



1969 ~ 2019

**Reunion 50th anniversary
class 1968/1969, IASL Montreal
at the Wolseley, London
Oktober 4th 2019**



Dear Class President, distinguished classmates, esteemed colleagues

First of all, I have got some good news. The Wolseley is open and we did not need the Supreme Court to achieve that! I was afraid not to make it here today, carrying the EU flag. I am pleased to report that I passed through customs with flying colours. Have a good look at it. It might be the last time. I am quite happy to acknowledge that I should not meddle in the domestic affairs of Britain, but let me say that for the British it was not the right thing to do having decided to turn their back on the EU. It is all the more a wrench for the Dutch, as our former foreign minister Luns made great pains in 1972 to make a case for a British membership of the EU. He even defied and infuriated the French President de Gaulle in doing so. It is a torrid time for the British people. Brexit has turned into a punching ball for political parties to gain votes at a general election irrespective of the implications for the British economy and with disregard for the national interest. The future of Britain hangs in the balance as a consequence of that being at the mercy of the whims of political sentiments. The Dutch people are observing it with dismay because we are neighbours either side of the Channel and more importantly best of friends. Things haven't been always that way. In the past. The Dutch were involved in many a naval battle with the British. Three Anglo-Dutch wars were waged. Most outstanding was the capture of the British flagship, the HMS Royal Charles, during the second war in 1667. She was towed away by the Dutch back home. Part of her transom bearing the coat of arms is to this day on display in the National Gallery (Rijksmuseum) in Amsterdam. It's all a thing of the past. Our Dutch William and his wife Mary Stuart were King and Queen of Britain. The choice the British made for a return of the former splendid isolation will not stand in the way of our longstanding friendship. More than ever it is imperative to keep it that way. Commemorating the battle of Arnheim 75 years on Prince Charles, dressed in battle dress, was captured one of these days putting his arm tenderly around our former Queen Beatrix. It is difficult not to get moved by it and is testament to the friendship between our great nations and so it may last forever. I will leave it at that.

If I am not wrong I am the oldest of the five of us, so I would think it is my job to say a few words. Let me first of all say that I am delighted to see all of you. I feel quite a strong sense of connection with all of you. It is reflected in the way some of us have been in touch with one another over the years. We share a pivotal part of our lives that bonded us forever. What better way to rekindle the old ties than having a lunch at this fabulous venue, the Wolseley, in London. We have an archive of common memories to share. We are commemorating that it is fifty years this year since we were awarded our Master Degrees. How long ago was it. I never thought I would see the day that we got together fifty years on. I am becoming more and more aware, getting more extreme as the years pass by, how privileged we were to be able to pursue our academic careers at McGill having a truly unforgettable time at the same time. Even with the gift of hindsight I would do it all over again, if only to have another lunch at the Wolseley fifty years down the road. Can I first of all, and you will join me in that, thank Jean for putting in a massive effort to have our reunion here. You should be awarded a knighthood for that or at least an OBE! You would earn it fair and square. I will ask the Queen to do so. Her Majesty will certainly give Royal Assent to that like she did suspending Parliament. With the Brexit around the corner, being on the lips of many people these days, and the prospect of food shortages in Britain. I had braced myself for a menu with fish and chips. It used to be the only food not rationed and readily available in Britain during the second world war on the orders of Churchill. It is a big relief that it is not going to happen. I would rather be dead in the ditch. I am afraid Boris wouldn't appreciate a Dutchman joining him down there.

But let's now proceed on a more serious note. Casting our minds back fifty years, Montreal was for some of us a pure adventure. For others it was the aspiration to have a further education in aviation law. For all of us it was a massive opportunity to spread our wings and to meet up with fellow students from all corners of the world. We learned to be respectful towards people with a cultural and linguistic diversity. We were in the same boat and we had to keep it afloat. It was a mix of banter and hard work. For the latter we were awarded our LLM degrees. Without waxing lyrical, how could we forget our professors at the time, McWhinney, Vlasic and Bradley and the secretary to the institute miss McBrayne. Being faced with them on photographs from way back they seem so young. Now we are even older than they were at the time, but we don't feel that way. Roger Moore who featured in several bond films came to our aid when he turned eighty, saying being shown pictures from his heyday, how young and pretty he looked and that all that had been left was that he still looked pretty. We could take some comfort from that. Hopefully I will reach that grand old age myself next year being as pretty as ever.

