

A record of my anecdotes in no particular order but as they come to mind.

Kornelis Casparus van der Molen

I did not like that name when I was a teenager and thereafter; particularly that Casparus. So should there be in my family some who have a problem similar to mine let that be a consolation. There must be lots with the same problem Kornelis was the name of my grandfather on my father's side. He was a smous. Walked from place to place with a little wooden box on his back selling things like shoe laces polish and so. No toothbrushes because in those days one did not brush ones teeth unless you belonged to high society. You used a finger.

This man eventually through bitter hard work expanded his business so that he could afford a cart with a dog to help pull it. By that time he must have had a more fixed abode, before he slept where ever the last customer, a peasant farmer lived and asked for permission to sleep in the 'hooiberg' - haystack His wife travelled with him her name was Trientje Korf.

Sales must have increased more and more, and a little shop in one of those tiny little villages; it was called Krewert was opened his wife [who outlived him by many years] had three sons; Klaas the eldest immigrated to America; Chicago and was a builder. In America called a developer. That was before 1916.

There was also Jacob he stayed in the area Groningen and was a building contractor with a fairly large family. One of his sons immigrated to South Africa also Jacob and a carpenter. He lived in Krugersdorp but we lost sight of him and his family.

Then there was another son Simon; he was a 'machinist' that is an engine driver with the railways. I remember clearly a "faux pas" [if you do not know what that is look it up or ask Georges because it is French/ We, my brother Jan and I stayed with this Uncle Simon a day or two [in Enschede] and my uncle wanted to show me his 'locomotief' his railway engine in the shed. We must have been about 12 and Jan was 2 years younger and I was disgusted with the small 'locomotiefje"

My uncle wanted me to climb in but I did not –such a stinking small thing!! And my uncle must have been disappointed at my lack of interest... There was also an aunt a sister who was left behind to become a spinster but not so long actually because she married a peasant called Tjardo. No surname known.

So as my mother used to say from my father's side I was "van lage kom af" (low born) not deftig which she was. One of the last in a long range of children, 13 of them. Her father [Casparus] also worked with the railways but on the tracks. Considering his large family he therefore had more than one track record... He was 'ploegbaas' of a group of labourers who laid and corrected the railway tracks. Now with a machine but in those days the effort to keep tracks straight was a very great one, all by hand, with the aid of wooden crosses and strings and looking glasses. The 'ploegbaas' never carried any of these instruments. The work was in a certain way more important than that of the highest authority in the organisation: One of the important things in Railway organisations is that trains do not derail and Casparus arranged just that. His surname was Spiers

My father and mother got married in 1916 and then shortly thereafter must have decided to emigrate. They taught at a school in Veenedaal that is in the province of Utrecht. Veenedaal was a place of clothing factories. My father applied for a post in Sout Africa and also for one in Indonesia. Imagine how small things like that influence lives: Had he been accepted in South Africa I would have been an Afrikaner for sure because my father was Gerofermeerd

church member. And I would never have met Mam all would have been topsy turvy.
Sometimes fate smiles on you

Well then I was born in 1918 which I do not remember, but from 4 years on there are still a number of things I recall such as the first house we stayed, in the Sumatra laan... Later in the Koningin Wilhelmina laan when my father bought a car. A model T Ford. On Saturdays we used to motor around in the late afternoon, when it was cooler. One of those trips led us to an area called Glodok in downtown Batavia. There was a jail there and the guards – military men- had bayonets up on their rifles.

I clearly remember that this impressed me no end as very ingenious: to shoot prisoners escaping with a knife!! Good idea. My mother was aghast and told my father to move on as fast as a T Ford could go. Little did I know that at a later age I would be an inmate of that very same prison, when a POW en route to Thailand. I was there about a fortnight I think. 'Het kan verkeren' has since then always been on my mind that means "It can change you know" I just said sometimes fate smiles on you! True enough but the stress is on the word sometimes. Since then I am classed a pessimist. Of course between the two meetings with Glodok Prison very many things happened.

The most important one was that my father died in 1926, in December, while we were on the way back from the Indies to Holland; my father was given sick leave but I think that it was known before we left that his illness was a very serious one; all went in a great haste. He never reached the end of the journey and died in Port Said. We were far too young to realise the consequences.

To grow up without a father is to grow up with some important factor cut away; and my mother, looking back later, was singularly ill equipped to meet that situation. Unbeknown it must have put a mark on the rest of our youth life; and it is only later, much later that I realised that she suffered much because of her dire need for support.

