

Interview with Vivian Hunter (3)

Mark Hoeksema

MHH: So on short notice, you headed for Guam.

VH: Right.

MHH: And he did have a job?

VH: He did have a job. He was the superintendent of the workshop for handicapped adults. We were there for five years. Rev. Wade died of his cancer during the time that we were there.

During the time we were on Guam, we went through another big typhoon. In fact, the Chicago paper's headline the next morning was, "Guam is Gone!" A very lush and beautiful island was flattened. No coconut trees, no anything. Everything was flat. Most of the houses were flat because a lot of them were made of sheet metal. They just blew down.

We lived in a complex of about eleven homes. Ours was the only one that practically received no damage at all. Toni Bourdine was living in a house on the beach. I called her about three o'clock and said, "Do you want to come and stay with us?" She said, "No, my friend is here with me"— Her friend who would become her husband. "I put all things up high," she said. "I think we'll be OK." It wasn't an hour later she called and said, "The police say I have to evacuate because the beach is going to be gone." So she came with the clothes on her back and a few other things to stay a few nights. But her house was gone the next day. There was a house across the street from us that the family never came back to and had to have a little bit of renovating. She lived with us for awhile, and that's the house they moved into when they got married.

MHH: So during your five years on Guam, this Pastor Wade died from his cancer. What happened next, and what brought you to leave Guam?

VH: Well, our first introduction to the Protestant Reformed Churches was through Antoinette Bourdine, who was a member of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. She had the permission of the consistory to spend her two years plus on the island of Guam teaching school. She did that for several years. During our five-year term then she and Ignacio [*Quenga*] became married. We stood up for them at their marriage. Rev. Wade and Chaplain Zeller, who was from the Reformed Episcopal Church, both officiated at the service, and Chips and I stood up for them. Toni had a baby within a year, and when he was a year old, they came back. They came back to the States in 1965. Rev. Wade had died in February of that same year. The typhoon had practically ruined the rehabilitation center. They were in the process of building a new one, and my husband didn't really want to leave until that project was finished. He never was one to leave anything unfinished. So in 1966 we came back to the United States. He had a job lined up in San Luis Obispo by the man who had been his supervisor when he first went to the rehab center. Just as we were ready to leave Guam, it was supported by federal funds. The funds were withdrawn, so the job was withdrawn. As we were heading for that part of California, Toni wrote and said, "Just come to Grand Rapids." She sent us a copy of the "Classified Ads" from the Saturday night *Grand Rapids Press*. My husband checked off 27 jobs he could apply for. Toni's family got busy in the meantime, and her brother made arrangements for him to interview at the children's workshop at Pine Rest. So very shortly after we came back to Grand Rapids, he

was employed again in the work that he loved, which was teaching people to do things. Oh, he loved the work. And within a week or so after we got back, I had a job in a nursing home. When I first took it, I thought, I'll just keep this until he gets a real job. I only stayed 20 years (laughter).

The first nursing home I worked in was a little one that originally had been the Posthumus funeral home—before they built that beautiful new big one on Grandville Avenue. So it had been converted into a twenty-six bed nursing home. That's where I started.

But when we went to Grand Rapids, we were not convinced that the Protestant Reformed Church was the place for us. We were still loving our roots in the Orthodox Presbyterian church, even though Rev. Wade was gone and we hadn't found a church to our satisfaction. In fact, when we first went to Grand Rapids, there was no OPC there at all. We first attended Seventh Reformed, and we enjoyed going to [*Rev. Gordon*] Girod's preaching, very, very much. I felt kind of bad for Toni. She had enrolled our children in Hope School before we got back. We came back on the 31st of October, and they went to school on November 1st. The next day we had a blizzard (laughter) and they didn't go to school. But they went to school there for three years before we became Protestant Reformed.

MHH: And in the meanwhile, you're going to Seventh Reformed.

VH: Seventh Reformed. We went to another one downtown—it was a DeJong—but we didn't like his preaching. Then Rev. Girod got kind of off course. He was becoming more political, and he was not really loved by the Reformed church. They said he made too much trouble at classis. I can imagine he did, because he was thoroughly Reformed until he started going Birch-wise [*John Birch society*].

