

## Reviews of 'Green Glasses – adding perspective to the Leiden experience'

*Transcriptions of the spoken reviews given at the book launch on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2024*

### **Elianne Wijnands (Member of the Leiden City Council)**

So let me quickly introduce myself, I am Elianne Wijnands, I'm a local politician in the city council. I am 25 years old and I'm also not originally from Leiden, I'm from Gouda. You know, from the cheese. So that's what we also call 'import'. I've lived here for six years now and I love Leiden very much. I met Aart at the 'Leids Bestuurendiner' and he asked me to read this book. And I was overjoyed, because I also work at this bookstore, so I suggested we do it here. I'm very glad we did and to see so many people here. So that's something about me. Then about the book.

I think Leiden is often seen as a typical Dutch city with the historical center, the beautiful canals and the old houses. It's also seen as a very white city, and I think in relation to Amsterdam and Rotterdam, we are. But I also think that people often forget the international roots that Leiden has. We've always been a city of refugees and pilgrims. I think that this book very much shows that side and that story of Leiden and that's what I love very much about it. I also like the sunglasses analogy because I'm not originally from Leiden. I am Dutch, so my glasses are maybe the same colour, but a kind of different shade if you will. When I got here as a student, I also had different kind of sunglasses than I do now as a politician. Because you really look at the city from a different angle and a different perspective. And I really like about this book that it takes us all over the world and lets us see through the different coloured glasses of all these people from different countries.

It's also very nice as a city councilor to get so many compliments about the city. If you've known Dutch people for a while, you know they love to complain. So it's not often that you get such a nice review of Leiden as a city. I also have some favourite parts about the stories in the book. I highlighted a few of them. I love that we now finally know who is behind the little door on the tree at Plantsoen! We always called him Wouter de Kabouter, but I guess his name is Elmer, as I read here. It's also a monument now, so it's very nice to see who was behind that. I also like that Nina liked the straightforwardness and directness of the Dutch. It's something we hear often and it's nice to see people sometimes appreciate that. And she also said she dislikes planning social gatherings months ahead, which is also a thing I hear so much from international students. That we always need a 'datumprikker', if you know it, to get anything done with a group of people. So that's very relatable, but I still don't know how to do anything spontaneously. I think we Dutch people need the structure. Also, I really liked Adrians story. He calls himself a Scottish Leidenaar and said he felt more like a Leidenaar than like a Dutch person. What I also found really funny is that Joanne admires this countries wonderful administration: fast, clean and practical. While I love to hear that as a politician, I do think a lot of Dutch people would disagree, myself included. But it's nice to hear that. And the last one: Maher and his partner. They started a hair salon here, and he gave discount to those who came to speak Dutch with them, to learn the language. I think he very early understood a very important and fundamental thing about Dutch culture: we love discounts! So that part was very good.

On a more serious note, I think this book is very important to shed another light on internationals. Because internationals are not always seen in a good light. Especially in this political climate, as Aart already said. They discourage international students to come here, to study here. What we also see in the student community - I am part of the student party - is that on housing websites it says in big

caps lock 'NO INTERNATIONALS'. They do not want internationals in their home. I think we have a lot to learn yet. So I think it's very important that internationals that do live in Leiden let their voice be heard. Because while this book is immensely positive I do think we can still go a bit further. So it's very important to vote, to talk about the problems you face and struggle with. Because a lot of international students that I speak to don't know that they can vote here. And Leiden is a gem, as Magdalena said, even a paradise, but I do think it's still far from perfect. Leiden needs its internationals and I think this book wonderfully tells us why.

**Kristel Rust (Management advisor at Hogeschool Leiden)**

**WHERE ARE YOU FROM?**

It's a commonly asked question, but I cannot give an answer straightaway. What is that intangible feeling of home? 1981, a girl was born in the Carolus hospital in Den Bosch. I owe my 3rd name to this location: Carola. After a year, my father got a job offer as tropical doctor in South-Africa, Swaziland. So, I ended up in Africa when I was 1 years old. We had to adapt to the African culture, customs and rituals. As a young girl, I walked barefeet with a doll on my back, because that's how all women carry their young ones in Africa. After a few years my mother wanted to return to the Netherlands and so we moved to Renkum when I was 3 years of age. As a 9-year old girl, we had to move to Nijmegen for my fathers' work again. After my final exams, I left the parental home to go to Maastricht to attend my bachelor (higher education hotelschool). I lived here during my studies, except for two semesters, where I lived in South-Africa and in the Hague. After graduation, I packed my stuff and moved to Amsterdam. For almost two decades I lived in Amsterdam. Recently, last summer, I moved to Oegstgeest, a suburb of Leiden, with my family (my husband and my three children).

