

No 10 Reminiscences,

Selling the house in Brook Street was a piece of cake – it sold quickly and I got a good price as well. Later the whole end of the block was demolished, including neighbouring houses on sides as well as the fish and chip shop behind us. Possibly someone had foreknowledge? Good luck to them – I couldn't wait for that, and I received a fair price.

The house-move to Johannesburg is worth telling about: The mover was “Eddie's Removals”; he arrived with a large, somewhat tired, but operational, truck into which the entire contents of the house was loaded until both the house and the truck body could be securely locked, though the truck remained open a little longer so the porters could take up their positions.

Eddie climbs into the cab to start the engine and.....nothing – the battery was dead. Shu, I thought to myself, what now? We'd arranged with Eddie that we'd be sleeping in our own beds in Blairgowrie that night, and now this! But Eddie had a solution for every problem: “Push!” he yells at the porters, and the labour set to getting this heavily laden truck moving slowly towards where Brook Street begins a downhill slope and the truck gathers enough momentum to allow Eddie to pop the clutch and get the engine started, and the workers dash to catch the vehicle and their seats within it.

Not very confidence-inspiring but we proceed to Johannesburg in the Vauxhall hoping for the best. Resourceful Eddie has the address but no keys for the house, but when we arrive in Standard Drive there is Eddie unloading the truck into the garden. Indeed we slept in our own beds that night – everything was in order except for a side-gate guide rod of the children's cot, which was missing. We phoned Eddie and as soon as the truck returned from the East Transvaal the missing part was delivered, to Mam's satisfaction. Eddie's business still exists, but likely without aged Eddie.

The house had but a single garage, normal for that time, but not now. And that single garage had very little space around it, sufficient for normal activity but later Fyk started all manner of projects that required more working room. From a young age Fyk had a technical feel for cause and effect; in Cape town, where the wind can really blow, I often went for a walk after work or on Sundays, and then the little chap would say “If the trees would just stop waving around like this the wind would stop”. And when Mam emerged from the Moedersbond maternity home with Marion he looked at his mother critically and said “They haven't made you nice and flat in that hospital!”

This was also an entirely new and recently completed house. We never ever bought a second hand house where you have to pull the nails out of the walls. This has enormous advantages since everything is newly painted and clean, though you do have to start a garden from scratch every time, but this can be done according to your own design, which is nice. So Standard Drive was brand new but the parquet floors were still fashionable and normally needed sanding and waxing.

The kitchen was large with a generous stove but there was, as was usual in the day, only a single bathroom, which makes such a house hard to sell today at any price. There were three bedrooms of which the master was quite spacious, which was normal then as it is now. Finding a house with more bedrooms is difficult without being propelled into the luxury bracket and Blairgowrie was a middle class suburb,

subsequently greatly enlarged by the extension added across the Randburg boundary.

The genesis of Randburg is worth describing. Johannesburg was English and the bane of Afrikanerdom. There was an Afrikaner politician, named Van Rooyen if I remember correctly, who had all the Boer attributes including ruddy complexion and sunhat. His mission was to give Johannesburg a more Afrikaner flavour by establishing a new municipal area named Randburg to accommodate dyed-in-the-wool Afrikaners.

That failed at the outset. The whole area was so new and had developed so quickly that sewers had not yet been installed. Grey waste water was disposed of in a French Drain, a large, covered hole filled with rocks where the water can be absorbed into the earth, and a toilet tank which was periodically vacuumed into a municipal tanker for disposal. Shortly after we moved in Standard Drive was tarred and a sewerage network was laid out to which you could connect your residence. That shows how new the suburb was.

The residual benefit of this was a lovely, wide entrance gate and a broad, strong concrete driveway to admit the large, heavy vacuum-tank trucks. The house was whitewashed with lime, which proved remarkably durable and the stand sloped downward and tapered towards the rear, making the front garden wall longer than the rear fence. As was usual for Johannesburg, the steeply-pitched roof was tiled, keeping the rain noise down.

