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 November 9, 2020

Life in the Eyes of a Euro-American

The person that is being interviewed is a close friend. The interviewer and interviewee met in the seventh grade in band class and became closer over the years. The interviewee, or research respondent, was chosen for this interview because she has her immediate family in northern New Jersey, but her extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, are all living in Holland. The purpose of the interview was learning about the kind of perceptions of life she had being exposed to both the American way of life and a Dutch way of life, or a European lifestyle. This recount of her life story reveals the values of family, a little about the differences in culture and climate between New Jersey and Holland, and some challenges in having family so far apart. The interview also gives insight into the transitions into adulthood and an individual finding footing within the transition.

The interview was conducted over Skype and was recorded by a phone by the interviewer with the consent of the research respondent. When it came to the transcription of the data, the recorder was played, and the data was written word by word with little paraphrasing. The interview was conducted with the interviewer at home and the interviewee at college. The questions began with simple introduction into the interviewee's life, understanding important moments within her life and what helped to shape her. Then, the questions took more focus to Holland and of the physical differences between Holland and New Jersey. These physical differences included environmental differences as well as food differences. Questions shifted then to how she feels being in Holland versus New Jersey, Europe versus America, and the focus moved to an interpersonal view of responsibilities, or lack thereof, and the importance of family. Advantages to the approach I took in terms of learning about culture and personality would be that I got a look into two different cultures that both have an incredibly different feel to them. The insurance of accurate data came from writing down exactly what came from the recorder

and trusting the interviewee to be honest. Since I have a history with the interviewee, I was not worried with misinformation. The setting and nature of the interview process reveals that the individual was easy to talk with and able to give a wealth of information having to do with personal memories and experiences. It reveals that the relationship with the individual is one of trust.

Transcript:

I: Hello. This is an interview about you. I would like to start broad with asking who are you?

R: I am 21 years old. I am currently a student at NJIT, and I am being interviewed.

I: Where do you think your life story begins?

R: Me, personally, as a person, I would probably say it started when I began playing an instrument. When I got my piano when I was seven. Because that is where I started with loving music and appreciating it a lot. We connected through music a lot and it got me into different clubs like marching band in high school and developed that weird, expressive side of myself. Maybe it sounds kind of cliché, but I got started with music as a person.

I: Yeah, that's really cool.

R: I never thought of it before.

I: Now you have, and I think that's really interesting. So, you got your beginning with music, what would you say are five turning points in your life? Could the music be one?

R: Music would be one. I feel like I have a lot more than five because I'm thinking of myself as a person. I think, because I did not have a huge amount of friends in elementary school, so becoming friends with my best friend was another because it got me out of my shell a little. Then, when she went to home schooling, that's when I met my next group of friends, which is a third one. Because we've all really stuck together, and I could constantly be myself with them. Socially, I think those are the main ones. I think four might be about academics, going to the math and sciences and understanding that's what I like. Five might be me getting

into NJIT because going from high school to community college was a big step, but it was also all about gen ed classes. So, coming to NJIT, really getting into my major, I'm seeing that this is hard and can suck as a career, but once I get there, it's going to be pretty cool. Those are my main five. There are steps in between. I'm a part of a very loving family that's far away and recently, losing three of them was a hard step, which might be a 5.5, like a half step. That really shaped me to understand that life does suck, and I do need to throw my ex in there too because he's shaped me to not be as naïve. I know that I am, but I really am a huge supporter of innocent until proven guilty. I will always give people the benefit of the doubt and I will defend people to the death, which is a really good, and really bad quality. I think I might want to change my five to be my current boyfriend because knowing what a loving boyfriend is, who actually supports me, he always checks in on me. I think all of those, my friends, my boyfriend, getting into NJIT, and losing my grandparents are all huge shaping points. My grandparents passing doesn't shape me as much as the rest because it was very recent now that I'm grown up, it doesn't dramatically effect, because if it happened as a kid, it would be a lot different with going to Holland every year. I would be so used to seeing them, and then suddenly it would have stopped But now that I'm an adult, going to Holland every year is going to lessen because, going into a career, family trips aren't going to be as much as a thing.

