

No. 14 My Reminiscences

In the previous chapters I tried to give a picture of the main issues and events of our lives. Too much from my side as Mam is no longer here to ask how she felt about any given event. The first ten years of living in the Maroela complex were happy years. You're more constricted here than would be the case in detached housing but the design allowed for some individualism. While there is some conformity of style there is diversity between the houses that doesn't greatly change their interior space.

The internal roads have long since been extended. Whenever new houses were completed the road was lengthened accordingly. The public road outside has also been named - Cedar Avenue West. Our garden has matured in the ten years since it was planted. After ten years we had no travel and though we had aged considerably, we were in good health. A peaceful life. I was chairman of the executive committee, more use than that I couldn't be.

Then something happened to disturb this all: I started getting seriously ill. One day early in '90 I asked to go to the doctor as she had a bit of pain. That was already unusual as she seldom went to the doctor. I expected the doctor to say something like "Let's start with some physio" but no he wanted x-rays straight away which we had done at the Olivedale Clinic. The x-rays showed nothing on the side where the pain was but on the other side they showed a large cancerous growth on the kidney. That was removed in the shortest possible time during a rather big operation.

That was the beginning of a series of major illnesses where I could do nothing more than go with her and be there for her. The cancer required radiation treatment. That caused bone weakening and osteoporosis, corsets and pills by the boatload. Then pneumonia, another operation, this time to a growth in her breast, fluid drainage from her lungs. Then the TIAs, first not serious but later very serious, continuing to the end.

As a spectator, because that is what you are even if the patient is your wife, there is nothing to do but be there. On 2 February 2002 Mam suffered her major stroke. We had watched the wedding of Crown Prince Willem Alexander on TV all day. She lay in the Olivedale Clinic for a few days before asking me to take her home and put her in her own bed to die.

The awful reality of that request does not penetrate for a long time. I lived longer than any doctor or nurse expected, more than a year. At first, after she died, I was relieved that she had been released from her totally broken body. None of the memories fade, not even in their tiniest detail and, amazingly, for the first couple of months do not hurt, but become unbearable over time. Soon you realise that your own life is also over, you just continue to exist.

What I did not have was a shield for was the stream of well meant but totally unasked for advice from all sorts of people on a variety of topics. At first that made me quite crusty. I did start to realise how little I knew what a terrible experience it is for people who lose their partners. And also what a blessing that is: that you cannot imagine what it is like to be left alone. Every bridal couple repeats after the pastor "until death do us part" but has no idea what that will be like and it is good that is we don't know.

Well possibly it is not the same for everybody, but for an emotional man like me it was actually too much.

I was raised in the Gereformeerde way of thinking (a very conservative church) but early in life, long before I was 20 began questioning these doctrines and developed an aversion for the Church as an institution. I did concede that certain rules are needed, a certain unity of thinking, but I was aware of the danger of having someone else telling me what I should, or should not, believe. You need to read the Bible carefully but realising that it was written by people, however inspired they might have been, who were just giving their opinion of what is true or not.

Mam was always keen to go to church. I carry many clear images of Mam in my memory in the pew beside me with her hymn book in hand, and how she held that book while singing. During her long illness she wanted me to pray with her.

As a young man, or even younger at about 17, I regularly prayed that Mam would become my wife, which didn't entirely mesh with the church doctrine of the time, very regularly indeed. And it happened despite all the obstacles, I don't believe my prayers have ever not been answered, and I rely on that now.

And that gets you contemplating on how you've spent your life. You look back and some days as being different from the usual, in what you do and what you say. Lying, to put it bluntly.

I think that without a concept of God a person's life loses meaning is diminished, but the concept of a deity is not prescribed, fixed or static. In the Bible given to me by my mother when I turned 18 she wrote "The world and her attractions will pass but he who does God's will stays for eternity" This sounded like an excuse for the non-achiever.

That is wrong-headedness from an Apostle. The world is created by God's will, because what, otherwise would the world be? An unholy place and that is not possible. You may do unholy things, but that is not reconcilable with the world. This Apostle was talking about something else entirely, possibly in the Greek or Roman times, I don't know, but I suspect these are man-made sacraments.

I am aware and feel that this was the most difficult chapter to write. It is about the person who is no longer here. Without Mam I am nothing, absolutely nothing. I have realised this too late and want to make this up to her and want to go to her. What is there left to do? Nothing. It is the end of a life. I am just existing. I must learn to be grateful for what everybody does for me particularly my children.



One important task (if you can call it that) is to not be any burden for your children – they may get their turn but to rejoice in your large family

A more peaceful place would be difficult to find



Maroela garden

EINDE

Mam suffered her stroke on 2 February 2002 at 5 0'clock. She died on the 24February 2003 at 2.30 in her own bed, as she wanted, with me present. She refused food at 1 o'clock when the signs of the coming passing away commenced. She died after a long struggle of one hour and a half, looking out on this lawn.

Mam's Memorial Service was on the 28th of February 2003