In the meantime, two gentlemen had started a mission work up in Lincoln County, near Lincoln Lake—37 miles from Grand Rapids. They found a church building that was empty and they were renting that. They asked the CRC to help them, but the CRC wanted nothing to do with it. I don't know how they got connected with the OPC, but they did. They got our name, so we were charter members of that church. Our first minister was a young man (I can't even think of his name anymore). He was fresh out of Westminster Seminary. He preached well. But these two gentlemen who had started the work said, "You can't preach about sin so much. You can't tell people what sinners they are. We're never going to get anywhere that way. You have to tell them more about the love of God."

My husband said to me one night, "We belong in the PRC." I was having trouble with my bad leg then, and the long ride up there and back twice a Sunday was a bit much on a day when I was supposed to rest. We'd been going to Hope [*PRC*] on the Sundays I didn't work. He would go with the boys out of some sense of loyalty up to Lincoln Lake. Finally one Sunday, he said, "This is where we belong." And that's when we came into the PRC. That was in 1970. We were thoroughly convinced and convicted that we no longer belonged in the OPC. It was our introduction to the Reformed faith. It had been preached to us so faithfully that to hear it watered down, we couldn't swallow it.

MHH: I understand. So did you join Hope Church?

VH: Yes, we did.

MHH: Who was the pastor?

VH: When we started going there, Rev. Kortering was the pastor. When the boys were in school, they weren't being catechized because it was too far for the preacher up there [*Lincoln Lake*] to come down for two kids. So I called Rev. Kortering and said, "Can our children go to catechism with the children from Hope School?" He said, "They certainly can." And that very day he took the books over to Jo Dykstra and said, "Give these to Skip and Lynne when they leave school today." He marked in the book what they were supposed to study.

We were slow in getting our papers from the OPC. That was at the time that Hull was calling Rev. Kortering back. One Sunday morning, with tears in his eyes, he said, "I have accepted the call to Hull." He said, "Those people have been without a minister for four years, and my reasons for wanting to stay in this area are personal." His parents were getting older. They were in Holland, and he was close to them. So it was hard for him. And, of course, it was hard for us.

So then we were vacant for the first two years that we first went to Hope. Our first pastor was Rev. VanOverloop.

MHH: And, what can you tell me about your life subsequent to that time?

VH: Oh, we loved going to Hope Church. We looked down on our children in catechism. We stayed in Grand Rapids for twenty years—the longest I ever lived any place in my life, and I thought I was there forever. My husband had his two heart attacks, and he had to retire after the second one. They couldn't do it now, but they were able at that time to put him through the disability business through the Medicare program, so he received what he would have received if he'd been on social security. I kept my job until 1984. We both retired at that point. But they kept calling me back to the nursing home because they needed people to fill in. My husband got tired of that. I came home from work one day, and he said, "We're putting this place up for sale and we're going to buy a trailer and we're going to go to Florida in the winters and just spend our summers up here." He was kind of a "house-husband" at that time, and felt kind of penned in.

So, I was shocked again. But we did. [*Name redacted*] came and he was so angry with us, because he did not believe that people should do that. If you had to stay in the house all winter, you just stayed in the house all winter. It didn't matter whether you got to church or not. You stayed where the church was. But we did it, and we were on our way to Florida. It was also the year of my husband's fiftieth anniversary from graduating from high school. So we went to the West Coast first, and visited in Apple, California at his high school graduation. Then we went on down to Modesto. Rev. [*Steven*] Houck was in Modesto at that time. We stayed there for three weeks in a campground and enjoyed him and his family and their fellowship because, we were at Hope Church when they came to Grand Rapids, and while he was in seminary they were visitors in our home often on Sundays. His children have always called me "Grandma."

Then we went to where Rev. Koole was preaching in Redlands. We were only going to be there over the weekend, but he said, "Oh, just stay a couple more days and we'll take you up the mountain." So we stayed there awhile.

Then we went to Houston, Texas by the next Sunday. It was around Thanksgiving time we got there. So we went down to Corpus Christi and visited there, and came back to Houston and stayed through Thanksgiving. Then we might as well stay for Christmas. We never got to Florida. The next year we went down there [*Houston*] with our papers.

