

MR. NORTHFIELD



Otto Bruyns, 1904-88

by **JOSEPHINE DiSTEFANO KAPUS**

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This book is dedicated to the memory of
Otto Bruyns, affectionately known as
Mr. Northfield, for his long and faithful
service to the City of Northfield, N.J.

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FOREWORD

I am truly privileged to have known and learned from Otto Bruyns. He and Gussie knew my parents when I was young, and I became much closer to them when I became Tax Collector in Northfield in 1962. Otto and Gussie were like my adopted parents and Otto was my mentor.

Over the years, as I became involved in government service, Otto served as my role model in the political world. He taught me how to accomplish important tasks and, perhaps most important, how to listen to people. He taught by example, by the joy he received from helping others and by the simple pleasure of hard work.

Through his church, his family, his role in government and his involvement with the Acacia Club and other fraternal organizations, Otto Bruyns touched many lives. He was intent on making the community better and making others' lives easier.

In many ways, Otto Bruyns embodied the American Spirit. He came to the United States as a young boy and worked hard to make something of himself. He told me many times that the two proudest moments of his life were the day he married his dear Gussie and the day he took the oath to become an American citizen. Because he was so proud of his adopted land, he felt he had a debt to his community and country.

Otto Bruyns often said, "It is a long lane that has no turn." His simple philosophy expressed a realistic view of life, that each of us must work hard to attain our goals, always ready for any turn in the road that we face.

RICHARD E. SQUIRES

County Executive

Atlantic County, New Jersey

INTRODUCTION

Johanna Van Looy Brujns (Bruyns) waited anxiously to board ship that Fall day in 1904 in the port of Cape Town, South Africa. At 28, she was leaving the strife-torn country with her six children: Sophie, 10; William, 8; Annie, 6; Cornelia (Cora), 4; Classina (Rena), 2, and her two-month old infant, Otto, the subject of this book.

Amid the clamor of dockside activity, Johanna struggled with her emotions — a strange mixture of relief in leaving this place of conflict with its unfamiliar customs and language, joy in anticipation of returning home to the safety of her native Holland, and heartbreak in leaving behind the man she had fallen in love with and married while still in her teens.

Only the previous year, Johanna had arrived at this port to be reunited with her husband, Otto, a house painter who had emigrated earlier from Holland to Pretoria, Transvaal, in South Africa, to make a new and better life for himself and his family. The young, adventurous husband felt certain he could realize his ambitions in one of the Dutch settlements in South Africa, so when the Boer War treaty was signed there in 1902, he left Holland. The following year, he sent for his family. All did not go well.

To understand what went wrong, one has to know the historical events which ultimately shaped the life and destiny of Otto Bruyns, the man called MR. NORTHFIELD.

South Africa had beckoned many people from Holland. The emigration began back in the 17th Century as a result of the Dutch trading with the Spice Islands in the Orient. With no Suez Canal yet in existence, Dutch ships had to sail around the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa in order to get to the Indies.

The Cape's climate was as pleasant as that of southern California, and soon Dutch farmers built settlements there. The Dutch word for "farmer" was "landbouwer," or "tiller of the soil." The word was later changed to "Boer." In time, these farmers were joined by West German farmers and French Protestants (the latter fleeing from religious persecution in their homeland), and these also became known as Boers.

By 1800, these tough, persevering Boers numbered 22,000. Dutch power by this time was declining, and the British were now masters of India. When Napoleon's armies invaded Holland, British troops were dispatched to the Cape to protect Britain's route to India. After the Napoleonic Wars, Britain paid Holland for the right to remain in South Africa. In the meantime, the Boers had evolved their own language, Afrikaans, and had become a distinct people. They resented the new governors, whom they found to be in conflict with their ways, so they began pushing the frontier further inland, forming new republics.

The struggle for land and power continued and finally the Great Boer War erupted in 1899 and raged until 1902, when the British defeated the Boers. On May 31, 1902, a peace treaty was signed in Pretoria, where Johanna's husband settled that year.

Although the country was officially at peace when Johanna and the children arrived, sporadic fighting continued and another outbreak of war seemed possible. Johanna found only a harsh struggle for survival in a primitive and hostile land. She endured for a year, during which she bore a son, born August 10, 1904, whom she named after his father, Otto.

Because of the constant threat of renewed hostilities, many women and children were leaving South Africa. The Boer War had cost thousands of lives, not the least of which were 26,000 women and children, who had perished from starvation and

disease in internment camps. Rather than risk a similar fate, Johanna and her husband made the agonizing decision that she, too, should return immediately to Holland with the children.

The journey by train from Pretoria to Cape Town had been a safe one, for which Johanna was so grateful that she discounted the hardships of travelling with a large brood and tiny infant. Now, as passengers began to board ship, she held little Otto tighter, herded her other children up the gangway, and set her jaw in brave determination. She did not look back.

GROWING UP IN HOLLAND

Holland, in northwest Europe, is on the North Sea. The flat windswept land, about the size of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined, has an average altitude of 37 feet above sea level. Much of the land is below sea level and is protected by 1,500 miles of dikes. The country historically has been overpopulated and, by way of comparison, where the United States currently has an average of 68 people per square mile, Holland has 931.

After returning to Holland, Johanna wasted no time settling into a modest house in the western city of Haarlem where her family lived. The city, crowded with quaint attached row houses topped with bright red tile roofs, is famous for its massive Roman Catholic Cathedral built in 1898.

With no husband to support her, Johanna obtained employment as a cook in a hotel at Zandvoort, a nearby seaside resort. Family members helped her within their means and each morning before she took the trolley to work, Johanna left baby Otto with her married sister Cornelia, who had no children. At the end of her work day, Johanna was permitted to ladle some of the hotel's leftover food into a large dish which she covered with a napkin to take home for supper for herself and the children.

It should be explained here that in Europe, it was not unusual for a childless couple to adopt a nearest kin's child, especially if that kin had a large family. Cornelia grew extremely attached to little Otto and, being aware of her sister's financial difficulties, offered to adopt him. Johanna understood the kind gesture, but said, "No, I couldn't part with any of my children."

In later years, Johanna Bruyns' children fondly recalled their mother as industrious, clean, family-oriented, strict, but always ready to laugh and have fun.



*Johanna Van Looy Bruyns and children
not long after their return to Holland from
South Africa. From left to right: Sophie,
Rena, Johanna, Otto, William, Cora and
Annie.*

When the eldest child, Sophie, was old enough to work, she became a domestic in the home of the president of Holland's railroad. Through her employment there, Sophie obtained for her mother the job of laundering the fancy uniforms worn by the maids in that household. By now, Otto was going to school and was old enough to fetch the dirty uniforms and deliver the clean ones.

Chores were a way of life for Johanna's children. As a single parent, she couldn't possibly support her family and keep her home clean and running smoothly all by herself. Cleanliness is characteristic of the Dutch, and Johanna delegated chores to each of her children. She did not tolerate shirking. Otto, even though he was the youngest, had to polish everybody's shoes on Saturday night, and he had to polish all the brassware inside and outside the house.

When he was ten, Otto got a job in a local bakery. Before going to school, which was six days a week, with Wednesday and Saturday afternoons off, he delivered baked goods with a hand wagon. When he was finished, he dashed back to the bakery, gulped down a piece of bread and cheese, and rushed to school. After school, he delivered laundry for his mother.

One can imagine the looks cast at the straight-backed boy with rosy cheeks and shock of blond hair as he marched down the street with starched uniforms laid across his outstretched arms.

Although fortune eluded Johanna's husband in South Africa, he never abandoned his dreams of prosperity there. She never saw him again, yet she remained loyal to him. On the wall along the staircase leading to the children's unheated bedrooms in the attic, she had hung a big picture of Otto, Sr. Each night as the children went to bed, they had to say goodnight to their father as they passed his picture. If they neglected to do so, they were called back to bid him goodnight.



