it seemed, Rouke said, "Cora, will you marry me?" Cora was stunned. What a place to ask a girl to marry you, she thought. "No!" she fired back at him, "I'd have to think about it." Her face flushed and her palms perspired as she rode the remainder of the way in embarrassed silence.

Upon arriving at the Schiettecatte homestead, she bolted off the wagon and into the house. "What's wrong with you, girl?" Louisa asked, "You are as white as a sheet. "Nothing," Cora lied, "At least I don't think anything is wrong." But to herself she thought, "I had to say no, I can't marry a man who isn't Catholic. How could I? It's out of the question. Who ever heard of such a thing? Me, marry a man who's not a Catholic? It's ridiculous. Sure, I've prayed long enough for him to become a Catholic, but I never prayed for him to be my husband. Never! I was right to say no to him. I do have to think about it."

The cooking and serving of the meal seemed to go by as a cloud drifts by to cover the sun, and then she was back home again in her bed. "What if he never asks me again?" she moaned all through the night, "What if he never does?" "What if he never asks you what?" questioned her mother the next morning. "Rouke asked me to marry him and I said no," Cora bawled. "Is that all?" her mother asked. "Don't worry about that. You have plenty of time to worry about getting married," for she knew that Cora was still very immature, and she was in no hurry to marry her off. "Besides, he'll probably be back." she said.

The year in which Rouke proposed to Cora yielded the finest crop since the Dutchmen had settled Hollandville and the devastating droughts seemed a thing of the past. Each settler looked to the future with renewed enthusiasm. Rouke wasted little time before asking again for Cora's hand. It was a lovely night in the fall when he came to the Zeestraten dwelling, asking to speak with Cornelius. Cora's stomach churned in apprehension as her father and Rouke sat at the kitchen table and discussed, in muffled tones, the rights and wrongs of marriage. "...willing to convert to Catholicism," she heard Rouke agree, and "...provide for her the best I can." Cornelius said something about "...being headstrong and young, but a hard worker." Cora, sitting in the shadows of the flickering light from the kerosene lamp, prayed silently that the two would soon come to some kind of an agreement. It seemed to her like the longest night of her life as her father lectured on and on. "He does relish this preaching," she said to herself.

Finally, the two men pushed back their benches, stood, up and shook hands. Rouke had won Cora's hand. He wrote to his family in Holland, telling them of his engagement, getting a reply in record time. "You are robbing the cradle," they wrote,

for there was in fact nine years difference in their ages. Rouke was undaunted. He was going to be a husband, provider and hopefully a father.

The next day Cora lay on top of a load of hay and mentally fashioned her wedding dress. "It will be as blue as the Montana sky," she dreamed, "With a fitted bodice, shirred about eight inches down from the waist, falling just to the tops of my high-buttoned boots. I'll buy a mushroom hat with yards and yards of veiling to complete my wedding ensemble." she told herself, "And Dena will be my maid of honor." Rouke immediately began instructions in the Catholic faith from Father Petit, and April 17 was set for the wedding date. It would be the very first wedding in Hollandville's Catholic Church. He spoke to his bachelor friend, George Eldring about building him a house, for, "After all, a man must have a proper home for his bride." he boasted. George agreed and the two men began construction of the house in hopes it would be completed by spring.

Construction was soon halted for the drifts were unusually deep that winter of 1916, and impossible to get through. Still, the youngsters enjoyed them, never realizing the hardship the snow created. Jake and Pete built a somewhat crude bobsled out of two boards, but the littler kids rarely got the chance to ride on it.

They rode down the snowdrifts on pieces of heavy paper. This day though, Pete was in a good mood and let Joe, Neal, Bessie and Mary take turns on the sled. "You ride and I'll push," Bessie said as Joe climbed on the cumbersome toy, sliding down one ice crusted bank and up to the top of the next. What fun they had. "Let us have a turn now," Mary and Neal called from a far bank. "Let's slide down together, Neal," Mary suggested, "That way we'll coast further." Up and down the endless drifts the four rode, oblivious to the hard times they were living in.

Winter also meant checker playing. Cornelius was an expert checker player and taught the children the tricks of the game. Many a long winter afternoon, too cold to even be outdoors sledding, was spent challenging one winner after another, Mary especially, being mighty proud when realizing she had defeated her father fair and square, giving her a wonderful feeling of accomplishment.

## I. The Sewing Machine

Dena had learned a great deal from the Commissioner's wife, so when someone in the territory needed a girl to come and help with the housework or care for the children while the mother was down in bed with a new baby, Dena was notified. Her services were in demand and she now received cash money from her employers. She spent very little, saving most of it to buy things for her younger brothers and sisters at home, caring for her pet lamb, Peter, and two rabbits, Nancy and Joe.

One lady who Dena worked for in downtown Chinook, Mrs. Culbertson, owned a millinery shop, and at times took projects home to be hand sewn. 'She soon discovered that Dena did beautiful hand stitching, so allowed her to work on the stylish creations. Dena loved just being exposed to the fineries and dreamed of someday wearing lovely clothes and hats of her own. It was no surprise then, that one day while at home visiting her parents, when some traveling salesmen came by selling new White Rotary

sewing machines, that she coaxed her mother into getting one. "Our old Howe is worn out," she pleaded, "And just look how nice this can stitch heavy cloth, even leather." But the price of the White was an unheard of \$85.00, and Cornelia did not even have 850, still the machine looked good to her. The salesman added a little bait to the offer, saying that they would leave it for thirty days without payment; giving her a receipt, coming back at the end of that time for their money, if the machine was satisfactory. "Besides, it's too late to go to another homestead tonight," they told her. The offer was more than Cornelia could refuse, and she took the machine.

In no time, Dena mastered the art of sewing on the new White, much sooner than her mother or Cora. The salesman never came back for their money, for it was later learned that the machines being peddled that day had been stolen. The men were apprehended, but because Cornelia had a paid in full receipt, the Company told her that she was free to keep the beautiful White Rotary, and with the camera she had purchased with her own money in Chinook, Dena had her snapshot taken in front of the new machine, wearing her mail-order dress with the bright red tie, feeling very proud of her mother's first brand new piece of furniture.

## II. Planning a Wedding

Joe Pruyt, though a homesteader like the Zeestratens, spent only the required amount of time on his claim. He seemed to have no interest in becoming a farmer, and instead worked in Chinook at different jobs, or on the railroad as did other of his bachelor friends. He and Dena kept company whenever he was in town and Dena considered him to be her boyfriend, although her parents were not aware of this, so it seemed only natural to Dena when she was chosen to be Cora's maid of honor, that Joe should be chosen best man. The decision was not hers to make however, for although Rouke and Joe were the best of friends, Joe was north working on the railroad at the time of the wedding plans and knew nothing of the engagement. Instead, another of Rouke's good friends, Henry Schick was selected to "stand up" with him.

News of Cora and Rouke's engagement spread, and soon everyone was busy piecing quilts and making gifts for the couple. Cornelia sent an order to Sears for blue poplin and denim for Cora and Dena's dresses. Also on the order was a goodly amount of raisins for the Boerenjongens (a Dutch wine made from raisins, yeast, sugar and boiling water), for it had to be set far in advance of the wedding date.

To pay for the wedding expenses, Cora was given money for her share of a young calf, and promptly ordered a mushroom hat from Montgomery Ward and Co. In her mind she could see exactly what it would look like, for she had seen one before.

Perhaps it was worn by the beautiful lady on the ship coming from Europe, or maybe it was the lady in the calendar picture which graced their living room wall.

Each time someone went in to Hollandville, they stopped at Martin Vander Ven's hall to see if the catalog orders from Sears and Wards had arrived.

Finally the Sears order came, and patterns for dresses were immediately designed. Cornelia would sew Dena's dress, but because Cora's was special, Hilda Wolneiviezs would fashion it, as she had a certain flair for such handsome trapping.

The Boerenjongens was set in a ten gallon crock and placed under' the kitchen table to "work".

When the mushroom hat arrived, Cora was sadly disappointed, for the hat had no semblance to what she had imagined it to be. She promptly mailed it back to Wards, requesting that they return her money, as she needed it for her wedding expenses. She waited and waited for Wards to return her money, vowing as time went by that when they did send her money back she would never order another thing from them. When the money arrived, she quickly mailed an order to Sears for another mushroom hat, that order coming back in record time. The white, lacy hat with its stiff, wide brim and rounded crown, put her in mind of an old-fashioned soldier's hat. It was the latest style in millinery and she felt quite pleased with it. She headed straight for the General Store, asking to see their finest veiling. The proprietor brought out a bolt of stiff netting. "No, I want veiling." Cora demanded. "Veiling?" the storekeeper said, "What do you, a prairie girl, know about veiling?" "I want veiling for my wedding hat." Cora insisted, and a bolt was shown her. "That's it," she beamed, and bought it, taking it home to create the lovely wedding headdress of her dreams. Lo, the creation was not at all what she had imagined and she felt most dejected. "Maybe I am just a prairie girl after all, who doesn't know about the fineries of life. I never liked them, anyhow." she told herself.

Nor was she any more encouraged when, at the Vander Ven hall, she tried to dance. She was clumsy, awkward and humiliated by the whole attempt. Still, Rouke did not seem to notice, and his kind, twinkling blue eyes told her that he was satisfied with her just the way she was.

The work on Rouke's house was progressing slowly and it now looked as if it would be some time after the wedding before it would be completed. The plans called for a living room across the front, with kitchen and bedroom across the back, a front porch, and white siding with green trim. If need be, Rouke and Cora could live in his dugout until its completion.

That winter, Cora bought her first new coat with money she had somehow acquired out of almost nothing. The coat, like the mushroom hat, came from Sears, and she loved it the moment she saw it. Dark navy blue corduroy, with a rounded collar and an inch of fur circling the cuffs and collar, she felt like a Queen as she slipped it on, feeling proud to be taking such a beautiful piece of clothing into her marriage. For her trousseau, she made new petti-coats and bloomers from white cotton flour and sugar sacks, which had been washed out, then laid in the hot sun to bleach. It was not a great deal to start out with, but it was the most she could afford.

By April, most of the wedding preparations had been completed. The Boerenjongens had worked under the kitchen table until even the fermented raisins themselves could make you a little tipsy. Had anyone asked her, Mary could attest to that, for she loved to crawl under the kitchen table, pull the flowered oilcloth which covered the table down as far as the floor, and hide behind it, snitching the plump, swollen fruit from the wine crock.

Mrs. Bremmer sent over a large box of clothes which her children had outgrown. Although the hand-me-down boys clothes fit Mary, that made little difference. Clothes could always be made over, shoes were shoes, and the socks were all black so size mattered little. "No one will ever notice." Cornelia told her daughter, though Mary

knew better. She also knew that they were fortunate to receive the Bremmer clothes and this time even shared them with the Schiettecattes.

### III. A Big Imagination

Mrs Wolneiviezs gave Cora a bridal shower of sorts, with many Hollandville women and girls attending. Cora received some lovely gifts, and the women enjoyed the time spent together in woman talk. Even Mary and Bessie were permitted to attend, though they were considered the kids. Mary was quite a child for being nosy, listening in on adult conversations whenever possible. She heard the women mention Mrs. Becker, one of the homesteaders who had been expecting a baby and lost it. To the other little girls at the party they had no idea how you "lost a baby", but Mary was wise for her years and figured things out for herself. She also looked Dora Van Laanan over carefully while at the shower, and when at home, as she and Bessie sat on the bench behind the stove, she casually remarked, "Dora is going to have a baby." Bessie was shocked. "How do you know?" she questioned. "All you have to do is look at her stomach." Mary said. Cornelia overheard the conversation and said, "That is a big lie, Mary. Stop your lying." But Mary knew better, and although she was not telling a lie, she did love to make up stories, entertaining her three younger siblings for hours on end.

