

Wijzer, vaster in 't geloof,
Jij geelgebroekte filosoof,
Dan menig mens, want jij beschouwt
Slechts dat wat goed is; jij vertrouwt
Je tong slechts toe aan 't zoet genot;
Jij lacht zo zorg'loos om het lot.

Stepping down the stones,
Sometimes slipping, ankle-deep
In cool, coiling water,
My life rushes with the river,
Breathes with every gust of wind
In the high trees.

't Is een besef tussen geluk
En machtsgevoel, dat welbehagen
Dat men heeft als alles lukt:
Als in rodeo met de wilde golven
Ontstuimig maar precies
Je kayak door de stroomversnelling
Naar beneden danst;
Als snelle opzwellende golven
Kolkend en spattend
En ongeloof'lijk sterk
Je meesleuren in hun razen
Totdat je je peddel recht
In hun wilde haren kliëft
En je je afduwt naar de stilte,
Het gladde water langs de kant.

Het leven, ontsprongen vanuit
De bulderende rivier, die dóórdavert,
Komt hier tot rust en schept een afstand:
Een vreedzame distantie
Tussen haar en wat haar bracht.

I'm absorbed, assimilated,
Without darkness, without light,
Comprising yet unrecognising
This is from where I came.

Walk of Life: Behind the poems

(For the enthousiast)

English Version

The poem on the cover of this booklet that is also included in my work 'Walk of Life', is a compilation of verses from different poems that my father - Jacques Kaat (14/09/1955 - 21/11/2017) - wrote during his life.

In my work I display the lifecycle of man on different fabrics. This lifecycle is shown in three phases: Growing up, living and dying.

These phases are illustrated by using the river as a metaphor for life itself: starting small and playful, making its way through the landscape and then turning into a fast paced swirling rush of water which then again calms down and comes to a calm open body of water.

In our lives we make the same journey as the river and experience the same phases, in which the fast paced part makes up the biggest part of your life. This is the phase of life of an adult, where it's easy to be swept away by the currents of college, marriage, having children and pursuing a successful career.

But because of all these distractions and bustles we sometimes forget to look around once in a while, and give attention to that which really matters in one's life, however small that may be.

Sadly enough we usually only come to realise this when we are dying, as it is easier to reflect in still waters.

That is why I have created this installation, in order to create an awareness of mortality to remind people to enjoy the real fundamental moments of happiness in life while they still can. I offer the opportunity of reflection while you can still look ahead, not only back.

In order to put more emphasis on this subject matter I have made use of four poems that my father wrote about life, each with their own message.

- De Hommel : A Dutch translation of the poem 'The Humble-Bee' by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Stepping down the stones...
- Leven
- Fathomless

From these poems I have extracted verses that I felt would convey the message well, and by doing so created my own story applied to this lifecycle.

The interesting thing is that my father actually writes about everything that I wish to say with my work. All the philosophies and lessons of life are in there. So what I have basically done is extracted parts of those poems and reassembled them like a puzzle, in order to communicate my (and my father's) message: be aware of your mortality and be the captain of your own ship in order to live and enjoy your life optimally, and not put things off.

The assembled poem used in 'Walk of Life' is, as you may have already noticed, bilingual. This is because my father wrote his poetry in English as well as Dutch. He was a Dutchman and lived in the Netherlands, but had an education in English Literature in Hull, worked at international universities and married my English mother.

Personally I have chosen to use poems from both languages in my work to safeguard that, but also because bilingualism plays an important role in my work. It's a part of my identity but I also think the work is at its best in its original language. It is after all the content that matters the most.

On the following pages you will find the original poems in their entirety to which I have added an explanation as to why I have chosen (parts of) those poems for my work.

De Hommel

Dommelende, dikke bij
Waarheen jij gaat is plaats voor mij;
Laat zo toch, die halve garen,
Naar 't strand van Porto Rico varen;
Ik volg enkel jou hoopvol,
Jij wervelende wereldbol,
Zigzag-kruiser, bloemverhuizer,
Laat mij nader aan je flank,
Ik je hoorder, je verwoorder,
Zingend over struik en rank.

