



De Wieken
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De Wieken News

December
2009

25th anniversary

De Wieken will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2010. We invite your suggestions on how to make this a memorable event for both adults and children.

Please send us your ideas about the location, type of party, theme etc. and we will discuss them during our next board meeting. If you would like to be involved in the organization, please send an e-mail to President Peter Greijn, peter@dewieken.org.

On the Web

Former club member Carla Newbound shares the following links:

- A tribute to *boerenkool*: <http://tinyurl.com/yho5yf5>
- Dutch-style bicycles gain popularity in New York City. <http://tinyurl.com/yzut56h>
- A review of Pascal Theunissen's book *Van Jankees to Yankees*, in which the author tours New York City in search of sites related to the city's glorious Dutch period. <http://tinyurl.com/yjypqo4>

Bernard Vernooij alerted us to the joys of reading *WereldExpat Magazine*: <http://tinyurl.com/yzrp6sr>

From the consulate

Due to stricter security requirements, Dutch nationals can no longer renew their passports at the Dutch consulate in Raleigh.

They will have to travel to the embassy in Washington DC or to the consulate in Atlanta. The paperwork is handled by appointment only. For more information, please visit the Dutch embassy's Web site, www.netherlands-embassy.org.

The reason for the change is that new passports will contain biometric data, including fingerprints. Because of costs, only consulates processing more than 500 passport requests will receive fingerprinting equipment.

From the editor

Meanwhile, the requirements that passport photographs must comply with remain maddeningly complicated. To assist bewildered photographers at outfits as Kinko's and Wolf Camera, the Dutch government has created a four-page flyer with examples of photographs that are unacceptable. Bald-headed applicants may not be too shiny, for example, and your turban should sit high on your head.



E. Reflectie
(witte vlekken)



A. Gezicht niet
volledig zichtbaar

He can't win

On the bright side, the appointment-only rule appears to be a bit of an improvement over the situation that existed before. When one Dutch national from Raleigh applied for a new passport in Washington this summer, the service counter remained unmanned for almost an hour after the official opening time, prompting the applicant to reconsider his attachment to Dutch citizenship.

De Wieken events

Every second Saturday of the month, De Wieken organizes a "Klaverjasavond," hosted by members on a rotating schedule.

Participants bring food and drinks. We typically play three rounds, switching tables and teams after every round. The game begins around 7:30 pm, with an opportunity to get instructions for those new to the game starting at 7:00 pm.

The rules of *Klaverjassen* and the game schedule are available at our Web site. A reminder of the upcoming game night and location will be sent each month via e-mail.

Events calendar

January 9 & February 13

Klaverjassen

January 23

Sjoelbakken

February 27

Stamppot avond



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Children and adults tackle Dutch

The Dutch lessons for young children were off to a good start in September in Raleigh. Under the direction of Jose Kreuk, the students practiced counting to 10 and sang delightful Dutch classics such as *Hoedje van papier*.

They also played games to familiarize themselves with the Dutch color names. The students covered colored markers under a towel, and each child was given a turn to take one away while the others closed their eyes. The group then had to guess what color was missing.



Who's afraid of geel, groen en rood?

Snack time started appropriately with the song *Smakelijk eten*. Jose then read a story from *Jip en Janneke*. After some free play upstairs with puzzles, color books and Lego, the morning ended with a name of number Bingo—all in Dutch. After practicing the numbers the students went back to the kitchen and filled bags with cookies to share with their relatives at home.

The Dutch lessons for older children and adults kicked off in November. Under the direction of Ria van der Veen, students learned to introduce themselves in Dutch, identify family members and practiced counting, the days of the week and the months of the year.

They also tackled the challenge of telling time in Dutch, which can be a bit confusing for people accustomed to more logical ways of describing what they see on the clock. This part of the class ended at ten before half past 11.

The adults' class is an eclectic group, comprising students from America, Holland, Belgium and South Africa. The diverse backgrounds also made clear how some of these countries are divided by their common language. During a round of the kitchen, two teachers' assistants got into an argument about the proper translation of *microwave* oven. The assistant from Holland called it a *magnetron*, while the assistant from Belgium insisted on *micro-golf*.

