

## Chapter 11. My reminiscences

We're on the Standard drive, at the start of our stay there. We lived there a long time, 16 years I believe. When we spotted the house on Standard drive and explored it (the house was not yet completed) we agreed to take this house, but the price needed to be agreed upon, this was important. It was built by a Dutch builder and what his asking price was I don't remember. He'd built one next door too but this one was clearly too small for us. Mam was totally satisfied with the kitchen and the size of the rooms. The garden wasn't a complete wilderness, and we bought it. The house in Pretoria had already been sold.

Shops were within walking distance, and in the adjacent suburb of Linden there were plenty of shops. On the corner of Standard drive and 1<sup>st</sup> avenue Linden there was a big cafe you could buy everything except drink coffee and no alcohol.

The school situation was less abundant, and within a short time we bought our first second car. The bus rode on First Avenue and I went to the office by bus.

The suburb of Linden was large and square and lay against the same hill as Blairgowrie. The roads going up the hill were avenues, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, etc. and those crossing it, streets, running along the hill. If you travel through Linden nowadays it's more or less the same except the cafe has disappeared.

In this chapter I want to relay Mam's point of view of Blairgowrie. This is a bit difficult but I'll try.

I was of the opinion that Mam wasn't very impressed with her new environment. In the first place it was a change she wasn't really pleased with. The area wasn't that different from Pretoria, the shop situation was a definite improvement, but it was in the feeling, I think. Like: now I'm in Johannesburg but I don't like Johannesburg. And if you asked why? Her answer was, oh it's so big. Nothing else really.

Well, no matter how big a place is, you only live in a part of it and the rest you don't see or seldom see. Mam never went to the centre of town; she never felt the need and didn't go. Johannesburg covers a huge area, then and now even more, forming what we call Greater Johannesburg with all its suburbs and municipalities. The old situation was just too crazy. In Sandton, now a suburb, then a separate municipality. I paid much less ownership tax than here in Randburg, also a separate municipality. Greater Johannesburg would fill the whole province of Utrecht reaching to the Veluwe as well as Leidschendam. But that doesn't matter because you never actually go there. You live in your surrounding circle, for the one bigger than the other. We made acquaintances quite quickly and there was the Hollandse Kerk, where Mam joined the ladies committee. Mam gets to know people fairly easily. The writer of this is more of a lone wolf.

The German family, the Schnelle's, lived around the corner. He worked for Siemens; they had a young daughter, and further up the road were people with two children, one Annemiek's age and the other Fijk's. Annemiek decided that her name was wrong and wanted to be known as Sal. Fijk also got another name but that one's disappeared. Annemiek still introduces herself as Sal.

Mam was good in organising children's parties, birthdays and such. I remember that anything that looked like a cushion was laid outside and underneath one a clock was ticking, which you could hear if you pressed your ear on the right cushion, and then you received a prize. That was something new because up until then children's parties were nothing more than hen parties and dead boring. Mam was a trendsetter in the area.

In Linden, in one of the shopping centres, was a bakery, more a delicatessen run by a Dutch lady who made all kinds of delicious things. She became known as Mevrouw Leuk because she called everything 'leuk'. We also said "we must go to Mevrouw Leuk" never knowing her real name.

On New years' Eve we always played Monopoly. The evenings in Johannesburg can be quite cold and we replaced the useless fireplace with a coal stove. At first we had an ESSE which you filled from above producing a lot of smoke. It burnt day and night making the house more comfortable. Later, for some or other reason this ESSE was replaced with one with doors in the front, which also burnt day and night, on anthracite.

I assume that Mam wasn't totally happy being mother and house-wife. There was a time when Mam said she wanted to work at the butcher's. I said at the Butcher's! But you can do so much better!!Of course! The entire butchery as concern has disappeared with the exception of a few specialist shops. There are plenty of shops where you can work but nothing came of it. The children say Mam didn't want to be happy and she was reinforced in this idea by Holland.

But then, oh fate took over and Mam became pregnant, again. This became Ireen. There was plenty reason, again, to thank Pa Tamsma for his negative support.

