

NAUL NIEUWS

Newsletter of the Netherlands America University League

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When the Saint Comes Marching In

Get ready for a visit from Sinterklaas - We are back in touch with Sint

via the e-mail of course. He even sent a text message to Ton Broos on his new i-phone about his visit to Ann Arbor on **Saturday, December 1.**

Of course, Ton Broos doesn't know the first thing about text messaging, nor does he own an i-phone, so Ton had to use old fashioned e-mail to confess to Sint that he is a little behind the times. Sint told him to get with it and join the 21st century. Who knows, perhaps Janet can finally convince Ton to, at least, carry a cell phone. With all his new gadgets, Ton was surprised that Sint hasn't yet 'dumped the horse'. Sint assured us that he will be here as usual with horse and Pieten and that he is really looking forward to seeing all his old and new friends in Ann Arbor. He just continues to rave about Gretchen's House as the best place to meet all the little ones.

The registration flyer is included with this Newsletter. It gives you all the information you need to sign up your kids, grandkids and yourselves in order to greet Sint and his helpers at **Gretchen's House, 1580 Dhu Varren Road, Ann Arbor.** We are counting on Bram and Lia van Leer to be on hand to lead us in a stirring musical welcome for Sint.

Sint's Ann Arbor helpers are busy getting ready for his visit. Riet Haas, who is in the Netherlands until November 20, researching Sint will still coordinate the names of the children and adults who will attend. So, it is even more important this year that you mail or e-mail your response by the **deadline,**

Saturday, November 24. Note that you will not be able to reach Riet by phone until after November 20. If you miss the deadline, we will not be able to accommodate your children and we cannot make exceptions. So please, do not disappoint them.

Tanya van der Voo is coordinating all the treats for the Sinterklaas party. Karla Vandersypen and Lineke Zuiderweg will be working with Tanya preparing food and drinks. We will have luscious bread rolls to enjoy with ham, cheese, turkey and more. Members are asked to bring a sweet or a savory snack or beer or wine to share with other NAUL members. If you have any questions about the refreshments, e-mail Tanya at tvandervoo@comcast.net or call her at 734-663-5506.

Mars de Ritis has lined up daughter **Lilian Dwyer** to take charge of the annual Sint raffle. Raffle donations from members are welcome: books, CDs, household gadgets, wine, and gift certificates. Bert Haas and some of the board members solicit donations from the local business community. Bert has indicated that a couple of the merchants who usually provide gifts have discontinued that practice. So, this year your gifts will be especially welcome. Karla Vandersypen will coordinate the raffle gifts. If you have something nice to donate, contact Karla by phone at 734-668-1240 or by e-mail to vandersypen@sbcglobal.net.

Finally, remember that your dues must be up to date to participate. If you haven't paid your 2007 dues, please do so now or be prepared to pay on the evening of the party.

More Sint Stories

Over the years, we have written many stories and legends about Saint Nicholas. Your editor is beginning to run out of interesting and amusing anecdotes about the Saint. I recently read an article listing all the people (children, sailors, fishermen, archers, pawnbrokers, thieves, etc.) and places where St. Nicholas is revered as patron saint – from Greece to Barranquilla Colombia, to Beit Jala in the West Bank of Palestine. What I did not know was that in 1809, the New York Historical Society convened and named Santa Claus the patron saint of New Amsterdam (now New York). Now, many believe that Santa Claus and the Saint are one and the same --- soooo, I guess we can say that Saint Nicholas is also the patron saint of New York.

We know that in the 11th century, the Turks defeated the Eastern Roman Empire and that the empire lost control of most of Asia Minor including Myra which was taken over by the Islamic invaders. Then, in the confusion of battle, sailors from Bari in Apulia seized the remains of St. Nicholas and brought them to Bari, arriving in 1087. Some people reported seeing myrrh exude from the saint's relics. Another local legend has it that three pilgrims brought some of the remains to a church in what is now Nikolausberg, near Göttingen, Germany. Still, a Venetian legend claims that most of the remains were actually taken to Venice and that only an arm was left in Bari. Ireland also claims that some of the Saint's remains were brought back from the Crusades by a local knight and were buried in Thomastown. Poor St. Nicholas! To be cut up and carted over half of Europe.

Truth is that St. Nicholas is unique among 'scattered' saints in that *most* of his bones are actually preserved in his grave crypt in Bari. In the 1950s, during a restoration of the chapel, the Roman Catholic Church, allowed a team of scientists to photograph and measure the bones in the crypt. Finally, in the summer of 2005, these photographs and measurements were sent to a forensic lab in England. The data revealed that the historical St. Nicholas was barely five feet tall (shorter than average for his time) and had a broken nose.

In the past, we reported on the many good deeds and happy legends about the Saint. However, one grisly story has it that during a particularly terrible famine, an evil butcher lured three children into his house, slaughtered them and put their remains in a barrel to cure. He then planned to sell them off as ham. St. Nicholas who was visiting the region saw through the butcher's horrific crime and resurrected the three boys from the barrel. Another version of the same grisly tale, that is thought to be the origin of the English horror legend of Sweeney Todd, is that three clerks wished to shelter the night in the butcher's house. The man murdered them and was advised by his wife to dispose of the bodies by turning them into meat. Of course, the Saint saw through this and brought the men back to life.

Manna from bones?

Each year it is said that the bones of Saint Nicholas sweat out a clear watery liquid, called manna, which seems to possess great powers. To the joy and relief of the populace, the bones continued to sweat even after they were brought back to Bari. To this day, on December 6, a flask of manna is extracted from the tomb of Saint Nicolaas. It should be noted however, that the tomb lies at sea level in a harbor town. However, many of the faithful still believe in the power of 'manna'.

