

From Japanese Prison Camp Child Survivor to UC Missionary in South Africa

Wouter Van Der Stok
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Wouter and Susan van der Stok

Wouter Van Der Stok was already an up-and-coming professional when his parents joined our church. His story is touching because of his humility before God's will, as he joined already having a wife and three children at a time when almost all the members in the Western world were single. Indeed, he was one of the first, if not the first, Unification Church member to go to Africa as a missionary. Here we present a short version of his testimony of the formative years of his life and mission work. Sadly, Mr. Van Der Stok passed away two months ago at the age of 78, but his legacy of submission to God's will and active engagement in God's providence will always remain to encourage and inspire a new generation. Wouter ascended on May 18, 2018.

I was born on 5th May 1940 in Djakarta, Indonesia and lived there till 1945. For 3 years, from 1942 to 1945, my mother, Johan (my brother three years older than me), and I lived there in various concentration camps under the Japanese during World War II, while my father was interned in Japan. In 1945 our family, seriously ill, returned to Holland where we stayed with my grandmother and where I went to school until 1947, when we moved back to Indonesia again.

When I was 10 years old, my older brother had a very serious accident in Switzerland and our whole family, except my father who had to remain behind for his work, returned to Holland, where I continued my studies till my 21st year. In 1961, I emigrated to Johannesburg, South Africa.

There was a period of 3 years, from my 14th to my 17th year, when my parents and brothers and sister had returned to Indonesia. Just my older brother Johan and I remained in Holland to continue our studies while we lived with another family. Emotionally and spiritually this was a difficult time for me, missing the love, support and guidance from my parents very much, as we always were and still are a close family. However, when my parents returned to Holland in 1957 I really felt for the first time the great difference between hell and the kingdom of heaven, because of the tremendous love, joy and happiness I experienced from living with my parents again.



Wouter van der Stok (left), with the three missionaries to South Africa sent out in 1975 from Japan, the USA and Germany (Kazuo Yokoi, John Brady, Mechthild Koelbener)

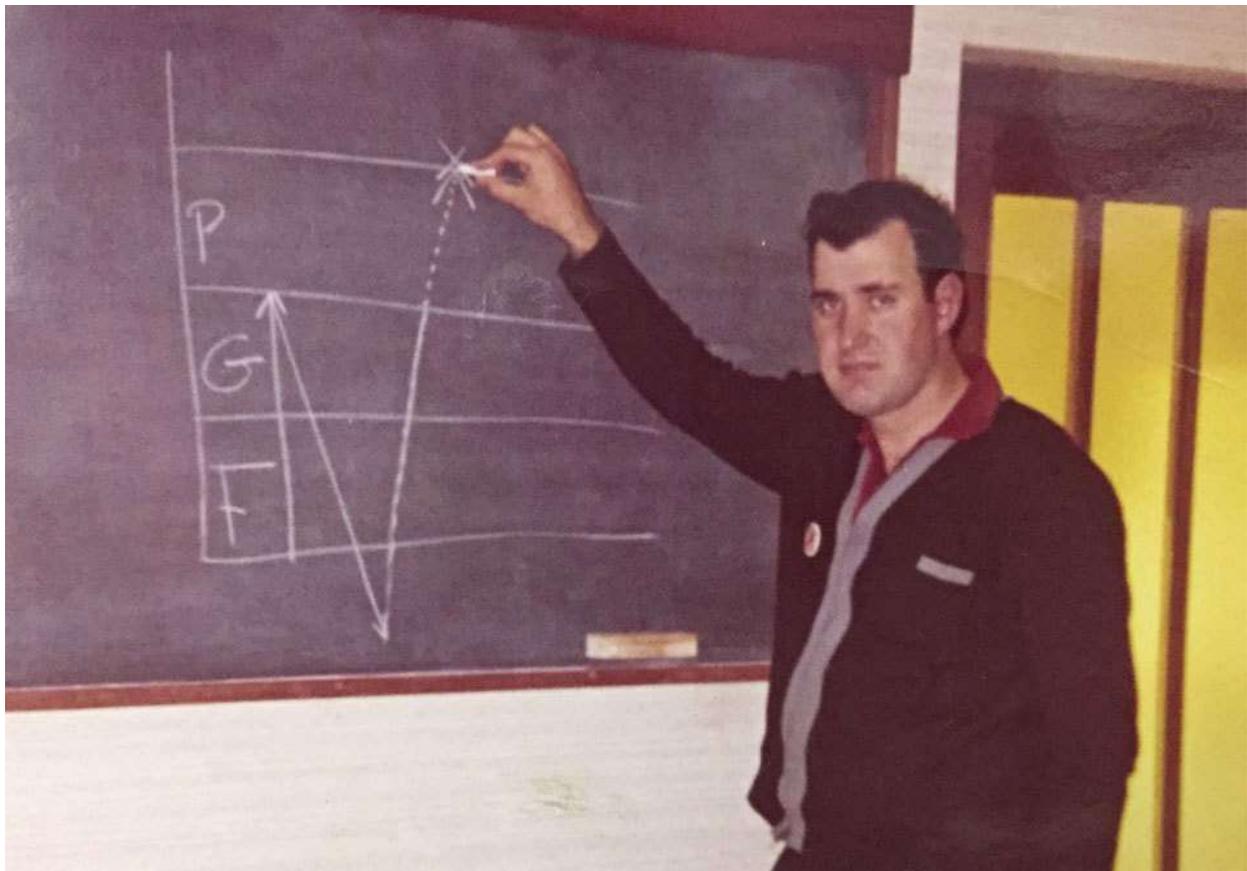
Although our religious upbringing was Christian (Protestant), my parents were open-minded and we learned many things about the spirit world and other ways of life, also through reading many books on many different subjects. After one year working for a Bank in Johannesburg, I asked for a transfer to Cape Town as I wanted to see more of South Africa. It was also because I had a strange feeling, actually already from the time just before I left Holland, that I would meet my future wife in Cape Town. When I was much younger, I asked my mother once how I would know which girl would be the right one for me to marry, because I had seen how happy my parents were. It was very important for me to find the right partner, but there were so many girls in the world. My mother's reply was that God would show me.