*Johanna's husband, Otto Bruyns,
remained in South Africa. She
never saw him again.*

There is no doubt that Johanna made a profound impression on her youngest child. However, there was another who influenced him perhaps even more, because he supplied the missing father image. That person was Grandfather Van Looy, a man of precise habits, who grew to adore the little grandson who watched intently so he could imitate him. For instance, getting ready for

THE YOUNG MAN IN AMERICA

Johanna's children were grown up and leaving home.

The year Otto and Cora left for America, their brother William emigrated to the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), where he worked for the Shell Oil Company.

Sophie married a railroad conductor. Annie also married in Holland. Only Rena remained with Johanna.

When Otto and Cora arrived in this country, they were met in Hoboken, New Jersey, by their mother's brother, William Van Looy. This uncle took them to his farm in Williamstown to live with his family in a large clapboard house. The next day, Otto got a job pulling radishes for a nearby farmer. Later, he got a job in a pickle factory in the same town. His duties were to supply the girls on the assembly line with cucumbers and take away the jars after the pickles were packed. It was a good job for a teenager who couldn't speak English, and the factory workers liked this pleasant, industrious young foreigner.

However, life on the farm was a bit of a shock. Otto had always believed that in America, things would be so much more modern. What he failed to realize was that he had come from a city, and here he was in a rural area. He had gaslights at home in Holland, but on Uncle Bill's farm he had oil lamps. And the toilet was outside!

Cora soon left the farm to take a job as a domestic in the city of Philadelphia. Otto didn't remain long in Williamstown. Having inherited his father's sense of adventure, he followed his sister to Philadelphia, where he got a room at the Y. M. C. A., and looked for employment. As he walked along Noble Street with its meat-packing houses, he saw a man on one of the loading platforms of Armour & Company.

Sunday church was special. As soon as Otto was old enough, his grandfather took him to church. The Dutch take their religion seriously, and Otto grew up in a Christian home where the Bible was read and God was worshipped. Each Saturday night, Grandfather Van Looy carefully selected what he would wear Sunday and meticulously laid out his wardrobe. Otto would do the same, a habit he continued the rest of his life.

Otto Bruyns graduated from primary school in Holland. It was the only formal education he received. When he was 15, his mother's youngest brother, Fred, visited from Switzerland. During one conversation, Fred turned to Otto and said, "Why don't you go to America? There is nothing for you here in Holland, and in America there are so many opportunities."

Uncle Fred had been to America, where he married. Later, he moved to Switzerland to help run his father-in-law's business there. He had loved America and was quite convincing that Otto should go there. At the time, Europe was still recovering from the first World War, and the economy was not good. America, however, was growing and heading for prosperous times.

It was therefore at Uncle Fred's urging that Otto Bruyns, with his sister Cora, arrived in the United States of America on July 20, 1920. He was just two weeks shy of 16.

"Do you have a job for me?" Otto called out in his thick Dutch accent.

"Ja," the man answered in German, a language Otto could comprehend more easily than English. "If you can handle a horse, we could use you."

Otto assured the man he could. He was given a slip to take to the barn authorizing him to hitch up a horse to one of the wagons. Having done this, he returned to the man on the platform who gave him a meat order to deliver to a ship along the waterfront.

The fact that Otto didn't know one street from another didn't deter him. He showed his delivery slip to a policeman and got directions. He worked several months for Armour.

Although Otto and Cora worked in the same city, they didn't have much opportunity to be together. She lived with the family she worked for and didn't get much time off; Otto worked long hours. Besides, brother and sister were in no position to do things which cost money, because they were both saving for a special purpose.

One of Otto's favorite pastimes after working hours was to enjoy a bowl of beans at Horn & Hardart (a forerunner of today's fast foods chains), and then go and sit in the terminal of the Reading Railroad to observe people as they rushed to and from their destinations. Otto loved to watch them. Where were these people going? What did they do? Here in America, things happened!

As he sat lost in these thoughts one night, a stranger sat next to him and began to speak. He was Dutch, the captain of a Sun Oil tanker. After they had conversed a while, he asked Otto if he would like to go to sea.

"I think I would like that," Otto replied.

"Good!" said the captain. "I am waiting for the train to Chester. If you want to come, I will wait for you here while you get your belongings."

Although Armour still owed him back pay, Otto never collected it because he went straightway to his room at the "Y" and checked out. He rushed back to the railroad station clutching a bundle of clothes. The next day the tanker put out to sea and 17 year-old Otto was on it. He was to work aboard that vessel three years, during which he advanced to able-bodied seaman.

After the first year Otto was on the tanker delivering oil along the Atlantic and Pacific coastlines and Panama Canal, he and Cora finally had enough money saved between them to accomplish what they had set out to do when they left Holland two years earlier. Together with a loan from their Uncle Bill (which they duly repaid), they could now bring their mother and sister to America.

Although Johanna and her family had known separation before, still it must have been a sad occasion when she and Rena left Holland for America. However, while there is hope, one can always look on the bright side. Life in Holland had not been easy for Johanna. Traditionally, it was a society that frowned on women leaving the home to go to work. Married or single, women were to stay at home. Johanna had to work. In America, she and her daughters could feel equal to other women.

Johanna and Rena arrived in America in 1922. At first, they both worked as domestics in Philadelphia. Then one day they read a newspaper notice that the Vienna Pastry Shop, a restaurant and bakery in Atlantic City, New Jersey, needed help. Cora and Rena commuted to the shop, about one block below the old City Hall on the ocean side of Atlantic Avenue, to apply for the position. The manager, a German by the name of Steimerling, hired both girls. Their Dutch accents gave the establishment an air of authenticity. They hurried to move to Atlantic City with their mother. In America, things happened!



Reunited in America, from left to right: Rena, Cora, Johanna and Otto on the front steps of Uncle Bill's farmhouse in Williamstown, N.J. Photo was taken circa 1922.

Those were the days of growth and prosperity for the seaside resort. Thousands of visitors poured into the city by train, bus and car for conventions or sightseeing. Johanna and the girls found an apartment above some stores at Arkansas and Atlantic Avenues, and while Cora and Rena worked at the pastry shop, Johanna worked as a domestic in Ventnor. Later, they moved to an apartment building at Massachusetts and Atlantic Avenues. Otto was still aboard the tanker.

It wasn't long before the frugal, hardworking mother and daughters had enough money saved to rent and furnish a big old house at 219 North New Hampshire Avenue. Johanna took in boarders, of whom one was John Boender, a salesman for Dutch bulbs, and another was Broer Lindblad, who worked in the delicatessen of the Vienna Restaurant.

It was while Johanna was running the boarding house that Cora was stricken with appendicitis. An operation was imperative, a delicate and serious one in those days preceding wonder drugs. Fearing her daughter would not survive, Johanna sent word to Otto to come home immediately. By the time he arrived in Atlantic City, Cora had had her operation and was recovering nicely. Notwithstanding, Johanna encouraged her son to remain with them. His seafaring days were over.

He had to find new employment. Walking in the city one day, Otto found himself in front of the electric company's office at Kentucky and Arctic Avenues. He entered and asked if they needed help.

"What experience have you had?" an interviewer asked.

"I've been aboard a tanker three years," Otto replied. By this time, his English had improved considerably.

"Well, then, you're used to working with ropes and can tie knots."

He was hired. He became a helper to an electric pole lineman. He now had a job and was comfortably settled in his mother's boarding house. He and the boarder, Broer Lindblad, became friends and the latter invited Otto to the First Baptist Church in Atlantic City where he sang in the choir. Since Otto also had a fine singing voice, it wasn't long before he, too, sang in the choir.

Otto Bruyns was a handsome young man, tall, with beautiful wavy hair and firm jaw. The girls in church began to notice him. One in particular was a tall, intelligent schoolgirl with a peaches and cream complexion and infectious smile. Otto wasn't immune to her friendly and unaffected ways. But more than that, she shared his abiding faith and love for Jesus Christ.

At 20, Otto Bruyns lost his heart to Augusta Kathryn Yates.

