In his spacious mansion located on the Tijgersgracht in Batavia, Willem Van Outhoorn worked on a letter to Pieternelletje. He composed his sentences and dictated them to his clerk, Balthasar Franck, who wrote it all down in his elegant penmanship. For the remainder of the letter he would try to decipher the barely legible scribbles and notes of the elderly man. To finish it off, grandfather started to add the latest titbits of news from Batavia and pass on greetings from the neighbours, when he received the news that Pieternelletje’s father had passed away. In a state of severe shock, he left the letter as it was and returned to it only a few days later, when he had recovered enough to offer his condolences, but with tears in his eyes. It was 25 November, 1711, and it had been two years since Pieternelletje and her parents departed for Amsterdam. It would be one and a half years before he learned that they had arrived safely. He had received letters from the Cape of Good Hope, but they were only mid-way through their journey.

It was more than half a century earlier that he had made the same voyage, only a small boy, when he was dispatched to the fatherland to further his education and embark on his studies. In his mind, it was easy to imagine how they fared out at sea – and acknowledge the potential dangers they may encounter. At the end of May, 1711, he still writes, ‘...how anxious we are to receive any news of the safe arrival of you and your dear parents in our dear fatherland, you can readily imagine’. Therefore his relief was great, when shortly thereafter Pieternellettje’s extremely welcome letter, dated 20 September, 1710, arrived, detailing their arrival in Amsterdam. After Pieternellettje’s departure grandfather’s health gradually improved and he often toyed with the idea of taking to the seas and venturing back to the Netherlands to join his dear granddaughter. But ‘his advanced years were too much for such a voyage’ and he finally decided to remain in Batavia. He must therefore have been speaking from the bottom of his heart when he wrote: ‘Alas my dearest darling Pieternellettje, only child of my only daughter, who is so dear to me, had I passed away instead of your dear father, you would have been happier’.

Grandfather had known his son-in-law very well. For more than forty years they had both served the Company and risen through the ranks, Van Hoorn consistently one step behind Van Outhoorn. And both had reached the top – governor-general for the East Indies. Van Outhoorn was appointed to this post when he was 56 years old, quite a respectable age for the times. That happened in 1691 and Valentijn described him as being ‘of a moderate stature, a rather broad build, energetic walk, quiet and healthy with long gray hair and with a very pleasant manner in his dealings with everybody’.

In his place, Joan Van Hoorn was appointed as director-general thus the second in command in the Indies. He had only recently moved into the Company house at the corner of the castle square, opposite the governor’s house and half a year later, he married the daughter of his boss, Susanna Angenita. For more than ten years, the duo Van Outhoorn and Van Hoorn, performed to the complete satisfaction of the directors back in the Netherlands. However, both performed their tasks with a growing degree of reluctance.
To my dear Pieter Nelte - Grandfather and granddaughter in VOC time, 1710-1720