

Book Review:

Open Turns: From Dutch Girl to New Australian

By **Kerry Methner**, PhD / VOICE

A SENSITIVE INQUIRY INTO THE DEPTH OF HER EXPERIENCES after surviving World War II's Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, in *Open Turns* Hendrika de Vries recalls her younger self's sometimes unwilling adventures as her family transports her from her beloved Lyceum, friends, and swimming pool in Amsterdam, into a new life as a 13-year-old Australian immigrant.



Hendrika de Vries

Photo by Ann MacNair Show

"Henny" as de Vries is known, takes on the tasks of every teen such as separating from her parents, finding her voice, and embodying her dreams. She also begins to metabolize her wartime experiences as she struggles to find her way and her feet.

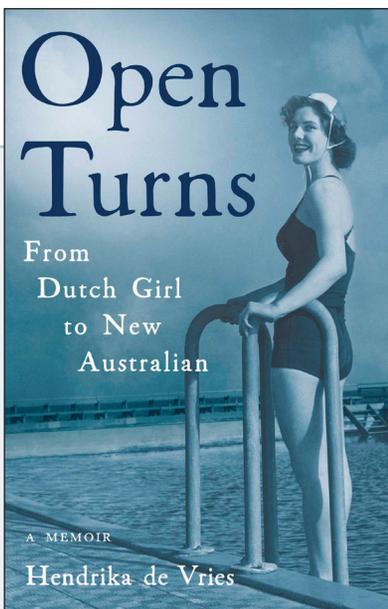
De Vries, with her crisp, easy to read writing style engages the reader's attention from the first page, as this 13 year old takes shape on the deck of a Dutch ocean liner converted into mass transport for post WWII European migrants.

That young girl, with strong ideas about who she would be and how the world should be ordered emerges and grows into a young woman over the space of just over 200 pages as the memories of a decade are formulated with insight into Henny's story a rich and textured lifetime later. The person who comes into focus is fiercely connected to her family and her dreams and grounded in the power of her own experiences.

She is also a wonderful, fast swimmer, who works her soft, travel-worn high school body into an elite swimmer. Along the way, her new country also plays a role as the stars in the night sky of the Southern hemisphere are etched in her mind and memories.

The young woman who the reader meets on the deck of the *MS Johan van Oldenbarnevelt* and gets to know in Adelaide, went on after this memoir ends to earn a BA, Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Colorado, an MTS cum laude in theological studies from Virginia Theological Seminary, and an MA in counseling psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara.

The book itself boasts a cover in rich blue with an image of Henny at an Australian pool where she won competitions and was a contender for the Australian Olympic team. It also includes praise from some of her former Pacifica colleagues including Maureen Murdock, author of *The Heroine's Journey*, who shared "This coming-of-age story reveals the working of destiny. It will inspire the migrant within each



Hendrika de Vries is a retired family therapist, a teacher, and a writer. Her life experiences with oppression and resistance in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, migration, competitive swimming, misogyny in 1950s Australia, and feminism in the US infuse her writing with historical depth and personal perspective on challenges facing women and anyone deemed other. She is the author of *When a Toy Dog*

Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew, award-winning memoir of her WWII childhood. She lives in Santa Barbara, California.

of us seeking home. You won't be able to put this book down!"

Renowned scholar and author Christine Downing, PhD, who wrote, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*, said, "What a powerful continuation of Hendrika de Vries' story! It begins in 1950 when thirteen-year-old 'Henny' and her family emigrate to Australia, a completely new and different world with no understanding of the war trauma she has just survived. I loved the way this honest, sometimes sad, but ultimately hopeful book evoked memories of my own experience as an immigrant and as an adolescent."

Dennis Patrick Slattery, Distinguished Emeritus Professor, and author, most recently, of *The Fictions in Our Convictions: Essays on Cultural Mythology*, adds, "*Open Turns* asks three essential questions: Who am I apart from my talents and dreams? What destiny is calling me to become who I authentically am? What does remembering my past add to the texture of who I have become? Moving between becoming and being, Hendrika's coming-of-age adventure into herself and out to the world resonates with all of us who have wondered about our identity, our destiny, and our purpose in life."

As the final page is turned of this second memoir by de Vries, this reader hopes the thread will continue. De Vries' story certainly did.

Open Turns: From Dutch Girl to New Australian was published by She Writes Press and is distributed by Simon & Schuster. Find it at Santa Barbara's Chaucer's Bookstore and online.



Photo courtesy of the author

Henny at 13 before her family emigrated to Australia

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