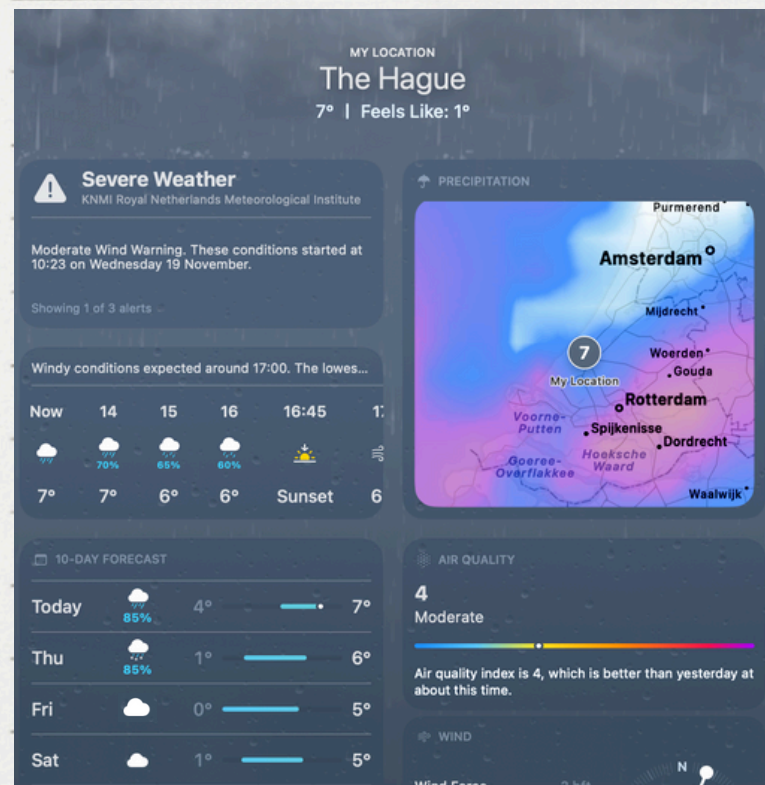


"Dear Diary,

The days have been gray and moody lately. I've been missing my wife especially in the last weeks. I feel the loneliest in the evenings when I'm having dinner by myself. It used to be my favourite part of the day, but now, without my family members here, it's the opposite. I have noticed that it is quite difficult to gain new friends at this age. Even though I am open to meeting new people, it is difficult to find them. My daughter would write in her diary whenever she was feeling lonely. Perhaps you can help me get through the days too."



Oh how I miss these days...



"Dear Diary,

Something exciting happened this morning. When I was throwing away my garbage at the end of the street, this lady noticed that I had a large amount of food waste. She bluntly asked why I had so much food to throw away. I honestly thought she was a bit rude initially but politely replied that I am used to cooking for a whole family but since my wife passed away and my daughter moved out, I always get too much leftover food. Her face softened when I said this, and she told me about this community dinner she was going to this evening, and she invited me to come along. Apparently, they organise these dinners every Thursday, I had no idea. I have been living here my whole life and had no idea it was organised only two streets away from my house. Maybe I'll go check it out though, it could be nice to share a meal and possible even gain new friends."



Dear Diary,

I decided to go to the dinner. To be honest, I was a bit nervous about showing up there but as I hesitated outside the door one of the volunteers kindly invited me in. I sat down at the table, and the woman sitting next to me introduced herself, and we started chatting. A great icebreaker was to talk about the meal in front of us. The atmosphere inside was warm, comfortable, and I felt surprisingly at ease with this group of people I had never met before. The whole concept of sharing a meal is a great way to connect with strangers, because all a sudden we have something in common – tonight it was stampot.

I think I'll go again next week, I really enjoyed sharing a meal with these kind people.



Dear Diary,

It's Thursday again – a day that has become my favourite day of the week! I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the dinner tonight. Both familiar faces and new ones. One of my favourite things about these meals is hearing everyone's stories, and what these dinners mean to them. One guy started joining after he lost his job, someone else moved to this neighbourhood and struggled to meet people until she started coming to these dinners, and others come so that they can practice their Dutch every week. These dinners are so much more than just food.

I forgot to mention something I learned today: all the meals are made from ingredients that would otherwise have gone to waste. Sustainability is everywhere these days, but I've never actually felt it so directly until these dinners. Hearing how farmers, grocery stores, restaurants, and so many others donate their leftover food honestly made me feel inspired – even hopeful for humanity. I see hope in my daughter's generation.

