

STILL WATERS AND GREEN PASTURES

THE GANZVLEI STORY



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Chapter One

HAPPINESS



It was the icy silence that made me feel unhappy and fearful. The almost inaudible whisper of 'Pass the butter please', came from my father at the head of the table and sighed through the room, threatening the silence. My parents were in the throes of deep disagreement. What made it worse was my father, the optimist, my normally cheerful laughing father, was betraying me. I could not bear to see him sitting all hunched up and sulky. It was he who urged me on: 'Put on a brave and cheerful face in every difficulty and keep smiling even when you want to cry. Time is a great healer. It won't be long before you feel better.' He looked as if he would never smile again, and time is forever when you are only seven years of age.

It was a relief when the unhappy meal was over and I could follow my elder brother on to the stoep overlooking the main street of Knysna. The few shops in the dusty street were not yet open and there was little traffic about. The December sun already had a bite to it, shining down through gloriously clear blue sky, and it promised to be a hot day. It was not long before Father joined us. His face was grave but he was no longer whispering. 'Your mother has a headache and is lying down. I am going to Sedgefield to visit my cousin Charles who has a holiday shack in the bush. It might be quite an adventure for you chaps.'

My brother gave a whoop of joy and made straight for the front seat of the shiny ruby-red 1933 Ford sedan in front of the building. I followed more slowly and slumped into the back seat of the already hot car. I was sick of the tension and wished my mother were with us. I lay down, closed my eyes and tried to think of something peaceful. We had recently been taught Psalm 23 written by King David. Strange to think of a king writing a song, but when you murmured it quietly to yourself it did seem to bring about a better feeling, and there is something special about having the same name as the chap who wrote it.

We set off from Knysna, winding our way along the edge of the lagoon and crossing the river at the Red Bridge. Instead of going up towards Phantom Pass, we turned towards the sea. On the flat stretch beside the river the car picked up speed until we bumped over the corrugations at a steady thirty -five miles an hour.

'Shakes you up a bit,' said Father loudly. 'It's almost as good as a dose of salts.' The idea seemed to please him and he looked more relaxed. My brother was humming. In those days, before canned music took over, there was a lot of whistling, singing and humming. People made their own music. Turning west up the twisting sandy road towards Keyter's Neck, the ride became smoother and the pace slower. I stood up in the back of the car, looked over the bench seat and took more interest in the scenery, thinking that it might not be such a bad day after all.

From the cleft in the hill the road wound gently down towards the river. Even from a distance the new railway embankment obscured most of the valley. We drove under the narrow stone arch where the railway line crossed over the road, and then suddenly there was the wide black river and the green fertile valley stretching before us. My brother stopped humming. Standing

looking over the back seat I had a perfect view and I let out a gasp. ‘Is this the place of still waters and green pastures?’

My father, born and raised in the shadow of the Knysna forest, had gone as a young man to Pretoria as there was little work in his home town. It was the chimes of the Union Buildings clock that delighted me as I lay in my cot, rather than the Transvaal countryside. I did not like the dry heat and the endless thorn bush, and the yellow winter grass had little appeal. I loved the English picture books with tall trees, rivers and canals, rolling countryside, with cows in the meadows. There were no meadows near our house, only thorns and *steekgras*.

We crossed the river and continued up the valley, the glistening water reflecting the deep blue sky and the contrasting shadows of the huge weeping willows growing along the banks. Further up the slope towards the old homestead huge oaks beckoned to shady nooks where contented cows lay chewing the cud. Closer to the road, which had now become a track, the ditches were filled with blazing white arum lilies. The succulent blue-green grass was knee high all the way from hill to river and in some places stood halfway up the fences, the poles of which were old and gnarled, and covered in moss. I had never seen a pole with moss on it.

‘Stop the car, please Dad, I shouted.’

He was surprised and turned to me.

‘Why?’ he asked.

‘Because this is where I want to live’

He laughed, and so did my brother. We all three laughed. I was happy.

‘So you want to live here,’ my father repeated. ‘Well I’m blessed. Do you see those three large orange trees in front of that old house? Well when I was your age I sat under those same trees and ate oranges. One evening I had so many that I wet my bed. My Aunt Hester who lived in the house was very angry and said I was a glutton and a pig’. We boys laughed hilariously and clamoured for more. ‘Well, I don’t quite know what to tell you. There are so many memories of my boyhood, like swimming in the river and the canoes we made out of sheets of old corrugated iron. We had to do a clever balancing act because our homemade primitive efforts were very unstable. Then of course there was all the delicious farm food and the huge meals and the wonderful fun we all had. My uncle, Pieter Schnetler, was a German who played the piano beautifully. He had a fine piano made of rosewood. Most evenings when I stayed with them, he would play for us after supper. Usually he would start with one of Mozart’s more melodious concertos like his Piano Concerto number 23, which we boys learned to know well and which he encouraged us to whistle when he got to the more straight-forward melodies within. He was a talented musician and would whistle and sing great chunks of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony when on his way through the fields in the late afternoon to fetch the cows for milking. The old man was full of fun. Sometimes he would be playing some soothing music and would notice that one of the young cousins was dropping off to sleep and he would suddenly switch to rag time, and some ridiculous song like, “Does the chewing-gum lose its flavour on the bed post over night.” Another of his favourites was “Swing me just a little bit higher Obedia, do.” Then we would all sing and laugh. It was a happy valley.’

There was a silence while we looked across at the old house. ‘Do you see the room on the right, on the end of the house?’ asked Father. ‘That was the schoolroom, and probably still is. At one time, after the 1918 war, your Aunt Mimmie was the schoolmistress. She is a spinster who lost her fiancée in the Boer war. She told me that she had a strong premonition at the time that he was going to be killed, and continually pictured all sorts of different scenes in which her hero battled against enormous odds. It never did happen that way. He was killed in some freak accident.

Mimmie believed that she was partly to blame, because she had ‘held the wrong thoughts,’ She often said, after that horrible experience, ‘you must be careful of what you think, and what you set your heart on, because you are likely to get it’.

Father sat pensively for a few moments, and then started the car. As we drove off he said ‘Merriman Schonken, who lived across the river, told me many years later that he and his fellow pupils thought that she was a witch. She had eyes in the back of her head and ‘read’ teacups, with such eerie prediction, that many people would not show their cups to her.’ The idea of his sister being thought a witch seemed very funny, and, almost choking with laughter, he spluttered, ‘ She had the narrowest, longest shoes I have ever seen, with long, sharp points. Just picture her lying on her broomstick with one foot on top of the other, sticking out in a point behind, as she flew down the river on a moonlit night’.

We drove on. Father sang loudly. The valley was a happy place.

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There is a golden thread of coincidence that winds its way through every life, the force of which we cannot stop. From time to time I had longed for a place to live, an old house with yellow-wood floors and ceilings, surrounded by huge trees, and green pastures, and a river a short stroll away. I never dreamed that I would ever own a piece of this valley, in this particular spot, where I said ‘Dad, this is where I want to live’ so many years ago.

Sometimes I wonder what force or what power of suggestion my father and his sister, old Aunt Mimmie, had on my fate. Mimmie (Marie Antoinette Auret Metelerkamp) was born one hundred and twenty years ago, in 1879. She was blessed with great wisdom and, for her time, original thinking. She was an ardent and influential Christian Scientist and believed that mind is stronger than matter.

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Forty-five years had to pass before I came to live here in this same place, and then my coming was intertwined with strange and curious quirks of fate. It so happened that like many men who find themselves approaching fifty years of age, I was at that time going through a long and terrible ‘middle-age crisis’. Not only was I terribly unhappy and discontented with everything about me and with every facet of my life at that time, but the unhappiness spread like an evil force to my family and everyone with whom I had any regular contact, making me feel very alone and isolated from the rest of humanity. In desperation I gave up my work and what I was doing and went off on a holiday on my own, motoring from up country to Knysna.

Driving westwards over the White Bridge, up to Keyter’s Nek and then slowly down the tarred road and along the valley floor, I recalled the childhood trip with my father. I stopped the car as we did many years before, filled with nostalgia together with a feeling of peace and tranquillity. At the place where I stopped the car, among the arum lilies growing up the fence, there was a sign. ‘For Sale’. It looked as if it had been there for some time, and had I been driving fast I might not have seen it.

The farm had not been occupied for some months and was overgrown and run down. The older house had been used as a hay store and the pillars of the front stoep were sagging. Borer

beetle had eaten some of the lovely old yellowwood floors in the newer house. I contacted the agent immediately and was told that many people had been to inspect the property but were put off by the desolation. What the agent did not say was that it was a time of great uncertainty following the 1976 Black School riots and the property market was in the absolute doldrums. I remembered what the place could be like and the sense of happiness that the surroundings engendered in me, and was determined to buy it, and start a new life. I first had to return home and get my affairs in order. I had property but not enough available money.

In desperation, the seller put the property up for auction. I was not aware that the auction sale was taking place and that the sword of Damocles was hanging over my head. Purely by chance I bought a *Farmers Weekly* and saw to my absolute horror a half-page advertisement announcing that the farm was to be knocked down to the highest bidder the next day. I was in Natal. It was not possible to get to Knysna by the next morning so I phoned an attorney in the town and asked him to go to the sale and bid on my behalf. I had enough money for the deposit and felt that fate would have to help me over the next hurdle. Ours was the highest bid but not high enough to satisfy one of the parties in this complicated sale. The property remained unsold. Weeks of negotiation followed and at last the purchase was signed and sealed. It was truly amazing that for six long months this pretty little farm had remained unsold and available for me to buy.



I have lived on this farm for nearly thirty years. During this time all four of my adult children have lived and worked with me here, at one time or another. Two of them live on the farm with their growing families in their separate houses. We live apart and yet there is a wonderful feeling of a family entity, and the strength and comfort of a powerful support group. Children have been born and brought up and people have died. Some of the huge willow trees have fallen, and some of the great oaks, hollow with age, have come to the end of their long lives.

There has been a great deal to learn, and opportunity to put into practice the good lessons learned from farming elsewhere in the past. We have tried to farm with nature, as nature farms in an organic way. We have experienced the magic of the earthworm, which, in some inexplicable fashion, turns soil, whether it is acid or alkaline, into a neutral friable and fertile medium for plant growth. The deep alluvial soils of the valley bottom have been the perfect place to harness the earthworm, to feed it and encourage significant multiplication and ensure that the minerals from deep down below are brought to the surface, to be used by the shallow-rooted clovers. The legumes in turn produce nitrogen, which keeps the pasture including the grass growing in luxurious abundance. We have planted trees and shrubs and flower gardens, and tried to make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, on a sustainable organic basis. The genetics of the dairy herd has improved in leaps and bounds, and the cows produce more and richer milk than when we first settled here. The beef cattle are fatter and sleeker, and the quality and succulence of the Aberdeen Angus beef is as good as the best of Scotland.

But living so close to nature, we have also experienced the awesome destruction that occurs. Drought that shrivels up the plants, including the hardy indigenous bush itself, and turns the pasture brown. Raging floodwaters that wash boats and boat-houses down the river and out to sea, never to be seen again. We have recovered a dinghy from the treetops, and the younger and braver of us have had to swim across the tops of fences to coax frightened heifers to swim to higher ground, while the rising waters sweep by all about them.

Nature destroys and nature heals. After a flood, the valley drains surprisingly quickly and grows rapidly to new fresh abundance. So too after a prolonged drought plentiful rain eventually falls, the grass responds quickly and prolifically as if all through the dry days reserves of strength have been storing up in the roots, only to be released by the rain.

The healing of nature is wonderful to see. A twisted White Stinkwood, which has been suppressed by thorn bush, will soon recover and grow straight if the thorn is cleared and it is helped along. And so too, in times of great sadness, the valley is a soothing place in which to live and to work through grief, helped along by the healing power of time. A happy valley.



Chapter Two

EARLY GLIMPSES : CROSSING THE GOUKAMMA



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The names of the first people living in the Goukamma do not appear in any records. Fanie Schnetler, a one-time resident of the valley, noted in his reminiscences:

The Bushmen (San) were the first people here. They found no surfaces suitable for painting as the rock formations were too rough and sandy, but we dug out many beads from below the sandstone caves – long beads which were very colourful, and small beads which my mother used to decorate the edges of the little covers she crocheted to cover the milk jug.

The Khoi (Hottentots) also lived in the area, and their legacy lives on in the names of many of the rivers and mountains. The word Goukamma (or Daukama, Doukoma, Gaukamma, Gowcomma), comes from the Khoikhoi word for the sour fig or *vygie* (*Carpobrotus*) which grows along the coast and is covered with shiny yellow or mauve flowers in Spring.

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In the early 1770s, when the earliest travellers from Europe made their way through Outeniqualand, it was a region remote from the Dutch East India Company's settlement at the Cape. Company officials at the Cape had known of the existence of this densely forested area, sparsely inhabited by Khoi and Bushmen, from the early part of the 18th century, but precipitous river crossings and the Outeniqua Mountains kept this strip of land between the mountains and the sea fairly inaccessible. As the herds owned by Khoi living near the settlement at Table Bay had been depleted, expeditions sent out to barter for cattle had gradually extended further north and east. Hunters followed, as did unofficial cattle traders and eventually settlers in search of fresh grazing grounds. The shortage of wood at the Cape at the beginning of the 18th century led to further expansion, first to the Grootvadersbos near Swellendam, and then to the splendid forests of Outeniqualand.

When Secunde JW Cloppenburg, deputy to the Cape Governor, visited Outeniqualand in 1768 he noted that there were 14 farmers settled between Mossel Bay and the Knysna River. Many were very poor and supplemented their income by cutting and selling wood. The early farmers themselves left no written records giving descriptions of the area, and for these we have to rely on the observations of Company officials and travellers from Europe. When Hendrik Swellengrebel Jr visited the area 10 years later he noted that 'as far as Swellendam and Mossel Bay and occasionally as far as the Zeekoei River, one finds quite respectable houses with a large room partitioned into 2 or 3, and with good doors and windows, though mostly without ceilings.' He was very critical of the methods used by the woodcutters, saying that 'everyone fells the best tree he can find, damaging

10 to 12 trees close to it, while still more are damaged in dragging it out.’ (Swellengrebel, pp. 357,361)

Francis Masson, a Scot who visited the Cape in the early 1770’s to collect plant specimens for the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, wrote ‘to the N.E. of Mossel-Baay lies a woody country, called Houteniquas Land; whose woods, intercepted by rivers and precipices, are so large, that their extent is not perfectly known. These woods are a great treasure to the Dutch, and will be very serviceable to the inhabitants of the Cape, when their other woods are exhausted. In them are numbers of wild buffaloes that are very fierce, and some elephants’. (Masson, F. *Account of three journeys to the Cape of Good Hope, 1772 – 1775*, p.118)

The first written description we have of the Goukamma valley is by Carl Pehr Thunberg, a distinguished Swedish botanist and student of Linnaeus. Thunberg had been commissioned by the Dutch East India Company to do a botanical survey of the Cape, and he travelled with Johann Auge, gardener and botanical collector of the Company’s garden at the Cape. Thunberg describes his crossing of the Goukamma River in his book, *Travels at the Cape of Good Hope, 1772 – 1775*. On the 3rd of November 1772

.....the woods we passed through were dense and full of prickly bushes. We could find no passage through them other than the tracks of the Hottentots, so that we were obliged almost to creep on all fours, and lead our horses by the bridle. Auge, the gardener, having travelled this way before, was now our guide, and we had left the Hottentots with our oxen behind us.

In the afternoon we arrived at Koukuma Rivier. We forded over one of its branches and intended to pass through a thicket to a farm which we discovered on an eminence on the other side of this thicket...but we had not advanced far into the wood before we had the misfortune of meeting with a large old male buffalo which was lying down quite alone... He no sooner discovered Auge, who rode first, then roaring horribly he rushed upon him. The gardener turning his horse short round, behind a large tree, by that means got in some measure out of the buffalo's sight, which now rushed straight towards the serjeant, who followed next, and gored his horse in the belly in such a terrible manner, that it fell on its back that instant, with its feet turned up in the air, and all its entrails hanging out, in which state it lived almost half an hour. The gardener and the serjeant in the mean time had climbed up into trees, where they thought themselves secure. The buffalo after this achievement now appeared to take his course towards the side where we were approaching, and therefore could not have failed in his way to pay his compliments to me, who all the while was walking towards him, and in the narrow pass formed by the boughs and branches of the trees, and on account of the rustling noise these made against my saddle and baggage had neither seen nor heard any thing of what had passed.

Thunberg was in the habit of stopping frequently to pick plant samples, and generally kept behind his companions in order not to hold them up or hinder their progress; so at the time that all this was going on he was ‘a small distance’ behind them. He continues with the story:

The serjeant had brought two horses with him for his journey. One of them had already been dispatched and the other now stood just in the way of the buffalo, who was going out of the wood. As soon as the buffalo saw this second horse, he became more outrageous than before, and attacked it with such fury, that he not only drove his horns into the horse's breast and out again through the very saddle, but also threw it to the ground with such violence, that it died that very instant, and all the bones in its body were broken. Just at the moment

that he was thus occupied with this latter horse, I came up to the opening, where the wood was so thick that I had neither room to turn my horse round, nor to get on one side. I was therefore obliged to abandon him to his fate and take refuge in a tolerably high tree, up which I climbed.

The buffalo then turned about and went off in the direction in which the travellers wished to go. Thunberg and his party decided that discretion was the better part of valour, especially the gardener and the sergeant who were absolutely speechless with fright, so, on climbing down from the trees they hurried back along the path by which they had arrived. A group of Hottentots were sent with their lances to drive the buffalo away and retrieve the saddles. Thunberg records spending a cold and relatively sleepless night next to a fire. The Hottentots smoked *dagga* that had been grown nearby.

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During the late 1700s and early 1800s a number of other travellers recorded their experiences while crossing the Goukamma River. One of them was James Callander, a Scot, who after an adventurous career in the British Navy and the English East India Company arrived at the Cape in about 1778. He was commissioned by the Cape governor to report on the forests, bays and rivers from Mossel Bay to Algoa Bay and travelled overland to Knysna. There he obtained the right of occupation from Johann von Lindenbaum, then owner of Melkhoutkraal, and built himself a wooden cabin on the Eastern Head but later moved to about where Woodbourne is now. In Callander's unpublished diary, December 1798-November 1800 (CA BO 235), he describes his experiences of crossing the Goukamma River.

Arrived at and crossed the Doukama river to the farm of Peter Terblans which stands immediately on the east side. This river is here a stagnant pool that we crossed by boat. The bullocks being unyoked from the wagon and horses unsaddled swim over, and the wagon dragged through by rope. Being all under water except the upper part of the tent which appeared above.

Went down to examine the mouth – nearly blocked...

I have since crossed the Doukama about one mile higher up, in the Publick road where there is no boat, those that do not send for the boat to transport their goods over generally make a float of timber. Here this river is fresh water and good to drink ...

The entrance of this river is about two miles from the crossing.

In August 1801 Robert Semple, a young British/American merchant from the Cape, travelled to Plettenberg Bay to investigate the condition of his stranded brig. In his book, *Walks and sketches at the Cape of Good Hope*, p.156-7, he relates 'we reached the brow of a hill, and saw beneath our feet the Daucuma River ... at a small house on the banks we procured a gun, which we fired twice or thrice as a signal for the boat, and then rode about three miles to the place where it usually crossed.' The boat was tied to a tree on the other side with no one in attendance, so Semple tried to ride across to fetch it. His horse became frightened of the deep, extremely cold water and he had to abandon it and swim across and paddle the boat over. 'The horse now frightened ran off into the woods followed by the other two; nor was it until after a tedious search that we collected them again and drove them into the river. After ascending the hills on the other side, we arrived at the house of Peter Terblans...' They were treated 'hospitably enough' and after resting

...rode six or eight miles further along the high ground until we came to the house of Hans Carvel close upon the river Knijnsna: here we were obliged to wait upwards of three hours on account of the tide, it being high water and the Knijnsna, so near its mouth was impassable.

Friedrich von Bouchenroeder, an immigration agent for the Dutch government, travelled to the eastern districts of the colony in 1803 and found crossing the Goukamma River extremely difficult. He relates that

Half an hour beyond Ruigte valley was the farm of Widow (sic) Voslo, where a certain Bernhard [Barnard], who had brought corn to the mill on this farm, helped us across the river Taucamma. This was the worst bit of road on the journey, through heavy clay mud, and took an hour. Bernhard swam over on one horse to the farm of Pieter Terblans, son of Widow Terblans, and brought us over in a *schuit*. Horses had to swim. Got to farm half an hour later. It is a good cattle and corn farm, extensive gardens, spacious homestead and outbuildings. P.Terblans together with his family are friendly, cordial people. He and his eldest son are great hunters and enjoyed hunting buffalo and elephant. (*Reize in de binnenlanden van Zuid Afrika in 1803*).

Willem Paravicini di Capelli, aide-de-camp to General JW Janssens, the Governor, accompanied him on his expedition to the interior of the colony in 1803. Paravicini wrote of his travels in *Reize in de binnin-lande van Zuid-Afrika gedaan in den jaare 1803*, and describes how the governor and his party were received and entertained with great hospitality by the farmers en route. After spending a happy morning hunting birds at Groenvlei, the 'lake of sweet water with abundant fish life, which is separated from the ocean by a narrow strip of high hills, [where] the shores are covered with dense trees and reeds; thousands of ducks, flamingos and other water birds cover the lake'; the Governor's party was served a midday meal at Ganzvlei, the farm of Wessel Vosloo. On continuing their journey through the Goukamma drift, they reached Buffelsvermaak, where Pieter Terblanche and his family (not to be outdone by the Vosloos), insisted that the party enjoy a second midday meal, served by Terblanche's 'angel-faced daughters'. Although Paravicini would have preferred to spend the night at Buffelsvermaak, the Governor wished to press on. Four hours later the party arrived at the Knysna River drift and found it too deep to cross as the tide was in. By now it was late in the evening; there were no farms nearby, so the party built a great fire and waited for the dawn. Paravicini commented sadly that he could not help comparing their present circumstances with a pleasant evening at the Terblanche farm.

Henry Lichtenstein, tutor and house physician to the Governor's family, who was also a member of the party, describes the same event slightly differently in his *Travels in Southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*. Lichtenstein concentrates on describing the countryside rather than the people and meals. He records reaching

the beautiful river Daukamma, which issues from a deep and widespread forest. At the place where we first saw it, and where, upon the heights directly over against us, stood the house at which we were to pass the night, raising its head above the trees that shaded the declivity of the hill; - at this place the river is so broad and deep that it cannot be forded. We were obliged to travel half an hour farther upwards to come at a ford. The road lay along the morassy bank of the river, among high trees: an immense quantity of the *cynanchum obtusifolium* (monkey's cord) was twining about in all directions. The

beautiful touraco (called by the colonists *loeri*, or *luri*) sported among the highest tops of the trees, unfolding its scarlet wings to the last rays of the sun. After we had crossed the river, we again went through a similar wood, and afterwards ascended the hill to the house of Peter Terre-blanche, called Buffelsmark.

As we were obliged to set off again very early on account of crossing the Neisna-river at the ebb, we only laid down upon the ground in our clothes, with a saddle for a pillow, and there took a short rest. The wagon had the misfortune to be overturned in the morassy road by the river side, and notwithstanding assistance being sent, it was very late before it arrived...

We set out again by moonlight. It was now three hours to low water, and we arrived just in the right time, as the morning twilight came on at the bank of the formidable river. It flows into a large lake called the Neisna, which is separated from the sea by a chain of rocks along the strand, the rocks having an opening in one place about two hundred feet wide, and deep enough to admit of the entrance of vessels, which here find a safe harbour... We now soon reached the ruins of a large farm on the eastern shore of the lake, known by the name of Melkhout-kraal.



