



No13 of My Reminiscences

We lament that to everything there comes an end! This is true for both pleasant and unpleasant situations. Were this not the case we would suffer endless misery. But Eternity, being endless will take some getting used to and is hard to imagine. This ending was also true of our peaceful life at Wilde Amandel Street. We planned to coordinate our departure with the completion of Maroela. We did not want to be delayed so we did not want to leave it too late to go to the estate agent and put our house on the market

Progress at what was then still called Tuindorp Buitenzorg was slow. We had planned to build 30 houses in a crescent shaped area filling one corner of the triangular plot. At the apex of the triangle there was a house built many years ago. What we bought was actually a smallholding owned by a couple who were deceased. We had bought the land from the heirs of the deceased estate who were numerous and had the same problem as us – only one house was permitted on the land.

When we at last obtained building permission it was under the verbal agreement that the complex would be exclusively for the over-50's. Along the way we gained some insight as to how this provincial government worked. A townhouse complex is proposed, and all sorts of questions need answers – Education Department asks if there are sufficient schools, Police, waterworks and many more. When we did get started we, the management, decided to manage the project ourselves in order to save on the builder's profit. That turned out to be a silly idea. We had no knowledge of the industry. Eventually 6 houses were complete with the next 6 due early in '81. We took house number 5 which we had paid in progress payments.

In the event our house in Ferndale did sell before we could move into No 5 Maroela. Annemiek and Georges assisted by accommodating us for the time we were homeless. Only it wasn't called Maroela yet; Runhaar wanted it named "Tuindorp

Buitenzorg Ouden van Dagen Tehuis”, which far too long and unpronounceable for most. The original farm, of which our section was but a small part, was named Maroeladal and we decided upon the contracted version Maroela. Mam and I were the first to move in, quickly followed by Runhaar next door.

Our home remover had everything in storage, so it was merely a question of delivery and unpacking. The whole place was still bare. No shrubs or trees, no driveways or fences, even the access road from Cedar road was untarred. It was early in '81 and I was still working fulltime at the bank, and even putting in extra time when asked. Mam was working at Fidelity Guard so in many respects life went on as it had in Ferndale, except that we were determined to travel. We estimated it would take ten years to undertake all the trips we planned – some of which would be to Holland, but many others to other continents as well.

Our first trip was to the East: Bombay, inland to Jaipur, Agra, Delhi, Kathmandu, Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Hong Kong for a bit more than 3 weeks. We were very pleased; the quality was excellent, well organised, top class hotels

That was our first conducted tour. We had done other overseas trips on our own. A big one was in 1975 to Holland which I remember well because we received a phone call from Georges announcing the birth of Dominic. That was 22 August and we were in Groningen with Rob and Mur. From Holland we travelled to Geneva and then to Florence and Rome. At some stage we visited Israel or possibly that was another trip

We did two trips to Greece – from here to Athens, and then by boat through the islands. The first itinerary also included Ephesus and old Corinth, ancient cities of which only ruins remain, both immensely fascinating. Ephesus is remarkable because the city's expansion had to be downhill towards the sea because they already had running water, which could not be made to flow uphill.

Ephesus also had a sewer system which, amazingly, was made from the same red vitreous clay pipes we still use today, just a bit longer. Istanbul we became hopelessly lost in the souk and had to ask directions to the outside world from a tapestry stall. We were immediately ushered inside and upstairs to have tea with the owner, who had family in Pretoria that also traded in carpets, and who we received introduction to.

We sailed back towards Athens, where we could see the Parthenon through which we had walked a year earlier, but passed the harbour and continued towards the Corinthian Canal to the island of Corfu, and the palace of the Empress of Austria, which was later taken over and rebuilt by Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany and still contains his desk.

