

Jerrold H. Mulder  
160 Henry Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

March 2013

### **My Life with My Michigan Ancestors**

Dear Todd, Brad, and Steve, and Madeline, Michael, and Nicholas:

During World War II, while my father was serving as a US Army Chaplain, I lived, with my mother and my brothers John and Jim, with my Michigan relatives. I was seven years old at the beginning of this period, which lasted from July 1942 through February 1946. We lived in Coopersville, Michigan in my (maternal) Grandfather's home, surrounded by many of my aunts and uncles, and we often visited my father's relatives, about 20 miles away in Zeeland, Michigan.

You never met any of these people, or even heard much about them from me. Their collective influence on my formative years was substantial and I want to share that with you. One reason their influence was so great was the *total separation* people experienced in those days when one went off to war. For over three years, none of us saw, or even *spoke* to, my father. Except for regular micro-photographed *V-mail* (Victory Mail) letters to my mother (which often came in bunches) and occasional post cards and birthday cards to us, Dad simply disappeared from our lives.

Despite the loneliness, I am highly thankful for those years and for their effect on me. But I am also eternally grateful that Dad and Mother moved us back to the East Coast after the war -- Dad turned down a "call" to a large church in Detroit in favor of a failing church in Ridgewood, New Jersey. New York City's population contains a very high percentage of people who have come from "somewhere else" and I am happy to have been one of them.

## **My Parents: Johan H Mulder and Josephine Hildred terAvest Mulder:**

My father and mother were the children of Dutch immigrants who had settled in western Michigan: Dad grew up on a farm in Zeeland (near Holland) and Mother about 20 miles away in Coopersville, a village near Grand Rapids. On my father's side, the Dutch ancestors are traced back to Bourke Mulder (*a*) who emigrated at age 8, in 1855, arriving in Zeeland by ox cart. Dad was born in 1907, one of six children, some of whom were half-brothers/sisters, as his father's first wife died at an early age.

My mother's father was descended from French-Huguenots (*b*). He always told us about growing up in "the old country" and of his arrival in the US at age four. The reality was that the terAvests --his parents (*c*) and their siblings -- arrived in the US in 1869, well before grandpa's birth in 1876. They were well-to-do Netherlands farmer-landowners clearly looking for expansion space for their large family. Mother was born in 1908, one of seven children, six of whom survived childhood.

My father, following in the footsteps of his older half-brother Bernie, graduated from Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, both in nearby Holland. Western Theological was operated by the Reformed Church in America (*d*). His first church (1932) was in rural upstate New York, in an area called Tyre (*e*), an apple growing region. In 1937 he moved us to Interlaken, NY, (between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, northwest of Ithaca), to become pastor of the Interlaken Reformed Church; I was two years old. In early 1942, he enlisted right after Pearl Harbor as a Chaplain in the US Army, taking a leave of absence from his Interlaken church. Perhaps my most searing childhood memory is that of learning in early 1942 that Dad would soon be leaving home for an extended period.

Mother grew up in Coopersville, graduated from Coopersville High School, and all her life regretted that she did not have a college degree, although this was common for girls in that period. She married Dad in 1932, after jilting her local suitor, Herman Laug, a Michigan University graduate, whose family owned the local feed mill. None of this went over very well in Coopersville, but mother clearly wanted to "get out," and

was not willing to follow the example of her two older siblings, who lived their entire lives in Coopersville.

### **Fort Totten, Queens, New York:**

In the spring of 1942, we moved to live with Dad for a month in the Officers' Quarters at Fort Totten, Queens, a lovely Civil War-era fort. Looking out on the water, we could see Navy planes flying across the bay; today one looks out at the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. My memoirs of that short period include seeing the French luxury liner Normandie lying on its side at a pier along the West Side Highway (*f*), seeing the partly torn down 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue EL (apparently much of the scrap steel was sold to our enemy Japan), and of riding with my father in the back of an open Jeep on the newly-built Long Island Expressway from Fort Totten to Floyd Bennett Field, where he conducted services.