## Chapter Three

### WESSEL VOSLOO, 1775 – 1838



It is very difficult for us to reach back across the years and construct a full and lively account of the life and times of the first family to live at Ganzvlei. All we have at our disposal are a few dry facts and dates, but we can discover very little about the people behind the names. There are few answers to our questions about their characters and experiences, their small triumphs and disasters, and what life at Ganzvlei was like for them.

The earliest document relating to Ganzvlei is dated March 1775, when a grazing licence was granted to one Wessel Vosloo (CA RLR 23(2), p 223):

*Werd door deesen gepermitterd aan den Landbr Wessel Voslo omme voor den tyd van een geheel jaar met zyn vee te mogen gaan leggen en weyden op de plaats gent. de Ganse Valleij gelegen agter in 't houteNiqualand aan deese zyde van de Goucomma ..... een soma van Sesthien Ducatons en 72 stuyv.  
Casteel de Goede Hoop den 19 Maart 1775 geteekent: JV Plettenberg*

This licence gave Voslo [or Vosloo] permission to live and graze his cattle for one year on the farm Ganse Valleij situated in houteNiqualand on this side of the Goucomma. It was signed at the Castle of Good Hope by the Governor, Baron van Plettenberg. (As illiteracy was widespread at the time and as clerks inscribed names phonetically in official records, there was little uniformity in the spellings of names and several variants often occur).

In 1703 Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel's administration first began issuing free grazing permits to all burger applicants who wished to push further into the interior with their cattle. From 1714 a small annual levy was charged for a grazing permit or loan farm. Tenants could not sell their loan farms, but after their deaths their widows or sons were usually allowed to continue the lease. It was also possible for heirs to sell the farm buildings or *opstal*.



We know very little about Wessel Vosloo, the earliest farmer of Ganzvlei, but interesting facts about his forebears have emerged. Like so many of the early settlers, he was a child of racially mixed parentage. His father Johannes was possibly the son of Johannes Vosloo, a German from Plettenberg, Westfalia, who was a master-woodcutter at the Cape from 1693 and who was mentioned as a farmer in 1714, but no marriage records survive. In any event, Wessel's father Johannes married Gerbrecht Herbst, the daughter of Johan Herbst, a German from Bremen who arrived at the Cape in 1686, and Lysbeth van die Kaap, a slave woman born at the Cape. Herbst was initially in charge of the VOC cattle post at Hottentots Holland before he became a free burgher

in 1690. He was granted Optenhorst, a farm in Bovlei, Wellington in 1699. (Heese, H.F. *Groep sonder grense*).

Wessel Vosloo's maternal grandmother Lysbeth was the child of two West African slaves – Abraham and Pladoor of Guinea. Lysbeth seems to have been a headstrong woman who made quite a mark on the local scene. In 1680 she was bought by Louis of Bengal, a former slave who had purchased his freedom. In 1683 Louis granted freedom to Lysbeth and her two children (at least one of whom was his daughter), and in 1687 she became his wife. Shortly thereafter Lysbeth took up with William Teeling, her husband's 56 year-old *knecht* and shepherd, and became pregnant by him. Louis, enraged, applied for a divorce and requested that Lysbeth be made a slave once more. The divorce was granted but Lysbeth retained her freedom. She was in trouble once more in 1696, when she was accused of stealing jewellery. She adopted the name Lysbeth Sanders and entered into a long-term relationship with the German Johan Herbst. The couple had two daughters, Clara and Gerbrecht (baptised in 1702). (*South Africa's Stamouers* <http://stamouers.com>)

Gerbrecht, Wessel Vosloo's mother, would have grown up on the farm Optenhorst. In January 1718, at the age of 16, she married Johannes Vosloo, and the farm was transferred to him in 1724. Wessel was their eighth and last child, and was baptised on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1740. (Births were not recorded at that time, but Church baptismal records provide approximate dates. As families in the outer districts only attended *Nagmaal* about four times a year, there was often a delay in baptising children).

A homestead still stands at Optenhorst, and is thus described by Hans Fransen 'The homestead is an elongated row of rooms, now Victorianised and with clipped gables and iron roof, but doubtless of greater age than appearance would indicate. It has some reed ceilings and retains its old kitchen hearth beam.' This is possibly where the young Wessel grew up, in one of the most fertile and prosperous valleys in the Cape, and perhaps when he first saw Ganzvlei he saw similar promise there.

Wessel Vosloo married Maria Meyer in March 1764. She was the eldest daughter of Willem Meyer and Elizabeth Loots, whose families were from the Paarl area. Maria's grandfather Jan Loots was a schoolteacher, and therefore an educated man. Where the young couple lived before they moved to the Goukamma valley we do not know, but four children were born to them in those years, including Wessel, who was baptised in 1773. After the grant of the grazing licence at Ganzvlei in 1775, five further children were born. At least one of the offspring died in infancy - little Willem Johannes, the third child, whose name was later given to the eighth child.

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One must bear in mind that the original farm Ganzvlei was not all thick forest as described by Thunberg in 1772. The farm stretched from the sea in the south, to the northern hills, and from the eastern shores of the Goukamma to west of Groenvlei. This meant a varied terrain. Initially in 1775 Vosloo is likely to have set up a camp in the vicinity of the windmill to the east of Groenvlei, where he probably dug a well to obtain fresh water for drinking purposes, unless the water in Groenvlei was not as brak then as it is now.

As one of eight surviving children, Wessel Vosloo would have had to rely on his own efforts to put together the necessary capital to establish and run Ganzvlei. Perhaps, like other

settlers in the area, he went elephant hunting, which offered good return for a small investment, in order to get started. It has been estimated that roughly 1,000 guiders would cover the cost of a horse, 20 cattle, 50 sheep, a wagon and a little equipment. (Elphick & Giliomee, p. 64)

When Wessel Vosloo was granted a grazing licence at Ganzvlei in 1775, his nearest neighbours were the Terblanche brothers, Stephanus and Pieter. Their father was a wealthy farmer at Rheeboksfontein, between the Groot and Klein Brak rivers, where he had been settled since 1762. Stephanus was granted grazing rights to Melhout Kraal on the eastern shores of the Knysna lagoon in 1770, and in 1774 Pieter acquired rights to Buffelsvermaak, across the Goukamma River from Ganzvlei. Hendrik Barnard, who became Wessel's son-in-law 15 years later, settled at Uitzicht, (Belvedere) also granted in 1775. Ruigtevlei, which lay to the west of Ganzvlei, was granted to Vosloo's brother-in-law Andries Gous in 1775 - Gous was married to Wessel's eldest sister Anna Magdalena.

It would appear that over the next few years Vosloo took up permanent residence in the valley, as the census return of 1778 (*Opgaafrolle* CA J317) finds him ensconced on:

Ganze Valley

Wessel Voslo d'oude / Maria Meyer

2 sons, 1 daughter, 1 horse, 20 cattle, 100 sheep, 1 musket, 1 sword, 1 pistol

As this modest list of worldly possessions reflects, eking out a living in the area at that time was a tough business. It must also be remembered that early census returns were not accurate, particularly livestock figures and wheat and wine harvests returns, as the burghers were trying to avoid tax. It was only after the British took over the Cape that returns became more reliable as they issued instructions that returns should be completed under oath, and tough punishment was meted out to those evading the census or giving false returns.

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In 1789 the Dutch government ordered a map to be made of the southern coast, from Cape Agulhas to Algoa Bay. This important manuscript map was made by Johan Christiaan Frederici, a Lieutenant of the Artillery, assisted by Cadet Bombardier Josephus Jones, and was completed in 1790. The map incorporates a list of 215 farmers and the names of their farms, each of which is indicated on the map. Ganzvlei appears as no.113, and Wessel Voslouw is named as the owner. (*Nieuwe kaart van den zuydelyker oever van Afrika ..... strekkende van de St Helena Baay tot de Baay Algoa* etc). (CA M3/36)

During the 17 years after the census of 1778 Wessel Vosloo became more established. In 1803 von Bouchenroeder recorded seeing 'a certain Bernhard [Barnard], who had brought corn to the mill on this farm'. Ganzvlei's mill probably served all the farmers in the area. The census return circa 1805 (CA J318) reads:

*Ganze Valley*

*44m*

*Voslo, Wessel d'oude / Maria Meyer*

*3 wagens & Rypaarden, 41 trekossen, 45 beesten, 92 bokken, ?Wijnstokken*

The census returns between 1805 and 1811 reflect the gradual growth of the farm, the increase in livestock and the planting of vines, the production of wine and the harvesting of wheat

and barley. As Vosloo's fortunes improved, he possibly developed a transport business to serve the relatively flourishing timber trade. Logs from as far afield as George had to be transported to Plettenberg Bay for shipping to Cape Town.

The census of 1806 is in English, as the Cape then became an English Colony. It indicates that the *wijnstokken* on Ganze Valley were doing well, as 2,000 vines were listed and 1 legger (563 litres) of wine was stored on the farm. (CA J319). By 1811 Vosloo had obviously acquired some servants, as the census roll (CA J89) of that year makes mention of 3 male Hottentots (Khoi), 2 wagons, 1 horse, 30 trek oxen, 49 cattle and 3 pigs. 60 muids\* of wheat had been harvested, and 14 muids of barley.

The Khoi, in addition to driving the ox wagons, were possibly used to clear forest and bush in the deep alluvial floodplain of the Goukamma River.



In the early days auctions were important events in the lives of the colonists, in towns as well as in the outlying areas. As shops were non-existent, auctions provided opportunities to stock up on all manner of goods. They were also major social events, and like weddings, funerals and *Nagmaal*, they provided welcome interludes to break the monotony of everyday life and drew burgers from far and wide. As Mentzel noted, 'All auctions...are congenial affairs. Wine and tobacco are freely offered to all comers. A sale at a farm provides in addition a free dinner for all those who attend the sale. When farms and houses are sold by auction, the furniture, livestock and slaves are usually disposed of similarly'. (Mentzel Pt 2, p 94) Sales took place in cases of bankruptcy, and also when estates of deceased persons were wound up for the benefit of the heirs, particularly if minor children were involved and the widow was unable to keep up the property.

Wessel Vosloo would certainly have attended many of the sales in the area – we have a record of him being present at a sale in Avontuur in April 1796, at the farm of Matthys Zondag. He bought 32 hamels and 2 mares, for 75 guilders. He also attended the sale at Melkhoutkraal, the farm of the Widow Stephanus Terblanche, in April 1798. This huge sale, which was spread over two days, was particularly well attended as Stephanus Terblanche had been a wealthy farmer who had built up a considerable estate. (CA Vendurollen). An excerpt from the auction roll reads:

*No. 17 Wessel Voslo d'oude*

|                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <i>2 bytels (chisels)</i>  | <i>1 – 3</i> |
| <i>2 bytels</i>            | <i>1 – 2</i> |
| <i>1 pot</i>               | <i>– 5</i>   |
| <i>1 tafel</i>             | <i>14 –</i>  |
| <i>14 Schotels</i>         | <i>8 – 5</i> |
| <i>6 borden</i>            | <i>3 – 5</i> |
| <i>1 aardekom</i>          | <i>– 2</i>   |
| <i>wat oude tinne goed</i> | <i>1 – 6</i> |

*No. 18 Wessel Voslo de jonge*

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| <i>2 schaar(shears)</i> | <i>– 6</i> |
|-------------------------|------------|

A rare glimpse of the first farmer of Ganzvlei is provided in the following episode, recorded in H.C.V. Leibbrandt's *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope – Requesten, 1789: 593a*.

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\* A muid is a measurement of capacity equal to about



Hermanus Hunels, a Dutch sailor, had been forced to leave his ship and remain at the Cape when he became ill. He was later placed on the frigate *Meermin*, which was the first ship to transport timber from Plettenberg Bay to the Cape in August 1788. When the ship returned to Plettenberg Bay that same month, a Dutch East India ship, the *Maria*, en route home from Ceylon, was totally wrecked in the Bay. Hunels was left ashore and appointed

to attend to the goods saved from the wreck of the *Maria*. On his return to the Cape, he had the misfortune, when on board one of the laden wagons, near the river *De Dauconma* about a day's journey from Plettenberg Bay, that it turned over, so that his left arm and shoulder were broken and the shoulder blade completely dislocated, which, on account of the absence of surgeons in such a far distant district, had for him that painful result that he lost the use of his arm, for the shoulder, being dislocated, it has become stiff and hangs down straight alongside his body, as will appear from the declarations of Lieut Winkelman of the Wurtemberg Regiment and the junior Merchant Kirsten. And as according to the declaration of the Chief Surgeon of the Hospital, he can no longer do service, and is unable to support himself, he prays that he may be discharged and granted the F500 fixed by regulation for the loss of his left arm, having lost the use of it in the service. He also asks to be permitted to reside in the country with the burger Wessel Vosloo who, compassionating Memorialist, was so good as to offer him a home. (Signature)

The Council decided to write off his salary, and to pay him 500 guilders in 6 October 1789.

Clearly Vosloo was a man of good heart, as having tended the injured stranger as best he could, he then offered him a home. He could not have expected much in return from Hunels, whose usefulness as a labourer would have been severely restricted.

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As Wessel Vosloo's children grew up and spread their wings, further links were established with surrounding farms and families. (See Vosloo genealogy in the Appendix). Wessel Vosloo junior, at the age of 21, was recorded in the census of 1792 as having 1 slave, 1 horse, 1 pistol and 1 sword. He was granted grazing rights to Hoge Kraal, and in 1818 was granted the farm in perpetual quitrent. He married Johanna Magdalena Strydom in 1800, and the couple had six children. In 1807, at the age of 34, he was appointed Field Cornet for the area '*Voor in de Plettenbergs Baay*', a post he retained until 1825. (*African Court Calendar*). He was clearly a man of good character and standing to have been appointed to such a position. As a Field Cornet, he would have reported to the Landdros in Swellendam and would have been responsible for the maintenance of law and order in his ward, Before the Plettenbergs Bay. We have a list of the 42 men in his ward, including the farmers of Ganze Valley, Drie Valleyen, Buffelsvermaak, Elands Kraal, Roode Kraal, Moerasfontein, Olive houte Kraal, Zwart Rivier, Leeuwe Bosch and Neysna (Uitkyk/Belvedere).

In later life, Wessel Vosloo junior moved to the lower Langkloof, where he acquired the farm Hoeree.

Wessel and Maria's eldest daughter Elisabeth became the second wife of Hendrik Barnard, a well-established farmer who farmed at Uitzicht (later Belvidere) for over fifty years. He was twice her age and had 11 children from his previous marriage, ranging in age from 21 to 3 years.

Elisabeth appears to have had had no children of her own – raising her stepchildren would have taken all her time as the three oldest girls married very shortly after their new stepmother came into the fold. Barnard also had grazing rights to Olyvenhout Kraal. In the Ofgaaf roll for 1811 (CA J89) Wessel Vosloo senior's two youngest sons, Willem and Hendrik, are listed as living at Olyvenhout Kraal, where they no doubt helped their brother-in-law with his 5600 vines, 18 horses, 70 trek oxen, 170 cattle, 43 wethers, 84 goats, pigs as well as wheat and barley crops.

Arnoldus Vosloo, the second son, married Elsje Susanna Swart and is recorded as holding the loan farm Leeuwenbosch in 1812, together with Salomon Terblanche, Pieter's son. In 1818 this farm was converted to permanent quitrent, and Arnoldus is shown as the owner of Leeuwenbosch on the Aegidius Peterson map of 1819. George Rex later purchased Terblanche's half portion of Leeuwenbosch.

Hendrik Gerhardus, the youngest son, married Johanna Carolina Moller but does not appear to have been granted any property. He died quite young, and at some stage after his death his mother Maria disposed of a half-share of Ganzvlei to his widow Johanna Carolina Vosloo. This is rather a puzzle, as in 1824, after his father's death, Hendrik's brother Willem is recorded as living with his mother on the farm. There are no records of Willem having married, which probably explains why Hendrik's widow obtained a half-share of the farm as an inheritance for her children.

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The system of loan farms came to an end after the British had taken over the Cape .In 1812 and 1813 the Governor, Sir John Cradock, issued proclamations which compelled all holders of loan farms to have their properties properly surveyed. Once this had been done they could request that their farms be granted to them in perpetual quitrent. This new form of land tenure was similar to freehold tenure, except that annual rent had to be paid to the government. ( Boeseken and Cairns)

Wessel Vosloo did not live to see his loan farm granted in perpetual quitrent - he died early in 1814, aged 74. On 20 May 1801 Wessel and his wife Maria Meyer had registered a joint will (CA MOOC 7/1/67 (49)). An excerpt reads '*Aldus gedaan en getesteer te woonplaatse van de Testateur genaamd de **Ganze Valey**, gelegen aan de Doukomma ...*'. This will makes no mention of specific heirs or property, and remained unaltered until it was '*vertoond ter Weeskamer aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop de 6 April 1814*' thereby indicating that one of the testators had died.

On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1818 Wessel's widow received a grant of 2848 morgen of land 'on condition that she be obliged to allow an outspan place on this land at the Green Valley'. An excerpt from the original document (DO George Quitrents 2/14, 20.1.1818, + SGO Diagram 413/1818) reads:

I do hereby grant on Perpetual Quitrent, unto the Widow Voslo, a piece of Two thousand eight hundred and thirty eight morgen of land in the District of George being the loanplace Ganzevalley ....

Annual rent: Thirty five rix dollars

Signed: Somerset.

The above Diagram A-F represents Loanplace Ganzevalley of 2868 morgen situated in the fieldcornetcy of before Plettenbergsbay district of George. Landholder the Widow of Wessel Voslo

Extending N by W contiguous to the place Moerasfontein  
Extending East contiguous to the place Buffelsvermark  
Extending SSW ? Caert  
Extending North contiguous to the Green Lake

Maria, Wessel's widow, sold an undefined half-share in Ganzvlei to one Carel Philip Rosenberg for 700 rix dollars, which payment she received on 29 July 1820. (Crail cards, NLSA) All we know about Rosenberg is that he came from Wildungen in Waldeck, Germany, and that he married Anna Maria Muller in Swellendam in 1811. Whether he ever lived on Ganzvlei or farmed there remains unknown.

The 1824 census (CA J104) records Maria Meyer, the Widow Vosloo, at Ganze Valley. 1 male Khoi (Hottentot) and 2 female Khoi are listed, as well as 1 wagon, riding horses, 30 trek oxen and a homestead. Her son Willem, then aged 40, was recorded as living on the farm, and all he had to his name was a wagon and riding horse.

When Wessel Vosloo's widow died we do not know, but the Vosloo ownership of Ganzvlei officially came to an end in 1838. The half-shares of the property of which Maria had disposed to Carel Philip Rosenberg and to her daughter-in law Johanna Carolina Vosloo, Hendrik's widow, at some stage before her death were officially transferred to them on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1838, and on the same day both half-shares were transferred to Johannes Jacobus Meeding.

Deeds Office Transfer T542, 8.5.1838 :

*...Wentzel, authorised by Wessel Voslo Jr ... declared that the said Maria Meyer, widow of the late Wessel Voslo, previously to her demise did cede and transfer to Johanna Carolina Moller, widow of the late Hendrik Voslo (Wessels's son), certain one half part or share in the Perpetual Quitrent place called **Ganse Valley** ... measuring 2868 morgen... etc... Purchase price: Seventy-five pounds sterling*

On the same day this half-share of the farm was transferred from Johanna Carolina Moller to Johannes Jacobus Meeding for seventy-five pounds sterling. (DO T543, 8.5.1838)  
Carel Philip Rosenberg similarly sold his half-share to Meeding for the same price. (DO T540, 541,8.5.1838)

A new chapter had opened in the Ganzvlei story.



## Chapter Four

# THE MEEDINGS, 1838 – 1865



The new owner of Ganzvlei, Johannes Jacobus Meeding, (born 1783) was the eldest son of Johann Frederik Meeding, the man who was regarded as the father of Plettenberg Bay. Meeding senior, a church minister's son from Finkenstein in Swedish Pomerania (West Prussia) was born on 4 November 1751. He was a well-educated man who had studied at the University of Königsberg, and after several adventures he arrived in Cape Town in 1776 as a soldier. He was working as a woodcutter at the Company post at Buffelsjags when he married Maria Martha Terblanche in 1781. She was the eldest daughter of Pieter Terblanche, the wealthy farmer of Rheeboksfontein, whose sons were the first farmers at Buffelsvermaak and Melkhoutkraal. Meeding was subsequently appointed deputy landdrost of Swellendam and superintended the wood-cutting post at Swart River near George. In 1787 he was appointed as the first *Postholder* at Plettenberg Bay. He continued to hold this post when the English took over the Cape, and was a widely respected man. In 1798 he bought the *opstal* to Ruigtevlei, the farm adjoining Ganzvlei to the west. He hoped to retire there but remained at his post in Plettenberg Bay until his death in 1813.

Henry Lichtenstein, in his *Travels in South Africa* (p.249-50), writes of Meeding:

...At the western end of it [the Keurbooms lagoon] stands the house of the postholder. The person who at present enjoys this office is by birth (sic) of Swedish Pomerania, and his name is Meding (sic). He lives there with a very amiable family in a very good house, built by himself in the European taste. Besides being postholder, he is overseer of the adjacent woods, and in this office has made himself extremely useful to the government; indeed, from his strict integrity and extensive knowledge, he is universally esteemed. Like the Dane Abué, in his early years he received a scientific education; he studied at Griesswald, and after many remarkable turns of fortune, at length in this remote spot found a scene on which his genius and activity could be displayed.



By 1809 Meeding's son Johannes Jacobus and his new wife Johanna Sophia Campher had settled on his father's fine farm Ruigtevlei. They clearly prospered there, but we have few details. Patricia Storrar gives an interesting glimpse of their life and times in her summary of a letter written by Meeding senior to the young couple in March 1811:

Apparently the Governor, Lord Caledon, was expected at Ruigtevlei at any moment and the father goes on...to give the young man a great deal of advice as to how to behave on this occasion. He was to offer his boat to the landdrost and the Governor, should greet them politely but not offer his hand, he should state his name clearly, and see that his servant, Mars, put on clean clothes (so that he will not resemble a vulture). Sophia, Johannes' wife, could offer the distinguished guests a glass of thick milk from the churn. Finally the father suggested that they should not be too reserved but could, if opportunity offered, mention

that their father was unable to afford buying slaves. (Storrar, P. *Portrait of Plettenberg Bay*, p.44-5)

Johannes and Sophia Meeding went on to have nine children, all of whom married in due course. When the opportunity arose to acquire Ganzvlei in 1838 they no doubt jumped at this chance to provide for their large and growing family. While the parents stayed on at their homestead at Ruigtevlei no doubt some of the children, by now adults, moved to Ganzvlei. Unfortunately few records have remained to give us any clear picture of the Meedings and their activities in the mid-nineteenth century.

We do know that in 1845 Johannes contemplated selling Ruigtevlei to William Henry Newdigate, a young prospective farmer newly arrived from England (he later settled in the Plettenberg Bay area and established Forest Hall). Newdigate described Ruigtevlei, with its fine stone house, to his father thus: ‘Now I wish you to picture to yourself a house with six rooms in it, situated in a very pretty valley and water running down the middle of it, with high mountains to the north of it and bounded on three sides by the sea, the Swart Lake and the Karatara River, with lots of good grass upon it, in extent some 6 000 acres – such a place is Ruigtevlei.’ He claimed that the fishing was very good in both sea and lake, and expected to be able to purchase the farm for about £1 200. However Johannes Meeding changed his mind about the sale, and the Meedings stayed on.

