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Special issue

Netherlandic migrations: Of memory and remembering
Guest editor: Hendrika Beaulieu

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From the editor

Inge Genee

You find in front of you the first of two special issues on the topic of migration, guest edited by Hendrika Beaulieu of the University of Lethbridge. The impetus for this project goes back to almost three years ago, when we received a contribution for consideration entitled *What's in a cup of coffee?* I sent it out to our board members with a request for advice on what to do with it: it was a lovely piece, but it wasn't a scholarly article in the usual sense – it was more a memoir. The board members all liked it very much too. They agreed that it was beautifully written and that the topic would certainly interest our readers, but they also said that it wasn't really suitable for a regular issue. So we initially turned it down, with much regret.

Our board member Hendrika Beaulieu was particularly sorry about this, and began to hatch a plan intended to create a context in which the piece would fit. The idea was to produce a special issue on migration narratives that would contain a mixture of different types of contributions to consider the migration experience from a variety of angles: traditional scholarly articles, but also, we hoped, memoir, creative non-fiction, fiction, perhaps even poetry. A call for papers was sent out, and we received enough material for two issues. We are very pleased with the results and proud to present you with the first issue in this series.

As you will see, this issue contains a nice combination of articles, fiction, memoir, and poetry, all shedding their own kind of light on different aspects of the migration experience. We hope you enjoy reading these contributions as much as we enjoyed working with the authors as their pieces found their focus and shape. We are particularly happy that all contributions in this issue contain images that truly complement the writing – mainly photos from the authors' personal collections, but also a set of original line drawings created specifically for one of them.

All contributions in this issue were assessed first by the guest editor Hendrika Beaulieu and myself, before being sent out for external peer review. We are very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for providing insightful comments and suggestions on work that did not always belong to the familiar genre of the scholarly article. We would like to thank our contributors for working hard at

sometimes quite significant revisions and for patiently responding to several rounds of proofs.

I would like to thank Hendrika Beaulieu for her intensive work with the authors in helping shape their pieces. Without her guidance and inspiration this issue would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Basil D. Kingstone for all French translations in this issue. This issue was produced with in-kind support from the [University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator](#) in the Lethbridge Centre for the Study of Scholarly Communications (CSSC). The issue was begun with assistance from managing editor Madoka Mizumoto, and was finished by our new managing editor Carey Viejou.

Lethbridge, May 2017

De la rédaction

Inge Genee

Vous avez entre vos mains le premier de deux numéros spéciaux sur la migration, dont la rédactrice invitée est Hendrika Beaulieu de l'Université de Lethbridge. L'inspiration de ce projet remonte à il y a presque trois ans, quand nous avons reçu un article intitulé *What's in a cup of coffee?* Je l'ai envoyé à notre conseil de rédaction en leur demandant ce qu'on pouvait en faire : c'était un essai merveilleux, mais non un article savant régulier – plutôt un mémoire. Le conseil l'aimait beaucoup aussi : ils trouvaient comme moi qu'il était très bien écrit et qu'il intéresserait certainement nos lecteurs, mais qu'il ne conviendrait pas dans un numéro régulier. Nous avons donc commencé, à regret, par le refuser.

Hendrika Beaulieu, membre de notre conseil, a été si attristée par cette décision qu'elle a commencé à ourdir un plan pour créer un contexte où cet article serait à sa place. Elle a proposé un numéro spécial de récits de migrants, contenant un mélange de différentes sortes de contributions qui refléteraient l'expérience de la migration d'une variété de façons: des articles savants traditionnels mais aussi, espérons-nous, des mémoires, des créations fictives et non-fictives, peut-être même des poèmes. Nous avons donc émis un appel à articles, et voilà que nous avons reçu assez de matériel pour deux numéros. Nous avons été très contents de cette réaction, et c'est avec fierté que nous vous présentons le premier de ces deux numéros.

Vous verrez qu'en effet, ce numéro contient une combinaison bien équilibrée d'articles savants, de fictions, de mémoires et de poèmes, qui éclairent tous à leur manière différents aspects de l'expérience des migrants. Nous espérons que vous prendrez autant de plaisir à les lire que nous en avons pris à collaborer avec les auteurs pour amener leurs créations vers la forme et la focalisation qui leur convenaient. Cela nous réjouit notamment que tous les articles soient assortis d'images qui rehaussent les textes : surtout des photos des collections privées des auteurs, mais aussi une série de dessins originaux créés exprès pour l'un d'entre eux.

Tous ces articles ont été évalués d'abord par notre rédactrice invitée Hendrika Beaulieu et moi-même avant d'être envoyés à un comité de lecture. Nous sommes très reconnaissantes envers ces évaluateurs anonymes d'avoir offert des suggestions et commentaires précieux dans des genres parfois autres

que celui, familier, de l'article savant. Nous tenons aussi à remercier les auteurs de tout leur travail de révision, parfois considérable, et d'avoir réagi avec tant de patience à plusieurs séries d'épreuves.

J'aimerais remercier Hendrika Beaulieu de son travail intensif avec les auteurs pour donner forme à leurs articles; sans ses conseils et son inspiration, ce numéro n'aurait pas vu le jour. Je remercie aussi le docteur Basil D. Kingstone de ses traductions vers le français. Le numéro a été produit avec le soutien technique de l'[University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator](#) dans le Lethbridge Centre for the Study of Scholarly Communications (CSSC). La directrice de la rédaction au début a été Madoka Mizumoto, et la tâche a été complétée par notre nouvelle directrice Carey Viejou.

Lethbridge, mai 2017

Van de redactie

Inge Genee

Voor u ligt het eerste deel van een dubbelnummer over migratie onder gast-redactie van Hendrika Beaulieu. Het oorspronkelijke idee voor dit project gaat bijna drie jaar terug, toen we een bijdrage ontvingen met de titel *What's in a cup of coffee?* Ik stuurde het stuk door aan de andere redactieleden met een verzoek om advies, want ik wist niet goed wat ik mee aanmoest: het was goed geschreven en interessant, maar het was geen wetenschappelijk artikel, meer een memoire. De redactieleden vonden het ook een goed stuk. Ze waren het met me eens dat het mooi geschreven was en dat het onderwerp zeker interessant zou zijn voor onze lezers, maar dat het niet geschikt was voor een gewoon nummer van ons tijdschrift. Dus in eerste instantie moesten we de auteur meedelen dat we het tot onze grote spijt helaas niet konden publiceren.

Ons redactielid Hendrika Beaulieu vond deze gang van zaken wel bijzonder spijtig, en stelde voor om een context te creëren waar dit stuk wel in zou passen. Het idee was een themanummer over migratieverhalen met een aantal verschillende bijdragen die de ervaringen van migranten op verschillende manieren konden belichten: traditionele wetenschappelijke artikelen, maar ook, hoopten we, memoires, non-fictie, fictie, misschien zelfs poëzie. We stuurden een oproep voor bijdragen uit, en ontvingen genoeg material voor twee nummers. We zijn erg ingenomen met het resultaat en presenteren met gepaste trots het eerste themanummer in deze serie.

Zoals u zult zien bevat dit nummer een combinatie van wetenschappelijke artikelen met fictie, memoires en poëzie, die allemaal op hun eigen manier een licht werpen op de ervaringen van Nederlandse en Vlaamse migranten naar Noord-Amerika. We hopen dat u net zoveel plezier beleeft aan het lezen ervan als wij hadden terwijl we met de auteurs samenwerkten bij het voorbereiden van de stukken in dit nummer. We zijn vooral ook erg blij met de prachtige illustraties bij alle bijdragen – voornamelijk foto's uit de persoonlijke verzamelingen van de auteurs, maar ook een aantal originele pentekeningen speciaal gemaakt voor een van de stukken.

Alle bijdragen in dit nummer zijn eerst beoordeeld door onze gast-redacteur Hendrika Beaulieu en mijzelf, en daarna uitgestuurd voor externe review. Wij bedanken de anonieme reviewers hartelijk voor hun nuttige

commentaar en suggesties op stukken die niet altijd tot het welbekende genre van het wetenschappelijke artikel behoorden. En we bedanken de auteurs voor hun bereidheid om hun bijdragen soms tamelijk drastisch te herschrijven en voor hun geduld en hulp bij meerdere rondes drukproeven.

Ik bedank Hendrika Beaulieu voor haar intensieve werk met de auteurs en haar hulp bij het vormgeven van hun bijdragen, zowel in vorm als inhoud. Zonder haar inspiratie en volharding zou dit themanummer er nooit gekomen zijn. Mede namens Hendrika bedank ik ook Basil D. Kingstone voor alle Franse vertalingen in dit nummer. Dit nummer is tot stand gekomen dankzij een bijdrage van de [University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator](#) in de Lethbridge Centre for the Study of Scholarly Communications (CSSC). Twee redactie-assistenten hebben geholpen met de productie: Madoka Mizumoto verzorgde de eerste fase, en haar werk werd afgemaakt door onze nieuwe redactie-assistant Carey Viejou.

Lethbridge, mei 2017

From the guest editor

Hendrika Beaulieu

As an anthropologist who routinely works with life story/oral history methodologies, I was excited when I was asked to comment on Jenny Radsma's *What's in a Cup of Coffee?* for publication consideration in CJNS. Conversely, I understood when a number of my editorial board colleagues rendered the opinion that it was not an article that met CJNS academic standards or guidelines. As I point out in *Of Memory and Remembering*, the introduction to this collection, narrative knowledge conveyance remains problematic across many disciplines in the Academy, particularly because the various forms require careful, alternative analytic methods and are still viewed through the objective/subjective binary. I am all the more grateful therefore, that the editorial board whole-heartedly supported the suggestion of a special issue – now grown to two – devoted to narrative ways of knowing. The articles that form this first issue underline the rich diversity of Netherlandic immigrant experiences, while simultaneously structuring an ensemble of common themes and motifs. It is my hope that this edition, and the forthcoming issue in the fall, will provoke further analyses. Much remains to be said regarding immigration, memory and identity; a timely topic given the restless dispersal of peoples across the globe.

I would like to thank the scholars who contributed to this collection and to express my gratitude for an amazing journey. It has been an exciting and fulfilling experience to work with each and every one of them, and to discover, in the process, my own connections to some of their memories and the commonalities of experience that invite further scrutiny. The support I was given by managing editors Madoka Mizumoto, and thereafter, Carey Viejou, cannot be underestimated, and the dedication and significant input proffered by internal and external reviewers cannot be gainsaid. To the CJNS editorial board, I convey my appreciation for the opportunity to showcase the quality and importance of memory and identity work around the immigration experience. I trust that your confidence in the editions will be amply repaid.

While a work such as this one is the product of many committed hands, I express my deep and abiding thankfulness and obligation to Dr. Inge Genee for her guidance, mentorship, advice, and sheer hard work throughout. Her support

for these issues, from their inception, has never wavered. It would simply have been impossible to bring them to fruition without her selfless contribution.

If this collection prompts even a single scholar to expand his/her methodological range through life story/oral history data gathering and analysis, it will have done its work.

Enjoy!

Lethbridge, May 2017

Introduction to special issue 37.1

Netherlandic migrations: Of memory and remembering

Hendrika Beaulieu

Since the mid twentieth century, life stories, oral histories and oral traditions represent important evidentiary sources for social science and humanities disciplines. The narrative mode of knowing represents a challenge for analysts using these sources, particularly since the academy's standards re truth value and universal utterances requires detailed and careful scrutiny of memory and remembering – the two foundations on which narration rests. Since orality, and inscription devised to mimic its qualities, focuses on filiation rather than on universal truths, scholars utilizing oral histories have devised precise socio-linguistic investigative models that emphasize both form and content in order to extract knowledge from these accounts. Attendantly, researchers increasingly recognise that people not only encode their worlds in stories, they assign significance to the objects that surround them. Analysis of photographs and cultural artifacts, as well as the aesthetics that characterize particular societies, deepens our understanding of Being in the world and facilitates cross cultural comparisons of human groups.

Key terms: Memory; remembering; artifacts; photographs life stories; oral histories.

Memories. We store them, draw on them, recall them, cherish them, lose them, are haunted, overwhelmed or plagued by them, find solace in them and narrate them. Memory structures our Being in and through time; we externalize the self through countless narrative fragments daily drawn from an experiential repertoire that reveals the "I" as central to particular cognitive processes. No one has the same perception of what I experience as my unique realities, nor my precise ability to reflect on, learn from, reject, revise and adjust my identity-memories (Bornat 1989, 20). We lament the loss of memory as the loss of identity and because we

are a species that communicates through symbols, we embed our memories in artifacts that we invest with meaning and often fetishize.

Memory-identity synchronicity is powerfully established through the narrative mode of cognitive functioning, one that Bruner contrasts with its irreducible complement:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two [though complementary] are irreducible to one another [...] Each of these ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria for well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification. (Bruner 1986, 11)

While the paradigmatic mode searches for universal truth conditions, the narrative style looks for unique connections between events through configurations that include descriptions of, and/or references to, the narrator's own actions or the actions of others. Life story narration seeks to contextualize chance happenings as meaningful contributions and to connect the significance of individual experience to the human condition; narration establishes filiation. Connective memory-identity is socially negotiated through symbolic interactionism; as we build intimacy, we increasingly share life story segments that signify the unique me and anticipate that others will reciprocate in kind. Although orality/narration is a fundamental component of the human 'coming of age', Bruner notes that we know "precious little" about how narrative processes work, while we have an extensive knowledge of the paradigmatic processes used in formal science and logical reasoning (Bruner 1986, 11).

The problem with memory

The discursively rich memory paradigm emerges from our perception of interiority; we are conscious as a singularity within a crowd. This experiential knowledge of memory storage and recall gives rise to the popular notion that memories are the result of a one-to-one correspondence between reality and what we recollect; *this happened to me and I remember exactly how it was*. Known by academics as the 'storehouse metaphor', we perceive a "multitude of stimuli imping[ing] upon the senses [...] discrete impressions of these stimuli are retained as memory units for later retrieval [and] as a result of decay or interference some of the units may become lost, weakened, or otherwise inaccessible" (Koriat & Goldsmith 1996, 167-228). Cognitive studies have long discarded the 'storehouse metaphor' as representative of how memory actually

works, but Jussim has rightly noted that “regardless of whether anyone actually believes in the storehouse metaphor, clearly many chose research topics, write and interpret research as if they believed it...” (Jussim 1991, 55).

On occasion, we are startled by the fact that people close to us do not remember a shared event in the way that we do and we are usually certain that *our* personal memory is the true one and the other’s contradictory memory, somehow ‘wrong’. Many a disagreement has arisen from a feeling of indignation by both parties that the other is misrepresenting what for each of them is a truth, which leaves a third party, should one be present, in some bewilderment as to which account is more reliable. This disparity in memory and its problematic implications have long been noted; Thucydides, when interviewing survivors of the Peloponnesian war, lamented the divergence in eyewitness accounts he collected and wondered if his consultants were seeing it from different sides or if their memories were flawed (Thucydides, 1972).

Since memories of events are often central to institutions such as the law, cognitive psychologists studying memory divergences began to query what we store as memory, how we store it (input), and how we relay what we have stored (output). Analyzing oral accounts of the same event, researchers quickly realized that operative memory in the ‘real world’, for example the way in which two sisters have very different memories of a shared familial experience, arise from a differing focus on, and divergent perceptions of, the details structuring an incident: we experience the world and store memories *subjectively*. To incorporate these new findings, the *correspondence metaphor* replaced the *storehouse metaphor* as the frame of choice for memory research. Three fundamental principles structure the model; representation, accuracy, and content, and each of them is problematic.

First, the representation element stipulates that memory is about an event in the real world. Thus, recounted memory bits are assumed to have truth-value; they are ‘about something’ that happened. This tenet retains elements of the one to one correspondence between ‘reality’ and memory found in the storehouse metaphor. Secondly, the accuracy component evaluates memory in terms of its descriptive intersection with real events: how close does this narrative come to describing the occurrence? Judging overlap between memory and reality however, a priori requires someone who is granted ‘authority’ with respect to the recall of other; there is no way to evaluate how accurate a memory of an event is unless we grant third party omniscience and omnipresence. Conway addressed this problem when he noted:

One difference between mental and physical states is that mental states have content, whereas physical states do not. Thus, my memory of dough rising is *about something*, some representation of an event I once experienced. But actual dough rising is not *about* anything; it is simply what it is – dough rising. (Conway 1994, 2; emphasis added)

Each person who narrates the ‘dough rising’, therefore, is merely relating their perception of how the dough rose. Facetiously put, whose account accurately parallels how the dough rose, only the dough can know.

Finally, the content factor is concerned with the *quality* of the memory; a crucial difference may arise if a narrator remembers one thing and not another. Koriat and Goldsmith offer the following example: “in the courtroom for instance, it might make a crucial difference whether the witness remembered that the burglar ‘had a gun’ and forgot that he wore a hat, or vice versa” (Koriat & Goldsmith 1996, 174). Thus, “functional considerations” (Koriat & Goldsmith 1996, 174) are intrinsic to the correspondence metaphor. Finally, rather than a focus on storage (input – how we store memories in the brain), the correspondence metaphor is concerned to address ‘output’ – “subjects are [...] held accountable for what they report” (Koriat & Goldsmith 1996, 174). The ‘quality’ of a memory is therefore judged according to its relevance to context. In the courtroom example offered by Koriat and Goldsmith, the memory that the burglar had a gun serves the prosecution, hence the quality of that witness’s memory is judged positively because it is relevant to their case. It is not difficult, however, to conjure a context where the gun would be less relevant than the hat, and the hat witness accorded greater veracity.

Issues related to the truth value and accuracy of memory, as well as the fact that people were ‘accountable’ for what they reported, continued to chafe scholars. What if there was only one witness to a certain event? How does one assess truth and accuracy under those conditions? If someone swears to ‘tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’, does their account not hinge on the truth *as they perceived it* and should its divergence from another truth lead to indictments such as ‘more or less truthful’? Under what conditions can that type of assessment be made and who has the authority to make it?

Researchers therefore turned to the central issue of veridicality; to use Conway’s example, how memories of the dough rising paralleled how the dough actually rose. In 1932, C.R. Bartlett tackled this perceptual problem and concluded that people do not store memory in terms of how the dough actually rose, but instead use schemata to make sense of their everyday experiences. ‘Schemata’ should not be understood as passive frames potentially available in a specific society, but as “an active organization of past reactions, of past experiences”

(Bartlett 1932, 201). Bartlett's discussion underlined that we not only process encounters with the world subjectively, we do so *narratively*. The web-like characteristics of narration facilitate our ability to process new information by linking it to experiences that inform our stored repertoire of similar occurrences; *this is just like the time, or this is how dough usually rises, and hence I have 40 minutes to do...* Known as the 'reconstructive approach', Bartlett's work on schemata moved our understanding of how memory works, and how we narrate memory, in new directions. Niesser, developing Bartlett's work further through the 'ecological approach', stressed the importance of context inherent in Bartlett's model:

Rather than beginning with the hypothetical models of mental functioning, ecological psychologists start with the real environment and the individual's adaptation to that environment. (Niesser 1988a, 151)

Since the Bartlett/Niesser eco-model emphasizes that social milieus play a significant role in the adaptation and (re)formulation of narrative frameworks, it charts an interpretative way forward for analyses that grapple with the memory work found in life stories, oral histories and creative non-fiction. How and what societies and bodies remember derive from the interplay between individual/group and narrative environment; social possibilities/inhibitions interact with narratives that are potentially accessible, but not always recounted. Elizabeth Cole's provocative analysis of "how societies and bodies remember, but equally important, how they forget and go on to forge viable practical models to help them endure" (Cole 1998, 628), powerfully unravels this effect of environment on reminiscence, while eliciting a deeper awareness of the narrative possibilities that inform memory and remembering. Life storytellers, as Cole emphasized, remain silent on topics they feel will be misunderstood, unappreciated, misinterpreted or threaten their very existence; memories may be bracketed to an extent that they may eventually disappear from individual/collective/public memory altogether (Cole 1998, 610-633). Bartlett's observation that people/groups adhere to the notion that by articulating one set of relationships they can forget or erase another (Bartlett 1932) led to Cole's observation – one that speaks directly to the immigrant experience –: "it is the forgetting that allows the creation of an acceptable social community" (Cole 1998, 622). Immigrant life stories/oral histories are characterized by the "development of specific images" that manifest through a "persistent framework of institutions that act as the schematic basis for reconstructive memory" (Bartlett 1932, 255).

The value of life stories and oral histories

If life stories and oral histories do not recount a one to one correspondence between truth and reality, then what is the value of memories to the academy? This legitimate question has been the focus of multiple scholarly debates, not only among oral historians, but within the institutions of the dominant culture. Adhering to the notion that only written documentation has truth value, the courts long dismissed oral testimony as unreliable and rendered their decisions wholly on the basis of written evidence. Curiously, as I discuss briefly below, documents are often more redacted, more subject to revisions written to convey lies as truth, and most often produce and reproduce hegemonic structures.

The swing to documentary evidence as truth, and oral testimony as completely unreliable, reflects the shift to literacy from orality in European culture. In *The coming of the book*, Febvre and Martin (2010) discuss the superstition and suspicion that initially greeted written texts, and the transition, for example in the courts, from the authority of orality where a man's word was his bond, to the slow acceptance of the superiority of documentary evidence, which held man's word to be in error unless supported by written records. Of critical importance to the discipline of history, life stories and oral histories were increasingly marginalized, a position made explicit in the German school of 'scientific history', where documentary sources were stressed and, finally, used exclusively.

Leopold van Ranke imposed a powerful oral/literary dichotomy on historical texts, one that continues to dominate aspects of the academy and western social institutions (Iggers & Powell 1990). Maintaining that documents addressing the event were the most reliable form of evidence and dismissing oral evidence as based on shoddy memories told from a biased point of view, Ranke and his followers were influential in transforming history from a literary (narrative) form into an academic discipline dependent upon a rigorous use of evidence and scrupulously trained historians who scrutinized documents in their search for objective 'truth'. Note, however, that 'writing' is merely memory inscribed – orality precedes literacy – from a writer's subjective – and often self-serving – point of view. During the transition from oral traditions to documented histories, only a handful of citizens had the ability to write and those that did served particular interests – a king, a church, a political position. Moreover, many historical incidents are characterized by paltry documentation and there is little in the way of checks and balances on 'truths' presented in specific texts, hence the resort to exegesis and tests for internal consistency.

Writing offers further possibilities for the creation of hegemonic structures not locatable – or maintainable – in oral cultures. When we interact face-to-face, each party to the communicative transaction has access to kinesic cueing and can immediately intervene to check, confirm, or challenge any utterance/body work contributing to the dialogic interaction; positioning, and its affirmation or negation, diverges substantially in oral situations. Indeed, in literacy, transcription disturbs the mutuality of interaction; the fact of the text mediates social relationships. As a writer, I can carefully position myself in relation to potential readers – who am I writing for, what do I want to convey, what type of approach will I take to my potential readers, and how will I structure the ‘voice’ I will use to present both myself and the point of my communication? Conversely, I may be uninterested in any of those questions; it may be the case that I am inscribing ‘only for me’ – narrating my thoughts, my insights and my experiences. In oral cultures the latter process leads to diverse narrative forms, while the earlier stance characterizes the rhetorical arts. In literate societies, where all inscription conforms to the formal rules that characterize various genres, the act of transcription limits the conditions for augmentation and creativity, including connotation, since words are anchored to the page. Even if I make the decision to phatically engage my readers, unless they are writing back to me, I cannot check that what I had intended to do has in fact been accomplished, that I have been understood. With the dissemination of a document, the authorial voice is decoupled from text and Barthes, in his discussion of the primacy of the reader-text relationship in *Death of the Author* (Barthes 1967), noted both the impossibility and undesirability of attempting to re-capture authorial intent.

Pinpointing originary intent to unpack truths, however, was the scientific school of history’s mandate. The established double binary; objective/writing//subjective/oral, with writing/objectivity as the privileged pole, can be problematically read as false, harmful and the key element in the creation of ideological hegemony serving institutional state apparatuses (Althusser 1971). The (re)introduction/adaptation of narrative forms of disciplinary evidence played a key role in dismantling the privilege of the paradigmatic mode and, in the process, has shown the desirability of iteratively moving between/combining narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing.

Given the radical swing from narrative to ‘scientific history’ in the 19th century, it seems appropriate that we discern a reactive epistemic shifting in the discipline during the mid-twentieth century. A focus on documents had considerably marginalized the consideration of other evidentiary material and, consequently, historical analysis focused on the lettered classes. Rejecting the notion that top down history can accurately capture historical epochs, scholars

began to access documents that spoke to the lives of the masses, such as church records, while others focussed their interest on the life stories and oral histories of people ‘on the ground’ (Thompson, 1967, 1975, 1978, 1982, 2000 etc.). The new ‘social history’ profoundly altered our understanding of historical trajectories and the making of epochal ideologies, both in the form of interviews conducted with people who lived through distinct historical events and analyses of the memory inscriptions, artifacts and aesthetics left behind by ‘ordinary folk’. A subsequent appreciation of the vibrant anti-hegemonic historical discourses episodically modified and available, simultaneously facilitated greater understanding of the ways in which subordinate groups and classes actively appear to support and subscribe to the “values, ideals, and objectives, cultural and political meanings, which bind them to, and incorporate them into the prevailing structures of power” (Storey 1993, 119).

An example of narrative querying official documents – ‘History’ – can be found in Schrager’s work on the largest work stoppage in the history of the American logging industry (Schrager 1998, 284–299). The strike, called by the newly emerging IWW (Industrial Workers of the World or “Wobblies”), began in the lumber camps of northern Idaho, western Montana and eastern Washington in July of 1917, spreading from there to the Pacific coast. Lumber companies, newspapers throughout the region, and state and local authorities vilified the IWW, who were “accused of being saboteurs, arsonists and foreign agents” (Schrager 1998, 291). Many IWW members were “imprisoned in county jails and makeshift bullpens” and, after the strike was over, the prevailing narrative maintained that management had defeated the IWW and gave credit to the lumber companies for “voluntarily improving camp conditions” (Schrager 1998, 291).

Schrager went into the field to collect the life stories of the strikers and their family members to reconstruct what he calls the “narrative environment” (Schrager 1998, 289): the web of discourses that addressed all aspects of the strike, including the events that led up to it, and the relationships of single accounts to the narrative whole. His attention to the interplay between the content and form of the stories he collected enabled his ability to quickly identify specific discursive formations that conveyed nearly identical attitudes and experiences *across class lines*. Managers, loggers, and foremen, for example, expressed the same attitude to the strike and chose virtually the same words to describe pre-strike camp conditions and the utter disregard for labour on the part of lumber companies. Interviewees used uniform utterances to describe the motives of the strikers as just, and their actions as necessary. Furthermore, all credited the IWW with improvements in their working lives and scoffed at the

notion that the lumber companies voluntarily eased labour conditions. Incidents widely reported by newspapers and amplified by company bosses – such as the alleged incendiarism – were explained, through these oral histories, as having a benign source (smut in the wheat fields) that were discursively reproduced as worker malevolence.

Always sensitive to context, Schragger does not take his interviewees at face value but probes their very different accounts of the strike in terms of the dialogic interaction between narrative environment and emerging labour identities, while simultaneously sifting through, contrasting, opposing and reconciling the documentary and oral texts. There is no denying however, that his results contested the documented/official versions of the strike in every detail, as well as academic analyses that relied solely on documentary accounts. His work amplifies – and attempts to reconcile – the troublesome literary/oral polarity that continues to define evidentiary protocols in many western institutions and disciplines. Furthermore, the narratives – since the mode focuses on connections – facilitate our recognition of intersectionalities not evident in the documents; foreman-worker solidarity across class and ethnic lines, malicious collusion between corporate and media interests, and individual/group, gender and ethnic relations.

The work that oral historians engage in is therefore multi-disciplinary and can be broadly compartmentalized; the analyst can treat life stories/oral histories as units of formal linguistic structure; the analyst can treat them as functional units of social interaction; the analyst can utilize content analyses, and finally, the analyst can choose to combine all, or any two of these. At least from the 1960s on, scholars deploying life story methodologies began to maximize the iterative content and form possibilities inherent in their data. Despite a brief postmodern fling in oral history analysis, when scholars lamented that ‘everything was discourse’ and truth an empty term, theorists began to seriously address what kind of information interviewees conveyed, how to work with the concepts of truth, reliability, and accountability, and how to subject oral histories to the same rigorous level of analysis applied to documentary history. Approaching spoken history as documentary history led to an appreciation and acknowledgement of the convergences between the two types of texts, as well as the clear identification of their divergences, particularly in the analytic methods required to extract knowledge.

Observations: life story form

I perceive. I internalize perception. I recall, reproduce and narratively re-externalize perception. This is not a chaotic process. Narration – stretches of talk that can be

identified as a story – is bound by culturally specific structural rules and the western life story through which I construct the ‘I’ is no exception. Linde’s groundbreaking work on the functions and form of ‘western’ life stories identifies two foundational principles that inform these narratives:

[...] the stories and associated discourse units contained in the life story have as their primary evaluation a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is [...]

[...] the stories and associated discourse units have extended reportability; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time [...]

(Linde 1993, 21)

Linde emphasizes that the stories we tell emerge from the I; the world is secondary. It is my identity that I am at pains to convey. Secondly, the stories we tell and re-tell are ones that have especial significance for us, they say something important about who we perceive ourselves to be. As we externalize that perception through well-formed and internally consistent life stories, we reproduce and ground the self. When self-perception shifts, life narrators will de-emphasize or silence previous narrative segments, and begin to privilege others. The life story therefore “consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them [...]” (Linde 1993, 21) that satisfy the above two criteria. In western life stories, the narrative is further anchored by fixed ‘landmark events’, both individual and socio-cultural, that are used to date social and personal epochs (*when JFK was shot, since I came out here, since I had the baby, or after the immigration*) and are marked by available domains that identify potential life/identity transits, such as occupations, education, marriage, childbirth, major illness, divorce, major geographical moves, or ideological/religious conversion. Reconciliation based on form – for example the landmarks utilized to mark life story segments in a particular culture, provides insights into an acceptable social life, while content analysis enriches that understanding.