Zonaanbiddend anthrapoïd,
Vreugde van je grondgebied,
Zeiler door de atmosfeer,
Zwemmer in het zomerweer,
Reiziger van 't licht, jij dromer,
Amazone van de zomer,
Wacht, ik bid je, tot ik kom
Binnen 't gehoorsveld van je brom:
Daarbuiten is al marteldom.

Als de zuidenwind in mei
Met een net van wolkenzij
Zilver aan de kim drapeert
En met zachtheid al toucheert,
En het menselijk gelaat
Met romantiek weer gloeien laat;
Als haar warmte alle zoden
Doet bestrooien met violen,
Dan drijf jij, in het kreupelhout,
Zwervend langs zon en hemelgoud,
De grauwe groene stilte uit
Met je diepe basgeluid.

Goede vriend van zomerdagen,
In je toon hoor ik de vlagen
Van een zwoele zomerwind;
Ik zie weiden, bont van tint,
En eindeloze vreugdestonden
In 't Indiaanse woud gevonden
Van idyllische onsterfelijkheid,
Met rust, plezier, en vrolijkheid.

Niets onsmakelijks of onkuis
Beste bij, is bij jou thuis;
Maar viooltjes, gele lissen,
Esdoornsap en ook narcissen,
Gras, manshoog, en zachte groene
Sichorij met hemelsbloemen;
Kelken met honing van akelei,
Geurend varen, agrimonij,
Klaver, addertong, silene,
Hondsroos, dáár, donsbal, dans je hene:
Daarbuiten schiet je de woestenij
Als in een schilderij voorbij.

Wijzer, vaster in 't geloof,
Jij geelgebroekte filosoof,
Dan menig mens, want jij beschouwt
Slechts dat wat goed is; jij vertrouwt
Je tong slechts toe aan 't zoet genot;
Jij lacht zo zorg'loos om het lot.
En als de felle noordenwind
De zeeën en het land gezwind
Weer afkoelt, zit jij op je plek
En je doorslaapt leed en gebrek;
Gebrek en leed: 't kwelt ons ontzaggelijk,
Maar jouw diepe slaap maakt het belachelijk.

Stepping down the stones...

Stepping down the stones,
Sometimes slipping, ankle-deep
In cool, coiling water,

My life rushes with the river,
Breathes with every gust of wind
In the high trees.

Life rebounding on the rocks,
Higher than this valley,
Fuller than the sky.

Trees were never so resolute,
Life never so full of life.

Did this joy start with
Thinking of you?
Did my heart form this nature?

How good is it to live
In the world when, for your sake,
The entire world
Confirms.

Jacques Kaat - Juni 1981

De Hommel (previous page) is a Dutch translation written by my father of the poem The Humble-Bee, written by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1904.

The poem is about the bee (bumble-bee): a miraculous part of nature. The bee sets the perfect example for any person. The bee brings life and colour by pollinating flowers, and only focusses on the good, the 'sweet' things in life and avoids the bad (the cold), and sleeps through the winter.

I have chosen this poem because in my eyes the bee (at least how it is described in this poem) is the perfect metaphor for being a child. A child is exploring the world playfully, and is innocent and free of worries. A child hasn't yet come into contact with all the bad things in the world nor has any responsibilities, which it can avoid. Bees and flowers also bring to mind spring and summer, the creation and blossoming of new life.

Stepping down the stones... (left) is a poem that is more about love and being in love. The thing that intrigued me are the first two verses, which is why I have placed them in my assembled poem.

According to me, especially the first verse creates a nice image of growing up: the transition from a child to an adult.

As a young adult you discover that life isn't just fun and games and you start obtaining responsibilities. You are still exploring, and make mistakes on the way.

The second verse then makes a transition to how this young adult is swept away by the current into full adulthood. The river is starting to gain speed.

It's all part of life. You can't stop the river, nor control the speed. But you can remain aware of your surroundings, and enjoy the ride.

