

Dieuwke L. Brand-de Heer (1947 - 2023)



It is not difficult to choose the key words to describe our colleague, friend and companion Dieuwke: very smart, fast thinking, assertive and trustworthy and at the same time modest, unobtrusive and "no nonsense".

Dieuwke entered the world of online biomedical information retrieval in 1974. Graduating with high marks in Biology at the University of Groningen it was obvious that she should take a PhD programme, but she and the professor didn't match in terms of intellectual level and critical thinking. Instead, she found the right job in a wonderful team of information specialists at the Department of Biomedical Information, University Library, Utrecht: Stien Verheijen-Voogd and Guus Mathijssen (1, 2).

Those were the early days of searching scientific data and literature by using computers. As the story goes, the USA government was surprised by the launch of the Sputnik by the USSR (Russia) and all military and research institutions run by the Federal Government were obliged to index, collect and retain ALL literature, worldwide, the

National Library of Medicine (Bethesda, Md.) was also obliged to do so. In order to include European literature, the NLM cooperated with several institutes in Europe, such as the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. This institute created one of the first medical information centres in Europe, that was tasked with collecting, indexing and uploading the bibliographic data of European biomedical journals. MEDLARS, Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System was born. Stien and Guus attended a three-week course in Stockholm (in winter!) to learn about the thesaurus, indexing rules and command language of the medical database system. They were both very much dedicated to the job and very professional searchers who unveiled the secrets of the system to Dieuwke.

Eager to learn, with a quick and analytical understanding, this was for her the ideal working environment. She loved the systematic and logical nature of the terminology, the hierarchy of terms and the syntax and grammar of the many command languages. Information specialists were not only intermediaries between the medical and research staff and the (very expensive!!) computer systems, but became experts in the field by comparing the performance and outcomes of the different literature databases (e.g. TOXline, Medlars, Embase and Biological Abstracts) and also of the different hosts or platforms (DIMDI, DataStar, Dialog, Pascal, to name a few) and their command languages.

Because the Dutch Library Association was not keen on taking on the digital revolution of information services, the pioneers of "online" founded a new group of information professionals, VOGIN (the Dutch online user's group) (3). The aim of the group was to provide critical analysis and comparison of databases and systems and the exchange of experiences as well as creating and organizing a full five-day course to provide fundamental knowledge in all aspects of online and to give hands-on practice in information retrieval. Dieuwke has been a teacher of these courses ever since the start in 1978. As a fundamental guide, JL Hall's book, *On-Line Information Retrieval Sourcebook*, used to be recommended as a supplement to the course, however in 1980 the lecturers, including Dieuwke, developed a Dutch language course book (4).

In 2008 Dieuwke was the second person in the Netherlands to be awarded the VOGIN silver pin.

Dieuwke started her career as an online literature searcher in Utrecht, and later in The Hague with the Ministry of Social Affairs. From 1997 till 2008 she was staff member and head of the Medical Library of the Leiden University Medical Center (LUMC). Over the years Dieuwke became very much involved in the biomedical information group (BMI) of the Dutch Library Association (NVB, KNVI). In the period 1991-2009 every issue of the group's newsletter *Biomediaties* (I, Suzanne, was the chief editor) contained an interesting article written by Dieuwke about her "experiences with Medline/Pubmed". Working together for the newsletter we

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developed and organized training courses in using Medline on CD-ROM, later Pubmed via Internet. Dieuwke was a remarkable teacher: well prepared, with a broad overview and thorough knowledge, a fast and creative thinker using well formulated and carefully articulated language. The EAHIL community awarded her for being the best oral presenter in Helsinki 2008. It was a presentation of the results of a study about the complexity of author addresses in biomedical databases (5).

With her analytical mind and perseverance to understand the bugs in the system she was in close contact with the helpdesk of OVID technologies, a Wolters-Kluwer company publishing the Medline database. No wonder this company offered her, after her early retirement, a job at the department to answer the most difficult and diverse questions of customers, but also to train OVID staff in the northern European countries. Only in 2018 did she decide it was time for her to step down. The last EAHIL conference Dieuwke attended was 2018 in Cardiff. I myself entered the biomedical library world in 1984, my first EAHIL conference was in 1988



(Bologna), my last one was in 2017. But I cannot remember any EAHIL conference or any BMI-meeting without Dieuwke being there as well. A strong companionship over many years; a well-respected colleague and close friend.

The cremation meeting was attended by many friends. from her student years in biology to colleagues in the biomedical information sciences. Dieuwke was a very loyal friend to many. Over decades she combined a fulltime job with being the key player and taking a pivotal role in the family of both her husband and two sons and in recent years including their wives and the three grandchildren. She will be much missed by many.

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2. Verheijen-Voogd C, Mathijssen A. A contribution to the comparison of the usefulness of the data bases of Excerpta Medica and MEDLARS in biomedical literature retrieval. ASLIB Proceedings 1974;26(4):136-51. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb050452>.
3. van der Meer K, Koster LM, Brand-de Heer DL. National courses in online retrieval in the Netherlands. Online Review. 1981;5(5):405-7. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/eb024078> ; <https://edepot.wur.nl/262869>.
4. Koster, LM et al. Inleiding tot online literatuur-onderzoek. Vogin; ITIS, 1980; published in 6th (revised and enlarged) editions, the most recent: Sieverts EG, de Jong-Hofman MW. Online opsporen van informatie : theorie en praktijk van het gebruik van interactieve informatiesystemen. 6e herz. dr. Den Haag: NBLC Uitgeverij Den Haag; 1996.
5. Brand-de Heer DL, Bakker S. Some comparisons between Embase and Medline. JEAHIL 2008;4(3):12-7. Available from: http://ojs.eahil.eu/ojs/index.php/JEAHIL/issue/view/109/04_3.

In the photographs: 2014 Dieuwke in Norway; LUMC 2008 Suzanne and Dieuwke at her farewell reception.