

Netherlands

Netherlands with a capital Amsterdam (the seat of government is in Hague) is a small but prosperous north European country where about 140 nationalities live in harmony. The land is flat and rich. Although only five percent of population works in agriculture, it is a major exporter in dairy products, chocolates and flowers. The highest mountain is only 321 m tall but Dutch are the tallest people in Europe.

Almost half of the country is under sea level but storm surge Barrier protects it from flooding.

The country is known for the international court in The Hague, for the biggest seaport Amsterdam and for the famous artists like Rembrandt and Van Gogh and Van Dyke.

Roman forces conquered the Netherlands' Celtic and Germanic tribes during the first century AD. Franks came and converted the people to Christianity in the fourth century. By 800 AD they came under Charlemagne and later Hapsburgs until Charles V granted control over Netherlands to Catholic Spain. After the Reformation Netherlands became split between Catholics and Protestants. The struggle for independence led by Protestants ended in 1648 when Spain recognised Dutch independence. Many Jews escaped from Catholic Spain to Netherlands during the seventeenth century Spanish inquisitions. Since 1960s many Muslims refugees arrived and there are now about 600 000 Muslims with 300 mosques in Netherlands.

By 17th century Netherlands was the biggest commercial maritime power. They established trading stations in Java, South Africa and America. The traders established the Dutch East India Company, which later took over the government of its lands. When it went out of business the lands came to Dutch government.

English and Dutch became colonial rivals and in the conflict Dutch lost New Amsterdam and North America.

Dutch settlers settled in other countries to make money. They did not have a political or religious ideology like English.

In 1642 Van Diemen sent Abel Tasman in search of the great southlands and he came to Tasmania.

In 1810 Napoleon incorporated Netherlands into the French Empire. In 1815 Netherlands was restored and included Belgium. In 1830 Belgium became independent.

In 1940 Netherlands declared neutrality but Germans invaded it.

In 1942 Japanese invaded Dutch colony of Indonesia and after the war Indonesia became independent with Sukarno as the first president. Dutch army returned prompting a war for independence and in 1949 Dutch gave up and left Indonesia.

Netherlands consisted of 11 provinces. The two more advanced provinces were called North and South Holland that's why the country is also known as Holland.

Pieter Verkroost

I was born on 26.12.1917. As a child I lived in Madijun in the middle of Java and in Surabaya and later in Jakarta the capital of Indonesia. Indonesia consists of over 120 000 islands of which less than one thousand are inhabited. Australia's landmass is four times that of Indonesia but Indonesia has ten times as many people. Indonesia is a hot humid country because it is close to the equator and is surrounded by water.

My father arrived from Holland to Indonesia in 1913 by ship. Later he married my mother by proxy and she joined him in Indonesia. They had five children, four boys and one girl. I was the third child. I only have one brother left in Holland.

My father worked for the Dutch government as a railway builder in Dutch colony Indonesia. He built platforms, railway stations, and workshops. I went to Dutch school in Indonesia. School started at seven and finished at one we had all afternoon free. Children of mixed Dutch-Indonesian races and Dutch children would go to school together but I don't remember that there were any Indonesian schools for Indonesians. The official language in Indonesia was Dutch. I don't know if a written Indonesian language even existed at the time and I never saw any Indonesian literature.

Even when Indonesia became independent the university in Bandung taught in Dutch. Lecturers from Holland went to teach there. At the time Indonesia had no terminology for the technical language. At present Dutch is no longer used in Indonesia.

Dutch were the rulers of the Indonesia so we had a very privileged life. My father was strict about my studies. After primary school I attended high school in Holland and did a mechanical engineering course. At high school we learned the modern languages like English, French and German.

Life in Indonesia was very carefree for us children. We played and participated in sporting activities. During the long school holidays my parents hired a house in a small village in the mountains where we went for bushwalks and horse-rides. On our walks we noticed the difference between the city people and those in the country.