One day she told the others about a bicycle which went by itself with a motor. She said they had bought such a bicycle and rode it on the road to Schiettecattes. Her mother caught her at that story too, and stopped her, though it did seem strange how she could make up such a convincing story not ever having seen such a vehicle. She, like her brother, Jake, had a very creative mind.

Still working in Chinook, Dena kept hoping that Joe Pruyt would get back from up north before the wedding, but time was running out. She dreaded the idea of being partners in the wedding with Henry Schick, but she had no control over it.

Cora and Dena's dresses were finished and word was sent out to all the homesteaders that they were invited to the wedding. The Mass would be celebrated by Fathers Vermaat and Petit.

Up north in a railroad section shack, someone read aloud an article in an old copy of the Chinook newspaper, telling of the engagement and upcoming marriage of Cora and Rouke. Sitting at a table in the shack playing cards, Joe Pruyt jumped up from his chair saying, "Let me see that paper." He read aloud, "...and will be the first wedding performed in the new Hollandville Catholic Church." "That's my friend, Rouke DeBoer," he said. "I have to be there for his wedding." So with just two days to get there, he threw his clothes into a valise and caught the train for Chinook.

Mary wanted to make a special present for Cora's wedding. She put her imaginative mind to work creating a bridal bouquet for her sister. Early in the morning, she and Bessie went out and gathered an armful of cactus flowers, being careful to set a few little stones in their place so they would know where to find the delicious cactus

berries later, for they were a favorite prairie treat. With long, lean straws as stems, they arranged half the collection in a peanut butter jar to be placed on the altar at church. The bright, red-orange blossoms would add a cheerful touch to the occasion. The remaining blooms were threaded onto short straws, until they made a perfect, round nosegay. With grocery string from a flour bag, they wound it round and round until it formed a handle. "What a beautiful bridal bouquet." Cora said when she saw it, deeply touched to think her little sister could be so thoughtful and creative.

#### **IV. War in Europe**

Meanwhile, war had been raging in Europe since 1914 with German troops sweeping across the continent leaving horrible stories in their paths of brutality and barbarian atrocities. Newspapers in Western United States however, did not carry news of the conflict in as great a detail as did those on the Eastern coast, the seaboard closest to the conflict, so the people in Hollandville were not as well informed as some.

In 1916, when German U-Boats attacked and sunk every boat in European waters, whether enemy or neutral, in order to blockade and starve the British, America objected bitterly, and that type of warfare was discontinued for one year.

Then in early 1917, Germany had a new buildup of stronger, more powerful submarines, and began a new attack. They were certain that the U.S. would never go to war for a mere principal as President Woodrow Wilson had just won his reelection on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." It was wishful thinking on Germany's part however, for on April 6, 1917, President Wilson said: "With a profound sense of solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the Government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of a belligerent which had been thrust upon it; and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defense, but also to exert all its power and employ, all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war."

When this news reached Hollandville, the people were shocked. Most of them had come from Europe and had families still living there. They felt a sense of obligation toward their families in Europe and vowed to defend the flag of their new country of which they were now citizens.

#### **V. One Day to Go**

On the day before the wedding, Dena caught a ride from one of the Goesens boys who had come into Chinook, and rode the fifteen miles out to Hollandville and her parents' homestead. The Zeestraten house was filled with happy, boisterous sounds of a family getting together for such a special occasion. Bessie and Mary proudly displayed their unique floral arrangements while Cora and Dena tried on their dresses for a final fitting. The blue in' Cora's dress was indeed as blue as a Montana sky, and the

reflection gave her hazel eyes a blueish cast, very becoming with her dark tanned skin. Dena's dress, fitted at the waist and high at the neck, was somewhat darker than Cora's, most appropriate for the occasion. Food which Cornelia had been preparing all week was covered with clean cloths and set aside for the party to be held after the ceremony.

Late that afternoon, Cora and Dena went to the barn to help with the evening chores. It had been a while since Dena had been home, and she felt good about going out to help her sister with her chores for the last time. From now on, Cora's chores would be at Rouke's house and barn.

As the girls sat milking the cows, Joe and Neal came running out yelling, "We have company!" They looked up to see Joe Pruyt standing in the barn doorway, grinning his most charming grin. Dena was thrilled to see Joe there and had all she could do to keep from flying into his arms. Cora too seemed a bit flustered about the sudden appearance, putting out her hand to greet him, unaware of the dirt on her hands from milking.

Being too much of a gentleman to notice, Joe took her hand and shook it gingerly. "It's good to see you," he said honestly, "Congratulations on your engagement." Dena greeted him saying, "I am glad to see you made it for the wedding. I had hoped you would come." Inside, her heart was beating a crazy, irregular kind of beat, thrilled beyond her very wildest dreams.

## 21. AN ARMFUL OF CACTUS FLOWERS

The morning of the wedding was cold and rainy with a grey sky overhead. Cora had already finished her morning chores when Fathers Vermaat and Petit arrived at the house. There would be plenty of time before the wedding to visit and talk over old and new times, with talk of the war uppermost on their minds. Hilda Wolneiviezs arrived to help the girls with their dresses, and to "make up" the bride. Although Cora did not care at all for such frivolous extravagance, she was outnumbered this time, and agreed to be made up.

She sat on a chair in the bedroom while Hilda smeared a paste-like foundation cream on her face. It felt like a mask, so Cora stood up and looked in the one and only mirror in the house, an oval shaped one with ornaments on each side, seeing for herself what she looked like. She was horrified. In just her petticoat, she marched out of the bedroom, through the living eating room, past the Priests, her father and brothers, and into the kitchen. No such stuff was going to be on her face, she vowed as she scrubbed it off. She refused to wear it, but later did consent to a light brush of powder over her pinkish scrubbed face.

At the church, friends were already gathering when the Zeestraten family arrived, and Rouke's blaze-faced sorrel, Mabel, was tied at the side of the church, his buggy swept, polished and waiting. Cora looked around as she walked into church, feeling more than a little strange at all the fuss being made her, and was surprised to see so many people already seated. The Schiettecatte family took up one entire pew, as now did the Zeestratens and Stassens. Seated behind them in rows were the Goessen brothers, Vander Weysts, Martin and Theodore Vander Ven, Henry, Ella, Tony and Anna Vande Ven, Joe Pruyt, Ed and Dora Van Laanen, Ann and Tony Williams and John De Haan. With some pews still vacant, there was George Eldring, John Oudenhoven, Vander Hydens and John and Dena Vander Heuvel on the opposite side of the aisle. Henry Schick and Rouke waited at the altar. The Wolneiviezs slipped into the last pew. Cora glanced up at the lovely cactus flowers placed on the altar by Mary and Bessie, and down at the precious nosegay. Although they were becoming slightly wilted, they were still lovely in her eyes, and she was grateful for something to cover her trembling hands. "Fear of the unknown is the greatest fear," she told herself. "I'll be fine when it is all over."

Dena too took the liberty of looking around as she entered the church, and was relieved to see Joe Pruyt kneeling there faithfully praying his rosary. The excitement of the wedding and seeing Joe gave her romantic ideas far beyond her fifteen years. She could almost envision her own wedding in time to come.

Cora looked at Dena and saw the glow on her face and thought to herself, "Humph, she isn't beaming because it is my wedding day. She is just radiant because he is here." But she realized that this was no time for petty jealousy and brought her mind back, to reality. Father Petit was saying, "In Nominee Patris, et Fili, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Introibo ad altare Dei." (In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. I will go to the Altar of God.) They all made the sign of the cross and listened to the Introit prayers. "May the God of Israel join you together and may He be with you..." the Priest read. At the Epistle, Father read from Eph. 5, 22-23. "Brethren: let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; because a husband is head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the Church, being Himself savior of the body. But just as

the Church is subject to Christ, so also let wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, cleansing her in the bath of water by means of the word; in order that he might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish. Even thus ought husbands also love their wives as their own bodies." "Ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies?" Cora repeated to herself. "I pray that he does love me as he loves his own body."

The Priest continued, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." "...and let the wife respect her husband." Cora felt cold and afraid. "What do I know about being a wife?" she asked herself. "My mother has never told me what to do or what to expect": Cora was right, Cornelia not only never told her daughters what life, love, sex or reproduction were all about, she chastised them if they so much as talked about it, saying, "Animals, not people do such things." Still, Mary and Dena knew about such things without their mother telling them. Perhaps Cora was just not inquisitive enough, but now she was being married and would find out, like it or not. "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine on the side of the house. Thy children as olive plants round about the table..." Father Petit read, Ps. 127.

"What is he thinking?" Cora wondered as she looked up at Rouke, for Rouke's face was serious and his blue eyes were as calm as ice, though not cold. "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause?" the Priest read from Matt. 19, 3-6 "But he answered them, Have not you read that the Creator from the beginning, made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Let us pray." Cora only half heard the words of the two Priests as they loudly proclaimed the prayers. "In Thy Mercy, look upon the hand-maid...Who pleads for Thy defense and protection. May it be to her a yoke of love band like Rachel, wise like Rebecca: long lived and faithful like Sara... May she strengthen her weakness by strong discipline... and mayest Thou see their children's children. Dominus vobiscum... Ita missa est." (The Lord be with you... Go, you are sent forth.) And then it was over, and the new Mr. and Mrs. Rouke De-Boer left the church arm in arm.

The well wishers noisily gathered round them, kissing the bride and congratulating the groom before they headed out to the homestead; Cora and Rouke leading the procession in their horse and buggy.

The wedding party was the first party ever given by the Zeestratens, and everyone was having a wonderful time. Boerenjongens flowed freely as well as some 2% beer bought at Vander Vens hall and for the poor homesteaders, such a lavish display of food as Cornelia set out was indeed a feast.

Bringing their accordion and fiddle, Ed Van Laanen and John Oudenhaven filled the house with their rendition of the Wedding Waltz. Rouke and Cora made one sashay

around the room as the other guests rushed to the floor. Joe Pruyt, looking around, spied Dena, and swept her out on the floor as gracefully as a petal floats from a flower. Dena was in her glory and romance was in the air. Mr. and Mrs. Zeestraten saw their fifteen year old daughter's enraptured look, confirming what they had suspected, Joe and Dena were decidedly sweet on each other.

The later it got, the, worse Cora felt, for she knew that she was going to have to go home with Rouke, and she was afraid of the intimacies of marriage. But it was too late now, for she was his wife. At the same time, she knew that Rouke was a gentleman, kind and understanding, and could sense her fear. The party lasted all night, so just as the morning sun came up over the horizon, Cora and Rouke pulled up to his dugout. This would be their home until the house was completed. "Don't be afraid," he told her as he held her close and laid his face to her flushed cheek, "Because I love you and will always take care of you." The gophers scurried from hole to hole, and the prairie chickens clucked their message of approval, as Cora and Rouke entered into their married life together.

\* \* \*

Like her parents, Cora and Rouke also had a homestead to prove up, plus the two that Rouke's brothers had left, and Rouke labored constantly to accomplish the necessary requirements, leaving Cora by herself much of the time. Cora tried to act grown up and be a good wife, even though, like all new brides, no matter how blissful married life was, she felt homesick, missing her little brothers and sisters most of all. Is it any wonder then, that, one day, as she sat at the table which set in front of the window overlooking the prairie, tears welled up in her eyes and streamed uncontrollably down her cheeks, for coming up over a slight knoll, she saw four little heads. "My four babies, my four little brothers and sisters, have walked that three miles from their house to my house all alone." she sobbed. Dashing out of the dugout, running to meet them, swooping them up in her arms, she cried, "My babies, my babies, you don't know how much I have missed you." Jumping up, hugging and kissing her, it was easy to see that the youngsters had missed their big sister as well.

