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**From colonial past to New Zealand classroom:  
The biographical narrative of Will Potter —  
Commercial secondary school teacher  
(1958–1976)**

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of*

*Doctor of Education*

*at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand*

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**2018**



## ABSTRACT

This thesis tells the teaching story of one post-primary Commerce teacher, Will Potter—my father. Will taught in five New Zealand post-primary schools from 1958 until his retirement in 1976. This case study of Will looks at what makes his story unique: he was an immigrant of Dutch descent, whose first language was not English and who came to teaching without qualifications at age 51, and went on to write Commerce textbooks. He also began teaching at a significant time in New Zealand post-primary education—the 1950s, with rising school rolls and lack of teachers and facilities.

This qualitative study of Will involved document analysis of his memoir, letters, and papers, a focus group discussion with Will's three other children, and semi-structured interviews with people who taught with or were taught by Will. Four research questions guided the study, and sociocultural–historical theory was used as a framework to reveal the complexity of his personal, interpersonal, and wider contextual teaching story.

Two major backdrop influences are revealed about Will's life: his colonial background in what was the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; now Indonesia) and his internment in Japanese concentration camps during World War II (WWII). Reasons are provided for his decision to go teaching, and his pedagogical approaches are described. Of particular note is his storytelling, mainly of his internment experiences. He wrote eleven Commerce textbooks that were used in New Zealand post-primary and tertiary settings, as well as overseas.

This story will add to the store of New Zealand teacher stories as well as contribute to the social history of the Dutch who were forced to leave the NEI post WWII.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge a number of people who have helped me on my doctoral journey. The first is my husband, Richard, who initially encouraged me to do doctoral study and who has given me licence to continue the years of part-time study. Thank you, Honey! For our children, Kelly, Morgan, Stephanie, Rachel, Olivia, and Christabel—and your respective spouses: thank you for your questions, interest, and, for some of you, your gracious acceptance of your mother as a student at the same time as you!

For my supervisors, Associate Professor Alison Sewell and Professor Howard Lee: thank you for your wisdom, encouragement, and sage advice. I knew that I could always ask you questions and opinions and that you would give me honest (and not always what I wanted to hear!) answers. I also appreciate the jokes and laughter that made our meetings—real and virtual—fun and lifted my spirits when the way was a little hard at times. More especially, you always took an interest in me as a person and encouraged me to share special life and research moments with you. Thank you.

There were also a number of people I approached in 2013 before beginning this doctoral adventure, asking for their opinions and personal experiences in the doctoral realm. You know who you are, but I thank every one of you as you each offered me a piece of the picture that has built up to the ‘bricolage’ of what it is to be a doctoral candidate and also in preparing me for the rigours of study and thesis writing that lay ahead.

As part of my doctoral studies, I was not alone in my journey. I was fortunate to be part of three doctoral support groups and the 2014 EdD cohort, sharing anecdotes and experiences with my fellow doctoral travellers. To the members of the Breakfast Club in Palmerston North, the Tauranga Group, my online buddies, and my fellow EdD cohort: thank you for sharing with and assisting me so openly. I was always in awe of your research, writing, and conference-presenting talents, technical acumen, and ability to balance study, full- or part-time work, and life.

To the people who so graciously offered to be part of the research process associated with Will's teaching story and shared so willingly of their experiences of having taught with or been taught by Will—thank you. It was a privilege for me to hear your stories, and I am grateful to you for sharing so openly and honestly about your own history. This thesis would not exist without your input.

Because this thesis is about my father, Will Potter, I must also thank my siblings for allowing me to research and write about our father. I am grateful that you allowed me to share this part of our family with the outside world and were so willing to be part of the research process as well. For you—and Will (Dad)—I dedicate this thesis.

