

July 20, 2010

To: Prof. Tobin Miller Shearer, Montana University AND to all who have helped make our journey back to the 1960 Graafschap Friendly Town experience so pleasant.
From: Rev. Jim Lont, journey guide who seemed lost but has found his way again.

Fellow Travelers,

I'm sorry I left you stranded since May 16 but several personal and professional detours came up (like participating in the inspiring beginning of the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (joining REC and WARC); hosting an Indonesian pastoral student; and the usual summer "relative roundup" etc.).

But I'm back on track, and with a DVD of our delightful 5/16 Sunday afternoon reminiscences for each of you, thanks to two helpful techy-type guys (Randy Stadt and Ron Breuker). Thanks also to Marilyn Hoek (especially for "recovering" and printing the pictures and to Sylvia Roon and others for helping.

Correction: in my introduction that afternoon I referred "in passing" to visiting a slave embarkation point in Ghana named "Elmira"; which I meant to be Elmina, a place of terrible memories for thousands of African persons made slaves. .

In retrospect, I'm glad we pursued this effort. We didn't come forth with gushers of socially significant perspectives on May 16 but it warmed our souls to remember little incidents that revealed growth in cultural understanding (e.g. the carrot scene, the hair setting trials etc.) and it produced true acts of love (e.g. the "uninvolved" neighbor who quietly took pictures and then gave a little party at the end; the dinner pail for dad etc).. Fishing, stars, a run-away-tractor, a knife and sleeping together – all were deposits in our memory bank.

And the little boys and girls of the village (like Ron Mokma) looked on and joined in as the "Negro children" played with new friends – good preparation for him for Vietnam. We remembered some of the names and undoubtedly still pray for some. Many of us left wanting to know more about the lives of the children today, 50 years later.

Thanks again for participating. Feel free to share what we found with others (for example, Patty Gebben (and husband Steve Brunink chatted with me recently by Fricano's pizza and they're eager to see their "peers". I promised them a DVD and more info about our journey. Likewise, Zwenna Harger called. She hosted a Gloria Johnson ..

FOLLOWING IS MY ACCOUNT OF THOSE "Living Hosts" or their children WHOM YOU WILL MEET ON THE DVD (and some of the things they said on the written responses they brought to the May 16 meeting). I count 8 of those who attended as STILL LIVING HOSTS – original heads of host families – after 50 years. We didn't hear from the host families of Oliver Den Bleyker, Warner Alof, Gradus Geurink, Herman and Ralph Schierbeek, Anthony Ten Harmsel, Richard Wierenga. Share with them or their descendants if you know them.

OPENING PRAYER: Howard Lubbers (brother of Lola and Patti and son of Henry) opened with prayer. Brother Cal Lubbers seemed to be away that summer. We also see the facial profile of Myra (nee Lambers) Zwiép who speaks later.

1. JEROLD AND JEAN HULST are first (once we got them on camera!). They now live at 4631 – 61st. Holland, Mi. 49423 Phone: 616-335 3054 (Bill Sytsma, ch. of the Historical Committee is shown helping Jean with the microphone.

Jerold and Jean (living hosts) said “It was good for our family. We regret we were never able to really make her feel comfortable...but she was only 7 years old. We cherish her memory and feeling close to another culture and race. I thought I should shampoo her hair not realizing that they use their own dressing. What a challenge that was. (Jean said their girl’s name was Shirley but thought it was Shelly at first). One day Jean was home alone and heard the tractor go down the driveway! Thankfully it choked. “She must have seen Jerold start it and quickly caught on”.

2. Then PATTI (nee Lubbers) PEEKS – “salt and pepper” hair, black and white jacket - is pictured also discussing “hair” (briefly).

NOTE: Patti’s sister Lola was sitting next to – to the right of – her, between Patti and Sally Rutgers (to the right of Lola).

