

We've reached the last, and also the longest period of our lives, and will start to relate that in this chapter, but this time is inseparably bound to the end of Chapter 6, which is not entirely finished, as will become apparent shortly.

We are still in Holland where it is mid-winter and when you exit the staff entrance HM Bank the cars hiss past you and spatter over the cobbled street, their headlamps brilliant in the dark from 5pm onwards. With the collar of your raincoat turned up against the weather you think to yourself: "What a country!" Homecoming is then also something special – rooms filled with warmth and shaded lamps and then best of all: len, who is now your wife. A warm hearth; with a very special meaning. If we had stayed in Holland len would also have found employment.

The rain stopped after a while and alternated with clear, cold air and then snow lying heavily on the trees as you see on Christmas cards, shimmering white. This was not so long after I caught NHM conning me a little over my salary, and I said to len, "I suggest that I'm ill and cannot go to work but we can go for a walk in the snow, for the entire day, if we feel like it because what we see outside you've not seen often, and I never – so let NHM go to hell."

Not very polite, but neither were they, and they knew full well what I thought of them. The days were perfect and the snow lay without thaw for a week – Mam and I later recalled this frequently – quite unforgettable. The winter persisted and then I received notice from the Netherlands Bank of South Africa that I should prepare to ship out, and that len should follow as soon as possible. Here there was a little snake in the grass: there naturally had to be accommodation for len's passage.

I would take the vessel Klipfontein, which sailed from Marseilles, so the journey started from Amsterdam on a special train near the end of April. len came to the station where the train stood ready at the first platform, the one on the Haarlem side, but you couldn't just board – the access to the platform was barricaded with barbed wire on poles. Each traveller had to pass through a checkpoint to be thoroughly searched before being allowed to proceed.

I was processed and emerged on the other side and len sees me and comes over for a final hug over the barbed wire. That created a panic - I was roughly dragged by the collar back to the checkpoint and again body-searched, even my shoes were inspected, by military with helmets and fixed bayonets. The reason for all this was exchange control. This is a concept foreign to readers of the present – the control the state exercised over transactions that could lead to an outflow or an inflow of foreign currency. An emigrant-filled train like this was seen as an ideal opportunity to illegally pocket and export some Dutch guilders.

The train bypassed Haarlem and The Hague but stopped in Rotterdam, where every door was immediately guarded by a soldier with a fixed bayonet. These trains were named D-trains at the time. From there it was a long distance to Marseilles where the train went directly to the quay. I wanted to write to len and went to the purser's office to buy French postage stamps, but this was completely out of the question, he was forbidden to sell them, never mind stock them – exchange control run rampant, for a couple of postage stamps! Ridiculous.

There was a French dockworker that noticed my plight and called me over by waving his cap. I was aboard ship and he was on the quay, so he lifted his cap on a walking stick and gestured for me to put my postcard in his cap together with a florin in it, and he would send the card with the appropriate French stamp. I complied and the postcard actually found its destination. Many ships followed this route and it struck me that many a French dockworker augmented his income by providing this service, made possible by these bizarre regulations.

The passage was uneventful – there were four of us together, Rompelman, Goedknecht, Pluygers, and myself. Rompelman and Goedknecht were to continue to Johannesburg branches, and Pluygers, who was just a youngster, was stopping in Cape Town. Mam was not

impressed with the letters I sent while underway – she had expected something more substantial from France, and not just a picture card, and something from the Cape Verde islands where we didn't even put in. I had to describe the passage in detail and the only place I could do this from was Cape Town, and in the event even that was unimpressive. Mam was less disturbed than I over the helmets and fixed bayonets when I told her that part.

When we landed in Cape Town we found that we had a double room reservation at the New Appledore Hotel, a nice sounding name, but names can deceive. From outside it didn't look too bad, good enough as an interim measure we thought, until we came to the actual accommodation. There was a long hallway with 15 doors on one side, and open space on the other. The rooms had twin beds and a chest of drawers between them, the drawers required considerable force with vertical shaking to open or close which dislodged all sorts of trapped filth and accumulated debris. Disgusting! A good thing Ien wasn't there to see it.