We have another glimpse of the Meedings in February 1850. The *Nepaul* was bound from Bombay to London with a cargo of cotton and furniture, and was driven onto the rocks near Gericke’s Point. Margaret Parkes and Vicky Williams tell the tale:

For three days and nights she was pounded unmercifully by the waves. The crew huddled aft to try and get shelter from the torrents of water which poured over the ship. There were two lady passengers on board, one with two little girls aged nine and seven, and for their greater safety, they were carried up the tall masts and lashed to the crosstrees. Their only nourishment for three days was raw onion and pumpkin...The local residents of the area gathered on the shore watching the wreck in dismay, powerless to help... On the fourth day when the wind and sea had died down a little, two rafts were hurriedly constructed on board the *Nepaul*, and a line was attached to a piece of wreckage floating towards the shore...once the line was made secure, the whole ship’s company in turn took to the rafts...The two little girls, in an unconscious state, were tied to the backs of sailors. They and the two ladies...were immediately taken care of and wrapped in blankets by Mr and Mrs Johannes Meeding of the nearby farm ‘Ruigtevlei’, who had come to the beach to see what they could do to help...The Meedings, together with their two youngest daughters, Anna, aged 26 and Catherina, 24, were full of concern for the plight of the survivors, and soon made arrangements for the Captain, seventeen men of the crew and the passengers...to travel post haste to the farm to recuperate. Here was all loving kindness and care...

Eventually the survivors found their way back to Cape Town but one crew member decided to stay with the Meedings, and remained there until he died 30 years later. The wreck and cargo were disposed of in a sale held on site. Certain items of furniture such as a carved rosewood table and chairs, a chest of drawers and a sideboard are owned by various descendants of the Meedings, and are said to be relics of the *Nepaul*. (M.Parkes & V.Williams. *Knysna the forgotten port*, p.95-6)

In the last will and testament of Johannes and Sophia Meeding, drawn up in 1861 shortly before the death of Johannes, they made a bequest to the longest living of them and made their nine children heirs to the remainder of the estate. Each child was to receive a 1/9 share of the whole of

both Ruigtevlei and Ganzvlei. They further decreed that each heir should erect his/her home on specified locations on the farms Ganzvlei (2868 morgen) or Ruigtevlei (2925 morgen) as shown hereunder:

- ❖ Susanna Roeloffina Meeding (b. 1810) widow of the late Frederik Wilhelmus Modeman, re-married in 1859 to Jacobus Raubenheimer – *aan de Groene Vally*
- ❖ Maria Johanna Albertina Meeding (b.1811) widow of Anthonie Michiel Ferreira, re-married in 1859 to Johannes Lodewyk Marais – *Steenboks Eiland*
- ❖ Johan Frederik Meeding (b. 1813) who married Rachel Catharina van der Wat – *voor Ruigte Vally's drift*
- ❖ Roelof Pieter Meeding (b. 1815) married Isabella Boswell [re-married in 1876 to Susanna Frederika Terblanche] – *op de dors vloer van de eerste postal van Ruigte Vally's plaats* (I presume this means Ruigtevlei opstal's threshing floor)
- ❖ Sophia Catharina Meeding (b. 1817) widow of John Hamilton, re-married in 1855 to P.W Schnetler - *Ganzen Vally, aan Doukama*
- ❖ Petronella Albertina Meeding (b. 1819) married to Stephanus Abraham van Niekerk - on the plain below the *streepbosch*
- ❖ Johanna Jacoba Meeding (b. 1822) married to Johannes Gerhardus Schonken - *Ganzen Vally aan Doukama*
- ❖ Anna Rachel Elizabeth (b. 1824) married to Herman Arnold Dreyer – *ons tegenswoordig woonhuis* [Ruigtevlei]
- ❖ Catharina Dorothea (b. 1826) married to Henry Hooper – *aan de Groene Vally*

(Deeds Office T123, 6.10.1865)

The matriarch, Johanna Sophia, died in April 1865, and ownership of Ruigtevlei and Ganzvlei passed to the Meeding children. The fact that each heir owned a 1/9 share in both farms, without any subdivision of the properties, is a complicating factor in plotting the history of Ganzvlei. The area of the farm as we now know it was designated as the home of Sophia Catharina Meeding and her family, and it is their fortunes which we will follow further.



## THE GREAT FIRE OF 1869

A traumatic event that touched the lives of all who lived in Outeniqualand, and undoubtedly affected the residents of the Goukamma valley, was the savage fire that raged in February 1869 from Swellendam to Humansdorp. It swept through the Langkloof and over the mountains, then through the forests down to the sea – ashes and burning debris were apparently blown far out to sea. The fire followed a period of intense heat, and was fanned by a gale force northerly wind and spread with terrifying speed, annihilating everything in its path. The town of George narrowly escaped as the wind changed direction, but there was a widespread swathe of destruction of life and property all along the coastal plain as well as in the forests.

There are vivid descriptions of terrified families fleeing from the approaching inferno, in wagons and on foot, through choking smoke and heat. Some tried to save their livestock by immersing them in rivers and dams, and Sophie Gray talks of birds dropping dead and snakes ‘slithering around open-mouthed’.

Ruigtevlei and Buffelsvermaak, which flanked Ganzvlei, were badly affected. Henry Barrington suffered heavy losses at his farm Portland on the Knysna River, which he recorded in his diary. ‘My God! To what state are we now reduced. All the country on fire. Portland House, Pen Cottage & cow byre, all destroyed. Westford, Buffles Vermaak, Rugter Vlei, Morasfontein ...all destroyed’.

A contemporary account by Bryan Darnell, owner of Westford on the Knysna River, conveys the horror :

As the morning advanced, darker and darker grew the smoke and brighter the glare of the fire, whilst the thermometer rose higher every minute. The wind too increased rapidly in violence...But presently, above the smoke I saw the liquid fire pouring over the great wooded kranztes and below them in the fields a great stream of fire surging along in the dry grass with incredible rapidity. Then I knew that all was up with Westford, and rushing into my house, got out my household, who stood ready. I directed my wife...to fly with them into the garden & into the dam...Instantaneously the whole of the buildings on the place were alight, and at the same time fire appeared all around us...I have lost everything.

...At Buffels’ Vermaak, Mr Barnard’s place, the farm house is burnt & some money melted, which they wisely kept in their own chests instead of entrusting to the George bank. Their silver spoons and forks are also melted down; but the loss these good people most deplore is that of their feather beds. ( Newdigate, K. *Honey, silk and cider*, p.56 – 7)

Fanie Schnetler, a later resident of the Goukamma valley, recalls being told of the fire at Buffelsvermaak : ‘When the great fire of 1869 devastated the district, Oom Heina (Barnard) had to have his *wakis*, in which all his documents and money were locked up, dragged out by two of his helpers using *ox riems*. The old farmhouse was partially burnt down and other valuable goods had to be rescued. Water was used to quell the fire. In recent times, when the Barlows demolished the old homestead, there were doorframes with scorch marks from the fire still visible’.

In an interesting aside, the Metelerkamp family did not escape the ravages of the 1869 fire. William Simon Gregorius Metelerkamp, one of the sons of Rutger Metelerkamp, the forefather of the family in South Africa, was a farmer and general dealer on the farm Zuurbron in the Humansdorp district. In the following translation from a recently published book entitled *Tsitsikamma*, the author Joshua Serfontein quotes a report from the civil commissioner for Humansdorp, writing about the effects of the great fire :

Metelerkamp’s shop in the Suurveld burnt down and 11 people lost their lives. Furthermore, his house, outbuildings, stables, workshops, two wagons, six carts, 20 horses, 40 sheep, 120 bags of wheat and 30 bags of oats went up in flames. He does not even know how many of his cattle are still alive



## Chapter Five

### THE SCHNETLER YEARS, 1855 –1962



For over a century the Ganzvlei land in the western part of the Goukamma valley was held and farmed by a single family: the Schnetlers. The adjoining eastern portion was owned by the Schonkens, a family with close ties to the Schnetlers.

The two Meeding children who were allocated places to live at Ganzvlei in terms of their parents' will, Sophia Catharina and Johanna Jacoba, had in all likelihood lived there with their families for some time before 1865. Sophia Catharina had married John Hamilton in 1835, and they had one daughter, Johanna Sophia Catharina. After John Hamilton died his widow, then aged 38, married 30-year-old Petrus Wilhelm (Pieter) Schnetler in May 1855. She died 11 years later without further offspring, and left her 1/9 shares of Ganzvlei and Ruigtevlei to her only daughter. (The Schnetlers had been married by anti-nuptial contract). Pieter Schnetler however was left the usufruct of her '*weigrond voor zijn vee, benevens bouw en zaai lande*n' for his lifetime, and although he had to wait until 1874 before he acquired ownership of Ganzvlei, he and his descendants farmed there for the next one hundred years.

Pieter Schnetler was born in Woodville, George district, in 1825, the son and fifth child of Johann Heinrich Valentyn Schnetler, a German from Marburg, and Martha Elisabeth Behrens. After the death of his first wife, in 1867 Pieter married Hester Jacoba van Huyssteen, the 19-year-old daughter of Daniel Petrus van Huyssteen and Andriana Johanna Zondagh of Wittedrif. The Van Huyssteens were a very well known and highly regarded family in the area. (In an interesting aside, Hester's sister Johanna married John Jacob Metelerkamp, my grandfather). Pieter and Hester went on to have eight children.

In 1874 Pieter Schnetler purchased the 1/9 share of Ganzvlei which his stepdaughter had inherited from her mother, paying £200 to her husband Barend Johannes Jacobus Swart Wessels. The following year he bought a further 1/9 share in Ganzvlei from Christian Lourens Barnard, who had purchased it from Johan Frederik Meeding.

Subdivision of the Ganzvlei farm finally took place on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1876 - the whole farm was divided into lots and each shareholder was allocated a piece of ground as follows: (DO T398 – 404, 27.12.1876)

- ❖ Lot B (254 morgen) : Catharina Dorothea Hooper (1/9 share)
- ❖ Lot C (253 morgen) : Petronella Alberta Van Niekerk (1/9 share)
- ❖ Lot D (551 morgen) : Stephanus Barnard (1/9 share)
- ❖ Lot E (590 morgen) : Petrus Wilhelm Schnetler (2/9 shares)
- ❖ Lot F (279 morgen) : Anna Elizabeth Dreyer (1/9 share)
- ❖ Lot G (295 morgen) : Gerrit Schonken (1/9 share)
- ❖ Remainder (642 morgen) : Matthys Johannes Hurter, Hendrik Johannes Hurter and C C Roelofse



The Schnetlers, now the legal owners of the Ganzvlei *werf* and the eastern portion of the valley, proceeded to raise their eight children and farm by the still waters and green pastures. Pieter Schnetler died in November 1901, and the grave he shares with his wife Hester lies beneath a gnarled old milkwood tree in the little farm graveyard on the hill.

Pieter's son Johnnie (Johannes Petrus, b.1868) lived a full and interesting life in the valley of his birth. He was a colourful character, and well respected in the district – he served as a Field Cornet for many years. His son George Marr Schnetler (b.1901) related 'My late father told us more than once how he and other members of the family went with three ox wagons heavily laden with selected stinkwood and ironwood to a wagon building firm in Worcester. It took them 20 days there and back. He always spoke of this as his most pleasant trip. When coming back the wagons were not empty but had a more interesting load than when going. This time they had raisins, dried fruits and a fair supply of wine and brandy – the latter was sold at one shilling per bottle and was real good stuff... When crossing the farms a few sheep were bought very cheaply and brought home, either killed or alive. At that time Worcester was our nearest railway station...' (*Het Suid –Western*, 24 Feb 1972).

After the death of his first wife Johnnie married Charlotte Rykie Cronje, and the couple had one son, Charles Pierre Roche, who was a minor when both his parents died within two months of each other. After Johnnie's death in December 1945 his land at Gansvlei passed to his eldest son George Marr Schnetler. The century of Schnetler stewardship of the valley finally came to an end in 1963.



## THE GOUKAMMA REBELLION



It is surprising how many people arrive at Ganzvlei and remark that they've often driven past the farm and said 'Isn't that just like a little piece of England'. Given the mixture of nationalities that made their homes in the valley, the comparison might not be so invariably made to England – at one stage the valley bristled with folk of German or Dutch descent.

At the time of the Anglo-Boer War the principal landowners in the valley were the Schnetlers, whose forbearer had come from Germany towards the end of the eighteenth century. Pieter Schnetler, the farmer, had first married the widow of an Englishman, John Hamilton. She was the granddaughter of Johann Friedrich Meeding, a German from West Prussia. Pieter Schnetler's second wife Hester was a Van Huyssteen from Wittedrif – a family noted for their pro-Boer sympathies. On the other side of river they lived the Schonkens, people of Dutch extraction. In this hodgepodge of nationalities, English was the language commonly spoken.

However, people were not terribly concerned about the country of origin of their fellow citizens or what language they spoke as long as it was possible to understand one another. Language was not a political football but a means of communication. It was only after the Anglo-Boer War that Afrikaans-speaking people (whose language at that stage was more akin to Dutch) started placing importance on their ability to use their language for most communications. If one

was against the government it was because of something that affected one as a citizen, such as seeming unfairness in granting woodcutters' licenses, not because of any grudge against the Queen far across the sea. It is understandable, then, that the people of Knysna had a tradition of loyalty to the Queen. There was relative harmony throughout the Cape between the English- and Dutch-speaking communities and there was little personal animosity. For instance, when one of the daughters of Hendrik van Huyssteen of Wittedrift married in January 1900 it was reported that the bride would be led to the altar by Ds M Malan. The ceremony was to be performed by the Rev. B C Mortimer of St George's Church in the absence of Dominee Marchant.

It was inevitable that things would change with the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in October 1899. Many families in this area had relatives and friends who had gone to the gold fields in the Transvaal to seek their fortunes, and now the British had sent their armies from across the ocean to take away the mines and farms of the independent Transvaal and Free State republics.. The youth were stirred up and some wanted to fight against what they perceived as injustice. In some communities there were violent outcries and in others mere mutterings from the safety of comfortable homes.

Knysna and the surrounding area were not directly affected by the war, but many of its young men left home to fight on both the Imperial and Boer sides. Many families were divided in their loyalties; the Schnetlers were no exception. Pieter's wife Hester was the sister of Hendrik Daniel van Huyssteen, a third-generation member of the large family that farmed in the Wittedrift area. Hendrik was a highly respected member of the community, a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly, a Divisional Councillor and a Justice of the Peace. He was not alone in his strong sympathy with the Boer cause – three members of the family left their farms to join the Boers in the Orange Free State. After the declaration of martial law, when horses were commandeered in Knysna and the surrounding district for the British forces, Hendrik van Huyssteen refused to hand his horses over, defiantly letting them free up at De Vlucht near the top of Prince Alfred's Pass. For this he was arrested and briefly imprisoned in the Knysna jail. He was let out on parole to live with his sister, Hannie (Johanna Wilhelmina), wife of John Jacob Metelerkamp, and was under house arrest for a while in her home on the corner of Long and Fichat streets. Because of his standing the utmost leniency was accorded him, and his trial took place not in the open court but privately in Major Thomson's office. (M. Parkes. *Knysna and Anglo-Boer War*, p.51).

In October 1901, two Field Cornets, CG van Huyssteen and JP Schnetler, were also put under house arrest and ordered to report to the authorities daily, and not leave the village of Knysna. Whether they had actually done anything or were merely suspected of being pro-Boer is not revealed. Johannes Petrus (Johnnie) Schnetler, Pieter's son, was then a young man of 32 years of age and lived at Ganzvlei. Fanie Schnetler relates that his father Gideon, Pieter's brother, together with a Schnetler cousin and two Pienaar brothers, attempted to join up with the Boer forces in the Uniondale area under the command of Gideon Scheepers. Archival records confirm that Gert Pienaar and his brother-in-law Hendrik van Rooyen were arrested in January 1901 and charged with attempting to join the Scheepers Commando, but there is no mention of the Schnetler cousins, who must have eluded capture.

Another branch of the Schnetler family supported the Imperial cause. Corporal CW Schnetler was a member of the Knysna District Mounted Troop, formed early in 1901 after reports of Boer attacks on Willowmore and Avontuur.

Years later, when World War 2 began, old wounds were re-opened. The older women had particularly good memories and atrocities that the British committed against the Boers were recalled and some new ones invented. The old woodcutters, now settled at the village of Karatara, concentrated on felling trees and did not come out of the security of the forests during any of the wars. Not surprisingly there were people in the valley and surrounding district who felt that there

were good reasons that they should support Germany, the country of their forefathers. As in every community there were the hotheads on either side of the political fence. There were also a few others who were not influenced by blood or birth or propaganda and rhetoric. There were a few who could think for themselves: Johnnie Schnetler was such a man.

Johnnie Schnetler, at that stage one of the principal landowners in the Goukamma valley, was born at Ganzvlei, and had spent his youth growing up in that little bit of paradise untouched by the cares of the world. On reaching manhood, he did what his father before him had done, which was running the little farm to the best of his ability. The farms in the valley, although rich and fertile, were small and it was difficult to make much more than a subsistence living. With the help of his wife and children and an elderly servant, everything possible was produced on the farm: milk, meat, butter, eggs, vegetables and fruit were always available, though occasionally there was a shortage of bread flour and maize meal. This was not because of poor planning, but due to the vagaries of the weather. When the river came down in flood every seven to ten years the damage was huge.

When it came to food production, Johnnie aimed to live rich. As a boy he had read William Cobbet's account of a farm on Long Island in America on which he had stayed in the early nineteenth century, and had noted the huge quantities of food the farmer and his family had consumed each year. Johnnie had related this to his family so frequently that it became a family joke, and sometimes while gathered at the dinner table the whole family would recite in unison the impressive amounts: 'Fourteen fat hogs, four oxen, twenty eight sheep, sucking pigs, ducks, turkeys and geese, the milk butter and cream from ten cows, eggs and poultry from seventy hens and vegetables from half an acre of good ground'. Johnnie tried to match this abundance, adding bottled fruit, jams and pickles, cakes and tarts. He was known throughout the district for his lavish hospitality.

A number of essential items could not be produced on the farm - matches and paraffin for the lamps, as well as tea, coffee and sugar were among the items to be bought in the village of Knysna eight miles away. The Schnetler's mode of transport consisted of a light cart and four gleaming horses; Johnnie invariably wore his good suit and a tie with a white starched collar when he set off to town. He was a gregarious person and had many friends and acquaintances, so a visit to the shops tended to be a long trip. The mayor of the town was a good friend of his, a friendship fortified by their shared love of hunting and shooting. The hills towards the sea and the western portion of Ganzvlei bordering on the Groenvlei teemed with small antelope in the early thirties. Bushbuck and the smaller Grysbusk were plentiful, and Johnnie sometimes organized shoots for a few of his favourite friends.

Johnnie maintained that farming and working with nature taught you to keep a flexible mind. You might mow some grass in order to make hay with the intention of raking it up and stacking it the next day. When you got to the field with the two oxen pulling the dump rake, you might see some clouds coming up over the hill on the southwest. You changed your mind and went to sit in the shade of the big belhambra tree to wait until you were more certain of the weather. During the course of a week you might leave a job half done and tackle something different and change your mind half a dozen times. In Johnnie's opinion, changing a decision or altering an opinion was what clever and confident men did.

It is not surprising that there was a good deal of dissention and argument in a community of such diverse backgrounds. Some of those who had fought on the side of the Boers against the British in the war of 1900 still harboured intense resentment and detested the '*verdommde Engelse*'.

Some were swayed by a prejudiced parson and others followed their neighbours like sheep. Others of Dutch origins had been completely anglicised, their families having lived in the Cape under British rule for more than a hundred and twenty years. The Schonkens, who owned six properties on the east side of the Goukamma River, had embraced the land of their adoption, going so far as to name a son Merriman, the name of the Prime Minister of the Cape colony at the time of the boy's birth. In addition, there was also a large section of the population who was firmly British. Whether a King or Queen was on the throne, they felt comfortable nestling under the crown.

During the early years of the twentieth century before the railway line was built, the town of Knysna was somewhat isolated from the rest of the Cape Colony. The swampy coastline rising to high forest, mountains and steep ravines with numerous swiftly flowing rivers plunging into deep gorges, and then spreading out into wide sluggishly winding waterways and estuaries, made road building difficult. The town owed its existence to a wide and wonderfully protected lagoon dominated by two prominent headlands of rock, with a narrow mouth through which the river flows out and the high tide swirls in from the southern ocean.

When World War 2 began the South African Parliament voted by a narrow majority to side with Britain against Germany. The fear arose that Germany might send naval craft, possibly submarines, to the Cape to bring weapons and organize an uprising of those who were anti-British. With this in mind the British navy sent a small warship and minesweeper to be stationed at Knysna. The English captain was an affable fellow who soon made friends with the mayor and other local folk. He had brought with him from England his sporting rifle, hoping that he may get some good shooting in Africa. It was not surprising that in this small community Johnnie should be introduced to the captain and before long he was asked to go aboard the warship. The Schnetlers were not easily impressed and, as they would boast, 'never stood back for any man', but Johnnie was amazed at the respect and deference shown by the sailors to their captain. He was flattered that such a powerful person should show him such hospitality. When shown the lovely English sporting rifle with its ornate engraving, Johnnie was filled with envy. He tried to comfort himself with the thought that the Boers had reported that the English were very poor marksmen, and that the captain probably could not hit a swiftly moving target even with his slick and fancy weapon – here Johnnie was proved wrong.

Since war had been declared the people of Karatara had been taking sides. Meetings were held to remind the villagers how awful the English were and how important it was to support Germany and get rid of the British influence once and for all. Meetings were also held to caution against all the inflammatory talk, as life was not so bad. After all, the people of Karatara were mainly ex-woodsmen who were given houses and pensions and so could sit about all day, thereby ensuring that the last of the valuable forests were preserved.

Eventually it was decided to hold a meeting in the community hall, thoughtfully built for the white people, to take a vote and to decide whether to support the war effort or to rebel. There was a move afoot to persuade Johnnie Schnetler to lead a rebellion. He was by then a man in his seventies, a much loved and highly respected elder who was the only survivor of those who were prosecuted for being rebels against the British during the Anglo-Boer War some forty years earlier.

A number of hothead bullies were of the opinion that a secret ballot would not do – in deciding which way to go it was important to know how your neighbour voted, and if he was on the other side he would be your enemy. A thick rope was placed down the middle of the hall. Together with most of the local farmers, Johnnie Schnetler was invited to attend the meeting. When he walked into the hall and saw the rope he paused then walked to the far wall and stood with his foot on the rope. The meeting took a long time, with many people wanting to give their reasons for their

decision to join the group of 'for' or 'against'. When all the talking was done, the two sections were almost even in number. There was a silence; all eyes were on dark-suited Schnetler with his stiff butterfly collar and black tie. Johnnie said: 'These are all words. I will do what I have to do when the time comes'. With this pronouncement he walked teetering along the rope and out of the hall.

Having accepted the naval captain's hospitality on numerous occasions Johnnie decided to give the Englishman an opportunity to do some shooting at Ganzvlei. Beaters were hired for the day and Merriman Schonken, Jock Fraser, young Jack Duthie, the English ship's captain and the mayor of Knysna were invited. A number of antelope and game birds were killed and the captain showed great skill in shooting birds on the wing and buck as they leaped for cover. The lavish spread of meats, vegetables and delicious pies and tarts smothered in rich cream that followed was thoroughly enjoyed by all the visitors, and the rafters rang with goodwill and merriment. The captain made a little speech of thanks and drank a toast to the ladies for all the hospitality and friendliness. The day was a success.

When the hotheads at Karatara heard of the visit of the English captain to Ganzvlei a self-elected 'commando' of the more militant arrived late one morning at Johnnie's house. Although they were all on horseback, some of their mounts looked as if they were straight from the plough, and the guns in their scabbards appeared to be ancient weapons inherited from grandfathers.

Johnnie was sitting on the stoep with a coffee mug at his side. As the deputation came up the steps they took off their hats one by one and greeted Oom Johnnie. Even the older men called him 'uncle' as a sign of respect. The exception was Gert Wesstand, whose cousin had married a visiting Dominee when she was only fifteen, and with such close ties to God Gert thought he did not have to show respect to anyone. Nobody was better than he. They sat where they could, a few on the rail of the stoep. Johnnie called to his wife to bring them all coffee but Gert interrupted and said that he thought that they should state their business while it was still fresh in their minds and then have coffee when the business was cleared up.

