

Life of a plant hunter

# LIFE OF A PLANT HUNTER

HANS NOOTEBOOM

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## PREFACE

Friends and family asked me to write up an account of my life because of the stories I told them, which I, eventually, have done.

About the author.

Hans Peter Nooteboom was born in the Netherlands Dutch Indies in 1934 and lived during the second world war in the Netherlands. There he witnessed in May 1940 the battle or the army airport Valkenburg and the dropping of food toward the end of the war in April 1945. During the hunger winter of 1945, when the western part of the country was closed by the Germans, he spent several months in the province of Friesland, in the North of the country where there still was enough food.

After the war he attended the Gymnasium with good results after which he studied Biology in Leiden. After finishing this study he engaged in a Ph.D. project revising the plant family Symplocaceae of the old world. For this study he made several expeditions to collect plants for the National Herbarium, i.e. in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Ceylon and China. As member of the scientific committee of the foundation Keurhout, a foundation to regulate the market of sustainable timber in the Netherlands, and as member of the board of the Netherlands commission for IUCN he was member of missions to evaluate forestry in Burma and Canada. For his botanical work for Flora Malesiana he attended several symposia i.e. in Australia, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia after or before which he took the opportunity to travel and look for plants. During several years he was secretary of the Dutch Commission on International Nature Conservation (the van Tienhoven foundation).

Leiden, 2017

I wish to thank Dick Figlar for carefully reading the manuscript and correcting the English language.

And also for useful advise re the contents

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## NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES (INDIË)

I am born in Waingapu, in the then Dutch East Indies, on July 2, 1934 in the military hospital. My father was “controleur” (a civil servant like district officer) with the colonial administration. He started at the end of 1932 with his career in the sub district Manggarai, in West Flores. During his stay there my mother married him by proxy on Mei 15, 1933 and followed him by boat. She must have arrived approximately the first of October. He was transferred in 1934 to Waingapu at Soemba (now Sumba) to replace his predecessor.



Netherlands East Indies 1934 – 1939 and after the war

His predecessor had, like all other Europeans over there, died from malaria. So, also the veterinarian and the officers of the garrison were newcomers. Because of the bad health condition in that area I was born in the military hospital.

De Heer en Mevrouw  
C. NOOTEBOOM—Teljeur  
geven met blijdschap kennis van de  
geboorte van hun Zoon 27523.7  
HANS PETER.  
Waingapoe, 2 Juli 1934.



With nanny (Babu)

From my first years I don't remember much. The only thing I remember is that my mother carried me out of the home during an earthquake.

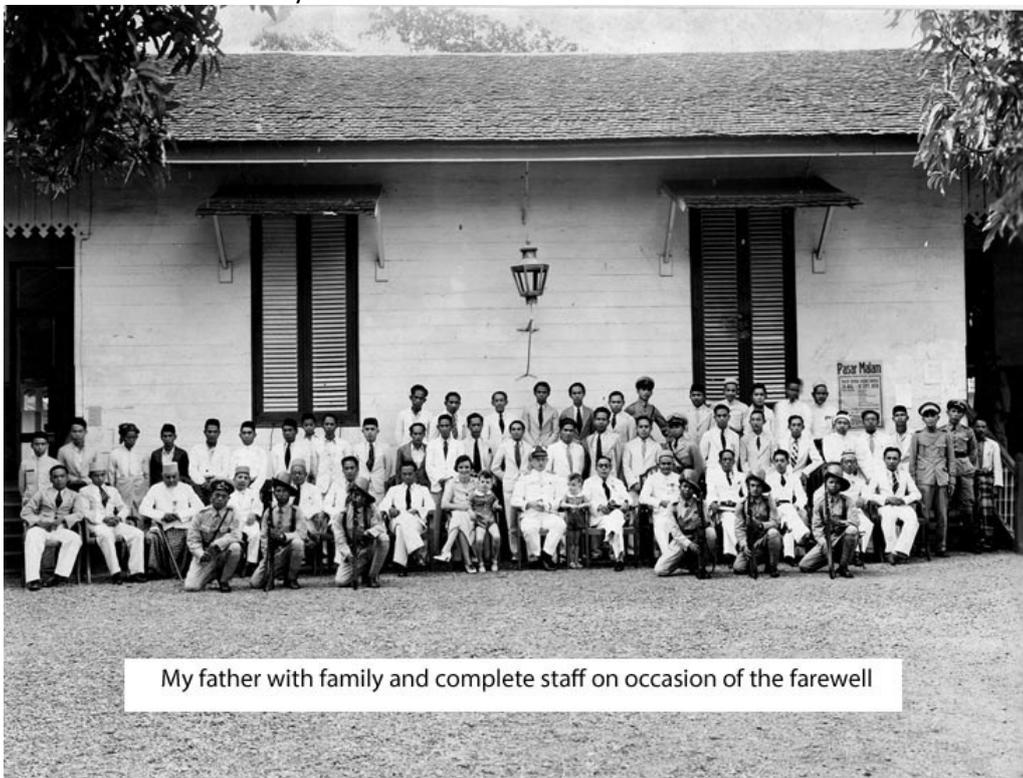
On 4 October 1935 we moved to a new location, in Pinrang at Celebes, 20 KM from Paré Paré, where he became interim “controleur”. My mother gave birth to my brother Jan Joost, in Makassar, the capital, where there was a hospital, on November 26. In March 1936 we moved to the island Saleier. My father there became sub district officer. He had at his disposal a patrol boat, the Albatros, to inspect the islands near by and collect taxes. During a patrol he arrested a Japanese fisherman for spying in the territorial waters.

