



## Neal Berghoef

April 20, 1922 - January 21, 2014

On Tuesday, January 21, 2014, Neal Berghoef left his earthly home and is now walking with His Lord and Savior in Heaven. Neal (Nelis) Berghoef was born April 20, 1922 to Jacob Berghoef and Heiltje Wilhelmus in Waddinxveen, South Holland, The Netherlands. He was the oldest of five brothers and subsequently three half-brothers and a half-sister. After graduating from furniture trade school as a teenager, he worked as a cabinetmaker and draftsman with a local furniture manufacturer. During World War II Neal spent two years in a German forced labor camp on the Baltic in what is now Poland. Around the age of 20 he was on his bicycle waiting for a bridge to close when a young woman on her bike caught his eye, and shortly thereafter he asked her on a date. Her name was Anna Maria (Ann) van Alten, and she and Neal were married in 1946. Neal's displacement to Germany qualified him for immigration as a war refugee, and in 1956 Neal and Ann moved to the United States with their four children having only rudimentary English language skills. Neal began his career in the furniture industry at Bergsma Brothers in Grand Rapids before moving the family to Holland, where he had obtained employment as a draftsman with Baker Furniture. He spent the rest of his career at Baker, retiring in 1986 as head of manufacturing operations in Holland. Neal and Ann were active in retirement years, travelling and enjoying their family both in Holland and Florida until resuming their permanent residence in the Holland area in 2003. His Christian faith played a central role in his life and he was active in church leadership, including many years of

service in both the Netherlands and the US as elder, deacon, Sunday school teacher, delegate to Synod, and other activities. He was a keen advocate of Christian education and took pride in seeing all of his children graduate from Holland Christian Schools as well as Calvin College or nursing programs. Neal always had a strong interest in gardening, the outdoors, and woodworking. His passion was politics and served as Holland councilman from 1983 until he was elected mayor in 1989. He served two terms as mayor of Holland, retiring in 1993. His chief goals as mayor were to foster ethnic diversity, support strong families, and encourage area-wide cooperation. He was proud of his participation in public service in the United States despite arriving in this country at the age of 34. He continued to stay informed on numerous subjects until shortly before his death and enjoyed taking advantage of the internet revolution. Neal is survived by his wife of 67 years, Anna, and five children, Jack (Nancy Zwart) of Holland, Henry (Leslie Boyle) of Chicago, Hilda (Tim Quist) of Frankfort, Ena (Jerry Gunnink) of Holland, and Joy (Anthony Paige) of Holland. Neal had 15 grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren, each of whom loved him dearly, and in return were individually loved and inspired by him. He is also survived by his sister Elly Berghoef, sister's-in-law Millie Berghoef and Audrey Berghoef, all of Grand Rapids and many nephews and nieces. Also surviving are many beloved brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces in The Netherlands. Three brothers, a sister-in-law, and a half brother preceded him in death. Funeral services will be 11:00am Saturday, January 25 at Langeland-Sterenbergh Funeral Home, 315 E 16th St., Holland with Rev. Marvin Hofman and Rev. Andres Fierro officiating. Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery. Visiting hours are scheduled for 4-7pm Friday also at the funeral home. Memorial contributions may be made to World Renew and Holland Christian Schools. The family is thankful to the staffs of Royal Atrium, Appledorn Assisted Living Center, and Hospice of Holland.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Neal Berghoef*

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August 31, 2022 at 01:26 PM

MV

“One of the things I will miss the most about my Grandpa is his voice. Not the voice of the past few years, the voice of Parkinsons and age, but the voice of my childhood. It was a strong, robust voice, completed by a Dutch brogue. I heard it throughout my childhood: on the phone, in prayers which often seemed far too long, in mayoral speeches, and in what our family lovingly called campaigning long after his mayoral years working the church narthex or the dining area at Russ's, before eventually returning to our table. The voice that asked me well into my 20s if I was still growing (and I had to bite my tongue from replying No Grandpa, you're shrinking.) That voice I will remember. But what spoke louder than that dear voice were my Grandpa's actions. As he moved from being a young cabinet maker in the Netherlands, to a Nazi work camp in Poland, to a newlywed and young father, to a trans-Atlantic move, to Grand Rapids and Holland Michigan, to a calling in a furniture plant, becoming a grandfather to a mayoral campaign: his actions were loud. Those actions had a voice of their own, they said.

