

Harold Bergey 2022 03 28

Harold: It's fascinating, some of the people that were, you know, not members of the church, but certainly impacted by the Mennonite community.

Alan: And part of the community overall.

Betty Vanderploeg is one of those persons. I'm thrilled to see her at Mount Pleasant, but she was, most of her adult life, she was a member at Centerville Baptist.

Alan: There's an attorney, Donna Swain. I didn't make the connection until about a month ago. She was a former attorney, now she's retired and does real estate, She and I and her husband are the only board members on a condominium in the western part of Chesapeake. And she's quite a talker. And I made the connection somehow and asked her, and I got two hours of Swain history.

Harold: Did you say Donna Swain? Now, there's another Donna Swain who is a niece of Betty.

Alan: Yeah, that's her.

Harold: That's her? I guess we're talking about the same person?

Alan: Speed Swain's daughter?

Harold: Yeah, Yeah, Well, she was my biology student many, many years ago. I mean, we don't see each other too often, but just appreciation for each other. And she's married to Dudley?... who has a mechanical shop.

Alan: He's retired now, and mainly does... fixes up houses and does a little repair work with her. Yeah, yeah. Nice fellow.

Harold: My next-door neighbor, Scott Chester.

Alan: Oh, right in the corner there.

Harold: Right, right.... worked for him for years. Connections. But anyway, you were just saying that Donna talked your ear off?

Alan: Oh, she always does. Whenever the phone rings I know this is going to be a half hour. In fact, I always answer the phone to her. Okay, Donna, Who are we gonna shoot today?

Harold: Bless her heart. Yeah, I think a lot of her. When Bobby Vanderploeg was very ill and not far from death, I had visited a couple of times, and I would bump into these nieces. See, she has a sister who lives down on Long Ridge. Her name's not coming to me right. Connie. But we better talk about whatever it is you'd like to talk about.

Alan: Well, about you and your perspectives and experiences. Were your folks living in the house you grew up in when you were born, or were they living somewhere else?

Harold: No. Shirley Buckwalker was my first neighbor. I was born, and until I was four years old, lived back on Wenger Road on the old Grandpa Clayton house. You remember that house for sure.

Alan: I do. We had Sunday dinner there once when I was a little kid.

Harold: Yeah, I guess I was probably, I don't know, I was something like four or maybe five, four to five, when we moved to the newly built house over here.

Alan: How old were you when you had to start taking part in the farm chores and milking cows?

Harold: Oh, man, that's a... at six years old, I would help with the milking. I think my job was to wash the udders and, you know, prep the cows for having the milking machine put on. At eight years old, I was put on the Ford tractor with the bush hog mower to mow pasture. Never my children or grandchildren do that, but that, you know, thank God I'm still here, and so on.

Alan: Did you have any close calls?

Harold: Well, not in regards to that. In my youth, I had a number of farm-related accidents that, you know, were mostly my fault, my carelessness or inexperience, but so would you remember when a bush hog mower fell on me?

Alan: What happened?

Harold: So it happened right out here in what, you know, was Grandpa's yard. This is a heavy bush hog mower.

Alan: That kind of mounts on the back of the tractor?

Harold: Yeah, it wasn't three-point hitch. It was a pull behind and had the ratchet-type jack.

Alan: Okay.

Harold: As you raised the thing, the threaded bars of the ratchet jack would continue to extend, and none of us realized that, then, but, you know, there's a point where they end, in which case the mower falls. So Amos Lehman was standing on top of the mower jacking it up, and I foolishly went underneath. The intention was to sharpen the blades, take the blades off and sharpen them. Well, we were both foolish in that there's actually a little port. You're supposed to be able to avoid that by putting the port open and undoing the bolts that held the blades in place. When that is done, all one would have to do is just reach under the mower and pull the blade out and do the sharpening and then fasten

it back in. So I had no business being under there. It caught me right here.

Alan: Across your back?