## I. Their Prayers Answered

When next the Hollandvillers gathered for Sunday Mass, Father Petit asked that all join in prayer for the recovery of little Marie Vander Weyst, daughter of Henry and Elizabeth. Marie had been seriously injured in a hay mower accident, while taking a drink of water to her father, mowing in the field. It seemed that as Marie approached her father with the jar of water, he saw her coming so halted the team, but just as Marie stepped up to hand him the jar, the team started up, the mower's long sickle bar slashing into her foot, nearly severing it. Driving the team wildly over the fifteen miles of prairie to Chinook, Mr. Vander Weyst rushed his daughter into the Doctor. Suturing the tiny foot back on, but making no promises for the success of the operation, the Doctor told the father, "All you can do now is pray." The Hollandvillers prayed unceasingly, asking God to spare the child's foot, and God heard their prayers, for her foot healed and she was soon able to walk again.

\* \* \*

Now that the children knew they could walk to Cora's all alone, it became one of their favorite pastimes, and when they had their chores done at home, often made the trip. One morning the four of them made another visit, running over the prickly stubbles as though they were cotton balls. Mary knew that Rouke always ordered prunes from Sears and usually had a dish full cooked up, but it was not the prunes she was after this time, for out behind the dugout, potato peelings and scraps were thrown, with dozens of prune pits mixed in.

Searching through the peelings, she carefully sorted out the prune pits, cracking a few between two stones, sucking out the sweet, sticky juice. Oh, how she loved them and was glad that no one else had a taste for the delicacy. She stuffed the remaining pits in her pocket, secretly hoarding them for another time.

## II. I Must Be Drunk

Rouke and Cora were invited to a party at Henry Vande Ven's shanty and Cora was excited, for now as a married lady, she could go to a party if she cared to without her parents' permission. She felt quite grown up. The party was a wild one, of course, and Cora, not being accustomed to alcohol, had no idea of how much she dare drink. Vande Vens had bunks in their house, and the partyers sat in a semicircle on the edge of the bunks, Cora sitting at one end, the drinks starting at the other. A bottle was opened and a swig taken out by the first person, passing it on to the next, all down the line, whatever was left being finished by Cora.

She "killed" one bottle after another until all the booze was gone and Rouke was ready to take her home. Although they say he carried her to their buggy, Cora insists she distinctly remembers going to it under her own power. At any rate, Ella Vande Ven thought it hilarious to see Cora polluted.

Once they were in the buggy, Cora began wrangling with Rouke. "Oh, shut up, you're drunk!" Rouke snapped. "I am not drunk!" Cora blasted. He said again, "You're drunk!" She argued, "I am not drunk!" "Well, if you're not drunk, what is your hair doing down from under your hat?" he demanded. Cora felt her hair hanging limply down in her face, and whispered rather sheepishly, hoping Rouke didn't hear, "I must be drunk."

The newlyweds rode the five or six miles home in silence, and by the time they reached it, the fresh air had cleared Cora's head considerably. Without a word, she went into the dugout, fixed some coffee, bread and butter, ate a lunch and went to bed.

Rouke never, ever mentioned the fact that his new bride had once gotten drunk and Cora never, ever reminded him of the fact.

Even Henry Schick, Rouke's best man, never found out about Cora's spree. Henry, who lived not too far from them, was considered a city slicker. Though not a farmer, he was a fine man, noticeably clean and well groomed for one living in a place where water was scarce and soap harsh. The four younger Zeestraten and were permitted on occasion to visit him in his dugout where he "bached" it. One such day, when Neal, Joe, Bessie and Mary went to see him, he invited them to stay for dinner, promising them a treat.

They were in their glory, for seldom did they get the opportunity to eat at someone else's home. For two hours, Henry fried pancakes for the hungry foursome, wondering if they were ever going to get "filled up", realizing, probably for the first time in his life what it must take to feed a family the size of the Zeestratens.

It was an experience remembered by the young bachelor and the four youngsters for years to come.

Though they did love to go visiting, all of their time was not spent that way, for with Cora married and no longer helping in the barn, Mary had to do more outdoor work. She learned to milk cows, never really caring for it, feeling that the heavy strain on her young wrists and fingers would cripple them for life. Her assessment was no doubt more accurate than she ever realized, for yet today her little finger on each hand is curved and crooked as a milkmaid's.

Neal's role changed too after Cora married, for although he was only six, he became his father's right hand man. Too little to stay on the cultivator by him-self, Cornelius would tie the boy to the seat, put the reins in his hands and tell the team, "get up." Neal would run the cultivator until noon, when his father would untie him, the two of them going up to the house for dinner. Neal felt very grown up and an important partner to his father, for although he was doing a man-sized job, he knew it left his father free to do some other back breaking chore that a child could not do.

### III. A second dam.

Cornelius built a second dam nearer the house, once more piling sod and stone up to keep in the rain water. The water, though still filled with bugs, was not shared with the cattle so remained much cleaner. Still, Cornelia used it sparingly, recycling bath water to scrub water, carrying the used scrub water out to the pigs as she also did the dish water, never wasting a drop. In the winter the water situation was less critical, for snow was melted and used for drinking, cooking and dishwashing, as well as bathing, but to prairie farmers, water conservation was an accepted way of life.

Then one blustery spring day, a big storm came up, with snow, sleet and winds of what seemed like a hundred miles an hour. The old sod dam, now more than five years old, bulging with water of yet unmelted ice chunks, gave way in the howling winds, spewing the precious water out over the flat land. Only the new dam remained and so once more the family was forced to resort to drinking the filthy water shared by the animals.

## 22. CARROT PIE AND KARO SYRUP.

Dena's next job was in Chinook with Sherrif Laswell and family, who had headquarters in the basement of the Court House. Mrs. Laswell did the cooking for the prisoners, usually not more than three or four men, and Dena assisted her. She was a very good cook and taught Dena how to make many new dishes, including carrot pie made with Karo syrup. Sherrif Laswell usually took the food to the prisoners, but one day took Dena along to help carry the trays to the cells. Walking through the corridors, the heavy iron doors clanging shut behind them, Dena's head throbbed and her stomach ached. What a horrible, locked in feeling it gave her, and she made a silent vow to never do anything to be put in jail for, although at one point she may have come close to breaking her vow.

It was on a day when she was home visiting her folks, for on that day she searched for but could not find her beautiful pet cat, Mitzie. "Where is Mitzie?" she questioned her mother, "I can't find her anywhere. "She's not here," Cornelia answered, "I gave her to Cora and Rouke because they have rats in their grainery and need a good cat." Dena was outraged to think that her mother would give her cat away without asking, and told her so in no uncertain terms. "You always spent too much time with that cat anyway." Cornelia told her. Then later on that day, Cora came over, and Dena complained again because her mother had given the cat away without her permission. "Well, it doesn't matter one way or the other now," Cora said matter of factly, "The cat is dead. She ate some of the rat poison I had put out for the rats." Dena was so furious with her mother and sister that she felt almost like murdering them, storming out of the house, going back to Chinook, never really forgetting the incident.

At any rate, nearby the Court House in the Chinook Hotel, lived a fellow by the name of Macalbrain, who was very handsome and drove a spiffy new automobile. Not having had many opportunities to ride in a car, when Macalbrain offered to drive her up in the mountains where Pete and Mary were camping with a group of school chums, Dena quickly accepted.

Part way up the mountain, Dena sensed that his intentions were not honorable, for she was certain that they were on the wrong road. Macalbrain stopped the car. "Why are you stopping the car?" she asked. "The car is running hot from so much climbing," he told her, "It needs to cool off." And she, being somewhat naive, believed him. While sitting waiting for the engine to cool, Macalbrain asked nonchalantly, "Is ...all that hair in those braids really yours?" "Certainly it's all mine." Dena answered in her innocent, childlike way.

"I don't believe it," he said, "Show me." . 1

So Dena, trusting as a newborn babe, pulled the bone hairpins from her braids and laid them in her lap. "See, it's all mine," she innocently stated. Macalbrain ran his fingers through the long, silky locks, smiling a deceitful, sickening grin, then suddenly grabbed her, holding her close, crushing her. She grappled with him although he was very strong and wild as a raving maniac. Somehow escaping his grasp, she leapt out of the car, her hairpins flying every which way, but once out of the car she had no escape, for Macalbrain was right behind her. In a low moaning, almost hysterical voice, she cried out, "Jesus, Mary, help me!" Just then a man, on a horse rode up and asked, "Is that man bothering you?" "Yes, oh yes, he is'." Dena cried. "Don't be afraid," the man

said, "You can drive the car home." "No, I can't," she sobbed, "I don't know how to turn it around." Then the man ordered Macalbrain to turn the car around, instructing him to get into the back seat. "Now you drive," the man on the horse said, "And I will follow along beside you." Shaking and crying, Dena drove the car all the way down the mountain and back to Chinook, with Macalbrain in the rear seat, the horseman by her side.

In Chinook, she drove up and stopped the car in front of the Hotel where some of her girlfriends waited for her, knowing that she had gone with Macalbrain, also knowing his bad reputation, but not having told Dena. "What happened?" they asked, seeing her driving, hair flying loose like a mad woman, Macalbrain riding in the back seat. Dena told them her story in between sobs, explaining that, "This man on his horse rode back beside the car." "What man?" her friends asked. "We didn't see any man on a horse." Dena looked around to see him, but there was no one in sight. The man had vanished. She did not argue the point with her girlfriends, for she knew in her heart that a man on horseback did rescue her and she breathed a silent prayer, "Thank you, Heavenly Father, for sending me a Guardian Angel."

Next door to Bogey Mercantile Co. in Chinook, was O'Hanlin's Store. One day Cornelius was in town, as were Ramey and Emil Goessens and Joe Pruyt. The men stood outside O'Hanlins, exchanging small talk, when Dena walked up with an orange in her hand, given to her by someone in town. "Do you want part of my orange?" she innocently asked Joe. "No, dear," he smiled, "I wouldn't care for it." Then he took her aside and cautioned her on taking gifts from strangers. "You can never tell what might be in them." he warned her. Dena was embarrassed but grateful, for she had indeed received some perfume and packages of gum from Macalbrain, but had been too shy to open them. "And I'll not open them, either, she promised, for after the episode in the mountain, she began to realize that the gifts could be a bribe or diversion for some ulterior motive.

## I. Part of Growing Up

Out in Rouke's wheat field, the gophers were busily eating big holes, causing much of the wheat to die. Consequently, Cora went out to set traps by the holes in hopes of thinning down the gopher population. Of course, Rouke only owned a few traps so she had little chance of being effective, thus she devised a plan of her own. Using the same technique that her little brothers and sister used, she carefully laid a slip knot of binder twine around each hole. Sitting perfectly still she waited at the hole until a gopher poked his head out, then quick as lightning pulled the twine, lassoing him. It was great fun, and before the morning was over she had caught eighteen of the little pest.

Coming out of the fields at dinner time, Rouke went to the house, finding no dinner ready. Cora excitedly told him about her morning's fun, but instead of being happy with her childish games, he was angry, saying, "Who was going to get my dinner ready while you were out catching gophers?" "I don't know," she answered, "I thought I was doing you a big favor." And then she started to cry. "I thought being married was supposed to be all fun and no work, instead it's all work and no fun."

she sobbed. Her heart was broken, for that day was the first of many days Cora faced in growing up.

