This story began more than 30 years ago in PHK (an Amsterdam zine by Cindy Hoetmer, Marieke Stolk, and Danny van den Dungen) and it ends here.

FOK MIJN LINKER ARM FOK MIJN LINKER ARM

This isn't a speech, it's a story. And it really happened exactly like this.

– Cindy Hoetmer (1967) columnist, writer and above all friend of the Experimental Jetset .

I saw him again at a funeral. The deceased was a fashion designer I'd known casually for a long time. I thought he was a nasty piece of work, but he was also the brother my friend Ciska.
The ceremony was on the outskirts of town, outdoors on a small field by the water. The elaborate robes some of the guests were wearing—probably designed by the dead fashion designer—fluttered artistically in the wind.
Hundreds of people had come to the funeral, so apparently you don't have to be a nice person for that. Next to me stood my friend Ciska crying in fits and starts. I put my arm around her and rubbed her shoulder. Actually, I'm not someone who can offer warm, physical comfort, but Ciska was wearing a kind of fur jacket, so I imagined she was a cat.
If there are cats out there who, like Ciska, are 5.8", you'd probably be better off not petting them.
'Isn't that your friend from back in the day?' Ciska asked, in between crying.
'What, who?' I said. 'I don't see a friend.'
She pointed ahead.
'There, isn't that the guy with that stupid name?'
On the other side of the coffin, which we were all standing around, I saw a very old, frail little man waving at me. Although I was pretty sure I didn't know him, I waved back because it was no trouble at all.

After the speeches were over, opera music came on over the speakers. A group of six young men in leotards carried the coffin to a shiny black funeral boat. Ciska stepped into the escort boat and left me behind. Alone. But that didn't last long, because the scruffy little man was already coming toward me.
'Cindy!' he called out.
Damn, I thought as he almost reached me, and I finally recognized his face among the wrinkles.
'John-Paul-George-Ringo!' I shouted. 'Is that really you? It's been ages, man!'
He wrapped his arms around me, then stepped back to look at me.
'Looking good, girl,' he said.

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We conversed in English because John-Paul-George-Ringo was British.
'You don't, JPGR,' I said. 'You look like you're eighty years old. What happened?'
'Just life. But why did you suddenly disappear all those years ago?'
'Well,' I said. 'I spent a while trying to figure out what happened—you might remember that—but then I ended up in a dark place mentally. I was literally off balance. Had to go through rehab and learn to function with just one arm. And after that, I didn't really feel like going out anymore, at least not like that.'
I tapped the prosthesis; it sounded a little hollow.
'Very convincing fake arm,' said John-Paul-George-Ringo. 'Can you do things with it?'
'No,' I replied. 'It's not a robotic arm or anything; it just hangs off my shoulder a bit.'
'Too bad. But I actually remembered the other day who we went out with that night. I mean the night you lost your left arm. We were with that doctor. The one with the house in Halfweg.'
'What?' I asked. I'm not deaf, but I often say 'what' because I need time to process things.
'That doctor. The one who cooked drugs in his shed. You know, that incredibly thin guy, just skin and bones.'
'Oh, Helvetica Light.'

Back in the nineties, I still thought I'd become a graphic designer someday, ever since I'd come across a very early Apple computer at the ad agency where I worked. I hadn't realized yet that I had no sense of aesthetics at all. It didn't work out, but back then I still thought I was possible, so I gave people graphic nicknames. There was also someone walking around with pale blue hair whom I called PMS 314.
'The doctor still lives in that house. We can go and visit him later. I'm driving.'
'What?' I said. 'Why?'
'He knows more about it.'

When the wine had run out and most of the funeral guests had left, I walked with John-Paul-George-Ringo to his car. It was a mini van, easily big enough to fit my bike.
'I'm not sure we should do this, man. Actually, I feel like I don't need to know anymore…'

'Nonsense,' he said.
After about forty minutes, we stopped in Halfweg at a detached house.
I didn't think I'd ever been there before, but John-Paul-George-Ringo clearly had. He rang the doorbell confidently, and then again. The door opened. I recognized him somewhat, though I probably would have called him Helvetica Bold if I met him today.
'Oh hi, Cindy,' Helvetica said enthusiastically.
'Finally.'
He shook my good hand.
'To get right to the point,' I said once he had led us through a narrow hallway to a sort of sunroom.
'John-Paul-George-Ringo thinks you know where my left arm has gone.'
'Of course,' he said. 'It's right here in the freezer.'
'For over thirty years?' I asked. Because I had the impression that you should eat or trow out meats after a couple of weeks.
'I have a very good freezer,' said Helvetica.

