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A Dutch Writer & New Found Friends

Pia de Jong already had a well established career as a novelist and writer when she moved from Amsterdam to Princeton in the summer of 2012 with her husband, Robbert Dijkgraaf, who had just been named the director of the Institute for Advanced Study.



Pia de Jong

But how to make friends and discover the charms of her newly adopted hometown? De Jong's solution was to keep writing, including producing a weekly column called Flessenpost (Notes in a Bottle) for the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad. Her columns are focussed on her life in Princeton and its environs, but also can range far and wide. Among her subjects: A Woody Allen lecture at Alexander Hall, an interview with Jim McCloskey of Centurion Ministries, and a tour of the Time-Life Building in Manhattan.

Earlier this month de Jong visited Judith Scheide, the widow of Bill Scheide, the Bach scholar and patron of the arts who died in November at the age of 100. Judith Scheide wanted de Jong to see the famous Scheide Bach portrait at the Scheides' Princeton home, before it was donated to the Bach-Archiv in Leipzig, Germany, an institution that Scheide had founded and served as curator and director.

Recreating the visit in her column, de Jong quotes Judith Scheide: "Bill bought this painting 62 years ago. It was his most prized possession. Our mornings always started here, in this room, with the music of Schubert. Bill said that listening to Schubert first gave him permission to listen the rest of the day to Bach."

Several days after her Scheide column appeared, Princeton University announced that Scheide had left the school his collection of rare books valued at nearly \$300 million, including a Gutenberg Bible, an original printing of the Declaration of Independence, all four of Shakespeare's Folios, and musical manuscripts written by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and Wagner.

De Jong will appear at the Princeton Public Library on Monday, March 2, from 7 to 9 p.m. to discuss her adjustment to writing in English and what it has taught her about the immigrant experience, among other topics. The free event will be moderated by Princeton resident Landon Jones, former editor of People Magazine and author of "Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation."

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