I: I really do get not being able to go as much, especially as you get older and try to make a life for yourself.

R: Right, especially because internships take the whole dang summer.

I: What about visiting Holland during the winter break?

R: See, that's actually a thing, where my aunt and uncle might come here. Which would be nice, but with COVID, things are iffy, so it's a to-be-determined type of thing. But it would be nice, I miss them and love them to pieces. I tell my aunt everything and we weren't really there, I mean, we talked, but we weren't really there for each other with the passing. And talking with her is nice because my dad and my brother are very similar in that they tend to bottle everything up and they don't really talk about it. It seems like not much has changed when something like that happens. So, for my aunt, it's nice to talk to her and ask if my dad and my brother are going to be okay. It was weird not having as much of a chance to do that with my recent grandmother.

I: That definitely makes sense and having that other kind of familial support is nice. But, when you go to Holland, where do you stay?

R: In Holland, specifically, Amsterdam is in the middle, but we are close to Germany, France, and Belgium. It is called Zaltbommel. It is like an hour and a half from Amsterdam. We were staying with my dad's parents. That is where my cousins, aunts, grandparents, both sets, or what's left, were there. My mom's parents had a cute little apartment. We would stay with my other grandparents in a cute, little house. It's like one of those houses where they're all connected. Like a duplex? It was old kind of architecture. They were taller and narrow, three stories with the third being the attic, but the attic was a big, open space unlike what we have here. It was a big room up there that my brother and I stayed in. The second floor had two bed, a bath, and an office. It used to be my dad's house growing up when he lived in Holland. My dad moved around a lot. He went from Holland, to England, to Holland to Australia, to Holland to Singapore, and he always came back to Holland. But that house is where we would stay. It was a five-minute bike ride into town. My dad always jokes that it is a village, not a town. It's a very cute, small town feeling with original architecture, and there's like two or three chain kind of stores. Otherwise, there are the small, boutique kind of stores in that space. A very cute, town square. My other grandparents were 5-10-minute bike ride from the center of town as well. The area itself was a little bigger, because as you go into the outskirts, that's where the bigger corporate buildings are, but in Zaltbommel, in the center of town, you can sit in a café and eat very calorie-ridden, chocolatey, creamy, desserts. Bossche bol is the bomb. But, yeah, to summarize, it's like 2 hours south of Amsterdam. It's not like Eindhoven or Utrecht, the cities, this is cute little town, and if you go to the wrong spot, you're smelling nothing but cow.

I: So, there are a lot of farms there?

R: Yes. When you fly over, it's like the quilted look you get here, except its all flat. SO pretty. There's a beautiful river 2 thousand feet from the town. There's an ice cream shop and a pancake restaurant there, but on the river, there are cargo ships. Here, in America, we don't really see any Cargo ships. We think of the Delaware and people tubing, but there, it's the cargo ships and the current is very strong which is why people really don't swim there. Some do, but only up to the waist, or else the current will grab you. But, on the cargo ships, it's so much fun to see all the different flags.

I: Yeah, that's pretty cool. So, you've said it a couple of times, that some of the things in Holland aren't how they are here. I just wanted to ask, how are things different between being here, in America versus being in Holland?

