

# CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Maps	10
Family Trees	12

## **OLD SEA**

1	The Golden Age	19
2	Following the Fish	26
3	Safe Harbors	33
4	A Future on the Dike	41
5	The Heart of the Nation	50
6	The Final Years	61
7	Right is Right	69
8	No Mere Appendages	77
9	IJsselmeer Monsters and Sea Serpents	83

## **NEW LIFE**

10	The Shoe Factory	91
11	Frisian Fyke Nets	100
12	Food Source	109
13	Primeval Race	118
14	Wet Socks	126
15	A Trip to The Hague	130
16	Pioneers	138
17	The Silver Pit	148
18	Ground Sea	157

19	Tension on the Periphery	165
20	A Migratory Bird	175
21	Boilers and Toilers	189
22	Women of the Fishing Towns	198
23	The New Manna	210
24	The Nine Younger Brothers	219
25	Life Raft	226

## **LEAVING THE LAKE**

26	Aquarium	239
27	The Scent of Home	246
28	Onshore Skipper	255
29	On the Sidelines	264
30	The Fire	273
31	<i>Kraplappen</i> For Sale	282
32	The Rocket and the Slump	290
33	Some Coke with that Fish?	299
34	All-Risk Insurance	309
35	The Miracle Net	321
36	The Tour Boat	332
37	Heirs to the Tradition	338

	Conclusion	343
	Acknowledgements	347
	Sources	349

## FOREWORD

The land on which we lived was younger than my father. He had a cattle farm in Luttelgeest, a small village along the northeastern border of Flevoland. A sign on the barn still announces the name the farm had when he moved there from North Holland with his parents in 1952: “SPES NOSTRA,” Our Hope, in proud, angular capital letters.

The farm is on a long, straight road of the kind that seems endless. As a child, I often helped to herd the cows into the shed at milking time. I would imagine that the path to the shed was a ruler. Our land measured exactly 300 by 800 meters, just like every other parcel of land nearby. The engineers who had designed the polder, the area of reclaimed land on which we lived, had planned it that way.

Above the swaying rear ends of the herd, I could see another road in the distance, the kind with lots of twists and turns. In the days when our polder had been the bottom of a salty, raging inland sea, the Zuiderzee, that road had been a dike. Beyond it was land much older than my father.

What did life look like on the other side of that winding dike before the sea became land? How did the great project of land reclamation affect the thousands of families who made their living from the Zuiderzee? And what long-term impact has it had on them, up to the present? I have always wondered. After all, the Zuiderzee was in a sense *their* sea, a sea of life.

To this day, the Zuiderzee project remains the most impressive feat of spatial planning ever carried out in the Netherlands. The 32-kilo-

meter-long Afsluitdijk, a dam extending from North Holland to Friesland, transformed part of the Zuiderzee into the bare landscape of Flevoland, a new Dutch province and the world's largest polder. What was left became the calm IJsselmeer, Western Europe's largest freshwater lake.

In the years that followed World War II, the inhabitants of the old Zuiderzee towns received little attention because of the intense faith in progress that held sway in those days. All eyes were turned to the new province. The man-made, perfectible world for which the Netherlands was striving seemed easier to bring about on the clean slate of the IJsselmeer polders than in the historic harbors of the Zuiderzee towns. The fishermen's narrowed eyes did not glow with a bright new day. They reflected the past.

To tell the story of the coastal people, I decided to delve into the family histories of four children of the Zuiderzee. They are the pillars of my narrative; their stories take us from the glory years of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Golden Age to today's communities, which only ever make the news for a surprising election result or a drug seizure.

Yes, you can call Cees Hopman, Jurie van den Berg, Cees van Eekelen, and Kees Kwakman children of the Zuiderzee, even if none of them has ever felt its salt water run through their fingers and sting the scratches on their hands, or heard the tall waves crash against the dike.

Bunschoten-Spakenburg still looked out onto open water when Cees Hopman was born there in 1938, but those were already the fresh, calm waters of the IJsselmeer. By his early twenties, when he first asked himself what he, a fisherman's son, intended to do with his life, the Zuiderzee project had reached such an advanced stage that he could see the Southern Flevoland polder taking shape, a ponderous expanse of clay just beyond the harbor.

In 1942, Jurie van den Berg's year of birth, Urk had not been a Zuiderzee island for three years. It had been demoted to a small town in a far-fetched location, which would have to reinvent itself, it seemed, now that it could no longer rely on fishing as its main source of income.

Cees van Eekelen came into the world in 1950 on the North Holland

side of the IJsselmeer, in Den Oever, the port on the former island of Wieringen. Wieringen had been part of the mainland ever since 1924, when the first section of the Afsluitdijk was constructed. The place was teeming with dike workers, laborers from all over the country who had been drawn to the Zuiderzee project because it was a source of well-paid work.