We were there for a few days while I scanned the daily newspapers looking for something better, until I spotted an advertisement for "A large room in an old mansion in Oranjezicht". Where could that be? Very nearby, it turned out. On a frontal photo of Table Mountain Oranjezicht lies on the slope midway between the two flanking mountains. The house was in Upper-Orange Street, it had a faux-granite floor, a double entrance door, an alcove at the far end, and a small kitchenette, as well as being on a bus route. It was furnished and better than anything I'd seen in Cape Town and I took it immediately.

I told Pluygers we were going to move – I'd already formulated a plan whereby Pluygers could stay with me until Ien arrived, after which he would go, though I didn't tell him that part yet. He was only 23 so I didn't feel too unethical about doing that since he needed just a single room somewhere, and I congratulated myself on the good luck of finding the place before someone else did.

Conditions at the bank were another concern, so much so that I initially thought I'd made a big mistake coming here, since there was no way back. The bank operated in rented premises in an old building that was far too small for its needs. The route to the toilet was out of the back door and into the lift-well! Everything was very primitive, but thankfully I was not totally deterred by the first impression. I decided to find out how many accounts the bank had and was pleasantly surprised. Also there were many Jewish clients, which gave me confidence because I didn't see them dealing with a dodgy institution.

The admin methods were also quite strange and on closer inspection very simple. Machines were used only for correspondence – all accounting was done by hand and attached to a bill for example, quite idiotic. For some time it had been the bank's intention to have their own building since Cape Town was the 'Mother City', and not to have your own building makes you an outsider. Compared to its competitors the Netherlands bank was but a tiny operation.

And now Mam appears on the scene. For continuity I'll tell about how Mam arrived in South Africa a little later.

Mam was always very active in the house and this resumed immediately. Prior to her arrival I'd always dined in a little restaurant 'The Lime Tree' which was cheap, but Mam put an end to that instantly. We bought a 2-plate cooker and set it on a table in the kitchenette, and Mam started cooking meals.

The room was furnished which meant we would never acquire anything of our own except that Mam discovered in-house auction sales, and one of her first purchases was a mattress, which Mam had me fetch when I arrived home one day. The mattress had a large stain on it and about halfway home I said to Mam "Stand still a second so we can turn the mattress to hide the stain from passersby" and Mam says "Ag nobody knows us here", but we turned the mattress just the same.

And so we began accumulating and we agreed with Mrs Damstra, the owner of the large house, that the rent would remain unchanged, because if we carried on like this we wouldn't need her furniture any longer, and we had rented the room as fully furnished.

So far I've been relating how I saw things that I remember; later on I'll try to include how Mam experienced them as well, though this will be separately as I have a tendency to dominate the narrative, then I'll relate how Mam came to South Africa.

This situation did not endure for long. The big house on Upper-Orange Street was built against a steep incline so that there were two levels at the front of the building but only one at the rear. The entrance for the lower level flat was in the centre of the facade and the entrance for the upper level exactly above it, with steps leading down to either side, like a small pyramid.

This area that Mam browsed for auction sales was ideal because there were sales aplenty in the Montrose Avenue neighbourhood. One of the reasons for the many auction sales was that although South African territory had not been involved in the war, the country was part of the British Empire and had sent a large army north, as well producing materiel and ammunition.

This was a well-to-do area and residents were quick to replace pre-war possessions with new goods and found it convenient to sell the old stuff from their homes rather than lug it down to a sales floor somewhere. Hence our room quickly filled with all these acquisitions, albeit all second-hand – all Len's doing.

The residents of the downstairs flat, a young couple with a little daughter that we befriended, moved to a nearby house so their flat became available. Mrs Damstra seemed to like letting to Hollanders and was happy for us to move in there after we'd been in the room for five or six months, which in itself was a luxury for newly arrived immigrants. Len had brought a chest containing all of our meagre possessions from Holland.

Before long we noticed a change of attitude in Hilversum, and possibly also in Bussum, that indicated a realisation that we weren't coming back. Pa Tamsma had somehow got the idea in his head that we'd only be here for a year or so – a silly idea since who would pay to send his family abroad for such a short time?

So the tone of the letters changed: "When are you planning to return?" There was one family member who used the term 'nightmare', and there was a rich uncle (isn't there always in such stories?) who wanted to give his sister a return ticket to South Africa to assuage the pain she was suffering, and to see how we were coping.