Nevertheless she settled in a place relatively away from family; in Bussum where she was on her own, the main reason being her determination to bring us up away from her non-believing family and away from my father's family whom she may have considered of a social standing below hers. My mother was deftig. And wanted us not to adopt any sort of local manner of speaking. But learn the pure Dutch. In those days speaking in a dialect however slim could put a mark on you,

Before we moved to Bussum we lodged with relatives of my mother and, though it would have been more sensible to have stayed in the vicinity of her family, she seems to have decided: "I must give my children a Gereformeerde education far from my not very Christian family, and also not near my dead husband's family, who are of a lower class".

Here I need to clarify something: Holland at the time was sharply divided into social strata defined not only by wealth, but also by religious affiliation – Catholic or Protestant. It was a certainty that Protestants would never buy from Vroom en Dreesman the drapers because that was a Catholic shop. Similarly we would not associate with a shop-keeper or a carpenter, because they were below our social rank.

Now that has all changed and angry tongues even allege that the Holland is governed by proles. Leo Vuyck, my school friend, who was from an upper class family and lived in a large house rarely visited at my house, and my mother jumped to the conclusion that, in their eyes we were not of their social standing and hence should be shunned. This was not the case – Leo Vuyck avoided my house because there he was offered only a single biscuit with his tea and then the tin was not only slammed shut, but locked in the cupboard as well!

The decade of the 1930s was a time of economic crises and the prices of goods steadily decreased, which was fine for my mother who received only a meagre pension. Fortunately my father had taken out insurance policies for his three sons' education which covered our schooling. During the war my younger brother studied law at the University of Amsterdam. Despite our somewhat straightened circumstances my mother insisted on taking us away for a holiday every year.

This Leo Vuyck was also Gereformeerd, which counted in his favour, also had to stretch his allowance. On Sundays he'd receive a quarter to put in the church collection bag on the end of a long pole handled by the deacon. To improve his financial means Leo would twist one of his fly buttons and drop that in the bag instead.

This was easier for Leo to do than for me, because the button would be replaced by one of his many sisters, whereas mine would be re-sewn by my mother who would ask where the missing button was, and why there was always a button missing. Zip fasteners had yet to be invented of course.

In church it was difficult to unobtrusively pull a button from the back of your pants – your fly was easier because your strategically placed other hand could hide the event from your neighbours, ideally while singing from a hymn book. Leo complained that his sisters secured the replacement buttons ever more tightly. Leo was no big fabricator of falsehoods, but I sometimes had doubts about his tales. Later when we attended the Lyceum in Hilversum we often went cycling together.

Earlier, in the Juliana Primary School, it occasionally happened that I went to a certain Oom Henk, or Oom Helmer Kuiper, who were friends and nephews of my mother, as well as being teachers at the Mulo School, which adjoined our primary school, to be lectured on how I caused my mother grief. What I was guilty of and when was never elaborated on, and there was a lot about this that I didn't understand.

From time to time I got a hiding with a carpet-beater. In those days there were no vacuum cleaners, at least none deemed effective in the eyes of a discerning housewife, so carpets were beaten with an elaborately woven, large, flat cane device while hanging outside on a sturdy wash line, which every house was equipped with.

It would come about that I made my mother's hands itch, and she would then work me over with the carpet-beater, and I say to her, "Mam, I don't know what this is about but if you think this is hurting me you're wrong". It was a huge flat and wide thing that distributed its impact over such a large area that it was quite ineffective, but to this day I wonder why anyone would want to explain this to his punisher. Might this be an early manifestation of cocky overconfidence? Probably!

There was a Youth League attached to our church which attended an annual congress where weighty issues of the day were debated, such as the question of sports being played on Sundays. One such meeting was held in Leeuwarden, up north, and I was sent as part of the Bussum delegation.

After some discussion a yokel from the village of Drente stood up and declared the entire debate futile since he had to cycle for an hour each way to church every Sunday morning, and then another hour each way in the evening – and if that wasn't sport, what was?

To this the Chairman, a Professor van Dijk arose and applauded, as did all his cronies in his support, thereby considering the matter settled. At this point the obnoxious side of my

nature emerged - I do not just blindly accept the majority decision, and why should I adapt to this bumpkin?

