

*This letter may seem a bit odd to you in places, in that it was written in lieu of this year's Christmas letter. Nevertheless, it'll give you a feel for our life here in Amsterdam thus far.*

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January 17, 1996

We didn't send out Christmas cards this year because we're spending the spring semester in Amsterdam, and the weeks preceding our departure were pretty chaotic: It's difficult to gather everything that one needs for a "simple" four month move; four of Caryl's graduate students defended their theses or dissertations during the days prior to our flight, so the holidays were spent working through endless revisions of those documents; we've got renters at our house in Chapel Hill, so it was necessary that we clean and clear out closets for their use; during the four days prior to leaving we suffered one of the worst snow-and-ice storms in history; etc., etc., etc. But at last, we've arrived in Amsterdam to commence our sabbatical (Jan 8 to May 8). And as you might imagine, life in Amsterdam is wonderful! I don't know whether you've spent much time here, but in the event that you haven't....

To begin with, the architecture is quite lovely. The buildings in the central part of the city are all several hundreds of years old, four stories tall, about the same width, and constructed of brick. Individuality is expressed in small ways – through differences in the shape of the top of the building, the type or color of brick, the form of windows, the existence of carvings and other artwork.... One encounters buildings with odd and beautiful shutters, carved sheep in stone relief-work, iron lettering listing dates of construction or occupations of owners from several centuries ago, dolphin sculpture on the roof, gold highlights on white window moldings.... all existing side-by-side in lovely harmony. Ceilings are high, windows are huge. There's a "sameness" in architecture that gives the city a very pleasant look – a pleasant uniformity such as that of Paris, if you can imagine a Dutch version of Paris. Why are the buildings of the same general age and height and construction? There was a terrible fire in the 1500's or thereabouts, and following the fire they instituted a building code. Thus.... general uniformity.

The canals give the city a wonderful appearance and feel – a little of the look and atmosphere of Venice, if you can imagine a Dutch version of Venice. The existence of water all over the city gives the place a sense of lightness, openness, airiness. There are a variety of bridge shapes; often, a bit of the bridge is outlined in white lights. Accordingly, the canals are quite lovely at night, with the lights of buildings and bridges reflected on the water. The boats are of incredible variety. Swans float by occasionally.

Our apartment is on the second of the three primary canals that form half-circles off the Amstel River. We're next to a bridge, looking down on the bridge and canal from our airy living room. The building is a couple of centuries old. The apartment is small – living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom – but the rooms are quite large, with ceilings that are 20' or so high, perhaps even higher. It's a corner apartment, so there are huge windows in every room, with the lovely light of Amsterdam pouring in all day. The ceilings are intricately carved in white plaster, with lovely designs. There's an old fireplace in the living room with a gas log that provides great warmth. There's an old gold-framed mirror above the fireplace. The furniture is contemporary and enormously efficient. You know – very "Eurostyle," lots of white cabinets, every centimeter employed in the most sensible manner imaginable. (Those clever Dutch!) (Over the course of many visits to this country, we have never encountered an elevator or toilet or computer or any other sort of machine that didn't function perfectly.)

It's quite a delight to walk around the city. Amsterdam is small, so everything in the center of the city is easily accessible on foot. There are lots of beautiful old bridges and churches and public buildings. The city is filled with sculpture – in parks, in public squares, on the sidewalks. And there are gobs of pedestrians, gobs of cyclists. This looks nothing at all like city life in the US. Plus, the people are great looking. I've been told that there's only one country on earth with a taller average height than the Dutch. (I believe the Masai in Kenya are taller.) Also, Amsterdam is a very young city, filled with artists and journalists and psychotherapists and such. So there are all of these long, lean, loose-limbed, great-looking, trendily dressed, very hip people walking around. Lots of skinny jeans, boots, black shirts, stylish jackets. Lots of people with hair so blond it's almost white. And there's a kind of un-selfconsciousness about them. These people are a pleasure to watch.

The shops are a ball – lots of small, odd, unique shops selling great food or wine or chocolate or bread or coffee or art or furniture or track lighting or watches or antiques or canvas bags or umbrellas or pillows or duvets or.... If you've ever imagined it, there's a special shop for it. There's an endless feast of smells and colors. And we love Dutch taverns. Dutch beers are of enormous variety, each served in a special sort of glass, sometimes with a slice of lemon or orange on the side. The taverns feel sort of like working-class bars in the US, or like pubs in Great Britain. You know – old, dark, warm, and friendly. Frequently, wooden tables are covered with an oriental rug as tablecloth. People hang out in the taverns, spend lots of time there.

We can't wait until the weather warms up in the spring and all the public squares are open, filled with small tables and chairs, the entire population sitting in the sunshine drinking beer and talking for hours. It's beautiful in the springtime; indeed, it's beautiful right now.

Of course, it hasn't been one endless feast of bakery bread and flavorful beer and Dutch chocolate. We've spent time in Amsterdam on perhaps a half-dozen or so occasions, so the city itself is familiar. But (a) visiting Amsterdam and (b) living in Amsterdam are two quite different matters. The experience of living here has been a powerful lesson in how much of life is a simple matter of convention. Food is organized differently in grocery stores. There are unexpected conventions for having telephone service connected. Banks don't issue checks – you pay bills by listing your bank account number on the bill itself, then mailing the bill to the bank. If you frequently use the trams (which I do, getting to and from the university), it's sensible to obtain a monthly tram card, which is an enterprise involving numerous complex steps. Opening a bank account was a hair-raising experience.

