

ROLLER COASTER MIGRANTS

Anne Rietveld (nee Rijnders)

FOREWORD

Somewhere between 25 and 30 per cent of the original post-war Dutch migrants to Australia returned to the Netherlands. Some stayed and re-established a home there. Others seemed unable to make a permanent home on either shore. Anne Rietveld's story highlights the trauma of families who became embroiled in a 'roller-coaster' existence.

I (Anne) was born to Paulina and Arnold Rijnders Engelberts on 15 November 1939. At that time the family home was in *Hoograven*, a suburb on the outskirts of the city of Utrecht surrounded by small farms. The house we lived in as a family of six, was newly built when my parents moved in. It consisted downstairs of a lounge, dining room, kitchen and toilet, and upstairs there were two double bedrooms, two single bedrooms, a bathroom and attic, as well as a balcony off the main double bedroom. We also had a shed in the back garden.

Until I went there on a return visit in 2004, it had always figured in my mind's eye as a large house. This was soon quickly dispelled, when the current occupiers walked me around the various rooms of what now appeared to be a greatly diminished version of our old place. The visit also included the back garden where I had spent many happy hours, which was now locked to stop unwanted visitors entering. I had been very happy there and was utterly surprised when my parents decided to migrate to Australia.



Figure 1
Rijnders Family arrives in Fremantle
2 October 1952
Courtesy: Anne Rietveld.

Why they made the decision to leave is still a mystery to us – their children. Perhaps it was the aftermath of being in forced labour camps in Germany during the Nazi Occupation, and/or because the prospects for the future for their four children were not the best in the aftermath of war. Dad had a job!

We arrived in Fremantle 2 October 1952, just over a month before my thirteenth birthday; my siblings then aged fifteen, eight and five. Although we were booked to go to Melbourne on the *MS Fairsea*, it had been so traumatic - not at all like the holiday, which we were told we would have – so that when the opportunity presented itself, we disembarked instead at Fremantle. This was due in no small part to my father having contracted an eye infection that had induced temporary loss of sight. Consequently on disembarkation he was whisked off to Royal Perth Hospital (RPH). The rest of the family: my mother, sister and two brothers were placed on a bus taking newly arrived migrants to accommodation at the Holden Immigration Accommodation Centre in the Wheatbelt town of Northam. Most non-English speaking immigrants were sent to rural immigration facilities for processing, orientation and to be allocated employment in those years.

We had never heard of Northam and had no idea that it was 98 kilometres from Perth. The journey in the bus seemed endless. The further we travelled through the desolate looking countryside, the more the sense of adventure



Figure 2
Holden Migrant Camp, Northam –
2 October 1952 to 19 February 1953.
Courtesy: Anne Rietveld.



Figure 3
Graylands Hostel, Perth 1953
Courtesy: Anne Rietveld.



Figure 4
Anne – teacher of year 4/5 at West Morley
Primary School 1973-75
Courtesy: Anne Rietveld.

abandoned even us children, to be replaced instead by feelings of catastrophe. What had our parents been thinking of to bring us out here?

Northam accommodation was an even greater disappointment. I took one look and burst out crying. However, children are resilient and after leaving Holden camp to go to Graylands camp near Claremont, and therefore in the city, things started to take on a better hue, and my parents eventually sent me to Iona Presentation College in Mosman Park. On completion of my leaving, I was going to enrol into Teacher Training College, but there was continuous talk of my family going back to the Netherlands, especially by my mother. So I did not go to Teachers College and went to work as a clerk for *Rheem Australia* instead. Dad then decided that he would send my mum and younger sister Marlene for a holiday to the Netherlands, hoping this would settle her better into the Australian life upon her return. This idea was a success and when she returned from the Netherlands, Mum settled down well and told us children that we were better off in Australia!

I was married to Rex Edward Turner in St Columbas Church in South Perth on 23 February 1963. However in April 1963, just six weeks later, my parents told me they were going back to the Netherlands to live and were taking all my siblings with them. Even Paul, my eldest brother, who married Lennore in March 1963, was taking his Australian wife to live in the Netherlands. My other brother Julius, who was studying in Melbourne, would join them later. I had heard they had plans to go, but of course had hoped that they would stay, especially since their daughter was now married to an Australian and who had no intention of going to live in the Netherlands.

This news left me feeling unloved and abandoned as an outcast. My thought went back to the war years when the Nazis took my father away as forced labour in Germany. Shortly after he left, the Red Cross and the Catholic Relief fund sent me and my eldest brother Paul away. My mother, being pregnant and without the support of my father, was finding it very difficult to locate enough food for us children. We of course did not understand this, when we were put on a horse and carriage and sent to a farm to *Enschede*. On arriving at the farmhouse we discovered that the farmer only wanted one child – a boy – but according to my brother, who is three years older than me, I had no intention of letting my brother go anywhere without me! So the farmer reluctantly took in us both.

When my first child was born in December 1963, I experienced an overwhelming sense of loneliness. It was devastating not being able to share the joy of the occasion with my parents and siblings. I sent them telegrams and they replied with telegrams. But it is not the same as being able to show the baby and have them hold her. I found it hard to come to terms with the fact that having decided to come to Australia, which we children did not want, my parents were now willing to break up the family in reverse. I could appreciate how my sister felt when four years later, in October 1968, they again migrated to Australia, this time leaving my younger married sister behind in the Netherlands. This turned into another disaster, for only

two years later in January 1970, when my father became seriously ill, they decided to return to pursue treatment in the Netherlands – and so it went on.

After the birth of my fourth child, I went to Claremont Teachers College and graduated as a Primary School Teacher. My first class was a Year 4/5 at West Morley Primary School. I resigned from teaching when I was 8 months pregnant with my fifth child and then took up Accounting at Edith Cowan University.

My marriage to Rex was dissolved on 2 October 1995, and I remarried on 23 November 1997 to Peter Rietveld.

It is not only the children of migrants on the 'rollercoaster' who suffer, so too do their grandchildren and great grandchildren, who all miss out on family contact. My parents were never happy back in the Netherlands, but neither would they have been happy in Australia once they had grandchildren in both countries. My parents have since passed away - my mother not that long ago.

She left a letter in which she laid emphasis on why she should never have returned to the Netherlands in 1963, as she was very content in Australia it was Dad who had wanted to see his parents again.

I guess I will never know why he did not just go for a holiday!



Figure 5
Anne's children: Sue-Anne, Jacqueline, Peter,
Anthony and Pauline
Courtesy: Anne Rietveld.