't Is een besef tussen geluk
En machtsgevoel, dat welbehagen
Dat men heeft als alles lukt:
Als in rodeo met de wilde golven
Onstuimig maar precies
Je kajak door de stroomversnelling
Naar beneden danst;
Als snelle opzwellende golven
Kolkend en spattend
En ongeloof'lijk sterk
Je meesleuren in hun razen
Totdat je je peddel recht
In hun wilde haren klieft
En je je afduwt naar de stilte,
Het gladde water langs de kant.

En hier, achter het ruisen
Van de stroom, hier staan de vissen
En veegt het lange wier
Over de begroeide rotsen;
Hier hangt de oude tak,
Eens meegevoerd met watermassa's
In het voorjaarsgeweld,
Hoog boven je in de ondergraven boom.

Hier vliegt ook het kwikstaartje
En pikt de insecten weg
Van tussen de stenen.
Het leven, ontsprongen vanuit
De bulderende rivier, die dóórdavert,
Komt hier tot rust en schept een afstand:
Een vreedzame distantie
Tussen haar en wat haar bracht.

This poem actually already tells the whole story of the river, and therefore also the lifecycle of man. The title is also 'Life'.

I have chosen this poem as the main part of my work, both literally in the poem that I have assembled as well as figuratively in the visualisation of my illustrations. This being because in my eyes it perfectly captured what I wanted to communicate.

I interpret it as follows:

The first part symbolises the loss of control on your (adult) life. You find yourself in a metaphorical water rapid, where the river is life. Man is continuously looking for happiness, and is striving to achieve goals that are deemed to make you successful and happy. You go to college, marry, have children and engulf yourself in a career. It is easy to lose yourself in this biggest part of your life, and forget to give attention to the things that you take for granted or personal goals that you still want to achieve.

In the second and third parts the river calms down. You have finally managed to gain some control, and you have the opportunity to reflect on life. The river however has come to its end, as has life. When a person is dying, that is when they reflect and look back on life the most. Everything that made that person happy in its purest form resurfaces, the rest fades away.

It's in this point of life that people also have the most regret. They regret the way they have lived their life (if they weren't satisfied with it), the choices they have (not) made, and the things they gave too little attention to. At this point it's actually too late to reflect, because you can't go back.

Fathomless

Dreamless void I'm entering
Without measure, without time.
Seamless and unfaltering
- Without knowing why.

I'm absorbed, assimilated,
Without darkness, without light,
Comprising yet unrecognizing
- This is from where I came.

Leave me, for I have arrived,
Cover me in nature's blanket.
Do not mourn me, I'm all right
- This is as it should be.

Draw from death its certain strength,
Cherish life, and I will bolster
Your resolve from day to day
- Through silent memory.

There's no way to soften this poem. This is about death and dying.

However this is not described as something bad or scary, but natural, peaceful and familiar.

Dying is simply a part of life, everything is in balance. Without death there can be no life, and without life there can be no death.

The last verse communicates the message of my work nicely: "Draw from death its certain strength and cherish life"

For my work I used the second verse. The river has at this point calmed down, and as I explained with the previous poem 'Leven', here comes the part of reflection on life. I wanted to emphasise the fact that life here comes to an end, and that you die but in a peaceful way that is simply a part of life.

We don't know what happens to us after we die, and there are many different opinions and religious views about it. This is also something that makes the verse appropriate. It doesn't describe death in a biased way. It simply is what it is: not good, not bad, not dark, not light. It's open to interpretation.

That is also what my work is about: you are invited to let yourself be immersed in the walk of life, where you can imagine and identify yourself in these phases of life in your own way. You can interpret the journey according to your own philosophies and views on life.

Here you have the opportunity to reflect on life and mortality, after which you can simply walk away and carry on with your life, no strings attached.

But maybe with a slightly different mindset, and something to think about.

Walk of Life

Lizzy Kaat - Januari 2019

The font that I use in my work and in this booklet is the same as that of the Underwood Traveling Typewriter, the typewriter that my father used to write his poetry on for most of his life.

Disclaimer:

The poems that are used in this booklet and in 'Walk of Life', are property of Jacques Kaat and are not to be shared or used without permission.