I remember a stall selling seamen's art in Corfu harbour, the length of the ship on the quay that we moored to. The ship bore down on the quay at right angles and, in the middle of the bay, dropped anchor, which set in the bottom and drew out released anchor chain until that was belayed, drawing the bow of the ship around and ringing the neatly vessel alongside. I thought that was pretty smart, but not the end of it, because after our short visit the anchor chain was shortened to draw the ship away from the quay towards the open sea.

Then we sailed on to Venice which is a picturesque city when approached from the seaward side, and it also became clear why the fare was so reasonable: the ship had come to board a party of Germans to take to Athens.

Our baggage was unloaded while we went off to take in the sights of Venice before booking in to our hotel on the mainland. I cast a last loving glance at our baggage wondering how inconvenient it would be to lose it, thinking there was a wealth of opportunity for something to go horribly wrong.

It's amazing how much sightseeing can be crammed into a well-organised, but whirlwind tour. At the hotel everyone was given a room number and to our great surprise there were our suitcases waiting at our door.

Venice was not on the itinerary – just a stop-over on the bus-ride to Pisa, Florence and Rome. Shu, I remember the cold crossing the Apennines, the mountainous spine of Italy, snowbound and icy cold.

Pisa is actually rather charmless. The tower a mild attraction, but only the fact that it leans has made the city famous, but other than that there's nothing. Florence is a wholly different matter. This wasn't our first visit, one of a total of three I think. The first time we lodged at a hotel that didn't look anything like a hotel situated in a tiny narrow street where the hotel transport was forced to block the road while our bags were unloaded. No matter how efficiently this is done there will always be an accumulation of traffic, which the Italians uncharacteristically accepted without protest or hooting.

A lovely little hotel was recommended by Mr. Haakman of Lissone Lindeman. Mam is a very easy travel companion, never complaining, just pushing ever onward. She has two principles: you mustn't eat too much, and the price of the room is very important. In this old-town hotel Mam suspected that the food would be ruinously expensive, so we set out to find a cheaper meal elsewhere in town where we can choose dishes that are not too generous. We wandered around until Mam found a smallish place near the station which we entered. Mam immediately identified what she wanted from the menu – soup, or Zuppa di something-or-other, which I also ordered.

When the zuppa di was served it turned out to be a towering mass of stodge, which we defeated, but with difficulty. I said to Mam: "Let's try the hotel next", which we did and found just the right sized servings at just the right price too.

Everything is decidedly small and narrow in Florence, but it's a treasure trove of artworks. We rode on a city bus to a point overlooking the city – Italians are not big on parks and gardens, but the landscape more than compensates for that.

We travelled onward to Rome by bus, arriving in the late afternoon and not knowing where to locate our hotel. It was a public bus but nevertheless had on board an semi-official travel guide who was outstandingly helpful and, in the unbelievable chaos of Roman traffic was quite prepared to divert the bus past our lodgings, but the driver demurred on the grounds that the bus was too big for the thoroughfare.

We strolled randomly around central Rome, also around the back of the Vatican, where we stopped for a bite at a small restaurant. We got into conversation with an English lady and her teenage son. They were Catholics and the son was suffering a terminal illness. His dying wish was to see the Vatican, which his mother had made

special arrangements and appointments for with a priest who was going to be their guide.

Making beautiful parks is not something the Italians understand very well. One evening we found ourselves in a park on a hillside at sunset and the skyline of the city with St Peter's Basilica was unforgettable. Writing about it now it's easy to imagine the two of us still wandering around there. Mam is an ideal travel companion and it's a total pleasure to schlep from palace to palace and museum to museum until we simultaneously grow weary of it. We soon perceived that in traffic an Italian is quickly transformed.

What I'm not too clear on any more is which odd encounters belong to which trip. We were in Rome several times and the chronology of experiences becomes muddled – one occasion we entered Rome's huge airport and found ourselves next to Yehudi Menuhin who, no rest for some, was studying an enormous sheet of music.