You see clearly: this fellow fancies himself to be 'deftig' No not really actually I objected to being brainwashed. This Prof Dijk had a son who married a friend of Mam, Ans Hogewoning [who hailed also somewhere from the Indies [I think] And one day we are in the house of the Vuycken =they were on holiday= and Dijk Jr with his wife Ans visit us; Ans wore a frock very similar to a coat; so I offered to take off her coat and hang it up somewhere. No she says because that is my dress and I wear nothing underneath. Anybody meets with that sort of situation sometimes or more but my great failing is that I never have a ready answer. Only much later! I think slowly: but why did I not say this or that? Slow thinker that's me,

My youth years were in no way dull or over exciting, no I had a normal nice time. One summer we went to a place Egmond aan Zee for our holiday and there I saw a blond girl springy hair that made an impression, strong and disturbing, as it happens with young men – still boys- and I did all sorts of things to find out where she stayed but never saw her again.

Back to school [Lyceum] and that was in September when the new school year started, Lo and Behold there; the first day in the new class there she sits. And I look closely but no it was a different girl and I find out by the name of Ina Tamsma; same sort of springy hair and blond but a different face, with big blue eyes. Little did I know that the first stone laying ceremony of a new building had just taken place because the image of that girl stayed imprinted somewhere in indelible ink.

Those days were less 'free' than they are now and you did not just speak as a stranger to a girl without introduction. But there was the telephone book and the address and the profession of Mr S.F Tamsma was described as 'komies" (comic) which I thought impressive. Only later did I gather my resolve and talk to her. And then I said to my mother one day when I showed a photo of the entire school population a girl who appeared on it: this is Ina Tamsma and I am going to marry her. I had this capacity to shock my mother and she said WHAAT? There are thousands of girls, later, much later for you to chose from, thousands and even more...I remember clearly that I said that is none of my business... And she has a brother who is at the present in a sanatorium. That information brought my mother again in all stages as I apparently had the ability to do: A sick family ook nog, possibly she is also sick. I think that it is correct to say that I stuck to my guns.

I missed the fund raising ability that Leo Vuyck had but used to save up on my coffee money:: that was 25 cents in a week [five times a cup something that looked like coffee from the school canteen {at 5 cente een koppie} and for two weeks produced fifty cents] and the ticket for the bioscope was 25 cents a seat. That meant that I could take Ina Tamsma out twice a month if she wanted to... Incidentally my fund raising method was far more honest than Leo's who kept on ripping buttons from his 'gulp' That produced only 10 cents because that's what he got to drop in church collection bag.

So he raised 10 cents a week and I 25!! Plus the inconvenience that he had to walk about met een open gulp until one of his sisters repaired the absence of the button, which actually sounds worse than it was because we had a Sunday suit which we almost never wore to school. The procedure at our house was that my mother bought for me on a Sale and this became my Sunday suit until my School suit wore out, at which point my Sunday, which in the meantime I had outgrown, would become my School suit, and my mother would be off to the next Sale to replace my Sunday suit.

Wanda has just come in as I was typing this to say that it's time to make Mam's dinner, which slipped my mind in the intensity of this work. I prepare the meal and take it to the

bedroom were len lies, a paralysed wreck and the simple reality smacks me in the face: That is the len I'm writing about courting, and now to see this – it's too terrible to contemplate. A man can die of grief, and very quickly too. To be abruptly yanked back to reality while re-living the past is brutally painful, and there's nobody now to dry my tears. Enough for now – I must go and sit with Mam.

It is now 1937, we leave school and I get a learners job with a bank the Nederlandsch Indiesche Handelsbank, the office in Amsterdam for training to be sent to the Indies and as it happens len gets a job with a trading firm also with Dutch East India offices and we travel by train daily to Amsterdam, However Ina Tamsma comes from a much larger place Hilversum than I Bussum, on the railway line to Amsterdam Hilversum comes first. So it did happen many times that Ina Tamsma "s train, an express train did not stop in Bussum and she whizzed past, But sometimes there was the occasion to walk from Amsterdam station to her place of work, not far from mine. It is at this stage July 1939 and I am due to leave on the vessel Johan van Oldenbarneveldt and arrive in what is now Djakarta [then still a not very impressive place] and am told I must move on in the ship to Surabaya, also the terminal Before leaving Amsterdam I asked Ina to marry me in due course but she said nothing.