Dad might have sailed on the Normandie but instead, in May 1942, sailed on the converted Queen Mary along with 15,000 other troops (*g*), for Great Britain. He participated in the November 1942 invasion of North Africa, and later landed and served in Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany. He sailed home on the Queen Elizabeth and arrived in Coopersville, Michigan in late 1945.

Meanwhile, Mother and John, Jim, and I went back to Interlaken, packed up our belongings and took a very long train trip to Michigan, to live in Grandpa terAvest's home.

### **Living in Coopersville, Michigan:**

Grandpa terAvest had a large home in a prime location in Coopersville. It faced a perpendicular street that crossed the Railroad tracks and led to Main Street, one block away. The RR served the coal yard which we faced to the left of the house, and the Air Control Products factory, to the right. Air Control was making parts for B24 Bombers. We would hear the plant's massive metal presses slam down every minute or so, 24 hours a day. Around noon every week-day the Grand Trunk Western's small steam engine would show up, deliver some freight cars, do some switching, and haul others away. I know it sounds noisy and dirty - and it was - but we considered it great entertainment.

Coopersville, population 1,083 in 1940, had a Main Street with stores, a gas station (my Uncle Mel's), a Fire House, feed mill, and Friday night farm animal auction, a small movie theater, its own school system, and several churches.

Grandpa's house was clapboard, with a front porch, a large lawn, and an unattached garage. It also had a very large garden, which we all tended as a "Victory Garden" and which, in fact, served as an important source of food year-round. *(A more complete description of Grandpa's house is contained in Footnote [h]).*

Much of life in Coopersville revolved around the Reformed Church. I can't really recall missing a church service. We went to Sunday School, Sunday morning services, Catechism classes (where we had to memorize the answers to questions about Biblical truths), and some kind of summer "vacation" school which also involved Bible study. The Reverend Gary Roozeboom held forth on Sunday morning with long prayers and even longer sermons and was not averse to stopping in mid-sentence to admonish the teen-age boys in the gallery to stop talking and pay attention to what he was saying (i).

For regular school we walked about a half mile to the building that included all grades, came home for lunch (actually dinner), and then went back again. I remember having a big crush on my second grade teacher – the blonde Miss Fuller. One winter day we decided to take a detour on the way back from lunch and I fell into an icy creek; Miss Fuller put me in the cloak room, pulled off my clothes, put them on the radiator and sat me next to it; by dismissal time, everything was dry and we went home, committed to keeping this a secret from you-know-who. But the wonderful Miss Fuller called to see how I was after my ordeal; it was hard to forgive her for that.

We would take change into school to buy war stamps and fill in these books to reach a given amount. And, we did get a good grounding in the basics of math, spelling, and reading. In the summer we played almost entirely with our cousins. Moving from one house to another, war games were an important part of our play. We also helped in Grandpa's garden.

Both John and I were exposed to piano lessons, which were aimed at teaching us to play hymns. But neither the spirit nor talent was present. When it finally ended, I could find Middle C on the piano, but little more.

We also helped Grandma and Mother a great deal in the kitchen. Since butter (and meat, sugar, etc.) was rationed, we ate margarine; it came white in a plastic bag, containing a yellow color capsule, and I was the designated “kneader” to turn the margarine from white to yellow. To save metal we removed the bottoms of cans, flatten them and turned them in for reuse. I also learned to darn socks and help patch dungarees because everything was in such short supply. We were allowed one new pair of shoes a year, and one time Mother bought shoes so big for me that she had to take them back and, surprisingly, the store exchanged them.

There was a massive canning effort – jams, jellies, (we hoarded our sugar supplies), peaches, plums, green beans, and mincemeat for pies. Another major project was Christmas boxes for four service people. The military allowed only one standard sized *small* box so, beginning in October, literally dozens of boxes were packed and sent off; Mother would generally wrap the presents and Grandma was the expert at tying string in strong knots around the boxes.

We would sometimes listen to the evening news by Gabriel Heatter, who had a distinctive and dramatic voice. I remember one period in particular – I later realized it was the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 – when we lay in our pajamas on the living room furnace grate and hearing that “American forces were pushed back another 20 miles . . . “. It was very scary and I thought we were losing the war.

