

13 Round the Table

Kooiman: 13 Round the Table
ISBN: 9789463427180 (paperback)

Copyright: © Kooiman 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Copyright owner.

13 Round the Table

Kooiman

A Family History

*Eleven children of the same family, the children of
Aafje Dijkstra and Arie Kooiman, tell the story
of their youth in Andijk.*

Piet, Gré, Lolke, Alie, Marrienne, Egbert, Arie,
Rob, Paula, Frans, Magda Kooiman

Contents

<i>Setting the Scene</i>	6
<i>Map of Western Europe</i>	9
<i>Map of The Netherlands</i>	10
<i>Preface</i>	11
<i>Family Tree</i>	14
<i>Glossary</i>	15
<i>Part 1</i>	
The beginning	17
Aafje Dijkstra – A Carefree Youth	17
Arie Kooiman – The Youth of a Christian Reformed Market Gardener	32
Childhood	32
Life and faith	41
Depression and war	43
<i>Part 2</i>	
Eleven stories	48
Four Roads (Piet)	48
Pake and Oma (Gré)	56
In The Queen's Breeches (Lolke)	66
Along my Father's Garden Path (Alie)	76
What's in a Name (Marrienne)	82
A Boy's Dream (Egbert)	90
Abschied vom Klavier – A Farewell to the Piano (Arie)	100
A Soft-boiled Egg (Rob)	106
A Thousand and One Memories (Paula)	113
Scent and Color (Frans)	132
Frozen Past: My Inner Child Speaks (Magda)	142

Part 3

Open End	178
Bye Mom	178
Dad – Lived, Died and was Buried	188
Mortality	188
Steak every day	189
The peeping Tom	190
Fortune and misfortune	192
Music	195
Anne Siebren – Job’s comfort	196
Dad at Albert Heijn	199
The bread thrower	207
“Well, Arie”	209
The family issue	213
The final golden week	220
Funeral	231
<i>Epiloque</i>	233
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	235

Setting the Scene

Two world wars tore Europe apart in the first half of the twentieth century. The first was a fierce battle between old, powerful empires and kingdoms, the second a struggle between the barbaric fascism of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin's communism. Their fanaticism unleashed the atrocities that dominated the political landscape of the Old Continent during the first part of the last century. Europe was then still mainly agricultural, and the Great Depression of the thirties caused poverty and despair among the population.

After the liberation of Western-Europe at the end of the Second World War by the allied forces – Holland was liberated by Canadian soldiers – the second part of the twentieth century was largely dominated by economic development and greater stability for the Western European democracies. There was a new wave of European emigration to Anglo-Saxon countries like America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Eastern Europe, however, still lived under Russian oppression, locked in behind the Iron Curtain throughout the years of the Cold War.

In the meantime people lived their ordinary everyday lives, often unaware of all the geopolitical changes, but unmistakably affected by those changes.

Holland, where the family history of this book takes place, is wedged between Belgium, Germany and the North Sea. A large part of the country lies below sea level, and consists of *polders* (manmade reclaimed land) protected by dunes and dikes. A country of windmills and tulips, but also of growing urbanization, prosperity and industry, which has been shaped

by the historical tensions between Calvinism, the country's commercial and entrepreneurial spirit, and a liberal approach to life.

The family whose stories are recorded in this book lived in a *polder*, in a small agricultural village – Andijk – 65 kilometers north of the capital of Amsterdam. During the Second World War between 4,000 and 4,500 people lived here, many of whom almost never left the village since in those days a journey to Amsterdam took almost a whole day.

Almost the whole village lived off the proceeds of agriculture. Andijk was a *vaarpolder* with multiple canals and small plots of land where the market gardeners – who could only reach their fields by boat – practiced their trade and tended their crops. In the seventies of the last century these plots were reallocated as part of a major land consolidation project. Many of the canals were filled in, and the resulting plots of land were bigger. As new roads were constructed, cars and trucks replaced the boats.

In the course of the twentieth century the population of Andijk increased to about 6,000 people, and the number of people dependent on agriculture declined.

The stories start in the 1920s with the birth of the parents, and include descriptions of their childhood and village life, the poverty of the 1930s and their courting days during the Second World War. They married in 1946 and had twelve children, one of whom died in infancy. The eleven remaining children, five girls and six boys were born between 1947 and 1963; they grew up in the rapidly changing second part of the twentieth century. There was poverty at first, but soon the improving economic climate

also colored their youth. All of the children helped out in their father's small market gardening business, which mainly grew tulip bulbs. This, and their father's wages as a factory worker, provided the family income.