Ireen was born at the "Queen Vic" as the maternity hospital was then called. The Vauxhall was gone and in its place stood the much bigger Willys. What a piece of junk. Everything about it was bad although it never failed us and never broke down. But I found it totally ugly. One day it was standing under the famous roof I had built in front of the garage and I was washing it. I muttered to myself what a bloody rot auto and there was Marion, still a little mite with pigtails. She said: Not at all a rot auto, he always laughs at me, so friendly. That thing had an opening, a grille, from one front wheel to the other, that was its style, and for Maik that was its smile. I must say, I was rather touched by that remark. Maik had to go to the orthodontist quite young and wore braces for years, then this way then that, another time with elastic bands.

That was the time Ireen was little and from time to time I took Maik to the doctor. This was a real low tide in our lives. That Ireen was born was entirely my fault.

One day she was sitting in the highchair at the table she suddenly had terrible diarrhoea, horrific, and I smelt a rat. That child was becoming horribly ill and I said to Mam, be sure to let Dr Lohman come over, there's something brewing here. When I arrived in the evening, no, the doctor hadn't been called, not for a poepje. I quickly went to look in the bedroom, and there Ireen was lying, unconscious! I phoned Dr Lohman right away, absolutely right away, and what a blessing he was still an old-fashioned doctor. He arrived in his car and very luckily he walked into the bedroom just as Ireen was having what looked like an attack. Shoe! Specialist called in no time and an hour later Ireen was in the children's hospital with encephalitis. Luckily just on time; the big blessing being that Ireen had another attack just

when Dr Lohman was bending over her. He therefore saw precisely and directly what was wrong and phoned the specialist immediately. He acted so quickly. There was no time to call an ambulance. He took Ireen in his own car straight away to the children's hospital which was quite far, on the east side of town. And there Ireen lay, within the hour. I think for a week. But all went well. After her discharge from the children's hospital, Mam had to take her to a special department where she was examined. Luckily everything was fine and there was no damage, none at all. Where does a toddler who is only at home and doesn't even go out of the gate contract such an infection?

Except for Annemieke's bladder infection, our children never had serious illnesses as far as I know.

That little car Mam used was a dud. At the time not a single factory could make small engines. Mam had a Fiat 500. There was always something up with this car, and then we went over to Hillman Imp. Also just so, so. With the birth of Ireen our house was definitely too small. The time would arrive when the eldest would possibly leave but we couldn't wait for that, and that is why we had an extra room built on, and later the carport which I've mentioned before.

That is actually the story of Blairgowrie from Mam's point of view but I want to intervene with my intention to go for promotion at the Bank. There was a person that riled me, Koster, a GM. I should have had a huge respect for this man; he came from the World Bank, how clever he must be! But not at all, he never brought in 5 cents worth of business, had left the World Bank to join a still obscure little South African bank because nobody wanted him, and I beat him, gloriously. I tell you this only to emphasize: be aware, you could be tempted to cause damage but you invite other forces to sour up your life at a later date.

Mam, of course, had the most work with yet another baby and battled a bit. But Ireen was an easy baby. Mam didn't like to have her sleep disturbed, and soon, Ireen being a few months old, I could do that. I can't remember that that was often and didn't take long. She had a problem in the evening, falling asleep. We were sitting at the table eating and then I went to the bedroom and rocked her in my arms a bit, and that was usually all that she needed to fall asleep.

We're talking now of 1959/1960 because Ireen was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1958 and around 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> we could go and fetch them from the Queen Victoria Children's Hospital - popularly known as the Queen Vic. That was when we just had the Willys and I captured the 4 children on film. They were kneeling on the backseat looking out through the back window. Mam's mood had reached absolute nadir. No this was not a good time for us and it was all my fault. But I can't remember being especially depressed by it. No, definitely not. And our idea that the eldest would move on because of marriage or a job was of course ridiculous.

