



### No 8 My Reminiscences

Emigrating is not easy, though for some it is harder than others, either because of the emigrant's personality, the reason for the emigration, or the migrant's thirst for adventure. The most powerful impetus for emigrating is always economic necessity, and that's what drove us forward. It's a difficult undertaking – I well remember move to Surabaya, and then later to South Africa; you'd think it gets easier with practice, but in that case two moves is insufficient to qualify as practice. Also it's one thing to go off on your own initiative and another to be sent by your employer or your government.

Mam always said that if you do have to emigrate then South Africa is an OK country to emigrate to, which does not imply that Mam escaped emigration trauma – that pain would be very difficult to be spared, and now I ask myself if I did everything I could to ease her homesickness, a question I cannot answer. It is true though that from the start Mam was determined to fully acclimatise to her new home, though sadly it was very difficult for her and made worse by opposition coming from Holland, opposition to our settling here which made me most resentful.

We're stepping back a few years now to before the time we moved to Plumstead, Mam had seen an advertisement for a property development across Table Bay from Cape Town by a developer named Porterfield Estates, and suggested that we look at buying early while there was still a wide choice of stands available. We bought a stand with a beautiful sea view and the Mountain in the background for 100 pounds if I remember correctly. There were as yet no roads or services installed and I was a little worried about how long this project was likely to take. My salary at the time was 37 pounds per month if I remember it right. I have a photo of Mam, pregnant with Annemiek, on that stand still rough and natural.

Subsequently the offer of a free house in Plumstead where we could stay while our finances recovered, though that was at the cost of a pair of teenaged brats that quickly became unacceptable, as detailed in the previous chapter.

In the meantime I'd made some progress towards paying for the stand, but the stress of those payments as well as housekeeping expenses were hammering my bank account, which often went into the red as a result. This drew the attention of the Accountant, Ben van Lingen, and I explained my debt to Porterfield Estates with the justification that you have to live somewhere! So I did this!

Van Lingen squints at me, grabs his telephone and asks his secretary to dial a certain person. "No, no, stay here", he says and talks the usual small-talk to the other party. After a time he says "You sold a stand to a young Hollander in my office name of.....What must he do with it? When can he use it? Cancel it man. And repay him his money – and also the interest". Shu, the next day I had my money back, though not the interest – that would have been asking too much. That got me thinking – how does this van Lingen manage all this? First he works his magic on our shipping chest, and now this.

He undoubtedly took a liking to me, it wasn't because of him that I transferred out of Cape Town, and all the account holders that he wrung favours out of were simply overdrawn beyond their credit limit, and Ben took advantage with lots of social circumlocution until – bam, the gunshot! The property developer was a subsidiary of a large fruit packing enterprise that would never notice the 100 pounds, and the chest was delivered courtesy of a shipping company who did nothing but deliver freight all day long and it cost them virtually nothing.

However this method of calling in favours would be frowned upon in Holland as being tantamount to bribery and in fact has become less prevalent here as well. At that time if the shipping company had balked at doing van Lingen's bidding the response would have been "What? How dare you? The next cheque you write that takes you over your credit limit gets returned with 'RD' (Refer to Drawer) in red ink!" This would cause the drawer of the cheque immense reputational damage.

The above scenario of course is all implied, and would in reality never take place. An important fashion client of Fox Street branch implored me to send Mam over for some special treatment, but we all knew what the limits to acceptable behaviour were and knew we'd cross them only once.

Mam once went to Holland alone, taking only tiny Ireen along, on Trek Airways, and I phoned a fashion factory. "But of course, it will be our pleasure." And refusing such an offer would cause offense. In this case the manager phoned to say Mam only bought three dresses, these factories have showrooms and sales people that sell at wholesale prices - Mam was quite embarrassed, though she's never had clothes of such quality before. I relate this only to show how uncomplicated business was back then – now it may be different.

Such a trip with Trek Airways was an interesting adventure – the first fuel stop was in Kampala, then Wadi Halfa, Malta and was the destination Luxembourg because Trek was not an IATA carrier. From Luxembourg they flew on to Brussels and then Rotterdam. Fyk was unhappy with the desserts they I prepared and Annemiek said that the porridge the maid cooked had a strange taste.

There was a problem when Annemiek became ill, these things always happen at the worst possible time, with something quite serious – Mam naturally wanted to know more, but nobody else over there showed any interest in Annemiek's condition, which she had been hiding due to the difficult situation. The only reaction from the family over there was harsh criticism of my using Annemiek's illness to spoil Mam's holiday with concerns about her family at home. We all recovered, including Annemiek who was suffering from a quite serious bladder infection, and Mam and I resolved after her return that we would never interfere to this extent in their private lives – a promise that we kept. Annemiek recovered and I no longer had to leave the office to check on things at home, which was a relief. Annemiek was given a powerful antibiotic by our German doctor Dr Lohmann.