Life of a plant hunter



The next location (starting October 13, 1937), as “controleur”, was Pankadjene, on South Celebes, not very far from Makassar. I remember that we had a swimming pool and that, on my 5st birthday, I swam for the first time after accidentally jumping into the water without a floating device. Not much later (still in July 1939) we went on a 6 month leave to the Netherlands. Civil servants got a 6 month leave after every 6 years of service. We were accompanied by the nanny. We travelled by ship, the Van Oldebarneveld, and the voyage took 3 months..

Ascension day 1938



My father with family and complete staff on occasion of the farewell



On the boat to Holland



In our holiday home

## THE NETHERLANDS, THE WAR

We left the boat in Genoa to travel by train to Amsterdam. The nanny stayed on board to arrive later in Amsterdam. However, she never arrived! We were with 3 children. April 19, 1939 Sibout Govert was born, also in Makassar. He was only three months old and laid in a carrycot. Upon arrival in Amsterdam we were welcomed by my mothers sisters, aunt Nini and aunt Wies, to go to Leiden, my mothers hometown. There my father rented a home for the duration of his leave at the Rijn en Schie kade. During the next winter there was ice in the canals, also in front of our house and I learned to skate.

In the mean time World war 2 started and my father could not go back to the Indies. From the time at the Rijn en Schiekade I do not remember much, except that in may 1945 the train cargo station behind our house was bombed, and that there was an air combat between German and Dutch fighter planes above Leiden and above our house. We hid with the entire family in the bathroom. The issue was the military airport Valkenburg, which was conquered by the Germans using parachutists.

In July 1940, a car with German soldiers parked in front of our house and they told my father that he had 10 minutes to pack before they took him away; eventually he was sent to Buchenwald, a concentration camp where also many Jews were brought. My father was arrested because he was a civil servant in the East Indies, and there, after the German invasion of the Netherlands, all Germans were arrested as enemies of our country.

My mother had to move to an other house because the rent had expired. Firstly, we moved to two rooms, and during that time my sister Ineke was born on October 17, 1940. Not long thereafter we could rent an entire house in the Fagelstraat 11. I went to a kindergarten first, and later, in September 1940, to a primary school in Oegstgeest.

From the biography of my father:

*19 July 1940 until 17 September 1944 interned by the occupying administration: arrested as hostage (as retaliation for the internment of Germans in Neth.-Indie) with 216 other Indian civil servants, 2 years interned in Buchenwald near Weimar, thereafter in St. Michelsgestel [camp Beekvliet], Haaren and Vught (with a.o. Pos, Schermerhorn, Drewes en J.P.B.), released on Mad Tuesday (5 September 1944); came home the end of September 1944 via Gouda on a bike without tires; during bombardment of Leiden by British aircraft, attacking the train station on 11 December 1944, hiding at State Museum for Ethnology, dangerously wounded [writing on Buchenwald and Beekvliet, 1945]; after long stay in the Elizabeth hospital he was slightly invalidated at his knee, and therefore discharged for service in the East Indies and detached at the Ministry for the colonies 1945-1946*

My mother now had to raise the children alone which was not easy. I remember that once she chased me with a stick from under my bed where I hid after being naughty. I learned to swim again, with difficulty. We used to walk to the swimming pool, about 5 Km away, because there was no public transport. There was no fuel for busses or electricity for trams. Once my mother rented a cottage near the sea in Katwijk, to which we walked using a rumbling cart for the baggage. On nice Sundays we used to walk to Katwijk to the beach. But often we went on Sunday to my grandparents (my mothers parents in the Dacosta straat (nr. 44), walking. In September 1944 my father returned on a bike without tires, I did not recognise him! There was no rubber for tires and mostly we had no shoes except wooden shoes because there was no leather or rubber for the soles.

