

In 2008 my late mother Nely, who passed in August 2010 dug into a box full of scraps and pictures and pulled out two old invitation cards, the crease held together with Sellotape. There were letters written on the back of both cards. "Look. I have always kept these. Isn't this funny?" She asked me, while handing me the cards.

I asked her for the story behind it.

As a fifteen-year old girl my mother was naturally taught English as part of the curriculum of the Marnix Gymnasium in Rotterdam. In one of her study books she found a model letter, addressed to someone living at "17 Leicester Road, London, West 1." On impulse she sent a letter to this address, curious to know who would be living there. After quite some time, on 19 February 1939, she indeed received a postcard, coming from 17 Leicester Road, Wanstead, London E 2. It reads:

As there is no Leicester Road in "London, West 1", your letter wandered around London, until the postman thought it might be intended for me. So I am sending you this card, as you request, in order to show you that your message had been delivered + to express the hope that you will continue your English studies in which you have already made good progress.

*I know Rotterdam.
(Charles Bressey)*

Because at that time it was popular for teenagers to have pen friends abroad, my mother wrote this Mr. Charles Bressey immediately again, asking if he could help her find a female pen friend. There came no answer. To her utter surprise however, she came across a newspaper item on him a few weeks later. It was about a film on his work and his person. He appeared to be a well-known engineer! Immediately my mother sent a letter, in which she wrote: "Now I know why you don't answer: you are too busy!"

A while later she received an answer. It was written on the back of two invitation cards.

Dear Miss Luitse.

As you have been so clever in finding out all about me, I think you deserve a letter, and then I will ask one of the girls at our high school to continue the correspondence.

I have just come (18.15) from the Reception given to the French President,