

Preserving Memories

A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

CATHERINA VAN DER LINDEN

“AUSTRALIA HAS TAUGHT ME TO WORK AND APPRECIATE THINGS BETTER”.

From horse drawn cart to motor cars, and kerosene to electricity, Catherina, born before the First World War, and living through the atrocities of the Second World War in the Netherlands, has now also lived through two pandemics.

She came with her husband and four children to Australia in the late 1950s, staying in Immigration Centres (Migrant Hostels) before settling in Glenelg and later near Aldgate.

At 110, as the oldest living person in Australia, Catherina has immaculate manners a keen dress sense, a determined spirit and an undertaking to keep active.

Catherina shares some of her long lifetime of memories.



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Catharina Adriana van Meegen was born on 26 August 1912 in Amersfoort.

There were five in our family in total, though one of the baby girls did not survive long. For many years, we thought there was only four of us: three girls, one boy.

1. Catharina Maria Cornelia
(16 Jun 1904, Breda - 25 July 1904, Breda)
2. Maria Catharina Cornelia (Riet)
(9 Feb 1906, Breda - 6 May 1983)
married 19 December 1929,
Eduard Josephus van Latum
Children: Lia, Sanny
3. Hendrikus Johannes (Henk)
(10 Dec 1907, Breda - late 1970s, Nijmegen)
4. **Catharina Adriana (Toos/Toosje)**
(26 August 1912, Amersfoort -)
married 23 August 1940,
Johannes Wouterus van der Linden
(20 July 1909, Oisterwijk - 16 February 1980, Aldgate)
5. Alberdina Johanna Maria (Tinie)
(1915 (unconfirmed due to lack of records kept WW1) - 25 February 1984)
married Johannes Fransiscus Verpoort (1911 - 30 Mar 1997)
Children: Gemma, Lia



Younger sister Tinie and Catherina, circa 1920

My Father – Gradus van Meegen (1876-1954)

My father Gradus Lambertus van Meegen was a tailor and made patterns for clothes. Around 1917 when I was about four or five years old, my father had stomach ulcers, he was very ill. He was at home for at least half of the year and was visited by the doctor every day, free of charge as we had little money. He had a reasonably rich mother and she supported us in those days.

I was about seven years of age when we went to see my mother's mother, and I think she was blind if I remember correctly. She lived in an old folk's home. My father's mother was quite a different type. She was a real old lady - absolute old lady - and she lived in the middle of the city with her two sons. They had a business there, I remember that. I've never seen any grandfather - never met one.



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My Mother - Cornelia Maria née Verstallen (1878-1946)

My mother Cornelia was quite shy. She was a skilled dressmaker and made her children's clothing. She was very young when she learnt the craft.

When she was 12 years old and her elder sister was around 17, they worked day and night to make black funeral clothes for a whole family.



Gerardus, Cornelia, Riet and Henk, 1908

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My Childhood

I was, as a young girl, very shy. I was often an unhappy child. I remember my brother said, "Gee, she cries all the time!"

My elder sister was six years older and went to college to become a teacher.

Toos always cared for my mother, her younger sister. My mother had pneumonia and they walked together under a black cape to protect her from the cold winds. **Gemma Verpoort (niece)**

We had very little money and with my father being sick we lived on bread and milk. The bread was supplied by my uncle, Ome Piet, my mother's brother, Petrus Johannes, who was a baker.

Home

Around 1922 we moved to the city of Nijmegen where my paternal grandmother lived. It was fairly close to the railways. I could always hear the trains going past.

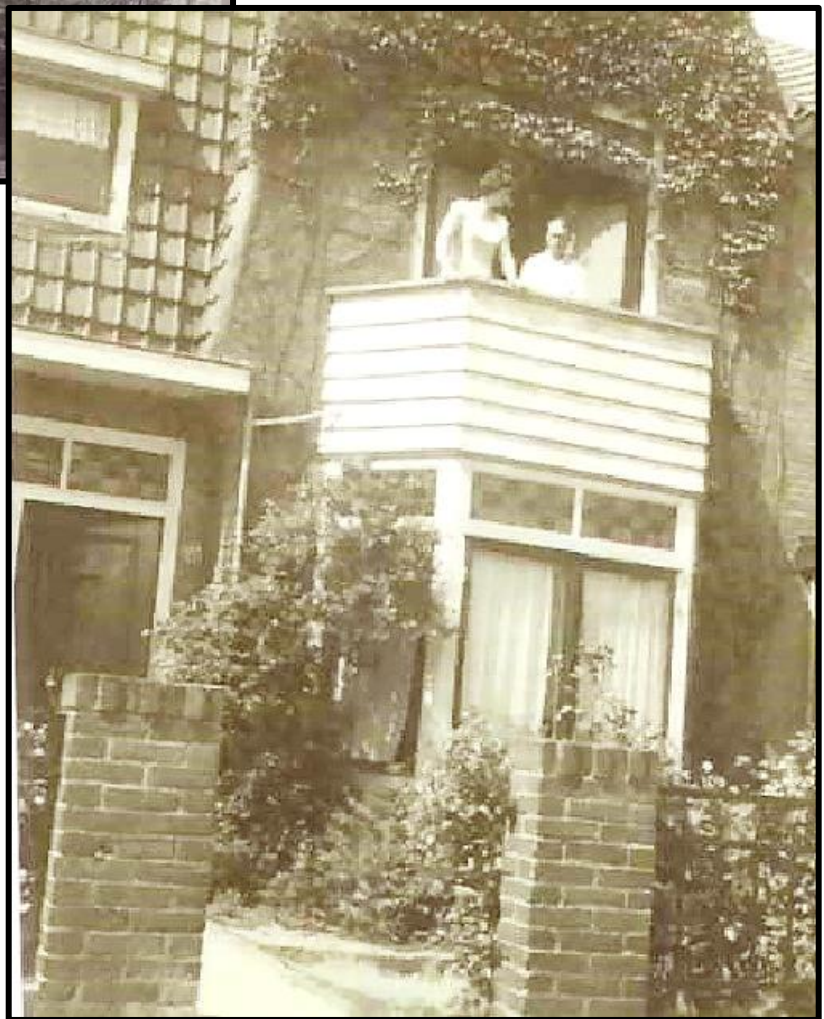


The first house I remember in Nijmegen had a garden in front and the back. I enjoyed having a garden as I liked nature and flowers. There were about five or six rooms with a family room, a kitchen and 3 bedrooms. My brother slept in a separate room and the girls slept in one room, in different beds.

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Around 1926 after grandmother died, the family inherited money and bought a bigger two storey house with six rooms, and an attic, and all new furniture. It was really a very beautiful home.



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Life at home

I remember as a child, it was so cold. The homes had no central heating so on cold nights my father would put a stone Bols bottle in the bed, full of hot water. These were bottles that would have held gin. They would be filled with hot water, corked, and covered with a sock. My father was very thoughtful for his little girls so that they didn't suffer from cold.

When I was a very small child I was taken by another bigger girl to a shop, and she told me that I had to take some of the sweets. They were in a big glass box in front, and I had to take some. I took some.

Apparently, it was stealing, but I didn't realise it. A lady from the shop came to my place and I got a big lecture from my parents at that stage. They didn't hit me, that was just not done in my home, never ever.



[ebay.com.au]

After the lecture my father took me to the park where there was a big peacock that spread out his feathers, and it was an absolutely beautiful afternoon. This was better than punishment and I have never ever done anything like that again. They told me that it wasn't right to do things like that.

Toos, do you remember behind the shed was a zinc bath, a washboard and a mangle? That was the way of washing. You had a maid in the house, who was very much appreciated and indiscriminately part of the family. (Adrienne)

I remember Toos was very good at sewing, cooking and winding people around her little finger. She was very much like her mother both in her appearance and character. Her mother was very loving and tolerant, and quite indulgent. Both parents were very hard working. When Riet and Toos wished to avoid being overheard they spoke to each other in French. (Lia Siemens)

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Religion and social life

My parents went to church regularly and my husband's family were very devoted Catholics who went to church twice on Sunday.

We didn't mix with neighbours. My parent's brothers and sisters lived in the same city, so they came round most of the time. They came to our house once a fortnight and played cards.

Religion and politics were hardly mentioned in our house.

School

Children began school at the age of six, and after seven years of primary school, would go to high school or college. Everyone went to primary school. High school fees were based on family income.

I went to a Catholic primary school and was taught religion. At about four o'clock, after school, I would play with friends in the street, games like hopscotch or skipping. When I got home, we would wash, eat dinner and then go to bed.

I went to high school for three years, learning French, German and English was compulsory; as was Dutch, arithmetic, physics, chemistry, geography and history. Latin and Greek were offered, but I did not study those languages. I really loved school - that was a haven for me. I cried my eyeballs when I couldn't go any further, I remember that.

I did go to special craft lessons which taught sewing, crocheting and knitting. I didn't have patience for embroidery.

Each night I would spend about two and a half hours doing homework.

I was very protective of my sister and would often look out for her at school.

School holidays were about four or five weeks in August, two weeks at Easter and two weeks at Christmas, that was all.

At the end of high school there was an exam to get a diploma. I wanted to study further to become a teacher like my eldest sister, Riet. Jobs for teachers were scarce so my sister had to work in an office for two or three years. She also married soon after finishing her studies.

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For my parents, the expense of study without job prospects meant that it was more sensible for me to go to a business school to learn typing. Schooling was important to my father; he would have liked for us all to continue if their financial situation was better.



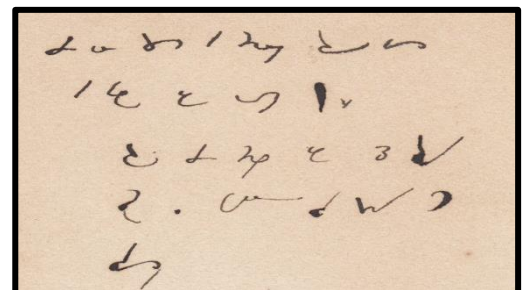
Teenaged Catherina, with her father, 1920s

After School

I went to business school and learnt typing.

After three weeks of learning stenography, I found that it took too much concentration and I only continued with typing. All those hooks and everything... I didn't like them.

When I was 16, I found work in an office.



[Dutch Shorthand reddit.com/r/shorthand]

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Social life

I didn't go out until about twenty-one. I never went out dancing or anything like that - never ever. I went with my sister to the library. We read all the time at night. There was no television. We had radio - that was something special.

I went to a tennis club when I was about sixteen or seventeen, and there were of course young men there, but I never went out with them.

Toos loved going out and playing tennis, going to a film or a restaurant. She wore make up and would never step outside without lipstick! She had great charm, perseverance, tenacity, but was quite yielding when necessary. **Lia Siemens**



Catherina ice skating with a friend, circa 1928



Catherina, circa 1932

She was the best Aunt there was. Toos was about 19 years old and was mad about playing tennis. I can see her in the kitchen, washing her hair in the basin and after that rolling her hair in curlers. Then put on her best skirt that her father had made. She was beautiful and she knew it, but used it in the most amiable manner.

Suzan (Sannie) Overdrop (niece)

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In 1933, a friend of mine invited me to my first ball, a Brabantie Ball, and I got a new dress Biedermeier line, made by my mother. It was black taffeta with silver lace everywhere on it. This is where I met my husband, John.

I was very shy, sitting in a corner and after prompting by his co-worker Jettie, John came up to me and took me to dance.

In the beginning I didn't want a bar of him, but the funny thing was, we met each other at the library later on. It was after the dance, about five or six weeks later that I saw him when I was at the library with my younger sister. I saw him going in, I said, "I don't want to go in when he's there". Apparently, he lived very close to where I lived, but I didn't know. Of course, then we saw each other every week. So, there you are, you never know.

My mother liked him, but apparently, they didn't like the work that he was doing. He didn't earn enough money according to their standard. Never is anyone good enough for the daughter, are they? But as a person they liked him, definitely.

We meet each other frequently, and he came to my place, and I went to where he lived in Oisterwijk.

We would go to his parent's place too; he was one out of sixteen children. I was not used to a big family - we had only four - but it was very pleasant there all the time. I became very close to them.

I was twenty-one when I met John in 1933. We got engaged after four or five years and I was twenty-eight when I married.



Catherina, 1938

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Wedding

Catherina married John van der Linden 23 August 1940. John was 31 and Catherina was 28 years old.



Catherina and John on their wedding day, Nijmegen

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War had broken out in May 1940, and we married on the 23rd of August 1940, so it was very hard to get anything in that time.

We first married in the registry office. In Dutch we call it Stadhuis. If you were a Catholic a registration office was not good enough, you had to marry in a church. And a church was not good enough for the registration - you had to go to both.

Three days later we had a church wedding. My mother made my dress, and it was very beautiful. My brother Henk made a drawing of it.

At six years older my eldest sister was married at 22. She thought I was an old maid by that time and said, "You'll never get married."



Charcoal drawing of Catherina in her wedding day, by her brother Henk

We had a few friends, my husband's relatives and my parents and siblings at the wedding.

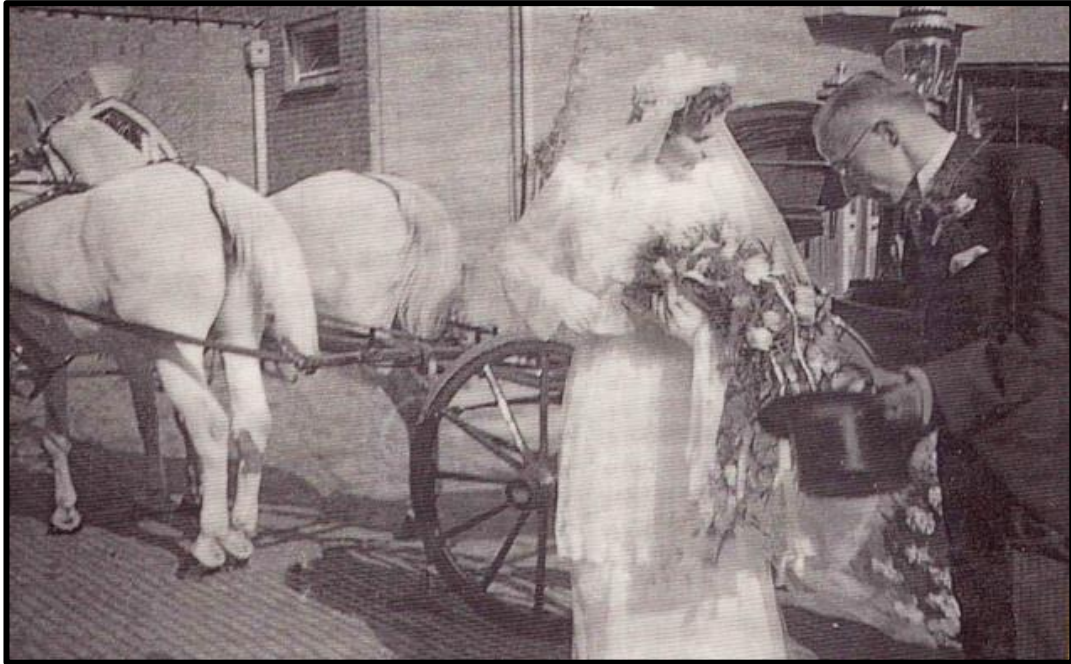
The menu included pheasant, venison, guinea fowl as well as a vat of beer. Eduard van Latum, Toos' brother-in-law, had prepared a song sheet, with drawings of Too's earlier life. They celebrated her previous life in song.