The eleven children of one Dutch protestant family have each provided a highly individual, personal description of what they remember from their childhood and family life. The result is a fascinating and unique psychological experiment.

Egbert

19 March 2016

Western Europe



The Netherlands



Preface

Families are meant to break up. Other relationships grow stronger, new families are formed and the original family ties disappear. Sometimes this is for the best. Conflicts can tear families apart, and the members of the family may never see each other again. But even families torn apart by disagreements and infighting may passionately defend those family ties in their dealings with the outside world. It often takes family members a long time to realize just how indelible and formative these early family ties have proved to be for their lives. Only then do they realize how important they are to one another and how much they need each other.

On a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 2006 Rob and his sisters Alie and Marianne were walking along the dike, reminiscing about the good old days. Reminiscing about the hectic life of a family of eleven children, the crackling coal furnace, village life in Andijk, and the tulip trade. It was Rob who came up with the idea: “Let’s write a book about our family, about the old days, when we were young, our childhood.” Alie and Marianne’s first response was enthusiastic. Rob and Marianne would be the editors of this project of family stories, together with their brother Egbert. The other four brothers and four sisters could decide whether they wanted to take part. Some were slightly hesitant at first but in the end, everyone agreed to participate.

We then asked our brothers and sisters to write a brief ‘history’, either about one specific event in their youth that would reflect the story of our family, or a story that would provide a more general view of the first decennia of our lives. Each family member was free to determine the outline of his or her own story.

All family members took the project seriously. Some consulted a coach, others wrote in isolation. The stories were completed in the course of 2007. The result: eleven highly personal accounts of our youth.

It was a journey down memory lane for all of us. But sometimes it also revealed how little we knew about each other. And especially, how what had been a minor incident for one person turned out to be hugely important in the life of another sibling, and vice versa.

It is a book full of nostalgic memories of a more or less typical Dutch family growing up in the fifties, sixties and seventies of the last century, full of melancholy and longing for days that are gone forever. They were days filled with cheerfulness and activity but there were also conflicts and loneliness. There was a lack of money, but never poverty. There was plenty of talking, but you had to fight get a word in edgewise. There was family solidarity, but also keen competition for attention.

We were mostly in good health but inevitably, there was also illness and death. Our little brother, who lived only for a few months played his part in our collective memory and the memories of our youth. Our parents were always there, but our grandparents had a huge impact on family life as well.

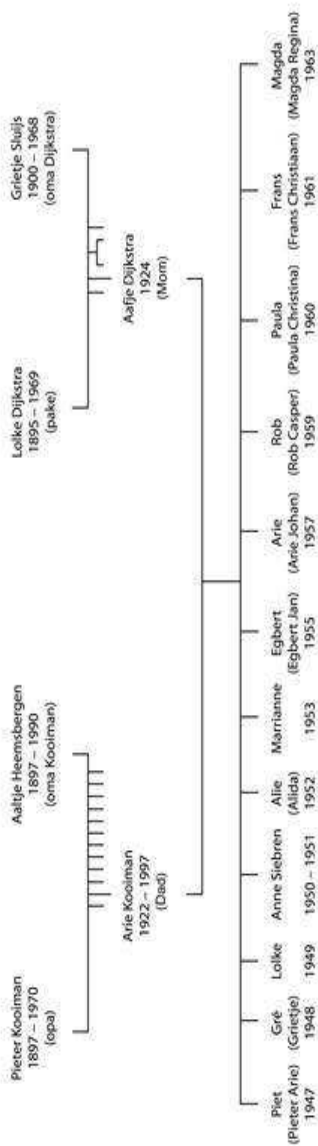
These stories cover every aspect of our family life, including the taboos and less cheerful moments. We also decided to include two separate stories about the lives of our parents in their youth. It is remarkable how in the course of the various stories more and more is revealed about the complex

character of our father who has had such a great influence on all of our development.

As a result of the book we have come to know each other much better. We have been reminded of the importance of the bond between brothers and sisters. Writing this book together has strengthened family ties, but we have also written it as a tribute to our parents, and as a box full of memories for our husbands, wives, children and grandchildren.