Harold: Yeah. And I fortunately didn't do anything to my spinal cord, but I did crack two vertebrae just slightly, you know, kidney damage, temporary kidney damage, thank God, and was in the hospital 11 days. Of course, that was back in...

Alan: How old were you?

Harold: I was 15.

Alan: Invulnerable.

Harold: Yeah. As I saw it then, sort of the worst result was that I couldn't play softball the rest of that year. But, I mean, as I look on it now, and honestly it was just that far away from death. I mean, if it had been another part of my body, it could easily have resulted in my death. But that was the worst one. There were some others too.

My brother Leonard, when he was real little, was driving the tractor and wagon to pick up wheat straw. And I, again foolishly, tried to get on the wagon while it was moving, slowly. And I fell and fell in front of the wagon and Leonard wasn't able to reach the clutch really. So, the wagon ran over me.

How many more stories do you...? Yeah, and there were a couple of others that were more minor than those two.

Alan: Who was your first teacher at Mount Pleasant when you started school there? Was that Lenora Wenger?

Harold: Yeah. Yeah.

Alan: And there were still... was it three rooms or two rooms when you started?

Harold: When I started there were only two rooms. Now, I'm trying to think, you know, there was definitely, by the time I got to the 7th grade, and I believe Dale [Keffer] and Preston [Wenger] and some of those guys would have been in the 10th grade, but we were clearly in the upper school room at that point, the third room, which I'd help whitewash the walls or something like that, you know, with my dad or with my grandpa.

Both Alene [Smucker] and Leona Krupp had both successively come to Mount Pleasant. So they were, each of them I think were my teachers for a year maybe. My first teacher was Mrs. Wenger.

Alan: Anything particularly you remember about her?

Harold: I do. I think I wrote a little tribute to be read at her funeral because it turned

out I had to be out of town for something. To summarize that little piece I wrote, it's just that I way underestimated the contribution she made to my life.

You know, I'll always wish that I had expressed my gratitude more. Granted, she had her quirks and all of that. Did you ever hear that she didn't think other books should be placed on top of the Bible?

Alan: Yes.

Harold: Okay.

Alan: I've heard Bro. Wenger say that too.

Harold: Okay. Well, maybe I shouldn't even call that a quirk, but I don't recall ever hearing that from anyone else.

Alan: I'd still feel guilty if I did.

Harold: Okay. But in terms of English and literature, she got me in a position where I thrived with those classes then at Great Bridge [High School]. Mrs. Gandel and Mr. Halterman. Do you remember him by any chance?

Alan: Both of them.

Harold: Okay. Okay. So you...all right. Lanier Halterman, bless his heart, he only died about, what, a year ago or something?

Alan: It's been recently, yeah.

Harold: But do you know he sent me a card and condolences when Rose died?

Alan: Really?

Harold: And came to see me when my mom died. At that point, he wasn't able to drive, but his wife drove him and just, we had a nice...So anyway, I always felt very blessed that somehow he followed me.

But my ability to, you know, confidently interact with literature and with Mrs. Gandel in writing was really due to Lenora Wenger's teaching.

Alan: Was she still having the one hymn a week or maybe it was one hymn a month? I think it was one hymn a week. When you went there? when I was there, she would introduce a new hymn every week, tell us the story behind the hymn, and we sang that one song every morning for a week.

Harold: Really? I don't remember that.

Alan: I thought I was the only one who remembered it, and I ran into Sidney Wenger... must have been a couple years ago. And some song came on, and he said, that's a Mrs. Wenger song. So I remember those hymns.

Harold: Interesting. I think your sister Nedy, I think, kind of picked that up. Hasn't she been known for giving the history behind the song? [when she led singing at church]

Alan: How about Bro. Wenger Any particular memories of him?

Harold: Yeah. Same thing, I would say. I was kind of a jerk, and he was really straightforward with me. I know he chatted me once, maybe more than once, but at least once, for kind of using the verbal politeness, yes sir, yes sir, but he said he'd much rather see action than for me to keep using those nice words. Once... some misbehavior that I was into, and he was reprimanding me, and I said, well, I'm trying. And he said "Well, trying's not enough." So I guess that's how bad I was.