The story within the story

Members of subcultures participate in narrative structural forms peculiar to their social groups. De Vos defines an ethnic group as “a self perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact” (De Vos 1975, 9). Dundes, however, argues that when we discuss ethnicity we are really talking about the lore of a folk. While the term ‘folk’ has experienced significant semantic degradation, Dundes points to its felicity as a

label for a group of people who share at least one common factor. In a multi-ethnic society, where people are members of multiple groups, 'folk' "considerably broadens the base of theoretical discussions of identity, beyond the "unfortunately overly restrictive limits of ethnic group" and allows "one to think of individuals belonging simultaneously to many different and distinct folk groups" (Dundes 1989, 11-12; Van Daele this volume). Rather than a focus on ethnicity, Dundes observes that any linking factor, a common occupation, language, customs, or religion for example, can solidify a folk; "what is important is that [a group] will have some traditions which it calls its own" (Dundes 1989, 11) and the individual "will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity" (Dundes 1989, 11).

The articles in this collection clarify that an individual is at once a member of a family, ethnic group, religious group, occupational group, nation etc., and is familiar with the folklore of each of these groups. As such, they learn to "code" and "identity switch" (Lyman & Douglass 1973, 357-358) as they transit groups. Therefore, immigrant story tellers that are members of enclave communities iteratively participate in, and modify, the culturally constructed and approved narrative structures that inform the larger society. The 'I' is indelibly linked, not only to their immigrant subculture, but, through transections, to the dominant culture. Intersections between western life story form and life stories told by immigrants from western countries, reveal commonalities that contribute to a structural understanding of diverse immigrant scripts, while at the same time exhibiting content divergences, particularly in foci.

Life story tellers usually narrate a 'primary' identity that they relay as fundamental to the Self and social belonging. This primary identity underpins how and when they identity/code-switch and pinpoints those occasions when they refuse to cross those boundaries. Fundamental to the primary identity is the immersion in social practices, often ritualistic traditions, not shared by others with whom they come into contact. Narrative markers define that space. Establishing the 'nature' of a group (*what kind of people we are*) and my own 'nature' (*what kind of person I am*) is accomplished through explicit and implicit narrative techniques that delineate character. Analyses of interviews with Dutch immigrants (Beaulieu 2009, 61 ff) led to the identification of multiple discursive formations that set out informant perceptions of the Dutch character; *this is the kind of person a Dutch man/woman is; this is how we/I react to challenges; this is how I accepted and lived up to (or not) that paradigm*. Moreover, character is directly coupled, through causality, to socio-morality and community – that Dutch community is of a particular *kind* and that the Dutch interrelate in unique ways

that mark them *as Dutch*. Note for example, Radsma's attempt to grapple with the word *gezelligheid*, a directly untranslatable Dutch term that encapsulates a unique social configuration and sense of communality. Responding to her husband, who noted that all of his customers had offered him coffee that day, Jenny Radsma's mother marks a boundary between Dutch and 'Canadian' socio-morality and community through her observation; "Oh ja? That doesn't happen so often with those Canadese people..." (Radsma this volume).

The deployment of character as 'adequate causality' in the Dutch immigrant life journey is a rhetorical device shared with the western life story paradigm, although the attributes of self that constitute 'character' may differ. Linde discusses the creation of coherence through character with reference to the doctrine of individualism and notes that it is narratively conjoined to aspects of the group/social self that emerge in a comprehensive and consistent western life story, in particular: a sense of agency, which includes self-responsibility and the ability to direct the life; the sense of continuity in time, in which memory plays the crucial role; a sense of physical cohesion; a sense of the reflexive-subjective self; and a sense of transmitting meaning (Stern 1985, 7-8).

Character, agency, and continuity in time are especially evident in narrative segments that successfully straddle *who I was in the old country and who I became and am in the new*. In these life accounts, narration connects past to present through past me to present me – *I have directed my life in this way, through these choices, because that's the kind of person I am*. The schema must incorporate obligatory mythemes; the reason for immigration, how we came to 'this' place in the new country, the story of our (sometimes painful) success, and the process of adaptation; the latter recounted in numerous vignettes that paradigmatically exhibit who we were/are.

Immigration is therefore a radical break that demands narrative resolution because it threatens the 'I's continuity through time; it has the potential to 'stop' a narrative, rather than propel it forward. To understand the mechanisms at work, and the content privileged, life story analysts, particularly those who focus on form and content, begin with the fluid and ongoing dialogic interaction between environment and life narrator. One, we must consider the positioning of a life story teller to events in the life; invariably, this relationship will emerge both through explicit narrative segments and gaps in the text. Two, we must account for events or motivations a narrator refuses to address or marginalizes, as well as narratives that exhibit "richness of account" (Linde 1993, 135-140). Schalk's discussion of interviewee recall that described their early immigrant years, suggests that her consultants did not dwell on the hardships they faced, glossing over both fundamental individual and immigrant group challenges they shared in

the new country and stressing their eventual success (Schalk this volume). It would be a mistake to read this silence synchronically and to assume that extreme hardship did not exist; Schalk's interviewees do discuss their challenges and she is certainly able to identify disjuncture. However, it is not narratively privileged, and this relative silence could be read as a boundary marker – it is possible that these individuals, members of a cohesive immigrant community with specific, well-articulated group boundaries and traditions, refuse to elaborate 'hardship' as a narrative device, silencing it and speaking the road to success as a "practical model that helped them endure" (Cole 1998, 628). Interviewee outlines of the creation of a new community that shared religion, immigrant experiences, and a land of birth, offer deep insights into the schema adopted by the community members Schalk interviews and sheds light not only on the evident fact that the boundary markers 'us' and 'Canadians' are well-articulated, but, through narrative intersectionality, that interfaces with the dominant society were anxious and the people, foreign. The community was 'home.' A comparative analyst could pose questions such as: Is 'overcoming' a communal narrative focus, and hardship dismissed within this narrative environment, and does *this* aspect of *this* narrative schema exhibit a commonality with the environmental narratives of immigrant communities elsewhere? Moreover, the 'closed' aspects of the community and its well-defined interaction with the dominant society, lead to research questions around immigrant adjustment and schemata adopted to survive and thrive.

On the other hand, Schalk's interviewees share in a narrative configuration that is well documented for immigrants in general; the richness of accounts surrounding the reason for immigration and how 'we came to this specific place' (Schalk this volume; Van Daele this volume; Hols this volume). Indeed, as noted, this narrative elaboration is an obligatory device in the immigrant life story since it creates continuous identity; *who I am now (naturally) grew out of the possibilities inherent in me in the old country*. Critically, the difference in narratives that create a relatively seamless transition, and those who exhibit crisis, are characterized by the act of forgetting that Cole references as essential to the creation of (new) community. Being 'born into' an ethnic group, in this place, on this land, with our traditions, speaking our language, and with our history, confers a naturalized identity (Handler 1998), this is simply who I am/we are. Netherlandic immigrants decided to break with the essential ingredients of 'folk' identity when they chose to leave their natal homes and, in doing so, re-evoked the essential questions of identity: who am I/who are we, in this new land, unfamiliar place, with strange traditions, no knowledge of our history and an unfamiliar language? Through self-agency, immigrants devise schemata that address what they can bear to remember, what they will continue to speak into existence, what they

must silence to survive, what aspects of their identity they feel are integral to the self, and how to re-create community and belonging. Having made the decision to start anew, what elements of my former life am I determined to retain, what do I pass to my children, where and how do I find myself in the midst of all this strangeness? How immigrants answer these questions – and who they answer them with – will radically affect the trajectory of the life-identity; *this is now me; these are now my people, this is where I now belong*. The “practical models they devise[d] to help them endure”, and the forgetting that they instigate to facilitate the making of new social community and personal identity (Cole 1998, 628), are integral aspects of the immigrant life script.

These decisions, however, are negotiated through sub/dominant cultural signs and mutual interaction. I well recall – with some bemusement as a child born in Amsterdam – studying ‘Holland’ in a Canadian elementary school and becoming aware that my identity could be reduced to a few totems: windmills, tulip fields and wooden shoes. These relatively benign signifiers, nevertheless a source of frustration for some immigrants, raises the question of the marked identities of other immigrant groups, particularly those imposed on refugees. Although wooden shoes had no relevance to my family history, within a few years, echoing Demers’ discussion of the ubiquitous identity markers in Dutch homes (Demers this volume), my mother acquired a pair that were carefully placed on a side table along with the Delftware and silver that marked our heritage to any ‘incomers’. This ‘ethnic interaction’ through objects that express an acknowledgement of ‘where I came from’ and how the other represents that heritage, is problematic at best for immigrants connoted through negative artifacts by the dominant culture and the use of those artifacts in the home may represent resistance as well as a re-working of signification.

Oral histories and life stories around immigration suggest that analyses of the immigration experience have been rather limited. For example, they have not, to date, focused on the widely divergent recall of immigrant parents, immigrant children and children born after the immigration. In making decisions regarding what they will remember and what they will silence, parents intervene in the ‘naturalized’ process outlined by Handler – that being born in this land, with these traditions, and speaking our language confers a ‘naturalized identity’ (Handler 1989). In other words, many immigrant children struggled to acquire the identity of the land they lived in or were born into. The parents of many of the interviewees in my database, relayed the ‘old country’ through stories, precepts, indeed ways of being, that structured a unique identity. While I have not had the opportunity to analyze a common discursive formation found in my data, I note its presence in van Daele’s article – the oft repeated assertion – in word and deed – that we are

'unique', different (Van Daele this volume) from the people around us. Children – those that immigrated, as well as those born in the 'new' country – were brought up with stories and hefty doses of European history – specific to their Netherlandic backgrounds - that signaled that they too, were unique and different; not the 'same' as the society they lived in. Essentially then, they were taught that the Dutch are unique, Dutch immigrants even more so, and "we" ourselves the most unique family among them. A comparative study that analyzes if this narrative is found among families of other ethnic backgrounds would offer insights into immigrant boundary formations.

Immigrant children are consequently at risk in terms of their primary identity and may remain liminal (Van Daele this volume). In the case of Dutch immigrant children, they might be firmly rooted in various trappings of Dutch community life reduplicated in Canada – a church, the ritualized coffee time, pseudo relatives drawn from their parent's friends to replace the extended families left behind. On the other hand, some parents rejected aspects of Dutch Canadian life, leaving the Dutch church because it was "too conservative", insisting on English at home so children could more rapidly make the necessary language transition, and making the decision not to participate in various Dutch community organizations or customs. For many children who immigrated with their parents, the primary question of identity – and the seamless creation of a story that links who I was to who I am – is troublesome, perhaps because as children, the life story narrative was in its early chapters, the plot not well-defined, and characters largely unmolded; although formulation of the latter was under the auspices of Dutch parents who adhered firmly to the socialization of children in terms of the 'Dutch character.' Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that the greater the boundaries drawn around the immigrant community, the more likely children are to acquire an identity securely related to the parent's natal land.

Parents made the decision to immigrate and *parents* narrate various acceptable reasons for that decision. Several paradigms feed the narrative utilized to transit this part of the life story. A cluster of accounts are linked to the war: we lost everything and wanted to start over, the country was struggling to get back on its feet, there were no employment opportunities, the future was uncertain for our children. In each case, the narrative defines the country to which they will immigrate as the land of *opportunity*. Pre-war immigration draws on employment opportunities, links to other family members who had already immigrated and adventure; data suggests – and requires confirmation – that more single people immigrated pre-war and that families immigrated post-war.

My own parents held firmly to the acceptable justification that 'we immigrated for the children'. Those of us who remember that transition, and the

confusion we felt when we could no longer visit dearly loved extended family members, certainly peppered our mother and father with questions; ‘why? – why did we have to leave?’ Well, they replied, we did it for your future. That was quite a burden to carry; we lived with the fact that they had given everything up – land, language, families, for us.

Ten years after our immigration, participating in another common immigrant narrative known as ‘The Return’, I arrived in Holland. Notably, as recounted by Van Daele in her article, I too received a delighted “Welcome home!” at Schiphol airport from the official who took my passport – the perception that an immigrant is returning *home* merits further study, as does the reaction on the part of the returnee, since it is invariably emotional.

On the first Friday night get together with both paternal and maternal sides attending, sisters, brothers, and parents fell to reminiscing about my parents, a most unsettling experience. With glee, they reminisced about my parents’ courtship and the long and difficult decision making process to immigrate. Since our familial immigrant script incorporated the assertion that Canada had always been the *only* land of the future, I was shocked (and my relatives entertained) to discover that my parents had flipped two guilders with four alternative immigration choices until they narrowed it down to Canada. Likewise, I felt completely deflated when I discovered that the mytheme ‘we left for the children (because) Holland was no longer a land of opportunity’, was also questionable, because my father [had] held an excellent position in Amsterdam with bright prospects.

An alternative explanation for our emigration was carefully promulgated by my Dutch family. When close extended family members emigrate, there is a rending of the social fabric in the home country. We tend to focus on the immigrant experience, but my data clearly reveals that the family left behind ritually engages in considerable narrative work to create a cohesive narrative around the emigration and that the resulting productions require further study. Thus, according to the family who were challenged with explaining why my parents would want to emigrate, my mother had been trying ‘to get out of the country’ long before she met my father, and my father, who was a bit of a pet, had little choice but to assent to her demands to leave. Expanding the narrative through causality to create richness of account, they explained that since my grandfather had prevented my mother from leaving the Netherlands, first for England and then to nurse in Indonesia, simply because she was female, my mother was determined to ‘escape the family’s clutches’ when she could and emigration with my father offered that opportunity; her father could no longer say no.

Two seemingly irreconcilable narratives: 'We left for the children' and 'They left because your mother wanted out'. Did I confront my parents with the alternative script when I returned to Canada years later? Although the new input considerably complicated my own identity, I let their discourse stand. Indeed, I am convinced that their revised life scripts/identities were their new reality; they selflessly immigrated for the children.

I remain equally perplexed by the fact that Netherlandic urban immigrants, who immigrated to large urban centers elsewhere, are relatively unstudied in the literature. The revisions of their natal identity scripts were, in many cases, profound. Many of them were firmly situated in particular 'pillars' in the Netherlands, and the creation of community in Canada required them, quite often, to make friends across class and religious lines that would have been unthinkable in the 'old country'. Moreover, their children participated far more fully in all aspects of 'Canadian' life and often had no Dutch friends at all, evoking socialization crises between parents and children since parents carried Dutch norms that often conflicted with parenting values in the dominant society. Thus, boundaries between the 'Dutch' way and the dominant culture became increasingly fluid and contested.

It may be the case that Netherlandic farming communities in North America, bound by specific religious parameters, are easily identifiable and hence, present more focused oral history possibilities (Schalk this volume). Boundaries between those communities and mainstream society are also more rigid and the opportunity to withdraw into a closed sub-culture more viable. My own interview data speaks to widely divergent urban immigrant scripts when contrasted with the Netherlandic farming communities that do appear in the literature.

Returnee immigrants, also known as 'failed immigrants' by those who 'succeed', also remain unanalyzed in the literature. Oral histories that recount immigration as a radical break, demarcate a crisis in the life story that manifests as a restless and complex search for a new 'identity'. Life story tellers who feel that life has 'done unto them', and that they are the victims of circumstances, do not weave narratives rooted in agency and hence the format of the life story dissolves; indeed, they often become uncomfortable for a listener. The immigrant who cannot 'forget' lives an unsettled life and exhibits a fragmented sense of identity. On the other hand, some of them decide to return 'home', an act read as failure by Dutch immigrants who 'succeed'. Returnees, however, reject that formal evaluation; in their opinion the 'succeed at any price' mandate stems from a false pride that informs flawed notions of 'Character'. Instead they create continuity in the life and the decision reversal through the 'I am a person who can admit when they have made a mistake' aspect of character and disparage many

of the ‘sacrifices’ immigrants state they made to succeed, challenging the narratives with the questions “What for?” and “How does that balance what they gave up?”.

Finally, some immigrants seize the opportunity to completely refashion the self in ‘this new place’ (Van Daele this volume). Rather than straddling the past-present divide, they employ extreme ‘forgetting’ as a technique to largely dismiss the past, retain a few elements of their former identity, completely reject others, formulate new ethnic affiliations and boundaries, and use ‘character-as-chrysalis’ as adequate causality in the life story; *this is who I was born to be, I now have the chance to become that person and though it may be hard, this is my journey.*

On creative non-fiction

The creative non-fiction genre that frames the contributions by Radsma, Hols, Van Daele, and, partially, Demers, attempts to grapple with the problems of orality inscribed. Playing with narrative styles that characterize orality, particularly its unique connective qualities, these authors simultaneously recognize the sequential constraints imposed when writing and situate the reader-text relationship as paramount.

Reading is still the principal thing that we do by ourselves in our culture. In *S/Z*, Barthes queries that reader-text interface and sets out two paradigmatic interactive models: the readerly and the writerly (Barthes et al 1974). Using the terms *lisible* (‘readerly’) and *scriptible* (‘writerly’), he respectively distinguishes between texts that are straightforward and demand no special reader effort to understand, and texts whose meaning is not immediately evident and demand input from the reader. A readerly text is one that presents a world of easily identifiable characters and events and one in which the characters and their actions are understandable.

In *The pleasure of the text*, Barthes further refines these concepts to illuminate reader/text interface (Barthes et al 1975), while de-emphasizing the importance of authorial voice. He notes that every reader brings a “culturally formed body” to a specific text and brings that subjectivity to bear in terms of textual choices. At this point in his thinking, Barthes held to the notion that the structure adopted by the author has an impact on ‘how’ the reader interfaces with the text. If the author tries to ‘lead’ the reader in terms of emotion, to ‘tell’ him/her what he is thinking/feeling etc., then the author has created a ‘readerly’ text. A reader may react with *plaisir* to that text, (i.e. will feel pleasure) but the reader will not invest in the text; the author leads, and the reader follows with pleasure. A ‘writerly’ text on the other hand, requires the reader to become

complicit with/in the text; he or she must inject the 'self' into the text to say 'what has not been said'. This reading-text relationship opens the door to *jouissance* – the complete loss of self in the text where text and reader fuse. *Jouissance* is felt 'in the body'. A viewer weeping copiously through a scene in a movie is experiencing *jouissance*.

Note however, that this process is purely subjective and highly personalized. I may lose myself in a text, may weep during a movie, because my embodiment facilitates interface. Another reader however, may merely feel pleasure, may refuse engagement, or may even be repelled by what calls to me. Creative non-fiction pieces are writerly texts. Van Daele, whose narrative is constructed as a life journey, and Demers, Hols and Radsma, all provoke connotative chains. In addition, the photographs that refer to text provoke connotation on the spatial level.

Of photographs

Grace Hols' vignettes, accompanied by photographs that evoke her memory segments, the drawings that accompany van Daele's creative non-fiction, and the photographs embedded in Radsma's, Demers' and Schalk's articles, speak to the power of image and text. Once again, it is Barthes who turns to semiology to understand the relationship between signs and symbols with their referents in the physical world or the world of ideas. He also attempted to understand the experience of seeing as a readable code, although he recognized the difficulty of distilling that code into words. However, he posited that the act of seeing something involves three components; the optical, in which the gaze informs or gathers information; the linguistic, in which relationship is established; and the haptic, in which the gaze looks at, attains, touches, seizes or is seized by something: the gaze as possession; the anxious gaze that seeks something or someone.

To understand his thinking, it is necessary to incorporate his notion of the 'photographic paradox'; the essential two element structure of the image. On the one hand, a photograph denotes, it is a sign of something, it has a literal or obvious meaning. I can look at a scenic photograph taken by a friend and think: "Oh yes, that is a picture of a boy on a bridge." On the other hand, however, the photograph has the power to connote, it may imply, it may suggest, it may activate cultural resonances. Looking at that same photograph, the bridge might evoke a memory of a bridge I once stood on, and trigger a connotative chain. Thus, I establish a more intimate or pleasurable reader/image interface with the photograph.

Since Barthes is always concerned with the reader/text relationship, and since photos or drawings are text, many of the distinctions that Barthes lays out for the reader/text relationship are re-articulated in his quest to understand the image/reader interface. Barthes posited that the denotative power of a photo/drawing, which can be equated with texts that elicit *Plaisir*, often gives the impression that it is 'nothing but' a similitude of that pictured and consequently, usually outweighs the power of a drawing's connotation. This fact is particularly noticeable for example, when one looks at someone else's photos; indeed, this is why they quickly bore us. The gaze seeks to establish connectivity, but is unable to do so. The pictures are just of people in a place, and simply establish what Barthes calls "the reality effect". Pursuing these ideas in *The rhetoric of the image*, in which he dealt with advertising (Barthes 1977), he expands our understanding of the relationship that develops between the viewer of a photograph or drawing and the artifact itself by again discerning three interfaces; the linguistic; the coded iconic and the non-coded iconic. Contrasting the denotative [non-coded iconic] and connotative interfaces, he simultaneously marks their connectivity; it is the *syntagm* of the denoted message that 'naturalizes' the system of the connotative message. In other words, the bridge may be merely a bridge, but it may also refer to yet another bridge, to what that day was like when I stood on that bridge, to how I got to that bridge; thus, the *syntagm*, or sliding signification, is an orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole within a text, sometimes called a 'chain' (Saussure 1983, 126). Barthes' focus however, is on spatial signifiers that "can exploit more than one dimension simultaneously" (Saussure 1983, 70) and to underline that they do not establish a consciousness of 'being there', but of having been there, the evocation of nostalgia: "handling the precious photographs of two joined family lives in my left hand, and a coffee cup in my right [...] Caught in an immense flood of sadness and joy [...] another life, another time were overwhelming (Van Daele this volume). In effect, Barthes sets up a spatial-temporal model: spatial immediacy of the past in the form of the photograph, along with temporal anteriority, an illogical conjunction of the here-now with the there-then. There, is he states, an implicit trauma in all photos or drawings.

Beyond the informational and symbolic, he turns his attention to significance and links it to writerly texts; it is significance that provokes *jouissance*, the loss of self in a photo or drawing, a loss that, in the case of image/reader, Barthes refers to as the "*punctum*". In *Camera lucida*, Barthes (1981) provides a plethora of images which facilitate a viewer's immediate ability to grasp the distinctions he makes between divergent viewer/text relationships. Casually paging through the images before turning to a serious reading, my eyes latched

onto a very old black and white tintype of a little girl. On her feet are a pair of leather buckled shoes. I had a pair just like them, in Holland, when I was five. Eyes locked on those shoes, I was engulfed in multiple memories accompanied by a wave of nauseating sorrow and nostalgia; indeed, the reaction was purely physical, the quality that links it to writerly text (we could say, that for me, the photo was a 'writerly' visual). I felt a *punctum* ('piercing'), and the rest of the photograph faded away. To this day, I cannot recall any other details of that picture.

The relationship between myself and this photo was unmediated by script but the pictures and drawings in this issue are accompanied by captions and extended discussion that moves us between image and text. As readers turn a page, their eyes are immediately drawn to a newly revealed image and only subsequently, to the words. Relay, the process that describes the moving eye as it travels between text and picture, encapsulates the way in which we add and subtract from potential meanings until arriving at a definitive interpretation. Furthermore, we may be directed in terms of the image and in 1977, Barthes coined the term anchorage to refer to texts or captions that represent an image's authorial voice in order to (or not) situate the viewer *in relation to* image. As Hall (1973, 178) states: "It is a very common practice for the captions to news photographs to tell us, in words, exactly how the subject's expression ought to be read."

Photographs and drawings in a single article, like the 'coffee ensemble' in Radsma's article, or the connections apparent between Hols' vignettes, can be read as a sequence of pictures that visually amplify each other through the image/reader relationships as well as through a process of relay and anchorage. Furthermore, the images *across* the articles in this issue can be read as a 'composite'; for example, the ubiquitous appearance of coffee as a signifier of Dutch communalism across the photos, leading to an understanding of its centrality to identity. Images amplify and interact with text.

On Artifacts

The adoption of artifacts as markers of identity and the fetishism of objects that we accord certain powers resonate with sympathetic and contagious magic. On one level, objects may simply act as *memento mori*; reminders of our personal or group identity. A displayed pair of wooden shoes may signify complicity in a sign of Dutchness externally imposed by Canadian society and amplified by the immigrant. Although those identity markers are reproduced, and hence complicit in their (re)construction, new settlers have no attachment to those shoes; they

denote, they do not connote. On the other hand, carefully chosen artifacts, packed for the immigration, have the power to evoke emotion and memories on a very deep level.

Even in secular societies, many people adhere to the notion that objects have powers; a lucky necklace, a piece of clothing which, when worn, always brings luck, angels on one's lapel etc. While not always as specifically articulated as the Maori concept of *hau* (Mauss et al 1990) with its connotations of conscious vital essence, people across cultures share a belief that there is 'something' in certain (or all) objects, some animistic presence, that forms a personal relationship with a person or a chain of people. Older objects are unique in the contagious principle associated with them: the idea that things that have been in contact with one another will remain in contact with one another through space and time (natural or acquired characteristics are material and transmissible), and that by holding, or looking at that artifact, we re-connect with that past and the people who have shared and similarly held that object/history. Through artifacts, we evoke the past *in* the present; objects dissolve time while simultaneously restructuring its pathways.

Indeed, human relationships to objects, the establishment of relationships between humans *through* them, and especially how objects are exchanged (Demers this volume), form the focus of a plethora of analyses, particularly in the discipline of anthropology (Mauss et al 1990; Malinowski 1922) and inspired Marx's classic discussion of commodity fetishism (Marx 1906). *We grant power to objects* in relation to ourselves. They signify identity, they connect us to others, they *contain* our essence, they are a gateway to the past, and they entrench relationship. In this issue, three authors focus specifically on artifacts: Helene Demers on the bracelets that she introduces through fragments of oral history and frames through scholarly analysis, Jenny Radsma through her creative non-fiction piece on the Dutch cup of coffee, and Grace Hols, who presents artifact memories through image-text connections in her vignettes.

Through the articles in the issue, readers are invited to contemplate the power of artifacts as both signifiers and meaning containers. Radsma's cup of coffee for example, is a boundary marker *and* container. It signifies her immigrant community as well as her Dutch historical identity, including its colonial past and Dutch contributions to the European palette. The use of the artifact has been thoroughly ritualized – almost fetishized – in terms of its power. Ritual: coffee must be ground in an exacting way to preserve and enhance its flavor, coffee requires certain types of cups, spoons, settings, and coffee should be accompanied by pastries. Coffee contains the elements of a good Dutch life, literally, drinking/internalizing the good life, while simultaneously signifying lack:

a time when the Dutch had no coffee, *were not themselves*, during the war. Coffee time marks the boundary between sacred and profane time, a time 'marked off' from the daily routine and ritually 'put away' once the allotted time has passed. Coffee makes friends of strangers who cross the threshold of one's home (Van Gennep 1909); once one eats or drinks with a stranger, the stranger is neutralized. Radsma's attempt to ritually provide for her landlord speaks not only to the paradigm of hospitality in which she was raised, but to his refusal to acknowledge relationship; one senses her textual anxiety. In Radsma's article, a cup of coffee connotes an entire communal way of life.

When Samuel Johnson was in Scotland inscribing and learning Scots oral history, he addressed the problem of writing history in real time and through oral traditions. Like Thucydides, he grappled with the 'accountability' of reporting and issues of 'truth value' in oral accounts of the same incident. Johnson however, recognized and underlined the precedence of orality, noting that all history was at first oral. For the purpose of transmitting oral histories in written form, he recommended the following solution: since people are divergently attuned to their social worlds, and hence perceive differently, an assemblage of narratives addressing the same event will offer all possible perspectives on an occurrence, thereby creating a holistic account (Johnson & Boswell 1990).

Oral historians follow Johnson's mandate when collecting life stories: the greater the number of accounts, the richer our potential understanding. Since narration is the defining quality of the evidence, analysis must proceed, as I have argued, on both a form and content basis. How a story is told in each (sub)culture facilitates identification of what that culture understands as essential in a 'life'. For example, if the recounting of 'professions' or 'type of work I did' forms an aspect of the life story, its inclusion signals the domain 'work' as a significant one both ideologically and socially in that culture. Similarly, reoccurring themes – the homeland; the return (which leads to self-reflection and reawakens family narrative segments); the history of where I came from/who I am; the reason we immigrated and why we immigrated to the place we did; childhood memories; the train; photographs that concretize memory; questions re ethnic identity; the strong immigrant mother – all these and more lead to further avenues of investigation while holistically extending our understandings of the immigrant experience.

Not inconsequentially, individual and composite life story collections *refer* historically, they facilitate our understanding of specific historical peoples, their social milieus, their ideologies, their praxis, their interactions, in and through time. Indeed, the historical aspects of life stories cannot be underestimated, quite often it is only through them that we gain an understanding of how people were

thinking, how they responded, complied or confronted political decisions and policies made by those in power, and how official versions of socio-cultural events are often one-sided and marginalizing. Indeed, it is oral histories that deepen our understanding of the human condition and shed light on social formations, human adaptability or resistance, and power/resistance formations.

The articles in this issue cast new light on the shaping of immigrant identities, on remembering and memories, on the artifact as repository of identity and memory making, and on the process of memory/identity shaping over the lifetime. When carefully analyzed and juxtaposed, extended life story collections offer critical evidentiary contributions to memory and remembering around the immigration experience, precisely because that event stands as the narrative crucible in the life.

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About the guest editor

Over the past 17 years, Hendrika Beaulieu-Boon has been engaged in oral history/life story research, initially with North American interviewees who were citizens of the Dutch East Indies during the last years of the colonial period and World War II, and who experienced the subsequent diaspora to the Netherlands. In 2009, she obtained her Ph.D. from Leiden University based on that study. Thereafter, she has been primarily engaged with life story/documentary research among the Blackfoot of Canada and the United States and with various immigrant communities. A historical anthropologist who commonly approaches analyses through the lens of multiple socio-linguistic methodologies, her focus is on extending and challenging official – and hegemonic – documented History through accounts derived from people ‘on-the-ground’. As an immigrant herself, she believes that there is a lacuna of detailed work around the immigrant experience, and advocates for extended social science research among immigrant communities, with a particular focus on cross-cultural experiences.