Of course, virtually everyone speaks English, which makes things enormously easy for English-speaking foreigners. But at the same time, we have only a limited understanding of the conventions of the Dutch, and the Dutch have little sense of what conventions are assumed by any given category of foreigner. Indeed, one isn't even aware that something to which one is accustomed is a "convention" until one experiences events unfolding in a surprising manner. For example, we took lots of cash with us when undertaking to have telephone service connected. No, no – you don't pay cash, the deposit will be requested in the first bill. Great! (Aren't the Dutch a trusting people???) We've got instant telephone service, the bill arrives (in Dutch), we set it aside to pay within 30 days. Whoops – two days later, our service is disconnected. That Dutch bill apparently indicated that the deposit was to be paid within two days. So we're instantly back to square one on telephone service, hiking to odd offices to pay the deposit, FAXing copies of the receipt here and there, begging for mercy on ignorant Americans. (Typically, they are merciful.) (We've got telephone service once again.)

Cooking has been one of the greatest adventures. Shopping for groceries is enormous fun: "What's flour in Dutch?" Bloem. "What's buttermilk?" Karmemelk. "What's cumin?" We still don't know. It's easy to confuse milk with yogurt. We still haven't located parmesan cheese, although they've got every other conceivable form of cheese. One develops enormous compassion for the illiterate – we rely on pictures, make inferences based upon contiguity to known products. Back in our kitchen at home, opening the food packages we've purchased is like Christmas: "Oh, look at this, what a surprise!" And there are enormous differences in what constitutes "normal" kitchen equipment. Now, I'm not such a pampered American that I didn't realize I'd have to get by without my Cuisinart and blender, my JennAir grill, my garlic press and parmesan grater. Okay, fine – I can live without a Cuisinart. But after purchasing a ready-made quiche one day, we walked home only to realize that not only did we not have a JennAir on the rangetop, we did not have an oven below the rangetop. Apparently, in the Netherlands it's not unusual to cook without an oven. And it seems that everything gets recycled, everything is environmentally friendly. For example, dishwashing soap is unfamiliar in feel and function. (No doubt, it's better for the water.)

But thus far, there's been only one brief period during which I've turned into that nightmare, "Petulant, Pampered American." And even then it was a private fit – I didn't make a public spectacle of myself. We know a few people here, so our "dance card" is sufficiently full. Saturday night we had dinner with longstanding friends Paul and Wilma, followed by a film ("Smoke," with Dutch subtitles), followed by hanging out in a tavern. This Sunday Naomi and Dick will take us sightseeing outside of Amsterdam, followed by dinner at their place. And there are gobs of things to do – great museums, a promising-looking concert hall (at present, they've got Emmanuel Ax playing Schubert and Chopin), a state-supported opera company. There would seem to be plentiful and diverse opportunities for a good time, all of which we plan to enjoy in excess.

So for now, the world most definitely is spinning in greased grooves. We may even get some work done during our time here. (The sabbatical's ostensible *raison d'être* is [a] time for Dave to recover from serving as department chair and get his research program rolling full tilt once again, and [b] time for Caryl to work on two books, one of which is in collaboration with a Dutch colleague at the Free University.)

Write if you've got the inclination.

With love,

*Caryl and Dave*

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We'll be in Spain during late March, in Italy during late April, in Paris for the occasional weekend.

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January 23, 1996

Dear Craig,

Boy, was it a mess getting ourselves out of Chapel Hill. Mother Nature dumped about a foot of snow over the weekend prior to our departure, then rained a bit, then snowed some more. Our driveway was a solid block of ice. The roads weren't cleared. The battery in our 12 year old Volkswagon has this infuriating tendency to go dead when it's really cold (it's one of those chronic, undiagnosable, unfixable qualities that CarylandDave vehicles invariably possess), so naturally the battery died that weekend. We were trapped in the house, unable to run all of those last-minute errands that needed to be accomplished before leaving town. Not only did we not get all of those errands run, we barely made it to the airport. A couple of hours before our plane was scheduled to take off we were still stuffing things into bags, stumbling across the snow and ice to shove our things into our friend Don's car. Don bravely steered us out of town to the airport, slithering over the icy roads. We couldn't make it up a couple of hills, and had to back down, get up some speed, and half-drive/half-skid over the top. We finally managed to pile ourselves and all of our bags onto the airplane, heaving huge sighs of relief.

But here we are at last, finally relaxing a bit and trying to pull our lives together. I'm sitting at my desk in our living room, looking out the front windows over the beautiful Keizersgracht (watching it freeze over!), drinking Courvoisier (to keep warm, not out of a sophistication that I don't possess). Just the mood and setting for writing a few letters. I've also enclosed an odd Christmas-substitute letter, which conveys a bit of the feel of our lives here. The précis: It's glorious.

At the same time, getting settled here has sometimes been a headache. In the enclosed letter I briefly note one "getting established" incident: We had telephone service connected, but it was promptly disconnected when we failed to pay a bill indicating that a 750 DG deposit was due within two days (the bill was written in Dutch). Our Dutch friend Paul made a series of phone calls to determine what was up and obtain instructions regarding the next step. We paid the deposit per instructions conveyed via Paul, but service still wasn't re-connected. It turned out that it was necessary to FAX a note to the telephone company, along with a copy of the receipt for payment of the deposit. We did so. Then it came to pass that although it was possible to phone us, we couldn't phone out. After another series of negotiations via Paul, full service was finally re-connected. We'll never again take telephone service for granted.