THE HUSBAND

"I attended the First Baptist Church in Atlantic City where Otto sang in the choir. I'd just stare at him and drool. When we first dated, I was only a junior in high school. We never dated anybody else after that."

— Augusta Bruyns

The girl who was to marry Otto Bruyns and be his lifelong companion was born Augusta Kathryn Yates on April 28, 1907 in Atlantic City. Her parents were Harry and Florence (Herold) Yates. Before the birth of their daughter, the Yates' had had two boys, one of whom died before she was born, and the other, born 14 years before her, was named Harry. Augusta was called "Gussie."

In her own words, this is Gussie Bruyns' story:

My maternal grandfather came from Germany and my maternal grandmother was of German descent. The paternal side of my family was of English descent.

My father was in the Life Saving Service, known today as the Coast Guard. I attended the Richmond Avenue School in the Chelsea district from kindergarten through third grade. Our home had gaslights because we had no electricity. When my father was promoted to Captain of the Inlet Station, a huge complex where the lighthouse was, we moved to the inlet. Our house there had electricity as well as gas. I attended the brand new Massachusetts Avenue School from fourth through eighth grades. After that, I attended high school at Ohio Avenue for two years, and the last two years I was at the new school at Albany Avenue.

When I graduated from high school, Otto and I wanted to get married, so Otto asked my father for permission.

"Young man," my father said firmly, "my daughter is not

going to get married. I didn't put her through four years of high school so she could get married. She has to work for a couple of years."

So I went to work for the Atlantic City Superintendent of Schools office. The superintendent at the time was Charles Boyer. After two years, Otto and I got married.

Our own church where we had met had burned down in the meantime, so the ceremony took place at the Chelsea Baptist Church in Atlantic City on September 1, 1927. I was 20 and Otto was 23. We were married by the Reverend Hinson V. Howlett.

Otto was working for the electric company at that time and eventually he worked himself up to lineman. The first five years of our marriage we lived with my parents in a three year-old brick house on New Hampshire Avenue, just a block above Otto's mother's boarding house.

His mother wasn't there too long after we were married, because she suffered a stroke. Since the boarding house was now too big a burden, Cora and Rena moved with their mother to an apartment where they could take better care of her. By now, both made enough money to keep her so she didn't have to work.

Then Cora went to New York City to work for Schrafft's, a prestigious restaurant chain in those days, and Rena joined her a short while later. The girls had a lady take care of their mother down here. After they were settled in New York City, they brought their mother up there and took care of her. At Schrafft's, Cora met a well-to-do young man, and they fell in love and got married. A short time later, Rena also got married. Through the efforts of Cora's husband, they were able to place their mother in a beautiful nursing home in the Fordham section of the city. She died there in 1934, but she lived to see Cora's daughter who was born a year earlier. I really can't stress enough what a wonderful woman Otto's mother was. She certainly had reason to be proud of all her children.

Rena and her husband settled in Long Island. Both girls were adept housekeepers and had lovely homes. Rena had no children and she pursued a clerical career. Otto, who was the youngest, survived his brother and sisters. (Sophie, William and Annie all passed away in the '40s.)

After Otto's mother died, she was buried in Zion Cemetery in Bargaintown. He took care of her grave, kept it clean, and planted flowers around it all the rest of his life. It was important to him that her grave was well kept.

Now, to get back to us, Otto had been with the electric company five years when he nearly got killed in an accident on the job. He was so severely burned that I told him I couldn't take it if he was going to be in constant danger like that. I urged him to seek other employment, so he got a job with a fellow Mason (Otto had joined the Masons in 1928) in an auto supply store on Atlantic Avenue. Not long after, he worked for the Ireland Coffee people on Albany Avenue. After a year or two, he worked for Walter Eschbach, who made and hung awnings. After that, he drove for the Coca-Cola Company. In the meantime, Otto had become an American citizen.

While he was working for Coca-Cola, one of Otto's friends informed him there was an opening for an insurance agent with the Prudential Life Insurance Company, and he took him to see the manager. Otto was telling the man all about Coca-Cola when the latter interrupted, "If you can get that excited about Coca-Cola, you can sell insurance!" Whatever Otto did, he put everything he had into it. He never did anything halfway.

That was in 1932. Otto took the job with Prudential, which then was located on Main Street and West Jersey Avenue in Pleasantville. He was to work there 38 years.

I had lived all my life in Atlantic City, but when Otto went to Prudential, he was told he had to live near his territory, so we

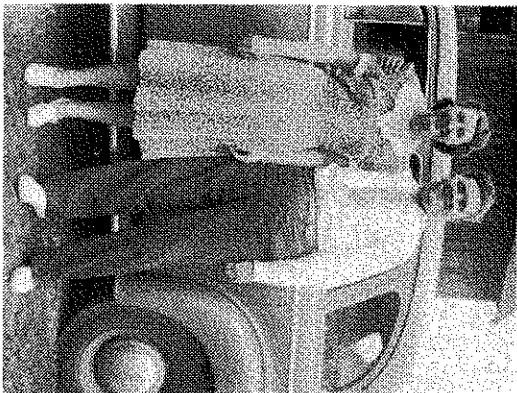
moved to the mainland. Our own first place was an apartment in Linwood, where we stayed only a few months. In 1933, we moved to an apartment on Ryon Avenue in Pleasantville. I was working for the Mutual Building and Loan in Atlantic City in the Guarantee Trust Building. I was there ten years.



In 1932, Otto Bryns took a job as an insurance agent with the Prudential Life Insurance Company. He was to work there 38 years.

In 1937, we moved from our Pleasantville apartment to our first house at 29 Jackson Avenue, Northfield. At the time the city was a small, friendly community of less than 3,000. There were lots of open spaces because it was sparsely settled, and everybody knew everybody else. I remember our neighbors over the years were the LeRoy Frankfield's, C. J. Underwood's, James Lake's, Eugene Long's and John Boucher's. There were only three policemen on the force and there was a volunteer fire department. We went to the post office to pick up our mail.

In 1942, after World War II broke out, Otto went to Philadelphia and tried to enlist in the Navy. He was 38 years old and was rejected because he "could not keep up with these kids." The



*A young Gussie and Otto pose
happily during a visit to Uncle
Bill's farm.*

Navy told him to go home and sell war bonds. Which he did. Otto by then was a staff manager at Prudential. As his men went into the service, some of them were replaced by women. There were two or three women on his staff, myself included. I worked as a Prudential agent two years and Otto was my boss. That was during the latter part of the war because as soon as the men started coming back, I quit. After that, there must have been a period I didn't work.

Otto's public service career in Northfield began when he was asked to serve as an assessor. He was one of three assessors and served from 1944 to 1953. He received \$100 a year.

From 1954 to 1964, he served on the City Council. From 1965 to 1975, he was Mayor.

He always said, "I'm not a politician. I'm a public servant." He was so proud to be an American citizen and wanted to pay his country back by being of service to his community. He wanted to be honest, dependable and upright, and he strove to exemplify Christian principles.

We attended the Pleasantville Baptist Church from 1932 to

1982, where Otto served as a deacon and later a trustee. From 1982, we attended the Seaview Baptist Church in Linwood, and Otto served there on the Deacon Board.

I didn't complain that Otto was out an awful lot. He worked full time in his position at Prudential. All the public service activities were on a part-time basis. When he was a Prudential man, he was out a lot selling insurance. I just made a life for myself. I kept busy.

In 1947, I was asked to be Secretary of the Northfield Board of Education. I had my office in my home and worked from there. Then in 1948, when our daughter Carol came into our lives, I was able to continue working. My father passed away in 1949 and my mother came to live with us. In 1950, Otto changed his position from staff manager back to insurance agent because it meant more money. He had two extra mouths to feed — Carol and my mother. My mother lived with us eleven years until she died in 1959.

When Carol was three years old, I had an operation. While convalescing at home, I had a desk put up in my bedroom because I had to catch up on so much of the payroll work. I don't know how I did it. What I'm trying to say is, since I was busy working, I didn't have the time to feel lonely.