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Neerlandische migraties: Over herinneringen en herinneren

Sinds het midden van de twintigste eeuw worden levensverhalen, orale geschiedenis en orale tradities beschouwd als belangrijke bronnen van evidentie in de sociale en geesteswetenschappen. Om te voldoen aan academische standaarden met betrekking tot waarheid en universaliteit, vereist de manier waarop kennis wordt weergegeven in narrative vormen een gedetailleerd onderzoek naar de aard van herinneringen en het proces van herinneren – de funderingen waarop de narratieve vorm rust. Aangezien oraliteit, en de inscriptie die de kwaliteiten ervan moet nabootsen, zich concentreert op filiatie in plaats van universele waarheden, hebben onderzoekers gedetailleerde socio-linguïstische onderzoeksmodellen ontwikkeld die zowel vorm en inhoud in aanmerking nemen met het doel kennis te ontleen uit orale narratieve bronnen. In dit verband realiseren onderzoekers zich steeds meer dat mensen hun wereld niet alleen weergeven in hun verhalen, maar ook betekenis geven aan de voorwerpen waarmee ze zich omringen. Een analyse van foto’s en cultuurobjecten, zowel als de esthetiek die karakteristiek is voor bepaalde

samenlevingen, biedt een dieper begrip van ons Zijn in de wereld en vergemakkelijkt interculturele vergelijkingen tussen verschillende groepen mensen.

What's in a cup of coffee?

Jenny Radsma

At home or abroad, the Dutch, irrespective of political or religious persuasion, have consistently nurtured a powerful culture, one centered on *gezelligheid*. My parents, who emigrated from The Netherlands, and their circle of Dutch friends did likewise, which included the prominence of *koffietijd*, coffee-time. In the post-war years, a freshly brewed cup of coffee represented so much: abundance, liberty, and freedom from want. A cup of coffee offered a pause from one's daily routine bringing with it momentary comfort and relaxation – a reminder that, at least for now, all was well. A *gezellig kop koffie* carried a potent expectation of sharing –with family, friends, and newcomers alike. Failure to offer one another the hospitality of a full-bodied cup of coffee was *ongezellig*, even ill-mannered. In this essay, a Canadian-born daughter of immigrant parents recounts the centrality of *koffietijd* during her formative years, its role in her life persisting long after moving away from a community of Dutch people with their custom of *gezellig samen een lekker kopje koffie te drinken*.

Key terms: Coffee; *gezelligheid*; Dutch-Canadian culture; immigration; identity.

Growing up as I did, the child of Dutch immigrant parents, personal and family friendships grew from within the Dutch community, people like us settling into their lives in Calgary. With them we had more than language in common; our shared beliefs and customs served as the bedrock by which to order our lives and our relationships. When friends and family dropped by on one another, they could be sure of an invitation to come in for coffee. By the time a second cup was poured, the exchange of stories and laughter were well under way. All of it contributed to the heart of Dutch culture: *gezelligheid*, a word defying satisfactory translation into English. Cozy, comfortable, and convivial reflect an approximate meaning. But the ambience of a place including the hospitality and togetherness of people also encompasses *gezelligheid* as, for example, when good friends catch up with one another in a cozy café. In my family, a *gezellig* evening almost always began with a cup of coffee.

For a long time, I naively assumed that others adhered to similar ways, including the daily coffee and tea breaks by which we could set our clock. Years after leaving home, well after transitioning to work and life in a non-Dutch environment, an innocuous encounter on a wintry day led me to offer someone a cup of coffee. Its polite refusal caught me aback and caused me to examine how rooted and embedded the cultural implications of the coffee tradition still remained for me.

“Can I make you a cup of coffee?”

“No thanks,” my landlord says, “I’m almost finished here; my wife will expect me soon.”

A late afternoon on a mid-January day, and barely a week after moving into his house, I’ve had to call Brent about a plumbing problem. He makes his way in and out of the living room to the shed out back where the water pump is. Wires, duct tape, and tools in hand, the bitter cold outdoors is etched in the pallor on his face. He leans momentarily into the warmth radiating from the gas fireplace.

I ask again, “Are you sure? It’s no problem to make something hot. You must be cold to the core.”

“No, thanks just the same.”

“Really, I don’t mind. I’d hate for you to drive home so cold. I can give you a car mug if you like.”

“No, no, that’s fine,” he smiles.

Why my dogged persistence, I wonder, despite his courteous but definite refusals? Then I hear his wife, or think I do, asking when he gets home, “Didn’t she offer you anything while you were there? Not even a cup of coffee?”

The voices and images change to my parents, my sisters, and me, seated around our supper table in the kitchen, talking about the events of the day. My father says something like, “*Ja*, so cold it was today. All my customers offered me a cup of hot coffee. What have I good customers, *hè Mem!*”

With their prominent Dutch accent, my parents say “*ver*” instead of “*were*,” “*vat*” rather than “*what*,” and “*that*” sounds like “*dat*.” When they call me by name, “*Jenny*” becomes “*Yenny*.”

“Oh, *ja*? That doesn’t happen so often with those *Canadese* people,” my mother, ever the skeptic, replies.

My family judged people by the degree of personal warmth and friendliness they extended. The measure of their genuineness and goodness came through their offer of a cup of coffee.



Figure 1. Coffee time. The author's mother, who prepared the coffee, shares a break with her husband (the author's father) during one of his early to mid-1980s backyard construction projects. From the author's personal collection.

After the war, coffee became available to the citizens of The Netherlands long before most of them could resume life in homes of their own where they could brew a fresh pot. Because cleanup and reconstruction took so long, many young families looked to Canada, where opportunities for employment and home ownership beckoned. Thus, in the early 1950s, my parents packed their *kist*, and with their three young daughters, they crossed the Atlantic by boat, then journeyed by train from Halifax to Calgary. I am the first child born in Canada, and a few years later a fifth daughter rounded out our family. The possessions my parents brought with them to Alberta included small pieces of furniture, their clothing, as well as my father's Calvinistic zeal. The manual coffee grinder came along, too, so they could make *echte*, real, coffee.

At home or abroad, the Dutch, irrespective of political or religious persuasion, nurtured a powerful culture, one centered on *gezelligheid*. My parents and their circle of friends did likewise, and that included *koffietijd*, coffee time. Who knows when the social tradition began of *samen een lekker kopje koffie*

drinken ('have a good cup of coffee together')? Certainly, the Dutch were among the first to grow the coffee tree in Europe. As far back as the early 1600s, coffee beans taken from Yemen were planted in Amsterdam's botanical gardens where they flourished. These cultivation skills were eventually used to develop extensive coffee plantations in the Dutch colonies, most notably the island of Java. As a result, The Netherlands became a major supplier of coffee to Europe.

During the 20th century, the Dutch culture of *gezellig koffietijd* endured some setbacks. The lean years of the depression gave way to five years of German occupation during another world war. Coffee went from being expensive to attainable only through the black market. By the time it disappeared altogether, the need for food overwhelmed the desire for coffee. Thus, in the post-war years, a freshly brewed cup of coffee represented so much: abundance, liberty, and freedom from want. A cup of coffee offered a pause from one's daily routine bringing with it all that was loved and familiar. A *gezellig kopje koffie* carried a potent expectation of sharing – with family, friends, and newcomers alike. Failure to offer one another a cup of java was *ongezellig*, even ill-mannered.



Figure 2. Relatives in The Netherlands chatting over coffee, approximately 1955. Author's personal collection.

Just as when they lived in Holland, *gereformeerde* immigrants like my parents attended the Dutch Reformed church. My father took seriously his responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of his family and ensured we attended both services, once in the morning and again in the evening. After church, usually the morning service, people visited at one another's home to drink coffee and eat a homemade slice of cake or a creamy, sweet *gebakje* purchased from the bakery the day before. Traditions of after-church lunches served in church halls belonged to those "*Canadese mensen*", those Canadian people who my parents felt nervous around because they spoke fluent English. Canadian Baptists or Anglicans didn't ask one another over after church to share a cup of coffee in their homes. Instead, they sipped coffee from styrofoam cups in the church basement or met at a nearby cafe. By contrast, we Christian Reformed people, God's covenant people no less, would not dream of going to a restaurant for coffee on Sunday. Not only was it *ongezellig*, but short of an emergency, buying anything on a Sunday, certainly a cup of coffee, was sinful.

No, on Sundays, the Radsma family got dressed up in their Sunday best. With my father at the wheel, we drove the few miles down Bowness Road, across the Shouldice Bridge, then turned left up 52nd Avenue. Maranatha Christian Reformed Church sat on the rise of the hill overlooking the Bow River, where on the western horizon, the snow-capped Rocky Mountains shimmered in the distance. After the worship service, congregants, all Dutch-speaking immigrants like my parents, mingled outdoors with one another. Among the adults, men lingered, their calloused hands holding a cigarette or slung into the pockets of their Sunday suit grown shiny from years of wear. Perhaps they talked about their work or discussed the text of the morning sermon while breezes played with their thinning hair. Women, in small circles, clutched their hats with gloved hands and shared news from the past week. Young children ran about on the gravel parking lot, unbuttoned coats flapping at their sides. Before long, boys in hand-me-down trousers and girls hiking up their sagging leotards would tug at their mother's neatly pressed skirt.

"What are we doing now, Mom?" they asked. "I'm hungry."

Parents answered in Dutch, or as with my parents, in Frisian, the language of my mother's home province, Frÿslan. We piled into our Volkswagon bus, my three sisters and me, for my oldest sister – 16 years old by now – had already gone with her young people friends to meet at someone's home where they would have coffee together just as we were about to do. Regardless that it was almost noon, *koffietijd* lent structure to the day, and on Sunday a *gezellig kopje koffie* always came before eating the midday meal.

We frequently visited with family and friends, but equally often, friends or out-of-town church visitors came over to share coffee with us at our home. Going

home to coffee and pastries without the company of friends or newcomers felt lack-lustre. We enjoyed the energy others lent to our Sunday. But no matter where we went, whether home or to someone else's place, the selection of baked goods warded off our hunger pangs.



Figure 3. The author visiting with Dutch friends in High Level, Alberta with after-dinner coffee and cake, ca. 1995. From the author's personal collection.

We loved visiting the Van Geemens, an older couple whose grandchildren were the same age as my sisters and me. Mrs. Van Geemen, with her hearty laugh and generous spirit, poured us kids sweet drinks with ice cubes that clinked against the glass. Unlike my mother, she never cautioned us to be careful and not to spill. A slice of her homemade cake smothered in whipping cream and topped with coconut or small canned mandarin orange slices looked and tasted divine.

At home, the cake or cookies my mother or older sister baked the day before in preparation for our Sunday were tasty but not elegant. Nonetheless, my father liked my sister's baking so well, he paid her, not much mind you, perhaps fifty cents each week. In a family where a weekly allowance existed only in story-books, and where every child, however old or young, was expected to pitch in and do her part, such recognition from Dad signified high praise.

"She can make even a stone taste good," my father bragged to friends about my sister's cooking. Mom cringed whenever he added, "... just like my own mother."

Soon after my parents' arrival in Canada, ground coffee, rather than the customary coffee beans, could be purchased in the grocery store. But once in a while, the favorite coffee came on sale only in bean form. At those times, my mother would buy several packages and rather than run each package of beans through the commercial grinder at the supermarket, she took them home and placed them in the pantry. After one such time, I remember coming upon my mother in the kitchen. She sat on a chair, the coffee grinder she'd brought from Holland squeezed between her thighs. The rhythmic swing of her arm as she turned the knobbed handle round and round fascinated me and soon I asked, "Can I do that?"

Mom made it look so easy but soon after I took over, I felt the burn of the muscles in my upper arm, the ache in my shoulders. Seeing my difficulty, Mom had me sit on a mat on the floor where I could more firmly brace the coffee grinder between my legs. But this adjustment did little to make it easier.

"This is hard, Mom," I whined, arching my back, ready to give up. But Mom would have none of it.

"You wanted to help, now you keep going, *trochbite*," she said sternly. With her back to me, she carried on peeling the carrots we'd later eat for supper. Her erect posture told me that I better not abandon the coffee grinding task I'd begun.

In the end I learned that trying to show off by going as fast as I could only resulted in jerky and ineffective motions. By rotating the grinder in a slow methodical way to grate the beans as they fell into the internal metal cogs, that's what it took to fill the small drawer that I pulled out and emptied into the large coffee can. The fresh scent of coffee filled the kitchen, and Mom handed me the package of coffee beans to grind another drawer-full. Perhaps at that point one of my sisters happened upon this scene.

"I want to do that; it's my turn," she'd say.

I handed the coffee grinder to my sister. By now an expert, I gave her directions on the best way to grind the coffee.

On Sunday, upon arriving home after church, Mom would duly hang up her coat, put on an apron to protect her dress, and begin to make the coffee. She filled the clear Pyrex coffee percolator with cold water and placed it on the stove over the gas flame. She reached into the cupboard for the red can of *Edwards* coffee. A scoop or two into the aluminum basket – just the right amount, mind you, to make a good cup of coffee – released the deep aroma of the fresh coffee. Coffee shouldn't be too weak or too strong; in fact, bad tasting coffee implied poor hospitality and an *ongezellig*, unfriendly visit. Although frugal in so many other ways, Mom never tried to save money by buying cheap coffee. Certainly, she

bought extra when on sale, but even then she bought only *Edwards* or *Nabob*; other brands were *rotzooi*, garbage, a waste of money.

Continuing with her preparations at the stove, Mom fit the lid on the coffee pot and positioned it over the burner. Once the water began to dance up the clear stem, she turned down the flame, and the coffee slowly infused into what would become a rich brew. Rarely did it boil over, which gave the coffee a harsh, burnt taste. While the water gurgled in the clear pot, I set out the cups, clanging a *lepeltje*, a small spoon to stir in cream and sugar, into each saucer. One of my sisters cut up cake and squares to arrange on a serving dish. The fresh aroma of the perking coffee began wafting through the house, whetting our appetite for what we knew would soon be coming.

Baked goods varied from week to week: *boterkoek* (a buttery almond-flavored shortbread), perhaps an apple cake or oatmeal cookies, and occasionally my father's favorites, cream horns or custard slices from the bakery. Served on small plates, we ate the delicacies with pastry forks. We swallowed each bite with sweet, milky coffee, and we willed the flavour of the last morsels to linger in our mouths for as long as possible.

The living room had, of course, been carefully dusted, vacuumed, and cleaned the day before. Any crumbs that happened to fall on the matted pea-green carpet, recycled from my father's work, would be vacuumed up later in the week.

Even as children, Mom let us drink coffee, liberally diluted with milk. We had our own half-sized cups and saucers, a coffee set Mom bought specially for us. Because it was more *gezellig*, and if we promised to be careful, Mom let us children drink our coffee in the living room. Should a pastry or desert call for whipping cream, Mom set aside enough so that everyone's first cup of coffee could be festooned with a dollop of the lavish treat my father loved so well.

"What was that *lekker, Mem!* Have you more of it?" he'd ask when served another round of coffee.

What remained of the *gebakjes* or cake after we finished our coffee time got covered and put in the fridge. Cookies went back into the *koekjestrommel*, the cookie tin, until the next time we'd have coffee, perhaps after the evening church service or at our evening coffee during the week.

As we reached adolescence, making and serving the coffee fell to us girls, which allowed Mom to remain with her guests in the living room and take full pleasure in their company. In this way, too, Mom could "show off" her daughters, how their social and domestic skills were maturing.



Figure 4. The author and her sister preparing coffee, ca. 2005. From the author's personal collection.

"Here's your coffee, Mr. VanderKuilen," I'd say as I offered a guest his cup of coffee. I'd go around again with cream and sugar in Mom's cut glass cream pitcher and sugar bowl used only on Sundays. Finally, I'd serve the pastries and hand out serviettes. By this time, Mom would have set up the metal TV trays and pulled in the end tables so guests could keep one hand free to sip their coffee comfortably without the awkwardness of juggling both coffee cup and *gebakje* at the same time.

Lively discussions took place over coffee, usually following traditional gender interests. Men talked to each other about cars, theology, and politics. Women talked about children, the upcoming bazaar hosted by the Ladies Aid Society, the gossip about someone who found herself unexpectedly pregnant, the wellbeing of aging parents living in Holland.

Conversations came together between men and women as they relayed stories about life and people in The Netherlands, how it used to be there, memories of the war, the relief of liberation, and of course, how different they found everything in Canada. The changes occurring in Dutch society back in their homeland, including the church, were repeated as understood from the letters received from family and friends; mishaps were shared and jokes laughed at, often back to back with a recounting of who was sick, in the hospital, or had died, perhaps from cancer or the euphemism of "female problems". Heads nodded at the costly expense of making a trip back to Holland to visit ailing relatives.

Boisterous arguments also erupted, often initiated by my father and always about something related to the church, be that the doctrine of predestination, election, justification by faith, or a recent decision made by members of the male consistory that my father opposed. My father, convinced he upheld the right view, gestured with his hand and raised his voice. His eyes took on a wild passion when he began quoting Bible verses and citing from an article he had recently read. Not to be outdone, men and women alike would “bite” (as my mother said) at the opportunity to speak their minds and shed their illuminated views in response to my father’s disputes. My mother did her best to divert the conversation to a neutral topic, like the weather, and someone else would try to find common ground in the midst of the heated debate. “*Ja maar* we all worship the same Lord,” someone interjected. Whether he would not or could not tame his intensity, my father remained unrelenting. In his loud voice, he told people how misguided they were in their thinking and what God’s punishment meant as a result. If in earshot of my father’s frenzies, we kids felt embarrassed and confused by his bullheaded rudeness. Surely he would discipline us if we carried on in the same way. My mother, far more mild in temperament than my father, dreaded my father’s outbursts; for her, a truly *gezellig* visit meant laughter and singing Dutch folk songs, not *rûzje* or arguments.

Like many Dutch reformed men of his generation, my father held a decidedly conservative world view. With his literal interpretation of the Bible, he considered himself to be the God-ordained patriarch and head of our household. And like many Dutch people who pride themselves on not mincing words (unlike the Canadians they knew), my otherwise good-natured father could be remarkably loutish, even insulting, when discussing matters of faith. And with his passion for God running high, he wasted no opportunity to initiate such conversations when sharing a cup of coffee with his Calvinist friends.

No matter how heated these exchanges might become, our Dutch friends, many of them equally outspoken and opinionated, almost always parted with a handshake to signify the goodwill between them. These were the same people who prayed for one another and made visitation when illness or tragedy struck and who celebrated birthdays and anniversaries together. And in a week or two, my parents would receive a return invitation to sip a cup of coffee and share a *gezellige* evening together at the home of their friends.

In the meantime, after the last person went home, the china cups and saucers would be washed and carefully placed back in the cupboard ready for next Sunday’s use. Mugs made their eventual way into our household but we rarely used them for company, and certainly not on Sunday. Their large, utility size made them much too *ongezellig*.



Figure 5. The author's father and uncle while visiting together in St. Catherine's, Ontario, with their mid-morning coffee, ca. 1967. From the author's personal collection.

Coffee time served an integral part of each Sunday; indeed, coffee time shaped our day-to-day life. Although each day began with a cup of tea at breakfast, you could almost set your clock by the mid-morning *koffietijd*. On weekdays, Dad went off to work and we kids to school. By midmorning, Mom, at home by herself, stopped the chores she happened to be doing – laundry, washing floors, mending, baking, cooking, whatever. By 10:00, she glanced at the clock: yes, it was time to boil the kettle and make a cup of Nescafé. Less robust in aroma and flavor, instant coffee was certainly inferior, but also quicker to make. Besides, brewing a full pot of coffee just for herself would be wasteful. After a 20-minute break consisting of radio music alongside coffee and a couple of cookies, she resumed her domestic tasks.

As her time in Canada lengthened, my mother, now a Canadian citizen and more comfortable with her English skills, invited the neighbor women for a weekday *koffie-klets*, where rituals and posturing were similar to the customary Sunday coffee. The women sat around the kitchen table laid out with cups and baked goods arranged on a plate.

"Mmm, Susan," as she became known by her Canadian friends, "does this ever taste good. Can I get the recipe from you?"



Figure 6. The author's mother and sister doing handwerk with their afternoon coffee, mid-1970s. From the author's personal collection.

In the evening, after the supper dishes had been washed – by at least two squabbling daughters – one of us would make a pot of coffee, the Pyrex pot finally giving way to a shiny stainless steel electric percolator. Because my parents did not care for the taste of drip coffee, they never purchased an electric coffee maker to clutter their countertop.

Just as on Sundays, during the weekly evening coffee something sweet accompanied and offset the bitter taste of coffee. Should the pantry of baked or store-bought goods be empty by week's end, not even a *speculaas* cookie left, Dad voiced his discontent. He hated "dry coffee" as he called it, coffee with nothing to

go along with it; how *ongezellig*! At one such time he stomped from the house and drove to the local grocery store to buy something “*voor bij de koffie*.”

By then, two of his daughters had become nurses, and despite the nutritional information they felt compelled to pass on, Dad never had a weight problem. He worked hard, and he ate sensibly, which, until he died, included *gebakjes*.

In fact, the 1960s of my childhood preceded the current preoccupation with caffeine, fat, cholesterol, and calories. That concern didn't materialize until the grown children of immigrant parents went on to post-secondary schooling, many to obtain careers in healthcare. With the memory of war and poverty still fresh in their mind, my parents and their friends seldom gave way to over-indulgence. They served coffee in small cups, less than half the amount of a modern-sized mug. Cake and squares were cut in adequate but not oversized portions.

In the warmth of summer, our family coffee time frequently took place outdoors, on the back patio. A tray with steaming cups of coffee would be brought out, complete with *lepeltjes*. On another tray sat the cream and sugar containers and whatever we'd eat along with our coffee. *Speculaas* cookies or a slice of *koeke* remained a lasting favorite for us all. *Vrouw Boonstra* gave Mom the *koeke* recipe, one of the first things Mom learned to bake after her arrival in Canada.

If the sun were too bright, Mom asked one of us to bring hats and sunglasses from the house to shield our eyes. Dad, biting into his *koeke*, then slurping on his coffee, would sit back, in pure, undisguised contentment.

“Ah Sjoukje,” he'd say, “What do we live here good, *hè!*”

The custom of Sunday coffee carried on whenever we were in the company of Dutch reformed adherents. Should we attend a Christian Reformed church elsewhere, we counted on the same *gezellige* tradition, an invitation for coffee served with a *gebakje*. My parents did not travel a great deal, but when they happened to visit a church elsewhere, their post-trip stories revolved around the friendliness of the congregation.

“People were so cold at that church,” my mother would say, “no one even asked us over for *koffie!*”

After another trip she might say, “Were the people ever *hartelijk*, so friendly. Three invitations for *koffie!* And did we laugh with the people where we visited! So *gezellig* it was there.”

The ritual of coffee remained equally important when my parents went away on vacation. As beautiful as the scenic landscapes they drove through might be, it was the coffee and pie they encountered along the way that made their road trips memorable. Dad's retelling of their experiences revealed the simplicity of his pleasures. He detailed all the minutiae and left nothing out.



Figure 7. A late 1970s family patio gathering – with coffee! From the author's personal collection.

"Ja, Mem, was not that the place where we went to the coffee shop? Remember? The waitress – what was she fat – and her apron not too clean, *maar* she was really friendly. The coffee was so-so. The pie, though, was homemade, and *mij* a scoop of ice cream, boy, was it ever good!"

My mother liked to go shopping with her daughters, but she shared an implicit agreement with us that coffee time came attached to our shopping trip. En route, on the bus to downtown or driving in the car to a mall, we talked about where we would go, which department store cafeteria served the best coffee. Our choice included being able to drink from "real" versus paper cups. Without the requisite time-out for coffee, our excursion could not achieve the *gezelligheid* standard.

In time I moved away from home to live and work among Canadians where the order of my days no longer rotated around the custom of coffee and *gebakjes*. On one particular return visit home, I made the mistake of overlooking this daily custom that structured my mother's life. My sisters and I took our mother on a day trip, driving an hour and a half to our destination. When we stepped out of the vehicle, I reached for my wallet, ready to pay for our tickets to the museum we'd come to see. At the same time, I heard Mom say, "Ah, what *gezellig*, hè, to be together today. First, we have a cup of coffee – and I pay."

“But Mom,” I countered, turning to face her. “We don’t have much time. We have to get back home before the kids come home from school.”

My reasoning did little good.

“How *ongezellig*. After driving all that way, to not sit down for coffee for just a few minutes! Hardly worth making the trip,” she said, her shoulders slumped in disappointment.

So we went for a leisurely coffee and rushed through the museum.



Figure 8. The author with her mother and sisters enjoying a sidewalk coffee in Fernie, B.C., ca. 2003. From the author’s personal collection.

As adult women, my sisters and I learned that coffee also signified health and wellbeing. Too soon after he retired, Dad declined the *gebakjes* offered him and Ensure replaced his coffee. Yet 25 years after my father’s death, when we’re together as siblings, one of us will occasionally take an exaggerated slurp of coffee and give a deep, satisfied sigh, just as my father used to do, and say, “Ah, Sjoukje, what is that a *lekker kop koffie!*”

When relatives from Holland came to visit in Calgary a few years ago, they brought with them a package of *Douwe Egberts* coffee – in case their Canadian cousins didn’t have good coffee to drink. And mid-morning throughout their trip we stopped to have a *gezellig bakje koffie* together. So, how could Brent have known that the backdrop to my persistent offer of coffee on that cold winter day came from such an embedded cultural tradition?

Last summer, Frances and I received an invitation to visit old family friends, people who'd immigrated to Canada a year or two before our parents did. Years ago, when visiting with my parents, Mr. Wagenaar argued with my father about matters of faith, and with her more even disposition, Mrs. Wagenaar would have cooled their fevered disagreements.

On this particular Sunday, Frances and I arrived at their door, soon after the Wagenaars had arrived home from church. The smell of coffee greeted us as we shook hands and gave each other a hug. They had aged and were faltering in their movements, but they remained as *hartelijk*, welcoming, as ever. After being seated in the living room, I glanced about at the Delft blue wall tiles, the lacy white Dutch valances over each window, the plants on the windowsill. Their home still retained all of its Dutch *gezelligheid*.

Mrs. Wagenaar brought us each our coffee, a little *lepeltje* resting in the saucer. We declined the cream and "shu-kar", as she pronounced it, but we accepted the cake topped with whipping cream and strawberries. We talked about my parents, both gone now. We asked about their children and grandchildren, spoke about our jobs, their retirement, as well as about Dutch people, living and deceased, we both knew. With our second cup of coffee, Mr. Wagenaar pointed to a plate of goodies on the coffee table complete with *speculaas* cookies and store-bought *koek*.

And even though my sister and I are middle-aged women, and just as in years gone by, he said to us, "You girls help yourselves; don't be shy."

It was all I could do not to take a noisy drink from my coffee and say with deep satisfaction, "*Hè*, what is this *gezellig* to be together like this!"

About the author

Twenty years ago, Jenny Radsma moved south from northwestern Alberta to live in northern Maine where meeting people with a Dutch accent is a rarity. The daughter of immigrant parents (her father from Haarlem, her mother from Lemmer), who by needs ended their formal education midway through the eighth grade, Jenny made her parents proud by becoming "Dr." Radsma. A professor of nursing by day, she writes when she can, mostly on weekends. She continues to take writing workshops and her work, primarily about the Dutch immigrant experience within her own family, has been published in *Goose River Anthology*, *Echoes*, and *The Sun*. When Jenny is not teaching, reading, or writing, she bikes, hikes, cross country skies, or snowshoes, depending on the weather. She still has hopes of learning to speak fluent Dutch and Frisian.

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Qu'y a-t-il dans une tasse de café?

Chez eux ou à l'étranger, les Néerlandais, quelle que soit leur position politique ou religieuse, ont toujours pratiqué une culture puissante centrée sur la *gezelligheid*. Mes parents, qui ont émigré des Pays-Bas, et leur cercle d'amis néerlandais ont pareillement respecté l'importance de la *koffietijd*, l'heure du café. Dans les années après la guerre, une tasse de café fraîchement préparée représentait tant de choses : l'abondance, la liberté, l'absence de pénurie. Une tasse de café offrait une pause dans la routine quotidienne, apportant un confort et une détente momentanés – un rappel que, du moins pour l'instant, tout allait bien. Une *gezellige kop koffie* comportait aussi une attente puissante du partage – avec la famille, les amis, de nouveaux venus. Ne pas offrir aux autres l'hospitalité d'une tasse de café corsé, c'était *ongezellig* et même mal élevé. Dans le présent essai, la fille née au Canada de parents immigrés raconte le rôle central de la *koffietijd* pendant ses années de formation, et comment son rôle dans sa vie a persisté longtemps après qu'elle s'était éloignée d'une communauté de Néerlandais et de leur coutume de *gezellig samen een lekker kopje koffie drinken*.

Wat zit er in die koffie?

Zowel thuis als in het buitenland houden Nederlanders stevig vast aan een ingebakken cultuur van gezelligheid, ongeacht tot welke politieke of religieuze stroming ze behoren. Dit gold ook voor mijn ouders en hun kring van Nederlandse vrienden die vanuit Nederland naar Canada emigreerden, en het fenomeen "koffietijd" vormde er een belangrijk onderdeel van. In de na-oorlogse jaren stond een versgezette kop koffie voor zoveel meer: overvloed, vrijheid, het ontbreken van tekort. Een kopje koffie bood een pauze in de dagelijkse routine en een moment van rust en ontspanning – het besef dat, voor dit moment ten minste, alles in orde was. Een gezellig kopje koffie gaf uitdrukking aan een krachtig gevoel van samenzijn en delen – met familie, vrienden en nieuwkomers. Elkaar niet een lekker kopje koffie aanbieden was "ongezellig", zelfs slecht-gemanierd. In dit essay kijkt een in Canada geboren dochter van Nederlandse immigranten terug op de centrale rol die de koffietijd speelde in haar jeugd, een rol die nog door-speelde in haar leven lang nadat ze was vertrokken uit de gemeenschap van Nederlanders met hun gewoonte van "gezellig samen een lekker kopje koffie drinken."