Then there was opening a bank account – another monumental headache. For awhile it appeared that we'd have to register with the foreign police (a procedure which is rumored to require a full eight hour day, at best), then register at the Amsterdam Town Hall. Of course, even this was not clear to us until Paul intervened to clarify matters. After a series of phone calls via Paul, we located a bank that was willing to open an account for us without all of this hassle. (Apparently, Paul threw around his status, along with "Professor" in front of both of our names, along with numerous repetitions of "Vrije Universiteit." Eventually, they succumbed. Paul notes that much of life in the Netherlands involves soft negotiation, assuring others that one is trustworthy, convincing them that they won't lose any money on you.)

Trying to find US-sized paper was another hassle. In advance of our visit, everyone assured us that US-sized paper was readily available. So yes – I should bring along my portable printer. But once we arrived, it became apparent that nowhere in all of Amsterdam do they sell US-sized paper. Of course, we determined that this was the case only after traveling to nearly every office supply store in the city, after frequent assurances that US-sized paper was sold in

Amsterdam, after frequent assurances over the phone that a given store in fact sold US-sized paper, etc. After visiting the eighth store – the largest office supply store in Amsterdam – it became clear that you simply cannot buy the stuff here. (It is possible to buy both European- and US-sized paper in Canada, so it seemed plausible that it would be possible here.)

Why have we encountered all of these impediments to easy settlement? It's certainly not due to obstinacy on the part of the Dutch. They're lovely. It's that (a) although their English is very good on average (something for which we're endlessly grateful), sometimes it's not sufficiently sophisticated to convey the whole story, and (b) there are an enormous number of conventions by which life is lived that simply do not translate from one culture to another. So ultimately, this settlement experience has been fascinating – a vivid lesson in the degree to which everyday life is governed by norms based on convention rather than logic. (David suggests that this fact punches huge holes in the public choice assumption that "rational, best solutions" exist and will be discovered.) And of course, this is as true of the conventions we assume based on life in the US as it is of the conventions the Dutch assume based on life here. It's astonishing! (Of course, my obsessive-compulsive tendencies also play a role in such complications [e.g., why did I plan to make use of US-sized paper while living in Europe????] I'm learning to loosen up, go with the flow, adapt. It's quite a new experience for me!)

It's also very cold here – colder than the actual temperature would suggest because it's simultaneously damp and windy. Just before we arrived the Keizersgracht was frozen; apparently, every resident of Amsterdam was out ice skating. (I wish we'd been here for that!) (Indeed, given that it seems to be freezing up once again, as I write this letter, we may actually have a chance to join the locals in some ice skating.) You can imagine what a shock this has been to me, given my warm and pampered past in Southern California and in the South. But Dave has taught me how to dress in a more fitting manner, so I'm learning how to stay warm while tramping all over the city. I'm learning the necessity of layering, scarves, multiple pairs of socks, sensible shoes, leather gloves, and anything else I can manage to wrap around my chilled body. My ears are still freezing (like needles jabbing into my eardrum), but otherwise I'm toasty.

And we do tramp all over the city, going to and from the university (in my case; Dave's by-and-large working at home), going out to lunch at noon or for coffee in the afternoon or for dinner in the evening or for a beer late at night. Plus, shopping is more or less a non-stop enterprise – picking up a few groceries, grabbing a bottle of wine for dinner, stopping by to inquire about repairs on a watch. You know how it is: When travelling on foot, you pick up only a few things on any given trip. There's also the problem of getting ourselves equipped in all of the ways we didn't anticipate a priori – warmer clothes, a monthly tram card, cold medicine (boy, do we miss Contact and Nyquil and Afrin!)... that sort of thing. Also, it's an enormous pleasure to use the local shops – fresh bread from the bakery, delicious chocolate, exotic beer, the day's Herald Tribune, Dunhills from the tobacco shop (I've had to resort to British cigarettes; they don't sell Virginia Slims Menthol Ultra-Lites here).

We've been wooed socially, as one would expect of the ever-charming Dutch – lots of dinners, lots of lunches.... I think we're sort of like catnip for these guys. Or at least, they treat us as though we're catnip. (As I said, these guys are ever-charming.) Friday night we went out for a beer with some of Paul's friends. They were adorable – smart, funny, sophisticated in an easy Dutch way, wordly, modest.... It was a nice time. Tonight Henriette – a Dutch woman I met last winter at a workshop sponsored by the Kurt Lewin Institute – is taking me to a string quartet performance at the Concert Hall. Even strangers on the street are charming. For example, this morning when I was rushing to catch a tram to the university, the tram that pulled up had a field of stripes where the tram number normally would appear. I held up five fingers to the driver, with a questioning look on my face ("is this a #5 tram?"). He opened the door, and I asked (in English) whether this was a #5. He said, "no – this is a no-number tram," then paused, smiled with a wink and the charm of a Frenchman, and said "the no-number means I'm going home." They're really beautiful people.

On Sunday Naomi and Dick (some friends from professional conferences) took us to the Kröller-Müller Museum outside of Amsterdam to see a special exhibit of the paintings of Charley Toorop. Very talented, very Dutch. The museum's permanent exhibit was also quite

nice – lots of van Goghs, Mondrians, Bruegels, etc. Lovely. And the experience as a whole was very Dutch. We parked the car and rode bicycles through the woods to the museum, through a grounds sprinkled with wonderful sculpture. And Naomi and Dick "worked" a museum as we do – slowly, a bit of talk about the influence of various styles and periods, the occasional story about stuff we've seen at other museums.... without being effete or overly intellectual.