At the same time, it's shocking how much perfectly good produce would otherwise be thrown away. Just look at this fridge. All of this would have been wasted.



The volunteers really outdid themselves with this delicious stir-fried noodle dish!! Can you believe all this food was donated?!

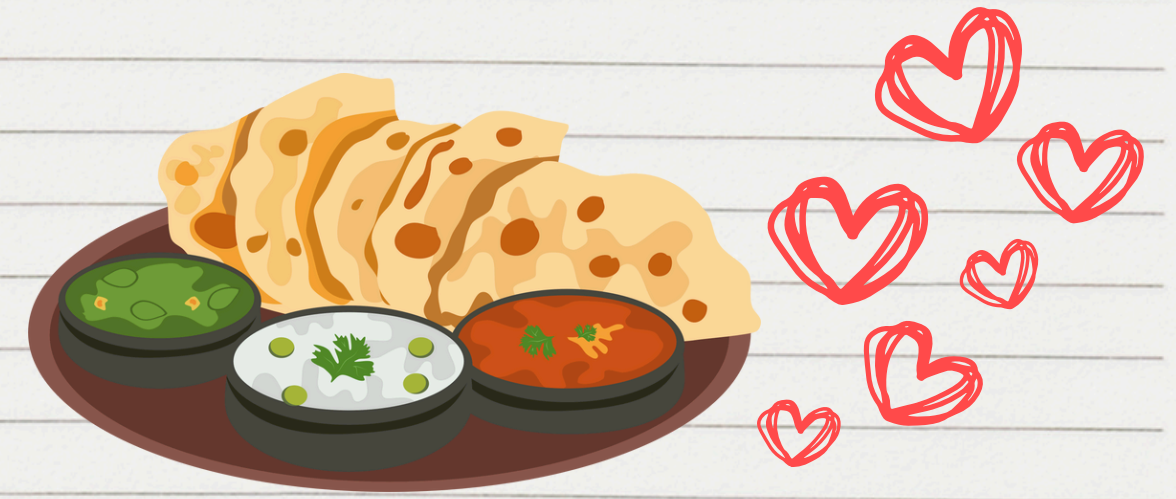


Dear Diary,

Another week, another Thursday. I decided to get more involved and asked if they needed any help in the kitchen. The chef was so welcoming and said that all contributions are appreciated. I was handed an apron and put to work chopping vegetables for the pumpkin curry that was on the menu for tonight. I chopped onions until tears stung in my eyes. There were two young girls in the kitchen as well. They study Governance of Sustainability at Leiden University and are working on a project for the community dinner organisation. So, they were conducting some action participatory research. Although all of us had different backgrounds we bonded through crying and laughing together. It was so fun watching one of the girls, Kyran, attempt to cut this gigantic pumpkin and the knife got stuck.

It felt really good to be a part of organising this meal and, above all, to experience the gratefulness of the people joining the dinner. I think I'll help again next week!

The 2 girls I volunteered with
- such great cooking company!



Dear Diary,

I have something big to tell you... and honestly, I should've told you sooner. Remember that first community dinner I wrote about? Well, something happened there ... or rather, someone happened.

I met this woman.

It's true that the community, the atmosphere, and the food have all been wonderful. But the real reason I keep showing up every Thursday is her. From the moment she handed me a piece of warm naan bread, I felt butterflies which I haven't felt since my wife passed away. Since that naan-moment, she has been stuck in my mind.

Every week I walk in hoping she'll be there. I look around immediately, trying not to look too obvious. And when I spot her, I'm suddenly in a better mood. I keep hoping I can sit next to her.

