

PACKING for a new life



**Migrants & Newcomers
Group**

Migrant Suitcase Hanna Mason

Nederland – The Netherlands
to New Zealand, year 1954

The Story

This suitcase story is about the de Bres family who emigrated from Holland to New Zealand in 1954. I was the youngest child at the time and was 18 months old. In total, there were seven children and my parents. We boarded the Waterman on 8 August for a boat journey that would last 33 days. My father was the ship's chaplain so we had a free passage and could take 10m³ extra of luggage. This meant we were able to bring household furniture as well as a car, which was much cheaper to purchase in Holland, especially as we had free freight.

My parents had been thinking about emigrating to Indonesia before WW2 but this wasn't possible. Having lived in occupied Holland and experienced the grim post war times, they were keen to go to another country that offered a better future for their family. The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand offered my father a position as a migrant chaplain so they had employment organised. However, I can hardly imagine the monumental task it must have been to organise a large family to travel to the other side of the world. First, there were all the immigration papers, health and police checks to be done and then all the packing!



The shephard and his flock.

We discarded some unsuitable clothes and a pair of sandals and laceups were purchased for each of us as someone had told us that the quality of the shoes in New Zealand was inferior to what you could get in the Netherlands. We got a good discount for such a large purchase! Unfortunately, the shoes were brown and as school shoes in our adopted country had to be black, my father painted them all, as buying new ones was out of the question. Linen and blankets had to be sorted, household appliances checked and repaired, the library thinned out and so on.

There were various farewells, the hardest one being with family at the wharf in Rotterdam. My paternal grandmother was too sad to come, as she knew she would never see my parents or seven of her grandchildren again. My parents could not afford a return trip back to Holland until 27 years later. At last, they found their cabin with four sets of bunks and an aluminium cot for me!

The boat came through the Panama Canal and stopped at Curacao, Balboa and Tahiti before arriving in Wellington. The journey must have been very busy for both my parents. My father was busy with his job and my mother had all the washing to do which was not easy as you had to line up to use the washing machines. You could pay to have your



laundry done but this was too expensive. There was a recreation officer and a playroom for the younger children but my mother had to go as well because there were too many children and the supervision was not adequate. My two older brothers loved to roam all over the boat although they fortunately came back at mealtimes! Luckily my 2 oldest sisters were able to help out a bit and I spent a lot of time in a playpen on the deck! The final part of the journey was rough so Wellington was a very welcome sight on 10 September. Before we disembarked, a reporter from the Evening Post took a photo of our family and it appeared in the paper the next day with the title "The Shepherd and his Flock."

We settled in a house in Lower Hutt that had been organised for us. People in the church had been very kind filling the pantry with lovely food and made us very welcome. One funny event a few days after our arrival was that my mother was looking out the kitchen window and saw a young elephant in the neighbour's garden. She wondered what kind of wildlife we had here, but soon discovered it was an escapee from the circus in town!

There was a lot to learn in their new country. Luckily, both my parents had quite a good knowledge of English but being able to read English and speak it in an everyday sense are not always the same. However, they



were keen to settle and learn English and we youngsters picked up our new language very quickly. Not without a few problems though. My elder brother did not know the word for toilet and was not able to make it in time, as he couldn't ask his teacher what he wanted! We were keen to correct our parents on their word usage or pronunciation! In the nineteen fifties, New Zealanders were not so ready to embrace diversity and we quickly learnt to be Kiwis. We wanted to be just like the other children at school and didn't always enjoy the fact that things were done differently at home.

There were many things my parents had to learn like different shoe sizing and changing from the decimal system of measurement to imperial. Later of course, this all changed when decimal currency came to New Zealand in 1967. The secondary schools here all had school uniforms that weren't worn in Holland and prefects in school were something new for us as well. They were rather shocked to find that teachers were still using corporal punishment in schools. Food was cooked differently, for example, my mother cooked her meat and chicken in an orange cast iron pot on the stovetop-not in the oven. Most people in New Zealand did their own baking but in Holland people bought cakes and biscuits from the bakery. Mum had to learn to bake our favourites from simple Dutch recipes. Pavlova was a real treat for us. We had never heard of a potluck dinner



Netherlands

Europe

Russia

Africa

The flag: The colors used in the flag of the Netherlands are based on the coat of arms of Prince William of Orange, who was a leading fighter in the freedom for the Dutch. The main difference is that the red band was originally orange in color.

and we soon learnt that bring a plate meant bringing a plate with some food on it. My mother asked for a citron at the greengrocer's and they sent her to a garage where they sold "Citroen" cars! My parent asked for tissue paper when they wanted toilet paper and were offered cigarette



First Christmas in New Zealand

paper. So many little misunderstandings in their new language but they took it in their stride and laughed at themselves a lot. One thing my parents did miss was that there were no cafes as they had in Holland at the time. There were only milk bars and tearooms that didn't have much atmosphere and good coffee was hard to buy as well.

Christmas was very different in New Zealand. In Holland, there was Saint Nicholas Day on the 5 December and that was when you gave and received gifts. On Christmas Day, it was a time for families to meet together, go to church and enjoy a good family meal. Here it appeared to have more of a party atmosphere with party hats, games, eating and drinking. As the years went by Christmas got more relaxed at home but it was still a quiet family day.

These are just a few different things, but they adapted well. My parents taught us that New Zealand was indeed a paradise and they never complained about missing their country of birth. They were excited to

show us the whole country and we travelled extensively around New Zealand. They were forever thankful for their new life here and we are all proud to be New Zealand citizens.



Country and its history

Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, the Netherlands also commonly known as Holland, is a country located in Northwstern Europe. A population of 17.30 million people, all living within a total area of 41,500 Km². Amsterdam is the capital. Holland is one of the most densely populated countris in the world. Two official language are spoken: Dutch and West Frisian. Greek geographer Phyteas is the 1st author to describe the coast in 325 BC. The Netherlands has a developed economy with coal, gas and agriculture highly mechanised. It is the world's second-largest exporter of food and agricultural products.

The oldest human traces dating from 250,000 years ago. From 800 BC to 1000 AC Celts, Germanic tribes and Romans then Franks, Saxons and Angles inhabited the country till to be controlled by the Carolingian Empire. Around 1100 AC, farmers began draining and cultivating

uninhabited swampy land. Then from 1384 to 1890 Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands kingdoms, Dutch and Batavian Republics follow each other. In the 17th century, the Dutch Empire grew to become a major seafaring and economic powers. The country has a long record of social tolerance having abolished the death penalty in 1870, allowed women's suffrage in 1917, and legalised same-sex marriage in 2001.

The Netherlands has had many well-known painters: Rembrandt, Vermeer and Van Gogh and philosophers: Erasmus. Football is the most popular sport.

***This Suitcase exhibit is prepared by Hanna Mason and
Nanda Rammers***



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