(Eduard, was an avid and very competent artist, he also created a painting of the crucifixion, but it was so lifelike that it frightened his wife). **Lia Siemens**

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You couldn't go very far as it was wartime, you could only go a few miles. We stayed one night in a hotel and then we went to one of my husband's relatives houses in Oisterwijk for a honeymoon.



Catherina and John on their wedding day, 1940

I liked to have little holidays with Toos and John and remember the linen press perfectly stacked, on shelves upholstered in pink flowers, each of the stacks was bound in pink ribbons. This was all very foreign to my mother, Riet, who was a 'rommelkont' (clutterbug). These memories must have been early in the marriage, as after the arrival of the children the ribbons and the upholstered shelves disappeared. **Lia Siemens**

I remember Toos always preserving vegetables, like peas and beans, something with which the neighbouring children helped. She was always busy. Later they also had boarders, nursing sisters and/or students. The table would always be beautifully set, and everyone would eat together. She was always hard working. **Lia Siemens**

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Children

Three years after we married, we were living in Tilburg, where Mariella was born. It was a home birth and John's mother was the midwife with a doctor in attendance. It was the worst night I can ever remember of my life. I didn't know a thing about it, I had no idea what it would be like. It took a very long time, and she was born at eleven in the morning.

I had a miscarriage after Mariella. My mother died suddenly and maybe the shock was too much.

I had the first two children at home with a nursing sister visit for nine days, to look after me and the house. I had problems with the second birth and John's sister was a midwife who told me if I had any more children to go to a hospital.

In the winter of probably 1954, we were living in the Betuwestraat, in Tilburg, when Mariella took Jerome across the ice on the canal that was nearby: he slipped and fell cutting his chin open necessitating an urgent trip to the doctor on the back of John's bicycle. Jerome still remembers they nearly had an accident with a motor car on the way there.

I had four children. Mariella, born 5 August 1943, Jerome born 28 March 1948, Garrath born 9 December 1949, and Margherita was born 21 March 1953 when I was 40 years old.

We spoke English at home in Australia because we thought it was better for the children to be accustomed to it. I'm sorry we did that as they lost a lot of their native language and hardly speak it. I'm not a very good disciplinarian and I spoilt the children, but it didn't do them any harm, they're still good people.

The children were baptised and went to Catholic schools and colleges. We didn't talk about religion in the home, we prayed together occasionally, and all went together to mass on Sundays when the children were small.

The children all had Australian friends who came to our house, I think they were all happy at school, they could study quite well.

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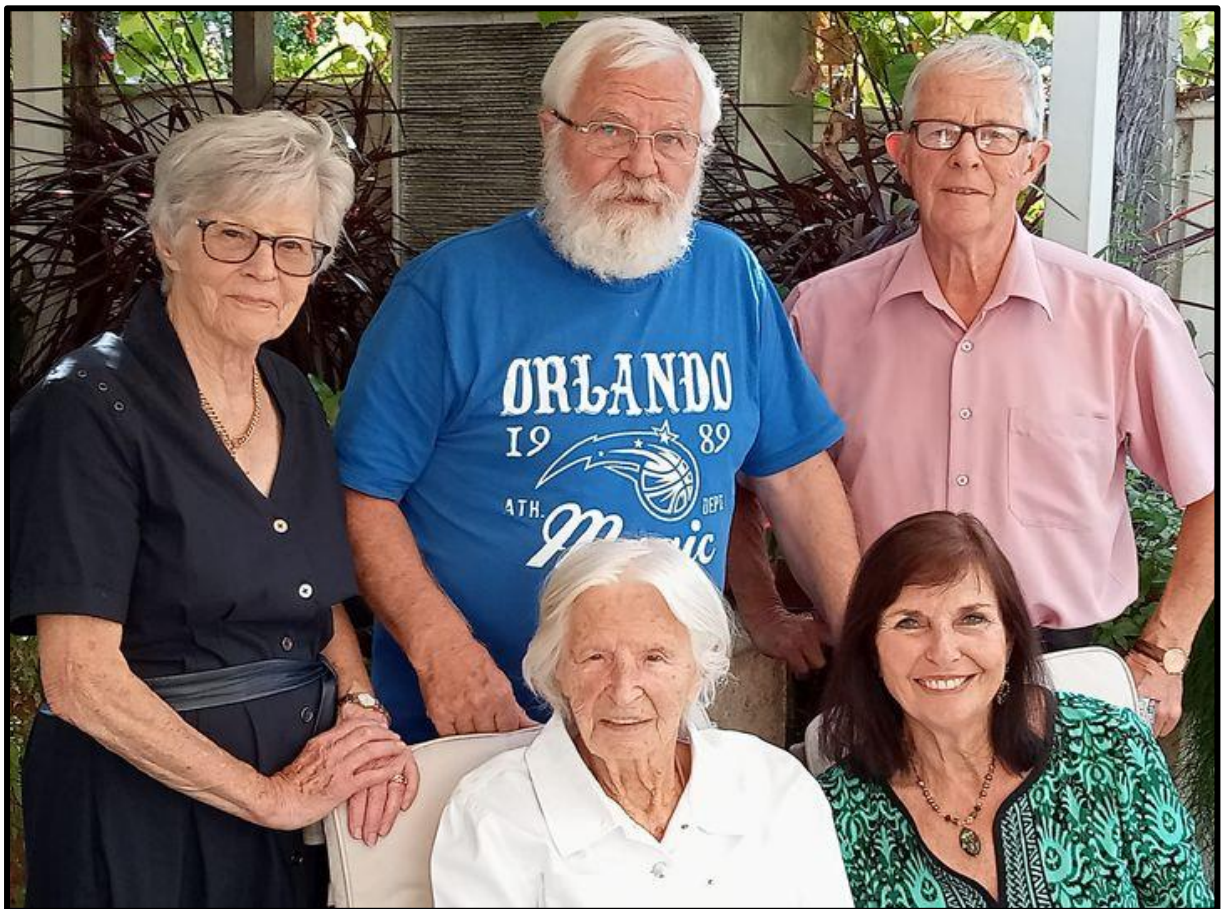
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Mariella did Matric and then teacher's college. She was a primary teacher and later gained a Diploma of Early Childhood Education. Subsequently, she gained a graduate diploma in school and community relations. Mariella married Bob Hocking.

Jerome went to Sydney when he was eighteen to attend the Marconi School of Wireless, training in radio and wireless telegraphy. He did this for a year and a half then decided to obtain a Bachelor of Business Degree. Jerome married Robyn Paterson.

Garrath studied in Melbourne and got a degree with a double major in Youth Affairs and Public Administration, and a sub major in Economics. Garrath married Thawanrat Thitivimutkun, affectionately known by the family as Nop.

Margherita did a Bachelor of Science and Education at Flinders University and taught at high schools. Margherita married Carl Dorsch.



Standing: Mariella, Garrath, Jerome Seated: Catherina, Margherita, March 2023

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Wartime

I remember wartime was very stressful. Rockets went over our houses, and you'd never know where it would stop. It would be silent, then you'd know what would follow. That was the very moment rockets would come down and you thought, "Where is it?"

One night we were walking back around eight o'clock, with Mariella in the pusher, the ten kilometres back from Oisterwijk to Tilburg where we lived. I still remember that those rockets went over very, very often.



1938 Map of Tilburg [wii-netherlands-escape-lines.com/netherlands-map-1940-45]

The worst thing I remember was when there was bombing in our area, around September 1944 and near the time of the liberation, when we knew that the Canadians were coming. I was with a friend who was holding Mariella and I was holding her child. We had to go in between the houses where my husband John and his friend had dug out a cellar. There were boxes of biscuits and some milk, but that was all we had for food. We were down there for two days.

We could hear the bombs going over, and on the corner from where we lived there was a house that was bombed, so it was good that we were underground otherwise we might have been hit. It was very stressful times.

My husband had a bicycle that was taken away, but we were very happy that it wasn't him that was taken and sent to Germany.

My father had been sent to Germany and when he came back, his face was, he was just skin over bones, he looked terrible. He had been eating out of rubbish bins. He had work as a tram conductor or driver in Berlin. He didn't like it, but he was picked up and he had to do it. He fled Germany coming back to where we lived. My uncle was killed by a hand grenade. Lots of things were not very good.

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I wasn't scared for myself; I was scared for my child that she might not survive.

My brother-in-law was living with us, but he was very fearful, so somehow, he went to London and lived there for seven months. My sister and her baby were with us. My mother, sister and brother were fleeing from Nijmegen, walking for hours with their bicycle. My mother was dirty, couldn't wash or sleep, and they had lice in their hair.

It was terrible those days, not very pleasant memories.

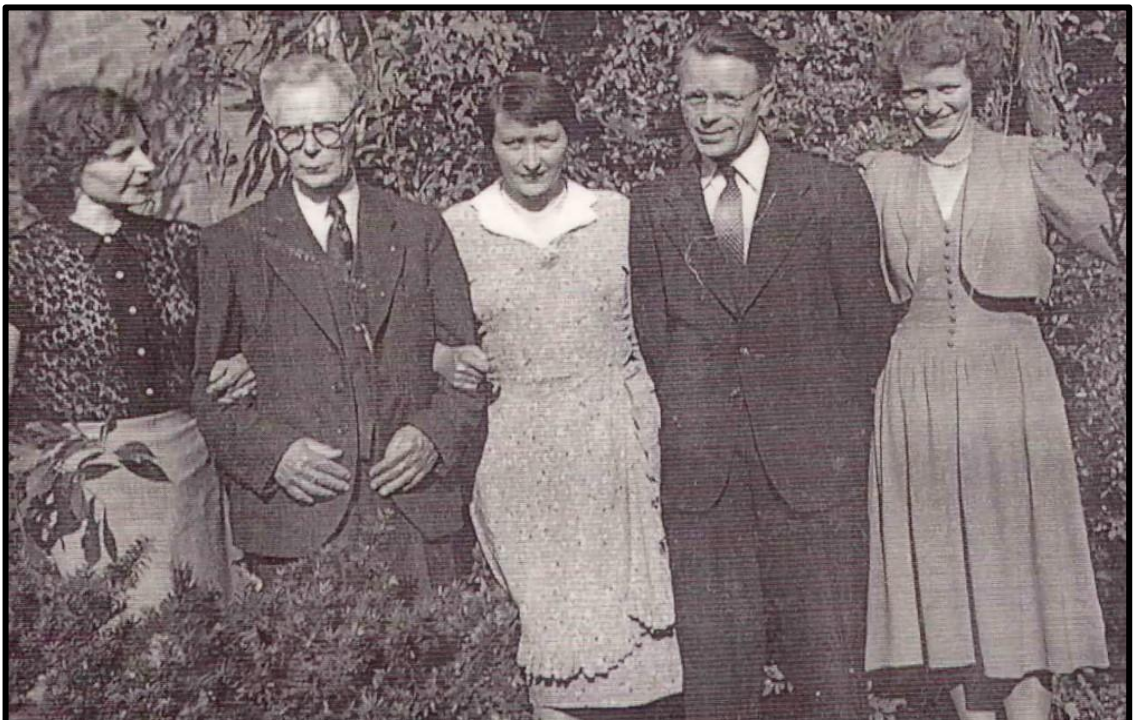
After the war

Very slowly we got a few things back. Food was rationed until about 1947.

Following the war my husband, who had been a Company Secretary, was unemployed.

My husband's company was liquidated, and the Managing Director died, and everything went wrong in those days. He couldn't find a job. At the age of forty-five it was difficult to find work.

We experienced some hard times. John put his lateral thinking cap on and developed some clever sponge/chamois cleaners with which he hoped to make our fortune, but alas, not to be.



Catherina, Gradus (father), Riet (sister), Henk (brother) and Tinie (sister) , circa 1950

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Australia

John's brother Pieter came to Australia in 1953 and around this time John had organised to go to New Zealand but I didn't want to go.

His youngest brother Walter had been a soldier in the Dutch Army in Indonesia. At the conclusion of the war, he chose to come to Australia instead of going back to the Netherlands. He met and married Nancy in Sydney.

John had been without work for over half a year, and we had used all our savings. John's brother, Pieter, wrote that we should come to Australia, as he could get a job for him. He was a manager of a shoe factory, maybe Clarks, and gave John a job there for the first eight or nine months that we were here in Australia.

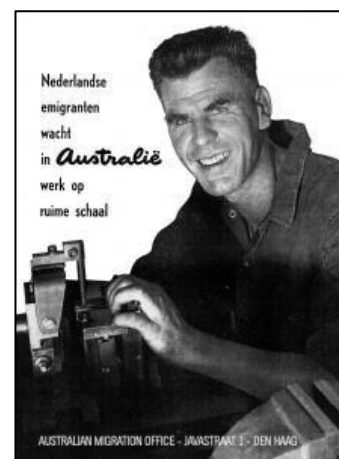
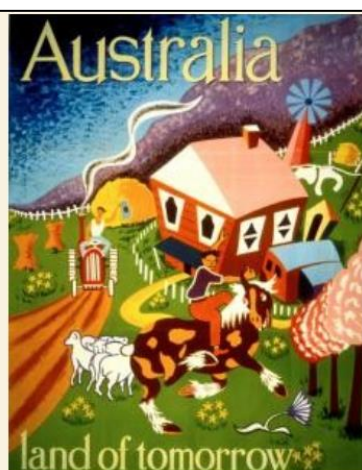
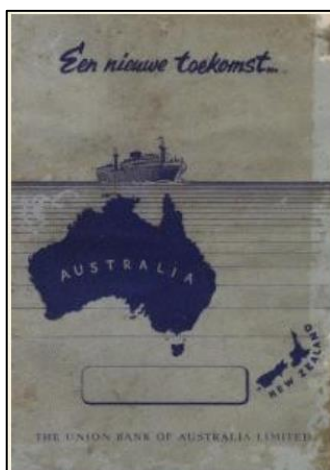
I didn't want to come to Australia, it took a lot of persuasion. After my father died in 1955, I relented.