I tell of this low point in Mam and my marriage in the first place because it was so and belongs in the history, and in the second place to make it clear that the most perfect of relationships are still always relationships between people. Relationships with all the human failings, often based on a person's idea "No, I'm right", "No, I will not give in"; often sticking to this no matter what, as if the other can never be right. In other words, they remain people who when confronted at the wrong moment, carry on reacting wrongly, often on purpose.

Annemieke married early, but that was in 1968 on the 19 September (*6 July Ed*) and somewhere between that date and Ireen's birth in 1958, it must have been that Mam went to

Holland with Trek Airways, more or less in secret because I didn't know about it for a long time. It was something between Pa and his daughter and by the time it needed to be paid for, well then I was allowed to know. I know that at our farewell at Jan Smuts I just got a peck on the cheek, a situation where a more excitable man would have said: "If you don't feel like it, you don't need to come back!" But, even if it's needed or necessary I cannot behave in an excited manner. I thought; let's wait for the first letter. The situation seems a bit bizarre but Mam had said something before that I refused pointedly to let it have influence. It's not for outsider's ears. And I'm still happy that that never happened.

That doesn't mean that my behaviour previous to this was right. Mam asked for a new start but I was angry and said no. There is always blame on both sides.

But the letters were totally normal, like a married woman writing to her husband, nothing what you would call cool, so it all blew over. And that was always the best that Pa Tamsma never understood, that man was too stupid in the matters of life. But he had the talent to talk himself out of everything, oh yes, without understanding that scars and wounds never totally disappear.

We did make a new beginning later, but that you must do right. We went to a "Rand Daily Mail" housing show. That was a newspaper that organised an annual show of newly built houses, in order to promote the newspaper. The builder can advertise freely and this time it was in Ferndale, on the Wilde Amandel Street. Eight houses if I remember correctly, all of which we explored, and one was especially attractive, but Mam had no intention of buying. But I remember: I thought a new beginning, a new house and a new car for me and for Mam and that we did, or actually me. And so we landed up in Ferndale, Mam with a new Fiat and not a small one. And a Ford Fairlane for me with a 5 litre, 8 cylinder engine, and new beds and extra furniture for the additional room and more other furniture. Proper servant's quarters with a bathroom with hot and cold water, and a separate entrance, not the traditional iron door. And a beautiful front door and hall etc. And the bathroom of the main bedroom, boy that was something!

I remember something funny. I try to get the most out of the Fairlane on 1<sup>st</sup> avenue Linden which runs uphill. My petrol tank is half full and I step on the gas at the bottom of the hill, shoo the car went, unbelievable! My gaze fell on the fuel gauge and that was on empty. WHAT have I done NOW, who's going to pay the fuel bill? But it wasn't so bad, a little later the gauge was again on half-full. What happened was the acceleration had driven all the petrol to the back of the tank, and the meter is in the front, so for a moment I thought I had no fuel.

On a Saturday or Sunday afternoon I took the children for a drive here in the north of Johannesburg where quite a few people lived on small holdings, no, the pieces of land were big where their houses stood but compared to a farm it was a small holding. Often pensioners who did things like keep chickens or grow vegetables etc. and then sold what they grew.

A lady stood on the side of the road with all sorts of puppies, and there I stopped. At once Marion and Saskia were very keen and then I bought one. Ai I still remember their faces, Maik was completely over the moon also because of the abruptness of the happening. All of a sudden there was this busy little dog and everything was so unexpected. I think it was Marion who decided on the name Chaka. Fijk was also with us. Notably Marion and Saskia are dog

lovers to this day. This little dog, like all puppies, was really cute, and then at home we had to get Mam sold onto the idea too, but that went okay.