The editors,
Marrienne, Egbert and Rob
October 2009

Family Tree



Glossary

Andijk – a small village in West-Friesland where agriculture and horticulture have always been the main sources of income. The name Andijk means ‘at the dike’.

Ausweis – the identification cards the Dutch were required to carry during the German occupation in WWII.

Bedstee – Many traditional Dutch houses had built-in beds, or cupboard beds, which saved space because the cupboard doors could be closed during the day. It was also easier to preserve warmth in this type of bed.

Gezelligheid – The quintessential, and untranslatable, Dutch word used to describe the warmth and intimacy of family and friends. It is also used to describe pleasant places and convivial gatherings.

Heit – The Frisian word for father.

Hutspot – A traditional Dutch dish made by mashing carrots, onions and potatoes together, served with meat or sausage.

Kleingouw – A street in the village of Andijk.

Kloet – A type of bargepole used to propel boats through the canals. The forked end of the pole was called the *flint*.

Knokkel – A street in the village of Andijk.

Konkeltijd – A West-Frisian word for a morning coffee break, during which cake or cookies might also be eaten.

Oma – The Dutch word for grandmother.

Pake – The Frisian word for grandfather (as opposed to the standard Dutch word *Opa*).

Polder – A polder is an area of reclaimed land surrounded by dikes. The first polders were built in the Netherlands in the 11th century. Most of the polders referred to in this book were constructed as part of the great Zuider Zee reclamation project, which created the Wieringermeer polder in 1930. Land consolidation projects carried out in the Netherlands after WWII consolidated many of the small plots of polder land that could only be reached by boat, and created larger farms connected by roads.

Stolpboerderij – This traditional style of farmhouse is common throughout the province of North Holland. These farms have a pyramid-shaped thatched or tiled roof. The farm family's living quarters are located in the front part of building, and the stables in the back are reached through a connecting door. The stable was in turn divided into the *koeies* or cowshed, and the *dars*, or threshing floor.

Voordracht – A recitation of a poem or a story.

Vrije Universiteit – This university in Amsterdam was founded in 1880 by Abraham Kuyper, the Leader of the Reformed-Protestant churches.

PART 1

The beginning

Aafje Dijkstra – A Carefree Youth

“Aafje, you’re almost four now, more than old enough to give me a hand now,” her mother says. “I can’t bend over anymore and we do need to clean up a bit.” Aafje is standing next to her; and can see the big belly, which is the reason why her mother can’t reach the floor anymore. Aafje picks up whatever her mother points at and hands it to her. Then the doorbell rings. Her mother walks to the front door and opens it.

“Good morning, Dien, how are you?” she says. It’s Auntie Dien, the world’s skinniest aunt.

“I’m fine,” Auntie Dien says. “But it’s amazing how incredibly pregnant you are and you’re carrying it so much in front!”

Aafje is standing in the sunlit room. She notes the difference between her mother’s belly and her stick-thin aunt. They are talking about curtains and the linoleum and how much that is going to cost. Aunt Dien is getting married to Uncle Jan, and once they are married, they are going to live in Aafje’s house. Such a thin aunt, she thinks. It is her very first memory.

Aafje Dijkstra was born on 10 May 1924, the second child of Lolke Dijkstra and Grietje Sluys. Her brother was four years older. It was not long before three baby boys emerged

from the big belly, only two of whom would live: Uilke and Wim. She now had both a brother and an uncle – her father’s brother – called Uilke. They moved from the farmhouse where she was born in to Uncle Uilke and Aunt Ietje’s farmhouse, which was big enough to accommodate several families. The house had lots of room to play in, and many cousins to play with.

Uncle Uilke and Aunt Ietje loved their little niece. They spoke Frisian to one another, because like her *heit* (father in Frisian) they had emigrated from Friesland years before. Their grandparents Pake and Beppe Dijkstra had emigrated to Andijk as well. Everybody loved Aafje, and her only regret was that the new baby born a few years later was also a boy instead of the sister she longed for.

Aafje didn’t like it at all when the maternity nurse came. She was so fussy that all the dolls Aafje liked to play with had to be put away. She was not about to let that happen. She put all her dolls in her little doll’s pram and walked through the stable to Aunt Ietje who had given her the pet name ‘Ale’. She could sit there under the kitchen table and play with her dolls. At Aunt Ietje’s you could do anything you liked.