I held my position as Secretary of the School Board until I retired in 1970. I went through many projects: Two new schools were built, Locuson and Kresge. We added a whole six-room wing to the Mill Road School, plus a five-room addition and a multi-purpose room to the Mount Vernon School. The Mayor at that time appointed the school board so the city had to take care of the bond issue.

Otto worked for Prudential from 1932 until 1969, when he retired. Actually, he had been on disability retirement from 1966. He became Northfield's Mayor in January 1965. Unfortunately, he had a heart attack during his first year in office. He was

THE FATHER

Otto and Gussie Bruyns' only child, Carol Bruyns Ryan, is a Registered Nurse, a graduate of Mountainside Hospital School of Nursing, Montclair, New Jersey. Now widowed, and the mother of two, she affectionately recalled her father:

I guess daddy's little girls are special. I know my father made me feel special. He liked having kids around; he gave me and my friends nicknames. I was "Carol Pickle Barrel."—Two of my friends were "Sandy Sandpaper" and "Marylou Hoffenpepper."

When I was small, he liked to take me to farms in Bargaintown where he collected insurance, and where they raised horses and sheep. I even got to feed the lambs. He never minded if I brought along two or three friends. We were fortunate he had a job where he could set his own hours and taxi us around.

I remember I had my tonsils out when I was only four. One of my friends had had hers out a short time before me and she had hemorrhaged. Daddy panicked when he heard that, so I had a round-the-clock private duty nurse. The day after the surgery, he and mom brought me my own pillow from home and the biggest doll I had ever seen. I had a sense of being loved. My father inspired me to believe I have the ability to do things. You need someone to believe in you, and he believed in me.

I always wanted to be a nurse and my parents, especially my father, encouraged me. When I was about ten years old, I had a little white table on wheels with medical stuff on it. I had a nurse's white uniform and my mom sewed red crosses on it.

Daddy had a great sense of humor. When I was attending nursing school, I brought two of my classmates home one July 4th weekend. One of the girls came down with the measles, which meant we were quarantined here. We'd be upstairs in the bedroom

hospitalized in the Atlantic City Hospital for at least one month. His recovery seemed to progress as time went on. However, the following year he suffered another heart attack. This time he was hospitalized in Shore Memorial Hospital. Dr. Peter H. Marvel, who was a well-known local heart specialist, warned him that he didn't feel it was wise for Otto to have the extra burdens of public office. However, when James Smith, who was to succeed Otto, died suddenly in 1967 people urged him to run again. By this time, his health had improved and he got the go-ahead from Dr. Marvel. It is interesting that Otto lived another 22 years after his second heart attack!

He often said, "I wrote up many insurance policies. Ironically, many who were rejected for health reasons lived to old age, and many who were accepted died young."

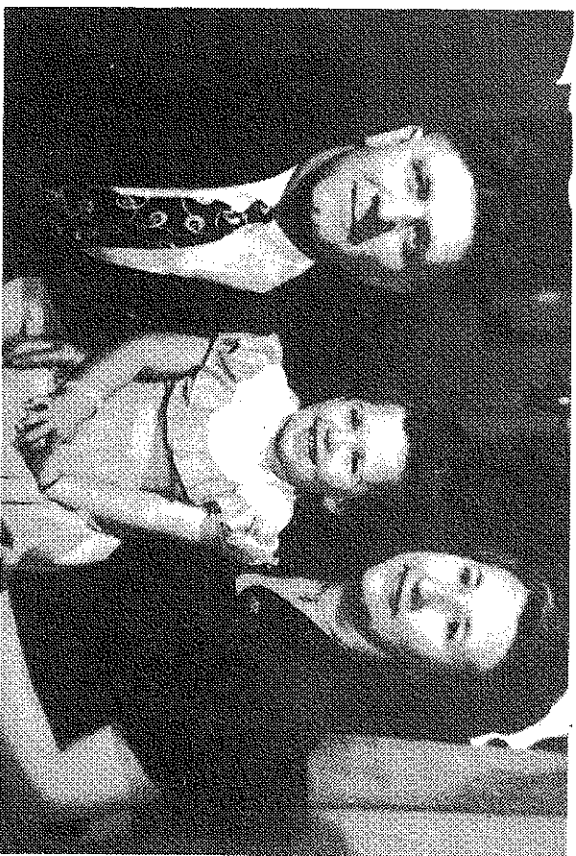
Otto worked hard, but he enjoyed life. He loved to read, especially poetry. He also loved music, and one of his favorite songs was Kate Smith singing "God Bless America." He liked to watch the Jeopardy Game Show on television, and also the news. His favorite commentators were Lowell Thomas, Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw, and Peter Jennings.

He had a large victory garden during the second World War, and he continued to raise a vegetable garden until a couple of years ago. His favorite dish was a Dutch recipe made with chopped kale, mashed potatoes and sausage.

In 1972, when we moved to Haddon Avenue from Jackson Avenue, we went to visit Otto's hometown in Holland. (We went there in April and we moved in May, so it was all rather rushed.) Otto was so pleased that his childhood home and school were still there as he remembered them.

We could both see how wonderfully the Lord guided us in our lives. Otto accomplished so much more than he ever expected. He used to say, "I have to pinch myself to think a little Dutch boy came over here and became the mayor of a growing American city." He just couldn't believe it happened. His one regret was his mother didn't live to see what he accomplished.

and we could hear daddy call the school: "The girls are better, but they are not well yet," he'd say. "I know it is a great responsibility, but we don't mind." Then he'd call upstairs, "Okay, girls, you can stay another day!"



... and baby makes three. A proud Otto and Gussie with their 3 year-old daughter, Carol

My father was friendly and outgoing. He loved his family, his church and his country. He always had little stories to tell about his experiences. For instance, he loved to tell this story:

When he first came to America and lived on his uncle's farm, he and a cousin were walking down the road and this man walked by carrying a big watermelon. Daddy had never seen a watermelon before. Turning to his cousin, he exclaimed, "Look at the size of that pickle!"

When he was mayor, he was called "the marrying mayor" because he performed so many marriage ceremonies. He officiated at the marriage of two of my nursing classmates.

He was so proud the day he took me to City Hall to register to vote. Harold Williams, who was the City Clerk then, registered me. That was upstairs in the old City Hall. One of the things my father passed on was his love of country and the fact you have to give back what you get. It was important for him to serve.

He was deeply religious and he always had a subtle way of letting people know his faith. For instance, at the end of a letter, he would write, "God keep you in His care." Daddy's favorite Bible verse was, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." (Psalm 37:5) He also believed you can't just send kids to church. You have to take them so they can see your example.

I was so pleased when my daughter Tara had to do a biography of someone she thought important, and she chose my father. She interviewed him, and got an "A" on her paper. Her teacher wrote on it, "A very interesting person."

My son Frankie told me nobody could be a better grandpop than his grandpop was. Daddy was big on Frankie. His axiom, "You can do anything you want to do, and nothing you don't want to do," never applied to Frankie.

Some reasons for daddy's success were that he was sincere, a good listener, and was very caring. He remembered people, their lives, their circumstances — their names. He had a terrific memory.

He wasn't vain, but he loved to hear compliments about his beautiful hair. Even in his later years, he had a full head of hair. Since he had a good singing voice, he loved to sing in church. And he had no problems speaking in public; he loved it.

He was very proud of the public library. He felt it was necessary for the city to have it so people could improve themselves. Although the children have libraries at school, he believed the city's expanded library could provide more. It was essential to him that the city have a good library, and then to have it named for him in 1983 was perhaps his greatest reward.

THE COMMUNITY HE SERVED

Otto Bruyns devoted 31 years of service to Northfield. The city lies between Pleasantville on the north and Linwood on the south, and it covers three and eight-tenths square miles of land. It is part of Atlantic County.

Atlantic County consisted of four townships when it was formed from the eastern portion of Gloucester County on February 7, 1837: Egg Harbor, Galloway, Hamilton and Weymouth. Over the years these were divided and subdivided into the 23 municipalities which make up the county today.