'It won't take more than a few minutes. We have come to ask you to make a pledge to join us in revolting against the war brought upon us by an unjust and uninformed government, who are under the thumbs of the English - the English shopkeepers and hotel proprietors like that Scotsman Jock Fraser and Randolph Metelerkamp who married the daughter of old man Templeman who has the shop and the sawmill'.

Johnnie rose to his feet and, lifting his head, looked out not at his audience but across the valley. So he stood for a minute. Gert, who was screwing up his courage for what he had to say, couldn't quite wait that minute out.

'Look Johnnie', he continued, 'you are a German. You come from a German family, and just remember what the English did to our women and children in the concentration camps during the Boer War. I see you looking over your valley. It is a very pretty valley. We all envy you. Maybe you are thinking that you are too rich and too comfortable to revolt or maybe you are just too cowardly. Maybe you are just like one of those *Hens Oppers*, (hands upper) unlike my father who would have joined Smuts' Commando when he came to fight the English in the Langkloof if it had not been for his bad back...'

Johnnie put up his hand to stop this oratory. '*Hou op*. Stop' he thundered. 'Let me tell you this. Yes, my family originally came from Germany but not every German supports this war or that corporal Hitler. The Boer War, and all that, is in the past. This is my country, and I must do my best for my country, and I believe that the sort of government that we have had for the past forty years is better than anything that Hitler could give us. I heard somebody call me a coward. Wait.'

With that he turned and went through the double door into the house. By the time someone had given a nervous cough he was back, carrying a double-barrel shotgun. ‘Now we will see who is a coward. I will count to twenty to give you time to get to your horses and then we will see what your rebellion looks like!’ There was a rush and some confusion but Johnnie counted slowly, and by the time he got to fifteen the last horse was cantering through the gate, Wesstand far in the lead.



## GOUKAMMA REFLECTIONS : FANIE SCHNETLER’S REMINISCENCES



Stephanus (Fanie) Schnetler, a great-nephew of Pieter Schnetler, was born and grew up in the Goukamma valley. In 2001 he wrote a lively account of life at Ganzvlei and the adjoining farms, ranging from the 1860s until the middle of the next century. Fanie’s unpublished narrative is largely woven around the small cluster of families who lived in Goukamma at that time – the Schnetlers, Schonkens, Barnards and Wentzels.

Fanie’s grandfather Gideon Louis (b.1831) was Pieter Schnetler’s brother. At some stage after Pieter’s second marriage and the subdivision of the Goukamma land, he asked his brother Gideon to sell his land at Roodekrans and join him at Goukamma. Gideon agreed to this and the arrangement worked well until their deaths – the two families lived happily together at Ganzvlei. Pieter was the farmer and Gideon was a woodcutter and timber dealer – he worked the wood in the forest and supplied building timber, wood for wagons and whatever else was required.

Pieter, the owner of the farm, lived with his wife Hester and their eight children in the upper house built on the slope, which also served as a school for a long time – this was the first house to be built on the *werf*. (Christopher’s house). Gideon, Pieter’s brother, lived in the *Groothuis* with his wife and 11 children (we don’t know if he built it or not). Johnnie Schnetler (Johannes Petrus, b.1868), Pieter’s son, later lived in the big farmhouse.

Fanie Schnetler was born at Ganzvlei in 1922, in the *Rooidak* house, which was a small cottage round the corner of the steep hill - the place was known as *Agter die krans*. He was the son of Hans (Johannes Christaan Jacobus, b.1875), Gideon’s fifth son, who moved to the *Rooidak* house after his marriage.

The Schonken family, relatives of Pieter’s first wife, lived at the eastern end of the valley – Johannes Gerhardus senior, married to Johanna Jacoba Meeding, lived there until 1902. His son, Johannes Gerhardus (Oom Gert) had 14 children, so there was no shortage of playmates for the children growing up in the valley.



Naturally, many of the tales passed on from the early days relate to the river, and floods in particular. Fanie relates :

I can't remember the month, but during 1884 the river flooded to its highest level, and during the night the water rose and flowed under the bed on which my Oupa and Ouma slept. During the night my Oupa was woken by his assistant, Floors, who told him that he was 'sleeping on water'. The *oubaas* asked Floors whether he had lost his wits, and Floors swore that what he was saying was true – 'Put your feet out of bed' and DOEM, they hit the water. The boys slept up in the attic and they heard this conversation – a ladder had to be placed at the attic window so that they could climb out. The floodwater covered the whole *werf*. They had to go right up till just below the tarred road to get to Oom Pieter's house as they didn't know how high the water would reach. By that time all the Schnetlers were awake. It is hard to convey the scene.

The Goukamma floods tended to reach the highest levels every 16 years – 1884, 1900, 1916 and 1932. The flood that was due to come in 1948 came in 1947, and again in 1948. The fastest flood was that of 1947 – after a week in which the weather threatened and threatened, the clouds decided to release a deluge of rain from the south-east at five o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. I had just finished milking my cows about two kilometres from the house and was tending to them and their calves. I had the cream can (a two-gallon can) and a gallon of milk for the house. I put on my coat, looked to the south-east and wondered whether I would reach the house in time. I didn't; with half a kilometre to go the rain caught me. I got soaked - as my father always said '*Jy het nat gereën; tot jou hare is nat.*' From five o'clock until half past eleven we had 150mm of rain (six inches in *die ou taal*). That night the flood took three of my large oxen. I recovered one that seemed to have suffered no ill effects; one died – his horns got entangled in the branches of a tree which stood on the river bank and when the waters receded he died; we never found so much as a hair of the third ox. Between 12 and 1 o'clock, the cows of Merriman Schonken, Oom Gert's son, were swept away out of the shed that still stands at his house on the hill. The water must have come in a solid wall because what usually happened when good rain fell was that the river would begin to flow strongly after about 12 hours or so. This time the Goukamma was in full flood after six hours.

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In the early 1920s the railways began building the arched bridges over the roads, and these were completed by 1924. In the beginning, when the rail administration had to survey and measure the road, the engineers and land surveyors set up camp on the riverbank just the other side of the Goukamma siding. My Oupa Gideon reminded them that the river could easily overflow its banks. 'No', they said, 'the old times are over'. It wasn't a week later that the high water trapped them there one night, and by dawn the floodwaters had taken their tents, bedding and other items of value. Old Mr Dixon stood there above the railway bridge, at an old belhambra tree which is still there; as my grandfather went past on his way down to the river Mr Dixon called out, 'Mr Gideon, I reckon the old times have come back.'

During my childhood here, the railway line was built and completed. During that time my mother baked a lot of bread, and roasted and made a lot of coffee. We had an outside oven, and more than one weekend she had to knead and bake over 100lb of flour, and roast and grind about 15lb of coffee beans. The flour was what we call bread flour today, or second wheat. It was ground and only the rough bran was sifted out. My mouth waters now when I think of the bread made with that flour. Later I sowed wheat myself and had it milled. Where the high chimney stands near Pick 'n Pay is where the flour mill was. It was quality flour.

Fanie Schnetler talks a bit about the crops and farming conditions in the valley:

Occasionally the river created problems for farming, but with every flood the waters brought a lot of fertile soil from the mountain forests in the form of silt. The arable land lay mainly alongside the river and it then became a soggy marsh covered in thick undergrowth. Who started it I don't know, but one after the other they began to dig ditches and in this way drained the vlei. Today one would never know that scrub was really all that grew there. The farmers grew wheat, barley and oats on a small scale. Oats were really a necessity, *the* fodder for cart and saddle horses. There was not enough wheat for household use, so meal had to be purchased.

There were also years of drought. Sometime in the late 1800s it was so dry that they had to uproot the wheat and bind it into sheaves, and then chop off the stem part with an axe on a block. Once the wheat had been threshed on a dry floor they then had to wash and dry it. Can you imagine Goukamma being so dry? The cutting of the corn wasn't a problem; the people, white and brown, could all handle sickles.

Oats were sown for the horse-drawn coach that transported passengers between Knysna and George. The owner of the coach purchased these oats for his horses. The sheaves had to be a certain weight and the straw and kernels of good quality. This fodder was grown on the Groenvlei farm; the horses were stabled in Knysna.

The main road ran via Rheenendal, Barrington and Hoogekraal. There was a stop along the way where four fresh horses were inspanned to continue on to George; the same applied on the coach's return to Knysna the following day.

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The old Goukamma post office and farm store are mentioned:

From the goose dam on towards Goukamma river stood an old *bywoner's* cottage right next to the road, and a bit lower down there was a small stone building which in my time was a farm store and also the Goukamma post office. The railway line was not there yet. A house of one of the Barnards stood immediately beyond the river. The authorities had to make a drift there for crossing the river, and the stone came from a quarry just beyond the Post office – I think the quarry is still visible. The stones had to be carted by ox wagon, and loaded by hand and laid in the river by hand.... At the time they were also building the road from the heights, the road that runs above the railway line. This so-called new road ends above the ridge, in the valley called Droëkloof.

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For years the Goukamma River mouth was closed and not even the 1932 flood could open it. Over years the mouth had silted up, so much so that at most times one could walk across it. The water would only come up to one's ankles, and one had to walk carefully as there was quicksand. Come rain or shine, we would go to Buffelsbaai to get fish – dried or fresh. There were a few coloured families, the Muller and Brinkhuis families, who were fishermen. We would walk across the sand at the river mouth to get to the house with the red roof.

The route from the river was through a milkwood forest, which was known as Mond se Bossie. It was also called Old Maria's Garden. Maria's crops had to be planted early because they would dry out quickly in the sandy ground. By November there were green mielies, green beans, green pumpkins etc. As the old people said, she was a proper Korana (a member of a Hottentot tribe of mixed origins) – "*groot verledes en groot toekomste*". She was very intrepid and had no fear of the sea; she would drape a wrap around her lower body and over her shoulder and go off in search of alikreukels, octopus, oysters and other edibles. She always operated between the Buffelsbaai fishermen and her place at Mond se Bossie. She was fond of a strong drink and was a fine fisherman from the rocks. One day when returning home from Buffelsbaai she saw something large lying in the distance. As she said, she broke into a run as the object was lying at the high water mark. There she found John Lake, who was under the influence of alcohol. After sobering him up she got him to her house albeit with a struggle. She lived with him until her death. He got a job with the Forestry Department, which was later taken over by the Divisional Council. His job was to plant the grass that can be seen all over the place. This grass was imported from somewhere, I can't remember where, but I think it came from Australia. It was especially for the sand dunes, as was the well-known Port Jackson which is now regarded as an invader. The Port Jackson, a member of the acacia family from Port Jackson Harbour (now Sydney), became widely known as *rooipitjie*, and is very popular today as braai wood.

This rather poignant story from times long past was passed down to Fanie as part of the folklore of the area:

In the valley called Buffelsvermaak, almost at the end of the valley, there was a dam that was known as Oom Gideon's goose dam. Oom Gideon was the owner of Buffelsvermaak at the time. Two coloured men and their wives were divorced there by a much-loved policeman. The two men and their wives had been to the police station in Knysna more than once, seeking to get divorced. The policeman told them sternly that this was the last time that they should come and complain; he ordered the four of them to be at Baas Gideon's goose dam later that day, when he would sort out the matter for them. The four were there on time, as was the policeman. The lawman questioned them closely and required them to promise that their present marriages were at an end, that they would exchange partners and that they would then be content and would never raise the matter again. Each of them had to make a sworn statement that they were now satisfied.

One of the men was blind and died an invalid; the other was an oyster gatherer, and the only trace of him that was found by his family and fellow oyster gatherers was his metal oyster spike, his knapsack and the footprints which led from his belongings at the high water mark to the rocks. Thus the families were in time separated by natural means. All four had died before my time.



Writing of the small group of families who lived in the Goukamma vicinity, Fanie Schnetler recalled: ‘There were many characters among them, not that they were peculiar or quarrelsome though’.

The Schonkens were a family with their own character and traditions. I have to single out Oom Frikkie Schonken (Frederik Wilhelm Modeman Schonken, b.1852) – a bachelor, he always saw things in a comical light. Oom Frikkie had a small herd of cattle, mostly black cattle. Among the herd there were two heifers that looked very alike, named *Dit Is* and *Is Dit*. The three brothers, Oom Frikke, Oom Bart and Oom Gert (Merriman’s father), were the sons of old Oom Gert, and had a large outside room that was called The Home. This was where Goukamma’s young men gathered of an evening. Oom Frikkie had acquired a dozen small tobacco pipes, and he had matches and tobacco available too. They then smoked until they almost suffocated, and they coughed and coughed. When Oom Frikkie grew old he decided that he needed reading glasses, according to Oom Merriman. He went to see Dr Langschmidt, who inquired how he could assist Oom Frikkie. He told the doctor that he wanted reading glasses and was then asked his age. ‘Doctor, I have 91 summers behind me’. Dr Langschmidt’s response was ‘And what does Oom still want to see?’



I must single out Oom Jimmie Wentzel as the neatest farmer in Goukamma. He moved to Schimmelkrantz to tend the lands and livestock of the Thesens when he was newly married. His horses were always fat, his saddle, bridle and cart harnesses neat and the brass buckles always gleaming. His fences and paddocks were always immaculate. His implements, the plough for example, had to be cleaned after use and a sack placed over the shiny metal blade to prevent rust. He was a man who could train young horses – not break them in – under saddle and in harness. However, one day he was out rounding up cattle in the veld and the bull was a bit moody and attacked him, goring him in the buttocks. It gored the horse too, but luckily not fatally. In the end rheumatism crippled him, and Tant Hannie had to help him with everything. However, he was never despondent and always kept his sense of humour. I learned a lot from him. Oom Jimmie told me never to put a blunt pocket-knife in my pocket ‘because when you need to cut something there is never time to sharpen it. You should also never leave the house without a handkerchief, a piece of string or *riempie* and some small change – a tickey is sufficient’.

Oom Jimmie planted two vine cuttings at the front door so that whenever it rained they got some run-off. They bore such huge bunches, he always referred to the ample bunches from Canaan. He spent his last years in his bedroom, and was always delighted when the birds would come and eat the grape pips on the stoep in front of his room. If I am correct, the traces of his threshing floor are still to be seen.



I must tell you something about the owner of Buffelsvermaak, Oom Heina Barnard, who was a contemporary of my Oupa Schnetler. My father told me of the wonderful lifestyle of this Oom Heina Barnard. He was a bachelor, and the owner of the land from Buffelsbaai right up to the Suurveld along the Goukamma, and higher up along Homtini to where Oom Bertes lived – the north-western section alongside Homtini bordered on forestry land. Later, strangers like the Van Rheenens acquired large tracts of the land.

As previously related, when the great fire of 1869 devastated the district, Heina Barnard's old farmhouse was partially burnt down and other valuable goods had to be rescued.

Oom Heina was a farmer much loved in his time. He was a stock farmer, and the *boswerkers* used oxen for their wagons. They always had problems, as the oxen needed replacing because of old age or sickness. My Oupa, who was predominantly a *boswerker* and timber dealer, also had to replace oxen. Slaughter cattle were always available; in my time, they were mainly black with white blazes on their faces, and white patches on their bodies. They were large-bodied, not pure bred but definitely not inbred. A bull or two were always purchased and brought in from the outlying district to prevent inbreeding. I heard the old folk talk of colonial cattle with short hair, which was preferable because of ticks, and also of the old Damara cattle with their big switches. One could go to Oom Heina for a slaughter beast for £3, but it was no good thinking that you could get the animal of your choice if somebody else had already reserved it. No matter how much you offered him. This also applied to the purchase of oxen. He would say, 'I have already told you it is reserved; are you deaf?'

There was a shoemaker in Knysna by name of Mr Waistcote, who was known locally as '*Onderbaadjie*'. As Oom Heina got old his feet started swelling and he struggled to get his *veldskoene* on. He would fiddle around with his shoes – 'come on Jack', and struggle some more; 'come on Jack', but Jack couldn't do otherwise as the leather was tight.

When Oom Heina was old, he summoned a nephew to come and visit him, as he did not have an heir. He said to his nephew, Klein Faans Barnard, 'You must come and live here with me as I shall not live long. I want to leave you all my possessions, the land, the money. Stay with me until you bury me.' 'No, Uncle, what will the family say about that?' 'Faans, what you do with it is not my business. It is yours to do with as you will.' So Klein Faans and his wife Martha inherited everything from Oom Heina. Shortly after Oom Heina's death, Klein Faans divided everything up among his brothers.

I would like to say something about my father [Gideon Louis Schnetler]. There was a great need for someone who could conduct funerals, and both white and brown people approached my father to do this. He was willing, but had first to go to Knysna to obtain a form permitting him to conduct funerals. The graveyard was in a place that I don't think is still used. As you pass the Schonken farm on the way to Buffelsbaai and climb the hill, Man Schnetler's house is on the right-hand side of the road. On the left of his house a road crossed the railway line and led to his cattle pen. Just before the

cattle pen another track turned left – into an area called the horseshoe, where the railway line ran around the cattle pen. This is where the graveyard was or is, and where my father committed many bodies to the earth. Man and his brother George visited each other often - at the time George was living in his father's house, where Dawie now lives.



We must not forget the Thesens; they are not only from Knysna but are also part of Goukamma. Before the Goukamma duneveld was subdivided, the area from where Schimmelkrantz was to the milkwood forest at Groenvlei belonged to the Barnards. The Thesens acquired the piece of land on the other side of the Schnetler's land. After a while the Thesens devised a plan for getting water to the livestock in the veld, as they had acquired a herd of breeding stock with the aim of breeding their own oxen. They also had quite a few spans of oxen for their transport business. Because the animals were in unfamiliar veld, they were not getting to the regular watering places. They would go to Groenvlei lake, then down to the veld behind Schimmelkrantz, then Goukamma River and on to higher grazing along the river, thus reaching a watering-place only every second or third day. So they thought of a plan and put it into effect, and it still serves a useful purpose today. Between the river and the veld there was, and still is, a spot where a shiny chalk sandbank sticks out. They investigated how large the chalk deposit was, and determined that the plan would work. They had a large section cleared very thoroughly – the sandbank lies against a level ridge. They built a good wall that could protect the cleared area from drifting sand, and another wall on the other side. A storage dam, a reasonably large dam, with a ball valve, ensured that the mules that were used to drag the forest timber out to the road had drinking water, and still do (today a large section is under pine plantation).

The timber industry was expanded in those years by the Thesens on the Island, and the Parkes family was also part of that. In the beginning however there was no machinery – it all began with the woodcutters. The woodcutters went off with their roughly sawed timber to trade in the Boland. My two grandfathers were among those men who took to the roads. This came to an end when the train from Cape Town reached Mossel Bay in 1904, and George in 1907. The transport problem was then largely solved, except for places such as Ladismith, where wagons and horse-carts were made on a large scale, as they were in Graaff Reinet. In Ladismith there was a Mr Dawid Theron who built one of the large carts, the Ladismither, black and strong for the Karroo roads. Stinkwood from the upper Goukamma was used. There were many four-horse as well as two-horse carts in Oudtshoorn and district in its glory days. In 1933 everything crashed, and certainly not only the ostrich was to blame.



Fanie Schnetler's stay in the Goukamma valley came to an end when he was 14 years old - he wrote nostalgically:

On 30 June 1936 we moved to Elandskraal, where my mother had inherited a piece of land from her father – it was 13 morgen, and too small to make a living from. Nevertheless we trekked to Elandskraal with two ox wagons. Our nice flock of Leghorn hens was the last to leave the Rooidak house - they went to Elandskraal in a large donkey cart drawn by four strong donkeys. My father left before dawn, but first gave a prayer of thanks for the long sojourn in the old house. We took the same road up over Swarthoogte and stopped before we entered the Walle – the donkeys and Hendrik and one of his sons continued, but the load of chickens was heavy and the donkeys had to have regular short breaks. It was about five o'clock, and the chickens sounded their own little tune as though they too were saying goodbye. We arrived at the house at Elandskraal at about eight o'clock in wind and rain, and opened the gates of the donkey-cart so that the chickens could find shelter in the bushes. It took a long time to settle in to the new place.

So ends Fanie's account of life in the Goukamma. As he noted, 'Goukamma treated its people well, and those who sowed, reaped'.



Chapter Six

THE METELERKAMPS



In 1978, in circumstances that I described in the first chapter, I purchased two portions of the farm Ganzvlei, and a portion of Buffelsvermaak which is not contiguous but further down the river, a small portion of 22 ha on the west bank of the river. In the forty-five years that passed since I first fell under the spell of this valley as a small boy; my life's course took me on a circuitous route back to this point, and along the way I was able to advance slowly up the ladder of farming knowledge and experience.

ORGANIC FARMING: THE BEGINNING

From time to time people have asked me why I chose to adopt the hard and financially unrewarding life of the penniless aspirant farmer when I could have lived in luxury in a city. It is a good question and one I would ask anyone in a similar position, and is in fact a very difficult question to answer. I think that in my case it was the wish to be able to enjoy the diversity that the life offered and to learn to be fiercely independent and to develop an ability to tackle every eventuality and challenge that life on a farm presents.

As a boy of eight or nine years of age I spent a holiday on my uncle's fruit farm in the Devon Valley near Stellenbosch. I remember so well Uncle Malcolm's muscular hairy forearms, and the hairs bleached to a golden blonde by the sun, and longed to be like him. My cousin Alec, who was a few years older than me, made a vegetable garden to which we piped water from a tap. This was my first real construction job. We called our little farm 'The Pipes'. By the time I was twelve I was laying bricks and keeping chickens, rabbits and guinea pigs in the garden of our Pretoria home. With a lot of hard work and some help from our gardener and a little favourable trading in bicycles I managed to save thirty pounds sterling, enough to buy a used motorbike by the age of sixteen. I loved watching things grow and liked the physical challenge of the manual work in spite of it becoming boring. The modern equivalent of the gym must be even more boring.

A farmer has to have a broad spectrum of knowledge. He should know something about machinery and be prepared to tackle mechanical problems especially if the farm is far from a town, as we were in Swaziland. He tries to fix it himself and doesn't count the hours spent. He must be able to use a dumpy level or theodolite and lay out contours, water furrows and building foundations. He has to be an architect, carpenter, plumber, bricklayer, thatcher, water diviner, dam builder, veterinarian, doctor, magistrate or judge, lawyer, accountant, preacher (at funerals)

shopkeeper, agronomist, stockman, geneticist and a host of other occupations whose skills are called for every day. It was my ambition to be able to claim 'There is nothing that I can't do'. I haven't quite got there yet but I can say of my three sons that here is nothing that they cannot do. They are all three superb cooks among their other attributes. To me grasping life in enthusiastic affirmation is what life is all about. I would rather play an indifferent game of football than sit and watch it. Just so Organic Farming encompasses all that there is to the physical side of life, birth, growth, death and decay.



A study of life should start with the study of the earthworm. Charles Darwin, writing about earthworm, said: 'It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as these lowly organized creatures'. He later goes on to make it clear that although they might be lowly, they are superbly organized.

In its simplest form Organic Farming relates to the method of farming with the exclusive use of living matter. It eliminates the use of chemical fertilizers and sprays, except remedies to rid plants of pests, the ingredients of the remedy being organic or from living material. The basic premise is to farm in nature's way with the build-up of humus providing the soil nutrients. The argument, which is sometimes quite fierce, flows round the fact that an excess of chemicals is actually poisonous to the soil and consequently to the crops and the animals which feed on them. It follows from this that a cow grazing grass 'poisoned' by too much artificial or chemical nitrogen will herself become ill or poorly in some way. As an example, she might abort her calf. There appears to be some empirical evidence for the poisoning ability of an excess of nitrogen as every farmer and gardener knows that a handful of chemical fertilizer such as limestone ammonium nitrate spilt on the lawn will kill that patch of grass.