I arrive in Surabaya on a Saturday, weekend and am invited to stay in a place called a 'mess', no more than a number of bachelors who hired a house plus servants and each had a room. That Monday I report for duty at the Surabaya office and am given work I have not the foggiest idea what it is about, what is more I am all of a sudden the controller of a department., Come 6 o'clock come 7 and I get a little anxious: I have no place to sleep yet nor know where I shall find things to eat. So after seven [and the office is still working as if it is early morning] I step into the sub-managers office and ask him may I go to arrange these things: "Well", says the *klootzak* (scrotum) "If you must then you must, by I find it a manifestation of very poor work ethic. If this is your commitment to your job you won't succeed much here, that's for sure".

This by way of encouragement: A different time much tougher and different way of thinking. But I tell this only to illustrate the manner of hammering youngsters into shape in those days—colonial times-do not forget... And I moved to the Simpang Hotel a little more up town. The businesses were all downtown...

These colonial cities in fact the entire country was awash with bachelors. Surabaya was known for its taxi fleet of small cars like the Austin, small Fiat and the like .Easy and cheap transport but too small if you sort of moved house. No problem you called for two taxis [taxis were easy to get sort of roving town looking for a fare] in the one taxi you loaded all your stuff and you travelled in the other. Not a ghost of a chance- you did not even consider- that the taxi with your stuff would take off and disappear with all your suitcases; I do not think we even took the licence number of the other taxi.

That does not mean that there was no crime; remember the Glodok prison, it must have been well populated. But the world was different and difficult. Nothing like young people now taking a holiday in Greece or the Bahamas. We had officially no holiday ever for our first tenure of 8 years: the argument was: after 8 years you will get overseas leave of 8 months AND stressed: of which 4 months paid!

Not much history here, but it was about to burst on me, something for permanent: War broke out the month after my arrival, and that was the Phoney part of it nothing much happened except that there was no airmail connection with Europe any more. But by boat mail, and only via the Cape [the Suez Canal was closed] came a letter for me from Ina Tamsma and with it a little parcel with a photo and a little silvery box. Shu was I amazed and all sorts of other things. I could still reply and correspond until the next year May when Germany invaded Western low lands and France.

I had a cousin in America in one of the Carolinas; he was an astronomer and he lent his address to correspond but this lasted not long until the whole world was aflame. So clearly she started it not me; I sort of prepared. This astronomer's name was Dick Ruyl, he married a daughter of my aunt 'Tante Jans' a formidable woman. In those days women were endowed with a; bosom' not separate breasts.

Well Tante Jans she could preach and possibly Dick Ruyl was rather keen to take that job which was open to him as soon as he finished his studies within a certain time. Much later Mam and I travelled in America; Saskia was with us and in Charlottesville [where they stayed before the war] we looked in the phone book but there was no such name. One of the things when you travel about is the great number of people you lose sight of.

That letter from Mam really did it and the photo. And it travelled with me everywhere in a very handy pack and that was.....the Bible my mother gave me!! With the inscription that all earthly things will be lost, only eternity lasts: so not to lust for those things that pass!! The wrong thing to tell a young fellow who is setting about to conquer the world. But the Bible came in very handy for Len's photo and I still have it.

Life in Surabaya was smooth; we worked a lot. In the office at 7.30 and out at about that time in the evening. There was the weekly cinema visit. I was not a member of "The Club" most people were but it did cost money and I decided I will take over from a colleague who was transferred to Calcutta, his old car. A Fiat of the year of manufacture 1929, you know such a high affair with the spare wheel on the side embedded in the front mudguard. Floorboards were wooden planks for easy floor cleaning. Just lift them and the floor is clean again.

I had no idea whatsoever of maintenance and when I came back 'home' in the meantime another hotel/pension by the name of DERMO there were two English fellows looking the car over and one pulled something out of the engine; I remember thinking :Now you go a bit far! What he pulled out was the dipstick and he says there is no oil in this car [and he was right not a drop] which amazed me; I thought it only took petrol.

Fuel pumps were something really out of this world and with 'this' I mean to day. A pump was twice the height of the present pump and was operated by hand: Somebody really pumped and the fuel flowed up into a 5 litre glass bottle like affair. When full the operator gave it another pump move so that you could see/witness that the thing was full, the extra flowed back underground in the tank. Then the operator turned a lever and the 5 litre container emptied through the hose into your car tank; there was however nothing to stop this flow like present pumps hoses. Then the operator proceeded to pump again and filled the second glass container again 5 litres and a turning of the swing handle.