Indonesians were labourers and Dutch were overseers. Sometimes I saw village people coming towards us. When they saw us coming from some distance they sat on the side of the road and bowed to us reverently when we passed and then they went on their way. It showed that they looked up to us and appreciated us. We were thought of as above the indigenous people but we felt that Indonesians also appreciated us. We saw that more in the county than in the city.

We had servants who looked after the household chores. We had native cooks, washerwoman, gardener and the baboe, which means Indonesian woman who, looked after the children. We talked Indonesian with baboe.

They were affectionate towards us. With natives I spoke Malay and Indonesian but I forgot most of it now.

I played mostly with Dutch children but there was no conflict between the races. Everything was very organised and we had a good security system. If there was any trouble they sorted it out quickly. They destroyed any revolt or uprisings in the bud.

Indonesians tried to gain ground to establish their independence. They knew that they could not achieve much but they wanted to show their dissatisfaction with the government. There were killings. Some Dutch people slept with the revolver under the pillow but we were never threatened.

We went to Holland for one year when I was 8 in 1925. I went to school in Holland. We travelled by ship and I saw how other people lived as we stopped at many places on the way.

In 1932 it was the end of our Indonesian experience. Dad was recalled to Holland and pensioned off. He was just over fifty. He was 69 when he passed away.

The climate in Indonesia is much more pleasant than in cold Netherlands. Holland was a big change for me and I did not like it.

I attended a technical mechanical engineering school when the war broke out. I got a study leave and did not have to go into the army.

Germans invaded Holland on 10.5.1940. Germans were bombing our cities and Rotterdam was flattened to the ground. Hitler wanted to rule the world. Holland resisted the invasion but we only had an unorganised small army and were taken over in five days.

My family and most Dutch people were against Germans but there was a small Nazi party in Holland who collaborated with Germans. Most Dutch people despised them.

I was late for work on 6.6.44. I walked to Amsterdam and saw a news item on the board announcing that the allies are coming. Great multitudes of allied soldiers crossed the channel through the night. Germans were confident that they could resist them but allies managed to hold their ground. That was the dawn of our liberation. Allies could not get over the Rhine during the cold months of winter but in May 45 they liberated everybody.

Japan occupied Indonesia but Indonesian forces organised the independence movement and later Sukarno became Indonesia's first president. Sukarno was Dutch educated.

After the war I joined the Dutch army and was sent to Indonesia to fight against the independence movement.

Indonesia became independent in 1949. Dutch still kept an army there to help Indonesians establish their own army and government. Dutch government wanted to remain on friendly terms with Sukarno's government specially since there were still Dutch companies in Indonesia and the Dutch government had to protect them.

Indonesians also needed our help in establishing their economy. Some of us were asked to stay longer to help them with setting up the army and the government. I left Indonesia in 1950 and returned to Holland.

At the time there was a lot of publicity for emigration. Like most of Europe, Holland had to recover from the war and could not provide for its people. The government promoted emigration to South Africa, New Zealand, Canada and Australia. I decided to come to Australia. I read about this wonderful warm continent. Canada and New Zealand were too cold. Africa had apartheid and Catholics were not desirable because we consider all human beings equal.

I landed in Sydney in January 1951. I did not know anyone. The Australian government gave me some money to start me off and keep me going until I got a job. It was very easy to get a job anywhere. Australia was badly in need of people. I learned English at school and refreshed it through the books. It takes years before you learn the language well but compared to others I was at an advantage. I also knew some French and German. I went to the technical college to learn welding. I worked in the truck assembly as a welder, and on the construction works.

In the Catholic weekly I found an advertisement for Thomas Aquinas academy in Sydney. Anyone who wanted to gain deeper understanding of Christian faith could attend. I attended courses on theology, philosophy and Scripture. The main lecturer was Doctor Woodbury. He was the greatest teacher I ever met. He was well educated and a good presenter of knowledge; he spoke with authority and I felt that he spoke the truth.