Some of the words

Grace Hols

Introduction

In writing class you hear: "Write what you know." You also hear that everyone has a story, or that every life is a story. But how do you narrow that down to specifics?

I have always enjoyed writing. Sometimes it was a matter of putting pen to paper and being surprised at what appeared. Other times there were characters who begged to be fleshed out and be permitted to engage in one or two of life's dilemmas or predicaments, so I wrote about them just to see what would happen. I wrote fiction, poetry, many newspaper articles. Mostly I wrote for myself, but the pieces I sent out began to appear in a variety of publications.

As I got older, the past became more interesting to me, and I wanted to explore that. I had written a local history book, but I was especially interested in my parents' stories. They had emigrated from Holland shortly after they were married, and it wasn't until I was away from them in terms of time and space that I appreciated what an extraordinary thing that was.

When I saw my parents and those of my friends begin to age and forget, we urged them to tell us more stories about their past, and to write on the backs of old photographs the names of people in them and what they were about. Sometimes that happened, but often the backs of photos remained blank. My siblings and I urged our mother to write about the "old days," which she did (reluctantly, because, she said, what was so special about her?) in a small scribbler. Then I took my laptop and sat with her as she read out loud, with me interjecting at frequent intervals, "I didn't know that, Mom. Tell me more!" and I would type madly as she answered, trying to capture each detail and implication. She provided the text and she picked out many photos, and it became a book for the whole family to enjoy.

Lately I have been writing about things in my own past. There are boxes of photos in my own closets, too, not to mention the hundreds, if not thousands, of digital images on my computer. I will leave the more recent coloured pictures for now, and am focussing on those taken many years ago. Somehow they are easier to write about.

Remember the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, I have a lot of pictures: black and white, some already fading. So I am trying to write the words, or at least a few of them. This process involves an intimate study of a photo, to the point where I take a magnifying glass to zoom in and capture details otherwise overlooked. The result of all this is a growing collection of vignettes that I am calling “Some of the words.”

A road less travelled

It's hard to say what made me go.¹ Maybe it was the Christmas shortbread lying crisp and colourful on the cookie rack, its red centres bright and cheery, completed. Maybe it was the November sun that poured brilliantly through my kitchen window, taunting me as I scrubbed and polished, daring me to take my bike out of storage and join in on this mockery of winter.

Whatever it was, I went. My bicycle was dusty but the tires were good. In my white running shoes and my summer windbreaker, my face turned to the sun and my eyes streaming as the crisp air rushed by, I found myself pedaling down the road, euphoric as a truant school child.

It had rained heavily the night before. I had heard it pattering noisily on the fallen leaves outside the bedroom window and gurgling down the drainpipe. We wanted snow. It was getting close to Christmas and the children were eager to start skiing. The dirt road down which I now pedaled was muddy and slick, but all around me the hills and mountains were white with snow, as clean and powdery as the icing sugar I had just dusted on my Christmas baking.

I had no intention of going there, really. It was just a bike ride to take advantage of the rare weather. I didn't know I would go that way until I came to the fork in the road and that road was less travelled. There was less chance of traffic to rush by and splash me. So I turned off.

Biking past the ‘No Entrance, One Way’ sign, I found myself suddenly transported back to my childhood, for this was the farm on which I had grown up. My father had once owned this land. When I was old enough to go away to school, he had been a dairy farmer well on the way to success. But big business had arrived and had forced our family to move because the land was needed in the name of progress. Now my folks live in a house that is bigger and better and in a

¹This story was first printed in *Calvinist Contact* magazine (now *Christian Courier*) on December 2, 1988. Reprinted with permission.

prettier location, but their moving has always left an empty spot and unfinished dreams of what could have been.

It is tempting to romanticize the past. It wasn't easy. We had no electricity, no telephone, no running water. There never seemed to be enough time to get done the things that farming and the upbringing of six children required. But my sister loves to come here and gets very sentimental about what used to be. Maybe she sees it differently. She wasn't the oldest. She didn't have to break the way.

The tires of my five-speed made crunching sounds in the wet gravel, and a train moaned in the distance. Much of the land my father used to farm is now criss-crossed with railroad tracks, but the fields in between still look the same. I ducked under a red gate with cross-bars and followed a trail to the front of the field, by the river. The same hills and rises were still here. We used to hay this field. My brother and I sometimes did the raking, he on the two-wheeled rake he had to activate with a foot pedal, I on the tractor pulling him around the field, making windrows. I remember how one day one of the high wheels suddenly fell off the rake, and how hard my brother landed on the moulded metal seat, completely at an angle and holding on for dear life. I remember how we laughed about that.

We once had a church picnic in that corner field. I remember it as a child, the sun hot and burning on our skins, and the sudden appearance of ice cream in Dixie cups with wooden spoons for all the children a miracle. Those spoons, like miniature paddles, left a taste that reminded me of the smell of the woodbox next to the kitchen stove.

Turning towards the spot where the house once stood, I noticed a pick-up truck slowly emerging from the trees. It moved a few hundred yards and then stopped. I remembered that I had crossed a 'No Trespassing' sign and sank into a crouch, but the sudden wave of guilt that swept over me soon passed. I wasn't trespassing. For all intents and purposes, as they say, this land was still mine. All I wanted from it was to reap a memory or two, and to nurture some distant recollections I could gather later. Surely no one else was interested in my memories. I wasn't interested in taking anything else.



The old farm, ca. 1969. From the author's personal collection.

The house isn't there anymore. They burned it one day to make room for the railroads or whatever. I was home visiting the day they burned it, and my mother stood at the window of her new home, silently watching the columns of smoke rise into the air as she twisted her hands in her apron pocket. It was more than smoke she was seeing. Part of her past, a large part of it, was disappearing into the pale autumn sky. She said nothing, but stood motionless for a long time. Then she turned and offered me another cup of tea.

The detail of each room in that house is still clear to me. I remember the old hand pump in the middle of the kitchen counter, which gushed cool clear water in the summer and which was frozen solid for much of the winter. Then we would melt snow in an oval water tub on the stove, and, later, water would be brought in from the dairy in milk cans.

I remember the old McClary wood stove, now sought after as an antique item, but then a source of heat, a place to sit next to with a good book on winter evenings made long and lovely by the early darkness and the absence of radio or television. The stove had a black top that I had to scour and polish with lard or margarine to bring out the shine. That was one of my Saturday chores, after the ritual baking for Sunday coffee but before our evening baths.

Baths were a complicated affair, with the metal tub from the Old Country brought out of storage and filled with water from the tank in the stove. Each of us, in turn, suffered soap and shampoo to make us clean enough for church. The best part of the bath was the final rinse of clean, hot water which our mother poured from a long-handled aluminum saucepan.

The kitchen table was homemade and solid. It had to be, for we not only ate around it, it also served as a cutting block for the moose my father brought

home as a winter's supply of meat. My mother cut out fabric and sewed our clothes at that table, and after supper, to the hiss of a gasoline lamp, we did our homework there. We played games around that table, we squabbled around that table, and we prayed around that table.

The stove and the hand pump and that homemade, scarred table were in the kitchen where so much living took place.

The living room was through a curtained doorway, and it was there we gathered on Sundays, often with a visiting family. In winter the airtight heater glowed red on its sides, and the coffeepot percolated and often overflowed on top of it. Sunday was the day my father would grow uneasy in his easy chair, finding forced rest difficult to deal with. Soon he would pull his warm winter coat over his Sunday suit and stroll across his fields, assessing and planning but most of all loving the land for which he had crossed an ocean to develop and make his own.

As I crouched and relived some of my childhood, I was distracted by a blur of yellow that looked suspiciously like my sister's heavy winter sweater. I ducked instinctively into the tall, dead grass, and peeked over the top to see her standing motionless, hands folded behind her back.

Her face was too revealing, too open. I looked away quickly, but not before I had caught a glimpse of wistfulness and longing that reflected what I was feeling myself.

Why was it I could not go to meet her, could not jump up and say, "Hi, isn't this a great day for November? I've just finished some Christmas baking and I thought I would come here for a ride." I did not want her to see me here nursing my memories, tearing open hidden recesses of my mind to uncover feelings long buried there. I felt naked, loathe to admit even to myself that I, too, sometimes ached for the security of childhood. Nor, I suspected, would she want to be caught in her reverie. We were both trapped and isolated in webs of reflection, each with our own treasured memories of growing up.

So I, the mother of three almost grown children, hunkered down there in the damp November sunshine, waiting until her footsteps receded and were gone. Then slowly I stood up, brushed off the dirt and got back on my bicycle.

The sun didn't seem as bright on the way back. It seemed to me it had suddenly become colder, and the wind stung at my skin.

I was almost home when a truck came up behind me. It slowed and stopped, and I turned when my sister laughingly called out, "What do you think this is – summer?"

And I, feeling the brightness come back into my voice, called back, "Hi! Isn't this a great day for November? Why don't you come in for tea – I've just made some Christmas shortbread."

About the author

Grace (Seinen) Hols was born in Holland and came to Canada in 1949 with her parents when she was one. The family settled in Houston, located in the Bulkley Valley of north-central British Columbia, where a group of Dutch immigrants had grown in number since first arriving in 1938. Grace completed high school there, then left for Victoria, B.C., where she attended St. Joseph's School of Nursing. She worked as a registered nurse in pediatrics in Vancouver, and married John, also a Dutch immigrant. Ten years later, now with a husband and three young children, she returned to northern B.C. and her original Dutch immigrant community. With no hospital to work at, she began to write for the local newspaper, contributing features and community news. As well, she wrote local histories, short stories, poetry and non-fiction pieces, many of which appeared in a variety of publications. She is the author of *Marks of a century, a history of Houston, B.C., 1900-2000* (Houston, BC: District of Houston, 1999) which was published as a year 2000 project. She has won awards for her work, and, though officially retired, her interest in writing continues. She now lives in Smithers, still in the Bulkley Valley. Author contact: holfam1@gmail.com

Belonging and dislocation: Postwar Dutch reformed immigrants in southern Alberta, Canada

Lisa L. Schalk

This paper uses the ideas of dislocation and belonging to examine the daily lives of post-WWII Dutch Reformed immigrants in southern Alberta. It is based on interviews I conducted with nine individuals who emigrated as young people from the Netherlands to southern Alberta during the postwar period. I focus on the challenges they faced in their new situations – some common to most immigrants such as language and cultural differences, others specific to this group in this place such as the work methods and tools they were expected to use. My goal is to expand the existing literature on this group of immigrants by discussing ways in which the challenges they faced influenced their journey toward creating senses of belonging and identities within their new context. Working from this discussion, I show how the immigrants I interviewed created new senses of belonging in southern Alberta by centering their identities in their families and church communities and then moving outward into other areas of their lives.

Key terms: Alberta history; Dutch reformed churches; identity; belonging; history of everyday life; post-World War II Canada.

Introduction

By the act of migration, migrants separate themselves from familiar places and situations. Often they leave behind family, friends, and a familiar language. Arriving at their destination, immigrants are faced with a variety of challenges. Some of these challenges result directly from their change of place and culture, both of which affect relationships and self-understanding in significant ways. This article seeks to explore these challenges in terms of “belonging” and “dislocation” (or “not-belonging”). The dislocation created by migration threatens immigrants’ identities; it forces them to re-create themselves in a new context and in relation to new people. The migrants from the Netherlands who came to Canada during the post-World War II era were no different. Much of the (sparse) scholarly literature on this group of people focuses on how quickly they seem to have

adapted and how easily they seem to have integrated into Canadian culture. However, my article focuses on the challenges they faced in their new situations (some common to most immigrants such as language and cultural differences, others specific to this group in this place such as the work methods and tools they were expected to use) in order to emphasize that these challenges should not be lightly dismissed, as other scholars seem to have done, because they had a great impact on these immigrants' journeys toward creating senses of belonging and identities within their new context.

Of the 105,000 Dutch immigrants who came to Canada in the decade after World War II, 17,200 settled in Alberta concentrating in central and southern Alberta where other Dutch families had settled previously (Sas 1957, 64). This article is built on the life-stories of nine postwar Dutch immigrants – five men and four women – who immigrated to southern Alberta from the Netherlands between 1948 and 1957. I conducted conversational-style oral history interviews in English with these individuals during the summer of 2014.¹ A few things are worth noting about this group of interviewees: Firstly, all of my interview participants chose to remain in (or return to) southern Alberta. Therefore this study does not reflect the experiences of immigrants who chose to return to the Netherlands or who permanently relocated to other parts of Canada, although I do provide some discussion of the latter. Secondly, only one of my participants originated from an urban center in the Netherlands; the rest came from rural communities as did the majority of immigrants during the early years of the postwar Dutch emigration due to the push and pull of various national and personal factors (see Ganzevoort 1988, 62-66; Gerritsen 2005; Moogk 2006, 2-4; Palmer & Palmer 1985, 158; Schryer 1998, 44, 48-49; Troper 1993, 258-260; VanderMey 1983, 50). Undoubtedly, this rural background influenced their experiences and their perspectives in southern Alberta. Thirdly, all of my interview participants were members of Protestant Reformed churches, both in the Netherlands and in Canada. This similarity creates a rich pool of information about the experiences of Reformed Dutch immigrants in southern Alberta, but does not allow me to address the experiences of non-religious or other religious immigrants who also emigrated from the Netherlands to Canada in the immediate postwar period. The experiences of these groups of people deserve further study as well. More information about my participants is included in Appendix I. In this article I focus on the stories and experiences which my participants shared with me during our conversational interviews. I use these to show how my interview participants experienced dislocation through immigration, a lack of belonging in their new

¹ I received permission to interview from the University of Lethbridge's Human Subject Research Committee in the spring of 2014 (protocol number UofL 2014-026). All participants agreed in writing to be identified by their real names in any publication resulting from my research.

context, and a few of the ways in which they re-created their self-understanding in southern Alberta.²

While there are a small number of scholarly works which discuss postwar Dutch immigrants in Canada (Ganzevoort 1988; Horn 1997; Hutten 2001; Ishwaran 1977; Sas 1957; Schryer 1998; VanderMey 1983), only one scholar's work focuses specifically on those postwar Dutch who came to the province of Alberta. In 1985, historian Howard Palmer co-authored a book with his wife Tamara Palmer entitled *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*, which looks at many of the immigrant communities within Alberta as part of a broad narrative regarding Alberta as a destination for migration. Their chapter, 'The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta', gives a generalized narrative of the Dutch in Alberta and emphasizes the success-over-adversity story. Their chapter on the postwar Dutch in Alberta is still the only academic work focusing on this group of people; it was republished in 2009 in an anthology on immigration and settlement in western Canada edited by Gregory P. Marchildon. Although the broad narrative of the Dutch in Canada does in some ways reflect the experiences of the Dutch immigrants who came to southern Alberta during the postwar period, the broader narrative does not do justice to the specific challenges which some of my interview participants faced precisely because of their destination in southern Alberta or to the larger picture of their daily lives. For example, Anne Van Arragon Hutten (2001) focuses on the Dutch immigrants who settled in eastern Canada and she only briefly mentions the challenges of work in the beet fields which many Dutch immigrants to southern Alberta faced; conversely Albert VanderMey's (1983) extensive work discusses the immigrants who came to southern Alberta *only* in terms of their arduous labour in the beet fields with little discussion of other aspects of their lives. This paper works toward filling these voids in the existing scholarship on postwar Dutch immigrants in Canada.

To explore the experiences of my nine interview participants, I first look at the theoretical concepts of dislocation and belonging as discussed by sociologist Vanessa May (2013). I then look at the central role of "home" – both the place and the people – as a place of belonging in the lives of my interview participants. The third section of this article focuses on the many daily ways these postwar Dutch immigrants became dislocated because of their immigration. I discuss language difficulties, daily work for both men and women, including the unfamiliar work

² It is also worth noting that my research necessarily reflects my own position as a quasi-insider to the Dutch community in southern Alberta. Although I have no Dutch heritage, three of my husband's grandparents were born in the Netherlands and immigrated to southern Alberta during the postwar era. Many of my interviews began with my participants recognizing my last name and asking how I was related to so-and-so, members of my husband's extended family whom they knew. These connections helped me to gain the trust of my interview participants.

methods and the tools they were required to use, cultural expectations which were incompatible with their new situations, and the resulting emotional “break downs” incurred by too much stress. I look at a few of the ways the postwar Dutch immigrants whom I interviewed navigated the differences between “us” (Dutch immigrants) and “them” (Canadians), emphasizing ways in which my interview participants negotiated cultural expectations to increase their senses of belonging. Lastly, I look at a few of the ways in which increased agency, social mobility and acceptance by Canadians influenced and were influenced by my interview participants’ growing sense of belonging in southern Alberta.

Theoretical background

Sociologist Vanessa May argues that belonging is central to identity because where and with whom we belong determines how we understand ourselves, as well as how the people around us identify us (May 2013, 3). She claims that our self-understanding, or “identity,” is based in our sense of belonging with one or more groups of people (May 2013, 79, 96). Because belonging is always in relation to other people, May claims that identity is relational; it is embedded in society and culture (May 2013, 4). We see ourselves as “belonging” with one group of people, but not with another. May also claims that understanding who we *are not* is necessary for understanding who we are (May 2013, 79). For the postwar Dutch in the Netherlands, the “pillarized” social system of the Netherlands helped to clarify where they belonged by creating several large-scale categories of “us” and “them” within Dutch society (Kennedy & Zwemmer 2010; MacDonald 2008; Platvoet 1983; Schryer 1998). Since all of my interview participants belonged to the Calvinist Reformed social “pillar” in the Netherlands, it is not surprising that religion continued to be foundational to their self-understandings and to their senses of belonging in their new southern Albertan context, as discussed below.

But belonging also has to do with specific people, places and material objects. Vanessa May defines belonging as “the process of creating a sense of identification with, or connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects” (May 2013, 3). May contends that places and material objects are part of our sense of belonging because we live in sensual bodies and continually experience life through our senses (May 2013, 133-138):

Our embodied and sensory connection to the material world of places and objects is of crucial importance to our sense of self. In addition, social changes are acutely experienced on the material level. Changes in the material landscape have a profound effect on the self and our connection to the world because belonging is partly based on the familiarity of our sensescapes or sensory geographies. (May 2013, 148-149)

We do not usually notice our sense of belonging because when we belong in a place or with a group of people, things are familiar. However, we do notice when we no longer feel that we belong – when we become dislocated. Dislocation can occur because the self has changed or because the surrounding world has changed (May 2013, 6-7). Obviously, the latter occurs during migration and influences the former. The changes in the surrounding “culture, people, places and material objects” disrupt the migrant’s sense of belonging and therefore his/her self-understanding or “identity”. After immigration, the immigrant is forced to re-create this sense of self by finding or creating new places, things and groups with which to belong as well as finding new ways to connect with the people who are left behind (May 2013, 107).

A new place

In coming to Canada the postwar Dutch immigrants left behind all the familiar places to which they belonged. One of the first situations which created a jarring sense of dislocation was their arrival at their new accommodations – a place in which they did not belong. For most postwar immigrants, their Canadian sponsor provided their housing. Often this housing was less comfortable than what they had been used to in the Netherlands. Gerard Schalk shared with me an oft-told story about his family’s arrival at their first house on their sponsor’s farm near Coaldale, Alberta in 1951:

So, and then we come to a place and the truck started to slow down and we already see, “Yeah, it looks a nice place coming up.” All trees on one side and the front. And then we come to an entry and we drove in, and here is a nice house there on the side, and along the other side there is all trees and in the back there is all trees, it’s just totally surrounded by huge trees in green and it’s all, you know, it’s like, hidden away. And this nice little house there. And then, on the other side, there’s another nice little house there. “I wonder if that’s our house.” No, no, nicely painted and everything. No. And the truck keeps on going, and we’re going past some graineries and we’re going past a big barn [...] and on the other side there is a cow barn and we keep on going. And then we come to the end, and [our sponsor] goes right through it and out of the trees and here we’re out in the field and then, ahead of us, there is a little house, not painted, or there’s no paint on it or nothing, it’s just bare. And he drives up along there, “Ok, here, you’re home.” [GS, 8-9]³

³ Page numbers indicate pages in interview transcripts. Each interview is indicated by the initials of the interviewee(s). For details about the interviews see Appendix 1; for details about the interviewees see Appendix 2.



Figure 1. Not the most welcoming landscape: the view of southern Alberta's fields from the Schalk family's first little house, 1951. Photo in the possession of Gerard Schalk. Used with permission.

As Gerard indicated, a small unpainted house in the middle of a prairie field was not a nice welcome for his family. They had lived in a much nicer home in the Netherlands. Others of my interview participants shared similar descriptions of their first house in southern Alberta. Ann Wielinga Bosker, who immigrated to southern Alberta with her family in 1948, described her family's first house near Iron Springs and how they used the resources they had to improve it:

And so we ended up there [Iron Springs] and we had a small home and our furniture was [shipped from the Netherlands] in these big wooden crates or whatever you called them. We had three of them. And one of those, we used as a porch to the house 'cause it was a small house we lived in. A beet house, we called it. [...] But a lot of immigrants lived in little houses like that. And so, that's what we did, the first year, we worked there in the sugar beets. [PB&AWB, 2]

Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt's family's sponsor had made other arrangements and he no longer needed their labour when they arrived in 1953. The family found other accommodations in the small city of Lethbridge but their house was not a single family dwelling. It was sort of a boarding house in which several families lived. As Lena explained:

We lived upstairs and we had two tiny bedrooms with Father and Mother and four kids and then there were... across the hall from us there was a little old man, he had one little room. And then there was one bathroom that was shared with three suites downstairs and all of us upstairs.

[CP&LWP, 25]

Places such as “home” hold significant meaning for many people and through migration these places are lost. Several of my interview participants discussed how they and their families (which included parents, dependent children, and adult children) worked toward re-creating “home” in their new context. Making a “home” out of these less-than-lovely living situations took some creativity, hard work, and a few familiar items from the Netherlands. Johanna Guliker Grinich, who immigrated with her family in 1951, explained that their sponsor at Iron Springs kindly supplied them with paint and wallpaper to spruce up their little “beet house”. She quite proudly showed me the before and after pictures of how they used that paint, along with some rocks, flower seeds and tulip bulbs which they brought from the Netherlands, to turn their “beet house” into a home [GG&JGG, 13-14]. Those seeds and bulbs from the Netherlands made a big difference in the re-creation of “home”, according to Johanna.

The inside of their first houses quickly became very cramped as the large Dutch families sorted out sleeping arrangements. Often the house was only one level, divided on one side into the living and eating area while the other side of the house was the sleeping area. The Guliker family of eleven managed in their little four-room house because there was a separate “bunk house” where the six boys slept [GG&JGG, 5]. Gerard Schalk explained how his family squeezed their eleven members into three bedrooms: one room for the parents and baby boy, one room for the five oldest boys (two of whom were adults) and one room for the two girls (the oldest was also an adult) and the second youngest boy. The five oldest boys had the biggest bedroom which, Gerard explained, had two double beds which just fit into the room.

[B]ut in order to get into bed, you have to climb over [the footboard] because there is no room between the beds. [...] And if you want to make the bed, then you have to sit on one bed and then make the other one. And then sit on that bed and make that one because that’s the only way to do it.

[GS, 9]



Figures 2 and 3. Turning a house into a home: the Guliker family's beet house before painting (top) and after painting (bottom), 1951. Photos in the possession of Johanna Guliker Grisnich. Used with permission.

Somehow the five Schalk young men managed to make it work for two years.

Living in such tight quarters with so many people was difficult; however, having left behind so much of what was familiar, family became very important as the one stable factor in the immigrants' lives. Family provided a place to belong when everything else in their lives was unfamiliar. Sociologist Steph Lawler asserts that families "are at the heart of understandings of identity both through the 'doing' of family relationships and through understandings of kin groups and one's place within them" (Lawler 2014, 49-50). Sociologist and anthropologist K. Ishwaran, writing about a postwar Dutch immigrant community in Ontario, describes the Dutch immigrant family as "a cohesive and well-knit group" which he says "acts as a social security system, taking care of its members when sick or in financial trouble or in some other kind of crisis." Ishwaran concludes that "[t]he family, therefore, is the most important single institution in Dutch[-Canadian] life. It provides the context in which most people spend their lives" (Ishwaran 1977, 30-31).



Figure 4. Many postwar Dutch emigrated as a family unit. The Schalk family of ten had a family photograph taken just before they left the Netherlands for Canada, 1951. Gerard's sister's fiancé (not pictured) also emigrated with them. Photo in the possession of Gerard Schalk. Used with permission.

Only one of the immigrants whom I interviewed migrated without his family. As the youngest son in a family of nine children, Peter Bosker felt he was not really needed on the family farm so he decided to emigrate in 1949. He came to southern Alberta by himself, at the age of twenty [PB&AWB, 13]. Peter Bosker's

situation was unique among the immigrants I interviewed because he did not have any family in southern Alberta to ease the dislocation which came by moving so far away from everything familiar. The other eight immigrants I interviewed, who migrated together with their families, experienced at least some continuation of what was familiar and their families continued to provide a sense of belonging. Historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten writes that, for herself as a Dutch immigrant child in eastern Canada, her family provided “a comforting security. Everything around us had changed, but our parents remained the same, and family dynamics continued unchanged for many years” (Hutten 2001, 182).

New but familiar people

Another vital aspect of belonging for the immigrants I interviewed was their church connections. The immigration field men who helped to place my interview participants and their families with sponsors in southern Alberta were all members of Dutch Reformed Churches. In most cases these field men connected the new immigrants with a Reformed church and from there my interview participants met other like-minded immigrants with whom they formed relationships. Although my nine interviewees all identified themselves as “Reformed”, their devotion to their own *specific* Dutch Reformed denominations was very important to them. At the end of World War II, there was one Reformed denomination in southern Alberta – The Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The CRC was established in the Nobleford/Granum area in 1905 by an earlier wave of Dutch immigrants (VanderMey 1983, 302).

When the post-WWII wave of Dutch immigrants came, the importance of home-country differences among Dutch Reformed people evidenced itself within Alberta’s religious scene. The new immigrants divided themselves into separate groups on Sundays based on a variety of theological differences, which are beyond the scope of this paper, and within a few short years these different groups had connected with like-minded groups from other areas and had solidified themselves into distinct denominations. Beside the original Christian Reformed Church denomination, during the postwar period there was also the Reformed Church in America (RCA), which was organized in southern Alberta by some RCA missionaries from the United States, the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC), which was a more conservative church, the Canadian Reformed Church, which was founded in southern Alberta following a disunion over doctrine in the Netherlands, and the Free Reformed Church (VanderMey 1983, 304; Schryer 1998, 125-126; Ganzevoort 1988, 100-101).



Figure 5. The Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Coalhurst, Alberta, c. 1952. Photo in the possession of Johanna Guliker Grisnich. Used with permission.

Among my interview participants, there was fairly equal representation of each of the first four of these church denominations (see Appendix 2). Because of the importance which postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants placed on their home-country identities as Reformed people and because of their devotion to their own beliefs on a variety of theological issues, the postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants in southern Alberta created places of religious belonging which were separate from Canadians and also separate from each other. These divisions resulted in the numerous Dutch Reformed church denominations discussed above.

Despite denominational differences, belonging with fellow church members was a common theme among my interview participants. Both Ann Wielinga Bosker, who attended the CRC church in Iron Springs with her family, and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, who attended the NRC church in Coalhurst with her family, described how important weekly church services were to them. Johanna said: “We were very happy that we could go to church on Sunday to hear the word of God but also to meet some [Dutch] people [GG&JGG, 6]. Ann explained further: “You know, you look forward to [going to church] because you met with other [Dutch] people and other [Dutch] kids, and that” [PB&AWB, 3]. Gerard Schalk, who attended the CRC church in Lethbridge with his family, described how Sunday church services and the socializing which occurred around the service times

created a group of people with whom he and his family came to feel that they belonged:

So then after the morning service, there was Sunday school [...] And then there was catechism classes and so, and the rest the people, they just milled around, outside or inside, and talked and talked and talked and catch up and see where you're from. "Where are you from and what do you know?" you know. And "Where are you at and what are you doing?" [...] Everybody's stranger when you come but in the end, you're so tightly connected that you're like family, you know. [GS, 13]

During the postwar period, services at all of these Dutch Reformed churches were conducted in the Dutch language. Many scholars have shown that religious services and gatherings help migrants through the period of adjustment to their new culture (Bonifacio & Angeles 2010; Bleszynska & Szopski 2010; Cadge & Ecklund 2007; Ebaugh 2010). More specifically, studies on Dutch immigrants in Canada have emphasized that postwar Dutch Reformed immigrants prioritized religion (particularly their own understanding of a variety of theological details) above ethnicity (MacDonald 2008, 171; Palmer & Palmer 1985, 164; Schryer 1998, 317; VanderMey 1983, 207). In other words, religious belonging was more important to them than ethnic belonging. For my interview participants, the relationships which they formed with *like-minded* Dutch people at their specific Reformed churches created a support system which became a place of belonging for them. Also, the anticipation of meeting together on Sundays gave the new immigrants the hope they needed in order to persevere through the difficult weeks of changes and challenges as they adjusted to their new life in southern Alberta.

A new language

Although families and church congregations served as groups with whom my interview participants felt a sense of belonging and these groups were a vital life-line of mutual encouragement and support, all nine of my interview participants discussed the ways in which the rest of their daily lives in southern Alberta during the first few months was unfamiliar and discordant. For all of the immigrants I interviewed language played a key role in their sense of dislocation in southern Alberta. When I asked Peter Bosker, who immigrated on his own in 1949, whether he missed home, he replied that he did not really miss home until Christmas time. He explained: "I did miss it [home] the first Christmas and New Year's. Yeah. Then you miss your old home, you know? Your familiar Christmas songs and stuff like that. And, well, they were all Christmas songs here too, but for me, it was all

English yet and I didn't understand all of these words that you were singing" [PB&AWB, 19].⁴ Many things were unfamiliar about his first Canadian Christmas but what stood out in his memory was the English language and the English Christmas carols which were so different from what he knew in the Netherlands.