Well, that was the house, all very satisfactory but unfortunately far from schools. There was a primary school in Roosevelt Park, named after the late American president, since the land was earmarked for returning veterans from WW2, as well as a high school somewhat further away. I always had the idea that Mam was not very happy in Blairgowrie, and did not want to be happy there either. It was a far larger environment.

In 1962 Mam took Ireen to Holland on Trek Airways. The crews were from an earlier airline, Tropical Airways, ex-military German pilots who ran into financial difficulties. This was also the time of the bank's development of holiday resorts, which we made use of for our annual April break. Of course you had to know Mam well before you could know her. A good example is the first time we went to Doonside where the bank owned a block of four flats with garages. At that time the road between Johannesburg and Durban was in a terrible state, and it was not being maintained because a new road was under construction.

So we're on our way to Doonside, all the way via Durban in those days, and darkness is already approaching because of delays on that lousy road, and then southward from Durban when it became completely dark. I had some idea of where to go from Runhaar but in the dark things look strange, Runhaar had emphasised not to miss the level crossing or we'd find ourselves back on the main road, as he had apparently done at some time. Mam was a bit uncomfortable with the darkness but said nothing other than "He-he" on arrival.

The pictures below show us in Knysna at top, and the lower is of Doonside.



2001. 11. 19



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This was in 1961. Pictures speak louder than words. Marion, the mite between Mam and I is already a grandmother. Annemiek, the oldest is about to retire on pension, and Fyk has been semi-retired for a long time. Nobody knows what awaits him or her at the end of their lives, and that's a blessing, but even so far too little appreciation is given to the good times while they are happening. In the photo you see Fyk and Annemiek, then me with Ireen, then Marion, Mam, and Saskia at the right.

One of the holidays was ruined. We departed before dawn because of the bad road and, just before Heidelberg, where you could see a long line of holiday-makers red

taillights there must have been a man standing on the left verge with a donkey, waiting for a gap in the traffic so he could cross the road. At just the worst possible moment he gave the donkey a slap on the behind, which set it forward directly into our path and I collided with it, damaging the bonnet, radiator and headlamps. At the time the AA did exist but it was less developed than today. I had to get a lift back to Johannesburg to get another car to retrieve Mam and the children. The repairs took forever which put an end to that holiday; if I'd known how long it would take I'd have hired a replacement car.

Other than that we never had any kind of accident or incident to affect our holidays, and in general, we had as a family a blessed existence, until in 1991 Mam contracted cancer and a whole range of other, serious illnesses or discomforts. Then, after an interval, came the last major stroke and that was the end.

Mam was angry (we're back to the failed holiday now). What we should have done she thought was immediately rent another car and tell the panel beater to hold onto our car until our return. Our car was a Ford Fairlane, large, but sudden stops can cause injuries and Sas had hurt herself colliding with the dashboard when we hit the donkey. The bank people also did their utmost to find a car, without success, and the promise that the car would be ready within a few days was unfulfilled when parts had to be brought in from Port Elizabeth. Thus the holiday never happened; but with a smaller car the outcome could have been worse for the passengers.

Now a few dates to set the chronology: We moved from Pretoria to Johannesburg in 1956, shortly after our return from Holland in 1955. Ireen was born in 1958 in the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital on the 19 September. In January 1962 Mam took Ireen to Holland on Trek Airways. I vaguely remember that Holland had something to say about the birth of Ireen, which for Mam was of course a lot of work again.

In 1964 we changed our holiday destination to Port St John's in the erstwhile Transkei, at the far end of a very long road the last part of which was particularly bad. On the return we decided upon a different route, taking two days and staying in Umtata overnight.

Towards the end of 1964 my mother, or 'Oma Molen' as the children called her, visited us from 8<sup>th</sup> October to 4<sup>th</sup> December, a visit that was only partially successful due to its timing. My brother Guus snidely asked if I couldn't have goofed off for a few days, I told him we don't goof off here. Later, it must have been in 1968 because Annemiek was already married, Pa Tamsma came for a visit, by which time the bank had started financing motor vehicles for the staff, which was a great relief.

We took len's father on a grand tour of the country – in retrospect we agreed it was in fact too extensive – all the way to Cape Point and through the Cape Winelands. It's an example of what I'm experiencing now: when you're young you don't perceive that there are many things that older people cannot do, and don't want to do either.