We had a few books, and we went to a meeting where someone that had been in Australia was trying to persuade people to go to there. He was a young student of about twenty-seven, I asked "Why did you leave Australia then if it was all so beautiful and wonderful." I was a bit sarcastic; I know! He said it was the uniformity of the country, that all the villages were all the same. He was so used to the variety of difference in Europe.

The immigration process took about three months.



National Archives of Australia
Collection, C3939/1,
N1957/75/106 PT 2



[daaag.org/node/selling-dream]

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In 1955 we went from Tilburg to Rotterdam and boarded the Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt. It was a very beautiful Dutch ship that was originally used for transport from Indonesia. In the mid-1950s it was being used to transport migrants to Australia and New Zealand.

When we first boarded, the two youngest children were put in quarantine for a few days, as they had measles. Mariella was eleven, nearly twelve. Jerome was about seven, Garrath was five, and Margherita, the little one, would have been two and a half.



Postcard showing the Johan van Oldenbarnevelt [pmhps.org.au]

Our cabins were on A-Deck with the six of us all together. We had very good food. We made acquaintance with some others on board, the ship was mostly Dutch people, and we might have played cards or had a coffee with them. The children could do plays or go swimming, throw quoits, and watch films occasionally.

We brought an enormous wooden container, two or three metres square which I think might have gone on a different ship and came later. We had hand cases with clothes.

We brought hardly any furniture, maybe a bed, I can't remember. We did bring, linen and things like that, and table silver, and crockery.

They all said we should leave our warm clothes behind but thank goodness we didn't. When we came the weather was freezing cold.

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The trip took about five weeks. I really enjoyed the sea trip. I thought it was absolutely fantastic.

The boat travelled through the Suez Canal, and we stopped in several ports. We stopped in Port Aden which impressed me very much. It was about three o'clock in the morning and we watched a magnificent sunrise over the hills. There were wild goats jumping everywhere, jumping on cars. There were poor people sleeping on little rolls with hardly any clothes on. They were a terrible sight for me. I'd never seen anything like that before.

There were people in little boats with things for sale. I wanted to buy one of those little fez handmade hats that he was wearing, but no money would persuade him to sell that to me. I bought something else from him, but I wanted to have what he was wearing on his head, but he wouldn't sell that, not for any money.

The first port in Australia was in Fremantle, Western Australia arriving 9 June 1955.

N.V. STOOMVAART MAATSCHAPPIJ „NEDERLAND“														
MANIFEST OF PASSENGERS ms/sex "JOHAN VAN OLDEBARNEVELT" d.d. 9th June 1955 from Amsterdam to: AUSTRALIA														
Nominal roll number	Cabin number	Surname	Christian name	Age	Sex	Marital status	Port of disemb.	Category	Passage money	Board money	Remarks	Occupation	Migrant status	Migrant contribution
713	410 AA	Liesker	Johan W.	19	M	S	M	SCH	1250,-	50,-		instrumentmaker		
714	66 A	Linden, van der	Johannes W.	45	M	M	M	SCH	5625,-	135,-		representative		
715	66 AA	do.-van Meegen	Catherina A.	42	F	M	M	SCH						
716	66 B	do.	Maria C.G.A.L.M.	11	F	S	M	SCH						
717	66 BB	do.	Jeroen J.G.A.W.	7	M	S	M	SCH						
718	66 C	do.	Geert J.W.A.	5	M	S	M	SCH						
719	66 CC	do.	Margherita B.J.B.	2	F	S	M	SCH						
720	146 A	Lindenhout, van 't	Christina L.	77	F	D	M		1500,-	100,-		none		
721	404 B	Linson	Gertruda M.Th.	28	F	S	M	SCH	1250,-	50,-		domestic		
722	402 CC	Loon, van	Cornelius J.N.M.	19	M	S	M		1250,-	50,-		representative		
723	348 AA	Loos	Maria J.	21	F	S	M		1500,-	50,-		domestic		
724	403 LL	Lorijn, do	Bernardus P.	54	M	M	S		8625,-	150,-		merchant		
725	371 A	do.-Elsen	Petronella	57	F	M	S							
726	405 M	do.	Bernardus P.M.	22	M	S	S							
727	371 AA	do.	Petronella F.M.	18	F	S	S							
728	405 MM	do.	Gerardus P.Th.	16	M	S	S							
729	403 N	do.	Antonius M.Th.	12	M	S	S							
730	403 NN	do.	Joseph C.L.M.	9	M	S	S							
731	25 A	Lossio	Johannes Th.	45	M	M	M	SCH	6750,-	135,-		unknown		
732	25 AA	do.-van Krieken	Johanna	57	F	M	M	SCH						
733	25 B	do.	Wilhelmina M.Chr.	15	F	S	M	SCH						

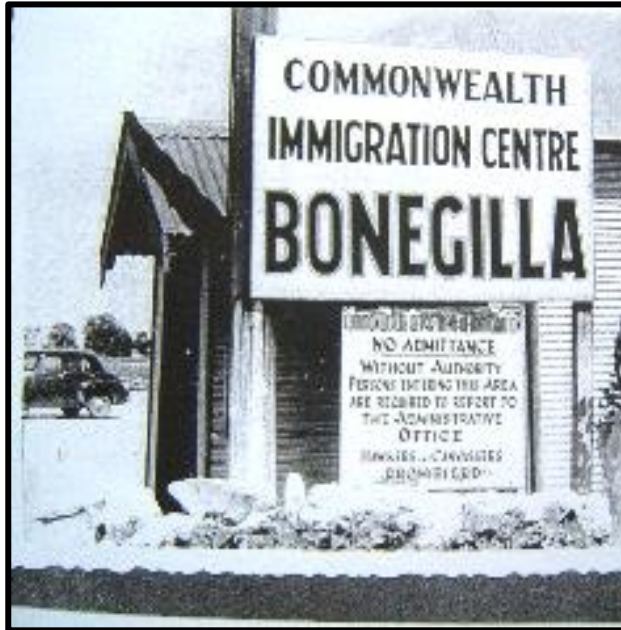
We arrived in Melbourne Harbour in July and then we went by train through what looked to me a vast country with dead trees, with their arms stretched out. I didn't like it; I couldn't see the beauty of it. The atmosphere was so different. Now I think that Australia is really beautiful.

There was an old chap talking non-stop to us and whilst John and I had both studied English at school we had difficulty understanding him as his accent was so broad.

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Bonegilla Immigration Centre



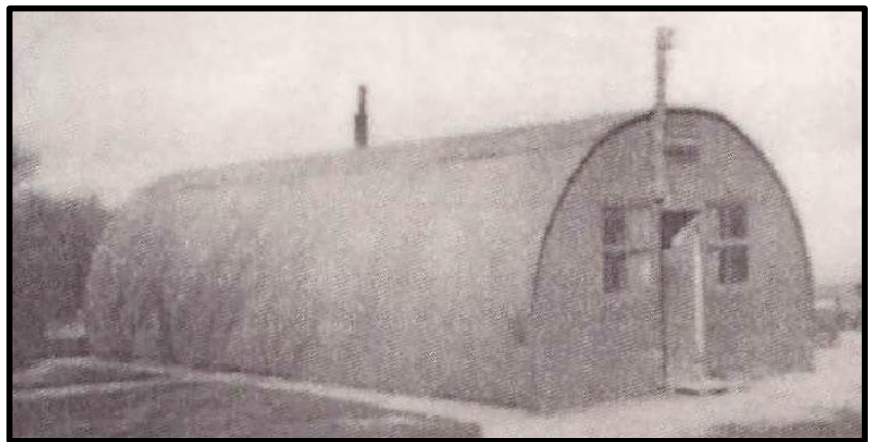
[bonegilla.org.au]

We arrived about seven at night at the Bonegilla camp near Albury.

It was freezing cold, and it was a terrible camp. In the morning there was ice on the little puddles outside.

It was a shock coming into Bonegilla from a beautiful luxurious ship with all the very first-class treatment. The camp barracks were dirty with filthy blankets, filthy, and many drawings on the wall, and it was absolutely shocking. It was really terrible.

We had two rooms in a Nissen hut made out of corrugated iron with what looked like soldiers' beds, little iron beds. The mattress and everything was absolutely filthy - filthy! It was freezing cold with no heating.



We had a cup of coffee or something like that, and we got a little strip heater to heat the rooms up. The children were cold. Thank goodness we had some warm clothes with us. Some of the people there didn't have any - they had sold all their warm clothes - they were there with summer clothes on.

We didn't have any cooking facilities, but there was a big kitchen where we had to go to eat. The Polish and German did the cooking and because it wasn't what we were used to, we thought it terrible. Lots of sausages and cabbage, the food was not good at all.

Our destination was Adelaide, so we only stayed about a week, then we got transferred to Woodside in the Adelaide Hills.

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Woodside Immigration Centre



sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au

We stayed at Woodside about two months until September. The children went to school and we played with them outside. It was all new and we went out with them. We saw nature and the flowers, and we enjoyed that part. We often went for walks with the children. We made friends there that were from Holland. We had coffee together and talked together about our experiences. Some went to work there in the hospital, and some went to other households to do housework. There were Polish, Germans, Ukrainians and Czechs, it was a whole different community.

John did all the arrangements and communications with the officials; I was an ordinary housewife and stayed home.

John had work. He went to Adelaide by bus during the week, came home on Friday night and went again on Monday morning. Most of the men did that.

There was a hospital close by, and if anyone was ill we would go to the doctors there. I never had any need to go to that. My children were healthy.

Washing was done in big laundries outside, practically in the open air.

The showers were far away from your own hut and there were no doors on them. That was terrible.

Coming from a beautiful house and being house proud, I thought Bonegilla and the Woodside camps was worse than anything.

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Glenelg Migrant Hostel



[sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au]

We stayed in the Glenelg hostel from September 1955 to January 1958. This was a little bit better than Woodside. I had a purpose to stay in that camp because I wanted to go back home, and that's the only way I could save up my money. I was working in an office so I could save my money.

Here we had three rooms, one living quarter and two bedrooms. You could cook a little bit yourself there if you wanted to. The food was not that wonderful either. We found sometimes little worms and things in soup and things like that, and it was not that good.

There were quite a few Dutch people living there. You got to know them, and you became friends. And we had the Good Neighbour Council too. They came and they had some morning or afternoon teas and things like that. They did a lot for the migrants too. We were not completely deserted.

I met Australians at work and they were all very nice, but made no close friends, there was still a certain distance.

My husband John stayed in the camp. He worked for one year at the factory where his brother was manager. He was later a bookkeeper/accountant for some other friends that had lived at the hostel who could not bear it there, so they left.

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I talked to a gentleman in the mornings when I was on my way to work. He said, "Well, why doesn't John try to get the job that I am going to leave?" And that's what he did, he got the job and from there on he wasn't working as a factory worker anymore.

The children went to school at St Mary's Catholic School, in High Street, Glenelg. My eldest daughter Mariella was around eleven or twelve years at that time, and she took the children to school, and the little one, Margherita, to a type of kindergarten.

To find work I took a bus to the city and went to Myer. I told a man about what I had done before. My English was reasonably good compared with lots of people that had just come out who never had any English experience. I hadn't worked in an office for many years, but they gave me a chance.



Myer 1950s [SLSA B-60646]

I got work in the office as a typist. I thought it was marvellous. My salary was something like ten, twelve, thirteen pounds a week and I got discount for everything in the store too. It was all in English which I could cope with, but my typing was not the best.

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I was working nine until five or five-thirty so Mariella, my oldest daughter took the children to school and after, they were at home for an hour on their own.

I liked the work, but anything that would get me out of the camp was good to me. I was shy and had no confidence in my capabilities whatsoever. I felt I wasn't clever enough to compete with the Australian women who had learnt more at school very early.

The office desks had partitions and there was one lady sitting next to me who was a very nice person and she helped me a lot. I did this work about one and half years.

I was sorry to leave but thought I could earn more money in another job. I found work doing bookkeeping in a religious office.

I did this for a few months finishing up by the time I had booked to go home in January 1958.



John, Catherina and their children at Glenelg in 1958.

Preserving Memories

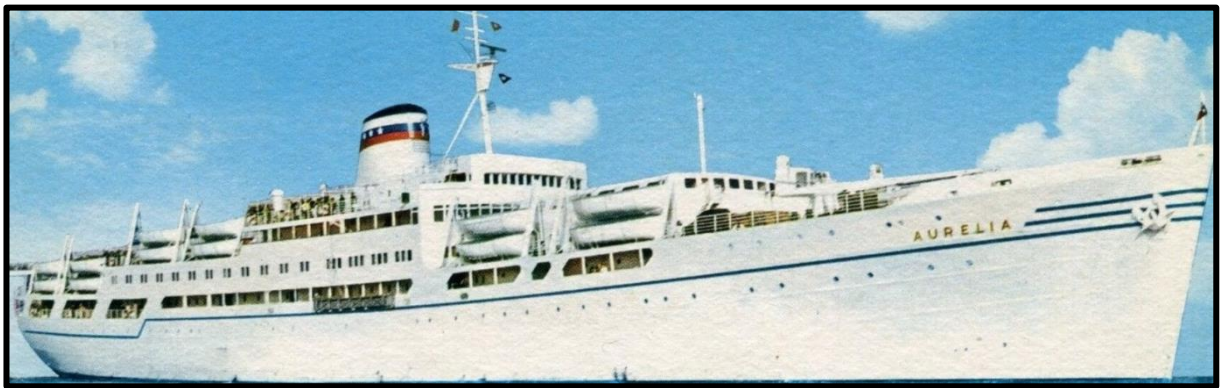
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Returning to Holland

I was so homesick. I had decided that there was no way that I could live in Australia and didn't intend to come back. I had stayed even though I disliked it and worked in those two years to save money.

John stayed as he had good prospects and a very good job. He felt that he would not be able to find work in Holland. He stayed in a boarding house where he was treated very well.

I returned to Holland in January 1958 with the four children, on board the Aurelia, an Italian boat, not as good as the Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt.



*Aurelia started life as the German freighter 'Husacaran' which was seized after the Second World War and awarded to the Canadian Government. In 1958 she was sold to COGEDAR, an Italian line who re-built her as a sleek and elegant Liner.
[linerdesigns.com]*

The children were happy to go on another adventure. You know how children are! Although I think my younger son was not too happy. He was very happy in Australia.