## II. Never Had Eaten Jello.

Dena had the chance to ride out to Hollandville to visit her parents, and Joe Pruyt would also be there "What could I take out to my folks that would be a treat for everyone?" she asked Mrs. Laswell. "Why don't you make them some whipped Jello?" Mrs. Laswell suggested. "That's a good idea," said Dena, "They have never eaten Jello before." So before Leaving for the homestead, she bought a box of Jello at the General Store, certain that she knew how to prepare it, as Mrs. Laswell said to whip it fluffy.

At home, she felt quite clever to have brought such a fashionable luxury, and proceeded to prepare it. She poured boiling water over the sweet sugar mixture, and began beating it with an egg beater, working on it most of the afternoon. Nothing happened! She was completely discouraged and humiliated, especially in front of her boyfriend, Joe, for the more she beat it, the more watery it seemed to become. No one had told her it had to set first, and everyone laughed and poked fun at her, especially her brother Jake, who seemed to have no idea how mortified she felt. But later, when she and Joe were alone, he told her, "It's O.K., don't feel badly, we all have to learn, no matter how old we become." Just those few words made her feel much better, loving him for his kind and understanding ways.

## III. Too Much Bull

Joe, Neal, Bessie and Mary spent a great deal of time together after Cora married and Dena worked away from home. Being as you could see for miles and miles across the prairie, Cornelia did not worry too much about their going visiting, as she could usually see them no matter how far away they were. And even though each homesteader fenced in his 320 acres as part of the "proving up" with the government, the four youngsters could easily cut kitty corner to wherever they were going.

In Schiettecatte's fenced field was a large bull, known to chase people and certainly feared by all the children. Their fear did not stop them from cutting across the field however, for they all knew that if the bull started toward them they could either run home or to the closest fence.

One afternoon as they walked through the pasture, paying no particular attention to their surroundings and merely philosophizing about life in general, they looked up to see the bull, pawing in the dry dirt, head down and ready to charge. Their first impulse was to scream, but instead stood still for a second, looking out of the corner of their eye to determine how far they were from home or the fence. "Exactly half way in between," Mary feared, "Either way will be a gamble." Taking no time for guesstimating, Neal took off on a dead run for the fence. "Come on!" he shouted, "Let's get out of here!" The four ran like antelopes, hopping over cactus and stubble as if they had wings, the old hull bearing down behind them. Clouds of dust rose up from his hooves and the moisture from his hot breath seemed to spray right on their heels. Mary, having the longest legs, reached the fence first, sliding to the ground like a swan gliding on a lake, rolling under the low row of barbed wire fence. Right behind her the

three others followed suit, rolling and tumbling out of range just as the snorting animal reached the fence, digging his hooves into the ground in a sudden halt. Their hearts pounded as they lay there, just out of reach of the bull, and they dared not move until he had lost interest in them and sauntered away. "Whew, that was a close one." Neal laughed, as they lay there catching their breath. Needless to say, it was the last time that they ever cut across the pasture without keeping a watchful eye on the mean old bull.

#### **IV. The Indian Reservation**

Not long after they were married, Rouke was to learn of an obstinate streak deeply ingrained in his young bride.

Father Petit had asked Rouke if he and Cora might like to work at the Blackfoot Indian Reservation near Cutbank. Seeing as they only had \$28.00 to start out their marriage, Rouke quickly accepted as it would be an opportunity to earn their room and board and a few dollars extra. He and Cora drove the wagon to the reservation where they were met by four Priests, two Brothers, twelve Nuns and one hundred and twenty Blackfoot Indian children. Rouke's responsibilities were to assist the two Brothers in the fields, while Cora was to be the cook in the kitchen. A tall, heavy set Nun who was in charge of the kitchen, informed her that she need only cook the potatoes and vegetables, as several Indian children were assigned to assist her, including a young Cree maiden. This was the first Nun Cora had ever met, and something about her rubbed Cora the wrong way. In that big sprawling kitchen with a wood burning stove stretching out at least ten feet, Cora looked at the Nun, the unfamiliar setting, and decided that she was not going to like it there. She felt that she had been brought along as excess baggage, just so her husband could get the job, and now she was going to be imposed upon.

The work on the farm and in the fields was very agreeable with Rouke. He and Cora had a room of their own, three meals a day, and at the end of a month would receive a small wage. He went to bed at night tired but grateful and fulfilled. Cora however, was not so content. Although she had been hired to cook only potatoes and vegetables, more tasks were added to her responsibilities each day. On top of that she was severely reprimanded for eating her meals with her husband in the refectory. "The hired help are supposed to eat in the kitchen, not out with the Priests and Nuns!" Sister Superior scolded. Cora resented the idea of having to eat in the kitchen, and so disobeyed the rules whenever she wished to join Rouke in a meal. "After all," she reasoned to herself, "I am a new bride and should not be separated from my husband."

Cora was accustomed to eating her breakfast the first thing in the morning, but the dominant Nun felt that Cora should eat after the others had eaten. Cora did as she pleased. Each morning she would hurry down to the spacious kitchen, build a fire in the huge cook stove, settling down to heaping bowl of bread and buttermilk, lavishly covered with honey molasses.

She had to admit, even to herself, that such a breakfast could never have been afforded at home.

She also resented the lack of help from the children. They came to help in the kitchen but only after their chores in their living quarters were completed. Cora, being little more than a child herself, and a headstrong one at that, fumed. The Nuns expected things of Cora, which for a young woman from the prairie were outlandish. Like for instance, washing the dried apples seven times before cooking them. Cora was accustomed to rationing water very carefully, and washing dried fruit was to her a sinful waste. Or spending hours sorting the dark grains of rice from the clean, white rice. In her home, they ate both dark and light grains, and were happy to get them. By the end of the first month at the reservation, Cora was like a volcano, ready to erupt. She had been scolded, humiliated, deceived and snubbed. Her tenacious nature would not take much more.

## V. Chew Your Cloves

This was the time of the terrible Spanish flu epidemic which held the country in its grip. The people at the reservation were terrified for fear the virus would be brought in to the children. To prevent them from such a disaster, everyone pledged to chew cloves, thought to ward off the virus. Cora did not like the flavor of cloves, and so, although she had promised she would chew them, secretly knew that she would not abide. Rouke was sent to Cutbank to deliver a load of pigs to market, being warned to be certain to chew his cloves. He did as he had promised but still felt sick on his way home. By the time he reached the reservation, he was shaking with chills, burning up with fever and delirious. Cora put him to bed in their room, keeping all the children away, but still having the cooking to tend to. Back and forth she dashed on the board sidewalk under the roof between the kitchen and their room. Rouke's feet were like ice, and no amount of blankets or heat seemed to warm them. Each trip she made she brought more wood to stoke up the heater, fearing it might catch the room on fire if allowed to burn too hot, but afraid to let the temperature in the room fall too low.

At last, after three days, the fever broke, and Rouke was weak but on the mend. Then word was received that all but Corenlia at the Zeestraten house, even Billie and Grandpa, at their place, had been down with the flu, she alone nursing the entire family, tend the livestock and carrying the water, by the Grace of God, bringing them all through. Although Cora never caught the dreaded flu "bug", she was exhausted and homesick. And then it was Thanksgiving morning.

Cora had been in the kitchen since before 5:30 A.M. mixing and frying pancakes for the more than one hundred forty residents of the complex. The breakfast dishes had not even been cleared nor the stove cleaned from pancake splatters, when five newly slaughtered baby pigs were delivered to the kitchen. It seemed that Cora was expected to prepare the piglets; apples in their mouths, fancy dressing and sauces, all the trimmings. She took one look at the tiny creatures sprawled on the kitchen worktable and felt her head swim. She wasn't sure whether she would faint or vomit. Never before had she seen such a helpless, sickening sight. Then the blood slowly began to return to her face and she felt an overpowering sense of outrage. How dare they ask such a thing of her? Never in a million years would she be a part of such a ghoulish

custom. She looked down at the spatula still in her hand from flipping pancakes, looked at the Nun with hands on her hips ready to do battle, and at the unprepared Thanksgiving dinner. "Never!" she said as she flung the pancake turner clear across the open kitchen. "Never! You can get yourself another girl." she snarled, as she stormed out of the kitchen and up to her room.

The reservation was in a turmoil, Nuns scurrying around trying to find away to appease Cora's anger. Extra children were brought into the kitchen to help with the cooking. Sister Superior went to Cora's room and tried to coax her out, explaining to her that they did not know the serving of the piglets would be offensive to her. The Brother went to her door and tried to prevail on her sense of charity, but Cora was unyielding. One of the Priests came to her door and appealed to her sense of duty. "After all, it is the duty of a wife to be at her husband's side." he rationalized, but Cora continued her doggedness. She would not come out of her room, and furthermore, she was going home. No one could convince her otherwise. The children, with the help of several Nuns, prepared the Thanksgiving dinner, even bringing a generous plateful to Cora. She, could not be pacified for she had made up her mind to go home and nothing would stop her.

Although Rouke loved the job, the two Brothers and the friendship they had formed, and Cora loved the Indian children, especially the young Cree, they gave up the work and left the next morning to go back to their home on the prairie. As the wagon lumbered over the bumpy trail homeward, Rouke was acutely aware of the inflexible stubbornness of his young wife and realized that it would take a great deal of love and patience in order to build a happy life together.

## 23. A HONEYMOON COTTAGE

Their house now completed, Cora and Rouke moved in, again placing their table and chairs under the window, so they could sit and look out over the vast expanse of prairie, the spaciousness which Rouke loved. The wood siding was painted a cheerful white, the trim a pale green, just as they had planned. Around the house they built a fence with a large sturdy gate wide enough to admit a team and wagon, and behind it planted their vegetable garden. As George Eldring had done much of the building, Rouke and Cora's house was one of the better built in Hollandville, and was indeed a honeymoon cottage. Cora loved her bungalow and living in it with Rouke.

Ofttimes at noon, when he came in from the fields for dinner, because she was such a slow eater, he would finish much sooner than she, patiently laying his head in her lap, falling asleep while she finished eating. It was a partnership that, with perseverance, would endure for fifty years.

Cora was adept at raising chickens and seemed to know just what mixture of grain and scratch feed would persuade them to lay eggs. She sold eggs and also butter and cream to neighboring bachelors who did not stay on their homesteads long enough at one time to raise animals. Henry Schick was one bachelor who came often to buy eggs, butter and cream, for though he did own a team of horses, he kept no other animals, not even a dog. Looking out her window one afternoon, Cora could see Henry coming across the three miles from his place, driving his team and wagon with its heavy flatbed and spring seats. Somehow, even driving a team, one could tell immediately that Henry was not a born farmer, for he looked out of place with his neatly combed hair and city clothes. "I'm glad I churned butter this morning," Cora said to herself, "And I'm sure there is a dozen eggs for him too."

Henry came to the house and after having coffee with Cora, paid her for the dairy products and left, placing the precious items down under the spring seat. Cora, busy in her garden, forgot all about the visit, until suddenly she looked up and saw Henry's team, wagon still attached, charging across the prairie, hell-bent for leather, with no Henry. Coming up to the gate, they stopped, just as docile as ever, as though they had come for an afternoon visit. Laughing, Cora opened the gate and said, "Well, Hello, come on in." They walked in and around the house to the back, walking right through her vegetable garden. "Hey, this will never do." she told them as she climbed up on the wagon, backing it out, turning it around, tying the team up to the gate. In about an hour, Henry came walking back, hot and tired from the long hike in the sun, obviously perturbed, asking Cora when he reached the gate, "How did those horses get there?" "I put them there," she said, "They were in my garden so I backed them out and tied them to the gate." Henry was amazed that a young woman could handle a team so well, and more than a little embarrassed about the whole affair, nor did he end up with any eggs or cream. He said that he had reached home with the team and wagon and had gotten off, when something spooked the horses, causing them to take off running, strewing the eggs, cream and butter out all over the prairie. Poor Henry! Had he had a wife like Cora he may have become a farmer, but he never did.