This time we didn't visit Pompeii – we did that later, striking and noteworthy that some urban problems from that time persist today. In the city centre is a plaza where wagons were excluded by the placing of rectangular blocks at the access points. Some smaller streets had similar barriers to allow only smaller carts to pass. Hard to say whether they had one-way streets though.

Fascinating how the houses look as though just abandoned, with wall decorations still intact, the poor dog that died because it was leashed, its shape outlined in the hardened ash. Bars and taverns are easily recognisable, and the tracks in the streets still preserved especially at the gates and the road to the harbour.

When visiting such places you need to realistically imagine yourself in that time. You see that people then had similar problems to what exists today. Their bathing habits too were similar, in varying facilities, and many small buildings serving as little shops. You get the impression of incredulous people hanging on till the last minute, sometimes even a little too long.

From there we proceeded to Naples by bus. The tour guide cautioned us: "Keep a close eye on your possessions because in this city someone will offer a good deal on shoe-soles which, once you've bought them, will turn out to be from your own shoes! A beautiful but economically depressed area. We were given a choice: See Naples or take a ferry to the island of Elba.

When the time came to leave we were short one female. She had taken the island tour and, on returning, had latched onto the wrong tour group, and boarded the wrong bus, which was only discovered when the bus was found to have one seat too few. Where do you start to search for a person in a city bursting with tourists? Someone shouted "Go to the market, she probably being sold there!" (Only kidding). At last she was found, terribly anxious, and convinced she's spend the night wandering around Naples.

We did another tour through Europe, this time in a rented car for part of the way. I'd always wanted to ride the Rheingold, an express train, running in those days, from The Hague to Basle. We were in The Hague and we went to the station to buy two tickets, where we found a numbered system in use by which you were called when your turn came so you didn't have to queue. We were a long way from being called since progress was slow so Mam and I went off for a bite to eat.

Our number came up soon after we returned from lunch and on reaching the counter the clerk said: "Sir, the Rheingold is very expensive – can you afford it?" I replied, "Not really, but hand over the tickets, because here's the money". Strange that such a woman is given that kind of job, but that's a country where people have learned to accept the unacceptable.

From Basle we travelled to Genève and then to a house that a relative of Mam (long since deceased) had there and rented a small car, the one we later drove to Vienna. People in Europe have shockingly bad manners, something we're not used to at home. He stopped in front of a hotel, Die Rote Hahn, which was perfectly OK, but when I went to pay with my American Express Gold card the counter-hand brought out a huge wad of papers and, in front of me, starts looking through the listed numbers to determine whether I'd stolen the card.

From Vienna we flew back to Amsterdam, overall that was an excellent tour, as were other trips we took to Spain and Portugal. We were stricken with illness only once, and that was when Mam came down with a one-day something in Portugal. In the south of Spain, where Hollanders are thick on the ground; we took a ferry across the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco.

Spanish cities are impressive, with broad avenues, large plazas and hotels from converted castles called Parador, or something similar, good for touring but not suitable for stays in excess of four days, I imagine. Some have decor reminiscent of the late middle Ages, with an abundance of that period's weaponry on display.

My narrative becomes un-chronological here. We took a somewhat unsatisfactory cut-price tour of Southern England and Wales, and then we made the mistake of booking another tour, this time to Europe with the same tour operator. The English tour was not too bad, On one occasion we were in a hotel in Bath, basic but adequate, you would say, but when we were in bed and somebody walked down the corridor outside the room, the bed would undulate as the floorboards, which ran under the wall would flex under the weight of the passer-by. Actually the wall was no wall but a flimsy wooden partition.

The second tour we booked with this same operator immediately after this one was memorable. The itinerary took us to Canterbury to see the cathedral and then by ferry across the Channel to Belgium, southern Germany, France, Paris, and back.