I stayed in Holland for a year and a half, working in an office for a few months until January then I was at home a few months and got a job in another office from March to July.

We stayed in Nijmegen and lived with my brother, Henk, in my parent's house. He was never married so he was very pleased to see us. He wouldn't come out to Australia.

The children went back to school, Mariella to boarding school, and the other children to primary school.

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... and back to Australia

John and I wrote letters all the time. I didn't want to come back but thought it was not very fair to my husband to take all the children away from him, even if I didn't like Australia at that time. I knew he loved the children and that it was very unfair for me to take them away. I wrote him in March or April that I would be coming back - he was over the moon of course, he was so pleased.

Leaving Rotterdam on the 23rd of June 1958, we arrived back in Melbourne on the 5th of August 1959. We came on an old ship called the Sibajak and there was an enormous storm which meant we were twenty-four hours out of the port before we could get in. After this voyage the Sibajak was sent to Hong Kong and broken up.

John came to Melbourne with a friend and took us by car back to Adelaide.



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John wanted to buy a piece of land in Belair, I said, "No, I only want to live in Glenelg," because I was used to Glenelg, and I was too shy. Now they could put me anywhere, but not in those days!

He went to see a lady with a flat upstairs in Moseley Street. She thought it would be too small for us, but John knew I wanted to stay in Glenelg.

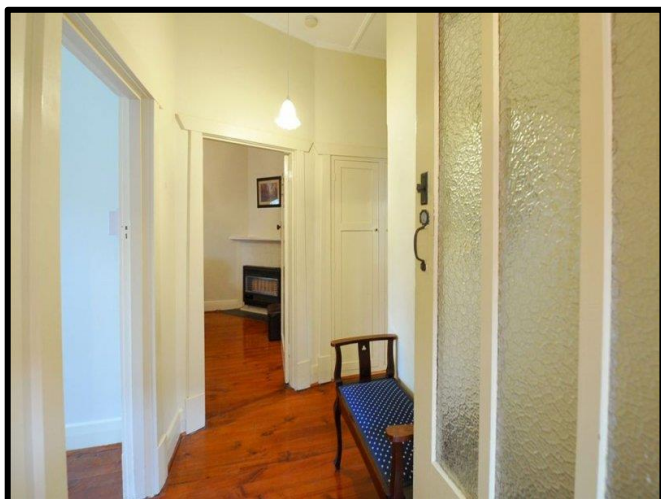
We went on to become good friends. She was originally from Melbourne and a very, very charming woman. She was very nice to me.

I think there were four or five rooms on the top. The boys had to sleep on a covered in balcony, the lady didn't want the boys to sleep there but there was no other way. My husband really wanted to have it, so persuaded her to give in. We rented this and I was very happy there.

From here we shifted to another house that we rented for seven and a half pound a week. We stayed about two to three years, and then I said to my husband, "We have to buy our own house otherwise we'll never get anywhere".



3 Williams Avenue, Glenelg East
[realestate.com.au]



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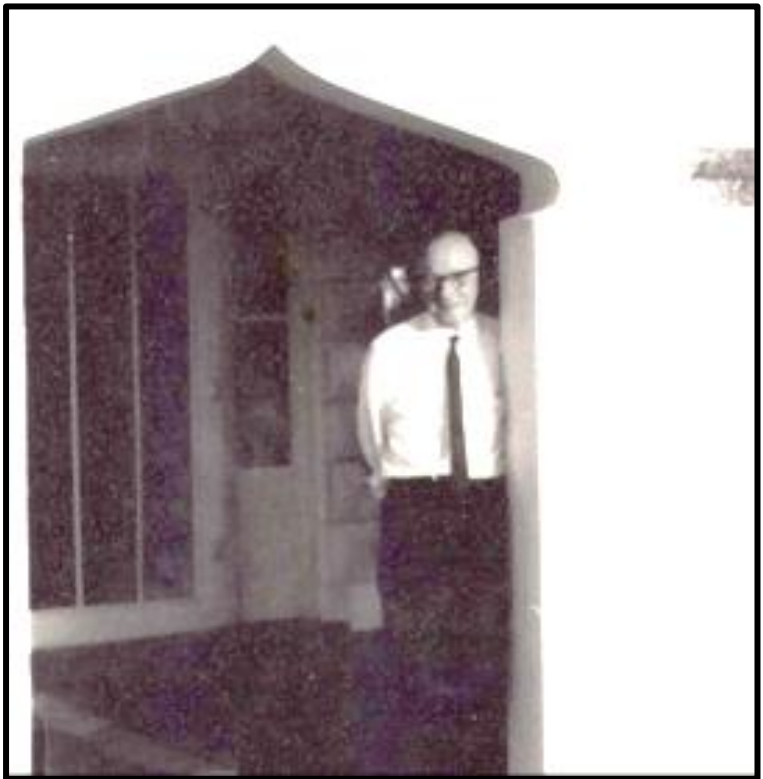
At last, around 1964 we bought a house in Malcolm Street, Glenelg. We lived there thirteen years. This was the house that I really liked, it was not very big, but it was really cosy, and we were happy there.



18 Malcolm Street, Glenelg East

We had a lounge and dining room, kitchen, and we had three bedrooms and a big corridor where we came in, a front and a back yard.

He built a pergola out the back. That was very nice too.



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Working

When I came back to Australia, I did all kinds of different work. Mostly this was just from approaching people.

I did some work as a nursing aid at the Glenelg Pier Street surgical hospital and worked in a motel, in shops and offices.



11 Pier Street, Waterworth, former Pier Street Private Hospital [realestate.com.au, 2008]

People were very good to me. Even the head of the hospital there lent us money to buy our house. We were two hundred and fifty pounds short, and she lent me the money. We paid it back of course, but that was wonderful of her to do that.

I did all kinds of things, just to get money to get a house, and to get the children educated. When they were teenagers, they needed a lot more money in clothing and uniforms. I worked about twenty years altogether.

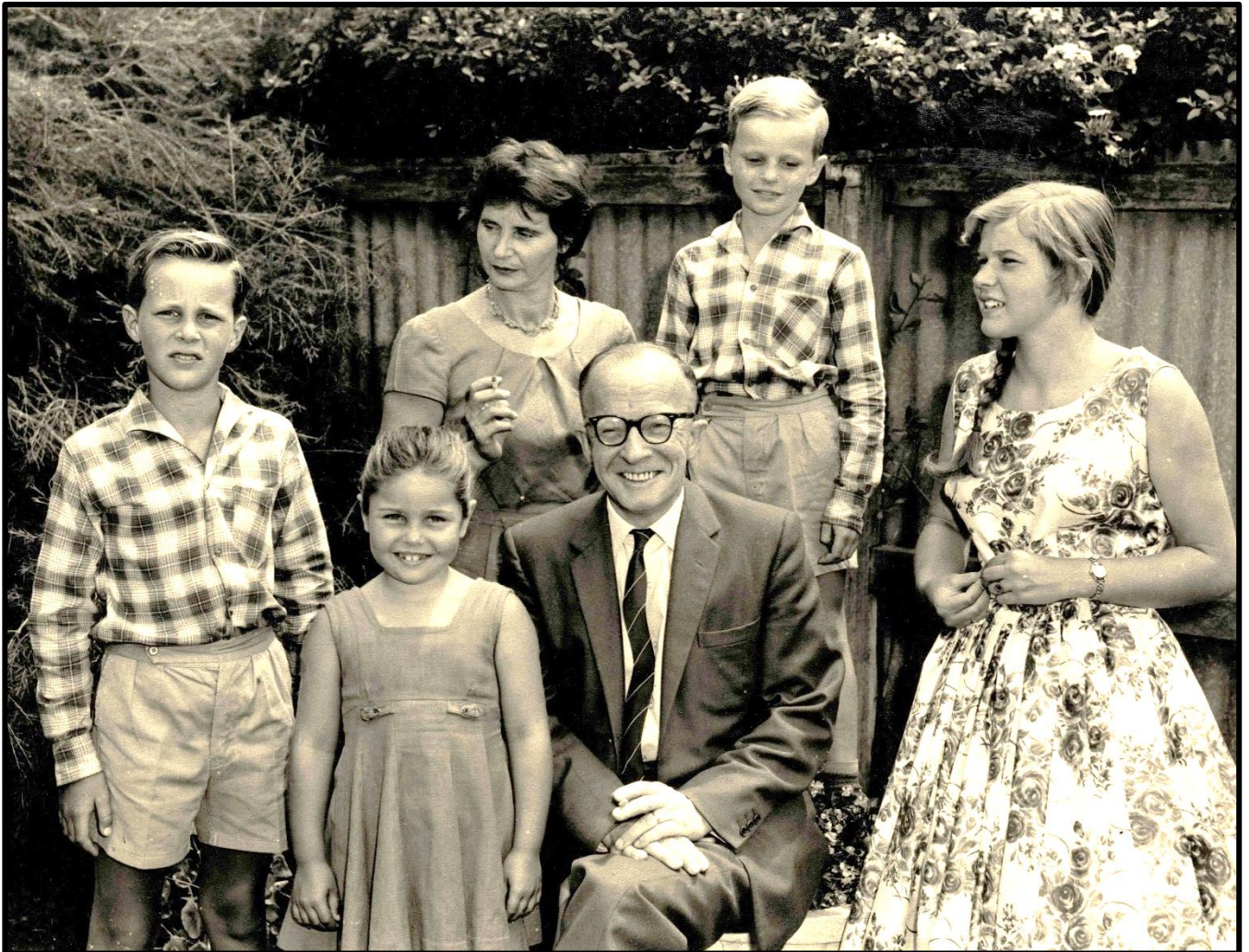
My husband was not happy and wanted me to stay at home. That was not the done thing, his wife should not be working. He hated it, but I was stubborn and continued. I was helping the family buy a house and I was able to buy things I otherwise wouldn't get. Things in the house or clothing or whatever I wanted. I felt a bit more independent that way and I wanted to get out and meet people.

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Home life

I would cook the dinners if I had part-time work. When I was nursing, I worked sometimes from twelve until eight at night, so I would prepare it and John could do the rest.



In Holland I did bottling of food, but not here in Australia. I did the washing and ironing and the cleaning. I did some sewing of dresses for my daughter.

I'm not a very good housewife and I hated housework from the time I was small. I didn't have to do it in Holland because I had help there.

My husband belonged to a Dutch club and the Dutch Catholic Choir.

I was a member of Zonta a service organisation for advancing the status of women.

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John

My husband worked in a shoe company and he was a company secretary and an accountant.

He was often inventing or improving things and made furniture for the home. He was very much a 'tinkerer' and spent years developing a gearless automatic transmission for cars, as well as venetian blinds that did not require strings.

When he got a job as an accountant he worked for the advertising agency, which eventually became Young and Rubicam, used by Chrysler Australia. There he became the Company Secretary. They used his accountant image in a newspaper advertisement for the Chrysler Dodge utility.

any ute but ours.

New Dodge Utility \$2195
Ex-Factory

When you think about it, a ute comes into this world for one reason only. To do a job. To help you make money. And that applies to one or a fleet of vehicles. If it costs too much—either to buy or operate—it's self-defeating. With that in mind, consider the following:

- Dodge is the lowest priced 6-cylinder utility in Australia. (If anybody asks why you bought one, that's a good place to start.)
- Dodge has an all steel tray with double-wall construction. And a full drop tail-gate.
- Dodge has strong solid unitised construction. No body bolts to vibrate loose.
- Dodge comes with smooth riding torsion bar suspension, and a heavy duty rear axle with 6-leaf heavy duty rear springs so you can handle bigger loads.
- Dodge has the largest fuel tank, load space and brake area in its class.
- The engine is our long proven 225 cu. in. Slant Six

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Camping Holidays

In the 1960s we had a camping holiday. When we were coming back from Victoria and driving through a National Park in the South East of SA, a pheasant in this protected area was unable to defend itself from our flying Hillman Hunter and left this mortal world. Never in favour of discarding items that may be useful, the bird promptly went into the back of the car and when home, was prepared, cooked and enjoyed by those present!



One time we were camping in the Otway Ranges or by the Glenelg River and woke with the tent totally covered in Huntsman spiders. Everything was covered with spiders, and we had to flee in the middle of the night. It was terrible.