The Dutch lessons will continue in 2010. For more information, please contact Jose Kreuk, jose@dewieken.org or Ria van der Veen, ria@dewieken.org.

A friendly brew

When Dutchmen living in the United States get together for a cup of coffee, the conversation will quickly turn to the abdominal quality of the local brew. This sentiment appears to be shared among visitors from other countries too, to the extent that it has brought together former adversaries.

In a recent letter to *The Economist* magazine, Zalman Shoval, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, recounts how American coffee kickstarted peace negotiations with his Jordanian counterparts.

After the 1991 Madrid peace conference Arab and Israeli negotiators convened at America's State Department to start talks, but the different Arab delegations couldn't agree on the modalities for actually talking to the Israelis.

One morning, after several days of unsuccessful attempts to break the ice and get the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to sit at the same table with the Israelis, the habitual American coffee cart was wheeled in.

After both Abd al-Salam Majali, the senior Jordanian delegate and myself had tasted the unappetizing brew that goes for coffee in America, I remarked, "Don't you think this coffee is terrible?" to which he enthusiastically agreed. From that moment, the talks started, culminating eventually in the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty.



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A touch of Dutch

Corine's Cafe is located in Mooresville about 30 minutes north of Charlotte, NC. A sign with big red letters marks the spot: "homestyle cooking with a touch of Dutch."



Owner Corine Croxell is a Dutch native and her husband, Dennis, works for a Nascar team. The cafe captures the family spirit by featuring orange Dutch flags and Nascar racing memorabilia. The classic American dining room is decorated with 1950s bar chairs and a black-and-white tiled floor and the cafe was used to create a TV commercial with Dale Earnhardt Jr., a Nascar racer.

The front page of the menu has a picture of a classic Dutch windmill and Dutch items on the menu include *bitterballen*, *kroketten*, Dutch pancakes, Dutch apple pie and home-made *stroopwafels*.

The waitress gave us a friendly warning. "The bitterballen and the kroketten are pretty much the same thing." She was right, of course, and it was nice to warn us, but we ordered both anyway. The bitterballen are homemade and delicious. They're filled with chicken, parsley and spices. While their crust was a bit thinner than the mass-produced ones in the Netherlands, they had a nice bite to it. Of special note is the mustard used. Corine's Cafe uses exactly the right type of mustard for bitterballen and kroketten—spicy and not too sweet.

Croxell is a hands-on manager and starts her day early, baking and preparing for breakfast. "I always have

From our members

to train the American cooks on how exactly to prepare a *pannenkoek*", she said. Her lessons paid off — the pancake was excellent.

We tried the cheese and bacon version and the structure of the pancake was classical Dutch—fluffy, with a great flavor and a little thinner than the American version. In the Netherlands pancakes are served in many different styles and flavors. While using fried instead of smoked bacon, *spek* is definitely American. It works out nicely and this is a true Dutch-American pancake.

Croxell worked in a pancake house in the Netherlands. She has worked in restaurants from an early age and in August 2005 she started Corine's Cafe. Through the years she has brought many Dutch items from Holland to North Carolina to decorate the cafe; even the pen-holder at the register is a wooden shoe. Croxell grew up in Waterland, a municipality just north of Amsterdam, and in the hallway there are a number of photographs of Marken and Monnickendam.

Corine's Cafe is a casual eatery with 225 seats and Croxell said they are frequently full. Breakfast is especially popular. They have a lot of regular guests. The Dutch snacks, such as kroketten and French fries, are popular for lunch. The kroketten are also home-made and except for the size and shape are very similar to the bitterballen, as is the case in the Netherlands.

The stroopwafels, made one-by-one by Croxell in a small waffle iron, are a real treat. They are different from store-bought stroopwafels (a little crispier) and remind of the freshly baked stroopwafels on the markets in the Netherlands.

Finally, the apple pie is as Dutch as it gets—this is the real thing. For a real "Dutch treat" we had it heated up with a scoop of whipped cream on top. Corine's Cafe is definitely worth a visit. For a real European experience, you could combine it with a visit to the Ikea a few miles away.

--Originally published on
www.dutchinamerica.com, Guus Bosman's
Web log detailing the Dutch experience in
the United States



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International festival review

This year's international festival was one of the better ones, from De Wieken's perspective. Below, Shoshana Serxner shares her impressions.