R: Well, the main one that always sticks out is the transportation. In the cities, there are more busses and such, but where we live, in Sussex County, New Jersey, you *need* a car. I tell my cousin, I am a 45 minute to an hour drive from the mall and she looks at me like I have three heads because she can easily take a 10 minute train ride or even a 20 minute scooter ride and she's already in a shopping area. Even for ages, the ages are swapped for drinking and driving. In Holland, they can drink at a younger age, but get their license at an older age. In America, we can get a permit at 16 and then a license at 17 or 18, but in Holland, they can get their permit at 18, but even then, a lot of people don't bother. My grandparents never got their license because they never needed them. They always took a taxi service, or they biked. Driving is not a big thing there. They have busses, or biking, or scooters. And there is always a bike path on the road and the roads are very small, which makes driving hard because everyone parks on the side of the roads and if you're driving, you need to be careful and not run over bikers. Food wise, Holland has very good fried food. My favorite is croquette. It's like meat in a weird paste, but it's so good. Mayo and fries with it, you're set. They also don't do Chinese food, they do Indonesian food. And they don't really have fast food places. They also don't have hamburgers over there. What they would give is a hamburger patty and ketchup and maybe lettuce. That's it. No bun or anything. For me, personally, these are the ones that I've really experienced. Dessert wise, I mentioned the Bossche bol. There's also the stroopwafels. They're like a thin waffle with caramel. There's also boterkoek, which translates to butter cake. Those are the main food staples that I know of personally. Those are the main differences that I've experienced, mostly transportation and food. Other than the language, but they do teach English side by side with their Dutch grammar classes. It's good because if you ever get lost, you can go up to someone and they know enough English to help you. It's also funny because they curse in English because the Dutch language doesn't have curse words really. I went to an amusement park and I'm used to tuning out Dutch, but then all the sudden, I hear the F bomb and I'm like, WHAT? So, it was very strange until my cousin explained it.

I: So, being born in America, and going to Europe a lot, these places have different feelings that you get when you go from one place to another. What would you say is the feeling that you get from being in America and from being in Holland?

R: For me, personally, just because I've gone so many times, I've lived there for a couple weeks at a time, it's like a second home to me. But, it's like a vacation home. It's like I'm on a vacation mindset. But with a vacation home, it's one spot that I know I'm on vacation. I can relax, I can do whatever I want, but I know where I'm going. I don't need a map. I can bike around. For me, a landmark is a huge clock tower, if I see that, I know exactly where I am. It's one of those things for me where I can breathe again, I don't have to do any work. I get to see my family again, and I can relax, but I know exactly what I'm doing, so it feels like a second home to me. That's how I've always thought of it. People always say home is where your family is. To me, I have my immediate family, and I have them. So, it's, yeah, a second home to me.

I: Nice. And what would you say would be the difference here, in America?

R: Here, I know I have responsibilities. Holland makes me think of when I was younger. Obviously when you're younger, you don't think about as much. You don't think about responsibilities. So, it's kind of just going back to that, going back to that nostalgic feeling. Here, in America, I'm always going to be home because I can see my friends, my boyfriend, I get back into that normalcy. But, there is a different type of nostalgic normalcy when I'm living in Holland. It's not like I'm just there for three days and we have to cram everything in. I can just sit in the house and read a book, or I can go by myself and bike to the river because it's a five minute bike ride, and just sit, do nothing, just look and people watch. So, the best way to describe it is living in the nostalgia.

I: That's a really nice term. It makes it sound more peaceful.

R: Yeah, it is peaceful. You have the background noise of a town. In Jersey, I live in the middle of nowhere. I live in a swamp area. My nearest neighbor is 500 feet away. In Holland, it's nice to have the background noise, but it isn't incessant. So, yeah, it is peaceful. Nice.

I: Yeah, and you're also in two different sort of living styles. Like, in Jersey, like you said, it's very rural, and then meanwhile, in Holland, it's like you're in a little town and everything is close.

R: Yeah. In Jersey, I jump in my car to do anything, but in Holland, I jump on my bike. I check my car tires; I check my bike tires. For me, the biggest difference is transportation and having that little more freedom. With my car, I need gas money to drive around, but with my bike, I just go sit at the river. If I really want to be in nature, I go to my backyard, but in Holland, I just go bike and sit at the river. It's my main go to, but it's a really beautiful spot.

I: How do you know when you're in America versus when you're in Holland other than the plane ride. How do you know when you're there?

R: So not environmentally either? Not with waking up and nearly bumping my head on the wall?

I: However you interpret it.