I met my wife at the college and we got married in 1960. We have six children. My wife still lives in Springwood and three of our children are still there. Two children are in Sydney and one in Cairns. I have six grandchildren. I see them a few times a year.

I hoped that my family would be my greatest achievement but unfortunately my marriage did not work out. My oldest daughter was unruly and unmanageable; she ruined her life with drugs and lives in an institution. She can't work and is under medication. Other five children are leading good lives; they are hard workers, healthy and honest. They do not practice Catholic religion but they have their children baptised and may one day return to the faith.

My wife and I split up and I came to Lightning Ridge in 1983 when I retired from work. We did not want to sell our house so the family has a home to go to. My wife stayed in the house and I left. I read an add in the paper that a house was selling for nine thousand dollars in Lightning Ridge. I could afford that so I came to Lightning Ridge and bought it for 8000.

The first week I realised that the camp I bought was riddled with termites so I had to rebuild it completely with termite resisting timber. It was a big job for one man. Lightning Ridge was quite different then. There were no houses just camps on the opal fields. I never associated much with Dutch people because I was born in Indonesia and don't really consider Holland my home.

In Indonesia we had a Catholic church. In the congregation were also those natives that understood Dutch. Franciscan order of priests learned Indonesian and they held Indonesian service for those that did not understand Dutch.

There was also a Protestant church but they were not as prominent as in Holland. There was no animosity between churches since we all lived in a foreign country.

I never returned to either Indonesia or Holland. I lost touch with friends in Holland many years ago.

I meet friends most often through St Vincent's shop or the Catholic Church. My family were always practising Catholics. Being a Catholic means everything to me. Christ himself established Catholic Church. There were some undesirable leaders in Catholic Church in the past but so were in other churches. Other Christian churches are changing the rituals and the dogmas. Ecumenical movement is a good idea but we can't have a middle church, we can't compromise on dogmas. Catholic Church does not condone divorce and abortion. It demands the celibacy of the priests. There are many off shoots of Catholic faith because people sometimes want particular liberties and they rebel against the rulings of the Catholic Church. They want to live the life that is not acceptable to the Catholic doctrine.

I believe in the trinity and incarnation and the resurrection. I believe in sacraments. The Eucharist changes us into holy people. Catholic Mass is the re-enactment of Last Supper. Protestants believe that the Christ is present during the ritual of remembrance of Last Supper but we believe that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus.

If we start compromising on doctrines what will be left of the religion.

I studied Mariology and accept the Marian dogmas. Protestants believe that Mary was just an ordinary sinful person.

St Vincent's was established in eighties. St. Vincent de Paul conference is a group of people that has committed themselves to help the poor. There are 250 of them in NSW. Lightning Ridge group is called Our Lady of Fatima conference. There are about a dozen members and we meet every fortnight. We visit the lonely, the old, and the sick. We look after the needy; we provide the money for the fare, electricity etc.

Some people get into a habit of asking for help so we advise them not to spend on gambling, smokes or alcohol. Most poverty is a result of people spending money the wrong way. Their greatest disadvantage is ignorance and the lack of training.

Sometimes people can not pay their prescription or buy new glasses. When someone needs to borrow money we ask the president Jed Hutchinson to

authorise any bigger payments. At least two people would have to agree and sign the cheque.

The money from the St Vincent's shop goes to the diocesan office and is used as funds for St Vincent's conference works. People who die bequeath the moneys to St Vincent's and that is a source of our funds. All the work is voluntary. We get clothing supplies from Sydney. Sometimes conferences have regional meetings but we are very isolated group belonging to Forbes dioceses.

About twenty years ago St. Vincent's conference decided to twin with another St. Vincent's conference in the third world and so help the poor and less privileged. Our twin conference is in Rimu in Sumatra. Indonesia is poor and conferences could not exist without our help.

Indonesia is predominantly Muslim country with only three percent of the population being Catholic. They have no social security and those that have no work are left at the mercy of the family and the charities like St. Vincent's.

I read history books specially the history of the Catholic Church and hagiography-the stories of the lives of the saints.