Alan: When you talk about the literature, I just finished a book called "A.D. and Annie" that the family put together, and I just finished reading it, and apparently he and Lenora had little games they played between themselves all their lives regarding literature, knowledge of, and language, and punctuation, and the proper use of words, and so forth, and it was like a game they played to try to outdo each other.

Harold: That is fascinating. Well, that would figure into what I just told you about. I mean, I know I wasn't the only one. You were probably on the same boat, but I had the sense when I got to Great Bridge High School, you know, I wasn't coming out of some second-rate preparatory education.

Alan: No, and in fact that people who came from that school in my time had an easy time over at Great Bridge.

Harold: Right. I would probably say the same. I mean, Joan Miller Steininger was a valedictorian of my [college] class.

Alan: Where did you go to college after you graduated?

Harold: EMC.

Alan: Is that where you met Rose?

Harold: That is where I met Rose, right.

Alan: How'd ya'll meet?

Harold: Well, she came a year after me, so by the time of my sophomore year, when I first met Rose, I had become involved somewhat with the, what was that, YPCA, Young People's....well, anyway, the sort of the spiritual... clubs, not the word, organization that encouraged connection with ministry, whether that was community, young people's, it would almost be like a community ministry to the youth of the area, that kind of thing, or in some cases help with some of the smaller churches. Anyway, so I was involved with that, and I remember in fall of 1970, as the freshman class, which Rose was part of,

closed in, I was somewhat involved with inviting new freshmen to join the, I think it's YPCA, so I hit on Rose. But the other thing was my farm habits, you know, I was accustomed to eating breakfast.

Probably 90% of my peers in college did not eat breakfast, and Rose had a work study job, she was a breakfast cook. She was a good cook in our married life, but I know she probably wasn't the greatest cook in the cafeteria So we'd see each other at breakfast, too. There you go. And there's lots more I could tell.

Alan: And it just evolved from that.

Harold: Yeah, yeah. And then there was a breakup. I came home for a year. I decided when I did go back, there were a couple of reasons, but one of the primary ones was I decided I liked her better than I thought earlier.

Alan: Did you all get married while you were still in school, or after you graduated?

Harold: Just after Rose graduated. Let's say she graduated in whatever it was, May of 1974, and we were married in August of 74.

Alan: Did you move back here then?

Harold: So we continued to live a year in Harrisonburg, where I still had a part-time job, still had a class or two to finish. Then we moved down here in 1976.

Alan: Where did you live?

Harold: Francis and Edna's,[Miller] initially. That little trailer. There was a trailer and then later Velma built a house there. Was that Rodney's trailer, maybe?

Alan: I don't know how that came about, because they had a little daughty house for...

Harold: Yeah for my grandmother Troyer [mother of Edna Miller and Mary Bergey]

Alan: Some of the teachers had lived there when I taught at Mount Pleasant, from time to time. Ruth Kurtz.

Harold: Oh, really?

Alan: The trailer was after my time. I don't remember, don't know if I ever knew why or how the trailer got there.

Harold: We felt warmly welcomed. Uncle Francis showed his softer side, too.

Alan: He had one, huh?

Harold: Right...but that was an interesting experience. We were only there for one year. There was some kind of a skirt under the trailer, but it was far from

varmint-proof. So, there were a host of black snakes under there, and the mice were... I've never lived in a place where there were so many mice. I mean, I even... this is the truth. I threw a table knife into the counter where I saw a mouse, and I actually managed to hit and kill the mouse. That was probably because he was so fat and full that he couldn't move it. That's where we lived until we built this house up here in 2117.

Alan: Were you teaching in school then?

Harold: Oh, yeah. Fall of 75, I did student teaching then. That was an arrangement where I had a professor to come down from EMC maybe two times during the semester or something like that just to check in. Well anyway, it was a distance arrangement, but it worked out very well.