Although it is known that Egg Harbor Township was mentioned as such by Court in Gloucester County as early as March 20, 1693 (it was also called "New Weymouth" at times), it was not incorporated until February 21, 1798. During later years, the following municipalities were all formed from it: Absecon, Atlantic City, Brigantine, (Egg Harbor Township), Linwood, Longport, Margate, NORTHFIELD, Pleasantville, Somers Point and Ventnor.

U.S. Census figures reflect Northfield grew from 1,127 in 1920 to 8,646 in 1970. A decline was noted in the 1980 census figure: 7,716.

Prior to being called Northfield upon its incorporation March 21, 1905, it was called Bakersville and/or Dolphin. In early days, it was a busy seaport. Today, it is a city of shopping centers, professional offices, medical centers, churches, schools, synagogue, banking institutions, restaurants, businesses, homes, etc. Many dedicated men and women have contributed to the city's progress and growth over the years. It is impossible to name them all, but here at least are the men who have served as its mayors. With the exception of two, all ran as Republicans:

Walter Fifield	1905-07
William Boice	1908-09
Joseph Rass (D)	1910-11
William Boice	1912-20
Walter Yates (D)	1921-23
Eugene Swilkey	1924-27
William B. Stokes	1928-29
Andrew K. Littlefield	1930-42
George M. Parker	1943-47
Gerald L. Infield, M.D.	1948-57
Englebert Breunig	1958-59
Raphael K. Feeney	1960-64
OTTO BRUYNS	1965-75
Nicholas Kuchova	1976-79
Arthur Faden	1980-82
William M. Felton, Jr.	1983-1/31/86
Philip S. Munafò	2/4/86-

THE PUBLIC SERVANT

"All Republicans don't have wings and
all Democrats don't have horns."

Otto Bruyns often voiced that sentiment. He did not like to be called a politician. He wanted to be known as a public servant.

His public service career began in 1944 when he was asked to serve as an assessor in Northfield, where he had lived seven years. He was an assessor for ten years. From 1954 to 1964, he served on the Northfield City Council.

In 1964, he ran for mayor since Mayor Raphael Feeney had died in office on March 21st that year. Otto Bruyns was sworn in after his election to fill the vacant post. Council President James J. Smith had acted as Interim Mayor.

In 1950, during Dr. Gerald Infield's term as mayor, the Acacia Club of Northfield was formed.

"Otto was one of the three founders of the Acacia Club," Gussie Bruyns noted. "The other two were Dr. Infield and Kurt Schilling. It was open to any Mason in Northfield who cared to join. Its purpose was to hold an annual fund-raiser to buy hospital equipment, such as wheelchairs, beds, walkers, crutches, etc., which were loaned free to anyone in the city who needed them."

Gussie Bruyns noted that her husband was called many times to help people. "He was in charge of all this hospital equipment, and whenever there was a need, he was the one who was called. The club even bought shoes for kids in school. I remember Mabel Garwood, who was a truant officer and secretary at the Mill Road School in the '50s and '60s, would call to say there was a child in school with no shoes and Otto would see the child got them. The Acacia Club also provided food baskets to the needy at Thanksgiving and Christmas," she added.

One person, in particular, who was helped by Otto Bruyns was Miss Lizzie Price, the city's first librarian. In 1948, when Miss Price was 83 years old, Otto Bruyns escorted her and her sister Louie to the Masonic Home in Burlington, New Jersey. The sisters lived out their lives there and when they passed away, he brought them back to their hometown for burial.

The first two years Otto Bruyns was in office were marked by his two heart attacks. In July 1967, local newspapers announced he would not seek reelection that year. James J. Smith, City Council President, was to be on the ballot as mayoral candidate. (The Democrats were not running a candidate for mayor that year.) Tragically, Smith died suddenly on October 3, 1967, just "minutes" before the filing deadline. By this time Otto Bruyns' health had improved, and friends urged him to please reconsider running. His doctor gave him the go-ahead, and permission to make him the Republican candidate in the general election was granted by Superior Court Judge Anthony J. Calfero, despite the lateness of filing.

He was in office from 1965 through 1975, during which he officiated at countless openings, ribbon cuttings, award presentations, marriages, etc.

Of note is that he cut the ribbon to officially open the McDonald's Restaurant on Tilton Road on January 14, 1969. The ribbon was made up of 50 one dollar bills, which were then donated to the Acacia Club for its charitable works.

More than 200 couples came from all over the country to be married by him, hence his being dubbed "the marrying mayor."

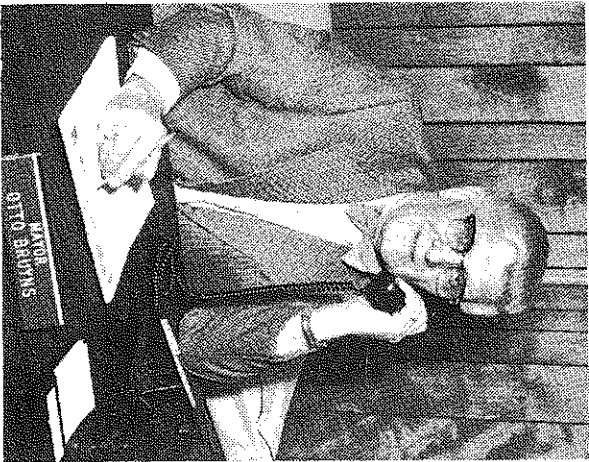
Change and progress marked his tenure in office. Some of them were:

Campsites were added to Birch Grove Park.

Ground was broken for a new City Hall on November 20, 1968. The City Council met for the first time in the new building on November 23, 1969. The new facility, complete with a new library, was dedicated on Saturday, September 12, 1970. (The old City Hall was razed in April 1970.)

Cable television arrived in Northfield in February 1966.

He appointed a Bicentennial Committee for 1976. It is now known as the Northfield Cultural Committee.



Man on the go. Even after he retired, Otto Bruyns could not stop caring for the people in Northfield. He was never too busy to extend a helping hand.

The small library building which had served the city for many years was moved behind City Hall and converted into a museum. (It is currently slated to be moved to Birch Grove Park.)

The city's sewerage project was implemented while Otto Bruyns was mayor.

One could go on and on, but perhaps a better way to know what he accomplished while in office would be to hear from the man himself. Here, then, are two of his annual messages to the city: those in 1970 and 1975. The first paragraph in each report gives strong indication of what the previous year was like:

January 6th, 1970

Mr. President, Members of City Council & Citizens of Northfield:

We stand once more on the threshold of a shining and unblemished year, untouched by time and frustration, unclouded by failure and fear. How we will use the days of this year will be a matter of speculation and will certainly be better known at the end rather than the beginning.

Permit me first of all to offer my congratulations to those members of City Council who have been returned by the electorate to serve for another term: Councilmen Michael Mazza, Nicholas Kuchova and Joseph Breeden. Also, we offer congratulations to our new elected City Clerk, Stanley Adams, as well as to our County Committeeman Robert Dix and County Committee-woman, Laura McCarr. It is good to have you all in our official family.

Whatever degree of success we may have attained during the past year has been largely due to the wholehearted cooperation of each department of our municipal family. I could not honestly name one of our departments over another as having excelled as it has truly been a team effort, and I have every reason to believe that this same cooperation will continue during the year before us. We have faced the many problems together and shared in making the necessary decisions.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not mention our Building Committee headed by our conscientious Councilman, Thomas Crane, assisted by Council President, Stuart Schuyler, and Councilman Laurence Palmisano. I think it altogether fitting that we give these gentlemen a round of applause as we look about us and see the fruit of their labor in this beautiful building. The completion of our Municipal Building is a dream come true. It has been so desperately needed for a number of years as our community has continued to grow. We are planning for the dedication ceremonies in the near future, at which time we expect to give a more detailed report.

