

The Hunger Winter in Holland, 1945

Pieter and Anne Wyminga, former proprietors of Pieter's Appleyard in Colborne, retired six years ago, settling in a new Cramahe Township home. This past summer, the Wymingas moved to be closer to family near Toronto.

The following is excerpted from Pieter Wyminga's memoir, *The Path Around our House*, his account of growing up in Holland.

Here, in 1945, the Wyminga family faces their most difficult winter.



Hunger left people listless and cold.



The interior of a kitchen, stripped of almost all wood because it was burned for heat.

By Pieter Wyminga

In January, February and March of 1945, the hunger suffered by the Dutch was at its very height. The period was later referred to as "The Hunger Winter".

Vader (Father) and Moeder (Mother) met with friends to discuss the alarming condition of a family they all knew very well, Mr. and Mrs. Overduyn. They had two young children, a girl and a boy, and relied solely on the central kitchen for their daily food intake.

The food served by the kitchen had deteriorated lately. It seemed that daily more water was being added to the already thin, watery soup.

The Overduyn family were spending the greater part of the day trying to keep warm and not burn excessive energy. Their friends offered to divide the Overduyn family amongst themselves.

Moeder and Vader took in Mr. Overduyn, another family took in Mrs. Overduyn and a third took in the children.

We had started to rely on the central kitchen as well but, luckily, still had some potatoes left. The tins of butter which Moeder had bought at the very beginning of the war had long ago been con-



In the streets of Amsterdam, the impacts of food and clothing shortages are clearly seen in this young boy heading out in search of food.

sumed. Our ration cards gave each of us two slices of bread a day.

We still had wood stored in the garage which needed splitting before we could use it to heat the one room we lived in. Mr. Overduyn was to help me cut the wood. But the poor man was as thin as a rail and had no strength left to raise the axe high enough to bring it down with any force.

He also told us that every bite of bread needed to be chewed 34 times in order to get the most nutrition from it. It drove me crazy to see him chew. I was so hungry, my two slices of bread were long gone when he still had most of his bread left, at least so it seemed.

One day after my breakfast, it must have been in February or March, my hunger was almost unbearable. I started to cry as I walked through the kitchen on my way to the garage. I hoped no one had noticed me.

I was trying to split a large piece of wood but my tears prevented me from seeing the crack left from my earlier hit. Moeder must have seen me heading for the garage and decided to follow me.

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The challenges of finding adequate clothing to keep warm, and food to live, many could not sustain in Holland's Hunger Winter of 1945.

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