

No 12 of My Reminiscences

In this chapter I propose to continue mainly with our story as from the new house in Ferndale, but from time to time it may be necessary to go back in history a little and if you will pardon me it will again be in Hollands.

I was not yet 58, but getting closer, and what I had not anticipated was my promotion to the rank of General Manager. The mandatory pensionable age for a GM was 60, as opposed to 63 for the lower rabble. So to nominate someone aged 58 for a job that ends at 60 makes little sense, but unknown to me a special resolution had been passed by the Board that KC should be elevated to GM rank and that his retirement age is raised to 63. With this knowledge I could re-evaluate my financial position.

That suddenly made the sun shine in Blairgowrie (where the era was thought to be at an end) again with full intensity. This was a boost financially as well as for my morale since Dick Pederson, then Company Secretary, whispered in my ear that such a resolution had never before been passed by the Board. The bank had become a major player with an important international reputation and this promotion understandably inflated my ego a little, I realise now. There followed a series of international trips by myself as well as some colleagues through the big, wide world.

Here is a homily that needs to be told which has nothing to do with business. There was a single week that I have to do Germany in, and that keeps you busy, I can assure you - likely eight meetings per day which, requires a good memory not so much the meeting as for the names of everyone you meet with.

By Friday I'm finished and leave from Frankfurt, which was our base, to Arnhem by train. Since I was only flying out of Schiphol on Monday night at 11 I could schedule a few more appointments in Holland during that day. I phoned Rob in Haren and told him to expect a visit from me. He asked if I was planning to sleep over to which I replied 'Yes, if possible, otherwise some little hotel will do.'

On Sunday night I was back in Arnhem Hotel from visiting Rob in Groningen and come across some stately gentleman that I incorrectly assume to be the hotelier. I explain to him my problem, which is that I need a taxi for the entire day on Monday to take me to seven addresses and then to Schiphol. 'Sir', he says, 'I know exactly what you need. You're on a business trip from South Africa? Let me handle this - you won't be sorry'.

On Monday morning at 8:45 I pay the hotel bill at the counter and go outside. There are moments in your life that you don't believe and have you peeping at the world between your fingers.

There was, waiting for me, an extra-long limo with a liveried driver, who hastened to open the door for me and stow my limited "travel light" luggage. I entered and was almost lost in the cavernous interior of the car, not knowing where to look from embarrassment. One of my ports of call was Philips where there was a double-wide gate, and upon seeing my sled, four men sprang into action, two per gate to throw the entrance open for us to zoom in without any delays. The driver was a woman, almost military in her correctness, and we criss-crossed the country so efficiently that I had time over at the end, needing only to visit Naarden, which was so near the Roemer Visscherlaan (the home of my mother and brother) that I decided to drop in on them for the 15 minutes I had to spare, since it had been a year or more since my last visit. A mistake of the first order!

Firstly the Roemer Visscherlaan is too narrow to accommodate a limo, secondly I emerged from the vehicle with the aid of someone in livery, but third, and worst, I had only 15 minutes to spend in the ancestral home. There was no way to set things right with my mother, who thought I had gone completely mad, as well as being angry with me. I was shown out of the house by Guus, my brother.

So, the narrative reveals that the depression of Blairgowrie (which wasn't very deep to begin with), was receding at an uncommon rate. A negative attitude can also adversely affect the way you regard your circumstances, whether it was this way with Mam too I cannot say with certainty - you can never see into someone's heart.

I think Mam had a need to find a job, but for that to happen she'd have to employ a maid, which she was not willing to do, for one reason or another. Often I'd feel the calluses on Mam's hands and say: "These are labourer's hands and there's no reason for them to be this way".

Our children were growing up - Annemiek was married and out of the house, Fyko was working at National Cash in the computer division, where he soon became bored. When the maker of a machine that National Cash represented opened their own office in Johannesburg, Fyk and a Scot, Sandeman left National Cash to join the new venture, which dealt only in computers.

This all happened a long time ago and computers of any significance were rare back then. The question is: how did Fyk's love affair with these machines come about? Well, he was in a group of young men working at the Hartebeeshoek Tracking Station not far to the south-east of Johannesburg (actually 80kms north-west - Ed), and there he became obsessed with this technology. He drew the attention of stations director, a Canadian, who influenced him and Fyk worked there for a time, later moving to National Cash on the understanding that he would by-pass the office machine division and moved direct being trained in the computer department.