Now we're all ready and assembled in the bus, but there's no tour guide. Ah, here he comes at a trot, and we departed from a different station in London. We're rubber-necking and I say to Mam how big London is, and Mam, ever wide-awake say: We've already travelled these streets in the other direction. And she was right because we were going to the tour guide's house – the fool had forgotten his passport! So that delay cut out Canterbury because the ferry wasn't going to be waiting on our arrival before sailing.

We were to stop in a town in the very scenic Ardennes whose name escapes me, but with the drive speaking exclusively French and the tour guide knowing only English nobody could find the hotel. Keep seeking and you shall find!

We dined in an area demarcated by the fluttering tape like the police use around a crime scene. We slept in a room off a hallway with two beds placed lengthwise and a washstand at one end. No shower. Ok, fine. The next day we started out early since

we had a distance to travel, according to the guide. After a time Mam says, Why don't we go via a certain Strasse which is renowned of its scenic beauty? No, says the guide – too expensive. We're just passing through, says Mam, no eating, no sleeping – what can be so expensive? Mam gets quite hot under the collar and I'm paying close attention too. Too much fuel is the reason given and hence, too expensive to make the detour.

Then came the cherry on the cake as far as we were concerned – the next overnight stop would be at a really cosy little hotel in a picturesque village, according to the guide, which was welcome news as we were ready for some rest. Except that we arrived at the wrong end of the village on nobody knew where the hotel was and turning the bus in the road was a challenge! Though fortunately we made it.

Lo and behold, there is the hotel, not at all small, that we charged past earlier. The tour guide apologetically claimed that he was actually only an expert on Paris. When you have been anticipating a night out in the veld, finding the hotel at the eleventh hour is doubly pleasing.

A lovely nights rest and then in the morning onward to Paris, which is bound to go well since we had a Paris expert for a driver who also spoke perfect French. After stopping en-route to answer Nature's call we proceeded to our hotel situated on a narrow street that ends in a square. The pavement was inlaid with mosaic tiles giving information on the famous old castle and prison that is the Bastille.

Naturally the usual attractions like the Louvre are on the itinerary, but we also did a night-time tour of Paris which was beautiful and unforgettable. At the end we visited a church on a hilltop taking the bus all the way up and, after admiring the magnificent view, found that the bus was blocked by a small car. On the bus were a group of Americans from a church group who without a word surrounded the little vehicle and bounced it onto the sidewalk, which probably caused the owner some puzzlement on his return.

By now it was 11pm and time for bed, except that we missed a turn and found ourselves in the Parisian suburbs. Fortunately the driver spoke good French, but at that hour we could fine nobody to talk to! Ah, there's a chap taking his dog out! And the driver accosted this lone Frenchman, who was clearly reluctant to enter into a long discourse. Luckily the dog chose this time to do its business, and being quite a constipated dog, this allowed the owner the time to explain to us that we were on the road to Brussels

So there we were back in the hotel and went to bed, which was fine except that there were no pillows, just a long roll of tightly stuffed material that was rock-hard. Actually softer than a tree-limb, I'll admit, but not by much. That seems to be the French custom – a roll instead of a pillow – incredible, but true. From there we reached London without further incident.

In this way we also toured extensively in Scotland, with Jan and Noor in their car, which was most enjoyable, especially the small country inns and the narrow roads. At the end of a certain road there was a sign pointing to Edinburgh. Mam asked: "Should we go there?" I didn't realise how much Mam wanted to visit Edinburgh because she kept quiet, while I'm thinking about what could go wrong in a big city in a borrowed car.

But much later we're in London where I have to do some business for a week or two and Mam took the opportunity to immediately return to Scotland, first to Dunoon and

then to Edinburgh, while I stayed in London. To travel by train to Scotland on Saturday afternoon and return 24 hours later makes little sense.

