

**The Life's Journey of
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B.A. B.D. M. Theology, M.A.(Honours)
Knight of the Order of Orange and Nassau
(The Netherlands)**

In 1924, Cornelis Uidam was born in Haarlem, the capital of the province of North Holland, The Netherlands. Haarlem is about 15 km west of Amsterdam.

Haarlem, is the place he spent his youth. During the last 2 years of primary school he received tuition in English and French outside of school hours. Being an enterprising fellow, Cor immediately set about using his new language skills. When holidaying in his grandparents' village in Monnickendam, he would hand out handwritten notes in French and English to the tourists. The note stated his name and address and one short sentence which read, "I collect stamps, could you please send me some stamps from your country". To his amazement, he received an astounding response and was sent hundreds of stamps from many countries. And thus began a hobby in stamp collecting that he maintained throughout his life.

The Great Depression of the 1930's was also disastrous for the Dutch ship-building industry which until then had a thriving nautical industry. As a ship's carpenter, Cor's father could only find work occasionally. So in order to fill the income gaps, his parents became caretakers in the 17th Century building (mansion) of the Metal Workers Union. It did not pay much but they had free accommodation and that helped make ends meet. In 1938, the family moved to Amsterdam because his father, who was relentless in his pursuit for scarce work, learned that the shipyard there had received orders to build a number of large ships.

At 18 years of age (1942), Cor finished High School, majoring in mathematics, Science and Chemistry. To protect him from being taken by the invaders into Germany as a slave worker or conscripted into the German Army, his father found work for him as a correspondence clerk in the office of the shipyard. Working in industry vital to the Germans, meant that he did not need to be taken. Mind you, during the war, not one ship was ever finished due to extensive sabotage or slow work or extraordinary sick leave etc....anything to disrupt production. After he had obtained a State Diploma in Book-keeping, he was transferred to administration. At times, Cor also functioned as a telephonist and overheard many secret conversations not meant for his ears.

Cor began his catechism training in the Reformed Church in Amsterdam in 1938. There he met Wim van Asselt and his sisters, Emmie and Ger, who were identical twins. Wim became his best friend but in the background Cor also became interested in both of the girls. Cor often said, "I picked the right one with Emmie!". Emmie and Ger had a friend named Truus. Cor already had a close friend named Piet Kops. So the 6 of them formed a group and entertained themselves during the war, despite curfews. Not too many years later, the association of the 6 resulted in Cor marrying Emmie, Piet marrying Ger and Wim marrying Truus. The 6, now 3 couples, remained the closest of friends throughout their lives.

When the Allies crossed the southern border of The Netherlands, the Germans blew up the shipyards. Soon after, the battle of Arnhem took place and it had disastrous consequences for the people in the western Dutch provinces as the Germans totally blockaded all food and supplies into Holland. Thousands in the cities perished from hunger and fierce cold. Cor's family fled to their ancestral area of Marken, where there was at least some food, wood for fires and they were relatively safe from German raids.

At the end of the war, Cor returned to Amsterdam to see Emmie. When he saw her, he was amazed to find her dressed in the military uniform of the Dutch Resistance carrying a sten-gun (machine gun). Her code name was "Tine" and she had been a Resistance Fighter for 1 ½ years. She had maintained her secrecy throughout the war and had never told Cor she was in the Resistance where she first transported weapons and later couriered sensitive information under the noses of the enemy which of course was extremely perilous had she been caught. After the war, in 1947, Cor served in the Amsterdam Police Force for 7 years. Being stationed in the "Red Light" district, gave him a view of many troubled lives. He loved Police work and worked in a variety of roles including a normal beat policeman, a traffic policeman, a plain clothes officer and as an undercover officer on covert operations. However, Cor was driven to use his talents in the service of the Church. The difficulty was that to enter the Theological Faculty of the University of Amsterdam, Cor had to switch from his Maths and Science education to one of languages, learning Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He took private after-schools tuition whilst

maintaining full time police work and succeeded in his languages exams, all within one year. Indeed, Cor had a working knowledge of seven languages.

Cor's theological studies started in 1948. For 4 years, Cor did all the rotten shifts no-one else wanted to do, like guarding prisoners at a hospital so that he could study full time as well. This could only have been achieved with tremendously strong support from Emmie. In the last 2 years of his Police service, Cor worked as a detective in the Special Children's Unit.

On 8th July 1948, and because Emmie and Ger were twins, Cor married Emmie and Piet married Ger in a double wedding ceremony. The marriage took place in the minister's vestry in the West Church in Amsterdam which is adjacent to the Queen's Palace. It could not be held in the main body of the church because Princess Julianna was to have her coronation service in the following days. In the following year, their first daughter Jacomina was born.