After the museum we went to Naomi and Dick's place for dinner. We could not believe their house! I think it's the most perfect house I've seen in my entire life. It's in a neighborhood beyond the Free University that's in the "Amsterdam style" – 1920s or so, sort of art deco, spare and lovely detailing on both exterior and interior. It's not huge or anything, but it's been restored and decorated with exquisite care. The entry hall is spacious, with black and tan marble half-way up the walls. The doors have lovely detail work – for example, a row of small square windows just above eye level, beautiful moldings, ivory doorknobs with a touch of black trim. Their furniture was designed by a friend – very modern, and crushingly stylish and beautiful. The lights are Murano glass. The kitchen is a marvel – glossy white cabinets, black granite surfaces, white or stainless steel appliances, a Dutch version of a Sub-Zero refrigerator.... And they have amazing silverware and china, beautiful glasswork from Venice or Israel or Prague.... every detail chillingly modern and gorgeous, a delight to the eye. The bathroom is a blend of spare modernity and opulent luxury. You get the idea – every detail in this house has been wrought with the utmost care and is of the finest quality. It's almost too much – the overall effect is so perfect it almost makes your teeth ache – but things never go over the edge. It took our breath away. Plus, they're terrific cooks – amazing and perfectly blended flavors in each course, absolutely simple (yet complex, if you know what I mean) Italian food. We listened to Maria Callas doing Turandot while they cooked.

So.... I guess that's about it. (When you find yourself writing in excruciating detail about home decorations and US-sized paper, it's time to close.) We think of you often, and wish that you were here to enjoy this beautiful city with us. For now, I'll close so as to drop this in the mail on my way to meet up with Henriette (pronounced "Harriet") at the very trendy "Balie" on the very lovely Leidesplein. We'd love to hear from you if you have a chance to write.

With much love,

*Caryl*

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To resume....

I've mentioned that the canals are frozen, right? – they've been frozen for several days now. The wind's bitterly cold, whipping down the canals and side streets. It's difficult to find refuge from the cold – it sneaks up your sleeves, slithers down your collar, and seeps into your bones. It makes my spine ache with the tension of resistance. When I'm outside walking somewhere, sometimes I'll slip into a shop just to escape the cold, sometimes I'll begin to run so as to warm myself and create the illusion that I'll reach my destination more quickly. (I don't run very fast under normal circumstances, but when I'm bundled up in a zillion layers of clothes and coat, loaded down with briefcase and purse, my running's a complete joke.) Well, now the weather's taken yet another turn: When we got up this morning it was snowing, and it's continued to snow all day. It's sticking. Mother Nature is really strutting her stuff, running through many of her available routines in quick succession!

However, Amsterdam is really beautiful in the snow. The view facing me: The sun is setting. The Keizersgracht is white – ice blanketed with snow. The sidewalks are white; the roads are brown brick. (Hordes of small trucks with plows and salt dispensers toured the city all day, spraying salt on the roads [I don't imagine the plows do much good, given that the roads are mostly brick]. US snow trucks are huge, lumbering things, never sufficient in number; Dutch snow trucks are small, efficient, adorable, and apparently unlimited in number.) The buildings are red or brown or white brick with snow resting on the ledges. Since the sun is setting, the yellow glow from the windows adds a soft tone to the scene. The street lights are golden. The bridge in front of our apartment curves over the canal, and the three graceful arches supporting the bridge are outlined in white lights. There aren't many cars out – mostly it's a sparse parade of bicycles. It's a modern-day Bruegel out there – really breathtakingly beautiful.

I still can't believe we're living here! Every morning we get up, shower and dress, and throw open the curtains covering the front windows in the living room, the side windows in the bedroom, the kitchen window. The windows begin about two feet from the floor and extend to the ceiling, which is enormously high; the windows cover the entire width of each wall; we're on the corner, so windows cover two full sides of the apartment. The sun pours into our rooms, and the glorious sights of Amsterdam are before us – the Keizersgracht just in front of us, a lovely row of centuries-old Dutch buildings across the canal, and a cozy little shop-lined street to the side (the Berenstraat, in the event that you want to look us up in an atlas). Looking down the canal a few blocks, we can see the steeple and onion dome of Oud Oestekirk (sp?), the lovely church near the Anne Frank House. Every morning I feel a shudder of surprise and delight that we've got the enormous treat of living in such a beautiful place.

The apartment Paul located for us could not be more ideal. It's a little student-y in size and furnishings, but has charm (e.g., high ceilings, huge windows, lovely fireplace, ornate plaster-work on ceilings). It's main advantage is that it's precisely in the heart of Amsterdam. Every morning I enjoy a wonderful three-block walk along the canal to the Leidesgracht, where I catch my tram to the university. Two blocks up is the Leidesplein – surely the best public square in the city. In the winter the bare trees of the Leidesplein are trimmed with white lights; this gives a wonderful festive touch to my tram rides home from the university in the evening. In the summer the Leidesplein is filled with small tables, which in turn are filled with the very young, very hip residents of the city, all of them drinking beer and conversing with animation. (The Leidesplein was an immediate contender for one of our pet competitions: Best Piazza in Europe.) The Dam is only a few blocks away, as is the Kalverstraat, one of the best shopping areas in town, including as it does the English bookstores W. H. Smith and American Booksellers, along with a thousand other shops. Walking to Kalverstraat and the Dam takes us along very small streets lined with an enormous number of unique and endlessly absorbing shops selling everything from antique maps to trendy lighting to Maria Callas memorabilia.

