

Changes in family life

by Nel de Goede

I was one of four girls in a family of eight children. We lived on the border of the village Heiloo, 20 km northern of Wijk aan Zee. We ran an agrarian business.

It needed hard working and we all of us had to give a hand. That's what has shaped us. There was no television in those days and in the evening after school and work we were together round the table chatting about sport, I was an active handball player. The boys played cards and the girls did needle work. We had a sociable time together.

I learned to know my husband through sports; he had a small building contractors business. We married and fairly soon we got six children. A big family was quite normal in those days and above all in catholic circles. The church did not recognize birth control and we actually knew little about this matter. Beside care of the family I did the paperwork for my husband. As from childhood I was used to helping in business, though it was completely different in the agrarian business at home. After ten years my husband died and I was left behind with six children. I was 32 then.

After 7 years I married a widower with five children. So together we had a family of 13 members. The children were in the age of 6 to 14. They all got a job to do through which they all have become quite independent. The mutual understanding between the children has always been quite well and we live on good terms.

Actually our family was a big organization. We had a hairdressing business for ladies and gentlemen with a tobacco shop selling newspapers and magazines, and we had rooms to let. And then there was the daily care for meals, washing and other jobs in the household. In the morning during breakfast I was busy preparing eleven packed lunches. For the evening meals we needed big quantities. For spinach we needed a whole case. It decided what we had for dinner and also what had to be done in the family. This was quite a full time job and that's why I may call myself an emancipated woman.

Many things have changed in family life. In the early days the living room was the central spot, there it happened and there you had contact with each other. Now this has been replaced to the bed room. Many children have a bed room of their own, with television, radio and so on. Through television, computer and mobile phone there is less contact among family members. Families do not even have meals together. It all has become more individualistic. Now we approach children differently than we did in the early days. I decided what we had for a meal. Now the children are asked: what do you want? Herewith parents disconnect themselves more or less as educators and the family tie get looser.