## I. A Farmer's Wife

Her worth as a farmer's wife was quite evident, for that fall when Rouke found a job in the coal mine, Cora worked up the fields for the fall planting. While Rouke was away, she hitched up their five horses in the morning, plowing, discing and harrowing until noon. At lunch time she went back to the house, ate a sandwich, then walked the three miles to Henry Schick's house, where she hitched up his five horses, working in his fields until supper time. There was never any money exchange for such deeds, for neighbors just traded labor. Nor did they receive cash money for products sold by them to the General Store. They were merely exchanged for merchandise.

One day Rouke took a twelve dozen crate of eggs to market, hoping to realize enough credit to buy some flour and sugar. Late that same night, he drove back into the yard, the full crate still by his side. "Why didn't you sell the eggs?" Cora asked. Rouke was furious. "Before I sell a dozen eggs for eight cents credit, I'll feed them to the horses." he raved, as he took the eggs to the dugout barn, dumping them into the horses' trough. The horses slurped up the eggs as though they were a delicacy, and Cora did without flour and sugar for a while longer.

Although it may appear that the farmers' were doing well because they had four or five horses, one must understand that the horses were wild horses which had been roped and broken, so were not purchased for money. But with little or no grain to feed the animals, they had to live on buffalo grass in summer and straw in winter. It is true that straw will keep a horse alive, but it will not give the animal a great deal of strength, consequently three horses on a wagon were better than two.

Such was the case when on a scorching, hot day that summer, Rouke drove his blaze-faced sorrel, Mabel, sorrel Cora, and grey gelding Nick, up the hill from the valley, pulling a precious load of winter wheat seed. No grain, and the shortage of water finally got the best of Cora, for crowding against her mate Nick, she stumbled and dropped dead on the hill. Rouke would either have to do with one less horse, or try to capture another, no easy task to say the least.

In the winter time it was no better for the horses, for although they might have snow for water, the straw fodder barely kept their bodies together. It was pitiful to see a half starved horse pawing through the deep snow, trying to find some buffalo grass, too weak to carry itself around, certainly not strong enough to pull a wagon to town.

## 24. CATECHISM OF LIFE.

It was Mary's responsibility to teach Joe his catechism and she hated the job. Just two years younger than Mary, Joe aggravated her to no end. Reading the prayer or statement to him, she would then tell him to repeat it. But Joe never answered correctly, it seemed. "No, say it again," Mary insisted, "It's not right yet."

Starting all over, Joe tried to repeat what she had read to him. "No, it's not right," Mary repeated, "Say it right!"

Finally Cornelius grew mighty tired of their wrangling. "Damn it, it is right!" he blasted. "It is not right." Mary flippantly replied, forgetting for a moment to whom she was speaking. Like a shot from a gun, Cornelius jumped up from the table, lunging for Mary, while she dashed around the other side, running and hiding behind her mother's skirt. Cornelia put out her hand and halted her husband as he ran into her, saying, "That's far enough!", but knowing very well that Mary had been a sassy brat, not entitled to protection.

So, Mary was saved once more by her mother, giving the other children the feeling that she was her mother's favorite. She did try to be bigger "stuff" than she was, possibly because she despised being considered one of the "younger kids".

### I. Called up for the Draft

At the time war was declared in April, America had very little to fight with. It was said that there were only 92,000 men in the Regular Army and only a few National Guard divisions, but as usual, when their country is in trouble, Americans will rally to a cause. They mobilized to begin a record breaking ship building, ammunition and aircraft production. Liberty Loan and War Saving Stamp drives were conducted by bankers and financial men and the public accepted food and gasoline rationing with enthusiasm. The country was in good spirits, committed to defeat old Kaiser Wilhelm. A draft law was put into effect and by June 5, all able bodied men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty were notified to register. A notice was put up in Vander Ven's store stating the rules for registration, and each man who received his draft notice came in to sign up. By June 15, 9,000,000 men across the country had signed up. George Eldring, Henry Schick, Houke De-Boer and all the other eligible men of Holandville who had received draft notices registered, their draft boards deciding their classification. If classified 1-A, they would be inducted and sent to a training camp in the U.S. where they would receive six months training, then sent to Europe for two months. Before entering the front lines, they were to be given a month practical experience in a quiet sector, it was promised.

Word came back from the government. Rouke, a married man and farmer, was classified 4-F and would not be called to serve, but Joe Pruyt and the others were classified 1-A. Before the summer of 1917 was over, they would be transported to various training bases across America.

Dena, working in Chinook, saw Joe every chance she could, for she had no idea how long he would be gone to war, or if in fact he would ever come back. A party was held

at the Vander Ven hall nearly every Saturday night to mark the farewell to one of the Hollandville's men, for every week someone else left for the war. And then it was Joe's turn to go. Dena felt numb with the blues, for she knew how much she would miss him, but he promised to write her frequently and to come back home to her. The night before he was to leave, a farewell party was given in his honor. During the evening, Ed Van Laanan played and sang a song composed especially for his friend, Joe.

He sang:

"Dear friends tonight we gather  
To say our last farewell,  
To one of our boys who is drafted  
To fight old Kaiser Bill.  
He is going to leave tomorrow,  
With the boys of the U.S.A.,  
And I hope you will all cheer him  
Before he goes away."

Joe and Dena sat, arms entwined, listening somberly as Ed continued:

"He is going to go to Europe  
Across the deep blue sea,  
And he's going to stand the hardships,  
To free both you and me.  
Oh to stand in mud and water,  
And to face the shots and shells,  
He will take the place of comrades  
Whom the German bullets fell."

Dena squirmed in her chair, for the thought of guns roaring and men dying was horrible in her mind, and she did not want to think of her Joe wallowing in mud or lying wounded on some battle field. Tears welled up in her eyes as Ed sang on.

"I hope you will save on sugar,  
On wheat and lard and meat,  
So that our brave young Sammies  
Will have enough to eat.  
And when the war over,  
All the boys are home once more,  
They will say we've done our duty,  
So eat now what you did before."

The group remained silent as the words tumbled from E's mouth.

"Oh wouldn't it be a blessing?  
Oh wouldn't we be glad?  
When Germany is defeated  
And the Kaiser's roaring mad?  
Come now friends we'll join together  
Tonight in Hollandville.  
We'll have another drink or two,  
To the man who kills Old Bill."

Every last person in the hall was up on his feet, applauding the song, and although he would be sorely missed, especially by Dena, Joe was sent off with a wonderful farewell. As Cora and Rouke bid Joe their goodbyes, a touch of sadness shown in Rouke's eyes, a sadness not only because his good friend was leaving for the war, but another kind of sadness, for it was not easy to stand by and see all of his friends leave, while he stayed behind. "May God keep you in His care." Rouke sincerely said as he embraced his pal and shook his hand goodbye.

## II. Let's Take a Snapshot

That year the Christmas program took on a patriotic theme with Bessie singing a song to Theodore Vander Weyst, who portrayed her son, though he was in fact two or three years older than she. In tones mournful enough to melt the most wayward, she sang:

"Oh where is my wandering boy tonight?  
The boy of my tenderest care,  
The boy who was all the world to-me,  
The child of my love and prayers?  
Oh where is my boy tonight,  
Oh where is my boy tonight?  
I love you I know, but I want you to go  
For your country needs you now."

Her beautiful rendition as usual, brought the house down, that cold, holiday night. And then the scene changed as Bessie, Mary, Mary Schiettecatte, Antonia Vander Weyst and Nellie Vande Ven, came out on stage dressed in Indian costumes, doing a tribal dance, a pleasant change from the thoughts of war. How the girls hooped and hollered. The audience applauded loud and long for the girls brave attempt at entertaining their admiring parents, and after the pro-gram, Dena lined the girls up outside and took a snapshot of them.

Although a snapshot was never taken of the next little scene, one can well imagine it and see why some of the other children in the family remembered the incident for years to come. As we have said before, Cornelia rarely reprimanded Mary, so Mary never expected it either. But it was her turn to grind coffee, and Neal kept pestering her. Each time she brought her arm up to turn the handle, he poked her, causing her to lose her grip.

"Leave me alone," Mary said, slapping him squarely on the back. "Leave me alone and get out of here!"

But Neal kept right on with his teasing, so Mary swatted him harder this time, and Neal began to bawl. "Ma, she's hitting me." he complained to his mother, as Cornelia came' to see what the commotion was. "Mary's hitting me." he cried. "You leave him alone." Cornelia said, slapping Mary on the head. "It wasn't my fault," Mary sobbed, broken hearted to think that her mother would hit her. "It was all his fault," She cried. She finished grinding the coffee, still crying over the unjust act, then stood looking out the window, crying some more, crushed at the thought of being treated so unfairly. It was a punishment she would never forget.

### III. Only a Volunteer

America's first shot in the war was fired on October 23, 1917, and from then until the end of the war, our boys performed heroic tasks over and over again. Their letters home were few, but occasionally someone did get word. And of course Dena always heard from Joe, sometimes bringing news of one of the other Hollandville men. Ed Van Laanan continued to sing songs of the "Sammies" and this one he sang of the Volunteers:

"Why didn't I wait to be drafted,  
And be led to the train by the band?  
And put up my "claim" for exemption?  
Why did I hold up my hand?  
Why didn't I wait for the banquet?  
Why didn't I wait to be cheered?  
For the drafted men got the credit,  
While I merely volunteered.

Nobody gave me a banquet,  
Nobody said a kind word.  
The grind of the wheels and the  
Puff of the engine, is all the  
Goodbye that I heard.  
Then off to the training camp hustled  
To be trained for the next half a year  
And then in the shuffle forgotten,  
I was only a volunteer.

Maybe some time in the future  
When a little boy sits on my knee,  
And asks what I did in the conflict,  
And his big eyes look up to me,  
I will have to look at him blushing,  
To the eyes that trustingly peer,  
And tell him I missed to be drafted,  
I was only a volunteer.

## 25. WHERE ARE MY BABIES?

On November 1, 1918, Schiettecattes had another baby, a boy, and they named him Arthur. Mary, now eleven years old, was like a miniature mother to her six little brothers. She could bathe, dress and care for them as well as any mother, and it was said that she could handle them like an expert. To one she requested, to another she told, one she flattered, another cajoled, but she always managed to influence them without an argument.

One day when Cora went to visit Louisa, she found her and Mary busy bathing children. A #3 wash tub, half full of water, stood in the middle of the floor; five little boys stark naked sitting in a row. One at a time, Louisa washed them, Mary drying and dressing them as they came from the tub. It was a beautiful sight to behold and one that Cora could never forget. She longed for the day when she herself might become a mother, but so far had not been blessed with a child. But she was still very young. She and Rouke, like other homesteaders, had a little dirt dam near their home. Cora decided, "Tomorrow morning I am going to have nice clean water for breakfast. I am determined."

