

Harriet Report #4 – Ambassador's Fancy Party Requires Shoes  
(still don't know he wants a divorce)

Thursday, September 28, 2000 – Delft, Netherlands

Hi Guys! Are you curious about my invitation to the US Embassy? I was!

There was a reception from 5 to 7pm on a Tuesday night for Fullbright grantees. I wanted to go. I wanted to see the Embassy. I wanted to see an Ambassador.

We went. I bought shoes special. And knee high stockings. I was dressed up. I brushed my teeth in the middle of the afternoon. Alex wore a tie and jacket and perfectly pressed clothes, spotless cream colored pants!

We walked from the Hague train station to the Embassy, 10 minutes, and were told we just missed the rest of the group walking to the Ambassador's house for the reception. We followed, at least Alex did and watched for their turns etc. I dropped farther and farther behind. It was hot. I carried my previously perfectly pressed jacket in my hand. It was a satisfaction to see from two blocks behind Alex that when he finally took off his jacket, there was a big wet looking spot down the back of his shirt. He was working hard too!

Thirty minutes later, my new shoes were definitely letting me know they were party shoes, not walking shoes. Finally we were there, a forty minute walk. The Ambassador's house was a fancy mansion set in a large park, all fenced, with discreet guards, all as one would expect except the discreet guards. I expected less discreet guards.

We went in. It was a fancy, traditionally furnished mansion. Lots of art. A Calder mobile hanging above our heads caught my attention right away. The guest book pen didn't work so I fished my pen out of my mini purse and left it there as my gift to the Ambassador, as if she knew.

We went out on the patio for drinks and snacks. There was FRENCH cheese, when we're in the land of cheese making, Holland, French cheese! And all of it smushy. Smushy brie, smushy camembert, smushy blue brie, smushy goat cheese, and five more smushy types. There were large shrimps on quacomole toasts, smoked salmon, fabulous fresh pineapple, chicken sate on sticks and spicy meatballs. There was also a large bowl of straight from the can mixed salted nuts! Imagine the audacity to serve such a plain jane thing.

The people milled, some of us munched, until the Ambassador, Cynthia P. Schneider, spoke. She was very petite, reminded me of Lilliana Kostinski (for those of you in Houghton), very pretty, intelligent, kind, sophisticated but normal. Then she left to take a plane to Washington. A little later, two ten year old girls in shorts and tee shirts with backpacks came through the throng of suited men and

long dressed women. I guessed “daughter of Ambassador” and friend, probably correctly.

It was easy to mingle, the crowd was half over 50's, embassy and professors, I stayed away, what would I say to them? The other half was 20 and 30 somethings, grad student grant recipients. This later group was easier for me. I could ask; where are you living, where are you from, what are you studying. Lots of room for conversation there.

For a while I sat down on the edge next to the whitest white woman I ever saw, and emaciated besides with long dank hair. Sorry to say dank, but she could have brushed it! It was a challenge I didn't totally enjoy to try to converse with her. But we both chuckled when we silently and independently observed a well suited embassy woman in her 40's hide her used hor d'oeuvre sticks in a potted plant. We both saw her look around first, look at the ground considering whether to drop them, then sneakily stuff them in this plant. The silent white woman put her face in her hands, but I just started laughing a medium sized Harriet laugh. Unfortunately and as expected, that wasn't so cool. The stick hider turned and saw me laughing and I think, MAYBE, she knew I saw and was laughing at HER. I'm not sure though. What do you think?

Then I snuck in the house and spied around. At least I felt like I was spying. Eventually there were others looking around too. Apparently it wasn't naughty or anything. The dining room was great, very formal and huge, wood and green, mirrors, and lots of silver. There were three living rooms. Each had framed photos of Bill Clinton playing with the Ambassador's children dressed up and looking like they were in the White House. My favorite had the 10 year old daughter stabbing Clinton with a toy sword while he threw back his head laughing.

One living room had three couches in a U, nothing unusual, but there was a podium with the US Seal on the front right beside the couch as though it were an oddly tall end table. Also a complete set of rock and roll drums. I guess in case someone wanted to jam. In the coat room there were stacks of papers and junk like one makes if they get home from the store late before guests come and clean up by piling everything on one hopefully hidden surface. Also cans of cat food. The bathroom was not exactly handicap accessible but very clean and nice.

There was lots of art, most of it I didn't personally like. There was a glossy catalog book and we were each given a free copy, signed by the Ambassador, as we left. All the art was American, and all of it was donated. That's a relief. Wouldn't want to “waste” tax dollars on art, would we?

Which reminds me, our first Dutch phone bill came and it has 17% tax! Yow!

When we left the party, Alex was lingering talking to the over 50 crowd, I vowed we would RIDE something back, not so much walking. We went where the guard told us the tram would be, of course it wasn't. Wandered back toward the city center and finally saw a bus, which we missed. Followed it's route to a big boulevard and tram stop. Waited there. My feet were hurting!

Got home way late for the family keeping the boys for us. They had been by our house twice to drop the boys home. As I walked up I saw them coming down our street and called out to them "I'm here!". Alex was getting his bike at the station. Home at last, shoes off, bite of chocolate, and the adventure is over.

Now I COULD, if I wanted or needed(?) to, brag "I've been to the Ambassador's house in The Hague, site of the World Court". I know it means next to nothing about me and my accomplishments, but it WAS at least as interesting as a house tour in Houghton, say Lou Helman's beauty out in Half Moon Beach. Only Lou doesn't have any stacks of "hidden" junk, or cans of cat food hanging around, and she lets me look in the bedrooms. And the Ambassador's staff did serve good free food. And happily, the Fullbright gang were pretty easy to mingle with, easier than some groups I've attempted.

I'm very proud of Alex getting a Fullbright. You go Alex! And glad I got to tag along. This is the end of my report and my apologies to Cheese Man and Twitchy Catholic Human Rights Boy and Betty who-was-almost-as-fat-as-me-and-wearing-wonderful-fabric because I didn't include you in my report. But I remember you!