It is well that I should discuss with you a few of the events of the past year and my thoughts concerning the future. To say the least, it has been a strenuous year with the usual number of problems. No other item has been of greater concern to your City Council than the ever increasing tax rate. As we look around us, whether it be local, state or national, it is evident that everyone is endeavoring to find a solution to this problem. It is my personal opinion that while we are living during this inflationary period, with continued increases in all phases of municipal government, that there is no answer but to hope for a leveling off of the spiraling costs in the near future.

Our Board of Assessors has been doing its part, under the able leadership of Councilman Kuchova, to meet some of our local tax problems by arriving at a more equitable distribution of our tax ratables. Accordingly, a great deal has been accomplished with the assistance of our Tax Collector, Richard Squires, who, in addition to being a Certified Tax Collector, is also a Certified Tax Assessor. Our tax office has continued to do an excellent job this year with the splendid cooperation of Mrs. James Arbogast and Mrs. Ernest Hartley. With the continuation of our present program, I have every reason to believe that the end result will show a definite and substantial saving to our City.

We are pleased to report that our sewerage program is moving into its final stages after five years of intensive planning. During the past month we have met with the Mayor and members of Linwood City Council to discuss the feasibility of combining our efforts along certain phases and from present indications, it would appear that within the very near future we will be in a position to furnish a more detailed report. We are looking forward to getting this project under way the early part of this year unless some unforeseen circumstance should arise.

As to our schools, you are all aware that we were able to open and dedicate the Charles M. Kresge Elementary School on Oak Avenue. To have this school named for the fine citizen who gave so unstintingly for thirty-five years was an honor well deserved. I do want to thank the Board members of both our local schools and the Mainland Regional High School for their continued efforts in giving our students the very best education possible.

I would not let this opportunity pass without a word of commendation to the members of our Library Board and the splendid cooperation afforded them by the Library Association. It has indeed been a matter of great satisfaction to me personally and to all of our citizens to see our new Library become a reality through their combined efforts. I am sure you will agree that our Library is one of the finest on the Mainland. It is my intention at our dedication exercises to enlarge upon these comments as time and space do not permit me to give due credit to so many citizens who have indeed completed a splendid program far beyond our expectations.

We regret that our Chief of Police has been on a leave of absence due to illness. It is difficult for anyone to follow in the footsteps of one so dedicated as Chief Howard Chambers, but we are indeed fortunate to have our Deputy Chief, Edwin Kroger, assume the responsibilities as Acting Chief during the past few months. The training he received under Chief Chambers has stood him well. We are happy to report that Chief Chambers' health is improving day by day.

Our Birch Grove Association is certainly entitled to a word of commendation. Our Councilman Michael Mazza, together with his assistant, Nicholas Kuchova, has brought back to us many splendid reports, particularly as to the demand for the campsites. Our City of Northfield is becoming well known throughout the country and we have campers from many states and Canada.

Time will not permit me to mention the many civic-minded citizens who are giving of their time, not only to this Association, but on the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, Board of Health, Welfare Board, All Sports, etc.

During the past year, we have been able to correct many of our drainage problems under the able direction of Councilman C. Paul Glenn and our Road Supervisor, Robert Dix, and City Engineer Ronald Price. We are well aware of the fact that much more needs to be done, especially in the area of Oak Avenue since the erection of the new school. Plans are under way to correct this problem the early part of this year. We do appreciate the patience our citizens have shown in other areas of town and you may be sure with the amount of money allotted by the State, we shall continue to correct these drainage problems as fast as possible.

Much thanks are due our Volunteer Fire Department for its continued efforts in serving our municipality. The new ambulance, purchased without cost to the City, is the envy of many of our neighboring communities. To accomplish this meant a great deal of work and sacrifice on the part of these fine citizens. Under the able leadership of Councilman Laurence Palmisano and Chief Howard Revelle, the membership of the Volunteer Fire Company is steadily increasing. When the Building Committee formulated the plans for our Municipal Building, ample space was allotted to the Volunteers and they have a fine place in which to meet and are busily working to improve this area. More will be said about this at the time of dedication.

I am happy to report that space has also been provided in our new building for our Civil Defense Director, Leroy Rankin. We

hope it will never be necessary to call upon our Civil Defense, but it is better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it. Mr. Rankin is indeed a dedicated worker for this department.

I could give you many more facts and figures — for instance, the total mileage covered by our Police Department, the number of homes watched while owners were absent, the number of cases disposed of by our Court, percentage of tax collections, etc., etc., but I believe these would only be boring and soon forgotten. Suffice it to say that all departments have performed splendidly.

In conclusion, let me say that we have given of our best and have endeavored to discharge all the duties incumbent upon us. As we enter into this New Year, we trust that we may be equal to the stern responsibility of this troublesome age and do our duty as municipal officials in continually striving to make the City of Northfield one of the outstanding communities on the Mainland.

And remember that companionship of time is but of short duration. It flies more quickly than the shades of evening and it teaches us that a man should so live that at the close of every day he can repeat, "I have not wasted my day."

May I wish you all a most prosperous and healthy New Year and may God's richest blessing abide with you always.

Respectfully yours,
/s/ Otto Bruyns, Mayor
City of Northfield, N.J.

The next report does not paint such a bright and optimistic picture:

January 7th, 1975

Mr. President, Members of City Council, and Fellow Citizens:

In Latin, it is *TEMPUS FUGIT*. In English, it comes out *TIME FLIES*. In any language, the past twelve months have passed quickly. Looking back upon these months and to say it has been an easy year would be anything but the truth.

First of all, I wish to offer my congratulations to those members of City Council who were recently elected. I am particularly happy to have Councilman Palmisano back with us again. Congratulations also to Councilman (Robert) Greblunas, a newcomer to our Council. I would also like to offer my sincere congratulations to Nicholas Kuchova on his reelection as our Council President. It is indeed an honor well deserved.

Relative to my previous mention as to 1974 having been a most difficult year, I am sure it is not necessary for me to enlarge upon the reason for this, as we have all felt the impact of the construction of our sewerage system. It is well to remember that growth has never been easy. We all have growing pains! With them come moments of disappointment, frustration, and depression. Learning to cope with these feelings and riding them out or turning them into a positive, creative experience is no easy challenge.

It is not my intention to bore you with a recapitulation of the many obstacles with which we were confronted, and I think we have all had our share of sewerage discussion. I am glad to report that construction has been completed and our entire system should be operating shortly. A vote of thanks is due Larry Palmisano and his committee who all worked so diligently for untold hours to see this project to its completion. I would be remiss if I did not make mention and offer thanks to Councilman (Daniel) Hickey for his advice and counsel as he is well versed in this type

of construction. Also to Councilman Harry Cummings, in charge of public roads, for seeing that our streets and roads were properly paved and repairs made wherever damage was done by the contractors; to our Treasurer, Robert Vogel, for his financial advice, and to our City Clerk, William Casto, for having to listen to hundreds of complaints and filing the necessary claims. As a matter of fact, each councilman contributed a great deal in seeing this project through.

To our citizens go our thanks for their patience and forbearance. You have as a whole been most kind and understanding throughout the inconvenience caused. Of course, as expected, a certain amount of criticism was voiced, none of which deterred us from moving forward. As we enter a new year, we will again face some difficulties, but I have the utmost confidence that our new Chairman, Wayne Thomas, will continue to guide us in the right direction for whatever is best for the majority of our citizens.

Thirty years ago, when I first became involved in local government, Northfield was a much smaller city and our problems were less complex. The scope of the local official could, and usually did, end at his jurisdiction's boundary lines. This was true then simply because each municipality, with a few exceptions, solved all of its problems by itself. Today, however, as I look at local government, the heaviest responsibility facing us as local officials and the greatest challenge facing the institutions of municipal government is *CHANGE*. I am referring to *CHANGE IN OUR SOCIETY* generally. Of course, I could start with those changes of a technical nature, such as sewerage. In the past, it was usually a simple decision of whether to continue with individual septic tank installation or whether to undertake the construction of a centralized sewerage system. Today, the decision is immensely more complicated and often involves tie-ins with other systems on a regional basis, requirements of the State Department of Environmental Protection, and Federal Environmental Protection Agencies, as well as compliance with state-wide water pollution control, etc.