Lola’s address is A5337 138th Ave, Holland, Mi. 49423 Phone 269-751-5844. She wrote that they (Henry and Lillian with children Lola, Howard, Patty) hosted a girl Wendy Gray and a boy Vincent Garcia and “it was a very good experience for our family. I remember the first night I slept with our little girl not knowing any black people and hardly ever seeing any...I was out of my comfort zone. I stayed way on my side of the bed”. Lola played ball with Vincent, “teaching him how to use a bat. He had never had one...They loved living on a farm with wide open space. Vincent had such a hearty laugh...he made us all laugh. Lots of tears and hugs when they left. It seemed they were going back to nothing...are they alive?, what kind of life have they lived?...do they remember?

SISTER PATTI agreed. She is now Patti Peeks 4444 64th St, Holland Mi. 49423 Phone 616 – 335 2659 (ppeek@charter.net). Patti wrote: “it was a very positive experience, I will never forget it”.

“Our late dad Henry,” Lola wrote “started the whole thing after reading about it in The Banner. He was a wonderful Christian, a good father...didn’t show a lot of warm fuzzy feeling...most fathers didn’t back then...(but) he really had a soft heart and wanted to do something for these kids. He enjoyed the experience so much as we all did” (THANKS, HENRY H. for planting seeds of love that are still producing a good crop of love!!! - Rev. Lont)

3. SPEAKING NEXT is living hostess MYRA (nee LAMBERS) ZWIEP. Her husband Ted died a few months ago. My wife Carol is seated between Myra and the camera. Myra (Lambers) grew up on Graafschap road. While hosting however, she and Ted lived in Grand Rapids where a neighbor had a pool (interesting result) She now lives in a Holland condo-141 Central Ave, 49423 – 616 399 4757). Her children were small but she tells

about what son Tom remembered. They did hear from their boy, Arsenio Ortiz, about 7 ("I think he wanted to come back"). Incidentally, in a few cases there were repeat visits.

4. Living hostess GLADYS GENZINK (her dear husband Jim, our local butcher, died not long ago), started to talk but we switched over to

5. HOWARD LUBBERS who SPOKE UP WITH SOME RICH INFORMATION about Vincent Garcia and Wendy Gray) – the carrot story, glass eye, sleeping arrangements-Howard's credential for a job later with Baxter Center in Grand Rapids etc.

6. LOLA LUBBERS appears next (see #2 above)

7. Back to GLADYS GENZIINK (6037 146th ave, Holland, Mi. 49423 Ph. 616-396-4145 – her girl, 7yr. old Dianne wanted white skin like Gladys' daughter Gail so she washed often. She called Gail's brother Carl "Fatso"...but loved him and didn't want to leave the Genzinks.

7. KATHLYN KNOLL LARSON - in black and white print - (K was daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gradus Knoll) Family hosted teen-ager named Harvey. At the local lake Goshorn swimming hole, Harvey could be on the sand but was NOT ALLOWED IN THE WATER!?! The Knolls went home disgusted. This is THE ONLY INCIDENT OF 'RACISM' IN THE COMMUNITY I COULD DETECT (but Goshorn is in the Saugatuck area, not Graafschap).. I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THAT ONE. (jl). Kathlyn lives in Grand Rapids: address 2.827 Cascade Rd. Grand Rapids. Mi. 49506. Phone 1-616-295-0952

8. The video continues with living host LOIS HOLTGEERTS -- in green jacket - (husband Lou has passed away and Lois is re-married). Good stories about arrival at home first night.(Lois appears again later on the video with fishing and turkey stories). They hosted Calvin Shepherd and Brother Rowe. Lois' address is now Mrs. Lois Broekhuis, 857 Millbridge Ave., Holland, Mi. 616-392-1375
Lois tells a touching story about their child wanting to buy a dinner pail for his dad.

9. SALLY RUTGERS now POSTMA – wearing pink "Garden Party" top - (Our sympathy to Sally whose 92 year old mother to whom she referred died recently-since we met May 16). Sally's address is Sally Rutgers Postma; 3673 Timber Creek Court, NW, Comstock, Mi. 49321 616 785 – 8746 postmav@comcast.net (I'm uncertain about accuracy of the "v" JL). She received a thank you note "a couple of years later". "It made me comfortable with other cultures". She also provided 3 black and white pictures (one identified as "girl from Harlem", one with young people swimming at Lake-town Park, and one with dad Harvey on the tractor). Enclosed.