And then I worked on the farm here for 76, 77, 78, and then was hired as a biology teacher at Great Bridge for the fall of 79. And I taught from 79 through 82.

Alan: Did you ever teach up here at Mount Pleasant?

Harold: I never did. No. I was on the [school] board for I can't remember which years. And of course, my sister Kathy was deeply involved in the school. But no, I never taught there.

Alan: One of the things I've run into, and it seems to be almost universal with a few exceptions, are that the women who moved into the community because they married some young fellow who lived here, have expressed never feeling at home here, as if they were never insiders. They were always outsiders. Some quite vociferously, some a little less so, but always that this was never home. Did Rose have that? Because she seemed such a dynamic personality and so adopted, I wondered if she...

Harold: Yeah, good question. I honestly don't think so. There was maybe initially just a little bit of awkwardness, but it really didn't have to do with being accepted by the congregation and community as a whole. Rose didn't grow up wearing the covering, even though she was a member of the Salford Mennonite Church. Brother Wenger asked that she wear one at least the first year or two that she taught. And a couple of other I guess little things like that. Rose seemed to be able to take them in stride and it wasn't too big an issue for her. I would say to be honest, for a couple of reasons, Rose probably felt less accepted by the Bergey family, not my parents, but we were kind of a rough bunch in some ways and not as gracious maybe as we might have been.

We, I don't want to include myself in that or not, maybe I should, but you're right in assessing Rose, and I don't think she ever felt rejected by the community as a whole or a misfit. She was, well, you know that she never quite fit the mold, any mold, whether it's the way a preacher's wife should be.

Alan: She was unique.

Harold: Yes, she was very unique, right, right. And even her friends from back in the Franconia area would say the same thing. She was actually a sought after friend in her growing up years, not just with guys, but with other girls too, and you know, just because she was, you know, this vivacious and sometimes ridiculous.

Alan: Franconia Conference, what community did she grow up in?

Harold: Salford Mennonite Church.

Alan: What town is that near?

Harold: Harleysville.

Alan: I don't know Harleysville.

Harold: Yeah, let's see, where would be the closest? Well, it's not that far from Lansdale. Does that make a connection? For whatever it's worth, it's the, you know, they love their townships up there, right, within the county. Montgomery County doesn't mean too much, but the townships mean. So it's Lower Salford township, has a little park by a creek, and it's the Bergey Park. So, you know, in some ways I came home, but that little Bergey Park and the original Bergey who came to the U.S. in 1717 has a grave marker in the Salford Mennonite Church graveyard.

Alan: Now, Clayton Bergey had moved away from Salford, hadn't he?

Harold: Yeah, oh yeah. In fact, he was born at the Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, which was right on the Montgomery County, Bucks County line. So east of...

Alan: Was that Lancaster Conference?

Harold: No, it's Franconia Conference. By the way, they've just changed names there now, you know, Mennonite, Mosaic.

Alan: I'm an old timer, I still think of them as Franconia.

Harold; Yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure. I think they might have been known as the most enmeshed Mennonite community.

James comes in: Are you getting any information Alan, He's got a lot of information.

Alan: A little bit. No family secrets.

James; One time, Paul Overholt told me to come up with that old Bergey money. I still haven't seen that money.

Alan: Well, Paul would be concerned about that.

James: He wanted to sell me his house.

Alan: Yeah, Neady [Harris] has this little joke that she has which Paul and Olin [Slabaugh] both loved. She said, do you know how copper wire was invented? Olin had a penny and was required to share it with Paul.

James exits: I like that.

Harold: Yeah, I've seen Franconia Conference move from that sort of enmeshed, everybody knows everybody's business and there's kind of, well, there's no question but what. I was probably part partly well received because I was Rose's husband and partly well received because, hey, there's Bergeys all around us here. You must be one of them somehow.

