

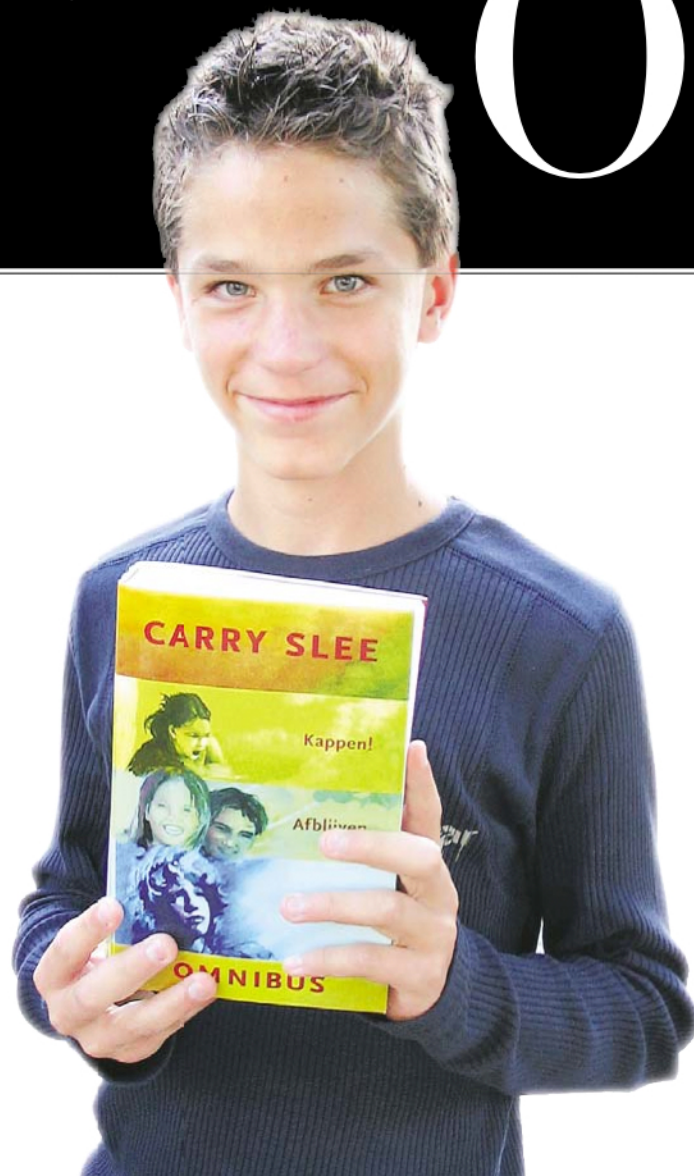
KidsPost



THE NETHERLANDS
3,925 miles
FROM WASHINGTON

This is the fifth in a series of KidsPost Journeys around the world to show readers how children in other countries and cultures live and play. Today we JOURNEY TO THE NETHERLANDS. Next month, travel with us to South America.

My name is . . . Otto Jan



Otto Jan Verkerk, 12, read five books during three weeks of vacation last summer.

● **BEEK**, The Netherlands—Many Americans think Otto Jan Verkerk's country is full of cheese, tulips and windmills. That's true, but this Dutch 12-year-old doesn't like cheese, the tulips are in a different part of the country and the windmills are mostly a tourist attraction.

Otto Jan (pronounced Yon) lives in Beek, a town of 17,000 people in the southern part of the Netherlands. Some people call the country Holland, but that is the name of two provinces, not the whole country. The country borders the North Sea, between Belgium and Germany in Western Europe.

Otto Jan's home is a three-story, four-bedroom duplex with big windows. His mom is a nurse, now studying to be a minister, and his dad is a water engineer. He has two older brothers, Adriaan, 17, and Samuel, 19.

Most Dutch families have a car, but not the Verkerks. When their car broke down seven years ago, they decided not to get another one. They ride bicycles instead.

