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A True Mother in Israel

BY P. GERARD DAMSTEEGT

I was a young seminary student from the Netherlands back in the late '60s. Students were assigned to a church of their choice for weekly practical experiences in ministry. The Adventist Church in Holland, Michigan, seemed like the perfect place for a Dutchman to go. And, sure enough, I found plenty of Dutch fellowship. A very cordial Dolores and Leon Slikkers invited me home my first week, and ever after took me under their wide wings.

I was intrigued by this American family. Leon, the successful businessman, was married to a friendly, down-to-earth, very earnest woman who seemed to watch out for everyone at church in addition to her own family of four. As someone fairly new in the Adventist church, I was amazed how serious Dolores was about implementing everything she had learned about healthful living from the Spirit of Prophecy and sharing it with others! Sitting at her table, I soon experienced that her food was excellent! So began a friendship that has lasted for many, many years.



Dolores and Leon Slikkers

I learned that, as a young girl, Dolores was a hard-working, top-of-her high school class student, responsible both at school and home and that her relationship with God was important to her. She was the first in her family to join a local church at 14 years of age. Then in her senior year of high school, she fell in love with Leon, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This relationship led her to study her Bible more, and she embraced all that God was teaching her through his Word.

Dolores and Leon's relationship grew and, on her birthday in 1947, Leon proposed to her with a dozen red roses. Their marriage and business career reads like an American success story. While living very simply and frugally, Dolores worked at their boat business — at one point, even

living in a small apartment above a shop where Leon built the boats. Through all their business growth years, Dolores and Leon brought immense blessings to help accomplish the mission of their church in Michigan and around the world.

Dolores' Bible became well-marked and was full of pieces of paper. When she promised to pray for someone, she made a note on a piece of paper and slipped it into her Bible. During her times of prayer, she flipped through her Bible, praying for each one.

As a true Mother in Israel, Dolores always looked for

opportunities to help others. On Sabbath mornings, she usually could be found at the back of the church, greeting all who entered. Dolores took caring for her church family seriously. She noted when members were missing and called to let them know they were missed, to see if they were well, and to learn if there was anything they needed.

She extended hospitality to visitors, welcoming them and making them feel at home. That is how she picked up on a young Dutch seminary student visiting her church. She welcomed me as if I was family. In fact, the Slikkers' children shared their mother not only with me, but many others whom she loved and nurtured.

Dolores took a real personal interest in people's lives. On important occasions, like birthdays and anniversaries, each

person in her life received a card. Her card address list was over 2,000! Always a woman of organization, Dolores had appropriate cards for different ages and kept careful notes to ensure cards were delivered on time.

When I completed my seminary training at Andrews, I pursued doctoral studies in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. While there, the Slikkers visited me. And when I returned to the U.S. to write my doctoral dissertation, they helped sponsor me when financial difficulties were about to interrupt the research. Without the Lord's help through them, I never would have been able to complete my studies. Later, I learned I was not the only one they helped. Today, no one knows how many students Dolores and Leon have sponsored with Christian education.

Dolores and Leon played another very important role in my life. When I believed the Lord led me to the woman I wished to marry, I turned to my spiritual parents for some counsel. Our first date was a weekend spent at the Slikkers' home. They concurred, and gave me the go-ahead to marry Laurel Nelson from New England. Of course, they had to be part of our wedding at the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Washington, New Hampshire.

Through the years, whenever our journeys took us near the Holland exit, our family would pop in on the Slikkers to catch up on how God was blessing our lives. We always enjoyed Dolores' delicious meals.

The last few years, our conversations focused on our Church and how we could experience revival and reformation. Dolores was concerned but never discouraged, always upbeat about the certainty of God's promises of the final triumph of his people.

Dolores' daughter, Susan, knew her mother to be "a woman of inestimable character, marked and molded by her desire to reach out, to make sure *you* knew that someone else knew you were alive, were remembered and cared about and, most importantly, that someone was not only praying for you but keenly interested in your eternal salvation." Dolores called; she wrote; she was there.

Dolores' life ended suddenly in a tragic car accident on the icy roads of Holland at the age of 85 on December 18, 2014. The impact of the life and ministry of this Mother in Israel will never be forgotten. Who will continue her influential, far-reaching ministry?

I, along with countless others, look forward to our soon reunion with her in Heaven.

P. Gerard Damsteegt is associate professor of Church History at Andrews University.

As a true Mother in Israel, Dolores always looked for opportunities to help others.

