



Kids newsletter



Konnichiwa! Hello! It is so nice of you to take an interest in reading about me, my family and the country that I live in. My name is Thom de Boo and I am 7 years old. My brother Berend is almost 5 and our sweet little sister Julie turns 1 this month!

song of belonging

Do you like listening to music, too? Let me teach you the lyrics of one of my favorite songs, it is called a 'song of belonging'. This is how it goes:

*'I am a child from the Netherlands
you can tell so when you hear me
but I am also a stranger
because I wasn't born here.
Long ago I arrived here by airplane
maybe that's the reason
why I am daydreaming every now and then.*

*Then I hear the sounds of that song of belonging
to that far away land
the song of longing for the other side.
It must be hard to understand
I can hardly grasp it myself
that song of belonging deep within me.'*

This song, although not written by me but by a Dutch Christian songwriter, tells you something about me. If you look at my picture, you can see that I am an ordinary, blond, Dutch boy with blue eyes. I was born on October 13, 1999 in the city of Leiden and that's why I am a Dutch citizen. But my passport probably looks different from yours. Maybe it is worn out a little bit more, because I have to use it a lot. There are a lot of special stamps and stickers in it.

America

When I had just turned 2 years old, I moved with my mom and dad from the Netherlands to the United States of America. God was calling them to become missionaries and for that reason they needed to go back to school. At that point I was very comfortable chatting in the Dutch language, but then I all of a sudden I had to learn a new one, because in America people speak English and nobody understood what I was trying to tell them. My parents remember that I was very frustrated and angry at first, and that I didn't want to talk at all. But after a couple of weeks I had gotten used to the new language and I started to chat in English. On June 23, 2002 I got a baby brother, Berend. He is 4 years old now and understands the 'song of belonging' very well. Even though he has an American passport, he looks just as Dutch as I do.

the Far East

Berend and I had to use our passports again when our parents graduated from Bible College. After having been back in the Netherlands for a couple of months, we traveled to Singapore. That is very close to the equator and it was so hot! But it was also very nice, because when we were done at our preschool, we could cool down in the paddling pool. For the very first time I met kids like myself. They came from many different countries and went together with their parents to the mission field. Having that in common, we sang our 'song of belonging' together. From Singapore we flew deeper into Asia and landed in Japan. Three years later, May 15, 2006 my sister Julie was born there! She is also a typical Dutch baby, but in her passport Tokyo is written as place of birth. Julie has a real Japanese name that can be written using this *kanji*, a Chinese character: 陽. This little picture is being pronounced as Yuri (the same pronunciation as Julie in Dutch) and consists of a gate with water flowing through it. Did you know that Jesus speaks about Himself as being the gate to God the Father (John 10:9) and that He says 'drink from the Living Water' (John 7:37-38). Yuri also means lily and that is the flower of the resurrection. We hope that the Japanese people will learn about Jesus through my sister's name.

Japan

Japan has become home for me now. Or is my home in the Netherlands? Or in America? To tell you the truth, I don't know what home is exactly. For me, home is not so much one place, as it is where my family and friends are. At first making new friends here wasn't easy. Just imagine that you look completely different from all the kids around you and that you cannot understand what the others are saying. Sometimes they wanted to touch my blond hair or white skin because they had never seen anything like it. All Japanese kids have yellow skin, brown eyes and black hair. At my Japanese kindergarten my new friends understood right away that you can play together without speaking the same language. And that's what we did! Back then we lived all the way up north in Japan in a city called Sapporo and from November to April about 7 meters (over 20 feet) of snow falls! Every day we slid down the hill on our rice bags. I am so thankful that my teacher and friends at school and in the church taught me Japanese. I also learned how to eat sushi, (raw) fish and octopus and lots of seaweed. Delicious! Berend also eats school lunch every day at his Japanese school and he loves rice.