10. BERNIE AND FAYE (white blouse) VAN KAMPEN had 2 boys - Ray Shepherd and Ken Johnson. They provided 109 3x3 black and white pictures of cleaning fish, eating "field corn", bag swing etc. Copies are attached (2 pages).

Address: 2347 Eagle Pt. Drive, Fennville, Mi 49508 269 - 561-2204

<bfvan@i2K.com>

Then LOIS HOLTGEERTS TOLD MORE (re. fear of one fish in boat and boy jumped out of fishing boat "where all the fish are!!!") (friend lauged); ran turkeys to death etc.)

(I THINK #s 10 AND 11 SHOULD BE IN REVERSE ORDER BUT I NEVER LEARNED HOW TO MOVE PRINT without losing it!!!! I'm computer semi-literate!!! E-mail around the world BUT that's it!. At 80 I'm too busy to learn because of "fun projects" like this-Jim)

11. STANLEY and JOYCE SLUITER from Zeeland shared stories of the impact of the event. Their families have become very multi cultural and very accepting of helping those from other cultures - in part because of our Graafschap effort, for which they expressed their thanks. Joyce commented on clash between Puerto Rican and Afro-American girls. Address: 10512 Summer Grove Court, Zeeland, Mi. 49424 616- 772-2040

12. MARILYN HOEK TOLD ABOUT SLUMBER PARTY AND PILLOW FIGHT AT the MENKEN house. Her family didn't host (had 6 in family, 3 bed-rooms),.

13. NANCY KOEMAN, DAUGHTER OF DON AND JULIA KOEMA

Nancy provided a written report but she wasn't there May 16. The girl they hosted was Jackie Rowe). Brother Ken AND Don and Julia met Jackie again in "67-'68 when Ken interned at the Harlem church. Two pictures - Jackie's new dress. Keith, Mary, Jackie and Nancy in front of Don and Julia Koeman's home.

General conversation followed. Lots of passing comments and insights; ANY NEGATIVE things? What was our greatest contribution in this non-violent effort? etc..

RON MOKMA, a "village boy" at the time - who joined us that afternoon out of interest - contributed some authentic insights about how all the children of the village came with their bicycles and played with their "new friends" (at ball games etc.). They became fearful after dark, Ron said, "and worried about cars coming, even from long away. They didn't know they were allowed to have so much fun". Ron later served in Vietnam where his "cross cultural experience" probably helped him.

ALL in ALL WE SPENT A WONDERFUL 2 HOURS TOGETHER.

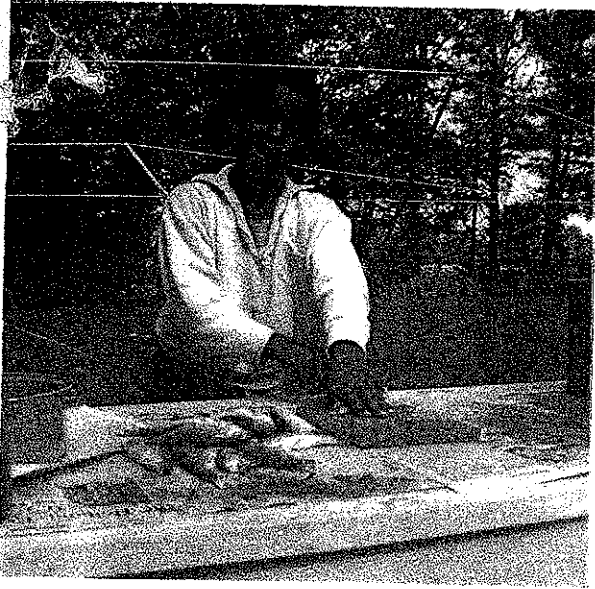
Thanks again to all! Rev. Jim Lont 616-335-6133 jimlont@sbcglobal.net
1130 W. 27th St. Holland, Mi. 49423