When Aafje was six years old she started primary school, and a whole new world opened to her. She no longer had to have someone read to her from the children’s books of W.G. van de Hulst: she could read them herself. She loved fairy tales, and drawing and language were her favourite subjects. She didn’t care much for arithmetic.

At school, she learnt a nursery rhyme by heart which she would later teach to her own children. But she began by reciting it at home to all her brothers and cousins:

There were seven little chickens, which didn’t have a ma.

*There were seven little chickens, which did have a pa.
And pa he taught them crowing, outside on an old truck.
But alas poor little sister, could only say cluck, cluck.
The other six were boys and crowed out firm and loud.
They teased and laughed at silly sister and shut her out.
But after a few months their sister laid an egg, shiny and
white.
None of her brothers could do that, much to her delight.*

After school Aafje liked to call on her grandparents Pake and Beppe Dijkstra. They had a box bed between the living room and the kitchen that could be climbed into from either side. Their house had many rooms – and a lodger. The lodger was a teacher from Aafje’s school, the Dr. Abraham Kuyper School, where Pake also worked as caretaker. Her name was Miss Kuitert and she was very kind to Aafje. She had big breasts which bounced up and down when she was in a hurry. Aafje wondered: will I get those too when I grow up?

Her childhood was safe and warm. She remembered her mother as someone who liked singing while she did the housekeeping or while arranging flowers, or making clothes. She also made lovely clothes for Aafje’s dolls.

Her father was always around; he was fond of company, liked people and telling jokes. He was by nature an optimist. Lolke Dijkstra emigrated from Friesland to Andijk to work as a farmhand when he was sixteen, but he preferred working as a market gardener to milking cows twice a day, seven days a week. When he was twenty-five he married Grietje Sluys, who was five years his junior. He eventually became a market gardener in his own right. “Better a poor boss than a rich slave.” In addition to farming his land, he also worked for the Gardeners’ Co-op

‘Akkerbouw’ which sold farm supplies. He was very personable, and popular with all the customers. Every morning at ten o’clock he invited some of them to come home with him for coffee. He never had to ask twice.

Whenever Aafje had a bad dream as a child, her father got up in the middle of the night to sit with her. He stayed until she was no longer afraid. The nightmares never came back.

When she was ten she moved with her family to Kleingouw. In that same year her youngest brother Piet was born. She took care of him and they had fun playing together. One time when her eldest brother came home and roughly shoved the youngest off ‘his’ chair, she even threw a bowl of pea soup at her older brother’s head. When little Piet became a nuisance and kept going on about something, they said: “Aafje has spoiled him.”

Her other grandparents, Grandpa and Grandma Sluys lived at Kleingouw as well. She loved going there too. Grandpa was friendly; he was a market gardener and a canal bargeman who had his own little boat. Grandma was good to him although she was a bit too thrifty, and very strict. “That’s because she has such a big family,” people said, “then you have to be strict.”

There was a hereditary illness in the family: deafness. Aafje remembered Uncle Kees, who went deaf when he was sixteen. He was a great lip reader, and he could tell from the vibrations when the bell rang. When someone spoke to him very loudly, he would say: “You don’t have to shout like that, I’m not deaf!”

He was afraid that because of his handicap no girl would want him, but he eventually found the love of his life. He married a deaf girl and they had two little boys. In the evening after dinner they played the harmonium and sang at the top of their voices, but completely out of tune, without any connection to each other or the organ. The children accompanied them, banging spoons on pots, pans, and lids. It must have sounded like the end of the world, but fortunately they were an optimistic couple, content with each other and with the children they had been blessed with.

The children slept in the loft of their rather small house at Kleingouw. Only Aafje had her own room. The boys had their beds on either side of her room. Her oldest brother Sjouke on one side, and on the other side the twins Wim and Uilke, who were always together. Sjouke was not a bad guy, but he was very bossy, at least according to his two younger brothers.

Wim was the technical engineer and the inventor in the family. One day he came up with an idea to stop Sjouke snoring. A rope was fastened to the end of Sjouke's blanket, and it ran through a pulley connecting it to Wim and Uilke's bed. As soon as Sjouke started snoring Wim and Uilke pulled the rope, jerked the blanket off the bed and waited for their big brother to wake up and pull the blanket back up again. This was repeated a number of times until Sjouke understood they were not only pulling his blanket but also his leg. He furiously pounded his little brothers who were hiding under the blankets, laughing themselves sick.

