

Wiete Westerhof Curriculum Vitae

Childhood

I was born during the 2nd World War. I had only one brother, who was nearly 4 years older than me. When I was two years old my parents were offered to take over the farm of my mother's father in Siddeburen in Groningen province in the north of the Netherlands. Farmers there were rich and often well-educated. They considered themselves a sort of country nobility. They looked down upon everybody except other notables, e.g. the headmaster, the pastor, the doctor and the mayor. I despised this attitude. My mother forbade me to play soccer, as that was only for kids of workmen. I had to play tennis. I found the primary school boring and was dying to go home to play with my friends. Our farm with fields up to a lake, Schildmeer, offered opportunities to our boundless fantasies.

Highschool and University

In the last class of the primary school some pupils were preparing for high school. I was uninterested in such a school, but I was tempted to join the others who might think that they were smarter. I passed the admission examination and another 5 years of increasing captivity followed. I did not like to give up, but I promised myself to stop wasting my time, after graduation and become a poet, describing the beauty of nature. Before the final examination one had to inform the director of the school about further studies. My parents (mostly my mother) wanted me to become a dentist, because they had a high income. I had other fascinations. Above all, I was attracted to the student life and subscribed/registered to the University of Groningen, Medical Faculty. I would have liked to study biology, because I was dreaming of going to the inlands of Africa to search for plants with medicinal properties. This plan was born after reading an anthropology book, which I discovered in a trunk in the attic of my parental home. But biology was not an option as I only got minors in chemistry (I could not be inspired by the subject). Studentship was great. I studied hard, made good friendships, was successful in sports (rowing in an eight for 5 years) and met my future wife Renie. In my second and third year (1964 and 1965), I was asked to become student assistant, for teaching junior students the basics of microscopical anatomy (histology). In the evening hours I was supposed to participate in immunological research of the department of Histology. I studied the follicle center response (in lymph nodes of rabbits) after injection with Salmonella species and also measured the production of immunoglobulins. This was in a time that no handbooks on that topic were available. In 1968 I married and we moved to Rotterdam, where I did my internships (Dijkzigt hospital, Erasmus university). I graduated as one of the first in my year.

Africa

Instead of joining in the army as a conscription soldier, I had the opportunity to go to Africa as a doctor for 3 years. In 1971, I followed a course in tropical Medicine in Amsterdam (Royal Tropical Institute) and was trained in Leprosy (clinical aspects, histopathology and epidemiology) by Dr DL Leiker (Institute for Tropical Hygiene, and Department of Dermatology, Binnen Gasthuis, University of Amsterdam). I was also trained (mostly surgical techniques and modern leprosy control strategies) for 3 months in ALERT, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. With Dr Leiker I made an adventurous journey of 3 days from Addis to Nairobi (1000 km). We traveled by car through vast areas of savanna and semi-desert without roads, where nomadic people lived, as they did thousands of years before. My wife

and my first-born daughter followed in a couple of months. In June 1971, I was stationed in the Alupe Leprosy Hospital (Kenyan Government) on the border with Uganda. It was a cultural shock. I was overwhelmed by the friendliness of the people. My course in Swahili was of no use, as the hospital was in an area of 3 different tribes: Teso (Nilo-hamitic), Mluhia (Bantu) and Luo (Nilotic), who did not speak Swahili. Beside their tribal tongue most men spoke English. I was besides duties in the hospital also responsible for leprosy control in the Siaya District (Nyanza Province). Every month, I visited clinics for supervision (see weblog article 'Obama and me'). So doing, I got to know more about the culture and beliefs of the people. My wife and I took once a year a short vacation to see more of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The people were always in focus. I witnessed tribes who were still undisturbed by western influence. This period radically changed my concept of the word 'civilization'. I also had my thoughts about foreign aid by western countries, including my own. Although I was convinced that the standard of care we gave was excellent, also due to the material support of the Dutch Government, I doubted if it was sufficiently serving the basic needs of the country, struggling with many other diseases, like malaria, tuberculosis, and above all with malnutrition and poor hygienic conditions.

Dermatology

Coming back to the Netherlands in January 1975, I became resident in Dermatology (Prof. Rudy Cormane, department of Dermatology, Binnen Gasthuis, University of Amsterdam). Apart from the residential training ,he also taught me lessons in life matters (religion and philosophy). Being an innovator himself he stimulated me doing research. It was the beginning of a successful career. After my dermatological training I was appointed as the chief of the clinical department and was responsible for the inpatients, which entails mostly the complicated end severe cases. I concentrated on 3 important therapeutic fields: wound healing (for leg ulcers), phototherapy (for psoriasis, vitiligo, etc) and skin pigmentation. My research was crowned in 1982 with an academic thesis: Melanin Pigmentary Disorders of the Skin. (Summa cum Laude). I established two research groups along the lines of my interest: Wound healing and Pigmentary disorders of the skin. Many articles were published and books and chapter were written. ([See List](#)). The time was ripe for co-operations and networks in these fields and I was co-founder and board member of two international societies: the European Society for Pigment Cell Research (honorary member in 2005) and the European Tissue Repair Society (president in 1994). I organized international meetings for both Societies. Through these international contacts I was invited often as guest speaker at meetings of national dermatological societies throughout the world. This helped me a lot in discovering the world and satisfying my curiosity for the diversity of human kind.

Netherlands Institute for Pigment Disorders

During the foregoing 15 years I had become the expert for pigmentary disorders for the Netherlands and even beyond. Therefore, I decided to establish a clinical and research center in the field of Pigmentation and Pigmentary Disorders of the Skin. This was not an easy task and I would be capable without help. ([see CV of Henk Menke](#)) In 1994 the **Netherlands Institute for Pigment Disorders** was founded on the premises of the Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam, as an independent foundation. Right from the start we attracted patients from all over the Netherlands, but also from other European countries and even from other continents. The research continued, as I was lucky in achieving research grants. This was very important as our research had

an direct impact on our clinical work. New treatments were developed and new disease entities were described. In 2004 (when I became 60 years) I decided to stop and to hand over the reins to a capable successor. <http://www.pigmentdisorders.com/index.php?lang=english> I wanted to continue with something less competitive, more social and closer to my family and friends.

“My new way of life”

As a matter of fact, I retired. However my days are filled. I am still very sportive; have 2 racing bikes, one at home and one in our house in Provence (France). With friends , I make tours in beautiful environments (in Holland flat, but windy ; in France mountainous). I make excursions with my wife to cultural sites, museums all over the country and we enjoy above all our (grand) children.

But there is something of a continuation of my former life, a passion and a mission. Already in 1997, Henk, his brother Jack and I started **Color Foundation**. We are quite ambitious. We want to do something for humanity. If you want to know more, than you should read the pages of this website. If you feel attracted to our ideas you are invited to work with us to achieve our goals.

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