This was while he was still living in Blairgowrie. Once he had steady employment he also wanted to live alone and rented a room with a little bathroom in an out building on a small-holding. We saw him regularly for a while, and when abruptly stopped I said to Mam "Let me go and take a look". From a distance I could see that he had a girl in the room, the girl that turned out to be Mandy. I quietly turned the car around and returned home where I told Mam what I'd seen and that we should await further developments.

How did Annemiek actually enter the world of Education? I just phoned her about that because there is so much you forget with the passage of time (it is today 16th January 2004) and, while this is primarily a memoir about Mam and I, the children play an important role as well. Annemiek told me that while she was still living in Blairgowrie she aspired to being a Physio but her school results were not up to it, and that it was me that had told her to go into education because she'd be good at it, which is something I had entirely forgotten.

Do you regret the decision or was I correct, I asked. No regrets at all, she answered. I thought teaching lacked glamour, but what work is actually glamorous? Possibly for movie stars, but otherwise? For this she studied for a year out of Blairgowrie, but then moved into residence for the following two years to save commuting time. This is also where she met Georges, who she married while still quite young; though 35 years later they're still together with only an average quantum of spats to their name

One evening we fetched Annemiek from her residence, I forget why, but among the bystanders there was a young man who bowed deeply before me - I was sitting in the

car but it was almost a Japanese-style bowing. I asked Annemiek who that was and she said: Oh just a boy I know. That was the first time I met Georges, in the dark illuminated by a street lamp.

So it was that our new house in Wilde Amandel Street was easily large enough. Only Ireen, who was still in high school and Marion were still living with us, other than Saskia intermittently living in the maid's room while between hotel assignments.

Saskia was resident in the White Horse Inn, Annemiek had a room in residence at the University, and Fyk made his own accommodation. Marion had a good friend named Trevor Carmichael who was a medical student - a nice enough chap, a bit quiet but with a good sense of humour, who visited the house often. Marion was working for a time for Hollander's one-man-show, a Mr Vernede, if I recall. Later she moved to Medical Research, a provincial institution and, after a short sojourn somewhere else, back again to Medical Research, where she is to this day.

That was the time our lives were in order and peace prevailed, in a manner of speaking, until one evening while we're doing to usual stuff like reading, or Mam doing some sewing when Trevor bursts in and announces "Marion is pregnant"; that meant our daily routine was put aside for a while.

We visited Trevor's parents, and they us, and agreed on a time and a place for a wedding. Pa was a bit of a *zak*, but not a bad chap, and Ma was hugely fat as well as being a Presbyterian minister, who then married them on a cold August day in 1973.

It was a bitterly cold day and the reception out our house was a great success. Marion, who was working, and Trevor took a flat in Hillbrow while awaiting the birth of their son, named Bradley, born on the 23 May 1974. The little chap played a big role in our lives, particularly Mam's, because with Marion working and Trevor studying he was often parked with us, and spent the night when it became too late to take him back to Hillbrow, or whatever other reason.

He was a restless little sleeper and I often got him up on finding him awake, and made him a cup of cocoa, which he refused to drink seated in a baby chair or even on your lap - you had to let him curl up in your arm. In winter the little man found this doubly cosy because of the warm oil-heater, which also produced a comforting sound. We have Super-8 footage of Mam feeding Bradley, as well as dozens of photos.

Saskia and the hotel business went well together, it seemed to me. One of the perks of the job was being allowed to bring her family in for dinner once a week, on Thursday night, which was the least busy night. Marion would gorge to bursting, such that she would walk out stiffly with very short steps – because it was free! One evening she ate so much she couldn't draw her legs into the car while sitting upright – she had to be driven home semi-recumbent. That was the White Horse Inn – a weekly treat that Mam could mostly not attend because she worked on Thursday nights since many employers paid wages on Fridays

This free dining didn't endure long because Sas left the White Horse Inn to take a job at a hotel in Durban, after an interlude at the Hluhluwe Game Reserve, where she worked for several years until it occurred to me that Sas, who doesn't lack efficiency, wit, or charm, remained single, without ever a beau on the horizon.

