

## The IFLA Staff

### An Open Letter to Margreet Wijnstroom

*Lieve Margreet,*

We realize that most of the articles in this special issue of *IFLA Journal* will be written by persons who know you professionally rather than personally. Many of the articles will link your accomplishments to a place name (Bellagio, Veldhoven, Reisenburg, and the IFLA Conference cities: Lausanne, Oslo, Manila, Chicago, Tokyo...the list goes on and on!...) and have special meaning to all who worked with you to achieve IFLA's goals. We who know you best and have worked with you so closely over the past years (some of us since 1960!) have come to regard you as a personal friend rather than as our employer, and this is the side of you that probably should be shown in an international tribute to you. Your IFLA career did not really begin in 1971, when the Secretariat moved to The Hague with you as its Secretary General. When you worked for the Dutch Library Association from 1960-71, the Netherlands hosted the 1966 IFLA Conference. Both Jos and Dia remember your enthusiasm and your attention to detail. Everything had to be perfectly organized from the host country point of view (and as the IFLA Conference still must be from your vantage? point as Secretary General). The 1966 Conference was comparatively small and each participant found a bottle of Dutch genever and a basket of fruit in his room as a welcome gift. You even managed to persuade Van Riemsdijk, the Director of the Amsterdam Library School, to stand in front of the Kurhaus, the Conference Hotel, to demonstrate the Dutch way of eating raw herring. The lucky man must have eaten hundreds!

In your Dutch Public Library days you were a stern task master. Letters had to be retyped (and this in the days before word processors and computer!) until they were word perfect – no erasures or mistakes. Now, with your limited staff, you are not so critical of typing errors, and if a staff member makes a major error – few and far between, we must stress – you are the first to admit that “the buck stops here”... and to assume total responsibility. This is most likely a carry-over from the days when you were an international field hockey player, captaining the Dutch team for a decade and later serving as its coach, accompanying it abroad. Your strong sense of fair play still prevails. If the Dutch team then had made a mistake (and now if the IFLA team makes a mistake) you personally shoulder the criticism.

As a very sports-minded person, it necessarily follows that you are also very conscious of the health and well-being of your staff. Before hiring Carol you very frankly asked, “How is your health? You look very fragile to me and none of my staff has ever been sick!” And to Dini who had been sent all over town in 30 degree Celsius heat during a conference to purchase supplies, and had dropped exhaustedly at her desk, “You don't walk enough. You have to have more exercise!”

Exercising your duties at IFLA Conferences is strenuous. During the 1974 Conference in Washington DC you yourself were busy rushing around for an entire day, constantly on your feet. An official reception was held that evening, you

dressed beautifully for it, and to your great consternation, because of feet swollen to twice their normal size you could not get your shoes on. "The Barefoot Librarian" to everyone's regret could not yet appear in public. Since then, to all IFLA Conferences you carry at least 10 pairs of shoes with you – rivalling Imelda herself!

In your car at all times are three pairs of shoes, not including your golf shoes.

When you took up golf six years ago – perhaps as a retirement hobby, but we who know you better insist that you want to maintain and sharpen your competitive instincts – you began with a very high handicap. You now have a 20 handicap, and so is it any wonder that Bill Welsh (Deputy Librarian of the Library of Congress) has refused to meet the challenges you extend to him whenever he is in The Hague? However, our message to Mr Welsh is that on the golf course in Zandvoort you do have a Waterloo, the 12th hole. Countless balls have gone out of bounds on that hole, and if Mr Welsh is wise, he'll insist on stroke play rather than match play.

How often does one meet royalty on the golf course? There was a time a few years ago when Prince Claus, playing with Prince Johan Friso asked whether he could "play through". (This does not mean that you are a slow golfer – just the normal golfing rules and etiquette which prevail).

Speaking of royalty, imagine the thrill for three of us who were at your side during the reception at the Tokyo Conference. You introduced us to His Imperial Highness The Crown Prince of Japan, whom you had met earlier during the opening ceremony. You introduced us as: IFLA's Dutch bookkeeper, IFLA's secretary of Hungarian origin, and IFLA's American executive assistant, and added that "IFLA's international membership is also reflected in its staff".

And how can your dedication to IFLA be more clearly illustrated than by your regrettable declining of an invitation to Soestdijk (one of the Royal Palaces) because you would be on a mission abroad for IFLA at that time?

We are constantly amazed that you are never at a loss for words – whether they appear in official documents which you seem to draft directly from the head to the pen, faultlessly (and this in the four languages in which you are fluent) – or to your extemporaneous speeches made during receptions. Hilda remembers particularly the IFLA Conference in Leipzig, her first after joining the IFLA staff. Mr Rückl, head of the DDR organizing committee handed over to you a very original present, the cook book of Goethe's mother. And you promptly found a witty answer to this unexpected gesture: "I not only thank you for this valuable book, but promise that when you next come to The Hague, I will use these recipes when preparing a meal for you".

However, you sometimes put us at a loss for words. Who would dare to begin a letter to a prominent librarian nationally (but one who is new to the IFLA circuit, as a Standing Committee member) with: "You of all people should know..."! And during an Executive Board meeting to have said, "John and Peter (names changed to protect the innocent), please stop talking and pay attention!"

Of course we will especially remember your personal gestures. You never return from your international travels without a small gift for each of the IFLA staff. And during IFLA Conferences you always remember to buy presents for our children – they might be t-shirts which will fit our husbands, but our children can always grow into them!

Your personal attention is not limited to staff and Board members alone. How many visits a year do you make to old persons in nursing homes, always with a small gift?

One of your volunteer activities – reviewing detective novels for the Dutch reading public – has had two results. First, since you receive a complimentary copy of each book read, and pass these on to hospitals, nursing homes and friends, their libraries have been increased by a book stock of more than 300 meters. Secondly, you must by now be aware of every means known to man to commit a dastardly deed – and this will be of great use to you upon your retirement when you plan to write your own mystery novels!

Finally, your expertise at juggling IFLA Conference schedules to avoid overlapping professional interests is somewhat akin to your penchant for puzzles of all sorts – logigrams and cryptograms in particular. And so, following our letter to you we have added a cryptogram, involving your own best kept secret. The clues for solving the cryptogram below are in boldface print throughout this letter (a simple letter substitution), but the actual cryptogram is much harder, and we know that only you will succeed in solving it, and that's probably as it should be, because it is *your* secret! Good luck in solving the problem, and our very best wishes to you in the future.

Love from us all, Jos (de Block), Carol (Henry), Hilda (Urai), Dini (Verschoor), and Dia (van Vliet).

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NP YVNW AZFY YHNWUTAF CUGBX NTJY UTH DSU LDUY YXWA  
YUBF 50 DGWIM BNW INAVLL?