So, just as she had learned at home, she took a clean sugar sack and folding it over until it was four thicknesses, she placed it over the pail of water brought from the dam. Again and again she strained it until there was nothing left on the cloth, placing a clean, fresh cloth on it overnight. "This time I'll have clean water," she assured herself, but by morning the water, as usual, was alive with wriggling polywogs. Cora began to cry, "No clean water, little food, and no babies. It is all such a big disappointment." but what good did the crying do her? Sacrifice was all she knew. Can we think of poverty worse than never having a clean drink of water? In Holland they had cistern water, rain water or salt water from the ocean, but never clean, clear water. In North Dakota, it was certainly no better and in Montana it was worse. Water, more than anything else, would leave a lasting impression on Cora.

How the people from Little Chute, Wisconsin, where they said that the water was fresh, pure and cold enough to make your teeth ache, could ever leave it and come to waterless Hollandville, was beyond her understanding.

## 26. LOVE LETTERS IN THE TRUNK

Her job completed in town, Dena went back home waiting for another job opportunity to come along. She had saved her money, buying only practical things. One such item was a heavy, metal steamer trunk. With a six inch deep, lift out top tray, and a sturdy, steel lock, she could keep her most private possessions hidden without anyone ever finding them. It was in this trunk in a large manila envelope glued to the bottom of the lift out tray, that she kept all of her letters from Joe. While living in town, it was no problem keeping their relationship a secret from her parents, but when she lived at home she had to be more careful, for she knew they would say that he was too old for her. When a letter did come to the Vander lien store, she made certain that no one else saw it, immediately hiding it in the secret envelope.

Although her mother suspected that she was hearing from Joe, she never found the letters, even when she insisted that Dena open the trunk and let her look inside. But these were Dena's personal love letters and she did not wish to share them with anyone else.

And then she found a job with Mr. and Mrs. Green in Chinook. Mrs Green was a lovely lady and Dena was happy to again have work, if only for a short time. When this job was completed, instead of money, the Greens paid her with a beautiful young heifer named Rose, which Dena took home to raise.

She then learned of a job opportunity at the Jim McCann ranch up in the mountains. Mrs. McCann, Jim's mother, needed a girl to help with the cooking for ranch hands. The pay would be excellent and she would have a nice room of her own, but she would not be able to come home often. Dena wanted the job, for she was now accustomed to having her own money, but was leery of going so far away from her family. She missed her boyfriend, and wanted to be near someone she loved. So she talked to Mrs. McCann and asked if she might bring her little brother, Neal along, as he would soon be out of school for the summer. Mrs. McCann readily agreed, and Dena was hired, Mrs. McCann coming to get them in her new automobile.

### I. McCanns Ranch

Neal had no trouble keeping himself occupied at McCanns, for everything was new and interesting, and when the cowboys were in from the range, he spent his time talking with them and listening to their stories.

The cook shanty had a slanted roof with a lightning rod at the top stayed with barbed wires. Neal loved to climb the slanted roof and lightning rod to be able to look out a great distance to see if the men were coming. One day he climbed the roof and lightning rod, lost his footing, sliding all the way down the barbed guy wire, pain shooting through his fingers. Screaming, he ran into the shanty to his sister, blood running down his arm, dripping off his elbow onto the floor. Dena felt weak in the knees as she washed away the blood and found that the same little finger which had been nearly severed as a baby had once again been cut deeply. There was nothing she could do but bandage up her little brother and hope for the best. The finger healed

nicely, but she made Neal promise to stay off the roof and lightning rod from that time on.

A dapple grey pony named Rufus was placed at Dena's disposal and she became an excellent rider, as did Neal. He often rode Rufus out to the range where the cowboys worked, just to pass the time away. Jim McCann also owned another pretty pony named Fletcher, which unbeknownst to Neal, had never been ridden. Fletcher was the pet of the ranch, having been raised by Jim as a colt. Jim was out working on the range one day when the pigs got out of their pen, and Neal knew that he was the only one available to put them back in, but how could he do it alone? Then he thought of the play house. Jim had lost a little brother when he was eight or ten years old, and all of the boy's toys were in a small play house where Neal often played. In there was a saddle. Neal rushed to the play house, getting the saddle and blanket, and carried them to the barn. He then went out and led Fletcher to the barn, putting the saddle and blanket on the pony, got on his back and chased the pigs back into their pen. Feeling quite proud of himself, for penning up the pigs, he rode out to the range where Jim was working. Seeing Neal riding up, Jim looked somewhat surprised and asked, "What are you doing on that pony?" "Well the pigs were out, so I put a saddle on Fletcher and got them back in." Neal bragged. Jim roared with laughter. "That pony has never been ridden before," he said, "But you can ride him from now on!" he promised.

## II. Why Must it be so Cruel?

One day when Dena was working at the ranch, Mrs. McCann said, "I am going to drive my car over to the other side of the river to see some friends. Would you like to ride along and stop to visit your parents?" "Oh yes, I would like that," Dena said, for she was delighted for the opportunity to visit home. When they got to her house, everyone was glad to see her, and wondered if she would like some dinner. "We had some good meat today, you'd like it." her brother Joe told her. So Cornelia fixed a plate of food for Dena while the younger children crowded round, watching every bite she took. "Do you know what you're eating?" one of them asked. "No, but it's good," Dena answered, "What is it?" "You're eating Nancy and Joe," the youngsters laughed, "We butchered them because they got into the garden." Dena was sick to her stomach. How could they butcher her pet rabbits and then feed them to her? She could not eat another bite, despising her family for pulling such a cruel joke on her, wishing she had stayed at the ranch. Nor was the news of Nancy and Joe's deaths the only traumatic news of the day, for her father informed her that Mamie was going to have to be butchered. It seemed that after Dena left for McCanns, the cow held her milk for so long waiting for Dena to come back and milk her that she went dry. Nor did Mamie breed that year, consequently she would be just another animal to feed that winter, with no calf being produced in the spring. For the penniless farmers there was no other choice. Dena stood by the window crying like a baby as they tied Mamie to a scaffold and shot her, Mamie bellowing as loud as she could until she fell. "Why must it be so cruel?" Dena cried, glad to be going back up the mountain to the ranch. "Why must it be so cruel?"

### III. Another Forty.

In March 1919, Cornelius purchased an additional forty acre parcel, making his total property 360 acres, the Land Office in Havre again furnishing him with a certificate to prove his ownership.

### IV. Pete, Jake and Mary

Pete was known as "the little fellow with a pipe in his mouth", for from age sixteen on he always smoked a pipe. He became the self appointed mail carrier, going weekly by horse and wagon into Chinook to the Post Office, bringing all of Hollandville's mail back to Vander Yen's hall, including his father's Volkstem. If nothing else, Cornelius needed his newspaper, and Pete was more than happy for an excuse to go to Chinook. He was becoming restless and inquisitive about the rest of the world, and Chinook was more in touch than was Hollandville.

Jake, too, now eighteen years old, felt there must be more to life than scratching out a meager existence on the prairie, and went to work for a sheep rancher, Jurgen Khur, north of Chinook. There he could at least earn a small wage. He enjoyed being away from home and earning money, but he did not care for sheep ranching.

Mary was still a child, and even though she had had a few scrapes and falls, her imaginative mind thought of other things to accomplish. She figured that if birds could fly, men should be able to also, so meditating on the idea until she thought she had it perfected, she set out to try her plan. Looking like a bird, and wearing a long black coat, she climbed to the top of the wood shingled barn roof, then standing upright, she grasped the bottom corners of the coat, making a wide wing spread, ready to take off in flight. Suddenly her feet slipped out from under her, and she went down the roof, seat first, wood slivers imbedding in her rump as she slid. Screaming in pain as well as embarrassment, she went bawling to her mother.

"It serves you right for trying such a foolish stunt," her mother scolded, "Now lay down here on your stomach so I can get those slivers out?" So, mortified but suffering, Mary lay and let her mother remove the slivers, convinced that there must be an easier way to demonstrate the art of flying.

### V. Summer 1919

And then the Armistice was signed. Germany had been defeated and all of the Hollandville doughboys were miraculously on their way home. Dena, now nearly eighteen, was ecstatic, for she knew it would not be long before she and Joe would be married. He had given her a ring before leaving for the war, which she considered to be an engagement ring, and she was certain there was no one else for him. She felt whole and protected as she summoned a picture of the two of them to her mind, knowing that she would soon see him in person.

She arranged a meeting between them that Sunday at her home, Mrs. McCann driving her there for the weekend. She was already home when Joe arrived, looking mighty handsome in his U.S. Army uniform. "Happy to have you back," Cornelius told him as he shook Joe's hand vigorously, "You look like you've grown a little taller." "Glad to be

home," Joe answered, sounding very sincere. "Hello, Dena," he said as he gave her a teasing wink. "My, but you look like you've grown up since I left." Dena was thrilled beyond words as her eyes sparkled with the pleasure of seeing him. Her boyfriend had finally come home, and now maybe soon they could tell her parents of their love for each other. Joe stayed for the day, eating dinner with the family and playing cards until dark. "I'd better get going," Joe said as he gathered up his coat and started for the door, "It's getting late." "I'll walk you out!" Dena blurted, as she jumped up from her chair, eager to have an excuse for a few moments alone with him. They walked out together into the night, flying into each other's arms the moment they were free of the window's lights. His lips moved feverishly to hers, satisfying the hunger that had waited too long. The kiss set her pulse throbbing as she kissed him unashamed. And then they were basked in light as the front door was thrown open and Cornelia appeared. "Dena, get in this house!" she snapped, stepping aside to let her daughter pass. Dena turned away from Joe and flew into the house, shocked and mortified. A few minutes later, Cornelia too came into the house, and without uttering a word, went to bed, though unbeknownst to Dena, had told Joe that he was robbing the cradle and to never darken their doorstep again.

\* \* \* \*

In the fall of 1919, four beautiful spring born calves, branded with the BX , Zeestraten brand, were tied up to a heavy wire strung up across the barnyard. The sky looked threatening as dark clouds formed in the north, so Joe and Neal, not wanting them to be frightened, went out to bring them into the barn. Joe untied two calves, taking a rope in each hand, leading them into the barn. Neal too had unfastened his animals and was leading them towards the barn, when the young, frisky calves started running, leading him in a circle right back into the strung-up wire, catching him in the neck. The force knocked him to the ground, letting loose of the two as he grabbed for his throat. Blood streamed down his arms as in disbelief, he ran for the house, holding his neck, never realizing that his throat had been cut from ear to ear. Cornelia looked at her eight year old son for a sickening moment, the color paling in his face. "Oh Mother Mary, please help me again." she prayed, as she ripped off her blue denim apron, thrusting it against the boy's bleeding throat, setting him down in a kitchen chair, keeping the heavy apron pressed against the bleeding cut. "Bessie, quick, bring me some clean rags," she ordered, "This bleeding has to be stopped." Bessie hustled around and found some freshly washed, sugar sacks, "Now tear them into three inch strips." her mother said. Neal sat motionless, almost afraid to breathe, while his mother bandaged the throat, holding the edges of the incision together as she wrapped. As the bandage grew thicker, the bleeding stopped, until just a faint pink shown through the last strip of toweling, forming a stiff, turtleneck-like collar. Slowly the color came back into his face, his eyes lost that terrified look, and they knew that he was going to survive. He walked around with the bandaged throat for many days, until the itching of healing began and the dish towel sugar sack strips were too soiled to wear any longer, the cut healing at last without ever leaving a scar.

## 27. SAINT NICKOLAS DAY.

A long awaited order from Sears arrived and Cornelia seemed a bit theatrical about opening the package. "I wonder if there are any special gifts in here for anyone?" she suggested, pretending not to know its contents. "Maybe Saint Nickolas put a present in here for someone." she teased, carefully untying the last knot. "Why, I'll be," she exclaimed, "Here is a doll for Bessie Zeestraten, and another for Mary. Now let's see, what are these small packages? Why, they're jack-knives for Joe and Neal Zeestraten. Wasn't that nice of Saint Nickolas?"