It worried us when we were told that we would not be able to get into the Raleigh Convention Center (RCC) until 5 pm on Wednesday, Sept. 30, because we were not sure that we would be able to get ready in little more than one day. It usually takes 2.5 days to set up, but at this point we had done this enough times that we can do it more quickly.

Peter Greijn and Alexander Liems were at Jonathan Serxner's house at 5PM on Tuesday to start loading the polder scenes and the house fronts and then we moved to Dixie Trail for the rest of the food booth equipment and supplies. It takes two trucks and trailers to load everything we need to set up.

We moved into the RCC on Wednesday evening, with the help of Jim, Carol and Eric Robertson, Margaret and Jim Fleischhauer, Alexander Liems and Jim Merchant. Peter Greijn and I took turns taking a truck and trailer to the RCC loading dock.

Unfortunately, the proprietors do not allow exhibitors to drive onto the floor to unload, so everything had to be moved in on big dollies. We were able to get the big things done—putting up our painted walls on the inside and the outside of the food booth and getting the inside of the booth decorated; setting up tables, placing fryers, and unpacking food.



Festival photos: Willem Bodisco Massink

International festival

We continued on Thursday afternoon with Ngaire van Eck, Janet Bodisco-Massink, Adrie VanderSterre, and Dirk Kelder, a new member who came all the way from Chapel Hill to help us.

There was not a whole lot left to do and we were ready for inspection by 7 pm—which we passed of course. The fire marshals also came by and they complimented us on our set-up. They were impressed that we



had foil-covered boards under all the electrical heating units inside the food booth. (Apparently, not everybody thinks that is a good thing to do and then they melt the plastic table covers.)

Our booth looked great, as usual. We always get lots of compliments on our booth—both for the inside look, where we use two of the house fronts with the lace curtains and the flower boxes; and the outside, with the colorful polder scenes.

Meanwhile, Willem Bodisco-Massink and Alexander Liems decorated the cultural booth, which turned out to be very interesting. Well done, Willem, Alexander and Willem van Eck for coming up with a nice interpretation of this year's theme, "languages," which I thought was quite challenging.

A little bit concerned about the early opening hour of noon on Friday, we were nevertheless frying oliebollen and cooking soup by 11:45 am. People were waiting for the first batch and we were off to a good start. Where in the past, Friday had been a slow day, this one was off and running at a steady pace, and to our surprise, this Friday



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International festival

turned out to be a very good day. We took in \$1,500—almost twice as much as we have on Fridays in past years.

The strong attendance was partially due to the people who had come to the naturalization ceremony—both the new citizens and their guests—which made for a captive audience on a workday afternoon.



Friday's hardworking crew in the food booth consisted of Albert van Koots, Paulette van de Zande, Jackie Hermans, Barry Lee, Marlon, Jane Hunt, Diana, Catie and Emma Greijn, Joost Grant, Ngaire van Eck, Adrie VanderSterre, Dirk Kelder, Piet Schoonderwoerd, Ellen and Ward Condelli, Jack Leenaarts, Jim and Carol Robertson, Chary and Bob Sundstrom and Jim Merchant. Willem Bodisco-Massink and Alexander Liems spent most of the day in the cultural booth.

Saturday morning came too soon. A few people came early to crank up the fryers, start making oliebollen mix—which needs at least 45 minutes to rise—and get the soup going (stir, stir, scrape the bottom, and stir some more). The rest came in to make beschuit met hagelslag, brewing coffee and setting out the food, ready for opening time at 10 am.

Our location, next to the biergarten, with the tables for people to sit at and eat, was great because the music stage was a good draw and there were always people coming and going. Some of the music was a bit loud, a lot of it was also

quite nice. We were busy all day long. At one point, we could not fry oliebollen fast enough. We had one order for 30 oliebollen. By the end of the day, we knew that we would run out of mix early on Sunday.