- Love and respect each other
- Nothing beats a good cup of coffee, and when there isn't a good cup of coffee, any coffee
- Honor God in whatever you do
- Fight for for the underdog
- Live simply
- Educate yourself (not just from books)
- Speak with conviction
- Spend time in nature
- Seek out ways to serve
- Make beautiful things
- Take risks
- Embrace change
- Enjoy your food
- Roll up your sleeves and work hard
- Travel
- Take care of your community
- Help those who are less fortunate

And in the past days, I reflected on my family- what you all--my parents, my aunts and uncles, my brother and sister in law, my cousins when I see what all of you are doing. When I see you, my cousins interact with your spouses and raise your children I see and hear Grandpa's voice and see his actions in what all of you are doing. Grandpa, we love you.”

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Melissa VanTil - January 29, 2014 at 12:00 AM

BI

“Our sincere sympathy to the Berghoef family. You are in our prayers and thoughts.”

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**Bill** - January 28, 2014 at 12:00 AM

JM

“Such a decent and personable man. It was an honor to know Neal.”

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**Janet Magennid** - January 27, 2014 at 12:00 AM

HS

“Lieve tante Annie, een lieve oom is van ons weggevallen, heel veel sterkte met dit verlies.  
Groet; Henk en Sjanneke Starreveld”

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**Henk en Sjanneke Starreveld** - January 25, 2014 at 12:00 AM

YB

“I am so sorry for your great loss. My father also worked in a German forced labor camp. My father(Henry Goedhart) immigrated to Holland, from Hemstada. He worked for Neal at Baker Furniture for 30years. Neal was more than a plant manager, he was family. And he made us feel like his family. He knew everybodys name and family members names. What a wonderful person he was and is. He has left a great legacy behind him. Cherish that. My sympathy again.”

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**Yolonda Goedhart Brinks** - January 25, 2014 at 12:00 AM

YB

“Neal was an excellent plant manager. It was an honor to have known him. My dad, Henry Goedhart, worked for him for 30 years at 6th st.. I worked for him also at 24th st. I enjoyed working for him. I'm so sorry for your loss. My sympathies to the family.”

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**Yolonda Brinks** - January 24, 2014 at 12:00 AM

IA

“Wij wensen tante An en onze familie heel veel sterkte.Hartelijke groeten uit Nederland,Johan en Ineke”

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**Ineke van Alten** - January 24, 2014 at 12:00 AM

HD

“Dear aunt Ann and family, our very deepest condolences to all of you.  
We are great full for the memories we have of you and him, the times you both were in the Netherlands.  
My dad, Guurt, was very happy to Skype with him until some time ago.  
I remember him as a very caring and nice uncle.  
Pleas know that our thoughts are with you and your family at this time as you mourn about the loss of your partner and father, grandfather.”

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**Hylde van Diggelen** - January 24, 2014 at 12:00 AM

BD

“Dear Hilda, Tim, and all of the family,  
I remember your dad as a sweet man. He was always so nice when I came to your house. What a comfort to know that he is with Jesus now! Praying that God will be near to you during this difficult time.  
Sincerely,  
Bonnie (Keen) DeJong”

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**Bonnie DeJong** - January 24, 2014 at 12:00 AM

WM

“Dear Mrs. Berghoef, Ena and Family, What fond memories of your father, his work, his life and the wonderful family he enjoyed so much. All of you have our deepest sympathy as he leaves this earth but rejoice with you in the promises of eternal life with our Loving Savior in glory. Cherish this family time, make more wonderful memories together as you celebrate your father's life. Rest in the arms of friends and acquaintances over the next few days and let them carry you through this grieving process. Our prayers remain with all of you for health, strength and perfect peace.”

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**Wanda and Russ Michmerhuizen** - January 24, 2014 at 12:00 AM

SG

“Ena, Jerry and the Berghoef family, we share your sorrow at the loss of your father and pray for God's grace during this time of grief. We love you”

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**Steve and Nancy Gunnink** - January 23, 2014 at 12:00 AM

AF

“you will be missed”

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**A friend** - January 23, 2014 at 12:00 AM