Despite gas rationing, we were occasionally driven (Mother never drove in her life) to Zeeland to visit Aunt Agnes, my father’s sister. “Uncle” Nick, who was a near-by Zeeland farmer, and who was dating Aunt Agnes, would often be there. The two couldn’t get married because 1) Agnes was living with and caring for mother Mulder, who spoke only Dutch and suffered from Parkinson’s disease; and 2) more important, Nick was living in the family homestead with his mother, who refused to allow him to add an indoor bathroom to the house. That was too much for Agnes. It wasn’t until many years later when the old lady died, that he added an indoor bathroom, and they finally got married.

When we visited Zeeland, my father’s siblings -- Aunt Jenny and her husband Gerritt (who ran the chicken hatchery in town), Aunt Alyda and her husband Harry, and Uncle

Albertus (who worked for Mead Johnson making infant formula) and his wife Ann, and all their children would gather. Dad's older half-brother, Uncle Bernie, was a Reformed Church Board Secretary living in New York. Dad had another half-brother – who we never met – living in Arizona.

We would also visit, in Holland, the Reverend Lester Kuyper and his family. He was a seminary classmate of dad's and had been dad's best man at his wedding. The Kuypers had a son and daughter about John's and my age. (j)

Despite the war and separation, living in Coopersville was for me a mostly positive experience. But it wasn't all joy: at one point I developed a nervous tick of rolling my eyes, and towards the end I developed Type I diabetes, although it wasn't diagnosed until several months later in New Jersey. On the plus side, Grandpa terAvest was the leading figure in the community and his house was a social center, with each of mother's siblings dropping in every day, and others often dropping in for coffee and cake (no prior arrangements needed). A major benefit to me for me was living with, and interacting with both strong male and loving female figures.

### **My Favorite Michigan Ancestors**

*Please refer to the enclosed picture, which shows the entire Coopersville brood in December 1945 (with identifications on the back) in Grandpa's living room. It includes four family members recently returned from World War II Service.*

*In the following section I have written about those Michigan relatives who most influenced my life: Grandpa and Grandma terAvest and my Uncle Mel and Aunt Charolte.*

### **John H terAvest – my grandfather, Todd, Brad and Steve's Great Grandfather, and Madeline, Michael, and Nicholas' Great-Great Grandfather:**

Grandpa terAvest was the most interesting of the Coopersville relatives. He was born in 1876 – so was in his mid-60s when we lived there -- was a graduate of Hope

College, and had an Advanced Degree (in Shakespeare) from the University of Michigan dated 1899. He started a Bank in Coopersville and managed to lose the family fortune in the 1920s. Mother always believed that he embezzled from the bank, but it seems much more likely that he made bad real estate loans. There was, in fact, a national real estate bubble that burst around 1926, with a particular focus on family farms suffering from the post WW I collapse in agricultural prices. I remember that on the outskirts of Grand Rapids there were empty fields with brick pillars that designated where suburban developments were planned.

Whatever happened, the bank's accounts came up short, and Mother and her sister Helene never quite forgave their father for their having to go to work at Lillie's, the local dry goods store, and having to turn their earnings directly over to him to pay off his creditors.

None of this tarnished Grandpa. He was elected Coopersville Post Master in 1924, an important position in those days, a post he kept getting re-elected to until 1936 (the second longest tenure in Coopersville history, going back to the 1870s), when he was elected a Supervisor of Polkton Township. I have no idea whether the Polkton Supervisors ever did anything, but they would regularly go off for day long conferences and he would come back full of stories. I hope the Supervisors did something useful and that he was paid for it, because this was his only possible source of livelihood when we lived with him - although I'm sure Mother paid him something for our room and board. .