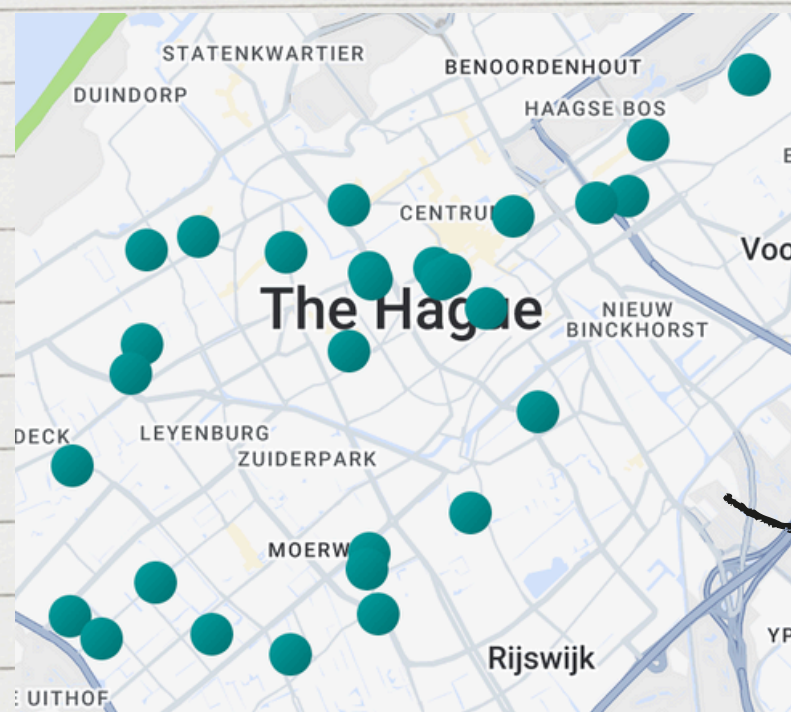
I didn't expect to feel like this again, especially not at a community dinner. I keep showing up mostly because of her... and I have a feeling that she is doing the same. At least I hope so

Dear Diary,

Although I'm grateful to have finally found this Thursday community, I can't help feeling a bit sad that I didn't know about it earlier. It's been right here all along, so close to my house, and yet I had no idea. And I know I'm not the only one, and there must be many others like me who have no idea that these community dinners are happening all over The Hague.

I don't spend much time online, which probably hasn't helped. But there's a website called De Aanschuiftafel where you can enter your address and see all the dinners in your area. I was genuinely surprised by how many there are. Maybe my New Year's resolution should be to try as many as I can.

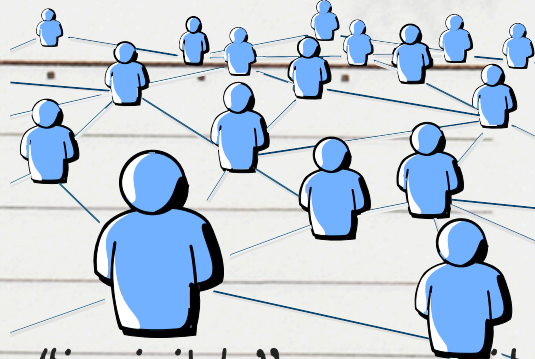
Still, I also can't help thinking about all the people who don't know this website exists, or that they're welcome to join these dinners. How can I become like my neighbour who once invited me...?



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Look how many different dinners there are! And these are just the ones that the Aanschuiftafel knows about... Imagine how many there are in reality!

We're all so much more connected than we realise - really blows my mind!!