The immigrants I interviewed dealt with the language problem in different ways. Gerard Schalk took an "English as a Second Language" course during his first winter in Alberta. This course gave him thirty hours of language instruction and practice together with other new immigrants [GS, 25]. Other immigrants used their jobs as a way to improve their English. Alice Van Spronson Tam's first job was as a housekeeping assistant at a Catholic rectory in Lethbridge. Her employers were four priests and a blind housekeeper, who was no longer able to do the housekeeping work but was still fully in charge and knew exactly what needed to be done. She gave the orders. Alice explained that her employers were very gracious with her as she learned to communicate in English. Although she had studied English in school in the Netherlands, she explained that it was British English and the English spoken in southern Alberta was "a little different" [AST, 8]. She recalled one humorous incident of her stumbling attempts to use English and her employers' gracious response: She was making breakfast for the first time at the rectory – eggs, bacon, etc., which was very different from the breakfast she was used to in the Netherlands – bread and a cup of tea. She tried to ask how they wanted their eggs and bacon cooked but she couldn't come up with the right words. Their response was very gracious, Alice explained: "I can still see them sitting there looking at each other: 'What are we going to do?' [...] And then, one of them spoke up and he said: 'Do you mind, that if you do make a mistake in the way we talk English, that we correct you?' And I said: 'Please do! That's the only way I can learn.'" [AST, 8-9]. Although she indicated how embarrassed she was at not being able to communicate clearly during that breakfast, Alice was very grateful to her first employers for their assistance in her language development, emphasizing that "they were so good to me" [AST, 9]. Other immigrants found that their employer was not as helpful in teaching them English as they had thought he was. Gilbert Grisnich explained that when he and his family arrived in southern Alberta in 1948, his family's sponsor was Hungarian and didn't speak English well either. Since this man was their primary non-Dutch contact, Gilbert laughingly recalled that his father began speaking English with an Hungarian accent [GG&JGG, 9-10].

At other times, the language barrier could cause serious problems. Peter Bosker discovered at the end of his one-year contract with his sponsor that his

⁴ Peter Bosker attended the original Nobleford/Granum CRC church which had already transitioned to using English for services. However, when the postwar immigrants began arriving in 1948/49, the church began conducting services in Dutch again (Heinen 1981, 57).

limited ability to communicate in English made finding a job much more difficult [PB&AWB, 15]. Johanna Guliker Grisnich learned that language problems could complicate interactions with healthcare practitioners. When Johanna was expecting her first baby several years after immigrating, she became very sick. The Canadian doctor told her she had toxemia⁵ and sent her home on strict bed rest. She and her husband did not know what toxemia was until after their baby was born and they had company from church visiting. The man exclaimed, in Dutch, that Johanna had been very sick with *niervergiftiging* – kidney poisoning! Now Johanna understood what had been wrong. Fortunately, she had followed the doctor’s instructions. Though the baby was born several weeks early, after some time in the hospital both mother and baby were fine [GG&JGG, 38-39]. Language challenges such as these created dissonance in my interview participants’ lives and underscored their lack of belonging in southern Alberta. However, as their ability to communicate in English increased, the language-related problems decreased.

Two of the Dutch immigrants I interviewed learned to speak English at school. They were both twelve years old when their families immigrated to southern Alberta so they continued their schooling in Canada. Ann Wielinga Bosker and Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt’s parents placed them and their younger siblings directly into local Alberta schools. Both girls were put back several grades from where they had been in the Netherlands because they couldn’t communicate in English, but as they caught on to the language they were bumped up to a higher grade. Ann described her experience of learning English at school:

And I actually went to school there in Iron Springs. We went to school... the bus picked us up and went to school – in grade one because we didn’t know a word of English. And then, later on we got into grade three. The way we learned the language, we had some pictures and words and we had to put the right pictures by the words [...] And that’s the way we learned, slowly on. Then we got [bumped up] to grade three. But I think the teacher was, maybe, quite frustrated with all the immigrant kids. [PB&AWB, 2]

Since Ann was twelve years old when she arrived in Canada and turned thirteen one month later, being put into grade one with the much younger children was certainly frustrating. Dutch Canadian historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten claims that Dutch immigrant children’s first experiences of school were often traumatic. It was not that anything went dramatically wrong at school but rather that, with their world turned upside down through immigration, being forced into an unfamiliar school environment with the sounds of an unfamiliar language

⁵ Toxemia, now called “pre-eclampsia”, is a potentially life-threatening complication of pregnancy.

everywhere, these children were completely overwhelmed (Hutten 2001, 89-90). Lena was more fortunate because her school in Lethbridge had a class for immigrant children to learn English. [CP&LWP, 20]. She also described herself as a very outgoing child who was eager to try the language even if she made mistakes [CP&LWP, 54-55]. As Ann and Lena learned the language and became more comfortable with Canadian culture their sense of belonging in southern Alberta grew. Lena was able to finish grade nine and Ann finished grade seven. Both girls were then in their mid-teens. At that point, their parents took them out of school so that they could start working full-time and contribute to the family income [CP&LWP, 23-24; PB&AWB, 6].⁶

Men's daily work

The type of work which my interview participants did on a daily basis and the material objects with which they interacted also shaped the way they understood themselves. Particularly for those immigrants who worked in southern Alberta's agricultural industry, the material surroundings, the tools, the methods and often even the work itself were different from what they had known in the Netherlands. Of the nine postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed, four of them worked in the sugar beet fields when they first arrived. While most Dutch immigrants who immigrated as agricultural labourers had some experience with agriculture, and although sugar beets were grown in the Netherlands, this did not mean that they had hands-on experience working in beet fields. Among the immigrants I interviewed, one family had been dairy farmers in the Netherlands, another family were chicken farmers, the father of another family had been a military mechanic but *his* father had owned a greenhouse. Further, Dutch-Canadian historian Herman Ganzevoort explains that even if Dutch immigrants had been farmers in the Netherlands, Canadian farming methods were different. Alberta's farmers ploughed less deeply (to prevent the strong winds from blowing the dirt away), and Canadian farmers made less use of manure, which the Dutch considered a highly valuable resource (Ganzevoort 1988, 88).

The work involved with sugar beet crops was labour intensive and involved many tools and methods which were new to my interview participants. There were three hoeing phases during growing season and then the harvest. The first hoeing was the most labour intensive because it was for both weeding and

⁶ Among postwar Dutch immigrants in Canada the "family kitty" was very common. Several of my interview participants (the adult children of immigrant families especially) discussed how their wages in Canada went directly to their parents who then looked after all the members of the family. Sometimes parents gave the children "pocket money" and usually once the adult children married they were freed from this family obligation [GS, 7; PB&AWB 5; AST, 9]. See also Ganzevoort (1988, 82, 108); Hutten (2001, 168-170).

thinning out the small beets plants, and the work was done with a hand-held hoe, a small shovel, or with the hands. Alice Van Spronson Tams explained:

Because the beets were just sown in a row. And we had little shovels like that. [Indicated six inches in size.][...] Little shovels, yeah. And then you had to have, I guess, a foot in between [each plant], something like that. So you have to go in between. But these two or three were too close. You had to bend down and pick them by hand. [AST, 8]

The next two hoe phases were mainly weeding. Then harvest came. Johanna Guliker Grisnich, whose family worked in the beets for four years, explained that their sponsor had a beet lifter machine which loosened the beets in the ground. Then she and her family pulled the beets up, shook off the dirt, and laid them in rows [GG&JGG, 7-8]. Later they had to pick them up again, chop off the leaves, and load them into trucks. Gilbert Grisnich elaborated a little further on his experiences:

You know, there was actually a plow that would lift the beet up but it fell back in the hole. So, they were loose. So then we came along and grabbed two beets and just throw them all [into rows] ... half a mile and then back again. And then the farmer had a bit of a stone boat. He leveled the ground a bit and then we had a knife with a little hook on there. And you pick up the beet. Grab the beet. Chop the leaves off. Throw them in the middle. And then the farmer loaded them all. [GG&JGG, 8]

Gilbert and Johanna went on to explain that chopping the leaves off of the beets could be quite dangerous. For women with smaller hands, it was often difficult to hold onto the large sugar beets which could be the size of a football. I asked Gilbert and Johanna whether anyone ever lost a thumb and Gilbert responded: “Yes. Oh yeah. It happened” [GG&JGG, 8-9].

Farming in southern Alberta also involved irrigation which was not a common practice in the Netherlands. Gilbert Grisnich explained in detail how he flood-irrigated the beet fields before irrigation machinery was introduced. The irrigation canals brought the water to the field and there was a “ditch digger” machine which created channels for the water across the field; however, ensuring that the water actually got to the plants was done entirely by hand, shovel, and gum boots. It was a time-consuming process. Although they only irrigated the beets twice in a summer, it took a full month to irrigate just one quarter section of beets and then there were other crops to irrigate as well [GG&JGG, 54-56].

The means, methods and tools of farming grain were also different in southern Alberta. Gilbert Grisnich explained a farming mistake his father made when he first rented his own land in southern Alberta, because he assumed that

Alberta's farming practices were the same as in the Netherlands. Gilbert explained:

[I]n Holland you only seed about an inch deep because there is lots of moisture, eh. And you get your rain on time. So, Dad did the same thing here. Usually my older brother got some advice from Ano Neiboer [...]. But that, I guess, they didn't ask, so when the crop came up, it was uneven because they only seeded it an inch deep, eh. What was in the moisture came up, the other not. So that was an uneven crop. And luckily we got some rain so then it caught up, right. [GG&JGG, 52]

Inexperience and lack of advice sometimes created problems, as the Grisnichs discovered. Gilbert also mentioned that when his father started farming rented land on his own, they plowed with horses as they had done in the Netherlands [GG&JGG, 19, 52]. While the farm machinery used by southern Alberta's farmers may have been exciting for some immigrants, their inexperience with it also highlighted that they were new to the area (Heinen 1974, 11). When Peter Bosker arrived in southern Alberta, he worked as a farm hand as he had done back home in the Netherlands for his father. Since his sponsor, George Poelman, didn't actually need extra help on his farm near Granum, Alberta, Peter found work with his neighbour Bert Hildebrandt for six weeks and then with other farmers in the area [PB&AWB, 15]. Peter had never seen a combine harvester in the Netherlands or a John Deere tractor, but Bert Hildebrandt had a combine and Peter operated it [PB&AWB, 21]. The use of a combine shows that grain harvesting was a less labour-intensive process on the Hildebrandt farm than on the Bosker farm in the Netherlands where the reaping, threshing and winnowing would have been done separately. The harvest results were also different. Peter explained that the Bosker family farm in the Netherlands produced rich, heavy crops. When he arrived in southern Alberta in August of 1949, however, it had been a dry summer and the crops were average, at best:

[W]hen I came there, yeah. That was harvest time, August. The grain was yay-high [indicates quite low]. You can see the ground, the dirt. And I said to them: "What is this considered, a good crop or a poor crop." I don't know. He said: "Average. Average crop." [...] So they had a very average crop. 20, 22 bushels to an acre. That is pretty poor. [PB&AWB, 18]



Figure 6. First experiences of farming in southern Alberta, 1951. Photo in the possession of Gerard Schalk. Used with permission.

Peter's opinion at the end of this explanation shows that he was comparing the southern Alberta crop with his experience of crops in the Netherlands. This is a natural way for new immigrants to orient themselves in a new place. Yet, as historians Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson point out, immigrants begin to feel settled only when they can adopt the new country's reference systems, making comparisons with what they know and have experienced in Canada, rather than comparing Canadian experiences with their home country (Barber & Watson 2015, 132).

Not all Dutch immigrants worked in agriculture. Among the Dutch I interviewed, two families worked in other sectors and were able to continue in the career for which they had trained. Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt's father was a carpenter in the Netherlands. The Van Westenbrugge family immigrated to southern Alberta in 1953 after their home was destroyed when the dykes broke in Zeeland, the Netherlands. They were expecting to work in the beet fields but

when they arrived their sponsor had found other workers and no longer needed them. This created a lot of joy, as Lena expressed: “Phew, was I happy because we didn’t have to work in the beets” 25). Their field man found the Van Westenbrugge family housing in Lethbridge and Lena’s dad found work with a construction company. When he was laid off that winter, he jumped at an opportunity to start his own business. Lena’s husband, Cornelius, told the story:

[Dad Van Westenbrugge] wasn’t working. He had to go to the doctor clinic for something. [...] And the doctor said: “What kind of work do you do?” Well, he said: “I’m a carpenter but I have not enough to do at the moment. I was laid off at Oland Construction.” Well, the doctor said: “There’s a door that needs planing because we can’t close it.” “Oh,” Dad said, “I’ll look after that.” After that, Dad never was in want of any work. He worked for doctors and lawyers and all, remodeling houses, remodeling. And he started like that. [CP&LWP, 32]

The Van Westenbrugge family’s situation had advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that Mr. Van Westenbrugge was able to continue working in his field of expertise, which meant that he (and his family) experienced less dislocation than other families whose daily work was new to them. However, his employment was not guaranteed during the first year in Canada, as it was for those immigrants who had a contract with a sponsor. There was surely some stress on the family when he found himself without a job that first winter although, fortunately, his unemployment did not last long.

When Hugo and Elizabeth Van Seters were looking into emigrating from the Netherlands in the mid-1950s, they were interested in going to Alberta because Hugo’s brother and sister were already there. However, many people urged them to look elsewhere. Hugo told the story this way: “And they all said: ‘Don’t go to Alberta. [...] Unless you want to go into the agriculture business and unless you want to hoe beets. Don’t go there.’ And I said: ‘Well, why not? They have cars down there.’ ‘Yeah,’ I said, ‘I repair cars.’” [HS, 4]. It was with this determination to continue working in the automotive industry that Hugo and Elizabeth and their baby boy immigrated to southern Alberta in 1957. Hugo’s brother helped arrange a job for him as a “body man” at the Hillman automobile dealership, which was a familiar setting for Hugo even if it was a step down in the business hierarchy [HS, 7-9].

At this point it is important to explain that the Van Westenbrugge and Van Seters families immigrated in different migration waves than the immigrants I interviewed who worked in agriculture. In 1952 the Canadian government relaxed its immigration policy a little, allowing non-agricultural immigrants into Canada (Troper 1993, 262). One important result of this policy change was that some

immigrants who immigrated later were able to continue working in their field of expertise and therefore able to maintain a little more of what was familiar to them, in comparison to the immigrants who worked in the beet fields. The six immigrants I interviewed who arrived in Canada before 1952 all spent a year or longer working in agriculture. The three immigrants I interviewed whose families immigrated after 1952 were involved in other industries. Among the immigrants I interviewed, therefore, their time of arrival in Canada likely influenced their ability to work outside of the agriculture industry.

Women's daily work

The working experiences of Dutch immigrant women in southern Alberta were similar to the men's experiences in some ways and different in others. Johanna Guliker Grisnich and Alice Van Spronson Tams worked actively alongside their fathers and brothers in the sugar beet fields, and both women expressed how difficult working in the beets was for them.⁷

Both Johanna and Alice also discussed the work they were responsible for at home. On rainy days when she could not work in the fields, Johanna was in charge of mending, since she had taken four years of education at what she called a "private sewing school" [GG&JGG, 4]. She explained: "The sewing machine [was] on the table and I had to mend all day" [GG&JGG, 7, 25]. This was no small task considering the wear and tear which her family's clothing experienced through their work in the beet fields. Housework was familiar to these women, but the tools they had at their disposal and the house itself were new and in many cases very foreign. The Dutch immigrants brought with them to southern Alberta only what they could carry in suitcases or pack into the large wooden crates which were shipped on a different vessel from the one on which they travelled. Therefore, many possessions were sold or left behind, including household appliances. Vanessa May points out that because belonging is partly tied to material objects, their removal can be damaging to one's identity and increase the feeling of dislocation which immigration creates (May 2013, 148-149). Two of the men I interviewed expressed repeatedly that they felt immigration had been particularly hard on their mothers [GS, 10-11; GG&JGG, 17, 26, 50]. When I asked them what they meant, both men talked about the changes in house work tools and methods which their mothers (and older sisters) faced.

⁷ Although my interview participants were clear that women were involved in both the outdoor and indoor work, the same double work standard for men was absent from my interviews, with two brief exceptions: Johanna Guliker Grisnich and Gilbert Grisnich each mentioned that their fathers often helped their mothers with the housework as well as working in the beet fields [GG&JGG, 7, 17].



Figure 7. The Guliker family takes a moment from their work in the beet fields to pose for a photo, no date. Photo in the possession of Johanna Guliker Grisnich. Used with permission.

Cooking, cleaning and washing all had to be done differently. In the Netherlands, according to my interview participants, most women cooked using gas stoves, many (if not most) had running water and flush toilets in the home, and the women washed clothing using some form of washing machine [AST, 16-17; GG&JGG, 5; GS, 2, 10]. Anne van Arragon Hutten claims that many Dutch women also had at least a Saturday maid who helped with weekly chores and bathing children (Hutten 2001, 106). My interview participants' situations in Canada were not simply different from what they had known in the Netherlands, they were a step back in time. When they arrived in Canada, the women I interviewed (and the mothers and sisters of two of the men) had a wood or coal stove with which to cook and bake, no running water in the home, an outhouse instead of a toilet, a washing board for the clothes, and no maid.⁸ Add onto this the very heavy, dirty

⁸ It is important to note that while the Dutch immigrant women had many modern appliances in their homes in the Netherlands, these appliances were not necessarily the norm in Canada during the postwar period. Joy Parr's analysis of the production and sale of household appliances such as gas or electric stoves, refrigerators and electric washing machines during World War II and the decade following shows several trends. First, Parr shows that through the war years more Canadians were purchasing wood stoves than gas or electric ones and that wringer washing machines (these could be powered by hand or by gas or electricity) were the standard purchase until 1966, when automatic washing machines finally surpassed them. Second, she explains that, during the war, electric stoves and refrigerators were a luxury item, not something that all

work which, in many cases, most of the family was doing in the fields each day, and it becomes easy to understand why Gilbert Grisnich stated repeatedly that “the mothers had it the toughest” [GG&JGG, 17, 26, 50].

Cooking and baking with a wood or coal stove was a new experience. Gerard Schalk described his mother’s experience with the coal stove in their first Canadian home:

Here she [Mom] comes with that big furnace, but she’s never seen a coal furnace in her life. We had a coal and wood stove [in the Netherlands] that was used in the winter for heating in the front rooms and so on, but for the rest, cooking was done on a gas thing, you know. So, she had to learn, and yeah, we all did, of course, to, first of all, get that thing started. This big monster, you know. And then, how to keep it going and how to make sure that the dampers were open and that you didn’t get smoked out and that there was water in the reservoir on the side of it [...]. [GS, 10]

Gerard’s expression, “this big monster”, indicates the extent to which the wood cook-stove disrupted the family’s feeling of familiarity and “home”. The stove was a constant reminder of difference and dislocation. During my interview with Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich, we spent some time discussing how Johanna baked bread with a wood cook-stove. Johanna explained that the stove was not just a fire box but was an old-fashioned stove in which the wood and fire went in one compartment of the stove and next to that there was an oven which the fire heated. There was a dial on the oven which indicated how hot the oven was, so once the mixing, kneading and rising was done and the oven was the right temperature, the bread would go in to bake. Johanna affirmed that it took a while for her and her mother to learn how to bake bread on that wood stove [GG&JGG, 25-26]. After the explanation of how to bake bread, Gilbert added that the old fashioned stove also made life physically uncomfortable. Even during the summer when temperatures could reach 30 degrees Celsius, the stove still had to be lit and the women had to cook the meal [GG&JGG, 26]. Until they became confident in using it, the wood cook-stove was a constant reminder to the Dutch immigrant women and men of their dislocation and lack of belonging.

One further connotation of the wood or coal cook-stove in southern Alberta was brought up by Gerard Schalk. During World War II in the Netherlands, gas for cook-stoves became scarce and some households were forced to do their

Canadians had. Third, Parr shows that production of these items lagged behind the demand for them in Canada throughout the postwar period. This last point indicates that many Canadians continued using the older versions of household appliances through the postwar years. Thus, although the Dutch immigrants may have felt deprived of important conveniences, their Canadian sponsors and neighbours may not have seen the situation that way (Parr 1999, 27-29, 67-69).

cooking on small wood stoves which were normally used just to heat rooms. Gerard Schalk explained that, during the war, his mother was forced to use their room-heating wood stove to cook meals. Other families, he claimed, invented small little stoves with only one burner on which they could cook meals by keeping a small fire lit with little pieces of wood and paper [GS, 2-3]. Primitive conditions, therefore, were not a new experience for the Dutch immigrants. However, the experiences they had during World War II in the Netherlands were difficult and threatening. Facing similar experiences in their new home in southern Alberta was not reassuring.

Stress and emotional breakdowns

Sometimes the hard work, pressure, stress and the unfamiliarity of things became too much to cope with. Three of my interview participants discussed ways in which normal cultural expectations in the Netherlands were incompatible with their new location in southern Alberta. For instance, the immense value which the Dutch placed on household cleanliness was, in some ways, an inappropriate value for the realities of southern Alberta. Gerard Schalk recalled that his mother experienced intense emotions one day over ruined work and ingrained expectations that were too hard to meet in southern Alberta with the antiquated tools that she had. As usual since their arrival, she had washed dirty clothes for eleven people by hand in a tub with a washboard. Gerard explained:

And a Dutch woman is as clean as can be as far as that wash had to be just white like snow, you know. That's what you expect. That's what you've learned, you know. And so, she stands there by the hour, scrubbing on a scrub board, trying to get stuff clean, you know. And then hanging it out on the clothesline. [...] And, so then she had Dad's nice white shirt, Sunday shirt, you know, had it washed and so then she wanted to iron it, of course. And so, we've got these ironing irons and yeah, you've got to put them on the stove [to heat] and so. She'd used them before but that time she forgets to wipe them down. And so she goes on Dad's nice shirt and here she's got soot from the top of the stove on that nice white shirt and here she's got to go through the whole thing and wash it again. [GS, 10-11]

Gerard conceded that the frustration of ruined work that day brought on a flood of tears for his mother. The very first big Canadian purchase for the Schalk family was a used washing machine. As Gerard explained: "it just was impossible for Mom to keep that up" [GS, 11].

Johanna Guliker Grisnich's mother also found that the stresses of dislocation and ingrained Dutch expectations which could not be met in southern Alberta were sometimes just too much to handle emotionally. Gilbert Grisnich

explained that his mother-in-law was a very clean woman: “Everything had to be spick and span in the house.” But that was simply impossible when caring for a family of eleven people, who worked in the beet fields and lived together in a small, cramped house [GG&JGG, 50-51]. As Johanna’s daughter Edith Grinich explained, Johanna’s mother had a “nervous breakdown” [GG&JGG, 50]. Edith also discussed how Johanna’s mother insisted that her six sons have polished black shoes each Sunday for church. However, this expectation was also ill-suited to southern Alberta where the dust clung to those beautifully polished black shoes, ruining the mother’s expectations [GG&JGG, 50]. Although Gilbert and Johanna chose not to mention these stories, their daughter Edith felt that these stories were an important part of her grandmother’s experiences and challenges in southern Alberta. While Gilbert and Johanna seemed reluctant to engage in these stories and Johanna did not comment, Gilbert provided the above explanation which he felt was important. For some immigrants the deep-rooted expectations of cleanliness, combined with outdated tools for house work and the unfamiliar routines they required, added to the stress of feeling dislocated from the people and places they knew and loved.

As discussed earlier, the age of my participants at the time they immigrated influenced the types of experiences they had during their first years in southern Alberta. Ann Wielinga Bosker, who immigrated at the age of twelve and attended school in southern Alberta for three years, experienced another form of dislocation when she finished school and began working during her mid-teen years. Ann attended school in Iron Springs and then later in Raymond. When she was fifteen, her parents removed her from school and she began working as a housekeeper for the parents of the girls with whom she had been going to school. While she stated that “it was ok”, her tone of voice as well as other comments she made intimated that being downgraded from equal status with her classmates to being their parents’ maid was a humbling experience. She was also very quick to add how glad she was that her children were able to pursue higher education and obtain better jobs [PB&AWB, 6]. Historian Anne Van Arragon Hutten claims that for rural families in the Netherlands, especially before 1950, it was very common for parents to remove their children from school in their early teen years and send them to work. Hutten says that this home-country expectation often continued in Canada among immigrants from rural areas (Hutten 2001, 175). Ann Wielinga Bosker worked for her neighbours for one year and then found a job as a live-in housekeeper for a lawyer named Mr. Davidson in Lethbridge [PB&AWB, 6]. Moving to Lethbridge allowed her to distance herself from the awkwardness of working for her classmates’ parents. She was also able to earn a little more money: \$45 a month on top of room and board, though she still contributed to the family income [PB&AWB, 5]. Several others of the Dutch

immigrants I interviewed discussed how they or their sisters worked as housekeepers [GG&JGG, 26-27; GS, 15; AST, 8]. In fact, as historian Herman Ganzevoort attests, it was very common for Dutch immigrant young women to work as housekeepers (Ganzevoort 1988, 102). Yet, as Ann Wielinga Bosker's story illustrates, the experience sometimes created an unhappy sense of not belonging and highlighted the differences between "us" and "them".

"Us" and "them"

The differences between "us" (Dutch immigrants) and "them" (Canadians) were very pronounced during the immigrants' initial year or two in southern Alberta and it was the acceptance of family and Dutch friends at church which created a place of belonging for the postwar immigrants. As discussed above, the various Reformed churches of southern Alberta became a place of belonging for many Reformed immigrants. Outside of church, the immigrants viewed the people with whom they came in contact as "other". Alice Van Spronson Tams provided an example of feeling very different from the "other" – Canadian young people. Alice recalled that at her first job as a housekeeper in Lethbridge her employers felt that she needed some things for herself. So, they gave her some extra money to buy a swimming suit, exercise clothes, and gym shoes, and they provided her with a pass to the YMCA so that she could go out in the evening and "mingle with other young people" [AST, 9]. As Alice shared this story with me it was apparent that she deeply appreciated her employers' generosity. When I asked her about her activities at the YMCA her response dealt with issues of belonging. She said: "I did go, but I did not feel comfortable going because I was not used to that. But I liked swimming because that's what we did in the *MULO* [secondary school in the Netherlands]. [...] And gymnastic I did too. I did that, but mingle with other young people, I did not feel comfortable with" [AST, 9]. As a new immigrant, having only been in Canada for a few months at this time, Alice did not feel that she belonged with the Canadian young people – they were the "other" – and so she kept her distance. However, swimming and gymnastics were activities with which she had a connection from previous participation at her *MULO* school in the Netherlands. Here she was more comfortable and felt that she could maybe belong, at least with the activity. While Alice's use of the YMCA facilities was unusual for a new Dutch immigrant, it was connections like these which began the process of creating a new sense of belonging and a new identity for the immigrants.

Minimizing visible and audible differences was another way to lessen the gap between "us" and "them". While the Dutch immigrants were similar to most Canadians in terms of physical colouring ("whiteness"), there were other visible and audible differences. Even as the Dutch immigrants learned to speak English, their Dutch accents still set them apart. Historians Marilyn Barber and Murray

Watson point out in relation to postwar English immigrants to Canada that even though immigrants may be “invisible” in terms of physical appearance, they can still be “audible” as soon as they begin speaking (Barber & Watson 2015, 102). One visible and audible difference which one of my interview participants discussed involved the traditional Dutch wooden shoes. Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt explained that her family brought to southern Alberta all their wooden shoes from their home in Zeeland. They had intended to continue wearing them for work around the yard as they had done at home in the Netherlands. However, not only did the shoes stand out visibly, since Canadians did not wear wooden shoes, but the noise made by wooden shoes while walking was also unusual in Canada. Lena only wore her wooden shoes one time after immigrating. She explained:

Dad always sent me out to do errands if there was something to be done because he knew I’d come home with the right thing. But the first time I went to mail a letter, I went in my wooden shoes to the post office but, that only happened once because every step I took, somebody’d [demonstrated how people looked around and stared]. [...] I went up town with them once, that was the end of it. None of us kids wanted to do it. [CP&LWP, 55]

Once Lena realized how much she stood out from the Canadians around her while wearing her wooden shoes, she refused to wear them again. In this case, the desire to belong within the new culture ended Lena’s connection with traditional Dutch wooden shoes.

Creating new belonging

Once the families of the immigrants I interviewed were able to re-negotiate their contract with their sponsor or find new employment, they could make more decisions for themselves. Making decisions, such as where to live, increased their senses of belonging in southern Alberta. For example, the Wielinga family left their sponsor’s farm as soon as they were able. Having found employment with a dairy farmer near Raymond, a small town south of Lethbridge, they moved closer to his farm. A few years later, the Wielingas bought a farm in Ontario and moved there. However, Ann Wielinga Bosker and her older sister stayed in Lethbridge because they had jobs as housekeepers and their boyfriends lived in Lethbridge [PB&AWB, 2]. These two girls had come to feel that they belonged in Lethbridge with their Christian Reformed Church friends and boyfriends more than they belonged with their parents and siblings, especially when faced with the possibility of relocating again.

Other immigrants also chose to move to another part of the country. Similar to the Wielinga family, the Guliker family moved on in search of a better place to belong. Johanna Guliker Grisnich's family worked in the sugar beet fields for four years before moving to the Fraser Valley in British Columbia where they rented a dairy farm. The climate there was similar to the climate in the Netherlands and there was better access to conveniences such as running water in the home [GG&JGG, 53]. Johanna moved with her parents, promising to help her mother, who was not well, for one more year before she married Gilbert Grisnich and moved back to southern Alberta and the Grisnich dairy farm [GG&JGG, 7].⁹ Like Ann Wielinga, Johanna's sense of belonging was shifting from belonging with her immediate family to belonging with the man who would become her husband. For Ann and Johanna, the people with whom they belonged were much more important than the spaces in which they lived, although those spaces still played a part in their sense of belonging.

