

He was a person who had a wonderful past, both in terms of personal achievement and in terms of service to others, but he was also a person who looked forward without fear and as such was a source of great inspiration to us and to many who were his junior in years if not in outlook. John DeJong was born in Holland, worked in Italy as a young man sufficiently long to become fluent enough in the language to dream in it, and then, still young, came to the United States where he lived the rest of his life. While he never lost his Dutch accent neither did he lose the Dutch zest for life nor the Dutch vision outward. It should be pointed out that his wife, Ruth, a midwesterner of Scottish descent was equally a participant in these achievements; a partner in the life of service, a forward-looker, and additionally a painter and potter of enthusiasm if short of professional skill. Since she contributed as much to John's outlook as he himself did, she was much more than a sharer of his life, but they had their time together when the normal division of labor was that the husband earned the livelihood and the wife managed the home and cared for the children. She would have filled the role of an independent career woman had she lived today, but she was not unhappy in her life with John and contributed to it, an equal in wit and intellect.

But this is about John and only peripherally about Ruth. When Olivia and I moved to Des Moines in 1951 as newlyweds. The DeJongs were among many who took us in tow and made us feel at home. The DeJongs were older than my in-laws, but they were friends rather than surrogate parents. John was a vice-president of the largest bank in the city, and my political orientation normally placed bankers outside of the pale. But John talked about banking as though it were a crusade in service to humanity, an attitude quite foreign to my stereotype of bankers as rapacious, greedy exploiters. He was also the best raconteur among many in the groups of people we knew. Not only did he have total recall of every story he had heard, but his retelling was unique, partly because of his accent, but mostly because of his nuances and sense of timing.

As we got to know them through the years, we learned new and interesting things about them. After the second World War, they had sent some food and clothing to his relatives in Holland. The relatives must have shared John's character because they shared their bounty widely, and the DeJongs received several letters from total strangers. The fact that their modest contribution would evoke so much gratitude indicated that a great need existed; so they wrote to the newspapers, got on the radio addressing anybody who would listen but particularly the Dutch town of Pella, about 40 miles from Des Moines. A shipload of goods was gathered and sent. Shipments continued until the need no longer existed.

A few years later they took a ship to Holland for a visit and wondered what had brought such vast crowds to the dock. Most of the hundreds of Dutch on the docks had come to welcome them and to express their gratitude. They recalled that they had been treated like royalty.

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