Consideration is being given at the present time to regionalization of our court system. Meetings have been held with the Mayors of the Cities of Somers Point and Linwood and Superior Court Justice Herbert Horn, as to the feasibility of such an arrangement and whether it would be a saving to our communities.

In addition to this, there are other areas where regionalization has been suggested and it would at this point be difficult to foresee whether any of these proposed plans will ever come to fruition.

As we face the year 1975, I do not hesitate to tell you that we do so with a certain amount of trepidation. I am sure we are all cognizant of our present economic conditions throughout our nation and the world as well. In the past we have been priding ourselves in having close to 100% collection of taxes. During the latter part of 1974, we have found a decided decrease in the amount of tax collections. As a matter of fact, the uncollected taxes this year is just double that of the previous year. This item must be carried over into our 1975 budget before we even begin to plan for the normal expenditures. I have asked each department head to hold its budget to the bare minimum and I must again give credit to the City Council, present and past, for having the foresight during the past five years to set aside a certain amount for the new fire engine which we were forced to purchase as directed by the fire underwriters. As you view this new piece of equipment, you may realize with satisfaction that it is all paid for.

There are several other projects to which we may well give our consideration. First of all, I have always been a strong defender of Civil Defense. I think it is one area which most of us view too lightly. As we read of the many disasters occurring both in our own country and in other lands, and being so closely situated to the ocean, we may well take warning to be prepared for any eventuality. It is well to remember that it is better to be prepared and not need it than to need it and not be prepared. I, therefore, would recommend very strongly to City Council, now and in the future, that we give serious consideration to this most important function of our community.

Secondly, as you have been well aware during the past year, our Council meetings have been unnecessarily lengthy. I personally know of some of our citizens who have contacted me who have come to our meetings for a specific purpose to ask questions and due to the lateness of the hour have had to leave before being able to be heard. I shall recommend to Council that some time limit be placed on each speaker so the meetings are not unduly drawn out. It is not my intention to stifle any citizen, but it is only fair that everyone be given a chance to be heard on any problem he or she may have.

As you are no doubt aware, a Juvenile Committee has been established under the able leadership of our former Councilman, C. Paul Glenn, and composed of a group of loyal, conscientious citizens with the desire of meeting with young people who have been in minor trouble. They will work in conjunction with the juvenile court of Atlantic County in the processing of juvenile complaints. Mr. Glenn is at present searching for a facility that can be used for a youth center in order to help these young people to make more profitable use of their free time.

We are rapidly approaching the time for the celebration of the bicentennial year of our nation. A committee has been appointed and they have been working very diligently to complete plans for this big event in 1976. It is their intention to begin this celebration in 1975 and you will be hearing more about this in the near future. They have met with the Birch Grove Association and have their complete cooperation in helping to make this an outstanding event in our city. We certainly hope all of our citizens will enthusiastically support this committee in their plans.

During the past year, we have heard so much of what is wrong with our country. This has been a very disturbing factor to me. Always in our nation, there are negative thinkers who deluge us with cynical, gloomy, pessimistic predictions that would discredit our country. At an hour like this, I suggest we stop talking and start

listening to the voice of the American Flag. I imagine that Old Glory, as some call her, would have fitting words for us tonight. Meeting after meeting, she stands silently in this room. Without the authority she represents, I would not have had the freedom to speak as I have. And so tonight, she speaks. Let us listen to her. "I am the American Flag, and I speak from the wisdom of a long life. I have travelled far and have never known defeat." Let this be our inspiration for 1975 as we plan to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of this great nation.

...May I wish you all a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year, and may God's richest blessing abide with you always.

Otto Bruyns,
Mayor.

When Otto Bruyns cleared out his desk in City Hall at the close of 1975, no goodbyes were necessary.

"He went to City Hall every day after that," Gussie Bruyns recalled. "It gave him something to do. He liked to stop in at the municipal building and say 'hello.' He didn't suffer from any lack of things to do because he was active on the Library Board and the Atlantic County League of Municipalities. And, of course, he was active in church."

The truth is Otto Bruyns could not stop caring for anyone. The tributes and awards showered on him throughout his lifetime testified that he cared about God, his family, his community, his country. He was proud of his accomplishments, and those of his family. He was known to say that between himself, his wife, and daughter, 61 years of service were given to the City of Northfield. He gave 31 years as assessor, councilman and mayor. Gussie Bruyns served 25 years on the school board, and daughter Carol served as a nurse in the city's school system five years.

He was genuine. That quality alone will stand the test of time.

Otto Bruyns' heart gave out on Saturday, November 26, 1988. He didn't have to lay out his clothes that night for church the next day. Angels prepared his wardrobe for a more wonderful place.

OTTO BRUYNs AND THE LIBRARY

The appeal of a library is that it lets us have fun while it teaches us. It offers much to choose from and there is nothing compulsory about it.

Otto Bruyns knew the value of "fun while you learn on your own." As a boy from Holland who didn't know English, he learned the language by reading comics. From the expressions of the cartoon characters, he could pretty well guess what they were saying. Then he studied the words. He improved his language skills because he loved to read, especially poetry and American history. By the time he was a grown man, he had an excellent command of the English language and didn't have a trace of an accent in his speech. To Otto Bruyns, a library was a place anyone could afford to go to for self-improvement. It was only natural, therefore, that he placed much emphasis on providing a good library for his beloved Northfield.

The history of Northfield's library is unique. Quite possibly, no other library in the county, maybe even the whole state, has undergone so many moves and transitions.

It began in 1926. As the result of the efforts of a citizens' association, a collection of about 100 books were placed for circulation in Mayor Eugene Swilkey's office. That was the start. Within one year, the walls of council chambers were lined with bookcases. Miss Lizzie Price, the city's first librarian, held library hours on Tuesdays and Fridays from 4:00 to 8:00 P.M.

In the Spring of 1928, the bookcases were moved across the street to 1607 Shore Road, then the home of Mrs. J. Muldoon. There the Association rented a second-floor room, this larger facility costing it \$20 a month for rent. The library was three years old and boasted a collection of 1,540 books. Miss Price continued as librarian, holding hours on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, four hours a day.

The library was moved back into larger quarters in City Hall in March 1930, and by 1938 had outgrown even that facility. It was then the city acquired its first library "building." It was a one-room structure that once had been a construction office at Mill Road and the Shore Fast Line. It was moved next to City Hall and renovated as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. The building was approximately 14' x 22' and the shelves lining its walls provided space for over 2,000 books.

Miss Price continued as librarian until 1947, when she retired at age 82. A painting, which was a 1939 WPA project, by G. Francis Meredith, "The Home of Miss Lizzie Price," is on indefinite loan to the library from the WPA, Federal Art Project, and hangs in the front of the library.

Miss Price was succeeded by Mrs. Fundis, who served until 1958, assisted for a short time by Mrs. Fields from Somers Point. Mrs. Elaine Swilkey, daughter-in-law of the aforementioned Mayor Swilkey, was Northfield's librarian from 1958 until 1966.

During the '50s and '60s, the library was on a small budget and most of the books were on loan from the county library. During Mrs. Swilkey's tenure, book circulation increased notably. A story hour for children was offered by the Cresset Junior Women's Club on Saturdays with great success, despite the fact the children were seated two to a chair in the narrow aisles. In 1966, Mrs. Frances Carey succeeded Mrs. Swilkey.

For thirty years, the one-room building attempted to serve the needs of a growing community. Then in 1968, a group of parents took a serious look at the library situation and organized themselves into a reactivated and vibrant Northfield Public Library Association. It was duly incorporated as a non-profit organization. Today, it can be credited with much of the library's progressive development over the years that followed. It had a strong ally in Otto Bruyns. As mayor, he appointed a City Library Board which was responsible mainly for the library's administration, while the Association was responsible for its functional needs.

Four volunteers kept the library open Tuesday and Friday evenings for an additional two hours each evening. They were: Jean Blasciak, Leonora (Lee) Haslett, Dorothy Cohen, and Edna Mae Dempsey. Two are still with the library: Jean Blasciak and Lee Haslett.