Conducting business is always tiring and this was particularly trying as the manager thought to limit the London volume of business instead of us doing so in Johannesburg. An Englishman can be a very tricky creature and by idleness or malice seeks to damage the enterprise. You have to be extra-vigilant and it is difficult to explain that you cannot travel to Glasgow and back in so short a time. You really have to watch these English, but I devised a weapon: "Please feel free to phone our local manager and tell him you had a talk with me from South Africa", and the local manager's chagrin they did this with enthusiasm, considering it a special favour to be visited by the South African management, rather than just the local.

The poor man never crossed me again, but with these kinds of experiences I thought to spend a boring Sunday in London. All of which is a little hard to explain.

Another major trip we undertook, accompanied by Sas, was to America. This was another expedition that went very well, though at the start I was troubled by bronchitis. We landed at New York without any problem and at Customs and Immigration found a very pleasant fellow to check our visas who had a huge book with heavily thumbed pages of numbers to check for undesirables and I found it most surprising that this function had not been computerised.

The trip lasted three weeks and from New York we flew to Los Angeles in a hotel named Bonadventure, a large building comprising three interwoven glazed towers between which was a huge atrium filled with hanging gardens. The rooms were generously proportioned with big bathrooms and the restaurants catered according to price levels, which fascinated Mam, not so much over the prices themselves as the huge differences between tiers. An excellent hotel placed nearly in the city centre.

.To start with we needed film for the camera and get some money changed. There was an American in a shop who advised me never to let anyone see where you carry your money. "Where yer come from? South Africa? Ah, pleased to meet you – must be a safe place".

You need to look a while to appreciate what you're actually seeing – the airport was a total shambles as it was being renovated for the Olympic Games. It was on a larger scale than we are used to, but the shopping area contained a surprising quantity of small shops, not only in the streets but also in the malls. The cities though, are too big to cover on foot. We were there for several days, I forget how many exactly, with the unavoidable visit to Hollywood which I missed due to my terrible bronchitis.

Then, en-route to Arizona the landscape changed dramatically and quickly to a much drier environment, by the highway remains divided all the way. We stopped a while in the village of Alice Springs where there are many holiday homes as well as permanent residents, one of whom was Bob Hope. The houses themselves were a bit disappointing – more basic than one would expect. We also examined the American version of what we would call a townhouse complex, and it was not at all what we would want – you couldn't even park in front of your house, a severe inconvenience should it rain, but everything was squeaky-clean and dust-free.

From Alice Springs we drove to Scottsdale, very near Las Vegas, which is entirely devoid of charisma by day, but very spectacular by night not only because of the flashing neon but also the many fountains and multi-coloured water-curtains.



The first evening we had dinner in a restaurant where you waited forever for a waiter and, once you had at last ordered, waited even longer for your food. Later I understood that this establishment was one where you went for an all-night yak-fest with friends and family, and only incidentally had a meal on the side. And expensive it was too. I said to Mam we should try the hotel's restaurant, which turned out far different – a place where people came to eat and immediately leave.

The areas that Americans call desert, filled with tall cacti and low shrubbery, is for us not desert at all. Namib Desert – now that's real desert.

I noticed that American's are friendly without being talkative. They are attentive but totally indifferent if you have no business with them, though that does not make them rude.

Well, from there we went north, their destination being the Yosemite national Park. You could take an air tour over the gorge, which Mam and Sas did, most impressive. In South Africa you get used to a certain standard camp accommodation, which is startlingly different in America, as are other camp facilities. We had our meals in the Yosemite cafeteria but slept in San Francisco, a long drive away on an ever-descending road through beautiful farms and orchards.

We lodged at a Hilton in San Francisco where the nights are quite cold – even until 11am in the summer, I believe, which makes the place unpleasant. We saw the giant trees named, I think, Sequoia – difficult to reference since I donated our encyclopaedias Sas and Alan's Iain. From San Francisco we travelled to Los Angeles and then flew eastwards to Orlando to see the Walt Disney creation, and then by bus up the East Coast all the way to New York with stop off in cities like Savannah. A wonderful trip.