In Kees Kwakman's home town of Volendam, they never lost their view of the open water. But the year Kees was born, 1954, most of the activity in the harbor began to dwindle. The focal point shifted to "the dike," the waterfront promenade where tourists had their pictures taken in the local dress that Kees's parents had worn daily.

The four sons of the Zuiderzee don't know this about each other, but all four of them often sleep poorly. They all have nights, at regular intervals, when they feel too restless to sink into peaceful dreams. It's a vestige of the old days, of going out fishing with their fathers and uncles. A fisherman has to stay awake to steer his vessel, or else arrange to be woken once every hour or two to haul in the net and sort the fish.

All four of them still have memories of those nights on board, as boys of ten or eleven, creeping out on deck to stand beside Father or Uncle at the helm. The best moments of all were when the water was calm and they could look out over the dark mirror, listen to the murmur of the waves, and gaze up at the stars together. Sometimes he would tell a story. Usually they would fall silent together; those were the best conversations.

The sea that had been their families' livelihood vanished. The restless nights remained.





# URK VAN DEN BERG

Hendrik (van den Berg) Steevenszoon  
1669 - 1719  
°Kampereiland

Three children, including:

Steeven van den Berg  
1707 - 1780

Dirck van den Berg  
1714 - 1780

Sjoerd van den Berg  
1805 - 1876

x  
Dedde (*Diene*) Zwaal  
1821 - 1900  
°Terschelling

Two children, including:

Jan (*van Diene*) van den Berg  
1856 - 1940

x  
Neeltje de Vries  
1857 - 1937

Nine children, including:

Jurie (*Rooie Juut*) van den Berg  
1891 - 1970

x  
Lummetje Romkes  
1893 - 1966

Nine children, including:

(Dé) Jan van den Berg  
1916 - 1954

x  
Fetsje Koorstra  
1918 - 2009  
°Lemmer

Jurie (UK63) van den Berg  
1932 - 1976

Six children, including:

## JURIE (Fet)

van den Berg

1942  
x  
Geertje Kramer  
1943

Five children, including:

Jan van den Berg  
1964

x  
Marianne Zwaan  
1966

Klaas van den Berg  
1980

x  
Mariëlle Post  
1988

## LEMMER VISSER

Jan (*van Fetsje*) Visser  
1854 - 1936

x  
Jantje Poepjes  
1858 - 1930

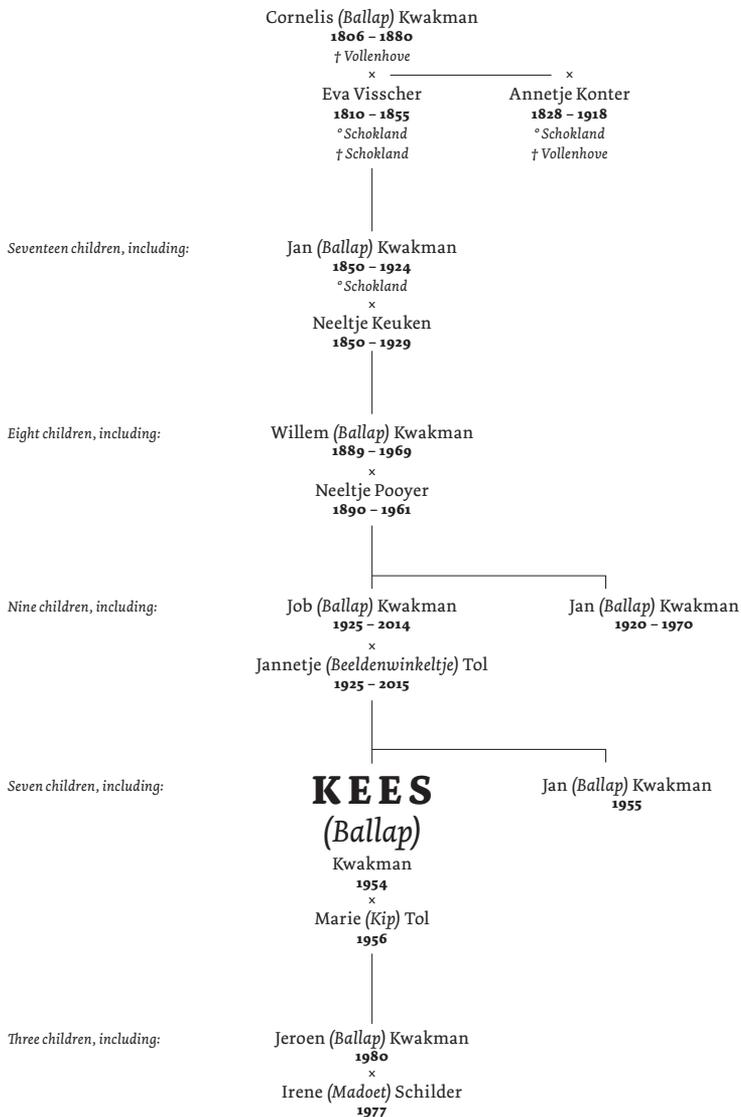
## MAKKUM KOORNSTRA

Grietje (*Fisker Grietje*) Visser  
1898 - 1981

x  
Andries Koorstra  
1895 - 1983

# VOLENDAM KWAKMAN

---



# SPAKENBURG HOPMAN

---

Jan (*Spreeuwte*) Hopman  
1839 - 1921

x

Geertje Heijnen  
1843 - 1913

Six children, including:

Gijsbert (*Spreeuwte*) Hopman  
1879 - 1962

x

Jacobje (*Jaopie*) de Graaf  
1878 - 1968

Three children, including:

Jochem (*van Jaopie*) Hopman  
1906 - 1983

Jan Hopman  
1913 - 1970

x

Jannetje de Jong  
1905 - 1983

Six children, including:

**CEES**

Hopman  
1938

x

Riek Malenstein  
1938

Gijsbert Hopman  
1929 - 2010

Four children, including:

Annemarie Hopman  
1970

x

Sjaak Ruizendaal  
1968

# WIERINGEN VAN EEKELN

---

Adriaan van Eekelen

1899 – 1983

° Wouw, Brabant

x

Marie Mens

1899 – 1992

° Wouw, Brabant

|

Four children, including:

Adrie van Eekelen

1924 – 1986

° Wouw, Brabant

x

Trijnie Boersen

1928 – 2008

|

Four children, including:

**CEES**

van Eekelen

1950

x

Grietje van den Berg

1949

° Urk

|

Four children, including:

Cees van Eekelen

1979

x

Franciska Prins

1980

## WIERINGEN BOERSEN

---

Cornelis (Cees) Boersen

1895 – 1945

x

Dieuwertje (Upke) Bakker

1899 – 1975

|

## THE GOLDEN AGE

Jurie van den Berg's story is the oldest. The genealogical research on his family goes back furthest.

For many years, the Urk where the Van den Berg family would put down roots was part of a dark and impenetrable region. Mighty oaks grew there alongside slender birches, with hazels running wild in their shade. Bears and wolves reigned supreme. Early writings call it the *Woud zonder Genade*, the Wood Without Mercy. There was a small lake into which the forerunners of the IJssel and Amstel Rivers flowed. A Roman geographer described it as *Lacus Flevo*, Lake Flevo, from the word *flevum*, related to the English word "flow," and referring to the passage to the North Sea that was gradually forming. During heavy storms, waves sometimes dislodged great oaks from the shores of the lake and set them adrift like islands of intertwined roots.

It was not until the late Middle Ages that the Zuiderzee took the shape it would more or less maintain until it was dammed in 1932. In fact, the inland sea would exist for no more than five hundred years.

Spring tides steadily battered away the soft, mucky peat bogs of the Wood Without Mercy. Lake Flevo, now known as Aelmere, kept expanding and was soon unmistakably connected to the North Sea. The people who dwelled in the region led lives of uncertainty, with the deadly threat of flooding hanging over their heads. They tried to scrape together a living by fishing for typical freshwater species, such as salmon and sturgeon—until a little ice age made the temperature drop. The IJssel River no longer brought as much fresh water to the area. At the same time, the salt water was gaining ground, making the

lake too brackish for freshwater fish. From the late Middle Ages onwards, fishermen brought in more and more salt-water fish, such as anchovies, perch, smelt, and, of course, herring. Herring and anchovies were the most important Zuiderzee fish in those days.

The salt sea that was forming needed a new name, the German merchant Jan van Holstein decided. In the fourteenth century, he became the first to refer in writing to the “Südersee.” From his perspective, the inland sea was to the south of the North Sea.

This Zuiderzee was much like a small bowl of tepid, muddy water. Its total surface area was around 6,000 square kilometers, and as seas go, the Zuiderzee was very shallow. Its deepest points measured 2 to 6 meters, as compared to about 90 meters in the North Sea. This led the water temperature to increase rapidly. The choppy seas caused by strong winds regularly churned up the thick layer of silt on the sea floor, so the Zuiderzee was never truly blue or bright green. Instead, its color was always murky: a milky white with a hint of yellowish green from algae.

