

Nedernoren



FOTOS & TEXT MARIEKE KIJK IN DE VEGTE
INTERVIEW DIRK MÖNKEMÖLLER

Photographer Marieke Kijk in de Vegte visited the Norwegian island of **HOVDEN**, where three Dutch families live with their kids among only 40 Norwegians. During her trips she captured the everyday lives of the teenagers. Unfortunately the lastest news she received from the island was deeply saddening.

FOR PETER

With every step I take, I can hear the crisp sound of the gravel road underneath the soles of my hiking boots. The strap of my photo bag presses hard into my shoulder. Fortunately, the cool breeze blows into the right direction. The sky is blue. The air is clean. In the distance, I can see the mountains of the Norwegian main land.

*“JJ ... here!”
... Good dog.*

I am on the main road of the Norwegian island Hovden. I am walking from the house of Peter, Monique and Kayleigh to the other side of the island, where one of the other two Dutch families live. Although it is a brisk walk and I have to constantly keep my eye out for JJ, I am overwhelmed by a profound sense of freedom.

This is why Peter and Monique moved to this island. It seems to be a paradox: a sense of freedom on an island which is only accessible by ferry three times a day. Then again, isn't it exactly this remoteness that enables a sense of freedom?

Drunk driving or being behind the wheel without your seat belt on? No one will hold it against you. Heated discussions about a neighbor's fence which cuts a few inches off your property? Impossible! Locking the doors at night? Unnecessary. On this island, you don't worry. And if you do, it simply has to do with the grim weather or tricky potholes.







Peter, Monique and their daughter Kayleigh have left behind their lives in the Netherlands to emigrate to a place of unspoilt nature and complete tranquility. The same goes for the other Dutch families on the island. The 40 Norwegian inhabitants are grateful for the newcomers, because they ensure that the ferry will continue to run to and from the island. After all, the children go to school every day on the main land. In addition, the fact that the Dutch and Norwegian culture have much in common makes it relatively easy to integrate.

Kayleigh and the other (and only!) four children thrive on the island. They play together and they take care of the animals. They swim in the bay, fish from the dock and at night they light bonfires. Peter takes the dog for long walks and helps the neighbors wherever he can. Every week. Monique drives around the island to deliver the mail. The house numbers on the envelopes serve no purpose; Monique knows everyone here. The days glide past slowly and time seems to stand still.

This seemed to be an everlasting image...

It's been four years since my last visit. Whenever my mind wanders to life on Hovden, it is always exactly the way I left it. However, Peter became gravely ill. His situation deteriorated rapidly. Too soon and against all expectations, he had to leave everything behind. Including his beloved island. Life on Hovden will never be the same again for Monique and Kayleigh. What good is paradise without your loved one? Only the memories remain.



The Island itself is beautiful. It's very rocky and barren. There is a hiking path that takes you over the mountain from one side to the other. Hovden is about 15 square kilometers big. If you want to take the short route from north to south, you just follow the only gravel road, which takes about ten minutes by car. A 30 minute boat trip brings you from the village Flore to the island. The ferry usually goes three times a day. If you can afford it, you can buy your own boat. But when the weather is bad, you better stay home. In 2009 there lived 42 people on the island, plus the three dutch families. Peter with his wife Monique and daughter Kayleigh. Another Peter with his wife Linda and daughters Sanne and Anouk. And Rudy with his wife Marion and their children Coen and Esmee. Most people who live on Hovden work at on the mainland and all children go to school in Flore. If you want to do groceries for the whole week and you want to go by car, you have to make a reservation for the ferry, because it can only carry two cars at a time. There is a community house where the people of Hovden come together every now and then to eat homemade cake, chat about the weather and talk about things that have to be done – like repairing the road.

Why did the Dutch families move there?

Most of them already knew Norway from their holidays and they were charmed by the wild nature and peacefulness. Some of them wanted to get away from the crowded Netherlands in order to feel free. I also heard that the Norwegian mentality has a lot in common with the Dutch. Such as a straightforward way of looking at things.

How did you hear about Hovden and what made you go visit the island?

By accident I came across this old newspaper-article. The headline was: Dutch people are welcome at island near Norwegian coast. The article was about the daily life of a Dutch women who migrated to Hovden. After reading it, I became interested in the Dutch living on this island, and how their lives changed during the time. I found out there were three Dutch families living among 40 Norwegian inhabitants. My interest in Norway goes back to my childhood. When I was young my parents took me there every year for camping, hiking and visiting old wooden churches. I had this love-hate-relation with Norway. I loved the nature and the adventures. But I also got bored because there were only few other children at the campsites and not much going on. I was wondering how the five Dutch children on Hovden were feeling about this, since they lived on an island with no facilities or other children.

Tell us a bit about Hovden and the everyday life there.

How many times have you been there? And what did change during this time?

During the four times I visited Hovden I've met three families who tried to find their happiness. Each member of the family at in his or her own way. By taking care and enjoying the pets and other animals, by making long hikes, by cooking for each other – or by just doing nothing and enjoying the summer sun and stunning surroundings. But I also learned that this island was not the right place for everyone. Almost all Dutch families who lived on the island moved somewhere else. They all had their own reasons. Health, social contacts, school or work. The one family that I think fitted best on Hovden, has got torn apart by this the awful disease of cancer. I really hope that Monique and Kayleigh will find their happiness again. I hope the beloved nature of Hovden will strengthen them. •

