

Deirdre resides in China with her four children and husband. She is a Breast Cancer survivor and actively campaigns for women to be checked from age 34+. She is an inspiration to many and with her fundraising will help many more. If you would like to contribute to either of Deirdre's two charities please visit the donations page on the Shell SWW for Earthquake victims, your local Red Cross or visit your local Breast Cancer support group to donate.



A LETTER FROM CHINA

DEIRDRE SMYTH

Dear Family and Friends from all over the world.

I would just like to tell you about July 7, 2008. At around 8:30 in the morning, in the city of Lan Zhou, China, I ran with the Olympic Torch.

I wanted to express my gratitude for the support you gave my cause and the outcome of your support. I ran only 30 metres, about 30 seconds in total, but they were one of the most overwhelming moments in my life. Any word I can use to describe the experience falls short of the real thing.

At that time a bus had just dropped me off and I could see to my left and to my right; hundreds of metres filled with people holding flags and cameras all cheering us, the torchbearers. Zhonguo Zhaio! On, On, China! I waited there for about ten minutes; my lips could not smile any bigger, my heart just on the tip of my tongue. Suddenly the Torch Master tapped my shoulder, as he needed to open the line of gas in my torch. I had not realized that the man running before me was almost there. It all happened so fast that I found myself looking eye to eye at this man with tears in his eyes as he passed his flame to my torch. We laughed and I told him: Isn't this wild?

My legs froze and my mind raced through memories of mango trees in my childhood home, the Socuy River and friends of long before, my school, my children and my family, and the new friends I have met along the way. Then suddenly a voice shouted Move, Move! And, back in reality I started to run, a slow pace to juice the moment. At this time my eyes could not see people around me, in the roar of the crowds I could only see what my soul was saying, and I tried with my free hand, to mimic it out, I held my heart and shouted Viva Venezuela, Viva Venezuela, hoping that the cameras would be able to show my lips as they voiced my heart. Suddenly I was there, time was up and I had to hand over the flame to the next runner. After this I hugged him, for I knew that the moment he was about to live would be treasured forever...

I thank you all for your support...you allowed me to help others by using the media attention on me to arrange help for people with Breast Cancer and Earth Quake Victims.

Thank you so much!





FRANCKA AND HER PARTNER, MARTIN HAVE LIVED IN AMSTERDAM FOR ONE YEAR. THIS IS HIS FIRST POSTING FOR SHELL IN GSGC. FRANCKA PREVIOUSLY WORKED AS A FREELANCE ENGLISH LECTURER IN GERMANY AND IS NOW MAKING A CAREER CHANGE TO JOURNALISM. SHE WILL ALSO JOIN OUR DESTINATIONS TEAM AS A SUB-EDITOR. THIS PIECE IS HER FIRST AND WAS PUBLISHED IN AMSTERDAM WEEKLY, A LOCAL ENGLISH NEWSPAPER .

FRANCKA SULLIVAN

IN WITH THE TRASH

TRASH DAY

It's Monday, trash day in De Pijp, and I take one final look inside my 30 liter sack before tying it up: strawberry bits, plastic gum wrappers, bright green napkins, Actimel cups, random plastic. Too afraid to dig deeper, I'm suddenly reminded of crazed fans who make a hobby out of sifting through celebrity trash.

Amsterdam households produce about 281,000 tonnes of rubbish annually, according to *Gemeente Amsterdam Dienst Onderzoek en Statistiek*. This means each person generates approximately 468 kilos of household waste annually or seven and a half kilos a week. Generally it's two or three bags a week for my two-person household and it still shocks me when I leave the house to discover a battlefield of discarded items and rubbish abandoned on the street.

But do you know where your rubbish ends up? As a concerned citizen who pays an annual *afvalheffing* or waste disposal fee, I wanted to know what actually happens to my rubbish after it leaves my house.

While following its trail, it becomes evident that waste disposal takes a greater part of Dutch history and its landscape than even the tulips. Landfills used to dot the landscape in Amsterdam until city authorities stopped dumping waste into the Naardermeer and started incinerating trash, at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Netherlands, incineration was an obvious choice because of the country's size: there is simply no room to store waste.