The whole family went from here to Durban where Mam had booked us into a hotel for a few days. On one occasion I took Pa Tamsma somewhere that len was not much interested in so she went to the aquarium. We finished our sightseeing before Mam and soon there arose a certain anxiety in Pa Tamsma, "Where can that child have disappeared to so quickly?" That was of course his problem: This mother of five children was still a child to him, until len emerged from the aquarium exit and all was well again.

After thoroughly exploring Durban started south to Doonside for just a brief look because we were headed to Knysna, a long way off, where we lodged in the bank's holiday house, one we'd also used at the end of 1966. We planned was to stay there a few days, and then for Mam, Pa Tamsma, and I to proceed to the Cape – a considerable distance to the west. It might have been more restful to just have stayed in Knysna for a holiday, but we wanted to show him as much of the country as possible, including Cape Point. He was most interested in everything and we often had to wait while he fell into conversation with a passer-by.

I clearly remember after a vast amount of touring, in fact when we were already back at home, I asked Pa Tamsma, "Well, you've seen a lot of the country and its development though there's a lot more to see, but time is short and it would be too exhausting for you to undertake. In the past you've made many comments about hoe we've sought a future above that of The Netherlands. In fact you've accused me of being 'not a Hollander' who consequently understands nothing the way you and Ien do; what is your verdict now?"

Oration was one of the gifts that Pa Tamsma possessed in excess and this never failed him, though this time he was uncharacteristically brief and said he was filled with admiration etcetera. But now I must tell of our life in Blairgowrie since this has been all about our holidays.

Across Standard Drive from us there was an entirely vacant block of land that was earmarked for a school, though this was not built for many years. The street behind us bordered on a large municipal sewerage disposal farm which also covered the next block along on our side of the road, and we were one stand away from the end of our block, so we were near plenty of undeveloped land.

Before this time, long before, when Saskia was not yet school-going and Marion even less so, Saskia was out and about and took Marion along to explore the neighbourhood – what she called 'making friends', and instructed Marion in the art. In this way they found the Dutch family Bak two blocks away, where there was a girl of Saskia's age, with whom she immediately bonded and stayed to play with until at length Mrs Bak wondered where these children came from, since it was growing late. Saskia was a little vague and Mrs Bak had no option other than to take Sas by the hand and say "Show me where you live."

Sas complied and this is how Mrs Bak arrived on our doorstep, introduced herself to Mam and asked "Are these your children?" "Yes" says Mam, and this is how we got to know the family Bak of which the head was an Economics lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. I remember now that on the undeveloped block across the road from us there grew a small pine tree which would make an ideal Christmas tree for the upcoming holiday season. I said to Mam "There is our Christmas tree, but give it a few more days so it doesn't wilt too early, and then I'll go and cut it down and bring it home."

When the time was right I said to Mam "Let's prepare the place and tomorrow I'll fetch the tree." And early next morning: no tree, too late! Somebody had got there before us, and that turned out to be Bak himself. Later he became Professor of Economics at the University of Pretoria and undertook local lecture tours on one of which he fell down a flight of stairs and died. His wife, as well as the daughter that Sas went to play, with are also long dead from cancer.

Now, as I proceed, the events are very clear in my memory but the dates have faded, and Mam is no longer here to help me. The first and most important is that Mam told

me she was expecting another baby. Shu! That was number five and my very first reaction, the actual very first, was that I said to myself “Enough of this nonsense, I now want advancement in the bank, real advancement in both rank and salary, because at the moment I’m just being used.” This was in the context that Nedbank was *the* bank for foreign trade and in the Fox Street branch we handled 90% of all export financing, and that was done by *me*.

We, along with every other bank, were periodically inspected for soundness and correctness as well as administration, and soon Fox Street and the foreign department were subjected to such an inspection. In the final report, of which every branch received a copy, it was noted under the heading Foreign Department: “No irregularities, mistakes, or omissions of whatever nature were found.” And that was the first time since the bank’s establishment in 1889 that such a clean finding had been made – someone even came out from Holland to see it and I still remember what he said: “Yes, this is very good. We do this in Holland as well, this chipping in with your little bit.” “No” I said to this little youngster who in fact wasn’t so young, “I don’t chip in, I do it all or nearly all, and otherwise it becomes sad for the competition.”