**THEN, WHERE DO I COME FROM?**

My hometown does not feel like the right answer to that question. Renkum, where I lived until I was 9 doesn't evoke the feeling of home either. How long have I lived there, how many people do I still know there? I don't feel like you can call me A Nijmegenaar. Amsterdam? Amsterdam is the place where I have lived the longest and where I have many memories. I experience a strong sense of connection with Amsterdam. This feeling comes from knowing the city, having a social network there and my friends are close by. Not only for myself but also for our children. But I wouldn't call myself an Amsterdammer either. Even now though, we only moved 27 miles and its less than 30-45 minutes by car, the transition from Amsterdam to Oegstgeest was a big one. In our new home we had more space and it provided us with a certain feeling of freedom, but we still missed Amsterdam. A feeling of estrangement. My daughter even said: I want to go back to Amsterdam! The safety of everything we knew, all the things we did, was gone. Everything was different; we didn't know anyone here in Oegstgeest, the route to the shops was different, and our belongings didn't have a standard place yet. There were other customs, and unspoken social agreements. But, slowly the feeling of being at home here in Leiden/Oegstgeest is starting to develop. - We have worked/ are working hard building a nice place to call our 'home'. - We are discovering / getting to know the beautiful city by playing a tourist. Thanks to Magdalena's book I learned about the Wednesday morning playdate in Vogelwijk's playgroup, Elmer's house in the Plantsoen, the Japanese tradition at Leiden market and more. - We are learning and adjusting to the 'codes' of the neighborhood and we show a willingness to adapt and integrate in the neighborhood. We have joined the local hockey club. For us sport is an easy way to integrate in the new community. In a way, sports has always been

my way to make friends and my way of having a social life in new places. And now I was even asked to participate in the hockey school. We had to adjust to our new place. It is not without reason they say: 'moving is a life event'. Whether it is a new residence, another country, or simply a move in your own neighborhood. Moving comes along with a lot of changes.

WHAT IS THAT FEELING OF HOME? What is home? Is home a place or a feeling? Or is it related to a person, family and/or partner? For me, feeling home has to do with feeling familiar and safe. It isn't connected to one place and it has nothing to do with the number of miles you move, but it refers to a 'number of places, groups, people or situations with which I feel connected'. When I am with my loved-ones I feel at home! Nijmegen, Amsterdam, even South Africa are places to which I feel connected. Especially, after our move I noticed that 'connection' is linked to freedom. Which is a strange contradiction. Feeling freedom through connection!

WHERE DO I COME FROM THEN FINALLY? At the moment I would answer Oegstgeest/Leiden SO: Leiden is increasingly feeling as our new home! Leiden has a lot to offer; it's a quiet and dynamic city with people from different backgrounds and cultures

### **Marlies Tiepel (BuZz)**

*English below*

BuZz houdt zich bezig met het aanleren van basisvaardigheden. Basisvaardigheden zijn vaardigheden die je nodig hebt om te 'surviven' in Leiden en in de Nederlandse samenleving. Het is best lastig voor sommige mensen om te leven in Nederland, bijvoorbeeld als je geen geld hebt of als je analfabeet bent. Dan gaat het mis en dan beland je in de eenzaamheid. We hebben samen met Blauwberg onderzocht hoe groot onze doelgroep is en dat is behoorlijk wat. Dat zijn 15 à 16 duizend mensen van de Leidse samenleving. En daarvan is, denk ik, zo'n negentig procent, expat. Ik ben zelf ook expat geweest; twaalf jaar lang heb ik in het buitenland gewoond. Maar ik was expat uit vrije wil. En de mensen die bij ons komen zijn mensen die expat zijn, omdat ze gedwongen zijn om expat te zijn. Ze zijn dat door armoede, oorlog in het eigen land en dat soort zaken. Dat is toch een ander type international dan de hoogopgeleiden met een goed salaris. Bij ons hebben de meeste mensen een bijstandsuitkering, ze leven van een minimumuitkering. Het is heel lastig om dan te 'surviven' in Leiden. En deze mensen weten vaak niet goed hun weg te vinden in Leiden. Waar moet je zijn als je een baan wil, of waar moet je zijn als een loodgieter zoekt, waar moet je zijn als je Nederlands wil leren?

Dat is echt super lastig voor de groep mensen waarvoor wij werken. En ze lopen dan ook vaak vast. Eenzaamheid, depressie, blijven thuis zitten, raken werkeloos, raken in de schulden. Het is best wel triest. En wat je ook ziet, is dat deze mensen vaak ook niet outgoing zijn. Ze blijven thuis. Want als het niet goed met je gaat, en je hebt weinig geld, dan kun je ook niet zoveel ondernemen. En onze taak is om deze mensen juist wel te betrekken bij de Leidse samenleving. Dan doen we door huisbezoeken, dat doen we door activiteiten in de buurt, heel dichtbij. Vanochtend hadden we ook een activiteit in de buurtontmoetingsplek. Het is een hele diverse club mensen die je daar ziet. Heel veel verschillende nationaliteiten. Er waren in totaal iets van vijftig mensen en negentig procent was niet geboren en getogen in Nederland. Er waren, ik heb even geteld, vijftien nationaliteiten en er werden elf talen gesproken. En wij willen graag dat iedereen Nederlands leert. Want alle brieven, al de administratie is toch in het Nederlands.