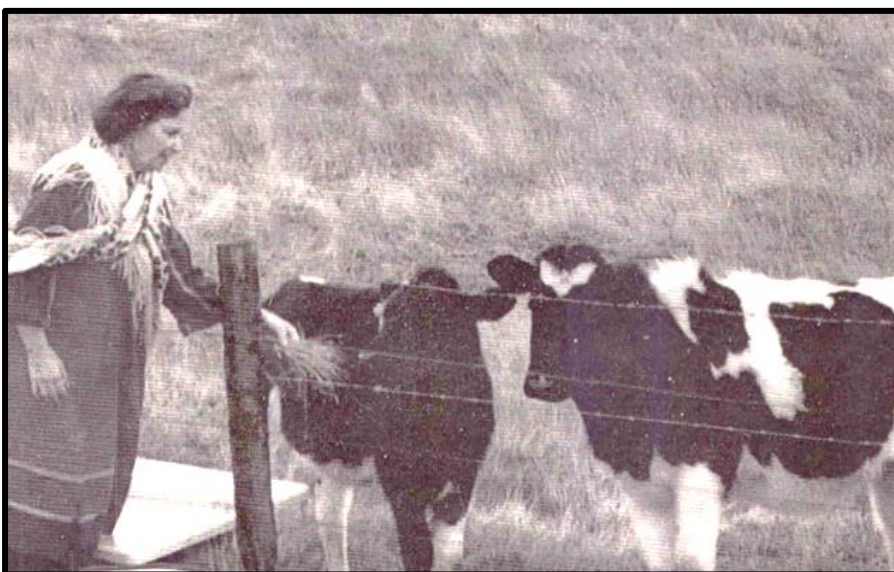
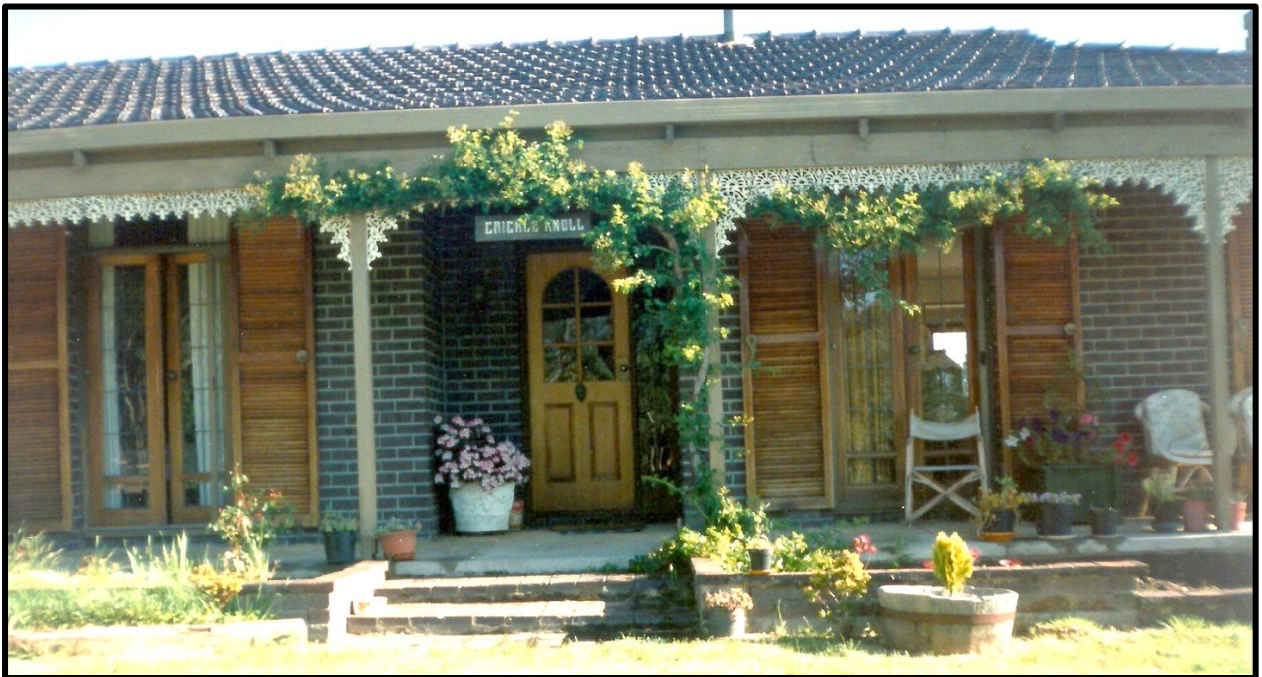
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Adelaide Hills

When my husband retired he bought a block of land near Aldgate, and he built our own house there. That was the first time that we built our own house. It was built for the two of us. It was called Crickle Knoll.

The property was about 1.2 hectares, and I had a garden with lots of flowers. I loved roses and hydrangeas and had them all around the house.

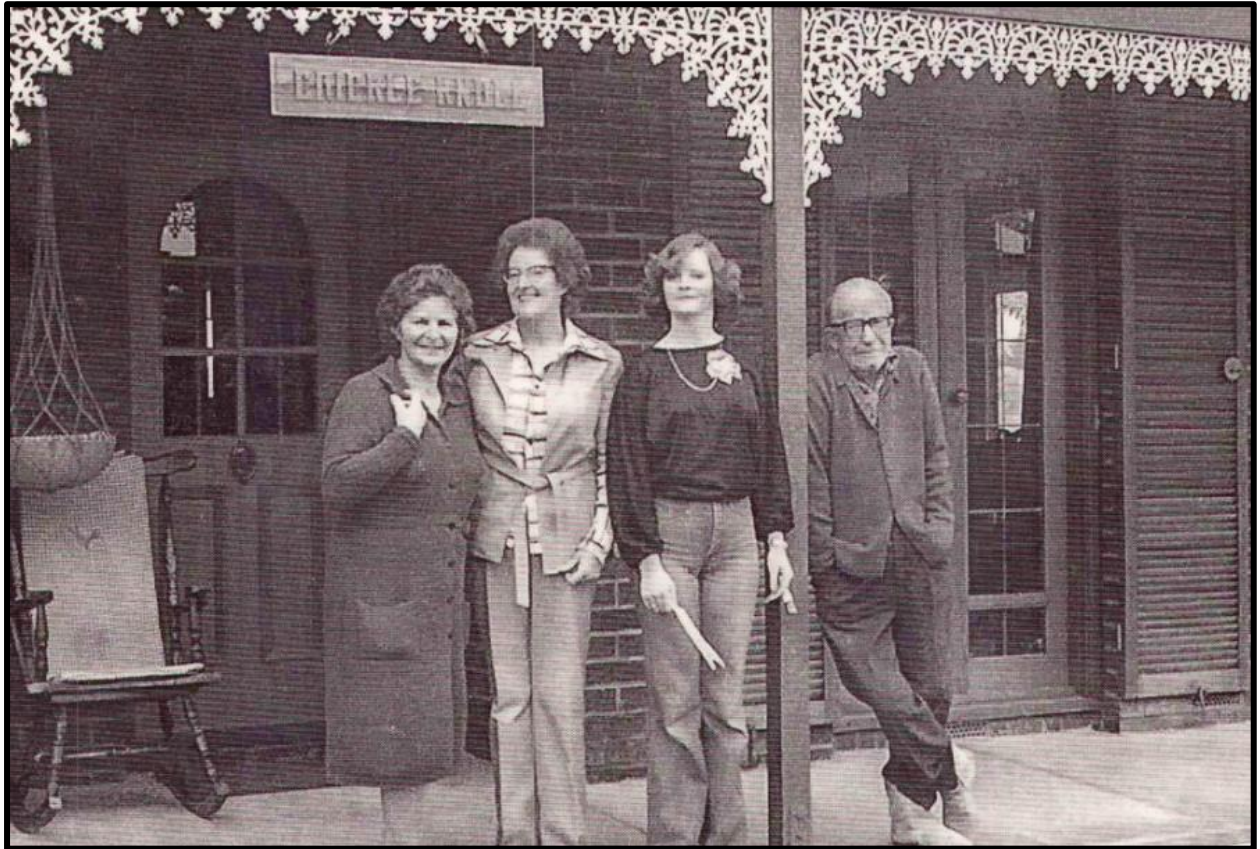


We had two cows, Hansel and Gretel and some sheep. The cows would get out and walk down on the road.

One time John took the car and trailer to go and collect them. Later that night the police knocked on the door suspecting he had 'rustled' someone else's cows!

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Catherina, Nancy, Michelle (John's brother Walter's wife and daughter) and John, circa 1977

After my husband died on 16 February 1980, I lived at Cricklewood Knoll on my own and maintained the house. My youngest children lived close by and they helped me. My older son and his son Adam would fix my car, so everyone was helpful. I have wonderful children.

I would do all my washing and shopping, and go to the bank, and then later in the afternoon go swimming in my daughter's pool at Crafers. I'd go home about 6 o'clock, cook and then go to bed. I would always be busy, out and about with the car.

I had to evacuate in 1983 when the Ash Wednesday fires came close to our home. Betty, my youngest daughter's mother-in-law, lost her home in the fire.

I returned to Glenelg in 2004. I lived in two different units in Glenelg, before moving in 2019 to West Beach Residential, a Southern Cross Care home.

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Holland or Australia – what is home?

I have been back several times for different periods, two or three months. I went most times with my husband. In 1984 I went on my own. I was quite happy to come back to Australia then, different than the first time I went.

If I had to make the decision again, I'm not sure if I would do it all over again. On the other hand, I must honestly admit that children are very happy here. They all have a decent life.

The country is good, the country is beautiful, however, you cannot compare Holland and here.

Margherita is the only one who has gone back to Holland for any length of time. Mariella and Jerome have returned to visit Holland for short periods.

Australia has taught me to work and to appreciate things much better. I always thought Australia taught me to be independent, in Holland it was more or less given to me. Australia has taught me a lot, and in that way I'm grateful for it, and I really love the country and I think it's very, very beautiful, although there are a lot of things I don't like - different too.

Australians, I should not lecture them, that's absolutely the wrong thing to do, but they must have a bit more refinement in my book. That's lacking from many, and I think that's probably the main thing that I would like changed.

In January 2006, I became an Australian citizen.



Over the years the biggest changes have been the number of houses and how much Adelaide has grown. Jerome was living in Sydney and bought land around Happy Valley in 1971. We were living at Glenelg and were stunned that he and his soon-to-be wife wanted to live so far away in the country!

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Family

My niece, Gemma came to visit in Australia every year for about 20 years up until the COVID-19 travel restrictions. She still telephones regularly and keeps in regular email contact with my children.



Catherina and Gemma, 2018

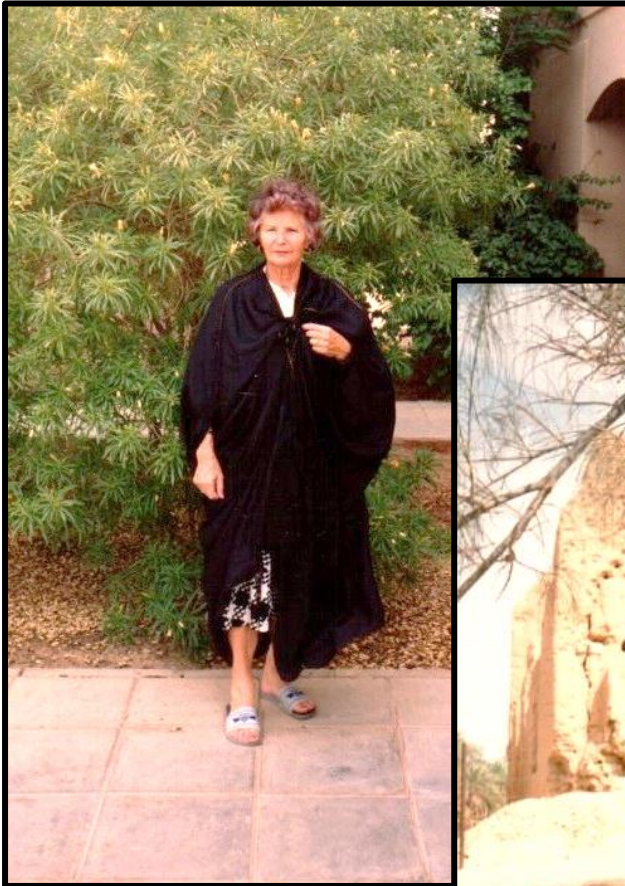


Catherina with her youngest descendants, 2012

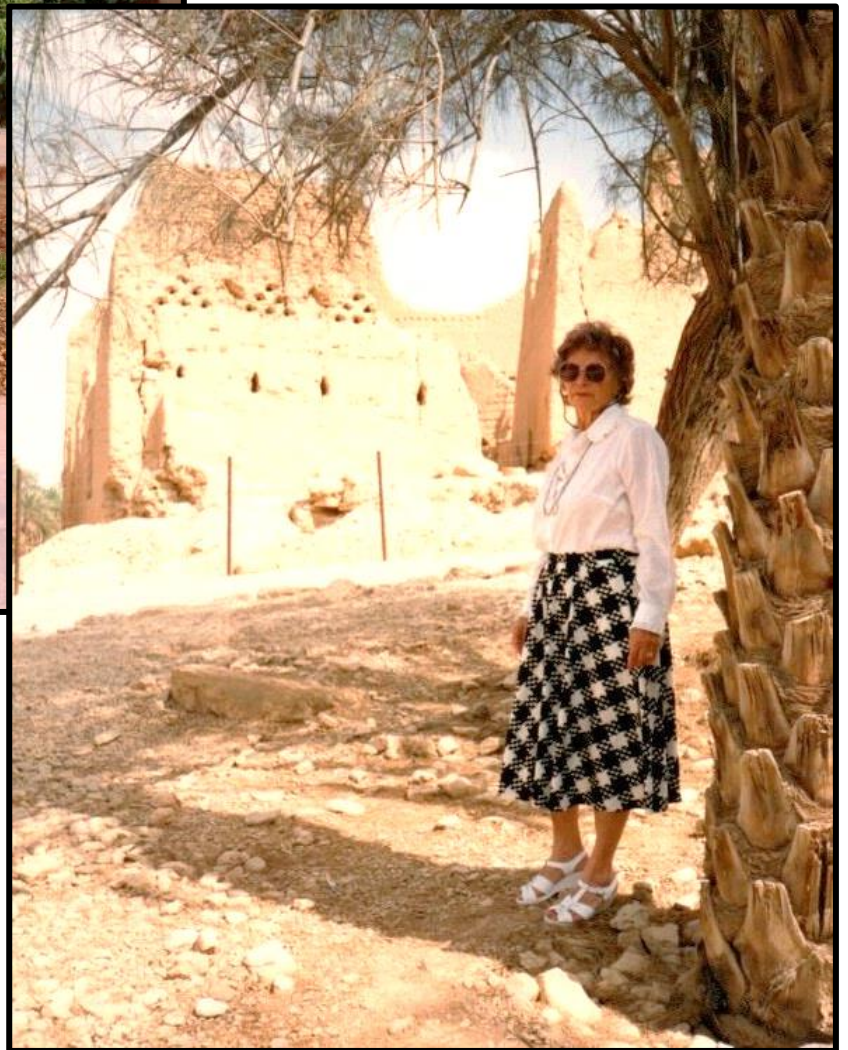
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Overseas Holidays



In 1990 Catherina travelled to the Netherlands to visit relatives and came back via Saudi Arabia where Jerome was working.



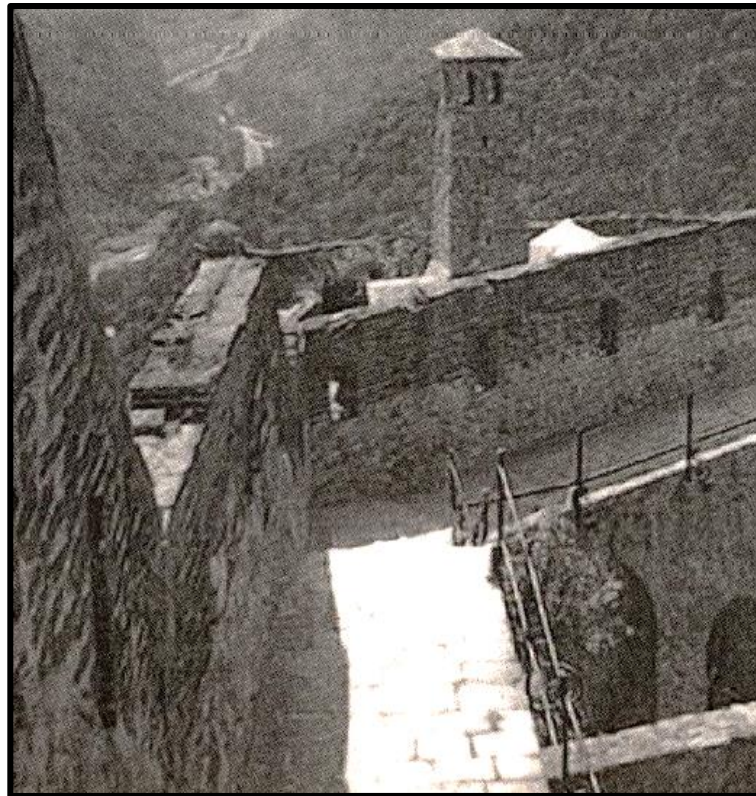
Catherina and Mariella went in 1994 to Europe to visit family, a sister-in-law and brothers-in-law, and Gemma, her sister Tinie's daughter.