R: So, I guess I will answer this in two ways. One, we have a couple plans when we go to Holland. We go to this grandparent on this day, or we go to the beach on this day. It's that feeling of having a little bit planned each day. Physically, environmentally, we have six people in the house and one bathroom. So, I wake up with the shower going and know that I need to wait a bit before could use that. Or, like I said, waking up to a wall above my head because I am in a room with the angle wall. There are a lot of dents in the wall. Then, there's the cross beam over the bed that I hit a lot as well. So, there's that. I think another one is that there is this one type of bird that's like an owl that I hear all the time, only in Holland. Hearing that constantly is a reminder that, oh yeah, I'm here. Another one would be the Weeping Willow trees. I tie the trees more to a memory. As a kid, I used to call them the whining trees and it's something that stuck with my grandmother because she always used to make fun of me for it. Environmental is the main one. Or maybe, just the sound of it being a little busier in Holland. Now that I'm in college, I hear it more, but it was something that a few years ago, made me realize, yeah, okay, we're here. But the bird on is a little weird, but that's a big one.

I: Do you think you would ever want to move to Holland or is it really just a nostalgic, summer home to you?

R: It's a mixture which depends on when. If it was now, I don't think I would just because my life is here. School, friends, boyfriend, is all here, but I have family there, so I've been very torn. I think it would be a very tough one, especially language because I can't speak Dutch. Now, I don't know if would want to, like, I would want to, but I don't know if I could. Just because my life is here. I am establishing my life here. But as a kid, I would jump on the idea to live there. But right now, I don't think so.

I: It makes sense, especially because, even though you have grown up going back and forth, you've mainly been here, in America.

R: Yeah, I'm there for 2-3 weeks in the Summer. I think my parents might. I always ask them if they would, but I don't think they want to be far from my brother and me. Just because they know how much it sucks to be far from their parents and vice versa. So, I don't think they would move because they have a full life here.

I: Okay. I think that's all for the questions that I had. Did you have any you wanted to ask me?

R: Yeah, I'm going to ask one. I know you have family in Denmark, but you don't really talk to many of them. Is that weird to you? Do you have distant cousins? I know you have your great uncles and stuff.

I: That whole situation is very weird for me. I grew up knowing that I had a cousin, Holly, and all this other family, and we would see them all the time for birthdays. And I have this distinct memory of going to a barbeque and not knowing who these people were. At the barbeque, my great aunt Vera, who recently passed away, came up to me and she did the 'I remember you', you know the thing many elders do to young kids, and I was creeped out in the time. But something happened from that time, to where I am now, where we stopped seeing that side of the family. I never questioned it as a kid. I never understood what happened. And I still don't really know what happened. I just know that now, we're starting to get back into the family. We're going over for Christmas and we're doing Danish traditions with a dish called

risengrød. A peanut is hidden within this really good sort of Danish rice pudding and you have to eat all of the risengrød, and the one with the peanut has to hold it in their mouth, and then everyone needs to guess who has the peanut. And the person with it, gets a prize, but the prize is always pig related because that's the main dish for Danish Christmas.

R: That's very interesting and cool. With my family, we don't do traditions. They have a Christmas, but it's at a different time, and most of the gift giving happens in the beginning of the year. Is that the same with Denmark?

I: I actually don't know. Because all I know is from the older generations in my family and we've become more Americanized. So, we do Christmas, but with the traditions that their parents have passed down onto them.

R: That makes sense. See, we don't really do the shoe thing. Here, we have stockings, but in Holland, they do that with shoes. But in my house, we don't do that, we just have regular Christmas. But, also, growing up, my parents always said Noel, which is why I didn't believe in Santa, because I grew up with a Noel and Santa, so maybe in my mind, I just thought they were my parents. But it's cool that you still do traditions. We don't really have that in my house, and I sometimes wish we did, but I'm also glad we don't because I like our little tradition of just having our own Christmas.

I: Yeah. Well, for me, that sort of traditional Danish game is something we just started doing in 2018 because we started to really see close family friends that my grandfather befriended that were also Danish.

R: I get that. My parents met friends when they got here, but they were also fully Dutch and also went back to see their family every year. I think that's nice that you do that. Because I was about to ask, which family members are in Denmark? I know it's your dad's side of the family.