The wooden shoes were provided with new soles with sawdust and glue!

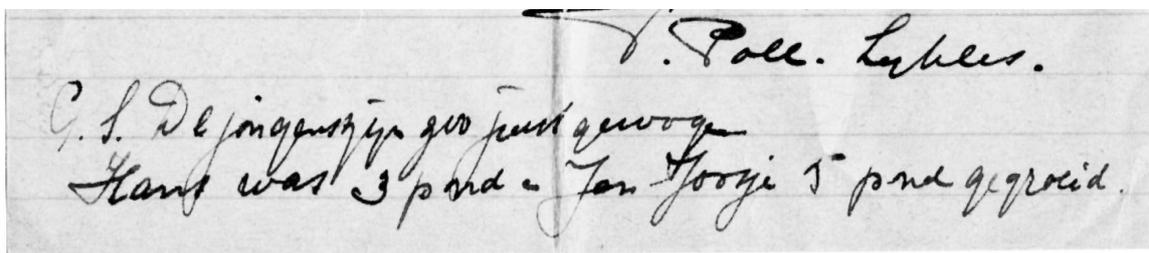
Because there was no gas or electricity we cooked on a small iron stove, called a wonder stove.

## Life of a plant hunter

For cooking we needed wood. Some people use the wooden floor of their attic and wooden bridges in a nearby park. We cut the trees in the park. Once, while I was cutting a tree, I heard shooting. German soldiers came to arrest us. Luckily the small canals were covered with ice, and I could easily escape. During holidays my mother used to put me, sometimes with my brother JanJoost, up in families in the country where there was more food. Once in the Haarlemmermeer, in Hoofddorp, later in the northern province of Groningen. In 1943 in Oxwerd-Noordhorn at the family Poll, who owned a farm with 9 horses, 21 cows, and a lot of agriculture of corn and rapeseed. We were put on the scale every week, and our hostess proudly wrote to my mother once that I had gained 3 kilo, my brother even 5!

Later we came in the family de Vries (uncle Menno and aunt Tine, her surname was also Poll). They had 60 cows and about 100 hectare agriculture.

In February 1944, food was nearly finished in the western part of the country where we lived, (we had one slice of bread each day) my mother arranged for us transport on an open truck that went to the North (Friesland and Groningen) to find food for the hospital my father was in at that time



J. Poll. Leides.  
C. S. De jongste zijn zoo juist gewogen  
Hans was 3 pond - Jan Joost 5 pond gewogen.

A Fokker fighter hiding (below) for German aircraft. The old monastery is the University building



In the National archives of the Netherlands is a manuscript with following text:

### **The last years of the war and the liberation**

**By: Hans Nooteboom, published April 6, 2010**

**1944 to 1945, Leiden, Twijzel**

“My father was civil servant in the Dutch East Indies where I was born on July, 2. We were on leave in the Netherlands and lived in the Rijn and Schie kade in Leiden when the war started.

Certainly during the “Hunger winter” (the Dutch famine) there was lack of food. With permission of the occupier a journey was organised with trucks to fetch food for the local hospital from Friesland, in the north of the country. My mother, my brother, and I joined such a journey in February. It was already light when we arrived in Friesland. Firstly we stopped somewhere to eat. I ate 20 slices of bread with cheese and drank 20 glasses of milk, without becoming ill.

## Life of a plant hunter

I was placed in a family with the name "Noordhoff", who owned a needle and thread shop in the village Twijzel. They were very nice and I went to the primary school in the village. I learned the Frisian language in a few weeks, because otherwise I could not communicate with the other children. I played often outdoors with the boys of the village, mainly from my school class. I had a really good time. My brother Jan Joost could stay with Aunt Tine and Uncle Menno.