The early 20th century pioneers of organic farming such as Sir Albert Howard, Sir John Russel, Lady Eve Balfour and Edward Falconer referred to farming with humus and green manures and organics as 'unorthodox' whereas the use of chemicals for optimum yields was considered as orthodox farming. It still is. Even today to be completely sold on organic farming is viewed in some circles as being rather odd. The addition of minerals and trace elements should be practiced as in some instances there is a definite lack. It was only about fifty years ago that it was found that the soils of the Knysna area were completely devoid of molybdenum, which militated against obtaining maximum yields of vegetables and maize crops. When one sees the lovely build-up of humus and the colour of the local forest soil it is difficult to believe that it is basically unfertile due to the lack of a few minerals. This lack is passed on to the streams, which have little aquatic life such as fish and frogs. There is little bird life in the depths of the forest, as there is a dearth of insects. In spite of the foregoing, there is no doubt that humus is the basis of all successful plant growth.



I first started farming on my own on 85 hectares of sandveld near Cullinan. It is a very dry, dusty, bleak area, as any soldier would agree if he was one of the many who had the misfortune to spend time in one of the huge camps such as Zonderwater or Kafferskraal during World War 2. The rainfall is low, the environment is not suited to agriculture and crops tend to be extremely poor. The farm consists of rocky *kopjies* ranging to poor grassland on dead sandy soil, culminating in an area of pure white building sand so fine and free of organic material that it is highly regarded as ideal for the plastering of houses. The property is situated a few kilometers to the northeast of the Premier Diamond Mine, with its village of Cullinan. Looking back with the hindsight of many years of farming experience, it is clear that I should never have persuaded my father, a lawyer in nearby Pretoria, to allow me to occupy the piece of ground that he already owned and furthermore, to finance the farming enterprise.

‘Just have faith in me. Put some money in and my sums show that we will be making a small profit within a year’.

What gave a slight edge to my plea was that on Dad's advice I had obtained a B.Com. degree at university and then had served a full year as an articled clerk with a firm of chartered accountants. I was well equipped for the additions and subtractions in the budget but the sum was wrong in its assumptions and I was wrong in the assessment of my capabilities and strengths and weaknesses. I never did make a profit.

Having decided that the life of a chartered accountant, with a background of golf and swimming pools, bowls and billiards, was not adventurous enough for me, I set my heart on a farming career. I first had to learn something about country life and making a living as a farmer. My father, who had been born on the edge of the Knysna forest and who had grown up as a country boy with horses, fishing and boating had, I think, a sneaking sympathy with me and my seemingly irrational choice. In his wisdom he pointed out that as he did not have the money to buy me a farm I would have to face the prospect of becoming a farm manager and possibly never aspiring to a farm of my own.

‘You might have to work for a boss for the rest of your life whereas you have already shown that you are capable enough as an accountant. You could become a partner in a firm, or if you preferred the option, you could later start a firm of your own, if you would only stick to accountancy. Can't you see that you have the world by the tail on a down-hill run?’

Having voiced his opinion and realized that I would not change my mind, he set about helping me and arranged with his great friend the Director of the Department of Horticulture, who had a farm in Swaziland run by a partner, to take me as a learner-assistant. Moving from the city to the farm at Ezulweni, between M'Babane and Bremersdorp (now Manzini), in the relatively untamed Protectorate was like being a goshawk freed from a gilded cage. I loved the country, the huge, wild, raw farm and the friendly people. I learned a great deal but at the same time I made a few mental notes of what not to do. After nearly a year of semi-tropical conditions and the repetition of another similar season on a crop farm without animals, my thoughts and daydreams turned towards cows to be milked and green pastures and still waters. So once again I appealed to my father.

This time he arranged for me to work for an elderly dairy farmer who had been the principal of an agricultural college. He was strong in theory but weak in the practical economics of farming. The farm was in the thornveld close to the city, and subsequently became one of the more popular suburbs of Pretoria. It was more like a factory than a farm, with most of the feed being purchased and no calves being reared - cow replacements were bought from a dealer in Johannesburg.

In those days most farmers in South Africa still had plenty of workers available and the practice was to milk cows by hand instead of machine. Each bucket of milk was brought to a central point in the stable where it was weighed and recorded. The cows were milked three times during every twenty-four hours, at 4am, 12 noon and 8 pm. It was my function to record the milk weights, so a night's sleep for me was from about 10.30 pm to 3.30 in the morning. It was boring work as my tutor only strolled into the huge tie-up barn about once a week to have a chat and give me some practical advice. This routine went on every day, seven days a week. This was a far cry from my romantic dream of the farmer tilling the fields, sowing and cutting the kale and making hay from freshly mown green pastures lying alongside the river, with glowing white arum lilies festooning the banks, then milking a few cows morning and evening. It is not surprising that the job soon began to pall.

By this time I had a car so I set off for Stellenbosch in the fourteen-year-old Ford to work on a small poultry and wine farm belonging to my cousin Alec, my mother's elder brother's son. In old age he is still a man of great charm and the only man I know who can tell the tale of how he danced with Queen Elizabeth 2. Alec taught me all he knew about poultry, and living in his happy home in the beautiful Vlottenberg area was one of the happiest times of my life. A huge benefit was to have weekends free and Cape Town nearby where I had friends from university days and lots of girls to take out dancing. I worked as hard as I could and of course made mistakes but after about six months of this period of learning, I considered it time to move on and look for a job which held more personal challenge and some prospects for growth and responsibility. I had learned a lot about chickens and I thought that I had learned a little about wine and women and merry-making. The year was 1951 and I had recently celebrated my 23rd birthday.

Having climbed onto the lowest rung of the farming ladder it was now up to me to climb higher and get a job with more responsibility. Looking back it is clear that I made some wrong decisions. My wise father thought I should apply for a job as an assistant manager on a fruit farm in the Cape or on one of the large company estates in the Eastern Transvaal lowveld. My mother was keen for me to look for employment with a sugar estate in Natal. She later admitted the reason for her choice was that there are always eligible wealthy girls on sugar farms, living in relative isolation, and it is just as easy to love a rich girl as it is to love a poor girl. Of course neither of my parents knew that I had this old recurring dream in my head - I wanted all the challenges of mixed farming in a pleasant climate. However, I did apply for more than one job as a fully-fledged manager, thinking that with a bit of a financial knowledge, the ability to organize and a little practical experience I might scrape by and then learn very quickly. Having sent my particulars and a rough CV to an advertiser for a poultry manager, I was called to travel some 120 kms to his office. It was the shortest interview that I have ever experienced. I walked into his office. He said good morning. Then he asked me, 'Have you been the sole manager of a poultry farm before?' I replied in the negative. 'Thank you. Next please.'

I went back to Pretoria and explained to my father that it was what today would be called a real 'catch 22' situation. You can't be a manager unless you have been a manager, but you can't have been a manager unless you are a manager who has been a manager to enable him to become a manager. This is when I began persuading him that he and I could make a go of his rough portion of ground near Premier Mine. I wasn't so eager to get into the chicken business but he had often talked about the simplicity of the life compared to the hard grind of being a lawyer. 'A lawyer has constant conflict. In every case someone is paid to prove that you are wrong. In what other trade, profession or calling does this happen? A plumber comes to make a repair, cuts off the water and promises to return in the morning with the correct replacement fitting. A doctor calls and

gives the patient two aspirins, tells him that he will call again in the morning if there is no improvement, then buries his mistakes. A lawyer's life is a life of tension'.

From the age of fourteen I would go with him to his barren piece of ground and help him to plant ornamental trees or carry out similar small improvements. I dug the holes and carried the water while he sauntered to and fro telling me how it was possible to make a humble living from two thousand laying hens. 'Attention to detail is the key to success.' I am sure that he was quite right and if I had only listened to him and stuck to the hens with punctilious care and attention to the smallest detail of their welfare, the enterprise could have been successful.

The trouble was that during those years I had been reading virtually every farming book that I could get my hands on while avoiding the dulllest technical books. The whole approach of Sir Albert Howard and his emphasis on Organic Farming, and the making of compost by the Indore method in India impressed me and captured my imagination. Charles, the Prince of Wales, in his book about his property Highgate writes that it takes seven years to convert from conventional farming to a farming system based on humus and the absence of artificial fertilizers sprays and pesticides. It took me somewhat longer. Not only because I changed farms but also for the simple reason that he of course had a little more money to put into the enterprise. I was not aware of the time-lag involved. When I first became interested in organic farming Charles was not yet born. It was not only because of what had to be put in before anything could be taken out, but to be successful the soil and the soil moisture had to be capable of supporting earthworms. A reasonable soil with good rainfall or irrigation and plenty of time is what was needed. In later years when I visited England I asked my host how he managed to achieve such a perfect lawn. He replied: 'It's not difficult. All that it requires is watering, mowing and rolling. For a hundred years.'

The year was 1951, not long after World War 2 had ended. Tractors were very difficult to obtain, not having been made for all the years that the factories were busy with the manufacture of war machines. In spite of the shortage my father managed to buy a brand-new David Brown, made in England and one of the first post-war tractors to reach our shores. I managed to find a used trailer adapted rather badly from a five-ton lorry body. It had double wheels at the back and, unlike modern light trailers, did not hitch directly to the drawbar of the tractor but had front wheels too and a very poor turning circle. This equipment was necessary to transport all the building materials for the construction of twenty hen houses built of a cement, sand and cinder mixture, each house about forty square meters large. We should have tried to get an old army lorry for the transport work. The presence of the tractor was too much of a diversion from the main enterprise of poultry farming and I spent too much time putting in contour banks on the relatively barren and unproductive fields. Then to compound the error I ploughed neighbours' lands on a crop share basis, which only lead to losses as I did not use any fertilizer and consequently only obtained the poorest of yields. I was foolishly optimistic and inexperienced.

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In September 1953 I married Margaret Alice Findlay, (known as Bimbi) a most exciting, clever, cultured, well-educated, marvellous woman. She only had three months to go to complete her articles as a lawyer but chose rather to help me on the farm. She was full of enthusiasm and energy but had no experience and in any event it was not long before she was tied to the home, producing and caring for three children who appeared in quick succession. We started off in two rondawels but

it was not long before my mother's gardener, who I had 'inherited,' built, with some help from me, a small thatched cottage with waterborne sewerage to supplement our accommodation. Lying on my bed under the cool thatch on the first Sunday morning after we had moved into the new house, I opened the book that my dear wife had given me for my birthday. It was *Fertility Farming* by Newman Turner. He described how he had taken over a completely run-down farm in England and, using only organic methods and a huge amount of old sawdust and many loads of compost, he had over a few years managed to turn the farm around into a highly productive payable unit. It was all very exciting and impressive. We realized that we could never accomplish anything like his success with the poor conditions with which we had to contend, and that we were not really cut out to spend the rest of our lives as poultry farmers working for my father.

We managed to sell the farm and bought, with the tiniest of deposits and a large bond, a smaller but more fertile farm with some irrigation possibilities but no house a few miles down the road and further from town. This was my next step up the farming ladder, but I had missed out one rung that a person with almost no money could not afford to do. We set about milking a few cows and growing vegetables, while two men, one a stonemason, and I built a simple house. Of course there was no electricity. I qualified as a junior judge of Ayrshire cattle, which was a good move as I used it later to make a prospective employer think that I knew something about dairy cows.

We drudged on for a few years, happy with our freedom and our delightful bundle of children, until we realised that unless we made a change we would never attain the standard of living of our parents' siblings and friends. One of the biggest problems that we had to face was that by staying where we were would mean that we were depriving our children of a reasonable education. The nearest primary school was appalling. I started looking at advertisements for any available jobs. We put our farm on the market but long before it was sold I got an excellent job as a farm manager in Natal and we had to meet the bond repayment out of our liberal salary.

Farming in the lovely misty midlands of Natal was pure joy, the only drawback being that the bosses were more interested in chasing high milk yields than in a more holistic approach to farming, and insisted in having the cows milked three times a day. I was expected to be present at every milking. The farms in the Lidgetton Valley where we were are truly beautiful. It is a real rich mans' paradise. Although I was only a manager and not a wealthy farm owner, we were taken into the social life of the community. This was wonderful for Bimbi, who had little involvement with the farming but a great deal to do with the other mothers of growing children. She became involved in the organisation of lift clubs to a good school, amateur dramatics, bridge and garden clubs and all the multifarious activities of a well-informed and prosperous community. We were given two old horses and she, being an accomplished horsewoman, taught me to ride properly. For the first time during our seven years of marriage we were free of pressing financial worries and we bought two good horses for our pleasure. Together, we rode to every corner of the vast farm and also to the farms of neighbours. Another big stimulation was having people to talk to about farming theory.

After a few years I managed to persuade the owners of our farm where I was the manager to adopt the more general system of milking the cows only twice a day, which gave me a little more time to devote to other things. Pietermaritzburg University was less than an hour's drive and so I enrolled as a part-time student in the Agricultural faculty and attended a weekly tutorial. This went on for four years and it gave me the opportunity as an older student and practicing farmer to get involved with the professors and lecturers. We were also near enough to Cedara Agricultural College for them to ask me to assist in fertilizer experiments on the farm. The emphasis at the time was

heavily geared towards the use of artificial fertilizers and on the leached-out Clovelly soils they were absolutely necessary to obtain any favourable results on a large scale. We did however stick to our principles of organic farming and gardening in our large kitchen garden. Professor Hamish Scott, born in Knysna, head of the pasture department at the university, asked me to join his newly established Grassland Society of SA. This opened the gates for discussion on the role of humus and legumes in pastures. I learned an enormous amount during those years but inevitably, after nearly seven years of faithful service, the need to be my own master reared its foolishly ambitious, egotistic head. My critics will say that this decision was a major mistake but I believed that great love and great achievement involve great risk. Great love was there in abundance, and risk is something that one lives with when living life to the full. The question in me was 'were we living to our greatest capabilities'. It was time to try to get on with taking more risk.

Apart from the owners constantly breathing down my neck and Jack, the major advisor who had driven the project from the beginning, causing constant friction, life was just too comfortable. Jack was apparently intent on emasculating me, so that he would inherit the farm. It is gratifying to think that I made at least one contribution to our country's dairy production at that time. It happened like this.

In the early nineteen-sixties the fashion in the Friesland breed in South Africa was to have short, blocky animals with heavy shoulders and udders with a good capacity, even though they might be pendulous and not attach well forward under the belly. The breed hovered on being classified as a 'dual purpose' breed, that is, aiming for high milk production but also a goody beefy carcass. What we had shown on this farm high up the Lidgetton valley was that a mixed pasture was generally not as productive as a specialised summer pasture and one grown essentially for winter production. I was of the opinion that the same principle should apply to cattle on our extensive farm. Don't try to incorporate the best marbled beef into a milk animal but rather run two separate herds, breeding one exclusively for milk and butterfat and the other for meat only. Looking at the magazine *Hoards Dairyman* that I received from the USA every month, it was very apparent that we were way behind in milk production. The North American dairy farmer who started with the same Dutch Friesland cattle was breeding a much taller angular fine-boned animal and concentrating on the length and capacity of the udder. Pendulous udders were out. Their average milk production was very significantly greater than ours. Other adventurous South African breeders had tried importing cattle from North America before but, as Jack was quick to point out, the cattle had not adapted well to our conditions and had not been a success. The owners of the farm, Birch and Barbara Bernstein, were going to Canada for a short holiday and I persuaded them to have a look at some of the better Friesland/Holstein cattle and import some. Much to my delight they bought ten young cows and a bull calf. At that time a prominent breeder had just imported the famous bull *Exwell Enterprise* from Canada.

When our animals arrived in Durban harbour I of course went down to the docks to see to the off-loading and the transport to the quarantine station. A newspaper reporter happened to come along sniffing for news and I told him about these fantastic milk cows being unloaded and that their progeny were going to change the whole milk production per cow yield in South Africa. My optimistic prognosis, or as some thought, boastful foolishness, was published in more than one newspaper. Jack was absolutely livid and accused me of alienating all the established Friesland breeders. I nearly lost my job and was told by the boss never to talk to a newspaper without referring to him first. As history knows, I was right. Bernstein's Endebeni Friesland Stud broke all individual cow milk records and became the top milk-producing herd in the country, a position they held for many years. *Exwell Enterprise* (imported by Donny Beal-Preston) was bought by the Artificial Insemination Co-op and was used extensively throughout the country. Today, forty years later, there

is hardly a herd of commercial milk-producing Frieslands in our country that does not show the major influence of the Friesland/Holstein blood. Unlike Jack's old friends who had failed, we did not turn the new cows out with the established herd but kept them indoors until they were acclimatised, and took their temperatures twice daily for more than six months, in case of tick-borne diseases picked up from the hay.

The wheel was turning and it was again time to climb the farming ladder. My decision led later to some years of unhappiness but at that period of my life it seemed to me to be the right thing to do. Swaziland had always appealed to Bimbi and me. A very great friend of hers, who was married to a farmer not far from M'Babane, was teaching at a good school where her two boys were pupils. We were offered a lease on a small farm near the town where the owner was producing milk that was sold direct to the consumer. We were well known to the elderly proprietor and he was happy to give us an option to purchase the farm, and to pay it off slowly as and when we made enough money. We took some leave and went to Swaziland to look at the whole situation, and on our return I gave notice to my employers that I would be leaving after the three months notice period. We started making plans to move. Swaziland was on the eve of independence and suddenly everything seemed to change. My elder brother, who was by then a successful attorney, joined my father in pointing out the risks and offered to help us find something else if we would abandon the idea of moving to Swaziland. A client of theirs who my father had been advising for many years was eager to rid himself of the burden of management and the problems of drought and no feed for his dairy cows. The proposition was that he and I should enter into a partnership, utilising his cows and my management and each putting in a little money with which to buy a suitable farm in Natal. The farm of course would have to carry a large bond. The family agreed to lend me some money to make a start.

We eventually found a farm near Richmond. It had many disadvantages, one of which was that the house was very run-down and damp, and would-be purchasers all shuddered away from living in such a smelly, damp and dismal old structure. The first part of it had been built by a Boer trekker during their brief stay in Natal, before the Byrne settlers arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although the farm had the Illovo River running through it, the house and main part of the farm was about 140 meters above the river and the river area was very rocky and not suitable for anything except a patch of irrigation. On the positive side, it was close to the village and school and not too far from Pietermaritzburg. What proved to be the biggest advantage of all was the fact that it consisted of twelve subdivisions of various sizes. I persuaded the elderly owner to sell us the farm lock, stock and barrel, with all his machinery, cows and shares in the company to which he sold his milk. We paid him for the loose assets and the whole of the price of the land itself was on a bond with the seller, the title deed and bond being in my name.

It is extremely rare for a farming partnership to work satisfactorily over the long term and it was not altogether surprising that my wealthy partner wanted all kinds of costly improvements done and wanted to spend money that we could not afford and did not have. We agreed amicably to dissolve the partnership.

During the following few years we on the farm forged ahead, winning the soil conservation cup for the most improved farm, planting orchards of citrus and avocado pear trees, growing vegetables and starting a farm stall on the main road to the Transkei. Milk remained our main enterprise and we grew as much maize as possible to feed the cows. The soils in the area are fertile red loam but in spite of this we used a lot of artificial fertilizers to obtain maximum yields. We had four children, some already at expensive boarding schools, and no other income so we had to make the farm pay. We also managed, by the skin of our teeth, to meet our bond repayments. To put it

another way, we could not afford the time or the opportunity cost to get an organic system going.

The children enjoyed their holiday projects enormously. Our second son, Christopher, was a keen farmer and had his own little chicken farm in a large 'courtyard' that he had built, where he supplied the fowls with cow manure to scratch in and obtain some of the 'organic' advantages. The youngest son, David, kept three milk goats. With the help of one of our staff he built an attractive wooden shelter, with a mounting box on which the goats stood in order to be at a convenient height when being milked. He did all the milking himself. He had a good financial deal going. He used the cow feed, for which I did not charge him, to supplement the goats' feed, then made cream-cheese from the milk, which he sold to his mother, most of which she then took to the university for sale. He rose early every morning to milk the goats and also milked them again in the late afternoon. We all helped to pick and pack tomatoes and other vegetables for the farm stall even on New Years Day. It was a very happy and rewarding period of my life and I think made us a close-knit family even though we started to have differences, and schisms appeared in later years.

By the time that our eldest son Peter was busy with a postgraduate degree, I found myself alone on the farm, with a wife and three children setting off to university and the youngest at boarding school. I was also becoming tired of the repetitious drudgery and the fun seemed to have gone out of the communal life so I attempted to join them. Fortunately the years that I had spent in part-time study had led to a reasonable level of higher qualification and I was fortunate to get a job affiliated to the University. We bought the cheapest old house close to the university, appointed a farm manager and all moved into town. The idea was that we should go to the farm for weekends and so left the house on the farm fully furnished, with a servant in charge. It didn't work out quite like that.

After five years of frustration and growing unhappiness and bad and reckless behaviour on my part I decided to make a new start elsewhere. We had sold some of the subdivisions of the farm as well as most of the dairy herd and the time had come to get rid of what was left. The country was in a political turmoil after the Soweto Riots and the property market was absolutely static. I was unable to sell any further subdivisions, the farmhouse or town house. I was at a low ebb and decided to visit my mother in Knysna.

Driving past Ganzvlei one morning I noticed a 'For Sale' notice on the gate. I went on to George to do my business, convinced that I would never be able to afford to buy the farm of my dreams, but one thing led to another and eventually an agent took me to see the property. The houses were very run down and the better of the two had been unoccupied for more than six months - prospective purchasers could not visualize living in a place with wood-borer in some of the old yellowwood floors. Pieter Schnetler's old house was virtually falling to bits and had last been used as a hay store. To me it all looked like a blissful challenge. The property market was so bad that we were able to continue negotiating for six months. I could not sell any of my Natal properties but felt relaxed and that everything was in the lap of the gods. An auction sale was held, at which my offer was not accepted despite it being the highest bid. No better offer was presented to the seller, who was adamant that she would not 'give the farm away'. Eventually we agreed on a compromise. A week after Ganzvlei was transferred to me I received an offer from a man who did not know that the Natal farm was for sale at the time, the farm that he always wanted. He was prepared to pay almost three times the amount that I had paid for it. The world was smiling at me, the whole world together with old Aunt Mimmie, flying down Adderley Street on her broomstick.

My mother was living on Leisure Isle at Knysna. In May of 1978 her house burnt down and had to be rebuilt from scratch. As she was getting on in years and comfortable in the house where she moved after the fire, she suggested that I should occupy her house when the builders moved out. At the end of the academic year Bimbi joined me and we moved to the Island. It was only in March of 1979 that transfer of Ganzvlei eventually came through. As mentioned earlier, the house on the farm was in poor condition. I still had not sold any more property in Natal and was paying interest on a large overdraft with the bank. So, feeling the financial pressure, we decided to remain where we were and repair the house at the weekends, using only our domestic worker's husband, who was a bricklayer, and a couple of helpers. The little team accomplished a great deal over the next few months but there was a lot to do as Bimbi had cleverly turned the inside of the house around and had removed dividing walls, making the side entrance the front by adding a hall. We also added bay windows, a bathroom, a back stoep and a side porch at the entrance. I was determined to move to Ganzvlei before Christmas and eventually we were obliged to get in a builder to finish off the repairs and alterations. We moved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1979.

One of the reasons that I was impatient to move was that I had a burning desire to have my own cows grazing on the lush pastures between the river and the house. I sent for an old bucket-type Surge milking machine that we had in Natal, and more importantly, eleven animals not sold on our dispersal sale some months before. Some of these were elderly and others were 'sick, lame and lazy' at the time. In the railway trucks with the cows, my son had sent two young brothers of twenty and twenty-two who had grown up on the Natal farm. We set up the milking machine with a little diesel motor in an old open shed and we were in business. We lived on Leisure Isle for nearly a year. Although I was working in Knysna I managed to visit the farm a number of times a week. Not only my critics but even my friends and family close to me thought that I was absolutely mad to start farming again. Living in the country was one thing but starting on a venture that needed capital outlay and that would probably run at a loss was considered truly stupid.