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Friends Bob and Gina named Catherina ‘Twinkle Toes’

Catherina and Mariella were visiting in Prades in 1994 and were taken to see a great Vauban fortress in Villefranche, (The Fort-Château Libéria), on the Franco Spanish border which had housed two women prisoners for more than 30 years accused of poisoning people (including family) The gaolers had been instructed to beat them frequently.



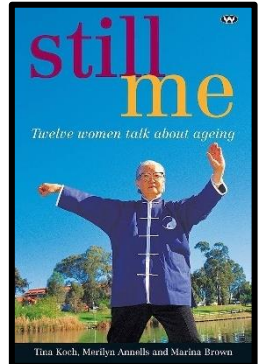
The approach was very steep, and winding and we went by 4-wheel drive which was very frightening at times, so we elected to walk down. The path down was just as steep but also rough with round slippery pebbles.

Catherina at 82 years of age with her usual turbo drive, descended very quickly. Nicknaming her Twinkle Toes encouraged her to descend quicker and she reached the bottom first.

Still me: twelve women talk about ageing

Published in 1999, Catherina was interviewed for *Still Me* a book in which twelve women talk about their experiences of ageing.

One thing that annoys me is that I don't look the same anymore as I did when I was younger. Your body is different, and your face and hair are different, but I know that is just part of normal life as everyone has to go through it. It's probably female vanity, isn't it? That could be. I know a little bit of myself! But I still feel the same person.



I do like to keep up my appearance. If I go out, I like to be tastefully dressed. Not very old-fashioned either, as I don't like that. I like to be well groomed - hands, feet and hair. I like to be myself and not over-done, but I don't want to look like an 'old-hag', if that's the word.

I feel very young. I still feel the same person I've always been and don't feel my age for eighty-six. Not at all! I never think about my age. Maybe I am blessed with very good genes. Mother's sister was a hundred and ten when she died in Holland. She was the oldest inhabitant of fifty million people. But my father was seventy-seven when and my mother was sixty-six when they died.

Maybe it is my life of being active and working hard. You have to keep on making the most of life. You don't think about your old age. Don't feel every little pain that you have.

It is nearly nineteen years since I lost my husband. For me, that does not get easier with time. I'm much more independent now. When my husband was alive, he ruled over everything. He was an accountant and a company secretary for a big American firm, and I was just an ordinary housewife. I let everything be decided by him, and when he died, I had to take over. I learnt to look after finance but I'm very bad at it. I used all the money to go travelling. That's what I love, and I'd love to travel again if I had the opportunity.

One thing I would like to do is to brush up on my French. I had five years of French at school, I can read French a little bit and understand it, but I can't speak it properly anymore. I spoke English, 'school English', when we settled here. I remember one of the neighbours at the time saying, 'You speak Oxford English!' I don't do that now but there are still some differences.

Preserving Memories

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Another thing that is quite different to Australian people is that we have been through a war. You've had war here too, but not in the same way we have experienced it. When I see Kosovo on television, then I get tears in my eyes. I know how bad that is. All these memories you take with you all the time.

I really enjoy driving, even though I do silly things sometimes, like driving too fast. I've had three speeding fines over, maybe, two years, which cost me nearly \$500, so I won't do it anymore. I have to be very careful, especially at my age. When I was eighty or eighty-two I had a driving test and now every year I have a doctor test my eyesight.

Swimming is good for your movements and joints. Mostly I swim for health reasons as I would like to keep as fit as possible and live as 'good' as possible.

I love physical activity. Mostly I walk. There are three kilometres from my road to another road and back, as measured out with the car. Sometimes I do that walk once or twice a week. If I am planning to do the City-Bay twelve kilometres, then I do six kilometres, then one day try nine kilometres, then I know I can make the twelve kilometres. That's what I think. It's easier walking from Adelaide to Glenelg than here, because there are no hills up and down between Adelaide and Glenelg. It's much more tiring here.

I like being outside, I love being in the sunshine, which is a good thing about Australia.

I've given up smoking, I smoked for years. I was about sixty-five when I realised it was harmful to me, so I gave it up. I could feel it on my throat and I started coughing. I thought, 'Well, this is the end of it, ja, I have to do that.' So I did. I'd smoked all my life and I still would love a cigarette sometimes, but I don't have one.

If I end up in a nursing home some day, I hope it is a long way off, I would find this very hard and I don't know if I could adjust to the different lifestyle, but I presume I'll have to.

The only way to approach getting older is to get involved and keep your mind busy with everything. Keep interested in life and in young people and all things. Read a lot, be interested in newspapers, books, and the whole world around you.

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Keeping Active

Catherina played tennis in her youth and still follows major competitions like Wimbledon. She walked the seafront at Glenelg most days when living there and also played lawn bowls.

At her late 80s, she was scared of water but would not let this defeat her, so she took swimming lessons.

She was going to the gym up to three times a week, which was affected by the COVID-19 restrictions over the last couple of years.

She still likes to go to the gym once a week.



Achievements, Acknowledgements and Recognition

City to Bay fun-run

In her late 80s and early 90s, Catherina participated in the annual City to Bay fun run, walking the 12km distance. She went on to participate in several more events over subsequent years.

I don't know why I first wanted to do the fun run. I did say, 'Well, everyone can do it. Why can't I do it? I'll give it a try.' My family was very supportive.

My youngest daughter said, "I'll come with you." So I said, "Alright," but she held me back all the time because she was worried I was walking too fast.

I walked the way I want to walk, which is as quickly as possible.



While most 85-year olds look for a quiet life, Catherina van der Linden took up a new challenge this year — being the oldest competitor in the 12km City Bay fun run.

A resident of Aldgate for 20 years, Mrs van der Linden made a "fast walk" dash in her first attempt in the event, finishing in a creditable 128 minutes 39 seconds.

She was accompanied by her daughter, Margherita Dorsch of Crafrers.

"Her time would have been even faster but I kept making her slow down as she had virtually no training. She had only done a few walks around the district," Mrs Dorsch said.

Mrs van der Linden has decided her next attempt will be a 10km fun run on November 9 at Unley, with proceeds going to Cancer Research.

"I am also planning to enter in next year's City to Bay, hopefully to better my time," she said.

Mrs van der Linden, whose appearance belies her age, believes in "good health and keeping active to stay young".

"I love good music, good friends, family (including 10 grandchildren) and gardens - I love life."

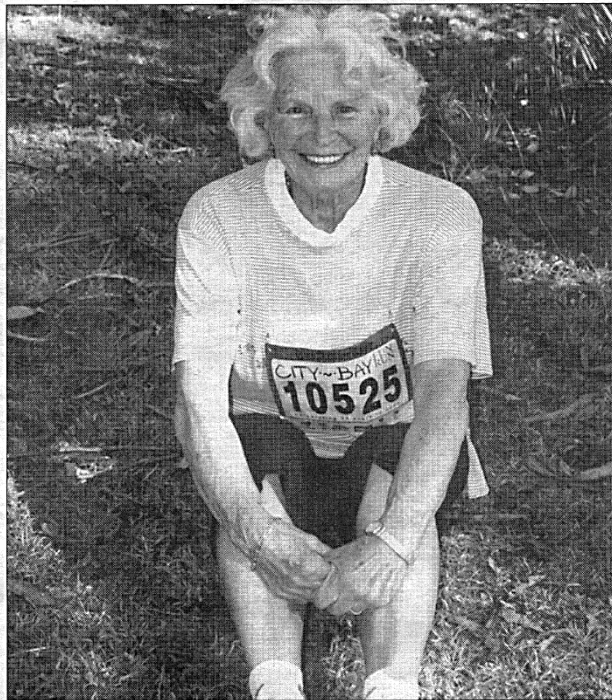
Born in Holland in 1912, Mrs van der Linden migrated to Australia with husband John and four children in 1955, living at Woodside and Glenelg.

She looks after her 1.6-hectare property and entertains friends and family.

Courier, 1 Oct 1997

Catherina steps out

It's good to push yourself to the limits and not to be too soft on yourself



By JUDY RICHARDS

Ninety-year-old walker Catherina van der Linden was disappointed that her times in this year's City to Bay Fun Run weren't quite as good as previous years.

The Aldgate woman's best time for the event was in 2000 when, in the spirit of the Olympics, she completed the course in an admirable one hour and 48 minutes.

This year her family insisted that she have a few cautionary stops in case of cramp and, although she won her age category, she believes she could have bettered her time if allowed.

Organisers of the run said Mrs van der Linden's time of two hours 15 minutes was acceptable for any age runners, but exceptional for the oldest participant in the challenging run.

The extremely youthful-looking grandmother has a positive outlook on all aspects of her life, generating laughter and fun wherever she goes. She enjoys a busy and active life and calls every day a "happy one".

"I smile when I go to sleep when I have accomplished a run or some other challenge," she said.

"I know I have been lucky with my health and I put it down to working hard and keeping busy and occupied."

"It's good to push yourself to the limits and not to be too soft on yourself."

Mrs van der Linden was born in Holland in 1912 and enjoyed a simple and happy childhood with her two sisters and a brother.

"I remember the food shortage during WW1 in

In the Spotlight

People in Profile

1914 and the world's first broadcast of black and white television," she said.

During her life, Mrs van der Linden played tennis and has spent years fighting a fear of deep water by swimming regularly.

After leaving school, she worked in an office until she married her husband John, a company secretary and accountant, on her 18th birthday.

The couple migrated to SA in the '50s and settled to rear two sons and two daughters in metropolitan Adelaide.

In 1977, they settled on their 2.4ha Aldgate retirement property until tragedy struck when Mr van der Linden suffered a fatal heart attack the day before the devastating 1980 Ash Wednesday bushfires.

"It was a very sad time for me and my family but life had to go on," Mrs van der Linden said.

She has competed in the last six city to bay runs after deciding to join a family member in the event.

She continues a busy life, maintaining her Aldgate property, gardening, travelling, reading and playing bridge, as well as having a very healthy social life with friends and her family.

Last month her family, now including 10 grandchildren, hosted a party for 70 at Kingston Park and a family gathering to celebrate her 90th milestone.

In 2001, she travelled to France with her daughter Margherita and was questioned by customs officers unable to believe her age on her passport.

Life story

Her story has been told in the book 'Still Me', published by the Royal District Nursing Service a few years ago.

"I don't find my long life anything out of the ordinary — it's all about living day to day and finding something positive with whatever life brings," Mrs van der Linden said.

"My first great-grandchild is expected within days, so life is continuing to bring me much happiness."

Age is no barrier for 90-year-old Catherina van der Linden, of Aldgate, who recently completed her sixth consecutive City to Bay Fun Run in two hours and 15 minutes. The grandmother of 10 attributes her health to working hard and keeping busy and occupied.

Preserving Memories

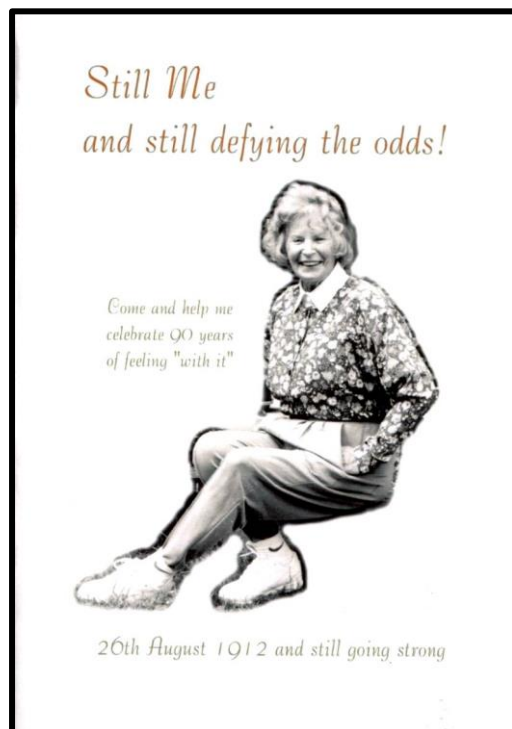
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Skateboarding at 88

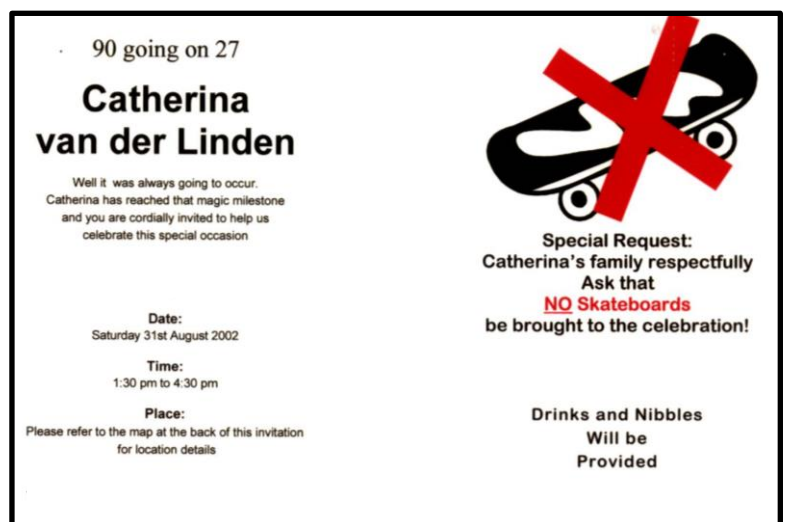
On Christmas Day 2000 the family get together was at Carl and Margherita's home. The big old house had long corridors with smooth floors. The youngest boy was given a skateboard for Christmas and Catherina, still wearing high heels, decided to try the skateboard in the passageway. After being told it wasn't safe, she followed the children outside and tried again on the cement verandah. On her attempt to turn she fell and broke her hip. Not one to be kept down, she was healed and back doing the City to Bay again by September the next year.