Saturday's crew in the Food Booth consisted of Marieke Pieterman, Richard Hartzell, Dirk Tijsmans, Jack Leenaarts, Adrie and Vroukje vanderSterre, Henk and Akkie Monsma, Joost Grant, Paulette van de Zande, Jackie Hermans and Barry Lee, Astrid de Mont, Peter and Diana Greijn, with Catie, Emma and Alex, Albert van Koots, Jose and Volkert Kreuk, with Lieselotte, Olga and Jennifer Rillely, with Jennifer's friend—whose name I forgot—Guus and Nellie de Groot, Riet and Leo Josemans, Carol and Jim Robertson, Ton Schoenmakers, Jacob Sternfeld and Andrea Mia, Annelies Gentile and Billy Chadwick, Jose and Peter van der Ham, Annelies Gentile Jr. and Gregory, Mary Boone, and Jim Merchant.

Wiebe van der Veen spent a lot of time in the cultural booth, as did Alexander Liems and Jacob Sternfeld. (Ria van de Veen did not attend, because she was in Amsterdam for medical tests)

Since we do not open until noon on Sunday, things are not quite as hectic to get started. We knew from Saturday's rush on oliebollen that we would run out of those in short order, and by 2 pm we were out of mix.



We had fried approximately 5,000 oliebollen. We had already run out of stroopwafels, but that was because I did not order enough of them since the packaging had changed and I did not recalculate the order. Meanwhile we were still busy serving



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fish, soup and beschuit, which visitors are becoming familiar with and are beginning to ask for.

That is a nice development, because in the first years we had to "push" those on people. All in all, we sold out of fish (all 220 lbs) and had little food left by the time we closed at 6 pm. We never felt the need to lower prices to get rid of our supplies, as some of the other booths did in the late afternoon.

Sunday's crew consisted of: Jose and Peter van der Ham, Bernard Vernooij with Arthur and Natasha, Annelies Gentile and Billy Chadwick, Piet de Munk, Mary Boone, Dirk and Judy Tijsmans, Carol de Bruyne-Clark, Dirk Kelder, Peter and Diana Greijn with Catie and Emma, Annelies Gentile Jr., with Gregory, Adrie vander Sterre, and Jim Merchant.



Bernard Vernooij and Alexander Liems manned the cultural booth most of the day, with help from Sylvia and Arnold Dumas.

Time flew by and 6 pm and clean-up time was there before we knew it. We had sold out of so much stuff and used up a lot of our paper goods, so cleaning and packing up were not much of a problem.



International festival

Because we had sold out of oliebollen, Jim could tell people to start cleaning up two of our three fryers early. All was done in less than two hours, a record time. Fortunately, we are allowed to drive onto the floor, close to our booth, which made the loading a lot easier. We were out of there by 8 pm, on our way to unload, first to Dixie Trail and then to Jonathan's at Kilgore Ave.

I have listed everybody who helped out this year, to give you some idea of what it takes to pull off such an event. But while this shows how many people came on two days, it does not show how many people worked more than one shift on either one or two days.

That is greatly appreciated, because without all the double shifters, we would not be able to run this operation. Some people worked even more than two shifts, and I want to single them out:

Margaret Fleischhauer came to set up on Wednesday, with her husband Jim, and was there early on Friday morning to help get things started. She then stayed until late afternoon

Our oliebollen King, **Joost Grant**, who was there from Friday 3:30 pm to closing and again early on Saturday until 4 pm. (He would have been there the whole day on Sunday, but he got the flu)

Jack Leenaarts, who was there from 2 pm Friday until closing and again on Saturday from 8:45 pm until early afternoon

Carol and Jim Robertson, who are always there to help set up (Jim has all the tools) and then were in the food booth on Friday from 6-10 pm and again on Saturday from 5-8 pm

Adrie VanderSterre, helping set up on Thursday, working on Friday, early on Saturday to get things started and again there to help clean up on Sunday

Ngairé van Eck, who also is always there to help set up and then was there again on Friday afternoon.





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Jim Merchant, who was there to set up on Wednesday and was there every day for the rest of the Festival from 3 pm on Friday until clean up time on Sunday, including loading and unloading at our house at the beginning and the end.

Alexander Liems, who helped with all the loading and unloading on Tuesday and Wednesday, came to the festival every day and was there for clean up and unloading.

The Greijn family, who put in more than 100 hours, plus Peter's help loading and unloading on Tuesday and Wednesday and unloading again with Catie at our house and at Jonathan's house on Sunday evening, by which time it was about 9 pm.