Grandpa was also the President of the Coopersville School Board. But his most important post was that of Senior Elder of the Coopersville Reformed Church, by far the most important institution in the village. This Church - and the community - had extremely conservative social mores: no drinking, no dancing, no movies, no card games, no Sunday papers, and no listening to Detroit Tigers' ball games on Sunday. Nevertheless, Grandpa would regularly take the bus to Grand Rapids to see the latest movies, would let us read the Sunday papers, and let us listen to Sunday ball games (the Tigers won the pennant and World Series in 1945).

Grandpa was very well read and was gregarious - he would always come back from his movie trips to tell us of a young soldier or sailor he met on the bus. He was also very

competitive --when he and mother played card games (they played a game called Rook which, for some reason I never understood, was not sinful), the game would often end when one of them would slam down their cards and stomp out of the room. As I realized later in life, the various leadership positions he attained clearly had to be driven by competitiveness.

Like most western Michiganders, Grandpa was a staunch Republican, who would disparagingly refer to President Roosevelt as "*that man in the White House.*"

Grandpa was clearly the man of the house; his authority was established and acknowledged long before we arrived and I never heard him raise his voice. Grandma was no pushover, but she quietly went about her business of seeing that everything functioned. We held Grandpa in certain awe, but he never really made a great attempt to get to know us - he could never remember what school grade we were in, and he never taught us how we should behave, and NEVER disciplined us - mother had that task completely in hand.

Still, your Uncle Jim, who was only 3 or 4 in those days remembers sitting on Grandpa's lap, while he would read Dickens with tears streaming down his face. When Grandpa turned 69 - late 1un the war - he was convinced that he would die in that year because both his father and grandfather had. But he died at age 76 in his sleep one night in December 1953 - when I was a freshman at Princeton.

#### **Henrietta Luben terAvest:**

We all loved Grandma terAvest, who was self-effacing, hardworking, and kindly and warm. She had a wonderful smile and a good sense of humor that she displayed often, especially when kidded by her son Mel. She was a slender woman who ran the household with efficiency; she was strong both emotionally and physically - she lived well into her 90s. Grandma made it clear to all her grandchildren that she loved and cared about us - one way she showed this was whenever John or I were spanked and made to stand in a corner, she would sidle up and slip us a couple of freshly baked cookies to ease our pain.

Grandma had a couple of minor failings. One was that every day when she was cooking dinner (held at noon) she would have to send either John or me to Main Street for the

one grocery item she forgot. I was too young to appreciate the other fault, but learned it later: she not only made the weakest coffee in the world (looked like dishwater) and she would drink it cold during the day. Your Uncle Jim still does the latter and it makes me shiver to think about it.

My regret is that we never really saw much of Grandma after the war – there were regular family trips to Coopersville in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but really nothing after that. She was a wonderful woman and I am thankful that I lived in her home for a time.

**Melvin terAvest – my Uncle Mel.** Everybody loved Mel. He was physically robust, charismatic, and fun to be around. Mel had lost a kidney in as a young man when a garage collapsed on him in a storm, so he couldn't go to war; nevertheless, he lived a long and healthy life. He owned the local gas/car repair station on Main Street, and was very active in the local volunteer fire department (there were no fire hydrants in town so a water tank truck was a crucial part of their equipment). He was later elected Mayor of Coopersville, and I have a local paper article showing him making the town's first automated long distance call (in the 1960s) to his brother Paul in California. Uncle Mel would show up every day around noon, bringing the mail, trailed by his faithful Cocker Spaniel, Spiffy. He brought cheer and we loved him because he got such a delight out of "needling" Grandma and mother. More important, we were often aware that he was our defender against excessive restrictions and discipline. He was a surrogate father, taking us places and letting us hang out at his gas station.

Mel lived his whole life in Coopersville with his wife Billie, who was a jolly and friendly person. It is a shame that they never had children, but I am thankful that they devoted their parenting skills to their nieces and nephews, especially the three Mulder boys.

**Charlotte terAvest Saenger – my Aunt Charlotte.** She was the female version of Uncle Mel – fun and full of life. She was living at home when we arrived in June

1942, working in the County Clerk's office in Grand Haven, but she soon – defying her father – went to Grand Rapids one day and enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WACs). She eventually was sent to the European theater where she met and – again defying her father – married Robert Saenger in Wiesbaden, Germany. He was a highly educated man, but had the nearly-fatal flaw of being *Catholic*. The Coopersville relatives swung between shock of Charlotte marrying an “outsider” and their fear that they would not measure up to this European-educated man's manners and education.