Decisions about what type of work to do also helped some immigrants increase their sense of belonging. The Schalk family worked in the beet fields for two years and then moved into the city of Lethbridge. The men and older daughters found employment wherever they were able. Gerard's sisters worked as housekeepers; his younger sister lived with an older lady in Lethbridge who needed help and a companion. Gerard and his father worked on road construction crews for a couple summers and in the winter they found other odd [GS, 14, 15-16]. Gerard explained that he was always able to find some work somewhere:

Always try and find something, yeah, yeah. You find a labour job. You work in a construction, until you find something better, you know. [...] Never say die, just... you got two good hands that the Lord's given you, use them. You know. And if there's nothing else to do, then you go and help some neighbour or a friend or so, you know, doing something or fixing something.
[GS, 18]

This positive attitude and stubborn determination helped many postwar Dutch immigrants continue when things became difficult. Even if the options were limited, Gerard chose the active option rather than the passive option. Gerard's ability to act and make decisions within Canadian society illustrates his increasing sense of belonging in his new country.

Several of my interview participants also discussed their increasing sense of belonging in southern Alberta in terms of social mobility. Once her family moved to Lethbridge, Alice Van Spronson Tams began working at Lee's Food Market, a Chinese grocery store in Lethbridge's north side, until she was offered

⁹ Gilbert and Johanna later moved back to the Fraser Valley where they raised their children.

a job at the Imperial Bank through her brother's new connections there [AST, 15]. Working at a bank was certainly a step up from housekeeping and unskilled labour at a grocery store. Another woman who secured a higher status job was Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt. She left school after four years, having finished grade nine, and found a job working for the Alberta provincial government. [CP&LWP, 23, 57]. Lena explained her good luck this way: "And then I got a job at the government. You had to write a civil service exam in those days, and me comes right out of school, there was lots of questions that was fresh to me. [...] So, then I got the job" [CP&LWP, 23]. The ability to obtain better-paying and higher-status jobs illustrates how these two women had become more connected to and more comfortable in Canadian society.

One last influential factor for all immigrant families was how they were treated by Canadians. Acceptance by Canadians went a long way in helping *all* postwar immigrants feel that they belonged. Alice Van Spronson Tams told me how thankful her family was for their sponsor, a Mennonite man named Henry Allart, who was extraordinarily generous to them. Many times, he went out of his way to help them. First, he allowed Alice to leave the family contract to work as a live-in housekeeper in Lethbridge during their first year in southern Alberta. Then, once the family's one-year contract was up, he encouraged Alice's father Joseph Van Spronson to look for work as a mechanic in Lethbridge, since this is where his training lay. Joseph took that advice and found a job the first day he began looking. The sponsor also found them a better house to live in that second year, still older, but a big improvement on the beet workers' house. Then, only a little while later, Allart found a suitable house in Lethbridge which he purchased on behalf of the Van Spronson family and then allowed Joseph Van Spronson to pay him back as he was able [AST, 13-15]. Henry Allart's generosity to the Van Spronsons, therefore, had a vast impact on the family's ability to improve their situation which in turn increased their connection to and sense of belonging in southern Alberta.

Conclusion

Through migration, the postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed left behind the familiar people, places and things which informed their sense of belonging and therefore their old identities. Belonging and identity had to be re-created in southern Alberta and this process deserves attention. The first place with which they began this re-creation was their new accommodation. Though at first it caused an isolating sense of dislocation, some of the immigrants I interviewed were able to turn that house into a home with some hard work and familiar objects which they brought with them. Those immigrants who migrated together with their families also found that they were not entirely dislocated. Their families as well as their church congregations became the axis around which their lives

revolved, and these relationships provided a sense of security, continuity and belonging which they all so deeply needed. All immigrants face the challenges of adapting to a new culture and many also have to learn a new language; the postwar Dutch who came to southern Alberta were no exception. Some of my interview participants also dealt with the additional challenges of unfamiliar work, methods, and tools. As the postwar Dutch immigrants I interviewed grew accustomed to life in southern Alberta, and as they gained the ability to act in meaningful ways by taking charge of their place, work, and relationships, their sense of belonging increased. Centering their new identities in their Dutch Reformed immigrant communities, the immigrants I interviewed moved outward from that place of familiarity and belonging to create their new lives in southern Alberta.

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Appendix 1: Interviews

- Peter Bosker and Ann Wielinga Bosker. Interview by Author. Lethbridge, AB. June 21, 2014. Interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author. [PB&AWB]
- Gilbert Grisnich and Johanna Guliker Grisnich. Interview by Author. Fort MacLeod, AB. June 23, 2014. Interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author. [GG&JGG]
- Gerard Schalk. Interview by Author. Cranbrook, BC. July 24, 2014. Interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author. [GS]
- Alice Van Spronson Tams. Interview by Author. Coaldale, AB. June 24, 2014. Interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author. [AST]
- Cornelius Van Pelt and Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt. Interview by Author. Lethbridge, AB. June 3, 2014, August 18, 2014. Interview recordings and transcripts in the possession of the author. [CP&LWP]
- Hugo Van Seters. Interview by Author. Lethbridge, AB. May 26, 2014. Interview recording and transcript in the possession of the author. [HS]

Appendix 2: Interviewees

Name	Year of birth	Place of birth	Family occupation	Education	Year of imm.	Age at imm.	Location in Alberta	Occupation in Alberta	Church membership
Peter Bosker	1929	Groningen	Farmer	Agricultural School	1949	20	Granum	Farmhand	CRC
Ann Wielinga Bosker	1935	Friesland	Marine Sailor/ Farmer	Grade 7 (Canada)	1948	12	Picture Butte	School	CRC
Gilbert Grisnich	(1932?)	Hoofddorp, S. Holland	Dairy Farmer	Grade 7 (Netherlands)	1948	16	Iron Springs	Beet Worker	Netherlands Reformed
Johanna Guliker Grisnich	1933	Leiden, S. Holland	Chicken Farmer	Private Sewing School	1951	17	Picture Butte	Beet Worker	Netherlands Reformed
Gerard Schalk	1933	Nieuw Vennep, S. Holland	Grocer / Chauffeur	Agricultural School	1951	18	Coaldale	Beet Worker	CRC
Alice Van Spronson Tams	1932	Schoonhoven, S. Holland	Military Mechanic	MULO School	1951	19	Coaldale	Beet Worker/ Housekeeper	Canadian Reformed
Cornelius Van Pelt	1933	Ridderkerk, S. Holland	Machinist / Motor Draftsman	Agricultural School	1953	19	Lethbridge	Farmer – Research Station	RCA
Lena Van Westenbrugge Van Pelt	(1941?)	Moriaans-Hoofd, Zeeland	Carpenter/ Contractor	Grade 9 (Canada)	1953	12	Lethbridge	School	RCA
Hugo Van Seters	1931	Dirksland, S. Holland	Miller	Upper Vocational School	1957	26	Lethbridge	Auto-body Repair	Canadian Reformed

About the author

Lisa L. Schalk recently completed her Master of Arts (History) degree from the University of Lethbridge (2016). Her research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship Award and the resulting thesis was entitled 'Re-creating Identities: Postwar Dutch Reformed Immigrants in Southern Alberta.' Her interests also include church history, history of the family, history of racial issues and many other areas of social history. Lisa is also a full-time mother of three busy preschool-age children.

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Appartenance et dislocation : les immigrants néerlandais après la guerre de 1940 dans le sud de l'Alberta (Canada)

Le présent article utilise les concepts de dislocation et d'appartenance pour examiner la vie quotidienne d'immigrants membres de l'Église réformée venus dans le sud de l'Alberta après la guerre de 1940. Il est basé sur des interviews que j'ai menées avec neuf personnes qui ont émigré jeunes des Pays-Bas vers le sud de l'Alberta à cette époque-là. Je me concentre sur les défis qu'ils ont affrontés dans leur nouvelle situation, certains étant communs à la plupart des immigrants (langue, culture), d'autres spécifiques à ce groupe (méthodes de travail, outils à utiliser). Mon but est d'augmenter la littérature existante sur ce groupe d'immigrants en discutant les manières dont ces défis ont influencé leur parcours vers la création d'un sens d'appartenance, une identité, dans leur nouveau contexte. À partir de là, je montre comment les immigrants que j'ai interviewés ont créé de nouveaux sens d'appartenance dans le sud de l'Alberta en centrant leurs identités d'abord dans leurs familles et leurs églises, puis en se tournant vers d'autres aspects de leur nouvelle vie.

Thuishoren in ontwrichting: Na-oorlogse Nederlandse immigranten in zuid-Alberta, Canada

Dit artikel gebruikt de concepten "ontwrichting" en "thuishoren" voor een onderzoek naar de dagelijkse levens van na-oorlogse Nederlands-Hervormde immigranten in het zuiden van Alberta. Het is gebaseerd op interviews die ik hield met negen personen die als jonge mensen van Nederland naar Alberta emigreerden in de periode meteen na de tweede wereldoorlog. Ik besteed aandacht aan de moeilijkheden die ze op hun pad

vonden in hun nieuwe situatie; sommige daarvan deelden ze met de meeste andere emigranten, zoals taal- en cultuurverschillen, en andere behoorden meer specifiek tot deze groep in deze locatie, zoals onbekende werkmethoden en gereedschappen. Mijn doel is om bij te dragen aan de bestaande literatuur over deze groep immigranten met een discussie van de manier waarop de juist de tegenslagen en moeilijkheden die ze moesten overwinnen van invloed waren op hun groeiende gevoel van thuishoren in hun nieuwe omgeving en het ontwikkelen van een nieuwe identiteit. Ik laat zien hoe de immigranten die ik interviewde nieuwe manieren vonden om zich thuis te voelen in zuid-Alberta door zich diep te wortelen in hun familie en kerkgemeenschappen en van daaruit nieuwe mogelijkheden te onderzoeken.

Some of the words: A visit to the old country

Grace Hols

Remember the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, I have a lot of pictures: black and white, some already fading. So I am trying to write the words, or at least a few of them. This process involves an intimate study of a photo, to the point where I take a magnifying glass to zoom in and capture details otherwise overlooked. The result of all this is a growing collection of vignettes that I am calling “Some of the words.”

A visit to the old country

In this photo we are far from home, or maybe we have finally come home, depending on your point of view. Five people, two older, two middle-aged, and one young person. It is about 1970.

The older couple is my Opoe and Opa, my mother’s parents, Hendrik and Annechien Lubbelinkhof. Opa, silver-haired and trim, is dressed in a jacket with white shirt and tie, and is seated comfortably in an armchair, large cigar between the index and middle finger of his left hand. Opoe, or Oma, as we also called her, is a storybook grandmother, slightly plump, in a belted, floral print dress, wearing Granny glasses and with her hair pulled back into a bun. She would have had that warm, close hug and a soft lap to sit on had I been around her when I was young enough to climb on laps.

Beside Opoe is my aunt Liny, Mom’s younger sister. She is tanned and pretty, dressed in a skirt and sleeveless top. Her handsome husband, Oom Henk, sits beside her. They are laughing. It’s hard to know what is so funny, but Liny is holding up what looks like a large lemon.

Between Opa and Opoe sits a young woman, looking a bit tentative, holding a small wine glass or a shot glass to her mouth. She is also tanned, short-haired and wearing a shirt and long white pants. That would be me, about 21.

I am in Holland, along with the rest of my family. We are on a six-week trip back to the Old Country. My Dad has just sold his farm (was forced to sell it really, to a large corporation that wanted his property in Houston on which to build a large lumber mill in the late 1960s, but that's another story) and decided to use part of that money to take us all back to the country he and Mom grew up in. We spent a couple of weeks in Holland, then travelled by Volkswagen van to Alicante, Spain, where Dad had rented a condo for us to spend another couple of weeks on the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea. We returned to Holland tanned and full of stories of how we packed nine of us into the van, slept at roadsides under coats and blankets, ate food prepared on makeshift camping gear, and lived to tell the tale. The family in Holland must have thought we were nuts. They rarely ventured anywhere; some of the family had never even been to Amsterdam, and they must have questioned our sanity when we thought nothing of driving days and nights to go to Spain.



Me with my aunt and uncle and grandparents in Holland, ca. 1970. From the author's personal collection.

But we did, eating croissants fresh from a bakery in France and washing them down with coffee heavily laced with milk, waiting for what seemed like hours at

border crossings in the hot July sun in a van with no air-conditioning, finding our way through places like Nice and northern Spain with limited knowledge of the language and maps. I was not one of the drivers and I remember reading James Michener's *Hawaii* as we drove; my way of coping with too many bodies and often too much noise in a small space.

Back to the photo. What was the occasion? Are we gathering for one last evening before we leave? The room we are in looks cozy, which is one word that applies to much of what we saw in Holland. In Dutch the word is *gezellig*, which doesn't translate well at all. It means cozy and warm and friendly and fun all at the same time. In Holland we found hospitable people, people with *time* for us, inviting us into homes with plants and flowers and lacy tablecloths and comfortable chairs in a circle, sheer curtains in the windows, a fireplace, and always much good food: coffee and cake and many bottles on the tables with gin, liqueurs and beer; plates of sausages and cheese. That Opa is smoking a large cigar speaks to a special occasion, our safe return from Spain and our imminent departure back to Canada, probably.

It was news to me that people in Holland had so much free time on their hands, so much time to visit and drink coffee and spend time with each other. In Canada it seemed to be all about work, and the work was never done. In Holland the homes were older and small but comfortable and completely finished. Everyone had electricity and indoor plumbing, which we in Canada had just recently acquired. Much of the family in Holland lived in row housing, so the backyards were small, with a shed maybe and a sitting area on a tiled square. There was a community garden at the end of the row where our aunt and uncle grew some beans and potatoes. Our backyard in Canada was large and unkempt with stinging nettles and dandelions, and grass that was cut only occasionally because there was so much farm work to do. We had a large vegetable plot to grow much of the food for our large family. Flowers were a luxury, although Mom always cultivated a few.

The broken postwar Holland we had heard so much about no longer existed. In the twenty years since Dad and Mom had left, there had been rapid recovery and repairs, but if my parents noticed, they did not dwell on it. They were happy in Canada and never regretted moving. Dad would not have been able to buy land and farm had he stayed in Holland.

Our unmarried uncle, Oom Arend, had moved out of his row house while we were in Holland, and we had made ourselves right at home in it, all nine of us. I remember he had even planted some vegetables for us to use while we were there. Sometimes a few of us were invited to go across the street to eat our warm noon meal at Oma's, and I remember that as a very special thing. She was warm and grandmotherly and a good cook.

In those days, vendors still went door-to-door in Holland: the baker, the butcher, the fruit truck and the milkman. We soon learned to listen for the ice-cream wagon and feasted on Holland's very fine dairy products. In the kitchen of our uncle's house was a large stone sink and counter, cold and hard, and the hot water came from a gas heater called a geyser, an ingenious device perched over the kitchen sink that heated water as you needed it, which seemed to make more sense than the way we heated and stored large quantities of hot water in Canada. I also noticed how the Dutch travelled in tiny cars that rarely contained only one person; already at that time (early 1970s) car-pooling was very common.

This photo is special to me because I am seated between my grandparents. It is one of the few times that I was able to do that, since I was only a year old when I left and really never got to know them very well.

An educator's return to Belgium

Christa Van Daele

This essay assesses the perspective shifts, struggles, and insights arising in a slowly consolidating immigrant identity. I adopt as a springboard for memory my visit to two public exhibits in Belgium in late 2015. In the form of a series of short numbered reflections, I offer a multiple lens approach to the question of identity formation, emphasizing adult development themes of continuity, discontinuity, and change. What are some of the elusive identifications inherent in such a journey? How is meaning constructed, later in midlife, as earlier immigrant experiences are tested, reframed, and reconsidered? How do I construe the post-war experiences of my immigrant parents? Working directly with Ontario's immigrants as an adult educator assists me in clarifying my own cultural role in the hands-on work of settlement, consolidating the unvoiced meanings of life choices in my own sphere while assisting others in soul-nourishing work. The research journey continues in the wider world of scholarship and writing. New friends and colleagues form part of a community for exploring collective memory for that which is unspoken and undocumented in individual life stories. It is my intention to continue to investigate, despite language barriers, the conditions and circumstances of the Jewish people during and after World War II in Belgium.

Key terms: Immigrant identity; post-WW II immigrant family life; adult education approaches in Ontario settlement work; storytelling as inclusive social practice; Red Star Museum, Antwerp; Dossin Kazerne, Mechelen; Holocaust studies in Belgium.

*There was a great pond between the two, across which ships
plied, without ceasing, back and forth. The waves splashed
between the two worlds and at times just thoughts alone would
pass from the one land to the other.*
Cyriel Buysse, Flemish writer, 1931
(cited in Caremans et al 2013, 3)

1

The Scheldt River. Antwerp. Great gusting blasts of air, huge liners stretched across miles of quays, gulls wheeling and calling in high circles – everything one might expect if one were accustomed to a giant, world famous harbour, the whole stretch of the strategic drama Churchill wanted so much to protect for the Allies in the closing chapters of World War II. Our voices crisscross each other, hoarse and excited, as we shouted to make each other heard on a late September day, sorting out our bearings in the rough weather. It was my second day in Antwerp.

A major bike path lay parallel to the harbour. We had pedaled in the rain to the Red Star Line Museum, a newly designed structure right on the harbour itself. The locals were proud of it, especially the younger people we met here and there, those with an interest in contemporary design; they wanted us to see a whole lot more on our journey of inquiry than Rubens, they told us. It had just opened, they said.

“Go there,” a young architect named Frederick had emphasized in a chance meeting during a train ride to Ghent. He was obviously proud of the building, and had extolled its merits to us, its sweepingly dramatic location abreast of the Scheldt. The immigration themes were huge there, he added; I would find much to be delighted in. It was not about art, but about stories. I had told him that my husband and I were Canadian citizens, and that my husband was a dual Canadian-American, but I had been born in Antwerp in 1950.

“I want to see everything I can,” I explained. “I’m here for two months. The homeland,” I added quickly, in case he was too young to understand. “The return.” He nodded, smiling. Gracious. He was not too young to understand. He was born and raised there too, he said, in Antwerp; he warmly welcomed me to Belgium as we exchanged our last sentences before waving goodbye. Frederick’s brief gesture of hospitality was to be repeated many times in my two-month journey. His phrasing echoed that of the Flemish customs agent in Brussels, who had also surprised me in an oppressively hot August day lineup by unexpectedly pausing, then choosing to weigh aloud a few words in thick Flemish-accented English from my dark blue Canadian passport. “Mortsel, Province of Antwerp,” he said, looking

up to make smiling eye contact. “You were born here. Welcome back to Belgium, Christa Van Daele.”

Intoxicated with the charms of the rugged Blue Bike system – impressively sturdy rented bicycles that we nudged up slowly on a long ramp from the depths of Antwerp’s elegant railway station – we figured the bikes would work well to bring us to the destination of the new Red Star Line Museum. We were glad to take the tip from Frederick despite the wild harbour weather. An immigrant myself, and a person who had spent much of her adult life in Central Ontario gathering satisfying immigrant family and vocational stories from the hundreds of recently arrived new Canadians I had collaborated with or assisted in my life, I was gripped with intense emotion, a buoyant feeling of hyper concentration, as I entered the light filled building.

Everywhere I looked – down the corridors and around the spare corners of the new structure – there were large images and texts of immigrants from all over Europe arriving with valises and bags, preparing to leave the docks for the journey from Antwerp. The Red Star Line had operated since 1872, bringing passengers one way to Canada and America, and cargo back to Antwerp, with passenger destinations to New York, Philadelphia, and Halifax. It had closed in 1934. The Holland America line had picked up the assets of the company. Before 1934, two million people had passed through the three warehouses on the *Rijnkaai* that I was standing in today. I was smitten, not just by the banks of hundreds of oral and videotaped stories available on every keyboard and video installation, but by the generous aesthetic vision that tied all this together in a spirited whole.

There was much thinking to do in the next few months. Thinking, and travelling. There were cousins, nieces and nephews, and an elderly aunt to meet – my father’s only remaining sibling. There were the art treasures of the Low Countries to gaze at and understand, the cathedrals and dozens of beguinages to linger in. After a great many years – over five decades, in fact – I had returned to Belgium in late 2015, a year of determined pilgrimage, energetically focused research interests, and strengthened resolve. The extent to which it was also a time of *Kairos* – an opportune and unlikely time for action in a life – has settled more clearly in my own understanding a few months after my return. My own immigration story, and that of my family’s, came flooding back.



Figure 1. Little refugee girl with cat. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

2

I already knew, because I had enrolled in sociology courses in my early years at university in Canada, that the year we emigrated – 1957 – was a peak immigration year for Europeans coming to North America. For many, including my parents, the distress caused by the Cold War was the precipitating factor that overcame the many human hesitations about emigrating. Hungary had been invaded in 1956; the writing, both my parents felt, was clearly on the wall. Another world war was not to be endured. A girl from East Germany floats like a song in my own child memory in this part of the story. She was a refugee child that I often played with in Antwerp, one of my last friends in Belgium, who was sheltered by the altruistically minded Van Dyck family, our close friends. Then, as now, migrants were crossing borders; then, as now, parents sent their children to safer countries. The Van Dycks pulled out a picture of her immediately when I spoke of these memories in late 2015. Good, I thought; I had not imagined this favourite friend.

So began my journey back in time. Even back in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Van Dyck parents were evidently committed to photographs of quality. Handling the precious photographs of two joined family lives in my left hand, and a coffee cup in my right, I was silent, caught in an immense flood of sadness and joy, the rich impressions of our closely linked early days with this nurturing family. The photographs of another life, another time, were overwhelming – so much affection, support, and laughter in those photographs. As a final gesture, without a word, they handed me a postcard with a photograph of the *Groote Beer*, the ship by which we had crossed the Atlantic.

“For you,” the ninety-three year old Jeff Van Dyck said, squinting through thick glasses as he handed it to me. There was my young mother’s handwriting on the back, as she said goodbye in a few lines of ink to this affectionate family for the last time. My own name was written under hers, along with that of my brother Joris and my sister Erna. The card was posted from the Rotterdam docks. I was stunned, unaware that such a picture existed.



Figure 2. Grooten Beer boat. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

3

Chatham, Ontario. Population: 30,000. Another world. The floors of our apartment swayed under our feet as we entered the simple rental my father had furnished for us in advance of our arrival. A patterned curtain separated the kitchen from the living room. Arriving in late September on the midnight train that had brought my mother Ilse, my sister Erna, my brother Joris, and me from the Holland America docks in Quebec City, I can declare that it was distinctly unsettling for us all to have our first glimpse of Chatham. Windblown, tumbledown, and loosely pieced together in what looked to us like makeshift building materials, the *Can. J. of Netherlandic Studies/Rev. can. d'études néerlandaises* 37.1 (2016): 91-116

first appearance of the assembly of streets and houses was a bit of a mystery as we slowly took it in. We found our footing together in the daylight, walking through the town. We held hands for dear life, slowly inspecting the surroundings.



Figure 3. Family portrait with two parents and three children. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

“Why Chatham?” we asked our parents, when we were more grown up. It still seems from today’s perspective a somewhat pointless sort of start for our family in the hypothetically fascinating map of a majestically proportioned nation full of land mass, fresh water, and unbelievable distances. The chained up dogs, the shabby back yards, the archaic Protestant-Catholic tensions in the Orange Parades of the 1950s that our Scottish downstairs landlord was a participant in annually – all of this seems to come from a dispiriting and thin memory book, during those first weeks and months of 1957.

It was the usual reason: my parents knew someone there. His name was Van Merbergen. We were not close friends with the Van Merbergen family; they were the casual acquaintance of another acquaintance around Antwerp.

Later, I learned that Chatham had a rich history of its own as an enormously significant site for Black settlement in Ontario. But we knew nothing of this as children. At the time, the official story shared with us was that our parents had received small snippets of information about jobs and wages in Chatham from this former acquaintance. Yet, the mailed envelope of critical labour market information that my father had been patiently waiting for had arrived at a different unit in our townhouse in the Antwerp post-war suburbs. My father stated that he never received the exact hands-on employment information he needed, making the Ontario town and its mixed employment possibilities even more a matter of fate rather than luck.

That's how the story started. The Red Star Line Museum's atmosphere of democratic multimedia stories, a direct invitation on each computer terminal for each visitor to leave behind a narrative at the site of the museum, was irresistible. At least, I found it so.

4

Were we actually Flemish? What were we, in fact? My mother, in the family's migration story, was neither French speaking from southern Belgium nor Flemish herself. She was a highly urban person, a German post-war immigrant to Belgium from the bombed city of Hanover. The Belgian government had repatriated all Belgians in Germany in 1946; my father and mother had met in Germany in 1944. She learned Flemish quickly and well, undertaking immediate responsibility as an earnest young eighteen-year-old for learning the literature of a country. I recall that she could quote the poetry of Guido Gezelle to us even years later, in Canada. My older sister was born in 1947, when my mother was only twenty.

My father, born in Antwerp and a clear-minded man today at 94 years of age, was a quietly understated tradesperson, an automobile mechanic who had directly benefitted from the war in ways that I grasped only more recently, while interviewing him in his advanced old age. Before the Depression, his father had worked as a cutter in the diamond business – a trade typical in Antwerp. In the 1930s, when small specks of diamond shards went missing on the linoleum floor during his father's grinding work, my father and his siblings crawled around under the table and around the baseboards to look for them. Diamond cutting and polishing was a trade commonly done by working people from their own home in the Antwerp area, right in the family's kitchen. His brothers, like him, apprenticed and became solid European tradesmen. One was a baker who moved to the Bronx in New York, and the other, the oldest, was an electrician who was openly unhappy with the decision of his two younger brothers to leave.

Although my blue-collar father was a multi-lingual person with exceptional language skills, beautiful musical talents, and a capacity to build and design anything, he was also completely modest about his many gifts. A self-educated person who subscribed diligently each month to small booklets of Pelman self-improvement courses, he considered himself and his destiny completely ordinary. It was my mother's striving background and temperament that hugely dominated family life after our arrival in 1957. Impulsive, intelligent, and physically beautiful, her English was softly nuanced and interesting, shaped with excellent syntax and low tones, carrying the slightly British accent that her private school teachers in Germany had imparted to her. With the ambiguous accent and dark hair, no one in Canada quite knew my mother was German; she looked French, possibly Eastern European.

This ambiguity was a distinct advantage for our family since a number of the Canadians we met in Chatham, I discovered, felt none too friendly about Germans in the 1950s. "DP" (DisplacedPerson) was a common slur. Her capacity to make friends, her driven class aspirations, and a lifelong ambition to live among beautiful things and surroundings set the tone for our family culture in our peculiar little Southwestern Ontario destination. There was not a living soul in our working class Chatham neighbourhood who bought the austere kind of Scandinavian furniture or the tasteful European artwork on the walls that my up-to-date mother favoured. Copper, lace, Delft windmills, and similar sentimental knickknacks from the Low Countries were discouraged in favour of things modern, spare, and international in tone. Other people in the houses around us had televisions on all day; we waited years to get one – a tiny black and white set at that.

"We are a special family," I was told, often and pointedly. "We are not ordinary." The meaning of this loaded wording of pathos and puff was, I understood later, that the other scrabbling, working class families – the immigrants from Italy, Portugal, and Ireland all around us in the 1950s – were certainly quite ordinary. My parents had met in a bomb shelter in Germany, and my technically-trained father – a Belgian who was directed with thousands of others to join the German labour force in 1942 – had become increasingly useful in every practical hardship that faced the bombed and homeless young woman of Hanover who was to become my mother. "The war" became the deeply imprinted phrase that utterly dominated every thread of belief in the emerging mythic fabric of our origin story.

"The war" was the reason, we learned, for many things, including the marriage, when it fell apart. It had, for one thing, thwarted my mother's ambitions to attain a more genteel life with a husband of the more educated classes. "The

war” was the reason that both of my parents prized chocolate and a good cup of coffee. “The war” was, above all, the reason that silences were observed. It was, after all, the reason we had come to Canada. No one discussed politics at home, or history, or Jews, including the Eichmann trials when they were aired on our tiny black and white television in 1964. These were forbidden subjects. Somehow, somewhere, my past was always about Germany – its tragedies and its bombs, its secrets and deep places of shame.

5

Nevertheless, the legacy of the German music and literature I was raised on was very fine. In Chatham, and later in London, Ontario, we sang German songs, heard my mother recite German poems, and cite Goethe, Rilke, Schiller, and Morgenstern at the drop of a hat; she would flip through poetry books for quick reference checks when she was inspired by the urge to offer something nourishing in the quotidian course of our lives. As a young girl who loved poetry and literature, they were the German traditions I actually respected. Strauss and Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, waltzing around together on Sunday mornings to the music, in the better times – these were standard expressive fare in our family. And they were certainly not all about snobbery. Far from it. These refinements were indeed my mother’s genuinely revered traditions. As we all grew older and we realized how flat out despairing she often was, I also appreciated that such traditions, along with the upper middle class cultured strivings that came with them, had kept my mother bolted together throughout World War II. These customs secured her when bombs finished off the elite Hanover school she attended. She would come to school finding that classmates had perished, that a favourite teacher was gone forever. I came to understand as I grew older that her passion for poetry and music had emerged as a potent healing force in her life among the many losses.

Decades later, sifting more recently through sources and articles authored by the wave of younger scholars investigating the rich Black history traditions of this town, I was to conclude that the obscure Chatham we had randomly landed within was a place of rich narrative importance that might stimulate any former resident with an interest in ethnic identities. Only superficial scraps of this knowledge were commonly known to European newcomers at the time, since Chatham had not written those stories yet, except for the Underground Railroad legends. We all sensed that there was a clear segregation in our immediate neighbourhood, with Black people living just a few blocks away from us. I knew, for instance, that Sterling Park divided the neighbourhoods and the public swimming pools. For us, a few blocks away, there was merely the economic reality

of immigrant life in a small town rural area. That reality for my parents consisted of mostly shift work and low wages. Our living conditions were basic.