We only burned one pot of soup this year. Not too bad, considering we had two pots of soup going all the time. We shared food with quite a number of booths. Most foods were wonderful, but our exchange with the Koreans was not so great. I think they got the better deal with our fish than we did with their tofu somethings, which tasted like cardboard. Later, I saw them eating pizza.

Overall, we took in over \$6,700 for the three days and our net will be a little bit over \$3,000. That is quite something, considering our booth costs were higher this year by almost \$500 over last year. Some of these costs were new, such as the \$153 for insurance coverage and \$75 for the health permit to Wake County. The insurance coverage seems to be a bit of a scam, since we are covered under the umbrella insurance that International Festival carries and there has never been a claim against any of the food booth due to a case of food poisoning, as far as I know. Somebody did collapse at one of the tables in front of our booth, but once I knew help was on the way, I quickly checked to make sure he did not have any of our food on his plate—just in case.

International festival

Paid attendance this year was about 14,000. That is not as many as we had hoped for, and the International Festival can only hope that this number will grow. We all need to do our part and let our friends and co-workers know about the event in the weeks before the festival. The place seemed crowded at all times, but there are a lot of volunteers from the ethnic groups and dancers as well as the volunteers. As you have seen in the listing for our booth alone, it takes a lot of people to make sure that something this big is well run. I think this festival was very well run.

Finally, a big thank you to all who helped make this festival a success.

Sinterklaas in Raleigh

Our Sinterklaas party was a great success again. Jose Kreuk spent time with the children, singing Sinterklaas songs and telling stories. It was great fun to see how the little ones reacted to Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet, particularly when their names were called and they had to talk about their accomplishments this year.

Soon enough it was time to sing goodbye to our guests from Spain, accompanied by Gerrit van Doorn on the keyboards (he makes us sound very good). We then turned our attention to all the wonderful food that was brought in and spent time socializing.

This party keeps growing every year. It is one of the reasons our organization continues to attract younger families.



Thanks to Volkert Kreuk and Emma Greijn for their part in making this Sinterklaas visit a memorable event.

—Shoshana Serxner



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Give me convenience or give me death

A neighbor recently asked what I would miss about life in the United States if I returned to “Denmark.”¹

My answer surprised him. He had expected me to mention the freedom and opportunities Americans associate their country with, but freedom wasn’t part of my shortlist. Not because I dislike liberty—on the contrary: While my articles elicit the occasional angry e-mail, it’s comforting to know that I am unlikely to go to jail for writing the things I do. (Although I suspect some readers would gladly “waterboard” me.)

The reason I didn’t mention freedom to my neighbor is that I don’t find the United States to be freer than the place where I grew up.

To be sure, it’s easier to start a business in America than it is in most countries. There are fewer permits to obtain, fewer regulations to comply with and, once you’re up and running, the tax man will demand a lesser share of your profits, giving you the freedom to spend more of your money as you please. This is all commendable. Too much regulation stifles innovation and suppresses economic activity. Even the recent financial crisis hasn’t changed those basic facts.

But while such freedoms may appeal to entrepreneurs, they’re fairly irrelevant to those with less drive—a group that, let’s face it, includes most of us. Outside of the economic sphere, it could easily be argued that Holland is freer than the Land of the Free.

Think about it:

- When commuting, you can pick from at least five modes of transportation—walking, cycling, riding the bus, riding the train or driving your car. (In non-New York City America, by contrast, the car is pretty much your only safe option.)

Love it or leave it

- If you choose walking, you can do so without attracting police attention
- In an emergency, you can pee at the roadside without risking a criminal record for an offense more commonly associated with sexual predators. (“indecent exposure”)
- Depending upon what turns you on, you can marry someone of the opposite sex or someone of the same sex.
- You can start drinking alcohol upon reaching adulthood—not three years *after* reaching adulthood.
- You can enjoy the company of a prostitute without risking jail time.
- You can consume certain narcotics without serious legal consequences.
- At a public pool, you can run as fast as you please and engage in “boisterous play.” If you hurt yourself while playing boisterously, you are free to curse out loud because there are no restrictions on profane language.
- Likewise, if your favorite movie star cusses on television, you can appreciate his acting talent to the fullest because there’s no censorship. Those who object to foul language have the freedom to switch channels.
- Performers are free to experience a “wardrobe malfunction” in public. If Janet Jackson had lost her shirt at the *bekerfinale* instead of the Super Bowl, she would have become a target merely of ridicule, not prosecution.
- You don’t have to drive 90 km per hour in cars and on roads that can safely accommodate speeds in excess of 120 km per hour.