After many years of arduous study, Cor graduated from the University of Amsterdam with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Divinity and in 1952, Cor was ordained into the Dutch Reformed Church. Subsequently, he was called for a special ministry amongst the river barge people in a township called Maasbracht, in the predominantly Catholic province of Limburg, close to the German / Belgian border. This village had a large inland harbour on the River Muese. It was pioneering work. Cor founded a hostel for barge children. He also formed a Christian political party for local government which campaigned for an inter-denominational Christian school which he founded after winning the election. Although Cor was a Protestant, he obtained strong support from the Catholic community and subsequently won 3 out of 11 seats.

In 1952, Cor and Emmie also had their second daughter Johanna, named after his mother. The following year, their third daughter Dorothea was born. It was not until 1954 that their first son, Symon was born followed 4 years later with the birth of Ger, their 4th daughter.

In 1960, Cor answered a call to come to Sydney to assist Dutch migrants coming from Europe. The family boarded a ship named the "Johan van Olderbarnveld" loaded full with 800 Dutch and 700 English migrants all wanting to establish new lives. It was certainly not a leisure cruise. Apart from taking 5 children, Cor was the ship's Chaplain and Emmie worked as the Migrant Officer for the Dutch passengers.

On arrival on, they found that expected accommodation arrangements were not yet in place. Compounding this, their luggage and possessions had not yet arrived. So initially, four of the children had to be billeted. Cor and Emmie and the youngest child, Ger, who was then only 1 ½ years old, stayed with the family of another Dutch minister. When all was sorted out, they moved into a house in Canterbury NSW as one family. After a couple of years, they moved to Granville to a new manse.

At that time, about 12,000 Dutch people migrated to Australia each year. One of Cor's tasks was to meet migrants on their arrival. Cor had to go onboard the customs boat at 4am whenever a migrant ship arrived or to the airfield whenever they came by aeroplane. Some of the migrants were then often first accommodated in hostels (like Villawood) and Cor used to visit them there. Others established their homes in Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, the Blue Mountains and Canberra and hence Cor had to drive from early in the morning to late at night in order to provide pastoral care. However, it was more social work than pastoral work. Cor also preached in 3 different locations every Sunday. For new Dutch migrants who had no local knowledge, with limited English skills and being in a new country, Cor had to wear various "hats": employment, accommodation, financial counsellor, legal advisor, educational aide, medical advisor, marriage counsellor, youth leader, activities organiser, public relations officer and let's not forget husband and father in amongst those. It was demanding yet very interesting and fulfilling work.

And in amongst all that, Emmie gave them another son, Michael, born in 1963. Cor used to say; "Enough children now - we've contributed our bit to increasing Australia's population." His family of 6 children was complete.

After 5 years in Australia, Cor and the family all return to Holland on invitation of the Dutch Government. Cor's mission was to meet new people planning to migrate and he gave lectures about Australia. Cor also met with some of the parents of the children who had previously migrated to Australia to tell them about how they were going. He was so heavily booked that it took nearly 3 weeks before Cor and Emmie got to visit their own families. He also met his former professors who urged him to do his doctorate. So in 1965, Cor decided to study for a

theological doctorate by correspondence through Amsterdam University. Five years later, Cor returned to Amsterdam to do exams.

On Anzac 1974, floodwaters went through Granville and inundated the ground floor of the 2 storey manse. As Cor's library was downstairs, a substantial portion of the library was destroyed or damaged. Indeed, when the sodden and mud filled books were put out on the footpath for rubbish collection, a local newspaper reporter, reporting on the flood, asked Cor how he felt. Cor said; "I am the minister with a lot of dirty books". The reporter promptly used that as a headline in the next newspaper edition. As a result of the flood, the family relocated to the top of the hill at Eastwood and lived there until his retirement.

Ever thirsty for more knowledge, Cor continued his studies and completed a Master of Arts (with Honours) in Modern History at Macquarie University, graduating in 1981. In the same year, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands bestowed Cor with a Knighthood, titled a "Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau".

After 30 years in the Dutch Parish, Cor retired in 1989. Cor and Emmie then moved to Epping. However, the job was not yet done. He was asked to provide relief ministry in Bellingen for 6 months, followed by 5 months in Leichhardt.

In 1991, Cor was asked to establish the Archives of the Uniting Church Assembly. After several years there, working part-time, Cor finally retired for good, having served 53 years in the ministry. On occasions, Cor would still preach at the Epping Uniting Church where he and Emmie became members.

Since then, Cor and Emmie enjoyed their retirement, travelling overseas and holidaying locally. Most of their free time is spent with family and friends.

Unfortunately, Cor became ill in late 2003 and it saddens us that he passed away on the 10th August 2005. Although seriously ill and knowing the inevitable outcome to follow, Cor shared his belief that he was starting a new life with Jesus Christ. Cor believed that his earthly life, with all its experiences and challenges, were merely a training ground for serving the Lord. His undaunted and steadfast faith always guided his thoughts and his actions and he has left us all with a shining example to follow on the path to salvation.

With the Grace of God, may some of the seeds of Cor's 53 years of ministry in service to our Lord, fall in good soil.