The four children jumped for joy, never having received such beautiful gifts.

Cornelia, in another one of her rare weak moments, had spent their precious pennies for the children.

Bessie's doll was chubby with a china face and black hair, while Mary's was tall and slim with brown hair. Her doll shoeless, Mary immediately set out to crochet a pair, and soon had fashioned some lovely slippers for her first new toy; a toy she would treasure a life time.

The crop that fall had again been only fair and some of the homesteaders simply pulled up stakes and left, looking for something more out of life than hardship and poverty unending. Hollandville began to take on the appearance of a lonely hasbeen.

## 28. WITHOUT A GOODBYE

Cleveland, about six miles from Mc-Cann's ranch was where Dena got her mail. She waited for a letter from Joe for she had not heard one word from him since her mother caught her kissing him goodnight. She was sick with worry. "Suppose something has happened to him after all the time he was away at war." she fretted, feeling she would go insane if she did not find out what was wrong. That Sunday she caught a ride down the mountain to Chinook, where she inquired about Joe. "Oh, didn't you hear?" a fellow at church said, "He went back to Holland last week. He sold his homestead to a fellow for passage money and left to go back to his mother in the Netherlands." Dena was shocked. "No, it can't be possible," she said, "We were in love, we were going to be married. It can't be true" "It's true, all right," the fellow said, "I saw him off at the Railroad Station myself. He had been acting terribly depressed the last few weeks about something, then he got a letter from his mother, went out and found a buyer for his claim and left the next day. It was really sudden.

Dena was devastated. She knew he missed his mother and sisters back in Europe, for she remembered how sad he would be each time he received a letter from them, but how could he leave without her? How could he leave without an explanation, or without a goodbye? She went back to the ranch in a daze, sick and broken hearted. Nothing seemed to matter anymore. Her life was meaningless now. She worked and saved her money, thinking that when she had enough saved she would go to the Netherlands where Joe was, "You can't do that," her mother told her when next she was home. "Self respecting women do not go chasing across the ocean after a man." she said. So Dena, a young, hard working woman, able to cook for twelve men six days a week, capable of supporting herself, was left alone, her heart crushed. On Saturday nights, the cowboys or Jim McCann took her along to the barn dances held at different locations on the mountain, and there were good times, but her heart wasn't in it. She could not get over the loss of her love.

### I. A Sassy Brat

Mary loved to go to her Grandpa Stassen's house for he always treated her well, but she like her older sisters, did not care for her Uncle Billie. She said that he never minded his own business.

Once when the family had all gone to confession on a Saturday, and were riding home on the wagon, Mary made the remark, "Boy, it was kind of funny in church today, because I overheard the fellow in the confessional say that he had been drunk four times, and anybody knows that he has been drunk a whole lot more times than that." "You're not supposed to tell anything that you overhear in confession," Billie scolded, "That is a mortal sin." "It's none of your business," Mary snapped back, "My parents are here, and they can tell me if I am doing anything wrong, you don't have to." "Shut your mouth!" Cornelius told Mary, and she did as she was told, though she felt she had a right to remind Billie that he was not in charge. "Besides, I didn't commit a mortal sin no more than you did." she added. Yes, Mary was indeed a sassy brat at times, and Billie knew better than to make sexual advances toward her, as he had tried with Cora and Dena, for he knew that she was tattle-tale enough to tell her mother. With Mary, Billie did indeed know enough to keep his distance.

And now she was thirteen and old enough to want to experiment in the kitchen. "Why can't I try to bake a molasses cake?" she coaxed her mother one day. "Kids at school talk about cake and I think I can make one." "Try if you want to," Cornelia said, "But if it doesn't turn out good, you'll still have to eat it." "I will." she promised, as she mixed the ingredients. The house smelled heavenly while the cake baked and everyone waited anxiously for Mary's concoction to be done. Once out of the oven, a masterpiece was displayed for all to see and taste. Her experiment, a huge success, was not only gorgeous, but tasted wonderful too. Mary could make the molasses cakes from then on, for she truly had a knack for baking.

Furthermore, to demonstrate her creative abilities, Mary gathered a handful of long horse hairs from the horses' tails, and braided them into a hair-net. Though her friends must have been wondering how she made the horses stand still while she plucked out the hairs, they were amazed at her talents and coaxed her to braid a net for them. She did create some clever items, and by age fourteen, was sewing shirts for her brothers, again using the old shirts or patterns, as her mother all taught.

Neal too was rather talented, especially as a horse trainer, for in 1920 the Zeestraten had a beautiful little horse named Nellie, raised from a colt from one of their mares. He could get on her and beat anything on the prairie. The cowboys from nearby ranches often came to Cornelius' corral just to admire the horse, even offering to buy her for big money, but Cornelius would never sell, saying that she belonged to Neal. If there ever was a race, Neal felt certain that he could enter her and win, for she could indeed run like the wind, but sad to say, no such event occurred.

## II. Stealing Sticks

Going to school was not all work and no play, and the Zeestraten children were no different than any of the others. Playing was something they all loved of course, but it was something they were allowed very little of at home, although their parents did seem to have mellowed some with the last four, so recess in school was looked forward to with great anticipation.

One popular recess game was called Stealing Sticks.

"Mary, you and Ann Wigman can be captains, and choose who you want on your side." Joe said, resting assured that he would be "picked" first. "O.K., I'll pick Neal, then," Mary announced. "And I choose you, Joe," Ann answered back. "Then I choose Mary Schiettecatte." Mary decided for her second choice. "And I choose Bessie." Ann declared in a confident voice. "Let's see, who is left?" Mary questioned. "Antonia. I want Antonia Vander Weyst for my last choice." Mary stated. "Then I'll take Nellie for my final choice." Ann came back, and they were ready to begin. "Do you have enough sticks for your side?" Mary asked. "All right then, put them in the circle of rocks and don't cross the line I have scratched in the dirt." she ordered. "Is everybody ready?" Ann called. "Then ready, set, go." The children scampered around trying to grab a stick from the center of the circle, bringing it back to their side without being tagged. "Neal, you go to prison," Bessie called, "I tagged you, so you have to go to prison, now somebody will have to get you out." "I'll get him out," Mary promised, stealing a stick

and running back to her side. "You're free now, Neal, come on back." Mary told him. Neal came back and the game continued, stealing, going to prison and being released from prison, until they were tired and the bell rang to come in from recess.

Recess time was also the best time for playing ball, Mary and Ann being the only two girls chosen, for they were very swift runners. Maybe tomorrow they would get a ball game going.

Though Bessie did join in the games at school and did love to play "Ball and Jacks" she did not enjoy playing outdoors as much as Mary, and was often accused of being an "old sett'n hen" because of it. It seemed that Bessie was showing signs of being a devout, contemplative sort.

At any rate, the next day at school, the Schiettecatte children had an announcement. "When we got home from school yesterday, the Doctor had brought us a new baby brother. We named him Eugene." they said. The Schiettecatte family now consisted of one girl and seven boys, surely a beautiful sight in the eyes of God.

\* \* \*

Each year a better crop was hoped for, the Bogey Mercantile Company going good for seed and supplies. Even the staple food like flour, sugar and rice were charged at the store, confident that the crops would bring in more than enough to wipe out their debt. Cornelia tried to furnish eggs and butter in exchange for supplies, but the few eggs she did get were needed for her own hungry family. Cora and Rouke were doing no better, nor was the whole of Hollandville.

With winter clouds in the sky, the hopes of many gave way to despair. Whipped by drought, parched by feverish winds, and starved by endless poverty, one family after another pulled out, leaving their homesteads to the gophers. Wagons rolled, by daily, carrying families with blown away dreams and broken hearts. But Cornelius was not yet ready to quit. "Next year will be better," he promised, as they looked out over the vastness to the abandoned homesteads. "Next year will be better, can feel it in my bones.

### III. Springtime in Montana

In the Zeestraten household it was a must that spring cleaning be done by Pentecost Sunday (usually the last Sunday of May), so one weekend when Dena was home she helped clean cupboards, for although they were practically bare, with little food and few dishes, the doorless shelves must be spotless. Using newspaper as shelf lining, she carefully folded the page so that all printed matter was on the shelf, making certain the unprinted edge hung down over the shelf front. Then, by cutting a scalloped trim on the white edge, she made an otherwise unattractive trim look very decorative.

At Cora's house the same rule held true; spring cleaning by Pentecost. Walls were brushed down, curtains washed and quilts fluffed and aired. Although it remained unused, as she swept and cleaned the empty corner of the bedroom, set aside for a cradle, Cora thought about the dream she had had at age twelve, of the little injured boy, and her waking up crying because she was never going to have a baby. Was it

precognition, or would she, like the caraganas in full bloom, finally get her wish and become pregnant this year? As Rouke entered the house, he looked approvingly at the freshly cleaned rooms. "Now it looks Crist-Lik (Christ-Like) a-gain." he commented as he sat down beside his wife and laid his tired head in her lap.

In May, it started "Chinooking" and soon the earth was warm and fertile, rye, flax and barley popping out of the damp spring fields, looking very promising, with every kernel of corn planted, sprouting forth in beautiful, straight rows. "I told you it would be better." Cornelius reminded, wishing that so many of the others had not gotten discouraged so soon. "Yes, this year will be a better year." he said.

Each day he rose to the new dawn, watching the grain which seemed to grow overnight, and at night, as the twilight fell over the prairie, he fell to his knees, thanking God for keeping him so steadfast. Blessed rains came regularly that summer, turning the grain fields into one endless field of golden hues, separated only by the fences surrounding each homestead. Cora and Rouke's, as well as Billie Stassen's fields, were equally as magnificent, waving majestically in the wind.

#### IV. Let us Celebrate

Cornelius mended the broken binder so as to have it ready to bind the grain.

"Two more days, and it will be ready." he said, looking out once more over the beauty of the crops. "Tomorrow we will go to town and see the 4th of July parade." he announced. "This will be a bountiful crop, so we shall go to town and celebrate."

Early in the morning of the 4th, the family left for Chinook, joining the other settlers who had braved the winter and stayed for another year, they too jubilant over the crops they would harvest this fall. Looking back, they could see their lovely, yellow flax and barley swaying in the gentle breeze, a scene more beautiful than any artist could ever capture.

In Chinook, it seemed as though all of Hollandville was there, and to the Zeestratens, just being there was a rare day indeed. The morning was filled with a parade, games, races and good food, truly a celebration. But in the afternoon, a bad storm came up, and in the north, the direction of Hollandville, the sky looked menacingly black. The homesteaders moved nervously toward their wagons, hurriedly gathering up the children who had wandered away from their parents. They left Chinook, charging down the road toward home, aware that their presence would not protect their fields, but still needing to be there. The rain came down in torrents, bringing hailstones along that slashed and cut their faces as they pushed homeward.

By the time they reached Hollandville's section, they knew there was no use. Nothing was left. Nothing! Everyone's crop was flat, bowled over by the rain and hail-stones the size of baseballs, bringing down buildings and shattering windows. Dead poultry lay everywhere, even an old couple who did not go to the carnival were found dead. Fences were gone, and the fields which only hours before swelled with beautiful grain, now contained only ridges in the ground where the grain had been. The people were devastated as they looked at the dream of a lifetime laid waste at their feet, for nothing of the crops could possibly be saved. Women moaned while men walked

around in a daze, too stunned to even speak; children stumbling over hail-stone-pelted pets.