We looked out on meager back yards with sagging, tacked together fences; we listened at night to chained unhappy dogs that were kept outside all winter. There was the search for apartments where three growing children could be marginally tolerated by the inevitable lonely landlord downstairs. A single wage life for a family of five, our parents had learned with chagrin, was not viable. To her credit, my mother gamely learned to work long hours, her hands soaked in hot water in a tomato canning factory in nearby Tilsonberg. She cleaned stained glass windows and polished up the pews of what we called the Protestant Church. She learned to scrub floors of private wealthy homes as a cleaning lady, served grilled cheese sandwiches at a place called Martin's, and eventually became a nurse's aide in a Catholic hospital. Observing her swift skills of observation in the role of an untrained nurse's aide, the nuns of the hospital in Chatham took her aside for a private vocational chat. "Go to a bigger city," they said. "Your children can go to university there."

The nuns were perceptive. She was smart, exceptionally good looking, and in excellent health. In her mid-thirties by then, she was not too old to keep training and learning, even in that time. Her kids were smart. The sisters encouraged her to pursue a year of government-sponsored training in London, Ontario, in practical nursing. Ontario needed nurses, the nuns explained. The dignity of this new achievement, which she prized, boosted her attachments with other dedicated and well trained women, some of whom were disciplined nursing superiors. Respected for her work ethic and fast thinking by these admirable head nurses of Chatham, themselves mostly working class or farm girls who had struggled to get ahead, she learned a great deal. They remained her friends, mentors, and soulmates for the rest of her life. As such, the vocational step she took eventually enhanced all our lives.

Still, given her depressive temperament and her earlier experiences as an orphan in Germany, over time the nursing roles she chose on oncology floors and renal units were especially brutal. Throughout these years, she was often humiliated by the persistent status hierarchy of the medical world, feeling both superior and inferior to most people that she met. She saw herself as a doctor's wife, not the spouse of a shift-working mechanic, a registered nurse with a respected university degree, not a practical nurse with a practical certificate taking orders. This was a special kind of paradoxical anguish throughout her life. It is fair to declare that she also achieved, in the course of her long life, some reasonably perceptive observations about what she was learning through the sometimes chaotic and shifting gamut of her humbling roles in Canada. These she would

sometimes write down, sharing her stories in letters home, or in long earnest talks with us at the kitchen table, marked by lots of pauses and the persistently dark colours of melancholy and loss. I taped some of her stories in 1984, in her last five years of working life, in my own graduate training in vocational counselling at the University of Toronto.

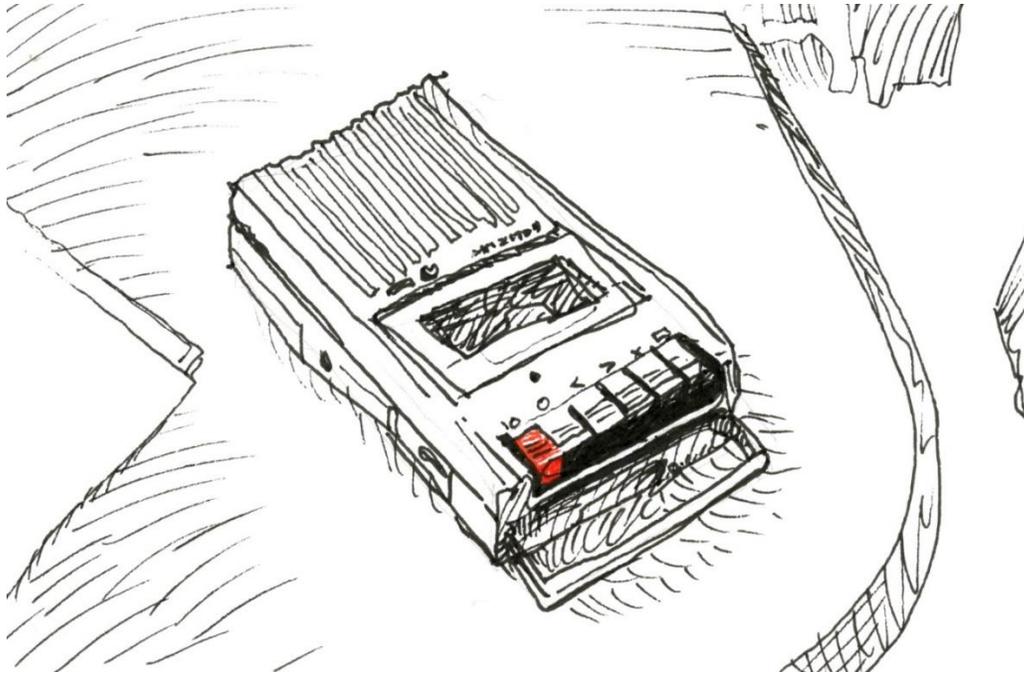


Figure 4. Retro tape recorder with red button. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

6

On the more buoyant side of the early years, it must be explained that there was a rollicking good and highly forgiving immigrant culture in Chatham, at least for our lucky Catholic children schooled by the nuns. On St. Patrick's Day, our parish staged major celebrations in the church hall. I was beside myself with excitement. I wore a white dress and a Kelly green sash, lined up with twenty other excited kids in grade threes, and fervently sang "Over in Killarney". My father donned a dashing Scottish outfit for playing clarinet with the Kiltie band. We heard bagpipes for the first time, filled with awe as our Belgian father paraded before us on the main street in a skirt, in smartly kilted Scottish company. We were Irish, Scottish, German – Flemish last. Diligently specializing in all things Scottish, I pretended I was Scottish most of my waking hours. This involved a keen memory for Scottish

ballads, Robbie Burns' verses, improvised sidewalk Highland Fling dancing that I longed to study formally, and weepy Irish songs of every kind. Thus equipped with my piercingly romantic Scottish persona, I entered small town cultural life with the rest of my family in a wildly democratic patchwork of eclectic opportunity. The remembered microcosm of Chatham in this account is distilled even more potently in the brightened fishbowl culture of the Catholic parish of St Joseph's Church, where a steady seasonal brew of any of these ingredients could be enacted with other aspiring entertainers in the church hall.

Exposed in these easygoing ways to the inclusive safety net of a small town, we lived a reasonably decent life in the available civic organizations of Chatham. There was a YMCA, a drama club, and a Zonta club that brought in the gifted singer of spirituals, Marian Anderson, from across the Michigan border. But my little brother Joris, the youngest child, wore unusually thick glasses and a perpetually worried, intense expression; he was bullied and beaten in the rougher public school setting that he was placed in as a five year old. He wandered to school by himself, and sometimes got lost in Chatham's back streets without a word of English.

Safe from bullies and commended for our ability to master English quickly, my sister and I lived out those years in the more protected circle of our Catholic school atmosphere. The Ursuline Sisters of Chatham, established in 1847, and later the Sisters of St. Joseph in London, did a good job of educating the children of immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s. When, in 2014, I made a study retreat with a group of alert Benedictine nuns in their eighties and nineties in a monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania, I realized that this group of engaging elderly women was the exact parallel cohort of the teaching nuns who had educated me and my sister so well. We felt guilty, later, about our easy transition into this cohesive Catholic school culture that we had the great fortune to land within, one that bridged logically back to our equally positive experiences in the schools of Belgium. Joris as a small child had no such congenial schooling experience. From the start, he learned to hate school fiercely and chronically, fighting back against small town prejudices from the very beginning.

In all of this mix, there was one truly surprising thing. None of us had actually met many Belgians, not even the tobacco belt Belgians who were reasonably prosperous, and who lived just down the road from us in Delhi, Ontario. These Belgians had their own banquet hall, their own festivities. Their social lives and clubs were solidly established, as I learned while absorbing Joan Magee's study of Belgians in Ontario. But there was one farm family that I had the good fortune to meet through the offices of the local priest at St. Joseph's. They were and are the only Belgians I was ever to meet in Canada, a remarkable fact

itself. The Denys were a Flemish farm family of 12 children who grew beets, tomatoes, and beans around the outskirts of Chatham. For a time, they made me feel that I belonged to a cozy Belgian tribe of my own. I stayed with this farm family every summer for a few years, helping out in the fields, gathering the eggs that were eaten daily, swimming in the Thames with the rest of the youngest children, all of whom had a role in the farm's daily life. These were happy days. Predictably, farming people and enameled blue medals of the Virgin Mary pinned on children's underwear did not go over well with my mother. Raised and schooled in cities, she wondered aloud why the parish priest would bother to introduce us to a Flemish speaking farm family whose daily life consisted of the daily rosary after supper, ten hours of work each day, and piles of ironing and sewing for the oldest girls on top of that.

It was hard to know how to answer such questions. I passionately loved the Denys family. My family's story always dissolved back into a black hole of perplexing questions, bringing perpetual doubt into the endless question of who we were. As I grew older, our discussions about the world around us plunged us into complexity and confusion as we navigated the reality of the social classes, the various trial and error occupations of my parents, and the anxious unstated concerns for our own higher education. At one point, an especially well off Chatham family (a rich family, as we referred to them) commenting on my grasp of Canadian diction, seriously offered to adopt me in a casual conversation with my parents at an outdoor public event. Such were the startling turns of conversation in Chatham in an immigrant family's life in the 1950s. Comfortable identifications with one group or another, one family or another, one place of belief or another, were pushed away. A sturdy footing on any ground was hard to find. There were always more questions than answers, more uneasy juxtapositions than consoling convergences.

7

Where did we belong in the society of Chatham? When we met educated people, my mother's anguish flooded her. "My husband is only a mechanic," she would typically say, glancing painfully down and sideways, when introduced to any established Canadian citizen of the educated classes for the first time. My father's occupation, as long as I can remember, was thus to be publicly offered to whoever we met as a source of family shame. We found this excruciating. My father, wholly at peace with his working class origins, did not complain about work shifts in the Chatham garage, though it took time to earn a reasonable pay check. Not a big man, polite and highly regulated in his work life, he quietly read books by Erich Fromm in his mechanic's uniform in the paid half hour for lunch, ignoring the

taunting that these sissy foreigner habits attracted in the local garage. Throughout his life, he spoke four languages fluently, could sing folk tunes in Russian, and happily learned a fifth, Spanish, when he retired in his sixties to correspond with a family in Central America.

The secular and material world stampeded in on us, as did the whole settlement process. We were teenagers when we completely lost our accents, bought a modest suburban bungalow, and replaced my parents' simple bicycles with an antiquated Morris Oxford car that my father bought for next to nothing. With all this also came the better pay of solid unionized jobs. All this time, so much was changing in the world outside, and we with it. We discussed clearly modern works at home, like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Bertrand Russell's *Why I am Not a Christian*. My mother bought me stacks of books by John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway and Pearl Buck as I grew older. Her Friday night pay check went to groceries and books. We read works in translation and she would speak to me of Mauriac and Somerset Maugham. More than anything – more than most immigrant families I knew – our whole family was encouraged to speak English, all the time, to guarantee our success in school. My mother herself read fiction in three languages, and mastered English well, though her own spelling mistakes in English deeply embarrassed her all her life. She wrote long letters home to both Belgium and Germany, in Flemish and German, at all hours of the night.

For me, sadly, the languages of German and Flemish started to slip away. Getting married at a young age and going to university was the obvious fast exit train out of the house. *Being Canadian* and *being ordinary* was, simply stated, the burning organizing principle in my life – looking and talking exactly like everyone else, going to summer camps, being a student council leader, sewing my own clothes in the styles we could not afford. To win over an acceptable Canadian boyfriend with a neat and tidy WASP last name who I might marry was a kind of stylish finishing package, a necessary culmination, of all this effort. It was a poorly realized instinct, as though I were blindly operating from one quarter of my brain. I may say that it was all I was capable of at the time, in the distressing puzzle of our all our fragmented lives together.

I was nineteen starting university. I married at twenty, the only married scholarship student in a large undergraduate class of students of English language and literature. I changed my last name for several years or so, and then, remorseful about what I had done, changed it back to my Flemish surname in one defiant move. Without particular irony, I took a cleaning lady's job in a Catholic hospital in the summers for the remarkably better than average union pay, financing my first and second year of university. Although a gold medal in English capped off my first degree, the vocational path ahead trailed off in a tight

swaddling of angst and apprehension. There were no women professors in the department of English to take even a sliver of kindly interest in my future – literally no one. The male professors were mostly breaking up marriages of their own or climbing their own career ladders, totally disengaged from student life outside the classroom. The first short story I wrote, *The Dossier*, was an immigrant story published in a national magazine. It drew praise from established writers. I couldn't leave the family story alone.

8

Generally, when people asked me in my own middle age how long it took my family to assimilate, I say “twenty-five years minimally, possibly more.” I am not sure that I can furnish a numbered list of objective criteria for this statement. I have given it plenty of thought over the years, with distinct markers freshly occurring to me, then evaporating just as rapidly through an unsteady vessel upon second thought. The reason is that any attempted answer of this kind, as any thoughtful person knows, is somewhat more complex than it looks, shifting fluidly over time in the dynamic process of living itself, as it is actively revisited and reshaped in memory over a lifetime. I know that even into my own mid-thirties, when I pursued a masters and then a doctorate in education and vocational counselling at the University of Toronto, I would suddenly surprise myself in informal class introductions by describing myself to fellow graduate students as an immigrant.

I would ask – where was my voice, my experience, my life, reflected in what I read? The question was charged with anger, turbulence, even a pit of nameless fear. My everyday dealings in the feminist movement at that time, experienced through publishing circles in Toronto in the late 1970s, certainly fanned such questions in openly charged terms. Mistrust and factional disputes were common in a number of branches of the women's movement. It is a good thing I pursued so many years of schooling and inquiry, discovering the uniquely nurturing greenhouse environment of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where a flourishing form of peer mentoring and collaboration was humanely possible in an intellectually stimulating yet far less polemical environment. My fellow students in adult education and vocational psychology in the late 1980s increasingly came from all over the world. They were interested in engaged inquiry and the acquisition of useful practitioner tools around building community bridges, not ideological warfare.

This was as refreshing to me as it was heartening. In this form of peaceful study, life had thrown me something truly remarkable, in both the feeling and thinking dimensions of experience. I had miraculously landed in a generative

incubator of the “three Ds” – diversity, dialogue, decency. A dashing Israeli friend and a veteran teacher and counselling specialist with an Italian immigrant background prepared me for my 1990 thesis defense, a solemn ritual of our own devising that brought to a decisive end our two-year-long thesis-writing group. I was just turning forty. With such sterling allies, I started to grasp more clearly how to cultivate a flourishing garden, sustain my intellectual life with a toddler and husband at home, and prepare to defend at the same time. Questions settled, leading to broader frameworks, perspective shifts, and more imaginatively posed questions. Over time, in this journey of steps, I realized that the *Where is my voice?* concerns I had apprehensively posed with a trapped sense of painful solitude during the 1970s were the utterly familiar questions that every uprooted immigrant asks, although today those asking it are richly posing it from every ethnicity and culture in the world.

My Israeli friend and Italian counsellor mentor soon after wrapped up their respective journeys, scattering with a sense of accomplishment into the communities of the world with their skills. We said our goodbyes. I moved from Toronto to Southwestern Ontario with my husband and child. Over the years, with the humanizing practices and theories of an applied social science knowledge base, I acquired hands-on skills in adult education group work, the design of programs for diverse newcomers, and vocational counselling for those from all walks of life. I also came to accept, as every educated person must, that the dilemmas within were fundamentally existential as well as political and cultural. Recognition would come if I worked hard, but first, as I was painfully learning, I had to find a way to recognize myself. In other words, it was up to me to create that voice and that reflected experience in whatever way I could. A sense of intellectual and personal maturation had finally started to settle, a centre from which I could be practically useful to others.

As I started to work more and more directly with immigrants myself, first with women in Toronto, then with persons of all backgrounds and ethnicities in the Southwestern Ontario community of Kitchener-Waterloo, a desirable and fast growing urban target of secondary settlement trends – satisfactions grew. In time, I was fortunate to land in a community development project that was utterly unique that brought both imaginative and humble angles to the business of welcoming newcomers. It was utterly without resort to bureaucratic thinking and the high handed attitudes of typical officialdom. Instead, the bottom-up practices of The Working Centre relied on integrating ethical concerns with community well-being, relying, as founders Joe and Stephanie Mancini put it, “on the agency of individuals and groups to develop cultural supports”.

There, and elsewhere in the community, was the growing panorama of life stories that resonated, threaded together, and made fascinating interlocking patterns – yet each one remained singular. I heard hundreds and thousands of variations on my parents' stories. They were often people who would never work again in their original profession or trade – people who felt downwardly mobile, with good reason – people rejected by employers for their accents, unclear educational qualifications, and skin colour – people who were close to despair, having brought urgent troubles with them from the old country, whether of an economic or psychological nature.

With others working in the field all over Ontario, we started to investigate at the more macroscopic level structural changes that were needed, changes in the opportunity structures and policies in educational institutions, changes in employer practices and beliefs. Such advocacy challenges are exhilarating and endless in this form of work, as are mature spiritual opportunities to truly meet the Other. Questions of identity – how one is the same, how one changes in time – constitute the common clay that shapes the everyday conversations of linked human interests among interesting colleagues. Such work is steadying. I have found in these encounters with both co-workers and immigrants that human intimacy is never so great as in that first crucial point of contact that a faithful settlement worker can offer in a setting which inspires friendship and respect for the migrant.

And so, in the end, it was a good thing, an enormously gratifying thing, these past 25 years, to find my own story repeated in every fluid variation, language, and cultural background in this world. This common narrative repeated itself in the burgeoning populations of immigrants that poured through the world of Ontario settlement agencies, community college settings, and preparatory bridging programs to universities. Who would have thought, in 1957, that my life purpose would evolve to hearing the immigration stories of others, to pull out the themes of continuity, mourn the losses and witness the triumphs?

Over the years, to consolidate this insight further, I was to meet children of immigrants precisely in my own age cohort who, like me, had similarly flourished in this emerging line of work in community settlement projects across Ontario. These observations, based on interview data with fifty employment and settlement counsellors, were a happy byproduct of a practical research report for the Association of Ontario Help Centres, sharing the best practices that a generation of settlement workers and leaders in settlement work had raced to acquire. The flood of highly skilled internationally-trained professionals coming to Canada at the turn of this century were no longer the bricklayers, mechanics, factory workers, and labourers of my parents' generation. They were highly-

trained professionals with the hopes and dreams of persons who hoped to land similar professional work in Canada. New tools and practices were urgently needed. The report proposed a spectrum of helpful approaches. But one thing was certain in my mind: things had come full circle. It was the children of immigrants who were typically jumping in to help.

9

With the death of my German mother in 2012, and challenged by a serious life illness of my own, an awakened resolve to explore my Belgian roots took hold inside me. An era had ended. There was a freedom in my determined notion to turn up those Flemish stones at last. I knew surprisingly little about the complexities of present day Belgian culture – the politics of Belgium, its struggles, its fine art, its literature, its contradictions. I was caught, as many immigrants must certainly be, in a clumsy time warp, out of step with ordinary realities. My mental constructs about the culture I had left behind were splintered. At nearly ninety-five years of age, my Belgian father, twice widowed, once by my mother and once by his second wife, communicated his openness to reviewing the life and culture of Belgium as he understood it – the facts of his own family life. His sharp memory and his desire to bridge our two worlds served both of us well.

Again, as I was reviewing my own transitions and recovering from illness, life threw me a complicated surprise. Suzanne Vromen's *The Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, published in 2008, had emerged in North America about the situation of Jewish children in the Belgium of World War II. Suzanne Vromen's book, and a second by Marion Schreiber, *The twentieth train*, had turned up on the shelves of my local library, astonishing me to the point where I was literally glued to the library chair on a hot summer's day. These two books would not let go once I read them. No one in my family had breathed a single word about the Jewish people in Belgium, as though they simply had not existed.

Two years later, during my stay in Belgium of 2015, I learned that none of my aunts or uncles living in the Antwerp area had been eager to discuss these subjects with their own children, my adult cousins. The Belgian cousins of my own generation, I found in my two month stay, could discuss these matters frankly. The explosive findings, for me, were personally devastating and politically complex to absorb. According to Holocaust scholar Lieven Saerens, ninety per cent of the Jews of Belgium were waves of recent immigrants themselves, rather than established Belgian citizens the state had an immediate interest to protect. Their vulnerability as non-citizens in a country occupied by the Reich was frightening high, with predictably dark consequences in 1943 and 1944.



Figure 5. Christa seated in the library of her community. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

The story of that research is another paper. In my own city, I pushed on, with an extended trip to Belgium forming in my mind. In late 2014, I tracked down more specialized, translated works of history, looking widely for suitable material that I could master. Specialists in these areas of Belgian history typically contribute fulltime in French or Dutch. Adding to the linguistic requirements, Dan Michman, editor of the massive 1980s international effort of *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans*, believes that “in order to achieve a really complete picture, a researcher must know six languages: French, Dutch, German, Yiddish, and Hebrew”. In other words, the obstacles to a growing knowledge base for all scholars can be formidable. This reason, along with a host of other political and historical issues traced in Michman’s essay, has created individual islands of effort with limited impact in the literature (Michman 1998, 25). I learned first-hand from archivist Dorien Styven at the Dossin Kazerne that getting out important Holocaust material from the museums and archives of Brussels, Leuven, and Mechelen has involved persistent dissemination barriers for all of the generations of researchers involved. My own native language of Flemish was nearly gone, making the whole quest discouraging at times. I realized how fortunate I had been that my own

Kitchener-Waterloo library system had stocked the original two titles that had originally gripped my attention in my own language.

Lives continue to change. The meanings of experience change, too. My cousins are better acquainted with me now, and me with them, their children too. A cousin, Annemie Van Daele, became directly involved in the research, helping out enthusiastically with the professional introductions I needed when I was stuck. American writer James Deem, author of *The Prisoners of Breendonk*, shared his expertise and research stories extensively, offering commentary on his breakthroughs and occasional research frustrations in the Antwerp area. Flemish-American historian and ethnographer Jan Vansina from the University of Wisconsin shared friendly commentary on my efforts, encouraging more inquiry. And Dorien Styven of the Dossin Kazerne lead me directly to further investigation of the biography of Irene Awret, a painter from Berlin who hid in Brussels, was imprisoned in the Kazerne for close to two years, and survived the war to tell her story after a long productive life.

I offered at the outset of this paper that the trip home to Belgium was exhilarating. It was actually a gift. Although the research material I recently began to draw together in Brussels, Leuven, and Mechelen has indeed been dark, it has proved significant to me and (I believe) to those that I met in friendly circumstances of shared quest. There are paradoxical features of those findings that I plan to build further on from Canada, despite my current language barriers. I am able to say that the circle of inclusion extended to me as a non-Dutch speaker by various archivists in “the old country” has enriched my worldview immeasurably.

What, after all, is more important than a sense of belonging? Or a shared sense of solidarity in constructing meanings from complex, buried material hovering close by, in the landscape of one's own past?

I arrived in Belgium as an eager Van Daele in search of cousins who lived, breathed, and had buried their parents, as I had. At the same time, as a Canadian, I arrived in blind trust (taking a chance) with an emerging reason to talk and write to people I had never met. In meeting fellow researchers and assessing the quality of their life commitments in tentative interactions, these strangers started to feel like the intergenerational friends I had been waiting for, friends with an international outlook where birthplace or ethnicity alone was not the determining factor.

Like me, they had complex identities. A cohort of unseen architects, designers, writers, and curators, persons of all ages and backgrounds, had designed these places of living narrative over a long stretch of years, while I was coming alarmingly close to retirement age in Canada. Their exhibits, their multiple

creative ways of shaping image and story, had in some post-modern way leaped over the clumsy time warp I had chronically fretted about.

Public architectural spaces of this quality are aesthetically and morally compelling. They house stories writ large. As we inhabit them, move through them together, connect them persuasively with our own experiences – they change us. Antwerp's Red Star Line Museum, focusing on world migrations, and the Dossin Kazerne of Mechelen, focusing on the deportments, deaths, and forced migrations of the Jews of Belgium – both are transformative settings of depth and quality for the reflective visitor from any point in the world.

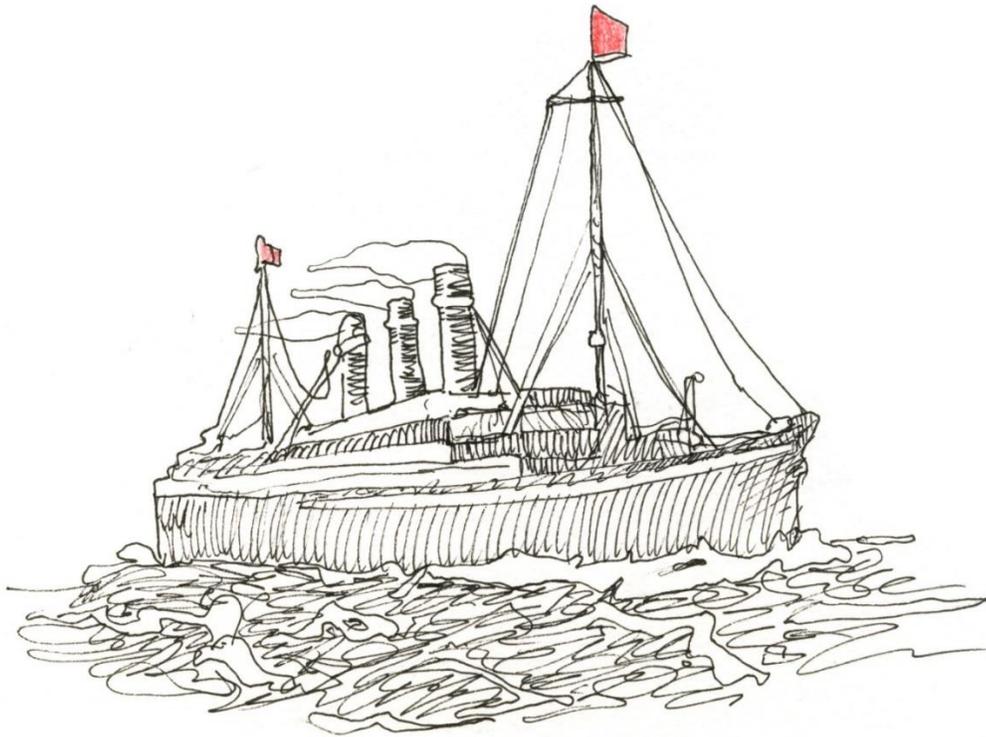


Figure 6. Red star ship. Original drawing by Julian van Mossel-Forrester.

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About the author

Christa Van Daele is an educator, vocational counsellor, and writer. She was actively involved in women's publishing in the 1970's and 1980's, contributing features, book and theatre reviews, and short stories to various Canadian publications. In 1990, Christa completed a Doctorate in Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. She became active as an advocate and educator in women's vocational issues, contributing to program design in both community college and agency settings. This work led her, in turn, to intensive support and advocacy work with Ontario's newcomers, especially newcomers seeking to re-establish themselves in the professions, a path that is often fraught with complexity and discouragements. Christa currently divides her time between writing, travelling, and carrying on support work with the Syrian and Rohingya communities. With her friend Julian van Mossel-Forrester and other neighbourhood connections, she collaborates in community projects of all kinds.

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About the artist

Julian van Mossel-Forrester has been practising art in various forms for eighteen years. He studied Fine Art and Environmental Studies at the University of Waterloo. His projects, travels, and passions in art and community life are both local and global. Working primarily with acrylic on canvas, Julian's recent work focuses on themes close to his heart. Julian's family has been highly involved in supporting the immigrant and refugee experience for several generations in Canada. His grandmother, Lorna van Mossel, actively assisted immigrants and refugees for over 50 years in several provinces as a passionate social justice advocate and Citizenship Court Judge. During her lifetime, she received many distinctions for her dedicated service, including the 2012 Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal. Lorna's work continues to inspire generations of settlement advocates and activists. The original drawings designed by Julian for Christa Van Daele's essay are part of his body of work exploring the themes of community, immigration, and personal history.

Retour en Belgique d'une éducatrice

Cet essai évalue les changements de perspective, les luttes et les aperçus se produisant dans une identité d'immigré qui se forme lentement. Je prends comme tremplin de mon souvenir ma visite à deux expositions publiques tenues en Belgique vers la fin de 2015. J'offre, sous forme d'une série de courtes réflexions numérotées, une approche « multi-lentilles » à la question de la formation de l'identité, en soulignant des thèmes du développement de l'adulte : continuité, discontinuité et changement. Quelles sont quelques-unes des identifications élusives inhérentes dans un tel parcours? Comment du sens est-il construit, plus tard dans la vie, à mesure que d'anciennes expériences d'immigrant sont testées, redéfinies et reconsidérées? Comment dois-je interpréter les expériences d'après-guerre de mes parents immigrants? Mon travail direct avec des immigrants ontariens comme éducatrice d'adultes m'aide à éclairer mon propre rôle culturel dans le travail pratique de l'accueil, consolidant les sens inexprimés de choix de vie dans ma propre sphère, tout en aidant d'autres dans ce travail qui nourrit l'âme. Puis le parcours de la recherche continue dans le monde plus large de l'érudition et des écrits. De nouveaux amis et collègues font partie d'une communauté qui explore la mémoire collective à la recherche du non-dit, du non-documenté, dans les histoires des vies individuelles. J'ai l'intention de continuer d'enquêter, malgré les difficultés de langue, sur les conditions et circonstances du peuple juif pendant et après la deuxième guerre mondiale en Belgique.