Twijzel is a village along a road, and behind the houses were meadows for cows and sheep. From the back garden I could walk into the meadow and play there. A few days before the liberation we played with about ten boys when a British Spitfire came toward us in the air. We often saw spitfires, they shot on everything on the road (the main road between Leeuwarden and Groningen) and next to the road foxholes were made to escape from the bullets.

Now we were the target. The meadows were separated by earthen walls covered by trees and shrubs. We jumped over the wall and laid down behind. When the aircraft fired we were safe. The aircraft flew over us and came back, so we jumped back to the other side. After that the pilot decided to leave us. The empty shells I collected! On April 15 we heard the sound of machine guns. Everybody went inside the houses to wait things to happen. Suddenly shooting bren carriers passed the house. We were liberated by firing bren carriers. German soldiers, often in the foxholes, were imprisoned or shot. A few hours later, all was quiet again, teen aged boys passed us with the bodies of shot German soldiers on a cart and their guns on their back. The German soldiers who tried to escape behind the houses and through the meadows were later captured. Immediately after our liberation we started to make orange and red-white-blue buttons to sell to the people. A few days later I witnessed a most terrible thing. Our school was used by the (former) resistance. I walked past the square and saw the resistance people with daggers in their hands chase captured National socialists. Of course I knew they were traitors, but they should be formally judged and not punished in this way. The official capitulation was on May 5, but we were liberated already. A few weeks later trucks came to transport home children from the west. I was put in a truck and left the vehicle in the village of Oegstgeest, a few Km's from my home in Leiden and walked home. On one of the earliest days home I witnessed the dropping of food by American bombers by a pilot who was apparently lost, in a park close to my house."



1945, dropping of food

December 11, 1944, bombardment of Leiden Station to destroy the V2's that were stationed there. Alas, not one hit. What was hit was an entire neighbourhood between the station and the Morssingel as well as the front part of the Ethnological Museum. Many were hiding there against the bombs and died, except my father who fell in a bomb crater and was later found and brought alive, but severely wounded, to a hospital .

December 1944, the bomb crater where my father had lain



## AFTER THE WAR

Liberation festival in front of our house, 1945.



After the war my brother and I went a few times to Groningen



1949. Farm "De Nie", Visvliet with uncle Menno and aunt Tine



Twijzel, 1951

In 1951 I went once to the Noordhoff family in Twijzel.

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In 1946 I successfully did my entrance examination for the Leiden Gymnasium. In the first years after the war my father rented a sailing boat.



After the war I joined the sea scouts, the Sagara Satrya group in Oegstgeest, where we sailed and rowed in small dinghies. My mother bought a sailing canoe with two masts, this canoe even could plane over the water.



In 1950 my father became director of the Ethnological museum and the Maritime museum in Rotterdam and we moved there. I went there to the Gymnasium Erasmianum.

Life of a plant hunter



On the gymnasium I had a girlfriend, Riet Liplijn, who joined us in a holiday with the sailing boat, a scow, called Nootedop (nutshell). After I graduated in 1953 I joined the army as a draftee and Riet decided to end the relation. Of course she met many men during her study of medicine. My mother took a girl in our home who went to school in Rotterdam while her parents lived far away. We fell in love, what lasted until halfway the first year of my study.

After leaving the army, because I had no money to study I first went in military service, first two months as a recruit to Ossendrecht, and thereafter to the school for reserve officers (SRO LUA = (antiaircraft) in Ede.



My father and Riet Liplijn on the river lek



In the first month as a recruit we were not allowed to go home and we were obliged to always wear our uniform.

Here some photo's of my gymnasium time, especially during graduation time:



Gymnasium Erasmianum, last school year class 6B, 1953



Spring 1953, farewell of the examination classes  
One of the pupils had a Volkswagen!



The Erasmus statue receives a wreath

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“invasion of the girls high school”



On the stage during a play at Christmas 1952

## MILITARY SERVICE

The recruits training was heavy and no fun, but after two months I went to the reserve officers school SRO LUA in EDE, where we were in a class of 20 people and had a lot of fun. On the photo we had piled up the beds and other furniture, The school sergeant on duty did not know how to deal with it, after all we also were sergeants. Nevertheless, the training was heavy. For instance, on the grounds of the barracks one was obliged to run and not allowed to walk. Very healthy!