Much of my knowledge of Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Bob came in the early post war years, when they moved to Flushing, Queens, where he had grown up, and his mother, brother, and sister still lived. He joined the family perfume-importing business. In those years, there would be regular visits between Queens and Ridgewood, N J. Aunt Charlotte and mother would laugh and carry on like a couple of school girls and the rest of us would enjoy the fun. Uncle Bob turned out to be a regular guy. He once drove to Ridgewood in his pre-war Cord, which was clearly the coolest car we had ever seen – among other things, it had hooded headlights. Later they moved back to Coopersville but would visit our area each year. Uncle Bob's mother would send Aunt Charlotte to Saks for the annual outfitting of the kids – there were eventually four boys – and would invite them to spend a few weeks at her summer home in exclusive Elka Park in the Catskills. We made a couple of day visits to Elka Park to see everyone.

**Uncle Bob was** story in himself. His family – German Swiss – had a successful perfume importing business in Manhattan (*k*). Bob had enlisted in the Canadian Air Force – I think because he felt the German heritage wouldn't be welcomed in the US forces. As noted, after the war, they moved back to Queens and Bob joined his family's business; but he couldn't take the commute and the business life, so he and Aunt Charlotte and kids moved back to Coopersville, bought a house and a partnership in Uncle Mel's gas station, and started pumping gas and fixing cars. Eventually they moved to Asheville, NC, where, among other things, he sold steel buildings to businesses. Both he and Aunt Charlotte became alcoholics – which was much on display when they visited my bother Jim in Germany, where they re-visited Wiesbaden, where they had been married.

Uncle Bob died before Charlotte, who wound up in a nursing home. She – perhaps unknowingly – played a role in my life in 1996, when I was applying for my 50 Year Medal from the Joslin Diabetes Center. I needed to submit evidence from two sources that I began taking insulin in 1946. Mother’s diary was one, and Aunt Charlotte the other. Although she was described as “pretty out of it,” I wrote a letter from her attesting to the fact that in 1946 she and Uncle Bob had driven Mother, Jim and me from Coopersville to my first view of Ridgewood. During that trip I was experiencing the extreme symptoms of out-of-control diabetes, although no one recognized it at the time; within weeks of arriving in Ridgewood, I was rushed to the hospital, diagnosed, and began taking insulin. Charlotte’s son George had her sign it.

So that is the story of my life with the Michigan relatives, of Coopersville and how it affected me. I hope you found it interesting and informative.

With Love and Affection to My Sons and Grandchildren,

Jerrold H. Mulder

*Footnotes: My Life With My Michigan Ancestors, by Jerrold H. Mulder*

- a. Bourke Mulder died at age 89 in 1935 and according to his obituary, he set up his own farm in Zeeland at age 22 (1868) based on his own \$2 of capital, which was doubled by his wife's. His wife, Jennke Snitzeler, was the first "white girl" born in Grand Haven, MI; together they had 15 children, 10 of whom survived (6 sons and 4 daughters). She died in 1916.*
- b. The Huguenots were French Protestants, followers of John Calvin beginning in 1530, who were widely persecuted by the French state religion, Catholicism. By 1700 some 500,000 Huguenots had fled to Protestant countries all over the world, including the neighboring Dutch Republic.*
- c. Grandpa terAvest's father was Jan Willem terAvest and his mother was Hendrika Johanna (Hanna) Michmershuizen terAvest. Enclosed is a picture of the Immigrant Generation, including Hanna terAvest, but not Jan Willem.*
- d. The Reformed Church in America was Dutch in origin, founded on the austere principles of John Calvin. It was in the US at the very beginning, in 1609 when the Dutch East Indies Company first settled New Amsterdam, and it still has strong outposts up the Hudson River Valley, in parts of New Jersey, and mostly among the Dutch in western Michigan and in Iowa. Hope College and Western Theological Seminary were, and are, organs of the Reformed Church, as is Central College in Iowa.*
- e. Tyre is located in the Finger Lakes Region, at the northern end of Lake Seneca. The area was originally settled by Revolutionary War veterans, who received land grants. It is located on the Erie Canal (and the current NY State Thruway), and contains the Montezuma Marshes National Wildlife Preserve, as well as an aqueduct remaining from the Canal. Since I left there at age 2, Tyre has been, to me, nothing more than a dot on the map. But, it turns out that Leslie knows it better than I: she remembers, as a young actress promoting the upstate NY dominant Genesee Beer, riding through Tyre in a coach pulled by four Lipizzaner horses, waving to the cheering populace.*
- f. The French liner Normandie was impounded in NY harbor after its inaugural sailing at the start of World War II. It was stripped of all its beautiful interiors and was*

