



**4. Europäischer Kongress für Menschen mit Behinderungen  
„In der Begegnung leben“ 24.-27.10.2008 in Den Haag /NL**  
[www.in-der-begegnung-leben.eu](http://www.in-der-begegnung-leben.eu)

**Vortrag / lecture 26.10.08**

**CHANGING THE TIDES (2)**

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Friends:

Yesterday Hannelore Speelman talked about changing tides in the World. She talked about the changing climate, and how each of us can help Mother Nature in sustaining our world. Mother Nature needs help in caring for the animals, and the plants. We are the ones to help her.

Changing the tides also regards how people behave towards each other. As human beings we need to care for one another. We are here because we want to share things. That is what this conference is about: living is what you do in encounter with other people.

Let me tell you about a friend of mine. His name is Ronald. Ronald lives in an institution where people with disabilities live. He is not very happy there. He spends his days with people that he has not chosen. Staff working with them come and go. Ronald has no say in who is coming to work with him.

I met Ronald a few years ago when I visited his place, and we talked about his life. When I had to leave he asked me to come back some time. I promised him I would. A few weeks later I did go to see him again. We went outside to walk in the sun. There were many others in the park. Every time someone came by, Ronald would stop him or her, point to me and say to them: "This is my friend, he is coming to visit me!"

At first I was a bit surprised, but also a bit embarrassed. I was claimed as a friend by this guy that I hardly knew. But then I thought: "Okay, Why not. He has chosen me to be his friend."



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Since then Ronald and I spent time together, I visit him, he visits me, we go out dining in the city, in the summer we go camping together. Actually, this summer we camped on the farm where Hannelore Speelman is living!

I have learned how important it is for Ronald to have a friend. Someone he has chosen to spend time with.

So let me ask you a question. It is a question I often ask when I am talking with people. The question is this. If you can choose between having a house of your own, or having a paid job, or having a boy or a girl friend, what would you choose?

Now let us try and see what the answer is. This is what we will do. I ask you a question and you answer as loud as you can. First we do the house. If your first choice a house, you say as loud as you can: "HOUSE".

Now we do the job. If your first choice is a paid job, you say as loud as you can: "JOB".

Finally we do the friend. If your first choice is a boy or a girl friend, you say as loud as you can: "FRIEND."

That was a loud and clear choice for the friend. I believe that this is the right answer. Of course, everybody is free to want as they like, but still I think "Friend" is the most important. I will tell you why.

Suppose you have a house of your own, but no one ever visits you. Suppose you have bought a new tv set for your house, or a new movie for your dvd player, but there is no one you can show it to? Is the house by itself going to make you happy? Maybe when you first move in, it will make you happy for a while, because it is new. But after a while, I will feel lonely, I think. You want to share the place with someone who comes and visits you.

Next, suppose you have a paid job. Is the paid job going to make you happy? Maybe. Maybe you like the work you do, you like the money you earn with it. But this is only maybe.

For example, you may have a boss who always tells you to hurry up. Or you may have people working with you who are making too much noise, or are irritating you. Does the job still make you happy then? I don't think so.



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A paid job only makes you happy when there are people who behave as a friend.

The same is true of your own house. A house will make you happy only when friends come visit you and are happy with you.

This is not to say that a house and a job are unimportant. But a house and a job will only make you happy when you can share them with other people. That is why friends come first.

Friends in life are the greatest gift you can get. But why is that? What makes a friend more special than a house or a job?

Of course, the answer can be many things. Your friend likes to go to the movies and you like that too. My friend loves to sit at the kitchen table and chat with me, while we are having a beer together. I like that too.

I have different friends than you have because you and I are different people. Yet there is one thing that makes all friends special. All friends have one thing in common. Let me tell you what that is.

Your friend is special because he or she has chosen you! She wants *you* to visit her! Or he wants *you* to go to the movies with! Ronald and I are friends because he chose me, and now we choose to spend time with one another.

A true friend wants you for your own sake. A true friend is happy when you are happy. A true friend will comfort you when you are sad. A true friend will make you strong when you feel weak.

That is what makes a friend special, not only my friend, or your friend, but all friends: they care for one another. That is what we need, that people care for us as friends, just like Mother Nature cares for us all.

So here is your task for today! When you leave this room and go to your workshop, and on your field trip this afternoon, make sure that you make at least one new friend before you come back for dinner. I wish you all a great friend making day!