In the nature of things every dairy farmer has aspirations of having good stock. I was no different and was impatient to buy a better class of animal. With this in mind I obtained a list of breeders of pedigree Jersey cattle from the Jersey Breeders Society and wrote to half a dozen members asking whether they had any cows or heifers for sale. I stipulated that their records should be above the average for the breed. There were no favourable replies. Within weeks however, the Outeniqua Research station advertised a public auction sale of their small jersey herd. It was my intention to have a registered pedigree herd and unfortunately these animals were not registered, although there was no question that they had been pure bred for many years. I went to the sale and bought six animals that over the next year proved to be disappointing.

In October 1980 our son Christopher, who had been working for Baynesfield Estate in Natal, resigned and came to join us on the farm. These were some of the happiest years of my life. We got on very well together and proved to be a great team. Some time before his arrival the Divisional Council building inspector wrote complaining that the old house originally occupied by Pieter Schnetler and his second wife, my great-aunt Hester van Huysteen, was falling to bits and was an eyesore from the national road. It had a wooden stoep up on piles and this was leaning crookedly and looked a bit precarious. The inspector instructed me to demolish the house. This is not the place to go into the politics of the time, but it was curious how quickly the quasi- fascist element of the National Party and their officials knew that I was not one of their supporters and opposed the bullying and discriminating policies of the period. There were always little things that told me that I was being watched. For example, within weeks of bringing my bakkie from the Natal farm to Ganzvlei the traffic department told me that I had to register the vehicle with a local number-plate. I explained to them that I had a

farm in Natal and that the vehicle was used primarily on that farm where it was registered. They did not accept the explanation.

We did not demolish the house but removed the long front stoep and then got a bulldozer to push up soil to make a wide open patio with brick pillars and a pergola, in the traditional South African Dutch style. We removed the original old tin tub, which was a real antique and today would occasion much interest and delight, and fitted a more modern bathroom complete with a flush toilet. After cleaning and painting, the house was attractive and there were no more nasty letters from the building inspector. As by then we had sold our two houses in Natal we had enough furniture to make Christopher comfortable when he moved in as a happy bachelor. He immediately started building a new dairy and milking parlour. Because cows have to be milked twice a day every day throughout the year it is clearly important to streamline this very important harvesting process. Over many years I had researched work-study findings of the layout of milking parlours and the ergonomics and labour element, so, armed with this theoretical knowledge and with many years of experience of the practicalities of milking cows, we designed what we considered a 'nice little unit'. When it was finished we were as proud of it as an engineer might have been who had invented a thoroughly workable but inexpensive motorcar with pleasingly elegant lines. Attached to the parlour is Christopher's large sunny farm office, which of course is the hub of the farm.

The prettiest portion of Ganzvlei, with green pastures running down from the high hill behind to the clear dark river the colour of coca-cola, is actually only a few hectares in extent. Around the spur of the hill, known in the old days as *Agter die kranz*, is an additional eleven hectares of deep alluvial soil adjacent to the river. In spite of a high stocking rate the number of cows that could be fed from the area was insufficient to cover the overhead expenses and provide a living for the farmer. We tried to overcome this by hiring additional land and buying lucerne from the Sunday's River and Vaalharts. The lucerne was railed to Goukamma station from where it was fetched, using a tractor and trailer.

The one big advantage that Ganzvlei has over so many other farms is its proximity to town. In order to obtain a better price for the milk we opened a milk shop near the post office in Knysna.

Christopher produced a thick Jersey cream, similar to Devonshire cream, which became famous from Cape Town to Johannesburg, and when the holiday-makers arrived he could not keep up with the demand. By milking about ninety cows and getting a reasonable price for the milk we jogged along happily for a while, until the authorities decided to close down all the small independent dairies and rely solely on the large milk companies for distribution. They started by merely making life unpleasant. At the time everybody was classified under the Apartheid Laws by colour and race. We employed one white woman and one white male, one coloured woman and one black male. We had one flush toilet and a change room in which the workers could hang their overalls and change out of their gumboots. The health inspector insisted that we should build an additional three flush toilets as it was against the law to have the different races and sexes using the same toilet. For some years this curious factor had not been mentioned, and the inspector was full of praise for the clinical cleanliness of the dairy and he, himself, bought milk from our shop.

Every pedigree herd of cattle which is registered with the Stud Book of South Africa has a herd prefix, and each cow's name starts with the prefix so that everyone knows from where she comes. We applied to have our animals registered with the prefix 'Ganzvlei' but this was turned down because the name had already been taken. We decided to translate the name as closely as possible into English and registered the herd as 'Goosemarsh Jerseys'. Goosemarsh has become



a well-known name within the Jersey breed. We have won prizes on shows from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth over the last twenty-five years and occasionally have come away with the top awards. Christopher has won the coveted ribbon for best Jersey cow and on one occasion for the supreme champion and best dairy cow of all breeds.

Usually a great show cow is also a big milker but this is not always so. All pedigree herds belong to the national milk recording scheme and the milk yield, butterfat and protein content is measured and recorded on a monthly basis. The results are put together and published. There are about 30,000 Jersey cows recorded in South Africa and every breeder strives to have cows that shine out from the masses. For many years a Goosemarsh cow has been in the top three hundred, that is to say among the top one percent. All of these cows were born and bred on Ganzvlei and then sold to people all over the country. Because we have an approach that is as organic as possible our cows are not pushed to perform great milking feats. Christopher is continually being told that an animal sold to a satisfied customer is doing far better than expected. A happy customer is a source of great happiness to us too. The final result is that when he wants to sell a few animals he no longer has to advertise or have a production sale or take the animals to one of the prestige show sales as he did for many years. His animals are so well known that he makes a few phone calls to people who have bought his cows before and he quickly concludes a sale, especially as he is never greedy when it comes to price.

Having written the above in April 2008, I was walking through the pasture looking at the cows and enjoying the quiet cool of the evening. I was struck by the fine visual show quality of the animals and their glowing health when I received a telephone message from Christopher to say that of the fifteen cows in milk which I was looking at, two of them had just been included in the top one percent of a new basis of measurement of all recorded Jersey cows in the country. The new way of measuring a cow's desirability does not only measure milk production but includes the score of the cow, which is the visual opinion of the field officer on of the closeness to physical perfection, and various other criteria such as longevity and short calving intervals. It is pretty good to have over thirteen percent of the cows that you see before you being part of the 300 Club.

Over the years Christopher has tried every way he could to reduce expenses. He sold stock at very good prices and has a fine reputation for his breeding animals. He is now down to a minimal staff, and is doing most of the work himself. He milks only about fifteen cows, and makes a superb mature cheddar cheese, Ganzvlei Vastrap, that was judged the third best in the country in the National Cheese Championships for three years in a row, from 2006 to 2008. He has recently started making a Camembert-type cheese that is proving very popular.

The wheel has turned a full circle and instead of trying to produce major yields with the aid of artificial chemical fertilizers, we are back to encouraging the earthworms to do more for us and to go full out at Organic Farming.

The more one thinks about earthworms the more one believes in magic. In creating the earthworm, nature has produced the ultimate high-speed humus factory, combining the mechanical and chemical processes to achieve the perfect product, which is fertile topsoil. This soil is properly balanced and conditioned for the best plant growth, containing in optimum proportion and in water-soluble form all the elements required for plant nutrition. The worm that we farmers are most interested in is the common 'Rainworm', (*Lumbricus terrestris*), known in German as *Regenwurm*. This common earthworm is a native of the fields and forests, pastures, lawns and gardens. As a rule it lives in the top four hundred centimeters of soil, eating ceaselessly day and night. It feeds on all decaying organic matter, dead roots, leaves and humus together with a certain amount of soil which it

sometimes fetches from up to two meters below the surface, and in so doing, brings up minerals which would not normally be available to shallow-rooting plants. Vegetable matter, living and dead bacteria together with large quantities of earth containing minerals and other nutrients all pass through the worms' system. Each night they deposit castings on the surface, adding enormously to the fertility of the area in which they are working. The true magic of the earthworm is its ability to handle highly acidic vegetable waste and turn it into a fertilizer with a neutral PH. It is the only animal that has a multitude of calciferous glands in the walls of the oesophagus, which secrete fluid rich in calcium that exerts its neutralizing action on the material passing through. This explains how it is possible to spread a thick layer of fresh sawdust and wood shavings over an area of grassland and instead of the grass being killed off permanently it is rejuvenated. Over a period of time the layer of waste material breaks down and disappears into the earth, leaving a soil which is much more friable and fertile. We have proved this without a shadow of doubt from empirical observation.

During the last fifteen years and more, we have had a source of supply of sawdust fresh from the sawmill. It has been our practice to spread it over the floor of the large barn in which a hundred cows can be tied. Every morning the worst of the dung is loaded on a trailer and taken out to the compost heap. Inevitably there is some dung and urine left behind which is raked and mixed with the remaining sawdust. New material is added once a week and the whole floor builds up over a period as in a deep litter henhouse. Every few months the barn is completely emptied and the product taken out to the compost heap. In similar conditions in the western world, especially in the United States of America, the barn is cleaned with the aid of a 'a barn cleaner', which is a conveyer belt that runs along the manure channel and then out on to a huge heap close to the cowshed. Our health authorities did not like this idea at all and insisted that the heap for composting should be well away from the source, so we had a site on the side of a hill bulldozed, making three terraces. The idea was to make a long heap about two meters wide and one and a half meters high. This would be a conventional compost heap but when it came to turning the compost, to speed up decay we would merely push it down onto the next level and finally on to a trailer to be carted to the fields. Once again it did not quite work as planned, mainly because we did not have the correct equipment to do the pushing nor could we afford to rush out and buy it. I still like the idea but nature, taking somewhat longer than an eager little mortal, slowly got on with the job and what was a large unwieldy heap turned out to be the most beautiful friable compost. We are learning patience and how to work with nature. This of course has some immense advantages and pleasures. You cannot hurry the incoming tide so you might as well go and have a nice cup of tea while you wait.

Cows will not graze the grass in the immediate vicinity of their excreta. This is the reason why, in a kikuyu pasture for example, the grass is grazed repeatedly around tall green patches of lush grass. The field appears to have large quantities of feed available but in fact the cows nibble at the short areas and come away relatively hungry. Most farmers resort to a grass slasher mounted behind a tractor to get rid of the problem and break up the dry dung-pats. Machinery, fuel and labour are expensive, so we bought a flock of sheep to graze down the pastures after the cattle. Sheep do this very efficiently and have the advantage that they are growing into more money and spreading their dung like marbles, fairly evenly, all over the pasture. But of course in practice it does not quite work like that. It takes a while to establish a system from small and slow beginnings.

Suddenly it was lambing time and the lambs started appearing fast and furiously. Then a strange thing happened. They were disappearing at a rate of half-a-dozen a day. A new source of food had been introduced into a stable ecology and the *Rooikatte*, the lynxes, called their friends from the adjacent farms and Nature Reserve to join in the sport and the kill. We tried putting cattle in with the sheep to frighten the big cats away, to no avail. The sheep were moved frequently but this also did not stop the carnage. One large lynx was caught in a trap and taken to a nature reserve away in the

mountains but there were still plenty more to wreak havoc. So the flock of sheep has been sold, which is a pity as the sheep could have played an effective role in fertility farming.



## ADAM BOTHA, THE MOLE CATCHER

Back in 1978 when we bought our first two portions of the farm Ganzvlei, there were still some of the old interesting characters living in the valley. To the north of both the rail and road bridges the river starts to narrow and eventually after a few hundred meters gets to a point where some shallow rapids occur. It was up the river in this area where the first crossing and drift was made. There is an old well-worn road through the forest growth that flourishes in abundance in this extraordinarily pretty and secluded spot. The cutting action of the narrow iron-clad ox wagon wheels had over many years produced banks on either side of a declivity, now covered with moss and tiny fern-like plants with larger varieties draping over the edges. The natural drainage of the forest has caused seepage and in places tiny trickles of water drain down the bank resulting in further mild erosion. The soil at the bottom has now washed away leaving a bed of stones. It is no longer a road but a pretty and romantic path up the hillside. It is as if nature itself seeks to keep the place wild and lonely and unviolated. Overhead the tree branches join so that the whole road is a tunnel laced with wild vines, where the light itself is the colour of the cool depths of the river just crossed.

Before reaching the rapids, the river flows close to the rocky protruding spur of the hill. On the sunny side of it in a splendidly wooded gully a tiny stream makes its way to the river. Here stood a humble cottage in which the widow Gertie Barnard, her daughter and her brother-in-law, Adam Botha, lived. The building was little more than a two-roomed corrugated iron shack with a mud floor covered with old and tatty linoleum.

A number of kilometres of the railway line from George to Knysna runs over very sandy ground, the consistency of which encourages the Cape Dune Mole to invade and take over large areas. This particular breed of mole is huge, about the size of a small cat, and consequently its burrows and passages are as wide as a brandy bottle, causing the soil to subside. In order to keep the railway tracks stable a mole catcher was employed. Adam Botha was the official Mole Catcher of the South African Railways and Harbours. In spite of being indifferently supervised, poorly paid and seldom encouraged, Adam was reasonably content. As he strolled along the line on a pleasant sunny day with his mole-traps, his glass sherry bottle of cold tea and his tin canister, issued by the railways, containing a sandwich and a guava, he felt that life was good. His only resentment was that the authorities had failed to provide him with a smart black cap with a shiny peak like the ones worn by porters. His old felt hat, which he pulled down to shade his eyes, had been without a hatband for many years. It was faded from brown to a yellowy colour and hung limply over his eyes and ears. It was not the hat of a man of authority and did not denote that he was a man of standing. He was a man with an important full time job, for after all, was it not up to him to keep the trains on a firm and steady track?

And of course it is not just anyone who can set a mole trap correctly and catch the big dune mole with its vicious incisors as long as a child's little finger. The secret was to understand the way the mole thought. Firstly examine the fresh mound of earth indicating the mole's presence then see which way the last of the newly dug soil pointed. This comes out in a sort of a ruffle on top of the

mound. Now clear away most of the mound without disturbing the mouth of the hole, place the trap with the jaws facing the opposite way to the ruffles, and cover the hole with a piece of newspaper, leaving a crack of about a centimetre open. After a while the mole will wonder where the draft is coming from and will back up to investigate. Wham!

On a winter's day Adam would stop and pause a while and rest, signalled by the ten o'clock train passing. There was plenty of time before its return at three o'clock so he would make a small fire and place his tea bottle near the flames, moving the bottle slowly towards the heat as the tea warmed, being careful not to be in a hurry and crack the glass. So many people failed in their endeavours through too much hurry. This was also a good time to take a deep swig from the flat hidden bottle in the pocket of his coat. Now sit quietly and watch to see if there is disturbance from the mole trap site and watch the tea begin to warm. In the summer there were a number of shady spots where he could rest before going on to check the previous day's traps and then set some new ones.

Adam Botha had not spent much time at school and his book learning was minimal. He had grown up in the forest surrounded by people who were completely unsophisticated in the ways of the outside world. For more than a hundred years these woodcutters had lived in an isolated environment of virtual self-sufficiency. Over the generations the magic use and effects of herbs had been handed down and so it is not surprising that Adam had a vast working knowledge of the plants of the forests and their applications. For a modern scientist to walk through a stretch of his home habitat with him was the opposite of a clergyman being shown through a factory. A clergyman probably would have faith that the product would work. For anyone remotely interested in homoeopathy a walk in the woods with Adam was sheer delight. As he strolled across the cleared area on the edge of the forest he would start telling about the plants and their cures. 'Most people would think that these are only weeds but that is not so. Many of them are valuable medicine. These blackjacks that stick in your socks are very handy to have near the house when there is a new baby. You can make tea from two handfuls of these leaves in a cup of hot water and give it to the baby when it has colic. It is very good stuff. You will see lots of blackjacks at my house. It is also good for earache and if you want to stop the bleeding in a cut or graze, take some juice of this *kweekgras* that you are walking on and squeeze it into the wound. When you have indigestion and too much wind, chew some of the nodules of this nutgrass. It stops the pain and sweetens the wind.' Then as he came to a sunny patch near an outcrop of rock, 'This *wildedagga* is really one of the best medicines. It too will cure earache and other complaints like that and is the best for coughs and sore throats. In fact it cures most things including tiredness. I use a lot of it all the time and also the stronger stuff that I grow. The only thing that it is not so good for is for rheumatism. For that you need buchu. You make a strong tea and drink it. What also helps is these arum lilies - if you warm them up then crush them and hold on the part that is sore. I use that too but it means that you have to sit still while holding the leaves for a long time and sometimes it is too difficult not to fall asleep.' So as we progressed up the creek into the tall trees of the multitude of varieties found in the Knysna forests, he had something to say about each tree or plant. He commented on the witch hazel, wild plum, cheesewood, ironwood, yellowwood, bladdernut, *bostolbos*, lemon-thorn, saffron and many others.

'This *kershout* has nothing to do with a *kers* or what the English call a candle. It is a *kers* - a cherry because the wood has a pretty red colour. It and that assegaai tree just over there were used for making spokes for wagon wheels.' Then walking on a little further. 'Everyone knows this stinkwood as it has always been used for making the best furniture and if you can reach a leaf to look at, it is very easy to remember because it has these two little bumps at the bottom of the leaf.' After a long thoughtful pause he said 'The forest is wonderful. It provides so many things and so many medicines. You can cure anything with all the plants we have right here. But of course it is a lot of work picking the leaves and heating the water to make a medicine to drink and then on a farm like this there is always so much other work. We long ago stopped keeping a cow because that was

really too much work, fetching it and milking it and all that but there is still wood to chop and the little chickens to look after. We can't let them run in the grass or the forest because the birds of the air will kill them so we have to carry water to them in their *hok* near the stream. Although it is not very far to carry you will be surprised how much water a dozen little chickens can drink.' He then went on to say 'There is only one thing that I have been unable to cure and that is the pain in my shoulder. It gets so bad towards afternoon that when I come back from work I am unable to chop wood or carry buckets'.

On the top of the hill on my portion of Ganzvlei there is a plethora of moles. I offered to pay Adam whatever he considered to be a fair price for him to come on a Saturday to help me with traps for the moles. Adam's reply was a flat refusal. He told me because he worked so hard during the week he needed all the rest that he could get.

I decided to ask his sister-in-law for her help in trying to impress on him how much I would value his help. When I visited her humble home on a Friday at four in the afternoon, Gertie happened to be leaning over the stable-type door shrieking at someone down at the spring only a few meters away from the house. She stopped when she saw me, her expression quickly changed from anger to a half smile of welcome. She asked me in and offered me a chair at the little table in front of the bed. She sat down opposite me on the only other chair. After a few pleasantries and opinions exchanged regarding the possibilities of a change in the weather she started to tell me how difficult life was on their little farm.

'You know Mr Met, people think it is so easy living on a farm. Take eggs for example. The town people say how lucky we are to have lovely fresh eggs that we can just go and collect from the hens every day. They don't know how much work goes into keeping chickens, carrying water to the new chicks in the *hok* so that they don't fall into the stream and drown. And then you have got to feed them and that costs money and there is never enough of that on a farm. Fresh eggs! Yes we do get fresh eggs if you follow a hen round all day in the hot sun to see where she is laying, otherwise you don't get fresh eggs. Eggs yes. But not fresh eggs. Only last Saturday evening I told Adam to go and look for some eggs so we could have something to eat with our supper. I don't think he was feeling very well because he seemed a bit unsteady and his eyes looked sore. Anyway, he came back with six eggs. I cracked the first one into the pan and it was so old that the chicken was almost ready to pop out. The stink was awful. We had to flap the top of the door to try to make a breeze to get some fresh air. Then it was dark and we couldn't just go down to the café on the corner like the people in town and buy a pie, so we just had bread fried in dripping, which as you know is good food if you are hungry, but I wasn't so hungry for that. I wanted a couple of eggs.'

'Can't Adam help a bit with some money?' I asked. 'You know how badly I want him to help me with my mole problem, and I will pay him well'.

'Adam has nothing. Nothing. And as soon as he gets paid he spends it'. She lifted her elbow in a significant gesture.

At this point Adam arrived looking tired and dirty.

'Did you have a good wash' asked Gertie.

'Ja', Adam grunted, and sat down on the step.

'Hello Adam' I said.

Adam nodded his head and squirmed on the step as if he was anticipating some trouble.

'I was just telling Gertie what I said the other day when you so kindly showed me all your different trees and their medicinal remedies. You remember I said that I would really like you to come over to my side of the river and help me get rid of the plague of moles up on the hill. You are the best mole catcher in the South-western Districts. You know that the moles are so bad on the open ground on the hill that we can't even plant a patch of mealies. I know that you work hard all week but can't you come for a few hours on a Saturday?'

I looked at Gertie for support, hoping that she would back me up, but she was looking down at the table. There was a long silence. Eventually I said: ‘Won’t you come if I get a “*papsak Oom Tas*” (Two litres of strong cheap wine) and of course I will pay you well’.

Adam got up and turned away, walking slowly towards his beloved forest.

When a man has nothing, all that he has left is his pride. Never take that away from him.

Adam never came to help me.



## TRAIN

In about 1927 it was decided that Knysna should have a rail link with George. Prior to that all the traffic had to go up what is now known as the old road, the main connection between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, which ran through Phantom Pass, up past Tierhoek, Barrington, through Geelhoutvlei, and then along the Serpentine and on to George. Because of the hilly nature of the countryside it was not easy to construct the rail link

The railway line came very close to the north-west corner of the Ganzvlei property – I always used to say that the Choo Choo went through my kitchen door. In many ways it was a pleasure to have the train – it was obviously an old steam train, and made a certain amount of noise, but one didn’t worry too much about that. It was a great thrill for little children walking out in the pasture to wave to the engine driver – not only would he return the wave but would give a few quick hoots.

The Goukamma station was on the east side of the valley, just over the bridge. Seven cottages stand there, in which railway workers used to live. They are typical little railway cottages and face the station, and because of the smoke and noise, the windows on the front of the cottages are very tiny and in some cases there are no windows at all. The railway workers never really became our friends, but we were certainly acquaintances.

We used to buy in truckloads of lucerne to feed the cows, lucerne that came from the Karoo or the Sundays River. When a truck load arrived at the Goukamma station one of the residents would phone us – as it was only a siding there was no station master there – to alert us that a load was there and we had better go and off-load it. Which we did, we would send a tractor and trailer around on the main road, over the bridge to the station where we would off-load the truck and load up the trailer. Sometimes it would take all day and many loads to get the lucerne home, sometimes it would take more than one day, depending on what else had to be done. After a day or two the stationmaster at Knysna would phone and say that the truck had arrived and would we come and off-load it. We would thank him very much and assure him we would come right away – having already off-loaded it.

The other virtue of the train was that our staff, our workers, could catch the train on a Saturday morning, pay 25 cents for a return ticket from Goukamma station to Knysna, do their shopping and return with their goods. They still had to walk a kilometre and a half back to the farm, but it was a secure and easy way to get to Knysna and back. All this came to an end when the Choo Choo took over.

The Choo Choo was the inspiration of the tourism department. They stopped ordinary rail traffic and used the train solely as a tourist ploy, a tourist attraction. It cost passengers not 25 cents but R50 to travel one way – either to George, where they got off and returned in the bus or by using private transport, or from George to Knysna, where again they had to find their own way back. A

few people would do the return journey, for R100, but not many – once you'd done the trip you'd had enough, and it took a couple of hours each way. The coming of the Choo Choo meant that we could no longer use the train to transport goods and people. As it happened the road authorities decided at that stage to give licences to heavy road transporters, which had been few and far between while the train was operating (the railway had always operated at a loss). It was much more convenient to use a lorry, to pay a transport operator to fetch the goods from the seller and deliver the load to the farm, to the very shed where it was needed.