You’ve never seen a mouth fall open at such arrogance as this little fellow’s. “Chipping in, that is Dutch, Sir.” A while later a new building was created for us and I became Assistant Manager – a small step forward but not enough. Then I decided to up the ante: We had a major client in the import export business who had often offered me a job. “You won’t believe your salary” he kept telling me, which is easy to say and you should not be too quickly swayed by. You can of course do the other thing like putting your head around the door of the manager and mention “Oh Hugo,” his name was Hugo Oosterwijk, “before I forget, I’ve had an offer from company ‘X’ to come across for double the salary. I haven’t decided anything but it’s obviously quite tempting, I’ll let you know”. And then you immediately close the door and let this sink in, not that much of that was needed because I returned straight to my office leaving the door open, soon to see Hugo hastening past, still donning his jacket, on his way to the lifts to the top floors where upper management reigned.

You need to be careful with these sort of tricks because they could just as easily say “Good idea, when are you leaving?” But not long afterward I sat where Hugo had been headed in such haste and acquired “Foreign”, whereas Hugo became General Manager, Cape Town.

We initially had one car and a single garage, then a second car for Mam’s use, and then a third for Fyk, and then eventually a fourth, which was getting too much. Mam’s car could partially enter the garage if the doors were left open, and I built a small roof to cover the rest, but the others had to stand outside, which was unsatisfactory particularly in case of hail.

We had a client named Benny Abrahams who dealt exclusively in second hand building materials, and I ordered from Benny poles joists and roof sheeting sufficient to build a large carport as well as bricks to pave the driveway. It butted against the extra bedroom that Lunenburg had built for us below its window and extended to the adjacent property boundary.

The front main cross-beam was too long and heavy for me to lift and hold while I drilled the holes and pushed the bolts through. Fyk was passing by so I called him over to assist – which he did for a very short time before lowering the beam saying this was a job for twenty men and disappearing. Next Marion appears and says unforgettably: “I’ll do that” and takes the beam on her tiny shoulders just high enough

that I can insert my bolt. I can still see the tiny back, bowed legs and pigtails sticking out of her head. This one will go far, I thought; very brave and determined.

But that carport mouse had a tail. Some while later I see a fellow on our property looking very interested in my carport. I went outside to ask what he wanted, already in an obstreperous mood because I knew he was a building inspector – I had recognised him from the time that Lunenburg was building the extension room, in fact I'd seen Lunenburg bribe him with five pounds, for whatever reason.

This inspector points at my carport and asks "What is that?" To which I reply "What does it look like?" All terribly wrong; then I say to myself, you bloody Afrikaners asshole, and aloud "So are you trying to squeeze five pounds like you did from Mr Lunenburg when he built this room, hey?" Not wise, but very uplifting to tell a bureaucrat his fortune.

That led to me getting a long letter itemising the shortcomings and failings of my construction, and demanding building plans within 30 days or immediate demolition. The man was clearly angry and I had to contemplate my next move. The biggest builder of Johannesburg office blocks at the time was Hoffman, who I knew well, so I went to see him and he immediately understood that I wanted something from him. I told him the carport story and he said "Ach Keesie zats nottink, I fix zat in no time" and he phones his architect who happens to be the biggest in Johannesburg and they give the project to their most junior to draw and submit to the same little Afrikaner bureaucrat, who soils his underwear from fright and hurries to my house to tell me everything is now in order.

I said "Fine, just put it in writing" and he did that forthwith, and KC was out of trouble again. Reminiscent of the Wild West, and so it was; and I enjoyed it.

We continue this story in the next chapter, with more about Mam, because this was only about KC. If I had not departed on the Klipfontein I would still have been at the NHM, not typing Letters of Credit any longer but now signing them. Not a chance! Though I could have met the family over coffee from time to time, the argument went.

The End