Alan: How did you make the transition into preaching? What was the process there? How did you get in? How did that happen?

Harold: I don't even know. Well, I'll just tell you how it started, anyway. This would have been 1988.

Alan: You were still teaching then or were you working on the farm?

Harold: I was not. I was then working on the farm and by the way, I think I've told you this before. I thought that my trying several different jobs may be a good thing and maybe it was but if I had it to do over again I would not do so much bouncing, teaching, preaching, managing a business, et cetera, you know.

Alan: Why?

Harold: I just think that I could have done better. I wish I had in pastoring I had spent more time and attention and training and continuing to develop as a spiritual leader. I guess having spent more years with that.

But the same thing here with my bouncing into and out of Bergey's Dairy Farm actually was a detriment. I came in in 1982, I guess. Full of vision and fascination with the possibilities that I had So, you know, in that time because it wasn't just me there were other of my siblings who were involved as well but we went from a period of time we went from no dairy store to three dairy stores. We went from door-to-door retail delivery to retail and wholesale delivery. We started making ice cream which we had never done before you know, increase the herd size increase the probably over a period of five to ten years it doubled the herd size and all of that. And that was rapid growth and rapid collapse you know, all of those things the majority of those things only lasted for about two decades and then you know gone as you know. Started over again so anyway but let me get back to the ministry part of it. So I'm on the tractor back there on the Schloss Farm and Robert Mass comes walking across the field. Have you heard me tell this before?

Alan: No.

Harold: Bro. Phil had just had a heart attack and Robert was in a pretty severe I think mental and emotional valley so that's when he was asking me, Merlin Miller,

and Chester Mast to be worship leaders...he didn't use the term "associate pastors", but pastoral support or something like that. So that's how it started.

The further process, I can't be judgmental in the sense that I'm ever gonna go back, it'd be too late anyway, to chide Robert Mast on the way he conducted things but I think overall there was more Robert Mast in my coming to be pastor than there was congregation, maybe you could say a little more autocratic. And I regret that.

Alan: Why?

Harold: Well I think it was misunderstood by a few folks in the congregation in the sense, what is it about Harold that makes him the chose nominee here.

Alan: Did it go through a church approval process?

Harold: It did eventually. It was awkward at times, the path...I was an overseer for seven years and worked with six congregations in the Eastern District in calling pastors. These aren't things that I designed. I definitely followed a protocol that was made to each congregation before they even started.

Alan: More inclusive?

Harold I think more inclusive. There were more opportunities for the congregation to know what they were getting into or at least attempting to know that.

Alan: Had the Virginia Conference completely dropped the lot by then?

Harold: Yeah, I don't think the lot was used...I can't remember. Who would have been the last person at Mt Pleasant to be chosen by lot.

Alan: It might have been Amos Wenger as minister. Nina [Troyer] says she remembers a "lot" and the ceremony and the formality and the seriousness of it but it wouldn't have been a preacher. I might have been a deacon. I've been trying to use dates to see if I can figure out who it was but...

Harold: I'm probably not going to be able to figure it out here, but I think that somehow my family observed a calling by lot by another church group. I wouldn't have any idea why we were there but...like the Deep Creek split back in the day, in the early '60's maybe?

Alan: That may have been it, because when Eli Kramer left, I believe I did read there was a lot to choose the next pastor because Charlie Warfel was in it. Somewhere I have read recently but I wasn't interested in this at the time I was looking for something else so it didn't stick. That may have been it.

Harold: Mt Pleasant had already dropped the lot when that happened that I remember seeing the lot being used to call a pastor. What was his...Dave Zook's brother-in-law. Why is that not coming to me. You'd know who I was talking about.

Married to...well he's passed on now. This person would have been in the Miller family.

Alan: Marion?

Harold: Marion. Yes, yes. Then they eventually went to Pantego. So I have no idea why I was in this service where Marion was called by lot to be a pastor. But I was there for whatever reason. Probably dragged there.