You could pump your tyre but there was no gauge; and when not busy the operator sat in a telephone booth like structure. So on the second day of my possessing a motorcar I decided that the tyres needed to be pumped up. One tyre looked a little odd::whitish in the middle all round rather wide irregular in shape and I later learned: that was the canvas. Now ja the pumping completed I went back to my hotel room which was a garage furnished to fit a gentleman, and sat outside looking with satisfaction at the new acquisition – it was a Sunday morning – and there was a big bang and a lot of dust: The canvas tyre had given in to the apparently too high pressure,

The seller a Mr van Akkooy a colleague who went to Calcutta the day he sold me his car for 200 guilders never got all that money I offered him 100 and he agreed; that was less than 10 pounds Sterling. Somewhere in a photo album is a picture I must have sent to Mam who kept it as an illustration of our bright future awaiting us...

One day I took it up in the mountain area around Malang. The car's maximum speed was 30/40 KM and climbing was not its strong point. Of course in those days there was no such thing as a pressurised radiator and on one climbing road there was something like an explosion and a lot of steam/ clearly something had given in. When the engine could be approached again I noticed in the engine block four round holes which had not been there before. And I thought after a while of the possibility that there was no water in the motor anymore but could not check that on account of the high temperature of the radiator cover.

I was fortunate enough to find, a few meters only further on, a few Indonesians working on the road or rather cutting growth along the road for the better view and, they on my direction, were good enough to cut from branches for fitting, wooden plugs, which I inserted in those holes, which I must admit disturbed me rather a lot. I thought the car was a goner.

The matter of refilling the radiator with water was simple. I travelled with a friend and his wife and their toddler daughter. His name was Schuurmans. On account of the low maximum speed of the car it took rather long to cover really shortish distances and Schuurmans wife very wisely brought a little potty along for that little girl to do *een plasje* on the way without the need to stop.

This little potty I used to dip out of a stream, water to fill the radiator which had cooled in the meantime. We then proceeded to a place called Malang and found an engineering sort off outfit. This man explained my problem which was something Irish. No I said this is an Italian car a Fiat. This man also said which was more important that he could fix it by welding round pieces of metal into the holes; however he could not guarantee his handy work, also saying that this sort of thing happened often on these mountain roads.

The man clearly had no high esteem of himself: this sort of accident never ever happened again; the welded props stayed in place firmly. How we got home I do not recollect anymore. I could come back next weekend to fetch the car again. The car had the most enormously powerful headlights: Bosch manufacture. That was actually the only thing powerful of the car. However the sight of a motorcar engine with big wooden props in it was really funny and the beauty was: it worked.

In those days there were no service stations yet. You could not get your car 'serviced;' Repaired yes but nothing fancy. I lived on the Darmo Boulevard and during my stay Caltex opened what we now call a service station but the object was to advertise. I went there very shortly after its establishment and the car went [even] better.

All these things happened before the war in Europe really got serious. When exactly I do not remember. We [with Schuurmans and his wife and child] also undertook a trip to Bandung where his wife's parents stayed. That was 900 KM there and 900 back, for an Easter weekend. Without mishap. Slowly on now we move into another area when war in Europe turned ugly and all and everything changed. Connections were broken. In the bank I was moved from the 'incasso Department to Aandelen [Securities]

Then in August [I think] 1941 I got tired of my Fiat. There were too many things that were wrong and I bought a SKODA against everybody's advice 'because it would be difficult to get spare parts' Small car but beautiful and in an excellent state. An entirely different proposition/ I was very happy with it. However in September/October I got the uncomfortable feeling of the possibility of war. I had not paid cash for the car and with monthly payments in war time seemed to me a situation to be avoided.

Then you meet with panic like feelings and I decided to bring the car to the dealer proposing: How about you taking it back keep my payments and that is the end. Why?? He said and I still see his utter amazement: Because there is going to be a war and I will be

unable to pay you. What a war never - we are safe!! No I do not think so and the deal was reversed as I proposed. So no more car, and indeed that time did not last long. A month later all hell broke loose. My life changed and things would never, even remotely be the same again, it is an entirely new chapter that I entered No news. About Ina Tamsma. And it seems right to describe that episode in a new chapter, a new Chapter for another entirely new and in nearly all respects difficult time, not only for me but for millions of people

End Chapter One



Grave of Kornelis and Trientje