WHERE DOES IT GO?

The trash on our streets is incinerated at the *Afval Energie Bedrijf* located in an industrial area near the *Westpoort Haven* in Amsterdam. Although the two looming smoke stacks are not featured in the Lonely Planet Guide to Amsterdam, you can catch an impressive glimpse of them on the IJ waterfront.

Incineration of rubbish has survived various transformations in the last few fifty years due to technological advances and environmental regulations. We are producing more waste than ever before and waste facilities struggle to strike the perfect balance between the economy and the environment. The old adage, *Not in My Backyard*

is an ever present reality in the waste business.

Advances in technology have changed waste disposal and incineration tremendously in the last decades, says Professor Dr. Georg Schaub, Professor of Chemistry and Technology of Fossil and Renewable Fuels at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in southern Germany. He worked for several years in the engineering business, building industrial flue-gas cleaning units for waste incinerators similar to the *Afval Energie Bedrijf*. 'There are minor quantities of substances formed during combustion that remain after gas cleaning,' he says.

Waste disposal is a complicated topic and consumers and businesses need to be equally involved in the process. 'The Amsterdam plant appears to be a good solution. In other parts of the world, in big cities, similar plants are being built. It is not an either/or solution, but a complimentary solution: recycling collection is always good for materials that are easy to collect and to convert into valuable materials (e.g. glass, paper), and there always remain quantities of heterogeneous material which require too much effort and cost for recycling, says Dr. Schaub.'

WASTE IS THE FUTURE

The journey drags on endlessly. The industrial factory buildings are set in a surreal landscape, with silos and steel pipes next to two massive smoke stacks, one ominously emitting billows of what looks like smoke. Actually, it turns out it's mainly water vapour, formed during combustion of our rubbish.

These two giant stacks belong to the *Afval Energie Bedrijf (AEB)* of Amsterdam, The older of the two was built in 1993. Additionally, a new ultra-modern waste fired plant with an annual processing capacity of 530,000 tonnes was expected to debut in April, but that was postponed on short notice because of an alignment problem in the turbine shaft.

The sickly scent of two-day-old lilies permeates the reception area of AEB, where I meet the senior communication advisor, Nadia Pattavina who has agreed to show me around. She seems impressed that I've worn sturdy sneakers for the tour, and she's very enthusiastic to talk rubbish.

'The public is unsure what stuff is coming out of the stacks and think everything is polluted, but they don't know us or what we do and garbage is not sexy,' says Pattavina with a laugh.

Awareness is the first step in image overhaul and the AEB has seen increased public interest in tours in recent years including a visit from an African journalist doing a documentary on modern incineration. Developing countries have also recently started sending officials here in an effort to get their own waste problem under control. Although many countries, she says, 'don't see incineration as a positive thing. Landfills that don't bother people seem better.'

STENCH POWER

The stench in the plant is truly nauseating although everyone seems oddly immune to it. Upstairs in an operating room, a crane driver is operating a massive crane. 'I mix the garbage,' he says. 'That way everything burns evenly.'

I look through the plexiglass, expecting to catch a glimpse of the cereal I threw out today. There are pigeons and seagulls celebrating in the filthy heaps and an operator tells me that they enter the building when trucks dock at the loading area. With roughly 500 garbage and container trucks passing through AEB daily - processing approximately 1.4 million tons annually-there are plenty of opportunities for illegal seagull entry.

After the garbage is incinerated at a temperature of 1,000 to 1,200 degrees Celsius, the hot flue gases are cooled down in the cooling section. Here, cooling water in cooling coils is evaporated to high pressure steam, which is expanded in

a steam turbine to produce electricity. My tour guide points out that the trams and Metro, as well as the Stopera in Amsterdam are fuelled with this electricity. The *Afval Energie Bedrijf* also provides community heating for 15,000 of the city's homes, which is all working because we are 'running on our own garbage.'

The rest of the garbage known as 'slag' is almost completely utilized in the process. Iron and non-ferrous metals such as copper and silver are recovered. Some materials are recycled and given new homes such as the fly ash for filler in asphalt. At the end of whole process, only 1.3

per cent of the total waste mass is unusable.