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- You can vacation in Cuba without having to pretend you went to Mexico.
- On a sunny day, you can enjoy a beer in a public park. (But, annoyingly, you will have to leave your gun at the shooting club.)
- On New Year's Eve, you are free to launch your own fireworks. *You* decide when the grand finale starts.
- If you work, you will have up to six weeks of vacation each year (versus an average of two in America). Assuming a career span of 45 years, that amounts to a whopping 3.5 *years* of additional liberty over the course of your life.

Of course, the freedom in Holland has limits too. I believe it's still illegal to greet your coworkers with a Hitler salute, for example. Misguided rules on store hours force people to shop when they are expected to be in the office or at the factory, and the Netherlands' strict zoning restrictions make Cary seem like an anarchic free-for-all by comparison. And then there are those pesky Dutch gun laws. Killing with a pitchfork is sooo old fashioned.

But on balance, America seems more eager to tell its people what to do—and threaten dire consequences for noncompliance.

The differences between the two societies are perhaps best illustrated by the way in which they approach drivers' education.² When I studied for my North Carolina written test many years ago, I was struck by the textbook's emphasis on punishments. The DMV seemed more keen on instilling fear among aspiring motorists than equipping them with the required knowledge and skills.

Likewise, America's ratio of cops to citizens must be one of the highest in

Love it or leave it



Four more years of this

the Western world. And those in uniform embrace their responsibilities with exceptional zeal. I've received a ticket for having my registration sticker on the wrong side of my license plate, and I've been sent to court for riding a moped without a *motorcycle* license. An off-duty officer recently pulled his badge because he (mistakenly) thought I had jumped queue at Wal-Mart. The neighbor who asked what I would miss about the States was once stopped riding a bicycle—presumably for suspicious behavior.³

But I guess I was lucky. According to *The Economist World in Figures*, the U.S. imprisons more people as a percentage of its population than does any other country. In 2004, 707 of every 100,000 Americans were in jail—compared with 112 per 100,000 people in Holland and 489 per 100,000 in decidedly autocratic Turkmenistan. Of course, it could be that Americans are more prone to crime than citizens of other countries, but that seems unlikely. Most Americans I know are of the God-fearing and law-abiding kind—hardly prison material.

And while some have suggested to me that a high incarceration rate reflects successful policing, the silliness of that argument becomes clear when you apply it to other countries with large prison populations. According to that logic, Myanmar and North Korea too have effective law enforcement. ►



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Bigger is better

So what *would* I miss if I'd return to Holland? Tallying the pros and cons, I found that the things I value most in America relate more to convenience than lofty ideals. For example, I love the size of things (big). In Holland, you are always wrestling with space limitations. If my mother in Uithoorn opens her washing machine, it blocks the door and my father cannot enter the kitchen. If there is a vehicle parked on your side of the lane, you will likely have to stop for oncoming traffic. No such issues in wide-laned America. Parking too is a breeze. When's the last time you've practiced your parallel parking skills?

My van, a modestly sized vehicle by American standards, comfortably fits seven. And if I fold the seats into the floor, I can transport goods that would require professional delivery in Holland. Among other items, I have moved a full-sized fridge and *thirty-one* bags of mulch in my car (though not at the same time—that would require a Hummer, a military assault vehicle converted for civilian use that would probably run afoul of Dutch emission standards). In Holland, by contrast, my father starts hyperventilating when he has to bring our family and luggage to the airport in his Volkswagen Golf.

The abundant space in America also means land is, on average, less expensive per square meter, making real estate affordable. I live in a bigger house than do my friends in Holland—even though they have far better-paying jobs than I do.⁴ To afford a similarly sized house and lot in Holland, I would have to be an investment banker—perhaps not the best example these days, but you get the point.

