

## Tekst 7 The Lost Continent

*De onderstaande tekst is het begin van het boek The Lost Continent van de Amerikaanse schrijver Bill Bryson.*

I come from Des Moines. Somebody had to.

When you come from Des Moines you either accept the fact without question and settle down with a local girl named Bobbi and get a job at the Firestone factory and live there for ever and ever, or you spend your adolescence moaning at length about what a dump it is and how you can't wait to get out, and then you settle down with a local girl named Bobbi and get a job at the Firestone factory and live there for ever and ever.

Hardly anyone ever leaves. This is because Des Moines is the most powerful hypnotic known to man. Outside town there is a big sign that says WELCOME TO DES MOINES. THIS IS WHAT DEATH IS LIKE. There isn't really. I just made that up. But the place does get a grip on you. People who have nothing to do with Des Moines drive in off the interstate, looking for gas or hamburgers, and stay for ever. There's a New Jersey couple up the street from my parents' house whom you see wandering around from time to time looking faintly puzzled but strangely serene. Everybody in Des Moines is strangely serene.

The only person I ever knew in Des Moines who wasn't serene was Mr Piper. Mr Piper was my parents' neighbour, a leering, cherry-faced idiot who was forever getting drunk and crashing his car into telephone poles. Everywhere you went you encountered telephone poles and road signs leaning dangerously in testimony to Mr Piper's driving habits. He distributed them all over the west side of town, rather in the way dogs mark trees. Mr Piper was the nearest possible human equivalent to Fred Flintstone, but less charming. He was a Shriner and a Republican – a Nixon Republican – and he appeared to feel that he had a mission in life to spread offence. His favourite pastime, apart from getting drunk and crashing his car, was to get drunk and insult the neighbours, particularly us because we were Democrats, though he was prepared to insult Republicans when we weren't available.

Eventually, I grew up and moved to England. This irritated Mr Piper almost beyond measure. It was worse than being a Democrat. Whenever I was in town, Mr Piper would come over and chide me. 'I don't know what you're doing over there with all those Limeys,' he would say provocatively. 'They're not clean people.'

'Mr Piper, you don't know what you're talking about,' I would reply in my affected English accent. 'You're a cretin.' You could talk like that to Mr Piper because (1) he *was* a cretin and (2) he never listened to anything that was said to him.

'Bobbi and I went over to London two years ago and our hotel room didn't even have a *bathroom* in it,' Mr Piper would go on. 'If you wanted to take a leak in the middle of the night you had to walk about a mile down the hallway. That isn't a clean way to live.'

'Mr Piper, the English are paragons of cleanliness. It is a well-known fact that they use more soap per capita than anyone else in Europe.'

Mr Piper would snort derisively at this. 'That doesn't mean diddly-squat, boy, just because they're cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and

Eyeties. A *dog's* cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and Eyeties. And I'll tell you something else: if his Daddy hadn't bought Illinois for him, John F. Kennedy would never have been elected President.'

I had lived around Mr Piper long enough not to be thrown by this abrupt change of tack. The theft of the 1960 presidential election was a long-standing complaint of his, one that he brought into the conversation every ten or twelve minutes regardless of the prevailing drift of the discussion. In 1963, during Kennedy's funeral, someone in the Waveland Tap punched Mr Piper in the nose for making that remark. Mr Piper was so furious that he went straight out and crashed his car into a telephone pole. Mr Piper is dead now, which is of course one thing that Des Moines prepares you for.

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- 3p **30**  Geef van elk van de onderstaande uitspraken aan of zij volgens de ik-persoon van toepassing zijn op Des Moines?
- 1 De inwoners hebben een hekel aan pottenkijkers.
  - 2 Er valt heel weinig te beleven.
  - 3 Er zijn nogal veel werklozen.
  - 4 Het sterftecijfer ligt er hoger dan in andere steden.
  - 5 Nogal veel inwoners gebruiken verdovende middelen.
  - 6 Vrijwel geen enkele inwoner verhuist ooit naar elders.
- Noteer het nummer van elke uitspraak, gevolgd door "wel (van toepassing)" of "niet (van toepassing)".
- 'The only person I ever knew in Des Moines who wasn't serene was Mr Piper.'
- 3p **31**  Noem *drie* vormen van gedrag van Mr Piper waaruit dit volgens de ik-persoon blijkt.
- In zijn gesprekken met de ik-persoon laat Mr Piper enkele van zijn opvattingen blijken.
- 3p **32**  Geef aan of de onderstaande uitspraken wel of niet opvattingen van Mr Piper weergeven.
- 1 Britten spreken Engels met een bekakt accent.
  - 2 De Britten zijn een onhygiënisch volk.
  - 3 De ik-persoon heeft Des Moines verraden door met een Engelse vrouw te trouwen.
  - 4 Hotels in Engeland zijn minder comfortabel dan hotels in andere Europese landen.
  - 5 John F. Kennedy heeft op een oneerlijke manier de presidentsverkiezingen gewonnen.
- Noteer het nummer van elke uitspraak, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".