When Jean Blasciak's husband, Bill, retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1964, the couple settled in Northfield. Mrs. Blasciak, who had received her library training in her native England, was curious about the library facilities in her new hometown.

"I was shocked that it was so small!" she exclaimed. "It looked like a shed, but I have to say I was surprised it held 3,000 books. Somebody heard I had library experience, so I volunteered one night a week."

When Mrs. Carey resigned in late 1968, Mrs. Blasciak succeeded her as librarian with some gentle persuasion from the Association to "please take the job—as a little paid hobby—six hours a week." With her training, she brought much needed expertise in library practices to the position. Under her guidance, and with the help of Jean Briggs who lived in the city at the time, a card catalog was compiled of city-owned books and long-term county books, all in accordance with American Library Association guidelines and identified by the Dewey decimal system.

When the new City Hall was completed in 1969, it included a much needed expanded library facility. The books and equipment that were in the small building were moved into the new quarters on November 19, 1969 by a chain of boy scouts from Troop No. 72. In 1970, the new library contained over 7,000 city and county-owned books. It also housed a children's corner, furnished by the professional and business people of Northfield. Over the years, there were many additions: more hours, more personnel and volunteers, more books, magazines, art collection, record collection, copy machine, outdoor bicycle racks, additional book stacks, etc.

In 1971, the library's name was changed from the Northfield Public Library to Public Library of Northfield, Inc. In 1983, in recognition of Otto Bruyns' long and faithful service, the City of Northfield declared by Resolution that its library was to be officially known as the Otto Bruyns Public Library of Northfield.

Since 1968, the library has been served by the following staff members and/or volunteers: Jean Blasciak, Lee Haslett, Dorothy Cohen, Edna Mae Dempsey, Mrs. Richard Wilson, Marie Tagg, Estelle Blumenauer, Kathleen Previti, Lorraine Whaley, and Jean Strauss.

Now the Director of Library Services, Jean Blasciak smiled as she looked about her. "This facility has served the City for more than twenty years. It doesn't seem possible we've been here that long. We've outgrown it, of course, and I look forward to moving to the new building."

The new building she referred to is the library building still under construction on Mill Road. Slated for completion by mid-1989, it is a dream come true, largely through the efforts begun years before by Otto Bruyns. He always envisioned the city's library at that site, and while other locations were considered, they never seemed as appropriate.

"I remember the very first time I met Mayor Bruyns," Mrs. Blasciak reminisced. "It was around 1968 when I was volunteering at the small building. One night he came in and introduced himself. Right away he asked, 'Is there anything you need, or anything I can do?' You know, for the next twenty years, those were his first words when he entered the library! But he was like that with everyone. He helped a lot of people in Northfield, getting them medical supplies through the Acacia Club, or getting them into the Masonic Home, etc."

Mrs. Blasciak continued that when Otto Bruyns retired from office, he was appointed to the City Library Board and served on it the remainder of his life. He was its President and later, as he got older, he served as its Vice President so he wouldn't have as many responsibilities.

According to Mrs. Blasciak, the city had a retirement dinner for Otto Bruyns at the Atlantic City Country Club, and the various departments gave him gifts. The library presented him with a book, published by the National Geographic Society, entitled **AMERICA'S HISTORYLANDS**.

"He was very fond of American history," Mrs. Blasciak recalled. "I also want to add that Mayor Bruyns was aware when we moved into the City Hall facility that it would be too small some day. Twenty years ago, when we moved here, we were asked to look at all the city-owned land and at that time, he agreed that Mill Road was the most desirable place. Other sites were studied, but in the end, he was proved to be right."

It was not until 1986 that circumstances were favorable to build a separate library building. In November 1985, Northfield citizens voted to withdraw from the County Library System to form their own municipal library. All county-owned items were due for return by the end of that year.

Lee Haslett, Senior Library Assistant, who also has been with the library more than twenty years, fondly recalled Otto Bruyns:

"He thought it was wonderful the way children came in here," she noted. "He said more people came through here than any other office in City Hall, and left happier."

"There aren't too many people around like him any more," continued Mrs. Haslett. "An era has gone. He was unique. No matter what came up in my life, I could always relate it to something he said. There was strength in his Christian witness. He

never quit. He was such a good Christian that nothing shook his faith. He was always here for everyone, and I miss him. I'm glad our paths crossed."

Those who frequent the Northfield library will recall an oil painting of Otto Bruyns. It was done by former library staff member Dorothy Cohen on the occasion of his retirement from office in 1975. He donated it to the library.

According to Mrs. Blasciak, the book collection on the shelves at the City Hall facility stands at approximately 14,000. The new Mill Road building has a floor plan of 4,638 square feet. 8,470 volumes can be accommodated in the children's stacks, and 11,725 volumes in the adult stacks. A total of almost 21,000 books can be lodged in the new library.

Ample parking facilities are behind the building with sufficient lighting for nighttime hours. A separate entrance for the handicapped, complete with ramp, is at the back of the building.

Otto Bruyns lived to participate in the March 26, 1988 official groundbreaking of the Mill Road facility. Sadly, he did not live to see the completion of his dream.

Perhaps Mrs. Blasciak said it right: "He left a vacant spot. But I can still see him walk through the door and hear him ask, 'Is there anything you need?'"

OTTO BRUYNS was of humble beginning. His father was a house painter and his mother was a domestic. As a child in Holland, he was nurtured by the love of a devoted grandfather and the dedication of a hard-working mother. He came to America in his mid-teens with only the values they had taught him, yet he dared to achieve.

From delivering freshly laundered uniforms for his mother while a schoolboy to guiding one of America's cities during its greatest period of growth, he exemplified faith in God, loyalty to family, and service to his fellow man.

Those closest to him knew his regret that his mother did not live to see his achievements. Surely, she would have been proud. For Otto Bruyns was gifted with the ability to dream with vision.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Just a few short weeks after Otto Bruyns' death, Gussie Bruyns sat in her livingroom and fought back tears while she shared her memories of her beloved husband. Believe me, only the strength she derived from her love and affection for him made this book possible. The same is to be said of daughter Carol Bruyns Ryan. To them belongs my heartfelt gratitude.

Credit must also be given to the following: Atlantic County Executive Richard E. Squires, for sharing his memories in the Foreword; to T. Robert Bishop for remembering names; to Northfield City Clerk Carol Raph, for her tireless efforts in providing me with city records; to Lois M. Smith, also of the City Clerk's Office; to Jean Blasciak, Director of Library Services, and Lee Haslett, Senior Library Assistant, who furnished library records, and who also shared cherished memories; to retired Northfield schoolteacher and friend, Elinor Merel, for her help in proofreading the manuscript, and to the Otto Bruyns Public Library of Northfield Association for publishing this book.

Thank you, all.

—Josephine DiStefano Kapus

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Josephine DiStefano Kapus is a native of New York City. Her parents were immigrants, who, like Otto Bruyns, came to this country and made a better life for themselves and those whose lives they touched. Mrs. Kapus is a title searcher by profession and a freelance writer. She is the author of **THE PROUD AMERICAN** and several other local history works. Her articles and short stories have appeared in local and national magazines and newspapers. For 23 years she has lived in Northfield, New Jersey, and is listed in the 22nd (1989-1990) Edition of Marquis' **WHO'S WHO IN THE EAST**.

LIBRARY STAFF

DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Mrs. Jean Blasciak

SENIOR LIBRARY ASSISTANT

Mrs. Leonora P. Haslett

LIBRARY ASSISTANTS

Mrs. Lorraine Whaley

Mrs. Jean Strauss

LIBRARY PHONE NUMBER

646-4476

LIBRARY OPEN HOURS

Monday and Wednesday

2:00 - 5:00

6:30 - 9:00

Tuesday and Thursday

9:30 - 12:30

2:00 - 5:00

6:30 - 9:00

Friday

2:00 - 5:00

Saturday

10:00 - 4:00

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