Some of our classmates stood out from the crowd. Let me mention some of them. First of all the Italian judge Damiano. He was a daredevil. He had a flying license and invited his classmates to join him on his intrepid flights over Montreal. Most of us turned it down because he had a bit of a reputation in terms of his flying skills. I did not. I shouldn't have done it. It was touch and go that I survived. One other classmate came from the Sudan. He was certainly a character. He used to go on a stroll with me hand in hand dressed in his national colourful costume and me having my London Savile Road tailor made pin-stripped suit at his side much to the amazement of passers-by in downtown Montreal. Another classmate of ours was Galicky from Poland. Rumour was going around that he was a spy for the communist party. He was apart from John the only one who drove a car back then. It was a Volkswagen and it was given to him by the communist party. However we never felt being spied upon and there was no evidence for that at all at least not to my knowledge. He sadly passed away and so did the communist party. The reunion takes us back to that truly amazing time when the going was good and we had a care-free time that was seemingly endless. I can't phrase it any better than by quoting the singer Mary Hopkins who had a number one hit in 1968, the very year we were in Montreal. It puts pretty nicely into words how we felt at the time thinking back on it:

“once upon a time there was a tavern
where we used to raise a glass or two
remember how we laughed away the hours
and think of all the great things we would do

those were the days my friend
we thought they would never end
we would sing and dance forever and a day
we 'd live the life we choose
we'd fight and never lose
for we were young and sure to have our way”

Having completed my law studies at Leiden and Groningen Universities, and following a short break in London to unsuccessfully brush up my English – it could do with some improvement-I headed to New York being my next port of call. Having specialised in maritime law I felt like making a transatlantic crossing on a Dutch ship. My great uncle was the First Lord of the Seas of the Dutch navy. He went on about reminding me of the time that both the Dutch and the British claimed to rule the waves.

I just wanted to see for myself what it means to rule the waves and that was exactly how I felt crossing the Atlantic ocean. Later on in my life when I had the honour to be vice-president of the Court of Appeal of the Hague and being a member of the admiralty division of the court I dealt with many maritime cases following in the footsteps of my great uncle. Seeing the statue of liberty and the skyscrapers of New York made an indelible impression upon me. My final destination Montreal was equally overwhelming. I felt lonely and slightly homesick. I wasn't to see my family for a couple of years and that was a depressing thought. Once I was settled I got revved up and Montreal became a home from home. After a while I came to terms with my new life. I indulged the city. I went to Irish pubs in old Montreal and got hooked on Irish music which I am still an avid performer of. I made friends for life even beyond our class in the Douglas Hall, the student residence that provided me with a roof over my head. I have been back many times and every time my heart melts. Canada was gripped and fascinated by the former PM Pierre Trudeau. His inspirational personality reached way beyond national boundaries. His son preserves his legacy by following in his footsteps as the current PM. He is up for reelection in Canada on October 21st. Both Canada and the UK might have another PM after that.

Ann and John took me under their wings. They both descend from European ancestors. The Dutch and the Canadians have a special bond. We share the same values and feel comfortable in each others company. It is forever etched in my mind. Having said that it's worth remembering that this year it is 75 years since the Canadians liberated the South of Holland from the Germans. They have paid a heavy price for that. In my birthplace Bergen op Zoom, about twelve thousand of them found their final resting place at a special war cemetery. Being a knee-high boy I remember the troops triumphantly marching past my ancestral home, being the vicarage, as my father was a Minister of the Church, all the while jubilantly cheered on by the Dutch people. Four thousand British soldiers lost their lives at the operation Market Garden in Arnhem. It proved a bridge too far as it has become commonly known. They were along with the Canadians and the Americans the saviours of our nation. We are in debt to them.