When he got big he got really big, and became a nuisance; still fun but how that beast flew through the garden, Often we heard a car slamming on brakes that made the situation dangerous. The school had been built which formed no obstacle for Chaka. He ran in and out of classes and made the situation really unmanageable. I said, Mam I'm going to take that dog to the vet when the children aren't looking and put him down. There's going to be a huge accident here on the road. Well, things happened not according to plan because this dog stumbled in with his abdomen completely open. It was clear that he'd jumped a fence too high for him and tore himself open as he fell down. So...to the vet for a totally different reason, for repair and Fijk came with to help, and also Maik I think. The vet needed help and Fijk stood up immediately. In a separate room with a stainless steel table in the middle. After a short while Fijk came back, no I need to sit down a while. Okay, then I went inside, what a huge wound, his entire abdomen and his chest open. I helped, but not for long because I also had to sit down awhile and look at something else. But the entire procedure didn't take more than a quarter of an hour, and Chaka was stitched up, and Fijk and I got some colour back in our faces.

This incident confirmed Chaka's death certificate. A short while later I went back and the doctor and said: It is a thoroughbred but always so wild. Unmanageable in a home. This time there were no children with me.

The school opposite us was finished and being used. It was a primary school, and none of our children went to a primary school anymore. I think Ireen went to this school although I don't really remember to which school she went.

The Presbyterian Church held a Sunday school which our children attended. That was nice with a young couple running it, really neat and tidy people. Really nice, Atkins was their name. One day they organised a fund-raising. Children were asked to motivate their parents to donate money, second-hand clothes, furniture etc. Well, I thought, 2 bottles of whisky could raise some cash. Annemiek hands these two bottles in the next Sunday and lays them atop a whole pile of junk. My whisky was the most valuable I must say. Not that it was that much of a sacrifice because I received lot's around Christmas each year, more than I could drink, I also didn't drink that much anyway. After quite a long time who do I see coming through the gate? That nice gentleman from the Sunday school, but the strange thing is he's wearing a raincoat that's closed in front of him, this in perfect weather. Well, I see him step through the gate and I get up to open the door as you do for acquaintances. His name was Atkins and he was married to a nursery-school teacher. She had taught Annemiek and Fijk when we lived in Pretoria. He sits down and I hear bottles clanging, and he puts the bottles on the table, my whisky bottles. I could see he was embarrassed by the situation. He began to say that he'd found these bottles amongst the collection and had deduced they'd come from me. There'd been a long discussion as to whether to accept them because of the alcohol that was forbidden. Someone had suggested selling them but that would mean the church was profiteering from the sale of liquor and that was forbidden. Eventually the minister had said: no away with the alcohol and where does it come from? I thought it was an example of church terrorism: the minister decides and who is he actually? No wonder churches are empty.

Blairgowrie wasn't our happiest time as compared to Cape Town and Pretoria. It had nothing to do with the places but more a case of mood or mind-set, the experience of daily life. We went on the nicest of vacations, we had cars, friends etc. In every life there comes a time when things seem a bit boring, you've been with your partner a long time, and sometimes it's okay and other times not, and then things are okay again. In these modern times people have less what the Germans call "Ausdauer": staying power, and people give up far too quickly and that has a strong influence on character. Mam had the problem that she sometimes, maybe often, was sick and tired of being at home and a house-wife, and she forgot that she was an excellent mother. What is preferable: a housewife or a cashier at the butcher's? The answer is clear, very clear but remains also unclear. A man's work looks very enviable...oh yes? Everyday much the same especially as a clerk. Higher up is somewhat different, definitely, but what do you get? The back-stabber, friction and the fight can be hard for position. And that happens in mid-life. In the present time it's easier: you change jobs and you try another woman. And that's how marital commitment easily flies out the window; in fact remaining faithful to someone is hopelessly old-fashioned. Then you're not totally with it.

This wasn't the case with Mam and me at the time, but there was some wear and tear, and repair is in one's own hands.

After a long time on the Standard Drive we went to a Rand Daily Mail show house event. That was an annual show of a number of houses, some more expensive than others. Mam proposed a visit, just to look. Mam had always been keen on these shows. This time it was in Ferndale, on the Wilde Amandel street, 8 houses and we examined them all, We were ready to go home, but we returned to look at a special house, Mam and the children were a little behind me. It was evening. And I made a decision; Mam was also attracted to this house. I walked to the lady behind the counter and asked if this house had yet been sold. No sir. Then I will buy it, I said. The price and specifications were made clear on a board. I continued in the same vein: Mam needed a new car; mine I could get via the bank, new furniture, a new bed. We're going to start anew and Mam got her new Fiat, but not so small (in the mean time she had gone through 2 Hillman Imps in Blairgowrie: 1 new. Terrible cars) Mam liked small cars, easier to park.