Before the flue gases are sent into the air, they have to be cleaned in the flue-gas scrubbing section, which makes up the largest section of the plant. The gas is sent through filters and several chemical cleaning processes.

My odyssey has drawn to a close. I'm on my way home in a tram fuelled by my own trash. I'll start seeing garbage as a poetic expression of human ingenuity. Some waste is not really so wasteful after all.

WASTEREDUCTION TIPS

Respect your street and garbage

collectors. Don't just litter and remember to put garbage out only on designated days.

Don't buy items with excess packaging.

Try your local markets.

Whenever possible, **buy refillable or reusable containers.** Avoid containers that can only be thrown away.

Bring your own bags when you shop and try to buy in bulk as often as possible.

Purchase durable goods of quality rather than disposable items. The cost may be higher initially, but in the long run you can save money. Get the longest warranty with the best repair service possible.

Be an informed buyer. Read consumer magazines and contact consumer organizations before making major purchases.

Certain items should not be disposed of with the rest of your rubbish. These include batteries, medicines and chemical substances such as paints, and products such as electrical equipment which can be recycled.

Don't throw anything away that can be reused or repaired. Your trash could be someone else's treasure. Fabric scraps, books, sporting goods, toys and clothing are always needed by non-profit groups.

Compost your food and yard waste.

Up to ½ of your household waste is compostable. It's a simple way to reduce waste and produce a nutrient-rich conditioner for your lawn, garden and houseplants. Many garden centers carry compost bins.

Say "no" to junk mail

Recycle paper and glass at designated containers when you can't reduce or reuse.

OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

MARIEKE PUNT-GOUDRIAAN

The Punt family are currently living in Perth, Western Australia. Marieke is 17 years old. She is in year 12 and having her exams in November. When they came to Perth, Marieke was 15 years old. She wrote this article for an English assignment at school and it was printed in the local newspaper.



Marieke hanging out with a local Koala.

The first impression of Australia from 30.000 feet was of a lifeless land. A land stretched out, brown and dry without a single sign of life. The red patches of sand were broken up by some scattered scrubs, withered by the burning sun. Trying to find a link with civilization, I noticed a track, but it faded away and I lost sight of it.

The heat took our breath away, when my parents and I stepped outside. The sky was of such an intense blue, which I thought would only exist in tales. I had only known those filled with misty clouds by which you





Right: Marieke with her rowing team.
Left: Mum and Dad enjoying the outback.



need to wear a rain coat. On our way to the new house, I soaked up the new feelings of this unknown ambiance. Turning around a corner in the car, my stomach turned upside down as I thought we would crash into something on the “wrong” side of the road. I forced myself to think about starting at my new school, except these thoughts made me merely panic.

I realized straight away that a girl’s school would challenge my experience of education. As I waited with my mum at the reception, feeling my uniform uncomfortably clinging to my body, I stared at the pristine blue carpet and the large deep-brown wooden reception table and a well-dressed

receptionist on the phone. A large photograph caught my eye, numerous girls in exactly the same uniform standing in straight lines. I appeared to be physically cloned to those around me in my new school uniform but inwardly I felt an alien in this new environment... A woman came up to us and introduced herself, while looking at me from my head till my toes, ‘what a lovely earrings, why don’t you take them out so that your mummy can take them home and keep them safe?’ I was so shocked that she made me take off something I chose to wear that I forgot to be relieved that I understood someone speaking English. Nevertheless, I took my bright bracelets off and soon followed my rings, earrings and anklets likewise and instead I was supplied with a ribbon. While taking me to my new tutor group, she told me in a pleased tone that I was the

only Dutch or Dutch speaking person at school, which made me feel even further from home.

Everyone was chaotically talking to each other, but when they noticed me the room fell quiet. I had looked up words which might be useful, but standing there I could only remember, ‘my name is Marieke, I am 15 years old and Dutch’. At that point, I got completely lost in the flow of words which were flying around as everyone started talking at the same time. I did, however, pick up the word Europe, but not what was said about it. I remembered my previous English teacher saying to me that I would be fine with speaking English, forgetting that my average mark was around 50%. Suddenly, I felt rather alone.