Unfortunately the Choo Choo has now come to an end, whether permanently or not we do not know, but during the floods of November 2006 there was extensive damage to the line that has never been repaired. There is now talk of repairing it, and of making a bicycle track all along the route of the line. That would be a perfect solution – to be able to ride a bike all along the line to Knysna, without all the traffic. The traffic has now become very dangerous for bicycles, and impossible for tractors, and of course horses haven't a hope. They might however be allowed on the bicycle track – that would be fun, riding into town like they used to in the old days....

The major downside of having the train going through the farm was that sparks would fly out of the chimney – it was a coal fired engine of course – and set light to the tinder-dry grass on occasions. It's quite surprising, one thinks of the climate being soft and very gentle, but we do have hot berg winds and at times the grass gets very dry and easy to ignite. The slightest spark could set a fire going. There were a number of fires, which also got into plantations - fortunately not on the portion of Ganzvlei where we live, but further along. A big fire that was started by the train burnt right through Tesar's farm and the Thesen's plantations towards the sea. We had a lot of contact with the railways and persuaded them to use an electric locomotive on what we call 'red days', when the fire hazard is predicted as dangerous. They frequently did what they had agreed to do, but sometimes did not.



## FLOODS

It is interesting that in his narrative Fanie Schnetler talks about the big Goukamma floods coming every 16 years, as it would seem that there has been some sort of flood more or less every seven years, some of which were clearly less dramatic than others. Although I bought two portions of Ganzvlei and one portion of Buffelsvermaak, each having a boundary on the Goukamma River, in 1978, I only came to live here at the end of 1979. By 1981 my son, Christopher, had left his farming job in Natal and had come to join us here at the Goukamma. He was then 26 years of age. Our first experience of a flood was unexpected. In those days we were accustomed to having plenty of rain and it often rained at night. On that particular occasion it had been raining hard all night. As it got light Christopher, who had got up to supervise the milking, came to me and told me that the valley was under water.

He said that we should rush off and see what animals might be in danger of drowning. My reply was to say, 'Just give me five minutes while I pull on some clothes, and put on the kettle in the meantime so we can have a cup of coffee as we go out'. He was furious that I should consider delaying to drink coffee while his precious animals were at risk, and dashed outside. It was still raining as I walked out on to the lawn, covered by my sturdy waterproof coat, with a cup of coffee in my hand. In the dull glow of the early morning I heard shouts coming from down near the river bank and saw a bunch of heifers swimming over the fences towards me, with Christopher's head bobbing behind them, driving them on. I waded through the shallow water in front of me to the

nearest gate, which I opened, and Christopher rose from the depths still fully clothed minus his coat and his boots, and brought them through to safety. The new road to the *Rooidak* house, where Fanie Schnetler was born, was under water, but we were able to reach the valley behind the hill by using the old path to *Agter die krans* which Fanie's grandfather, Gideon, had made. So we were able to drive the balance of the Jersey herd, which had not come in with the milkers, on to higher ground. We lost no animals and during that flood, and actually gained three young oxen that had been washed down from a farm further upriver.

When the next flood occurred some years later, Christopher was determined not to have to swim, and watched the weather very carefully. He had all his animals on safe ground when the water started rising. Next door, however, Mitchell Brown was not quite so well prepared. He was now living in the house on top of the koppie next to the bridge, behind the old post office. As the water rose still further Christopher went to see if he could be of any assistance and between them they managed to disconnect Brown's milking pump and motor and get it out of the water's way. On that occasion the flood was higher than the top of the door of Brown's milking stable.



## ADVERTISING ENCOUNTERS

During the early eighties, before the road was widened and people started driving so fast that they had no time to look, a number of pictures of the farm appeared on calendars and elsewhere, depicting it as the farm that everybody loved. The Ford motor company commissioned a television advert to be made and after some discussion about what they required, arranged to pay Christopher three hundred rand for his contribution to the advertisement. The theme was a drive from the hub of the busy Transvaal through the Karroo and then, memorably, alongside a flock of ostriches with their heads popping up above the sleek blue Ford car. The car swept passed the lakes and turned into the gate of Ganzvlei. A small blue Ford tractor with a trailer could be seen from the gate, giving way to the car approaching the dairy building, and as it slowed down was surrounded by noisy geese. Christopher and Beth, an attractive woman with long shining blonde hair who was employed in the dairy, came out to meet the couple in the car. The driver got out and shook hands with Christopher. 'CUT' shouted the director. He turned to Christopher, standing there in his rather grubby farm clothes. 'You should have smiled when you shook hands.' 'Oh' was the reply. 'We did not discuss that part. We will have to do it again, and that will cost you another three hundred rand'.

The overseas advertising world found that sunny South Africa was a good and cheap place to make TV advertisements and we had groups from Europe coming to make short films, which took a lot of time and huge amounts of money. We took quite a lot of trouble to help the producers but were ignorant of the economics of the business and were paid very little for the site and for our input.

One of the groups was from France, who came to make a delicate advertisement for perfume. We negotiated a price of about a hundred rand a day, which turned out to be only for the days that they were actually shooting the film. All the days that they were hanging about asking for



little favours in preparation for the action, or the days that they had a party to celebrate a successful performance, or the days that they spent dismantling the set and clearing up, were not counted. Before starting there were assurances that only a few people would be involved. It is true that there were only six main actors. The star, the main attraction for the perfume, was a French actress who came from Paris for a few days. She arrived when the set was up and some of the filming already completed. There was also an understudy, and a stunt man who became stranded on a pole in the river, and dozens of other people. The whole thing became a bit of a nightmare when the makeup artists took over the house and were quite unpleasant and rude, not being accustomed to such primitive dressing rooms and ablution facilities. The pressure on the septic tanks became a point of concern. When I was told 'Oh no. There are only very few people involved', they clearly had not counted in as members of the staff the number of local people who were the technical staff and camera crew. The admin staff member used the telephone constantly, ordering meals from caterers in George, or hardware from shops in Knysna, or phoning their boy friends/lovers, parents and friends. It is not surprising that I heard mutters from the family 'Never again'. Our fee for the site, the river, the pastures and the house, which obviously made the whole thing possible and attractive to the makers and millions of television viewers probably came to about one quarter percent of the cost of the production.

Shortly after this we were approached by a group of Italians who wanted to make a very simple little film on the river advertising milk, or was it honey? This time they were dealing with someone who learns quickly and who had become a hard and almost bitter businessman.

Remembering Bimbi's tears I started by saying 'Of course we will have a written contract and first and foremost the house is strictly out of bounds. You will have to hire chemical toilets of a specification of which I approve. No using the bushes. Got it? Secondly, we will be paid for every day that anyone who has a connection to the project is on the property. This includes carpenters, fixers and technicians'. Then came my brain wave. 'You say that you want to build a houseboat as part of the set. You must build this at the river so we are not involved with little favours and the inconvenience of noise and people, and when you leave the farm the boat must be left intact and it will become my property'. Eventually, faced with my hard bargaining, they agreed to all the conditions, and we hoped that we would make enough money to provide half a plane ticket to fly to Rome and be left with a tub of some sort on the river.

The technical staff started with zest. They arrived in a large lorry with high sides, loaded with timber and sheets of marine board and made for the river. The overhanging trees were too low for the load to pass under so they took some time in cutting down overhanging branches and trees that were blocking the lorry's path. The devastation was appalling but it had not occurred to me to put anything into the contract about not cutting down trees, so apart from having a talk to the guilty party there was little else I could do. They worked through the night to the early hours of the morning, as theatre people sometimes do. The next morning the neighbour across the river who had to put up with the hammering and singing phoned and suggested that the way to overcome the weakness in my contract was for him to phone the police if they did not stop after nine o'clock at night. I passed this information on to the director.

The houseboat turned out to be a huge structure about ten meters long, with a high deck and a two meter high structure on top, with a further deck and canopy over the large sitting out area. It looked as if it would be better suited to the Danube rather than the Goukamma. The top area was substantial as that was where the action would take place, but the interior had no floor to speak of, just a back balcony and some planks inside the doorway where the actors could stand and wave to the admiring crowd. It took them two weeks to build the houseboat, and when completed it looked

very inviting. The director flew home to Rome on the Friday morning, as he had at the previous weekend, having given some last minute instructions about some details. When he returned from the airport on the Monday he had changed his mind and whole sections had to be altered and repainted. By the end of the week he was ready to roll. Cars full of people started pouring in until it was difficult to find parking near the river. We never did know what the advertisement was all about, nor could we follow the story, if there was one. The director promised to send us a video copy of the film but he never did. No one ever sent us a copy of the films that they made.

After the Italians and their many followers had departed the houseboat was tied up at our jetty, which is in a recess or natural harbour of the river, so it added a touch of romance to the river and did not obstruct the flow of boating traffic. At some cost we put in a solid floor to the craft and it became a fine place to have a cocktail party or a large playroom for children. I looked forward to the time when the grandchildren were old enough to have a 'sleep over' on the boat with their friends. All went well for a year or two, without any maintenance needed - we only had to keep an eye on the moorings which needed frequent adjustment because of the rise and fall of the river. Then a few years later a severe flood occurred. The boat weathered the storm in a magnificent manner. It broke from its moorings and, riding the floodwaters, sailed down the river far into the Cape Nature Reserve, where it crashed into the cable and suspension bridge at the picnic place. It was a total wreck. Ho hum. Easy come easy go. What a pity.

Not long after the advertisement for milk or honey, which the Italians made, foreigners who wished to make an advertisement for milk approached us. I remember it was milk and not honey because they were prepared to pay good money for the hire of a cow. By this time the penny had dropped and we had learned the lesson that Christopher had taught us from his experience of charging twice when he was expected to smile on the occasion of the filming of the Ford car arriving on the farm. The path to wealth was to quote a smallish daily charge for access to the property but to add on as many extras as possible. We would charge a large amount for a relatively easy thing like moving a fence. Once the project had started and enthusiasm was running high, costs seemed to disappear out the window so to speak. When negotiating the hire of a cow, great emphasis was placed on the fact that she was a prize-winning animal, and if we had to hang her championship sash round her belly that would naturally entail an extra couple of hundred rand. Talk like that seemed to convince them that the initial price was not as preposterous as it seemed. We had the initial contract all pencilled out but not yet signed, and Bimbi was already making bookings for a holiday, when disaster struck. I can't remember what the exact cause of the change of plan was - whether it was riots in Cape Town or tightening of sanctions, but suddenly all the plans were cancelled. Film companies found an alternative venue and that was the end of our venture in the film world. They never came back.



## GANZVLEI GEESE

The farm Ganzvlei was probably so named because of the plethora of Egyptian geese that abound. When farming in Natal we had a thriving flock of Muscovy ducks that fended for themselves in the stable yard and the area around the large water trough. Our many friends seemed to enjoy the novelty of stewed duck when they came to lunch on a Sunday. Here at Ganzvlei we thought that ducks would be inappropriate as they do their copulating on water and the natural place to make for would be the river. Taking a tip from nature, we saw it as a good place for geese. We managed to obtain a few large white ones and they multiplied profusely, tending to their own needs in the dairy environs. When they became too many they ventured further afield, and some of the little goslings fell into the water furrow and others had various accidents that kept the numbers fairly stable around the twenty mark. The geese were excellent ‘watchdogs’ and made a great hullabaloo when people arrived at the dairy, which at that time could be seen from the National Road, making a pretty sight for passers by.

We enjoyed the geese and loved the little goslings but apart from the natural hazards they were always under threat from predators. The otters were the worst. We tried protecting them by herding them into a pen at night but as the years went by the numbers dwindled. The otters would come up from the river and leave a trail of feathers back to the banks. We had a list of people who at one time or another had asked us for geese so after a bad patch of losses and while there were still some left, we gave the last few away.

In an interesting aside, Johnnie Schnetler, an earlier owner of the farm, once found himself in hot water with the law over Ganzvlei geese. Johnnie, the Field Cornet for the district, was charged, together with his brother-in-law D.P Heyns, before the Resident Magistrate in Knysna with wrongfully and illegally assaulting Frederick Wilhelm Schonken from the neighbouring farm. From the evidence led it emerged that Schonken had killed five of Mrs Schnetler’s geese, and was seized by the arm and knocked down by Heyns. After intervening to remove Schonken’s chopper, Johnnie Schnetler ‘left them to fight it out as they appeared to be evenly matched’. He was acquitted but Heyns was found guilty and fined £5.

## HOUSES AT GANZVLEI

One of the delights of a farm like Ganzvlei is that it is big enough to accommodate several houses, so spread out that one is close enough to be of great support to one another and yet not so close as to be on top of one another. Here at Ganzvlei in the year 2008, I David Peter live in what is called the Groot Huis – it is the second oldest house, and the one that lies closest to the national road.

My son Christopher and his wife Jenny live in the house that Petrus Schnetler built 150 years ago, which started to fall down as previously described. It has been repaired to a certain extent, but is still an old house with thick mud walls and crooked doors – I’ve yet to see a door in the house that doesn’t stand like a crooked, unbalanced matchbox. Christopher likes his house very much.

Further up the hill my daughter Joan and her husband Michael Maughan-Brown came to build their house in 1999 – 2000, where some twenty years before they bulldozed a rough road to the top. They selected a spot which at first glance I thought was not the best site on the hill, but

which has the most magnificent views over the Goukamma valley, with the black Goukamma river meandering through the oxbow at the cottage at Buffelsvermaak and then on to its mouth and the white waves breaking onto the rocks at the Wild Side at Buffalo Bay. They chose a site on the eastern slope, but very cleverly – a slight promontory out towards the east enabled them to make their house in a little dell that faces north, so that the house has quite a lot of north frontage. The house is surrounded by glorious fynbos and it's always fresh and lovely up there, but sometimes the wind can blow a bit hard. It is a very nice house, which Michael designed according to what lengths of timber were available, and what could be cut at Geelhoutvlei sawmill, which is where he was working at the time. He cut every piece of wood in theory on the computer, and knows from the plans where every piece of wood goes.

## THE SCHOOL ROOM

Before the motorcar became the normal and popular form of transport on the roads of South Africa, schools as we know them today were few and far between. All the towns had their schools, some much larger than others, but in the rural areas it was the custom to employ teachers to teach only a small number of local farm children. The teacher frequently lived in the farmer's house when there was no other accommodation. These teachers were usually highly esteemed but often poorly qualified, and were employed to teach all the classes, grades and standards in one room. The provincial education department paid them. Pupils from other farms who were within walking distance were encouraged to make up the numbers so that employing a teacher became worthwhile. There was no shortage of children in the wonderful fertile valley of the Goukamma. Fanie Schnetler's Oupa Gideon, we are told, had 14. Naturally they would not all have attended a junior school at the same time, but there were other families equally blessed.

Some time before the year 1900, Petrus Schnetler built a schoolroom on to the west wall of his house at Ganzvlei. It is a large room, the length of which is the width of the house and it is almost square. Most of the children in the surrounding area attended the school. Across the river on the eastern bank lived Johannes Gerhardus Schonken (Gert), born 29<sup>th</sup> April 1849. He married Ingeborg Marie Franzsen who had arrived from Stavanger, Norway on the ship *Fransiska* which docked in Knysna on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1875. She was 17 years of age at that time. Her first child was born when she was 23. She had 14 children during the next 24 years, all of them growing to healthy adulthood, a feat quite unusual for that period in our history.

Gert and Ingeborg Schonken's 13<sup>th</sup> child was born in 1902 and named after the prime minister of the Cape Colony at that time, John Xavier Merriman. He was always known as Merriman, and was a pupil at the school at Ganzvlei. His teacher was Miss Mimmie Metelerkamp, my father's sister. History does not relate which other Schonken children attended the school, but we do know that there was a group who crossed the river every day on a rough pont made of barrels for buoyancy, with planks or poles fastened to the floats. A later teacher lived down the river, probably a boarder at the Wentzel farmstead. Each day she rowed a boat up the river, picking up pupils on the way to school. She must have been abnormally fit and agile as it is no mean feat to row about three kilometers twice daily in all weathers in a wooden boat filled with children.

By 1939 there were about 40 children at the school, with a Juffrou Hugo in charge. A boarder in the house, Mr Daan Barnard, helped her out. A Juffrou Senekal also taught there at some time. In 1943 there was a change in policy and buses were provided to get the children to town and to a 'proper school'.

Some years ago Christopher walled off a corner of the large room at the end of his house, and installed a bathroom. In the alcove on the other side he fitted cupboards and made a very functional kitchenette. It is now let to visitors as a self-catering unit and is still sufficiently spacious to easily accommodate three beds. Of course being the old school room it has its own

entrance. The surprisingly low door lends a sense of history, and conjures images of children passing through followed by a short teacher.

In front of Christopher's house, towards the riverside so as not to obscure the view, is the old smithy where horses were shod and wagon-wheels repaired. After the farm buildings had been moved further up the hill behind the house and a large new workshop built to service all the modern machinery and equipment, the smithy became redundant. Christopher put in new ceilings and beautiful wooden floors, built on a bathroom and kitchenette and large front stoep. They now have an attractive cabin to let to a holiday couple. The accommodation is in great demand over the Christmas period and when there are popular activities in Knysna like the festival Forest Marathon and the cycle races.

The letting of accommodation is nothing new. Shortly after World War 2 when George Marr Schnetler inherited the property from his father Johnnie, he ran a popular holiday establishment known as 'The Lotus Guest Farm'. He hired out boats for visitors to spend an afternoon on the river and provided camping facilities. One of the big attractions was a Sunday afternoon drive from Knysna to Ganzvlei to partake of the delicious fresh scones and cream. It seems that Ganzvlei cream has been in demand for over sixty years. Sitting on the stoep looking over the lush green pastures makes the double thick cream even more desirable and delicious.



## B V COTTAGE

Down the Goukamma River towards the sea from Ganzvlei Farm the river makes a big oxbow with deep wide water on three sides of gently rolling fertile pasture. The small farm, about 22 hectares in extent, is a portion of Buffelsvermaak and was occupied and farmed for many generations in spite of being virtually an island cut off from the rest of the world. The cause of the isolation is the very steep and unstable sand dune on the western landward side, a precipitous dune with a dangerously narrow path that drops sharply to the river some distance below. A small cottage lies on this land, and the best way of getting back into the busy world from the cottage is by crossing the river by boat or on a pont, and then coming up through the neighbour's thick bush for more than a kilometer to the provincial road. This has been the access for many years and was also used by Jimmie Wentzel while he occupied Skimmelkrans, which lies between Ganzvlei Farm and Buffelsvermaak. The provincial road goes right past the back of the house that Merriman Schonken built. As an eighty year old, his widow Maria took pleasure in telling of wagon-loads of maize and pumpkins going past the house, some loaded so high that some of the mealies fell off and were crunched and ground into a paste by the next wagon. The fields of the valley were exceptionally fertile and produced heavy crops.

Shortly after Bimbi and I had settled at Ganzvlei and Christopher joined us to start farming seriously on a reasonable scale, we realised what a great asset the extra grazing afforded by the small portion of Buffelsvermaak would be to us. There is access for animals over the dune and over Skimmelkrans, so the idea was that, should we be able to buy the property, the dry cows and growing heifers could use the grazing, making more pasture available for the milking herd closer to the milking parlour. A Hollander named Offerman, who lived in Pretoria, owned the cottage and used it for his family's annual Christmas holiday. The problem was that he did not want to sell it.

Peter was living with us at that time so it must have been 1983. I asked him and Christopher to come with me and we motored to Pretoria to try to talk Offerman into a *pragtige skone skema* which would benefit both parties. My proposal was that we buy the property at a

premium price and then enter into a nine years and eleven month lease, rent-free for the cottage building and half a hectare of land. The existing law does not allow a lease to exceed ten years without a great deal of legal complication. He would then have another ten years of free holidays, to come and go as he liked, plus all that lovely money in the bank. The three of us sitting in a row on the couch in front of him must have resembled those great comedians, the Marx brothers, with Christopher, like Harpo, smiling and nodding but uttering not a single word. We explained to Offerman that it was 'like having your cake and eating it'. He liked that idea and we produced the prepared deed of sale and an agreement of lease for him to sign.

After five or six years Offerman got tired of the same old holiday venue and we paid him out for the balance of his lease. Now we were left with a problem of how to turn the cottage, which became known to us as BV (Buffelsvermaak) Cottage, to good use. The answer was close at hand. Christopher is a man who frequently has good ideas about how to solve problems. Usually the solution benefits someone other than him. One of his friends happened to be between jobs and had nowhere to go, so Christopher suggested that he and his family might like to occupy the cottage in exchange for planting a few ornamental trees and doing some minor repairs. This arrangement didn't work so well and after some months they found another place to live. The best thing that came out of this episode was the warm friendship that developed between us all. Mike has a lovely sense of humour and always had more than enough energy to produce a laugh.

My gardener, Eric, and I spent a while painting and cleaning and clearing paths and trying to make the cottage a little more attractive. It has no electricity and no telephone. The water supply needed attention and we spent many frustrating but in retrospect, happy hours crossing the river in a boat or taking a fat-tyred beach buggy over the dune and the improved but dangerous road. We were lucky with some free advertising in a tourist guidebook sold in England which attracted a series of people on holiday from England.

The cottage was not meant for couples on honeymoon. We had two couples at different times who we established were on honeymoon and determined to get away from everybody and be alone together. They both gave up after three days. We were not altogether surprised.

The cottage was then let for a year to a very nice couple with a child in matric. They had a farm in the mountains, much too far to take the girl to school on a daily basis, so they spent four nights a week at the cottage and went back to their farm for the weekend. They too were delightful people. It is so much easier to let a house on a longer term basis rather than short periods to holiday makers so when Johan, that very talented musician, came along in his bare feet to ask us for accommodation we jumped at the chance of having a permanent tenant. Johan was with us for a number of years, but eventually he moved on and moved out of Knysna.

Christopher has recently built on another large bedroom and put in an extra shower and loo and with a good gas geyser, stove and gas fridge the cottage has become a very pleasant place to stay. The attraction still is the remoteness, but at the same time the wonderful beach at Buffalo Bay is only a few kilometres away, and the lovely river is right on the doorstep.



## WILD ANIMALS

While the buffaloes that gave Buffelsvermaak its name are no longer inhabitants of Ganzvlei Farm, numerous other wild animals still are. Otters, a menace to the fish in ponds in the bird garden as well as to the geese, live in the banks of the Goukamma River. There is a fairly

diverse habitat for animals in the dune thicket and fynbos, as well as in the plantations and nature reserve along the farm boundaries. George Marr Schnetler, who was born at Ganzvlei in 1901, recalled in 1970 ‘When I was a teenager we used to go out hunting three or four times during the season, a period of three months a year. We usually went out in the afternoon and I recollect that on one occasion we put up 60 grysbuck...This I do know, that the poor little grysbok is practically extinct.’ (*Het Suid-Western*, 24 February 1970).

The bushbuck, which live on top of the hill, have greatly increased in numbers in recent years, and have become relatively tame since we moved into the house on the hill. Nocturnal visitors are more exciting, like the caracals or rooikat, which are rarely seen but regularly prey on lambs, making sheep farming impossible. One was caught and taken to a nature reserve but was soon replaced by another equally efficient hunter. Driving up the hill at night porcupines, their little eyes gleaming in the headlights, scurry out of the roads with their huge backs of quills rustling. They too are a menace, this time to the farm garden where they ensure that arum lilies cannot grow at the Groot Huis – their bulbs are far too delicious!