"It's bad for the environment to drive," Otto Jan says. His parents have other reasons, too. "We want to show the children that we don't have to do everything we can do," says his mother, Bertha. "We have to make choices in life."

On trips, they can take the train. Over the summer, they rented a car and camped in Germany, Switzerland and France, going to the beach near Montpellier in southern France. During three weeks of vacation, Otto Jan read five books. Dutch students have eight weeks of vacation every summer, and kids in different parts of the country have off at different times. "If everyone was on the road at the same time," Otto Jan's mom says, "it would cause problems."

He rides his bike to school, which is nearly three miles away in the town of Geleen. "When it rains," Otto Jan says, "there's nothing you can do about it. You get wet."

Children here go to a kindergarten for two years, beginning when they are

about 4 years old, and then go on to six years of primary school. Then comes six years of secondary school.

Otto Jan goes to a school called Graaf Huyn College. Classes start at 8:15 a.m. and end at 2 or 3 p.m., depending on the day. Otto Jan has Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish, math, science, geography, biology, art, music and gym. The classes are 50 minutes long, with Dutch and math three times a week and most of the others twice a week. Art and music meet once a week each.

Each week there's three hours of gym, which includes track, soccer, volleyball, basketball and judo. In spring, the students play softball. Schools in the Netherlands don't have sports teams. Kids compete in sports teams at community centers after school.

The Netherlands that Otto Jan lives in might not be the Netherlands that most Americans think of, but it's a good place, he says.

"I like it here."
—Kathy Lally



Just for Fun

Favorite TV show: "Everwood" (in English with Dutch subtitles).

Favorite music: Rhythm and blues and hip-hop. He especially likes the Black Eyed Peas and Justin Timberlake.

Favorite sport: Soccer. "Barcelona and Manchester United are my favorite teams," he says.



Mealtime



For **breakfast**, Otto Jan usually has bread with butter and chocolate sprinkles (called *hagelslag*) and a glass of milk.

Otto Jan takes his **lunch** to school. While most kids have bread and cheese, he takes three slices of bread and eats some with slices of pork and some with chocolate paste.

For **supper**, the family might have meatballs with potatoes and vegetables. They always have a milk-based dessert such as yogurt or flan.

In Limburg province, the region where Otto Jan lives, there's a **special pie** (above) called *vlaai*. It's usually made with plums or cherries and has a thick, cake-like crust sturdy enough to hold with three fingers.

The Netherlands

How many people: 16.3 million. There are about 3 million kids (age 14 and younger). The people are called Dutch.

Size: About 16,000 square miles, or twice the size of New Jersey.

Religion: Roman Catholic 31 percent, Protestant 21 percent, Muslim 4.4 percent, other 3.6 percent. No religion reported by 40 percent.

Capital: Amsterdam, but most government business is done in another city, The Hague.

Language: Most people speak Dutch, the official language. Frisian and Flemish are also spoken.

Economy: Otto Jan might not like cheese, but agricultural industries are important in the Netherlands. There are about 4 million cows, 11 million pigs and 98 million chickens in the country. Engineering and machine manufacturing are other industries in the Netherlands.

Television: There are 54 televisions for every 100 people, compared with 84 TVs per 100 people in the United States.

Famous people: The Netherlands is known for its artists, including 17th-century painters Rembrandt and Vermeer. It was also home to Anne Frank, the young girl whose famous diary told of the time she and her family spent hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II.

Fun fact: The Declaration of



Bicycles are used by many people in the Netherlands, and Otto Jan bikes to school each day.

Independence was written on parchment from the Netherlands.

Don't call it Holland: Many people think "the Netherlands" and "Holland" are the same. Holland really refers to two provinces, North and South Holland.

Windmills: There are about 1,000 in the Netherlands. At one time, the country had as many as 10,000.



The Verkerks live in the left half of a duplex in Beek, in the southern part of the country.