So living right here in the heart of things is quite staggeringly, overwhelmingly Dutch. We're endlessly grateful that Paul found this place for us, and that we're not living on the outskirts of the city – say, near the Free University, where one might as well be living in the US, in that it's not nearly as cozy or interesting or overwhelmingly Dutch. Residing where we do, we live and breathe all of the pleasures of the city. (Besides, there's one last advantage of our living quarters that I haven't yet mentioned: There's a "nightstore" right next to us, just around the corner. It's funny, but virtually every Dutch person who's visited our place has commented on the tremendous good fortune of living next to a nightstore.) (Whoops – one last advantage of our living quarters: We're virtually 20 yards from one of our favorite B-grade restaurants in Amsterdam, 't Zwaantje [the little swans?]. We're only a couple of blocks from the hotel we always stay in when we visit here, and there's this cheap restaurant that we just love – more of a tavern than a restaurant, oriental rugs on the tables, very warm and cozy, terrific satay, that wonderful stew-like dish with mussels that they fix here, an adorable blond waiter who seems to live in the place, etc.)

Every night, it seems like every single resident of the city is out having a good time, drinking beer and talking. Monday night Henriette took me to a string quartet performance at the Concert Hall. The concert itself was well beyond my musical sophistication – 20th century stuff that sounded to my brutish ears like monster insects from a science fiction film. But the audience seemed to be tremendously sophisticated, everyone sitting on the edge of their seats, many following along on their personal scores, rising to applaud thunderously at the end of each piece. (And even I, with my complete lack of sophistication, was moved by the last piece. Perhaps the stuff begins to make some musical sense if you merely allow it to wash over you for long enough.) In any event, before the concert we ate terrific Indonesian food at a small bar, and the place was packed. After the concert we stopped by a tavern for a couple of beers, and the place was packed.

And these people are so great looking. The women have natural hair, little or no makeup, easy yet trendy clothes, and are simply, naturally great looking. The men have longish, tousled hair, wire-rims, easy yet trendy clothes, and are simply, naturally great looking. This has the feel of a city filled with journalists and academics and musicians and psychotherapists and artists and every other form of compassionate, well-educated human being. Everyone looks smart – they look like they read and pay attention to the news and have intelligent things to say about life. They look like they know what matters in life, they look like just the sort of people you'd love to spend the evening talking to for hours and hours. And indeed, they seem to be just that – they do know what matters in life, they are the sort of people you'd love to spend the evening talking to for hours and hours. We've done a fair amount of stuff socially, and the conversation invariably has been funny, thoughtful, well-informed, absorbing, intelligent, charming, interesting, a bit self-deprecating, and enormously enjoyable. I like these people.

I'll close now so as to cook dinner, but will return later to write a bit more.

January 28, 1996

To resume once again....

I'd have thought that life here couldn't get better, but it has. Today the sun came out, it warmed up a bit (or perhaps the wind merely died down), and everybody's out on the canal skating. It's an incredible "scene!!!!" There are speed skaters, people playing ice hockey, parents pulling their kids on sleds.... People of every age and skating ability are out there, all of them having a ball. It's a pleasure to watch some of these guys, in that they seem to glide forward in such a smooth and effortless manner, hands behind their backs. Insight #1: Watching adults skate, it's quite clear that they're playing – literally playing. When we see adults out running, for example, there's something about it that looks a bit like work ("I'm doing this for the sake of my health"). And when we see adults out playing football, for example, there's there's something about it that seems a bit like "trying too hard" ("I'm doing this to win"). But seeing adults out skating, it's absolutely clear that they're doing it for the sheer pleasure of play. Insight #2: One element in the Dutch excellence at speed skating is environmental. The conditions under which they skate (i.e., on canals) provide them with these huge, long "rinks" on which they can really get going. Somehow, this environmental element becomes lost when one skates around and around on a rink or on a pond.

I haven't said much about work, have I? Well, at last, we're really rolling on work. It took a week to get our lives running here, then it took another few days to become acclimated to working in this new setting. (You know – you've got to get all your reprints located near your desk, get the light adjusted so it's just right, get the printer functioning properly, get plenty of paper and ink cartridges on hand, etc.) But finally, we're enjoying the benefits of being away from Chapel Hill. This became particularly evident this weekend, given that we had no social activities and spent four full days snowed in. (We'd planned a couple of things, but cancelled because of the snow, because both of us now have colds, etc.) Over the weekend we worked (in an unfrenetic way) all day and all night for four days straight, and now we're clearly "in the zone." I'm loving it. In particular, I've been spending a lot of time working on the outline for the book with Paul. Thus far, it's a 38 page outline. (Think we should just blow off the book and publish the outline? It's a masterpiece.) This is gloriously free.

And now, to more important matters, my reading activities: First I read *A Marriage Made at Woodstock* (Cathie Pelletier), about divorce and renewal and self-discovery. Perhaps self-recovery would be more descriptive, in that the protagonist has lost himself in middle age, and recovers the best parts of himself only through the process of rebuilding his wrecked life. Not bad – a B+. Then I read *Uncivil Seasons* (Michael Malone), also about re-construction of the self in middle age. It's very Southern – includes dead-on characterizations of Southern wealth and Southern "trash." The protagonist is a hero in the oldest tradition of Southern writers – troubles with drink, family, and the meaning of life. It's a mystery, very funny, and quite good – an A- (a high score for me; only Wharton and James and Stegner earn A or A+). I'm now reading another Michael Malone, *Handling Sin*. It's just great. The protagonist has become "respectable" in middle age, and his father decides to save him by causing his life to unravel. I'm really loving it. Here's a gem I enjoyed while putting on make-up this morning:

Raleigh's commitment to the managerial power of the will was such that it was far easier for him to believe people would do idiotic things on purpose than that idiotic things could be, without purpose, done to them. Were this not true, sanity would be a useless skill, was probably a handicap.

Nice, eh?