TCK

Maybe you are wondering about this 'song of belonging'. I hope the story of my life that I just told, helps you a little bit to understand it. In the song it says that I am a 'stranger'. No, not because I am an alien or weird or anything, but because I am different from the kids around me. Experts use a very difficult word and say I am a 'Third Culture Kid' (TCK). That means that I am a child growing up in a third culture (a culture is a group of people looking alike, speaking the same language and doing the same thing). My first culture is the Netherlands and my second one is Japan. But my world isn't completely Dutch and it isn't completely Japanese. It is somewhere in between and that's why it is called a 'third culture'.

skin, hair and eyes

Do you want me to make it even more complicated? I attend an American mission school named Christian Academy in Japan. That does not confuse me at all, because even though I am the only Dutch student at this school they understand exactly who I am. I my class everybody is a TCK and together we come from 13 different countries: America, Canada, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, India, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Vietnam, South-Korea, Japan and of course, the Netherlands. Together we have any color of skin, hair and eyes that you can imagine! Inside the class room we speak English amongst each other, but on the playground we talk Japanese. At home we speak Dutch and my mom home schools me in that language.

different

Not only am I different because I am a TCK, but also because I am Christian. We came to Japan to tell the people here that God loves them, too and that Jesus came to save them. Hardly anybody knows that here. Only 3 out of 1000 Japanese go to a church regularly... Almost everybody prays to other gods like Buddha, deceased ancestors or trees or rocks. If the weather is bright, we can see the famous Mount Fuji from where we live. The enormous volcano is a beautiful sight, but at the same time it makes me sad when I realize that the Japanese people around me believe the mountain is a god. Just as some think that the emperor is a god. On my way to school I pass several temples and shrines and kids are also worshipping there. I tell my teacher that and together we pray and ask God if the children of Japan will learn quickly about the God of the Bible.

school, sports and playing

School is very important to Japanese children and often they stay there or at the cram schools till late at night and some even have to go on the

weekends. Just like Berend the kids have to wear uniforms to school. After school they like to play computer-games. When we go to church, many Japanese kids go to their clubs where they play baseball, judo or sumo wrestling. I play sports at school every day and I like basketball, baseball and tracks. At home I read lots of books and write my own stories. I also like to draw the illustrations to go with my writing. Besides that I like making things with Lego and build train tracks with Berend. We both love trains and collect everything that has to do with that. I enjoy studying the rail road map of Tokyo and try to learn all the names of the train lines and stations by heart.

big city

We live in the biggest city in the world with over 30 million people. It is really crowded here and all the space is taken up by people, concrete and asphalt. In summer billions of insects are added to that. I think those huge cockroaches, praying mantises and other bugs are really cool, but my mom screams every time she sees one. Especially when the geckos come into the house! It is too bad that in summer we have to stay in and play in a little air-conditioned room, because outdoors it is too hot. Besides that there is the rainy season in June and then it is too wet outside because the rain can go on for weeks. In winter I stay close to our little kerosene heater. Outside the temperature is very low then and since we live in a traditional Japanese wooden house, inside it is just as cold. We don't have a heating system for the house, so we buy kerosene from a little truck that drives through our street some days of the week. The kerosene fumes are smelly, but it keeps us warm.

nature

I worry sometimes about the weather and nature here. Lots of rain causes mud slides, typhoons blow roofs of the houses, volcanoes erupt sometimes and the worst are the earthquakes, I think. At school we do earthquake drills often and we hide under our desks then. At home we also take cover under the table and when it is really bad we rush to the front door where our emergency backpacks with flash lights, food and clothes are in case we need to leave the house behind. After an earthquake I sometimes cry. I try to be brave, because I know in the next couple of hours many little aftershocks will come. Fortunately till now not much has been damaged in our house. Things fall down and my gold fish splash from the fish tank, but after the quake we quickly throw them back into the water.

farewell

Since I've moved to Japan, I went back to the Netherlands and America to visit. I enjoyed that a lot, but I also found it difficult. You know why? I had to say goodbye again to so many relatives and friends. When the farewell makes me cry, I sing this song with mom and dad:

*'There is a God who never says goodbye
He loves big ones and little ones
He is not far away, because He lives in your heart
that way He can be with you always.*

*Saying goodbye
sometimes makes you cry
You want to say just one more thing
But you know that you can keep the memories
in that little room within you.'*

Thanks for reading my story! If you want to share yours with me, please, write me a letter. Make sure you enclose a picture of yourself ☺.

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