Please let me know if any corrections are needed so I can change them. ✓

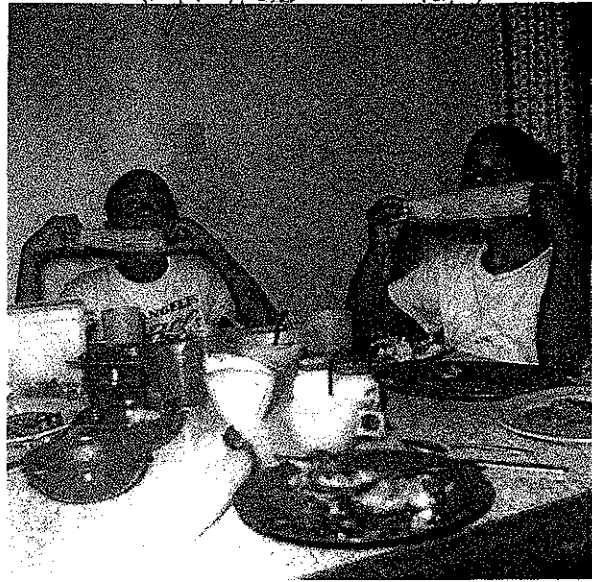
If your DVD is faulty, let us know and we'll replace it. ✓

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"We became more color blind" - Mrs. Joyce Sluiter quoting Pres. JFK





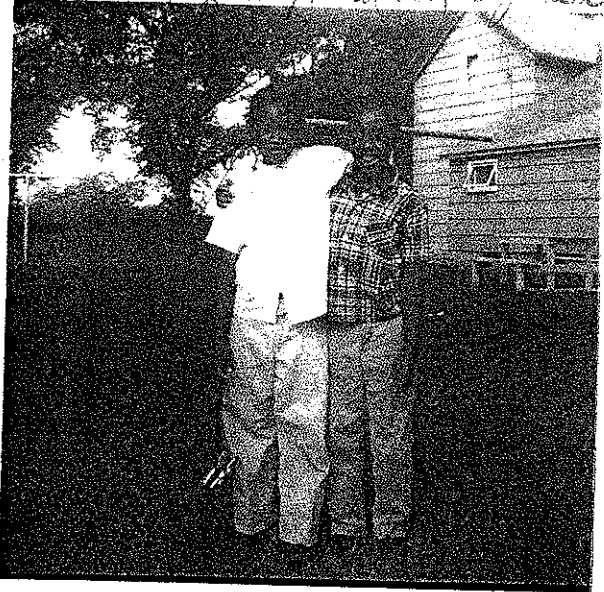
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SEP 60

Ray & Ken - eating food

1960 Ray Shepherd & Ken Johnson



SEP 60

Ray & Ken



SEP 60

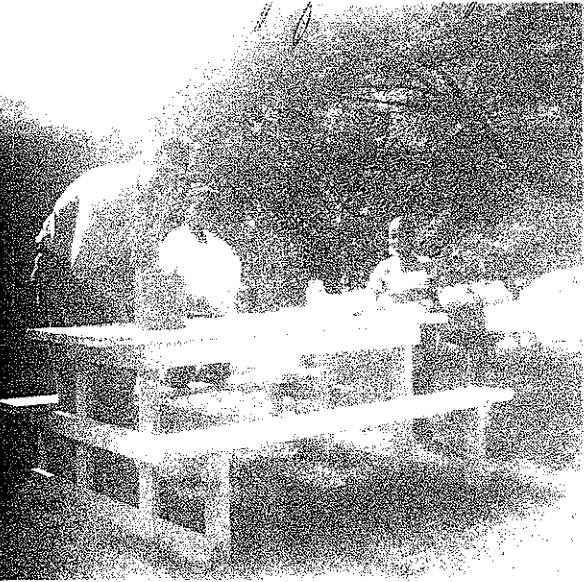
10 VAN KAMPEN PICS



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GIRL FROM HARLEM
AT HARVEY RUTGERS