*being converted into a troop ship when it caught fire and capsized at its pier. It never sailed again, going to the scrapyard after the war. There are some beautiful fittings from the Normandie at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and on the Armenian Cathedral in Brooklyn Heights (corner of Henry and Remsen Streets); the beautiful brass doors are from the Normandie.*

- g. Unlike the slow moving (6 knot) freight convoys, which suffered heavy losses to the Germany submarine "Wolf Packs" in the early years of the war, despite destroyer and land-based aircraft protection, the converted fast passenger liners sailed unprotected on the theory that they could out-run the submarines; fortunately the theory worked throughout the war. To put 15,000 troops on one liner meant stacking bunks everywhere, including in the swimming pools; moreover, the typical soldier got to occupy "his" bunk for only 12 of the 24 hours; much of the other 12 hours were spent standing in line for the two meals served each day. Even the officers had it relatively rough: Dad shared a "hot bunk" in one cabin with 17 other officers; he was lucky, however, to have the bunk near an air shaft in the non-air conditioned ship in the middle of summer. One other interesting note: the ship was so heavily loaded that, upon leaving from the West Side Hudson Pier, everyone on board had to stand rigidly still while passing over the Lincoln and Holland tunnels, to avoid scraping the river bottom.*
- h. Grandpa's house contained a living room, with a bedroom on one side, a parlor with another bedroom on its side, a full dining room and kitchen and the bathroom. Upstairs there was a large open space at the top of the stairs as well as two bedrooms, where we slept. The house also had a full basement where there was a coal furnace, a washing machine, and a cold storage room. It scared me to death when I was sent down to retrieve potatoes or carrots we had grown and stored in crates, or some of the canned fruits and vegetables stored there. The house was almost totally un-insulated and had one heating source - a large furnace grate between the living room and the parlor. In winter Grandpa closed off the dining room, which included the stairway to our sleeping quarters, so we would rush to the unheated upstairs and jump into bed before freezing; fortunately there was a toilet (but no sink) upstairs. In summer, as in winter, mother insisted that we go to bed at 7:30, (supper was at 5:30) and we were forced to watch our friends still playing outside. We hated that. The home had a telephone, but it was a 4 party*

*line, so it wasn't used that frequently – someone could be listening in. Mother claimed that the operator gave a special long ring when the call was Long Distance.*

- i. Reverend Rozeboom had three young daughters. One of them, Louella, married a minister named Eddie Mulder (no relation) who in the 1990s was serving as an Assistant at Marble Collegiate Church on lower 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I called them and Leslie and I took them out to dinner, and were invited back to their apartment for dessert, but we never heard from them again.*
- j. Son Bill Kuyper eventually became the timpanist for the New York Philharmonic. In the 1990s, when I learned of this, I contacted him through Todd, who was working then at Lincoln Center. Leslie and I had dinner with them but we never heard from them again, either.*
- k. the 1950s, after Uncle Bob left the business, his brother Werner joined with movie producer Mike Todd (married to the famous actress Elizabeth Taylor) to create “smellies,” movies in which smells would be injected into the theater at the appropriate time to enhance the mood. Not surprisingly, it proved a total failure.*