In Savannah we visited a wooden house dating from the time of the War Between the States, as they call the Civil War there. The Curator of this museum was a trim little woman of advancing age. When I told her that, in my understanding, the city was saved from destruction by the Yankee military commander allowing him to be bribed by the proceeds of cotton that would otherwise have been burnt by the Confederate government. Shu! The woman nearly exploded. How could I suggest such a thing – and a foreigner as well! They were all gentlemen, remember! You often still see Confederate flags flapping in the breeze, though this trip made us appreciate that these States were actually united.

What I didn't enjoy was the legal protections you see everywhere against liability suits for trivialities such as falling down a flight of stairs or bumping his head – the tendency to sue.

And then we flew back. This trip and the one to India and Thailand are still the most outstanding in my travel memory, though I shouldn't forget the trip to the Greek islands that we did in a small ship, not a huge cruiser, but a ship of the Emperotiki Line that carried no more than a hundred passengers.

So, and here the timeline is skewed, we are back in our new house, and back to humdrum reality. The first twelve houses are complete, and the Tuindorp had been built without clashing colours. That had not been very difficult because the houses had been built to order and progress payments had been made for them, so there were no cashflow problems and no sales to conclude. I was nothing more than just a shareholder but urged Runhaar to keep in contact with the son of one of our residents who was an Attorney because we had the situation that the developer was



the owner of my house. Giel de Klerk General Manager of Credit Guarantee was concerned about how to get all of this in order. He tragically died suddenly of a massive heart attack in his existing residence, but had only himself to blame since he was terrified of surgery and declined the bypass operation that would have kept him alive.

Mam phoned me at the office saying: "Be prepared for Louis to ask you to join the Board, when you get home". And there he stood, ramrod stiff, at my garage door. Wow, I thought, that means he and his company are in trouble, as so it turned out. We had 12 of the 30 houses built and were committed to building and selling another 18, to outsiders. And this required finance. Then it transpired that, of the 12 existing houses one had not been sold and hence we were broke. I could not have been worse. At that time a complete house cost R60,000. A clean-out of the Board was in order, which Louis agreed to entirely. Secondly, none of the so-called other directors would have a voice, no more meetings – the two of us would go it alone.

That's how Louis Runhaar and I cleared up the mess. Louis certainly pulled his weight. Louis had a lot of time available since he'd retired with nothing else on his plate to occupy him. And he had a lot of help – he found a builder (a condition I forced on him to keep me in the game) who was satisfactory. The builder knew that he stood to build 18 houses but would accept an order for no more than two until those had been sold. We'd go to the bank and get a loan, on nothing more than our good name, for R200,000, plus another R60,000 for the extra house we were building. Louis wanted more, and so did I, but cash was the limiting factor. And that's how we ran the business without ulcers to our stomachs.

The previous management did not understand that we weren't just building houses – with every house you have to start the basics of a garden, to make the house accessible you need to extend the road, which needn't be ultra-wide because quality roads are expensive. Electricity reticulation is for the account of the townhouse developer, and I can tell you that that is expensive! Nobody had thought this through, other than de Klerk, which I discovered once I got talking with him. Sad to say his management colleagues didn't know their arses from their elbows. But we did it without financial problems in the sense that we had no money. Runhaar contributed enormously and de Klerk was so stressed by the ignorance of his fellows that he suffered a heart attack, which was tragic since he was a nice chap, who never lived here and failed to see the stress was ruining his health.

All of the journeys I have described, and some other short ones, we made during the first ten years of our stay here, a few before I took pension. Other than the earlier 'long leave' trips that is. After those ten years had passed here in Maroela things changed and Ien contracted various serious illnesses, though in the times between everything went well again. I won't go into detail over Ien illnesses but there were times I was at my wit's end, but then she recovered again, albeit with a diminished constitution.

Until the final blow, which I will cover in the next and last chapter which tells of our final denouement and what led up to it.

The End

