

Seniorenkring
Wijk aan Zee

Wijk aan Zee, march 2009

Dear Friends,

Many thanks for the report of the start of your discussions. You have made an interesting list of subjects. It is very promising for the substance of our conversations next June.

In our third meeting about the subject "CHANGE" we have further unraveled some subjects from our list. Four of our members have told how those changes played a role in their lives. Herewith is a short summary.

The unity of Europe

Western Europe has peace now for more than 60 years, whereas there has been war after three generations (1870, 1914, 1940) The European cooperation has grown from 7 countries in 1950 to 27 countries now.

Nico: I have always been in favour and an advocate of a united Europe. When at a more advanced age I started a study, it dealt among others about the history of our continent

I worked at the steel factory Hoogovens on the buyers department and had a lot to do with customs regulations. The open borders within Europe eased and quickened import of goods. No lots of complicated documents, no import duties, no time-consuming controls at the border.

Thanks to the introduction of the Euro (€) traveling around Europe has become a lot easier. Free traffic of persons also has an ill effect. The open borders also namely mean an easy spreading of criminality.

Arise of the personal computer.

Not only youngsters make use of the personal computer but also the elderly people intensively use the PC. In our group 10 out of the 15 members use it frequently.

Nico: After a hesitating start the PC has become a part of my life. In 1981 I got the opportunity to follow a course in elementary automation at my work at Hoogovens and I was all too happy to grasp that chance with both hands. Together with my two sons I bought a game computer to achieve more skill. Then the advance wouldn't stop: no more use of the type writer. The possibilities increased. With internet the world came within reach.

The possibilities of the use of the PC are still increasing. Consult of an encyclopedia, the use in schools, information about traveling, digital photography, banking business, buying via internet... Our children already find

this all very normal. For the elderly people the question arises: if you for one reason or another cannot cope with the PC, do you get behind in our society or isolated? Another question: is the personal contact between people going to suffer? On these questions we have no clear answers.

The changing role of man and woman, the growth of women's independence.

In old civilizations the role of the women was often important and high positions could be reached.

In our western civilization this was for a long time not the fact. Men dominated history. The struggle for women's rights began in our country in the second half of the 19th century and lasted a long time. Seniors of today have still closely experienced the changes of women's rights. Sixty years ago women were obviously subordinate to men.

Margaretha: A girl was expected to be a help in the household. When I was a girl of twelf years old (1939-1940) I had to miss several times school in the morning to help my mother who was ill.

My brothers did no jobs in the house. After diner the girls did the washing up, made sandwiches for the boys and even shined their shoes. My brothers were allowed to study, not me, I felt as being put behind and was sad. I was eager to become a schoolteacher.

Fortunately, there are different relations now. It is also possible for girls to study. Even in the sphere of sharing household tasks many things have changed.

Margaretha: My husband did all the jobs in the house, even though this was not a matter of course in our generation. When for example he hanged out the washing, some people commented upon it. This was a women's job, they would say . My son, who lives apart from his wife, takes care of his two daughters four days a week and does all the housekeeping.

In 1956/57 in the law of our nation several restrictions for women were written down.

So it was arranged that they were fired from functions at the government and in education when they married. Women were not allowed to independently conclude contracts.

Margaretha: this last regulation was evaded on a massive scale in Wijk aan Zee. Many women namely arranged the letting of houses to tourists in our village. They signed contracts and arranged the finances.

In 1964 the introduction of Contraceptives brought about an important change in a woman's life. In 1971 the legal provision had gone that the man was head of the marriage. Yet there are still existing, stubborn elements in the man-woman relation.

Margaretha: Several women told me that their husband don't stimulate them to get their driving-license or that they actually are no allowed to

drive in presence of their husband. Also, if you as a woman would like to undertake something without your husband you get a funny reaction. Boards of management are often bastions of men.

Changes in authority

Authority and power are not the same. Power is unilaterally influencing the behaviour of an other person. With authority there is also influence of behaviour of the other person, but he will acknowledge and accept it.

Jan: In my childhood about 1950 authority was a matter of course. It came from your parents, the police officer, head of school and the pastor. They taught you about good and bad and you accepted those rules. Contradiction was very restricted.

The relations in society and therefore also the relations of authority strongly changed in sixties-seventies. Especially in circles of students this is very noticeable.

Jan: I studied at the university. There were professors with much authority, but there were also some professors very authoritarian. We started to object very carefully against certain regulations. Just after my graduation in 1968 some students uprisings came with occupation of buildings. The authority was being affected.

Relations in church, an old-established institution with much authority, also came under pressure. The clergy had to discover that emancipated people went their own way in life.

Government did not escape from the changes in relations of authority. Both in politics and in the official organizations great changes occurred.

Jan: In 1974 I became city-councilor. Then many decisions were still made in private commission meetings. I have co-operated on new rules for more openness. Later on I became town clerk and noticed that the hierarchical structure with civil servants was still very important. When the town clerk asked something, it was often slavishly act upon. It became clear to me: power is there, but authority must be earned.

In the mean time many people and organs are involved in the decision making of the government, not always with mutual consent. It is still difficult to decide something with authority, that is to say: making a decision accepted by everyone.

Jan: we often said in the municipality that we must see and treat the civilian as a customer. But that is a one-sided approach. A customer behaves as consumer; he has rights, is distrustful and will complain. A civilian is more than that, being a civilian also means that you feel jointly responsible.

So authority is over the years taken for granted and has come to something we must be looking for.

Changes through education

In the beginning of the fifties it was usual that girls and boys after 6 classes of the primary school immediately started working. A reasonable number began to study a profession or to the school of housecraft. Only a little part joined the secondary school and going to gymnasium was an exception.

Bert: I was born in a small village where my father was a school teacher. He came from a family of farmers and turned teacher through a practical schooling. I had decided that

I wanted to be a clergyman. That is why I had to join the gymnasium. Through this I came into a totally different world. The protected surrounding of the village and of the protestant community became altered. Now I learned complete different ideas and came into a different sphere. It was a world my parents didn't know.

Children, who went to college, came to live between two worlds and it was not always easy to unite these two worlds. According as the level of education was higher, the difference even became bigger.

Bert: At the university the alienation still became bigger. I was active in several international organizations of students and organized political meetings. I traveled abroad and got the opportunity to study in Prague for one year. After my study I ended up in the international relief and saw a little of Africa and South-America. Through this I grew away from my elderly home. We did not have a common language anymore. I alienated from the family I came from. I did not want it but it just happened.

Nowadays there is less question of a big gap in educational level between parents and children. This, we still often see only with migrants.

Dear Friends, this was it this time. We are looking forward to your mails about discussions in Killingi Nomme. Till next month, best wishes from Wijk aan Zee.