

In Memoriam.

Galina, Nicole, Erik. The Hendriks family, the Kandidatova family.

The staff of Hendriks Graszoden. Friends and acquaintances. Welcome all at John Hendriks' memorial.

Dear John,

For a second, I thought: 'We're in the wrong place here, John'.

Not because it's a church, to the contrary.

But the Amsterdam Arena, the Lokomotiv Moscow stadium, or the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid suited you so well. These are the locations where you spent countless of hours and where, after your wife Galina and daughter Nicole, you found your third big love.

Corona prevented us from holding this memorial in such a way,

but the feeling of those present here, and of hundreds or even thousands of people who could not be present here today, is one of great gratitude.

Your way of life, your love for Galina and Nicole, your kindness and warmth towards your employees and business relationships fills us with pride, gratitude, respect and, above all, appreciation.

We are sincerely proud and glad to have gotten to know you. You gave us more than enough to continue. Even if your life was far from over and your head filled with ideas.

A warm heart was filled with love for Galina and Nicole. Galina freed something inside of you that others could not; that no one even expected would be possible. That it would be possible that something in this life could surpass your love for the stadiums.

You cherished the love you shared deep inside your heart like a shining pearl. I still see the glitter in your eyes, when you told how you beamed when the door of that office in Moscow opened and Galina appeared.

How you looked deep into her eyes when you stood in front of that jewellery store at the Kremlin and modestly said: 'How do you feel about those rings?' While what you meant to say was: 'Will you marry me?'

How you spoke warmly about that first meeting with Galina's mother. You were nervous. And how proud you were to be immediately accepted as a son in law.

Your extraordinary wedding, for which you flew in 27 family members and friends from the Netherlands and who were welcomed by Galina's family.

In the past week, I looked at the photo of Nicole as a baby lying next to you in the big bed, and you, the proud father lovingly and tenderly watching her sleep.

There's a special place for the letter you wrote personally in the plane back from Moscow, in which you tell Nicole about your first meeting with Galina. A letter that once again seals your love for each other. A love that transcends this life.

With the added wealth for Nicole to have the privilege of being raised in both the Russian and Dutch cultures.

And you, John, considered it a great challenge to move between these cultures. The 'grass man' that put Heythuysen on the map all over Europe and far beyond it. The man who as easily navigated countries like Russia, Iran, Iraq, Uzbekistan and so on. And everywhere you came, in every country, you found new challenges.

John, the man with the big roles, as you were called proudly. The initiative you started together with your father Pierre in 1975, that grass mat company you started with about 5 hectares of grass, you turned into an internationally respected company together with your brothers Wil, Thijs, and Erik, whose knowledge of grass growing and whose grass mat quality was desired and loved from PSV to the Kuip, and from the Arena in Amsterdam to the Arena in Munich. From Loden to Turin, and from Moscow to Tashkent in Uzbekistan where you even provided a complete stadium and training fields.

Four brothers with grass running through their veins, who could have intense discussions and differing opinions, but who, when it came down to it, when one of them was attacked, worked together as one, and closed ranks that no one could break. Together you were unbeatable. In everything, including the development of company that garnered so much respect and credit due to its modesty and accessibility, even with large international organisations, such as the Champions League, the World Cup, and European Cup and European and global football organisations FIFA and UEFA.

You helped the Amsterdam Arena out of trouble when they could not get the grass to grow. Prior to the European Cup in Basel, Switzerland, where the organisation were beside themselves with worry two days before the start of the first match, because the mat was in such a bad condition, and when no one thought it would be possible to play, you said: 'It'll be alright, in two days you'll have a new mat.'

You embarrassed Germany and German growers of grass and made the headlines, because nine of the twelve stadiums in Germany had the Dutch grass of Hendriks' grass mats during the 2006 World Cup.

Respect and acknowledgement that can be seen in the dozens of letters you received in the past days, that have been read to you, and that you will take with you in your grave today.

Letters, from which I wish to repeat one quote. With which I want to express the feelings of all your relationships:

'John, you were strict and demanding, but above all you were a modest and charismatic man. You picked up the rake to show us all the details, show us how to do it, or how to do it better. Always patient when explaining, and always looking for perfection.'

A German journalist once asked you how you obtained all this knowledge and you answered:

'When you sleep with the grass every day, you understand it'

And you ended with the legendary words: 'The grass is like a child, it behaves differently every day'.