The following Christmas, again at Margherita's, Catherina collapsed, and the ambulance was called again. The attending paramedic walked through the door and looked at her and remembered "We were here for you last year on Christmas Day!"

Garrath, who has such a wonderful sense of humour, the following year when we were all getting together, he said, "Well, I'll ring up and book an ambulance in advance."



She subsequently received a skateboard of her own for her 90th birthday, no doubt with instructions to not use it herself.



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Driving at 99

Still driving at 99, she was instructed that it would be fine for her to drive locally. To Catherina local meant 'Adelaide' and was quite happy still driving up and around in the hills. Unfortunately, her eye sight was deteriorating rapidly, and it soon became necessary for her to give up driving.

100th Birthday

When Catherina turned 100 in 2012, she received congratulatory messages from the late Queen Elizabeth, as well as the late Queen Juliana of the Netherlands.

Many of her friends and family from all parts of the world attended this celebration at Partridge House, Glenelg.

The large gathering included nearly all of Catherina's family and their offspring.



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GLENELG

So busy, never bored

Catherina races to 100

TIM WILLIAMS

williamsti@mng.newsltd.com.au

SHE was driving at 99, tried skateboarding at 90 and walked the City-Bay Fun Run five times in her 80s.

So it is little surprise Catherina van der Linden has become a centenarian, or that she scored an iPad as a family birthday gift.

"I do try things," the Glenelg resident says.

"I never get bored."

Mrs van der Linden celebrated her milestone with about 70 family and friends at Partridge House on Sunday, August 26.

It was a much more successful party than the family Christmas gathering 10 years ago when she decided to give a young relative's skateboard a go.

"I broke my right hip," she says. "It was just dinner time so I ruined the whole Christmas dinner."



BIRTHDAY WISHES: Centenarian Catherina van der Linden from Glenelg. Picture: Ian Roddie H0402379

Mrs van der Linden migrated from the Netherlands and settled in Glenelg in the 1950s.

"I did all kinds of things – office work, hotel work, motel work – you name it, I did it."

She was also a typist for Myer, a nursing assistant, shop assistant and grape picker.

With her late husband John she raised four children and now has 10 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

For almost 30 years she tended a 1.2ha property with cows and sheep at Aldgate, before returning to the Bay in 2004.

But she felt cooped up in a seventh-floor apartment and

moved to her Maturin Rd unit.

So fast does she flit down the hallway of her immaculate home, she's hard to keep up with.

"I do everything myself. I like my independence," she says.

Her sprightliness and longevity she attributes to exercise – daily walks on the Broadway or to the beach and "a bit of gardening".

Technology

Jerome set up a computer for her and she took lessons so she could use it.

For her 100th birthday Catherina received an iPad from the family. She loved using it to look at photos.

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Modelling at 103

In 2016, at the age of 103, Catherina debuted on the catwalk. As part of a fundraiser for the Soroptimist Group, along with her granddaughter Samantha and great granddaughter Isabella, plus others, she modelled the fashions of the 1960s.

A model life helps fashion big debut

ELEANOR MILLER
GUARDIAN MESSENGER

AGED 103, Catherina van der Linden is making her catwalk debut in a charity parade of 1960s fashion.

The Glenelg woman, who walks up to 3km each day for fitness, is among several models of different ages who will feature in the Soroptimist International show, *A Sixties Affair*, next month.

Trying on a long summer dress with bright geometric designs, Catherina says she remembers wearing this type of style the first time around, when she was in her 50s.

She has always liked 1960s style, but, even back in the day, considered herself a bit long in the tooth for the decade's trademark skimpy skirts.

Always interested in fashion, Catherina says the looks of her youth in the 1930s were suits, generally made to measure by her seamstress mother, or tailor father.

"I was reasonably dressed," she said. "My mother was elegant ... we didn't have much money in those days - I didn't go out very much."

She married John, an accountant, in 1940 wearing a white satin wedding dress with lace she had bought in France.

A photo of her in the dress sits in the living room of Catherina's home, where she still lives alone. John died in his seventies - Catherina says he was a "very good husband" and she never looked for another.

On moving to Australia in the 1950s, she found women here at the time were more formally dressed than those in her Holland home.

Clothes for the parade are being lent by avid vintage fashion collector Chrissy Wright of Goolwa. *A Sixties Affair* will be held at the Glenelg Golf Club, on Saturday, May 7, from 6pm.

It will raise funds for eye checks and birth assistance in Cambodia. Cost: \$60. Phone 8271 4633 or 0439 880 871.



BACK TO THE '60s: Catherina van der Linden, with collector Chrissy Wright, strikes a pose.

Pictures: TRICIA WATKINS

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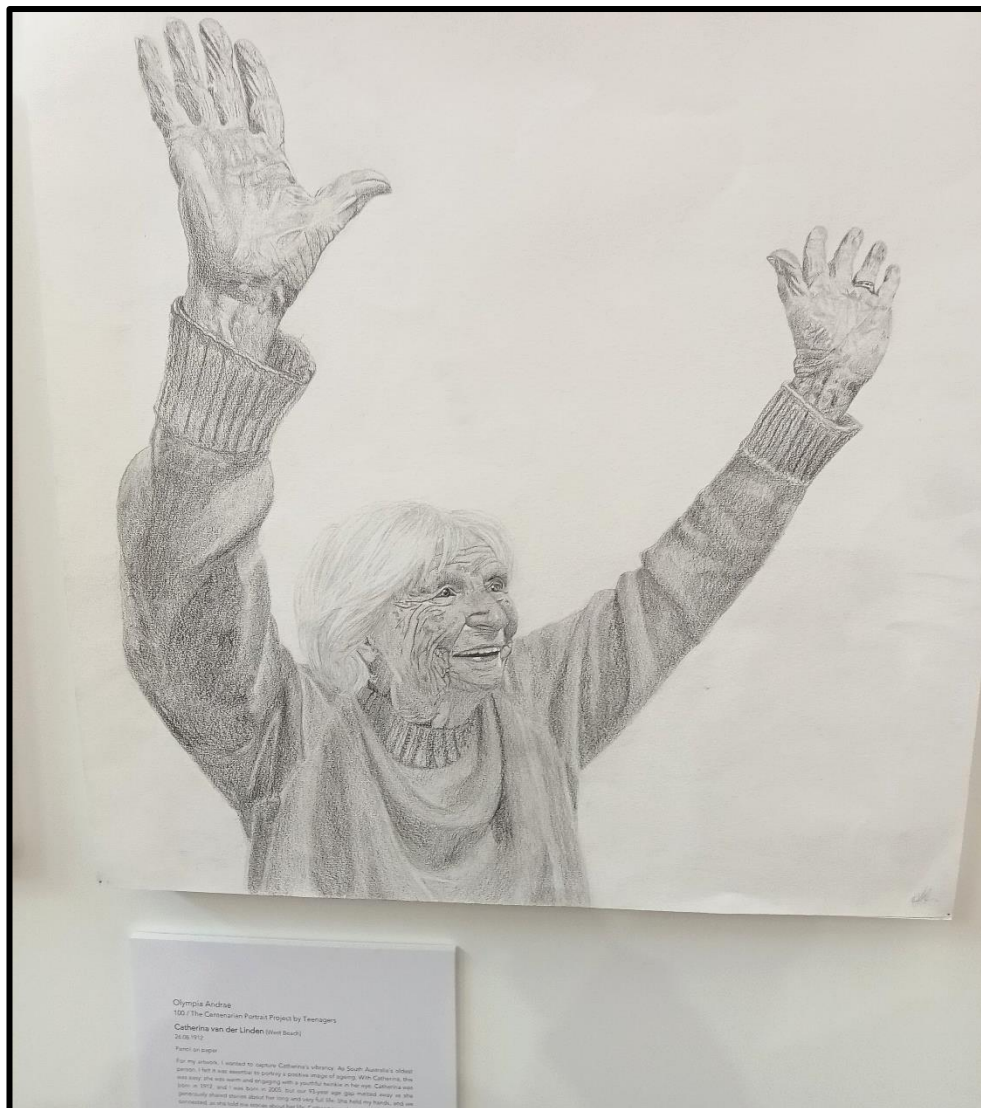
Centenarian Portrait Project

During 2022, Embraced Inc. conducted a National project where teenage artists were invited to produce portraits of centenarians.

In South Australia, a portrait of Catherina was produced by 16-year-old Olympia Andrae. The portrait intends to show Catherina enjoying her gym workout.



Catherina with artist, Olympia Andrae



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Catherina's was one of a number of South Australian produced portraits that were chosen to be displayed and judged in June 2023 as part of The Centenarian Portrait Project by Teenagers. This exhibition of 100 portraits of 100-year-olds, from around Australia, formed part of a National Competition at the Belconnen Arts Centre in Canberra.

Catherina met with the Honourable Frances Adamson AC Governor of SA, at the Adelaide unveiling of her portrait in early 2023.



The Honourable Frances Adamson AC and Catherina with Jerome, 2023

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Media Appearances

As well as newspaper articles, Catherina also featured frequently in television and radio broadcasts as her birthday would come around.



CATE THE GREAT – Catherina van der Linden works out with Angus Smart at the gym.

Did somebody just say something about age?

CATHERINA van de Linden spent her 104th birthday at one of her favourite hangouts – the gym.

Putting many younger people to shame, the spritely senior celebrated her birthday with a workout.

Catherina signed up to an exercise program in Glenelg last year when she was 103 and said she never misses a session.

She heard about the weekly Life Exercise program, run by not-for-profit aged care organisation ACH Group, from her daughter Mariella Hocking, who also attends. The program covers strength, conditioning, balance and fitness.

ACH Group fitness team leader Angus Smart said Catherina is passionate about keeping active and fit and is an inspiration to many others at the gym.

“We have created a fitness program tailored to what Catherina wants to focus on,” Angus said. “She always strives to push further and is not afraid to go the extra mile.”

Catherina migrated from the Netherlands and settled in Glenelg in the 1950s.

For almost three decades she tended a large property with cattle and sheep at Aldgate before returning to the Bay in 2004.

Angus said the program provides many benefits to older people.

“Exercising regularly is good for health and fitness, it helps prevent injuries and to recover from injuries faster,” he said.

“But there is also the social aspect of coming to the gym, meeting people and not being isolated that people value too.”

August 2016

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GYM-LOVER: Catherina van der Linden is a firm believer that exercise and a healthy diet are crucial to a long life.

Picture: TRICIA WATKINSON

Birthday gran says 106 is worth the weight

ELIZABETH HENSON

NEXT time you're thinking of making up an excuse to avoid exercising, just think of Catherina van der Linden.

Not only does Catherina never miss a gym session, she celebrates her 106th birthday tomorrow.

The self-confessed Glenelg gym-junkie, who will enjoy

her extra special day with her family, is proof exercise really is the key to a long life.

She joined the ACH Group's Glenelg Health Studio in 2015 and has been pumping weights once a week ever since.

"I would come more often if I could but I only have a lift here once a week," Catherina said with a smile.

Exercise has always been an integral part of Catherina's life.

"I used to swim laps and I played tennis for many years ... I'm not one to just sit around," she said.

"I like to get out and enjoy life."

On turning a year older, Catherina, who continues to live independently with help

from her daughter Merielle and Meals on Wheels, said: "I don't feel any different really. Ageing just comes naturally; you don't notice that you're really so old," she said.

"I can still do a bit of shopping and have Meals on Wheels three times a week.

"I don't feel old – I really can't believe it myself."

ACH Group fitness leader

Scott Attwood said Catherina was an inspiration to other gym-goers.

"She's a great example of the benefits of exercise," he said. Catherina emigrated from the Netherlands and settled in Glenelg in the 1950s. For almost 30 years, she ran a cattle and sheep farm at Aldgate before returning to Glenelg in 2004.

August 2018

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108th birthday [SevenNews, 2020]



Southern Star, September 2020

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109th birthday
[Southern Cross
Care, 2021]

Gym junkie gran shapes up for 109th birthday

REBECCA DIGIROLAMO

SOUTH Australia's oldest person – a “gym junkie” super gran who likes to give her muscles a triweekly workout – turns 109 on Thursday.

Catherina van der Linden says it's not in her DNA to stay still.

“I like to move,” says the great-grandmother of 14.

The only thing that's slowed her down is a broken left hip, sustained 18 months ago while hanging out the washing.

Right up until then she was living independently near her daughter's Glenelg home.

It's not her first broken hip, either. In her 90s, Mrs van der Linden broke her right hip after road-testing her grandson's skateboard while wearing heels.

“Some people can sit for hours – but I'm not a person who can sit still,” she says.

For the past three years, Mrs van der Linden has participated in weekly group fitness classes.

The classes are run at ACH Group's Health Studio 50+ at Glenelg and involve a 45-minute circuit of state-of-the-art fitness equipment designed to strengthen the upper body, legs and core for older bodies.

Mrs van der Linden also flexes her muscles twice a week through seated exercises at “home” – Southern Cross West Beach Residential Care.

“I think movement is something that is necessary to live a healthy life and is important for every person to do ... don't be sedentary,” she said.

Fitness leader Scott Attwood said Mrs van der Linden was an inspiration for class members.

“She is a great role model and encourages them to workout and keep fit. It's very rare for her to miss a class,” he said.

Mrs van der Linden was born in the Netherlands in 1912 and migrated to Australia with her accountant husband John looking for work post-World War II.

The couple had four children – among them Mariella Hocking, who says her mother wasn't always a “gym junkie”.

“She has always walked and ridden a bike but the gym is something she's taken up later in her life,” Mrs Hocking said.

She said her mother's try-anything-once attitude motivated the entire family.

“I think she is quite inspiring – she inspires me,” Mrs Hocking said.

INSIDE TODAY: INDEPENDENT LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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Sunday, August 21, 2022 | NEWS 19



Born in 1912, Catherina still hits gym with her trainer

Catherina van der Linden celebrates with great-granddaughter Isabella, 18, granddaughter Sam, 51, and daughter Mariella, 79. Inset, with her fitness trainer. Picture: Dean Martin

Supergran turns 110

REBECCA WHITFIELD-BAKER

TURNING 110 this week, age-defying Catherina van der Linden – South Australia's oldest person – truly is a state treasure and the most remarkable of women.

The mother of four, grandmother of 10 and great-grandmother of 13, affectionately referred to as "Toos" by her family, has outlived her beloved husband of 40 years, John, by four decades, after tragically losing him, aged 70, to a heart attack in 1980.