MHH: Because the congregation had organized at that time?

VH: Oh, they were already organized before we got there. Rev. Ron Hanko was preaching there at the time we went there. He had come in August of that year that we went there. Yes, they were organized. That was after Rev. Bekkering had been there, so they had been organized for awhile.

MHH: So you spent your summers here and your winters...

VH: Summers here in Grand Rapids and winters in Texas. When we brought our papers in '87, we went earlier and we stayed later. We would leave late October and then come back early in April. We didn't do that. They were delighted to have us. It's the church I enjoyed the most because we were really needed. We weren't just people filling in a pew. We were really needed in the whole thing.

They were always so happy to see us when we'd come back in the fall. I've just recently gone over the number of people who were our friends when we were there that are gone to heaven now.

MHH: So now you are living part time in Houston and part time in Grand Rapids. What happens next, Mrs. Hunter?

VH: Well, the last time that we went to Texas was the winter of 1996–1997. As we were coming home, my husband said, "I don't think we can do this again." The Interstate highways had become so complicated. You had to be in the right lane at the right time with that big rig. It was getting too hard for him at his age to do that. We had already talked to the people in Texas, and they understood why we would not be back again in the fall of 1997. So that was our last trip to Houston. We had plans to remain in Grand Rapids and during the summertime that we were there we found ourselves not having much contact with either of our two children who lived in that area. Ignacio and Dwight were very busy. Skip said to us at that point, "You might as well come to Doon."

So we thought about it. We didn't know where we were going to live. And there was two sets of fourplexes in Doon up the street from where Barb and Skip lived. I tried to contact the manager, and I didn't get any answer for about a week. We were planning to go back to Grand Rapids. I was fixing lunch and decided all of a sudden to call Henry Tenbrock one more time. When he answered the phone, I said, "How do I get my name on the list to rent one of the apartments?" He said, "I have one vacant now, and you may have it. Come over in about two hours and I'll give you the key." We just felt that God's providence was speaking to us again. So we made a complete move from Grand Rapids to Doon, Iowa.

I thought, now I've moved for the last time in my life. We were in Doon for almost eleven years, and Skip informed us that there was an occasion for him to change jobs. He said, "Will you move?" By then I had lost my husband. He had died in December of 2005, and this was in the spring of 2008. I said, "Yes, I'll move." The opportunity was in Edgerton, Minnesota. The school board gave him a contract, so in the summer of 2008 we came to Edgerton. We found the preaching as orthodox in Edgerton as we had found it in Grand Rapids, in Texas, and all the places in between that we had gone. The people here have been gracious to us, friendly to us, helpful to us in every way possible. I'm content with God's obvious bringing us to this place.

MHH: That's quite a story! Your commitment to the church certainly shines through all of the comments that you have made. You have certainly lived a very interesting life, and I thank you

for sharing that with us. Before I leave you, I would like to ask one last question. Are there any issues that you would like to address or any opinions that you would like to give?

VH: I certainly have no complaints about the way we have been treated in any of the Protestant Reformed Churches that we have attended, either as a visitor or as a member. When I think about the fact that the relatively short time that we have belonged to the Protestant Reformed Churches, we've probably been members of more churches than people who grew up in the PRC (laughter). Of course, you don't always like everything you hear. You don't always like all of the people that you meet. But I would not have anything adverse to say. We have been treated well in all the congregations that we belonged to. For many years our summers when we were in Grand Rapids, we went to First Church. The people always welcomed us and treated us just as if we were members there. I can truthfully say that our membership in Houston was the one that made me feel the most used in God's kingdom, because the congregation being so small, there were many things for everybody to do.

One thing I forgot. If anybody ever questions the sovereignty of providence, I have only to tell them about my life—the places God has taken me, the people he has placed in the places where I was which have brought me to this point in my life—I've been totally controlled by my heavenly Father. And to him I give the thanks and the glory.

MHH: That's a wonderful note on which to end. Thank you, Mrs. Hunter, for sharing your life story with us. We wish you God's blessing.

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