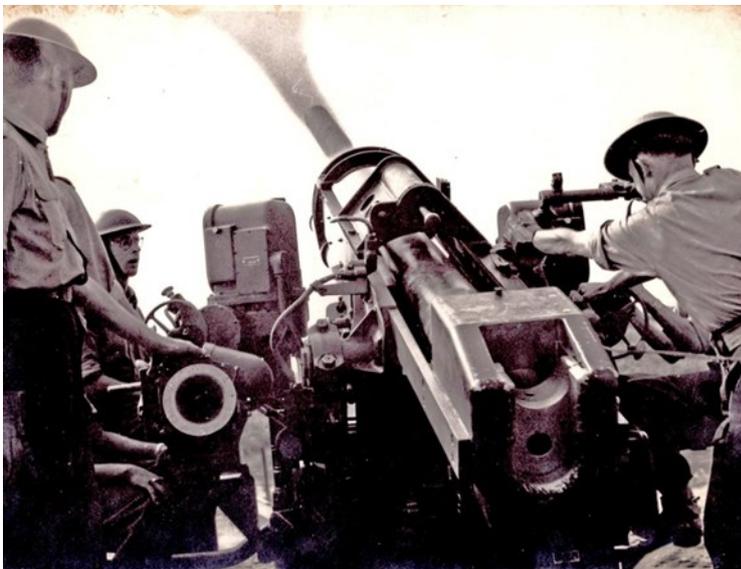


Also the men in disguise were sergeants.

Life of a plant hunter



Field exercises were often hard, certainly in winter.



Our main anti-aircraft weapon was the 9TL (90mm anti aircraft cannon). A battery consisted of 4 cannons connected with a battery junction box. That box was connected to the fire control that was connected to the radar standing on a separate truck. Before shooting air pressure, wind direction and wind force had to be recorded. During shooting it appeared that we had to change the distance because otherwise every shot was striking and we had no more target, and we needed too much time to fetch a new target (a target was pulled behind an airplane).



After the School Reserve officers, SRO I was posted, now with the rank of cornet, in de Lier, where we often had pleasant evenings in the officers mess. My function was Chief Artillery Controller. i.e. I had the duty to stop shooting of the anti aircraft guns when our own planes were in the air (guns tight), when the skies were clean of our own aircraft the command was Guns free.

## Life of a plant hunter

After several months I was transferred to Ossendrecht, where I became head of the gunners school. My brother Jan Joost happened to be recruit there! My swearing in was in Bussum (1955). It was on a Monday, and the weekend before I had gone home. Because you needed a weapon, I took my carbine with me in the train. From the picture it is clear that I didn't need it because I could borrow a pistol. Also as an officer I needed to maintain my shooting skills. Here in Ossendrecht, 1955. The rifle is a Lee Enfield, from last world war!



Swearing in



shooting



### Life of a plant hunter

My military service lasted 24 months and in the first year we had no holidays. But towards the end the government had established a two week holiday, just 14 days before my time had finished. So I took that holiday and joined my parents who had rented a cottage near a lake where we could sail. After two weeks I returned to Ossendrecht only to demobilise.

## MY YEARS OF STUDY

I did not join a student Union because I had no money, but also because I had a freshmen's rag already at the officers school and I did not like that again, especially because I was older than my fellow students.

I went to live in Leiden where I rented a room for only 35 guilders a month. During summer, beginning with Easter, I gave sailing instructions at a sailing school at the Kaag, where in the first week I got my diploma as assistant instructor and at the end of that summer I passed my exam for sailing instructor at Sneek, in Friesland. Despite not being at the university in summer I passed my bachelors exam as the first of my year on January 3, 1959. Because my income as sail instructor was not much, I started to teach at high school after my bachelors exam, first on the Rembrand lyceum, later also on the municipal Gymnasium in Schiedam.



Inge

That gave a much higher income which I needed because, on March, 26, 1959 I had married Inge Riel, above, and I passed my exam as biology teacher on may 24, 1960. In the last year of my study I taught 29 hours a week and on December 12, 1961 I passed my doctoral (masters) exam cum laude.

I Joined a biology students debating club, Omnia Dubia. That club tried to be scientific and elitist. That is probably the reason that it disappeared in later times because our community became more and more socialist.

## Life of a plant hunter

In my first year I came member of the commission that organised the founders day of the biology club. One of the things we organised was a theatrical performance in which I took part. There was also a diner and a dance.