The fun-loving super gran, who as a near octogenarian broke her hip after falling while skateboarding in high heels, attributes her long life to remaining fit, active, social – and "unusual freaky genes".

Without fail, the once keen tennis player walks twice daily and still hits the gym at her Southern Cross

Care's West Beach Residential Care home twice a week, remaining a keen gardener.

On Friday, the much-loved matriarch who was born the year the Titanic sank and has lived through two pandemics and two world wars will celebrate a new milestone birthday. She is just 11 days younger than Australia's oldest person, NSW man Frank Mawer who turned 110 on August 15.

From horse-drawn carts to motor cars and kerosene to electricity, the world has changed significantly in her lifetime.

Mrs van der Linden says she recalls when a car cost \$2000 and "a gallon of fuel (about 4L) was 25 cents", shoes could be bought for a couple of dollars and a leather jacket less than \$5.

Born in the Netherlands in 1912, Mrs van der Linden moved to Aus-

tralia with her husband and young family – at the time Mariella was 12, Jerome, 7, Garrath, 6 and little Margherita, 2 – in 1955.

"It was a six-week sea journey and a great experience for the children," she recalls, adding the family initially lived for two years in the Victorian migrant camp of Bonegilla. "It was very basic ... (we had) two freezing cold rooms inside a Nissen hut with a small two-bar radiator."

The family later moved to Woodside before settling in Glenelg.

When asked if longevity is a family trait, the fashion-loving, immaculately-presented Mrs van der Linden, smiles and shakes her head.

"No, most of my family – I had two sisters and a brother – died in their early seventies but I did have one aunt who lived to be 110, so (I) must have her unusual freaky genes," she says.

In fact it is Mrs van der Linden who sets the standard fitness-wise at her residential care home, according to Southern Cross Care chief executive David Moran.

"Catherina is impressively the fittest resident among her peers," he said.

"(She) is a South Australian treasure who brings joy to our staff with her positive outlook and commitment to living better for life. We look forward to celebrating her remarkable 110th birthday milestone."

PAGE 84: AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST PERSON



LIFE AND TIMES OF TOOS

1912: Born on August 26.
1929: Finished school.
1933: Met future husband John at a ball "wearing a black satin dress, Biedermeier line", made by her mother.
1940: Married in the same year the Netherlands was occupied by Germany.
1943-53: Children Mariella, Jerome, Garrath and Margherita born.
1955: Moved to Australia.
1960s: Bought first home.
1990s: Walked the City-Bay.
2000s: Became an Australian citizen.
2011: Stopped driving at 99.
2019: Moved to Southern Cross Care's West Beach Residential Care.

Advertiser, 21 August 2022

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Thoughts and Advice

Most influential person?

My sister Riet helped me to speak up for myself and become more outspoken.

Traditions lost?

It is a pity that we couldn't have real candles on the Christmas tree, like we did when I was young.

What has surprised you as you have aged?

People are kinder to young people than in my time. We were used to being put aside, adults were more important.

What age would you go back to if you could?

I would like to be a 15-year-old again, as at that age I was half adult and still half child. I enjoyed being 15 years old.

Catherina's maternal aunt, Petronella lived to 110 years and 107 days. Longevity is in the family, however, there is no doubt that Catherina's long life has been attributed to her love of keeping active.

She says, *"The best lesson for your life it to do more activities, do more things with your body".*



Catherina van der Linden just before her 109th birthday in 2021

Give a bit more love to each other, much more consideration. And love animals and things like that.

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The oldest living person in Australia

As of April 2023, Catherina is believed to be the oldest living person in Australia and is also the oldest known living Dutch born person in the world.

This was acknowledged by Marion Derckx, Dutch Ambassador to Australia, when she came to visit Catherina, in March 2023.



With the Hon. Dutch Consul for South Australia and CEO of ACH, Frank Weits (standing on right) Dutch Ambassador to Australia, Marion Derckx (seated on right) March 2023

At 110 she is still an active woman, attending the gym at her home, West Beach Residential Care, twice a week and fitting in two walks every day.

Catherina has four children, 10 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren who continue to visit. She is in good health apart from difficulties with her eyesight and hearing. She enjoys an occasional glass of champagne and gardening.

Her current aim is to make the ripe old age of 111 years, in August 2023.



Celebrating 110 years, watched by youngest great grandchildren Bella, Lily and Leo, 2022

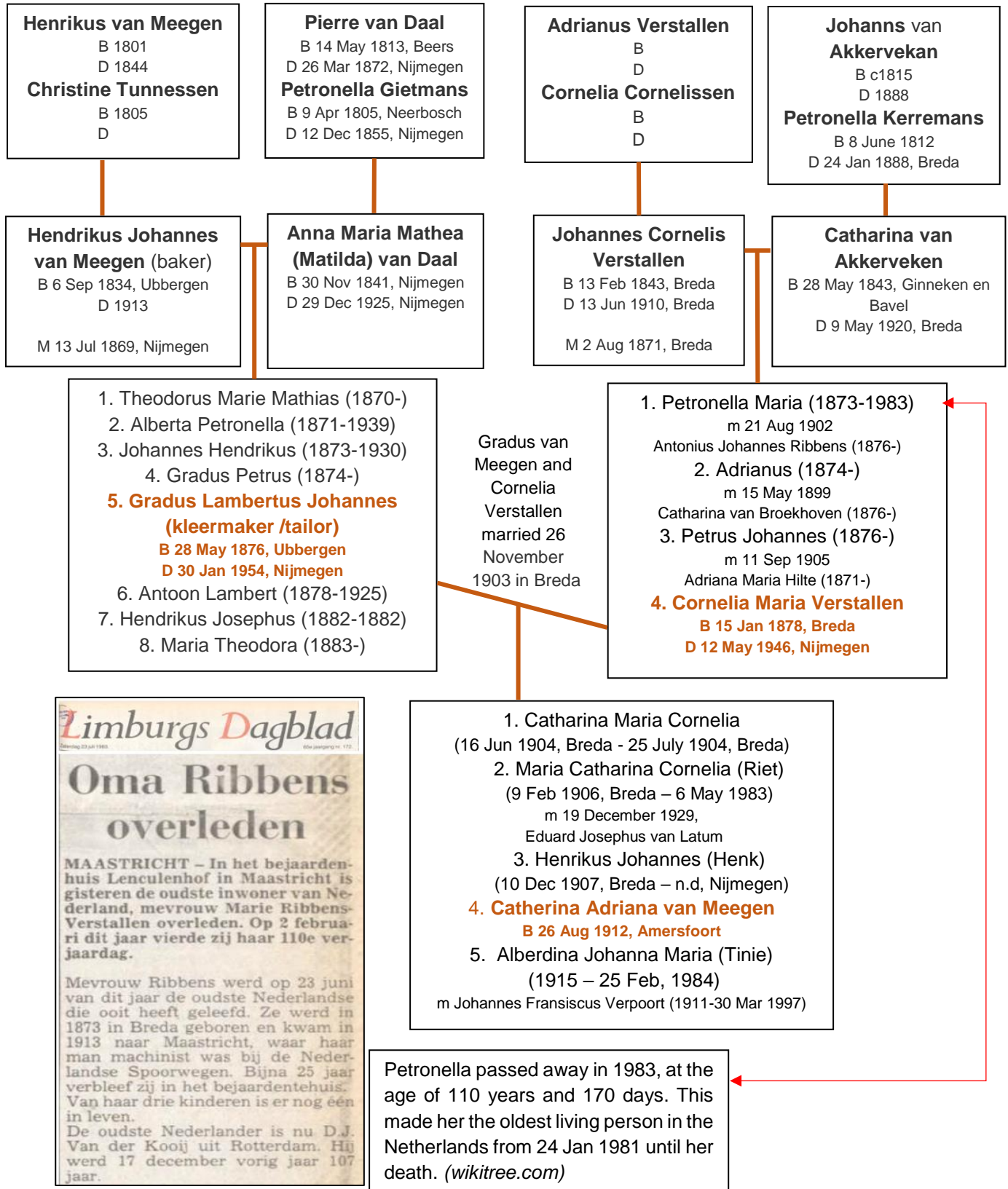


Catherina with great granddaughter Isobella, granddaughter Sam, and daughter Mariella, 2022

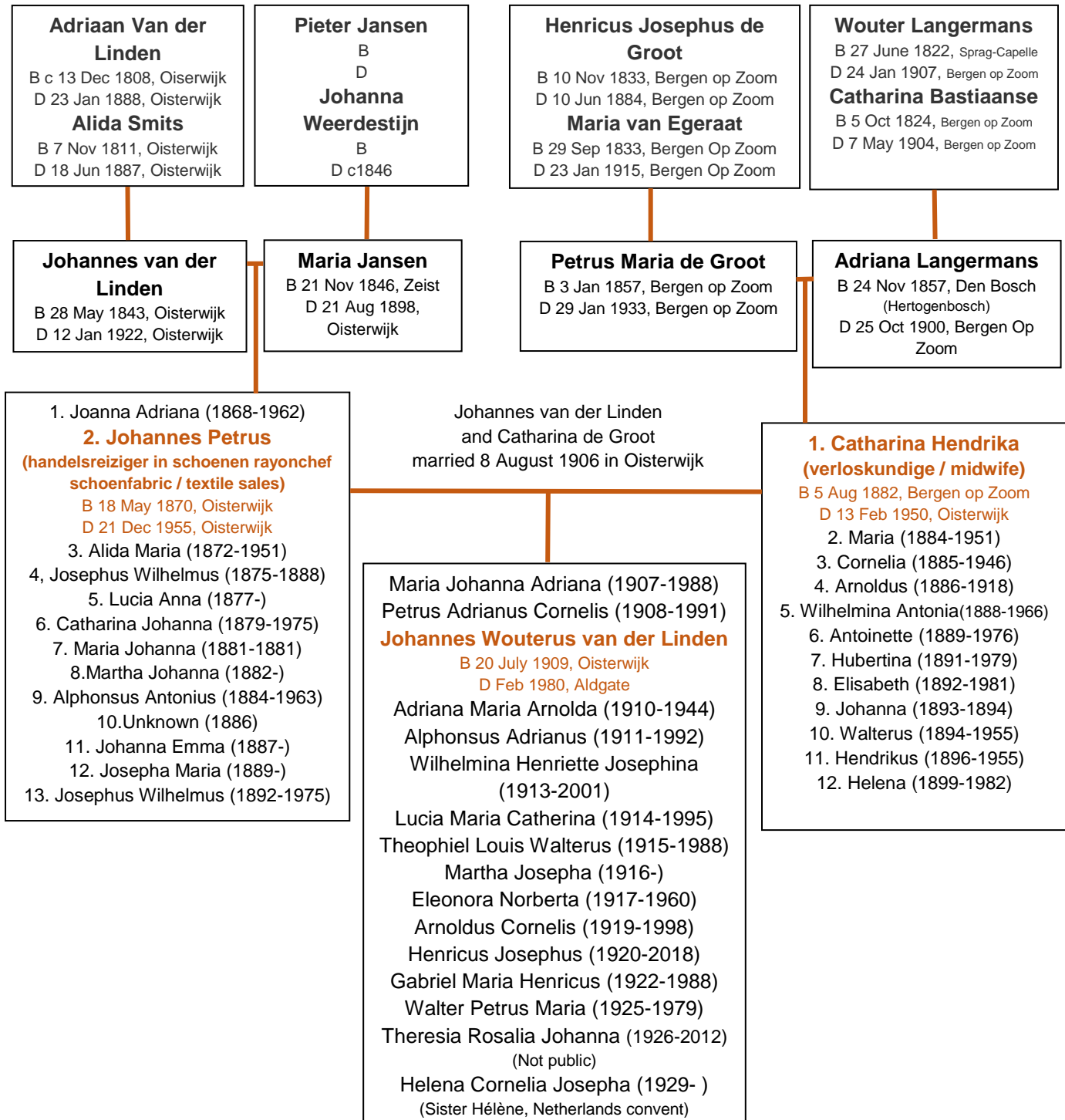
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Family Background - van Meegen



Family Background - van der Linden



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Historic Events

1912

- Establishment of the Republic of China (end of Qing Dynasty)
- Amundsen announces discovery of the South Pole
- Sinking of the Titanic

1910s

- World War 1
- Spanish Flu

1920s

- First TV images transmitted in London
- 1924 Olympic Games in Paris (Netherlands ranked 9th with 4 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze medals)
- Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin
- Pluto discovered

1930s

- Depression / Wall Street Crash
- Sunglasses became a popular fashion accessory
- Teabags introduced and sold commercially
- Photocopier, ballpoint pens, polaroid, radar, sticky tape

1940s

- 26 countries agree to create the United Nations
- Popular films: Casablanca, Mrs Miniver, Bambi
- 10 May 1940, Germany invaded & occupied Netherlands / World War 2

1950s

- Cold War
- Teenagers buy clothes with own money
- First credit cards, transistor radios, video tapes
- McDonalds replaced hand cut fries with Frozen French Fries

1960s

- Vietnam war, Beatles, Rolling Stones
- 1963 US president John F Kennedy assassination
- 1963 Cassette tape developed in the Netherlands
- Fashion: miniskirts and boots for women, paisley shirts and velvet trousers for men

1970s

- Home computers, barcodes, IVF, email, lava lamps
- Growth in women's rights, availability of contraceptive pill

1980s

- Collapse of communism, German unification
- Margaret Thatcher, UK Prime Minister; Ronald Reagan, US President
- Tiananmen Square, China, hundreds of democracy movement protesters killed
- Mobile phones, 3M post-it notes, World wide web

1990s

- Gulf war, break-up of Yugoslavia
- Cloning of Dolly the sheep, stem cell research, genetic engineering

2000s

- Sydney 2000 Olympic Games
- 2001 US terror attacks
- 2008 Apple iPhone

2010s

- Prince William and Harry's royal weddings
- Missing Malaysian planes
- Reality TV star Donald Trump US president
- 2019 COVID pandemic

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Preserving Memories

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The *Preserving Memories* project aim is to interview people who have lived in or had connections to the West Torrens area. The West Torrens Historical Society in conjunction with the City of West Torrens invite them to share their memories and talk about the events and experiences which helped to make up their life's history. It allows us all the chance to reflect on the past and to preserve those memories into the future.

This document has been produced from a 1988 interview, and 2023 discussions with Catherina and her family members.

'Catherina and family would like to commend the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society for their 'Preserving Memories' project.

A special thanks must go Lynette Bacchus for providing interesting snippets of information from her research and then pulling the whole document together with the data and the photographs'.

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June 2023