Alan: So it started out initially with you Merlin and Chester taking some of the load off Robert?

Harold: Correct.

Alan: Did he not take a sabbatical for a year or so when he was going through his depression?

Harold: I can't remember the exact sequence of things but he did admit himself to a mental health facility, Phil Haven and some counseling and therapy there but that was like a month or so. And he and Esther also did a year with a church in southern upstate New York. Maybe Cortland...not Cortland. Well, anyway, whatever the church was it was New York a little north of the Pennsylvania line and they were there for a year. Kind of a VS assignment.

Alan: I've got family in Cortland.

Harold: Really. Yeah the more I think about it, Cortland's probably not the right name but it doesn't come to me right now.

Alan: When he was gone did the three of you move more into...or how did it evolve into...it wound up being you and Merlin? Is that correct?

Harold: Yes, yes. Well actually, I was called first as assistant pastor. And in 19...

Alan: Did they ordain or license you?

Harold: In 1988, 89. It was just licensed at that point. I was assistant pastor to Robert Mast. And then in '89-'90...did I say '88-'89, and then in '89-'90 Adona Nissley was my mentor, senior pastor. I was mentored by both of the successively, then I was called to be pastor sometime in Adona's year I was called to be pastor and I don't recall exactly when ordination happened but it was somewhere in there.

Alan: Was Merlin ordained also?

Harold: Yes, yes.

Alan: Before or after that?

Harold: I don't remember the exact time but very shortly after Adona...well by that

time he had gone to Deep Creek. But very shortly after that Merlin and I came on as a team. I don't know if you'd call it associate pastor or assistant pastor but we worked together, I guess for about five years.

Alan: What was the hardest thing you had face being a pastor, the most difficult thing.

Harold: Yeah. Good question.

Alan: For instance, I know in talking to Dale [Keffer], his most difficult thing is counseling. He has no patience. He's "lets just get it fixed" so he doesn't listen well. He has no problem preaching.

Harold: So, I don't know if you know anything about the Augsburgers brothers? Myron and David and Don. Don Augsburgers has passed on now. David Augsburgers said to a group of us that "you know I have two brothers and both have unique gifts. One will say 'tell me about that and the other will say 'here's what you ought to do'. You probably know them well enough to know which is which there.

So you were saying that was Dale's most difficult thing. I think probably, this isn't so much a task but the whole milieu in which I worked. I think just being pastor of the church where I'd grown up...parents, aunts, uncles, siblings and so on, that that was the most challenging.

Alan: How come?

Harold: A whole host of things. I think initially it was more what I felt and what actually was happening to me. People with whom I'd been buddies before, suddenly would throw away their cigarette and crush it out when they saw me coming or be more careful about their language or whatever. That was just difficult for me. Lets see, what has changed here?

Alan: You were no longer one of the guys.

Harold: Yeah that's right, I wasn't. Was kinda set apart or whatever. If it was just that I probably wouldn't identify it as a major problem. But later on, in particular with Leonard and Elsa it became very, very difficult to function as a pastor and also at that point I still had...up until 1996 I guess, I still had some involvement with the farm and that kind of thing and I couldn't effectively be both. I glad you asked that question, because while I don't want to be a griper, I'm getting now to what was the very most, specifically, the very most difficult for me and that was my exit as pastor after eighteen years.

You may or may not remember Jim Meador...were you...

Alan: Vaguely. He was pastor when we came back to the church.

Harold: Ok. He was interim pastor. Was he here for a year, or was it two years? I don't remember.

Alan: I don't know but he left about six months after we came back.

Harold: So, again, I was educated about ways of handling exits. Lloyd Weaver gave me a book, or a booklet, on the subject called "Running Through the Thistles" on the subject, how does a pastor considerately, kindly, honestly exit a church assuming the people have come to love the pastor and the pastor loves the church.