09 AON

NOV 60

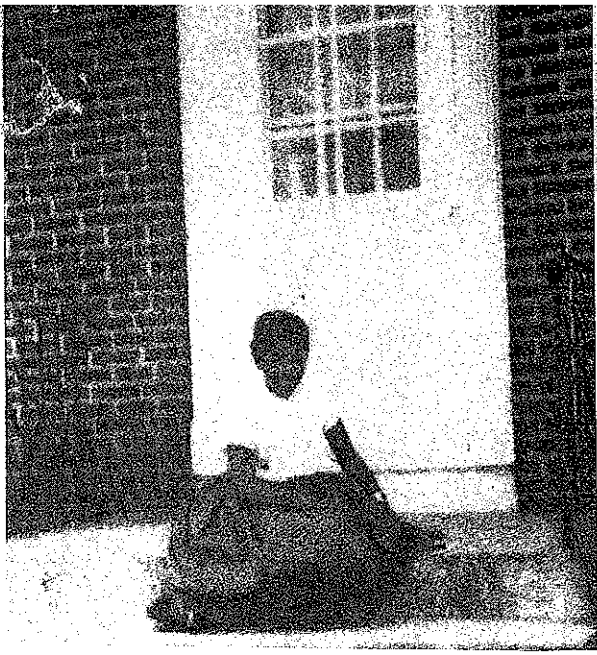
HARVEY RUTGERS AND GIRL
FROM HARLEM



NOV 60

SWIMMING IN LAKE MICHIGAN





09 • ADX •



Jackie in her
new dress

Kerth Koeman Mary Koeman

Jackie
Rowle

Nancy
Koeman

Both taken in front of the Koeman Home.

Sunday Afternoon, May 16, 2010: 2:30-4:30

Welcome,

We are met this afternoon in the beautiful sanctuary of the Graafschap Christian Reformed Church, in the historic village of Graafschap, Michigan.

Built in 2001, this is the third church building of the congregation begun when 70 Dutch-speaking German, Reformed, Calvinist immigrants arrived on June 20, 1847 and settled in the forest, on the hill South of Holland, Michigan.

For over 160 years now, the congregation has gathered twice a Sunday for worship and its members have faithfully and creatively served the Lord in each new generation. The story of that service is varied and rich, as told in the church's well developed, frequently visited Historic Center.

Fifty years ago this summer, in August of 1960, at the beginning of a decade of much social change and turmoil in American society, marked by the war in Vietnam, the "youth revolution" and especially the Civil Rights movement, our congregation experienced one of its most unique learning and Christian service opportunities.

That summer, in 1960, we participated in what was called "The Friendly Town" program of our CRC mission in Harlem New York - as a number of Christian Reformed churches had over a period of a few years preceding. For us it was new; brought to our attention by Henry H. Lubbers and children Lola and Patty. I'm Rev. Jim Lont and was the pastor here at the time and well recall the enthusiastic support of our people to it. .

Our present Council leaders can find no reference to it in the minutes; it seemed to "just happen" as often good things do! Harlem church leaders had suggested bringing 3 or 4 children to us by one car. Over a dozen families responded however, hosting 21 mostly African American children from Harlem for about two weeks.

Today we are here to share some stories, and hopefully some insights. We do so not only for the enjoyment of refreshing our own memories, but to help strengthen the historical record - as requested by history professor Tobin Shearer of the University of Montana. Prof. Shearer is researching and writing about the movement toward civil rights that was a "parallel process of change taking place in homes and sanctuaries that has been largely ignored due to the drama (that took place-ji) on the streets and sidewalks". He is pleased that we are taking this opportunity seriously.

We'll try to follow the guide distributed for the purpose.

Thanks much to our team of Marilyn Hoek, Sylvia Roon, Ron Breuker, Randy Stadt and others who are helping us to share the story.

Rev. James C. Lont (pastor, 1959-1962)