So I gave Sas some advice: You should think about coming to work at Nedbank, where there is at least a proper pension plan, which you need since you remain

single. She did that and was assigned to Pietermaritzburg. I get the idea that competent in her job without being strongly career-oriented

Working at reception in these super hotels is quite glamorous, which the hotel owner knows and this is reflected in the salary, but such employees tend to leave to get married – other than Sas that is.

After a time in Pietermaritzburg she was appointed manageress of a mini-branch. This was the time before ATMs, and Nedbank hatched the idea of operating mini-branches in shopping malls, of which there were two in Pietermaritzburg. The manageress of the other one knew Sas, and that she was single, and sent friend with an estranged wife over to Sas's branch – and that's how Sas got to be married.

The reception was held on the 4th of January 1986 in a marquee in the garden of the matchmaker, a lovely event. Mam and I attended and spent the night in a hotel. There is of course no favourite amongst your children, who are all unique individuals, but this is a union that has been most successful.

So we now had Annemiek and Marion was married, as Sas was now, and that leaves Fyko to talk about - deliberately last, as it was highly unusual.

Fyko was co-habiting with his girl friend Mandy, that Mam and I had got to know. We were sitting quietly on an evening in Wilde Amandel with other members of the family visiting, when the interior door to the lounge flew open and Fyk, with Mandy on his arm, announced that they too were getting married. Mandy already had two children but was divorced, and shortly after was widowed when her ex drowned in the sea in the Cape. Mandy's children were a little chap not yet walking, and his older sister. Fyk had met Mandy in that house where everything went regarding the repair and rebuilding of cars. They were married on 17th February 1973.

The memorable thing about that day was that everything went wrong – other than that they became legally married. In this country you don't need both a civil ceremony *and* a church wedding – one or the other will suffice. The event was scheduled for 10:00 or 10:30, very early in any case, and we would all return to Wilde Amandel for the party, which was scheduled for 1:00 and was to be catered by the bank's chef. I was going to record the entire event on 8mm film, this being the era preceding video recorders. The chef whose name was Heres did this sort of thing regularly, so everything was organised and had only to be initiated.

We left for the church in some haste, I still had to load my camera which was of the old type using reels, while the bride and groom entered the church, and before I was done they were already coming out again, deal done. And not going back for a re-take either.

From there we returned to the house where chairs and parasols are set out for the whole party and toasts and congratulations are bestowed, and we await the caterers - who never show up. We phone Heres who tells us the meals are en-route, but still they never come.

At length Georges goes to the local Chinese take-away to get us all something to eat and Fyk, always in a hurry, departs, but while taking their fond farewells at the front of the house a huge gust of wind at the other side hurls the parasols and tables asunder to the cacophony of smashing glass – a terrible mess. Months later it transpires that we also forgot to pay the Chinese for the take-away.

Fyk adopted Mandy's two children which now carry the Van der Molen name. Justin, the boy, now a married man the a little chap of his own, makes furniture and panelling, and his older sister Peta is likewise married with two children. Her husband is a successful architect, as she is too, a very likeable woman who came to visit recently to tell me she now lectures architecture at the university, a post that has recently become permanent. Apart from that Fyk and Mandy have a son, Miles, who is in the aviation business.

Mam and I avoided Ireen's wedding, as we told her we would. "This chap is a parasite", we warned her, "and not right in the head. He'll be your downfall". And how was that confirmed? By the tremendous welcome of his family, a point we haven't reached yet. Ireen first went to university, to the medical school for a nursing degree, and was the only one still living with us.

One of the things Mam was at odds with was the lamentable lot of the housewife, which would also have been the issue of the day in Holland. Mam had for some time been earning her own money but I still had the idea: Why don't I put about half of our cash on Ireen's name and let the interest accrue to her savings account? I did that but it didn't quite mesh with Mam's intention – she was saving from her salary to buy a Toyota, which she did eventually, without telling me. Ireen didn't keep regular office hours like I did, but often accompanied me to the city to be dropped off at the university.

Then, who did I see on our estate? A little building inspector. We had a swimming pool, but it didn't appear on any building plan. There was a clause in our contract stipulating that the pool builders were responsible for this, but hadn't bothered since these were only municipal inspectors.

Additionally the pool was too close to the boundary and the nearest house. The discussions were quite amicable and I said: "Oh well, we'll just have to fill the hole in and start again". "Don't be ridiculous", says the little inspector, "I'll just amend the plan and everything will be in order". Sometimes things were easy with building inspectors.