Only in seven years of oversight ministry did I learn better ways of practically doing that

It just so happened that, in my estimation, of all the interim pastors we might have called, Jim was one of the most sensitive to the former pastor getting out of the way. Which that's understandable. The transition doesn't happen if the former pastor is still there interfering.

But on the other hand, I grew up here. One very good example, I think, of the dilemma...ever since Clyde [Bergey] and Donnie's [Dickerson] deaths in...what was it? 1961?

Alan: Somewhere in that period.

Harold: Long, long time ago. I think Sylvia Dickerson always saw me, whether pastor not...I was a twin, Donnie and I were the same age and Donnie was her youngest..of what? 13? So in some ways I was the son she didn't have. And that was ok. We had many a pastoral visit and so on.

So when Sylvia died, Shirley first called me even though Jim was on the scene as pastor even though Jim was on the scene as a pastor. First of all Shirley's my first cousin you know and I saw nothing wrong with responding to Shirley's call and just giving some pastoral care, I guess both on behalf of her grandmother and also Shirley herself, as you know, someone who's known a lot of tragedy. Well Jim was not happy about that and just real antsy about anywhere where I would show myself on the scene. And by the way, you know it, wasn't like Jim was already there and I came and butted in. Grandmother just passed and Shirley gives me a call.

Most or all of the cases where I was working with pastoral transition later on, we'd do some kind of memo of understanding very carefully worked out so that both the incoming, whether an interim pastor or not, so the incoming pastor knew what was expected and what the parameters were and the outgoing pastor knew the same.

Alan: You had decided to leave, when you came to that decision and let it be known to other church leaders, what kind of feedback did you get?

Harold: Not a lot but I had a few who wondered, out loud, why I was leaving now. They had some kind of send-off for Rose and me. I don't know if, I can't remember if you and Linda might have been present at that.

Alan: We may have. It doesn't mean I remember it.

Harold: Yeah, yeah, right. Well, anyway, be that as it may. The Church did a nice scrapbook, which individual families were invited to contribute to. And so a lot of good memories there.

I didn't really hear much comment on this, but you know that we, in 2004, just a year and a half before I ended up leaving, we'd had a misunderstanding about moving the church to the school location and making it both a church and a school. But we had also done some attempts, pretty significant attempts at healing and, you know, binding up the wounds. I think with generally a lot of satisfaction, but there were still a few people on either side, maybe a few people who thought it's probably time for, and there were others who said, I remember one person specifically said, Harold, why are you leaving now? After you've done this work to heal the wounds and try to, it wasn't just me, but those who teamed up with me. You know, we've come to a point of more understanding and acceptance, maybe, of each other. Yeah, why now?

Alan: What happened? See, I wasn't here then, so I'd have no experience with that. Because [my brother] Eric was on the committee to draw something up so I had tangentially heard things, but I really wasn't interested and was out of town working in Richmond, too. So what happened there?

Harold: Yeah, well, certainly I gave Eric and Sharon an apology, and I owed them an apology, but I'll just try to put it in brief terms anyway. This dream was floated about moving the church to the school. This was following the pretty significant expansion of real estate on the school site, and also the beginning, already some of the development had started, but the beginning of the school going from being surrounded by peach orchard to being surrounded by houses, a very significant number of houses, as nobody knows better than you.

And it just seemed like, not only to me, but to some others as well, that this was a fantastic opportunity to provide some recreational space for the surrounding communities. At that point, Chesapeake seemed really short on recreational space. There had been a number of such big, since that time, there had been a number of contributions to solving that problem.

I mean, one would be the Dan Yoder property down by the railroad tracks. Another would be the, what is that called, the southeast, the baseball complex off of Eason Road.

In addition to that, as there was more talk in church council, leadership council, and the like, to me anyway, it seemed like the orientation, the mood, seemed to be moving in favor of such a thing. So there was a prayer meeting, one, I think it was a Saturday morning or something like that, where the church council, leadership council, school board all got together for a morning of prayer and discernment. And the approval was unanimous in that.