Now in the context of finding us a home this didn't fit at all, so we let it simmer on the back burner – all that we had was a one-bedroom flat, well-equipped but with only one bedroom, within just a few months? That was incredible, and definitely not my doing – purely good luck that we should find it, as we found everything without help from friends or family, be it jobs, houses or cars.

Interwoven into this is another story: after the first six months we started hearing mutterings from Holland about how bad it was that Len was gone. I thought that would reduce with time but it did not. And the Len became pregnant, which meant in the first place no more lugging auction purchases home (I still see her back, since she always led the way, with her curly brown hair tied at the neck with a ribbon, and her dark blue blazer), which was in any case not necessary since we had everything we needed, other than what the pregnancy occasioned.

Len reported this to Holland which caused a flurry of excitement, but soon there was a letter from Pa Tamsma in which he was forced to report something really nasty. He'd been to a fortune-teller who told him that while all indications were that Len was expecting a baby, this was in fact not so. Once in so many cases this went awry and instead of a baby a monster was delivered, and this was definitely one of those instances.

How did the seer know this? Pa Tamsma had given the seer a photo of Len on the side of the road to Loosdrecht cutting flowers, and he had touched his finger to this photo and had felt the monster inside her. What a calamity! Who believes such rubbish? But poor Len didn't know what to believe so chose to just try to ignore it – which didn't come easily. Len had, for whatever reason, a lifelong aversion to doctors and to get her to one in Cape Town was impossible.

Just when there seems to be no way forward, one presents itself. But this time Pa Tamsma over-reached himself: the next letter said that he had been back to the fortune-teller who recommended that Len should return with all haste because the operation was now urgent and could only be performed in Holland by a member of the cult – no other was qualified.

This was a huge problem with no quick solution – until the following day a woman visits the inquiries counter at the bank. I assist the woman, who is Dutch, with her business and in conversation tell her how new we are to the country. She tells me that she and her husband who is a builder have been here since well before the war. I then tell her that what I desperately need is a Dutch doctor, mature enough to engender confidence. She tells me she knows just the man I need, though he's a way out of town in Rondebosch, and she'll take Mam there herself. Though she doesn't yet know the reason for the consultation, and afterwards even takes Mam for coffee,

When Mam tells the doctor the story he holds her by the shoulders and tells her she's carrying a perfectly healthy and normal baby, and that she herself is also completely well. He also tells her these seers and fortune-tellers are everywhere and her father gave one of the credence surprised and disappointed him greatly. He told her how these frauds will predict a certain gender for the foetus and then write the other gender in a notebook. Once the baby is born and the prediction seen to be correct, all is well; however if the prediction proves false the seer will point to the note made earlier and claim the mother's recollection is false, because here it is written down, look at the date! "That your father listens to such people! He should know better".

So circumstances conspired to solve that problem for us, but left Pa Tamsma without a means to retrieve his daughter. A few months later Annemiek was born, but my opinion of Pa Tamsma, so good while Mam and I were still in Holland, was drastically changed, and remained drastically changed henceforth. A father that causes his own pregnant daughter such anguish for his own selfish, egotistical reasons? What a scoundrel! And Len's mother never called a halt to the iniquity either.

Two such horrible people I've never met or heard of before or since – apart from the behaviour being disgraceful it was also directly at odds with how he helped his daughter get to South Africa in the first place, which is something I'll cover shortly, since she just magically appeared here in the narrative above.

Well, that worked out remarkably well, we were living in the upstairs room while the Horn's who occupied the downstairs flat moved out and we could take over the flat once it became available. We now had a bathroom, a kitchenette, and another very small room – just like that! This was shortly before Annemiek was born – her crib stood in the corner of the bedroom as you entered.

Quite understandably 'Overseas' wanted to see Annemiek, our firstborn. Horn had an 8mm cine camera and took 8mm monochrome movies (colour film was not yet available in SA though it was in America). That gave me the idea to also find a cine camera so that we could send the occasional film to Holland, but in South Africa such luxury goods were hard to find. One day walking past a chemist's shop I saw such a camera in the window, and I bought it immediately – it cost 60 pounds, a huge amount of money, and was a bare, simple thing without anything resembling a zoom lens, and required frequent winding of its drive spring. If you compare that camera to the video cameras of today with battery-driven motors and zoom lenses, and the portion of your salary needed to buy them you appreciated how much the prices today are a tiny fraction of what they were then. We took many films over the years, and sent them over. Now in

2003 I'm looking at boxes of them. We took the first 50ft film in Oranjezicht just before we moved, and sent it to Holland where it was shown to a gathering of the family.