Years later Oma Molen, as the children called her would come for a visit, naturally on a date she alone had decided upon, which coincided with the time we were building a swimming pool as well as being the hottest time of year, and a time it was impossible for me to take leave, all of which she

was aware of but expected us to adapt to her requirements. That visit was very unsuccessful which was tragic because it could have been so much better. From Holland there was never the support that I needed, especially early on.

For now we're still in Cape Town and our finances are looking healthier. A rewarding climbing outing was Table Mountain on the right hand side if you look at the travel agent photo – the Platteklip Gorge, which Mam and I once climbed. Table Mountain looks serene in pictures but it can be very dangerous – the rocks have been weathering for millions of years and have become friable at the surface, you have to test every outcrop before you put weight on it. Evidence of rock falls is everywhere.

You do it for the pleasure of climbing, since the view from inside the gorge becomes more constrained the higher you get. The summit is a lot less flat than it looks to be from a distance – you could make a nice garden up there if you carried the soil up. There is the phenomenon of the cloud cover which evaporates and clears as the descending air warms once it has cleared the mountain top – inside the cloud it is freezing cold, shu! With good weather you can cross the entire mountain and descend to Rondebosch by way of the beautiful Kirstenbosch botanical gardens.

John Veenendaal was a colleague who was engaged to a girl working at the bank whose father ran a small shop in Parrow, a town north of Cape Town on the railway to the North. The father lived in a corrugated iron house without electricity where we had dinner a few times by the light of oil lamps, which Mam found enchanting, and the sound of the wind generator needed to keep the fridge working. Mam found living like this a lot more interesting than a suburban house in Plumstead, I think, but I wouldn't live there at any price. Even to road was of loose sand.

Mam was attracted to a house with roof run-off tank, and in that respect we were badly matched, possibly in other ways as well. For Mam a career and advancement did not carry such a high priority, though she never articulated that in so many words, she tolerated me for 55 years and at the end, in that hospital bed asked no, implored me to take her home to her bed so I could take care of her until she died – a desperately sad job, but I did it for a long time.

Who could have anticipated that in Plumstead where we were so happy? I often said to Mam that we, you and I, have endured such misery that if there's any justice then we've done our bit. But it doesn't work that way, especially not for Mam who went through twelve years of the most awful illnesses between periods of reprieve. It's a blessing that you cannot see into the future. And then there was more than a year of total paralysis in her own bed from a stroke that made her dependant on the most intense nursing until her life came to its end.

But we were still in Cape Town where, before the war a Dutch enterprise, the 'Hollandse Aanneming' (Dutch Acceptances) had considerably enlarged the harbour, for which purpose the company imported a large workforce amongst whom were many adherents of the Hervormde Kerk which established a congregation in Cape Town to serve them. (The Gereformeerde Kerk and Hervormde Kerk were the two main arms of Dutch Protestantism resulting from a schism in 1834. Ed). The dominie was a certain Ds Brandt. By the time we arrived in Cape Town the entire workforce had been repatriated, leaving just a tiny local community. The church was named the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk van Zuid Afrika.

We knew nothing about church politics but we visited the church and we found Ds Brandt to be an excellent fellow - from his speech you could barely detect that he was an Afrikaner. His wife was Swede. That tiny congregation couldn't support a preacher that like to live large in Rondebosch, so Ds Brandt moonlighted as an estate agent. It was a curious setup: services were held in a smallish hall hired for the occasion from the YMCA.

I thought this dominie would play a role in our transfer out of Cape Town, should that happen, because we'd then have to sell the house, which is better done by oneself or, at worst, by a dominie, who might charge less than the usual commission. A strange situation.

We knew nothing about South African churches and, other than that there we weren't really interested. At the time we were very busy and couldn't be bothered, though this changed later in Pretoria. Annemiek, Fijko and Saskia were baptised by Ds Brandt, of which there are pictures somewhere.

Once we were firmly established in our own house in Plumstead we were in a position to invite Mam's mother over for a visit – we had the space, though the house was not that big, and we had the means to take Oma Rie on some sightseeing trips. It was wonderful for Len, and myself as well, Mam's mother was less opinionated and critical than many Hollanders particularly Oma Cor, as she liked to be called, and she was especially good with the children. On one of the 8mm cine films you see Oma Rie with Annemiek and Fijko, who was still very small, with knitted pants pulled right up under his armpits, something Fyk was not thrilled with when he saw this many years later.