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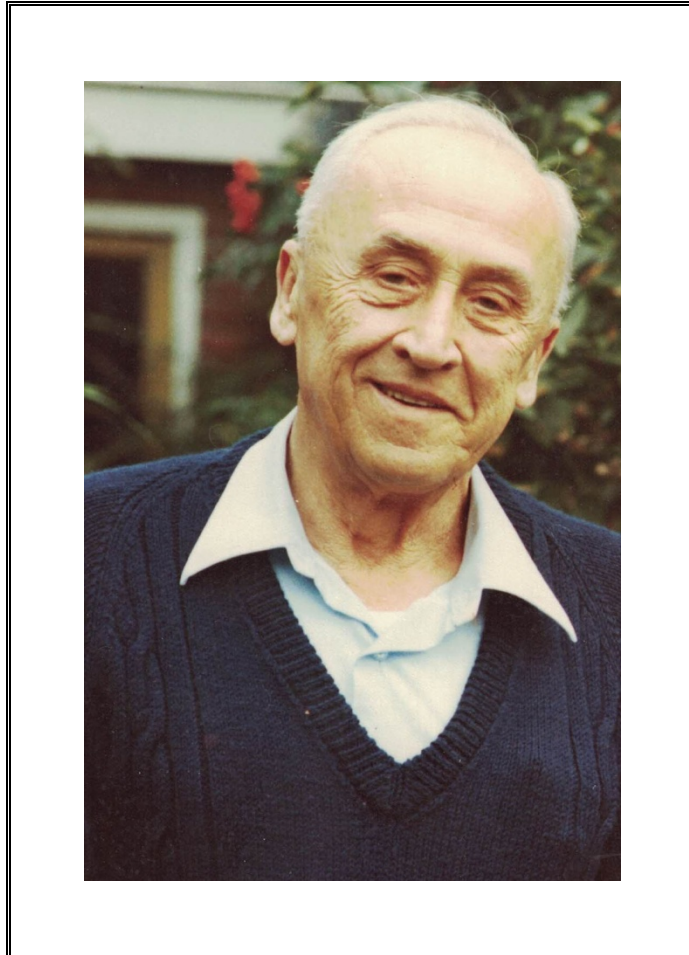
## TIME LINE OF MAJOR EVENTS AFFECTING WILL'S LIFE

- 1595 The Dutch arrived in what was to become the Netherlands East Indies (NEI).
- 1901 The Dutch introduced the Ethical Policy to the NEI.
- 1906 Will was born in Probolinggo, Java, Netherlands East Indies (Sugar Factory Ombul).
- 1912 July 1: Will began primary school in Surabaya, NEI.
- 1924 Will failed high school examination; returned to school for another year. Due to bank collapse, Will's father lost money and could not afford to pay Will's tertiary tuition costs.
- 1925 Will passed high school examination (age 19). On a Dutch passport, Will went to the Netherlands to study Accounting at the Dutch Trade School in Rotterdam; his uncle paid Will's tertiary fees.
- 1926 Will's first cycle trip to Switzerland.
- 1927 Will attempted his first oral examinations for his first five subjects at university.
- 1928 Will's second cycle trip to Switzerland and Germany.
- 1929 Will completed military service (Dutch)—six months.
- 1931 Will returned to NEI to work at Bunisarie, a remote rubber and coffee plantation on Java in the NEI.
- 1934 Will began working at Tanyong East rubber plantation just south of Batavia.
- Will began tutoring his boss's (at Tanyong East plantation) high school age daughter in the evenings in all subjects, including languages.
- New Zealand's Department of Education first School Certificate examination instituted in New Zealand post-primary schools as a school leaving examination for those not intending to go to university.
- 1937 Proficiency Examination abolished in New Zealand.
- 1938 Will paid off his student debt to his uncle's widow.
- 1939 World War II (WWII) began.
- Will became the manager of the Tjarui and Redjodadie Estates, situated in south Central Java.
- Will bought his first car.
- 1940 The Nazis occupied the Netherlands.

