

From one village to another

by Douwe Buwalda

You are now in the Netherlands and you come from Estonia.

Your country is just a little bit bigger than our country.

The Netherlands has 40.844 km², Estonia 45.549 km², a difference of circa 11%

One of the biggest differences between our two countries is the amount of inhabitants.

Estonia 1,506 miljoen

The Netherlands 15,4 miljoen according figures from 1998

That is ten times more. I think you remarked the difference already.

I am born in 1925 in a village in the northern part of the country, in Friesland.

My native language is Fries, a language that deviates from the Dutch language that I learned to use from my school time.

The surroundings of Ureterp – my native village – was an agrarian region with a lot of small companies, with arable and dairy farming.

The community where I grew up was very religious, very introvert and a compelling social control.

After the high school I studied electrotechnic at the HTS in Groningen.

After finishing my education it was not possible to find a fitting job in my native area.

In 1953 I got a job at the Chemical Company Akzo. Now Akzo Nobel, first in Ede and later in Arnhem. There I got acquainted with my wife and there have been two sons.

In 1961 I came in the service of Hoogovens (now Corus), a big integrated steel factory. By mediation of this Company I got a house, here in Wijk aan Zee. It was on distance of 15 minutes by bicycle from my working place. Here our third son has been born.

Living in Wijk aan Zee was not without problems. My wife and me were far from our nearest families. A car was not so usual as it is now. That brought the feeling of isolation and desolation. We were foreigners in a village where all people knew each other. Through the contacts of our children with the children of our neighbours came into existence a tough bond with the neighbours. A complicating factor during this process of acclimatization was our belonging to another church than most of the people of Wijk aan Zee.

Oecumenical contacts and also our own choice faded the differences away.

Now I am living 48 years in Wijk aan Zee. Seven years ago unfortunately my wife died. She was 69 years old and we have been married for 47 years.

The transition from a agricultural region to an industrial area was a radical change. But also the world has changed. The society and the economy. It is not possible to return to my native village. There has changed a lot as well. On my age I will not find anything back from my youth..... and I have a small garden next to the church.