Dies natalis of the LBC (Leidse Biologen Club) 1955



Play repetition for Dies natalis LBC 1955



Excursion of my year in Nieuwkoop  
(Brigitta Duyfjes, Riet van Meeuwen, and Eveline Oldeman )

Life of a plant hunter



House boat of the Netherlands Sailing School (1956)



Instructor at the Netherlands Sailing school

At the sailing school I met a young woman who worked there in the kitchen in her holiday , Inge Riel, and I fell in love with her. On March 26, after my bachelors exam, we married and rented an apartment in de Moddermanstraat in Leiden.

### Life of a plant hunter

In the third year of my study we had an excursion to Yugoslavia, mainly looking at sea animals like fishes that we identified in the evening. Many we also ate, and I was the cook.



With my fellow students on a ship. In the middle the excursion leader, Dr. Vervoort. 1960



Dubrovnik 1958

Augustus 26, 1961, my oldest son, Sibout Govert, named after my fathers father who died before I was born, and February 13, 1963, Menno (after uncle Menno) Coenraad (after Inge's father) were born. In 1964 we moved to a house I had bought in Leiderdorp, Schoutenstraat 2.

## AFTER MY STUDY

After finishing my study I got a job as scientist at the Laboratory for Experimental Systematics, director Prof. Hegnauer, where I could start writing my thesis, a revision of the family Symplocaceae of the old world, with Prof. C.G.G.J. van Steenis as my supervisor.

Before that Prof. van Steenis, who was the most important teacher for my masters study, offered me a voyage on a freight ship to Leningrad (St. Petersburg). I enjoyed that very much. First we went from Rotterdam to Hamburg, and thereafter through the Kiel canal to Leningrad. The ship was owned by a German company and chartered by a Dutch company, van Ommeren (now Vopak) where a friend of van Steenis was director. The ship went to Leningrad to fetch rockets (missiles) destined for Cuba. (The rockets never arrived because of the blockade of Cuba by the American fleet during the Cuba crisis . In 1967 my daughter Marije was born on September 20.



On the Kiel canal



The Hermitage (the winter palace) in Leningrad



The summer palace (Peterhof) at the Gulf of Finland



Danaid at Peterhof

In 1950 after moving to Rotterdam my father bought a Friesian 6m. scow in Zevenhuizen near the Kaag (In the mainsail : UK84 (before the war the ship was used in Urk for fishing ). We fetched the ship, my father and I together with his model boat builder a mr. Hazekamp (known from the Hazekamp models, In that time my father was also director of the maritime museum in Rotterdam). With that ship, the Nootedop, I sailed a lot, in the beginning with the entire family (we slept wit six in a ship of 6 m long and 1.8 m wide!) to the Biesbos, but also to Friesland, via Arnhem and the IJssel, and back on deck of the Lemmer boat. We did everything without a motor because my father told us we had to learn sailing very well before he would buy an outboard motor. We had a tow line of 60 m, and once we towed the ship the entire Amsterdam-Rhine canal, c. 30 Km. I could use the ship also in the time I was sailing instructor and gave lessons in touring with a sailing ship. From Rotterdam, the ships home port, till my fathers death we sailed to the Kaag, the Braassem, the Vinkeveen lakes, and the Loosdrecht lakes, but also to the

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Biesbos, Den Bosch, the Oude Maas and the lower river Ryne, even to Leeuwarden. I had the ship inscribed in the monument register where it received the number 790. The ship was built about in 1880 on the Pôllewarf in Grouw.



Nootedop

After moving in 1964 with my family to the Schoutenstraat 2 in Leiderdorp I wanted my own ship. On the balcony I have built one of 5.5 m long. The balcony was 6 m long, so I could just walk around it.

Life of a plant hunter



The self build ship, for sale c. 40 year later, by the second owner.



Nootje

## Life of a plant hunter

In 1973 my brother Janjoost, who had been sailing in the Nootedop after my fathers dead, bought a larger ship, a fisherman sea scow, OH4 and I could use the Nootedop. My mother was the official owner. I sold the ship I had build my self. In the mean time my children were growing up and I had a small scow build in 1970 (the oldest became 9 years old) which I named Nootje (small nut), 3.50 m long by Jan van Klink in Leimuïden (registration number 980 ). I was member of the sailing club Braassemermeer, and gave sailing lessons for children in optimists.



Giving sailing lessons to children from a RIB



The Nootekraecker