In het boek zie ik drie zaken terug, die ik ook in mijn werk terug zie. Daar zit wel bepaalde overlap in. Ten eerste, de Nederlandse taal, is heel erg belangrijk, om die onder de knie te krijgen. Wat ook heel belangrijk is: ontmoeting. Als je geen mensen kent, dan gaat het fout. En de derde is werk. Je moet werk hebben. En dat hoeft niet per se betaald werk te zijn, dat kan ook een stage zijn of dat kan ook een vrijwilligersplek zijn. In het boek zijn twee verhalen die mij heel erg aanspraken. Dat was ook het verhaal van Maher. Die drie componenten zie je in dat verhaal terug. Dat is werk, hij werkt als kapper. Hij ontmoet mensen, dat zijn klanten, en die klanten, die leren hem de Nederlandse taal. En datzelfde zie je ook bij het VrouwKindCentrum, dat lijkt een beetje op wat wij doen bij BuZz, daar gaat het ook om ontmoeting, van vrouwen van divers plimage. Wat ook heel belangrijk is, je kan daar vrijwilligerswerk doen, je kan de taal daar leren. Daar zitten ook weer die drie componenten in. En die taal, die ontmoeting en dat werk, dat zie ik eigenlijk als een soort springplank om verder te komen. Als je die onder de knie hebt, dan gaat het toch wel een stuk beter met je. Ik ben ook echt een fan van plekken die zo'n springplankfunctie in zich hebben. Ik noem dat springplankplekken. Wij hebben zelf bij BuZz ook zo'n springplankplek, dat is de buurtontmoetingsplek. En ik vind dat daar veel meer van in de stad moeten komen. Die dichtbij moeten zijn waar de mensen wonen en leven. Dus ja, ik vind het een top boekje. Het is een klein boekje maar ik vind het echt een heel groots verhaal hebben. Ik heb er echt heel veel uitgehaald, dankjewel.

#### *Translation:*

BuZz concerns itself with teaching 'basic skills'. Basic skills are skills you need to survive in Leiden and in Dutch society. It's quite difficult for some people to live in the Netherlands, for example, if you don't have money or if you're illiterate. Then things just go wrong and you end up in loneliness. We have investigated together with Blaauwberg how big our target group is and that is quite a lot. That's 15 to 16 thousand people in Leiden society. And of those, I think, about ninety percent are expats. I have been an expat myself; for twelve years I lived abroad. But I was an expat by choice. And the people who come to us are people who are expats because they are forced to be expats. They are this because of poverty, a war in their own country and things like that. That is really a different type of international than the highly educated ones with a good salary. At BuZz, most people are on welfare, living on minimum income. Then it's very difficult to survive in Leiden. And these people often don't know how to find their way around Leiden. Where should you go if you want a job, or where should you go if you're looking for a plumber, where should you go if you want to learn Dutch?

That's really difficult for the group of people we work for. And so they often get stuck. Loneliness, depression, staying at home, getting unemployed, getting into debt. It's pretty sad. And what you also see is that these people are often not outgoing either. They stay at home. Because if you're not doing well, and you have little money, you can't do much. And our task is to involve these people in the Leiden society. We do that through home visits, we do that through activities in the neighborhood, very close by. This morning we also had an activity in the neighborhood meeting place. It's a very diverse club of people that you see there. A lot of different nationalities. There were a total of something like fifty people and ninety percent were not born and raised in the Netherlands. There were, I counted, fifteen nationalities and eleven languages were spoken. And we would like everyone to learn Dutch. Because all the letters, all the administration, is in Dutch anyway.

In the book I notice three things that I also notice in my work. There is a certain overlap in that. First, the Dutch language is very important to master. What is also very important: meeting people. If you

don't know people, it goes wrong. The third is work. You have to have work. And that doesn't necessarily have to be paid work, that can also be an internship or that can also be a volunteer position. There are two stories in the book that really appealed to me. That was also the story of Maher. You can see the three components back in that story. That is work, he works as a hairdresser. He meets people, those are clients, and those clients, they teach him the Dutch language. And you also see the same thing at the VrouwKindCentrum, which is a bit like what we do at BuZz, where it is also about women meeting each other, from different walks of life. What is also very important, you can do volunteer work there, you can learn the language there. The three components come back there. And I see the language, the meeting people, and the work as a kind of springboard to further progress. Once you have mastered those, things will go a lot better for you. I'm a big fan of places that have such a springboard function in them. I call those "springplankplekken" (springboard spots). And we have one of those springboard spots ourselves at BuZz, and that's the neighborhood meeting place. And I think there should be a lot more of those in the city. Which should be close to where people live. So yeah, I think it's a great little book. It's a small book but I think it really has a very big story. I really got a lot out of it, thank you very much.