February 12, 1996

I keep thinking that I'll reach some sort of natural closing point on this opus, but that's clearly not happening. What's wrong with me? Are the conditions for writing here so glorious that I've become verbal-expulsive? I fear so. (On the other hand, I've completed one chapter and one empirical article thus far, so I'm not going to sneeze at this verbal-expulsive state I'm in. Moreover, there's a third paper that's inches from completion, awaiting some analyses I've requested from a collaborator in the States.)

However, I really must close now, or I'll never get this thing in the mail. This weekend we're going to Maastricht with our friends Paul and Wilma to celebrate Carneval, so that should be fun. Maastricht's really a beautiful city – very, very old, with gobs of charm. Following Maastricht I'll no doubt begin another opus, so for now....

With much love,

Carol (and Dave)

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Life here continues to be as good as we'd anticipated. Correction: It's even more lovely than we'd imagined it might be. We continue to feel delighted each morning when we look out our windows onto the beautiful Keizersgracht. I continue to feel delighted on my walks along old Amsterdam streets to and from the tram, as well as on tram rides through the streets of the city on trips to and from the university. Dave continues to feel delighted on his walks along old Amsterdam streets to pick up "appleflops" from the bakery and grab a copy of the Herald Tribune at the newsstand. It's quite beautiful at night, with the lights of the bridges and buildings reflected on the canals. We're still gawking, misty-eyed tourists. It's just so thoroughly.... Dutch. The unique shops, the "brown cafés," the architecture, the gorgeous public buildings, the wonderful people are just so thoroughly.... Dutch. This is a sunny, open place. Even the architecture is sunny and open, with high ceilings and huge windows that are seldom covered with curtains. It's quite marvelous.

They've got this important word "gezelligheid." Actually, it's more a way of life than simply a word. It's used to describe the appearance of a room, the atmosphere of a café or bar, it's even used to describe individuals or the mood of an interaction (e.g., "keep it gezellig"). There's no English language equivalent. The word that comes closest is probably "cozy," but gezellig conveys much more than simple cosiness. The Xenophote's Guide to the Dutch suggests that it's "partly a sort of cosiness and partly a living togetherness." (This is a fairly high-density country, so perhaps there's good adaptive value to keeping it gezellig.) This quality permeates all of Dutch life, from the environmental to the interpersonal. It's quite wonderful – something we'd never have fully realized on the basis of vacationing here.

An illustration: Several weeks ago we travelled with Paul and Wilma to Maastricht to celebrate Carnaval (Mardi Gras). The city was crowded with thousands of visitors, all of them in costume, all of them having consumed a fair amount of alcohol. Now, we all know what would happen in the US under such circumstances – there would be some nastiness, some fighting. But here.... there was bottomless good cheer. There were troops of costumed revelers and musicians roaming the city (anyone owning an instrument was playing it). The musicians occasionally burst into music while marching down the street – "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" as a dirge, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" in self-effacing comic form. Now, we all know how this would be organized in the US – gobs of police, gobs of official organizers, gobs of lists and permits specifying what troops could march at what times, and where. Yet this event had no apparent organization, no police presence.... it was complete anarchy for five full days. And yet, we saw virtually no "bad scenes," no signs of hostility, nothing but cooperation and celebration. Lovely. (And quite a bit of fun.)

Another thing we're discovering about this culture centers on their odd blend of individualism and socialism. In a way, the Dutch are intensely individualistic – more so than Americans, in some respects. One needn't even imagine uttering "do your own thing." At the same time, there are strong norms favoring egalitarianism and decency. These are very humble, modest people – it's not good to "put oneself forward" (they've got a saying about this, something to the effect that "tall trees catch wind"). They're very fair-minded, with enormous tolerance for "deviance" (drug use, varieties of sexual behavior) and strong inclinations to take care of one another (social services are terrific). These fine qualities don't stem so much from kindness as from "good sense." Since the Golden Age they've had a solid middle-class; since the Golden Age they've been merchants, traversing the globe doing business with all sorts of "different" people. The Dutch have a very fundamental sense of how to "get along."

Naturally, there are drawbacks to this odd blend of individualism and egalitarianism. Their university system strikes us as somewhat antithetical to excellence. It's the old European system, with one or two "big cheese" professors in any given program, along with many "smaller cheese" faculty and grad students (with no great distinction between the latter categories). I've heard young faculty refer to the local professor as "my boss." To "move up," one must literally move – to a different program at a different university. This guarantees that no single program stands out in

excellence – each program has one or two "good people," along with numerous "smaller people." It's nicely egalitarian and guarantees a high minimum level of quality, but doesn't foster striving to be "the best" ("tall trees catch wind"). Plus, the professors must be "professors" for their entire lives (endless memos, endless meetings, "running the show" forever). Oddly, their within-university hierarchical structure yields across-university egalitarianism. In the final analysis, we much prefer the within-university horizontal structure of the North American system, which yields across-university variability in excellence.

Indeed, the cultural atmosphere to some degree discourages bold creativity and wildly innovative behavior. They've got dreadful music here, dreadful food. Why is this? I think it's that although it's very important to do good work and "carry one's load" – although it's even desirable to make a lot of money (so long as it's not displayed conspicuously) – it's bad form to really stand out from the crowd. So whereas American individualism yields rock 'n roll, blues, jazz.... Dutch music is awful "Las Vegas lounge" pop. And whereas American individualism yields nouvelle cuisine and wonderful regional cooking.... all Dutch food more or less tastes alike (bland, smothered in gravy). (Of course, the local "non-Dutch" food is terrific – Indonesian, Italian, French....) So although we love the fairness, decency, humility, and basic socialistic tendencies, there's an absence of wildness that's.... not so good.