The other thing I'd miss is the civilized behavior of Americans in public life. You can attend a ballgame without worrying about dodging bricks, urine-filled balloons and other projectiles, or exposing your children to racist *sprekkoren*. And Americans can stand

Love it or leave it

in line (perhaps because of those plain-clothed police officers). One of the most annoying features of Dutch life must be the inability of people to wait their turn. It's outright shocking to see your 76-year old mother getting shoved aside in the supermarket by a man in suit and tie who wants to get to the cash register first.

Another wonderful aspect of American life is the ease of returning unwanted merchandise. If you are unhappy with your purchase in Holland, you'd better be prepared for a long and heated debate with the shopkeeper, who will likely argue that you should have exercised better judgment by not buying his faulty product in the first place. For a nation built on trade, that attitude seems strangely shortsighted. Americans, by contrast, understand it's good business to facilitate returns, because customers will be less hesitant to buy and more likely to come back to the store in the future—and once sold, unwanted goods might not be returned anyway because many customers can simply not be bothered.



Come back and see us

And store owners in America are generally happy to see you—or at least, they pretend to be, which is still better than being treated as a nuisance. In Holland, you often get the feeling the shopkeeper expects you to be grateful for the privilege of entering his store. Don't browse the magazine stand for too long or inconvenience the store clerk by paying with a credit card. And don't even think about splitting the bill in a restaurant. I've had a calculator thrown into my lap by a waiter who was annoyed by my ►



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request for separate checks—"You figure it out!"

In light of the recent corporate bailouts, Americans might find the following observation bizarre, but the U.S. government is more willing to account for the way it spends taxpayers' money than are many European governments. I love, for example, how government communications are accompanied by a statement disclosing how much of my money was spent on preparing and distributing the letter. The paper used for official U.S. communications is decidedly substandard compared with the fancy stuff used in Holland, but it is certainly less wasteful. A call for jury duty or a rejection of a visa application is equally well communicated on yellowish recycled paper as it is on watermarked stationery—and it all ends up in the same place anyway. The DMV envelopes that tear and fold in selected places to become return envelopes are simply brilliant!

And sometimes there are unexpected twists. The nutty requirement to have a motorcycle license for a moped that maxes out at 34 mph is offset by the ease with which such a license is obtained. While getting a motorcycle license in Holland involves many weeks of expensive lessons and a tough public road test, in North Carolina, at least, you can take a two-day course for less than \$150. Upon successful completion of the course, which takes place within the safety of a community college parking lot, the DMV will stamp an M (for "motorcycle") in your driver's license and you are free to risk your life—and that of others—on the highway. As it turns out, freedom and convenience are two sides of the same coin.

Of course, it's important to maintain some perspective. As I explained to my neighbor, none of the points made above are made to downplay the contributions made by the United States to the cause of freedom. While Holland is in many ways a freer society than the United States, I am well aware who

Love it or leave it



You speed demon

made that possible. Without America's sacrifices in World War II and its security guarantees afterward, I would likely be writing these words in German today—or, worse, regretting my cheek in an interrogation room.

—Taco Tuinstra

¹After 15 years in the United States, I no longer bother to enlighten the geographically confused. While Holland is mostly misplaced in Scandinavia, people have also tried to claim common ground with me on the basis of acquaintances in Switzerland or their mission trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the token foreigner at work, I've been asked to translate texts from German (no problem) Swedish (in writing surprisingly akin to Dutch) and Hungarian (impossible). I can't get worked up about it anymore. And, to be fair, the average Dutchman would have similar difficulty telling apart, say, the New England states on a blind map, each of which is comparable in size to a small European country.

²The drivers-education proxy theory seems to apply in other countries, as well. My friend Sjaak, who is studying for a driver's license in Shanghai, says he recently failed a test because he didn't blow his horn often enough—perhaps reflecting China's rapid but chaotic growth.

³To be fair, I've been ticketed in Romania too, but that was for a far more cut-and-dried offense—theft. In the days following the 1989 revolution, I was regrettably caught trying to pinch one of the few remaining flags from which the communist crest had not been removed.

⁴This isn't because pay scales are higher in the Netherlands (they aren't). Rather, it reflects the fact that I work in publishing, while my friends work in fields such as finance and information technology.