But you don't just make a new start with new furniture and a new house. The house cost R40 000, 5 years later I sold it for 120 000. There was some inflation involved but not as much as it looks on first sight. The neighbourhood was fine and improving, an important factor in real estate. The house was special in a number of ways. The windows of the main bedroom and the dining room had these very wide window sills. Nice garage doors and a hardwood backdoor. A very special type of kitchen, everything built-in. And the bathroom of the main bedroom was also special. And we put in a swimming pool as well. And all the ceilings were made of wood, only white ceilings in the bedrooms. The lounge had huge sliding doors leading to the garden. No wooden floors, all wall to wall carpeting, even the main bathroom, not in the second bathroom and toilets.

But enough boasting because we need to go back to Blairgowrie because I still need to tell you about Annemieke's wedding. Annemieke brought home Georges Hebert, and that was a nice lad with curly hair and a black two-seater car. That only looked black because he always parked the car on the right hand side of the street. Why's that? The left door was white because that had been dented badly and he's bought a second-hand door, and spray painting this door black was rather expensive for this young fellow. It's your eldest daughter that he wants to get to know well and this was a new experience for his own parents as well. He

introduced us to them. His father had been in the French navy in the war and his mother in Afrika. Georges made a good impression at that visit because he'd brought something, I'm not sure, maybe a big tape recorder and he'd put it on the dining-room table. His father made some comment about it and Georges' answer was: Dad, soon this will be my house too because my wife lives here. I am a stranger no more. I liked that, coming from this boy. Later, Mam and I visited there and I said this to Georges' mother whom I really liked: Well, my daughter is planning to marry and this is all fine but there is the matter of the Lobola. And Georges' mother rose to the occasion, got up and left and came back with a number of clay cows saying: Is this enough? Perfectly satisfactory. Those little cows stood around here for a long time; till someone thought they would look good in their house too.

They married in a church in Park Town, on the border of Park View, the same church that arranged the Sunday school in the school opposite us on the Standard Drive. Later we had a party at our house. They went to live in a flat on the Louis Botha Avenue. Yes, that was 35 years ago.

Personally I have a problem with the Church as an institution, no matter what the denomination. On the one hand you can say it's necessary and needed but on the other the most awful abuse can be caused by churches which become too authoritarian in their organisation, even dictatorial, in any case totally unchristian in the behaviour of highly placed individuals in the church.

That a company, a municipality, or a country has an organised administration following certain fixed rules is normal and understandable. But a Church is a matter of the heart and the unseen.

But for a pastor to decide on issues? I don't know. When I was 21, only just 21, about to leave for Indie, my mother consulted our Dominie on what he thought about this. Where you going? He asked. Batavia I think, I answered. Oh, that's okay because there's a reformed church there, was his answer. And when my mother asked if it was a place like Shanghai that I was going to? Oh no, that's absolutely forbidden!! I remember thinking to myself that I would go anyway. And this way of thinking exists everywhere, whether it be the Protestant church in South Africa or a Catholic church in Northern Ireland: you make an institution with bishops and moderators etc. and the true love from the heart is immediately under pressure. We can busy ourselves with Bible study groups where moderators explain to us all what they have learnt beforehand out of books written by a Professor, who has made a career out of this, and if you visit the home of a Professor in Religion in South Africa you will find yourself in a palace. And that is now my objection but I'll immediately state that there need to be rules.

One example in the early Christian Church under the Roman emperor Constantine, a heathen who reformed just before his death. And the bishops of the time, I think in Ephesus or something, a place in Palestine, the name escapes me, were called together by the emperor and ordered to form a doctrine because there was chaos. That's the other side of the coin. It is remarkable that unity was forced by a heathenish emperor and not a natural development. These are the thoughts that go through my head and I call that worry, which it is, and every hour of every day I spend worrying if there is nothing else to do.