I: Yeah. We don't actually know, I don't know who's in Denmark because a couple of aunts and uncles have gone over to Denmark that stay with relatives, but I don't know who these relatives are. I'm just starting to get back into the family, so I'm not really sure. I'm just focusing on trying to understand who all is *here*. We have family in Virginia and now in Pennsylvania because my dad's uncle's wife passed away, so he moved from California to be with his

daughter in Pennsylvania. But it's hard to figure out because everyone in my family is older. So, my dad's uncle is 94 and was living on his own. And we saw him for my great aunt Vera's funeral, and my dad said that he hasn't seen Bob in 40 years. So, it was a big moment. Our family is all pretty far from each other, and there are a lot of tensions within the family, so it's hard for anyone to see each other. Which is probably a part of why I hadn't seen them for such a long time as well. It's hard to piece everyone together because of that.

R: To me, that's really weird because even though my family is so far away, we're still really close. We can not see each other for a year and not talk for a couple months, but when we do talk, it's like we're best friends still. It's weird for me then. I get the distance, but to not like know anything about it... Like my parents moved from there to America, that's where the line splits. So, it's such a weird thing to not think of that.

I: Yeah, I can see how it would be strange. I'm just glad to be getting into the family again now.

R: Yeah, that's really nice.

I: Is that all the questions you have for me?

R: I believe it is.

I: Okay, thank you so much for allowing me to interview you.

R: Of course, thank you for having me.

After the interview was conducted, another question came that required reaching out to the research participant again and this is the question:

I: Do you know why your parents decided to settle in America? Because your dad has been all over. Why here? Do you know?

R: My dad got a job offer here. He was in a job that wasn't bad, just kind of stagnate. So, he got an offer from someone, now his current work partner, in a company because he wanted to start his own business. His partner had the funds to start it but needed/wanted my dad's skill and knowledge. So, my dad accepted, he got his American work permit and all other green card paperwork in place, after lawyer troubles, and he and my mom moved here. It was great because

my mom could join the company too. So, it was a fantastic offer, and he loves his job. He got a job in a field that he wanted to do not what he went to school for. My opa [grandfather] pushed him for a physics degree and most of my dad's the optical engineering stuff was self-taught. My opa wanted to make sure that he could land a solid job, but my dad was super lucky.

Conclusion:

The final question was necessary to include to understand how her immediate family decided to stay in America. It helps to contextualize part of the distance with her family that is in Holland. Overall, the ways in which the interviewee is constructed clearly points out personal values from family, friends, passions such as music, responsibilities that she finds in America, and an escape that allows her to relax and have her whole family present with her in Holland. Aspects of culture such as values of family and friends, responsibilities and coming to adulthood, foods and changes in physical environments affects the formation of the interviewee's identity.

These cultural aspects allow her to know that when she is in America, life ensues and she has responsibilities and relationships like friends and her boyfriend, but she holds onto a nostalgia that allows more freedom into her life as she goes over to Holland for a couple of weeks each year. The freedom stems from a time of innocence of nostalgic past that is held dear to the interviewee's heart and this feeling is tied up in the meaning of Holland. Meaning of Holland for the interviewee escapes the boundaries and ties of responsibility and stands as a symbol of her youth. She expressed feelings of nostalgia and being with her entire family as one, shows that Holland is representative of those familial values as well. Meaning of America is presented to the research respondent in such a way that America stands as her first and true home. It is a place of responsibility where social pressures push her toward adulthood and building a life for herself rooted in American values such as hard work.

The balancing of the two cultures does not seem to weigh on her directly, but rather the familial distance. This issue of agency becomes worse as she combats with the challenges of adulthood because it would mean being able to travel less to see her family in Holland. This remains a main component of the social and cultural issue that is represented by being a part of two different cultures, in two different worlds. It is clear from the interview, self-identity of the research respondent is understood in America from personal life goals and ideals that she would

like to uphold, while in Holland, family values are more so celebrated within her. From the interview, everyday recounts and stories of what life is like going back and from between America and Europe reveal the self-processes and cultural aspects of goals, responsibilities, and distance pressures placed on family in the lived experience of the research respondent.