The van As family had made a proposal to len: They had bought a house in Plumstead but van As was a builder and had landed a big project in South West Africa, they had two teenage daughters at school in Cape Town who they didn't want to move. We could live in the house free of charge in exchange for looking after the two girls. The idea appealed to len, and we moved to Plumstead, a suburb of Cape Town on the railway line to Simon's Town.

For a while all went well but then certain issues arose with these girls that I found quite intolerable. They were unhappy with Mam's cooking and generally felt free to yell out at Mam whatever entered their heads. Totally unacceptable. I asked the bank for finance and bought a house in Plumstead from distressed builders for 2,225 pounds,

By now Mam was expecting her second baby, and that became Fijko Evert, born on the 4th November 1949, by which time we were already in Plumstead, so it took the two years from end 1947 to November 1949 to acquire permanent housing. Fyk was born in the Booth Memorial Hospital in Upper Orange Street, while Annemiek stayed a few days with the Horn – she was born in the Provincial Hospital in Cape Town district 6.

Once established in our own house len's mother could come over for a visit, though len established somewhat more slowly than I. The house was strangely designed – there were two large bedrooms and a single smaller one, a fairly modern kitchen, and a dining room/lounge combination that was too small. In Cape Town it was customary to buy a house without an electric stove, so we started with a paraffin stove with three burners, which worked well but as long as you remembered to stock up on paraffin and didn't mind the smell.

The community generated its own electricity and was thus not reliant on Eskom for energy. They were eager to sell appliances in their own shop and provided us with a 3-plate electric stove with oven for 61 pounds, which could be paid on an instalment plan.

Thinking about it now, I recall that the local community power station was not up to matching the expansion of Cape Town and supplementary power was required from Eskom who built South Africa's first and only nuclear power station there because of the great distance to the nearest coal field.

Cape Town works at a subdued pace when compared to Johannesburg, so my advancement at work was gradual, though not at home. Fijko was born on 4th November 1949 and Saskia followed on 6th July 1952, which virtually matched the period we lived in Plumstead, during which time many other things happened. That house, in line with the custom of the time was fitted with a parquet floor that had been machine sanded but never polished. len and I undertook this task which proved arduous until we bought a polishing machine with rotating brushes to do the work.

The entire Cape Flats from table Mountain to the rising terrain at Strand is composed of beach sand, and so it was with Evremond Road as well, which means nothing grows there readily. Mam and I regularly travelled to neighbouring Wynberg where there was a cinema, or we'd take the train to the beach at St. James or in the other direction to Claremont Park which Mam loved. How did we enjoy such freedom with two babies at home? Just down the road lived the Boumans, aptly named since he was a builder before taking his pension. They were childless and particularly Mrs Bouman loved looking after our children, by day and evenings as well, giving len the opportunity to leave the house. They liked it so much they'd encourage us to go to the movies more often.

Our first steps in Cape Town were a very carefree period for us, though we weren't aware of it at the time. Despite baby Annemiek, joined a little later by Fijko, we could visit cinemas occasionally; we could spend Sundays and holidays at the beach, and quite often even attend concerts in the City Hall. We looked up Elco de Vries who came out to SA with me on the

Klipfontein and settled near Somerset West where he restored valuable items of antique furniture derived from surrounding farms where these had been neglected.

Mam also enjoyed herself there but we didn't really appreciate how much. Also neither of her parents paid her any attention, and my mother absolutely none at all; we'd take a bus or the train to town and then to Sea Point for walks on the promenade, and friends would often take us by car to Cape Point, southward on the west side of the peninsula and then northward on the False Bay side. The Atlantic side particularly is a natural scenic wonder.

On several occasions we climbed Table Mountain; this contributed to the fine time we had at the very start of our career in Cape Town, which is scenically very special. Various friends, particularly the Horns took us sightseeing in their car – this was the family from whom we took over first the single room and then later the flat in Oranjezicht.