Een lerares keert terug naar België

Dit essay analyseert de perspectiefwisselingen, worstelingen en inzichten die allengs te voorschijn komen uit een zich vormende immigranten-identiteit. Als beginpunt voor mijn beschouwing gebruik ik een bezoek aan twee openbare tentoonstellingen in België in het najaar van 2015. In de vorm van een serie genummerde overpeinzingen behandel ik de kwestie van identiteitsvorming vanuit verschillende gezichtspunten, met nadruk op de thema's continuïteit, discontinuïteit, en verandering. Met wat voor ongrijpbare identificaties gaat een dergelijk proces gepaard? Hoe geven we op latere leeftijd betekenis aan vroege immigrantenervaringen? Hoe

interpreteer ik de na-oorlogse ervaringen van mijn immigrantenouders? Door mijn werk in het volwassenenonderwijs met immigranten in Ontario krijg ik een beter inzicht in mijn eigen culturele rol in het praktische werk van inburgering, en bevestig de onuitgedrukte betekenis van keuzes gemaakt in mijn eigen leven terwijl ik anderen help een nieuw leven te beginnen. De wetenschappelijke reis voert door een bredere wereld van onderzoek en schrijven. Nieuwe vrienden en collega's vormen deel van een gemeenschap waarin plaats is voor de collectieve herinnering aan dat wat ongezegd en ongedocumenteerd blijft in individuele levensverhalen. Ondanks de taalbarrière streef ik ernaar het onderzoek naar de omstandigheden en condities van de Joodse bevolking tijdens en na de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België voort te zetten.

**Some of the words:
Snow day**

Grace Hols

Remember the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, I have a lot of pictures: black and white, some already fading. So I am trying to write the words, or at least a few of them. This process involves an intimate study of a photo, to the point where I take a magnifying glass to zoom in and capture details otherwise overlooked. The result of all this is a growing collection of vignettes that I am calling “Some of the words.”

Snow day

It’s a bright day in March in 1953, warm enough for sweaters and no hats. There is a small hill just beside the old farmhouse, and the snow has thawed and melted and thawed and melted to a hard crust that glistens under the clear blue sky. We are outside, my mom and my brother and sister and I. Mom has brushed my hair and put in a starched white ribbon, ubiquitous on all the heads of most immigrant girls in those days.

My mother and I are at the top of the hill on a small sled. The sled looks like something my dad must have made. He probably cut out the runners with a handsaw after tracing the outline with his carpenter’s pencil on a piece of lumber he cut on his own sawmill from trees he felled himself on the property we owned five miles out of town. Dad was all about being self-sufficient. The sled is two runners with a small raised platform nailed on top. Mom is crouched on the sled, two feet firmly planted on the platform and her bare hands wrapped around the front bar. I am draped across her back with my arms around her neck. We are both looking at the camera. It is as if Dad has just finished making the sled and has brought it out of his workshop for us to try for the first time. He probably carried it out proudly, still brushing the sawdust off the raw edges. Maybe he rubbed bear grease or candle wax on the runners to make them glide. Anyway, it looks like he

gave us the sled to try and then went back to the house to get the camera. He took a lot of pictures in those days because he sent many photos back to family in the Old Country. It was, I think now, a way of justifying their move, a way of proving to parents and other relatives that emigrating had been the right thing to do, that things had worked out well for them in this new frontier of northern BC.



My Mom and I sledding, March 1953. From the author's personal collection.

So there we are, Mom and I, smiling at Dad behind the camera. The sun must have been brilliant, because we are both squinting and I doubt if any of us owned sunglasses in those days. I don't know if that sled really worked. It looks good, but did it slide? Our shadows are very clear but there is no sign of tracks that a sled would have made. My younger brother and sister are off to the side, carefully walking down the hill, and our two large dogs are running circles around them. It must have been a Saturday or a Sunday, because I was in school already and this was in the middle of the day.

It is good to see this photo because it proves that life then was not all work and no play, which is what we often remember about that time.

Dutch immigrant identity as reflected in home artifacts

Helene Demers

Home artifacts, the objects and their stories carried from our homeland, aid in the construction and maintenance of memory, identity and home. They stand in for places left behind and mediate geographical and generational divides, and over time are transformed into different, but equally powerful, narratives and markers of a virtual “homeland” for subsequent generations. The oral history of a family bracelet is the vehicle for exploring the breaks in transmission that can occur when objects are bestowed in secrecy on the cusp of journeys resulting in incomplete narratives. The journey of reconciling such a narrative illustrates the complexity of immigrant identity, the transformation of meanings assigned to home artifacts and the emergence of new narratives carried from person to person across times and places.

Key terms: Home; home artifact; homeland; immigrants; memory; identity; narrative.

Introduction

The items that immigrants bring with them and display in their homes have multiple meanings – ethnic, family, personal, religious, political – and mediate powerful feelings of identity and home(land), real or imagined.¹ Drawing on concepts from the field of material culture as it relates to “home studies” (e.g. Davidson 2011; Flynn 2004; Miller 2009; Pechurina 2011, 2015; Pink 2004; Smart 2007; Werner 2007) and workshops conducted with immigrants, I initially explore the multidimensional relationship between material objects and cultural identity and then shift to a personal oral history surrounding a family bracelet given to me by an aunt and its meaning in shaping my own identity. The bracelet links me to a homeland and a region as well as to a line of women I am named after, and its

¹ This paper is dedicated to Jannigje and Janny. I would like to thank Tyler Sage for reading various versions of this paper and providing insightful comments. The stories of his walks along the Dutch coast evoked memories of childhood seaside holidays for me and these memories flow beneath the surface of this paper.

journey through time and place reflects the complexity of family narratives as well as the duality of immigrant identity. The home artifact narratives we share – and the ones we do not – assist in constructing and maintaining identity, home, and belonging for first generation immigrants but also create intangible connections to a virtual homeland for later generations.

Home artifacts and imagined homelands

Home artifacts – the various material objects and home possessions which migrants “keep, use, exchange and curate” (Pechurina 2011, 97) – play an important role in linking immigrants with their “imagined homes” and, as documented by Daniel Miller, can “repair” personal and social identities (Miller 2009, 97). The potency of memories of imagined homes and homelands evoked by a material object and “in the sensation which that material object will give us” (Proust 1928, 48) is poignantly described by Gaston Bachelard in *The poetics of space*: “I alone, in my memories of another century, can open the deep cupboard that still retains that unique odor, the odor of raisins drying on a wicker tray” (1994, 15). Later in the same chapter, Bachelard states that “the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us” (1994, 15). Here I follow Bachelard but also interpret “house” to mean “homeland” and would add that traces of this inscription are left on subsequent generations. Marianne Hirsch, in her influential body of work on Holocaust memory, proposed the term “Postmemory” (Hirsch 2012) to describe connections to the past mediated not by recall but “by means of stories, images, and behaviors transmitted to later generations” (No author, 2012). In an interview about her book, she reflects on her personal experience of accounts her parents had told her: “Their accounts had the textures and qualities of memories for me, but they were clearly not my memories: I had not experienced any of them directly. I felt that I needed a term to describe this indirect form of recollection, its belatedness and its multiple mediations” (No author, 2012). I think here of my youngest son, attending university in the Netherlands, who is gradually walking the country’s shore and the islands, tracing an ancestral landscape filled with stories of previous generations. He reflects that these tracings are experienced as repetition, but also difference in that he is inscribed as well as inscribing (Tyler Sage, pers. comm., August 2016). A connection to a virtual homeland, previously intangible and shaped by transferred parental memories, is bridged and transformed by his trajectory through the contemporary Dutch landscape and the generation of new, but linked, stories and deepened intergenerational dialogue. In *Motherlode. A mosaic of Dutch wartime experience*, Carolyne Van Der Meer, a second generation Dutch-Canadian, sets out to preserve her mother’s family’s experiences of World War II but ultimately writes a narrative merging fact and fiction and informed by many voices. After

visiting her mother's childhood home in De Krim, Overijssel, she returns to the village square:

to purchase Gouda cheese, a hunk of rye bread, bottled water, and a package of *gevulde kanos*, my favourite almond finger cookie, fondly remembered from childhood. I sit on a bench and quietly tear the bread, adorning each piece with a savoury slice of cheese. It's hard to imagine my mother running in that backyard from air raids, but property holds many secrets. I know it happened and now I've seen the place. Somehow that is enough.
(Van Der Meer 2014, 39)

Van Der Meer's consumption of food iconic to the Netherlands and Dutch identity can be interpreted as a symbolic act commemorating the bridge to the imagined homeland and recognizing the traces inscribed by a parent's cultural origins.

In diaspora populations home artifacts and their narratives can also become powerful reminders of journeys taken and hardships overcome in order to arrive at a new homeland. Tonya K. Davidson refers to "objects recovered or safeguarded from incidents of trauma" as "object survivors" (Davidson 2011, 51). In *Tjideng Reunion*, Boudewijn van Oort, preparing for his father's funeral, contemplates a clock that has been in his family for several generations. "On the wood-paneled wall above me hung the old Friesian clock, calmly ticking away the hours with a wonderful soothing rhythm, as it had done for almost three hundred years. There was no other sound" (Van Oort 2008, 3). This clock miraculously survived his family's experience of World War II, displacement from their South African homeland, internment in the Netherlands East Indies, subsequent return to South Africa and eventual emigration to Canada. Along more contemporary lines, an article in the *Globe and Mail* dated July 2, 2016, highlights objects – some iconic, some personal – brought by Syrian refugees who recently arrived in Canada. Among the items carried by Aliye and Omer el Hussein were a Koran previously belonging to Aliye's grandmother, 20-odd hijab headscarves, a battered cell phone, a tiny embroidered bag of Syrian soil, the keys and deed to the family apartment in Aleppo, three kilos of Syrian coffee, and a delicate gold Turkish coffee cup. The coffee cup was part of a matching set Aliya brought from Turkey where they lived after fleeing Aleppo. Aliye was told the cups were Syrian, "but God knows. The more important thing is that it reminds me of my culture" (Aliye el Hussein 2016, 4-5). Like Van Oort's family clock, such "object survivors" can be viewed as tethers which reach temporally and spatially back, but they may also be tools for making a new home. When American writer and activist bell hooks first left home, she carried with her two emblematic artifacts, braided tobacco leaves and a crazy quilt given to her by her grandmother: "These two

totems were to remind me always where I come from and who I am at my core. They stand between me and the madness that exile makes” (hooks 2009, 16).

Omer and Aliye el Hussein are two of the many caught up in processes of migration which have come to define the 21st century, displacing and detaching groups and individuals from their homelands. From these displacing and relocation processes have followed studies of homemaking practices – what makes a place a “home.” In one such study of Russian immigrants in the UK, Anna Pecherina focused on a range of “typical” or iconic Russian objects which are often found in migrants’ homes (Pecherina 2011). She describes these diasporic objects as “circulating in transnational semiotic spaces (book covers, film posters, and other printed media) where they index “Russia” and “Russian” while mediating complex feelings and engagements with notions of “Russian-ness” and “home” for migrants” (Pecherina 2011, 98). I am reminded of the Dutch magazines, books, videos, recipes and plant cuttings² that actively circulate among Dutch immigrants and the sharing shelf of books and magazines at my local “Dutch store.” At the same time, Pecherina notes that when placed in domestic spaces these objects lose typicality and acquire fluid and multiple meanings – not just ethnic, but also familial and personal (Pecherina 2011, 98). This is echoed in my own experience of immigration and in my own research.³ In three workshops conducted with Dutch immigrants (as well as three workshops with other immigrant groups) over a period of five years, participants were asked to bring an item that was symbolic of their homeland, consider the accompanying narrative, where the item was kept or displayed in their homes and whom they would pass it on to or exchange it with. Each workshop began with the story of my bracelet and was followed by sharing the meanings ascribed to the participants’ “home artifacts”, the stories associated with them (which triggered other stories), how they curated these objects by placement in specific locations in their homes and whom they intended to pass the items and the accompanying narratives on to. A consistent outcome of each workshop was that several participants realized they had neglected to pass on their home artifact narratives and expressed the intent to do so. Artifacts brought to the workshops included pairs of skates, stuffed animals, a grandmother’s Sunday apron, LPs, tea tins, books, a Delft tile, coins, a cigar cutter, teaspoons, jewelry, a piggybank, a *poffertjespan* (a cast iron frying pan with shallow indentations for making small puffed pancakes), an ID card from WW II, a

² Cuttings of plants once belonging to relatives in the Netherlands actively circulate in my family and among friends.

³ Throughout Canada, “ethnic stores” are sources of typical objects (and foods) for those who did not or could not bring them from “home”. “Dutch stores” typically carry items such as tea towels, kitchen towels, *washandjes* (wash cloths, literally ‘washing gloves’), *boerenbont* china, perpetual calendars, CDs, and wooden shoes.

small replica of a *draaiorgel* ('street organ'), photographs, a beloved aunt's skirt, a teething ring and a metal milk container. Iconic objects such as a small version of a traditional Dutch metal container ("*melkkan*") used to collect and store milk – now a decorative object – evoked memories of the owner as a small girl riding home from a local farm on the back of her grandfather's bike, feet firmly planted in the bicycle's panniers to keep warm, while carefully balancing the full milk container. Sharing such narratives with other immigrants triggers similar memories and assists in affirming identity and belonging. In *Belonging. A culture of place*, hooks notes, "we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection" (2009, 5).

Previous research on Dutch-Canadian identity (e.g. Biemond-Boer 2008; Gans 1979; Ganzevoort 1982; Schryer 1998; Van den Hoonaard 1991) touches on, but does not focus specifically on, home artifacts. A study conducted by Biemond-Boer in the Fraser Valley, British Columbia, mentions that objects from the homeland (home artifacts), such as furniture, were present in all homes in the study. Biemond-Boer suggests that Dutch immigrants in her sample kept the original furniture they brought because they were family possessions as well as "souvenirs" and indicate a strong connection to the Netherlands. She further comments that an additional reason for keeping the furniture is the strong Calvinist emphasis on thrift (Biemond-Boer 2008, 94). My own research indicates that object placement is significant e.g. Dutch *verjaardagskalenders* ('perpetual birthday calendars') are customarily hung in the bathroom (not a Canadian custom). While Biemond-Boer (2008, 96) notes that iconic objects such as windmills, wooden shoes and tulips were quite scarce in her sample, my own observations indicate that worn wooden shoes are frequently placed by the front or back door of Dutch-Canadian homes not as footwear to slip on, but as decorative items. In our home, my late mother's wooden shoes sit by the front door – reminding me daily of her love of gardening. They can simultaneously be understood as iconic, decorative, and "linking" objects. The term "linking objects" was first used by Vamik D. Volkan in 1972 to describe physical objects that belonged to the deceased and how these objects become important in mourning processes. Linking objects are somewhat like transitional objects of children – seeking solace in physical objects to overcome separation (Volkan, 1972, 215-222).⁴ My eldest son wore wooden shoes as a child and they sit by our fireplace, perhaps as a reminder of *Sinterklaas*, when children's shoes were placed by the fireplace in anticipation of *Sint's* arrival. Similarly, Biemond-Boer (2008, 95) documents the specific placement of carved wooden plaques of Bible verses from

⁴ Volkan's theories of the role of "linking objects" in grief and mourning represent other avenues to understanding the function of home artifacts especially in the case of traumatic displacement and relocation experiences.

respondents' wedding ceremonies on living room walls. Both Biemond-Boer (2008, 93) and Ganzevoort (1982, 304) note that *vitrage* (lace or net curtains) are a custom older Dutch emigrants have kept. Respondents insisted that this is a matter of preference, not a way of distinguishing themselves from Canadians (Biemond-Boer 2008, 93). In my experience, however, *vitrage* does mark these homes as being Dutch to the informed passerby and such public identity markers are present in many immigrant communities. An older Chinese immigrant in a home artifact workshop conducted at the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria (October 2009) shared that she recognizes a Chinese-Canadian home by the vegetable garden in the front and the visible placement of ceramic lions.

Home artifacts hold a different meaning for first generation immigrants with regards to identity than for the second generation (Gans 1979, 5; Rooijakkers 2000, 124). Rooijakkers posits that material objects are important components of cultural identity for first generation immigrants, but take on a different function and more of a symbolic value for the second generation. Annette Wierstra, a second generation Dutch-Canadian, describes the symbolic meaning of her grandfather's cigar mold on her blog *Created heritage: Exploring my Dutch heritage through food and stories*:

It's a cigar mold from my maternal Grandpa, Fokko (Franklin) Prins. In Holland, Grandpa Prins [had] his own cigar store behind the house. My great grandfather was a tenant farmer, and there wasn't enough land for his seven sons, so they had to find alternative work. My Grandpa came to Canada because he has (sic) work in Southern Alberta; like many immigrants, he came to Canada with hopes of a better life and more opportunity after the second world war (sic) devastated Holland. When I look at the mold, it is a connection to my mom, Joanne, and her family. It reminds me of the path my family took from Holland to Canada.

(Wierstra n.d.)

I suggest that not only do home artifacts take on new functions and symbolic meanings for second generation immigrants, but they also give rise to new narratives. For me, my mother's green enameled *petroleumstelletje* (a small paraffin stove) evokes visceral memories of simmering *soep met balletjes* ('soup with small meatballs') in the small unheated kitchen of my early childhood, with the smell of nutmeg used in the meatballs lingering in the air. For the next generation, never having experienced it in its original location, it yields a different story of using tea lights in Oma's *petroleumstelletje* to boil water during a prolonged power outage one winter.

The oral history of a bracelet

In 2009 I began to explore the history of a bracelet given to me by my aunt and the lives of the women to whom I am linked by name, place, and family history, when asked to prepare a presentation for a BC Women's History Conference. Research has shown that we begin to look back on our lives in our 40s (Rubin, Wetzler & Nebes 1986, 212) and until then I had not given the story of my bracelet much thought. The delicate gold bracelet with a small garnet in the center of a traditional *Zeeuwse knop*⁵ clasp is not something I wear and is kept in a shabby old jewelry box purchased at a garage sale by my oldest son at age five.



Figure 1. The family bracelet. Photo by author.

I am the fourth child in a family of seven and was named Helene Janny after my paternal grandfather, Leendert and my father's sister, Janny. At the time of my birth Leendert owned a tobacco shop⁶ with attached living quarters where he, his wife and three adult daughters resided. Their three sons, one of which was my father, were married and lived elsewhere. One of the daughters eventually married, which left Janny to care for her ailing mother and her handicapped sister. After they passed away, she cared for my grandfather for many years and eventually took over the tobacco shop until she retired. To this day, very few members of my maternal and paternal families have moved away from the region in Zuid-Holland they originated from, and my family's relocation to the province of Gelderland at age eight represented a monumental move. When I was a teenager, my family emigrated to Canada (even further "away"). I was sad to leave behind my friend Trudy who had been my *hartsvriendin* (my best friend, literally 'heart friend') since our move to Gelderland. Trudy and I exchanged silver plated friendship bracelets with our names engraved and vowed to stay friends forever.⁷

⁵ A style of jewelry characteristic of the province of Zeeland.

⁶ I have fond memories of helping my grandfather empty out his shop window for display changes and convincing him to sing ballads like *Het Vrouwtje van Stavoren* which I was determined to memorize.

⁷ This worn bracelet is stored in the jewelry box with the gold bracelet.



Figure 2. The friendship bracelet. Photo by author.

As our furniture had been shipped, one of my sisters and I along with Trudy spent a few nights before our departure at my grandfather's house, sharing a room with Tante Janny. Early in the evening, Tante Janny called Trudy and me into the bedroom, carefully closed the door, and took a shoebox from a high shelf in the closet. Inside were a small beaded purse and a box containing a bracelet made of three heavy silver chains joined by a delicate gold clasp with a garnet in the center. She told me they had been given to her by Tante Jannigje (her aunt, my great-aunt), who had been given them by her wealthy employer when she left her service to care for her sick sister Jaantje. I well remember the impressive array of medicines great-aunt Jaantje had on the nightstand next to her bed.⁸ Because I was her namesake and moving so far away, she was giving me these items now, as she might never see me again. I thanked her, but secretly thought the bracelet old fashioned and much preferred the silver name bracelet I had exchanged with Trudy.

Sometime after arriving in Canada, I sold the bracelet given to me by my aunt to one of my sisters for \$20 because I wanted to buy a transistor radio. My sister replaced the heavy silver chains with fine gold ones, transforming the bracelet much as immigrants retain a core of ethnic identity while incorporating elements of their new homeland. A few years later, my husband bought the bracelet back from my sister as a surprise birthday gift. I consider myself fortunate to have been given this gift twice and given the opportunity to recognize its link to my personal history.

⁸ Our family doctor who used my grandfather's tobacco shop as a pick-up location for prescriptions also prepared medicine for Jaantje. When asked by one of my aunts what kind of medicine it was (since nothing appeared to be wrong with her), he replied, "water and a little coloring."



Figure 3. The family bracelet. Photo by author.

When I began to research the story of the bracelet for the BC Women's History Conference, I was unable to speak with Tante Janny, who was recovering from surgery. Her sister had never heard of the bracelet and the beaded purse, but shared what she knew of my great-aunt Jannigje (with whom the bracelet story began). Jannigje had been in the service of a wealthy woman who had no heirs and the agreement was that if Jannigje cared for her all her life, she would inherit some of her wealth. However, when Jannigje's mother died, she was expected to leave her position to look after her sister, much to the displeasure of her wealthy employer who promptly wrote her out of her will. Tante Janny did not recall that we stayed at their house before moving to Canada and relatives did not think Tante Jannigje had anything valuable other than a small bible with a gold clasp she left to Janny when she died. I visited Tante Janny twice before her death a few years ago but intuitively felt I should not bring up the bracelet, as she became quite emotional during one visit and was unable to speak at all during my last visit. Subsequent inquiries have not yielded much more information and the origins of the bracelet remain a mystery. Families often have multiple narratives of the same event. Some narratives, like my bracelet story, are shrouded in secrecy. I may never uncover the truth of its origins. How did my great-aunt and aunt come to be in the possession of the bracelet? Why the secrecy? Despite the gaps in this particular family narrative, my search for answers reminds me of the importance of family history and place in shaping identity. On the journey to trace the history of the bracelet, I heard many stories about my father's side of the family and particularly the lives of the daughters who were duty bound to look after parents

and siblings. The polder landscape through which I travelled to visit relatives is the landscape of my childhood and I was reminded of how deeply rooted I am in the place of my birth. As Liên-Worrall states in the afterword of *Finding memories, tracing routes. Chinese Canadian family stories*:

Our understandings of ourselves are so powerfully shaped, for good or ill, by our relations to family and to others who have raised us. For those fortunate enough to hear stories passed down as family lore, whether we treasure them or not, we should recognize that they form an incomparable inheritance, different and unique to each of us. (Liên-Worrall 2006, 73)

Conclusion

Given to me on the cusp of a journey, the bracelet has travelled from the Netherlands to Canada. It has been transformed by movement through “different spaces” just as immigrants experience transformations in their own movements. The bracelet links me to my homeland as well as to a line of women I am named after. Its journey and the secrecy that surrounds it reflect the complexity of immigrant identity. In the workshops on home artifacts I have conducted with Canadian immigrants, narratives of receiving unexpected gifts or family secrets at such times of departure are common, especially when air travel was rare and the possibility of reuniting remote. Like the story of the bracelet, immigrant narratives often become obscured, transformed or lost over time. Trudy, who witnessed the giving of the bracelet and the beaded purse, and whose own gift of the silver name bracelet I treasure, passed away before I thought to ask her about her memory of the event. The bracelet is a tangible connection to a childhood friend and to two women who had many constraints placed on them. The women I am named after lived in a time of strict class and gender divisions, and I imagine my great-aunt Jannigje had little choice but to go into service. Both Jannigje and Janny sacrificed marriage and families of their own in order to care for parents and sisters. They lived their entire lives in the same region surrounded by family and lifelong friends and acquaintances. I am profoundly aware that I have had a very different life trajectory, different expectations and opportunities, and I pay tribute to these two selfless women and the secrets that surround them. bell hooks reminds us that “[w]e are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering” (hooks 2009, 5). I hope to pass the bracelet on some day. So far it has been passed from aunts to nieces with a shared name, but that child is yet to be born. Whomever the bracelet is passed on to, the story will continue linking women across time and space. In my search to uncover the story behind the bracelet, I have gained insight into my family history

and women's history and had the privilege of listening to many immigrant narratives. Despite the gaps in my own narrative, I have come to know myself better through the act of remembering.

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About the author

Helene Demers is a member of the Department of Anthropology at Vancouver Island University. Her research in the Cowichan Valley spans 27 years and includes recording life histories and the repatriation of a Cowichan mask. As an immigrant, she is deeply aware of the significance of the interconnection between identity and place and this is a thread that runs through her research. She has had the privilege of listening to many stories of the Cowichan Valley which connect her to a different landscape far from her homeland. Currently, Helene is researching the meaning of "home artifacts", the items that immigrants and refugees bring from their homeland, as well as the role of "linking objects", the items that provide solace in mourning processes.

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L'identité des immigrants néerlandais reflétée dans des artefacts domestiques

Les artefacts domestiques, les objets et leurs histoires transportées de notre pays natal, aident à construire et maintenir les souvenirs, l'identité, le chez-nous. Ils représentent des endroits que nous avons quittés et enjambent des abîmes géographiques et générationnels, et au cours des ans ils sont transformés en des récits différents mais tout aussi puissants, des signes d'une « patrie » virtuelle pour les générations futures. L'histoire orale d'un bracelet de famille est un moyen d'explorer les cassures de transmission qui peuvent se produire quand, au moment du départ, des objets sont confiés à quelqu'un en secret et portent donc un récit incomplet. Le parcours de réconciliation d'un tel récit illustre la complexité

de l'identité immigrante, la transformation du sens attribué aux artefacts domestiques, et la création de nouveaux récits qui, à leur tour, seront passés d'une personne à l'autre à travers les époques et les endroits.

Huishoudelijke voorwerpen en de identiteit van Nederlandse immigranten

Voorwerpen meegenomen van thuis, en de verhalen die eraan verbonden zijn, helpen de immigrant bij het construeren en onderhouden van herinneringen, identiteit en een gevoel van thuis. Deze objecten en hun verhalen staan voor alles wat we hebben achtergelaten en overbruggen de scheiding tussen plaatsen en generaties die emigratie onherroepelijk met zich meebringt. Na verloop van tijd vormen zich nieuwe, maar net zulke krachtige, verhalen die verwijzen naar een virtueel "thuisland" voor de volgende generaties. De mondeling overgeleverde familiegeschiedenis van een armband vormt het beginpunt voor een exploratie van de narratieve breuk die het gevolg kan zijn wanneer een voorwerp in het geheim wordt doorgegeven aan een emigrerend familielid. Het proces van verzoening met de onherroepelijke onvolledigheid van het verhaal illustreert de complexiteit van de immigranten-identiteit, de transformatie van de betekenissen toegeschreven aan de meegenomen voorwerpen, en de vorming van nieuwe verhalen om door te geven aan de volgende generatie.

Some of the words: Mystery

Grace Hols

Remember the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, I have a lot of pictures: black and white, some already fading. So I am trying to write the words, or at least a few of them. This process involves an intimate study of a photo, to the point where I take a magnifying glass to zoom in and capture details otherwise overlooked. The result of all this is a growing collection of vignettes that I am calling “Some of the words.”

Introduction to *Mystery*

There is no actual photo for this piece. But the picture in my mind is sharp and clear. It is an image that emerged after hearing stories from my mother and from many of the other immigrant women in her circle as I was growing up. They are stories about leaving a country that may have been crowded, war-torn and broken, but that nevertheless offered a lifestyle much different from what they were to experience in northern Canada.

My mother had been a seamstress, and she liked to dress nicely. In Holland she didn't do much housework because her job was to sew for everyone. But a week after we arrived in northern BC in 1949 she was living in a leaky cabin in a remote logging camp, cooking for a group of men, the only woman around, no electricity or indoor plumbing, no vehicle, no telephone. There was no wallpaper, so she flattened grocery boxes and nailed up the cardboard to keep out the draft and provide a place to hang a photo of her parents. A few years later she was living in a new, though far-from-finished house on a remote farm, still no power, phone or plumbing. No vehicle either, until my dad walked 40 miles to pick up his new Ford tractor, which then became our transportation.

I do not remember ever hearing any complaints or negative talk about living conditions. My parents often spoke about how much they loved Canada, how right it was for them. They were young, still in their 20s when they arrived. They woke to each new day with a sense of adventure, of pioneering even, of building up a better place in which to raise their family and develop a community. They weren't the only immigrants in town, and they were all in it together. Mom

thought she “had it good.” Other women had arrived from Holland to live in hastily remodelled calf sheds or chicken barns.

It wasn't until I was older that I realized that many of the early immigrant women had little idea of what lay ahead of them, especially those who ended up in remote areas of Canada. My grandparents saved letters my mother wrote, some of which came back after they died. One of the first things my mother sent back was a note from the ship on the way across the ocean, and what she asked for has always tugged at my heart, because it became clear to me then that she did not have a clue about what she was in for. She may have needed work gloves and gardening gloves and rubber gloves, which she wouldn't be able to afford for a long time, but what she wanted her mother to send from Holland wouldn't have served any purpose until many years later. It prompted me to write this poem.

MYSTERY

with a razor blade my father released the pressure from under her blue nails:

the hay fork had come down hard and struck her unprotected fingers, but the thunderclouds burst long after the hay was under cover

my mother did not wear rubber gloves to wash and fill thousands of milk bottles, nor to pull milk cans from the water cooler, rubber being too elusive or too expensive for those early immigrant lifestyles, probably both

with bare hands she pulled down one-inch poplars, twisting the green trunks until they splintered and broke, the only sticks she could find to chase heifers out of the valuable oat field, and our dad away at work

in fact, she took her off her woollen mitts when she chopped through ice so the cows could drink, the wool newly knit and too valuable to soil

as a child I watched her fingers fly as she patched work pants worn beyond patching, almond nails darkened by soot from wood fires and kerosene socks that wouldn't light

so it surprised me, forty years later, when old letters were returned to Canada:

on that first crossing of the Atlantic, my mother had written home from the ship

“ma, I have forgotten my brown leather gloves in Holland ... please send them to me as soon as possible”