In the past days, Erik characterised you in a very special way: 'John could focus endlessly on one thing. He could throw in all his passion and tenacity. And of course things would get messy now and again, but John always kept looking forward and when I looked back and saw what had gone wrong, he would say: 'Didn't you see that? Why wouldn't you pick up that mess?'

The company, as Erik puts it well, is a gift, but a gift they acquired together with their employees and countless others through hard work and ceaseless effort. But also with honesty, all based on your motto of quality and service.

John, firstly Galina, Nicole, your family, friends, but also definitely your employees will miss you intensely.

You were sociable, provided guidance, stimulation, education and were filled with humour. You had a no-nonsense attitude, were down to earth and had a clear own opinion.

But above all, you were loving and proud. Proud of your family, of Galina, your wife, and Nicole, your daughter.

Proud of your company, and proud of your people.

We will miss John as a respected and strong person. But will also think back on you with gratitude. You gave us more than enough to continue your legacy thanks to your passion, drive and humour. We will go on knowing that Erik, Gardien and all staff members have your full confidence.

John, we will say goodbye physically, but we will carry you with us in our hearts and minds for a long time.

And on a personal note, John, I am so unbelievably glad that I had the honour of knowing you, no matter how briefly. You did not need long to give me so much. And I am truly happy that, by writing the book, something you were sure to tell me, and which I will gladly realise for you, I will get to be in your presence long and often.

What is left can only be this;

John, on behalf of all of us..... OUR SINCERE THANKS.

Bert Heijnen

Dear John...

...the plans we had, back in the day - almost half a century ago...We were going to build a cabin, the most beautiful cabin in central Limburg! A cabin all seven of us could live in...play, eat, sleep...everything...No problem! And then we'd build an actual swimming pool; there's more than enough room. Right between the hen houses.

You thought that if we'd just keep on digging that morning until dark that we'd be able to do it. And we'd all be able to swim together the next day. No problem!

And when we built that cabin, dad soon ran out of nails. We hammered it into the wood, all of it, by the bags! But fair is fair: it was a great cabin.

We dug in the sand with small bulldozers; you could make entire buildings out of it. No problem. We went to the forest with our cart filled to the brim (and little Erik on top). To build an underground cabin.

Extremely dangerous, of course. But so much fun. Which meant: no problem...

Playing outside was John's favourite thing. And everything else that came along with it: rolling in the mud with the pigs, helping calm down panicking horses. And driving around on a rickety moped behind the house. Everything worked for John and his brothers, as long as it was noisy. The girls: Josée, Irma and myself needed you for everything we considered too dangerous (and rightly so!): getting things out of a tree...or going into a dark hole in the forest first, even though every kid knew there was a monster there...

Sometimes, after our adventures, we had to 'sit on the couch' for a long time as punishment. But it was definitely worth it.

To you John, it all (apart from dangerous) was one big *preparation*. When you got older, you started helping out in the fields. It was the best thing in the world. You were going *to work with dad!*

And it certainly worked out for you. You worked on the formation of your dad's grass mat company, and after its formation, you developed it with your brothers Thijs, Wil and Erik.

For a long time, work came first... and second, and third, and...

Until you met Galina. Who understood your obsession. Who understood you wanted to conquer the world with grass mats. She helped you take a step back. And embrace happiness. Galina turned your house here into a *home*. And everyone around you was happy about it. She turned the garden into a lush sea of flowers with a view of a beautiful pond. Here, you could just sit back and enjoy yourself after work.

The happiness of both of you increased infinitely when Nicole was born. What a joy it was!

And how grateful we are, Galina, that you completed John's life. And what a joy it is to see wonderful Nicole enjoy the garden that, for all its space, almost became a natural playground.

And now what, John?

When I close my eyes, I see you and your brothers...I meet with you somewhere...in an undisclosed space. You're sitting on a bench...satisfied.

Maybe it's because I see my children every day...

I see John in the middle, flanked by Wil and Thijs. There's no time anymore, and so you three have all the time in the world. And they look down at all that was so dear to them. They don't need to explain this to each other, these three brothers.

They are looking down. And see how the grass is growing.

Dear John...wherever you are. Be proud of your work, of your family. Of your friends. Of your decisiveness.

Fare thee well.

Leni Hendriks