And so my first big mistake, unanimity among the leaders doesn't mean unanimity in the entire congregation. And so I should have just known that

from the beginning. But as plans continued forward, and we certainly announced this to the congregation about this meeting and the unanimous agreement, et cetera, but didn't really ask at that point for any further feedback.

So at some point shortly thereafter, it was...I mean the first step was to hire an architect. Mistake number two, hired the wrong architect. Do you remember?

Alan: I wasn't here.

Harold: Oh, you weren't here, OK. Let's just say he was a friend of Sam Scagg's, and that wasn't why he was hired, but pretty unique as a professional architect.

And also, he was a member of the church over in Kempsville. The biggest mistake that I made was allowing him to pursue, which is definitely his MO, a kind of, I want to surprise you with something grand and glorious. I should have known Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church doesn't really look forward to surprises.

Alan: Especially those that are grand and glorious.

Harold: Yes.

Alan: Does not fit the ethos.

Harold: And that was so, well, anyway. So he was invited, well, let me back up why he was invited. So it would have been Philip Miller, in particular, was a gung-ho fan. And Philip was also... Philip, in my estimation, had very little awareness of what Christlike discernment in the church community. Basically, Philip was, "hey, if it wins by 51%, we've got nothing more to worry about". Well, all of us know better than that.

So he was invited to preach and to present this thing. Well, that's a huge mistake.

Alan: Why?

Harold: Because the guy who has thousands of dollars to make on the approval of this plan is the guy preaching that this is God's will. You know, whatever. I suppose. Anyway, and you know, I'm sure, that Eric was one of the most adamant on the other side.

Alan: No, I didn't know that. I just knew he was involved. I had no idea which side he was on.

Harold: Well, Olin Slabaugh was another one who greatly opposed that. So we should have found a way before rather than after to find some common ground and in an honest, straightforward fashion figure out who was where on this before we invited...I'm so bummed that I can't remember the guy's name... before we invited him to preach. But that didn't happen.

And so after he preached, there was a vote. And definitely, definitely there were many questions in the minds of members, parishioners, that were unanswered. And they were legitimate questions.

Like, well, what are you going to do with the current church building it? So the vote comes out at 60-40 or something like that. Well, even those of us who favored thought this would be a death knell for the congregation to go ahead on a 60-40.

And assume that 60%, if it remained that high, would have also carried the full financial and other responsibility for making it a success. So after we realized that that was a no-go, all the leadership council, we made sure that every person who had voted negatively was visited and listened to. And that included Eric and Sharon.

So I think there was some healing partly because of that and partly because we didn't pursue moving ahead with a simple majority. So that maybe just relaxed people a little bit.

Alan: Was this the end of it then?

Harold: At that point, Keith Miller was very helpful in, I guess, at least starting a path forward logistically. Specifically, it had to do with fundraising and that kind of thing. And I guess the alternative plan was to, if we move forward, to do so in increments, not just a win all or lose all kind of arrangement.

So yeah, that was also at the same time that Bergey's Dairy Farm was about to fall. So I admit that helped.

Alan: How did you come to that decision to come back and rescue the farm?

Harold: Well, I think the biggest thing, Alan, was that, and this is, I'm not trying to criticize Leonard or Elsa. I don't know if you know, I've had a few redemptive kinds of encounters with Leonard. I'm happy about that.

But the reality was that mom and dad had what some legal experts would have said was a unacceptable high level of liability coupled with basically losing their income. The rent that they had been receiving from Leonard dried up. So part of it was just how we take care of mom and dad here.

I guess that was probably the main motivation. I went with the concept that, well, do this for one or two decades and then do the next assignment for one or two decades. And so it wasn't anything that really super frightened me, but I could well have, well, in fact, specifically, Rose wanted me to take off a month or two, just take off. You know, and I didn't do that. I was in real big hurry to, real big hurry to get this done. You know, make the next move and move on.

While I don't regret that I did it, I do regret that I kind of pushed it forward faster than I might've done.