## BIRDS

Ganzvlei is recognised as a birding paradise - with all our trees and the abundant water we have a tremendous variety of birds. Up the hill there is quite different vegetation, so there one finds the seedeaters, such as francolin and guineafowl, as well as jackal-buzzards and other raptors. Bimbi was a very keen birder and went on a number of courses with various birding experts. On one occasion we spent three weeks in Malawi travelling from the southeast to the northeast corner, with a chap called Ian, doing nothing but look at birds, of which we saw a tremendous number. We also went bird watching at Etosha in Namibia and of course we went to the Kruger Park every year, as this was in a way Bimbi’s spiritual home. Bimbi taught the family to look at birds, and when the children were quite small they could distinguish between an enormous number of birds. They have since all become quite expert and knowledgeable. When she died in August 1999, Christopher built a bird hide on Ganzvlei down near the river, where one could rest awhile and gaze at the water and enjoy watching the birds there. I in turn ripped out fences and cut away bush and turned the old vegetable garden into what we now call Bimbi’s bird garden. We planted a variety of shrubs and many indigenous trees to try to attract birds, and subsequently have added many plants over the years, and made a very beautiful garden. In the middle is a water fountain where there is plenty of space for the birds to drink and bathe, and a bench where one can sit and think and watch all this going on.

The end result is that Ganzvlei has become a very popular spot for various bird clubs to visit. The Lakes Bird Club, for example, visits us every year. It is the biggest and most popular bird club in the south western districts and includes people from Knysna, Sedgefield, the Wilderness and George, and members include well-known birding experts. Margaret Kylie invariably brings overseas birders, from America, Australia, Europe and the UK, to the farm. In spring one has a chance of seeing all five cuckoos resident in the south western districts in one day. We have them calling constantly until one wants to go outside and say ‘Just desist for a few minutes, please!’ Or there is a chance of seeing the beautiful Narina Trogon, named by Le Vaillant in honour of a Khoi maiden whose beauty he admired. Once I saw it sitting right in front of me, and when it saw me, abundance, particularly after a flood, and we’ve had seagulls sitting here on the pasture – but that’s an unusual sight, thank heavens!



## TREES AND TIMBER

From the earliest days the people living at Ganzvlei have been involved with the forests and trees. Everyone living in this area, so close to the most spectacular and diversified forests in our country, used to be aware of the important part that the trees and the timber played in their lives. The Knysna lagoon and the Knysna forest were what Knysna was all about.

When Gideon Schnetler left his farm at Elandskraal to join his brother Petrus and to live at Ganzvlei, he was a woodcutter. He continued to be a woodcutter. That is what he did and knew about and where his skills lay. There is little doubt that Petrus also spent time sawing in the forest and it is highly probable that his son Johnnie had a licence to do the same.

George Rex, so often named the founder of Knysna, became involved with timber as soon as he arrived in the area. He had a ship built, the 140-ton brig *Knysna*, largely from stinkwood from his own portion of the forest; and wood and the forest got into the blood of his offspring. (My wife Bimbi's great, great grandfather, Captain John Findlay, was the captain of this ship in the last few years before he retired from the sea).

The Thesen family settled on the edge of the lagoon and founded their shipping business, but they also turned to growing trees and owned large portions of the indigenous forest, and later sawed the timber themselves. The Parkes family, followed by the Templemans and van Reenens, also started cutting wood with machinery instead of the old pit method of the woodcutters.

The romance of trees and their growth, and understanding of their life cycle and importance also began to flow in the blood of our family. Peter Carel Metelerkamp, my grandfather's brother, (who was always known as PC) was already running the Knysna Steam Sawmill when the first George Parkes arrived on the scene. Parkes bought the sawmill and for a while PC Metelerkamp continued to run it. John Jacob Metelerkamp, my grandfather and younger brother of Peter Carel, sold his shop at Wittedrift and came to Knysna to run the timber plantations and forests of Geo Parkes and Sons. He lived at The Glebe on the edge of the Main Forest for a time, where his youngest son, my father, was born in 1897. John Jacob's eldest son, Fred, was the manager of the Searle's empire at Great Brak River, which in those days consisted of a tannery, shoe factory and trading stores which also incorporated the Ford car agency. In later life he too bought a large area in the mountains just north of Mossel Bay, and planted pine trees and set up a sawmill at Great Brak River.

Knysna was known for its wood not its tourism. It is not altogether surprising that we and the next generation of our family could relate to forestry, and that we joined the present generation of Parkes, van Reenens, Fechtens and others who are still in the business. I like to think of myself as a 'woodcutter'. By sheer good fortune and coincidence the farms in the mountains which were owned by my Uncle Fred and which have passed through the hands of others over the years, have come back into the family and were recently bought by my son David Charles and me. The plantations are part of our sawmill holdings. The time-honoured link between the forests and the farm continues.



## THE SAWMILL

Before we bought the farm Ganzvlei we were aware that the small size of the farm precluded our making a decent living from dairy farming in spite of a few hectares being lush alluvial river land. Although we managed to hire two small pieces of arable ground close by, the farm as a unit was still too small to provide sufficient income for two families. I did not know how to remedy the situation until one happy day fortune again smiled on me. Wilf Vowels, one of Knysna's leading lawyers, asked me to accompany him to inspect a farm near Karatara on the old road from Knysna to George, the owner of which had recently died. He thought that I might be able to help him to make a report to the lawyers handling the estate as I had postgraduate training and experience in forestry economics and exploitation and was a registered estate agent. In the three preceding years the market for farm properties had been good and I had sold a number of farms in the district on behalf of clients.

We drove up the road towards the hills and through the wonderfully fertile flat farms of the Robertson clan with their extensive rolling fields, some with irrigation sprinklers strongly squirting water onto the lush lucerne. We then turned left towards George at the T-junction of the old road. On the high ground of the farm Hollywood, Wilf stopped the car for a moment to take in the splendid pastoral picture - the green fields sweeping up to the edge of plantations on the far hills, with patches of forest and then the blue of the imposing Outeniqua Mountains reaching to the sky. With the blue meeting the blue it was almost like a cyclorama backdrop on a stage. We wound down the hill to the Geelhoutvleirivier, which is little more than a stream at the start of the property that we were to inspect. 'The John Markham Timber Co' consisted of four adjoining farms stretching from the Geelhoutvlei stream over the rise and down to the Hoogekraal River.

Apart from some indigenous forest towards the river and in the declivities it was largely planted to Radiata pine and was being managed by a local timber company for the owner who lived in America. The trees varied in age between twelve and twenty-eight years and there were areas of large well-grown trees, but most of the compartments had been sadly neglected and the wattle invasion was so intense in some areas that we could not push our way through. This appalling neglect was the factor that gave me the chance to get my foot in the door.

When the estate was offered for sale none of the timber companies wanted the place. It so happened that at the time there was a plethora of sawable trees, known to the trade as 'roundwood,' available and private growers were finding it very difficult to find a market of any kind. Added to which the property market had suddenly come to one of its periodic lulls after a brisk upsurge. There were just no buyers and no one wanted to undertake the arduous task of clearing all the wattle that was growing like fury and choking the plantations.

Measured Farming South Africa (Pty) Ltd was appointed to make an economic analysis and to make a full count and mensuration of all the timber belonging to the American company. Their report together with Wilf's observations disappointed the heirs to the estate and they sent their lawyer from the USA to visit the site and confirm that the neglect had indeed taken place. I had suggested that if the verdict was to sell the company it would probably be easier to sell the four properties individually. The Americans were not in favour of this and Wilf was instructed to dispose of the whole company as quickly as possible. It was then offered to all the timber companies in the area and all the larger tree growers as well as being advertised extensively in the press. Three of my greatest loves have always been Jersey cows, trees and plenty of flowing water. We had only about sixteen hectares of pasture at Ganzvlei and I visualised the mammoth task of

clearing ten times as much and having about a hundred and sixty hectares of irrigated pasture surrounded by tall cool pine plantation. A fellow can dream, can't he? I began to love the place and with this new genuine enthusiasm did my utmost to sell it on behalf of the heirs. If I could achieve a satisfactory sale I would at least earn a reasonable commission for my application and effort. So I approached all the large landowners in the district with a sparkling scheme of development. In each case I was laughed at. The answer was that it would be cheaper, especially if one took the time factor into consideration, to buy readymade pasture. In the end my enthusiasm was so great that it lodged in my head and I sold it to myself. The trouble was that I had very little money at the time as we had spent quite a lot on animals and buildings and developing Ganzvlei. I approached my elder brother Michael, who was an attorney and a financial advisor in Knysna, and told him that I had a client who was prepared to buy one portion of the estate of the J H Markham Co. If he, Michael were to buy the largest portion I would then buy the remaining two smaller pieces. BUT, he would have to arrange large bonds over the properties that I bought. I presented him with a budget explaining that we could meet the bond repayments by selling trees and then by sheer hard work and effort clear the land and over the years turn it into a lovely farm. I was young and strong, a mere fifty-four years of age and once again eager to bite off more than I could chew and then just keep chewing.

We bought the company and then proceeded to split it. My eldest son Peter, who was in the film industry and who had resigned from his relatively well-paid job for political reasons, offered to help us to get started. He had grown up on a farm and was accustomed to tackling anything that came his way. He is not a qualified forester but we were not interested at that time in any further silviculture. He was just the man for the job, which he tackled with energy and enthusiasm. He started off by selecting and selling transmission poles for which there was a market at that time. It was never Peter's intention to make a career out of farming or forestry. After all he was our son who at the age of seven rose from the dining room table where he had been reading the *Sunday Times*, thumped the table and said, 'They can't do it. They have it all wrong!' Peter grafted away, rising in the dark, fetching people to help him from Keurhoek and only getting back to Ganzvlei when it was well after sunset for over six months. Apart from the work that he had achieved he left us one important legacy - he pointed out that my focus had been far too much on output per worker. He was right in saying that it was far more important to focus on price rather than production. We should fell fewer trees and process them in some way. I had been looking at the possibility of erecting some sort of small sawmill but the costs involved were far too great. The alternative was to put up a pole treating plant for telephone, fencing and vineyard poles for which there seemed to be a fair demand. I made a few tours of the Cape treating plants with the forestry extension officer, Gerrie Van der Berg, who was very helpful and instructive. The start-up capital would have been far less and, once the market had been established, the returns quite rewarding.

When Peter left we hired a pleasant house from the Forestry Department on the adjoining plantation and engaged a manager. What a disaster. After some months his petty thieving and indolence became too much and we asked him to leave. We stopped felling trees and kept a small squad of workers who continued with the clearing in the plantations. I had spent some of the money that we had received by selling trees below the market value at the time to hire a bulldozer to clear about 20 hectares of a compartment with the most prolific wattle growth. The huge brush lines were subsequently burnt. We sowed Italian ryegrass between the brush piles, having disced the ground over and over with a tandem disc. During that winter we went daily from Ganzvlei in an old three-ton lorry to fetch fresh grass, which was blown into the lorry with a tractor and forage harvester. In those days I helped Christopher when I could on Ganzvlei and knew all the cows, a hundred and twenty of them, by name. I took my turn at fetching grass on Saturdays and Sundays and thoroughly enjoyed the satisfaction of having all the extra feed.

During those early years our youngest son, David Charles, was at university and then in the army. He was posted to the border during the Angolan War where he soon got his second star as a full Lieutenant. He was put in charge of administration at one of the camps right up at the firing line. He quickly got the hang of the system and ran his section of the army with great efficiency, which stood him in good stead later on when he was running a sawmill employing over three hundred people. When his two years army service was completed he was unsure of his future plans, and agreed to take on the supervision of Geelhoutvlei and see whether he could make a living out of growing a few vegetables. Initially he was to follow the family tradition of entering the law profession but had decided against this line as a career although he had almost fully qualified to be admitted to the bar. Like his elder brothers he had grown up on a dairy farm and could turn his hand to any outdoor project. As he was heard to remark later 'my only regret was the wasted years when I was taught Latin at school instead of being taught to weld'.

Having meticulously cleared a few hectares to his satisfaction, Dave grew a fantastic crop of tomatoes on trellises, a field of pumpkins and a few other vegetables and quietly got on with the enormous task of clearing all the wattle and hakia in the plantations. We discussed the proposition of a treatment plant but, filled with boundless energy and enthusiasm, he was determined to erect a simple homemade bush sawmill. He first had to teach himself to weld. That is how it all started. Of course there was no electricity so for the first year or two he had an enormous battle against the constant and overwhelming odds of failure. He learned and tried and persevered. It was a big milestone when he managed to saw a whole 16 cubic meter lorry-load of logs into various sizes in one day. By the time he got to fifteen lorry-loads a day we had a huge sawdust problem.

The farm Ganzvlei benefited from the large quantities of sawdust being produced. We were milking nearly a hundred cows a day, which in the eighties and the last few years of last century was sufficient to scratch a living from farming but is no longer so. The cows in milk were tied up in a big barn where they were fed after each milking, and the floor of this barn was not concreted which resulted in it becoming full of dung and urine within a few days. The answer was to spread a thin layer of sawdust over the floor on a daily basis and remove all wet and offensive but valuable material to the compost heap. The heap became excessively large in spite of being a great source of fertility for the pastures, and we started selling a little well composted material to gardeners. We had found at the sawmill that in spite of being warned that excessive applications of the acidic pine sawdust would lead to soil problems and a very acid and infertile soil, this did not in fact take place. We found that the magic of the earthworm solved this problem very efficiently, the worms working for us while we slept. As mentioned in the section on Organic Farming at Ganzvlei, the earthworm has the amazing capability to digest vegetable matter and pass it out in a form which is neither too acid nor too alkaline but in a neutral pH form. Sawdust spread 150mm thick over the fields of natural veld consisting of a predominance of wiregrass *eragrostis planum* resulted in a much more fertile stand of grass after a few years. Grasses of a more advanced or higher ecological order such as kikuyu and buffalo grass started coming in and the sawdust almost disappeared. We found that when digging out scotch thistle, below every plant there seemed to be at least one earthworm. The lasting enhanced fertility to the clay soils is evident in comparison with the fields of the neighbour on the other side of the fence.

Ten years ago, Mike Maughan-Brown, the husband of our daughter Joan, left the Town and Regional Planning Company with whom he was associated and where he was a director. He sold their house in Gillets in Natal, a very nice house on large grounds, and packed up and came down to work with Dave at the sawmill. The business had grown to the extent that it was necessary to introduce new management and he was to direct all the administration work. The

family moved into a rather unprepossessing house on the farm close to the sawmill that we had acquired not long before. The two children went off to school at Elandskraal nearby. It was an enormous change for their family and thereby hangs another tale. Joan is a significant South African poet and wrote some interesting work about the heat, the dust and the loneliness. It was not long before Mike came up with a plan to build a house on the hill at Ganzvlei. We had to wait a while for all the necessary formalities and the permission to be granted but as soon as he could Mike employed a carpenter and his very able and willing son to start erecting their large wooden house, which I have described earlier. After about five years at the mill Mike decided to return to his profession of Town Planning and opened an office in Knysna.

Thanks to Dave's great commitment and hard work, the sawmill has prospered in spite of very adverse circumstances on many occasions. He has concentrated exclusively on building up the business 'Geelhoutvlei Timbers CC', and has been clear that the business comes first – when he married and children were born he merely added on rooms and improvements to the caravan and shack in which he started. Now after twenty years he is finishing off a fine new large wooden house, using indigenous timber for the windows, doors, cupboards, stairs and so on. It has taken some years to build as all the components have been made in his workshop and erected by his staff.



## AFTER WORD

For many years now Christopher has been doing all the work here at Ganzvlei and I have merely helped with an occasional opinion and a little office work that is becoming less and less. Over the years Dave has taken the sawmill from strength to strength. It has become more successful than I could have imagined and solved the problem of an income and pension for me, the parent of such marvellous and willing children. Without them my early dream of resting in green pastures by still waters would never have come to pass. Now that I am over eighty years old I am considering buying a hammock to hang between the two stinkwood trees that I planted for that purpose some years ago. Knowing the way that Lady Luck smiles on me, it would not surprise me if someone provides the hammock when Christmas comes.

Ganzvlei  
April 2008

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to Fanie Schnetler for his manuscript notes on growing up in the Goukamma valley in the early years of the last century, which I have used extensively in Chapter Five.

Unless otherwise specified, photographs used in the book are from the collections of the Metelerkamp family and Margaret Richards. Ian Fleming's photographs convey the special charm of the farm and valley. My son Peter's striking black-and-white studies add an extra dimension.

Mark Zullsdorff kindly provided a photograph of his grandfather George Schnetler, and Margaret Parkes provided the photograph of the Knysna Volunteers as well as a copy of George Marr Schnetler's letter to *Het Suid-Western*, 24 February 1972.

Leonie Twentyman Jones has helped in many ways with the creation of this book and has been a steady source of encouragement, which I appreciate very much.

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My family has been supportive, and my granddaughter Frances in particular has been very helpful.

Lastly, my thanks to Isabel who has quietly and firmly kept me focused.

DPM

## METELERKAMP GENEALOGY

(direct line to current generation)

**Rutger Metelerkamp**, b Zwolle 1780 m Maria Christina Hoets

Frederick Johannes Alexander, b 1806 m Maria Anna Auret

John Jacob, b 1846 m Johanna Wilhelmina Van Huyssteen

Percy Clifton, b 1897 m Christina Margaret Mackenzie

David Peter, b 28.2.1928 m Margaret Alice Findlay (Bimbi)

Peter George, b 7.7.1954 m Sara Easby

Ruth, b 19.6.1994

Christopher John, b 8.9.1955 m Jennifer Anne Rolle

Heather, b 10.7.1999

Joan, b 12.12.1956 m Michael Maughan-Brown

Frances, b 25.4.1987

Paul, b 29.9.1989

David Charles, b 15.9.1961 m Fiona Knox

Joanna, b 30.1.1999

Zoë, b 28.5.2001

A full genealogy of the first two generations is contained in JA Heese and RT Lombard's *South African Genealogies*. Genealogies of other Goukamma families – the Schnetlers, the Schonkens, the Meedings and the van Huyssteens – are also to be found in this volume.

**GANZVLEI BIRD LIST** (checked and collated by Anne Brash)  
(Roberts numbers (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) in brackets; new official bird names in brackets)

- |                                              |                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Apalis, Bar-throated (645)                   | Red-chested (377)                                     |
| Batis, Cape (700)                            | Cuckooshrike                                          |
| Bishop                                       | Black (538)                                           |
| Southern Red (824)                           | Grey (540)                                            |
| Yellow (827)                                 | Dabchick (8) (now Little Grebe)                       |
| Bittern, Little (78)                         | Darter (60)                                           |
| Boubou, Southern (736)                       | Dove                                                  |
| Bulbul                                       | Cape Turtle (354)                                     |
| Cape (566)                                   | Cinnamon (360) (now Lemon)                            |
| Sombre (572) (now Sombre Greenbul)           | Laughing (355)                                        |
| Terrestrial (569) (now Terrestrial Brownbul) | Red-eyed (352)                                        |
| Buzzard                                      | Tambourine (359)                                      |
| Forest (150)                                 | Drongo, Fork-tailed (541)                             |
| Jackal (152)                                 | Duck                                                  |
| Steppe (149)                                 | African Black (105)                                   |
| Canary                                       | Yellow-billed (104)                                   |
| Bully (877) (now Brimstone)                  | Eagle, African Fish (148)                             |
| Cape (872)                                   | Egret                                                 |
| Forest (873)                                 | Cattle (71)                                           |
| Cisticola                                    | Little (67)                                           |
| Fantailed (664) (now Zitting)                | Finfoot, African (229)                                |
| Levaillant's (677)                           | Flufftail                                             |
| Coot, Red-knobbed (228)                      | Buff-spotted (218)                                    |
| Cormorant                                    | Flycatcher                                            |
| Cape (56)                                    | African Dusky (690)                                   |
| Reed (58)                                    | African Paradise (710)                                |
| White-breasted (55)                          | Blue-mantled Crested (708)                            |
| Coucal                                       | Fiscal (698)                                          |
| Burchell's (391)                             | Francolin                                             |
| Crake, Black (213)                           | Red-necked (198) (now Spurfowl)                       |
| Crow                                         | Gallinule, Purple (223) (now African Purple Swamphen) |
| Black (547) (now Cape)                       | Goose                                                 |
| Pied (548)                                   | Egyptian (102)                                        |
| Cuckoo                                       | Spur-winged (116)                                     |
| African Emerald (384)                        | Goshawk, African (160)                                |
| Black (378)                                  | Grassbird (661)                                       |
| Diederik (386)                               | Guineafowl                                            |
| Klaas's (385)                                |                                                       |

Helmeted (203)  
 Gull  
   Kelp (312)  
 Gymnogene (169) (now African Harrier-  
   Hawk)  
 Hamerkop (81)  
 Harrier  
   African Marsh (165)  
 Heron  
   Black-crowned Night (76)  
   Black-headed (63)  
   Grey (62)  
   Purple (65)  
 Honeyguide  
   Greater (474)  
   Lesser (476)  
   Scaly-throated (475)  
 Hoopoe (451)  
 Ibis  
   Hadedda (94)  
   Sacred (91)  
 Kingfisher  
   Brown-hooded (435)  
   Giant (429)  
   Half-collared (430)  
   Malachite (431)  
   Pied (428)  
 Kite  
   Black-shouldered (127)  
 Longclaw  
   Orange-throated (727) (now Cape)  
 Martin  
   Brown-throated (533)  
   Rock (529)  
 Moorhen (226)  
 Mousebird  
   Red-faced (426)  
   Speckled (424)  
 Neddicky (681)  
 Nightjar  
   Fiery-necked (405)  
 Oriole  
   Black-headed (545)  
 Owl  
   Spotted Eagle (401)  
   Wood (394)  
 Pigeon  
   African Olive (Rameron) (350)  
   Rock (349) (now Speckled)  
 Pipit  
   African (716) (Grassveld)  
   Plain-backed (718)  
 Plover  
   Blacksmith (258)  
   Crowned (255)  
   Three-banded (249)  
 Prinia  
   Spotted (686a) (now Karoo)  
 Puffback  
   Black-backed (740)  
 Rail  
   African (210)  
 Raven  
   White-necked (550)  
 Robin  
   White-starred (606)  
 Robin-Chat  
   Cape (601)  
   Chorister (598)  
 Sandpiper  
   Common (264)  
 Seedeater  
   Streaky-headed (881)  
 Shoveller  
   Cape (112)  
 Shrike  
   Fiscal (732)  
   Olive Bush (750)  
 Sparrow  
   Southern Grey-headed (804)  
 Sparrowhawk  
   Black (158)  
 Spoonbill  
   African (95)  
 Starling  
   Black-bellied (768)  
   European (757) (now Common)  
   Red-winged (769)  
 Stonechat  
   African (596)  
 Sunbird  
   Black (792) (now Amethyst)  
   Greater Double-collared (785)  
   Southern Double-collared (783)  
 Swallow  
   Black Saw-wing (536)  
 Swallow  
   European (518) (now Barn)  
   Greater Striped (526)  
   White-throated (520)

|                    |                                                   |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Swift              | Bleating (657a) (now Green-backed<br>Camaroptera) |
| Alpine (418)       | Knysna (640)                                      |
| Black (412)        | Lesser Swamp (635) (Cape Reed)                    |
| White-rumped (415) | Little Rush (638) (African Sedge)                 |
| Tchagra            | Yellow-throated Woodland (644)                    |
| Southern (742)     | Waxbill                                           |
| Teal               | Common (846)                                      |
| Cape (106)         | Swee (850)                                        |
| Hottentot (107)    | Weaver, Cape (813)                                |
| Red-billed (108)   | White-eye, Cape (796)                             |
| Thrush             | Whydah, Pin-tailed (860)                          |
| Olive              | Wood-Hoopoe                                       |
| Trogon             | Red-billed (452) (now Green)                      |
| Narina (427)       | Woodpecker                                        |
| Turaco             | Knysna (484)                                      |
| Knysna (370a)      | Olive (488)                                       |
| Wagtail            |                                                   |
| Cape (713)         |                                                   |
| Warbler            |                                                   |

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