The Institute shaped our future. Some of us were called to the Bar. Others ended up in the judiciary, so Bench and Bar are united here today. We have grown older, a bit of wear and tear. Some of us raised families. All of us found happiness. Some of us have faced health problems but we are still around. We all had our moments. We stood the test of time. Some of our classmates didn't and have sadly passed away. They will be fondly remembered. Let's spare a thought for them. Fast forwarding to this day fifty years on five of us are gathered here. Let me first mention John. After parting ways in Montreal we became best of friends to this day. I am in great debt of gratitude to you, John, for endowing your friendship on me. I used to be an usher at your wedding with your lovely wife Ann in Montreal. On the hunt for seal-skin slippers with our common friend Vincent Prager we were hard-pressed to make it to the church. We left the guests finding their seats on their own steam. It didn't stand in the way of you getting married. We had a great laugh ever since about it. Following the wedding KLM with our friend Aart van Wijk, the captain on the flight, took us to Amsterdam, the first port of call on your honeymoon. We made a trip through the canals of Amsterdam. I will never forget and it will always stay with me that we watched the first moonlanding somewhere in the middle of nowhere in the Laurentians. I recall us being gathered around a tiny portable tv set all the while being deeply and acutely aware that we witnessed an event of epic proportions. History was being made as it turned out to be later. As president of the Alumni Association of the Institute John made a massive commitment to the Institute. We commend him for that. We got together with Jean in Paris in 2009 in celebration of the 40th anniversary of our class. Sadly I lost Jamie and Manuela out of sight but they were never out of mind. Jamie went into hiding in the rugged mountains of the Scottish highlands.

Not being wide apart from the Dutch lowlands, though, it was a bridge too far to reach out to one another. Manuela travelled the world and finally settled down in New York. My radar didn't stretch far enough to keep track of her. You both more than compensated for that by being here. It is a great privilege to be able to touch base with you as well after so many years. I am delightfully surprised and truly amazed actually that you didn't change unrecognisably. We changed a bit over the years, though, but not for the worse. The presence of our spouses will only add to this festive occasion. I am delighted to welcome you here as well. I do hope you will feel comfortable in our company. A special welcome to Jean's husband Guy. When you retired at Winchester Crown Court in 2014 you were described as 'everyone's favourite judge' and someone who addressed the law as few others can. In a speech by one of the barristers you were characterised as someone who it was a pleasure to appear in front of. However I doubt whether suspects felt the same way. For us not having committed crimes or even considering doing so it definitely is a pleasure to have you here. As I have been reliably informed you once graced a fashion show catwalk at the Law Courts in Winchester to raise money for a charity. Sadly I never matched up to that! Jean must have been mindful of the saying that a good lawyer knows the law and a great lawyer the judge. But, Jean, don't take it the wrong way. It is not meant in a derogatory way because I think you are extremely fortunate of having the best of both worlds. However I feel I have done a better job by getting married to a doctor. It might be very helpful at times. I can relate to it. This year it's hundred years since women in the UK were allowed to practice as a lawyer, so that is for Jean something to be proud of and cause for celebration as well.