From the late Middle Ages onwards, trade with northern regions became a major source of income for the towns around the Zuiderzee, sometimes in cooperation with Hanseatic cities. Fishermen generally set out onto the Zuiderzee from the east coast. From places like Kampen, Harderwijk, Zwartsluis, and Genemuiden, they would attach their nets to poles in the water. After a day or two, they would take down the nets again. But going out to sea became more and more difficult. Because the wind usually came from the west-northwest, sand heaped up around their harbors. In high winds, the east coast often silted up entirely. As their vessels grew larger over the years, the fishermen more and more often ran aground on shoals.

Their competitors on the west coast seized their opportunity, using fewer fixed nets attached to poles and more towed nets, attached to two vessels, and dragged along as they sailed. Fishing with fixed or towed nets—it was a world of difference. The battle between these fishing methods colored relations among Zuiderzee fishermen for a long time.

On the North Sea coast, fishermen were increasingly focusing their efforts on herring. They were very successful, mainly because they worked together efficiently. The fishermen helped each other find the

schools of herring. Herring fishing became a highly respected line of business in the Dutch Republic, which was founded in 1588, and Enkhuizen played a central role in it. This Zuiderzee town was close enough to the North Sea that its fishermen could work there as well. Around 1600, Enkhuizen, with more than four hundred vessels, was the largest fishing town in the Zuiderzee area.

It must have been a sight to see by night, when the fires maintained on the many vessels would glide past in the distance. If you squinted, all those streaks of light would merge into a spiderweb of gold.

The Zuiderzee was becoming more and more crowded. In a time when there were hardly any roads over land, water transport was the fastest and cheapest method. During the seventeenth century, the inland sea developed into the most significant and most heavily trafficked junction of the Golden Age, a gateway for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) ships that made Amsterdam wealthy. The Zuiderzee played a crucial role in the birth of the Netherlands as an exporting country. It was teeming with vessels: tens of thousands, according to estimates.

And this is where Jurie van den Berg's distant ancestor enters the picture.

At first, this forefather had a different surname. He was called Hendrik Steevenszoon when he settled on Urk, in the middle of the Zuiderzee, sometime in the seventeenth century. The island rested on boulder clay deposited there by a glacier during the Ice Age. In those days, Urk was one of the four Zuiderzee islands. Just to its east was Schokland; Wieringen and Marken had emerged from the waters off the west coast. Schokland and Marken were fragile places, fens where flooding could easily wash away the peaty soil. The boulder clay of Urk and Wieringen was more resilient, not as easily displaced by the water.

To warn the many Zuiderzee vessels when they were nearing Urk, the islanders built a fire on a rectangular stone structure known as a *vuurboet*, a rectangular stone structure. Hendrik Steevenszoon had traveled from Kampereiland to Urk to become the island's stoker, responsible for this fire. For maximum visibility, his *vuurboet* was situated on the top of the boulder clay mound. He soon became known

as Hendrik “van den Berg” (“of the mountain”), a reference to the mound on which he worked.

Fishing was becoming less and less significant in the Zuiderzee region. Over the sea’s history, the economic importance of fisheries kept fluctuating. Fishermen’s income varied, going up and down in the same rough rhythm as the vessels bobbing on the choppy waters of the inland sea. At this stage, the fishermen were elbowed aside by merchants who used the Zuiderzee as a passage to the North Sea.

Amsterdam profited most from the new trade route. From the late sixteenth century onwards, the merchant vessels were larger and traveled further. They sailed from Amsterdam to the East Indies by way of the Zuiderzee. The Dutch capital developed into an entrepôt, where goods imported by ship were stored in warehouses until they could fetch a decent price. Enkhuizen also benefited from this flourishing trade. From that coastal North Holland town, ships laden with herring, salt, and wine departed for the Baltic ports, returning with grain and shipbuilding supplies. Thanks to the Baltic trade, Enkhuizen became the second-largest investor in the VOC, contributing 540,000 guilders. Across the water, Hindeloopen remained a hub of trade. For example, Frisian traders took Dutch gin (genever) and woolen fabric to Scandinavian countries and Russia, bringing back wood ordered by Amsterdam merchants.

The settlements along the coast became more oriented toward the Zuiderzee than toward the hinterland, thus developing their own languages. For example, the people of Hindeloopen, although they were in Friesland, did not speak Frisian. Because the people of the Zuiderzee coast were in frequent contact with merchants from the capital, the Amsterdam accent spread to all their towns and villages. Urk became part of Amsterdam’s sphere of influence because the city needed a safe trade route with reliable fires for visibility.

From his *vuurboet*, Hendrik van den Berg must have had a magnificent view of the bustling Zuiderzee, its sailing ships toiling onwards under majestic, cloud-filled skies, and its waves in a palette of colors that could hardly be pinned down. At the same time that he worked as the stoker on Urk, Dutch landscape painters were discovering the sea. The Zuiderzee became one of their favorite subjects; they marveled at the magical light over its inland waters.