

Inclusion Press International

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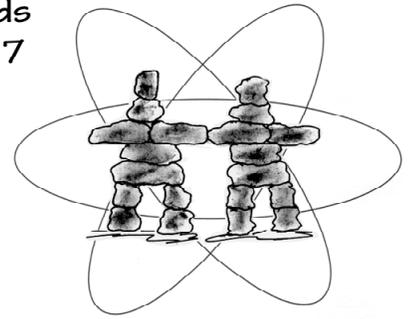
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Dear Erwin,

Please accept these deep and heartfelt congratulations to you as you receive this honor so well deserved. I want to use this occasion to travel down memory lane and recall some of the journey, at least as I experienced it.

It was the early 90's when we met, when through your work for the Province of South Holland, you were, I believe, on your second study tour in the United States. Your visit to Rhode Island with the first Dutch '6 pack', as we affectionately called you, was at least for me, a turning point. The 'Dutch Six': Hans Krober, Hans Van Dongen, Gert Dagers, Bob Geijp and Joost Van Lee and you.

That was a remarkable beginning to our collaboration for some 18 years, which continues to this day. You actually taught us a great deal with your questions! It was an early learning for me that often the questions and conversation are even more important than the answers. It was as though experiencing an 'international program evaluation', that invited us to reflect on the themes that mattered most in our work to support people to experience genuine inclusion in schools and everyday community life, as adults. You helped me to discover the pockets of excellence we had in our state, and to hold up our stories of success *and* our interesting failures, and learn from them all. You embodied a curiosity about and respect for people that is quite remarkable. You understood hospitality in a way that offered me some powerful lessons that I rely on to this day.

Your determination to change and expand the conversation in The Netherlands was unparalleled. You invited Gayle Kranz and me to Holland in those early years and to our surprise, created radio interviews, magazine interviews with Klik, and presentations across the dutch countryside. We also met some of the members of your informal learning circle – "Gideon's Gang." Your intention and focus were very clear. You wanted to do nothing less than change the culture and the conversation. I was, as you will recall, stretched beyond my comfort zone. No matter. There was, I agreed, a greater good to be served.

*What kind of community do we want to create? How could we live together
in community, where Everyone's gifts are welcomed,
everyone experiences belonging and inclusion, and everyone's voice is heard?*

You held the vision of all children in school together and the end of segregation and isolation of all children and adults.

From about 1992, you led numerous study groups from The Netherlands to Rhode Island, and also in various combinations to Connecticut, Colorado, New Hampshire and Wisconsin. In Rhode Island alone, I am sure there were no less than ten such visits, likely more. These impacted hundreds of people. The ripples from these visits were significant for everyone engaged, on both sides of the ocean. This led to even longer exchanges with folks from Pameijer Stichting, Keerkring and DAG. At least a dozen people came to live and work in Rhode Island for several months. You had a great capacity to lead and organize these learning journeys. These were, again, very powerful for everyone involved. These also were some of the early opportunities for people with disabilities to be recognized and paid as consultants and teachers, as well as opportunities to focus on the power of listening to the people we assist, as we spent time with self-advocacy groups and coalitions and met leaders in this movement.

You helped us organize events at the end of each of these exchange and study visits that invited the Dutch visitors to make declarations of their intentions for action on their return home, and created the occasion for gathering our community of ALL the hosts – people with disabilities, family members, friends, agency staff - to come together and celebrate even small successes. We relied on these opportunities to hold up and stay true to our values, our vision of community, and to ‘remember the soul of our work.’

We did not thank you often enough for this gift of celebration and helping us continually clarify our intention and learning. Quite literally, we could not have done this without you.

In the midst of all this ‘international exchange’, you had the inspiration that we invent and offer a course in the Netherlands on person centered planning and the values of inclusion. There was an opportunity to offer this through FIAD and you seized it. You were the engine underneath this idea and together with Bob Geijp and Barbara Brent, we jointly created the course “Nieuwe Kijk Op Zorg” – ‘A New Look Into Services’. You and Barb and I offered this course many times, again connecting with hundreds of people in many corners of The Netherlands. And we had great fun doing it.

You have carried on with innovations such as Partners on Policymaking courses and the very powerful ‘livingroom conversations’ held with thought leaders in the movement – gathering people in your home with John O’Brien, Doug Watson, David Pitonyak and Beth Mount, to recognize only a few.

Erwin, you are a charismatic catalyst, a man who speaks truth with an authentic voice, whose deep sense of social justice compels you and others forward to positive action. Your capacity to listen and see with an open heart and mind are attributes of your leadership. In my experience you are a brilliant trainer and quite remarkable story teller. Your passion and determination are unwavering And contagious!

Erwin Wieringa

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Your keen sense for innovation and staying at the leading edge have called many to push the boundaries of their current work and understand there is always more to do toward realizing the futures we want for us all.

I am hoping for another 18 years of collaboration. Your sense of social inclusion strong, you have been a pioneer, sometimes lone voice, in working for inclusion – simply because it's the right thing to do. You continue to be a great teacher of mine and dear friend.

May the force be with you always.

With deep respect and affection,

Lynda