Speaking of Helvetica. I've been friends with Marieke, Danny, and Erwin for a long time. Some longer than others—Marieke, for example, I met when we were thirteen. Yes, that's forty-five years.

Ages ago, Danny, Marieke, and I made a zine. It was called PHK. It was sold at places like the Athenaeum News Center. We never collected that money—it was about fifteen guilders, which in today's economy is equivalent to about ten thousand euros. So we're still owed that.

I wrote the first few installments of the serial Fok mijn linkerarm, which I just tried to wrap up, but the purpose of PHK was to showcase our design talent. Unfortunately, I didn't have any talent in that field, whereas Marieke and Danny had plenty.

We had the magazine printed at Marieke's father's printing shop, who also covered all the costs. I'm sure I never thanked him for it, because I'm not very considerate. But I trust Marieke did.

There are many wonderful things to say about Rob Stolk, which the Jetset fortunately does regularly, and I'll tell you that he was also a generous patron. The magazine PHK ran for three issues, and we used everything we could get our hands on at that print

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shop, including the printing press and the people who worked the machines.

The Experimental Jetset didn't really come into being until Erwin joined Marieke and Danny.

Back in the nineties, I once spent the night with an American—I met him at the Melkweg—who was the singer for Faith No More, before they broke out worldwide with their new singer, the dazzling Mike Patton. That was probably pretty shitty for that guy; I can really feel that.
Which isn't to say that Erwin is Mike Patton. All three of them are Mike Patton. So to speak, because why on earth are we even talking about Mike Patton? (That unfortunate American is dead now, by the way, so compared to him I actually did pretty well for myself).

There is two kinds of people I hate: braggarts and people who've 'stayed so wonderfully ordinary.' The Experimental Jetsets are neither. They have an almost painful lack of arrogance, but they also haven't stayed ordinary at all—nor have they ever been. They're incredibly famous and admired in every corner of the world. They create amazingly beautiful things for impressive institutions, but they talk about it with such matter-of-factness as if they were making flyers for the local pizza delivery service. Who doesn't recognize their signature style? Their t-shirts that have been copied a thousand times? And how many people do you know who've created a capsule collection for Patta (for me it's only them).
But my reading shouldn't turn into a eulogy, because they would not approve. So this is still about me and my left arm.

So we followed Helvetica into the garden, toward a large shed. There stood a huge industrial freezer made of brushed steel. The door was unlocked by turning a kind of wheel, and it opened with a hissing sound. Steam escaped from the freezer. The arm was standing upright against the back wall and was wrapped in a piece of white plastic. Tears started to well in my eyes.
'Shit,' I stammered. 'Is that my left arm?'
'Yes,' said Helvetica. 'You wanted to get rid of it, so I amputated it. Here, in my operating room…'

He pointed to an operating table, with one of those big lights above it and a few steel cabinets.
'… of course, you only know me as a brilliant chemist and, uh… drug dealer, but above all, I'm a surgeon.'
'But why did I want to get rid of that arm? I can't remember any of it.'
'Because of the tattoo; you didn't like it anymore.'
'But I'd only just gotten it done then, and I thought it was beautiful.'
'You said you'd looked into the future. The drugs I was making back then had that effect. I stopped making them because they had serious side effects. Memory loss, of course, but even scarier things. But if you come back next week, that arm will have thawed out. Then I'll just reattach it.'
'What? Really? Is that even possible?'
'Yes,' said Helvetica. 'A lot is possible in medicine these days. And I'm still taking refresher courses.'

Well, he wasn't exaggerating. My arm is back in place, and I can do everything again. It took some getting used to, of course, but in the end I'm pleased.

Except for that tattoo. It's true that I don't like it anymore.

Translated with DeepL.com

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