These were the depression years of the 1930s. After elementary school, most girls started working right away, as a maid, or in similar jobs. But Aafje's parents were modern. She was allowed to go to the Domestic Science School in

Enkhuizen. Two things stuck in her memory of those days: friends and laughter. They were glorious years.

With her friends from Andijk she cycled about twelve kilometres along the dyke to school. She enjoyed her school days; the language, arithmetic and geography lessons as well as the more practical subjects such as sewing, mending, pattern designing and dressmaking. At noon, they had lunch at school and after that were free to walk through the town.

One of her lessons involved converting two old shirts into a new one. She remembers how all the girls shrieked with laughter when, as a joke, she put on the top half of the old shirt over her apron. As a punishment, she was sent to the fitting room to look at herself in the mirror wearing half a shirt and a red face from laughing!

She remembered another lesson during which it grew deadly quiet in the room as the girls listened intently to a midwife explaining what happens during the birth of a baby. Then the girls were allowed to ask questions, the most urgent of which was: how much does it hurt?

She was not a difficult adolescent and she had very few arguments with her parents. Only once did her father feel the need to speak to her in private about the rows she sometimes had with her mother. This made a great impression on her because he had never done that before. "He was always more about making jokes and all that." He never had to do it again after this incident.

Her first experiences with the opposite sex happened during elementary school when some boys dragged her into a barn and wanted to get under her skirt. She felt right away that this was not what she wanted. She managed to tear herself loose and run away. When she was thirteen, she went to visit

her Uncle Jan and Aunt Dien. They had a sixteen-year-old boy working for them as a farmhand, who had been sent away by his parents because he was ‘a bit of a handful’. As she was walking back home again in the evening the boy began walking along with her. He suddenly wrapped his arms around her and to her horror started kissing her. Not one, but numerous kisses. She was totally stunned and afraid to say anything, but she knew she didn’t want him. After that she avoided him whenever possible until he lost interest and gave up.

Aafje grew up to be a beautiful girl. As a toddler she had blond hair, but it became darker as she grew older, and as an adult she had a beautiful head of black curly hair. When she was just sixteen she was courted by a boy who was madly in love with her, but she didn’t have the same feelings for him and it ended after a couple of weeks. The boy was very disappointed, as were his parents, who really liked her. She felt sorry for him, but the real tragedy for the parents was the fact that the boy, their only son, was killed in Indonesia after the war. He never had another girlfriend.

Those were her only romantic experiences until her first and greatest love entered her life when she was still sixteen. At this point the world’s problems were light-years away from Aafje. She was barely aware of them. Although there was a lot of poverty in North Holland during the depression, her family did not dwell on it, and they responded to it with their usual restraint. There was some talk about emigrating to Argentina in 1939, just before World War II, but her father was unable to sell their house. They decided to stay in Holland.

Aafje was unaware of the threat of war. She walked and laughed with her friends, who included Ma Brouwer, Annie

Visser, Nel Tensen, Jantje de Vries and Engel van Zwol. At home, she played with her brothers or read girls' literature and the regional novels that were popular at the time. She was a member of a girls' gymnastic club and the Girls' Society of the Christian Reformed Church.

World War II broke out on Aafje's birthday, Friday 10 May 1940. Airplanes flew over Andijk, and its bewildered citizens talked of nothing but war. Everyone listened to the latest news on the radio, but in Andijk everything remained quiet. A few boys joined the army and were mobilized. That was it.

Years later when her children asked Aafje what happened the year she turned sixteen, the war was not the first thing that came to mind. It was another event that was to determine the course of her life. "That was when I started going steady with Pa." And her face would still light up a bit when she said those words.

It was Wednesday 6 November 1940: the annual mixed meeting of the Christian Reformed Girls' Society and the Christian Reformed Young Men's Society. The ideal marriage market. Aafje was there, as was one of her brother Sjouke's friends: Arie Kooiman. After the meeting, he asked if they could cycle home together. Aafje agreed. He was neatly dressed, wearing a pin in the shape of an elephant on his coat. Talking to Arie under a street lamp she saw the light reflected on the little elephant, which looked as if it was illuminated. Together they cycled home. Arie kept up a cheerful banter all the way home. After that, Aafje always thought of 6 November as 'illuminated elephant's day'.

For Aafje it was not love at first sight. Yet she agreed to take a walk with Arie one evening. When the time came she said: "I first want to go for a walk with my