- 1941 Will married Loes Willemse on June 6 in Bandung, NEI.  
As a plantation manager, Will attended a meeting as to what to do should the Japanese invade.
- 1942 January: Netherlands East Indies invaded by Japan and surrenders.  
Will became a father when his first son was born on June 9 in Lawang (10 June, 2602 under Japanese time).  
July: Will interned in his first concentration camp, Kesilir.  
Thomas Commission set up in New Zealand to look at post-primary school Education.
- 1943 August: Will transferred to his second concentration camp, Banju Biru, just south of Semarang in Central Java.
- 1944 Will sent to next concentration camp at Tjikudapateuh in Bandung.  
February 1: New Zealand school leaving age raised from 14 to 15 years.  
Thomas Report released; included establishment of a new subject, Commercial Practice.  
Matriculation replaced by University Entrance Examination in New Zealand.
- 1945 May: European World War II ended.  
August 15: Pacific War ended.  
August 17: Sukarno declared independence of the NEI from the Netherlands.  
Indonesian civil war began.
- 1946 February: Will and his immediate family came to New Zealand the first time as 'Displaced Persons' to recuperate from their internment for six months, then returned to the Netherlands to await call up to NEI.
- 1947 Wellington Technical School set up first one-year Commercial teachers' training course.
- 1948 March: Will returned to NEI to a remote plantation amid the continuing civil war; Loes and their three children joined him about July.
- 1949 December: Republic of the United States of Indonesia proclaimed.  
Will and Loes made plans to emigrate to New Zealand.
- 1950 Republic of Indonesia proclaimed.  
Will and his family came to New Zealand, then on to Western Samoa to work for the New Zealand Reparations Estates.
- 1952 Post-Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) set up.

- 1953 Will had a new job as Accountant at the Treasury of Western Samoa.  
Will and his family became naturalised New Zealanders while on furlough in New Zealand.
- 1954 Will passed Stage 1 Accounting and Stage 1 Commercial Law.
- 1955 Will passed Stage 2 Accounting.
- 1956 Will and his family relocated to Auckland, New Zealand.  
Will began a job as an audit clerk at the Education Department in Auckland.
- 1957 Will's boss at the Education Department suggested to Will that he could teach Commercial subjects as a post-primary school teacher.  
Will applied for four post-primary school teacher positions: Avondale College; Pio Pio District High School (DHS); Te Kuiti High School; Onewhero DHS.  
Rotorua Boys High School contacted Will and also offered him a job.
- 1958 February 1: Will started teaching at Onewhero District High School.
- 1959 Will organised Onewhero DHS's textbooks.  
Will became the Careers Advisor at Onewhero DHS.
- 1960 Onewhero DHS girls' hockey team—coached by Will—beat Manurewa High School 11–0.
- 1961 Will started teaching as Head of Department (HOD) Commercial at Waiuku College.  
Will coached boys' hockey team.
- 1962 Will became the Treasurer to the Waiuku College Board of Governors.
- 1965 Will started teaching as HOD Commercial at Paeroa College.  
Will Treasurer to Paeroa College Board of Governors (three months).  
Will began marking School Certificate Commercial Practice examinations.
- 1967 Will started teaching as HOD Commercial at Spotswood College (New Plymouth).
- 1968 Will began self publishing textbooks: Suggested Answers to '*An Introduction to Accounting*' (1968 edition).
- 1969 Post-primary teachers' grading system abolished.  
Will wrote Suggested Answers to '*School Certificate Bookkeeping*'.  
Spotswood College is divided into three schools: East, West, and Senior.  
Will began marking School Certificate Bookkeeping examinations.

- 1970 Will self-published: *School Certificate Commercial Practice: Study Notes*.  
Will self-published: *School Certificate Commercial Practice: Revision*.  
Will self-published: *School Certificate Commercial Practice: Suggested Answers*.
- 1971 Will self-published: *Bookkeeping—The Why and the How*.
- 1973 Will self-published: Suggested Answers to 'An Introduction to Accounting' (1972 edition).
- 1974 Will self-published: *UE Accounting: Theory and Practice*.  
Will self-published: *UE Accounting: Tests and Exercises*.  
Will self-published: *UE Accounting: Solutions*.
- 1975 Will began teaching as a pro rata teacher at Mount Maunganui College.
- 1976 Will retired from teaching at the end of the school year, aged 70.
- 1979 Will self-published: Suggested Answers to 'An Introduction to Accounting' (1978 edition).
- 1982 Will wrote his memoir for his children.
- 1993 Will passed away February 15, aged 86 years.



*William George Potter (1906–1993)*

Source: Private Collection (c. 1979)