And what else is there to tell you? When we moved to Johannesburg, Saskia stopped her nightly transfer of sleeping place, but replaced this with soft mutterings because she needed to pee. Her feet were then stretched out on the blocks of the floor and I remembered an article

by a doctor who could predict the growth of a child depending on the size of his or her feet. With that in mind I thought: Saskia will grow tall. And Fijk had read about a tokolosh, a local spook who hid under the bed, and when you wanted to go to sleep would pull on your legs. Fijk therefore took a huge jump from far off to get into his bed, but never wanted to admit why...some form exercise or suchlike he said.

One day Fijk had a motorbike, he was too lazy to park it behind the house, out of sight at night. The next morning: no motorbike. He found it along the road in Bryanston, broken if I remember correctly. We weren't the type of parents who said, ach shame, here, I'll buy another. We threw them in the deep end but stay around, they may not drown.

Saskia was actually the most normal but make no mistake: with very sharp eyes and excellent perception. What we experienced with Marion... (Who has a good brain). Mam said Marion and Fijk, those are our brain boxes. When Marion got her school report and she'd got 55% where 51% was enough! She muttered and threw herself on the couch...why? 51% would have been enough; I overdid it by 4%, wasted effort! Unforgiveable!

The big problem became Fijk who bought 3 written off Jaguars, type Inspector Morse together with his friends. And then they made one from these 3. The rest, which was a lot, lay around the place. This must have caused a headache at the Motor vehicle Administration, because they had chassis numbers and motor vehicle numbers that no suddenly longer belonged together. This couldn't take place in our house, there was no space for this, but he had friends in the neighbourhood in a big unkempt house with a big piece of land where you didn't fall over a piece of discarded motor so easily. And there was the end-product; a Jaguar model like Inspector Morse drove around in, at least in the films.

Once in Ferndale the situation was different. Mam went to work at Fidelity Guards, together with a number of friends. The firm transported money under guarded protection. Also they did pay-packets, usually for factory personnel: On Thursday the factory handed in a list of names, hours worked and necessary payment and Fidelity Guards saw to it that each worker got his pay in a neat little packet at the factory payment office. That meant lot's of night work but that was in a time when Johannesburg was a lot more peaceful, and it wasn't unsafe. It no longer exists. And we had a maid who did the heavy work. Mam no longer cleaned windows, no longer cleaned floors and dressed neater and worked in a position that required intellect and organisational talent. Because the employer, the factory, paid Fidelity Guards with a cheque that was the amount that had disappeared into all those various packets. The night work was so-so but not unusual. At first the firm operated in town in an old dilapidated building, later in a new building in Randburg. That was all possible because in the mean time Pa and Ma had died and Ien had gone to both their funerals, she'd flown over for the occasion! Holland was no longer a factor, he he! And Ien, my Mam no longer had calluses on her hands. Ien worked there so long, right into the Maroela period and when she left she received a silver platter which I can no longer find.

Mam showed this platter to me especially, was proud of it. At long last we'd reached a situation I'd vaguely envisioned when Mam came back to Blairgowrie with Ireen as a small child. At that time I had trained a maid and employed her with the idea that when Mam came back we could start afresh. But that plan flew out the window very quickly.

That we have carport lights here that automatically go on if they feel warmth is because of Mam's frequent homecomings into a dark carport. We now have made it into a garage. As soon as Mam came round the corner of the carport bright lights went on for 10 minutes, enough time for her to enter the house.

About that Anti-Hollands:

You might find that a little exaggerated! Not at all. Try live your whole life with interventions at the most inadequate of times from really silly people which Mam gave ear to so that she wouldn't feel to be a disappointment in the eyes of the oldsters. I realise this is a subject that often arises in my writings, but I can assure you it was indeed a pest.

I'm going to stop here. Possibly I have forgotten important matters. No matter let me know and I can include that in a next chapter.