

Last goodbye to Jan (by Joop van Alphen)

“And *that...* is how it’s done”. We’ve often heard you speak these words. “And *that...* is how it’s done”. It could’ve been your trademark line. They are words that both characterise and typify you. We can pretty much visualise them in the little picture on your obituary. Clear, decisive, determined, firm, yet cheeky and friendly, with a well-placed pride: This is the man you are.

Jan, I have started to write my last goodbye to you, sitting in the garden, underneath the sun; a tree is dropping its first leaves and autumn has started. We’ve known each other for 58 years now; every year, for a month and a half, we’d be the same age, number-wise. “We’re the same age”, you’d hear. This year is no different and sadly for the last time.

How young and inexperienced we were in the Enschoot of so many years ago. Pushing things and testing them to their limits, exploring, always experimenting. How strong are these eggs? How far can we push and tease the neighbours? How are calves born? What are the implications of us walking over a rooftop not quite complete? In short, our parent’s farm provided ample opportunity for research and these extra-curricular activities.

I’m sure we haven’t always been good boys at home, or school for that matter, but that’s by the by, and between the two of us. There may have been some disagreements along the way as well. If we couldn’t reach agreement and raising our voice didn’t quite cut it, we wouldn’t shun the use of our fists to generate consensus. When reminiscing, we’d laugh about such memories. Our youth, way back then, seen from our current perspective, surely *was* a time of fun and games, and eternal togetherness.

Father had quite the farm; he wanted to advance, expand and grow. Rolling up your sleeves was *de rigour* in our household and so it became for us. Back then, as we were still little boys, machinery necessary for the farm had been purchased, bringing us into contact with machinists and engineering. This opened up a whole new avenue of opportunity for research and experiment.

Jan, you’ve always had a keen eye for engineering and this has been a driving factor, not only in your professional life. You’ve experimented with the effect of potatoes, stuffed in the exhaust of a teacher’s car. The maximum speed of your moped has undergone various modifications, notably to its benefit. Likewise, the standard Renault Dauphine was quickly transformed into a “cabriolet”. These were all a precursor, preparation for the real thing: tractor pulling. “And *that...* is how it’s done”.

Together with Thea, you started your dairy farm in Berkel, in ’72; full of energy, determined, diligent and hard-working. During my college graduation, I made the technical drawings for your extension to the house and the new dairy stables. We started the work, rolling up our sleeves, and when you thought things were to be built a little differently, as I’d initially worked out in my drawing, that was how it was to be done. Yes, *that...* is how it’s done. Quite.

The foundations of a young, strong and dynamic family were now all there. Sandra, Ton and John were born. In the early eighties I was able to help you and Bert with the construction of your new tractor, the first using an Allison motor, and the rebuilding of a truck into a trailer, for transportation to tractor pull events. This tractor had a little plaque inscribed with another of your mottos: “*the difference between men and boys is the price of their toys*”. And *that...* is how it is. Quite.

Berkel didn't really meet the expansive plans you sought; thus, a move to Bladel was made in '86. Was it a complete change of life? Not exactly, but a new start nonetheless. *Venture Farm* was painted in bright colours in the top of the dairy stables. *Farm* we understood, but what about this *venture*? *Venture* is a dare, a speculative thing, an adventurous undertaking, not without risk, and with the element of chance. As such, it could always be conceived as a liberal translation of your “and *that...* is how it's done”.

Bladel was a good place to do your thing, it had plenty of space. A little expansiveness never was an issue for you. *Venture Farm* is a testimony to your hard work and determination, your drive and passion, your love of life. This was a place of give and take, of happiness and hardship, of devotion and success. Every time we paid you a visit, new plans were shared, ideas and visions, because “*that...* is how it's done”. The only time of peace and quiet would be at night, after ten, settling down and watching the telly; a pure respite. *Venture* is another of your life's mottos, and of your whole life, inspiring indeed and hard to follow for some.

Jan, other areas of concern didn't escape your attention either; concepts of norms and values. How is one supposed to do business and communicate accordingly? What of politics? It always meddles too much with a farmer's work. You didn't shy away from the use of protest to make your views clear because were you not one time sitting in one of the tractors up front, blocking the road in Vught. If justice or morality was at stake, you'd let us know. You'd also let the established government, all the way up to Den Hague. I'm certain even MP's have heard of your “and *that...* is how it's done”. It's in your genes; father has it, you have it, and I can catch a glimpse of it in your children. For that reason alone, I am confident things will be all right.

Literally your ship has come in Jan. Of Thea, of your children and your grandchildren, you can be proud. Of all you've achieved in your life you can be proud. Of all the support and sympathy we've received and experienced in the last few weeks, and now and here today, you can be proud and grateful. Our mother and father particularly are proud of you. “He could do anything, always” was one of the first things father said upon hearing the sad news from me and your sister Ria. Thea, your children and grandchildren can and should be proud of you. Me, my brothers and sisters, we are, and always will be proud; that we can call you our brother.

Fifty-eight years ago your life started, born on April third, a third child to our parents; you carried the number three in the Dutch Tractor Pull Organisation. The number three is you, it's your number. In ancient Greece, three was a number of ultimate perfection. Husband, father and grandfather. Your youth in Enschoot, your foundation in Berkel, and your thriving in Bladel; it typifies your faith, your hope and your love. These three triplets, interwoven into the whole make of life, are your life. In a few moments we will escort you to your final resting place, a spot which Thea and John

have handpicked for you: Area C, third letter of the alphabet, row three and lot number three.

Jan, in your house and that of our parents is a picture of four generations; father, you, Ton and Lars. It represents a powerful chain, of four bondsmen. The second is no longer among us, but it will always be four generations, for what is locked in our hearts death cannot take away.

Clear, decisive, determined, firm, yet cheeky and friendly, with a well-placed pride. We've celebrated your life full of appreciation, Jan. Fully convinced, that you did indeed make the most of it. I will bid you adieu with 'Dank sei Dir, Herr', by Aafje Heynis. For comfort, in appreciation of, and acceptance, because Jan, *that...* is how *I* do it.