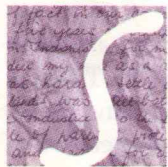




Arthur Schoonveld sits in the driver's seat of a tractor in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1954.

Try, Try Again

by Arthur Schoonveld



LOWLY IT DAWNED ON ME. The conductor on the train from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Kitchener, Ontario, was calling out *my* name. I had a scary thought—if after four years of studying English in the Netherlands, I could not even recognize my own name, how was I ever going to understand anything in this new country?

But here I was, 18 years of age, getting off the train in the middle of the night at one of the tiniest railroad stations I had ever seen—where people spoke English. The very next day I began my new occupation as hired help on a dairy farm. Instead of sitting behind a desk as I had for the past two years, I got on a John Deere tractor and started cultivating.

What a success story! Within four weeks I had advanced from riding a bike to driving a tractor. There was only one little problem: at noon, when someone waved me in, I found I had no idea how to shut the tractor off. So I kept on circling the field until the farmer came running out, jumped on the tractor,

and pushed a little button under the dash.

During the next six months I got other signs that my future fortunes might not come from farming. Five different farms in about as many months did not make for an impressive resumé—and in one instance, I'd actually been fired. But things were looking up.

After trying a few more jobs, I found employment as a construction worker. It was a year after I'd come to Canada. I became an expert shoveler. Five shovels of gravel to one of cement, nine or 10 hours a day. I actually managed to save some money.

Giving Up on Immigration

It was enough to get me back to the Netherlands that fall. I had to swallow my pride and admit that I had failed as an immigrant. Through a connection, I got my old job back. Within a short period, I was once again sitting behind a desk. I was afraid that desk would be my future.

God had other plans for me. During my stay in Canada, a couple from Grand Rapids, Mich., had come to visit the people I was staying with. They encouraged me to apply for a visa to the United States. The man offered to be my sponsor and give me a job.

I did apply, and while I was back in the Netherlands my turn came up. Just 14 months after I had come back, I found myself aboard ship again, on my way to the United States. I arrived in New York City on Christmas Eve, which meant eating Christmas dinner on board in New York harbor, with the Statue of Liberty in full view.

Starting Over

Twenty-four hours on a Greyhound bus brought me to Grand Rapids. There my sponsor did everything he promised. He found me a place to stay and gave me a job driving a truck in the morning and working in a cash-and-carry dairy store in the afternoon. I was as happy as could be, and I fully intended to stay with it.

But just five months later I received a letter. It seemed the U.S. Army had heard about my skills, and Uncle Sam wanted me. So by June of 1957 I was in Fort Leonard Wood, in Missouri, wash-

ing pots and pans while a U.S. Army sergeant swore at me in words I never knew existed. A colleague who was more familiar with the language explained that the sergeant was not happy with my performance in the kitchen.

Somehow, though, I made it through those first few months, and five months later I was driving a 50-ton U.S. Army tank down a German autobahn. My experience as a tractor driver was beginning to pay off.

Two years after I entered Fort Leonard Wood, I was discharged. I went back to work for my sponsor, and this time I was really planning to make it last. Again, God had other plans for me. While I was in the army, one of my buddies kept telling me that when I got out I should go to college. I'd always shrugged it off by saying that I had no money to do anything like that. Besides, I'd never had the slightest intention of going to college.

God Gets His Way

But the thought he'd planted didn't leave me. While driving the truck that summer, I kept thinking about college. So in August of that year, I applied to Calvin College in Grand Rapids. The dean was not impressed with my Dutch high school diploma, but he accepted me because of an equivalency certificate I received in the Army.

So in September 1959, at age 23, I started Calvin College. If there's ever been a more insecure freshman in the history of that school, I'd like to meet him or her someday. Apparently, though, God was determined to get me where he wanted me. Despite my doubts, he pushed me through. Then, after four years, I was accepted into Calvin Theological Seminary, from which I graduated three years later. And in September 1966, I was ordained as the minister of East Martin (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church.

Exactly 30 years and four churches later, I look back with awe at how the Lord has led my life. My feelings were summed up by one of my former employers in the Netherlands who said to me some years ago, "I never thought you'd be a minister."

For sure! From that train ride through Nova Scotia 42 years ago all the way here to Grandville, Mich., two things have been



At left, Arthur Schoonveld leaves Rotterdam, the Netherlands, for Canada. Below, he poses with his tank in Baumholder, Germany, in 1958 after immigrating to the United States and being drafted into the U.S. Army.



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and God always
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made absolutely clear to me: God never lets go, and God always gets us where he wants us. And God still reminds me of my farming days. Today I have an 8-by-14-foot garden with four tomato plants and three rhubarb plants. **B**



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