Cape Town and actually all of South Africa was a rather backward part of the British Empire – there was little manufacture and the road network totally inadequate for serving the slowly growing economy. The way the empire worked was the colonies and dominions were to supply raw materials to the mother country where they were then used in manufacture. It was quite normal to find butter from New Zealand on sale in England, with only shortages being made up from Denmark or even the Netherlands. The same applied to mining – machinery was imported from England and minerals were exported without beneficiation. The system worked for a time but had become unworkable in the post-war era.

On arrival in Cape Town we found the country to be very old-fashioned, particularly Cape Town itself, with its typically English restaurants and general infrastructure. This especially irked the Afrikaner population who felt left behind and disadvantaged, which they often were, but their biggest obstacle was their general philosophy derived mostly from their church, which contributed to their inflexibility and ultimate demise of their power.

Rigidity was the heart of their problem – the inability to see the impossibility of their dream, though we knew nothing of this at the time, we were intent on starting a family, working towards advancement, and enjoying some recreation. All the normal pursuits in other words, and in this we were quite successful. On the standard travel agent frontal photo of Table Mountain you'll see a thin white line about halfway up – the Bridal Path it's called, a famous hiking trail, and we often on it.

Where we, or rather I, went wrong was to assume that I had lost too much career time in the war, that time now had to be caught up. This was in fact not the case. Let me explain: the Accountant in Amsterdam, who was a real courtly gentleman, but in retrospect, when I consider what he actually did, it was not very much – more or less the lowly position of a sub-accountant in our office. I naturally started at the lowest level but rose quite quickly. What was pleasing in Cape Town was the relaxed attitude to work – not quite manhana, but not too pressured either.

Now I must first tell about Mam before we get to the birth of Saskia shortly before we moved to Pretoria, so the calendar moves from 1952 back to 1947.

After I left Mam returned to living at Elzenlaan, in our room in the attic. The bank had said 'as soon as possible, but not longer than three months after the departure of her husband shall Mrs van der Molen follow, assuming adequate housing can be found', But there was intense demand for passages out of Holland, and because of exchange control departures through England were not possible.

Mam's father had a one cubic metre chest made since this was the free cargo volume allowed per passenger, and it was filled with sundry household items, amongst others a little chair that we still have, and two long tables with tops made from composite board and three rods below, and green woollen blankets from ter Haar. It was kept packed as far as possible so as to be

ready to go at short notice, but there was a heavy demand for ocean passages by emigrants and no vacancy could be found for Mam.

Then towards the end of August the idea of flying to South Africa was born, which was of course more expensive, but Pa Tamsma offered to chip in the difference between the ship and KLM fare, which made this option possible. But airline seats were also scarce due to the high demand from emigrants, so Mam elected to go on stand-by for a cancellation, and I would receive a telegram when she was underway, though the destination would be Johannesburg, where she spent a night with Goedknecht (since deceased), and then boarded an onward rail connection to Cape Town.

We took a taxi to our lodgings where I strutted around like a weaverbird proudly demonstrating his nest, but Mam said nothing, which I still had to learn did not necessarily indicate disapproval. The chest arrived later by sea and I expected to have to go and get it cleared through Customs, a complicated and irksome procedure. I asked the Accountant for time off to visit the harbour, "What for?" he asked, and I explained the problem. "You don't want to do that", he replied, "Hang on", he phones somebody and starts to talk about golf and general chit-chat, and I wonder what's going on till he says "We've got this newcomer from Holland and he has a chest at the harbour, clear that for him please", and he gives my address. That evening Mam's chest is standing in front of our door waiting for us. The Accountant's name was Ben van Lingen, a live wire who had a hard life and died young.

The next day Mam began unpacking, storing, and setting out furniture, after which a difficult time started for Mam – getting through the day alone with nothing to do other than walk around the city, which soon became boring. The secret of successful immigration is that goes well right from the start, which it did, but I made the mistake of not getting Mam employed in a furniture or art shop. This would have been difficult since Mam spoke little English and no Afrikaans (and never learned the latter in her life), and where were these kind of shops?

That is the sad part of writing about recollections – why did I not encourage Mam to do this? Also to let her discover that we now lived in a country with a strange language – was I concerned that she might be disappointed in the immigration? You remember a lot, but not everything.

Below is Mam's parent's house in Hilversum. Our room was behind the two little roof windows on the left.

END

