



Annelies van Dommelen

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I can tell you many things about my dad, Dirk van Dommelen the the most important is that he was an extreme nature lover before it became popular. He was a simple man, the kind that makes it hard to buy a present for. He smoked a pipe so tobacco was something at least. Dressed in Harris tweed, corduroy and a viela shirt, and usually a swiss fedora, the kind with the feater, pin thing sticking out of it. I still have his ascot and wear it occasionally along with the top hat that he was married in during the war in Holland to my mother, Johanna Fenna Melching, his dresser and love of his life. Most of my memories are of him sitting in a chair, with book and music, mostly classical but jazz as well and upon returning from a trip to Jamaica, the bob Marley record appeared, also way before its time.

He was a stern man, at least it appeared so at first glance and unless smiling, a bit intimidating, my brother and I inherited that look along with the jowls that I knew I would receive when I was older. My father was defiantly a boss in the park and some employees loved and respected him and one of them called him a Nazi which went down hard. After all they lived in Holland during that time and stories where overheard by us about the horrors and the narrow escapes and the concentration camps that our dutch, even non jewish friends had endured. Most of their friends were Dutch and they had shipped their entire inventory of dutch antiques, Persian rugs, copper, pewter, silver along with them on the Holland American Line along with my sister and brother to the states in the promise of a good job for a gentleman farmer in Connecticut, who at that time had to authorize their transplantation. But back to the park, he wanted Ray, the man who loved and lived for the park, no degree but had worked there for decades to become the super and he fought for his promotion and one could feel the respect and friendship he had for Chief who brought the prisoners, the trustees in, to work in a park, what a good job for them, with nature all around. I remember that even though their color was different, there was no feeling of hierarchy . My father was respected by most of his employees. Some of his best friends were women who with him formed the Washington Crossing Association, like Tia Boyan and Annette Carter. My mother was not of this interest but was friends with these women also, more of a shopping and lunch relationship. Tia came from Holland and was a model and married Bill Boyan a judge who also became close with Dad and stood up for him when he was frankly framed and screwed by the powers that be that wanted him to retire. This is an ugly story and I don't want to go there right now. Perhaps later.

Most of the friends who visited us and hung with Dirk and Annie were Dutch and from all over Holland with many different dialects. Dutch was the language in our house, however, they spoke English when addressing we kids, so learning Dutch was challenging and it seemed like we were not really included in the bigger picture of



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friends and dinner parties and such. Very frustrating for us because there was no teaching of the language only an expectation that we should speak and know it. Sort of living another life amongst a life going on in the home one lives in. Since my parents death and my own surviving breast cancer, I started to travel to Holland each year to connect with relatives and learn the language somewhat and to know more about my heritage from direct contact in the country kind of way which put a lot of cultural habits and inclinations into perspective, something that would have come in handy as a younger person.

I am not sure why they came, my mother , Johanna Fenna Melching-van Dommelen seemed to not care for this country much but I think that was because of her eventful and glamorous youth before the war and the adoring father who built a tennis court for her and then because she wore a shortish skirt had to plant lots of shrubs around it. This was around the years of her twenties in the thirties. She had the gift of extreme beauty and I believe because of this, was the favorite girl in the family. Her Sister Tina was not beautiful in that way but still attractive and funny and lovely. She had 1 sister and 3 brothers. Egbert, the youngest was her favorite and you could see why, such humor between them along with that sophisticated flair. She also had exquisite taste and our home was a dutch still life, with fresh flowers, always. She also was the person who told me not to have children, have my own life and I did not take this badly, I knew that had she had the choice, like I have had, her life may have been different, hence no me, but I knew she loved my father and she loved us. My sister Marijke had problems with her brain due to a seizure when she was so young and she would never advance beyond being child like. She was lovely and artistic but had many difficulties compiled with the extreme sensitivity that ran in my family. A difficult path for my mother always, who was not equipped to deal with the matter in a positive and progressive way, not to mention in the 50', 60' and 70's had little resources for the mentally challenged. Very difficult time for such a lovely girl/woman and my parents. Roeland and I, naturally came second because of the energy trying to better Marijke and just to even deal with her and her situation. Now understood.

Dirks was raised by his sisters, Juul and Nel because their father died when he was only 10 and I think the feminine side of him, the gentleman and sensitive soul, for he was truly and overly sensitive about certain things [a trait I inherited and have had to check many times in my life, still do]was formed by this event in his life. Juul, quite strong and forceful, eventually a teacher and Nel, I believe also a teacher but gentle with large soft eyes, more maternal and nurturing, I suspect. They eventually lived together in a beautiful house in Arnhem and that is where I met them at the age of 18 and several times afterwards. Along with Tante Janie, Kee's wife, Dirks older brother whom I never met for he had passed before my time, the three women came



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to visit us in the late 1970's and stayed for a month until Juul was diagnosed with a brain tumor and that is another story, sad and long.

My cousin Enno was raised by the same women, for his father, Nels husband, died when he was 10 as well. I guess this is why, when I see Enno, he reminds me of the same character in some ways as my Dad, can't really pinpoint it but there are similarities about them.

Dirk, forester, gardener, thinker. My father wrote papers on recycling and composting and sent them around the country in the 60's. Only to be rejected, we found the stack after his death that was 6 inches high. I believe that although he had a handle on the English language and had worked for the VAM in the Netherlands which was responsible for land issues, he did not care about packaging and wrote them on a typewriter from the flea market that was *italic* and the "j" skipped above the line and as we know, packaging is everything.

I remember walking with Dirk near the open air theater, deep in the park, the natural slope modeled after one in the Netherlands and he told me about his plan. I was a child then. The whole family spent our summers at the Open Air Theater, We took tickets, worked the concession stand, appeared in the musicals and plays, helped construct the scenery and went to the rehearsals. I made posters and did make up for the cast. This went on for decades and the park seemed like ours because we inhabited it so thoroughly. We were the first marks in the snow and we sledged on the hill next to the theater.

My affinity for birds and especially for crows and Ravens came when I found a crow on the ground with a broken wing. As I gazed into that black eye and he or she gazed back at me, I firmly held him as we made our way over to the Nature center a distance away, through the woods we formed an understanding of mutual trust. From there we went to the local vets office where he set the wing and I dropped to the floor, a sign that I was not to become a veterinarian after all. That crow lived at the nature center for the time it took to recuperate and then was set free to become himself again.