At the same time, the Dutch do have wonderful government, they do take care of one another admirably, they do have bottomless tolerance, and there is virtually no violence (I can walk the streets at 2:00AM with literally no fear of assault). So it's not clear whether the tradeoff in "wildness" and innovation might not be a desirable compromise. We're not sure. (Of course, this question is moot from a personal point of view – we're so thoroughly American that we could never really be Dutch. This is not our culture.) (Also, although they're unremittingly tolerant and fair in most respects, their women's movement is decades behind the US. There's not one female full professor in Dutch social psychology. It's clear why this is so when you examine everyday Dutch life: Shops and banks close at 6:00; there's really no viable day care; etc. The entire social structure is solidly pro-family. All of this means that life is meant to be lived on one salary [his]; this means that she's meant to produce and care for children.)

But the preceding cultural analysis to some extent is beside the point from a personal point of view. In that life here – for this too-brief period – is just terrific. We're having a wonderful time. We go to museums occasionally, enjoy the occasional concert. Our friend Dick's trying to get tickets to La Boheme (opera's very popular here, so tickets sell immediately). Paul took us to an Ajax game the other night. Naomi got us all tickets to see the Vermeer exhibit at The Hague in April. We spend time with friends over dinner or late-night drinks in these wonderful Dutch taverns. Following a very good (Italian) dinner the other night we walked to the American Hotel for coffee. The American Hotel is this incredible pile of yellow art deco brick on the Leidesplein. The dining room of the hotel is an art deco extravaganza – a complete expatriot experience. Wonderful. (I met Xavier Hollander in the women's toilet.) We take long walks around the city on weekends, roaming the streets randomly. It's such a small city that I know it better than I ever "knew" Los Angeles. So everyday life here is an enormous pleasure.

And working here is really quite unbelievable. We're free to work on whatever we wish, whenever we wish, with no obligations or appointments to interrupt intense absorption. We can work until 3:00AM and rise at 10:00AM whenever we wish, eat (or not eat) whenever we feel like it. Thus far, I've got four manuscripts or chapters "off my desk," and Paul and I are making good progress on our book. Dave's enjoying equal or greater progress in his work. It's incredible to be able to "load" all relevant stuff for a project, "live" the project for a while, and produce a polished product that can be put in the mail at the end. There's glorious absorption during work on a project and glorious closure at the end. This is what a sabbatical is meant to be.

So.... To quote Steinbeck, the world most definitely is "spinning in greased grooves."

Cheers,

*Camp*

From Jan 8 through May 8 I'm at: Department of Social Psychology / Van der Boechorststraat 1 / Free University. Amsterdam / 1081 BT Amsterdam / The Netherlands / 31-20-444-8934 (office)

ary's parents flew to Amsterdam in mid-March. After several days in town, the four of us split for two weeks in Spain, travelling with a tour group so as to make life easier for all. (We're sheepish about having toured with a bunch of rich Americans [and rich British and rich Australians and rich New Zealanders], but have to admit that in many respects the "tour route" had its benefits, including convenient travel, tremendously informative guides who took us EVERYWHERE, and luxurious hotels. And someone else carried the bags.) (Nevertheless, we won't soon do it again: It's insufficiently leisurely – not enough time drinking wine in public squares, watching life roll by – and turns one into a passive "sights" spectator. Also, fellow travellers are likely to exhibit – and sometimes induce – shopping frenzy.)

We covered well over 2,000 miles in our travels around Spain, beginning in Madrid, travelling northeast to the Basque region, southeast to Barcelona, southwest along the Mediterranean Sea through Valencia all the way to Gibraltar, and finally travelling northwest through Toledo back to Madrid. Whewwww! Spain was warm and sunny – it rained just once during our visit.

We found the Spanish to be enormously attractive and appealing, with a bit of the soul of the Italians – happily hedonistic, soulful and artistic, religious at least in part for the sake of art and ritual, enormously generous and friendly, and thoroughly committed to good food and wine. But while the Spanish share the Italian conviction that "if it isn't pleasurable, why bother?", there's a dramatic, rather dark and wild side to the Spanish that includes a deep attraction to the "kiss with death" (e.g., bullfights, flamenco, bonfires and fireworks; more on this below).

Assorted comments: The Spanish excel at wine and food (coffee con leche, fish and seafood, wine and sherry and cognac, chocolates, breakfast pastries, fruit, almonds, olive oil...); there are multiple, truly lovely architectures; the Iberian Peninsula is quite isolated from the rest of Europe (geographically, and due to Franco) so they've got a highly distinctive culture; some knowledge of Spanish is essential; talk about the Spanish Civil War continues to be "not the done thing."

### Some highlights:

Segovia and the Sierra de Guadarrama: A graceful hill-town in the breathtaking Sierra de Guadarrama; crisp and sunny skies; a cool river running along the town; magnificent El Alcázar; 2,000 year old Roman aqueduct; beautiful cathedral; Iglesia de la Vera Cruz; lovely monastery....

Burgos and Old Castile: Lovely Old Castile; El Cid's tomb; Santa Maria Cathedral and Arco de Santa Maria; "Burgos" is a pleasure to speak ("Boooooorgos," with a rolling r)....

*Some of our first evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: El Cid was a soldier of fortune, admired for the reckless courage and zeal with which he fought both the Spanish and the Moors.*

Pamplona and the Pyrenées: A quiet town jammed with lovely churches and public squares and sculpture; intense Basque men of all ages wearing boinas (Spanish berets); bull ring with Hemingway statue; the majestic Pyrenées; Rioja wine and the Ebro Valley....

