The end of a union, but the start of a beautiful relationship?

I currently live about five miles from the border with Germany, and I am always excited to visit. It reminds me of my excitement travelling to another country as a Tynemouth boy used to island life.

That meant getting up early for a flight or the adventure of a night on the ferry.

Arrival was always thrilling – my younger self loved the intriguing passport stamps, and as you got older, the duty-free bargain provided an alternative thrill.

Part of that glamour died in the 1990s: the Single European Act ended passport stamps and airports became giant shopping malls. But deep inside, crossing a border still feels to me like a ‘big thing’.

So it’s a shock to jump in the car and be in a totally different country in quarter of an hour. Or go jogging, and in three quarters of an hour cross a tiny beck that today is my gateway to Germany.

But even if crossing the border is easy, Germany is totally different. The street signs, the language, and the houses are so different from the Netherlands that the place has a completely unfamiliar atmosphere.

Even if we use the same money these days, prices vary across the border. Petrol is 40p a gallon cheaper in Germany and a good meal half the price: Germans flock to Enschede on Saturdays for cheap Dutch Edam, fresh fruit and flowers.

Those differences can mean it takes a while to find your way in the other country. We had to build up our courage for two years before we dared to take our first German supermarket trip.

And that difference is part of the charm, and it’s not really about grabbing a bargain. Crossing the border to a different world remains as exciting as childhood trips to Dieppe.

They say change is as good as a rest; a day in Gronau or Münster can be as refreshing as a Barcelona or Paris city break, but without all that welcome change: in practical terms, the border is no big deal.

So I’ve been surprised by recent kerfuffle surrounding Scottish Independence.

Having lived through the pain of the North East ‘no’ vote, I think Salmond is massively overestimating his chances of success.

Despite Scotland’s distinct culture, we are still a single country, and I’ll shed a tear if we break up.

Thirty years ago, it might have been a disaster for the North. Imagine if the shine was taken off a Christmas trip to Edinburgh by close searching by stone-faced customs officers on the way back.

Even if things go badly and Scotland votes ‘Yes’, then at least we don’t have to worry about barbed wire and border posts. Cross-border public transport won’t be abandoned overnight, and there’ll be no new barriers to trade.

We don’t have to worry about becoming the dead end of England or the last stop on the train.

Europe’s borders these days are primarily ‘soft’ mental barriers of unfamiliarity and uncertainty, not the hard barriers of the cold war.

In Holland we’ve found that the other side’s unfamiliarity makes it exciting and enjoyable. Independence may bring us closer to Scotland, clearing the air regarding past injustices of union and funding arrangements.

Our existing deep ties with the borders mean we are strongly positioned to benefit economically, socially and culturally from stronger relations with an independent Scotland.

It might even make London a bit more appreciative of our massive positive contribution to the UK, and make us less shy about demanding a fair deal from government.

So come the referendum I might find myself mourning the end of three centuries of union.

But the next day I’ll wake up ready to welcome our new northern neighbours to the start of a beautiful relationship.