What better place to host our reunion than the Wolseley. Jean did a wonderful job. It really ticks all the boxes. I am pretty much blown away by that. It wasn't the easiest of jobs for Jean to get all of us on the same page. Going through the mails in the run-up to the reunion I couldn't help wondering why the choice of the menu at the Wolseley could be such an issue as it turned out to be. One of the set menus was a serious contender and when we were just about reaching unanimous agreement our Canadian friend, John, threw a spanner in the works. He had some reservations about the pudding. We had to get past that hurdle. 'Better some of a pudding than none of a pie', as the saying goes, didn't get him over the line, leaving Jean at a loss how to deal with a potentially divisive issue, only to be surpassed by the Brexit. The Dutch stepped in to find a way out and free John from his predicament. Dutch ingenuity came up trumps. It did the trick. I made an offer to John to have his pudding. I threw myself up as the great redeemer. Sadly I won't go down in history for that act of great mercy and sacrifice. Actually, we should have asked Lady Hale, President of the Supreme Court, to have a casting vote. She once appeared on TV as a judge on MasterChef despite cooking not being her area of expertise. Don't let it put the others off eating their pudding. When I was young and skinny people said, boy, you should eat more pudding. I don't need them anymore - I wish I had to - but I will have them anyway. It is for a good cause after all and in the interest of finding common ground. As Jean had big shoes to fill meeting all our requirements I brought you a pair of quintessentially Dutch wooden shoes. They come with two brushes to keep them shining. I am afraid they are not the right size. You are not the tallest of people but they won't fit you. For Jamie, our class president, I brought some Dutch tulips from Amsterdam. They are the right size. Unnecessary to water them, since they are as enduring as our friendship. A wee bit of Scotch whisky, or preferably for obvious reasons Dutch Heineken for that matter, every once in a while will do the job. As a judge in the Sheriff Court he once acquitted a female prosecutor who was suspected of drink driving. He made the headlines in Scotland doing so. Many thought it was a disgrace. The woman was found sitting in her car just having had a whole bottle of whiskey. She must have been a fan of Scotch whiskey and there is nothing wrong with that. She had marital problems and what better way to cope with that than with some whisky.

However I could think of a better place to drown your sorrow and anger than in a car. Can't blame her for that and so did judge Gilmour on the grounds that she wasn't actually driving when she was caught. In her statement she was adamant and persisted that she had no intention at all of driving in the state she was. Judge Gilmour believed her. He should be commended for that. It's interesting to know whether his decision was appealed. For Manuela I brought Dutch wooden shoes as well. I just hope you haven't become too big for these boots. You need to walk a mile in them, as the saying goes, to understand the Dutch. John has been waiting for my memoirs for too long. I will redeem myself by presenting him with a copy. It's in Dutch so you can't read it and that is just as well as it contains a lot of rubbish. Montreal is part and parcel of it with a lot of pictures. Canada has legalized and decriminalized the use of cannabis. I guess, John, you brought some with you for us to experience what it's like to have an even better time than we have now.

A big thank you for all of you who literally made the extra mile to be here, in particular our friends from across the pond, John from Canada and Manuela from Argentina accompanied by their spouses, Ann and Alberto. Argentina is very close to the hearts of the Dutch people. Our Queen Maxima Zorregieta is as you know from Argentina. Our King was extremely fortunate to find such a wonderful woman who is loved and very popular in the Netherlands. I wish you all a most enjoyable and memorable lunch. Let's also remember those who have to miss out on our reunion for whatever reason. Their absence is being felt. All being well and with some divine intervention we will meet again hopefully in good health in 2029. Long may our friendship continue! But for now, without further ado, let's indulge the champagne. What is an event like this without champagne. Napoleon is quoted as saying: "champagne is for all times. You deserve it to celebrate, you need it to comfort". With a slight twist I would say we need it because we deserve it. It will certainly go down a treat. Let's get the party started. We will have loads to discuss, so quite a roll-call today!

Gerrit de Boer, the Netherlands.

London, October 4th 2019







We'll always have Paris



On September 7, 2009, an extraordinary reunion was held in Paris. It was attended by **Jean Ritchie** from London, England, **John & Ann Keenan** from Montreal, Canada and **Gerrit de Boer** from the Hague, the Netherlands.

They celebrated that it was 40 years since they were awarded their LL.M. degrees at the McGill Institute of Air and Space Law.

Jean Ritchie was a London-based barrister and head of her chambers, while Gerrit de Boer was Vice-President of the Court of Appeal at the Hague. They are both now retired. John Keenan is still active as an attorney in Montreal.

Over the years, they have been in touch with one another occasionally and this special occasion brought them together once more. Many dear memories were remembered of their time at what they called *their* Institute during the McGill academic year 1968/1969.



From left to right: Kees Veenstra, class of 1964, former Deputy Secretary-General, Association of European Airlines, Brussels. Peter van Fenema, class of 1971, former vice – president foreign relations, KLM and adjunct professor of law, IASL. Gerrit de Boer, class of 1968, former judge, Court of Appeals, the Hague; Yola Veenstra, wife of Kees Veenstra.