"I'm ready to leave!" Jake shouted, after surveying the destruction done by the storm.

"I'm ready to leave and never come back!" he said.

"It isn't that we didn't try, Cor'," Rouke choked through his tears. "We did try. It's just no use." And even while he was saying it, neighbors were loading up their wagons, making ready to leave.

Beaten and dejected, Cornelius too gave up hope, having no credit left and nowhere else to turn. The money realized from the crops was to have gone toward paying off the debt to the Mercantile Co., but now they had nothing. They had been living on practically nothing for so long, waiting for the day when they would have a good crop, and now their hopes were destroyed. Cora was keenly aware of the defeat her father felt, knowing how much owning land and being his own boss meant to him, for she herself possessed a great deal of the same self-pride. It was indeed a dark day in everyone's lives. Although they owned 360 acres, it was all mortgaged to Bogey, as were their houses and branded cattle.

The Zeestratens, Stassens and DeBoers, along with everyone else in Hollandville, surrendered to nature, and made plans to leave Montana.

## 29. THE TOY DART

Having not the vaguest idea where to go, Cornelius picked up a toy dart which lay on the kitchen table, blindfolded his eyes, throwing the dart at a United States map which hung on the wall, the dart landing on Butternut, Wisconsin. Wisconsin it would be then, with its icy cold waters and towering pines. Wigmans made arrangements to go to Michigan, while Schiettecattes planned to go to Canada, though not until Louisa had her baby, due in November.

At McCanns, Dena heard of the storm which hit Hollandville and the havoc it had caused. She had been at McCanns for two and one half years, loved it there, but she had lost Joe and now her family were planning to leave too. Although she had lived away from home for several years, still she could not stand by and see her family go away without her, for it seemed like that would be the end of the world. The money she had saved for passage to Holland, she gave to her parents to pay for the railroad cars which would transport any unbranded cattle, agreeing that her heifer, Rose, went too and would always be hers. Billie had no money, either, so he agreed to ride with the cattle, looking after them during the trip, as did Jake, though he planned to hide under the hay whenever the inspector came through, for he had not paid a fare at all. Children under fourteen traveled half fare, so Joe, being small, would travel as Bessie's twin, while Neal actually qualified for the reduced rate.

The unbranded horses were turned loose, left to run wild again in the mountains where food was more plentiful and nature more compassionate, while the Chinook sheriff stood by, making certain they left all the branded livestock which now belonged to Bogey Mercantile.

### I. Someone Else to Midwife

Goodbyes for the Zeestratens and Schiettecattes were agonizing, for they, more than any other two families, had been a stalwart rock to each other. Cornelia hated leaving Louisa, for now she would have to find someone else to midwife, but the time had arrived to leave. "I'll make it, Kay," Louisa promised, sensing the worry in her friend, "I'll make it and so will you. Our Lord and Blessed Mother will keep us in Their care." she reassured through her tears as she embraced her dear friend.

"God Bless you," Cornelia answered as she wiped away the tears rolling down her cheeks. "I could not have survived without you. Goodbye, my friend," she choked, not being able to hold back the sobs any longer. "Goodbye."

The Zeestratens, DeBoers and Staesens boarded the train for Wisconsin, leaving behind more than ten years of back-breaking labor and broken dreams, but still believing that this was the will of God, confident that He would watch over them in this new venture.

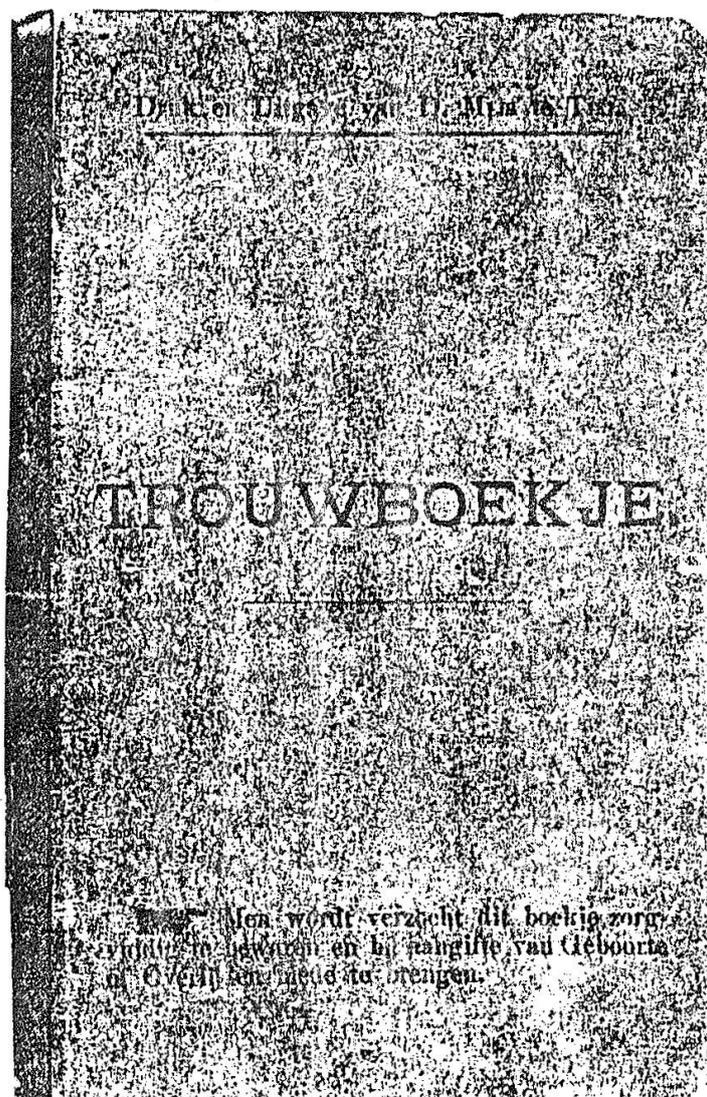
### 30. A LETTER FROM AN OLD FRIEND

Cora stirred in her tan naughahyde tilt-back chair, glancing at the little cuckoo clock behind her. "No wonder I feel so stiff," she said half aloud, "I've been sitting in this chair for hours. I almost believe I fell asleep, and now I feel a teensy bit chilled. What I need is a coffee, that always warms me up." So she pushed down the footrest of her recliner, slowly standing up, being careful not to take a step until she was certain that her legs would carry her. Fixing her coffee, she settled down once more, letting its warming powers effect her.

"Here's your mail, Grandma," a granddaughter called, stopping on her way home from school. "You got a letter from Mary Schiettecatte Quataker in California. Is she an old friend of yours, Grandma?" "Yes, dear," Cora answered, "She is an old friend of mine, but it seems like only moments ago since last we met, and I have a wonderfully comforting feeling in my bones that it won't be long until we meet again."

## The 'Trouwboekje'.

The 'Trouwboekje' or wedding book mentioned on page 19



N°. der akte 22

Op den 5<sup>de</sup> Mei 1897 is het huwelijk voltrokken tusschen  
 Cornelis Keeskraker  
 geboren te Seggatgeest den 31 Juli 1872  
 zoon van Petrus Martinus  
 en van Cornelia van der Riet  
 weduwe van

en  
 Cornelia Kraspen  
 geboren te Oude Tonge den 13 Januari 1874  
 dochter van Jacobus  
 en van Dingena Rabbers  
 weduwe van

KINDEREN UIT DIT HUWELIJK GEBOREN.

VOORNAMEN.	GEBOREN		OVERLEDEN	
	JAAR	DEN	TE	DEEN
1. Cornelia Sophia Kraspen Keeskraker				
2. Jacobus Adrianus idem	1898	15d. april 1899		
3. Petrus Martinus idem		29 aug 1900	11 mei	26 Jan 1901
4. Dingena idem		21 Dec 1901		
5. Simon Maximus idem		16 Januari		
6. Joseph Maria idem	1902	12 Juli 1904	11 mei	16 Juni '04
7. Maria Catharina idem		16 Juni 1905	idem	2 Juni 1906
8. Petrus Paulus idem		13 Juni 1906	idem	18 Februari 1907
9. Maria Catharina idem		20 October		
10. Elizabeth	1907	3 December 1907		
11. Josef	1908	23 December idem		
12. Cornelis	1909	24 Mei 1911	11 mei	

## Certificates of registration.

Doc, No. 14363

Havre 09741 4-1003.

The United States of America

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS, a Certificate of Register of the Land Office at Havre, Montana, has deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 20, 1862, "To Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain," and acts supplemental thereto, the claim of Cornelius Zeestraten has been established and consummated, in conformity to law, for the northeast quarter, the north half of the northeast quarter, the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter, and the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section twenty-one in Township thirty-four north of Range twenty east of the Montana Meridian, Montana, containing three hundred twenty acres, according to the Official Plat of the Survey of then said Land, returned to the General Land Office by the Surveyor-General:

NOW KNOW YE, That there is, therefore, granted by the United States unto the said claimant the tract of Land above described;

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land and appurtenances thereof, unto the said claimant and to the heirs and assigns of said claimant forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for mining, agricultural, manufacturing, or other purposes and rights to ditches and reservoirs used, in connection with such water rights, as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs, laws, and decisions of courts and there is reserved from the lands hereby granted, a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, Woodrow Wilson President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the SEVENTH day of FEBRUARY in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and SIXTEEN and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and FORTIETH.

By the President: Woodrow Wilson

By M.P. LeRoy, Secretary,

L.Q.C. Lamar

Recorder of the General Land Office.

(SEAL OF UNITED STATES GENERAL LAND OFFICE) RECORDED: Patent Number 506279

Filed for Record this 24th day of March, A.D. 1916, at 2:45 o'clock P.M.

Vernon Butler County Recorder

Not a photo static copy

Doc. No. 38186  
Havre 039077 4-1024  
The United States of America,  
To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Havre, Montana, has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that full payment has been made by the claimant Cornelius Zeestraten according to the provisions of the Act of Congress of April 24 1820, entitled "An Act making further provisions for the sale of the Public Lands" and the acts supplemental thereto, for the southeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section twenty-one in Township thirty-four north of Range twenty east of the Montana Meridian, Montana containing forty acres, according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Land, returned to the General Land Office by the Surveyor-General:

NOW KNOW YE, That the United States of America, in consideration of the premises, and in conformity with the several Acts of Congress in such case made and provided, HAS GIVEN AND GRANTED, and by these presents DOES GIVE AND GRANT, unto the said claimant and to their heirs of the said claimant the Tract above described; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities, and appurtenances, of whatsoever nature, thereunto belonging, unto the said claimant and to the heirs and assigns of the said claimant forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for, mining, agriculture, manufacturing, or other purposes, and rights to ditches and reservoirs used in connection with such water rights, as may be recognized and, acknowledged by the local customs, laws, decisions or courts; and there is reserved from the lands hereby granted, a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States; reserving, also, to the United States all coal in the lands so granted, and to it, or persons authorized by it, the right to prospect for, mine, and remove coal from the same upon compliance with the conditions of and subject to limitations of the Act of June 22, 1910 (36 Stat., 583).

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.  
GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the TENTH day of MARCH In the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and NINETEEN and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and FORTY-THIRD (SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES GENERAL LAND OFFICE).

By the President: Woodrow Wilson

By M.P. LeRoy, Secretary

L.Q.C. Lamar,

Recorder of the General Land Office. Recorded: Patent Number 669208

Filed for Record this 22nd day of April, A. D. 1919, at 2:25 o'clock P.M.

Vernon Butler

County Recorder.

Not a photostatic copy



The Cornelius Zeestraten family in 1913