Read also Lia van Leer's account in the Dutch Corner – next page.

The Dutch Corner

Het gebeente van Sinterklaas

Waarom Sinterklaas al jaren lang uit Spanje komt weet ik niet. Hij is geboren in het tegenwoordige Turkije en was bisschop van Myra in de 4e eeuw. Dat was toen deel van het Byzantijnse rijk. In de 11e eeuw, toen het rijk werd aangevallen door Mohammedaanse Turken, werden de Christenen in het Italiaanse vissersdorp Bari bezorgd dat de bedevaartplaats Myra niet meer toegankelijk zou zijn voor hen. In 1087 staken de “dappere vissers” van Bari de zee over, stalen het gebeente van Sint Nicolaas en brachten het naar Bari.

Ik zou dit nooit geweten hebben als ik niet in 1993 met Bram een week in Bari had doorgebracht op sabbatical. We gingen die winter achtereenvolgens naar Bari, Rome, Tel-Aviv en Amsterdam. We dachten dat het in Bari het warmste zou zijn, daarom gingen we daar het eerst naar toe. Dat viel lelijk tegen! Er stond een gemene wind uit zee. Ik moest een extra wollen jas kopen en Bram een wollen mutsje. Bari was best een leuk Italiaans stadje, maar het was er zo verrekte koud dat we niet veel toeristisch ondernamen. Behalve het kunstmuseum bezochten we een kerk die Sint Nicolaaskerk werd genoemd. Tot onze verbazing stond daar een kist rechtop in een nis, beschilderd met de beeltenis van Sint Nicolaas. die de beenderen van de Goedheiligman zou bevatten. Van een monnik hoorden wij hoe het “heilig gebeente” in Bari terecht was gekomen.

Na 9/11 las ik toevallig in de krant dat in de buurt van het World Trade Center ook een Sint Nicolaaskerk stond, die tijdens de ramp eveneens geheel verwoest werd. De bevolking van Bari heeft toen geld bij elkaar gebracht om die kerk in New York weer op te bouwen. Dit bericht zou me nooit zijn opgevallen als ik niet in de kerk in Bari was geweest.

Lia van Leer

An Editorial

A Letter from Iraq

Here are excerpts from an e-mail Ton Broos showed me and I think it worthwhile to share in this Newsletter. Our writer is ‘Andrea’ a recent former student of Ton’s Dutch class who is now serving in Iraq. Andrea was in the ROTC at the UM and after graduation was deployed to Iraq. This is her second deployment. She is with a marine unit that coordinates the evacuation of wounded marines back to the US. She really feels good about her role in helping the wounded survive and return home to their families. When her military service is finished, Andrea wants to do a Masters degree in Library and Information Science.

Some, your editor included, do not agree with the current administration’s policy on Iraq and the Middle East – the invasion and the continued deployment of troops, but I believe Andrea’s words are worth sharing. First, I should mention that Andrea sent a contribution all the way from Iraq for “Dutch Studies” which prompted a thank-you e-mail to her from Ton. This is part of her response

“...I like supporting the Dutch department. You were one of my two favorite professors at Michigan.I feel very honored that you are proud of me! I know that the war is not popular in a lot of places, but I do still think it’s important and a worthwhile cause. And I can attest to all the positive changes that have taken place in Al Anbar province that the President and Gen Petraeus have talked about. I have been in Al Anbar province every deployment [since] I’ve been here and it is amazing the differences that we’ve seen. ...” [Andrea goes on to ask about Ton’s Anne Frank course] “I have the book of her diary which I’ve read several times. It is pretty amazing and whenever I read it, it makes me feel really grateful for the stuff we have today and how few sacrifices we really have to make for anything. While it is not nice making sacrifices, I will say that in general, people appreciate things less when they haven’t had to sacrifice for it.”

Regardless of one's personal politics, I think we can all recognize Andrea's sacrifice – her own and that of the hundreds of thousands of young men and women taking part in this conflict; young people who have put aside their own dreams and ambitions in a cause for which most of us have had to sacrifice so little. I hope Andrea returns to fulfill her dreams.

Trivia

Sweets help chase the blues away! Statistics reveal that during rainy weather more sweets are sold. (I guess this could be called a "Dutch consolation").

Matt Lauer, NBC reporter, has a Dutch wife and his youngest kid is called Thijs.

Composer Benjamin Britten was commissioned to write a Christmas cantata. The story tells of Saint Nicholas and his Christian exploits. It was written for a small orchestra, three choirs, a tenor soloist (St. Nicholas) and a treble (young St. Nicholas).

Exhibitions

Metropolitan Museum New York City. *The Age of Rembrandt: Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum*, now through January 6, 2008. This exhibition features 228 paintings from the Met's own collection, including works by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Frans Hals and others. You can read Holland Cotter's wonderful review of this exhibition by accessing the NY Times Arts archives. Also in the archive is a User's Guide to the exhibition.

The Morgan Library and Museum, New York City. *Painted with Words: Van Gogh's letters to Emile Bernard*, now through January 6, 2008. This show features twenty never before exhibited letters by Van Gogh to Bernard. It also includes twenty-two paintings, drawings and watercolors chronicling their brilliant artistic exchange.

Congratulations to Laurens and Julie de Jong on the birth of their baby boy, Ansel. The De Jongs showed off Baby Ansel at the NAUL's September reception. Look at this darling boy's website, just Google Ansel de Jong.

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