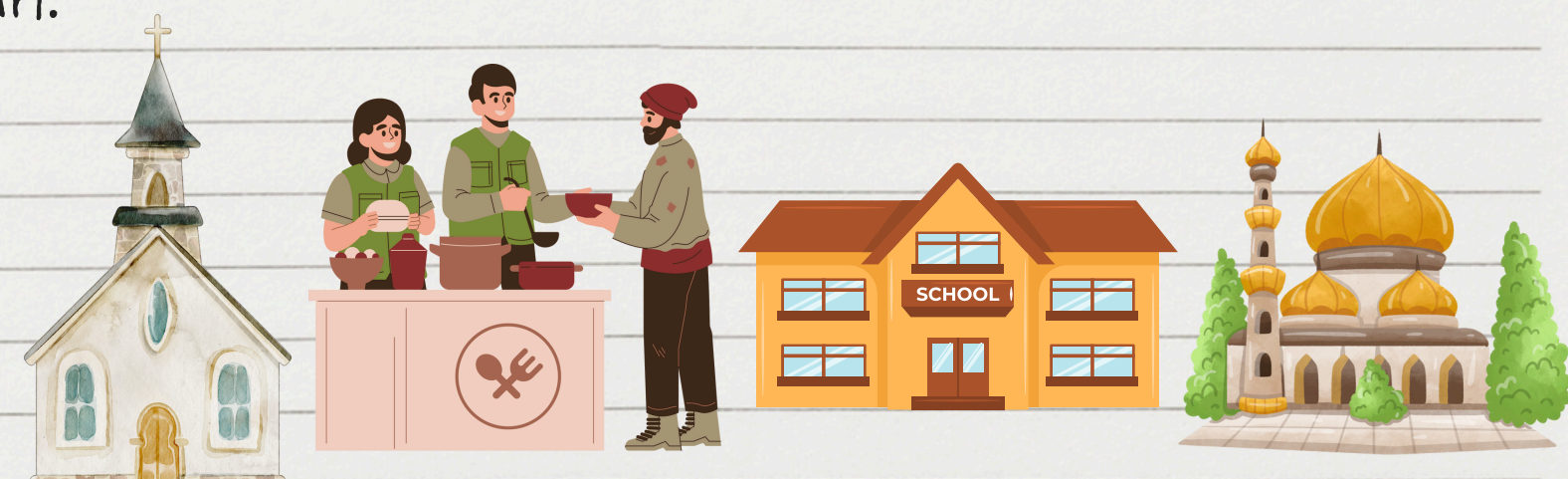


Dear diary,

I've heard there are more than 200 of these "invisible" community dinners around The Hague, and I'm determined to find them and tell them about De Aanschuiftafel. So, I stayed behind after dinner today with the two young women I cooked pumpkin-curry with, as I wanted to discuss their project. I also got to meet the rest of their group - two Dutch guys and one from Hong-Kong. We realised we're all more connected than we thought. Some of us even share the same doctor or go the same gym.

We realised that through these connections we're much closer than it seems, and that by talking to key stakeholders and social hubs in the community like churches, food banks, schools, mosques, and so on, we can connect the dots so much more easily. I'm really excited to see this take shape, and I hope more people like me will find these dinners and start their own journeys just by searching on the platform De Aanschuiftafel.

I had a long conversation with Antoinette, where we talked a bit about the project, and we realised that organising round-table discussions with the right stakeholders in each neighbourhood could be a great place to start.





Dear diary,

Today I participated in a round-table discussion with key stakeholders in Rotterdam for De Aanschuijtafel. The event was successful, and we got new contacts, a bigger network of hosts, and even the chance for these stakeholders to help spread our name and mission which will make such a difference for our outreach.

Walking home I was thinking about this whole journey. How that first dinner, that I almost didn't go to because it pushed me out of my comfort zone, somehow turned into... all of this. New friends, new ideas, new opportunities I never saw coming. And most of all, it led me to the love of my life, Antoinette.

All I can say is that I will forever be grateful for the woman who judged my food waste six months ago. Her invitation to that dinner genuinely changed my life. The days aren't grey and moody anymore. The tulips are blossoming, and the sun is finally shining.

Thank you, dear diary, for letting me process my thoughts during this journey.

And to anyone reading this story of mine: I hope it inspires you to be open, to share your table, and to sit down with people you don't know yet. You never know what one simple dinner might turn into.



If you know of any such dinners happening in your community, please reach out to De Aanschuijtafel!! We would love to help people like Henk find local events more easily <3

Email: info@aanschuijtafel.nl

Phone: 070 720 08 90

Yemek yapmaktan nefret
ediyorum ama yemek yemeyi
seviyorum. bu yüzden bu harika!

JAG HAR FÅTT SÅ
MÅNGA NYA VÄNNER
TACK VARE DE HÄR
MIDDAGARNA.

Diese Abendessen haben
mir wirklich geholfen, mich
in meiner neuen
Nachbarschaft einzuleben.

Oensaarvt
inspiraatiotaavata
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呢個係實現更可
持續生活方式嘅
好方法。

Срещнах
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Le bénévolat ici m'a
appris à cuisiner.

PARTICIPATIE
KEUKEN

میں تے میرا بھرا ہر
پیر نوں کمیونٹی لنچ
تے جاندے آں، تے
سانوں ایہ پسند اے

Épp most költöztem
Hollandiába, és senkit sem
ismertem itt. Az, hogy
csatlakoztam ehhez a
vacsorához, segített
abban, hogy beilleszkedjek
a környékbe.

Ik ga hierheen om
Nederlands te
leren, en ik spreek
het nu bijna
vloeiend

Henk's Diary