In the meantime Ireen was married. Mam and I visited her occasionally; she qualified as a nurse and attained several additional diplomas that enabled her to work in the first aid facilities in factories, amongst others. It was obvious that the man she had married had little intention of contributing by seeking regular employment. He was the only son, with a number of sisters, who had been spoiled by his mother since birth, possibly because she'd detected something not quite right in her son. The mother was killed in a motor accident many years ago. Other than that our lives proceeded placidly, Bradley stayed over regularly and the others visited on Sundays and whenever they were free.

One day Louis Runhaar arrived with a proposal: He suggested a group of people; he had sixteen at the time, jointly buying a communal piece of land for building a group of retirement homes. The idea was not entirely new, from government utterings we knew that the South African way of everyone living in detached houses must come to an end since the cost of roads and services would become too high. The government wanted to encourage a more compact way of housing development.

That is how what we call the townhouse principal came about to which our proposal would conform except that we would determine how many houses would be built on our site. That was a fine idea of Louis Runhaar and I said that in principal I was in.

That was in 1971 and I thought that would mesh well with my retirement in 1981 when I would be 63.

The rezoning of a piece of farmland to housing estate required lots and lots of time since it was a Provincial matter but soon a company was established: Tuindorp Buitenzorg (Pty) Ltd which purchased a land in Cedar Road Randburg.

But a lot of time would elapse before we were able to start building – there were a legion of difficulties the principal one being that it was contrary to the development plans for Randburg to build houses so far away from the town. They wanted Randburg to expand outwards from the centre, not the other way around, and that was the nub of the problem and quite understandable, though totally at odds with what Runhaar had been told.

That Runhaar had a tendency to hear what he wanted to hear and ignored the rest was undeniable, and what also became clear was that all the prospective residents would be members of a resident's organisation and had something else in common – they were virtually all members of the Gereformeerde church. Another condition of membership was that only those over 50 or 55 were eligible, meaning that there would only be older people there

This entire saga dragged out so long – it started before we moved to Ferndale – and moved along very slowly, but we had plenty of time left over.

My retirement date was only on 31st May 1981, the month in which I turned 63, which approached gradually, when at last we were given permission to start building in the near future, and from now the account of our domicile grows dull. But something else happened: I was asked if I would stay on beyond my retirement date, that had already been delayed by three years, not so much at the front lines, but discretely in the back, against payment over and above my pension. I agreed to this on condition that I could take longer leave periods, since we'd already decided to start travelling in 1981 and this way could do both. They agreed and Mam too was pleased

In Johannesburg there was a travel agent with whom you could book dozens of different tours that had a unique concept of group travel. The two tours that Mam and I booked in London, not in some little alley, but in Bond street, travelled in a group from beginning to end, and even meals were taken together in a sectioned off area.

TFC did things quite differently – you'd book a trip say to India, Nepal, Thailand, and Hongkong. You'd be given the price, the dates of course, and hotels, the total duration as well as the time in each country, and then nothing. Until the time of departure you had no idea who your travel companions would be or how large the group.

On arrival at Bombay there would be a chap with a sign saying TFC Tours and you'd all be taken to the hotel, which was always first class, and deposited there, your luggage taken care of, and you could do what you wanted thereafter and choose where to take your meals.

The first morning in every new city there'd be bus and tour guide to go with it. Other than that you as free as an independent traveller. Often you would have breakfast in your hotel, but even that was your own decision – you paid all this yourself so you could establish your own level of expenditure and what you saw or didn't see. Only when there were legs by bus did you have to be with the other members of the tour on that bus.

We travelled frequently with TFC Tours, as we did with the trip to America when we took Sas along, though not on the trips to Holland of course. We did two trips to the Greek Islands, remarkably on the first one we walked across the bridge over the Corinth Canal, and on the second one we sailed under the same bridge on our way to Corfu and Venice. Lovely that we could do that, every year another one until it became too difficult. As Mam always said: We've done it and nobody can take that away from us.