*Further evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: Everyone is familiar with the "running of the bulls": After praying to their favorite saint, everyone runs with the bulls – the young and the old, women and children. Enough said.*

Saragossa: We knew little of Zaragoza (sounds like "Faragotha"), but it's lovely; wonderful moorish Castillo de la Aljaferia; Plaza del Pilar, Basílica del Pilar, and Our Lady of the Pillar; bull ring; Catedral La Seo; it's vaguely exotic....

Barcelona and Catalonia: Beautiful Catalonia; unbelievably lovely Monestir de Montserrat perched high on a sheer rock rise above the Catalonian plain; Royal Basilica and the Black Madonna; clear, high voices of the boys' choir singing at noon; Barcelona is a loud and busy city but has its charms; fantastic architecture by Gaudí in the cathedral and elsewhere; lots of art nouveau architecture; Ramblas and Plaza de Catalunya; Paseo de Gracia; bull ring (they brag that they don't torture and kill the bull in Barcelona fights); Monjuich Hill; Catedral Santa Eulalia; Picasso museum with art by seven-year-old Pablo; gypsy flamenco....

Valencia: Beautiful Mediterranean coastline, Mora Pass, massive Roman aqueduct, truly gracious living combining Roman/Moorish/Spanish elements; citrus trees everywhere; Plaza de la Virgen; La Lonja; bull ring; Serranos and Cuarte; La Seo Cathedral; the local cathedral claims to have the Holy Grail (and takes this very seriously); lots of Goya paintings; troglodyte cave dwellings....

*Further evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: Valencia recently enjoyed their annual saint's day celebration in which they construct hundreds of two-story paper maché sculptures, drunkenly celebrate day and night for a full week, and burn all sculpture in a wild and magnificent display at the end.*

Granada, the Alhambra, and the Generalife: The serenity and beauty of the Alhambra and Generalife Gardens cannot be conveyed with words; quoting David, "these people were defeated by barbarians" (referring to the Moors' defeat); a fantasy of lace in stone with arabesque gardens and fountains; exotic water gardens of the Generalife (these guys knew and treasured water!); the Catedral de Granada; Calle de las Flores; the Old Quarter; bull ring; the Sacromonte and gypsy cave dwellers....

*Further evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: The Spanish fought the Moors from 711 until 1492; desirous of a new outlet for their violent tendencies, they immediately proceeded to explore and conquer the rest of the world.*

Torremolinos and the Costa del Sol: The Costa del Sol is exceptionally beautiful; at the same time, Torremolinos is one of the most tourist-y beach towns we've ever encountered (a bit dreadful; stay elsewhere); excellent seafood with odd and delicious combinations of flavors....

Gibraltar and Costa de la Luz: A truly "great" rock fortress with a fascinating history; Moorish Castle; St. Michael's Caves; Barbary apes living the high life on the rock; delicious sherry....

Seville and La Mancha: Beautiful, civilized Andalusia; Maria Luisa Park; Plaza de España; Puerta del Príncipe; La Torre del Oro on the Guadalquivir River; Cathedral and Columbus' tomb; bull ring; Santa Cruz Quarter; flamenco dancing....

Toledo, La Mancha, and the Valley of the Guadalquivir River: Evocative Venta del Quixote and windmills; Toledo itself is a spectacular medieval town on a granite hill surrounded by a loop of the Tagus River; narrow streets with beauty at every turn; moorish bridge; a glorious early synagogue in Moorish architecture; a most wonderful gothic cathedral (in our view, second only to Notre Dame); Puerta Bisagra; Claustro de San Juan de los Reyes; lots of El Greco paintings....

*Further evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: The Spanish Inquisition.*

Madrid: Madrid is splendid; broad avenues with lovely parks in the median; fountains and sculpture abound; grand public buildings; a harmonious and beautiful arboretum; gracious, sprawling El Retiro Park; extraordinary Museo Prado (de Goya! el Greco! Velázquez!); Puerta del Sol, Plaza España; Parliament; Paseo de Castellana; bull ring; Plaza Mayor; extraordinary El Escorial Palace with amazing history (Phillip II); Monasterio de San Lorenzo; stunning basilica combining renaissance and neo-classical architecture; breathtaking descent to the glorious tomb of the Spanish kings (since Phillip III); monumental architecture of the Valley of the Fallen, with a massive basilica built inside the mountain (although it's prototypical fascist stuff; shades of Nurenborg)....

*Further evidence of the Spanish kiss with death: We saw a club show (Bob Fosse crossed with Las Vegas feathers-and-lights) including amazing flamenco and other uniquely Spanish dancing; one act included topless female "toreador" dancers fighting male "bull" dancers; the kiss with death seems to include a hefty component of sado-masochistic fantasy.*

When we returned to Amsterdam, Hal Kelley was here for two weeks to work with Paul and Caryl on several interdependence-type projects (commenting on the VanLange-Rusbult book, preliminary work on an "interdependence atlas" project, etc.).

During the interim we went to a moving performance of Porgy and Bess by the Harlem something-or-other Group; managed to get tickets to attend the glorious Vermeer Exhibit that's touring the world (a peak experience); and saw a wonderful performance of La Bohème by the local opera company. Also, Caryl gave a colloquium at Leiden, and had a load of fun. Dave finished teaching his course at Twente.

In a few days Dave's parents arrive for several weeks of travel with us in Amsterdam, Paris, Thun, Venice, Florence, and Rome (i.e., an "if this is Tuesday, this must be Belgium" tour).

And just a few days after our return from Rome to Amsterdam, we fly back to Chapel Hill. Whewwww!