This is what I strongly felt happened when, within a few days of my arrival in Cape Town in 1962, I met my future wife Susan, a South African girl. The next few months there was a constantly strong voice inside me telling me not to disappoint this girl, although she was 3 years older than I was. In 1963 I took Susan with me to Holland to meet my parents, and we were married in Cape Town in 1964. Until May 1970, when we heard the Divine Principle for the first time, we had a normal, happy family life and 3 children were born, Wanda (daughter), Frank (son) and Sanet (daughter). From the age of about 16 years, I had felt the urge to follow and live as Jesus had lived, but did not know how to put this into practice from day to day.

On May 5, 1970, my 30th birthday, our small family arrived back in Holland from South Africa for a 3 months' period of long leave. On the third day, May 7, my parents started to teach us the Principle in the evenings and we heard everything over about 7 nights.

Although chapter I and II were interesting, it was chapter III, the Mission of Jesus that really opened my eyes and gave me the answers to so many questions. The History of Restoration made me feel so excited, because here was the key to mankind's struggles and the history between God and man! After hearing the mission of Jesus I already felt, and started to ask questions if Mr. Sun Myung Moon wasn't perhaps the Lord of the Second Advent. Because of the indemnity paid by my ancestors and physical family (my older brother Johan, who accepted True Parents Dec. '65 in the USA, fasted for 12 days for his physical family and my mother had severe migraines for about 6 weeks before we came), I could accept True Parents immediately and at that time our whole van der Stok extended family, consisting of my parents, four sons and a daughter, had already accepted the conclusion.

After 77 days and much studying, Holland's national leaders at that time, Teddy and Pauline Verheyen, sent Susan and me with our 3 children (aged one and a half, three and five years old) back to Cape Town to start as pioneer missionaries in Africa, especially South Africa. Initially the members who joined did not stay very long (7 months was the longest period), and only after 1974/75 was a stronger core finally built up in Cape Town.



Wouter teaching the Principle

In 1972 Susan and I went for a 6-week training period to Holland (the children stayed behind), where

after we had the great honor and blessing to meet our True Parents for the first time in Essen, Germany and afterwards again in Amsterdam. My first impression of True Father was of a tremendous force of (will) power but also great sadness and love. During August/September 1973, Susan went again for a 40-day training period to Holland, while I stayed behind with the 3 children and in February 1974 I myself went to Belvedere, Tarrytown for a 70-day training, where I passed the Divine Principle test and 3 weeks fundraising test. On my return to South Africa in May 1974, we sent our 3 children to stay for seven and a half months with my parents in Holland to give us more time for church work, which I did then for 10 months full time, having left my job at the Bank.

From April 30, 1975, the 3 missionaries arrived from America, Japan and Germany and started to work in Pretoria and Johannesburg, about 1300 km to the northeast of Cape Town. In March 1976, we started public fundraising, but before that, on February 8, 1976 the HSA-UWC was officially established. In September 1976, the first Church property was bought at Wynberg, about 20 km from Cape Town, as a residence and center for our black members [Note: This was the time of apartheid, when there was, among other restrictions, segregation by law of the areas where black and white people could live].

On December 22, 1976, Susan and I were happy to be blessed together with 34 other couples (including my own parents) by our True Parents at Belvedere.

The work in Cape Town showed thereafter a slow but steady growth, while the number and quality of the members increased until, at our departure from Cape Town in May 1978, there were about 12 members living in the center and over 30 associate members. We were very sorry to leave our mission there, as there were many plans, but Heavenly Father, True Parents and the brothers and sisters taught Susan and me many valuable lessons for which we are very, very grateful and also for the opportunity we had of being of some use in the great plan of mankind's restoration.



The van der Stoks with members at the center (1978)