But first we must step back in time to Wilde Amandel Street. Maroela doesn't exist though we've bought the land it will be built on. The delays we experienced were the result of the total ignorance of the management of Tuindorp Buitenzorg and ourselves when it came to establishing a residential township. Firstly Runhaar made the mistake of continually badgering the bureaucrats in Pretoria for progress reports. It's a fact that government officials the world over hate being pressured, and the South African version played their part to the full.

My time was of course not unlimited – being born in 1918 dictated that my retirement would be in May of 1981 after 33 years of service, which was still some distance in the future, but not *very* far, and then you have to sell your house because the mortgage has to be repaid to the bank. You could of course enter into a new one with another institution which would allow you to remain in a large house, but we had already made arrangements to downsize.

That meant selling Wilde Amandel for which the time seemed propitious just then. So we decided upon selling our house when we retired, and also to start building, on that estate that would later be named Maroela, a house more suited to older people, and with a smaller private garden within a large communal garden. But this was still in the comparatively distant future.

Thus we had only decided principal, but can say we never regretted it. Not that we needed to discuss things at length – long debates were never necessary for us, at least I can never remember having one. The question of employing a maid was also not a matter for consideration – it just didn't happen. Well it did once, when Mam returned from Holland with Ireen and I had hired a maid.

Of course there was no way for me to wash dishes, clean the house *and* work at the bank, and it worked beautifully, but after three months the maid was gone, and Mam didn't know that I knew it was at her insistence, right! From her mother of course, and without a word to me. Certainly it's annoying having someone around you all day, but you discuss it – and not with your mother, for Pete's sake. And Mam said she'd given the maid three months notice on the day before she left,

I remember that I was furious over the unbearable interference of these two old people. I think I surprised Mam with the intensity of my rage. The reason I remember it so well was that the maid's room and facilities were below standard – as if the builder couldn't be bothered with constructing something better, and had left it at that. What a blessing that we didn't live within walking distance of the Elzenlaan (Mam's parents) or the Roemer Visscherlaan (my mother's address)

This is not entirely an exaggeration! I remember clearly a time Iren and I dined in Bussum, accompanied by plenty of remarks; I ate too fast; I had the habit of moving my fork from one hand to the other, or of eating with my right hand - all wrong and excoriated. Oh what lamentable table manners! I decided there and then that I wouldn't be returning soon.

And in Bussum I'm scanning through the newspaper, which was also totally wrong – This is an excellent paper, which you should also be reading, they say. I should be reading this commie rubbish? I ask. I'm talking now about 25 years ago – I tend to forget how old I am. I don't know how that publication Trouw (faithful) is today, but then....! The progressiveness, which is another word for Red propaganda with a thin Christian veneer, gets shoved down your throat with a thick stick.

In Elzevier (a Dutch current affairs magazine) there's a weekly column (admittedly the only one) by Bart Tromp, with dull, worn-out ideas, and a dull worn-out face, never says anything novel, but always correct in hindsight, and always knowing better. I mustn't keep on because the Johannesburg Star beats all others – but OK I'm not a newspaper critic but an auto-biographer.

The last few years in Wilde Amandel were peaceful I think. Mam was working regularly and Bradley often came to stay which was a delight, and something we photographed extensively. A pity there were no digital cameras back then, though there are dangers with those things. Very recently my computer suddenly lost all its data – everything gone – and that doesn't happen with an old-fashioned album.

A few days ago it struck me that Mam received a plaque after years service, and there were many, when she had to stop, being too old. I searched high and low but in vain and in desperation shout to Mam "Where is that plaque? I want to save it as a family heirloom". And then I heard a voice from within: "I had to give it back – it was a floating plaque".

I was stunned but later remembered that I've had more than one such revelation, as do many people, but you don't notice, I think. In the coal mines of Omuta it often happened and afterwards you think: Why wasn't I standing in that place anymore where that rock fall just had come crashing down? When there was no cogent reason for me moving from that spot as I had. So strong it send shivers down your spine. That was what I heard! And it saved me often

I have become totally convinced that there is far more to it than we can see, and we are directed towards deism, without a doubt, but it's sad that reality theology is so often corrupted, in many instances by churches. The funeral of my brother GUUS was an example of that – they couldn't care less as long as they get the money. But I digress! Stay with the programme boy!

Now to the sale of our house. It took longer than we'd expected – a month or two, as I'll relate in the next chapter, which will be the last I think. We sold the house at three times the purchase price, though a lot of that was attributable to inflation.

THE END