In Cape Town everything moves a little slower, so also at New Year. The customary single New Year's Day holiday is extended to two days in Cape Town, and on the second day the Cape Coloureds celebrate with a carnival through the street of the city. At our first New Year Mam and I went to see this carnival and were bitterly disappointed, it was completely without charm, Mam was disgusted ("What a horrible country"); admittedly it's easier to get along with the Black population than the Coloureds. In the middle of the city there is a large park named Gardens, which is where the original gardens of the East India Company were laid out to provision passing ships, and this provides the city with a history that Johannesburg lacks.

There is not much more of interest to relate about Cape Town. Saskia was also born in the Booth Memorial Hospital and, as I remember it, was the easiest baby of them all. This was shortly before we left for Pretoria (I had hoped for Johannesburg). We'd been given a month's notice which is not much if you have to sell a house, and might set you at a disadvantage if it becomes known that you're a forced seller. I was determined to make sufficient profit on the sale of the house to enable me to buy a car once we reached Pretoria.

This was in 1953. (Mam, who I could always call upon to confirm a date is no longer here.) We engaged some agents in Wynberg, which is the next stop on the railway to Cape Town, and also did our best to find a direct buyer, without holding out too much hope of success. The agents, as I remember, were not very active and I was some time before the first prospect came to see the house. The potential buyers were often investors seeking an impossible bargain, and I was seeing the car deal going up in smoke.

Then I heard that a whaling company Willem Barentz planned to open a small office in Cape Town and needed housing for their employees. I immediately sought out the responsible person and offered him our house for 3200 pounds, a ridiculous price, but I was expecting to be beaten down, which I was. After much hemming and hawing I asked him, "Do you want it or not?" "Yes but it needs this that and the other in upgrades and repairs," a wall had to be re-plastered etc etc.

This was all by telephone from the bank, and then I had a inspiration and told him, "Sir, this house is five years old, if you pay me you have a house in your name that you can do with whatever you want – just pay me the 2950 pounds." There was a short silence and then he said, "OK then let's do it", which was music to my ears – not only the house sold before our departure, but a car in the bag as well.

Accommodation in Pretoria was arranged already – an older man in the Standard Bank had bought a house in Waterkloof (a posh area it turned out) for his retirement and was letting it in the meantime. The current tenant's departure was imminent, leaving us with only two days to spend in a hotel while waiting for the house to become vacant. In the end this transfer, the most complicated as far) was a piece of cake, which means the subsequent ones were even easier.

Further along Evremond Street live a Coloured family of which the head was taxi driver, and I arranged with this neighbour that he would take us to town on a certain afternoon and deposit us at a hotel with his large car. The same morning the removal company had loaded and taken away all

our household goods with the exception of a carry-cot standing in the far corner of a bedroom and containing a contented and quiet Saskia, and a suitcase filled with baby paraphernalia. The following morning we were due to board the train to Pretoria.

I have one amusing anecdote over our move to Pretoria. When I was told in Cape Town that I would be transferred to Pretoria the sun-manager called me over: "Keesie", he says (the Afrikaners often called me that – my initials KC pronounced the English way), "Now you're going to Pretoria and you'll spend the first night in a hotel. The next day you'll ask where the Netherlands Bank is and nobody will know, so you mustn't ask that. Just ask where the public toilet is on Church Square – everyone knows that, and the bank is right behind it."

And that's exactly what came about. Nobody in Pretoria had ever heard of us, and that was the bank's headquarters with a branch office! And that grew to Nedcor Bank, asset-wise the largest in the country - there are many subsidiaries but Nedcor is the umbrella body for the group. When I asked people on the street where the Netherlands Bank was, indeed nobody had ever heard of it. Granted that we had a pretty insignificant CEO, and an equally insignificant Branch Manager, but there's no denying they were located behind a pissoir. The manager took an instant dislike of me and I soon transferred to Johannesburg Main Office.

The following day we go the station and board the train, just the two of us in a compartment reserved for us. The train was long but most carriages were very old, though quite comfortable, with a shower on board. Everything was quite impressive, other than the speed which was a dismal 50km/h and made the entire journey 30 hours long. Dated it might have been but there were six beds, three per side, with sheets blankets and pillows; nevertheless you arrive a bit shattered. From there into a hotel for a few days, much better than what I'd experienced in Cape Town but very frustrating for Mam who could not unpack and was stuck the whole day with the children.

Very soon we moved into the house that was meant for us, the house of the Standard Banker, which was generously proportioned but of out-dated design – it had only one garage! The master bedroom opened onto a large veranda enclosed with mosquito netting where the beds were located – the so-called sleeping stoop that Pretorians waxed lyrical over because of the welcome relief it offered on hot summer nights.

Consequently the large bedroom was entirely empty since the beds were outside. We were not overly impressed by it, but we did find that Waterkloof was a posh, upmarket area. The house stood on a very large stand which impressed me not at all since I had no intention of maintaining such a big garden



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